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Introduction

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Abstract

This brief introduction examines some of the notions which may serve both as cause for introducing the articles in the issue and as providing a (re)-problematic sphere of critical dialogue and research regarding Southern African literature and Languages.

In the wake of the theoretical and methodological proliferations inform(ed) by the introduction of aspects by psychoanalysis and communication in the arts and humanities during the seventies and eighties, the turn of the nineties ushered in scholarship and the renewed challenges of notions of aesthetics, value, power, knowledge, feminism, nation, culture, space, history, labour and racism to name but a few—to heuristic theories of communication of the uncertainty which prevails in the work of scholars who engage in cross-disciplinary cultural issues. Indications are that the prominence of the 'linguistic turn' of the complexity and multiplicity inherent to the critical and analytical engagement of such. This is evident in the study of aesthetics (Eagleton 1990; Rajan 1992), new historicism (Veeser 1989), feminism (Belluscio & Cornell 1987; Boyce-Davies 1994a & 1994b; Veeser 1991; Showalter (Ed.)ng 1993; Eagleton & McGowan 1993), the nation (Bhabha 1990), race (Goldberg 1993) and modernity (Mouralian 1992; Hall 1992; Wood 1992) amongst others. The reworking or retracting of critical discursive practices also accompany this conjuncture. The way in which scholars engage ideology (Žižek 1994), materialism (Williams 1961) and more particularly Marxism (Derrida 1994) as well as linguistics (De Beaugrande 1991) are examples. That the study of these notions and critical practices should follow an interdisciplinary route unfolds through processes of dialogue or communicative interaction and that it should ultimately focus on 'the local' seems inevitable in these times. A host of new concepts are being coined, defined, contested and abandoned in this context. In this introduction, I offer a few fragmentary thoughts which may serve as cause for some of the arguments which are developed in this issue. Notions of *cultural difference*, *hybridity*, *transculturation*, *the incommensurable*, *aesthetics* and *language* are discussed.

The realities of *cultural difference* manifest in the ebb and flow of the formation and dissolution of boundaries. The indigenous or regional cultural constructions (re)-enact forms of modernisation processes and more particularly the traversing of all forms of culture by the reality effects of the heterogeneous life processes of daily life. The appreciation of cultural difference is based on the recognition of cultural complexity and reciprocity of one's own and other culture(s). Simultaneously, consciousness of cultural reciprocity and regularity provides the space for the acknowledgment and accepting of the differentiation between the multiplicity of the symbolic systems at play in social life forms. Concurring with Bhabha (1990:2), this thought trajectory provides the rudiments for the 'possible unconditional acceptance of the supposed natural and non-antagonistic tension' that narrates the margins and boundaries of the 'society' and the 'subject' of the modern nation. Cultural difference, then, traverses and intervenes in the hegemonic and hierarchical notions of Tradition, People, the Reason of State, Organic Culture, The Folk, The Guild, General/Universal Knowledge which aim at the coercive and ultimately the repressive homogenisation of experience (see Bhabha 1990; Laclau 1990:212 on Gramsci). The positive value of cultural difference is that it provides the space for a multiplicity of historical and temporal voices of both past and present to articulate—in equal, locally speaking, discourses. Its operation is not of interchangeable, universal elements. Nevertheless, it is not to be reduced to fragmented structures of mutual intransigence and

Antipodal sentiments across the free play of polarities and dualities in the homogenous empty time of the national community" (Bhabha 1990:3,4). As such, cultural difference

> makes the construction of new forms of meaning and new sites of identification through processes of negotiation which no discursive universals can be established without recourse to difference (ibid:4).

and

> schematises the effective network representations of social life which surround the space of communities, public institutions and individuals in the production of the meaning of citizenship (Bhabha 1990:308,312 resp.).

The notion of *hybridity* in cultural difference does not imply a benign subsumption or subsuming of the diverse terrains of identity or resistance traversing culture. On the contrary,

> [H]ybridity is the displacement of the terms to interrupt the representational claim/address of the one in the terrain of the other, to reinscribe the boundary – the space of the in-between – through which the meaning of cultural authority and agency is negotiated. Hybridity represents the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge (Bhabha 1990:211 resp.).

And we know that translation continuously comes about in the never ending complication of the individual forms of identity in other systemic systems.

Intercultural identity is the discursive practice which scholars engage in to explore issues raised by the cultural difference and the interactions represented by hybridity. Positively, interdisciplinary study and research works with the logic of intersection and in appropriation. It can therefore be used to create chains of equivalence and oppositions. Its most important feature is that it empowers individuals to speak to the other in an empowered or unsilenced way and engage critical thought and reflection. There is a universe of knowledge available for everyone. Its empowerment effects the continuation of the reconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge, social and cultural structures and systems in society on the terms set by and for minorities themselves.

> The disciplinarity of the acknowledgement of the complex manners of culture presented in the ambivalent movement between the polarity and performance of cultural signs is never strictly the formulation of cultural contents that augment the positivity of a pre-given discipline or encircle discourse in the essential drive for cultural consensus. Instead, the act of locating open up a discourse in the language of culture which suggests that the similitudes of the words that it plays across cultural sites must perform the task that is never in itself given: social practice has different and antagonistic rules to the discourse of cultural difference. It is in this sense that the articulation of cultural difference – it could then be said – is the enigmatic transcendence of writing that reinscribes the discourse of culture as a form of life, but nevertheless not their inevitable destiny (ibid:174).

Whereas I borrowed the notion above primarily from Bhabha, the notion of the *incorporative* comes from Goldberg (1990). Since race is one of the most dangerous conceptual conventions by modernity (see Goldberg 1992:5), it provides the test case of how modernity's open-ended culturality operating through antipodal Others may be transformed and rendered powerless. The same is true of literature's strategies of deference manifesting in the bleaching of racial differences through assimilation, appropriation and strategies of "improving race relations via integration by degrees" (see Goldberg, 1990:7,210). Integration, especially in the American circumstance, was accredited on the "common values (which) were to furnish the grounds for consensus, the conditions of Americanness". However, the "central values constituted more by default than by consensus, were white, patriarchal and appropriately communal" (see Goldberg, 1990:7,91). In distinction to integration, Goldberg (1990:220) asserts that incorporation moves beyond

> the extension of established values and conventions over an historically successful group, rather, it [aims] for the creation of a transformed collective consciousness of the future.

On the contrary,

> The dynamic juxtaposition of two cultural spaces is not fixed in a relation of mutually contradictory communicative opposition but rather displays a metonymic representative incompleteness. A political process of articulation, rather than a base from which assertions can be more or less clearly extended, managed and manipulated.

The incorporative has two pragmatic sides to it. Firstly, it engages political projects which fashion the process set to consolidate, ... for continuing reformations on human functioning, for social and individual well-being. The values underlying these practices would comprise a contextual acceptance of the personhood of another, the participation in mutuality, relation, and reciprocity and even the possibility of "assuming ourselves into the existences of others and beyond Otherness" (see Goldberg 1993:321,218). Bergson (1946:86) warrants it up when he says that "it is through sympathy that we shall find the means of getting outside ourselves, of communicating integrally with the object studied". Empathy and intuition provide the basis for *communion* in the dynamic way of incorporative practices. Secondly, quoting Connolly (1991), Goldberg (1990:221) applies the incorporative practices

> not on the level of understanding but social subjects who confront and actively engage the relational and contingent character of the identities that constitute them". They require that social subjects strive to appropriately represent the values of their activities, identities or interests in open conversation and will be prepared to see in their contestants, even despite hold onto their values, "morally intelligible reasons for transforming their identities in relation to the critical values and calls of the transformative dynamic".

Eagleton (1994:177) argues that the notion of aesthetics has its origin as a concept in the body. Referring to Baumgarten, the inventor of the concept, he stresses the distinction between the material and immaterial. Aesthetics then denotes the re-engagement of the material and sensory world. In this move, Eagleton (1994:19,22) relates the development of the aesthetic to its crystallization in the political consciousness, consensus, power and the imaginary. In contradiction to German naturalism and British empiricism Eagleton proposes that the next stage in the aesthetics discourse must depart from the two main contributions, Marx and Freud. For Marx, with the labouring body and Freud with the desiring body, he believes everything should be thought through again "in terms of the body" (Eagleton 1994:89).

Consequently, for the study of literature which foregrounds that they can not have to be reduced to either the system-competence or the performance poles, Bakhtin's notion of dialogism which is in effect a philosophy of language (Bocquet 1990:1) is based on the view that dialogue means communication between significant differences. Dialogism treats language as both a cognitive and social practice where one dynamic colours language as a heteroglossic phenomenon. By its dialogic nature and operation, language reveals the ideologic loyalties in the language of the period or profession, class and generations and series (Clark 1984:86,1). "Language", in its organic sense, is

> in its every moment – for historical consciousness – concrete heteroglossia, where one finds embodied specific socio-ideological world views, forms and practices of verbal life, the speech of one or another distinct socio-ideological groups, the present day or past, literary languages, languages of generations and so forth, in one or another socially typical combination (Bakhtin 1981:291).

This view of language has points of contact with Foucault's notion of discourse.

Briefly, the articles collected in this issue. With a backward glance at four

The Pleasures of Labour: Marxist Aesthetics in the 1990s[1]

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Abstract

The paper explores the consequences for Marxist aesthetics of the emergence of a post-Marxist world. Proposing that we bracket the 'truth' of Marxist theory (as anticipated by Derrida) it assesses the continuing efficacity of Marxist aesthetics through close attention to four central instances.

Through labour in its broadest sense the human species produces and transforms itself and the human environment. Under private ownership that production is appropriated by capital so that the human subject becomes alienated from its own objective realisation. Under public ownership and communism will one day become free expression, annulling the gap between subject and object. Of this, including artistic labour, a communist future Marx (1970:705f) wrote in stable terms:

> possession [ownership] in exchange value breaks down into the direct material possession of products by the form of private property and labour. The free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time so as to posit surplus labour, but rather the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum which corresponds then to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means posited for all of them.

As Raymond Williams says above, with socialism people will become their own artists.

Given where we are with capitalism, under the conditions of alienated labour, Marx imagines artistic wedding out to us the reversed by of unalienated labour. At the same time, of course, art is an instance of ideology compromised by its entanglement with the present alms and processes of capitalist society. Marxist aesthetics does not consist of a given body of knowledge nor politics a tradition, a continuing practice. I shall take this double aspect of art, both complicit with the forms of society and resistant to them, as the working definition to characterise the object.

Classic Marxism

A Marxist aesthetic arises from and within classic Marxism. One can assume that its validity and particular interest depends upon the validity of classic Marxisms. The question, then, for a Marxist aesthetics in 1990 is how we would now assess classic Marxism.

So far the left in Britain has been thrown into disarray by its failure to confront the loss entailed by the open and unreconstructed acceptance in 1989 of Eastern European capitalism, whether previously considered as Stalinist or

[1] This was delivered to the 1994 Tuesday Seminar on April 19th.

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naturalised as actually existing socialism. Part of this failure has been a widespread refusal to come to terms with the theoretical limitations of classic Marxism. These need to be faced directly and openly.

We might begin with two empirical objections to classic Marxism: Firstly, it is a fact that you cannot run a modern, national economy through centralised, state control, no matter how many bureaucrats you appoint, or how many computers you install together in the Ministry of Economics to your capital city. Secondly, Marx believed that within his lifetime the main form of collective identity would be class, in a world divided between bourgeoisie and proletariat, and stretching from Birmingham to Bangalore. History proves this view was mistaken. Emerging into modernity the world has chosen as its essential mode of collective identity not class, for the most part, but, stretching from Finland to the Philippines, the nation and national identity.

Besides empirical worries there are a host number of objections in principle to classic Marxism. One is to its anthropology. Unlike its cousin, Darwinism, classic Marxism is founded upon an anthropology which privileges labour and the instinct for survival over the instinct of reproduction. 'Eat first', as Brecht says. A better anthropology would recognise both survival and reproduction as necessary instincts for the species. Developing this, Freud notes that the instincts for survival and reproduction are signified by the human species in the form of narcissistic drives. And developing these, psychoanalysis would conclude that to perform as a speaking subject every human being must achieve a sense of his or her own identity through recognition from others. As GA Cohen (1985:134) argues, against the anthropology of classic Marxism, 'nothing is more essentially human' than 'the need for self identity'.

Classic Marxism is logocentric. It finds a centre for itself by means of a series of binary oppositions. Materialism/idealism, use value/exchange value and base/superstructure are to be held in place by a fixation and opposition between the real and the apparent. Foundational or world-to foundational for as Derrida (1994:97) indicates, referring to Marx's discussion of the mysterious 'spectral materiality' of commodity fetishism with its delicacy and 'wit' you might miss his critical intent:

> Marx does not like ghosts any more than his adversaries do. He does not want to believe in them. With his breath of serious man, the scholar believes it when it is supposed to distinguish there from normal reality, using ethics or by. He believes he can oppose them, to life to death, like an apparition to its disappearance or to its presence.

Althusser's revision was aimed to step aside from this binary real and apparent by claiming for example that the lonely hour of economic determination in the last instance would never come. Derrida (1993:208) again has shown the difficulties with Marx's logocentrism even in Althusser's attempt to intervene it:

> If the economy as real instance can never appear as such, due to what concept of presence, of non-presence, of phenomenon or essence, does one have to think

Derrida goes on to urge recourse to a Heideggerian account of Being understanding. Such recourse was impossible for Althusser: he might have escaped 'economism' not only by ascribing to a position outside the Marxist tradition.

And classic Marxism is functionalist. As Jon Elster (1985:27) writes in *Making Sense of Marx*:

> Intentional explanation cites the *intended* consequences of behaviour in order to account for it. Functional explanation cites the *actual* consequences. More specifically, to explain behaviour functionally involves demonstrating that a fact *benefits* or has consequences for someone or something...

There's nothing wrong with functional explanation if you can specify a mechanism which moderates the relation between behaviour and consequence. As Steve Rose (1992:182-184) points out, even modern biology, for example, has some very good functional explanations: the human species lost all its body hair except in places where it protects vital organs because that increases the species' chances of survival, and there is genetic machinery to ensure reproduction of this beneficial effect. Functional explanations are often more problematic when applied to society yet they pervade classic Marxism and naturally without providing an adequate feedback mechanism.

For example, a Marxist account of the institution of literature teaching in Britain. You can easily show that English promotes individualism at the expense of a social perspective: sets up a canon, an ideal tradition with a bourgeois character; discriminates a liberal elite from the masses, and so on. The institution has these actual consequences and many others besides. Further, it would not be hard to demonstrate that at times certain groups (the Newbolt Committee, for example) have had explicit intentions in promoting English. So far, no problem. The objection arises if you name the consequences of the institution of English and then go on to argue that these work to the benefit of an agent (say, the ruling class) without specifying mechanisms by which those benefits are mediated and reproduced. When it relies on functional explanation classic Marxism lists actual consequences as though they were all *intended*.

Here classic Marxism betrays a Hegelian residue. When Marx writes famously that 'mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve', he assumes that the goal is rational (if only it were) and that its history 'are' no accidents, as if some ever living brain controlled the universe from the centre of the shareworlds. It doesn't. Global warming may have already released enough fossil methane to terminate the species with extreme prejudice.

Classic Marxism encourages a slide 'from "capital", a category of economic analysis, to "capitalism", both an economic category and a way of thinking'. My question would be: does capital think?

Truth or practice?

I now have to cancel or put into suspension the whole of this critique. For

2. To date critiques of Easton, Levine, Sober and Wright (1992:11-54) fail to take due cognizance of this crucial issue of 'feedback' mechanism.

what it has been doing is to argue that Marxist aesthetics depends on Marxism and that to ignore sections reported as basic Marxism is not *true*. To determine the truth of Marxism in this way is to try across the general inequality between Marxist theory and the work of correspondence, that is, between a discourse of formation and the real. Such an enterprise, as more than one commentator has argued, is fraught with epistemological difficulty. Not only that, it may be politically limiting, for it ignores the cross-palpably of the Marxist tradition. Derrida (1994:55) again:

> We inherit words, we believe in our names and names, above our heads, in a certain sense for the sake of Marx and Marxism. That is why we must [illegible] singularity of a project or of a practice—which has a philosophical and scientific [illegible].

Marxism remains the possibility of justice, and it is of course justice for all or the world as St Paul said, 'tomorrow and of another', but it does so not as a psychological or ethical force but in an Enlightenment, scientific discourse.

The same attitude holds for Marxist aesthetics. We would do far better to attend to the strategies and effectivity of Marxist aesthetics as an historical, human work, asking not so much 'Is it true?' but 'What can it do?'. I shall consider such examples as offering terms for the discussion of aesthetic texts. I don't think I could set out these terms programmatically, but I can say I'll approach the examples with a series of questions: 'How does this instance run to work the double vision of Marxist aesthetics?' 'What kinds of analysis does it make possible compared with others on offer?' 'What does it do, to say and what does it inhibit?' 'What are its *effects*?'

For Marx art 'always remained' always trapped inside ideology or it isn't clear how he would explain the relation there is (or will be) between artwork and audience, text and reader. Does the reader respond to the image of unalienated labour progressively or emotionally or both? Or is some other connection envisaged? 'The problem of how texts and readers work on each other is crucial to our understanding of Marxist aesthetics but has often been fudged. Brecht, for example, criticises bourgeois art on psychoanalytic grounds (it encourages identification and 'implicates the spectator') and then goes on to develop his radical alternative for essentially repressive reasons (it forces the spectator into an objective)' (Brecht, 1964:37). Can he really claim to have evaded each other? I shall watch out for the way each writer conceives the text/reader relation and return to the topic at the end.

Marcuse

In his far-sighted and sensitive essay of 1937, *The Affirmative Character of Culture*, Herbert Marcuse picks up the double-sided feature of art from Marx but also from the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*. Art in the classical period pertained to a world beyond, an impossible and alien reality, while, Marcuse says, in bourgeois society everyone is supposed to participate equally in a universal culture freely accessible to all—except, of course, that this notional freedom of access is contradicted by the inequalities of class

society. Even so, Marcuse (1968:103,95) describes such culture as affirmative because it is spiritual and establishes 'an inner state', 'an independent realm of value … consequently superior to the fixation'.

Art and culture would escape the realities which are in contradiction and make it desirable. If bourgeois society is coldly utilitarian, art is passionately useless; if it binds its subjects to objective necessity, restricting the body, art envisages subjective freedom and celebrates the body; if such society is unequal, art asserts perfect democracy. Culture, then, as Marcuse insists, exhibits a double character, both as evasion which would justify the reality it evades *and* as utopian promise furnishing a critique of the conditions which make it necessary:

> As affirmative culture calls for evil as a part of eternal order … it anticipates the hidden truth that in this world a form of social existence is possible in which the economy does not preempt the entire life of individuals (Marcuse 1968:103).

Writing, admittedly under the immediate threat of fascism, Marcuse (1968:130) remarks that 'even keeping alive the desire for fulfilment is dangerous in the present situation'. Against a Kantian aesthetic which defines art as useless in its address to the perception of the individual, Marcuse can give a coherent account from a social perspective of how that very uselessness makes it useful to bourgeois society.

English writers in the 1970s, such as Christopher Caudwell, derive much satisfaction from assigning art for the crime of being a bourgeois illusion; unlike these, Marcuse situates himself in a lived relation to the culture he analyses. My summarising comments do not do justice to the way the writing of the essay keeps doubling back on itself, exposing art as evasion rather only to affirm its divided character as an other affection, a position of struggle, a critique which is itself only possible because of art's alternative status. We are left with the sense, undeveloped perhaps, that Marcuse's critique is established not on some absolute point outside and looking on but precisely in relation to certain key features of art he annotates.

And yet Marcuse never asks himself about any mechanism or mediations by which art does and does not do all that he says. The essay remains, I think, locked into a bad functionalism. Stepping aside from questions of why, even given the situation he analyses, anyone might come to desire such culture, or, equally, how bourgeois society knows such culture is good for it, in its long-term interests (and maybe it isn't), on Marcuse's showing it:

Adorno

Marcuse treats high and popular art together, thinking the double bind in Marxist aesthetics as the antinomies potential of culture. Writing, *On Popular Music* in 1941 in the same journal that published Marcuse's essay, Adorno takes the opposition between unalienated labour and ideology, and makes it as the split between high art and popular culture. Thus the potentially utopian and critical side of culture is discovered 'in Beethoven and in good serious music in general' whereas popular music is deemed as conformist and escapist.

In its formal properties, Adorno says, popular music exhibits standardisation while serious music resists such standardisation, constantly, through unassimilated novelty, unsettling its listener. In this essay Adorno (1973) is on his way to the uncompromising position he takes up in 1948 in *Philosophy of Modern Music* where he rejects Western Renaissance rationality represented by Stravinsky as symptom of an economic traditionalism and asserts that the radical novelty of Schoenberg's avant-garde experiments with an atonal system are more fitting to modernity.

There are probably two ways to resolve Adorno's formal contrast between 'refractory' and 'positive' music: either you reject the opposition standardisation/non-standardisation by denying his formal analysis or you would argue that musically as he describes it non-standardisation in fact do occur in popular music. (Adorno seems to have missed Duke Ellington, for instance, and quite a lot more.) Nevertheless, musical stands d'oeillet demanded by commodity production, correlative to what he names as 'pseudo-individualisation' and defines by saying that the effort endows 'cultural mass products with the halo of real choice in open market on the basis of unquestionable facts' (Adorno 1962a:207). It is this which lends popular music its hold on the masses. What makes Adorno's essay exciting is not only its ability to frame culture from several perspectives but its willingness to pursue discussion over the traditional terrain of formalism, and this in the case of just that form most immediately resistant to conventional analysis, music. Adorno's sympathetic yet critical insight contrasts favourably with, say, the narrow attitudes of Q.D. Leavis writing about popular fiction in 1932.

Here is Adorno's psychoanalytic-informed account of the musical process with which standardisation produces the effect of pseudo-individualisation:

> ... when the orchestra in a sentimental film or radio serial music become aware of the overwhelming possibility of happiness, they seem to address to themselves what the whole order of society has ordinarily forbidden them to admit, namely, that they actually have no part in happiness .... The music finds out of sentimental music lies rather in the temporary release given by the awareness that one has missed out than in ... Tin Pan Alley ... [which] has become the image of the product which says: 'Come and weep, my child' (Adorno 1962a:222).

This maternal image is very tricky. According to the usual structure of melancholic fixation, the intensity of dyadic union desired from the mother is expressed by the intensity felt at her loss. Joy, along with the possibility of happiness, the mother is impossibly rebound as she tells the child to come and weep precisely for that loss. The marvellously suggestive implication of the analogy seems to be that just as the commodity form of popular culture realises use of the social alienation it means to conceal, so the imaginary fullness of 'sentimental music' reinstates lack by insisting so coercively on that very presence.

Adorno's theory of popular culture as promising to restore the nostalgic, melancholic, masochistic, dyadic moment between mother and child, though extraordinarily powerful, is not developed. Yet it puts Adorno of any sophisticated and free identification with the reader in popular

music. And it outlines a sense of a mechanism at work between the commodity and its subject. Adorno does not, however, risk extending the terms of his explanation to performances of Mozart, Beethoven and Stravinsky; these remain somehow exempt from the intense emotional effects of songs such as 'Deep Purple', 'Sunrise Serenade' and 'Alexander's Ragtime Band'. The Beach before him, psychoanalytic explanation is good enough for popular culture—high culture requires something more subtle.

'Screen' and Cultural Studies in Britain

In the 1970s a group of writers associated with the film journal *Screen*, worked out a development of Marxist aesthetics which has come to be called '*Screen* theory'. This in turn was hugely influential on cultural studies in Britain during the 1980s and beyond. Drawing on Brecht as mediated through Adorno and Eisenstein, *Screen* took the double vision of Marxist aesthetics and gave it the full formalist treatment, mapping the dis-relation between everyday ideology and radical practice onto that between the textual modes of realism and modernism. Aiming, in the words of Stephen Heath (1981:203), to stage a totalising theoretical 'encounter of Marxism and psychoanalysis on the terrain of subjectivity', *Screen* was determined to look beneath the surfaces of content analysis for a formalist analysis of what it called the specific 'ideological operation' of its chosen topic, film. And it addressed, via Lacanian psychoanalysis, the question of the mechanisms operating between reader and text. (Once again, like Brecht and Adorno, *Screen* was astute in suggesting the psychic effects of mainstream cinema but unable to say much about the radical text beyond claiming it interrogated or challenged the imaginary complicities of realism.)

Even with its emphatic discussion of mechanisms the *Screen* project remained inhibited in unsatisfactory functional explanations. Capitalism, through its chosen film institution, Hollywood, succeeds in its intrinsic ploy promoting the ostensibly realist text leaving it to a politicised avant-garde to attack capitalism by making films (usually with government money) whose jagged modernism confronted the reading subject with their own constructedness. But *Screen* came up with a brave and innovative if finally unconvincing manoeuvre to make good its functionalism: it distinguished between two kinds of reader of the text, the implied and the actual.

When Colin MacCabe (1932–98) wrote in an essay published in *Screen* in 1974 that 'the classic realist text ensures the position of the subject in a relation of dominant specificity', he is talking about the effect of the text on its reader as understood within the parameters of *Screen* theory (and of course there are no rights outside a particular theoretical interpretation). That implied effect of the text is ultimately a consequence of Hollywood as capitalist institution. Meanwhile, any other actual effects of the text can be safely passed off/by since they are not visible under the spotlight of *Screen* theory.

Adorno discussing popular music warns the listener seeking to defend his or her pleasure: *Screen* and nothing but my contempt for readers

trapped in the realist text, sunk in ideology, captured by dominant textuality and limply subject to all the unresistable pleasures of the Lacanian imaginary. Macherey's high above the struggle, like Moses on Sinai, the well versed film theorist could see and judge everything, except themselves, measuring exactly the degree to which a given text reproduced or subverted the dominant ideology, an ideology to which these positions within theoretical practice were themselves happily immune.

In *Screen* theory, and in subsequent work in cultural studies in Britain, that ascribed position outside and looking in was justified by appeal to Althusser's opposition between science and ideology. In its disdain for ordinary people, however, I think it reveals something rather more familiar to us.

Wonderfully unEnglish as *Screen* theory was in its theoretical rigour and its ramarin in pursing history through and beyond formalism, it fixed an unbridgeable gulf between those who understood theory and could sit through the more extreme interventions of British independent cinema, and, on the other hand, we ordinary punters who go to the movies. In retrospect, (and I am indulging in a little auto critique here) I am struck by how far that jejune and superior demarcation inhabited a traditional English moralism, bringing *Screen* into unconscious and unrecognisable proximity to the aesthetic moralising of F.R. Leavis.

Derrida

While Macherey, Adorno and *Screen* theory fit snugly within Marxist aesthetics because of their adherence to the view of art as double featured, my next contender, although he claims his project is as much a beneficiary of Marx as Young Hamlet is heir to his dead father, may not (or not properly) qualify as Marxist. We'll see. For him art has a single effect and is always radical.

Difference (*différance* you'll recall), 'instigates the subversion of every kingdom' (Derrida in Attridge 1992:12), and for Derrida writing (and especially literature as the military wing of difference—has a crucial function in subverting kingdoms:

> Whether it is pleasurable or not (and that is not so easy to decide), the more 'powerful' a text is (on this power is not a metaphysical attribute but rather the most risky of fictions), the more it is written, the more it stakes up its own terms or (lets face the thought) as well as the limits of phallogocentrism, of all authority, and all 'patriarchy' or hegemony in general (Derrida in Attridge 1992:66).

Although officially committed to the view that 'No *internal* criterion can guarantee the essential "literariness" of a text' (Derrida in Attridge 1992:73), Derrida (see Attridge 1992:460) speculates that the potentialities of some texts 'are richer and denser' than others, embodying a performativity which 'in some sense, appears the greatest possible in the smallest possible space'. 'Every literary work', he says, "betrays" the dream of a new institution of literature' (Derrida in Attridge 1992:73f), a unique institution, though if it really were unique we couldn't read the text at all. These are the views of the man who when asked to lecture at the *Ninth International James Joyce Symposium* at Frankfurt in 1984 told his astonished and appalled hosts that there was an institution Joyce had gone everything 'he could to make impossible' (Derrida in Attridge 1992:2nd).

Derrida's High Modernist aesthetic would attribute formal properties to certain aesthetic texts—richer, denser, as much as any Kantian or Coleridgean aesthetic: some texts, he argues, are just more *written* than others. And it's all high art, for there is not a trace here of popular culture (I've not come across anything to suggest that Derrida has ever sat in a cinema or watched television). His aesthetic picks up Adorno's trust in the power of high art as an alternative culture; it posits, as the opposition between logocentrism and writing Derrida actually extends the radical force of Modernist textuality by proclaiming it as a threat to 'all authority' and 'all hegemony in general'.

Although there is clearly a conceptual opposition between presence and difference, logocentric power and the subversions of writing, Derrida does not otherwise offer an account of how writing produces phallogocentrism (this may be the occasion at which to recall the argument of Peter Dews that, in comparison with Lacan, Derrida lacks a conception of the subject). And although Derrida knows perfectly well that writing doesn't do anything unless its process is enacted in and through human subjects, frequently (as in the bits I've cited here) he slides out a position in the form of a bad functionalism. It is, however, a bad functionalism since its effect is radical. Thus, given the present field of forces, by insinuating the violence of difference, writing in the Modernist mode operates not to the benefit of established power but always to its detriment.

Derrida owes this kind of functional explanation not so much to Adorno, Frankfurt and the Marxist tradition as to something quite different. In his discussion of *The Origin of the Work of Art* and elsewhere Martin Heidegger (1993:139-212) also rejects a Kantian aesthetic on the grounds that it supposes an epistemological relation between reader and text, that 'art works become the object of a form of human experience' and in accordance with that, art comes to be an expression of human life' (Heidegger 1993:265). In contrast, Heidegger (1993:264) proposes an ontological conception of the art work, beyond any merely cognitive or emotional appropriation, as one of the most important modes in which *Dasein* enlarges its own possibilities into existence by 'discovering what it is to be human'.

If, as Heidegger repeatedly maintains we must, we start by posing every question as a question in relation to the truth of Being, then, I think, we arrive inevitably at something like Heidegger's analysis of the work of art. Similarly, if we start by posing every question in relation to an opposition between presence and difference, speech and writing, then, I think, we are driven in a fairly straight line to Derrida's view that 'literature in the twentieth century has a radical power to shake up the 'rights of 'hegemony in general'.

Well, perhaps it does. But that account leaves some quotes

answered. What are the mechanisms by which literature does this, or are we to accept that question is sufficiently answered by rehearsing the opposition between presence and difference? How does literature establish what its effects are, that it is indeed threatening hegemony and not unwittingly consolidating it? And crucially: should we really think of art as a social and cultural phenomenon without introducing any sense of agents' subjects and intentions at all? In admitting to these worries I hasten to say that it would be a false and unnecessary alternative to return instead to humanism, whether naive or sophisticated, and the belief that subjects are freely constitutive. And this may be the moment to interject that the necessary alternative to crude humanism is not methodological individualism.[5]

To me begin to sketch a conclusion: Macherey, the *Screen* position, and, yes, Derrida (despite Heideggerian nuisances) reproduce and rework the Marxist aesthetic tradition because they explore varying implications of Marx's conception of art as unalienated labour. (One might even think of claiming Heidegger as a bedfellow of the same tradition, not only because of his admiring respect for Marx, but because for him too art has a transformative force insofar as it may recall us from our forgetting of Being.) Yet, my constant reservation has been that the unfolding discourse of Marxist aesthetics relies too much on tendentious functional explanations, and detailing sufficiently how a social organisation determines what is or is not in its interests and the means it uses to make this knowledge effective. A consequence of this functionalism is that Marxist aesthetics does not always deal satisfactorily with the question of how readers experience texts.

I want to end by trying another take on this issue. Marx's assertion within the alienated forms of production art keeps alive the hope of unalienated labour. Suppose one was to approach that idea not from the side of history and the social formation but from the view of subjectivity and the unconscious. Leaving aside the possibility that the reader's response to the idea of unalienated labour is cognitive, that from art he or she acquires a piece of knowledge, what fantasy pleasures might the reader find in that image. How might the figure of unalienated labour serve as an object of desire?

On very different grounds to Marx, Jacques Lacan discusses a quite different conception of alienation and arrives at a much more pessimistic conclusion. What Lacan names as the *vel*—the either/or—of alienation is represented by a Venn diagram in which *Being* and *meaning*, the subject and the Other, the real and the rational, necessarily exclude each other. Choose being and you fall into non-meaning; choose meaning and you get it, but only because your being is eclipsed by its disappearance into the field of the signifier. It is, as Lacan (1977:212) says brusquely, 'Your money or your life!' None of this is really something like the situation into which we're thrown. It would reveal the ambitious attraction of any representation promising escape from the alienation of the subject, any image restoring unity between subject and object, any dyadic relation in which being and meaning appear to be at one.

5. This is well argued by Levine, Sober & Wright (1987).

Obviously, Marx's economic alienation and Lacan's alienation of the subject run at tangents to each other. However, the Lacanian thing would explain, in a way the Marxist tradition itself cannot, why art's representation of unalienated labour draws the imagination so seductively. But it provides this explanation at a price (your money or your life again). For it asserts that no matter what might happen in a Communist future and no matter how much we might hope that people could become their own art, through the rendering of objective realisation as free choice and by closing the gap between subject and object, no one will ever elude the *vel* of alienation, that constitutive either/or between meaning and Being which generates all those familiar self-evidencing, recessively embedded Lacanian sentences that always say the same thing, that the signifier

> functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to not a lot more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject. (Lacan 1977:200).

Reading Lacan against Marx implies we may have to surrender our Utopian hopes. Some things, like cigarettes, we do have to give up. But there is no reason to stop trying to make the situation better in the meantime.

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White Mythology: What Use is Deconstruction?

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Abstract

What follows is an attempt to examine the relevance of one aspect of deconstruction with an eye to its usefulness, or otherwise, for the purposes of a counter-hegemonic discourse. Moving quickly through facets of Hegel, Derrida, Kant and Marx, I argue that only if deconstruction is supplemented by historical contextualisation can it reach beyond the confines of a narrow academic specialism.

Rather than use [its] words (Goldberg 1990:238)

The phrase 'white mythology' is often invoked as shorthand for both imperialism and colonialist racism: the elevation of the experience of Western man into the universal experience of humanity and the subjection of non-Western 'others' to the imperious logocentrism of disinterested reason. Robert Young (1990), for example, appeals to these connotations of the term in his *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. Yet the exact functioning of white mythology is rarely if ever elaborated beyond this rhetorical invocation, and it is simply taken as self-evident and used with the confidence of a given term. I propose to examine the meaning of white mythology, teasing out the thread of the aesthetic, with an eye to its suitability as a resource for a counter-hegemonic discourse. (I don't propose to explore here the weaknesses of the white mythology thesis.) I think this direction offers the most promise for the use-value of deconstructive strategies that are themselves always double edged and never straightforwardly liberatory. Such a perspective is more appropriate to the deconstructive trajectory than Rodolphe Gasché's anxiously philosophical reading of white mythology in the final chapter of *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (1986).

Derrida (1982:212-3) gives the following definition of white mythology:

> Metaphysics—the white mythology that reassembles and refocuses the culture of the West, the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own *logos*. For it is the myth in this idiom, for the universal form, of that he must still wish to call Reason ...

This cluster of propositions operates in critiques of Eurocentrism, reservations regarding modernization and postcolonial imperialism, and in attacks upon instrumental reason inspired by critical theory and ideological critique. However, the complications of this thesis are not so well attended to and consist of the following:

> White mythology—metaphysics has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible design covered over in the palimpsest (Derrida 1982:213).

This definition appears in the essay 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the text of Philosophy'. White mythology is the erasure of the scene of production. When white mythology is invoked the mythological element is fastened upon at the expense of metaphor—doubtless because of the demythologising impulse that sees myth as ideology and aims to demythologise the nexus of power. But metaphor is the key to white mythology, it is how it functions.[1] Metaphor as the exchange or transpositive substitution of qualities on the basis of a shared substance or nominal resolve *is* white mythology. The 'invisible design' is the possibility of the metaphorical and the literal, itself unreadable and all-pervasive. In contrast to the pathos of Derrida's 'fabulous scene' I want to lead the analysis of white mythology beyond the orbit of classical philosophy (the target of Derrida's deconstruction) to the tropic territory of colonialism where the cost of this erasure can be counted in real, historical terms. Beyond its function as a slogan or incantation of postcolonial discourse theory white mythology has a precise tropological meaning and its usefulness in historico-specific contexts demands more than well-intensical sloganeering or theoretical generality.

The first thing to note about white mythology is its connection with an onto-theological teleotropism—the meaning of this philosophical vocabulary will become clearer in the following argument. The work of metaphor is inconceivable outside of this tropic system. I propose to begin with a) an outline of teleotropism (Hegel), and then b) follow Derrida's analysis of white mythology, extending those considerations into the tropes of c) aesthetic praxis (Kant) and d) exchange and colonialism using Marx to bring white mythology down to earth. I will conclude with some suggestions regarding translation, literary history and academic exchange.

a Hegel

In *The Philosophy of History*, a collection of lectures delivered in 1830/31, Hegel provides an apocryphal narrative of 'the geographical survey, [in which] the course of the World's History has been marked out in its general features'. This narrative of the great awakening of the West in the course of civilization and enlightenment marks out the destiny/destination of the West—that is, of Man.[2] Hegel's transcendental history is in tune with Western

1 See Spivak's (1988:210) half-hearted attempt to use the deconstruction of the metaphor project against itself.

2 In his 'On the Progress of Philosophy, Arts and Learning in America' of 1725, Bishop George Berkeley writes in the spirit of this teleological teleotropism: 'Westward the course of empire takes its way; The first four acts already past, A fifth shall close the drama with the day: Time's noblest offspring is the last' (see Tomlinson 1990:170). Henry David Thoreau, at peace in the radiance of America's Manifest Destiny, celebrates 'Jefferson's sense which I witness inspired me with the desire to go to the West as far as land to raise the sun goes down' (Thoreau 1888:158). The tropism cuts across Albert K. Weinberg's (1963:231) paranoid analysis that the 'imperialist doctrine of inevitability was distinct from the fatalistic "Great Destiny"'. In the Herderian view of myth, aesthetics, culture and history sparkling, a given mythology expresses a given people's conception of nature (see Richardson 1978:chapter 7).

triumphalism, inner clarity, revelation, destination and discovery are inextricably located in the West as the fulfillment and 'portion' of World History, *within and below*, the circle as destination/destiny. The West's perennial destiny is to recover what it has lost and myths concern ends, destinations, as much as origins. For example, the sun is central to the ideology of *Manifest* Destiny– the elemental association of truth and light that grides American imperialist expansion. It is also integral to the Enlightenment project of enlightenment. This triple play is not simply secondary or supplementary as an accidental metaphor. It is central to the extermination, assimilation, the white mythology of European domination.

Accordingly, continues Hegel, at dawn in 'utter astonishment' and first blinded by the 'flaming glory of the ascending', eventually, 'when the Sun is risen' this astonishment is diminished: objects around are perceived, and from them the individual proceeds to the contemplation of his own inner being', and 'by the close of day man has erected a building constructed from his own inner Sun and when in the evening he contemplates this, he esteems it more highly than the original external Sun'. The sun is internalised in the movement from sensory to spiritual, from physical to metaphysical. This analogy is characteristic of what is called *metaphysics (passage to physics)*. Hegel writes that 'the outward physical Sun' rises in the East 'and to the West sinks down'. The setting of the Sun is its orientation and elevation for 'here consciousness only sees the Sun of self-consciousness, which diffuses a nobler brilliance'. The solar course of self-consciousness is the activity of recollection or memory – a return or fulfillment of meaning to its propriety and unity, an inner content that is an interiorised experience. This is memory as *Erinnerung* and recollection (*Verinnerung*) rather than memory as mechanical repetition (*Gedächtnis*). In the movement of interiorising anamnesis, memory and imagination, achieves the production of signs. The trajectory of imagination's tasks ultimately is recognition.

'The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, As to the beginning' (Hegel 1956:103).[4] The sensory sun is interiorised in the eye of the Westerner who achieves the essence of man 'illuminated' by the true light. Hegel's metaphor of self-consciousness as solar orbit and world history as self-consciousness is an revelatory metaphor. The telos of the fulfillment of man as the fulfillment of world history is the transformation of sensory presence into the self-presence of self-possessed-inwardness –the propriety or property of subjectivity to and for itself that is the nature of man. The universal burden of man's destiny is carried by Western man. Hegel's metaphoric assembles man on the basis of a speculative return to itself of the absolutely original – an interiorising, or interiorising anamnesis and recollection of meaning. The representative superiority of imperious Western man nurtured by Hegel might well be

4. 'America, characteristically, is the *future* quarter of the globe: the region of imagination. It is the Western world (2). America, but as Europe presses on the whole, the centre and end of the old world, and is absolutely the West—so Asia is absolutely the East' (Hegel 1956:86).

called sublime, whose experience of the sublime gives rise to an imperious self confidence.[5] Hegel's parable presents the metaphor of the domination of sense over sensory as the birth of self/consciousness as *lumen naturale*, the teleology of meaning as return to origin. There is more to this mythopoetics than meets the eye. It is my view that heliotropism names the trajectory of the West – a discursive frontier that radiates out in many all hemispheres, and marks out the law of the frontier and, most problematically, the frontier of the law.

b Derrida

Derrida notes that the course of the sun is the trajectory of metaphor from sensory self presence to spiritual self-presence. Light is the neutral element of appearing, the pure medium of phenomenality in general. The proper, as origin and as destination, is defined as presence – either sensory presence or spiritual presence. The proposed deconstruction of this heliotropism goes as follows. Firstly, this heliotropic figure is not one metaphor among other metaphors:

> Everything in the discourse on metaphor that passes through the eye *alone*, with its entire system, is articulated with the analogy between the visible and sensory world, between the intelligible sun and the visible sun. The determination of the truth of Being as presence passes first of all by the detour of this given system (Derrida 1982d:220).

Hegel's fable, however it might appear as the mythos of the West (plane mythology), cannot be merely deflected or bracketed even when it is seen to be ideologically self-serving (which, for it, it originates the resource of any attempt to counter the imperious mask of the West. There is no simple outside of this system (inside/outside is, of course, a spatial metaphor). The sun supervises the heliotropism that is white mythology:

> The presence of *unity as telos* (to be placed 'before the metaphor of eye') or as *Begriffsinhalt* (to override visible phenomena or sentiment) frees the theoretical organ. . . . This articulation is not executed before the visionary metaphorics and provokes the transformation of presence into self-possession, into the property or proprietas of subjectivity to and for itself. It is the history of "proper" meanings, as we said above, where detour and return are to be allowed' (Derrida 1982d:254).

Derrida points out that as the sensory object, *par excellence*, the exemplary origin, the sun is also potentially both private and absent, and can always

5. Enno Cassirer (1946:69) notes the following of the Darkness sublime: 'There is no other aesthetic experience of man that gives him so much self confidence and courage as the original – the impression of the sublime'. For 'When the sun was the son of the Good, the invisible source of light, and this object and metaphorical image' (Plato 1941:509b) is the aesthetic equation of the beautiful as the symbol of the good.

