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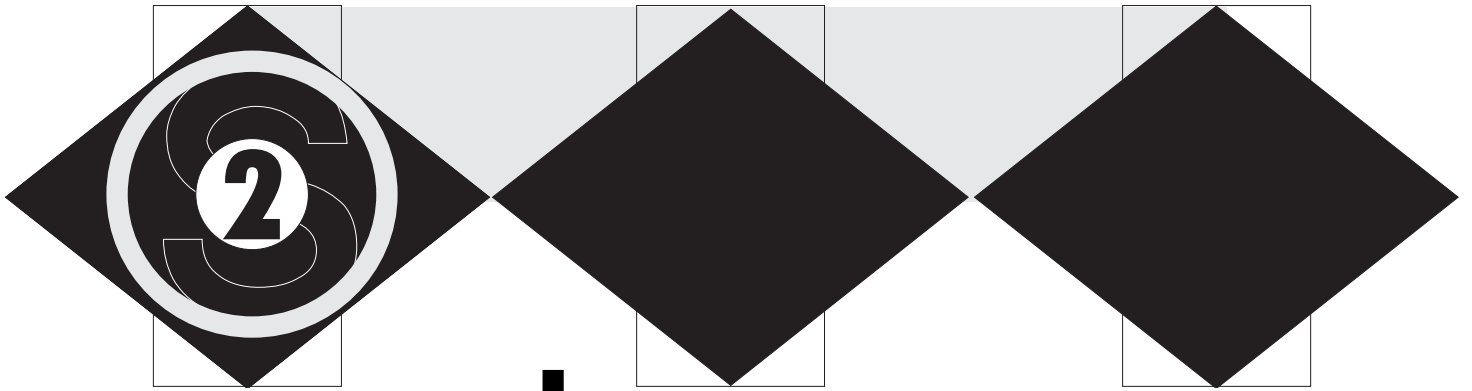
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**Editorial Policy:** The journal places emphasis on theoretical and practical concerns in English studies in southern Africa. Uniquely southern African approaches to southern African problems are sought. While the dominant style will be of a scholarly nature, the journal will also publish some poetry, as well as other forms of writing such as the interview, essay, review essay, conference report and polemical position. The editorial board invites contributors to break the mould of orthodox scholarly writing. It welcomes a variety of styles in a spirit of redefining the parameters of the discipline and its discourses.

**Submissions** should be presented in Harvard style and be sent on paper as well as disk (WordPerfect) or e-mail attachment, to the Editor, Department of English, University of South Africa, PO Box 392, Unisa 0003. E-mail: [dkockl@unisa.ac.za](mailto:dkockl@unisa.ac.za) Letters to the Editor will be published. **Subscriptions:** R40 and \$30.00 for two issues a year. Write to the Business Section, Unisa Press, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003. Subscription information by e-mail [delpoa@unisa.ac.za](mailto:delpoa@unisa.ac.za)



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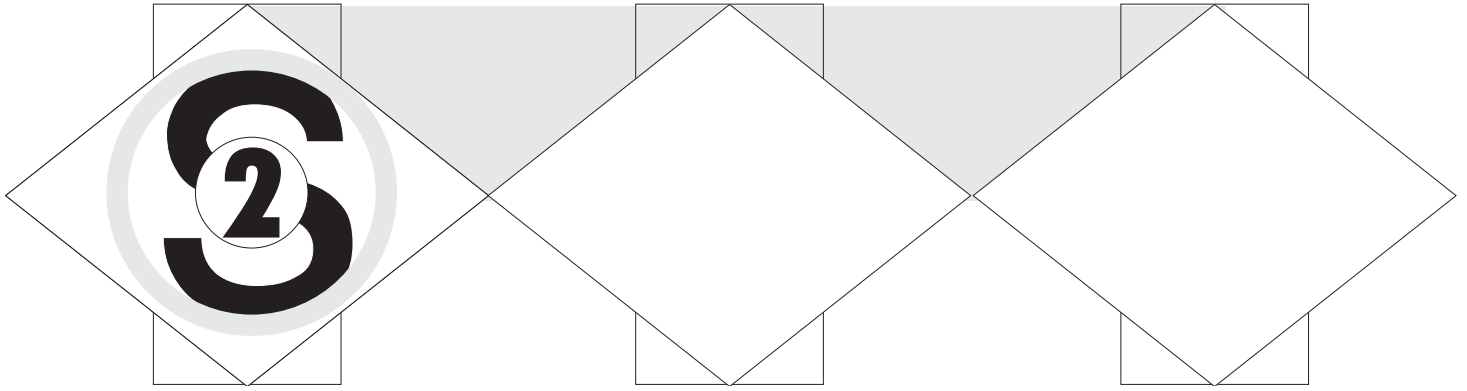
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# The Race to be hero

RACE AND GENDER IN ROY CAMPBELL'S *LIGHT ON A DARK HORSE*

JUDITH LÜTGE COULLIE

While blackness and femininity are interrogated, whiteness and masculinity come to seem to be incontestable and axiomatic. Thus race comes to mean that which is not white, while gender appears to signify femininity only

Even though contemporary theories question the apparently self-evident truths about race and gender, analysis in South Africa still tends to focus on the construction of the black and/or feminine subject. This rejection of the devaluation in hegemonic discourses during apartheid of all who were not white and male is understandable; but there are dangers inherent in this, for while blackness and femininity are interrogated, whiteness and masculinity come to seem to be incontestable and axiomatic. Thus race comes to mean that which is not white, while gender appears to signify femininity only. This is beginning to change, more noticeably with regard to whiteness – hardly surprising, given the conspicuous self-consciousness (fostered by the TRC, by conferences and commissions of inquiry into racism and the recent public apology

for whites) that has infused white South Africa since the advent of democracy in 1994. And while “men’s studies” – inspired by feminism, and an accepted part of academic inquiry in America and the UK since the 1980s – is at last beginning to make its mark in South Africa,<sup>1</sup> generally, analysis of masculinity is still subsumed under the rubric of gender studies. And gender here usually means a focus on women. A conference held at the University of the Western Cape in 1997 is a case in point: the theme was gender and colonialism, but most papers focused on women’s issues. The bias towards women’s studies is often justified by the argument that traditional scholarship is all about men anyway, and that men do not need additional attention. However, the resultant “overgeneralization from male to generic human experience not only distorts our understanding of what, if anything, is truly generic to humanity but also precludes the study of masculinity as a *specific male* experience” (Brod 1987:40). And such experience is shifting, localized and complex: “The more anthropologists, sociologists, and historians explore the meanings of being a ‘man’, the more inconsistent, contradictory, and varied they become” (Stimpson 1987:xi). This paper aims to contribute to the

growth of scholarship on race and gender in South Africa by examining (by means of post-structuralist and psychoanalytic theories) the particular construction of Roy Campbell’s white male autobiographical hero, thus indicating that neither whiteness nor masculinity is simply given, “normal”, universally relevant or without “pernicious effects” (Brod 1987:2).

In terms of both poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory, self is a process, a *site* – constituted “within power relations within particular historical moments” (Nussbaum 1989:10) – for interpretations of experience. The de-centred subject controls neither consciousness nor the unconscious: “The unconscious comes into existence simultaneously with the subject’s first assimilation of cultural prohibition” (Silverman 1983:55). The subject is thus subjected to the social, but is also the agent of action and may thus initiate change. Julian Henriques (1984:117) and his co-authors argue that the material individual is conceived of as a subject, which

is the effect of a production, caught in the mutually constitutive web of social practices, discourses and subjectivity; its reality is the tissue of social relations ... [Analysis] ... must refer to the specificities of the different practices in order to describe the different subject positions and the different

power relations played out in them. It cannot simply speak of a specific subject's behaviour and attitudes or ascribe in advance the subject's position according to class or gender.

The ideologies of racism, sexism, nationalism, and so on invite us to conceive of these hierarchical divisions as incontestable and immutable, but history and autobiographical writing prove otherwise. Race and gender involve the inscription of meaning on material bodies: "The ... body itself is social" (Barthes 1977a:124).<sup>2</sup> What we are is obviously determined in large part by the meaning and worth accorded to our material bodies, or, as Bob Connell so neatly puts it (1995:64), identities are constituted "as meaningful bodies and embodied meanings" in social circuits.<sup>3</sup>

Although they can be theorized in like ways, textual and material subjects are not interchangeable or equivalent. The subject who writes and the autobiographical subject are not simply equivalent. The refractions of the "real" are multiplied in the autobiographical text: perception is conventionally determined; and narration is governed by yet more sets of prescriptions and expectations. The autobiographical subject is a function of the text, and as such is subject to a whole host of pressures pertaining to texts, such as what is publishable (who is reading what, when), what various functions a genre might be held to perform at a given time, what styles or approaches are in favour amongst particular kinds of readers, and so on. Analysis thus foregrounds the social implications of the precise constitution of the autobiographical subject so that stylistic features are considered as indices not simply of individual character (which is, of course, unstable and multifaceted) but of discursive and non-discursive practices in the wider social formation, of fundamentally important "cultural codes" (Nussbaum 1989:15). As I've argued elsewhere, analysis of the autobio-

The refractions of the 'real' are multiplied in the autobiographical text: perception is conventionally determined; and narration is governed by yet more sets of prescriptions and expectations

graphical text aims not to tease out the influences of the society on an independent individual, but rather to foreground the complexity of the textual codification of those discourses which constitute the social formation and the subjects who are produced and are productive therein (Coullie 1991:9). The narrator and protagonist of *Light on a dark horse* are not equivalent to the man, Roy Campbell. But this does not mean that textual analysis is irrelevant to our understanding of the material world: since no discourse can be private and "[s]ubjectivity ... is merely the wake of all the codes which constitute me" (Barthes 1974:10), analysis of the textual constitution of the subject entails concomitant interrogation of the social; "the traditional division of individual/society dissolves in favour of a recognition that these are mutually constitutive" (Coullie 1991:9).

Roy Campbell's *Light on a dark horse*, first published in 1951, subscribes emphatically to the ideology of individualism.<sup>4</sup> The vigorous narrative style serves to underline the claim of the hero's exceptionality. The publisher's comments (1971: back cover) are apposite: "This rip-roaring autobiography catches the full flair and flavour of a man much larger than the life of his times." The narrator would, I think, have approved of such a description of himself. Setting himself apart from ordinary people, he was, he says, "the first man to torry a buffalo on horse-back on African soil" (1971:35). As a boy in South Africa, he staged spectacular octopus fights, hunted wild pigs (which are extremely dangerous) and other animals, and from adolescence was a crack shot. He was, he says, an exceptionally accomplished naturalist at a very young age (115–6). Later, in Europe, he worked as a stuntman, "doing all sorts of acts such as falling from high places, eating fire, and chewing up glass" (243). He jousting in Provence and was a bull-fighter in

Spain. He broke horses in and, “[e]xcept for climbing my horse up the flagpole ... did every reasonable trick within a circus rider’s or a bullfighter’s repertoire” (326). He risked life and limb to shelter monks during the Spanish Civil War, and was “the unique case in history” of a foreigner being permitted to exercise “the right of a master-fisherman in the most exclusive trade-freemasonry in the world” (292) (that is, in the French fishing industry). Always better than ordinary men, as a soldier his charge-sheet was “kept stainless throughout the war, till [his] discharge with ‘Military Conduct: Excellent’ ” (237).

Not only a man of action,<sup>5</sup> the hero is also a successful poet and writer. His exceptional abilities thus allow him to see through the sham of Bloomsbury when others cannot, and to appreciate the true worth of Toledo (he is *one of two of all* foreign visitors to Toledo who are gifted enough to perceive this!) (329). When he falls in love, it is with a “most beautiful young woman” (244), who, along with her friend, was an unparalleled source of inspiration to a great many men:

No other contemporary women ever had so much poetry, good, bad, and indifferent, written about them or so many musical compositions dedicated to them, or had so many portraits and busts made of them – as those two girls between them. (247–8)

That this is a superlative hero is conveyed, too, in the construction of the narrator’s vantage point on reality as stable, secure, and exceptionally perspicacious. His opinions, expressed with supreme confidence, are given

freely and with scant regard for moderation on a whole range of subjects. Consider his pronouncement that the French Revolution was a “volcano of blood and pus”, which caused France to decline into “a third-rate masonic republic, divided against itself” (158). Not afraid to pass summary judgement about disparate global events, he goes on: “All political activity which has been attempted outside of tradition during the last one hundred and fifty years has worked out in the inverse sense from its original intention” (158). The narrator makes similar pronouncements about animals, whole nations and race groups, and about women and men.

Campbell’s autobiographical subject displays the unswerving certainty of the white male conqueror who is portrayed as representing the best of the colonizer’s culture. For this narrator, there is no question but that his inherently superior intellect and sensibility are the source of his knowledge of reality and of himself. Personality is construed as a function both of inherited characteristics and autonomous personal response. In the first chapter, entitled “Forebears”, the narrator recounts many anecdotes about his relatives, all of whom are exceptional and rather eccentric individuals. In keeping with common-sense notions of inherited personality traits, this chapter establishes (both implicitly and explicitly) a core set of characteristics, which readers can associate with the narrator/protagonist. For example, from his maternal grandmother, a Gascon, he inherits his “love of bulls, and of Provençal, French, and Spanish poetry” (23; also

84–5). From his paternal grandfather he inherited the “malady” of versifying (25). An exceptional ability with animals “runs in the family” (35). This first chapter functions in part, then, to establish the reader’s expectations of the rest of the autobiography.

Reality and self are held to be independent, discrete, stable and knowable. In one example of his certainty that an objectively discernible reality can be grasped, Campbell’s narrator says: “From the very beginning my wife and I understood the real issues in Spain” (322). The “real issues” are phenomena that may be apparent to anyone who is willing and able to look with (it is implied) a measure of detachment. Such conviction regarding the division between self and other allows the narrator to perceive of his opinions as being due to independent thought: there is no sense of their being shaped by current discursive practice. If we recognize that “the ‘knowledge’ that the human subject possesses about itself figures within discursive systems of power that are available at a given historical moment” (Nussbaum 1989:15), then the very fact that Campbell desires, and is able, to construct such an autobiographical subject becomes indicative of the distribution of power in the social formation of the time. These are features such as patriarchy and colonialism and racism, all of which may be seen structurally to heap confidence and might upon – and to shape the desires of – a white male such as Campbell.

Campbell’s text makes manifest the intersection of a host of discourses

that serve to bolster the discourse of the humanist individual. This means that Campbell's narrator is no less the subject of prevailing discourses than is anyone else, even though he presents himself as a super-individual who often swims against the idea of popular opinion. As Belinda Bozzoli observes in *Women of Phokeng*:

Each fragment of identity ... has a history, and a link with a prevailing discourse. Each fragment is an inherent tradition which was once derived from a particular past situation, socially created, and yet brought into idiosyncratic and individual expression by its incarnation in ... the "self" of each particular [person]. (1991:241)

Some of Campbell's narrator's more obviously controversial opinions belong to discourses or ideologies which are presently under attack: the ideology of "character" (that is, of the humanist individual) is the basis for the ideologies of masculinity (coupled with sexism and homophobia), and of national and class and race-based prejudices.

Extreme individualism dominates the narrative, but it is dependent upon the subordinate discourses listed above and their associated ideological implications. The text's celebration of a specifically defined, extreme masculinity is crucial; in terms of the hierarchization of discourses in the text this is without doubt most important. Right from the outset<sup>6</sup> the narrator defines himself as a soldier and adventurer and the subsequent account of his actions further style him as the masculine ideal: skilled sailor, bullfighter, expert horseman, swimmer, marksman, intellectual, husband (proprietor) of a beautiful woman, and so on. As a mark of his excellence the hero "lost interest in hunting with guns as being too dull, having experienced the hand to hand stuff. [He had] often before and since then gone into a wounded bushbuck and fought it out with a knobkerrie" (78). He quells horses, fish and women:

None of my very best horses were ever too easy to break in: and on the human plane I like there to be some tension in the harmony so that it never grows stale,

Only that beauty shall be mine  
That never slacks the strain,

A fighting salmon on the line,  
A snorter at the rein. (249)<sup>7</sup>

He inspires undying loyalty in his underlings, implying that they too recognize his superiority. Pillay, a servant of Indian extraction, bids him farewell:

Dear Master you are the man talking true and honest in this World, every Indian and native saying you are the god in this world I am very sorry that I lost you I am thinking you all the time in my mine. (180)

The hero masters his world from a very young age. Untamed Africa affords him a wealth of opportunities for ultra-masculine adventures in which physical and mental strength are pitted against great odds. He learns to understand (and hence subjugate) the bush and its inhabitants. "After I was eleven I could bring down a charging buck and knew most of the answers of the Bush ... In those days all I needed, to take a wild beehive, was a hoe or an axe ..." (65). It is mastery – as sovereignty and specifically masculine dominance – that Campbell's autobiography extols:

It is fine to see nature in its rugged grandeur, just as it is fine to see the ruggedness of nature dominated by skill: the precipitous slopes terraced into orchards; and the horse completed with a fine rider. (325)

The narrative testifies to the Romantic notion that man is most himself when he pits himself against nature – and wins.<sup>8</sup> As we know, in the West nature is not only conceived of as feminine (Mother Earth), but women are aligned with nature. Annie Leclerc's thoughts on mastery are apposite: "Master, master: there is the master word of all our submissions to the greatness of man" (1980:81). She observes that men must conquer to obtain mastery:

I know that what a man likes about himself and what he's made the object of his respect are the virtues of the conqueror and the proprietor. He needs the strength to conquer and the bulk to possess with impunity.

The virtue of virtues, the *virtus*, is force. (1980:82)

The conquest must, however, be benevolent and "civilized" (in the European tradition). The ideal man

must, in fact, be a benevolent dictator and representative of the best of his Culture.

The hero has to master himself too. Constantly exposing himself to fear and danger, he asserts self-control by overcoming these. A particularly amazing example comes near the end of the text. Campbell recounts that when arrested by soldiers in the Spanish Civil War (men who have, he believes, killed in cold blood two civilians – an adolescent boy and an old woman), the hero refuses to put up his hands, saying: “Would they please excuse me, but my British ancestry made that impossible, and that to dismount at their orders was the very utmost damage I could do to my self-respect” (347). He is then, he says, severely beaten; one of the men crashes his rifle

several times across my nose and lips, so that the blood splashed on to the wool of the sheepskin on my saddle ... I stood at attention each time I could recover my balance, staring into the man's inflamed eyeballs. I knew I was saving my life, and that my way of taking this sort of punishment contemptuously was interesting both men. (347)

This is supremacy of rationality over physicality at its most extreme – a mind-body dualism so crucial to conceptions of the civilized races (and racism) and to the masculine, unemotional ideal (and thus to sexism).

Further evidence of his (masculine) power over the material world is his mastery of language:

I am able to address the barrack-square as a Sergeant-Major, and explain the parts of a machine-gun, speaking as one ranker to another, in English, Swahili, or Chinyanja; I

can address the English Society at Oxford or Cambridge from the same platform as TS Eliot, or Sir Osbert Sitwell: confer ceremoniously in flowery Zulu or Sintabele with delegations of headmen: I can join a knot of stokers in a pub in Glasgow or Liverpool as one of them: I can lecture in French or Castilian to the Universities of France or to the *Ateneos* of Madrid and Barcelona: I can give talk to the Portuguese people, from the BBC, in Portuguese, on street-warfare, Civil Defence, and fire-fighting, as I did in 1941 ... and feel equally at home in the Sergeant's Mess or at the high table at Magdalen College. (62)

Mastery of discourse means mastery of self and social situation (which is defined as interaction of men not with people, but with men). Language is held to refer to an objectively discernible external reality, and thus control of the latter means a concomitant increase in the subject's ability to refer to, and thus manipulate, the real. Of the interview with four critics, Campbell notes:

Though they pulled a great many feathers out of me, they all agreed that the remarkable thing in my verse was a familiarity with the physics, chemistry, and biology of the natural and mechanical universe: and a knowledge of animals, fish, ships, engines, guns, machines, which no other modern poet possesses. It helps one manipulate words deftly ... This knowledge, which is of infinitely less importance than spiritual knowledge, nevertheless enables you to give form and obvious meaning to what would otherwise remain obscure and difficult. (285–6)

Campbell's hero transcends his circumstances using all the means at his disposal, including language. His certainty of his superiority never falters. Consider the incident early in his marriage which is part of the process of breaking his wife in:

Though we were happy, my wife and I had some quarrels since my ideas of marriage are old-fashioned about wifely obedience

and in many ways she regarded me as a mere child because of being hardly out of my teens.<sup>9</sup> But any marriage in which a woman wears the pants is an unseemly farce. To shake up her illusions I hung her out of the fourth-floor window of our room so that she should get some respect for me. This worked wonders ... My wife was very proud of me after I had hung her out of the window and boasted of it to her girl friends.

This infuriated them, as their young men always gave in to them: and they got no excitement or “polarity”. But it was five or six years before we broke each other in to our complete satisfaction and I wore the pants for good. (253–4)

It is noteworthy that *she* labours under illusions while *his* grasp of reality is axiomatic. The hero's circus-master act with the unruly performer is performed so that *she* may have an opportunity (unbidden as it was) to share in what he sees as his incontestable apprehension of “the truth”. In order to ensure that his wife may see things from his (unavailable) viewpoint (and thus accept her subordinate position), he has – literally and figuratively – to shake up her illusions. So sure is his sense of the greater rights which he must enjoy because of masculine superiority, that he happily boasts of his use of physical force to subjugate his wife. His confidence, one realizes, is quite independent of her eventual compliance. He simply *is* right. His masculine ascendancy is a symptom of that.

This conviction that male dominance is the result of inherent (and natural) superiority – physical and intellectual (and no doubt spiritual) – informs the narrator's critique of “the smug little Sunday School world of Bloomsbury ‘queerness’ ” (263). The

problem, as the narrator sees it, is that these men do not conform to his masculine ideal.<sup>10</sup> That these “males [are] under the domination of females” (263) cannot be blamed upon the females for, one can infer, females are underlings and cannot be expected to know better unless they are taught by real men.

