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“Local is Lekker”: Or Why the New South African Parochialism Will Not Go

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Summary

Based upon brief comparisons with other literatures, the article examines the current debates on South African literature, isolating four symptoms which seem to indicate national self-assertion via the high road of literature. These are the pride taken in locally produced artefacts; an increasing “cross-over” and mingling of different languages which make any quests for purity of language a risky business, challenging control over dominant discursive formations; the attempt to find an “authentic” South African voice in literature, and, finally, a questioning of hitherto accepted critical traditions and boundaries. But although the intense focus upon the local seems both necessary and fruitful at this particular juncture in South African political history, the birthpangs of an emerging literature ought not to blind its practitioners into becoming parochial by cutting themselves off from the international debate.

Opsomming

Uitgaande van 'n kort vergelyking met ander literatuur as basis, word die huidige debatte in Suid-Afrikaanse letterkunde in hierdie artikel ondersoek aan die hand van vier losstaande simptome, wat oënskynlik dui op nasionale selfhandhawing via die verhewe weg van die literatuur. Hierdie simptome behels 'n trots op plaaslik vervaardigde kunswerke; 'n toenemende “ineenvloeiing” en vermenging van verskillende tale, wat enige soeke na taalsuiwerheid 'n riskante onderneming maak, omdat die beheer oor dominante diskursiewe formasies uitgedaag word; die poging om 'n “outentieke” Suid-Afrikaanse stem in die letterkunde te vind; en, uiteindelik, 'n bevreemding van tot hertoe aanvaarde kritiese tradisies en grense. Maar alhoewel die intense fokus op die plaaslike skynbaar tegelyk nodig en vrugbaar is op hierdie bepaalde tydstip in die Suid-Afrikaanse politieke geskiedenis, behoort die geboortepyne van 'n opkomende literatuur nie die beoefenaars daarvan te verblind om parogiaal te raak deur hulle afsnyding van die internasionale debat nie.

“Poetry is cosmopolitan, and the more interesting the more it shows its nationality”, Goethe wrote in a letter to a friend in 1827 (Gearey 1986: 228). Against the backdrop of South African cultural events and debates in the early nineties, linking the national with the cosmopolitan seems almost a contradiction in terms. For celebrating local talent and furthering indigenous criticism bears the mark of liberation from twofold oppression, namely apartheid and colonialism. Writers, artists, and “cultural workers” always tend to focus upon the local in preference to the cosmopolitan when they have gained what appears to be sufficient ground to affirm their voices against a dominant discourse. All national literatures, including Afrikaans literature,¹ were born out of the desire for emancipation from ruling conventions and institutionalized norms. Thus, the emergence of vernacular literature in the European Renaissance was as much an affirmation of particular local experience against the all embracing hegemony of latinized learning, for instance in the example of Dante, as was the formation of German literature in the eighteenth century. It was then that young Goethe could exclaim how

marvellous it is to be alive and part of the birth of a people's poetic voice, a sentiment befitting the local state of affairs in this time of transition. Similar emotions accompanied the rise of Russian literature at the end of the eighteenth, Czech and Polish literatures in the nineteenth and Brazilian, Argentinian, and last but not least African literatures in the twentieth century, to name but a few other examples.² In each case, protest and resistance to what appeared to be a suffocating embrace by foreign norms, values, artistic conventions and even foreign languages coloured the emergence of a national voice in literature prior to an achievement of political self-determination. German literature, as a case in point, protested firstly against the supremacy of French taste and later, in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, against French political and economic dominance. Similarly, the birth of Russian literature in the name of Pushkin marks the moment of self-assertion of things Russian in the face of dominant foreign influences. Czech and Polish literatures herald the dawn of liberation struggles against German, Austrian, and Russian sociopolitical and economic supremacy. And, finally, South American and African literatures, while still written in the languages of the colonizers, announce the break with their metropolitan masters in order to assert national selfhood and singularity.³ Each of these births was marked by crisis, forgetting and revolution. The crisis was usually brought on by the rivalry between the old and the new such as suffocating rules at the hands of a firmly entrenched political and aesthetic order opposing the passionate ideas of the voiceless and the young. Characteristically, crises always transgress limits and break down the divide between the political and the so-called aesthetic, laying bare the very fabric upon which such divisions were erected in the first place. (It has to be remembered that aesthetic norms are by no means universal, our education system merely succeeded in naturalizing them as such!) In addition, crises are accompanied by a forgetting of similar occurrences elsewhere, thus pronouncing new sets of values which after the achievement of birth turn out to be not so new after all. Therefore, each new arrival on the stage of world literature is but a revolution, a turning around reminiscent of the retuning of an instrument in an orchestra whose local voice, perhaps jarring at first, will sooner or later join the chorus of existing voices.

