

Book Reviews / Boekresensies

Verhaalteorie in die Twintigste Eeu

Heilna du Plooy. 1986
Durban: Butterworth

Hierdie werk het reeds baie aandag geniet. As tesis is dit in die *TLW* (Oktober 1985, 1(4): 84-85) bespreek; die boek sal ongetwyfeld selfs meer belangstelling uitlok. Dit is goed versorg, goed geskryf en maklik leesbaar. Dit bestaan uit twee gedeeltes, wat egter nie as sodanig gekenmerk is nie, nl. 'n uiteensetting van verhaalteorieë vanaf Henry James tot Prince en Rimmon-Kennan (179 pp.) en 'n toepassing van geselekteerde begrippe in 'n analise van *Die Kêrel van die Pêrel* (88 pp.). Hierdie twee dele word voorafgegaan deur 'n inleiding, waarin die boek verantwoord word, die begrensing van sekere tekssoorte gemotiveer word en die werkwyse uiteengesit word.

Reeds hierdie inleiding getuig van die lewendige belangstelling wat die outeur vir die verhaal as 'n grondliggende menslike aktiwiteit het, 'n belangstelling en warmte – dit is die woord – wat op elke bladsy voelbaar is en aan die bespreking van *Die Kêrel van die Pêrel* 'n groot oortuigingskrag verleen. Dis dan ook hierdie ontleding van 'n Afrikaanse werk wat sekere problematiese aspekte in die teoretiese gedeelte soos met 'n towerstaf laat verdwyn. In die teoriedeel is die outeur gedwing om *alle* teorieë voor te stel; in die toepassing kon sy die instrumente 'selekteer' wat op die spesifieke verhaal toepaslik is in die wete dat nie alle teorie op alle verhalende tekse toepaslik is nie (p. 9). Die konkrete verhaaltteks verleen aan die teorielele wat gebruik is, 'n hoër mate van konkreetheid as wat die betrokke terme binne die teoretiese deel besit. Hierdie enigins repetitiewe ontleding getuig van die noodsaak dat literêre teorieë behoorlik *verteer* moet wees, voordat dit vir 'n goeie teksanalise gebruik kan word. In hierdie sin is die analise nie 'n 'toepassing' van geselekteerde begrippe nie, maar die oortuigende *gebruik* daarvan. (Die resensent kon egter die naam van die konkrete outeur van *Die Kêrel van die Pêrel* eers in die Indeks opspoor. 'n Klassikus of 'n Romaanse filoloog sou graag hierdie boek gebruik. Van sulke gebruikers kan dit nie verwag word dat hulle *alle* Afrikaanse outeurs en boeke moet ken nie.)

Die skryfster maak duidelik dat die hoofstorie van die *Kêrel* op die vlak van die vertelhandeling self lê, dat die handeling van vertel, die verteller se worsteling met feite en die weergawe daarvan die belangrikste aksie van die *Kêrel* is, dat die verteller *self* die aktant/subjek van die metanarratiewe *fabula* is, nl. die subjek van die basiese proposisie [ek soek na waarheid]. In hierdie metanarratiewe skema speel die drie stories afwisselend of gelyktydig die rol van Helper en/of Teenstander (pp. 328–332). Dr. Du Plooy slaag ook uitmuntend daarin om die komplekse tydstruktuur, soos dit in die verhaal beliggaam is, as 'n semanties belangrike aspek van die *Kêrel* uit te wys, met ander woorde, om te laat verstaan dat Lämmert se *Rückgriffe* of Genette se *analyses* belangrike fases in die verteller se strewe na die waarheid is. Na die

pedagogies en letterkundig oortuigende analise van *Die Kêrel van die Pêrel* sal dit vir ander akademië wat in die Afrikaanse prosa belangstel, moeilik wees om hierdie modelontleding te verontagsaam.