This state of affairs ... is absolutely the fault of the husbands. No woman will ever forgive a husband who does not give her a thoroughly good hiding when she knows she has deserved one. On the contrary, she will hate and despise him, and make a fool of him at every turn and corner, if he does not behave like a man. (263–4)

The dogmatism of the language is clear in words such as “absolutely”, “a thoroughly good hiding”, “hate and despise”, and “at every turn and corner”. The discourse of sexism (of which heterosexual chauvinism is an essential feature) relies on unchanging absolutes. An implied charge of homosexuality is thus to be expected since, in the hegemonic gender system, “any kind of powerlessness, or refusal to compete, among men readily becomes involved in the imagery of homosexuality” (JH Peck, cited by Carrigan, Connel and Lee 1987:86). Manliness (as Campbell defines it) is an ideal that transcends individuals, but it is an ideal to which all males should aspire and that some, like Campbell, can attain.

Although Campbell’s autobiography clearly construes the attempt to be “a man” to be a matter of choice for males (not all males qualify as real men, for this is a value-laden epithet which has to be earned), it serves to exemplify my earlier point about discourses pre-existing subjects’ participation in them: the hero/narrator is *spoken by* the discourses of masculine idealism and rationality, and sexism. The insistence on tradition (his views on marriage, religion and politics, for example) evidences the way in which discourses, which involve both linguistic and material attempts to define reality, speak (through) the subject. These discourses intersect with the social organization of material beings so that hegemonic masculinity and an attendant mastery are defined, determined and confirmed. Campbell’s text as artefact is a product of these intersecting discourses. It is, furthermore,

(re)productive in that it reproduces (its own version of) these ideologies.

That material circumstance and linguistic form are mutually reinforcing is especially striking in Campbell’s autobiography. As is suggested by the passage describing how beneficial the man’s use of physical force can be to his relationship with a woman (Campbell 1971:263–4, quoted above) the language used in all sorts of situations expresses forceful mastery. Another example may be found when the hero feels himself compelled to criticize “the smug little Sunday School world of Bloomsbury ‘queerness’ ” (263). “Many of the male retinue of these great Matriarchies felt a surreptitious gratitude that I had *struck* such a *resounding blow* against the ‘degrading’ tyranny under which they live” (my italics; 263). While “the Bloomsburies shrink with horror” (263), Campbell rallies to battle. His choice of words reinforces the image of himself as the fearless warrior, fighting to right wrongs. He always acted, he tells us, “with the greatest chivalry”, taking for his role model “that mirror of Chivalry, the Red Cross Knight, in the *Faery queen*” (264), thereby implying that he is the “‘masculinist’ Messiah” (263) who assails the citadel from without. Apart from Campbell, a certain Mr Mortimer “was the only one with the courage and honesty to describe the state of things in those days” (263). That this was a war for real men (who are rare) who can apprehend “the state of things” is implied when the narrator tells us that Mr Mortimer “deserves a Bloomsbury DCM!” (263).

Gendered ideology is apparent also in what is not said. Confining the discussion to the examination of the fashioning of the discourses of masculine superiority, we might note the narrator’s frequent failure to name the women in his life. More significant than the metonymic reductiveness of his descriptions of young women as “pigtails” (67, 115) is the narrator’s marginalization of his wife. The chapter entitled “Marriage” is astonishingly consistent in its shadowy treatment of Mary Campbell. In this entire chapter, virtually nothing is said about what she says, thinks or does; she is quoted directly only once, and this is to indicate her acquiescence to Campbell’s mastery of

her. She says only one word: “Yes” (254). This occurs when she is being hung out of the fourth floor window “so that she could”, he says, “get some respect for me” (253):

This worked wonders for she gazed, head-downwards, up at the stars till the police from their HQ on the opposite side of Beak Street started yelling at me to pull her back. She had not uttered a single word, and when I shouted pleasantly across the street: “We are only practising our act, aren't we, Kid?” she replied “Yes;” as calmly and happily as if we did it every ten minutes. The police then left us alone, saying: “Well, don't practise it so high up over other people's heads, please.” (253–4)

Mary's textual insubstantiality is due, too, to the fact that she is hardly ever actually named, and on those rare occasions when she is named she is *never* the subject of the sentence. The narrator himself (in his own voice, not quoting others)<sup>11</sup> uses her name only twice, in both instances making his relation to her clear: she is *his* fiancée or wife. His only use (in the entire text) of Mary's full maiden name occurs when he is describing his victory over rival suitors:

Van Dieren, and a sculptor, whom we nicknamed Sennacheribs, had been hanging around for weeks, vainly, on the doorstep. They were furious that I was accepted as a fiancé the day after our meeting. Van Dieren had already dedicated some of his music to Mary Jarman, and Sennacheribs was running after her friend, although at that time she gave him no encouragement. But I turned up on the second day, with a special marriage licence, upon which I had spent my last two or three pounds: and I installed myself at once. (245)

It is not entirely clear that the Mary Jarman referred to is Campbell's fiancée (since her friend's identity is unspecified, the vagueness is in-

creased), for in the preceding passage the only reference to her by name is Wyndham Lewis's description of her as “the very beautiful Mary Campbell” (244). In both this instance and that of the passage quoted above, Mary is not the subject of a sentence and her identity is given incidentally. Furthermore, she is not the subject of either paragraph; she is merely the object of men's attentions. The only other time the narrator himself uses his wife's name, the name is again not given prominence (“I went to find Augustus John and Mary”, 257). Both before and after they are married Mary Campbell is usually referred to as “my wife”.<sup>12</sup> She is also referred to as “this one” (244); as one of “the girls” (245) or one of the “young ladies” (244, 245); as “the girl I married” (247) or “this girl” (249, 252), the “young woman” (244) or “this woman” (249). From the time that their first child is born (259) she becomes even less substantial in the narrative as she is usually subsumed into the effacing “we”. Mary Campbell is reduced to the margins of the narrative; ironically, she is much more ghostlike than most of the male characters in this chapter whose subject, and title, are “Marriage”!

This stable, humanist individual, the narrator/protagonist, is constituted as the centre of rationality; the power which he enjoys as a male is thus justified. Also symptomatic of this discursively and materially hierarchized world are ideological constructions of national and racial stereotypes. Of the former one might refer to the narrator's pronouncements on the French (thrifty yet given to extreme avarice) and Spanish

(“being at once the hardest-working and also the laziest people in the world”, 271), the English and Germans (who are castigated for preferring “animals, especially dogs, to their own species and exult in the killing of men”, 310) and a whole host of others. Concerning racial stereotyping, the narrator is just as confident. “There is no doubt”, he avers, “that the average native is socially inferior to the white man” (163).<sup>13</sup> The use of the masculine universal in this statement is not merely symptomatic of the linguistic practice of a bygone era. It is specifically the white *man* who represents the ideal to which black *men* should aspire. (Black women do not, it seems, figure at all.) One of the narrator's horribly crude objections to black-white liaisons illustrates the point:

I think it is silly to interbreed, though I have no colour prejudice. Hybrids are rarely any good, except in the case of a donkey stallion and the mare of a horse. When superannuated English society-tarts take up negro lovers, it is generally a sort of perversion like the exaggerated feeling for dogs and cats. I knew one who went negro in order, as she said, to “study conditions amongst the negroes”. Having selected the negro with the largest “condition” she could find, she brought him to Europe. I knew this couple and they happened to call on me in a Levantine port ... I was working in this town in partnership with three very deeply-coloured Saracen-like gentlemen and they were highly indignant when they saw me sitting at the same table with a negro. I explained it away by saying it was an aunt from South Africa with a dear old faithful servant. It did not help matters when she started wiping his nose for him in front of everybody, and then putting his tie straight. (162–3)

Part of the narrator's disapproval stems from the black man's total lack of manly self-assertiveness. To begin with, she selected him (presumably,

from a position of economic and cultural superiority), which is of course an inversion of the male choosing a mate. The subversion of gender roles exacerbates what is, for the narrator, an unacceptable blurring of racial divisions. While the narrator presents these as quite different issues, Campbell's racism is clearly partly due to the perceived failure by some members of other race groups to observe the proprieties of the "real man" (white, European): these proprieties are, of course, not acknowledged to be relative.

Racism, without explicit attendant sexism, also informs much of the narrative: when on his way to England, the hero (in his late teens) is shocked to see mixed-race couples in Dakar. He had always assumed, he says, that people were differently coloured "so that they could keep to their own people" (184). But the next comments indicate that the prejudice he learned in South Africa in his youth is still very much a part of the narrator's make-up about thirty years later:

Hybrids between Negro and white do not seem to justify the mixture, as they are neither hardy, strong, nor intelligent as a general rule, especially when, as almost without exception in Africa, the father is white and the mother is black. The most intelligent and the best half-breed ever known in Africa was the son of a black man by a white mother – but that proves nothing.<sup>14</sup> It is such a rare occurrence. (185)

He justifies his initial prejudice against the people of Provence because their predilection for chillies and garlic reminds him of the Indians who "impregnate the air at home in Natal" with these (220). Of his experiences as a stuntman in London, the narrator adds an account of how he helped the film team cope with unruly "Negro" members of the cast:

I know how to fight Negroes, not having acquired the European complex of inferiority. I wasn't made an instructor to coloured troops in this last war for nothing. First of all I gave Umslopogaas two such kicks on the shin that he nearly hopped out of his skin, for the shin to a Negro is what the skull is to a European; then I came in with two rib-busters under his heart so that he gasped for mercy, and stam-peded, leading the rest of his crowd helter-skelter after him. (243; see also 311, 340)

Nevertheless, in spite of these examples of appar-

ently simple racism, the discourses of sexism and racism are, as a rule, mutually reinforcing. As I shall show, they are informed by the same system of binary oppositions. The very qualities which are attributed to blacks in colonial discourse are, with similarly traumatic effect (one might argue), attributed also to women in sexist discourse. As Fanon demonstrates so powerfully in *Black skin, white masks*, the colonized are construed as irrational, intuitive, natural, emotional, unreliable, weak, submissive, dependent and imitative (and certainly, as not having anything worth imitating). They are associated with the moon, with changeability, with darkness and obscurity. But what Fanon fails to see is that each and every one of these characteristics applies equally to women (indeed, Fanon himself crudely employs this value system in his discussion of "the colored woman"). Fanon bemoans the emasculation of black men; but his formulation, "the black is not a man" (1967a:8) unwittingly points to the fact that the discourses of racism and sexism intersect, for in both the privileged term in the binary system, whites and males respectively, are rendered as rational, cultured, logical, reliable, capable, fearless, strong, dominant, independent, original and authoritative. Whites and males are associated with the sun, with constancy, and with clarity and revelation. I have argued that *Light on a dark horse* hierarchizes its constitutive discourses: sexism is most pervasive and it informs the overall value system of the text. Given the fundamental role of sexuality in the constitution of the subject in psychoanalytic theory, this is not surprising.

Significantly, both sexism and racism contain elements of paternalism. Paternalism means a benevolent authoritarianism (though this contradiction in terms is generally resolved in favour of authoritarianism which insists on its right to punish); it may often demonstrate contrary impulses to exclude (people of colour and women are deemed inferior) as well as impulses to include (people of colour and women should aspire to the standards of white males). It is thus both a spurning and (usually less markedly and less consistently) an embracing of subordinates. I have discussed the dismissive tendencies in Campbell's narrative regarding women and people of colour, but

might add that this is further evidenced in the text in the reductive terms for women (“girls”) and black men (“boys”), in the marked marginalization of women throughout the narrative, and in the dismissive accounts of Zulu culture (47; 159). “Native” beliefs are generally treated as rather curious superstitions (149; 152); consider the deprecation of polygamy (27), indigenous medicine (47 and 54), and Mali’s “vision”, which, the narrator tells us confidently, was, in reality, merely a dream (132–3).

But there is also some evidence of the opposite impulse, the desire to include. This is only really evident in relation to race, perhaps for the obvious reasons that although a woman might try to be *like* a man, she can never actually *become* a man, whereas a black male can at least aspire to be “a man” (and may exhibit some of the most admirable characteristics – in particular, physical prowess – of a real man). Campbell’s hero shows his (limited) respect for other men of colour (and thus diverges from the expected forms of racist discourse) in his fluency in Zulu language and lore, and other African languages, and in his rejection of municipal laws that protect European sensibilities from being offended by traditional Zulu dress (38). Although contemporary readers might gasp disbelievingly, the narrator asserts that he has “no colour prejudice” (162); he is, he says, quite prepared to “defy public opinion, even at its most frantic, as in the case of ... the Colour Bar in South Africa” (83, also 261). But his defiance is couched in terms that illustrate simultaneously the contrary tenden-

cies of dismissive exclusion and benevolent inclusion: “There is no doubt that the average native is socially inferior to the white man, but he should not and cannot be prevented artificially from becoming his equal, for the good of all concerned” (163).

Now while the discourses of sexism, racism, national and class prejudice (in that hierarchical order) can be seen to intersect in this text, it should be noted that the effect of mutual reinforcement is not consistent between discourses, nor is a particular discourse necessarily internally consistent. More to the point, the interpellation of the subject by the variety of ideology-laden discourses is not monologic. This is as true of the narrating and narrated subjects as it is of the reader. The textual constitution of the implied reader deserves attention because it is this addressee who functions to secure or anchor the narrating subject. When the implied reader’s attitudes appear unremarkable to the real reader of the text then one can be sure that this is because the real reader’s ideological positions coincide with those implied by the text. Campbell’s implied reader is a white male who applauds masculine adventurism. We know this, in part, because of the narrator’s confidence in all of his opinions, including sexist and racist ones. He addresses the narratee in an almost conversational way, as when he begins a sentence with “Naturally” (52), and with the rather chatty “As I’ve said before” (217). That the addressee is a young (white) male is evident, for example, in this rare direct address to the reader:

If you, my reader, at any future date find

yourself sitting there with your arm round some young beautiful living torso ... whoever you are, say a Grace for me and my beloved and my friends, for we also knew what you know,

Yet, though knowing naught,  
Transcended knowledge with our  
thought. (215–6)

And he adds on the next page: “But if you want the thrill of cowboy life, with real wild horses and cattle, you don’t have to go to the Far West for it” (217).

The implied reader, then, is appreciative of the ethos of the archetypal male adventurer. The reader is also interpellated as a stable, rational (male) individual who will derive sufficient vicarious pleasure from the narrated adventures perhaps to wish to emulate these, but at any rate, not to seek a greater degree of introspection on the part of the narrator. Narratorial stability is echoed in the narratee’s stable individuality. And it is perhaps this that accounts for some of the narrative’s appeal: the reader is securely held in the grip of the narrative. There is no suggestion of uncertainty or vagueness or disagreement. Although I do not know of the term being applied to autobiography, it seems to me that Campbell writes what might be referred to as a classic realist autobiography,<sup>15</sup> for it denies, as other classic realist texts do, that there is any reality outside of the textual construction of it, and it tends to seek to obscure the materiality of the text, the process of its production.

Campbell’s autobiographical subject speaks with the voice of confident authority, proclaiming in every utterance the speaker’s absolute right to exercise the freedom he has to deter-

mine who he is and how he lives, but this position of sovereignty is one that has to be constantly policed, struggled for.

This is why, when we speak today of a divided subject, it is never to acknowledge his simple contradictions, his double postulations, etc.; it is a *diffraction* which is intended, a dispersion of energy in which there remains neither a central core nor a structure of meaning ... (Barthes 1977a:143)

In terms of poststructuralism, notably Foucauldian theory, the subject may determine the form that his utterance will take by adopting subject positions from amongst those offered by sometimes contestatory impulses within one discourse or from contradictory discourses, for the subject of discourse is also the subject of action. In keeping with a poststructuralist paradigm, we can analyse the inconsistencies within and between discourses to uncover the interstices for individual choice from within the range of options delimited by culture and history; for instance, Campbell's narrator's occasional shifts from judgemental to benevolent paternalism are presumably due to *some* conscious decision-making on his part. But what of the unconscious? I want now briefly to consider this autobiographical hero in the light of psychoanalytic theory.

Anthony Easthope argues that masculinity, as it is defined in the West, wants to present itself as an essence – fixed, self-consistent, pure. But because all individuals begin life as bisexual, the sexual identity that a person acquires, although it may be relatively fixed, can never be more than a preference, a predominance. Freud, Easthope reminds us, “refers confidently and unequivocally to ‘the constitutional bisexuality of each individual’ ” (5); the unconscious always calls into play both masculine and feminine desire inside the individual (Easthope 1986:166–7). Moreover, since masculinity is never a consistent endowment or quality, but is differentially defined by different social groups and even within one social group across time, it can only be determined and delimited in relation to its opposite, femininity. We see in Campbell's autobiography a need to fictionalize this away; to reject unequivocally (and with aggression, usually) in others what he fears most in himself.

In order to present a masculinity that is everything that the feminine is not, the hero must control what threatens both within and without. “Within, femininity and male homosexual desire must be denied; without, women and the feminine must be subordinated and held in place” (Easthope 1986:166–7). Campbell's aggression towards and dismissal of women and effeminate men can be seen to work in tandem with his racism; it is the typically feminine subservience and dependence, the “softness”, the disempowerment that all of these groups share that is so threatening. We see in Campbell's autobiography the complex imbrications of chivalric gentlemanliness with condescension towards women, and of admiration for the noble native with contemptuous dismissal (with the latter carrying more weight in each instance). Segal (1990:181) explains this phenomenon:

The doubling of fear and desire detected in men's contradictory relations to “the feminine”, and projected outwards to construct the Madonna/whore dichotomy, reappears in the white man's image of the Black man, projected outwards, this time in the noble savage/black beast dichotomy.

Interestingly, the role of soldier both reinforces the masculine myth and threatens it: it reinforces the masculine stereotypes of aggression, toughness, control of emotions and so on, but it threatens the ideals of independence and authority. It strengthens male bonds, but it threatens obligatory heterosexuality. The autobiography begins with the narrator/hero as soldier. He continues with pride:

I am, as a senior British NCO, a great believer in obeying orders unquestioningly and without expostulation, no matter how absurd they may be, simply because it saves time and ill-feeling; and here, for the first time in experience, was an erroneous order which suited me right down to the ground. (13)

Although referring to American men in the 1980s, Drury Sherrod's points about men needing to construct relationships of intimacy and friendship bounded and defined by articulated rules and determined by shared activities seem pertinent (1987:213–217). Perhaps more telling, however, is Lynne Segal's claim that

[a]rmy training [in Britain] relies upon strengthening the opposition between male and female, with “women” used as a term of abuse for incompetent performance, thereby hardening and cementing the prevalent cultural links between virility, sexuality and aggressiveness. This serves not only to discipline men, but to raise “masculine” morale against the threats of a more typically “feminine” reality of enforced servility and conformity characterising army life. (86)

That men have to work especially hard to paper over the ambivalences – and these are exacerbated by male bonding – is explained in psychoanalysis as the result of the resolution of the Oedipal complex for males and the concomitant fear of castration. In allying themselves with their fathers and their fathers’ powers, males identify themselves as exceptions to the rule of lack, which is, Easthope argues, “an imaginary lie”. They do this, he continues, by “a fetishization of woman who becomes a ‘symptom’ for men – of Otherness, the outside, the unconscious” (206).

The castration complex is an idea or meaning that arises in the gap *between* the two sexes, as the negative in which masculine is not feminine and feminine not masculine. The masculine myth aims to reconstruct castration on its own grounds. It tries to read sexual difference as her difference from him.

The myth is therefore all set to trigger aggression from the tightly bound masculine ego. Narcissism and desire are deeply interwoven. If the feminine is viewed as more deeply castrated, more lacking than masculinity, then the idea of woman appears as inherently threatening to the masculine ego. The object of desire will become an object of dread able to undo the unity of the “I”. And the risk here is that a fearful aggression will be released against the idea of woman ... (Easthope 1986:165)

It is not difficult to see how this fear of the “castrated” woman would lead to both an irrational fear of and

loathing for other men who seem to have become feminized (homosexuals and those rendered subservient by dominant cultures). It is also apparent that such a rejection of the feminine at such a profound level of being would result in greater investment in homosocial relations than in male-female relations. Indeed, it has been claimed (by Easthope, amongst others) that such homosocial ties and attractions generally emerge out of repressed homosexual desire. Whether this is relevant to Campbell or not, certainly male comradeship (or its obverse, enmity) feature much more prominently throughout Campbell’s tale than do relations with women. (And this is true even of his relationship to his mother, his wife, and his daughters – all of whom are marginal in the extreme in the narrative.) The chapter entitled “Marriage”, to which I referred previously, is primarily about the hero’s victory over male rivals, rather than about his love affair with Mary Campbell. Of his experiences of soldierly comradeship, he says:

I have always been in demand for concerts in the Sergeants’ Mess, for whoopees on troopships, and also on long marches because I sing in tune and have a sense of rhythm ... One night when the WOs passed around my bush-hat on the *Antenor* after I had sung and done a comic turn, it was so heavy with money that I could hardly lift it. This I spent on my platoon, and I loved every one of those twenty-nine men as much as if each had been my son. (190)

The hero of the narrative is indeed the epitome of the man’s man; and this, of course, means that he is also “a ladies’ man” who has been successful in his conquests over many women. Campbell’s professedly chivalric attitude to his wife in no way

precludes his womanizing pursuits. Although almost thrown away in narrative asides, Campbell tells us of a kind of urban hunt in which he and Liam o’ Flaherty “carried out the four best-looking ladies” from a Mayfair club (“without any opposition from their menfolk”), forgetting that their wives were waiting in the taxi (317). And later, it is only when he and Mary convert to Catholicism and are remarried in the Catholic Church that he claims to have become “monogamous” (325). He does not record these earlier affairs. As Laurie Lee comments in his Foreword, “There is small room left for such rogue males and adventurers” (9). I fervently hope so.

But it is to Lee’s implied charge of falsification that I want to turn to now. Campbell, the “arrogant chest-thumper” (11), whose “inveterate boasting could at times exasperate his friends” (10), narrates “feats of daring and derring-do from which [he] invariably emerges triumphant. Campbell walked tall and he talked tall” (10). If Lee is correct (and he is not the only person to accuse Campbell of fabrication), then what are the implications of this for our understanding of the textual constitution of the white male hero? It seems to me, that the boasting, the superlatives, the lies are necessary for several reasons: at the time of writing, Campbell was almost 50 years old, disabled (and reliant on walking sticks) and subject to “complications of relapsing malaria” (Campbell 1971:14). His relationship with his wife is rumoured to have been extremely problematic (she is reputed to have had lesbian affairs). Campbell’s ultra-masculine persona in the autobiography, then, could con-

ceivably have offered the author “gratification through fantasy” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1987:92). Also significant, however, is the fact that this hero is trying to escape unscathed from a world in which the global effects of World War II on economic systems and gender systems were profound, and feminist and anti-colonial movements (it was first published in 1951) had already rendered such figures obsolete. Campbell is forced to create fictions because the kind of heroic persona which he strives to create – the product of the meshing of specific individual and social histories – was not possible in the material world. The irony is that to create this ideally rational male – one who conquers the (irrational) natural world as well as (natural) human irrationality – Campbell had to resort to fiction since such a being could exist nowhere else but in his (and his implied readers’) desire. For Lacan, the entry into language always entails the alienation of the subject:

One of the specific characteristics of language is that it evokes a thing, a reality, by means of a substitute which this thing is not, evoking, in other words its presence against a ground of absence ... This act of substituting a sign for a reality is also an operation of mediation whereby the subject places himself at a distance from the lived experience and is thus able to locate himself as a subject distinct from his surroundings. (Lemaire 1977:51)

Campbell can only win the race to be superhero if he forgoes the very rationality which is *the* defining characteristic of such a man.

