

Culture in the Public Sphere: Recovering a Tradition
of Radical Cultural-Political Debate in South Africa,
1938-1960.

by

Corinne Sandwith

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social
Sciences

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Durban 2005

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the negotiation of cultural and literary matters in South African public life during the period 1938 to 1960. While I begin with an exploration of the more ‘orthodox’ or ‘academic’ traditions of literary-cultural discussion in South Africa, the far more urgent preoccupation has been to explore a hitherto undocumented tradition of cultural-political debate in the South African public sphere, one which arose in the ‘counter-public’ circles of oppositional South African political groups. What has emerged is a rich and heterogeneous public debate about literature and culture in South Africa which has so far gone unrecorded and unrecognised. What sets this ‘minority’ discussion apart from more mainstream cultural discourses, I argue, is its overt engagement with contemporary socio-political issues. Articulated mainly by ‘subaltern’ writer-intellectuals – who occupied a precarious position in the social order either by virtue of their racial classification, class position or political affiliation – this is a cultural debate which offers a forthright critique of existing race and class norms. In these traditions, literary-cultural discussion becomes a vehicle for the articulation of radical political views and a means whereby marginalised individuals and groups can engage in oppositional public debate. In this regard, I argue, literary-cultural debate becomes a means of engaging in the kind of public political participation which is not available in the ‘legitimate’ public sphere.

Focusing in the first instance on literary criticism ‘proper’, this thesis considers the distinctive reading strategies, hermeneutic practices, and evaluative frameworks which mark these alternative South African discursive traditions. Here I argue that the political, content-oriented, historical and ideological emphases of an alternative South African tradition are in marked contrast to the formalist, abstracted and moralising tendencies of more normative approaches. What the thesis points to is not only the existence of a substantial body of anti-colonial criticism and response in South Africa from the mid-1930s onwards, but also to a vigorous tradition of Marxist literary criticism in South Africa, one which predates the arrival of Marxist approaches in South African universities by some thirty years. Aside from the more traditional critical arena of literary consumption and evaluation, the thesis also considers a more general public discussion, one in which questions such as the place of politics in art, the social function of literature/culture, and the complex ‘postcolonial’ questions of

cultural allegiance, identity and exclusion are debated at length. In this regard, culture becomes one of the primary sites of a much broader contestation of ruling class power. Regarded by many in these traditions as intrinsic to the operations of class and colonial oppression, culture also figures as one of the primary nodes of resistance.

In seeking out these marginal South African ‘subaltern counterpublics’, the project has sought to retrieve a history of radical cultural-political debate in South Africa which is not available as part of the existing literary-cultural archive. In this regard, I hope not only to keep these ideas ‘afloat’ as a way of complicating and interrogating the present, but also seek to provide a more accurate and inclusive sense of the South African public sphere during the period under review. In particular, I offer a sense of the many competing intellectual discourses which formed the broader intellectual context out of which the dominant English Studies model was eventually constellated. I also give attention to the complex social processes by means of which certain intellectual discourses are granted legitimacy and permanence while others are discarded: what emerges in this regard, as I suggest, is gradual ‘outlawing’ of politics from South African cultural debates which coincides with the rise of the apartheid state.

Key Words

Cultural Discourse

Public sphere/‘counterpublics’

South African literary criticism/theory

Reading Cultures

Postcolonial

Anti-colonial resistance

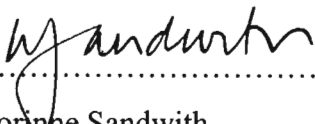
Marxist literary criticism

The Alternative Press in South Africa

Print Culture

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all acknowledgements have been properly made. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. It has not been previously submitted for any other degree or examination in any other university.


.....
Corinne Sandwith

.....19th.....day of August 2005

Acknowledgments

The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation in the early stages of this project is gratefully acknowledged. Opinions expressed in this thesis and conclusions arrived at are entirely my own and should not necessarily be attributed to the National Research Foundation. This thesis is based on extensive archival work and I owe a particular debt of gratitude to the librarians and archivists at the Historical Studies Library in Cape Town, the National Library of South Africa, the William Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand, the Pretoria State Library, Killie Campbell, the Natal Society Library, the Alan Paton Centre and the Pietermaritzburg Archives for their valuable assistance.

Much of the progress of this work depended on the information I could glean from interviews and private collections. In this regard, I am especially grateful to Sheila Belshaw (Dora Taylor's daughter) for putting me in touch with so many of the people who knew her mother and for expressing such enthusiasm for, and interest in, the project. Grateful thanks also to Ronnie and Chrystal Britten who generously provided me with a copy of one of Dora Taylor's lectures and invited me into their home. In England, Doreen and Michael Muskett were equally generous, providing me with meals, and giving me access to Dora Taylor's notes and manuscripts. Special thanks to Richard Dudley for fascinating conversations about the world of *The Torch* and the life of the Non-European Unity Movement. Thanks also to Baruch Hirson, Helen Kies and Amelia Lewis for answering my letters and providing me with much-needed help and information.

Closer to home, special thanks are due to all my colleagues in English Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am especially grateful for a stimulating intellectual environment and generous support. For specific comments on drafts and chapters, I wish to thank, in particular, Duncan Brown, Michael Chapman, Michael Green, Margaret Lenta, Shane Moran, Sally-Ann Murray, Matthew Shum, Michael Vaughan, and Tony Voss. Thanks also to Glenda Robson for valuable administrative assistance. I am indebted to Jeff Guy, Barbara Harlow, David Johnson, Kelwyn Sole, and Catherine Woeber for helpful comments and suggestions on aspects of this thesis. Most especially, I am indebted to my supervisor and colleague, Margaret Daymond,

for her astute, meticulous, enthusiastic and always-stimulating engagement with every aspect of this project.

Finally, thanks to my parents, Faye and Dick Whittaker, and to the rest of my family, Rodney Sandwith, Athol Maclaggan, Trevor, Margaret and Jeffrey Sandwith for sustenance, love and encouragement. Special thanks to my partner, Angela Spencer, for her extraordinary patience, insight, funny stories and much-needed support.

Contents

Introduction	<i>1</i>
Chapter 1 English Studies in South Africa: Democracy and Culture on the Precipice	<i>26</i>
Chapter 2 Outlawing Politics	<i>62</i>
Chapter 3 Dora Taylor: South African Marxist	<i>114</i>
Chapter 4 Contesting a Cult(ure) of Respectability: The Radical Intellectual Traditions of the Non-European Unity Movement	<i>158</i>
Chapter 5 Culture and the Communists	<i>204</i>
Chapter 6 The ANC and the Congress Alliance: 'From Urban Gentlemen with Clean Hands to a Militant People's Movement'	<i>253</i>
Conclusion	<i>309</i>
Bibliography	<i>326</i>

Introduction

1968 is accepted as a decisive year in the history of the British academy. Expanding student populations, shifting demographics, the influence of a newly-available European critical theory, as well as the revolutionary politics of student-worker alliances in Paris, the anti-Vietnam war movement, the Nuclear Disarmament Campaign and a growing women's movement all fed into what became a formidable and largely successful assault on established university practice. The discipline of English Studies was not immune. As David Johnson observes, "before 1968 the study of English literature was organised by an Anglophile liberal fraction of the ruling class; after 1968, a new self-consciously heroic generation looked to Continental thought to challenge that hegemony" (1996:189). In South Africa, the effects of this dramatic institutional shift were to be seen not only in the emergence of a powerful critique of the dominant discourse of liberal humanism, but also in a self-conscious appropriation of the insights of radical critical theory for a specifically South African cultural project. Here, while critics such as Tim Couzens (1971, 1977) concentrated on affirming the value of an indigenous literary archive, others, including Isabel Hofmeyr (1977), Kelwyn Sole (1977) and Brenda Cooper (1980), argued convincingly for the value of a Marxist emphasis on class.

This thesis examines a much earlier instance of radical literary-cultural discussion in South Africa. It is a hitherto unexplored, and largely forgotten, history of 'counter-hegemonic' or 'oppositional' cultural-political debate which, like its early 1970s counterpart, offered a significant challenge to established intellectual and political norms. Coming to the fore from the mid- to late-1930s onwards – as much a response to, as a reflection of, a volatile social and political scene – this is an overtly politicised cultural discourse which offers a striking alternative to a more mainstream discussion. Unlike the later 1970s radicalism, however, these radical cultural discourses did not emerge from within the academy. Instead, they found a place in the marginal public sphere activities – mainly newspapers, journals, discussion clubs, study groups, theatre associations and debating societies – of militant anti-colonial or leftist political organisations. What is particularly intriguing about this rich and varied history of radical literary-cultural debate is that it has been completely erased from the dominant literary-historical record. In the present, it is available only in fragments, in the yellowing documents, newspapers,

magazines and journals of a largely un-accessed South African literary-cultural archive. In the spirit of recent efforts to rethink, re-read and ultimately “refigure” the South African archive (Hamilton et al, 2002), then, this thesis is chiefly a project of historical recovery and retrieval, an effort to follow the traces of a hidden history of radical cultural-political debate in South Africa in order not only to recuperate and preserve a significant moment of radical South African discussion, but also to consider the implications of its reinsertion into the dominant literary-historical account.

First a few words of caution: the radical intellectual traditions I describe in this thesis are neither homogenous nor coherent. Regionally specific, conceptually varied, and articulated within the ambit of diverse political and social groups, these are the occasional, dispersed, and often ad hoc responses of a heterogeneous and wide-ranging cultural-political debate which was not consciously understood as a coherent tradition by those who were involved at the time: they are only available as an intellectual ‘tradition’, in other words, as a result of my own critical intervention, selection and reconstruction. There is nevertheless a degree of intellectual and political coherence in these debates, despite their diversity, which makes it appropriate (certainly in retrospect) to grant them the unanimity of a distinctive South African ‘tradition’. What unites these diverse, disparate, often elusive discursive ‘events’, in particular, is a powerful common opposition to the combined authority of academic institution and state in South Africa which, in some cases, pre-dates the more well-known challenges of the late 1960s by at least thirty years. In this sense, they can be said to form a significant ‘counter tradition’ to more normative literary-cultural approaches.

In describing these hidden intellectual traditions as ‘radical’, ‘counter-hegemonic’ or ‘oppositional’, I enter a debate about ideological ‘purity’ in South Africa (particularly on the Left) which is complex, highly-contested and, for the most part, completely unresolved. Without wishing to downplay or ignore the significance of these debates, I have chosen to avoid the precise ideological distinctions of a heterogeneous and sharply divided South African political history, choosing instead to focus on a more inclusive definition which nevertheless retains sufficient conceptual and political clarity. In this regard, I use the terms ‘radical’, ‘oppositional’ or ‘revolutionary’ to refer to a political position which is fundamentally at odds with the dominant social order. In South Africa, in the years immediately preceding and following the implementation of apartheid – a period with which this study is specifically concerned – the dominant social order can be understood as a complex amalgam of race and class hierarchies. A ‘revolutionary’ or

‘radical’ position, in this instance then, is one which seeks to subvert and interrogate both middle-class hegemony and the superiority of Western culture and the ‘white’ race.¹ A deeply politicised and oppositional socio-cultural intervention which takes a range of forms across a variety of contexts, this alternative cultural-political discussion is not only close in spirit to the late 1960s challenges to a range of intellectual and political orthodoxies in South Africa and elsewhere, but also represents a significant departure from the mainstream literary-cultural discussion of its own period. This ‘radical’ cultural-political discourse and its difference from the more conservative university-based tradition are two of the key issues which this thesis sets out to explore.

These discourses are, of course, never completely discrete; in fact, the intriguing overlaps between these traditions form some of the interesting ‘knots’ which this study has sought to unravel. While there are clear similarities between some of the basic areas of concern, it has been important, for my purposes at least, to foreground what is distinctive about these traditions rather than to emphasise continuities. Perhaps those scholars who return to this material in the future will want to complicate this too-neat opposition, look with more sympathy at conservative South African cultural projects, and seek to retrieve a more heroic identity for their practitioners. In my present context, a context in which a left-wing or Marxist approach is an increasingly marginalised one, it has been important both to preserve the distinctiveness of a radical tradition of cultural-political debate in South Africa and to reflect on its implications for on-going cultural-political discussions in the present.

Part I

In his study of the rise of the bourgeois public sphere in Europe in the eighteenth-century, Habermas makes a useful distinction between the “public sphere in the world of letters” and the “public sphere in the political realm”. Located mainly in social institutions such as *salons* and coffee houses, the eighteenth-century public sphere in the world of letters was an important public forum for the debate of literary and cultural issues. As Habermas argues, both ‘publics’ – whether cultural or political – tended towards the same political and social effects: briefly put, both functioned as significant public arenas of “rational-critical debate” (1999:51) in which individuals and groups could reflect critically on the conditions of their own existence, thus creating the broader conditions for the development of a more inclusive democracy. In fact, as Habermas suggests, literary *salons*, coffee houses – and later book clubs, reading circles and

subscription libraries – provided some of the first opportunities for the emerging practice of independent, unrestricted and critical public debate, thus serving as an important training ground for the development of other forms of ‘rational-critical’ debate in the more strictly designated ‘political public sphere’.

Habermas’s efforts to theorise the eighteenth-century European bourgeois public sphere provide a useful departure point for my own exploration of more contemporary South African public debates. In the first place, the concept of a ‘public sphere in the world of letters’ gives shape and definition to a notoriously nebulous and ephemeral area of cultural-historical experience, and, at the same time, makes an important point about its wider political and social significance. While socio-political questions are never far from view, this project is specifically concerned with the public discussion of cultural issues in South Africa in the period 1938 to 1960. In this sense, what I am investigating is a kind of mid-twentieth-century South African manifestation of the eighteenth-century bourgeois ‘public sphere in the world of letters’, the many and varied sites of public discussion and debate in South Africa – newspapers, journals, reading groups, debating societies and book clubs – in which culture features as a central topic of public debate.

This rich history of radical cultural debate, as I have already implied, is deeply caught up in, and frequently spills over into, a broader discussion of socio-political issues. A rigid distinction between the ‘public sphere in the political realm’ and the ‘public sphere in the world of letters’ may, therefore, have the effect of obscuring some of their more interesting connections. Perhaps the most obvious example of this kind of generic ‘transgression’ is the discourse of English Studies itself, which – particularly in its early twentieth-century Leavisian varieties – seldom remained confined to its own self-proclaimed borders, seeking not only to define the parameters of an acceptable practice of reading, interpretation and evaluation, but also attempting to inaugurate the spiritual (and political) transformation of society as a whole. In this sense, an ostensibly neutral or apolitical literary-critical discussion comes to function as a kind of disguised or displaced form of socio-political critique. The focus in this thesis on the public discussion of culture and cultural issues in South Africa, then, proceeds from the basic assumption that ‘culture debates’ are also intensely political ones. In seeking an adequate term to describe what is a complex, varied and often generically ambiguous discussion, I have chosen the phrase ‘cultural-political debate’ – rather than ‘discourse on culture’ or ‘cultural discussion’ – in order to signal precisely those kinds of overlaps and instabilities which form such a significant aspect of this slippery discursive field. The term is also an

important reminder that this kind of discussion is never free of the broader socio-political formation in which it is embedded and to which it addresses itself. I will return to this question in a moment.

The exploration and retrieval of hidden traditions of radical cultural-political debate in South Africa, of course, falls within a much larger (and well-traversed) area of critical inquiry. Inaugurated most famously in Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* (1958), and taken up more recently in Francis Mulhern's provocative examination of twentieth-century cultural debates in *Culture/Metaculture* (2000), the exploration of culture as a subject of contemporary public discussion – or what Mulhern has termed “metacultural discourse” (2000:xiv) – has been a significant focus of critical attention. Within this broad ambit, those studies which concentrate specifically on the institutional history of English Studies itself provide a further elaboration of this influential intellectual field. In this regard, Mulhern's *The Moment of Scrutiny*, Chris Baldick's *The Social Mission of English Studies* (1983), and, closer to home, David Johnson's history of Shakespeare reception in South Africa (1996) have been important critical precedents in defining the shape of the present study. Where this project departs from this work is in the emphasis on a rich history of intellectual exchange and discussion which occurred beyond areas of mainstream institutional sanction (such as universities or publishing houses) amongst those groups and individuals who occupied a much less prominent position in the broader social formation.² In exploring the parameters of an alternative South African cultural-political debate, in other words, this project specifically sets out to retrieve the arguments and debates of those groups or individuals who were routinely excluded from the sites of ‘legitimate’ public discussion in South Africa, by virtue of their gender, class position and racial classification, or as a result of their location in oppositional, leftist or anti-colonial political organisations.

My interest in the debates of marginal social groups in South Africa is primarily informed by the assumption that cultural discourses, of whatever kind, are intimately bound up with the material contexts in which they emerge. As Mulhern puts it in relation to a more general set of issues, “any intellectual practice internalizes its cultural conditions of existence to some extent....[T]he political and cultural conditions in and against which it moves are always already a part of its own being” (1992:6). Close attention to some of the contextual ‘trace elements’ of a radical South African debate has therefore been an important methodological emphasis in the project as a whole. In a society divided along class, race and gender lines – a society in which individuals have

differential access to social power – it has also been especially important to consider the relationship between public debate and its socio-economic location. In this sense, the project works from the central assumption that the nature of cultural-political discussion in South Africa (what one says, how one says it, who speaks at all) is deeply dependant on the socio-economic and political ‘place’ from which these arguments are made. Middle-class white South Africans in the 1940s and 50s, for example, occupied a position in South African society which differed significantly from those who were disenfranchised and less economically secure. A central concern, then, is to examine to what extent this has an impact on the kinds of cultural-political issues which are brought to the fore in public debate.

A focus on the cultural discussions of those who operate outside of the established demarcations of economic and social power opens up a rich area of literary-cultural debate which, as I have suggested, is completely ignored in standard historical accounts. In the cultural-political debates of a more radical minority discussion are a particular set of emphases, protocols and socio-political agendas which depart significantly from a more mainstream debate. By reinserting this tradition into mainstream South African literary-cultural history, the project both complicates common sense and canonised notions of this history, and provides a much more expanded, inclusive, and therefore more accurate, sense of the broader public discussion at the time. By reinserting this tradition into the mainstream record, I hope not only to ‘refigure the archive’ by taking into account more marginal, hence obscured, South African political and intellectual traditions, but also to keep these ideas and traditions ‘afloat’ as a way of complicating and interrogating the present. This is not just a partial answer to the notorious racial occlusions which characterised the apartheid and pre-apartheid years, but is also a recognition of other forms of social exclusion (currently enjoying a less prominent position as a result of the more overwhelming preoccupation with race in South Africa in the present), namely those of class position or political alignment.

This kind of historical re-configuration also has particular implications for the discourse of English Studies in South Africa, allowing for some insight into the shaping forces of contestation and debate against which this discourse emerged in the first place. In this sense, what is recovered is a kind of ‘shadow history’ of English Studies in South Africa, a significant, mostly troublesome, antagonist or counterpoint in its own development which has since been completely ignored in the dominant historical record.

The retrieval of this hidden history therefore provides an intriguing angle from which its characteristic gestures and practices can be assessed and scrutinised.

The alternative intellectual traditions which I describe in this thesis were, for the most part, confined to the newspapers, journals and others public sphere activities of an oppositional South African politics. What is interesting, however, is the extent to which these discourses also became part of a more mainstream debate. In periodicals like *Trek* (and to a lesser extent, *The South African Opinion*) as well as in the enormously popular South African Left Book Club, for example, radical ideas gained a prominence which went far beyond the tiny circuits in which they originally emerged. What this demonstrates is not only that these were publicly debated, circulating and *visible* ideas – not just the madcap arguments on of a handful of obscure and infrequently-attended study groups or debating societies – but also that the challenge they represented had to be negotiated in some way by those whose cultural positions and projects were more closely aligned with a mainstream view. The arguments of South African Leavisites like Geoffrey Durrant and Christina van Heyningen in the pages of *Trek* are a fascinating example of this kind of confrontation. In giving detailed attention to a radical tradition of cultural-political debate in South Africa, then, I hope to provide a greater sense of the available alternatives to a more normative or hegemonic discourse.

The recognition of an alternative intellectual tradition in South Africa also prompts questions about the reasons for its disappearance. Part of what needs to be done is to work out not only why this earlier challenge failed to alter the course of South African intellectual and political life, but also, more importantly, why it slipped so quickly from historical memory, so much so that those who were at the forefront of racial critique and challenge in the 1970s felt themselves to be pioneers. One of the remaining key questions, then, is to highlight some of the socio-political processes by means of which certain texts, discourses, and intellectual traditions are ‘authorised’ and others simply ignored. The fact that this particular tradition of radical cultural debate in South Africa does not exist in the present as a recognisable ‘tradition’ provides powerful confirmation of this process. The disappearance – or more correctly, displacement – of more radical approaches from mainstream public discussion by the early 1950s, and the ascendance of a much more apolitical public discussion is a dramatic emblem, I suggest, of a general shift in South African cultural-political discourse towards a more conservative response which coincides with the rise of the apartheid state.

There is, of course, no simple act of historical retrieval or reconstruction. A critical intervention which is shaped by my own background, social position and particular historical moment, this study bears the imprint of my own immediate context. Needless to say, an explicit focus on retrieving a radical South African tradition of cultural-political debate in the first place inevitably establishes particular parameters for the inquiry, and shapes the eventual outcome. In this regard, it may be possible to argue that there is a tendency in this thesis to over-play a South radicalism at the expense of foregrounding continuities with more mainstream intellectual traditions. If this is the case, it is the inevitable consequence of a first engagement with a new field, and arises out of the need to establish the significance of an important South African intellectual tradition which has so far gone completely unnoticed.

Part II

The radical cultural-political debates which I explore in this thesis are of two main kinds. The first, and most obvious, is the discourse of criticism itself. Defined by Francis Mulhern as “any kind of formal discussion of any activity thought of as cultural” (2000:xv), this is a well-established discursive and intellectual field, which in the less academic, more popular, sites of public debate and discussion examined in this thesis takes a variety of forms, including book reviews, feature articles and public lectures. The discussion itself is extremely wide-ranging, and apart from the more conventional focus on the novel, play or poem, also includes such areas as jazz music, sculpture, painting, popular magazines, architecture and film. Moving beyond the formal sites of literary-cultural engagement in South Africa, I also consider some of the more attenuated and implicit forms of cultural criticism, evaluation and response which occur in other public sphere activities such as reading clubs, debating groups and even amateur theatrical societies.

As one would expect, a focus on hidden traditions of intellectual engagement in South Africa is primarily concerned with unearthing the distinctive reading strategies, hermeneutic practices, aesthetic assumptions, and modes of literary-cultural consumption of marginalised social groups. It proceeds on the basis of the well-known argument, articulated (in different ways) by critics such as Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), Pierre Bourdieu (1986), Barbara Herrnstein-Smith (1983) and John Guillory (1987, 1994), that the ostensibly universal and timeless definitions of literary value or, more generally, ‘taste’ can function as a means of ‘outlawing’ or denigrating the tastes and values of

subordinate social groups. The elevation of particular social values to the status of universal or timeless ‘truth’, in other words, has the effect of naturalising and reproducing existing structures of social power. In this sense, the aesthetic choices, values and preferences of what might be termed ‘cultural outsiders’ (women, the working classes or, in South Africa, those classified as ‘non-European’) emerge as an important site of contestation and challenge in relation to political and social values of the dominant culture itself.

Western middle-class feminist challenges to male-dominated definitions of literary excellence provide a striking and well-known instance of this kind of important counter-cultural critical response. Less prominent, but equally significant, have been those revisionist histories – such as Paul Murphey’s 1994 study of literary criticism in British working-class periodicals – which have begun to give attention to a substantial archive of working-class literary-critical response. This kind of counter-hegemonic canonical refiguring, of course, defines much of the work presently undertaken in the field of postcolonial studies. Rob Nixon’s late 1980s exploration of Caribbean and African appropriations of *The Tempest* is one of the most interesting early examples of this area of enquiry. It gives attention to the way in which texts are appropriated, re-interpreted, absorbed and re-imagined by marginalised communities in situations of colonial or post-colonial rule. Reacting to a view which places the colonial subject on the passive receiving end of the classic texts of an all powerful colonial regime, these critics have unearthed a hidden tradition of literary-cultural engagement which registers, not deferential acceptance, but a range of subversive, transgressive, even “outlandish” (Nixon 1987:577) practices of postcolonial ‘writing back’ and appropriation. More recent studies such as Stephanie Newell’s *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana* (2000) and Isabel Hofmeyr’s exploration of (mainly African) appropriations of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* in *The Portable Bunyan* (2004) both go beyond the narrow field of literary criticism ‘proper’ to consider a broader, more ephemeral, arena of literary-cultural public debate, discussion and interpretation. These studies also, interestingly, make a claim for a more expanded definition of ‘indigenous’ appropriation, and critical reception, which includes the possibility that indigenous responses to the privileged texts of a Western European canon might in fact be independent of, and even exceed, the traditional boundaries of what might be termed a strictly ‘postcolonial’ reaction.

While this kind of alternative appropriation of a range of literary-cultural texts is clearly an important aspect of the present project, I also move outside of a discussion of

the colonised writer-intellectual per se to consider a broader stratum of marginality which also includes the white (mainly middle-class) intellectual-activist who occupies a less prominent position in the dominant social order because of his or her commitment to a radical politics. In this sense, an alternative or resistant reading strategy, rather than articulating an anti-colonial reinterpretation of a privileged Western text, might take the form of a left-wing critique of the political and economic norms of the dominant social order.

The second main area of concern – and one which has close links with the discourse of criticism as traditionally defined – is a rich and wide-ranging public debate which centres on the place and significance of culture in the broader political and social sphere. In turning my attention to this important tradition of socio-cultural debate in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s, I pay particular attention to the ways in which the broad area encompassed by the designation ‘culture’ comes to figure as a significant site of socio-political engagement. As Raymond Williams argues, ‘culture’ in its modern senses emerged in the West as a response to a developing industrial society and the particular kinds of social relations and practices that this enormous socio-economic transition engendered. Defined at various times as “a state or habit of the mind”, or “the body of intellectual and moral activities”, or “a whole way of life” (1958:xviii), culture has always been a significant term in debates about social and political questions. In periods of heightened social catastrophe in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, it has been understood both as that which is under threat and that which will stave off further disaster. In the more radical traditions of the British Left, and in the now-discredited Stalinist traditions, cultural pursuits were seen as secondary to the struggle between classes, but were nevertheless held up as an important way in which people could be inducted into new ways of thinking and being. While the definitions of culture and the roles assigned to it have varied according to the distinctive constituencies which have sought to mobilize it in their interests, culture repeatedly surfaces as an important element in a long tradition of discussion which seeks answers to pressing social questions. The same is true in the South African case. Thus, for example, while Leavisites like Geoffrey Durrant and Christina van Heyningen made a claim for the privileged status of culture in relation to what they regarded as the inevitably compromised and contingent realm of direct political action, South African Communists, on the other hand, sought to harness culture as a ‘weapon’ in the broader struggle against oppression and discrimination.

In the many public discussions and debates which take place in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s, culture is mobilised for a variety of socio-political ends. One of the most influential examples in this regard is the notorious ‘culture as civilising’ discourse which provided such important ideological sustenance for the many liberal initiatives carried out amongst oppressed groups in South Africa from the early 1920s onwards. The discourse of English Studies itself, with its messianic claims for the role of Western ‘High Culture’ in a rapidly deteriorating social order, offers yet another influential version of these long-standing efforts of social co-option and control. The recognition that culture is very often implicated in the operations of oppressive rule is nothing new. As Edward Said observes in an interview with Tariq Ali, culture is always “hopelessly involved in politics” (Ali 2003), “inextricably enmeshed”, in Janet Batsleer’s words, “in the historical structures and power relations of class societies” (1985:4). This is, of course, also spectacularly the case in contexts of colonial rule. The site on which Western hegemony has repeatedly been demonstrated and enacted, culture is a powerful and complex tool of oppression, marginalisation and exclusion, an important part of the way in which the non-Western world has been disfigured, ‘exoticised’ and occluded, and one of the most effective ways in which existing relations of domination and subordination are rationalised and entrenched.

In this context, for those struggling to assert the counter-cultural discourses of a more militant anti-colonial or left-wing politics, culture plays an equally important role. For those on the Left, culture is a powerful weapon of struggle, a productive site of counter-hegemonic debate and resistance, an important politicising and educational tool, and a means of restoring dignity, inspiring solidarity and creating the conditions for a more egalitarian future. In contexts of colonial rule – as critics like Frantz Fanon have powerfully demonstrated – culture has been one of the primary sites of an emerging anti-colonial resistance. In other words, while particular forms of social dominance have historically been partly effected via the realm of culture, culture has also figured as an equally significant site of counter-hegemonic opposition and critique. For those on the wrong side of the colonial equation (negotiating a culture from which they have been irrevocably and painfully excluded) one expects that the encounter with the cultural realm (and the realm of Western ‘High Culture’ in particular) will be especially fraught. In this regard, it is interesting to note that while the cultural-political debates of white middle-class leftists tend to focus on the role of culture as a catalyst for radical social change, the more overt preoccupations of those South Africans classified as ‘non-

European' concern the more immediate questions of cultural 'identity', access and exclusion.

The socio-political conditions which led to a burgeoning of both leftist and anti-colonial resistance from the 1930s onwards in South Africa are well-known. On the international scene, world economic depression, the rise of Fascism, the Civil War in Spain, and a looming Second World War propelled many South Africans, both black and white, into more militant positions. Conditions in South Africa itself, of course, played a decisive role: this is the period in which an emerging generation of Western-educated, petit-bourgeois intellectuals and activists watched in horror as a marginally more benevolent Victorian liberalism gave way to the increasingly brutal exclusions of the proto-apartheid state. If the notorious Hertzog Bills of 1936 provided the most spectacular evidence both of the betrayal of liberal ideals and the inevitable drive towards full-scale apartheid, mass migration throughout the 1940s from rural areas to South African cities and towns played a central role in the development of an increasingly militant, mass-based anti-colonial resistance. In this regard, the inspiring examples of anti-colonial movements in India and the spirited defence of Ethiopia against a determined Italian invasion were eagerly seized upon as powerful examples of what a new spirit of outright challenge (rather than gentlemanly protest) might achieve. In general, the new political energies awakened by this turbulent period in South African and world history were reflected in an unprecedented popularity of socialist ideas, the growth of an influential left-wing movement as well as an increasingly forthright and outspoken opposition to colonial rule. In organisations like the All African Convention (AAC), the National Liberation League (NLL), the Non-European United Front (NEUF) and the slowly galvanising ANC, the largely accommodationist political tactics of a small petit-bourgeois black elite gradually gave way to the more inclusive strategies (which cut across both race and class identities) of an increasingly mass-based movement

The alternative intellectual traditions which I describe in this thesis are the direct result of this turbulent socio-political context. In some cases, these ideas take shape under the immediate stimulus of a growing leftist political movement. In other cases, they are the responses of a disillusioned black petit-bourgeois class which has decided to throw in its lot with the vast disenfranchised working class majority. Unlike the ostensibly 'neutral', 'objective' or 'non-partisan' stance of normative literary-cultural approaches in South Africa, then, this alternative cultural-political debate bears the explicit imprint of particular political philosophies, whether more obliquely expressed in terms of general

political orientation and affiliation, or more formally articulated in the specific agendas of particular organisations and groups. Here, political commitments range from the leftist-inclined socio-political analysis of the Communist Party (CPSA) and the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), for example, to the more explicitly African Nationalist orientations of the ANC Youth League. Forged in close proximity to oppositional political movements in South Africa, these alternative cultural-political traditions, as I will demonstrate, were also an essential part of liberation struggles themselves.

Part III

My examination of a hidden history of radical cultural-political debate in South Africa, as I have already suggested, relies in part on Habermas's influential notion of the bourgeois public sphere. A site of open and unrestricted public debate and association which is independent of both the state and the official economy, the public sphere functions as a kind of "theatre", as Nancy Fraser puts it, in which "political participation is enacted through the medium of talk" (1992:2). As an emerging forum for the expression of a hitherto non-existent 'public opinion', the eighteenth-century European bourgeois public sphere, as Habermas argues, began to take on an important socio-political function, serving increasingly as a public forum in which government policies could be subjected to the "rational-critical" scrutiny of an increasingly confident and articulate middle-class public (1999:51). While Habermas expresses reservations about the extent to which these appeals to public opinion were in fact politically effective, he nevertheless concludes that "[b]y the turn of the nineteenth century, the public's involvement in the critical debate of political issues had become organised to such an extent that in the role of permanent critical commentator it had definitively broken the exclusiveness of Parliament....Step by step, the absolutism of parliament had to retreat before [the] sovereignty of [public opinion]" (66).

Subsequent studies have questioned these optimistic claims. Drawing on a number of significant revisionist histories, Nancy Fraser, for example, makes the point that "despite the rhetoric of publicity and accessibility", the "'official' public sphere rested on, indeed was importantly constituted by, a significant number of exclusions" (1992:4), the most important of which were the exclusion of working-class citizens and women. In this sense, the public sphere functions not so much as an important site of anti-government critique and opposition but as one of the most effective ways of

establishing the kind of social consent upon which the continuing dominance of particular social groups depends. The ‘official’ bourgeois public sphere, in short, is deeply implicated in the reproduction of existing social relations. Rather than become trapped in the simplistic polarisation of the public sphere as either egalitarian ideal or site of domination and control, however, Fraser turns her attention (amongst other things) to an examination of the role of a host of multiple, *competing* public spheres which exist alongside, and mostly in conflict with, the official public sphere. “Subaltern counterpublics”, as Fraser defines them, are “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses so as to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” (1992:14). While the present study retains a sense of the overarching public sphere as a potential (if not always actualised) site of political participation, discussion and debate, the notion of a more fractured and unequal public sphere, one which is constituted by a number of competing, overlapping, often marginalised, “subaltern counterpublics” – some of which articulate a political perspective in opposition to both business and the state – offers a more useful way of approaching the particular intellectual and political traditions of an oppositional South African politics. In this sense, the project takes as its principle focus a complex web of interconnecting South African ‘counterpublics’ which articulate a political perspective in marked opposition to the ruling regime.

In seeking out a radical tradition of cultural-political debate in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s, I have cast the net very wide, including not only the more obvious examples of public debate and intellectual exchange in newspapers, journals and magazines, but also the more ephemeral and less accessible sites of public debate such as study groups, book clubs and debating societies. In this regard, I look mainly at the so-called ‘alternative’ South African press – by which is meant all non-commercial and anti-government publications which were directed predominantly but not exclusively towards a black reading public (Switzer 1997) – as well as other more informal sites of radical public discussion such as left-wing reading groups or debating societies.³ This exclusive focus on alternative ‘counterpublics’ in South Africa may appear to accept the misleading assumption that there is a direct correlation between an oppositional public sphere and radical ideas, and – in the rider to this argument – that conservative, business-owned or government-sponsored public events or media activities are necessarily the sites of a more conservative discourse. There are many examples which challenge this assumption: the case of Xhosa poet, Nontsitsi Mgqwetho, whose anti-government poetry

was a regular feature of the conservative mine-owned publication, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, is just one that comes to mind (Daymond et al 2003:176-179). My decision to focus mainly on alternative 'counterpublics' in South Africa arose from the need to give some parameters to a project which would otherwise have been too unwieldy to do justice to. Within the broad parameters of the oppositional public sphere in South Africa, I have also focused only on those publications which were written predominantly in English. Arising out of a similar need to establish appropriate boundaries for a large project, it is a decision which nevertheless may be seen to reinforce an inaccurate and misleading sense of the South African public sphere as it existed at the time. Again, this is a limitation of the project which can only be corrected by further research. A further constraint on the scope of this thesis relates to the exclusive focus on those (alternative) publications which made explicit reference to cultural concerns, either in the form of book, film or theatre reviews, critical articles or designated 'arts' and 'culture' sections. For this reason, otherwise fascinating publications such as *The Democrat* (irregular, April 1939-December 1949), *The Africanist* (1953-March 1969), and Ronal Segal's *Africa South* (October/December 1956-October/December 1961), which very little in the way of cultural debate, have been omitted.⁴

The effort to uncover a hidden tradition of radical cultural-political debate in South Africa inevitably hits its head against the unavoidable reality of mass illiteracy. A study which purports to be an examination of the South African 'public sphere', a study which concerns a history of lost or marginalized intellectual traditions, then, is in danger of misrepresenting the reality of South African experience. While I have tried to uncover some sense of the South African public sphere which does not involve the written word, the newspaper, magazine or journal nevertheless remains a central category of analysis, for the simple reason that these publications are so much easier to access. In this regard, the project is skewed towards an examination of the literate middle-class or petit-bourgeois South African subject. Much more difficult to retrieve are the cultural-political debates of those who fall outside these categories.

When it comes to the alternative press in South Africa, the existing archive is rich and plentiful. Despite the almost continual harassment by both South African mining companies and the state (particularly in the 1950s and 60s), most radical South African newspapers have been meticulously preserved. There are, of course, some publications which have fallen by the wayside, thus problematising any claims to offer a full and comprehensive account of the public sphere of the period. This is not a claim, in any

event, that I set out to make. When it comes to the recovery of more ephemeral public debates such as those which occurred in book clubs, debating societies, public lectures and so on, it has been possible to reconstruct a partial sense of these events through newspaper reports, public notices and interviews; however, this is an area of public debate and exchange in South Africa which remains largely inaccessible to the contemporary researcher.

Before I give more detailed attention to the many and varied ‘counter-public’ sites of oppositional discussion and debate in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s, it is worth making a brief detour into the ‘official’ public sphere itself. The muzzling of the press and the curtailment of free expression and association during the apartheid era needs little elaboration. What is perhaps less clearly understood are the more subtle kinds of repression, censorship and control of free public debate which characterised the pre-apartheid years. The most telling example of this kind of anti-democratic interference is the degree to which South African newspapers (the English daily press in particular) were subject to the control of the South African mining industry. That this was a well-known fact at the time is demonstrated in the first comprehensive history of the South African press, Lindsay Smith’s *Behind the Press in South Africa* which was published in 1946. Most English newspapers in South Africa, Smith argues, positioned themselves within the general ideological framework of bourgeois capitalism, and, while they may have been outspoken on other issues, went to great lengths to avoid criticising the mining industry. According to Smith, it was the general policy of at least one newspaper group for all news items bearing on the mining industry to be submitted to the scrutiny of the mining companies prior to their release in the press, and during the 1922 miners strike on the Rand, for example, no reports of strike action appeared in the English daily press until the events became too disruptive and too widespread to ignore. In addition, as Smith explains, most newspapers were under the monopolistic control of the Argus group, which also had controlling shares in the South African Press Association – the only news agency supplying news to the Union at the time. For another early twentieth-century commentator, G.H. Calpin, this resulted in a docile, uncritical press, which criticised the government with “its left hand”, and was unlikely to challenge the status quo: “It is not far from the truth – gold being the hinge, axle, and wheel of the South African economy, and the Argus group reflecting the opinion of the Chamber of Mines – that every newspaper in the country is Conservative” (1941:322). The controversial Cape Town periodical, *Trek*, in characteristically outspoken style, describes the English daily press as an “owned press,

the rigid and regimented voice of [its] masters” (28 August 1942: 9) and “a propaganda agency controlled by financiers in the interests of the gold mining trusts” (24 September 1943:11). While Smith acknowledges instances of independent, critical journalism in the English-language press, he nevertheless concludes that “this outspokenness [did] not cut across the line of policy that first and foremost shall be the interests of the gold-mining industry and the interests of the State as related to that industry” (1946:77). The only significant section of the daily press in vigorous opposition to the government of the day, he argues, were a number of smaller and less profitable Afrikaans newspapers, which acted as mouthpieces for Afrikaner Nationalism. Anti-British and vigorously opposed to South Africa’s participation in the war, they were nevertheless as dependent on the Argus-controlled South African Press Association as their English counterparts.

Despite the many overt and covert restrictions on free public discussion in South Africa during the 1940s and 50s, the period nevertheless stands out as a remarkable moment in the history of independent, oppositional public debate. Turning to the alternative press in particular, the years between 1930 and 1960 saw the emergence of a host of independent publications: never more than a smudge on the broader South African media landscape, they nevertheless articulated an important alternative view (Switzer and Switzer 1979; Johnson 1996; Tomaselli 1991; Switzer 1997). A significant growth in the independent media during this period also coincided with the emergence, from the late 1930s onwards, of an array of alternative political organisations and societies in South Africa, including such groups as the Left Book Club, the Bantu People’s Theatre, the Spartacus Club, the New Era Fellowship, the Liberal Study Group, the Pretoria People’s Theatre, the Orlando Study Group, the October/Peoples’ Club and the Lenin Club to name just some of the most prominent. The period with which this thesis is particularly concerned, therefore, is an especially important one in the history of ‘unofficial’ or oppositional public debate in South Africa.

In order to grasp something of the extraordinary achievement of the alternative press in South Africa during this period (particularly those publications directed towards African audiences) it is necessary to get some sense of the broader social context. As Switzer (1997) explains, government and big business responded to rising levels of social dissent in South Africa from the early 1920s onwards with the introduction of a number of highly successful commercial newspapers directed exclusively at a hitherto completely under-serviced African market. Newspapers like *Bantu World*, *Umteteli wa Bantu* and *Drum* – which fell under the new umbrella of Bantu Press (Pty) Ltd – sought not only to

define (and dictate) the contours of a more acceptable African politics, but also to take advantage of the enormous remunerative possibilities of a substantial emerging African market, both for newspapers themselves as well as the many products they advertised. The result of this move was an effective wiping out of the independent African press in South Africa during the period. Newspapers like the ANC-aligned *Abantu-Batho*, unable to compete with the lavish productions of the corporate media, were either swallowed up by larger publications and gradually stripped of their political concerns, or simply dissolved of their own accord. It is these conditions which make the continued survival of successful independent African newspapers like the Durban paper, *Inkundla ya Bantu* (April 1938-November 1951) and the Orlando newsheet, *The Voice of Africa* (September 1949-May/June 1950) all the more remarkable. On a much smaller scale, the various ANC Youth League publications such as the *African Lodestar* (1949-1950) and *The Africanist* (1953-March 1969) continued to find small but loyal audiences amongst those who supported the ANC. By far the most successful alternative publications during this period emerged from the Communist Party. These included (amongst others) its official organs, *Umsebenzi/The Worker* (1915-1938), *Umvikeli-Thebe/African Defender* (irregular 1936-1938) and *Inkululeko* (irregular, August 1939-May 1952), as well a string of successful and not so successful unofficial publications such as the *Guardian* and its various successor papers (1938-1962); the Durban-based left-wing publication, the *Call* (January 1940-April 1942); Ruth First's *Fighting Talk* (February 1942-February 1963); *Spark* (1952-1953); and the Johannesburg Congressite journal, *Liberation* (September 1953-December 1959). Looking further afield at those newspapers and journals which also articulated a militant anti-colonial politics but remained opposed to the ANC, *CATA* (September 1934-June 1956), *The Spark* (irregular, 1935-9), *Workers Voice* (irregular, 1944-1946), *The Torch* (February 1946-December 1963), *Discussion* (June 1951-December 1952), *The Citizen* (March 1956-May 1958) and *Ikhwezi Lomso* (July 1958-1960) provide further examples of a lively oppositional South African press. In the case of a more general South African readership, hungry for an alternative to the mine-owned capitalist dailies, the Western Cape-based weekly, *The Cape Standard* (May 1936-November 1947), the Cape Town periodical *Trek* (August 1939-April 1947) – and for a short time in the late 1930s, the *South African Opinion* (November 1934-August 1937) – Wulf Sachs's, *The Democrat*, and Ronald Segal's *Africa South* (in the late 1950s) also played an important role.

My enquiry into a hidden tradition of radical public debate in South Africa focuses in particular on the years between 1938 and 1960. 1938, as I have suggested, is a significant date both for the emergence of new forms of political protest in South Africa as well as for the development of a critical, counter-hegemonic or oppositional 'counterpublic sphere'. This important instance of oppositional public debate in South Africa continued well into the late 1950s. With the Suppression of Communism Act of June 1950, and the subsequent banning of all 'Communist' organisations and activities, however, the future of the oppositional 'counterpublic' sphere in South Africa looked increasingly bleak. Countrywide mass protests in the early 1960s were greeted with the imposition of a state of emergency. This was followed by a decision on the part of both the ANC and PAC to begin a campaign of violent, armed protest (*Umkhonto We Sizwe* and *Poqo*, armed wings of the ANC and the PAC, respectively were formally established in 1961). The South African government responded with a string of even more repressive measures: the Sabotage Act of June 1962 and the notorious '90 Day Act' (which allowed for 90 day detention without trial) meant that South African activists increasingly faced House Arrest, banning orders and even imprisonment (Saunders 1994). Many fled the country altogether. While some newspapers, such as the *Guardian* and *The Torch*, managed to survive into the early 1960s, these years effectively mark the end of this fascinating period in the history of oppositional public debate in South Africa.

In reconstructing a history of the South African 'counterpublic' sphere during this period, I have chosen to focus on particular instances of radical cultural-political debate in South Africa (the work of individuals such as Dora Taylor, *Trek* magazine; or the activities of the Left Book Club, for example) rather than constructing a single overarching chronology. This has allowed me to give close attention to the particular characteristics of what is an enormously varied intellectual field. In some cases, it has also arisen out of a need to position particular intellectual traditions in relation to the distinctive political organisations with which they were associated. Although there is a strong chronological emphasis in the individual chapters themselves, therefore, the overall effect of this kind of parallel historical organisation is one of overlap and repetition.

There are a number of public sphere activities which fall outside of the parameters of this study: here, University of Cape Town publication, *The Critic* (1932-1939), edited by Hugh Reyburn, the short-lived *Liberator* (Feb-March 1937), militant organ of the Cape-based National Liberation League edited by Jimmy la Guma, and the

New African (January 1962-July 1964), an English monthly edited by Randolph Vigne, are some of the more interesting examples which had to be omitted from the present study. Earlier publications such as the *Liberator* and *The Critic* are an important reminder that a radical cultural-political debate did not simply appear in 1938 but that there were interesting and significant earlier traditions which a more comprehensive study would have to include.

Finally, a note on the use of quotations: the individuals who contributed to the radical cultural-political debates of an alternative South African tradition come from a range of educational and class backgrounds; this complex South African socio-economic reality is inevitably reflected in the discourses themselves. In this regard, I have reproduced the quotations in exactly the form in which they originally appeared, including all stylistic variations and idiosyncrasies as well as spelling and grammatical errors.

Part IV

Chapter 1 begins with the discourse of criticism in university departments of English, focusing particularly on South African versions of the critical-cultural project associated with F.R. Leavis and the *Scrutiny* school. I have chosen to concentrate exclusively on a Leavisian cultural project in South Africa largely because its text-bound, formalist and pointedly apolitical critical methods form such a striking contrast to the much more politicised and overtly oppositional approach of an alternative South African discussion. Often required to give an account of itself, South African Leavisian discourse tended to be more theoretically self-aware than other contemporary approaches: in this regard, its many public statements and explanations also provide a rich source of material for examination and critique. As a significant competing cultural discourse, then, a Leavisian cultural project forms an important counterpoint against which an alternative South African cultural discourse can be read and understood.

To characterise a 1940s South African Leavisian criticism as the dominant or mainstream view in South Africa, however, would be to distort its early history. Beginning as an embattled minority position in the mid-1940s, it was only in the late 1950s that it came to occupy a position of authority in English Departments in South Africa. Notwithstanding the important differences between established historical or philological methods and those of an emergent 'practical criticism', I suggest that there is

an essential continuity – in terms of a general set of socio-cultural values and aims – between these two traditions which is difficult to ignore. What we see in the gradual emergence of a Leavisian approach in South Africa, as I hope to demonstrate, is not so much a rupture as a slight shift in orientation within an overall cultural and socio-political terrain which remains largely unchanged. In this sense, a narrow Leavisian cultural discourse in South Africa is emblematic of a broader institutional ‘atmosphere’ or emphasis, namely a noticeable unwillingness to engage with the politics of literary-cultural texts and a desire to preserve the aesthetic and political values of a privileged intellectual elite, which is in marked contrast to the much more politicised and egalitarian discourses of an alternative South African tradition. Without reducing it to the part of convenient ‘straw man’, a Leavisian English Studies is nevertheless held up as a crucial critical measure against which the significance of an alternative South African debate can be properly understood.

The thesis begins with a detailed case study of two well-known South African Leavisites, Christina van Heyningen and Geoffrey Durrant. Influential and charismatic teachers of English in South Africa, both van Heyningen and Durrant played a central role in the implementation of the new techniques of ‘practical criticism’ in South African universities from the late 1940s onwards. Both enthusiastic champions of an emerging Leavisian cultural project in South Africa, they were also the only South African academics to engage at some length with the challenge posed by an alternative South African debate. In exploring the work of these two South African academics, the chapter seeks to give a sense – albeit partial – of the dominant concerns, protocols and practices of a more mainstream literary-cultural discussion.

In chapter 2, I extend and complicate the previous examination of more mainstream or institutionalised cultural discourses in South Africa by looking at the cultural-political debates of two successful, independent South African publications, namely *The South African Opinion* and *Trek*. Both these publications (to a greater or lesser extent) provided a forum for a more conservative or mainstream literary-cultural discussion as well as that of a more radical or leftist approach. In this sense, these publications provide a rare opportunity to observe the way in which a more conservative South African critical tradition engaged with the forthright arguments of a Marxist or leftist approach. This more politicised literary-criticism is to be found mainly in the Cape Town periodical *Trek* which was edited in the 1940s by the maverick Afrikaans ex-Western Cape farmer Jacques Malan. Here was an instance of critical public debate over

cultural and social questions which is unsurpassed in South African cultural history to date. In *The South African Opinion*, on the other hand, what we observe is the gradual displacement of a radical cultural-political discussion by the resolutely apolitical discourses of a more orthodox approach. In this sense, the history of both these South African periodicals is emblematic of a disturbing tendency in South African public life, namely the gradual closing down of the forums available for independent, critical discussion in the South African public sphere. *Trek* was one of the few publications in South Africa which encouraged radical cultural-political debate. It re-emerged in the early 1950s (an amalgamation of the conservative *S.A. Opinion* and the previous *Trek*) as an exclusively literary-cultural journal which studiously avoids any direct engagement with contemporary socio-political concerns.

In chapter 3, I begin to give detailed attention to an alternative cultural-political debate in South Africa which began to take shape from the 1930s onwards. What concerns me particularly in this chapter is the work of Scottish immigrant Dora Taylor. Taylor was schooled in the literary-cultural conventions of a much more conservative tradition. However, an intimate involvement with early left-wing groups in South Africa as well as a close personal association with the leaders of prominent liberation organisations like the Non-European Unity Movement led her to take up a radically different perspective on culture and its place in the broader social environment. The work of this journalist, literary critic and writer is fascinating for a number of reasons. First, it forms part of a significant, but barely recognised tradition of radical cultural discourse in South Africa which took its cue from classical Marxist traditions. In this regard, as a regular feature writer and literary reviewer for *Trek* magazine, Taylor was one of the first South African writers to introduce a Marxist perspective into the discussion of literary and cultural questions in South Africa in the 1940s, thereby substantially shifting the grounds of the contemporary debate, and offering a fundamental challenge to the assumptions and aims of the dominant discourse of English Studies. A materialist perspective on literature and culture in the service of an emancipatory politics offered a serious and compelling alternative to the idealising tendencies and conservative social agendas of more normative literary-critical approaches. It also allowed for a rare public discussion of, and critical engagement with, South African politics and society via the medium of a radical literary criticism. The desire to foster critical debate on pressing social questions through the analysis of literary texts was part of a broader concern with teaching a critical method, and thereby encouraging an independent, oppositional

analysis of South African society based on a Marxist perspective. With this in mind, Taylor sought to publicise her ideas as widely as possible in the circles of what was rapidly gaining ground as one of the most influential political and intellectual movements in the Western Cape, namely the various groups associated with the Non-European Unity Movement.

Chapter 4 focuses on the intellectual traditions of the Non-European Unity Movement and associated (as well as break-away) groups. Focussing in particular on publications such as *The Torch*, *The Educational Journal* and *The Citizen* as well as discussion groups like the New Era Fellowship and the Progressive Forum, this chapter sheds some light on the broader intellectual and political milieu of which Taylor's work was an essential part. It also begins to explore some of the distinctive cultural-political preoccupations of black South Africans during the period. These discussions begin with the premise that culture can be a powerful force in contesting the status quo. The more overt emphasis in terms of cultural strategy, however, has less to do with the reading of particular texts, and much more to do with drawing attention to questions of cultural identity, access and exclusion. An issue of overwhelming concern to Unity Movement intellectuals in this regard is the spurious colonialist equation between the acquisition of Western 'cultural capital' and the attainment of political and economic rights. An on-going contestation of the 'cult of respectability' is not only an attack on the more conservative political agendas of an established black leadership, but is also a powerful repudiation of a hegemonic colonialist 'truth'. In drawing attention to the social function of culture in contexts of colonial and semi-colonial rule – particularly its role in reproducing and supporting damaging social hierarchies – Unity Movement intellectuals make an important contribution to a broader anti-colonial debate. In contrast to the inevitably obsequious, and ultimately futile, attempts to win political favour through the attainment of a kind of 'civilised respectability', Unity Movement intellectuals posit a radical education, one which consistently interrogates the conventional operations and assumptions of hegemonic rule. At the heart of this 'hermeneutics of suspicion' is a radical cultural practice, one which foregrounds material contexts, and interrogates the hegemonic separation of 'politics' and 'culture'. In this sense, it forms an important part of a more wide-ranging and multi-pronged practical offensive against the South African state.

In chapter 5, I give attention to the cultural-political debates of the Communist Party and associated groups in the period 1937 to 1960. This is a period in which the

Communist Party (CPSA) enjoyed perhaps its greatest success; it is also a period which coincides with the life of the *Guardian* newspaper, unofficial organ of the CPSA. The *Guardian* forms a central focus in this chapter. It was a crucial site of cultural-political debate for Communists and fellow-travellers in South Africa during the period, and also served as a platform for the many radical clubs and societies which formed part of South Africa's lively left-wing scene. These include the ephemeral and difficult-to-access sites of radical public discussion and debate in groups such as the Left Book Club, the People's Club and the Jewish Workers' Club as well as the Pretoria People's Theatre and the Bantu People's Theatre.

In exploring some of the cultural preoccupations and agendas of this influential political tradition, one is immediately confronted with the monolithic stereotype of Stalinist-style regimentation and prescription in the cultural sphere. An important aim of this chapter, therefore, is to look beyond the stereotypes to consider the implications of specific examples. There are many cases in which the routine gestures of a Stalinist cultural project are uncritically repeated in the South African context. The close exploration of the cultural-political debates of the Communist Party, however, reveals not just the dutiful or rigid application of pre-existing cultural formulas but a lively cultural debate which engages thoughtfully and suggestively with contemporary cultural concerns. Like the radical intellectual traditions of the NEUM, this is a cultural discourse which engages explicitly with political and material issues. This emphasis speaks to the founding assumption that culture is inherently ideological: either it supports existing socio-political hierarchies, or it can serve as an additional ideological 'front' in the struggle against established class and race oppressions. This more pragmatic emphasis on culture as a political tool amongst South African Communists during this period meant that intellectual effort was directed less at the elaboration of Marxist critical theory as at developing the conditions for a more effective political resistance. Like the writer-intellectuals of the NEUM, South African Communists made a conscious effort to challenge the race and class-based hierarchies of the ruling social order with a more democratic and inclusive cultural practice which aimed to build on the creative and intellectual capacities of its many contributors rather than imposing a pre-defined cultural norm.

In chapter 6, I turn to a number of publications associated with the 1950s Congress movement in South Africa, drawing particular attention, once again, to a continuing legacy of radical cultural-political debate which has largely been obscured

from the dominant literary-cultural record. In considering *Guardian* successor newspapers such as *The Clarion*, *People's World*, *Advance* and *New Age* as well as the pro-Communist paper, *Fighting Talk*, I continue the investigation begun in chapter 5 of the cultural-political discourses of the Communist Party. The cultural-political debates of the Congress Period continue many of the emphases and preoccupations of the previous two decades. Under the impact of the Congress Alliance, however, the nature of the debate shifts slightly to include a consideration of what in some ways amounts to a new intellectual field, namely an engagement with the question of what Mphahlele terms “cultural cross-currents” (*Fighting Talk* February 1960:11), the shifting, ambiguous and deeply hybridised spaces of inter-cultural exchange. Amongst black South African Communists – many of whom achieve a greater presence in pro-Communist publications during this period – there is a greater emphasis not only on recognising the existence of an African literary canon, but also on contesting on-going racist stereotyping and historical distortion in the dominant culture.

This chapter also considers the cultural debates of *The Voice*, a lively township newspaper which had some affinities with the political perspectives of the All African Convention and the NEUM. African intellectuals writing for *The Voice* not only contested the racist myths of the dominant culture; they also built much of their cultural-political project on a strong repudiation of government efforts to lock Africans into the marginalized cultural identities of a reified ‘tribal’ or ethnic identity. In response, *Voice* critics such as Es'kia Mphahlele and Khabi Mngoma articulated a forthright African modernity, and contested a painful legacy of cultural and social exclusion with a powerful claim to a ‘world’ cultural inheritance.

Notes:

¹ I omit the term ‘gender’ from this discussion since a consciousness of gender discrimination and inequality is largely absent from the traditions I describe in this thesis. The reasons for this absence are beyond the scope of the present discussion.

² Johnson’s study (1996) makes some attempt to incorporate more marginal examples of Shakespeare reception in South Africa.

³ For this reason, I have omitted all examples of the commercial press in South Africa as well as those newspapers – like *The Natal Witness* for example – which may have been independent but did not articulate an overtly radical position.

⁴ A.C. Jordan’s well-known series on African literature published in *Africa South* between 1958 and 1960 is the single notable exception.

English Studies in South Africa: Democracy and Culture on the Precipice

This chapter begins with an examination of the discourse of criticism in South African universities during the period 1940 to 1960, concentrating in particular on South African deployments of the critical-cultural project associated with F.R. Leavis and the *Scrutiny* school. One of the main purposes of this chapter is to provide a sense of the mainstream or hegemonic tradition of cultural-political debate in South Africa against which to interpret the alternative preoccupations of a more radical minority discussion. The exercise of defining a 'hegemonic' or 'institutional' position is, of course, fraught with difficulty. English Studies in South Africa is not easily reducible to a single, all-embracing definition. In addition, the identity of English Studies in South Africa in the 1940s was the subject of substantial debate as a newly-converted vanguard of enthusiastic South African Leavisites began to assert the value of 'practical criticism' over more traditional approaches. In this context, it was practical criticism itself which occupied the minority position of embattled outsider in relation to the more firmly-entrenched historical and philological approaches. In setting up a South African Leavisian cultural project as the main 'antagonist' against which to read the existing alternatives, then, I am in danger of distorting the historical record.

There are a number of reasons why, despite these difficulties, I persist in locating a South African Leavisian cultural project as part of a hegemonic position. As a significant and increasingly prominent 'alternative' or 'oppositional' discourse in the mid-1940s, this not-quite-institutionalised approach nevertheless enjoyed a measure of institutional and social sanction which was simply not available to those outside the university. In the first place, then, the terms 'oppositional' and 'alternative' do not apply in exactly the same way. Even more important, while I make every effort not to overlook its early identity as a challenging, innovative and iconoclastic approach, I also make the claim that there is a considerable overlap – in terms of shared political and cultural values – between a South African Leavisian approach and those which it sought to displace which makes it impossible to draw a clear line between these two traditions. In this

regard, I make a case not so much for a Leavisian exceptionalism as a much more fundamental continuity. In both these senses, then, an embattled Leavisian alternative is much more closely aligned with the dominant cultural discourse than it is with those on the 'outside'. Finally, it is also a position, which within a few years would inevitably displace the older methods as the dominant critical approach in South African universities. A hegemonic position-in-the-making, it is the direction in which English Studies would eventually move.

This chapter sets out to explore the nature of this discourse, paying particular attention to its implications for a specifically South African context. In order to provide a focus for this wide-ranging tradition, I have chosen to concentrate on the work of Christina van Heyningen and Geoffrey Durrant. This more or less exclusive focus calls for some justification. Both Durrant and Van Heyningen were at the forefront of the Leavisian assault on conventional English pedagogy in South Africa, and played a significant role in establishing and promoting 'practical criticism' in South African universities from the mid-1940s onwards. They were both charismatic and respected teachers, and their critical interventions made a lasting impact on English Studies in this country. Notwithstanding a strong commitment to the 'words on the page', van Heyningen and Durrant also had a very highly developed sense of their own political and social responsibilities, and as public intellectuals, took their literary preoccupations beyond the classroom into the public arena, engaging with many of the key cultural and political debates of the period. Finally, as regular contributors to the popular Cape Town periodical, *Trek*, they are also two of the only South African academics to actively engage with the more radical cultural-political debates which form the focus of the rest of this thesis.

English Departments in South Africa in the 1940s, as I have said, began to feel the effects of a new Cambridge-educated vanguard which challenged established historical and philological approaches to English pedagogy, and argued for the greater social necessity of the critical and cultural project which was pioneered by F.R. Leavis and the Scrutiny school.¹ Despite substantial opposition and many protracted debates, this critical project, which poured scorn on a range of sacred English literary cows (the importance of literary biography and Old English, to name just two) would soon become the dominant critical discourse in South African English Departments.² The mid 1980s saw a number of timely and well-delivered blows to many of its fundamental assumptions: the limits of its liberal humanism; its narrow 'tyranny of the text'; its notion

of a universal and timeless aesthetic order; its Eurocentrism; its appeals to ‘common sense’ and ‘human nature’; its condescension towards popular culture; and, perhaps worst of all, its complicity in South Africa’s racial-capitalism. Nevertheless, as Michael Vaughan (1984) reminds us, the original Leavisian attack on established academic practice in South Africa was a fruitful and necessary intervention in its day. In comparison to the rather moribund critical practice of the mid-1980s, he argues,

[t]he early days of ‘practical criticism’ were at least associated with the exercising of some fresh and iconoclastic critical energies (for example, Leavis’s ‘demotion’ of Milton, Spenser and others; *Scrutiny*’s assault on late-Romantic aesthetics, and upon the ponderous historicist scholarship of the academic establishment); with the acclamation of the work of developing and highly controversial writers, disdained by the powers of orthodoxy; and with a momentarily influential redrawing of the dominant literary map. (41)

Positioned ultimately in the service of a conservative – in Vaughan’s assessment “mistaken” – intellectual project which drew its logic from the threat posed to ‘minority culture’ from an ever-expanding ‘mass civilisation’, it was nevertheless a “cultural project of great enterprise, cogency and boldness” (41), which advocated a much-needed return to the practice of close reading, and engaged with a wide range of literary-cultural forms.

A useful departure point for a discussion of this influential cultural project in South Africa are the conferences and symposia at which these critical ideals were first tested, debated and defended.³ Here it is important to note, in the first instance, that it was precisely those academics who were most in tune with the specifics of the South African context in which they taught who first saw the value of the new critical approach. As Christopher Doherty points out, one of the reasons for the tremendous success of practical criticism in English Departments in South Africa at the time was that it took into account the needs of South African students who lacked the necessary cultural references which were commonplace to their British counterparts (1989:105). In other words, as Doherty argues, the rapid rise of ‘practical criticism’ in South African universities had less to do with the incursion of new class elements into the academy, or the increasing professionalisation of the discipline itself (as was the case in England), and much more to do with the fact of its strong pedagogic value in a context in which English culture remained remote from the everyday experiences of ordinary South African students. (1989:101). The problem of cultural and educational ‘unpreparedness’ was most acute amongst Afrikaans and African students, and therefore it was not surprising that alongside its main champions, Geoffrey Durrant, Christina van Heyningen and Alan

Warner, it was those who worked with second-language speakers of English who quickly seized on its usefulness as a teaching tool.

The second and more far-reaching point has to do with the nature of the debate itself. Here I would argue that, while there are certainly important surface differences between the two opposing critical schools in English Departments during the period, they nevertheless form part of a single intellectual and discursive tradition, differing only in the methods they chose to advance their fundamentally similar socio-cultural aims. Similarities at the level of style are perhaps easy to grant given that most South African academics and scholars had close ties with England (or Scotland), either having grown up in Britain, or having pursued post-graduate studies at one of the British universities. There is nevertheless a congruence that goes deeper than mere surface performance. However heated the discussion, however 'embattled', 'oppositional' and 'pioneering' the methods of the new critical vanguard, there is a degree of uniformity in relation to an underlying set of cultural values and broad social goals which is difficult to ignore. In the most obvious sense, this is an in-house disagreement which would have been completely incomprehensible to a (cultural) outsider who happened to stumble upon one of these discussions. Perhaps even more striking in the context of English Studies teaching in the present is the ease with which all these academics assume a position of cultural and intellectual authority in their communities. Imbued with a strong sense of social and moral responsibility, their socio-cultural endeavours are carried out with all the confidence and unconscious privilege of an enlightened clerisy.

Disagreement and discussion notwithstanding, a point upon which everyone was in complete agreement was the pedagogic and social necessity of inculcating a strong sense of 'literary values' in South African students. Repeatedly cited and appealed to, the term itself was seldom defined. If nothing else, the fact that conference participants did not find it necessary to give substance to one of their most central literary terms is in itself strong evidence of a shared socio-cultural ethos. The fundamental assumption to which everyone conceded was the importance of students' apprehension and understanding of the great spiritual 'truths' of the English literary heritage. If there were differences between the two schools of thought, it was more in the manner in which this particular complex of literary-cultural values could be most effectively disseminated. Anxious to preserve a more 'spiritual' approach to the apprehension of literary texts, the historicist bloc was wary of a critical approach which relied too heavily on 'method' and 'science': the process of literary appreciation and understanding, on more than one occasion, was

likened to a religious experience, demanding “faith” and the secure ordering of “ritual” (Davis 1949:6). Drawing on a familiar cultural reference, Prof. Peter Haworth of Rhodes University College, in another example, was concerned that “murderous dissection” would lead to a lack of reverence for literary texts which would compromise the humanist ideal of literary studies:

I fully appreciate the special difficulties which confront us in the teaching of English in South Africa, but to encourage a captious and sceptical frame of mind, in our dealings with young and inexperienced students, may have positively dangerous results. An overdose of Practical Criticism may impair and even destroy his aesthetic faculties for the rest of his life. (1949:3)

Similarly, Prof. W.S. Mackie (who stood for a version of the more traditional approaches) emphasised that the inculcation of “a tolerant sense of literary values” should be achieved “without the use of forcing methods” (1949:4). Students should be led, he suggested, “without any authoritative driving, to the exercise of independent and responsible judgement”. This argument sounds very similar to a Leavisian position. In Mackie’s view, this aim was best achieved through the careful study of historical context:

What is often loosely termed the background, and put into English curricula only as a sort of pious flourish, should be given an importance at least equal to that of language or literature. [The student] should be expected to make a worthwhile study of the political but still more of the social and economic history of his period. The currents and cross-currents of the thought of the age, its scholarship and its science, its art and music, its attitude towards or treatment of the problems of human society and human life, should be an essential field of study. (1946:6)

Another reason why South African historicists were reluctant to abandon the study of history (and Old English) was that it provided rigour to a discipline which would otherwise be in danger, as Mackie put it, of degenerating into “facile journalism”, increasingly susceptible to the embarrassing appellation of the “soft option” (1946:5). Mackie is unusual in his insistence on the study of socio-economic conditions. For many other English lecturers, history meant *English literary history*, which must increasingly be supplied in the (understandable) absence of this knowledge amongst South African students

Whilst still holding on to the importance of historical knowledge, academics like Geoffrey Durrant, Christina van Heyningen and Alan Warner pressed for a more ‘direct’ approach. While the ‘historicists’ argued that texts “cannot be studied in a vacuum” (Davies 1949a:17), the practical critics were convinced that the spiritual and humane messages of ‘Great Literature’ would still communicate themselves in the absence of this kind of information. As Alan Warner put it: “[b]ackground is important, but you do not

get to the centre of the poem that way...detailed knowledge is extremely helpful but the texture of the verse itself read closely gives a kind of realisation which cannot be had except in poetry” (1949:18). Geoffrey Durrant makes a similar point in his response to Guy Butler’s argument that “a poem grows out of a man who is rooted in a particular time”. (1949:19):

The poem is autonomous. Poets can communicate what they have to say anonymously.... Poetry is not always dependent on place and time and if we make it so, that takes us away from poetic study....Poetry read critically mirrors the humane culture of the Western world. Milton, for example, is the focus of many streams. We may feel that it is necessary therefore to begin with lectures on background, but after that we find they need Latin and classical mythology. But we can’t teach them everything. And Milton’s humanity comes through in spite of their ignorance. At crucial points help them along, but the poetry comes through because the poem is so highly organised internally, that although it has a link with the outside world, it has an internal wholeness of its own. (1949:19)

Another area of shared concern, and one that speaks eloquently to the particular social and cultural goals which lie behind their respective literary-cultural projects, is the overt preoccupation in both critical camps with deteriorating standards of pronunciation and language use amongst South African students. Of central importance to a classic Leavisian view (Durrant’s connection between language and ‘right-thinking’ is apposite here), it was also a concern of those advocates of a more traditional approach. Prof. Mackie’s concerns with the “misshapen sounds and slovenly assimilations” (1946:3) of South African students, and Prof. Hopwood’s argument that “the fight for English includes also the fight for English language and pronunciation” (1949:61) are just two examples of a strong preoccupation with the preservation of a particular set of social and cultural norms which was shared by South African Leavisites and historicists alike.

Despite differences of approach and emphasis, then, South African Leavisites shared a great deal in common with the advocates of more traditional approaches. Both were anxious about the need to communicate the spiritual values of a humane literary tradition: they differed only in the methods they adopted and in the urgency with which they approached the task. Academics like Durrant and van Heyningen were inspired by the apocalyptic social vision of a Leavisian socio-cultural view and sought to put literature and criticism to practical use. Although they focused exclusively on the literary text, they were paradoxically more conscious than their historically or philologically-minded colleagues of a society beyond the text. The strong impulse behind this gesture, I would argue, was a desire to defend the very world which the historical scholars were naively taking for granted. More aware of a pervasive commercial culture and

threatening new political ideologies, South African Leavisites were also more mindful than a previous generation of scholars of a world in which 'English' and 'good' values were increasingly under threat.

In attempting to make sense of some of the urgent socio-political concerns which animate the Leavisian cultural project in South Africa during the period, it has been useful to situate it within the broader context of the influential European intellectual tradition which Francis Mulhern has brought together under the label 'Kulturkritik'. In this sense, a South African Leavisian criticism emerges very distinctly, not as an isolated or idiosyncratic phenomenon, but rather as the particular expression of a much broader contemporary response, albeit with its own peculiar local inflections. An apocalyptic sense of modern 'mass society' on the part of a privileged elite, and a desire to return to the threatened values of an increasingly marginalised critical minority are some of the key characteristics of this influential socio-cultural discourse. According to Mulhern, the late eighteenth-century discourse of 'Kulturkritik', in its classic European form, is a "critical, normally negative discourse on the emerging symbolic universe of capitalism, democracy and enlightenment" (2000:xvi). Including such thinkers as Thomas Mann, Julian Benda, Karl Manheim and José Ortega, its counterpart tradition in England, Mulhern suggests, "is the subject of Raymond Williams's classic study *Culture and Society*" (2000: xvi), with the work of F.R. Leavis standing out as one of its more influential, cogent and highly-developed examples. If the founding moment of English 'Kulturkritik' occurred in Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, Mulhern suggests, its European counterpart can be traced back via Coleridge to the German Romantic tradition.

In the first half of the twentieth century, this influential discourse received new vigour as a whole new array of social and political problems presented themselves in the tumultuous inter-war period. The failure of democracies, threats to liberalism, the rise of Fascism, the decline of traditional values, a devastating economic slump, the challenge of organised labour, and the rise of commercial culture were all spectacular signs of deepening social crisis and deterioration.⁴ According to Mulhern, within the broad (and, needless to say heterogeneous) discourse of 'Kulturkritik', the prevailing social reality is imagined in the apocalyptic terms of a threatened cultural minority surrounded by an emerging mass civilisation. At risk "was the future of culture in the epoch of modernity, whose culminating feature, now manifest, was the rise of the masses, the distinctive life-form of civilisation" (2000:4). At the root of this ideology is the loss of stable hierarchies

and ancient authority structures as a result of the gradual expansion of the franchise to include previously marginalised groups such as women and the working classes. For many, what it necessitated was the strategic intervention of a critical minority, now increasingly isolated from the centres of power. I do not wish to explore some of the more far-reaching implications (or criticisms) of Mulhern's argument here.⁵ I make use of the term in the context of this discussion in order to make better sense of a particular South African socio-cultural project which, in its cultural elitism, its alarmist social prognoses, and its elevation of the realm of culture over the realm of practical political action repeats many of the preoccupations of a much broader contemporary response. In this instance, anxieties about the loss of social power occasioned by the ever-widening gap between 'culture' and 'civilisation' are registered in the form of vanguard tactics, specifically the importation of the methods of 'practical criticism' into South African university departments of English.

Christina van Heyningen: A Common Humanity

Christina van Heyningen is an exemplary figure in the South African Leavisian tradition. She articulated a critical-cultural project in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s which is intimately connected with its dominant perceptual schemes; she was also eager to take up, adapt and develop its spiritual and socio-cultural lessons for a completely new set of South African conditions. In this regard, van Heyningen's South African cultural project is matched, in moral seriousness and intellectual commitment, only by that of Leavis himself. The daughter of an English mother and an Afrikaans father, Christina van Heyningen was born in one of Milner's notorious concentration camps in 1900. She attended schools in the Orange Free State, and studied at the University of Stellenbosch where she received a Masters Degree in English Literature. Her excellent results were rewarded with an Abe Bailey Scholarship which enabled her to continue her studies at Somerville College, Oxford. She was awarded a degree in English in 1926. After spending a short time as a school teacher both in the Free State, and in what was then known as Rhodesia, she moved to Bloemfontein to take up a post as lecturer in the Department of Education at Grey University College. In 1932, she became Senior Lecturer in English at Stellenbosch University. She joined the staff of the University of the Witerwatersrand English Department in 1947, and left in 1955 to become Professor of English at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg where she was awarded a D.Litt. She is remembered by former pupils as a principled, charismatic, at times intimidating

teacher. Her teaching was motivated by an unshakeable belief in the value of a personal experience of the classics of English Literature. She published book reviews and critical articles in a number of South African journals and periodicals including, *Trek*, *Vandag Ons Eie Boek*, *Standpunte*, and *Theoria*. She completed a number of textbooks on English language and expression, and is remembered, particularly, for her work on Samuel Richardson, John Milton, and the South African playwright H.W.D. Manson. Along with Geoffrey Durrant – with whom she enjoyed a lifelong friendship – she was a key figure in the implementation of the techniques of practical criticism in South African English Departments in the 1940s and 1950s.⁶

Turning in the first place to van Heyningen's politics, it is clear that one of her most consistent and deeply-held principles was an opposition to totalitarianism and oppression of any kind. In the early years of the Second World War, for example, van Heyningen was particularly troubled by the support shown by many members of the Afrikaans community for Nazi Germany. Fiercely opposed to all forms of ideological and political control, she identified with the values of democracy and individual freedom, and devoted considerable time and energy to their defence. These commitments are best summarised in her response to the enormous growth of pro-Nazi ideas and sympathies in South Africa in the early 1940s. In 1941, she published a petition in the *Cape Argus* which was signed by eighteen other colleagues at the University of Stellenbosch. The petition, which was also published in the *Sunday Times*, *The Sun* and *The Star*, was written in protest against “the slavish imitation of foreign methods of ideological warfare, blind prejudices and bitter intolerance” amongst the Afrikaans-speaking community (*Cape Argus* 15 April 1941:5). It argued for the need to protect “personal freedom” and autonomy, and rejected excessive state intervention. It also gave an important place to the role of education and the training of critical thinking:

Being a student means, in the first place, studying, acquiring knowledge, for the purpose of translating his knowledge into deeds later on in life. A student who does not study will be a man who does not know, and such an ignorant person, is of course, the best subject of a totalitarian state. (*Cape Argus* 15 April 1941:5)

This commitment extended to the post-war period when as a founder member of the Johannesburg Education League – an organisation established to combat government indoctrination in education – van Heyningen resisted attempts by the Institute of Christian-Nationalist Education to enforce religious and cultural instruction in schools. Notwithstanding her commitment to active political involvement, she retained a faith in the inevitable spread of liberal ideas. Responding to a demand by the University of Cape

Town's SRC in 1948 that a unilateral decision be made on the question of whether or not Africans should be allowed to participate in the social and sporting life of the university, she criticises UCT for "not lett[ing] sleeping dogs lie", arguing instead that "if nothing more is said on the question, non-Europeans will be accepted as equals in those places that are liberal enough not to mind, and the letter of the law will be carried out in the illiberal places, and that in this way liberal ideas will gradually gain ground" (Letter to Nell Marquard, 19 July 1948).⁷

Always an independent thinker, Van Heyningen formulated her critical position in relation to Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, Q.D. Leavis, and Denys Thompson. She did not always agree with individual contributors, but the assumptions of the *Scrutiny* school remained an influential critical touchstone. She owed a principal intellectual debt to F.R. Leavis with whom she corresponded on a number of occasions. Passing references to "the triviality and debasement of our time", the "meanness of modern life, the squalor of promiscuous love, of the greatness gone from England, and London's glory faded" (*Trek* 13 July 1945:16) bear the familiar signs of a *Scrutiny* nostalgia for the values of 'Old England'. For van Heyningen, all that remains of this heroic past is a sense of spiritual unease, which "is the one sign left of man's nobility, the neglected stirring in him of a forgotten idea of manhood, of a harder, but a finer and more victorious past" (13 July 1945:16). This nostalgia for a more 'virile' bygone age is coupled with an equally familiar pessimism about the spiritual emptiness and crass materialism of a degraded commercial culture. In an unpublished review of the 1946 Hollywood thriller, *The Postman always Rings Twice*, for example, van Heyningen inquires, "[i]s it Democracy that has brought us to this gutter art, where neither beauty, nor grace, nor brains, nor talent, nor sense, nor affection, nor loyalty, nor honour, nor anything is admired anymore, except what? a desire to get on in business, and a carnal attraction" (Christina van Heyningen Collection STP2/2/1).

Given these concerns, it is not surprising that the question which forms an abiding point of reference in all her criticism is the one to which Matthew Arnold devoted such energy: "the problem of how to prevent the world from being engulfed by Philistinism" (*Trek* 19 December 1940:7). Interestingly, however, when van Heyningen uses this term, it is not in the sense of a lack of culture or 'poor taste'. Instead, in keeping with the overriding moral overtones of her work more generally, she uses the term as a shorthand for a callous and inhuman response to one's fellow human beings. For van Heyningen, the most obvious indication of this kind of spiritual and moral bankruptcy is to be found in

the ever-increasing influence of the values of an exploitative mass culture, and the rise of Fascist political ideologies. Van Heyningen's equation of 'philistinism' and Nazism, then, is a significant modification of the *Scrutiny* analysis. As she puts it, "[i]n fighting the Nazis we are fighting not only oppression and cruelty but also the ignorance of, and contempt for all that is most valuable in the human spirit that we call Philistinism" (*Trek* 19 December 1940:7). The strong sense of moral decay to which her work responds, therefore, derives from two sources: the *Scrutiny* analysis of a "spiritually starved" (Christina van Heyningen Collection STP2/2/1) modern, industrialising world, emptied of value by an unstoppable commercial ethos and a degraded "gutter art"; and a more specific and immediate political danger, the threats to democracy and individual freedom posed by totalitarian political systems.

Van Heyningen's critical-cultural project in South Africa in the 1940s rested on two main assumptions: first, a belief in the moral authority and the humanising potential of 'Great Art'; and second, a conviction that modern culture and politics represent a potential threat to the moral order on which civil society depends. Although her literary criticism makes few explicit references to the pursuit of democratic ideals, the key assumption which informs her critical practice is that culture provides the spiritual and moral base essential to the creation of a more humane social order. In this, she echoes the central Leavisian premise that the reading of Great Literature provides the basis for a healthy political life. Van Heyningen's faith in the moral benefits of Western High Culture rests on a particular view of the artist's social role. The artist, she argues, has a primary "duty of giving direction", in the process disclosing the universal moral order in his or her work. Here, she assumes "what in most ages has been thought self-evident truth: that life and art are both in their very nature and essence subject to the operation of absolute moral laws" (*Trek* 19 April 1946:17). In her characteristically earnest style, she is critical of what she regards as the modern tendency to make light of the problem of 'good' and 'evil', and "this in 1945, when, one would have thought evil had been thrown into sharp relief with a brilliance as harsh as if modern history were Allegory instead of Life!" (17). Macbeth himself, she argues, understands the lie of the witch's claim that "fair is foul, and foul is fair":

That foul is not *fair* his soul knew in its unknown depths, and the knowledge wrecked his nerve, and turned him into the insatiable bloody tyrant he became....To Shakespeare good and evil were not dead, nor can I think of any great writer who has not accepted the responsibility, explicitly or implicitly, of choosing between them, and who has not made the affirmation of values his chief right and function as an artist. (*Trek* 19 April 1946:17)⁸

For the artist, the duty of giving moral direction should not be shirked. It requires the “annihilation of vanity, of self-pity, of self.... This cannot be done by abstraction, nor without the most intense and passionate imaginative compassion with other lives...or other ‘modes of being’” (17). The position is close to T.S. Eliot’s, and the exemplary instances of this sacrifice of identity are to be found in the work of Katherine Mansfield and D.H. Lawrence. What concerns her in her present is that many contemporary artists appear not to have the same moral compunctions as their predecessors.

The strong moral imperatives implicit in her view of the social function of art – and the aesthetic ideals of ‘balance’ and ‘objectivity’ which this position presupposes – mean that her literary aesthetic is closely linked to the extent to which a particular work of literature is able to reveal the lessons of a universal moral order. In this sense, she tends to underplay political or social content in favour of abstract themes, privileging the ‘universal’ over the concrete or particular realisation of human experience. These preoccupations are starkly revealed in a review of a 1946 production of Sartre’s *The Flies* at London University College, a production which, in the immediate context of Nazi-occupied France, offered pointed comparisons between the world of Argos and war-time France. Yet, while van Heyningen recognises and acknowledges the play’s covert pro-Resistance sympathies, she is far more interested in the particular moral problem it poses, concluding that the “universal principle” offered in the play’s conclusion is that “every man has in the last analysis...to forge the moral law out of the actual facts in which he finds himself living” (1948a:52).

Van Heyningen’s overwhelming concern with an abstract morality leads her into difficulties when ‘Great Literature’ falls short of her high moral standards. In a discussion of the novels of Henry James, for example, she criticises his implicit acceptance of the often “immoral” and “dishonourable” behaviour of his characters. “One hates to agree with [H.G.] Wells”, she writes, “but Wells in his deplorable parody was right – the beautiful cathedral has been laboriously built, and James has ‘ever so reverently’ laid upon the altar – a dead kitten” (*Trek* 7 September 1946:17). What are, for her, flippant and perverse moral judgements, particularly in his later works, make it impossible for her to endorse his writing, and she vacillates between respectful admiration for his stylistic achievements, and disquiet at the moral bankruptcy of his themes. Part of her dissatisfaction with James’s novels relates to his tendency to equate wealth with nobility; his dishonest silence about the ways in which such wealth is made –

the result of “sweating labour, undercutting, manipulating the market and advertising themselves with the utmost blatancy” (16) – and his dismissive attitude towards the lives of the poor. In what in this tradition can only be the lowest kind of insult, she sees a similarity between James’s moral outlook and the empty consumerist values of Hollywood and the Advertising Industry. These explicit comments on the problems of social inequality and economic exploitation suggest that van Heyningen’s moral attack on industrial society extends beyond a horror for crass cultural forms to include a concern with exploitation and poverty. In a critical discourse, as we have seen, which preferred to engage with literary-cultural questions in terms of a more abstracted moral discussion, this is a significant, albeit rare, instance of a direct engagement with socio-political issues.

Van Heyningen’s faith in the humanising potential of culture means that she assigns a central social function to the reading and interpretation of literary texts. An article written in defence of modernist poetry (particularly that of T.S. Eliot), which appeared in *Trek* in 1945, offers a detailed explication of the techniques of close, critical analysis, and argues for the transforming power of ‘poetry’, an inclusive term which also applies to fiction. The reading of poetry, she argues, is “of the utmost moment...[f]or poetry, partly because it demands so much of us, of the whole man, not merely his brain, his emotions or his body, is perhaps the most valuable activity of the human spirit”. Poetry is a difficult pursuit calling into play “incessant movement and ‘vigilance’ of the senses, brain and emotions” and because it is concerned with the problem of “value” – of its affirmation, renewal, and definition in an ever-changing world – the reader “is forced to go through the same process, to reconsider, to renew, to re-affirm the values that we live by” (*Trek* 13 July 1945:16). Whilst good literature provides an exemplification of abstract moral truths, considered attention to the ‘words on the page’ leads to a sharpening of critical awareness and challenges a clichéd or habitual response, the complacent sinking into well-worn and comfortable old ‘armchairs’ of ideas as opposed to thinking critically about new ones.

Van Heyningen remained convinced of the (social and political) value of nurturing an intelligent literary response and her efforts as a teacher are principally directed towards the training of a critical vanguard capable of appreciating and promoting ‘Great Literature’. This is done in the hope that a more refined literary sensibility would eventually translate into a more humane political response and ultimately a more egalitarian social order. Van Heyningen’s method of teaching literature is set out in her

contribution to the 1946 conference of English Teachers held in Johannesburg in which both she and Durrant are at pains to defend the value of practical criticism against older historical and philological traditions. Here, van Heyningen argues that the training of critical judgement is best achieved by means of guided small-group discussion and comparison. Interest in historical background is confined to the information it provides about the artistic, moral and social conventions of the period. By far the major preoccupation is a detailed analysis of literary form (rhythm, use of language and imagery). Using the comparative method, students are taught both to distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ poetry, and to identify the “false feeling”, “cant” and “sentimentality” of contemporary popular culture (1948b:14).⁹ In the long-term interests of a more healthy political response, students would have to have a clear sense of the manipulative and clichéd emotionalism of contemporary advertising, but, perhaps even more important, be able to identify the superior quality of, for example, Wordsworth’s “Prelude” over Tennyson’s “In Memoriam”. What these examples suggest is that what lies behind the more manifest and benign social goal of inculcating a liberal politics is a less generous and more prescriptive imposition of a particular set of (elitist) cultural values.