6. Paul Ricoeur (1978) notes the necessary complicity between metaphor and metaphysics: between the metaphor's pair of the proper and the figurative, and the metaphysical pair of the visible and the intelligible. Derrida (1978) replies to these observations in 'The Retrait of Metaphor'. See Derrida (Caputo 1997). For a full discussion on this exchange

potentiality and improperly disappear. Such anti-heliogenesis is improper because the sensory being-present of the celestial is the proper *par excellence* and that to which the unity and rigidity of the proper must be fixed.

> There is only one sun in this system. The proper name, here, is the concealed/denied source-power of metaphor, the father of all figures. Everything turns around it, everything turns toward it (Derrida 1982d:243).

The sun discloses what is visible as what is present in so far as it discloses the sensory and is thus the origin of propriety:

> the very opposition of appearing and disappearing, the entire lexicon of the *phenomenon* of attitudes, etc., of day and night, of the visible and the invisible, of the present and the non-present, does is possible only under the sun (Derrida 1982d:247).

The proprietor of the self-present of the sensory and the illumination of interior senses are part of the heliocentric system. The sun itself is not beyond the system of tropic exchanges it enables, and as the proper *par excellence* it too is subject to turning. As the origin of propriety, the sun itself is subject to the impropriety of alterity.

Metaphor (*metaphorai*) consists in giving (*epiphora*) the thing a name that belongs to something else' (*Poetics* 1457b6).[7] Analogy is the mode of this transportive exchange on the basis of a shared being-substance. 'Analogy is metaphor par excellence' (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III,10,1411a1). 'To produce a good metaphor is to see a likeness' (*Poetics* 1459a7)[8] and this involves a carrying over or transport of qualities, and this *epiphora* is linked to *metaphysis* by *phoresis*. Resemblance and similarity intermesh with that of imitation and to the '*Mimesis* is never without the *theoretical* perception of resemblance *from-afar*, or similarity' (Derrida 1982d:237). As a sort of metaphoric derivation of identity from a comparative sameness, 'the unity and continuity of meaning dominates the play of syntax' (Derrida 1982d:210); whereby metaphor executes its transference through the improper extension of a predicate proper to one element of the conjunction to another element, that is, carries exchange or trade their senses on the basis of a nominal essence of being-substance, or the security of their nominal stability. There is a connection between the primitive and the proper/original and semantic propriety functions as the linguistic analogue of an ethnopoetics positing a pure origin. Etymology (in Greek root *etymon* means 'discourse on true meaning') means place or origin, the proper, and so bears upon the question of the ethical-political. This heliocentrism extends not only man but also questions of knowing and of the ethics of the natural and proper implicit in them.

6. Derrida's analysis moves quickly here, and I want to register a reservation regarding the economy of semantic unity and ontological unity within which Derrida is operating. Other works by Derrida (1976, 1982a, 1983a) address this issue. This economy is what is termed 'logocentrism'.

7. Nelson Goodman (1968) argues that metaphor is a redescription involving labels. For Max Black (1962) metaphors confer insight. Donald Davidson (1984:245-265) argues that metaphors have no cognitive value beyond their literal paraphrase.

> If a conditions for metaphor (for good and true metaphor) is the condition for truth, therefore it is to be expected that the animal, deprived of logos, or whose *phonematic* of *mimesis* etc., also would be incapable of metaphor. Moreover if the deprivation belongs to *logos*, and is not immediately aping, or gesticular, it is related to the possibility of meaning and truth in discourse (Derrida 1982d:217).

The animal is without *logos* while man is the *zoon logon echon* for 'the human voice ... of all organs can best imitate things' (*Rhetoric* III,III,1404a-21b). For Aristotle, mimesis, imitation, is what is natural to man.

The course of this anthropocentric white mythology runs thus:

> Without doubt, all subsequent appurtenance to this law is already a bit less than natural, a supplement, which says nothing, nothing that can be reduced to a metaphor. As for the law of this 'meaning nothing', one is mainly an animal, but rather a plant, a reed, and not a thinking one. ... And even a metaphorical vegetable (*phuton*, to which belongs completely to *physis* to the extent that it possesses its form), by analogy, logos, and the voice of man (Derrida 1982d:248).

What is proper to man is bound up with the law of nature. The lawfulness of the moral laws appeals via analogy to the mechanical necessity of nature. The naturalisation of the moral law is intimately part of an ethnocentrism whereby there is a detour through the improper towards the unity of appropriation. White mythology is thus a humanist 'aesthetics that posits the idea of the universal formal identity of the human' (Lloyd 1984:39). What is universally proper to man is declared from within this tropism.

Derrida (1982d:253) argues that the metaphor of the sun

> does in order to signify metaphor itself; ... is a metaphor of metaphor: an appropriation, a being outside one's own residence, but still in a dwelling, outside its own residence but still in a residence in which one always 'looks to oneself', recognises oneself, reassembles oneself or assembles oneself, outside oneself in oneself.

As telos or originary unity the sun is central to the system of white mythology. Hegel's task marks the transformation of the sensuous sun into the spiritual interior sun of consciousness, a sensory kernel, an original presence to be idealised-transported-idealised. This movement from the sensuous to the spiritual is the movement of metaphorisation from proper sensory meaning to proper spiritual meaning; the movement of idealisation and interiorisation of metonymy and meta-physics. The claim that metaphor concretises meaning does not escape this metonymical circuit since the material is in its turn ultimately idealised. The movement of idealisation in Hegel's text whereby the sensory is conserved in the ideal is not simply to be opposed by a pure ideal, literal, sensory kernel of the proper.[8]

The deconstructive turn can be distilled to the following. If a sun itself, the source of all propriety, functions, according to Derrida's deconstruction of this exemplary origin, an originary improperty since it can be both present and absent. It is inscribed in a system of relations that constitute it. It can

8. For Hegel the idea' returns to concrete singularity via the creative imagination. See Derrida (1982a:69-108) on this fantastic production.

only be itself improperly named.

> This name is no longer the proper name of a subjective being which metaphor would overtake, it already has begun to owe its role to a divided origin: it all, such as the eye, of the solitary, sexless, the father, the "proper name" ... (Derrida 1982d:214).

It is, then, the paradigm of both the sensory and of metaphor, of both the perception of originary presence and the transport/mediation of presence. What, then, has happened to the unique and natural sun, the paradigm of originality, the irreducible and properly natural referent?

It seems that the sun too is metaphorical and hence no longer natural and non substitutable: the heliotropic system is divided at its origin. Metaphor resembles a kind of transport, communication, frontier crossing, or translation of meaning that can never be closed off by any legislative necessity positing the proper before metaphor. And Derrida (1982d:230) rather baroquely calls this indeterminacy 'the interminable *dehiscence* [gaping open] of the supplement (if we may be permitted to continue to garden this botanical metaphor)'. From metaphor to reference, one loops to metaphor ... so this point metaphor is used to destabilise the proper to which it is conventionally opposed. This is the Nietzschean thrust of Derrida's deconstruction. But his generalisation of metaphor faces a logical impasse: all cannot be metaphor for metaphor is only in opposition to the proper. Just as this argument does not subvise metaphorical language as that which identifies one thing with another, it also does not express man's harmony with nature (Aristotle).[9] Neither does it seek to reduce all to metaphor, seeing a conspiracy of reception and ideological mythology operating via metaphor (Nietzsche). Derrida proposes to reinscribe the conventional course of metaphor—metaphorisation as loss of sensible meaning or gain of spiritual meaning—by tracing its historico problematic terrain. Metaphor gets the proper lost (orientation—or rather, the not-quite proper since what precedes metaphor also precedes the category of the proper. Whether this fabulous scene is metaphorical or proper is what is undecidable. This is the 'result' of the deconstruction.

If the exemplary and original sun circumscribes the anthropocentric in its orbit, engendering what is natural and proper to man, then its *modus operandi* is resemblance and likeness. Originality is not only the characteristic of the irreplaceable thing, originality is also the genius of the sublime artist. Genius, as the exemplarity of the human, is an originality that claims to be incomparable; namely, a genius that transcends the cypress man and has ethico-political consequences.[10] The sun is related not only to the forging of metaphor but also to the originality of genius. The heliotrope manifestly generates disclosure and unveiling, cultivation (*Bildung*: formation, culture) and growth. I would now like to link this discussion of metaphor and heliotrope via mimesis to genius, moving from the aesthetic to the economic.

9 Pol Bergen (1982:37) misleadingly translates the indispensable principle for interpreting diverse phenomena and perspectives without sacrificing their diversity'. Nor, alternatively, is the following critique of metaphor to be based on an argument for metonymy over metaphor, since metonymy no less than metaphor is governed by resemblance. According to Jakobson (1971) metonymy is based on contiguity, correspondence and combination while metaphor is based on selection and resemblance. This distinction is designed to preserve the syntagmatic, combinational aspect of metonymy and the selective, comparative, declarative axis of metaphor. However, it is unclear why metaphor is not also contiguous and combinational and why metonymy is not also selective and comparative. As the bringing together of separates not related by resemblance, the contiguity of metonymy (eg cause and effect, sign and signification) designates can best by the same of another on the basis of a shared idea—that is not of a specific contiguity posits a resemblance, and so resemblance cannot be the 'monopoly' of metaphor. This debate is still far from settled. Possibly, metonymy, as pure relational contact, is more a matter of chance while metaphor is closer to necessary use (De Man 1979:14).

c Kant

Kant's discussion of genius and the sublime in *The Critique of Judgement* centres on a citation as an example of the sublime: 'Perhaps there has never been a more sublime utterance or a thought more sublimely expressed, than the well known inscription upon the Temple of Isis (Mother Nature): "I am all that is, and that was, and that shall be, and no mortal hath raised the veil from before my face"' (Kant 1986:179).[1] Hegel, arguably drawing on Plutarch as his source, also quotes 'the Goddess of Neith at Sais', who was introduced into the Osirian cult and confounded with Isis: 'I am that which is, that which was, and that which will be; no one has lifted my veil' (Hegel 1956:220).

'The modern concept of genius and the ideal of artistic self expression, sincerity, authenticity and originality cut across questions of morality and aesthetics, and is tied historically via notions of hierarchy and propriety to a social consensus or at least recognition by some persons whose opinions have weight in terms of the history of culture' (Battersby 1989:120).[2] Since genius as the exemplar of individuality is ethically and politically charged, any interrogation of it has consequences beyond literary phenomena. For Aristotle the ability to use metaphor well and therefore to perceive resemblance is the mark of genius. 'To be a master of metaphor ... is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others and it is also a sign of genius' (*Poetics* 1459a55-57, and see *Rhetoric* III,1). Kant tells us that genius is constituted in one of its parts by 'the faculty of presenting *aesthetic ideas* which are intuitions' (representations of the imagination), 'without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. *concept*, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render

10 Derrida (1981:31) notes: 'The problem of genius and the problem of the seal are now [after Burke] moving in the same direction, and they become the two bases upon which a new and deeper conception of individuality radically evolves'.

11 Lacoue-Labarthe (1989:14) notes that Kant's example of sublime objects was 'connected with the representations of God'.

2 'The cult of genius emerged in a cluster of times in the countryside around Rome. Genius was one of a number of household spirits that were all connected in some way with the ownership, protection and cultivation of property and land by a family or clan' (Battersby 1989:37).

completely intelligible" (Kant 1986:175f, sec 49).[13] Genius is traditionally the synthesizing capacity of conferring, on particulars the aura of universality: "Genius does not receive its law from without, but from within itself; it produces its law in its original form" (Cassirer 1951:327).[14] Genius is the portrayal or expression of *aesthetic ideas* consequent upon

> the free harmonizing of the imagination with the understanding's conformity to law ... such as cannot be brought about by any observance of rules, whether of science or mechanical imitation. It can only be produced by the nature of the individual. Genius, according to these presuppositions, is the exemplary originality of the natural endowments of an individual in the free employment of his cognitive faculties (Kant 1986:185f).

Genius is tied to autonomy and freedom. As with the Hegelian Sun which attains its proper element in the self-consciousness of Spirit (Nature as Reason itself), the return of nature to itself via the analogical detour of exemplarity-resemblance ('naturalite in general says itself, resemplifies itself, knows itself, appears to itself, relieves itself', and "animes" itself par excellence and *in vivo* in human nature' (Derrida 1982d:237). Analogy proceeds not by direct correspondence, but by the transfer of reflection via what, Kant in the *The Critique of Judgement* terms 'a symbolic hypotyposis'. Reflection, of course, is another optic metaphor within the orbit of heliotropism. What is proper to man is to be the privileged medium of the return of nature to itself. To be a genius is to have more nature, more seed than others, for genius privileges hidden resemblance and substitution from the outset. Genius is then caught up in mimesis which aims at the pleasure of knowledge/discovery. Metaphor belongs to mimesis, to the fold of *physis* returning to itself and giving itself rules via genius.

It is at this point, within the humanist aesthetic of singularity and individuality, that Derrida points to the sacrifice of man in nature's return: this sacrifice is what is proper to man. In the humanist drama only man is capable of mimesis, and genius has its rules dictated by nature. Genius naturalizes anthropomimesis, and gains productivity becomes nature's functioning. Man, like metaphor, is simply a detour to nature's return (if a privileged one. Man is the only example. This sacrifice is part of the humanistic aesthetic that has traditionally presented itself as exhalting and preserving the individuality/singularity of man. This deconstructive reading into the aesthetic is of the greatest importance:

> What is art? Kant seems to begin by supposing art to be man's nature, the subscribing to the 'is' of nature, visible', simplified opposition between *tekhne* and *physis*. On the side of nature as mechanical necessity; on the side of art, the play of freedom. In between there is a whole series of boundary determinations. But analogy cancels out opposition. It places under Nature's dictate what is most wildly free in the productivity of art. Genius is the locus of such a deletion—the means by which art receives its rules from nature. All prepositions of an anthropomorphic cast, all condescendences level against intuition are underlined at this point. The location of human nature (art nature, assigning its rules to genius, feeds itself, returns to itself, reflects itself through art. This specular fiction provides Kant the principle of reflexive judgements: nature guaranteeing legality in a movement that proceeds from the particular and terminates returns to universals understood not as the two poles of an imitation of nature by art, but as a flexion of the physis: nature's return to itself. There is no longer any opposition between *physis* and *mimesis*, nor consequently between *physis* and *tekhne*; on that, at least, is what now needs to be verified (Derrida 1988:6).

According to Kant for more, law is conceivable only via analogy with the mechanistic laws of nature; this is the enigma of the analogy of the causality of freedom with the causality of nature (see Kant, 'Teleological Judgement' *Critique of Judgement*). In the Kantian schema man does not outside nature: nature returns itself. Kant's claim that art is not imitation, does not escape the economimetic economy affirmed from Aristotle to the present. The natural and the proper resemblances itself, gathering man into his propriety. The circular economy of analogical exchanges maps on the natural exchanges of nature with itself. Genius is the medium of nature's recollection, and is caught up in white mythology—the appropriation of nature to the I.[15] The singularity of man does not escape this appropriation. Man is a means and an end in himself. As in heart, the humanist, anthropocentric aesthetic is anti-human. What is it, just man relates? Self present nature itself. Thereby nature returns to itself, reflects itself via what is proper (natural) to man. Mimesis is the unveiling of nature, *physis*. Mimesis is based on resemblance and the condition of truth is correspondence/resemblance and metaphor as the manifestation of analogy is the means of knowledge of recognizing the same. Even the mechanistic, *tekhne*, is returned to nature, *physis*. Through man exemplified by genius, nature gives/takes itself. The analogy of resemblance between the imitation and the original is the basis of mimesis. Metaphor, in the telos of return home, is reappropriation of origin and the temptation of romantic yearning for lost origin and unity. This is the dominant aspect of the aesthetic tradition that merits the name of white mythology.

One might speculate that the value of analogy is precisely to articulate this inevitable return to itself of nature. Analogy must have a non-anthropomorphic origin and according to the received and hierarchizing anthropomorphism this origin is Man: the shared being-substance of human nature. But Man is enfolded in nature, *physis*, and Man as a fundamental origin, itself functioning analogically with nature, is caught up in an analogical economy of self-presence whereby nature returns to itself. That is, the terms in the analogical tie between man and nature) relation are already caught up in a metaphysical relation of substitution and resemblance. Man suffers no specificity against this destiny of return to originary self-presence. Man, as Western

[13] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (1990:130), points out the significance of the use, rather than of nothing, in Kant's illustration of the sublime. See also Ernst Cassirer (1951:318ff) on genius.

[14] Cassirer is recapitulating Schelling's and traces the romantic aesthetic leading through Schiller to Kant. See also A. Schlegel (1962:16ff).

[15] 'Inspiration, the artistic creation, like art in general, subsists in itself for aspects: it conceals joy, consciousness, and this aspect it is which the subject cannot generate in himself but must find in himself as immediately given. That alone is the sense in which we may say that genius and talent must be inborn' (Hegel 1975:285). 'Originality proves', that is, by nature.

man, possessed of reason and freedom, has a privileged place in this system but it is an unstable place that Derrida attempts to destabilise internally.

The metaphor of exchange and communication, the transfer of the proper (the 'literal', proper meaning, the propriety of the proper 'Being' Derrida 1982a:214) in metaphor signals that metaphor (*meta-phorein*) is a meta-physical concept, perhaps even the concept of the meta physical itself.[16] The notion of the literal opposed to the literary 'is only an ideal that may never be realised in natural languages (whatever whatever is said must be said in a language that is, to some extent, formed by tropes and figures' (Bennington 1989:68).[17] Idealisation or assumption into the concept, that is, into the self-present idea, effectively transfers priority from the sensory to the sense and recalls the self-containment of the creative imagination and the sense of the sublime that for Kant in *The Critique of Judgement* is a source of our appreciation of the independence of nature. Derrida's solicitation results in undecidability in that the 'scene' that produces metaphor and concept is and is not metaphorical. What are the consequences of the analysis of white mythology, and what use can be made of it?

◊ Marx ◊

The aesthetic is traditionally placed by Kant beyond the economic (although the remarks on art in the 'Deduction' section of *The Critique of Judgement* [on calligraphical art as production].[18] Kant holds that '[i]n the kingdom of ends [a systematic union of different rational beings under common laws] everything has either a price or a dignity' and this is a means of distinguishing between things and persons:

> What is relative to universal human inclinations and needs (to a market price, where ever without presupposing a need, accords with a certain taste—that is, with satisfaction in the mere purposeless play of our mental powers) has a price [*Marktpreis*]; but that which constitutes the sole condition under which anything can be an end in itself has not merely a relative value—that is, a price—but has an intrinsic value—that is, dignity (Kant 1991:96).

This dignity is particular to man and supposedly blocks the voracious encroachment of system of exchanges.

But such an elevation beyond exchange marks the utopian aesthetic moment, a moment that also marks the place of the aesthetic within economics.[19] However, Marx is more ambivalent about this 'superfluous'

16. 'Does this mean that literariness does not exist? As an ideally independent, self-enclosed and perfect language, it certainly does not exist' (Bennington 1989:69).

17. Susan Buck-Morss (1992:9) comments perceptively on *The Critique of Judgement*, '[i]t is at this point in the text that the modern constellation of aesthetics, politics, and war emerges, linking the fate of these three elements'.

18. Steven Connor (1992:68) notes: 'There is a certain congruity between such *exergues* and the early Marx's division between archaic use and fixed "true value" and the alienated inalienability of "exchange value"'. See also Terry Eagleton (1978:107). Eagleton (1990:202) also sees the 'inexhaustibility of use value *inscribing* into the utopian aesthetic in Marx: 'only when the bodily drives have been released from the dessication of abstract need, and the object has been revested from functional extraction in sensuously patient use value, will it be possible to live well enough'.

commodity of authentic exchange. Transport-exchange values this chain of transferences links the aesthetic and the economic and crosses over to the ethical. Exchange is bound up with representation and economimesis. Marx (1973:145,149) writes that

> [t]he commodity is transformed into exchange value. This doubling in the idea proceeds (and must proceed) to the point where the commodity appears double in real exchange: as a natural product on one side, as exchange value on the other.

Exchange supplements the natural original with a duplicitous reality in which 'all real products and labours become the representatives' of money, thereby inverting the original order.[20] In exchange-value, form dominates over content. The form/content distinction signals the operation of the conduit metaphor whereby words, like monetary symbols, are presented as having insides and outsides. Communication is a form of exchange and is equally bound up with representation and economimesis particularly when communication is viewed as free exchange in the linguistic marketplace, where every participant has equal access to the means of exchange. Kant's desire to raise the dignity of man beyond the commerce system indicates the danger of such a system to the ethical. Marx (1973:203) is of interest because, building on Hegel's critique of Kant, he attempts to work with an eye to contamination: '... processes of the same subject, thus eg the substance of the eye, the capital of vision etc.'.[21] Can the metaphor of the marketplace be eradicated or at least blocked by an intrinsic human dignity that transcends economimesis?[22] Can man transcend the economimetic system? In Kantian terms, what of freedom and the moral law? Does the metaphor of economy (exchange, transport, representation) swallow every value into the system of exchanges or does something original and proper (marginal, fundamental and

19. Marx (1973:21) is describing the nexus whereby exchange value represents commodity and commodity represents exchange value. This is not a simple mechanism, but a 'constant movement' in which the property of the representee is the result of consumption and is the outside of the consumption. Connor and Eagleton (for example Marx on this point. Despite the contradictory to the proposition that labour time is 'the real common substance of exchange values' Marx considers such reductiveness. 'The reality of the price-form lies, however, not in the relation in which a commodity is exchanged for money, but in the money existing outside it, in the money which is potential, not as a definitive realization, but always only as an intermediate mediating realization' (Marx 1973:204,210).

20. This sentence is a continuation from a missing page of the notebook that ends on the *Grundrisse*.

21. 'The metaphor of economy has proved in recent years to have had a very great, striking and explanatory power in philosophy and literary and cultural theory' Rorison 1992:57). Mediation (representation, exchange, process) the original and Georg Simmel (1978:44) compares money to 'the forms of logic, which lend themselves to any particular content'. The danger of the economic metaphor can be seen in *The Political History of the United States of America* where Hugh Brogan (1990:27) deftly writes of the early American colonists' genius with 'for the price of slaves to fill before they could own slaves themselves, "they had to wait for the guns to fall on Antioch Ocean to expose" [its inhabitants] in ragtle large numbers' (see L. Bland suppose from 'an which is exactly what such trade for its victims was for you, it cannot be the economy of colonialist imperialism.

substitution'. Marx and Saussure introduce complications and reservations into the analogy of money and language, but both exploit its explanatory value. This analogy has a historical lineage; money and language are linked in Aristotle's discussion of metaphor in the *Poetics*. as. FD Sparshott (1974:81) reminds us that 'the exchange of meanings is explained much as the exchange of goods in the market is explained in his *Nichomachean Ethics*, V 6,1131a,29-b24'.[19] As a *symbolon*, a coin, like other graphic symbols, stands for what is absent and thus possessed of *aisthesis noetikes* (invisible substance). Both paper and coin money are statements, numismatically impressed by legitimated and official inscriptions. This would seem to enforce the analogy between language and money. As statements circulating in the medium of exchange these inscriptions effectively promise a certain correspondence between the abstract value they represent and actual commodities: as statements, money has a performative dimension, and the erasure of this sense of production and representation is the root of capitalist ideology.

Perhaps the economic metaphor, or rather the metaphoric economy, the economimetic white mythology, is the site *par excellence* of a post colonial mythology. And perhaps money is part of a wider metaphysics and economimesis that motivates the ethical discourse of character.[20] Recall that the category 'person' is what Kant wishes to put beyond exchange as the locus of the dignity of the moral law. Attempting to limit the economic metaphor and preserve the dignity of man, Kant (1961:56) distinguishes between what 'has a price, something else can be put in its place as an equivalent', and what 'is exalted above all price and so admits of no equivalent'.[21] The equality of this dignity and the substitutive reciprocity it implies recalls Marx's (1973:238) notion of 'simple circulation as such [the metabolism of circulation, the exchange] [as] exchange among equals equivalents'. The economic and the ethical discourse press in this notion of an original propriety, and economimesis enfolds even the category of the person. The ethical subject as person, persona, character is not beyond ecocurrimesis. The metaphysician, like the metaphorical, is a trans-former: an exchange or what we might call a frontier crossing. *Metaphora* (carrying across) is equivalent to the Latin *translatio*, and both words, *metaphorein* and *translatus*, have the root meaning of 'carrying across' or 'transportation' across frontiers.

17. Marc Shell (1982:1:68) suggests that perhaps 'money also is not through and through economic in origin' and that '[t]he property or function of money, like that of coinage, cannot be eradicated from discourse without changing thought itself, without whole tropes and processes (the language of values, *Wertausdruck*) of an immeasurable purveyance'. See also Shell (1978a:51). Derrida (1982d:216) notes that the analogy between money and language is used by Marx, Nietzsche, and Saussure to explain or simply use metaphorical process. See also Gayatri Spivak (1988a:95).

18. Gregory Jay (1990:145) argues that the abstract denomination of a coin is not enough to be one of the exemplary economies of 'proper names' which such metaphysics are requisite to the production of economy per se, to 'the exchange that consists in appropriation, exchange, or distribution of values'. Jay offers the suggestive description of capitalism as 'a restricted economy of translations, exchanges, and metaphors that enable the ascription of properties and the capitalization of proper names'.

19. See also Halpern (1954) where the proto-political notion of the sovereign self is placed in its historical context.

c Marx 2

Metaphor is intertwined with translation and exchange. Consider Stephen Greenblatt's (1991:110) account of the frontier economy:

> Where they might view imperial motives get, giving on, alternatively, a more or less satisfactory economic translation. The Europeans instead tended to imagine an exchange of empty signs, of alluring counters (say, for overwhelmingly abundance. Objects of little value provide access to objects of immense value, while the more worthless and hollow the latter, the more value is gained in the exchange (see also Barkstone 1993:15).

The colonial encounter is inflected within economimesis, and the mimetic and ethical frontier is inscribed within this discursive nexus as surely as it is inscribed in a geopolitical location. It is an asymmetrical exchange on the basis of a common substance: not here Marx's labour time (the proper possibility of values—Marx 1973:297) so much as the internal systematics of colonialist capitalism monopolised as the possession of, and serving, the interests of, Western man. If Greenblatt locates this exchange as a transient or asymmetrical exchange—as opposed to a reciprocal, understanding encounter—it is still nonetheless an exchange that, as such, supplements or parasitises an idealised, authentic use-value that is communion. It is not simply inverse to proper communication. This ideal of unmediated, authentic encounter is located by Marx on the edge or the frontier of the economic system as the 'direct, unmediated exchange' of barter. It is not outside of the system, but rather is it completely inside either:

> Firstly, this character [of exchange as partial does not yet constitute production as a whole, but concerns only its superficies and is hence itself more or less superficial. [like exchange itself], it stands at those places only where it touches upon or borders on the borders of the natural communities, at their contact with strangers ... (Marx 1973:224).

If we see these 'borders of natural communities, contact with strangers' as referring to the colonial context of frontier encounters—and supposing we drop for the moment reservations regarding the nature of 'natural communities'—it is possible to move toward a new conclusion.

Both superficies and normative, extrinsic and essential, inside and outside, authentic exchange as use-value remains ambivalent: the origin of exchange remains at the origins of the system of exchange, both properly inside and outside of the economimetic system. The propriety of authentic use-value is improperly contaminated. One of the terms used to designate contact with strangers is 'colonialism'. Colonialism is then superfluous and yet normative of 'production as a whole', or of what we have termed white mythology. The fact that Marx sees it as an exchange of equivalents rather than as an asymmetrical exploitation suggests to me that the normative ideal of reciprocal equivalence and universality is not external to white mythology. Consider the intertwining of the conventional aesthetic of originality with the criticism of alienation in the following.

20. 'The economic relation, the character which capitalist or worker bears in the

> categories of a single relation of production—[illegible] more clearly and adequately in proportion as it loses all the characteristics of art; as its particular skill becomes something ever more abstract and irrelevant, and as it becomes more and more a purely abstract activity, a purely mechanical activity, hence indifferent to its particular form ... (Marx 1973:297).

Exchange value is always contaminated, distorted, and the history of colonialism is the narrative of this distortion of the ideal exchange between equals, equivalents. The exchange of equivalents presupposes an exchange on the basis of a shared substance: Marx's human labour time or the ideal of community formed on the basis of shared substance, ethos or spirit as the basis of exchange. Community, as a form of social integration, is constituted by tropological processes of identification, imitation and myth. Even where equity and reciprocity are inscribed into the function of the economic system, this white mythology of the exchange of equivalents presupposes a universalisable substance that in fact erases difference. To move quickly from the economic to the pedagogical, we can note that 'our' context is not outside white mythology. As the exchange of equals or the same, prescriptions of universal equality and dignity both propose and withdraw the individuality usually associated with the person:

> The formal identity of the subject which aesthetic education is designed to form is in fact then 'undifferentiated', but what this subject finally represents is the ideological figure of the universal subject realised and identified in the same moment (Lloyd 1990:122).

Where equality is imagined and the formal identity of the human is posited in the supposition of a shared anthropomorphic substratum—human nature—the universal formal identity of the human erases all examples of man's distinction on the basis of Western man.

Conclusion

In conclusion I propose to use as a pretext a recent South African study by Helize van Vuuren, 'Forgotten Territory: The Oral Tradition of the /Xam'. This essay attempts to attend to the cost of colonial exchange in a way that brings to the fore the functioning of the academic marketplace, and it addresses itself to an area of the South African literary canon that highlights the dangers of white mythology.

Van Vuuren (1994:57,62) argues for acceptance of the 'impurity' of the written transcription/translation—'contaminated as it has become by endless mediatory processes'—of the testimony of the Bushmen, 'survivors of a society of which the last signs are the languages, the rock paintings, and the oral narratives':

> It is highly paradoxical that we do not have any 'access' except via the 'orality' of this tradition, except by way of analogy with the role of the oral tradition in African languages in southern Africa ... by way of analogy one may look at the function of oral literature in other societies.

Analogy is central to this projected recovery, and this negotiative exchange takes place within the rubric of resemblance and metaphoric transport. Analogy also operates the mechanisms of ethnographic exclusion/inclusion. The pious conclusion of such a literary historical route is usually the insertion of a representation (here the Bushmen) into the place reserved for the authentic South African voice that, as the aboriginal embodiment of national unity, can serve as the proper origin of national identity. This course would enact the reappropriation indicative of white mythology, assuring self-identity through resemblance via tropism.

Acknowledging the 'inevitable distortions and loss of precise spirit of the original through the process of translation', Van Vuuren (1994:65) suggests that '[t]he reader must imagine the original which is always deflected into the mediation of the translation/transmission'. Imagination operates by way of representation, and is the inventive faculty of genius, yet the temptation to represent the /Xam poetry as archaic site is precisely what is to be resisted. Recall that for Kant the analogy between nature and art always provides a principle of reconciliation. There is no pure origin free of reconstruction, no original 'object' as self-identical and unmediated given. There is here a declared refusal to internalise and idealise the /Xam; Hegel's *Erinnerung* (recollection as the inner gathering and preserving of experience) is resisted as romantic pathos. There is no innocent natural memory. The colonial context determined the ethnographic interest of the researchers Bleek and Lloyd, and the translative nexus is one of exchange as appropriation. The mode of recollecting the /Xam via the poetry/testimony of /Kabbo (who's name translates as 'Dream') is after all a product of colonialism and the academic/pedagogical scene is formed by this same history, the transmission of the written testimony is contaminated with ethnological fascination.

Acknowledging in a common sense way mediatory cultural context and history is to display a scholarly tact integral to what is best in the humanistic tradition: an implicit imperative to respect the event of /Kabbo's narrative performance, its colonialist/racist context in which addresser and addressee are overdetermined as civilized Western man and natural savage. The mute imperative to respect the singularity of /Kabbo's discourse addresses us through the performative dimension of Van Vuuren's text. Calling attention to the pragmatics of communication draws attention to three things: that the question of the intention behind /Kabbo's poetry/testimony is vital to its meaning, that as the testimony of a survivor such poetry has a moral force, and that the use of a circumspect literary-aesthetic approach might offer the most promise for the study of Bushman poetry. By 'circumspect' I mean one that does not simply consider the testimony as poetry and submit to an aesthetic uncritically contoured by white mythology. The poetical and the aesthetic would cross in making the Bushman symbolic.

I read into Van Vuuren's critical manoeuvre an implicit criticism of an academic postcolonial exchange whereby objects of little value (here translations of oral testimony) provide access to objects of immense value (original oral art). Attempting to have a place for the proper, original testimony of the /Xam and warning against the neo-romantic yearning for the

original. Van Vuuren attempts to avoid both the problems of representation and the politics of romantic nostalgia.[21] She leaves room for distance and inappropriability and this act of practical judgement (*phronesis*) stands opposed to theoretical generality, it evinces a receptivity to the 'otherness' of the work of art or the past. /Kabbo's poetry is also his testimony. Correspondingly, what has 'dignity' without erasing the price of white mythology involves the strategy of making her own impure retrospective exchange resist the fascination of an asserted destination or primal unity. Despite the attraction of 'a unifying memory history which would be inclusive of all the peoples of South Africa' (Van Vuuren 1994b:7), the unifying origin is inferred into mediation/translation. But this strategy is not without complications.

The purpose of writing is to assuage genealogical anxiety by conserving and supplementing genealogical classification. Initiatory Bushman art within this narrative without questioning the genetivism of literary history records with this purpose. Writing is the condition of ethnography and within the history of writing the ideal of one and same of communication as direct mediation, authentic communication, marks the methodical atmosphere of anthropology and has an ethical thrust. The direct contact implied by oral communication suggests a Rousseauistic crystalline immediacy at the site of authentic exchange, a social authenticity grounded in the transparent proximity of face to face encounter. Resisting the lapse to unity does not rule out succumbing to an anxious desire to unify the new South African by means of a benign race-blank and non-white origin—a gesture full of political pathos and not unmarked by an anti-Eurocentric ethnocentrism or idealisation of Rousseauistic community that makes the Bushman serve the domestic agenda of unity. To propose a communication encounter with Bushman literary 'culture' on the basis of a shared substance of South Africanness erases the victimisers and their descendants in an aura of benevolence. An ethic of nostalgia for origins, of archaic and natural innocence, harbours even the acceptance of contaminated origins. To endorse the lure of the myth of simplicity of origin, of speech existing the origin, is not thereby to escape the historical form of South African pedagogy and the social, economic, and political structures of its organisation, its particular discursive deformation of white mythology.

The search for a grammar and lexicon of the South African literary canon is also a search for a common root or bridge over the painful abyss of colonialist racialism. This project of recovery is embedded in analogism: how far can it hope to avoid reconstituting reconciliatory synchronicity, succumbing to the law of the same and the project of eventually expropriating the other to the economy of the natural? The dominant metaphors articulating Van Vuuren's argument that the 'new' South African literary canon as a corpus of texts, and

21. This sense of nostalgia is, according to Derrida (1976), the mood of anthropology. Derrida proposes to replace this with a reconstructive affirmation of the nonconcentric otherness of man the free play of Nietzschean play. This is where deconstruction might begin to be heard—but this is not simply a matter of time.

the more inclusive 'we' of South Africa. These tropes are not mere formulaic academic superlatives: they mark the distinction between outside and inside. These tropes figure a conceptual schema that has a history. To introduce marginalised *matter* into the *form* of the South African literary canon is to frame the identity of the Bushmen as South African, a literary citizenship that is little better than a *fait accompli* for the victims and survivors of the colonisation of an undercapitalised literary reserve. Such a gesture elides the problems of representation and restitution faced by those descendants of the Bushmen, trapped, like their predecessors, in the exigencies of South African history. The site of this present injustice is what would be erased in the sentimental construction of the Bushmen as symbolic community. So this investigation needs to be supplemented by other questions: Where does this frame come from? Who supplies it? Who constructs it? Whose interests does it serve, and who does it silence? This raises the historical, cultural, economic, institutional context of Helize Van Vuuren's own signature, the basis of its propriety and legality.

Noting the almost ubiquitous use of metaphor that permeates both the written and the painted or engraved documents of the Bushmen, Van Vuuren (1994:65) remarks upon the resemblance between a 'story' and a 'presentiment' which 'suggests something of the function of story-telling in /Xam oral tradition'. The same can, I think, be said of the academic study of such sources which function within the Western tradition as unifying stories and communicative exchanges. Academic study, if it is not to succumb to white mythology and erase the faculties which are the source of its creation, if it is not to settle into the metaphysics of metaphorical lexicalisation complicit with white mythology, must attend to the channels of formative power we read/perceive via mediation in the context of /Xam metaphories as 'Thinking Strings'. The task is not to explain /Xam metaphors by literalising them, substituting the literal for the metaphorical, thereby representing them in accordance with the explanatory impulse. Aristotle notes, '[m]ost of all metaphors imply an enigma, plainly, therefore, a metaphor can [be borrowed] also [to be] well corrected' (*Rhetoric* III, 1405b), but the task is surely not to better translate /Xam metaphors into equivalent synonymous metaphors under the illusion of an equitable, reparative exchange. Neither is the task to assimilate /Kabbo as poet, since poetry is conventionally (for 'us') seen as the summit of the fine arts, distinguishing the property of man as freedom. As the poetic genius has his role dictated by nature, so might /Kabbo be reappropriated by nature whereby the poets' gift is the gift of nature (even a nationalised South African nature). In this ahistorical level the poet submits to no exchange context and is above economic and political sedition. For both Hegel and Kant poetry is the highest of the arts. Finally, the pleasure that such poetry might afford us, while it might depend on some ideal of universal communicativity, is also grounded in sociality, a certain *sensus* or reflexive intersubjectivity, a community: a community (with readers and societal constitutes here in South Africa, and rightly) set in its historical and psychological roots, with respect to the exterminated Bushmen's communities.

While the attribution of metaphor to the Bushman erects them into a projection and imagination it also runs the risk of succumbing to an ethnocentric trope of white mythology – seeing the primitive as metaphorical (Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Languages*). In characterising Bushmen as *as* metaphorical the interpreter is really announcing a decision to read those artifacts as metaphors (as analogous to what are called metaphors), thereby erecting a linguistic solution to practices presence, truth, and naturalness. Oral literature leads itself to the collapsing of the distinction between author and narrator, the self is displaced from the referent into the figure of the narrator, and the transparency of meaning, intention crystallises in the performative act. If Kabbo's poetry/testimony offers silence more after that romantic notion and stirring, evoking an obligation to respect that is not beyond communicative exchange, then in this exchange something is irrevocably lost. The sense of this loss can assume the face of the proper embodied in the poignancy of loneliness to which we must return as a source of authenticity and value on which to ground a desire for 'future community'. The dialectic/recovery of the authentic voice is, of course, one of the archetypal metaphors of the tradition and part of the historical process of tradition in its negotiation with temporality and discontinuity, worldliness and difference. Recovery is not innocently apolitical or disinterested, and one would need to point to the historical complexities of such modes of reliance that might pervert or incapacitate the potential for transgression.

Or discovery/recovery can highlight the violence of transport, the appropriation/expropriation of interpretation and cognition, and the contemporary regime of knowledge that makes the course of history in its general features. 'Only' white mythology casts a shadow even where it succeeds to illuminate. Perhaps even more so when the 'we' sheltered in that 'our' embrace the work of an Indigenous Australian artist. In Mary Macgill (1972:210) the arch-historicist perceptively remarks

> Years of slavish phrases, which made everything to everything else by means of stock metaphors, lay upon upon them and the first time they are expressed, all the misery of their identity lies most distinctly there.

Still, there is the promise of a critical reinscription of the tradition so as to displace its dominant presumptions by rethinking the border or threshold. The close mutuality of translation opens up the field of Southern African studies to the greatest risks but also affords the opportunity to problematise white mythology and suggest, perhaps, the potential use-value of deconstructive strategies. That is, a use that can only have value if it is turned and returned in the historical contest of South Africa, rather than uncritically imported on the backs of a naive belief in some international academic free market. In this exchange, as in any other, the contemporaries of evaluation are inescapably ideological and never purely academic (always contextual), likewise demanding the vigilance of economy and strategy. Any use of deconstruction must carry a cautionary and deformatory solicitation: What Use is Deconstruction?

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Reading in a State of Emergence: The Rhetoric of Cultural Transformation and the Post-colonial-Post-apartheid Condition[1]

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Abstract

This article interrogates the notion of cultural transformation as implied and sometimes overtly articulated in the colonial, anti-colonial and resistance discourses of the past. It is argued that the basic assumption that cultural transformation is a punctual occurrence with unambiguous values of before/after, positive/negative, progressive/counterprogressive cannot be accepted. These values emerge from and remain trapped in closed dualistic structures of thought and reading. The argument against this view is two-fold: in the context of material change, these values constitute a transformation that conceals value judgements which only benefit the values of an emergent civil society; secondly, civil society - whether old or new—springs forth from a host of different forms of sexual and psychic repression which disrupt its unisonance.

To locate a state of emergence in any condition of cultural transition confronts one immediately with serious difficulties. As products of locating culture periodically carry with them assumptions of its linear progression: in the way it is written, spoken, photographed, filmed, gazed at - or fact, to the ways in which it is represented structurally. To speak of a 'post' (as in post-colonial/post apartheid) needs to be effectively removed from the language of origin and destiny, for such may be the sustaining myths in a context that has never had a single teleological framework.

My paper seeks to interrogate ways in which literature has been read in the past, and how it continues to be read in South Africa today. It takes as its case readings of Nadine Gordimer's recent novel *None to Accompany Me*, which appeared in the Review section of *The Weekly Mail* of September 30 to October 6, 1994. These readings, due credit to their sincerity duly granted, to a large extent exhibit a loss of impatience with that writing which 'suspends final judgement' or who its characters represent in the real state of transition from minority to majority government. Or at least that writing which 'name(s) the real' (Nussbaum 1989:xvi) in a manner which to some is 'not so real'. One immediately becomes aware of reading being gradually seen in the context of 'peace and reconciliation, reconstruction and development', and its related rhetoric which attempts to erase contradictions. This type of reading of cultural signs, characteristic of most societies to whom literature offers possibilities of self-apprehension and progress—these

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belatedness, yet persistent binarisms seemed to surprise. What seems to underwrite it, however, and which reveals as that socio-political reality is 'chaotic', unrepresentable and incommensurate with procedural materialist frames, is often locked away in conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories, with their almost exclusive emphasis on morality overdetermined from a standpoint external to the signs that construct cultural engagement, are suspect. They are suspect insofar as 'they eclipse our understanding that forms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively' (Bhabha 1994:2), and are certainly not processes of *mere praxis*. Therefore, even where such 'voices of dissent' are taken on board in the reconstruction of a national culture, they are often parabolic, whilst remaining largely unenfranchised in the terms that are seen to constitute cultural transformation.

I am interested in how cultural transformation is staged and sometimes overtly articulated in those discourses of the past, often termed colonial, and radical and resistance. I am also interested in showing how cultural transformation cannot therefore be seen as a gradual occurrence, the values of which are unambiguously 'before' other, positive/negative, progressive/counterprogressive, and other such closed dualistic structures of thought and reading that constitute this transformation which, when translated into material change, conceal value judgements that only benefit values of an emergent civil society. Civil society, old or new, as many of its critics have variously shown (here I can mention Cherrie Moraga, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Frantz Fanon), has as its inessential basis different forms of repression (sexual, psychic or fiscal, everyday, that disrupts its 'maintenance'. It should be remembered that 'the boundaries of national culture are open so long as the voices of dissent remain individual and muted' (Bhabha 1994:94).

