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Helize van Vuuren

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Introduction: Literary Historiography, with Specific Reference to the Problems of the South African Context

Helize van Vuuren

1 Literary History

When J.C. Kannemeyer's first volume of his new Afrikaans literary history appeared in 1978, it caused an uproar in Afrikaans circles. The Potchefstroom academic, T.T. Cloete, accused Kannemeyer of "adoption" of others' literary interpretations, and a lack of originality (1980a and 1980b). This furore petered out after intense polemic on literary history in Afrikaans literary journals between 1980 and 1982. Kannemeyer went on to publish volume two, and subsequently shortened, popularised versions of this two-volume history in both Afrikaans (1988) and English (1993). His *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse literatuur* in two volumes (1978 & 1983) remains - in spite of the furore - the most scholarly and thorough Afrikaans literary history, useful especially for its extensive bibliographical detail and footnotes. It is a prime example of the much maligned *omnium-gatherum* impulse, the comprehensive literary history, now considered outdated.

The debate around the merits of Kannemeyer's work - which has to date produced the most comprehensive twentieth century literary history attempted in South Africa - alerted scholars to problematic issues such as influence and originality (with reference to the literary works under discussion, as well as the use made by the literary historiographer of existing critical writings on the works he writes about), periodisation, and genre delineation. Kannemeyer's approach as literary historian (one researcher writing a history of a literature in a particular language and treating this literature as a sum of its parts: a chronological overview of writers and their oeuvres, author after author, text after text, period after period) has much in common with the methodology and thoroughness of the various volumes of Dutch literary history produced by Gérard Knuvelde whose *Handboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse letterkunde*, first published in 1948 was regularly revised, with new editions up to 1976. In a fashion similar to Cloete's critique of Kannemeyer's history, the Dutch academic,

W.P. Gerritsen complained that Knuvelder tended towards superficial reading and "all too often his summaries and characterisations were compilations of others' compilations" ("al te vaak het samenvattingen van andermans samenvattingen" (1975: 92)). This is probably an inevitable methodology where one historian is at work.

The debate sparked off by Kannemeyer's publication prompted a search for alternative approaches to literary history in South Africa (for instance Cloete's suggestions for a reception history, summarised in Olivier (1981: 39-40), and Coetzee's sketch of a possible model (1990)), which, to a degree, reflected literary preoccupations elsewhere.

With reference to the European literary climate, Van Gorp (1985: 246) identifies Jean Weisgerber's "Défense de l'Histoire" ("In defence of history") (a paper delivered in 1963 at a FILLM conference in New York) as an important plea for the re-evaluation of literary historiography. This paper was a reaction against New Criticism's tendency towards an ahistorical literary approach. According to Van Gorp, Weisgerber's paper reintroduced the problematics of literary historiography into European literary debate, and resulted in the founding of a journal such as *New Literary History* (1969), as well as Jauss's famous inaugural lecture on literary history as a challenge to literary theory, "Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft" (1967) (Van Gorp 1985: 246). The idea of an evolution of norms in literary systems was not really new, but a continuation of the ideas of Tynjanov, Mukařovský and especially Vodička (Van Gorp 1985: 247 & 249). Jauss's emphasis on reception aesthetics and the reader's horizon of expectations transferred the literary perspective to the reader rather than the sender/author or the text as was previously the case (1985: 246 & 250).

The contents tables of major international literary journals (*Critical Inquiry*, *New Literary History*, *Poetics Today* and *PMLA*) of the eighties and the nineties show an acute rethinking and problematising of what constitutes literary historiography. In part, this reawakened interest was the result of a dawning consciousness of the pluralistic, heteroglossic nature of societies that had before been conceived in ways which were later described as "monologic". The rethinking of literary history has to do with new concepts of what constitutes literature:

It is understandable that, in a pluralistic society, what has been, is, or should be canonical for those who represent power has not been, is not, and cannot be representative of marginal communities.