While van Heyningen reiterates the traditional Leavisian assumptions about culture (and politics) under threat in the modern world, she is also able to discern in the South Africa of 1942 a menace to civil society of a different kind, one that was seldom registered in those arguments made in England:

Our greatest danger as a nation (I speak here for the white South Africans) is our attitude to the Coloured people....[O]nce people have fully admitted into their minds a belief that there is any class or race of human beings essentially different from themselves, they can by degrees be reduced to any level of irrationality, baseness and cruelty. We are perilously near that belief in South Africa. In the phrases one commonly hears about the natives and the coloured – they’re different, they’re like children, they’re like animals, they have a lower standard of living – lurk the unexamined implications that there are some human beings whom cold cannot chill, hunger starve, pain hurt, injustice warp nor ignorance debase. (*Common Sense* August 1942:12)

In a further elaboration of the function of culture and criticism in contexts of moral and social decay, Van Heyningen points to the power of art in encouraging empathy and imaginative identification in relation to various kind of cultural difference. For van Heyningen, art acts as a “cure for prejudice” (August 1942:14) because it reveals the universal human condition. “The artist who takes human nature as his subject matter, whether writer or draughtsman, penetrates through all the wrappings to the man in all men” and – in a colonial version of Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* thesis – she suggests

that art can combat race prejudice by directing individuals towards their common humanity. South African artist John Dronsfield's drawings and sketches – which are the subject of the argument in question – are held up as exemplary because “[in them], we see the coloured people not as a class or a race, as we are accustomed to seeing them, but as a people, through an eye which has its idiosyncrasies (and strong ones), but which like that of all artists is objective”:

This is why of all those who serve humanity, the artist plays the greatest part, even when an unconscious one, in building up our human solidarity. When Shakespeare turned traitor and tried to write a popular anti-Semitic play, he couldn't do it. His imagination took control, the deeper part of his artistry struggled with the shallower part, with the result that the play became the monster it is, and Portia, Antonio and Jessica dwindle and freeze, against their creator's will, because Shylock is realised. (*Common Sense* August 1942:12)

Continuing with the Arnoldian theme, van Heyningen is also convinced of the power of 'Great Art' to console and heal. This is evident in a 1949 review of theatre in post-war England published in *Standpunte*. As people tried to come to terms with the devastation of war in the immediate post-war years, culture, and Shakespeare in particular, provided the balm for a troubled nation, becoming “the great hearth” around which traumatised Londoners gathered in an effort to recover their spirits. For culture to fulfil this humanising function, however, it must effect a displacement of the ordinary, unstable world of suffering, conflict and emotion (the “real”), and open a space for “the profounder world that rolls beneath our daily life” – the “calmer region of contemplation, where one does not so much suffer as reflect suffering, and accept it as in real life it could not at that moment be accepted” (1949:69). The function of 'Great Art', in other words, is to “draw us up and out of the mire”; it is to produce an Aristotelian catharsis in which our “nerves are quieted” and we are purged of pity and fear. For this reason, van Heyningen deplores the recent attempts in modern Shakespearian productions to meet the aesthetic criteria of contemporary realism. Instead, she argues:

[T]hese scenes should be somehow withdrawn from a too specific reality, a too natural speech; being poetry as much as they are drama, they should have an ideal and universal rather than a real and particular nature, and the beat of the rhythm should be heard clearly and steadily through the most intense emotion and the sharpest conflict. (1949:69)

For van Heyningen, the conscious foregrounding of artistic form (particularly rhythm and metre) helps to purge art of its social implications, and move it beyond the concerns of a particular time and place. The plays of Shakespeare and Webster in particular, “when their stage is strewn with corpses” depend upon “what Coleridge calls the hypnotic effect of

metre, its regular underlying narcotic beat...to subdue our more mundane reactions, and clear a space for the contemplative spirit to work in. Blood and horror, death and suffering are mesmerised by the calmly beating metre to fall quietly into their subordinate place". In high tragedy, she goes on, "the metrical beat is indispensable". It "lulls our awareness of the ordinary, and because it is not the rhythm of normal speech, it makes our ears expectant and awaken[s] them to that which transcends the ordinary" (69). The point of theatre it seems is to effect a radical transfiguring of ordinary experience, one in which the violence and strife of everyday responses give way to quiet, abstract reflection. She has similar hopes for the role of culture in the South African context:

We in South Africa are apt to pity England because of her bad luck and rationed clothes, food and fuel. We are not, indeed, suffering as England is, from the traumas of delayed shock and fatigue caused by war. But there are much worse deprivations here, though not in our own comfortable colour groups and class. And we have not, as we should have, any national activity of the spirit comparable to that which is flourishing in the heart of England's poverty as it seems to flourish nowhere in the world...we shall never have anything like it unless in whatever national theatre we do have we refuse to give Barry and Somerset Maugham and insist on only the best plays and the most exacting standards of performance. (75)

In this example the focus is less on the capacity of art to unify across the colour bar, and more on an explicit attempt to address issues of poverty and deprivation amongst 'non-Europeans' in South Africa. The disparaging swipes at Barry and Somerset Maugham notwithstanding, the argument is intriguing in the way in which, in its enthusiasm for the performance of great theatrical works, it effectively sets up 'High Culture' as a partial answer to social deprivation, in this sense, privileging spiritual catharsis over material redress. The same impulse is to be observed in van Heyningen's response to a performance of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in South Africa by "non-Europeans".¹⁰ In this case, the play has been successful in moving its audience beyond their 'ordinary' selves and their 'commonplace' concerns. While "not all the acting was good" and while "the verse in some mouths was spoken without the rhythm and music of verse", her verdict on the performance is favourable:

[From the beginning] the play took form as poetry, and as poetry it was felt until the epilogue was over and beyond. This was a most unusual achievement. And all the harshness, the grim and angry lines, the disappointment that bites like acid into this disquieting play, were eased out, as perhaps the author would have wished, and the element of spell-bound charm was underlined in every part...as if touched by Prospero's wand and wizard's mantle or as if Ariel's veiling wings had passed before our faces and lulled our commonplace selves to slumber, we sat rapt in enchantment, and feasting on strange, sea-like, Protean beauty. (*Common Sense* May 1946:134)

In this example, van Heyningen's approves of the way in which the everyday aspects of the play are displaced, finally, by an atmosphere of peace and magic. As such, this production provides an exemplary instance of the Arnoldian vision for the role of culture in a world of conflicting interest groups: culture as the means through which we can transcend our petty concerns and our "commonplace selves". The significance of this particular critical response becomes even more apparent in a comparison with A.C. Jordan's much more concrete and politicised reading of *The Tempest* in his address to the Teachers League of South Africa in Cape Town in the same year. (See chapter 4 for a fuller discussion). An interpretation which foregrounds the politics of the play in conscious opposition to the abstractions of mainstream criticism, it also draws out an anti-colonial theme in the immediate interests of the developing liberation movement in the Western Cape. In the context of a escalating state repression and deepening poverty – in the same month in which van Heyningen wrote this review, a number of unsuccessful wild cat strikes for better wages were the militant precursors of the massive African Mineworkers strike of August 1946 (Lodge 1983:20) – van Heyningen's eagerness to avoid the "harshness" and the "grim and angry lines" in favour of an almost narcotic serenity comes perilously close to an evasion of South African political and socio-economic realities.

Nowhere are the differences between van Heyningen's literary-critical approach and those of South Africa's more radical intellectual traditions more evident than in her emphasis on the 'timeless' and 'universal' over the concrete specifics of everyday socio-political concerns. A similar disjuncture is also evident in a more general political view. Van Heyningen is always attentive to individual instances of social deprivation and exclusion; however, the limitations of her liberal-democratic vision become apparent when we examine her understanding of the encounter between black South Africans and European high culture. An article entitled "Entering a New World", published in the Afrikaans periodical *Vandag* in 1946, records her experience of marking English exam papers submitted by African students. What she found was that the work of 'Bantu' pupils was far in advance of that produced by white children. This, she suggests, is because their missionary education had ensured that they remained grounded in the classics of European civilisation, and had been protected from the influence of commerce and popular culture:

The Bantu pupils were older, they'd been sifted (for a very few of them get any schooling at all and very few indeed reach this exam), and they'd been left better off, and were better educated. In the kraal they had inherited the morals and manners of their tribe, at mission school they'd been taught the Christian code, and the language

not of Hollywood, but of Wordsworth, Shakespeare and the Bible, they'd also been well-grounded – missionaries are not ignoramuses, nor the lickspittles of Commerce. (*Vandag* November 1946:10)

Like many at the time, van Heyningen assumes that the advent of Western culture has “hurled [the African] into an age far ahead of his own”. This article celebrates one of the more benign results of this encounter: “in the Bantu essays I saw a people turning over, waking up in the brave new world, and rubbing their eyes with wonder; and I found it so touching and so interesting that I should like to show it to other people” (9). Her excitement at the prospect of being witness to this intoxicating and liberating cultural encounter is marred only by a concern that this might soon be denied them:

One must fear for these young Bantu, when one sees how, rooted in the old tribal tradition, they love to spread their branches and breathe and flower, and expect to go on flowering, in the new and enchanting air of white civilisation....Will they sweeten the air? Or must they wither too? Must they too be poisoned? (*Vandag* November 1946:14)

Here, van Heyningen's earlier gestures towards a common humanity are belied by her insistence on the superiority of British culture as embodied in English Literature, and the cultural violence of her assimilationist ends. Unlike South Africa's more radical intellectual traditions, van Heyningen's sense of the relationship between white and black South Africans is defined in terms of liberal patronage rather than any kind of political solidarity. While she makes an earnest appeal – in direct opposition to the segregatory impulses of the United Party government – that Western ‘High Culture’ become more widely available to black South Africans, she nevertheless accords little value to the lives and cultural practices of those whom she wishes to bring into the fold. Similarly, while she clearly opposes the many structural obstacles in the way of African aspiration, her intervention remains at the level of a weak moral appeal.

Van Heyningen's critical and cultural interventions in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s have a clear ethical base. Her critique of a decaying modern social order derives from a familiar (now politically suspect) apocalyptic vision of social and cultural degeneration and anarchy in the modern world, and invokes the equally spurious notion of a more glorious past which can be retrieved by means of a return to its only surviving remnant, the works of a narrowly-defined European canon. Nevertheless, her concerns with the rights of the individual, registered both in her efforts to thwart Nazism and Christian-National Education, and in her disquiet about the dishonesty of big business and the existence of social inequality and racial prejudice testify to a political and social awareness in marked contrast to the ever-narrowing preoccupations of the *Scrutiny*

adherents. In this sense, whereas her moral concerns with “carnal attraction” in *The Postman Rings Twice*, for example, may sound quaint to a contemporary ear, it is difficult to fault her commitment to social justice. That said, the tendency to privilege the world of abstract contemplation over the messy arena of suffering and material life – effected largely by means of a critical method which ignores the political in favour of the ethical or ‘transcendent’ – means that she remains unable to engage either with the practical questions of socio-economic oppression in South Africa, or the concrete means by which they can be addressed. In her elevation of ‘culture’ as a solution to various forms of social distress, then, van Heyningen explicitly downgrades the value of practical political intervention. Furthermore, her own imaginative failure in relation to the cultures and experiences of black South Africans is a telling instance of the disjuncture between the abstract ideal and concrete experience. The capacity for “a passionate imaginative compassion with other lives...or other ‘modes of being’” (*Trek* 19 April 1946:17) seems to fail at precisely that point where it is most necessary. This inability to realise the ideals of a “common humanity” and the difficulties she has in connecting democratic principles with material practice is also evident in the work of Geoffrey Durrant.

Geoffrey Durrant: A Gentlemanly Taste

Geoffrey Durrant was born in Derbyshire, England. He was educated at Cambridge University and obtained Honours in both parts of the English Tripos in 1935. In 1937 he completed a Teachers Diploma at Kings College London, and after a brief spell as Lecturer in English, first at Durham and then at Tübingen University, he took up a post as Senior Lecturer at Stellenbosch University where he remained for a year. In October 1940 he enlisted in the Second World War and, after spending some time in Europe and East Africa, was posted to South Africa in 1941 where he worked for the Army Education Service as Senior Information Officer in the Pretoria Command. After the war, he elected to remain in South Africa, taking up the Chair of English at the Natal University College, Pietermaritzburg in 1946. He emigrated to Canada in 1961.

Like van Heyningen, Durrant took a firm and principled stand on the importance of the institutions of a democratic society, namely Parliament, a free press, the liberty of speech and belief, and freedom of assembly. In 1949, he denounced proposals by the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuur (FAK) to implement Christian-Nationalist Education (*Natal Mercury* 21 April 1949), and again in 1951 at a meeting of the Pietermaritzburg City Parliament Debating Society, he protested against Government proposals to override

the Entrenched Clauses of the South Africa Act, which would necessitate a change in the constitution and make it possible to remove coloured South Africans from the voter's role. In his address, he articulated his objection in the following terms: "There could be no ordered government of any kind if there was no security of contract. The alternative was political chaos in which only brute force would prevail". Such an act would undermine "the moral authority of the Act of Union" and leave the country "entirely at the mercy of the fluctuations of party strife" (*Natal Witness* 20 March 1951).

A pamphlet entitled *Propaganda and Public Opinion*,¹¹ which was written during the closing years of the Second World War, reflects on an issue central to the democratic tradition, namely the conditions for free and open discussion in the public sphere. It begins with a premise fundamental to the European Enlightenment that "[d]emocracy depends for its proper functioning on a free and active public opinion", and goes on to commend the defence of those institutions "which make such an opinion possible" (1944:2). In this pamphlet, Durrant looks with some anxiety at the future of democracy in the post-war period in South Africa, and in particular at what he describes as a mood of "cynical indifference" amongst South Africans, who as result of the war "have lost their simple faith in our own institutions and leaders". If this mood persists, he continues, "we can only expect a growing impatience with democratic methods and, when an economic depression comes, a preference for more forceful methods. The urgent need is to open up the channels of knowledge and discussion, at present blocked by censorship and choked with rubbishy propaganda" (4).

With this aim in mind, Durrant examines the institutions of the public sphere in South Africa, and offers practical proposals for their transformation. These include, amongst other things, an objective and serious press free from the influence of vested interests of business and party politics; a reinvigorated broadcasting system; the creation of listeners' groups; democratic participation in public institutions; the establishment of a National Scheme of Adult Education; and the founding of a National Cinema.¹² Although the ultimate responsibility for democracy lies with each individual, the "government" also has a responsibility to be "positively and actively democratic". It is not enough "merely to abide by the rules of the parliamentary system"(27): an active democracy requires the investigation of national problems through Commissions of Inquiry; full public discussion of legislation; and improved government publicity.

While he restates many of the assumptions of the liberal-democratic tradition, he also presents a potentially radical critique of a public sphere in which commercial

considerations increasingly hold sway. Echoing an argument which frequently appears in more radical publications like *Trek*, *The Voice* and *The Torch*, Durrant suggests that the disproportionate influence of powerful financial organisations in the public sphere poses a serious threat to the democratic ideal. The muzzling of the press by commercial interests is particularly worrying: the English Press in South Africa, for example, is “reverential in its attitude to the gold mines and the economic policy they favour” (6), and while the letters pages offer an opportunity for “vigorous democratic discussion”, financial considerations dictate which are published and which are not. The reliance on advertising revenue means that “editors are very careful not to offend important advertisers, so that there are many subjects of public importance which the press will not dare to discuss frankly”. This dependence on advertising gives “business men...an influence out of all proportion to their numbers or their real value in the community” (10). Added to this, monopolistic commercial arrangements mean that “there is no free competition”, and no alternatives for consumers (11). Echoing some of the cultural politics of the Scrutiny school, but keeping his eye firmly on the goal of a more effective and inclusive South African democracy, Durrant’s pamphlet also takes up the deleterious social effects of Hollywood cinema. Here, he cautions that a relentless emphasis on the values of love and prosperity in Hollywood may mean that we will be unlikely “to realise our obligations to society” or “take our duties as citizens seriously” (18). Similarly, his analysis of the South African advertising industry, while reiterating many of the arguments of Q.D. Leavis’s *Education and the Reading Public*, is also especially concerned with the transferral of unscrupulous and manipulative advertising techniques to the political sphere: “If an advertiser may sell a quack remedy by playing on our fear of vitamin deficiency or halitosis, why should a politician not sell his policy by appealing to our fear of the Native?” (23).

One of the most intriguing aspects of this pamphlet, despite its clear affinities with a left-leaning socio-cultural critique, is the contradiction which exists between Durrant’s fervent defence of the value of free and open discussion, and his simultaneous desire to direct and shepherd this discussion in the way that he sees fit. This is reflected in his preoccupations with the problems of state “censorship” and “rubbishy propaganda”. Many of the proposals outlined above echo the arguments which accompanied the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in Europe in the eighteenth-century, an account of which appears in Habermas (1999). Here, the creation of the possibilities for public discussion and participation in the public sphere assumes that the

application of individual reason to the analysis of contemporary issues acts as a check on the power of the state, and provides a way of confronting social injustice. An assumption of equal, if not more, significance in Durrant's argument, however, is that the majority cannot always be trusted to make the correct political choices. Of central importance in Durrant's view, therefore, is the need to shape public opinion. In a familiar yoking of the political and the aesthetic, Durrant is concerned to raise not only the general level of critical thinking, but also the "general level of public taste" (1944:20). Durrant's emphasis on the creation of a critical minority through a sound education echoes the concerns of such thinkers as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Matthew Arnold and George Eliot: in Durrant's terms, the hope is that, by means of this process, people will eventually develop a more "reasoned attitude towards national affairs" (1944:3). In Durrant's pamphlet, despite its left-wing leanings, the public sphere is seen less as a site of rational-critical debate than a means towards educating an untrustworthy and unpredictable majority. Viewed ungenerously, Durrant's pamphlet can be seen as yet another instance in the long quest to control and shape 'public opinion' pursued ever since the idea of popular supremacy was first entertained and feared. As critics like Chris Baldick (1983) and others have shown, it is the distrust of mass democracy (when democracy really does mean everyone) which spawned the social mission of English Studies in the first place. Despite its gestures towards a more open democracy, the deeper pull of the pamphlet is towards an avoidance of social 'anarchy' by steering the general populace away from dangerous political ideologies (effectively either Communism or Fascism), thus avoiding the dangers invoked in his later protests against the removal of the Entrenched Clauses: "political chaos in which only the rule of brute force would prevail" (*Natal Witness* 20 March 1951). In his explicit elevation of the values of a privileged elite over those of the 'undisciplined' and 'wayward' masses, then, Durrant goes directly against the spirit of a genuine left-wing socio-political critique.

While van Heyningen is more responsive to a South African context of growing poverty and deprivation, Durrant's principle fear as the war reached an end was that South African citizens would reject democracy as they faced the inevitable hardships of the post-war world. Before considering his response, it is worth looking briefly at the particular definition of democracy to which this argument appeals. In this regard, a single throw away line concerning the fact that "children and natives" are not citizens (1944:29) provides the only indication that, in this South African democracy, black South Africans are completely excluded from the vote. It is a situation which Durrant neither challenges

nor even comments upon. As David Johnson argues, “Durrant’s exclusion of black people from the citizenry of South Africa reflects not only on how he as a settler critic perceives native subjects as an absence of white citizens, but also on the inscribed limits of the left liberal discourse he reproduces” (1996:152). Instead, the principle source of concern is a disaffected and alienated white citizenry which might be persuaded to choose a charismatic demagogue over a democratically-elected leader or resort to violence as a way of achieving their goals. These fears are exacerbated by the existence of powerful interest groups with sophisticated methods of influence at their disposal. “Demagogues”, propagandists, and political extremists of various kinds present a substantial threat to social order, making some kind of sustained defence against the “stampeding of public opinion” (1944:22) essential. While his focus in this instance is on the white electorate, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that what lies behind many of these arguments, as it did for many of Durrant’s contemporaries, is the vague threat of a large and increasingly militant African population. Heaton Nicholls’s *Bayete!* published twenty years earlier in 1923, for example, raises the spectre of a powerful African leader who manages to orchestrate a national strike. Alan Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country* published in 1948 evinces similar reservations about the figure of the revolutionary trade unionist. Indeed at the start of the war, there were many who feared that, given the opportunity, black South Africans would join forces with any enemy which might present itself on South African shores. (A Japanese invasion was a particularly worrying possibility in this regard).¹³ If one considers the development of black protest movements in South Africa, there was much to substantiate Durrant’s fears: the early 1940s saw a gradual increase in tensions between urban African populations and the state, and a growth in trade union activity on the Witwatersrand, much of which was Communist-inspired and led, and which culminated in the 1946 mineworkers strike (Lodge 1983:19). Similarly, much of the service and sacrifice of black South Africans during the Second World War had been won on the promise of dramatic post-war social reform, the absence of which, from Durrant’s perspective, would have been likely to drive people into ever more militant responses.

For Durrant, then, a transformed public sphere in post-war South Africa should win consent for democratic institutions. In broaching the thorny issue of consent, he suggests that if there is a measure of transparency in government decision-making, people would be more likely to respond positively to leadership. Durrant’s comments on his recent experiences as Senior Information Officer provide a revealing illustration of

the way in which he understands the operation of effective political rule: "In this the civilian departments might well learn from the army where it has been found that troops will endure hardship without much complaint if they are treated as reasonable human beings and taken into the confidence of authorities. In the absence of any explanation, the darkest rumours are the most widely believed" (1944:29). Again, the emphasis here is the way in which a reasonable and benevolent leadership can ensure the co-operation and obedience of a heterogeneous, potentially wayward, population in a situation where it is necessary for individuals to forget their private gripes in the interests of the greater good.

Durrant's concerns with political extremism and 'wrong thinking' in the public sphere are premised upon the basic assumption that he himself occupies the more rational 'middle ground'. His comments on the periodical press show that his claims for the public sphere are made from the position that there is a 'neutral' or 'reasoned' position on political and social issues which is uncontaminated by the pressures of either politics or commerce. What is lacking in the press, he argues, are "authoritative" and "reliable" summaries of contemporary issues "which hold the balance fairly between opposing political schools". The same is true of his tendency to label any political position which is not his own as "violently partisan" or "propagandist" (9). Added to this, as we have seen, is an extremely patronising attitude towards the masses whose "profound ignorance" of important questions and "helpless[ness]" in the hands of "demagogues" or "charlatans" (24) make them a threat to social order. Whilst he is wary of the disproportionate influence of corporate interests in the direction of public affairs, he never questions the moral and political authority of the state, seeing it as a benevolent and neutral institution which is beyond the sway of organised financial interests. If there are any faults, they lie in nothing more serious than a little tardiness in its public relations department, and in the speed with which it acts on the findings of government-appointed commissions. In South Africa in particular, this view of the state is astonishingly naïve. The most glaring omission in this critique of South African democracy, however, remains his outright failure to seize on the obvious problem that eight million inhabitants in South Africa simply did not have the vote.

Durrant's definition of what it means to have a "reasoned attitude towards national affairs" (1944:3) is given more substance in his inaugural address, "English Studies and the Community", given at the Natal University College, Pietermaritzburg, a few years later when he took up the Chair of English Studies. Reiterating a central Leavisian insight, Durrant (like van Heyningen) is convinced that the formation of

'correct' political attitudes is entirely dependent on an education which has English Studies at its core. In this sense, nothing could be of more importance to the general political health of society than the close reading of the great classics of the European tradition. What becomes clear in this discussion, then, is that the 'middle ground' or 'neutral' position which Durrant is at pains to defend from a variety of commercial and political threats has an identifiable social base: in other words, Durrant's 'middle way' is the expression of Western middle-class culture.

The social crisis to which Durrant turns in this lecture, however, is not a threatened democracy, but the decline of 'civilisation' (the inherently positive values of traditional Western society) as a result of an industrialising society. The majority of people in modern society, he argues, are forced into "routine jobs where they have little scope for the creative instinct and much smaller demands are made on their total personalities" (1945:3). This leads to intellectual and emotional torpor, and results in the demand for a "substitute life" in their leisure hours in response to which a massive industry has grown up "which purveys to the masses at second hand the emotional riches which their own lives cannot afford them" (4). An additional source of concern is the "lack of any real education" which leaves the majority of the population "emotionally unstable and intellectually defenceless". The "professional persuaders" pose another threat to civilisation: their characteristic appeals to the lowest kinds of human emotions lead to "an increasingly crude organisation of emotional life" (5), a hardening of sensibilities and a declining respect and value for "the respectable sources of emotional life, to poetry, music and serious political thought"(6).

In his sensitivity to the boredom and routine of a highly regulated industrial workplace, and his sense of the mitigating role played by the 'culture industry', Durrant again crosses paths with a more left-inflected social analysis. This kind of critique, which is also evident in the work of South African leftist critic, Jack Cope (discussed in chapter 5), bears a strong, if unwitting, resemblance to the socio-cultural preoccupations of the Frankfurt school. There is, of course, a significant overlap between the cultural pessimism of a Leavisian analysis and the socio-cultural preoccupations of the Frankfurt school. In both perspectives the contemporary cultural milieu is rendered as stupefying, distracting and dangerous: Hollywood 'shlock', a sensationalist, inaccurate press, a powerful advertising industry and a standardised 'machine' culture encourage docility, deaden consciousness, and destroy critical thinking. While the basic tropes are similar, the political roots could not be more distinct. While Durrant's fears are that the crude

responses encouraged by a degraded commercial culture will lead to a 'wrong-headed' rejection of bourgeois democracy, the 'anti-enlightenment' feared by Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) pertains more to the way in which the culture industry acts as a powerful distraction from political consciousness and revolutionary action.

Like van Heyningen, Durrant looks to an education in the classics of English Literature for a solution to the contemporary crisis of a crass industrial age. The only thing which will ensure "the survival of values cherished by civilised men" and preserve society from a "collapse into barbarism" (1945:19) is a sound literary education. Here he makes explicit what van Heyningen only hints at: that "[English Studies] will make possible...a more intelligent political life, a clearer sense of ultimate values and a generally higher standard of human life" (3). The solution, however, requires a very particular kind of literary experience. Like van Heyningen, Durrant is at pains to defend the value of a "personal experience" of the very best kinds of writing. This "means a continual immersion in what Wordsworth [for example] actually wrote, a continual grappling with the actual words and a readiness to return again and again to poems which have not yet yielded up their secrets". The desired outcome is an "improvement in discrimination" and "intelligent reading" (7), individuals who have an intimate knowledge of "the best that has been thought and said" and who can guide others to the same understanding. These critical skills derived from a literary training – worthwhile in themselves – are also an excellent defence against a pernicious popular culture, and an effective safeguard against the exploitation of emotions by advertisers and politicians. However, just as South African audiences cannot benefit from the theatre of Barry or Somerset Maugham, the full benefits of close reading can only be derived from a certain kind of literary text. Here, Durrant argues, the student must not be fooled: "this task is not compatible with an easy enjoyment of even the most respectable second-best. The poetry of Brooke, or Masfield, or Noyes, or even much of Tennyson, may be valuable as a stepping-stone to the understanding of Wordsworth, or Milton, or Pope; but we must never admit that it is anything but inferior poetry when judged by the only standard we ought to accept: the standard of the best" (6). In this regard, Durrant's students would have felt the same strong pressure to conform to the elitist cultural values and unequivocal literary judgements as those who found themselves in van Heyningen's tutorial classes.

Interestingly, in the post-war world of Allied victory and German defeat, the "sources of clarity, order and light" (12) to which Durrant repeatedly appeals are

explicitly not the Germanic or Anglo-Saxon traditions from which the English language is derived, but those of France and Italy. Contrary to popular opinion, he argues, “[t]he mainstream of English literature flows not from *Beowulf* but from medieval Latinity and Catholicism, from Renaissance Italy and from France”. French and Italian literature is “intrinsically much more valuable” than the Anglo-Saxon, and most students will find that the pursuit of Anglo-Saxon is “much less profitable than a knowledge of French or Italian” (11). Whilst it is easy to caricature this kind of blatant war-time xenophobia, this example nevertheless gives the lie to the claim of political disinterestedness or neutrality which underlies all of Durrant’s interventions in the cultural and social spheres. In this regard, the recent World War makes it relatively easy for Durrant to dismiss what he describes as “the sandy soil of Germanic philology” (3) in favour of “a direct approach to books” (7). The emphasis on close reading, as we have seen, was one of the key preoccupations of the emerging Leavisian vanguard in South Africa: a ‘direct’ approach to literature, according to Durrant, required “a watchful good sense”, a “fine and luminous distinction” and “complete self-possession” (1945:7).

Durrant’s 1945 address gives detailed attention to concerns which were to occupy him throughout his career. The themes of culture on the verge of ‘barbarism’, the need to preserve the European literary heritage, and the belief that a training in English literature leads to a “reasoned approach to national affairs” (1944:3) are repeated with little modification throughout the 1940s and 50s. His speeches and articles on the subject tend to take a more apocalyptic and emotive tone in comparison to van Heyningen’s writing, but essentially they share much the same vision. One indication of the urgency of these questions for Durrant is the frequency with which he refers to them in public discussion. A respected member of the white, middle-class Pietermaritzburg community, he often received invitations to speak to local organisations and groups. These addresses and articles provide a further elaboration during the late 1940s and 50s of the central points made in his inaugural address, chiefly the notion that English Literature provides the principle means by which ‘wrong thinking’ in South Africa can be addressed. In 1949, for example, in an article which appeared in the *Natal Mercury* entitled “What do you know of English?” he emphasises the importance of guarding the language on which ‘right-thinking’ depends: “The inevitable consequence of loose talk and sloppy writings is wrong thinking, for nobody can think very far without the aid of language. And in a world as complex as our own, wrong thinking about politics, social problems, racial questions, or morality, may lead to speedy disaster” (*Natal Mercury* 13 May 1949). Here

again, the classics of English Literature are the means through which the crisis can be averted:

The study of poetry, of drama and of the novel at its best, is not, as so many people quietly assume, a means of making students more 'cultured'. It is at once a discipline of language and an exercise of intellectual insight, for when we have learned to interpret language as subtle as Shakespeare's, we can begin to see the world with all the clarity and sensitiveness of Shakespeare's own mind. (*Natal Mercury* 13 May 1949)

In this instance, Durrant rejects the superficial and status-conscious literary activities of the frivolous cultural dilettante (a frequent target of Leavisian derision), and emphasises, instead, the enormous political and social importance of the close reading of literary texts. The careful reading of poetry, he argues in this example, "gives us a more comprehensive and delicate understanding of the life around us" and a "better control over the intricacies of language, so that we can think more clearly ourselves" (*Natal Mercury* 13 May 1949). Such weighty moral concerns are less apparent in some of his other comments. A controversial address to a Conference of the National Council of Women in April 1950, in which he claimed that South African Universities were turning out 'barbarians' because students were not compelled to do courses in English as part of their degrees, also takes up the seemingly trivial social problem of the pronunciation of South African radio announcers: "[we need] educated and cultured radio announcers who will not speak to us of 'marauding' lions and inform us that *tres jolie* means "the three jollies"; who will not place the accent on the first syllable of such words as *romance*, *repeat*, *renew*, *review*, and a host of other such words" (*Natal Mercury* 6 May 1950). Here, it is not so much the preservation of humane values that is at stake, but the assertion of a particular class identity. Finally, in an address at a Civic Reception to mark the Natal Society's Centenary in 1951, he links the rise of commercial culture with degeneration in the social sphere. One must not under-estimate the dangers to Western Civilisation of "neglecting the written word, and putting in its place such visual media as the film and the cartoon... We neglect our literary heritage at our peril; and the peril is not only of personal, spiritual impoverishment, but of social retrogression as well" (*Natal Witness* 15 May 1951).

Durrant's public comments consistently assume that a training in English Literature provides the means for a more intelligent political life. Although never conceived of as political in any direct sense, English Studies as it was remodelled by F.R. Leavis and I.A. Richards in England in the 1930s was nevertheless understood as "the

permanent precondition of fecund political thought. Ever 'above' and 'beyond' politics itself, 'culture' was a permanent meta-political sanction, the tribunal before which politics stood judged in the name of 'the human'" (Mulhern 1981:99). As David Johnson argues in relation to the South African context, implicit in the commitment by South African English Departments to the close reading of literary texts was the belief that "teaching good reading habits will ultimately contribute to good practical politics, an assumption which generally translated as: practical criticism leads to English liberal politics" (1996:160). As Durrant makes plain in a paper delivered at a Conference of English Teachers held in Johannesburg in 1946, this concern with good reading practices and the cultivation of critical skills has its roots in a more general loss of social authority, and is the expression of a desire to ensure the perpetuation of the values of a ruling intelligentsia via a liberal education:

If our belief in great literature means anything, it means that current values (the values of the cinema, the press and the wireless) are bad values that must be fought. This in its turn involves much social courage, especially now that there are so few 'educated' people, even in the universities, who have any inkling of the values we believe in. (1946b:5)

If the values of a critical minority are to have any purchase in the years to come, the lines between 'good' and 'bad' poetry, 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' thought, must be continually policed. An immediate source of concern in this regard were the contemporary calls – in the wake of a renewed interest in socialism and Marxism around the world – that literature and culture be tied to political struggle. Durrant wrote only two articles for *Trek* magazine, and perhaps because of the left leanings of many of its contributors and readers, both articles are written in reaction to the prescriptions of "dogmatic left-wing critics" (*Trek* 4 May 1945:16). Durrant was an active contributor to the debates in *Trek's* popular letter's page. This hostile attitude towards both left-wing literature and left-wing critics was also articulated in his frequent responses to particular examples of *Trek's* leftist reviews. The articles themselves, however, are also a fascinating example of literary criticism as a displaced form of political critique, and as such reveal much about Durrant's definition of a "reasonable approach to national affairs". In an article entitled "Cast a Cold Eye" (*Trek* 4 May 1945) he begins by characterising contemporary left-wing poetry as a suppressed, unconscious form of religious feeling, a kind of "spilt religion". No longer rationally able to believe in Heaven, these left-wing writers, like the Romantic poets before them, try to establish a

“Heaven on Earth”. Drawing heavily on T.E. Hulme’s essay on Romanticism and Classicism (the phrase “spilt religion” is his), Durrant applauds the general change of taste in poetry from Romanticism to modern verse: “Fewer people”, Durrant writes, “now admire the typical work of Victor Hugo, Shelley or Rupert Brooke....The poetic diction and the poetic machinery of the Romantics have been thrown on the rubbish heap. The poetic revolution has been accomplished, and poets can draw free breath again”. This “damp” poetry (another characterisation which he borrows from Hulme) still has a popular audience, but “it is dead as mutton amongst those who take poetry at all seriously”. He sees in the most recent left-wing poetry of the 1930s and 40s a contemporary reincarnation of Romanticism, arguing that

while the Romantic chase of personal happiness (in love, or in the contemplation of nature, or what not) has been abandoned, and is even looked upon as indecent, there are many people who have simply transferred their own personal adjustments to another level. Instead of bemoaning their unhappy lot they now give a political expression to their woes in the guise of the proletariat, and to their Romantic dreams of happiness in a vision of a future world state where all men will be happy. (16)

Instead of “maudlin sentimentality” and self-indulgent “whining”, poets are urged to “see the world without blinkers”, to have the “courage to see life steadily and see it whole”. In describing Yeats’s progress from “a thorough-going Romantic-escapist” to a modernist poet, he argues that despite an early immersion in the “fog of Gaelic mysticism and folklore”, he managed to “emerge from the fog and cast the intense light of a cool clear mind on the real world” (16). Rejecting the tendency amongst the 1930s English poets to offer sentimental “dreams” of the possibilities in a world under socialism, Durrant agrees with Yeats when he says that poetry should be “the contemplation of what is, not of what the poet would like things to be” (cited in Durrant, 17). In the same way, poetry’s true function is to “to show the world the true face of things and to look on in tragic joy” (17). A long quote from Hulme reveals an obsession with the maintenance of social order as well as a deep distrust of the politics of “disorder”, by which he means the universal struggle against discrimination and oppression. The ideology of the Romantic poets, Hulme argues, is based on the assumption that humans are essentially good, but suppressed by laws and custom: in this regard, human potential can only be fully realised when oppressive social structures have been eliminated. For Hulme (and Durrant), this is a belief that “something positive can come out of disorder” (16). Eschewing both Romantic ‘escapism’ and left-wing idealism in favour of the “clarity, precision and coolness of a new classicism” (17), Durrant opts for the (in his view) more courageous

acceptance of existing reality. In an interesting twist to Leavisian preoccupations with the dishonesty and superficiality of commercial culture – and in what is clearly intended as a particularly nasty affront – Durrant equates left-wing politics with the sentimental and manipulative techniques of modern advertising and commerce: “If we want to feel the warmth of universal brotherhood, we can get it more efficiently from a mass meeting or by reading an advertisement for an insurance company, than by reading poetry. But if we want to see the truth, the world as it really is, stripped of lies and sentiment, then we shall turn to the poets” (17). The cultural and political lines are clearly drawn: truth – represented by the values of traditional European culture – on the one hand, and the lie of commercial culture and radical politics on the other.

Still consumed by this issue ten years later, Durrant reserves a place in an address delivered to the Annual Conference of the South African Library Association for an attack on what he calls “the provincialism of sociology” which he describes as the “tendency to require of writers that their books be socially ‘useful’. [The sociological critics want books] to help to solve our problems, to tackle the difficulties we meet with as a nation, as a race, or as a class. In South Africa, they regard as ‘escapist’ any book which is not concerned with the colour problem or with human freedom, or at the very least they believe that no serious writer can ignore these and similar problems in his writing” (1957:124). This position, he argues, tends to diminish the value of works which do not deal with social problems. Once again, Shakespeare provides the crucial example:

What concern does Shakespeare show with the special social problems of his day? And yet, there were as many in his day as there are now. The difference was that men were not so badly frightened. They knew that life had always been tragic. They chose to enjoy the vision, terrible though it might be, rather than organise a common salvation. The poet Yeats has expressed this noble indifference to politics and to ‘calling all hands to the pumps’ in his great poem “Lapis Lazuli”. That and nothing I can say, is the best answer to those who would insist that the poet must be ‘involved’ in the problems of the day, and do what he can to help us solve them....It is said that the ship’s band played during the sinking of the Titanic. Not everyone can man the pumps, even in the worst emergency, and music may often save more lives than meddling. (1957:124)

While it may be necessary to stake a claim for artistic freedom in the deeply over-determined political context of South Africa in the late 1950s, it is difficult to look sympathetically upon this arrogant and complacent appeal to a kind of sturdy machismo in the face of overwhelming socio-political distress. With the country heading towards the Sharpeville massacre and the intensifying repressions of a fully-fledged police state,

it would seem that, at the very least, one would accept the necessity to “organise a common salvation” even if one is unable to contribute to it.

In one crucial sense, Durrant’s critical interventions in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s are an attempt to mediate between two opposing principles in both the political realm and the world of art, namely authoritarian control and prescription, on the one hand, and the anarchy of private self-interest, on the other. Out of sympathy with both these positions, he is still faced with the problem of ensuring the continued purchase of traditional values in a rapidly changing world in which the opinions of literary critics have increasingly less influence. As far as literature goes, in the lamentable absence of a “catholic criticism”, this situation is akin to being “caught between the dead rock of imposed opinions and the whirlpool of private preference” (*Forum* April 1952:41). As Durrant’s arguments make plain, the crisis which engenders these difficulties is a loss of political and cultural authority amongst the ruling intelligentsia. As such, his arguments evince some nostalgia for a world in which the values of a critical minority do not have to be defended. In this regard, he looks back fondly at the early days of the *Times Literary Supplement* when literary critics

shared a common authority of tone, an authority urbanely and for the most part moderately exercised, but unmistakably taken for granted. For these reviewers there was no serious problem of values. Each work could be referred, if not to a complete system of thought, at least to a clear notion of what was acceptable and what was intolerable to a gentlemanly taste. From our own chaotic world we can certainly not afford to scoff at the ‘certain certainties’ of which these writers are so quietly assured. In them at least we can discern a happy union of personal taste and traditional authority, a union for which we look in vain today. (*Forum* April 1952:40)

By 1930, Durrant continues, it is clear that “the gentlemanly manner is wearing thin”, and there are clear signs of anxiety. Faced with “[a] new world in which traditional culture is everywhere challenged and nowhere taken for granted”, literary critics must find a way of ensuring that the values of an inherited (Western) literary culture retain their influence for succeeding generations. In the absence of “a happy union of personal taste and traditional authority”, the aim – in both politics and culture – is to find a viable stance which is neither unfashionably autocratic nor dangerously laissez-faire. It is a struggle to ensure an open society (avoid totalitarianism), but also to maintain control over the political and cultural choices of the majority. Durrant’s solution to political and cultural anarchy in the modern world is to wage a covert attack on both ‘bad’ politics and ‘bad’ culture. It is not to claim “universal validity for [one’s] own system of

preferences”, but to “conduct an underground resistance movement” against the forces which threaten both democracy and civilisation (*Forum* April 1952:41).

While van Heyningen’s preoccupations lie with establishing an ethical base for modern society, Durrant is more interested in making a pre-emptive move against the steady debasement of language, which as the basis of intelligent thought, is also the necessary precondition for ‘intelligent’ action in the political and social spheres. Durrant’s cultural project in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s, despite a surface rhetoric of democratic participation and inclusion, has at its core the aim of securing consent for the political values of a marginalised cultural elite. These ideals are presented under the guise of ‘neutrality’, ‘objectivity’ and ‘impartiality’: the limits of Durrant’s democratic aspirations, however, are starkly revealed in his wholesale refusal to consider the problem of South Africa’s disenfranchised majority. Looking at Durrant’s arguments from a contemporary perspective, it is difficult to give much credit to a cultural theory which suggests that the correct use of a word, proper pronunciation, or the reading of poems by William Wordsworth could have a significant effect on the political and social health of a nation. In the same way, it is difficult to conceive that a (Leavisian) diagnosis of society forged in response to conditions in post-war England could be applied without some modification to the South African context which, in 1945, faced so many peculiar problems of its own. As I have suggested, Durrant’s concerns with the safeguarding of public opinion imply that he is uncomfortable with the full implications of a democratic society. Furthermore, the outright hostility aroused by left-wing literature, and his explicit rejection of the “politics of disorder” are further indications of a deeply conservative political project which is at odds with the democratic surface of his arguments. Finally, his sympathy with the abstracted, historical perspectives of Yeats’s “Lapis Lazuli” seems utterly inappropriate in a context of violent cultural and economic oppression. In these arguments as in others, there is an astonishing lack of engagement with South African society and politics, and a careless arrogance about the values of Western culture which gives no space to the cultural values, or democratic rights, of the South African majority.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on two important examples of Leavisian cultural discourse in South Africa. There is much here that is familiar: a pervasive hostility towards a crass commercial culture; a deeply pessimistic view of contemporary society and ‘mass

civilisation'; an ongoing preoccupation with the preservation and continuity of the threatened values of a 'minority culture'; and the elevation of European High Culture as the solution to various forms of social chaos and distress. These are all the characteristic elements of a Leavisian socio-cultural perspective; they also echo the more general anxieties of the discourse of 'Kulturkritik'. Defined by what Francis Mulhern has described as "intuitions of loss" (2000:161), this discourse attempts to secure the spiritual values of a vanishing age in a rapidly deteriorating present through the actions of an enlightened intellectual vanguard.

While it is clear that both van Heyningen and Durrant import a largely unmodified *Scrutiny* project into the South African context in the 1940s and 50s, their efforts to address questions of democracy, individual freedom and the attainment of social justice are partly inspired by a recognition of the very particular socio-political conditions which mark the South African place. Turning at times towards a left-inflected socio-political analysis of South African society, a South African Leavisian project, however, is much more likely to consider these conditions (and their solutions) in terms of the more conservative socio-cultural agendas of the *Scrutiny* school. In this regard, when it comes to questions of social justice and equality in South Africa, the 'health' of the nation is evaluated, not in terms of concrete material change, but in relation to the successful dissemination of a privileged set of Western cultural values.

This elevation of culture over the messy world of practical political action is one of the central assumptions of the South African Leavisian perceptual scheme, and one which marks it out most distinctly from the other intellectual traditions discussed in this thesis. Regarded as an essentially impoverished resource – one which can take you so far and no further – political action must take second place in relation to the greater authority of Western 'High Culture'. In the Leavisian scheme, in other words, culture is substituted for politics: as Mulhern puts it, "culture dissolves the political and takes up the general labour proper to it, assuming the role of a valid social authority" (2000:166). The relative priorities given to the 'cultural' and the 'political' spheres in a South African Leavisian project are clearly revealed in relation to the more specific questions of critical method and aesthetic evaluation. In stark contrast to the overtly politicised discussion of more marginal intellectual traditions, a South African Leavisian criticism is marked by the almost complete absence of direct engagement with socio-political concerns. A cultural project underscored by a clear political agenda, the discourse itself remains resolutely apolitical. The antipathy towards an overt political discussion is revealed in a number of

ways: in the most obvious sense, a de-contextualised, text-bound approach concentrates attention on the minutiae of form rather than the implications of content. Where political content is acknowledged, it is deflected and contained by an approach which both subordinates political concerns to a consideration of universal ethical dilemmas, and ignores particular contexts (and angry protest) in favour of transcendence, catharsis and escape. When it comes to an overtly politicised or left-wing literature, the response is simply to deny its literary value, to question its status as ‘Literature’, and thereby avoid its challenge. Unwilling or unable to engage in any meaningful way with the cultural and material realities of black South African experience, an avowedly assimilationist cultural project, which is based on a careless assumption of Western superiority, is also the occasion for a kind of cultural violence which is in stark contradiction to its humane ideals.

In a period in South Africa in which there is considerable methodological and theoretical disagreement, a period in which radical cultural discourses are circulating in a more general public discussion, it is of no small significance that it is a Leavisian approach – built on an explicit subordination of the realm of politics to the realm of culture – which becomes entrenched as the dominant literary-cultural paradigm in South Africa from the 1950s on. What is especially interesting for the present project is the way in which the ascendancy of a Leavisian cultural project in South Africa also coincides with a growing political conservatism in South Africa more generally. It is this displacement of more radical South African traditions by the conservative cultural agendas of a more mainstream cultural discussion – as well as a growing hostility towards a leftist political perspective more generally – that form the main concerns of the chapter which follows.

Notes:

¹ See the following detailed institutional histories: Mary Penrith (1972), Christopher Doherty (1989, 1990) and David Johnson (1996). For articles which explore aspects of this debate, see Michael Green (1984) Michael Vaughan (1984) and Nick Visser (1984).

² There was some unevenness in the implementation of Leavisite approaches in South African English departments in the 1940s. Mary Penrith observes, for example, that it was only on the retirement of Prof. Oswald Doughty in 1955 that the Cape Town English Department finally shifted its position. Nevertheless, interest in the new methods signalled “a new phase of critical thinking in South Africa, for from this time on these methods had to be taken into account even by those who disagreed with them” (Penrith 1972:101).

³ Two conferences of the University Teachers of English were held in Pietermaritzburg and Johannesburg in 1946 and 1949, respectively. Published proceedings are to be found in the Christina van Heyningen Collection STP 2/6/4, Pietermaritzburg Archives. Two symposia on the subject held in Cape Town and Bloemfontein also issued in two publications, the first edited by W.S. Mackie (1948) and the second by D. Hopwood (1949).

⁴ For more details, see Hobsbawm (1994:109-164). As Francis Mulhern points out, it seemed like a good moment to bring Arnold back. The year 1932 saw the publication of Lionel Trilling's biography of Matthew Arnold, a new edition of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* and the launch of *Scrutiny* (Mulhern 2000:175).

⁵ See, for example, the response from Stephan Collini (2001).

⁶ For a short biography of Van Heyningen, see the introduction to the collection of essays edited by J.A. Berthoud and C.O. Gardner (1969). See also the work on Van Heyningen's Shakespeare criticism in David Johnson's *Shakespeare and South Africa* (1996).

⁷ Christina van Heyningen Collection STP2/2/1, Pietermaritzburg Archives.

⁸ These remarks are made in the context of a review in *Trek* of Cyril Connolly's "self-indulgent" (16) work, *The Unquiet Grave*. In it, she makes out the features of a new literary creature, the "half-artist", who refuses to admit his moral responsibilities: "This refusal", she argues, "has never, to my knowledge, been made, in his practice by any artist of the first rank" (*Trek* April 1946:17).

⁹ Examination questions such as the following exemplify her approach: "Which of the following poems do you prefer and why?" In another example, students are asked to describe the mood of a poem, and to decide whether or not it is "healthy" (Christina van Heyningen Collection STP 2/6/4, Pietermaritzburg Archives). See also Van Heyningen's textbooks for the study of English Literature, *A Practical Course in English* (1935) and, with A. W. van der Horst, *English: Intelligent Reading and Good Writing* (1938).

¹⁰ The production she refers to is a performance of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* at the City Hall in Cape Town on the 30th March 1946. It was produced by Rosalie van der Gucht and sponsored by the South African Association of Arts. The Cape Town Municipal Orchestra provided the music; the sets and costumes were designed by John Dronsfield, and painted by Cecil Higgs.

¹¹ For a discussion of this pamphlet as well as other aspects of Durrant's cultural and political project in South Africa, see Johnson (1996:148-155).

¹² His idea for a National Cinema runs counter to a generally pessimistic *Scrutiny* view. While generally scathing about Hollywood culture, he nevertheless sees the potential of National Cinema as an important educational tool.

¹³ An open letter "To a Non-European Intellectual" in *Trek* magazine by D. Robinson considers this possibility in some detail. Remarking on the way in which early Japanese successes in the war caused "the prestige of the European [to slip] a peg or two", he asks his imagined (black) readers: "Perhaps you were hoping that the Japanese would come to South Africa and remove the Europeans from leadership of the country". The rest of the letter attempts to persuade his audience that this is foolhardy (*Trek* 31 July 1942:9). This kind of white paranoia was satirised in some of the editorials in *Trek*. (See chapter 2).

Outlawing Politics

My exploration of an alternative tradition of cultural debate in South Africa begins with two successful independent publications – *Trek* and *The South African Opinion*. Both launched in South Africa in the late 1930s, these publications were defined by a unique combination of serious literary-cultural analysis and independent political comment. With their eyes on a small but fairly affluent (mainly white, middle-class) market, and patterned on successful overseas models like the *New Yorker*, these publications aimed to provide stimulating, well-informed and energetic commentary on local and overseas issues. As the site of an important alternative cultural-political debate in South Africa, both *Trek* and *The South African Opinion*¹ have a central place in this thesis. These cultural debates, however – like most of the others considered in this thesis – cannot be said to form either a coherent tradition or a developed ‘theory’. Sporadic, ‘occasional’, and heterogeneous, they are nevertheless united by a shared concern with contemporary social realities and a strong desire to link a conversation about culture with a more general political discussion. Articulating what can be described as a broadly leftist approach to culture (which in some cases takes on more explicitly Marxist forms), this alternative debate is especially interesting because it occurred in close proximity to a more normative view: while *Trek* and *S.A. Opinion* provided space for left-wing perspectives, they were equally amenable to the views of South African English academics like Christina van Heyningen, J.Y.T. Greig, Geoffrey Durrant and A.C. Partridge. In some cases, as we shall see, this resulted in an intriguing, and hitherto unknown, debate between South African English academics and those on the Left. Aside from beginning an exploration into a radical cultural tradition in South Africa, then, this chapter also provides a further elaboration of the institutional view, in particular the way in which it negotiated the challenge of the Left.

The first half of this chapter considers the emergence of an embryonic leftist cultural discourse in the Cape Town periodical *Trek*, placing particular emphasis on some of the more interesting interchanges between South African Marxists like R. Bergman and George Marsden and those South African academics who were more closely aligned with a Leavisian view. In the second half of the chapter, the focus falls on *S.A. Opinion*:

here an early engagement with more radical cultural perspectives is gradually displaced by more conservative approaches. In this sense – and this is also true of the chapter more generally – I explore the larger story of the gradual rise to prominence in South African cultural life of the predominantly apolitical cultural emphases of a university-based perspective. As this discourse increasingly favoured a separation of the areas of ‘politics’ and ‘culture’, both *Trek* and *S.A. Opinion* offered an unusual conjuncture of the ‘literary’ and the ‘political’ which, at the very least, was an important recognition of their complex and intimate connections. The wholesale disappearance of a political South African criticism from the 1950s on – dramatised in this instance by the intertwined histories of these two interesting South African magazines – is one of the aspects of South African literary-cultural history that this chapter sets out to understand and explore.

Whilst they were both very successful magazines, *Trek* and *S.A. Opinion* naturally attracted much smaller audiences than daily papers like the *Star* or more popular magazines like *Outspan*. Nevertheless, the emphasis on critical analysis and open debate encouraged a level of reader participation, particularly in *Trek*, which was seldom seen in the mainstream commercial press. Part of my intention in this chapter is to highlight this extraordinary moment of unrestricted South African public debate and discussion. Of special interest in this regard is the extent to which the opportunities for free and unrestricted public discussion became increasingly circumscribed as the century wore on. Articulating something of the dissident leftist politics of the late 1930s moment, both *Trek* and *S.A. Opinion*, in their individual ways, bear witness to a growing conservatism and intolerance in the public sphere. In the case of *Trek*, this is to be seen in the simple fact of its demise. In *S.A. Opinion*, it is to be found in a noticeable shift from a left-of-centre approach in the late 1930s to the much less intrusive politics of South African liberalism.

The Moment of *Trek*

Trek was a bilingual fortnightly magazine edited by maverick South African journalist, Jacques Malan. An exemplary instance of vigorous public discussion and debate in South Africa, and an important organ of anti-government opinion, it was also the site of a significant oppositional cultural-political debate. *Trek's* role in the history of South African letters has been almost completely overlooked.² Something of a wolf in sheep's clothing, *Trek's* fairly elastic political identity to some extent masked an editorial perspective which was decidedly to the left of the mainstream. That the periodical

nevertheless managed to retain a loyal following despite the increasing unpopularity of a leftist analysis is as much due to the generally excellent standard of its articles as to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of its editor. While South African academics like Christina van Heyningen and Alan Warner were active contributors on the cultural front, *Trek's* book reviews, for the most part, tended towards a position on culture and social change which differed considerably from those articulated in English Departments in South Africa at the time. In this sense, *Trek* has enormous significance in South Africa literary history as the site of an early articulation of a Marxist or left-inflected approach to literary-cultural questions. Even more interesting, perhaps, is the fact that the magazine became the site of an unusually energetic public discussion of these questions, specifically the value of a Marxist approach and the relationship between culture and the attainment of social justice. In this regard, *Trek's* popular letters pages were also the site of long-winded, often sarcastic and acrimonious encounters between South African leftist critics and Leavisites like Geoffrey Durrant and Christina van Heyningen. This is a significant debate, not only because it is an important instance of an embryonic South African Marxism, but also for the light it sheds on the literary-political priorities of South African Leavisites themselves.

Death's Head at the Feast

Malan's favoured editorial role was that of "death's head at the feast" (14 August 1942:5). His editorials (written in both English and Afrikaans) typically addressed themselves to current political and economic affairs. They ranged in tone from harsh rebuke to contemptuous and ironic dismissal. Many of *Trek's* full-length articles, which engaged with a range of social, economic and cultural issues, continued in the same critical spirit. Very few aspects of South African life were immune to Malan's attacks. While he targeted the relatively easy scapegoats of Afrikaner Nationalism, the Ossewabrandwag and Oswald Pirow's New Order, he saved his most stinging criticism for the liberal white-washing being applied by Smuts's United Party Government to repressive legislation designed to ensure the preservation of white supremacy and the continued exploitation of black labour.³ Malan opposed the racial policies of South Africa's "slave state" (5 November 1943:5), and called for full voting rights for Africans. The 1943 war-time elections are described in an editorial as a "struggle between two minority groups for the privilege of dominating each other and the voteless mass" (16

July 1943: 5),⁴ and a later comment on government reluctance to carry out promises made during the war highlights the strategic imperatives underpinning government policy:

Gone are the days when fear of the Japanese led to bold threats that, rather than kow-tow to the yellow peril, we would arm the black and brown men. Gone are the exalted moods in which Natives and Non-Europeans generally were promised that there would be an honourable place for them under the post-war sun. For the Japanese didn't turn up and white South Africa is trying to forget as quickly as possible the ridiculous emotionalism of the time. Its one concern, as is that of the British conservatives, is to see that there shall be no essential alteration of the existing social situation through careless loss of vigilance. (24 March 1944: 5)

The South African Labour Party, in particular, received frequent criticism for its racist exclusion of black workers both from its ranks and its politics. South African universities come under the spotlight as a result of a decision to introduce a colour bar in four South African universities. Instead of “radiating light and sweet reason”, Malan argued, these universities have become the “centres of conservatism”. Emphasising that this is not an “isolated outbreak of reaction”, he concludes that South African universities are playing an important role as the “cheerleaders of reaction, illiberalism and rank prejudice” (8 September 1944: 6).⁵ Malan rejected the ideals of Western democracy, the capitalist mode of production, social reformism, and what he and others described as Stalinist betrayals of classic Marxist doctrine.⁶ He looked forward to the overthrow of the capitalist social order and the rule of the proletariat, argued for a more state-regulated market place, and emphasised working-class solidarity. While some of *Trek*'s writers shared what can loosely be described as Malan's 'Trotskyist' leanings, *Trek* drew contributors from a wide political spectrum, ranging from Stalinism to liberalism. As a result, it offered neither a uniform point-of-view, nor was it associated with any of the political organisations in existence at the time. In fact, both the CPSA and Fourth International Organisation of South Africa (FIOSA), a Trotskyist splinter group, were quite careful to distance themselves from the publication.

A world war against Fascism and Nazism, the anticipation of post-war democratic reform in South Africa and abroad, and the awakening of widespread anti-colonial sentiment encouraged the circulation of socialist ideas both in South Africa and abroad. In South Africa, wartime industrial expansion led to massive increases in urban working-class populations. This, coupled with steady state-encroachments on the political and economic freedoms of oppressed groups in South Africa resulted in the transformation of organised coloured, Indian and African politics, the growth of trade unions and rising levels of militancy (Lodge 1983; Lewis 1987; Beinart 1994). The Western Cape, in

particular, was the site of a lively tradition of independent left-wing activity. In this regard, Baruch Hirson points to the existence of a largely forgotten “socialist current” (1992:65) at the University of Cape Town in the 1920s and 30s that included Lancelot Hogben, Professor of Zoology, Frederick Bodmer, linguist and lecturer in German, and Benjamin Farrington, classicist and Latin lecturer. Associated with them were J.G. Taylor (lecturer in Psychology), Dora Taylor (literary reviewer for *Trek* and author of *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest*), Jean van der Poel (History lecturer), Helene and Jacques Malan, David Schrire (lawyer and businessman), George Sacks (co-founder of the *Guardian* and member of the Communist Party), and Paul Koston (owner of Modern Books). According to Hirson, “there is a continuum before the Second World War that links these people: their criticism of racism, opposition to imperialism and war, defence of minority rights, and their rationalism and socialism” (1992:47).⁷ This academic community, which overlapped with a larger group of Cape Town Trotskyists, had established the Lenin Club in 1933. Along with a number of other left-wing clubs and discussion groups in Cape Town during this period, the Lenin Club became “a centre of serious Socialist discussion attracting sizable audiences, offering celebratory meetings on May Day or the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, and staging socialist plays” (Hirson 1993:76). The Trotskyists subsequently split to form the South African Communist League (later re-named the Fourth International of South Africa), and the Workers Party of South Africa (WPSA), respectively. None of these groups ever represented more than a marginal presence in the context of South African politics more generally, and very few members were politically active.

Although it must be stressed that there is no direct link between *Trek* and any of the Trotskyist groups in existence in Cape Town at the time, *Trek* should be understood as part of the independent left-wing intellectual culture that flourished there in the 1930s and 40s. *Trek*’s pursuit of non-racism, its anti-reformism, its Marxist interpretation of history, and its anti-Stalinism exemplify this tradition. Indeed, *Trek*’s denunciatory and uncompromising tone, coupled with a particular kind of vocabulary (terms like “herrenvolk”, “master race” and “quisling”), signals its similarity to the outspoken polemics of the Non-European Unity Movement, a political organisation established in 1943. Although not affiliated to any of these groups, Malan was personally associated with many of its members. *Trek* writers, Dora Taylor, J.G. Taylor and Hosea Jaffe – then a student at the University of Cape Town – were active in Trotskyist and Unity Movement politics. There is also evidence that activist Ben Kies and other leading

members of the Unity movement published articles in *Trek* (using pseudonyms) in which they outlined developments in an increasingly militant Western Cape opposition movement, and put forward proposals for a new liberation movement. Other left-wing writers included R.K. (Jack) Cope, the author of *Comrade Bill*, a biography of the communist trade-unionist W.H. Andrews, and Edward Roux. Roux was a leading member of the Communist Party of South Africa between 1923 and 1936. He published a biography of Communist Party stalwart S.P. Bunting in 1944 and wrote the first history of black struggle in South Africa, *Time Longer than Rope*, in 1948.⁸

Trek had its origins in the liberal bilingual review *The Independent* which was launched in 1936 under the editorship of the wealthy Cape Town economist Dr. Andre Bruwer. *The Independent* was published by the Independent Publishing Company. The majority shareholder was Natal philanthropist, Mrs. C. Whitehead, a daughter of J.W. Jagger, formerly minister of Railways in the Smuts government. Bruwer and Malan were minority shareholders (Smith 1946:10). Formerly Secretary of Finance under the South African Party government and a supporter of Smuts, Bruwer nevertheless held fairly progressive views on economic and political issues. As a result, he fell out of favour with the National Party government, which came to power in 1924. He resigned from government service shortly afterwards. Bruwer's aims were twofold: first, to create a space in South African society for the unrestricted and forthright expression of political and economic opinion unimpeded by party-political constraints; and, second, to educate public opinion, combat ignorance, and cultivate critical and independent thought. Bruwer expressed dissatisfaction with the "wire-pulling" (*Independent* 9 July 1936:3) and dishonesty of South African party politics, and feared that South Africans lacked critical skills and were easy prey to the dishonest machinations of politicians and propagandists. In 1939, a year after the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek, *The Independent* changed its name to *Trek*. The connections between the periodical and the celebrated historical event are not accidental, and are made explicit in the opening editorial of the new-look "family magazine for all South Africans" (17 August 1939:cover). Readers of the review are invited on an invigorating journey in the manner of their courageous white forefathers towards a position of enlightenment and knowledge. In these opening comments, the analogy of the Great Trek and the genuflection to an all-white ancestry serve to illuminate its role as bold and critical commentator on South African affairs, as well as the exclusionary nature of its politics. With Hertzog's resignation in 1939 over

the war question, Bruwer re-entered government service as economic advisor to the Industrial Development Corporation, and therefore abandoned the editorship of *Trek*.

It was under Jacques Malan's direction that *Trek* began to assume the radical stance for which it became well known. Malan took over from Bruwer as editor of *Trek* in February 1941. He rejected Bruwer's liberal politics, but retained an emphasis on economics, and an independent, critical position. He received editorial assistance from Lily Rabkin, former leader-writer for *The Natal Witness*, who became literary reviewer for *The Forum* in the 1950s, and later assistant editor of the *Sunday Times*. Rabkin was responsible for a substantial part of the critical commentary as well as publication and distribution (Potgieter 1970:626). According to C.J. Greshoff⁹ the combination of Malan's and Rabkin's talents was the key to the journal's success: "He threw out ideas – a great number of them in the realm of fancy – and she made them into something feasible" (Letter to the author, 19 January 1998).

Malan came from a Western Cape Afrikaner family based in Worcester. He was co-editor of *Ons Eie Boek*, a periodical founded in 1935 to promote Afrikaans literature, and his friends included the major Afrikaans writers of the thirties such as Van Wyk Louw, Uys Krige and I.D. du Plessis. He was associated with both *Die Suiderstem*, a liberal Afrikaans United Party paper, and the *Cape Times*. After spending some time in the United States, he returned to South Africa to join Africopa, the short-lived South African press service associated with I.A. Schlesinger which was set up in opposition to the South African Press Association (*Forum* August 1944:21). C.J. Greshoff recalls that Malan was "in many ways an early prototype of a later manifestation of Afrikanerdom: the de-tribalised urbanised Afrikaner" (Letter to the author, 19 January 1998). A.J. Friedgut of *The Forum* describes him as "[l]anky, fair-haired and a brilliant conversationalist, with a theorist's eye that read volumes between the lines of reports in the daily press....Highly critical of everything, he made his attitude apparent in his journal. He got much enjoyment, he'd told those who knew him, out of 'swinging a dead cat around the editorial sanctum'" (19 August 1944:21). Malan's political views are summarised by N.P. van Wyk Louw in a letter (cited in Kannemeyer 1990:88) in which he describes Malan as intelligent, well-read and a fanatical believer in Marxism: "Hy glo eenvoudig dat die blankes in Suid-Afrika aan die vooruitgang van die swartes, die meederheid, opgeoffer sal en moet word – al is dit deur die masjiengeweer – en hy glo dat dit binne ons leeftyd sal gebeur".¹⁰ Along with Jean van der Poel, Malan and his wife Helene assisted in the translation of the *Communist Manifesto* into Afrikaans, which

appeared in 1938 on the ninetieth anniversary of its first publication with an introduction by Trotsky.

As an open forum for free and unrestricted public discussion, *Trek* is an almost perfect expression of Habermas's understanding of the way in which the institutions of public democracy in eighteenth-century Europe could provide an important counterpoint to the enormous power and influence of the state. Not only was government and overseas policy held up to public scrutiny, but a range of other social evils were attacked and exposed in the pages of *Trek*. Even more interesting, many of the issues raised in articles and reviews spilled over into the letters page. Here, readers "with caveats to file against anything that has appeared in *Trek* or with novel and persuasive programs for getting rid of stupidity, sin or the censor, or with schemes to sell something and cunning enough to get their propaganda past the Editor" were invited to "cut loose on this page" (*Trek* 10 April 1941:1). *Trek's* letters pages became the site of energetic, extended and often acrimonious polemics on a wide variety of social, political and cultural questions. This, even more than its critical stance, assisted its functioning as a viable public sphere in the increasingly constrained atmosphere of a country moving towards an apartheid state. As a critical review and carrier of public opinion, *Trek* offered a significant challenge to the discourses emanating from both government and big business.

Reader response to the growing radicalisation of the periodical was mixed. Some commended its fearless, iconoclastic stance, while others criticised it for its carping, sneering tone and wildly unsubstantiated statements.¹¹ Its left leanings led to its being labelled "blood-red" by the conservative financial review, *South African Advertising and Selling* (July 1944:35). In similar spirit, a reader suggested *Trek* rename itself "a communist fortnightly" rather than "hide propaganda under the guise of a critical review (22 October 1943:1). Interestingly, Malan's anti-Stalin position invited a stinging attack from a member of the central committee of the South African Communist Party, Michael Harmel. In an article entitled "The Truth about *Trek*", Harmel set out to expose *Trek's* Trotskyist "taints", its anti-Soviet and so-called anti-working-class bias, and its sneering attitude towards the Labour Party (*Inkululeko* October-November 1943:5-6). *Forum* writer, A.J. Friedgut, records that The People's Bookshop – much patronised by orthodox Stalinist Communists – even banned it because it was too far left (19 August 1944:21). The Labour Party organ, *Forward*, despite disagreeing with its position, felt compelled to concede its merits:

We have accounted – we account – *Trek* politically irresponsible, because while apparently sharing our socialist objective, they are not infrequently destructive of what seems to us the most practical means, the best machinery, by the use of which that objective can most readily be attained. Despite his sharp criticism of labour, we “salute his honesty of purpose”; salute his unbending independence; salute his championship, even where we considered it wrong-headed and ill-informed, of the Non-European. (18 August 1944: 7)¹²

As the “most enthused-about and abused magazine in the country” (*Forum* 19 August 1944:21), *Trek* enjoyed a relatively high profile in South African public life. The Communist paper, the *Guardian*, (which, like *Inkululeko*, was otherwise very uncomfortable with its ‘Trotskyist’ leanings) described it as “the most read, most discussed and most quoted journal in South Africa”, “a highlight in the sadly shoddy history of journalism in this country” and “an antidote against intellectual dry-rot” (*Guardian* 10 August 1944:5).¹³ *Trek* was distributed nationally, and its audience was drawn mainly from a white middle-class intelligentsia. The absence of any overt political affiliations meant that it attracted a varied audience that included Trotskyists, orthodox Communists, a substantial number of left-liberals as well as anti-war (and anti-British) Afrikaner Nationalists. The Afrikaans literary community, in particular, awaited its arrival with bated breath as literary reputations could fall with a single stroke of Afrikaans literary reviewer Kees Konyng’s irreverent literary pen.

In arguing for its role as an important organ of a restricted public sphere in the political and social life of South Africa in the 1940s, it is worth noting the extent to which this public sphere was a limited and somewhat exclusive one. Notwithstanding its iconoclastic desire to nudge the complacent seats of established power, *Trek* continued to signal itself – and was received as – an ‘intellectual’ review rather than a ‘popular’ magazine. The somewhat Olympian posture resulting from its journalistic style combined with an air of cynical detachment led to criticism that *Trek* failed to address itself to workers. The *Guardian* and *Inkululeko*, for example, in their attention to the daily problems of the working classes, had a sense of urgency that *Trek* lacked. In addition, while it enjoyed the support of a small black readership,¹⁴ and while some of its contributors included black writers such as I. Funeka, B. Ywaye, Woodroffe Mbete, H.A. Naidoo, Saul Galant and Henry Johannisen (many of these names were pseudonyms), it remained largely a forum for white, middle-class English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans.

Marxist Criticism Before 1970

Like its political commentaries, *Trek's* book section, which included both reviews and full-length articles, bore the imprint of early twentieth-century preoccupations with socialism and Marxism. While it included criticism from Leavisites like Christina van Heyningen, Alan Warner and Geoffrey Durrant, the majority of its critics grappled with the questions of a turbulent and crisis-ridden social and political environment through the mode of a more politicised literary criticism. Furthermore, in the work of people like Dora Taylor, R. Bergman and R.K. (Jack) Cope, *Trek* also became the occasion of an early South African articulation of Marxist literary criticism at least three decades before its appearance in university English departments. Equally interesting is that it became the site of a lively public discussion between left-oriented thinkers and South African liberals. The moment of *Trek* is significant not only for its oppositional political stance but also because it is a record of an important South African debate. For the most part, these literary-cultural discussions (found mainly in the letters pages of the magazine, and which often went on to three or four pages) engaged with the broad question of the relationship between culture and society, the role of art in social change, and the usefulness of a Marxist approach in an understanding of contemporary society. Stimulated by international and local socio-political events, they were also bolstered by the spectacular evidence – in the Soviet Union in particular – of the very real possibility of radical social change, however compromised or problematic. In this sense, the left-oriented preoccupations of many of *Trek's* correspondents were – as one reviewer put it – part of “widespread international interest in the social significance of literary texts occasioned by the rapid and devastating social changes of the last thirty years [that] have affected in a radical way not only the creative writers of our time but the critics as well” (Bergman 1945:14). Indeed, these debates are very close to similar discussions in left-wing publications in Britain like *Left Review*. Whilst they did not always share a single political vision, literary-cultural discussions in *Trek* are, without exception, deeply engaged with the pressing social and political questions of 1940s South African society.

Although it is only possible to speculate about the origins of *Trek's* literary criticism, the influence of Cape Town's lively left-wing culture must have been a factor in its development. The influence of English Marxism is also apparent. That Marxist ideas had to some extent travelled to South Africa by the 1940s, and had had some impact on critical approaches to literary texts is borne out by Philip Segal's comments in 1948 concerning the popularity amongst Cape Town students of “sociological” criticism.

Needless to say, Segal, who at that time was a lecturer in the English Department at the University of Cape Town was less than sanguine about this turn of events.¹⁵ As we have seen in chapter 1, it was during this period that English departments in South Africa were beginning to negotiate the challenges presented by the new critical approaches associated with I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis, which were to achieve hegemony in the 1950s. *Trek's* more politicised criticism offered alternatives both to traditional historicist paradigms, and to the new dominance of the practical critics.

While *Trek's* left-wing criticism resembles neither a coherent nor a uniform body of work, it can broadly be described as an approach which, in the words of one of *Trek's* reviewers, “attends to the social and economic base of literature” and does not “simply take the aesthetic viewpoint” (26 March 1943:15). As such, it represents an attempt to make connections between literature and its socio-economic roots, and relies on the assumption that literary texts reflect ‘reality’ in fairly uncomplicated and direct ways. Often a stumbling block for anti-Marxist intellectuals, the problem of the relationship between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ as understood by South African Marxists in *Trek* at this time was not the crude, one-dimensional interaction which Raymond Williams described in his well-known critique of the Marxist approach in *Marxism and Literature*. In fact, in response to criticism from a Mr. Stewart in Pinelands that Marxists are contemptuous of the ‘inner life’, for example, *Trek* writer Oliver Caldecott points to the ethical basis of a system which seeks equality for everyone, and argues that whilst not denying the value of “the subjective element of life”, Marxism sees a necessary conjunction between the ‘inner life’ and objective structural factors, the broader “movement of history”. Citing Arthur Koestler’s argument in the *New Statesman* that “history is always written in terms of keys and locks”, the keys being “shaped by subjective individual factors” and the locks by “objective constellations in the structure of society”, Caldecott suggests that “Mr Stewart is in danger of collecting keys but never looking for the locks” (Letter to the Editor, 23 January 1944:1).

In contrast, Dora Taylor, D. Lynn, R.K. Cope and R. Bergman – all regular literary reviewers for *Trek* – recognise and foreground the connections between literature and material conditions, and emphasise the class-determinants of artistic production. In consequence, they have an acute sense of the impact of broader political and social events on literary production.¹⁶ Their critical method leads to a focus on so-called ‘proletarian’ or ‘committed’ writing. In this regard, literature which focuses on the struggles of the working classes, incorporates a sense of the broader social forces at work

in the lives of individuals, and offers Marxist solutions to social problems is favoured over the individualist preoccupations of much contemporary bourgeois literature. In their attention to a wide range of authors including H.G. Wells, Ignazio Silone, and James T. Farrell, *Trek* critics extended the narrowly defined literary canon of traditional criticism to include more popular left-wing texts.

Trek's leftist literary discussion drew critical responses in the letters pages from both readers and fellow-contributors. "Puzzled" from Stellenbosch, for example, asks Dora Taylor "what, in her opinion should the difference be between the function of a poet and that of a propagandist for the Marxist revolution?" (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 14 July 1944:1). According to another, while reading Taylor's reviews, he can "almost hear the guns of Moscow and vodka glasses saluting the destruction of poets" (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 14 July 1944:2). Those at the forefront of the South African assault on traditional English pedagogy in the universities – namely Durrant and van Heyningen – were also the most vigorous opponents of *Trek*'s Marxist criticism. In this regard, Durrant warns that *Trek*'s "fortnightly frenzy of speculation" is spreading to its literary columns (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 15 January 1944:1), and sums up *Trek*'s 'irresponsible' attitude towards the established canon in the following poem: "Since reading *Trek*... I know our poets/are all bad/Yeats an escapist/Rimbaud mad/I know the artists/I thought dull/are exquisitely/beautiful (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 7 April 1944:2).

As I have suggested, *Trek*'s literary polemics are significant not only because they are a rare example in South Africa of the public debate of literary-cultural questions, but also because they testify to a dialogue between emerging Leavisian criticism and Marxist critical approaches. This is something that has been overlooked in critical histories of the period, which tend to confine the struggle to that which occurred between historicists and Leavisites.¹⁷ Many of these debates were sparked off by Dora Taylor's book reviews and articles, particularly those on South African authors. First accused of a "lack of detachment" (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 5 June 1942:1), she was soon charged with the familiar crime of reducing texts and writers to their political ideologies. According to I. Pinchuk from Cape Town, Taylor requires that South African novels be "text-books of sociology with an agitational appendix at the end". None of her "fortnightly anthologies of slogans" examines any of the "writers as writers". Obsessed with "social significance", she wants "solutions to economic and political problems which haven't been solved in action" (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 31 July 1942:1). Those who took up this criticism, on the other hand (Taylor did not respond), defended her

interest in political issues, arguing that “our times demand a more social attitude on the part of the writer and critic” (*Trek* 28 August 1942:1).

Contributions from R.K. Cope were equally provocative. In an interesting article on South African literature, for example, Cope offers a political definition of literary worth, suggesting that the positive changes he observes in some of the emerging writers of the period are directly attributable to a new political awareness on the part of South African authors. Responding mainly to a new crop of young South African war poets, Cope suggests that a disillusionment with contemporary politics has invigorated South African literature, giving rise to “an infant literature of discontent”. In his opinion, good art is that which rejects racist and colonialist myths, is informed by a Marxist historical perspective, and identifies itself with working-class struggles. Rejecting the romantic, tragic mode of much Afrikaans writing in favour of documentary realism, he argues that “[a]s long as the Afrikaans writers and poets refuse to accept the Marxist or scientific view of life and hold themselves to a deadly intellectual and racial isolation their literature will tend to be reactionary, tragic and inverted....Along this road, there is no advance. It is the road to literary perdition” (3 December 1943:13). Cope’s article tends to credit English writers (such as W.H. Auden and Cecil Day-Lewis) with a far more sensitive social and political conscience in comparison to those writing in Afrikaans. This attempt to divide the English liberal sheep from the Afrikaans racist goats can be regarded as itself reactionary, an early version of the complacency of white English-speaking intellectuals which was mercilessly exposed by Mike Kirkwood in 1976. While Cope appears to argue for a more enlightened sensibility in England, South African English writers are also urged to “march with the struggle for freedom” (13), and to produce literature which is both entertaining and politically useful.

The complex question of literary evaluation – another area which was often eagerly seized upon as obvious proof of the deficiencies of a Marxist approach – is the topic of R. Bergman’s article, “Approach to Literature”. Aware of many of the pitfalls of this debate and eager to respond to the increasing contemporary interest in the “social significance” of literary texts, Bergman rejects both the “ivory tower” and the purely “sociological” approaches in favour of a strategic and more intelligently-applied synthesis:

Our own position is briefly this: that these two methods of approach are by no means irreconcilable; that the social significance of a poem, novel or play does in fact and moreover *should* enter into one’s total assessment of it; but that the activities distinguished by these methods should be consciously and deliberately

separated in the practice of the literary critic, so that he may be able to say without fear of self-contradiction that *The Idea of a Christian Society* is a distinguished piece of writing though the social philosophy is reactionary, or that *The Grapes of Wrath* is a third-rate novel of great didactic value. (original emphasis *Trek* 23 February 1945:12)

Similarly in a review of *Dragon's Teeth* by Upton Sinclair, D. Lynn commends the truth and fearlessness of Sinclair's thinly-veiled propaganda even though his "style is as stodgy as suet and as unpoetic as a stock-exchange report" (*Trek* 11 September 1942: 15).

George Marsden, editor of a small Trotskyist paper called the *Worker's Voice*, who made a significant contribution to *Trek's* literary-political polemics, also attacks the purely literary approach, arguing instead for a critical method which is attuned to the social and material contexts of literary production. In a letter to the editor which responds to Christina van Heyningen's criticism of 'sentimentality' in Dickens, he argues that van Heyningen's refusal to acknowledge the social roots of literature prevents her from offering an adequate reading of the text. For Marsden, if one attends to the material determinants of Dickens's fiction, for example, it is clear that his sentimental portrayal of female characters is determined by a more general social conservatism "which could not envisage any higher role for women than the clinging, submissive, self-effacing wife" (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 15 November 1946:1). In a slightly different, but equally significant, response to one of the central preoccupations of a Leavisian approach, Marsden argues that van Heyningen's emphasis on questions of abstract morality rather than concrete socio-political issues has the effect of obscuring and containing their significance, creating the mistaken impression that social injustice and deprivation are the mysterious products of some vague 'moral decline' rather than the tangible outcome of particular historical agents in a specific historical context. Taking the argument one step further, Marsden suggests that the refusal of South African Leavisities to register the claims of politics is, in fact, a tacit endorsement of the status quo. Geoffrey Durrant, Christina van Heyningen and all the other "Scrutineers" are thus accused of a Kantian elevation of moral categories, which accomplishes the displacement of economic, political and social concerns. In Marsden's view, the subordination of political issues to moral problems produces a critical practice which, in its overwhelming preoccupation with ethical and moral dilemmas, acts to perpetuate and preserve an unjust and oppressive social order. Reserving their "petty venom" for those on the Left, these "self-

styled defenders of morality and civilisation” cannot bring themselves to comment on the “reign of terror and barbarism which is so marked here in South Africa”, since this might appear “Communitic!”. In this way, South African Leavisites become the

petty, oblique purveyors of a system of oppression and brutality through the very simple device of hypostatizing morality, and either outlawing politics, or making it a slight appendage....[T]he moral earnestness of these Neo-Kantians and their evasion of political problems, or the subordination thereof to morality, is in truth their capitulation to the vast, cynical political forces at play....Let [them] not imagine that they are playing no role; in their petty way they are struggling to maintain this system. (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 6 September 1946:2)

This acrimonious exchange notwithstanding, *Trek* criticism differs most significantly from the preoccupations of South African English academics in the social function it assigns to literature in the broader social and political formation. Bergman’s insistence that writers and artists identify themselves with progressive social movements and commit themselves to the struggle against oppressive economic systems initiated what was to become a lengthy debate on the relationship between the artist and political commitment which forms part of a broader repudiation on the part of *Trek*’s leftist critics of the artistic ‘ivory tower’. In response to the question of whether or not the artist has the right to claim exemption from active service, Bergman argues that *as a citizen* the artist has a duty to join in the struggle for a more just society:

It seems to me that the artist...should show an intelligent understanding of and sincere sympathy with the aims and methods of progressive political parties, and that he should, in times of social crisis – when every man has to choose on which side of the barricades he will take his stand, give his support to the progressive rather than the reactionary forces. (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 20 April 1945:17)

Bergman also makes it clear that a commitment to a progressive politics does not automatically mean that an artist will become the “servile appendage of the Commissariat of Culture”. In contrast to this kind of dogmatic cultural prescription, Bergman returns to a more classic Marxist position, in this case, reminding his audience of the “honourable and independent status that Marx and Engels always regarded as [the artist’s due]” (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 18 May 1945:1). Geoffrey Durrant had no time for such qualifications, suggesting that Bergman’s unwillingness to assent to the privileged position of the creative artist in the social formation in relation to other workers would compromise the very ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’ that was the necessary precondition for good art. According to Durrant, “the artist who permits himself to be hustled into organisations and parties must lose the personal detachment without which art of any value is impossible” (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 6 April 1945:17). It is only from a

position 'above' politics that the artist can meaningfully contribute to social and political change:

The artist can have no 'side', can stand in no breach between ourselves and our mistakes. But if we are prepared to give artists the necessary freedom and leisure, they will do much more for us than any political party. They will re-make our minds, give us clearer aims, and provide the basis for a healthy political life...[A]ll creative workers...are invaluable in a mass-producing society, and...we should be well-advised to preserve them carefully...But the most urgent need is to protect the poet, whose raw material is Thought itself, and whose craft is therefore of the greatest importance....A badly made and ugly chair will harm us; careless speech, shoddy thinking, and shabby values will destroy us. That is why the poet's job seems to me to be the most important there is, and why we should stop jogging his elbow. (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 4 May 1945:2)

Here, Durrant repeats one of the most important themes of his own intellectual and political practice, namely that an education in the 'best that has been thought and said' will inevitably produce citizens who will be able to make responsible political choices. As he puts it on another occasion, "a subtly organised person will not be capable of crude political action". Interestingly, Durrant's understanding of a "crude" political response has nothing whatever to do with traditional social evils like racism, discrimination or exploitation. Instead it refers to the much more alarming social phenomenon of an enthusiasm for left-wing politics, in other words "political slogans", "flag-waving" and "sentiment about 'the toiling masses'" (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 29 June 1945:3).

Bergman's response reiterates one of the central claims of a Marxist critical method. Rejecting Durrant's Romantic view of the artist as "unacknowledged legislator", he argues that "to claim that the artist's insights, however valuable, are a substitute for organised political action seems to me extravagant to the point of irresponsibility" (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 18 May 1945:1). Although in agreement with the argument that the artist is able to make a unique contribution to the spiritual and intellectual health of the nation, Bergman categorically denies that the artist is able to bring about social change:

I have always accepted I.A. Richards's remark about "bad taste and crude response" being the "the root evils from which other defects flow" as a true statement of the value of art as the most important integrative agent of a human personality. But I cannot follow Mr. Durrant in his leap from this relatively modest claim to the contention that art is "determinative of our political action". Political action must have as its end political change if it is not to lose the name of action...[T]he only effective instrument of political change is an organised party, and...artists and those who value art can perform their civilising function only from 'within' – as critical adherents of the political program represented by the party. (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 15 June 1945:2)

Another challenge to these founding assumptions concerning the political and social effects of 'Great Literature' comes from Bertha Meyer, another of *Trek*'s regular literary reviewers. Pointing to the slave economy of Greece, she refutes the conventional view that levels of cultural and intellectual advance are commensurate with social progress:

One only has to remember ancient Greece and look at modern Germany to realise that culture, whatever its importance and significance, does not determine the development of society along progressive lines. Ancient Greece still holds our reverence for its thinkers and artists. Germany was renowned for its contributions to the world of culture. The one was a slave state; the other became so. The ultimate measure of civilisation has little to do with the artistic level of a community, but everything to do with the relations of man and man. (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 15 June 1945:3)

Working within the paradigm of a broad, but not stringent, dialectical materialism, and responding in part to conditions of increasing reaction and repression in South Africa and abroad, *Trek* critics like Taylor, Bergman and Cope advocated a critical method which was closely attuned to the shaping influences of material contexts. Eschewing the purely 'aesthetic' or 'ethical' preoccupations of a more hegemonic discourse, *Trek*'s radical critics (and a number of its readers) combined a close attention to form with a detailed engagement with both content and context. In this regard, *Trek* critics tend to dismiss the 'art for art's sake' or 'ivory tower' traditions in favour of a more socially conscious art, one which engages directly with contemporary socio-political realities. Here, the aesthetic preferences – in contrast to the more abstract preoccupations of South African Leavisites and its more general 'outlawing of politics' – are for the kind of realism which highlights the impact of broad social forces on individual experience. A further departure from a more mainstream discussion is the refusal to privilege the insights of culture over the practice of politics. Here Taylor, Bergman and Marsden, in particular, reject the influential Leavisian view of culture as an antidote for social chaos in favour of a much more circumscribed approach, one which (in keeping with a Marxist perspective) looks forward to revolutionary social change rather than preservation and containment.

Trek's radical stance led it into direct confrontation with the interests of capital in the form of the Rand Mines. In 1944, a libel action of £150 000 was brought against the publishers of *Trek* by four Rand Mines because of two articles written by R.K. Cope which made public the findings of the Landsdown Commission of Inquiry into the conditions of employment for African mineworkers on the Rand.¹⁸ The matter was settled out of court, but one of the conditions of the settlement was that Malan had to

agree to the control of an editorial board. Malan refused and resigned as editor. The magazine continued for some years under the editorship of Lily Rabkin but eventually ceased publication in early 1947.¹⁹ In May that same year, *Trek* merged with the much more conservative *S.A. Opinion*; in an ironic twist, the new magazine was named *Trek* (May 1947:5). In 1950, the new *Trek* announced its decision to drop all political content. From this point on, *Trek* would function as an exclusively literary-cultural magazine (March 1950:1).

