Catalogue as book
for U Coll.

Literature in South Africa Today

SPECIAL ISSUE

68

DECEMBER 1986

THEORIA

*Literature
in South Africa
Today*

Edited by M. CHAPMAN and M. DAYMOND

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The annual subscription for *Theoria* is

Individuals	R9,00 per annum (plus GST)
Institutions	R12,00 per annum (plus GST)

Payments should be sent to:

The Secretary
University of Natal Press
P. O. Box 375
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3200 South Africa

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INTRODUCTION

This special issue of *Theoria* presents a selection of papers from the annual conference of the Association of University English Teachers of Southern Africa (AUETSA), which was held at the University of Natal, in Durban, from 1 4 July, 1986. As the title 'Literature in South Africa Today' indicates, the volume reflects current interests and directions in English studies in this country, and topics range from Shakespeare to Breyten Breytenbach with debate on the function and significance of literary education at a time of social crisis. The fact that the conference began less than a month after the declaration of the most recent official State of Emergency, gave an added bite to our deliberations on the functions of the critic and the teacher of literature.

In the concluding paper reprinted here, for example, Anton van der Hoven summarises the 're-readings' of traditional assumptions that have increasingly characterised English studies over the last ten years in South Africa and abroad. Earlier confidence that a literary text is humanising in its moral example and universally relevant has come under sustained literary and political attack. Critics in the last decade have begun to see their task as the exploration of the complex relationship between the text, the socio-historical context from which it has emerged, and the context within which it is being read today. In this way, the revered classics of English literature are no longer immutable in their meaning, and the resultant questionings and tensions produced under such purposes are evident in several of the papers included in this volume. Martin Orkin's critique of *Othello*, evincing an awareness of our post-colonial present, takes cognisance of the English colonial enterprise of the Elizabethans; similarly Malvern van Wyk Smith investigates some of the earliest European myths of Africa. The sociological present also provides the frame of reference for Michael Chapman's plea for a supple historical sense in reading Roy Campbell's South African lyrics of the 1920s. In his discussion of individuality and cultural definition in Camara Laye's *African Child*, Abner Nyamende emphasises the need, in the African context, to reassess the Western-literary notion of novelistic interiority as an index of value. J U Jacobs's article on Breytenbach's prison book is a reminder that South African

writers have so often gained powerful possibilities of human and social exploration by ignoring customary divisions between fact and fictional representation, and Wendy Woodward, in her article on narrative form in Christina Stead, offers the insights of feminist studies to challenge the traditionally male-dominated field of literary language and criticism. In fact, the need for discourse analysis — whether we are reading imaginative works or the newspaper — is the point of Malcolm McKenzie's socio-linguistic approach, while the probing of what, by now, may have come to seem an author's apparently natural ways of seeing and thinking also marks two of the more 'traditional' papers, Audrey F Cahill's on George Eliot and W H Bizley's on T S Eliot as a Decadent.

Several factors influenced the final selection. As the conference took place in Durban, we had available a relatively large number of contributions from Natal, while some participants had already committed their papers to other journals. In addition, we had to take into account the fact that AUETSA invites speakers either to deliver a twenty-minute paper or to talk to a lengthier paper which has often been prepared in advance for publication. Not unexpectedly, the latter usually proved to be the most suitable for inclusion in the present volume.

What this special issue shows, negatively so, on the whole, is that the enormous practical problems attendant on education in a changing South Africa, including various needs for wise and radical syllabus reconstruction, have to be yet more squarely confronted. With the views of new European thinkers swiftly and often stridently espoused, a persistent, albeit modified Eurocentrism still, perhaps inevitably, governs the perceptions and preferences of a largely white academic community. On the positive side, however, the challenges to the assumption that meaning resides naturally within the text, which were brought to criticism by the semiotics of structuralism and by neo-Marxism's emphasis on a writer's and reader's ideology, have sharpened a traditionally liberal and humanistic activity. If there was a certain reluctance by many of the speakers to surrender a critical emphasis on the literary text itself to an interest in sociology and history, there was at the same time an acute awareness that English studies in South Africa today cannot afford to favour aesthetic sensibility, fine conscience and

formal excellence over and above the heterogeneity of social purpose and exchange. The present selection stands as both a record of the 1986 conference and a spur to further debate.

We would like to thank the regular editors of *Theoria* for allowing AUETSA to have this special issue, and the publishers for allowing us the extra length required for a representative selection of essays. Our thanks are also due to two other South African publishers, Ad Donker and David Philip, for their generous help in enabling us to print enough copies of this issue for it to reach the wider audience we think it deserves. Finally, we have to thank the University of Natal for hosting the 1986 AUETSA conference and for its generosity, in stringent times, in helping with this publication.

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CIVILITY AND THE ENGLISH COLONIAL ENTERPRISE NOTES ON SHAKESPEARE'S *OTHELLO*

by MARTIN ORKIN

It is tempting to believe that the choice in *Othello* of the locations Venice and Cyprus is not merely the consequence of the fact that the most likely source of the play, Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, published in Venice in 1566, so situates the tale of the Moor and Desdemona.[1] Evidence suggests that the Venetian state and its island Cyprus, for at least the influential and powerful élite in early seventeenth-century audiences watching *Othello*, would have invited keen, pointed interest.

For one thing, Venice, a great presence in the Mediterranean in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, operated in ways suggesting a colonial power. Cyprus, which the Venetians acquired, was the main Levantine source of sugar; when Portugal was able to bring the price of sugar down, the Venetians put their island to use, in addition to the production of sugar, by expanding the production of cotton.[2] By the end of the fifteenth century Venice had no real competitor in supplying cotton to the fustian industry in Europe, and it went on marketing cotton for decades, even after it lost Cyprus to the Turks in 1571.[3]

For another, the English audiences that sat down to watch the first performances of *Othello* belonged to a nation that was itself soon to undertake colonisation in the New World. Some Englishmen had argued for and attempted unsuccessfully to initiate such colonisation in the sixteenth century.[4] Despite their failure, and the war with Spain, continuing expansion of trade overseas helped to make future colonisation a possibility. Thus, the Muscovy Company and the commercial explorations of Antony Jenkinson across Russia to Persia contributed to the emergence of a prosperous group of Jacobean merchants and investors with capital and the will to expand.[5] In 1601 the first expedition of the East India Company set out, to return with a million pounds of pepper and spice and enormous profit for investors.[6] And the Levant company which operated in the Mediterranean was becoming increasingly important. Moreover its flourishing trade with Turkey coincided with a decline, after 1600, in Venetian

domination of the commercial trade between the Orient and Europe and in its shipping, shipbuilding and woollen cloth industries.[7]

When James made peace with Spain the possibility of trade and expansion in the New World opened up even further.[8] The extent of England's mercantile growth, to say nothing of the examples of Spain and Portugal, encouraged interest in possible colonisation.[9] Those merchants, administrators and investors in Shakespeare's first audiences, aware of the increasing strength of England's thrust into the Mediterranean and toying with ideas of colonisation, might have been especially interested in a play presenting the state of Venice (and its island Cyprus) in its heyday.[10] Even in the first decades of the seventeenth century, despite the profound factors that were producing its inevitable decline, Venice 'seemed to shine very brightly . . . [although] it was glitter and facade by then'.[11] England, which had in the late Middle Ages been a colony of Europe, an exporter of raw materials (wool) for continental manufacturers, itself underwent, as the sixteenth century unfolded, a transition from a colonial to a core state.[12] In terms of Wallerstein's account, too, the Venice-Cyprus conjunction might have offered more than simply the allure of the exotic to many in the early seventeenth-century English audience.

Other factors also invite recognition that *Othello* in part suggests, draws upon and contributes to the discourse of colonialism. If English colonisation of the New World had, in most senses, yet to commence at the beginning of the seventeenth century, this was not the case within the British Isles. There, a process akin to colonisation was under way in Wales and, especially, in Ireland.[13] British penetration into Ireland had been going on since the 1530s and it sought

> to consolidate and expand British political control and economic exploitation of a strategic marginal area previously ònly partially under British authority.[14]

If we recognise, in the context of these developments, the inevitable emergence of a discourse of colonialism, it received further impetus from the encounters of explorers and adventurers in Africa, and the travel writing about Africa that, as a result, began to appear especially in the sixteenth century.[15] Although English involvement in slavery only began well into

the seventeenth century, the English were certainly aware of the practice of slavery amongst other nations. Winthrop Jordan argues that their reaction to the people of Africa was affected not only by this or other factors but markedly, in profound and subtle ways, by the advent of English Protestantism.[16] The black peoples of Africa encountered in voyages of discovery and described in travel writing at precisely this time provided a convenient repository for all that was disturbing, disordered, and to be feared within the English self, and within English society. The uncontrollable in this world was thus conveniently situated in the 'other'. This was an important contributory factor in the growth of English racism; its pertinence in the discourse of colonialism must be equally evident.

Paul Brown's account of masterlessness and savagism helps us to turn from these factors to certain aspects of the discourse of colonialism interesting for *Othello*:

> Masterlessness analyses wandering or unfixed and unsupervised elements located in the internal margins of civil society . . . . Savagism probes and categorises alien cultures on the external margins of expanding civil power . . . . At the same time as they serve to define the other, such discursive practices refer back to those conditions which constitute civility itself. Masterlessness reveals the mastered (submissive, observed, supervised, deferential) and masterful (powerful, observing, supervising, teleological) nature of civil society. Savagism (a-sociality and untrammelled libidinality) reveals the necessity of psychic and institutional order and direction in the civil régime.[17]

The dominant order in the metropolis, which regards itself and the existing relationships of domination and subordination of which it is part as the embodiment of civility, sends its functionaries to operate the colonial apparatus at the periphery.[18] There, its representatives, in turn, stand for civility and assert mastery over the population subordinated to the colonial power, contesting the masterlessness and savagism that in one way or another challenges that mastery.

It is in the context of such discourse that Othello's role as Christian Commander of Cyprus may be partly apprehended. Othello represents the masterful civil society which must deal

both with the submissive Cypriot population and with the alien Turkish power (and culture) which threatens the periphery of Venetian dominance. His reaction whilst still in Venice, to the play's first presentation of civil disorder –

> Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.
> Good signior, you shall more command with years
> Than with your weapons –   (I. ii. 61)[19]

reflects not only martial and military confidence but shows how this is allied to notions of decorum and faith in the capacity of the dominant class to dispense justice. At the end of the first act this faith appears justified. He also assures the principals of Venetian power that Desdemona's presence in Cyprus will not impede in any way his ability to administer that power. This has been frequently misread as an indication of Othello's sexual limitations; in fact his commitment to an absolute respect for civility is presented as a deliberate contrast to Iago's already much bruited – to the audience – self-interest and cynicism about the dominant order he serves.

Othello's sense of his position as representative of a colonial power that must maintain civility is evident not only in his attitude towards sexual pleasure as potentially subversive, but in his response, on Cyprus itself, to the potential threat which disorder – attendant upon the quarrel which Iago has stage-managed – poses:

> Are we turn'd Turks and to ourselves do that
> Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?
> For Christian shame put by this barbarous brawl.
> He that stirs next to carve for his own rage
> Holds his soul light; he dies upon his motion.
> Silence that dreadful bell, it frights the isle
> From her propriety.   (II. iii. 176)

Recognising Montano's gravity and stillness, and upbraiding him 'that you unlace your reputation thus' (II. iii. 194), Othello turns with angry concern to the effect that this brawling amongst the military apparatus of the dominant colonial class will have upon the subordinate classes of the island:

> What, in a town of war,
> Yet wild, the people's hearts brimful of fear,
> To manage private and domestic quarrel?
> In night, and on the court and guard of safety?
> 'Tis monstrous.   (II.iii.217)

Behind this language lies the colonial ruler's fear of disorder; it suggests the reaction of the ruling class to that 'other' which is 'a threat around which the governing classes might mobilise'.[20] The 'other' becomes feared as barbarous and disruptive, requiring order and civility.

This fear of the 'other' operated in the metropolis as well as on the periphery. As I hinted earlier, recent critical work has made only too clear the extent to which the Tudor and Stuart monarchies were not absolute in power, and the extent to which we need to set, against the ideologies of hierarchy, the actual political, social and economic history of the age. Fear of difference, of rebellion, of the unmanageable in political and administrative contexts, produced in the ruling class a need to define that 'other' against which the norms of its own civility could be continually measured. Thus Brown describes the

> socially specific production of the 'masterless man', the ungoverned and unsupervised man without the restraining resources of social organisation, [who is] an embodiment of directionless and indiscriminate desire. Masterless types were discerned in royal proclamations to exist in the very suburbs of the capital.[21]

Such fear, and the way it may be dealt with by the dominant classes within the metropolitan social order as well as at the periphery, manifests itself in *Othello*, not only in Act II but at the end of the play. There Othello is brought to the recognition that, as a ruler who should embody civility he has, through his mistake, enacted a disordered justice that is in fact murder. Moreover the disruptive impulses at work have come partly from within himself. After reaffirming his sense of his identity in his past loyalty and service to the state, his past role as military and administrative representative of civility, he applies to himself the image of the 'other', that which lies beyond what constitutes civility. It is as infidel

that he punishes that within, which has produced disruption:

> Set you down this;
> And say besides, that in Aleppo once
> Where a malignant and turban'd Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,
> I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him — thus.   (V.ii.356)

Othello's attitudes in the final act, then, reflect the position he holds as devoted servant as well as member of the dominant class, as military and colonial administrator on the periphery of the state's power. He is earlier in the play revered and respected by the Venetians precisely because he so ably represents and defends their interests. In the case of any agent of the dominant classes, it might be observed, such able service depends in part upon the perpetuation of certain myths — amongst them, as we have just seen, the displacement of profoundly based fears of disorder or internal dissension onto the 'other'.[22] The journey Othello takes in the play, however, leads him by its end to discover that his own class and being is constituted not merely in the mastery of civility but in antagonisms, conflict, contradiction as well. Moreover his error itself demonstrates, for the audience, the potential within the dominant order, or its representatives in the colonial apparatus on the periphery, for malfunction and violence. This recognition is even more fully and more alarmingly made in the presentation of Iago.

Despite the temptation to pursue this kind of reading, the text establishes certain limits beyond which it seems unwise to go. Thus it is clear that, apart from the references Othello makes in Act II to the subordinate order on Cyprus, the 'colonised' are almost completely absent. This is similar to the presentation of the majority of the population in most of Shakespeare's plays: with the slight exception of *King Lear* and certain elements in *Measure for Measure*, the masses are marginalised as much as possible, certainly in the plays likely to have been written in the period 1601—6. If the location of Venice and Cyprus does indeed invite a reading that takes the discourse of colonialism into account, it must be emphasised, nevertheless, that the play remains mainly concerned not with the relationship between coloniser and colonised, but with the

internal workings of the governing class itself. This is presented at first within the relative safety of metropolitan Venice, where the justice of the governing class is seen to work successfully in containing possible disruption. The play then shifts to the more vulnerable and exposed periphery of Cyprus. Here the operation of the colonial apparatus, in the absence of the principals of Venetian power, proves subject to inner dissension, disruption and self-destruction.

Of anyone in the play, Iago offers the most striking example of untrammelled libidinality and a-sociality which the discourse of colonialism defines as the marks of savagism. His much discussed cynicism about love and sex, his libidinous imagination, language and suggestions about the sexual behaviour of those around him, and his tendency to project these fevered impulses onto Othello, all contrast starkly with Othello's capacity for love, his Christian sense of marriage, his hatred of adultery. Iago's secret a-sociality is identified at the start of the play; during the course of it he is responsible for the disruption of the lives of Emilia, Cassio, Desdemona and Othello. Himself a member of the dominant colonial order, he clearly opposes his own attitude to service to that expressed in Othello's language and behaviour:

> You shall mark
> Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave
> That (doting on his own obsequious bondage)
> Wears out his time, much like his master's ass,
> For nought but provender, and when he's old, cashier'd.
>
> (I.i.48)

Iago argues that the exploitative and dominant master hides the real character of his dominance over the servant behind concepts of duty and loyalty. His view in effect asserts that service and mastery will always entail exploitation. Moreover, he determines upon engineering the subversion of his master's position by enacting the very principle he has identified operating in the legitimation of service by the ruling class. He hides his thrust to dominate Othello by presenting the relationship under the aegis of 'honesty' and under alleged adherence to traditional doctrines about loyal service.

Stephen Greenblatt has described the skill which Iago displays, not merely in hiding his motives but in using language in

order to manipulate and redirect the behaviour of others, and his skill in taking advantage of the opportune and unprepared-for moment, as characteristic of a Renaissance tendency, which he calls improvisation.[23] He suggests that amongst Iago's skills are to be found 'a sharp eye for the surfaces of social existence . . . a kind of reductive grasp of human possibilities'. He is 'responsive to habitual and self-limiting forms of discourse', and 'demonically sensitive to the way individuals interpret discourse, to the signals they ignore and those to which they respond'.[24] To illustrate other Renaissance instances of this art of improvisation, Greenblatt recounts a story told by Peter Martyr, in 1525, about certain Spanish raids upon islands in the Lucayas (now called the Bahamas) in order to replete a serious labour shortage which the Spaniards were encountering in their gold mines:

> Two ships reached an outlying island . . . where they were received with awe and trust. The Spanish learned through their interpreters that the natives believed that after death their souls were first purged of their sins in icy northern mountains . . . then borne to a paradisial island in the south . . . . When the Spanish understood these imaginations, writes Martyr, they proceeded to persuade the natives 'that they came from those places, where they should see their parents, and children, and all their kindred and friends that were dead: and should enjoy all kinds of delights, together with the embrace-ments and fruition of beloved things'. Thus deceived, the entire population of the island passed 'singing and rejoicing,' Martyr says, 'onto the ships and were taken to the gold mines of Hispaniola'.[25]

Greenblatt argues that this skill of improvisation displays 'the ability both to capitalise on the unforseen and to trans-form given material into one's own scenario . . . .'[26] And he suggests that such improvisation depends upon

> the ability and willingness to play a role, to transform oneself, if only for a brief period and with mental reservations, into another . . . . Such role-playing in turn depends upon the transformation of another's reality into a manipulable fiction.[27]

In *Othello*, however, Iago, unlike the Spaniards, turns these skills against members of his own class — this includes Roderigo, Emilia, Cassio and Desdemona, as well as Othello. Greenblatt suggests he is able to do this, firstly, because of the general submission of the characters in *Othello* to *narrativity*. They perceive themselves in terms of narrative, as in the tale Othello offers about his past and as in Desdemona's response to that tale.[28] Iago 'knows that an identity that has been fashioned as a story can be unfashioned, refashioned, inscribed anew in a different narrative'.[29] Moreover, Iago is able to play on Othello's 'buried perceptions of his own sexual relations with Desdemona as adulterous'.[30] This is possible not because of the position Othello holds nor because of his 'Moorish' past. It is possible primarily because of that in Othello which connects with 'the centuries-old Christian doctrine of sexuality, policed socially and psychically . . . by confession',[31] confession being the institution through which 'the larger order of authority and submission within which marriage takes its rightful place'[32] is affirmed. Desdemona's submission to Othello is total and it implies a deeply erotic response to him. This, suggests Greenblatt, has in turn a violent and unsettling effect upon Othello because, even as it prompts mutual thriving in love, it incites what is also considered to be the vice of bad blood.[33] Both Catholic and Protestant writing condemned excess in marital love as akin to adultery. Iago's own fevered projections of adultery onto Othello, and his attitude to sexual behaviour reflects ultimately a similar impulse to demonise sexual desire, to punish it, to displace it onto the 'other'. His cynicism does not free him from these impulses; it is precisely his understanding of such fear that enables him to gain entry into Othello's narrative fashioning of Desdemona.

I have elsewhere discussed the way in which Iago first attempts to attack Othello by exploiting the facts of Othello's past in slavery and that which still makes him partly a stranger in Venice.[34] With such facts the text almost deliberately highlights a surface ambiguity in Othello which suggests points of connection with the 'other', that which lies beyond the domain of civility. These superficial points of connection encouraged the emergence, in the nineteenth century especially, of the view of Othello as 'erring barbarian' and gave rise to the — in my opinion — racist tradition of criticism,

popularised in the twentieth century by writers such as Eliot, Leavis and Lerner.[35] But the text itself, situating Othello within the dominant class not beyond it, also invests Othello with attributes which make him, of that class, an exemplar. Apart from his royal origins and the largeness of his language and imaginative vision of love, Othello's role as representative of a Christian state against the Turks should not be underestimated. Othello is likely to have had, for those members of his first audiences aware of the significance of the victory at Lepanto, heroic significance as a Christian participant in a larger struggle. As important, Othello manifests the most impressive attempt in the play, tragically mistaken though it becomes, to live according to a Christian sense of honourable love and justice.

These elements locate Othello within the dominant order in a profound and important way. Iago's early attempts to re-align Othello by means of those facts connecting him to the 'other', and the racist innuendo he draws upon to suggest them, prove impotent (although once Othello's equilibrium has been disturbed he attempts, in referring to Venetian custom, for instance, to exploit these factors once more). When these attempts to exploit Othello's strangeness fail, Iago turns to the Christian doctrine of sexuality. He abandons, in other words, the attempt to locate disorder in Othello himself, and finds it instead, in Othello's bed, in Desdemona. The complex attitudes relating to sexuality, which Greenblatt describes, are ones that also operate in profound ways for the Jacobean audience — an audience which shares Othello's religion. Through his exploitation of these complexities within the culture of the dominant class Iago is thus able to reverse the process of displacement. He recalls the displaced and demonised desire that has been lodged in the libidinous and uncontrollable 'other', and he redirects it into Desdemona. Iago knows that this discovery of disorder within his class and within his marriage will prompt in the commander the impulse to punish and to eradicate. All the more so because the suggestion of illegitimate sexuality parallels, as it must for all intense relationships within this culture, that desire within Othello's own breast. Such desires, inevitable in any deeply felt erotic relationship, suggest deep-rooted complexities within this culture, because they are at the same time defined within Christian discourse as themselves adulterous. If Othello

had even remotely within him the marks of savagism he would not be as vulnerable as Iago finds he is.

The doctrines of civility, order and hierarchy used by the dominant colonising order to legitimate its hegemony, allege unity within that order and within its agents. In *Othello* the range of disturbing ambiguities that emerges from events on Cyprus points to the text's unease about this claim. If Othello's very connection with the culture of which he is himself one of the potent representatives renders him vulnerable, the ambiguities in the behaviour of Iago are even more disturbing. His mode of utterance and his manipulation of judicial procedures in Acts II and III, together with his own cynicism about the internal workings of the civil administrative apparatus, and about its experience of sexuality, present throughout the play clear demonstration of the extent to which agents of the dominant class may actually operate — they may do so in ways totally disconnected from those traditional values often used to legitimate the hegemony of the dominant order, or its operation on the periphery.[36] Furthermore, ambiguity is especially evident in the deadly antagonisms within the whole military/colonial apparatus that are revealed as the play unfolds. In the absence of the ruler after Act I the military/colonial apparatus on Cyprus proves subject to internal division, antagonism, and violence. The disruptive savagism that, in terms of the discourse of colonialism, should reside in the 'other' and provide for the governing class a unifying factor confirming a civility that radiates psychic and institutional order is shown instead, in multiple ways, to reside within that dominant class.

Such unease seems implicitly to reflect upon the real nature of that civilised government which was through its agents asserting its mastery in Ireland and dreaming, at least, of asserting it elsewhere. Side by side with this recognition of unease, we may, finally, set Greenblatt's description of Spenser, one of the masters, as he calls him, of English civility:

> ... in art and in life, his conception of identity ... is wedded to his conception of power, and after 1580 of colonial power. For all Spenser's claims of relation to the noble Spensers of Wormleighton and Althorp, he remains a 'poor boy' as he is designated in the Merchant

Taylor's school and at Cambridge, until Ireland . . . . For
what services, we ask, was Spenser being rewarded? And
we answer blandly, for being a colonial administrator.
But the answer, which implies pushing papers in a Dublin
office through endless days of tedium, is an evasion.
Spenser's own account presses in upon us the fact that
he was involved intimately, on an almost daily basis,
throughout the island, in the destruction of the Hiberno-
Norman civilisation, the exercise of a brutal force that
had few if any of the romantic trappings with which
Elizabeth contrived to soften it at home. Here, on the
periphery, Spenser was an agent of and an apologist for
massacre, the burning of mean hovels, and of crops with
the deliberate intention of starving the inhabitants,
forced relocation of peoples, the manipulation of treason
charges so as to facilitate the seizure of lands, the end-
less repetition of acts of military 'justice' calculated to
intimidate and break the spirit . . . . Civility is won
through the exercise of violence over what is deemed
barbarous and evil . . . love and leisure are not moments
set apart from this process but its rewards.[37]

In the two plays Shakespeare seems most likely to have
turned to after *Othello, King Lear* and *Macbeth*, we may
detect this unease about the workings of power, even more
intensely pursued, but moved back again from the periphery
to the metropolis.

