ALTERNATION

Journal of the Centre for the Study of Southern African Literature and Languages. Vol. 1, No. 1, 1994

Address: ***Alternation***
Centre for the Study of Southern African Literature and Languages
University of Durban-Westville
Private Bag X54001
Durban
4000

Telephone: (031) 820 2245 or (031) 820 2283
Fax: (031) 820 2160

Contributions to ***Alternation*** may be sent to the above address. Articles should not exceed 20 pages (double spaced), and all references must be as in the present edition with a minimum of endnotes. Contributions must include one double spaced printed copy of the article, accompanied by a copy on double density floppy disk *WordPerfect 5.1*.

Subscription: R 20 per year (2 editions)

ISSN 1023-1757

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Jean-Philippe Wade
University of Durban-Westville

This is the first issue of *ALTER***NATION**, the journal of the **Centre for the Study of Southern African Literature and Languages (CSSALL)**. The Centre was established at the beginning of 1994 at the University of Durban-Westville with the purpose of promoting an interdisciplinary study of the great variety of southern African literatures and languages. Besides being a research centre, the CSSALL offers a course-work Masters degree which provides a systematic knowledge of the literary history and languages of the region. The Centre is also committed to hosting a biennial conference on southern African literary and language studies.

As Helize van Vuuren demonstrates in her paper included in this volume, the discourses of colonialism and apartheid have led to the radical 'segmentation of South African literature and literary studies'. In the first historical surveys written in a period marked by the construction of an inclusive settler nationalism, the focus is on what J.M. Coetzee has called **'white writing'**, with the consequent exclusion (Nathan) or marginalization (Besselaar) of black writings. A developing segregationist logic institutionalized the separation of the various languages and literatures of the region, dissolving that earlier rapprochement between Afrikaner and English and reinforcing the marginalization of the literatures and languages of the black majority. Within the privileged white universities, the dominant ethnic discourses of Afrikaner nationalism and an Anglo-colonial liberalism functioned to reproduce this literary apartheid, and it is therefore unsurprising that from the later 1970s onwards an emergent radical intelligentsia launched a political critique of these hegemonic ideologies, which in the case of English Studies led to a sudden intensification of interest in South African writing (both white and black), and, in the case of Afrikaans, to a radical 'paradigm switch in the approach to Afrikaans literature and literary historiography' (Van Vuuren). These challenges have led in recent years to a growing interest in black writing, oral traditions and women's writing, but it is nevertheless remarkable that well into the last decade of the twentieth century an inclusive literary history of southern Africa has yet to be published. Now that the critical demolition of oppressive literary paradigms has been largely accomplished and

previously excluded voices have begun to be listened to, we need to move 'beyond the fragments' to attempt such an embracing survey. The CSSALL sees this as its first major research task, but what Van Vuuren's essay also points to is the sheer impossibility of doing so from the angle of a single discipline.

The danger, identified by Jeremy Cronin (quoted in Van Vuuren's paper), is the establishment of a 'national literature under the hegemony of a white, liberal, English project', a likelihood encouraged by the emergence of English as the *de facto* national language of a postcolonial South Africa. It is for this reason that the CSSALL is determined to approach the study of southern African literatures in a rigorously **interdisciplinary** manner: the Centre has been established by the Arts Faculty rather than a particular department, and academic staff have been drawn from the fields of Anthropology, English, Afrikaans, Zulu, History, Linguistics, French and Education. Moreover, there is scarcely a discipline at the university which has not participated in the CSSALL's weekly seminar programme. However, Roland Barthes 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 confrontations between various specialized branches of knowledge. Interdisciplinary work is not a peaceful operation: it begins **effectively** when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down - a process made more violent, perhaps, by the jolts of fashion - to the benefit of a new object and a new language, neither of which is the domain of those branches of knowledge that one calmly sought to confront. (1973:79).

If the CSSALL desires to construct a 'new object and a new language', then how do we challenge 'the solidarity of the old disciplines', many of them constructed to reproduce political and cultural segregationism? It is in part a practical question about 'subjects' taught in schools and universities: will the literature of the region be continued to be taught within the disciplinary specificities of English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa, Anthropology (orature), History (non-fictional writings), etc., and, if so, how can we even begin to speak of a 'national' literature? My own view is that this acute problem can only be resolved by the introduction at schools and universities of something called 'South(ern) African Cultural Studies', which will not only be focused on the mass media (although it must surely and importantly include this), but on the great diversity of **semiotic** practices from 'Bushmen' rock paintings to the *avant-garde* stories of Ivan Vladislavic, from history texts to television serials, from the Zulu *izibongo* to the poetry of Breyten Breytenbach. It is this disciplinary

transformation which can overcome the disabling exclusionary oppositions - high/popular; literacy/orality; fiction/non-fiction, etc. - around which literary studies have been traditionally constructed. Such a new departure is suggested in Johan van Wyk's essay in this volume, which reads early southern African cultural processes such as burials and rock paintings as semiotic practices explicable in terms of Kristeva's notion of a pre-Oedipal semiotic kinesis and Freudian dream theory.

Indeed, one of the important consequences of the theoretical explosion of the last three decades has been to push the hegemonic paradigm of literary studies into crisis: after the onslaughts of ideology-critique, textuality, semiotics, ecriture, subaltern studies, etc. it has become clear that this discursive formation can only continue *sous rature*: we are obliged to perform the empty rituals of an institutional formation whose gods are no longer with us. Within South Africa the apartheid system has itself contributed to the retardation of disciplinary transformations, as the example of English Studies makes clear. As a literary critical movement, 'liberal humanism' (Leavis, New Critics) died decades ago elsewhere in the world, and yet it has ironically been preserved in South Africa by the apartheid regime, which kept liberalism in place in the (white) universities as the appropriate non-radical ethnic ideology of the white English-speaking community. While many within this discourse imagined themselves to be participating in a radical de-colonization of English Studies by paying serious academic interest to South African writings, what they seemed entirely unaware of was the extent to which such intellectually vacuous incorporationist readings simply reinforced the colonizing ambitions of an Anglo-liberalism. A proper transformation is not only a matter of **what** (content) we read, but more importantly, **how** (theory) we read.

On the other hand, Johan van Wyk's essay in part takes issue with a certain orthodox Marxism through a questioning of Volisinov's separation of 'the domain of semiotics ... from physical phenomena, instruments of production and consumer goods'. He concludes:

> Production and consumption, the metabolism between man and nature, imply essential processes for cultural life. To transform a stone into a hammer indicates a metaphoric and poetic perception of the world. It is only through centuries of use that the poetic impact of the discovery of a particular implement becomes repressed into the unconscious.

What is being challenged here is a certain 'realist' Marxism which, in the architechtonics of the base/superstructure model, articulates the division of (a determining) materiality and (a determined and supplementary) culture. If the traditional criticism has been that such an

account denigrates the palpable effectivity of culture (as discursive formations producing subjects), then Van Wyk interestingly points out how it also depends upon a reified concept of the material which has lost sight of Marx's emphasis upon the creativity of human labour. His view leads to similar conclusions to that of Michael Ryan who, in *Politics and Culture*, a text working at the intersection of post-structuralism and Marxism, argues the following:

> In the post-structuralist perspective, culture inhabits materiality as the forms of social life, from the family to the workday to our very psychological dispositions. The forms and representational patterns of culture are not simply added onto an already constituted substance of social existence. The supplement of cultural form is that without which no sociality could be possible; decultured sociality would be a diffusion of formless and boundless energy and matter. (1989:12).

What we now need, as South Africa emerges into postcoloniality, is not the perpetuation of literary-critical orthodoxies of either Left (Marxism) or Right (Afrikaner Nationalism, Liberalism), and least of all some romantic-organicist construction of an 'essential' national identity, but a vibrant theoretical experimentalism impatient with all dogmatisms. I am reminded of the liberating moment of early twentieth century Left Modernism in post-revolutionary Russia - the *avant-garde* theatre, film, poetry, painting and cultural theory which set out to 'shock' all traditions out of their deadening familiarity in the name of a to-be-constructed future. In the language of Russian Formalism, we similarly need to 'defamiliarize' traditional automated perceptions of our literary past to construct a 'shocking', renewed, unrecognizable cultural history. To do so is to align literary critical practice with the more radical potentialities of the larger democratic transformations occurring in the present, which Chantal Mouffe describes thus:

> In this respect the fundamental characteristic of modernity is undoubtedly the advent of the democratic revolution. As Claude Lefort has shown (...) modern democratic society is constituted as "a society in which power, law and knowledge are exposed to a radical indeterminacy, a society that has become the theatre of an uncontrollable adventure, so that what is instituted never becomes established, the known remains undetermined by the unknown, the present proves to be undefinable." The absence of power embodied in the person of the prince and tied to a transcendental authority preempts the existence of a final guarantee or source of legitimation; society can no longer be defined as a substance having an organic identity. What remains is a society without clearly defined outlines, a social structure that is impossible to describe from the perspective of a single, or universal, point of view. (1988: 33-34).

Such a post-absolutist radical democratic practice, affirming indeterminacy and difference, becomes in the project of constructing a national literary history among other things a

theoretical interest in the concepts of intertextuality (Kristeva), heteroglossia (Bakhtin), discursive formations (Foucault) and differance (Derrida), of texts as unstable entities traversed by a multiplicity of (cultural, political, literary, etc.) codes which are themselves without origin or *telos*. As Roland Barthes explained it in *S/Z*:

> the one text is not an (inductive) access to a Model, but entrance into a network with a thousand entrances; to take this entrance is to aim, ultimately, not at a legal structure of norms and departures, a narrative or poetic Law, but at a perspective (of fragments, of voices from other texts, other codes), whose vanishing point is nonetheless ceaselessly pushed back, mysteriously opened: each (single) text is the very theory (and not the mere example) of this vanishing, of this difference which indefinitely returns, insubmissive. (1974:12).

Such readings of the South African literary past it seems to me enable an avoidance of the twin pitfalls (they are both complicit antagonists in a closed binary logic) of an organicist national discourse which reduces difference to a fundamentalist Same, and a fetishization of difference (a perpetuation of apartheid axiomatics) which precludes intertextual interaction (however conflictual). Such a postcolonial reading is found in Sikumbuzo Mngadi's essay in this volume on Credo Mutwa's play, *uNosilimela*, which symptomatically reveals the dubious metaphysics and reactionary exclusions of Mutwa's conservative nationalism, and instead endorses a politics of cultural **hybridity** and a Derridean working 'within the claims made by the dominant about its dominance in order to undermine its authority'.

If the work of the Centre is rigorously interdisciplinary and working broadly within the non-dogmatic intersection of post-structuralist, Marxist and post-colonial theories, then the essays here not only question the boundaries separating disciplines (Julie Pridmore's interrogation of the history/fiction opposition; Helize van Vuuren's critique of South Africa's linguistic apartheid), but also offer critiques of the dominant assumptions within those disciplines. Jaco Alant's essay registers its dissatisfaction with both 'anthropological' and 'literary' definitions of orality: if the former sees it in 'negative' terms as non-literacy, then the latter imperiously fails to recognize orality's irreducible difference. Alant therefore attempts to account for the specificity of orality by offering a linguistic definition which, drawing on the work of Walter Ong and Jousse, is located in the somatic materiality of sound and consciousness. Alan Thorold is similarly suspicious of 'literary' interpretations of orality, but is even more concerned that the turn towards orality is not only in danger of succumbing to a romanticism of the 'noble savage', but is also based upon what he describes as the 'oral

fallacy ... that writing is an extension of speech'. Such a phonocentric prejudice fails to recognize the prevalence of non-alphabetic African writing systems such as the pictographic one he encountered in Malawi.

Julie Pridmore's analysis of the *Diary of Henry Francis Fynn*, written (supposedly) by a pioneer of colonial Natal, is in part a critique of the *Diary*'s reliability as a historical document about the Shakan period: the *Diary* is contextualized within contemporary colonial discourses in order to reveal its ideological project. However, Pridmore then takes her analysis further, reading the text as a fictional production intertextually modelled on Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. In the process, the categories of 'history', 'myth' and 'fiction' are all shaken from their certainties, and her essay, working within the undecidability of the history/fiction opposition, therefore becomes an exemplary model of how the Centre can pursue the reading of 'non-fictional' historical texts. Such readings would follow Foucault's description of the changing function of the historical 'document':

> The document, then, is no longer for history an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains; history is now trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations... in our time, history is that which transforms **documents** into **monuments**. (1972:7).

All the essays gathered here were originally presented as papers to the weekly CSSALL seminar programme last year. They were not written specifically for publication, but the editorial board felt they should be published in order to begin that great debate about how we should begin to re-read the literatures of the region. Although *ALTER***NATION** was established to publish research material emanating from the CSSALL, it welcomes contributions from scholars beyond the University of Durban-Westville, just as the Centre hopes to attract visiting scholars from the rest of southern Africa and abroad. It is, incidentally, more than a happy coincidence that the first centre to undertake research into the **national** lineaments of southern African literature, and from a broadly 'postmodernist' perspective, should be established at the University of Durban-Westville. As a 'historically black university' which has decisively liberated itself from its apartheid management structures, it is also free of the tribal dogmatisms that continue to characterize the hegemonic discourses of the privileged 'white' universities and whose entrenchment is retarding their own transformations.

The title of this journal - *ALTER***NATION** - is of course open to a variety of interpretations and contains many theoretical echoes. I will conclude by drawing attention to two signifieds: the other nation - our democratic, non-racial and non-sexist postcoloniality - positions our re-readings of this region's literary history; but we also need to be alive to the limits of such a discourse of nationalism, of what is 'other' to the nation, of the irreducible heterogeneity of our common humanity. The alternation between these two meanings provides something of a direction and a warning to future studies.

References

Barthes, R. 1974. *S/Z*. Translated by Richard Miller, New York: Hill and Wang.
Barthes, R. 1979. 'From Work to Text', in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, J.V. Harari (ed)., Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Foucault, M. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith, London: Tavistock.
Mouffe, C. 1988. 'Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern?', in *Universal Abandon?: The Politics of Postmodernism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Ryan, M. 1989. *Politics and Culture: Working Hypotheses for a Post-Revolutionary Society*. London: Macmillan.

RECENT CHANGES IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERARY HISTORIOGRAPHY: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Helize van Vuuren
University of Natal - Durban

I

This paper is an attempt to indicate problematic areas in the writing of literary history in South Africa. In response to vast socio-political changes, critical practice (specifically when dealing with categories such as race, language and group boundaries), is in a state of flux and 'theory needy'.

Originally I intended to offer in this paper an analysis of criticism dealing with 'Literature on Robben Island' as a 'case study', illustrating how recent research indicates change in the nature of writing, followed by a shift in the focus of S.A. literary historiography. Critics such as J.U. Jacobs have been writing extensively on prison literature and the 'discourses of detention', Piniel Shava in a recent history on black South African writing in the twentieth century (1989) derives part of a chapter heading, ('From Sophiatown to Robben Island'), from this cluster of texts, and an MA student at the University of Natal, Cynthia Hassan, recently completed a thesis on 'Robben Island as symbol of the South African political prison, with specific reference to Frank Anthony's collection of poetry *Robbeneiland my kruis my huis* (1983)'. Access to many of these texts has only become possible during the last few years, with the lifting of censorship.

It became increasingly clear from the growing literature on the Robben Island experience, that South African history is being rewritten in a body of work characterised by its testimonial nature. Memoirs, letters, poetry, docu-novels, autobiography by political prisoners held for many years on Robben Island - all have a strong factual nature and socio-political critique in common. Patrick Lekota's *Prison Letters to a Daughter* was read by Hassan **not** as letters, but as a historical text, narrating South African history from a black perspective, which focuses on resistance. The rewriting of South African history in evidence here, is the result of a new socio-historical situation, with a radical shift in power relations. Autobiographical writing (e.g. diary, journal, memoirs) has gradually become the dominant model in South African prison literature.

Shava equates Robben Island with 'a microcosm of the oppressive macrocosm', the 'representation of the prison as a replica of South Africa itself'. (1989:39). Constituting a more or less coherent subsystem of works (comparable to Holocaust literature), these texts are written mainly in English but (remarkably enough) **also** in Afrikaans, often perceived as the language of the oppressor.

The next step would have been to illustrate how these writings and the criticism on it, indicate changes in the broader South African literary context. But at this point uneasiness set in as I started questioning the concepts contained in my title.

II

What constitutes **South African literature**? Is it a self-evident concept? How can one then talk of **South African** literary historiography? Can the cluster of works on the experiences of political prisoners on Robben Island scientifically be described as a subsystem or subcanon? What do we define as literature in the South African context? Govan Mbeki's political essays, *Learning from Robben Island* (1991), belongs to this subsystem, and is of historical significance, but is it literature? Clearly these works are the products of a specific community, and of central importance to an identifiable community, but what about the problem of **language**? Is **race** to be a distinguishing literary characteristic when trying to describe these works? Each of these concepts is problematic and needs to be looked at seperately.

At the beginning of the century literary historians seemed to have fewer problems in identifying a unified body of work carrying the epithet 'South African', as is clear from Manfred Nathan's *South African Literature: A General Survey* (1925). He defines his topic as 'that which is **in or of South Africa**' and the 'tests for admission to the ranks of African literature are either **birth and residence**; or **domicile** for a certain period'. (1925:13). Ironically he uses 'African' and 'South African' as synonymous, although he deals only with English and Afrikaans literature. 'South African' to him means **white**, and by implication members of this community use either English or Afrikaans as their medium.

What we have here in Nathan's literary history is the 'silencing and marginalizing' of the other voices 'by the imperial centre', as Ashcroft (et al) describes it in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. (1989:83). This 'silencing and marginalizing' is seen as an intratextual characteristic of what the authors rather inaccurately

call 'post-colonial' literature. Their definition reads as follows: '"Post-colonial" here refers to all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression'. But this silencing is equally remarkable in Nathan's early literary history of South Africa.

Nine years earlier Besselaar's *Zuid-Afrika in de Letterkunde* (South Africa in Literature) (1914) had fared only marginally better. He included - along with extensive overviews of English and Dutch literature (and language), also 'travel descriptions' by Portuguese, French, Germans and Swedes, as well as a short chapter entitled 'Aandeel der Inboorlingen' ('Participation of the natives'- 1914:183-191). Besselaar points to the existence of the oral tradition, but seems to credit the indigenous peoples mainly with their 'rich imagination', a fertile source for the colonists' literature.

III

After Besselaar and Nathan's early attempts at inclusivity, South African literary study and historiography became increasingly compartmentalized, according to the languages used by the different communities. This development, institutionalised at universities by different departments of Afrikaans, English, Zulu, Xhosa etc., coincides roughly with the socio-political development in the country: one of 'separate development'. A new impetus to South African literary studies started developing in the late seventies, arising out of 'social pressures, located outside the university'. (Hofmeyr, 1979:41). It developed, according to Hofmeyr, out of rejection of the existing liberal tradition with its selective exclusion of working class literature, African, Afrikaans and popular literature. Hofmeyr states:

> 'This "tradition", which claims to represent South African literature ... ignores the culture and literary endeavours of the majority of people in this country (...) it is not simply a matter of fact - what South African literature is there? - but is more fundamentally a matter of theory - what is literature?' (1979:39-40).