This history is interesting for a number of reasons. In the first place, the demise of *Trek* is a dramatic example of the way in which the opportunities for free and unrestricted public discussion in South Africa were, in the late 1940s, becoming increasingly circumscribed as the country headed towards the more total repressions of the apartheid state. While the censorship of the apartheid era is well-known, what is intriguing about this example is that the threats to free public discussion in South Africa in the 1940s come not from the state, but from big business in the form of Anglo-American mines. Oppositional discourses, in other words, are allowed to continue so long as they do not stand in the way of the efficient working of capital.

If the story of *Trek* is the story of a shrinking South African public sphere, it is also the story of the increasing marginalisation in South African public life of a leftist cultural discourse. In this regard, the decision to drop all political content from the reincarnated 1950s *Trek* is emblematic of a much more pervasive cultural-critical shift, highlighting not only an increasing tendency to separate the world of 'culture' and the world of 'politics', but also the ascendancy and entrenchment of a much more conservative literary-cultural approach. In this regard, it is interesting to consider that while *Trek's* Afrikaans review, "Kanttekenings", made a substantial impact on established literary-critical practice in the Afrikaans academy,²⁰ there was no comparable influence in relation to the development of South African English Studies. For critics like Durrant and van Heyningen, Marxist cultural discourses have no place in a liberal education that favoured the steady humanising influence of the great works of the English literary canon. Without this institutional sanction, *Trek's* radical critical methods were unlikely to survive longer than the periodical itself, and today there is no evidence that this early articulation of Marxist literary criticism ever took place. Its institutional exclusion was so complete that when Kelwyn Sole addressed the problem of the interpretation of South African literature in 1977, he argued the benefits of a materialist

approach to the analysis of literary texts as though this point were being made for the first time:

It is thus my belief that it is time more attention was paid to the social and political position of the writer in a specific concrete situation in Africa. Only when this is done, can questions of aesthetic and ideological merit have any real significance. (1977:6)

This particularly significant exclusion provides abundant evidence of the power of hegemonic academic institutions in determining which ideas achieve prominence in the social and cultural formation, and which are discarded. From here onwards, to seek out the connections between culture and politics remained the marginal activity of small pockets of intellectuals and activists in fringe newspapers like the *Guardian*, *The Voice*, *The Torch*, *Spark* and *Fighting Talk*. While Jack Cope was able to find a congenial forum for his leftist views in the *Guardian* (see chapter 5), Dora Taylor's literary journalism came to a halt with the demise of *Trek*. In the years which followed, she concentrated on writing lectures and plays for the much narrower public forum of the political groups in which she remained active (see chapter 3). Lily Rabkin, somewhat unexpectedly, joined the United Party publication, *The Forum*, as one of its regular literary columnists. Here, Rabkin's reviews of many South African authors, including Daphne Rooke, Nadine Gordimer, Phyllis Altman, Laurens van der Post and Sarah Gertrude Millin, articulate a muted but nevertheless noticeable leftist perspective in contrast to the much more apolitical literary discussion of *The Forum's* principle reviewer, Mary Morrison Webster.²¹

From Politics to Culture: *The South African Opinion* and *Trek*

If *Trek* is the story of a little-known instance of cultural and political radicalism in South Africa, and a striking example of the way in which the contexts for an alternative or oppositional discussion in South Africa were systematically shut down, *The South African Opinion* is the story of the triumph of a more conservative position. Its trajectory from a left-of-centre literary-political periodical of the turbulent 1930s to an exclusively literary magazine of the post-war period bears similar testament to the gradual narrowing of the public opportunities for radical debate in South Africa. At the same time, while it provided the opportunity for an interesting clash of ideas, what emerges in the cultural-political debates of the 1930s and 40s is the wholesale displacement of more radical voices by a liberal consensus which is at pains to mask its deep support for the status quo

under the guise of neutrality and non-partisanship. In this sense, a powerful distrust of political art, and a corresponding reluctance amongst literary critics to engage with the concrete particulars of the South African context has strong affinities with the approach pioneered by Christina van Heyningen and Geoffrey Durrant which is discussed in the previous chapter.

S.A. Opinion was launched in November 1934. Its editor, Bernard Sachs – less famous brother of trade unionist Solly Sachs – ran the paper for twenty years, no mean achievement for a periodical of its kind. *S.A. Opinion* began as a bi-monthly literary-political review covering local and international politics as well as the arts. Described by Stephen Gray as an “embattled” and “courageous” (Gray 2002:15) publication, it faced the usual difficulties of any serious publication in South Africa: lack of advertising support, paper restrictions during the war years, and a small reading public easily tempted by a less arduous read. In August 1937, unable to impress its advertisers sufficiently to count on their support, it found itself in serious financial difficulty, and was forced to close down. Resurfacing briefly in the early 1940s as *The South African Spectator* and *The Democrat*, respectively (Gray 2002:15), *S.A. Opinion* was officially re-launched in March 1944. The second series, which now appeared once a month, offered a more attractive layout, a wider pool of contributors, and interesting visual material, which included hand-drawings, black and white photographs and wood-cuts, as well as dramatic and memorable cover pages depicting images of South African life, and some excellent political cartoons. In 1947, *S.A. Opinion* merged with *Trek*, which at that time was struggling to recover from the loss of its editor. Claiming to combine what was best in both publications, the new magazine was in fact a continuation of the old *S.A. Opinion* under a new name. What is particularly significant for the shape and direction of its cultural discussion is that in 1950, as we have seen, the editor decided to drop all political content, with the new *Trek* focusing exclusively on literary-cultural issues. The fruitful proximity of a cultural and political discussion which had been such a successful innovation of both publications was replaced by a cultural debate which had less and less to say about contemporary socio-political affairs.

The 1929 Wall Street Crash, the world economic depression, and Hitler’s unexpected success in winning a frightened German middle class to the cause of National Socialism were the decisive elements in the early formation of this long-running South African periodical. Whilst an equally turbulent local politics played an important role, *S.A. Opinion* responded in the main to the broader threat to democratic ideals posed by

economic crisis and the rise of Fascism in Europe. As its opening editorial declared: “These are confused and unsettled days when ideals and traditions which past generations have taken for granted are being ruthlessly tested for their right to survive”. Its explicit self-positioning within the broad ambit of a ‘progressive’ or ‘liberal’ outlook did not prevent it from accruing to itself the virtues of an impartial, ‘non-political’ stance.²² Like many liberals, it sought to occupy the higher ground of the reasoned moderate who, from a position above vested interests, offers dispassionate comment, avoiding the perils of both partisanship and fanaticism: “Our task [is to] supply an ordered interpretation of vital issues, based on fact, and informed with a progressive point of view”. With “no axe to grind”, and “committed to no platform” the paper hoped to maintain a balance between the various “extreme viewpoints to which our disturbed epoch has given rise”. In its avoidance of “all powerful biases and currents”, it sought to bring a “calm and reasoned logic” to the discussion of pressing socio-political questions, hoping thereby to “[compensate] the reader for any lack of emotional fervour” (1 November 1934:1). This self-positioning as a neutral, reasonable voice in a sea of rabid extremisms was not an uncommon strategy in the history of South African periodicals during the period. It reflected both a sincere faith in the real possibilities of a non-partisan stance, and was also, in part, a reaction to a public sphere dominated by a string of highly successful and outspoken ‘Party’ publications, whether of Afrikaner Nationalism or Communism.

Always careful to avoid “a spirit of Olympian aloofness and cynicism”, *S.A. Opinion* sought to clarify, interpret and critique aspects of South African society and culture in the interests of a more democratic society. In this sense, it responded to the growing need for an informed political and cultural discussion in the country. Whilst both Europe and America could boast an abundance of “fairly advanced journals”, the South African public was either unwilling or unable to support the offerings of a serious critical review. In an effort to garner support for this risky new venture, its opening editorial sought out both the concerned liberal and the cultural snob: its first editorial addressed itself explicitly to “those thoughtful South Africans who refuse to be smothered in the complacency of the closed mind and who do not derive aesthetic pleasure from endlessly eating chewing gum while reading endless stories of snakes, tigers and more snakes” (1 November 1934:1).²³ Progressive politics were allied to a ‘high-brow’ cultural aesthetic, forged in response to commercial culture and a substantial appetite amongst white South Africans for exotic colonial fare.

The marked preference in *S.A. Opinion* for the apparent virtues of the moderate 'middle way', and the related fear of political 'extremisms', can be traced to the personal history of the editor himself. Sachs's autobiographies, *Multitude of Dreams* (1949) and *The Mists of Memory* (1973) offer interesting accounts of the origins of the periodical. As he describes it, the start of the magazine marked a turning point in his own political and intellectual life, when after many years of conscientious involvement in left-wing politics, a growing disillusionment with the Communist Party both locally and abroad led to an outright rejection of socialism and a return to more individualist preoccupations. Bernard Sachs was born in Lithuania in 1905, one of the many Eastern European immigrants to South Africa who made a significant contribution to South African life, particularly in the forging of an oppositional politics. Sachs grew up in the Johannesburg working-class suburb of Ferreirastown and attended Jeppe High School where he met Herman Charles Bosman, with whom he shared a long (if not always harmonious) friendship. Inspired by the drama of the 1922 Johannesburg strikes, Sachs joined the Communist Party in 1923. As he wryly recalls, the extent of his youthful activism during this period was confined to anti-war demonstrations and meetings in front of the City Hall. Nevertheless, his commitment to the cause of social justice, heightened by his family's experiences of persecution and oppression, was always sincere. Like many others around the world who had been inspired by the events of the Russian Revolution, Sachs watched the changes under Stalin in the early 1920s with growing trepidation. For Sachs, it was a tragic decline as the tremendous hopes of the Russian revolution of 1917 were gradually replaced by power struggles, paranoia, and increasing bureaucratisation. The vilification of that "most splendid example of Bolshevik heroism", Leon Trotsky, was something which he found impossible to accept: "One of the saddest moments of my life was the news...that Trotsky had been banished, first to Siberia and then to Turkey. A whole world, into which had gone my most precious dreams and the full ardour of my spirit, was visibly collapsing before me. I continued to hang on to my membership of the Party. But there was no longer any enthusiasm or a will to sacrifice myself" (1949:158). The Stalinist phase, by contrast, was like "dust and ashes from which no phoenix could rise" (160).

As a member of the Communist Party of South Africa, he felt the immediate effect of the 'revolution betrayed' in the arbitrary and authoritarian way in which Comintern policies were handed down to the South African Party, often with very little knowledge of local conditions. The notorious "Native Republic Thesis" of 1928 was

especially problematic as was the Party's increasing bureaucratisation and coercive reach (Drew 2000: 94-108). In his autobiography, Sachs finds an echo for his deep pessimism and despair in the character of Prince Andrew in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* who, after witnessing the collapse of Europe at the hands of Napoleon Bonaparte, turns his back on politics, choosing instead to "live for [him]self" (cited in Sachs 1973:155). As he goes on to explain, an overwhelming interest in politics and philosophy during his years as a "dedicated soldier" in the war against capitalism had eclipsed any desire to read "pure literature" or to engage with "the mysteries and mystifications of the human soul". In fact, as he records, his attitude and that of his fellow comrades towards the middle-classes "was one of utter and complete hostility". As "the propertied section of society" they were amongst those "whom history had consigned to the dustbin". Furthermore, since the established literary canon "dealt almost entirely with the hopes, fears and iniquities of this class, it was of no greater concern to us than the fate of an African is to an Afrikaner in our remote hinterland". After his eventual emergence from the Communist Party, he writes, "it was as if something constraining me had snapped" and he was free to "bound forward into a new area of interest and a clime much more equable and suited for reflection" (1973:157). Significantly, for Sachs, this meant the previously scorned examples of bourgeois high culture: *Madame Bovary*, *Crime and Punishment* and *Sons and Lovers*.

Whether it was the disaster of the Stalinist period or a well-known tempering of radical opinion that was to blame, by 1932, Sachs had abandoned left-wing politics altogether. In one sense, then, the periodical, which was to occupy him for the next twenty years, marks a significant rupture, its inception coinciding with a conscious retreat from any kind of left-wing political involvement save that which was the accidental result of his brother's continued activism. Equally significant, as his autobiographies make clear, the appreciation of literature and the pursuit of radical politics are understood as belonging to entirely separate realms. If for Sachs Communist sympathy entailed the stifling of literary and aesthetic reflection and pleasure, the end of left-wing political involvement marked his entry into the world of the imagination and the unfettered exploration of individual as opposed to communal concerns. In its immediate location in this 'post-Trotskyist' moment, *S.A. Opinion*, then, was a reaction to Stalinist constraint, and its basic opposition between Communism (more accurately, Stalinism) on the one hand, and human freedom on the other, provided the blueprint for its engagement with South African politics and culture. While Sachs retains a strong

commitment to social justice, the ‘narrow’ obsessions (and failures) of twentieth-century Communism are cast aside in favour of a more ‘humane’, more open, and more individual response to contemporary questions. His position could only have been strengthened by Hitler’s rise to power, providing as it did yet another powerful confirmation of the need to champion the rights of individuals in the face of a looming totalitarianism. These sentiments provide the broad backdrop of Sachs’s own worldview; however, in so far as one can infer a unitary ‘voice’ or ‘persona’ from the many contributors to the periodical, a similar consensus emerges: *S.A. Opinion* is a magazine which regarded its own approach to national and international affairs as more reasoned, accurate, balanced and objective than that of a range of left- and right-wing ‘extremisms’, and as the years went by, its opposition to communism and socialism became more and more entrenched.

In his introduction to a collection of Bosman’s sketches and essays – part of the recent centenary re-publication of the complete works of Herman Charles Bosman by Stephen Gray and Craig MacKenzie – Stephen Gray provides a glimpse into the early twentieth-century Johannesburg literary and social scene as a backdrop to Bosman’s life and work. According to Gray, *S.A. Opinion* formed a significant part of this world: a Johannesburg paper,²⁴ it reflected in detail on the local socio-political and cultural scene and, fortunately for Bosman, offered a platform for his various literary interests which became something of a lifeline in what was always a precarious career. *S.A. Opinion* combined the talents of what Gray describes as “those three B’s of the South African newsprint industry” (2002:17), Bernard Sachs, Edgar Bernstein and Herman Charles Bosman. While Sachs and Bernstein concentrated on local and international politics, Bosman took care of the newspaper’s literary and cultural offerings. Bosman’s contribution to *S.A. Opinion* was substantial: as literary editor, he was in charge of the overall ‘cultural content’ which included regular cinema, theatre, and book reviews; he also contributed short stories, reviews, essays, poetry and sketches under the various by-lines of Herman Malan, C.M. van den Heever and ‘Spectator’. His presence in the periodical was clearly a strong selling point: Gray describes him as the paper’s “star-turn”, his latest contributions eagerly awaited by enthusiastic fans. The combination of serious political comment and detailed cultural analysis, which characterised *S.A. Opinion* in its early years, marked it out from its contemporaries, and offered a compelling model for many subsequent South African publishing ventures.

While Sachs's youthful radicalism made him less, rather than more, likely to champion a left-wing approach to contemporary society and politics, his brief induction into the world of the South African Left is still evident. This is particularly so in the early years of the periodical's existence. Sachs's political editorials in the mid-30s offered a left-of-centre interpretation of local and international events, which drew at times on a Marxist approach. His economic analysis recognised the failings of Victorian economic liberalism, which had led to world economic crisis, widespread unemployment, and the paradoxical problem of "too much capital seeking foreign markets" (28 December 1934:1). Instead of looking to the "revolutionary impulses of Communism", however, he argued in favour of a Keynesian 'planned economy', and advocated international economic reform. In the mid-1930s, Sachs was deeply troubled by the growing talk of war amongst the European powers and the failure of international peace efforts. Locating Hitler's rise to power in Germany's economic collapse, he drew on a Leninist understanding of the function of war in the modern global economy: "We must make it abundantly clear to the British statesmen that if South Africa is to sacrifice the flower of its manhood, it will not be in a war where behind glittering facades painted with such fine phrases like 'Freedom of the Seas', 'Make the World Safe for Democracy' or 'National Honour', fresh markets are being conquered apace" (8 March 1935:1).²⁵ Furthermore, his outspoken condemnation of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia also demonstrated an acute understanding of the function of Europe's colonies in the grand scheme of imperial squabbling.

In the periodical more generally, reflecting a common tendency in many other publications of the time, Adolf Hitler and Nazism were the frequent subjects of both satirical cartoons and scathing critique, as were the many local Nazi sympathisers in Malan's Purified National Party (which emerged in 1939, a breakaway from Hertzog's National Party). In fact, as you would expect from a liberal publication, the political analysis which characterised *S.A. Opinion* drew much of its force from its reaction to an insurgent Afrikaner Nationalism. Here, the likes of Oswald Pirow were easy targets in an economic analysis which emphasised the absolute necessity of South Africa's transformation from a "feudal", agrarian economy (based on an outdated racism) into a modern, industrialised nation (14 June 1935:1). Like many South African liberals, Sachs believed that the segregationist impulses of a powerful South African land-owning class were detrimental to the political and economic progress of the country. This argument, which drew on the lessons of the American Civil War, became one of the periodical's

strongest themes, increasingly defining the ambit of its political engagement in the 1940s, the preoccupation with modernity and industrial progress gradually taking it further and further away from an explicit engagement with questions of race and class. Whilst many of the discussions of the 'Native Question' during the 1940s have all the benevolence and tell-tale vagueness of a typical South African liberalism, the editorials of the pre-war years freely exposed the disingenuousness of South Africa's racial policies and condemned the farce of South Africa's race relations. For Sachs, the notorious Native Bills, passed in 1936, for example, "would do justice to Hitler himself" (22 February 1936:1). A paper which consistently promoted the value of democracy over other available alternatives, and which was frequently critical of developments under Stalinism, it was nevertheless careful to retain a distinction between "dictatorships from the left and from the right", asserting that while Nazism "is but the gigantic preparation for war, the world would some day profit in one form or another from the vast social experimentation that is the feature of Soviet Russia" (4 September 1936:1).²⁶

Whilst the 1930s periodical relied on the contributions of a core group which, aside from the "three B's", included R.A. Hoernle, Dr Joseph Sachs as well as university academics such as Professor Max Drennan (Head of English at the University of the Witwatersrand), Professor J.Y.T. Greig (Drennan's successor) and A.C. Partridge (lecturer in English at Pretoria University), the early *S.A. Opinion* also attracted the notice of some of South Africa's leading Left intellectuals. These included J.G. Taylor (lecturer in Psychology and husband of Marxist literary critic and activist, Dora Taylor), Benjamin Farrington (Classics lecturer at the University of Cape Town who was closely associated with journalist, Ruth Schechter), Eddie Roux (one-time Communist Party member and author of *Time Longer than Rope*), and Frederick Bodmer (Physics lecturer at UCT). Whilst their contributions remained small (many of them did not submit more than one article), they were a noteworthy and often controversial feature of the periodical in its early years. Some of the more contentious issues which these, and others, took up included women's oppression, censorship and free speech, the so-called immorality of contemporary cinema, the causes of poverty, Olive Schreiner's interest in socialism, and Karl Marx's association with South Africa. For the rest of the magazine's contributors, the great socialist experiment on the other side of Europe was viewed with caution, and some distrust. If there was interest, it is tempting to see it as part of the general upsurge of 'Left' commitment which characterised the 1930s Popular Front period when even the

most resolutely apolitical were forced into some kind of heightened awareness as Fascism strengthened.²⁷

One contributor who appears to have been influenced by the broader popularity of left-wing ideas during the period was regular literary critic, Cyril Kantor, whose numerous positive reviews of books like L.F. Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night* (16 November 1934:21), Ignazio Silone's *Bread and Wine* (3 April 1937:15) and Liam O'Flaherty's *Famine* (17 April 1937:14) brought the classic texts of the 1930s muck-raking tradition to the attention of South African readers. About Jack Kirkland's adaptation of Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*, for example, he writes:

Here is a play that shatters the aesthetic susceptibilities of our 'anaemic' critics who write for the vulture press. A play that stabs at that section of the world's community which is prepared to trade humanity's blood for their stagnant traditions, and gets to the very core of our putrefying civilisation. (17 April 1937:14)

Caldwell is described as a "courageous thinker" with "flickers of genius and a penetration that hurts". He is also an author who resists a common tendency in North American fiction to depict "Negro workers as happy crooning children" (17 April 1937:14). Kantor seems genuinely appreciative of a new "revolutionary trend in modern literature" which is committed to social equality, and seeks a balance in "our muddled and stormy decade" between rapacious individual greed and social obligation (12 June 1937:14). This enthusiasm notwithstanding, his many casual caricatures of "our fanatical Marxists" (1 May 1937:8) seem to suggest that while he supports the contemporary concern with social justice and equality, he has no stomach for those who promote it, resorting to the stock comic caricatures typical of the period. In a review of Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, for example, Kantor dismisses Marxist "cranks" as "tract-writing, hair-splitting, platform-strutting socialists who eulogise the glories of machines and industrialism and splash about in the sea of dialectical materialism" (15 May 1937:14). His antipathy for Marxists really comes to the fore in a review of Andre van Gysegem's production of *The Hairy Ape* by Eugene O'Neil at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg (discussed in more detail in chapter 5), where it would seem that the spectacle of Africans spouting Marxist propaganda is far too much for him to bear.²⁸ In his review, the play is roundly criticised for its attempt to "cram [the] unready minds" of his African cast with "the half-digested seeds of revolution" (6 February 1937:13):

Does it seem at all feasible that hydrophobic revolution might ever successfully bridge the gap of spiritual evolution, an evolution that is yet far distant? Unmasticated propaganda must necessarily exercise a derogatory influence upon their progress in that direction, and certainly no true and lasting realisation can be

attained while they continue to strut as revolutionary marionettes. With the exception of Yank...the remainder of the cast were mere puppets, mouthing without feeling or sincerity the diatribes of writers whose acid barbs are directed towards the muddled but desperately receptive minds of the so-called down-trodden masses, and not for the uplift or regeneration of a people but recently emerged from the sanity of the Kraal. (6 February 1937:13)

In fact, after at least three years of enthusiastic reviews of the 1930s 'social problem' novel, he almost breathes an audible sigh of relief when in the late 1930s, he can move on to books "that are non-political in character and which reproduce the essential beauty of fiction in its pure and uncontaminated form" (12 June 1937:14).

Aside from the articles by the UCT radicals, much of the 1930s 'leftism' of *S.A. Opinion* seems to have been little more than a dutiful gesture in the direction of social equality which was provoked by the demands of a particular moment rather than being the result of a genuine commitment to left-wing ideas. With *S.A. Opinion*'s re-emergence in the mid-1940s came a substantial change in political orientation, editorial preoccupations having shifted from questions of social justice to the characteristic themes of South African liberal politics. This identity grew more self-assured as National Party policy began to take shape in the years that followed. This more conservative political direction was cemented in the late 1940s when *S.A. Opinion* merged with *Trek*. The new magazine was to continue in the footsteps of both its predecessors, but for many of *Trek*'s faithful subscribers, the "old gods of 'Trek'" had been "effectively exorcised" (*Guardian* 22 May 1947:3). Arguing that it was "quite lacking in the critical integrity that distinguished its predecessor", *Guardian* journalist and Communist Party member, Brian Bunting offered the following damning assessment of its politics:

Its antipathies range from Soviet Russia to the organised working class, and under cover of preserving a literary detachment from the field of struggle, it puts across quite a lot of the dope that is peddled by Churchill, Truman and Co. For instance we are told in a windy editorial on Wallace that "the threat to our values comes not only from Communism but also from Nazism"; "that our challenge to the advance of Russian Communism will only carry the stamp of legitimacy if life can be made more livable (sic) for the mass of the people of this world"; that "the real basis for suspicion of Russia is a foreign policy that keeps asking for more and more, and which is supported by the Communist Parties in other countries". If this is the sort of drivel that we are going to get from *Trek*, the editors should be made to understand that there is no need for their publication....There are a hundred magazines that can churn this stuff out better because they write it with more conviction, and without any pretence that it is progressive, or 'intellectual'. (*Guardian* 22 May 1947:3)

Its politics aside, *S.A. Opinion* stands out as one of the few English publications in the country to actively promote and develop an indigenous South African culture.

These efforts flew in the face of an academic orthodoxy (in South African English Departments especially), which dogmatically insisted on the importance of maintaining cultural ties with Britain, and gave little serious attention to local writers. The opening editorial of the newly-launched 1944 *S.A. Opinion* makes this commitment explicit for the first time: “[a] field in which we aspire to perform a pioneering role...is in the developing of an indigenous South African approach to matters literary”. This included the “cultivat[ion] of South African short story writing and poetry that can be truly called South African and attains to the necessary standard of literary quality” (March 1944:1). From its inception in 1934, *S.A. Opinion* had provided a platform for local writers through its regular short story and poetry slots, publishing work by Bosman, Gordimer, Bernard Sachs and Uys Krige, to name only a few. In the mid-1940s, this coverage increased dramatically, with writers given further encouragement in the form of short story and poetry competitions, the first of which, launched in March 1944 and judged by Professor Greig, was won by Nadine Gordimer for her story, “No Luck Tonight”. An indigenous South African criticism was pursued through regular reviews and articles on South African literature, theatre and art. Most noteworthy amongst these efforts are the numerous pioneering survey-type studies which appeared from the late 1940s onwards. Here, Edward Davis’s “English Writers of South Africa” (December 1946-April 1947), Edgar Bernstein’s “Steps to a South African Culture” (March-May 1950), J.P.L. Snyman’s “The Rise of the South African Novel” (August- November 1950), a series on “Post-War Literature in South Africa” written under the by-line, ‘Masque’ (March-July 1950), and “The Pulse of Africa” (May-August 1950) by Joseph Sachs which looked at African sculpture, music and painting represent some of the earliest efforts to define the content of a national culture.

As literary editor, Herman Charles Bosman did much to establish *S.A. Opinion* as a significant part of what he saw as an embryonic South African cultural renaissance (April 1944:25-26). Apart from his popular Marico tales, his “Talk of the Town” series and his many extraordinary sketches on South African life in all its fascinating variety reveal an unerring eye for a distinctive South Africa cultural identity and experience. His sketches, which touched on squatter camps, the Johannesburg Public Library, the Roeland Street Jail, the Cape Town Castle, white youth culture, architecture, street protests as well as the enduring South African ‘dorp’ (and many others) are all delivered with the characteristic understated humour and knowing irony of his Marico stories.²⁹ His enthusiastic and detailed attention to the local (mainly white) South African scene

was a pioneering effort – while many English-speaking white South Africans had their eyes firmly fixed on England – to recognise, and begin to define, an indigenous South African culture. In his non-elitist interest in, and appreciation of, a far broader definition of culture than was generally accepted in South African universities, he also did much to challenge a dominant consensus which privileged ‘High Culture’ over ordinary, everyday experience.

The question of a South African culture – whether it existed at all, and if so, was it any good – was addressed by many contributors to *Trek-S.A. Opinion* in the years which followed.³⁰ The debate was sparked off by the publication in November 1935 of an article by Professor J.Y.T. Greig. Dismissing South African English literature as third-rate at best (Roy Campbell’s poetry was the single exception), Greig also voiced his objections to a growing tendency in South African society to regard English South African literature as a separate literary tradition from that of England. As literature written in English, he argued, it automatically formed part of the English literary canon, and ought therefore to be judged according to its standards. The discussion about an indigenous culture went on for the better part of twenty years, and whilst Greig and others offered a cautionary word now and then, its on-going defence and promotion proceeded with very little direct provocation. The work of Peter Abrahams was occasionally given an enthusiastic mention, but it was rare for *Trek-S.A. Opinion* to pay much attention to the cultural production of those classified as ‘non-European’. The discussion also tended to have a predominantly literary focus, with the notion of culture as ‘everyday life’ remaining largely unrecognised and unexplored. Despite some differences in approach amongst the ‘literary nationalists’, there was widespread agreement on a number of issues: first, that South African English literature *did* form a distinctive literary tradition from that of England (the almost unvarying list included Thomas Pringle, Olive Schreiner, William Plomer, Sarah Gertrude Millin, and Roy Campbell); second, that it had intrinsic value; third, that South African writing relied too heavily on European models; and finally that South African writers (in the exemplary tradition of Olive Schreiner) needed to develop an indigenous style appropriate to distinctive conditions. A favourite and, by the end, exhausted analogy was that South African literature should be ‘rooted’ in the ‘South African soil’.

Literature has always been a fundamental element of national projects worldwide. A form of “cultural self-recognition”, literature, Robert Lecker argues, is one of the means by which a national group can “know [itself] and verify [its] national

consciousness.” The value of a national literature is that “it reflects the value of the nation” (1990:662). In this sense, Lecker suggests, criticism then becomes a “displaced form of nationalism” (664). The cultural nationalism of the predominantly English-speaking white South Africans who wrote for *Trek-S.A. Opinion* was clearly spurred on by the rise of a powerful Afrikaner Nationalist movement – dramatically signalled by the 1938 centenary celebrations of the Great Trek and the National Party victory ten years later. Here, the all-too-proximate example of a much more vigorous Afrikaans literary tradition was a frequent source of concern and envy, something which put English-speaking South Africans to shame.³¹ Nevertheless, it was repeatedly held up as the model which they should endeavour to emulate. As one commentator put it, only the work of Afrikaans writers “rings true” (*S.A. Opinion* 22 February 1936:6). Another thorn in the flesh for the mainly South African-born promoters of an indigenous literature was the frequently patronising attitude expressed by members of the dominant British culture towards the lowly cultural efforts of its ‘backward’ dominions. Here, an English South African literature struggled not only to define itself against the much more powerful English tradition, but also had to contend with patronising English critics who tended to dismiss the cultural products of the commonwealth as second-rate and insignificant. This cultural snobbery was undoubtedly reinforced by the many British-born academics who filled important posts in South African universities at the time. It was also uncritically reproduced by English speaking South Africans themselves, hoping to bolster their social position at home by insisting on their primary cultural allegiance to England. The assertion of the value of a distinctive English South African culture was one of the most important ways in which colonial dependence could be resisted.

The response from *Trek-S.A. Opinion* was the reverse of the traditional ‘colonial cringe’, a somewhat exaggerated and defensive stance which in its early stages argued its case on the grounds of a popular anti-elitism. Thus Germiston-born Edgar Bernstein, who was the first to take up the argument for an indigenous South African culture, rejects the “snobbish bigotry” (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936:11) of men like Greig, asserting (in a later article) that an indigenous culture cannot simply be “scoffed out of existence by the higher brow of Johannesburg’s Parktown or the colonial outlook of Durban’s Berea” (*Trek* March 1950:24).³² That the argument was as much about literary values as it was about national pride is clear from responses in *Trek-S.A. Opinion* to two articles published in the *Times Literary Supplement* and *Die Burger*, respectively. Charles Eglinton – in a “Reply to the ‘Times’ and ‘Burger’” published in *Trek* in October 1951

– is particularly irritated by the polite but nevertheless damning disavowal of South African literary achievements in the *TLS*, sentiments which are expressed in a “patronising, rather bored” and vaguely “authoritative” tone. An equally dismissive article in *Die Burger* – although “expressed at a very much lower level” – is every bit as irksome (*Trek* October 1951:6).³³ Eglinton’s critique provoked a number of sympathetic responses. This might suggest that it was all water off a duck’s back for the English-speaking South Africanists; however, a noticeable preoccupation with ‘cultural philistinism’ and the declining standards of colonial South Africa in *Trek-S.A. Opinion* more generally suggests that the cultural snobbery of English critics (and the complacent superiority of those from *Die Burger*) may have touched a nerve.

Edgar Bernstein’s response to South Africa’s cultural snobs was to assert that in the work of artists, poets and writers like Olive Schreiner, Thomas Pringle, Pierneef, Roy Campbell, and Sarah Gertrude Millin, the foundations of a “specifically South African culture” had already been laid (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936:11). Unlike the Afrikaans writers, however, English South Africans were still crippled by a kind of “spiritual colonialism”, creating art “after established English patterns” and merely “setting them against a background of local colour”. Echoing Olive Schreiner’s comments in the Preface to *The Story of an African Farm*, Bernstein argues that “[t]oo many books written before World War II could have been written in London or in Timbuctoo” (12). A reliance on imported literary models, he suggests, has given rise to an “underbrush of cultural inconsequence”: romanticised portraits of “sun-dappled farmhouses” and “rolling veld”, and a colonialist literature of “brawny farmers and ‘savage’ blacks”, histories which are “too often only a whitewash of chauvinism” (*Trek* March 1950:25). R. Feldman, and later Herman Charles Bosman in the 1940s, also objected to the overwhelming reliance on European models. For Feldman, South African writers “draw too much from the fountain of English literature and too little from the reality around them”. He notes in particular some of the less successful attempts to create a “South African atmosphere” through the judicious introduction of a few “good Zulu or Swazi names, and an eloquent flow of Biblical language, intermixed with a little native folklore”. But, he warns, “South Africa is stubborn and whimsical and does not allow its skies and veld, its children and all life to assimilate with the legends and tales...of distant lands and strange people” (*S.A. Opinion* 22 February 1936:6). Similarly, Bosman attacks a pervasive colonialist mindset, in which South African writers, their eyes fixed on a European or American market, churn out literature which “is neither African nor

European”, but a “mongrel product” with little “survival value as a culture” (*S.A. Opinion* April 1944:25). For Bosman, this “synthetic quasi-European culture” has had its day (26). In taking this line, *Trek-S.A. Opinion* echoed an embattled minority position in South African English Departments which was represented in the mid-1940s by people like Guy Butler. At the 1948 conference of English teachers held in Pietermaritzburg, for example, Butler exhorted his audience to remember that “[w]e are Europeans living in Africa”. Like Bernstein, he criticised the desire “to escape to Europe in imagination”, concluding that “we should not be exiles on a mental St. Helena – neither Europeans nor Africans” (1949:59).³⁴

What for these ‘literary nationalists’ constitutes a ‘truly South African culture’? According to Bernstein, an authentic South African art should “savour of the spirit of the land” (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936:11). In support of this rather vague assertion, in an article which appeared over ten years later, he draws on a materialist understanding of art/culture as deeply intertwined with the environment in which it emerges: culture, he argues, “arises whenever a people, living long years in a given land, are so affected by the impact of their environment...that they seek to express it in artistic form” (*Trek* March 1950:24). Whilst he gestures towards the human and socio-economic aspects of ‘environment’ (racial tension, a distinctive economic, cultural and social configuration, etc.), it is to the impact of the *physical* environment on individual consciousness that he most consistently returns. If, for Bernstein, culture is (everywhere) an expression of the impact of ‘the land’, this influence is “infinitely stronger in a country like South Africa where nature assumes so imposing a form” (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936:11). What he is suggesting, in short, is that if English South African artists are fully cognisant of their physical location in ‘Africa’ (if they have severed their emotional ties with Europe) their writing, painting and music will be deeply imbued with a strong sense of place. What is remarkable about his arguments more generally is how quickly they shift from a materialist awareness of the determining influence of specific environments to the rather more mystical requirement that literature written in South Africa should somehow capture its distinctive ‘atmosphere’ or ‘spirit’:

[The artist has a] new land to interpret. A strange land, a land that has slumbered indolently for centuries, dark and unknown, and only now, in our own day, is coming to life....It is a land where the bigness is overwhelming, and in the end, it will only be in terms of that bigness, and the dark brooding spirit of eternity it carries with it, that great South African art will be created. (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936:11)

According to Bernstein, Olive Schreiner is the first South African writer to capture this “dark, brooding spirit”, its “strange fascination, its ferocity and its tenderness, its bigness and power” (*Trek* May 1950:26). As these comments suggest, Bernstein’s defence of South African culture engages at some length with a particular interpretation of the South African landscape, reading at times more like a tourist brochure than a critical review. The image of South Africa which emerges is one of blistering heat, wide open spaces, and harsh, unpredictable weather: sparsely populated, beautiful and overwhelming, South Africa is also violent, inscrutable, merciless, a place in which humans feel their true insignificance in relation to powerful “elemental forces” (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936:11). Here nature is “no kind and soothing mother”, but a “peasant nurse rudely castigating her charges”. Ultimately, for Bernstein, “the problem of fashioning a culture in this environment is the problem of finding tones, rhythms, words, colours and forms hard enough and sharp enough to reflect the impact of this violence – yet not so hard and sharp as to leave no room for the broad, massive undulations, and the strange, frightening harmonies which also characterise this land” (*Trek* March 1950:25).

That landscape and physical environment appear as such strongly charged terms in this, and other, attempts to define a national culture is intriguing. Robert Lecker’s analysis of the founding moments of the Canadian literary canon provides a useful comparison. He suggests that the tendency for Canadian literary critics to valorise realism over other literary modes can be understood as part of a powerful, “fundamentally narcissistic” desire on the part of an emerging national literary institution to see itself reflected in the emerging culture. The institution, Lecker argues, “wants clear, mirror-like images of itself and what it sees: the stuff out of which representational realism – and most canonized literature – is made. Realism confirms the [institution’s] position in time and space. It says: you are fixed, you are concrete, authoritative. You exist” (1990:662). As Lecker suggests, for critics as varied as Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood, the single most important index of literary value in Canadian literature has been the realistic documentation of Canadian experience, and therefore the dominant criterion used to determine whether a given text should be admitted to the canon. The pleasures of recognition are an undeniable part of the fascination of culture and, for a literary institution seeking to define itself in the shadow of another much more powerful one, the reflected image is also a potent confirmation of self-worth. In South Africa, there is a similar valorisation of realist modes, and the same demand for ‘local colour’ as a way of confirming both the existence and value of the emerging culture. However, because of

the absence of anything approaching a shared South African identity or experience – South African society being irrevocably divided along race and class lines – critics have turned to one of the least controversial aspects of the South African place, its distinctive natural environment. Ironically, the focus on landscape rather than the many forms of cultural life that were actually in existence in South Africa at the time unintentionally reinforces the very stereotype which the South African literary nationalists presumably wished to challenge, namely Africa as a place in which culture does not exist.

That said, there is more to this emphasis on landscape and place than a desire for self-recognition and national valorisation. As we have seen, despite his explicit distaste for the exotic African portrait in which Africans are ‘savages’ and white men are heroes, Bernstein’s own rendering of the South African landscape draws from exactly the same colonialist tradition. Bernstein’s Africa is the Africa of European colonial myth, the primitive, slumbering, sexual, violent and inscrutable ‘other’ of Europe: a place in which ‘nature’ overwhelms ‘culture’, a site of the irrational and the unconscious, a new world “still as it was in the first day of creation”; and a place of freedom and possibility in sharp contrast to the “confined spaces”, “primping hedgerows” and “tremendous cities” of Europe (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936:11). That this is so is evident in the way in which Bernstein’s guide-book discourse increasingly abandons a precise geographical location as he becomes more and more caught up in the European fantasy (and fear) of Africa. The ‘essence’ of South African culture which Bernstein is at pains both to define and to encourage is therefore no more and no less than the stale colonial stereotype of ‘primitive’ Africa. Like many other white South Africans at a loss for an adequate description of the experience of living in South Africa, Bernstein’s arguments also invoke the equally worn out and racist image of the writer and artist as a kind of virtual pioneer, a colonial adventurer or settler painfully making sense of anarchy and chaos, imposing order onto an essentially untamed place. In making his case for South African culture, for example, Bernstein writes: these “men (and women) of cultural pretension” who ridicule South Africa’s artistic achievements “set at nought all that has been painfully won from chaos by those in this country who have given their effort to search for other riches than the gold of the mines, and to build more enduring structures than clothing factories”. Bernstein was careful to distance himself from the distortions and idealisations of both the exotic and the banal – “pretty little stories of people living on farms”, “melodramatic tales of hunters in the backveld” and “queer little Negroid” carvings. However, his double-edged attack against both the elitism of cultural snobs and

the crass materialism of a frontier culture, also reinforces a dubious cultural stereotype (11).

What are the other key features of Bernstein's aesthetic? Like many other South African literary critics of the period, Bernstein evinces a strong preference for the realist mode defined against both popular romance forms (particularly the work of Rider Haggard and Percy Fitzpatrick) and the avant-garde experimentation of European modernism, which he lightly dismisses as "sex-triangles, cubist paintings and formless sculptures" (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936:11). Olive Schreiner, for example, saw "the people of her African farm as they were in life, not as romance might have painted them" (*Trek* May 1950:27). This appreciation for a kind of earnest realism is also reflected in the way in which he highlights (and heartily approves of) a tendency in South African writing towards the 'tragic' mode. The austerity, suffering and difficulty reflected in much of the work of Schreiner, Sarah Gertrude Millin and Pauline Smith, for example, are for Bernstein another important aspect of the cultural 'essence' he is seeking to define. Taking Schreiner as the example yet again, Bernstein is also openly appreciative of South African writing which demonstrates originality of form: the attempt to find a formal equivalent for a distinctive South African experience. Here he provides an illustration of what Nina Baym (1979), in an article on the emergence of the North American canon, describes as a tendency for an emerging national literary criticism to seek difference from, rather than similarity to, the dominant corpus of works against which it is attempting to define itself.³⁵ Unlike many English academics who applied an unmodified European aesthetic to an emerging South African literature, Bernstein attempts to move towards a South African aesthetic capable of appreciating the cultural practices of a wholly different context. Schreiner's novel is not damned for departing from conventional European models of formal unity and cohesion; instead its formal inconsistencies are regarded as one of the chief elements of its success. In similar fashion, Ridley Beeton's 1948 article on Olive Schreiner's novel gives serious consideration to her formal experimentation in *The Story of an African Farm*, so often dismissed by South African critics of this and later periods as signalling a lack of artistic control (*Trek* August 1948:28).

Despite the more than occasional lapses into romantic idealisation and colonial stereotype, Bernstein's emphasis on the decisive influence of 'place' in relation to cultural production is an important corrective to an English Studies tradition which remained fixed on a notion of an unchanging 'human nature' and the importance of

'universal' concerns. Furthermore, Bernstein was also one of the few to recognise the value and significance of the already-existing cultures in Africa, seeing in the cultural practices of indigenous South Africans a unique example of art which in its distinctive forms reflected the specific qualities of the South African environment. Nevertheless, like many others, in attempting to challenge a powerful institutional consensus which would deny the separate existence of a South African literature and culture, he rather overstates the case.

Bernstein is not alone in his reliance on the colonial stereotype. In their attempts to define what was distinctive about South African culture, many other contributors to this debate found themselves instinctively reaching for the 'elemental', sexually-charged and desultory Africa of Victorian fantasy. H. Poyurs's Africa, for example, is a "dark, vast continent" characterised by "heat", "decay", "dullness", "destitute people" and "vast expanses of lifeless sun-scorched land" (*S.A. Opinion* October 1944:27). Even the more cautious Frank Sinclair, who warns against the superficial discourse of "the tourist-agency brochure", and the various "stock symbols" of South African identity which appear with "sickening frequency" in South African writing, fails to come up with anything more concrete than "vastness" and "emptiness....a mind itself stripped bare" (*Trek* May 1949:27). Charles Gulston, editor of a recently-published anthology of South African poetry, was the only one to sound a consistently more sober note, criticising the "national geographical characteristics" of (in this case) South African poetry which had become obsessed with "drought, the boundless veld, and blistering heat" (*S.A. Opinion* November 1946:24). Perhaps the steamiest version of the colonialist myth is to be found in an article by Anthony Peck published in November 1947. In seeking to define the 'essential' characteristic of the South African experience, Peck comes up with what, to his mind, is the most fitting adjective, namely, "hotness" (32). This quality is to be found first, in the tradition of a certain kind of landscape depiction; in a distinctive South African "rhythm"; and finally, in what he can only describe as "the hot mystery of Africa", "the red, throbbing life force itself":

It seems to me that the mystery largely was (or is) its savagery. In Africa alone there were complete and utter savages, animals, reptiles, insects and diseases that *killed* - all these, spread out under a sun-drenched, limitless sky - of things on a large scale - of extremes - of swelling fecundity and sudden death side by side. Here was a land of really unknowable danger, where hot death continually menaced, where sex was urgent but as satisfiable as a craving for tobacco, and where there was cruelty - cruelty that instilled abject terror - abject, imminent terror that could only find escapism in grossest, terror-stricken superstition. (original emphasis *S.A. Opinion* November 1947:32)

What takes this discussion from the downright offensive to the simply ludicrous is his fear that the “vital core of things”, the “primitive fundamentals of Africa” are threatening to disappear altogether as “soil erosion” and “communications” (33) take their inevitable toll.

There is some merit in this discussion: an important rejection of a patronising Eurocentrism, a recognition of the determining influence of place, a recognition in Bernstein’s work particularly of the value and significance of the cultures that were already in existence before the arrival of white settlers, and a substantial commitment to the South African context. As a departure from the position of South African English academics, it forms an alternative intellectual tradition of a kind. Eschewing cultural snobbery, and recognising the value of local production, it could be said to represent a less elitist cultural tradition. However, its tendency to reinscribe the degrading binaries of a discredited colonial tradition does much to compromise its achievement.

Two critics who depart substantially from the pack of over-enthusiastic literary nationalists are R. Feldman and Frederick Bodmer both of whom contributed articles in the late 1930s. R. Feldman, another strong advocate for an indigenous South African aesthetic, is less concerned to define the essence of a South African culture than to encourage South African writers to take into account existing socio-political realities. While Feldman resorts to the trite colonialist image in his argument that the many themes of South African life offer “a mighty sub-continent to explore and conquer”, he does at least move away from landscape to discuss real people: “[t]he first and fundamental cause of our literary poverty”, Feldman suggests, “is due to the fact that that writers here hold aloof from portraying the reality around them since the social theme of master and servant, and the racial theme of white and black would not be welcomed”. This avoidance is particularly noticeable in the representation of African experience: “We get stories of Native life, are told of the witchdoctor, of ‘lobolo’, of beads and skins, and assegais, and the patriarchal life at the kraal” but are seldom troubled with the terrible stories of rural poverty and desperation which feature so frequently in the daily press. “These and a thousand similar themes are shunned by South African writers because they do not wish to offend the ruling cult” (*S.A. Opinion* 22 February 1936:6). Feldman singles out the work of Irma Stern both for its avoidance of the common temptation to depict Africans as “grown up children”, and for its commitment to depicting “social life and social problems”, working as she is within a tradition which generally “fights shy of

the painful and the tragic”(17 May 1935:10). Here Feldman’s realist aesthetic arises out of his conviction – shared by those on the Left – that the contemporary socio-political scene called for a more politicised, socially responsible art:

During the present decade...it has become apparent that literature cannot continue as a free, aimless art, bound to no subject or ideal, free from the problems of the day, removed from the anvil on which new ideas and conceptions are being forged. The muses have been taken down from their pedestals. ‘Art for art’s sake’ has been relegated to oblivion together with other obsolete maxims and conceptions. It is no longer feared to be called ‘tendentious’ since to have a ‘tendency’ means to have an outlook, means jumping off the fence and taking a stand. (*S.A. Opinion* 22 February 1936:6)

A similar emphasis on a more politicised art and (in this context) the related preference for realist modes is to be found in UCT academic, Frederick Bodmer’s discussion of South African painting published a year earlier. For Bodmer, the predisposition amongst South African artists to prefer the naked, ‘noble savage’ in environments of rural simplicity over an increasingly modernised African population are indicative of a worrying tendency to shun the more disturbing realities of the South African experience, in which beauty is appreciated over “social reflection”:

[The South African artist] never echoes in the least the Native as we know him from the factory, the police court and the petrol pump. His exact genesis and habit are difficult to state. Maybe the artist actually catches him where he is said to exist in the raw, unharmed yet by the wiles and vices of white civilisation. Then he develops him in the purifying medium of his creative vision whence our canvas-native emerges full of that shining glamour and unaggressive dignity which so much enhance the charm of the South African drawing room....This is an art which knows nothing of menial toil because the artist works within and for a privileged class which is not interested in the process of production. (*S.A. Opinion* 11 January 1935:15)

In addition, he argues, despite the fact that “European and Native are bound together by the most intimate working ties, in industry, in agriculture, in the kitchen, even in the nursery”, they remain completely separated in South African art (15). Bodmer’s determination to acknowledge the reality of contemporary urban African experience not only challenges the romantic (and racist) distortions of a characteristic white South African aesthetic, but is also an unequivocal repudiation of a powerful political and social consensus which hid its repressive social aims behind the liberal rhetoric of ‘indigenisation’ and ‘retribalisation’. As Bhekisiswe Peterson has argued, the political aims of a supposedly “benevolent segregation” (2000:162) – premised on the myth that a ‘pure’ African culture had to be protected from the corruptions of modernity – also found parallel expression in the arts. The explicit encouragement of traditional African art

forms was just one of the many ways in which the South African state sought to entrench cultural difference as part of its broader segregationist goals.³⁶ As we shall see, both Bodmer's and Feldman's insistence on the need to recognise the reality of a well-established African modernity, and their corresponding scepticism towards a dubious African 'indigeneity' are important early examples of the central themes of an alternative South African cultural-political debate, an issue which would receive even greater attention in later publications like *The Voice* and *Fighting Talk*.

The work of Herman Charles Bosman offers an interesting counterpoint to these arguments. Unapologetically and exuberantly nationalist in his concerns, Bosman presented his case for an indigenous culture with all the cliché and emotionalism he could muster. South African literature, Bosman asserted, "must grow from the granite of our pavements, from the sun-stricken soil of our veld". It should be "torn from the stark womb of the earth", its "roots deeply entangled with the dark purple of the raw tissue of the life that is at hand". His celebration of an idealised, 'blood and soil' version of culture draws on something of a Lawrentian opposition between the vitality, energy and 'life-force' of Africa (representing for him, a culture in its early stages) and the degeneration of Europe. Generally speaking, however, he steers clear of the colonialist excesses of his many contemporaries, being one of the few *S.A. Opinion* writers to take into consideration the cultural achievements of black South Africans. For Bosman, "a common culture, virile with the warmth and mystery of the earth, is the strongest bond there is for knitting the heterogeneous elements composing a nation into a strong united whole". If a strong 'rootedness' in the South African 'soil' is the pre-requisite for a vigorous (and truly national) South African culture, another requirement is the absence of "foreign ideologies". In fact, as Bosman is at pains to suggest, there should be no politics at all, just "that gaudy, frightening, suffocating, incredible, catastrophic vortex that goes by the simple name of 'Die Lewe'" (*S.A. Opinion* April 1944:26).

Bosman's dedicated antipathy to politics, in both art and life – part of a strongly-felt Romantic approach which he was seldom shy to promote – was expressed at a time when the work of left-wing writers like Stephen Spender, Harold Laski, and Cecil Day-Lewis still enjoyed popular support. In fact, it seems likely that it was precisely in response to the contemporary vogue for left-wing ideas and socially responsible art that Bosman advanced an 'ultra-Romantic' position of this kind. His articles on a range of subjects written between November 1944 and September 1948 celebrated artistic freedom and individuality, gloried in the image of the artist as uniquely gifted and

unusual, and (echoing Sachs) rejected the constraints which ideological conviction and an obligation to community imposed upon imaginative flight. For Bosman, the artist was a “divinely inspired madman” (*S.A. Opinion* August 1944:24), someone born “with a question mark in his mouth” who performed a “god-like” truth-telling function long before anyone else has woken up to the real issues (*S.A. Opinion* October 1945:26). To read poetry “is to ennoble [oneself] by reaching out towards the high things of the spirit” (*S.A. Opinion* August 1944:24). Reacting in horror to the demeaning prospect of art competitions in the *S.A. Opinion*, he writes, “the artist’s vision takes in heaven and earth in a single sweep – not a row of medals of somewhat inferior design” (*S.A. Opinion*, October 1945:26). Championing the Romantic view of poetry as instinctive, irrational, spontaneous and chaotic, Bosman characterises Shakespeare as both rebel and “inspired barbarian”, an accidental genius, whose “hit and miss” approach broke “every cultural law relating to the art of the drama” (*S.A. Opinion* September 1945:26). Continuing this theme in relation to poetry, he writes on another occasion (under the by-line H.C. Malan) that poetry “has got nothing to do with reason...the only science it knows is its own science...and the whole thing is just a dazzling world of unreason in which Shakespeare is king” (*S.A. Opinion* November 1944:24).³⁷

The above article (entitled “Art and Feudalism”) was one of Bosman’s most outrageous. An artistic manifesto of the most politically incorrect kind, deliberately calculated to offend the liberal sensibilities of *S.A. Opinion* readers, it was essentially a plea for artistic freedom and integrity versus state-controlled art, and a defence of the virtues of an apolitical stance. Its more alarming qualities relate to the way in which, in making this case, it provocatively celebrates the opportunities presented to the artistic sensibility by the spectacle of vast social inequalities; in short, the benefits for art in a feudal regime:

My view is that poetry can reach its ultimate power of expression only in a state in which a monied, leisured and useless aristocracy is at the head of the nation. Art can leap forth as a tiger only in a state governed by an aristocracy, or – even better – in a slave state. For poetry to be great and inspired and a living force you have got to have a world in which there are magnificent and terrible contrasts. You have got to have jewels and ermines on one hand and rags on the other. Anything less than this is no material for poetry. Life itself is a paradox and life and poetry are one, and only in the splendid illogicalities of a system in which all humanitarian considerations are sacrificed to heartless futilities can the spirit of poesy thrive. In a state where there are equal opportunities for all you can’t tell where the caesura must fall in a dactylic hexameter. And you can’t invent a worthwhile zeugma....You don’t need much more than a standard four intelligence to say that it is not fair that some people should be rich and others poor, and just for no reason...This is all obvious stuff....But it is only an artist with the stature of Christ who can dismiss the

whole question with the magnificent finality of 'the poor you always have with you'.
(November 1944:24)

A more flamboyant version of Durrant's Yeatsian stoicism in the face of terrible human suffering, Bosman's article can be interpreted as the expression of a profound hostility (perhaps boredom is a better word) to any kind of morally serious, democratically-inspired, socially conscious art. Extending this point in another article on South African literature, he responds to the enormous economic, political and social disadvantages of black South Africans by suggesting that African writers make the most of the material around them since "[n]obody can know the streets, the gutters, the seamy side of life like a kaffir does". His only proviso is that "the theme of kaffir man and woman in the city must be handled romantically". Sounding very much like Durrant again, he argues that the "art of literature is to transform this kind of squalor into the hard, imperishable grey beauty of literature" (*S.A. Opinion* September 1948:25).³⁸

Bosman's insistence that this was not a satirical piece compelled Bernard Sachs to append an explanatory note. He had decided to publish it, he said, "because it [was] well and amusingly written" but made it plain that he rejected its "blatant ultra-Romantic, ivory tower conception of art" (*S.A. Opinion* November 1944:24). Since it is almost impossible to find the 'real' Bosman behind his many satirical masks, I will avoid becoming another victim of a typical Bosman prank and focus instead on the very interesting discussion the article provoked. All respondents were united in their antipathy for the kind of Romantic escapism and extreme individualism which they took Bosman's position to represent. Even the ever-cautious Professor Greig, called upon, against his better judgement, to respond to Bosman's flagrantly apolitical piece, was forced into a more politicised stance, even going as far as to make the rather weak counter-argument that it was the artist's duty "to revolt" (*S.A. Opinion* March 1945:22). For someone with such an extreme distaste for politics in art, this acknowledgment was quite exceptional.³⁹ For the most part, however, despite a willingness to engage with the issue of a more socially conscious art,⁴⁰ *S.A. Opinion* readers and critics tended to prefer the virtues of the 'middle-way', a position consistent with a liberal politics, which enabled them to avoid the unpleasant 'extremisms' of both a 'left' and 'right' perspective. A writer who chose the by-line, 'H. Postumous', for example, attempted to convince Bosman of the virtues of a position mid-way between the two extremes of art written from an "ivory-tower" on the one hand, and art as "Marxist propaganda" on the other. Concluding that "neither of the two views is realistic", 'Postumous' invites Bosman to "consider the possibility of

another way” in which “art would have the greatest possibilities of development” (*S.A. Opinion* January 1945:23), but neglects to explain exactly what this meant.

Despite a reluctance to consider the merits of political art, *S.A. Opinion* readers and contributors were generally opposed to an extreme Romantic view. An article entitled “Social Background and Literature”, for example, rejects the familiar Romantic tropes of the artist as “unacknowledged legislator”, “lone eagle”, or “man of prophecy”, arguing instead that the artist is “subject, like all others, to the frailties, prejudices, and ambitions” which are the lot of ordinary human beings (*S.A. Opinion* August 1945:24). Charles Gulston was another to add his voice to the anti-Romantic lobby, in this case partly reiterating Bosman’s preference for an art of ordinary life. Writing about changing currents in both local and international poetry, Gulston approves of the contemporary shift away from the image of the artist as lofty truth-teller:

There is no longer the idea that the poet is a creature apart, a mystical figure who wears his hair long and his clothes untidily. The poet, it is realised, is as much a member of the community as the architect or the lawyer....His inspiration, we are apt to find, comes not from a sojourn in the Aegean Isles, but from the pavement outside the poet’s doorstep....The poet in South Africa to-day is going not so much to the mountain top or the flowering field for his inspiration, as to the mine shaft and the city slum....There are many who might sigh with Tennyson “all that I was is in ashes” – the poet has...fallen from Mount Olympus, and is no more among the gods. For them, poetry no longer “walks in beauty like the night,” but has taken on the unromantic attire of day...she has become an ordinary mortal. (November 1946:24)

Instead of exchanging “his birthright for a mess of pottage”, Gulston continues, the artist has finally come to the realisation that “there is a poetry of the street as well as the cathedral”. For Gulston, this shift is evident among the new crop of South African poets who eschew the eternal truth and the Romantic pose for poetry which is “part of themselves, and wholly of their age”, and which “if it expresses no immortal truth” at least expresses “a temporary one, which is creditable” (24).

Coming back to the question of a South African aesthetic, then, it would seem that whilst realism is repeatedly held up as one of the key characteristics of an emerging South African national canon, there were many ways in which this was understood. If Bernstein’s emphasis on tragic realism, forged in opposition to the romance traditions of Rider Haggard et al, nevertheless invoked a romantic ‘African’ essence, Bosman’s ‘gritty romance’ celebrated ‘reality’ but wanted no truck with any kind of earnest political statement. Feldman and Bodmer’s appeals for a South African literature which offered a more honest confrontation of South African socio-political issues tended to fall on deaf

ears. In fact, if it is possible to define a common feature of this early South African national literary criticism, it is a marked antipathy towards art which engaged with socio-political concerns. *The S.A Opinion* was committed to the propagation of a liberal point of view (however much this was disguised as a neutral one). While it was careful (like Durrant) to distance itself from anything that smacked of rabid individualism, its preference for the 'middle way' also made it hostile towards political art.

A number of articles on South African literature by some of the 'heavy-weights' of South African criticism which appeared in the late forties and early fifties give ample expression to this trend. In his series on South African literature published in 1947, Edward Davis, of the University of South Africa, evinces an almost schoolboy delight in the irreverence and political irresponsibility of a figure like Bosman, whose literary aesthetic for the most part defines his own approach. In a somewhat tortured tribute to the work of Olive Schreiner, he writes, "[The] *Story of an African Farm* is short, by much, of the tremendous thing it might have been. This is not to say that it is not great. In the greatness it reaches after, in the very act of reaching, lies the book's nobility". Amongst its faults, Davis lists its tendency to "wallow" in tragedy, its bleak dissection of human suffering and its weak characterisation of men: Waldo, he writes, "is a primrose by the river's brim, if not quite a pansy". Turning his attention to Schreiner's treatment of women's issues, he is equally unimpressed, declaring that he finds it "impossible to admire a prose which sometimes bristles with a feminine moustache". He finds Schreiner's portrait of Africa particularly difficult to accept, mainly because its sombre preoccupations are so far removed from his own more Bosman-like appreciation for the comically absurd. For Davis, Schreiner depicts an Africa in which "the clouds return not after the rain, and in which the grasshopper is a burden. The few fresh and breezy landscapes Olive permits herself to sketch only serve to accentuate the gloom. Africa is not like that. It is not a land of weeping and gnashing of teeth. The voice of the veld is thunder, silence or a snore". For Davis, the "characteristic sound on the stoep of a South African farmhouse is a guffaw, not a groan" (*S.A. Opinion* January 1947:22). Sarah Gertrude Millin is similarly chastised for her insistence on wearing the wearisome "hair-shirt" of social consciousness, a tendency, as Davis puts it, to "linger wretchedly over many thoroughly unpleasant things" (*S.A. Opinion* February 1947:27). Finally in an article which compares Steinbeck's *Tobacco Road* with Bosman's *Mafeking Road*, Davis registers a strong antipathy for the social realism of the Steinbeck tradition, preferring

Bosman's less earnest style which "doesn't point out anything", least of all a moral truth (*S.A. Opinion* January 1948:32).

The same tendency to reject the more earnest preoccupations of a socially-conscious South African literature is also to be found in J.P.L. Snyman's work. Whilst his study of South African literature (for which he had just been awarded a D.Litt from Unisa) tends more towards the descriptive rather than the evaluative, his article on Olive Schreiner is the occasion for the expression of some rather violent feeling. Writing about *The Story of an African Farm*, he suggests that "one is inclined to over-estimate the value of this book because it happens to be the most famous novel in South African English fiction" (*Trek* September 1950:16). As a novelist, "Olive Schreiner's temper, and her biased, even angry, attitude have a harmful effect on her work. *The Story of an African Farm* is a statement of her opinions on religion, and a challenge flung to a bigoted society by a young woman who hated cant but did not have sufficient experience in writing to practise literary restraint and thus obtain objectivity" (16). He concludes, "Olive Schreiner's writing expresses 'angry' convictions – and most critics are agreed that no true artist should allow personal convictions unduly to colour his work. The true artist stands above such contentious issues" (18). This response is clearly motivated by more than a general hostility towards politics in art. A woman with a bad "temper" and "angry" convictions has overstepped the boundaries of acceptable femininity. As if to clinch his case about Schreiner's inadequacies as a writer, Snyman ends his article by questioning whether or not she had any influence on any of the South African writers who came after her.

An article entitled "New Writers and the Colour Problem" by 'Masque', which examines the work of Alan Paton, Wulf Sachs, Doris Lessing and Oliver Walker, repeats many of the same aesthetic (and apolitical demands). Beginning with a review of Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, 'Masque' echoes Van Heyningen's view that good literature should convey 'objective' truth: 'Masque' appreciates the novel's "objective" stance on racial questions and the fact that it "paints no obvious moral". Instead, its position "derives from a broad moral attitude to life rather than from any particular political or ideological point of view" (*Trek* June 1950:3). This gives it "universal" appeal. For 'Masque', however, Paton's solutions are too optimistic. The inevitable final reconciliation, which the author describes as a Romantic flight from harsh reality, is an evasion of 'objective' truth which serves conservative political ends. In the end, Alan Paton fails by being too hopeful. In contrast to Paton's sentimental optimism, Wulf

Sachs's novel, *Black Anger*, is too despairing: its "obvious prejudices", its undisguised sympathy for its black hero, and its "countless illustrations" of white obstinacy, stupidity and cruelty give the impression of "a lack of balance". Similarly, both Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Oliver Walker's *Kaffirs are Lively* are too heavy-handed, too earnest, and too strongly partisan in their approach to the "colour question". They lack "poise" and "objectivity" and 'Masque' wonders at their "strange compulsion to take sides" (5). In their muddling of the "aesthetic" and the "moral", these writers "have failed to attain that universality which would have brought their work into the enduring prestige of world appreciation" (46).

Finally Joseph Sachs's examination of the work of Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing places the early Nadine Gordimer as the more "universal" and less political of the two writers. For Sachs, while Gordimer gently points to South Africa's conflicts, Doris Lessing is "like the Classical Fury in her merciless pursuit of stupidity, prejudice and social injustice". More political than her contemporaries, she "formulate[s] her problems socially, before treating them artistically". A naturally "tendentious" writer fully absorbed by the realities of her context, "she is at her best...when she forgets her moral mandate and writes out of the sheer exuberance of her talent" (15). Once again, Bosman's work provides the more attractive example: In contrast to this earnest propagandising, Bosman "travels light....He does not carry the ideological luggage of the young writer today, and seems to get along very well without it. On the rough road he has taken, it would only be an encumbrance. Freud and Marx would be out of place in the Marico Bushveld" (*Trek* November 1951:16).

If a pervasive hostility towards a 'political' or 'partisan' South African literature defines the literary aesthetic of this pioneering tradition of South African criticism, what if anything, does it have to say concerning questions of race? As we have already seen, in seeking to define what was 'truly South African' about South African culture, much of the early national criticism in *S.A. Opinion* drew on a racist European tradition. In this sense, the many examples of casually (often unconsciously) expressed racism in the magazine's literary criticism give a powerful sense of the racist underpinnings of a benevolent South African liberalism.⁴¹ The worst offender in this regard is Joseph Sachs. A series of articles on African culture entitled "The Pulse of Africa" reproduces all the familiar Manichean binaries of a racist cultural vision. In his discussion of African music, for example, a syncopated, jarring, "angular", and overstated African musical idiom, which caters to the body and the senses, is contrasted with the emotional and intellectual

subtleties of European classical forms (*Trek* June 1950:25). Similarly, another article entitled “Primitive Negro Sculpture” denies African consciousness, agency and even spirituality in its emphasis on the ‘intuitive’, ‘instinctive’ and ‘unthinking’ nature of the African’s response to his or her environment. For Sachs, the origins of African sculpture lie in the “primal shudder” experienced at the “impact of nature on [the African’s] crude but vital sensibility” (*Trek* July 1950: 9). A discussion of Bushman painting invokes a similar evolutionary logic, making a distinction between the ‘immediate’ and ‘unthinking’ characteristics of African artistic “perception” and the more cerebral and detached activity of European “conception” (*Trek* August 1950:26).

There was some challenge to the dominant racist consensus. In “Aspects of S.A. Literature”, Bosman, for example, artfully sends up the absurdities of colonial stereotypes in the manner of some of his Marico tales:

Some years ago it was fashionable for a European tourist to explore some part of Africa, and after he had spent a week or two on the Dark Continent, to return to Europe and to write an authoritative work on the tribal customs, etc., of the savages who allowed him to pass peacefully through their territories. Because they didn’t ask to see his visa, or offer to kill him – as would have happened to a foreigner trying to walk through any part of Europe that way – the tourist always knew that he was dealing with a lot of savages. And the funny thing is that Africa has been uncivilised like this for a very long time. Look for how many years Livingstone walked all over Africa as a spy. And whenever he came to a village the savages, with studied brutality, would set before him food and drink. When he got fever, the benighted heathen even nursed him back to health without pay – just so that he could go and spy on them some more. There’s this continent for you, sunk in absolute abomination. (*Trek* September 1948:24)

Durban author and journalist, Oliver Walker, who wrote a regular column entitled “Leaves from my Diary”, also attacks the widespread notion – often uncritically reproduced in South African fiction – that “the black man is psychologically a mystery, and by usual implication, mentally inferior to the white man” (*Trek* October 1948:10). Like Bosman, Walker chooses satire over moral condemnation in order to poke fun at some typical white South African fallacies, including the popular myth that the African suffers less physical pain.

If *Trek-SA Opinion* provided the space for a critique of South African racism, it also afforded the opportunity for a more politicised literary response. Here, contributions by Guy Routh, Oliver Walker and R.K. Cope offer a significant, if much less substantial, alternative to the largely apolitical readings of the more regular literary critics. Routh’s critique of Edward Davis’s five-part series on South African literature is a rare example – in the *S.A. Opinion* at least – of a direct challenge to the dominant consensus from a

Marxist point of view. Routh's main complaint about Davis's survey is that it fails to offer what he calls an "integrated view". By ignoring the social and material contexts "on which [South African literature] is based", Davis overlooks one of the most important aspects of the South African experience, namely the problem of its "human relations" (Letter to the Editor, May 1947:3). Routh's suggestion that a literary critic should "attempt to assay the mineral" rather than merely "describe the quartzite" invokes a familiar Marxist critical method, and his emphasis on "human relations" leads to an awareness of racial division and tension which is rare amongst mainstream critics like Davis. Sensitive to the way in which Africans are represented in fiction by white South African writers – regarded as either "lovable children" or "mysterious savages" (3) – Routh also gives credit to a more socially-conscious South African tradition. Particularly concerned that Davis omits both William Plomer's *Turbott Woolf* and Olive Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket*, he also suggests, in anticipation of a much more contemporary debate, that an adequate account of South African literature would need to give attention to non-literary genres like travel writing and popular magazines.

Finally, where Oliver Walker goes against the grain in his satire on white South African racism, and offers a thoughtful critique of the patronising sentimentality of Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*,⁴² R.K. Cope, the only remaining contributor from the original *Trek* team, was also one of the few *Trek-S.A Opinion* critics to make a case for a socially responsive art.⁴³ In a rare gesture towards existing political realities in South Africa, Cope suggests that South African writers should offer honest, fearless and forthright comment on the world in which they live: and "[if] I am accused of advocating a literature with moral and social implications", he says, "I must answer that is precisely what I'm doing!" (March 1950:10). Rejecting the 'art for art's sake' traditions as "unsubstantial", his case for a political art is nevertheless qualified by two important (Marxist) assumptions. In his suggestion that "a moral and social aim does not make literature", Cope offers a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between literature and ideology than is generally credited to Communist or left-inclined literary critics. The second qualification (surely a conscious reference to Engels's comments on the work of Honore Balzac) that "the conscious aims of an author have sometimes been in contradiction to his creative achievement" (10) also makes it clear that Cope's sense of what it means to produce a socially-conscious art is far removed from any simplistic notion of art as 'message' or 'propaganda'.

S.A. Opinion presents an interesting set of issues for this thesis: marginally engaged with leftist agendas in the late 1930s, the periodical settles down into a more mainstream politics and a familiar South African liberal programme regarding questions of race in the post-war period. While it offered a lively mix of politics and culture in the early years of its existence, its unexpected (not to mention, unpopular) decision to exclude all political content in the early 1950s in pursuit of an exclusively cultural agenda seemed to confirm a growing tendency in South African literary circles to regard the areas of 'literature' and 'politics' as mutually exclusive and incompatible. As far as its cultural criticism is concerned, whilst always willing to provide a forum for the work of South African academics, *S.A. Opinion* is also the stage for a more popular discussion of literary matters. Here, its on-going support for South African writers, its defence of an indigenous South African cultural tradition distinct from that of Imperial Britain, and its enthusiastic engagement (mainly in Bosman's work) with the notion of culture as 'ordinary life' are an important part of the magazine's distinctive contribution to South African letters. On the negative side, those who actively promoted an indigenous South African culture did so by means of a dubious effort to define a South African cultural 'essence' which succeeded only in reproducing a dehumanising and oppressive racial typology of civilised Europe and barbaric Africa. As the site on which an emerging national culture was constructed, defended and contested, *S.A. Opinion* offers an unusual glimpse into the complex processes of canon formation. Here the range of positions that are articulated include a more conventional concern with the formal properties of literary texts as well as an increasingly unfashionable preoccupation with both South African political realities, and the call for a more accurate, less racist representation of African people. The literary value which emerges most strongly in its literary criticism can be summarised as a kind of apolitical realism, a critical consensus in tune with that of university academics, and one which shows increasing discomfort at the growing tendency in South African literature to confront political issues, whether these be women's emancipation or racial equality. What emerges is a broad consensus which is not only patronising towards African cultural expression, but reveals the operations of an insidious racial othering. A racist cultural discourse is coupled with a self-congratulatory scorn for anything earnestly political, particularly women's demands for equality and recognition. In this sense, the *Trek-S.A. Opinion* merge represents the triumph of a more conservative apolitical cultural discourse in South Africa over other available alternatives.

The demise of *Trek*, the growing conservatism of *S.A. Opinion*, and the story of Bernard Sachs's gradual shift from a leftist political stance to the more 'expansive' territory of the 'free' artistic imagination are all emblematic of a significant shift to the right in South African politics in the post-war period which is also echoed in other parts of the world. In considering the implications of this shift for a developing South African cultural-political debate, what has emerged is an interesting conjuncture between the political and the discursive realms: in other words, the increasingly reactionary politics of a powerful white minority – pushed into even more extreme responses as it confronted rising black disaffection from the 1940s on – is also mirrored in the gradual disappearance in mainstream discussion of a leftist cultural approach and the corresponding ascendancy of the more conservative and apolitical discourses of a university-based tradition.

Notes:

¹ The title of this periodical is henceforth abbreviated as *S.A. Opinion*.

² Of the histories of the South African press, Lyndsay Smith's *Behind the Press in South Africa* (1946) is the only one to make mention of *Trek*. There is an entry in *The Standard Encyclopedia of South Africa*, and passing reference is made in Edward and Win Roux's *Rebel Pity* (1970). The periodical is also mentioned in E'skia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* (1980), and the introduction to Dora Taylor's *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest* (1952). Jan Kannemeyer has compiled an anthology of *Trek*'s Afrikaans literary criticism entitled *Die Koléperas van Kees Konyn* (1983).

³ The Indian Pegging Bill, which sought to restrict Indian trading and property rights, and the Coloured Advisory Council, set up as a sop to coloured fears concerning threats to their voting rights, are described as the most repressive measures passed in any allied country since the war began (*Trek* 9 April 1943). *Trek* also rejected the Native Representatives Council, and other liberal bodies like the Institute of Race Relations and the Society for the Friends of Africa.

⁴ *Trek*'s attention to examples of social and economic injustice earned it the reputation of social crusader and champion of the rights of the under-privileged. *Trek* also gave attention to developments in black resistance politics: articles were devoted to the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department Committee or Anti-CAD (established in order to oppose impending restrictions on coloured voting rights) and the All African Convention (convened to oppose the implementation of the Hertzog bills); the Alexandra bus boycotts; and the inaugural conference of the Non-European Unity Movement.

⁵ The Universities of Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein had refused black students entry to a conference on social welfare, while the University of Cape Town had just passed a resolution barring black students from access to any of its sporting and social facilities (*Trek* 8 September 1944:6).

⁶ Malan and others are critical, firstly, of the Stalinist rejection of international socialism in favour of 'socialism in one country', and secondly, of the pursuit of strategic alliances with capitalist and Fascist regimes in the interests of self-preservation.

⁷ During this period, many of these academics contributed articles to the University of Cape Town journal, *The Critic* which, as David Johnson notes, articulated an increasingly left of centre position (1996:124).

⁸ At this time, Roux was also editor of the Communist Party paper, *Umvikele-Thebe*.

⁹ C.J. Greshoff is the son of Kees Greshoff, an important contributor to *Trek* magazine.

¹⁰ "He believed simply that if a black uprising occurred, most white South Africans would and should be sacrificed – even by means of the machine gun – and he believed this would occur within his lifetime" (Translated by the author).

¹¹ Reader dissatisfaction reached such heights at the end of 1943, that the editors published a "goodwill issue" in a gesture of mock-apology. Something of *Trek*'s mischievous, heavily ironic tone is captured in its response to one of these complaints: "After so earnest a rebuke, *Trek* feels compelled to mend its ways. All collaborators have been notified that in the issue of January 28, the spirit of goodwill is to permeate our pages. Correspondents may stick to their unsaintly ways, though they are invited as a voluntary gesture to

share our change of heart" (14 January 1944:1). As many vitriolic letters to the editor make plain, the public sphere which *Trek* inaugurated was not a coterie of mutually-affirming left intellectuals, but an open forum for debate from all quarters of public opinion.

¹² This tribute to *Trek* was published upon Malan's resignation as editor, which probably accounts for its effusive tone.

¹³ By 1945 its regular circulation had reached nearly 5000. (*Standard Encyclopedia of South Africa*, 1970:626). It also enjoyed a considerable reputation overseas: the *Guardian* records that at one stage it was mentioned thirteen times in nine weeks in the British and American press (10 August 1944:5).

¹⁴ An open letter to "the average Non-European intellectual" (31 July 1942: 9) prompted responses (both hostile and approving) from a number of black readers, one of whom replied in a letter to the editor that "many non-Europeans have come to have quite a warm regard for your journal as being an independent section of the European Press which openly puts forth ideas for giving non-Europeans a square deal, and which does this from the viewpoint of democratic principle and not trusteeship" (*Trek* 7 May 1943:1).

¹⁵ Although Segal agrees that "in order to understand the poetry of any epoch, we have to examine... a whole matrix of social conditions within which it may be said to grow" (1948:9), Marxist literary criticism, which reduces the literary text to "a chemical product of class struggles" (9), is described as "thoroughly medieval in its tendency to look on every book as an allegory on the salvation of the proletarian soul" (10). Segal is the only English academic at the time to make mention of Marxist approaches to literary texts.

¹⁶ Dora Taylor was by far the most prolific of *Trek's* Marxist literary critics. Her enormous contribution to South African literary criticism is addressed in chapter 3.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the dialogue between *Scrutiny* and English Marxism, see Pechey (1985).

¹⁸ In the mid-1940s, declining profits as a result of the war and growing worker agitation meant that the South African mining industry was more than usually sensitive to criticism from the press. Cape Town left-wing newspaper, the *Guardian*, was also sued by four mining companies for £10 000 each because of an allegedly defamatory article concerning the working conditions of African mine employees. The court awarded £750 damages to each of the four companies, which the paper managed to repay as a result of generous donations from its readers. In keeping with general policy, most of the English dailies ignored the report altogether (*Guardian* 7 December 1943:1).

¹⁹ C.J. Greshoff recalls that in order to escape what was an extremely expensive law-suit, one which he would more than likely have lost, Malan was advised to join the army where he would be protected by the moratorium on prosecution (Letter to the author, 19 January 1998). He joined a public relations unit in Italy (*Forward* 18 August 1944:7).

²⁰ For a discussion of the influence of *Trek's* Afrikaans arts column "Kanttekenings", see J.C. Kannemeyer's *Die Koléperas van Kees Konyn* (1983).

²¹ Rabkin's approach to South African literature bears a striking resemblance to Dora Taylor's position, which is explored in chapter 3. Beginning with the view that art can "throw light on our human tensions" (*Forum* April 1952:36), Rabkin's view of literature as a privileged mode of apprehension nevertheless stops short, as does Taylor's, of the position of art as "a stalking-horse for politics", art as 'message', warning or guide (*Forum* July 1952:54).

²² *S.A. Opinion* declared itself "strictly non-political" in one of its early editions (16 November 1934:6).

²³ It is possible that the popular South African magazine, *Outspan*, was the target of this particular attack.

²⁴ The paper had a branch office in Cape Town in the mid-thirties, but the centre of command was always in Johannesburg.

²⁵ In this sense, he echoes both the (early) Communist and Trotskyist positions on the war question in South Africa. At the time this was a deeply unpopular response (See Drew 2000:226-238).

²⁶ The article, however, goes on to suggest that it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between the two dictatorships, stating further that Stalin's efforts to reassure the West of its non-imperialist aims was a strategic ploy to secure much-needed support. Hyman Basner wrote a scorching reply in the following edition, in which he accused the editor of being a Fascist.

²⁷ One particularly intriguing discussion which I think was more indicative of the peculiar strains of this historical moment than suggestive of any genuine engagement with socialist ideas is to be found in an article on democracy and Fascism by A.C. Partridge in which he offered a left-wing attack on the limitations of democracy while at the same time rejecting the ignorance of 'mob' leadership and advocating the rule of an intellectual aristocracy (*S.A. Opinion* 17 April 1937:7-9 and 1 May 1937:5-6).

²⁸ Van Gyseghem was a Belgian socialist theatre director who came to South Africa in 1936 under the auspices of the British Drama League (Couzens 1985:176; Peterson 2000:160). The theatre group with which he worked was the Bantu People's Theatre, not the more well-known Bantu Dramatic Society. For further discussion, see chapter 5.

²⁹ These were later collected in the *Mafeking Road* and *A Cask of Jerepigo*. See Gray (2002).

³⁰ See “There IS a Growing S. African Culture” (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936), “An Indigenous South African Culture is Unfolding” (*S.A. Opinion* April 1944), “Steps to South African Culture” (*Trek* March 1950) and “Is there a South African Culture?” (*Trek* February 1951).

³¹ In the wake of the 1938 centenary celebrations, a number of other English publications in South Africa also woke up to the need to invest more in the promotion of a South African English culture. See for example the United Party publication, *The Forum*.

³² Certainly the periodical (mainly through the efforts of Herman Charles Bosman) revelled in a kind of anti-intellectualism, a carry-over from Bosman’s days writing articles for Aegidius Blignaut’s the *Sjambok* (see de Kock 1988).

³³ Eglinton refers to an article in the *TLS* which was written on the 24th August 1951. The author is not named. He does not provide details about the article in *Die Burger*.

³⁴ See Doherty for a full discussion of this debate (1989; 1990).

³⁵ According to Baym, the appreciation for the genres of romance and melodrama over realist forms is understood as an attempt to distinguish the cultural products of the newly independent North America from those of the United Kingdom, with the result that realist fiction tended to be marginalised in the emerging North American canon.

³⁶ In this regard, see Peterson’s discussion of Bertha Slosberg’s involvement in Durban-based theatre group, the ‘Mtetwa Lucky Stars’ (2000:170-171).

³⁷ Professor Greig dismissed Bosman’s articles as the “noisy...rattling of home-made castanets” (June 1944:22).

³⁸ See also *S.A. Opinion* August 1944:24.

³⁹ Just how far Greig was prepared to go to deny the political significance of literary-cultural texts is demonstrated in a review of Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times* in which he responds to what he regards as an alarming tendency amongst critics to concentrate on its political significance: “I shuddered at the thought of Charlie Chaplin in the clutches of an ‘ism’”. Happily he remains “no more contaminated by isms than a child of ten”. The film, he suggests, is not modern at all: it is “as old and therefore as new, as the story of Harlequin and Colombine, the fooling of Shakespeare’s clown, and the pretty fable of Cindarella. In essence, it is clean outside time...I would have called it ‘Houp-la!’ or ‘Nuts and Boltings’ or ‘Oil and Chianti’” (*S.A. Opinion* 24 July 1936:15).

⁴⁰ The *S.A. Opinion* published at least two articles by Stephen Spender on this issue in October 1946 and May 1947; see also “Politics and the Writer” by H. Gill (May 1948:32-33).

⁴¹ For a fuller discussion of this kind of South African complicity, see Johnson (1996:40-73).

⁴² In this article, Walker offers a response to a critical review of Paton’s book by a young Rhodes student by the name of Murray Carlin (December 1948:7).

⁴³ During this period, Cope wrote only two pieces for *Trek*, concentrating instead on his “Art and the People Column” which appeared in the Communist newspaper, the *Guardian* (see chapter 5).

Dora Taylor: South African Marxist

This chapter examines the work of South African journalist, literary critic and activist Dora Taylor. Forged in close proximity to the liberation struggles of the day, and developed largely in isolation from other South African ‘Marxisms’, Taylor’s critical-cultural project in South Africa is arguably one of the most important of the alternative cultural histories explored in this thesis. A significant body of work – some of which still remains locked up in private collections – this is a substantial intervention which deserves to be recognised as an important part of South Africa’s critical-cultural history. Many South African cultural critics of the 1940s and 50s were influenced by Marxism; these critics form the substance of the discussion in the chapters which follow. Taylor’s efforts to fashion a Marxist theory of art in South Africa, however, were by far the most sophisticated. The breadth of Taylor’s critical and creative achievements as well as her special contribution to the development of a Marxist literary aesthetic in South Africa make it appropriate, I think, to devote an entire chapter to a consideration of her work.

Much of this chapter is concerned with developing an understanding of Taylor’s broader critical project, focusing in particular on the implications of a Marxist cultural discourse for an understanding of the relationship between culture and social change. A significant part of this investigation involves a comparison of Taylor’s cultural project in South Africa with available critical-cultural alternatives. An obvious point of reference in this regard – and one which has already been anticipated in the preceding chapters – are the more normative perspectives of a university-based discussion, exemplified in the present project by the work of Christina van Heyningen and Geoffrey Durrant. Here, I argue that whereas there is a clear departure – in terms of both political perspective and cultural ‘theory’ – from the pessimistic and largely conservative emphases of a South African Leavisian project, there are important points of overlap which need to be explored. A second area of comparison is the relationship between Taylor’s Marxist cultural perspective and the intellectual and cultural traditions associated with the Communist Party (and later the Congress Alliance). Again, while I highlight significant

areas of shared concern, I also give attention to the way in which Taylor's project departs from a Communist or 'Congressite' perspective. In this sense, I try to explore some of the complexities and differences within South Africa's radical traditions rather than just reducing them to a uniform oppositional or counter-hegemonic view. Finally, moving away from questions of Marxist 'theory' to more practical concerns, this chapter also considers Taylor's efforts in the South African public sphere. For Taylor, as for many others on the Left, a theory of culture (or society) makes no sense unless it is tied to, and deeply informed by, the aims of liberation struggles more generally. In other words, in Taylor's case, the public discussion of literary-cultural texts (as well as other forms of creative self-expression) is explicitly harnessed to a project of political education, mobilisation and emancipation. In this regard, I make a claim for Taylor's significance not only as a Marxist literary critic, but also as an important figure in the development of a significant alternative public sphere or 'counter-public' which both interrogated the prevailing consensus and sought to provide a meaningful alternative view.

One of the first examples of radical historiography to appear in South Africa was a history of missionary activity entitled *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest*. It was written by 'Nosipho Majeke' and was published in 1952. Along with I.B. Tabata's *Awakening of the People* (1950), it was one of the central texts of a large and influential political organisation known as the Non-European Unity Movement which had its origins in the Western Cape. A truly populist text, *The Role of the Missionaries* was read, discussed, treasured and passed around by members of the Movement. It offered a radical perspective on the history of colonial conquest in South Africa, and was a crucial source of political education and inspiration for those beginning to define their position in the struggle against oppression. On coming across this text many young historians eager to uncover a dissident black history-writing tradition in South Africa have been disappointed to find as author not an angry young black radical, but a white Scottish immigrant named Dora Taylor. This historical work was only a small part of what was an extraordinary and wide-ranging contribution to South African intellectual and political life, most of which has gone unrecognised and unrecorded. One of a small but noteworthy group of socialists in Cape Town in the early 1930s, Taylor was closely associated with the Non-European Unity Movement (discussed in more detail in chapter 4) and made a significant contribution towards the formulation of its policies and programmes. A journalist for the *Cape Times*, the *Cape Argus* and the Cape Town

periodical, *Trek*, Taylor's political articles drew attention to social inequality and political injustice. In addition, her literary criticism in *Trek* and her lectures to Cape Town students were amongst the first attempts in South Africa to articulate a Marxist position on literature. Taylor was also a novelist, poet and playwright; her writing was an inspiration to many in the movement, and her plays and lectures provided the means for the creation of a variety of alternative 'counter publics' which drew together a diverse group of participants and offered a high level of debate.