Listen to Cherrie Moraga (in Anzaldúa nd:11), in *Loving in the War Years*, speaking from within and between the intercultural space that defines 'malestream' military culture:

> But I know, stronger I have ever known was the hunger to see and be heard in and between, in my mind and heart, those worlds that are usually not mutually exclusive. If I could not use the sources of my hunger as the source of my activism, how then was I to be political to be effective?

or the narrator in Sembène's (1972:62) *Black Girl*:

> You've emptied me whole! Master wanted me to be his servant, so I became one. Inside [of] me, there stood a wall of [...] Black stone. Flesh alone would not [...] Beat down.

or Guillermo Gómez-Peña broadcasting from the US/Mexico border:

> Hello, Anzaldúa, this is the voice of Guco Vato Chavalero broadcasting from the no man's land of Nogales, Arizona/Sonora. Please forgive me for my absence on these documents, but I am celebrating Labour Day in Seattle, while the Klan demonstrates against Mexicans in Georgia! [1995, quoted in Bhabha 1994:7]

or the Black slavewoman under masculine and racist surveillance in Meiling Jin's (1987:126) *Strangers in a Hostile Landscape*:

> We are two in the Northern Hemisphere/ when summer was set in its way/ running from the flames that lit the sky/ over the plantation./ We were a struggle bunch of immigrants/ in a fly white landscape./ One day I learnt a secret art/ Invisible Ness. it was called./ I think it worked/ as even now you look/ but never see me [...]/ Only my eyes will remain to watch and to haunt,/ and to turn your dreams to chaos.

What these voices express is neither resistance, refusal nor acceptance to be incorporated into the spaces that attempt to authorize their 'deaths' and to determine terms of 'political' engagement. These political stances are too closed to be assumed in any such state, as they ultimately and invariably reconstitute the 'host' and the 'other' polarity. Such stances paradoxically feed on the very terms set by ideologies which record their presence as fixed and primordial. Rather, the location of these ambiguous interventions between authority, desire for authority and its subversion, places under suspense the language of responsibility, what Derrida calls the 'ought to' (Derrida 1992:19). In other words, it is not a *moral* (political or personal) that these voices resonate, for, as James Baldwin once observed, *creators* have a tendency to become 'notoriously bloodthirsty' (Baldwin 1955:15) as they are exclusively morally determined. What the persons in Cherrie Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* articulates quite somewhat obliquely through masculine values of confrontation and penetration in a state of war. She does so most effectively by bringing into the confined space of 'malestream' military culture that which has always been perceived as other to it, that is, sexuality, and more specifically un-masculine sexuality. She questions the very forced exteriority of sexuality as unconstitutive of, and other to, politics and political activism, so that in the end what has always measured patriarchal orientalism, that is, gender as an essential category and all that it implies, becomes a truism. The expression of female sexuality (which in malestream ideology equals a 'lack of') as constitutive of political activism therefore splits the uniformity of patriarchal expression by neither refuting its traditional sway, nor resisting its presence as false but, by recognising its expression as forked, or 'fac[ing] two ways without being two faced' (Bhabha 1994:97). In this way, patriarchal culture, which ostensibly encodes the public/private divide into what is a much more complex intercultural space of activism, is undermined by Bakhtin's 'carnival', in this case without the element of ordered disorder Bakhtin's notion seems to imply. It is a perpetual interrogation of the ontology of the so-called private space – and not the letting in of the 'barbarians' into an externally-determined ideological frame. It is what Derrida calls *An Oblique Offering* which, while it appears to 'offer the best figure for all the moves' and as ideal in a situation where disruption rather than prescription is demanded, it is undermined by the very discernible geometrical origins it bears. Derrida (1992:19) continues to elaborate on the 'oblique' as

> For geometrical space, the conjunction 'and' stands with the preciseness of its place, for both the angle ('a diagonal') and the right angle between the vertical and the horizontal. A predicate resonates the choice of a strategy that is said to be obliged to ward off what it must organize: a generative action is to diverting as quickly as possible both the 'front' apprehended and the straight line presumed to be the shortest route from one point to another. Even in its rhetorical form and in the figure of figure that is called *chiasmus*, this displacement still appears as a direct, if short-circuited, correlation between the diagonal and...

It may well be argued, therefore, that in a state of emergency political practice, as opposed to political consciousness which, in Edward Said's terms is, at bottom, an unstoppable production of alternatives' (in Ryan 1990:1).

The same conundrum that anticipates traditional military culture and to which *Looking in the Wrong Room* responds, is perhaps at the root of the American army's 1994 debate on homosexuality, which raises the question of whose values constitute participation in military service. In the terms that construct traditional militarism, gay sex remains one of those 'dirty little secrets' which, in the age of human rights, has to be explained away in conspiracy theories, such as 'lack of (masculine) discipline'. Recourse to discipline, as Hayden White observes in another context, remains a problematic solution. For historians, he argues, 'sensationalization suppresses the "imaginary" and the "fantastic" in search of the normal, factual and natural' (White 1987:107). To discern sexual urges in 'the war years', more especially those which civil society accords the label 'abnormal', only compounds our suspicions of the validity of normative criticism. Normative criticism appeals to our 'common sense', with the hope that what has often been accorded the status of the 'normal' remains unaffected by ideological interest. But we know, as Ranjan Seider (1985) argues in the Introduction to *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, that 'common sense' in social discourse enters our perceptions through the method of repetition. What, time has surely shown, as a result of it being repeated, ultimately loses its ideological mask, thereby passing for the natural are one of nature's irresistibles.

In Scott's persona, what can easily be read as an existential condition (i.e. we all experience self-doubt in the face of adverse circumstances), is by a single stroke of linguistic manoeuvre transformed into a *beyond*. It is not a return to an essential self for it recognises that it is by partly re-locating the terms of its 'trap' that it can construct itself as the 'other'. But paradoxically, it is by differentiating itself from those terms that it can define its resistance. The persona here becomes aware, at the very moment of its articulation of resistance, that in such a state of emergency, what emerges is neither within the traps in which his identity has been constructed by colonial incursions, nor is it outside that frame. In fact, it lies somewhere in the region of undecidability which denotes the space of colonial intersubjective interpretation. What can be read as nonsense in the sense/nonsense binary opposition, becomes effectively a displacement of such a dualism and a construction of a hybridized borderline language to conditions of transit (as the state of emergency is indeed above a state of emergency). Also, what can

be read as a Caliban complex, becomes a case of Caliban neither resisting nor refusing this 'intersubjectivity' but, instead, collapsing the boundaries that seem to separate the two in a colonial continuum of differences. Homi Bhabha's (1994:97) observation in this regard is apt. He argues that

> What threatens the authority of colonial command is the ambivalence of its address. Either an oppressor or, alternatively the native are invoked which will not be resolved in a dialectical play of power. For those doubly inscribed figures face two ways without being two-faced. Western imperial strategies are spatially split across the colonial scene, as the colonial text emerges uncertainly with its narratives of progress. Between the civil address and the colonial signification – each also displaying a problem of recognition and semiosis – what are the signifiers of authority in search of a strategy of surveillance, subjection, and examination. Here there can be no dialectic of the master-slave kind where recognition can never be the passage from truth to misrecognition? From subjection to authority? Both colonizer and colonized are in a process of recognition where each point of identification is always a partial and double recognition of the discourses of the self demanded and coped, subversive and servile, native and child.

The point being made here, as my analysis of Scott's persona's subjectivity demonstrates anyway, is that the 'split' in colonial encounter keeps in suspense both the desire to oppose colonial authority in colonial discourses of civility on the one hand, and its resistance in nativist rhetoric on the other. A familiar image of the native's 'primordial laxity' in colonial discourse of civility is undermined by an appropriation of its reverse trash, the book and the word, redefined variously and unceremoniously: 'Black books/ Bossa blood words sister Hard ...'. This 'shatters the signifier of authority in search of a strategy of surveillance'. In *Strangers in a Hostile Landscape* this surveillance is perpetually held in suspense by the modification of attempts to hold under its gaze. Surveillance becomes subject to and to surveillance which denies it its desire to monitor and control. The master's 'dreams' of final control and definition of the slave's identity (which consensus masterhood and slavehood in a colonial situation), become undermined by the ambivalence of their final destination. Where these dreams have always found their final confirmation in the presence of its servile target, they now find not resistance (which paradoxically improves and sharpens strategies of control) but, rather, 'Invisible-Ness', which suspends while confusing colonial authority. The masculinist and racist gaze of the master is 'tangled into chaos' by a subject that

> 'speaks, and is seen, by a writing it does not. The migrant work of art subverts the perverse substitution of the racist, masculinist gaze that disavows her presence, by presenting it with an anxious absence, a double-gaze that turns the discriminatory look, which denies her cultural and social difference, back on itself' (Bhabha 1994:47).

It is what one reads in Gomez Pena who, broadcasting from the US/Mexican border, plays on the American export image of 'the land of the free' by introducing into the 'truth' on 'the' that defines the imposed margins of the internal politics. The anthem as text from which this 'truth(s) be' emerges,

to use Bhabha's paradoxical formulation, foregrounds a singularity of purpose, 'voiced by a unanimous people assembled in the self-presence of its special' (Bhabha 1994:95). Within this type of reconciliation of the American exper. identity, in the anthem, is an unexpressed subtext which, like the absent gaze of the black slaveowoman in *Strangers in a Hostile Landscape*, 'speaks, and is seen from where it is not'. The 'border', signifying Gomez-Peña's dislocation in relation to mainstream America, becomes a space where America's perverse self-congratulatory jingoism is re-thought. This is done in a way which exposes and undermines the fixation of American society within the frozen margins of speech and writing.

But what of the glaring discord within the ranks of the colonized? What cultural imperatives constructed a force so clearly visible as the Inkatha Cultural Movement a.k.a. Freedom Party? What cultural signs, to be more precise, continue to sustain its staggering hold on a significant section of the South African population, even if not, by comparison to its rivals, the African National Congress? These are serious questions which, unfortunately, in South Africa anyway, are not given the analytic attention they clearly deserve. These questions are also reminiscent of 'moderate' Black America's concern with Farrakhan's Nation of Islam with its 'and Jews and anti-white' stance, which attracts a vast number of especially poor black American people. It is inevitable that this is blamed on racial conditioning and abuse of power, which in effect removes the focus of debate away from the signs that manipulate our responses to social realities, placing them within some sphere as more, certitudes.

Bill Faure's television drama series, *Shaka Zulu*, provoked much academic critical attention, of markedly post-marxist and post-structuralist-feminist variations, and highlighted the continuing centrality of the Shaka legend in South African social and political life. 'Coincidentally', the production of this series, towards the end of 1986, came at a time when the nationalist government of South Africa was introducing reforms within its entrenched ethnic, by attempting to co-opt moderate ethnic or related political parties into its slightly modified political structure. Accompanying this was a great amount of emphasis placed on the importance of recognising cultural and historical diversity, narrowly defined to fit the apartheid socio-political vision. The proliferation of narratives of nationhood and ethnicity was justified under the rubric of democracy and freedom of expression, also defined in a manner that legitimated the government's vision of a thoroughly and rigidly fragmented South Africa. Under these circumstances, the government's arch rival, the African National Congress (ANC), could effectively be pitted against a strong oppositional force created within the ranks of the oppressed. This could in part be attributed to the terrain of historical discourses, since it is in them that myths of origins and nationhood are constructed and perpetuated as essential and transcendental. Indeed, Homi Bhabha's argument that 'nations are narrations' sharply defines the ways in which identities are constructed, particularly in moments of transition. In such moments, when one social and political order is replaced by another, a

sense of insecurity gives way to solidarity based on some consensus, the most immediate being common history and ancestry.

Thus, the manipulation of the sign as the basic element in the process of identity construction, by the government apparatuses, helped 'produce' a highly militant Zulu faction which saw its 'nationhood' being threatened by the ANC, which itself produced a different notion of nationhood. These discourses of origin and destiny (the Shaka legend being central), were used to legitimate the government's divide and rule strategy, but they ironically put into question the very concept of 'nation', showing it to be an unstable construct, a concept that cannot be seen independently of the ideology that sustains it and gives it specific meaning. Therefore, it could be argued, taking into account Antonio Gramsci's argument that it is not only in the state that power is located, that there are other episodes of power, producing and disseminating historical discourses equally significant for analysis.

In any case, recent events in South Africa have demonstrated the extent to which most of what had been explained away in contemporary theories, that is, the strong presence of ethnic alliances, has assumed an existence independent of the state's direct influence. Afrikaner-ness, Boere-ness, Zulu-ness, and other ethnic essentialist identities (all of which suspend indefinitely the fulfilment of a desire for a single national or continental 'destiny'), are shown to be constructed on discourses not created by, although to a significant extent resourced and manipulated by, the state apparatuses. This can be said of those identities, African and/or black, constructed in opposition to the state's manipulation of ethnic sentiments, in an attempt to forge unity among those who have often simplistically been referred to as the 'oppressed'. Both nationalists and africanists, on the one hand and, on the other, ethnicists, can be seen as 'complicit antagonists in a closed binary logic' (Wade 1994:15) where none can claim sole access to authentic historical information, nor political and moral legitimacy over the other. This is because the terms of antagonism between them to a very large extent and, paradoxically, within those discourses about Africa of explorers and anthropologists of past centuries imposed on diverse and sometimes converging cultural, social, historical and political alliances dating back to a period before British colonial occupation. In fact, the rhetoric of pan-africanism, which essentially sees Africa as a single unit, permeates even the strictest of ethnic groupings who see themselves as constituting a separate entity within what pan-africanism regards as a unit. To the 'Zulus', for example, Shaka would not only be regarded as the sole property of the Zulu ethnic group but, over and above this parochial proprietorial right, Shaka would be a legitimising agent for the centrality of the 'Zulus' in the history of the continent, a centrality which, when ignored, makes the history of the continent incomplete. Perhaps it should be added that Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party, has often regarded himself as Shaka's incarnate, thus manipulating what he others is a symbol of African unity to resource his personal objectives, and those of his followers. Despite his constant references, in his speeches, to 'our brothers in the ANC and the

PAC", which in the past afforded him credibility as being 'de-racialised', it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify points of political and historical convergence between these ideological factions. To Buthelezi and his supporters, Shaka has become the sole property of the ethnic group with which he bears blood relation, the Zulus. The recent rift in the royal family as to how the Shaka legend could be made relevant to the changed South African political circumstances, where Buthelezi referred the Zulu king's suggestion that Nelson Mandela, president of South Africa and the ANC, be invited to the celebrations, is proof of how access to political power informs blocs of 'self-cultural' interpretations and the cultivation of 'self-margins', which 'privileges', at the same time, the terms of removal from the language of 'blood' relations to that of power.

The September 1991 Shaka commemorations - notwithstanding the king's proclamations about the illegitimacy of the occasion if not 'blessed' by his presence as heir to the Zulu throne - which was widely publicized and his conspicuous absence at the commemorations, went ahead without him anyway. Its 'success', graced by the presence of a number of chiefs from the king's own Ningetsa stronghold, raised a number of questions as to the king's real status that 'his assumed position as "blood" leader of his kingdom. Prior to this, the 'Shaka Festival' (A Festival for all of Us), organized by the Natal branch of the ANC in 1992 as an occasion for celebrating the role of past Zulu kings in the struggle against colonial occupation in South Africa, and particularly in Natal, was another reason for the piety which it had already identified as central to Buthelezi's stranglehold on his followers, that is, the interpretation of cultural signs that punctuate Zulu history, with much emphasis placed on his family's role in it. Also, what the ANC hoped to deconstruct in organising the Festival and recalling it Shaka (all of Us), is what it saw as Buthelezi's autocratic language of predestination, a language which constructs him a prehistorical leader of KwaZulu, and the 'Zulu nation' as his predestined followers. It is highly unlikely, however, given the degree of cultural disagreement and rivalry between the ANC and IFP (which in my opinion, is profoundly more complex than conspiracy theorists have been prepared to concede), that the Shaka 'Us' was all-inclusive.

Now, I am against any reading of cultural signs that assumes authority without acknowledging that it might be just one of the many readings within which the Shaka legend and its implied significance in political positioning can be located. The question 'whose Shaka is Shaka?' remains an historical conundrum that critical theory and its relative privilege within the academic space needs to appreciate. Whether or not his identity is read politically as a way of cultural and political validation of one group over another, criticism needs to engage with strains that animate such ossifying readings, without itself clearly becoming an assimilative alternative. It is this tension I find in Thembu Mchunu's reading of Farrie's *Shaka Zulu* (Mchunu 1991:237). Mchunu's reading elides as familiar unmediated reception and Althusserian critical assumptions where the discerning subject is assumed to

be either preformed before the act of analysis, or, as in the Althusserian model, is totally in control of the material to be symptomatically discerned. It makes for interesting reading when located within these reading formations, for it applies them unambiguously. However, a mere pinpointing of distortions and stereotypes is an expression of moral privilege often characteristic of privileged social classes. Mofolo's *Chaka*, which Mzolang curiously classifies under those 'distorted' versions of Shaka's personal history, is, together with James Saunders King's and Farrie's *Shaka*, one of the many personal histories of Shaka inscribed in various artistic and theoretical discourses (written and/or orally transmitted). Its strength, to me anyway, lies in the fact that while it offers a 'Christianised' version of this past, it is a version that disturbs both the Christian mission to 'civilising the savage' (because it celebrates some of the 'savage's' cultural values), and a complacent Africanised epic version (because in its interpretation of this past, it endorses and displaces Christian-colonialist discourses of good and evil). What emerges from the text, however, is that Shaka, as a cultural icon,

> is still historically a human contradiction, someone whose impact on Southern Africa can be measured but whose personal history is now virtually irretrievable, having slipped permanently into the domain of legendry (Omer-Cooper).

Thus, it is not impossible to reject a self-proclaimed corrective without leaving an impression that there is an alternative truth.

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Cultural Transformation in South Africa: The Role of Literary Studies

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Abstract

A comprehensive national literary history can contribute importantly to the cultural transformation of South Africa along non-racist and democratic lines. This would be made possible by an inter-disciplinary approach to the field which transforms literary studies into cultural studies, which constructs a conceptual unity termed history rather than language, which engages with contemporary literary theories, and which encourages a suspicion of the discourse of nationalism.

> Students of South African literature must welcome the salutary way that research in such disciplines as race, artistic culture has long been the absence of any unified, systematic, integrated account of the country's literature and culture as a whole (Gerard 1983:599).

It is quite remarkable that, at the close of the twentieth century, South Africa has yet to produce such a comprehensive national literary history. The reasons are both political (the ethno-linguistic segregations imposed by colonialism and exacerbated by apartheid—and theoretical: the absence of adequate models to conceptualise such an 'integrated account'. It is now apparent that these political and theoretical obstacles have been severely weakened by the emergence of a non-racist democratic State and the radical transformation of literary studies in recent decades by contemporary literary theory (Marxism, Semiotics, Post-structuralism, Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis etc). This is no idle academic exercise. South Africa's recent political transformations need to be accompanied by an allied *cultural transformation*—the birth of a post-racist, democratic, national and non-racist culture. If language and literature departments (segregated) schools and universities played their part in compelling ethnically divided subjects, then it would seem that a key element in the educational restructuring of post-apartheid South Africa would involve the construction of an integrated national literary history manifesting itself in school and tertiary syllabuses.

It is crucial to accept that such a national literary history cannot be constructed from the space of a single discipline. It is therefore central that such a project be rigorously *inter disciplinary*, drawing not only upon work done in the eleven official South African languages, but also upon disciplines such as history, anthropology and cultural studies. However, Roland Barthes (1974:72) has pointed out the radical consequences of such an approach:

> Interdisciplinary activity, valued today as an important aspect of research, cannot be accomplished by simple juxtaposition between various special and branches of knowledge. Interdisciplinarity worthy of the name presupposes a theoretic site where the notions of the old disciplines break down [...] to the benefit of a new object and a new language, neither of which is the domain of those branches of knowledge that are rationally sought to be reborn.

If a 'new object and a new language', a renewed, unrecognizable literary history, is to emerge from the breakdown of the ossifyingly familiar 'old disciplines', then it seems to us that specific transformations need to take place in a number of important areas.

Firstly, the very notion of literary studies in South Africa would need to be radically reconceptualised. It is not only a matter of, for example, suddenly 'filling up' syllabuses with South African literary texts, but of making a decisive break with the hegemonic notion of what counts as 'literature'. Such a notion of the 'literary' is structured around a series of binary oppositions whose first term is always privileged: the written work rather than the oral performance; the 'fictional' text rather than 'factual' texts such as his orical writings, diaries, travelogues, and so on; 'high' literature rather than the 'popular'; and alphabetical writing rather than other writing systems. It is instructive to break with this model because so much of the literature that deserves serious consideration is thereby marginalised. To disturb this structure is not to privilege its denigrated other but to re-position literary studies in terms of a *cultural studies* paradigm which, as Antony Easthope (1991:106) argues, analyses texts generally as 'examples of signifying practices'. Such a textualist approach, Easthope continues, 'is grounded upon the following notion:

> Both literary and popular cultural texts operate through a system of signs, meanings arising from the organization of the signifiers, to both can be applied the same procedures.

Secondly, in his recent essay, 'Towards a National History of South African Literature', Albert Gérard has confronted the serious difficulties South Africa presents to such a project. He draws our attention particularly to the pronounced racial, political and linguistic divisions, but then interestingly argues that despite the 'diversity of South Africa's population and the resulting variety of her literature(s)', there is to be found a decisive element of unity which binds together all racial and ethnic groups with their different languages and traditions' (Gérard 1993:471). This element is a shared South African *history*, which he briefly divides into four 'phases':

> first, the settlement of whites, black and white, on formerly free and practically non-occupied Khoikhoi and San ground, the British conquest, and, the discovery of enormous mineral riches and the ensuing consequences: proletarisation and urbanisation. Fourth, the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the institutionalisation of *apartheid*. Each of the broad groups that constitute the population of the country was diversely affected by each of these processes. The various branches of the national literature emerged and grew as specific responses to these processes (Gérard 1993:47).

As we are aware, traditionally national literary histories have been constructed around a single dominant language. In South Africa, with its multilingual and multicultural diversity, this would be an impossible task. Indeed, there is a danger identified by Jeremy Cronin, of the establishment of a 'national literature' under the hegemony of a white, liberal, English project', a

inevitably coloured by the emergence of English as the *de facto* national language of a post-colonial South Africa. It is for these reasons that Gérard's emphasis upon *history* is so important, a point developed by Johan van Wyk (1995) in his paper entitled 'Towards a South African Literary History':

> In South Africa ... with different language groups claiming their own national history, literary history cannot be exercised on the basis of language. Rather, the issue is to integrate as much as of shared historical information within a common paragraph as is possible – although different, even conflicting, perspectives and ideologies embody this information ... The traditional literary history assumes that continuity of texts written in a particular language is stronger than the possible ruptures between levels of different languages. In a multilingual society, language is secondary to the experience of a common history.

This emphasis upon historical *interaction* leads me to my *third* point, that our analyses of texts in this multicultural and hybrid society need to draw on the important theoretical concepts of intertextuality (Kristeva), heteroglossia (Bakhtin), discursive formations (Foucault) and différance (Derrida), that is, to see texts as unstable entities traversed by a multiplicity of cultural, political, literary) voices or modes which are themselves subject to change or relocation. As Rolando Barthes (1974: 10) explained in *S/Z*:

> ... the ideal text is not an (aesthetic) object, a model (what would be the point of describing it?), and also a network with no beginning, no end, no hierarchy, no structure, not at least as a law of texts and departures: a virtual text, or rather, to put it paradoxically, the proof of impossibility of a text (such a text, at the limit, would coincide with the world, as Borges has dreamed of a map which would be the same size as the territory it represents). What can a plural text be? Its very theory (but theory is only a way of speaking, not of seeing) is the very theory of the limit: the plural text is the text of its own variation. It is made not of the coexistence of meanings but of the passage, the overcoming of the verdict.

Accounts of the local post-structuralist theories of the text such as these, which locate with traditional notions that texts are enclosed totalities containing single meanings and wholly determined by their 'original' context of production, enable us properly to address the vibrantly *hybrid* South African literary enterprise. Moreover, such readings of South African literature enable us to balance—they are both powerful antagonists in a crucial literary logic—of an organicist national discourse which reduces difference to an essentialist Same, and a fragmentation of difference uncritically a postmodernist or apartheid orientation) which overlooks an encounter with these intersectional spaces.

South African literary nation is something of a microcosm of the democratic nation state, in the phrase of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), as 'an articulated system of differences'. The 'totality' or 'unity' is 'articulated' – constructed, provisional, unstable, indeterminate, resistant to closure. To separate it from any suggestion of an essential unity grounded in some transcendental signified, one can say it is a 'totality' made up of irreducible 'differences'. The multiplicity of voices which make up our national terrain. Simon During (1987: 36) writes in something similar to the case of New Zealand when he refers to 'constructing a non-essentialist unity across a maintained difference'.

Fourthly, I hope it is clear from what I have been saying that I am as suspicious of the discourse of nationalism as I am of the discourse of 'literature'. In the post-colonial context, nationalism all too easily becomes a new master narrative, an unreflexive 'myth' which 'naturalises' historical and political contingency. As Benedict Anderson (1983: 11) argues in an *Imagined Communities*, nationalism 'naturalises' historical and political contingency:

> Something of the nature of political love can be recaptured from the ways in which 'nationalisms' – languages describe their objects: cradles in the vocabulary of kinship (motherland, Vaterland, patrie) or tombs (terre natale, *Heimat*, or *mère-patrie* ... Both always contain something to which one is naturally tied ... In one sense, 'nation' therefore always connotes something chosen.

Nationalism as myth elides the cultural complexity of a specific nation in its specificities of class, gender, regions, ethnic groups, languages and so on—it must also, in its desperate bid to construct a local 'other', elides the reality of cultural syncretism, 'an inescapable and characteristic feature of all post-colonial societies and indeed the source of their peculiar strengths' (Ashcroft et al 1989: 30). Furthermore, in its hostility to 'cultural imperialism', an essentialist nationalism is unable to account for the *international* dimension of cultural exchange what Diana Brydon (1991: 196) refers to as

> the new globalism ... as being simultaneously about local independence and global interdependence. It seeks a way to empower without creating a way to define differences in ways that depend on modes of cultural purity ... and identity but that focus on interaction that 'contaminates' without overwhelming.

It is for these reasons that any teaching of a South African national literature must be alive both to the complexities of local differences and the ways in which 'local' cultural discourses are inevitably caught up in a global cultural network—must occupy the terrain of the 'national' in a profoundly critical manner, working within a space which must be constantly discussed and renamed.

Perhaps what we are really after in South Africa beyond nation-building—is the construction of a radical democratic culture. In their book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Laclau and Mouffe make a distinction between what they call a 'popular subject position' and a 'democratic subject position'. In the third world, the popular struggle has a single enemy—the imperialist, which has the effect of 'dividing the political space into two antagonistic camps'. The 'popular subject position' is therefore constituted by this binary division. In South Africa the 'national-liberation' subject position of the 'people' versus the apartheid-colonialist regime. The 'democratic subject position', however, is found in societies with a multiplicity of antagonisms (class struggles, the new social movements) which cannot be subsumed under the unifying notion of the 'popular'. Perhaps we need to lay the basis for such a pluralist democratic society, where we acknowledge differences—the particular, the multiple, the heterogeneous ... (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 96), the fact that we are all

multiple and contradictory subjects. Implications of a university to come (Moore 1998:44).

It is by the encouragement of such a radical conversation, culture that we can break with the essentialised unitary subject of nationalist discourses, and finally begin to celebrate our cultural diversity and hybridity, itself only a sign in a global network of cultural exchange.

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Social Concerns in Afrikaans Drama: 1930-1940

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Abstract

This essay explores some of the complexities of Afrikaans drama in the period 1930-1940. The drama of the period was not characterised by any radical break with the past. Most plays continued the social realist and naturalist trends of the twenties. Many plays are nevertheless interesting in terms of the portrayal of social concerns of the period. This article explores the aesthetics of the period as well as the themes of the poor whites, family and race.

1 Introduction

This essay explores some of the complexities of Afrikaans drama in the period 1930-1940. The drama of the period was not characterised by any radical break with the past. Most of the plays continued the social realist and naturalist trends of the twenties. NP van Wyk Louw was the only *Dertiger* belonging to the important movement of literary renewal in the 1930s to produce a drama, namely *Die Dieper Reg*, produced for the 1938 Voortrekker centenary. This play relates strongly to the new aesthetic orientation of poetry of the *Dertigers* and therefore stands out from the other drama production of the period.

2 Aesthetics in literature and politics

The *Dertiger*-movement, under the leadership of NP van Wyk Louw, was a movement of aesthetic gentlemen. It reacted against the mass based popular cultural productions of the period, by emphasising the author as individualist, prophet and craftsperson. For Kruger-Meyer (1978:350) their work is characterised by the 'more subtle use of the word and a concentration on the inner life of the individual'.

Central to their writing was a concern with beauty. To NP van Wyk Louw (1970:94) the word beauty referred to meanings outside middle class and mass understanding—it meant exploring areas which challenge and threaten middle class society, readers and audiences. The middle class signified to him the downfall and distraction of spiritual life; they 'materialise all beauty with their own banality'. Only the disenchanted, those who suffer and stand outside of middle class life can appreciate art. True spiritual and subjective life becomes the yardstick of beauty: poetry is measured by pain, suffering, sorrow and desire.

This new aesthetics had its counterpart in the *Dertiger*-National Party feud, 1934) and its intimacy to aestheticise politics. Diederichs was the philosopher of this new nationalism. Trained by the Nazi's Ahnenerbe Institute (Wilkins & Strydom 1979:76), he showed some understanding of fascism in articles such as 'Die Fascistiese Staatsfilosofie' in the *Huisgenoot* (3 Nov 1933).

To Diederichs racism is *Hier gaan Dit* or the terrain of politics. Both Diederichs and Van Wyk Louw envisage hierarchical differentiation as or

essential trait of the new aesthetic movement in culture and science:

> to recognise and investigate the different levels of reality (intellect, life, psyche, spirit) each in its own right. ... It is not only a more advanced intellectual development when compared to the earlier denial of differences, but also one which is more true to the natural and realistic attitudes of man. Ordinary man sees the world as [illegible] and diverse, and he refuses emotionally—even when he strives intellectually to accept the dogmatism that materialism presents him of the world. In his immediate aesthetic experience of the world he discovers everything that was reasoned away: sound and colour, beauty, even pain and the [illegible] values and people[1] (Van Wyk Louw 1937:2[illegible]).

This aesthetic, to both Diederichs and Van Wyk Louw, is anti-bourgeois. Diederichs describes fascism as 'in its being a romantic and anti-bourgeois impulse' (*Huisgenoot* 1 Nov 1935:17).

The word 'bourgeois' to them does not refer to the owners of the means of production, but rather to those rationalism and materialism. The bourgeois are the 'respectable' audiences, the well-to-do, the important state officials, indifferent to progress or adventure (Van Wyk Louw 1940:[illegible]) who attended the Afrikaans plays such as JFW Grosskopf's (1926) *As die Tuig Skawe* in which Van Wyk Louw acted in the mid-thirties (Nienaber *Perd* 1976:53; see also Van Wyk Louw's *[illegible] in Kampland* 1970). They preferred audiences selected according to wealth, class or education (Van Wyk Louw 1970:25). He would have preferred an audience of:

> All those who know suffering, who are restless, empty and hungry, socially unsatisfied, the weak, and yet strong ... they are the ones who can appreciate beauty[2] (Van Wyk Louw 1970:23).

Diederichs praises the same impulses in the youth. Youth is characterised by the 'spontaneous' and 'chaotic': 'The spontaneous entity of will, power, youth, movement and action for the sake of action' (*Huisgenoot* 1 Nov 1935:17).

The deed without reason is rejected for the sake of the deed, there [illegible] (*Huisgenoot* 3 Nov 1935:17).

The deed as theme, found its most pure expression in Van Wyk Louw's (1938) *Die Dieper Reg*, 'n spel, a play written for the Voortrekker Centenary of 1938, consists of chorus and individual voices allegorically representing the Voortrekkers in the Court of Eternal Right which must decide over their continued existence as a people. They are charged for rising up against, and breaking all ties with the law; for appropriating land and enriching themselves; for being motivated by restlessness and self-righteousness. In their defence they name their suffering, the fact that they paid the highest price by sacrificing their lives.

They are redeemed, not because of their suffering, but because of the power and simplicity, the *deed*, which motivated them and which made them an expression of God himself who is the 'mysterious Council, mysterious Source, of restlessness, deed and life itself'[3] (Van Wyk Louw 1938:15). Because of the deed their existence is secured in the land South Africa. God is the unreasoning, motivating force of history transcending intellectuality and human law. This play is the most profound expression of the 'birth of a nation' in Afrikaans.

3 Poor whites

An important theme of the drama of the 1930s was the 'poor whites'.

By 1930 there were about 300 000 poor whites out of a population of one million Afrikaners. They made their living from farming as tenants, worked as hired farm labourers, or were owners of small pieces of land, squatters or unskilled labourers. Others were roaming trek farmers, hunters, woodcutters, the poor of the towns, diggers and manual labourers on the railways and relief workers (Toukier 1938:4). The poor white was defined as a person whose income did not enable him/her to maintain a standard of living in accordance with general norms of respectability (Toukier 1938:5).

By the 1930s the poor white already constituted an established literary category: poor whiteism as theme abounded in prose and drama. As in the many social studies on the topic, the poor whites in literature were seen as the direct descendants of the Voortrekkers: they represented the last of the people living according to the Voortrekker ethic—as the character Jim in PWS Schumann's (1935) *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* makes clear when he points to the parallels between the Voortrekkers and Hantie's parents:

> Is it not true that the (Louis Trichardt), the Voortrekker leader, was possibly just as poor, if not poorer, than your father is today? Your mother and father still live like the real Voortrekkers of the older days. And what right do we have to reproach them for still living in the same way? They are still Voortrekkers, just like their parents were[4] (Schumann 1935:84).

The poor whites are portrayed as the remnants and descendants of the people who lived according to the unthinking deed that Diederichs and Van Wyk Louw romanticised: 'they did not gather material possessions, personal wealth or luxury. Nature was their wealth and freedom, their luxury and pleasure' and 'They roamed from here to there ... from the diggings to the settlements, to wherever their instinct lead them' (Schumann 1935:94).

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[1] [illegible] die verskillende lae van die werklikheid (verstand, lewe, psige, gees) elkeen in sy eie reg te erken en te ondersoek ... Dit is nie alleen 'n verder ontwikkelde wetenskaplike houding ... nie, maar ook een wat nader aan die natuurlike en die realistiese houding van die mens is. Die gewone mens sien juis die wêreld as [illegible] en veelvuldig, en hy weier gevoelsmatig ... om die dogmatiek wat die materialisme hom van die wêreld gee, te aanvaar. In sy onmiddellike estetiese ervaring van die wêreld ontdek hy alles wat weg geredeneer was, klank en kleur, skoonheid, selfs pyn en [illegible] waardes en mense.

2. [illegible] wat onrustig, honger [illegible] ... [illegible] dié mense wat die skoonheid kan verstaan.

3. ... verborge Raad, verborge Bron van onrus, daad en lewe self—.

4. Is dit nie waar dat hy waarskynlik net so armoedig was as [illegible] Voortrekkers [illegible] ... Hulle is nog Voortrekkers, net soos hulle ouers was.

From this perspective the term 'poor whites' seems to be a misnomer. Indeed the poor white character, Annie Oosthuizen, points out that 'the tag poor white' is a discursive invention by the petit bourgeois rather than a reality as experienced by the poor whites themselves:

> I am no 'thriving street woman' and also not a 'poor white' ... It is the 'charities' and the 'Distress' and the 'Mayor's Fund' and all the people who want to make 'poor whites' of us. My husband says they are just like doctors who invented a new illness and now want everyone to have it (Schumann 1933:8)[5].

The poor white in literature was more than just the depiction of a social fact of the time. The theme introduced modernism, in the form of naturalism, to Afrikaans literature.

Naturalism – especially the petit bourgeois family drama – formed part of the materialist tradition rejected by NP van Wyk Louw and Dietrichsen, especially in so far as it shows individual characters as victims of external forces, the social environment and heredity.

Naturalism, nevertheless, was in vogue in Afrikaans theatre in the 1930s. Many of the naturalist classics were translated and performed – among them Ibsen's *A Doll's House* staged by Paul de Groot and his travelling players in the rural areas. Before every performance De Groot would give a lecture on the importance of naturalism to Western literature and during the performance:

> Audiences followed the play in silence, a silence of non-comprehension. The ending, if anything, surprised them. They simply threw their hands up indignantly in the air at the thought that Nora would leave her children rather than sacrifice her individuality (Hauptfleisch 1990:59).

On the other hand naturalist melodramas also displayed this extreme realism: an exact but superficial imitation of reality that the audiences – unaccustomed to the artifices of theatre – loved:

> Because they have never seen a production by 'strangers' who play with someone's convictions and speak, as such, 'fluent Dutch' as they called it, the experience was a revelation. For them the play was something real, a reality, and without much effort they deceived themselves into that reality. Without any conception of what a theatrical performance actually is, they were convinced by the play and believed in it. It is to this uncritical surrender that I attribute the initial big success of Afrikaans theatre ([illegible] 1950:39).

One of the interesting examples of this extreme realism was Hendrik Hanekom's production of the historic and symbolical play *Oom Paul* by DC Postma in 1955. This play, based on the life of the Transvaal president, Paul Kruger, was an attempt to recreate history: Paul Kruger's house, the wallpaper, the uniforms of the time, the gestures as recorded from the memory of people who knew the president, his drinking of coffee from a saucer and being addressed by the black servants as 'uncle' were portrayed in the greatest of detail (Binge 1969:75).

Naturalism in Afrikaans literature dates back to Harm Oost's *Ou Daniel* (Old Daniel) in 1906. This was also the first depiction of the poor white. Old Daniel, the main character, is seen as the 'first truly living character in Afrikaans drama' (Bosman 1951:13). In this psychological and sociological study in Afrikaans literature Old Daniel is the 'personification of the clash between the old and the new in the changed Afrikaans society after the Anglo-Boer War and he becomes the distant precursor of the social problem drama' (Bosman 1951:11). The poor white theme enabled writers to depict the 'Afrikaner as a human being instead of as a patriot, or simply man as man' (Bosman 1951:21).

The following plays have the poor white as theme: *Hantie Kom Huis Toe* by CWS Schumann (1933), *Die Skerwemaat* by AJ Hanekom (1932), *Oorwinning* by HS Vetter (1933) and *Die Stad Sodom* by FW Boonzaier (1921). A nationalist perspective is explicitly manifested in these texts. The poor white is seen from the outside—from a concerned petit bourgeois perspective—as a difference that must be returned to the same of the nation. One of the main criticisms by theorists against Afrikaans playwrights was the fact that the political prejudices of the authors made objective depiction of the characters impossible:

> [illegible] playwright in Afrikaans could without distance [illegible] personal interference with his character portrayals. His inability to portray objectively the many different characters [illegible] most commonly against their work (Hauptfleisch 1984:125).

Most of these texts are critical of the wealthy Afrikaner's preconceptions and exploitation of the poor whites. The class differentiation, implied in 'poor whiteism', was experienced as a threat to Afrikaner unity. Unsuccessful nationalist strategies towards the poor white problem were even criticised in some plays:

> HANTIE (Her voice all passion): Yes, they have congresses, and they make resolutions, and they create [illegible] and appoint commissions of [illegible] and [illegible] resolutions [illegible] But what is their approach? (Schumann 1933:60)[6].

The most extreme portrayal of the raw reality of the poor whites is found in Schumann's (1933) *Hantie Kom Huis Toe*. This play was produced in Cape Town by Anna Neethling-Pohl with the assistance of Van Wyk Louw. Neethling-Pohl (1974:95) felt that the HA Fagan plays usually produced in Cape Town 'were too civilised' for her 'rebellious taste, and not relevant enough'. In contrast, *Hantie Kom Huis Toe* represented 'a piece of real life, crude and raw, saying things as explicitly as possible' (Neethling-Pohl 1974:95). Anna Neethling-Pohl would later be confronted with the reality of the poor whites

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[5] Dis die 'charities' en die 'Distress' en die 'Mayor's Fund' en al die mense wat 'poor whites' van ons wil maak. My man het gesê hulle is net soos die dokters wat 'n nuwe siekte uitgevind het en nou wil hulle hê almal moet daaraan ly.

[6] [illegible] Hulle hou kongresse en hulle neem besluite [illegible] en hulle stel kommissies aan om ondersoek [illegible] Die vraag is [illegible] wag?

as represented in *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe*. In 1935 she became the secretary of Schumann's wife, who was a social worker in the Krugersdorp area.

Politically, poor whiteism – 'the factory of idlers, rogues, useless'[7] (Oom in *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* – Schumann 1933:76) – is of interest because it points to an emerging class differentiation undermining the unity of the nation ('I do not believe in classes for white people'[8] – Schumann 1933:56). As a class that may define its interests in opposition to that of the nationalists the poor whites posed a direct threat to the nationalists.

The increasing assimilation of the poor whites into a racially integrated South African society was perceived with shock by the nationalists. This process of integration is symbolised by *Doppiesdorp* where the poor whites of *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* lived with 'Greek and Syrian, and Hottentot and Malay' (Schumann 1933:73). In the same play, evidence that the poor whites were outgrowing their racial prejudices is seen in the friendly relations between them and Abdool, the Indian shop owner, called 'Oupa' (Grandfather) by some children.

A less unambiguous description of emerging class differentiation is found in the articles 'Nogeens die bediendevraagstuk' (Once again the servant question) and 'Die wit meisie in huisdiens' (The white girl in domestic service) from the *Huisgenoot* (21 Aug and 18 Sept respectively). The problems that employers could expect when employing poor whites according to the *Huisgenoot* were:

> 1 The fact that they saw themselves as the equals of their employers, because no clear cut class distinctions exist amongst Afrikaners.
> 2 A prejudice against work that they considered to be the work of blacks [illegible] 'I won't allow my child to do kaffir-work'[9] – Schumann 1933:29).

The *Huisgenoot* (21 Aug 1931:57) then gives the following advice:

> Make your white domestic understand for her own sake that although she is one of the same class as the employer, she nevertheless does not belong to the circles of the employer, just as [illegible] belongs to the circle of parents. She is the servant and may not sit at the table. But at the same time it must be seen to that she lives in respectable conditions.

Class differentiation and the question of white domestic servants are discussed in J.F.W. Grosskopf's (1938) play *Die Skeidsmuur* (The Partition Wall). This play attempts to show that poverty in itself does not define poor whiteism: the poor white for him is rather the person that has lost his/her self-respect and is no longer a true part of the Afrikaner people. This is shown by contrasting the poor but respectable railway family of Johan Terblanche with their neighbour, Gert. Gert's loss of self-respect is especially evident in the following aspects of his use of language:

> 1 In the form of address he addresses Mrs Terblanche as *Miesies* (Missus).

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[7] [illegible]

[8] Ek glo nie aan klasse vir witmense nie.

[9] Ek laat nie my kind kafferwerk doen nie.