When local writers, critics, artists and scholars animatedly and sometimes even furiously debate the pros and cons of partisan versus nonpartisan works, of social commitment versus social silence, form versus content, "realism" versus postmodernism, elitist sophistication versus simplicity and literature versus culture, etc., then we may regard this as a crisis associated with oncoming birth. We are not so much taking part in a "discursive event" as Marianne de Jong (1989: 144) believes but, possibly, in the emergence of a national literature in South Africa. Only this time, the quest for national liberation and socioeconomic independence seems to aim at the formation of a postapartheid society rather than the nationalism of one particular group, as was the case with Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaans literature. The following four symptoms which I wish to outline briefly, point to a resistance to that which is perceived and experienced as oppression in the sociopolitical

and economic realm on the one hand, while these very same symptoms on the other, indicate national self-assertion via the high road of literature, culture and the arts. However, the emergence of what, ideally, might turn out to be a multifaceted yet shared South African literature is marred also by an unnecessary degree of critical blindness producing parochialism in its wake. It is this aspect to which the second half of my argument will turn.

The first of the four symptoms indicating the occupation of new ground in South African literary and cultural affairs manifests itself in the general consensus that "local is lekker". The valorization of cultural imports has shifted towards pride in local achievements. As this is not the place to probe the manifold conditions underlying such change in attitude,⁴ a few examples have to suffice: *Onse Johnny Clegg* has "made it" overseas more so than Mimi Coertse could ever dream of; *Seraphina* was a runaway success in the States and Europe; Gerard Sekoto's work became the subject of a major exhibition in the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1989, succeeding a display, entitled "The Neglected Tradition: Towards a New History of South African Art"; the stalwarts of South African writing, Brink, Fugard, Gordimer, Mphahlele and the late Paton not only enjoyed increasing recognition, culminating in the award of the Nobel Prize to Nadine Gordimer, but were joined also by new names such as those of Matsamela Manaka, Mzwakhe Mbuli, Njabulo Ndebele, J.M. Coetzee and others. There has been a phenomenal increase in local book publications; prizes and other financial awards have been established to benefit the arts; and finally, the discovery of local history, at first the prerogative of Afrikaner historians, has left a mark on English-speaking circles, now, as well as among Black South Africans: For instance, in the area of literature we have now, after the literary histories by Kannemeyer and Lindenberg, the works by Stephen Gray and the biographies by Couzens, Clayton among others, while Ndebele (1989: 18-31) traced the history of Black writing. The notion that "local is lekker" is creeping slowly but steadily even into the institutions of learning and research. Thus, in addition to the forty-year-old privileged status enjoyed by Afrikaner literature and culture, South African and Black literature is not only being taught but also funded. In short, as Njabulo Ndebele puts it, albeit with reference to Black literature only: "We are struck by the sheer force of enthusiasm, of the desire to learn, to inform, to influence, to record, if only to affirm existence in history" (Ndebele 1989: 19).

Secondly, there appears to be general agreement among progressive writers, critics, academics, artists, big business and the government of the day even, that an *indaba* with representatives from all interest groups – or in South African jargon – all "population groups" is desirable. Interestingly enough, the very combination of words such as "local", "lekker" and "indaba", originating as they do in three diverse dictionaries, could be read as an attempt at emancipating, at least, our speech habits from the fetters of those guardians of discourse who believe that purity of language in speech is in itself a prerequisite for a ruling elite. (Such puritans, in the guise of arbiters of *proper* expression, would hate to see their guardianship of *propriety* demasked for what it is: namely an interest in retaining their *property*. This

property being none other than the control over dominant discursive formations.)⁵

