Evaluating Evaluation Strategies: A South African Case Study

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Summary

The recent polemic sparked off by the debate between Stephen Watson and Andries Oliphant in *The Weekly Mail* (April-May 1989) underscores the fact that the contingency of value judgments coupled with the complexities of a diverse number of critical theories make it imperative to develop a methodology which will prevent a breakdown in critical discourse and enable the literary historian to identify, classify and evaluate the subjective value judgments at a particular point in time from a sound philosophical basis. This paper explores the methodological possibilities implied by Shusterman's analysis of the logical status of value judgments by an examination of the evaluative strategies employed by Watson and Oliphant in their respective reviews of *SA in Poetry/SA in Poësie.*

Opsomming

Die onlangse debat tussen Stephen Watson en Andries Oliphant in *The Weekly Mail* (April-Mei 1989) onderstreep weereens dat die kontingensie van waardeoordele, tesame met die kompleksiteit van 'n diverse aantal literêre teorieë die ontwikkeling van 'n metodologie noodsaak wat enersyds 'n totale ineenstorting van kritiese diskoers sal verhoed, en andersyds die literêre historikus in staat sal stel om vanuit 'n deeglik filosofies-gefundeerde basis die subjektiewe waardeoordele op 'n bepaalde tydstip te identifiseer, klassifiseer en evalueer. Hierdie artikel ondersoek die metodologiese moontlikhede soos geïmpliseer deur Shusterman se analise van die logiese status van waardeoordele deur 'n kritiese ontleding van die evalueringstrategieë wat deur Watson en Oliphant in hulle onderskeie resensies van *SA in Poetry/SA in Poësie* gebruik word.

The recent debate sparked off by exchanges between Stephen Watson and Andries Oliphant in *The Weekly Mail* (April-May 1989) can be seen from a number of perspectives. One way would be to regard it as the personal squabbles of two critics whose own poetry lies behind the critical arguments they are advancing. As such it can be construed as an interesting, even amusing, skirmish, but nothing more. There is, however, a far more representative aspect to the debate which makes it worth noting as their exchanges can be seen as an expression of the confrontation between two conceptual models which also elucidates the current battle within the discipline of literary studies, viz. that between "traditionalists" who favour a textual approach to literature, and "cultural critics" who have a more holistic[1] approach to literature. As such it once again highlights the contingency of literary values and the complex issues involved in the current debate on cultural values and canonization. Recent work by New Historicists (Veeser 1989) and research on canonization and the role played by external power groups in establishing criteria for determining literary quality (Smith (1983), Adams (1983), Van Rees (1985) and Lefevre (1986)) clearly emphasize the contingency of literary values. One very important implication of this contingency is the focus on the urgent need to establish clearly defined criteria for assessing both evaluative strategies and value judgments.

The question of how well a literary work fulfils particular criteria of excellence is a difficult one, but is one which is at least decidable, especially if critics can agree upon their criteria (Hirsch 1969: 22). It is a very different matter, however, when these criteria are not only not agreed upon, but also differ quite radically. In an age of critical diversity – and in the case of South Africa, general political, social and cultural uncertainty – it may seem that such a state of affairs may easily lead to critical anarchy, with (ultimately) no consensus to be reached between radical points of view, leading to the inevitable breakdown in critical dialogue. The emotionalism which often accompanies the South African debate makes it all the more urgent to find a way to repudiate the Arnoldian concordat as the contingency of literary values coupled with an age of critical uncertainty also makes matters very difficult for the literary historian who attempts to map the literary critical behaviour of a specific country at a specific point in time, the "Sachs controversy" (1990) being a case in point.