Die hoogs positiewe indruk wat die modelanalise maak, is m.i. te danke aan die eenheid van verhaaltaal en metataal, d.w.s. beide die geanaliseerde verhaal en die analiserende teks is in Afrikaans. Hierdie eenheid kan vanselfsprekend nie in die teoretiese gedeelte bestaan nie. Die resensent het eenvoudig nie van die taalmengsel waarin bv. Franse teoretici aangebied is gehou nie. As 'n mens aan René Wellek of Claudio Guillén dink, wat alle teorieë, die Russe inkluis, in die oorspronklike taal lees en dus die spesifieke kultuurveronderstellings maklik verstaan, is mens geneig om jou te vra of die ondersoeker Frans of Duits magtig is. Een aspek van die resepsieteorie (Jauss) word in Engels weergegee, 'n ander in Nederlands (uit Van Gorp *et al.*), 'n derde weer in Nederlands (uit Segers se artikel in Van Gorp *et al.*). Wat Barthes betref (goed deur die aanhaling van Susan Sontag beskryf, p. 150), is 'n goeie kennis van Frans onmisbaar.

Dit blyk nou maar die weë van die internasionale literatuurteorie te wees: 'n klein deel 'teoriebou' en 'n veel groter deel 'krities oor die teorie uitwei'. In ieder geval kon die resensent in die teoretiese gedeelte geen noemenswaardige foute vind nie. 'n Groot getal terme is uit die uitstekende en betroubare Indeks verkry en gekontroleer met die betrokke teksgedeeltes. In die hoofstuk oor Barthes egter is *langue* as 'gewone taal' weergegee (p. 154) en 'n bietjie later as 'gewone artikuleerbare taal' (p. 154). Die Franse kontrasteer *langue* streng in die sin van De Saussure met *parole* (=spraak), d.w.s. taal as sisteem vs. taal as taal-in-gebruik. Die metaforiese gebruik van linguïstiese terme (waarteen Georges Mounin sterk beswaar geopper het) kom baie dikwels by Barthes voor. Om sy geskrifte te verstaan is 'n uitgebreide kennis van die Franse linguïstiek wenslik. As daar van Barthes se *verhoudinge van verspreiding* gepraat word (p.153), veronderstel die resensent dat daarmee die *rapports de distribution* bedoel word. Hierdie linguïstiese term moet in Afrikaans egter *spreiding* of *distribusie* wees.

Die foutiewe gebruik van *temps du histoire*, wat *temps de l'histoire* moet wees, is deurgaans irriterend (pp. 206–209, ook Indeks); *komtemporêr* (p. 293) is slegs 'n drukfout. Daar is baie min van hulle.

Ten slotte wil die resensent nog sy waardering teenoor die outeur uitspreek vir haar respek vir en indringende begrip van die Franse strukturalisme. Barthes, Todorow, Greimas en Genette word dikwels bloot as 'n mode van die sestiger- en sewentiger-jare beskou en as sodanig teenoor latere teoretiese of filosofiese bewegings te lig bevind. Dr. Du Plooy spreek tereg haar bewondering uit vir 'die skerp insig, oorspronklike denke en verstommende erudisie, wat hulle teoretiese besinning en hulle briljante analise kenmerk' (p. 205). Afrikaanssprekende studente in die Franse letterkunde behoort aangeraai te word om *Verhaalteorie in die Twintigste Eeu* te raadpleeg.

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Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature

Colin MacCabe. 1985

Manchester: Manchester University Press. 152 pp., £4.95 (R30,90), paperback

It appears from the introductory autobiographical essay of this collection ('Class of '68') that their theoretical underpinnings are partly poststructuralist, i.e. dependent upon the 'radical semiotics' of Barthes and Derrida, which recognises no stability of meaning, partly psychoanalytical (of the Lacanian variety) which further resists the idea of a fixed identity on the part of texts as well as subjects. Both of these models are placed in the service of what is apparently of most fundamental importance to MacCabe, viz. a neo-Marxist political model of the subject as emancipated from the imaginary security of closed bourgeois ideology.