It is both encouraging and challenging to note an increasing "cross-over" of either one artistic language by another, as in music, or one verbal formation by another, as in many dramatic productions. As Mbulelo Mzamane observed in 1984 (p. 41): "Language is culture specific and, therefore, the use of language entails communication of the culture that goes with it." He pointed to "A remarkable exercise in syncretism, in merging cultures, obliterating cultural boundaries, for the original novel is not only set outside Nigeria but written in French" (Mzamane 1984: 41); hence drawing attention to the fact that literary genres such as the novel, when used by Black Africa, are already constituting, as he puts it, "a conglomeration of Africa and the West". It is, furthermore, illuminating that the "true South African writer" – who ever that might be (!) – "might", in the words of Gray, "be the 'polyglot versatile' type" (Gray 1989: 20). Gray, recognizing the importance of translations in a multilingual society, is quick to follow up his vision "of the poet as an intermediary between cultures and languages" (Greig 1989: 56) by producing his *Penguin Book of Southern African Verse*. This anthology expands the canon of hitherto published collections of poems from this country but seems to cater too much to the taste of liberal-conservative readers. While Gray enlarged the canon, the political Left had already come up with a much debated reversal of it in *SA in Poësie/SA in Poetry* by J. van Wyk, P. Conradie & N. Constandaras in 1988.

Borrowing from other languages and other cultures, even apartheid isolationists will agree today, is not a bad thing. Yet, it appears, especially among English-speaking South Africans, to be not as widely recognized as it should be. Already the staunch Frenchman, Chasles, observed, when he wanted to establish a *littérature étrangère comparée* in 1835 that "nothing can live in isolation, because real isolation is death [. . .]. Everybody borrows from everybody else; and the great job of give and take is universal and constant" (1971: 31). Amidst this useful merging, the search for those stories which might provide South Africans across the language and colour bars with cohesion by way of shared "experience" continues unabated.⁶ However, in the meantime, there seems to be a genuine attempt at finding local voices.

This attempt constitutes the third symptom. There has, of course, been a so-called South African voice in the writings of Gordimer, Brink and in the, by now "classical", description of township life by Mphahlele in *Down Second Avenue*, not to mention Plaatzie, Mofolo, Dikobe and many others. Afrikaans literature found its voice in the sixties and Guy Butler's *Oxford Book of South African Verse*, appearing after World War Two, alerted pupils and university students to the existence of a South African poetry written in English, rather than English poetry written in South Africa. Nevertheless, the importance of one's own voice has recently been reiterated by, among others, Robert Berold (1989: 10) in a review of Kelwyn Sole's *The Blood of Our Silence* when he says approvingly: "Sole has clearly found a language of his own." In similar vein, albeit from a "non-white" perspective, Farouk Asvat (1987: 3) observed:

The early seventies saw a dramatic turn in writers' perspective as to what literature should be about; it definitively discarded the Western "classical" outlook of writing; and brought about an indigenous (though sometimes flawed) manner of writing and performance poetry

In addition to the impact of performance poetry, as outlined by Peter Horn (1990), Jeremy Cronin (1987) and others, there is the celebration of workers' poetry and performance. Mi S'Dumo Hlatshwayo's poems, collected in *Black Mamba Rising*, "celebrating the Dunlop workers' struggle and victory caused a sensation beyond union circles", as Sitas (1986: 50) claimed. Furthermore, Ari Sitas continued (1986: 51): "Hlatshwayo sets us square in the shadow of revolution with an intensity unparalleled to workers' theatre."

The examples in which the local or indigenous are praised are numerous and matched only by an increasing reassessment of authorial function. Thus, a new rôle is being ascribed to the South African writer. For instance, Ndebele who embraces Walter Benjamin's storyteller writes, quoting Benjamin:

experience which is passed from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. And among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers.

(Ndebele 1984: 25)

And Asvat seems to agree with this notion of author as storyteller when he says:

. . . there are many of us in the community that believe and know that the function of the poet is to be the conscience of the people, and also to give people a fresh insight into their own lives and struggles and victories and losses.

(Asvat 1987: 3)

Questioning not only the function of poet and poetry, author and the boundaries of literature, but also areas ranging from teaching literature (or anything else for that matter) to cultural, social, political and economic institutions is indicative of the fourth symptom: It seems that we are witnessing an acute legitimation crisis in which ruling opinions are taken to task as regards their right to dominate institutionalized discourse. Again, I shall focus, for brevity's sake, only on a few areas most closely associated with literature, such as the vigorous debate surrounding *Black Mamba Rising*, *SA in Poësie*, J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and, most recently, Albie Sachs's paper "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom".