(Mignolo 1991: 11)

Hayden White's perspective on history as "narrative" changed the manner in which historiographical discourse is thought of:

... historical accounts cast in the form of narrative may be as various as the modes of emplotment which literary critics have identified as constituting the different principles for structuring narratives in general.

(White 1986: 487)

The perceived "duality" of history as both event and "account of that event" (Kronik 1992: 9) "feeds" into how we perceive literary history: it relativises the perspective offered by any specific literary historian. Written by another, it might have had a totally different "plot".

Part of the problem of writing literary history today relates to the perception that "there are no real beginnings" (Brown 1992: 20) and that there are problems with closure. In his introduction to an issue of *PMLA* dealing with literary history, Marshall Brown points to the need for "slower and more discontinuous literary histories". There is resistance, in the theorising of literary history, against unitary thinking. Robert Johnstone goes so far as to refer to comprehensive literary history as "the impossible genre":

Comprehensive literary history, perversely, refuses to die. (Some) scholars dismiss it out of hand as academic make-work. Many of the remainder note the often cumbersome and inconsistent methodological machinery in histories of whole traditions and conclude that the oxymoron of literary history defies resolution even in theory. Acclaim is rare, and a mixed blessing.

(Johnstone 1992: 26)

Johnstone quotes René Wellek who in 1949 questioned the feasibility of writing a text which is both literary and a history, and then in 1977 coming to the conclusion that it is not feasible, proclaiming "the end of an illusion, the fall of literary history" (Johnstone 1992: 27).

In continued attempts to write comprehensive literary histories Johnstone sees evidence of the carnivalesque:

... the new literary history excites because its bold advertisement of its impossibility promises intellectual carnival of high order. Few balancing acts are more delicate than the attempt to work within the irresistibly totalizing medium of comprehensive literary history and yet, in Bercovitch's words, "to see in totalizing answers, as in self-evident truths, the traces of ideological snares or blunders".

(Johnstone 1992: 36)

1.1 New Historicism and the New Literary History

Johnstone's usage of the term "the new literary history" alerts one to the uncomfortable relationship between New Historicism and the new literary history. The New Historicist approach of Stephen Greenblatt (1980 & 1988) and others tends to concentrate on particularities in their "unearth-and-reveal approach to supposedly self-evidently meaningful historical texts" (Coates 1993: 277). New Historicism's contribution can be seen in its insistence that "what had previously been guarded, marginalized, or 'irrelevant texts' need to 'enter into intellectual discourse'" (Coates 1993: 277). Yet various critics have alerted us to the theoretical limits of New Historicism (see for instance the debate in *New Literary History* 21(2)). Rena Fraden (1990: 275) points out how New Historicists "have used a certain reading of Foucauldian power as a way to assert yet once more a monolithic world view, one that once again denies agency to 'others'". She accentuates the positionality of the critic - especially after the De Man affair - which stresses the need to pose the question: "How are we as critics implicated in our own social texts?"

Richard Lehan criticises the lack of a coherent methodology, and the New Historicist tendency to underplay the historical context of literary works:

... it is my belief that the new historicism is without a methodology that gives coherence to it as a movement. What we have from this group is a series of discrete and diverse readings of literary texts and cultural periods as if these readings were bound by doctrine as the new historicism is applied to literary (especially narrative) texts it often creates a disjunction between what the text is saying about history and what the historian is saying about the text. It is exactly this *inability to come to terms with the diachronic nature of some of our main literary and historical texts* that presents for me the *main problem in both new historicism and representational kinds of reading*

(Lehan 1990: 535; my italics)

There is an irreconcilable rift between the integrative historical impulse towards a new literary history (especially prevalent at the moment in South Africa) and New Historicist studies, although the demand to place in the foreground previously marginalised or "irrelevant" texts in the literary discourse has clearly had an enormous influence on literary studies in our time.