What then would seem to be the answer? There have been many attempts to address the contingency of literary values by studying the nature of value judgments and the logic of literary evaluation (cf. Ellis (1977); Shusterman (1984)). One starting point is to ascertain which philosophical logical strategies are available to critics at a particular time in the literary debate, and especially which strategies are favoured by the various "approaches". Shusterman (1984: 179–212) offers a number of criteria which facilitate the description and categorization of value judgments. While he makes no claims to having developed a "methodology" as such, this paper will investigate the methodological *possibilities* offered by Shusterman's analysis of the logic of evaluative strategies by using it as a tentative method to uncover the implicit criteria underlying the evaluative strategies used by Watson and Oliphant in their respective reviews of *SA in Poetry/SA in Poësie* (Van Wyk et al. 1989). Time and space prevent one from analyzing a range of polemical encounters collectively to illustrate further usefulness of the model and must be left for a later paper as this represents an important second step in refining the model. The aim of this paper is therefore not to provide a conclusive and comprehensive overview of the Watson-Oliphant debate, but merely to investigate the underlying principles and possibilities of a method which might enable one to deal with subjective and ideologically-biased value judgments on a sound philosophical basis. This seems to me to be an urgent need, especially in a period in which ideological differences clothed in dubious clichés often obscure the essence and similarities of seemingly "oppositional" literary projects.

No one would disagree that the entire question of what exactly makes a critical position or model "convincing" is an extremely complex one. One way of "demystifying" the elusiveness of any such a position is to unravel the implicit criteria used by critics, i.e. to determine the nature of their arguments by means of a logical analysis of value judgments, the role of arguments in value judgments, and the general format of value arguments. Schusterman's work falls within the ambit of a broader analytic aesthetic tradition and as it is not all that well known, the paper will first explore Shusterman's theoretical

tenets in some detail before paying closer attention to the Watson-Oliphant debate, after which some tentative conclusions will be drawn. It should be noted that, while neither Oliphant nor Watson uses all the types of strategies mentioned by Schusterman, the usefulness of the model can only be assessed properly when one has a full overview of it.

1

There are three major positions on the logical status of value judgments: descriptivism, prescriptivism and performativism (Shusterman 1984: 172). In order to compare these three positions, Shusterman introduces a general formula, "W is E", as representing a typical evaluative judgment (e.g. "*Ulysses* is a great novel", "*Esther Waters* is an artistic failure", etc.), where "W" takes works of literature as values, and "E" takes evaluative predicates.

Descriptivism regards evaluative statements as expressing some kind of truth value (Shusterman 1984: 174) and can be divided into three categories, viz. subjectivism, strong (or absolutist) descriptivism, and weak (or relativist) descriptivism.

Subjectivists interpret the general equation "W is E" ("*Ulysses* is a great novel") as "W is E for me [or for people of my group, or for qualified academic critics, etc.]", i.e. it is valuable or beautiful to me. This kind of evaluative criticism can be seen in the impressionistic criticism of D.H. Lawrence and Walter Pater and is characterized by personal and affective statements such as "The only impression the book left on me was boredom or fatigue" or "The novel so amused and fascinated me that I was sorry to have finished it".

In contrast to this subjectivist descriptivism, one finds strong, or absolutist descriptivism, whose main approach is "'W is E' is true" ("Shakespeare is a great writer"). Evaluative judgments are either true or false, and conflicting evaluations are incompatible and unacceptable. Strong descriptivists base their judgments on evaluative "facts" or assumptions which have been so firmly entrenched that they can be regarded as fact; common statements in this cadre would be "Shakespeare is a great writer", "'*The Iliad*' is an excellent epic". Yvor Winters represents this kind of approach, as can be seen from the following statement: "The absolutist believes in the existence of absolute truths and values . . . . The relativist, on the other hand, believes that there are no absolute truths, and that the judgment of every man is right for himself" (in: Shusterman 1984: 178).