In her argument for more inclusive South African literary studies Hofmeyr is objecting to a tradition which sees literature as: 'a) written b) in books c) "good" d) (which) approximates as closely as possible Anglo-American models'. (1979:44). In short: the established canon of 'high literature' taught in most English departments at the time, often derivative of British or American models, and studied in the framework of the autonomous work of art to which a

New Critical 'close reading' was applied. Her plea is for a radical new approach to literature and to what constitutes 'the history of South African literature'. She sees it as '**not** a tale of the literary endeavour of a small fraction of its people. It should include the modes and discourses of all South Africans, be that discourse oral, be it in newspapers, archives, magazines and pamphlets'. (1979:44. My emphasis). Her stance indicates a shift in perception of what South African literary studies should focus on, the object of study is redefined.

Also in 1979 Stephen Gray's *South African Literature: An Introduction* appeared. In a review of this book I.E. Glenn points out that the 'crucial problem is whether we have one, two, three, or four literatures: oral literature and writing in the various African languages; Afrikaans literature; English literature (White/unbanned); English literature (Black/banned/in exile)'. He suggests that 'one society produces one literature, whether it likes it or not'. (1979:58-9). Albert Gérard in 'Prospects for a national history of South African literature' (1983) underlines the difficulty for the literary historian in uniting the cultural and literary diversity, but points to the organic unity of the society: '(d)espite (the) fundamental ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, the various communities which make up the populations of South Africa have been living in close interaction, and have common historical experiences, even though the relationships may have been characterised by varying degrees of mutual hostility'. (1983:41). His 'prospects' are qualified in such a way that it is not really persuasive.

In 1982 Michael Vaughan pointed to the need for 'identifying the configuration of literary forms and forces that is specific to the Southern African context, rather than simply assuming the relevance of a Western-type literary landscape'. (1982:43). Like Hofmeyr he follows a historical-materialist approach; accentuating the 'socially significant developments' of what he calls 'black township literature' and seeing it as a priority to engage with this 'developing literature'. (1982:62). Studies of black popular theatre, the forms evident in oral tradition, and the exploitation of local language resources are seen as projects which should receive attention.

In 'The Praxis of Comparative Theory: On Writing the History of Southern African Literature' Gray referred categorically and rather cosily to '**our** common literary system' (my emphasis) which is 'not divided, but is **about** division'. (1986:76). In describing the praxis of putting together *The Penguin Book of Southern African Stories*, he points to 'the existing canons of the various **sub-literatures**' (i.e. English, Afrikaans, Zulu etc.), and how he selected

stories reflecting 'cross-lingual, cross-subgroup encounters', because that seemed to him the 'main concern of all writers within the system'. (1986:77). Here he argues for one South African literature based on **thematic** or **semantic** ground. Glenn's argument (one society, one literature) can be described as **organic**, whereas Hofmeyr's arguments have a **historical-materialist** basis. Joining the debate in 1986, Chris Swanepoel states that 'a comparative history of Southern African literature presents itself as a logical "must"', and he suggests a methodology based on Even-Zohar's **polysystem theory**: '(f)irstly, a concise though thorough description of individual systems, and secondly and consequently, the much desired comparative history of Southern African literature'. (1986:85).

This is more or less where the debate about the nature of South African literature as a whole, as well as a possible comparative South African literary history, petered out in the late eighties. As a result of this debate and the change in direction it brought about in various scholars' research, the curricula in literature departments, noteably in English departments, started changing slowly, incorporating more black writing in English and even Afrikaans literature in translation. These changes in university curricula are indicative of changes in what is perceived as the canon of South African literature study. The signs of change in the canon are, however, not reflected in the curricula of most Afrikaans departments. This probably has to do with how the field of study is perceived as clearly demarcated into firstly Afrikaans language and literature, and secondly Dutch language and literature. The comparative impulse and the incorporation of Afrikaans texts in translation by English departments, seem to indicate a sense of a stronger, less threatened position. Both Afrikaans literature and 'black township literature' (Vaughan's term), provide the more dominant English system with models for appropriation.

IV

I will now attempt to give an overview of the rather fragmented field of South African literary historiography in recent times.

Even-Zohar points out that 'in a pluralistic society, what has been, is, or should be canonical for those who represent power has not been, is not, and cannot be representative of marginal communities'. (1990:11). Afrikaans literature, privileged since 1948 through access to political power, is in the singular position, compared to the other South African literatures, of having various full-length literary histories written about it. (Cf. Dekker,

Antonissen, Kannemeyer). Between the sixties and the eighties most important literary critics published volume upon volume of literary criticism on authors central to the canon, such as Opperman and Van Wyk Louw. The high point of this canonization process was probably reached with Kannemeyer's two volume *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur*, in 1 100 pages, published in 1978 and 1983, followed by a popularised version in 1988.

The heated debate between Cloete on the one side and Kannemeyer, Olivier and Jansen on the other, which ensued between 1980 and 1982 about what constitutes a literary history, centred on a rejection by Cloete of the nature of Kannemeyer's encyclopedic, strongly bibliographical work, described by Olivier as 'the culmination of traditional historiography in Afrikaans'. (1981:41). This led to an article by Olivier, 'Literary history: Ideal or reality?', in which he stated that 'Cloete's objections against this book ... can be maintained only if one also rejects the whole tradition of literary historiography in Afrikaans'. (1982:193). Although the thrust of the article was polemical, dealing with the divergent positions of Kannemeyer's published book and Cloete's hypothesised ideal, this discussion reopened the debate in Afrikaans literary circles on what constitutes literary history.

The historical-materialist model put forward in Ampie Coetzee's *Letterkunde & Krisis. 'n Honderd Jaar Afrikaanse Letterkunde en Afrikaner Nasionalisme/Literature & Crisis. A Hundred Years Afrikaans Literature and Afrikaner Nationalism* (1990), although sketchy (62 pages) and flawed by an inclination to dismiss the writers constituting the existing canon (rather than to **reread** them from a new socio-historical context - for a more comprehensive discussion see Van Vuuren, 1991), can be seen as indicating a paradigm switch in the approach to Afrikaans literature and literary historiography. He suggested a possible scheme for periodization based on historical and political events such as the advent of Afrikaner Nationalism, the mine strikes of 1922, and the happenings at Sharpeville in 1961 and Soweto in 1976 (1. **1875-1922**; 2. **1922-1948**; 3. **1948-1961**; 4. **1961-1976**; 5. **after 1976**). This differs radically from the orientation around genres, 'period codes' such as romanticism or realism, or the use of decade names such as 'Dertig' and 'Sestig' to indicate a specific group of writers, which Kannemeyer used as ordering principles.

Most relevant however to this discussion, is Coetzee's consciousness of the lack of integration of Afrikaans literature in the 'master narrative of S.A. history' and how the reading of Afrikaans literary texts in isolation, separate from other literatures and cultures in S.A., has led to what he calls a resultant inbreeding ('inteelt'). He stresses the need for

incorporation of Afrikaans into the broader context of a diversified S.A. literature. (1990:56). Siegfried Huigen has pointed out that Coetzee wants to put literary historiography to use in serving the aim of one South African unitary state. (1992:50). Maybe this is overstressing the agenda set out in the introduction of 'striving for a united, non-racial, democratic South Africa' in rewriting the history of Afrikaans. However it is clear from this suggested model for a rereading, and from 'work in progress', that serious work is also being done in Afrikaans historiography from a comparative South African vantage point. His *Letterkunde & Krisis*, although possibly overstating the case politically, alerts literary historians and critics to the necessity of placing their work within a historical context. Too much Afrikaans scholarship is still ahistorical.

In her seminal work on Breytenbach as public figure (*Breytenbach as Openbare Figuur*, 1990), Francis Galloway suggests that disillusionment developed in 'leftist' Afrikaans literary circles during the mid eighties with the imported theory of deconstruction, as it could not offer an answer to the problem of the literary text in its relationship to South African 'reality', and because increasingly it was felt necessary to recognize the social and political codes in the individual text. This radical break with Afrikaans tradition of previous decades is characterized, according to Galloway, by Marxist, sociological and ideological-critical approaches to literature. (1990:307). The dissatisfaction with literary practice in traditional Afrikaans circles and the stronger accentuation of the inescapable political nature of all literary production in a society in a state of crisis, led to a joint meeting in Zimbabwe in July 1989 of ANC members involved in formulating cultural policy, and representatives from these 'leftist' Afrikaans circles. On this occassion the call for '**a more inclusive and hegemonic national literature**' (Cronin, 1990:180) surfaced again. In a lengthy discussion of a 'South African literature' (recorded in Coetzee and Polley's *Crossing Borders*, 1990:176-203), Cronin introduced a new perspective by rejecting the earlier tendency to produce 'white, English language (so-called) **South-African** anthologies', and the later striving '... to establish a national literature under the hegemony of a white, liberal, English project'. According to him this has been a project that presents the white English community as privileged, with a special cultural 'roeping' ('calling': HvV) - bestowed upon it by virtue of its language ('a window on the world'), and by virtue of its alleged social position ('between the two warring

parties of Afrikaans and African nationalism'). Needless to say, this attempt to establish some kind of special claim for fence-sitting has not really led anywhere - whether in literature or politics'. (1990:180).

The alternative use of the qualificatory 'national' as synonym for 'South African' refers us back to Gérard's project in the early eighties, but has not caught on, probably because of the unintentional association with the now pejoratively regarded concept of 'nationalism'. Degenaar pointed out that a concept such as 'national culture' in a 'sharply divided society' is 'likely to mean little more than the political and cultural predispostion of the particular commentator or organisation'. (In Chapman, 1992:156).

Cronin's tirade against the white English literary community and their perceived tendency to usurp and appropriate literary fields of study from what is seen as a privileged social position, is an acute observation, and underlines the position of power which the English language has in relation to the politically stigmatised Afrikaans. Implicitly Cronin also introduces the role of **race** into this discussion, as his tirade seems to be aimed at the 'whiteness' of the English literary community to which he refers.

Malvern van Wyk Smith's recent publication, *Grounds of Contest. A Survey of South African English Literature* (1990) sets out ostensibly to 'note the quintessentially South African landmarks in **our** writing'. His use of 'our' seems to suggest that he writes from the centre of the South African white English community, but his choice of material includes black writing in English. This black writing in English is what Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his latest book, *Moving the Centre. The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, dismissively calls 'the tragedy of the Europhone tradition which has come to wear the mask of African literature'. (1993:20). The boundaries of Van Wyk Smith's project are defined by the English language, just as the boundaries of Coetzee's *White Writing* are defined by race. Of Afrikaans writers, Smith only has fleeting references to Breytenbach, Brink and Elsa Joubert, indicating where translation has facilitated access and probable appropriation into what is seen as the highly selective canon of 'South African English Literature'.

One is struck by the extraordinary fragmentation and polarisation of the South African literary scene when looking at the way **race** is used in descriptions of literary histories. In 1985 the University of the Western Cape published *Swart Afrikaanse skrywers (Black Afrikaans Writers)*, signalling the consciousness of an alternative grouping with a group identity separate from mainstream Afrikaans literature. In this collection Jakes Gerwel

identified four elements in the work of Afrikaans writers situated geographically in the Cape: exile literature (De Wette and February), political struggle poetry (Willemse and Anthony), poetry of the 'private ache' (Oliphant), and poetry eminating from the Cape Flats, using the sociolect of the working class (Snyders). These poets, like their African counterparts, the Soweto poets, is seen by Gerwel as representing Black Consciousness. They were motivated to overcome the alienation from Afrikaans as medium which followed the political hegemonic rule by white Afrikaners. (1985:15-16).

A divergent development from the literary historiography of the (white) Afrikaans canon is the rediscovery of a so-called alternative Afrikaans literature, a process with which Hein Willemse is occupied. In a recent lecture he stated his aim: '"Afrikaans" and the "Afrikaans literature" are elitist, white-centred, cultural constructs, and essentially univocal institutions. To fathom the extent of the suppression, necessitates the establishment of the presence of the **other** in the history of Afrikaans literature. Who were the oppositional voices? Perspectives and attitudes of black Afrikaans speakers have been excluded from the central canon up to now'. (Conference of the Afrikaans Literature Society, Stellenbosch, 1992:1). Willemse has thus far succeeded in salvaging for his 'alternative' canon the almost forgotten novelist, Arthur Fula, as well as the cultural commentator and journalist, Piet Uithalder.

In 1987 a collection of essays, *Race and Literature/ Ras en literatuur*, by writers representing a wide spectrum of ideologies and viewpoints, revealed an attempt to bring clarity to the confusion. In reality this project only functioned to underline the segmentation of South African literature and literary studies. Confirmation is to be found in the continuing appearance of anthologies and literary histories using **race** as a qualifying epithet, in spite of Henry Gates's remark that 'when we attempt to appropriate ... "race" as a term for an essence - as did the négritude movement ... we yield too much: **the basis of a shared humanity**'. (1985:13). However, South African literary historians seem unable to avoid racial distinctions when dealing with literature, which seems to indicate the overwhelming presence of socio-political realities, and the problem of ideology in dealing with South African literature. In 1988 J.M. Coetzee published *White Writing*, dealing with Afrikaans and English literature until 1948, but with the misleadingly, all-encompassing subtitle, 'On the Culture of Letters in South Africa', yet focussing only on Afrikaans and English literature.

In Andries Oliphant's recent contribution to the encyclopedic *Literêre terme en teorieë* (edited by Cloete, 1992) under the title 'Swart literatuur in Suid-Afrika' ('Black literature in

South Africa'), he no longer distinguishes between writing by black authors in language divisions: black writers in Afrikaans **and** in English are dealt with simultaneously, indicating a shift in perception. This contribution implies that language boundaries can be set aside, and that he perceives coherence in the literary production of the black South African community. Oliphant also stresses that '(t)his literature is not a separate entity and can be compared productively with the literature of whites. Such a comparative study will illustrate how the themes which occur in black literature are intertwined with similar themes in white English and Afrikaans writing. Seen together, this dialogic relationship forms the basis of **the underlying unity of South African literature**. This overview should be seen as the first step in the direction of an inclusive approach'. (1992:524. My translation). So in spite of the continuing practice of dealing with fragmented sections of SA literature defined by the race of the authors, Oliphant underlines belief, at least on a theoretical level, in an 'underlying unity'.

A seminal contribution to the problem of race in SA literary historiography, is the review in *Staffrider* (1991:59-71) by Mbulelo Mzamane of Shava's *A People's Voice. Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century* (1989). He accuses Shava of reductionism in 'categorising all African literature in SA as protest' (1991:60), and in a strange parallel to the Cloete-Kannemeyer debate, points to the 'secondary and tertiary source flavour' of his literary history, hampered by Shava's linguistic limitations in not knowing Zulu, when dealing with R.R.R. Dhlomo's work. Like Cloete, Mzamane has unrealistic expectations of the literary historian in wanting first-hand interpretations of all texts dealt with, rather than recognizing his task on a meta-level as also dealing with the reception history of works. He also criticises Shava's theoretical underpinning: '(a) gesture here towards formalist textual criticism and a gesture there towards Marxist contextual interpretation, it ends up doing neither efficiently'. (1991:7). However, the important contribution Mzamane makes in this long review essay, is his identification of salient characteristics and changes in the body of literature under review. He stresses the '**symbiotic relationship between politics and literature in South Africa**' (1991:61), and points to the '**collective ethic**' that marks the **new form of the African novel** in South Africa as an emergent literary form attempting to 'respond adequately to the evolving political situation in South Africa'. (1991:65). In alerting

the reader to Shava's neglect of women writers, Mzamane states that **autobiography was 'revitalised' in the eighties** (in the writing of amongst others Kuzwayo, Makeba, Makhoere and Magona).

Recent literary historiography has seen a growing consciousness of, and steady increase in research publications, on the oral tradition, as in the work of Jeff Opland (see *Xhosa Oral Poetry. Aspects of a Black South African Tradition*, 1983). Knowledge of this indigenous tradition can radically influence our rereading of the existing canonized works, as becomes clear for instance when one realises that Opperman's poems, 'Heilige beeste' and 'Shaka', are actually examples of cultural syncretism. These poems utilize parallelism and repetition, characteristic techniques of oral tradition, and are also examples of transcultural appropriation in their use of 'Denkschemata' and imagery based on traditional pastoral Zulu culture.

Several anthologies published recently focus on women's writing. Recent publications in this field include Lockett's *Breaking the Silence: A Century of South African Women's Poetry*, 1990, Van Niekerk's *Raising the Blinds. A Century of South African Women's Stories*, 1990, and Clayton's *Women and Writing in South Africa. A Critical Anthology*, 1989. An emergent feminist literary history also 'inevitably challenges the boundaries and major preconceptions of existing canons and orthodoxies' as Hofmeyr pointed out in a rather negative review of the theoretical basis of these anthologies, which tend to be ahistorical and to 'indigenize' metropolitan theories, rather than trying to define a South African literary tradition 'with which an indigenizing debate may engage'. (1992:90).

V

This overview of what constitutes South African literature and the writing of its history, is an attempt to illustrate the complexity and hybridized nature of the phenomenon. A comparative literary history of the totality of South African literature is clearly an ideal which is far from being realized, while we still struggle with the problematic concepts of race, language and gender, the relationship between aesthetic text and urgent political reality, and how to define our various literatures.

References

Anthony, F. 1983. *Robbeneiland my huis my kruis*. Kasselsvlei: Kampen.

Antonissen, R. 1955. *Die Afrikaanse letterkunde van aanvang tot hede*. Kaapstad: NASOU.

Ashcroft, B. Griffiths, G. and H. Tiffin. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge.

Besselaar, G. 1914. *Zuid-Afrika in de Letterkunde*. Amsterdam: J.H. de Bussy.

Chapman, M. 1992. The Function of Literature in South Africa Today: Tasks and challenges. *Theoria* 80. October: 155-157.

Clayton, C. (ed). 1989. *Women and Writing in South Africa: A Critical Anthology*. Johannesburg: Heinemann.

Cloete, T.T. (red). 1992. *Literêre terme en teorieë*. Pretoria: HAUM-Literêr.

Coetzee, A. and J. Polley (eds). 1990. *Crossing Borders. Writers meet the ANC*. Bramley: Taurus.

Coetzee, A. 1990. *Letterkunde & Krisis. 'n Honderd Jaar Afrikaanse Letterkunde en Afrikaner-Nasionalisme*. Bramley: Taurus.

Coetzee, J.M. 1988. *White Writing. On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. Sandton: Radix.

Cronin, J. (et al). 1990. 'A South African Literature', in Coetzee and Polley, 176-203.

Dekker, G. 1947. *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers Boekhandel.

Even-Zohar, I. 1990. 'Poly-system Studies', *Poetics Today*. 1.1-2: 1-268.

Galloway, F. 1990. *Breyten Breytenbach as Openbare Figuur*. Pretoria: HAUM-Literêr.

Gates, H. 1985. 'Editor's Introduction: Writing "Race" and the Difference it Makes', *Critical Inquiry* 12(1): 1-20.

Gérard, A. S. 1983. *Comparative Literature and African Literatures*. Pretoria: Via Afrika.