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NOTES

1. See Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources* (London: Methuen, 1957), pp.
   122–140.
2. Frederic C. Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins
   University Press, 1973), pp. 297–8. I rely in this article upon certain argu-
   ments in the work of Immanuel Wallerstein who, in *The Capitalist World-
   Economy* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1979), writes about the nascent European
   world-economy of the sixteenth century.
3. Lane, *Venice*, p. 298.
4. Louis B. Wright, 'Colonial Developments in the Reign of James I', in *The
   Reign of James VI and I*, ed. A. G. R. Smith (London: Macmillan, 1973),
   pp. 123–129, mentions the experiences of Sir Humphrey Gilbert and his
   half-brother Sir Walter Ralegh respectively in Newfoundland and North
   Carolina.

5. Wright, p. 124.
6 Wright, p. 124.
7. Brian Dietz, 'England's Overseas Trade in the Reign of James I', in *The Reign of James VI and I*, pp. 106–122.
8. James began negotiations with Spain on his accession in 1603, which led to peace in 1604.
9. Wright, p. 125, writes that Ralegh's early 'emphasis on silk, cotton, dye-stuff, pepper, sugar, ginger and other commodities would find constant iteration in later advocates of colonisation. These and other exotic products England had to buy from economic competitors – sometimes her enemies – at a great loss to the nation. Colonies might prove to be the remedy'.
10. Robert Ashton, *The City and the Court 1603–1643*, pp. 35–85, shows that of the twenty-eight aldermen of London serving at one time or another in 1603 at least half had come to have directive interests in overseas investment, twenty-two had interests in overseas trade, eighteen had interests in more than one branch of overseas trade.
11. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1979), p. 44.
12. Wallerstein, pp. 45–48.
13. Paul Brown, '"This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine." *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism', *Political Shakespeare*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), provides useful references and information on the subject (pp. 48–71).
14. Brown, p. 55.
15. For an account of this see Eldred Jones, *Othello's Countrymen* (London: O.U.P., 1965), pp. 1–26.
16. See Winthrop Jordan, *The White Man's Burden* (New York : O.U.P., 1974), pp. 22–25, to which my discussion is largely indebted.
17. Brown, pp. 50–51.
18. See 2 and 6, above.
19. All references to *Othello* are from G. Blakemore Evans, ed. *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). Where more than one line has been quoted, the number for the last quoted line is given.
20. Brown, p. 52.
21. Brown, p. 54.
22. See for instance Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (Sussex: Harvester, 1984); J. W. Lever, *The Tragedy of State* (London: Methuen, 1971); J. Drakakis, ed. *Alternative Shakespeares* (London: Methuen, 1985); Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, ed. *Political Shakespeare*.
23. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 222–254.
24. Greenblatt, pp. 234–5.
25. Greenblatt, p. 226.
26. Greenblatt, p. 227.
27. Greenblatt, p. 228.
28. Greenblatt, p. 234 ff.
29. Greenblatt, p. 238.
30. Greenblatt, p. 233.
31. Greenblatt, p. 246.
32. Greenblatt, p. 241.
33. Greenblatt, p. 242 ff.
34. Martin Orkin, '*Othello* and the "plain face" of Racism', forthcoming article in *Shakespeare Quarterly*.
35. See T. S. Eliot, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932; Third Edition, 1958); F. R. Leavis,

'Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero', *The Common Pursuit* (Harmonds-worth: Peregrine, 1962); Laurence Lerner, 'The Machiavel and the Moor', *Essays in Criticism* 9, 1959, pp. 339–360. For the nineteenth century see, for instance, *Coleridge on Shakespeare*, ed. Terence Hawkes (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1969), p. 188; 'Some Notes on *Othello*', *Cornhill Magazine* 18, 1868, pp. 419–440; Francis Jacox, *Shakespeare Diversions, Second Series: From Dogberry to Hamlet*, 1877, pp. 73–5.

36. Winifred Nowottny, 'Justice and Love in *Othello*', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 21, 1952, provides what is still perhaps the best study of the treatment of justice in the play.

37. Greenblatt, pp. 185–186.

WHY NOT WRITE IN THE FIRST PERSON? WHY USE COMPLEX PLOTS? SOME THOUGHTS ON GEORGE ELIOT'S THEORY AND PRACTICE

by AUDREY F. CAHILL

My aim in this paper is to examine the relationship between the critical thought of Marian Evans, translator of Strauss, Feuerbach, and Spinoza, and Assistant Editor of the *Westminster Review* from 1852 to 1854, and her subsequent creative activity as George Eliot. I want to start by drawing attention to two of the formal aspects of her fiction: the almost entire absence of both first-person and restricted point of view narration, and her evident preference for double and complex plots. These can of course be accounted for in purely formal terms in any particular case, but it is the habitual choice of complex modes and complex structures that I propose to try to relate to her intellectual development.

In George Eliot's early works there is evidence of some not very successful experimenting with narrative modes which are soon abandoned. In *Scenes of Clerical Life* we find a dramatised narrator occasionally intruding, in the person of a man who knows the history of Shepperton and its surroundings, and is able to place Amos Barton and Mr Gilfil in relation to each other, and to the state of the parish at the time of writing. This dramatised narrator is not strictly necessary, for the placing can be done, and is to some extent done, without him; for the most part, the narration is undisguisedly omniscient. There is the same kind of awkwardness in Chapter 7 of *Adam Bede* when the authorial voice is suddenly identified as that of a narrator who claims to have talked to Adam Bede in his old age. The chief purpose of this device is to allow Adam to defend Mr Irwine while the narrator appears to attack his laxity. The awkwardness arises because by confronting us with a narrator whose existence is within the novel, the author seems to suggest that he (the narrator) has heard the details of the story from Adam himself; a clear impossibility when we think of the chapter headed 'The Two Bed-Chambers' in which Hetty's secret day-dreams about Arthur Donnithorne are juxtaposed with

Dinah's silent prayer and anxious concern for her. The
device is not sustained, and cannot be, for much of the'
effect of the novel depends on the reader's recognition of
incompatibilities and incongruities that cannot be known
by any single person within the fictional world. It is clearly
in the interest of the narrative that it should proceed without
making claims which undermine the contract already estab-
lished in the early chapters, which lead us to expect that we
shall be given insights and information which would in real
life be unknowable.

After *Adam Bede*, the dramatised narrator intrudes no
more. The narrative voice of the other novels is a voice that
speaks with authority, that exists in the same world as the
readers, and that, in its generalising, its pleading and its
explaining, addresses us directly, insisting that we should
understand, sympathise, and forgive. Only in one short
story, 'The Lifted Veil' (1860), do we find a character telling
his own story, and the nature of this story makes it a special
case. Its narrator is clairvoyant, and though he is by no means
omniscient, he is able to transcend in part the normal limi-
tations of space, time, and the privacy of other minds. Even
this story, therefore, points towards George Eliot's reluctance
to accept the limitations of narration from a single point of
view.

The structure of her plots, too, suggests the same kind of
refusal to limit her vision. Apart from the two short stories
and the *Scenes*, only *The Mill on the Floss* has a simple plot.
In the other novels we find interacting plots, often involving
antithetical experiences of some of the same events. In
Silas Marner, for instance, Godfrey Cass's denial of respon-
sibility, which leads to his subsequent deprivation, becomes
the occasion for Silas's acceptance of responsibility, and his
subsequent enrichment and integration into the community.
Adam Bede learns tolerance through the same sad set of
circumstances which teaches Arthur more responsible self-
discipline. *Romòla* and *Daniel Deronda* likewise have anti-
thetical plots, while in the case of *Middlemarch* we have no
fewer than four plots, unified in such a way that each modi-
fies the effect of one of the others. It is possible to trace
through all George Eliot's works the growth of a mind whose
field of vision was always expanding. In the shifts of point
of view within a plot, in the juxtaposing of plots within a

novel, and even in the passage from one novel to the next, she conveys the sense of a refusal to rest content with a single view, and an insistence that there is always another story.

I am going to suggest three reasons for this complexity in George Eliot's plots, and for the shifts in her point of view. The first has to do with her sense of the involvement of the perceiving subject in the act of perception. She realised that any set of events was open to more than one interpretation, and that a mature response would be, not to insist on one's own interpretation, but to recognise the possibility of different views from different positions. Her novels reflect this ambiguity faithfully; and in causing the reader's attention to move from one view to another (as when, in *Middlemarch*, the narration suddenly shifts from Dorothea's point of view to Casaubon's, and examines his disappointment in the marriage), she was evoking the kind of response which she believed life itself called for. Her realism therefore goes beyond the presentation of what she elsewhere calls 'a picture of life such as a great artist can give'; it extends to the mental processes through which 'reality' is explored, and requires a comparable activity on the part of her readers. That the evocation of such a response was a conscious intention is, I think, indicated by a passage in her first article for the *Westminster Review*, a passage about the importance of just such an imaginative effort as her novels were to demand:

> It may be doubted, whether a mind which has no susceptibility to the pleasure of changing its point of view, of mastering a remote form of thought, of perceiving identity of nature under variety of manifestation — a perception which resembles an expansion of one's own being, a pre-existence in the past — can possess the flexibility, the ready sympathy, or the tolerance, which characterizes a truly philosophic culture.[1]

Although it was a book on the history of religions that was being reviewed, and the 'remote form of thought' meant, in this context, the religious rites and theories of ancient Mediterranean cults, these words describe equally well the kind of endeavour in which George Eliot was to engage her

readers some seven years later, and they suggest the nature of the contribution which she hoped her fiction would make to the creation of 'a truly philosophic culture'.

A second reason for George Eliot's characteristic choice of narrative mode is perhaps to be found in the dramatic change in her thinking that came with her abandonment of Evangelical Christianity. The crisis was not simply a loss of faith, or one of those changes of point of view that she mentions in the review article just quoted. It was something much more radical, involving a complete over-turning of her mode of thought. Let me chart the change briefly.

If one looks at her early letters, it is clear that until about May 1841 her thinking began with an a priori belief in the providence of God and His special concern for the individual, and all her arguments proceeded from this fundamental assumption. One is reminded of the narrator's comment, in *Middlemarch,* on Dorothea's initial blindness to Casaubon's defects:

> She filled up all the blanks with unmanifested perfections, interpreting him as she interpreted the works of Providence, and accounting for seeming discords by her own deafness to the higher harmonies.[2]

One finds in George Eliot, before 1841, a constant effort to shape and interpret her daily life in terms of her belief, at the cost of much repression and suffering. She had for several years been reading widely and thoughtfully in mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, and geology, as well as in her favourite Romantic poets. As the world revealed by nineteenth-century science expanded, and as her volatile emotions and intellectual loneliness became more disturbing, the task of reconciling either the external world or her interior experience with her religious aspirations grew more and more difficult.

The turning point was precipitated by her reading of Charles Hennell's *Inquiry Concerning the Origins of Christianity,* and the importance of this has been well documented. Less attention has been given to an influence at least equally important, and that is Hennell's brother-in-law, Charles Bray. His book, *The Philosophy of Necessity,* had just been published when Marian got to know the family in November 1841, and its thesis must have been a favourite topic of conversation

during her frequent visits there. Bray's introduction describes his project in these words:

> My object in the present treatise is to pursue this inductive method of inquiry in investigating the nature of man, his place in creation; the character of his mind; and particularly to trace to its legitimate consequences the doctrine of philosophical necessity, which the connection between cause and effect implies. I would show that the mind of man is not an exception to nature's other works; that like everything else it has received a determinate character; that all knowledge of it is precisely of the same kind as that of material things, and consists in the observation of *its order* of action, or of the relation of cause and effect.[3]

Bray's thought obviously owed a lot to Comte, whose first instalment of his *Course of Positive Philosophy* had appeared in 1830 (in French). It is almost certain, though, that George Eliot came to the tenets of Positivism first through Bray. What impressed her about Bray's thinking was exactly what attracted her to Hennell's *Inquiry*, and later to Strauss, Feuerbach and Comte: that is, the rejection of a priori reasoning in favour of the inductive method of enquiry into psychology, morality, and social relations. For a young woman accustomed to think teleologically about the world in general, as well as about her own life and conduct, this was a radical change in methodology. It freed her to adjust her theories to fit her knowledge, instead of trimming her knowledge to fit her theories; it made sense of her past reading; and it fitted her to become the translator of Strauss and Feuerbach, and Assistant Editor of the *Westminster Review*.

The *Westminster* regularly included articles and review articles of a scientific nature, often written by eminent scientists. The comments of George Eliot at this time show a critical awareness of the philosophical assumptions and methodology of the writers, and a tendency to challenge the validity of their reasoning. Of Herbert Spencer's botanising expeditions, she remarks in a letter to Sara Hennell,

> I went to Kew yesterday, on a scientific expedition with Herbert Spencer, who has all sorts of theories about plants — I should have said a *proof*-hunting expedition.

> Of course, if the flowers didn't correspond to the
> theories, we said, *'tant pis pour les fleurs'.* [4]

One of the articles she liked least in the *Westminster* of
January 1853 was 'The Atomic Theory' by Samuel Brown.[5]
It is a competent history of atomic theories from the time of
Democritus, but what she must have objected to (though we
have no record of her reasons) was its failure to distinguish
between scientific enquiry and theological speculation. As
Tess Cosslett points out in *The 'Scientific Movement' and
Victorian Literature,* the great struggle of nineteenth-century
scientists was to substitute the principle of causation for the
'teleological' approach of Natural Theology.[6] It is clear that
as early as 1852 George Eliot had recognised the nature and
the importance of this struggle, and had sufficient confidence
to engage in it at a philosophical level. For her, the true
scientist was one who, like Lydgate, observed the available
facts and asked questions about their causal relationships; the
spurious one, like Casaubon, started with a preconception,
and selected only those facts which might give it support.

The most important consequence of this change in method-
ology — important though the work on the *Westminster*
was — was that it gave George Eliot the tool she needed to
become a writer of fiction. All novelists need to assume a
connection between cause and effect in order to construct
a plot, but what distinguishes George Eliot from other mid-
Victorian writers is the thoroughness of her acceptance of
causality as a principle that could explain mental and
emotional phenomena, and moral and social actions, and her
careful and consistent application of it to her fiction. She
embraced it with the enthusiasm of a convert, and indeed
she was a convert. She made her position clear in her review
article on Mackay's *Progress of the Intellect* (1851). Com-
menting on Mackay's view that divine revelation was 'co-
extensive with the history of human development', she wrote,

> The master key to this revelation, is the recognition
> of the presence of undeviating law in the material and
> moral world — of that invariability of sequence which
> is acknowledged to be the basis of physical science,
> but which is still perversely ignored in our social organ-
> ization, our ethics and our religion.[7]

Six years later, when she had just begun writing fiction, she reaffirmed this view. Bray had written to consult her about the prospects for a second edition of his book, and before mentioning her differences with him on some matters of detail, she reassured him about her agreement with his thesis:

> In the fundamental doctrine of your book — that mind presents itself under the same conditions of invariableness of antecedent and consequent as all other phenomena (the only difference being that the true antecedent and consequent are proportionately difficult to discover as the phenomena are more complex) — I think you know that I agree.[8]

This interest in tracing cause and effect informs Eliot's novels, from the shortest, *Silas Marner,* to the longest, *Middlemarch.* Of the latter, she herself said,

> I hope there is nothing that will be seen to be irrelevant to my design, which is to show the gradual action of ordinary causes rather than exceptional, and to show them in some directions which have not been from time immemorial the beaten path.[9]

To set out to show 'the gradual action of ordinary causes' seems to be an important factor that inclines a writer towards multiple points of view, double and multiple plots, and lengthy novels. Because she was interested in the actions of circumstance on character, of character on circumstance, of circumstance on circumstance, and character on character — and on the multiplicity of permutations that occur when several characters and several circumstances begin to interact — George Eliot had to tell her stories and construct her plots in such a way as to suggest an infinite number of interconnections, while nevertheless producing something finite, selective, finished, publishable and readable.

The third reason that I can think of for this choice of a complex narrative form seems less important in itself than the other two, but in combination with them it is significant. It is simply that by the time George Eliot started to write fiction, she had had a very broad experience, and an education that went far beyond anything officially on offer (for men) at either of the universities. Nominally only Assistant Editor of the *Westminster,* she was soon directing policy, com-

missioning articles, corresponding with the writers, making suggestions, correcting, rewriting, rejecting. The *Westminster* was a quarterly, normally about three hundred pages in length, containing substantial articles catering for what was then the Radical and Intellectual Left. A typical number, the first she edited, included the following: two articles on representative reform, inspired by the supposed imminence of a Second Reform Bill; an article on labour relations by the industrialist and social critic, W.R. Greg; Froude's account of the life of Mary Stuart; an article on shell-fish; one by James Martineau on 'The ethics of Christendom', and lengthy surveys and reviews of contemporary literature in England, America, Germany, and France. In other numbers there were articles by Mill, Spencer, Mazzini, and Lewes; subjects ranged from education to colonial policy and the emancipation of slaves. Most of these articles are characterised by a lucidity of style and a modernity of thought that make for compelling reading even today. What distinguishes them from similar articles in, say, the modern *Guardian Weekly*, is, apart from their length, a buoyant optimism and a faith in the power of reason and common sense. Màny of the virtues of these numbers of the *Westminster* (1852–1854) are of course due to George Eliot and the quality of the minds she attracted; but the influence must have operated in the other direction too. To read these issues is to be in touch with some of the best minds of the period, and to confront some of its most pressing problems. To have edited such a review for two and a half years must have provided, for the future novelist, an extension of knowledge that would make her self-imposed task of tracing causes an even more complicated matter.

I am suggesting, then, that these are the three most important factors in George Eliot's decisions about narrative form: the range of her knowledge, which put her in a position to see a great variety of forces in operation; her need to find a formal equivalent in fiction for the complex causal connections which she believed to be operating in life; and her belief that tolerance, flexibility and sympathy could be cultivated in her readers by the kind of work she made them do.

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NOTES

1. 'The Progress of the Intellect', *Westminster Review*, LIV (Jan. 1851), pp. 333–368. Reprinted in *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia, 1963), p. 29.
2. Ch. IX. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1893), p. 52.
3. Charles Bray, *The Philosophy of Necessity; or the Law of Consequences as Applicable to Mental, Moral, and Social Science* (London: Longmans, 1841, 1863), p. 6.
4. Gordon Haight, ed. *The George Eliot Letters* (New Haven and London: Yale, 1954–6), II, p. 403.
5. *Westminster Review*, 59 O.S. 3 N.S., Jan. 1953 (London: Chapman), 169–196.
6. (Sussex: Harvester; New York: St Martin's, 1982), p. 89.
7. Pinney, p. 31.
8. Letter to Charles Bray, 15 Nov. 1857. *Letters*, II, p. 403.
9. Letter to Blackwood, July 1871. *Letters*, V, p. 168.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

THE DECADENT METROPOLIS AS FRONTIER
ELIOT, LAFORGUE AND BAUDELAIRE

by W. H. BIZLEY

It is not difficult to see why the City might have been sought after, at the *fin-de-siècle*, as a sort of antidote to Nature, Nature which had been over-indulged and become a somewhat domesticated and benign goddess. Without raising the problem whether Modernism was fair to the best and strongest in Romanticism, I imagine we all have an inkling of the saturation of a poetic vein that could lead T. E. Hulme to complain, lecturing in the 1900s:

> We constantly tend to think that the discontinuities in nature are only *apparent*, and that a fuller investigation would reveal the underlying continuity. This shrinking from a gap or jump in nature has developed to a degree which paralyses any objective perception, and prejudices our seeing things as they really are.[1]

To get out of that paralysis, to be able to see 'gaps' and 'jumps' again, was for the avant-garde of the 1890s and 1900s sound enough reason for patronising the less seemly sights of great cities. But that can merely lead to an exercise in romanticising the city: Arthur Symons bids us, in *Studies in Two Literatures*, to 'haunt the strange corners of cities, to know all the useless, and improper, and amusing people who are alone very much worth knowing . . . .'[2] For Baudelaire, back in the forties and fifties, it required, rather, a new psychology, and a new technique. Walter Benjamin is particularly fond of the formulation we get in one of the dedications of *Spleen de Paris*:

> Who among us has not dreamt, in moments of ambition, of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, supple and staccato enough to adapt to the lyrical stirrings of the soul, the undulations of dreams, and the sudden leaps of consciousness? This obsessive ideal is above all a child of the experience of giant cities, of the intersecting of their myriad relations.[3]

That cities cause 'intersections' and 'leaps of consciousness' is surely why Eliot is going to find in Baudelaire not just another cityscape painter, but an imagery of 'the first intensity', and 'a mode of release and expression for other men'.[4]

I am going to make the claim, then, that Eliot got going as a poet, not because he was a Modernist, or a Symbolist, or an anti-Romantic, or an Aesthete, but because he was a Decadent! Of course, there is more than one sort of Decadence and, in any case, it might seem perverse to insist on this derivation when he himself claimed so ardently that the watershed in his early career was his chance discovery in the Harvard Union Library, one day in December 1908, of Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. But we must remember that the chief essays in that work had originally appeared in the early 1890s as an introduction to the *Decadent Movement in Literature*. Richard Ellman tells us that whereas Symons could use the term Decadence with impunity in 1893, by 1899 and the first edition of *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* Symbolism was ushered in almost with relief as the more respectable term.[5] That, of course, is a retrospective view: Symons will tell us fairly summarily in the Introduction that

> [the] interlude, half a mock interlude, of Decadence, diverted the attention of the critics while something more serious was in preparation. That something more serious has crystallised, for the time, under the form of Symbolism . . . .[6]

But what if that 'something more serious' was actually the diversion? What if literary diplomacy has led us to forget that the chief characters of Symons's book — Nerval, Verlaine, Laforgue, Huysmans — almost deliberately celebrated a style of life that was 'half a mock interlude', and scorned anything the nineteenth century might dish up as 'something more serious'. For all that Symons might say, his real genius is to celebrate that 'lifestyle', as it was represented for example in Gérard de Nerval:

> He [Nerval] returned to Paris at the end of 1843 . . . and for the next few years he lived mostly in Paris, writing charming, graceful, remarkably sane articles and books and wandering about the streets, by day and night, in a

perpetual dream from which, now and again, he was somewhat rudely awakened.[7]

Now it is that admixture of dream and awakening, that biographic shock, which makes life in the city always 'half a mock interlude'. Hence the great importance of cities: they guarantee, with their sudden interruptions of one's interior time-scheme, the haunted, guilty ego that is the hallmark of the true Decadent. The Baudelairean Decadent divests himself of the privileges of Romantic or Idealist or Kantian 'inner' time, and insists that he has to renegotiate identity with public or external time – with 'events', we might say, such as meet him at street corners or in hotel rooms or in rooms where women come and go.

Of course, to have confessed the ephemerality of one's inner mental stratum might well be to court madness. Eliot would probably have read, in the Conclusion to Symons's book, that

> [to] live through a single day with that overpowering consciousness of our real position, which, in the moments in which alone it mercifully comes, is like blinding light or the thrust of a flaming sword, would drive any man out of his senses . . . .[8]

Paradoxically, however, this discovers a possible comic variation in the later Decadence. For the Decadent is long practised in evading this huge possibility that looms over him, the possibility that 'Streets that follow like a tedious argument' actually define the real you better than you yourself can. At the frontier of the 'overwhelming question', one manoeuvres quickly:

> Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'
> Let us go and make our visit.

In the case of Nerval, though, the confession of 'one's real position', of what might happen to one as an 'event', proved too much for him, as we can see in Symons:

> Nights of insomnia, days of anxious waiting, the sudden shock of an event, and one of these common disturbances may be enough to jangle the tuneless bells of one's nerves.[9]

So it is the interlude, the interruption, the digression, that
is the genius of the ethos, and Eliot got the principle pretty
soon on from his reading of Symons and Laforgue. I have to
say, though, that he got the idea before he got the technique,
as is evident in one of his own versions of Parisian 'Spleen'
(in a Bostonian variety) written for the *Harvard Advocate* in
January 1910. The poem is still in his student style, but it
attempts atmosphere of a Laforguean *Dimanche*:

> Sunday: this satisfied procession
> Of definite Sunday faces;
> Bonnets, silk hats, and conscious graces
> In repetition that displaces
> Your mental self-possession
> By this unwarranted digression.
>
> Evening, lights, and tea!
> Children and cats in the alley;
> Dejection unable to rally
> Against this dull conspiracy . . . .[10]

One's 'mental self-possession', which sounds dignified and
strong, cannot stave off the incessant interruption, the
awakening brought about by domestic trivia and their 'un-
warranted digression'.

But to see a joke, and to tell a joke, are two different things.
I think we must admit that Eliot's stiff verse with its cumber-
some rhymes sounds rather more like the 'dull conspiracy'
itself than any rallying wit. Just look, by contrast, at what
happens to the word 'digress' in 'Prufrock', at that nicely
comic moment when the speaker's voice goes in one direction,
but his aroused senses in another:

> Is it perfume from a dress
> That makes me so digress . . . ?