Weak or relativist descriptivism occupies a position midway between subjectivism and absolutist descriptivism. Relativists base their judgment on precedent and make use of a wide variety of conflicting judgments and the wide range of principles and standards which have been applied in the literary history of the past. The relativist's main emphasis is on adequate standards, but he[2] also acknowledges that there can be various kinds of adequate standards. The position is to regard "W is E" as "W is E by (the adequate) standard S", or, more simply, "'W is E' is adequate" (Shusterman 1984: 180). Objectivity is maintained, says Shusterman (1984: 180), because it is ". . .ren-

dered conditional upon standards, and diversity of judgment is safe by the fact that though some standards are clearly wrong or irrelevant, many different standards, yielding different judgments, are acceptable, relevant, or adequate for evaluating literature". E.D. Hirsch has adopted this approach, as the following statements quite clearly reveal: ". . .if there is no privilege in literary evaluation, there is nevertheless objectivity and accuracy, and these reside entirely in the judged relationship between literature and the criteria we choose to apply to it" (1969: 33). Helen Gardner has also argued that ". . .many critics . . . give a very different account of their beliefs and practices. . . Good taste is not absolute. Two persons of excellent taste and judgment may differ strongly on the relative merits of two works" (1963: 23).

It is thus clear that the descriptivist framework exhibits a logical plurality with regard to value judgments. It is also necessary to investigate the two other positions mentioned earlier, prescriptivism and performativism.

Prescriptivism does not imply that evaluative statements express true or false statements, or that they work with relatively adequate criteria. The main emphasis falls on decisions and recommendations as to how the work in question should be read. The prescriptivist framework analyzes "W is E" as "W should be seen or take [sic – taken?] as E", or simply as "Praise (Despise) W" (Shusterman 1984: 182). A critic who adopts this position is expressing his own manner of regarding the work and recommending to his readers that they should adopt the same stance. This position is clearly delineated in A.J. Ayer's famous book, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (1971), in which he states that evaluative judgments are "pure expressions of truth or falsehood. . . It follows, as in ethics, that there is no sense in attributing objective validity to aesthetic judgments. . . The critic, by calling attention to certain features of the work under review, and expressing his own feelings about them, endeavours to make us share his attitude towards the work as a whole" (1971: 144).

Prescriptivist critics often make use of rhetoric and quasi-imperatives in their statements. F.R. Leavis's criticism is a good example of this paradigm in action, and many of his evaluative statements are similar to the following: "A poet who can bring home to us the possibility of such naturalness should today be found important" (in: Shusterman 1984: 185).

Shusterman (1984: 186) concludes that prescriptivism asserts that all critical evaluation is essentially prescriptive, whereas allegedly descriptive statements are merely prescriptivist in disguise. This is clearly not the case, and prescriptivism is therefore quite unsatisfactory to use as a framework for evaluative statements.

Performativism presents a third view of evaluative statements. Evaluations are neither descriptions nor prescriptions, but "performances, or 'performatives'" (Shusterman 1984: 186). The formula "W is E" is construed as "W is rendered E" or "W is presented as E". The performativist framework is based on Austin's speech act theory, and links evaluative statements to other kinds of performance, like that of a judge rendering a verdict, or ". . .the executant artist displaying and in some sense creating aesthetic value, and the counsel creating a client's case. This is in contrast to the scientist or logician who

merely describes, and, say, the 'pushy' salesman who merely urges" (Shusterman 1984: 186).

Performativist evaluations of literary works often abound with exclamations of praise (Coleridge's praise of Shakespeare – "How admirable, too, is the judgment of the poet!" – being a case in point). While it is possible that the descriptivism will see these as disguised acts of description, and the prescriptivist as an urging to see something as admirable, Shusterman (1984: 189) contends that such exclamations in their typical contexts function primarily as acts of praise rather than descriptions or prescriptions.

Having outlined three positions with regard to the logical analysis of value judgments, we can now consider the role of reasons or evidence in evaluative arguments.

2

There are again three major positions involved: the critic's reasons can be regarded as evidence or principles which support his evaluative conclusion, or as reasons which are not used in support of the argument, but merely to indicate the causes which led to a particular judgment; and finally, to clarify and articulate what is valued in a work without logically justifying these values. Each of these positions will be dealt with briefly (Shusterman 1984: 191–201).