Apart from brief references in two surveys of South African historiography, Dora Taylor has virtually disappeared from the historical record.¹ The reasons for this disappearance are complex, only one of which has to do with the obvious dangers and need for secrecy in the face of an increasingly hostile and paranoid apartheid state. It has become a commonplace to cite the general neglect suffered by women at the hands of male-dominated history, and as historians like Baruch Hirson have shown in particular cases, there is much concerning women's role as journalists and activists in South Africa that has escaped notice. The problem is deepened because women themselves are often involved in historical processes in ways that are not recordable, and so unwittingly contribute to their own neglect. Although a member of the Trotskyist Workers' Party, and deeply involved with the work of the Non-European Unity Movement, Dora Taylor was not in the forefront of political activity. Self-effacing and diffident about her abilities, she created a public role which was an extension of her identity as wife and mother: one of support, encouragement, and guidance. Apart from this, the highly collaborative nature of much of her intellectual work has made it easy for subsequent historians of the period to miss the extent of her achievement. Not least of all, the tendency in post-apartheid South Africa to flatten out a highly complex and heterogeneous struggle tradition into one which is dominated by the story of the African National Congress has had the effect of marginalising the alternative political traditions of which she was a part (Alexander 1986:180).

Dora Taylor was born in Aberdeen in 1899, the illegitimate daughter of working-class parents. When she was six years old, her mother died of tuberculosis. Unwanted by her father, she suffered neglect and abuse until she was taken in by a middle-aged teacher, Mary-Ann Brown Craig, who took responsibility for her welfare and education. Despite such an unpromising start, Taylor completed grammar school and studied English Literature at Aberdeen University, where she received an MA degree in 1922.

Two years later, she married James Garden Taylor. Also a native of Aberdeen, James Taylor had been accepted for a post as senior lecturer in Psychology at the University of Cape Town. Taylor joined him in South Africa in 1926 and they settled in Claremont, Cape Town where they remained until Taylor and her family went into exile in England in 1961. As a white immigrant living in South Africa in the late 1920s, Taylor was automatically entitled to all the privileges afforded by her class and race, and the journey from middle-class housewife to radical intellectual and activist is an extraordinary one. Considered alongside other narratives of immigrant experience in the early twentieth century, however, this trajectory may not have been as atypical as it sounds. South African conditions tended to have a radicalising effect on many of those who came to the country from elsewhere, either reinforcing already strongly-held commitments or challenging individuals into more militant positions.² Certainly, immigrants to South Africa have played an important role in the progressive movements in the country. The nature of the immigrant perspective is clearly a strong determining factor, but in Dora Taylor's case especially, an early passion for social justice was heightened and given direction by the peculiar social and intellectual environment of Cape Town itself. On the international scene, a sense of imminent social catastrophe and disintegration in Europe led to a quickening of interest in Marxism and socialism. With pressing social questions of its own, Cape Town was also very well positioned to receive the influence of these radical new ideas from abroad. As one observer explains:

Cape Town, the gateway to Africa, was by the same token the door between South Africa and the rest of the world. Through this door, amongst others, there came economic and political refugees of the first world war, immigrants and visitors, inescapably caught up with ideas born of the socialist revolution in Europe - ideas which questioned the legitimacy of the capitalist ideology, which had little with which to defend itself at that time. In its own corner of the world, Cape Town was a veritable ideological melting pot.³

Added to this was the unique social interaction made possible by the convergence of a number of highly distinct groups. As David Adelstein⁴ explained, exiles from Eastern Europe, emigrants from the UK and South African intellectuals, both black and white, met and interacted during a time of social and political turmoil. A relatively relaxed racial policy, and a strong tradition of discussion and debate in Cape Town made for a highly-charged and stimulating intellectual and social environment. This "intellectual ferment", as Adelstein described it, was reflected in numerous left-wing clubs, debating societies, discussion groups, dramatic societies, and an active salon culture in which people met in

private homes to talk about politics and art (Interview, Cape Town 25 January 2001). A group of left-wing intellectuals at the University of Cape Town – which included Lancelot Hogben, Ben Farrington and Frederick Bodmer, each of whom went on to make a substantial contribution to South African intellectual life – formed a natural point of entry into this lively Cape Town scene.⁵ Saturday evenings at the Hogben home, in particular, offered a generous and passionate intellectual and social milieu in which the Taylors immediately became absorbed.⁶ It was through their association with the UCT socialists that Dora and her husband were introduced to the unstable politics of the radical left in the Western Cape. They began attending a small Trotskyist discussion group known as the Lenin Club in the early 1930s. The group met every Saturday evening to discuss social and political questions, and particularly to learn about the history of socialism.⁷ Deeply disturbed by the widespread evidence of social exclusion and discrimination in the Western Cape, Taylor found in the discussions of the Lenin Club a compelling political alternative to the liberal tradition in which she had been schooled. It was also the place where she met some of Cape Town's leading black intellectuals, the most significant being I.B. Tabata,⁸ founder member of the All African Convention (1935) and the Non-European Unity Movement, and a principle figure in Taylor's political and intellectual development.⁹ As new recruits to socialism, Tabata and Taylor found themselves in a similar position as novices in a group of individuals many of whom were veterans of the Left.

This stimulating intellectual and social environment was a key influence in Taylor's political development. The Lenin Club¹⁰ provided an intellectual framework with which to approach a complex social reality, but its sometimes acrimonious personal dynamics could be a source of frustration and anxiety. It emerged at a time when the socialist movement was facing one of its many crises, namely the first wave of Communist Party expulsions as the Party initiated a series of purges against the threat of so-called 'right-wing' elements (Drew 1991:185). Added to this, the Lenin Club was forged from a range of left-wing groups, often with widely divergent histories.¹¹ Although members made some attempt to work with local trade unions, Lenin Club activities tended to remain at the level of discussion and preparation, and were generally small in scale. Remembered chiefly for its intellectual contribution, it was a forum for intense discussion and fierce debate which only occasionally translated into practical activities. As Hirson, somewhat dismissively, points out,

[t]he one organisation in which members of the club were active was the Coloured Unemployment League which drew large crowds, but collapsed amidst criticism of gross inefficiency. Thereafter, open activities were limited to Club meetings, the production of leaflets, some street theatre, and...the holding of weekly street meetings - in Castle Street outside the GPO. (1989b: 74-75)¹²

Dominated by a weighty and authoritative old guard, many of whom were exiles from Eastern Europe, the group undertook the difficult tasks of adapting an imported Marxist analysis to a complex South African social scene, and translating this analysis into a concrete political programme. Like many other left-wing groupings, however, the Lenin Club proved unable to contain or tolerate differences in opinion, and eventually split.¹³ The two factions which emerged differed on matters of political theory, specifically the question of whether the peasants or the proletariat would lead the liberation struggle in South Africa. Taylor and her husband sided with what became the majority faction, and moved over to the newly-formed Workers' Party of South Africa, and the Lenin Club's successor, the Spartacus Club. The minority faction, led by A.M. Averbach and which included Goolam Gool amongst others, formed the Communist League (later re-grouping as the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa – FIOSA) and published a newsletter called the *Worker's Voice*, which was edited by Charles van Gelderen. The Workers' Party, continuing under the leadership of Yudel Burlak, took control of the Lenin Club publication, *The Spark*, which it ran from March 1935 to May 1938.¹⁴ The newly-constituted group also included Ali Fataar and Ben Kies, a young student at UCT who helped establish a radical Cape Town discussion group, the New Era Fellowship, a few years later. Fearing opposition from an increasingly fascist state, the Workers' Party went underground in 1938. In 1943, a number of its members provided the impetus for the formation of a federal alliance between a range of organisations which became known as the Non-European Unity Movement. Described by Tom Lodge as "the major political force among coloured intellectuals" in the 1940s and 50s (1983:39), the NEUM united this broad alliance on the principles of non-racism and the popular struggle for political rights, with the Workers' Party functioning as its "secret, inner core" (Drew 1996:36).¹⁵

It was clear to most observers at the time that the objective conditions for the emergence of a proletarian-led socialist revolution in South Africa simply did not exist. Consequently, Workers' Party leaders argued that the ultimate goal of a socialist society could only be achieved through the establishment of a mass democratic movement as a

first step. This focus on the struggle for political rights meant that socialist ideals went into hiding. As Drew observes, this set up an awkward bifurcation: “[s]ocialism was a topic for private discussion, not for the masses” (1991:432).¹⁶

From its inception, the Workers’ Party stressed the importance of a broad intellectual and political education through study groups, lectures and debating societies. These goals were reaffirmed in the NEUM where, in the 1940s, the emphasis shifted slightly to the creation of a radical black intelligentsia which would form the political vanguard of an emerging democratic struggle. The approach drew in part from Lenin’s discussion of political strategy in *What is to be Done?* but it was also a local response to the peculiarities of the South African social landscape, dominated as it was by an enormous illiterate, uneducated and often politically ‘backward’ and docile population.

International events such as the rise of Fascism and the war in Ethiopia in the mid-1930s had a radicalising effect on many black South Africans.¹⁷ The rapid increase in industrial production during the Second World War and a relaxation of pass laws led to increased urbanisation and the consolidation of an emerging black working class, the greater self-consciousness of which tended to produce a more militant response to discrimination, and a growing frustration with the methods of a more polite, and some said, reactionary, older generation of activists.¹⁸ At the same time, South Africa was heading towards a more firmly entrenched policy of racial segregation and exclusion. Already in the 1940s, the signs of this were clear: extreme poverty, deprivation and malnutrition in both rural and urban areas, a rise in discriminatory legislation, an increase in state harassment, and talk of a new state-controlled education system designed to enforce and reproduce racial inferiority were ominous indications of what was to come. Despite a rise in militancy and protest action which expressed itself in a wave of strikes, boycotts and other forms of civil disobedience throughout the 1940s and 50s, the problem of an uneducated population, crushed by poverty and lulled into submission by religion, remained a crucial one for those attempting to formulate a strategy for liberation. The ‘teachers as vanguard thesis’, as it became known, sought to realise its political goals through education and politicisation. Those in the African National Congress tended to reject the emphasis on political education as cowardly, even elitist; however, NEUM leaders maintained that clarification and the spread of ideas had to take place prior to direct action. This strategy produced a strong culture of scholarship and discussion in the Western Cape, and a theoretically astute intelligentsia which was far in advance of other

liberation movements. In protest meetings, reading groups, fellowships, journals and newspapers was “the anchorage of an independent, lively, critical left tradition. Here was the development of a pre-eminently ‘Coloured’ intelligentsia....Here was a cluster of tough-minded amateur scholars working outside white universities at least three decades before the emergence of academic Marxism in the 1970s” (Nasson 1990:194). NEUM intellectuals produced an impressive body of anti-establishment, mainly historical scholarship, the significance of which is only beginning to be recognised.¹⁹ Combative and polemical in style and propagandist and didactic in intent, it defined a new relationship between scholarship and political activity in South Africa. A self-consciously oppositional tradition, written against the myth-making of both Afrikaner Nationalist and liberal university-based histories, it was remarkably successful in achieving a popular hegemony for its ideas.²⁰

An educational project which aimed to expose and unmask the relations of exploitation and discrimination in the society at large was also matched by efforts in the cultural sphere. Here, the development of a popular radical theatre and the formation of reading and discussion groups in which literature and literary criticism had a central place were just some of the ways in which NEUM activists sought to harness the insights and practical possibilities of various forms of cultural expression in the broader struggle against oppression. Not only an opportunity for creative self-expression, affirmation, and the forging of a united struggle, literature and drama offered a potentially powerful means of telling the ‘truth’ about the operations of power in South African society. This influential South African intellectual tradition is discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

Taylor’s intellectual and cultural project is inseparable from the NEUM. Her work took shape in the hothouse conditions of its independent, left-wing intellectual culture; it bore the unmistakable stamp of the NEUM’s dominant conceptual scheme, and shared its ultimate political goals. It was also a vivid example of the kind of intellectual production that characterised Unity Movement scholarship, particularly the close relationship between individual research and a set of common ideas and aims. As Nasson explains, referring to Taylor’s *The Role of the Missionaries* and another influential historical work by Hosea Jaffe,

[these studies] are best considered not as innovative, *individual* compositions, but as representative of the intensity of the Unity Movement’s collective historical polemic. In other words, the rhetoric of *Three Hundred Years* and the *Role of the*

Missionaries in Conquest is that of the movement, practiced and developed in a coherent and fairly extended historical form. (original emphasis 1990:205)

Taylor's main intellectual contribution to the Unity Movement lay in the areas of historiography, journalism and literary criticism. This contribution was significant for two reasons. First, in its attempt to bring a materialist perspective to bear on South African society and culture, it was part of a founding moment in the development of a South African Marxism. Second, it was a noteworthy strand in what became a popular, alternative, largely hidden, intellectual tradition in South Africa that opposed mainstream academic production.

Taylor's contact with socialist groups in South Africa and her close personal association with leaders of liberation struggles led to an understanding of society which differed in several fundamental respects from that which underpinned the study of English in South African universities during the period. For South African Leavisites like Durrant and van Heyningen, the steadily deteriorating conditions of the modern social environment – spectacularly evident in the rise of a degraded modern commercial culture – had to be counteracted by the activities of an enlightened critical vanguard who would concentrate their efforts on promoting the traditional values of 'Old England' against the 'barbarism' of a steadily encroaching 'mass civilisation'. While terms like 'enlightenment' and 'critical thinking' have a strong presence in Taylor's discourse too, the imagined socio-political outcomes could not be more distinct. For Taylor, modernity was understood as progress rather than degeneration, social revolution was welcomed rather than feared, and the crisis of capitalism was interpreted as part of the irresistible course of history on the road towards socialism. In consequence, Taylor's concerns lay less with preservation and continuity than with creating the conditions in South Africa in which a new society could begin to take shape. What this meant in the 1940s and 50s was the fostering of critical awareness and opposition through the creation of a more vigorous, critical and independent public sphere. Novelist, playwright, poet, literary critic, historian, journalist, and lecturer, she employed critical analysis, radical polemic and exposé, theatre, popular song and historiography, as well as the imaginative, political and emotional insights of literary and poetic modes to disseminate radical ideas, expose the 'truth' about social reality, and stimulate debate. Holding always to a belief in the ultimate pre-eminence of economic forces, Taylor concentrated on creating the foundations for the growth of revolutionary consciousness as a first stage toward

meaningful social change. As she argues in *The Role of the Missionaries*, the usual problems of ‘false consciousness’ in capitalist societies more generally, are particularly acute in contexts of colonial rule:

Now if a ruling minority can enslave the mind of the people, control their ideas and their whole way of thinking, they have found a more efficient weapon for subjugating them than the use of force, the military and the police. For then the people themselves assist in their own enslavement. If the rulers can make the people believe they are inferior, wipe out their past history or present it in such a way that they feel not pride, but shame, then they create the conditions that make it easy to dominate people. (1952:i)

For Taylor, the “Great Lie” (1952:i) of Western superiority was expressed not only in history books, but in science, religion and literature as well. Her response was a propagandist project of another kind: an education in the Marxist critical method, which would reveal the ‘motor-forces’ at work in a capitalist society, and expose the lie at the heart of ‘herrenvolk’ domination.²¹ Taylor’s desire to interrogate the myths of a class- and race-divided society reflected an understanding of social processes which had close affinities to Gramscian notions of hegemony. Her concerns with ‘truth telling’, however, drew on a more immediate example. For Taylor, Olive Schreiner’s fearless search for truth in the deeply hostile context of nineteenth-century colonial society stood as a powerful and enduring example of what might be achieved. Citing Schreiner’s childhood diary entry that “all great truths have first seen the light, and the foundations of all great works have been laid in hours of solitude and silence”, Taylor wrote:

Thus early, did the power to discover truth and the ability to express it, come to this woman who had a quality of mind rare in any generation, rare in any country, a quality never needed so much as it is today and in this country today, the quality, namely of an unrelenting search after truth, that curious hunger for an exact knowledge of things as they are. To those who are capable of it, it is more than happiness or fame, more than life itself; it accepts nothing, no dogma, creed or generally accepted mode of behaviour, till it has passed the searching test of truth. (*Trek* 30 January 1942:13)

A Marxist Politics

Taylor’s political project was pursued in the first instance in the many book reviews and articles she wrote for *Trek* magazine. A critical review which, as we have seen, achieved notoriety for its outspoken and controversial anti-government stance, *Trek* clearly provided a congenial forum for Taylor’s journalism which, from the start, adopted an oppositional stance, courting both government and public disapproval.²² By 1946, Taylor

had become one of *Trek*'s most prolific and long-standing contributors: during a period of seven years, she wrote two book reviews a month as well as over seventy full length articles. Written under her own name as well as by-lines like 'William Blake', 'Sheila Craig', 'T Day' and 'Macduff', Taylor's political articles in *Trek* tended to be occasional pieces, responses to contemporary issues as they arose in the social and political spheres, which addressed a wide range of subjects including education, health, politics, science, economics and government. Taylor's political journalism provided an important counterpoint to her concerns in the cultural sphere. Motivated by the same desire to expose injustice and clarify political aims, her attention to contemporary socio-economic conditions in South Africa was also an indication of a broader perspective in which, unlike the more mainstream view, the 'literary' and the 'political' were seen as closely integrated and intertwined. In this regard, Taylor's Marxist approach formed a strong underlying logic which both decided her subject matter and informed her method. For the most part, however, these convictions remained implicit.

Articles written during the early years of the Second World War addressed the menace of Fascism and the growth of sophisticated propaganda techniques both in South Africa and abroad. At this stage of the war, the right-wing threat to hard-won democratic advances in the West appeared substantial. The presence of many Nazi sympathisers in powerful positions in South Africa, and a sophisticated propaganda machine made widespread "suggestibility and ignorance" and an astonishing dearth of critical skills amongst white South Africans particularly serious: "The most depressing – the most hopeless thing – about modern society is the existence of a mass of docile, uncultured men and women, unable to think, unable to realise when they are being exploited, a prey to false beliefs and prejudices" (*Trek* 19 December 1940:14). It provides an "excellent seed-ground for the Fascist ideology and Fascist methods, for goose-stepping and racial vanity, for intolerance and the idolatry of Fuhrers, football captains and film stars" (*Trek* 16 January 1941:7). In response, Taylor advanced a series of arguments, which, like those of Durrant and Van Heyningen, stressed the importance of 'critical thinking'. More concerned with pedagogic practice than content, however, she explicitly attacked the mindless regimentation and authoritarianism of South African schools which, she stressed, encouraged docility and rewarded "correct responses" rather than independent thought. "Education", she continued, "should draw out the powers of the mind, the faculty of reason, the ability to think for oneself, the power to deduce one fact from

another, to reject what is inferior and false and to turn to what is good". Without these skills, the individual is "helpless, a prey to any well-organised propaganda and blind amidst the social system in which he lives".²³ Armed with the critical skills acquired in an education which fosters independent thought, South African citizens, she argued, will be able to successfully negotiate the modern menace of both advertiser and propagandist. They will be able "to take their place in society and...to change it where it is rotten":

How necessary it is, to have such a weapon in this complex society where we become more and more bewildered by politics, economics (as they affect our livelihood), wars, race-prejudices, the deafening noise of propaganda of various kinds in the newspaper, in bioscopes, in gigantic advertisements, and so on. In other words, a man should be trained to think for himself: *here is the true function of education.* (original emphasis *Trek* 19 December 1940:14)

The familiar catastrophic scenario invoked in this argument, as well as the privileged place of education offered in its alternative scheme, was closely linked to the discourse of South African Leavisites like Durrant and van Heyningen. Nevertheless, Taylor's consistent attention to the stark realities of a society in which the majority of its members were deprived of even the most basic human rights provided a powerful counter-argument to the incessant clamour from liberal quarters about the need for 'education for democracy' which gave no attention to the desperately impoverished material circumstances of most of South Africa's (non) citizens. In response to the demand that training in democratic citizenship should begin in schools, she argued that these attempts at reform – worthwhile in themselves – were nevertheless based on the assumption that "the school exists in a vacuum whereas it is an inseparable part of a social and economic system". Carefully instilled democratic principles are fundamentally at odds with "an economic and social world where the ideals of justice and equality...are at a discount; where deeds and words stand at opposite poles; where the dignity of the individual and the dignity of labour are fiction and not fact". To teach people about democracy without changing society as a whole is to produce "cynics" and "madmen" (*Trek* 18 July 1941:9).

In her journalism for *Trek*, Taylor rarely missed an opportunity to confront her readers with the uncomfortable realities of an unequal society. She used the public sphere of this popular magazine to question and expose South Africa's racial policies, to interrogate the meaning of the familiar terms of a liberal-democratic worldview such as 'democracy' and 'individual freedom', and to challenge white middle-class liberalism. Her articles gave detailed attention to poverty, malnutrition, low wages, discriminatory

legislation, police harassment, and other forms of social and economic exclusion. Following Schreiner, she attacked government's efforts to keep Africans in a state of feudal impoverishment in Native reserves while exploiting their labour in the mines, and urged the state to make adequate provision for the unavoidable reality of a large, urbanised African proletariat. Writing at a time when a devastating world war was being waged in the name of democratic freedoms, Taylor went out of her way to challenge some of democracy's most cherished assumptions, the shortcomings of which were nowhere more evident than in South Africa. In this regard, she argued, "[I]t is time [for South Africans] to take stock and restate what we mean by democracy and discover if we really possess any of the things we are fighting for". Citing inequalities in the judiciary, the growth of anti-Jewish sentiment, as well as widespread poverty and racial discrimination, she makes a compelling case for the limits of South African democracy. New legislation such as the Colour Bar Act and the Masters and Servants Act are a "blot on the democratic page of our statute book", whilst "the Native Representation Bill, the Land Act and the Urban Areas Act, are a still graver denial of the principles of democracy" (*Trek* 2 January 1941:7). Responding to the findings of a 1940s commission into so-called 'coloured poverty' (which she persuasively argues, grossly underestimates actual levels of poverty in the Western Cape) Taylor concluded that for many South Africans, the supposedly sacrosanct rights of a democratic society "exist only in rudimentary form or not at all". Furthermore, "when we consider the mass of nearly seven million Africans who are in an even more submerged section of the community than the 800, 000 Coloured, we are forced to ask ourselves if it is not time to exercise one of the democratic duties that go hand in hand with democratic rights, namely a sense of social responsibility" (*Trek* 6 June 1941:8).

Whilst the South African case stands out as a particularly obvious example, Taylor was convinced that the problem was more widespread, arguing that justice, freedom, and self-determination remain illusory in any society which is based on economic inequality. With its "class basis", she argues, "bourgeois democracy [is] a travesty of true democracy" (*Trek* 13 March 1942:13). Taylor was sceptical about any notion of democracy which did not include the satisfaction of basic economic needs, and she questioned the liberal belief in the inviolability of individual human rights and freedoms in a capitalist system, pointing out that people are at the mercy of the

impersonal forces of a vast “state machine”, and subject to subtle forms of state coercion.

A response to an article demanding an end to war for example asks

[h]ow can individuals demand anything? Those who demand must be in a position to use force if necessary. Are we not all puppets in a mighty state machine?...Of course ‘signing petitions’ is not enough. They are useless because they are ignored. As members of a democracy we do what we are told. Not that we are compelled. We believe what we are daily encouraged to believe through propaganda in many disguises so that it is easy to behave in the way that we are expected to behave. (*Trek* 31 August 1939:19)

Thus, while she acknowledged the need for a critical and independent public sphere, she was very aware of its limits. This tendency to dismiss the channels of opposition and resistance provided in a democracy such as the free press, parliamentary representation and freedom of speech was also reflected in her distrust for South African liberals:

The liberal knows the non-European is not getting a square deal and realises that a change is imperative, if White as well as Black and Coloured are to survive.. Fearing both catastrophe and violent change, he has a mighty faith in sweet reasonableness, in petitions and table conferences, in changing the individual hearts of oppressors. And it is a faith that dies hard. (*Trek* 17 July 1942:13)

Taylor criticised the liberal response because of its tendency to confine itself to abstract notions of democracy, and its failure to develop its assumptions into concrete political terms. Olive Schreiner’s early liberal hopes, for example, while espousing “the all too familiarly vague terms of ‘the welfare and happiness of humanity as a whole’”, are understood as exceptional in their demand for an unrestricted franchise. While Olive Schreiner may be forgiven for her turn-of-the-century optimism concerning what the liberal spirit might achieve, “time has conclusively, ruthlessly proved the bankruptcy of liberalism to stem the tide of political events. Such thorns as it might have fancied itself as inflicting on the rhinoceros hide of governments have been brushed aside like thistledown” (*Trek* 13 March 1942:13).

Despite the radical implications of these arguments, there is evidence of ambiguity and contradiction. Taylor’s responses to modern society and the ‘mass’ bear the unmistakable traces of the discourse of ‘Kulturkritik’. Industrial society is rendered as complex, hypnotic, and bewildering, and the ‘masses’ are characterised as confused, gullible and ignorant, victims and “pawns”, a prey to all kinds of unwelcome forces (*Trek* 28 September 1939:14). Passing references to a debased and exploitative commercial culture, and imagery derived from war and combat draw on a version of social crisis central to its perceptual scheme, and an emphasis on ‘critical thinking’ and education

echoes one of its most basic fears, namely the problem of an expanding population, ill-equipped to deal adequately with a rapidly transforming social environment, and the emergence of dangerous new political and commercial influences. This basic template forms the ground of her social analysis, but it is overlaid with a more radical agenda. While reiterating a familiar sense of social crisis, her arguments offer a challenge of a more substantial kind: the call for a higher level of public awareness and debate, a more questioning, sceptical attitude towards the state, and a more politicised citizenry (*Trek* 28 September 1939 and 5 December 1941). Taylor's desire to challenge notions of 'democracy' and 'individual freedom', and her explicit attention to issues such as poverty and discrimination also give her arguments a more radical inflection. It is evident that her concerns lay less with the corrupting influences of modernity, than with the particular form of social relations which obtained under capitalism. Finally, Taylor's arguments repeatedly foregrounded the condition of mental and political paralysis in South African society upon which continued exploitation depended. A South African populace seduced by propaganda and stupefied by Hollywood, pulp fiction and billboard advertising is also ignorant of its oppression, unaware of the economic laws which determine its existence, and powerless to effect social change.

Taylor's political journalism, which drew on a classic Marxist concern with the routine obfuscations of bourgeois capitalist societies, sought, in the first instance, to unmask the reality of inequality, oppression and deprivation in South African society. The desire to reveal the 'truth' of South Africa's exploitative racial-capitalism as an antidote to the on-going mystifications of the state is also the motivating impulse behind her literary criticism. Pursued mainly in *Trek* magazine, but also in the numerous public forums associated with the NEUM, Taylor's literary journalism reveals strong left-wing commitments. It also reflects the deep and extensive engagement of someone who is passionate about the world of culture and the arts. A voracious reader, Taylor kept a constant record of her responses to a remarkable range of literary, historical and theoretical texts.²⁴ A writer herself, she completed a first novel *Kathie* in 1951, and went on to write two others, *Rage of Life* and *An African Odyssey*, none of which were ever published. She was also the author of a long narrative poem called *Tristan and Iseult*, as well as many short stories, plays and poems.²⁵

A Marxist Aesthetics

During the 1940s, Taylor contributed regular book reviews to *Trek* magazine, as well as longer articles on individual authors and literary movements. Her regular "Literary Review" column tended to concentrate on works of fiction, drama and poetry which were no longer current. These reviews explicitly engaged with the work of the past in order to address the pressing concerns of the contemporary socio-political scene.²⁶ The range of these book reviews is enormous, amounting to an impressive corpus of work which included discussion of texts as diverse as Ibsen's *Doll House*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, Emile Zola's *Germinal*, John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*, Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit*, C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. Longer *Trek* pieces, on the other hand, offered in-depth discussion on the work of well-known South African literary figures such as Olive Schreiner, Sarah Gertrude Millin, Roy Campbell, Peter Abrahams, William Plomer and Thomas Pringle. They also took up broader themes such as the representation of Africans in South African fiction, the history of black South African literature (including such figures as Thomas Mofolo, Sol T. Plaatje and H.I.E. Dhlomo), and 1930s US fiction. Fascinated with indigenous cultural production, Taylor conducted a trip to Botswana in 1948 in search of local oral forms.²⁷ Aside from her prolific journalism, Taylor also gave many lectures on literature to NEUM discussion clubs around the country. Those that survive reveal an interest not only in writers such as Gerald Gordon, Alan Paton, Phyllis Altman and Thomas Mofolo, Vladimir Dudintsev and Boris Pasternack but also engage with broader literary-critical themes, such as the question of 'individualism' in literature and the social function of literary criticism itself.²⁸ She intended to produce a full-length study of the work of Nadine Gordimer, but did not manage to complete it.²⁹

While Taylor's place as radical historian has been partially accepted, her significance as an important South African literary critic has yet to be recognised and fully explored. In this regard, while most South African historians are well aware of the existence of an early Marxist historiography prior to its emergence in South African universities in the 1970s, the same cannot be said for an early South African Marxist literary criticism. In the absence of this kind of historical understanding, Marxist literary critics like Kelwyn Sole, Isabel Hofmeyr and Mike Kirkwood writing in the early 1970s had no access either to the insights and shortcomings or the sense of continuity and

distant comradeship of previous South African traditions. In this sense, critics like Sole, Hofmeyr and Kirkwood appear as the isolated, embattled, and pioneering representatives of a new critical approach rather than the most recent historical manifestation of an ongoing concern. Taylor's literary criticism – all of which was published outside a formal academic context – made a substantial contribution to this genuinely pioneering South African Marxism. Writing at a time when South African universities were negotiating the new critical perspectives of South African Leavisites, Taylor's emphasis on material context and her recognition of the salience of class were an explicit challenge to these largely apolitical concerns. Offering detailed comment on South African society, Taylor's literary criticism was also the vehicle of forthright political and social critique. The opening sentences of a survey of Sarah Gertrude Millin's fiction, for example, signalled a distinctively new note in polite letters, and were a clear sign of a very different understanding of the function of the literary review:

[South Africa] is a society where the ruling class consists of a privileged minority planted on the back of a conquered and oppressed people and sucking from them its wealth and power. It is a society where the majority of the workers, Coloured, African and Indian, suffer both economic exploitation and racial oppression. The ordinary class divisions in a capitalist state are obscured by race divisions so that a great gulf exists between the white worker-aristocracy and the non-European workers. It is a democratic Christian society, so-called, where the inequality of man is a religion. The dominant caste has evolved a system of ruthless control so that for the mass of non-Europeans and more especially the Africans, this capitalist-imperialist state grafted on to a semi-feudal society, has all the elements of fascism with its colour-bar acts, its pass laws, its curfew, its Indian pegging act and its whole segregation policy. Savage exploitation masquerades in the sheep's clothing of trusteeship over 'inferior' races, while the laws of the land with cynical ruthlessness lay down conditions designed to perpetuate the inferiority so necessary to uphold the myth of the superiority of the ruling class. (*Trek* 21 May 1943:12)

Aside from articulating a political directness completely alien to the traditions of mainstream South African (and English) literary criticism, Taylor's reviews were unique in the sense that they were amongst the first attempts in South Africa to apply a Marxist analysis to society and culture. A lecture given to students in Cape Town which reflected on her preference for the contextualising methods of a Marxist approach reveals both a high level of self-consciousness and a clear sense of the claims of alternative views.³⁰ With regard to the formal emphases of "aesthetic" approaches, she writes, "[t]o us it is axiomatic that a writer is first of all a creative artist, that his book is a work of art and must obey its laws. The critic should therefore take cognisance of it as a work of art and express his opinion as to why it succeeds or fails as such. Our joy in Shakespeare, in

Balzac, in Tolstoy, springs precisely from the fact that they are great artists". Nevertheless, she argues, a critic who restricts himself to a 'purely' aesthetic approach to art imposes an unnecessary constraint: such claims "imperil art, which can never separate itself from society". The "psychological" approach which looks for an explanation in the writer's "personality" suffers from the same limitations as the 'purely' aesthetic approach: "it does not extend its vision far enough and does not give a satisfactory answer, even within in its own terms of reference". Again the fault lies in the artificial separation of the artist and society: in this approach, the writer "is viewed as an isolated entity spinning his art from the cocoon of his individual soul". Finally, in relation to a moral or ethical approach, she writes that while this school of thought does recognise the connections between the artist and society, it tends to overstate its socio-political effects: such critics, she argues "seem to think in terms of literature as being able to *reform* society, a belief that grossly exaggerates the role of the writer in capitalist society". Much more persuaded by the immediate usefulness of an historical method, she argues that a critic must "relate the work of art to the society from which it springs". Elaborating this point on another occasion, she writes:

The Marxist approach to art, in so far as it shows the relation between art and society, in so far as it explains why and how a certain tendency in art has arisen at a particular period in history, in so far as it assists the critic in analysing the individuality of the artist into its component elements, in so far as it is able to examine critically the 'above the battle' attitude of both artists and critics and reveal the social roots even of 'pure' art, is invaluable as a means for more fully understanding the artist and for a more complete interpretation of art. (*Trek* 1 June 1945:16)

Where most South African English academics looked to England and F.R. Leavis for guidance, Taylor did not draw in any great measure on the English Marxist traditions of the 1930s.³¹ Described by Perry Anderson as a "spontaneous radicalization within traditionally dormant milieux" (1992:55), English Marxism was primarily a reaction to the social, economic and political crises of the period, and took its political and theoretical cue from Stalinist Russia, rather than Central Europe:

Whereas there had been a tradition of Marxist thought in Germany, Italy and France since the late eighteenth century, "[n]o comparable local heritage was available to the marxisant intellectuals of Britain in the 1930s....The works of Marx, Engels and Lenin were, of course, available, but for their knowledge of contemporary Marxism, the British neophytes were almost entirely dependent on the officially sponsored writings of Plekhanov, Bukharin and Stalin. The memories of Trotsky and Luxemburg had by this time been thoroughly effaced; and the works of Lukàcs, Korsch and the Frankfurt School remained undiscovered. (Mulhern 1974:39)

Increasingly contaminated by Stalinist control, English Marxism was cut short after a few years by the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Second World War. In subsequent years, English Marxist literary criticism became a source of embarrassment – simultaneously pilloried for its vulgar determinism and its Romantic roots – and suffered a corresponding lack of critical attention.³² In a summary of English Marxism, Mulhern argues that English Marxists “were united in their insistence that literature could be understood only in relation to the social conditions in which it was produced. Hence, literary criticism came to be regarded as the elucidation of the social determinations of a text, as the identification of the ‘social equivalent’ of a given character, sentiment or situation” (1992:40). While Taylor’s criticism can also be broadly understood in these terms, she does not share their intellectual origins, claiming instead the intellectual and political tradition of classic Marxism, which she received from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. Unlike many South African cultural and political traditions, then, Taylor’s Marxism owes very little to Britain. In an article which appeared in University of Cape Town journal *The Critic* in 1935, Taylor registers her indebtedness to the Lenin-Trotsky heritage, and opposes the perversion of their ideals under Stalinist rule:

Under the Soviet regime art has become synonymous with propaganda. It was not so immediately after the revolution. In the first naïve enthusiasm of the liberated proletariat forty thousand poets blossomed in Russia. But when Stalin, in opposition to Trotsky, turned the Russian Communist Party into a nationalist organisation surrounded by a hostile Europe, it was necessary to create weapons of defence not only in iron and steel, but in every medium of art as well. Art became state-controlled like any other form of labour....It is possible that this is a transition stage. This tyrannical attitude to art is a contradiction of Lenin’s whole purpose in liberating the proletariat. Culture is possible only where there is leisure, and in spite of the present work-worship in Russia, the ultimate goal of the movement is to create more leisure for the masses. Freedom from the tyranny of the machine will enable them to study the culture of the past and other countries. (1935:84-85)

Taylor made use of as much of the Marxist critical tradition as was available to her at the time and a glance at her notebooks gives some indication of her reading interests.³³ Of the British leftist traditions, she was familiar with works by Henry Hazlitt, Granville Hicks, Edmund Wilson, Stephen Spender and Ralph Fox. Russian writers Tolstoy, Kropotkin and Plekhanov as well as Marxist periodicals like *Horizon*, *Partisan Review*, *International Literature* and *Modern Monthly* are also listed. The work of Bertolt Brecht was also clearly a key influence.³⁴

Of all the available resources, Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* (1921) had the greatest impact on both her outlook and her method. Trotsky's work was published in the early 1920s in the years following the momentous events of October 1917 which saw the successful overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy and the establishment of a workers' state, followed by four years of bloody civil war during which a fragile people's government had to be defended against a powerful counter-revolution. Stalin's rise to power in 1921 marked the beginning of a period of increasing state bureaucratization and regimentation, which in the cultural sphere reproduced itself in the rise of the proletkult movement and, from 1930, the doctrine of socialist realism. *Literature and Revolution* is a direct intervention in this post-revolutionary context. It is polemical and argumentative in tone, and practical in its concerns. In its efforts to define the cultural imperatives of a post-revolutionary society, it treads a difficult path between an endorsement of revolutionary literature, and an indictment of emerging tendencies towards rigid ideological prescription and control in the cultural sphere. Given her position in marginal struggle groups in South Africa, it is not surprising that Taylor would have turned to that strand of early twentieth-century Marxist criticism which was most oriented towards political intervention. This 'political' criticism was distinguished from the positivist, didactic, 'anthropological' criticism of thinkers such as Kautsky and Plekhanov. Much of Trotsky's contribution lies in his attempt to take up the problem posed in Marx's key argument in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that "changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure" (1859:426). In his 'cultural continuity' thesis, Trotsky rejected the notion popular amongst Soviet intellectuals in the 1920s that a new proletarian culture would be formed in 'laboratory' conditions under the direction of a proletarian avant-garde. Both Trotsky and Lenin had argued that continuities with pre-Revolutionary bourgeois culture should be preserved and extended rather than discarded.

Following Trotsky, Taylor concentrated on an elucidation of the "social roots" of art and did not give close attention to literary form.³⁵ Working from the basic model provided in Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*, she sought to establish and underscore the complex relationship between art and society. 'Narrative' rather than analysis, her literary criticism shared the revisionist aims of her journalism and historiography, and through an examination of a wide range of literary texts offered alternative, oppositional readings of history, society and culture. Her examination of South African literature, in

particular, reveals the priority she gives to the historical and material circumstances in which literature is produced. If, as she argues, “culture ... bear[s] the stamp of its material basis” (*Trek* 21 May 1943:12), the prospects for South African literature are going to be bleak. The compromised political and economic position of white English-speaking South Africans in the 1940s, bolstered as it was by a number of racist and capitalist fictions, led inevitably to a sterile literature which could contribute nothing to social change, and she concludes: “on such a rotten foundation culture, art and even science are tainted and warped and cannot reach their full growth” (*Trek* 21 May 1943:12). The class allegiances of white South African authors are nowhere more apparent than in their treatment of the African character in fiction. Either he is depicted in uniformly negative terms as a threat or a menace, or he is an innocent savage who should not be exposed to the evils of Western civilisation:

For the most part, their works reflect the ideology of their class as in a mirror. When they admit an African or a Coloured into the pages of their books in more than a menial or decorative capacity...they write as members of a dominant white caste looking from afar at some almost sub-human species. When he is not a mere victim, an object of humanitarian pity, he is a Problem, a menace, a threat to white purity and white civilisation. Sometimes the work has an air of impartiality, almost of scientific objectiveness. But it turns out to be a fraud. Race prejudice falls like a blight on nearly every approach to the non-European, and art is born of intellectual dishonesty. At the opposite extreme there are the authors who may be called negrophilist. The African is depicted as the unsullied child of Nature dragged from his natural habitat, contaminated by the missionary, the trader, and the magistrate and finally broken on the wheel of industry. There is no happy medium and impartiality is impossible. (*Trek* 22 May 1942:10)

Either version, she argues, leads to the “distort[ion] of art”, and gives powerful ideological support to racist political policies. Here, it is worth noting that Taylor’s use of the word “class” rather than “race” derives from the Unity Movement position – to which she was sympathetic – that race as a category of analysis is misleading. Understood as a construct, a *consequence* of capitalism, it was generally avoided in favour of class (Saunders 1986:76; Nasson 1990:200).

The works which come in for specific comment in this series include Sarah Gertrude Millin’s *God’s Stepchildren* (1924), William Plomer’s *Turbott Wolfe* (1925) and the short story collection, *I Speak of Africa* (1927), Heaton Nicholls’s *Bayete!* (1923), Ethelreda Lewis’s *Four Handsome Negresses* (1931) and *Wild Deer* (1934),³⁶ J. Grenfell Williams and Henry John May’s *I am Black* (1936), Wulf Sachs’s *Black Hamlet* (1937), Stuart Cloete’s *Turning Wheels* (1937) and Laurens van der Post’s *In a Province* (1934).

Sarah Gertrude Millin provides the most disturbing example of the tendencies Taylor describes in her introduction. While the ‘miscegenist’ nightmare of *God’s Stepchildren* was being celebrated in journals like *The Forum* in South Africa – and fuelling reactionary attitudes in the US – Taylor drew attention to the novel’s overt racism. Unaware of the “political and economic factors, the long history of conquest and oppression lying behind the poverty and disease amongst non-Europeans”, Millin presents a “deliberately misleading” story of the innate “degeneracy associated with colour”. This novel, she concludes, is a “monument to race prejudice” (*Trek* 22 May 1942:10). In *Bayete!*, on the other hand, the non-European characters are just the mechanical puppets of the author’s over-riding concern to sound a warning “to his fellow-countrymen against the forces of white supremacy”, particularly the dangers of a “laissez-faire approach where the African is concerned” (*Trek* 19 June 1942:10). Taylor is critical of the tendency in Ethelreda Lewis’s novels to offer Romanticised portraits of African characters: in her emphasis on the African as unspoiled child of nature, Lewis gives unwitting support to the segregationist policies of South African Nationalists. Amidst a generally gloomy picture, the novels of Williams and May, van der Post, Plomer and Cloete stand out for their efforts to offer vivid, accurate and sympathetic accounts of contemporary African experience. While Plomer tends to some extent to idealise his African characters, and while these African portraits remain largely drawn from the ‘outside’, his work nevertheless presents a picture of “dignity, grace and virtue” in clear opposition to the dominant white South African view (*Trek* 5 June 1942:2). While Sachs’s novel reveals the inevitability of African urbanisation and modernisation, Cloete and van der Post, respectively, generally manage to avoid the Romantic tendencies of many of their peers, and present accounts of contemporary African experience which are both sensitive and realistic (*Trek* 31 July 1942:12).

Taylor’s work on African literature is one of the first attempts in South Africa to give serious attention to this growing body of fiction, poetry and drama. She begins by examining its oral roots. Like Frantz Fanon, Taylor is wary of an uncritical endorsement of pre-colonial oral traditions. For Taylor, the material conditions which produced these cultural forms in the first place have been irrevocably destroyed by the destruction of “tribal life” under colonialism so that they exist in the present only in “emasculated” form. Consequently, she gives attention to those cultural forms which emerge in response to industrialisation and proletarianisation, and favours “literature that is in active process of creation and is a reflection of life as it is lived in the present” (*Trek* 28 August

1942:10). Here, Taylor's remarks echo Trotsky's post-revolutionary distaste for the cultural 'backwardness' of an agrarian existence. And while she recognises that the desire to preserve indigenous oral traditions can be an important element of an insurgent nationalism, she is also wary of the ideological and political consequences of such preoccupations in the hands of the less scrupulous. For the government official, their existence is used to justify oppressive racial policies like 'trusteeship' and 'separate development', and for the missionary – under the auspices of a mission-controlled press – they become a vehicle for religious indoctrination. In this emphasis on the 'uses of culture' in South Africa during this period, Taylor articulates a position which would become central to the arguments of black South African writers and activists in the years to come. This very significant strand in a broader South African culture debate will be explored more fully in chapter 6.

Turning to African writing of the early twentieth century, Taylor argues that the material conditions of racial oppression and economic exploitation, and a corresponding political docility have been inimical to the growth of culture:

Culture requires a sound basis on which to build. Where is it for the African? There is no basis. There is an abyss. Africans form an oppressed mass, without political power, without democratic rights; their political and economic destitution is summed up in the pass laws, in the Colour Bar Act, in the Urban Areas Act, in the Land Act, in the whole policy of segregation. Under such conditions there must be cultural destitution also. (*Trek* 11 September 1942:10)

Aside from the poverty of its material base, another factor that contributes to the mediocrity of writing by black South Africans, Taylor argues, is the fact that African writers are completely reliant on a mission-controlled press. Apart from the restrictions on subject matter, the dominance of religious values results in the stifling of social protest, the falsification of history in keeping with official orthodoxies, and blindness to the injustices of colonial conquest. For Taylor, it is a conservative literature that perpetuates rather than challenges oppression. It is interesting to read these views in the light of more recent efforts in South African postcolonial studies to interpret the responses of earlier generations of mission-educated African writers, not as the signs of complicity, but rather as evidence of a kind of strategic acceptance (Attwell 1997, 2005). Like those Congress members who wrote for *Fighting Talk* in the late 1950s (an issue which is discussed more fully in chapter 6), Taylor prefers to retain a clear distinction between 'progressive' writers and those whose work, however tactical or nuanced, appeared to lend support to hegemonic colonialist

views. For Taylor, the emphasis is on the ideological effects of such writing rather than its complex origins. In support of her argument, she cites H.I.E. Dhlomo's positive reading of the cattle killing incident in 1857 in his novel *Nonqawuse*, an event which secured white economic and political control over the amaXhosa. Similarly, Taylor endorses R.R.R. Dhlomo's realistic depiction in *An African Tragedy* of social conditions in the Johannesburg of the 1920s, but argues that his concern with individual morality and the Christian themes of sin and repentance prevents him from either describing or critiquing the social forces which have produced the situation he depicts. Growing political consciousness, a common sense of oppression, collective organisation and the "determination of a whole people to strive for democratic rights" (*Trek* 30 January 1942:15) are the necessary pre-requisites for the production of "a culture worthy of its name" (*Trek* 30 January 1942:10). In an argument which anticipates the 1970s materialist rejection of both Eurocentric and Africanist approaches to writing by black South Africans, she points to the anomalous position of educated black writers in the social formation as members of a privileged group, alienated both from the majority of uneducated blacks and their white oppressors, and implies that their position of partial social and economic elevation in relation to the working masses makes them reluctant to challenge the status quo:

It must not be forgotten either that the few who contrive against great odds to rise above their fellows; hold a precarious footing between two worlds. They are neither at one with their oppressed brothers, nor are they acceptable to the white man.... They are moreover apprehensive of losing through any action on their part the little they have gained as individuals. It is an atmosphere fatal to the flowering of any art. (*Trek* 22 May 1942:10)

Taylor's historical approach and her emphasis on class offered fresh perspectives on well-known South African literary figures. A four-part series on Olive Schreiner registered her own intellectual and political debt to Schreiner's life and work. Describing her as a "Cassandra" whose prophecies have fallen on deaf ears, she resisted the tendency of many of her contemporaries to narrow Schreiner's achievements to those of famous young genius-author of *The Story of an African Farm*, and her biographical-historical approach allowed her to give serious attention to the significance of Schreiner's contribution in the public sphere. Suspicious that Schreiner "receives only lip-service from the present generation of South Africans" (*Trek* 30 January 1942:13), Taylor goes to some lengths to consider the more radical implications of Schreiner's politics, and offers

an unqualified celebration of her achievement in contrast to a much more ambivalent mainstream response. In this regard, Taylor's reading of Schreiner's work is one of the first of a noteworthy tradition of leftist critical response (including such critics as Jack Cope, Michael Harmel and Hilda Bernstein whose work is discussed in chapters 5 and 6) which remains unrecognised in standard histories of Schreiner reception.³⁷

In a more conscious deployment of the insights of a dialectical approach, Schreiner reads Pringle's efforts to establish a free press in South Africa in the eighteenth century as part of the struggle of the European bourgeoisie to wrest power from the relics of feudal authority. Similarly, Roy Campbell's "feudal" outlook, his defence of social hierarchies in poems like "The Zulu Girl" and his contempt for liberalism are understood as part of a wider twentieth-century reaction to social crisis and change. In Campbell's case, he takes refuge in "vociferous contempt" (*Trek* 10 October 1941:13) for modern society, an elevation of the self, and a nostalgia for pre-capitalist social relations. Critical of William Plomer's emotionally-charged, "sledge-hammer" (*Trek* 5 June 1942:2) approach to the articulation of radical views in *Turbott Wolfe*, and ambivalent about Peter Abrahams's superficial and sentimental account of South African society, Taylor also gives detailed and interesting attention to the way in which racial prejudice acts as a constraint on imaginative 'truth' in the novels of Sarah Gertude Millin.

If Taylor's sensitivity to the material context of ideas cast a new light on South African literature, it also led to a persuasive materialist analysis of the rise of European artistic movements, as well as a compelling critique of the modern capitalist state. A series of articles on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European and American poetry published in 1944 draws out the broad connections between a specific socio-historical conjuncture and its attendant effects in the cultural sphere, and resembles the kind of wide-ranging cultural and economic analysis attempted by the English Marxist Christopher Caudwell in *Illusion and Reality* (1937). In particular, it examines the way in which late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers and artists registered the shocks of an alienating and attenuated modern existence:

In a period of Capitalist decay, of economic crises, imperialist wars and revolutions, the artist looks around for a shelter from the whirlwind, and many and strange are the forms which their search for security takes. In spite of attempts to prove that the artist is independent of society there is no getting away from the fact that art is rooted in the society from which it springs and to understand the nature of the society which nourished the artist is in greater part to understand him and his art. Now in a period of social and economic upheavals like the present, art, which, as it

has been said, is the most complete part of culture, the most sensitive and the least protected, suffers most, as society is unable to offer even the minimum conditions for the development of art. (*Trek* 10 October 1941:13)

As Western capitalism faces what for Taylor is inevitable decline, there is a growing insecurity amongst writers who feel isolated from the mass and can no longer assume that their place in the social order is assured. This insecurity takes the form of a more strongly marked individualism, hatred for the mob, a repudiation of politics and ‘systems’ of any kind, and a withdrawal from society, or what Taylor describes in a recurring trope, “a more complete occupation of the Ivory Tower” (*Trek* 19 May 1944:13):

Some escape into the supposedly romantic past and deceive themselves and their readers with a popular but false interpretation of history. Others, like the English writer, Beverly Nichols, escape down the Garden Path and arrive in the midst of the Oxford group where they can enjoy the luxury of public confession in evening dress. Yet again, others like Edith Sitwell, contrive still to dwell in their ivory tower, happy in a confusion of the senses and a barren pre-occupation with exquisite form. On the other hand, in the progress or rather the degeneration of the poet T.S. Eliot, can be seen an interesting development from acute and painful pessimism that simply had to find a way out by making a definite choice on the side of reaction. (*Trek* 10 October 1941:13)

For Taylor, early signs of artistic ‘ivory towerism’ are evident in the work of nineteenth-century poets like Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Rilke and Yeats, and turning to the more contemporary period, aside from the writers listed above, she finds evidence of the same tendency in the work of D.H. Lawrence, Dylan Thomas, Herbert Read, Nicholas Moore, Henry Treece and the later poetry of Spender and Auden. While quick to celebrate the manifold achievements of the individualist outlook, itself seen as an expression of capitalist social relations, she argues that these preoccupations in the twentieth century have become “trivial, formless and small” (*Trek* 5 May 1944:13). This retreat into the self is a conservative and defensive reaction to a loss of security, and reflects the common bourgeois misconception that freedom can be found beyond social relations:

The poet is the recalcitrant child of his society. In a capitalist society based on a rapacious individualism which in the economic world manifests itself in the profit motive and a veritable anarchy of private enterprise, the most arrogant individualist is the artist. He is the person with the unique personality and with the cultivation of his unique function, nothing, in his opinion, should be allowed to interfere, so that while his roots are in the society which nourishes him and his individualistic mode of thought is determined by it, he has been able to pose, indeed believe that he is above and beyond that society. (*Trek* 12 May 1944:13)

This critique of the individualist ideology is a central preoccupation in all her criticism: it defines her literary aesthetic and registers her strong commitment to a

socialist ideal in which individual freedom finds its truest expression in relationships with others. A letter to I.B. Tabata in 1952, which registers both her debt to Trotsky and her repudiation of the Romantic individualism of someone like Roy Campbell, offers an insight into her musings on the subject:

Briefly, B, what do you think of relating this upsurge of individualism more specifically to the expanding capitalism and indicating its collapse still more clearly as part of the *ideological* decay bound up with the crisis of the system itself. Then, instead of ending there, I expand...on the picture of how the *individual* can only truly fulfil his potentialities under socialism. You know how the writers, desperately clinging to their ego, look for a solution inside themselves. But the paradox is that it is only when there is a healthy communication with, and a *belonging to*, a community that the *individual* can expand to his full height. Retreating into his ego, the 'sole reality' defeats itself, for without the group contact, the ego shrivels up. There are different kinds of individualism says the old man. Pursuing that thought – which I didn't quite understand – I see a way to make my picture more complete. Individualism standing tip-toe on that world of far-reaching horizons at the beginning of capitalism ('what a piece of work is man') achieved much. But it is nothing compared with that individualism which will blossom when the forces of socialism are planting the deserts with corn and conquering nature to man's needs. This is all the more important to emphasise because there is a common and deep-rooted bogey from arrogant poets like Roy Campbell downwards through the unleavened mass of people, that socialism will produce a dead level of 'equality' and destroy the individual. (original emphasis 25 January 1952)³⁸

Taylor's dismissive attitude towards the contemporary bourgeois literary tradition (its arrogance, its contempt for the mob, its conservatism), her rejection of the idealist assumption that ideas exist in isolation from a material context, her repudiation of the illusion at the heart of bourgeois culture (that freedom is to be found beyond social relations), and her focus on the politics of South African fiction are all a means of attacking the 'sanctity' of culture, of questioning its privileged status as repository of spiritual values, as the embodiment of a higher truth against which the political is judged in the name of the 'human'. In this sense, Taylor's materialist method was an explicit challenge to the discourse of 'Kulturkritik'. In South Africa in the 1940s and 50s, a position on culture that insisted on its material roots might interrogate assumptions about its transcendence. It may also have been an important way in which a firmly-entrenched Manichean colonial orthodoxy could begin to be disrupted. At the same time, however, Taylor invokes a view of the artist and artistic production which in some respects reinscribes the discredited Romantic view: the artist as unique individual and art as the source of special wisdom. As she puts it, "the essence of art is a heightened

consciousness of oneself, of the objective world and of the relations between them, and art communicated enriches the self-consciousness, the awareness of those who share the artist's experience" (*Trek* 15 May 1944:13). Similarly, artists have a higher degree of sensitivity, and a greater ability to tune in to their environment than ordinary individuals.³⁹ Like many early Marxist thinkers, Taylor tends to see literature as a privileged mode. In this sense, she returns to a Hegelian view of the artist, privileging the artistic sensibility over other forms of 'work'. Despite a carefully argued position on the 'ordinariness' of culture, she also wanted it to stand as a kind of truth-bearer.

A Practical Criticism

How did Taylor define the function of culture and literary criticism in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s? In a seminal lecture given to students in Cape Town, she argued for the central place of an "historical" criticism in the context of political struggle.⁴⁰ A Marxist method, Taylor suggests, provides the means to critically examine socio-political issues and come to an understanding of social processes. It also makes possible trenchant political critique. Less concerned with extending an existing body of Marxist theory, Taylor sought to put criticism to practical use: in drawing out the connections between art and society, she hoped to "heighten social consciousness" and clarify political aims in the interest of the wider struggle against oppression. In this endeavour, she drew inspiration from the pre-Revolutionary tradition of nineteenth-century Russian literary criticism, the leading exponents of which were Belinsky, Dobrolybov and Chernichevsky. Founding figures in the Russian Marxist tradition, these imposing and forthright Russian thinkers were nevertheless an unusual critical touchstone for a South African critic. While Taylor was clearly drawn to many of the practical emphases of Trotsky's critical approach, his immediate concerns with post-revolutionary culture in the heady days after the Russian revolution may have seemed remote from the problems which occupied Taylor in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s. By contrast, the material conditions of nineteenth-century Russian society – an autocratic state, a disenfranchised and enslaved peasantry and an emergent dissident fraction – offered a closer approximation to South African conditions at the time and, consequently, a critical practice more directly appropriate to the burning questions of the day. Where Trotsky provided an explication of the category of class as a means of literary analysis, Belinsky and Dobrolybov offered an elaboration of the role of literature and criticism in contexts of struggle. For Belinsky and Dobrolybov, literary

criticism was politics pursued by other means. In a context of heavy censorship and oppression, their work offered a sustained critique of conditions under Russian Tzarism, and played a significant role in the growth of the revolutionary-democratic movement amongst the Russian intelligentsia. This tradition of political criticism was best represented in Belinsky's famously outraged "Letter to Gogol" in which he not only subjects Gogol's final novel to devastating criticism, but exposes the feudalism and autocracy of Russian society as a whole (Yovchuk 1948:529). Belinsky's letter was widely circulated, even achieving the status of a canonical text in the struggle against an oppressive state. As one commentator explained, "[t]he name of Belinsky is known to every youth who is at all given to thinking.... There is not a single high school teacher in the Gubernia towns who does not know Belinsky's letter by heart" (cited in Yovchuk 1948:530).

Taylor was inspired by this example; she also embraced the particular understanding of the literary text that this approach presupposed. In this view, literature sheds a strong illuminating light on social conditions and processes. Drawing on the Hegelian view of art as a special kind of cognition, Belinsky in particular argued that the artistic mode could reveal important social, moral and historical truths before rational, scientific thought had achieved the same insights. Thus, literature tells the truth about society, reveals the nature of its social relations and the position of the individual within it. "Literature opens society's eyes to itself and is instrumental in awakening its self-consciousness" (cited in Taylor).⁴¹ The function of criticism, then, follows from this understanding of art: the task of the literary critic is to "explain the phenomena of reality which called a given artistic production into being" (cited in Taylor). In nineteenth-century Russia, while a new crop of Russian realist novels illuminated the conditions of enslavement and privation in Tsarist Russia, a new generation of literary critics drew out the full social and political implications of this fiction. Literature and criticism's combined effect is to "throw a strong light on the nature of society". For Taylor, this illuminating function could apply as much to popular culture as it could to High Art, or as she put it, as much to "the emergence of the anti-hero and the hipster, [and] the rebel without a cause" as to Shakespeare or Balzac. Whereas in the Leavisian view literature fulfils its humanising function by pointing to the universal over the particular, directing individuals away from their own self-interested concerns towards the 'common good', for Taylor, literature's social function is to enhance an understanding of the social forces at

work in society. In this, she shares the concerns of leftist theatre directors, Andre van Gysegghem and Guy Routh (discussed in chapter 5), whose efforts to develop a popular radical theatre in Johannesburg in the early 1940s were also grounded in a belief that drama could shed light on the reality of contemporary South African life.

The view that literature could reveal the ‘truth’ about society is, of course, also one of the oft-quoted insights of Marx and Engels themselves. While never explicitly addressing the subject of a Marxist literary criticism, the scattered references which do exist have been eagerly seized upon by later Marxists in an effort to define a Marxist critical practice. In this regard, Engels’s view that Balzac’s *Comédie Humaine* reveals more about French society than “all the professional historians, economists and statisticians of the period put together” (cited in Solomon 1979:68) has provided the (Hegelian) starting point for many a Marxist thinker.⁴² A reference to this idea in Taylor’s notebook – as well as numerous examples of its specific application in her work more generally – suggests that it was also a cornerstone of her own approach.⁴³ As Engels explains, however, the capacity of art to reveal the ‘truth’ about society is often independent of a writer’s conscious social purpose: as he puts it, “the realism I refer to may creep out in spite of the author’s views” (Solomon 1979:68). Taylor’s methods, as we shall see, reveal a similar understanding of the complexities of the artistic process. Nevertheless, her sense of the illuminating function of culture also to some extent draws on a more Romantic belief in the unique capacity of the artist to (almost mystically) grasp the ‘true’ meaning of complex social forces.

This view of art as a privileged mode of historical apprehension is of course tied to a particular literary aesthetic, one which Engels in his preference for Balzac over Zola appears to endorse as well. For Taylor, the texts that are successful are those which achieve a “larger realism” (*Trek* 19 May 1944:11) in comparison to that which characterises the bourgeois literary tradition with its tendency to privilege individual human experience. In arguments which bear a striking resemblance to those advanced by Georg Lukàcs in the early 1930s, Taylor calls for a literary imagination which synthesises elements of the fictional landscape and draws out their individual significance and meaning in relation to larger social forces and pressures. The minutiae of individual experience should be embedded in the shifting matrix of social and political life. For Taylor, “[f]idelity is not enough....The more deeply a writer penetrates the facts he observes, the more he is aware of the spirit of the time, of the new ideas actuating the

minds of men, 'the more freely will he be able to yield to the suggestions of his artistic nature'".⁴⁴

In relation to South African literature of the contemporary period, Taylor writes that despite the recent emergence of a number of more socially conscious South African novels, "we are still waiting for the South African Balzac who shall take the true measure of [this society] and show 'the very age and body of the time its own form and pressure'". Instead of "throwing light on the nature of society", most contemporary South African novels, she argues, only "[hold] up a distorting mirror". Disappointed by most South African fiction, Taylor responded to the predominance of the racially-circumscribed perspectives of South African art with a clear-eyed analysis of its role in rationalising and supporting racist myths, giving particular attention in this instance to Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* as well as the work of Sarah Gertrude Millin. What is interesting in this discussion, however, is the use Taylor makes of the idea that art can have an illuminating function irrespective of the nature of the author's political views. Gerald Gordon's *Let the Day Perish*, for example, which offers a largely conservative response to the question of 'miscegenation', nevertheless provides a strong sense of some of the anxieties and preoccupations of a contemporary South African liberalism; in this sense it tells the 'truth' about "the particular stage of social conflict in South Africa to-day and the attitude of the liberal towards the social crisis they feel is advancing upon them". Continuing this line of thinking, Phyllis Altman's *Law of the Vultures* "holds up a mirror to society" in its clear demonstration of the destruction of human relationships by the "poisonous" ideology of white supremacy. However, as Taylor argues, the novel's exaggerated emphasis on the ruthless militancy of its central African protagonist, Thabo Thaele, reveals a latent fear of African aggression which is at odds with Altman's stated purpose:

Now I am not suggesting that Phyllis Altman sat down...to write about the menace of Black Nationalism. The relation between the writer and society, between the process of creating a novel and the social forces that prompted it, are more subtle than that. It was more likely that she was genuinely moved by social injustices and set out to give a sympathetic picture of Thabo Thaele, a figure meant to excite pity. But...the artistic process revealed more of the writer's true position in society than might at first sight appear. What I am saying is that the *social implication* of the novel is precisely the alarm of the liberal at the widening gulf between White and Black and the threat to white supremacy. This dictated the choice of the main character, Thaele, the violence of his disillusionment in the good will of the White man, and the violence of the climax. (original emphasis)

Here, Taylor's preoccupation with "artistic process" rather than conscious artistic intention moves her away from the Romantic emphases of some of her other arguments. Similarly, while ideological critique is clearly an important aspect of her critical practice more generally, her more nuanced sense of the relationship between literature and ideology allows her to offer a more sophisticated critique than those South African Communists, writing in the *Guardian* and *Fighting Talk*, for example, who tended to concentrate mainly on a more overt or spectacular kind of ideological expression.

This view of art as 'truth-teller' forms the basis of Taylor's efforts to bring the critical discussion of literary texts into the South African public sphere. Unlike similar efforts amongst South African Leavisites, this discussion was one which responded directly to contemporary socio-economic conditions. Aside from her regular literary reviews in *Trek* (which those in the movement were encouraged to read), Taylor also gave numerous lectures on literature to small groups around the country. These included the New Era Fellowship, a left-wing discussion group which met in District Six, the Teachers' League of South Africa in Cape Town, and another of the more far-flung Unity Movement affiliates, a Johannesburg group known as the Progressive Forum. These lectures, which went on throughout the 1940s and 50s, were the occasion of energetic discussion and debate which made a lasting impression on those who participated.⁴⁵ While Taylor's lectures opened up areas of culture and criticism to audiences for whom these ideas were often unfamiliar, she also achieved one of her primary goals, namely the critical analysis of pressing social questions in the interests of the broader liberation struggle. Although the Unity Movement is often remembered as a 'coloured' movement, it was, in fact, a heterogeneous organisation which strove to implement an unqualified non-racialism in all its activities. The lectures and discussion groups with which Taylor was involved would not have departed from this fundamental emphasis.⁴⁶

In what was a familiar dialectical move, Taylor also subjected her own critical approach to the radical hollowing out of history. If, like literature, the discourse of criticism is itself shaped by the pressures of a particular historical moment, then she can make no claim for the transcendence of her own method. Instead, she argues, it is the one most appropriate for the peculiar conditions of the present moment. South Africa in the 1950s, she maintained, was on the brink of "profound social change",⁴⁷ at a stage of struggle which demanded clarification of ideas and strategy prior to direct political action. The understanding acquired through a materialist analysis of literary texts would

assist in this process. Like many in the Unity Movement, she drew her model of social change from the historical examples of France and Russia respectively, where the years leading up to revolutionary action were characterised by a radical questioning of ruling class ideology, a questioning which was led by the class of petit-bourgeois intellectuals. During this time of preparation and clarification, Taylor suggests, culture can be a productive focus of public discussion and debate. This, as we have seen, was also the position of the Unity Movement more generally. During this period, Unity Movement activities concentrated on general political and cultural education, on the building of a critical vanguard through which the pressure of revolutionary consciousness would eventually be felt by all layers of South African society.⁴⁸ Cultural activities were also, of course, enjoyed for their own sake. In part a claim by the culturally dispossessed, they were also a means of transcending the narrow, instrumentalist confines of a missionary- or state-controlled education, a repudiation of ‘barbarian’ rulers, an assertion of self-worth, and a preparation for a post-revolutionary society. According to Norman Traub, secretary of NEUM discussion group, the Forum Club, “[t]he founders of the Unity Movement gave breadth of vision: they didn’t just look at politics because they were interested in the society they would create in the future”. In this sense, they sought to establish a “humane culture” (Interview, Cape Town 26 January 2001). In pursuit of this broader cultural education, Taylor opened her home to the many individuals and groups associated with the NEUM, and throughout the 1940s and 50s it became the focus for a regular stream of visitors who came to discuss politics and art, hold play-readings, and listen to music.

Drama was also an important focus for the exploration of cultural and social questions, and, from the late 1930s onwards, Taylor wrote a number of propagandist plays which were performed by those in the movement.⁴⁹ These plays were presented to small audiences, either in Taylor’s home in Claremont or at the Stakesby-Lewis hostel in District Six where Tabata lived at the time.⁵⁰ There is evidence that they were also performed on street-corners or as part of public meetings and celebrations organised by the Lenin Club, the Workers’ Party, and later the Unity Movement itself. The most popular of these plays was an adaptation of Ignazio Silone’s *Fontamara*, called *Bitter Waters*.⁵¹ Written with the express purpose of ‘holding the mirror’ up to contemporary South African society, Taylor’s plays addressed both the contemporary South African scene, and offered an oppositional view of South African history. In this sense, many of

her plays were a means of restoring dignity to those whose histories had been distorted. Another play, for example, entitled *Hints* sought to recuperate this important historical figure from the contempt of orthodox historiography. A letter written by I.B Tabata sums up his (and Taylor's view) of this important function in the South African context:

In view of the distortions and belittling of the past of our people so that the African youth is not aware of the true nature of the struggles of our people, the dignity and the spirit of resistance – this play seeks to give them a past of which they can be proud and to restore also their self-respect, from which alone can flow that desire for human freedom and that determination not to submit or yield until it is won. I need hardly emphasise to you the well-known fact that literature – particularly drama and the novel – has always constituted a very powerful weapon which was used effectively by the oppressed nationalities and peoples in their struggles. The non-Europeans in this country are now entering upon a new phase of struggle in which the scope is much broader. The whole community on a national scale will be brought into the stream and each one will contribute according to his or her capacity and talent. The novelist and the dramatist will hold the mirror up to the present-day society and portray a true picture of the struggle, past and present, in such a way that the social and political awareness of the people will be sharpened. (18 August 1948)⁵²

Brief comments in Taylor's notebook on Marx's views on drama also provide some insight into her understanding of the political functions of this particular cultural form.⁵³ Arising at "critical periods" in history, she writes, drama is a "democratic art that has tremendous power in influencing the masses". A strong reflection of the "polemical" character of the period, it "recreates existing conflicts" and "shows the struggle of opposing principles". Bertolt Brecht's plays are regarded as an excellent illustration of this dramatic ideal: in comparison to the "dustbin dramas" of Samuel Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter, Taylor writes, Brecht's plays reveal "society as it really is, how it works, what its basic motives are [and] the ideas that drive it". Throwing an "extraordinarily sharp light on his subject", his picture is "ruthless, ironic, grim, and never fear, full of gusto".

For Taylor, then, the critical exploration of and participation in culture is an important part of public and political life. It makes possible the creation of a public sphere of debate and intellectual exchange, is one of the ways in which the ideal of a rational, critical, informed 'public' could be achieved, and in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s, was a key element in the formation of an intellectual vanguard where a specific conjuncture of social and political conditions demanded careful discussion and clarification. In the context of a racially and economically fractured society, such discussion also opened up a space where different social groups could find common

ground. Despite her strong commitment to the role of culture in the public sphere (and her tendency to grant it privileged status over other modes of apprehension), Taylor was always careful to see literature and culture in their proper perspective. She insisted that whereas a critical exploration of culture is an important way of directing people towards the realities of their oppression, culture does not in itself produce social change, nor can it stem the tide of social chaos. Commenting on early twentieth-century attempts to awaken Irish national sentiment by means of Celtic theatre and the work of the Gaelic League, for example, Taylor argues that “it is well known that revolutions cannot be made by literary or cultural movements; the deep social discontent of the masses must supply the urge to action” (*Trek* 10 April 1941:15). She writes, “[a]rt in many and varied ways reflects social processes, art accompanies great historical movements and the study of art illuminates these”, but one must be careful not to overemphasise the role of art in the social process, to see art as the “maker of a new world”, as a “lever in social change, as the mighty agent of a peaceful revolution, as a *substitute* for the workers taking over power by force” (original emphasis *Trek* 15 June 1945:16). Here, Taylor draws on Trotsky’s understanding of the relationship between literature and its economic base. For Trotsky, “the nightingale of poetry, like that bird of wisdom, the owl, is heard only after the sun has set. The day is the time for action, but at twilight feeling and reason come to take account of what has been accomplished” (1925:53). As Taylor suggests on a number of occasions, this position marks her out both from the contemporary exponents of an Arnoldian or Leavisian conception of the function of culture and criticism, and from those writers in the 1930s and 40s in South African and Britain who committed themselves to the anti-fascist struggles of the Popular Front and who argued for art as a weapon in the class struggle. According to Taylor, both these positions – while radically different in the assumptions they make about the nature of social change – tend to exaggerate the importance of art in the public sphere. To argue that literature should be the handmaiden of political struggle, or to argue for its redemptive function in a society facing the inevitable forces of disintegration and decline, is to confuse art with politics, and to “force art to solve problems outside its legitimate sphere” (*Trek* 31 May 1946:16).

These arguments offer an interesting counterpoint to the dominant preoccupations of South African Communists – discussed in greater detail in chapter 5 – and are also of interest in relation to the heated discussions which followed Albie Sachs’s more recent argument, in the early 1990s, that art should move away from an explicit focus on the

struggle against apartheid. Taylor's scepticism regarding what she describes as the "sledgehammer" approach to political questions is very similar to Engels's cautionary attitude towards what he refers to as the "tendenzroman", or an explicitly partisan art (Solomon 1979:69). Unlike those South African academics of the early 1990s who welcomed the move towards less overt forms of political expression, however, the emphasis in both Engels's and Taylor's arguments is not away from 'political art' per se, but rather in finding the (literary) means for its most effective expression.⁵⁴

For Taylor, the tendency to make inflated claims for the role of art in achieving social justice is in itself a conservative reaction to social crisis, and symptomatic of a loss of social power. As capitalism advances and the privileged status of the artist and literary critic becomes less secure, so conservative criticism's claims for the redemptive value of 'High Culture' become more insistent. As we have seen, Taylor exposes the reactionary nature of this influential cultural tradition: its horror of the mass, its nostalgia for a vanished agrarian society, its fear of democracy, its forebodings about the deleterious effects of industrialisation, its elevation of culture as a solution to social chaos, and its inability to accept the legitimacy of emerging social forces. Although she does not state it explicitly, these arguments could just as easily apply to South African Leavisites.

Taylor's understanding of the relationship between literature and social change was an explicit counter-argument to frequent charges from her critics of Stalinist-inspired cultural pragmatism. For Taylor, "it is not possible to steep literature over-night in a political program, nor is it desirable. Creative literature is impossible without a deep imaginative assimilating of experience" (*Trek* 26 March 1943:15). Similarly, a broad conception of artistic movements in relation to changes in the economic base is qualified by a recognition, first, that artistic movements are subject to their own laws of development and, second, that individual responses may take different forms:

The development of literary (artistic) movements is not a simple thing to be traced mechanically in each country in parallel lines according to the development and decline of capitalist society in each. While the economic base is an invaluable and essential guide in tracing the rise of certain ideological concepts, literature at the same time has its own laws of growth, change, assimilation, imitation and revolt when imitation lacks the dynamic spirit of the movement in its beginning. (*Trek* 2 June 1944:12)

Interestingly, Taylor does not fall into a common trap of many early Marxists, especially in Britain, who, in opposition to the hegemonic view, tended to assert a very mechanical materialist dialectics. Nevertheless, Taylor's unwillingness to abandon the category of the

‘literary’ in pursuit of ‘political’ art, and her far more nuanced understanding of the relationship between literature and its material context did not prevent her work from being recuperated by both laymen and academics as Stalinist prescription and vulgar determinism. In fact, responses from the predominantly white middle-class readership of *Trek* were generally extremely hostile, ranging from anger and indignation to outright ridicule. Already inured to any form of ‘political’ or ‘sociological’ criticism by the 1940s, *Trek*’s readers could only see ideological prescription in Taylor’s work. According to D. la Cock, for example, “Mrs Taylor has sinned greatly in so far as she has attempted to force down the already raw throats of poets standards which belong to a world of narrow, distorted and factitious conceptions of value” (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 14 July 1944:1). Similarly Geoffrey Durrant responded to Taylor’s reviews with the following sarcastic jibe:

The horrible suspicion has entered my mind that what worries Dora Taylor is not that the poets refuse to face facts, or are not interested in politics, but that she cannot forgive them for not sharing her own political views This is an offence of which, alas, we shall have to convict many others besides those she has pilloried. Dante, Villon, Shakespeare, Homer, Virgil, even Ella Wheeler Wilcox and Rupert Brooke, are all damned. We shall have to face the situation frankly. Not one of the great poets, or even the lesser poets, was a really clear Marxist thinker. They will all have to be scrapped when we get out a New Progressive History of literature. In the meantime we can comfort ourselves with the thought that their poetry proves how rotten bourgeois society has been for two thousand years or so. (Letter to the Editor, *Trek* 23 May 1944:2).

In stark contrast, her influence amongst those in the liberation movement was deeply felt. Although her writing had nothing like the influence of Belinsky’s “Letter to Gogol”, her literary criticism had an enormous impact. Norman Traub, for example, suggested that Taylor’s lectures “opened up a new world for her listeners”, and that they “read in a much wider way as a result of her influence.” (Interview, Cape Town 26 January 2001). Similarly, in his address at Taylor’s funeral in 1976, I.B. Tabata offered the following fond recollection:

When the Teachers’ League of South Africa, (the coloured teachers from all over the country) had their conferences in Cape Town, they would stop for extra-mural activities, and then they would ask Dora Taylor to give them a lecture, either on literary criticism or on literature. And these teachers, most of them graduates, were happy to do this, and in this way they took her own teaching to the children they had to teach. (Tabata’s address at Taylor’s funeral 1976)⁵⁵

Taylor’s lectures, Tabata suggested, provided students with an ‘education’ where before they had received only ‘schooling’. By directing people to the “philosophical

mainstream” underlying literary texts, she taught people to “see the world in a different way”. Indeed, it is possible to detect the spirit and tone of Taylor’s critical approach in a number of radical journals which grew out of the activities of the Unity Movement – *The Educational Journal*, *The Torch*, and *The Citizen* – all of which are discussed in more detail in chapter 4. Similarly, her plays, poems, songs and short stories were valued as records of human suffering, a necessary corrective to the distortions of the South African government, and a means of gaining self respect. A letter to Taylor from her friend, Leo Sihlali (at the time a school teacher in the Eastern Cape, and a leader in the Cape African Teachers’ League), gives an indication of the general feeling towards her work:

You can’t imagine the effect your “Prelude” had on me especially as we had a conference ahead of us. Whatever the ‘shortcomings’ of the thing may be (if there were any at all) it does many of us a great deal of good to sit on the ground and tell the sad tale of how a people has been outraged. Perhaps even more than this what enamoured me of the little piece was the glimpse of beauty I saw flitting across the lines....Please now, don’t again censure yourself so undeservedly for your alleged inability to participate in the same way as some of us do. Really now, don’t take this for a mere polite expression of sympathy or something like that. How many of us are in a position to provide that absolutely essential aspect of the Movement - writings that throb with real human passion? We shall not be like some of those ‘practical’ Romans who said they had no need for Homer to sing the praises of great heroes but were concerned with performing great deeds and exploits themselves. Goodness knows how much we need to be reassured that we belong to *Homo Sapiens* and should bear ourselves with dignity - befitting the species. When we come out on the other side of the valley of the shadow of herrenvolkism we should have something to build upon. Don’t you see? I don’t get angry with you for saying such things, I get disturbed. Please now do see the matter as we others do. (Letter from Leo Sihlali to Dora Taylor, 8 May 1954)⁵⁶

As this letter suggests, Taylor was often uncertain about the value of her emphasis on culture. Taylor’s involvement in the struggle for liberation in South Africa meant that she was forced to interrogate the place of literature and criticism in society in a way which may not have been possible had she stayed in Scotland. Anxieties about the value of writing and criticism in the context of social oppression continued to plague her throughout her career. These were intensified by the regular correspondence she kept up with members of the movement whose often-harrowing accounts of everyday experience under an oppressive regime affected her deeply. Another letter from Leo Sihlali, which attempts to put her mind at ease, also points to the way in which her work was received by many of the oppressed:

Please don’t make the mistake of thinking that your lectures can be unimportant even at this moment. We can’t be spinning our web from our own cocoon. It is now, in fact, that such things are necessary. You see, it’s not very many of us who have

such spiritual and intellectual resources to draw on in those rare moments when we can permit ourselves the luxury of vacant or pensive mood. (Letter from Leo Sihlali to Dora Taylor, 13 October 1953)⁵⁷

Through the discussion of literature, Taylor imagined an egalitarian kind of interaction in which participants discussed politics and art on an equal footing. In practice, this may not always have been the case and, despite her best intentions, these discussion groups and lectures may have reinforced the kind of in-culture/out-culture opposition which has always characterised the discourse and practice of English Studies, especially in its colonial manifestations. Because of the privileged status of 'culture' in Western society – and by association those who study and teach it – the groups which are constituted around it are necessarily unequal in nature, and the object of discussion cannot escape being set up as something rarefied, special, privileged, thus reinforcing colonial hierarchies. In seeking to expose the "Great Lie" at the heart of "herrenvolkism", in other words, she may, unwittingly, have reinforced it. The staging of plays may not have had the same effect, and may have facilitated freer forms of access and participation. In any event, it would not have been possible for an individual to transcend or escape pre-existing structures of interaction between unequal groups in South Africa. In this sense, participants felt the effects of a particular set of historical circumstances. However much Taylor's lecture groups may have been affected by the damaging hierarchies of conventional South African society, her overt commitment to a non-racial and egalitarian society may have mitigated the potential elitism of her role, at the very least offering a less coercive and intimidating environment than that which obtained in 'prac crit' tutorials in South African English Departments.

The contradictions and ambiguities which mark Taylor's cultural project in South Africa are the signs, not of failure, but of a process forged in response to specific historical conditions, and one which was necessarily limited by them. As we have seen, Taylor's view of modern society draws to some extent on a Leavisian perceptual scheme but does not share its conservative social goals. Her criticism oscillates between a materialist approach to culture that resists notions of its transcendence and recognises its limits in the social process, and a view of art and the nature of literary apprehension drawn squarely from the Romantic tradition. Nevertheless, if Taylor regards literature as a privileged mode of apprehension, she is always cautious about its potential to effect

social change. This is a significant departure from a mainstream position in which culture was consistently privileged over the practical, 'partisan' activities of the political sphere.

Taylor's critical-cultural project represents a pioneering effort to develop a Marxist discourse on culture in South Africa: more derivative than original, the value of her criticism lies in its effort to apply a set of appropriated categories to a new set of conditions. Her preoccupations with the material contexts of literary-cultural production and her recognition of the salience of class represent an enormous methodological challenge to the formalist, text-bound methods of an emerging critical consensus. A similar challenge is to be found in her efforts to address some of the pressing issues of the contemporary socio-political scene: unlike the apolitical discourse of mainstream literary-cultural discussion, literary criticism in Taylor's hands becomes the occasion for radical socio-cultural critique. Taylor also gives serious attention to the work of black South African writers and builds much of her broader political project on an examination of the way in which racist attitudes are bolstered and entrenched in cultural forms themselves. This is an important reinsertion of an ostensibly neutral 'High Culture' into the fractured, compromised and partisan arena of history. It is also a demonstration of racial solidarity and equality which forms a significant contrast to the fitful patronage and casual cultural violence of more mainstream discussions. Interestingly, as we have seen, this was a critical project which was fortunate to have developed, unlike so much Marxist literary criticism, alongside and within a revolutionary political movement. It is to this close relationship, I think, that one can attribute much of its success.

Perhaps even more important than the development of a Marxist theory of art in South Africa is Taylor's concern to encourage a radical cultural practice which aimed at wider cultural and political emancipation through critical debate, lectures and the performance of plays. Literary criticism, as we have seen, was a key element in this strategy, providing rare opportunities for radical critical analysis and debate. This tradition of public discussion and debate with culture as its focus bears a strong resemblance to Habermas's "public sphere in the world of letters" (1999:51), the institutions of which – coffee houses and literary journals – provided a forum in which a relatively unpractised eighteenth-century middle-class public could begin to exercise its rational-critical skills. Through literature, drama, fiction and criticism, Taylor was instrumental in the creation of popular, oppositional 'counterpublics' in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s, thereby providing one of the means by which subordinate social

groups could articulate a growing opposition to the state. The occasion for an alternative public debate, her work was a means of political education and a spur to action. It was also an instance of the articulation of an important ‘counterdiscourse’ in South African society: a radical take on history and culture, an unflinching critique of South African politics, and a means by which human dignity could be restored. The disappearance of the kind of radical social critique offered by critics like Taylor, and the retreat into the critical isolation of a formalist poetics which the institutionalisation of practical criticism in University English Departments entailed coincides with an increasingly repressive state policy towards black South Africans which culminated in the triumph of Afrikaner politics in the 1948 elections and the implementation of apartheid rule.

Notes:

¹ Recently, Allison Drew’s study of the South African Left (2000) has gone some way to address this omission.

² Ruth Schechter, Ben Farrington and Clare Goodlatte in particular stand out in this regard. See Hirson (2001).

³ Anonymous Tribute to Jane Gool by the Unity Movement of South Africa 18 May 1996 (UMSA/Tabata Collection BC 925. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town).

⁴ David Adelstein’s parents were close friends of Dora Taylor and her husband, J.G.

⁵ British-born scholar Benjamin Farrington was Classics Lecturer and author of *Head and Hand in Ancient Greece*; Lancelot Hogben, a Professor of Biology, was author of the hugely successful *Mathematics for the Millions*; and Frederick Bodmer, author of *The Loom of Language*, had been part of early Marxist student groups in Britain.

⁶ Both Roux and Roux (1970) and Hirson (1989, 1992, 1993 and 2001) provide fascinating accounts of this lively intellectual milieu. A newcomer to Cape Town in 1929, Eddie Roux, former member of the Communist Party of South Africa and editor of its monthly publication *Umsebenzi*, records his experiences of the ‘Cape Town scene’ in his autobiography *Rebel Pity* (part of which was co-written by his wife, Win Roux). He makes particular mention of the social and intellectual importance of Saturday evenings at Lancelot Hogben’s home, affectionately known as ‘Xenopus’. Similar open houses were held at Cissie Gool’s home in District Six (Hirson 2001:170). See also Shamil Jeppe and Crain Soudien’s collection of essays on District Six (1990).

⁷ Interview with David Schrire (Colin Purkey Papers A/1984/E30. William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand). See also Tony Southall (Alan Paton Centre PC116/1/5/3).

⁸ I. B. Tabata was born in Lesseyton, Queenstown. Known to his political friends as ‘IB’ or ‘Tabie’, “to his African protégés he was ‘Mdengentonga’ which means a man of short stature but tall in deeds”. Educated at Lovedale and Fort Hare, he came to Cape Town to seek work just before the Hertzog Bills. He threw himself into politics and “met other young intellectuals from the Coloured, Indian and white communities, all locked in the great debate on ‘Socialism in South Africa’”. In 1941, he launched the anti-CAD, and he was instrumental in bringing the Cape African Teachers’ Association into the All African Convention. “Most of those who became politically aware in the mid-1940s learned their political ABC’s from Tabie”. He fled South Africa in 1963, and died in Harare, Zimbabwe, October 13 1990 (Jordan, Phyllis 1990. “I.B. Tabata: South African Revolutionary”. *News and Letters* UMSA/Tabata Collection BC925. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town.).

⁹ Taylor and Tabata’s intellectual and political collaboration began some time in the early 1940s. Documents and interviews suggest that they worked closely on most projects. Tabata had a profound influence on Taylor’s political views. Taylor in turn helped give shape, clarity and editorial polish to much of Tabata’s work (UMSA/Tabata Collection BC 925. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town). Ciraj Rassool’s doctoral thesis (2004) explores this relationship in detail. It was not available at the time I was writing this dissertation.

¹⁰ For more information concerning the origins and development of Trotskyist groups in South Africa, see Hirson (1993) and Drew (1991, 1996 & 2000).