## Notes

- 1 A colloquium devoted to masculinity was held in 1997 at the University of Natal; for an overview see Ron Viney’s essay, “A history of masculinities in South Africa: context and parameters” (1999).
- 2 See Foucault’s essay, “Nietzsche, genealogy, history” (1984). He takes the argument regarding the body’s socially determined significance a step further:
 

We believe ... that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is false. The body is molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances ... Nothing in man [sic] – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men. (1984:87–8)
- 3 And if, as I have argued elsewhere (Coullie 1991:12), one bears in mind the special significance accorded the author’s name in autobiography, indications of the author’s race and gender will probably affect readers’ interpretative strategies, as well as the more fundamental decision of whether to read the text or not.
 

It is important to point out, however, that even though race is a seemingly obvious signifier functioning in the distribution of power and privilege in apartheid South Africa, its range of meanings is not predictable. Race, like all social systems of organization, is a means of apportioning power, but even in a profoundly racist social formation such as apartheid South Africa this does not necessarily happen in the obvious – and most common – ways of white oppressor/black victim, nor does race function in isolation from other features of the social organisation. We might consider, for instance, the fact that while Campbell’s autobiographical subject displays all the certainties of the white man and Ellen Kuzwayo’s illustrates the difficulties and hesitations of a black woman, Breyten Breytenbach’s *True confessions of an albino terrorist* explores the uncertainties of a white man who rejects the significance with which apartheid imbues his skin. For anti-apartheid whites like Mary Benson, Riaan Malan and Helen Joseph, their white skin is a source of discomfort, as well as – no, *because* it is also a source of privilege. By the same token it is apparent in autobiographies like Mathebane’s *Kaffir boy*, William Makgoba’s *Mokoko* and many others that simply being black may imbue the autobiographical subject with a measure of moral authority. This use of race by the victims of racism to appropriate a position of power illustrates Foucault’s point that power should be conceived of as a relationship, rather than a property.
- 4 The humanist subject – such as we find in Campbell’s autobiography – has dominated South African autobiographical writing in English in the last five or so decades, and continues to do so.
- 5 Whether the hero’s exploits, recorded in the narrative, were *actually* performed by the writer, Roy Campbell, or not (and the implications of verifiability) will be discussed later.
- 6 The narrator’s introduction indicates the motive and time of writing: he is a demobilized soldier, the time is 1951 (20).
- 7 The narrator adds (with uncharacteristic self-consciousness): “It would be blasphemy to talk about a divinely created soul in terms of horsebreaking, but for the precedent in Holy Scripture where they are represented as fish to be caught. My wife had quite as much of a job to break me in, too” (249).
- 8 Laurie Lee uses the adjective “romantic” three times in his two-and-a-bit page Foreword to *Light on a dark horse*.
- 9 Campbell was “still a only minor of nineteen” (25) when he married.
- 10 Perhaps class infringes on gender here. As Harry Brod

points out about social organization in the West in the last few decades, “persisting images of masculinity hold that ‘real men’ are physically strong, aggressive, and in control of their work. Yet the structural dichotomy between manual and mental labor under capitalism means that no one’s work fulfills all these conditions[...] Capitalism and patriarchy are at times complementary and at times contradictory for men” (1987:14). Campbell’s masculine hero achieves both intellectual and physical prowess; but perhaps one can speculate that his disdain for economic or institutional power (which “the Bloomsburys” may have seemed to him to possess) could have arisen from inverse class snobbery and from Campbell’s status as the outsider, the “Zulu”, from the colonies.

As Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee have argued, while the hegemonic model of masculinity may correspond to the actual characters of only a small number of men, large numbers of men are complicit in sustaining it for various reasons, most important of which “is that most men benefit from the subordination of women” (1987:92). Whether Campbell’s “larger-than-life” hero represents the ideal of hegemonic masculinity of the time is debatable. It was probably too extreme even for those times, as Lee’s disparaging comments suggest. However, it is likely that Campbell’s autobiographical hero (and I use the term “hero” deliberately because of its mythical, fictional and celluloid connotations) merely exaggerates characteristic features of the hegemonic ideology. Elsewhere, Connell (1995:234) argues that heroism is so tightly bound to the construct of hegemonic masculinity that even in the 1990s it is virtually impossible to represent gay men as heroic in mass culture.

- 11 She is referred to by name by Wyndham Lewis (“Mary Campbell”, 244), Stuart Gray (“Miss Mary”, 247), by a servant (“Miss Mary”, 251), by the gypsies in reported speech (254), and by a woman whom the narrator dubs “Mrs Sennacheribs” (“Mary”, 255).
- 12 In the narrative dealing with their courtship, this phrase (“my wife”) occurs three times (248, 249, 251); after marriage it is used more frequently (252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 258, 264).
- 13 That the autobiography is peppered with racist sentiment is undeniable, but one should also bear in mind that the author claims to have made himself very unpopular by defying the “Colour Bar” (83, 261).
- 14 Although Fanon is not concerned with the progeny of trans-racial unions, Campbell’s position here resonates strikingly with Fanon’s in *Black skin, white masks*.
- 15 Most South African autobiographers write what I would call classic realist autobiographies; Noni Jabavu, Alan Paton, Zola Budd, EG Malherbe, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Guy Butler are just a sample.

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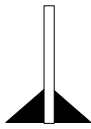
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# The myth of authenticity

FOLKTALES AND NATIONALISM IN THE 'NEW SOUTH AFRICA'

SAMANTHA NAIDU

Folktales texts  
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and entertaining

 In post-apartheid South Africa, there is a great opportunity to reshape stories, to recreate selves, and to redefine cultural relations. One such exciting prospect is the transcription of indigenous oral folktales into a popularized written form. Many authors, believing that folktales are a means of bridging cultural gaps, have already exploited this literary resource. Most often, indigenous folktales are “retold” and published as examples of “authentic” African literature for a juvenile audience. Folktale texts are published in glorious, polychromatic, innovative forms that promote the texts as both culturally educational and entertaining. A 1994 study<sup>1</sup> of indigenous children’s literature discovered that the folktale genre accounts for the majority of children’s books produced in South Africa, as well as being the genre most commonly borrowed from libraries.

The transcription of indigenous oral folktales into written English texts began in the colonial era when folktale texts were included in anthropological and ethnographic studies of Southern Africa. Even though some of these texts clearly constituted part of a colonialist discourse that sought to inscribe the subjectivities of both colonized and colonizer,<sup>2</sup> in South Africa, no significant theoretical studies of folktale texts from a postcolonial perspective have been undertaken. As a result, many texts of colonial origin remain in circulation, either unrevised or uncritically adapted by contemporary authors. Some contemporary scholars have recognized the role of folktale texts in the processes of cultural identity formation, but they do not situate these texts in the wider discursive structures of colonialism, nationalism or neo-colonialism.<sup>3</sup> There is thus an urgent need to historicize the folktale genre in South Africa. Postcolonial studies in tandem with folkloristics provides the ideal disciplinary tool for such a task.

## Modern tales in two fields

Modern folktale texts in South Africa are embedded in two main discursive fields: a neo-colonialist discourse, which employs the essentialist typol-

ogies of a colonialist discourse to categorize and describe African folklore; and what I shall call a “new nationalist” discourse, which seeks to reinscribe African cultural identity in positive terms. Often these two discursive fields overlap. Many of the neo-colonialist publications are genuinely committed to “preserving” African oral traditions, but ironically, the commodification of folktales as specimens of an “other” culture often results in stereotyping which “reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes ‘difference’” (Hall 1997:258). These texts are often heavily indebted to colonial folktale texts, as I will show later.

The main aim of the “new nationalist” discourse is to bridge the cultural gaps of a post-apartheid society. It employs the indigenous folktale as a symbol of unity and patriotic pride and has its roots in anti-colonial and anti-apartheid resistance movements. In the face of domination by transplanted European culture, the decolonizing nationalists had to construct a discourse which incorporated and amalgamated the “essences” of local culture, whilst assimilating aspects of the hegemonic foreign cultures. At the centre of this

African nationalism is the paradox of utilizing local cultures and histories, together with the Western discourses of modernity and nationalism, for purposes of liberation and self-determination.

The appeal to cultural “tradition”, especially oral traditions, in this process of reinvention, was and still is strong. Timothy Brennan (1995:173), influenced by Benedict Anderson, concludes that nations are “imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role”. Folklorists too have identified the role of oral traditions in nationalist projects. Ruth Finnegan (1992:27) comments on the use of folklore in contemporary nationalist discourses: “In more recent ex-colonial nations, the search for national and ‘folk’ identity has fostered the collection and creation of texts expressing national culture or providing a focus for nation-building and local education.” Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998:289) recognizes the role played by nationalism in the founding of folklore as a discipline in Europe in the nineteenth century: “Cultural nationalism ... gave to philology, and to folklore studies in particular, its racialist tendencies.” In South Africa, indigenous folklore has had to be reclaimed from colonialist clutches for the purposes of nation-building.

Even before the formation of the African National Congress (ANC), indigenous written folklore formed part of the “apparatus of cultural fictions” intended to foster a new national identity. Many of the first literate blacks (some of whom were the frontrunners of African nationalism in South Africa) such as William Gqoba, “Hadi” and WB Rubusana, translated and transcribed various aspects of their oral traditions for publication in newspapers. In the years to follow many more African nationalists took up their pens in order to reclaim some of the “tradition” that had been eroded first by the Christianizing, civilizing mission of the colonialists and then by the exploitative, apartheid regime of the Afrikaner nationalists. Herbert Dhlomo, in the 1940s, wove *izibongo* into his dramas, but insisted on English as an African lingua franca. In the 1960s, novelist and critic

AC Jordan turned his attention to “traditional” Xhosa culture, where he found material for his fictional and scholarly works.

In post-apartheid South Africa, where a “new nationalist” discourse is crucial for reparation, regeneration and cultural identity formation, the politicians and other voices of authority spearheading the transition processes speak of healing the rifts of the past, of reconciliation, and of a bright future for the “new South Africa”. Their vision is couched in terms of non-racialism, cultural pluralism, peace and nation-building. African nationalism is no longer offered as a panacea for blacks only, but for all the people of the nation.

The chief contradiction and challenge of South Africa’s “new nationalist” discourse is its insistence that all cultural groups can be equally represented and respected, whilst all citizens adhere to a single, homogenized national culture. Gary Baines (1999:3) has noted how the ANC’s 1994 draft document on National Cultural Policy “situated culture squarely within the twin processes of development and nation-building”. Baines quotes one of the objectives in the document: “To promote the development of a unifying national culture, representing the aspirations of all of South Africa’s people.”

The first step towards addressing this contradiction and meeting the challenge of co-existing cultural difference and national unity, lies in the problematization of the term “nation”. Homi K Bhabha (1990:3) describes this problematization as “explor[ing] the Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation”. The “new, rainbow, South African nation” needs to be understood as a complex discursive construct which is aimed at projecting peace, unity, and co-operation, and the flip-side of this is the realization that, as subjects in this discourse, the diverse citizens of South Africa are urged to identify with this “mythic memory of a unique collective identity” (Bhabha 1989:123), a sentiment which is expressed in our new coat of arms.<sup>4</sup>

The tensions between diversity and unity have perhaps been neglected in favour of immediate and surface amelioration.

The dynamics of power which inform the “new nationalist” discourse and the various forms it assumes, be it in the media, on a political platform, or in the classroom, need to be identified and scrutinized. As Stuart Hall (1992:297) proposes: “Instead of thinking of national cultures as unified, we should think of them as constituting a *discursive device* which represents difference as unity or identity” (emphasis in original). This seeming contradiction, that disparate people are unified, is not insuperable, but it is the facile representation of this unity which is questioned. For example, the popular slogan “*Simunye, we are one,*” signifies that we, despite our differences, are united. What is not clear is *how* we are different, and *how* it is that we are able to unite. Moreover, an analysis of the “new nationalist” discourse needs to be balanced between an understanding of its political expediency and its tendency glibly to impose a national cultural identity on a heterogeneous and hybrid society.

Certainly, one of the aims of the discourse is to redress the imbalances, injustices and suppressions of apartheid, in the hope that new cultural relations will be forged, and that a new, shared identity will be negotiated. Some of the folktale publications attempt to do just that. Authors, although they might sometimes claim “authenticity”, present their readers with images of a shared and re-articulated cultural heritage. The cur-

rent folktale texts are neither “essentially” African, nor purely European-derived, but “other”. This “otherness” is created by and reflects the cultural hybridity of the “nation”.

The increased publication (and popularity) of indigenous folktale collections in the last decade can be seen as a significant facet of the “new nationalist” discourse which pervades post-apartheid South Africa. But the role of folktale texts in the development of this discourse goes back a bit further, to the days of anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggle. At the same time, it must be noted that many of the present-day authors, whilst valorizing indigenous cultures, employ a neo-colonialist discourse. The purpose of this essay is to examine the publication of specifically Xhosa folktales in recent times, showing how these texts are embedded in both neo-colonialist discourses, as well as the “new nationalist” discourse of the “new South Africa”.

### **A powerful union of rhetorics**

In this section the works of a few selected authors will be analysed. The tales, the superstructure that surrounds them and the general packaging of these “modern” publications will be considered. The “powerful union of rhetorics” (Briggs 1993:404) used by authors to market or entextualize the tales, are of chief concern. The essay is limited to authors who have published Xhosa folktales in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Those authors who draw upon a neo-colonialist discourse, be they amateur anthropologists, creative

writers or scholars, implement a variety of rhetorical strategies. First, the unreflective and glorifying use of colonial sources is common. AC Partridge’s collection, *Folklore of Southern Africa* (1973), is one of many publications that are hugely indebted to GM Theal’s *Kaffir folklore* (1882). In the introduction, Partridge (1973:iv) enthuses about the value of colonial folkloristics: “The wealth of folk-tales indigenous to Southern Africa is a debt to the collecting zeal of European missionaries, especially from Germany and Britain ... The Europeans who communicated indigenous folk-tales attempted to preserve the originals in their native purity.” He thus subscribes wholesale to what Briggs (1993:396) terms the “image of intertextual transparency”, which is the assumption that “texts created through transcription, translation and editing bear an intrinsic connection to their source such that the former are extensions or synecdoches of the latter”. Partridge’s ethnography of the Bushmen, Hottentots and Bantu is merely a summary of Theal’s *The yellow and dark-skinned people of Africa south of the Zambesi* (1910). For example, his comments on the fate of the “Bushmen” are very similar to Theal’s: “[M]ost were exterminated, as useless marauders, by Hottentots, Bantu or Europeans” (1973:vi). Theal is quoted on subjects ranging from oral performance to ethnology and, finally, acculturation. No attempt is made to update the material or even alter the colonialist rhetoric: “Theal noted that thousands of Christianized Bantu were encouraged by their nineteenth-century teachers to borrow ideas from European literature. At the

same time he observed that their powers of reason were quite equal to those of a white man” (1973:x). Extending this implicit confidence in Theal’s scholarship, Partridge published two tales from *Kaffir folklore* (1882), *The story of Demane and Demazana* and *The story of lion and little jackal*, without revision.

Second, the adoption of specific colonialist discourses, such as social evolutionism, is *de rigueur* with some authors. Partridge (1973:iv), for example, describes folklore as “the study of legends, customs, beliefs and superstitions of the common people, whatever the stage of civilization reached” (my emphasis). Phyllis Savory, in her introduction to *Tales from Africa* (1968:12–13), uses social evolutionary theories and the comparative method to construct a somewhat lyrical history of African culture and folklore: “Surely some of these tales were carried, this time from the Teutonic and Scandinavian Northlands of antiquity, downwards to the then still slumbering shores of dark Africa” (emphasis in original). Note that the geographic trajectory described mirrors the movement on the “ladder” of civilization. Also, in *Little wise one* (1990:11), Savory cites “The great authority on folklore, Sir James Frazer” who, in his seminal work, *The golden bough*, expounded the theories of social evolutionism.

Third, the “production of knowledges of the colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated” (Bhabha 1994:70), continues today. This affects, particularly, the evaluation of religious beliefs. In 1991, 39 of Savory’s tale texts were republished in the revamped and re-imaged collection, *The best of African folklore*. Interestingly, the tales themselves were unrevised, showing Savory’s (and the publisher’s) complacency with her original rhetoric. One tale in particular is worthy of mention: *The founding of a tribe: a true story from the area where Grahamstown now stands*. This aetiological tale, which explains the origins of the Xhosa “tribe”, abounds with witchcraft, superstition, and “savage” violence, and is, in fact, a strong moral indictment of *sangomas*. Savory, as an admirer of James Frazer, was no doubt influenced by his formulations on the subject of superstition. Vail and White (1991:6) describe Frazer

as “an optimistic believer in the dynamism of evolutionary processes, [who] also saw Reason as struggling with Superstition, with the ultimate victory guaranteed to Progress”. In this tale Savory (1990:96) maps a causal relationship between “superstition” and violence, declaring at the end that this cultural trait was the cause of the Frontier Wars: “The tribe fought many fierce battles against the British before they put down their arms to become the civilized and peaceful people they are today.” The message, which echoes the “civilizing” discourse of the colonialist missionaries, is that the Xhosa were once superstitious and fierce, but now, having relinquished autonomy to the British, they are vastly improved.

Fourth, some of the first collections were classified as anthropology, including histories and ethnographies of the relevant cultures, providing glossaries and maps, sketches and then, later, photographs. They were packaged so as to render the tales accessible to foreign readers, but, ironically, this encoding would have also exoticized the tales, presenting them as curiosities from “other” and different cultures. Such practices have survived and many of the “modern” collections assume this pseudo-anthropological character. Almost all of Savory’s collections contain ethnographic, historical or geographical material. In a more recent collection, Dianne Stewart’s *Daughter of the moonlight and other African tales* (1994), each tale is “accompanied by snippets of fascinating information” (back cover). For instance, a version of *The milk bird* in this collection is elucidated by an information panel on *amasi*, “Milk of Africa” (1994:15). Even Marguerite Poland, who has been singled out for her innovative style, includes a glossary of animal names in *Once at KwaFubesi* (1981). In the case of the “modern” collections, such information is aimed at educating children about “other” cultures. Ironically, this strategy is potentially divisive because it perpetuates the binarism between “us”, the gazers/voyeurs and the “other” cultures, the objects of speculation and enquiry.

Fifth, a particular rhetoric of authenticity, which is employed by colonial authors to imbue their texts with authority and epistemological status, abounds

in the “modern” publications. Savory’s rhetoric of authenticity is a crude and ingenuous one. The forewords and prefaces to her collections are often written by politicians or well-known literary personalities. For example, the foreword to *Bantu folk tales from southern Africa* (1974) is written by Gatsha Buthelezi, leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party and chief of the Buthelezi clan. *The little wise one* (1990) is represented as particularly “authentic” because the foreword is by Alan Paton and the preface by Kenneth Kaunda. The word “authentic” features strongly in her cover blurbs: “These delightful tales ... are *authenticated* in a Foreword by Chief Gatsha Buthelezi of Kwa Zulu” (1974:n.p.; my emphasis); “This substantial collection of *authentic* folktales about the hare in all his guises was gathered by Phyllis Savory over a period of more than eighty years” (1990:n.p.; my emphasis). The effect of these emphatic claims is to create the illusion that *iintsomi* performances are fully reproducible in printed texts, that the essence of the culture which created them is somehow captured and preserved by Savory.

In a slightly more subtle bid for authenticity, Dianne Stewart tells us that her folktales are “true to the African oral tradition of storytelling” (back cover 1994) or that they are “as true to the original as possible” (Introduction 1994). Here Stewart is using a “quasi-moral lexicon” (Briggs 1993:396) to authenticate her versions of the tales. The combination of “true”, “tradition” and “original” creates a mythologized authenticity that is based on a romanticized notion of an “essential” African culture and

is consolidated by Stewart’s “image of intertextual transparency”. But Stewart is not the only author to romanticize African culture. Briggs (1993:398) points out that it was actually nationalism that prompted this practice of romanticizing the “folk”:

[R]omantic nationalism thrived on a process of breaking off fragments of the past, creating and containing their meaning by placing them within schemes of classification, and framing them as representative specimens, synecdochic stand-ins for the cultural universe from which they were purportedly extracted.

The “new nationalist” discourse, as discussed previously, has its roots in African Nationalism, which attempted to reinvent a cultural identity for black people by romanticizing pre-colonial Africa. At present, the discourse of the African Renaissance, as touted by president Thabo Mbeki, utilizes a similar strategy. For example, the lost civilization of *Mapungubwe* is taken as a synecdoche for a glorious African past. This counter-discourse is aimed at rejuvenating African culture and reversing the damages of colonialist and apartheid discourses. Folklore, too, is held up as a symbol of the rich African cultural heritage which has to be recorded, preserved and even revived.

Two collections by black authors, BL Leshoai and Nombulelo Makhuphula, are “authenticated” by references to the authors’ grandmothers. Makhuphula states in the “Author’s Note” to *Xhosa fireside tales* (1988:n.p.): “I remember my grandmother, Nokulila, as a good and kindhearted woman ... I remember her, most of all, as a unique story-

teller.” The book is dedicated to “Nokulila, source of my inspiration”. This sentiment is echoed on the back cover, where the reader is invited to collapse the oral/written interface: “Nombulelo Makhuphula could be imagined as a grandmother encircled by her children and grandchildren as they listen carefully to every gem that pours from her mouth.” Note that these tales are not infantilized, as both “her children and grandchildren” comprise the audience. Leshoai’s foreword to his own *Iso Le Nkhono: African folktales for children* (1989:n.p.), written in the third person, states that “the author has used examples of legends, folktales and fables told to him by his grandmother”. What more reliable source than one’s own grandmother? Here the rhetoric of authenticity operates to affirm African culture, which is “preserved” in this organic way.