While the exchange between Sitas (1988: 87-90) and Spiegel (1988: 52-56) highlights the positing of "tribal order and traditional life" as either politically progressive or reactionary,⁷ the debate turned quickly into one in which partisanship with "the struggle" and relevance were regarded as superior and "aesthetic norms" appeared irrelevant. Thus, Jeremy Cronin wrote in *The Weekly Mail* (1987):

We were once taught to think of poetry as obscure and elite. In the last decade, however, poetry has been marching in the front ranks of the mass struggles that have rolled through our land.

(That Cronin conflates bad teaching with the function of poetry, for never and nowhere has poetry properties such as described here as "obscure and elite", is another matter!). What is important, though, is the fact that the function of writing is being questioned. In similar vein, *SA in Poësie* questions the legitimacy of the traditional canon of Afrikaans and English poetry, fuelling a debate in the pages of "Little Magazines" (cf. *Upstream* 7 (4), 1989: 71–73). On the other hand, the discussion surrounding *Foe* plays itself out in learned journals. Characteristically, the text is an avant-garde one and not a novel by Brink and Gordimer, for it is the supposedly "obscure" text and not the "realist" one which is questioned. Thus, one of the recent editions of *JLS* was devoted to a debate on *Foe* where Marianne de Jong (1989: 106–118) with her heart in the right *plek*, attempts to provide an overview of the current lively discussions on literature. Her article coincided with the dissemination of Albie Sachs's paper, which, although ruffling some establishment feathers, appeased those institutions which support cultural events and programmes financially,⁸ while enraging committed cultural workers. To be sure, most of these debates have as yet to reach the hallowed halls of learning. As Martin Trump observed, albeit in a different connection when reviewing the work by Keyan & Ruth Tomaselli & Johan Muller in *EAR* 6 (1989: 163): "Hands up the undergraduates who have been taught any of this material in their English courses".

Nevertheless, the intense focus upon the local, including its concomitant challenge to teaching, research and administration is growing. Furthermore, it seems necessary at the sociopolitical juncture in South Africa at this particular time when all the players retune their instruments, so to speak. However, the imminent birth should not blind us with regard to the pitfalls of parochialism which tends to be the flip side of any privilege accorded the local in place of the foreign. The dictum "local is lekker" and the celebration of local talent in its name, easily masks the manifold interdependencies and processes of mediation surrounding all artistic production and reflection and reaching across local, regional and national frontiers. Noble and heartfelt sentiments might be in order at times surrounding the crisis of birth but they should not preclude such questions as: Does the South African emergence of literature as an early symptom of national liberation differ from other such occurrences in Africa and elsewhere? The Kenyan, Nigerian, Senegalese and South American situations would be worth investigating in order to find out about the position of literature after the politically successful event. Once political self-determination has been achieved and new political powers have been installed, as in Russia after the Revolution of 1917, partisanship quickly turned to blind affirmation of the ruling party and the debates were silenced. It is a cosmopolitan vision, recognizing filiations and merging the most insightful knowledges gleaned from here as well as from Europe, the Americas and Asia which prevent us from a repetition compulsion of naïvety and mediocracy. Both are ingredients of parochialism which is evident when, for instance, Patrick Fitzgerald believes that "decisive cultural action by the progressive forces may well yield spectacular results" (1989: 167). For, neither does "cultural action" nor "spectacular results" signify anything in particular. Avoiding mediocracy means being specific and concrete with regard to par-

ticular situations at particular times under particular conditions. It means asking of our literature, for example, as Annamaria Carusi (1989: 143) puts it so succinctly in her contribution to the *JLS* debate on *Foe*: "Where do you come from? who do you wish to affect? and finally, who is speaking whom?". Avoiding parochialism means being a competent reader and noticing the implications of the following lines by I.W.W. Citashe, quoted by Ndebele as an early example of "coming to terms with the ultimate reality of conquest" (1989: 20):

Your cattle are gone,
My countrymen!
Go rescue them! Go rescue them!
Leave the beachloader alone
And turn to the pen,
Take paper and ink,
For that is your shield.

....

Ndebele notes:

Citashe's insight recognized at least one seemingly unavoidable implication: the written word, perfected in the isolation of the study, which itself perhaps represents a form of strategic marginalization, may be the only viable bearer of witness, the one last act that would provide proof of existence.