Of the two happenings concurrent in the room, Prufrock's
voice and the spreading scent of perfume, there is no doubt
which is the *event*.

This comic counterpoint makes nonsense of the solipsism
by which Eliot's early poetry is so often characterised.
Solipsism can, of course, mean more than one thing, but I
would take it that the man for whom Mind is a world in itself

has locked himself *against* 'digression', against sudden, insidious interruption. That is why I find it necessary to press the Decadent type against Robert Langbaum, for instance, who tells us that

> Eliot's method in 'Prufrock' has caused many readers to doubt that anything external is going on.[11]

Are these 'many readers' such a different species that they have never watched their speech founder in the competitive arena, or been invaded by eyes that 'fix you in a formulated phrase', as external an event as you could wish for, but with the resultant collapse of your body-space as you are left 'pinned and wriggling on the wall'? (I am reminded that it was in the 1900s that Eliot's great contemporary, Charlie Chaplin, was learning the vernacular of body-movements that could express this dislodgement, this interruption of hauteur.)

The gain in technique that makes the later 'digression' so much more effective than in the earlier poem, has to do with the discovery of an ego-type who, though he is wide-awake and intelligent, is yet hopelessly vulnerable to that turnabout, the possibility that streets or dinner-plates or footmen might have the last word as to where one is real. There *is* an 'I' in the poem, but an 'I' that constantly sees running aground its propensity to be an author. Michael Collie says of one of Laforgue's *Pierrot* poems that it is the 'je', the personal pronoun, that 'keeps it out of the world of the Symbolist',[12] to which I would agree, provided we remember that the decadent self is the one who begs the question, from moment to moment, who is the real author of its text.

The situation comes clear in the opening stanzas of Laforgue's 'Soir de carnaval' (from the Posthumous Poems):

Paris chahute au gaz. L'horloge comme un glas
Sonne une heure. Chantez! dansez! la vie est brève,
Tout est vain, — et, là-haut, voyez, la Lune rêve
Aussi froide qu'au temps où l'homme n'était pas.

Ah! quel destin banal! Tout miroite et puis passe,
Nous leurrant d'infini par le Vrai, par l'Amour;
Et nous irons ainsi, jusqu'à ce qu'à son tour
La terre crève aux cieux, sans laisser nulle trace.

Où réveiller l'écho de tous ces cris, ces pleurs,
Ces fanfares d'orgueil que l'histoire nous nomme,
Babylone, Memphis, Bénarès, Thèbes, Rome,
Ruines où le vent sème aujourd'hui des fleurs?

Et moi, combien de jours me reste-t-il à vivre?
Et je me jette à terre, et je crie et frémis,
Devant les siècles d'or pour jamais endormis
Dans le nèant sans coeur dont nul dieu ne délivre!

Et voici j'entends, dans la paix de la nuit,
Un pas sonore, un chant mélancolique et bête
D'ouvrier ivre-mort qui revient de la fête
Et regagne au hasard quelque ignoble réduit . . .
                                    ('Soir de carnaval', 11. 1—20)

(Carnival Night

Paris riots in the gaslight. The clock like a knell
Strikes one o'clock. Sing! Dance! Life is short,
All is vain — and, on high, see, the moon dreams
As frigid as when a man was not on this earth.

Ah! what a banal fate! All glitters then passes
Deluding us into seeking the infinite through Truth and
                                                        Love;
And on we shall go until in its turn
The Earth bursts open to the skies, without leaving a
                                                        trace.

How are we to awake the echoes of all the cries, the sobs,
The proud fanfares which History lists,
Babylon, Memphis, Benares, Thebes, Rome,
Ruins where the wind now sows flowers?

And I, how many days have I left to live?
I throw myself on to the ground, I yell and shudder,
In front of the golden ages forever vanished
In the heartless void no god can redeem.

And there I hear, in the peace of the night,
A sonorous step, the melancholy and stupid song
Of a dead-drunk workman who returns from the fair
And haphazardly reaches some unspeakable hovel . . .)[13]

Many Eliotic thumb-prints are immediately noticeable — the all-too-punctual clock, Pierrot's moon as an indifferent judge, a prophetic wind (indeed, thinking ahead to *The Waste Land*, even a list of 'unreal cities': Babylon, Memphis, Benares, Thebes, Rome). But more important is the technique, at the opening, of there being no first-person reference in this first-person narration. In the hectic motion of the carnival, it is a matter of question who or what is the carrier of identity: is it the city, or the clock, or the dancing, or the moon, or is it in fact the narrator, who tries to find audience for his distressed cries? The ego-substance has no assurance of text, realises that it might be erased, might leave the moon 'froide qu'au temps où l'homme n'était pas'. Who shall even name him, let alone declare his identity real, if the earth can watch his disappearance and not shed a tear?

With the introduction of 'Et moi' in stanza four, though, we reach an interesting crux. After all, this 'moi' despairs rather loudly of his anonymous status! If he is going to spread himself in his text yelling and shuddering with a real 'cri de coeur', his very pessimism will assume the same egotistic size as in that much-parodied figure of the Romantic on the hillside, in full lyrical cry. What gives vitality to these lines is the metropolitan interruption, the unexpected sequel. The appearance of the drunk workman ends the melodramatic confession: his imperturbable stupor stabilises the poem and restores the world in which life goes on. So the poet's voice is punctured by a digression — even as he in epic manner pronounces damnation on himself, he cannot sustain his text! So expendable is his 'I' that it gives capricious bargaining power to all the phenomena about him.

The importance of discerning and retaining that decadent ego becomes clear as we see how Laforgue infiltrated Eliot's style. Consider the opening of what is perhaps Eliot's first major poem, 'Preludes':

> The winter evening settles down
> With smell of steaks in passageways.
> Six o'clock.
> The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
> And now a gusty shower wraps
> The grimy scraps
> Of withered leaves about your feet . . . .

Again the question: who is 'author' of this experience? What
stable centre 'anchors' the sequence of time? Is it 'Winter
evening', or the speaker's voice or the speaker's nostrils, or
simply the disembodied smell of steaks? Who pronounces, or
for whom is intended, the precise time 'Six o'clock', especially
as it is immediately cancelled by the monotonous circularity
of the 'burnt-out ends of smoky days'? (A true Laforguean
ritournelle.) Is it because I cannot square existence to my
own time-scheme, cannot call the tune with 'Six o'clock',
that my feet, absurdly prominent at ground level, become the
true measure of events? And even then, 'Grimy scraps' seem
to have more power to appoint me than do my feet or my
voice (even though I try hard to remain consequential with
'And now . . .'). And note, by the way, that it is an even less
likely presence than a drunk workman that keeps Eliot's
Prelude intact, when, on the corner of the street, 'A lonely
cab-horse steams and stamps'.

There is an identity drama implicit here that is simply
beyond the range of the lesser Decadence of the 1890s. Here
is Dorian Gray, writing to Lord Henry of one of his expeditions
into the city:

> There was an exquisite poison in the air. I had a passion
> for sensations . . . . Well, one evening about seven o'clock,
> I determined to go out in search of some adventure. I felt
> that this grey, monstrous London of ours, with its
> myriads of people, its sordid sinners, and its splendid sins,
> as you once phrased it, must have something in store for
> me . . . . I don't know what I expected, but I went out and
> wandered eastward, soon losing my way in a labyrinth
> of grimy streets and black, grassless squares . . . .[14]

But to watch sins and sinners is not to be oneself the type of
the sinner, the type of the guilty or haunted or anonymous
ego.

In what sense, then, was Baudelaire the founder of the ego-
type we have been' looking at? An excellent answer lies, I
believe, in the synthesis that Walter Benjamin so perceptively
diagnoses in Baudelaire between the fashionable stroller – the
metropolitan *flâneur* of the Second Empire – and Edgar
Allan Poe's figure of the amateur detective. This *flâneur* was
the character 'we used to encounter on the sidewalks and in
front of the shop-windows', the 'inconsequential type who

was always in search of cheap emotions' but knew nothing 'but cobblestones, fiacres, and gas lanterns'.[15] Now there are two main ambiguities in this ultra-decadent type that make him a figure of sustaining interest. The first is that, though he is a crowd man, a man of the anonymous life of the metropolitan streets, he nevertheless holds fast to his individuality, and even protects his loneliness in the traffic of galleries and arcades. He is alone, and yet he negotiates his identity in the minute-to-minute intercourse with the passing events of the city all around him. He is alone, but (I would add) his speech is conducted as dialogue, not as monologue. So Prufrock might be the type of loneliness, fearing interruption by 'human voices', but he is also the man who needs to make visits, needs to impress a salon where women 'come and go', needs to cut a figure on the beach. It is not, surely, from behind Pater's 'thick wall of personality' that one wonders

    Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?

The *flâneur* is a public figure, a figure on view, and it is as a public figure that he suffers his isolation.

But the other ambivalence in the type is even more interesting. The *flâneur*, in Benjamin's description, has at once the wide-awake watchfulness of the amateur detective, and yet the shifty, peripheral ego of (as Benjamin puts it) the 'type and the genius of deep crime'.[16] Prufrock's disposition to 'murder and create', to shift identities, to 'prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet', is at one with the fecund voyeurism of his detective-like observation, analysing those feminine arms that 'in the lamplight' are 'downed with light brown hair'.

So it is because the scrupulous watchfulness of the *flâneur* is the other side of the coin to his imminent discovery of himself as the interrogated, guilty party (think of Chaplin in 'City Lights') that you get the strange dynamism which is locked up in this thoroughly undynamic type. In the 'Fleurs du mal' collection, you might find it in a poem like 'Beatrice', where the poet is haunted by demons who mock his propriety, or in that poem often cited and quoted by Eliot, 'Les Sept vieillards', where the poet starts off into the streets, 'roidissant mes nerfs comme un héros' ('steeling my nerves like a hero'). Like Prufrock off to pay a visit, he starts off as the initiator,

the mapper-out of time, but he is overtaken by successive visitations (thus seven old men) who interrogate him and render him criminal-like even though he has committed no crime:

> A quel complot infâme étais-je donc en butte,
> Ou quel méchant hasard ainsi m'humiliait?

> (To what was I exposed, what plots, what crimes.
> What peril faced my cowering inmost self?)[17]

For all the 'hero's part', what transpires is the 'guilty self', the self that takes the side, so to speak, of the voice that interrogates it. In the same way, Eliot's 'rhapsodist', in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', is as watchful as a detective, and stares down the midnight street to 'regard that woman' in the 'light of the door', yet guiltily submits, at the end of the poem, to the efficient demands of 'Memory':

> The bed is open; the tooth-brush hangs on the wall,
> Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life . . . .

What the *flâneur* has to endure, then, is more than but one variant and hostile point of view: it is a reversed point of view, one that has the initiative so far as the text of events is concerned. He who lives on the brink of this 'overwhelming' and imminent possibility is the true frontiersman of the city. His is the new game that has to be played when mind no longer 'underwrites' identity, when streets of Paris 'judge' one, discover one, 'vaporise' one (in Baudelaire's term), before one has time to compose one's story. He lives with the possibility that 'le riche métal de notre volonté/ Est tout vaporisé par ce savant chemiste', and that 'C'est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent . . .' ('Au lecteur', lines 11−13). (. . . the noble metal of our will is wholly vaporised by this learned chemist. It is the Devil who holds the strings which move us . . .)[18]

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NOTES

1. T. E. Hulme, *Speculations*, ed. Herbert Read (London: Routledge, 1924), p. 3.
2. Quoted by Patricia Clements, *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 191.
3. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, tr. Harry Zohn (London: New Left Books, 1973), p. 69.
4. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1951), p. 426.
5. Richard Ellman, in Introduction to Arthur Symons *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (New York: Dutton, 1958), p. x.
6. Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (rpt. 1908; New York: Haskell House, 1971), p. 7.
7. Symons, p. 73.
8. Symons, p. 324–325.
9. Symons, p. 83.
10. T. S. Eliot, *Poems Written in Early Youth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), see notes on p. 41.
11. Robert Langbaum, *The Mysteries of Identity* (New York: O.U.P., 1977), p. 84.
12. Michael Collie, *Jules Laforgue* (London: Athlone Press, 1977), p. 48.
13. Translation by I. C. Wakerly, Dept of French, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
14. Oscar Wilde, *The Portable Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Aldington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 193.
15. Benjamin (quoting Paul Ernest de Rattier), p. 54.
16. Benjamin, p. 48.
17. Florence Louie Friedman, tr. *Poems of Charles Baudelaire* (London: Elek, 1962), p. 140.
18. Elaine Marks, tr. *French Poetry from Baudelaire to the Present* (New York: Dell, 1962), p. 42.

ON THE PRESENTATION OF SPEECH AND THOUGHT IN NARRATIVE FICTION

by MALCOLM McKENZIE

This paper is based on two premises, the first being the simple, but in some cases still disputed, assumption that stylistics has much to offer literary studies. I shall not even attempt to prove this assumption, but will treat it as an axiom. The second is that an analysis of the ways in which speech and thought are presented in fiction is of crucial significance to both literary and language studies. This is so, as I shall attempt to illustrate, because such an analysis must shed light on the larger area of point of view, and hence on important ways in which readers can be manipulated.

Working from these premises, I shall outline a synthetic model of the different ways of presenting speech and thought in narrative fiction, locating the resulting model within a broadly functionalist view of the nature of language. Then, and this is clearly related to a functional emphasis, I shall illustrate some of the effects that can be realised through the interplay of different modes of speech and thought presentation, focusing on a phenomenon for which I have coined the term 'switching'.

Various methods for dividing up the spectrum of speech and thought presentation have been proposed by different scholars: McHale, for instance, has suggested a sevenfold partition to capture the flexible range of possibilities 'from the "purely" diegetic to the "purely" mimetic', and Page favours an eight-part typology.[1] My predilection is for a fivefold system, which becomes a ten-part division if speech and thought presentation are treated separately. This is the model adopted by Leech and Short and it possesses a number of distinct advantages:[2] it is sufficiently detailed to capture essential differences without pretending to be exhaustive; it maintains a rigorous distinction between the presentation of speech and the presentation of thought, a distinction not consistently adhered to by other writers in the field but necessary because the communication contexts of speech and thought are fundamentally different (the addresser and addressee always being identical in the case of thought presentation); and, with the exception of the introduction

of the necessary categories of the narrative report of speech and thought acts, it employs standard and unambiguous terminology. The ten categories are:

Speech presentation	**Thought presentation**
Free direct speech	Free direct thought
Direct speech	Direct thought
Free indirect speech	Free indirect thought
Indirect speech	Indirect thought
Narrative report of speech acts	Narrative report of thought acts

As the five modes of thought presentation are essentially the same as those of speech, it will not be necessary to look specifically at each one.

Free direct speech, as its name adequately suggests, is the most direct form of speech presentation, creating the illusion that the characters are talking almost without any interference from the narrator. The qualification 'almost' is necessary because, even if the reporting verb is dropped during the dialogue, the narrator's voice will always be present in the narrative frame surrounding free direct dialogue, and will thus provide some perspective on it.

> His father watched the Japanese sergeant walk along the parapet of the trenchworks. Jim could see that it was an effort for his father to speak. His face was as strained and bloodless as it had been when the labour organizers at the cotton mill threatened to kill him. Yet he was still thinking about something. 'We'll leave it for the soldiers — finders keepers.'
> 'Like kites?'
> 'That's it.'
> 'He wasn't very angry.'
> 'It looks as if they're waiting for something to happen.'
> 'The next war?'
> 'I don't suppose so.'
> Hand in hand, they walked across the airfield. Nothing moved except for the ceaselessly rippling grass, rehearsing itself for the slipstreams to come. When they reached

the hangar, his father tightly embraced Jim, almost trying to hurt him, as if Jim had been lost to him forever. He was not angry with Jim, and seemed glad that he had been forced to visit the old aerodrome.[3]

The paragraph of narrative report immediately following the exchange provides the key to an accurate interpretation of the illocutionary force of Jim's father's utterances, which could otherwise be interpreted as brusque and authoritarian instead of caring and cajoling.

I shall look at direct and indirect speech as a pair as they are undoubtedly the two most familiar of the five modes of speech presentation, with pedigrees on the metalinguistic level dating from the distinction in classical rhetoric between *oratio recta* and *oratio obliqua*. It used to be a standard assumption that indirect discourse was and could be derived from a prior direct discourse version through a given set of transformations.[4] Such transformations included removing the inverted commas enclosing the reported speech, introducing a subordinating conjunction to mark the dependence of the reported clause upon the reporting clause, changing first and second person pronouns to the third person, back-shifting the tense of the verb in the reported clause, altering deictics appropriately, and so on. Thus a direct speech sentence such as:

(1) She said, 'I want you to visit me tomorrow.'

could, by following the transformational rules, easily be converted into its indirect speech 'equivalent':

(2) She said that she wanted him to visit her on the following day.

As early as 1929, however, Volosinov argued that the relationship between direct and indirect discourse is not a simple derivative one.[5] On the formal level, this contention has recently been supported by Banfield.[6] On the functional level the significant difference between direct and indirect discourse lies in the control that the narrator possesses to impose an interpretative filter upon the utterances of the characters. Remembering the crucial fact that the utterances

of a character in narrative fiction have no existential reality external to that fiction, and that the reader's perception of a multiplicity of voices in a text inevitably entails a suspension of this knowledge, it is easy to illustrate the extent to which control differs between these two modes. In direct speech the 'voice' of the narrator retains some interpretative control and so, for example, the narrator can indicate to the reader the illocutionary force of an utterance through the simple ploy of modifying the 'unmarked' *verbum dicendi* 'say' or 'said'. The following sentence conveys a very different force from (1):

> (3) She demanded aggressively: 'I want you to visit me tomorrow.'

Because the narrator cannot, however, tamper with the *ipsissima verba,* such control is more circumscribed than in indirect speech. We can borrow from pragmatics theory the notion of defeasibility or cancellability to show how this is so. It would, for example, be semantic nonsense to alter (1) in the following way:

> (4) She said, 'I want you to visit me tomorrow,' but I can't recall her exact words.

But it is quite possible to change (2) to read:

> (5) She said that she wanted him to visit her on the following day but I can't recall her exact words.[7]

The contrast between these two examples indicates the extent to which the narratorial voice is dominant in indirect speech. And it is for this reason that the verb tense of the reported clause must, in indirect speech, agree with the tense of the verb in the reporting clause.

Free indirect speech is, in its unexceptional forms, typified by a greater degree of vocal blending than is possible in either direct or indirect speech. Guiraud comments on such polyvocality:

> ...the placing of tenses and pronouns in perspective is the mark of the indirect style that makes self-expression

> possible to the author; and 'freedom' (i.e. absence of subordination) is the mark of the direct style that makes self-expression possible to the character to whom voice, vocabulary, and syntax have been partially restored.[8]

The first part of this description suggests that lexical items which are not placed in an overtly 'backshifted' narratorial perspective (in which, for ease of reference, I include pronominalisation and deictic changes) will be perceived as either having emanated from a particular character or as being of indeterminate status. As far as backshifting is concerned, the exact 'placing' of voice is a relatively simple matter; what is referred to as disambiguation by context is far more complex. An example of this process is what Halliday refers to as 'syntactic imagery', individualised patterns of syntax which are habitual to a character.[9] Other examples would include noting markers such as interrogative indicators, exclamations, modal auxiliaries, addressee-oriented adverbials like 'frankly' and adverbials expressing doubt such as 'apparently'.

What of the functions of free indirect speech? Often it is used to ironic effect, as Leech and Short demonstrate with an example from *Persuasion,* by manipulating its 'ability to give the flavour of the character's words but also to keep the narrator in an intervening position between character and reader'.[10] Other writers, such as Pascal and Gregory, have focused on its ability to forge an empathetic identification of narrator (and reader) with character.[11] These two functions are, paradoxically, very different, and this difference can only be attributed to the fact that free indirect speech is a highly flexible mode and, more so than the other modes, its effects are influenced by neighbouring types of speech and thought presentation in specific texts and by the narratorial milieu supplied by the context.[12] The fact, then, that the narrator intervenes between character and reader does not necessarily imply distance from the character; distance will undoubtedly result when the narratorial milieu is one of dissonance with the character, but a heightened merging of narrator (and reader) with character will occur in cases where that milieu suggests consonance. This example from *Life and Times of Michael K* illustrates the point:

> He was anaemic, he said, he had a weak heart, it was in
> his papers, no one contested it, yet here they were
> sending him to the front. They were reassigning clerks
> and sending them to the front. Did they think they
> could do without clerks? Did they think they could run
> a war without a paymaster's office?[13]

Until this point the speaker, who has been dominating K with
what he perceives to be his natural authority as a white person,
has been presented only through direct speech. Here, however,
there is a sudden shift to FIS, and this coincides with a tem-
porary shift in sympathy towards the speaker as the reader
realises that he has been caught up in a military machine
from which the only escape is desertion.

The fifth and final category of speech presentation is what
Page calls 'submerged speech' and Leech and Short the
narrative report of speech acts (NRSA).[14] In this mode the
narrator downgrades the discursive potential of a speech act,
or of a number of such acts, almost to the level of straight
narrative report. Consequently, the voice of the character
being reported is presented only as an echoic trace of his or
her free direct speech potential. As in the other modes, there
is a considerable range within NRSA, from near indirect
speech to the baldest of diegetic reductions, as in the following
examples:

> (6) She mentioned her desire for him to visit her on the
>   following day.

> (7) She said something as he was leaving.

Besides the principal difference between speech and
thought presentation, that of communication context, there
remain two important subsidiary differences. The first is a
relatively minor matter and concerns a distinction in il-
locutionary force expectations, on the part of the reader,
which arises from the difference in communication context.
Readers readily accept that, in fiction, they have privileged
access to the interiors of other minds in a way which they
never do in daily reality; they do not expect, however, any
detailed information as to how the thinker expects to respond
to his or her thoughts. In other words, illocutionary force

indicators are marginalised in the case of thought presentation because of the relatively opaque and self-contained nature of the process of a thinker thinking to him/herself. One can 'ponder deeply' or even 'cogitate furiously', but such modifications of the verb are less revealing and less common than their speech counterparts.

The second matter stems from the fact that fictional thought is a highly conventionalised medium as there is no external model to which to relate it, a problem which does not exist in quite the same way in the relationship between fictional and quotidian speech. As a consequence, the kind of free direct and free indirect thought characteristic of many twentieth-century interior monologues is remarkable for a syntactical abbreviation and lexical opacity not found in corresponding speech forms in novels. In other words, people think to themselves in ways more linguistically eccentric than they address others. This can be illustrated if we try to attach a verb of thinking, that is if we try to introduce a reporting clause, to a typical Bloom monologue:

> 'Didn't catch me napping that wheeze,' he thought. He continued thinking, 'The quick touch. Soft mark. I'd like my job. Valise I have a particular fancy for. Leather.'[15]

Because the reporting verb tends to be associated with a high degree of rationality and coherence, such interior monologue strings are reduced to a kind of psychobabble when they are forced into an association with a reporting verb. Thought is, therefore, not quite the same as speech minus the sound, and in its narrative presentation we should be wary of pushing an essential similarity to a strenuous synonymity.[16]

Having described the forms and functions of the different modes of speech and thought presentation, I want to outline certain effects that can be achieved by the controlled interplay of some of these modes. I shall be considering 'switching', the description of which entails a prior definition of the related phenomenon 'slipping'. 'Slipping' refers to a move or 'slip' from one mode of presentation to another within the same sentence. As a rhetorical device in literary texts, slipping has been used for centuries.[17] In addition to the polyvocality created, it adds an extra dimension of complexity

by juxtaposing two modes within the same sentence. Whereas slipping is an intrasentential change, switching occurs at the macro level of discourse, and refers to a change in mode of presentation across sentences or paragraphs.

Switching has two major forms. The first occurs when the mode of speech and/or thought presentation of a particular character changes over time. Jones has recorded a particularly good example of this in *The Secret Agent* by pointing out that the changes in the personality of Winnie Verloc correspond directly to changes in the way in which her speech is presented. He shows that her speech before the murder of Stevie is almost all direct, whereas after this event and before the murder of Verloc this switches to indirect. Jones comments on this interim period in her development as a fictional character:

> Winnie, on the other hand, has twice as much *indirect* as *direct* statement, and the few *direct* statements given to her are again nearly all of the one sentence variety. Verloc is consequently forced to take over Winnie's earlier assuring, comforting and explaining role, the change being made manifest, among other things, by shifting the patterns of speech representation.[18]

After her murder of Verloc, Jones contends, she reasserts her earlier self. He has estimated that in her meeting with Ossipon shortly after the death of her husband, 95% of Winnie's utterances are in direct speech.[19]

It appears, therefore, that this form of switching will inevitably be associated with, or indicative of, some degree of character or personality change. This is clearly not the case in the second type of switching, which occurs when the author and/or narrator consistently uses different forms of speech or thought presentation for different characters within a dialogue. For example, character A may have her or his speech presented in the direct mode, whereas that of character B may be continually in the indirect style. This will entail not a change in the two characters involved in the fictional interaction, but a switch in the reader's affective relationship to these characters as he or she moves alternately between the one who is presented directly and the other who is presented more obliquely.[20] Such perceptions will clearly

be the result of an inferential process on the part of the reader which is both accumulative and contextual: a single instance of a direct/indirect pair will not result in the attribution by the reader of dominance and submission to the two speakers, and neither will direct speech, taken out of the context of its indirect foil, necessarily be associated with the overbearing. Other contexts, too, could allow for quite different values to become attached to direct/indirect switching.