Thomas Nevin uses the same rhetoric as Savory to authenticate his folktales, sometimes using even the same “celebrities”. *The quivering spear* (1996:n.p.) has a foreword by Buthelezi, in which he expresses the belief that the book will foster intercultural understanding in Africa, as well as help the international community to understand (an essentialized) African cultural identity:

The culture of Africa is the culture of all the people who live in Africa regardless of race or colour. This book can only create more understanding amongst all the people of Africa ... I have no doubt that readers of other cultures will see into the African soul through this anthology.

They will know us better as people of this part of Africa.

Nevin's previous publication, *Zamani: African tales from long ago* (1995), is "authenticated" by a message from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, printed on the back cover for optimum visibility. His sentiments offer another trope of nationalism – the importance of pride in one's "origins and cultural history" in the self-definition of a nation:

*Zamani: African Tales from Long Ago* is important because it records some of those myths and legends for today's youth. May they grow strong in the knowledge that their origins are as rich in cultural history as those of any other nation. A nation does not have a future unless it understands its past.

Nevin, despite (or because of) his overt nationalist stance, displays some other neo-colonialist traits. He uses both colonial and neo-colonial sources uncritically. His bibliographies cite both Henry Callaway and Theal, as well as Savory and Partridge. But, significantly, even though he claims in a preface that "fragments of traditional tales were gleaned from tribal storytellers" (1996:3), he does not cite any indigenous performer as a source. In the tale *The tribe of dead warriors*, Nevin narrates the founding of the *Gqunukhwebe* clan of the *AmaXhosa*. Perhaps, here, within the actual tale, the intermingling of Nevin's neo-colonialist and nationalist discourses is most apparent. The opening paragraph presents an idealized and romanticized description of the physical character and mental disposition of the *AmaXhosa*:

As they still are today, the men of the *AmaXhosa* were tall, handsome and powerful; the women graceful and very beautiful. By nature they were a peace-loving, hardworking folk, but they were fierce and skilful warriors if they were attacked. (1996:53)

By reducing the description to a few, "simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized" characteristics (Dyer 1977:28), Nevin recreates the stereotype of a noble *Xhosa*. In colonial times such a stereotype (of a "noble savage") would have served to maintain a social and symbolic order favourable to the colonizer. Here Nevin is trying to create a positive image of the *Xhosa* which serves the nationalist aspirations of South Africa.

The "new nationalist" discourse does not represent its redefined, reinvented cultural identity to the "nation" alone, but also to the international community which has so avidly observed South Africa's drama of liberation and democratization in the last decade. Here the "new nationalist" rhetoric attempts to capture and project to the world a distinctly African culture. For authors and publishers the challenge is to promote this unique quality of African folktales without alienating foreign audiences.

For example, Kathleen Milne's book, *Demane and Demazana*, carries the following blurb (1994:n.p.): "The folktale enthusiasts might recognise some elements from *Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel* and *The wolf and the seven little kids*, but the story is completely Africanized, also in style and atmosphere." The reader is given something to identify with but is also reassured of the "authenticity" of the tales. The packaging mirrors this strategy. The design is bold and bright, with imposing illustrations and stylized borders. The cover blurb describes Brigitte Schroder's illustrating technique: "Here she uses the earthy colours of Africa – even 'yellowish' pages – and a stylised style to portray the people and their story – and to create a remarkable cannibal who symbolizes the bad without being offensive." Even though colour is used as a synecdoche for "earthy" Africa, the "stylised style" bears a strong resemblance to Gauguin, and is employed for a subtle form of sanitization. Savory, too, simultaneously claims an international character for her tales whilst insisting on their rustic African identity: "The tales are like fairy tales told all over the world, but they have a strong African flavour that is as real as the smell of rain on the hot earth."

Nevin's attempt (1996:n.p.) to validate African tales by comparing them to European tales is crude and counterproductive:

Was there an African Camelot? I believe there was. In fact, there were many. And what about Africa's King Arthur, Robin Hood, Davy Crockett, William Tell, Gulliver and Rip Van Winkle? Where do we go to find them? We listen to the heartbeat of Africa ... Deep in the traditions of the people who share this

land are the stories of their legendary heroes. Their adventures are no less exciting than Lancelot's or Gulliver's.

Nevin's anxious comparisons imply the need for a European benchmark against which the African tales have to be measured, and then pronounced worthy. The mention of famous characters in Western legends and folktales reveals Nevin's intended audience – one which is well-versed in Classical Western lore, and which, it seems, requires convincing of the quality of African tales.

As argued previously, a tension exists within the central aim of the “new nationalist” discourse: to establish a unifying national culture which, at the same time, represents the aspirations of all of South Africa's people. For authors of folktales, tackling this tension begins with cross-cultural education. The folktale texts are seen as a means of cultural expression from which valuable lessons about differences and similarities may be learned. In a school reader containing Leshaoi's tale *Madiepetsana and the milk bird*, Diale Rangaka, the compiler and editor, explains the aim of the anthology (1989:vi):

The aim of this anthology is to introduce you to stories that speak about the life you live and know. This will help you to see this life in a different way, show you how other people live it and hopefully make you enjoy seeing these pictures of your own life. From this it will be easier to understand and enjoy the stories that other people tell about their own lives, to see and appreciate the differences and similarities.

The tale itself, *Madiepetsana and the milk bird*, differs from other versions of *The milk bird* tale type in that it offers a great deal of contextual detail

regarding village life, the famine and cultural practices. In this way the tale is conspicuously didactic. The “beautiful pure milk white bird” (44) that befriends the heroine, Madiepetsana, does not undo work in the garden or trick children, but it becomes a sacred symbol of hope, kindness and generosity. In keeping with this, the bird does not shit or make *amasi*, it produces *amasi* by “purging pure white curdled cow's milk” (1989:47).<sup>7</sup> Leshoai also writes ethnographic information into the tale. For example, the practice of “singing” is explained concurrently with the unfolding of the plot: “The braver women neighbours also began to ‘sing’ Mannini and her daughters in cutting and biting mocking songs ... To be ‘sung’ in this manner is worse than to be ignored” (1989:43). Thus we learn that “singing” is an acceptable form of criticism (similar to the *izibongo* tradition). The text abounds with performance elements, such as songs and Sotho epithets. Leshoai's tale, as part of this collection, is certainly being presented as a cultural as well as a moral lesson.

### Encountering the hybrid

One has to wonder how much genuine commitment to the project of harmonious cultural relations does exist, and how many of the folktale publications are “bandwagon” texts, playing the humanitarian tune for commercial dividends. Certainly, some authors have exhibited an unswerving, passionate and discerning commitment to the understanding, preservation and enjoyment of written and oral indigenous folktales, either through creative writing, scholarship or performance. One such author is AC Jordan, whose collection, *Tales from*

*southern Africa*, was published post-humously in 1973 (the same year as Partridge's collection). The front flap describes the exiled Jordan as having a constant and genuine interest in his own roots: “One manifestation of this concern was his deep interest in the oral narrative performances of the Xhosa people, the ancient narratives transmitted through the generations by countless sophisticated artists.”

The publishers are also adamant that these tales are not “verbatim texts of oral performances” but that the author has “created new and fascinating written versions”. The blurb is remarkable for its insight into the limitations of transcription and translation processes, and its grasp of the hybrid status of Jordan's folktales:

The themes remain Xhosa themes, the structures of the performances remain Xhosa structures in many respects, but the hand of the accomplished artist AC Jordan is also there, and the result is a kind of *hybrid art-form* that borrows from written traditions in an effort to communicate the intellectual substance, some of the artistic vividness and many of the images of the oral traditions.

(my emphasis)

Leshoai too, despite the veneration he holds for his grandmother's art, admits that “much more flesh and blood have been added to Nkhono's skeletal stories” (1983:2) in order to render them interesting reading matter. Jordan does not make claims to authenticity and none are made on his behalf. Instead, Jordan's realization that tales have to be “recreated” for the written medium is stressed. Rather than devalue the tradition, this enhances and extends it by combining some of the

artistic elements of an oral tale with the aesthetic form of a written narrative. The result is a hybrid text, which is best described by Dell Hymes (1971:76) as a “convergence [which] implies not only approximation, nor mixture even, but *creativity*, the adaptation of means of *diverse provenience to new ends*” (emphasis in original).

Harold Scheub’s introduction to Jordan’s collection is a summary of Scheub’s structural theory of Xhosa *intsomi*. In this introduction he is vehement that the transcription of an *intsomi* is a “terrible injustice to the performer and the tradition ... The written text becomes a mere outline, a scenario – nothing more” (1973:11). He is at pains, though, to point out that Jordan did not attempt to merely record an *intsomi* performance:

Jordan did not attempt to do this, because he knew it was impossible. Instead, he fleshed out the scenario with words. He used techniques of the short story to bring *life to the skeletal outlines*, and he thereby moved away from the original *intsomi* performances into the hybrid art form ... (1973:13)

It follows, then, that Jordan’s specific “hybrid art form” is a conscious, creative convergence of the *intsomi* and short story genres. Jordan also combines tale types – in this collection, *The milk bird* tale type and *Demane and Demazana* are integrated into one tale called the latter.<sup>7</sup> In this tale, two main elements are derived from the *intsomi* genre: the themes of community spirit and family life; and the structure, which is shaped by the core-clichés<sup>9</sup> in the form of utterances or songs. For example, the utterance of the bird that undoes the weeding – “The weeds of this field, go scatter! Scatter!” – is central to the action of the first section of the tale, which takes place at the home of the twins. Also, other performance elements are retained. Xhosa epithets with English translations in parenthesis abound in the text; for example, “*Somawe*le (Father-of-the-twins)”, and ideophones<sup>10</sup> such as “mpr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!” infuse the text with liveliness and colour.

A few tools of the short story are also employed by Jordan, some of which are directly influenced by the

content. For example, Jordan adds descriptive details of character and scene. These are details the oral performer would have found superfluous. For example, in the opening paragraph, Jordan (1973:34) presents a detailed description of village life, explaining the division of labour:

In the village where the twins lived, the men used to hunt, the boys used to look after the livestock, and the women and girls used to cook at home and, in the proper season, till the lands with hoes, sow the seed, and hoe the ground again to clear away the weeds.

Not only does this provide background information for the “foreign” reader, but it also sets the scene for the bird’s magical undoing of work which follows.

## Conclusion

This essay has examined written folktale texts today, and has shown how they are employed in a “new nationalist” discourse to represent a unified cultural identity for the “new South Africa”. I have also argued that these texts are sometimes part of a neo-colonialist discourse which exoticizes and essentializes African culture. Common to both discourses is the view that the tale texts are able to bridge gaps and heal rifts in our society. This ameliorating role of folktale texts can be achieved only if both the risk of eliding difference and the challenge of positively rearticulating difference are forcefully tackled. The union of postcolonial and folklore studies provides the ideal disciplinary tool for such an overhaul.

One way of tackling both of the above issues is to highlight the benefits of synthesizing differences into something new and progressive. This is something that AC Jordan was able to achieve in his tale texts. Jordan recognized and embraced heterogeneity rather than claiming authenticity. In doing so he was able to use the resources of different literary and performance traditions as the basis for his unique, creative fusions. His hybrid tale texts, and the tale texts of others, too, occupy a carved-out, in-between space, in which differences converge but are not smothered. This space symbolizes the success of one form of cross-

cultural literary activity in South Africa, and the potential for more encounters with the hybrid in other spheres.

## Notes

- 1 Conducted by Katrine van Vuuren for her MA dissertation: *A study of indigenous children's literature in South Africa*.
- 2 One such text is GM Theal's *Kaffir folklore* (1882), which comes under close scrutiny in my MA dissertation: *Transcribing tales, creating cultural identities: an analysis of selected written English texts of Xhosa folktales*. Theal's folktale texts, which are examined as part of his specific colonialist discourse, continue to exert an influence on present-day authors.
- 3 An example of such a scholar is Elwyn Jenkins, who expresses concern about "white publishers [who] promote the otherness of tales" (1993:12), without questioning the motives of these white publishers, or analysing how this "otherness" is represented.
- 4 The new coat of arms, unveiled by President Thabo Mbeki in April 2000, carries the Khoi San slogan *!KE E: /XARRA // KE* ("Unity in diversity").
- 5 This is another term borrowed from Charles Briggs. He calls the formal processes (such as selection and editing) associated with producing particular types of texts in the service of social or political agendas "entextualization" (1993:390).
- 6 *Mapungubwe*, in the Limpopo valley, is where southern Africa's first city and greatest kingdom ("cradle of civilization") is said to have flourished about a thousand years ago.
- 7 In some versions of *The milk bird* tale, for example, in Harold Scheub's transcripts of performances, the bird often "shits" or "defecates" *amasi* (Scheub 1975).
- 8 This combined tale text was also published by *The readers' digest* in a collection titled *The best of South African short stories* (1991). The tale here is accompanied by information panels which describe Xhosa culture, and illustrations and a "picture feature" of "Transkei – home of Xhosa tradition".
- 9 Scheub (1975:3) defines a core-cliché as "the remembered element of the *ntsoni* tradition, the stable element; it is recalled during the production by means of a complex process of cueing and scanning".
- 10 Okpewho (1992:92) defines ideophone as an "idea-in-sound, in the sense that from the sound of the word one can get an idea of the nature of the event or the object referred to".

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# Writing lives and letters

STEPHEN GRAY. 1999. *FREELANCERS AND LITERARY BIOGRAPHY IN SOUTH AFRICA*. AMSTERDAM: RODOPI.

CRAIG MACKENZIE. 1999. *THE ORAL-STYLE SOUTH AFRICAN SHORT STORY IN ENGLISH: A.W. DRAYSON TO H.C. BOSMAN*. AMSTERDAM: RODOPI.

GAIL FINCHAM

Why is the strategy of  
employing fictional  
narrators who 'tell' their  
stories to an implied  
audience so popular in  
South African fiction from  
the middle of the  
nineteenth century?

Stephen Gray's *Freelancers and literary biography in South Africa* (1999) situates the challenges of compiling literary biography in the context of South African writing. The book draws the reader's attention to a paradox: the popularity of biography as a genre in a cultural climate that has largely rejected the ideas of authorship and self-authoring. His study opens with four eminent Victorians: Charles Maclean, Douglas Blackburn, Beatrice Hastings and Stephen Black, and then goes on to consider six twentieth-century figures: Edward Wolfe, Bessie Head, Etienne Leroux, Mary Renault, Sipho Sepamla and Richard Rive. Ultimately the interest of the book is as much in Gray's literary personality as in any of the figures he is researching. If biographers have to choose between writing revisionist history and revealing personal idiosyncrasy, Gray is clear about his own bias. He wants

"to salvage ill-used reputations" and with each of his subjects "to catch the right angle, set it down, just so. Make each of them memorable"(xi). In the process of catching the right angle he exposes his own passions, oddities, quirks and convictions. The introduction contains a reference to Henry James's *The Aspern papers* as a cautionary tale against scholarly vandalism. Gray might as well have cited *The wings of the dove*, for, like Merton Densher in that novel, he "consecrates by his appreciation".

This is not to deny that the book is uneven, less a monograph than a collection of loosely linked occasional pieces, which differ in length and scholarly range. The lack of an Index in an otherwise painstakingly researched study is irritating. But the book's chief recommendation is its writerly *joie de vivre*, precisely what Gray – in the tradition of biographers for centuries – is coy about. At the end of the introduction he cites Michelangelo's biographer, Condivi:

And if I earn any [praise], I am content that it should be not as a good writer, but as a diligent and loyal compiler of these matters, and I affirm that I have collected them honestly, that I have drawn them deftly and most patiently, and finally that I have checked and

confirmed them with the testimony of writings and men worthy of belief. (xiii).

Gray's diligence in relation to the subjects of his research sacrifices none of the deftness which also preoccupied Condivi, and is characterized by the personal engagement that makes his study not only informative but engrossing.

The opening chapter on Charles Maclean combines accurate research with vivid writing, a saturation in the sights, sounds and smells of the Caribbean environment about which Maclean wrote in his *A voyage to the West Indies, with notes on Saint Lucia*, published in 1857. Maclean lived in Saint Lucia from 1830 to 1880, and Gray visits the island to fill in those parts of Maclean's history that have been deliberately obscured in his reincarnation as "John Ross". the colourful figure who is shipwrecked off Natal to become Shaka's special protégé. The bare historical facts of this episode in Maclean's life are already bizarre. Related by a flustered Gray to a representative of the Saint Lucia Tourist Board in London W8, they become surreal ("He was *saved* from a fate worse than death by King Shaka, no less – heard of *Shaka Zulu*?"). Safely arrived on Saint Lucia, Gray describes the island in terms

that are lyrical (the sea is “fragrant, coral-infested, urchin-spiky, grey-green ... under a sky of dazzling blue or the spermy Milky Way”), comical, detailing Saint Lucia’s many “fissures” (features), and infused with literary texts. Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* is explicitly mentioned, while Warner’s *Indigo* ghosts behind the real-life descriptions of a 400-year-old Saman tree in Columbus Square, Castries, and behind the account of the last years of the now-extinct indigenous peoples of the island, the Caribs and Arawaks. Although little new historical information comes to light about Maclean (who, it transpires, died at sea and not on Saint Lucia at all), Gray’s sojourn on the island is a rich cultural experience. Prefaced by his remark “I needed to go to Saint Lucia; some deep desire to experience a society *not* like my own – one that indeed could, and did, convert me to creolize a bit”(3), the piece ends with Gray bouncing over potholed roads in an ancient taxi on his way to the airport to catch his flight back home. On the radio he hears De Klerk’s voice announcing his joint project with Mandela to “negoti-ate apart-hate” to death, in order to “cree-hate” a new multiracial society.

The opening chapter on Maclean is written with the *panache* and accessibility of a travelogue. It does, however, cue the reader into the book’s preoccupations and its ethos as a study that creates its own genre, a mixture of original research, shrewd cultural analysis, and personal anecdote. The second piece, on Douglas Blackburn, is an impressive example of literary sleuthing. Gray insists that “the real Douglas Blackburn – one of South Africa’s great writers, and certainly the best of the many colonial Englishmen who recorded life in South Africa at the turn of the century – has never been discovered before” (13). Confronting the enigma surrounding Black’s life and work, Gray conjectures that he has been eclipsed by the numerous eminent Edwardians – Forster, Lawrence, Bennett, Wells, Kipling, Conrad and James – who were his contemporaries. Gray goes on to trace Blackburn’s journalistic careers in Britain and South Africa, commenting that he was to become “the great chronicler of the last days of the Boer Republic”. He remained, throughout his writing life in South Africa, a fiercely independent social critic. Sympathizing with

the Boers, whose society he perceived to be classless and tribally cohesive, he wrote scathing satirical journalism exposing both Kruger’s attempts to muzzle the press and the workings of British capitalism on the Witwatersrand. A prolific and versatile writer, Blackburn produced, in addition to his journalism, a book on mesmerism, two opera librettos, and five novels in the first decade of the 1900s. Returned to London in 1908, he wrote first a handbook entitled *On the detection of forgery* (1909) “for the use of bankers, solicitors, magistrates’ clerks, and all handling suspect documents” and then, in 1911, a joint autobiography, with W Waithman Caddell, called *Secret service in South Africa*. After his return to England, Blackburn worked for the last 13 years of his life for *The Tonbridge free press*. He was finally buried in Tonbridge in 1929.

No less fascinating is the story of Beatrice Hastings. Gray notes that “her written output represents an interesting strain in the cultural practices and products of the two periods her life straddled: the late Victorian and the early Modern” (59). He believes that her writings deserve to be placed next to those of Olive Schreiner, Sarah Gertrude Millin and Pauline Smith. Neglected as her fiction may be, Hastings is a figure whom we are all likely to have met, if not recognized. As the longest-lasting lover of Amedeo Modigliani, she is the subject of no fewer than 14 oil paintings and several dozen drawings. If nothing else, readers will have seen Modigliani’s 1915 *Beatrice Hastings in an armchair*, which is reproduced on the cover of Mary Eagleton’s *Feminist literary theory*. But Hastings was no mere female muse supplying inspiration to a male artist, like the haunting figure in Christina Rossetti’s “In an artist’s studio”, eternally depicted “Not as she is, but as she fills his dream”. In her freelance journalism in Paris after 1914 Hastings bore witness to the decisive events of the Modernist Revolution: “The Easter Rising of 1916 against British Imperialism in Dublin, the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, by which the first country in the world adopted the socialist programme, the advent of Freudian psychology – these transforming events are all carefully handled in Hastings’ columns” (68). Hastings’s anti-war feminism and socialism have

multiple connections with Olive Schreiner. *The maid's comedy* rewrites the motif of two sisters from Schreiner's *The story of an African farm* in a gothicized Cape setting, while her pamphlet *Women's worst enemy – woman* (1909) anticipates a number of Schreiner's arguments in *Women and labour* (1911). Asking why Hastings has not been recognized in South African letters, as have Schreiner, Millin and Smith, Gray concludes that her remarkable testimony will never be fully registered until the contribution by colonial women to the making of the modern world "has been acknowledged and appreciated" (76).

In Chapter 4, we return to the topographical mode of the first (Saint Lucia) piece, where Gray – now dunking a croissant in a tumbler of black coffee on a terrace above Nice – discusses Stephen Black's plays with a researcher into contemporary South African theatre. Black, whose work belongs in the continuum of Victorian and Edwardian show-business, produced plays that were, in their time, widely acclaimed in South Africa. But they were never published. Did he ever intend to publish his scripts? Was the avenue of publication even open to him? Probably not, for metropolitan publishers would have had no interest in plays that never reached the West End or Broadway, and the South African publishing industry was in its infancy and unwilling to take financial risks. (Gray remarks that even now it is hard to publish drama in South Africa.) Although this chapter records an absence – the work of a playwright whose dramas died when the lights dimmed and the applause ended – it is nevertheless

suffused with a presence: the ambience and ethos of the south of France. This is equally powerful in Black's own nostalgic reminiscences of the smell of orange blossoms and Gray's poetically mediated depiction of "glaciers behind, rocky terraces, olives, roof-tiles, the gauzy meander of liquid snow ... Huguenot country. Wine and Roy Campbell's wild horses of the Camargue" (77–78).