It should therefore come as no surprise that MacCabe's political affinities are socialist, and although this shows especially in his narrative of the history of the film magazine, *SCREEN*, it undoubtedly also played a role in the parallel history of his involvement with the English Faculty at Cambridge, which culminated in the so-called 'structuralist' controversy. MacCabe's account of the infamous episode at one of England's most famous centres of learning reveals that this description is a misnomer, symptomatic of the ignorance and related fears which effectively prevented his permanent appointment in the English Faculty. The interest which the whole episode generated in the English literary world is variously reflected (or refracted) by the different contributions printed in the TLS issue (February 6, 1981:135-137) that addressed the question of the place of literary theory in teaching.

Although readers may find some of the passages dealing with theory in the introductory essay somewhat obscure due to their density – they become clearer in retrospect from the vantage point of the subsequent theoretical essays – this does not detract from its importance as a document of the extent to which recognition of the analysis of popular forms of culture such as film and television, especially by educational authorities, is still hopelessly inadequate.

The 'theoretical' essays which follow the 'historical' introduction provide a wealth of novel insights, such as the illuminating analogy that MacCabe draws between realism in literature and in the cinema ('Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian Theses'), despite the difficulties brought about by the relative absence of a suitable vocabulary. He shows how the transparency afforded by the dominant discourse of the narrative prose (which functions as a metalanguage) is paralleled in the realist film by the narration of events, in which the camera fulfils the crucial function of showing 'the truth' against which the various characters' discourses can be measured. Central to MacCabe's concern is the fact that the status of the narrative in the classic realist text generally goes unquestioned, which affirms the existing order with regard to reality as well as the dominant position of the subject. The essay in

question aims precisely at formulating the conditions for subverting the dominance of the subject, i.e. rendering its position problematic with a view to replacing the fixation of both subject and object by their inescapable temporality or ever-present possibility of change, while avoiding the error of 'Hegelianising Marx' – the belief that change will inevitably result in the realisation of 'the beautiful dream of the real becoming rational and the rational becoming real' (p. 53). The typology of texts mapped out here in terms of the way discourses are organised within them is a useful, if not an unproblematical one: the classic realist, progressive (but reactionary), subversive, and revolutionary text, respectively.

While the following essay, 'Theory and film: principles of realism and pleasure', also focuses on the 'crucial area of discussion', realism, MacCabe's approach differs from that of the previous essay in an important respect in that he attempts to get rid of the 'structuralist contamination' of the earlier one, viz. the assumption that the text has a 'separate existence'. Instead, text (film) and reader (audience) are said to be inseparable, and realism 'is no longer a question of an exterior reality nor of the relation of reader to text, but one of the ways in which these two interact' (p. 78). As a consequence, the typology of texts proposed in the earlier article no longer makes sense. Unfortunately MacCabe does not pursue the philosophical implications of a radical hermeneutics which seems to locate meaning in the space of 'interaction' between unidentifiable entities. If text and reader are inseparable, it follows that both are first constituted (reciprocally) at the moment of interaction; their respective 'identities' evaporate into (at most) potentiality when the interaction is over. But what is it that interacts with what? The answer has to be: nothing, for both (non-)entities first come into being by interacting, which, logically, therefore becomes impossible. Hence there can be neither reader nor text. Still, the emphasis on the *production* of a certain reality by film, the application of Lacan's analysis of vision to the situation of the spectator and the subsequent analysis of *American Graffiti* in those terms provide valuable insights into a complex phenomenon. It also invites comparison with recent non-psychoanalytical film analysis by the French philosopher Deleuze.

MacCabe returns to the question of realism once more in the last essay of this collection – this time with regard to the question of theory in the context of Barthes's *S/Z* (which also, of course, involves Balzac) – while the intervening two concentrate on language (discourse), linguistics and the study of literature. For lack of space I cannot discuss them at length here. Briefly, the essay 'On Discourse' – perhaps the most complex of this collection – examines the work of linguists Benveniste and Harris in relation to the status of the subject. Despite valuable contributions by both, a consideration of Lacan's concept of the signifier shows their failure to recognise the division of the subject in and by language, a recognition which MacCabe regards as essential to a theory of discourse. This leads to Pecheux's extension of the division-model to the communicative and non-communicative functions of language in modern society, and to MacCabe's corrective criticism of his re-introduction of a coherent subject into a Lacanian schema which promises an understand-

ing of the discursive disruption of dominant ideologies. Quite accurately, MacCabe speaks here of 'the politics of the signifier'.