¹¹ Hirson outlines its complex origins: "The majority of its members consisted of those who had been expelled from the Communist Party or its associated bodies, including the Independent Labour Party and the *Linker Kring* (Left Circle) a group which was composed of Jews who had been expelled from the Gezerd (*Gezelschaft fur Land*) which advocated the formation of an autonomous Jewish state in the USSR" (Hirson 1989b:74; see also Drew 1991:192-193 and Drew 2000:137-145). Founding members included exiles from Eastern Europe, Yudel Burlack, M.N. Averbach, and Joe Pick, a founder member of the CPSA. Other members included Paul Koston, an American sailor who had jumped ship in Cape Town, and who later founded Modern Books; Clare Goodlatte, the so-called 'Red Nun' (Hirson 1989b), an ex-teacher who became a socialist in her seventies; and George Sacks who later returned to the Communist Party and helped launch the *Guardian*. The club also attracted an emerging black intelligentsia in the Western Cape including I.B. Tabata, S. Jayiya, Goolam Gool, Jane Gool, Arthur Davids and J. Beyers, many of whom went on to play a significant role in liberation movements such as the Non-European Unity Movement, the National Liberation League and the Non-European United Front.

¹² Allison Drew is more generous: "In its first two years, the Lenin Club engaged in various activities. Jane Gool and Millie Matthews ran a socialist Sunday school for children. The Club held a study class in District Six, at the offices of Abdul Gool. In 1934, the centenary of the abolition of slavery in South Africa, it organised a May Day rally on the Greenpoint common, producing its only known publication, *Workers of South Africa, Awake!* On Wednesday evenings it held open-air meetings in Castle Street, outside the old Post Office" (2000:142).

¹³ For a range of views on the Lenin Club split, see Gentle (1978), Hirson (1993) and Kayser (1997).

¹⁴ See Drew (2000:140-143). *The Spark* was edited by Clare Goodlatte. It had a strong theoretical slant and included almost nothing in the way of literary or cultural discussion.

¹⁵ See also Lewis (1987) and Chisholm (1991).

¹⁶ In *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958), Doris Lessing recalls similar conflicts among leftist groups in Rhodesia.

¹⁷ As Eddie Roux recalls, there was an unprecedented demand for CPSA publications like *Umsebenzi* and *The African Defender* (Roux and Roux 1970:142). Dockworkers in Durban and Cape Town refused to load any goods destined for the Italian war effort, and massive demonstrations against the invasion continued throughout 1936 (Drew 1991:226-228). This period also saw the rise of two Popular Front organisations in the Western Cape, the National Liberation League (1935) and the Non-European United Front (1938). See also Lewis (1987).

¹⁸ This was evident not only in the ANC, but also in groups like the Teachers' League of South Africa, the African People's Organisation, the All African Convention, and the South African Indian Congress, all of which had to accommodate the challenge of a more forthright and militant younger generation. See Lewis (1987).

¹⁹ For a discussion of its significance, see Nasson (1990). The only other historians who have given it serious attention so far have been Ken Smith (1988) and Christopher Saunders (1988).

²⁰ Landmark texts in this pioneering Marxism include Ben Kies (*Background to Segregation*), Willem van Schoor (*The Origin and Development of Segregation in South Africa*), I.B. Tabata (*The Awakening of a People*) and 'Mnguni' (*Three Hundred Years*).

²¹ 'Herrenvolk' was one of a cluster of terms which characterised Unity Movement polemics.

²² In 1944, for example, Taylor was dismissed from her post as lecturer at Buxton's teacher training College for an article entitled "The Churches Cash In" which challenged government plans to introduce 'Christian National Education' in South African schools (Interview with Doreen and Michael Muskett, England 24 February 2001).

²³ See also 2 January 1941:7 and 16 January 1941:7.

²⁴ Sheila Belshaw described her passion for art, theatre and music. She kept a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets next to her bed. "She could recite chunks of Shakespeare, and had read all the classics. She had books up to the ceiling, and read everything that had been written by South Africans. She had a great admiration for Doris Lessing and Athol Fugard in particular" (Interview, Cape Town 26 January 2001).

²⁵ Along with some of her plays and poems, the manuscripts of Taylor's three novels form part of Doreen and Michael Muskett's private collection.

²⁶ The phrase "wherein is discussed some book of yesterday" formed the regular subtitle. See, for example, *Trek* 24 March 1944:17.

²⁷ Her Botswana visits are recorded in a fascinating series of letters to I.B. Tabata (UMSA/Tabata Collection BC 925. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town). Although her attempts to record

indigenous poetry were largely frustrated by interfering chiefs, her descriptions of interactions with both white colonials and community leader are interesting in themselves.

²⁸ The three lectures that I have been able to have access to include “South African Literature and Society” (1953), “Individualism Old and New: A Review of ‘Dr Zhivago’ by Boris Pasternack and ‘Not by Bread Alone’ by Vladimir Dudintsev” (undated), and “The Function of Literary Criticism” (undated). These lectures were kindly supplied to me by Ronnie Britten, a former member of the Anti-CAD and the NEUM.

²⁹ Taylor’s notebooks give evidence that substantial work on this project had already been completed, but the arguments have not been properly synthesised and are difficult to follow (Notes, Doreen and Michael Muskett’s personal collection).

³⁰ All references in this section are to Taylor’s undated lecture on “The Function of Literary Criticism” (Ronnie and Chrystal Britten’s personal collection).

³¹ It is worth noting that the opposition between Marxism and *Scrutiny* was not absolute. Leavis confessed to an admiration for ‘the dangerously intelligent’ Trotsky, and T.S. Eliot sympathised with certain of Lenin’s ideas. See Stan Smith (1994).

³² For a critique of English Marxism, see Williams (1958). See Pechey (1985) for a more sympathetic account of the outcome of the 1940s Marxist/Leavisite contest in England.

³³ Notes, Doreen and Michael Muskett’s personal collection.

³⁴ Her notes also make interesting reference to Vilakazi’s thesis on the “Conception and Development of Poetry in Zulu”. While in exile in England she read Christopher Caudwell’s *Illusion and Reality* and *Studies in a Dying Culture* as well as works by Freud and Isaac Deutscher (Notes, Doreen and Michael Muskett’s personal collection).

³⁵ Lecture on “The Function of Literary Criticism” (Ronnie and Chrystal Britten’s personal collection).

³⁶ These novels originally appeared under the pseudonym, R. Hernekin Baptist. This is how they are referred to in Taylor’s text.

³⁷ None of these critics make an appearance in Cherry Clayton’s well-known 1983 collection of Schreiner criticism. While many of these newspapers were probably unavailable when this collection was published, it is worth noting the complete absence of this important leftist tradition from mainstream literary history.

³⁸ UMSA/Tabata Collection BC 925. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town.

³⁹ This view was shared by I.B. Tabata. Here he extends the artistic sensitivity to members of the “intelligentsia” as well: “we the intelligentsia are bound to sense the coming storm long before it overtakes us. Because you are an artist, you feel the atmosphere sooner than others. Your tentacles are always spread out to feel your environment. That is why you can write. Without that quality of sensitiveness you would not be artistic. But that same quality exposes you to tortures occasioned by the changing temperatures in winds, the cross currents or even social torrents...” (Letter from Tabata to Taylor, Lady Frere 1952. UMSA/Tabata Collection BC 925. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town).

⁴⁰ Lecture on “The Function of Literary Criticism” (Ronnie and Chrystal Britten’s personal collection).

⁴¹ These comments appear in the lecture entitled “The Function of Literary Criticism” (Ronnie and Chrystal Britten’s personal collection).

⁴² Marx expressed a similar view in relation to nineteenth-century British writers: here he comments on “[t]he brilliant contemporary school of novelists in England, whose eloquent and graphic portrayals of the world have revealed more political and social truths than all the professional politicians, publicists, and moralists put together” (Solomon 1979:64).

⁴³ Her notebook, for example, records that among the French realists Balzac is regarded as “the apogee of bourgeois realism”, a writer who presented a “great many social phenomena...more deeply and truthfully” than most “bourgeois historians and scientists” (Notes, Doreen and Michael Muskett’s personal collection).

⁴⁴ Unless otherwise specified, all the quotations which follow are taken from Taylor’s 1953 lecture entitled “South African Literature and Society” (Ronnie and Chrystal Britten’s personal collection).

⁴⁵ Interviews with Gwen Wilcox and Norman Traub (Cape Town 26 January 2001). Gwen Wilcox was active in Unity Movement activities in the Western Cape. Norman Traub was secretary of a Unity Movement discussion group in Johannesburg known as the Progressive Forum.

⁴⁶ It is interesting to look briefly at a few examples of how these discussions were received. Gwen Wilcox, who was a student at the time, recalls many heated debates in Taylor’s home. One such debate centred around Taylor’s own novel, *Kathie*, which explored the issue of ‘passing for white’. Although appreciative of the novel’s depiction of working-class experience, people felt that Taylor had failed to offer a credible portrayal of her central character. As Gwen Wilcox put it, “Kathie wasn’t true to life. Kathie didn’t exist” (Interview, Cape Town 26 January 2001). From Wilcox’s account, it also becomes clear that Taylor’s historical work had more impact than her fiction. The influence of *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest* was huge, and had much to do with the fact that people were hungry for an account of their

history which made sense. As Wilcox put it “Our thirst was quenched. We didn’t know what to think about our past” (Interview, Cape Town 26 January 2001).

⁴⁷ Taylor’s 1953 lecture entitled “South African Literature and Society” (Ronnie and Chrystal Britten’s personal collection).

⁴⁸ For this summary of the NEUM position, I am grateful to Ronnie and Chrystal Britten. This position was explicitly contrasted with that of the ANC. According to the Brittens, the ANC was not interested in theory, just “throwing stones” (Interview, Cape Town 29 January 2001).

⁴⁹ Some of these plays have survived. At present, they form part of Doreen and Michael Musket’s personal collection

⁵⁰ Interview with Gwen Wilcox, Cape Town 26 January 2001.

⁵¹ Other plays included *The Peasant*, performed at the Athlone City Hall (Interview with Gwen Wilcox, Cape Town 26 January 2001). *The Spark* was performed by the Spartacus Club to commemorate the October 1917 Revolution in Russia (Drew 2000:154). Another play known as *The Sausage* was performed by members of the Unity Movement, but did not survive more than one performance (Letter to the author from Amelia Lewis, 5 November 2002).

⁵² The recipient of this letter is unknown (UMSA/Tabata Collection BC 925. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town). There are clear indications that Taylor’s novels and short stories were written with the same purpose in mind. *Kathie*, for example, deals with the story of a coloured family, and addresses the issue of ‘passing for white’. According to I.B. Tabata, another story is “based on an actual incident which took place in South Africa, the most bestial and brutal act reported in the SA Press. But in the telling of it, it is the impression of human worth and dignity which predominates, though the cruelty is not softened” (Letter from Tabata to George Padmore, 25 May 1950. UMSA/Tabata Collection BC 925. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town).

⁵³ Notes, Doreen and Michael Musket’s personal collection.

⁵⁴ For another more recent version of a similar point, see Ari Sitas’s comments on South African English academics (Sitas 1990).

⁵⁵ Doreen and Michael Musket’s personal collection. Grateful thanks to Doreen and Michael Musket for making this transcript available to me.

⁵⁶ UMSA/Tabata Collection BC925. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town. ‘The Prelude’, one of Taylor’s poems, was published in the NEUM organ *Ikwezi Lomso*. It has been reprinted as part of an edited collection of her work. See *English in Africa* October 2002 29(2):29-31.

⁵⁷ UMSA/Tabata Collection BC 925. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town.

Contesting a Cult(ure) of Respectability: The Radical Intellectual Traditions of the Non-European Unity Movement

The intellectual and political traditions of the Non-European Unity movement, as Linda Chisholm (1991) explains, are unlike any other in the country. Subversive, confrontational, and theoretically astute, NEUM intellectuals generated an extraordinary body of critical work which constituted a pioneering effort to develop a Marxist critique of South African society and culture as part of a broader programme of political and social emancipation. Chisholm concentrates on this rich legacy in the field of education: one of the first groups in South Africa to develop a theory of the intelligentsia, Unity movement intellectuals also achieved enormous success in the promotion – in schools, fellowships and lectures – of a radical, critical education. This enormous intellectual energy also bore fruit in the area of South African historiography: here as Bill Nasson (1990) has shown, Unity Movement intellectuals were some of the first to develop a radical interpretation of South African history, which preceded the emergence of a university-based Marxist historiography by at least thirty years. My aim in this chapter is to highlight yet another area of intellectual and practical endeavour in this already impressive list, namely the production of a radical critical discourse pertaining to the cultural sphere. Something of the breadth, complexity and intellectual rigour of this alternative Western Cape tradition has already been suggested in the discussion of the life and work of Dora Taylor. This chapter takes this tradition as its primary focus, placing it within the social and political environments that shaped it, and examining its intersections both with the dominant university-based discussion as well as with other more moderate examples of political and intellectual engagement in the Western Cape with which it came into conflict, and against which it was defined.

There are two main strands in this discourse. The first has to do with the development, in opposition to the dominant English Studies model, of a more politicised cultural criticism. In contrast to the narrow canonical emphases of South African English academics during this period, Unity Movement intellectuals, in the first place, aimed to circulate and promote an alternative left-wing canon as part of a broader politicising and

educational project. This emphasis was accompanied by a critical method which both interrogated the privileged status of literary texts, questioned the hegemonic separation of 'culture' and 'politics', and countered the apolitical tendencies of mainstream criticism by giving detailed attention to material contexts of deprivation, oppression, discrimination and resistance. This radical cultural practice also, crucially, went beyond the discursive arena to include a broader political and educational programme comprising popular theatre, music, workers' education, reading groups, public lectures and debates. In this sense, Unity Movement intellectuals worked towards what Terry Eagleton has described as "the cultural emancipation of the masses" (1981:97). Generated by an enthusiastic group of public intellectuals who took active part in the major struggles of the day, this radical criticism forms a significant counter-tradition to that of a more apolitical and conservative university-based practice. As such it has a place – alongside the work of Dora Taylor (and the Communist and Congress writers discussed in chapters 5 and 6) – in what is emerging as a rich history of radical cultural-political debate in South Africa which has yet to be fully explored.

Another important emphasis in Unity Movement discussions more generally concerns the social functions of culture in contexts of colonial and semi-colonial rule. NEUM intellectuals and activists were well aware of the role of education and culture in South Africa in the reproduction of existing social relations of domination and subordination. In this sense, an on-going emphasis on the ideological function and material 'situatedness' of various forms of intellectual and creative production becomes the cornerstone of a compelling critique of the operations of colonial domination and oppression. Here, NEUM intellectuals rejected the notion of Western superiority, and countered the exclusions and deprivations of the developing apartheid state with a strong claim to a 'world' culture. Pointing to the role of liberal cultural organisations in facilitating racial oppression, they also challenged the deeply-entrenched colonialist principle that economic and political rights would be awarded upon the demonstration of a certain degree of 'civility'. By rejecting a powerful consensus regarding the function of culture and Western civilisation as markers of both racial and class superiority, NEUM activists also offered a radical challenge to entrenched social hierarchies.

In this regard, the position of NEUM intellectuals stands in stark contrast to the perspectives of an older generation of political leaders in the Western Cape who, in the desperate attempt to win much-needed political advantage, tended to accept the racist terms of a dominant order which demanded substantial proof of 'civilisation' from those

classified as 'non-European' before it would countenance the provision of basic human rights. For the Non-European Unity Movement, people like D.D.T. Jabavu of the All African Convention (AAC) and Abdullah Abdurahman of the African Political Organisation (APO) were the chief representatives of this increasingly discredited political strategy which, they argued, had sacrificed political integrity in favour of the short term benefits to be derived from collusion with the white government in the interests of a privileged few. In short, to use the language of the day, they were 'quislings', 'sell-outs', 'time-servers' and 'collaborators'. Instead of co-operation with the government in the hopes of piece-meal reform, NEUM leaders put their faith in the substantial political advantage to be gained from a position of unity amongst all of the oppressed.

In drawing attention to some of the conflicts and disagreements which arose amongst oppressed groups during this period, then, this chapter also seeks to highlight the heterogeneity and complexity of anti-colonial resistance in South Africa during this period. This is a partial response to recent arguments which, in seeking to complicate and question the "seeming subservience" (de Kock 2001:408) of more moderate traditions of political engagement in the Western Cape, tend to underplay important political distinctions which were deeply felt at the time.

The contribution made by the NEUM and its associated groups to the South African liberation struggle is not widely known. Its historic formation as an organisation defined largely in opposition to the African Nationalism of the ANC has meant that it has generally not found a prominent place in either the politics or the historiography of the post-1994 period. Its marginal position in contemporary South African politics is repeated in the academic arena as well. Vigorously defended by some, it has come under attack for a range of omissions and misdemeanours. In this regard, to describe this intellectual tradition as 'radical' or 'revolutionary' requires some explanation and qualification. For someone like Baruch Hirson, (1995a) activist-intellectual and a former member of the Unity Movement himself, this organisation ultimately abandoned its original radicalism in pursuit of what for him was the treacherous route of African Nationalism. For those in the ANC and the Congress Alliance, on the other hand, the NEUM was roundly criticised precisely because of its political passivity. Others dismissed it as elitist, an organisation which hid both its fear of genuine revolutionary activity and its failure to become a mass-based organisation behind the mask of rigid theoretical principles like 'non-collaboration', actively sabotaging the more

interventionist political activities of groups like the ANC.¹ An alternative view articulated by Allison Drew is that the early position of NEUM intellectuals as “very much an organic part of the working class” shifted into the more complacent and elitist politics of a petit-bourgeois class increasingly remote from working-class concerns (1997:15). Any attempt to enter this deeply-contested historical terrain (where ‘left’ and ‘right’ are not fixed terms denoting clear positions in a single landscape, but rather the shifting signifiers in a turbulent and on-going debate) is naturally attended by a number of risks. This division and complexity notwithstanding, the intellectual traditions of the NEUM form part of a radical South African debate, the significance of which has only begun to be explored. The focus in this project is on the implications of this radical political tradition for a broader South African cultural discussion.

Rooted in the revolutionary culture of Cape Town’s tiny socialist left, the NEUM attracted a wide range of adherents including working-class Africans, coloured intellectuals and teachers, as well as a cluster of white socialists located at the University of Cape Town. The formation of the radical discussion group, the New Era Fellowship, in 1937 led to the establishment in 1943 of the Anti-CAD movement – an organisation which resisted government efforts to remove coloureds from the voters’ roll – and a few months later, the establishment of the NEUM, a broad-based political organisation which sought to unify all the oppressed under a single non-racial banner (Simons and Simons 1983; Lodge 1983; Lewis 1987; Goldin 1987; Adhikari 1993). Other groups which also formed part of this radical tradition include the Teachers’ League of South Africa (after its post-1944 takeover by young radicals), the Cape African Teachers’ Association (CATA),² and a number of fellowships and reading groups around the country, one of which was the Johannesburg-based Progressive Forum. Those groups which fell outside of the ambit of the Unity Movement but which shared something of its radical aims include the Cape Town-based Heatherly Civic Association, and its short-lived publication, *The Citizen* (March 1956 to May 1958)³ and the Forum Club,⁴ another Cape-based group which published the literary-political journal, *Discussion* (1951 to 1952).⁵

The Non-European Unity Movement is often erroneously thought of as a ‘coloured’ organisation. This designation not only ignores its heterogeneous racial composition, but also goes against the principles upon which it was established. An explicitly non-racial organisation, it tried as far as possible to dispense with the category of race altogether. While the discussion which follows makes a determined effort not to fall into the race trap, there are a number of reasons why this effort is likely to be

compromised. In the first place, groups like the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) which formed part of the NEUM's federal structure, were in fact organisations of exclusively coloured membership. In the second place, some of the main antagonists of the NEUM position were members of the Western Cape coloured petit-bourgeois elite who articulated a particular political response on the basis of this historically-defined racial category. If the discussion tends to foreground a 'coloured' response, this is partly an unavoidable consequence of the nature of the organisational contexts in which these debates occurred, and partly a recognition that the historical and political construct of a 'coloured' identity has played a significant role in the way in which individuals understand and interpret their experiences (Wicomb 1998; Erasmus 2001).

Barbarism and Civilisation: A 'Cult(ure) of Respectability'

In an influential article which examines the discourse of race in South Africa in the early twentieth century, Saul Dubow points to a "distinct ideological shift in the late nineteenth-century Cape" when a failed liberal integrationism was gradually superseded by an emerging segregationist philosophy (1987:73). A belief that those classified as 'non-European' would gradually become assimilated into the dominant culture gave way to an obsession with 'racial stocks', a fear of racial 'mixing', and new segregationist policies which sought to preserve racial 'purity' by limiting interracial contact as much as possible. Whilst originally conceived as a compromise between "the discredited policies of 'assimilation' and 'repression'", segregationist thinking, according to Dubow, did not actually constitute a rejection of the central assumptions of these two schools of thought. Rather, as "a synthesis of divergent political traditions...the discourse of segregation...continued to carry within its terms resonances of those very elements which it professed to reject" (74). The unstable combination of these distinct but similar racial philosophies forms the ambiguous terrain on which oppressed groups in South Africa attempted to formulate an appropriate political strategy in the early twentieth century. For those classified as 'coloured', the situation was further complicated both by their marginal status within the broader South African polity, and by the uncertain way in which they were treated by successive white governments, at times courted and embraced as part of the 'European' community, but also just as easily shunned (Lewis 1987; Adhikari 1993). Defined as being of 'mixed blood' by a racist science which positioned those classified as 'coloured' mid-way between 'white' and 'African', coloureds enjoyed some of the political and material benefits of their supposed greater racial proximity to

whites, but faced the ever-present threat of expulsion from this always-precarious position of deeply qualified privilege.

These differences notwithstanding, the strategy favoured by most political leaders in the Western Cape was one that sought gradual incorporation into the dominant political and economic order through a careful assimilation to the standards of a 'superior' European civilisation. As Neville Alexander argues,

the politics of almost the entire black leadership of the first thirty years after Union can be said to have consisted in futile attempts to persuade the British crown and the local white ruling class that they were worthy of being incorporated into the established political order....[T]he history of the period right into the early 1950s is in one sense a history of the disillusionment of the black middle class. (1986:181)

This strategy – summed up in the phrase “equal rights for civilised men” (cited in Lewis 1987:49) – was an appropriate response to a powerful argument concerning the nature of human progress and the existence of racial hierarchies that had provided justification for varying degrees of racial exclusion and discrimination since the early nineteenth-century. It was also an approach which appeared reasonable in the light of the historical record. According to Mohammed Adhikari,

[the coloured elite] looked back to the introduction of liberal policies under British rule as the start of the coloured people's ascent from a dark past of savagery and slavery. The repeal in 1828 of the vagrancy laws that had virtually enserfed the Khoisan, and the emancipation of slaves in 1834, were taken to mark the start of the coloured people's “rise in the scale of civilisation”. Politicised coloureds regarded the establishment of the principle of equality before the law and the introduction of a non-racial franchise in 1853 as forming a watershed in the development of the coloured people because it bestowed basic civil rights upon them and provided a means for their incorporation into the mainstream. (1993:15)

By the mid-1930s, the ruling United Party Government – determined to pursue a policy of full-scale political and social segregation – was paying only lip-service to these ideas; nevertheless, the conceptual link between 'civilised' norms of behaviour and political integration was still very strong. It was only after four or five years of National Party rule in the mid-1950s that the hollow rhetoric of an older regime which promised the gradual incorporation of an educated black majority into the dominant culture had been completely jettisoned in favour of full-scale social and political segregation. During the 1920s and 30s, under the guidance of influential political organisations like the African National Congress and the African People's Organisation (APO), however, petit-bourgeois leaders put their faith in the possible rewards of assimilation. A political strategy which linked economic and political rights to an ability to pass the 'civilisation

test' took much of its inspiration from the arguments of prominent African-American scholars like Booker T. Washington who, in their emphasis on self-help and economic independence, encouraged a pragmatic strategy of socio-economic uplift and advancement over direct political action. Here, the influential middle-class myth of individual achievement and the possibility of self-advancement through hard work, thrift, and sobriety formed the basic pre-supposition of an approach which looked to self-improvement and adaptation rather than radical transformation of an exploitative and hierarchical society. Something of the characteristic rhetorical gestures of this conservative political agenda is suggested in the following extract from the inaugural address of the launch of the Coloured People's Union (CPNU), a political organisation established after the take-over of the APO by young radicals in 1944:

[The CPNU aims to] improve the existing economic, social, educational and political conditions of the Coloured people by means of closer understanding with the Government,...to assist in the Coloured man's attempt to better himself in all spheres of life; and to enlighten European public opinion as to the needs and aspirations of the Coloured people with a view to enlisting their sympathetic assistance in matters of vital importance. One of the cardinal points in our policy is that we are organised on a Christian basis. Tolerance, forbearance, charity, the principle of self-help, building up of economic strength through our own efforts, by encouraging our people to be thrifty and diligent, and faith in ourselves, forms the foundation on which we have started to work. (*Sun* 8 July 1945:2)

Despite the dominance in this early-twentieth century discourse of the racially-defined minutiae of social Darwinism, what this slow and painful journey from 'primitive' to 'civilised' meant in practical terms was the taking on of a particular class identity. In other words, to become civilised was to become middle-class. In *Rabelais and His World*, Michael Bakhtin (1984) notes how in sixteenth-century Europe, 'upper body functions' like reason, delicacy, and refinement become the distinctive markers of a new bourgeois subjectivity. What this tended to produce was an implicit categorizing of human behaviours and preferences, so that a taste for 'High Culture' or an avoidance of lewd or excessive behaviour, for example, became the visible signs of a more civilized sensibility, and as a powerful mechanism of class distinction and differentiation, an effective way of ensuring the continued hegemony of the ruling class. Taking up the implications of this argument for a more contemporary example, Laura Kipnis draws attention to the way in which the opposition between high and low discourses, high and low classes, and high and low culture is "enforced and reproduced" in the interests of "a class hierarchy tenuously held in place through symbolic (and less symbolic) policing" of

the threats posed by the lower orders. “The very highness of high culture”, she argues, “is structured through the obsessive banishment of the low, and through the labour of suppressing the grotesque body...in favour of what Bakhtin refers to as the ‘classical body’” (2001:137). In South Africa in the 1930s and 40s, a similar constellation of attitudes, tastes and behaviours functioned as the naturalized, arbitrary signifiers of a privileged (white) middle-class subjectivity, and marked the boundary between those deemed acceptable or ‘civilized’ and those who were not. Petit-bourgeois leaders in the Western Cape in the 1930s and 40s – forced to embrace this hierarchical and exclusionary logic in the interests of their own political survival – sought a remedy for political and socio-economic discrimination through the cultivation and conspicuous public demonstration of middle-class manners, tastes, habits and behaviours. In Bakhtin’s terms, in their quest for the basic human rights of political representation and freedom from want, petit-bourgeois leaders had little choice but to adopt those behaviours and values which had come to signify social acceptability and power.

In this regard, political leaders in the Western Cape in particular directed considerable energy towards a broad project of moral and social ‘improvement’ and education in conformity with Western middle-class norms. For Dr Abdurahman, influential and highly-respected community leader and president of the APO from 1902 to 1940, education was the key to cultural, economic and political ‘upliftment’ (Adhikari 1993:25). The TLSA established in 1913 under his guidance was one of the principal community bodies charged with this task, and its publication *The Educational Journal*,⁶ was an important forum for the public discussion of these aims. One of the more disturbing consequences of this political strategy was the way in which it gave active support to the hierarchical and exclusionary modes of the dominant culture. This is most powerfully suggested in conservative leader George Golding’s repeated requests to government during the period that “the ‘better class’ of coloureds...who had ‘reached the stage of development which is on a par with that of the average European’, could be admitted to ‘European status’” (cited in Lewis 1987:238).⁷ The entrenchment of class distinctions was also accompanied by an active assertion of racial difference in conscious opposition, as one commentator put it, to the “semi-civilized blanketed Natives from the reserves” (*Coloured Opinion* 20 May 1944:1-2).⁸

The overwhelming need for visible ‘progress’ and ‘advancement’ amongst coloured people was made all the more urgent by the existence of an influential body of (white) opinion which could see little of value in this ‘backward race’, automatically

assuming, as one writer put it, that the coloured community was “little better than an aggregate of immoral, or at best, amoral creatures addicted to drink, dagga and dice” (*Sun* 25 October 1940:3). For those classified as ‘coloured’, the usual problems of an ‘uncivilised’ or ‘backward’ people were exacerbated by a peculiar racial discourse in which ‘mixed blood’ had become synonymous with moral degeneracy and ‘shame’ (Coetzee 1988). An example of racial aberration, a horrifying act against nature, the children of ‘miscegenation’ were regarded as constitutionally flawed and hence morally degenerate in a way in which African or Indian peoples never were. Consequently, a political strategy which sought a place for coloured people in the dominant order had to confront the basic problem of a people who were regarded as intrinsically aberrant, compromised in some unspeakable way.⁹ A ‘race’ with ‘a taint in the blood’ could find respectability only by means of a severe moral and social re-education, part of which entailed the uncompromising adherence to a strict moral code.¹⁰ The destructive weight of such opinions resulted in a painful rhetorical posture: whilst anxious to assert their right to fair and equal treatment, coloured leaders simultaneously reinforced notions of their own racial inferiority, always taking care to demonstrate the requisite gratitude for any of the minor concessions offered by a government which, at that time, took great pains to preserve the allegiance of this politically significant group. As this writer puts it, “we cannot contend that we are a community of saints, but we can justifiably maintain that as a group we have made creditable headway in the face of discouragement and insidious opposition” (*Sun* 25 October 1940:3).

For many of the coloured elite, the rhetoric and practice of protest itself were seen as key areas in which to demonstrate the kind of moral and social propriety and ‘good breeding’ which would mark them out from the rabble-rousing horde. Enormous emphasis was therefore placed on a political strategy that remained polite and dignified at all times, even in the face of increasing racism and repression. In this regard, Adhikari cites a telling example from a much earlier period of the way in which community leaders drew attention to the anarchic, violent, and irrational behaviour of white mine workers during the Rand Revolt of 1922 in order to show up their own far more respectable and law-abiding politics. In the Teachers’ League in particular, decorous conduct, solemnity, restraint, moderation, and self-control – many of the attributes of what could be described as the ‘ideal’ British subject – “were amongst the most highly-valued behavioural traits” (Adhikari 1993:98). It is for this reason that community leaders in the mid-1940s responded with such energy to the ‘uncivilised’ behaviour of an

emerging radical bloc whose uncouth, aggressive, often defamatory style was seen as fundamentally harmful to their cause.

Radical ideas amongst black South Africans had been gaining ground since the mid-1930s. Intensified by the events of the Spanish Civil War and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1936,¹¹ they were given even further impetus in the same year by the government's successful attempt – after some difficulty – to secure the two-thirds majority necessary to introduce the notorious Hertzog Bills that would deprive Africans of the vote.¹² Aside from widespread poverty, unemployment and malnutrition (highlighted by the findings of the Wilcox Commission in 1938), oppressed peoples in the Western Cape also faced the indignity of a new set of segregation initiatives. For those feeling frustrated with the 'cap-in-hand' methods of the APO, new groups like the National Liberation League (NLL), the New Era Fellowship (NEF) and the Non-European United Front (NEUF) were the principle channels for a new popular radicalism.¹³ Of even greater import for the coloured community was the announcement in 1943 of the government's plan to form a separate Coloured Affairs Department. This single issue had an overwhelming impact on political and community organisations in the Western Cape, bringing to a head incipient tensions, and dividing the community irrevocably (February 1983; Lewis 1987; Adhikari 1993; Drew 2001). In February of that year, the NEF launched the Anti-Coloured Affairs Department Committee or Anti-CAD. In the Teachers' League, simmering antagonisms since the early 1940s between a new generation of radical teachers and a more cautious old-guard finally split the organisation in two resulting in the formation in 1943 of an alternative organisation, the Teachers' Educational and Professional League (TEPA). What is interesting is that in the unsettled and unsettling days of the Teachers' League split, the growing antipathy towards this new radicalism was argued as much on the grounds of political strategy as it was on the basis of good manners. For the older generation of leaders, for example, the fact that the young radicals shouted "as though they are on the verge of a nervous breakdown" was as threatening as their radical ideas (*Educational Journal* May 1943:7). Their lack of decorum was "the way to debase and not to raise our people". Meanwhile, moderate coloured leaders dutifully vowed to fight "with determination...without causing friction between the Coloured and any other section of the people" (*Coloured Opinion* 20 April 1944: 1).

If unbecoming conduct (and radicalism) were to be avoided at all costs, it was also considered necessary to subscribe to Western middle-class norms of dress, language,

behaviour, social activities, and cultural pursuits. Here there is a marked preference amongst the professional classes for English (as opposed to Afrikaans), an interest in elite cultural forms like classical music, literature and theatre, and the participation in middle-class activities such as dances, concerts, conferences, eisteddfods and bazaars. Further confirmation of middle-class status was sought in the conspicuous, almost exaggerated, adoption of middle-class manners and habits. Public events like the meetings of the Teachers' League of South Africa, for example – aside from their significance in relation to the day-to-day concerns of coloured teachers – were also the occasion for an important public display. For Adhikari, Teachers' League functions were “studied attempts at propriety and were meant to be demonstrations of its member's degree of refinement” (1993:90). Vernon February also draws attention to the decidedly British flavour of Teachers' League gatherings, particularly the speeches delivered at their annual conference which became noteworthy for their “vigour, eloquence and oratorical charisma” (1983:21). Respectable in their politics, conservative petit-bourgeois leaders also took great pains to articulate a ‘civilised self’ through their (middle-class) speech, manners, and behaviour.

As an important public forum for community leaders in the Western Cape in the 1930s and 40s, the commercial coloured press played an absolutely central role in the creation of a ‘respectable’ colonial subject, and in particular the reinforcement of those values and behaviours which were deemed crucial signifiers of a middle-class sensibility. *The Sun*, at that time the only newspaper dedicated to the coloured community in the Western Cape, began its life in 1931. The foremost exponent within local politics of the conservative point of view, *The Sun* “stressed the need for self-help and the importance of ‘race-pride’” (Lewis 1987:156). A strong supporter of the liberal Joint-Council movement in the Western Cape, it rejected “belligerent” politics in favour of more “pacific” methods of reform (*Sun* 26 August 1932:1). *The Cape Standard*,¹⁴ which emerged five years later in 1936, tended to favour the more radical perspectives of groups like the National Liberation League and the Non-European League, and was particularly partial to the activities of outspoken activist and champion of the poor, Cissie Gool. Despite these fairly substantial differences in political orientation, both newspapers were in agreement about the need for coloured advancement and ‘civilisation’. These preoccupations are reflected in their promotion of a middle-class way of life and middle-class values, in particular the myth of individual achievement, the virtues of hard work, thrift, moderation and self-control. An abiding interest in the activities and achievements

of community leaders also served to promote and privilege a middle-class way of life, and offered a standard of conduct to which people were encouraged to aspire. The creation of newspapers specifically devoted to so-called coloured news and the subsequent nurturing of a newspaper-reading public (an important marker of ‘civilised’ behaviour) were the first steps in these broader aims. In both papers, political developments, particularly as these impacted on the community itself, jostled with society pages which highlighted the social activities of the petit-bourgeois elite. As one writer observes, “[In *The Sun*] Coloured people were able to read about the worthwhile activities of other groups within their communities, and not the reports that appeared in the daily papers about the degenerate portion of the Coloured people only. For the first time the progress of our people was being chronicled” (*Sun* 29 March 1938:10).¹⁵ A conscious attempt to counter the predominantly negative images on offer in the white mainstream press and an important affirmation of the possibility of racial ‘progress’, it was also one of the ways in which a dominant race and class hierarchy was confirmed, reproduced and entrenched.

The political imperatives of this kind of public demonstration of ‘civilised’, middle-class respectability – a kind of showcasing of coloured achievement – were always uppermost.¹⁶ However, the attributes themselves were also regarded as decisive determinants of success and hence group progress. In both *The Cape Standard* and *The Sun*, middle-class virtues such as civil obedience, forbearance, thrift, sobriety, deference to authority and ‘ambition’ were articulated and reinforced through weekly sermons and short fiction. A regular short fiction section in *The Cape Standard* which featured writers like Roland Cohen, Abdol Gaffoor and Alfred Chester were virtually indistinguishable from the weekly sermon, plotting the same neat narratives of meek Christian suffering and eventual reward. On its first birthday in May 1937, *The Cape Standard* was “proud of its achievements in the first year of life” and “certain that it [was] on the threshold of a bright era for Coloured people”. Highlighting its role as “watchdog of the Coloured man’s interests”, it reflected on its attempts “to make the Coloured child ambitious and race conscious” and “[to foster] in the Coloured youth the benefits to be derived from healthy exercise” (*Cape Standard* 29 March 1938:10). Here, the desire to ‘progress’ as a race is explicitly linked to the familiar elements of a middle-class world-view: an emphasis on self-improvement, a faith in the ameliorating effect of (in this case) “healthy exercise”, and the conviction that individual disadvantage can be remedied through discipline, diligence, and hard work. Similarly, substantial coverage of cultural

institutions like the Hyman Liberman Institute as well as the many debating societies which flourished in Cape Town during this period also signal the newspaper's strong faith in the 'improving' influence of critical thinking, intelligent reading and rational debate. For someone like George Manuel or 'Gemel', a regular writer for *The Cape Standard*, "[t]here are few hobbies that are more useful than reading". Promoting understanding and tolerance, as well as offering unusual vistas into the world beyond, reading gives us "something to occupy our time" and "make us more ambitious". Even more important is its role in the "formation of character" for "by reading the lives of great men who attained success by surmounting all difficulties, we cannot help becoming ambitious" (*Cape Standard* 6 October 1936: 3).

The inculcation of middle-class values formed a substantial part of a general programme of education and 'improvement' which located political exclusion and economic distress within the ambit of individual failure and inadequacy. The key to a people "advancing in civilisation", education consisted in the moral, physical and intellectual education of the coloured child, "so that he can by virtue of his attainments prove to be a true citizen in the land of his birth" (*Cape Standard*, August 1941:3).¹⁷ Seen as a powerful "civilising factor" and "the strongest aid to the observance of law and order" (cited in Adhikari 1993:80), education was routinely held up as the key to socio-economic transformation, and widely regarded as an effective solution to a variety of social evils such as 'hooliganism', crime, alcoholism, apathy, and unemployment. These arguments form an interesting contrast to Dora Taylor's repeated insistence, during the same period, on the strictly limited function that education could play in this regard. This kind of thinking, nevertheless, formed the basic presupposition of much of the social intervention undertaken on behalf of the working-class majority, who were believed to be even more susceptible to degenerate behaviours such as "drunkenness, shebeening and thieving" (*Educational Journal* August 1942:12). As Adhikari observes, many of the petit-bourgeois elite, relatively secure in their attainment of middle-class respectability, were "very embarrassed by the behaviour of the Coloured working classes and [were] concerned that the progress of the more 'advanced' sectors within the Coloured community was being retarded by their misconduct" (1993:151).

Attitudes towards the annual 'Coon Carnival' celebrations offer perhaps the most telling examples of these kinds of anxieties and fears (Patterson 1953:156). For community leaders, the annual New Year carnival was a terrifying display of the 'grotesque' body, a spectacle of coloured degeneracy and 'shame', which actively

sabotaged all their efforts to conform to the social and cultural standards of the dominant social group. During these celebrations, drunkenness, carousing, excess, singing, music-making, disorderliness, law-breaking and violence were spectacularly confirmed as the defining attributes of coloured people, in horrifying contrast to all the sobering and improving efforts of a desperate and determined petit-bourgeoisie. In the annual New Year festivities, as it were, the repressed social body returned with a terrible vengeance.

The argument that there is a racially-inherited predisposition amongst coloured people towards laziness and excess which could be held in check and ultimately corrected through the ameliorating and shaping influences of education and industry derives its logic from the pseudo-scientific and racist discourse of early twentieth-century eugenics, and ignores obvious factors such as structural unemployment, low wages and job reservation. In a particularly short-sighted example, given the deliberate attempts by government to create a black labouring class through the imposition of colour bar legislation, a writer for *The Educational Journal* suggests that waste and an inability to save are to blame for extreme poverty among working-class communities (April 1932:8-9). Looking at the future of the “Coloured race” and asking “what can be done to raise it to a higher position in our country” (8), he urges them (ironically) to look to the British example:

[The British race] takes stock regularly each month and considers whether at least a third of the earnings has been retained. Their power lies in what they attain. And they control our future and the future of South Africa, as well as the great industries of the world....We cannot do worse than do likewise if we are to make progress at all. (*Educational Journal* April 1932:8-9)

Another example of this widely-held assumption is to be found in an article written in 1940 by J.R. Pfaff, which seeks a solution to the problem of ‘hooliganism’ and apathy amongst coloured youth. Dismissing the “home-influence” as “in most cases of a negative degree”, he lays the blame squarely at the feet of primary school teachers who, having the greatest influence outside the home, are in the best position to expose children to “the greater things of life”. In a move which quietly conflates ‘being cultured’ with ‘economic security’, he suggests that “of all school activities”, art and music, are “the most powerful instruments we could possibly find to raise our people to a higher status of culture”. In seeking a solution to poverty, unemployment, and ‘hooliganism’, Pfaff in all seriousness recommends that every student be able to draw from memory, be familiar with common musical terms, be able to “sing or play any simple tune” and have the

capacity to discriminate between “higher types of music” and “common jazz tunes” and other “inferior concoctions” (9).

These assumptions suggest a deliberate effort on the part of an educated elite to incorporate, domesticate and train an ‘unruly’ and ‘uncivilised’ mob. In a move which bears a strong resemblance to a well-established Western tradition which pursued its civilising aims with equal energy amongst the working classes in Europe, and the ‘primitives’ abroad, petit-bourgeois leaders in the Western Cape concentrated on civilising the ‘barbarian’ working classes in their midst (Baldick 1983; Viswanathan 1989; Ashcroft et al 1989). Whilst education is clearly an important asset for those wanting to improve their individual position in a society in which resources are unequally distributed, it is easy to see how these more benign goals could blur into something more troubling: the control and co-option of what are seen as degenerate and lawless elements in the social body in the direct interests of an established social consensus. Petit-bourgeois attitudes towards the coloured working classes are generally contemptuous and belittling. “Apathetic” and “bemused”, working-class coloureds, according to one commentator, must be “stirred to activity” and their feet firmly planted “on the upward path of social and economic endeavour” (*Cape Standard* 30 May 1941:3). This contempt was tempered by an enormous sense of (always patronising) responsibility: the educated were duty-bound to carry out the obligations of their more privileged social position by actively assisting the helpless on the path to ‘civilisation’. A letter in *The Cape Standard*, for example, offers pointed criticism of those who express hostility towards the working classes whilst doing nothing to ‘improve’ them:

Coloured people, who are at present unambitious and backward, should be shown by those advanced specimens of their race how to improve their position. Our educated people should by precept and example lead the way....These educated men should try to analyse the faults and short-comings of the Coloured people. They should with a little vision and insight show the people they now criticise how they could do better. (26 July 1937:10)

A broad project of moral and cultural regeneration found much favour with prominent white liberals, many of whom were actively engaged in precisely the same kinds of ‘humanising’ and ‘improving’ projects in the long-term interests of racial harmony, mutual tolerance and understanding. Frequently called upon by coloured leaders to offer support for, and recognition of, the achievements of hard-working coloured men and women, white South African liberals were also behind many of the educational initiatives themselves.¹⁸ In this regard, it is worth turning briefly to Tim

Couzens's (1985) argument about the role played by white liberals in 1920s Johannesburg in the creation and encouragement of a moderate African middle-class, as a means of minimising the threat of a rapidly expanding and increasingly militant African urban population. The outcome of these efforts was the Joint-Council Movement, and the establishment of cultural institutions such as the Bantu Men's Social Centre and the South African Institute of Race Relations. Within this broader project, Couzens argues, "culture and entertainment" in particular were used as "auxiliary forces" in the attempt to defuse African dissent (318). It was a question, as one commentator put it, of "moralising the leisure time of Natives" (cited in Couzens 1985:319).¹⁹ Whilst white liberals concentrated on diverting an incipient radicalism, the hopes of coloured leaders in the Western Cape in the 1940s and 50s lay in the possibilities for education, 'civilisation' and reform.

Chief amongst these liberal initiatives was the establishment in the early 1930s of the Coloured-European Council, the Eoan Group and the Hyman Liberman Institute. Part of the Joint-Council movement, the Coloured-European Council formed in 1931 played an important role in fostering more harmonious race-relations and, through the provision of study and recreational facilities, assisted in the important goal of "moralising the leisure time" of Western Cape coloureds. The Eoan Group, a cultural organisation with an exclusively coloured membership formed in 1934 by English-born Helen Southern-Holt, had a similar function. Its aims – to "[train] coloured children in elocution, acting, ballet and singing, and [to give] general character-training and instruction in hygiene" (Patterson 1953:138) – reflect an explicit desire to engage in the enlightenment and improvement of a 'backward' race. Without wishing to dismiss or underestimate its achievements in any way, the full significance of the Eoan Group, and organisations like it, would be missed if one did not recognise the role it played in inculcating middle-class sensibilities, habits and values in support of an established class and race hierarchy. As an important means of both inoculating people against various forms of radicalism, and inculcating middle-class attitudes and values, these efforts were also part of the complex ways in which people were culturally oppressed. Writing about the Bantu Men's Social Centre, for example, Robert Mshengu Kavanagh points to the way in which these institutions, "through their special relations with the black intermediate classes", were able to "[exercise] a subtle and complex form of domination especially in the area of culture" (1985:19). A powerful way in which marginalised groups were co-opted into the

value-systems of the ruling elite, these institutions also played a significant role in encouraging consent for existing social relations.

The Hyman Liberman Institute is another such example. Established in 1937 as a result of a donation by a former Cape Town Mayor, it was a centre for “social and cultural upliftment” and a place of “mental recreation” which was aimed specifically at working-class coloureds (*Cape Standard* 31 January 1938:7). With its substantial library, on-going adult education classes, lectures, reading groups, and debating societies, the Institute was both a confirmation of (white) liberal commitment to coloured ‘advancement’, and an important route to ‘self-improvement’ and ‘respectability’.²⁰ Similarly, the Cape Literary and Debating Society (CLDS), established in 1932 under the auspices of the Liberman Institute, was another enormously successful cultural initiative in this broader moralising endeavour, providing an opportunity for intellectual discussion, critical thinking and debate which was considered fundamental to the ‘progress’ of coloured people.²¹ It was also, of course, a crucial way in which liberal ideas were circulated and reinforced.²²

This analysis of the complex middle-class coercions of liberal cultural institutions is not meant to downplay or ignore the possibility that these institutions were actively or strategically appropriated, creatively adapted and manipulated by those who used them. As Bhekisizwe Peterson suggests, one should not “assume an unproblematic and homogenous articulation” between white liberal cultural institutions (in this case, the Bantu Men’s Social Centre in Johannesburg) and the cultural achievements of oppressed peoples themselves (2000:114). This is an important corrective to simplistic (and patronising) notions of colonial domination; however, to argue that these appropriations were always necessarily subversive is, I think, to go too far in the opposite direction. In relation to the liberal organisations in Cape Town such as the Eoan group and the Hyman Liberman Institute, then, I wish to draw attention to the way in which a liberal rhetoric of racial advancement and progress was taken up by certain elements of the petit-bourgeois elite as a way of controlling the errant behaviour of a threatening working-class majority, and to suggest, that while it may have been strategic, it nevertheless lent powerful support to the race and class hierarchies of the dominant culture.

A similar kind of rhetoric is also evident in relation to primary and secondary education. Aside from the conventional emphasis on ‘reading, writing and arithmetic’, coloured children were also instructed in basic virtues such as ‘hygiene’, healthy exercise, ‘neatness’ and ‘good manners’. Extra-curricular activities such as drama, art,

ballet, choir competitions, debating, participation in eisteddfods, and what was known as ‘Physical Culture’ were all vital elements in a multi-pronged offensive against racial degeneracy and backwardness. The aims of these activities were clear: to fill up the leisure time of coloured children in productive ways, to steer them away from their innate tendencies towards apathy, laziness and excess, to inculcate middle-class ideologies, and to instil middle-class tastes. ‘Physical Culture’ trained young children in the discipline of physical exercise, teamwork, and co-ordinated display. The marked emphasis in public discussions on the importance of neatness, discipline, “smartness”, “precision” and “zest” (*Sun* 25 October 1940:3) suggests that aside from their physical benefits, these exercises were also understood as being of crucial importance in the broader civilising project. Of all the ‘civilised’ and ‘civilising’ pursuits, ‘Physical Culture’ was the one most explicitly directed towards the creation of the ‘civilised’, middle-class body.

Alongside these basic middle-class virtues, it was also considered necessary to cultivate the various ‘higher order’ behaviours and values with which a privileged Western middle-class subjectivity had come to be identified. With the long term aims of citizenship and respectability in mind, teachers sought to encourage an understanding for and appreciation of “the nobler things in life” (cited in Adhikari 1993:152) namely, ‘good taste’, delicacy, love of ‘truth’ and ‘beauty’, forbearance, fortitude and moral correctness (*Educational Journal* August 1942:12). The induction into these ‘higher order’ middle-class (Christian) values, it was repeatedly affirmed, was most effectively achieved by means of a thorough immersion in Western culture, particularly literature, art, classical music, and theatre, regarded by most as powerful ‘humanising’ and ‘moralising’ activities. This faith in the redemptive power of European ‘High Culture’, of course, echoes a long-standing and extremely influential Western intellectual tradition – including, amongst others, such notables as Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis – which reacted to the ominous modern phenomenon of an expanding democracy, an unscrupulous commercial ethos and an uneducated mob with arguments about the need to inculcate an appreciation of Great Art. Popular culture, by contrast, would almost certainly have the opposite effect: like their British counterparts, those amongst the coloured petit-bourgeoisie who routinely invoked the rich spiritual and moral resources of a privileged Western Culture also warned against the dangers of new popular forms like *Tarzan* films, jazz music and *Superman* comic strips. A writer for *The Sun*, for example, warns against the “Menace of the Comic-Reading Habit”, arguing that the comic reader neglects the development of his own faculties and as a result his “power of

reasoning and imagination are stultified". Worst of all, it is "killing the love for literature" (*Sun* 31 January 1947:1). A broad educational project amongst oppressed groups in the Western Cape, carried out in the long-term interests of political and social incorporation, then, was also crucially involved in on-going efforts to police and exclude 'low' discourses, 'low' classes, 'low' culture, and 'grotesque bodies'.

An acceptance by moderate coloured leaders of a hegemonic discourse of race and class necessitated a continuous effort to minimise and control the threat posed by the 'lower orders'. The tendency to privilege middle-class experience and identity resulted in the relegation of a substantial part of the social body to the outer limits of human society, even as a few concerned individuals made periodic proselytising forays to 'rescue' a deserving minority or instituted broad social programmes which would effect their gradual domestication and incorporation. This 'cult(ure) of respectability', whilst presenting a rational course for a community excluded from social power on the grounds of their 'backwardness', was also an important means whereby this powerful ideology was reproduced.

Forging a Radical Culture

From the late 1930s on, a generation of intellectuals and activists schooled in the left-wing traditions of groups like the Workers' Party of South Africa and the NEF rose to prominence in the Western Cape, launching a systematic attack on the politics and practices of what they regarded as a reactionary and compromised older generation of leaders. In an attempt to account for the radical disjunctions in political opinion which characterised these two groups, Gavin Lewis (1987:208) points to the shaping forces of material context. The two factions had much in common but were nevertheless products of very different social milieux. The older generation, educated in mission schools, continued to pin their hopes on the promises offered by an older Cape liberal tradition. For the younger generation, the impact of a much tougher socio-economic climate, and clear signs of government hypocrisy led to growing disillusionment with the older methods which tended to be expressed within the terms made available by a new anti-imperialist ideology. Particularly eloquent on these matters and passionate about their import for the liberation struggle was Ben Kies, a gifted young intellectual who spearheaded many of the attacks on the conservative old-guard, and quickly rose to a prominent position in the liberation movement.²³ To his talents were added the intellectual and political acumen of people like Dr Goolam Gool, I.B. Tabata, Willem

van Schoor, Jane Gool, A.C. Jordan, Edgar Maurice, Dora Taylor, Hosea Jaffe and Kenny Jordaan. Described by Bill Nasson as a “politically alert and articulate coterie of sharp petty-bourgeois radicals” (1990:195), they provided the intellectual leadership for the emerging radical bloc, and were largely responsible for developing its programme of action. Sarah Mokone (pseudonym for Victor Wessels), writing in *The Educational Journal* some years later, is at pains to emphasise the location of these activists within a broader radical milieu: “[t]hey were not freaks born out of their time but a vanguard articulating an awareness and a mood that was already widely felt and was growing, even though as 1942 came to an end, passivity and demoralisation seemed to hold the political organisations of the oppressed, such as they were, in a choking grip” (1978:61). This growing antipathy for the ‘gentlemanly’ and ‘civilised’ politics of an older generations of leaders is, of course, most dramatically illustrated in the emergence in the mid-1940s of the much more militant and mass-based politics of the ANC Youth League.

Deeply critical of the exaggerated obsessions with bourgeois ‘respectability’ amongst the existing leadership, this group of young radicals explicitly rejected the pervasive idea that individual value was contingent upon the ability to master a set of arbitrarily-defined behaviours and attitudes. In the many examples of public debate and discussion of these issues (which occurred mainly in the debates of the CLDS and the NEF, as well as in the local newspapers) there is also widespread agreement that by their acceptance of what we might call the ‘civilisation test’ and their continuing obsession with middle-class respectability, the moderates had compromised the liberation struggle, destroyed the solidarity of the oppressed, and isolated themselves from the bulk of the working class. Self-serving and obsequious, they attempted to ingratiate themselves with white rulers by pursuing moderate political aims. Even worse, they were prepared to accept (or at least manipulate) the arbitrary racial classifications handed down by a state which employed vicious divide-and-rule tactics in order to dissipate black resistance. A political strategy which produced damaging class distinctions within oppressed groups (many of which were tied to equally insidious racial privileging of ‘lighter’ skin), it had also spectacularly failed to advance their cause.

As the organization most representative of the opinions of established community leaders, the Teachers’s League of South Africa was the obvious target for this growing dissent. In an address to the NEF entitled “The Revolt of Youth” in 1938, Ben Kies offered one of the most cogent statements of the radical position: “Defeatism and despair”, he began, are “not necessarily the unanimous characteristics of the present day

Coloured man, despite the assertions of the novelist Sarah Gertrude Millin, the statements of the Coloured Commission Report, and the tacit admittance of all the Coloured leaders”. Arguing that the TLSA had pursued its “gentlemanly” fight for “petty” educational reforms “with a patience hitherto associated with angels and certain dumb animals”, he pointed to a growing class divide: “More than anything”, he argued, “[what] is dividing the teacher from his people is his spurious cult of respectability. His pride in his profession and his new-found dignity and culture make him ashamed of [the] rough, untutored parents who made his education possible”. Here Kies undermines one of the most cherished assumptions guiding the strategy of the conservative bloc, namely that education and ‘respectability’ would change the minds of the oppressors resulting in more democratic privileges for coloured men and women. As he put it: “[t]he Administrator, Mr J.H. Conradie, forgot the respectable Coloured man...when he drafted the Segregation Ordinance” (*Cape Standard* 7 June 1938:9). Similarly in an article for *The Sun* a few years later, Kies suggested that it was time for a reassessment of the “[t]he old theory [which] ran that an ‘educated’ man by virtue of the fact that he [had a degree] would prove to the rulers of the land that he was worth more than a kick in the pants and an inferior place in the country’s affairs, and that – automatically – economic, social and cultural improvement would be extended to the community” (*Sun* 17 January 1941:3). In fact, as many argued, precisely the opposite had occurred. Far from assisting the political emancipation of oppressed groups, by “turning out a regular supply of wages slaves” – “literate labourers, factory girls and errand boys” who were taught how to “drill” and “play football” to ensure they were healthy enough to work (9) – the TLSA, was actively assisting in their continued economic subjection.

Public debates and discussions at the time articulate a particular sense of outrage against the snobbishness, ‘white-mindedness’ and self-absorption of petit-bourgeois leaders in the Western Cape. Communist Party member, Harry Snitcher, summed up the general mood in a debate between the NEF and the CLDS held in District Six in November 1938. Responding to the question, “Are Non-European intellectuals pulling their weight in the community?”, he railed against petit-bourgeois leaders: too “sophisticated” and “respectable” to come down to the masses, they “lik[ed] to toady to the European”, and scrupulously avoided any meaningful political action in the hopes of remaining “popular with the Europeans and the white press” (*Cape Standard*, 8 November 1937:1). For Dr Goolam Gool from the NEF, ‘non-European’ intellectuals who had actually “come from the working class” had “completely isolated themselves

from the community”, failing to address even the most basic community needs (*Cape Standard* 8 November 1937:1).²⁴

A series of articles by Ben Kies which appeared in *The Sun* in 1941 (under the by-line, I.N. Fandum) continued in much the same spirit. Dispensing with the politeness and sense of proportion which had always characterised the politics of the coloured petit-bourgeoisie, he described the Teachers’ League as “the most reactionary group of Coloured people existent today”, pointing in particular to its evasion of socio-political realities, and its snobbish preoccupations with (British) bourgeois values:

Theoretically, it frowns upon politics, but, actually it is the bulwark of conservatism, the Holy Defender of the defeatist slogan ‘Alles sal regkom’, the glorifier of ‘culture’, ‘respectability’ – ie. dressing well and never doing ‘what is just not done, what’, degree worship, reverence for all those who, irrespective of their utility, are able to reach the age of fifty five or more, the subtlest exponent of the art of agreeing with both sides at once, and the pleasing of everyone, the greatest friend and admirer of the churches, the self-appointed policeman and Lord High Executioner in the realm of ideas. (*Sun* 11 July 1941:3)

Kies was also critical of the energies it invested in the political cul-de-sac of short-term incremental reform, and its consequent humiliating dependence on government handouts: the Teachers’ League “spen[ds] all its energy and resources chasing crumbs....We have got used to being down on all fours, searching for strays, and we have not yet stood up on our own hind legs, as almost everyone has been in the habit of doing since Neanderthal set the fashion” (*Sun* 13 June 1941:3).

The Torch newspaper (mouthpiece of the NEUM in the 1940s and 50s) adopted a similar position towards the bourgeois obsessions of petit-bourgeois leaders to whom they mockingly gave the term “human zebras” (*Torch* 19 January 1948:4). Regular columnist ‘Roamer’, for example, attacks the greed and subservience of “the Coloured aristocrat or snob” who, “pot-bellied” and “cigar-smoking”, is either collecting slum-rent, trying to slip in at a ‘white’ cinema or standing at the kitchen-door of some Government authority” (22 July 1946:4). Their tendency towards political conservatism, and their snobbish and disdainful attitudes towards the so-called ‘uncultured’ and ‘uncivilised’ sections of the “Non-Europeans” also come under fierce criticism. This, ‘Roamer’ suggests, “might appeal to the play-whites who, beplastered with pancake make-up and metamorphosa creams, queue up regularly at the Alhambra and Colosseum”, but is anathema to “the toiling masses” who have committed themselves to a unified, non-racial struggle (*Torch* 19 January 1948:4).

In contrast to this – inevitably self-defeating – “cult of respectability” which implicitly supported the damaging race and class discriminations of the dominant order, NEF radicals concentrated on developing a culture of resistance, a key element of which was the promotion of a critical education which actively opposed rather than sought accommodation with ruling class ideas and values. As Kies argued in his 1938 address to the NEF, “the educated and comparatively leisured classes of Coloureds should first read”. They should “study history”, make “objective analyses” and, above all, avoid the uncritical acceptance of conventional wisdom, looking “with as much suspicion upon a University Professor or a Bishop, as upon a parade monger”. The aim of this education was explicitly political: to combat ‘mental slavery’, and “muddled thinking”, and to “break down the many barriers within our own ranks” (*Cape Standard* 7 June 1938:9). Here, in brief, are set out the basic political and educational aims of the Non-European Unity Movement which, in the years that followed, concentrated on the nurturing and development of a critical, independent and enlightened black intelligentsia which would act as a vanguard for the developing liberation movement. This was always understood as a first step in a gradual process of radical social change. Like many others in the movement, Kies’s arguments prioritized careful planning and theoretical preparation over spontaneous mass-activism, which he and others tended to characterize as ‘adventurist’ and likely to result in unnecessary bloodshed rather than social transformation (Nasson 1990:193).

Acutely conscious of their more privileged position in relation to the oppressed majority and profoundly aware of the need to foreground their role in the struggle, the radical intelligentsia developed a theory of the intellectual class which, offering an interesting variation on the Gramscian model, defined their position and summarised their aims. The “Teacher as Vanguard Thesis”, as it became known, drew on the historic example of the role played by the intelligentsia in liberation struggles around the world, particularly in the French and Russian Revolutions. Kies and others maintained that the black intelligentsia had a decisive part to play in the development of an “emancipatory theory” and in “practical leadership” in South Africa (cited in Drew 1997:53). Its position as part of a relatively more leisured class, which was nevertheless excluded from any real social power, meant that it was more likely to question the social order in which it had, and did not have, a place. The workers, “exhausted and bowed down by arduous toil”, did not have the time or resources to examine the causes of their oppression. As those who “had sprung straight from the loins of the working class”, they also had the

moral authority to provide leadership to a politically backward and illiterate proletariat (Drew 1997:53). This close union, according to Enid Williams writing in *The Educational Journal*, also meant that the working classes would exert a necessary check on its activities and ideas (1944:10).²⁵

As these comments suggest, the young radicals placed enormous emphasis on a critical education as part of a broader liberation strategy. Unlike the conservatives, however, they regarded education as a stage towards emancipation rather than a remedy for social ills. Education was not about ‘civilising barbarians’, the inculcation of middle-class values or the formation of ‘character’. Neither was it the means whereby a subjugated class would eventually take its rightful place in a democracy of which it had finally proved itself worthy. As we have seen, the argument that a demonstrable middle-class respectability would automatically lead to full political and economic integration was regarded as fatally flawed. Indeed the young radicals vehemently rejected a system that promised rewards to those who came closest to approximating Western definitions of the ‘civilised’, and ridiculed those who attempted the task.

A.C. Jordan’s opening address at the 1946 Conference of the Teachers’ League of South Africa (which was published in *The Educational Journal* in August of that year) went to the heart of these issues. Taking up the question of the social function of education, Jordan (at that time a lecturer at the University of Cape Town and a member of the Cape African Teachers’ Association) offers a radical critique of the assimilationist goals of petit-bourgeois leaders.²⁶ In what is probably the first (African) postcolonial reading of a Shakespearian play (Nixon 1987; Bowen 1993), Jordan uses *The Tempest* to expose the emptiness of the liberal promise that education and civilisation are the necessary precursors to political rights, and offers a penetrating analysis of the role of education in contexts of colonial rule. In a critical appropriation of the play that consciously resists hegemonic readings, Jordan offers an interpretation of *The Tempest* which attends to its colonial dimensions, something which, he argues, Western scholarship in its preoccupation with ‘character’ and ‘abstract moral truths’ had tended to overlook:

Pages are devoted to the character of Prospero, and much is made of his “magnanimity”, of his being generous to his enemies – the brother who betrayed him and usurped his dukedom, the drunken sailors who plotted with “this thing of darkness” to take his life. Yes, he does forgive his own countrymen; but he never forgives Caliban for being the son of Sycorax. (August 1946:4)

Here *The Tempest* is read as a play which unmask the operations of colonial power, a valuable lesson for those attempting to negotiate an oppressive state. In the first place, Prospero's behaviour towards Caliban reveals that a restricted education encourages deference towards an unattainable culture and fosters subservience. In other words Caliban is taught Italian, as Jordan argues, so that he might willingly follow Prospero's instructions. Secondly, *The Tempest* offers a corrective to the widely-held assumption that participation in culturally elite forms could challenge notions of black inferiority, and lead to an improvement in economic and political status. According to Jordan, *The Tempest* offers a clear message: no matter how educated Caliban becomes, he will always be a 'Caliban' to Prospero. In its overt political concerns, this literary analysis consciously departs from a hegemonic literary-critical tradition; in its attack on the humiliating subservience, and outright futility, of the politics of the conservative petit-bourgeoisie, it is also a significant instance of 'postcolonial' resistance.

As Jordan's reading of *The Tempest* suggests, the emphasis on a critical education amongst Unity Movement intellectuals arose in part from an acute awareness of the historic role that education had played in establishing and legitimising oppression and social exclusion. In an article that appeared in *CATA* – the official organ of the Cape African Teachers' Association (itself radicalised in the mid-1940s) – Jane Gool examines the social function of education in Europe and South Africa.²⁷ Denied to Greek slave and medieval serf alike, she argues, it became an essential element from the Enlightenment period onwards in the co-option and domestication of a potentially threatening majority. The same was true of present day England, where, she argues, an "educational system based on class differentiation" played an important role in reinforcing and legitimising the existing class structure (*CATA* December 1952:15).²⁸ Similarly, in South Africa, education has a central place in the creation of a subservient labouring class. Writing some years earlier in *The Educational Journal*, E.E. Mason makes a similar point. Rather than encouraging the "the spirit of unfettered, dispassionate enquiry", coloured schools foster "docility" and "meekness". "[R]egimentation is the key note of a system which prepares non-European children for a subordinate position in society....The last thing that is encouraged is clear thinking and independent judgement, for if applied they could upset the apple-cart and expose the rotten foundations of the system" (*Educational Journal* September 1944:3). These sentiments, which were echoed by African teachers in publications like *CATA*, would only increase in the post-1948 period as the effects of a

newly-minted Bantu education policy under a new Nationalist government began to be felt.

Whilst NEUM activists were painfully aware that the fruits of Western civilisation were only grudgingly and partially apportioned in the interests of colonial rule, it was also necessary for them to come to terms in some way with its much vaunted moral, cultural and technological superiority. Articulating a common theme in the cultural-political debates of oppressed groups in South Africa, NEUM activists vigorously asserted their right to participate in and have access to the cultural products of Western societies.²⁹ In doing so, however, they rejected the notion of a 'pure' or 'white' culture. Given the nature of its historical development, culture could not be tied to any one racial group, but should be understood as the hybrid product of a number of contributing streams. Rather than the grateful recipients of the treasures of Western culture, they saw themselves (in an argument very similar to that articulated by W.B. du Bois) as heirs to a 'world culture'. A.C. Jordan, for example, describes the concept of 'white' civilisation as "an absurdity of the first magnitude". It is as if "this civilisation sprang out of the brain of the white man in the same way as the Goddess, Pallas Athene, sprang out of the brains of Zeus" (16). "For us", he continues, "Shakespeare does not represent his white skin. He represents human culture, and his contribution to culture is the legitimate right of all mankind" (*CATA* 1950:18).³⁰

The call that culture be made accessible to all South Africans was repeated time and time again in the pages of *The Educational Journal* and *CATA*, becoming ever more urgent after the findings of the Tomlinson Commission into education were released in 1956, and its ominous recommendations: separate education suited to the 'distinctive needs' of separate racial groups. In this regard, a writer for a Claremont newspaper, *The Citizen*³¹, makes a powerful plea for cultural incorporation and collaboration rather than the patronage extended to (always inferior) separate cultural institutions set aside for 'non-Europeans'. Dismissing white theatre as "an anaemic little stream diverted to local shores from the main current of European theatre", this writer despairs for the future of an "independent South African culture". By contrast "the abundance of theatrical activity...amongst so-called Non-Europeans, is a striking, if generally pathetic, expression of a burning desire on the part of aspirant artists, who without even having considered the basis on which art can develop in South Africa attempt to express themselves artistically". For this writer, a recent 'non-European' performance of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* – singled out by critics for its many technical failures – testified

to an even greater tragedy, “the tragedy of legitimate human aspirations frustrated at every turn”. This “desperate band of people, caught up in their ‘vaulting ambition’, tried to scale the sheer cliffs of genuine artistic expression with bare hands. Heroic, yes, but productive of nothing but further frustration” (*Citizen* 30 July 1956:9). The frustrated desire for a richer spiritual life on the part of South Africa’s “culturally starved masses”, this writer argues, has resulted in a sterile theatre. Even more serious is the acceptance by ‘non-Europeans’ of the “insulting conditions of the very regime that daily oppresses and degrades them. Without dignity, without self respect, without a total rejection of inferiority and a degraded status, without a recognition of the artist’s position of independence on the basis of complete equality, there can be no art in South Africa, still less a South African theatre” (9-10). As the above example suggests, a moral interrogation of Western civilisation coincided with equally strong claims to its benefits. If civilisation is not ‘white’, as A.C. Jordan argued, there is no reason why those designated ‘backward’ should be discouraged with spurious evolutionary arguments that they are not yet ‘ready’ to receive it.

Another important aspect of this strategy was an explicit rejection of notions of Western moral superiority. This argument drew much of its force from its location in the post-Ethiopia, post-Spanish Civil war era which had done much to expose the “savage beneath”³² the benign exterior of Western civilisation. This scepticism was articulated in a number of ways. In an argument that bears a strong resemblance to those advanced by Aimé Césaire (1972), Walter Benjamin (1973) and Raymond Williams (1973), respectively, one writer for *The Cape Standard*, for example, underlines the ‘barbarism’ of Western civilisation and questions the moral superiority of the West. Responding to the increasingly influential segregationist discourse in the late 1930s, the writer draws attention to the fact that far from posing a threat to Western civilisation, Africans have done much to *make it possible*:

One might say with truth that it is the Native particularly and the non-European generally who has built up this European civilisation. They have been the hewers of wood and drawers of water and on their exploitation the present lop-sided economic structure of South Africa has been raised....European civilisation so-called is not going to be saved by segregation. It can only be saved by the elimination of poverty. (*Cape Standard* 10 May 1937:5)

In another example, I.N. Fandum (Ben Kies) responds to the widespread liberal emphasis on education as training in democratic citizenship, and challenges the common assumption that “ignorance is the root of all evil”. In a similar argument to

that advanced by Bertha Meyer in *Trek* (discussed in chapter 2), Kies cites the example of the ancient Greeks who were educated and yet condoned slavery. The same, he argues, is true of those in charge of European education. They are well educated, yet commit great evil: “It is not a case of ‘father, forgive them, for they know not what they do’ but on the contrary, they knew what they were doing, and why; they were serving the interests of their own group or class” (*Sun* 2 May 1941:3). For the young radicals, the historic involvement of the West in imperial plunder, oppression and discrimination gives the lie to its insistent moral posturing. In the same way, an alleged moral superiority was consistently undermined by the present injustices and exclusions meted out with depressing regularity by the South African state. By the 1950s, it had become abundantly clear that the government had discarded all plans to incorporate a respectable middle-class black minority. Segregationist initiatives were well under way, the coloured vote had been lost, and a new ideology of ‘separate development’ made plain the desire to deny ‘civilisation’ and ‘culture’ to the majority of South Africans who had been abandoned to the ambiguous pleasures of ‘developing along their own lines’.

For these reasons, a key element of the oppositional culture of the NEUM and associated groups (especially in the post-1948 period) was an uncompromising repudiation of the many (segregated) cultural institutions developed for the edification and improvement of oppressed groups. Acting primarily as ‘civilising’ agents for a backward race, segregated institutions both reproduced and entrenched the dominant social relations of apartheid discrimination and oppression. Part of a ruling effort to co-opt and distract a moderate petit-bourgeois elite, they were also one of the most effective ways in which the superiority of Western culture was affirmed and reinforced. According to *The Citizen*, one of the worst offenders in this regard was the Eoan Group: “befouled by an apartheid atmosphere”, the Eoan group lent support to racial thinking through its humiliating preoccupations with the subtle gradations of skin colour and humiliating “pencil tests” (*Citizen* 31 March 1956:1). Even worse, it thought nothing of participating in “apartheid festival[s]” at the very same time as “the Council was demanding the removal of so-called non-white residents from the area under the Group Areas Act” (31 March 1956:1).³³ For this writer “[t]he most smarting humiliation to date” was the performance of *La Traviata* for “prominent South African racialists”, which is likened to the annual “debasement” of coloured people during the New Year Coon Carnival celebrations in Cape Town:

People who publicly spit in the faces of these artists, who are horrified at the very thought of sitting next to them in the same bus, or even standing in the same queue to buy a stamp, who at this very moment are trampling underfoot the last vestiges of their political rights, to these the Eoan group are “thrilled” to give a special place of honour during the performance of “La Traviata”....The elegance and high artistic form merely substitutes for the capering and cavorting of the New Year revellers. The essence of coonery is still there for all to see – the voluntary self-abasement and degradation of an oppressed people for the pleasure of those who oppress, despise and insult them. (*Citizen* 3 March 1956:2-3)

In the context of apartheid discrimination, the participation in segregated cultural events becomes a degrading spectacle which, like the annual ‘Coon Carnival’, reinforces racist stereotypes of uncivilised, clowning coloureds.³⁴ For this writer, culture has become part of the way in which people are oppressed. A similar awareness of the way in which culture in South Africa was often implicated in the exercise of racial oppression is to be found in an incident which occurred when ‘non-European’ theatre-goers were refused entry to a ‘whites only’ screening of the 1949 film version of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Students from Fort Hare University decided to boycott the film in protest. A *Torch* reporter summed it up in the following way:

[T]he local educational authorities...applied all the usual forms of pressure inseparable from missionary institutions. This time, the sentimentality, the cajoling, the sermonising, the soul-stuff was heavily spiced with talk about cultural uplift and the chance-of-lifetime to see the immortal bard. The students were indeed sorry to have missed the film, but decided that the swallowing of an insult was too high a price to pay, even for Shakespeare. (30 May 1949:3)

A Radical Education

As we have seen, cultural deprivation and exclusion, an education system which prepared ‘non-Europeans’ for ‘slavery’ rather than freedom, and the role of segregated cultural institutions in achieving consent for the values of the dominant culture were some of the more significant thorns in the flesh of the developing Unity Movement project in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s. Rejecting the route of strategic accommodation, NEUM activists poured their energies into the development of a radical educational programme as an antidote to the deprivations, exclusions and conservative social aims of the emerging apartheid state. Despite tremendous obstacles, this home-grown, oppositional and independent educational project, which tied a broad political and cultural education to the larger struggle against the state, achieved an influence out of all proportions to its tiny numbers (Nasson 1990:200), and made a lasting impact on the political and cultural landscape of the Western Cape.

The beginnings of this radical programme of education and empowerment lie in the formation, in 1937, of the New Era Fellowship under the guidance of Dr Goolam Gool. While it provided intellectual direction to an incipient Western Cape radicalism, the NEF was also very much a product of its time, a response to dramatic socio-political changes both internationally and locally, and part of an extraordinary moment in the history of Cape Town itself. The intellectual and philosophical groundwork laid in the discussion and debates of the NEF played a crucial role in the radicalisation of existing organisations like the AAC, the TLSA and the CATA, as well as in the formation of new political groups like the Anti-CAD and the NEUM which set out to respond to the significantly different political and economic environment of 1940s South Africa. “An open forum to ‘discuss everything under the sun’– South Africa’s Jacobin or Cordelier club”, the NEF, according to Hosea Jaffe, became for the NEUM “what Lord Milner’s ‘Kindergarten’ was for Smuts and the Cape Liberals between the Boer War and the 1910 Act of Union: an apprenticeship in the theory and art of politics” (Jaffe 1991:14-15). A “sorting house of ideas”, it became a significant political force which played a major part in changing “the whole basis and outlook of the liberatory movement” (February 1983:13). It also offered a rare opportunity for social and intellectual exchange with people from diverse backgrounds and affiliations. As Kies argued, it was “an organisation where graduates, undergraduates, high school and college students, Native, Coloured and white [could meet] on an equal footing” (*Cape Standard* 7 June 1938:9).³⁵

One of its most valuable contributions to South African intellectual life was its emphasis on critical thinking and inquiry, and its refusal to defer to established authority. For Unity Movement intellectuals, for whom the NEF provided a central locus of political education and intellectual exchange, disingenuousness, obfuscation and deliberate distortion both in the mainstream press and in the official historical record had to be countered by fearless exposé and rigorous critique through the application of a distinctive methodology which NEF radicals tended to describe as ‘scientific’, ‘rational’ or ‘objective’, and which looked for a hidden truth. Arrogant and scornful towards the shortcomings of other liberation groups (including the ANC) and the endless hypocrisy of government, its idiosyncratic discursive style established both the bounds and bonds of its ‘imagined community’; as Nasson explains, this radical discursive style was an “assiduously cultivated” code characterised by incessant word-play, “ceaseless insinuation, mordant humour, powerful irony, scorn and wit” (1990:197).

The NEF operated on a number of levels. Monthly public lectures, discussions and debates, which were open to all, were held at the Stakesby Lewis Hostel in District Six. Lecture topics were wide-ranging, covering politics, education, literature, religion, anthropology, and science, and tended to reflect an overwhelming interest in Marxism, socialism and anti-imperialism.³⁶ Lecturers included Margaret Ballinger, Eddie Roux, Dora Taylor, Willem van Schoor, I.B. Tabata, Ben Kies and University of Cape Town academics, J.G. Taylor, Benjamin Farrington, Lancelot Hogben and Frederick Bodmer. Those who showed promise would be invited to participate in smaller study groups in which there was a deliberate – occasionally harrowing – induction into the politics and theory of the NEF. NEF member, Richard Dudley, for example, described his own experience as “a baptism of fire” (Interview, Cape Town 17 July 2002).³⁷ These individuals in turn established study groups in a number of local trade unions, where they taught the history of left-movements in other parts of the world. With the establishment of the NEUM and the Anti-CAD in 1943, NEF activities were somewhat overshadowed. They were revived, however in the late 1940s after which, building on the success of the NEF, a number of similar groups were established all along the Cape Peninsula and around the country. These included the Cape Flats Educational Fellowship, the Langa Educational Fellowship, The Progressive Forum in Johannesburg and The South Peninsula Educational Fellowship, which took over from the NEF in the 1950s. Branches were also established as far afield as Port Elizabeth and Kimberley (Drew 1991:454). After its emergence in November 1943, the NEUM became the principal focus of the young radicals, with the now numerous fellowships continuing their function as “a sorting house of ideas”, and a conduit for a new black intelligentsia which continued to influence local politics in the Western Cape. Wide reading, exposure to radical ideas, and a holistic approach to knowledge were some of the key elements in the Unity Movement educational programme (Interview, with Richard Dudley, Cape Town 17 July 2002). An education which sought not only to ‘conscientise’ in a narrow, political sense, it introduced young students to a wider world of ideas and experiences, invited a healthy scepticism towards existing knowledge, and sought to encourage and inspire through its emphasis on solidarity with liberation struggles worldwide. Perhaps most important, in its outright rejection of the subservience and deference of conservative leaders, the Unity Movement educational programme provided the means for the development of a much more assertive, less self-negating political approach.

Cultural activities formed a significant part of the NEUM's radical educational project. Forged in the shadow of the painful exclusions and deprivations of the society at large, these activities not only played a role in the development of political consciousness, but were also an important assertion of the right to cultural participation, and a powerful antidote to the dehumanising effects of a racist society. In this sense, the emphasis on establishing a "humane culture" (Interview, Norman Traub, Cape Town 26 January 2001) should be understood, not in the Arnoldian sense, but as a reaction against the barbarous exclusions of the apartheid regime. A central aspect of this radical cultural project was the reading and discussion of literature. Here it is worth reiterating that while many of the educational emphases on critical thinking and independent analysis bear a close resemblance to the discourse of English Studies, the respective political goals are completely different. Writers like C.L.R. James, Earnest Hemingway, Ignazio Silone, Sinclair Lewis and John Steinbeck (as well as many of the current Left Book Club selections) were popular choices for lectures and debates. Members were also introduced to the major Indian authors who were writing during at the time of the 1930s "Quit India" Campaign. Here, the circulation of texts like Mulk Raj Anan's *Mother India* and the writings of Pandit Nehru are an important example of the way in which South African activists forged links with, and drew inspiration from, the lessons of anti-colonial struggles in other parts of the world. As we have seen, the historicising methods and ideological emphases of Dora Taylor's critical approach were an important aspect of these discussions, her (Marxist) understanding of literature as an illuminating 'mirror' on society providing a powerful way to engage with the contemporary socio-political scene.

Reading, literary criticism and lively debate were also accompanied by efforts to develop a popular radical theatre. Aside from Taylor's involvement in the writing and staging of left-wing plays, there were also many examples of successful theatre initiatives under the broad Unity Movement umbrella. Here, as Amelia Lewis recalls, the Trafalgar Players, directed by Isaac Pfaff, the Peninsula Dramatic Society under Eleanor Granmer, and the St. Philips Group led by George Veldsman, amongst others, made an important contribution to the development of a progressive theatre in the Western Cape during this period (Letter to the author, 5 November 2002). In this regard, the staging of plays by Bertolt Brecht, Shakespeare, Chekov, Jean Genet, Lillian Hellman, Ibsen, William Saroyan, Lorca and George Bernard Shaw were part of a broader preoccupation with the development of a democratic, critical and 'humanising' cultural practice.

The radical educational project which grew out of the discussions of the Unity Movement fellowships and study groups was rapidly incorporated into a growing number of schools in the Western Cape during the 1940s and 50s. In keeping with the broad emphasis on the pivotal role of the radical black intelligentsia, Unity Movement members, their intellectual development and political goals fostered and directed in the fellowships, drama groups and political organisations of the NEUM, took these ideas and aims into the schools in which they taught. Amelia Lewis explains:

[L]ectures and debates in meetings of the New Era Fellowship gave us an education outside of the narrow confines of school syllabuses and a philosophy of questioning, analysis and assessment of events, situations and beliefs. In the classroom we were able to apply, in our teaching, what we had absorbed through reading and participation in the lectures and debates. We were enabled to counter the racialistic and restrictive attitudes which officialdom expected teachers to foster. (Letter to the author, 5 November 2002)

As these comments suggest, apart from the more general emphasis on a critical, oppositional education, teachers in the Western Cape had an enormous responsibility to counteract a state education which gave ideological support to existing race structures. Accordingly to Dudley: “We had a mission to teach the oppressed, to teach in a broad way and to impede the racist education of the state” (Interview, Cape Town 17 July 2002). In this regard, Unity Movement teachers were determined to challenge the ideology of ‘race’ and ‘race thinking’. “In the schools such as those in which I taught”, observed Amelia Lewis, “we had to devise strategies to nullify and neutralise the efforts of the education departments to ‘Colouredise’, ‘Indianise’, [and] ‘Bantuisse’ the pupils through their syllabuses, textbooks, snooping school inspectors and other agents of racial thinking”. Many of these lessons were taught through music and drama (Letter to the author, 5 November 2002). The spirit of resistance and independent critical inquiry was extended in particular to the disciplines of history and literature, regarded by many as two of the main areas in which an ideology of inferiority was cultivated.

The success of these efforts in the schools was largely due to the fact that they were generated within a small community, with complex social, political and familial ties. The teachers themselves formed a tightly-knit group and were in broad agreement with the challenges they saw before them. This made possible a largely successful effort across a number of schools in the Western Cape to tackle an inferior education and to propagate radical ideas. It produced a generation of students whose educational training was much richer and more critical than that available under the conventional school

system, which by the 1940s was facing the imminent threat of ‘ghettoisation’ and ‘tribalisation’ under the newly-formed Coloured Affairs Department. Trafalgar and Livingstone High Schools were the early centres of this intellectual and political “renaissance”, as Dudley described it, and became the centres of student revolt against the axing of the coloured vote. Noted for their academic excellence and political outspokenness, coloured schools in the Western Cape became a powerful force in the liberation struggle. The efforts of teachers like Amelia Lewis and Richard Dudley produced generations of students in the Western Cape whose educational training was far superior, not only to other ‘non-European’ schools, but also to the many elite white schools in Cape Town as well (Wieder 2002:198).³⁸

Alternative ‘Counter-Publics’ and the Development of a Radical Cultural Criticism

Aside from fellowships, schools and political associations, *The Torch* – a weekly newspaper published in English and Xhosa which was launched in Cape Town in February 1946 – played an important role in disseminating this alternative political creed. As an important forum for the NEUM, it has been dismissed as narrow and partisan, the expression of what has come increasingly to be seen as an idiosyncratic and (for some) misguided movement in the history of the struggle for liberation in South Africa. According to Baruch Hirson,

The paper was sterile, Cape-oriented, with little South African or foreign news....There was no news of trade union activity, of strikes or of victimisation. The politics consisted of condemnation of those who would not accept non-collaboration and the boycott as necessary political principles, attacks on other political bodies, and a list of words that became stale with overuse. Opponents were ‘quislings’, the whites acted as a ‘herrenvolk’, the Communists, The Native Representatives and a host of others were making the system work, and liberals were the lowest of the low because their task was to fool the people. Put this way, the message failed to convince any but the converted, even though there was some truth in many of the statements. If they had been presented with some analysis there might have been a basis for serious discussion and a deeper understanding. The articles were self-congratulatory and self-indulgent and could not lead to any political activity. (1995a:259)

This view ignores a crucial aspect of *The Torch’s* significance. The newspaper of a political movement, it was also the site of an influential cultural-political debate, and the focal point of an alternative ‘counter-public’ which offered a significant challenge to the dominant order. *The Torch* was an outspoken paper with a distinctive style. Caustic, scornful, and ironic, it employed black humour and comic hyperbole in order to bring out the absurdity of South African society, and the stupidity of its leaders. It was a clear

indication that the older, deferential style of the conservative bloc had been jettisoned in favour of a much more militant stance. This weekly newspaper, which relied on the voluntary contributions of a dedicated editorial board, was sold on street corners and distributed through the networks of Unity Movement fellowships around the country. It reached an impressive average circulation of 10 000 copies in the early 1950s (Patterson 1953:160). Its first editor, Solly Edross, was replaced in 1948 by Joyce Meissenheimer who, along with Ben Kies, took overall responsibility for what was always a highly collaborative and democratic news-generating effort.³⁹ Reporting mainly on local community and political issues, but attempting also to link local struggles and grievances with a growing international resistance, *Torch* writers gave special attention to the role of ideas in the liberation struggle:

To wage an effective struggle against the entire political, economic and intellectual slavery in this country, Non-Europeans must break down and break away from the servile ideas put into their heads by the herrenvolk, ideas which throttle and suffocate us, [and] blind us to the nature of our problems. There can be no half measures. To free himself from enslavement of his body, man must first free his thinking, rid himself of ideas that perpetuate his slavery... (6 June 1949:4)

The Torch is interesting for a number of reasons, not least of which is its role as the purveyor of a radical cultural critique. Here, *The Torch's* literary journalism formed an important adjunct to a broader programme of political resistance. Continuing the educational emphases of the Unity Movement fellowships, *Torch* book reviews were part of an energetic effort to circulate the key texts of a radical cultural and political tradition to those amongst the oppressed. Like many of those on the Left, *Torch* writers gave radical literature a central place in a broader project of political education and empowerment. A powerful antidote against the dehumanising effects of oppression, it was also the springboard for a significant political debate. Reiterating some of the aesthetic and political assumptions of Dora Taylor's cultural project, *Torch* critics looked to literature as a means of illuminating the exploitative and oppressive social relations of society at large. Their emphasis on a particular kind of realism, namely the stark, documentary realism of the 'social problem' novel, however, may have been closer to that of the leftist critics of the Communist Party (CPSA). For *Torch* reviewer, 'A.I.' for example, the work of Richard Wright is an especially good example of what an oppositional literature could achieve. His detailed treatment of life in the Southern States exposes "the rotten system of oppression, hatred and crime which is the culture of the South and which is allowed to continue unhampered in the 'home of democracy', the

U.S.A.” (29 April 1946:4). Much of the fiction of Peter Abrahams, on the other hand, is dismissed because of its tendency to romanticise South African life, and because of its superficial and, at times, naïve understanding of South African politics.