Chapter 5 – on Edward Wolfe, the alleged inspiration for Edward Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe* – is a literary biographer's dream: an apparent wild goose chase that turns speculation into incontrovertible evidence. The scene is London, the date April 1981. Gray has traced the frail and forgetful painter Edward Wolfe to his studio on the banks of the Thames in order to conduct an interview designed to clarify the connections between the living painter Edward Wolfe, the dead writer William Plomer and the fictional Plomer character Turbott Wolfe. Though the interview is abortive (Wolfe can remember nothing of interest), the encounter is fruitful. In *Turbott Wolfe*, Gray reminds us, "one of the most scandalous scenes is the one where the artist-narrator enrages colonial public opinion by habitually posing blacks as models before his easel. One of the central questions of *Turbott Wolfe* is how art in Africa is to portray this encounter with the exotic and forbidden without sentimentality or sensationalism" (107). Before Gray leaves, Wolfe shows him his final work, a painting to illustrate *The song of songs*:

On a silver base, in Rouault-like strokes, he had painted King Solomon, a pale, exotic traveler-figure, lingering. At his

feet, or coiled above him, or astride him, was the black girl, his roe, his dove, his heart's delight – illustrations of the most erotic encounter in the Old Testament. Only a South African would be prurient enough to point out the "immorality" of it, the sexuality across the colour-line with a handsome negress. Plomer had given her another name, Nhliziyombi. (114)

The next two essays, on Bessie Head and Etienne Leroux, are very short, presenting little new information about these writers while reflecting the biographer's sympathetic identification with both. The Leroux piece is a touching obituary to a writer whose memory Gray recollects with sensuous immediacy. Bessie Head's earlier novels (*When rainclouds gather*, *Maru*, and *A question of power*) are "conventional and consumable" in contradistinction to *A bewitched crossroad*, which Gray regards as her most powerful and original work. He comments that the novel is "still not available in many parts of the English-speaking world", implying that Heinemann has failed to recognize its importance: "As soon as Bessie pursued her intelligence out of orthodox Western forms – and found her genius – she was heavily let down by a dull and ... deceitful world which wanted her to talk only in terms other than her own" (119). I found this comment puzzling, given that Ad Donker published *A bewitched crossroad* in 1984 and it is readily available in South Africa. Could the reason for the publication of the novel in Africa rather than London not have as much to do with Botswana's appropriation of its most eminent writer as Heinemann's insensitivity to her genius?

Chapter 8, a review of David Sweetman's *Mary Renault: a biography*, is

largely positive (“caring ... a fine work and a superbly nostalgic experience” (133)), while foregrounding the “layer of transgressive sparkle” under the words and actions of Mary Renault and her lifelong consort, Julie Mullard, which he feels Sweetman has missed. He also corrects some names (such as Heinrich Verwoerd), which Sweetman gets wrong. Gray’s regard for Renault (“Likeable. Real. Teaching us not to cheat” (131)) is everywhere evident, and is based on her uncompromising standards as a historian and researcher who asked that her epitaph should read “She got it right”.

The next chapter, on Sipho Sepamla, presents a carefully considered account of the “Soweto Poets”. Gray moves through Sepamla’s childhood – the family background with a domestic worker mother and a teacher-turned-miner father – to Sepamla’s apartheid-dictated career as a schoolteacher, to his early theatre writing, to his best-known poetry in *To whom it may concern*. Detailing the political indignities suffered by Sepamla under apartheid – the fact that he received a passport for the first time in 1980 and that *The Soweto I love* remained banned until 1986 – Gray outlines Sepamla’s preoccupations as set out in “The black writer in South Africa today: problems and dilemmas” (1975) and in his two collections *Hurry up to it* (1975) and *The blues is you in me* (1976), before detailing his only personal contact with Sepamla, an interview conducted in June 1977. Commenting on the success of *A ride on the whirlwind* (1981), which has been translated into French, German and Italian, Gray cites the awards recently offered to Sepamla by the French government and the Woza Afrika Foundation. He ends the chapter with Sepamla’s rousing manifesto: “An artist is the conscience of any nation. He should be free of party politics, he should be free to criticise politicians” (156). Always politically aware, the Sepamla essay nevertheless stands out from the other pieces in this collection by its lack of personal anecdote. It eloquently demonstrates what writers like Gray have often deplored in print: the almost unbridgeable gap between the experiences of black South Africans under apartheid and the cultural privilege of their white peers.

The concluding chapter on Richard Rive has a very different feel. Though the barbarities of apartheid impinge as grossly on Rive’s as Sepamla’s life, this is nevertheless a chapter about literary friendships – *inter alia* with Jack Cope, Uys Krige, Jan Rabie and Marjorie Wallace of *Contrast*, and with Gray’s and Rive’s publishers, David and Marie Philips. Gray and Rive share many encounters, from embattled classrooms during the 1976 riots to posh restaurants where Rive gourmandizes and Gray pays, to diving into the Indian Ocean rollers at Onrust in search of Uys’s false teeth, bashed out by the thundering surf. Framed though it is by the tragedy of Rive’s untimely death, the chapter contains some of Gray’s funniest anecdotes. My favourites are Rive’s reply to “that old racist battleaxe” Sarah Gertrude Millin, author of the eugenicist *God’s stepchildren*:

When the colour-bar dowager encountered this upstart [Rive in his brilliant twenties] she was evidently struck with genealogical confusion. All she could blurt was: “What are you, *Indian*?” To which Richard suavely replied: “No, ma’am, I am your step-child.” (158)

There is also the story of Cecil Skotnes carving panels depicting scenes from Schreiner’s *Story of an African farm* on the front doors of Richard’s Heathfield villa. This occasioned a visiting Belgian scholar to remark in bewilderment: “But, Richard, in Europe only cathedrals have carved doors” (174). All in all the picture that emerges of “funny, kind, impossible Richard” (158) is of a figure of great talent and integrity, remembered unsentimentally by a close friend.

Craig Mackenzie’s original, scholarly yet always accessible *The oral-style South African short story in English: AW Drayson to HC Bosman* takes as its point of departure the fact that “writing (hence written literature) was preceded by many thousands of years of cultural life rooted in oral discourse”(1). He explains that this book is not concerned with what Walter Ong calls “primary oral cultures” (cultures with no knowledge at all of writing) but rather with *orality as a literary device*. This trope dates back to Boccaccio and Chaucer, where “the reader can pretend to be one of the listening company”(1).

Why is the strategy of employing fictional narrators who “tell” their stories to an implied audience so popular in South African fiction from the middle of the nineteenth century? Looking at the short stories in English of nine South African writers – Drayson, Scully, Fitzgerald, Glanville, Gibbon, Slater, Smith, Blignaut and finally Bosman – Mackenzie remarks that “the stories of these writers exemplify a significant – and largely unexplored – narrational tendency: they all adopt, in various ways and in varying degrees, ‘an oral style’ ” (3).

A key feature of “oral style” is the creation of a fictional narrator through whose speaking voice the story is mediated. Here Mackenzie draws on the work of the Russian Formalist Boris Eichenbaum, who uses the term *skaz* to describe literature that has an orientation toward the oral form of narration. Eichenbaum defines *skaz* as

that form of narrative prose which, in its lexicon, syntax and selection of intonations, reveals an orientation toward the oral speech of a narrator [...] a form which fundamentally departs from written discourse and makes the narrator as such a real personage. (4)

As much a written or literary narrative as any other form of narrative, the *skaz* creates the illusion that we are hearing rather than reading a story because it foregrounds the narrating rather than the experiencing self. Inherently self-reflexive, *skaz* narratives – like modernist and post-modernist texts – thus introduce the dimension of metafictional play.

A further element of theoretical sophistication is added to the discussion of *skaz* narratives by Anne Banfield, who brings in the question of audience. The *skaz* narrator “addresses the tale to some audience whose presence is linguistically reflected in the tale itself” (6). Such fictional audiences, Mackenzie explains, are persons associated with the narrator – fellow travelers meeting around an evening campfire or fellow farmers meeting on a farm stoep or at the village post office. To the work of Eichenbaum and Banfield he adds Mikhail Bakhtin, whose distinction between monologic (single-voiced) and dialogic (double-voiced) narrative forms affords the *skaz* the possibilities of irony and parody.

Mackenzie deploys this Eichenbaum-Banfield-Bakhtin theoretical framework to distinguish, in South African oral-style stories, between “artless” and “artful” stories. The tales of the master-storyteller Herman Charles Bosman (in whom the oral-style story reaches its apogee), though ostensibly simple and artless, are quintessentially artful. Taking over the older genre of the fireside tale with its characteristics of intimacy and familiarity, Bosman introduces new elements of narrative economy and incisive social commentary, exploiting the potential for self-subversion latent in the works of his predecessors and “creating a complex set of relationships between author, narrator, internal audience, and readership” (144). Thus the Bosman chapter (entitled “The oral stylist *par excellence*”) is the most important in the book. Earlier chapters establish, in contradistinction to the metafictional artfulness of

Bosman’s stories, claims to “plain truth” and “authenticity” (in the stories of Drayson, Doyle, and Ingram), a characteristic Eurocentrism in the depiction of Africa (“the polarity European/African does not include the native inhabitants of Africa, who are therefore effectively denied a full human subjectivity” (30)), and, in relation to one of Ingram’s stories, an anthropologically striking attempt on the part of the authorial persona to “translate” from one language and culture into another, as though this project were unproblematic.

In the chapter on the late nineteenth-century stories of Scully and Fitzpatrick, Mackenzie notes some progression away from the cultural myopia of the earlier tales and a greater degree of narrative sophistication, reflected in “a more self-conscious aestheticism and ... the beginnings of ironic interplay between internal narrator and frame narrator” (52). Scully, unlike Drayson, “recognizes the integrity and importance of African culture in its own right” (54). Where the work of earlier short-story writers revealed a generic indeterminacy that suggested these writers’ struggle to find cohesive narrative modes to embody the “African experience”, both Scully and Fitzpatrick are consciously “telling tales”.

Chapter 4 considers Ernest Glanville’s achievement in incorporating humour and irony into the oral-style tale, thus inaugurating in the South African context what Bakhtin calls “parodistic *skaz*”, marked by the idiosyncratic nature of the storyteller’s verbal style. Glanville’s “Uncle

Abe Pike” tells yarns that take on characteristics of the fable or parable: “The point of the tales, the old man seems at times to be implying, is not their literal veracity or otherwise ... The yarn itself may be patently untrue, but the broader human vision it illustrates may in the end be more significant” (69). In Glanville’s stories, a further progression is noticeable in the individuation of indigenous perspectives: “Not only does the native now have a voice, he actually also elicits a marked degree of sympathy from ... the main narrator in the tale” (74). Significantly also, the narrator’s perspective is endorsed by the authorial voice.

With Perceval Gibbon’s “Vrouw Grobelaar” sequence, considered in Chapter 5, we move for the first time into the territory of the “artful” oral-style story. “Vrouw Grobelaar”, Mackenzie points out, is a key literary predecessor to South Africa’s most celebrated fictional narrator, Oom Schalk Lourens. The Vrouw’s stories portray a typical Boer farming community of the late nineteenth century: “They have wholly subjugated the local population, have an old-Testament fear of God, and have placed the local predikant at the center of their religious cosmology” (81). Creating in the Vrouw sequence stories which intermingle comic and tragic elements, Gibbons introduces a humorous irony in the distance between the Vrouw’s perceptions of events and the perspective the reader is encouraged to adopt. Part-comic and part-sage, Vrouw Grobelaar anticipates Bosman’s Oom Schalk.

The next three chapters discuss further predecessors to Oom Schalk in the “artful tale” tradition: Francis Carey Slater’s Oom Meihaas, Pauline Smith’s Koenraad and Aegidius Jean Blignaut’s Hottentot Ruiter. Oom Meihaas is lazy, dissembling and cunning, an Afrikaans male narrator who is “a gross caricature rather than a carefully delineated individual” (103). Nevertheless he is “cast in the same mould that Bosman was later to use” (103). Smith’s achievement in her “Little Karroo” stories is her innovative use of the frame narrative convention. Unlike Drayson Boyle and Ingram Smith makes no attempt to suggest that we are listening to a “real” voice that has

somehow been captured in print. In the Koenraad stories, however, the potential for Bakhtinian polyphony that is introduced by the dissenting frame narrator in the “Little Karroo” stories is absent. The “reporting agency” in the Koenraad tales is passive, and this allows Koenraad an “uncontested narrative space” (116). Blignaut and Bosman are to adopt a similar narrative strategy in their Hottentot Ruiter and Oom Schalk stories, with the crucial difference that these narrators are clearly unreliable.

Despite Blignaut’s remark to Lionel Abrahams that, in relation to Bosman, he had “only small talent to set against genius”, his Hottentot Ruiter stories were to have a formative influence on Bosman. According to Abrahams, Blignaut

... demonstrated a particular way of employing the narrator, showed how “Afrikaans experience” might be rendered in English, illustrated an appropriate distance from realism and a distinctive role for playfulness even in treating tragic subjects, exemplified an imaginative blending of romantic and comic elements, revealed the potential magic in oblique, off-handed presentations, and even provided models of kinds of humorous sallies that would suit the spirit of what he had to express. (123)

Chapter 9, on the central achievement of Herman Charles Bosman, argues that while Bosman takes over many features of the South African oral tale such as a narrator, a conversational style, an appropriate milieu and an implied audience, he combines these with the economy, irony, structural tautness and social critique that characterize the modern short story. Bosman is masterful also in exploiting tensions between the narrator’s perspective and an implied authorial perspective. Oom Schalk is thus a fallible or unreliable narrator and the reader is constructed by the text as somebody who is able to respond to ironies of which Oom Schalk is unaware. In later metafictional stories set in the bushveld without Oom Schalk as narrator, Bosman substitutes for the voice of Oom Schalk Lourens a story-teller reflecting on his craft:

[“Old Transvaal story” exhibits] the merging of genres (discursive, fictional) ... Bosman is ... supremely conscious of the impossibility of being entirely original in the telling of a story: a story one tells is always a reconstitution of the “always already written”. (177)

After Bosman, the tradition of the oral-style story, which was so influential in South African letters between the mid-1800s and the mid-1900s, comes to an end. With the demographic shift away from Smith's Little Karoo and Bosman's Great Marico the cultural context of early Dutch settlement gives way to the increasingly urbanized and increasingly fragmented realities of postwar apartheid South Africa.

It is difficult to compare two books

so differently conceived as Gray's and Mackenzie's. Gray's is a collection of *sui generis* pieces, which makes it delightful to read but challenging to review; whereas Mackenzie's book is an impressively integrated argument. Interestingly, each author refers to the other: Gray to Mackenzie's work on Bessie Head and Mackenzie to Gray's work on Herman Charles Bosman. Combining originality with meticulous research, both writers are also fine stylists. Gray creates a shifting, multi-generic mode that allows for

close portraits as well as wide-angle perspectives in a study that fuses historical with literary analysis. Mackenzie creates a sophisticated theoretical framework which accounts for the narratological features of the short stories he is discussing and demonstrates a progression towards the master storytelling of Herman Charles Bosman. Readers will find both books accessible on a first reading and invaluable as reference tools.

# The modernization of redness

ZAKES MDA. 2000. *THE HEART OF REDNESS*. OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS.

DAVID LLOYD

Mda's novels develop his critique of black society and governance, from the campaigning of political parties in 1994 to the established black rule in the late 1990s and 2000. However, the suffering of the poor and the venality of their leaders are balanced with the redemptive possibilities provided by a selective appropriation of African values and spirituality

With the demise of the apartheid state, it would appear that many black writers have diminished their output, possibly lacking a suitable subject. Not so with Zakes Mda. In 1995, his first two novels, *Ways of dying* and *She dances with darkness*, appeared. Last year, his third adult novel, *The heart of redness*, was published. It is perhaps not surprising that the appointment of the first democratically elected black government did not rob Mda of novelistic material, because even in his plays, such as *We shall sing for the fatherland* (1979, 1993), he focused on black oppression and exploitation of

other black people, as well as the ills of colonialism and apartheid. His novels develop his critique of black society and governance, from the campaigning of political parties in 1994 to the established black rule in the late 1990s and 2000. However, the suffering of the poor and the venality of their leaders are balanced with the redemptive possibilities provided by a selective appropriation of African values and spirituality. Thus, in *Ways of dying*, the protagonist finds that a recovery of the presence of his ancestors, as expressed in artworks, forms part of a process of resuscitating in him a sensibility that enables him to cope with the miseries of life in a squatter camp. In *The heart of redness*, certain traditional values and beliefs also help to ameliorate the present.

One of the means Mda has adopted to blend the elements of the traditional past with the materialistic global culture of the present (as modified by specific South African conditions) is that of magical realism. Brenda Cooper (1998:16) has defined magical realism as “the fictional device of the supernatural, taken from any source the writer chooses, syncretized with a developed realistic, historical perspective”. Cooper (16)

argues that magical realist writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende and Salman Rushdie are, nevertheless, “not inserted within these indigenous, pre-technological cultures that provide their inspiration”. However, while these writers may not actually believe in the “magic” they incorporate into their fiction, it would appear that Mda (1997:281) does. He comments:

Some critics have called my work magic realism ... I wrote in this manner because I am a product of this culture. In my culture the magical is not disconcerting. It is taken for granted ... A lot of my work is set in the rural areas because they retain that magic, whereas the urban areas have lost it to Westernization”.

It is this acceptance of the magical that allows him to imbue traditional black values and spirituality with a vitality that offers a redemptive hope for the present.

In *The heart of redness*, Mda explores the contrasts between the present Westernized urban black person, the rural areas where traditional beliefs are being contested and the past where traditional beliefs were still dominant but challenged by the two central events of Xhosa history –

British imperialism and the Great Cattle Killing of 1857. To examine conflicting values in the present, modern South Africa, he has as his protagonist, Camagu, a Westernized returnee from exile, who travels from Johannesburg to a remote rural village, Qolorha-by-sea. In his encounters with the villagers he gradually discovers his Xhosa roots – the heart of redness – and is spiritually transformed, so that he attains a sense of community with the rural people. The narrative of past imperialism and the Cattle Killing is woven into the contemporary *bildungsroman* by means of flashbacks. The various villagers, both past and present, the prophets of the past and British imperialists, the modern urbanites and, above all, Camagu's consciousness, provide a polyphony of voices that allows Mda to present a richly complex and ironized debate about the issues facing contemporary South African society and its historical, colonial antecedents.

The book opens in Qolorha with the present-day controversy between the Believers and the Unbelievers, headed by Zim and Bhonco, respectively. After the defeat of the Xhosa by the British in the Seventh Frontier War (called “The War of Malajeni” in the book, thus indicating a specifically black perspective), and despite Xhosa prophets predicting otherwise, a rift arises between those who believe in the prophecies of their seers and those who do not. This rift splits the nation when, after a devastating drought and a fearsome incidence of livestock disease, a young prophetess, Nongqawuse, predicts that if the people plant no grain and slaughter all their cattle, at a specific date, their food will be replaced and healthy cattle will arise from the sea, along with their ancestors. A new Edenic age will dawn. The Unbelievers, who are sceptical of the forecast, refuse to comply with the demands and, indeed, some have so forsaken the religious traditions of their forefathers that they align themselves with the British. Such animosity arises between the two factions that the whole fabric of the nation is torn apart: for, when the grain, cattle and ancestors do not arrive, the Believers maintain that it is because of the disobedience of the Unbelievers that the prophecy was not fulfilled. Brother fights against brother. This is literally the

case when Twin, the ancestor of Zim, raids the kraals of his twin brother Twin-Twin, the ancestor of Bhonco, who retaliates by denying the existence of his brother's family when starvation haunts the land. After many months of increasing starvation and internecine strife a final date (16 February 1857) is set for the apocalyptic day. The disappointment of the Believers' final hopes breaks the nation. In the months that follow tens of thousands die while others exchange their liberty for food rations in the Cape Colony. After the destruction of the power of the Xhosa, they become the Middle Generations who languish under the dominance of whites. However, after black majority rule, when an imperative exists to explore complexities between black and black and not simply between black and white, Bhonco and Zim resurrect the feud between the Unbelievers and the Believers.

Mda's outline of the epic tragedy of the Xhosa does not only allow him to outline two basic modes of thinking in the nation, it also gives him scope for a sardonic critique of British imperialism. The arrogance on which imperialism is premised is revealed in a particularly fatuous form when Sir Harry Smith (who calls himself the Great White Chief) forces elders and chiefs to kiss his staff and boots. More subtly, Mda exposes another premise of imperialism when he has Dalton, a soldier, boil the head of Bhonco and Zim's ultimate ancestor so that the cranium can be stored for phrenological analysis. People of “lesser” cultures are thus reified. The consequence is that they have little right to their land which then can be appropriated so that colonists can make better use of it. One of the processes of appropriation, discussed by David Spurr (1993:5), is that of naming: “The very process by which one culture subordinates another culture begins in the act of naming or leaving unnamed, of marking on an unknown territory the lines of division and uniformity, of boundary and continuity.” Thus, Sir George Grey, after “pacifying” the Maoris in New Zealand, consolidates his appropriation of their land by naming twelve rivers. The Xhosa mock Grey's pretensions of owning their land by calling him “The Man Who Named Ten Rivers”. Grey informs

the Xhosa that he has only come to impart the wonders of British civilization to “barbarous natives” (96). However, men such as Twin-Twin (one of the Unbelievers who has not become pro-British) realize that the gift of “civilization” entails the loss of their land. But, after the Cattle Killing, the Xhosa are not in a position to resist the British. Men like Dalton become rich by selling goods to Xhosa survivors. Missionaries find rich ideological pickings in disillusioned people. Ultimately – in a passage reminiscent of the title of the District Commissioner’s book, *Pacification of the primitive tribes of the Lower Niger*, at the end of Chinua Achebe’s *Things fall apart* – in Southern Africa, “Pacified homesteads are in ruins. Pacified men register themselves as pacified labourers in the emerging towns ... Their pacified fields have become rich settler farmlands” (312).

Nevertheless, not all is lost in the holocaust. Some people, like Twin’s Believing wife, Qukezwa, retain a sense of African spirituality. Her numinous experiences are conveyed by the way that in her dreams “[s]he flies ... in the land of the prophets”. After the destruction of her people, she is still associated with magical qualities for “[s]he sings in soft pastel colours. She sings in many voices” (312). Furthermore, she has passed such characteristics on to her descendant, the modern-day daughter of Zim the Believer, also named Qukezwa.