2 The Situation in the Netherlands and the USA: Work in Progress

2.1 The Netherlands

In 1986 a group of Amsterdam-based scholars published *Twee eeuwen literatuurgeschiedenis* (Van Bork & Laan 1986). This was followed in 1990 by a "one-man history", Ton Anbeek's *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur tussen 1885 en 1985* (1990), and three years later by *Nederlandse literatuur; een geschiedenis* (Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1993). Anbeek raised the wrath of the Flemish because he chose to exclude their literary production (he only included Flemish works published in the Netherlands). Anbeek presents his literary history as "a narrative" ("een verhaal") and states that he is not interested in a complete picture of all Dutch authors and their separate texts, but rather in giving a picture of changing literary norms (1990: 14). He refers to Knuvelde as an "overview writer" ("overzicht-schrijver" (1990: 17)) and states that in the 1990 history his (Anbeek's) objective was not comprehensiveness, but to question whether each literary change could be related to an important political event which occurred before or at the same time (1990: 18).

The 1986 Amsterdam team's effort was not too favourably received. As one critic commented: "een *complete* literatuurgeschiedenis leverde het niet op" ("not resulting in a *comprehensive* literary history") (Ruiter 1993: 108; my italics to stress the yearning towards totalisation in the reviewer).

In 1993 a team of 109 specialists published their collective effort of some magnitude: *Nederlandse literatuur, een geschiedenis* (Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1993). The model for this work was *The New History of French Literature* (1989) which states its perspective thus:

... the question today is no longer, as it still was for Sartre, "What is literature?", but rather, "What is not?" because "such a questioning, occurring both within and outside literature, both constitutes and undoes literature", because the fixed categories have collapsed and because there is now an opportunity "to disrupt the traditional orderliness of most histories of literature".

(Johnstone 1992: 27)

In a discussion of the three new Dutch literary histories mentioned here, Frans Ruiter describes what he sees as important ideas influencing the present view of literary historiography:

Een tijd waarin kennis van het verleden als een verhaal wordt beschouwd, de literaire canon als een min of meer willekeurige verzameling werken, en het idee

van een nationale identiteit als een anachronisme, lijkt weinig bevorderlijk voor het tot stand komen van een monumentale nationale literatuurgeschiedenis. Maar dat blijkt een vergissing. De relativistische tijdgeest heeft bevrijdend gewerkt: er kwam ruimte voor experimenten.

(A time in which knowledge of the past is regarded as a narrative, and the literary canon as a more or less arbitrary collection of works, and when the idea of a national identity is seen as an anachronism, can hardly be considered conducive to establishing a national literary history of some magnitude. But this has proved to be an erroneous conclusion. The relativistic spirit of the time has been liberating inasmuch as it has created scope for experiments.)

(Ruiter 1993: 108; my translation)

However, *Nederlandse literatuur, een geschiedenis* (1993) was also perceived as a failure for two further reasons: because as a history it is too fragmented (consisting of 151 loose contributions of approximately six pages each), and as an encyclopedia it is too chaotic to be functional. The introduction of *Nederlandse literatuur, een geschiedenis* states as the aim of literary history the need to focus especially on the functioning of literary works in society, rather than on the texts themselves (Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1993: 109). According to Frans Ruiter (1993: 109), this focus has resulted in a *social* (rather than literary) history with the "isolated and often sterile study of the literary text" forced to the background.

2.2 New Literary Histories in the USA

In his article on comprehensive literary history as the "impossible genre", Johnstone (1992) compares the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (Elliott 1988) with the history by Spiller (1948) with reference to where each sees his beginnings. The older history sees its origin in the moment "when *the first settler* from abroad of sensitive mind paused in his adventure long enough to feel that he was under a different sky", whereas the Columbia history states that "the literary history of this nation began when the *first human being* living in what has since become the United States used language creatively" (Johnstone 1992: 32; my italics).