When a critic provides reasons as evidence or principles for his judgment, it should be noted the reasons may be insufficient to fully demonstrate the truth of the evaluation, but that they ". . .at least logically strengthen or help to confirm the evaluation as probable or adequate" (Shusterman 1984: 191). This approach is often congenial to descriptivist arguments. Shusterman (1984: 194–5) uses the classic example of Eliot's criticism of Milton's influence to illustrate the second manoeuvre, namely that of not using arguments in a logical way, but seeing these rather as the causes of a particular evaluative judgment. The reasons which he brings to support his argument function as causes or motives, and when these motives are weakened, the evaluative censure is weakened.

The third view of the role of reasons in evaluative judgments can be termed perceptualism (Shusterman 1984: 196). Perceptualism regards evaluative reasons as having two different but complementary roles. They may first function to qualify and define the characteristics of the work on which the critic bases his judgment. These reasons clarify and articulate what he values in a work, but do not logically justify this value. A second function of these reasons is "to convey the critic's evaluation to his reader by inducing in the reader the desired perception of the work" (Shusterman 1984: 196).

Shusterman (1984: 200–201) is careful to point out that there is no one *correct* position, but that there is a movement to a kind of pluralism present in most criticism, in which all three or a combination of these positions play a role.

3

The third aspect of evaluative logic is loosely related to the role of evaluative reasons, and concerns the structure of evaluative judgments, i.e. whether these are typically inductive, deductive or neither.

Critics sometimes reason in a deductive way, and their arguments are based on a set of universal principles which govern the structure of each literary genre.

Many critics question the existence of such universal principles and feel that there are only tendencies, and not principles in literature. The notion of unity in literature is not seen as a principle, but as a tendency: works which convey a strong sense of unity tend to be valued highly. Evaluation is based upon inductive arguments, e.g. if a work continues to please a great number of readers over a long period of time, it must be good.

A third structure found in value judgments, is one which is based on analogy, which Shusterman (1984: 205–207) calls dialectic argumentation. This kind of argumentation consists of a complex interplay of leading questions and comments, suggested answers, comparisons and contrasts. By using this method, this reader is gently "lead" to the "correct" conclusion. The aim of this method is to establish certain perceptions in the unconscious of the reader so that he will eventually agree with the final evaluation. This type of argumentative structure is quite congenial to perceptualism and one of its best exponents was F.R. Leavis.

After considering Shusterman's analysis of the logic of evaluative arguments in some detail, the question that needs to be asked is whether these categories and criteria can be transformed in a valid methodology which will enable one to distinguish between the various systems of argumentative logic of various critics. This will be attempted by an analysis of two diametrically opposed reviews of a controversial new anthology of South African poetry, entitled *SA in Poetry/SA in Poësie* (Van Wyk et al. 1989).

4

As stated previously, one of the most difficult things for a literary historian to do when mapping and assessing contemporary literary-critical behaviour as "objectively" as possible, is to maintain a certain distance from his material. No historian of contemporary events can claim to have the ability to clearly delineate the state of affairs at the present moment in time from an objective point of view; yet it is – paradoxically as it may seem – expected of him not to show too much of his ideological petticoat. However, it is a basic premise of this paper that some kind of compromise should be reached. One logical starting point for such a process is for the literary historian – dealing with the state of evaluative criticism from a synchronic perspective – to ensure that his arguments have a firm methodological basis if his analysis is to stand up to the rigours of critical analysis from a future vantage point.

Such a methodology is needed all the more in South Africa at present at a time when the ideological jockeying for positions and the perennial conflict between Eurocentrism vs. Africanism are complicated even more by the

assumptions, methods and implications of contemporary literary theories. A methodology which will enable one to at least explore the possibilities to identify, classify, compare and contrast the underlying assumptions of diverse, and even (seemingly) diametrically opposed judgments of the same text, may prevent a complete breakdown in critical dialogue and may possibly even enable one to lay the groundwork for a finer delineation of South African critical discourse at a crucial point in literary history.

An analysis of two reviews using Shusterman's criteria provides an interesting example of how similar the methods of two seemingly opposed reviews really are when analyzed according to clearly defined criteria.