However, the book does not begin with an examination of the contemporary Zim’s camp of Believers, but with a positive description of Bhonco, the Unbeliever. He is a sensitive man

who weeps at beholding beautiful things. Like his ancestor, Twin-Twin, he has not quite given himself over to Westernization for, although he does avail himself of Western benefits, he retains a staunch belief in the powers of the ancestors. He is the bearer of magical scars that are handed down from father to son. He and fellow Unbelievers are in possession of a dance, given to them by the abaThwa (Bushmen), which allows them mysteriously to communicate with their ancestors “when they were still people of flesh and blood” and the land “still belonged to them” (81). Nevertheless, Bhonco does believe in modernization. Thus, in the huge debate between his party and the Believers – whether or not a casino and, later, timeshare units – should be erected, he favours the developers because they will ostensibly bring employment, proper roads and electricity to the area. His daughter, Xoliswa, takes his modernizing views to the extreme for she despises redness: she has even abandoned belief in the ancestors. With her superior education (which is exposed as being pathetically meagre), she aims to leave the rural areas to go to Pretoria to the Ministry of Education where so many lucrative jobs are opening up to upwardly-mobile blacks, eager to board the gravy train.

Zim, head of the modern Believers, does not utterly oppose modernization, but he is more traditional than Bhonco. Zim’s primary idea in life is that the Believers of colonial times were right and that it was owing to the betrayal of the Unbelievers in not killing their cattle that the tragedy of the Xhosa nation came about. Furthermore, unlike Bhonco but like

the traditional Xhosa, he perceives the sacredness in nature. He is so much part of the natural world that he can talk with birds. Unlike Bhonco, too, he does not mourn the past but communicates with the world of the present ancestors. His ancestors are more vitally perceived. Most importantly, however, he opposes the casino and timeshare schemes because they would destroy the natural world that he so loves. Like Bhonco, he too has a daughter, Qukezwa, who embodies his worldviews in an extreme form. She is actually a throw-back to her Khoi ancestor of the same name and partakes of her sense of the numinous qualities of her world. Her Khoi ancestry is important because, as depicted in Mda’s previous novel, *She dances with the darkness* (and indirectly in *The heart of redness*), for Mda, the Bushmen and the Khoi, as the truly aboriginal people of Southern Africa, are most vividly imbued with the spirit of the place. Thus, Qukezwa, with her miraculous multi-toned voice, her strong, fighting spirit and her harmonious existence with the natural and spiritual worlds represents a quintessential Africanness – the heart of redness.

In the many figures of the Believers and the Unbelievers – both in the colonial period and in contemporary South Africa – Mda seems to be exploring two central forces in black culture. In the colonial period there was the tension between believing in the Xhosa prophetic traditions and a rationalistic scepticism concerning these traditions that, in some, went as far as Westernization and loss of their traditional faith in favour of Christianity. In the case of the modern

Believers and Unbelievers there is a tension between embracing traditional life, with its supernatural elements, and a desire for “progress” which, in an extreme form, means yielding to the exploitative materialism of global capitalism.

When the protagonist of the novel, Camagu, arrives in Johannesburg, he is initially exposed to materialistic Unbelief. Mda wickedly satirizes modern South Africa in the exile’s inability to find employment. Well-educated, with a doctorate in communications, he is not wanted by the corporate world which “did not want qualified blacks. They preferred the inexperienced ones who were only too happy to be placed in some glass affirmative-action office where they were displayed as paragons of empowerment” (33). But neither can he find work in black government offices. The problem is that he cannot and, later will not, “dance the freedom dance”: he will not yield to government sycophancy, nepotism and mendacity. He is advised to

[j]oin the Aristocrats of the Revolution ... Only then did Camagu understand the full implications of life in this new democratic society. He did not qualify for any important position because he was not a member of the Aristocrats of the Revolution, an exclusive club that is composed of the ruling elites, their families and close friends ... The jobs he had been applying for had all gone to people whose only qualification was that they were sons and daughters of the Aristocrats of the Revolution. (36)

Disgusted, Camagu decides to go back into exile but, after meeting a beautiful woman from Qolorha, travels to that village.

Because of his education and sophistication, it is assumed that Camagu will identify with the Unbelievers. He does initially associate with the “educated,” extreme Unbeliever, Xoliswa, but finds the traditional way of life that she rejects more and more fulfilling. His sojourn at the village actually initiates a process of rediscovering his Xhosa identity, lost to him during the long years of exile. A turning point is reached when he is visited by Majola, the brown mole snake that is the totem of his clan, the amaMpondomise. A link is forged with the spiritual heritage of his own people for “Camagu is beside himself with excitement.

He has never been visited by Majola ... . He has heard stories how the snake visits every newborn child; it sometimes pays a visit to chosen members of the clan to give them good fortune” (112). The cosmopolitan urbanite has begun to enter the magical realm of his ancestors’ faith. This is reinforced when, immediately after the incident, he meets Qukezwa, the most ardent Believer, and they walk to the place where Non-gqawuse had her visions. Here he follows a Khoi ceremony of placing a stone on an ancient cairn in a symbolic gesture of commemorating the Khoi God, Heitsi, and the ancestors. While Camagu never actually becomes a Believer, in so far as he never accepts the old prophecies, he increasingly believes in the spirituality of his people.

His sense of solidarity is consolidated in his opposition to the casino and time-share developments fervently desired by the Unbelievers and rejected by the Believers. A black economic empowerment firm arrives to plan the developments. This gives Mda further chance for sly satire because an obviously ignorant black executive is advised by highly-paid white consultants who actually control the endeavour. The casino and the time-share units, they argue, will provide the electricity, running water and employment for the villagers that the Unbelievers so want. However, as Camagu argues, the development will only supply limited employment to the people because they lack the sophistication to operate a casino and the electricity and water will not extend to the village. Instead, the indigenous vegetation will be destroyed when decorative exotics replace them and, as the beaches are privatized, they will lose free access to an important food source. In fact, they will effectively lose their land and be reduced to tourist curiosities. The only people who will be empowered by the schemes are the fat-cat Aristocrats of the Revolution and their white backers. Camagu proposes, instead, the development of cottage industries, limited selling of seafood delicacies and a simple hostel for backpackers who have come to appreciate the beauty and sacredness of the area: all these enterprises are to be communally owned by the villagers themselves so that, with the profits generated, they can install the electricity and running water as they require. Above

all, they will all be employed. The success of such schemes is finally ensured when, against all odds, the area is declared a world heritage site owing to the persistent efforts of a supportive white shopkeeper, Dalton, who is none other than a descendant of the colonial soldier who decapitated Bhonco and Zim's ancestor. (Dalton's empathy for the Xhosa, although not unironically treated, offers one of the many polyphonic voices of the novel, for he is implicitly contrasted with the Aristocrats of the Revolution who disregard people of their own race.)

Throughout the debate about modernization which rages intermittently in the book, the position of the Unbelievers, who have increasingly entrenched themselves in their support of materialistic progress, is gradually undermined. They become alienated from their traditions, as indicated by the fact that the abaThwa take away their trance-like dance. This helps to fracture that solidarity the dreams gave them. Bhonco's tears no longer flow because he no longer finds beauty in life owing to an increasing bitterness that is consuming him. His wife leaves him to join the Believers and work in their cottage industries. His daughter leaves him to join in the freedom dance and become one of the Aristocrats of the Revolution. He is rejected by his ancestors as they, in the form of a swarm of bees, attack him. Finally, there is his defeat concerning the casino and time-share units. His ultimate degeneration occurs, however, when his mind becomes unhinged and he attacks his life-long friend, Dalton, with a panga.

As the Unbelievers deteriorate, the Believers gain the ascendancy. Zim gains in a quarrel involving a school choral performance. He gains a son in Camagu who was supposed by everyone to marry Bhonco's daughter, Xoliswa, but actually marries his own daughter, Qukezwa. He gains a grandson, Heitsi (Camagu's son), while his rival's daughter, Xoliswa, remains barren and unwed. His greatest victory, however, occurs when the plans to develop the area are thwarted. Yet Zim has one more victory. He is granted leave to join his ancestors after a long period of mourning for his wife. Bhonco is deeply embittered because this means that Zim will be able to blacken his name in the spirit world. Furthermore, as Zim is now an ancestor himself, he will be deeply revered by the whole village.

Mda's apparent endorsement of the present-day Believers is problematic because they still venerate those prophecies of Nongqawuse that caused the destruction of the Xhosa nation. Can a view of life that generated such a holocaust be a viable one – in any context? It seems that Mda resolves this tension in the enigmatic final scene of the novel, in which he fuses the historical figures of Qukezwa and Heitsi with their modern counterparts. Qukezwa calls to her son to join her swimming in the sea, but the boy is terrified of the water. The novel concludes with his flat refusal to swim. This may not be such an abrupt ending if we consider that water – especially the sea – is, throughout *The heart of redness*, associated with the cattle-killing and its concomitant events. Nongqawuse

first told of her visions at a lagoon near the sea. In one of the earlier versions of the prophecies, the ancestors would have come with cattle out of the sea. In a later version, the ancestors would have led Russian forces from over the water which would then defeat the British. (The Crimean War, in which Russian and British forces fought each other, had just occurred and the Xhosa assumed that, if the Russians were enemies of their enemies, they must be their friends.) Furthermore, much of the action during the period of famine occurs on the seashore when the starving Xhosa look yearningly to the sea horizon from which their ancestors must surely come. Many even claim to have seen the spirits of the dead and their cattle beneath the waters. Seen in this context, Heitsi is actually rejecting the disastrously prophetic aspect of his traditions. Implicitly, however, he does not reject the spiritual aspect of his kinship to the dead. Moreover, he is not only his mother's son but is also named after the God of the Khoi. As previously mentioned, for Mda the Khoi and the Bushmen were the people most closely attuned to the spiritual forces operating in the African reality. So, from his mother Heitsi he inherits a living awareness of his ancestors while his name alludes to the spiritual – the “magical” elements within that world. When one takes into account that his father, Camagu, is a man steeped in a knowledge of the West, who has practical plans for uplifting the community (but who has also found his African identity), this little trinity offers much, by example, to the modernization of redness.

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# Floodtide

.....

IAN TROMP

A sigh in the body to say  
you have returned. My love,  
this year has passed in absence.

November comes and with it rain  
enough for playing fields  
and streets to hold the sky.

We drive south by south-west,  
entering the floods. At dusk  
we crawl past a white house,

its porch light lit,  
its windows bolted against the tide,  
its door wide open and the river,

like so much time and distance, running through.

# On a journey

.....

IAN TROMP

I wonder at the commonplace,  
the lives we could have had.  
Tender grace of simple things:

high windows, a scrubbed  
wooden table; November air  
that's sweet and bright

and ordinary. Other people's lives,  
unnamed, unknown. Then lost, let go  
as the train clatters through open fields.

# Inflexion and innuendo

.....

IAN TROMP

*“I do not know which to prefer”*  
– Wallace Stevens

Silence in the piney woods,  
darkness descending.

Pouring its sweet senseless music  
into the twilight,  
a nightingale sings, unseen.

Across the valley  
an owl speaks, call and echo  
leaving the silence deeper,

the woods more lonely  
than before.

# Along the way

.....

IAN TROMP

*Granada, 1-2 April 2000*

Before the first day swims into darkness  
and the long white road climbs the breathless hill,  
before stone swarms in geometries  
of praise, the city winds bring cinnamon,  
lemongrass, basil.

Sudden, elusive  
as sparrows in the Plaza's pepper trees,  
but enough to call you through winding streets  
to basins of blue mallow, pimento,  
saffron's radiant flame: colour to robe  
this time between and sing the going forth.

# Glass

.....

IAN TROMP

*for Sara*

In the body as light is  
in air, inseparable: abiding  
simplicity, this mystery  
we mistake for a question,  
imagine it answerable.

But it is not asked. More truth  
than conversation, it comes  
across the fields like light,  
wakes us with its insistent  
presence. And we rise

into it: we make it true,  
undoubtedly. How strange  
this question we both ask  
seems weightless when we wake  
together, the meadow

tumbling off in mist  
and distance. There is no shame  
then, or mystery, our bodies  
pressed together. All night,  
unthinkingly, we answer

our own imagined question:  
call and response, we find ourselves  
uncomplicated, our bodies  
refuting years of doubt.  
Then we are like glass, light

streaming through, suspending  
a lucid verity, like high windows  
flooding stone. Or closer:  
our bodies – simple, easeful –  
mingle, as colours stained in glass.



# Bothy

.....

IAN TROMP

*Glen Crotha, Braes of Balquidder. December 2000*

Built on stilts in the high heart  
of weather, it soars on storms:  
world dissolves to a vast blank

ten feet from the bolted door,  
wind runs under the floorboards,  
shudders walls, the windows roar

with rain. Invisible, streams  
braid the far hillside, silver  
rushing to the loch's dark glass.

# Untitled

.....

JOHANNES VAN JERUSALEM

We walk around the mountain  
We walk around it, walk around it.  
We talk about awareness  
We talk about it, talk about it.

# Sonnet at sixty

.....

GUS FERGUSON

According to Vladimir Nabokov  
our dreams are memories of the future.

Last night I dreamt of Heraclitus or,  
more precisely, of his famous foot –

I imagine his left one. His right, flexed,  
supporting his step into the river.

The images (courtesy of Miró) –  
were static, animated, schematised;

ie, the aforementioned mystic foot.

A tick-ticking clock. The turbulent stream.

Reconstructing the dream this morning,  
I noticed, while testing the temperature

of my running bath, that I chose not to use  
a finger but, a very tentative toe.

# Bekendstelling / Introduction

.....

CHRISTINE MARSHALL

Hier's my handvol  
weerbarstige woorde,  
uitgekies met die oog  
op vorm, kleur en gewig,  
puntenerig geplaas  
bokant die plek  
waar ek lewe  
soos 'n witgekalkte Karoonaam  
halfpad teen 'n koppie  
in die verte.

Here's my handful of  
recalcitrant words,  
selected with an eye  
to shape, shade and weight,  
earnestly arranged  
above the place  
where I live  
like a whitewashed Karoo name  
halfway up a koppie  
in the distance.

# Survival / Voortbestaan

.....

CHRISTINE MARSHALL

An animal  
sustains life blithely  
on air  
water  
a little food.  
She sleeps lightly  
for her young.

She has no need of words  
to survive  
nor  
to perish.

'n Dier  
onderhou die lewe blymoedig  
met lug  
water  
bietjie kos.  
Sy slaap  
vir haar kleintjies lig.

Sy't g'n woorde nodig  
om te oorleef nie  
nog  
om te vergaan.

# Mechanical garden / Meganiese tuin

.....

CHRISTINE MARSHALL

I'm a woman  
who lives  
in a mechanical garden  
inside the clang  
of flowers  
as they bang together  
in the sour wind;  
where tin leaves tick down  
and shift beneath my shoes;  
where trunks  
root in steel,  
branches barring the clouds;  
where no water comes.

Ek's 'n vrou  
wat bly  
in 'n meganiese tuin  
binne die klenk  
van blomme  
soos hulle teenmekaar kap  
in die suur wind;  
waar blik blare neertik  
en skuif onder my skoene;  
waar stamme  
in staal wortel,  
takke die wolke tralie;  
waar niks water kom nie.

# Brood alleen / Bread alone

.....

CHRISTINE MARSHALL

Bloesend en geurig  
van die oond af  
loop ek om 'n hoek  
in jou vas,  
  
dood van die honger.

Toemaar, lief,  
my arms is vol brode:  
hulle vul my hande warm,  
sag stoom hulle binnekant,  
broeis aan my borste,  
brandwarm teen my hart.

Dis my gawe dié.

Kom,  
eet na hartelus,  
versadig jou.

Flushed and fragrant  
from the oven,  
round a corner  
I run into you,  
  
starving.

It's all right, love,  
my arms are full of loaves:  
warmly they fill my hands,  
they steam inside softly,  
broody against my breasts,  
hot against my heart.

This is my gift.

Come,  
eat to your heart's content,  
have your fill.

# Not mother & daughter

.....

FINUALA DOWLING

I've been at the very edge like this with you before,  
on the cliff face drive of pleasure. Our curving wheels  
and smiles – like Saturday, or being six – holding  
the road, not letting go an instant while  
our doubles – for we have doubles –  
test the corners, feel the wind at the face, fly.

Not mother & daughter, someone's idea of us,  
but who we really are, stars in our life's movie.

You've turned up the volume and we're rocking,  
grooving, throbbing like the Flats and the light  
through the clouds rolls the credits with our names.  
Home is behind now, we're hanging out and loose,  
looking for hikers and unfinished off-ramps and low dives.  
Your spit flying in the wind, like a girl in a road movie.

Not mother & daughter, someone's idea of us,  
but who we really are, stars in our life's movie.

# I'm sorry but I have to go because

.....

FINUALA DOWLING

I'm sorry but I have to go because  
there's a bald woman screaming down my passageways like the Edvard Munch painting,  
pressing hands against toothless cheeks.

She's something akin to me, as Rochester might have said.

And anyway I've lost the pegs – the line – we used to hang this thing on.  
For a while, after the loss of the pegs, I used the thorn bush, but the fabric got shredded and  
the wind blew away its remains. (In my brain, that teenage refrain:  
Someone left the cake out in the rain.)

I'm sorry but I have to go because  
I keep dreaming my letter box is full of old, damp and stuck together envelopes  
and that trapped in underground tunnels I have to sleep with someone I hate  
and can't touch someone I love (you)  
and that Rumpelstiltskin is shouting at me  
and that my good teeth are falling out.

And that there is an explosive device near my front door.

I'm sorry but I have to go because  
you've made me speak allusively about things that are absolutely real,  
like compass points – no, not LIKE anything at all – the things themselves.

I said, "This is how I feel," and you said, "No, you don't."

I'm sorry but I have to go because  
you make me feel ugly, hysterical, mad & powerless.  
I have to go because, when I unclench my teeth,  
I release a thousand curses upon your domestic happiness,  
and I'm not sorry.

# Rule three thousand and ten

.....

FINUALA DOWLING

I've forgotten a lot of the rules,  
like how you get to the square on the hypotenuse  
(and what you do once you're there)  
and how to do long division  
and getting percentages on a calculator.  
Netball draws a blank.  
Don't even know the right way to lace shoes,  
Or the bowl to use when whipping chocolate mousse.  
Why one is not supposed to clink glasses  
or say pleased to meet you.  
What to say when someone dies  
or to do if they do.  
And when to say "owing" and when to say "due"  
(not that I ever have good reason to). What has gone away?  
The whole thing about the past tense in French novels.  
The meaning of zig zag yellow road markings.  
The rite of contrition after confession  
Whether Mrs Ramsay said it was doors or windows should be left open.  
But I'll always remember rule three thousand and ten:  
never sleep with married men.

# Green house

.....

FINUALA DOWLING

I live in a large green house  
with my daughter and three dogs.  
Also here you may find sister,  
certainly brother,  
and mother (grand).

No husband,  
and no cat.

People sometimes ask about the cat.

# When I was least happy in life

.....

FINUALA DOWLING

When I was least happy in life  
my daughter led me across the road  
to a neighbour whom I did not know  
with the purpose of a toddler  
who does not see gates and fences  
but the ducks and puppies  
on the other side

You spoke to me in the same low murmuring tones  
you used for lame horses and bilious dogs.  
Crops, flowers and poultry were our theme:  
you made me tea and wiped the counter,  
you said “foeitog” and “I don’t hope so.”  
You guessed.  
You told me I was beautiful,  
in the courtly way of an old man.

One day when it rained  
you phoned from your side and said  
“I’m sending some ducks for Beatrix”  
– you always called her “Beatrix” –  
out the window we saw them,  
waddling over,  
in the way of ducks  
when directed by Oom Piet.

You moved and I moved, but one thing stays:  
the sense of a rescue, somehow being saved.

# Teaching Margaret Atwood

.....

FINUALA DOWLING

Most meaning comes as a vista,  
a sudden access of plain and space.  
And joy, I forgot, sheer happiness.  
But when we read her poem, the class  
saw nothing, nothing opened.  
Why did the speaker (in the poem)  
want a corner of sunlight to lie in?  
Why did (she) want a sunny room?  
And find no room, and find no sun?  
The poem was bad, self-pitying.

I remembered myself at nineteen,  
locked out, virginal, unbereaved,  
reading “Lycidas” with an old HB  
which splintered softly in my mouth.  
Bent over the blue-mantled shepherd,  
(who did not really batten his flocks  
but something else: the human spirit  
against loss), I recognised what poets do:  
stand on the rise and call: “Weep no more,”  
impatiently, when the tide is out, and  
the reborn sun setting on the floodless plain.  
I was slow, coming after to the view,  
but still I felt his cloak brush past my cheek,  
and held within me these words as true:  
“Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.”

Here is tomorrow and these woods are old

and known. I have been the one curled up,  
twisting towards corners and shafts of sun.  
I know the dread of space; I have lain down  
on the “pissed floor” till I could weep no more.  
So, now I understand your meaning and it comes  
not as a vista, nor is it plain. There is no rise here,  
no place to stand and view. I am completely  
unconsoled. Your mantle is a jacket, tied and strait.  
This is my own old home, cold and roomless  
that you have brought me to. At last,  
I look out. Faces watch me, nineteen and lost,  
but trusting me to trace, with pencil soft  
a sunset, dot-to-dot.

# I don't mind. Please don't worry

.....

FINUALA DOWLING

Don't worry about your tonsils,  
or getting your hair cut, or dying.  
"Life's like a cardboard box" –  
you said it yourself –  
"and when we die we get out";  
though I don't think a sore throat  
creates enough momentum.  
I don't mind if your hair's too long.  
Still, strong men and some  
little girls of seven have survived the salon.  
You can lie all night in my arms,  
we'll die together, or just get numb,  
I don't mind.  
We'll do whatever you'd prefer.  
I'll dye my hair while they cut yours.  
We'll go into hospital together,  
we'll invite your friends,  
we'll have a tonsil party.  
I'll die first, and be there to receive you;  
or try to live so long I die in your dying arms.  
I don't mind. Please don't worry.  
Until then, together  
we'll imagine row after row after row  
of tonsils in little surgical bottles  
until we fall sleep. Or if you can't  
then I'll have your tonsils out for you,  
just bring me Barbie & some good ice cream –

I don't mind.  
And hell, they can cut my hair –  
I won't look like Britney Spears  
but who cares, I don't mind.  
When you wake, as you will, later,  
don't worry:  
I plan to swallow the stuff that says "drink me"  
and get swept to the back of your throat & snip  
off all that lymphatic tissue myself while we're both  
down the dark hole dreaming.  
Trust me, I'm a doctor.  
Trust me, I'm your mother.  
I don't mind.  
Please don't worry.