In the following essay the difficult problem of the relation between linguistics and the study of literature is addressed, with MacCabe arguing – following Jakobson – that mutual ignorance on the part of these disciplines of each other's findings, although still widespread, is anachronistic. He goes further than Jakobson, however, in urging the transformation of their respective assumptions. MacCabe's knowledge and application of the results of linguistic research demonstrates that, as we read on the book's back cover: 'The study of English literature can no longer claim the theoretical innocence with which it was long content'. There is obviously no reason to restrict this observation to *English* literature and *linguistic* theory. Hence I can safely say that teachers of literature and language-related theory would benefit from reading these essays.

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Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory

Howard Felperin. 1985

Oxford, Clarendon Press. R76,00

Vir die meeste lesers is literêre teorie iets abstraks en hoegenaamd nié genietlik nie. Howard Felperin is egter só 'n meesleurende en humoristiese teoretikus dat 'n mens gereeld lag. In *Beyond Deconstruction* word die huidige stand van sake in die 'wildernis van literêre teorie' (à la Geoffrey Hartman) gekarteer.

Felperin dra tereg sy boek op aan twee van die briljantste teoretici in die VSA: Geoffrey H. Hartman en wyle Paul de Man. Hiermee erken hy 'n skatpligtigheid aan die sogenaamde Yale-skool of ondersteuners van 'n 'negatiewe' hermeneutiek. Dié skrywer is tans Robert Wallace-professor in Engels aan die Universiteit van Melbourne en 'n begaafde retorikus. Om 'n leser enduit te wil boei in 'n oorsig soos hierdie, vereis gewis bepaalde retoriese strategieë.

Humor, woordspelinge, oordrywings en 'n onkeerbare geesdrif is van die belangrikste kenmerke van Felperin se oordrag. Ook besit hy die vermoë om 'n boek te skryf wat vir sowel die erudiete leser as die jong student duidelik relevant is. Daarbenewens word die verwysings genoegsaam verhelder sonder om ooit te verveel of in dordroë pedanterie te verval.

In navolging van Walter Benjamin beweer Felperin dat dekonstruksiekritiek soos 'n besoek aan 'n vreemde stad is. Ten einde die stad te kan 'ontdek' moet 'n mens leer om jou weg te verloor ... En dit is gewis 'n adekwate opsomming van dekonstruksie: daar word van die leser/toepasser verwag om ál sy/haar vooropgestelde idees te bevraagteken ten einde 'n nuwe of anderse lesing teweeg te bring. (Vanselfsprekend 'ontglim' min teoretici

van hierdie 'rigting' ooit die invloed van die New Criticism-tradisie en is daar min lesings wat die radikale uitgangspunte genoegsaam illustreer.)

Ek het reeds verwys na Felperin se humorsin. In die eerste hoofstuk, 'Leavisism Revisited', word daar verwys na die mistifikasie van gewone, alledaagse taalgebruik. Felperin beskryf hoe hy as 'n jong student van Harvard na Yale, die mekka van literêre teorie, gegaan het. Die opvallende verskille tussen Cambridge, Mass. en New Haven word knap weergegee. Die Yale-'produkte' ('n tipiese Amerikaanse woord) het in 1966 konsepte soos 'binêre opposisies', 'bricolage', 'ostranenie', en so meer rondgestrooi, iets wat vir die jong Felperin kennelik na Grieks geklink het.

Hy bely: 'Gradually, the principles of plain talk and common sense began to seem more like fallacies of univocal expression and unmediated perception, and soon I could have been taken for a native speaker' (p. 7). Net toe hy die 'nuwe taal' onder die knie had, vertrek hy na Australië as professor in Engels. Dit was 1977.