(Ndebele 1989: 21)

By sensitively explicating the information provided by these lines, siding with their sentiment rather than with their verbal implications, Ndebele overlooks the fact that "the pen, paper and ink" are themselves objects associated with the conquerors. The proof of existence mediated by the pen is, therefore, not a "last act" but a new form of existence; an existence, which in the reading offered by Ndebele is heavily implicated by European Romanticism. There is, of course, nothing wrong with this reading; it is only that so much of South African literary criticism, obsessed as it is with sentiments and values,⁹ forgets that even apparently "simple" and "honest" texts are mediated. The critic is always already the recipient of other readings to which his or her own are supplements. "Immediate expressivity" (De Jong 1989: 155) does not exist either on the part of the poet nor on that of the reader in the shape of unmediated response because all language is always already mediated.

Carusi's questions as well as the above small example of "reading a critic reading a text" together with insights into the workings of language are informed by theory. Or, in other words, they are informed by a vision gleaned from the work of critics, linguists, philosophers or in short from theoreticians. We ought to remember that the anglicized version of the Greek word *théa*, that which is viewed, via its Latin use, turns out as *theory*. Yet, it is precisely this informed vision, theory, which is the most broadly contested subject among South African literary critics to-day. (But even in this arena, the local scene is not much different from the rest of the English speaking world if Eagleton (1983) or De Man (1986) among others are to be believed.) While literary theory has been viewed with suspicion for some time, now, there is an

additional resentment gaining ground which holds that "the people" have to learn so much anyway, why bother with such elitist considerations which stop the reader from getting to the words "themselves". But even the belief that words are there "for themselves", begging a direct involvement in the reading process, is one ultimately informed by a theory, albeit not an explicit one.¹⁰ In as much as literary theory sets up a model of – and a method for – viewing procedures in relation to the reading and understanding of texts, ignoring its input can only lead to parochial appreciation or, conversely, nonappreciation of literature in the place of teachable skills. What is needed now are precisely those skills which aid the analysis of textual representations as part of discursive formations because they are the ones shaping particular power/knowledge configurations at any given time. For it is in and through language that opinions are formed, values set up and judgements passed down. It is a cardinal mistake to assume, as so many ardent participants in the current debate do, that language is a natural, transparent medium through which readers and speakers could grasp a solid and unified "truth" or "reality". Blindness to this mistake, coupled to the particular urgency, felt locally, of the quest for sociopolitical and economic self-assertion leads to much of the parochialism evident in the work of a number of literary and cultural critics. The tunnel-vision thus produced can be seen to manifest itself in the following symptoms:

To begin with, the substitution of literary by cultural studies, although usually containing an implicit critique of the traditional canon of literature and dominant aesthetic norms as handed down by the institutions, turns out to be a parochial gesture in most cases. It is by no means confined to local "progressive" academics and cultural workers¹¹ but seen elsewhere as a way of revolutionizing traditional literary criticism by releasing it from its narrow idealist confines of bourgeois high art. Following Raymond Williams's (1983, 2nd ed.: 13) lead, culture is seen here "as the *signifying system* through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored" (Williams's emphasis). Williams's intention, aiming as it does at an analysis of forms of power is commendable; yet, what he and cultural studies forget is the fact that all so-called cultural manifestations from dancing to eating, to art and literature, even in the conventional Western sense, are grounded in a language and accessible only in and through natural languages. Power, as the Romans knew already, is ultimately subject to language: *Caesar non est supra grammaticos*, even Caesar, that is supreme power, is not above grammar. This means that language is the very ground upon which the various power- and meaning-relations in social processes are constituted and structured, as the Marxist theoretician V.N. Vološinov (1986: 50–65) pointed out earlier this century.