# Treasure

.....

JILLIAN HAMILTON

slick-thick black, the sea  
soaking-seeping black, the sand  
sliding-glistening black, the rocks  
feather-coating  
eye-blinding  
gullet-choking black, the birds

twenty thousand birds  
drowning in the slick-thick sea  
sticking in the soaking-seeping sand  
slipping down the sliding-glistening rocks

twenty thousand barrels of hot soapy water  
line the coast  
when we've cleaned the penguins  
we'll use those barrels  
in which  
to boil  
the spillers  
of oil  
in their own  
spillage  
and teach  
the cleaned birds  
to feed  
on their eyes.

# Song to my grandmothers

.....

ELIZABETH TREW

Kristina comes in her long worn skirt  
and wooden shoes  
fills her pail with river rice  
picks wet berries by the mountain stream

*Bring down berries Kristina*

*Rush down water*

Kristina sits spinning her wool  
for rag-runners and jumpers  
With nimble fingers she filches  
rainbow patterns by the indoor fire

*Knit stitch Kristina to cover the cradle*

*Work wool and water my fisher's daughter*

Mary goes to the well in the Great Karoo  
sings for the rain  
and *Jerusalem!*

collects stones in the wind and tumbleweed

*Sing rainsongs Mary*

*Blow tumbleweed down*

Mary drinks from the cool water jar  
sits and stitches the shade  
sewing silk ribbons and bows  
to her bolsters and beds

*Make ribbons Mary to cover the cradle*

*Draw deep well water my farmer's daughter*

*Sing stitch grandmothers to cover the cradle*

*Work wool and water for your grand-daughter*



# The artists' house

.....

ELIZABETH TREW

Two artists work in a tall city house.

He takes art from small natural forms  
caught in their momentary fall,  
knows the rub of insects and shells –  
past lives embedded and gone  
into silt, ash and resins.

In his naturalist hands is his talisman,  
an ancient bee arrested in amber – tears  
of the ancient sun god Apollo.

Inside his frames he prints inky tadpoles, and  
fixes dragonfly wings to watercolours.  
Into the first floor he has ferried  
fallen leaves found in shadowy underbrush,  
has patterned spring leaves shaped like our hands  
against dark rubble cities.

He sings and seals  
fallen leaf tones  
onto parchment, making a mural of burnt oaks,  
olives, charcoals,  
plastering his walls with guttering nutmegs and copper leaves.

The apprentice upstairs has opened tins –  
powdered acrylics, intense coloured lights.  
Into her pollens she mixes and stirs, adds the sky's  
tones and borrows, from the master downstairs  
a handful of charcoals, a few yellowed tears.

Onto her walls she is busily mapping and painting  
her radial, tulip-bowl city,  
inside pivoting and dipping wide-shouldered brushes  
into her cauldron  
coating colour on colour,  
tries the brilliance of  
reds, purples, blues.

Windows and doors become colour slabs  
boiling light.

Blown seeds – the black eyes of her flower heads  
scatter eyelids.

She pours out her city's fluorescence  
spilling through skylight,  
cascading downstairs,  
launching her scripts on his coppery bed,  
flaunting her storey of colour and light.

# Putting the cart before the horse

THE PREDICAMENT OF STUDENTS FROM DISADVANTAGED EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUNDS IN PROGRAMMES OF ENGLISH STUDIES AT HISTORICALLY WHITE UNIVERSITIES

EMMANUEL MGQWASHU

Students from  
disadvantaged  
educational backgrounds  
at HWUs  
are faced with the  
problem of 'swimming  
against the tide' and,  
unfortunately, most  
of them sink



It too often debates about the transformation of universities tend to concentrate on the establishment of broad principles to guide the restructuring of policies regarding access, affirmative action, democratization, and so on. While these issues may be regarded as laudable initiatives in an attempt to democratize institutions, they do not go far enough to assist in transforming the quality of teaching and learning processes. This article is by no means an attempt to undermine the involvement of those committed to redressing institutional inequalities, but instead seeks to focus attention upon ways in which the transformation process could be tackled on a micro-level in terms of the quality of curriculum being offered to incoming students (from disadvantaged educational backgrounds) registered within

the Programmes of English Studies (PES) at the Historically White Universities (HWUs).

Students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds in the PES at HWUs are faced with the problem of “swimming against the tide” and, unfortunately, most of them sink. Drawing on my experiences as a product of Bantu Education, a BPaed student and a tutor, an English Honours student and a Graduate Assistant, a Masters student and a Graduate Assistant, and currently a staff member and a PhD student, I can safely say that the reasons for such a dilemma arise from the fact that the linguistic needs of these students are not given the attention they require and deserve. Instead of prioritizing the linguistic needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, some PES in the HWUs continue to approach literary studies as if, linguistically, all students were equally competent. That is to put the cart before the horse – hence the title of this article. As a consequence of this error, students and staff members in these programmes experience anxieties when they have to engage with texts, and when they have to assess students’ written work, respectively.

These anxieties, it may be argued, arise from two factors: firstly, the change of policy regarding access to HWUs, and, secondly, the fact that the formerly white universities are “the children of a colonial mentality” (Moulder 1991), which causes these institutions to evince ambivalent attitudes toward bringing about change. For most of these institutions, change means “lowering of academic standards”. Moulder (1991) asserts that “they cling to the academic and intellectual apron strings of their West European and North American mothers” (in Jansen 1991:111). This points to the fact that, to a large extent, the assumptions and beliefs that inform decisions in such universities are alien to the South African context, and are informed by beliefs and values rooted in “first world” experiences.

This partly explains why most of the PES in formerly white universities regard themselves as primarily English literature programmes, and hence are characterized by the absence of courses offering systematic programmes in language learning and acquisition for students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds. The University of Zululand

(a formerly black university) PES, for instance, offers a one-year language course called “Practical English” which is designed to attend to the linguistic needs of students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds. Likewise, the University of Durban Westville PES is about to start a similar language competency programme.

Such programmes are prerequisites for first-level English registration. My view, however, is that in HWUs intensive language courses should not be prerequisites for first-level English. Instead, they should form part of the first-level English syllabus, lest we add a whole extra year onto students’ degrees. At the least, PES need to develop year-long language courses, for English Studies is about texts which are mediated through the English language and since enrolment is now open to all students, regardless of their home languages.

Perhaps an autobiographical account of how I learned English as a second language during my secondary education within the former DET educational system may be useful for understanding the extent to which most of the incoming students from former DET schools are educationally disadvantaged. By reconstructing personal experiences of teaching and learning English as a second language during my secondary education, I wish to foreground the relevance of the *autobiographical narrative* as a means to enhance our understanding of educational practice under and against apartheid. The assumption is that only by unpacking the rich and variegated detail of educational practice in apartheid’s classrooms will we be able to propose a suitable English second-language programme for linguistically needy students in the departments of English at the HWUs. I do not want to generalize about black students. There are those who have a different experience of learning English during their pre-tertiary education. This narrative is meant to account (relatively speaking) for the source of the difficulties lecturers experience when assessing essays written by second-language speakers of English.

As might be expected, most pupils from black

townships were not exposed to an environment conducive to the effective learning of English. This may be attributed, among other things, to South Africa’s history of discrimination, the impact of which we are still witnessing – the scarcity of educational resources such as school-owned television sets, tape recorders and others; and of community libraries and home environments conducive to learning. I myself was not immune to this plight. I started learning English effectively when I was in grade eight. Until grade eight, I was an absolutely monolingual individual.

During my junior secondary education teachers seemed to be obsessed with completing the year using the English language syllabi. Although the majority of the pupils could not read English, teachers who were dealing with short stories set a very fast pace, as if they were teaching first-language speakers of English. At grade eight dictionary usage became necessary. During reading lessons, our teacher would give us a list of seven to ten words, telling us to find their meanings by ourselves. Instead of assisting us with her knowledge on how to use a dictionary, she would make discouraging comments such as: “I am not your walking dictionary.” Because her priority was to finish the syllabus, she never considered our general and individual difficulties.

My grade nine and ten English teacher, who would always carry a stick when teaching, never smiled during his lessons. On one occasion he gave me five lashes because of my “wrong pronunciation” of the word “apple”. I ended up concentrating on English more than other subjects, not because it was more interesting, but because it was frightening to be in the English class.

Grades eleven and twelve were the worst for me. In grade eleven our teacher “taught” us only one novel and essay writing throughout the year. While she was reading to us (for there were not enough copies for the whole class), we remained listeners and spectators, watching her movements around our desks, seated passively without contributing to our own learning.

Grade twelve was even worse. Our teacher told us that she would not waste her time teaching us grammar because we started it as early as grade five. She meant it. We did two literary texts with her; one play, and one novel over the whole year. Worse than anything, she was always translating these texts into the Zulu language.

My autobiographical account is typical of the way Bantu Education not only had a devastating effect on the overall level of education of students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds, but also deprived most of them of opportunities to acquire good literacy skills in English.

The University of Natal, Durban, PES has developed a language competency programme geared at addressing the linguistic problems of students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds. This programme (which is run over a period of 10-12 weeks) tends to focus on grammar to assist students to improve their essay writing. The handbook used in this language programme and a marking grid sheet that is useful to lecturers when marking students' essays provide a clue to how the programme hopes to achieve its envisaged goals. With these resources it is hoped that students will identify their grammar problems and thus improve their writing skills. It is interesting to note that the introduction to a grammar handbook points to the fact that the department is aware of the limitations of this programme, and thus calls for possible suggestions to improve the workbook (or the programme in general). That is exactly what this article responds to.

There is little likelihood that the language programme currently in place in the UND PES can help students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their linguistic competencies enough to enable them to engage in a critical dialogue with texts. The programme's duration, among other things, is a serious limitation. This situation reminds me of the Academic Support Programmes (ASPs) that failed to address the challenges posed by "*underprepared students*". When black students began to trickle into the then predominantly English-speaking universities in the 1980s, it was sensible to adopt something like an Academic Support strategy. One does not change a large institution for the sake of a few individuals. Now, however, many more black students have joined the university population. As James Moulder points out, "at present Black matriculants outnumber White matriculants, and the projections agree that in about five years time the number of White matriculants will decline in real terms" (in Jansen 1991:113). Now that the number of black students has increased (proportionally since the 1980s), perhaps the Programmes of English Studies need to explore the possibility of introducing year-long English second-language programmes (as is the case at the University of Zululand and UDW) to attend to the linguistic needs of English second-language students coming from disadvantaged educational backgrounds. Given the demographic changes at these universities, it is possible that not only students enrolled in PES could benefit from this kind of course, but that students from other faculties may also

see the usefulness of enrolling in order to improve their linguistic proficiency. What is needed is a proper year-long programme, not a peripheral Academic Development Programme (ADP).

Such programmes have been caught in a contradiction between conflicting assumptions: on the one hand, the assumption that the education DET matriculants have received is vastly inferior to the education which white matriculants have received; on the other, the assumption that one needs not more than 10-12 weeks to bridge the gap between these two systems of education. If that is the case, there cannot have been much wrong with the DET system of education, and so our indignant protests and condemnation of its work are unjustified. It has to be noted, however, that the attempt to reconcile the two contradictory assumptions are, to a certain extent, a consequence of the manner in which HWUs are structured and financed. But the problem is too serious to be explained in terms of "budgetary constraints". The HWUs need to come up with something better than programmes fashioned along the lines of ASPs and ADPs. The idea of ASPs, as Moulder argues, "was imported from America, and assumed that South Africa is essentially a First World country with some unfortunate pockets of Third World underdevelopment" (in Jansen 1991:117). Unfortunately, this assumption is simply false. As Clem Sunter suggests, "South Africa is an average country with an average economy. In the world of economic rankings, it goes with Chile, Brazil, and others" (in Jansen 1991:118).

So a new paradigm for English departments at HWUs should assume that South Africa is a third world country, with some pockets of first world privilege. A paradigm shift may enable these English departments to steer clear of *ad hoc* responses designed to enable the white university constituency to carry on “with its mainly white literature” (Chapman 1973). There has to be a new way of looking at things, a new way of understanding what is happening. The important thing to recognize is that the development of linguistic competence has to come first; that is a precondition for everything else. Accordingly, I do not agree with the claim that language and critical awareness are best acquired through the study of narrative, and I argue that the presence of formerly marginalized voices in the classroom is a cultural resource from which *other students* may learn. Delighting in diversity and emphasizing that a section of learners is a potential cultural resource is, however, inappropriate if the latter is not linguistically proficient (not to mention the political undertones the term “delight” carries). At the same time, though, second-language speakers, much as they deserve attention, need also to be part of the solution. They have to learn to use English outside the lecture hall. They need to speak English among themselves, unnatural as it may feel.

In conclusion, instead of attending to linguistic

difficulties by way of improvisation and “damage control”, it would be appropriate for English departments to devote as much time to language teaching as is devoted to discourse and textual analysis at present. The study of language ought to carry the same weight as literary discourse analysis. A complacency that ignores the pressing language needs of large numbers of second-language speakers of English will only land up negating the good intentions of those who would like to see them encounter and enjoy English literature on equal terms.

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# Reviews

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## **Cultural weapons and national stages: theatres and politics in South Africa and elsewhere**

Blumberg, M and D Walder (eds). 1999. *South African theatre as/and intervention*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Colleran, J and JS Spencer (eds). 1998. *Staging resistance: essays on political theater*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Kavanagh, R. 1997. *Making people's theatre*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

## LOREN KRUGER

“Preparing ourselves for freedom,” Albie Sachs’s critical revision of the ANC line on “culture as a weapon of struggle” was released more than a decade ago and may seem out of date in a post-apartheid economy of scarcity, which seems to have little place for culture, political or otherwise. Nonetheless, Sachs’s polemic against the production of political slogans and for a cultural practice that engages with the complexity and diversity of lives in South Africa continues to resonate in ongoing debates about the role of culture in a post-apartheid environment, in which the clear lines of conflict of the anti-apartheid struggle have given way to a much more ambiguous picture of mixed allegiances and uncertain futures. Institutions once beholden to the apartheid state have been closed or restructured out of existence and those that once played a role in the struggle, such as the Market Theatre, now seem at sea, if not yet on the rocks. Clearly, theatre has yet to cross into a definitively post-apartheid world, but, like other cultural practices in South Africa, inhabits a moment that might be called *post-anti-apartheid*. This condition may not be completely dominated by apartheid as such but, as Ian Steadman suggests, it is still governed by the legacy of apartheid (Steadman 1999:25).

Paradoxically, as the Market and other venerable anti-apartheid institutions of theatre struggle to survive, academic production about South African theatre has proliferated in the last decade, as Robert

Kavanagh’s pioneering but self-serving study (published in 1986, but concluding triumphantly with his own play, *Survival*, performed in 1976) has been supplemented and corrected by histories of the theatre in South Africa, such as Orkin (1991), Hauptfleisch (1997) and Kruger (1999), as well as by collections of articles on theatre, such as Davis (1996), and on links among theatre, literature, and orature, such as Gunner (1994). While journalists and other cultural commentators predict a gloomy future for the theatre, the most enterprising academic researchers in South Africa and elsewhere have taken the opportunity offered by the current paradigm shift to investigate links between the present and a rich and unexplored history of performance practices beyond a narrowly defined institution of theatre. Hofmeyr’s study of oral histories of dispossession among the Northern Sotho (1993), Peterson’s account of New African contributions to institutions of theatre and other kinds of performance in urban and rural South Africa that were resolutely syncretic and intercultural despite their colonial inheritance (1999), and Brown’s collection of essays linking particular written and oral traditions in South Africa with a wide range of African, European, and syncretic traditions and contemporary practices (1999) may not all engage with *theatre per se*, but their analysis of orature and performance, past, present, and future, broadens the field of theatre in South Africa in ways that can enrich current practice as well as scholarly investigations.

*Making people’s theatre*, the most recent book by Robert Mshengu Kavanagh (a.k.a. Robert McLaren), is cast as a practical theatre manual, with advice on “getting started”, “rehearsing”, “staging”, and “performing”, but it also makes theoretical and political arguments for the value of purposeful popular theatre in an African context. Framed by an introduction by Zimbabwe’s Secretary for Culture and a concluding step-by-step account of the production of *Mavambo*, a play in Shona, Zimbabwe’s majority language, and English, based on Wilson Katiyo’s novel, *Son of the soil*, about the anti-colonial struggle against the British, the book rests on Kavanagh’s academic and practical work with performers and audiences pri-

marily in Zimbabwe, where he has taught for fifteen years, while drawing also on experience in South Africa in the mid-1970s and Ethiopia in the 1980s, and thus complements other recent books by critic-practitioners based in Southern Africa (Kerr, Mda), whose commentary should be essential reading for South Africans as well. Although marred somewhat by careless editing and omissions in the references and glossary, the book's great strength lies in the author's ability to interweave political and theoretical questions with the practical aspects of theatre making.<sup>1</sup> From the outset, Kavanagh highlights how the diverse functions of performance, from ritual to entertainment, state representation to popular satire, are shaped by particular social conditions and audiences, and insists that would-be theatre-makers begin by asking and answering a question that is as political as it is practical: why do they want to make theatre and for whom (1997:4)?

In particular, the two central chapters, "Bringing it all to life" and "A more expressive theatre", show how combining the basic materials of theatre, from dialogue and gesture, through music and light, to capturing and keeping the audience, is a process shaped by the economic and educational capital of all involved and subject to very different conditions in different places and times. Thus, the role of dialogue in Ibsen's *Ghosts* depends not only on actors trained in the naturalist manner, but on a theatre institution wealthy enough to support this training as well as the expensive set that naturalist staging demands (53), whereas the framing of dialogue by familiar songs may engage an audience more directly on a stage without this set. Kavanagh favours democratic process: in the social organization of the group, the collective deliberation about the script, as well as the actor's contribution, but does not always push the critical potential of his ideas as far as he might. Workshop performances of texts-in-progress allow the ensemble to get feedback in reshaping a script written by the theatre-makers themselves, but may also give government and other authorities an opportunity to censor the play; the ending of the feminist play, *An adamant Eve*, in which a member of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) addresses the question of sexual harassment was changed on the grounds that it showed the party in a bad light (43).

Kavanagh's moderation of critique of ethnic centralism and the damage it has done to democracy in Africa in general and in Zimbabwe in particular is particularly striking in the otherwise pointed discussion of language in the theatre, including the ambiguous position of the colonial languages, English, French, and Portuguese. He criticizes the glib use of minority dialects or accents for cheap

comedy, such as Malawian jokes in Soweto theatre, but passes over the fact that Amharic-speakers (the long-dominant but small minority in Ethiopia) were unwilling to accept a Woleita actor for the high tragic *Oedipus*, despite the fine quality of his acting (102). This moderation shades into problematic omission in the use of *Mavambo*, a mostly Shona play about the anti-colonial struggle rather than the more contemporary but more controversial bilingual Shona/Ndebele play, *Seri Kwesasa/ Okusemsamo*, about current ethnic tension in everyday life (17–18), as the showpiece of the concluding chapter, and in the discussion of conflicting reactions of Shona audiences and minority Ndebele audiences in Zimbabwe to the use of Ndebele to represent collusion with the erstwhile British colony; according to Kavanagh, the theatre company Zvido/Izifiso "were only reflecting colonial history as experienced by Shona speakers" and while they apparently could be made "sensitive to the use of language", he does not address the *post*-colonial experience of Ndebele speakers (at best exclusion from power and favour; at worst the suffering of systemic violence sanctioned by the Shona-dominated ZANU) that probably motivated their "incensed" response to the use of Ndebele for "swearwords" (103). While the author may have needed to avoid controversy to get the imprimatur of the Ministry of Culture and perhaps also the authorization of the book as a set text, the preference of the safe subject of the anti-colonial struggle rather than a more topical post-colonial conflict (comparable with the plays that animate Zakes Mda's more critical account of development theatre) blunts the critical edge of a book that otherwise provides useful guidance and illuminating commentary for both practitioners and scholars of theatre.

Whereas *Making popular theatre* offers readers information and analysis from a seasoned scholar-practitioner of theatre that has clearly intervened in the lives of Southern Africans, the essays in the collection, *South African theatre as/and intervention*, make a rather less convincing case for intervention. Based on a conference organized in London in 1996 by the two editors, the volume brings together some strong contributions, mostly by South Africans, with other uneven and under-researched papers by people whose engagement with South African theatre is enthusiastic but not always deeply informed. The overall unevenness of the papers, which might have been offset by a comprehensive bibliography and strong introduction, is rather accentuated by a list of works cited that tends to confirm the suspicion of superficial research with a surfeit of newspaper articles and misquoted conference papers. It is also not well served by an introduction that reproduces standard textbook stuff on the great men of the heyday of European political theatre, Bertolt Brecht and Erwin Piscator, without directly quoting either, where it might have taken the opportunity to review

the actual history of theatrical intervention in South Africa, a history that includes lesser-known European practitioners of theatrical intervention who were also contemporaries of Brecht, such as Andre Guyseghem and Kurt Bohm, as well as a remarkably syncretic and intercultural repertoire of political theatre in South Africa, which emerged with people such as Griffiths Motsieloa, Herbert Dhlomo, Guy Routh, and Gaur Radebe, and groups like the Bantu Peoples Theatre and the African National Theatre in the 1930s and 1940s, long before the work of Fugard and other internationally known practitioners. A review of this sort would not only have helped to localize the international traditions of political theatre, but also to fill the gap in the introduction between the historical remarks and the contemporary situation, a situation which, as I suggested at the outset, is more usefully described as post-anti-apartheid than as “post-election”, especially since the country saw two general elections and nationwide local elections before the publication of this book. Historical context may also have made the interviews more useful; in addition to Fugard, Fatima Dike and Reza de Wet certainly deserve attention, especially since some of their work is now in print (see references), but an interview with playwright/storyteller Gcina Mhlophe, whose plays and person appear in the photographs as well as in Marcia Blumberg’s paper, would have been more to the point than Janet Suzman.