En weer blyk *taal* 'n probleem te wees. Hier is begrippe soos 'crisp', 'brittle', 'buoyant', 'essential', 'central', en so meer gebruik. Die rede? Australië is 'n 'last outpost' van *Leavisism!*

Hierdie taalverwarring, aldus die skrywer, onderstreep eerder dat daar verskillende benaderinge bestaan én dat dit nie meer vandag 'n vraag is of literêre teorie belangrik is nie, maar eerder welke teorie om te gebruik of aan te wend (p. 28). 'Moderne' literêre teorie het ons daarvan bewus gemaak dat selfs 'n spontane of natuurlike benadering op 'n groot hoeveelheid aannames gebaseer is.

Natuurlik maak die skrywer vele opmerkings wat 'n vraagteken of kantaantekening uitlok. Maar dit is 'n boek met soveel gevathede en kruisverbindinge dat dit dadelik die leser se bewondering afdwing. En hoef teorie 'waar' te wees? wonder 'n mens saam met die skrywer. 'n Teorie postuleer eerder.

'n Kwessie waarop Felperin besondere klem lê, is dat die outeur van 'n teks gewoon 'n funksie en nie die determinant/bepaler van die teks is nie. Hierdie siening is natuurlik terug te voer na Foucault en Barthes se sieninge van die outeur. Felperin beklemtoon hierdie aspek, juis omdat die verskil tussen moderne en konvensionele kritiek hier aangetoon kan word. Vir die ouer kritikus is die betekenis agterhaalbaar en is hy/sy selfs bereid om te verwys na wat die skrywer 'bedoel' het. Daarenteen is daar eeder sprake van 'n 'web of meaning' in die moderne kritiek. Die teks kan selfs 'n betekenis *produseer* wat die skrywer nooit bedoel het nie.

In die tweede hoofstuk word meer gesê oor die 'misbruike' van literêre teorie ('Marxism *Redivivus*'). Felperin wys terug op die foutiewe aanname dat sommige Marxistiese kritici, soos 'Eagleton's rewriting of the great tradition does not escape or transcend but only inverts the value-structure of its arch-conservator' (p. 56). 'n Mens kan sy waardering vir Eagleton óók raaksien, maar die irritasie met die Oxford-don ontglim die leser nie. Die skrywer voel hom ook meer tuis in die geledere van Amerikaanse dekonstruksie as die Franse 'skool'.

In die derde hoofstuk word 'n oorsig oor die ontwikkeling in Barthes se denke gegee ('Structuralism in Retrospect'), terwyl die vierde een heet:

'Deconstruction Reconstructed'. Hier wys Felperin daarop dat die beginpunte van dekonstruksie véerder terug lê as Nietzsche *et al.* 'n Mens kan selfs die 'beginpunte' aantref in die pre-sokratiese tydperk!

Ook word die verskille tussen Amerikaanse en Franse dekonstruksie verhelder, te wete Parys versus New Haven/Baltimore, en dit behoort veral in die lig van onlangse polemieke 'n belangrike hoofstuk te wees omdat vele literatore net in terme van Europese dekonstruksie dink. In die vyfde hoofstuk, 'Toward a Poststructuralist Practice; a Reading of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*' word teorie en praktyk versoen.

Die skrywer werp lig op die 'duistere' sonnette van Shakespeare wat skynbaar nie-referensieel is. In die sesde en laaste hoofstuk, 'Beyond Theory' word daar gewys op die vanselfsprekende gevaar dat dekonstruksie 'n nuwe 'religie' kan word. Weer eens word die einde van 'n spontane, natuurlike benadering tot die literatuur ondersoek, omdat literêre teorie ons algaande méér bewus maak het van ons vooropgestelde idees, ons subjektiwiteit, ideologiese betrokkenheid en so meer.

'n Leesbare studie teen R76,00 plus AVB!

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Southern African Literature Series

General Editor Stephen Gray
Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill

- Athol Fugard*. Gray, Stephen (ed.). 1982. (No.1).
Soweto Poetry. Chapman, Michael (ed.). 1982. (No. 2).
Pauline Smith. Driver, Dorothy (ed.). 1983. (No. 3).
Olive Schreiner. Clayton, Cherry (ed.). 1983. (No. 4).
Doris Lessing. Bertelsen, Eve (ed.). 1985. (No. 5).
Herman Charles Bosman. Gray, Stephen (ed.). 1986. (No. 6).