It is in the combination of these two facts (that the effects of switching are both accumulative and contextual) that much of the value of a focus on switching lies. Far too many discussions of speech and thought presentation in narrative fiction never move beyond the level of the single sentence, which is often extracted from its context in order to illustrate some taxonomic category.[21] Even those studies which are both more systematic and more specific, have tended to work from a limited view of the range of effects possible through small changes in speech and thought presentation. Neither Jones nor McDowell,[22] for example, is concerned to distinguish between speech presentation and thought presentation although, as I have argued, certain significant factors are inevitably missed if the distinction is not made. The entire area of switching between speech and thought presentation has been much overlooked, the notable exception being Leech and Short who analyse an extract from *The Old Man and the Sea* to show that 'Hemingway uses the interaction of speech and thought presentation to represent two distinct aspects of the old man's mind'.[23]

I shall conclude with one short example which illustrates something of the range of effect that can be attained by this type of switching. In this extract from *Elegy for a Revolutionary,* two policemen have come to arrest a student activist, Arthur, who shares a flat with his friend, Henry Naude:

> 'This is all I've found, Sergeant,' the policeman said, handing the book to the sergeant. It was a copy of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Capricorn.* Oh, the fool, the fool Henry, thought Arthur, I told him that it was banned and that he should get rid of it.
>
> The sergeant looked at the book and then at Henry. 'Are you aware, Mr. Naude, that this is a banned book?'

'I didn't know that it was in my room. Someone must have left it there and the maid stuck it in with my books.' Oh, you liar, thought Arthur, oh Henry you beautiful liar.[24]

Switching occurs here because the reflective consciousness of the various characters is presented in different ways. Of particular interest is the free direct utterance of Henry which, because of the absence of a reporting verb to indicate its manner of delivery, can be interpreted as meaning one thing to the sergeant and quite another to Arthur. We are shown the perlocutionary effect of relief that Henry's utterance has upon Arthur (made more immediate by holding back the words 'thought Arthur', thus creating the temporary illusion that Arthur's response is in free direct thought and not direct thought) while at the same time its illocutionary force is deliberately kept opaque, thus preserving the possibility that the sergeant will react to the protestation of innocence at its face value and not, as Arthur does, as a lie intended for Arthur's benefit. It is a combination of the switch to Henry's free direct speech with the switch back to Arthur's direct thought that allows Henry's words to possess their double value.

Switching of this sort clearly has great potential when it comes to rendering encounters where power is asymmetrically distributed, especially when the asymmetry is so marked as to render the one participant literally speechless. In a society permeated by bannings, both of people and books, a research focus on this particular area of speech and thought presentation would have an immediately discernible pertinence. In addition, such a focus need not be restricted to the domain of literature. Although stylisticians have explored the different ways of presenting speech and thought primarily in order to understand better certain features of literary texts, recent work has begun to apply the categories of speech presentation to newspaper discourse.[25] Some preliminary findings have far-reaching implications, one perhaps expected example being that judicious switching is often used to present two opposed personalities to the benefit of the one to whom the reporter is predisposed. Another is the fact that the strict adherence to the original words used

which is expected of both direct and free direct speech is often relaxed in newspaper reporting in England. As Short has discovered, 'the maxim of strikingness appears to be more important in this genre than the maxim of quality'.[26] Given the fact that the British press regards as legitimate the practice of altering a speaker's words and yet still enclosing them in quotation marks, is it not imperative to find out to what extent the same phenomenon occurs in this country? And, in a land where many leading political figures may not be quoted directly, might it not be useful to explore a related but inverse phenomenon, the degree to which the actual words used by banned persons are reported in what is ostensibly indirect speech but is, in fact, free indirect speech?

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NOTES

1. B.G. McHale, 'Free Indirect Discourse: A Survey of Recent Accounts', *Poetics and Theory of Literature* 3, 1978, pp. 249–287. N. Page, *Speech in the English Novel* (London: Longman, 1973), pp. 33–35.
2. G.N. Leech and M.H. Short, *Style in Fiction* (New York: Longman, 1981), pp. 318–351.
3. J.G. Ballard, *Empire of the Sun* (London: Panther Books, 1985), pp. 34–35.
4. McHale, 'Free Indirect Discourse', p. 256.
5. V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973).
6. A. Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 27.
7. An exception to this rule has been noted by Lawrence in Pott's *Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster.* Although he admits that he is not quoting exactly, the clerk of the court nevertheless records the following utterance in direct speech in order (claims Lawrence) to augment the dramatic force of the accusation:

   This Examinate...sayth, that in or about Christmas, some eighteene or nineteene years agoe...the Examinate heard his said Brother then say unto his said Father these words or to this effect, *Father, I am sure I am bewitched by the Chattox, Anne Chattox, and Anne Redferne her daughter.*

   K. Lawrence, *Speech Presentation in the Seventeenth-Century Legal Deposition with Special Reference to Pott's 'Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster'* (Unpublished M.A.E.L.T. project, University of Lancaster, 1978), p. 11.
8. P. Guiraud, 'Modern Linguistics Looks at Rhetoric: Free Indirect Style', *Patterns of Literary Style,* ed. J. Strelka (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), pp. 85–86.

9. M.A.K. Halliday, 'Linguistic Function and Literary Style: An Enquiry into William Golding's *The Inheritors', Literary Style: A Symposium*, ed. S. Chatman (Oxford: O.U.P., 1971).

10. Leech and Short, pp. 326–327.

11. R. Pascal, *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century European Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977) and M. Gregory, 'Old Bailey Speech in *A Tale of Two Cities', A Review of English Studies,* 6 (2), 1965, pp. 42–55.

12. Leech and Short, pp. 334–336.

13. J.M. Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 84.

14. Page, p. 32.

15. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973). Original version on p. 77.

16. Cf. D. Bickerton, 'Modes of Interior Monologue: A Formal Definition', *Modern Language Quarterly* 28 (2), 1967, pp. 229–239.

17. Schuelke has unearthed many instances of slipping in Old Icelandic sagas. G.L. Schuelke, ' "Slipping" in Indirect Discourse', *American Speech* 33 (2), 1958, pp. 90–98.

18. C. Jones, 'Varieties of Speech Presentation in Conrad's *The Secret Agent', Lingua* 20, 1968, pp. 162–176.

19. Jones is correct about Mrs Verloc's speech. His analysis would, however, have gained in cogency had he pointed out that much of Ossipon's response is presented as free indirect thought, thereby throwing into exaggerated relief the direct speech of Mrs Verloc.

20. McDowell has analysed a passage from *Joseph Andrews* to show that the reader perceives the 'direct discourse' character as 'dominant' and the 'indirect discourse' one as having a 'submissive attitude'. A. McDowell, 'Fielding's Rendering of Speech in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones', Language and Style* 6 (2), 1973, pp. 83–96.

21. Discussions at the level of discourse are often vitiated by vagueness such as this: 'Flaubert can obtain varied and delicate effects from the alternation of direct and free indirect style.' S. Ullman, *Style in the French Novel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), p. 109.

22. Jones, 'Speech Presentation in Conrad' and McDowell, 'Fielding's Rendering of Speech'.

23. Leech and Short, p. 347.

24 C.J. Driver, *Elegy for a Revolutionary* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1969), p. 24.

25. N.L. Fairclough, 'Discourse Representation in Media Discourse' (Unpublished paper) and M.H. Short, 'Speech Presentation, the Novel and the Press' (Unpublished paper).

26. Short, (unpublished), p. 11.

WRITING DIFFERENCES AND THE IDEOLOGY OF FORM: NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN THE NOVELS OF CHRISTINA STEAD

by WENDY WOODWARD

Even to pose the problem of whether women's writing is different, and if so just how differently women write from those in the dominant tradition, is risky because it immediately sets women within a male/female framework which has of course always subordinated the woman. To claim difference in a radical feminist mode is not, however, to acquiesce to inferiority, nor is it to assert an exclusivity as that too would suggest a masculinist position: male writers outside the dominant tradition (those of the avant-garde or the working class)[1] might also write in the forms endemic to women's writing; conversely, not all women writers inscribe the ideology of gender to the same extent. Having acknowledged the differences within 'difference', I will examine how the ideology of gender determines the forms of women's writing with examples from the narratives of Christina Stead to illustrate my points.

The problems presented by 'difference' are exemplified both by those who simply assume its presence, and by those who over-react to it. Freud, for example, revealed androcentric beliefs about the question of women's creativity;[2] he asserted that women's phantasies are dominated 'almost exclusively by erotic wishes' while men's are informed by 'egotistic and ambitious wishes'.[3] Besides considering the poet as always male, Freud had obviously never read or interpreted the desire for power expressed in so many Victorian novels, not those 'Silly novels by lady novelists' decried by George Eliot, but those by the Brontës, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Eliot herself. These novels, according to Gilbert and Gubar, tell of their fury in metaphor and in the 'wicked' or 'mad' *alter-egos* of the more conventional women heroes.[4] This impulse to power that surfaces or submerges repeatedly in women's writing deserves the seminal critical attention it gets in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, but Gilbert and Gubar over-react. They are too sentimental in their desire to celebrate the existence of a female literary tradition (hidden though it might have

been) and reductionist in their conflating of author and female hero, life and art. In a recent essay, Gubar equates the blank page with inner female space and contends that the 'centrality of blood' in female creativity often suggests some form of violation.[5] To concentrate on the issue of blood in women's creativity is, however, to perpetuate essentialist myth, locating woman within the confines of her body and, again, to celebrate the artist as victim.[6]

Hélène Cixous, in her desire for *'écriture feminine'* is just as essentialist: rejecting discourse as male in 'The Laugh of the Medusa', Cixous calls for women to 'write the body':

> To write. An act which will not only 'realise' the de-censored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength...
> it will tear her away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty ... tear her away by means of this research, this job of analysis and illumination, this emancipation of the marvellous text of her self that she must urgently learn to speak ....[7]

In her analysis, however, nobody 'inscribes femininity' except Colette, Marguerite Duras, Jean Genet (and presumably Cixous herself) and her scheme is too utopian to be of any practical value, particularly if one is addressing the problem of writing differences descriptively rather than prescriptively. Virginia Woolf is more useful: she considers that women's novels show, always, some 'deference to authority' which introduces 'distortion' and constitutes 'weakness'; she does not view these traits as exclusive to women's writing but locates them also in the writing of 'a working-man, a negro, or one who for some other reason is conscious of his disability'.[8] Ostensibly ignoring the (female) body, Woolf is concerned with the 'technical difficulty' of the form of the sentence which 'does not fit' the woman writer.

A gendered syntax is impossible to substantiate however, although masculine discourse *is* identifiable as Annette Kuhn notes:

> feminine language...works against the very closure which, it is suggested, is a feature of dominant 'masculine' language, to the extent that such a language

embodies a hierarchy of meanings and implies a sub-
jection to, a completion and closure of, meaning.[9]

Cixous, Woolf, and Kuhn concur broadly that the dominant
discourse is not suited to a woman's purpose, but, though
'infection' may breed in the male sentence, [10] it is not at this
level that I wish to remain in analysing women's writing. I will
turn, rather, to the question of how women are sentenced
to difference by the androcentric society they are born into:
biology has nothing to do with gender which is a cultural
construct. It is the ideology of gender which has made
women's writing different from that of the dominant tradition.
Catherine Belsey defines ideology as

> not an optional extra, deliberately adopted by self-
> conscious individuals . . . but the very condition of our
> experience of the world, *un*conscious precisely in that
> it is unquestioned, taken for granted. Ideology, in
> Althusser's use of the term, works in conjunction with
> political practice and economic practice to constitute
> the *social formation* . . . .[11]

Such is the ideology of gender; in Simone de Beauvoir's
words 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman'.[12]
Nancy Chodorow, exploring the socialisation of gender,
sees the act of mothering and being mothered as perpetu-
ating for the girl and woman the typical gender difference
of the Western 'social formation'. A prolonged pre-oedipal
period for girls promotes 'feelings of primary identification,
lack of separateness and differentiation, ego and body-ego
boundary issues and primary love not under the sway of the
reality principle'. This 'generates a psychology of male
dominance as well as an ideology about women's capacities
and nature'.[13]

Her analysis of gender has provided, for feminist theorists,
a welcome reworking of Freud, but, for my purposes,
Chodorow's sociological emphasis stops short of taking
cognisance of woman's insertion into language, which involves
a splitting rather than a merging. It is Kristeva who, for all
her rejection of the concept of women's difference, most
cogently discusses the position of women forced to function
within a (male) symbolic.[14] She focuses on how language

constitutes meaning by separating the subject from a 'presumed state of nature':

> The analytic situation indeed shows that it is the penis which, becoming the major referent in this operation of separation, gives full meaning to the *lack* or to the *desire* which constitutes the subject during his or her insertion into the order of language.[15]

Women experience their 'insertion into the order of language' differently from men and Kristeva offers her theoretical apparatus as a starting-point for women to 'try to understand their sexual and symbolic difference in the framework of social, cultural, and professional realization', in order ultimately to 'call into question the very apparatus itself'.[16] Judith Kegan Gardiner maintains that women have never identified with the 'old unified subject' of humanism,[17] and Virginia Woolf substantiates this:

> if one is a woman one is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness, say in walking down Whitehall, when from being the natural inheritor of that civilization, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical.[18]

Women's discourse is characterised by this 'splitting off of consciousness' which is revealed in the interrogation of the 'apparatus' of the social formation and in the subversion of the male symbolic: in the narrative structure of the novels of Christina Stead this ideology of gender informs the implicit and explicit engagement with androcentric discourse.
    Nancy K. Miller considers that

> the plots of women's literature are not about 'life' and solutions in any therapeutic sense . . . . They are about the plots of literature itself, about the constraints the maxim places on rendering a female life in fiction.[19]

Stead subverts the *Künstlerroman* genre in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney, The Man Who Loved Children*, and *For Love Alone*,[20] each of which renders the life of a putative woman artist, by constituting the novels differently from the *Bildung*

of the dominant tradition. Annis Pratt has documented how the *Bildung* of female heroes differs from the male archetypal form: female heroes tend to enact rebellion against, rather than accept the norms of androcentric society and often spiral within themselves in a dramatisation of internal conflict.[21] Although this pattern is present in Stead's *Künstlerromanen*, the female hero's artistic quest occurs within a linear plot. In Stead's other narratives, however, a circular, repetitious plot metonymises women's stasis in either the social formation or the (usually male) capitalistic pursuits. In these novels repetition signifies the horror of stultification, a dearth of change, and death as the end of the pleasure principle.

Women's writing is often characterised by silence, either extrinsically or intrinsically: it is a phenomenon Virginia Woolf and Tillie Olsen have both treated at length.[22] In Stead's novels many women characters are never brought to narrative closure; it is as though they have become silenced by their conformity to androcentric norms. Those who seek marriage as their only choice in life – Peggy in *Cotter's England*, Kitty in *For Love Alone*, Sara in *The Beauties and Furies*[23] – are scripted out of the narratives. In addition, all women characters, even when they are the text's main focus, have their sexuality silenced: in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* Catherine's relationships are treated metonymically in gestures; in *The Beauties and Furies* Elvira's narcissistic sexuality is suggested in oneiric sequences. Even in the realistic mode of *Letty Fox: Her Luck*, Letty's love-making is depicted metaphorically and sometimes mythically (Luke Adams is her preferred lover).[24] Silence also obtains for those women who attempt to tell their stories to male narratees: in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, Catherine's narrative and tale are framed by male incomprehension and in *The Man Who Loved Children*, Louisa's art is threatened with obliteration by Sam's censorship.

Many women writers, experiencing exteriority to the male symbolic, suggest another discourse for themselves or for their female characters. Just as female sexuality is depicted metaphorically in Stead's texts, so the narratives told by the women artists are inscribed in the metaphorical mode. *Herpes Rom*, Louisa's play, in her own devised language, tells of a girl impregnated and murdered by her father, thus duplicating metaphorically Louisa's feelings of being stifled by Sam;

Catherine's tale tells obliquely of her incestuous love of her
brother and her quest for thanatos; Teresa's 'Seven Houses of
Love' also links eros and thanatos in the metaphorical mode.
The discourse of these women constitutes a very different
genderlect from that spoken by male characters,[25] whose
stories and anecdotes, never as intensely personal, occur in
the metonymic (realistic) mode. They engage in discourse
that boasts of their hegemonic *modus operandi* (like Robert
Grant in *A Little Tea, A Little Chat*, Jonathan Crow in *For
Love Alone* and the financiers in *House of All Nations*),[26]
or dramatises it in competitive intellectual repartee (like
Jonathan Crow and James Quick in their savage 'bull session').
Male and female genderlects are presented as divisive, and
always oppressive of the women: Catherine, having slashed
her wrist in a self-sacrificial attempt to convey her love to
Baruch, quotes Nietzsche to him ('they are alien . . . so alien
that they cannot even speak their difference to each other').
Sam and Henny do not even share a common vocabulary: to
the idealistic, egoistic Sam, a spade is 'the predecessor of
modern agriculture', to the domestically-enslaved, slatternly
Henny, it is merely a 'muck dig'.[27]

Christina Stead is acutely conscious of the position of
women within a hostile symbolic, and the texts foreground a
woman's difficulty in finding her voice by using metafictional
narrative strategies. This occurs especially in the *mise en
abyme* aspects of the female characters who attempt author-
ship and, more generally, in constant self-reflective references
to the writing of a novel, as in the endings of *Seven Poor Men
of Sydney, For Love Alone,* and *Miss Herbert (The Suburban
Wife).*[28]

Alice Jardine suggests that an excessive respect for form
on the part of the woman writer is

> the obvious cultural result of having always been closer
> to all possible transgressions: one fatal step outside of
> symbolic prescriptions and she is designated as 'mad'.[29]

Certainly, Stead's earlier texts strive for literariness in their
mannered style and overblown prolixity, and the static plots
(with the exception of the *Künstlerromanen*) are enclosed
within structures that foreground form rather than represen-
tation. A corollary to this concern for form, as Jardine

notes, is the rupturing of representational space and chrono-
logical time which are seldom presented teleologically.

In Stead's novels, time is not so much telescoped or
broadened but ignored as a *topos,* and space tends to be an
internalised factor rather than an external construct: the
nightmarish valley becomes a rite of adolescent passage for
Teresa in *For Love Alone,* the mud flats surrounding Spa
House an expression of Henny's penurious slough of despond,
the architectonics of New York a duplication of the Massines'
teeming states of mind in *The People with the Dogs.*[30] Meta-
phor, too, accumulates a different significance from that in
the dominant tradition: a house, never Gaston Bachelard's
'felicitous space',[31] merely suggests female domestic entrap-
ment; metaphors equating women with tractable, sensuous
animals or birds are satirised; still other metaphors suggest a
desire for some visionary transcendence of the male symbolic.

These so often are the forms found variously in women's
writing and exemplified here in the narratives of Christina
Stead: dislocation of genre, silence, an awareness of gender-
lects, metafictional references to the act of writing, a respect
for form contradicted by the rupturing of time, space and
metaphor of the dominant tradition. I agree with Cixous
that women 'shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain
which is the margin or the harem'[32] and with the desire of
Kristeva's utopianism that deconstructs male and female
difference in its assertion that 'the very dichotomy man/
woman as an opposition between rival entities may be under-
stood as belonging to *metaphysics'.*[33] But while we await
Kristeva's 'new theoretical and scientific space' beyond
identity, while the ideology of gender still obtains within
women's (and men's) discourse, then analyses of this ideology
could profitably constitute the endeavour of literary critics
I would prefer not to label feminist — it is, after all, the
masculinist ideology that should be marked.

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NOTES

1. Virginia Woolf's reference to this phenomenon is documented below. Julia Kristeva also equates women with 'oppressed classes of society' in 'La femme' (24) quoted in Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory,* New Accents Series (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 164.

2. 'Androcentric' replaces the more polemical 'patriarchal'; it refers to any culture in which the male is privileged in every sphere.

3. Sigmund Freud, 'The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming', *Collected Papers,* Vol. 4, The International Psycho-analytical Library 10 (London: Hogarth, 1925), pp. 173–83.

4. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

5. Susan Gubar, ' "The Blank Page" and the Issues of Female Creativity', *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory,* ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 292–313.

6. An essentialist argument attributes to the sexes inalienable differences rooted in biology.

7. Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', *New French Feminisms: An Anthology,* ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester, 1981). p. 250.

8. Virginia Woolf, 'Women and Fiction', *Granite and Rainbow* (London: Hogarth, 1958), p. 80.

9. Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 17.

10. Infection in the sentence breeds/We may inhale Despair/At distances of Centuries/From the Malaria
    Emily Dickinson, *Final Harvest* (Boston: Little Brown, 1961) p. 267.

11. Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice,* New Accents Series (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 5.

12. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* tr. H.M. Parshley (1949; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 295.

13. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) p. 110 and p. 208.

14. The symbolic is defined as 'language as nomination, sign and syntax' and is in dialectical conflict with the semiotic which belongs to the stage of instinctual drives and dependence on the mother. Julia Kristeva, 'From One Identity to Another', *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* tr. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, Leon S. Roudiez, ed. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 136.

15. Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', tr. Alice Jardine, Harry Blake, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7 (1) 1981, p. 23.

16. Kristeva, 'Women's Time', p. 23.

17. Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'Mind Mother: Psychoanalysis and Feminism', *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism,* ed. Gayle Green and Coppelia Kahn, New Accents Series (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 113–45.

18. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; New York: Harvester, 1957), p. 101.

19. Nancy K. Miller, 'Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction', *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory,* ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p. 356. See also Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers,* Everywoman: Studies in History,

Literature, and Culture series, ed. Susan Gubar, Joan Hoff-Wilson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985). DuPlessis discusses the significance of the Künstlerroman for women writers, pp. 84–104.

20. Christina Stead, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934; Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1981); *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983); *For Love Alone* (1944; London: Virago, 1981).

21. Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).

22. Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (New York: Delacorte, 1978), and Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own.*

23. Christina Stead, *Cotter's England* (1966; London: Virago, 1980); *The Beauties and Furies* (1936; London: Virago, 1982).

24. Christina Stead, *Letty Fox: Her Luck* (1947; London: Virago, 1982).

25. 'Genderlect' means those dialects spoken either by women marginalised within the male symbolic or by men empowered by it. K.K. Ruthven, in *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 103, attributes this term to Wayne Dickerson, cited in Cheris Kramer, 'Women's Speech: separate but unequal?' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60, 1974, p. 14.

26. Christina Stead, *A Little Tea, A Little Chat* (1948; London: Virago, 1981); *House of All Nations* (1938; Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974).

27. Catherine, in *Seven Poor Men,* p. 311; and Henny in *The Man Who Loved Children,* p. 67.

28. Christina Stead, *Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)* (1976; London: Virago, 1979).

29. Alice Jardine, 'Pre-Texts for the Transatlantic Feminist', *Yale French Studies* 62, 1981, pp. 233.

30. Christina Stead, *The People With the Dogs* (1952; London: Virago, 1981).

31. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* tr. Maria Jolas (New York: Orion, 1964).

32. Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p. 251.

33. Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', p. 33.