> *Miesies* was the form of address used by black servants when speaking to white women. It indicated a class and racial difference. Compare also *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* where Mrs van Niekerk reproaches Aunt Grieta for calling her *Miesies* because she is 'also white' (Schumann 1933:30).
>
> 2 In the 'carnivalesque' (Bakhtin 1984) aspects of his discourse: he uses the words 'poor whites' as if between quotation marks, thereby mimicking learned society's definition of him. The quotation marks show that he puts on the mask of society when he uses the words 'poor whites'.
>
> 3 In his particular way of transforming English words into Afrikaans. This can be seen as a bastardisation of the self: *pawnie* (pawn), [illegible] (twee sente).
>
> 4 In his use of idiomatic expressions like [illegible] he evokes the foolish wisdom of [illegible] and the 'trickster' hero.
>
> 5 In his use of incorrect forms of standard Afrikaans words: [illegible].

Through his use of language he attempts to establish a sense of equality between his family and that of his neighbour; he wants to make the Terblanches feel at home in their poor white environment. By calling Mrs. Terblanche *Nig Maria* (Cousin Mary) he accentuates kinship ties. He says this was the way 'our grandfathers and grandmothers spoke' (Grosskopf 1938:4).

Terblanche, on the other hand, resists his assimilation into poor white society by maintaining his family's dignity or his family's difference from poor whiteism at all costs although they are temporarily in a similar situation. Gert, on the other hand, as a typical carnivalesque character, reduces everything to the lowest common denominator, namely the body. The carnivalesque language of the working class (Gert) is typified by its ability to assimilate and to generate a rich and lively diversity of expression.

Terblanche's daughter, Aletta, works as a domestic servant in the house of the mayor and prospective member of parliament, Van Zoelen. Van Zoelen sees the poor whites as backward types who are nothing but a social burden and completely worthless to society. In his house Aletta has to pander to all the whims of the spoilt daughter, Helena. In these circumstances Aletta has to maintain her self-respect.

Helena senses in the dignity of Aletta that Aletta has forgotten her place as servant in the house. She refuses to be tolerant towards Aletta, because then Aletta might see herself as an equal. Aletta represents a class to Helena that has to be kept in its place.

Van Zoelen's son, Albert, on the other hand, challenges the stereotypical images of the poor whites shared by his sister and father. He sees that the rich, instead of helping the Church and the State in the struggle against poor whiteism, are strengthening the dividing wall between rich and poor. According to him the wealthy should rather encourage the poor whites to maintain and develop their self-respect. The poor whites must be taught that the history of the Afrikaner people also belongs to them, that they are fellow Afrikaners and equally part of the people. He gives effect to these words by

falling in love with Aletta and marrying her against the wishes of her father.

Like the Nationalists of the time, Albert emphasises the unity of the People and the need to struggle against developing class divisions. In this way he is verbalising the author's own views.

4 Family

In most plays of the period a conflict between father and children is developed on the basic structure of the biblical parable of the prodigal son. The conflict implies the tension between the modern and the traditional, the rural and the urban, the past and the future. Sometimes as in *Die Skeidsmuur* (Hanekom 1938) it is a struggle by the son against the preconceptions of the father. In *[illegible] Boerdery* (Backward Farming) by David J Coetzee (1933), the son wants to introduce scientific methods of farming against his father's wishes. In the foreword to *Die Stad Sodom* (The City Sodom) PW Rossouw (1931) states that his play should serve as a warning to the daughters who want to settle in the city. In this play poverty forces the unmarried young woman to prostitution. Her father disowns her and, unlike the father of the Prodigal Son, he does not welcome her back when she returns to the farm dying of TB.

Another dimension of the generational conflict is Fritz Steyn's (1938) *Grond* (Land) which is about the duty of the unwilling son towards the dead father's wish to keep the inherited farm within the family. The son is a qualified teacher and does not enjoy farming. He keeps his feelings towards the farm a secret from his children who in their turn also revolt against the farm and the rural ethos. He forces them not to abandon the farm, all to be part of his promise to the dead. However circumstances such as a bond repayment and a hailstorm force them off the farm. The loss of the farm leads to the transformation of the family and enables the children to go to university and pursue professional careers.

Loss of the farm signifies the loss of the means for production: the inability to reproduce independent life itself, it means alienation - the fact that the independent person is forced to become a wage labourer. This is made clear by Terblanche in *Die Skeidsmuur* (Hanekom 1938:7) when he says: 'How can I forget that once we were also independent farmers, that we could face people as equals'.[10]

The duty to the ancestors in *Grond* (Steyn 1938) expresses the duty to 'the idea of the gewyde fatherland' (Moodie 1975:17) which is so central in Nationalist ideology.

In *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* (Schumann 1953) the father is identified with God and the devil. Hantie - who never knew her father and was taken away from her poor white family at the age of five—has mystical conversations with God. Gertjie, her poor white little brother also has moments of clairvoyance. Hantie dates her mystical conversations back to her childhood from the time that she was taken from her real family:

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10. Hoe kan ek ooit vergeet dat ons ook eenmaal selfstandige boere was, dat ons ander in die oë kon kyk, op gelyke voet met die mense kon verkeer?

> It's not as strange ... [illegible] ... He has been everywhere with me since my childhood .... I see Him often ... always .... I don't know how to explain it[11] (Schumann 1953:16).

When her friend, Jan, asks her about her father she answers:

> I do not know much about Father. Do not ask me about Father, because ... Ma never talks about Father. Sometimes I feel so scared[12] (Schumann 1953:37).

When Hantie meets her real father, without knowing that he is her real father, he stirs irrational revulsions in her. He is a most violent poor white. She tells her mother: 'he has the most abhorrent face I have ever seen'[13] (Schumann 1953:65). She becomes completely hysterical in his presence.

> If only I never have to see him again—the devil marked him .... I feel like the day when I slipped on the mountain's slope when I had to cling onto some shrubs to prevent my fall[14] (Schumann 1953:70).

At the end, God and devil merge in the father when she discovers with shock that he is her real father.

> He? Then I've got his blood in my veins? My body is of him and my nerves are my constitution and my spirit descended from him? There is not a part of my body, or of my soul, where his stain is not! My creator, God that formed Me, that saw me before I existed, that knew me before my birth, was it really your aim with me .... Then the night is part of me, and I embrace the darkness like a [illegible]?[15] (Schumann 1953:105).

After this she faints, recovers a few minutes later and declares the ground holy where she saw God. She finally feels relieved of material reality.

5 Race

Race in the 1930s still referred to the differences between Afrikaners and the English. When Mrs Van Niekerk says 'There are so many mixed marriages these days'[16] (Schumann 1953:56) in *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe*, she is referring to marriages between Afrikaners and the English. The 'Native Question' indicated the thinking on the future of the African peoples—an obsession of

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11. Dit is tog so wonderlik nie ... [illegible] ... Hy was oral by my sedert my kindsdae .... Ek sien Hom dikwels ... altyd ... Ek weet nie hoe om dit te verduidelik nie.
12. Ek weet nie veel van Pa af nie. Moenie my van Pa af vra nie, want ... Ma praat nooit van Pa af nie. Ek voel soms so alleen.
13. Ag Moeder, hy het vir my die walglikste gesig wat ek nog ooit gesien het.
14. ... as ek hom net nie weer hoef te sien nie—die duiwel het hom gebrandmerk .... Ek voel soos ek die dag langs die berghang gevoel het toe my voete gly en my hande bossies en gras moes vasgryp om my val te keer.
15. Hy? —Dan het ek sy bloed in my are? My vlees is van syne, en my senuwees, my gestel, my gees van syne afkomstig? Nie 'n deel van my liggaam, of ook van my siel waarop sy stempel nie afgedruk is nie! .... My Skepper en Formeerder, wat my gesien het toe ek nog nie daar was nie, wat my geken het voor my geboorte—is dit dan waarlik so die bedoeling met my gewees? Dan is die nag my deel, en ek omhels die duisternis soos 'n [illegible].
16. Is daar deesdae nie so baie gemengde huwelike nie.

especially general Hertzog. In the early thirties the Native Question was seen as a 'matter of the utmost gravity calling for a meticulously thought-out long term policy' (Pirow nd:1[illegible]). No coherent plan on the political future of the Africans seems to have existed. The Native Question went hand in hand with what was called the 'survival of White Civilisation' and the fear that whites would become 'swamped [illegible]' (Pirow nd:195) when a 'black man would no longer be a fear of civilisation' (Pirow nd:195).

Hertzog differentiated in the late twenties between the future of the coloureds on the one hand and the Africans on the other. His view of the coloureds was that ultimately they should be integrated 'into the White Man's world industrially, economically and politically, but not socially' (Pirow nd:127). On the other hand his 'native policy was based on the principle of segregation and it had as its ideal the development of the native along his own lines in his own territory' (Pirow nd:128).

Hertzog, according to Pirow, was not a protagonist of *Apartheid*, but of differentiation with 'benevolent guardianship' (Pirow nd:193). The determining factor for eventual self-government by Africans was not 'the organisation of the white man's [illegible], but of his ethical conceptions' (Pirow nd:193). There was a general fear amongst whites about the political consequences of education for Africans. This is expressed as follows by the patriarch Van R[illegible] in the play *Van R[illegible] van Niekerk*:

> The Kaffir is here to work. Make it compulsory. Close down that mission school! They only spoil the blacks. Why must they learn to read and write? A Kaffir that can read and write is worthless. And if he speaks English I'll kick him from my property! (Van Niekerk 1930:29)[17]

Central to the propagation of the white man's ethical conceptions was the spread of Christianity. 'The paramount position of the European population vis à vis the native is accepted in a spirit of Christian guardianship' (Pirow nd:198). The play *Jong*, by JC [illegible] (1930) which could be performed by any farm schools as long as they sent ten shillings of the takings to be used for missionary work in the Eastern Province and the Transkei, aimed to make white children on the farms aware of their duty to spread the gospel amongst the 'heathen' children of African farm labourers.

By 1935 the Broederbond began to formulate its ideas on black and white relations systematically. These ideas would eventually become the policy of the Purified National Party. In a secret circular it defined the basic points of the policy as follows:

> 1. Total segregation should be implemented.
> 2. Black people be removed from white areas to separate areas provided for the different tribes and [illegible] from the State through a form of taxation such as [illegible], or [illegible] from the State' (Wilkins & Strydom 1978:[illegible]).

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[17] Die Kaffir is hier om te werk. Maak dit verpligtend. Sluit al daardie sendingskole. Hulle bederf die swartgoed net. Waarom moet hulle leer lees en skrywe? 'n Kaffir wat kan lees en skrywe is niks werd nie. En as hy Engels kan praat, skop ek hom van my werf af.

The 'detribalised native' in urban areas would be seen as 'temporary occupants' of locations in white areas and living 'there for their own [illegible] and self gain'. The same would apply to the coloured people who would get their own homeland (Wilkins & Strydom 1978:193,194).

The integration which became discernible in the mixed areas (such as [illegible] in *[illegible] Kom Huis-Toe* – Schumann 1933) was looked on with horror by the educated and wealthier Afrikaners: it was a direct assault on their sense of propriety.

A concern with what is proper was one of the obsessions of university-educated Afrikaners of the time. It manifested itself in a concern with the [illegible]. Compare M.P.R.'s outrage during a performance of Langenhoven's *Petronella* at the torn and tattered red velvet curtains and at the constant laughing of the town's people who saw all drama as comedy (*Huisgenoot* 25 May 1931:67). She calls it 'cultural disgrace'. The concern with what is proper is further manifested in Hannie's dismay at her mother wearing a night gown in the streets in *[illegible] Kom Huis-Toe* (Schumann 1933:64).

The concern with 'cultural disgrace' and what is proper explains much of the nationalist's racism. But this racism also has economic motives. The obsession of the wealthy Mrs van Niekerk with the friendly relations between the Indian shopowner and the poor whites in *[illegible] Kom Huis-Toe* indicates her fear of the growing economic power of the Indians.

> Yes my child, here you can see the very truth about poor whiteism. And as you noticed, one is astonished by the [illegible] Indian shops. But the reason is: the Indians treat the poor as their equals. They feel at home with them. Do you see that shop? It is Abdul's. The people call him 'Oom Abdul'[18] (Schumann 1933:25).

In another passage Mrs van Niekerk scolds Aunt Grieta:

> Are you again at the Indian's shop? You promised me last time you will not buy from the Indian if you could be helped elsewhere[19] (Schumann 1933:5[illegible]).

To this Aunt Grieta answers:

> Oh Missus, it is easy for you. You can simply go [illegible] where you like and what you buy, but we poor people must be happy to buy at the cheapest place[20] (Schumann 1933:55).

It is more than the price of goods that attracts Aunt Grieta to the Indian shop: there she does not feel discriminated against; she does not feel she is looked down upon by her own kind. When Mrs van Niekerk suggests that she should

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[18] Ja, my kind, hier kan jy nou die armblankedom in al sy naaktheid sien. En soos jy seker ook verwonder het oor die baie Koelie-winkels. Maar die rede is: die Koelies behandel die armes soos hul gelyke. Hulle voel daar tuis. Sien jy daardie winkel? Dis van Abdul s'n. Die mense noem hom oom [illegible].

[19] Is jy alweer by die Koelie se winkel? Jy het my laas belowe jy sal nie by die Koelie koop as jy op 'n ander plek [illegible] kan [illegible]. (In the 1955 edition the word 'Koelie' is replaced by 'Indiër'.)

[20] [illegible] dis maklik vir u. U kan net gaan waar u wil en koop wat u wil, maar ons arm mense moet maar bly wees om by die goedkoopste plek te koop.

boy from Goodman, a white man in spite of being a Jew. Aunt Gricta says:

> I went to old Goodman's shop, and do you know who I saw there behind the counter? Why, that Kanyan you know. Rock. Visagie's Kanyan. Rock with the lips of Red Riet. Not she was so dressed up and powdered that I nearly did not recognise her and she was so full of airs, the little slut. I wanted a few yards of lace. But I refuse to be humiliated by such a Kaffir wench. Were she or her parents just white trash? Or were they rather decent people? (Schumann 1951:59)

Another reason why they prefer buying from old Abdool is because he gives credit to the poor. (Schumann 1951:57).

When with her servant daughter, however, Aunt Gricta reverts to a crude racism. When Abdool addresses her with the familiar 'you' she replies:

> What! You saying to me 'you'? I am Missus Dawnies. I'm no such 'a Coo'e. Where does he get his 'you' from? (Schumann 1951:67)

The author's own prejudice towards Indians rather than coloureds is manifest in the many scenes in which the quality of the products Indians sell are questioned, the business ethics questioned and described as ghastly to everybody except Aunt Gricta. The stigmatisation of Abdool's goods is part of the context for the proposition in *Groot Kos Boer-Toe* (Schumann 1951). Africans are only marginally present. One senses in the presence an immense fear, as if the poor whites saw in the decolonisation of the African their own possible fate. The women react with intense irrational fear to the African lodger creeping around the veranda and asking for Hans (the real father). The African's presence threatens the carefully rounded rule of the law which leads to the arrest of Ryan and Rack for selling liquor illegally to Africans.

The play which most consistently and most interestingly explores the obsession with colour prejudice is JCB van Niekerk's (1950) *Van Riet, van Rieygersdal*. Van Riet, the owner of the farm Rietfontein, upholds racist ideals. He is upset about the precipitation given to the native question in the newspapers and the fact that there are drastic new laws to define the relationship between master and servant. This means that he cannot 'chastise' (assault) his labourers any longer without being challenged in court. He is especially upset because 'in elkaars' always interfere with existing relationships. To him this intervention is unnecessary. The 'native question' is a 'question of experience and common sense'[24] (Van Niekerk 1950:21).

In contrast, Prins, a university professor, pleads for the 'upliftment' (Van Niekerk 1950:29) of Africans. To him:

> The Native is no longer a beast of burden. He is beginning to think. He refuses to be the property of the white man in the servile sense of the word' (Van Niekerk 1950:29).

Later on he states:

> there is a possession nobody can deny them (Africans) namely the right to freedom. Freedom of movement, freedom of thought, freedom to search for his own salvation[25] (Van Niekerk 1950:29).

and,

> The time will come when the native will play a part in the government of the country. For better or for worse, whether we want to co-operate with them as friends or resist them as enemies[26] (Van Niekerk 1950:31).

These arguments set the context in which Van Riet's son, Piet, announces his love for Malie Hanekom, a world-renowned violinist, but 'unfortunately' coloured. In his love for Malie, he expresses 'powers that are stronger than prejudice and hate'[27] (Van Niekerk 1950:33) and which have to struggle against the autocratic father's 'willpower and ... race pride' (Van Niekerk 1950:33). Despite her colour Malie as violinist is representative of what is most noble in 'white civilisation'.

The whole play is then an exposure of the author's racist bigotry. Malie makes it clear: 'Your father condemned me for my descendancy, before he knew me'[28] (Van Niekerk 1950:52). His racism is further extremely self destructive. All his farm labourers desert him and he goes bankrupt. Klara, the faithful African coloured servant, sacrifices her life's savings in an attempt to postpone the auction for bond repayment on his farm.

When his son arrives to help in these circumstances, he still refuses to accept Malie as possible daughter-in-law. Although he was sympathetic before, he is possibly reflecting the sentiments of the author when he says to her:

> You are not ... to my liking for a daughter-in-law and you do not control .... No person can do more than sacrifice their own life for what is right. You do not, ... There is no other way[29] (Van Niekerk 1950:99).

Although the play shows Van Riet's racism as irrational, unreasonable and self destructive, it is still victorious in the end. This pity—which is one of the most pervasive, in its rejection of the rationality of racism—still condones

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24. Die Kaffer is verdomde meer verbeter as hy begin te dink. Hy weier om die eiendom van die witman te wees in die diensbare sin van die woord.
25. Al Mense aan is 'n mening wat niemand kan ontken nie, moontlikheid tot vryheid. Vryheid van beweging, vryheid van gedagte, vryheid om sy eie heil te soek.
26. Die tyd sal kom wanneer die naturel 'n rol in die bestuur van die land sal speel. Of hy verkies om te bestuur of om met hom self saam te werk as 'n vriend of kom hy [illegible] as 'n vyand.
27. ... krages wat sterker is as vooroordeel of haat
28. Jou vader het my oor my afkoms veroordeel, voordat hy my ken en my geken het.
29. Jy kan nie alles beheer nie. Niemand kan sy lewe opoffer vir wat reg is nie. Daar is geen ander uitweg nie.

[illegible] as far as it presupposes a transcendental rationality. Racism is then right, exactly because it is irrational and unseen. This links the *Rede* to the *Kleingeister* (Van Niekerk 1990) with Van Wyk Louw and Diederichs' notion to salute "the final taking-shape" as the ideological foundation of Afrikaner nationalism (and racism!).

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Reading History as Cultural Text[1]

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Abstract

This article takes issue with a undeniably strong trend in the politics of South African cultural debate in terms of which varieties of 'Post' criticism are extolled as 'textual radicalism', and then condemned as critically and politically irresponsible. The essay questions the generalised evasion-from section of 'post-everything' concealed by critics who draw their validation from an assumed position of engaging in what they call 'practical politics'. The article sees such arguments as damaging both to the theoretical integrity of materialist criticism and to the particular inflections of 'Post' critique which derive from specific South African constructions and histories. Finally, an example of particularist critique is offered. The reader is invited to judge whether such work is indeed an example of 'import rhetoric', or whether it asks worthy questions whose import is not limited to a specific's textual ephemerality.

1 'Import rhetoric' or indigenous practice?

If one wants to believe some influential commentators on the state of cultural history and study in southern Africa, then it would seem that the challenges posed by various 'Posts' are little more than vainglorious burblings by enthusiastic scholars *manqué*. In the *Southern African Review of Books*, for example, columnist Malik Saki (1993:24) feels secure enough to attack new waves of deep campus evangelicals, attributing to them statements such as "an irrationalising of indigenous capacity" and "the glorifying appropriations of silenced marginality". Maki Saki's parody seeks to "find out in a deliberate way" an anti-jargon concept that says we're "open-hearted, sensitive, non-objective, we use plain language and evaluate everyone". Sibabrat proceeds to seek funding in Cape Town and Johannesburg, with an apparently devastating observation:

> But writing specifically to be rejected for funding cuts across the "transition", "neutrality", "equilibrium" and "mediation", during a period when so many resources are worried by the practical challenges of change on the African continent. With an uncanny edge one learns to keep one's delegates focused free of bizarre economic and political concerns; there should be no shortage of nominations for Maki Saki Memorabilia (Maki Saki 1993:26).

We are inclined to conclude that what Maki Saki here characterises as "over-hysterical post-cultural post-structuralist navel-gazing" (Maki Saki 1993:24), is the root cause of a deeply irresponsible escape from the "practical challenges" of change on the African continent.

On at least two counts, this binary trap – between "textual politics" vs. irresponsible textuality – is quite breathtaking. First, how does a Maki Saki escape its own vice of judgment? Does s/he engage in "practical" politics

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1 This is a revised version of a paper delivered at the *Association of Literature, African Studies* 20th Anniversary Conference, "Transgression, Censorship and Resistance", hosted by the Association of Southern African Studies at the University of York, September 1993.

which is unaided by significance! Second, the patronisers of pidgeon invite the reader to confirm as basic common sense a strange duality by which some 'writers of (grammatically isolating) English language, are 'practical', while others are of the 'navel-gazing' variety. Without delving into the unstated theoretical assumptions about language and reference here, let us simply note that all the variants of 'Post' criticism are judged as *relatively* irresponsible, and that 'Post' criticism is seen as inherently cowardly, or moving in a direction of inferiority. In a tradition of Southern African scholarship which has been strongly influenced by Marxism, there can be few shortcomings more egregious than this.

Mafe Sole is not a lone voice. In the *Southern African Review of Books*, Nelson Visser (1993: 9) offers a sharp challenging criticism of what he calls the 'enthusiastic reception colonial discourse analysis and postcolonial theory have received in certain academic circles in South Africa'. He says:

> Feminist scholars who are doing some of the most exciting work in this area are no longer making these claims. What this work provides is a more sensitive and precise analysis of the various 'literacy' practices in which the remarkable ingenuity of the human subject is displayed as it struggles to get by in terms of the total set of social, economic and historical circumstances with which it is confronted.

He then argues that such positions lead to 'a serious radical slant to what is often no more than an unreconstructed liberal position'. Significantly, he adds:

> *His subversive instinct for genuinely political endeavour* and it is partly out of such concerns that we in SA have come to legitimate 'resistance' literature as a 'political' activity (or as the work of people who represent it as such). (Visser 1993: 9; my italics)

Visser's suggestions are compelling, yet they set up a false opposition in which 'serious' scholars are politically involved in politics, while less scrupulous scholars languish in the deriving, sterile world of textualities. As in Mafe Sole's case, these criticisms seem to assert an equal hierarchy—but not of 'real' political involvement against 'purely postural politics', since both writers seem eminently to be engaged in *upholding* and *writing* as occupational activities—one remains puzzled about what distinguishes *their* writing as non-discursive ('practical'?) and what makes *their* signifying activities more 'political' than those of 'Post' critics. Visser's position leads one to speculate

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[7] It is difficult to understand, moreover, the very argument implied in Visser's comment that 'serious' scholars do not find the literary or the historical aspects of text such an exclusively white preserve. Historically white scholars have been subjected to a variety of critiques, not the least of which has been the charge of racism in their writings, even in serious' scholarship. Among theorists who take positions which are clearly sensitive to racist(ic) representation are, for example, Abdul Norval (1996: The Machine (1993), Clifton Crais (1992), Patrick Harries (1994). A large number of cultural scholars also adopt 'Post' positions without hesitation. The argument would be more serious if it were to discuss these positions in scholarly research rather than in terms of a vague, moral conception of 'the people', by simply noting how often such scholarship proves to be of benefit, which can be put across the disciplines.

that legitimation, for South African scholars, must be found in extra-disciplinary political activities. But if that is the case—and it does seem to be a necessary implication of his statements—then one must ask: of what order, and who is to examine the appropriateness of one's 'practical' politics?

In my view, such a paradigm for the adequacy of scholarly positions is hugely problematic. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s writers such as Visser and many others took great pains to convince their Leavisite-humanist colleagues in literature departments that everything was political—appearance, textuality, the canons of universalist literature, art and even theory, nothing to mean, everything. Now we are asked to believe that the politics of post-this and post-that are *purely gestural*. As opposed to *purely practical*?

It may be worth pausing for a moment to consider the shift in a more or less finely calibrated formulation of worldliness in the politics of critical practice. When historical materialist cultural studies engaged in disputes with those they were wont to characterise as 'idealists' in the 1970s and 1980s, the argument was often framed as one in which proponents of the text itself as an autonomous—in the best cases, a 'universal'—artifact, were challenged by the 'harder sleights' those were indeed that the *materiality* of class relations and forces of production were constituting (or at least influential) factors, even in the spheres of writing and culture. In doing this, they were making what still seems a necessary and valid point about the manner in which cultural objects are produced. Indeed, such a perceived Realist notion of individual 'genius' as a totalisation of the textual artwork as fully self-reliant in itself, historical materialists would quick to point to the implicit class interest of such positions—bourgeois critics disguising 'bourgeois values as 'universal'). In South Africa, where the theory of the beautiful artist has taken a long time to die—indeed, it remains a heavy shadow in many unreconstructed spheres of English—requirements the advocacy of art for art's-sake has been seen as particularly anachronistic. For 'historical' materialists, literature and textuality were more 'necessary' spheres of social struggle, and it was to such broader streams of 'struggle' that many of us who argued for historical materialist say consciously contributing.

Such a position descended on assumptions about levels of 'materiality' each just was ideologically constructed and it served from a discernible nexus of class relations as well as worldly interests. The job of the materialist critic was to analyse the dialectics of text and world, to attend to historical specificities, and to disclose the ideological camouflage by which some texts sought to present themselves as non-partisan or as ahistorically universal. In short, it was argued that representation was never 'innocent'. Language and literature were never 'purely postural' or merely 'discursive' and therefore 'outside' politics. That was when the antagonist was perhaps what Visser calls the 'unreconstructed liberal' before the cosmetic modification effected by what Visser conflates into a unitary category and he labels 'post-isms'.

This may be the source of Visser's outrage. A new wave of dispossessed aesthetes have perhaps discovered that, too often Barnabas

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[8] On 'innocence' in relation to textuality, see Bowers W. Sole (1994).

certain kinds of poststructuralist, postmodernist, or post-colonialist critics a 'privileged haven of textuality in the shadow' where a place of refuge from political and contextual constraints in criticism. Similarly, Maki Sato may be making political exaggerations to point to the terminological excesses (or 'jargon') which are occasionally evident in work written by 'Post' critics. But in this context, the excess of political criticism has also been countered by the axiomatic assumption that 'theoretical' concerns are somehow 'ivory-tower' or trivial ones. The historian Paul Landau (1994:6) confirms this trend in a later and subsequent issue of the *Southern African Review of Books* in which he warmly congratulates Vivan for his stance against 'textual reductionism' (see also Sole 1994). Franz Fanon, says Landau, would have been pleased to see that 'scholars are now depicting the destructive constructions of "the native"'. Landau then ends this review: 'But another, seemingly opposite trend would not have pleased him: that there is no other reality except that textual construction, and that the colonised African cannot therefore be anything but the native' (Landau 1994:6).

This is an intriguing charge. Landau's letter is brief and does not allow for much elaboration, so one must make certain assumptions. Further on in his article he refers to the 'intoxicating' attraction of textual, gestural politics, 'as being underpinned by' which needs to be heard by 'historians of Africa'. The implication is that in rejecting Vivan's appreciation of Ajay Ahmad's critique of the 'discourse of nationalism' and of the 'perspectivism that creates the "colonial subject"' (Landau 1994:6), Vivan is guilty of the 'reductionist' error of 'textual' deflection of what has come to be perceived as the more 'real' postcolonial alliance with postcolonialism in alliance with appropriating 'anthropological' arguments. Although many writers even within 'Post' positions have offered committed excuses to justify such claims, and although there is a certain danger of postmodernism (or deconstruction) which is sometimes seen as the re-appropriation of the material by new-empowered cultural superstars (Said, Spivak, Bhabha, and others, in the 'Beckley Mafia'), this does not mean that we should accept uncritically the massive conflations inherent in what one may call the straw-man version of post-structuralism (which may conveniently be abbreviated as 'PST'). The straw-man version seeks to hold anyone who adopts 'Post' positions to the 'strong' postmodernist attitude that knowledge necessarily comprises an internal system of differential relations with no 'real' relation to the outside world.[4] From here it proceeds to formulate claims about the ethical irresponsibility or 'misprisionship' the encultured subject in textual confinement

4. For example, see Wilson (1992:5) with a view to objecting against 'metaphorical' appropriations of such an African cultural historian as Cheikh Anta Diop (1967).

5. See, for example, Henry Louis Gates (1989), Kwame Senghor (1987), Ania Ahmad (1992), to name only a few.

6. Such 'strong' postmodernism is often cited, for example, American-based South African scholar, Jo Ellsworth, Ellsworth (1995:342) as 'the alienation of the apolitical self-referentiality of deconstruction'. See also Andrew Apter (1991).

and disallowing the 'native' any proper existence in the world in which such a subject may wish to disagree with any or all representations of his or her subjectivity. The final step is to conclude that the natives or PST critics are utopian because they are conceived to be sides of 'people' in a way that struggling people are not. PST practitioners are middle class, concerned to warn academic dependencies, and have presumed to fix the 'natives' of the world in textual representations which, by dint of their deconstructive nature, are most utopian of projections.

The problem one faces in trying to read such particular representations is not that they are illegitimate, but instead 'befriending' the terms in actual ways connected with which one disagrees. In the first place, the 'post-structuralist/post-colonial' polarity opposition is hard to counter because one does not wish to support the notion that the terms do always oppose each other in one way. However, the arguments which pit 'real' against 'textual' do not allow much space for dispute except by developing the semantic of value which their binaries inscribe. For such, I feel one example of the idea of 'reference' post-colonialism as though it were a necessary safety which seems to deserve defending in the first place. I have argued at length elsewhere for the provisionality of the term 'post-colonial' (De Kock 1992a), and would not believe to repeat such arguments now. The important point is that 'post-colonialism' exists as a singular entity only in the shadow cast by consciousness of critics who place themselves in an adversarial relation to the 'first world'. At best, one could argue that there are only a plurality of post-colonial approaches to cultural practice analysis, such as an affinity with post-structuralist revisionism, and the exploration towards the discovering of non-west categories of knowledge insofar as such categories have been integral to Imperial-colonial constructions of identity and knowledge which non-Western peoples have been compelled to negotiate. I believe one is free to take from 'Post' theories as much as one needs to 'liquefy' (Conner 1993:35) oppressive representational procedures, and today seem to a decidedly *polarised* version of such a narrative.[7]

The real question seems to be whether anything 'Post' implies a abnegation of reference to a world which is palpably real, and one in which values still matter. If 'Post' means radical indeterminacy in the matter of both value and reference, then Vivan, Maki Sato, Landau and the more extreme 'Post' positions are indeed fully justified in the charges they make. PST adversaries assume that such relativism is necessarily salacious in Post practices. From my point of view, nothing could be less true. In my view of what one may call cultural-historical critique from within a 'post-colonial' space, the most urgent subjects are those which *labour* reference. It is from a questioning of *how* the possibilities of value and reference is to be conceived of, how one understands such terms, and a critical view of how earlier forms of such understanding reflected the making of a colonial history which comes to us mainly in textual forms.

Instead of the notion of an 'ivory tower' theoretical level, we can see

7. On 'liquefy' see Kroker and Kroker (1989).

precisely from the sense that the narratives, or 'accounts', in history documents are such that they were heavily constructed, that they made explicit claims to an inference which have been unhelpful to the 'natives' who have found their identities inscribed in peculiar, and discomforting, ways in print representation. In the nineteenth century, missionaries and other colonial figures under whose teaching or administrative [illegible] many colonial subjects were [illegible] to seek social mobility, were wont to present their own voices under the [illegible] sway of a theory of [illegible] reference [illegible] language-reality. It did not need poststructuralism for sceptical readers to [illegible] with the [illegible] word, but poststructuralism provided a compelling theoretical context for questioning the representational procedures manifest in colonizing discourse. It enabled one to adopt the notion of 'discourse' to reinforce its constructions, implicated in power, plays the representations found in colonizing discourse. In this historical context, one may indeed happily adopt a 'Post' discourse in order to question not the ability of language to refer at all, [illegible]

This is a crucial point. 'PET' haters accuse the poststructuralist 'PET' variant of discourse of constructing the 'native' as an imprisoning textuality which allows no external means to intervene, or in a manner which is so totally textualised as to deny 'native' subjects historical agency. But a necessary distinction is needed here in order to distinguish between different historical moments of representation, between the imperialist construction of the so-called 'native' in the first place, and what it means to remake this earlier construction. In very basic terms, the imperialist objectification of the indigenous as Other, as 'black', as 'Oriental' etc., is made by poststructuralist-theoretical critique to be a deceptive linguistic construct masquerading as reality within a positivist conception of language as capable of bearing truth unproblematically. This is not the same thing as saying language does not refer at all. Philosophers in widely divergent traditions have long held that an independent world is undeniably there, but that it is not available to human comprehension outside of representational and conceptual means. It does not come to us in brute, essential form, as itself. The world is apprehended via senses and conceptual scheme apparatuses. The charge against 'post everything' of 'imprisoning' the indigenous subject in language should therefore be laid at the door of the philosophical enterprise itself, for removing the concept of reality from unmediated availability, or for subordinating the 'practical' or the 'real' to theoretical-discursive constraints.

It is one thing to analyse the ways in which subjects have been conceived in modes of apprehension, and textually represented in various tropes or emplotments (see White 1973) and quite another to deny their existence or to hold that the text is the only place where subjects may be found. The very point of doing discourse analysis, or 'deconstructing' representations, is surely to say that there is a gap between text and world, not that there is no reality. It is to say that not all texts are equal, and that some texts contain greater foreclosure than others. It is, ultimately, to set up [illegible] standards of value about the way in which subjects are inscribed in

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It is in the first place a need to bring across the antagonisms that might exist in the agonistic spaces between representation and self-apprehension. Arguing for a 'weak form of postmodernism', Judith Squires (1993: [illegible]) maintains that humans are 'both embodied and embedded' but that their identities are constructed narratively' (emphasis added). She adds:

> ... whilst we may give up a notion of [illegible] and [illegible] concepts, we still need a notion of the [illegible]. And this theory of the [illegible] should not [illegible] which [illegible] on the self as simply a [illegible] in language (Derrida), an [illegible] of discourse (Lacan) [illegible] simply [illegible], it is also [illegible], embodied and [illegible] (Squires 1993: [illegible]).

For Squires, the issue of postmodernism [illegible] but it is [illegible] located within contexts in which notions of value and [illegible] are [illegible] from the [illegible], often associated with the 'Post' of absolute relativity:

> The postmodern engagement [illegible] and [illegible] fragmentation [illegible] differentiation [illegible] of difference [illegible] (Squires 1993: [illegible]).

Another theorist dealing with what he calls the 'necessity of value', Steven Connor, identifies in postcolonial critical theory [illegible] 'evaluative impulse' which is at its [illegible]:

> [illegible] (Connor 1993: [illegible]).

However, Connor argues strongly that such a suspicion of value in general cannot amount to a negation of value, because 'value, like the unconscious, knows no negativity, since every negative evaluation, even of the principle of evaluation itself, must always constitute a kind of evaluation on its own terms, even if it implies no [illegible] positive alternative [illegible]' (Connor 1993: [illegible]). In terms of such a reconstructed view of what we may or may not wish to call 'postcolonial theory' of history, I believe one may move beyond the problem of reducing all textual politics with little relevance to 'practical' concerns. Indeed, one may affirm that [illegible] what we [illegible] as 'history' is available to us largely in textual form, and since such textual forms embody the politics of representation [illegible] that people in [illegible], it is an ethico-political duty to [illegible] distinctions between [illegible] and [illegible] orders of value in the case of history. Despite the argument that 'history' is discourse and [illegible], one should not subscribe to a hopelessly relativistic position of absolute textuality. The very relation between 'reality' and 'discourse' is [illegible] of the reality is

[illegible] postulates the existence of its own mastery, it is nonetheless one that only exists as such (as the *mastery* of 'reality') in relation to the ceaseless human activity of interpretation. When one talks history, one talks in a discursively constituted linguistic order of interpretation whose tropes are partially evident to prior discourse, even as ('evidence' generally consists in verbal accounts, rather than [illegible]). For Tony Bennett, 'the past is [illegible] always in discourse ... the historical past' acts as the referent for the historian's way of being post-discursive' (in Jenkins 1991:12), and within this qualified sense, certain rules of reliability and credibility come to adhere to historical narratives, perhaps [illegible] discursive [illegible]. Clearly, there is always some problem in saying that in a 'historical' document (even if that document is no more than a recognition that a certain story has been told in a certain way about an ascertainable event). It is surely inaccurate to say, then, that critics [illegible] 'Post' theories necessarily lead one to deny subjects, or a 'referential' world, say, materially outside the text. Rather, it is in the conjunctions of ascertainable events (by sensory evidence, by multiple perception, the significance [illegible]) and their appropriations in verbal discourse that the historical turn in history should make itself felt.

3 The turn of the text

The contested nature of textual representations, and the ensuing sense of difference between, on the one hand, public 'stated' [illegible] comparable [illegible] of evidence, and, on the other, generally held senses of identity, are evident in the record itself. One does not need to construct textual politics as an afterthought or an outgrowth of [illegible]-theory. Textual [illegible] contestation, slippage and play can be discerned as historically evident in the [illegible] of written accounts which constitute the textual archive.[8]

One example can be drawn from the record of missionary imperialism [illegible] relating to Lovedale, on which I have conducted some research (see De Kock 1993). The example concerns a controversial accusation made in the Lovedale mouthpiece, *The Christian Express*, in 1885, that the teaching of classics to Africans at Lovedale 'ha[s] been found to do no special good but to produce positive evil' (in *Imvo Zabantsundu* 4 May, 1885). John Tengo Jabavu, [illegible]-editor of *Imvo*, replied, in the same issue:

> We shall be extremely sorry to say anything which may appear to charge the Editor of the *Christian Express* with [illegible] and unfairness to Natives. With all due respect to the ability and reputed [illegible] of Lovedale authorities, we ask: Have positive evil these classics produced in Natives trained at Lovedale? We crave information and light on this subject. The native [illegible] to their parents and guardians that they do not enjoy [illegible] the European [illegible]. They cannot understand why the difference is being made. Among students of the same class, who have reached the same standard in examinations set by their teachers and Government Inspectors of Schools, a difference is made. The Europeans are given other subjects to study, the Natives are prohibited, even when they express a desire to study those subjects. These are classical studies. The [illegible] know what good Latin and Greek [illegible] would like to be informed [illegible] why the difference is made [illegible] the reason [illegible] not arise from unwillingness to see natives enjoying the same advantages [illegible] what reason [illegible] the natives read classics produce positive evil?

Jabavu, always deferential to the protocols of respectable [illegible] and compositional form, nevertheless seeks in such writing to draw attention to alarming slippages in signification, which were perhaps all the more disturbing because meaning in the Victorian era was taken to be reasonably stable. The urgent question, 'what positive evil have classics produced to Natives trained at Lovedale', is an attempt to stabilise the trajectory of that ultimately legitimating signifier, 'civilisation'. 'Civilisation'—in its religious guise (see Bosch 1991; Osborne 1993)—one of the foundational promises of early missionary teaching, had been understood to promise a 'golden age' in which undifferentiated equality would be guaranteed. Yet Jabavu was compelled to perceive, in the writings of his own missionary alma mater, a redeployment of 'civilisation' rhetoric in which the transcendental value of complete equality was displaced. Suddenly, he was given to understand, Latin and Greek corrupted the minds of 'natives', but remained good for European pupils. How could such a deeply unsettling differentiation—a perfidious deferral of the once pure promise of civilised equality—suddenly be slipped in? Jabavu resorted to what firm ground he could muster. He challenged Lovedale on facts. He wanted a list of 'African students that were educated at Lovedale, who had a classical education while there, but who are now a disgrace to Lovedale and a failure', and a list of African scholars who 'have been educated at Lovedale and have never studied classical studies while there, who are now a credit to the institution and a success in the country' (*Imvo* 4 May 1885). Jabavu was confident that he could profile a reversal. In both cases, he asserted, it would be possible to provide the opposite names of scholars who never read classics and who had become a disgrace and a failure, and names of former pupils who did read classics and who were now a credit to the institution as well as a success outside it.

This example of textual struggle is overt and explicit, in that the issues were raised into public debate, by the figures involved, in newspaper columns. More frequently in 'Post' theories, notions of text and discourse tend to suggest that conceptions of sameness and otherness are 'textual' or 'discursive' in the broader, *looser* sense of discourse as a relatively constituted range of preconceptions rendered material through the mechanisms of representation. However, the overt nature of Jabavu and Lovedale's battle over what amounted to a more just conception of the 'native' and of our

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[8] [illegible] it is interesting to note what the American author Toni Morrison has said, in an interview, about the [illegible] of slavery: [illegible] had to deal with 'post-modern' problems in the nineteenth century and earlier. [illegible] had to be addressed by black people a long time ago [illegible] certain kinds of [illegible], the need to reconstruct certain kinds of stability [illegible]. Certain kinds of madness [illegible] (in Gilroy 1993). Clearly, [illegible] used to describe [illegible] perception of the [illegible] of postmodernism.

useful to him, it is suggested, because it brings to the surface precisely the stratifications of value which would normally be submerged or veiled in the talk about 'upliftment'.

The *Christian Express*'s remark that, far from educating Africans, the study of classics produced 'positive evil' struck a raw nerve among Africans who had themselves been educated in classics at Lovedale. Shortly after Jabavu's comments were published, a correspondent, 'Lovedalian' of Kimberley, wrote a detailed polemic in which he mentioned by name many Africans educated in classics who now occupied high positions. 'Lovedalian' [illegible] with [illegible] phraseology of Dr James Stewart. [illegible] the following statement:

> With all respect to Dr Stewart, who holds a very honourable position in this country, [illegible] positive and [illegible] classics [illegible] positive evil [illegible] positive good' (*Imvo*, 2 June 1885).

'Lovedalian' expressed the concern that the 'positive evil' statement was not only unwarranted by facts, but was likely to mislead present and future students who might study at Lovedale, 'that at the strength of it they are prevented from competing in the Cape University examinations'. 'Lovedalian' then sought to answer [illegible] question. [illegible] like preachers, [illegible] leading African clergymen, translators, schoolmasters and others who had taken classics at Lovedale. After naming each group, he repeated the question: what positive evil and failure was produced in the case of these people? 'Lovedalian' concluded by calling upon the principle of 'perfect freedom of will in man's free [illegible]', and arguing that the prevention of students from studying classics was an interference with the principle of free will.

'Lovedalian's' letter was an exemplary product of a young, well-educated person. It drew on a whole 'box full of good Lovedale learning' right back [illegible] moral philosophy. But instead of pleasing Lovedale, this mastery of good learning was utterly repugnant to the mission institution. Lovedale's reply, a letter from the Rev John Knox Bokwe (at the time, Stewart's personal assistant at Lovedale) to *Imvo*, bristled with resentment at the 'impudence' of the Kimberley correspondent. Bokwe said he could not bring himself to repeat 'Lovedalian's' 'sort of *suggestio falsi et suppressio veri* against Stewart in plain English', and added: 'If anything, the effect of the classical education Lovedalian received at Lovedale, the manner of his letter—if not the matter itself—has proved beyond doubt that to [illegible] "too much attention to Classics" in his case at least "has produced positive evil"' (*Imvo*, 1 July 1885).