Glenn, I.E. 1980. 'Towards a Sociology of South African Literature', *Social Dynamics* 6:56-59.

Gray, S. 1979. *Southern African Literature. An Introduction*. Cape Town: David Philip.

1986. 'The Praxis of Comparative Theory: On Writing the History of Southern African Literature', *SAVAL Conference Papers* VI. Pretoria.

Hassan, C. J. 1993. *Robbeneiland as simbool van die Suid-Afrikaanse politieke gevangenis met spesifieke verwysing na Frank Anthony se digbundel Robbeneiland my kruis my huis*. Unpublished MA thesis, University of Natal, Durban.

Hofmeyr, I. 1979. 'The State of South African Literary Criticism'. *English in Africa* 6(2), 39-50. September.

1992. 'Feminist Literary Criticism in South Africa'. *English in Africa* 19(1), 89-102.

Huigen, S. 1992. 'Bezeten door de volksgeest: de historiografie van de Nederlandse geschriften uit Zuid-Afrika'. *Stilet* IV: 43-52.

Jacobs, J.U. 1986. 'Breyten Breytenbach and the South African Prison Book'. *Theoria* 68: 95-105.

1991. 'Confession, Interrogation and Self-Interrogation in the New South African Prison Writing'. *Kunapipi* 1(13): August.

1991. 'The Discourses of Detention'. *Current Writing* 3: 193-199. October.

Kannemeyer, J.C. 1978. *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur I*. Kaapstad: Academica.

1983. *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur II*. Kaapstad: Academica.

1988. *Die Afrikaanse Literatuur 1652-1987*. Kaapstad: Academica.

Lekota, M.P. (Terror). 1991. *Prison Letters to a Daughter*. Bramley: Taurus.

Lockett, C. 1990. *Breaking the Silence: A Century of South African Women's Poetry*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker.
Mbeki, G. 1991. *Learning from Robben Island: The Prison Writings of Govan Mbeki*. Cape Town: David Philip.
Mzamane, M. 1991. 'Cultivating a People's Voice in the Criticism of South African Literature'. *Staffrider* 9(3): 59-70.
Malan, C. (ed). 1987. *Race and Literature/Ras en Literatuur* (CENSAL publication no 15). Pinetown: Owen Burgess.
Nathan, M. 1925. *South African Literature: A General Survey*. Cape Town: Juta.
Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. 1993. *Moving the Centre. The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. London: James Currey.
Oliphant, A.L. 1992. 'Swart literatuur in Suid-Afrika', in Cloete, *Literêre Terme en Teorieë*: 514-525. March.
Olivier, G. 1981. 'Oor die literatuurgeskiedenis: Cloete en Kannemeyer'. *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* 21(1): 26-41.
1982. 'Literatuurgeskiedenis: ideaal of werklikheid?' *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* 22(3): 193-199. September.
Opland, J. 1983. *Xhosa Oral Poetry*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
Shava, P. V. 1989. *Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century*. London: Zed Books.
Smith, J. F. (et al, eds). 1985. *Swart Afrikaanse skrywers*. Belville: UWK-drukkers.
Swanepoel, C.F. 1986. *Literary Historiography: A Survey*. SAVAL Conference Papers VI. Pretoria: 82-92.
Van Niekerk, A. (ed). 1990. *Raising the Blinds: A Century of South African Women's Stories*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker.
Van Vuuren, H. 1991. 'Afrikaanse of Suid-Afrikaanse letterkunde? 'n Kritiese kyk na die Kannemeyer- en Coetzee-modelle van Afrikaanse literatuurgeskiedskrywing'. *Stilet* 3(2): 63-70.
Van Wyk Smith, M. 1990. *Grounds of Contest. A Survey of South African English Literature*. Kenwyn: Jutalit.
Vaughan, M. 1982. 'Ideological Direction in the Study of Southern African Literature'. *English in Africa* 9(2): 41-63.
Willemse, H. 1992. '"Ik is onbekend, ma ik is een van de ras so moet my nie veracht nie": die beeldvorming van Piet Uithalder in die A.P.O. (1909-1922)'. Unpublished keynote address, Conference of the Afrikaans Literature Society, Stellenbosch, October.

DREAM WRITING

Johan van Wyk
University of Durban-Westville

South African Poetry, Drama and Narrative, an Archaeology and Mythology

This essay explores the origins of poetry, drama and narrative in South Africa. It also poses questions on the status of such a search for origins. Is it science or is it mythology? To what extend does archaeology - the science of origins and evolution - overlap with mythology?

Secondly: the material investigated corresponds to similar material in other parts of the world. Interesting parallels, for instance, occur in ancient Greek mythology and literature. I will make some comparative references to these. The implications of the similarities, though, must still be developed. Greece is isolated for comparison because of its important position in the construction of world literary history.

According to Robert Graves (Introduction to the *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*) myths are attempts, in the form of religious or heroic legends, to tell about the origins of the universe, man and death. In its focus on origins, mythology is similar to archaeology. Archaeology also traces human origins, evolution and history.

Often myth and archaeology seem to overlap: Schliemann's 'discovery' of 'Troy' [1] rests on his reading of Homer's *Iliad*. Before 1873, when Schliemann made his discovery the story of the *Iliad* was considered to be a myth rather than history. Another example of this mythology and archaeology intertext is D.G. Hogarth's discovery of Zeus' Birth-Cave on Mount Ida in 1900.

Archaeology reveals the artefacts of the past through excavation. These artefacts are signs of the reality, the presence, of the past. It is evidence. Carbon dating, detailed descriptions of the fragments of objects found, photographs, classifying tables and drawings clearly position the past within the narrative of human development.

Mythology, though, is not without its evidence. The tracks left in the mud or engraved in ancient times at the 'creation sites' of Kopong and Metsing in Botswana, are, to the Bechuana, those of the first-created people and their animals who according to legend emerged from a hole nearby. (Wilman, M, 1968:1). Interestingly they describe these imprints and marks, as 'lokualo' the same word that came to mean 'writing' and 'printing'.

Unlike archaeology, mythology is dreamlike. Condensation and displacement transform the events mythology refers to: its time, space and content are uncertain. It often, as in the case of Schliemann, presents important clues to the archaeologist.

As in archaeology, mythology classifies human history into broad periods and genealogies. The Greek poet, Hesiod, divided the 'story of man' into five stages: a Golden Age, a Silver Age, a Bronze Age, an Heroic Age and an Iron Age.

Archaeology distinguishes the different ages by the production of implements and the materials used. In South Africa the different ages refer to 1) the Stone Age and 2) the Iron Age. The Stone Age includes a pre-tool making phase (2 million to 500 000 years BC), an early tool making phase (500 000 to 19 000 years BC) ending with the introduction of the bow and arrow (19 000 BC to 1000 AD). Early evidence of an Iron Age is copper being mined at Phalaborwa from about 800 AD and iron at Bambandyanalo from about 1055 AD.

In the place of the mythical or orally-transmitted family tree, archaeology presents hominid development in different evolutionary stages. It reconstructs these stages according to the discovery of hominid remains. The earliest South African remains are those of Australopithecine Robustus and Australopithecine Africanus found at places like Sterkfontein, Makapansgat, Taung, Swartkrans and Kromdraai. They date back to a period of 2 million to 50 000 years ago.

The Origin / Semiotics

Hominid presence in South Africa dates back to about 2 million years. At what point did precursors to poetry, drama and narrative emerge? [2] Poetry, drama and narrative are part of a semiotics that predates alphabetic writing. It has its roots in events and rituals indicating the emergence of semiotics itself. A number of practices such as burial and rock painting can be linked to narrative, poetry and drama if semiotics rather than language (spoken or written) is the starting point. Semiotics includes the study of these practices. The inclusivity of semiotics is clear in its etymological derivation. The word semiotics stems from the Canaanite root *sem* that refers to a mark, a name, a token, a form, a shape, a figure or a configuration. (Bernal, 1991: 60). De Saussure foregrounds this comprehensive nature of semiotics by describing it as the science that studies the life of signs within society. De Saussure defines the sign as a mental image (signifier based on a sound, a written or other materially perceived image) referring to a concept (signified). Kristeva sees the sign as not only designating a concept, but

as being motivated by unconscious drives. The sign can therefore comprise of a burial site (as mark: *gravelgraph*), a rock painting and ritual [3] insofar as these refer to meanings, unconscious motivations and other signs.

Volosinov in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1986) attempts to delimit the domain of semiotics and signs by differentiating it from physical phenomena, instruments of production and consumer goods. These points of delimitation, though, are the junctures where semiotics and poetics most interestingly emerge.

1) According to Volosinov, physical phenomena are not semiotic. Because the physical entity equates with itself it does not signify something else. It only becomes a sign when given a conceptual meaning. Burial of a corpse, though, would be an example of the transformation of the physical into a sign. While the corpse is only physical, it points to a semiotic awareness of death when buried; it indicates death becoming a sign for the living.

   Some time in history, death became a sign to the living; a sign, usually, to be covered or made absent through burning or other means. The covering of the corpse became a powerful mark and meaning. From this meaning given to death, various rituals developed. The dead became potent sources of protection and fear. Important literary forms accompanied the rituals surrounding the dead. The *insinqulo*, for instance, is a Xhosa prayer whereby the living addresses the dead. While living, it was the individual's *isibongo* or praise name. The *iziduko* is a catalogue of the names and deeds of the ancestors. The Xhosa bury their dead in the sacred ground of the cattle kraal. Here the living use the *insinqulo* and *iziduko* at special occasions. The *insinqulo* and *iziduko* show death as an ultimate sign of power - a power transcending the social and the symbolic.

   According to Julia Kristeva, the poetic sign is a product of the drives repressed by social and symbolic meaning. Freud defines the drives as the urges to restore earlier states of things abandoned because of social or other external disturbing forces. The *insinqulo* and *iziduko*, as addresses to the dead, are attempts to restore the dead to a position where they still affect the living. They belong to a beyond. A beyond that the living can reach through ritual and dream. This imagined beyond compensates for the loss caused by death.

The discovery of death is one of the originating points of semiotics and poetry. The graves and burial grounds endure for ages. They are fragments of performed poetry. They are evidence of poetry before the event of writing.

2) Volosinov excludes the instruments of production from the realm of signs: the tool only has a designated function; it does not stand for or reflect anything else.

The instrument of production, nevertheless, can become a sign. This happens, for instance, when it takes on totemic significance. Iron smelting and the instruments made from iron took on special significance for the Barolong, and is commemorated in an ancient totemic dancing ritual in honour of the founding members of the lineage: Morolong and Noto. The name of the founding chief, Morolong, means 'blacksmith' and the name of his son, Noto, refers to the 'hammer'. The totemic emblems of the Barolong are iron and the hammer.

The totemic dancing ritual of the Barolong is reminiscent of the fire-renewal rites or metallurgical mysteries and torch-races of ancient Greece (the *Panathenaia*, *Hephaistia* and *Promethia*) centring on the figures of Athena, Hephaistos and Prometheus.

The rites do not point to a scientific understanding of the iron-smelting process. Rather, it indicates an indebtedness to the ancestral realm, the realm beyond. Prometheus did not invent fire; he stole it from the Gods, i.e. the ancestral world.

Between 500 000 to 9 000 BC people made increasingly sophisticated tools of stone, bone and wood. The introduction of the bow and arrow towards the end of this period was a dramatic change. Rock paintings often depict the bow and arrow, and other instruments such as the spear, digging stick and kierie. They have assumed important semiotic significance for the painters. To them these tools were 'images of power'. In the traditional Xhosa culture two spears are an important aspect of the *imbongi's* costume. The rhapsodist in ancient Greece carried a staff or wand when they recited their poetry. In mythology Circe turned Odysseus' followers into pigs with her wand.

The staff or wand associates strongly with a transformation of consciousness, as well as the shifting of shape and metamorphoses experienced during trance and hypnotic states. In the Norwegian traditions, the word *völva* ('witch') relates to the

word *völr* ('staff'). This staff has hypnotic powers and potency. It is known as the 'wand of subjection'. (Chadwick & Chadwick, 1968:142.) These instruments link an inspired person with the spirit world. They express divine force.

3) Volosinov further excludes consumer goods from the domain of signs. An object of consumption only becomes a sign when it attains a meaning separate from its function. The relation between animals as food and animals as depicted within art and belief systems needs investigation.

A favourite topic of Xhosa pastoralist praise poetry is cattle. They slaughter cattle, though, only for consumption on special occasions such as the *ukukhapa* - the burial of a chief. The hunter-gatherers hardly ever depict the rock rabbit, an important source of food, in their paintings.

Fish is a forbidden form of food for many Africans. A song of the circumcision school at Leribe reads:

> Nna ha ke je hlapi
> Hlapi ke noha
> Noha ya metsi
> E ya nkudisa
>
> I do not eat fish
> A fish is a snake
> A water snake
> It makes me ill (Wilson and Thompson, 1975:167).

An exception to this rule is the Tlhaping ('the fish people') who abandoned the taboo, apparently because of a period of food scarcity. Their name refers to this change.

Production and consumption, the metabolism between man and nature, imply essential processes for cultural life. To transform a stone into a hammer indicates a metaphoric and poetic perception of the world. A tool in its historical founding moment is poetic. It is only through centuries of use that the poetic impact of the discovery of a particular implement becomes repressed into the unconscious. Myths, though, still commemorate the important founding moments in the history of production and consumption. These moments include:

1) The discovery of the bow and arrow. Egyptian myths ascribe this discovery to the god *Mntw* (the pharaoh Menthotpe or the Greek Rhadamanthys - the root word for mantis).

2) The domestication of animals. This, again, the Egyptians attributed to *Mntw*, the bull god and probably the origin of the Cretan Bull Cult of the Mycenean Period. The earliest African depictions of domesticated cattle are from the Tassili Plateau in the Sahara Desert. These paintings date from about 3250-2950 BC. People brought cattle to Zimbabwe in about 300-1085 AD. Their presence south of the Limpopo followed soon. The cattle depicted in the rock paintings of Lesotho are similar and different to those depicted in North Africa. They are humped while the ones in the North are humpless. Like those of the Sahara they have a multi-coloured hide.

3) The discovery of fire and iron-smelting.

In Greek mythology Prometheus embodies the discovery of fire. He stole fire from the gods after being inspired by Mekone (according to Hesiod's *Theogony*). The name Mekone means poppy place and implies a narcotic condition. Prometheus, as thief who steals from the gods, is a typical trickster figure, comparable to the Irish Cormac or the South African hunter-gatherers' */Kaggen*.

/Kaggen, associated especially with the praying mantis, reveals himself in many forms. Sometimes he is the Eland Bull, the Snake or the Vulture. This ability to change form is typical of the metamorphoses hallucinated by shamans in trances. The association of the shaman with the animal world finds a parallel in Greek portrayal of the costumes of their mythological heroes and gods: Hermes wears a ramskin, Herakles a lion skin; they show Zeus as a goatskin bearer, while the goddess Athena manifests herself in various bird forms such as owl, dove and gull. The Xhosa *imbongi* wears an animal skin cloak as costume.

Jack Lindsay connects the Greek trickster, Prometheus, to a shamanist phase in human and literary history. In the mythology of the South African hunter-gatherers */Kaggen*, the trickster-god, was originally a shaman. The following section explores the role of the shaman in history.

Poet / Shaman

Lindsay defines the shaman as someone who controls the rituals connected with fertility renewal, illness and death. Through music, song and mimetic imitations of animals and spirits, the shaman enters a state of possession (Lindsay 1965:121) or trance - in this state he or she enacts a passage into the spirit world. He or she often carries the spirit of a sacrificed animal or a dead person to its correct destination in the underworld, or rescues the spirit of a sick person. The shaman confronts the gods, ancestors and spirits in a state of trance and 'tricks' healing powers, rain and the power to control animals from them.

The shaman was, further, a medium for divine inspiration. The Greeks called poetry, produced in these states of inspiration, *sophia* or wisdom that came from forces beyond the self. The poet was a mantis or prophet, an intermediary between people and the gods of the spiritual world. They rarely used the Platonic idea of the poet (*poietes*) as maker. Poets did not intentionally make poetry. Forces, operating within the body, but not identified with the conscious self, inspired them. Dreams are one such state of inspiration.

The work by Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989) on the rock paintings and engravings of the hunter-gatherers in the South African region, if proved correct, makes a better understanding of shamanistic inspiration possible. It also clarifies the role that dance and music play in the process.

Shamanism is especially common among hunter-gatherers. Nearly half of the men and a third of the women amongst the !Kung have shamanist abilities.

Hunter-gatherers

Giving a common name to the hunter-gatherers is impossible. The Europeans call them *Bushmen*, the Xhosa *Twa*, the Sotho *Roa* and the Khoikhoi *San*. The few remaining clans call themselves */Xam*, *//Kau//* and *!Kung*. In previous centuries they were widely dispersed over the continent of Africa. Although they share a hunter-gatherer economy, they vary in physical type and speak a number of different languages. These are click languages, at least four of which are not related.

They live in bands of between fifty to seventy people (in previous centuries, bands might have consisted of more people). Each band is independent from the next and moves within a defined area, usually around a particular waterhole. (See Bleek 1923: *Introduction*). They encourage marriage between the different bands. At particular times the bands of related

groups gather for a few weeks in a sacred place. Lee (1984:16) writes about such a regular gathering at /Xai/Xai in the Dobe area of Botswana. This gathering usually takes place during the dry season. Its purpose is trade, dancing and the arrangement of marriages. These meetings are reminiscent of the more elaborate *panegyris* or intertribal meetings of ancient Greece. During the *panegyris*, worship, sacrifices, prayers, athletic and musical contests, trade and funeral orations (panegyric) and the recitation of poetry took place.

The rock art of the South African hunter-gatherers occurs especially in mountainous regions such as the Drakenstein, the Cedarberg, Outeniqua, Camdeboo, Sneeuberg, Winterberg, Stormberg and the Drakensberg.

According to Stow (who travelled in the Queenstown district in the nineteenth century) every band of hunter-gatherers had a cave with a sacred painting as its headquarters. From this painting the band derived its name: the Eland people from the painted Eland, the Python people from the Python cave and the Springbok people from the Springbok cave.

The paintings were an integral part of the trance dances of the hunter-gatherers. Lewis-Williams and Dowson state that the hunter-gatherers believed the paintings contained power, and that this power, stored in the painted animals, flowed to the trancing dancers. The painted sites are 'storehouses of the potency that made contact with the spiritual world possible'. (Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989:36). The mixing of the blood of animals, such as the Eland, into the paint, instilled potency into the paintings. Because the hunter-gatherers in the Drakensberg are extinct, Lewis-Williams and Dowson, unfortunately, had to link the paintings to the dances by referring to the *!Kung* of Botswana.

The *!Kung* of Botswana usually dance once a month, especially during the full moon. They ritually eat the meat of the giraffe, eland, kudu or mongongo nuts to produce heightened experiences of power. For the dance, the women arrange themselves in a circle around a fire. It is their task to tend to the fire and to sing. The men dance around the women.

The purpose of the dance is healing, rain-making and the control of animals. To achieve this purpose the medicine owners (*n/um k"ausi*) enter a trance (*!kia*). The movements of the dancers, the music (the rattles around the ankles, the clapping of the hands by the women, the drumming and the playing of reed flutes) and the singing induce the trance.