The evolution from "the first settler" to the "first human being" as focalising point of consciousness in the forty years that lie between these two histories alerts the researcher to the problem of ideology which "stands at the intersection between the terms 'literary' and 'history', mediating between canon and context, expressive form and social structure" (Bercovitch 1986: 636). In their formulations the two histories clearly delineate themselves as colonialist (taking the "first settler" as focalisor in 1948) and postcolonialist (with the "first human being" as point of departure in 1988)

in ideological intent. Bercovitch (1986: 637) stresses that "questions of race and gender are integral to formalist analysis" and that "political norms are inscribed in aesthetic judgment".

With reference to Bercovitch's forthcoming *Cambridge History of American Literature* the editor admits that it will most likely be hailed "as being neither history nor literary nor American".

Though the affirmation of impossibility complies with the postmodern insistence on theoretical self-consciousness, the comprehensive commitment undercuts the relativism that often accompanies such an all-knowing stance.

(Johnstone 1992: 27)

The tension between the appeal of comprehensiveness on the one hand and the commitment to relativism on the other forces the editor of the *Columbia Literary History* to wonder whether there *is* "such a thing as literary history" (Johnstone 1992: 27).

A possible way out of the impasse of the comprehensive historical method is offered by the critic David Simpson who suggests replacing the word culture with the word subculture:

The megalith of a normative and all-governing historical paradigm vanishes at once; we anticipate instead a world made up of a complex assembly of interests and factions, each struggling to become the culture Difference is reinscribed where literary criticism has all too often been content to image sameness.

(Simpson 1988: 744)

The tension suggested between sameness and difference when approaching cultural matters and the effect of each axiomatic approach to culture and literature leads us into the South African arena.

3 The South African Literary Context

3.1 The Term "South African Literature"

An overview of South African literary histories (Van Vuuren 1994: 8-20) illustrates that the concept "South African literature" only seemed self-evident at the beginning of the century, namely in the histories of Besselaar (1914) and Nathan (1925). But in both these works the focus is on Dutch/-Afrikaans and English texts and on the literary, to the exclusion of oral traditions and the other indigenous languages. After 1925, when Afrikaans became one of the official languages of South Africa, Afrikaans scholars

started concentrating on writing their own literary histories (Dekker 1947; Nienaber 1951; Antonissen 1955; Kannemeyer 1978 & 1983).

The term "South African literature" is invariably used by English South African literary scholars and historians with reference to their field of study: English South African literature. Because of the distinction between metropolitan (British, and to a lesser degree American) and local literature, English scholars in this country tended to drop the qualifying "English" in front of "South African literature" and to use the epithet "South African" to refer to locally produced literary texts. Thomas Pringle was seen as the founder of this branch of local English literature. But it was not until the eighties, after the publication of Stephen Gray's *South African Literature: An Introduction* (1979), that English curricula started focusing more strongly on local production of what they understandably, but misguidedly, called "South African literature".

Thus the term "South African literature" has become something of a misnomer in literary circles, as it is mostly used by English scholars, to refer to their own particular local brand of literature in contrast to the metropolitan, British and/or American trunk of the tree. During the eighties CENSAL, an off-shoot of the Human Sciences, initiated a project under the auspices of Charles Malan and Francis Galloway to assemble the research done in the different languages and literatures in South Africa, which would all qualify as comparative "South African literature". This initiative was aborted in the late eighties, partly due to organisational problems (which led to the closure of CENSAL), and probably also partly due to lack of enthusiasm from the then still extremely polarised and compartmentalised literature and language departments in the country. The foundation of a Centre for South African Literatures and Languages at the University of Durban-Westville in 1994 under director Johan van Wyk has given renewed impetus to interlinguistic and interdisciplinary research (Afrikaans, English, Indian, African languages and literatures as well as history, anthropology etc.).

This impetus was carried through into a colloquium on literary historiography held in May 1995 where scholars and literary historians from diverse fields attempted to look theoretically and empirically at the *status quo* to determine whether there was a need for a comparative South African literary history.