DEEPER THAN THE CHILD PERCEIVES
CAMARA LAYE'S *THE AFRICAN CHILD*

by ABNER NYAMENDE

My aim in this paper is to indicate something of the significance
of Malinke traditional life in Camara Laye's novel *The African
Child*, which was originally published in French in 1954.
Peter I. Okeli's observation that Camara Laye 'exposes the
beauty of Africa and leaves it to the reader to read between
the lines',[1] reinforces my suggestion that Laye's presentation
of traditional life achieves an unusual depth and purpose, and
Dan Izevbaye is correct when he says:

> To see the hero of the autobiography as cultural type or
> model the reader needs to be fully aware of the extremely
> complex cultural condition from which the hero emerges.
> There will then be no doubt about the true cultural
> status of the hero.[2]

In this novel Laye does, indeed, seem to confront the very
idea of tradition without committing himself to any dogmatic
explanations. He leaves it to readers to make up their own
minds and to impose their own judgements. Unlike the
anthropologist, Laye affords us the benefit of his own feelings,
needs and apprehensions as an individual in the midst of his
traditional society. At the same time he depicts his characters
as symbols of a society, figures who are meant to emphasise
the cultural background rather than assert their individualised
selves. As narrator, Laye serves as the first point of contact
between his reader and his own socio-cultural inheritance. He
is in a sense featureless, and begins the story as a boy of 'five,
maybe six years old'. As such he is any boy of that age whose
vision suits our imagination.[3]
    In fact, the title of the novel suggests 'any child' and
persuades us to regard the narrator and his society generally
as the representatives of the African peoples. Furthermore,
nowhere in the novel is the African child explicitly identified.
It is mainly through the use of the first person, 'I', that we
are able to judge Camara Laye himself to be this particular
African child. But even the 'I' is ambivalent, since it suggests

both an adult looking into his past and the latent 'I' of an
adult who is a child at heart. The mother and father, too, are
central to the novel while remaining physically vague as
individual presences. The only hint about the mother's actual
appearance is given in the following brief description:

> I seemed to see her walking along the dusty road, her
> dress falling in noble folds, her waist-band neatly tied,
> her hair carefully plaited and drawn back on to the nape
> of her neck. (p. 111)

Even this mental perception is adequate only in giving us a
picture that can fit any African woman, with the emphasis on
the dress and hair style. The physical appearance of the
grandmother is also dismissed in a few general remarks,
reflecting her slim, strong and healthy physique as well as
her 'jet-black' hair (p. 32).

In marked contrast to the 'Western' novel of inner explo-
ration, Laye's *African Child* asks us to look closely at the
background which the characters occupy, as a microcosm of
the Malinke community. The Camara's clan constitutes an
extended family with at least two women as wives of the
family head, the grandmother, the apprentices, and children.
As such it fully resembles the composition of Malinke society
on a minor scale. Specific tasks and appointments give co-
hesion to the family unit, in which the apprentices seek means
and ways of self-development, while the father, mother, and
also the grandmother and the grandfather, to mention only
the most recent couples in the Camara genealogy, have the
more involved lifetime task of validating their mutual co-
existence and the significance, to them, of their cultural
heritage and tradition.

Marriage, which in this case brings the woman, Laye's
mother, out of her familiar social environment and into a
new family set-up, can be interpreted as a form of pilgrimage
on the part of the woman. This ritual is undertaken more as
a social duty than a matter of love for the husband, or a
passive submission to the urge for procreation. This idea of
pilgrimage becomes evident when the woman is compared to
a devotee paying homage to the 'holy land' of her religion,
where she receives grace and strengthens her faith. It is a
faith that can be felt in Laye's own mother when she dares to

challenge the forces of nature and the patrons of her religion by her simple purity:

> If it be true that from the day of my birth I had know-ledge of no man until the day of my marriage: and if it be true that from the day of my marriage I have had knowledge of no man other than my lawful husband — if these things be true, then I command you, horse, rise up! (p. 59)

The era of colonialism and its rapid introduction of changes in the fundamental way of life of the Malinke greatly affects the mother, who, like the rest of her people, senses the pressure brought to bear upon her as the preserver of her own culture, and feels tested by the introduction of the new standards of a foreign counterpart. Her immediate reaction is one of resistance. According to traditional arrangement, her child should have been permitted to grow and develop under her supervision, thus becoming an active force in the pro-motion of societal interests and a tangible representation of her glory. But now she finds her son — who wants to travel to France — threatening to leave the immediate social environ-ment. This is seen as a test of her faith, one ultimately to reveal her human weakness and uncertainty. As she exclaims to her husband:

> So you haven't . . . noticed that they don't eat as we do? This child will fall sick, that's what will happen. And then what will I do? What will become of me? Oh, I once had a son, but now I have a son no more! (p. 156)

She cannot guarantee the continued existence of her son in a world she fears he has not been prepared for. True to her nature as an imperfect human being, she wavers in her faith when her traditional way of raising her children is put to a crucial test through her son's being, as she feels it, snatched away to a completely new environment. Ostensibly, her con-cern is about his physical well-being: the care for his clothes, his meals and his health seem to be of paramount importance to her. But whether African nurture will prove to be worth the attention of the world, is her inner concern. Her depen-dence on the lasting influence of her nurture on the young person is felt here even more strongly than in their curtailed

meeting at the entrance to the sanctum of the circumcised, where he 'only had to go a couple of steps and [he] would be at her side' (p. 109). At that time he had not crossed beyond the gate, in solemn obedience to custom. To have done otherwise would have disgraced the family and shattered his mother's faith. By contrast — as Adele King points out — when Laye returned to the country of his birth in 1956, his parents, 'he said, were unable to understand what he was doing, since his success as an artist was not comprehensible to them in terms of traditional society'.[4]

King's comment that 'Komady [Laye's father in real life] was proud of his son's success even though it was in a world quite different from his own' is astute in as far as it indicates a more modern view of life on the part of the father than on that of the mother.[5] That the father's perspective 'has moved beyond family and tribe to the nation', accords with Laye's intention in the novel.[6] The demarcation between the mother and father is not exaggerated, for traditional cultural roles would have dictated that the father — as head of the family — be prepared, against a background of French 'assimilation' in colonial policy, to look beyond the village for new opportunities for his son. Contrary to his wife's rather clouded perception of her son's prospects abroad, the elder Camara tells the boy that each one 'follows his own destiny' (p. 153). There is thus no vehement resistance to the infiltration of western culture, such as we encounter in the first novels emanating from the British sphere of colonial influence, including *Things Fall Apart*. The Malinke society, represented by the elder Camara, is seen to be flexible and adaptable while not wanting to abandon its traditions. In consequence the focus of the book remains on the interrelationships and workings of the community rather than on the themes of 'modernity' or 'exile'.

In the novel, culture is shown to be a living activity, closely related to the everyday lives of the Malinke. Thus the hoe, which is waved in a ceremonial dance, inspires the dancers and onlookers with a spirit of well-being (p. 97). Similarly the picture of Laye's father at his appointed task of melting gold and making a trinket out of the metal is an impressive one, as he dances to the douga 'which is only sung for celebrated men' (p. 30). The child recalls from memory how

> At the first notes of the douga, my father would rise
> and utter a cry in which happiness and triumph were
> equally mingled; and brandishing in his right hand the
> hammer that was the symbol of his profession, and in
> his left a ram's horn filled with magic substances, he
> would dance the glorious dance. (p. 31)

The horn with its magic substances supports and ensures the
smooth performance of work; hence its juxtaposition to the
hammer, a symbol of workmanship. Just as magic justifies
the rhythms of work, so work gives form to the religious
impulse in people's lives. The melting of gold is a 'ceremony'
and a 'matter of ritual' which is performed with 'religious
concentration' (pp. 25–29), and Laye's father owes his
success as a blacksmith to the guiding spirit manifest in the
black snake. In the performance of his task the blacksmith
conjures up spirits to come to his assistance and he 'never
failed to stroke stealthily the little snake' (p. 27). In fact, the
worker in the novel also plays the role of a priest. He has to
be ritually pure before embarking on the process of melting
gold. By the same token, the close association the writer
suggests between his father and the orange tree, which
dominates the main section of the yard, is a fitting one.

Like the tree, the father provides a protective shelter for
his dependants, and shares the generosity of the tree which
provides the fruit. It is through orders given by him that the
fruit can be picked. For this he is described by his son as 'an
open-handed and, in fact, a lavish giver' in that everyone who
happens to be in the compound at the time of the harvest
receives a share (p. 14). Like the 'heady perfume' that is a
result of the fruit-creating process of the tree, the father's
hard toil becomes the sweetness of a blessing to his dependants.
In the novel it is crowned by the noble task of jewel-making,
'in which he can display his abilities with a virtuosity that his
work as a blacksmith or a mechanic or even as a sculptor is
never invested with' (p. 28). In similar fashion the Tindican
reapers are vested with a 'virtuosity' that far exceeds their
normal grace – a virtuosity made apparent in the spiritual
harmony that prevails among them as they perform their
work (p. 51).

Laye's mother can assert her womanhood through her
domestic duties. During meal times she prevails over everyone

in the compound, including her husband. At the same time, and in order to continue enjoying such influence in the compound, she has to be efficient in her work. The preparation of food being 'a woman's business', she wakes up at dawn to do it (p. 56). Significantly, she is the only prominent member of the compound who is not drawn into the workshop to watch her husband melting gold. Her work not only detains her, it also provides her with a position of strength. And in pounding millet or rice furiously, she signals her objections to her husband's plea that she should release their son to go to France. As befits the theme of 'cultural inclusiveness', the dialogue at first centres on her work:

> 'What do you want?' she said. 'Can't you see I'm busy.'
> And she began pounding faster and faster.
> 'Don't go so fast,' my father said, 'you'll wear yourself out.'
> 'Are you trying to teach me how to pound millet?' she said. (p. 155)

This exchange prepares for a confrontation between the husband and wife, in which the wife − by virtue of the context of her woman's work − has the upper hand. The level of seriousness is, however, nicely controlled, and the exchange concludes as a mutual demonstration of motherliness or fatherliness within a secure community.

Indeed, one of the characters who is deprived of the privilege of asserting himself in purposeful work is the African child himself. But his role in this novel is of a slightly different nature. The choice of a child as the central figure is a useful device. By choosing to inform us about what he had seen as a child, Camara Laye can offer information and perceptions that do not need qualification or explanation. We cannot expect the child to supply details of the customs governing harvest, because he 'had left Africa behind' before he could learn anything about such ceremonies (p. 45). He is as puzzled as we are about the symbolic relationship of the little black snake and his father, as we (the readers) suddenly find ourselves working hard to bridge the gaps in rational understanding that have deliberately been created in the text. The narrating presence of the African child forces us to re-create our own child-like way of seeing and understanding, as

we attempt to give experienced, adult interpretations to the child's instinctive truths. At the same time, however, the child's curiosity is used by the novelist to pinpoint the more profound aspects of his people's culture and tradition, as the narrator asks himself:

> What were these guiding spirits that I encountered almost everywhere, forbidding one thing, commanding another to be done? (p. 16)

Where an adult would feel obliged to define his world for us, the child senses something more profound than rational explanation. Instead his 'story' evokes for us the deeper rhythms of a traditional African world. Thus, the tale of this African child is inexhaustible, drawing significance as it does from the memory of vital tradition against the necessary counter-movement, as Laye saw it, of change and exploration outwards to the metropolitan and European world. In its inclusive treatment of cultural life as a symbolic and continuing entity, *The African Child* is a work that can, in university study, provide a good corrective to Europeanised notions of 'individual' dominance and value in fiction and in life. Laye's equation finally promotes community understandings above any solitary insight.

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NOTES

1. Peter Igbonekwu Okeli, 'Two Ways of Explaining Africa: An Insight into Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir . . .*', *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*, 1975, p. 80.
2. Dan Izevbaye, 'Issues in the Reassessment of the African Novel', *African Literature Today* 10, 1979, p. 11.
3. Camara Laye, *The African Child* (1955; Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1959), p. 11. Further page references to this work appear in brackets in the text.
4. Adele King, *The Writings of Camara Laye* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 6.
5. King, p. 2.
6. King, p. 33.

'WATERS FLOWING FROM DARKNESS'
THE TWO ETHIOPIAS IN THE EARLY EUROPEAN
IMAGE OF AFRICA

by MALVERN VAN WYK SMITH

'Africa has always seemed an important image.'
Graham Greene, *Journey Without Maps*, 1936.

This paper will survey briefly some of the more important
notions that accrued, from Greek antiquity to the early
Renaissance, around Homer's claim in the *Odyssey*, i. 22–24,
that there were two Ethiopias, one in the west and one in the
east, both at the ends of the earth. It is customary to think of
such a description as largely, if not purely, mythic, but there
is in fact a substantial reality behind this Homeric notion.

Homer's 'Ethiopians who dwell . . . some where Hyperion
sets and some where he rises' were probably inspired by, and
certainly from an early period became focalised in, two quite
different historical realities: the powerful Kushite empire of
Meroe on the Nubian Nile, whose inhabitants were perceived
as highly civilised, 'the first of men', isolated in a wasteland,
who came to represent the 'admirable Ethiopians' of the east,
as against the nomadic tribes of the Sahara and sub-Saharan
regions who became the 'other Ethiopians' of the west, and
were frequently presented as savage, bestial and treacherous.
This division came to control numerous subsequent descrip-
tions of Africa, from Herodotus in the fifth century BC to as
late as the *Nuremburg Chronicle* of 1493.

Herodotus, who travelled up the Nile as far as Aswan in
about 440 BC, depicts the Meroitic Ethiopians (who fought
off the Persians and hence ensured Greek admiration) as
long-lived . . . the tallest and handsomest men in the whole
world', cunning but peace-loving (iii. 17–24).[1] Far to the
south-west, however, were 'the dog-faced creatures, and the
creatures without heads, whom the Libyans declare to have
their eyes in their breasts; and also the wild men, and wild
women, and many other far less fabulous beasts' (iv. 191).
The note of scepticism right at the end would disappear in
later accounts.

Diodorus Siculus, who also visited Egypt and also based

much of his description on personal enquiry, nevertheless reveals how much more schematised the basic division of Africa into two Ethiopias had become by the first century BC.[2] Specifically invoking Homer's division (iii.2.3–4), Diodorus presents the Meroitic Ethiopians as 'the first to be taught to honour the gods', thus 'they manifestly enjoy the favour of the gods' and ' from all time they have enjoyed a state of freedom and of peace one with another'. Their country is the 'most famous' island of Meroe in the Nile, 'on which there also lies a famous city bearing the same name' and there 'are also to be found in it mines of gold, silver, iron and copper, and it contains in addition much ebony and every kind of precious stone' (i.33.1–3).

However, a further exotic element now enters the picture, namely the notion that beyond Meroe an even more fabulous country existed. The Ethiopians, Diodorus tells us, call the Nile the *Astapus*, which he translates as 'Water from Darkness' (i.37.9), thus setting up an evocative image of the mystery of the Nile that would be reiterated in many later accounts. In Diodorus's own words the Nile has 'its sources in regions which have never been seen, since they lie in the desert at the extremity of Ethiopia in a country that cannot be approached because of the excessive heat' (i.32.1). Here, in embryo, is an exotic Ethiopia that would remain a fundamental element in the image of Africa for many centuries to come.

Indeed, Diodorus's 'other Ethiopia', located largely to the south and west of Meroitic Ethiopia, could only serve to emphasise such an image, so sharp were the contrasts it created. Stretching away from both banks of the Nile to 'the neighbouring country of Arabia' (the Red Sea coast) on the one hand and 'the interior of Libya' on the other, are 'a great many other tribes of Ethiopians' who

> are black in colour and have flat noses and woolly hair. As for their spirit they are entirely savage and display the nature of a wild beast, not so much, however, in their temper as in their ways of living; for they are squalid all over their bodies, they keep their nails very long like wild beasts, and are as far removed as possible from human kindness to one another; and speaking as they do with a shrill voice and cultivating none of the practices of civilised life as these are found among the rest of mankind, they present a striking

contrast when considered in the light of our own customs. (ii. 8. 2–3)

One hardly needs to labour the point that here we have, in embryo again, a notion of 'savage Ethiopians' that was to become a set-piece in the repertoire of the European ethnography of Africa, and notably of West Africa.

The sharpness of Diodorus's discrimination between Meroitic and 'other' Ethiopians, legitimised by Homeric authority, inevitably became a blunt but ready paradigm for representing two great classes of Ethiopians. Strabo, writing some fifty years later, defends Homer's description of Ethiopia as 'sundered in two' and sees the Nile itself as marking the main division.[3] An apologist for the new imperial Rome under Augustus, Strabo also begins to show signs of scepticism about the fame of Meroitic Ethiopia. Speaking of the Ethiopian queen he says: 'Queen Candace was ruler of the Ethiopians in my time – a masculine sort of woman, and blind in one eye' (xvii. 1.54), and unlike earlier Greek commentators, he calls into question the military prowess of this kingdom (xvii. 1.53).

Pliny, coming some two generations later, took the process further. Starting from the imperial Roman assumption that Europe was the centre of the universe, 'the nurse of the race that has conquered all the nations, and by far the loveliest portion of the earth',[4] he developed an environmental ethnography in which the Mediterranean becomes, as E. M. Forster was to put it later, 'the human norm', productive of people and cultures as temperate and equable as the climate, in contrast to the human and environmental extremes of both Scythian north and Ethiopian south (ii. 80. 189–190). Hence the whole of Africa is substantially reduced in stature on Pliny's scale. He repeats Homer's division as 'the most reliable opinion' (v. 8. 43), but his Meroe is now a kingdom in decay, already a legend: of many places on the Upper Nile listed by earlier writers, says Pliny, 'at this day there is neither stick nor stone to be found of any of them . . . only deserts and a vast wilderness instead of them' (vi. 35. 181).[5] His other Ethiopia is entirely reduced to a land of monsters and sub-human shapes, the notorious dog-headed men, anthropophagi, and 'men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders' of many later accounts, unredeemed by any of the detailed

accuracies found in Diodorus.

But while we see here a substantial degeneration in the two Ethiopias of Herodotus and Diodorus, and even while Pliny specifically demolishes the notion of a superior eastern Ethiopia based on Meroe, his invocation of the Homeric distinction between two Ethiopias helped to ensure the survival of the older concept of a 'noble' Ethiopia and a 'savage' Ethiopia quite regardless of what was actually being described.

Thus Homer's division, nourished by a European propensity towards binary thinking, continued to develop into the most powerful of European myths about Africa, growing over the centuries into the elaborate meliorative mythologies of a 'terrestrial paradise' at the sources of the Nile or in the south, beyond the Mountains of the Moon; into the legends associated with Prester John and Abyssinia; of Monomotapa; of Sofala or Zimbabwe as King Solomon's Ophir — all these as transformational extensions of the Meroitic Ethiopia of the east and all set variously and at different times against a recidivist mythology of the west: the 'white man's grave', the locale of the slave trade, and the barbarities eventually so readily associated with Dahomey, Asiante and Benin in West Africa.

The early history of the Christian church in North Africa effectively confirmed the conception of two separate Ethiopias. The western branch, based in Carthage in the Roman province of 'Africa', was seen as troublesome and disruptive, wracked by the Donatist controversies of the fourth century to such an extent that Salvianus of Marseilles could, in the middle of the next century, welcome the Vandal destruction of this section of the Christian church as God's just punishment of typically barbarous 'Africans'.[6] Conversely, the eastern branch of the church, based in Alexandria, became, of course, one of the greatest centres of early Christianity, and remained for very much longer a part of the central Christian tradition.[7] After the Muslim conquest of the area, refugees established the legendary hermitages of the Thebaid while embattled Christianity withdrew first to Nubia and finally to Abyssinia, thus creating an enduring source of speculation about a lost Christian world somewhere beyond the infidels. Hence the surviving image of the church of the 'western' Ethiopians remained in European memory a largely

troubled one; that of the 'eastern' Ethiopians acquired all the charm conferred by distance.

When we turn to the cartography of Africa, we can recognise a similar bipartite treatment of the continent, and a familiar movement from realism to myth. No authentic classical maps have come down to us; however, the maps suggested by and that may have accompanied Ptolemy's *Cosmographia* were probably crude but realistic attempts to match his carefully calculated co-ordinates for all the main centres of the known world. The medieval Christian church, however, eschewed such realism in favour of an allegorical reading of the cosmos which produced an essentially symbolic image of the earth, reflected in maps such as the Hereford *mappamundi* of the thirteenth century. This kind of map was typically oriented with east at the top, surmounted by the terrestrial paradise. In the case of the Hereford map a further allegorical embellishment is a judgement scene overtopping all, showing the damned being led off to God's left, which is southward, and thus heading towards the weird one-legged, one-eyed, and other monstrous figures filling the southern extremities of a crescent-shaped Africa under God's left-hand. It must be remembered that before the discovery of the magnetic compass, 'east' and 'west' from a European vantage point were vaguely south-east and south-west. The 'eastern' paradise could therefore be located anywhere through an arc east and south of the Mediterranean that was as substantial as it was symbolic and vague. The significance of this will appear below.

In the case of Africa the move to a map as icon rather than as chart was further encouraged by first the Vandal and then the Muslim conquest of North Africa, which effectively shut inner Africa off from Europe for the best part of a thousand years. During the same period Arab cartography seems similarly to have developed two quite different but parallel realistic and symbolic traditions. Superior skill in mathematics and astronomy enabled Arab mapmakers to develop the Ptolemaic configurations into remarkably accurate marine charts of the Mediterranean seaboard, but apparently only as long as such maps were regarded as route directions and not as images of the earth; Islamic proscriptions on images of God or His work encouraged an alternative totemistic representation of the earth which is hardly recognisable (and was not

intended) as a map. In the fourteenth and early fifteenth
centuries these traditions blend in the portolans (marine
charts) produced for various European monarchs by Arab-
Jewish mapmakers. Once the Portuguese voyages of discovery
got underway, the maps revealed a remarkable and speedily
registered realism in the presentation of the African seaboard,
while adopting an emblematic but equally valid mode for the
African interior. A good example of such a transitional map
would be the world globe of Martin Behaim (1492) made just
after Bartolomeu Dias's rounding of the Cape of Good Hope
but before Vasco da Gama's continuation of the route to
India. It reveals a substantially accurate African west coast as
far as the Cape, but a crude fantasy of the eastern seaboard
and an interior of mythic kingdoms and creatures. By the
nature of the sequence of Portuguese discovery, a 'realistic'
and inevitably demythologising tradition thus came to be
attached to the exploration of the 'western' or 'savage'
Ethiopia, while an emblematic and inevitably mythopoeic
treatment of inner and 'eastern' Ethiopia further enhanced
the status of that area in, at first, the Portuguese and then the
general European imagination.

In the geographic and cartographic interpretation of Africa,
the Nile and its hydrographic system occupies a special
position. Described by Ptolemy (quite accurately, as it turned
out) as flowing from two great lakes beyond the equator fed
by the Mountains of the Moon, the Nile intrigued every
ancient writer on Africa. The astonishing reality of a massive
river emerging from a desert, the mystery of its sources, the
existence of empires such as those of Kush, Meroe and Aksum
on its upper reaches, and persistent rumours of even more
fabled kingdoms at its headwaters (ultimately associated
with Prester John and Abyssinia), blended with a patristic
tradition that the Nile was in fact the Gihon, one of the four
rivers of Paradise, to create the potent myth of a terrestrial
paradise sited beyond the Sahara, sometimes in east Africa
(itself initially seen as part of 'greater India') but also progress-
ively southwards. In this development the imprecision of the
symbolic cartography mentioned earlier played a richly
imaginative part. If the Gihon/Nile (or at least its major
eastern affluent, sometimes identified with the Blue Nile but
sometimes with the Atbara) was one of the rivers of paradise,
paradise itself had to lie somewhere beyond it, and there are

several maps that indicate just that. Most fourteenth-century portolans describe the eastern Nile as the 'fluvius Gion qui descendit de montibus paradisi'; the Catalan world map of about 1450 shows the Gihon/Nile flowing from a paradise in east Africa surrounded by a circle of fiery mountains; the Munich portolan of 1502 shows a fairly accurately shaped Africa but with a magnificently walled mountain-top paradise in east-central Africa; and the Albertin de Virga map, dated 1415 (but surely too early) by Albert Kammerer, depicts another circular mountain-walled paradise that fills almost the whole of southern Africa.[8]

It should therefore hardly be surprising that the Portuguese approach to Africa in the early fifteenth century seems to have been markedly influenced by the notion of two quite distinct Ethiopias. Because of the strong tradition of the survival of a Christian kingdom at the sources of the Nile and beyond Muslim North Africa, identified with the realm of Prester John, the first Portuguese emissaries to these parts sought their goal in reverent expectation, while their successors here often conceived of themselves in chivalric terms, forging links between great Christian empires. When the enterprise failed on the banishment of the Jesuits from Abyssinia in the early seventeenth century, the whole image of a fabulous empire was for a while conferred on the less familiar Monomotapa. There is, then, a dogged tendency over several centuries to over-react to 'eastern' Ethiopia, reflected in the exaggerated importance and size of Abyssinia in the carto-graphic tradition established by Gastaldi in the 1560s and followed by Mercator, Ortelius, and most mapmakers till the late seventeenth century.[9]

In the west, however, the Portuguese approached Africa quite differently. Here the enterprise was inspired by the Portuguese conquest of Ceuta in 1415, conceived as a victory over perfidious infidels and as the culmination of a history of crusades. The Moors of Muslim Africa were arch enemies, to be exterminated. In setting off down the west coast, Prince Henry the Navigator's sea-captains took their prejudices about Moors, nourished on centuries of Mediterranean con-flict, with them, and regarded all they met as 'the enemy'. No clear distinction was initially made between 'Moors' and 'Negroes', and the Portuguese had no difficulty in regarding the blacks of the west coast as the 'savage Ethiopians' of the

core tradition, who had to be circumvented in order to reach a lost Christian empire beyond. Indeed, Gomez Eannes de Azurara's *Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, completed in 1453, makes no mention at all of the circumnavigation of Africa as one of Henry's aims; the enterprise is initially obsessed with outflanking Islamic North Africa, and afterwards with plundering the African seaboard.