The rhythmic sounds and movements induce a somatic energy called *n/um*. The *!Kung* describe *n/um* as a substance in the pit of the stomach of the healers. The dance activates this

energy. The *!Kung* describe it as boiling. In this process it rises up the spinal cord and creates a feeling of power and energy in the body: trembling legs, heaving chests, dry throats and visions follow.

N/um

The hunter-gatherers' explanation of *n/um* boiling up in the body overlaps with Julia Kristeva's view that the rhythmical aspects of poetry and poetic language derive from energy discharges. The rhythmic movements of the body and the non-referential singing, correlate with Kristeva's semiotic layer of energy activity. In Kristeva's terms the semiotic embraces the neural imprints, marks and traces manifested in the rhythmic responses of the body. These rhythmic responses are expressions of the drives. It is rooted in the infantile and in the period before language acquisition. It relates to the pleasure and pain experienced especially in the oral and anal regions of the body when the infant interacts with the mother and other family members. Kristeva's definition of semiotics differs from Volosinov's. Volosinov interprets semiotics in terms of the referential sign and conscious processes. The drives and the instinctual are central to Kristeva's semiotics.

N/um, further, matches the Greek menos. Menos refers to a force or a power-heightening felt in the chest and 'thrusting up pungently' into the nostrils of the shaman (Lindsay, 1965:70-1). It enables him or her to confront the gods.

The trance evokes the *//gangwasi*, or spirits of the deceased ancestors. The healers 'cajole, plead, argue and do battle' with the *//gangwasi*. (Lee, 1984:103). These trance confrontations with the spirits of the underworld are typical of shamans or the 'defiers of the highgods'. (Lindsay, 1965:118.)

Megan Biesele recorded, in Botswana, a report of the trance experience from an old *!Kung* healer called *K"xau*. A translation of this report is found in Joan Halifax's book *Shamanic Voices* (1979). The Drakensberg rock paintings and the transcription made by Biesele point to shared motifs, a shared world view - despite the great distance between the Drakensberg and Botswana. This transcription, although far removed in time and space from the paintings, is a key to understanding them. Matching the motifs in the paintings and the transcription with those from ancient Greek mythology further highlights shared aspects of a broader shaman culture.

Universal movements of the trance

The trance experience consists of three movements that recur universally as motifs: an underwater, underground and in-the-air movement.

During the first movement, God, the giraffe, calls *K"xau* and takes him 'to a wide body of water' that he enters by lying on his back in the direction the water is flowing. His body stretches out with the flow of the water. The rock paintings depict this by means of elongated figures lying on their backs and surrounded by fish, eels and crabs. (Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989:54.) Greek mythology refers to the waterleap of a variety of figures. (Lindsay, 1965:216). One of them, Glaukus, the fisherman, seized by a divine madness, flung himself into the sea after eating a powerful grass. He then became a seagod with prophetic powers.

K"xau describes the going under water as a struggle with the water: 'I fought the water for a long, long time'. (Halifax, 1979:56).

While *K"xau* is psychologically going under water, the spirits are dancing. *K"xau* describes his own dance as hopping. Later he refers to the spirit Dwamananani who misses one leg and hops about. This image also recurs in the paintings. It is also found in ancient Greece. The ancient Greeks called the one-legged shaman dance *askoliasmos*. (Lindsay, 1965:332). Vases depict satyrs in this posture. Supported on the right foot they straighten out the other to the tip of the toes and then bend the knee and cross hands. (Lindsay, 1965:41).

K"xau enters the earth in the second movement. Painted figures disappearing in the grooves or folds of the rock surface indicate this travelling underground. (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:88.) Hades and Chthonic spirits conjure up images of going underground in ancient Greece. (Lindsay 1965:41).

Thirdly *K"xau* climbs a 'thread into the sky'. In the paintings the lines emanating from the dancers' heads probably refer to the thread of energy that pulls them into the sky. Birds and birdlike figures also represent the trance movement into the sky. (Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989:56 & 73).

Climbing into the sky is a universal theme in ancient cultures: in Genesis, Jacob dreams of a heaven-ladder. The symbol of the heaven-ladder (*klimax*) is widespread in Greek culture. An Attic *kylix* of about 470-460 BC depicts Thracian women tattooed with the symbol of the ladder. (Lindsay, 1965:104). Mythological figures portrayed as birds are common in ancient Greece. Various dances such as the *geranos* or crane dance use bird costumes.

Pictographic language

The rock paintings form a pictographic language . The pictorial aspects of the rock paintings correspond to the thetic level of energy activity identified by Kristeva as a source of poetry. The thetic roots in the mirror stage, the stage when the infant recognises him- or herself as separate entity. The pictorial nature of this discovery of the self as object is important. This is also a discovery of the separateness of the world and its objects from the self.

This pictographic language has features that are significantly different from the features of spoken language. Unlike spoken language there are no syntagmatic links between the signs. The rules underlying the production of sentences, positing causal relationships are absent. The pictorial points to a thetic and spatial realm of objects. It implies a subject and object position in spite of the first person being absent from the painting. The painting does not contain the eye that determines its production. The 'I', clearly identified in spoken language, is not explicitly indicated in the pictograph. We assume that the figures portrayed as animals, or half-animals, or apparently undergoing transformations, refer to the painter as subject who underwent these shape-shifting experiences. The relation between the figures portrayed and the painter is however not clear. The figure depicted with the most vivid attention to detail, and situated in the centre usually indicate the subject. This figure is often larger than the rest.

Dream-interpretation is one methodological approach to these paintings: they stem from the dream or trance hallucination. The paintings, like the dream, are pictographic. They further share a common instinctual intermediary in the painter who transposes the signifying elements of the dream onto the rock painting. The instinctual intermediary is also collective or cultural. The recurrence of motifs in the various paintings and in the oral reports of trance experiences seems to point to the trans-individual deep structure from which these motifs stem.

Oral reports of trance experiences, such as that of *K"xau*, or the painted reports, are what Freud calls secondary revisions: the oral reports and the paintings as representations of the dream are different from the original dream material. The transposition from the dream system to the system of paint or orality leads to distortions and falsifications. It is impossible to reconstitute the material dream. It is possible, though, to recover the dream-thoughts, beliefs and ideas that prompted the dream. The various revisions contain traces of these.

Interestingly the differences between the rock paintings and the dream are not real for the traditional Venda. To them the rock paintings at Tombo-la-Ndou are not paintings but 'things in the eyes' that only become visible when gifts are left there. (Buijs, 1992:12).

The dream is different from the static painting in that it depicts scenic action: the dream constructs the images into situations that dramatise ideas. The images form a narrative in which scenes follow on one another. The situations are disconnected, full of contradictions and impossibilities. The dreamer, who is usually the protagonist in his or her own dream, experiences it with pleasure or fear.

The dreams and the paintings are a pictorial form of writing. It is tempting to view the hieroglyphs of Egypt as a development from the North African rock art. The dream is a vanishing, fleeting form of writing, spontaneously happening inside the sleeping person or trance. The painting, on the other hand, is an object, concrete and durable.

Seeing, hearing and thought

Alphabetic writing is phonic in contrast to visual pictorial writing. This phonic aspect is decisive for thought. Through words such as 'because' and 'if' the phonic can link concepts causally. This is difficult to express pictorially. The phonic is closer to thought. Heidegger points to the difference between seeing and hearing in thought processes. He states that one can see a situation clearly and yet not grasp it. Grasping means hearing distinctly. It means retaining the seen in the ear. Thought is a transposition of the seen into the heard, of the pictorial into the verbal: 'thinking is a grasping by the ear that grasps by sight' and 'thinking is hearing and seeing'. (Ricoeur, 1986:281).

Pure seeing belongs to Kristeva's semiotic phase: it implies a certain infantile, erotisation of sight. Thinking, on the other hand, as a combination of internal hearing and seeing, points to the thetic and symbolic, to the emergence of self-presence - the recognition of the self as subject-object in the mirror and the naming of the world.

The seeing-hearing constituents of thought are also important in Freud's description of the contrast between dream and waking states. In waking states, perceptual and sensory imprints (principally visual and pictorial), move towards memory where, through selection, it gains entrance to consciousness.

Consciousness transforms the visual imprint to verbal form. An opposite movement, from verbal form to perception, constitutes hallucination. This is rare in normal waking states.

Dreams are the product of a similar regressive movement in the nervous system. Verbal ideas change into pictorially experienced situations.

The dream, according to Freud (1980:699), regresses on three levels: 1) topographically from one place in the nervous system to another: from idea to perception; 2) formally, a 'primitive' pictorial form replaces the verbal form; and 3) temporarily in that vision (before it combines with hearing in the formation of the thinking subject) refers to the pre-verbal semiotic stage of development.

The dream as regression is an instrument of the drives in so far as it implies a harking back to older psychical structures. In the trance dance, and the rock paintings, older psychical structures become manifest in the form of the ancestors and the dead. God and his wife confronting *K"xau*, in his vision, with their massive sexual organs ('lo-o-ong' penis and wriggling labia) indicate the regressive, semiotic and pre-oedipal domain of trance.

'Formless areas of luminosity' and the 'vivid and rapidly changing images' (hypnagogic hallucinations) that appear within the closed eyelids, especially, when people fall asleep, instigate dreams according to Freud (1980:93-95). To Lewis-Williams and Dowson the geometric shapes (zigzags, chevrons, dots, grids, vortexes and u-shapes) depicted in rock paintings refer to the early formless stage of trance, identified as the entoptic stage. A construal phase follows when entoptic phenomena transform into familiar objects: the zig-zag, for instance, becomes a snake. During the final, iconic phase, spontaneously produced hallucinations of people, animals and other objects occur.

The entoptics represent the physical experience of pure *n/um* and energy. The thetic and symbolic consciousness has not transformed and interpreted it into the familiar. The construals and iconics are mental translations of this force. It indicates the way in which the mind makes sense of the energy produced within itself. To Derrida the translation of this internal energy into images is original because of the great metaphorical difference between force and image, and because the image does not derive from something outside the mental system. (1981:207).

The transformation of force into images constitutes the dream-work (i.e. the process whereby energies, drives and thoughts gain dream-content). Condensation and displacement structure the dream-work.

Condensation, or the compression of a large number of possible associations, meanings and ideas into a limited number of images, occurs in the construction of collective and composite

figures. Animals referring to clans, and animal names functioning as kinship names, or composite figures such as the therianthrope (human beings with animal features) and superimpositions would be examples of condensation. Ideas treated as things also condense: for instance, when a kinship group, named after an animal, is depicted as the animal itself. Composite figures function as neologisms and are a common feature in dreams.

Displacement coincides, to some extent, with condensation. It points to the transferral of a value attached to one object onto another. The lineage group condensed in the image of the animal points to the fact that the value of that lineage invests in that animal. This explains the logic operative in totems and taboos: the identity and value of the group displace onto the animal. Eating the flesh of that animal is equal to eating someone from the own group. The painted animal referring to the totemic clan, further, displaces the clan name onto the pictorial image.

Painting also presupposes a displacement of energy, from the eyes to the hands, onto the surface of the rock. Both the hands and the eyes are infantile zones of pleasure. The power to produce paintings indicates a strong investment of the drives and energy in these organs.

The painting of the trance experience implies a return of the repressed: or a semiotic material gaining signifying form. Repression refers to a blocking of infantile impulses that would under different conditions contradict the purposive ideas of secondary thinking. These impulses, charged with energy, continuously seek outlets. They find these outlets in the unintended, the non-communicative and mysterious aspects of symbolic life: in obsessive behaviour, ritual, dreams, jokes, literature and slips of the tongue. Ritual, jokes, art and literature are socially sanctioned manifestations of the repressed. The various manifestations of the repressed point to a distortion of conscious language.

The Formalists refer to this distortion, but without indicating its basis in repression, as *ostranenie* (making strange of language). Psychoanalysis shows how drives and pleasure motivate *ostranenie*.

The inaccessibility of the hylic (the real outside human consciousness) suggests an ultimate repression. Because of this inaccessibility of the real, we know force only through the imaginary, through the perceptual and symbolic constructions thereof. In so far as the self is such a repressed and inaccessible real, name and identity always refer to the other, or to the

outside. This is why a particular kinship group takes on the identity of an animal or object. The repression of the real, and the energy invested in it, inscribes poetry in all semiotic systems. Language is always strange.

Conclusion

Although the oral traditions, predating writing, have disappeared, the early stages of South African poetry, drama and narrative can be studied through the rock paintings and other semiotic remains, such as burial sites.

Notes

1. This has recently been contested by archaeologists.
2. The term 'literature' as an overarching term is too narrow to use here. It is too specific to the written letter and the book.
3. De Saussure stated: '(b)y studying rites, customs, etc. as signs, I believe that we shall throw new light on the facts and point up the need for including them in a science of semiology and explaining them by its laws'. (1959:17).

References

Bleek, D.F. 1923. *The Mantis and his Friends*. Cape Town: T. Maskew Miller.
Bernal, M. 1991. *Black Athena*. London: Vintage.
Buijs, G. 'Sources of power: The role of the divining dice (thangu) in Venda Cosmology'. Paper presented to the Annual Conference of the Association for Anthropology in Southern Africa, University of Durban-Westville. September 16-19, 1992.
Chadwick, H.M. and N.K. Chadwick. 1968. *The Growth of Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Derrida, J. 1981. *Writing and Difference*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Derrida, J. 1984. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
De Saussure, F. 1959. *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: Fontana/Collins.
Freud, S. 1980. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Harmondsworth: The Pelican Freud Library.
Graves, R. (Introduction) 1975. *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*. London: The Hamlyn Publishing Group.

Halifax, J. 1979. *Shamanic Voices*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
Kristeva, J. 1984. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Lee, R.B. 1984. *The Dobe !Kung*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
Lewis-Williams, D and T. Dowson. 1989. *Images of Power*. Johannesburg: Southern Books.
Lindsay, J. 1965. *The Clashing of the Rocks*. London: Chapman & Hall
Ricoeur, P. 1986. *The Rule of Metaphor*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Stow, G.W. 1964. *The Native Races of South Africa*. Cape Town: C. Struik.
Volosinov, V.N. 1986. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Wilman, M. 1968. *The Rock-Engravings of Griqualand West & Bechuanaland South Africa*. Cape Town: A.A. Balkema.
Wilson, M. and L. Thompson. 1975. *The Oxford History of South Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

'POPULAR MEMORY' AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORICAL DRAMA OF THE SEVENTIES IN ENGLISH: THE CASE OF CREDO MUTWA'S *UNOSILIMELA*

Sikhumbuzo Mngadi
University of Durban-Westville

> *'Light from the past passes through a kind of glass to reach us. We can either look for the accurate though somewhat unexciting image or we can look for the glorious technicolour. This is where the writer's integrity comes in. Will he be strong enough to overcome the temptation to select only those facts which flatter him? If he succumbs he will have branded himself as an untrustworthy witness. But it is not only his personal integrity as an artist which is involved. The credibility of the world he is attempting to re-create will be called to question and he will defeat his own purpose if he is suspected of glossing over inconvenient facts. We cannot pretend that our past was one long, technicolour idyll. We have to admit that like other people's pasts ours had its good as well as its bad sides'.* (Achebe, 1978).

To me, this metaphorical 'glass' to which Achebe refers in the above quotation, is the ideological prism that stands between objective reality and its subjective interpretation by the artist. It is in this ideological prism that certain political and gender identities are constructed and maintained as insular. Where language and literature are 'called into the service of a profound and embracing nationalism' (Ashcroft et al, 1989:23), this ideology needs unpacking, if only to discern the assumptions upon which it is predicated. Social change can thus be wrestled from the constrictions of nationalism and, to a certain extent, dialectical materialism. As Keyan Tomaselli argues:

> If ideology accounts for the 'lived' relations between people and their world, then we must accept that meaning is saturated with the ideological imperatives of a society.... In nearly every case, the conditions we 'see' through decoding the signs contained in the code are only imaginary in the sense that they are a mental construction distilled from what the individual consciously or unconsciously elects to absorb from his/her environment. (Tomaselli, 1985:15).

The struggle for meaning fought on the territory of historical representation of reality should thus be seen in this light.

Mutwa's ideological intentions are made clear in King Magadlemzini's short speech during the marriage between his daughter, Bagangile, a Zulu, and what in *uNosilimela* is referred to

as a 'moSotho groom'. He addresses the groom as a 'horse-meat-eating son of a moSotho!' (Mutwa, 1981:19). (Of course, this will be familiar to those conversant with ethnic tensions between the various black South African ethnic groups). But Mutwa's intention is not to endorse these divisions. In fact, he intends showing that, while they do exist, they have been blown out of proportion by the 'divide-and-rule' apartheid policy. Perhaps this position is what may explain why Magadlemzini, in spite of the 'foreign gibberish' by which the groom responds to his demand for a vow of commitment to his daughter, asks the patrons not to mind his 'ritual teasing' for 'it is a fellow blackman's voice'. (Ibid:19).

It seems to me that the notion of 'a fellow blackman's voice' is far too simplistic to gloss over inconvenient historical conflicts, and is incompatible with the play's conservative ideological stance. The 'ritual teasing' and the slapstick comic mode within which it is encapsulated, does not go beyond surface reconciliations. As a result, comedy is simply used to 'terminate accounts of change and transformation' (White, 1973), accounts which the play seems to avoid at all costs. There are various pointers to this failure of the play to engage in the arduous task of explaining the role of history as a vehicle for social change in contemporary South Africa. For example, the 'Storyteller's' story of 'self-understanding, self-discovery, love of your neighbour and love and respect for the laws and religion of your civilized forefathers' (Mutwa, 1981:8) is problematic. The problem of discovering a unified 'self' in history is concealed, and self-discovery is treated as an occasion that comes about naturally through one's recourse to historical fact. This 'self' is seen to be essentially tied to the past selves, which can be transposed to the present conditions of split subjectivities. The complexity of the present social environment within which this is articulated, is far too pronounced to allow such an unadulterated transposition.

In this regard, I see Mutwa's retreat to history, in the way he does, as backward-looking and utopian. In his play there is no sense that recourse to history as guide to present action is an act of repetition. In this act, as Homi Bhabha argues, the 'self' 'can neither be original' by virtue of the act of repetition that constructs it, nor 'identical'- by virtue of the difference that it defines. Consequently, '(its) presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative, and its articulation as repetition and difference'. (Bhabha, 1985:150). Thus the ironical distance between the past and the present is substituted for the play's revelationary disposition. Historical realism in a context fraught with identity crises can only serve to stifle change rather than to effect it.

With this whole historical import, the play entrenches and perpetuates the same old stereotypes which have determined gendered power relations in traditional societies. For example, women are still perceived as mysterious creatures, who either possess superhuman qualities, like the 'goddess' uNosilimela, or are obstinate and historical outcasts, as Namdazulwana is. As a result, the play freely confines them to the margins of society, with uNosilimela being refused the right to engage in a love affair, and Namdazulwana consumed by fire for refusing to listen to her husband, King Magadlemzini, who, throughout the play, is depicted as a noble patriarch.