3.2 Literary Historiography in South Africa

In many ways the South African literary scene can be viewed as a laboratory for testing various approaches to literary history. The multilingual nature of the country (with eleven official languages) and its various lite-

ratures makes the conception of one, all-inclusive literary history for all South African literatures a mammoth and as yet unrealised task.

As a view from "outside" Schenkeveld-van der Dussen has suggested a South African literary history on the "open model" of the new Dutch literary history for which she was end-editor. She suggests that a pragmatic description of what constitutes South African literature should entail literature produced in South Africa (1994: 48). Clearly this indicates her unfamiliarity with the field: what of the many writers still in exile or self-imposed exile or who died after years in exile (Breyten Breytenbach, Olga Kirsch, Elisabeth Eybers, Christopher Hope, Lewis Nkosi, Bessie Head, etc.)? These writers are/were divorced from their country of origin, but have all produced works which are seen as integral to South African literature. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen (1994: 48) then moves on to the question of commonality: what binds the different literatures? She glibly states that "er zijn toch heel wat gevallen van interactie te ontwaren" ("there are evidently many cases of interaction perceivable"), giving factually incorrect and non-existent examples (1994: 49). On the question of aspects of commonality between the different South African literatures, Malvern van Wyk Smith gave a thought-provoking paper at the CSSALL colloquium where he challenged this type of glib acceptance of "irreducible commonality" in South African literatures:

... to bring together what has never been put together before, does not really show what sort of interaction there has been. Our literatures have grown up in isolation.
(Van Wyk Smith 1995)

This difference of opinion on the point of commonality indicates how complex "South African literature" is as an integrative concept.

Since Besselaar (1914) and Nathan (1925) the only attempts at an inclusive overview have been Stephen Gray's *South African Literature: An Introduction* (1979) and Michael Chapman's forthcoming *Southern African Literatures* [1995] (in the Longman series of literary histories of various countries). But Gray's title is somewhat misleading: he opens up English literature to include a consciousness of the indigenous voice, but does not go far enough. For instance, at the end of chapter two, "The Frontier Myth and Hottentot Eve", after a fascinating overview of texts which give voice to Khoikhoi characters - including the neglected *Kaatje Kekkelbek, or Life among the Hottentots* (first performed in 1838) - he blandly states:

There are no more Khoikhoi characters in *the* literature.

(Gray 1979: 71; my italics)

This categorical statement about "*the literature*" does not hold true for Afrikaans literature. The first example that comes to mind is S.J. du Toit's poem "Hoe die Hollanders die Kaap ingeneem het" ("How the Dutch invaded the Cape") (late nineteenth century: a fictionalised imagined perspective of the first Khoi upon the arrival of the Dutch at the Cape), as well as Eugène Marais' *Dwaalstories* (1927). So "*the literature*" referred to here is probably South African *English literature*, although it suggests to the reader a greater "South African" inclusivity.

Although Chapman's original project was to write on "South African literature" he chose to broaden his focus to "Southern African Literatures", including the literary production of Mozambique and Angola, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, as well as Namibia. Presumably this overview will put in relief significant shifts and changes in the literary history of southern Africa, but a thorough literary history of South Africa it will not be, and does not purport to be. Chapman's literary history is also a one-man history, centring on a particular narrative, like Anbeek's *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur tussen 1885 en 1985* (1990). What differentiates it methodologically from Anbeek's approach is the latter's choice to exclude Flemish writing in Dutch, and concentrate solely on writing produced in the Netherlands. In contrast with this centripetal perspective, Chapman's book will probably have a broad, outward sweeping perspective, including all the literatures of the region. (See De Kock's criticism of Chapman's approach, 1993: 45-55).