Gone are the days when all research into Southern African writing was a marginal enquiry into scattered, neglected work, and when retrieving material was a historical treasure hunt conducted by a few researchers who could not believe their luck – or the complacency of their colleagues. Those (often still complacent) colleagues now shift uneasily at the increasing evidence of a national literary publishing bonanza, which is bypassing them utterly. The shoeboxes of cards on figures like Pauline Smith, Olive Schreiner, H.C. Bosman etc. are transforming themselves into glossy casebooks, companions and individual critical works. Southern African literature research has become a respectable activity, and the publishing industry, often a long way ahead of the academic industry, is getting ready for the big time in academic, institutionalised and canonised studies in Southern African writing.

The Southern African Literature Series is, in fact, in the middle of two

extremes: it is nourished by the serious researchers who have been doing historical and literary research into the minutiae of the field (which gets bigger and bigger the closer you get to it), while it addresses itself to those, like undergraduate or Honours students and academics whose special interests lie elsewhere, who have very little sense of the 'shape' of Southern African writing. This appears to be a paradoxical situation. The efforts of researchers are to deny easy schematisations and to emphasise the need to cover the ground before ascending to literary-critical heights; but the series, while incorporating such work, irresistably suggests a grand shape, a historical procession of 'major' figures whose presence makes most other writers seem secondary. This impression is reinforced by the attractive format of these books, and by the intellectual seriousness with which the authors are treated. The question answers whether there is a danger of reifying a 'major tradition' – with all the attendant platitudes and 'received' critical assumptions that are the cheaper alternatives to real academic endeavour – or are these books the best way to launch greater involvement in research in a well-organised, exemplary way?

Several years ago, at least one critic recognised the danger of prematurely developing a canon. I. Hofmeyr suggested that the mental picture of the progression of South African writing which many of us have, namely Pringle, Schreiner, Millin, Plomer, Van der Post, Campbell, Bosman, Paton, Cope, Jacobson and Gordimer (one would like to add Pauline Smith, Doris Lessing, Fugard and Coetzee), is hopelessly selective:

It excludes, for example, all pre-nineteenth-century writing, the most notable exception being oral literature. It ignores all working class literature, both African and Afrikaans, and it shuns large chunks of white popular literature with vehemence. In total, then, this 'tradition' which claims to represent South African literature, quite staggeringly ignores the culture and literary endeavours of the majority of people in this country. (Hofmeyr, 1979: 39-40)

Despite Stephen Gray's preface as general editor of the series, in which he emphasises 'open-endedness' and 'work-in-progress' (comments which indicate that he is all too aware of the dangers of constructing a premature tradition) the series does *appear* to present a highly selective literary history. The line-up is mostly white, often writing in the liberal idiom. Granted, there are as many factors which scramble too-definite categories: Fugard is not essentially text-based, Bosman is not bourgeois, the 'Soweto' poets may be said to have oral connections, Lessing is a self-mutating phenomenon, Pauline Smith, like Bosman, translates the experience of nonliberal, unEnglish South African survivors into unusual English fiction, while Olive Schreiner was a Victorian feminist who exploded categories of writing as far as she went. But despite such wonderful diversity, five of the six titles deal with figures who, to some extent, have become culture heroes among the white middle-class establishment. This emphasis is perhaps obvious, given the fact that much of the interest in and research into South African writing emanates from white, middle-class, English-speaking people in the process of outgrowing an unproblematic liberalism. Certainly, if one's aim is to examine the past

in order to make better sense of the present, it seems obvious to begin with your own class-heroes and work out how and why they have come to assume such a position. But the target-market seems inevitably sectional, which leads one to wonder who is paying for South African literature studies anyway, and for whose benefit it is being conducted and why. Perhaps these are moot points, as long as you are aware of the dangers of doing things in a certain way. But what may obscure such a need to be self-conscious about why one selects certain literary heroes above others or above *groups* of writers, in a series like this, is the need to *explain* the works the chosen authors at the kind of level where a student or a junior researcher can begin to feel he or she is in a position to engage with them.