Despite uNosilimela's protest about the 'tribal stuffiness' (Mutwa, 1981:26) of traditional social organization, and her eventual exile in the city, in order to justify the authority of the tribal gods, the play eventually punishes her with blindness and hopeless prostitution. In the end, she is saved from total annihilation by her brother, Solemamba, only to return home as a prodigal child. This biblical play-within-the-play best illustrates the sociology of Mutwa as a conservative historian-playwright.

The play's conservatism can also be noted in the play's plot shift from the rural setting to the urban environment of Johannesburg. Black people in Johannesburg are depicted as social and historical outcasts (thugs, whores, crass tycoons, greedy and corpulent shebeen queens and inyangas). There is no indication of the material conditions that produce such 'statuses' and/or classes of people. Even though that may be assumed, such an assumption is undermined by the broader argument implicit in the play's structural motif. In other words, their social positions appear to be a result of their having defied their tribal gods by emigrating to the city, where, apparently, they do not belong. Eventually, the nuclear holocaust wipes out the whole of mankind except rural inhabitants, who are spared from the disaster by their tribal gods. 'No matter how strong a society's spirits and gods may be, it is straining credulity to suggest that the society can be spared from the disaster of a nuclear holocaust merely by hiding in a mountain tunnel'. (Shava, 1989:131). At the time Mutwa wrote his play, black people had become 'so proletarianized and urbanized that the return to the past that Mutwa postulates is impracticable and defeatist'. (Ibid:13).

This problem in Mutwa's historical representation is further explored by Robert Kavanagh in his introduction to the play. He argues that 'Mutwa's rejection of the modern city, its technology and its children in favour of a mystical paradise presided over by a religiuos hierarchy, stamps him as a romantic visionary and a conservative. Hence his passionate

hatred of the product of the brash, modern environment of the Rand and the Cape'. (Mutwa, 1981:xx). Of course, Kavanagh refers to Mutwa's participation in the state's efforts to crush the seventies upheavals and the subsequent burning down of his house by the resisting masses. But Kavanagh's choice of words also curiously situates him within Mutwa's conservative stance. For example, his description of the emergent radical resistance culture as 'brash' and of its participants as 'children', is by implication, conservative. Although the uprisings were sparked off by the youth, it cannot be assumed that they were the only people involved. A cursory glance at the historical context from which this is drawn makes his assumption unjustifiable. Therefore, one may read his criticism of Mutwa as that which calls upon Mutwa to be a loving parent, but still with the authority of the 'origin' and the 'wise'.

The relationship between the King and his subjects also requires close critical attention, if only to 'measure' the extent to which the play challenges and/or reinforces conventional historico-political subjectivities. In *uNosilimela*, the authoritarianism characteristic of Magadlemzini's relationship with his subjects is mystified in the play's depiction of him as a feudal king, whose authority is equivalent to that of the gods. This entails the danger of perpetually excluding dissenting 'voices', in the same way that the play silences those of the urban proletariat and lumpen-proletariat. Magadlemzini, for example, enjoys the freedom of addressing his subjects as 'dogs', and the historical realism with which that relationship is endorsed defeats the modern historiographic project in the light of which the play may have been conceptualized and written.

The conservative historiography of the play finally reaches its most absurd conclusions in uNosilimela's fall from grace, after her brief involvement with the Roman Catholic Church as a 'highly qualified teacher'. (Ibid:35). According to the play, she became so 'dangerously ill, partly due to a feeling of guilt and confusion that boiled from the deeps of her soul', that she was eventually admitted at Baragwanath Hospital for treatment. She was subsequently thrown out of the hospital simply because she refused to be treated by the doctors whom she overheard discussing, 'for all the world', the symptoms of her illness, as if they were discussing the symptoms of 'a sick and mindless animal'. (Ibid:35). On her departure, she loses consciousness, and is found lying on the ground by Mamoloi, a shebeen queen, who plans to use her as a shebeen whore. With the best will in the world, it is inconceivable that one can reconcile these two disparate identities afforded uNosilimela. They can only be reconciled by the historical determinism of the play.

One needs only to read Lewis Nkosi's novel, *Mating Birds*, to see how the cultural hybrid around which *uNosilimela* could have developed its plot, (especially where the issue of colonizer-colonized is concerned), can best serve as a basis for cultural change. If the struggle for social change is the struggle for extending the sign beyond its traditional confinement in the service of nationalism and other social categories, then Nonkanyezi's hopes for her son Ndi can be seen as predicated on that recognition. She says of her son: '(a) real devil Ndi is going to be with a pen, you wait and see'. Here she hopes that Ndi's 'encounter, however brief, with books, would confer upon (him) awesome powers of the occult, an almost miraculous ability to manipulate the universe at will'. (Nkosi, 1987:85). Rather than being made to retreat to the obscure world of the gods, *uNosilimela* could have worked within the claims made by the dominant about its dominance, in order to undermine its authority.

References

Achebe, C. 1978. 'The Role of the Writer in a New Nation', in *African Writers on African Writing*. G.D. Killam (ed)., London: Heinemann.

Ashcroft, B. (et al). 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge.

Bhabha, H. 1985. 'Signs taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi'. *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 1, p.150.

Mutwa, C. 1981. 'uNosomilela'. *South African People's Plays: Ons Phola Hi*. R. Kavanagh (ed)., p.19. Johannesburg: Heinemann.

Nkosi, L. 1987. *Mating Birds*. Braamfontein: Ravan Press.

Piniel, V.S. 1989. *A People's Voice: Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century*. London: Zed Books.

Tomaselli, K. 1985. 'Popular Memory and the Voortrekker Films'. *Critical Arts: A Journal for Media Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, p.15, Durban: University of Natal.

White, H. 1973. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination of Nineteenth Century Europe*. USA: The John Hopkins Press.

TOWARDS A LINGUISTIC DEFINITION OF ORALITY

Jaco Alant
University of Durban-Westville

Introduction

The term **orality** only exists, for purposes of scientific interest at least, in so far as it refers to and evokes a particular continuum [1]: orality-literacy. I am concerned, in this article, with highlighting the problematic nature of only the first pole of this continuum. Literacy, however, poses problems of its own, and the question **What is writing?** has no simple answer. Moreover, depending on one's definition of the latter, even the (generally accepted) chronological relation suggested by the continuum (orality was first, then came literacy) can be a matter of dispute. I shall consider orality in relation to a writing conceived of in only its, to us, most obvious form, namely **phonetic** writing: visible marks that are intended to represent specific sounds of a specific language. This approach will quite obviously also place my argument within the framework of the above-mentioned chronology.

1. Sorting out Orality from Oral Literature

If one were to distinguish between, on the one hand, **literacy** as the ability to write, and on the other, **literature** as a particular **application** of that ability (whether it be 'cultural', 'artistic' or 'creative'), then there should be no logical reason why an analogous distinction could not be drawn between **orality** and **oral literature**. It turns out, however, that the relation between **oral literature** and **orality** is far from one of application to ability, if, indeed, any distinction is drawn between the two terms at all. The scientific inquiry into oral forms of linguistic expression as distinguished from the written (often referred to as *Orality-Literacy Studies* [2]) has generally failed to provide a clear theoretical distinction between the two terms. In this respect the following two factors might be worth considering:

i. Studies in orality tend to concentrate on those societies or languages in which literacy has been a relatively belated and not particularly widespread phenomenon; the "oral" amounts, in fact, to the 'pre-literate'. As such the dichotomy oral:written (orality:literacy) takes on a particular anthropological significance; it becomes a criterion by which to evaluate perceived differences between certain societies and peoples. This case is strongly put by Jack Goody, who regards other dichotomies of

this nature (for example the logical:pre-logical and domesticated:savage respectively devised by the anthropologists Levy-Bruhl and Levi-Strauss), as examples of '(European) ethnocentric binarism'. (Goody, 1977:8). The oral:literate dichotomy, indicative as it is of a **material change** in the system of human communication and human interaction generally, provides a far more specific criterion for differentiating between different types of societies. But what **is** orality within this anthropological dichotomy? We can conclude, in fact, that the term ends up by referring less to the context of speaking **per se**, than to the context of speaking in the (more or less) complete **absence of writing**. Orality is therefore viewed in terms of what it is not; it is given a distinctly negative definition.

ii. We may agree, based on the above, that orality pertains generally to linguistic expression in so far as the latter has remained relatively uninfluenced by literacy. But that will only be partly correct, for the **study** of orality deals specifically, not so much with speaking in its everyday sense, but, in fact, with particular culturally defined **forms** of speaking. As such, orality studies are about oral **genres**: the praise-poem, proverb, folktale, epic, burial chant etc. In this respect it may be enlightening to briefly refer to the origins of what Walter Ong calls the 'new understanding' of orality: the demonstration by Milman Parry in 1928 that the distinctive features of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, for so long seen as **the** literary (therefore literate) embodiment of classical Western culture, were, in fact, 'due to the economy enforced on it by oral methods of composition'. (Ong, 1982:21). The awakening to the contrast between the oral and the written is therefore credited, not to linguistics, but to the field of literary studies. Whatever areas of research may have come to the fore within the field of Orality-Literacy [3], the link between orality studies and literary studies remains as strong as ever. Researchers into the oral have indulged in the study of oral genres in much the same way as students of literature may choose to focus on the novel, the short story or the Shakespearian sonnet. In other words, the study of orality generally does for the oral what the study of literature does for the written.

iii. Although extensively used (and with some justification no doubt, given the interaction between studies of orality and literature), the term *oral literature* is at best a somewhat vague metaphor for oral linguistic creations, at worst a contradiction in terms. To describe the products of oral culture as **literature** is, according to Walter

Ong, akin to describing a horse as a 'wheelless automobile'. (Ibid:12). (He suggests, instead, the terms 'oral texts' or even, 'voicings').

Within an anthropological perspective orality amounts to non-literacy, within a literary context it becomes oral literature. Research in Orality-Literacy Studies has in fact tended to fall within the broad framework of these two perspectives. The study of orality as pre-literacy has led researchers to circumscribe in great detail what they perceive to be differences between the oral and literate 'mindset' [4], while, veering towards the oral as genre, they have documented peculiarities of oral themes, expression and style. Of course, the 'anthropological' and 'literary' perspectives do overlap: while features of an oral production as genre are analysed and explained in the light of peculiarly oral **prerequisites** (for example the need to have a metric pattern that facilitates memory recall, or - given that the oral is always performed - the need to make a certain impression upon the audience), researchers may also, on the strength of these features, make certain inferences regarding the mentality of the people concerned. This link between style and thought process is emphasised by Ong: '(h)eavy patterning and communal fixed formulas in oral cultures serve some of the purposes of writing in chirographic cultures (i.e. as an aid to memory), but **in doing so they of course determine the kind of thinking that can be done**, the way experience is intellectually organized'. (Ibid:36. My emphasis). This kind of differentiation between an oral and a literate culture is on the whole, it must be stressed, characterized by a high degree of circumspection. In an article on the highly reflective attitude of the Limba people of Sierra Leone towards their own language, Ruth Finnegan, for one, strongly criticizes any simplistic differentiation between cultures merely on the basis of literacy:non-literacy: '... the distinction commonly made between literate and non-literate societies may not be as clear-cut as is often assumed; and ... some of the specific characteristics of at least one non-literate society (the Limba) may not be as wholly attributable to the fact of their non-literacy as it might seem at first'. (Finnegan, 1988:58).

2. Orality as Language

Can there be **more** to orality than non-literacy/oral literature? The question may be asked, of course, given the depth and variety of research into the oral, whether this implied redefinition of **orality** is at all necessary. In considering the need for a more proper **linguistic definition**

of orality, the most salient characteristic of the spoken word in relation to the written, namely **sound**, might be an obvious place to start. We shall also have to briefly consider the extent to which such a perspective on the oral might actually contradict commonly held theoretical perspectives on language.

2.1. Orality as Sound

Ong (1982:71-4 as well as 1967:111-38) goes into a detailed analysis of the peculiarity of sound or, more precisely, of our **sense** of sound as compared to the other senses (in particular that of vision). I shall here consider only the two main characteristics he mentions.

Sound, to the extent that it is perceived in hearing, exists only as it vanishes; it is essentially evanescent. Its movement (or flow), unlike that of vision, cannot be arrested: '(v)ision can register motion, but it can also register immobility. ... There is no equivalent of a still shot for sound'. (Ong, 1982:32). Sound intercepted in its passage through time is, immediately and irrevocably, silence. This means that the auditory perception of sound, more strongly than other kinds of sensory perception (and significantly more strongly than vision, the sense of literacy), evokes the **here** and **now**, unmediated physical reality. The evanescence of sound also links it with energy; one cannot apprehend sound other than in its very process of production. Hence, the association of sound with **power**, aptly illustrated in the following example related by Ong (ibid:32): '(a) hunter can see a buffalo, smell, taste, and touch a buffalo when the buffalo is completely inert, even dead, but if he hears a buffalo, he had better watch out: something is going on'.

In spite of its fleetingness sound reveals objects in ways other sensory phenomena cannot: **from the inside**. The sound made by a container when one knocks against it tells us, for example, whether the container is empty or full. In order for us to receive the same information from any of the other senses, we will have to first open the container. Hearing is the only sense capable of '(registering) interiority without violating it'. (Ibid:71). Sound, in other words, reveals interiority **as such**. Light, by contrast, is always perceived as a surface, an exterior, even when it is supposed to show up what is inside something.

Sound is also 'interior' in a further sense. Apart from expressing that which is inside, it also situates the hearer of the sound at the center of what is being heard. Whereas vision comes to us only from the direction in which the eyes are turned, sound is simultaneously perceived from all around us. Ong refers to this quality as the 'centering effect' of sound; it

establishes the perceiver 'at a kind of core of sensation and existence'; he is **immersed** in his sensory (auditory) perception to a degree unequalled in any of the other human senses. Coming from all directions at the same time, sound is, consequently, always perceived as a totality, as a whole. This once again is in strong contrast to vision which, through operating only in a given **line of sight**, breaks the visual world into parts. Vision is, therefore, 'the dissecting sense', hearing, 'the unifying sense'. (Ibid:72). Light makes things distinct, moves them apart; sound brings things together, harmonises them.

2.2. Sound as 'Gesture'

The above reflections on the nature of sound can be given a further dimension in the light of Marcel Jousse's idea of 'laryngo-buccal gesticulation': sound (the production of sound) as **gesture**. Sound in relation to **power** and **interiority** (dealt with above) becomes, in Jousse's conception, sound in relation to nothing less than the cognitive process itself; the production of sound in humans is 'gesticulation of consciousness'. (Jousse, 1990:43).

What is consciousness? Jousse puts it as follows: '(o)ur intelligence has only one mode of action. Whatever fact it apprehends, it is always in the domain of experience ... that it finds it. I cannot know what it means to think, feel or want if I no longer experience (or revivify) in myself thought, emotion or volition'. (Ibid:44).

The idea of 'experiencing thought', if one regards thought as already being at a remove from experience, may well seem contradictory. But the basic point made by Jousse is clear enough: there is no consciousness that is not rooted in experience. And this experience is always **concrete**; it is the very way in which the physical reality impacts upon us through our senses. To be conscious is therefore nothing less than the ability to **re-experience** (or 'revivify') the 'concrete fact' of a particular experience. Before it manifests itself as intellectual, consciousness is something fundamentally **physical**.

Let us now turn to Jousse's notion of gesture (gesticulation). All experience (as related via sensory perception) is physically harnessed by the body. This takes place as a muscular reaction, a 'gesticulation'. As such, the sensual impact of perceived phenomena is 'mimed by our muscles'. (Ibid:44). The production of sound by means of our vocal ('laryngo-buccal') organs represents an act of consciousness in so far as the very process of muscular contraction it involves constitutes a **reminder** ('revivification') of original experience.

2.3. Sound as Language?

If we could devise a theory of language incorporating the **distinctiveness of the sense of sound in relation to the other senses** (a distinctiveness which, in an environment where the production of sound is the **only** means of linguistic expression, would be vital to the existence of language itself), we would, of course, arrive at a linguistic definition of orality. I do not want to reflect here on the **possibility** of such a definition being formulated. But the **theoretical need** for it can be made apparent in the face of some of the most prominent concepts of modern linguistic theory, at least as formulated by the founder of modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure.

Not all sounds that emanate from the vocal canal constitute speech. There can only be speech when, in Saussure's words, '(the) sound, a complex acoustical-vocal unit, combines ... with an **idea** to form a complex physiological-psychological unit'. (Saussure, 1959:8. My italics). Speech sees the sound become **sign**: the functional sound unit or phoneme combines with other units of the same order to form an 'acoustic image' or **signifier**, which serves to express the **idea** referred to above (the concept or **signified**). This leads us to the well-known definition of the sign as the union of 'a concept and a sound-image'. (Ibid, p.8).

Seeing the signified of the sound-image as something purely psychological is, for Saussure, a methodological choice: it holds the pragmatic advantage of accounting for the fact that language may be used to talk about things that either never existed or would be impossible to identify. (Baron, 1981:20). (If one adopts Jousse's point of view one may argue, of course, that the psychological concept is rooted in experience anyway). But the notion of the sound-image and signified belonging to two entirely different realms (the physiological as opposed to the psychological) also underlies a Saussurian concept which, to us, concerned as we are with the distinctiveness of sound, is crucial: the **arbitrariness** of the linguistic sign. This arbitrariness is, for Saussure, evidenced by the fact that different languages use different sound-images for what may be considered as essentially the same signified. In fact, the very existence of different languages may be seen as an illustration of this principle. (Saussure, 1959:67-8).

It is appropriate, at this point, to re-examine Jousse's idea of 'gesticulation as consciousness'. In the context of 'laryngo-buccal' (vocal) sound **as language**, he refers, in fact, to gesticulation as **semiological** gesticulation: the gesture is itself a sign, it carries a specific meaning or, for that matter, signified. But the signified, in this case, can never be

psychological to the same extent as the one described by Saussure. Neither can the relation between the sound-image and signified be totally arbitrary.

We have already seen how vocal gesticulation **as such** implies the 'recapture' within the body of a particular sensual experience. Jousse (1990:46) concedes that the gesture as sign might well, under the influence of what he terms our 'disassociating' (highly visual, higly literate?) civilisation, lose this link with the concrete. The result is a language with a 'dessicated abstract vocabulary', words (sound-images) whose referents are entirely psychological. Jousse refers, however, to numerous examples of languages (notably Hebrew, Amharic and Chinese) in which (or, more precisely, in whose linguistic signs) '... the original union of sensation and idea has always remained, (where) neither of the two terms has ousted the other, ... (where) the process of idealisation, in a word, has never been completed'. (Ibid:48). In Hebrew, for example, anger is expressed 'by a host of picturesque expressions, all of which are borrowed from physiological traits. On one occasion the metaphor will be taken from the rapid animated breathing that accompanies passion ...; on another from heat ..., or from boiling ...; on one occasion from the actions of loudly snapping something ...; on another from quivering ...'. (Ibid:47).

Significantly, the examples quoted by Jousse are from communities where literacy (in our sense of phonetic writing) has been interiorised on a relatively small scale. On the strength of observations such as these, we may deduce the following:

i. in a language primarily characterised by orality, i.e. where the sign has no support other than sound and is strongly evocative of physical experience, the 'two-sided' definition of the linguistic sign is inadequate.

ii. the definition of the linguistic sign as the **arbitrary** union of sound-image and (psychological) **concept** is the result of a particular linguistic experience in a particular type of society.