Secondly, communality is not a prerequisite for texts as De Jong (1989: 115) together with many others, who feel strongly about a new social binding outside the apartheid structures, suggest. – The very existence of a postmodern text, for instance, is proof of this! – An aesthetic of popular communalism and informative wisdom with its celebration of Black literature is deeply flawed when it wants to naturalize the storytelling situation. Although it is

evident at so many occasions that poetry in performance as a continuation of the oral tradition exists to great effect, Benjamin (1977: 83–109) merely relates these forms of expression to a particular mode of production, namely precapitalist. The storyteller is alive only among peasants and artisans; and although his existence is desirable, he cannot be subsumed under a generalized authorial function. It has to be remembered that Benjamin outlines additional forms of narration in his essay, all of which he sees tied-up with changed modes and relations of production. The novel, thus, depends upon capitalist modes of exchange.¹² The crisis of the novel, incidentally being one of the conditions for postmodernist texts, would not have been possible without the emergence of late capitalist information systems.¹³ That all three types of narration exist in South Africa to-day, encapsulated in the names of, among others, Bosman, Head, Mphahlele and Ndebele, as representatives of the first type, Brink and Gordimer of the second, and Coetzee of the third, is proof of the heterogeneous make-up of our society. One type of narration, be it storytelling or the novel, can not be made into a prescription for South African writing. Instead, critics should investigate the conditions of possibility for all three types within the framework of local determinants.

Thirdly, the notion "that literature must define itself in terms of its national traits" by using local themes is a fallacy as Borges ([1957], 1964, 2nd ed.: 215) observed in connection with "The Argentine Writer and Tradition" in the 1950's. Pride in the local and personal voices is not only subject to this fallacy but also deeply tinged by the eighteenth-century European cult of originality and creative genius, epitomized in Goethe. As Borges, borrowing Gibbon's observation, notes: "in the Arabian book *par excellence*, in the Koran, there are no camels".¹⁴ Translated into the local situation, this means that our creative texts do not have to resound either with *négritude* concepts of the African personality nor with apartheid themes. As the late Richard Rive (1981: 23) said:

I cannot recognize palmfronds and nights filled with the throb of the primitive. I am busses, trains and taxis. I am prejudice, bigotry and discrimination. I am urban South Africa.

Drums, similar to Borges's "camels" are what the tourists would like to find here; our critics ought to pay more attention to the constant merging of "themes", structures of narration and linguistic and historic filiations. Only in relation to the international or the general does the national, local or particular obtain its contours.

Fourthly, the current debates, with their seemingly irreconcilable differences of mutually exclusive positions, forget that not only have similar debates taken place elsewhere, but also that the local concerns are, in many ways, a reflection of global ones. At this juncture we would do well to remember the ardent debates in Russia immediately prior to the Revolution and afterwards, before Stalin finally silenced all critical voices. There are also, the by now famous debates on realism between Brecht and Lukács, and the illuminating insight concerning a *littérature engagée* by Sartre, to name but a few. As regards the legitimation crisis, at the root of local debates, critics

ought not to forget that this crisis is presently shaking the whole world. For communication technology has long since eroded cherished assumptions in connection with the superiority of the arts, the wisdom of the poet, the author as legislator of the world, the sensitizing effects of the arts, their political clout and their very rôle as guides and guardians of human affairs. In the place of "the social as saviour" and "faith in communal values" (De Jong 1989: 114, 115) an investigation into that which constitutes communalism and value systems needs to be developed. We do not need belief systems (they are proliferating anyway), but more rigorous thought. We need to know how discursive formations evolve values in order to buttress particular constellations of power so that we might begin to not only understand but also to master the power/knowledge configuration shaping our lives and our world at the end of the twentieth century.

Notes

1. A comparison between the "rise" and formation of Afrikaans literature and the aspirations voiced by Black critics and so-called cultural workers to-day would not only be useful, but illuminating with regard to the conflation of the artistic with the political.
2. It is interesting to note that in each case a "literary revolution", intensely nationalistic, preceded changes in the political structures. In each case, too, pamphlets, manifestos, and what we would call "protest poetry" to-day, accompanied the emergence of a national literature. Besides, it was literature which legitimized political aspirations. The case of French and English is slightly different, for Britain and France had developed centralized political structures much earlier. See Eagleton (1983: 17-53) on the "Rise of English" which traces national legitimization with the help of literature in the England of the nineteenth century.
3. While other countries (cf. the "rise of Afrikaans literature") could develop their vernaculars in association with their literary pursuits, South American Spanish and Portuguese, together with English in South Africa remain the vehicle carrying the voices of protest and resistance against the colonial masters.
4. There is no doubt that apartheid policies on the one hand, enforcing isolation in the economic sphere, succeeded by the cultural boycott, made readers and the public alike more aware of the local "product". Again, it is interesting to note, that due to the linguistic barrier, Afrikaans literature and culture differed from English in this respect.
5. See in this regard the so-called language policies entertained by the SABC, by publishers and especially by the education boards and publishers of school books, particularly with regard to the Black languages.
6. It is not only Clem Sunter who is presently looking for a national "myth" or "story" shared by all "population groups". The cohesive affects of such stories can be seen in the use of the *Nibelungenlied* during nationalistic periods in Germany. Further examples are the position of the *Song of Roland* in French culture and, closer to home, the Voortrekker myth/story and its binding effect for Afrikaner nationalism. Shakespeare plays this rôle in British life, and emerging literatures are usually busy looking around for suitable subject matter, which should preferably date back to pre-writing times.