3.3 CSSALL Colloquium (5-7 May 1995): "Rethinking a South African (National) Literary History"

The bracketing of "national" in the title of the May colloquium points to the problematic status which the concept of one South African nation currently has. In the new South African democracy there seems to exist a need to foster the evolution of a single, unified national identity. Thus Yunus Carim recently wrote in a leading local Sunday paper:

People have multiple identities and these can be reconciled. The challenge before our new democracy is to provide the space for people to express their multiple identities in a way that fosters the evolution of a South African national identity.
(Carim 1995: 22; my italics)

In academic and intellectual circles there is extreme scepticism about this forging of a new "national identity", expressed chiefly by the Stellenbosch philosopher, Johan Degenaar (1991), who suggests that a diversity of

languages and cultures should be respected and fostered, that there can be unity in diversity.

The May colloquium (with representatives from all linguistic groupings in the country) came to rather paradoxical conclusions. It felt that there was a need for an "integrated approach" in the writing of a South African literary history, while remaining alert to the "dangers of a totalising history". The choice of an integrated approach was in reaction to the academic "apartheid" of the past, which found expression in separate, compartmentalised literature and language departments. The colloquium felt a specific need to "break the boundaries" of these divisive language and literature departments. But there was also a clear movement towards breaking the boundaries in an interdisciplinary way: Rory Ryan suggested that a reconstitution of the humanities was taking place, at the nexus between literary studies and cultural studies, history, anthropology, etc. Leon de Kock described his view of what such an "inclusive history" would look like, responding to these boundary shifting pressures:

The more inclusive history however, is one that will not be contained by any single narrative or overarching principle. It is as much ethnographic as it is literary, historical as well as formal, and my intuition tells me that it derives its greatest force from the undoing of the sedimented layers of discourse which makes up our knowledge of the past. It is a process of unmaking the larger narratives and splitting them into diverse and discontinuous stories, or local histories.

(De Kock 1995)

Ampie Coetzee suggested the use of "discursive formations" (of Foucauldian derivation) in the exercise of rethinking South African literature. (In what way a literary history based on identified "discursive formations" would differ from a thematically based description of literature(s), remains to be seen.)

Many participants at the colloquium including a delegation of worker poets from the Culture and Working Life Project at the University of Natal, stressed that this rethinking should accommodate the pressure towards popularisation of literature, and popular forms such as oral poetry and worker plays. Annemarie Van Niekerk pleaded for the recovery of marginalised Afrikaans women writers.

Michael Green accentuated the difference between a "*comprehensive* national literary history" (which could too easily be read as "claustrophobic appropriation") and the more desirable "*comparative* literary history", which could be a "vigorously interdisciplinary project".

In spite of the resistance verbalised by some participants to a project that might tend towards an expunging of existing diversities, the director of the

Centre (CSSALL), Johan van Wyk, alerted participants to the hiatus in the market for sourcebooks or encyclopedias on South African literature - which could provide chronological and comparative overviews of dates, events, and publications in the various literatures, related to historical and political events. The lack of such an integrated sourcebook or encyclopedia was felt as something which should be rectified. It was tentatively agreed to set up a working community of interested scholars and literary historians with the aim of writing a comparative and inclusive South African literary history as a team.

3.4 American, Dutch and South African Literary Historiography

With reference to historiography, Colin Bundy notes:

... there is a bifurcation in South African historiography, without parallel in the U.S. case. This is the division between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking historians. This is no mere linguistic divide, but bears also upon methodology, subject matter and ideology.

(Bundy 1990: 123)

The situation with regard to South African *literary* historiography is even more complex, with the multiplicity of languages, numerous literatures, and also numerous different literary historiographical traditions.

At the CSSALL colloquium the African scholar C.T. Msimang pointed to the added irony that the first literary history of African languages in this country was written by Alfred Gérard (1971), "based on second hand opinions", because he did not have access to the languages themselves. This situation is in the process of being rectified, with new literary histories of the African languages being written by mother tongue speakers of the languages. (Yet, most literary historians of the African literatures are still, more often than not, non-mother tongue speakers. This probably reflects the effect of the underdevelopment of African literature departments during the apartheid years, with a resultant dearth of sufficient mother tongue-speaking African literary specialists.)