One is thus faced with the danger that the concern with a formalistic process of elucidating *texts* (still the most important practical requirement for students) will obscure (i) the debate about selective historiography, and (ii) the need to investigate literature as a social process within a broad context which cuts across single-author studies as well as categories of language, race, ethnicity and class.

Linked to this is the danger that the series has and will continue to deal with the visible and obvious figures in Southern African literature, as opposed to 'the reconstruction of a past that resuscitates, in a meaningful way, those areas of literature that have been hidden from history' (Hofmeyr, 1979:44). Olive Schreiner, Pauline Smith and Athol Fugard seem the most obvious choices (although one could quibble about the status accorded to Smith above certain of her contemporaries): these authors are favourite choices for inclusion into literature syllabuses, in the company of other authors like Gordimer, Paton and Coetzee. The same goes for 'Soweto Poetry' (a term that sounds more and more tenuous as time passes): Serote, Mtshali, Sepamla, Gwala and others have been quite gladly appropriated by the white academic establishment. Bosman and Lessing are equally visible, but perhaps less obvious choices from a publishing point of view. Bosman is not readily integrated into literature courses because he is seen as 'popular' (which he is) and perhaps because his writing so effectively subverts formalistic 'meaning', while Lessing has mutated to such an extent that it is problematic to include her even under the heading 'Southern African Literature'. Overall, however, there is no escaping the appearance of a 'tradition' in the making.

The next question is thus whether there are areas of research and methodologies which the series cannot reflect, by virtue of the format of text-centred, (mainly) single-author studies? Obviously, there is little reflection of research into oral literature, which Couzens and White have described as 'the literature to which all attempts at writing in Africa are alternatives' (White and Couzens, 1984: 10). Likewise, the series cannot properly accommodate micro-study approaches, in which the emphasis falls on the interaction of historical processes and broad cultural and literary activity during a circumscribed timespan rather than on mainly the texts of single figures.¹ It is questionable whether the series could include writers whose work is formalistically problematic or ideologically 'suspect', but who can be studied in broad, overlapping terms (eg. Sarah Gertrude Millin and H.I.E. Dhlomo). The

series, so far, caters little for 'black' writing (apart from 'Soweto' poetry). Does one extract figures like Eskia Mphahlele, Peter Abrahams, Dennis Brutus or Alex la Guma from the process in which they were formed and cross-section them? Can one account for the interaction between English and Afrikaans writing within the present format? (Admittedly, Gray makes pertinent suggestions in this regard in his introduction to the volume on Bosman.) How does one counter the tendency to relegate 'lesser' writers to a position of unimportance, merely by virtue of their exclusion (one thinks of authors like Jack Cope, Jillian Becker, C.J. Driver, Arthur Nortje and many other, even less obvious figures)? Obviously, one pushes the point here for the sake of argumentation: the series is young, and may eventually include such a comprehensive array of writers that these quibbles will become less insistent. Also, one should remember that the series serves as a reservoir for established research, and should not be expected to supplant the work of primary research in dissertations, theses and articles (its purpose, too, is different, reaching *back* to newer students in the field). But the dangers inherent in the good sense of publishing works on figures with the right kind of academic *appeal* remain, since that appeal is determined by certain obvious class interests – books like these are rightly designed to sell (even if there is a considerable time-lag before institutional Southern African literary studies really get going), and it's the white, middle-class liberal establishment (to use the cant, but accurate, description) which is leading the activity of buying, reading and searching for meaning in critical appraisal of national literature right now.