A week later, Jabavu responded to the dispute by asserting that 'Lovedalian's' facts were unanswerable and that it was 'exceedingly preposterous' to speak of classical education 'as having been a failure among the Natives as a mass' (*Imvo*, 8 July 1885). Jabavu's [illegible] plea for a [illegible] verification, and 'Lovedalian's' challenge on the basis of ascertainable information, were alike ignored by *The Christian Express* and by Lovedale spokesmen. This was clearly an argument in which facts had little purchase on the desire to configure Africans within stereotypical conceptions of relative human worth within a scale of values influenced by Social Darwinism. However, such configurations meant that [illegible] had to be entertained between competing notions of 'progress'. Earlier missionary discourse of the millennarian kind, in which someone like Jabavu was sure to have been schooled, now had to be adjusted so that the same language might express a new turn, a foreshortening, in which meaning was subject to deferral.

Evidence of such a process became palpable when *The Christian Express* itself entered the debate with an editorial entitled 'A Suggestion to the *Imvo Zabantsundu*' in which it claimed that 'we should be sorry to put the slightest obstacle in the way of any native acquiring any language, living or dead, if he himself chooses to take the trouble of learning it, and paying the cost of teaching.' It continued:

> But we may, on taking leave of this subject, be allowed to make a single suggestion to the *Imvo Zabantsundu*, which is a [illegible] and also of higher education, as it understands that question. [illegible] natives will [illegible] of this country depends almost entirely on the habit of steady, consecutive work, and that it is of more consequence for them to understand this than to be able to read all the lore of the ancients (*The Christian Express*, 1 August 1885).

Jabavu could not leave matters here. *The Christian Express* was telling him that all the great vistas of elevated life, both on earth and hereafter, had suddenly veered away from the glorious promises of a golden age, and were now foreshortened into suspicions about the indolence of the native! Jabavu harnessed all his eloquence in his answer, in which he combined courtesy and challenge in the same register.

> It [*The Christian Express*'s editorial] is so good, and we look on it as a compliment to ourselves. It is not with the object of [illegible] we propose to offer an observation or two on it, but rather to point out some errors into which [illegible] seems to have fallen, so as, if possible, to improve it. To begin with, our mentor starts with the idea that this paper is the great champion of classical education [illegible] because we are [illegible] the doctrine that, as a rule, the more a man is educated the better fitted he is for whatever trade it may please [illegible] to call him, we are therefore champions of classical education [illegible] have been engaged in [illegible] against those who were understood to [illegible] to suggest that [illegible] of the Native [illegible] classical or higher education (*Imvo*, 19 August 1885).

Again, one can see in this extract a consistency to unsettling layers of signification which occur in each successive displacement of the arguments. It also observes how the manipulation of an ideal in search of its the greatest possible level of realisation is taken by a newly deferred meaning: that of being a 'champion of classical education for natives', which in turn can become a justification for seeking for bumiputra or 'inappropriate' skills in order to have access only consciously to what is understood this choice as deferral by reasserting the original assumptions and interests of the original ideal (for instance but not solely and in fact not at all in favour). Yet the evidence suggests that no sooner has he uttered these unsettling statements than they were again muted, and that, in addition, he seemed to be aware of such slippage in the very choice of meaning and reference.

In historical retrospect, it appears that the principle of absolute and by no means equal freedom for all people was being asserted by the colonial context, particularly by the Labour leader of an expanding economy, to which these values had to be extended. What Lovedale's education has in the high historical era were were the idealistic, romantic assimilation especially in a civil society, but the radical, eminent treatment of nineteenth century. Unfortunately, Jabavu appeared to remain the 'heaven of civilisation and the hell of savagedom' of West Africa (1969:236) with the 'anti-colonial, deferred addition of selective self-government—a dualistic of a gardless from the service of British constitutionality and that of selective the 'inward and coherent' Africans were potentially trapped within the parameters of a crude conception of civilisation. On the one hand, Africans had been taught the doctrine of free and of humanity, while at the same time they had to endure the effects of that stereotypical 'inscription' of contemporaries—and their enforced forms of repression—consequent upon the colonial doubling of misrecognition, humanitarianism. The only way to begin escaping such crude representations was through the assertion of counter-narratives.

Jabavu's struggles for a truthful representation of his people open a crack of ambivalence, which is identifiably also an important moment in colonial discourse theory. There is a telling indication of Jabavu's possible awareness of the discursive slippage inherent in such ambivalence in the final words of his reply to *The Christian Express*'s 'suggestion' to leave, when he writes:

> Old friend, it will be observed, was up the valuable extract, on which we are arguing, with the significant remark that [*Imvo Zabantsundu*] has any doubt of the wisdom of these views because of the source whence they come, let it be forgiven as well to the friends of the Native people, in our press, who do the bidding of monopolists. We confess we cannot account for the exposure we have taken the liberty to discuss, for we have been told not to give great deference to the opinions of the Editor of the *Christian Express*, even when we had the

A. On the matter of 'colonial discourse' and the 'ambivalence' of colonial discourse, see Bhabha (1994) pp. 1–35.

B. These words were spoken by Langham Dale, Superintendent-General of Education in the Cape, and quoted in Jabavu (1969:238).

> misfortune to differ from them. Of course, there is little else in this world, what the sacred legal maxim, the 'searchings of the heart', is to which we can look for guidance in the field. With [our] humility, we make, however, we have great pleasure in appropriating 'A Suggestion to the *Imvo Zabantsundu*' ... (*Imvo*, 4 August 1884).

With the deeply subversive act of mimicry, Jabavu both reproduced *The Christian Express*'s editorial in full, and placed discursive markers around it which deconstructed its every meaning. Jabavu recognised a crack in the civil mask of the editor of *The Christian Express* (James Stewart) in the editor's remark that starts the soundness of his views be regarded as compromised by their source. Such declarations would be simply absolutist. Jabavu's indignant suggestion of 'searchings of the heart' implies that only he or his own community could have had in the discursive power to speak about it because it be capable of suspicion because its practitioners had been taught to show great deference to the institution, its personages and organs. But were such notions of the legitimacy of its discursive claims, why should the 'a deviant suggestion' in the mouth of one of its former pupils?

At the same time, however, Jabavu's phrase 'even when we had the misfortune to differ', seems to contradict the assertion of willing confidence in the assertion that 'we have great pleasure in giving great deference to the opinions of [Stewart]'. Jabavu seems here to have allowed his own critical reason a double revealing an awareness of two levels of discourse, the public sphere of apparent opportunism and obedience to authority, 'sociable civility', and the secondary awareness of ambivalence. By allowing this secondary awareness to become apparent while ostensibly showing obedience to proper form and the highest standards of civility, Jabavu reproduces *The Christian Express*'s piece under the counter suggestion of its ambivalence. Here indeed is an example of 'slyly civility' in which the 'look of surveillance' returns as the displacing gaze of 'the observed' (Bhabha 1984:29). The 'suggestion to the *Imvo Zabantsundu*', thus reproduced in form, was now ready to read as a testimonial of the instability and ambivalence of coalitionary representations.

In my view, then, Jabavu's struggle for adequate representation was no naive hankering after the lost utopian ideals of the brotherhood of man enshrined in early missionary ideology, but a carefully considered manipulation of the legitimating essentials of the *assimilation* of those ideals within the distorted 'civil' context of the 1880s. This is not to suggest that someone like Jabavu did not believe in the ideals represented by nineteenth-century philanthropic humanism or that he was cynical. On the contrary, his only power was to use the sporadic counter-discourse of assimilation, passionately, against those who had misused it in its name and who would now distort it into a racist parody.

In conclusion, I have tried to show how, in Jabavu's case, a deep frustration with the ambivalence of orthodox missionary discourse and who as displacing negations, led him to conduct a subversive textual reinvestment of such discourse in order to reveal the colonial doubling of humanitarian values. In such cases, 'textual politics' and 'inside the purely

C. This view is evident in Chapters (1920, Notes (1924) and Ngcayecibi (1930).

general domain of dusty academics, but the space in which historical struggles have been, and continue to be, [illegible].

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Ideological Bases of Literacy Programmes[1]

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore the way in which the discursive practices of literacy programmes reflect their underlying ideologies. After providing a brief overview of David Lee's proposal concerning how discourses reflect and construct perspectives and ideologies, I use his model to analyse the discourse of a specific literacy programme. I then argue that the success of literacy programmes depends at least partially on acknowledging the ideologies behind them.

1 Introduction

Literacy programmes never take place in a vacuum. They are embedded in a social context and are influenced by the ideologies of the particular society in which they take place (Street 1984:2). The objective of this paper is to look at how the discursive practices of literacy programmes (and for that matter, literacy in general) reflect the ideologies underlying them. To achieve this, I first examine some of the ways in which discourse reflects ideology. Secondly, I analyse the discourse of a specific literacy programme in order to identify the underlying ideology. I will then argue that the success of literacy programmes depends—partially at least—on acknowledging the ideologies behind them.

2 Discourse and Ideology

In his book, *Competing Discourses: Perspective and Ideology in Language*, David Lee (1992) examines how our discourses not only reflect but also construct our perspectives and ideologies. Lee (1992:52,55,91,97) argues that our world view, perspective and ideology are reflected in our language use. Furthermore, human language has properties, such as classification and selection, that enable it to function as a medium of world-view, perspective and ideology (Lee 1992:1). Lee (1992:8,11,93-96) identifies several linguistic features that can act as markers that mediate a specific perspective

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1. This is a revised version of a paper delivered at the Ninth Conference on South African Literature, 'Pedagogies of Reconstruction: Teaching Literature in a "New" South Africa', Bad Boll, Germany, [illegible] 15 October [illegible].
2. This is the gist of Street's (1984) 'ideological' model of literacy. For a summary of Street's argument see van Zweel (1994). In this paper I argue that an awareness of the ideological bases underlying literacy programmes will affect the planning, execution and outcome of not only literacy programmes but also language teaching programmes.
3. Lee (1992:x) defines discourse as follows: '[D]iscourse is defined here not in formal terms (lexical and grammatical characteristics) but in semantic terms—as a cluster of typical meanings that are systematic reflexes of a specific way of making sense of the world'.
4. Lee (1992) uses the notions of 'perspective', 'world view' and 'ideology' as closely related terms and unfortunately does not draw clear distinctions between them.

ion ideology. These linguistic features include passivisation, cleft sentences, nominalisation, metaphor, 'recontextualisation' and 'formality relations'.

Lee (1992:96ff) claims that it is especially nominalisation and metaphor that are used for 'ideological manipulation'. They function as instruments of 'social control' because these processes must take place in both written discourse and later spread into general discourse.

Literacy programmes and literature teaching programmes are institutional discourses with specific ideologies and perspectives behind them. It is important that we acknowledge this. Then we can analyse the ideologies

2 The discourse of 'Project Literacy'

I have chosen to analyse the discourse of 'Project Literacy' by Lotkin, a short 'Mission Statement' believing that it should reflect their ideology. Their 'Mission Statement' consists of the following five paragraphs. I have numbered the paragraphs (i-v) to make discussion easier.

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3. In terms of the passivisation analysis to be given, it is also possible to speak of the 'concepts of social and others in the background' (Lee 1992:71). Lee (1992:73) refers to the following examples of passivisation and nominalisation:

(a) *The Nile was crossed by the army.*
(b) *It was the Nile that was being crossed.*

(c) Lee's examples, for objects, *the Nile* is not clear.
(d) Nominalisation is a process by which an event can be referred to as a thing. Nominalisation can be a means to '... to express complex propositions succinctly by structural compression' (Lee 1992:89). Lee (1992:90) illustrates nominalisation as follows:

(a) *Man communicates by speech.*
(b) *Man's communication by speech.*
(c) *Man's communication by spoken language.*

Sentence (a) refers to an event and (b) to the nominalisation of that event. Sentence (c) is a complex proposition which contains the embedded proposition that 'Man uses a language'.

4. Mangelos (1976:69), cited by Lee (1992:89), uses portray as objects and events (i.e. not a way of 'the reader's relationship to the text/author'). From this, Lee refers to an example (p. 89): 'Conservatives have portrayed the welfare state as ...'. Lee (p. 89) claims that the people of Slovenia as more kind of nouns' for specific events (conservatives and welfare state) immediately becomes an object 'created' .... The discourse is seen as 'reality' constructed by invisible social forces rather than human feelings and decisions.

5. Lee (1992:98) claims that most spoken discourse is 'informal', i.e. relating more to (i) than (ii) in the following quotation: '... the literature tends to focus on examples like "The cats ate the rats" and "The rats were eaten by the cats" ... [which] ... are not typical of most spoken discourse'. Lee (1992:98) argues that 'Passivisation is not a feature of informal discourse'. Lee (1992:98) argues: '[W]e can find examples of passivisation in informal discourse, but they are not typical of most spoken discourse'. Lee (1992:98) argues: '[W]e can find examples of passivisation in informal discourse, but they are not typical of most spoken discourse'. Lee (1992:98) argues: '[W]e can find examples of passivisation in informal discourse, but they are not typical of most spoken discourse'.

6. Quoted in Fairclough (1989:54), 'Politics is primarily concerned with relations between people ... [and] ... establishes the basis for differences between the various groups in society. In a democratic political system, the opposition challenges the dominant political ideology and seeks to win support for its own political position'. This is also relevant to the discussion of literacy and literature teaching because the goal of reformers

(i) PROJECT LITERACY believes that literacy and basic education are a fundamental right and not a privilege, and is therefore committed to reducing the backlog in education caused by the inequalities of the past.

(ii) Its primary concern is for the many illiterate and poorly educated adult South Africans, who for political and economic reasons, have been denied access to the education system.

(iii) Our goal is to provide literacy skills and basic level upgrading with job-related training for as many adult and out-of-school adults in South Africa as possible.

(iv) by establishing and supporting cost effective part-time adult Basic Education Centres, in existing buildings, where holistic learning can take place from basic literacy to matric level.

(v) by providing a support service of research, community consultation, education management, teacher training, and curriculum and materials development for the extensive replication of these proven projects, as well as the strengthening of other adult basic education initiatives countrywide.

Using the linguistic features identified by Lee (1992) as markers of ideology and perspective, I proceed by analysing the ideology underlying this specific literacy programme.

The statement in (i) contains the following ideological propositions:

(i_a)	There is a backlog in education.
(i_b)	There are inequalities in the past.

The proposition that the backlog was caused by inequalities of the past is stated directly. However, what is meant by the *past* is not specified. The reader has to make his/her own interpretations. In (ii) we find the following propositions:

(ii_a)	There are many illiterate and many poorly educated South Africans.
(ii_b)	These South Africans, for political and economic reasons, have been denied access to the education system.

The proposition expressed in (ii_b) represents a phrase which is an example of passivisation. The statement does not say who has denied them access, only that the reasons are political and economic. In other words, actively or covertly present, these South Africans' access to the education system. Readers are left to draw their own conclusions. If they recall our earlier discussion of the past' reflect the current ideology of reconciliation in South Africa.

Some other propositions can be found in (III) and (IV):

(III) There are many educationally disadvantaged adults in South Africa.
(IV) These problems are pressing.

It is clear from this brief analysis that the organisation aims to address and reduce inequalities and problems of poor education and illiteracy. It is also clear that the Mass Campaign for Literacy, for instance, adopts a 'literacy' attitude. However, what is less clear is the extent of their commitment to these. According to the Mission Statement, the practical activities of the PEOPLE'S EDUCATION MOVEMENT, for instance, 'provides a structure for a network of research, community consultation, education programmes'. This statement is confusing: do they provide the components mentioned or do they provide the information for other groups, do they speak for a specific community or representatives of do they consult various communities about their needs. Literacy theorist like Street regard this as an important question.

4 The 'ideological' model of literacy vs. the 'functional' approach to literacy

Street (1984: 155), regards the 1960 Unesco conception of literacy as an example of 'functional' literacy. According to the Unesco definition of literacy a person is regarded as

> one who has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community and whose attainments in reading, writing and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue to use these skills towards his own and the community's development (Unesco 1984: 89).

Street (1984:95f) claims that the literacy programmes resulting from this conception of literacy fail because

> Literacy is not a neutral technology. It makes its appearance in particular social contexts and can be used for different purposes and with different consequences.

He further claims that '... the concept of "functional" literacy disguises the relationship of a technician preparation to the underlying political and ideological framework' (Street, 1984:154). Street cites the failure of Unesco preparations as examples of instances where the underlying political and economic ideologies were not acknowledged. He says in this regard that the Unesco programmes

> ... ignored the interests of foreign investment and multinational companies on the one hand and the way that local communities on the other hand were exploited (Street 1984:154).

The result of this policy is that the ultimate aim of literacy programmes was financial and economic return. The government provides the 'capital' and the literacy programmes subsidy were the

> ... 'skilled' workforces could be developed by the introduction of new 'values' of technology in the form of literacy skills. Literacy and/or a particular approach to literacy could be exported from the West (Street 1984:154).

Street criticises this 'functional' approach saying that international capitalism and the 'autonomous' model of literacy are incompatible with this approach.[10]

5 Conclusion

It is evident that 'literacy programmes are described in various and multifarious ways as the 'imparting of skills' so that people can 'function' better, we need to ask 'function better in what way and in whose interests?' A dynamic of social practice and not neutral. Literacy programmes have underlying ideologies and are embedded in social contexts. All we have to acknowledge was that we can practice them underlying ideologies. A few words from Perfetti as summarised by Street (1984:169):

> Acquired literacy, as believed, is an active process of using acquired skills in just the handling of a fixed content, as we would like to provide people with literacy and the ability to do so of practising by rote a small number

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10. For a comparison of the 'ideological' model of literacy and the 'autonomous' model of literacy, see Van Zwieten (1991).

Towards Reconstructing a Curriculum for Secondary Schools[1]

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Abstract

Drawing on the understanding of 'curere' as the individual's own capacity to reconceptualise life as her own autobiography, this paper explores the interface between this notion of curriculum reconceptualisation and the principal processes of identity, culture, and politics. It is argued that the implications of these interfaces should provide the bases for a national core literature curriculum for secondary schools in South Africa.

1 Introduction

Among the many images that constitute the field of curriculum studies, Schubert (1986:33) identifies the metaphor-concept of 'curriculum as lifelong journey' as 'curious' to be 'rare' contrary to the notion of curriculum as 'overt and intended'. The reconceptualists emphasise that a more relevant notion should provide possibilities for the individual 'to re-conceptualise his or her own autobiography' (Schubert 1986:111). This reconceptualisation of curriculum is incorporated in both Pinar's (1975) and Grumet's (1981) autobiographical notion of 'currere'.

In his autobiographical approach, Grumet (1981:119) believes that it is only in the fleetness and immediacy of our narratives of lived experiences that curriculum can be meaningfully lived. Pinar (1975:396) asserts that 'currere' is a process involving a powerful sense of becoming through excavating and bringing to light that which has been buried by layers of schooling and social conditioning. Curriculum is thus seen as a continuous process of construction and reconstruction of an active reflection on one's own experiences in the service of self-understanding. In the words of Sarton's (1970) *To Everyone of Another Day*, 'I must work myself anew'. By shifting the focus of attention away from the technical rational towards dwelling on the nature of one's inner experience, the curriculum is thus seen as autobiographical, a knowledge-creating method of inquiry appropriate for the achievement of self-realisation and identity. Sarton's (1962)

> The early medal-back poet,
> And later the naïve, the lay
> Shipwrecked bark

provides one literary example of reflection on one's circumstances and, by implication, the autobiographical dimension of curriculum reconceptualisation.

1. This is a revised version of a paper delivered at the Natal Conference on South African Literature, 'Languages of Reconstruction: teaching literature in a "New" & Africa', Rhodes University, 1st to 3rd December '94.

Positioning 'currere' as a student project in the curriculum field involves more than just a struggle around issues such as selecting objectives, content, structure, delivery, evaluation, organisation and evaluation. It should rather concentrate on a series of subjective issues that strike at the heart of literacy, culture and political ideologies, aspirations of individuals and the perceptions of all these. This article is concerned with exploring the psychic processes of identity, culture and politics and the implications of these processes for the reconstruction of a national core literature curriculum for secondary schools in South Africa.

2 Curriculum reconstruction: realities

Reconceptualist thinking is valuable and more relevant to the present curriculum where issues and priorities in curriculum reconstruction are complex and shifting and educators themselves must make decisions on how to proceed with curriculum reconstruction. It may strike us more aware of the inadequacies in the rational approaches present in curriculum models of the past. Central to the technocratic/rational thinking about curriculum reconstruction are two issues which pose on the learning axes of the curriculum debate in South Africa. These are the reality of the shifting political ideology on the national agenda and the challenge to construct a 'patterned' struggle in a divided South African literature. It is not an easy task to reconstruct the curriculum in the cultural and social context of a society in transition. From an unjust racist system of government towards an unknown democratic future. According to Fensham (1992:60),

> [c]urriculum struggles are not merely technical and narrow as technical advocates claim for they are not merely a matter of 'how to' decide.

Thus, it would be a serious error to regard the curriculum struggle as one concerning only issues such as selecting objectives and content. Curriculum negotiation must address broader educational and political issues. As such, it does not merely rely on political decree. It concerns a space of political struggle and involves an intensely political process.

Questions related to specific curriculum priorities, the nature of a new national identity and the identification of similarities and differences should structure the way in which curriculum reconstruction questions are posed and answered (Miller 1993:89). The important issue we encounter in our debates in South Africa is to concentrate on the specificities of the South African context and to incorporate these realities into the curriculum in a way that results in the reconstructing of a knowledge which will be able to lead us into the future. Ultimately, the biggest challenge is to construct a nation, a collective 'we' that transcends the disparate and fragmented local communities. Crucial to this project is that the previously suppressed knowledge and experiences of people who were 'silenced' should be made central to the knowledge which is to be taught, learnt and celebrated as part of the reformed culture. The complexities of these challenges is succinctly described by Moulin and Taylor (1992:3),

> lives of Black women, cultural studies demanded [illegible] to respect the rights of the wider minority groups without destroying the very framework of its political solidarity as established by the constitutions and promotes the [illegible] modern democracy and [illegible] our destiny as citizens.

The challenge of dealing with and finding adequate solutions to the realities of the pluralistic society that we live in while simultaneously upholding the democratic rights of individuals and groups will require a continuous process. According to Degenaar (1992:15) the notion of 'cultures' in the plural refers to the variety of particular communities and 'culture' (in the singular) to the spiritual development of humanity. Since the above points [illegible] a vital important space where the struggle for democracy must be waged.

At present, we have just won the right to participate legitimately in the process of moving towards a South African nationhood. The process of becoming one nation has hardly begun. As yet, there is no proper sense of consciousness about what it means to be a South African amid the conflicting unitarist, federalist and unitary geopolitical and ideological models. Most probably, Sol Plaatje's (1978:174) desire provides one important avenue: '[illegible] them with ourselves, so that together we form one great nation'.

However, the wish for a single nationhood should not exclude the cultural diversity of our society. Any attempt to reconstruct a curriculum must, therefore, also provide space for the expression of cultural diversity. Mathe (1993:126) believes that community can only be built on and out of differences. This commonness does not merely imply a mere condoning or tolerating of differences. It requires a learning about how to deal with them. Serote's (1972) appeal is most relevant in our present context:

> White people are white people,
> They are burning the world.
> Black people are black people,
> They are the fire.
> White people are white people
> They must learn to listen.
> Black people are black people
> They must learn to talk.

In order to reconstruct a curriculum for secondary schools in South Africa, we should recognize that despite the English language which we share, we are not culturally identical to the British or Americans. Sydney Clouts (1966) states in this regard,

> I have not found myself on Europe's maps …
> I shall go back with my five simple senses
> [illegible]

Even though it is virtually impossible to identify and describe what one South Africanism should or could be, we have to begin to construct a vision of a new national form. As Ngara (1985:8) suggests, literature forms an important instrument in the nation-building exercise.

> literature is [illegible] singularly effective tool of colonial domination. Equally, it can be used as a powerful weapon of liberation. By [illegible] the aesthetic appeal of anti-colonialist [illegible] the need for [illegible] literature [illegible] values through the educational system.

This type of qualitative change not only has effects [illegible] European ideas of transcendental rationality are replaced with common sense and space is provided for the construction of multiple identities and the proliferation of dispersed meanings in the national core curriculum. The plurality and diversity in our South African literature provide a most valuable source for this purpose. This variety encompasses not only the diversity of art forms in literature but also the diversity of cultural and political experiences.

3 Curriculum questions and the alternative literature curriculum

If the reconceptualist belief is that the curriculum should be constructed in terms of the freshness and immediacy of our narratives of lived experiences, then it is also to be accepted that the curriculum must be reconceptualized as 'the collective story we tell our children about the past, the present and the future' (Grumet 1981:115). It is evident that this notion of curriculum requires that we ask a range of questions that go beyond a narrow and officially functional conception of schooling. Following Beyer and Apple (1988) I provide an overview of a few of the areas and the related questions which should be addressed when we attempt to produce a reconstructed curriculum. In attempting to categorize curriculum issues in this way, I hope to create a context for thinking about some of the contextual and substantive concerns of the curriculum debate which could shape a new model for literature teaching for secondary schools.

- *historical*: which traditions in the field of curriculum development already exist? how can these traditions assist us in answering current curriculum development questions?;
- *political*: who should control the selection and distribution of knowledge?;
- *ideological/epistemological*: what knowledge is of the greatest value? why?;
- *pedagogical*: how is this knowledge to be taught?

In responding to these questions in a synthesized way, I attempt to read Pinar's definition of 'currere'—especially in so far as this approach will enable us to analyze educational experiences and to reconstruct the curriculum in terms of nearly universal autobiographical [illegible] to recall episodes from past and present lived experience.

3.1 The historical question

Historically, past curriculum practices were presented in a top-down approach, were handed in a directive manner and [illegible] in packaged form for implementation. Prior to February 1990, the curriculum was [illegible]

[illegible] literature such as history, religion, value systems, and social [illegible] were imposed on people irrespective of whether these were relevant to the society, the people or their lived experience.

Some of the historical issues present in literature which a new curriculum could address are themes relating to central figures from the history of the black people of Southern Africa in literature. Themes related to racial bias, to the definitions of cultural solidarity, struggles for equal access to education and employment as well as the fight for a living wage. Since many of these issues have impacted on the lives of many white as well as black South African writers either in the form of fascination or disastrous political repression, they can be studied. There cannot have been so pressing a need for studying largely extra-curricular works to be more relevant and [illegible].

South African literature has developed into an exciting and diverse literary complex. It has come a long way from the colonial writings overflowing with stereotypical portrayal of blacks. Even Afrikaans literature that provided the Calvinistic ideology and nationalism so crucial in the 1870 period by Hofmeyr (see Opperman 1966):

> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]

Alongside the movement and even later on, which was, by a tradition of protest literature was developed. The works of Ingrid Jonker, Breyten Breytenbach and André Brink are examples. A small part of African literature was and is being produced by Afrikaans speakers who did not and do not belong to the establishment and who are not white. Black Afrikaans poetry gives excellent historical and current perspectives on the experiences of black people. If the reconstructed curriculum must tell our children about our past, our present and our future, then all the varieties of Southern African literature, also Afrikaans, must form part of the curriculum.

In the broader context of Southern African literature, a broad outline of a reconstructed curriculum may draw on some of the following historical and ideological categories.

- Precolonial literature: recorded materials on the San and Khoi Khoi including petroglyphic series, rock paintings, the *Lifaqane* and the oral literature.
- Colonial South African: Thomas Pringle, Olive Schreiner, DC Slater, Roy Campbell, Sarah Gertrude Millin, the controversial *God's Stepchildren* (1924).
- Afrikaner nationalism: DF Malherbe, Totius, Jan FE Celliers, GA Watermeyer.

- Apartheid and resistance: Nadine Gordimer, Ruth Miller, Mariannie Jordaan P. Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, Bloke Modisane, Dikobe Ka[illegible].
- Black writings of the seventies addressing issues such as political despair and violence: Bessie Head, Mothobi Mutloatse, Dikobe [illegible].
- Post Soweto 1976 and the beginning of the *Interregnum* including themes of prison, exile, anti-apartheid and resistance: Breyten Breytenbach, Dennis Brutus, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Wally Serote, Sipho Sepamla.
- The 1980s and the emergence of political activist: Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Jeremy Cronin, John Miles.
- Late eighties and nineties: worker unrest and trade unions, gender and sexuality: Emma Mashinini.
- Post February 1990 writings and new writings: A. van Wyk, Robert Berold, Sitlhenkosi Khegwana, Kelwyn Sole, Heather Zwimpfer, Tatamkulu Afrika.
- The archaeology of autobiography, which traces the themes and approaches of the early novelists and lecturers to the present works of Sol Plaatje at the turn of the century to the more recent *Cracks Across the Country* and Mark Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy*.

There are many more examples of authors who could be studied in such a category. It is important to state that there is no reason whatsoever that the reconstructed curriculum should not allow the Southern African literature in all its diversity and particularity at the centre of secondary school literature study. We may agree with Malan (1988:13) that South African literature has acquired its own identity and is no longer a kind of appendage of other literatures.

3.2 The political question

To assign what controls the selection and distribution of knowledge, there is a need to recognise that the curriculum process is by its very nature a political process. Hennessy (1987:90) sees alternative literature as a form of 'alternate governance' or a government in exile'.

Spivak (1987:119) posits the theory of the centralized versus the marginalised literatures as a recurrent feature of the fate of South African literature and authors prior to 1990. This categorisation aligns her to the pattern where literature which provides a voice for the experiences of the majority of South Africans has been discouraged from them by political repression. Curricula connected too closely to the dominant sociopolitical realities of Southern Africa might be seen as reproductive. The diverse

experiences of exploitation, subjugation, oppression and adversity under the hegemony of the apartheid state, though, will counter this argument. These curricula will prevent us from reading our writers in a distorted and stunted mode which does not include literature in all its diversity from the earliest times. Moreover, since a large portion of South African writers have been and are inspired by themes related to the reaction to the dynamics of colonialism, apartheid and discriminatory exclusions in various forms, the study of literature is fundamentally a political act. These themes no longer point to political defiance, but are part of our very existences. It is aptly stated in the *Drege Policy Document on Education and Training for South Africa* (1994:7) which states that '... now the legacy of the struggle is the common heritage of all South Africans'.

3.3 The ideological question

In arguing for a reconstructed curriculum in literature, the development of a specifically South African aesthetic is just as important as locating South African literature at the centre of the curriculum. This aesthetic may be read as 'landscapes, physical, psychological and social' (Chapman 1985:149). This approach will develop and enlarge the configuration of literary forms and forces sensitive to the Southern African context. It will provide a reconfiguration of canonical texts from our own perspectives.

Ideologically, this more rooted curriculum in literature aims to create a common 'we' or collective identity on the basis of common experiences of oppression, exclusion, subordination, colonialism and apartheid nationalism. This 'we' will understand itself in a different relation to dominant groups. This may be formed along the lines of Degenaar's (1992:7) plea:

> a pluralistic rather than a relativistic approach, discovers rather than endorses ... any values other than the story about life and history, tolerates rather than suffers racism, and for a choice against amnesia is who we are from.

In answering ideological questions about the curriculum, I am not suggesting that an extreme reaction to white injustice is the basis for a relevant literature curriculum for secondary schools. Such an approach would be sterile and would not make positive contributions to the experiences and identity formation in a democratic society. On the other hand, as long as the realities and results of the situation of oppression are with us, the acknowledgement of the experiences of the imposition of hegemonic ideologies will form the primary space of departure for the reconstructed curriculum. James Matthews (1972) represents this in *Cry Rage*:

> It is said,
> life must be written of beauty
> of flora, of flowers and of love
> for the words I write
> are of pain and rage.

From the varieties and diversity of anger and despair we may move to a new

identity, a Southern African consciousness. However, the pluralistic approach assumes that coherent ideologies are embraced within a single curriculum model.

3.4 The pedagogical question

The pedagogical question addresses the issue of how pupils would interact with the new curriculum and how it would be taught to them. In the mainstream schools, literature syllabi and teaching practices are blissfully unaware of current issues and levels of contestation in curriculum development. The whole process can be described as flat, conservative/liberal, extremely transactional, lacking in depth and resonance. Pupils learning in accordance with these curricula have glossed over fragments of 'the great tradition' and together with it an extremely deprived, intolerant and misinformed worldview. One of the major drawbacks of the present curricula is that secondary school pupils assume that literature comes only in three forms: poetry, fiction and drama. We have come to view these three forms as the only channels through which truly significant ideas flow (Malan 1984:2). There is a challenge to open up to the new categories: diaries, letters, communiqués, collections, notebooks, biographies, autobiographies, as well as other media forms such as radio, television and film.

Advancing, as Vaughan (1982:43) the need to move away from metropolitan and elitist literary models, privileged genres, and selected texts by male British authors. The important question in the reconstructed curriculum is to ask how literature at secondary schools can contribute to a wider understanding of our past, present and future situation. It must be able to clarify our past, situate us in the midst of the complexities of our present situation of transformation and give us a vision of the future. If I believe in democracy, if I want to analyse the social injustices of the past, if I want to understand the historical conditions of the social, economic and educational structures which are still in place in society, what is the significance of the experiences of male British colonists and upper class literary ideologies? This question has been and still is asked amidst growing resentment of colonial or Western literature, its values and ideologies. It does not have any pedagogical value in the South African context if set apart from analysing it critically as examples of the hegemony of colonialism and apartheid.

Works which are closer to the pupil's socio-political world and experiences should be prescribed. Even though this is the desired mode to follow, we must also acknowledge that the mere substitution of colonial works with works closer to the pupils' socio-political world can only be fractionally helpful at a content level. If a text is taught by a teacher who merely uses it as a hermeneutic tool, a mode of decoding, investigating and sharing a complex cultural phenomenon, the learning experience will remain foreign to the pupil's lived experiences. Any reconstructed model must be rooted in teaching practices that use these texts with informed radical attitudes and creativity. This is also voiced in the report *White Paper on Education and Training* (1994:7) which supports the idea that the

> curricula should encourage [illegible] to [illegible] to weigh evidence and form arguments [illegible] between [illegible].

4 Towards a national model for literature

The study of a regional literature has developed around a variety of sociopolitical struggles/engagements that have been [illegible] to be [illegible] contributory focus, even the history [illegible] (Chapman 1990:[illegible]).

The fact that many young literatures are developing simultaneously. Apart from the well established Afrikaans and English literatures, there are those produced in the Black languages: Zulu, Xhosa, North Sotho, South Sotho, Venda, Tswana and Tsonga. These co-exist within the same socio-political framework and are being encouraged to develop. There is a need to find [illegible] plural experience [illegible] literature [illegible] notwithstanding the language differences which may exist (Ngara 1990:[illegible]). In order to avoid the real danger of linguistic and cultural isolation in developing a regional model for South African secondary schools, there is a need to embrace the diversity through a consensual and [illegible] approach. We should call for variety within a curriculum that [illegible] unity [illegible].

The [illegible] that South Africans [illegible] not [illegible] tolerating or condoning different beliefs, values and attitudes, but learning to deal with them (Mulder 1993:[illegible]). In curricular terms, a recognition of common content in the curricula would represent the demand for the recognition of particularity, distinctness and difference. Any attempt at redefining curricula in terms of a common corpus of assumptions and practices must provide space for the expression of cultural diversity.

5 Conclusion

Stenhouse (1975:4) defines the curriculum as the means by which the experience of attempting to put an educational proposal into practice is made widely available. In comparison with past practices which marginalised much of the local South African literature, Stenhouse sees curriculum change as a proposal to be presented in accessible form for public scrutiny and debate. Seeing it in this way, a curriculum will always remain provisional, constantly under revision and informed by a consensus that our sense of the past is almost as incomplete as our sense of the future. However, to assert centrality in the curriculum is to emphasize that each country, each literature, each text provides the contextual [illegible] in terms of which it is to be understood. Each pupil is entitled to study literature with which he or she can [illegible] in the service of self-realization.

Although much is [illegible] said about a reconstructed curriculum in the present situation of transformation [illegible] still attempting to reappropriate lost histories and silenced experiences, one of the main issues which has to be addressed now is the construction of the literature curriculum for the future. There is a need to grapple with the issue of

producing a literature curriculum for a more accommodating future. And in the end, we would have [illegible] counsel to the words of [illegible] *[illegible]*:

> we must know
> the ultimate embracing of Africa
> is the grasp that death
> in its bony ugliness
> has no power to separate

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Learning and Teaching Literature: A Curriculum Development Perspective[1]

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Abstract

This paper attempts to critique the quality of experience which many students (at secondary and tertiary levels) have as a consequence of studying literature within the present educational system. It is argued that if the study of literature is to include a qualitative literature learning experience, the development of the English language curriculum needs to move beyond a dialogue about the change of the content and the 'Africanisation' of the curriculum. If the purpose is to enhance the quality of the readership of students, then the project of social values, should include the reading of and the reading into a critical dialogue with any available text. Such a critical dialogue will both evaluate the cultural and ideological assumptions and values of the text and in the process reconceptualise the function of literary studies, methodologies of teaching, learning and study, the process of examination and aim to better prepare future readers for their task. It will also contribute to the liberating of the creative and critical potential of learners.

1 Curriculum as commodity

If you and I were asked to develop a curriculum for English language studies at either secondary or tertiary level, perhaps the first question that would spring to our minds would be 'which particular literary texts should we prescribe for study within the schools or lecture halls?', which particular texts are no longer appropriate in terms of the kind of ideologies we wish to develop amongst the student population of new South Africans?', 'which texts should go?'. If we do question ourselves only narrowly along these lines, we soon realise that we have a limited understanding of the process of development of a qualitative curriculum for a new South Africa.

Our attitudes and actions are perfectly understandable given the desire to leave behind the biased selection of literary texts which served to construct particular cultural ideologies during apartheid education. However we would not be trapped within a conservative view of what curriculum reconstruction usually is, namely the replacement of one set of content material with another. All that our classrooms would end up doing would be merely reflecting the dominant ideologies and value systems of those who select the items of cultural content deemed worthy of study.

Unfortunately much of the discussion about curriculum development of English language courses has taken on this element, focusing on what content has been excluded or included from the selection for formal study in the classroom/lecture hall. A similar view emerges from the recent statements on the content of the English curriculum that the curriculum is a 'package of

1. This is a revised version of a paper presented at the *Natal Conference on South African Literature*, 'Pedagogies of Reconstruction: Teaching Literature in a "New" South Africa', Bad Boll, Durnsay, 24–26 October 1991.

information' which learners need to be exposed to. Such a preoccupation with the content of the curriculum treats the curriculum as a 'product'—a commodity to be dispensed to the unthinking learner population (Doherty 1987). It has been argued that the concept of 'curriculum' is synonymous with the concept 'syllabus'. It is therefore believed that curriculum reconstruction/development is about syllabus reduction, syllabus editing, syllabus revision, syllabus expansion .... Within the context of a highly restrictive education system it is inevitable that the dominant definition of curriculum has been equated with 'syllabus mastery'. Students who succeeded in obtaining better results were those who were able to recall the already constructed knowledge packages that the so-called experts in a field have formulated. The schooling system was seen as an agent for delivery of particular parcels of cultural knowledge. The successful learner was one who could 'show evidence of adequate mastery of the information deposited in his/her memory store'. The role of the student of English literature was therefore seen as serving one of the underlying conservative goals of the schooling system, namely to develop memory capacities. Paulo Freire (1972) called this process 'banking education': the depositing and retrieving of information. Surely this is not the kind of learner that the new South Africa wishes to produce?

2 An extended notion of curriculum development

Our point of departure should be a wider conception of 'curriculum' and 'curriculum development'. Reconstruction of the English language curriculum needs to include a redefinition of the notion of what is studied, as well as a redefinition of how literature is taught and learnt within a qualitative educational process.

Qualitative education aspires to soar beyond the confines of learners' ability to revert interpretations already formulated by the curriculum constructors. Within qualitative education the learner is not seen as a passive recipient of knowledge but as an active participant who constructs and reconstructs the totality of experience within the teaching and learning environment. The learner is seen as individual agent who is simultaneously a product and a shaper of contextual circumstances which surround him/her. Therefore, the development of a qualitative education recognises the need to situate the social background of the learner as well as extend the learner to explore different and varied possibilities within and beyond his/her own experience. A qualitative education therefore aims to liberate the individual learner beyond the possibility of the here and now and instead urges him/her to shape a world using his/her unrealised creative and critical potential (see Samuel 1987:123). In this formulation of the concept 'curriculum', the learner is therefore seen as a conscious constructor of the curriculum in that s/he shapes the way in which the syllabus information is mediated. This is a more accurate picture of what student involvement in curriculum construction entails. It also contains simplistic historical notions of studying literature in terms of questions such as 'who wrote/teaches what to whom and when?'. The focus of a qualitative education therefore needs to be directed towards

both in the production of how the syllabus content is constructed during the engagement of teaching and learning as well as the quality of learner involvement in those processes. The starting point is therefore to encourage the proliferation of alternative conceptions of what education is. The learners (with all their unique and subjective thoughts about 'education') are at the centre of (post-apartheid) education. Within the English language classroom, this forms a call for developing their practices to engage critically and critically with the medium of language.

3 Will Africanising the literature curriculum develop critical and creative readerships?

In the present South African education system the vast majority of learners are still not gratified when their learning centres by virtue of the manner in which education is mediated within the schooling system. Given the need to hear the value systems of the oppressed sectors of the South African community as part of the attempt to redress the historical distortions perpetrated by a racist, sexist and classist education system, it is easy to argue that the curriculum reconstructionists will need to focus on 'Africanising' or 'Social Africanising' the curriculum. A qualitative (if not literacy) education system seeks to allow all its learners to find their voice being heard, read, debated and discussed in the English language classroom (see Lemke 1992). Of course, this poses a serious challenge to the average pupil-teacher of English literature—namely that s/he becomes an active reader of literature. Since the majority of pupils are English second language users and since there is not enough material available, this challenge is undoubtedly no easy to meet. From my own experiences of working within the secondary school system, there does not seem to be any significant reading culture within most secondary schools irrespective of whether the learners are first or second language users. How, does one initiate the critical and creative growth of learners who have not developed a positive experience of reading literature? If anything, the schooling system has taught learners to be distrustful of the engagement with written texts. For many pupils (besides those who go on to read by degrees in English literature studies) the last literature text that they engage with, is the one studied for their last school examination. In the light of the poor provision of library facilities and the lack of access of most secondary school students to literary texts—especially within the 'African township system'—it is understandable that a significant reading culture has not emerged here. Also, it might appear to many that reading is a cultural activity that only those who can afford the luxury of purchasing literary material can engage in. However, in the light of the fact that reading to e.g. bedtime stories to children does not occupy any significant place in the cultural pattern of Black middle class homes, this argument seems to be flawed. Is the reading of books a cultural pattern confined to Western family life? Moreover it seems that despite the availability of and access to literary resources in westernised family contexts, English language teachers still complain that their pupils 'just can't read'. Within this context

one wonders whether the goal of developing critical and creative reading skills is not just another unattainable dream and that what teachers need to expend their energies on is simply developing a basic reading culture first.

In order to develop such a reading culture, it is argued that if one attempts to cultivate a reading culture one would have to work with texts with which pupils can easily identify. This identification is believed to proceed from the principle that pupils work from the known to the unknown. It is therefore concluded that 'Africanising' the literature curriculum is the solution to developing a culture of readers.