Implicit in this discussion is the rejection of the tendency in mainstream literary circles to separate the world of ‘literature’ from the world of ‘politics’. Here *Torch* critics (and Unity Movement intellectuals more generally) argued instead for an understanding of literary texts as embedded in, and speaking to, particular historical contexts and social formations. What follows is a radical interrogation of the treasured cultural artefacts of a dominant culture, which, as Terry Eagleton (1981) has argued, form one of the primary sites upon which Western political hegemony is premised and sustained. Here, the kind of radical appropriation to be found in A.C. Jordan’s reading of *The Tempest*, in which a classic European text is read against the politics of colonial rule, becomes an exemplary instance of this kind of oppositional critical (and political) practice. Similarly, by paying detailed attention to the (often covert) ideological preoccupations of literary texts, Unity Movement intellectuals sought to interrogate and expose the values of a dominant culture. This critical approach flies in the face of what Martin Orkin (1987) has described as a strong tendency in English teaching in South African schools (and universities) during this period to emphasise the contemplation of abstract moral truths over the particulars of history and politics. If hegemonic literary-critical modes can be linked to a broader project of establishing consent for an oppressive race and class-based order, *Torch* literary criticism aimed for exactly the opposite effect. In this regard, *Torch* reviews make no pretence at a kind of ‘neutral’ or apolitical literary apprehension. Indeed the intricate connections between the discreetly separated worlds of ‘literature’ and ‘politics’ are eagerly sought out. Socialist writing is mined for its political lessons, and reviews of US and European fiction make frequent reference to South African social and political concerns. As such, literary texts are flattened out, unravelled, dispersed, and made to mean within a wider socio-political and economic context. Here, literary texts are regarded less as the transcendent objects of a privileged Western canon, than as just some of the many elements of a wider discursive and material field.⁴⁰ In keeping with this more utilitarian approach is an aesthetics which links literary value to a progressive politics: in other words, the regulating norms and implied solutions offered in the text are measured against what one commentator described as “the politics of emancipation” (*Torch* 29 November 1948:5).

If, in this tradition of textual consumption and interpretation, literary texts are explicitly understood within a wider socio-political field, it is not surprising that the critical discourse itself will be marked by political tensions, either between 'conservative' and 'radical' positions, or in relation to the differing political strategies of other liberation groups like the ANC. Many *Torch* reviews, for example, are explicitly directed against collaborationist and reformist tendencies within the liberation movement. Jack London's *Iron Heel*, commended for its "brilliant social analysis", its acute understanding of Fascism, the worker's struggle and the ruthlessness of reactionary social forces, also makes an important point about the treachery of "the respectable middle classes" and their tendency to betray the revolution. In what is another veiled attack on conservative politics in the Western Cape, 'A.I.' argues that the novel is an important lesson for South Africans to forge struggle alliances along class and not race lines: "In this country where the working-class struggle is camouflaged as a 'colour problem' a book like *The Iron Heel* brings home to us again the fact that the oppressed proletariat of all races and colours have the same battle to fight, and if we unite, we cannot fail to win" (*Torch* 20 May 1946:4). In a review of Italian socialist writer Ignazio Silone, M. Gonnema bids "Farewell to Silone!" who for him has fallen from the great heights of *Fontamara*, "that classic of the liberation movement" (*Torch* 13 May 1946:4), and sunk into mysticism and cynicism. For Gonnema, the "new Silone" sees the struggle against oppression as a "sacred mystery" and looks for religious solutions to political problems. The implications for South African politics are obvious: Silone's philosophy which advocates the "bread of sympathy and the wine of meekness" is clearly unsuited to the struggle in the Western Cape in the 1940s against the erosion of coloured and African political and economic rights. A similar concern with the reformism amongst sections of the democratic movement in the Western Cape is to be found in Gonnema's review of *Swing Low* by Edwin Peeples. The reviewer hopes that the novel's attack on the hollowness of the US justice system might disabuse coloured and African leaders of their "pathetic faith" (*Torch* 29 July 1946:4) in the impartiality of the South African Law Courts.

As the above discussion suggests, much of the literary-political commentary presents a distinctly NEUM position, which would have been vigorously disputed by others on the Left. In a review of Arturo Barea's autobiography of his experiences in the Russian Revolution, for example, the writer points to Stalin's betrayal of the revolution, and warns of the dangers of United Front tactics, and Anarchism. Anarchist strategy is

misconceived because it “rejects the class theory of the state, the class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat” (*Torch* 19 August 1946:4). Phyllis Altman’s *Law of the Vultures* – otherwise regarded as an honest and authentic account of South African politics – is criticised for its endorsement of what the reviewer describes as “black chauvinism”. For this reviewer, it is “very important to counter the thesis of this book in no uncertain terms” (*Torch* 2 December 1952:7) because of the existence of dangerous African Nationalist elements in the liberation struggle which threaten to do the movement irreparable harm.

In similar fashion, *Torch* reviews also attack the racism of much South African fiction. For M. Gonemba, South African writers are a “posse of unimpressive also-rans pedalling along in the wake of the one and only great writer this country has ever produced – Olive Schreiner” (*Torch* 1 April 1946:4), and he remains unimpressed by the liberal patronage extended by white critics towards black South African authors. Writers like Joy Packer (*Torch* 11 October 1955:6) and Sarah Gertrude Millin are obvious targets for *Torch* condemnation. Joe Ka Nelani, for example, describes Millin’s *King of the Bastards* as an attempt to “vulgaris[e] the history of the African peoples” (24 April 1950:6). Her distorted and stereotypical descriptions of pre-colonial culture and society lend support to apartheid policy. Less obvious, perhaps, is the criticism of writers like Harold Bloom and Oliver Walker. Harold Bloom’s *Episode*, which is described as an excellent exposé of conditions in South African townships, and a telling indictment of the brutality of the South African police, is nevertheless weakened by its denial of the role of English-speaking South Africans in apartheid discrimination, and its failure to foreground the economic roots of South African racism (*Torch* 29 May 1956:6). Despite its crushing indictment of Jan Smuts and its exposure of the fraud of much of South African politics, Oliver Walker’s *Kaffirs are Lively* is charged with a similar naiveté concerning English complicity in apartheid:

[Walker] works on the (old Cape Liberal) argument that the Afrikaners are mainly to blame for the state of things found in the Union today. He does not or cannot (rather than will not) see that the English-speaking section of the white Herrenvolk are every whit as guilty. When he blames the English-speaking section at all, it is for allowing Afrikaaners to push them around in this caddish sort of way.... He does not see [that their passivity is] a deliberate policy as part of the horse-deal made by British Imperialism after the Boer War; he does not see that the political superstructure of South Africa arises from, and does not contradict, the economic sub-soil. The English South African isn’t quite the lazy, golf-playing, more sinned-against-than-sinning sleeping partner Mr. Walker fondly imagines. (*Torch* 2 August 1948:7)

The strong emphasis in *Torch* criticism on the politics of literary texts is also evident in a brief, but interesting, report on a writers' conference held at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1956. Reacting to a call from William Plomer and Uys Krige that South African writers should refrain from political themes in their fiction, the anonymous *Torch* reviewer rejects the argument as yet another example of artistic 'ivory towerism', claiming that it constitutes an evasion of political realities in South Africa which comes close to the overt racism of South Africa's apartheid rulers: "The escapists from reality", this reviewer suggests, "betake themselves to their little ivory towers and find (sometimes to their dismay) that there are nothing else but old tents in the Herrenvolk camp of oppression of the Non-Europeans and the suppression of the liberatory struggle" (*Torch* 17 July 1956:7). Like those South African critics who reacted negatively to a similar call made by Albie Sachs (and Njabulo Ndebele) in the early 1990s, the argument here is that, in contexts of political struggle and rehabilitation, certain kinds of literary themes can make an important political contribution.⁴¹

The Educational Journal, organ of the Teachers' League of South Africa, was also the site of a significant alternative cultural critique. A series of articles written on the representation of the 'non-white' character in Afrikaans fiction in 1945 is both a continuation of Taylor's concerns in *Trek* in the early 1940s, and an early version of Es'kia Mphahlele's more substantial discussion in his MA thesis submitted in 1957, part of which was reproduced in the Congress journal, *Fighting Talk*. Here, the anonymous writer draws attention to the reliance, in Afrikaans fiction, on racist stereotypes, and points to their ideological role in encouraging and reinforcing coloured inferiority, particularly as they are prescribed in schools. Some of the anxiety and self-doubt involved in taking on a powerful cultural establishment is evident in the hesitancy with which the author makes his case.⁴² Another writer, however, is less intimidated, arguing that much of this literature is plainly "immoral". In the same way English authors like Kipling are regarded as reactionary; he and others play a role in legitimising racist thinking.

This political criticism in the service of the liberation struggle that denounced racism and was critical of the South African liberal tradition represents an important alternative to conventional literary-critical practice in South African universities. A positive review of Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* by well-known Cape Town theatre director and teacher, Isaac Pfaff (27 September 1948:5), led to an avalanche of letters and an explosive debate between a politicised criticism and those approaches that

looked for abstract moral lessons. The intensity of the debate and the levels of acrimony it generated bear witness to the enormous *political* and practical importance of literary judgements, and the potentially devastating repercussions of something as innocent as a book review: as a result of his comments, Pfaff's political credentials were called into question and he was forced to publicly state his "political creed" (Letter to the Editor, *Torch* 6 December 1948:5). Describing it as "easily the best English novel to come out of South Africa to date" (*Torch* 27 September 1948:5), he says that Paton's moral attack on South African society reveals a "broadness of vision that raises him far above the average white South African" (5). The novel depicts the appalling conditions in African slums, exposes the ignorance and complacency of white South Africans, and questions the impartiality of the South African legal system. For Pfaff, what is particularly moving is Paton's attempt to be faithful to the "lyrical beauty" and "naivete" of the so-called "African idiom" which "keeps the sophisticated reader spellbound with its strange beauty" (6). Pfaff's review provoked angry responses from *Torch* readers, all of whom drew attention to the novel's conservative politics. In a letter entitled "Dope-peddling in *Cry, the Beloved Country*" (Letter to the Editor, *Torch* 25 October 1948:5), 'J.W.' from Athlone argues that Paton's novel endorses the suspect political notion of re-tribalisation, and denies the need for radical political change. Another reader from Maitland rejects its solution of Christian trusteeship and religious resignation:

[Paton] appeals to the Christian conscience of the White trustees of South Africa which has always combined in nicely balanced quantities a keen sense of self-preservation with a desire for the welfare of their Black wards. This is the acme of liberalism. And the author leaves no doubt where he stands. He dedicates the book to J.H. Hofmeyer, the arch-priest of liberalism. (Letter to the Editor, *Torch* 1 November 1948:5)

In his replies, Pfaff consistently refused to acknowledge that Paton adopts a political position in the novel. In what is a typical gesture of traditional criticism, he attempts to preserve the fiction of the ideologically neutral text, by arguing for a distinction between political pamphlets and fiction. It is only propaganda, he suggests, which carries political ideas:

But now the question arises whether *Cry, the Beloved Country* aims at being a revolutionary social tract, or whether it strives to give us an impression of the utter despair and frustration in which the detribalised African lives to-day. I hold that the latter is the case. *Cry, the Beloved Country* is essentially lyrical, a song of pain, a subdued song of subtle cadences and mournful strains, which must move the listener to a sympathetic mournfulness. This, and this alone, is Paton's aim. (Letter to the Editor, *Torch* 1 November 1948:5)

In contrast, *The Educational Journal* offers critical discussion of literary texts which seeks to underscore rather than deny the connections between politics and literature. In an article on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, 'J.M.' is critical of a "widespread intellectual and cultural climate [in] Western society which seeks to substitute ideal and transcendental conceptions for fruitful inductions from real situations" (*Educational Journal* September 1950:5). 'J.M.' rejects those readings which look for unity in the play in psycho-analytical or moral themes, and points, instead, to the play's political concerns. According to him, *Hamlet* is best understood as a play which addresses the problems of absolute monarchy via a critique of the prevailing ethical standards of the Danish court.

Conclusion

The intellectual traditions of the NEUM and associated political organisations in South Africa constituted an explicitly counter-hegemonic intellectual project that sought to disrupt the dominance of existing accepted 'truth' whether in the form of government propaganda, 'common sense', or academic knowledge. This treading on the corns – to use Bill Nasson's phrase – of contemporary thought in South Africa (1990:208) was an effort to revise and critique contemporary political and intellectual orthodoxies, not for the sake of scholarship itself but in the direct interests of an oppressed majority and the struggle for liberation. Established knowledge is challenged rather than deferentially accepted. The new knowledge, the alternative 'truth', offered a way in which subordinated groups could understand the causes of their present oppression, and come to a position of self-knowledge and self-validation. While its uncompromising rhetoric was often much more forceful than its actual achievements on the ground, its intellectual and political integrity cannot be disputed. Their attempts, sometimes crude, to apply Marxist paradigms to South African history, society and culture resulted in a substantial body of texts, "a fecund deposit" (Nasson 1990:195) which preceded the university-based tradition of left-wing historiography and literary criticism by at least thirty years, and established a legacy of critical thinking in South Africa whose value it is impossible to quantify.

"Pitted against various dominant constructions of the past" (Nasson 1990:198), a radical historiography found a place for those who had been marginalised and diminished both by history and by the state. A radical literary criticism, on the other hand, provided the means by which subordinated groups could interrogate and challenge a dominant culture that designated them inferior, their experiences marginal, and their 'tastes'

irrelevant. Here, an abiding interest in literature, art, music, debating societies, reading groups and the development of a popular theatre were both an assertion of the right to world culture, and a 'humanising' activity which offered much needed relief from the routine degradation of society at large. These attempts to democratise cultural access in South Africa resemble the kind of broad-based cultural project forged under the auspices of the Communist-aligned Left Book Club, and are an important corrective to the largely elitist cultural practices of more dominant traditions. A politicised cultural discourse was also a significant challenge to more normative literary-critical modes. Resisting the hegemonic emphasis on 'culture' as distinct from 'politics', NEUM intellectuals subjected the rarefied and transcendent cultural artefact of orthodox literary criticism to the intensive scrutiny of the ideological approach, and contested the moral and ethical emphases of mainstream criticism with a critical discourse which paid explicit attention to the material conditions of oppression, deprivation and exclusion in South Africa. Adopting a much more instrumental, pragmatic and demystifying approach to the consumption of literary texts, NEUM intellectuals developed oppositional reading strategies in which literature and culture were drawn into, and made part of, a wider political debate. In this sense, they offered a powerful critique of the role of culture in sustaining social inequalities, and challenged a so-called transcendent 'High Culture' by drawing attention to the race and class exclusions upon which it was based.

As we have seen, the development of a radical cultural discourse was also a significant element in a broader anti-colonial project. Whereas the older generation of leaders accepted the assimilationist rhetoric of a ruling order which promised (but never delivered) political and material rewards to those who most closely approximated its definition of the 'civilized' being, a younger generation of activists harnessed a radical education as a preparation for revolutionary change. The first strategy emphasized the creation of a respectable, educated elite in an attempt to negotiate the always-unstable line between the 'civilized' and the 'uncivilized', and worked in tandem with white liberals in the co-option and 'pacification' of a 'degenerate' working-class majority. For the conservatives, this was the only possible means whereby a marginalized constituency could become recognizable (politically and economically) by the state, and avoid being sunk into obscurity through association with an allegedly even more backward African majority. If they embraced the hierarchical discourse of a fractured society in an attempt to secure political advantage, their efforts to accommodate themselves to that order also offered powerful confirmation of its oppressive and exclusionary codes. In their pursuit

of social justice, in other words, they locked themselves into the very categories they sought to challenge, and ended up reproducing the same exclusionary hierarchies within their own communities. For the younger generation, an outright rejection of a race and class-based order, and a conscious allegiance with all of the oppressed was a significant means of resistance. Whilst education and culture also occupy a central place, the emphasis here is less on the creation of a civilized bourgeois subject than on the use of education and culture as empowering and conscientizing tools. In this regard, culture is deployed as part of an educational project which has as its primary goal the revolutionary transformation of existing society. Loud, irreverent and ill-mannered, the young radicals demonstrated an oppositional ethos in their ‘uncivilized’ behaviour. Through mockery, laughter and wit, they challenged middle-class seriousness and pretence; through radical appropriations of ‘High Culture’ and ‘High History’, an untiring ideological interrogation of literary texts, and the constant attention given to contexts of production and consumption, they drew a traditionally elevated academic practice (literary criticism in particular) down to its material roots.

In summing up the achievements of the NEUM, as we have seen, many commentators have criticized in particular its elitism, its middle-class roots, and its failure to connect with working-class struggles. There may be some truth to these claims; certainly the emphasis on education, and a rather arrogant style, may unwittingly have played into a damaging intellectual elitism. Notwithstanding a strong desire amongst members of the NEUM to hold onto the kudos of education, and taking into account the complexity of the arguments put forward, I would nevertheless argue that the intellectual and political traditions of the NEUM – inevitably shaped and to some extent constrained by a particular historical moment – offered a substantial challenge to a powerful class, race and cultural consensus which must be distinguished from more conservative responses. This compelling legacy of radical critical engagement and activity in the cultural sphere, whilst providing an important example of postcolonial ‘resistance’, also offers much for those contemplating a radical cultural practice in the present.

Notes:

¹ See Lerumo (1971:95, 104), Simons and Simons (1983: 503-4, 545-546) and Lewis (1987:242-243). For more sympathetic accounts, see Nasson (1990), Chisholm (1991) and Kayser (1997).

² The Western Cape Branch was led by A.C. Jordan, C.M. Kobus and I.B. Tabata. W.M. Tsotsi was at the forefront of CATA activities in the Transkei (Simons and Simons 1983:600).

³ The Heatherly Civic Association was made up of those left-wing activists who were disillusioned with both the NEUM and the Congress Alliance.

⁴ The Forum Club was an independent Left discussion club which emerged briefly in the early 1950s from the remnants of a small Trotskyist group known as the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa (FIOSA). The Forum Club was home to Kenneth Jordaan, Arthur Davids, Eric Ernstzen and Zayed Gamiet (Drew 1997:14).

⁵ Both *The Citizen* and *Discussion* articulated a political position in opposition to the NEUM. They appear in this discussion because their Trotskyist roots align them more closely with the NEUM position than any of the other traditions discussed in this thesis.

⁶ Founded and published in Cape Town in 1915, *The Educational Journal* was the official organ of the Teachers' League of South Africa. Originally associated with the moderate politics of the African People's Organization and its president, Dr Abdullah Abdurahman, *The Educational Journal* was taken over by radical elements in 1943 after a split over the question of whether the League should be engaged in political activity. In the 1940s, *The Educational Journal* was increasingly associated with the Non-European Unity Movement, its editors, Ben Kies and Willem van Schoor, both being prominent activists in the NEUM (February 1983; Adhikari 1993).

⁷ George Golding was a powerful figure in the Western Cape. Headmaster of a local primary school, he was also editor of *The Sun* newspaper and one-time Chair of the notorious Coloured Advisory Council. In 1948, he took *The Torch* newspaper to court for defamation, and was awarded damages of £150 (Patterson 1953:313).

⁸ This phrase occurs in the context of an argument which rejects solidarity with oppressed African groups, arguing instead for the need to protect coloured interests from the 'threat' of cheap African labour: "We'd be very puny, backboneless men indeed if we allowed the Native to come into our very midst and oust us from our jobs, drive us from our homes, and threaten us in the streets where we have lived all our lives" (*Coloured Opinion* 20 May 1944:1-2).

⁹ Zoë Wicomb's (1998) argument concerning 'shame' as one of the defining features of coloured identity is apposite here, as is its moving fictional representation in her short story collection, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987).

¹⁰ As critics like Zimitri Erasmus (2001) and Cheryl Hendricks (2001) have argued, this moral policing was particularly directed at women.

¹¹ The summary which follows is drawn from Gavin Lewis (1987), Vernon February (1983) and R. Van der Ross (1986). For details of this radicalization, see also Eddie and Win Roux (1970:142) and Allison Drew (1991:226-228).

¹² This was an achievement of the Fusion government or the South African United Party which was the outcome of a strategic union in 1934 between Smuts' South African Party and the National Party. Disaffected Nationalists formed a new party, the Purified National Party. See William Beinart (1994).

¹³ Taken together, the National Liberation League (1935), the New Era Fellowship (1937) and the Non-European United Front (1938) sounded a new note in Western Cape politics. While differing in terms of specific aims, they can be understood as part of a more militant, left-wing response to contemporary politics which was in conscious opposition to the tactics of the APO. For more details, see Lewis (1987: 184-198).

¹⁴ *The Cape Standard*, edited by George Manuel who wrote under the by-line, 'Gemel', was a commercial newspaper which in 1938 claimed a readership of 45 000 (Lewis 1987:184).

¹⁵ A particularly inspiring and oft-cited example of the possibilities of progress was the story of Christian Ziervogel who, despite working-class origins, became librarian of the Hyman Liberman Institute and established a personal library of over 3000 books.

¹⁶ 'Gemel' of *The Cape Standard* writing about coloured students at the University of Cape Town enthusiastically remarks, for example, that "[h]ere is a fine opportunity for the Coloured youths, as the highest educated representatives of the Coloured race to show the younger generation of Europeans the Coloured man's outlook and status in life" (*Cape Standard* 22 February 1937).

¹⁷ See also *The Cape Standard* 7 September 1940:3 and *The Educational Journal* August 1940:12.

¹⁸ See for example a nauseating speech delivered in 1937, by deputy mayor, W.C. Foster on the occasion of the opening of the Hyman Liberman Institute – a recreational and cultural centre for working-class coloureds: a “rallying point of all that is good and fine and noble in the non-European...[i]t has given them the opportunity to prove what fine material there is in the Non-European community” (*Cape Standard* 30 August 1937:1).

¹⁹ The Bantu Men’s Social Centre was founded to “[help young native men to devote their leisure time to the best advantage in healthful recreation and good citizenship, the development of worthy character, and the promotion of real sympathy between Europeans and non-Europeans” (cited in Kavanagh 1985:46).

²⁰ Reflecting on this duty, a writer for *The Sun*, for example, is shocked that more people have not taken the advantage of the opportunity for self-development offered by a series of adult education lectures being held at the Institute: “[t]aking into account the fact that for the first time in the Coloured people’s history have lecturers of a university status given a planned course of lectures in the heart of a district where Coloured people live, it seems incredible that such small numbers turned up” (27 September 1940:3).

²¹ See, for example, *The Cape Standard* 26 October 1936:3 and 22 March 1937:9

²² Some of the topics discussed include: “The Marriages between Europeans and non-Europeans should be legislated against” (*Cape Standard*, 23 March 1937); “South West Africa should be handed back to Germany” (*Cape Standard*, 3 May 1937); and “The Salvation of the Coloured People lies exclusively in socialism” (*Cape Standard* 28 June 1937).

²³ Ben Kies was born in 1917 in Cape Town. Active in the NEF, the Anti-CAD, the TLSA and the NEUM, he exerted an enormous intellectual influence in Unity Movement circles. Initially a teacher at Trafalgar High, he was banned from the teaching profession in 1956 because of his political views and subsequently became an advocate (Drew 1997:155).

²⁴ A rather embattled Christian Ziervogel of the Hyman Liberman Institute attempted to present the case for the moderates, but was defeated 34 to 9.

²⁵ As Bill Nasson (1990) Linda Chisholm (1991) and others have argued, however, the dialectic which they anticipated between intellectual leadership and working-class ‘discipline’ which drew from classic left-wing theory nevertheless proved almost impossible to achieve in practice.

²⁶ A.C. Jordan was born in Transkei in 1906. He was educated at St. John’s College, Lovedale and Fort Hare. He received a PhD from UCT in 1956, where he remained as lecturer in African languages until he went into exile in the USA in 1961. He was active in both the AAC and the NEUM (Drew 1997:165).

²⁷ *CATA* (also known as *The New Teachers’ Vision*) ran from September 1934 to June 1956.

²⁸ Jane Gool was one of a number of formidable women intellectuals in the NEUM. Born in 1902, she graduated from Fort Hare University and became a teacher. An active member of the Workers’ Party of South Africa, the AAC, the Anti-CAD and the NEUM, she and her husband I.B. Tabata went into exile in 1963 (Drew 1997:156).

²⁹ See for example, the Orlando-based newspaper, the *Voice* discussed in chapter 6.

³⁰ Ben Kies’s argument (written under the by-line ‘I. N. Fandum’) that ‘non-European’ children should be introduced to the “finest fruits of civilisation” makes a similar point: here, he stresses that he is talking about civilisation in general and not “Western civilisation” because “I don’t know where to draw the geographical nor yet the time boundary, and in any case, to place something called ‘western’ civilisation on a pedestal seems to me snobbish and racist” (*Sun* 13 June 1943:3).

³¹ *The Citizen* (March 1956 – May 1958) was established as a rival to *The Torch*. Part of the movement against the conservative old-guard, but disillusioned with the NEUM, it was the mouthpiece of the Heatherly Civic Association, an organisation which was established by former members of the Trotskyist breakaway group, FIOSA. Cardiff Marney was editor. Other contributors included Christopher Mda, A.N. Stewart, Joseph Nkatlo and Kenneth Hendrickse (Van der Ross, 1986:246; Hirson, 1995a:86; Switzer and Switzer, 1979:61).

³² Cited in Martin Orkin (1991:33) This phrase also provides the title of one of the chapters.

³³ An article in *The Torch* is equally critical of the group’s complicity with a conservative politics: “The Eoan Group will never develop into a real national theatre of all the people in South Africa while it behaves like a collection of puppets with the CAD pulling the strings” (31 January 1956:5).

³⁴ Whilst conservative leaders saw the annual ‘Coon Carnival’ celebrations in Cape Town as a deeply embarrassing showcasing of racial ‘backwardness’, Unity Movement intellectuals stressed its humiliating and exploitative aspects. Neither group were able to see anything like creative (even subversive) self-expression in these carnival activities. For an example of such an approach, see Goolam Gool’s article in *The Citizen* 24 September 1956:1. For an alternative view on the Carnival, see Jeppe (1990).

³⁵ This was reiterated by Amelia Lewis, a primary school teacher and member of the NEF and the NEUM (Letter to the author, 5 November 2002).

³⁶ The first lecture at the NEF was on Imperialism, given by Willem van Schoor (Jaffe 1991:15). Ben Kies gave two lectures on “Educational Segregation, 1652-1939” (*Sun* 9 February 1940:3) and Margaret Ballinger gave a talk on “Liberalism in South Africa”. Peter Abrahams’s lecture to the NEF, entitled “The Rise of the Negro Poets”, was reported in *The Cape Standard* (31 January 1939:6). *The Cape Standard* also reported on the formation of the NEF Literary Circle on 24th May 1939: Ben Kies reviewed George Bernard Shaw’s *Black Girl in Search of God* and Mr S. Stoddard presented a review of Sarah Gertrude Millin’s *God’s Stepchildren* (*Cape Standard* 16 May 1939:9).

³⁷ Richard Dudley was born in Cape Town in 1924. An active member of the NEF, and later the NEUM, he was also one of the journalists on *The Torch*. Educated at Livingstone High School, he graduated from UCT with an MSc in 1943. After obtaining a B.Ed degree in 1944, he joined the staff at Livingstone High School where he remained until he retired in 1984.

³⁸ In fact, Harold Cressy High School and Livingstone High School were ranked tenth and eleventh as feeder schools for the University of Cape Town, surpassing many of the privileged white schools in Cape Town at that time (Wieder 2002:198).

³⁹ *The Torch* was the official organ of the Non-European Unity Movement. The first directors of the company that published *Torch* were Richard Dudley, H.N. Jacobs, J.M. Joshua, B. Magan, E. Ramsdale, W.S. Rule, and Mrs W.B. Schloze (Patterson, 1953:160). For additional information, see Switzer and Switzer (1979:61) and Lewis (1987:229).

⁴⁰ There are many examples of such reviews in *The Torch*, only some of which are touched on here. *The Educational Journal* after 1944 also offers examples of a politically-engaged literary criticism which actively resisted mainstream tendencies to ignore the ‘material’ in favour of the ‘ideal’.

⁴¹ For two examples, see responses by Ari Sitas and the Culture and Working Life Project in de Kok and Press (1990)

⁴² These reviews are reprinted in February (1983: 151-157).

Culture and the Communists

This chapter examines the cultural-political discourses of the Communist Party and associated groups in South Africa between 1936 and 1952. The focus in this chapter is on the public circulation of books, ideas and debates in the newspapers, periodicals and cultural groups associated with the CPSA.¹ The bulk of this chapter concerns the Party's foremost publication, the *Guardian*, which ran from 1936 to 1952; however, I also give attention to a range of other cultural and reading formations such as the Left Book Club and the Bantu People's Theatre. In this sense, this chapter continues an implicit interest in this thesis more generally, which is the exploration of alternative public spheres or 'counter-publics'. I cannot hope to describe any of these exhaustively; at most it is a gesture towards future work on both public spaces and public debates in South Africa

It is important to recognise the continuities between the cultural-political discourses of the Communist Party and the other leftist traditions discussed in this thesis. Operating from the same dialectical-materialist assumptions, and assuming similar reflectionist models, Communist-aligned activists and intellectuals share a strong commitment, along with other left-inclined groups, to the circulation and promotion of counter-hegemonic ideas, and to the creation of a democratic, non-racial national culture. There are, of course, also important differences. Taking Dora Taylor as the most obvious comparative example, these differences are most noticeable in the degree to which literature and literary criticism are pressed into the service of the liberation struggle. As we have seen, the Communist emphasis on culture as a weapon in the struggle is a significant departure from Taylor's more circumspect approach, and although there are areas of overlap (the preference for 'socially conscious' fiction which tells the 'truth' about society; the valorisation of collective rather than individualist concerns; and the concern with contemporary experience), the dominant aesthetic emphases of South African Communists are very close to the prescriptive critical preoccupations of Soviet socialist realism. That said, the crude stereotypes of 'culture as a weapon in the struggle' and 'socialist realism' should not prevent one from recognising the importance of this contribution: a rare example in South Africa of a politicised literary response, it was also

the occasion of a creative, intelligent and nuanced literary engagement which cannot be reduced to the dutiful application of a pre-established formula.

Soviet cultural discourse is deservedly remembered of as one of the worst examples of dogmatic prescription and repression in the cultural sphere. Notwithstanding a genuine commitment amongst Soviet activist-intellectuals, in the immediate post-revolutionary period, to the encouragement of a proletarian art in contrast to the elitism of the past (Malley 1990), the kind of cultural policy which took shape under Stalin in the 1930s came to exemplify all the worst features of Communist Party rule. Premised on a disingenuous distortion of Lenin's 1905 call for "Party Literature", Soviet cultural policy – guided by the twin orthodoxies of 'proletarian literature' and 'socialist realism' – was given official sanction at the first Soviet Writers Congress of 1934, and implemented under the watchful eye of A.A. Zhdanov.² Described by Maynard Solomon as a "temporary aberration of Marxist criticism peculiar to a particular stage of the development of the Soviet Union and the world Communist Parties" (1978:235), 'Zhdanovism' was a defensive, doctrinaire and deeply repressive approach to the arts which emerged in the crisis of the post-revolutionary period when a precarious new order had to be protected from violent encroachment and challenge from a hostile world community. The exigencies of this post-revolutionary situation, Solomon argues, led to an emphasis on the creation of exemplary myths, the rejection of artistic sophistication and innovation, and a tendency towards repression and censorship (Solomon 1979:235). Relying on a crude sense of the relationship between 'base' and 'superstructure', literature was regarded as nothing more than a direct reflection of the economic system which produced it. Thus while 'bourgeois' literature reflected the ever-deepening crises of a 'decadent' and 'decaying' social order, Soviet art, by contrast, was a direct mirror of the glorious possibilities under socialism.

Trotsky was one of the first to denounce this sterile cultural orthodoxy. An article in *Partisan Review* in 1938, for example, attacked the "falsification" and "myth-making" of doctrinaire Stalinist art. Guided principally by a "paralysing fear", he argued, it will "rot away...until present day society is able to rebuild itself" (August-September 1938:4). A truly revolutionary party, by contrast, would never "take upon itself the task of leading and even less of commanding art". Such a pretension, he continues "could only enter the head of a bureaucracy – ignorant and impudent, intoxicated with its totalitarian power – which has become the antithesis of a proletarian revolution. Art, like science, not only does not seek orders, but by its very essence, cannot tolerate them.

Truly intellectual creation is incompatible with lies, with hypocrisy and conformity. Art can become a strong ally of revolution only in so far as it remains faithful to itself" (August-September 1938:9-10). Trotsky's critique draws much more closely from classical Marxist traditions, which as Solomon points out, provide no basis whatever for the kind of ideological prescription which came to the fore under Stalin.

My exploration of the cultural debates of the Communist Party in South Africa cannot help but respond in some way to this monstrous intellectual and cultural tradition. Regarding the development of Marxist literary criticism in Britain, critics are in agreement that, for the most part, British Marxist criticism tended to remain "within the parameters of a version of Marxism increasingly defined by the propagandist directives of the Stalinized Communist International" (Baldick 1996:87). Subject to the same kind of authoritarian control, South African Communists would have been unlikely to defy what they regarded as a mostly benevolent and necessary authority. In this regard, there is evidence of a somewhat dutiful application amongst South African Communists of a pre-existing formula rather than the more original and independent theoretical exploration and experimentation of someone like Dora Taylor. Nevertheless, as I have said, to dismiss a leftist criticism outright as rigid communist dogma is to miss much of its significance.

This was, of course, the response of many South African critics: we have already encountered the knee-jerk hostility to Taylor's work, the almost instinctive shudder in the presence of a politicised discourse from people like Geoffrey Durrant, and the widespread anxiety about the prospect of communist doctrine in the mouths of (African) babes. South African Communists were not the ignorant and hapless stooges of a powerful Soviet state: intelligent, enormously courageous and deeply committed to the attainment of meaningful democracy in South Africa, they developed a critical and cultural practice in South Africa which both drew on and, in certain respects, went beyond the Soviet formula. The stereotypical Zhdanovian position, of course, was one of the unfortunate cultural consequences of a social order under tremendous threat. In South Africa, where material conditions were at quite a different stage, one would expect the cultural agendas of liberation struggles to take a slightly different shape. In this context, those activists and intellectuals associated with the CPSA concentrated on furthering the struggle via a politicised art. In this regard also, it is important to appreciate the relative autonomy of Communist Parties beyond the borders of the Soviet Union, particularly after Russia opted against the original revolutionary goal of international socialism, and

pursued socialism in one country with the blessing of the emerging superpower of the US (Deutscher 1974; Claudin 1975). The reality of Communist cultural discourse in South Africa, as I hope to demonstrate, is both less crude and less prescriptive than the stereotypes would suggest.

My investigation into the intellectual and cultural traditions of the South African Communist Party begins in the late 1930s. As we have seen, the combined effect of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and the successful passage through parliament in 1936 of legislation which removed Africans from the common voters' roll stimulated unprecedented levels of black militancy around the country: dockworkers in Cape Town and Durban refused to load ships with Italian goods, and a number of new political organisations like the All African Convention (AAC) and the National Liberation League (NLL) emerged in response to a worsening political environment at home. For white South Africans, as in Europe, the Wall Street Crash, the resulting economic distress and the rise of Fascism played an equally important role in drawing many people into more active political involvement and a greater sympathy with left-wing ideas. In particular, the spectacle of a young democracy desperately trying to hold its ground against the forces of reaction in Spain was enormously significant, both on its own terms, and as a dramatic symbol of a turbulent political environment in which everything that had once been taken for granted was now rapidly "melting into air".³ In this context of international economic and political collapse, as Paul Laity comments, "[a] Marxist view of the world was never more plausible" (2001:xi).⁴ If the political and intellectual fervour occasioned by a turbulent international and local politics, particularly in urban centres like Cape Town and Johannesburg, was not destined to outlive the war, it nevertheless stands as an extraordinary moment in the history of the South African Left.

The weakness of the Communist Party in South Africa during this time meant that it was unable to fully capitalise on the greater militancy of the period.⁵ The CPSA was a fledgling party with few political traditions to draw on; it also faced almost continual harassment from the state. Even more serious, the organisation was crippled in the early 1930s as a result of increasing Comintern intervention and a series of dramatic about-turns in Soviet policy. In 1929, it was a robust organisation of 3000 members in which black members were in the majority, but by 1932, its membership had fallen to just 60 (Drew 2000:132). The first large-scale purges occurred in 1931. Interpreting the Great Depression as confirmation that a world-wide socialist revolution was imminent, the Comintern called for a complete repudiation of 'right wing' or 'reformist' activities.

Those who did not toe this 'New Line' were quickly expunged. A growing deference to Comintern decree and increasing pressure to demonstrate loyalty and ideological purity created an atmosphere of deep paranoia and mistrust. It was a period of which the Communist Party of South Africa is least proud, a period in which it expelled some of its most committed and experienced members, including trade unionists Fanny Klenerman, Sidney Bunting and W.H. Andrews. Numbers remained small in the mid-30s while factionalism and personal rivalries grew. A second wave of purges in 1935 further weakened the Party, whilst the spectacle of the Moscow Show trials of 1936 and the beginnings of Stalin's 'Great Terror' compromised its public image even further. The Popular Front movement in England and Europe which proved so effective in mobilising people across a broad political spectrum was singularly unsuccessful in South Africa, collapsing almost immediately in the face of deeply entrenched racial prejudice. By 1938 the Johannesburg branch of the Communist Party had virtually collapsed. The decision to move its headquarters to the slightly less volatile Cape Town branch, however, led to an almost immediate improvement in Party fortunes. Even so, whilst Cape Town Communists had been much more successful than their Johannesburg counterparts in involving themselves in popular struggles through the leading role they played in organisations like the National Liberation League (NLL), their numbers were still insignificant: in 1939, there were just 42 members (Drew 2000:189).

A new generation of Communists including some who had recently returned to South Africa from England (people like Jack Simons and Brian Bunting, amongst others) took the leading role in drawing the CPSA towards a position of greater openness, flexibility and cohesion in the years which followed. For most of these (youthful) new recruits, the internecine squabbles which had wracked the Party since its formation were easily set aside as they concentrated on forging a united front to overthrow what was a far more pressing and immediate issue, the rise of Fascism in Europe and at home. In addition, the absence of any other viable political alternative made them more willing to overlook some of the more worrying aspects of 1930s Comintern policy. The growing success of the Communist Party during this period is also attributable to a marked reduction in Comintern intervention in local affairs.

Turning to the question of the place and significance of culture amongst South African Communists during this period, there can be no doubt that it was given a central role: aside from the active and enthusiastic cultivation of a range of activities including discussion groups, lecture programmes, radical theatre, film societies, book clubs,

concerts and socials, cultural pursuits of various kinds were also the routine accompaniment of almost every political occasion, whether celebratory or defiant. If the approach to culture could be somewhat utilitarian or instrumental, it is nevertheless clear that it was not regarded as inconsequential, politically dubious, or 'bourgeois' in comparison to more 'serious' activities. Whilst these activities were clearly underpinned by a recognisable set of political and aesthetic assumptions drawing on both Soviet and British Marxism, the emphasis amongst Communist sympathisers in South Africa in the 1930s and 40s was less on the development of critical 'theory' than on encouraging a lively and inclusive cultural practice which would draw people to the movement, encouraging solidarity, inspiring, educating and politicising. The absence of a theory in the South African case was, of course, quite different from British Communist traditions, where, aside from the debates and discussions in journals like *Left Review*, the work of people like Christopher Caudwell, Ralph Fox and Alick West still stands as a major contribution, in the absence of any other available Marxist models, to the continuing elaboration of Marxist critical theory for a new generation of British activists and scholars.

These differences notwithstanding, on a more practical level, both British and South African Communists looked to culture as a means of making the Party more attractive and accessible to ordinary people. It was also an important part of the way in which communists sought to overturn some of the damage caused by the disastrous mid-1930s period. For both Croft (1995) and Laity (2001) – referring in particular to the British Communist Party – the late 1930s saw British communists actively embracing culture as a means of rehabilitating the Party's image in an effort to recruit new members. It was, as Arthur Koestler put it some years later, a period in which the Communist Party in the West, at least, "acquired a new façade with geranium boxes in the windows and a gate wide open to all men of good will" (cited in Laity 2001:xviii). If culture created a more attractive-looking Party in Britain, it also enabled it, as Croft suggests, to "[establish] a kind of bridgehead for its ideas on the mainland of British politics" (1995:92). The same is true of the South African case: the Party's engagement in a wide range of cultural pursuits became a crucial element in its broader educational programme.

Paradoxically, nothing could have been more advantageous to the Communist Party in South Africa (and in the West more generally) than the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. The events of the mid-1930s notwithstanding, the signing of

the Soviet non-aggression pact of 1939 and a fiercely anti-war stance did little to improve its already tarnished image. However, almost overnight (and even more so as the Red Army met with increasing success), the Party shifted from treacherous pariah to heroic defender of human freedoms against the Nazi menace (Lerumo 1971:72; Simons and Simons 1983:536; Lodge 1983:28; Drew 2000:234). The greater legitimacy of the Communist Party in South Africa during this time was reflected in a number of ways: the disappearance of anti-Soviet propaganda in the mainstream press, a much more cordial relationship between the Soviet and South African governments, and a marked decline in state harassment of Communist Party members (Drew 2000). Perhaps even more impressive is the fact that while many South African newspapers faced severe paper cutbacks as the result of war-time restrictions, the Communist organ *Inkululeko* and the Communist-aligned workers' newspaper, the *Guardian* were actually permitted an increase in paper allocation during the war (Switzer 1997:302).

For its part, the CPSA went to some lengths to play down its radicalism during this period, even to the extent of actively discouraging trade union militancy for fear that it would jeopardise the war effort (Lodge 1983:15; Hirson 1989a:88). A tacit agreement amongst Communist sympathisers “not to hit below the belt” (*Guardian* 20 March 1941:7)⁶ meant that questions of social justice at home were to some extent set aside as the country concentrated on supporting the war. According to Drew, this pro-war position entailed an “endorsement of government domestic war policies which set the Party on a distinctly accommodationist path” (2000:234). Whilst initially causing problems for some of its black members (many of whom were still naturally convinced by an earlier argument which equated fascism abroad with racial oppression in South Africa), this policy shift led to a substantial rise in white working-class and petit-bourgeois membership (Hirson 1989a:84). Between 1941 and 1943, the CPSA's national membership increased to 1300 (Drew 2000:234). A renewed emphasis on the more tolerant politics of the Popular Front as well as a shift towards white parliamentary political activity (a number of communists contested seats in both the 1943 parliamentary and municipal elections) meant that while the Party enjoyed a hitherto unheard of popular legitimacy, its politics during the war period were of a distinctly more moderate kind.⁷

As part of its recruitment and rehabilitation efforts of the late 1930s, then, the Communist Party in South Africa encouraged and supported a broad range of cultural and social activities. Fleeting references in various newspapers hint at a rich cultural and intellectual scene (mainly in Cape Town and Johannesburg) which seems to have thrived

even in the dark days of the Communist purges: clubs like the October Club in Cape Town (later the People's Club) and the Jewish Workers' Club (Johannesburg and Cape Town), for example, provided opportunities for discussion, socialising and informal 'theatricals'.⁸ The October Club, in particular, made an effort to widen its appeal by changing its name to the less radical-sounding 'People's Club'. As *The Cape Standard* reported, "[t]he new name will help in making the general public understand that there is nothing revolutionary in the club's activities. In fact, it is a school for the less intellectual to get in touch with the literature, plays and music of other days, also with the line of present day thought. Almost everyone is tired of jazz revue, and other styles of modern amusement. It is the serious side that is needed" (31 January 1938:6).

Perceived as less "dogmatic and less intellectual" than Trotskyist discussion groups like the Lenin Club (Schreuders 1988:17), the People's Club's aim to make culture more widely accessible nevertheless reproduced elitist 'high'/'low' cultural distinctions which echoed those of the hegemonic culture. In keeping with the politics of the Popular Front, the People's Club invited speakers from a wide range of political perspectives and encouraged open debate. It also initiated a broad educational project in the form of advanced night schools known as People's Colleges.⁹ The *Guardian's* weekly 'What's On' column, which gave regular notice of lectures, concerts and socials, gives some indication of the breadth and variety of left-wing activities during this period.¹⁰ Groups like the Young Communist League, the Springbok Legion, the People's Club, the Left Book Club, the Progressive Music Society, Friends of the Soviet Union, Medical Aid for Russia and the People's College testify to the enormous popularity during this period (amongst a fraction of the middle classes at least) of a left-of-centre approach. Although not strictly aligned with the Communist Party itself, Fanny Klenerman's Johannesburg film club, which began its first screenings in 1947, was also an important part of the cultural life of the (mainly Communist) Left in Johannesburg during this period. Monthly screenings of progressive films in the Johannesburg Library followed by informal discussions attracted good audiences, and the club lasted well into the 1970s (Klenerman A2031/a).¹¹ In Durban, the Liberal Study Group and its short-lived English monthly publication, the *Call*, provided another important debating and discussion forum for those on the Left.¹² With so many people drawn into active participation (as reviewers, playwrights, actors and musicians) one of the real achievements of the Communist Left in South Africa was a democratisation of access and participation in the cultural sphere, which offered a considerable challenge to

mainstream cultural practice and also acted as a focal point for an important alternative public sphere.

Revolution by Reason: The Left Book Club in South Africa

Of all these cultural initiatives, the one that looms largest in the history of the South African Communist Party is the Left Book Club. The overwhelming success of the club in England has become one of the legends of the 1930s British cultural scene. Initiated by Victor Gollancz in 1936, it provided cheap copies of left-wing books to a subscription-based membership in the hope that a popular, radical education would ultimately translate into a broad-based political movement developed in the interests of democracy and world peace. As John Lewis – LBC National Organiser in England – explained, “[t]hrough books and pamphlets, the ideas of men can be changed... there is no other way in which to change the world”. Needless to say, the principle of “revolution by reason” (*Guardian* 19 May 1939:2) upon which the LBC was founded represents a significant departure from the central Marxist assumptions about the primacy of material conditions in producing social change.

The rise of the Left Book Club in England was dramatic and swift: in three years the club had attracted over 60 000 members in Britain and other ‘commonwealth countries’. While its links with the Communist Party were never made explicit, the Left Book Club was regarded by Party members – many of whom played an important organisational role in LBC hierarchies – as a unique opportunity for the recruitment of new members. That Gollancz was indeed sympathetic to Communism is evident from his refusal to publish anything which took an anti-Communist (or indeed ‘Trotskyist’) position (Laity 2001:xvii). Despite its early identity as a working-class organisation, it tended to attract a predominantly middle-class following, a fact which was also manifested in the overwhelmingly middle-class character of most of its activities. The democratisation of access, which I would regard as one of its most significant achievements, clearly had its limits.

In South Africa, the LBC took root with equal speed and success. By 1939, discussion groups had been established across the country in most major towns. Even Bulawayo in Rhodesia could boast a branch of the LBC, and in Johannesburg, no less than four groups were established to cater for hundreds of eager participants (*Left Monthly* 1 March 1941:1).¹³ The South African Left Book Club was committed to carrying out the original principles of its founding members and actively pursued a

programme of progressive education and open discussion in the interests of “world peace, and a better social and economic order and against Fascism” (cited in the *Guardian* 16 February 1941:3). Echoing the Popular Front ideology of the Communist Party, it concentrated on the formation of a “united front of the Left” (*Left Monthly* 1 March 1941:2), where ‘left’ was broadly defined as “the community of all those who are dissatisfied with the present social and economic order, and who are out to change it” (1). This is very broad definition in anyone’s book. Left Club members “agreed to differ so long as [they remained] united by a common objective” (2). “Poverty in the midst of plenty”, “class oppressions”, “racial antagonisms” and war (1-2) are listed as some of the issues of most pressing concern, and whilst there is some engagement with South Africa’s own peculiar forms of racial oppression and discrimination, these tended to be sidelined as its predominantly white members concentrated on questions more directly impinging on their own lives. Thus, whilst the LBC clearly captured the imagination of many white South Africans through its informative and lively discussions of Left Book Club choices, it failed to attract a significant black membership. As veteran Communist Party member, Lionel (Rusty) Bernstein, put it, “if there was a black left in Johannesburg, there was no sign of it [in the Johannesburg Left Book Club]” (1999:14).

The Left Book Club in South Africa was popularly regarded as a more intellectual forum in comparison to other groups like the October/People’s Club. According to Jean Bernadt, a former member, the ‘rank and file’ were more likely to attend the People’s Club over the LBC, which was considered more appropriate for “reading people” (cited in Schreuders 1988:16). This was certainly true in the early years of its existence, and while it did expand its activities as the movement grew, it was always primarily identified as a reading and discussion club. In keeping with its emphasis on political education, Left Book Club choices tended to be works of history, biography or politics. John Strachey’s *Why You Should be a Socialist*, Stephen Spender’s *Forward from Liberalism* and Leo Huberman’s *Man’s Worldly Goods* were some of those classics of an emerging left-wing canon which were widely read and discussed. By far the most popular genre, however, was personal political reportage. Here, John Langdon Davis’s *Behind the Spanish Barricades* and Edgar Snow’s *Red Star Over China*, for example, provided positive, stirring examples of both revolutionary heroism and Stalinist success in typical socialist realist style. Works of fiction which approximated a realist documentary form such as Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* were also widely appreciated.¹⁴ As the club grew in popularity, the *Guardian* began to publish a weekly

feature entitled 'Left Book Club News' which reported on the activities of regional branches. In scope and emphasis, then, the South African Left Book Club bore a strong resemblance to Unity Movement efforts towards the creation of countrywide discussion groups and fellowships in the interests of political education, solidarity, and the spreading of radical ideas. In a context in which so many groups on the Left had come undone as a result of ideological differences and violent factionalism, the South African LBC was a rare example of a successful South African broad-based, popular radicalism. The outcome, as in England (although not nearly as large) was a united front against Fascism and war. That this attracted a predominantly white constituency reflects both prevailing racial attitudes in South Africa as well as the differing priorities of South Africa's broader population.

An open forum for the discussion of radical ideas, the LBC during the late 1930s also provided one of the few means of access to the world of communist and anti-Fascist literature, and in this sense played a significant role in the political awakening and education of many of those on the Left.¹⁵ Most South African bookshops at the time were extremely reluctant to handle left-wing literature of any description, and only a number of small bookshops, operating mainly in Johannesburg and Cape Town, were prepared to act as distributors.¹⁶ Writing about his own introduction to left-wing literature through Salmon's Bookshop in Eloff Street, Lionel (Rusty) Bernstein recalls,

Salmon's [bookshop] and the Discussion Group opened up a small world of books which I could have found nowhere else....I worked my way through Years of Left Book Club publications, many of them now outdated and forgotten. Together, the good, the not so good and the pretty bad opened my mind to the political theory, history and philosophy which shaped my political development....The shelves were cluttered with dun, blue or grey-bound volumes, many of them in foreign languages or from Soviet publishing houses. Left Club 'choices' with fading covers gathered dust among the back numbers of *Moscow News*, *Pravda*, and *Impreccor*....There was no space for browsing, but there was a cluttered lobby where one could rub shoulders with customers from other left-wing circles, waiting while Mr Salmon pattered and muttered around the shelves. (1999:13)

Aside from the circulation of a the primary texts of a largely inaccessible popular left-wing canon, the institution of discussion groups around the country also inaugurated an important alternative South African 'counterpublic' and, as Bernstein suggests, the bookshops themselves played a significant role in fostering an active left-wing subculture.

If the LBC in Johannesburg is anything to go by, the country-wide LBCs supported an ambitious monthly and weekly programme, not all of which was confined

to serious discussion.¹⁷ The clubrooms of the Johannesburg LBC were located in the centre of town in Harrison Street. Here, aside from monthly lectures, LBC members gathered for lunch hour “News Analysis” (*Left Monthly* 1 March 1941:11) and “lecturettes” (which promised “attractive features”, “popular talkers” and “breezy discussions”). “Socialist study groups” met on Friday evenings and members gathered once a month for play readings by the South African Unity Theatre Group (*Left Monthly* 1 March 1941:10). Modelled on the English radical theatre group, Unity Theatre (itself an initiative of the Left Book Club), the South African Unity Theatre Group was inaugurated in 1941. Its first project was William Saroyan’s surrealist drama, *My Heart’s in the Highlands* (*Left Monthly* 1 March 1941:7). It planned to produce Irwin Shaw’s *The Gentle People* in May, but the anticipated programme of quarterly productions does not appear to have been realised. The LBC was also active in organising concerts, socials and variety shows in aid of various causes such as the Medical Aid for Russia Fund (*Inkululeko* 31 July 1943:3). The small Communist newsheet *Inkululeko* (which was mainly directed at African audiences) made occasional references to the club in the mid-1940s, some of which were tied to community protest action, indicating that in Johannesburg at least, the club was able, occasionally, to move beyond its whites-only concerns.¹⁸ The equally successful Cape Town LBC held its monthly lectures and discussions at the YMCA Hall in Long Street (Schreuders 1988:16). Its core group consisted mainly of Communist Party sympathisers and trade unionists, including English-born journalist Betty Radford and her husband George, Jimmy Emerich, Johnny Gomas, W.H. Andrews and James la Guma.

An enormously successful movement, which played a significant role in the political and cultural education of many South Africans, the Left Book Club was not able to survive the war. Gollancz’s shift to a pro-government stance as the prospect of war became more and more inevitable went directly against the Party position in which the war was regarded as yet another imperialist scramble for territory and resources. When the controversy first erupted, the South African LBC declined to enter the debate, standing by the principle that it was not a political party and reaffirming its commitment to “free discussion” and the clarification of political understanding “so as to play an effective part in the common struggle” (*Guardian* 16 February 1940:3). A year later, however, most Left Book Clubs in South Africa had begun to distance themselves from Gollancz’s position. A creature of the peculiar late-1930s moment, the LBC began a rapid downward slide as the war progressed, and by 1946, it had all but disappeared.

Popular Radical Theatre

One of the more significant achievements of the Left Book Club movement in South Africa was the development of a popular radical theatre. Although much has been lost, occasional newspaper reports and reviews provide some insight into these activities: what emerges from these fragments is a lively cultural movement which sought to harness South African theatre for radical political ends. One of the more interesting, if short-lived, examples in this regard was the Pretoria People's Theatre, which produced Sean O'Casey's pro-Soviet play, *The Star Turns Red*, in Pretoria and Johannesburg in 1941 (*Guardian* 13 February 1941:3; 13 March 1941:3). The Pretoria People's Theatre was explicitly established in the interests of the development of "vital theatre" in contrast to the routine offerings of other dramatic societies on the Rand. The two performances on the 28th February and the 1st March drew a crowd of 700 people and, according to the *Guardian*, were widely "discussed in factories and workshops" (13 March 1941:3). *The Star turns Red*, chosen perhaps because of the great success of a recent performance by London's Unity Theatre (*Guardian* 13 February 1941:7), is described as "one of the few Left plays which combines good art with good propaganda". The struggle it depicts between Communists and the Roman Catholic Church "is at the same time representative of the whole struggle of Progress against Reaction" (13 March 1941:3). Another review of the performance, which appeared in the *Left Monthly*, emphasised the importance of theatre as a political tool, even suggesting that it might come to "overshadow" many of the other LBC initiatives. The need to develop and sustain counter-hegemonic political perspectives in opposition to both Hollywood and the state was regarded as a crucial element in a broader political resistance: "[i]n an age when every film and play is either frankly propaganda (for the possessors of the propaganda machine of course) or just a mere narcotic to sustain us through the bad patches we have to endure, a theatre with a realist approach must appeal to all" (*Left Monthly* April 1941:8).¹⁹ A strong preference for a Lukàcsian realism and the presentation of an unambiguous moral and political message is an essential aspect of a radical cultural project which actively sought to include ordinary South African workers.

A similar desire to recognise and give value to the experiences of ordinary South Africans is evident in the somewhat instrumentalist 1948 play, *Africa Comes to Egoli*, performed at a Communist Party rally held on 22nd of October at the Gandhi Hall in Johannesburg. Written by members of the Communist Party it told the story – in English,

Zulu and Sotho – of the archetypal journey of a rural African to the heart of Johannesburg in search of work. Robbed of his money and his pass by gangsters, he is arrested and imprisoned for being “idle and unemployed”. Very confused by his experiences in the city, he is introduced to *Inkululeko* newspaper by a friend. In a kind of Communist re-writing of *Cry, the Beloved Country* (which appeared in the same year) his eyes are opened to the reality of South African society: he joins a trade union and becomes actively involved in militant strike action. The review in *Inkululeko* – despite the improbable and somewhat contrived plot – was favourable, emphasising in particular that the play was produced by “the workers themselves” and included many “life-like touches” like African work songs (*Inkululeko* 23 October 1948:4).²⁰

A more nuanced and theoretically self-conscious approach to theatre can be found in the work of Andre van Gyseghem and the Johannesburg-based Bantu People’s Theatre.²¹ The Bantu People’s Theatre was established in 1937 by Belgian socialist, Andre van Gyseghem, who came to South Africa to direct the pageant for the 1936 Empire Exhibition (*Trek* October 1950:20; Couzens 1985:176; Kruger 1999:36).²² Van Gyseghem’s keen interest in African theatre drew him to the Bantu Dramatic Society (BDS), a successful Johannesburg theatre group established under the auspices of the liberal Bantu Men’s Social Centre. Van Gyseghem’s offer to produce one of the plays of acclaimed New York playwright Eugene O’Neill (*The Hairy Ape*, *The Emperor Jones* or *Stevedore*) was however rejected on the grounds that the plays were “insufficiently genteel” (Couzens 1985:176). The actors of the BDS, it would seem, were more comfortable with turn-of-the-century English, middle-class drawing room pieces like Keble Howard’s *The Cheerful Knave* and Oscar Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan*. Van Gyseghem’s efforts were not, however, without success: three months later, a group calling itself the Bantu People’s Theatre had been established, and had completed rehearsals of Eugene O’Neill’s powerful and disturbing play, *The Hairy Ape*.²³

Modelled on the Unity Theatre in England, the Bantu People’s Theatre articulated its theatrical aims in explicitly socialist terms: here, the more typical preoccupations with working-class experience, economic “disintegration” and the formation of trade unions are combined with those which were unique to the South African scene – “the break down of tribal economy” and the impact of race (cited in Kruger 1999:74). Van Gyseghem makes his political and aesthetic priorities explicit in an article published in the *Cape Guardian*²⁴ in February 1937. At that time, he was in Cape Town directing George Bernard Shaw’s *Man and Superman* for the Cape Town Repertory Players.

Drawing on Hamlet's injunction to the players "to hold as t'were the mirror up to nature", he makes the point that theatre should reveal "the patterns of contemporary life" (2). By this he means not trivial abstractions like "petty jealousy, love, theft and seduction" (2), but the urgent questions of particular socio-political contexts. For van Gysegem, writers like Ibsen, Brieux, Toller, Capek, Galsworthy and O'Neill are amongst those who successfully tackle the "big issues" of their immediate socio-political contexts. Drawing on a reflectionist model of literature, he is nevertheless preoccupied with a particular kind of 'realism', one which accords with a Marxist interpretation of history. Van Gysegem's premise that "no writer works in a vacuum" makes him particularly sensitive to the specifics of the original moment of artistic production. The challenge for the contemporary theatre director is to draw out the significance of the play's original context, while simultaneously remaining open to its altered significance and shifting meanings in contexts remote from its original creation. In *Man and Superman*, for example, he carefully reproduces its original setting, but takes care to highlight the central juxtaposition of the rebel and conventional society in a way that allows the play to resonate with contemporary South African socio-political concerns. A Janus-faced theatre which both draws on an original moment of production and looks to repeated instances and contexts of reception and consumption evinces a strong feeling for the ever-changing horizons of interpretation and meaning which is close to that of the New Historicists of the 1990s. Needless to say, this double perspective also allows for powerful, covert resistance to injustice and oppression at home.

Whilst we can only guess at the particular interpretation favoured by the BPT in their production of *The Hairy Ape*, the fact that the strong New York working-class idiom of the original play was replaced with something more closely resembling the speech of urban black South Africans (Couzens 1985:176) suggests that some care was taken to make the play relevant to South African concerns. As it is, the play's moving exploration of working-class marginality, alienation and oppression offers rich material for an engagement with urban black South African experience: the play's central protagonist, Yank, a stoker on a New York-based transatlantic liner, is plunged into turmoil and self-doubt as an unexpected encounter causes him to become aware of his own despised and degraded position in society. In an experience much like that of Pip in *Great Expectations* (and Waldo in *The Story of an African Farm*), he comes to realise that in the eyes of polite society, he is nothing more than a brutish clown, a despised "hairy ape" who has no place in the world which he helps to create and sustain. The

industrialised working class, the play suggests, has become an aberration, a monster created by civilised society, which it is desperate to expel, or at the very least ignore. The central experience of profound dislocation and ‘unbelonging’ can find no easy solution either in radical politics or in a retreat to the apparent idyll of a pre-industrial world, and the play ends with the stoker’s death. While we have no way of knowing whether the many parallels with South African urban working-class experience were fully exploited in this particular performance, there can be little doubt that the play spoke powerfully to South African concerns. In any event, the stark, expressionist nature of the play’s design, and its tendency towards symbol and abstraction rather than mimetic ‘truth’, would seem to encourage such connections.²⁵

Van Gyseghem’s desire to encourage and promote a radical theatre in South Africa is coupled with a strong commitment to the development of indigenous forms. At a conference of the British Drama League, for example, he reportedly urged those involved in African theatre to “preserve the essential Bantu culture and to avoid the imitation of European art” (*Umteteli wa Bantu* 26 January 1938:4). A report by ‘Gossip Pen’ of the government-owned *Bantu World* suggests that this advice was being acted on: according to the report, the Bantu People’s Theatre was working on a production of *Dingaan* by Vilakazi (5 March 1938:4).²⁶ When one turns to van Gyseghem’s pageant activities, however, the implications of his desire to “preserve the essential Bantu culture” begin to look more ominous. According to Loren Kruger, these productions were notable for their attempts to erase any “evidence of [African] modernity” (1999:43): in clear opposition to the wishes of his African performers, van Gyseghem sought to create a visual spectacle which fixed Africans into the timeless arena of ‘culture’ rather than engage with the realities of contemporary socio-political experience. Given his strong commitment – reflected in the production of *The Hairy Ape* – to address the urgent questions of an urbanised African context, I am inclined to see these efforts in a more positive light, to read them as an assertion of (indigenous) value rather than a disingenuous attempt to reify culture in the interests of a reactionary ‘native policy’.

Efforts to forge a less Eurocentric theatre met with some success a few years later, by which time Johannesburg-born trade unionist and Communist Party member, Guy Routh, had taken over from van Gyseghem as director of the BPT (*Trek* October 1950:20; Couzens 1985:195). Recalling his experiences ten years later, by which time he had relocated to England, Routh recalls a group of actors “who were completely at ease on the stage”. At the time they were working on a production of the musical, *Porgy and*

Bess (*Trek* October 1950:20). Frustrated by, but not completely insensitive to, the tremendous obstacles in the way of developing an indigenous theatre, Routh persuaded the BPT to abandon this ambitious project, and to concentrate instead on the production of a number of short sketches. Routh's literary and political aesthetic had much in common with that of his predecessor. His emphasis on the development of radical theatre, which drew to some extent on traditions of Soviet Marxism, coincided with a deep awareness of the racial peculiarities of the South African context. In an article written in the full optimism of the early days of his involvement in African theatre, he looked forward to the forging of a more inclusive, more accessible and more popular national cultural practice in South Africa, in which theatre would have a prominent place. Unlike Plomer and Campbell's failed attempt in the short-lived magazine, *Voorslag*, this effort, he argued, would set its sights further than the charmed circles of the English-speaking middle-classes. A 'truly South African' culture would not only draw "its strength from the energy of the South African masses", but seek to reflect a distinctly modern condition: "the intense economic and social conflicts that result from the impact of Imperialism" (*Guardian* 10 July 1941:3).

Routh was deeply influenced by the techniques of 'method' acting and psychological verisimilitude pioneered by Constantine Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko of the Moscow Art Theatre, and while it may not have been possible to realise his ambitions within the constraints of what was always an exceptionally 'poor theatre', it is clear that his efforts rest on a commitment to ground his theatre in the emotional and social experiences of the actors themselves rather than to enforce or impose a foreign cultural practice. These preoccupations with emotional authenticity are coupled with a theory of the function of art which offers an interesting blend of Gestalt psychology and an almost Lukàcsian drive towards 'typicality'. Through the isolation of key structural or determining principles from the complexities of everyday experience, Routh argues, art renders experience coherent, hence meaningful:

[T]he function of art was not to create but to arrange – out of the jumbled mass of experiences and emotions of masses of individuals, to arrange the essentials in a way that made them comprehensible to the individual. The purgative effect that is a well-known property of art was a process of clearing blocked circuits in the brain, whereby fresh connections were established and mental and emotional processes tuned up. The individual emerged from the experience with a heightened understanding of himself and his relation with humanity. (*Trek* October 1950:21)

The notion of art as ‘purgation’, a kind of mental unblocking and ‘tuning up’ – which unwittingly reproduces a pervasive mid-twentieth century advertising discourse around digestive functioning (Dr Parton’s “Pink Pill that Will” is a staple of newspaper adverts during this period) – is remarkably close to the psychological preoccupations of the work of I.A. Richards. The power of art as a means of spiritual education also, of course, bears a strong resemblance to a Leavisian cultural paradigm. In this case, it takes a somewhat patronising turn as it confronts the idea of largely African audiences: echoing the cultural paternalism of South African critics like Christina van Heyningen and Geoffrey Durrant, Routh ends this discussion with the point that he purposely wrote plays which dealt with problems that were “confusing” to Africans, in the hope that this would “[make] them less confused” (21). Despite some shared ideological ground, Routh’s preoccupations with the development of a radical national theatre nevertheless take him in a very different political direction. By focusing on ordinary, everyday experience (starkly rendered via the visual economy of theatre) he hoped to make visible the deep social forces which structure and impinge on daily life, thereby revealing the connections between seemingly independent or merely contiguous elements in a confusing socio-political landscape. In South Africa, this is to expose the ‘motor forces’ of oppression in the interests of political enlightenment and real social change.

His choice of plays reflects these commitments. Like van Gyseghem, he looks to a radical tradition of theatre in the US, notably to the plays of Eugene O’Neill and Paul Green. A strong desire to develop an African theatre foundered on the problem of the scarcity of local material, something which he attempted to rectify by drawing, somewhat reluctantly, on his own creative resources. The result was a number of short sketches, which reflected on aspects of contemporary urban society. The only two other South African plays which the group produced were *Tau* by Wits graduate and trade unionist, Issie Pinchuk, and *The Rude Criminal* by Communist Party and ANC member, Gaur Radebe.

The first major project by the Bantu People’s Theatre under Routh’s direction was a three-night drama festival held from the 25th to the 27th July 1940. The programme consisted of four plays, *The Word and the Act* and *Patriot’s Pie* by Guy Routh and two O’Neill one-act plays, *The Dreamy Kid* and *Before Breakfast*. The festival opened in Sophiatown, moved briefly to the Bantu Men’s Social Centre in Johannesburg, and finished its run at the Orient theatre, Pretoria (*Trek* October 1950:21). By Routh’s account, writing ten years later when he was living in England, it was a great success:

“Our African audiences, who had never seen anything like this before, took it up with enthusiasm. If only we had sufficient capital...we might have done a triumphal tour of the Union, and made a lot of money and a permanent contribution to South African culture” (21). In their treatment of issues such as urban poverty, unemployment, social anomie and dislocation, the two O’Neill plays *The Dreamy Kid* and *Before Breakfast* offer fruitful entry points into an exploration of black urban experience: while *The Dreamy Kid* focuses on the relationship between a dying older woman and her gangster grandson, *Before Breakfast* harnesses the common stereotype of the shrewish housewife complaining about a husband, broken by poverty and unemployment, who can no longer leave the house to seek work. The South African sketches – advertised in *Bantu World* as “dramatized stories of location life” (20 July 1940: 4) – take up the issues of black soldiers enlisting in the Second World War (*Patriot’s Pie*), and the on-going effects of Hertzog’s Native Bills (*The Word and the Act*), respectively.

A review of the performance by ‘Gossip Pen’ in the conservative *Bantu World* begins dismissively: “What they have failed to teach with any measure of success through their night schools and political organisations and by mass agitation, they now hope to ‘drive home’ by means of drama and the stage. I refer to the anti-Nazis and Anti-Fascists – the Communists so to say – of the Bantu People’s Theatre” (3 August 1940:4). After the knee-jerk response, the discussion of the plays themselves is more sympathetic, to some extent even recognising Routh’s commitment to exposing the underlying ‘rationality’ of what on the surface appears to be chaotic and random experiences of persecution and oppression: *The Word and the Act* is set “at the height of the controversy on General Hertzog’s Native Bills in 1937, but the theme is skilfully woven round the present situation. Against this background the Native’s lot in the socio-political structure of South Africa is clearly explored, everyday incidents in the average Native’s life being introduced to lend colour and atmosphere” (4). Similarly, *Before Breakfast* was “well acted by Josie Palmer, who as Mrs Rowland in characteristic feminine self-righteousness, declaimed in forthright language against the shiftlessness and lazy habits of her husband” (Coplan 1985:204; *Guardian* 10 July 1941:3). Another review in the Communist news-sheet *Inkululeko* was much more enthusiastic: here the reviewer commented on the significance of the fact that this play was performed before both black and white audiences, and concluded: “Bonke ababekhona babuyela emakhaya bevuyisekile yimidlalo yeliqela. Abanye bagoduka izisu zibuhlungu ngenxa yentsini eyayilaopo” (August 1940:17).²⁷

The second major performance by the Bantu People's Theatre took place a year later at the Gandhi Hall in Fordsburg in July 1941. By this time the group had renamed itself the African National Theatre.²⁸ On this occasion, the programme consisted of *Tau* by Issie Pinchuk, a sketch by Guy Routh called *The Foolish Mistress* and Paul Green's *The Hymn of the Rising Sun* (Couzens 1985:187-188; *Guardian* 10 July 1941:3).²⁹ Once again, the emphasis was on the exploration of contemporary African experience in the interests of radical political education: where *Tau* addressed the conditions of African labour on South African farms, *The Foolish Missis* took a satirical look at the relationships between South African 'maids and madams'.³⁰ Paul Green's stark portrayal of the experiences of a North Carolina chain gang, presented from the perspective of one of the black prisoners, is again an interesting choice for the Bantu People's Theatre, suggesting a continuing commitment to political education and radicalisation.³¹

Always anxious about the need to 'awaken' his predominantly African audiences to the realities of their oppression, Routh may in the end have gone too far. Concerned about the fact that many in the audience seemed to laugh at the suffering they witnessed rather than angrily identify with it, Routh decided on a radical plan to bring 'reality' into dramatic collision with the theatrical experience. In what became the final performance of the African National Theatre, Routh used Gaur Radebe's biting critique of the pass laws in his play *The Rude Criminal* to stage what appeared to be a real life pass raid on the premises of the theatre hall itself. In an audacious move, which overturned the traditional demarcations of the proscenium arch, the audience became the unwitting actors in a play about their own oppression. This radical South African theatre was all too real however, and many of the patrons rushed out for fear of being arrested (*Trek* October 1950:23).

David Coplan describes the Bantu People's Theatre as South Africa's first "radical, committed theatrical organisation" (1985:204). This significance has not prevented it from suffering the fate of much of South Africa's radical cultural traditions. A rare example in South Africa of a popular, radical, African-oriented theatre, it was also an important effort by those on the Left towards the creation of a more accessible, less elitist and more inclusive South African cultural practice. The aesthetic assumptions which inform these activities echo some of the preoccupations of a more mainstream South African tradition. Where the Bantu People's Theatre departs from these emphases, however, is in the explicit attempt to harness a radical theatre for the broader project of political education and emancipation, as well as in its concerns with the 'larger' or more

‘typical’ realism of a kind of proto-Lukàcsian view. These concerns with the “big issues” of the larger socio-political scene as well as the strong preference for contemporary urban South African experience, as we will see, constitute some of the defining features of a South African Communist aesthetic more generally.

The Radical Traditions of the Party Press

Another important forum for the dissemination of a radical cultural discourse in the Communist Party was the newspaper. In this regard, the socialist weekly the *Guardian* takes centre stage. Described as the most successful and most influential publication in the history of the socialist press in South Africa (Switzer 1997:274, 281), this English-language newspaper, which ran for a remarkable twenty-six years, managed to survive almost constant state harassment by continually changing its name. Launched in February 1937, and banned in 1952 in the wake of the Suppression of Communism Act, it re-emerged in a number of guises (*The Clarion*, *People’s World*, *Advance* and *New Age*) as each new version was banned.³² At the time it was the only newspaper in South Africa dedicated to the furtherance of worker and trade union interests: it championed the rights of the poor and oppressed in the face of deepening discrimination and exploitation, and offered detailed coverage of instances of social dissidence and unrest, particularly the activities of the CPSA, various trade union organisations and community action groups. In this sense, it played a significant role in the developing liberation movement.

The *Guardian* articulated a strong oppositional politics in reaction to an increasingly repressive state. It also responded to the rise of Fascism and the Second World War. The inspiration of the Cape Town Left Book Club, the paper sought, in the first ten years of its existence at least, to counter the growing Fascist menace (both at home and abroad) by uniting a broadly leftist constituency in the interests of meaningful democracy and social justice. According to Lerumo (Michael Harmel), the paper “helped to educate an entire generation of revolutionaries, at a time when the English-language press, controlled by big mining and finance houses, under pressure from the Hertzog government, were virtually silent about the Nazis’ crimes, and the Afrikaans newspapers under editors like Verwoerd, increasingly sympathetic to them” (1971:68).

Its 1937 editorial board, which represented a range of political interests, included trade unionists, W.H. Andrews and James Emmerich; National Liberation League activists, Jimmy la Guma and Johnny Gomas; ANC official, Thomas Ngwenya; University of Cape Town academic, Harold Baldry and his wife Carina Pearson; and

recent immigrants to South Africa, Betty Radford and her husband, George.³³ Although never officially identified with the CPSA, the *Guardian* remained the Party's unofficial mouthpiece until the paper's demise in the early 1960s.³⁴ In fact, from the 1940s onwards, its editorial board read like a veritable who's who of the Communist Party Executive.³⁵ With the look and feel of a commercial newspaper, the *Guardian* was one of the few left-wing newspapers in the country to offer standard news stories as well as comment and analysis, and branches in Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg ensured its country-wide reach.³⁶ Distributed by a group of dedicated volunteers on street corners and through door-to-door sales, its circulation figures testify to its considerable popularity. Expanding rapidly in the first few years of its existence, its circulation reached a peak of 55 000 during the 1943 General Election (Switzer 1997:281), and, although it suffered a considerable down-turn in the early years of the Cold War, it was able to sustain a readership of around 42 000 (*Guardian* 7 December 1943:1). Of course, the enormous 'follow-on' readership would undoubtedly have pushed its actual circulation figures into the 100 000s (Switzer 1997:281). As Don Pinnock observes, however, its role as mouthpiece of the oppressed in South Africa was never an easy one:

From week to week it teetered on the brink of closure, with pennies in the bank and policemen at the door. Titles were banned, and the newspaper was sued, firebombed, spied on and had its presses sealed. It was banned from railway news stands and raided by police. Two commissions of enquiry investigated its activities. Its editors received personal banning orders, most staff members were arrested and charged at some time or another, its street sellers were harassed and beaten up, and eight staffers went on trial for high treason. (1997:308)

Aside from the considerable achievement of being the longest-running socialist newspaper in the country, the early *Guardian* also had the distinction of being one of the few South African newspapers to be headed by two women, Betty Radford (later Sacks) and Carina Pearson (Lessing 1995:349). Described by Doris Lessing as two "formidable" and "efficient middle-class Englishwomen" (349-350), both Radford and Pearson were recent immigrants to South Africa who quickly became involved in the South African socialist scene. Radford served as editor for the first eleven years of the paper's existence. Working initially as publisher's agent on the *Cape Times*, a three and a half-month visit to the Soviet Union in 1935 spurred her on to commit herself to the struggle for socialism in South Africa. She joined the Communist Party in 1941 (Lazerson 1994: 49). The only professional journalist on the *Guardian* editorial team, Radford is

described somewhat unflatteringly in Switzer's account of the newspaper's history as "a kind of socialist socialite on display" (Switzer 1997:276). A "clipped English accent, patrician mannerisms, smart clothes and jewellery" identified her – as did her "grand Oranjezicht home below Table Mountain where she dressed every evening for dinner" – as one of Cape Town's elite (cited in Switzer 1997:276). Part of a large pool of contributors, and assisted with administrative matters by Carina Pearson, Radford took overall responsibility for the newspaper, contributing regular pieces which included a weekly commentary on contemporary news. Jack Simons, history lecturer at UCT, was responsible for most of the editorials until 1947 (Switzer 1997:276).³⁷

Under Radford's guidance, the first ten years of the paper's existence saw a concern with working-class issues and black oppression which remained to some extent within a reformist political paradigm. In addition, despite its identity as a workers' paper, the *Guardian's* position on race – at least in its early years – was contradictory, reflecting a not unfamiliar leftist paternalism which is nevertheless strangely at odds with its emerging radicalism.³⁸ An article entitled "Girls who Steal" (21 April 1937:3), for example, expresses typical white middle-class anxieties about the growing menace of "Native Girls" stealing from suburban homes. Advertisements for household cleaning products also regularly featured African women dressed in 'maids uniforms' doing menial household chores.³⁹ This is in stark contrast to the paper's outright repudiation of government racial policy, its condemnation of poverty and discrimination, as well as its refusal to engage with pervasive white South African fears about the looming threat of an ever-intensifying African militancy. A letter from one *Guardian* reader who argued that the paper should tone down its revolutionary content because Africans are not yet 'ready' for equal rights, elicited the following response in the letters page the next week:

To my mind the 'Guardian' is right in placing the emphasis of its reports on exposing the deplorable conditions under which the majority of us live. To switch the emphasis to praise of the admirable efforts of the few sincere Liberals would lull the privileged population into complacency and the unprivileged into stupor....As to the 'harm' being done to us by your paper, all I can say is that we prefer that sort of harm to the harm that results from low pay, and from being forced to live in slums. (13 February 1941:3)

The newspaper adopted a much more radical and less paternalist stance in the years following the Second World War. This was partly the result of a change in editor – Communist Party member Brian Bunting took over from Radford in 1948 – but was also the inevitable result of worsening political conditions in the wake of the National Party victory of 1948.⁴⁰ Towards the end of the Second World War, the United Party

government abandoned its conciliatory war-time stance towards the Communist Party in favour of much more repressive measures. A wave of strikes across the Rand, as well as the emergence of popular protests in both urban and rural areas sparked renewed 'black peril' fears amongst whites, and pushed the government towards a more combative stance, this despite war time 'new deal' promises and a greater willingness – amongst a more pragmatically-minded industrial elite at least – to recognise the inevitability of large-scale African urbanisation (Lodge 1983:23). The period saw a tightening of influx controls, ominous new segregation laws, particularly amongst the Indian and coloured populations, and a growing intolerance for strike action. The first direct assault on the newspaper itself – coming on this occasion primarily from big business in the form of Anglo American Mines – was the 1943 court action against the *Guardian* for libellous allegations regarding the treatment of workers in the mining industry (7 December 1943:1). The *Guardian* was found guilty and fined. *Guardian* staff also experienced increased intimidation in the aftermath of the 1946 African mineworkers strike when many left-wing groups were subjected to raids, harrassment and even arrest. Radford was one of those arrested and imprisoned, and shortly afterwards resigned as editor.

My discussion of cultural issues in the *Guardian* in this chapter is confined to the period 1937 to 1952. Chapter 6 will take up its later incarnations as mouthpiece for the Congress Movement. As a newspaper which sought to educate and politicise its readers, the *Guardian* took little interest in the kind of literary and cultural discussion which characterised Marxist periodicals like the English *Left Review* or *Partisan Review* in North America, periodicals in which topics like the social function of literature, the political duties of writers, and the thorny questions of literary value were debated by the likes of Ralph Fox and Cecil Day Lewis. A newspaper format, of course, did not allow for this kind of discussion anyway. By contrast, regular book reviews in the *Guardian* articulate a rudimentary Marxism geared explicitly towards popularising a left-wing approach, the reviews themselves serving mainly as sympathetic counterpoints to the other news stories. To some extent, then, the *Guardian* offered a less elitist engagement with literary and cultural concerns than, for example, *Trek* or *The South African Opinion*. Nevertheless, the newspaper's assumptions about the existence of a large reading culture were out of touch with the majority of South Africa's (mainly illiterate and uneducated) population. The literary/cultural pieces in the *Guardian* assume a familiarity with the established left-book club tradition of reading and discussion which could not possibly have been the case given its substantial working-class readership. The LBC undoubtedly

had a lot of purchase amongst those who in one way or another retained their British cultural and social affiliations, but for those to whom these cultural ties were less significant, one must assume that these pages were of far less interest than other kinds of news.

Before turning to a more explicit discussion of the cultural discourses of the *Guardian*, I would like to make a brief detour into another Communist Party publication which was more explicitly directed towards Africans. The purpose of this detour is to consider the kinds of cultural discussion which took place amongst African Communists, something which, for obvious reasons, is a rare occurrence in the South African press. Poorly funded and rudimentary in form, Communist Party paper *Inkululeko*, edited from the mid-1940s by Party member Edwin Mofutsanyana,⁴¹ had to compete with the much more expensively produced, mined-owned papers like *Umteteli wa Bantu* and *Bantu World*, newspapers which not only carried much more in the way of regular 'news', but were also able to include a variety of additional material such as sport, 'women's issues', a substantial children's section and other audience-attracting features. Most of *Inkululeko*'s contributors had little or no formal training. In fact, in accordance with its commitment to the views of ordinary people, the newspaper actively encouraged the contributions of readers from the remotest corners of the country. This meant that the paper itself had to educate its readers and contributors in the basic tenets of journalism.⁴²

Like *Drum*, *Inkululeko* was an urban publication which reflected on the daily experiences of workers in South African cities. A Johannesburg paper, it was initially conceived by Communist Party leaders as a useful method of reaching a wider African audience. Unlike *Forward*, a stodgy theoretical journal dominated by stock photographs from Stalin's propaganda factories which was edited by George Sacks, *Inkululeko* took a much more sensitive, less detached, and more humane approach to the everyday concerns of those who experienced the brunt of South Africa's discriminatory laws. With regard to the discussion of cultural questions in the newspaper itself, the picture which emerges is disappointing. Apart from an unsuccessful attempt to launch a regular book review section in July 1946, occasional theatre reviews and poems,⁴³ regular cinema listings from 1946, as well as the latest book titles from People's Bookshop⁴⁴ form the sum total of the cultural content of *Inkululeko*.⁴⁵ This is not surprising. The absence of literary-cultural discussion reflects a harsh material context of economic privation and continual state harassment. This in itself is an important point to make in relation to the overall

argument of my broader investigation. Many African publications are more concerned with the problems of human survival than with the discussion of books.

That said, what *Inkululeko* does provide is a rare glimpse into some of the cultural activities amongst African communists which occurred beyond the newspaper itself. I will refer to two of these. The first example comes from a brief report about an attempt amongst African Communists to establish a discussion group called the South African Cultural Club. "A non-colour bar body" which sought to play a role in the "development and liberation of the oppressed South African peoples", it aimed to nurture a "true South African culture which would reflect the life and aspirations of the South African nation" (*Inkululeko* July 1940:6). Activities would include lectures and discussions on art, science, music, literature, economics, psychology, politics and history as well as writers' workshops where members could be assisted and encouraged to write short stories and plays "which will be an artistic expression of the lives and struggles of the peoples of this country" (6). The club commenced with a Paul Robeson evening, and thereafter seems to have collapsed.

Another frustratingly small glimpse into cultural debates amongst African Communists during this period is to be found in a gathering of African writers and critics in Johannesburg in December 1945. The Non-European Arts Conference held in the Gandhi Hall, and reported in both *Inkululeko* and *Trek*, was a rare occasion for the articulation of a specifically African approach to literary-cultural issues.⁴⁶ The conference was opened by P.S. Joshi, author of a booklet entitled *Apartheid in South Africa*.⁴⁷ Joshi began with the point that art had an important role to play in the struggle of the oppressed peoples and that "it was necessary that the non-European people of this country should develop it along the right lines". Turning to more practical concerns, the congress stressed the need for combating illiteracy, and looked towards other long-term goals of establishing a theatre, the publication of an arts magazine, and the "encouragement of actors and singers and the promotion of art as a whole". Another delegate made the point that "non-European men and women had contributed to the culture of this country" but that "it was their economic status which was the cause of the insignificance of that contribution". The speaker concluded that it was the responsibility of all 'Non-Europeans' to bring this contribution to the world's attention. The congress ended with a "heated discussion" following Joshi's address on the lessons of the Indian National Struggle for South Africa. The general feeling of the meeting was that while the ultimate objective of the Non-Europeans should be socialism, at present the struggle

should concentrate on “the extension of democratic rights to Non-Europeans” (*Inkululeko* 14 January 1946:4).

A similar report in *Trek* by Woodroffe Mbete pays more attention to some of the issues that the conference set out to resolve. Of high priority in this regard was the relationship between ‘non-European’ artists and their communities. This issue was considered particularly important given that a more communal artistic function was undergoing considerable change under the impact of modernisation, industrialisation and an “acquisitive capitalist ‘civilisation’”.⁴⁸ While it was difficult to reach consensus on this particularly intractable question, the second area of focus concerning the preservation of indigenous cultural forms was, according to the report, more easily resolved. Here delegates argued that while there was a need to “seek inspiration from the glorious past, and [to] create authentic history”, it was equally important to retain a focus on contemporary socio-political realities. In this regard, aside from the need to create art which reflected on “the slumdom of the gold mining compounds, the fenced [ghetto-like] ‘Native locations’ and [the] Asiatic Bazaars”, it was also important to focus on more practical issues like “problem of mass illiteracy and mass education” and the revision of racist school text books (*Trek* 25 January 1946:14).