The Watson-Oliphant debate started with a rebuttal by Oliphant (*The Weekly Mail* April 21 to April 27, 1989, p. 14) of Watson's scathing review of Oliphant's own collection *At the End of the Day* (1989) (*The Weekly Mail* April 14 to April 20, 1989, p. 28). Watson criticized the volume of poetry for being clinchéd, stale and generally flat-footed, and for its unoriginal protest nature. Watson does state that the anthology does contain some poems which are more than "paint-by-numbers protest poetry" (*The Weekly Mail* April 14 to April 20, 1989, p. 28) but Oliphant accused Watson of being biased and hostile towards "socially committed poetry" and to reducing the volume to "a single misread political theme in order to mount his rickety hobby horse with the zeal of a reactionary" (*The Weekly Mail* April 21 to April 27, 1989, p. 14). In the ensuing weeks[3] it became clear that Watson is generally regarded by a certain group of writers and critics as a white liberal clinging to humanist values who also suffers from a dated text-centred vision of criticism. Oliphant, on the other hand, seems to be regarded by some of the respondents as having a certain legitimacy among the new generation of South African writers who are part of the so-called "struggle".

Watson's review of the multilingual anthology, entitled "As baneful as any other type of ignorance" (*The Weekly Mail* May 5 to May 11, 1989, p. 28) firmly frames his views by referring to the compilers' "aesthetic illiteracy". He also criticizes the definition of poetry given by the compilers, thereby implying that the real test of what makes good poetry good, is not whether it reveals class affiliations, or identifies the ideological pedigree of the poet, but simply whether it has been "well-written" or not, and whether or not it is a "good" or a "bad" poem. He also clearly states that one cannot shy away from "value judgments" as the compilers have done. Good poetry, says Watson, is "experienced subjectively" ("W should be interpreted in such a way as to move the reader's emotions"); and what is more, if it is good poetry, it will necessarily give more insight into the "ideological formations as these stand in history".

Watson places his review in the aesthetic cadre thereby implying a textual orientation. His criticism of the definition of poetry and his views about poetry are a combination of prescriptive and performative approaches. Good poetry must be "well written"; yet no criteria are provided with which to judge whether or not a poem has been well-written or not.

Watson does not provide any reasons as evidence or principles for his argument. His implied reasoning seems to be based more on a kind of

perceptualism, as the implied reasons for his argument have to "...convey... [his] evaluation to his reader by inducing in the reader the desired perception of the work" (Shusterman 1984: 196).

His criticism of the "radical" point of departure presented in the anthology, and the neglect of the work of poets who have traditionally been regarded as good poets, implies that Watson argues deductively; he believes in a canon with certain key works which all comply with the (unstated) criteria of "good" poetry, and slates the inclusion of certain newly "discovered" poets. His quotation of a few stanzas of what he regards as a bad poem switches his method from a prescriptive to a descriptive one, again only implying that a number of principles exist which distinguish good poetry from bad poetry, and that the reader will be able to deduct from his quotation that this is a badly written poem. This view is echoed in a letter contributed to the debate by Chapman who aligns Cullinan and Watson as critics who "...naively [justify] poetry according to a fixed, though undefined, standard of excellence" (*The Weekly Mail* May 12 to May 18, 1989, p. 12).

The title[4] of Oliphant's review immediately signals an ideological contextualization for his views: "The New Illiteracy vs. the Old Colonialism" (*The Weekly Mail* May 5 to May 11, 1989, p. 28). His arguments are, however, far more convincing than those of Watson because of their balanced structure. He firstly describes the linguistic (and implicit racial and ideological) demarcations prevalent in S.A. and in the anthologies of the past, before setting out to analyze the pros and cons of a multilingual approach.