That this approach has merit is certainly true. Some caution, however, should also be exercised. I refer to Rachel Wright's (1992) caution when examining the Africanising process of University of Sierra Leone's English literature curriculum. She argues that the danger of focusing only on the West African art forms is that it becomes 'too indigenous, too exotic and loses mature appeal'. Since modern African students have significantly widened their perspectives beyond rural life and traditions, a wider approach is necessary. She also quotes Bright (1988) who recalls that the texts produced by earlier writers of West African English literature—and which were used as part of the 'Africanised' programmes—were written with Western or European readers in mind. These texts are not necessarily more easily mediated by African readers today. The modern (perhaps only urbanised) student has developed new preoccupations as a consequence of living in a growingly multinational, multicultural and multilingual environment. If the education system is to reflect this growing tendency then it should reflect this new emerging 'Africanisation' and not an 'Africanisation' based on a romanticised western perspective of Africa.

Let us examine more widely what 'Africanising' the language curriculum in the South African context might entail. What exactly are South African pupils reading and enjoying? Perhaps the question that teachers need to ask is not why their pupils are not reading but what is it that they are 'reading' within the everyday South African cultural context. This may necessitate a redefinition and expansion of the teacher's conception of 'literary texts' beyond the written textual materials contained on library shelves or within classrooms. It is possible that second language pupils in South Africa experience the mediation of English language through the lyrics of popular music rather than literary texts. This music is enjoyed in even the remotest of rural settings. The radio as a prime means of mediating the English language has not been significantly incorporated into language classrooms. Perhaps we need to extend our definitions of literature to include the 'reading' of cultural forms such as posters, placard sloganeering, public signboards and the reading of visual media such as photographs. Thus, TV programmes, newspapers. Perhaps we need to develop a wider understanding of 'Africanising' to include a more specific focus on how the English language is being mediated to the average user of English in everyday South African life.

Contrary to this approach, 'Africanising' the English curriculum is

seen by some as entailing a rather narrowly defined viewpoint into the days of yore, a romanticising of an era gone by. To these, the term 'African culture' usually connotes a looking back over the shoulder to see where we have come and a hearkening back to traditional values. To others, the concept of African culture incorporates a vivacity that embraces the complexity of the African in the present South African context. The concept 'African' therefore cannot belong to any one separate cultural group (within the apartheid driven conception of separatist cultural groups). Alexander (1990: 16) argues that it is even possible to conceptualise a national South African/Azanian culture that transcends language boundaries. Our very existence as Africans has been defined as a part of the shackles of oppression. A truly liberatory education system will seek to remove these barriers of division. And literature in particular will therefore need to reflect this diversity emerging from the varied cultural, linguistic, socio-historical political experiences of the South African community. What is more significant is not merely their representation within the curriculum, but how this cultural richness and variety is critiqued, challenged and extended within the classroom. John Carlin (1993) argues that the segregation of the parallel, though separate cultural systems of the various groupings constituting the South African fabric should not be whisked away in the desire to appear politically correct. The colonial heritage of South Africa as well as the resistance to such colonial oppression are as much a part of South African society as 'braaivleis, sunny skies and ... Toyotas!!'. The modern South African is therefore a conglomeration of many interlocking, complex and often contradictory values, bolstering with diversity. All of this is the African experience, ranging from colonial racism reeking to euphoric liberationist nationalism.

The goal of the language teacher is therefore to mediate this rich tapestry for his/her students, recognising the particular angle or authorial stance of the writers in relation to their subject matter. Any text therefore might be considered for inclusion within a South African curriculum provided that the learners and teachers engage in a critical dialogue with the authors, his/her views, as well as the text's cultural and ideological bearings. If this approach is carried, I believe that we will serve the goals of developing critical and creative readership.

The process of merely introducing 'Africanised' texts into the curriculum will therefore not automatically result in the development of critical and creative readers. The responsibility for such a development will rest largely with the teacher of literature. S/he will have to cultivate the necessary culture of reading through the processes by which cultural (including literary) texts are mediated to, for and by the learners.

4 Inside the English second language classroom

Let us look at how far away we are from realising the goal within the English language classroom. The key figure in the development of a culture of reading experience with English literature is the teacher herself/himself. The previous education system failed to develop the potential of the teacher to act as a curriculum developer. Instead, the teacher was deprofessionalised in order to serve the ends of the apartheid ideologies. In this process the teacher was perceived as a syllabus implementor, a role that is/was willingly accepted by many teachers because they could abrogate the responsibility of thinking what and how to teach. In some cases at least, the state education department (which ironically was the target of teachers' criticisms). The result was that the study of literature was/is perceived as serving utilitarianist aims. The 'magic of enjoyment of texts' (Wright, 1993:4) was/is seen as of secondary importance if at all. Within the second language context the teaching of literature was/is seen only as serving as a tool for the development of a new or more comprehensive vocabulary, a tool for language analysis and dissection rather than as a tool for expanding visions of our inner thoughts. The focus on studying the diction in a poem, for example, was seen as an end in itself rather than as a means of aid/investigation into the social matter and social, historical and political experiences which the author grappled with. The experience that students imbibe as a consequence of this rather mechanistic approach to literature is that literature is not seen as a means of communicating thoughts, ideas, fears, dreams ... Rather, literature is like an unwanted spade full of dirt/sand: you have to tunnel deep into the bowels of the earth in order to retrieve one grain. Is it worthwhile with the effort?

The marginalised status of literature within the second language curriculum can be seen in terms of the number of lessons that teachers devote to the study of literature within the English second language classroom. Many teachers see the study of literature as a luxury. They assume that the only means of developing competence in the second language English is through a significant concentration on structural grammar. This approach is based on the mistaken belief that since pupils do not have a significant grasp of English grammar they cannot read well and that the study of literature is therefore of secondary importance. In view of this belief, our own unsystematic way in which evaluation of literature studies very often meets with resistance. If the teacher does use literature in the classroom, s/he resorts to evaluation practices focusing on the interpretive content which the student is required to memorise for examination purposes. For example, the text is read aloud in English and the teacher then explains or paraphrases 'what it means' in the mother tongue. The result of this 'method' is that the disempowered learners within such a classroom develop an over-reliance on the teacher's interpretation of the text. They then regard a good teacher of literature as one who is able to neatly package the necessary content information which will be regurgitated in question/answers. The second language literature classroom is usually characterised by marked learner passivity. This confirms teachers' belief that they cannot afford/risk a more extended reading of English literature. They complain that they follow this method because 'pupils don't understand English'. Perhaps the difficulty lies not with the study of literature *per se* but with an ossified and outdated curriculum practice and learners' misconceptions about how second language learners (should) acquire reading competence.

5 The tail that wags the dog

Since language teachers of literature often argue that their primary task is to prepare students to pass the term and examination papers. They therefore concentrate only on what the students need to master. The examination system seems to require only superficial analysis of the literature which pupils study in a student's ability to reproduce the learned knowledge s/he passes on paper. Moreover, it is argued that it is beyond the competencies of second language learners to provide analyses of literature which cap appreciative and evaluative responses. Hence the examination is characterised by unsurprising questions which do not require the learner to reveal his/her creative or critical skills. The examination system thus becomes the tail that wags the dog: classroom practices seem to be geared to a large extent towards mastery of the examinations and not necessarily to the development of the pupils' appreciation of literature.

A reorganisation of the English language curriculum should therefore evaluate the manner in which the curriculum will be examined, the kinds of examination questions students will be expected to answer and the levels of reading analysis that will be expected. This will necessitate that teachers examine their conceptions of how second language learners acquire competence in a second language. They will have to focus on less the skill of developing reading proficiency should be tackled. This in turn would lead to a reprioritisation of the active theoretical pedagogical rationale underlying the English second language learning and teaching process. Curriculum development involves not only syllabus revision, but also a retraining of existing teaching staff in relation to better informed theoretical and practical views about English second language acquisition, a reconceptualising of classroom practices and a reconceptualisation of the examination system. All these parallel processes are contributory staging factors which may enhance the quality of the engagement of learners with the literary syllabus.

6 English teachers in the making

Let us examine the way in which teachers of the English language are currently being trained/educated within the tertiary education system. Most students do a four year course in English. At the University of Durban-Westville the minimum requirement to become an English language teacher is a two year course in English. These courses consist largely of literary textual analysis. Only in the final (or fourth) year of study do students engage in a course of English teaching and learning methodology offered by the Faculty of Education.

I do not think that I am too cold if I say that despite the supposedly liberatory content of what university or college students engage in during their study of the English language, the dominant pedagogical engagement with that content still reflects a generally passive, uncritical and non-creative learning scenario. The student's own experiences during the twelve years of schooling within the secondary school system in which a particular state

view of knowledge – i.e. as being merely packaged products of information. Students thus attend the lectures and tutorials to become *au fait* with the appropriate package of knowledge that particular lecturers produce. When they have to write an examination, the students select for regurgitation the appropriate content which lecturers have presented within the lecture halls. Students are not necessarily able to extend these critiques to inform the way in which they read other texts. Hence one might see a student employ a dated/'old' Marxist critique of a particular text simply because the lecturer concerned had presented this kind of analysis within the lecture hall. Yet, the student is unable to provide alternate readings, for example a feminist reading of the same text, because the lecturers have not dealt with the text in this manner of analysis. This kind of response from students is the result of seeing the curriculum as a commodity external to their own personal frame of reference. After all, it is argued that simply passing the course is to the benefit of the student. A more rigorous engagement and critical dialogue with a variety of texts and authors involving several readings of texts from different theoretical perspectives is seen as a luxury reserved for the over-diligent student. In addition to the student's own schooling experiences, the university experience totally corrupts the process of how content is mediated and disseminated in the student's and future teacher's mind.

The curriculum of current courses of English study also leaves much to be desired. Within the current courses of English language study, little attention is given to theories of language learning, language acquisition and creative writing in English. The study of the English language seems to be concerned primarily with the already constructed products of the English language, namely printed texts. When analysing the quality of the curriculum in preparing teachers of English, the most significant shortcoming is that virtually no attention is paid to developing students' own writing potential, i.e. to become producers of literature in the English language themselves. It appears that curriculum developers believe that the analysis of other literary products provides enough motivation and expertise for future authors.

The result of present practices related to the teaching and learning of English teachers is that students emerge from courses in English literature at tertiary level with only a piecemeal and fragmentary knowledge and inadequate skills. These do not provide an adequate basis for the complexities of critical writing and reading in which the teacher has to engage. Since the traditional departments of English do not conceive of their role as serving a pedagogical function, they do not engage in activities which promote and develop their students to become analysts of the processes of developing products of literature. Hence, when students are in relation to their role as teachers of the English language in the final year of study within the Faculty of Education, they bewail the fact that they are unable to get their pupils to develop their skills of critical, engaged reading and writing. After two and often three years of study, they feel that they (i.e. we) do not have the competence to teach their pupils. Instead, they mechanistically offer their pupils many of literary theoretical jargon gleaned from university or college notes or

hard books. This obviously fails to provide an adequate basis to pupils for a tangible and qualitative development in the reading and production of literature. Students consequently argue that the kind of literary analysis gained at tertiary education is irrelevant for the secondary school system and for the exercise of the level of reading capability of secondary school pupils. Therefore, when they become teachers, they either fall back on the banking education system or resort to processes of superficial textual analysis. And so the cycle perpetuates itself .... One of the ways to break the cycle would be to equip prospective teachers both with the necessary theories of language acquisition and with the practical expertise of reading and producing literature during the first two or three years of study.

7 Qualitative reading: designing clusters and ladders

The rest of this paper addresses the development of qualitative reading skills within the English second language classroom. Krashen's (1981) conception of 'focussed reading' provides a possible initial step for readers who are unskilled in qualitative reading. He suggests that the teacher initially needs to be presented with extracts from different texts which share a particular connectivity. This commonality may be reflected in the theme, the genre, the common author, etc. of the different texts. Probyn-Inga (1989:100-200) refers to these commonalities or focussed units as 'clusters' of reading material chosen to match the learners' current level of reading competence. In creating any one cluster, the teacher may provide a variety of critical considerations between the way in which the different texts treat a particular theme or genre or differences in the author's approaches in the texts. The teacher here shows pupils practically how to work by kinds of literary material or constructs. The intention is not to memorise the teacher's particular critique of the given texts, but to see the texts as vehicles for the study of 'how to read'. The text therefore merely becomes a means to an end: the end being the ability to read creatively and critically.

Probyn-Inga further argues that the teacher of literature should exercise his/her role as a curriculum developer by constantly upgrading the nature of the engagement with the particular clusters of texts. He refers to the progressive developmental clusters as 'ladders' which need to be organised over an extended period of involvement with the learners. This approach to clustering and laddering requires that the teacher himself/herself is a sophisticated and advanced reader of literary texts of various kinds.

Since each teacher will develop the appropriate level of curriculum for his/her particular learners, the choice of appropriate texts need not be centrally determined for all schools uniformly. This approach requires a major decentralising of the choice and design of curriculum material, and can only be accomplished with the necessary retraining of the teacher of literature. The retrained teacher must be able to reconceptualise the role and function of literature within the education system. Furthermore, the cluster approach does not require that students be introduced to complete texts. Initially, only extracts may be provided. This requires that teacher educators

spend more time in preparing and empowering teachers to become curriculum developers in their own right. The creative production of unique materials for particular, graduated learning environments (which may be done in conversation with pupils) will be one of their main objectives. The objective is to assist, reskill and empower pupils to encounter and critically interact with the clusters of material. The intention is not that pupils should engage with all the texts at the same level of analysis. The schools should be able to choose different clusters of texts and selectively design appropriate levels of engagement with the cluster in relation to their pupils' interest and language proficiency. This may take the form of using extracts from texts during the introduction of the programme and later moving on to complete texts.

I provide a brief example of how such a cluster syllabus may function in a grade eleven (standard nine) class.

> 1 *Group 1* may explore the various interpretations of the concept 'teenage love' as conceptualised by texts chosen from a variety of historical periods;
>
> 2 *Group 2* may explore newspaper clippings related to the differing political parties' views on the concept 'democracy' prior to the debate, the 1994 South African elections;
>
> 3 *Group 3* may examine an anthology of South African short stories with a view to writing a short story that fills a gap which the students think the compilers of the collection have not addressed;
>
> 4 *Group 4* may choose an author whose they think represents the aspirations which they themselves have for a new South Africa, their study will involve explicating the socio-historical circumstances which gave rise to the author's views.

It is evident that the emphasis has moved away from the selection of particular single texts to the development of the learners' engagement with a variety of texts and themes. It also stands to reason that this approach will be more effective in facilitating qualitative and focussed engagement with texts. The objective of 'understanding a whole text and nothing but the text' is hereby decentred. The learning experience is directed towards all three levels of critical engagement, with texts in relation to larger purposes. As such, pupils engage in a range of reading activities which centre on the 'how to read' and 'how we communicate using language as a means of organising thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences'.

8 The teacher as a curriculum developer

Since didactics and teacher development courses do not concentrate on reskilling the teacher to become an in the role of curriculum developer, teachers may feel themselves inadequately prepared for the task. Some teachers may also argue that curriculum development is not part of their

professional duties. Moreover, many student teachers are trained within the framework of a 'Didactics' course aimed at classroom management and the implementation of syllabi designed by higher departmental authorities. Since traditional courses in 'Didactics' at university and college level do not include the embedding of prospective teachers to become curriculum developers, many teachers and departments have replaced this course with 'Curriculum Studies'. This, however, usually merely reflects a name change instead of a reinterpretation of the process of developing a prospective teacher to realise his/her potential as an active constructor of the pedagogic engagement of his/her learners.

Within the English language teaching course at the University of Durban-Westville, there have been conscious attempts to prepare student teachers to realise their role as curriculum constructors. During school-based teaching practice, the student teachers, together with the resident teachers within the school and the supervising lecturer, work jointly on an action research project. This project is intended to focus the team's efforts on the specific practical problems relating to English language teaching within the school. The student teachers are then expected to develop a 'work book' of instructional strategies which will attempt to address this practical problem. The team is then engaged during school-based teaching practice to test the workability of their draft workbook and to make further recommendations as to how to address the problem. This form of teaching practice requires student teachers to work in collaborative teams and to use the approach of concentrated clusters in realising the aim of integrating the development of the basic language skills of reading, speaking, writing and listening. The choice and order of presentation of the material in the workbook is expected to take on a progressive developmental nature. By working together with the resident teachers in the schools, the teaching practice functions as both a pre-service and in-service training of participants, pre-service for the student teachers and in-service for the resident teachers. For all participants in the collaborative team it becomes a useful means of interrogating theoretical and practical knowledge in a dialectical way. This programme has only recently been introduced at the University of Durban-Westville. Despite participants' differing levels of self-comprehension, participation in and realisation of the possibilities of the programme, the benefits of the programme will hopefully be evident at a later stage when we measure the degree to which both prospective and resident teachers have mastered their roles as curriculum developers.

9 Addressing some of the constraints on qualitative curriculum development

In order to realise the goals of implementing a qualitative curriculum aimed at developing critical and creative readership, several constraints need to be addressed: the examination system, budget constraints, the establishing of curriculum development resource centres and teacher orientation.

9.1 The examinations

The examination system will have to be revamped so that critical reader abilities can be assessed adequately. Brandt and Killen (1986) provide examples of the kind of examination paper that may be used. Centralised curriculum developers need only prescribe the broad guidelines of how critical readership will be examined. Particular schools will be given the freedom to select texts appropriate to the experiences and contexts of their unique corps of pupils. For example, the senior secondary 'syllabus' may suggest that:

9.1.1 grade ten (standard eight) pupils engage with texts which reflect a clustered *thematic* notion such as 'Emancipated South African women'. The department only provides a list of possible texts which practitioners could use as a guideline to explore this theme.

9.1.2 the grade eleven (standard nine) syllabus comprise a cross section study of a variety of texts (different *literary periods*. The choice of texts is left to the individual language departments of each school.

9.1.3 national examinations at the end of the final year of schooling (grade twelve/standard ten) reflect a freedom of choice of material for the student. To ensure that pupils are exposed to a *variety of genres, cultural perspectives and linguistic styles*, the curriculum may limit the number of projects to some or all the categories. The examination questions should not focus on the recall activity dominant in present examination papers. Instead, a student will be asked to use the different texts studied during the literature lessons and to explore a particular generally framed question. For example,

> i Arising out of your analysis of the portrayal of South African women in the texts you have studied, identify one literary character who stands out in your mind as an individual who embodies the spirit which you think is to characterise women in the nineties. Argue critically why you have chosen this particular character in comparison to the other characters you have 'met' during your literature survey. Also show how the author is able to evoke your identification with this particular character.
>
> ii A significant characteristic of schools literature is that it portrays the oppressed as the 'liberated other'. Through a sample of the texts you have studied over a two Program examination, show whether you agree with the above statement.

Certainly, these questions reflect a sensitisation that school pupils will not be able to engage with given the manner in which texts are achieved within our current literature classrooms. But if it leads the way, then maybe the development of such examination questions would begin to assuage

the way in which teachers and learners engage with texts within their language/literature classrooms. Similar questions may also be addressed for the other grades/standards in the school system.

9.2 The budget

Another obstacle to realising the goal of extensive critical reading is the perceived inflated costs that such a system may bring about. However, if this approach is compared with the current system where millions of rands are being spent on providing copies of individual single texts for uniform use, the curriculum development approach might be more cost effective. I say 'might' because it will have to be assessed properly. If the new approach is more expensive, then we will have to reassess the spending of the money with the results it brings about and compare it with the results of the old system. Moreover, through schools will have the autonomy to decide which particular texts they wish to prescribe, the important element in this approach is not the texts in themselves but the quality of the critical readership which it brings about. The same budget may be used to provide a number of different sets of texts. Perhaps they may change texts after using certain sections of a text for particular projects. This may also ensure that teachers design the curriculum in more creative ways, eg. in terms of group work, peer development tutorials and parallel group work sessions. It is expected of more tertiary school teachers to be creative in this way. Secondary school teachers may follow suit. All of these issues point to the need for teachers to be trained to realise their truly professionalised role as curriculum developers rather than functioning merely as syllabus implementors.

9.3 The resource centre

To enhance the goals of qualitative critical reading, library and curriculum resource centres (where they exist) must become engaged in the development of an active culture of reading amongst disempowered teachers and pupils. The development of school and community libraries and resource centres is vital to the establishment of a cognatively developed and intellectually active society. However, the provision of these resources will not guarantee the output desired for a quality education system. Librarians, teachers and learners must work hand in hand to promote the quality of the engagement expected of learners when working with the texts available in the resource centres.

9.4 Teacher commitment

It is evident that qualitative language curriculating involves diverse dedication, time management and curriculum planning by language/literature teachers. The temptation to resort to talk and chalk transmission education must be resisted by those who see teaching as a vocation and not only as a job. A developed literature curriculum serving the goals of liberatory education requires whole-hearted commitment. Within the context of schooling where the culture of teaching, learning and reading have all but

broken down, these goals may well exceed the scope of what teachers or learners would wish for themselves. Apartheid education has made many individuals come to accept substandard education. The need to redevelop a sense of excellence, the improvement of the quality of the curriculum of English language literature teaching and learning as well as a commitment to our own history, contexts and inner selves will inevitably involve serious self-reflection from all concerned. If we commit ourselves to the task of true qualitative education now, we ourselves as well as future generations of South African learners, may reap the benefits.

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Redefining the Teaching of Literature in the Primary School as Meaning Construction[1]

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Abstract

This article argues that the majority of South African children are alienated from both the culture inscribed in the curriculum and the nature of teaching in their classrooms. Various facets of the formal and hidden curricula often function to silence students. This is especially apparent in the area of literature teaching, which seems to be increasingly unconnected to the real lives of students. I therefore address the urgent need to make literature teaching at the primary school level more personally meaningful to students. I examine two issues relevant to curriculum development: firstly, the selection of texts for pupils in the primary school and secondly, the reconceptualization of methodologies used in literature teaching and learning.

1 Introduction

In the large majority of South African schools, it has become apparent that what counts as legitimate knowledge has always had close connections to those groups who have had economic, political and cultural power. Within these teaching contexts, students whose knowledge is most closely allied to what is considered the dominant knowledge are privileged and legitimized. In contrast, there are other learners who see their life experiences as distant from the educational learning culture. Various aspects of the formal and hidden curricula often function to silence students. The result is that the majority of South African children are increasingly alienated from the culture inscribed in the curriculum and from the nature of the teaching in their classrooms. This is especially apparent in the area of literature teaching, which seems to be increasingly unconnected to the real lives of students.

This paper focuses on the urgent need to make teaching literature at the primary school level more personally meaningful to students. It also explores issues relevant to the teaching of literature in the primary school within the framework of critical literacy – a term associated with the work of Freire & Macedo (1987). According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1985:192),

> [critical literacy] implies [helping students] teachers and others learn how to read the world and their own cultural texts critically. It means developing a greater understanding of how knowledge gets produced, transmitted, and used

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> purposefully in particular situations.

In addition, I examine two issues relevant to curriculum development: firstly, the selection of texts for pupils in the primary school, and secondly, the reconceptualization of methodologies used to teach and learn literature.

2 Examining children's literature in our schools

The first question to ask is, 'whose knowledge is promoted in the classrooms by the texts we use at our schools?'. It is naive to think of the school curriculum as having neutral knowledge. What counts as legitimate knowledge is always the result of complex power relations among class, race, gender, and religious groups. Furthermore, books are published and distributed among the masses within political and economic constraints of power. Apple and Christian-Smith (1991) explain that books signify 'particular forms and contain particular constructions of reality and particular ways of organizing and structuring knowledge. Those cultures control that body of knowledge

> which is regarded as possible knowledge, what knowledge can be in the process of [re]production one gives privileged status to [and] loses another' (Apple & Christian-Smith 1991:3).

Thus, the selection of knowledge for schools is not ideologically neutral but rather serves the interests of powerful classes and social groups. It legitimizes existing social relations and the forms of life which are implicated. It does so in a way that ignores the fact that these are only some forms of life.

It is common knowledge that children's books used in the majority of urban schools in South Africa have in many ways alienated our students. The manager of one Soweto bookshop (cited in Christie 1992:149) explains that

> [the] reading habits of Black children are a result of [the] history. Many of the books we stock are the kind that parents would like their children to have. [...] Dealing with the social issues of the day is not a priority. There is a lack of interest in reading for total pleasure.

This experience was evident when I had just begun teaching in primary schools in Durban's townships. Children's books in classrooms and school libraries were largely depicting the children in these schools' contexts. Class, gender, and racial issues were widespread in the materials. Books such as 'A piece on the beach' and 'A visit to the dentist' were not relevant to the experiences of most students. All too often, 'appropriate' knowledge does not include the historical experiences and cultural expressions of the children who are required to learn it.

Further research into the texts books students in these many schools are exposed to are basal readers and their supplementary books. Some of the readers were *The Day We Went, The Magic Stones, Rosy and Jane, Story Land* and *What Did It Eat?*. These books, including books at the upper levels such as standard four and five, portray British children engaged in speech associated with the British middle class. It is of grave concern that these books continue to be used despite the fact that they historically

Indian schools are now desegregated in the sense that large numbers of African students have been enrolled. The books do little to help South African children learn about issues related to diversity or even to learn that such issues exist, or to develop an understanding of different cultural groups in the country and more importantly, how these groups experience life and how knowledge of other indigenous groups and cultures can help children define themselves.

In African schools in KwaZulu/Natal, teachers continue to make use of *The New Way to Say English Classes* published by Maskew Miller and *English Readers for Southern Africa* published by Van Schaik. Typical as the core reading materials. Again, even books at the standard four and five levels have the typical stories about African people and often contain many gender stereotypes. They portray African people across many roles but do not reflect the group's particular experiences. Such stories contain inaccurate and inauthentic portrayals of the experience of African people. Although they may contain stories about interpersonal issues such as the interaction between children and teachers, they avoid presenting social issues. Some of the stories depict rural scenes but nothing about the power relationships in the lives of rural people, children, teachers, schools and the farm owners with whom the lives of the people are inextricably bound. The books do not deal with the particular pressures of human relationships in South Africa.

Some schools are making use of what are referred to as 'second language reading materials'. I have had the opportunity to examine some of these materials. The books feature mainly black children and adults, mainly middle class families, rural or urban. None of the stories reflect the lived realities of the people. They reflect experiences that are largely generic. Most stories do not portray people and situations having identifiable ethnic or racial. They tend to show blacks participating in mainstream cultural activities and speaking standard English. It is likely that this is done to avoid stereotyping. However, it is clear that in the process, authentic experiences and positive cultural differences are ignored. Social class difference is not raised in these books at all. Problems among people are reflected as individual in nature and are ultimately resolved. The role that parents and affective aspects play.

Few teachers recognise the potential for a more critical life and school literacy. Teachers do not realize how schools can function to disempower our pupils, for example by providing them with knowledge that is not relevant to, or speaks to the context of their everyday lives. The curriculum is defined so that the majority of pupils are taught only those skills which are seen as necessary to enable them to read and write with accuracy and to make limited decisions - meaning what is referred to as functional literacy. Our classrooms are based on the mechanical learning of reading skills. In our primary schools, the work of the teacher is to 'transmit' knowledge and the task of students is to receive it. Both teachers and students follow a passive routine day in day out. Classrooms are organized, supervised, routine, controlled and predictable. Reading programmes are organized around responses with students grouped according to ability, age and differences,

and if one is more analytical, social class. In the majority of classes, teachers direct students' attention to the mechanics of reading a text, for example, phonic characteristics of isolated words and literal interpretations of content. There is no sense of independence or creative involvement in reading lessons. Students seem to be socialized for subordination rather than empowered to take responsibility for their own learning. Students have no control over their own learning, over the texts, and over their meanings. There is no discussion of the negotiated and shared aspects of reading literature.

3 Redefining the teaching of literature: critical literacy

Critical literacy views literacy as a social construction that is always implicated in organizing one's view of history, the present and the future (Freire & Macedo 1987:13). Since literacy is a representation for social transformation, its objective is to extend the possibilities for individuals to actively participate in the understanding and transformation of their society.

According to Freire and Macedo (1987:32), literacy is both a narrative for agency and a relation of empowerment. As a *narrative for agency*, literacy attempts to restore history, experience and voice from ethnocentrical discourse and dominant social relations. It provides the conditions for individuals to locate themselves within their own histories and to see themselves as agents in the struggle to expand the possibilities of human life. Here, ethnocentrism has to be liberated in order to be free to hear the voices of the struggle for liberation in the wider history and culture. Human agency does not imply that the production of meaning is immune to analyzing particular texts. Literacy is a social construct not aimed at the enhancement of human possibility. As a *relation of empowerment*, literacy plays a role in helping individuals understand the socially constructed nature of their society and their experience.

The aim of developing a critical literacy is to broaden our conceptions of how teachers actively produce, sustain, and legitimate meaning in our experiences in the classroom. It provides an awareness of how the wider conditions of society produce, negotiate, transform and limit how we see the conditions of teaching so as to either enable or disable learners from learning in a critical manner.

The critical literacy approach provides crucial insight into the learning process by linking the nature of learning itself with the dreams, experiences, histories and languages that students bring to the schools. It stresses the need for teachers to confirm student experiences so that students are legitimated and supported as people who matter, people who can participate in their learning, and people who can speak with a voice that is rooted in their sense of history and place. Schools often give the appearance of transmitting a common culture, but more often than not, they legitimate what can be called a dominant culture. The dominant culture often sanctions the voices of middle class students, while simultaneously disconfirming or ignoring the voices from other groups, whether they are black, working class, women, Jewish, or minorities.

Teachers need to understand how schools, as part of the wider

dominant culture often function to marginalize the experiences and beliefs that the majority of our students use in mediating their lives. Students' experiences, like the culture and society of which it is a part, is full of political conflicts. It is important to sort through its contradictions, and to give students a chance not only to confront themselves but to understand the richness and strengths of other cultural traditions and other voices.

It is necessary, then, to clarify the distinction between child-centred approaches and critical literacy. Child-centred approaches claim that schools thwart children's activity by treating them as passive receptacles, and by using top-down notions of instruction. This is to approaches based on process writing, psycholinguistics, and whole-language-acquisition and more recently, constructivist approaches. These approaches suggest that teaching must proceed according to the child's nature. They emphasize the need to give children choice and control over their learning. In contrast, critical pedagogy begins with an acknowledgement of differential power within society and within schools. Teachers are not free, and students cannot really progress according to their nature. Shannon (1992) explains that under such unequal social arrangements, the role of the school and the teacher is to intervene within the context of material social forces. The implication that this intervention which will bring about social justice and equality of opportunity.

Critical literacy stresses self-knowledge, social critique, and social action based on this new knowledge. Child-centred approaches neglect the political reality of the forces which run opposed to efforts to help children learn and develop. Critical theory stresses that the role of schooling in a democratic society should be to redistribute use of social and academic knowledge equally in order to prepare students for life.

In the teaching of literature, developing a critical literacy implies that the classroom is in the most fundamental sense a place of conflict where teachers and students interrogate the knowledge, history, values, language, and culture through books. Teachers must develop selections in the classroom where different voices are heard and legitimized. In order to improve the quality of life and citizenship of students, teachers must create social relations that allow students to speak and to appreciate the nature of differences both as a basis for democratic tolerance and as a fundamental condition for critical dialogue.

According to Giroux (1992), the notion of voice is developed around a politics of difference and community. It does not merely stress plurality—which is present in most multicultural literature, but emphasizes human community. This approach regards plurality as part of an ongoing effort to develop social relations in which all voices with their differences are heard. Teachers need to assume that there are multiple voices in the classroom. The challenging task is to find ways in which these voices can interrogate each other. This involves dialogue or struggle over the interpretation and meaning constructed. Such dialogues expand individual experiences and redefine individual identities. Simon (1992: 141) explains this position when he elaborates on the approach of critical literacy:

> Teaching and learning must be linked to the goal of allowing students to take risks, to struggle with an ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside their immediate experiences, and to envision versions of the world which is not yet. In order to be able to effect the possible upon which life is lived.

This brief overview of critical literacy and how it differs from traditional and child-centred approaches provides the context for the question "Which books should be used in the teaching and learning process?"

4 Selecting children's literature

It is important that teachers understand that conflicts over the selection of texts relate to wider questions of power relations. They need to see that canon and other uphold and enforce unequal socially constructed relations or function as tools of liberation and empowerment and not just to amuse the pupils. It is clear that children's books presented in our classrooms thus far have reflected one version of reality—a version that embodies certain values, certain interpretations, certain value judgements, and gives prominence to dominant knowledge(s) while rendering others invisible. In this section I provide a few guidelines for the responsible selection and use of texts in the classroom as part of the critical literacy approach.

Teachers need to understand *how texts and classroom relations work in forms, and teachers talk about how to come to different readings*. Teachers should provide students with the opportunity to interrogate knowledge presented to be valorized in our assessment of texts and other activities.

It is crucial that the *cultural diversity* of our society is reflected in the literature we present to children. Books need to focus on themes related to the intersection of race, gender and culture—the lived experiences of people in a multicultural context. The introduction of "African-based texts" into our schools is not advocated as one not only wants the faces of our people in our books, but also the voices that populate our multicultural and multilingual society. Books need to present authentic images of society rather than uphold socially constructed ideal relationships. For example, South African books have not reflected on the realities of urbanization.

Books depicting *children with disabilities* are limited. Storylines tend to ignore people with disabilities, missing the opportunity to teach non-stereotyped images about the contributions that people with disabilities have made to society. They also fail to depict the struggles, strengths, desires and lived experiences of people with disabilities.

Students need to have a knowledge of different *textual materials*, to include the writings not only of one's own and other cultures, but to include the different kinds of materials we encounter in our world. These could vary from story books, pop songs, cartoons, newspapers, novels, poetry, advertisements, and students' and teacher produced materials. Students can produce their own life stories and share these with peers.

Another important issue to be addressed is *the nature of the language used* in books. It is necessary to vary the way language is presented and used.

Materials should reflect the variety of ways people in society speak and use language. Mildred Taylor, a black American writer, provides brilliantly constructed narratives depicting images of those silenced by society. Her sensitivity to multicultural and historical concerns is reflected in her narratives. She uses a variety of dialects that reflect the social and ethnic backgrounds of characters.

A good example of a text that could be useful for teachers who adopt a critical pedagogy has been produced by the South African Council of Higher Education (SACHED 1988). The publication is the reader's version of *Down Second Avenue* by Es'kia Mphahlele. The novel describes in powerful form the experiences of the writer growing up under apartheid, and his decision to go into exile in Nigeria. The reader provides excellent opportunities for the exploration of experiences through language, the identification of what is explicit and what is hidden, and the creation and exploration of relationships between various texts for the young Mphahlele's developing consciousness.

I recently read a story printed in *The Daily News* (August 1993) entitled *Why Are Nelson and Winnie Not Talking?* The story was taken from a book called *The Small Ones*, a text about the street children of Cape Town written by Lesley Beake and published by Maskew Miller (1987). It depicts the child's lived experiences and how these are bound with social, cultural, economic, political, racial, and class issues. Real life themes emerge, such as school boycotts, youth unemployment, the sense of alienation and meaninglessness experienced by children in over-crowded, and under-resourced schools and social influences on family relationships. The text provides an excellent opportunity for children to develop understandings of the construction and experiences of street children in relation to the wider society. Similarly, the book entitled *Bird in Yellow* by Jenny Robson tells the story of a Cape Town street child based on true experience. The story reveals the lived experiences of the boy, Mess, and reflects the hopes, dreams, loyalties and innermost thoughts of the characters. It has tremendous potential to raise various critical issues and themes such as inter-generational issues, gender, inter-racial issues, family and peer relationships. A critical analysis and comparison with *reader's* own stories can lead to dynamic dialogues in the classroom. Such stories can open up new possibilities for readers in terms of the way they perceive themselves and can contribute to their own developing consciousness.

5 Some methodological issues

A basic problem faced by teachers responsible for the teaching and learning of literature in the primary school is that they do not know how to move more decisively from a model that produces and legitimizes inequality to a model of critical literacy teaching. Freire (see Shor 1987:23) calls for a dialogical education which invites students to critique the larger society through sharing their lives, and enables them to locate their experiences socially, to become involved in exploring the social factors that make and limit them and to reflect on who they are and who they could be. Freire and Macedo (1987) view literacy as a way to read the text and the world critically.

O'Loughlin (1992) argues that the most fundamental building block in a critical pedagogy is acknowledgement of the life experiences and voices of our students. As Freire (Horton & Freire 1990:57) says in during a conversation with Horton about educational practice:

> When students come, of course, they bring with them a body of data in their bodies, in their lives, they bring their hopes, dreams, expectations, knowledge which they got by living, by fighting, by becoming frustrated. Politically, they don't come here empty. They arrive here full of things, in most of the cases, they bring with them opinions about the world, and about life.

Teachers' most important task is to affirm not only the individuality of students but their personhood and their experiences. They must allow them to voice their thoughts and examine their experiences. Central to the construction of knowledge is the creation of a safe community in which students are comfortable enough with themselves, their fellow students as well as the teacher to take the risk of sharing themselves and engaging in public examination of deeply held beliefs, thoughts and feelings. Horton (Horton & Freire 1991) noted that the process requires the building of trust as well as a deliberate effort by the teacher to relinquish the role of expert in the classroom.

Teachers need to see that the language and discourse found in books are not neutral. Teachers need to 'read' the various relationships between writer, reader, and reality that language and discourse produce.

We need to build communities of learners and thinkers in our classrooms. Literature lessons are to be seen as opportunities for reflection and meaning construction. Language plays an active role in constructing experience. Vygotsky (1962; see Cole 1978) stressed this when he elaborated on the fact that shared social behaviour is the source of learning and that education is an effort of community. Students need to share interpretations and hypotheses about texts based on their unique lived experiences. This does not simply imply that students must be given opportunities to talk in class. Teachers need to assess whether students are talking on their own terms or only in terms of the dominant discourses of school and society.

Children must be given opportunities to bring their own unique social, cultural and historical experiences which impact on the meaning making process in the classroom. All students possess multiple and contradictory frames of reference with which to construct knowledge. These include their ethnic background, race, class, gender, language usage, religious, cultural and political identities. The potential for knowledge construction depends on how teachers react to students' attempts to employ these diverse frameworks for meaning making. As Horton (1990) fleshed out in his work at Highlander Folk School, true learning can only take place when people are given the opportunity to construct knowledge for themselves, on their own terms so that they can act to change their worlds. Critical literacy increases awareness of the contradictions inherent or dissonant in everyday understandings.

Teaching from such a paradigm would involve the setting of a critical community in the classrooms. In such an environment, students and teachers can be empowered to re-think their world and their own place in it. Simply

response to literature are seen as forms of self-definition, then stories can be read with the following thoughts uppermost in our minds: 'What message does this have for me?' 'Can this be possible?' 'How would I behave in a similar set of circumstances?' 'How does it affect my relationship with others?' 'How does it improve my understanding of myself, my community and society?'.

I believe that it is now that more teachers accept the challenge of becoming agents in the process of critical literacy despite possible opposition. If we do it at primary school level, our children as well as society in general will certainly reap the benefits in time.

6 Conclusion

Critical literacy requires that teachers understand that they are dealing with children whose stories, memories, narratives, and readings are inextricably related to wider social, political, economic situations. Teachers are in the position to provide the critical and reconstructive space in which children can work through their contradictions, continue confirm themselves and gain understanding about the richness of other cultures and other voices. Such an approach to contemporary literature for our children and legitimates the texts that they bring to the classroom. It is believed that such an approach to literature will also instil in children a love of reading.

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Asinamali! Then and Now

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Review Article

We Murder to Dissect! Give us our Money!
The Cultural Origins of an African Work Force
Natal South Africa, 1936-1960
by Keletso E Atkins
Portsmouth & London: Heinemann for James Currey, 1993, 190pp.
ISBN 0435080928

1 Introduction

Travelling along Mayden Wheel just after 5am recently, I was flagged down by a casual dressed desperate to make the call and *bhola* (sign on) for the day. His anxiety not to be late and fear of not getting work for the day is conclusive evidence of the distance travelled by migr (day) workers in time and space between 1841 and the present. In time one African workers asserted their right to daily contracts free from the coercive contracts of the migrant, now there is a formidable battle to be free of win permanency and some security in the 1990s geoquitainer world of work. The strike against casual labour conditions on 2 February 1995, which involved the mobilising of some 1 000 workers throughout the port, in the grandeur of the nineteenth century, is not mentioned in any of the newspapers, black or white.

The invasion of the work ethic of African workers in Natal in the nineteenth century is the stuff of Atkins' original and in many ways, controversial study. This is a challenging work, rigorously expressed in a dense style, which at times appears to take on the flavour of the English of the nineteenth of the time. It is a discursive exposition, the first full scale discussion of the master-servant relationship in South Africa in its multifaceted racial and racial form.

On its cover it is stated by an American institution that the issues 'at the center of the new cultural history of South Africa' and that it will become a classic for scholars working on 'labor and the colonial encounter'. These are strong claims to the attention, raisin, as they do questions of the intersection of culture and history in the South African context, and it be will be examined in this extended review. She Atkins really broken with an existing orthodoxy in the study of colonial relations and launched an African the alternative paradigm?

2 The frontier: Certain autonomy to culture?

Social or 'racial' relationships in colonial Natal were, in comparison to the rigidities of segregation thereafter, quite fluid. Somewhat of a 'frontier situation existed. Even though the colony was not directly ruled or conquered, disintegrative processes were at work but, within and from outside Zulu

society the threat of white settlement in Zulu areas. The world Atkins describes is one of settlers anxious to be able to secure African labour, of independent day labourers, of domestic servants frequently making use of courts to complain against their masters, and of heated arguments among settlers over the best way to secure long-term labour supply. In many ways colonial Natal internally, and in its relationship with Zululand, replicated a frontier situation. In the words of John Rex (1970:38):

> two groups with unequal technological and educational standards confront each other but the superior group has not yet imposed its rule on the other one.

As in the Cape Colony the stronger group did not have absolute power over the other. The two social systems were in competition as a capitalist productive network was established there was an internal proletariat within its borders and an external proletariat—to be met with the technologically 'inferior' group gradually becoming enmeshed with the trading and social system of the 'superior' group, while retaining a formal independence. Eventually the 'boundaries' are defeated, the frontier ends in conquest, and they are 'incorporated in the civilised society only on its lower terms'. A debate about the nature of divided society then begins: can there be the equality of fellow citizens or should certain kinds of non-citizens be outlined? 'From the start there is a distinction far more fundamental than any class distinction between the conquerors and the conquered' (Rex 1970:36).

This perspective of a frontier society leaning towards the conquest of its internal proletariat—through taxes, land restrictions, and other measures—and of its external proletariat eventually through war, helps to guide us through the historical processes at work in nineteenth century Natal. In the period of contested social frontiers, when the colonial state was relatively weak, and the non-capitalist mode of production retained a certain vitality and even vigour, the relationship of domination and exploitation was often brutal, but also relatively fragile.

What is clearly brought out in this and other texts is the fact that the European colonist approached the indigenous people of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, with more than a gun in hand. Central to the achievement of domination over the native peoples was, in addition to the material culture, the cultural equipment of literacy, time, religion, numeracy, and a set of values peculiar to the world of material acquisition and control. In the frontier period these aspects of the culture of the dominant achieved a certain influence beyond the borders consolidated by conquest and military domination, but Atkins argues convincingly that the traditional African societies also exerted forms of adaptation to their ways.