These examples, although brief, provide a sense of some of the dominant concerns of an African Communist intellectual class. Culture and the liberation struggle are clearly regarded as inseparable. Attempts to forge a national culture which reflects the creative input of all South Africans is both an important way in which the experiences of ordinary people can be recorded, and an equally powerful means of empowerment and self-assertion. While the emphasis on the role of culture in furthering the revolutionary struggle is close to that of white Communists, the attention given to more practical concerns like mass illiteracy is unique to black South Africans, and an important indication of the decisive influence of material contexts in the shaping of cultural debates.⁴⁹

Returning to the more uniformly ‘white’ concerns of the *Guardian* critics, a slightly different picture emerges. What is clear from the outset is that literary-cultural discussion in the *Guardian* is largely informed by the philosophy of the Left Book Club. This is to be seen not only in the noticeable presence of Left Book Club choices in the literary pages and in the regular coverage of Left Book Club news and activities, but also in the fact that literary reviews are regarded primarily as a way of popularising left-wing ideas. In this regard (and this is not surprising given that it used the format of a daily

newspaper), *Guardian* cultural criticism is less about the elaboration, extension, or specific application of an existing body of Marxist critical theory than the enormous task of education, politicisation, and mobilisation in the interests of revolutionary social change. While Soviet literature plays an important role in sustaining the levels of enthusiasm and sacrifice necessary for the success of an embattled Soviet state, literary discussion amongst South African communists is accorded a central place in the struggle which is to come. There is a high degree of consensus amongst South African Communists regarding these political aims. This is not just a case, I think, of ‘towing the party line’; rather, it arises from an acute sense both of the urgency of the contemporary political and social scene, as well as from an unshakeable faith in the deeply compelling alternative offered by the example of the Soviet Union. The first workers’ state, to which many *Guardian* readers refer with intense pride and even a kind of jealous propriety, clearly provides South African Communists with a very clear sense of what things mean, and ‘what must be done’. The political landscape, at this stage at least, is very easy to read. Far from being the subject of intense and protracted discussion, arguments like those presented by Wulf Sachs in a lecture to the Cape Town Left Book Club, for example, that “all literature is propaganda; it’s just a question of what propaganda it makes” (*Guardian* 13 February 1941:3) are endorsed without question.

Communist party members Betty Radford, Michael Harmel,⁵⁰ Brian Bunting and Lionel Bernstein⁵¹ were responsible for most of the reviews during this period. An equally important contributor was Jack Cope – one of the founding editors of *Contrast* in the early 1960s – who produced a weekly column in the early 1950s. A number of key assumptions guide the literary discussions of the Communist Left in South Africa during this period: the first challenges the hegemonic view of literature’s transcendence, going out of its way to foreground the connections between politics and art. The second is that art is ideological. Conscious that certain ideas are actively promoted in the interests of a ruling elite, *Guardian* critics are especially anxious to articulate viable alternatives. In this sense, the book review occupies a central place in the circulation and promotion of counter-hegemonic views. In keeping with the aesthetic and political requirements of the doctrine of socialist realism, reviewers generally endorse progressive, optimistic and inspiring texts which tell the ‘truth’ about social conditions and expose injustice. There is a strong preference for realism over modernist innovation and a tendency to recommend fiction which identifies with the working classes. There is also a noticeable emphasis on strong, heroic characters who embody the spirit of resistance and fortitude: ‘Ma’ from

The Grapes of Wrath, for example, is the symbol of “people who ‘keep on coming,’ who cannot be denied” (*Guardian* 13 February 1941:3). Good art, according to this scheme, also articulates a particular understanding of society, one which privileges material forces over individual agency. In keeping with this more instrumentalist cultural perspective, literary works are appreciated for the extent to which they elaborate an archetypal moral contest between the forces of ‘progress’ and ‘reaction’, a basic template which is observable across a range of texts from Upton Sinclair’s *The Iron Heel* to Richard Wright’s *Native Son*. If this tended to flatten out the peculiarities of individual contexts, it was also an expression of the political requirements of the particular moment. Despite the very different social outcomes envisaged, the view amongst these critics of art as a kind of lever in social change aligns them much more closely with South African Leavisites like van Heyningen and Durrant than perhaps they would have liked to acknowledge. As we have seen, critics like Dora Taylor were much more cautious about the role of art in bringing about social change.

Aside from giving attention to the usual suspects of a well-established left-wing canon, as well as the many literary eulogies to life in Soviet Russia, *Guardian* reviews also explore the contours of an emerging South African literature. Here Radford’s reliance on a Leavisian aesthetic emerges very clearly. In an article which has strong echoes of the critical preoccupations of someone like Christina van Heyningen, for example, she describes Alan Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country* as a “sympathetic and understanding study of the breakdown of African social life” which will “help to inform white South Africa about black South Africa; about the misery for which white South Africa is so largely responsible” (4 March 1948:4). Similarly whilst Peter Abrahams’s *Dark Testament* is “too self-conscious and too little socially conscious”, white South Africans should read this collection because “it will help them to understand the brutality of the colour bar, and its wastefulness of human life and human potentialities” (31 December 1942:5). Less concerned with converting recalcitrant white South Africans, Brian Bunting and Michael Harmel tend to concentrate on the degree to which literature offers a faithful record of lived South African experience. Brian Bunting’s review of Es’kia Mphahlele’s first collection, *Man Must Live*, for example, expresses strong disapproval for what he sees as its Anglo-Saxon derivations:

This collection of five short stories, written by an African teacher of Johannesburg, reflects a dangerous tendency on the part of the African intelligentsia to become isolated from their people. Those who are charged with the education of the African people must inevitably superimpose upon the aboriginal raw culture in which the

average pupil was nurtured, the more complex pattern of European culture and ethics. The resultant conflict between the two modes of thought and life can lead either to the extinction of the weaker culture or to a fusion of cultures drawing strength equally from both sources. Unfortunately the author of these stories has had the god of his forefathers exorcised by the missionaries. He has forgotten that he is an African. (9 January 1947:3)

Evidence of this cultural displacement, Bunting argues, is to be found in the total absence of a sense of South African experience, a preoccupation with themes like “ideal love, heavenly justice [and] patience” and a use of language derived from the world of Jane Austen. These characters “might be creatures of any race or clime....Not once do they complain about the pass laws, the pick-up vans or the insolence of the white man, though they all live in urban locations where beer raids are the order of the day” (9 January 1947:3). The comparison with Jane Austen is not meant as a snide comment on a kind of misguided African presumption; this writer is good. Similarly, the criticism does not derive from disappointment with a lack of political engagement since “[a]rt ...cannot be made to measure”. Instead the problem is one of allegiance: “[Mr Mphahlele] should return to his people for inspiration, otherwise his muse will wither and die” (3).⁵² While evincing an unusual awareness of class distinctions amongst the oppressed, Bunting has nevertheless not been able to see beyond the stereotype of ‘raw’ primitive Africa. On the other hand, J.B. Kafia’s little-known novel entitled *This Thing Has Got to Stop* is appreciated because of its realistic depiction of South African experience, and for its keen sense of the larger social process underlying individual suffering. Another *Guardian* critic, Michael Harmel, makes similar appeals to literary verisimilitude. While he admires Peter Abrahams’s “virtuosity” in *Mine Boy*, he finds his characters thin and his plots “absurd” and “unreal” (16 January 1947:4).

Moving away from questions of literary value towards a more general cultural philosophy, 'BF's' review of Christopher Caudwell's *Studies in a Dying Culture* is a strong endorsement of both the value of a dialectical approach to cultural questions and of Caudwell's sense of "man as social man" in contrast to the "bourgeois opposition of the naturally free individual to a restricting society" (16 March 1950:4). Like Dora Taylor, this critic rejects the 'freedom' of Romantic escape in favour of solidarity with the oppressed. Finally, Sam Kahn's forthright attack on T.S. Eliot's cultural elitism, which makes pointed parallels with the situation at home, is worth quoting in full, not only for its content, but also for its brazen and outspoken style. Addressing himself specifically to the revered poet, Kahn writes,

Your surrender to mysticism...makes sad reading particularly to a citizen of South Africa where most of the people never receive any education at all. You strongly attack the wider diffusion of education and argue in favour of a culture-creating elite based on the dominance of our hereditary aristocracy in a semi-feudal social order determined according to birth and wealth....Under the tattered banner of the defence of culture you ill conceal a contempt and fear of the masses of the people who you aim to keep in darkness, while the privileged few, the 'superior individuals' enjoy their 'rewards and emoluments'....Make literacy and knowledge the right of all, open up the way for all you can to enter the heritage of culture, and then, and then alone will civilisation have firm roots and the guarantee of its transmission and full flowering. South Africa's uncultured "elite", the apostles of darkness and inhumanity, will find much comfort in your egotistical apology for the maintenance of class and social privilege. (26 January 1950:4)⁵³

Jack Cope: Romantic Revolutionary

The final section of this chapter examines the literary and cultural criticism of *Guardian* critic, biographer and novelist, Robert Knox (Jack) Cope. While other literary-cultural discussions in the *Guardian* remained sporadic, occasional and undeveloped, Cope's regular art column, written over a period of two years, provided an opportunity for a more sustained discussion which is both wide-ranging – Cope's column covers literature, architecture, film, painting, sculpture and even the cultural politics of the Cold War – and more theoretically adventurous. While Cope draws to some extent on the aesthetic assumptions of Soviet-cultural discourse, and whilst his overall critical project is very much in keeping with a broader Communist view of art as a weapon of struggle, he is one of the few Communist-aligned South African critics to consciously apply the principles of a Marxist critical method to specific examples. In addition, his efforts to move beyond the narrow range of the literary text are a pioneering example of a more wide-ranging South African cultural criticism.

Jack Cope's considerable reputation as editor of one of the most successful liberal arts journals in South Africa (*Contrast*, begun 1960) belies a more radical past. Cope was born in the Natal Midlands in 1913 and educated at Durban High School. His 1943 biography of veteran South African trade unionist and Communist Party member, W.H. Andrews, is evidence of an early entanglement with the politics of the South African Left which may have been encouraged by contact with Cape Town socialists in the late 1930s.⁵⁴ Cope made a name for himself as a controversial leftist literary critic in *Trek* magazine in the mid-forties (see chapter 2). His two-year literary column for the *Guardian* entitled "Art and the People" provides further evidence of a fervent commitment to a Marxist perspective.⁵⁵ The journey from Durban High School to Communist Party supporter is an aspect of South African literary history that remains to be explored, as is the transition from angry young radical to somewhat more sober editor of a liberal South African arts magazine.⁵⁶ Whatever the limits and lacunas of Cope's Marxist perspective, it is clear that by the time the first edition of *Contrast* appeared in 1960, an earlier commitment to Marxism appears to have been displaced by a much more familiar white South African liberalism. Contemplating the future of the journal in an increasingly crisis-ridden society in the early months of 1960, Cope goes to some lengths to emphasise the magazine's detachment from the messy (and seemingly unnecessary) world of politics. Reassuring his readers that "in a policy ridden country, this is a magazine with no policy", Cope downgrades the 'political' in favour of what he sees as a far more effective Arnoldian disinterestedness: "keep[ing] out of the rough and tumble of parties and groups", the magazine will "cross all borders" and "hold a balance between conflicting opinion" (1960:9). Opting for the 'larger' view and more 'balanced' perspective of the liberal approach, Cope's main concern in the years that followed was to affirm the value (in conventional Leavisian terms) of an emerging South African literature. It is not clear whether Cope's retreat into the relative calm of a more liberal perspective was the result of disillusionment with left-wing politics (which resembled that of Bernard Sachs) or whether it was a more strategic withdrawal as the Verwoerdian political vision took on more and more monstrous shape. Whatever the reason, Cope's little-known contribution to the development of a Marxist discourse on culture in South Africa is a significant one which ought to be recognised and remembered.

Cope's critical outlook is an intriguing, sometimes contradictory, amalgam of the Romantic-radicalism of British Communists like Christopher Caudwell, Alick West and T.A. Jackson, the aesthetic preoccupations of Soviet-defined socialist realism, and the

cultural pessimism of the *Scrutiny* school. In self-conscious opposition to the tendency of idealist criticism to treat art as a “manifestation of the human spirit”, he argues instead that “as one of the products of human consciousness” art should be studied “not as an independent thing but as an ever-changing activity of men”, something which “is altered by them as they change their class relations, the very world they live in and their ideas about it” (10 August 1950:4). Adopting a thorough-going dialectical materialism which, following Caudwell, occasionally attempts the encyclopaedic scope of a long-range materialist view, Cope simultaneously invokes the deeply Romantic image of the artist as a sensitive ‘rebel-in-society’, the last outpost of human integrity in a steadily deteriorating commercial age, and remains committed to the idea of art as the repository of humane values through which society can be permanently transformed.

As Raymond Williams has observed, an uneasy blend of Romanticism and Marxism was not uncommon amongst British Marxists of the 30s and 40s. Eager to apply the lessons of a compelling critical method and anxious to respond to the growing social crisis, many intellectuals embraced a Marxist perspective, but despite a willingness to engage with the more practical aspects of a Marxist view, their work remained largely within the more liberal paradigms of the British traditions from which it had grown (Williams 1958:271). Given Cope’s shift to a more liberal position in the 1960s, it is tempting to see his Marxism in even less generous terms: something of a Peter Abrahams figure, Cope’s youthful flirtation with the Cape Town socialist scene may have been more the expression of temporary intellectual and political fashion than a genuine commitment, something which would soon give way as conditions in South Africa steadily deteriorated.

Cope nails his Marxist colours to the mast in an early article entitled “Art and Reality” which looks at the history of European painting. Of all the existing theories of art, he argues, Marxist criticism has the greatest explanatory power. While other schools of criticism have “succeeded each other as the changing fashions and neurotic instability of our time demand”, Marxist criticism has only “broadened and deepened”. The “only sure guide”, it is destined to become an ever more cogent analytical tool. He concludes optimistically, “as our knowledge grows, [and] as the best talents and genius of mankind are drawn into the camp of communism”, so a Marxist aesthetics will “[sweep] away all other theories of art”. Cope is also sensitive to existing stereotypes of vulgar literary determinism, and is careful to make the usual qualifications: Marxist theory is a “guide to action and understanding”; it offers “no dogmatic laws or immutable judgements”.

Cope's literary preferences are for an all-encompassing and meticulous realism: art should offer a "powerful and emotionally convincing representation of reality", but at the same time, it should not become so obsessed with minutiae that it forgets the larger socio-political scene (24 August 1950:4).

Cope's "Art and the People" column was written in the early years of Nationalist Party rule. Eager to shore up its unexpected 1948 victory, the newly-elected apartheid government immediately set about enacting a series of racist laws designed to entrench white Afrikaner supremacy and control dissent. The Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 was quickly followed in the same year by some of the main lynchpins of the developing apartheid vision: the Mixed Marriages Act, the Immorality Act, the Populations Registration Act, the Group Areas Act; and various reactionary amendments to existing "Native Policy" sought to prevent inter-racial contact, entrench segregation, control movement and eradicate so-called 'black spots'. A strong sense of crisis deriving from both local and international conditions of increasing intolerance provides the spur to Cope's reviews. In this regard, Cope's column is less a review than an emotive appeal to the revolutionary values of what he regards as a long-standing and powerful tradition of heroic resistance to oppression and inequality in the field of the arts. An almost reverential weekly tribute to previous generations of writers as diverse as Olive Schreiner, Charles Dickens, Louis Aragon, Guy de Maupassant, Maxim Gorky, Istaq Peretz, Robert Burns and Howard Fast, Cope's column celebrates a legacy of opposition in the arts which, as a touchstone of progressive values, stands as a powerful indictment of contemporary socio-political conditions in South Africa and elsewhere.

In an article which is both idealistic celebration and sardonic comment, for example, Cope offers a few "helpful suggestions" to the South African censors regarding potentially incendiary texts. Alongside the Bible, a "dangerous book full of sedition, provocation, and equalitarian propaganda" he lists William Morris, Robert Burns, Henri Barbusse and Anatole France. Pushkin, as a coloured writer, if not banned altogether, should "at least be placed in the libraries on a shelf apart". While Shelley was a "revolutionary, an atheist and a blasphemer, Shakespeare's *Othello* can never be performed on the South African stage because its hero is a black Moor who loves and marries a white girl". In fact, "the whole of Shakespeare is so charged with sentiments contrary to the ideas and laws of the Nationalist Government that it would be better to dispense with him altogether." His advice to the Nationalists is "to ban all books except

an approved list of Afrikaans authors and all publications in Germany in the period 1933 to 1945" (3 August 1950:4).

Titles like "Charles Dickens the Radical" (20 July 1950:4), "Poet of Resistance" (10 August 1950:4), and "Songs of Liberty" (15 March 1951:11) give some sense of the stirring tone of many of Cope's reviews. Charles Dickens, for instance, is a "superb writer, a man of the people" and a "dyed-in-the-wool radical" (20 July 1950:4). Robert Burns is "a mighty people's poet and a true-blooded revolutionary". His "hatred of falsehood and tyranny" and his "defence of equality and personal freedom for all men" confirm him as the true son of an ancient Scottish peasant lineage (1 February 1951:11). Cope's weekly celebration of the Western literary canon is written in opposition to mainstream literary criticism which, he argues, tends to "sanitise", domesticate and de-politicise the works of the past. In this sense, his radical canon is less an example of what Alan Sinfield has described as a "politics of dissident reading" (1992) than a genuine belief in the essential radicalism of the Western literary tradition, a radicalism that has been suppressed, distorted or simply ignored by a predominantly conservative literary-critical establishment. In rescuing radical writers from the misappropriations and mis-readings of conservative literary histories, Cope reiterates a somewhat clichéd opposition between a reactionary literary-critical establishment on the one hand, and rebellious artists on the other. Apart from a reliance on the suspect notion of the transcendent Romantic artist therefore, Cope also remains convinced about the moral authority of the dominant European tradition. With the exception of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, the dominant European literary canon remains intact.

Cope's intellectual debt to a Soviet-inspired cultural aesthetic is to be found in his emphasis on the need for artists to be connected with the 'people', his preference for stirring and inspiring stories of human resistance against oppression, and his endorsement of the aesthetic requirements of socialist realism. In true Soviet style Cope's artist is a "positive type" (21 December 1950:4): courageous, optimistic and full of fiery enthusiasm, this artist has clearly identified him/herself with the new society to come. In contrast, Cope's sense of literature as the repository of humane values, his almost religious faith in the ability of the downtrodden, yet indomitable, masses to resist and transcend their oppression, and his naïve sense of the inevitable triumph of the human spirit mark him out not so much as a "dyed-in-the-wool radical" as a dyed-in-the-wool Romantic. The reactionary politics of someone like T.S. Eliot notwithstanding, Cope clings to the belief that "most artists have a good deal of the rebel in them and are

enemies of the hypocrisy and cant on which the social order is built” (30 November 1950:4). In this view, art is born in conditions of social oppression, and artistic expression is the search for a more perfect social order, a kind of dreaming of freedom: “discontented with the actual world about him” the artist attempts to create “something better”, something more “orderly”, “harmonious”, “beautiful” and “heroic” (21 December 1950:4).

This tendency to exaggerate the revolutionary impulses of his literary heroes, to romanticise working-class resistance, and to over-emphasise the role of ideas in social change is partly a response to an immediate context of escalating intolerance and oppression in South Africa. Facing what must at the time have seemed like an almost unbelievable descent into reaction and repression as the apartheid juggernaut got under way, Cope’s columns have the desperate sound of a last-ditch attempt to stave off the inevitable. Although more an expression of desire than a realistic response to existing conditions, his emphasis on freedom, resistance, and rebellion could be seen as a potentially powerful rhetorical strategy in an increasingly repressive social environment where human rights were being trampled underfoot every day. If not likely to produce a change in the stony hearts of South African government officials, his Romantic-individualist approach may have provided inspiration and hope to those struggling on the ground. Certainly, in the context of the newspaper itself, the Romantic spectacle of isolated artists standing bravely against powerful odds provides a stirring literary parallel to the many heroic struggles against exploitation and oppression recorded each week in the rest of the paper.

Cope’s Romantic excesses are in marked contrast to his usual, much more astute, sense of the operations of orthodox literary assessment, evaluation and canon-formation, a position which anticipates the great canon debates of the 1980s by some thirty years. Deeply embedded in particular political and social contexts, the Western literary-critical establishment represents the interests of identifiable social groups. Cope is, accordingly, deeply sceptical of its claims to universality and disinterestedness. Instead, literary value is understood as a highly contested area, part of the way powerful groups ensure their continued hegemony. While a “revolutionary” artist in the present “stands a very good chance...of finding himself behind prison bars” (4), the literary reputations of the “great rebels of the past” are the subject of on-going contestation and struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. Older writers, Cope argues, are likely to suffer one of two fates: “either they are thoroughly disinfected and canonised as saints by respectable

middle-class society or else they are systematically attacked as babblers and impostors with no real claim to artistic worth.” William Morris, Cope suggests, has “suffered a mixture of both fates”: while “literary snobs have derided him”, “a complacent class of sham progressives have turned him into a kind of idol to whom they mechanically bend the knee without going too closely into the really explosive content of his art.” “It is an appalling destiny”, he concludes, “to become an English middle-class saint” (30 November 1950:4). Another article on the critical reception of Charles Dickens (20 July 1950:4) draws attention to his lukewarm reception at the hands of the critical establishment, and contrasts it with his abiding popularity amongst the working classes all over the world. For Cope, mainstream critics have remained ambivalent about Dickens’s fiction because his social and political concerns make him an enemy of their class: “they cannot forgive him for being richly interested in life, politics, and the hurley-burley of real events” (4). Despite the depredations of orthodox criticism, Cope suggests, the revolutionary spirit of the great Western canon continues to be recognised by those who matter, the downtrodden and oppressed. An interesting article, which looks at the fortunes of the Prometheus figure in literary history, provides another angle on the discussion. Here Cope challenges the tendency in mainstream literary criticism to equate a strong political or social agenda with artistic failure:

Through all significant literature there runs a political idea. This can be put to the test by choosing any single piece from the writings of the past. At the same time, it is almost an invariable practice of reactionary writers and critics to prove that political ideas are the ruin of art, that art is pure and that all the greatest works of literature are of a kind that have no political significance. (8 February 1951:11)

In the case of the Prometheus story which Cope reads as a representation of the struggle between the proletariat and the ruling classes, orthodox criticism responds either by reinventing this “humane and complex god of the proletariat” (11) as a troublesome agitator, or “the stodgy writers of reaction insist that the story contains no political message or social significance, that Greek playwrights generally ignored contemporary life” (11).

In contrast to a hegemonic critical perspective which sought to downplay the political significance of literary texts, Cope’s reviews go to some lengths to foreground a political position. In an article on Olive Schreiner, he praises the “pure cool heights, the sureness of intuition and the humanity” of *The Story of an African Farm* (5 January 1950:4). Her preference for truth-telling rather than romantic idealisation is placed within the broader context of her progressive political views, her support for “Africans and the

Boer Republics against British Imperialism”, her defence of women’s rights, and her understanding of “the broader struggle of the working-class for freedom against the capitalist” (5 January 1950:4). Challenging the common view that she “exhausted her inspiration in one book”, this review also consciously constructs a much more radical Olive Schreiner than mainstream criticism generally allowed, one who “welcomed the great November Revolution, became an admirer of Lenin and joined her voice with the rising tide of Communism”.⁵⁷

Finally, drawing attention to the class roots of orthodox criticism, Cope makes an interesting point about the tendency of middle-class British critics to universalise their own concerns. An article on the poetry of T.S. Eliot rejects the common assumption that the atmosphere of spiritual emptiness and uncertainty of poems like “The Waste Land” and “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” are a reflection of the mood of an age. For Cope, this is a gesture typical of the middle classes “who identify all culture with themselves”. While the middle classes feel as though their world is collapsing, Cope argues, Russian workers and peasants were reaping the fruits of socialism: “the period 1917-1922 when Eliot’s celebrated poems appeared brought the great mass of humanity their first real hope of freedom, dignity and self-expression. Their future was assured, not wiped out” (2 February 1950:4).

Cope’s challenge to the conventional operations of literary assessment in the mainstream (mainly British) academy is also accompanied by a wide-ranging critique of contemporary politics and culture, particularly in the United States. Cold war repression and censorship, military aggression in Korea, and escalating East-West hostilities provide the shaping context of Cope’s political and cultural analysis. Increasingly unable to address South African concerns directly, his compelling critique of growing political intolerance and paranoia in American society also gives him an opportunity to offer deflected and oblique comment on reaction and repression at home. Commenting on the imprisonment of Howard Fast – under investigation by the notorious ‘House Unamerican Activities Committee’ (HUAC) – Cope compares the United States campaign against “dangerous thought” (17 August 1950:4) to the activities of the Spanish Inquisition. In the wake of the Suppression of Communism Act, the unspoken parallels with the South African context are abundantly clear.

Cope’s hostility towards North American society is clearly framed within the politics of the Cold War itself. In this sense, he draws on a typically Zhdanovian model of the ‘decadence’ and social decay of a ‘dying’ capitalist culture which is counterpoised

to the liberating energies of the Communist world. Like ancient Rome, the dominant civilisations of the West have run their course. Over-fed, corrupt and dissolute, they turn for new energy and vitality to the previously colonised countries in an effort to stave off the inevitable collapse. He concludes optimistically that “[c]ompared with the mighty fall of Rome, America’s final outburst before she too disappears from the scene of imperial history will be no more than a day” (7 June 1951:11). If, as Cope argues, “changes in social relations bring about changes in art forms”, the steady deterioration of Western capitalist societies will be observable in its dominant forms of cultural expression. In the United States, as many previously progressive writers either retreat into mysticism or become apologists for war, the most glaring sign of social decay is to be observed in the dominance of the profit motive in all areas of the arts. Invoking the standard tropes of a *Scrutiny* analysis, Cope points to the stupefying, drug-like effects of a debased contemporary mass culture. The “sterilised emotion” and “mild massage” of the Hollywood film industry, in particular, offers “a kind of dream compensation” for what the capitalist system is increasingly unable to provide (23 November 1950:4). Reduced to a state of inane passivity, film audiences surrender themselves willingly to the unreality of Hollywood myth-making, but leave the cinema “dissatisfied” and “disgusted”, even “a little ashamed” (23 November 1950:4). For Cope, the enormous potential of cinema for education and positive propaganda is unlikely to be realised as long as it remains under the control of big business. Instead of encouraging people to understand and act on their environment, its only function is to divert people from their everyday suffering. An “art of the sales curve” (12 July 1951:7), contemporary popular culture panders to the lowest common denominator; its preoccupations with “crime, violence, sex and moral degeneracy” and its nonchalant acceptance of “abnormality, neurosis and unbridled behaviour” have resulted in both the debasement and “over stimulation” of taste, and the steady deterioration of artistic standards: “just as they have debased tens of millions of their fellow citizens into the class of slum-dwellers, so they degrade the tastes of the reading public from childhood upwards in order to make profits.” Alarmed at the way in which the “nerve-taut” and “suggestive” products of a crass American culture industry are “flood[ing]” the British and South African markets (20 April 1950:4), Cope’s hostility towards US culture is also an interesting early critique of a “coca-colonising” American cultural imperialism (7 June 1951:11).

While Cope’s one-dimensional analysis of contemporary mass culture seems to reproduce a familiar Leavisian response, his hostility towards profit-driven art, his

attention to cultural production as an *economic* practice, and his concern that the enjoyment of mass culture will numb people to the realities of their oppression align him more closely with the political and aesthetic preoccupations of the Frankfurt School. The alignment is all the more extraordinary given the fact that the School's critical insights were at this stage still unavailable to Marxists in the West. What marks him out from both these traditions, however, is an almost pathological hostility towards social 'deviance', and a particular aversion to any kind of sexual reference in the arts. Cope's on-going critique of the debased products of a cynical American culture industry is largely founded on its increasing preoccupations with themes of a "violent and erotic character". Contemporary pulp fiction comes under particular scrutiny here: instead of the "positive" and "heroic" characters of the great Western literary tradition (19 October 1950:4), "thieves", "scoundrels", "police sleuths", "prostitutes" and "sexual perverts" now jostle for the highest positions (26 April 1951:11). While to some extent overlapping with a pessimistic Leavisian cultural diagnosis, Cope's extreme discomfort with sexually explicit themes is a particularly revealing instance of his dependence on the aesthetic preoccupations of Soviet socialist realism. As Maynard Solomon points out, most of those works which were censored or banned under the Stalinist regime were targeted, not because of their ideological incorrectness, but because of preoccupations of an overtly sexual nature (1978:240). Hostility towards sexuality, Solomon argues, is a commonplace of post-revolutionary (and some capitalist) societies where the need for hard-working and docile labouring populations requires the strict repression of all such individualist and 'self-indulgent' activities. Cope's uniformly negative view of contemporary popular culture also of course makes no allowance for the creative and critical agencies of its consumers.⁵⁸

Despite these short-comings, Cope offers a compelling assessment of the operations of American Cold War propaganda, particularly the role of the media in securing popular consent. Beginning with the contention that much contemporary popular culture in the US plays a decisive role in spreading the conservative social messages of a highly-organised state propaganda machine, Cope also examines some of the more interesting contradictions of this process. While it projects some of its less morally acceptable attributes onto an increasingly chimerical Soviet state, US propaganda promotes an image of the Soviet Union as both powerful aggressor and puny proletarian state. In the same way, the United States itself is simultaneously constructed as the peace-loving and reasonable defender of human freedoms, as well as militant and

ruthless defender of the rights of the American people. In an assessment which speaks directly to present-day concerns, Cope points to the glaring contradictions between the image of North American society as democratic, tolerant and freedom-loving and the reality of increasing repression and restraint. As he puts it, “America must abolish freedom in order to remain free” (26 April 1951:11).

While Western culture is increasingly robbed of its vitality under a decaying capitalism, it is “literature, inspired by, and reflecting the interests of the working class and of the undeveloped peoples struggling against Imperialist oppression” which has become the bearer of a new artistic ‘truth’. Commenting on the extraordinary efflorescence of cultural activity in parts of the colonised and formerly colonised world, Cope asks how it is that while “the imperial race seems no longer to have anything vivid, joyful or wild to say”, people in formerly colonised areas “now floor their one time rulers in the highest fields of creative work?” The answer he provides echoes Dora Taylor’s 1940s diagnosis of contemporary Western culture: middle class writers under capitalism, he argues, have become the “cautious and uninspired defenders of a decaying social order” (19 April 1951:11). Isolated from the masses, and unmoved by their struggles, writers divert themselves with the “literary tricks and threadbare devices” (16 November 1950:4) of an increasingly obscure art. The barbarian “invaders from the outer islands and remote parts of the world” have “taken up the mastery of English and it is to them that one looks for vigour and life” (19 April 1951:11). In an early anticipation of the more recent developments of postcolonial criticism, Cope concludes that instead of “English literature”, it is more accurate to talk about “literature in the English language” (19 April 1951:11).

Commenting on the work of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, Cope makes much the same point about the vitality of the Spanish language in contexts in which American imperialism still holds sway. A continent which for decades has been oppressed by “brutal dictatorships” and “juntas dominated by American dollars” (31 August 1950:4), South America has paradoxically become the site of a notable cultural production. This he relates to the close relationship between a largely illiterate population and the poets who continue to speak directly to their concerns. Buoyed by the positive energies of a “proud” and “freedom-loving” people, contemporary South American writers, many of whom are descended from Spaniards, Africans and Indians, have been able to “throw off the gloom and obscurity characteristic of much bourgeois poetry today” (31 August 1950:4). In marked contrast, white South African writers are “cut off from the masses by

habit or language or lack of sympathy” and, bar a few notable exceptions, have been unable to face the more difficult social questions head on: “[s]earching too far and truthfully would involve an exposure of social, moral and political conditions, something which the writers seem unable to face” (19 October 1950:4). Falling back, like Taylor, on a materialist view of artistic production, Cope writes, “the social order is based on a lie, and the mental outlook this produces is shallow, fraudulent or cynical”. Those who do not accept “draw apart and suffer the inevitable weakness of isolation”. Finally, commenting on literature by black South Africans, he draws attention (as do so many black South African critics) to the “grave social obstacles” (19 October 1950:4) which stand in the way of the growth of indigenous cultural expression.

Cope’s interest in the emergence of literature by black South Africans forms part of an on-going concern with ‘folk’ or indigenous art. While this is clearly a reflection of his own immediate context, it also echoes long-standing Soviet preoccupations with the recovery and encouragement of ‘the art of the people’. Cope’s particular take on pre-modern cultural expression to some extent repeats a William Morris-like idealisation and nostalgia for the ‘authentic’ cultural products of a pre-industrial age. Arguing that rural Africans, for example, have an “innate” sense of taste (9 February 1950:4) and reminding his audience of the shared, communal nature of pre-modern cultural production (from the fashioning of wooden spoons to the making of bee-hive huts), he deplores the uniformly ugly products of a profit-driven, industrialised process. At the same time, he repeats the arguments of many of the critics discussed so far in his scepticism towards the possibility of recovering an uncorrupted pre-colonial culture: “[t]he type of tribal society which produced such works began to deteriorate a hundred and more years ago under the impact of European conquest.” For this reason, continuing efforts to reproduce such work under vastly different social conditions “appear stiff and forced”. Often it is “completely degenerate” merely serving the “curio traffic”. Cope ends by holding up the example of Nigerian sculptor, Ben Enwonwu, as someone who has taken up the challenge of “finding new forms in sculpture to express the conditions of his changing world” (12 October 1950:4). Turning to South African literature, a positive review of Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka* reveals a sensitivity to the continuing legacy of orality in Mofolo’s work which allows Cope to respond to aspects of the novel which other critics overlooked. Mofolo’s novel “shows the mind of a sensitive African in transition between the vast unwritten ‘memory literature’ of the past and the new tradition of the written word”. Mofolo is an artist who “knows the unwritten traditions of the past and is close to the

people who are the source of all literature. Many tongues speak through Mofolo's pen" (26 January 1950:4). A hybrid form which combines realism, allegory, folklore and direct observation, *Chaka* has the flavour of the medieval epic.

Cope's interest in indigenous cultural forms also derives from his concerns about the way in which they can be manipulated for conservative political ends. The 'politics of representation' in relation to the culture of oppressed groups is therefore also of major concern in his work. Commenting on the treatment of African-American folk-lore in contemporary North American fiction, for example, he condemns the tradition of "whimsical tales and sentimentality" seen in works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the 'folk-lore' of Uncle Remus and Brer Rabbit, concluding that "even at their most sympathetic, this tradition of writing is false" (24 May 1951:11). More important for Cope, are the ways in which African Americans themselves are beginning to incorporate folk traditions into a more contemporary literary and cultural practice. When he turns to the South African context, his judgement is even less favourable:

Leaving aside the openly hostile and stupid misrepresentation of the African and Coloured peoples in most writing by white authors, even the sympathetic writers fall into the anti-colour trap because they have failed to see [the people] in their social setting. They are obsessed by race patterns and the effect of their work is not much different from the racialsists. (24 May 1951:11)

Finally, while he is appreciative of some of the positive changes in the contemporary representation of African Americans in fiction and drama, Cope also makes the point that no amount of political correctness in the arts can change the fact of the existence of institutionalised racial oppression in the United States. In stark contrast to the developments in the cultural sphere, he reminds his audience of the "terrible reality of Willie McGee's death in the electric chair" (24 May 1951:11).⁵⁹

A similar sensitivity to the material contexts of cultural expression informs Cope's response to the annual Cape Town 'Coon Carnival'. Echoing the concerns of many Unity Movement activists, he argues that while it may at one time have been "a genuine outpouring of folk art", in the present context of racial discrimination, poverty and oppression, it becomes nothing more than a degrading spectacle of coloured inferiority which lends support to existing racial policies: the "clownish antics" and the "insultingly painted faces" put the performers in the role of "humble entertainers who are willing to prance and posture if it will amuse the crowd" (2 August 1951:3). He is particularly suspicious of the active support the carnival receives from white South Africans. To some extent aware of its potentially Rabelaisian elements, he nevertheless

maintains that “[w]hether one likes it or not, coon carnivals reinforce the colour bar and colour hatred. If they are an outlet for suppressed energy they draw that energy into futile and poisonous channels” (2 August 1951:3). Instead of advocating its complete abolishment, however, he suggests that it becomes the forum for a more forthright political statement “and if anyone complained that this was introducing politics, the answer is that the politics of the present carnivals is to keep the coloured man a happy servant” (2 August 1951:3).

Cope’s reviews reiterate some of the central preoccupations of a Soviet cultural aesthetic and attempt to apply the insights of more classical Marxist traditions. A theoretically sophisticated literary analysis which pays particular attention to the role of culture in sustaining hegemonic ideas, it is also extraordinarily wide-ranging in scope. Giving attention to more traditional literary areas such as the British, European, South African, Russian and North American traditions, Cope is also interested in those writers who remain outside the mainstream. Here, the ‘muck-raking’ and working-class traditions of writers like Robert Tressell, Jack London and Howard Fast form part of a more general preoccupation with working-class and African-American culture which includes expressive forms such as the ballads and songs of nineteenth-century working-class British protest movements and the folktales and poems of African-American slaves. Cope’s elastic sense of ‘literature’ and ‘culture’ also leads him into areas remote from the dominant concerns of mainstream literary criticism: here, he gives enthusiastic attention to cultural forms as diverse as architecture, furniture, sculpture and painting and explores more contemporary popular forms such as cinema, pulp fiction, radio and the annual Cape Town ‘Coon Carnival’ celebrations. While Cope’s weekly column clearly owes much to a Romantic aesthetics, his loose reliance on a Marxist critical method, his ongoing preoccupation with the social function of culture, and his strong sense of the material ‘locatedness’ of literary-cultural forms and practices also suggests an influence which is often profoundly at odds with this tradition. This kind of conceptual blurring and borrowing, as we have seen, is not peculiar to Cope’s work, but is also evident in the many other examples of radical cultural-political debate in South Africa during this period.

Conclusion

What emerges most strongly in an exploration of the cultural discourses of the Communist Party in South Africa is the way in which literary-cultural issues are so

consistently and insistentlly tied to the larger imperatives of the struggle against the South African state. A clear reflection of Communist policy more generally, this is also an interesting early version of the 'culture-as-a-weapon-of-struggle' debates which animated academic discussion in South Africa in the 1980s and early 90s. In this earlier version, however, there is no debate, just a surprising amount of consensus in what is a fairly broad-based and heterogeneous cultural and political project. If cultural discussion is deeply informed by the exigencies of political struggle, the concern amongst South African communists (unlike their British counterparts) is less about the elaboration of an existing body of theory than the development of an inclusive cultural practice which will further the aims of the liberation movement. In terms of its real practical effects, South African Communists, particularly those of the Left Book Club variety, did much to democratise cultural access and circulate the texts of an influential left-wing canon, and made some progress towards the difficult task of forging a non-racial national culture. The extent to which these efforts remained locked into the social divisions created and fostered by the apartheid state is less a testament to a lack of political will than a reminder of the overwhelming imperatives of the larger material context. Whilst many South African Communists explicitly drew on and accepted the cultural philosophy of the Soviet state, it is clear that this was not experienced as limiting or constraining, and whereas there is a strong uniformity of response across many of these critics, people like Guy Routh and Jack Cope were able to move beyond the well-trodden paths to consider other possibilities. In the work of these two writers, as I have suggested, lie the most interesting examples of theoretical experimentation and application. Differences of approach and emphasis notwithstanding, there are a number of aesthetic assumptions which recur across the board: the preference for documentary realism, particularly the kind which penetrates the surface of random experience to reveal the underlying (Marxist) pattern; a tendency to privilege those expressive forms which explore the lives of ordinary individuals; and a strong endorsement of those works which promote an oppositional political view. If culture is regarded as an important political tool in the dissemination of counter-hegemonic perspectives, literary-cultural discussion itself also has an important role to play: 'the public sphere in the [communist] world of letters', in other words, becomes a fruitful site of provocative and oppositional public debate.

Notes:

¹ The South African Communist Party was initially known as the CPSA. Its name was changed to the SACP in 1953 when it was reconstituted as an underground organisation following the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 (Saunders 1988:532).

² For more details, see Steiner (1967:335-340) and Solomon (1979:237). For a more general history of Russian literature, see Hingley (1979).

³ On the significance of the Spanish Civil War for the British Left, see Hobsbawm (1994:161). For an account of Communist betrayals in Spain see, for example, Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* (1962).

⁴ My account of this period is drawn from Hobsbawm (1994).

⁵ The following account is drawn mainly from Allison Drew (2000), but is echoed in historical accounts from those inside the Party. See Simons and Simons (1983) and Lerumo (1971).

⁶ These comments arose during a discussion of an LBC lecture given by *Rand Daily Mail* writer, George Heard, in Johannesburg on the 13th March 1941. They were reported in the *Guardian* (20 March 1941:7).

⁷ Interestingly, as Drew points out, this does not seem to have seriously affected its ability to attract African members (2000:235). Aside from a successful anti-pass campaign launched in 1943, much of the work of the Communist Party during this period concentrated on the building up of trade unions (Simons and Simons 1983; Beinart 1994:126).

⁸ The Jewish Workers' Club was composed largely of Eastern European immigrants. The club concentrated on helping its members, many of whom could not speak English, to adjust to life in South Africa. Klenerman, for example, became involved in teaching English (Fanny Klenerman Papers A2031/a. William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand). There is also evidence of more light-hearted activity: "comradely" picnics and commemoration evenings were held which included speeches, songs, recitations and one-act plays (MSB1004 Communist Party Papers).

⁹ Cissie Gool and Betty Radford were among those invited to give lectures (Schreuders 1988:17).

¹⁰ For more information on the intellectual and social circles on the Left in Cape Town, see Schreuders (1988).

¹¹ Fanny Klenerman Papers A2031/a. William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.

¹² Directed mainly at Indian youth, the group was closely associated with the Non-European United Front. Its newspaper, which ran from January 1940 to April 1942, made no secret of its opposition to what it saw as a conservative older leadership, specifically the Natal Indian Association as well as individuals such as R.V. Selope Thema and D.D.T. Jabavu. The newspaper was owned by D.A. Seedat. For more details, see Switzer and Switzer (1979:33).

¹³ Fanny Klenerman, a socialist and trade union organizer who was expelled from the Communist Party in 1931, started a Left Book Club discussion group in central Johannesburg. Meetings were held in the Johannesburg Public Library. One of the most popular speakers was John Grey, a sociology lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand. Klenerman's bookshop, Vanguard Books, was also one of the first to import LBC choices (Fanny Klenerman Papers Autobiographical Material A2031/a. William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand).

¹⁴ In Cape Town, Dr Joan Searle gave a lecture on Leo Huberman's *Man's Worldly Goods* to an audience of about 50 people (*Guardian* 9 April 1937:6). In February 1941, the Cape Town branch enjoyed a "brilliant lecture" by Wulf Sachs (author of *Black Hamlet*) on Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (*Guardian* 13 February 1941). The LBC also addressed subjects of a more general nature such as a lecture on "South African Post-war Problems" by David Murray and "Tasks of the Left Movement" by Stefan Coetzee (*Left Monthly* 1 March 1941:10). Mr Franklin, lecturer in Economics and Commerce at Rhodes University College, gave a talk at the Port Elizabeth LBC on "Advertising and the Public" (13 February 1941:3) to an audience of about seventy. The address concerned the "anti-social effects of advertising" and "the flagrant misrepresentation" which had become commonplace in the industry.

¹⁵ Suspicion of left-wing literature in South Africa extended to issues of morality and sex. As Klenerman explains, hers was the first bookshop in South Africa to sell copies of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Fanny Klenerman Papers Autobiographical Material A2031/a. William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand).

¹⁶ There were three left-wing bookshops in Johannesburg: People's Bookshop, Salmon's Bookshop and Fanny Klenerman's Vanguard Books. Advance Books provided for the Cape Town market (Fanny Klenerman Papers Autobiographical Material A2031/a. William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand).

¹⁷ These activities are recorded in a short-lived newsletter of the Johannesburg LBC entitled *Left Monthly* which was launched in March 1941. It provides an invaluable (if brief) record of both the ethos and the activities of this lively movement. The Pretoria LBC reportedly held fortnightly lectures as well as short lunch hour talks (*Guardian* 20 March 1941:7).

¹⁸ The Johannesburg LBC supported the anti-Pass Campaign of March 1944. An advertisement read: "Everybody Welcome. No Colour Bar. Refreshments Free". Entertainments included "speeches, songs [and] sketches" (*Inkululeko* 4 March 1944:1).

¹⁹ The *Guardian* also reported on the activities of another LBC enterprise, the Unity Theatre Group. Consisting of around 200 members the Unity Theatre, headed by S.J. Rapp, announced plans to produce Irwin Shaw's *The Gentle People* as well as to produce play readings from Upton Sinclair's *Depression Island* (*Guardian* 27 March 1941:7). In May, the *Guardian* recorded the production of two other plays which dealt with "the problems that confront the working classes daily", namely an Afrikaans play entitled *Broers* and an English play called *The Great Philanthropist* (8 May 1941:4).

²⁰ This early workers' theatre, which clearly experimented with more improvisational and collaborative methods, is an interesting precursor to similar efforts towards the development of trade union theatre in South Africa in the 1980s. See, for example, von Kotze (1988).

²¹ A number of histories of South African theatre give brief attention to the Bantu People's Theatre. Generally this is a tangential focus to their more immediate concerns. See Coplan (1985) Couzens (1985), Orkin (1991) and Peterson (2000). Loren Kruger's study of South African theatre gives it much more attention (1999:74-75).

²² For a fascinating account of this pageant, see Kruger (1999:35-43). Precisely why a socialist would have been involved in this pageant has yet to be understood.

²³ Information about the group's early formation is hazy. According to Loren Kruger (1999), Dan Twala, who was secretary of BDS, invited van Gysegem to work with the Bantu People's Theatre in 1936. It would seem, then, that the BPT was already in existence prior to van Gysegem's arrival; there is, however, no record of any activities.

²⁴ The name was subsequently changed to the *Guardian*.

²⁵ Cyril Kantor's generally negative review of the performance gives some idea of the reactions of mainstream white critics (*The South African Opinion* 6 February 1937:12). For further discussion of Kantor's reviews in *S.A. Opinion*, see chapter 2.

²⁶ There is no record that the performances ever took place (Couzens 1985:176).

²⁷ "All those who were present went home delighted with this group's performance. Some even went away with aching stomachs as a result of the humour in there. Whoever did not go to these performances did not see a great story unfold." Translated by Mbongiseni Buthelezi.

²⁸ Routh explains the name change as follows: the company wished to "spread its wings...to cover all sections of the South African people" (*Guardian* 10 July 1941:3).

²⁹ In the 1950s Routh was involved, along with Fred Thabedi, Dan Poho, Bob Leshoai and others, in the formation of the Union of South African Artists, an organization which, according to Martin Orkin, was originally founded to protect the interests of African artists. Routh left for England some years later (Orkin 1991:72-73).

³⁰ *Tau* was written in Sesotho. According to Kruger, it was "probably the first play written in the vernacular to tackle contemporary politics, certainly the first vernacular production from an explicitly socialist perspective" (1999:75).

³¹ Interestingly, the Draft Constitution of the Bantu People's Theatre asserts a "non-political" stance (cited in Kruger 1999:58). It is difficult to square this claim with the record of the BPT's actual activities. Here, I go along with Kruger's suggestion that this claim can be read as an attempt to ward off unwanted government interference.

³² Switzer (1997:276).

³³ For more details, see Switzer (1997:274).

³⁴ *Umsebenzi/The Worker*, *Umvikela-Thebel/The African Defender* and *Inkululeko/Freedom* were more openly identified with the CPSA. The official Party papers had little to say on issues of culture, concentrating instead on conference reports, policy statements and discussions, reports on dissident activities, and calls for solidarity and various protest actions such as the "Refuse to Load Italian Ships Campaign" of the late 1930s. See Lerumo (1971).

³⁵ The list included Betty Radford, Brian Bunting, Sam Kahn, Yusuf Dadoo, Ruth First, H.A. Naidoo, Michael Harmel and Fred Carneson.

³⁶ The Durban and Johannesburg offices were established in 1941. A Port Elizabeth branch was set up in 1953 (Switzer 1997:275).

³⁷ Lessing makes an interesting point about the deeply hierarchical structures of the *Guardian* office. What she describes is an atmosphere of petty territorialism and protected privilege which went against all its radical claims. According to Lessing, "come the Revolution... here was an essential bit of Communist machinery all ready to fit into a power structure" (1995:350).

³⁸ In South Africa, racism and anti-capitalism were not necessarily incompatible, as the notorious slogan of early socialist groups in South Africa, “Workers Unite for a White South Africa”, bears eloquent witness.

³⁹ See, for example, the *Guardian* 16 January 1947:4.

⁴⁰ Brian Bunting was the son of veteran Communist Party member S.P. Bunting. Born in 1920, he brought considerable journalistic skills to his role as contributor and later editor of the *Guardian*, having worked on the *Rand Daily Mail* as well as the *Sunday Times*. He was elected to the Johannesburg District Committee of the CPSA in 1946 and later became a member of the Central Committee. (See Drew 1997:163).

⁴¹ Founded in 1939, *Inkululeko/Freedom* was originally produced co-operatively. In 1944, it came under the sole editorship of Michael Dipuko who was replaced in June 1945 by Edwin Mofutsanyana. Mofutsanyana remained editor until the paper was forced to close in 1950.

⁴² An article entitled “How to Write News for Inkululeko”, for example, put forward a definition of ‘news’, explained the difference between ‘facts’ and ‘opinion’, stressed the need to access the voice of “some important person”, and pointed to the importance of accuracy and brevity and the need to avoid potentially libellous views (8 July 1944:8). Interestingly, despite its almost total scepticism towards mainstream news, the advice from *Inkululeko* to its readers reproduces some of the more conservative aspects of the capitalist press.

⁴³ Moses K. Mphahlele’s poem entitled “The Ode of van der Byl”, for example, was an attack on the Pass Laws.

⁴⁴ Titles included Harold Strachey’s *Why You Should be a Socialist*; *Comrade Bill* by R.K. Cope, and H.G. Wells’s *A Short History of the World*. Geoffrey Durrant’s 1944 pamphlet was also listed.

⁴⁵ There were occasional reviews of LBC activities as well as some of the productions of the BPT, but these are rare.

⁴⁶ This conference was the first activity of the newly-formed, Non-European Arts Congress, described in *Trek* as “an organisation of African, Indian, Coloured and Malay writers, artists, composers singers and journalists” which was begun by “five non-Europeans resident in and around Johannesburg at the end of 1944” (25 January 1946:14). Not confined to those of left-wing persuasion (Vilakazi, for example, attended the first conference), there was nevertheless a strong left-wing presence.

⁴⁷ A review of Joshi’s book in the *Guardian* was appreciative on the whole, but objected to his “milk and water” political solutions (5 July 1951:11).

⁴⁸ In this article, the pronoun ‘he’ refers to artists in general, but also reflects the predominantly masculinist bias of the discussion more generally.

⁴⁹ A similar tendency is to be seen in the newspaper, *CATA*, organ of the Cape African Teachers’ Association. In this paper, the stark reality of malnutrition amongst African children is clearly of much more concern than the kinds of books they are reading.

⁵⁰ Drew describes Harmel as “one of the major CPSA ideologues” of the period. Born in 1915, he joined the CPSA in 1939, and became a member of the central committee in 1941. He was prominent in Congress Activities in the 1950s and lent his considerable talents to Communist-aligned publications such as *Liberation* and the *African Communist*. See Drew (1997:290) for more details.

⁵¹ Lionel Bernstein played a major role in the Communist Party during this period. Born in 1920 into a middle-class family, he attended a private school in Natal and subsequently studied architecture at the University of the Witwatersrand. He joined the Communist Party in 1939 while he was still a student. He was detained in 1960 and went into exile in 1963. (For more details, see Bernstein, 1999).

⁵² Mphahlele’s response to this criticism is recorded in *Down Second Avenue*: “This made me squirm, not because my shortcomings at the time were being spotlighted – I recognised them only too clearly – but because of the half-truths that the critic indulged in: a man who had, as a white man, never needed to carry a pass and go through the numerous humiliations that are the lot of the African (1980:165-6).

⁵³ Sam Kahn was born in Cape Town in 1911. He was a member of the central executive committee of the Communist Party in South Africa from 1938 to 1950. Increasingly a target of state aggression, he left the country illegally in 1960 and settled in Britain (Gerhart and Karis 1977:47).

⁵⁴ R.K. Cope Papers A953. William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand. Although there is no record of Cope’s involvement in the Communist Party, he was clearly well known in Communist circles. Ray Alexander, for example, describes him affectionately as “Comrade Cope” (Alexander 2004:204). According to Communist Party member, Pauline Podbrey, Cope (who would later marry Podbrey’s close friend Lesley de Villiers) was one of the few Natal whites with “left-wing views” (1993:65). Described by Podbrey as “dashing, erudite and worldly” (98), Cope moved to Cape Town in the early 1940s, and clearly found a place in the left-wing circles there. Podbrey’s account suggests a commitment that existed prior to Cope’s move to Cape Town.

⁵⁵ The entry in the first edition of the *Companion to South African Literature* (edited by David Adey, Ridley Beeton, Michael Chapman and Ernest Pereira) makes no reference either to Cope's biography or to his literary journalism in *Trek* and the *Guardian*.

⁵⁶ For a sense of Cope's achievements in relation to South African literary history more generally, see Chapman (1996, 2003).

⁵⁷ In certain respects, Cope followed the accepted view: reproducing a common perception of female frailty, he also went along with a widely-held notion that Schreiner's feminism was to some extent an impediment, and that *The Story of an African Farm* was poorly constructed.

⁵⁸ These hostilities are not unique to Cope. *Guardian* reviewer Lionel Bernstein is also disgusted by the "sordid portrayals of unrelieved degeneracy" in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and profoundly disappointed by the underworld preoccupations ("gangsters, touts, bullies, pimps and prostitutes") of Luigi Bartolini's novel, *The Bicycle Thieves* (*Clarion*, 24 July 1952:4).

⁵⁹ Willie McGee, a 39 year-old black truck-driver from Mississippi, was executed on 8th May 1951. He was convicted of raping a white woman despite the fact that there was evidence that the couple had been having a relationship for the last four years (<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAabzug.htm>. Accessed 18 January 2004).

Chapter 6

The ANC and the Congress Alliance: 'From Urban Gentlemen with Clean Hands to a Militant People's Movement'

This chapter examines four instances of cultural-political debate in South Africa in the post-1948 period, namely the Orlando-based community paper, *The Voice of Africa*, the Congress newspaper, *The Clarion* (and its numerous successors), the Transvaal Indian Congress paper, the *Spark*, and the pro-Congress publication, *Fighting Talk*. With the exception of *The Voice of Africa*, these publications explicitly articulate the emerging political vision of the newly-formed Congress Alliance, a broad-based liberation movement which was founded in 1953 in the wake of the Suppression of Communism Act. An independent publication, with close links to the ANC Youth League, *The Voice of Africa* is nevertheless very close in spirit to that of the Congress Alliance, evincing a similar urge to shrug off the conservatism of an older generation of leaders in the interests of forging a more militant non-racial opposition against the South African state. With regard to the newspapers of the Congress Alliance such as *The Clarion* and *Fighting Talk*, the pro-Communist cultural discourses of previous Party-aligned newspapers like the *Guardian* continue mostly unmodified under the impact of the new political alliance. What is new, however, is the greater visibility of the cultural-political debates of black South African critics. Here, while there are clear continuities with the Soviet-inflected cultural discourses of white South African communists such as Michael Harmel and Lionel Bernstein, there are also important differences, which speak to the dramatically dissimilar socio-political contexts from which these debates emerge. Lengthy public debates in *The Voice of Africa* also offer a fascinating window into the preoccupations of black South Africans during this volatile period in South Africa's history. What emerges in this particular instance is a forthright anti-colonial debate in which culture and cultural issues take centre stage.

The Voice of Africa

The Voice was an English-medium newspaper published by a group of African intellectuals living in the Johannesburg municipal township of Orlando. A rare instance of literary-cultural discussion in comparison with other publications associated with the

ANC, *The Voice* is also an example of a forthright anti-colonial critique.¹ While it responded, on occasion, to specific literary-cultural texts, its greater significance for this project lies in its participation in a more general anti-colonial debate. In this regard, its engagement with the meaning of an ‘African’ cultural identity, its relationship to Western culture, and its on-going critique of the cultural exclusions of the apartheid era offer some insight into the cultural-political preoccupations of African writers and critics during the period. What is intriguing about *The Voice* is that while its politics are those of an outspoken and unapologetic African nationalism, it simultaneously evinces a regard for Western ‘High Culture’ – expressed both at the level of style and content – and a decidedly ambiguous attitude towards indigenous cultural forms, which could well be interpreted as the unmistakable signs of cultural elitism and political ‘complicity’. In seeking to unravel this particular conundrum, I aim to respond in part to a growing critique of what has begun to be regarded as a kind of fetishisation of oppositionality in postcolonial studies.² While I have some sympathy with this attempt to complicate the fixed binaries of ‘complicity’ and ‘resistance’ in South African postcolonial criticism, I would nevertheless argue for the importance of situating these positions within a more explicitly foregrounded socio-political context.

On June the 8th 1940, *Bantu World* journalist, Walter M.B. Nhlapo, wrote an article condemning the deteriorating standards of the Johannesburg Bantu Men’s Social Centre. The Centre, it seems, had begun to attract a “motley crew of patrons” whose behaviour was not in keeping with the elevated traditions of this once respectable establishment. Alcohol, single women, people dressed in “sportswear” and “ordinary clothes”, as well as a tendency for patrons to keep their hats on while dancing were just some of the signs that “the veneer of civilisation [was] falling in this place.” These people, he wrote, have “lowered the value of [the Centre’s] erstwhile educative and social atmosphere”. A common enough feature of “‘tsaba-tsaba’ and marabi gatherings”, this kind of behaviour was out of place in a centre which had been established for the intellectual and cultural edification of a respectable African elite. “A place for such a person”, Nhlapo continued “is not the Centre, but a bench in the park” (5). A month later, another article by Nhlapo, this time on the behaviour of patrons at orchestral concerts (again at the BMSC), suggested that a more “orderly” state of affairs could be ensured if “simple courtesies” like “silence”, “applause”, “no fidgeting” and “no leaving while music is on” could be encouraged by means of signs held up at appropriate intervals during the concert (*Bantu World* 13 July 1940:12).

Nhlapo's views on 'civilised' behaviour had their counterpart in arguments on 'civilised' art. Disturbed by the ever-growing popularity of jazz music on the Rand, which, he complained, was lowering artistic standards and drawing people away from 'High Culture', Nhlapo advocated what he described as the less ephemeral pleasures of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Boswell, Beethoven, Schubert, and Handel. A "low type of noise full of cheap sentiment", jazz "has deafened and blinded our appreciation for art. Art's visage is too high to hit our senses, and our expressions are but a clumsy revelation of ignorance" (*Bantu World* 24 February 1940:14).³

Nhlapo's defensive early 1940s diatribes against an emerging urban working-class culture are an amusing example of a well-documented African elitism in contexts of colonial rule (Couzens 1985; Kavanaugh 1985; Orkin 1991). Elsewhere, invoking dubious narratives of African evolutionary progress, and deeply uncomfortable with a growing mass militancy in African politics, Nhlapo appears to reiterate the familiar stance of someone who has bought into the cultural and social hierarchies of Western societies.⁴ What is also interesting about these comments is that the kind of 'cultural capital' which Nhlapo implicitly invokes as the outward sign of social respectability includes not only the familiar cultural icons of Shakespeare or Schubert, for example, but also things like behaviour, accent, style of dress, manners and general demeanour, or what Pierre Bourdieu has described as a cultural capital which has in a sense become 'embodied'. This kind of deference to the fine social distinctions of the dominant culture is common: one need only look at newspapers such as *Bantu World*, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, and the Cape Town-based, *Sun*. It is against this background that I would like to consider the cultural politics of *The Voice*.

The Voice of Africa – edited by Es'kia Mphahlele, Isaac Matlare and Khabi Mngoma – ran from September 1949 to February 1952.⁵ Produced on a shoe-string budget in rough, cyclostyled form, this idiosyncratic community newspaper has been neglected by historians and literary critics alike. Completely absent from Mphahlele's autobiography, *Down Second Avenue*, it appears briefly in Peter Walshe's history of the African National Congress, but is erroneously linked with a number of pan-Africanist broadsheets produced by members of the ANC Youth League in Orlando.⁶ It was originally the inspiration of a small community discussion group, the Orlando Study Circle, whose members included Mphahlele, Mngoma, Matlare, Barney Ngakane and the afore-mentioned Walter Nhlapo. *The Voice of Africa* is a remarkable document of a particular place, a distinctive community and a peculiar historical moment. With virtually

no support from advertisers, bar a few local Orlando businesses,⁷ the costs of producing *The Voice* were borne almost completely by the editors themselves who were able to make use of printing and rooneing facilities provided by the South African Institute of Race Relations (Manganyi 1983:70). In a landscape dominated by white-owned African newspapers, at this time unashamedly engaged in the promotion of a conservative politics and cynically marketing first-world commodities to a fast-growing urban African population, *The Voice* was a rare example of an independent, black-owned newspaper. Rejecting those papers which “serve the interests of the capitalist, cold-blooded moneyman”, *The Voice* committed itself, instead, to a policy which was “guided by the needs of the masses” (September 1949:4). In stark contrast also to “that archangel of political cowardice” the *Bantu World* (January 1950:8), *The Voice of Africa* offered both a militant response to an increasingly repressive apartheid state and a scathing attack on the compromised politics of conservative African leaders.

Forthright, uncompromising and opinionated, *The Voice* gained a reputation for unrestricted and independent political comment on the contemporary South African scene. Primarily an organ of political commentary, analysis and critique, *The Voice* also acted as a township chronicle, providing news of local community events (particularly the numerous cultural and social activities of the popular Donaldson Community Centre) and addressing local community issues such as housing shortages, the high cost of transport, and the ever-present menace of the South African police. In this sense, as Mphahlele’s biographer puts it, it was “very Orlando in flavour” (Manganyi 1983:101), balancing a concern with a wider political scene with the more intimate address of a community news-sheet. With a substantial literary focus which included book, theatre and music reviews as well as short stories and poetry by Mphahlele, Mngoma and Nhlapo, *The Voice* can be said to prefigure the by now well-known literary renaissance which was to emerge in *Drum* magazine a few years later.⁸

Anxious to intervene in the impasse of South African resistance politics in the wake of the shock victory of the National Party in 1948, *Voice* writers asserted a strong African Nationalist project in the interests of radical political change. The paper was tolerant of a wide range of political solutions within this more militant nationalist position, and made a point of avoiding what it termed the unnecessary “political pea-shooting” (July 1950:2) of internecine political squabbles amongst the oppressed. In fact, the discussion group (The Orlando Study Group) from which the newspaper emerged seems to have been deliberately created in order to allow for the expression of the widest

possible range of political views (Manganyi 1983:70). One of its contributors, Isaac Matlare, for instance, was a member of the Progressive Forum, a Johannesburg-based group which fell under the wing of the All African Convention and the Non-European Unity Movement (Mphahlele 1980:212), both of which (by this time at least) were antagonistic towards the ANC.⁹ Zeph Mothopeng, a teacher at Orlando High, was a member of the Africanist wing of the ANC Youth League (Lodge 1983:80). Mphahlele and Mngoma, also teachers at Orlando High, were amongst a group of younger teachers at that time engaged in a struggle against the more conservative old-guard in the Transvaal African Teachers' Association.¹⁰ Walter Nhlapo is something of an anomaly in this group. Erudite and articulate, and still holding onto something of his earlier cultural elitism, Nhlapo stands out from his co-contributors on *The Voice* in his obvious sympathies with the more gradualist and reformist political approach of a familiar South African liberalism.¹¹

Clearly, the desire to avoid unnecessary “political pea-shooting” was an important factor in the newspaper’s success. A collaborative effort in which contributors were given a free hand, *The Voice of Africa* reflected the diversity of African opinion on the Rand during the period. Thus in October 1949, while Nhlapo argued that “white and black can live together” if whites would only “do away with prejudice” (October 1949:7), another editorial reacting to the upcoming celebrations of the newly-established Voortrekker Monument angrily denounced this “Klu Klux Klan orgy”, where “beards [are exchanged] for hoods”. “In these circumstances”, the piece continues,

it does nobody any earthly good...to court their co-operation or appeal to their finer feelings, or even hope for a change of heart. They do not want our co-operation, but our labour, on their own terms....If the whites ever possessed any finer feelings, they lost them over 200 years ago. We can do nothing else but give back hate for hate, bitterness for bitterness, insult for insult. (November 1949:1)

Contradictions of this kind inevitably make it very difficult to speak of any kind of unitary ‘voice’ in this paper. And, since the names of editors and many contributors remained a closely guarded secret in order to protect contributors from the wrath of the South African government and insulted community leaders, it is also virtually impossible to identify any of the original authors.¹² There were a few exceptions: Mphahlele’s articles were usually written under the by-lines ‘Naledi’ and ‘Edi Mento’, while Mngoma tended to use the initials K.B.M.V. Most of the other pieces were published under pseudonyms like “Orpheus”, “Scorpion”, “Pedagogue” and “Politicus Africanus”.

Responding to the 'spirit' rather than the 'letter' of *The Voice*, I have nevertheless persisted in identifying a collective position.

It was the job of its two main editors, Mphahlele and Mngoma, to bring some kind of coherence to the publication (Manganyi 1983:69), and while neither Mphahlele nor Mngoma were members of the African National Congress or its more militant Youth League wing, there is evidence that they were sympathetic to the more left-inclined position within the League.¹³ Working in an education system designed to reinforce racial inferiority and provide the oil for the wheels of an oppressive state, their experience as teachers acted as a strong politicising agent, and a spur to their efforts in the public domain. Both products of missionary education, and the recent recipients of university degrees, they had nothing but contempt for the recommendations of the Eiselen Commission on Bantu Education, and fought hard to prevent them from being implemented (Mphahlele 1980:168).

Interest in the bulletin appears to have been immediate and widespread. Manganyi puts circulation figures at around 500 copies. The paper was sold by a team of volunteers in Orlando for a penny and, according to Manganyi, it was "keenly sought after", it was "really hot stuff" and the "people lapped it up" (1983:70). An apology published in the second issue of the newspaper regretted that it could only meet a small proportion of the demands for the paper, and immediate demands from readers for a letters page would seem to confirm this claim. Even as early as the second issue, *The Voice* was very confident about its role and value in the community:

'The Voice' has come to the people of Orlando as a blessing. They feel that at last there is an organ which can voice their opinion freely and clearly, because it is a paper, free from the control of vested interests. Unlike many of the so-called African papers which most of the time echo the opinion of the capitalist daily papers, even when that opinion is inimical to African aspirations, "The Voice" will seek to serve the healthy interests of the Black Man. (October 1949:5)

It is worth noting the predominantly masculinist discourse of *The Voice*. The relegation of 'women's issues' to a separate section reinforces conventional distinctions between a male political and public domain and the private domestic concerns of the female world. Even worse, in contrast to the more Rabelaisian and anti-elitist elements of the paper more generally, articles in the women's pages have a decidedly more moralising and admonishing tone, even to the extent of reiterating some of the conservative cultural prescriptions of the dominant culture. So while in one article, women are chided for their snobbish and status-conscious behaviour – for using their

women's clubs to show "how many tea-sets they have" and "how expensive their wardrobes are" (April 1951:7) – they are also exhorted to refrain from unacceptable conduct like gossiping, flirting and laughing out loud. In the manner of a much more conservative cultural tradition, women's clubs are described as places of moral and cultural uplift: "You will as a member of a club with high ideals, learn that life is not a thing to be idled and frittered away; it is a sacred trust that implies true and laudable service to God and man. It is a school where one's boldness is restrained and where the vulgar outburst of coarse high spirits is repressed" (December 1950:13). When it comes to women, it seems, the cultural prescriptions of the dominant culture are anxiously applied rather than satirically dismissed.

Ranging in tone from angry denunciation to wry satire, the newspaper retained a kind of irrepressible equanimity and optimism even in the face of an increasingly repressive and intolerant political regime. Idiosyncratic, playful and ironic, *The Voice* was as critical of the conspicuous failures of the liberation movement as it was of the apartheid state. Reacting to widespread apathy and self-doubt amongst the oppressed, and fiercely opposed to what it saw as a deferential, self-serving and complacent African intellectual class, its principle concern was to educate, politicise and mobilise its readers in the interests of meaningful change. The first editorial begins:

There is a general political inertness among us. Nothing...ever awakens our political consciousness. For most of the time, we are apathetic and contemptuous, even destructively suspicious of any person or group of persons who try to revive our spirits. Then we sigh and feign boredom or cry down such attempts by nauseating criticism. Why do we wait until a few Whites have initiated any struggle on our behalf before we snap out of this hangover? Something MUST BE DONE...we are thwarted everywhere we go, thwarted by weak and undisciplined leadership; by our own indifference and corrosive habits...No. Self-pity never solved personal or national problems: it is a maladjustive reaction...Suffice it to say we know what we want. No nation ever attained its liberation by accident or by the visitation of some fairy godfather. (September 1949:1)

In this regard, *Voice* journalists tended to dismiss a liberal emphasis on the quiet politics of negotiation and compromise as ineffectual "gas-talk" (July 1950:1) and, like the ANC Youth League, reiterated the urgent need for a change in political tactics both as a response to a renewed state onslaught on black South Africans in the post-war period, and in relation to an increasingly visible "master-race cult" (November 1949:1). One of the incidents which invited strong condemnation from *Voice* journalists was the state response to the 1950 May Day protests against the Suppression of Communism Act. Clashes between crowds and a 2000-strong police force in Alexandra, Sophiatown,

Benoni and Orlando resulted in the deaths of eighteen people, three of whom were school children (Lodge 1983:34). According to *The Voice*, this was “government by a police-state where the masses of Non-Europeans are fodder for the sjamboks, batons and guns of savage policemen” (May 1950:1).

Afrikaner Nationalism, not surprisingly, came in for a great deal of criticism. In his regular column “Rabelais at Large”, Mphahlele took great delight in satirising a stereotypical Afrikaans racism through the figure of “Baas Pieter”, inhabitant of the fictional world of “Rooikop”. For the most part, Mphahlele’s satire in these columns was directed at a solipsistic and myopic Afrikaner Nationalism which could see no value in any culture other than its own. This satire was also concerned with exposing the moral bankruptcy at the heart of its supposedly Christian morality. In conversation with a friend, for example, ‘Baas Pieter’ on one occasion declares,

There is nothing Wordsworth or any other English poet ever wrote which can ever surpass DIE VLAKTE by Cilliers. There is also too much fuss about “daardie kerel” Shakespeare. The only good thing about that bloke was that he was a Nationalist. Instead of a learned man translating MACBETH into Afrikaans, he should have written a tragedy on Paul Kruger. (April 1950:4)

Admittedly, the joke depends on one’s acceptance of an unfavourable comparison between Afrikaans culture and supposedly superior English variety. In this, it is interesting to consider to what extent it is an exclusively Afrikaans culture which comes under attack in this paper, and to what degree British or European culture is subjected to a similar kind of scrutiny. I shall return to this question in a moment. In the meantime, it is important to recognise that as far as the general politics of *The Voice* is concerned, English liberals were also subjected to harsh critique. In this regard, while ‘Rabelais’/Mphahlele rudely exposes the ignorance and racism of someone like ‘Baas Pieter’, he also takes an occasional stab at the pecuniary underpinnings of the British Christian ‘civilising’ mission. An editorial published in October 1951, for example, while commenting obliquely on the question of the notorious ‘civilisation test’, also accuses white liberals of “[sowing] confusion among the very people who they claim to protect”:

[The Liberal’s] vision Splendid is that which envisages in a distant future a change in attitude on the part of his government towards the poor black slave; he believes in gaining an inch in 10 or 20 years towards his ideal; he believes in protests through the medium of the telegram, or memorandum, or deputations to the government to ease off the pangs that are imposed on us day after day; he has a hazy idea of equality among races, but gets mixed up in his qualifications of such quality e.g. the education or civilization qualifications – only those black people who can exercise the vote “intelligently” should have it....He is primarily a white man and

secondarily an apostle of freedom for all: hence his satisfaction in merely keeping within the Constitution...; hence his resentment of any revolutionary step we want to take because he would be involved. He is ready to wage any "fight" constitutionally, to avoid arrest, and then he tells himself that if he acted against the law, he would be depriving us of the help of other would-be white sympathisers... (October 1951:1)¹⁴

While often in sympathy with the ANC Youth League, *The Voice* preferred to remain independent. Mphahlele and Mngoma in particular were extremely wary of some of the more extreme forms of African Nationalism within the League which resisted co-operation with other groups in the interest of a purer form of African nationalism. Instead, they saw a more politically effective strategy in co-operation with others amongst the oppressed (August 1950:2). This strand in a broader South African nationalist project, which embraced both coloured and Indian groups, was a position which was to become the corner-stone of ANC policy from the late 1950s onwards. Once again in opposition to ANC leaders, *The Voice*, in a position which was close to that of the Non-European Unity Movement, advocated an uncompromising principle of non-collaboration "with all councils of state which are segregatory", and condemned "those who serve on such councils and boards, and any other people or organisations which seek to perpetuate these councils" (January 1950:11).¹⁵

The more militant brand of African nationalism in *The Voice* reflected a new mood in African politics. Post-war disillusionment with empty war-time promises had fed into a growing radicalism which was first seen in the emergence of popular, grass-roots resistance movements, and only later adopted by more aggressive elements in the ANC. In 1949, a document produced by the African National Congress Youth League was finally accepted at the annual ANC conference held in Bloemfontein. The ANC "Programme of Action" rejected the 'cap-in-hand' moderation of the Congress old-guard, and committed the organisation to the strike, boycott, civil disobedience and non-collaboration tactics of a more militant mass movement. In the words of ANC Youth League secretary, Joe Matthews, this was a transition from "urban gentleman with clean hands to a militant people's movement" (*Spark* 29 February 1952:1). A more assertive nationalist philosophy, inspired in part by the success of anti-colonial struggles abroad, it accommodated a range of positions from the Garveyite 'Africa for the Africans' stance to a more left-inclined, class-based analysis (Gerhart 1978; Lodge 1983; Walshe 1987). Whether they propounded an unapologetic ethnic nationalism or a more inclusive form of

anti-colonial resistance, members of the ANC Youth League were united in their dissatisfaction with existing ANC leaders.

Paradoxically, while those in the ANC Youth League tended to some extent to temper their criticism in the hopes of initiating reform from within the ANC, *Voice* journalists took little notice of such political niceties. In its insistence on following only constitutional methods of resistance and, at the same time, adopting an extremely patronising attitude towards the ‘backward’ poor majority, the “lethargic and slow-moving ANC” (November 1949:3) had become isolated from its people, its members concentrating their efforts on removing the obstacles in the way of their own economic empowerment. In this regard, the ANC was in danger of degenerating into “an exclusive fashionable club where the educated elite wallow in intellectual theory juggling”, imagining its domain as a kind of “Mount Olympus where intellectual demi-gods delight in chatting about the fates that harass the mortal masses” while sitting around “waiting for the masses to raise burnt offerings to them.” These intellectuals “have never shared the miseries, poverty and the helplessness which are the lot of ordinary man”. Content to “bask in the warmth of applause from their own clique, and to eat of the crumbs from the white liberal table”, they completely ignore the “ yawning gap between intellectual armchair theorists and the people” (March 1951:9).

The ANC was not the only target of this critique. African professional classes more generally are dismissed on countless occasions as “crumb-beggars” (July 1950:2), “belly crawlers” (March 1950:3), “black boot-lickers” (December 1950:4) and “yes men” (September 1950:4). In many ways, the early success and growing notoriety of this newspaper was directly linked to this on-going preoccupation with the conservative and obsequious politics of local community leaders. In an editorial entitled “Yes-Men must GO”, the writer rails against the class of “Good Natives” who “have failed the people by putting [their] personal interests first”. “Doormats of liberals”, and “oppressor’s puppets”, “their jobs have deadened their consciences” and they are “no longer able to tell the difference between selling out and playing straight” (March 1950:1). Instead, African leaders are urged to “come down to mother earth”, to “forget [their] intellectual snobbishness”, and to “stop wandering in the Utopia of [their] political ideals!” (November 1949:7). The extremely high levels of aggression and hostility in these attacks, which echo those of the NEUM debates discussed in chapter 4, bear testimony to the enormous significance of these issues for those concerned.

Particularly galling in this regard was the treacherous role played by teachers in fostering servility and deference to authority amongst the poor: instead of preparing the youth for their role in shaping a more just social order, teachers were “actively assisting the ruling class in keeping the non-white in a state of ignorance and servitude” (October 1949:3).¹⁶ Fort Hare University, for example, is described as “tower[ing] conspicuously above [other institutions] as the brightest beacon light of suppression and repression”. The products of such universities are “learned fools with haloes”, “harmless, angelic, subservient, insensible dullards” who are “shamefully indifferent to the cries, miseries and struggles of their people” (June 1950:1). Closer to home, in response to its willingness to go along with the new syllabuses of Bantu education, Orlando High School is dubbed ‘Orlando Tribal High’. Rural chiefs are treated no more politely. Described as the “hypnotised snakes” of government officials, who “[dance] to the jarring music of white domination” (October 1949:9), they are accused of being complicit in the oppression of their own people.

The hostility of these attacks had much to do with the particular character of Orlando itself. Described “as a glorified Marabastad” by Mphahlele (1980:203), Orlando was in fact held up as a model African township, set up by the Johannesburg council as part of its efforts to establish alternative accommodation to the more centrally-located (and, therefore, more threatening) free-hold African settlements like Sophiatown and Alexandra. Situated much further away from Johannesburg, Orlando tended to attract a slightly more affluent petit-bourgeois class, who had gained the reputation of being politically passive and unconcerned with the struggles of ordinary people (Lodge 1983:15,89). *The Voice* was unequivocal on this point, frequently berating Orlando residents for their “yellow-livered cowardice” (May 1950:1). Distinguishing between “two streams” in the Orlando community – the “majority group” of “loving and lovable good folk [who bear] their own burdens and miseries with a kind of stoical bitterness and tragic humour” and the group of “untouchables” who “live in houses you dare not breathe when you pass, lest the windows break” – *The Voice* made no secret of its primary allegiance to the poor (January-February 1952:17). Like the radical intellectuals in the NEUM, *Voice* journalists repudiated any connection, despite their own relatively more privileged position, with an elite African class, claiming instead the role of people’s champion: *The Voice* was “the journal of the people, by the people for the people” (January-February 1952:17).

In the same spirit, *The Voice* was also careful to distance itself from the conservative politics of ‘good native’ African publications like the *Bantu World*. Described on one occasion as a paper which “aims at keeping the African under the perpetual tutelage of the white man”, *Bantu World*’s argument that “‘both races can live in this country peacefully, not as masters and servants, but as partners, the white race playing the role of senior partner’” leaves “the whole concept of white supremacy intact”. “Small wonder”, the article continues, “that even a liberal author dubbed the BANTU WORLD ‘the voice of Caliban’ – a deformed sub-human slave of Prospero’s in the TEMPEST. This Frankenstein monster of white supremacy must go, whatever its shape or form” (June 1950:6). Another article also picks up on the paper’s conservative politics, arguing that its “milk-and-water prescription” is “chiselled in Darwin’s workshop, reared on the breast of Gobineau and graduand of the Rosenberg university” (July 1950:5).

Not surprisingly, *Voice* journalists made themselves profoundly unpopular with the leaders of the day, both black and white. Coming under the scrutiny of the Johannesburg Special Branch in the early 1950s – the school principal of Orlando High School, Godfrey Nakene, had secretly submitted copies of *The Voice* to the Transvaal Education Department – the paper was banned from Orlando High on account of its recklessly anti-government stance. According to Mphahlele’s biographer, Nakene felt himself personally attacked in its columns, and wasted no effort in getting Mphahlele and some of his co-conspirators fired. In spite of the fact that more than half the school came out in protest, Mphahlele and Zeph Mothopeng were dismissed towards the middle of 1952 (Manganyi 1983:71).¹⁷

Writing in 1961 about the emergence of Nationalist movements against forms of colonial oppression, Frantz Fanon points to a stage in the development of national consciousness when, feeling “like a stranger in [their] own land” (176), assimilated African intellectuals throw off their allegiance to the culture of the colonised and attempt to “renew contact with the oldest most pre-colonial springs of life of their people” (169). Although Fanon is critical of a tendency towards ‘exoticism’ and sceptical of the real political effects, his rejection of Western culture is described in positive terms as “a phase of consciousness which is in the process of being liberated” (177). After a period of “unqualified assimilation”, the native “decides to remember who he is”. According to Fanon, while the attempt to revive the ancient customs of a culture under colonial rule is an important stage in the development of national consciousness, what tends to emerge as

the liberation struggle slowly gathers strength is a “fighting culture” (179). Eventually abandoning their quest for an increasingly chimerical pre-colonial past, African intellectuals begin to identify with the revolutionary struggles of the masses.

The Voice of Africa presents an intriguing problem for this influential narrative of anti-colonial resistance. Whilst consistently promoting a militant African Nationalist project – at the same time, actively contributing to its progress in the practical realm of local community politics – *Voice* journalists were so steeped in the literature and culture of the West that these not only form part of a deeply-felt literary sensibility and overarching world view, but to some extent provide the very terms of reference in which an anti-colonial resistance is expressed. The left-inflected African Nationalism of *The Voice*, in other words, is articulated in an idiom drawn almost completely from the world of European literature: Podsnap, Don Quixote, Micawber, the Ancient Mariner and the Scarlet Pimpernel are just some of the literary figures which find themselves in the pages of *The Voice* as it negotiates, puzzles over, and rages against an increasingly oppressive regime. Similarly, Dickens, Austen, Shakespeare, Swift, Shaw, George Eliot, and the Romantic poets are all freely appropriated, cited, echoed and ‘rewritten’ in the interpretation and critique of the contemporary political scene.

In one example, the narrator of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* finds herself in unfamiliar company as she is unceremoniously enlisted in a materialist argument concerning the operations of ruling class power: “It is a truth universally acknowledged”, the article begins, “that the intellectuals of any nation hardly ever constitute a class of their own, but are as a rule the representatives of some class or other” (January 1950:8). Similarly, another short piece on recent Voortrekker celebrations in the Northern Transvaal town of Lydenburg concludes, “We know enough of Voortrekker ‘Christian plundering’ and rule by rifle [and] Bible...to be able to say like Banquo: ‘Thou hast it now...and, I fear, thou play’dst most foully for it’” (October-November 1950:6). In the most explicit re-writing of an example of Western literature, Milton’s “Paradise Lost” and Byron’s “Vision of Judgement” are subjected to extensive ironic re-fashioning in the service of an anti-colonial politics. Both these re-writings – prefaced with tongue-in-cheek apologies to the writers concerned – are significant examples of the confident and playful appropriation of Western ‘High Culture’ for radical political ends. In this regard, they bear a strong resemblance to a similar process of cultural refashioning and appropriation amongst a small Ghananian petit-bourgeois class in the 1920s and 30s

which is discussed in Stephanie Newell's study *Reading Cultures in Colonial Ghana* (2002:36).

Aside from this reliance on the resources of an imported culture, *Voice* journalists also insist on their right to unrestricted access to forms of European 'High Culture' (classical music, in particular), an access which was increasingly being withdrawn under the specious logic of the need to protect a traditional 'Bantu' way of life. Instead of "spurning those acquisitions which make him a stranger in his own land" (Fanon 1990:177), these African intellectuals conspicuously embrace them as part of a Nationalist project, and while there is anger at the distortions of pre-colonial history and culture, and pride in the achievements of the past, *Voice* journalists also evince an extreme sensitivity to any calls to return to pre-colonial traditions and culture.

What brought many of these issues to a head was a proposed series of concerts by world famous violinist Yehudi Menuhin which were confined to white audiences. Reacting angrily to comments in the press by the Minister of the Interior that Africans were unable to appreciate music in the "high idiom", Khabi Mngoma in his regular music column rejected the conclusions of these so-called "European experts on Native affairs":

[Government officials] believe that instead of concert halls where Africans can listen to symphony, arenas should be built for them where half-naked and dressed in their traditional costumes, they would sing and dance to their own music. Africans are wary of such statements because they reek of apartheid with all its nefarious motives, i.a. oppression. People may have their folk music, but it is absurd to confine a people's appreciation, composition and performance of music to their indigenous music. When people come into contact with Western culture, they die out, unless they adapt themselves to it. We are suspicious of "experts" who want to isolate us and probably annihilate us, as has been the fate of the American Red Indian, Australian Black Fellow, the Bushman and Hottentot, who are fast dying out. It is stupid to expect an African born and bred in town to take as active a part in indigenous music as the rustic. The former has the Western influence, and he comes into contact with music that is predominantly Western. To the urban African, indigenous African music can be as new and strange as it can be to the average European. (November 1949:10)¹⁸

In the context of calls from Africanists in the Youth League that Africans abandon Western culture altogether, these arguments were also to some extent directed at Africans themselves. Reacting to arguments by ANC Youth Leagers that Africans should "resign from anything European", the anonymous editor responds:

Perhaps they would rather see us play the isiba rather than the oboe, jungle drums rather than the piano; dressed in beshu instead of suits; live in huts instead of villas, and so on. When nationalism takes this trend, the attitude is strikingly uncongenial to progressive temperament: it is a poisonous and disastrous transition of thought that must narrow and stereotype men's outlook on things, forcing them to see no

glory in Debussy, Baudelaire, Maurois and others who are unAfrican. (December 1950: inside cover)

The tendency to conflate nationalist projects with the repudiation of Western culture is, to some extent, understandable. Cultural assimilation or Western acculturation, viewed with suspicion by many historians and literary critics, is regarded by many as a kind of litmus test of ‘oppositionality’, a clear sign that an individual has internalised the Manichean cultural divisions propagated by the West. In the same way, despite Fanon’s warnings, the corresponding return to the cultural resources of a pre-colonial state of grace is regarded with much more sympathy. Are these journalists examples of Fanon’s “race of angels”, assimilated African intellectuals – target for radicals and African Nationalists alike – who have “thrown themselves greedily upon Western culture” (1990:176), who regard their traditions with horror, and who have lost touch with their people and their history? Do we dismiss them as political sell-outs, members of a relatively more privileged elite, who value their financial security more than their freedom, and who preach moderation and argue along with colonial governments for the qualified franchise?