Accepting the bona fides of an approach which focuses the attention not on the aesthetic quality of the poems included but on the light cast on "the relationship between the San lyrics and these people's mode of life", and on the documentary evidence the poems provide of the way in which generations of South Africans have experienced the impact of the ideological demarcations of their day, Oliphant proceeds to describe in chronological order the various responses of the poets to the various ideologies of the periods in which they wrote. His approach seems purely descriptivist. However, a glossary of some key words clearly implies a strong undertone of ideological prescriptivism: "rationalizations of colonialism"; "... the mystic and spiritual responses of Breyten Breytenbach's... social and political articulations during incarceration"; "Watson's defeatist denigration of workers"; "...sharp reminders of the class betrayal inflicted by racism on workers", etc. These concepts strongly remind one of Fredric Jameson's view that interpretation and, by implication, evaluation, takes place "within a Homeric battlefield, on which a host of interpretative [and evaluative] options are either openly or implicitly in conflict" (1986: 13). It is not difficult to see on whose side of the conflict Oliphant is.

By using a descriptive approach based on an acceptance of the bona fides of the compilers, and by providing reasons as evidence for his views, Oliphant seems to comply with Shusterman' view that even though the reasons may be insufficient to fully demonstrate the truth of the evaluation, they at least "...logically strengthen or help to confirm the evaluation as probable or possible" (1984: 191).

Up to three quarters through his review, Oliphant uses a descriptive approach which seems to base his views on logical reasons and uses a combination of inductive and dialectic argumentation, implying that there are no universal principles but merely trends, and very persuasively combining a complex interplay of leading comments, suggestions, comparisons and contrast which seem to "lead" the reader to the conclusion that this is a very good anthology if one accepts the role assigned to poetry by the compilers and suggested by his use of certain words and phrases.

The last four paragraphs see a drastic roundabout turn, one which chastises the compilers for an "inadequate definition" and "flawed conception of poetry" which "reduces the three distinct but interrelated notions of subjectivity, ideology and poetry to a single unproblematic operation". The result of this abandoning of the distinctly poetic category of aesthetics leads to "a reduction of poetry to ideology" which fails to facilitate a radical transformation of the way in which readers understand the "textual processes and symbolic mediations" specific to the genre of poetry, and firmly places Oliphant as a prescriptive critic who works according to a set of principles – even though these are not pronounced – which regard the primary function of poetry not to give an "insight into ideological formations as these stand in history", but to "facilitate a transformation of our understanding of textual processes and symbolic mediations" of the genre.

Oliphant concludes his review by an acceptance of the approach outlined in the volume's introduction, which leads him to read the volume in the materialist way in demands, viz. by seeing it as a "strategic presentation of South African poetry in terms of a historical mastercode and its principal antagonists".

When considering the way in which reasons are used to present his case, it is clear that Oliphant uses a pluralistic approach, providing both reasons as evidence for his judgments as well as using a kind of perceptualism, qualifying and defining the premise on which he bases his argument. Oliphant's argument is based on strategies which are logically more balanced and therefore more persuasive, than those of Watson.

5

As stated previously, while it is obvious that the methodological assumptions and criteria provided by Shusterman's analysis which this paper has explored provisionally need to be explored much more extensively by an analysis of a substantial number or reviews before a more substantial claim to validity of the methodology can be made, these two examples obviously provide proof that Shusterman's logical analysis of evaluation does have methodological merit in that it offers possibilities for the literary historian to classify, categorize and evaluate the logical status of value judgments at a particular point in time, thereby gaining a hold (albeit a somewhat fleeting one) on the contingent nature of conflicting value judgments. If we take Oliphant's critical position to be the representation of an approach which attempts to incorporate an awareness of the historical processes of the time into its

strategies, and Watson's arguments to represent the views of a more textually-bound approach, it follows from the analyses that Oliphant's position rejects descriptive criticism and favours prescriptive criticism, while Watson's point of departure is a rejection of the prescriptive and an acceptance of the descriptive approach. Some of the questions which need to be asked in the process of testing and refining the model are: Can this be taken as an axiom for the two opposing approaches, or is it merely the outcome of this particular case-study? Can a taxonomy of typical evaluation strategies for various "approaches" or theories be compiled? Can this be used by the literary historian to map the nature of the critical debate at a given point in time?