Contrary to the racially distorted view of the nineteenth century African worker, Atkins (1993:7) argues the 'most radical finding' she reached was that African men exhibited a

> set of patterned responses, guided by a body of corporate values and shaped by structural processes, that correlates closely with the constructed 'African work ethic'.

With the vantage of history she implicitly (and at times explicitly) offers an answer to the colonial problem; the white employers should have had more understanding of the social mores of the African people and more flexible in employing traditional customary practice in labour relations.

Unmasking racism is the task of the historian and social scientist. A thorough-going task is required to show the way in which theories and ideas often falsely portrayed as being based upon biological science, are built into the structure of social relationships. We have to explore the relationship between racist theory and social structure. The matter is complicated by the fact that in South Africa, racism was initially justified on the basis of biological determinism but later it was justified on *cultural* grounds—that black and white had fundamentally different cultures and that this justified a fundamental distinction in law, politics, and society. More than any other factor this has produced a curious scepticism towards culture, in a study of African cultural practices, and even traditional.

This approach involves more than a simple demystification of uncovering a motive for the racist attitudes; it also involves illustrating the link between the material struggle for the resources of land and the ideological formation of race and class.

Atkins does not follow this logic but sets out to show that racist ideas were in contradiction with the real interests of the white settlers, that the 'body' of racist formulations like the British flight of a strategy for their success. The main implicit argument is that there was a cultural misunderstanding based on whites not listening, and it is suggestive at times that the settlers could have used more appropriate labour management techniques.

Atkins in her introduction describes the Natal colonial obsession with labour shortages and the blame they placed on 'lazy Kaffirs' for their predicament. In approaching the question of the 'lazy Kafir' syndrome, the author first sets out to come to an understanding of the complex cultural milieu of Zulu people of the time. This is a considerable task which she attempts to accomplish through reference as far as possible to original texts. She then studies the urban context and argues that the relationships existing in the towns are deeply influenced by the culture of the African women.

While at no time does she engage in an extended discussion of the concept of culture, which Raymond Williams acknowledges as the most complicated word in the English language, it is clear that Atkins is referring to 'traditional' Zulu culture, which she often refers to as an 'ancient' inheritance. In presenting the context of labour in Natal she traverses to some degree or other the entire surface of the nature of Zulu society, a pre-African cultural practice (big men; authority, power and prestige and implicitly the acceptance of African women of the same goals in the domestic context), the reasons for refugees from Zululand, the sexual division of labour (a non-division as she argues), *lobola*, the temporal beliefs of the Zulu, etc. Once

Rex (1968:2) employs these concepts in his discussion of the destruction of the independent existence of the Khoi people

this is established, she then approaches the more modest and accessible chapters on rural labour and African work culture at the conclusion of the book. In establishing Zulu culture the balance of the book leans to the historic and rural, rather than the urban and civil in which social change is more evident.

2 A method for the study of madness?

In constructing the question of a settler employing class with an almost obsessive preoccupation with the 'Kafir' labour question, a number of alternative methodologies are offered by historians. One of these employed by Atkins (1993:82) is to assume that a distinctive type of black slave personality existed because of the frequency with which the 'Sambo' stereotype is portrayed in white literature on slavery. The question then is to explain how such an identity could come about: a stereotype is taken seriously because it would represent an identity within a given historical context, characterised by an extreme juxtaposition of coercive power and powerlessness. The same method could have been employed on the stereotype of the white colonists, imagined by African intransigence and showing all the characteristics of a taboo mentality – alternately panicky and then full of the arrogance of power.

Atkins favours a different method: she studies the validity of the white colonists' stereotype of the 'lazy Kafir' and leaves this paradigm to argue precisely the contrary: that the African people of Natal were industrious, hard-working, and were actually fully engaged in wage labour.

To demolish the stereotype of the 'lazy Kafir', Atkins (1993:6) follows a method of deconstructing the colonial texts, a strategy which she compares to that of a criminal attorney in defence of client whose case seems hopeless, but who believes that hostile witnesses would eventually betray themselves and provide crucial information. It is with this approach that she reads the diaries, memoirs, missionary accounts, and Zulu/English phrasebooks, and draws out the world of the African worker and even his portrait from the pen of the employer, missionary, and administrator.

Atkins announces a definite political perspective in the introduction: that she is writing a history for a black audience, a history that confronts the humanity of people of African descent. Far from 'being backward and disorganised', she argues, the African people

> arose from their first encounter with the white-dominated economy, reached within themselves and often beyond the white man or his own economic game' (Atkins 1993:7).

There are basically two sections to the book: in the first two chapters a survey of social conditions and an assertion of an African work ethic which contradicts the stereotype of the 'lazy Kafir' and includes a reassessment of traditional society to establish the nature of Zulu culture; and then original work on the social history of African labour in the town, in the last four chapters.

In writing this review I have found it necessary to start in the second section, skipping over the first and to return the substantive argument later in the review. In many ways this is an artificial separation as the question of work culture surfaces across the book and themes appear, disappear, and reappear again. On the other hand this approach helps keep a necessary balance in this review between appreciation of the text on its own terms practices and conflicts, and the necessary criticism of structure and logic.

3 Labouring in the town

The strength of the book is undoubtedly the fascinating accounts of misunderstandings, conflicts, and concordances between black worker and white master (and mistress) in a period before the cheap labour system took on its later rigid structure. In many ways, despite the oppressive regulations and the racism of the colonists, black labour was not particularly cheap by way of international comparison (in my study of the Rand workers I discovered that in the 1870s the black day labourers were not earning significantly less than London dockyard Black labour was expensive as well as was, as at times more expensive than white workers. In an incident quoted by Atkins a white newspaper columnist complained that black workers were demanding 2s instead of 1s for carrying parcels. Eventually a white worker was prepared to do the work for 1s

> We thought to ourselves that it must have indeed changed when a gentleman can be found to do work and labour of this kind for which he should be paid by a Kafir (Atkins 1993:104).

The wage relationship was fundamentally unequal, but it did not have the crude and despotic authority of later years. The detail that Atkins provides is often amusing with black workers cocking a snook at white employers and authority. There is the wry and irreverent humour of the African worker who is reported to have retorted in court that

> Overwork would never kill a Kafir, but not being paid for it might ... if overwork would kill a Kafir there would certainly be a great loss of life in the colony (Atkins 1993:95).

The book is full of many examples of fascinating insight and discoveries which reveal a much richer and more mature consciousness than previous histories revealed. As early as 1846 Durban workers were demonstrating their independence, and the colonists were concerned that Africans were becoming part of public opinion giving 'very intelligent attention to public [colonial] matters' and following closely the proceedings of the Kafir Labor Commission. It was even suggested that the publication of the official report should be repressed 'in order that the natives may not come to the knowledge of their own power' (Atkins 1993:103). There is evidence of workers reasoning about the relationship between the rise of wages and the imposition of a higher hut tax, and otherwise being knowledgeable about economic events. All this pushes back much further the question of an African worker consciousness, and authenticates the view that African workers could come to an understanding of their interests without the prompting of a white person.

From the beginning Atkins argues that the legislation of labour originated more from the practice of the workers themselves and the

> ... desire of masters, mines, etc., to get labour, by hook or by crook, as well as the collective bargaining skills of certain workers who were able to force their employers to double pay during the early migrant wage' rules of labour [sic] ... These first moves were Natal's Native Service Contract Regulation and Indentured Labour Ordinance (Atkins 1993:158).

But this is provided to support his statement, but it is also true that this resistance spurred the white rulers into counter-action of labour capture by legislation and despotic custody, a point which will be returned to below.

It was a strategy not just around the modern institution of trade union or through exhibiting many of its properties but around the existing material to hand, around the idea of hospitality or *ubuntu* which lay at the 'marrow of a mutual, self-conscious workingness other' (Atkins 1993:170). It was also a strategy of class action particular to the migrant situation in which in the words of van Onselen there was 'the pervasive influence of the rural economy on the character of resistance' (Atkins 1993:108). The 'independence of the African worker in inexplicable without an understanding of the coexistence of a relatively self-sufficient homestead economy and discontinuous participation in wage labour'.

It was the intention of the colonial authorities that the African worker should remain a migrant and not become a urban dweller. The early history of Durban which Atkins describes is one of shameful forced removals of Africans from lands around the chief town and the demolition of Inanda's Shepstone. The main concern was to remove Africans from centre for fear of uprising. The fact is both Inanda and Africans living around the Umlazi to Dr Adams mission station and the many hundreds in Reverend Grout's temporary village on the Umgeni were, it appears, eventually removed by command and in other cases eviction arrived as the land was sold to white settlers (Atkins 1993:159).

The fruitless circle which lasted well into the 1930s about a place for African people in Durban started surprisingly early. In December 1847 an African township was planned which would be two or three miles away from centre, and provide one acre each for 'the most intelligent and sufficiently advanced natives'. There would be a common cattle kraal, chapel and school; and Africans would be selected to manage own affairs. All this came to nothing as it was stated there was a 'lack of funds' (an explanation which Atkins does not dispute) and for that its establishment 'would lead to the formation of places of refuge for indolent vagrants' (Atkins 1993:158).

From the beginning, the African presence in the city, which probably outnumbered the white population in the 1850s, was impermanent, fragile, and constantly questioned. One of the unresolved questions in the labour relationship is precisely the existence of white employers on the impermanence of the African workforce, on migratory labour, while at the same time complaining that Africans were not prepared to work for long contracts; the 'lazy Kafir' argument is thus also a demand for a specific form

of wage labour – one not allowing for permanent escape but in the towns but demanding contracts with African men making annual returns to their rural homes.

This was the migrant order rule enforced on African people, but for a whole period the character of labour discipline was far from assured. In my thesis *Class Consciousness and Migrant workers. The Dock Workers of Durban*, I quote a colonist who captures the easy-going atmosphere of the early towns in the following description:

> The only fault in our Caffre [sic] labourers arose from their excessive gallantry for (I should observe) it is a native rule never to allow Caffre women to pass within sight without saluting them, or else ill-treating their mate, standing quite mute and motionless, while the girls survey them and pass on. Now it frequently happened that troops of girls came in from the Caffre kraals [sic] with maize, butter milk, eggs, wild fruit, sugar-cane, potatoes, &c., &c., for sale and, as no sooner did their sweet song reach the ears of our servants, than they rather more than their work just as they were ... (Mason 1953: 44).

This is a moment in history in which the colonists lade their fantasies and are caught up in the novelty of social experience in the colony. It is a moment of unestablished norms and social exploration.

Atkins chronicles the mutual adaptation of African people and white people to the evolution of a colonial labour relationship: a process which is uneven, contradictory, and yet ultimately resolved in favour of the colonist and employer. She stresses the domination of African values over those of the towns in the wage relationship, an important element in reassessing the balance in an assessment of the 'flow' of 'acculturation' between black and white.

But her text, and history itself, provides the data of European cultural practices becoming immediately attractive to African leadership and penetrating deeply into the independent African kingdom of Zululand.

> [W]hile Natal's black population may have been, relatively speaking, slow in converting to imported time practices, no corresponding level of resistance was shown toward the adoption of foreign currency (Atkins 1993:69).

Money was rapidly accepted as the medium of exchange as cattle were shown to be at times highly vulnerable to the diseases of colonisation. It also became, at a surprisingly early stage, the element of value in *lobola* settlements. The Inanda magistrate reported in 1857 that 'money is rapidly becoming the substitute medium in the purchase of wives; ten pounds sterling being the standard value of a damsel of average attraction', and that money was regarded as safer than cattle and saved until sickness passed (Atkins 1993:80).

The hopefulness of 1855 fastened appreciation of the utility of British sterling as a medium of exchange and convenient store of wealth: 'They say it is no use working for years for that which may die in a day'. Mpande, king of the Zulu, saw whites using coins as black people used cattle (Atkins 1993:66).

African society here is shown to be highly adaptable, not in the

direction of integration into the contemporary world economy, with the inevitable result (via the artillery of cheap commodities or conquest or both) of mercantilization of human relationships and the entry into the world of commodities through the 'Gate of Misery' (a category which Atkins eschews on her introduction – see Snell, forthcoming). But this is to anticipate a horrendous process which was not seen at that time to be inevitable by either side and a period in which the independent action of human beings as workers or employers had an important effect on the outcome.

Another aspect of Zulu cultural practice was revolutionised by workers overcoming custom (the belief that witches are abroad at night) and taking to the streets after working hours. A curfew was initially considered necessary by the white colonists since in African wards to a rule of repression and custom operated universally to keep unwilling Africans 'from being abroad after dark' but by the late 1850s loiterers and vagrants were evident. Possibly this is rationalised by African workers adopting the understanding noted by Mayer that witches are not present in cities. But in the absence of labour discipline and a public order apparatus to do it a curfew law was introduced in 1871 in Pietermaritzburg and 3 years later in Durban (Atkins 1993:93). There is a need to keep to colonial rule and capital's leading to the breaking of night/day connections (the division between day and night) and thus trying to re-assert these connections to limit the mobility and organisational capacity of the working class.

4 'The small matter of time'

Undoubtedly one of the greatest strengths of the book is the way in which Atkins deals with the question of how the conventions of time, that of the astronomical creation of African society built around the natural events of day and night, the waxing and warning of the moon, and the seasons on the one hand, and the imposition of a Western and capitalist notion of time – worship to a watch and calendar on the other. It is clear that this was a major issue in the regulation of the working day and working month which bedevilled the growth of an unambiguous work contract – labour. Like any commodity, is processes by peasants, and black and white bar 'separate portions' of the measure.

According to Atkins, the African workers showed resistant to the Western calendar, and she quotes a colonist who says:

> Our tribal illiterates in regulating the hours of labour have not yet been overcome, notwithstanding a half a century of experience acquired in prisons, gaolyards, or workshop rooms (Atkins 1993:87).

The long process of the rural dweller being turned from an independent being whose life is governed by natural events to one dominated by the mechanic-time of the clock, the wrenching around of 'common sense' notions of the sequence of daily life, had begun.

The misunderstandings between the migrant worker and colonial master over these questions were numerous. The colonists misunderstood the

word *inyaka* to be the 'year' but in Zulu the word refers to six 'moons' or a season. In African society there was no concept of year, the annual cycle was divided into two distinct seasons of six moons: *ihlobo* rainy or fertile season and *ebusika* the dry or winter season (Atkins 1993:83).

Atkins quotes a Magistrate who states 'it seems as if the Kafir was unable to [perceive] the idea of a longer embodiment term of service', and a relay method was at times adopted with the head of the homestead providing a continuous, circulating supply of labour (Atkins 1993:83).

The month also posed a problem as the lunar cycle did not correspond with the calendar month. In addition, the length of the working day was a matter for contention, whites wanted a regular number of hours throughout the year, while African workers were prepared to start work at four after sunrise and stop an hour before sunset. This was not a problem in the longer days of summer but in winter ordered employers were determined to get the same hours of work.

In addition the holidays, or breaks in time or routine, were markedly different. Africans celebrated the traditional holidays of the 'moon of the new season's fruits', *umasingana*, in March and April and it was a common practice in the next three or four months to withdraw to the kraals to help with the harvest and eat green mealies (Atkins 1993:89). Colonists had to learn to live with this cycle of African social life.

As Atkins reveals, the problem of seasonality bore particularly sharply on the operation of sugar production. The harvesting and milling were comes in winter, from June through September, when the hours of sunlight were limited. According to newspaper reports in the 1850s there were demands for work to continue day and night without interruption, for fear of the cane spoiling, and the planters felt it was 'absolutely necessary to obtain labor of a more settled and suitable character'. But Africans were opposed to night work and work in rainy weather and sugar mills closed for lack of labour (Atkins 1993:85).

The problem of the planters was not in the area of field work which fell in slack season – *ebusika*, when workers were plentiful, the problem was one of extension of work hours beyond the customary active work day in winter during the harvesting (Atkins 1993:86). Such was the sense that the work day was governed by the alternation of light and dark that in 1874, after an eclipse, the sugar workers insisted on being paid for a second day (Atkins 1993:87).

Atkins brings back to life Bryant's account of the establishment of the days of the week among Zulu people, and the sense that this arose from the seven day work regime laid down by the colonists and preacher by the church. In traditional Zulu society there was originally no division of time into seven day periods nor any day of rest. The naming of the days was a product of the employers' need to mark off the segments of the week and base of the chants of the migrant. Monday thus becomes *umsombuluko* 'the turning out to work day', and Saturday *umgqibelo* 'the completing day' and Sunday *isonto* or church day.

Fascinatingly this division of the month into weeks and the naming of days of the week penetrated into pre-conquest Zululand, as the time culture of the capitalist world in the period of Natal/Zululand frontier extended beyond its borders. This process was obviously uneven, although in another context missionaries managed to get Sunday observance agreed to in an astonishingly short period of time.

The towns became centres for the assertion of capitalist time, for negotiations mediated between the colony and the metropole. The activities of commerce and industry and the private activities of working people were dominated by the enforcement of time-swords to regulate the working day, in a world where few people carried watches and where time was not necessarily reliable. A public clock tower was established in Durban in 1866, all necessary signals which 'aided town workers in determining their temporal bearings' (Atkins 1993:87). The time signals did not have a general public service function, they were in a sense commands to work.

The psychological internalisation of capitalist time, the establishment of common norms between worker and employer around what wages should be apportioned, half took time: it is perhaps valid to say that many years would pass before the migrant population fully developed clock consciousness' (Atkins 1993:87). In the interregnum disputes over time flourished, in particular over payment of wages at the Zulu month end.

According to Atkins there were constant complaints by African workers of being cheated of two days' pay because they were not paid after four Sundays, six notches but sometimes only four notches for one day to tally with the decay of the moon. Some colonists argued that time disputes were 'the cause of Natal's labor crisis'. The *Masters and Native Servants Law No 49* of 1894 laid down an official calendar of twelve months with consecutive numbers of units of 30 days. Artisans were obliged to keep a daily book and paid when the notches numbered 30.

The title of the book *Our season is always Cash; ours is our money*, relates to the demand made during a strike in August 1860 when African workmen in an hotel 'like operatives in a factory' to demand their pay (Atkins 1993:146).

The arguments about time took a concrete rather than conceptual form in the towns, where labour-time was the measure of human activity and the basis for its reward. Through the 'process of defining time' and through struggle Africans gained a new sense of unity with disputes centering around weekend and Sunday rest.

While there was resistance to the idea of maintaining a regular working day irrespective of the season and to being paid at the calendar month end, the attitude of workers to the Sunday rest day and to public holidays was rather different. The dock *togt* workers succeeded in the institution of a Saturday half-day by merchants in 1856 by striking to demand the same conditions, and this was eventually conceded on the basis that daily workers were entitled to follow town custom (Atkins 1993:90).

This court decision was in the interests of the workers: most were not. It was generally agreed by contemporaries who were not liberal that the

courts, staffed by whites unapologetically sympathetic to employers, did not do justice to African people. Nevertheless, according to sources quoted by Atkins, the workers more often than not initiated legal action against employers, despite the very evident bias of the courts.

5 The *togt* phenomenon

One of the most significant developments in the colonial labour market was the rise of *togt* or daily labour. Nothing was more calculated to raise the fury of the employer and administrator than the spread of day labour from the docks to other sectors of employment in the 1850s and particularly in the mid-1870s. Atkins chronicles now the phenomenon had its rural as well as urban side, as sugar estate workers demanded to be paid daily in the 1860s.

Women workers on the white farms seem to have been seeking daily labour, but it is in the cities that the controversy raged, and the official response marked a turning point in the evolution of African 'labour traditions' in Natal. Prefiguring what was to come, in 1869 the *Natal Mercury* called the practice of day labour 'vicious and disorganizing' and blamed employers taking them on for 'inculcating an irregular disposition amongst a population that needs ... to be inoculated with ideas of fixed organization' (Atkins 1993:106).

Atkins describes the variety of occupations which could be clustered as *togt* work: washermen (blamed by colonists for 'popularising the idea of day labour'), bricklayers, wood suppliers, and the dockworkers themselves: fishermen transporting cargo on barges from ships at sea to the inner harbour, hawkers, stevedores and wharf workers.

In the view of this reviewer the discussion of *togt* labour is unfortunately rather confused. After examining the various possible origins of the word (such as being derived from 'dock') Atkins adopts the view that it 'pertains to a trip or journey'. In her note 41 on page 107, she takes the advice of Dr Hauptfleish that *togt* is an 'obsolete form of the modern Afrikaans word *reg*, a journey, trip, moving from one place to another ...'. The form *togt* is still used in South African English combinations such as *togt labour* and *togt labourer* = casual or day labour(er). But she stresses the stated original obsolete meaning rather than its common usage.

> Thus the word *togt* seems to refer neither to a time unit nor a work task, rather it denotes a unit of movement (Atkins 1993:107 – emphasis added).

The problem is that this does not solve the problem, it rather adds difficulties which were never there before. The term *togt* (or more usually *tokeit*) is still in use today as meaning day labour as in the words addressed to a potential employer, *Ufuna tokeit* (I want work for the day). Most of the poor workers then and now are not itinerants: the washermen and dockers of the nineteenth century had a trade, and the idea of constant mobility, presumably from one job to another and from one place to another, is missing then and now.

Atkins states that

> [t]his definition [i.e. monetary] ignores the notion that contracts can be broken such easily with days' work and allows us to extend it to include ... a variety of other arrangements. Atkins 1993:125)

However, the sense of day labour- which is the only concrete denominator of the activities discussed - does the same.

6 The brothers in the kitchen?

The rise of togt labour has to be considered in relation to the overall development of African workers' culture in the towns, and in particular the relation of migrant to togt workers. As Atkins (1993:120) explains, the Master and Servants Act laid down that food and accommodation had to be provided during the contract. No such provision was made for daily workers and therefore it was never anticipated that daily work would spread as it did in the 1910s. Atkins argues that out of the practical arrangements workers made for food and shelter, associations and solidarity (or 'brotherhoods') grew, and as early as 1856 there was a Durban solidarity for African workers to lay down the minimum wage that Africans could accept.

Migrant workers were

> a mobile, self-fed, land and riverbank proletariat; however, they had recourse to rights at periods of behaviour to which they expected their employer and their fellow workers to conform. Atkins 1993:127).

In the early workhouses in the nineteenth century servants worked during the day, and slept at night. During their leisure time this was the only place to entertain visitors, family members and friends. Atkins argues that the lack of accommodation and hospitality of the whites' 'huts' have seemed extraordinarily unnatural to anyone accustomed to the notion of *idlozwe*' (Atkins 1993:130), and she finds evidence of Africans approaching the mayor's wife for support and camp abusive language when refused (Atkins 1993:121).[2]

The argument is well rounded, but invites a much wider debate about domestic housekeeping, segregation in the white household, and the question of African housing in the towns.

African workers were sociable and shared the togt and the day abattoir must have tried to find someone in monthly employ and sought close or other material attachments to share food and comforts. Atkins describes the rise of 'kitchen associations' in groups of African workers which seemed to have followed a strategy whereby 'if one of them found a job, he provided access for the others to food and shelter. She describes a 'gracious repast' for the group being protected from rumours for domestic servants (Atkins 1993:120).

While colonists denounced this 'sponging system' as petty thievery but it became near universal in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In getting a job a worker also demanded the right of hospitality to 'forbidden guests' and if denied, a master found himself without servants. The ever reactionary *Natal Mercury* complained:

> The crime of 'sociation is indeed one of the largest and most gigantic proportions that we know of. Any attempt to put them in order is a personal injury (in Atkins 1993:127)

There were reports of groups of workers pelting at night, shouting and brandishing knobkieries at imaginary foes, smoking dagga, and destroying *mealies*. The affairs of the day (Atkins 1993:124). But the tradition of hospitality also had its monetarised aspect and also incorporated 'the spirit of profit' as monthly workers seemed to have demanded payment for accommodation and food. Despite this Atkins argues that through the kitchen associations workers maintained housing networks, and that these were also a breeding ground for new ideas (Atkins 1993:121).

Invariably the criticism of the 'sponging system' comes of the togt worker. As Alexander the Superintendent of Police complained:

> A togt kaffir runs on boiling water to work with a tin canteen during the hours of labour by law, in addition to his food he receives tea and sugar to cook it for him, which the employer finds by agreement (Atkins 1993:125).

In taking up the criticism of colonists of the 'unpoetic singing and incitement' at gatherings around the pot, Atkins suggests that the songs were probably versions of *izibongo* praise poems sung in an 'aggressive, rallying' way, composed to spread praise or derogatory ridicule on employers. Students of *izibongo* discuss how poetic licence allowed social criticism to be woven into their structures.

Surprisingly Atkins doesn't mention the associated practice which appears in colonial texts and which is still very evident today, the naming of employers by African workers using nicknames are coupled which are usually acutely accurate, amusing, and irreverent.

The portrait she presents is of elders among the workers having the labour market almost entirely under their control. These 'brotherhoods' in Atkins' analysis, operated much like modern labour unions; providing mutual support and protection.

> Like later unions, the associations were an ambiguous gathering to work stoppage by the availability of jobs and the unreliability of workers to workers and masters .... Retained workers, out of togt earnings, kept observation, and a developed network of informants collected facts on labour market trends and gain of new workers into synagogue positions of employment, with a steering or unwary away from strike action to preserve the reputation (Atkins 1993: 98).

In this colonial development, she is guided by the points made by colonists and carried in newspaper reports, but the more elaborate event is that of an 'institutionised', the suggestion that workers took the institution of the *izibongo* and adapted it to the modern labour strategy in the nineteenth century, it has to be said, is an act of imagination. Its existence beyond prejudices of workers defining 'custom and practice' can only be uncovered by building on the incidents which were reported through the eyes of the colonists themselves.

Nevertheless these incidents are certainly vivid and the colonists

2 In the twentieth century they were removed to the slums or other squalid dormitories, now commonly the 'Cramer Days'.

themselves terminate the solidarity among the workers to 'regular trade unions'. In practice the role of 'brotherhoods' seem to be more that of 'social or initiation' societies attempting to control conditions in a specific locale. This is illustrated by the following quotation from the Superintendent of Police in response to Africans 'buying in the cheap Boers' goods across the border:

> There was a regular trade union among the Kaffir boys in the said cities [Pietermaritzburg and Durban] and if it was learnt that a master was paying his boys anything up to 5 more or less than others the other boys refused on a system of strike and intimidation (Atkins 1993: 27).

The reference to 'kids' seems to imply that this was a control system of the younger workers, although this tends to upset the view Atkins puts forward of older workers striving for power over the labour market.

Although Atkins provides evidence from the 1850s, significantly the 'brotherhood' phenomenon appears both in Pietermaritzburg and Durban in the 1880s. These practices are suggested to be existing and permanent, but how useful are these associations formed during the particularly favourable market situations.

This point raises a general problem with the text. One of the intrinsic difficulties in writing a vast cultural history is that of providing a clear chronology of events and practices to permit the understanding of trends, of early or mature practices, or a sketch of cultural *development*. A first reading of the book does not reveal these difficulties, but a close reading, unravelled by an accurate timeline often throws up awkward juxtapositions and 'readings backwards' from the more recent to the past. For example Atkins argues that 'established practice' was to exclude young Africans and 'keep to the ranks only those boys who were obliged by their parents to work' (Atkins 1993:91).

This seems to accord with the division of Zulu society into age groupings, which Atkins argues is carried over into the towns and into access to occupations, but the practice was *abandoned* and came from the twentieth century (Atkins refers to the file of the Chief Native Commissioner, dated 5 July 1911). The authorities may, of course, have wanted to put their stamp on an existing practice to administer the labour market and to ensure labour for the white households. But significantly the age of cargo handlers and porters 'on the beach' (i.e. *togt* workers who were allegedly part of a privileged strata) is estimated in the 1850s and 1870s to have been between 15 and 25 years (Atkins 1993:65). Did conditions change, or was the predominance of older workers in the more prestigious occupations not well established, but an generalisation of the authorities? A clear chronology would lay the basis for con-textualising the cultural practices against the backdrop of the economy in boom or slump or against other conditions. Interestingly the 1904 census reveals that the number of African male workers aged over 40 (about the age of majority in pre-conquest Zulu society) in Durban was smaller than males

paid, just over 1 000, and as a proportion of the total, just under 7 percent. Probably the distinction between occupations workers was not closely related to traditional categories but to a wider sense of maturity and youth.

Whatever the case, the workers' ability to 'punish through words' is clearly demonstrated and provides a fascinating insight into the setting of work and pay norms in the colonial town.

7 Cultural action and violence

The world which Atkins describes is one of African worker initiative in a variety of social exchanges (often based around traditional values and conceptions), in associations, hospitality, and united social action. Human agency in the Natal towns of the nineteenth century is vividly portrayed. But this extended range of freedom of action and dominance of the cheapening of their labour limited the operation of capital. Wages are small, and the political strategy of developing Natal as a colony of white settlement.

In fact for Natal the limit to colonial action against the African people, the constraint on squeezing them into ever smaller locations and raising the extent of economic coercion to labour through taxes, was set by the fear of armed retaliation from Natal Africans and war with a formidable military power across the border. Shepstone is quoted shortly before the British invasion of Zululand as stating:

> Cetshwayo is the secret hope of every ... independent chief, headmen of tribes from him, who feels a desire that his colour should prevail, and I will not be until this power is destroyed that they will make up their minds to submit to the rule of civilisation' (see Etherington 1989:187).

African initiative stood in the shadow of an impasse in state power. But as the colonial economy improved, white migration slowly resulted in a larger white population, and as the infrastructure extended, so did the ability of capital to exercise its power over labour.

The turning point was marked in 1873 as I noted in my thesis (see Hemson 1980), and as Atkins confirms. The relatively free play of market forces in which African initiative flourished was first challenged by the importation of a more subservient workforce (Indian indentured labour) and increasingly squeezed by the structural restraints of taxes, bureaucracy, and the police and army. Indeed from the embryo of *ad hoc* responses to the freedom of action of African workers I trace the origins of a repressive labour bureaucracy which gradually seized the ground of urban labour and built an edifice of controls and oppression over the lives of African people.

African initiative was fused by the constraints of structures ingeniously financed from the very taxes of the oppressed. As freedom of cultural action in the cities widened to form the basis of a colonial civil society, the authorities responded with ever increasing intolerance and force. The apparatus of control was all paid for by African workers out of registration fees and fines. From this intersection of the African worker and colonial

3. Calculated from data in Hemson (1981:58).

administrator chose the "pragmatic" path of urban segregation on the basis that the city belonged to the whites and that all Africans in the city were there to provide labour for the whites. A corrosive class struggle was set in motion to curb and control African social energies which made an important contribution to the unusual totalitarian structure of labour and political controls in the high apartheid era.

A number of social theorists have noticed the fact that even while capitalism "frees" its workers from the labour market (see Giddens 1981) but the entire development in Natal and South Africa has generally, until fairly recently, been in the opposite direction. This central development in South African society has been the dominant ground of theoretical discussion for the whole period of the relationship between racial oppression and class exploitation, and the matter is by no means at rest.

Suffice to say that all which went to form the establishment of an apparatus of control over African people was in the nature of a preparation and a pleasant diversion. From the 1870s the racial legislation aiming at more systematic class exploitation piled up. First there was the vagrancy law in October 1873 which prohibited the employment of African people between 9 pm and 5 am. Then there was the *Natal Native Code* of Theophilus Shepstone and the *1874 Togt Rules and Regulations* where Atkins describes as a

> [g]reat decisive milestone in the creation of African labour [...] [It] went considerably out of its way to "fix" the worker (Atkins 1990:133).

The *togt* regulations aimed to prevent formation of "combinations" and also made it "[o]ffence" for an African who was allowed to live in a Natal borough unless he was a proprietor, a tenant or a monthly worker. By forcing the badge of *togt* an African was given five days to obtain employment. If one failed to register a worker had to wear the *togt* badge, and had to accept the next job. Contraventions could result in a fine, imprisonment or both and the worker could be banished from town. The "instrument," whose history Atkins is the first to bring to light, had special badges (Atkins 1990:133).

Significantly the *togt* workers saw the hidden hand of a "secret power" not previously in existence behind this "uniform" and protested. Over the next many years around the system, but the "secret power" of a state deeply antagonistic to the interests of African workers was creeping into the countryside.

Atkins expresses a somewhat ambivalent attitude to this repressive regulation, commenting that *togt* labour procedures were a reminder of the system of forced labour, but also expressing some sympathy for a colonist who "sensibly pointed out" the need for different badges for different occupations and the need to limit the number of licences issued (Atkins 1990:133). This comment seems to indicate a lack of recognition of the

> 6. Atkins's contribution is not to take up my argument (see Hemson 1981) that there is a necessity to historicise the class expression of African workers and the formation of the class itself. Urban symbolic systems (1976:206-209) are the first indication of changes in the early development of the ideologies of identity for Indian workers in Natal.

fundamentally oppressive nature of the law and the ideological basis behind it. The *togt* regulations were more than an attempt to regulate casual labour in the manner of town councils in Britain and the United States; they were a foundation on which the edifice of apartheid structures would be built in Natal.

The view of dynamic relations between blacks and state, with the initiative in the hands of the African workers is, unfortunately, somewhat deceptive. The repressive legislative and administrative apparatus existing in embryo before the turn of the century was accumulating a capacity for extraordinary oppression of the African worker. A migratory labour system evolved which is regarded by some as more cruelly and destructively efficient than slavery.

8 A 'Lazy Kaffir' in Natal?

This book is in many ways a celebration of traditional Zulu culture and its deployment against the ruthless capitalist system imposed by whites; a culture of resistance grows which is based on traditional culture. This is its strength and its limit because in the last analysis a working class culture has to be in its essence a radical revolt against the authority of tradition.

The core argument of the book is rigorously expressed and supported by evidence; Atkins argues that the "lazy Kaffir" stereotype was one of white colonists' racial misunderstanding of African society and did not reflect the real social relations of the time. In reviewing the literature, Atkins found that the labour complaints of the settlers did not ring true but were characterised by a "surreal quality"

> [A]t the heart of the prolonged labor crisis was an invented fallacy, an idea extracted out of the imagination of the European elite to fit its matrix of perceptions. That is to say, whites created the "lazy kaffir" before [sic] ever encountering real [...] Racial chauvinism [...] was one leading cause of the countless failures of Natal's colonial labor schemes.

From her argument the white colonists appear trapped in a false consciousness, unaware that African labour was available and ready to work for them under different conditions. Atkins identifies the belief in the "laziness" of the native as an essential characteristic of colonialism. It is easy to see to what extent this description is useful. It occupies an important place in the dialectics existing the colonizer and tormenting the colonized. Furthermore, it is economically fruitful" (Memmi 1990:145). What has to be established is what specificity there is to Natal colonialism which led to such obsession.

What is certainly true is that the African worker could readily perceive in the longer wage contract the humiliation, subordination and indeed slavery of capital accumulation; that an unequal exchange was taking place between sale of labour power and receipt of the wage in the settler capitalist economy

> 7. Part of the novelty of the book is Atkins' unapologetic and "correct" evaluation of "Kaffir" from the colonial texts.

labour in land and entrepreneurship through wage labour. Labour is power over individuals.

Originally Zulus considered it a disgrace to work for whites; in their use of 'Kafir', *ukugqila*, they referred to the Natal Africans labouring under the yoke of whites who were their conquerors. As members of an independent African kingdom, they had no reverence or awe of white men (Atkins 1977:71).

A critical issue, which surprisingly is not developed in Atkins' survey of Zulu culture, since she is making a study of work relationships, is the existence of degrading and servile labour among the Zulu and Natal Africans. The word *isicoboti* refers to work which is of a humiliating and degrading kind, connoting the nature of a footman or a personal servant such as one paid to 'fetch and carry' another's cattle. This servant has to do anything the employer orders him to do, the work is not specific 'not properly organised' (in the words of a Zulu informant). Such servile labour within the family existed where the only reward is the eventual entitlement to one or more of the master's cattle. The issue here is whether in Zulu society there was a tradition of wage labour or not: apparently there is such a notion of degrading labour and an inherent resistance to it.

The issue is somewhat contested as some argue that the term *isicoboti* arose only with the rise of mission stations and new forms of subordination, and the matter needs further study. My informant mentions a number of forms of servile labour which were accompanied by intense feelings of inferiority, subordination and thwarted ambition.

If one pre-supposes Zulu view the Natal Africans as underlings and servants, surely these feelings must also have been harboured by the Natal Africans themselves?

There is considerable evidence, also mentioned in Atkins, that African workers were seeking an alternative relationship to the wage contract which terminated any social obligation on the side of the white employer. To some extent this was filled by the Shepstonian system of paternalism and reinforcement of the tribe, but only by creating vastly complex problems for the future. At one point Atkins mentions that white employers were seen as chiefs (Atkins 1993:76), this is precisely the point I am emphasising that a very substantial cultural-political form of servitude (termed by sociologists the extra-contractual aspect) was part of the wage relationship.

Hannah Arendt (1959:73ff) proposes a distinction between labour and work and argues that every European language contains two etymologically unrelated words for the same activity; one denoting a craftsman and one referring to those who, like 'slaves and tame animals with their bodies minister to the necessities of life'. She argues that the passionate striving for freedom necessarily involves contempt for labouring. Among the Greeks a prime distinction was made between slaves or vanquished enemies who worked in the victor's household, and workmen 'who moved freely outside the private realm and within the public' who could be admitted to citizenship.

This distinction carries conviction in the colonial context and a failure

to distinguish labour and work, in part the dimension between free and unfree labour, makes no account of the extra-contractual nature of colonial labour problematic. The Zulu saw work for the white colonist in a sense as slave labour (of the type in some ways parallel to that of the Greeks employing their vanquished). African people still see (to a lesser or greater extent) in the wage relationship a term of slavery, and the matter needs to be further explored.

Although there is a discussion of the operation of the laws governing the distribution of refugees from Zululand (Chanock 11), Atkins (1) not quite sketches a composite view of the labour market in Natal. At one level this is not necessary, as she is focusing on the question of culture and using the argument that culture determines the pattern of labour relations. The problem arises, however, firstly in understanding why the colonial government decided to bring in indentured Indian labour, and secondly in assessing the division of labour particularly in the white household. Atkins, unfortunately, largely ignores the evidence to the Indian Commissions, and avoids the huge corpus of documents and statistics on labour shortages in the Natal Archives.

The colonial labour market was structured on the following dualities which often overlaid each other in a complex arrangement of class, race and gender:

White labour generally excluded from work	'Kaffir work' using assistants, supervise, discipline, service and expenditure of raw muscle power
Free labour consideration around the identity of being white and a citizen	Unfree labour being Black and subject
African male wage labour for the white employer	Reproduction of *umuzi* sustained by African women's labour
Wage labour	Monthly employer
Men's work	Women's work
Work for yourself as peasant	Work for others e.g. labourer

Atkins is at pains to question the distinction between male and female labour in traditional society, to show that under certain conditions men perform the work bracketed as 'women's work'. She demonstrates that under certain conditions boys were also involved in child rearing, drawing water, fetching wood; and that Shaka as a boy was made to thresh millet. In reviewing the literature she concludes:

> There are no objections to gender relations in the above-mentioned tasks however, is there a division of labour that fell within the purview of women's work (Atkins 1993:67).

At this point she seems to be *discovering any gender division of labour in Zulu*

worker and *citizen* instead *generational* divisions among males. This begs the question of any gender specific labour undertaken by women.

There can be no doubt that there were strong generational divisions where 'seniority was the very essence of social interaction', but the argument appears to be made in retrospect from the urban context and arises from the fact that the division of labour and other cultural practices in the towns are 'carried over' from the rural areas, and were not imposed by the white settlers.

She argues, for instance, that a problematic aspect of the labour market was that Africans were given work that 'degraded their rank' and insulted them (Atkins 1993:68).[6]

Crucial to her argument that African traditions were carried over into the towns is that there is a direct link between the *femmes* who undertook hide or skin dressing and the washermen who emerged in nineteenth century colonial Natal. She argues that the 'guild' was adapted to men, the European need so 'they could enjoy a continuance similar to that attached to their traditional roles' (Atkins 1993:69). This elaborate argument appears necessary to deny that African men in town were doing 'female' labour.

Atkins appears to be dissolving all gendered labour distinctions in Zulu society, in response to the European thinking that washing clothes was an 'unmanly' profession (Atkins 1993:114). If African cultural determinist views pertained to the towns as she argues, how could men be employed as the European intended in the 'female' tasks of washing clothes, cooking, maid wearing, cleaning, etc.? She answers this dilemma in three ways: by arguing that there was no distinct gender division of labour in Zulu society, that age divisions were paramount, and that younger men did this work as they were at times required to do traditionally, and that occupations such as washermen were 'carried over' from traditional practices.

While the dissolving of Zulu social practices has to be corrected, established views read with contemporary questions in mind, and conventional notions undermined (I, for instance, was cared for—for a time—as a boy with great kindness and concern by an old African man) these explanations fail to account for many of the dynamic sides and peculiarities of colonial labour market.

A prime distinction has, it is argued, to be made between the traditional mode of production in the *umuzi* and wage labour: this distinction became increasingly that of 'female' and 'male' labour. Bozzoli argues that the tribe was not entirely destroyed because of the resilience of the women who took over male activities. The position of the black woman on the farm was in one sense strengthened by migrant labour as a 'more self sufficient female world' became possible when the men were absent (Bozzoli 1983:162).

6. I would argue that humiliation was integral to the wage contract, but that the objection to 'inappropriate labour' could be in men defensive of their domain for male workers (i.e. as in shops). Many domestic workers would leave the kind of work and poverty in which the family members of the contributing men are. In addition to the contradictions in the use of male labour because of employment apparently for the creation of women's dependence and a fully proletarianised.

In her view the world of the African men became increasingly that of wage labour, and African women were vigorously excluded from urban wage labour through patriarchal controls consciously reinforced by the colonial state. Once the prime distinction has been made between the *umuzi* and the town, then the apparent contradictions between gender typologies of labour are of secondary consequence. The conclusion has to be that traditional Zulu culture, while important to the development of the wage relationship (also in many ways only hinted at by Atkins e.g. in particular forms of paternalism) could not be decisive in setting the basis for gendered divisions of labour in the white household. Women were simply not in the towns in nineteenth century Natal, a very important point which is undeveloped in the book. The colonial authorities were determined that they should remain on the land to preserve the family on the land and stem the pressure of African urbanisation. But there were important contradictions in white consciousness: seeing the utility of employing African women, but fearing the consequences.

The domestic division of labour in the settler household thus results from the overall setting of the political economy. But it is also important to note from a socio-cultural perspective that the tasks involves in maintaining the white household were considerably different from those of the African *umuzi*: cooking, house cleaning, etc. for Europeans was a *different* skill from those learnt in African society.

This point is strongly reinforced in studies of domestic labour in other African contexts where often male domestic labour still predominates. In European domestic ideology, it is argued at one level, that of African women's sexuality takes precedence over the gender-specific nature of the tasks.

> African women would remain in their own domestic domain, while African men would enter that of Europeans to work for wages. For European domestic duties, [it] became the African's wider social sphere (Schmidt 1992:264).

Men undertaking domestic labour exist of ability to learn fast, and see the workplace carrying different conventions at variance with those of their upbringing. In one sense it is a different situation, demanding a response to which they were prepared to adapt in order to survive'. As one male domestic argues: 'At home all that is done by our mothers. But I didn't feel bad doing it—I wanted to learn so that I could earn some money' (Mujo 1992:254).