7. Cf. Mills (1987: 37) quoted by Spiegel (1988: 53): "Ideologies that stress 'tribal order' and 'traditional' life . . . are . . . viewed as reactionary concepts that serve to disrupt the development of a national consciousness", a matter exacerbated by the state's "Bantustan" policy.
8. Thus certain banking institutions supporting cultural and artistic events to the tune of millions of Rands breathed a sigh of relief. However, the necessity of funding literature and culture ought not to be underestimated. Pure state subsidies usually lead to a narrowing of options.
9. The current overt sentimentality accompanying much literary criticism which seeks to bring about political change is understandable only against the backdrop of certain trends in English criticism which have always been moralistic. Thus Leavis's statement that criticism should engage in "moral discrimination and judgement of relative human values" (1948: 29) nicely bridges the gap between the Arnoldian and the Marxist humanist tradition of critics such as Lukács and Raymond Williams.
10. Even critics who believe that literary theory gets in between them and their untrammelled enjoyment of literature are ultimately informed by a theory, albeit unconsciously. For the very "spontaneous" enjoyment of a text is acculturated, since we would not enjoy reading if we had not first learned it and had read other books!
11. Cf. Eagleton (1987: 1-9) who in his otherwise excellent article seems to wish to broaden literary studies by an inclusion of "culture". However, culture as a concept in the hands of well-meaning academics critical of institutionalized formal and "close reading" practices forget - as do sympathizers with CASA (Fitzgerald et al. 1989) - that cultural studies appear to be desirable only where the dominant discourse prohibits change. When political action is not possible, culture has to come to the rescue.
12. It is interesting to note in this connection that Benjamin's views, formulated in the thirties prior to Barthes' and Foucault's work, nevertheless coincide with their explanation as to how the novel became the dominant form for narration with the rise of capitalist modes of exchange. Cf. Carusi (1989: 137f).
13. Cf. François Lyotard's views concerning the conditions of possibility for changes in narration after the grand narratives lost their validity in the postmodern age of information systems. (*The Postmodern Conditions: A Report on Knowledge*)
14. Since this text is most helpful for our discussion at the present time, I am quoting the relevant part in full:

Besides, I do not know if it is necessary to say that the idea that a literature must define itself in terms of its national traits is a relatively new concept; also new and arbitrary is the idea that writers must seek themes from their own countries. Without going any further, I think Racine would not even have understood a person who denied him his right to the title of poet of France because he cultivated Greek and Roman themes. I think Shakespeare would have been amazed if people had tried to limit him to English themes, and if they had told him that, as an Englishman, he had no right to compose *Hamlet*, whose theme is Scandinavian, or *Macbeth*, whose theme is Scottish. The Argentine cult of local colour is a recent European cult which the nationalists ought to reject as foreign. Some days past I have found a curious confirmation of the fact that what is truly native can and often does dispense with local colour; I found this confirmation in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Gibbon observes that in the Arabian book *par excellence*, in the Koran, there are no camels; I believe if there were any doubt as to the authenticity of the Koran, this

absence of camels would be sufficient to prove it as an Arabian work. It was written by Mohammed and Mohammed as an Arab, had no reason to know that camels were especially Arabian; for him they were part of reality, he had no reason to emphasize them; on the other hand, the first thing a falsifier, a tourist, an Arab nationalist would do to have a surfeit of camels, caravans of camels, on every page; but Mohammed, as an Arab was unconcerned; he knew he could be an Arab without camels. I think we Argentines can emulate Mohammed, can believe in the possibility of being Argentine without abounding in local colour.

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