Southern Africa occupies in the geographic-cartographic mythography of Africa a position second only to that of the Nile. From Aristotle's *Meteorologica* onwards, it was speculated that another temperate, habitable region, opposite but complementary to the Mediterranean world, had to exist beyond the 'uninhabitable torrid zone' of Sahara and tropics. Southern Africa was thus invented before it was discovered, a fact of crucial importance to subsequent European attitudes to the region, particularly when coupled with the persistent notion of a southern 'terrestrial paradise', articulated most famously by Dante.

In this regard the lingering notion of Ptolemy's 'Mountains of the Moon' played some significant part. Cited originally as the source of the *fontes Nili*, they came to be construed, as we have already seen, either as protecting the terrestrial paradise or as providing an elevation for it. Pushed progressively further southward, they formed on many maps of the Gastaldi-Mercator-Ortelius tradition a natural frontier for southern Africa, sometimes as far south as the 20th latitude. This strengthened the notion of the Cape of Good Hope as a secluded, paradisal enclave such as we have already met and as described by Livio Sanuto in 1588 and reiterated by Samuel Purchas in 1613:

> Upon the top of this promontory [the 'table of the Cape', Table Mountain] Nature . . . hath formed here a great plain, pleasant in situation, which with the fragrant herbs, variety of flowers, and flourishing verdure of all things, seems a terrestrial paradise.[10]

Perhaps the most striking graphic exemplar of such thinking is one of the very earliest Dutch maps of Table Bay to be compiled *in situ* — Johannes Vingboon's panoramic map of about 1660, showing a veritable garden settlement of 'weylandt' (pasture) and streams shielded by a wall of mountains from a surrounding emptiness.[11]

In this tradition Camoens's *Lusiads* (1572) occupies a significant position since the work seeks to reconcile in its treatment of the Cape of Good Hope the paradise of expectation with the storm-wracked headland of the seafarers' experience. It is perhaps not accidental that Vasco da Gama's famous confrontation with the mythic spirit of the Cape, Adamastor, is framed by two archetypically different meetings with the indigenous inhabitants: the first, Fernao Veloso's escapade on the west coast, is marked by misunderstanding and treachery, culminating in violence; the second, along the south-east coast, is an edenic celebration, complete with 'women-folk and fat, sleek flocks', and 'pastoral songs . . . to the accompaniment of rustic flutes, as did Tityrus long ago'.[12] One can hardly miss the symbolism: the terrifying encounter with the monstrous Adamastor at the very southern tip of Africa is Da Gama's rite of passage from a savage 'western' to an idyllic 'eastern' Ethiopia.

The African 'terrestrial paradise' maintained a vigorous and itinerant literary history. Sought for in Abyssinia by the earliest Portuguese venturers, it yielded 'Mont Amara' on the equator to inform the writings of Samuel Purchas, Milton and Johnson's *Rasselas*. It became ubiquitous in a number of eighteenth-century fictitious travelogues and nineteenth-century adventure romances such as Rider Haggard's and, later, John Buchan's, before yielding a standard trope of twentieth-century colonial (and notably East African) nostalgia, as in the writings of Karen Blixen, Elspeth Huxley, and Gerald Hanley.

The 'savage wasteland' of the western Ethiopian tradition has had an equally vigorous and protean history. Growing and intimately associated in the European mind with the horrors of disease, the slave trade, and the actual desert aspect which large stretches of the African coast present along both the Sahara and the Namib, this image of an unredeemed world degenerated into the notion of 'the whiteman's grave', the diabolist and cannibalist reputations of, notably, Dahomey, Asiante, and Benin, and the recidivist mythologies (often associated with an Antonine spiritual quest in a primitive wilderness) of Conrad, Celine, Gide, Graham Greene, Saul Bellow and V. S. Naipaul.

Such a dualist 'reading' of the continent is made quite explicit in Samuel Purchas's late Renaissance presentation of

Africa in *Purchas his Pilgrimage* (1613), in which a barbaric
West Africa viewed from an imaginary ascent of Mount Atlas
presents a savage spiritual wasteland, while the 'table of the
Cape', on top of Table Mountain, becomes a welcoming and
natural paradise. Ultimately, no doubt, there may lie an even
more fundamental distinction behind the concept of the two
Ethiopias, namely the ancient associations of life and death
with east and west respectively, or Resurrection and Judge-
ment in Christian mythography, such as expressed in John
Donne's 'Good Friday, 1613: Riding Westward', or 'Hymn to
God My God, in My Sickness':

> I joy, that in these straits, I see my West;
> . . . As West and East
> In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,
> So death doth touch the resurrection.

Within this paradigm, here wittily obscured by Donne, 'west'
is almost wholly bad and 'east' proportionately good.

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NOTES

1. *Histories*, tr. G. Rawlinson, ed. E. H. Blakeney, 2 vols. (London: Dent
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   Heinemann, 1917–32), i.1.6 and i.2. All references are to this edition.
4. *Natural History*, tr. H. Rackham *et al.*, Loeb Classical Library, 10 vols.
   (London: Heinemann, 1938–62), iii. 1.5. All references are to this edition,
   except where indicated below.
5. Text from Philemon Holland's translation (London: Adam Islip, 1601),
   p. 145.
6. Salvianus, *De gubernatione Dei*, tr. Eva M. Sanford (New York: Columbia
   University Press, 1930), pp. 207–215.
7. W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965),
   pp. 84–96, and see the relevant chapters by Frend and P. L. Shinnie in the
   Cambridge History of Africa, vol. 2: From c500 BC to AD 1050, ed. J. D.
   Fage (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).
8. Portolans in Youssouf Kamal, *Monumenta Cartographica Africae et Aegypti*,
   16 vols. in 5 (Cairo: Privately published, 1926–51), and Egon Klemp, ed.
   Africa on Maps (Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 1968); Catalan world map in Charles
   de la Ronciere, *La découverte de l'Afrique au moyen age*, 3 vols. in 2 (Cairo:

Soc. Royale de Géographie d'Egypte, 1924), vol. 1, plate 10, and Klemp, map 5; Munich portolan in Albert Kammerer, *La Mer Rouge, l'Abyssinie et l'Arabie depuis l'antiquité*, 2 vols. in 3 (Cairo: Soc. Royale de Géographie d'Egypte, 1929–35), vol. 2:2, plate 153; Albertin de Virga map in Kammerer, vol. 2:2, plate 138.

9. Maps of this kind typically show Abyssinian features and place names, deriving initially from Francisco Alvares's *The Prester John of the Indies . . . being the Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520* (1540), popularised in Ramusio's *Navigationi et Viaggi* (1550), as far south as the hinterland of Sofala and Mocambique. See R. A. Skelton, 'Gastaldi's Map of 1564', in Alvares, *Prester John of the Indies*, ed. C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1961), and W. G. L. Randles, *L'Image du sud-est africain dans la littérature européenne au XVI siècle* (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Historicos Ultramarinos, 1959).

10. Sanuto, *Geografia dell'Africa* (Venice: Damiano Zenaro, 1588), fol. 137; Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimage* (London: William Stansby, 1613), p. 579.

11. In F. C. Wieder, *Monumenta Cartographica*, 5 vols. (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1925–33), vol. 1, p. 14.

12. Luiz Vaz de Camoens, *The Lusiads*, tr. William C. Atkinson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952), v. 24–72.

ROY CAMPBELL, POET
A DEFENCE IN SOCIOLOGICAL TIMES

by MICHAEL CHAPMAN

i

Any study of South African poetry which underestimates the presence and persistence of Roy Campbell would be severely limited. Lyrics such as 'The Zulu Girl', 'The Serf', 'Autumn', 'Tristan da Cunha', 'The Sisters' and 'Horses on the Camargue', to name only a few, touch literary and mythic consciousness, in this country or abroad. Campbell's juxtapositions and attempted reconciliations of his own romantic and classical impulses define, almost simultaneously, his need to explore the experience and to conserve ancient points of identification and order. The force and even splendour of his imagery and rhythms announce his poems as distinct kinds of acts, somewhat apart from though complementary to other more utilitarian modes of behaviour, choice and communication. The aesthetic specificity, or 'form', of his poetry is of itself the content, and to subject the artefact over-insistently to the 'heresy of paraphrase' is to deny images as old as art their primal impact and import:

> I dropped my sail and dried my dripping seines
> Where the white quay is chequered by cool planes
> In whose great branches, always out of sight,
> The nightingales are singing day and night.
> Though all was grey beneath the moon's grey beam,
> My boat in her new paint shone like a bride,
> And silver in my baskets shone the bream:
> My arms were tired and I was heavy-eyed,
> But when with food and drink, at morning-light,
> The children met me at the water-side,
> Never was wine so red or bread so white.[1]

The 'nightingale', the 'moon', the 'boat', 'fish', 'wine' and 'bread' – the resonances of 'Mass at Dawn' take us back, imaginatively, to the earliest times when poets first attempted to fix the elements of existence, the bread and wine of experience, in forms that represented all human aspiration. In seeking to contextualise such a response within the demands

of twentieth-century life, further 'meanings' arise, pertaining
to the continuing possibilities of romantic-symbolist poetry –
the transfiguring vision – in modern technological and
political times. It is not that Campbell lacks 'ideas' (a
common complaint against his work), but that when arranged
in correspondences, confrontations and even contradictions,
his emotions and feelings are in themselves the 'ideas' of his
poems. As he rightly said about his own lyrical practice, the
imagination is the highest form of the intellect.[2]

Such recognitions could be conceded in different degrees
by Campbell's champions and detractors. But related ques-
tions about the 'poem' and 'belief' have remained especially
problematic in the case of this poet. Traditional criticism,
usually concerned with 'universal truth' and textual imma-
nence, has praised the 'verbal alchemy' of Campbell's verse
while evincing a certain moral disquiet about several of his
socially antagonistic statements and sentiments, including his
tendency to hurl abuse at those whom he perceived to be his
enemies.[3] (Campbell, as we know, fought bitter literary wars
against what he regarded as the cant of the intellectual Left
in its various denials, especially in the 1930s, of individual
endeavour and skill in favour of co-operative ideals and
practices.) More recently literary sociology has begun to
attend to Campbell.[4] Usually neo-Marxist and concerned
with modes of production and reception, it has been under-
standably critical of Campbell's archetypal imagination,
seeing it as reinforcing notions of the high art of poetry.
Against the measure of social, or more likely socialist demands
Campbell is judged to be severely compromised, his literary
practice a manifestion of what is broadly referred to as
colonial or bourgeois culture: Eurocentric, individualistic
and, in relation to massive social change, politically conser-
vative.

Whereas an earlier textual criticism tended to neglect the
poem as the construction of specific critical and ideological
practices, the tendency among sociologically-orientated com-
mentators in current South African literary debate is to go
to the other extreme and collapse all textual signification
into surrounding discourse. In focusing here on Campbell I
want to defend the resilience of the poem as text and, by
implication, literary-critical activity against the intrusions of
the 'sociological idea'. In doing so it will be necessary to

acknowledge several valuable insights and procedures of literary sociology, particularly those which reveal criticism as active social practice and which open the efficacy of any poet's self-declaring intentions to ideological investigation. (In our own harsh social times it is good to understand that no one person – whether poet or politician – should be regarded as the 'unacknowledged legislator of the world'.) At the same time, however, I want to remain critically alert to the hidden agenda of literary sociology as a struggle in South Africa for new forms of dominance: particularly in those cases where it is held that one may not give assent to any writer whose 'message' does not accord with that of the socialist millennium. As far as Campbell is concerned, I shall suggest that just as his texts have over the years resisted the schemas of the moral-humanist, so they will more than probably continue also to resist the sociologist's theoretical grid. Such a position entails of course its own particular viewpoint, but it is one that attempts to allow for the conditional nature of any single perspective, and for the way in which different perspectives may or may not illuminate each other. If the compulsions here are liberal, I hope that my critical activity can help to recall liberalism to its first imagination of variousness and possibility. It is a direction that should have value in a country like ours, where the complexities of living in a heterogeneous society have largely been effaced, especially over the last few years, by a rhetoric of polarised and absolute alternatives.

In all of this Campbell remains an interesting figure. The pressures of his own time, particularly in the troubled 1930s in Europe, often resulted in his tendency to reduce difficult issues to cliché, dead metaphor and verbal junk (most extremely in the gloating Franco-ism of *Flowering Rifle*). In attending to his work, therefore, I find it often necessary to try to distinguish between my own prior beliefs and what in several instances strike me as the alienating, and even damaging, alternative views of a gifted poet. In his 'South African' lyrics of the 1920s Campbell is, I feel, evocative, dialectically challenging, and either eloquently or bitingly concerned with the potential of human, social and artistic energy, sharply opposed to greater or lesser forms of constriction. Yet, in the case of one of these poems at least, 'Rounding the Cape', Jeremy Cronin, writing fairly recently

from a neo-Marxist, broadly sociological viewpoint, sees only evidence of Campbell's ideological confusion and colonial limitations.[5] Where I see in the poetry peculiar possibilities of giving significant shape to difficult, perhaps irresolvable tensions in Campbell's experience at the time, Cronin sees social irresponsibility. He allows relatively little credence to those elements which I tend to regard as the *raison d'être* of the poetry: the power of voice, image and rhythm to articulate actions, emotions and perceptions in the material world. It would thus seem appropriate to address Cronin's critique on Campbell, as it is fairly representative of the current sociological line.[6] By contrast, and without emerging as a sub-Campbell, I intend to allow the poet considerable volition and appeal within the constraints of his own epoch and, in certain ways, within the difficult and modifying pressures of our own time.

In the article in question, Cronin regards Campbell, on the evidence of a single poem, as perceiving black Africa only in terms of savage irruption. As Campbell sails away from the land that he 'hated or adored' in 1926, he invokes the agency of 'Night, the Negro', a variaton of Camoens's Adamastor (the spirit of the Cape of Storms, which four hundred years earlier had been defeated by the 'new European enlightenment' of Vasco da Gama):

> The low sun whitens on the flying squalls,
> Against the cliffs the long grey surge is rolled
> Where Adamastor from his marble halls
> Threatens the sons of Lusus as of old.
>
> . . .
> Across his back, unheeded, we have broken
> Whole forests: heedless of the blood we've spilled,
> In thunder still his prophecies are spoken,
> In silence, by the centuries, fulfilled.
>
> Farewell, terrific shade! though I go free
> Still of the powers of darkness art thou Lord:
> I watch the phantom sinking in the sea
> Of all that I have hated or adored.
>
> The prow glides smoothly on through seas quiescent:
> But where the last point sinks into the deep,
> The land lies dark beneath the rising crescent,
> And Night, the Negro, murmurs in his sleep.[7]

In the course of examining the colour imagery (white...
dark) and the poet's use of pronouns (I...we...he...thou),
Cronin offers us an unwitting reminder of the importance in
poetry of retaining distinctions between 'pseudo-statement'
and referential language. In his determination to show that
Campbell was trapped by a regressive 'colonial' view of
history, Cronin cannot allow the phrases 'we have broken/
Whole forests' and 'heedless of the blood we've spilled' (in
the extract above) to stand, separated by the emphatic colon,
in mutual reinforcement of the exploitative nature of the
colonial enterprise. Instead, he takes the colon literally as the
end-stop to a unit of sense, minimises the pivotal effect of
the strong rhyming word 'spilled', and concludes according to
the syntax of grammar rather than verse that it is Adamastor
who is heedless of the colonists' blood (their sweat and toil?)
in their taming of the hinterland.[8] We can of course grant the
punctuation and arrangement of these particular lines a
degree of ambiguity; the advantages nonetheless remain
Campbell's. If Adamastor is indeed 'heedless', his heedlessness
is that of the 'terrific shade': anciently and heroically dis-
dainful of repeated and, ultimately, puny acts of colonial
expediency (the 'blood we've spilled' in pursuit of power
and plunder), massively confident of resurrection and belong-
ing in the larger destiny of a continent. Campbell's point, as
reinforced by his other writings of the time,[9] is that the
colonists are clearly the exploiters, heedless of Africa's
blood; moreover that Adamastor's prophecies of endless
strife for the European invaders have perfect legitimacy.

Cronin's attempt here to reverse certain poetic intentions
is his first step in suggesting that Campbell is ideologically
confused – the poet does not really know whether he is one
of the colonists, whether he is sympathetic to 'Night, the
Negro', or an independent poet ultimately destined to trans-
cend the details of black-white troubles in the land of his
birth.[10] Yet even if we were prepared to allow such terms to
stand, we should need to enquire whether the poet is merely
'confused' or whether he does not in fact display psychologi-
cally credible reactions towards the South Africa that he
'hated or adored'. Rather than attempting to enter imagin-
atively at this point into the specifics of Campbell's situation,
however, Cronin baldly declares that the poet takes evasive
action: he avoids the epic possibilities of his subject – racial

confrontation – and seeks lyrical resolution. Social under-
standings – we are told – are ignored by Campbell in favour
of the mental projection of a dark force ('Night, the Negro,
murmurs in his sleep'). Such observations on Cronin's part
are presented as evidence that race phobia has continued to
lurk in the white South African psyche, whether reactionary
or liberal.[11] (This is also the conclusion arrived at in the
several sociologically-directed responses listed in note 6,
whether Tim Couzens is examining John Buchan's fantasies
of Empire or David Maughan Brown is seeking elements of
'false consciousness' in Harry Bloom's liberalism of the 1950s.)

Although literary sociology in South Africa today sees
little virtue in attempting to distinguish between 'progressive'
and 'regressive' impulses in so-called colonial or bourgeois
consciousness (the terms, together with that of 'liberal', are
often used interchangeably), Cronin at least takes on a for-
midable foe in Campbell. Whereas Percy FitzPatrick, or Rider
Haggard or (in our own times) Wilbur Smith easily reveals his
Imperial bigotries under radical dissection (as has been
shown in recent articles by Gareth Cornwell and Couzens),[12]
Campbell persists in revealing both 'colonial' and 'modern'
tendencies, and Cronin is prepared to admit that in 'Rounding
the Cape', the young iconoclast from Natal at least 'takes a
step forward from mere bravado and triumphant assertions
of much racist discourse by calling a plague down upon his
own house'.[13] Such an acknowledgement, however, can only
be grudgingly allowed, if the poet is to remain predictably
true to Cronin's preferred stereotype of the 'white colonial
writer'. We are thus immediately reminded that for Campbell
'to reduce in effect decades of organised resistance by the
majority of [black] South Africans against their racial oppres-
sion to some primeval (albeit welcomed) cataclysmic force
is not really to escape from the broader assumptions of
colonialism'.[14]

This may be true as far as it goes, but should hardly be
left to stand as the whole picture, whether the main purpose
of the enquiry is social-historical or literary-critical. In using
Campbell to exemplify 'colonial consciousness' in implicit
contrast to his own Marxist-inspired insights of the 1980s,
Cronin chooses not to remain particularly true to his inten-
tion of a historically-based response. As a corrective to his
view, I would initially want to allow Campbell's texts to

interact dialogically with their context in the mid-1920s. In spite of the early activities of black opposition in South Africa, it is hardly likely that Campbell, writing in 1926, would have had historically available to him, as poetically assimilable language, the imagery of black reformist politics, even had he believed unambiguously in the solution of social revolution. The interesting thing about Campbell is of course that in the mid-1920s he was – perhaps under the radical-liberal and artistically avant-garde influence of William Plomer – willing to entertain a socially apocalyptic vision at the same time as he was concerned, symbolically in his poetry, to invest indigenous forms of life with the full palpability of their being, as in the inextricably linked images of iconic order and social revolt in 'The Zulu Girl':

> When in the sun the hot red acres smoulder,
> Down where the sweating gang its labour plies,
> A girl flings down her hoe, and from her shoulder
> Unslings her child tormented by the flies.
> . . .
> His sleepy mouth plugged by the heavy nipple,
> Tugs like a puppy, grunting as he feeds:
> Through his frail nerves her own deep languors ripple
> Like a broad river sighing through its reeds.
> . . .
> Her body looms above him like a hill
> Within whose shade a village lies at rest,
> Or the first cloud so terrible and still
> That bears the coming harvest in its breast.[15]

Certainly one can already see in Campbell's use of typological figures (the mother and child) something of the classical (Cronin would say, colonial) conserver who in the 1930s and '40s would continue to embrace pre-industrial hierarchies against communist or even social-democratic movements. But it is equally important to remember that Campbell, who as the son of an Edinburgh-trained doctor had been nurtured in traditions of upper middle-class professionalism within the commercial life of Durban, was prepared in the 1920s to write eloquently and sympathetically of the Zulu girl and serf as noble peasantry, when the designed policy of Natal was to destroy the very independence of a black peasantry and, for economic convenience, to create serfs and migrant workers.[16]

Just as the figure of the Zulu girl suggests, almost simul-
taneously, permanence and possible change, so Campbell's
serf 'that moves the nearest to the naked earth' will – it is
envisioned – one day plough down the European superstruc-
tures of 'palaces, and thrones, and towers':

> His naked skin clothed in the torrid mist
> That puffs in smoke around the patient hooves,
> The ploughman drives, a slow somnambulist,
> And through the green his crimson furrow grooves.
> . . .
> But as the turf divides
> I see in the slow progress of his strides
> Over the toppled clods and falling flowers,
> The timeless, surly patience of the serf
> That moves the nearest to the naked earth
> And ploughs down palaces, and thrones, and towers.[17]

Is the utterance social or mythic? Does Campbell allude to
the serf's primordial continuities with the African earth as
longer-lasting than any order of imported civilisation, or does
he refer primarily to the inevitability of future courses of
revolutionary action? In attributing to Campbell a position
he opposes, Cronin would probably see such apparent 'contra-
dictions [as] cognitively fruitful'[18] only in helping him
further to identify confusions in the poet's ideological
response. (Certainly Michael Vaughan – one of the commen-
tators currently advocating a prescriptive Marxism – sees a
tendency among the new black poets of the '70s to mingle
the registers of 'myth' and 'history' as a distinct shortcoming
of the poetry: a lapse from historicist thought to petty
bourgeois 'voluntarism'.)[19] We could, however, be prepared
to see in Campbell's treatment of subject and theme kinds of
a-logical associations which rupture ideology. The serf's
'timeless, surly patience', when contemplated and felt in
conjunction with his action of ploughing down any foreign
intrusions on the landscape, allows us cognitively and imagin-
atively to perceive 'dignity of being' rather than 'subjugation'.
At a point beyond the white man's reign, the 'broken tribes' –
damaged by alien, social constraints – remain as remote
biological and cultural bases of regeneration.

Admittedly Campbell's depictions here (as in 'Rounding
the Cape') will not satisfy Cronin, when the long view of

socialist transformation demands that any form of pro-
letarianisation occurs sooner rather than later, and I do not
want to credit Campbell with acute powers of social analysis
that he did not possess. Nevertheless, we do not necessarily
have to try to reduce poems like 'The Zulu Girl' and 'The
Serf' to any single programme of intent, whether mythic or
social. Instead the literary critic – if not the literary socio-
logist – might locate significance and strength at the very
intersections of archetypal source, individual socialisation
and continuing historical potentiality for the human species.
(In similar vein, where Vaughan sees a lack of diagrammatic
'truth' in the new black poets of the '70s, I see emotional
and experiential truth to the difficult demands of social
and cultural consciousness-raising.) Arriving as a vivid re-
minder of poetry's capacity to strip away the conditioned
response and to tap the primitive unities of words and things,
Adamastor (1930), the collection where the 'South African'
lyrics appeared, had instantaneous impact:

> ... a poetic force for the rejuvenation of poetry, abun-
> dantly alive, starkly individual and cyclonic in utterance.

Such praise from *The New York Times Book Review* (25
January, 1931) probably sounds naive and in its own way
'bourgeois' from within the delimitations of Cronin's project,
which is not to allow Campbell his own validity as a poet.
The literary critic is, however, obliged to take serious account
of the views of the day, as indicative of the shaping forces of
literary expectation and possibility in any one epoch, in
relation to any writer's social and artistic purpose. To reduce
the paradoxes of Campbell's personality and practice to a
limiting 'colonialism' is to fail fundamentally to restore his
poetry to the full imaginative and emotional pressure of its
moment of creation and reception.

<div align="center">ii</div>

To return more specifically to 'Rounding the Cape' we need
not, finally, share Cronin's feeling that Campbell has practised
some sort of deception in his response to the South African
situation. The poet, says Cronin, 'had suffered along with his
fellow colonists and now "we" is magically transformed to

"I", so that the poet alone escapes both bigoted white society and darkest Africa':[20]

> Farewell, terrific shade! though I go free
> Still of the powers of darkness art thou Lord . . . .