In a wider context, that of South East Asia, one have to struggle to take on the apparent gender qualification of being 'docile' and 'docile', and some argue that this involves gender subordination. But Mujo (1992:258) argues that men can learn this as the 'do', and that 'class domination is sufficient in itself'.

Skills and ideologies carried into the workplace, she argues, are not a sufficient explanation of gender segregation in the workforce.

> Prior market skills and ideologies are not transferred unproblematically to the wage sector, though they may sometimes be appropriate. In the case of

> domestic servant, what work they do, work is not simply an extension of their domestic role, because domestic labor is transformed by the forms in which it is carried out. The skills and attitudes appropriate to the wage situation are a product of the structure of relationships (power, hierarchy, solidarity) in the workplace itself, and the form of articulation of processes of gender socialization, especially when the material basis of such socialization is masked by class (and other) distinctions (Moore 1992:958).

The predominance of male migrant labour in African society is thus seen by social scientists today as an aspect of the continuing patriarchal order of those societies only when other ways opportunities open up for men as women move into 'domestic' labour. They also show that the domestic context is profoundly contradictory: men struggling to maintain employment in 'female' occupations, and contradictory responses being made by employers and the state.

This raises a number of interesting issues: at one time settlers viewed the town carrying 'pass' for the male workers. The absence of any mention of this in the book demands some explanation prior to the issue. Is it simply one of construction in the early 1900s. Did the pressure just fade away or were there specific powers given to suppress the movement of women to the towns and the drinking of beer among workers?

9 Culture or political economy?

The discussion of the household economy raises a necessary discussion about the polarisation of approaches and paradigms in Atkins' writing. To a large extent this operates as a screen, with the sharpest comments being relegated to footnotes, but a close reading reveals another methodology from that of the Natal lawyer interrogating the Natal colonist. While quoting generously from colonial texts, Atkins is extraordinarily reluctant to give any credence to the radical historians who place capitalist relationships and exploitation at the centre of their analysis. These scholars, termed 'revisionists' by their opponents for 'revising' South African history and placing class rather than race at the centre of South African reality, are generally ignored or referred to in minor footnotes. Not incidentally many of them are white, male, and influenced by Marxism.

She waves in passing at these 'revisionist' historians, some of whom she argues reproduce the 'lazy Kafir' argument by claiming that African workers did not turn out to work for the whites until forced to do so. She goes so far as to argue that the revisionist historians are gripped by the 'lazy Kafir' parody which has a 'surprisingly tenacious and pervasive unconscious hold even on the new crop of neo-liberal South African writers' (Atkins 1993:54). This is an extraordinary statement, bordering on an accusation of racism, yet she does not substantiate her argument beyond a reference to Slater's statement that by the mid-1850s the 'impoverishment of the Natal African population had not proceeded to the extent that they would voluntarily enter labour relationships'.

Atkins' Afrocentric methodology involves asserting a new paradigm by largely ignoring critical historiography, and creating an account of work practices and general socio-historical processes from the texts of the original colonists and ethnographers. The international school of social change and political economy which places the cultural and social practices of wage labour in the context of the universal processes of proletarianisation and capital accumulation (in England, Latin America, Africa, etc.) is not confronted but largely ignored and slighted when touched on.

In short, a sharp contrast can be seen between Atkins' cultural studies and the analysis of social historians who employ the concept of proletarianisation and mode of production and include the racist and figures of employment, production, and labour repressive measures. At times culture appears to be used to reject a materialist approach. Of course a colonial setting is a fruitful one for every imaginable misunderstanding, but the question is what emphasis to give to 'their attitudes' and practices and to violence, the ruthless pressure of poverty, and landlessness in a reserve-ised environment.

In a sense it could be argued that in trying to develop an Afrocentric method, it is justifiable to put away views which possess contradictory theories to simplify a line of argument. But it does expose Atkins to a number of weaknesses which have to be confronted. Not least among them is the question raised and thoroughly developed by Colin Bundy (1988:n) and other scholars that African people responded positively to the development of market relationships in early Natal *by becoming peasants*, that is, by expanding the existing homestead production, and by introducing new crops and other forms of economic activity such as transport operations. This is one source of economic initiative *independent of settler control* on the part of Africans which is passed over, and yet is crucial to an understanding of the alternatives faced by African people in nineteenth century Natal.

Bundy, in a sense, presents his own critique of the 'lazy Kafir' stereotype of Africans who were described by a leading colonist as:

> simple and barbarous barbarians who ought to be ruled by a vigorous and critical hand exercise of authority, into habits of industry and peace. Like all barbarians, they are constitutionally indolent and averse to labour (see Bundy 1988:166).

He demonstrates that this section of the African population gave severe competition in agriculture to the white farmers and were only defeated through support of white agriculture. Significantly the labour supply was adversely affected. A magistrate in Umgeni complained in the 1850s of the African labour supply

> has year by year become more inadequate as the Natives became richer, and yearly cultivate a large acreage with the plough, besides engaging in transport using on their own account four hundred (688:176).

Atkins says nothing about the political economy in the wider sense, the grand sense of money and profit, whites becoming rich, the origin of African

6. See especially Chapter 6 'Natal: Variations Upon a Theme'

marginalisation and the integration of colonial Natal with the world economy. But without some sense of a black proletariat in the making, of uneven development, and contradictions the central argument of the book, that African men responded readily to the opportunity to engage in wage labour, does not find sufficient support. The debate extends largely on a reading of the racism of the white mind although, surprisingly, even this crucial theme is not well supported by references.

Whites are presented as of a uniform mind, except for a small group of planters favouring African rather than Indian workers. William Campbell, for instance, strongly opposed the introduction of Indian indentured labour and used nothing but local African labour, and his sons carried on the same tradition at Mtunzini. Natal Sugar Estate (Atkins 1993:158n). There were actually different strands of opinion relating to different dominant class interests in Natal, for instance, between sporadically farmer and planter, which received constant adjudication.[2]

Atkins is unfortunately rather unclear on her argument and this makes an assessment of her work and criticisms of others more difficult. On the controversial question of the 'lazy Kafir' stereotype and the real circumstances of the time she presents a number of differing and contradictory views. At times there is a real labour crisis in Natal (Atkins 1993:9) and the response of Africans to wage labour is indifferent:

> Varying reports speak of 10% rise [1857] in wages of native artificers trying to the works, because funds were unavailable to harvest them (Atkins 1993:63).

and in a discussion of price rates,

> But despite such efforts to increase efficiency and retain labor in the market, the response of Natal Africans was negligible (Atkins 1993:86).

and cultural practices:

> ... [sic] ramshackle blow at the beer supply (Atkins 1993:66).

at another time there is not a labour crisis:

> The determination overwhelmingly suggests that Africans were offering their services for hire in very great numbers (Atkins 1993:51).

and there were:

> ... [sic] numerous advertisements of labor during this period (Atkins 1993:100)

and:

> ... one explanation that can not summarily dismissed as nonsense is the rumor that were out to work for white people (Atkins 1993:105).

and,

> A curious irony is that the 'lazy Kafir' myth developed in Natal at a time when Africans were dramatically responding to the commercial economy (Atkins 1993:78).

This issue is not only the 'lazy Kafir' stereotype which exists at the psychological depths of the settlers' consciousness but also the common view that African males were (surely not unreasonably) loath to work in the blazing heat, losing more than a gallon of sweat a day, for at least 12 hours a day, seven days a week, when they had women to till the land, cattle to accumulate and the possibility of working on their own account, when in fact considerable vitality still in the *umuzi* (homestead), as a *peasantry*. Atkins attempts to fuse these two views into the 'lazy Kafir' syndrome when in fact they are logically distinct and only a desire to prematurely assign a Protestant work ethic to African tribesmen could lead to conflating the second view.

Atkins considers Slater's view that divisions among the whites and alternative economic activities to wage labour strengthened the African community, but declines to assess "whether the argument is valid or not". She argues that it is "irrelevant for understanding the core pattern of cultural richness underlying Natal's chronic labor shortage" (Atkins 1993:101). A sharper contrast between the 'new cultural history' and critical historians could not be imagined: she refuses to pass judgement on the material issues and declares them irrelevant to an assessment of workers' culture.

But what is Atkins losing in ignoring the questions of the political economy? What is missing is a sense of proportion in the weighing up of alternative strategies of African initiative (i.e. the contrast between workers and peasants) and the not insignificant question of another proof of the African contribution to colonial development. Max Weber remarks somewhere that colonialism relies on some form of fiscal operation, in short that colonial peoples have to pay for the oppressive apparatus erected over them. In Natal not only the Africans pay an ever increasing amount of taxes and duties, but these taxes *paid for almost the whole government of Natal*. In 1872 as much as 73% of all revenue was derived from African people and this paid for white education, roads, the armed forces, the salaries of government officials, etc. Africans had to pay hut tax, for the registration of marriages and duties on goods exclusively used by Africans: cotton and woollen blankets, 'Kaffir' picks and hoes, beads, and coarse tobacco.

> ... when the decision was made to import Indian labour for sugar plantations, the new schedule of tariff charges was known as the 'Coolie tariff'. African workers thus contributed largely to the cost of the importation of their competitors on the labour market (Etherington 1989:134).

Without some understanding of these extraordinary arrangements it might be possible to accept the argument of 'lack of funds' to lay out an African township in Durban in 1847. As it was the white colonists who profited fabulously from the taxation of the African family and reproduction, a fact which provides a crushing refutation of the 'lazy Kafir' argument.

In short, as Etherington points out, while Africans suffered taxation

2. These conflicting interests are partly taken up in the section (1993:176).

without representation, while whites enjoyed representation virtually without taxation (Posel 1991:16). These are the political and economic realities the social environment in which colonial culture, a culture of work and of European paternalism, took shape.

10 What form of cultural politics?

Probably at no time in twentieth century history has South Africa been such controversies in notions of culture and tradition as it does now. Subterranean currents stream to the surface, new and challenging trends emerge in a Rainbow spectrum, only to be accompanied by developments of the greatest cruelty and cruelty. In 1988 it could be pronounced that the concept of 'tribe' is no longer crucial in South African political discourse' and is a form of 'false consciousness' (Bonner-Delius & Sharp 1988:68,71). Now students contest the view that tribes and traditions were invented and a professor can declare that although at one time he was fairly sure what culture really meant to African people, this is no longer the case.

Atkins never discusses precisely what she means by culture, in her use she develops the notion as inseparable from tradition based on the use of 'cultures of solidarity' or 'moral cultures' and culture is essentially tradition I culture with some adaptations.

She faces a classic problem by maintaining a view of 'two very distinct cultures' and arguing that there was a continuing clash of cultures. How is it then possible to account for new institutions which have little or no with *traditional* cultural practices of the dominant or dominated? The compounds, mission stations, the kholwa associations, rap labour, master/servant relationships, and, it has to be argued, had little to do in essence with either European or African culture, they were new institutional practices which were formed in the colony rather than 'carried over' from European or African society. After listing practices under two columns headed 'European' and 'African', there are remaining institutions which have to fall under a third column 'colonial' or later 'South African' practices. The central inventions of exploitation, the long lasting and peculiarly oppressive set of the compound, the location, and the reserve, could be paralleled to institutions elsewhere but importantly their colonial and South African context is distorted from the original meaning and practices elsewhere.

Atkins argues that what happens in the city is essentially the adaptation of traditional institutions to new circumstances:

> For these 'blue' men clearly bodied-forth through a creative adaptation of indigenous institutions a notion of their common grievance as workers and the general conditions of labor under which grievances could be articulated and resolved (Atkins 1993:158).

The 'indigenous institutions', it has often been said, may infuse and influence the 'third country' of colonial institutions, but from a closer reading of the texts they are not extant in the town. The culture of working class resistance is something more than 'creative adaptation of indigenous institutions', as it has

to be cultivated from the soil of a rising formation unknown to African tradition, a productive working class with the power to contest the awesome might of the capitalist state. A culture emerges from below, bearing all the marks of its cultural and social origins, but in an order so different, from tradition as to be a new practice: the construction of permanent and modern organisation with the idea (implicit or overt) of contesting, and taking power from the ruling class.

African workers have been the bearers of traditional culture and have adapted this in a defensive way in contact with white society. Language and tradition at one level does 'carry over' into the workplace: the dock workers have called themselves *amagiti* since the 1960s or earlier but the meaning has changed over time. From its initial meaning of a robust assertion of muscle power the term has come to mean something else. Meanings are contested. In a current survey of dock labour, older workers tend to see *amagiti* or stevedores as displaying the strength of a buffalo, while younger workers tend to describe *amagiti* as simply 'bucket (dirty) work'. Most stevedores and urban workers generally adopt the latter meaning. Language becomes socially defined; a buffalo becomes a bucket worker (see Hemson 1982:360). A reading of the term *amagiti* in a 'traditionalist' sense would entirely miss the point. African workers finally cannot depend on the adaptation of traditional culture, but have had to pursue, as workers universally, the industrial and political organisations which are appropriate globally.

In the emergence of working class cultures, at times distant from its origins, at times indistinguishable, and at all times carrying a dialectary in language (as in the term *amagiti*), the 'lower orders' define their world and make their critique. At times part revolutionary and part-defensive, the working class moves towards imposing its economic and political sway over the whole of society.

There is in the text an unproblematic and axiomatic relationship between traditional culture and the cultural practices of resistance. At one level this is obvious: the colonial order has as its object in the creation (and perverse transformation) of an independent African consensus. Defence of the African order implies resistance to the European imposition. But at another level it is deeply problematic as the emerging colonial order works to preserve and even consolidate African customs and chiefly rule precisely to exercise domination (cheaply and effectively) over the African people, and particularly over African women.

There is a deep ambiguity within traditional culture: it is used by African workers in early colonial times as a sign of resistance, but this does not exclude its employment by colonial officials as a logic of control. This question is brought to the surface in the discussion of the Shepstone policy of administration. Although Atkins is critical of Shepstone's actions she also shows an ambiguous attitude towards his policy of segregation, and misunderstands its practice.

She states that Shepstone moved Africans to locations where they could be 'effectively contained and "civilized", shielded from white men's vices

skins' (Atkins 1993: 115). Although some of the language of early segregation had this flavour, the practice was very different. The last thing that Shepstone had in mind was the 'black Englishman' (the educated black leaders who would later form the leadership of nationalist resistance). This policy was never one of cultural assimilation, in fact the very opposite is shown in Shepstone's attitude to the emerging civil society in the towns.

Shepstone wanted to limit 'acculturation' through segregation and preserve as far as possible the traditional cultural practices which marked off Zulu people as a distinct 'natural group' as a means of sustaining a despotic, paternalist, and racial, colonial order. This was justified ideologically as maintaining a frictionless relationship between races through a lack of contact. This, of course, was an absurdity, but segregationary practices have contributed not a little to the desperate poverty and inadequate state services in the field of housing, education and health in the region today. They have also provided the socio-structural basis for one side in the ongoing civil war.

Zulu culture was also preserved to serve as an African identity to the black people of Natal. During the nineteenth century on the mines the Zulu were employed as policemen to maintain order over African workers. Elements of traditional culture were preserved, adapted, and used by the authorities (for example, the indaba system) to dominate the migratory workers. This was the other side of the preservation of traditional culture which has been applauded by many perspectives then and now who see these practices as a bulwark against radical youth, emancipated women, African unity and socialism. A certain unease about the use of traditionalism and ethnicity misses the point of the nature of a violent cultural response to change.

The Natal town therefore never was a social setting for Europeans but a labour camp for Africans. In the early days of colonialism African workers redefined social relations on their terms through greater or partial resistance. Through the bureaucracy of Native Administration and police the urban space is later defined as a field of social control, the prison, the hospitals, the industrial centres and the docks all come under the all-pervasive gaze of authority.

Simultaneously, however, we witness the rise of civil society. All kinds of permutations appear possible and early working life allows possibility of new freedoms unimaginable and impossible in tribal life. A culture of the informal, of personal interests of Africans putting roots down into the cracks of the wider system, is growing. This is not heroic or dramatic, but all of it is the daily struggle for a better life; asserted, lost, partially regained, and lost again, only to continue in another round in the future. This civil society is genuinely subversive of the legislative and administrative and gives priority to the pragmatic, the social and practical.

The advantage of an Afrocentric view is an extremely sceptical view of colonial statements, a concern in the detail of colonial apologetics for facts of subordination and the scale of resistance.

The difficulties, at least in Atkins' exposition, both in an approach to the evolution of culture which does not address the emergence of essentially

new institutions, and a segmental and bounded approach to the roots of colonial society. The African contribution is valuably retrieved but the multiple existence of the working class is not developed and it is difficult thus to regain a sense of the whole from below which approximates the perspective of the ruling class from above. Unfortunately Indian workers and the African/Indian relationships are not explored at all, and only antagonism appears in a few comments made.

There remains an intense problem in theorising the origins of the new South Africa –the multicultural and ethnic evolutions towards a common 'way of life' with its complex cross-cultural possibilities. At times Atkins expresses sympathy for the devil, portrays the gulf of misunderstanding between colonist and African, and adopts a perspective of the colonist as seeing 'labourers incongruously attired in cast off garments' and

> the spectacle of brawny Zulus working on the beachfront, costumed in near nakedness or animal skins and carrying clubs (Atkins 1993:142)

These labourers and the destitute are still with us sleeping on the beach and struggling for the scraps of life.

In the detail of contested practices, Atkins succeeds in returning human agency among the common people to the history of Natal. Subjugated knowledges again come to light. A common feeling at times is evoked from the European, who sees in resistance the solidarity and bonds 'worthy of worship in a manufacturing town in the old country' (Atkins 1993:143). These infrequent acknowledgements unfortunately lose nowhere but they do provide glimpses of imagination as testament to what could have been.

A critical consciousness which acknowledges the need to build networks and structures, works in the wider world as persuasion. Jim Merod (1987:150) argues that traditional academic criticism flounders as the more knowledges and values spanned are too diverse.

> This is also where radical critics come apart, corporate, theoretical differences occur the expense of the larger, more profound possibility of intellectual and political partnership that could work perpetually in a world that stresses social change as the root for necessary, pertinent, consistent growth, multiplicities of ideological combat, and authority of every kind but the one that speaks for and with the oppressed.

It is in this spirit that radical historians and sociologists have tried to work, to move away from the circularities of text to criticism, text to institution, and criticism to text; to the extended possibilities of text to community, text to social action, and social action to text.

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Book Reviews

Beyond a Culture of Censorship

A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa
by Christopher Merrett
Cape Town: David Philip, University of Natal, Mercer University Press. 296 pp.
ISBN 0-86486-259-8

Reviewed by Jane Katz
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This is a quite extraordinary book—not that one does not expect meticulous scholarship and research with a keen eye for the crucial of resistance and oppression in the field of censorship in South Africa. A further advantage is that Merrett has not focused narrowly on the popular notion of censorship as the activity that bans a Gorge Bergerac or *A History of Red Bats*, but has persuasively shown how censorship can conceal itself in a variety of ways, including unexpected practices like taboos or interdict legislation.

Merrett recalls Milan Kundera's remark: 'The struggle is also a struggle against forgetting'. This makes the publication of the study timeous in the light of the debate that is currently being waged on the airwaves of the *Truth Commission* and the *Freedom of Information Act*. From this perspective alone, the book is part of the history of the present. There is enough evidence in the nine chapters of the pernicious and interventionist influence of any attempt to introduce secrecy or restrictive practices on any aspect of communication, personal or mass.

Merrett reminds us that one of the most important and perhaps least appreciated characteristics of the South African censorship system has been its longevity. Its roots lie in the *Suppression of Communism Act* of 1950 and the first chapter describes the formative years up to 1958 as the state found increasingly *political* reasons for it to act *morally*. The state became increasingly aware of the situation neatly described by Nadine Gordimer:

> No social system in which a tiny minority must govern without consent nor can ever impose upon the majority can afford to subject any part of sources of communication to the hazards of a court decision.

This so-called tactical reason for the introduction of censorship was matched by a need to maintain distance between race groups and a further desire to perpetuate the myth that differences between them were greater than common humanity. As a commentator wrote in the mid-1970s,

> Certainly, the South African government takes enough clear ideas on my very hair to prevent most from reading South Africa.

One remarkable aspect of this book, apart from its detailed recounting of watershed historical and political events, is the author's appreciation of an

insightful phrase. He recalls Kundera's description of 'organized forgetting' in Czechoslovakia, Amanda Armstrong's summing up of intellectual repression as 'manufactured normality', Marcuse's aphorism about 'repressive tolerance' in which a certain amount of dissenting discourse is permitted to encourage the idea of a reasonably liberal society and Roy Campbell's description of the censorship provisions as 'the direct expression of an illiterate ruling class'.

These quotations show that even if the last page is the worst, the good guys had all the best lines.

Merrett's analysis of laws such as the *Native Administration Act* of 1927 shows how censorship, forbidding criticism of forced removals for instance, has been only one repressive administrative legislation. Later on he reminds us of the *Information* case in 1979 in which the state spoke of legal transactions were concluded under the *Official Secrecy Act*. And again he shows how the *Companies Act* forbids details to be published about the performance of South African companies in foreign markets.

Censorship has had many faces including bannings of individuals, house arrest and restriction of movement. The account of the harassment of journalists and the draconian measures taken against alternative newspapers and the alternative press either makes for depressing reading or causes a surge of anger at this rape of the human right to information. The difficulties in reporting events like the *Boipatong* case should not be forgotten.

The 'Total Onslaught' obsession had its share in consolidating various layers of censorship.

However, it is the last chapters, 'The Impact of Censorship' and 'Censorship in a Democratic South Africa' that make for sober reading. It is not coincidental that the title of the book is '*The Culture of Censorship*'. Merrett argues that the years of censorship in all its forms have created a climate that is conducive to limitation rather than liberation of thought. He reminds us that press freedom is not about freedom for journalists but about the right of people to be adequately informed.

He suggests that extra-legal, informal repression has become the most important facet of South African censorship and in terms of its effect on the social fabric, perhaps the most devastating. He believes the government should shed its securocrat tendency by instilling the power of symmetricals. He also repeats Phillip van Niekerk's question: 'Will the deficiencies of the press survive the weaknesses in a democratic South Africa?'.

The ten points he raises about the pernicious, lingering effects of censorship need to be discussed widely in academic, government and media circles. Bram Fischer's statement in 1961 is still valid:

> If by my fight I can encourage people to think about, to understand and examine the policies that are clearly below, I shall not regret any punishment. I may learn if the court does not, to prefer, if any of my fellow accused, it will be punishing them for holding the views they will be proved, the accepted tomorrow.

Some Afrikaans Novels of 1993

Die Stiefmoeder
deur Etienne van Heerden
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1993, 322 pp
ISBN 0 624 03228 0.

Fratse van die Flensies
deur Ellen Venter
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1993, 264 pp
ISBN 0 624 03303 1.

Die Reuk van Appels
deur Marie Roh
Strand: Queillerie, 1993, 228 pp.
ISBN 1 874903 06 6.

n.o. Dawnie Donner
deur Joanne Goosen
Strand: Queillerie, 1993, 153 pp.
ISBN 1 874903 04 4.

Kierielou Perreira
deur Lettie Viljoen
Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 1993, 192 pp.
ISBN 0 7981 3191 8.

Die Oorlewe se Pain
deur François Bloemhof
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1993, 202 pp.
ISBN 0 624 02531 4.

Julfees Sonder Weg Terugkyk
deur Berta Smit
Strand: Queillerie, 1993, 254 pp.
ISBN 1 874903 03 6.

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The early 1990s saw an inflated production of Afrikaans prose. Various factors contributed to this: the perceived threat to Afrikaans as language, the relaxation of censorship, the support of the independent press such as *Die Vrye Weekblad* and the yuppie monthly *De Kat*, the impact that the publishing house Taurus had on bringing younger authors to the fore, the general willingness of publishers to publish and the substantial literary prizes to be won. But most important, possibly, was the unfolding, ends political narrative of the country itself which formed the violent backdrop to the moment when South Africans of all hues endeavoured to give substance to the new national identity. Most of the texts of 1993 reflect on this political transition from the yuppie perspective. In a nutshell, Afrikaans prose entered its post-apocalyptical phase. It has triumphed over its major enemy: censorship. The political conflict has been resolved for those entrenched in their urban and middle-

class lifestyles. The post-modernist element is associated in the rich associative style of the Afrikaans novel as represented by especially Etienne van Heerden *Die Sandwoestyn* and Elsen Venter *Reisiger van die Vlaktes*. This style is characterised by its episodic construction and its multiple characters and situations juxtaposing from and into.

Die Sandwoestyn is a high point in Van Heerden's oeuvre. Despite the surreal elements, Van Heerden manages to combine the surreal with psychological depth. A narrator speaking from death, is one of the most attractive features of the text. The text is also original, for Afrikaans, in dealing with the settler families of the Eastern Cape.

Ilse Venter published his final volume of prose, *Wolwe*, in 1996. As a very nuanced and subtle evaluation of racial politics in the eighties, *Wolwe* is one of the most underrated collections of short stories in Afrikaans. In contrast, the allegorical novel *Vuurpyl van die Vlaktes* is also in slow motion. Political torture and *rites de passage* seeking constitute a post-modern architecture in this text. The Frankenstein and apocalyptic fantasy fail to deliver. Nevertheless, it is one of the masterpieces in Afrikaans literature.

Some of the texts of 1993 do not fall into the trap of excessive decoration and mythic jumps. The most interesting of these texts is Mark Peter's *Die Waarheid van Appels*, published by the recently established Queillerie Uitgewers, the latest novel to speak to reader. This text stands out because of its unadorned language the narrator being the seven year old Marnus yet complex in structure. It is one of the most human and disturbing Afrikaans stories about apartheid. The overbearing Marnus Kloppers is father, a general in the South African army, who imposes on his son all the apartheid values, prejudices, and commandments. Through a series of events Marnus's world falls apart when he discovers his father sodomising his class mate and best friend Pikkie, and his mother making love to a visiting South American general. These discoveries are not explicitly stated. The reader's view is as limited as the small boy's through which Marnus peeps. The story of Marnus, the child, is juxtaposed with the story of an older and more cynical Marnus who is trapped in the Angolan war. This juxtaposition serves to express the consequences of the lie of the fathers but also that life continues despite the tragedies of childhood. Marnus's earlier struggles to understand why there are black South Africans fighting on the side of the SADF. This continues the theme of the discrepancy between the apparent and the real. Black South Africans are expected to be the enemy while in reality they just struggle to make ends meet.

In a lighter vein is Jeanne Goosen's *n.o. Dawidjie Droomer*. The narrator is the adolescent Dahlia Swanepoel, who belongs to an unconventional working class family of Tierville. The text, through its unconventional characters, moves away from the stereotype of the Afrikaans working class as sub-intelligent fascists. The carnivalesque tone of the text, although funny, cannot really give expression to the dilemma of the contemporary Afrikaans working class. In this regard RS Rygen's earlier

text, *Beersie en sy Bergies* (from 1992) is more convincing.

Hettie Viljoen won the M-Net prize for her *Karolina Fernalee*. It is unusual in the way it links up with the experimental and intellectual prose tradition represented by Etienne Leroux and Jean Miles. The novel centres on the pool room of a hotel in the Free State town, Voorspoed and its archetypal and dream-like visitors. The attorney, Pol, the farmer, Gawie de Melek and the policeman, Kleinman, all link up on a deep psychological level with the entomologist and main character, Karolina Bezuara. The primal forces, the sexuality and violence embedded in the small town intrigues, seem to liberate Karolina from her urban background with its civilising oppression. As in a dream, the reasons for things happening are not important. Instead the focus is on the revitalising effect that these have on Karolina. The destruction of the hotel itself becomes part of the therapeutic effect of the dream. This destruction leads to a further awakening dreaming by the main character.

Satanism and the occult, the abduction and sacrifice of children are explored in Francois Tomaschoff's allegorical suspense story *Die Oulevel se Tom*. Although situated in the suburban Durbanville, the story happens in a political vacuum. Not one reference is made to either Afrikaners or the South African political situation.

In the early sixties, Berta Smit wrote one of the most expressive surrealist allegories in Afrikaans: *Die Vrou en die Berg*. In *Juffrou Sophia Vlag Vorentoe* we see elements of this earlier text recur, as the earlier text's theme of the absurdity of faith in coded symbol, moralising in *Juffrou Sophia Vlag Vorentoe*. It deals with potentially very interesting material, the aged Juffrou Sophia, being discharged from hospital, is confined to the four walls of her flat. Her only links with the world outside are her television and the domestic servant, Mavis. She tries to reach out to Mavis, who becomes central to our existence. The novel fails flat, however, when Smit introduces the allegorical and experimental elements that marked her earlier style. Juffrou Sophia's story-writing attempts, interwoven with the main story line as meta-narrative, is not really functional and hinders the slow exploration of the theme of helplessness and old age.

Bushman and Afrikaner: Cultural Interaction[1]

Kanna van die Hemon
deur DJT Van Niekerk
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1995. 170 pp.
ISBN 0 624 02901 0.

Die Sonnemeyer
deur Piet van Booven
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1994. 147 pp.
ISBN 0 624 02960 2.

1. This review article is a re-worked and translated version of a review that first appeared in the Afrikaans Durban weekly, *Rooi* 3 March 1995:21 as 'Boesman en Afrikaner: Kultuurverwantskap'.

Toere van die Kalahari
deur W Fan D Kotze
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1994. 176 pp.
ISBN 0 624 03224 6.

Reviewed by Dolf van Niekerk
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During 1994, Tafelberg published three Afrikaans novels in which the authors try in different ways to reconstruct the world of the now practically extinct Bushmen and their interaction with Afrikaans communities.

The novella by Dolf van Niekerk—established author of trilogies (which the psychological novel *Die See Sonder Ruimte*, *Die Roere van die Herrie* (The Coming of the Big Rain) is masterful, understated but finely nuanced, written in strikingly sober Afrikaans prose. It is a modern farm novel in which Hendrik and Rykaard's claim against Johannes du Plessis, an Afrikaans farmer, on whose land they live, forms the central plot. The text is complicated further by the court case in which Jackson, a black attorney from Soweto, has to defend Koraap's challenge of possession of land. "Die Boere will lag as ek dit" Jackson says when Koraap wants to base his demand for land rights over Du Plessis's farm on traditional oral word of mouth. The private and beliefs of the San/Bushmen and of the Western world are juxtaposed sharply in this novella. It is an extremely well written, economical text which keeps the reader's attention to the end.

In Piet van Rooyen's *Die Spoorsnyer* the focus is also on Afrikaans farmers and their Bushman farmworkers, but the central story of the tracking journey grows into a metaphysical discovery of the nature of *homo sapiens*.

> With a little cramps that one takes, with all the pain that more through one's feet, is there ever a place where one can say, "Bushman, here has past, my footprints will never be found again"? (Van Rooyen [n.d.]:12).

The novel is a strange mixture of anthropological facts and adventure story, along with an attempt to give the text a postmodernist turn. This attempt—which takes the form of self-consciously occurring throughout in the 'writer' and his relationship with his editor. "It can already hear the editor moaning and groaning" (Van Rooyen 1994:29)—is the least successful aspect of the novel. The central adventure and the imagery surrounding the tracking, have as intertext the formidable work of Louis Liebenberg *The Art of Tracking: The Origin of Science* (David Philip 1990), of which parts are quoted literally in Afrikaans translation (see Van Rooyen 1994:35). It is this intertwingling of the adventure of tracking, the anthropological and scientific factual elements, as well as the poignant description of the disappearance Bushmen-as-first-inhabitants-of Africa, twice being abused by farmers as

2 *Die hoorsnyer se oë sou sê:*
3 "Met al die donder van die more loop al die paaie wat ons ken by sover daarheen, is daar een van hulle waar by Boere en Bantoetaalsprekers van die begin af 'n oog gehad het"

farmhands in often inhumane conditions, which is the most moving aspect of the novel.

... *Toere van die Kalahari* (Years of the Kalahari) by Kotzé is in many ways reminiscent of PJ Schoeman's novels, especially *Trekos, die dwarsvoël Boesman* (Trekos the wandering Bushman - 1960). In this comparison Schoeman's novel stands out as the more memorable. Despite the occasional 'slipping' of the narrator's voice in the direction of over sentimentality, anthropologically, Schoeman's novel is based on accurate knowledge. In Kotzé's novella there is evidence of lack of information about the community and lifestyle of the Bushmen despite the fact that this is the basis of interest in the text.

The story of Years starts on the farm of a Koraki Louw in the Nossob region. Here he grows up as a lost Bushman child, found in the Kalahari. Later he is put to work as a shepherd, but eventually deserts the farm and returns to the Kalahari where he suspects that his people are. By implication, Kotzé's text evokes the myth of the 'civilized' mission of Afrikaner and offers also a strange image of the Bushman as an instinctive and intuitive being, closely related to the animal kingdom. This aspect of the text, although probably well-intentioned, I find objectionable. When, for instance, describing Years's finely-tuned olfactory sense of imminent rain, the author writes "with the postures of a wild animal his body senses it" (Kotzé 1994:10). The inter-personal relationship between Years and the farmer's wife is crude and has racist overtones (that this may be a realistic description of the relationship at the time, is another matter). After his desertion she is made to say: "Just when you have brought them up and made them useful. They put poison in your food or stab you in the back" (Kotzé 1994:14). Of the three texts of Van Niekerk, Van Rooyen and Kotzé, Kotzé's ghost work is the least successful.

The question arises why so many Afrikaans writers feel the need, at the end of the twentieth century, to return to the cultural interaction between Afrikaans farmers and the almost extinct Bushman community. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, retribution commandos went out to kill these people after stock-raids by Bushmen took place. Retribution by Boer commandos was so successful that the prehistoric inhabitants of Africa have today practically disappeared in this country—except for the few remnants of their race still trying tenaciously to survive in abysmal circumstances in Schmidtsdrift (near Kimberley). The fact that the Bushmen's hunting grounds were being encroached upon by the settlers and Boers, the wild game killed off in droves by Boer hunting safaris and that the Boers and settlers did not understand the Bushmen's tacit understanding of the possession of water holes and allocation of territory, all played a collective role in this tragic part of history.

In Kotzé's case, the re-exploitation of this material is probably mainly nostalgic in nature—it is the world of his childhood which he describes as a utopian, lost world. Somewhere, collective guilt about the genocide of the

4 ... met die [wêreld] van [w]ilde dier[e] [ge]dryf deur [g]eweerskote.

Bushmen perhaps also play a role. Eventually, however, all these fictive works can be linked by a psychological vector into the domain of intercultural relationships in South Africa and the history of racial relationships. In the past literary texts exploring the relationship between Afrikaans and Bushmen societies (such as the works of Von Wielligh, the Hobson brothers, P.J. Schoeman, J.J. van der Post and Jan Rabie's early novels) were seen as peripheral literature, not belonging to the main stream of the Afrikaans canon. Yet, the exploration of this relationship in the three texts under discussion here as well as the fact of their simultaneous publication in 1996 are beginning to make it clear that such works are of central importance for a better understanding of the country, its people and the way in which they deal with each other.

Recent Southern African Books from the Heinemann African Writers Series

The Return of Shanyisho
by W.P.B. Botha
Oxford: Heinemann, 1995. 207 pp.
ISBN 0-435-90859-9.

A Shattering of Silence
by Farida Karodia
Oxford: Heinemann, 1993. 216 pp.
ISBN 0-435-90855-6.

Cape Town Chicks
by Richard Gosi
Oxford: Heinemann, 1996. 142 pp.
ISBN 0-435-90259-0

Jesus is Indian and Other Stories
by Agnes Sam
Oxford: Heinemann, 1989/1990. 134 pp.
ISBN 0-435-90821-1.

Tales of Tenderness and Power
by Bessie Head and others, ed. Gil Lan Stead Eilerson
Oxford: Heinemann, 1989/1990. 94 pp.
ISBN 0-435-90809-2.

The Heinemann Bunyan Short Stories
Duchudzo Mavosiano
Oxford: Heinemann, 1978/1993. 154 pp.
ISBN 0-435-90896-3

Reviewed by Jean-Philippe Wade
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WPB Botha was originally we are told of the 'Afrikaner working class', left South Africa in 1975, and now teaches in London. *The Return of Shanyisho* is his first novel, and deals with Seamus Doyle, a world-weary Catholic

Irishman who returns to the rural Transkei where he has spent his youth (his parents were Irish nationalists who fled their homeland to teach Xhosas during the years of Boer/Britain bondage).

Suspected of being a dangerous liberal by the Security police and a collaborator by militant Afrikaners, he is in reality a jaded cynic trying to come to terms with the memory of his dead father who emigrated from Irish nationalism for a 'place in the sun' in racist South Africa. When he learns that his father was actually working for the ANC, his enthusiasm for life is 'recklessly' and he is inevitably drawn into the deadening underground battle between the ANC and the State as an unwitting 'liberal hero'.

The novel marries a melodramatic climax, and in the end Doyle struggles with political conviction and his relationship with his father. An anti-apartheid novel weary of its white hero but if we are expecting something fresh and de-familiarising and intelligent to be written about South Africa then we will be disappointed.

A Shattering of Silence is the second novel by the former South African Farida Karodia (her first was *Daughters of the Twilight* 1986), who now lives in Canada.

Faith, the young daughter of liberal Canadian Protestant missionaries working in colonial rural Mozambique, witnesses the horrifying murder of the entire mission including her parents by Portuguese soldiers. The now mute Faith, unable to remember the trauma, 'just one more child cripples and orphaned by acts of barbarous violence', spends the rest of her childhood in a variety of orphanages before becoming a teacher of sign language in a school for children maimed physically and psychologically by the war.

This is not a typical anti-colonial war novel to the extent that it focuses instead on the women—caring and strong—who were 'veterans of another kind of war, the war of survival fought on the battle-ground of their homes and in their townships'; and the children: 'apart from starvation, abandonment and their dispossession, these young victims, defenceless and vulnerable, were also sacrificed at the altar of war'.

Faith is increasingly drawn into the escalating anti-colonial struggle, in particular by attempting to expose the kidnapping of Mozambican citizens by the Portuguese, who sell them into Middle Eastern slavery. With the colonial authorities closing in, she embarks on a harrowing escape from the country to tell the world about the abuse of children during which she also has to deal with her personal amnesia and muteness. For all its desire to represent women in more politically acceptable ways, and to foreground the innocent victims of war, the narrative is too predictable and does not really rise above being an adventure story.

Yet another novel by a former South African, *Cape Town Chicks* is actually a re-working of an earlier novel by Richard Gosi, who died in Canada in 1989. Set in Cape Town in 1947 (the date is not arbitrary), the novel is narrated by a white Afrikaner academic of anarchist leanings and focuses on Henry Naidoo, an Indian liberal lawyer who gets caught up in the corrupt machinations of the capitalist Sheikh Moosa, the 'indigenous spider'

who is plotting fiercely to exploit the inevitable coming victory of Afrikaner nationalism. His devious plots include raising the ire of the citizens of District Six, and Naidoo forms a Tenant's Association to combat him. Along the way, he gets entangled in the obscure complexities of Cape Town's fringe Trotskyite groupings, and falls in love with the flighty daughter of one of the most dis-ingratiated Coloured families'.

Yet again an unlikely figure is drawn reluctantly into political involvement, and yet again, despite some interesting observations about the complicated lives of professional Coloured and Indian people in the Cape Town 'belt', the novel never really rises to become a profound political novel and instead remains a rather dull portrait of uninteresting characters.

Agnes Sam is yet another South African exile, having left South Africa in 1979 and now resident in Britain. *Jesus is Indian and Other Short Stories* is her first published book. The fifteen stories deal mainly with the South African Indian community—the religious schisms, tensions over arranged marriages, their historical victimisation and being Indian in Britain (the racism, the generational divisions), and throughout Christian and feminist discourses can be partly traced. The stories are however rather inconsistent and are perhaps mainly aimed at teenagers.

Tales of Tenderness and Power is a magnificent collection of short pieces of writing by Bessie Head, one of Southern Africa's greatest writers. And another South African exile! This is Bessie Head's third collection of short writings to be published (the others are *The Collector of Treasures* and *A Woman Alone*), and here ranges from early writings in the 1950s to North African material set in her adopted home of Botswana. As the editor Gillian Stead Eilersen puts it, the writings 'cannot all be classified as short stories in the usual sense of that designation: some are short descriptive observations, some are fictionalised or semi-fictional, some historical stories'.

Many of Head's persistent concerns are to be found here: the tension between modern independent individualism and traditional African communities (see 'The Lovers', where this tension is figured as between arranged marriages and romantic love); her respect for the gentle dignity of the African peasantry, but sensitive to the corruptions of political and sexually power (see her portrait of the post-colonial politician in 'Narrow Escape'). 'As I told you, I'm an honest guy. I believe in day-light robbery.' is the constant sense of overwhelming forces lurking just below the placid surface of existence. Read her moving, beautifully crafted portrait of Robert Sobukwe: 'The Cardinal of the Christ-Child', and, of course her manifesto, 'Dreamer and Storyteller':

> Recently, our Southern African artist was driven by the force of the tragedies and horrors, which did not exist there but only threatened, new visions. He lived with wonder.

Bessie Head had an uncanny ability to write stories which, instead of dictating the way they are read, provoke the reader into an active imaginative participation in the creation of the fictional experience. In a remarkable way

her festivity to authoritarian power-games seeps into the very creation of her narratives.

Dambudzo Marechera, whose inevitably premature death in 1987 was a tragic loss to modern fiction, is the quintessential 'post-colonial' Zimbabwean writer, and *The House of Hunger*, a collection of nine short stories, including the hugely title story, is one of the most important texts to emerge from Southern Africa in recent decades. It should be on every school and university syllabus, because these powerful stories challenge not (just) every complacently hegemonic view of what 'African literature' is. Trapped in the frozen time of late colonialism—in the 'foul breath of our history' of Ian Smith's Rhodesia—the protagonists, mostly young black intellectuals, suffer from an inverted heroic 'anti-hunger', a self-reflexive *Angst* at our world twentieth-century Modernism. These are stories about identity, many never painfully on the threshold of adulthood—that instant of fictionally resolving the overwhelming tensions and contradictions of being a western-educated African in an oppressive colonial context through the discourse of, say, African nationalism. Marechera boldly lives these tensions. The conditions of Africa/Europe, tradition/modernity, and colonialism/post-colonialism become the very site of a powerfully imaginative avant-garde writing which, instead of taking sides, tracks down the complex impossibilities of his historical fate. In this profoundly unsettled colonial world, where the self is lived as 'split' there can be no pretence of seizing on some authentic African tradition. Subjectivity, like fiction, is seen as a flagrant fabrication, something actively put together and put too successfully from the fragments of multiple interpellations. And Marechera peoples the stories.

Marechera knows all too well the 'sins' associated with literature, the limitations of traditional African communities, the disastrous performances of post-colonial nations, the ironies of being an independent intellectual on a continent reluctant to abandon the correctives that awesome political struggles cannot do without. After encountering his liberatingly disturbing stories, there can be no simple return to the comforts of the anti-colonial discourses that have articulated our post-conjuncture in South Africa. And for that we must be grateful. In a meta-critics' move, I will leave with a passage from the story, 'A House of Hunger':

> Stephen was mean, a bully, a typical African bully of an ordinary African school. ... Stephen was an avid reader of the Heinemann African Writers Series. He firmly believed that there was something peculiarly African about being written by an African and said that no native European mode of criticism should be used in the analysis of 'African literature'. He had also gleaned a few nuggets of thought from B. Mphahele's *The African Image*.