These reflections may lead us, finally, to concur with Jacques Derrida, who sees the definition of the linguistic sign as actually **excluding** the oral: '... the exteriority [5] of the signifier is the general exteriority of writing ... (T)here is no linguistic sign before writing'. (Derrida, 1967:26).

2.4. 'Criteria' for Orality

It is tempting to summarise the above arguments by advancing possible standards by which orality could be distinguished from literacy. The two most obvious ones would be:

i. **sound**. Of course, all languages make use of sound. But in some languages particular sounds may be more evocative of a particular meaning (signified) than in others. This criterion will obviously need to be developed more fully in the light of concrete linguistic data. Suffice it to say that it should extend far beyond an analysis of so-called **onomatopeic** use of language.

ii. **metaphor**. The vocabulary of all languages is, to some extent, metaphoric. But some languages may be more metaphoric than others, at least from within a purely synchronic perspective. Also, the imagery evoked in a particular metaphor may be more pertinent to the actual experience of members of one linguistic community than in another. The sound or rhythmic pattern of a metaphor may well provide important clues in this regard.

The criteria in question here probably apply more readily (and more easily) across linguistic boundaries. It needs to be stressed, however, that there is no reason why they could not also be applied **within** a particular language, as for example between different socio-linguistic or regional dialects. These variations are indeed of crucial importance when dealing with the oral, given the generally weaker degree of standardisation in oral language than in the written.

3. Conclusion

If our 'linguistic' approach to orality has failed to provide us with a watertight definition of the latter, we may at least make certain inferences as to what it should dictate orality is **not**: orality does not necessarily coincide with speaking; something is not **oral** merely because it has not been written down. By the same token, a linguistic production should not be regarded as a manifestation of literacy as a result of the mere fact that it has been written, even if this writing amounts to an actual **composition**. The crucial factor in distinguising between orality and literacy lies in **certain characteristics of the language used**. An **oral conception** of language may well, at times, manifest itself as writing, just as a highly literate conception of language may be put across orally.

Finally, all languages are primarily oral, but can it be said that some languages are **more** oral than others? Many may find this assertion to be potentially dangerous. As Goody (1977:8) reminds us: '(h)uman languages appear to display few differences in their potentiality for adaption to development'. Indeed, the most important lessons of modern linguistics has probably been that of the complexity of **all** languages, and their equal capacity to express that which their users need to have expressed. It also cannot be said that one language is more 'logical' than another: ' ... languages are not instruments for discovering the truth. For individuals as for societies, they constitute available resources of expression'. (Hagège, 1985:145. My translation).

These considerations notwithstanding, we should be careful that our reluctance to regard orality (in a linguistic sense) as more characteristic of one language than another, does not just reflect our own **prejudice** against an orality which we persist in regarding as **non**-literacy, with the inevitable connotations of 'primitiveness' and lack of development we associate with the latter. Of the various approaches to orality, the linguistic is, in my view, best equiped to give account of orality as a positive content. If we heed Finnegan's warning and avoid seeing differences of expression as obvious differences of mentality [6], **orality** as a linguistic concept (rather than anthropological or literary), may yet provide the study of the oral with its most distinct and meaningful perspective.

Notes

1. 'Continuum' in the sense of the link between phonetic writing and the speech on which it is based.

2. The influence of Walter Ong has been considerable in this regard, given the particular prominence he lends to the term *Orality-Literacy*.

3. In conclusion to his *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Ong mentions, amongst others, the fields of literary history, literary theory, philosophy, biblical studies, studies of human consciousness (what I have termed'anthropological') as well as the media.

4. Ong lists the following characteristics of what he calls 'orally based thought and expression': '(a)dditive rather than subordinative', 'aggregative rather than analytic', 'redundant or copious', 'conservative or traditionalist', 'close to the human lifeworld', 'agonistically toned', 'empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced', 'homeostatic', 'situational rather than abstract'. (1982:67-88).

Symbolic as "real"
Transcendental
metaphysical as real.
Creator-God.

5. "Exteriority" in the sense of **form**. In the most common Saussurian definition of language (language as 'system of signs'), the sign is conceived of as a purely abstract or formal entity, lacking in specific content (substance) and existing merely to the extent of its **difference** (opposition) relative to the other signs in the system.

6. This is not to say that some of the grammatical differences between languages highlighted by proponents of the 'relativist' theory (which emphasises the influence of grammatical structure on conceptual framework), might **not** be of relevance to an orality-literacy perspective - at least in so far as they may reveal certain structures to be suggestive of a 'concreteness of experience' as explained by Jousse.

References

Baron, S. 1981. *Speech, Writing & Sign*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Derrida, J. 1967. *De la Grammatologie*. Paris: Editions de Minuit.
De Saussure, F. 1959. *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: Mc Graw-Hill.
Finnegan, R. and Horton, R. 1988. *Literacy and Orality*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Goody, J. 1977. *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hagège, C. 1986. *L'Homme de Paroles*. Paris: Fayard.
Jousse, M. 1990. *The Oral Style*. New York: Garland.
Ong, W. 1967. *The Presence of the Word*. London: Yale University Press.
Ong, W. 1982. *Orality and Literacy*. London: Routledge.

TOWARDS AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF WRITING IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Alan Thorold
University of Durban-Westville

Introduction

My suggestions about what I think anthropology can bring to the study of South African literature can be summarised in two propositions. The one is that priority should be given to that which is written and to the technical aspects of writing. The other is that the study of texts should not be tied to the study of social contexts. I will expand and try to justify these propositions, but I should say at the outset that my intention here is not polemical but merely that of trying to caution against tendencies in southern African literary studies that seem to me misguided and which stem partly from the influence of misrepresentations of anthropology.

1. Writing and Literature

> *The physical basis of writing is clearly the same as drawing, engraving and painting - the so-called graphic arts.*
>
> Jack Goody

Anthropology is often represented as the study of non-literate societies - the lack of writing being one of the many characteristic lacks that define the tribal societies which are the object of anthropology in the popular imagination. So you might expect that anthropology will be able to furnish you with theories and methods for recording and interpreting oral traditions of various sorts. You might also expect that the accumulated ethnography of southern African society will contain transcriptions and interpretations of oral traditions, and indeed many ethnographic accounts do contain such transcriptions. The real question here though is not whether anthropologists have been interested in the songs, myths, stories, riddles, oratory and other oral performances of the people of southern Africa, but whether the study of literature should direct itself to this. The use of the term 'oral literature' implies that there is a continuity between oral and written forms and that they should be treated in much the same way. There does not seem to have been much serious debate about the status of oral forms

in South-African literary studies. Rather it appears that it is just taken for granted that if one is going to look for a pre-colonial or indigenous equivalent to the literature of the settlers then it must be towards oral traditions [1]. Furthermore there is now a tendency in South-African universities to over-compensate for their Eurocentric past and shift the focus of literary studies to oral forms. This elevation of the oral is of course not unique to South Africa although the political considerations involved here are a little different to those elsewhere. Jack Goody (1987:293) suggests that there might be a general tendency at work in this:

> A perpetual trend of complex, written cultures is the search for, and to some extent identification with, the simpler cultures of the past. One has only to recall the attraction of 'savage' cultures for the eighteenth-century Rousseau, the lure of the medieval period for the nineteenth-century Carlyle and the whole Gothic revival, the continuing opposition in European thought between the tribal, Germanic versus the urban, Roman traditions and its association with the growth of nationalism, an opposition that at the same time represents the vernacular versus the Latin, and the oral versus the written. A modern version of the same theme lies behind the search for the natural, the untouched, the oral, influencing the growth of oral history, the interest in the oral tradition (especially folksong), and the attraction of anthropology, and representing in some of its guises the apotheosis of the oral and the renunciation of the written as the real source of truth.

Goody is a bit dismissive here but the serious point is that there are some very questionable assumptions which underpin the growth of oral studies and which have been imported into the study of South-African literature. A recent example of this is a book by Landeg White and Leroy Vail called *Power and the Praise Poem* (1991). It seems to me that this book perpetuates what might best be described as the oral fallacy. Their main concern in the book is to erase the distinction between the oral and the written in southern African literature and to demonstrate that there is a continuity and a unifying aesthetic in the poetry of the region: '(c)entral to this aesthetic is the concept of poetic licence, the convention that poetic expression is privileged expression, the performer being free to express opinions that would otherwise be in breach of other social conventions'. (1991:319). They claim that their approach has many advantages over previous ones: 'It makes redundant the distinction between text and context, between formalist analyses of literary devices and social analyses

of content, in short between poetics and history, by offering us a corpus of poetry whose content is legitimised by its forms. Finally, it enables us to recognise important lines of continuity between oral and written poetry in southern Africa'. (Ibid.: 320).

There is much to recommend this book - especially the detailed studies of the transformation of oral forms in the region - but it seems to me that the conclusion of their argument does nothing to undermine the great divide between the written and the oral which they set out to eradicate. Leaving aside the fact that their own evidence contradicts their assertion of a continuity of 'poetic licence' - the one **writer** of poetry (Jack Mapanje) whose work they examine was detained without trial for several years by the Malawi regime - the real problem with their position is that it never questions the premiss that pre-colonial society in southern Africa had no writing. Their procedure is to elevate oral forms to a position of equivalence with a written tradition but in so doing they simply perpetuate the idea that the people of this region lacked writing. The oral fallacy - which is a lot older than Vail and White's book - consists of two related parts. The one is that there is a continuity between oral performance and literature and the other is that writing is an extension of speech. The first of these misconceptions derives from the second, and the flaws in both are quickly exposed if one looks outside alphabetic systems of writing. As Roy Harris puts it: 'Once one sees the fallacy of equating writing with alphabetic writing, the whole question of the extent to which and the sense in which writing is a representation of speech at all becomes more debatable than Aristotle, or modern Aristotelians, would acknowledge'. (1986:27). Much of what has been written by linguists and historians about writing is based on the study of alphabetic scripts and has at its foundation the idea that writing is linked to speech. In this view writing is a sort of secondary system of representation in which the letters of a script represent the sounds of speech which in turn refer to an idea or thing. The most elaborate critique of this approach is of course that of Derrida (1976) who suggests that this 'logocentrism' - or privileging of speech - is mistaken, since all systems of signs including language are in some sense secondary systems of representation.

The important point here is that although alphabetic systems of writing are now quite widespread they are not the earliest and are certainly not the most durable of writing systems. (Coulmas, 1989). There are very successful writing systems - such as the Chinese one - which have only a tenuous connection with speech. Taking a broad view of the different sorts of writing which have developed in various times and places it is clear that they are connected

not by their relationship to sound but rather by the way that they are produced. Writing consists of durable inscriptions on some kind of surface, and it makes more sense to see it as an extension of drawing than of speech. As Goody puts it: '(w)riting, then, has its roots in the graphic arts, in significant design'. (1987:4). Pictographic systems of writing, many of which are still in use today, are obviously much closer to the decorative arts than they are to other systems of representation and in some cases it is not easy to determine whether an inscription should be described as drawing or as writing. To a certain extent these exist on a continuum and the boundaries between writing and other sorts of design are not at all clearly defined. Indeed, it is possible - and I would suggest that this has frequently been the case - to fail to recognise writing as such and to dismiss it as decoration or primitive art.

This brings us back to the question of writing and the history of literature in southern Africa. I became aware of the existence of indigenous systems of writing in this region while doing fieldwork in southern Malawi. There is a system of pictographs in this area which is still in use and which certainly owes nothing in its derivation to the scripts introduced by Muslim and Christian missionaries. It then occurred to me that there might be other writing systems in the region, and I came across the pioneering work of the Austrian anthropologist Gerhard Kubik who has documented the existence of a large variety of graphic systems from all over southern Africa. He summarises his findings as follows: '(o)ne of the most tenacious stereotypes about Africa is rooted in the notion of so-called non-literate or pre-literate societies. Such notions have been upheld despite abundant evidence to the contrary. Various graphical systems designed to express and transmit ideas or to convey messages were known in Africa south of the Sahara in pre-colonial times, from phonological systems ... to mnemotechnical, ideographic and pictographic systems'. (Kubik, 1984:72). He points out that much of what has been described as ornamentation or decoration from this region actually turns out to be pictographic systems when properly analysed.

There is clearly a great deal more research to be done on the whole topic of the development and uses of writing in pre-colonial southern Africa and it seems to me that if one is to rethink the history of literature then it might be fruitful to begin by looking at writing and graphics rather than just at songs and dances. After all, there are graphics from Namibia which have been dated to around 27 000 years ago.

2. Text and Context

> *So that attempts to swallow up the intention that lies in or behind a book of mine - let's assume for the moment that there is an intention there - into something wider or more all-embracing, more swallowing, notion of social intention - I have to resist them because frankly my allegiances lie with the discourse of the novels and not with the discourse of politics.*
>
> J M Coetzee

It may seem curious for an anthropologist to suggest that the study of literary texts be detached from a concern with social contexts since in an important sense anthropology is all about contexts. The dominant mode of explanation in anthropology from Boas and Malinowski onwards has been to locate beliefs, practices and institutions in their appropriate cultural context. Nevertheless it seems to me that there is something in the nature of writing - any sort of writing and not just 'literature' - which should make us cautious about looking for its meaning in the social conditions of its production.

One of the defining features of writing is that it is durable - it leaves a trace. It can therefore travel across time and space in a way that speech and other non-graphic systems of representation cannot. By its very nature writing is able to convey meaning away from the context of its production, and it can do so repeatedly and with precision. One could go so far as to say that it is part of the meaning of any writing that it is detachable from its context - that it seeks to move beyond the purposes of its producer and link itself to other inscriptions in other times and places. It might be better then to stick with the more conventional mode of literary studies and locate the significance of a text in a world of texts rather than trying to root it in the social formations of its origin. It is surely more fruitful to look for the influences and resonances of southern African literature in a global literature than in a particular historical context. It makes more sense to situate recent South African novels in relation to styles and models associated with global literary movements, such as naturalism and modernism and maybe even the Japanese autobiographical novel, than to try and relate them to the local political economy.

To look for social causes or effects of literature is almost always a misleading process. It involves either an inflation or a diminishing of the significance of writing. On the one hand it ascribes to books a power to interact with society which in fact they very seldom possess and on the other hand it reduces them to a peripheral status in an arena where other

discourses are dominant. What I am saying here is that perhaps we need to accept literature as marginal - but not secondary - to the fundamental forces at work in society. This would at least allow us to take literature seriously in itself instead of trying to link it to discourses in which it inevitably comes off second best. Writing is important, but I think we would be deluding ourselves if we think that it has a fundamental place in the struggles and transformations of contemporary South-Africa. Literature projects itself to a world beyond the concerns of its immediate social environment. The very act of reading (or writing) is one of detachment and there is a real sense in which writing can be regarded as an anti-social activity. The context of writing is not society but other writing.

Notes

1. The difficulty in finding a suitable term - oral tradition/literature/folklore etc - is symptomatic of the general theoretical haziness in dealing with this material. It is in any case probably a mistake to lump together a whole range of oral forms which are regarded as being very different in their function and significance by the people who perform them.

References

Coulmas, F. 1989. *The Writing Systems of the World.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Derrida, J. 1976 *Of Grammatology.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Goody, J. 1986. *The Logic of Writing and the Organisation of Society.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goody, J. 1987. *The Interface between the Written and the Oral.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harris, R. 1986. *The Origin of Writing.* London: Duckworthy.

Kubik, G. 1984. 'African graphic systems - a reassessment'. *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, 114.

Vail, L. and L. White. 1991. *Power and the Praise Poem.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ZULU ORAL TRADITIONS

Noleen Turner
University of Durban-Westville

Introduction

With reference to the discussion by Jaco Alant on orality, I would like to emphasise certain points raised which correlate with my overview of 'Zulu Oral Traditions'. Firstly, 'the study of orality deals specifically, not so much with speaking in its everyday sense ... but, in fact, with particular culturally defined **forms** of speaking. As such, orality studies are about oral **genres**'.

Secondly, 'the crucial factor in distinguishing between orality and literacy should lie in **certain characteristics of the language used**. An oral conception of language may well, at times, manifest itself as writing, just as a highly literate conception of language may be put across orally'. Ong makes the important point that 'oral cultures concern themselves with doings, with happenings, not with being as such: they narrativize their own existence and their environment'. (1988:8).

In this discussion I am going to concentrate not exclusively on the form of oral tradition, but the **functions** that its various forms play in modern society.

Literature forms part of the human communication system, and when the language is used with particular care in terms of images and words chosen, it can be said to represent an artistic expression. However, it is **when** these expressions are used in particular ways in a society and **how** they are used that echoes Ong's sentiment of an oral 'culture'. The 'literary expressions' that are dealt with here, are based in orality, some sections having been recorded in writing only since the latter half of this century.

'Oral residue', a term coined by Walter Ong, pertains to the characteristics of orality which remain in the world of literacy even after the introduction of writing. This term encompasses the psychology of the 'oral mind' which is determined by both environmental and hereditary factors.

Oral traditions are part of the heritage of the Zulus' cultural wealth in its various forms and expressions. Folklore is the main source of these oral traditions, and this lives on, regardless of whether it is recorded in writing or not. It continues in a parallel fashion to written records, often intermingling with them.

Alan Dundes (1965:1-3) defines the term **folklore** in two separate parts. He says that folk 'can refer to any group of people who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is ... but what is important is that a group ... will have some traditions which it calls its own'. He then goes on to define lore as traditions which are orally transmitted, but makes the point that the 'oral transmission' criterion is not sufficient, as not everything that is orally transmitted can be called folklore, and not all folkloristic items are necessarily orally transmitted. Dundes lists a number of folklore forms which correspond to the criterion of traditional material orally transmitted, covering such things as myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, curses, oaths, insults etc.

1. Categorization of Traditional Zulu Oral Forms

The Zulu Language Board has recently categorised the various forms of poetry in oral traditional literature in the following way:

- *Imilolozelo* (lullabies)
- *Amahubo* (poetry accompanied by song)
- *Izibongo* ('praise' poetry)

Under the heading of *amahubo*, we have various divisions which encompass wedding songs, funeral songs, political songs, war songs, hunting songs and work songs.

The form of oral poetry known as *izibongo*, or praise poetry, is divided into four major categories viz. *izibongo zabantu kumbe izihasho* (the praises of ordinary people known as *izihasho*); *izibongo zezinto ezingaphili* (the praises of inanimate things); *nezibongo zamakhosi/izibongo zabantu abakhulu abagqamile* (the praises of kings/praises of famous and important people), and *izithakazelo kanye nezibongo* (clan praises).

The categories of traditional oral prose forms are made up of:

- *Izinganekwane* (folktales)
- *Izisho/izaga* (idioms & proverbs)
- *Iziphicaphicwano* (riddles)

2. Characteristics of Oral Texts

Central to oral forms is their performance without which they eventually die out. Oral performance involves visual dimensions as well as audial dimensions. These aspects tend to heighten the emotional and dramatic impact, and bring about a great degree of audience participation. The involvement of the audience is also vital to the performance as it is essentially a communal experience. This aspect brings oral 'literature' closer to dance, music or drama which rely on the performance to be enjoyed and appreciated, than to fixed written forms of literature. There is no rigidly fixed form handed down from generation to generation, as rigidity is foreign to the tradition. There are, however, traditional cores which a performer uses, as well as external and internal devices which are common to the various forms.