It is also clear that seemingly opposite points of view are arrived at by means of the same method. When considering the important role played by reviewers in the production of canons and "great" works of art, and when one considers Van Rees's theory (1985) of consensus formation, Shusterman's methodology will not only enable one to analyze the criteria of a particular reviewer, but will also be a useful instrument in determining more exactly the nature and functioning of power structures in critical discourse. As such it provides a sound philosophical basis for the development of a more refined instrument. In a period in which negotiation seems to be the keyword in the political arena, it may also become the keyword with regard to forging a new South African critical vocabulary, and Shusterman's methodology may prove instrumental in reaching such a stage.

Certain objections may be raised with reference to the model and approach of this paper. Marxist critics may feel that it does not provide insight into the historical processes of the time. One counter-argument is that it does precisely what an eminent Marxist critic asks of literary studies, viz. that "Wetenskap vorder ook nie as daaraan voorgeskryf of as dit aan dogma onderwerp word nie. Wetenskap behoort juis die bevryding van dogma en vooroordeel te wees" (Liebenberg 1990: 253), as it uncovers the dogma underlying critical approaches in a way which is logical and philosophically sound. A second counter-argument is that the Marxist approach to literary discourse is not necessarily the only or most important one available.

Another point of criticism which could be raised can be linked to the "scientific"[5] nature of the model, viz. that it represents a "scientistic" approach which implies a kind of objectivism which, in turn, could easily become the target of another attack. While I fully acknowledge that all critics write within some kind of ideological context, I also feel that an over-indulgence in self-conscious ideological positioning must ultimately lead to some form of critical paralysis and should therefore be avoided at all costs. Scientific models can only be developed and shown to be more or less useful precisely by setting up a number of tenets which should then be challenged and tested, and then improved or refuted. A number of steps still needed in the process of testing the basic tenets of Shusterman's approach have indeed been mentioned during the course of the argument. Finally, it also seems that the "scientific" nature of the model might force us to recognize the hot air

produced by much recent critical "debate" in South Africa precisely for what it really is.[6]

Notes

1. I am using the concept *holism* in the sense that Betty Jean Craig uses it in her paper "Literature in a Global Society" (*PMLA* 106(3), May 1991: 395–401), viz. "Holism is a model of reality, a methodology, and an ideology... It is an approach to knowledge that privileges study of a system over analysis of the system's discrete parts. And culturally, it is an ideology incompatible with absolutism of any sort: whereas absolutists are intolerant of differences, holists value diversity; and whereas absolutists resist change, holists understand reality as a continuous flux...In the academy, cultural holists, among whom may be found feminists and leftist political activists, are abandoning the traditional ranking of literature over nonliterature and of Western culture over other cultures" (396–397).
2. Use she (where applicable) if so preferred.
3. The debate can be found in the following reviews and letters:
   Watson, S. 1989. On the Unforgiving Page, the Clichés Fall with a Heavy Thud. *The Weekly Mail* April 14-April 20, p. 28.
   Oliphant, A. 1989. Letter. *The Weekly Mail* April 21-April 27, p. 14.
   Oliphant, A. 1989. The New Illiteracy vs. the Old Colonialism. *The Weekly Mail* May 5-May 11, p. 28.
   Watson, S. 1989. As Baneful As Any Other Type of Influence. *The Weekly Mail* May 5-May 11, p. 28.
   Chapman, M. 1989. Letter. *The Weekly Mail* May 12-May 18, p. 12.
4. I am aware of the editorial practice that titles of reviews and articles are formulated by the editor responsible, and that these can not automatically be ascribed to the author's preference. However, I found no letter of complaint or correction by Oliphant in this regard and therefore assume that the title signifies his acceptance of ideological contextualization which it gives to his views.
5. I am using the word *scientific* for lack of a better word in English. The use of the word should be seen in the light of the German notion of *Literaturwissenschaft.*
6. This paper was prepared for a graduate seminar under supervision of Prof. H.M. Viljoen of the Department of Linguistics and Literary Theory at the PU for CHE. I have benefitted a great deal from discussions with him about this topic and acknowledge with thanks his comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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