In describing the changing approaches of South African historiography (in English historiography), Christopher Saunders (1992) indicated three main characteristics: (a) a deliberate search "to counter the myths embedded in received versions of the past" (p. 74), (b) a tendency for new work to explore themes and topics in social history (p. 75), and (c) a clear ascendancy in the realisation of the importance of race, class and gender (p. 77).

In English literary criticism and historiography the focus is also increasingly on aspects of race, class and gender, and there is a marked tendency

towards topics exploring the relationship between literature and its social context. In Afrikaans criticism there is still possibly more of a focus on the "aesthetic" element of literature, although this is slowly changing. It would seem that literary studies have been influenced by general historiographical research, the strongest impulse probably emanating from the triennial History Workshop conferences held since 1978 at the University of the Witwatersrand (Saunders 1992: 73). The focus on the marginalised and the collection of oral life histories and testimonies have had a definite influence on the methodology of literary studies, where literary "excavation" work of archival material has increased considerably in the last decade, with special attention to the interaction between the oral and the written as a developing interdisciplinary field.

Knowledge of the South African situation elucidates the fact that the fragmented and multilingual local literary scene challenges the literary historian in ways unprecedented in the American or Dutch situation. Two examples will have to suffice: extant oral traditions, at the interface with written texts, and the constant translation between literatures - literally and culturally - that characterises the literary forum.

Although from a theoretical point of view the thrust is away from the totalising impulse, a practical need does exist for a comparative, integrated literary history of South Africa, even if only as a sourcebook for students and researchers.

4 Content of this Issue

It should have become clear that literary historiography in South Africa is still embryonic and the discipline is undergoing serious rethinking, reinforced by the accompanying changes of the political state and the problematic concept of nationhood. There is also hardened resistance from many sections of the literary community to the concept of a comparative "South African" literature. No doubt it has to do with a perceived threat to existing literary empires and institutionalised structures. The resistance inside the country is in stark contrast to views from the "outside", best illustrated in the ease with which journals like *World Literature Today* discuss all literature emanating from this country under the rubric of "South African literature" (no matter what language the texts were originally written in).

In this issue we offer a variety of topics, ranging from contributions dealing with the actual practice of writing literary history in general, to specific studies of relevant authors.

The perceptive reader will no doubt notice the omission of contributions by African scholars or researchers on literature by black Afrikaans and English writers. This sad absence, speaking louder than the presences, reflects the inability to elicit contributions from those approached. Possibly it is also indicative of the fragmentation and alienation which still characterise the South African academy.

While William Thornton writes from an international perspective, giving an overview of important developments in the theoretical field of literary historiography, Michael Chapman offers an outline of the "social theory" on which he based his forthcoming comprehensive *Southern African Literatures*. Henriette Roos's contribution gives insight into the practical problems that confront the author of a single language literary history in South Africa today. It is an occasional piece, included for the perspective it gives on the *practice* of literary history. Ampie Coetzee describes how he sees a Foucauldian description of "discursive formations" as an alternative way of writing literary history. His article sheds light on many of the problems facing the South African literary historian. Johan van Wyk's contribution on "Identity and difference" attempts to clarify the elusive constitution of different South African identities.

David Johnson, Corinne Sandwith and Shane Moran have contributed specific "case studies" on Sol T. Plaatje, Olive Schreiner and J.M. Coetzee, which deal with various aspects of canonisation and re-evaluation. In "Reading the Bambata Rebellion in South African English Fiction" Jack Kearney closely relates history to its reflection in English novels of the time. The issue ends with a review article by David van Wyk of Malvern van Wyk Smith's recent literary history, *Grounds of Contest. A Survey of South African English Literature*.

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