Ong proposes that as oral cultures produce mnemonic thoughts, they think in mnemonic patterns shaped for easy oral recollection. These patterns include rhythmic, balanced patterns consisting of repetitions and antitheses, alliteration and assonance, epithetic and formulaic expressions and standard thematic settings.

These patterns are evident in the eulogistic and extended praise poems of the Zulu Kings (*izibongo zamakhosi*), as well as in the oral narrative form of Zulu folktales (*izinganekwane*).

3. The Function of Oral Texts

In examining **the characteristics of the language used**, it is pertinent at this stage to investigate the function of these oral texts in Zulu society bearing in mind Ong's definition.

3.1. In terms of the *izibongo zamakhosi* (praise poems of kings and their modern counterpart in the praises of politically prominent people), these are praises which are considered to embody the most sophisticated poetic art of all the oral traditions. They describe the events and lives of the Zulu kings, as well as incorporating physical and personality descriptions. These are heroic poems which contain the epic of a whole nation, personified in its sovereign, and are performed by professional bards. It is worth noting, that the current Zulu *imbongi*, Dlamini, who praises the king at all formal occasions, is totally illiterate, having received no formal education whatsoever. In 4 versions recorded of him 'performing' his praises, there are several differences,

some chronological, some in terms of new praises composed recording a recent event, which are then incorporated into the praises during their next recitation.

The recitation by the *imbongi* of the *izibongo zamakhosi* play an important role as an 'oral tradition':

a) they instill in the audience a sense of pride and 'nationhood';
b) by praising the king, they are an expression of the loyalty and pride felt by his subjects, serving to exult and honour him;
c) they are the channel of public opinion between monarch and subjects;
d) they play a religious role in that the *imbongi*, by calling out the names of the ancestors, becomes an intermediary between the living and the dead;
e) they are used as an urge to greater valour and endurance (this was especially the case in days gone by, prior to battle);
f) they are an oral record of historical and cultural events;
g) they serve as a warning to potential enemies by virtue of the exclamation of the kings achievements.

3.2. The modern counterpart to these traditional praises is found in the praises of the common man - *izihasho*. These can be seen as an ongoing counterpart of the traditional oral poetry and form an oral history of the ordinary man in the street. A person, with no royal connections or even special status is still embued with pride in being recognised by his praises. This is even the case with those people whose 'praises' lack any element of **true** praise in them. However, within the Zulu communal society, being known by one's praises, provides a person with a distinct identity which is important to his ego and self image. The functions of this type of 'praise-poem' are essentially:

a) as a form of encouragement to achieve greater heights (whether on the battlefield, when giya-ing or on a sportsfield);
b) to honour or humour, appeal to or to appease a person;
c) to record the personality, physical characteristics and noteworthy achievements of one's life as well as infamous deeds;

d) to criticize, admonish or warn someone about behaviour patterns deemed unacceptable by the immediate society;

e) to expose or humiliate a person whose behaviour is made public through his 'praises'.

These oral poems are of an informal nature as they are not composed by professional bards, and are normally recited at non-formal occasions, such as on the playing fields, or where men get together to talk or drink (perhaps as a way of introducing a newcomer), or in recognition of the return of a man to his home area after a lengthy absence, at wedding or engagement parties etc.

3.3. *Izithakazelo* are the third category of *izibongo* which is the corresponding praise name accorded to every Zulu surname. In Nguni society, the basic unit of the family bears its identity by means of the clan name or *isibongo*, which is normally the name of the original kraal head, founding father, or some particularly famous member of the clan, e.g. Zulu, Buthelezi, Dlamini etc. In addition to the *isibongo*, every clan has a particular address name or praise name. The *isithakazelo* is normally the name of a famous ancestor of the clan, and is usually taken from the first or second line of the clan praises, e.g:

Isibongo	*Isithakazelo*
Buthelezi	Shenge
Bhengu	Ngcolosi
Nxumalo	Zwide
Mkhize	Khabazela
Zulu	Mageba
Zondi	Nondaba
Zungu	Manzini

Clan praises play an important part in Nguni society and are performed in a wide range of situations. They need not be recited in their entirety, but this is normally the case on serious occasions such as private family rituals and ceremonies. These praises act as a cohesive force binding the members of a clan together into a solid social unit.

The *isithakazelo* may be recited as a form of respectful greeting to a man, in circumstances of consolation or comforting, as an expression of appreciation and congratulation, in marriage negotiations and formal betrothal, at marriage ceremonies, as well as at sacrificial ceremonies. The content of clan praises consists of references to past events, and constitutes a brief summarised record of the history and behavioural traits of the entire clan or of certain prominent ancestors.

3.4. *Imilolozelo* are lullabies, or songs used essentially to lull a child to sleep. Being poetic in form, they make use of traditional poetic linking devices, especially rhythm, but also alliteration, assonance, parallelism, bold imagery etc. In addition to the soporific function they perform, these songs may also be used in certain instances as a type of melic poetry which is used in the communal setting in order to make a verbal attack on someone. Children are adept at picking up the words of these rhythmic songs and may often repeat them. This repetition serves to drive a point home or deliver a message to the desired target, heightening the torment of the victim.

3.5. *Amahubo* include work songs which are chanted in a solo-chorus fashion in group work situations and serve to lighten the burden of manual labour. They create a sense of team effort and often contain derisive but amusing words aimed at a particular person or group of people. The other categories of songs included under *amahubo*, such as love songs, elegiac songs, political songs and war songs fall beyond the scope of the present brief overview.

3.6. The category of **oral prose** is made up of *izinganekwane* (folktales), *iziphicaphicwano* (riddles), proverbs and idioms. The main difference between the modern written forms (the novel and short story) and traditional oral forms is to be found in the methods of composition (oral versus written), the characters and setting.

The folktale is composed in performance, out of traditional material, following the traditional compositional canons as expounded by Axel Olrik (1908). They rely for their survival on mnemonic principles and techniques, such as strong polarity, repetition, stereotyped characters, and the inclusion of motifs and images from the general reservoir common to a

whole community. Folktale characters are also stereotypes and are often fantastic creations: animals, ogres, cannibals or humans with superior powers. In terms of settings which refer to time, place and social conditions, the folktale often deals with mythological times, and is set in a world which crosses between the real and the fantastic. This world expresses the desire for a perfect society and wrongs can often be righted by supernatural intervention.

3.6.1. The **riddle** as oral art form is used to stimulate a child's imagination and his spirit of observation and to identify the various meanings of words. They are introduced by set formulas, and involve highly allusive word play, e.g:

Ngiyakuphica ngezinkomo ezimhlophe ezaluswa yinkunzi ebomvu. (I quiz you about the white cattle herded by a red bull) > *Amazinyo nolimi* (the teeth and the tongue).

3.6.2. By far the most prolific form of oral prose in the Zulu oral tradition, is the **folktale**. These are nearly always performed (not just told) by the grandmother, who is the acknowledged expert on traditions and customs of the people, and the educator in the family. A story, in order to be effective, must be suitable to the moment, not an abstract creation which may be 'read' in the future. Any performance entails an impromptu creation within a traditional framework. (Finnegan, 1970).

Gough (1986) describes the creative act and its development in terms of memory activation: the storyteller has stored in her memory bank, 'tale chunks' as well as a number of other traditional elements. Her short term memory is activated by the immediate circumstances, by the title and the main character and by the refrain of her tale. Her long term memory sets in motion the cueing and scanning faculty. (Scheub, 1975).

The adaptation of the material at hand takes the form of cueing and linking while the grandmother presents her tale. Cueing consists, on the one hand, in identifying the narrative elements normally connected with a particular character or core image, and the dissemination of details which are going to be made use of at a later stage (cueing to the story), as well as, on the other, in determining the audience's reaction to what is being represented and directing it towards the story's intended goal (cueing to the audience). Linking entails the choice of suitable episodes for the main characters in the story, and the proper linking of these episodes through the dissemination of

important narrative details (interlocking details and images). This is achieved by making use of relevant transitional details. Propp uses the term *function sequences* for connected actions, which are expressed in content units called *core-images* (Scheub). Ong (1982:60) describes these units as: 'a float of themes and formulas out of which all stories are built'.

Formulae and linking techniques are essential in helping the performer concentrate on the actions of the story rather than on the actual wording. The use of language, ideophones, expressive idioms, repetition etc. are equally part of this texture.

Ong (1982:9) affirms that, in an oral society, one learns by apprenticeship, discipleship, listening, repeating, mastering proverbs, combining and re-combining materials and participating in a kind of corporate retrospection. These are also the means by which a storyteller is gradually trained.

3.7. Bascom highlights 5 basic **functions** of folktales:

a) amusement or entertainment;
b) validation of culture, beliefs and ritual practices (giving charter to social institutions);
c) education through approval or reprimand of behaviour;
d) etiology;
e) survival of ethnic solidarity.

With regard to Zulu folktales all these functions apply, except for the fact that possible contradictions occur between the concept of the educative function and the anti-social behaviour of the **trickster**, which is so common to many of the Zulu folktales. The trickster's unscrupulous handling of social institution and traditions wreaks havoc in society. Trickery seems to be an all-pervading element in Zulu folktales. It produces fun and laughter by the portrayal of the unexpected, which in turn serves as a valve to release pent-up tensions, often caused by strict social rules. The folktale lives in the fantastic world where humans and animals meet and interact quite freely; trickery seems to have no role to play in purely human society. At the end of a performance based on the trickster, both performer and audience spit on the fire, as if to purify their lips of all the 'impurities' which have passed through their minds and tongues.

This is symbolic of the fact that whatever may be permissible in the fantastic world, the real world of human society has different and more pure rules, by which one must abide.

4. Conclusion: The Role of Satire in Zulu Oral Tradition

Prominent in virtually all forms of Zulu oral traditions are various forms of censure, reproof, disapproval of broken norms etc. This is often represented in a satirical manner. As an 'oral' form (being totally dependent on performance and requiring an audience), Zulu folklore is an obviously suitable medium for the expression of satire within the realm of Zulu oral literary traditions.

One interesting aspect of Zulu oral tradition and folklore is the expression of its view of itself: its control system works either by means of positive encouragement of socially acceptable forms of behaviour, or by punishment of negative attitudes, law breakers and social deviants. It is the latter aspect that is the source of satire in Zulu oral tradition. It has been practised as a form of social control as part of communal entertainment, not only in days gone by but in present times as well.

The type of satire that is prevalent in the poetry and narrative forms of Zulu oral tradition or folklore is not of the type practised by a class of the social elite, as for example in eighteenth century English literature. It is not abstract or intellectual, but is distinctly popular in nature, concerning itself, as Ong has mentioned, with social transgressions. It functions primarily to ensure that certain patterns and modes of behaviour are adhered to. When they are not, it gives rise to public protest and indignation which manifests itself either in the form of oral poetry aimed at the individual, or in the form of folktales with an ethical base.

The Zulus have always been a community orientated society, placing great importance on good social relations between neighbours and others within the community. Direct confrontation is not an acceptable form of behaviour in this environment, hence the importance of allusive satirical 'messages' which occur in various oral traditions. These coded forms of language are typical of the euphemistic and allusive language that is common in the speech of Zulu speaking people and they

serve a significant function in 'working out tension, ... in minimizing friction ... or in providing a means of indirect comment when a direct one is not feasible'. (Finnegan, 1970:470).

References

Alant, J. W. 1993. 'Towards a Linguistic Definition of Orality'. Paper presented at Seminar on South-African Literature and Languages, University of Durban-Westville, Durban.

Bascom, R. 1965. 'Four Functions of Folklore', in Dundes, A. (ed). *The Study of Folklore*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Canonici, N. 1993. *The Zulu Folktale Tradition*. University of Natal Press: Durban.

Dundes, A. 1964 *The Morphology of North-American Folktales*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.

Dundes, A. 1965. *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Finnegan, R. 1970. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gough, D. 1986. *Xhosa Narrative*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.

Olrik, A. 1908. 'Epic Laws of Folk Literature'. In Dundes, A. 1965. *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Ong, W. 1982. *Orality and Literacy*. New York: Methuen.

Scheub, H. 1975. *The Xhosa Ntsomi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Turner, N.S. 1991. *Elements of Satire in Zulu Oral Traditions*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Natal University, Durban.

THE WRITINGS OF H.F. FYNN: HISTORY, MYTH OR FICTION?

Julie Pridmore
University of Durban-Westville

Introduction

In his Preface to *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn*, James Stuart pointed out that:

> 'Fynn stood and still stands in a category of his own, and it is this freely and unanimously accorded precedence which straightaway invests almost everything from him about the earliest days of Natal and Zululand with a distinction and quality of its own'. (Stuart and Malcolm, 1950:xii).

As early as the 1850s, material written by Fynn was being utilised by writers on the pre-colonial Natal past. J.C. Chase for example in his publication *The Natal Papers* incorporated a description obtained from Fynn on the 'devastation' of the Natal region by Shaka in the period prior to European arrival in the 1820s. (Chase, 1843:20). With the publication of Bird's *Annals of Natal* in 1888, Fynn became widely accepted as an authoritative source on the Shakan period and he was viewed as having been in a unique position of access to that past in that he was an eye-witness to important events. (Bird, 1888:6; 60-101; Gibson, 1903:21-24). Since the publication of the *Diary* in 1950, Fynn's texts have been used by both popular and academic writers as crucial sources on the Natal-Zululand region and this trend has outlasted major shifts in the approaches of historians. (Bulpin, 1953; Ritter, 1955; Morris, 1966; Thompson, 1969; Du Buisson, 1987; Ballard, 1989). Even the most recent arguments concerning the nature and historiography of the concept of an *mfecane* have drawn on Fynn's *Diary* to illustrate various issues. (Cobbing, 1990:3-5; Eldredge, 1992:12; Hamilton, 1992:41).

1. The Fynn Text as History

In 1988, Julian Cobbing described the publication of Fynn's *Diary* as 'one of the major disasters of South African historical literature'. (Cobbing, 1988:524). Yet, two years later he drew on material in the Fynn text to point to evidence of the slave trade (as carried out by Europeans) from Port Natal in the 1820s. (Cobbing, 1990:3-5). In the Preface of the *Diary*, Stuart had noted that Fynn in all probability wrote his manuscripts in the 1850s and not the 1820s. (Stuart and Malcolm, 1950:xiii). The tendency to utilise Fynn as contemporary (i.e.

1820s and 1830s) material has survived amongst historians for the past forty years and despite recent research into the motives behind Fynn's writing, (Gewald, 1989), researchers continue to rely on Fynn as a key source to the pre-colonial Natal past and particularly the Shakan period. This can be partially explained by the **images** of Fynn that have emerged over the past 150 years and specifically the idea of Fynn as a reliable source which was entrenched by Bird's publication and by the *Diary*. It is possible to view these images as **myths** in a separate category as they are the result of the ideological contexts within which Fynn produced his texts. It is possible at another level to examine the texts as **historical** material.

I have selected three central extracts from Fynn's *Diary* for this analysis. All three of these were previously published in Bird's *Annals* and so served as sources for writers on Natal from the 1880s. The first text deals with the fairly well-known tradition of Dingiswayo kaJobe's exile and his supposed contact with Europeans some time during the late eighteenth century. A.T. Bryant had in his 1929 publication *Olden Times*, questioned the nature of Dingiswayo's contact with Europeans. (Bryant, 1929:83-4). Douglas Malcolm, who had taken over the editing of the Fynn Papers from James Stuart in the 1940s, was a Zulu linguist and Head of the Department of Zulu at the University of Natal. It is unlikely that he would have been unacqainted with Bryant's work. Yet, apart from using Bryant to verify the chronology of Fynn's account, Malcolm did not include Bryant's points in the *Diary* text. (Stuart and Malcolm, 1950:4-8). Thus, the version that appeared in the *Diary* remained unquestioned until the 1970s and this served to reinforce the idea that Fynn had been the only person with access to the account. (Argyle, 1978; Koopman, 1979). The second text is an account of Fynn's supposed medical treatment of Shaka following an assasination attempt in July 1824. This was a central theme which had been used, since the publication of Bird, to build up a particular image of Fynn as a 'humane' individual and by the time that Malcolm was working on the Fynn Papers, had become firmly established in historical literature. (Gibson, 1903:23-4; Bryant, 1929:578-9; Mackeurtan, 1931:100-4). Malcolm followed this trend by stating that Fynn was known 'for his prowess as a pioneer doctor'. (Stuart and Malcolm, 1950:72). Recent historical accounts have overlooked the crucial point that Shaka's 'own doctor' assisted Fynn, (Becker, 1985:185-6, Du Buisson, 1987:56-7) and it is probable that the former's treatment was more effective than Fynn's, given Fynn's limited knowledge and the

extremely restricted methods employed by Western medicine at the beginning of the nineteenth century [1]. A close examination of the oral traditions on Shaka produces at least one informant who was 'not aware' that Fynn treated Shaka. (Webb and Wright, 1979:232).

A third extract from the Fynn text deals with the assasination of Shaka in 1828. Malcolm, in keeping with the idea of Fynn as a recorder of historical events, did not mention Bryant's point that there were in fact no European witnesses of Shaka's death. (Bryant, 1929:662). Malcolm retained Fynn's quotation of Shaka's dying words as 'what is the matter, children of my father?' (Stuart and Malcolm, 1950:157) and this served to reinforce the notion that Fynn had been a unique eye witness to these events. Again, a discrepancy arises within oral tradition where Shaka's last words are reported as 'the land will see locusts and white people come' [2].

2. The Fynn Text as Myth

Even the limited analysis above makes it possible to detect major discrepancies between Fynn's accounts and other sources and a number of crucial questions arise around Fynn's construction of such texts. These problems lead to a re-defining of the Fynn text as a series of myths rather than as 'history'. McNeill has redefined the interplay between history and myth as a concept which he terms 'mythistory' and he suggests that all 'history' in fact takes this form, noting that 'the same words that constitute truth for some are, and always will be, myth for others, who inherit or embrace different assumptions and organizing concepts about the world'. (McNeill, 1986:19). Most historians and literary analysts would agree that it is no longer possible to view text simply as text and that a framework or context for what the writer has said is essential in order to understand the point from which he or she is writing. (Eagleton, 1978:50-55; Stickland, 1981:67-108). At the same time, some have argued that the text is in and by itself a valuable entity (Barthes, 1954:9-29; Barthes, 1976:4-5) while others have argued that texts as collective forms of knowledge can be used as authoritative power bases. (Foucault, 1973:219-220; Foucault, 1981:48-9).