This leads to the larger danger of the appropriation of Southern African literature studies, by departments of English, with a strong formalistic and liberal-moralistic bias. Try including a South African novel in an undergraduate course which includes, say, Swift, Austen, Hardy, Dickens, Forster and one or two others, and one finds that very few authors 'fit' – Paton, Gordimer 15327002 (although the prejudice against her is quite unbelievable), Coetzee (a favourite for the wrong reasons perhaps), Head (maybe), Schreiner (suitable perhaps, but problematic), Pauline Smith (suitable, although 'parochial') – one soon runs into 'paucity'. The right kind of text needs to be hermetically self-contained, with an inherent aesthetic of 'complexity' and 'open-endedness' (so that the problems of criticism remain absolutely within the multivalency of the text itself, and in order to deny 'simple' political and ideological cross-referencing, which is anathema because it explodes the poetics of *textual* 'complexity'). Very little Southern African writing outside of the highly selective liberal tradition identified variously by Gray (1979), Hofmeyr (1979), and Watson (1983) stands a chance in such a selection process. Such selection is a very poor compromise from the point of view of studying national literature comprehensively. The point is that to do it any other way requires a revolution of institutional methodology for which few departments seem ready or willing. Seen from this point of view, the series could be in danger of becoming part of a process of formalistic sanitising of the field by satisfying high-brow, elitist prejudices in the selection of authors and material for consideration.

However, even with such reservations in mind, a strong case can be advanced for working within the constraints of this kind of series and placing the emphasis on studying 'literature' in the plural, broadly historical sense. Gray seems to be proposing something of the kind when he says: 'Each volume in the series is designed to collect together (information and a range of opinion about the literature of the past and the present of Southern Africa) for the use of the general reader and the student of literature, in a convenient format . . . As this field of literary studies is not at present established in any definitive or even extensive way, the series also aims to encouraging a sense of open-endedness and work-in-progress.' Also, in each volume there is a highly useful chronology relating to the author under scrutiny, contemporaneous reviews, and shorter views and interviews. This means that a student/researcher is offered valuable (and extremely interesting) primary material, quite apart from articles collected under the title 'symposium' in each volume. The usefulness of the volume on Athol Fugard, for example, seems to reside equally – if not more in the background material as in the articles, which are vulnerable to the advance of newer, better Fugard scholarship. But overall, the important question is to what extent the various editors have chosen material with an awareness of the shortcomings of narrow tradition-building, or to what extent the various editors have chosen material with an awareness of the shortcomings of narrow tradition-building, or to what extent the material included challenges prevalent academic orthodoxies.

The different volumes provide different answers, depending on availability of material and the preferences of the editors. Some volumes are more inclusive of a range of critical approaches than others, but on the whole one is left with an impression of a field of study which by its nature demands an investigation into context and the use of mixed and unorthodox approaches. To study Bosman with any real seriousness one cannot ignore his literary relationship with figures like Eugène Marais, C.J. Langenhoven, N.P. van Wyk Louw, Gustav Preller, and others – it becomes necessary to cross over into Afrikaans writing and a much more general, but local and specific, view of history; the same applies for studies on Schreiner, except that while Bosman demands consideration of certain American influences, Schreiner calls for an understanding of weighty influences like Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Edward Gibbon, John Stuart Mill and Ralph Emerson; and to study both Bosman and Schreiner in any depth, it becomes unavoidable to look at their non-fictional writings: the work of both writers, when viewed broadly, undermines 'easy' reading; Smith, again, leads one into linguistics; Athol Fugard into stagecraft, South African stage history and the idea of meaning as performance; 'Soweto Poetry' into innumerable methodological and literary-critical problems; and Doris Lessing from Rhodesian realism into science-fiction. But it is also to the credit of the series that a reasonably wide range of approaches is reflected, although there is a slight formalist bias, arising from the need to explicate *texts* primarily. The various editors, in their introductions and selections, on the whole manage to reflect the need for multiple perspectives and contextual studies in criticism of Southern African writing. Certainly, for students, researchers and teachers, the series offers a wide and

profitable cross-section of approaches. If used in this way – as a site of contention and a field for critical comparison of different approaches and methodologies – then the dangers suggested above become less obvious. We might then be able to move in two directions at the same time – towards standardisation and academic respectability for Southern African writers, but away from complacent academic rituals which often make literature studies tedious and predictable.

Notes

1. See, for example, the work of Couzens on H.I.E. Dhlomo and the era in which Dhlomo worked (Couzens, 1985).

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