At its worst, the volume includes tourist snapshots such as the Fugard reviews by Errol Durbach and Toby Silvermann Zinman, which are partly offset by the more illuminating Fugard readings by Jean Colleran and Dennis Walder and Robert Leyshon’s account of producing *The island* in Barbados, or the scrappy paper on “gay theatre” by Michael Arthur, who focuses exclusively on three performers he interviewed at the 1996 Grahamstown Festival and the allegedly “strong” influence of “the theory and practice of American gay theatre artists”(Arthur 1999:153). Arthur’s overemphasis on American influence ignores the history of gay performance in South Africa, in theatres and out. In addition to the drag acts discussed in Mark Gevisser’s and Edwin Cameron’s ground-breaking collection of research essays and memoirs *Defiant desire* (mentioned but not used here), any generalization about a new, “emerging” gay literature should also include its past and present, most obviously, the work of theatre practitioners such as Pieter-Dirk Uys, who was on show at the 1996 festival, but who had explored gay characters explicitly in his 1973 *Selle ou storie* long before he

adopted the female persona of Evita Bezuidenhout, as well as lesser-known contemporaries, Vincent Ebrahim and Bill Curry, who starred with him in the all-male production of Genet’s *The maids* at the integrated Space Theatre in 1974.

The stronger contributions to this volume are precisely those that use the history of theatre in South Africa to inform their discussion of current interventions. The keynote address by Ian Steadman makes judicious use of this history to provide a frame for a topical critique of black essentialism in South African cultural practice and criticism, calling for “critical vigilance as regards race and nationalism, particularly as scholarship moves from a focus on apartheid to ... the legacy of apartheid” (1999:25). Drawing on recent work by Isabel Hofmeyr and Bhekizwe Peterson, he argues against the “mythologization and nativization of the black aesthetic” (36), particularly in the popularizing and relatively uncritical promotion of an ahistorical “African Renaissance” in the South African media. David Alcock’s essay on contemporary physical theatre offers an excellent example of theatre moving beyond race-based categorization; although regrettably brief, his sketch of the work of the First Physical Theatre Company, Andrew Buckland, Ellis Pearson, and Theatre for Africa, among others, shows the common ground that can be established by combining dance, mime, storytelling and music hall comedy with often quite complex plots in plays such as *Horn of sorrow* and *The guardians of Eden*, which deals with the relationship between environmental degradation, threats to animals and human poverty in Africa.<sup>2</sup> Michael Carlin and Hazel Barnes each present analyses of their work with theatre in education, deploying drama to stage fictions that are politically as well as artistically compelling (such as David Lan’s *Desire*, about the responses of people in a particular village to the aftermath of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle) and to provide students a key opportunity to perform and so negotiate actual tensions among them. Veteran Africanist Bernth Lindfors (based in Texas) provides a sharp critique of the rise and fall of South Africa’s most hubristic theatre impresario, Mbongeni Ngema, and the debacle of the so-called AIDS musical, *Sarafina II*, but he might have supplemented quotation from the press with the more systematic key source of evidence, the Public Protector’s *Investigation of the play “Sarafina II”*, which, although publicly available for half a decade, has been all too rarely quoted.

If *South African theatre as/and intervention* does its important subject and its best contributors a disservice by sacrificing substantial research to up-to-datedness and thus blunting the critical edge of intervention, *Staging resistance* generally succeeds in showing how the most compelling political theatre draws on the past with an eye to the future even as it pointedly engages the conflicts of the present. Although the collection includes only one essay on South African drama (Blumberg's paper on 1990s revivals in Princeton and Johannesburg of Fugard's Port Elizabeth plays *Hello and goodbye* and *Boesman and Lena* respectively), the strongest contributions and the editors' lucid introduction to the terms of politics and theatre provide a framework both sturdy and elegant on which local analysis could rely. While Colleran and Spencer also begin with Brecht and Piscator, they use these standard references to distinguish between the received idea of political theatre as "putting politics on the stage" and a more complex, even ambiguous contemporary notion of "a cultural practice that self-consciously operates on the level of interrogation, critique and intervention, unable to stand outside the very institutions and attitudes it seeks to change" but including a range of theatrical activities from the staging of "overt political content" to performances that provoke differentiated political responses from different sectors of their audiences (Colleran and Spencer 1998:1). With this more nuanced definition in view, they urge caution to those who claim that overt political content itself amounts to intervention, while calling due attention to the significance of conflicting institutional, formal and social influences in the creation and the location of political meaning in performance.

The most compelling essays in this collection are those that highlight the institutional and social *location* of performance over and above any political content of the dramatic text. The opening essay, Lionel Pilkington's critique of the mythologizing tendency in Irish theatre historiography, is particularly strong. Pilkington challenges the standard history that conflates anticolonial resistance with the dominance of the elite literary model of Irish culture promoted by WB Yeats and other Anglo-Irish founders of the Abbey Theatre by showing how this dominant institution's defence of high literary culture has encouraged the marginalization or outright dismissal of more direct political performance in terms that appear to rely on aesthetic rather than partisan political criteria, but in fact exclude controversial topics and audiences from the legitimate

national stage. The ambiguous politics of aesthetics is also the subject of other essays in this first section on "resituating radical theatre". Lisa Jo Epstein analyses of historical and present tensions between Ariane Mnouchkine's *Théâtre du soleil*, which has made its reputation in the last quarter-century by high-art, high-prestige plays on political subjects from the French Revolution to the recent scandalous corruption in France's bloodbank, and Augusto Boal's *Centre du théâtre de l'opprimé* (Centre for the theatre of the oppressed), which has had a lower profile but perhaps more widespread social impact through the dissemination to teachers, social workers, and lay activists of many stripes of skills in the methods of *forum theatre*: staging and restaging local social conflicts in ways that encourage spectators to become *spect-actors* and thus also social agents able to change not only the outcome of the theatrical fiction they are playing but also the terms of conflicts that oppress them in their daily lives (see also Boal 1992). Una Chaudhuri's astute dissection of the presumptions of competing factions praising or condemning the attempt by Peter Brook and Jean-Claude Carrière to "universalize" or "Westernize" the national Indian epic, the *Mahabharatha* (see Pavis for sample views), achieves the apparently impossible: it offers a fresh and relatively impartial view of the pleasures as well as the pitfalls of the epic in performance. In the final section, "Towards a civic theatre", Tom Burvill offers a critical account of "two political theatre interventions in the Australian Bicentennial Year of 1988" – *Death at Balibo: the killing, by Indonesian forces, of five Australian newsmen during an attack on Balibo, East Timor, on October 16, 1975* by the Darwin Theatre Group in Australia's Northern Territory, and Sydney-based Sidetrack Theatre's *Whispers in the heart*, about the ambiguities of "aboriginal identity" – which are remarkable for dramatizing pointedly local concerns and for highlighting the global resonances of these concerns.

Although these and other noteworthy essays in *Staging resistance* may not appear at first glance to address South African concerns, they raise important questions about the recovery, creation, and even invention of national dramas that should be posed to promoters of the African Renaissance and other representations of usable pasts, presents, and futures in this country. On the large scale of national drama, Pilkington and Burvill call attention to the ambiguous politics of attempts, especially in self-consciously postcolonial countries, to revive as pure and authentic an identity suppressed by colonialism. From the

bottom up, Epstein's comments on the value of Boalian forum theatre for democratic social action resonate with local experiments using theatre to nurture *spect-action* at the grassroots (Kruger and Watson Shariff). Harry Elam and Alice Rayner return to the problematic history of national and racial representation in their analysis of "story and spectacle in *Venus*", African-American playwright Suzan-Lori Parks's dramatization of the life and exhibition of Saartje Baartman. These essays complement Steadman's local critique of constructed authenticity in *South African theatre as/and intervention*. In the middle section of *Staging resistance*, which focuses on "gender and national politics", Tracy Davis on Eve Merriam's *The club*, a feminist recasting of the patrons of an Edwardian male club, and Linda Kintz on the ambiguous politics of the anonymous but controversial American play, *Keely and Du*, about a pregnant woman chained to a bed by anti-abortion activists, highlight the ways in which women's bodies continue to bear the brunt of nationalist objectification by those who assume that women may be figureheads for the nation but that men are its chief agents, and thus resonate with South African analysis of nationalist and gendered staging in, for instance, the inauguration of Mandela in 1994 (Kruger 1999) or the opening and closing ceremonies of the 1995 World Cup (Maingard 1997).

As these examples suggest, the most compelling theatre scholarship does not stop at the critique of the politics of theatre, but also offers key tools for analysing the theatricality of politics, from the public roles and dramas that politicians adopt to impress or bamboozle the population to the role-playing skills that citizens and students can develop in forum theatre dramatizations of social and, in current educational parlance, "life-skills" conflicts and the critical acumen to see through the histrionics of the powerful. As formal theatre departments close across the country, the people best equipped to teach these skills have increasingly to ply their talents elsewhere, in the commercial sector or in non-formal education, or in university structures which may be more hospitable to arguments about developing skills than in elaborating theories about them. In this environment dominated by OBE utilitarianism, *Making people's theatre* may more readily find buyers than *Staging resistance* or *South African theatre as/and intervention*, but the strongest contributions in the collections provide players as well as readers with critical tools for understanding and interrogating the potential as well as the pitfalls of theatre, theory, and politics.

## Notes

- 1 For instance: Peter Brook's influential book, *The empty space*, appears in the text (37) but not in the list of sources; *gestus*, a key term, is discussed in the middle of a chapter (63), but not in the glossary; quotations, especially about the historical antecedents of political theatre (Brecht, Piscator, Soviet agitprop), are cited without the source reference which the target readers of the book would be unlikely to find otherwise. The absence of an index to help readers (or potential directors) locate discussion of specific plays is also frustrating.
- 2 Despite steady national and international touring since the mid-1980s, Theatre for Africa's scripts are not readily published, in part because their evocative miming does not reduce well to textual form. *Horn of sorrow* is in print, however; see Ellenbogen (1999).

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Elleke Boehmer. 2000. *Bloodlines*. Cape Town: David Philip.

KAREN SCHERZINGER

Too long a sacrifice

Can make a stone of the heart.

O when may it suffice?

That is heaven's part, our part  
To murmur name upon name,  
As a mother names her child  
When sleep at last has come  
On limbs that had run wild.  
(WB Yeats, "Easter 1916")

The events that inform *Bloodlines* – the Boer War and the early 1990s of a transforming South Africa – stand (rather asymmetrically, it is true) on either side of the famous Easter uprising in Ireland of 1916. But both Yeats's poem and the history of the Irish struggles are central to this remarkable novel about the emotional economies upon which the desire for reconciliation is built.

The novel's plot is complex, and almost impossible to render adequately in a review. It pivots around four women for whom sacrifice threatens to "make a stone of the heart". Firstly, there is Anthea, neophyte journalist for the *Natal Times* whose fiancé is killed in a bomb blast in South Clacton, Natal; and Dora, mother of Joseph Makken, the man who planted the bomb. Anthea, in an attempt to make sense of the senselessness of her fiancé's death, rather blunderingly seeks to establish connections with Dora, who is herself emotionally felled by her son's actions and subsequent imprisonment. Hesitantly, the two women become engaged in an increasingly mutual and difficult journey into Dora's past, in which they discover and rewrite the history of the "bloodlines" that connect them and, in so doing, make equally hesitant and flawed, but nonetheless meaningful progress towards reconciliation. This process, in turn, both introduces and is shaped by the story of Dollie, a Boer war *meid*, and Kathleen, the Irish nurse who introduces her story.

Boehmer draws Irish history into her novel, both as a direct influence on the lives of the protagonists and, perhaps more intriguingly, as a counterpoint for the acts of rage and their consequences which South Africa's past has elicited. The connection between South Africa and Ireland ranges from the particular to the general. The bomb blast that sparks off the events of the novel is intended to take place at a time (Easter) and a place (the post office) strongly reminiscent of Dublin's Easter uprising. The support of the Irish Republic for the Boers is central, as is the role of the Irish Brigadiers during the Boer War itself.

The letters and poetry of Yeats segue seamlessly into the appearance of Maud Gonne and she, in turn, contributes a yet further dimension to the part that the women in the novel play in the agonizing dance between activism and forgiveness.

Yeats's acknowledgement of the need to "murmur name upon name/ As a mother names her child", succinctly indexes the inclination of Boehmer's narrative. The litany of the names of the victims of the bomb blast ("Hart. Long. Stone. Cronje. The Harts and the Crosses, the Stones, the Longs, and the widowed Andries Cronje" (14)) are amplified and counterpointed by the evolution of the bomber-child's names, bequeathed with such care by his ancestors and tossed about by the carelessness of history. As Yeats biblically intones "MacDonagh and MacBride/And Connolly and Pearse", so Boehmer weaves together the names, identity and motivation of her characters. And, reminiscent of the mother in Yeats's poem, Boehmer's women are embroiled in what it means to give birth on troubled and contested soil to a boy whom they will still love when he is known only as the "Clacton bomber" or one of the dead "Clacton six".

The novel is at its strongest when Boehmer traces the exhilarating, perilous leaps of faith and imagination required if the desire for reconciliation is to be a present possibility, and when she does so in a context that embraces both the familiar and the strange: for example, when she draws a fine parallel between Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* and Dora's drunken and loyal friend, Gertie Maritz, who is driven to testify to and rehearse, in a mixture of despair and hope, the "cocked-up history" (105) that binds South Africans of all races together. The complex way in which Boehmer involves the reader in piecing together Dollie's story, too, is extraordinarily accomplished and situates the reader at the forefront of the evolution of meaning – and, by association, reconciliation – in the novel.

It is at its weakest when it fails to rein in implausibility. I found Anthea's motives inadequately substantiated (just how self-reflexive about anger and loss can even the most open-hearted reader expect a young, white, "fried polony and chips"-eating university dropout to be?), an unease only exacerbated by her desire, towards the end of the novel, to participate in applications for Joseph's release and actually to wear his clothing. This weakness leads to a lack of

credibility at the core of the novel that threatens its balance.

Similarly, I found that a tendency to stereotype some of the characters disappointing in a novel that seeks explicitly to overthrow easy assumptions about the limits of ordinary people to overcome unbearable loss. At one extreme, Connie, Anthea's mother, is a predictably rich, white, ineffectual suburban housewife with neither sense nor compassion, and is represented rather cheaply by a metonymic "blue plastic earring" and a tendency to call her daughter "darling" (89); her father is an emotional wasteland who smells "clean like a new car" (89). At the other extreme, and equally predictably, Joseph Makken, the bomber, is your typically misunderstood good guy: black and angry (he swears a lot), but "such good company at a party" (110) and above all, good to his mom, to whom he, naturally, could never tell a lie (110). Pity about the six dead people ...

But these flaws are surely forgivable, even to be expected, in a novel such as this, which bravely tackles the almost ineffable possibilities thrown up by the moral and emotional shifting sands upon which reconciliation is based. This is an original, complex and ambitious novel which epitomizes Yeats's vision of the "terrible beauty" that is "born" of revolution, and which contributes significantly to the extraordinary body of literature that is being irritated into existence by the still-to-settle dust of our recent past.

*Postcolonizing the commonwealth: studies in literature and culture.* Rowland Smith (ed). 2000. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

#### KHOMBE MANGWANDA

This volume contains selected papers from the "Commonwealth in Canada" conference held in 1997 at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. The collection presents a multifaceted study of postcoloniality. In a short review it is impossible to do full justice to all of the essays in this volume. Therefore, I will limit my comments to a select few.

Edward Baugh's piece, entitled "Postcolonial/commonwealth studies in the Caribbean: points of

difference”, offers the reader a useful overview of the state of postcolonial studies in the three English departments of the University of West Indies. He shows how the change of name from Department of English into Department of Literatures in English reflects a desire to displace the focus from a metropolitan centre to a new centre located in what was seen as the periphery. In her very persuasive contribution, Jacqueline Bardolph describes the present state of postcolonial studies in France and analyses the limited attention given to the field. She shows how the interest in and teaching of this field are closely linked with the trend in continental Europe, and particularly in French universities, to view postcolonial studies as an appendix to English literature and also as a further proof of the foreignness of English. Another important obstacle, Bardolph points out, is the traditional French approach to texts that tends to emphasize the linguistic aspect of a text over its content, and of form over cultural aspects. Describing the French approach to postcolonial studies as more applied than theoretical, she laments that the current emphasis on “la francophonie” might have a negative impact on postcolonial studies, for it means the neglect of a rich body of literature for the sake of favouring texts in the French language. Despite this, Bardolph reports a growing interest in France in this field as reflected partially in the existence of specialised journals like *Commonwealth* and in the inclusion of postcolonial studies in most postgraduate programmes.

Alan Lawson’s paper on the discourse of land ownership and Stephen Slemon’s essay on the discourse of mountaineering are interesting to read. Lawson offers invaluable insights into the tropes of proximity that naturalize and explain settler-aborigine relations. Slemon makes an interesting connection between the colonial naming of Mount Everest, its location at the border of the British Empire, and the association of the Mountain with imperial tropes of colonial control, exploration, conquest, travel and technical superiority.

Perhaps the most interesting essays in the collection from a South African perspective are those by Johan U Jacobs, Sheila Roberts, Margaret J Daymond, and Cherry Clayton. Jacobs devotes an illuminating paper to the subject of *métissage* in Breyten Breytenbach’s *Return to paradise*. He shows how the novel reveals the true meaning of Breytenbach’s claim to both

Afrikaner/South African and African identity. *Return to paradise*, he argues, is really about the connection between these different identities, Breytenbach’s multiple identities. Basing his argument on an examination of the different characters in the novel and its diverse discourses, Jacobs suggests that Breytenbach projects himself in the characters of Afrika, Walker, Mr Ixelle and Elixé, and that the narrative maps through its typography his South African past. We get a useful overview of Afrikaans texts written in the magical realist mode in Sheila Roberts’s paper entitled “Inheritance in question: magical realist mode in Afrikaans fiction”. Particularly significant is Roberts’s suggestion that the growing popularity of Afrikaans magical realism speaks of Afrikaners’ desire to write their emerging marginality. Daymond’s essay focuses on letters by Natal settler women in order to elucidate the positionality of settler women within the economy of imperialism. We are familiar with the kind of discussion she provides on the doubleness of settler women, but Daymond offers an insightful rethinking of this type of writing by pointing to the way differences in social and economic status, as well as the nature of the targeted audience, affect on the encounters of the two women writers with the natives. Cherry Clayton’s essay on Lauretta Ngcobo’s *And they didn’t die* deals with gender within the context of resistance literature. Behind the argument one hears echoes of Fanon and Said. The paper is important in showing what it meant to be a rural woman in the context of transition from a system of socio-economic, political, cultural and sexual oppression to the current dispensation.

Readers interested in Salman Rushdie are served with two essays by Susan Spearey and Mac Fenwick. Spearey explores the concepts of homeliness and its opposite, displacement, and their relationship to questions of responsibility in Rushdie’s *Shame*. This is a solidly argued paper. Mac Fenwick’s paper provides an interesting, if too brief, presentation of the different perspectives by Kamau Brathwaite, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Salman Rushdie on the cross-cultural processes of globalization.

One of the strengths of this collection lies in the sheer variety of perspectives taken by the contributors. Though the essays are not of even quality, this volume is a valuable contribution to the study of postcoloniality.

# Notes on contributors

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**Finuala Dowling** is a freelance writer and materials developer who lives in Cape Town and tutors students at the Unisa regional office.

**Khombe Mangwanda** completed a doctorate in African literature and teaches English for Special Purposes and African Literature in the department of English at Unisa.

**Loren Kruger** graduated from UCT and Cornell and currently teaches at the University of Chicago. She is the author of *The national stage* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), *The drama of South Africa* (Routledge, 1999) and a range of articles, on topics such as “Soul City” (in *Research in African Literatures*) and, with Patricia Watson Shariff, on educational comics in SA (in *Poetics Today*).

**Johannes van Jerusalem** – after growing dissatisfaction with a previous name and insomniac nights with a raving, vampirish Blake, Johannes van Jerusalem was born somewhere last year. Johannes is a regular, enthusiastic participant in the Bekgeveg/Poetry Slam roadshow, a former user of hallucinogenic substances, an avid acolyte of various saints and famous sinners, an aspirant prophet, and above all he loves swinging his hips to the rhythm of a nice hot samba and kissing beautiful girls on their sweet lips ...

**Emmanuel Mgqwashu** is carrying out doctoral research into the issues of academic discourse and pedagogy in South African universities. His interest in this area developed after he completed a BPaed degree and an Honours degree in English Studies. During this time he proposed a language course for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and visited Cambridge, Oxford and SOAS.

**Karen Scherzinger** wrote her doctoral thesis on Henry James and aesthetic failure and works in the Department of English at Unisa as Course Co-ordinator for postgraduate studies. Her interests include American studies, of which she is an tireless supporter, and popular culture.

**Christine Marshall** lectures in the Department of English at Unisa. Her academic interest include various aspects of the politics and methods of language teaching in southern Africa, as well as women’s writing.

**Judith Lütge Coullie** is a senior lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Durban-Westville. After completing her PhD at Syracuse University, New York State, she has pursued an enduring interest in autobiography from theoretical and practical viewpoints.

**Samantha Naidu** is a PhD student, Department of English, Rhodes University. Topic: “Describing an Indian feminist aesthetic: an examination of selected prose fiction by Indian women writers.” Her MA, also at Rhodes: “Transcribing tales, creating cultural identities: an analysis of selected English texts of Xhosa folktales.” She is a contributor to the Learning Online SA Literary Encyclopaedia.

**Gail Fincham** teaches in the Department of English at UCT, where her research interests include intersections

between metropolitan and postcolonial literatures. She is co-editor of *Under postcolonial eyes: Joseph Conrad after empire* (UCT Press, 1996); Chief Editor: *Conrad at the millennium* (Columbia University Press, 2001); co-convened, with Attie de Lange, University of Potchefstroom, the first Conrad conference in Africa, in 1998, as a centennial celebration of the publication of *Heart of darkness*. Lives in Cape Town with her English husband Jonathan Geidt and their two small adopted children.

**Elizabeth Trew** was born in Cape Town, worked as a librarian and taught English to refugees and immigrants in England. Returned after a long exile. Teaches English language and communication at Wits. Poems published in magazines in England and South Africa.

**Jillian Hamilton** was born in Cape Town, now living in Durban, mother of three sons and a “new” grandma. She is lucky enough to be in early retirement and to have the time to indulge her delight in adventuring with words, the playthings of the poet.

**Gus Ferguson** successfully completed English I through UNISA circa 1974. His brilliant assignment on *A passage to India* earned him a well-deserved 57%. Sadly lacking discipline, he gave up a promising academic career to concentrate on light verse which emphasised the need for interspecies amity.

**Ian Tromp** writes regularly for *TLS*, *Poetry Review* and *Poetry*. He has prose forthcoming in *Verse* and poetry in *Agenda*. He currently lives in a Buddhist community in Cambridge, England.