Whatever the various arguments, it is still important here to provide a **context** for the Fynn text in order to arrive at the starting-point for the kind of 'mythistory' created by that text. (Lincoln, 1989:3-15). While it is possible to examine the text as **historical text**, as I have tried to demonstrate above, it is now widely accepted that history or 'mythistory' is produced and shaped within very specific contexts. (Tosh, 1984:1-16). Fynn wrote the bulk of his

manuscripts in the 1850s in colonial Natal where he was employed as a Resident Magistrate under the Natal government. This was obviously a particular political context and the kind of colonial ideology which shaped Fynn's writing was based on notions of the legitimacy of European presence in the Natal region and colonial domination over indigenous populations. Fynn, like other Natal writers of the 1850s, was attempting to justify European rule by describing pre-European Natal as being in a state of anarchy and 'devastation' due to the actions of Shaka. The 'devastation' stereotype or myth as propagated by writers like Fynn was to become central in the emerging historical literature on the destructive impact of the *mfecane* over a wide south-east African region. (Wright, 1989:272-91; Wright, 1991:409-25).

Interwoven within Fynn's writing on Shaka's 'devastation' were the supporting myths of Fynn's supposed 'friendship' with Shaka which was a direct result of Fynn's medical treatment and the idea that it was due to this 'diplomacy' exercised by Fynn that Shaka 'gave' land to Farewell in July 1824 'extending 50 miles inland and 25 miles along the coast, and including the harbour of Natal'. (Stuart and Malcolm, 1950:86-8). Within this combination of myths or images it is also possible to detect subtle pointers to the wider political mythology of European superiority at Port Natal, a colonial 'discourse' which eventually formed the basis for 'indirect rule' up to the 1940s. (Ashforth, 1990). An example of this was Fynn's medical treatment of Shaka which can be viewed as an instance of the progressive nature of Western technology. (MacLeod and Lewis, 1988:1) juxtaposed against the negative behaviour displayed by Shaka who, Fynn states, 'cried nearly the whole night, expecting that only fatal consequences would ensue'. (Stuart and Malcolm, 1950:84). The extent to which such myths endure has recently been demonstrated in the visual imagery presented by the S.A.B.C. T.V. series *Shaka Zulu* where 'Fynn the doctor' is portrayed, not only as the talented individual who healed Shaka, but as the voice of Western liberal reason and the representative of negotiation between white and black or inherently between civilisation and barbarism. (Mersham, 1989:336).

The framework for Fynn's 'mythistory' can also be examined on a far more personal level than the wider colonial context. During the late 1850s, Fynn was in the position of attempting to obtain a land-grant from the Natal government, claiming that his original farm in the Isipingo area had been given to Dick King for the latter's services to the Natal government while Fynn was employed on the Cape frontier in 1843. Fynn's letters to the Natal authorities included statements to the effect that Fynn had been given land by Shaka

due to his precedence as the first European in the Port Natal region [3]. Thus Fynn, in portraying himself in his writing as the person ultimately responsible for Farewell's land grant, was stressing his role as the instigator of European rule in Natal, a fact that the Natal government of the 1850s was, in Fynn's view, overlooking.

The images constructed by Fynn about his own role at Port Natal were far-reaching and have been reworked right up the present, although a kind of 'reversal of villains' has occurred in recent literature, particularly in attempts to 'popularise' history. (Oakes, 1988:76-77; Hamilton, 1990:141). This trend has been extended onto the platform of political debate where the negative Shaka and the positive Fynn have been exchanged in an attempt to deconstruct the dominant historical mythology. (Forsyth, 1992:74-92). Stuart's portrayal of Fynn in the preface of the *Diary* as the person who 'was by far the best informed as to the conditions of the country (Natal) and its inhabitants', (Stuart and Malcolm, 1950:xii) had also served to perpetuate the image or myth of Fynn as a reliable source on early Natal. This has led to a reliance on Fynn's *Diary* by historians into the 1990s and Fynn as an **author** has become a myth in itself, so that even film-directors like Bill Faure have drawn on Fynn and Fynn's *Diary* despite the assertion that *Shaka Zulu* was to be a version of history that avoided or rectified the distortions provided by 'bigoted white historians'. (Faure, 1986:3). On another level, Fynn is still viewed as a vital source as a recorder of oral tradition and oral poetry. (Pridmore, 1991; Opland, 1992:132-3). These images of Fynn as a single all-important author have persisted despite the evidence which points to at least one individual assisting Fynn in his writing [4]. Stuart had also pointed out in the *Diary* preface that Fynn's manuscripts were constructed by more than one person. (Stuart and Malcolm, 1950:xi).

However, it is the **context** within which the myths about Fynn were and are produced that is equally relevant to the myths themselves. Fynn's writing has in this sense generated a whole mythology on early Natal which Barthes would define as a kind of relationship between context and 'knowledge'. (Barthes, 1970:247). Martin has also compared the set of images generated by British writers on 'the Zulus' with the whole framework of ideas about the nature of 'orientalism' as illustrated in Said's seminal work *Orientalism*. Martin has pointed out that such images have a whole 'history and dynamic of their own' while 'at the same time, images are themselves the product of history, of the society in which they occur'. (Martin, 1982:333-6).

3. **The Fynn Text as Fiction**

A significant image interpolated in the text of the Fynn *Diary* by Malcolm was that of Fynn as Robinson Crusoe. Malcolm used this analogy noting that Fynn was 'equally affable, ... courageous and large-hearted'. (Stuart and Malcolm, 1950:117). This can be viewed on two different levels. Firstly, there is the obvious use of Robinson Crusoe as a model to illustrate the contrast between civilisation (in the form of imperial expansion) and barbarism, a context used here to provide a framework for Fynn's 'pioneering' actions. On another level is the image of Robinson Crusoe as **author** or narrator. In 1910 the historian I.D. Colvin had commented that Fynn's text 'rivalled' Defoe's in its 'adventure-book' quality. Is it possible then to see Fynn's *Diary* as a novel rather than history or 'mythistory'? Should Fynn's 'historical' account not be read as literature and thus, as La Capra has suggested, be analysed in terms of literary and not historical theory? (LaCapra, 1985:18-19).

Providing a context for the production of 'history' has to some extent grown out of the concern in recent decades to provide contexts for literary texts. (Brantlinger, 1990:15-33). Central to the debate generated by structuralists and post-structuralists has been the issue of the relationship between texts as discourses and the ideological framework in which these are produced and formed. (Macherey, 1978:94; Young, 1981:80-93; Hampton, 1990:153-70). Clearly, the overall context for Fynn's writing was that of colonial domination and his portrayal of himself in a medical and diplomatic role was a deliberate attempt to create the feeling of contrast between the Europeans (Fynn) and the indigenous people (Shaka). Such a use of contrasts and differences was a central theme in what can be termed 'colonial discourse'. (Bhabha, 1983: 195-7). There can be no doubt that Fynn's text, like Isaacs' 1836 publication, was a fictional production written with specific political and ideological motives, and in a sense as an autobiographical account. (Wylie, 1991). Isaacs had written to Fynn in 1832 urging him to 'make them (the Zulu) as bloodthirsty as you can' as this would make Fynn's publication 'more popular' [5]. Isaacs did not hesitate to stress that his own 1836 publication *Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa* was written with the specific purpose of 'inducing the British government to colonise Natal' [6]. Pratt has suggested that the ideological context for a given text can be discerned in what she calls its 'conventions of representation'. Such forms, of which the eighteenth century novel *Robinson Crusoe* is an example, can be evident in fiction or non-fiction and are a 'relatively independent' genre distinction. (Pratt, 1989:16-9). The kinds of representation used in the *Robinson Crusoe* text

have been used in nineteenth century literature and in this context it is useful to compare Fynn's text with these representations. Two themes in the *Robinson Crusoe* narrative are relevant here - the abandonment of family and community and the life of supposed misery and misfortune which results. Both of these are evident in Fynn's writing. He described his early 'wanderlust' life in the Cape Colony after leaving England in 1818 and his trips to Delagoa Bay and Port Natal in 1823 and 1824 are suggestive of a severing of links between Fynn and the 'civilised' world - a point also emphasised in *Robinson Crusoe*. A point to note here is that Fynn's references to the misery and financial need which he experienced later in life as a result of these hasty decisions are described, not in his *Diary* text but in verse [7]. The 'conventions of representation' which Pratt describes are evident in Fynn's writing and it is probable that he was modelling his form on eighteenth and early nineteenth century 'travel' accounts, either fiction or non-fiction. (Gray, 1979:83-4).

A second and perhaps more important consideration here is the similarity between the ideology underlying the *Robinson Crusoe* text and that framing the production of Fynn's *Diary*. Green has described the evolution of what he calls the 'Robinson Crusoe Story' over the two hundred and fifty years following the publication of Defoe's novel. Until the 1950s the story underwent different forms of the same theme - imperial expansion. (Green, 1988:51). In the historical colonial context of Fynn's writing this was the major ideology of the society in which Fynn functioned to produce the text which eventually became the *Diary*. Thus, however 'fictional' Fynn's account actually was, his writing still reflected the reality of the world in which he operated. Colvin had referred to Fynn as a kind of Defoe in the early twentieth century when a romanticised Victorian imperialism was still dominant in South African literature. By the time that Malcolm was inserting the image of Fynn as Robinson Crusoe into the *Diary* text, the 'Robinson Crusoe Story' had in a sense 'become' William Golding's novel, *Lord of the Flies*. (Green, 1988:55).

Malcolm's imagery was taken up by later writers who used Fynn in their own fiction, but within the changing themes of South African English literature. An example here is Jenny Seed's publication *The Prince of the Bay* which, although published in 1970, was still being recommended for 'young readers' into the 1980s. Seed concentrated on the notion of Fynn's assimilation into indigenous society which was in contrast to the traditional images of Fynn as a 'pioneer' battling against numerous 'hardships'. Coetzee has pointed to the changing ideas in English South African literature since the 1960s where Europeans have to

increasingly come to terms with indigenous **people** rather than the (to the European) alien South African **landscape**. (Coetzee, 1988:8). In the case of Seed's novel, however, Fynn's introduction to indigenous society is through the medium of his adopted refugee Bongisani and the parallels with the Robinson Crusoe/Man Friday relationship are evident in this context. (Seed, 1970:95). The imagery suggested by the *Diary* was used in a number of fictional accounts from the 1950s and despite new trends (for example in examining the relationship between white and black in South East Africa) these established images of Fynn remained largely unchanging, with writers drawing directly on the *Diary* as a source for their own texts on Fynn. Michael Kirkwood's poem 'Henry Fynn and the Blacksmith of the Grosvenor' was, for example, based on the descriptions given by Fynn in the published *Diary*. (Kirkwood, 1971:70-72). Is it possible to view this kind of writing as, what Alex Hailey calls, 'faction'? Certainly it is a combination of what we 'know' (or think we know) of 'history' and a fictional embellishment.

Conclusion

Coetzee has made the point that 'history is not reality, it is a kind of discourse'. (Coetzee, 1987). In the case of the Fynn texts, the material that is read is a discourse between ideology on the one hand and the need to create a past which justifies European actions at Port Natal from the early nineteenth century on the other. The kinds of images that result from this discourse can be defined neither as 'history', nor as 'myth', nor as 'mythistory' nor as 'fiction'. There is a need for an ongoing redefinition of the blending of these forms which emerge **from Fynn** and also **of Fynn**. Such a blending can be identified most clearly in the praise-poetry created around Fynn and around Shaka. Fynn's praise-poem has an unidentifiable source but it is possible that it was in fact written by James Stuart. In this poem Fynn is described as the 'tamer of the evil-tempered elephant', possibly referring to his 'influence' over Shaka - a theme, as shown above, which was dominant at the time that James Stuart was writing. An alternative description is given in Kunene's poem *Emperor Shaka the Great* where Fynn is portrayed as being 'like a monkey ... ever peering into forbidden places ... He is no man, nor is he like King who respected the customs and laws'. (Kunene, 1979:390).

While it is important to note that praise-poetry is not 'representative' (Vail and White, 1991:84), it is somewhere between these two opposing views that the 'real' Fynn exists, although it is doubtful if such a personality can ever really escape from the continuing discourse which surrounds it. In the same way, it is impossible to arrive at clear definitions of what constitutes 'history', 'myth' or 'fiction' in the Fynn texts. Certainly it is no longer possible to make the distinction, as Stephen Gray did in the 1970s, between 'imaginary voyages' as fiction and the 'real diary' of Fynn. (Gray, 1979:83-4).

Notes

1. Fynn was a surgeon's assistant from 1816-1818 (i.e. from age 13 to 15). For details on Zulu medicine see A.T. Bryant, *Zulu Medicine and Medicine-Men*, Cape Town, 1970, p.77.

2. Killie Campbell Africana Library, Stuart Papers, File 61, Interview with Dinya Ka Zokozwayo, 27 February 1905.

3. Natal Archives, Colonial Secretary's Office, File 120, No. 65: Fynn to Napier, 10 August 1843; File 103, No. 171: Fynn to Allen, 15 February 1858; File 120 No. 25: Fynn to Allen, 29 February 1860.

4. Killie Campbell Africana Library, Fynn Family Papers, File 300104, Folder 4, p.8: Interview between James Stuart and H. Fynn Junior, 27 December 1906.

5. Natal Archives, Fynn Papers, Vol. 1, No. 6: Isaacs to Fynn, 10 December 1832.

6. Natal Archives, Fynn Papers, Vol. 1, No. 26: Isaacs to Fynn, 7 September 1840.

7. See *Young Africa Booklist*, 1985.

References

Argyle, J. 1978. 'Dingiswayo Discovered: An Interpretation of his Legendary Origins', in J. Argyle and E. Preston-Whyte (eds). *Social System and Tradition in Southern Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ashforth, A. 1990. *The Politics of Offiaial Discourse in Twentieth Century South Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ballard, C. 1989. 'Traders, Trekkers and Colonists', in A. Duminy and W. Guest (eds.) *Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910. A New History*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

Barthes, R. 1954. (Translated 1968). *Writing Degree Zero*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Barthes, R. 1970. *Mythologies*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Barthes, R. 1976. *The Pleasure of the Text*. London: Longman.

Becker, P. 1985. *The Pathfinders*. Harmondsworth: Viking.

Bhabha, H.K. 1983. 'Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism' in F. Barker et al (eds.) *The Politics of Theory*. Colchester: University of Essex Press.

Bird. J. 1888. *The Annals of Natal*. London: Longman.

Brantlinger, P.A. 1990. *Crusoe's Footprints. Cultural Studies in Britain and America*. London: Routledge.

Bryant, A.T. 1929. *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*. London: Longman.

Bryant, A.T. 1970. *Zulu Medicine and Medicine Men*. Cape Town: Struik.

Bulpin, T.V. *To the Shores of Natal*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter.

Chase, J.C. 1843. *The Natal Papers*. London: Longman.

Cobbing, J. 1988. 'The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo'. *Journal of African History*. 29.

Cobbing, J. 1990. 'Grasping the Nettle: The Slave Trade and the Early Zulu' in D. Edgecombe et al (eds). *The Debate on Zulu Origins*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

Coetzee, J.M. 1987. 'The Appropriating Appetite of the Discourse of History'. *Weekly Mail*. 13-19 November.

Coetzee, J.M. 1988. *White Writing. On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. Yale: Yale University Press.

Du Buisson, L. 1987. *The White Man Cometh*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.

Eagleton, T. 1978. *Criticism and Ideology*. London: Methuen.

Eldredge, E.A. 1992. 'Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa c. 1800-1830: The "Mfecane" reconsidered'. *Journal of African History*, 33.

Faure, W. 1986. *Shaka Zulu Official Souvenir Brochure*. Johannesburg: S.A.B.C.

Forsyth, P. 1992. 'The Past in the Service of the Present: The Political Use of History by Chief A.N.M.G. Buthelezi 1951-1991'. *South African Historical Journal*, 26.

Foucault, M. 1973. *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Tavistock.

Foucault, M. 1981. 'The Order of Discourse' in R. Young (ed). *Untying the Text*. London: Routledge.

Gewald, J.B. 1989. '"A Faithful Circumstantial and Unvarnished Detail of Incidents". A Critical Reassessment of the Accounts Relating to Shaka in *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn*.' Leiden: Leiden University.

Gibson, J.Y. 1903. *The Story of the Zulus*. London: Longman.

Gray, S. 1979. *Southern African Literature. An Introduction*. Cape Town: Juta.

Green, M. 1988. 'The Robinson Crusoe Story' in J. Richards. (ed). *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Hamilton, C.A. 1990. '"An Appetite for the Past": The Recreation of Shaka and the Crisis in Popular Historical Consciousness'. *South African Historical Journal*, 22.

Hamilton, C.A. 1992. '"The Character and Objects of Chaka": A Reconsideration of the Making of Shaka as "Mfecane" Motor'. *Journal of African History*, 33.

Hampton, C. 1990. *The Ideology of the Text*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Kirkwood, M. 1972. *Whitewashes*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Koopman, A. 1979. 'Dingiswayo Rides Again'. *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 2.

Kunene, M. 1979. *Emperor Shaka the Great*. Nairobi: Heinemann.

La Capra, D. 1985. *History and Criticism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Lincoln, B. 1989. *Discourse and the Construction of Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mackeurtan, G.M. 1930. *The Cradle Days of Natal*. London: Longman.
Macherey, P. 1978. *A Theory of Literary Production*. London: Routledge.
Martin, R. 1982. 'British Images of the Zulu c. 1820-1879'. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Cambridge University.
McLeod, R. and M. Lewis. (eds). 1988. *Disease, Medicine and Empire*. London: Methuen.
McNeill, W.H. 1986. *Mythistory or Truth, Myth, History and Historians*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
Mersham, G. 1989. 'Political Discourse and Historical Television Drama: A Case Study of *Shaka Zulu*'. Unpublished D. Litt et Phil Thesis, UNISA.
Morris, D.R. 1966. *The Washing of the Spears*. London: Jonathan Cape.
Oakes, D. 1988. (ed). *The Readers' Digest History of South Africa*. The Real Story. Cape Town: Readers Digest.
Opland, J. 1992. *Words that Circle Words*. Johannesburg: Ad. Donker Publishers.
Pratt, M.L. 1989. 'Conventions of Representation. Where Discourse and Ideology Meet', in W. van Peer (ed). *The Taming of the Text. Explorations in Language, Literature and Culture*. London: Routledge.
Ritter, E.A. 1955. *Shaka Zulu*. London: Allen Lane.
Said, E. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
Seed, J. 1970. *The Prince of the Bay*. Johannesburg.
Strickland, G. 1981. *Structuralism or Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Stuart, J. and Malcolm, D. (eds). 1950. *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter.
Thompson, L. 1969. 'Co-operation and Conflict: the Zulu Kingdom and Natal' in M. Wilson and L. Thompson (ed). *The Oxford History of South Africa*, vol. I. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Tosh, J. 1984. *The Pursuit of History*. Harlow: Longman.
Vail, L. and L. White. 1991. *Power and the Praise Poem. South African Voices in History*. London: Longman.
Webb, C. de B. and Wright. J. 1979. *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples*, vol. II. Pietermaritzburg and Durban: University of Natal Press.
Wright, J. 1989. 'Political Mythology and the Making of Natal's Mfecane'. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 2.
Wright, J. 1991. 'A.T. Bryant and the "Wars of Shaka"'. *History in Africa*, 18.
Wylie, D. 1991. 'Autobiography as Alibi: History and Projection in Nathaniel Isaacs' in *Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa* (1836). *Current Writing*, 3.
Young, R. 1981. (ed). *Untying the Text. A Post-Structuralist Reader*. London: Routledge.