But as in 'The Serf', Campbell's powers of association and organisation within the paradigmatic form of the lyric enable us to see more challenging co-ordinates of 'individual', 'society' and 'poem' than Cronin does. To reiterate, the colonisers in Campbell's view have not suffered, but are indicted here as exploiters. In his use of 'we' Campbell does not enter into empathic identification with what he saw at the time as a grubby philistine society in colonial Natal; rather he intuits that he is inevitably implicated in the conquistadoring spirit of colonisation (his grandfather William had been among the pioneers of large-scale sugar-cane cultivation in Natal). Simultaneously, however, he has the emotional and imaginative need to be the poet, and to set himself in opposition (in a way that his family, including his brothers, never did) to the ambitions of the 'grocers' paradise'.

Cronin's own prior view of social commitment (activist and organisational)[21] will only allow him to interpret Campbell's reaction as a failure of social responsibility (he finally favours 'individual revolt' and flight to continuing engagement with social problems).[22] Yet Campbell's response is in its own way decidedly interventionist, in psychical, social and artistic terms. (In attempting in 1926 to place his satirical *Wayzgoose* on the South African scene he had not been able to find a local publisher who would risk the possibility of retaliatory 'bourgeois' anger.)[23] In 'Rounding the Cape', 'Night, the Negro' can be accepted as an effective enough symbol (within the visionary mode) of the writer's sincerely held belief at the time that 'the colonist cannot be brought to see that machine-guns are only a feeble argument in the long run: that it will make things far easier to meet the natives half-way than merely to go on damming up colour hatred until it breaks out in every corner of the country'.[24] But attention should perhaps be given predominantly to Campbell's predilection for literary revolt, in that he so often saw himself, both in South Africa and later in England, as a scourge in the heroic-romantic vein. In consequence, and by means of

poetic logic rather than 'magical transformation', 'Night, the Negro' serves primarily as the objective correlative of the poet's *alter ego*, as the harshly evocative and necessarily literary (as opposed to societal) image is projected in wish-fulfilment and example against what in the real world was regarded by Campbell as a moribund society; more particularly a society that at the time of *Voorslag* (1926) had denied him due recognition as a 'literary genius'. Were the image not to yield its recognisably 'literary' character, the intended thrust – Campbell's intrusion of the striking art-object into a culturally as well as a socially impoverished milieu – could not have been achieved. In entitling the relevant volume *Adamastor*, Campbell understood his own chief role as a poet who, amid contingency, has recourse to the transfiguring image. The difference between Cronin's response and my own is that I would be unwilling to make opposition to Campbell my principal pursuit. Rather, I would attempt to allow him something of his complicated project within the real and metaphoric landscapes of his time.

But Cronin's real concern is of course with Campbell's status in our own time. Located firmly in the sociological present Cronin's materialist view, in its uncompromising dismissal of alternative human or artistic claims, becomes a new kind of idealism, against which Campbell is quickly 'transhistoricised' and, by extension, any recognition of his poetic response is seen to be ideologically suspect. As in current literary sociology generally, a new form of moral and social 'high seriousness' prevails here which is impossible to challenge in any way that will disturb the commentator concerned. This notwithstanding, we can at the risk of being called neo-colonially naive, or, at best, bourgeois-liberal, continue to insist that poetry – whether romantic-symbolist or socialist – can retain its own peculiar character and justification within changing contexts of value and belief. By the same token literary criticism, as an activity prepared in good faith to privilege the text, can at a valuable divergence from the sociological idea continue to define its own role in intellectual life. In looking at Campbell, we should at least be prepared to dialogise his poetry in the context of the new perceptions and debates of our own times, thus refusing to hurry to preferred moral closure but attempting to keep

alive alternative possibilities of literary and human under-
standing. Whereas Cronin's own commitment to the 'curbed
imagination' in a time of political stress has placed severe
restrictions on his willingness or ability to appreciate the
romantic-symbolist impulse, for example, the German
Marxist-philosopher Walter Benjamin might have been
prepared to allow Campbell continuing significance within
a qualified sphere of activity. Writing astutely of Baudelaire,
Benjamin followed several critics of different political per-
suasions in observing with some understanding that the
highly attuned imagination, insofar as its values are indi-
vidualistic and even idiosyncratic, has often had difficulty in
limiting itself to social issues proper.[25] Or, at another but not
unrelated extreme, we might be prepared to give greater
credence to Campbell's purpose, and to poetic possibility
more generally, in the light of Sebastiano Timpanaro's
'biological-materialism'.[26] In noting fellow Marxists' ideo-
logical need to deny the primacy of human agency in the
world, Timpanaro sees certain experiences as longer-lasting
than socially institutionalised reactions, while poetry is
seen concomitantly as touching human need and desire at
other levels than that of political 'correctness':

> After hot loveless nights, when cold winds stream
> Sprinkling the frost and dew, before the light,
> Bored with the foolish things that girls must dream
> Because their beds are empty of delight,
>
> Two sisters rise and strip. Out from the night
> Their horses run to their low-whistled pleas —
> Vast phantom shapes with eyeballs rolling white
> That sneeze a fiery steam about their knees . . . .[27]

Of course, we might be prepared to acknowledge that these
lines from Campbell's 'The Sisters' continue to identify
anchor-holds of existence and experience, but still feel
that from the perspective of a strife-torn South Africa of
the mid-1980s the poet is asking us to occupy a relatively
trivial moral space. This would arise especially in relation to
poems like Alfred Qabula's 'Praise Poem to Fosatu' (1986),
where the voice from the factory-floor demands worker
power:

Teach us FOSATU about the past organisations
                              before we came.
Tell us about their mistakes so that we may not
                              fall foul of such mistakes.
Our hopes lie with you, the sambane that digs holes
     and sleeps in them, whereas others dig holes and
                                        leave them.
I saw this because you teach a worker to know what
                    his duties are in his organisation,
And what he is in the community.[28]

But, if Qabula's appropriately rough-hewn lines, and his
sudden shifts from rhetorical praises to the colloquial speech
of the newly 'unionised man', help us to define the limi-
tations of Campbell's *religio poetae,* 'Praise Poem to Fosatu'
also serves to delineate, again by contrast, Campbell's gifts of
symbolic gesture. 'The Sisters' remains a strikingly imaginative
check on any form of social prescription.

   Cronin's critique usefully reminds us that, after the radical
enquiry into semiotics of structuralism and Marxism over the
last twenty years, no defence of poetry can simply offer
tautologous pronouncements on 'beauty', 'truth' and 'life'.
At the same time, however, his critique reminds us, by its
very omissions, that poetry, indeed any imaginative literature,
is a humanistic pursuit: a grappling at particular times with
the complexities of experience, within various kinds of
personal, historical and formal constraints. Despite the
fact that Campbell does not meet Cronin's particular view
of social health, the poetry – as I have tried to show – is
sufficiently resilient, flexible and challenging to reassemble
itself within other critical projects. Campbell the poet is a
reminder to literary sociology in general that, while culture,
ideology and convention govern individual roles in systems,
every person's sociolinguistic abilities are diverse. Language
embodies ways, not one way, of looking at the world. Simi-
larly literary criticism – especially in societies of narrowly-
defined political tolerances – should also perhaps set out to
affirm, in valuable new ways, its own semi-autonomous
relationships to iron sociological times.

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NOTES

1. 'Mass at Dawn', first published in *Adamastor* (1930); reprinted in *Collected Works* (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1985), vol. 1, p. 162.
2. See Campbell's defence of F. Garcia Lorca's poetry in *Lorca* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1952) and his own practice in *Broken Record* (London: Boriswood, 1934) and *Light on a Dark Horse* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1951).
3. See for example Alan Paton, 'Roy Campbell: Poet and Man', *Theoria* 9, 1957.
4. Two characteristic papers are Peter Kohler's 'Roy Campbell, the Ideology of Segregation and the "Native" Policy – Durban 1904–1926', Paper delivered at the AUETSA Conference, Cape Town, 1985, and Jeremy Cronin's 'Turning around...', bibliographical details of which are given in 5, below.
5. Jeremy Cronin, 'Turning around, Roy Campbell's "Rounding the Cape"', *English in Africa* 11 (1), 1984, pp. 64–78.
6. Like Cronin, the following critics pursue investigations of what they see as the author's 'colonial' or 'bourgeois' shortcomings: Tim Couzens, ' "The Old Africa of a Boy's Dream" – Towards Interpreting Buchan's *Prester John*', *English Studies in Africa* 24 (1), 1981, and (on H. Rider Haggard, Wilbur Smith and other 'adventure' writers) 'The return of the Heart of Darkness', *English Academy Review* (November, 1982); Michael Vaughan, 'Literature and Populism in South Africa: Some Reflections on the Ideology of *'Staffrider'*, *English Academy Review* (November, 1982), and *'Staffrider'* and Directions within Contemporary South African Literature', *Literature and Society in South Africa*, ed. Landeg White and Tim Couzens (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1984; Stephen Watson, *'Cry, the Beloved Country* and the Failure of Liberal Vision', *English in Africa* 9 (1), 1982; Gareth Cornwell, 'FitzPatrick's "The Outspan": Deconstructing the Fiction of Race', *English in Africa* 10 (1), 1983; David Maughan Brown, ' "Like a leaf on the stream": Harry Bloom's *Transvaal Episode'*, *English in Africa* 11 (1), 1984; and Ian Glenn, 'Sydney Clouts – Our Pen-Insular Poet', *English Academy Review* 3, 1985.
7. 'Rounding the Cape', first published in *Adamastor* (1930);   reprinted *Collected Works*, p. 124.
8. Cronin, p. 68.
9. See the series 'Modern Poetry and Contemporary History', *The Natal Witness* (March – September, 1926), reprinted in *Collected Works,* vol. 4 (in press); and Campbell's letter to C.J. Sibbett (December, 1926), reprinted in *Voorslag 1, 2 and 3,* ed. Colin Gardner and Michael Chapman (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1985), pp. 64–71.
10. Cronin, pp. 66–73.
11. Cronin, pp. 75–78.
12. See 6 above, for details.
13. Cronin, p. 77.
14. Cronin, p. 78.
15. 'The Zulu Girl', first published in *Adamastor* (1930); reprinted in *Collected Works*, p. 129.
16. John Lambert, 'The Impoverishment of the Natal Peasantry, 1893–1910', *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony,* ed. Bill Guest and John M. Sellers (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1985), p. 302.
17. 'The Serf', first published in *Adamastor* (1930); reprinted in *Collected Works* p. 128.
18. Cronin, p. 77.
19. See both articles listed in 6, above.
20. Cronin, p. 76.

21. Cronin was arrested in 1976 and charged with having carried out ANC underground work (he exploded a pamphlet bomb, the pamphlets being deemed 'revolutionary' by the court). On his release from gaol he published a volume of 'prison' poems *Inside* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983) and has continued to take a keen interest in political affairs. With Raymond Suttner he recently edited *30 Years of the Freedom Charter* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986).
22. Cronin, p. 78.
23. See Campbell's open letter to *The Cape Argus* (January 1927), reprinted in *Voorslag 1, 2 and 3*, p. 72.
24. Unpublished letter to Edward Garnett (20 November, 1925).
25. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, tr. Harry Zohn (London: New Left Books, 1973). The point was first made by Laura Riding and Robert Graves in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927).
26. Sebastiano Timpanaro, *On Materialism* (London: New Left Books, 1976).
27. 'The Sisters', first published in *Adamastor* (1930); reprinted in *Collected Works*, p. 152.
28. *Staffrider* 6 (3), 1986, p. 31.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

BREYTEN BREYTENBACH AND THE
SOUTH AFRICAN PRISON BOOK

by J.U. JACOBS

'...a prison, even though entirely surrounded
by walls, is a splendidly illuminated theater
of history.'
Milan Kundera: *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

A growing body of writing has been produced in this century
in response to totalitarianism and its chief instrument of
control, the prison-house: that 'black flower of civilized
society' as Hawthorne called it in *The Scarlet Letter.* South
Africans feature prominently in an international list of prison
writers, which includes Gramsci, Solzhenitsyn, Soyinka,
Ngugi, Timerman and the Cuban poets Armando Valladares
in *Against All Hope* and Jorge Valls in *Twenty Years and
Forty Days.* 'When you are interested in prison accounts as
a genre,' the South African poet Breyten Breytenbach writes
in a concluding note to his prison book *The True Confessions
of an Albino Terrorist,* 'you will soon see that prisons are
pretty much the same the world over. It is...the peculiar
relationship of power-repression which seems immutable,
wherever you may hide.'[1]

The Spring 1986 Amnesty International Campaign Report
deals with the escalation of human rights abuses in South
Africa since the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950.
The cryptic title,'A South African Story: Banning, Detention,
Imprisonment', given in this Report to an account of yet
another victim of the extensive and intimidating body of laws
that enables the government to rule by force, recognises what
has become established as a tragic pattern in the life of this
country. When the most recent national State of Emergency
was declared, the *Guardian Weekly* of 22 June announced the
event with a metaphor suggested by the reality of South
African life: 'The prison that is South Africa'.

How this 'penal universe' has come to pass has been
documented, analysed and imaginatively rendered in a body
of prison writing in South Africa during the past twenty
years. In varying degrees of accurate reportage, inevitable

masking and conscious fictionalisation, these books present all aspects of the prison process: pre-trial detention; modes of interrogation; methods of torture; the ritual pattern of the security trial; the routines, rhythms and myriad humiliations of prison life; conditions in our prisons; the hierarchy of prison officialdom; the ambivalent fellowship of prisoners; the curious bonding in the relationship between interrogator and detainee, warder and prisoner. It amounts to a vision of the prison-house as a microcosm of South African society.

The following classification, tentative and by no means exhaustive, gives an indication of the range of this literature about imprisonment in South Africa:

1) Biographical works with accounts of detention or imprisonment:

Nelson Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life* (1978); Piet Coetzer, *Alan Hendrikse: Awaiting Trial* (1984); Winnie Mandela, *Part of My Soul Went with Him* (1984).

2) Prison memoirs:

Albie Sachs, *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* (1966); Hugh Lewin, *Bandiet: Seven Years in a South African Prison* (1974); Indres Naidoo (as told to Albie Sachs), *Robben Island: Ten Years as a Political Prisoner in South Africa's Most Notorious Penitentiary* (1983); Molefe Pheto, *And Night Fell: Memoirs of a Political Prisoner in South Africa* (1983); Breyten Breytenbach, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1984).

3) Fictional works in the form of prison memoirs:

D M Zwelonke, *Robben Island* (1973); Wessel Ebersohn, *Store up the Anger* (1980); Christopher Hope, *A Separate Development* (1980); Lewis Nkosi, *Mating Birds* (1986).

4) Novels concerned with imprisonment, detention and interrogation:

C J Driver, *Elegy for a Revolutionary* (1968); Alex la Guma, *In the Fog of the Season's End* (1971); Rose Moss, *The Schoolmaster* (1979); André Brink, *A Dry White Season* (1979); Nadine Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter* (1979); J M Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980); Miriam Tlali, *Amandla* (1980); Sipho Sepamla, *A Ride on the Whirl-*

wind (1981); Mongane Serote, *To Every Birth its Blood* (1981); J M Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983); Breyten Breytenbach, *Mouroir: mirrornotes of a novel* (1983).

5) **Poetry and drama dealing with detention, imprisonment and interrogation:**
Dennis Brutus, *Letters to Martha and other poems from a South African prison* (1968); Athol Fugard, *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* (1972), and *The Island* (1973); David Edgar, *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* (1978); Jon Blair and Norman Fenton, *The Biko Inquest* (1978); Jeremy Cronin, *Inside* (1983); Strini Moodley, *Prison Walls* (1985).

In this literature, the reader is taken into the dark chamber of interrogation, torture and confession[2] and introduced to figures and places which have become the most important symbols in modern South African history: Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko and Robben Island are now almost mythical symbols of political imprisonment in this country. These books all show how the prison with its mysteries contaminates the whole of society; in descriptions of police assault and humiliation, often sexual, they offer scenes that go beyond mere reportage. Such scenes become emblematic of pain and human degradation, of perverse power gone mad, and of police brutality so enmeshed in the fabric of South African life that it becomes its very condition.

In a number of these prison works, the experience of confession so extorted seems to have suggested to the imprisoned writer a subsequent mode of literary distancing and thereby of self-definition. In the words of the detention camp doctor to Coetzee's Michael K: *'talk,* make your voice heard, tell your story!'[3] Detention, interrogation, confession. This structural metaphor is finally to be found underlying all these books produced by and reflecting a state of fear.

Breyten Breytenbach's acute sense of placelessness during his exile in France led to his first homecoming described in *A Season in Paradise,*[4] and eventually to his calamitous return in 1975 when, in disguise and as a member of an organisation called Okhela, he planned to recruit agents to oppose the South African authorities. This cultural renegade – 'Afrikaans writer' is an inadequate appellation – can be regarded as a

model of the forcibly exiled consciousness. First as exile
and later as internal *émigré* during his imprisonment for
alleged terrorism, Breytenbach, like Dennis Brutus, came to
understand the place of tyranny in South African society
which he analyses in his series of prison books, *Mouroir:
mirrornotes of a novel*;[5] *The True Confessions of an Albino
Terrorist* and *End Papers: Essays, Letters, Articles of Faith,
Workbook Notes*.[6] Just as Breytenbach's life can be seen
as representative of the tragically divided stream of South
African culture into one defined within the borders of the
country and the other in exile, so his fictional output has
also been determined by a tradition of South African prison
writing. *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* in
particular is, I believe, the most remarkable prison memoir
to have come out of South Africa and simultaneously meta-
fiction of the highest order. It can be seen as a culmination
of the entire tradition of South African prison literature –
autobiography, fiction, poetry and drama – and is at once
an important historical document and an achieved work of
the imagination. It is the tale of the person who introduces
himself as

> Breyten Breytenbach. That is my name. It's not the
> only one; after all, what is a name? I used to be called
> Dick; sometimes I was called Antoine; some knew me as
> Hervé; others as Jan Blom; at one point I was called
> Christian Jean-Marc Galaska; then I was the Professor;
> later I was Mr. Bird: all these different names with
> different meanings being the labels attached to different
> people. (p. 3)

In 'Why I Write', the opening chapter of *Robben Island*,
D M Zwelonke explains his choice of a fictional mode to
reflect his own experience of imprisonment:

> For various reasons I have written it as a work of
> fiction. Fiction, but projecting a hard and bitter truth;
> fiction mirroring non-fiction, true incidents and epi-
> sodes. The characters are all fictional, including, in a
> sense, myself.[7]

Fictionalisation of the self in order fully to experience and grasp the self is an established novelistic procedure: it enables experience, no matter how bitter, to be probed in a way that yields significances beyond the understanding obtainable in authorial confessions of personal history. The Czech writer Milan Kundera explains this need for fictional self-alienation in the words of one of his character-selves in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*:

> The characters in my novels are my own unrealised possibilities. That is why I am equally fond of them all and equally horrified by them. Each one has crossed a border that I myself have circumvented. It is that crossed border (the border beyond which my own 'I' ends) which attracts me most. For beyond that border begins the secret the novel asks about. The novel is not the author's confession; it is an investigation of human life in the trap the world has become.[8]

Following Kundera's suggestion about alternative, fiction-alised selves, it is clear that Breytenbach's satirical treatment of the Security Police, under whose constant surveillance he and Yolande visited South Africa at the end of 1972, is an example of fictional self-alienation and, thereby, of self-scrutiny. In *A Season in Paradise* he offers an exposition of this imaginative strategy of '*The self-image in the eye of the I*', a creative concept he explains in terms of a mask, or more accurately *imago*:

> What I would like to get at is that all of us live behind projections of ourselves. With the writer – because his self-consciousness is intimate material – this probably happens more consciously. We project an image of ourselves. That projected image, which is an intermediary, is more than likely not the one observed by others. (I see my image from behind, the 'others' see it from the front, because I look through my eyes from behind.) But to the degree in which others react upon that image, that image exists, that image has a right to existence. (p. 147)

That image which is created and then projected, Breytenbach continues, is influenced and shaped by the community, and

may become a substitute or even a shield for the 'I'. It becomes a mask to which little by little the person becomes prisoner:

> A struggle may then ensue between the 'I' image and the image. You may rebel against it, may smash yourself on it. You may become one with the mask, until that form is moulded. (Perhaps the image is the sum of your scars.) The image as swathes of the mummy; the futile attempts to embalm the 'I' within, to immortalize it. Creation of an image as a quest for eternal life. The image as mirror. Image coffin.
>
> But the creation of an image (therefore?) as a desire for self-destruction. The fixation of certain I-attributes against which there is rebellion afterwards because it is false and imperfect. (And bound with time.) (Every word is an image. Every word is false.)
>
> But what leads us to suspect that there is a fixed (waxing and waning) 'I', that there is an I-I, you-I, she-I, we-I, it-I? Is 'I' not the absent construction, the lost master-key? (p. 148)

It is this dialectical interplay between image and 'I', in effect a metaphysical and literary voyeurism of the self, that Breytenbach conveys in the title of the book he wrote in prison, *Mouroir: mirrornotes of a novel. Mouroir,* the *memoir* that contracts *miroir* and *mourir,* is, to use another metaphor suggested by Breytenbach himself, a quest for the minotaur 'I' in the labyrinth that is the living death of his incarceration. In this imaginative outpouring forced from him by the controlling image he creates of the prison world, we are more fully introduced to the persona of his mirror-mentor, Don Espejuelo. *Mouroir* reveals the immediate operation of the process Breytenbach refers to as 'Eyego' (p. 39). He recognises, in his loneliness and alienation from his fellows, his death and in so doing sees that he belongs to the world of his undoing, that there is a relatedness between himself and his captors. In the most powerful section of this prison narrative, 'The Double Dying of an Ordinary Criminal', Breytenbach extends his vision from a lyrical panoramic survey of the South African landscape to the execution room 'in a building of red bricks in one of the ruling cities of the Heartland' (p. 51). In his meticulous account of the attendants

at the ceremony of death (the minister, the executioner) and of the scenario of the hanging, the minotaur 'I' is glimpsed in the *dramatis personae mortis* at the heart of the South African penal labyrinth: the victim, the grieving relatives, and finally the recording self. From the satirical stance towards the figures of investigation he created in *A Season in Paradise,* Breytenbach's fictional technique of mirrored self-examination has led him in *Mouroir* to an acute awareness of his own cultural and creative complicity in this world of living death.

The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist is formally perhaps best understood in terms of Kundera's definition of his own achievement, in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting,* as polyphony. A novel, he argues, is a long piece of synthetic prose:

> Ironic essay, novelistic narrative, autobiographical fragment, historic fact, flight of fantasy: The synthetic power of the novel is capable of combining everything into a unified whole like the voices of polyphonic music.[9]

The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist is just such a polyphonic synthesis of various discourses. It contains Breytenbach's account (almost like a spy thriller) of his secret return to South Africa in the guise of Christian Galaska and of his surveillance, pursuit and eventual capture by the Security Police. It records his detention and interrogation, and narrates the course of his trial on charges of treason, his conviction and sentence to what was an effective seven and a half years' imprisonment in the Pretoria Maximum Security Prison and then in Pollsmoor in the Cape. Inserted into the memoir are commentaries on various aspects of prison life and on the significance of imprisonment, as well as sections of metafictional reflection on the actual text being created. The narrative reveals a compulsive need to recreate the environment in which he was detained, to record its inhabitants – his fellow convicts, the warders and other prison officials, the members of the Security Police with whom he enjoyed such awful intimacy, the government officials with whom he came into contact – and to probe the complex and ambivalent relationships between authority and the individual and between prisoners themselves.

Confessions not only echoes the details about the destructive trivialisation of life contained in all the earlier South African prison literature; it also continues the radical political debate that informs the bulk of this writing. Furthermore, it shares with it an identification of pain as the appropriate symbol for detention and for the torture that is politically motivated confinement. The lesson of the prison book, it reiterates, is that the human system can contain pain which then becomes its terrible condition. Solitary confinement and sustained interrogation, whether accompanied by physical violation or not, we are reminded again, are in themselves forms of torture and acts of barbarism.[10] This is the essence of Breytenbach's conclusion in his account of his own interrogation:

> In fact, Mr Investigator, the interrogation never ceased and the first trial with its conviction was just one step in the ongoing process of dissecting and undoing the psyche and washing the brain....There was no urgency. It could not be that they wanted any information. What was there to be had from me, locked away from the world for months already? Yet they kept on testing, prying and prodding. No, I think it was more out of a morbid and sadistic fascination with agony, a preoccupation with their own mirror-problems. We seemed to be locked in an embrace of hate and mutual dependence. (p. 161)

It is from such interrogation that Breytenbach emerges, reduced as a person, to vomit his experiences into his tape recorder in Paris in a first stage of fictional distancing and self-definition. He undertakes a second investigation, this time an imaginative 'process of dissecting and undoing the psyche and washing the brain':

> I'm home now, maimed, diminished, splayed, with my vision impaired, my horizon narrowed, my reference points vague, obscure; and yet there is this total clarity even if it's only at the level of language, which is the surface, which is the superficial, which, by definition of language, must disappear to be allowed to exist. (p. 16)

Assuming the voice of his interrogator, Breytenbach turns interrogation into his most potent structural metaphor:

I am the controller. I despatch you. I drive you on. I
manipulate you. You are my lifeboat. You must open
up, go open. You must just say. Say that which I must
hear. Tell that which I know. I know you so intimately.
In such a profound way you will never know yourself.
I nose around in your psyche. You are my excursions to
wanton cellars. You are my book. I create your past.
Your future is in my hands. I leaf through all the pain-
fully constituted files on your comings and your goings,
the records of your thinking and the organigramme of
your associations. We are never free of one another
again. I am your control. I am your handler. I squint up
your arse. Relate your deepest fears to me, your best
hidden desires. Forget about yesterday and tomorrow.
The world knows only ending, ending. Pain is *now.* (p. 44)

Detention and interrogation leading to confession. The
psychological matrix that lies at the heart of all these prison
books also shapes Breytenbach's *Confessions*: it is a complex
of forces that makes people compliant to their captors and
likely to provide what they want in the way of testimony or
confessions. It combines *dread,* that accumulation of all the
fears to which the detainee is entitled concerning his own
safety and the safety of his family, *debility,* the consequence
of all those factors that grind the prisoner down physically
and eventually bring about mental changes, and *dependency,*
the prisoner's curious identification and bonding with his
captor on whom he has paradoxically to rely for kinship and
fellowship in his solitude.[11] The obsessive need to describe all
the interrogators and warders, from the relentless Huntingdon
to the most abject specimen in charge of prisoners, reflects
Breytenbach's experience of such forces. It is necessary to
understand the zone in which interrogators live, existing as
they do in the torture chamber as well as in the everyday
world, celebrating and destroying life with terrifying ambiv-
alence. Breytenbach's probing of their reality extends from his
satirical presentation of Minister Louis le Grange ('Le Grange,
I believe, has the nickname of "Clark Gable" among his col-
leagues, a name he is probably inordinately proud of –
although I consider it to be an insult to the intelligence of
the regretted real Clark Gable') to his realistic depiction of
his various warders with their ordinary human inadequacies
and deformities:

> But what does it matter, Mr Investigator, what does it
> matter? I can go on for ever evoking these caricatures
> of mankind.
>   But, listen: they are *killers* down to the last man!
> They torture and they kill, again and again. Sometimes
> you see them in daylight, caught in the glare of another
> inquest after a 'death in detention'. See their dark
> glasses, the ill-fitting suits, the faintly laughable haircuts.
> Do you feel the menace? Do you get the message?
> Watch it – they kill! (pp. 32–3)

There is no composition, Breytenbach maintains, like
decomposition. *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*
represents finally a far greater achievement than simply
analysing in psychological terms the relationship between
interrogator and detainee. The relationship of dread, depen-
dency and debility applies particularly to the relationship
between the 'I' and its *alter ego*, between the self and its
mask-images of self, between the novelist and his fictional
characters. Breytenbach's *Confessions* is addressed to his
'Mr Investigator, Mr I', his endlessly interrogating mirror-
brother whose reality he is trying to establish while his own
identity is being probed and eroded. It is a relationship which
is destructive and simultaneously generative, resulting in a
creative act which is also a documentation of his undoing in
the realm of the living dead. The infinite metaphysical and
narrative reciprocity means that, like his investigating
adversary, Huntingdon, Breytenbach too has had to 'partake
of the plunging emotion of the pain so as to feel alive, and
justified. He had to have it. He needed to abase himself even
more, to rub the raw nerves so as to forget about the dead
hole in his centre' (p. 43).

These are the confessions by Breytenbach to the Atrikaner
in himself in an imaginative attempt to locate the minotaur
of self in the heart of the South African prison labyrinth.
These confessions are also addressed to the Afrikaner god,
'a cruel, white interrogator', and are finally also an analysis
of his being as a South African. The mirrored self-images
which we glimpse in the book also afford us the privileged
view of the voyeur into the complex 'I' that is the authorial
Breyten Breytenbach, whose many personae in turn reflect
the identities of many other writers of South African prison
books. Ultimately, Breytenbach maintains, it is in the typical-

ity of his *Confessions* that the value of this document by an albino terrorist is to be found:

> I'm telling you that what I'm describing is *typical* of that mirror which the South African penal universe holds up to the Apartheid society — and that it is *inevitable*.... At the heart of the South African prison system is the denial of the humanity of 'the other' — and in that it is only a reflection of the larger South African cosmos; that is why those wielding power, they who believe themselves to be superior, are inevitably moral decadents; that is how and why they inhabit No Man's Land. (p. 247)

The prison-house, the South African prison book argues, offers the true and tragic mirror of No Man's Land.

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NOTES

1. Breyten Breytenbach, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (Emmarentia, South Africa: Taurus, 1984), p. 309. Subsequent references in brackets are to this edition.
2. See also J M Coetzee, 'Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa', *The New York Times Book Review* (12 January 1986), p. 13.
3. J M Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), p. 192.
4. Breyten Breytenbach, *A Season in Paradise* (London: Faber, 1985). Subsequent references in brackets are to this edition.
5. Breyten Breytenbach, *Mouroir: mirrornotes of a novel* (London: Faber, 1985). Subsequent references in brackets are to this edition.
6. Breyten Breytenbach, *End Papers: Essays, Letters, Articles of Faith, Workbook Notes* (London: Faber, 1986).
7. D M Zwelonke, *Robben Island* (London: Heinemann, 1973), p. 3.
8. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (London: Faber, 1984), p. 221.
9. Milan Kundera, 'Afterword: A Talk with the Author', *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 232.
10. See Elaine Scarry's argument in *The Body in Pain: The making and unmaking of the world* (London: Oxford University Press, 1986) that the physical pain inflicted in the process of torture is a method of deconstructing the language and the world of the victim.
11. The D D D Syndrome is defined by Dr Louis J West in 'Effects of Isolation on the Evidence of Detainees', *Detention and Security Legislation in South Africa: Proceedings of a Conference held at the University of Natal, September 1982*, ed. A N Bell and R D Mackie (Durban: Centre for Adult Education, University of Natal, 1985), pp. 69–80.

PLANNING THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA : SOME OBSERVATIONS

by ANTON VAN DER HOVEN

> The cultural critic is not happy with civilisation,
> to which alone he owes his discontent.
>
> T. W. Adorno

The main title of the discussion to which this paper contributes — 'Common Pursuit and Situation Pedagogics: Some Perspectives on the Role of English Departments' — could seem to be presenting us with a happy conjunction. But English studies, as traditionally conceived and practised in South Africa, have tended to regard the 'common pursuit' as the valuable goal, the pedagogics of the subject as little more than an unfortunate necessity: simply a first step on the path to the proper study of literature. 'After all,' as one of our local pursuants once put it, 'without the special gift of literary understanding, without the power to achieve, from a set of printed symbols, a unified and rich poetic experience, all our ancillary knowledge is so much dead wood.'[1]

It seems to me, however, that English departments are now inexorably, if sometimes reluctantly, turning away from their traditional 'mission' and seeking another more suited to both the urgent times in which we all live and the need for future reconstruction of education and human life in this country. In this sense the question of pedagogical aims and practices has begun to command increasing attention. The value of the researches done by some of our colleagues, largely in the black universities, is becoming especially apparent, for clearly they more than most of us have been forced to face the true conditions of our South African existence. To be fair, there is a similar movement in many traditionally white English-speaking universities. My own department in Pietermaritzburg, for example, was once a chief proponent of 'practical criticism', in which the minute analyses of textual subtleties and richness were conducted with little attention given to the shaping codes of specific social and cultural contexts. But we too are seriously attempting to adapt our teaching, and to redescribe our

subject in a way that is both positive and relevant to our situation.

Yet how are we to achieve such a revision? How are we to break free of the thinking that has characterised main-stream English departments in this country until now? We might like to imagine that we are able to make a new history, but it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to fashion it just as we please.

> The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.[2]

This is Marx in his account of the *coup d'etat* that followed the revolution of 1848. And what holds for politics in general surely also holds for its many sub-categories, like thinking about education and about the future of English departments. Indeed, the problem that I would like to address in this paper is that the thinking of those most urgently and intimately concerned with restructuring English departments is too often compromised by the various 'spirits of the past'.

Any syllabus is, it seems to me, a more or less volatile mixture of three distinct and often competing interests: the staff who must teach it, the students who must be taught, and the material which should be its content. But rather than focus on staff or the changing sociopolitical profile of our students, I would like to focus here on the matter of content. I do so precisely because it has been and is still the chief locus of discussion in the white English-speaking universities. We might even say that the distinguishing mark of these universities is that they have had, or have been able to act as if they had, the luxury of deciding their syllabuses solely on the basis and value of their content. 'This must be taught because...' is how the argument usually begins.

But what logic ought to operate in such evaluations? In

order to examine the rationale behind syllabus content at the same time as trying to bear in mind the nightmarish baggage that inevitably weighs on us, I want to look at the idea of a syllabus in terms of three oppositions that have, in my experience, been central to debate about our courses. The most prominent and also the most difficult to unravel is the distinction between the 'relevant' and the 'irrelevant'. Here the terms themselves have not been helpful, as they have been appropriated alike by what I shall conveniently refer to as 'traditionalists' and 'revisionists'. The second opposition involves the conflict between theory and practical criticism. Here the sides are much easier to distinguish: revisionists tend to see theory as the indispensable foundation for a rational and disciplined study of literature, while traditionalists are incined to see theory as little more than a *post facto* rationalisation of what one is or should be doing anyway. And the third opposition is a rather more general one which holds that the final line in all arguments of this sort is, and must be, political. Here the contrast is most often between the traditional liberal humanists and the new radicals.

Let us turn first to the question of relevance. The traditional argument has a strong tendency to locate relevance in the intrinsic worth of the works studied. In my view, however, this conception of relevance is mistaken; it reifies literature and puts value in things rather than in people's relationships to those things. The counter-argument is a familiar one, and I do not plan to dwell on it, except to remind you briefly of the peculiar history of the traditional view. Only in the later nineteenth century did such an attitude become possible, only in the twentieth was it enshrined. The crucial moment here is, of course, Matthew Arnold's famous attempt to define the 'classic'. 'Critics,' Arnold argued,

> give themselves great labour to draw out what in the abstract constitutes the characters of a high quality of poetry. It is much better simply to have recourse to concrete examples – to take specimens of poetry of the high, the very highest quality, and to say: the characters of a high quality of poetry are what is expressed *there*.[3]

The point about this is not simply that it is reification, but rather that it announces itself as such. One might almost call

it heroic reification, since it is an attempt to rescue value
from a world that is liable to trash everything it touches.
It is only later that this historic moment itself gets reified,
and what Arnold felt as a desperate necessity becomes, for
many later critics, nothing less than the law of their disci-
pline. In his essay on 'Arnold as Critic', F.R.Leavis points
to Arnold's reluctance to define and suggests that it is less
an unfortunate failure of intellect or age than it is a sure
sense of the function of the critic to exhibit certain 'positive
virtues':

> tact and delicacy, a habit of keeping in sensitive touch
> with the concrete, and an accompanying gift for implicit
> definition – virtues that prove adequate to the sure
> and easy management of a sustained argument and are,
> as we see them in Arnold, essentially those of a literary
> critic.[4]

The result is a double reification, of literature and of the
moment; and out of this twofold distancing a discipline was
born.

The wonder, then, is not that social influences were sup-
pressed in English Studies, but that this double suppression
was tolerated for so long. The history of this tolerance needs
to be written, but surely we should not be surprised to find
that many teachers of English literature have felt the very
crisis of relevance that their discipline was once so determined
to avoid. In South Africa this has meant, first and foremost,
attention to our own society, and the literature that it has
produced. From this point of view it is argued that students
should study Schreiner rather than Austen, and Serote rather
than Yeats. For, so the argument runs, it is only by engaging
with our present society and its history that we can hope to
be relevant, and to establish moral connections between our
discipline and our world.

How can any reasonable person fail to be persuaded by
this kind of questioning, and by the benign influence it has
exerted on our syllabuses? But that does not mean that one
must not examine such changes closely, for at times they
seem to insist on a logic that ultimately undermines its own
premises. If Serote and Schreiner are more relevant to the
South African situation than Austen and Yeats, then surely
a course on South African television is more relevant than

either; and surely political or sociological courses on, say, 'The social structure of townships', or on 'Viable strategies for non-violent opposition' would, in the end, be more valuable than anything literary at all? In short, I do not believe that the proponents of relevance are able to answer at its most fundamental level the question they pose. For radically alternative views to literature and literary studies as valid activities *per se* have usually revealed little more than different attempts to co-opt that very literature into the service of new but equally circumscribed activities, for example to immediate political exigencies.

I would certainly agree that all culture is political, but politics, let alone a particular political vision, is not all there is to culture. Let me make this clear: I am not arguing the conservative position that some things are so private or so sacred that they escape contamination by the political. Rather, I am urging that we recognise that politics itself is a product of culture; it is subject to the same limitations, the same distortions, and the same indigence as the culture which it seeks to purify. It can thus never exhaust the culture which it seeks to make relevant. This is why it is not inconceivable to me that the so called 'irrelevant' may, at some moment, become the most relevant thing to study, not because until now people have been mistaken about it, as if Austen's vision of the landed gentry could suddenly evoke important parallels with the *plaas*. Rather, the seemingly irrelevant could become a way of resisting the imperiousness of a particular view of the relevant.

Let me try to explain this paradox. The notion of relevance, as I see it, is fired by a desire to engage in what the Frankfurt School called the 'transcendent' critique of culture. It wants to call culture into question because it is incensed by culture's blindness, by the way it seems to perpetuate the interests of the ruling classes and, ultimately, by its inability to create the ideal society. But the paradox here is that in order to make such a necessary critique, critics must assume that they are outside of culture, when in fact 'the choice of a standpoint outside the sway of existing society is as fictitious as only the construction of abstract utopias can be'.[5] If transcendent critics fail to recognise the contingency of their own conceptions, they are simply making a fetish of those conceptions, and in that way not subverting but rather

replicating the central mechanism of bourgeois ideology whereby it pretends that our present social world is the normal and natural one. This is why Adorno argues that transcendent criticism is prone to regard its own view as 'natural', and so itself to speak the language of 'false escape':

> It despises the mind and its works, contending that they are, after all, only man-made and serve only to cover up 'natural' life.[6]

But the moment we embrace a 'natural' view, we do no more than inaugurate a culture which determines what is valuable 'according to the criteria of the administrators who have appropriated it'.[7]

Such, then, is the paradoxical nature of the question of relevance. It is a question which we must always ask, because relevance does not reside in texts, unequivocally signalling its presence to us; it is the product of the use to which we have in the past and will in the future put such texts. But the question of relevance is also one which we can never finally answer, except at the risk of contradicting ourselves and the very conditions which allowed us to ask it in the first place.

What are the practical implications of this? In metropolitan literature first, I think we can see that there can be no universally persuasive reason why any individual text should be on a syllabus. Instead, texts should be chosen for the way they contribute to a particular kind of understanding which is important for our students to acquire. Such an argument must always be made if we are to escape fetishising literary value. But to offer such arguments need not mean that everything on our syllabuses will be instrumentalised, taken as examples of some or other lesson that we think it fit for students to learn. Cultural artefacts can never be exhausted by one particular theory; indeed, as Adorno points out, 'no theory, not even one that is true, is safe from perversion into delusion once it has renounced a spontaneous relation to the object'.[8]

And what of Africanising our syllabuses? There are a good number of arguments in favour of such a course, many of them persuasive precisely to the degree that the relevance of the local has been denied. Ultimately, however, it seems

to me that the best *general* argument for including African and South African literature on our syllabuses is paradoxically a negative one: there can be no persuasive reason why such literature should not be on a syllabus.

Above all, one ought not to dismiss the colonial prejudice, with its Eurocentric tendencies, only to adhere uncritically to all things local. This is why I find myself unable to accept Ngugi's well-known argument for the Africanisation of the English Department at the University of Nairobi. When Ngugi and his co-authors argue that there is no intrinsic reason why English literature should be the centre of their syllabus, they are right. Why should the manifold crimes of colonialism be given a shadowy after-life in the seats of higher learning? But then, equally, there is no intrinsic reason why African literature should be at the centre of a syllabus. Indeed, my argument is that we must eschew the very idea of a centre. Consider the following statement:

> The aim, in short, should be to orientate ourselves towards placing Kenya, East Africa, and then Africa in the centre. All other things are to be considered in their relevance to our situation, and their contribution towards understanding ourselves....In other words English writings will be taught in their European context and only for their relevance to the East African perspective.[9]

The logic of this argument seems to me to fail in two closely related ways. First, it appears to assume that relevance can be determined at a general level; and, second, it argues for such relevance by imitating the thinking it seeks to replace, by championing an alternative set of values, an African Great Tradition, which could itself become a transgression of the African history it seeks to enshrine.

In the end this kind of thinking can lead to the abdication of relevance, instead of its genuine reign. Indeed, I found an unwanted and disturbing example of this while browsing through Ngugi's own writings of the period. In an essay entitled 'Okot p'Bitek and Writing in East Africa', Ngugi is concerned not only to show that East African writing is as rich as that of other parts of the continent, but also to claim that it has a special kind of richness most clearly revealed in *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*. The unique value of these

poems, he argues, is the way in which they grow out of and further the oral tradition of popular resistance to colonialism and neo-colonialism alike; they represent a true poetry of the people.

In the course of his argument, Ngugi refers to the document on the abolition of the Nairobi English Department, specifically to its argument that the oral tradition deserves an important place on their university syllabus. In Africa, the European sense of the written word is clearly inadequate to 'the verbal embodiment[s] of a people's creative spirit'. And so Ngugi moves on to show the importance of the African oral tradition as the repository of the beauty, the dignity, and the human protest of the exploited African masses. This is persuasive enough. But then we find a troubling example. Ngugi writes:

> During the anti-colonial struggle new song-poems were created to express defiance and the people's collective aspirations....During the 'thirties the Agikuyu of Kenya and the colonial missionaries came into conflict over the matter of female circumcision. The religious conflict was, of course, a reflection of the deeper political and economic struggle. People created a song-dance called Muthirigo, to discourage and ridicule those who sided with the missionaries. The following is a poor rendering of three verses:

> I would never pay bride-wealth for an uncircumcised girl.
> My mother is circumcised.
> My father is circumcised.
> A lamb whose tail is not cut
> Cannot be used for sacrifice.[10]

I have quoted only one of the three verses from this song; but it should suffice. My point is not that the Agikuyu of the 'thirties had a violent and sexist practice — here gently paraphrased as 'female circumcision' — enshrined in their culture. Rather, it is that Ngugi himself, and in the name of liberation, chooses this text as a powerful expression of the 'people's collective aspiration'. Of course, it *is* partly that. Equally, however, it records a moment of brutal repression which we can legitimately expect the contemporary critic to register. Instead, Ngugi appears to be swept along by a kind of politicising that is, paradoxically, as blind as the aestheticising so frequently indulged in by traditional critics.[11]

Even the relevance of Africanisation cannot be taken for granted. To summarise the matter: I am arguing that there is no meta-language in which we can define what is relevant. To put one's faith in such a language is to take a first step down the road to barbarism.

This conclusion leads directly to my second opposition: that between theory and practical criticism. The conflict between traditional and more recent approaches has often focused on the matter of theory, its place in the syllabus and, of course, its value. Those who dismiss theory do so because, ultimately, they find that as value is all present and accounted for in the texts of some Great Tradition, theorising is at best a kind of *post facto* systematising of what one does or should do when reading a text.

The advocates of theory quite rightly find this attitude untenable, and nowhere is it more surely mistaken than in its naive belief in the spontaneous and uncontaminated naturalness of the qualified reader. All reading, the theorists counter, is always already theoretical. Thus our task is not to pretend we can avoid theory; rather, we must make sure that we choose the right theory. But if the traditional argument relies on a fetishised notion of literary value, this one is often dangerously close to fetishising theory itself, forgetting that it too is a cultural product, as embedded in the contingencies of history as any literary text. Thus although theory is a necessary and inescapable component of literary understanding, it can never be a completely secure foundation on which to build a syllabus. Indeed, it seems to me that our syllabuses will be best when they subvert such simple dichotomies. We need syllabuses that help our students to recognise that theories tell stories just as surely as stories are instances of theories.

This argument has a further implication. If the distinction between theory and practice cannot be sustained, then the distinction between the literary and the non-literary must be equally untenable. There is, therefore, no reason why our syllabuses should not cover a far greater range of the discourses present in society. To some extent this kind of thing is already happening, as Cultural Studies and courses in popular culture find small footholds in our departments and faculties. But my argument suggests that we should move beyond the usual strategy – often countenanced by both sides in the debate – of introducing such courses as sub-disciplines, each with its

own methodology. This is to perpetuate false hierarchies and the discourses they empower. What we need to do is to encourage our students to confront the way our society orders its discourse. And to do that we must find ways of introducing the 'non-literary' into our literary courses.[12]

In conclusion, I would like to address the politics of these arguments and, of course, of my analysis of them. Again the opposition is a predictable one: the traditionalists are labelled 'liberal humanists', and those who favour relevance and theory are 'radicals'. But it has always seemed a great misfortune that the Leavisian tradition was labelled 'liberal humanism'. Although it was indeed human – all too human, as Nietzsche might have said – it was never truly liberal, either in its literary or in its social thinking. Indeed, if this particular label had not achieved currency, English Studies might have been spared the first phase of contemporary left-wing critical theory, with its hard-nosed, oppositional, but ultimately spurious emphasis on a materialist science. For, as I have argued, such scientism inevitably establishes a single criterion of relevance. Instead, we need to teach a discipline that is firmly open-ended. Terry Eagleton seems to suggest this in a recent volume:

> For a new generation of critics in Western society, 'English Literature' is now an inherited label for a field within which many diverse preoccupations congregate: semiotics, psychoanalysis, film studies, cultural theory, the representation of gender, popular writing, and of course the conventionally valued writings of the past. These pursuits have no obvious unity beyond a concern with the symbolic processes of social life, and the social production of forms of subjectivity.[13]

Of special interest here is the variety of subjects and approaches that Eagleton sees as making up the 'field'. He does not attempt to reduce English Studies to one 'relevant' subject or perspective. And in this crucial but strictly limited sense, I submit that a radical approach to constructing English syllabuses must be a liberal one.

This does not imply an easy academic pluralism. On the contrary, I have been trying to suggest that what we need most when we think about our subject and its syllabuses is a persistent negative disciplining, a secular *via negativa*, which

must always ask the question of relevance, and always refuse to give it a final answer. For ultimately, if we are to understand ourselves and our history in their African and metropolitan moments, we will need to overcome the divisions of past tradition, and to find a path to a genuinely post-colonial future. Indeed, if South Africa is a crystallisation of the relationship between the 'first' and the 'third' worlds, a kind of mirror in which the first world can see itself writ brutally and writ large, then surely we who live here have the potential, because we have the desperate need, to move beyond the imperialist legacy so easily ignored in the comforts of the first world, so painfully remembered in the violences of the third. Should our syllabuses not play their small part in convincing people that the world is, in the first instance, a place to be lived in and shared equally with others?

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NOTES

1. G.H. Durrant, 'Notes on the Teaching of Literature', *Theoria* (1947), p. 7.
2. Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', *The Marx-Engels Reader,* Second Edition, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 595.
3. Matthew Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry', *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold,* ed. A. Dwight Culler (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 313.
4. F.R. Leavis, 'Arnold as Critic', in *A Selection from Scrutiny,* Vol. 1, compiled by F.R. Leavis (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 266.
5. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', *Prisms,* tr. Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Spearman, 1967), p. 31.
6. Adorno, p. 31.
7. Adorno, p. 32.
8. Adorno, p. 33.
9. James Ngugi, Henry Owuor-Anyumba, and Taban Lo Liyong, 'On the Abolition of the English Department', in Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1972), p. 146–148.
10. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 'Okot p'Bitek and Writing in East Africa', *Homecoming,* p. 68–69. On the horror of what is euphemistically called 'female circumcision', see the Minority Rights Group Report (No. 47) *Female Circumcision, Excision and Infibulation,* ed. Scilla McLean and Stella Efua Graham (London: Minority Rights Group, 1985). The editors point out that female circumcision is a rare and mild form of mutilation when compared to the much more brutal and widespread excising and infibulation of external female genitalia. They add that the practice is particularly difficult to combat in Kenya because Kenyatta himself made resistance to the elimination of genital excision a cornerstone of the national liberation campaign.

11. On aestheticising see, for example, Gerald Graff on the controversy stimu-
    lated by the award of the Bollingen Prize of 1948 to Ezra Pound's *Pisan
    Cantos,* in *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern
    University Press, 1970), pp. 172–179.
12. On difference discourses, see Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Know-
    ledge,* tr. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972).
13. Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-
    Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984), p. 123–124.