The Voice’s overt nationalism and its antipathy towards conservative African leaders make any easy assumptions about either colonial deference or reactionary politics equally difficult to defend. In order to unravel the conundrum of the assimilated colonial subject who simultaneously resists, we must look both at the range of arguments put forward, as well as their historical location. Primarily a reaction to cultural exclusion, and a claim to equal participation in South African cultural and political life, in a context in which pseudo-scientific racial theories still held sway, this position was also the strong assertion of a shared humanity, which explicitly drew on and echoed the powerful arguments of early nineteenth-century African-American intellectual, W.E.B. du Bois, whose arguments were quoted with enthusiasm in *The Voice*:

I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they all come graciously with no scorn or condescension. (October 1949:8)¹⁹

Mphahlele’s response to the afore-mentioned Yehudi Menuhin concert provides a particularly illuminating example of the way in which Africans reacted to the on-going cultural exclusions of the apartheid era.²⁰ Africans were eventually allowed to attend a

special concert for Africans only: Mphahlele's anger at this kind of cultural apartheid turns into a bitter and deeply ironic cultural display:

It is all over now – the Menuhin concert. I'm not a music critic and all that: I listened with my native ear, surrendered myself to the effect of that music. I don't know anything about E Minor or E Major. They mean nothing to my simple untutored mind...But Bach's concerto in E Major and Mendelssohn's in E minor brought that night "sensations sweet, felt in the blood, and felt along the heart" and "feelings too of unremembered pleasure," as Wordsworth says....So, if on hearing that music I may have seen some maiden "amid the alien corn", "faery lands forlorn," the crystal streams," a river flowing "through caverns measureless to man down to a sunless sea," or "meandering in a mazy motion," or "alone upon a branch that's bare, a trembling leaf left behind," or may have heard the wailing of "a God in pain," it is because the height of poetic truth reached by the composer...struck on the lyrical strings of my being. (April 1950:10)²¹

The strong repudiation of an ideology of racial backwardness and inferiority implied in this response was also accompanied by an interrogation of the meaning of a 'national' culture which was partly indebted to the work of British educationist, Victor Murray, also quoted in *The Voice*. In a defamiliarising strategy very like the opening pages of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Murray reminds his European audience of their debt to cultures other than their own:

For [the African] as for us the treasures of the world's past have been heaped up. We receive the treasures of the East, Rome and Judea, and have added to them. And if for us Barbarians and Gentiles, Plato thought, and Virgil sang and Jeremiah agonised, and Christ died, these things happen for the African too. For him also in later days Beethoven played, Leonardo painted, Shakespeare wrote, Pascal disputed, and James Watt invented. (October 1949:8)²²

Interestingly, this position – in which culture is understood not as the fixed preserve of particular nations but as the unstable and ever-shifting combination of many cultural streams – was also the position adopted in 1944 by the African National Congress Youth League, and reiterated in their "Basic Policy" of 1948:

Culture and civilisation have been handed down from nation to nation and from people to people, down to historic ages. One people or nation after another made its own contribution to the sum-total of human culture and civilisation. Africa has her own contribution to make. The Congress Youth League stands for a policy of assimilating the best elements in European and other civilisations and cultures, on the firm basis of what is good and durable in the African's own culture and civilisation. In this way, the African will be able to make her own special contribution to human progress and happiness. (Karis and Carter 1987:326)²³

If *Voice* journalists claimed an equal space for Africans in the broader field of cultural endeavour, thereby rejecting the 'backward' cultural designations of the apartheid state, it is also true that they held no illusions about Western pretensions to

moral and cultural superiority. While the hegemonic Western narrative of benevolent colonial emancipation and economic development is countered with stories of plunder and oppression, *Voice* journalists also remain less than convinced of the ‘morality’ of government policy in the present. Mphahlele’s article attacking the “stupidities of white civilisation”, for example, also provides an embryonic sense of an alternative (African) value system to counter the dominant Western model. Commenting on white “laziness”, “greed”, hypocrisy and an endlessly competitive spirit, Mphahlele, in the often rude and satirical guise of his alter-ego “Rabelais at Large”, takes much pleasure in reflecting on some of the peculiarities of white South African culture: “These white demi-gods...are afraid of laughing out loud; they get rich and starve and beat their labourers in the process, and when they are 80 and feel the tug of the grave, give out their money to charities so as to die peacefully...” His conclusion is deliberately flippant: “Civilisation?!! No-no-no-no, I refuse to go!” (August 1951:3) On a more serious note, his five-part series beginning in January 1951 entitled “What it means to be a Black Man” provides another important counterpoint to the moral pretensions of white civilisation by offering a detailed exposition of the role of the South African legal system in keeping non-Europeans in continued subjection.²⁴ Expressing the same mixture of moral outrage, hostility, anger and cynicism which characterised similar arguments in the NEUM (discussed in chapter 4), *Voice* diatribes against the moral superiority of the West are also marked by the defensive, even pessimistic, tone of those who are acutely aware of their own subordinate position in the larger society. If Western civilisation is, as one commentator described it, “fickle”, “foppish”, “bragging”, “cowardly”, even “stark raving mad” (June 1950:4), it has nevertheless effected a seemingly impenetrable hegemony.

Western moral superiority is also frequently contested on the grounds of culture itself. Regular literary reviews – which take up a range of literary-cultural texts including Oliver Walker’s *Proud Zulu* (April 1950:7), Adamastor’s *White Man Boss* (December/January 1950:11), the film *Jim Comes to Jo’burg* and popular magazines such as *Drum* and *Zonk* – become the vehicles for a forthright contestation of colonial rule. An overtly political criticism, very close in spirit to that of literary reviews in *The Torch* and *The Educational Journal*, *Voice* reviews test the claim of Western superiority against the many examples of racist distortion and stereotype in contemporary South African culture. A few examples will suffice. Rejecting the derogatory representations and “cheap roles” in “Jim Crow” films like *Jim Comes to Jo’burg*, one writer argues:

We have had enough of being called 'Jim' and 'boy' by Europeans without films like these adding to the humiliation. By all decent means let us have African film actors, but let the dignity of the African also be maintained. We should accept roles that show the African in better light than as incorrigible servant, the frightened animal, the blundering idiot, the criminal or dunce. We also have noble feelings and ambitions in life....Films like "Jim Comes to Joburg" and "Zonk" [magazine] are just one more grain of dust in the African's eye! (July 1950:10)²⁵

Turning to Afrikaans fiction, another writer looks in particular at the frequent recourse to racist descriptions like "kaffir", "outa", "ayah", and "meid", as well as words like "vreet" and "trop", which assume a connection between Africans and animals. Nothing more than an "immoral linguistic display" (April 1950:2), this fiction remains "outside of the realm of noble and dignified literature" (April 1950:2).²⁶ A review of John Buchan's *Prester John* is similarly concerned with inauthentic and inaccurate depictions of African characters, in particular the way in which such descriptions are made to serve the purposes of a conservative and disingenuous politics. John Buchan, the review begins,

[belongs] to the political school known as the Milner Kindergarten....A Word of Caution! The unwary reader must realize that John Buchan's mind, as revealed in this book, is typical of the mind of most whites which fabricate 'risings that must fail' in the hope of discouraging for all time any attempt on the part of the African to shake off the fetters of oppression. The author has lamentably failed to show that the rising would have been an undoubted success if it had had as its basis an effective organisational machinery. The writer should have created not a mere neurotic self-seeking visionary out of Laputa, but a more substantial personality with clearly defined political principles and a dynamic far-reaching programme: but then his Lordship was part of the ruling class! (April 1950:7)

By contrast, those white South African writers who consciously oppose the distortions of colonialist histories are treated much more sympathetically. In this regard, Oliver Walker's *Proud Zulu* and Adamastor's *White Man Boss* are both singled out for their more progressive reading of South African history. While Walker, for example, succeeds in showing "the dishonesty, the chicanery, and the complete lack of moral scruples" which characterised the Boers in their dealings with Africans, he also evinces a clear sense of the equally duplicitous role played by "the representatives of Her Majesty the Queen" (April 1950:7).

The over-riding preoccupation with the politics of literary-cultural texts is also discernible in two responses to the recently launched *Drum* magazine. An editorial entitled "The False Beating of Drums" dismisses the paper's claim to an apolitical position as hypocritical and insincere. In an assessment which comes very close to the cultural discourses of the South African Communist Party, this writer makes the point that no text is apolitical: "CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY is written by a liberal who

preaches liberalism – that’s political thought; ‘Biography of Aggrey’; ‘Migration into Africa’ (a gigantic guess from a professorial chair passing off as history) – that’s also political propaganda. ‘Chieftainness Molitzie culls her cattle’ is political propaganda to influence other reserves to cull their stock instead of demanding for more land” (20 April 1951:1). Whether this magazine is “purely literary or musical or both”, this writer concludes, you will “find yourself caught up in our political maelstrom” (20 April 1951: inside cover page). Because of its refusal to confront political realities in South Africa, this newspaper will remain a “muffled” drum which will “fail to portray the real spirit of Africa” (August 1951:2).

As the above argument suggests, a simple equation between Western acculturation and political ‘complicity’ would have failed to offer an adequate account of the distinctive cultural and political preoccupations of *The Voice*. In the first place, as many of the extracts suggest, *Voice* journalists understood very clearly that any attempt to renew contact with pre-colonial culture as part of a developing African Nationalist project was more likely to hinder than advance their cause. Cynically manipulated by the state as an excuse for excluding Africans from full participation in the economic, political and social life of the country, the restoration of indigenous cultures which went under the name of ‘re-tribalisation’ had become the disingenuous justification for apartheid segregation and oppression. Cultural difference was actively entrenched in order to show up the supposed superiority of Western civilisation and thereby justify oppression. As an African, to embrace ‘indigeneity’ in the context of apartheid oppression was to provide support for existing government policies, a move which almost certainly guaranteed one’s political and economic isolation. As one writer put it, to assert the value of a pre-colonial culture was to become the spectacle of curio-seekers, anthropologists and musicologists (June 1950:3). For the same reason, any recourse to notions of an “African mind or African psychology” (August 1951:2) in the South Africa context would play into the hands of the apartheid government. In their outright rejection of this concept in favour of a more “universal” understanding of human psychology (April 1951:1), *Voice* writers advocated a position significantly at odds with the discourse of ‘negritude’. That cultural choices of this kind are inextricably tied up with the particular historical contexts in which they emerge becomes even clearer when one compares the position of *Voice* critics with Sol T. Plaatje’s very different arguments – briefly alluded to in the preface to his novel, *Mhudi* – regarding the need to preserve and promote indigenous knowledges and culture (1930:11). That political strategy, which still

retained some force in the early twentieth-century, was now regarded as a form of political suicide.

Of all *The Voice* critics, Mphahlele's response to these issues is the most explicit. Drawing on an influential critique of contemporary anthropology by Diederich Westermann,²⁷ Mphahlele argues that Africans who attempt to rescue their cultures from the denigrations of typical colonialist attitudes remain unhelpfully fixated on the past instead of engaging with the many demands of the present. In an argument which clearly anticipates Fanon's discussion of a similar issue in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Mphahlele considers the way in which Africans

came to the anthropologist for comfort and consolation if they happened to lose faith in their primitive past. As soon as they felt confident again that there was a stage in their past when they were no longer just animals but had social codes and well-organised governments, they sat down and lived in the glory of the past, forgetting that the present should claim the greater interest. We see the dangerous effects of this outlook among us in S. Africa today, as the government is using it to put a stop to our advancement. (14 August 1950:8)²⁸

In the context of South Africa in the 1950s, then, the conspicuous display of Western cultural 'proficiency' becomes a conscious strategy of political resistance. In this sense, despite its deep affinities with Western culture, *The Voice* articulates a position which is in fact closer to Fanon's "fighting phase". Recognising the value of the past, *Voice* journalists are clear that it is the present that demands the greater attention. Eager to embrace the reality of an industrialising and urbanising society, *Voice* writers were also very sceptical of reified indigenous cultural practices which, they argued, were often cynically manipulated by the state for conservative ends (14 August 1950:8).

While Mahmood Mamdani (1996) cautions against those explanations of South African society which treat South Africa as a special case, it seems to me that the response of African intellectuals outlined above cannot be understood without some acceptance of the peculiarity of South African racial policies in the early 1950s. I do not wish to exaggerate the distinctions between the segregatory initiatives of the Smuts government and the elaborate apartheid engineering which superseded them. The newly-elected Nationalist government, however, was determined to reverse a worrying trend which had accelerated during the Second World War, namely the massive increase in the numbers of Africans settling in urban areas in response to crippled rural economies and deepening poverty levels. In this sense, the Nationalists embarked on what Mamdani describes as a process of "de-urbanisation", an attempt to reinstate 'tribal' authority in a much more systematic way than the previous advocates of trusteeship had ever dreamed

possible. For the likes of Mphahlele and his colleagues, the most glaring indication of this policy change was the establishment of differential systems of education for 'Whites and 'Non-Europeans', and an increasing reliance in official discourse on the notion of 'Bantu culture'. This 'moment' in the history of resistance in South Africa, then, is a peculiar one: Africans who had benefited in part from the sectional privileges bestowed on them as a result of a divide-and-rule policy which sought to create an educated elite with a stake in the system now face the inevitable prospect, along with everyone else, of being pushed back into the ghetto of a disgraced cultural identity.

The complexities of historical context notwithstanding, there are a number of other compelling reasons why it is more appropriate to understand *The Voice* as an example of anti-colonial 'resistance' rather than political compromise or 'complicity'. In the first place, *The Voice* articulates a version of African Nationalism which is very far from the gentlemanly and self-serving politics of an older generation of ANC leaders. This is evident in its overt emphasis on the political and economic emancipation of all South Africans, its fervent anti-elitism, its strong identification with the struggles of the poor majority, and its deeply-felt unease with all forms of social hierarchy and privilege. In this sense, *The Voice* articulates a Nationalist project which recognised in the poor majority not just a tool of resistance, a powerful 'muscle' of revolution to be abandoned as soon as power had changed hands, but one which worked towards creating a social order in which the working classes are not left out in the cold while a new black elite prospers. In this regard, it is important to note that of all the issues which emerge in the pages of this newspaper, the problem of the petit-bourgeois sell-out is considered by far the most urgent. Whilst the intensity of this attack on collaborationist leaders is partly a result of sensitivity about their own relatively more privileged position, it is also a powerful attack on the social and cultural distinctions which sustain the deeply entrenched inequalities of Western capitalist societies, an argument which, interestingly, echoes the position of NEUM intellectuals discussed in chapter 4. In other words, in their repudiation of notions of cultural 'respectability', in their rejection of 'civilisation tests', and in their explicit attacks on the elitist cultural preoccupations of conservative petit-bourgeois leaders, *Voice* journalists articulate a forthright opposition to the routine social exclusions of the dominant culture. To be clear, what *The Voice* represents is not the conservative politics of a socially aspirant petit-bourgeois elite. Nor is it the kind of snobbish defence of Western values against a 'debased' African working-class culture represented in Walter Nhlapo's attack on a new generation of patrons at the BMSC.

Strongly repudiating existing class and race divisions amongst the oppressed, *The Voice* expressed an unapologetic Rabelaisian ‘up yours’ to the dominant culture, a refusal which both rejected its premises and mocked its pretensions. What is rejected is not Western culture as such, but the wider set of social relations of domination and subordination in which the acquisition of Western ‘cultural capital’ figures as both powerful signifier and determinant of social dominance and power. A strong affinity with Western culture, in other words, does not necessarily signify an acceptance of the fine social distinctions upon which this culture is built. My argument is that in order to assess the ‘complicity’ or ‘resistance’ of particular examples of African colonial response, then, it is necessary to move away from the indeterminacies of cultural allegiance to consider a more practical politics. Anti-colonial resistance, in other words, is best understood not in terms of cultural identity but as the articulation of a particular political stance, one which is based on an overt contestation of the race and class exclusions of the dominant social order.

The Congress Press

In 1953, a new liberation organisation forged from the distinct political traditions of South African liberals, communists, and a number of racially-defined liberation organisations such as the South African Coloured People’s Organisation (SACPO) and the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) came to prominence in South Africa. The 1950s in South Africa, a time of increasing prosperity for whites, was also a period in which a strong mass-based protest movement finally began to find its political feet. The tremendous success of the 1952 country-wide Defiance Campaign, the moving and powerful symbol of the women’s 1956 anti-pass demonstrations at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, and the extraordinary effort of community mobilisation and democratic process which came to the fore in the creation of Freedom Charter, all speak to the success with which a new people-oriented, non-racial political alliance responded to the changing political conditions of a country which was rapidly approximating the status of a fully-fledged police state (Lodge 1983). In this regard, the story of this period is also one of a dramatic increase in state repression. According to Tom Lodge, by the end of 1955, 42 ANC leaders, 40 members of the predominantly white South African Congress of Democrats and 19 SAIC members had been banned (1983:76). Worse was still to come: in 1956, 156 of the most prominent members of the South African liberation

movement were arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the state. The notorious Treason Trial, which dragged on for the next five years, had a devastating effect on the ANC and the Congress Alliance, robbing it of many of its most experienced leaders (Lodge 1983:76).²⁹

What of the South African Communists during this period? Under the umbrella of what came to be known as the Congress Alliance, South African Communists to some extent discarded a left-inflected political analysis in favour of the more immediate and practical concerns of an emerging non-racial African Nationalism. The publication most obviously connected with this new political vision was the *Guardian* (discussed in chapter 5), forced after its banning in 1952 to change its name to *The Clarion*, then later *People's World*, *Advance* and *New Age*.³⁰ While continuing to express a predominantly pro-Communist outlook, its greater significance in the 1950s lies in the extent to which it began to reflect the views of the ANC and the Congress Alliance. As Andre Odendaal and Roger Field observe, "by the mid-50s, [the *Guardian*] had become the semi-official mouthpiece of the ANC, the 'weekly heartbeat' of the liberation movement" (1993:xi). These papers along with *Spark*, organ of the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress, and Ruth First's pro-Congress *Fighting Talk* are the subject of the rest of this chapter.³¹

Looking at literary-cultural discussion in the Congress papers and *The Voice* respectively, one is immediately struck by the differing cultural priorities of the two publications. These differences clearly speak to the enormous differences between the material contexts in which these debates emerge. While *Voice* writers, for example, are primarily concerned with questions of cultural access, exclusion, and identity, white Congress critics tend to concentrate on the much narrower field of the text. This focus, of course, derives from a much more 'worldly' sense of the role of literature and art in either sustaining or challenging hegemonic views. Nevertheless, where white Congress critics unthinkingly assume their right to cultural access, no such privilege is available to black South Africans. This is the ground, rather than the role of literature/culture in furthering the liberation struggle, on which the struggle is fought.

There are clear similarities between the cultural-political emphases of the *Guardian* and those of the post-1952, pro-Congress press, and with many of the same critics continuing to write for the pro-Congress publications like *The Clarion* and *Fighting Talk*, this is hardly surprising. Amongst Congress critics, culture continues to be widely-regarded as an important tool for political change, its function either to unmask and expose a 'truth' which is denied in the dominant culture, or to provide inspiration

and hope for the on-going struggle. In their concern for 'social significance' and literary verisimilitude, and in their emphasis on 'positive', inspiring literature, Congress critics for the most part continued to rely on a Soviet-inspired aesthetics, and did not depart from the well-established formula of the *Guardian* approach. If there were any changes in literary-cultural response during this period, it was only that the essentially political task of literary-critical discussion was carried out with an even greater confidence and sense of purpose than before. In a rapidly deteriorating socio-political context, Congress critics were even more convinced of the practical and political value of a leftist critical approach.

A spate of novels published during this period, which reflected on the personal, familial and social effects of apartheid legislation in the 1950s, provided ample opportunity for Congress writers to engage with the urgent questions of the day. In this regard, critics such as Lionel Bernstein and Michael Harmel, amongst others, continue their cultural brief in the post-1952 period with an almost microscopic attention to political content. In all cases, 'truth-value' and political significance are tested against the particular political criteria of a leftist point of view. Gerald Gordon's 1952 novel, *Let the Day Perish*, for example, which explores the issue of 'passing for white', is taken to task for its focus on the experience of 'passing' rather than the more devastating and politically significant experience of having to endure the social stigma of remaining 'coloured'. By restricting his fictional interest to the character that manages to escape his coloured identity, this writer argues, Gordon ignores the much more pertinent social issue of the effects of the colour bar on ordinary South Africans, the "suffering [it brings] into the homes and lives of innocent people" and the way in which "it condemns whole communities to a life of poverty and inferiority" (*Advance* 13 November 1952:7).

If Gordon's novel falls short because of its inability to confront a difficult socio-political issue, Peter Abrahams's *Path of Thunder* is weakened by an unnecessarily pessimistic political outlook. According to Lionel Bernstein, Abrahams has "lost his ear for the idiom and turn of phrase of his people" (*Clarion* 24 July 1952:4). What concerns him more, however, is that "the struggle for a free and happy life" turns out to be "a ride into a cul-de-sac". Bernstein's negative judgement raises interesting questions about the problems of writing realist fiction. In dealing with a socio-political 'problem' such as love across the colour bar, Bernstein writes, Abrahams is to some extent restricted by the pressures of historical circumstance: "[the characters] can either brazen it out, and spend the rest of their days fighting against the colour bar...or they can run away to other lands

where miscegenation is no crime, or the lovers [could be] killed by accident or lynch gangs". For Bernstein, the writer's pessimistic choice to end his novel with violent death rather than successful transcendence leaves the reader feeling as though "South Africans were trapped in a cage from which there was no way out". Clearly invoking a Soviet-inspired preference for heroic stories of brave resistance, Bernstein compares this "dead end philosophy" (24 July 1952:4) with the much more inspiring story of Howard Fast's *Spartacus*. While successfully managing to convey the deep disappointment of the slave defeat, the author nevertheless "contrives to leave us feeling that their revolt has been worth while – that it has added something, not only to the lives of many individuals but also to the story of mankind as a whole". This "devastatingly true picture of caste society and the rot that afflicts its rulers" is of particular relevance to South African readers who will scarcely be able to miss the obvious political parallels (*Advance* 16 April 1953:7).

Harold Bloom's *Episode*, reviewed by Alan Doyle, is another work of fiction which exposes some of the unpleasant realities of contemporary South African society. Once again, the test of 'verisimilitude' is the most important determinant of literary success. A "powerful" and "compelling" story, it is appreciated primarily for its accurate dissection of the brutality of the South African state: "I do not think the hard inhumanity of the police mentality towards the African has ever been exposed like this in South African literature before...Paton blunts it, and the others just ignore it. This is just how the police think; just how they behave. We know it and we nod our heads in agreement...Ja, that is South Africa". The same test of political 'truth' – this time even more explicitly aligned with a leftist point of view – provides the basis for his argument that the novel nevertheless fails to portray "the work of the liberation movement in its true light". Doyle concludes, "And, in case someone is quickly preparing to interrupt me by saying this is art not politics, in so far as it is not quite true it is also inartistic" (*New Age* 10 May 1956:6).

That Cold War hostilities and a powerful Soviet cultural orthodoxy still had an impact on the literary-critical preoccupations of South African Communists during this period is starkly revealed in Lionel Bernstein's review of Norman Mailer's novel *Barbary Coast*. In an uncharacteristically spiteful outburst, Bernstein relies on a typical Soviet conflation of the 'pornographic' and the 'politically incorrect' to denounce what he regards as Mailer's sexually explicit and morally dubious attack on the Stalinist regime: "ooz[ing] Trotskyite slime in large doses", Mailer's defence of the "grey-haired man who died in Mexico with an axe buried in his brain" has ensured that his book will

be “stamped 100 per cent American by the Un-American Committee” (*Clarion* 24 July 1952:4). Five years later, however, there is some evidence of a slightly more circumspect approach to the perceived ‘truth’ of the Stalinist view. A number of articles appearing in the *New Age* in the late 1950s respond positively to the much more relaxed, less prescriptive political and cultural climate under Krushchev. In these articles – many of them reprints of overseas pieces – there is a new willingness to confront the cultural dogmatism of the Stalinist period. According to this writer, it had resulted in a sterile art of cardboard cut-out characters, “positive heroes” and the “false-hearty laughter” of a uniformly rose-tinted view of Soviet life (*New Age* 16 July 1959:4).³²

While the above examples for the most part replay the standard moves of a well-established Communist cultural criticism, there were a number of articles which offered a more original application of the basic template. The first of these is Michael Harmel’s engaging four-part series on the life and work of Olive Schreiner. Written on the occasion of the 1955 centenary celebrations of her birth, this series is worth singling out, not only for its scholarly breadth, energy and focus, but also because it offers a significant alternative to the literary judgements of the mainstream press. The 1955 centenary celebrations coincided with a flood of new critical appraisals of Schreiner’s work. A quick survey of reviews and articles in publications like *The Forum*, *Jewish Question* and *The Listener*, for example, reveals a number of recurring themes: a discussion which generally shied away from political questions (and which tended to restrict itself to mainly to analysis of *The Story of An African Farm*), it was also marked by something close to an obsession with the ‘problem’ of whether or not Schreiner was a ‘genius’ or just more ordinarily ‘neurotic’. Coupled with this fascination with Schreiner’s emotional life is the related tendency to locate her perceived literary ‘failures’ in the biological fact of her ‘femaleness’. Thus for example, Edgar Bernstein concentrates on her tendency to suffer “periodic fits of suicidal depression”. “Restless”, “neurotic”, “suspicious in personal relations” and “difficult to live with” (16), Schreiner was “driven by the need to find expression for her conflicts” and to work out her many problems in her fiction (*Jewish Affairs* April 1955:16-17). Similarly, J.P.L. Snyman a few years earlier suggests that “we are...inclined to consider certain neurotic qualities in Olive Schreiner as indications of great genius” (1952:10).³³ The relegation of women writers to the status of abnormal freak is a common enough trope in the history of male (and sometimes female) responses to women’s writing (Poovey 1984; Battersby 1989). South African critics, bolstered by the deeply conservative gender politics of the 1950s era, are

clearly quite happy to continue in the footsteps of their British and North American counterparts.

In sharp contrast, Michael Harmel is one of the few South African critics to see in the fact of Schreiner's female gender identity not a biological limitation or weakness but a material reality which may have had a constraining and debilitating effect. In this regard, he draws attention to the "tremendous strength of character and intellect" which lies behind the achievement of *The Story of an African Farm*, written at a time "when prejudice against women writers was rampant" (*New Age* 24 February 1955:11). Similarly, while most mainstream critics find something deeply objectionable in Schreiner's feminist sympathies, Harmel not only gives them central place, but also understands and appreciates her symbolic and material importance as an icon of the Western feminist movement:

If we...see in many parts of the world today women entering parliaments and professions, taking their place in industry and commerce and in social life as partners and equals, this is in no small measure due to the labours of pioneer emancipators like Olive Schreiner. A brief half century ago male 'baaskap' and exclusiveness went almost unchallenged. The idea of a woman professor, scientist or M.P. was as unthinkable to the arrogant, male-dominated society of the day as that of an African Cabinet Minister would be to Dr. Strydom or Dr. Verwoed". (*New Age* 10 March 1955:7)

Harmel makes much of Schreiner's "passionate sincerity and eloquence" on behalf of women's rights, an intervention which, he argues, "swept aside...the cobwebs of Victorian convention and ignorance" (*New Age* 24 February 1955:7). His interest in Schreiner's feminism derives in part from his ability to appreciate the more discursive and philosophical elements of Schreiner's fictional style, elements which many South Africa critics tended to dismiss as tangential to her other more concrete fictional concerns. It was the "daring originality" of these ideas which "stirred literary and intellectual London in the 'eighties'" and placed "this young governess from the Karroo in the advance guard of European thought" (*New Age* 24 February 1955:7). Similarly, in a point which anticipates 'Womanist' responses to the mainly middle-class preoccupations of Western feminist literary criticism, Harmel appreciates the way in which Schreiner's advocacy of women's rights is situated within a much broader human struggle: far from "being a narrow feminist, seeing only the women's problems in society", Schreiner was the "courageous champion of the oppressed, the weak and exploited, wherever they might be" (*New Age* 10 March 1955:7).

Harmel's central aim in this series is to establish Olive Schreiner as the inspirational example of a courageous and intelligent South African radicalism. In doing so, he consciously opposes what he regards as the misreadings and distortions of conservative mainstream criticism which tended to suppress the more challenging aspects of her work by remaking her in its own more conservative bourgeois image (*New Age* 24 March 1955:7).³⁴ Harmel's hostility to the conservative critical establishment and his efforts to counteract its influence echo those of Jack Cope a few years earlier (discussed in chapter 5). Particularly critical of the way in which so much of her work has begun to fall outside of the purview of contemporary critical attention, he consciously extends the discussion beyond *The Story of an African Farm* to include works like *Trooper Peter Halket*, *Closer Union*, *From Man to Man* and *Woman and Labour*. For Harmel, Schreiner was a "fearless fighter against injustice", a bold, iconoclastic "people's artist" (*New Age* 10 March 1955:7), and a "revolutionary by nature and intellectual conviction" (*New Age* 17 March 1955:7) whose work remains startlingly relevant to present day South African concerns. Never one to "escape from reality into an 'ivory tower'", she entered "passionately into the lists in the cause of human freedom" (*New Age* 10 March 1955:7).

Harmel's distinctly more politicised criticism also moves beyond Schreiner's achievements as a writer of fiction to her role as public intellectual and activist, something which we have seen was also of interest to Unity Movement critic, Dora Taylor. Drawing on a wide range of sources, which include pamphlets, political speeches and private letters, Harmel highlights her opposition to the South African War, her championship of the rights of women and Africans, her denunciation of British Imperialism, her support for the South African trade union movement, and her later sympathies with Marxism. If he tends to overstate Schreiner's radicalism, he is also one of the few South African critics of the period to take her seriously as a writer, intellectual and activist.

Another example of a bold iconoclastic South African criticism is to be found in the work of long-standing Communist Party leader and *Guardian* journalist, Sam Kahn. Following on from his earlier critique of T.S. Eliot's conservative stance on education, published in the *Guardian* in 1950 (see chapter 5), a further article in *Advance* tackles Eliot's reactionary politics. Commenting on Eliot's statement that he is a "classicist in literature, a royalist in politics and an Anglo-Catholic in religion" (cited in *Advance* 14 January 1954:4), Kahn issues the following fiery response: "His classicism [was] soaked

up in his youth like a piece of blotting paper – blotting paper steeped in European culture; his Royalism is a snobbish way of ignoring decaying society, an escape from bad-smelling reality to the rose gardens of fairyland” and his “Anglo-Catholicism is class interest masked in the pretension of high moral purpose with no spark of feeling for the poor or oppressed, with no essential respect for humanity.” According to Kahn, T.S. Eliot’s poetry is “reactionary, anti-Semitic, people-hating verse” (*Advance* 14 January 1954:4). Targeting both his conservative politics and his aristocratic elitism, Kahn pays particular attention to Eliot’s antipathy towards the values of the French Revolution, his support of pro-Fascist political organisations in France, and his anti-Semitic arguments in *After Strange Gods*. Interestingly, it is a judgement which is completely at odds with Christina van Heyningen’s argument regarding the humanising possibilities inherent in a close reading of Eliot’s work (see chapter 1).

An article on Sigmund Freud, entitled “Put Sex in its Proper Place”, is a rare exploration, in Communist cultural criticism more generally, of the implications of a materialist dialectics. Here, Kahn takes issue with what he regards as Freud’s abstracted and idealist sense of human sexual behaviour: in Freud’s analysis, Kahn argues, “sex [has become] divorced from the real and actual life process, separate from the social and economic relations of society and the individual’s place within them.” There are similar weaknesses, he asserts, in a Freudian understanding of the workings of the human mind more generally: in a classic anti-idealist formulation, Kahn makes the point that “matter is not the product of mind. On the contrary, mind, thought and consciousness itself is the highest product of matter”. The consequences of this idealist approach in relation to the more practical demands of psycho-therapy are that “[i]n the majority of cases, it is not a question of curing a neurosis or mental illness.... It is a question of the whole environment of our capitalist society which produces and maintains...its huge and inevitable quota of fractured minds and mental disturbances”. Instead of adjusting people to an essentially maladjusted society by removing the symptoms of disease, he argues, “let us remove the basic causes of it” (*Advance* 8 October 1953:7).

Alex La Guma’s weekly column “Up My Alley”, published in *New Age* between 1956 and 1962, introduces a more popular element into what so far has been a somewhat esoteric debate.³⁵ A column which offered brief and witty commentary on aspects of the contemporary South African scene, its engagement with literary-cultural questions was tangential to its main concerns, but nevertheless worth exploring. Pieces like “Dead end Kids of Hanover Street” and “Identical Books”, for example (collected in Andre

Odendaal and Roger Field's *Liberation Chabalala*), offer vivid and sympathetic descriptions of working-class experience in and around Cape Town.³⁶ La Guma's sharp eye for aspects of 'subcultural' style and an occasional partiality for the mock-gangster idiom of the *Drum* stories give these pieces a vivid documentary feel and a strong satirical edge. They are also a powerful plea for a shared humanity. "Identical Books", which explores the suffering and stoicism of poor coloured communities in Cape Town, for example, concludes with the argument that "[p]eople are like identical books with only different dustjackets. The title and the text are the same" (Odendaal and Field, 1993:3).

The format of La Guma's columns does not allow either for in-depth comment or lengthy analysis. Brief, punchy, often elliptical, they are nevertheless the occasion for sharp political critique. A sardonic take on anti-red propaganda and racial stereotyping in American cinema ("Movies" 1993:116) as well as harsh criticism, in pieces like "The Wild West Show" and "Uncle Sam", on American Cold War culture take very much the same anti-America line as the other Communist critics discussed in this and the previous chapter. Despite the enormous hostility between Communists like La Guma and those activists affiliated to the NEUM, La Guma's columns also demonstrate that there were interesting areas of shared concern. Stories such as "Me and Cultcha" and "More Rock-n-Roll" (1993:111-112) offer ironic comment on the kind of 'culture-as-solution-to-hooliganism' arguments propagated in many liberal circles at the time which is identical to the Unity Movement position. Similarly, "Liedjie for the Master" and "Song and Dance" (1993:114-115), respectively, make interesting reference to the 'good boy' politics of conservative coloured leaders, and comment on the replication of apartheid-style thinking in the Eoan Group, both of which, as we have seen, were issues of central concern to Unity Movement activists.

Interestingly, La Guma's engagement with contemporary popular culture combines an intense interest in and appreciation for the cultural life of ordinary people with a somewhat more elitist sense that people's 'low-brow' tastes would be eradicated if only they had access to better education (Field 2001:137). In this sense, La Guma's claims to unrestricted cultural access echoes those of other South Africans discussed in this chapter, but is premised on rather more hierarchical assumptions. An article on the annual 'Coon Carnival' celebrations in Cape Town, for example, avoids the standard arguments of conservative leaders that this is a terrible spectacle of coloured 'degradation', shifting the blame, instead, to the wider social context of deprivation,

oppression and exclusion. If people are deprived of basic human rights, La Guma argues, it follows that they will “only able to appreciate culture of a lower type” (Field and Odendaal 1993:114). In this sense, as Odendaal and Field suggest, La Guma’s response “simultaneously undermines and reinforces politically and culturally elitist arguments against the carnival” (1993:xx). At the same time – and this is a point made by Odendaal and Field as well – La Guma’s interest in certain anti-authoritarian elements, in the carnival suggests an appreciation of its more iconoclastic elements which was far in advance of more conventional contemporary responses. The piece ends with the following comment: “[l]ast New Year’s I saw a coon with a picture of Herr Strijdom sewed to the seat of his pants. That’s one coon whose side I’m on, anyway” (Field and Odendaal 1993:114).

La Guma gives more detailed accounts of his particular literary aesthetic in occasional early reviews published in *New Age* in the late 1950s (discussed at length in Field 2000:125-130), and more substantially in articles in the Communist Party publication, the *African Communist* which appeared in the 1970s (Mkhize 1998). These reviews and articles articulate a literary aesthetic which was deeply influenced by Russian Marxist traditions, and which reiterates the assumptions of Soviet socialist realism.³⁷ La Guma’s preoccupation with a functional art which tells the ‘truth’ about existing social conditions, then, reveals a literary aesthetic which is very close to that of other South African Communists.

Young Radicals

In contrast to a pervasive hostility towards popular culture – as prominent amongst South African Leavisites as it was amongst South African Communists – a short-lived English-medium newspaper published in 1952 by members of the Transvaal Congress Youth League, entitled the *Spark*, gives some indication that an automatically negative response to popular culture was gradually giving way, amongst the younger generations at least, to a position which recognised its working-class origins, and was able to appreciate the value of a cultural form whose primary rationale was that of providing pleasure. The *Spark* was edited by Rissik Desai, secretary of the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress. Contributions from Ahmed Kathrada, Nelson Mandela and Dr. J.L.Z Njongwe, who was President of the Cape ANC, suggest that the paper enjoyed a high profile in ANC and Congress Youth League circles.³⁸ Printed by Royal Printers in Westgate, Johannesburg

and backed by a number of regular advertisers,³⁹ the paper has a clean, professional look which is rare for a publication of the oppositional press. While its advertisements, letters pages and social features suggest that it found an audience primarily amongst the Indian communities of Fordsburg and Vrededorp, the presence of both African and Indian contributors marks it out as one of the first oppositional publications to reflect the new non-racial emphasis in the ANC-led Congress Alliance. Circulating mainly in the Johannesburg area, the paper also appears to have built up a solid readership amongst Indian communities in Durban.

Like the pro-Congress *New Age* and other *Guardian* successor newspapers, this fortnightly publication espoused an inclusive African Nationalism of the kind advocated by *The Voice* newspaper just a few years earlier. The newspaper's short run, from the 15th February 1952 to the 27th February 1953, also coincided with the Defiance Campaign, and the paper reflects some of the militancy, optimism, and energy of this turbulent time. In terms of political content, the newspaper concentrated on the many spectacular instances of defiance and repression that marked the period. Focusing mainly on local Congress activities, it also reflected on some of the major stories on the international scene, reporting for example on Franco's Spain as well as the accelerating racial tension in the United States. A somewhat earnest paper, it was not above the occasional satirical joke. On the National Party: "What are the Nats made of?/Of Swart's jails/And cat-o'- nine tails/Plus Hitler's heils/That's what Nats are made of" (19 September 1952:4); and on American imperialism in the Congo, somewhat less successfully: "Oh Bongo bongo bongo/We don't want to leave the Congo,/Oh! no, no, no. Here's plenty of uranium/From which we can make/Atom bombs you know" (19 September 1952:4).

Spark is one of the few examples of alternative or oppositional newspapers in South Africa to combine serious political content with regular coverage of the more frivolous and ephemeral preoccupations of contemporary Hollywood cinema. This at times results in rather unexpected and startling juxtapositions of gritty political content and exaggerated Hollywood fantasy. An article on the proposed expropriation of Indian-owned land by the Durban City Council in Cato Manor, for example, shares the same space with swashbuckling and glamorous scenes from the latest Hollywood production (9 May 1952:5).⁴⁰ This more relaxed attitude towards contemporary mass culture on the part of a younger generation of Congress activists is in sharp contrast to the condescension and hostility of other leftist critics like Jack Cope and Lionel Bernstein. If

this was an example of a conscious anti-elitism, it may also have been simply the expression of sheer delight at the action-packed drama and dazzling technical virtuosity of an increasingly impressive Hollywood cinema.

An article on jazz music – always a very sensitive barometer of ever-shifting attitudes towards contemporary popular forms – provides another angle on the debate. Here the writer makes a case for jazz as the expression of urban working-class experience, arguing that rather than being seen as a “sign of degeneracy in modern youth”, jazz music is more correctly understood as an authentic working-class idiom, “the emotions of an oppressed people set to music” (29 February 1952:4). A reader’s response the following week, while in agreement with this more positive evaluation, is nevertheless concerned that working-class and “negro” jazz should be distinguished from the “sort of drivelling, vulgar, mass-produced tripe that drools forth all day over the Springbok radio”. It is an “insult to the workers and Negro people to suggest that they have anything in common with this so-called music”. While this reader is adamant about the need to avoid elitist “jazz versus classics’ debates”, another kind of cultural divide is nevertheless reinscribed, that between the authentic musical forms of “Bach, Beethoven, Shostakovitch and Duke Ellington” and the degraded products of the mass culture industry: the “average American comic or Hollywood film – dope for the masses: cheap substitutes for culture” (Letter to the Editor, 14 March 1952:5).

For regular *Spark* film critics, ‘M.M.J.’ and ‘S.R.’, the pleasures of Hollywood cinema are experienced neither as “dope for the masses” nor “cheap substitutes for culture”. Attentive to more formal aspects such as pace, editing and cinematography, ‘M.M.J.’s’ reviews are also a significant instance of a very early attempt to develop a critical vocabulary for an emergent cultural form. In addition, it is clear that an appreciation for some of the innovations of contemporary cinema does not necessarily entail a wholesale blindness to questions of ideological and political content. In keeping with the strong anti-war message of the newspaper more generally (particularly in relation to US military interventions in Korea and the on-going hostilities of the Cold War), film reviews pay attention to the reactionary and openly propagandist messages of 1950s Hollywood cinema. ‘S.R.’, for examples, is particularly outraged at the way in which, in films like *Desert Fox*, Nazi history is being re-written in order to suit the new political chessboard of the Cold War period. This is an era in which even Nazi generals like Major Rommel are being recast as political heroes in the interests of the much

greater moral imperative of establishing the Soviet Union as the absolute embodiment of outright evil (28 March 1952:5). An enthusiastic reader is in full agreement:

Desert Fox is an attempt to whitewash the deeds of the Nazis....They want us to forget the deeds of the Fascists, they want us to forget Buchenwald and Dachau. They want us to forget the misery and suffering they caused to the working class of Germany. They want us to forget millions upon millions of men, women and children who were brutally murdered by the Nazis....Once again the imperialist powers are trying through the medium of their vast propaganda resources to bluff the people into another war. In order to carry out the rearmament of Germany, which is universally opposed by all peace-loving people, American propaganda is aimed at showing that the Nazis were not such bad fellows after all. (Letter to the Editor, 11 April 1952:5)

In similar fashion, the 1952 Hollywood film *Fixed Bayonets* is dismissed as a “disgusting glorification of America’s bubblegum boys in Korea”. ‘M.M.J.’ pokes fun at the transparently propagandist scenes of “brave G.I’s fighting ‘Korean Commies’” as well as the inevitable clichéd ending: “the bubblegum boys make a desperate stand and guess what happens – that’s right. The Yankees kill a couple of hundred ‘red’ Koreans whilst they suffer a couple of casualties here and there”. This kind of film “goes well with the little children and with some of the grownups who like ‘action’ but intelligent people can see through such trash and filthy propaganda. Intelligent people are no longer prepared to see films which glorify the American aggressors who have to date been responsible for the death of 3 million Korean people” (5 September 1952:5).⁴¹ Interestingly, *Spark* reviewers are less concerned about the conservative politics of South African films like *Jim Comes to Jo’burg*, a film which was roundly criticised in *The Voice*. Here the significance of this “first attempt to produce a full-length film on South Africa, as played by South Africans” (29 February 1952:4) as well as the enormous pleasures of seeing “familiar places [such] as Park Station and Eloff Street” displayed on the big screen seem to outweigh its conservative political agenda.

Further evidence of a more politicised response is to be seen in reviews of films like Charlie Chaplin’s *Monsieur Verdoux* and *Dead-line USA*, both singled out for their more progressive take on contemporary political affairs. While *Monsieur Verdoux* is described as a “brilliant, slashing satire on Western civilisation” (9 May 1952:5), *Dead-line USA* is a worthwhile exploration of “the battle of a free and vigorous press against the forces of big city corruption”, a film that also makes the point that “politics and crime often go hand in hand” (28 November 1952:7). Emphasis on a more progressive politics also coincides with an interest in the representation of working-class experience in contemporary culture. Charlie Chaplin and Howard Fast are singled out for the

significance they attribute to the lives of those ordinary individuals who are often ignored in the works of more mainstream writers and film-makers. According to 'S.R.', Howard Fast's "genuine compassion for his characters, the 'nobodies' and 'everybodies' of which history is composed", makes him "one of the most important historical novelists writing in the English language today" (23 May 1952:5).

Aside from these more conventional 'leftist' concerns, the *Spark* also gave expression to what has by now become identifiable as the particular cultural preoccupations of black South Africans, namely the problem of cultural access and exclusion. Whilst a tongue-in-cheek article on the South African Board of Censors – described as "a bunch of narrow and fascist-minded Dutch Reformed Church predikants and...Nationalist Party members" (3 October 1952:5) – attacks the misguided morality and outright hypocrisy of South African Censorship laws, the *Spark* also offers more serious comment in the form of an open letter to the old Vic Company – in 1952 on tour in South Africa – from a writer who signed his name 'Othello'. Like the Fort Hare students we encountered in chapter 4, as well as Mphahlele and his colleagues in *The Voice*, 'Othello' is forced to confront the painful contradiction between the idea of Western culture as repository of humane values and the fact that it is this same culture which denies him full participation because of his race. 'Othello's' response contains some of the standard rhetorical gestures of the cultural access argument. Making the point that culture is something to which all nations have contributed, and to which all nations therefore have equal rights, he argues that "'Othello' and the 'Dream,' [were] written by one who belonged not to one country alone but [to] humanity as a whole", someone "who wrote for and is acclaimed and loved by the masses of peoples throughout the length and breadth of the world" (25 July 1952:5). Drawing on the very cultural humanism on which so many Western critics based their claims to an inherent moral superiority, he concludes with the following appeal:

Culture – art, music, literature – knows no barriers of race, colour or religion. Culture knows no passports. Just as our white compatriots in South Africa appreciate and enjoy renderings of Shakespeare, so too, do we, the Black people. Yet we are denied the right to participate in the cultural life of our country, because culture, according to the little, frightened, selfish, racist men who govern our country, is for 'Europeans Only.' And it is this feeling of racial superiority, this most uncultured belief that permeates and mars every aspect of our lives. (25 July 1952:5)

For this reader, the solution in the present does not depend on the hope that the "little, frightened, selfish, racist men who govern the country" will see the error of their ways.

Instead, cultural freedom will be won in the more general struggle, and inevitable victory, against “this artificial law of ‘Europeans Only’” (25 July 1952:5).

Fighting Talk and a Fighting Culture

Fighting Talk made its first appearance in February 1942.⁴² An organ of the Springbok Legion, a serviceman’s association founded in 1941, this monthly newspaper, published in English and Afrikaans, articulated the League’s strong commitment to the principles of non-racialism and democracy. It drew particular attention to the fascist inclinations of South African Nationalists, combining a “vigorous campaign for soldier’s rights” (Simons and Simons 1983:540) with the more long-term objectives of genuine post-war social transformation. In 1954, this largely liberal publication became the unofficial organ of the Congress Alliance. Only two of its original contributors – Lionel Bernstein and Cecil Williams – remained on the editorial board of the new magazine. Ruth First was editor of the publication until it was banned in 1963.

Fighting Talk has a special place in the history of the oppositional press in South Africa. As an expression of the Congress Alliance, it was the site of a much more meaningful non-racialism than was achieved – despite the very best intentions – in other publications on the Left. Not only is there a significant increase in the number of black contributors (in contrast to the *Guardian*, for example), but the paper also seems to have succeeded in establishing a much more equitable balance of power between its white and black contributors. Whilst a non-racial ethos was clearly of high priority in the Communist Party, for example, an altogether different dynamic appears to have emerged as the confident and articulate leadership of organisations like the ANC and the South African Indian Congress met and interacted with white progressives for the first time. If nothing else, *Fighting Talk* is eloquent testimony to the more egalitarian political context fostered by the many examples of joint participation and protest which characterised the period. Aside from the Congress Alliance itself, the writing of the Freedom Charter and the camaraderie and solidarity of the Treason Trial are two of the most obvious examples in this regard. In relation to the discussion of cultural questions, a material context of greater inter-racial contact also precipitated a much greater awareness of questions of cultural ‘mixing’, contact and exchange than is observable in any of the other papers in the oppositional press. *Fighting Talk*, in other words, is an important example of some of the first postcolonial theorising in a South African paper.

In terms of its political agenda, *Fighting Talk* was an almost carbon copy of the other papers of the Congress Alliance, and with many of the contributors writing for both publications (people like Michael Harmel, Lionel Bernstein and Brian Bunting, for example), this is hardly surprising. The spectacular political landscape of the 1950s also threw up obvious topics for discussion and debate which were replicated across all the papers, namely apartheid legislation, Bantu Education, the trade union movement, the Treason Trial and a growing anti-colonial movement in other parts of Africa. Substantial attention was also given to an increasingly well-organised and outspoken South African women's movement. On the international stage, Cold War politics, the threat of nuclear war, German re-armament and US imperial activities in the Congo and Guatemala, for example were given in-depth coverage. There is also a much greater consciousness in this magazine (especially with the publication in the late 1950s of Mphahlele's lively "Letter from Lagos") of the rest of Africa, which is beginning to impinge on and interact with the local discussion. Continuing the traditions of South African Communist-aligned papers like the *Guardian* and its many successors, *Fighting Talk* provided an angle on contemporary socio-political events which would not have been available in the mainstream press. What made *Fighting Talk* different from these publications was a greater opportunity for analysis, comment, and debate. In this sense, *Fighting Talk* was less concerned with conveying standard journalistic 'news' than with creating the conditions for a critical and informed public discussion.

Similarly, while literary-cultural questions were always a significant part of the broader political agenda of other pro-communist/Congress newspapers, *Fighting Talk*, which explicitly styled itself as a literary-political journal, gave much greater attention to the cultural sphere, and invested considerable energy in establishing the newspaper as an important forum for new literary talent. Ruth First's efforts in this regard, particularly in her encouragement of new black writers, are worth emphasising. As Hilda Bernstein recalls, "an astonishing number of people who later became well-known writers appeared in those early years in the pages of *Fighting Talk* for many, their first appearance in print" (1992:iii). The impressive list includes Nadine Gordimer, Alex la Guma, Es'kia Mphahlele, Richard Rive, Dennis Brutus, Lewis Nkosi, Phyllis Altman, Albie Sachs and Alfred Hutchinson. While South African communists like Lionel Bernstein, Michael Harmel and others continued to hold the fort as far as book and theatre reviews are concerned, *Fighting Talk* is also notable for the emergence in print of a number of hitherto unknown literary critics, many of whom were black. At the risk of homogenising

an 'African', or even worse, a 'non-European' response, it can be said that the contributions of Tennyson Makiwane, Joe Matthews, Henry Makghoti, M.B. Yengwa, Thembekile ka Tshunungwa, Lewis Nkosi and Es'kia Mphahlele give further insight into the cultural preoccupations of black South Africans during this period. Finally, the magazine is also noteworthy for the greater visibility of South African women critics such as Communist Party member, Hilda (Watts) Bernstein and novelist, Phyllis Altman.

Literary discussion amongst white Communists like Lionel Bernstein and Michael Harmel departed very little from the by now well-trodden paths of a Soviet-inspired literary-cultural criticism. An abiding emphasis on literature as a weapon in the broader liberation struggle, and a tendency towards overt political discussion are combined with a familiar Soviet-derived literary aesthetic: a preference for realism; a high regard for literature which tells the 'truth' about the contemporary socio-political scene; a valorisation of collective rather than individualist concerns; a preoccupation with the representation of ordinary experience; and a strong preference for the depiction of inspiring and heroic resistance. The book review, even in its more substantial *Fighting Talk* form, is still largely regarded as an opportunity to circulate and endorse a left-wing perspective in conscious opposition to ruling class ideas. Even in the face of dramatic shifts in Soviet cultural policy itself – particularly in the aftermath of the appearance of the first 'dissident' Soviet novel, *The Thaw* by Ilya Ehrenberg – a Soviet literary-cultural aesthetic continues as the dominant, if somewhat loosely applied, literary model.

In this regard, Hilda Bernstein's response to changes in Soviet cultural practice is an intriguing example of the way in which South African communists negotiated what must have been a very painful transition as the cultural dogmatism under Stalin came under increasing criticism within the Soviet Union itself. While Bernstein acknowledges the many failings of recent Soviet art – its "glorification of aspects of Soviet life at the expense of the truth", its "pale", "lifeless" situations and its "pallid unadventurous characters" – the overall thrust of her argument is positive, emphasising not Soviet shortcomings but the tremendous "scope and depth of the literary discussion, controversy and stock-taking" (July 1955:14) which has emerged as a result of the appearance of Ehrenberg's novel, a literary discussion, which she pointedly observes, involves the mass of ordinary people.⁴³ Similarly, despite her reservations, Bernstein's summary of the role of the writer in Soviet society repeats the conventional manoeuvres of a standard Soviet response:

The Soviet writer has become a vital, living part of the tremendous sweep of socialist construction. He has been more than a recorder of Soviet life; he has been an inspirer, writing of the great conflicts that move society onward, enriching the understanding of the people and helping them towards conquest of each new obstacle that lay before them. At his best, he is a fighter for the advance of socialism, taking part in the living struggle. And because of that, the Soviet people in return have to regard Soviet literature as an important part of their lives. (July 1955:14)

This is not to suggest that cultural discussion in the magazine consisted solely of the sterile repetition of received cultural formulas. A glance at the many literary-cultural articles in the magazine reveals a lively and intelligent criticism which – like its Communist-aligned predecessors – explicitly engages with the politics of literary-cultural texts as part of a broader liberation struggle. It is perhaps worth mentioning at this point that all the literary critics who featured in *Fighting Talk* were actively involved in local liberation struggles. Many faced banning orders. Some were even jailed. In conditions of increasing political intolerance and constraint, *Fighting Talk* continued to offer a rich and varied cultural discussion which covered writers as diverse as George Bernard Shaw, Norman Mailer, Howard Fast, Boris Pasternak, Doris Lessing, Richard Wright, Jean-Paul Sartre, Bertolt Brecht, Peter Abrahams, Olive Schreiner, Nadine Gordimer, Harold Bloom and Jan Rabie. In reviews of plays like Lewis Sowden's *Kimberley Train*, Athol Fugard's *No Good Friday*, and Basil Warner's *Deep are the Roots*, critics such as Phyllis Altman (November 1953:13) and Cecil Williams (April 1954:12) also offer interesting comment on an emerging South African 'protest theatre', and – consistent with the newspaper's generally pro-Soviet stance – articles by Hilda Watts and others examine the debilitating social effects of Cold War hysteria in the US, and deliberately counter images of US prosperity with information about escalating poverty and social injustice (June 1954:12-13). One of the more intriguing aspects of this highly politicised literary-cultural discussion is the extent to which it overlaps with a Romantic or Arnoldian perspective. The strong assumption informing most of the magazine's pro-Communist and pro-Soviet discussion is that culture has an essential role to play in the creation of a more tolerant and humane society. In drawing on this assumption, *Fighting Talk* (like many of the other leftist intellectual traditions discussed so far) steers an ambiguous course between Romantic and Marxist cultural paradigms. These ideological instabilities notwithstanding, this 'public sphere in the world of [Communist] letters' functions both as a much-needed platform for local writers, and an important public forum in which political ideas can be debated through the prism of culture: less concerned with the

elaboration of Marxist critical theory, *Fighting Talk* critics direct their literary-cultural efforts towards the more immediate demands of practical political struggle.

For critics like Hilda Watts and Michael Harmel, part of this project is to make a strong claim for the revolutionary values of well-known writers such as Olive Schreiner and George Bernard Shaw. Like Jack Cope, both Bernstein and Harmel make the point that the more radical implications of literary texts are often ignored, wished away, or 'contained' in some way by the dominant culture. While Harmel counters these tendencies by recuperating a more radical George Bernard Shaw (July 1956:8-9), Hilda Watts responds by reading Olive Schreiner as a "passionate materialist", singling out in particular her views on race and the position of women. These ideas, Watts argues, represent an enormous threat to mainstream South African society, "with its racial contempt and hatreds, its government that seeks to exterminate 'the resisters of South African law', its backwardness towards women". White South Africans, in consequence, can never pay proper tribute to Schreiner's achievement, and her ideas are either watered down or simply "kept out of print" (April 1955:6).

Interestingly, Nadine Gordimer's significance as a progressive South African writer is much less secure. While many *Fighting Talk* critics leap to her defence, there is considerable disagreement about Gordimer's use of realism, particularly the extent to which her novels are able to draw out the deeper patterns of contemporary urban South African experience. 'A.O.D', for one, is very appreciative of Gordimer's "vividly realised personal story" in the novel *The Lying Days*, and commends the "ruthless intensity" of her detailed exposé of urban middle-class white society (April 1954:13). Another critic, (who signs him/herself only as 'F'), finds Gordimer's microscopic observations and cold detachment in *The World of Strangers* less effective. In this novel, the "world remains a world of strangers" (August 1958:14). A longer review of the same novel by Stanley Uys also takes issue with Gordimer's almost obsessive attention to detail. Invoking (or more accurately, anticipating) the 'larger' realism of a Lukácsian aesthetic, Uys rejects the superficiality of Gordimer's socio-political diagnosis, arguing that a more probing analysis would make a greater contribution to the wider political struggle. Gordimer's careful vivisection of South African life, he argues, however perceptive, "never dips below the surface" and while the satire is good, it is "personal, not social...Gordimer does not satirise her characters for what they represent, but for their individual idiosyncracies" (September 1958:16). In this case, it is Gordimer's very particularity which militates against a genuine exploration of contemporary South

African society. For Geoffrey Hutchings, on the other hand, Uys is far too prescriptive: “apparently Miss Gordimer’s sin is to try to see her characters as human beings” (November 1958:15).

The overwhelming emphasis on political significance which drew much of its force from the deeply over-determined political context of 1950s repression and resistance is also evident in an interesting re-writing of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* for the South African scene. ‘R.J.R.’ re-reads the play in terms of the great struggle between “tyranny and democracy” (Letter to the Editor, April 1954:15) currently being played out in the South African context. In this interpretation, while Cassius is the determined and passionate ‘democrat’, Brutus supplies the figure of the ineffectual liberal, “bound by outmoded, inappropriate bourgeois concepts” and a “fear of radical change”. In South Africa, the political lesson is all too clear: “we too have found, as Cassius did, that the ‘respectable’ leaders throw away the fight and betray their cause”. By far the greatest lesson of the play, however, is to be found in the role of the crowd. Stretching this particular reading of the play to its absolute limits, ‘R.J.R.’ makes the point that it is the people – grossly underestimated both by themselves and by their leaders – which, the play demonstrates, will supply the only “sure foundation for a genuine democracy...In our own country when the people, most of them black have realised their strength, their wisdom and the inevitable rightness of their cause, then and only then will South Africa be saved from tyranny and made fast for a genuine democracy” (Letter to the Editor, April 1954:15).

With regard to contemporary popular culture, *Fighting Talk* critics tend to reiterate the more cautious arguments of earlier leftist South African traditions. Phyllis Altman’s response to a burgeoning black commercial press, for example, is tentative at best. Eager to respond to a publication “which is read avidly from Cape Town to Accra” (July 1955:10), Altman is very impressed by Henry Nxumalo’s outstanding “exposures of the oppressive and brutal side of white trusteeship” in *Drum* magazine, as well as the excellent efforts in the “Masterpieces in Bronze” series to foreground the cultural and political achievements of black South Africans, achievements which are completely ignored in the mainstream press. On the latest developments in the area of magazine fiction, however, she is less positive, expressing some anxiety about what she regards as a deplorable manipulation of an embryonic African reading culture for commercial gain. For Altman, magazine fiction in *Drum* and *Africa!* is “sordid escapism” of the worst kind: she cites in particular the “sex and sadism”, “‘slick’ writing”, the “cheap

Americanisms”, the glorification of the gangster figure and a fast-paced township idiom which she finds completely incomprehensible (July 1955:10). Altman’s preference for the overt expression of a militant African Nationalism in keeping with the growing resistance movement prevents her from seeing the political significance of what lies before her: the confident self-assertion of an urban African identity in defiance of humiliating apartheid labelling.

Another anonymous article in *Fighting Talk* is unusual in its anti-elitist, non-hierarchical approach to a range of contemporary African cultural forms. Here, jazz, traditional dance, Church choirs and classical music are simply part of a general cultural scene, all of which have equal value. The most pressing concern for this writer is not whether culture has become ‘debased’, but the extent to which “tribal” forms are manipulated for conservative political ends and, perhaps even more important, the way in which African artists, musicians and performers are being exploited by a hard-nosed culture industry. In this regard, the writer urges African artists to establish trade unions “to protect [their] economic interests” (February 1954:11).

Moving away from the concerns of specific literary texts, *Fighting Talk* critics such as Alan Lipman and Cecil Williams also pay attention to the larger material contexts of cultural production in South Africa. Alan Lipman, for one, makes a strong argument that without “national consciousness”, there will be no viable South African culture. For Lipman, this is not the exclusive, racially-defined nationalism of Hitler’s Germany but one which acknowledges the economic, cultural and political rights of all South African citizens (July 1954:14). For well-known theatre director Cecil Williams (echoing both Dora Taylor and Jack Cope), “the system of preserving white supremacy has...stunted the growth of a healthy, helpful indigenous art culture” and today “the intensified repressions of apartheid are going far to kill the plant altogether” (April 1954:8). The outcome for everyone is an impoverished cultural life: as a result of apartheid, many of the best talents have left the country, many artists are kept out of the country, and the viability of home-grown cultural forms is increasingly threatened by the fact that “out of a population of twelve and a half millions, we allow only one fifth to participate” (9). He is especially critical of a recent decision by the Labia theatre in Cape Town to accept a colour bar rule in order not to jeopardise a substantial government grant.

What is also distinctive about the cultural discourse of *Fighting Talk*, as I have suggested, is the greater visibility of criticism by black South Africans. A three-part

series by ANC leaders and Treason Trialists, Joe Matthews, Henry Makgothi and M.B. Yengwa respectively, published in 1957, addresses the origins and development of African literature in South Africa. The distinguishing features of this discussion are a strong awareness of the material obstacles in the way of African cultural expression, and a growing impatience with what they regard as a predominantly conservative literary tradition. The first article which serves as broad overview was written by Joe Matthews, secretary of the ANC Youth league.⁴⁴ Tracing the earliest written texts to the advent of colonialism, Matthews argues that an essential aspect of the “great task of drawing African people into the orbit of the capitalist economy consisted in converting them ideologically – in Christianising them”: this has “led to the reduction of African languages to writing”. The early influence of missionary institutions on the development of African literature is to be seen in the predominance of religious themes and an avoidance of overt socio-political investigation. More recently, an almost total reliance on the missionary press has resulted in a subtle kind of self-censorship: this is of course “[q]uite apart...from other difficulties arising out of the status of the Africans as an oppressed people which militate against any flowering of culture” (February 1957:11). Singling out the historical romances of writers like S.E.K. Mqhayi, Thomas Mofolo and R.R.R. Dhlomo, Matthews notes with approval that many of them “treat of African Chiefs and heroes of the past in a manner rather different from the accepted ‘official’ version”. Contemporary writing, in contrast, is marked by a “tendency to escape from the realities of African life”. In short, African writing is in “a romantic rut”. Matthews ends his article by emphasising the need “for progressive works in the different African languages”; this applies to original works as well as, interestingly, “translations from English of important works with a socio-political message” (*Fighting Talk* February 1957:11).

Henry Makgothi’s article on Sotho literature makes a similar plea for progressive African literature, one that “portrays the struggles of the people for a better life and freedom”.⁴⁵ Early mission writing, he argues, can be compared to the kind of literature which “flourished during the Middle-Ages”: subservient to the “paramount aim of spreading the Christian ideology”, this is an “other worldly” literature with a strong didactic flavour. With rapid industrialisation in the early twentieth century and the “consequent proletarianisation of the African”, Sotho literature is rescued from “the blissfulness of the other world” and slowly “secularised”. Makgothi places Sol T. Plaatje at the forefront of this new trend, making special mention of Plaatje’s “superb”

translations of the Shakespearian tragedies. For Makgothi, these daring experiments with the “potentialities of the Sotho language” are ample proof that African languages are able “to serve as the vehicles for the best expression of human experience and feeling” (*Fighting Talk* March 1957:15). This concern to demonstrate that African languages are adequate “vehicles...of modern political thought” (*Fighting Talk* February 1957:11) is reiterated in Matthews’s article. Unlike Plaatje, Makgothi is completely uninterested in Sotho folk tales and animal stories; for him, this is literature which reflects “a way of life that belongs to the dying past” (*Fighting Talk* March 1957:16). The far more urgent need in the context of National Party rule is to develop literature as an additional “cultural front” in the on-going liberation struggle. For Makgothi, despite the enormous material obstacles, the task of building a “genuine progressive literature” is an essential aspect in realising the aims of the liberation movement.

M.B. Yengwa’s assessment of Zulu literature takes a very similar view. A writer himself – he wrote a novel called *Inqaba ka Mabelemade* – his obvious appreciation for writers like John Dube, R.R.R. Dhlomo and Vilakazi is tempered with some frustration regarding their failure to confront the pertinent issues of their time.⁴⁶ R.R.R. Dhlomo, for example, is taken to task for his over-dependence on “Zulu history as told by the White historian” (May 1957:15). Yengwa is particularly concerned with the fact that African historical fiction of this kind is entirely reliant on the school market and therefore must have the stamp of approval of the Bantu Education Department. This, he wryly concludes, “might explain some of the obvious omissions of certain events in Zulu history”. On Vilakazi, he writes, “most of his poems are works of ‘art for art’s sake’” and “[e]xcept in a few cases, he does not portray the life of the Zulu people, their suffering, their pleasure, their hopes and fears”. His overall assessment is that “African writers have thus far not been able to interpret African life as it truly obtains today. Their characters are those of the mine boy, baffled and afterwards corrupted by city life. They have not yet characterised a Mandela, educated, independent and politically victimised” (*Fighting Talk* May 1957:15). The reason is that African writing still remains subservient to the deeply reactionary imperatives of the apartheid state. “[S]uch themes”, he writes “would illuminate the situation that officials try to suppress: the emergence of Africans to full equality with other South Africans despite attempts to keep them in perpetual subjugation” (*Fighting Talk* May 1957:16).

Two other articles by Tennyson Makiwane⁴⁷ and Thembekile Ka Tshunungwa respectively, are more concerned with contemporary popular forms. Makiwane’s analysis

of African work songs highlights their original role in the facilitation of hard manual labour, but is more interested in drawing out their increasing political significance as ironic commentary on contemporary South African politics and township life. He commends in particular their depiction of the insecurity, difficulty and deprivation of township life, the horrors of government bureaucracy, and the growing opposition to apartheid oppression. Makiwane's clear appreciation for "this wonderful heritage of the working people" (*Fighting Talk* December 1958:9) is also an important recognition of the significance of an emerging working-class urban culture, and an acknowledgement of the way in which traditional forms are changing under the impact of shifting historical conditions. Another article on "freedom songs" by Thembekile Ka Tshunugwa examines the role of popular song in the developing liberation struggle, placing particular emphasis on their role as politicising tool. For many South Africans, he argues, radical ideas are often encountered for the first time in this form.⁴⁸

Mphahlele's two-part series based on his MA thesis, and published in 1962 as *An African Image*, introduces another dominant theme in black criticism more generally, that of the politics of representation. Mphahlele's article, which considers the representation of "the non-white character" in fiction by white South Africans, is also an important early instance of an African 'writing back' to the colonial centre. To begin with, Mphahlele places his analysis of South African fiction within a broad historical framework, and foregrounds the role of a changing material context in the shaping of inter-racial attitudes. Thus while the earliest literature is written "in the heat of brutal historical circumstance" as British and Dutch settlers come into increasing, often violent, contact with indigenous people, the work of later writers like Olive Schreiner and Sarah Gertrude Millin is shaped by "a context where the African is becoming more and more integrated into a European farming and industrial economy" (*Fighting Talk* September 1957:11). What strikes Mphahlele about the pioneering literature of people like Pringle and Haggard is its almost complete failure to explore the enormously fruitful subject of cultural contact and exchange. By this he means not the physical confrontation of the colonial frontier (which remains a violent and unequal one), but the intensely fascinating transactional moment when one culture is forced to negotiate an unknown 'other' for the very first time. Mphahlele's understanding of this primary moment of cultural exchange in the highly ambiguous and mutually transformative space of the colonial frontier offers an interesting early version of Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zone" (1992:6). Moving away from explanations which emphasise the "clash" and "conflict" of diametrically

opposed and fundamentally unequal groups, however, Mphahlele foregrounds a more equitable kind of cultural adjacency in the interests of asserting the value of African culture: for Mphahlele, the two cultures exist in a “supplementary” relationship, the contact occurring between “a European culture which has been lucky enough to produce technical skills” and an African culture “whose content finds the maximum satisfaction not so much in ‘doing’ (in the Western sense) but in social ‘being’ – in the best human relationships and communal responsibility” (*Fighting Talk* September 1957:11).

When it comes to what Mphahlele describes as the “gloating” fiction of writers such as R.M. Ballantyne, A.W. Drayson, Glanville and Percy Fitzpatrick, the literary and political judgement is unambiguous: here, “crude descriptions like Hottentots having tough heads; Africans looking like monkeys; Africans running against mimosa thorns ‘with impunity’; and ‘Kaffirs, although savage, being ‘fastidious’” reflect a racist ideology that Mphahlele strongly repudiates. Similarly, writers like Celliers, Leipoldt, Totius, even C.M. van den Heever could “never outgrow the ‘Great Trek’ mentality”. For all Schreiner’s ability to enter imaginatively into the lives and experiences of some of the African and Khoisan characters in *The Story of an African Farm*, (Waldo’s Bushman painter, for example), the “non-white character” often makes an appearance solely as “a butt for the wrath of Tant Sannie” (*Fighting Talk* September 1957:11), and even in as sympathetic a work as *Trooper Peter Halket*, African characters – spoken *about* more often than speaking themselves – remain the passive victims of social forces beyond their control.

While Plomer is “something of a Romantic”, Mphahlele has a high regard for the “sustained irony and cynicism” with which he approaches the pretensions of Western civilisation, and is especially appreciative of his attempts to “tell the other side of the story of the missionary endeavour and Christian civilisation”, namely its “defeat”. The tendency to “harp on the perpetual theme of ‘evangelising the native’ or ‘missionary endeavour’” he argues “hardly ever suggests what the African can teach the white man” (*Fighting Talk* September 1957:11). Millin, of course, is a writer who “brings to the ‘problem’ of mixed blood all the contempt and disrespect she can muster for the Coloured man” and her later novels reveal that “time has not taught her anything as a creative writer”. Van der Post’s *In a Province* introduces into South African literature the theme of “African goes to town”. Here Mphahlele is particularly concerned with the way in which this central South African trope has been encouraged in African writing in the vernaculars in the interests of reactionary re-tribalisation policies: “the black hero is

invariably frustrated by city life and goes back to the reserves...if the writer justified the presence of the African in the city and presented him as an integral part of urban society, he wouldn't have a book published by an Afrikaans firm" (*Fighting Talk* November 1957:12).

Paton is one of the first white writers to place African characters centre stage, but for Mphahlele the results are deeply disappointing. Particularly critical of the too-good-to-be-true stoicism and Christian resignation of characters like the Reverend Khumalo and Mrs Lithebe, Mphahlele dismisses Paton's characters as mechanical "puppets", stereotypical, undeveloped and ultimately subservient to a conservative socio-political message, namely "[j]uvenile delinquency should be faced with sympathy; boys should be kept busy in church activities; [and] we should wait patiently for a change of heart in those who rule us" (*Fighting Talk* November 1957:11). Interestingly, an on-going preference for complex and credible characterisation over an overt political 'message' is also evident in his responses to the work of Harold Bloom and Nadine Gordimer. For Mphahlele, both these writers have sacrificed their characters for an over-riding political agenda. In Gordimer's fiction in particular, African characters serve the purpose primarily of showing up the ignorance and racism of the whites, and "a great deal [is left] unexplored" (13). That political concerns are nevertheless important is revealed in his appreciation of the historical re-writing in novels such as Peter Abrahams's *Wild Conquest*. Mphahlele especially approves of the way in which the novel contests the "traditional-historical" image of the African of Mzilikazi's time as "the unfeeling, unthinking savage who merely revelled in beer, war and women" (12).

Mphahlele's article concludes with a somewhat unexpected appeal to the English and American models of E.M. Forster, Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner. His point finally is that in a context of racial segregation, South African writing, whether by whites or blacks, will be able to tell only "a fraction of the story". Reiterating the concerns of other *Fighting Talk* critics, he emphasises the importance of forging a "common national culture". This, however, remains impossible as long as there are people who "regard themselves as the master race, whose sole mission is to order, instruct, control and push others into ghettos" (13).

Mphahlele's interest in the complexities of cultural interaction is echoed by a number of other *Fighting Talk* contributors, a clear indication, I would argue, of the greater inter-racial contact made possible as a result of the success of the Congress Alliance. Cecil Williams's notion of cultural "infusion", for example, offers a useful

image for the creative and cultural possibilities of mutual cultural exchange. This will be possible, “he argues, only when existing “cultural barriers [are] thrown down”: “Shakespeare, Sheridan and Shaw are for all people...so are the dramatic legends, the songs and dances of Africa and of India” (*Fighting Talk* September 1956:13).

Another writer who is intensely interested in the rich potentialities of on-going cultural interaction and exchange is Phyllis Altman. Altman’s report on a writers’ conference held at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1956 (which makes pointed reference to the noticeable absence of African participants) seizes in particular on a paper delivered by American critic, Professor Firebaugh of Queen’s University, New York. Firebaugh’s paper on American literature offered a definition of the “frontier” which provides Altman with a very suggestive image for an understanding of inter-cultural negotiation in the South African context. A place where the limits of two existing cultural orders are exposed and challenged, the ‘frontier’ – defined by Altman (following Firebaugh) as “that point in space and time where new and old meet and clash, geographically, socially and intellectually” (*Fighting Talk* August 1956:6) – has the potential to undo and remake, a place where “the old gods and the old standards will be overthrown”. Altman concludes, “[w]hile our legislators attempt to split and divide us into a number of infinitesimal groups, we meet – black, white, Indian and Coloured – and from this meeting will come a new society” (6). Like Mphahlele, Altman offers an intriguing early example of local attempts to theorise the ‘liminal’, ‘inbetween’ and ‘unhomely’ (Bhabha, 1994) spaces of competing cultural domains, an enquiry which precedes the more famous example by some forty years.

Alfred Hutchinson’s article “Open Wide the Doors” enters this debate with an impassioned plea for cultural access.⁴⁹ “White South Africa”, he argues, “is engaged in cultural brigandage. Like all the good things of life, culture, too, is regarded as the preserve of the European section of our population”. Like *The Voice* critics, Hutchinson rejects the “tribal loyalties” foisted on black South Africans in the interests of retaining white supremacy, and his clear-eyed assessment of Bantu Education accurately anticipates that, as a result, “the African [will be forced] to relinquish his claims of membership to a larger community, to world citizenship” (*Fighting Talk* December/January 1957:10). Hutchinson’s argument against cultural exclusion, however, is founded on a continuing faith that the colour bar is a “violation of the spirit of culture” rather than – as critics like Aimé Césaire (1972) and Walter Benjamin (1973) have suggested – an exclusion which is built into the culture itself. For Hutchinson, while

“apartheid tramples on human dignity, culture upholds it” (*Fighting Talk* December/January 1957:10).

In his emphasis on “the invigorating, life-giving currents of [cultural] cross-pollination”, however, Hutchinson takes the conventional arguments about cultural access one step further. While writers in *The Voice* lent rhetorical force to their claims to Western culture by speaking of a ‘world’ rather than a ‘national’ culture, Hutchinson emphasises not only the negative effects of full-scale cultural apartheid on *all* South Africans but draws attention, like Altman and Cecil Williams, to the enormous possibilities to be derived from open cultural exchange. In this sense, Hutchinson evinces an unusual feeling for the complex dynamics of inter-cultural interactions, interactions in which, he argues, neither culture remains unaffected, and on which the continuing growth of a national culture depends. For Hutchinson, this mutual influence is all to the good, and reflects a growing trend towards greater openness and cultural exchange the world over. Interestingly, in Hutchinson’s case, the demand for greater cultural interaction does not entail a wholesale refusal of the “cultural heritage of the past”. Instead, while he applauds the development of a vigorous and politically astute new township idiom (songs like “I-pick-up-Van” and “Meadowlands” as well as contemporary Jazz forms, “unfettered to American models”) he also appreciates the enormous value of “African folk dances, folk songs, folk-lore, arts and crafts” (*Fighting Talk* December/January 1957:10).

In his enthusiasm for the possibilities of a continuing cultural enmeshment, Hutchinson’s emphasis on the role of culture in South Africa may in the end be somewhat over-stated. Drawing closely on culture-as-weapon-in-the-struggle arguments, he makes the point that “culture can be a driving force, drawing more and more people into the struggle”. In the following section, which sounds closer to Matthew Arnold, he suggests that “culture can be a two-way traffic bridge – where the people meet and learn to understand one another”. Cultural exchange, in Hutchinson’s view, “leads to a better understanding, to respect for the culture of other people, and so to the love of other human beings” (December/January 1957:10). Perhaps the difference from the very similar views expressed by South African academic, Christina van Heyningen (discussed in chapter 1), lies in his emphasis on the “two-way traffic bridge”, an image which highlights *mutual* transformation and exchange rather than the conventional Arnoldian privileging of the values of an elite Western culture.

Mphahlele's encounter with the work of the major poets of the Negritude movement in the early 1960s offers another intriguing angle on the 'cultural contact' debate. Interestingly, Mphahlele's encounter with this influential African movement, especially its preoccupations with a pre-colonial past and the so-called 'African personality', has the effect of entrenching, rather than disturbing, his earlier position on issues like cultural identity, contact and mutual exchange. Conscious of his own identity as a "de-tribalised" artist "producing a proletarian art" (February 1960:11), Mphahlele is deeply sceptical of Negritudinist arguments:

It is significant that it is not the African in British-settled territories – a product of indirect rule and one that has been left in his cultural habitat – who readily reaches out for his traditional past. It is rather the assimilated African, who has absorbed French culture, who is now passionately wanting to recapture his past. In his poetry he extols his ancestors, ancestral masks, African wood carvings and bronze art and tries to recover the moorings of his oral literature; he clearly feels he has come to a dead end in European culture, and is still not really accepted as an organic part of French society, for all the assimilation he has been through. (February 1960:11)

Coming from a different context altogether, Mphahlele is well aware that this particular instance of cultural and political 'writing back' has its provenance in a very specific set of historical circumstances. For a South African whose struggle has been about claiming the political, social and cultural rights of contemporary society, the forthright assertion of a pre-colonial identity is difficult to comprehend. Neither is he impressed by the poetry, describing it as mostly "sheer romantic mawkishness". Similarly, the journal *Présence Africaine* is "too preoccupied with anthropological creepy-crawlies" (February 1960:11) to devote enough attention to the problems of the artist in his present predicament. What this movement seems to have missed altogether, he argues, is the material and inevitable consequence of cultural hybridity and intermingling in contemporary African society. In fact, in order to make their case, Mphahlele suggests, negritude writers have concentrated exclusively on those African contexts where cultural interaction is a rarity:

It worried me a lot that such a useful institution did not seem to be aware of cultural cross-currents that characterise artistic expression in multi-racial societies. They seemed to think that the only culture worth exhibiting was traditional or indigenous. And so they concentrated on countries where interaction of streams of consciousness between Black and White has not taken place to any significant or obvious degree, or doesn't so much as touch the cultural subsoil. (February 1960:11)

By contrast, he writes, "our choral and jazz music, literature, dancing in South Africa have taken on a distinctive content and form". This is a clear indication of a "merging of cultures" and "we are not ashamed of it" (February 1960:11). Firmly rejecting the

impulse to be “[carried] away into ancestral fields” (February 1960:11),⁵⁰ Mphahlele’s artistic preoccupations are much more firmly located in the contemporary world.

Mphahlele’s earlier harsh judgements concerning white South Africa are also confirmed by his experiences in Lagos, a city where “the whites appear no longer as custodians of some mythical civilisation or as a sharp reminder of some negative law or other” (December 1958:4). And on the question of cultural exclusion, he can afford to adopt an even more ironic tone. Commenting on cinema in Lagos, he writes, “I’ve seen quite a few pictures that I couldn’t see in the South because I’m black and because a film like *The Seven Deadly Sins* will arouse the kaffir savagery in me. It hasn’t done so yet. I’m sure the day the kaffir in me breaks loose, the catechism of the seven deadly sins will prove too tame” (December 1958:4).

Conclusion

This chapter has brought into focus some of the differences between the literary-cultural preoccupations of black and white South African writer-intellectuals in the alternative South African press. It has also highlighted areas of shared concern. South African Communists writing in newspapers like *Fighting Talk* and *Guardian* successors, the *Clarion*, *People’s World*, *Advance* and *New Age* brought a largely unmodified communist cultural discourse into the new political context of the Congress Alliance. The role of culture as a ‘weapon of struggle’ and the circulation of counter-hegemonic ideas remain two of the dominant concerns of a pro-Communist literary-cultural project in South Africa. Similar preoccupations are evident in surveys of African literature by ANC-aligned literary critics like Joe Matthews and Henry Makghoti. The absence of a strong political tradition in African writing is noted, and African authors in the present are urged to commit their talents to the liberation struggle. For many of the mission-educated writers of *The Voice*, an education in the ‘classic’ Western tradition meant that their preoccupations centred largely on the problems of cultural exclusion as various forms of Western cultural expression were increasingly denied to them in the post-1948 period. Where there is attention to specific literary-cultural texts, the focus is once again a political one. In this regard, *Voice* writers challenge a hegemonic ‘master-race’ cult by paying close attention to racial stereotyping and historical distortion in South African fiction. Mphahlele’s detailed examination of the treatment of Africans in literature by white South Africans makes an enormous contribution to this debate, while his over-

riding concerns with the details of character and lived experience over an overt political message are a significant departure from a Communist-inspired literary aesthetic.

As regards contemporary mass culture such as commercially successful African-oriented magazines like *Drum*, *Zonk* and *Africa!* and an emerging African cinema, the responses from Congressite and Communist critics are largely those of outright disappointment. While critics like Tennyson Makiwane and Hilda Bernstein prefer to concentrate on the more 'authentic' (and, of course, more politicised) cultural forms of popular song and dance, others like Phyllis Altman register strong disapproval for what they regard as the apolitical and largely frivolous concerns of publications like *Drum* and *Zonk*. *Voice* writers evince a very similar response. Ironically, despite their confident predictions about the imminent demise of these politically naïve magazines, many of them would soon find a place as some of *Drum's* most important contributors as other journalistic avenues were slowly shut down. A significant shift in critical attitude as regards contemporary mass culture, however, is observable in the younger generation of activists and intellectuals who wrote for the *Spark*. While the political critique is never far from view, there is also a much greater willingness to take pleasure in the stylistic and technical innovations of an increasingly successful Hollywood cinema.

One of the cultural issues which emerges most strongly in this chapter is the problem of cultural exclusion. Initially only of interest to African critics like Es'kia Mphahlele and Khabi Mngoma of *The Voice*, it would soon emerge as one of the central cultural debates of the Congress movement more generally. This is not surprising given the state's determination to implement full-scale political, social and cultural apartheid in the post-1948 period. As I have tried to suggest, it would be misleading to interpret the many claims in *The Voice* for full access to the products of Western 'High Culture' as a sign of cultural complicity and political conservatism. In this context, to wage a campaign against South Africa's cultural apartheid was also to register a strong protest against a much larger socio-political exclusion. In the same way, the conspicuous demonstration of Western cultural proficiency was a direct assault on government efforts to lock Africans into a 'primitive' cultural identity as a way of rationalising oppression. Where this debate becomes especially interesting is in its implications for the development of an embryonic South African postcolonial theory. Frequent appeals to images of cultural 'hybridity', merging and enmeshment as the most appropriate way of understanding and negotiating the inevitable inter-cultural flows and interminglings of contemporary South African society are both a repudiation of essentialist cultural

explanations (favoured by both the apartheid state and the theorists of Negritude) and an important gesture towards the rich cultural potentialities of the 'third space'.

¹ ANC-aligned publications such as *The Africanist* (1953-1969), edited by Mangoliso Robert Sobukwe, make almost no reference to literary-cultural questions (Sobukwe, of course, broke away from the ANC to form the PAC in 1959). *Inkundla ya Bantu* (April 1938-November 1951), edited by Verulam entrepreneur Philip Goduka Katamzi and Govan Mbeki (Switzer and Ukpanah 1997:216-218), is much more interesting. One of the few independent, African-owned publications in South Africa, it carried articles by ANC heavyweights such as H. Selby Msimang and D.D.T. Jabavu. It was also an important forum for the articulation of a more militant African politics. During the early 1940s, however, it offered little in the way of cultural comment. In 1944 it came under the editorship of Jordan Ngubane, and eventually moved further and further towards a more liberal position. It was during this period that the newspaper began to publish regular book and film reviews. These, and a regular column entitled "Peregrine at the Crossroads", are the sites of an interesting cultural debate which is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis.

² See Leon de Kock (2001).

³ In similar fashion, the popular jazz band Mtetwa's Lucky Stars is dismissed as "primitive vaudeville", an empty art form which trades on sensational stories of "witchcraft" and love potions (22 February 1941:9).

⁴ In another article, Nhlapo reiterates the familiar view, seen amongst conservative Western Cape intellectuals discussed in chapter 4, that Africans should "work out their salvation" and "cultivate the instinct of self-help" (1 June 1940:11).

⁵ It appeared once a month between September 1949 and August 1950. From September 1950, it was only issued every two months. It was at this time that its name was changed to *The Voice of Africa* (Switzer and Switzer 1979:64).

⁶ It is also given brief mention in Couzens (1985:317). Switzer and Switzer give a fuller description (1979:64).

⁷ The two businesses which received (very) occasional advertising space in *The Voice* included "The Sphinx Funeral Undertakers and Directors" and the "Donaldson Centre Cafeteria" (February 1950:1).

⁸ It must be emphasised that, aside from the shared aim of publishing new writing by black South Africans, there was very little similarity between the two papers. *The Voice's* strong anti-government stance and its characteristically earnest style are in marked contrast to the market-driven ethos of its more famous competitor.

⁹ Mphahlele describes Isaac Matlare as a "short, brilliant fellow", a "bitter cynic with a sharp stinging tongue for his enemies, Congressites included. When he wears a dirty frown over one eye, then it means that he has been spitting venom" (1980:212).

¹⁰ Mphahlele was also secretary of the Teachers' Association (Manganyi 1983:70).

¹¹ Walter Nhlapo published poems and book reviews in *Bantu World* in the 1930s and 40s (Couzens 1985:120-122). Inspired by H.I.E. Dhlomo's role as Librarian-Organiser of the Carnegie European Library, Nhlapo established an Archives Committee to collect historical documents and materials relating to African culture, politics and community life. This was part of a strong impulse to found a counterpart tradition and to take African experience and history seriously (Couzens 1985). Couzens also cites examples of his more elitist cultural preoccupations.

¹² This fact is acknowledged with some satisfaction. "Rabelais at Large", commenting on the angry responses from some community leaders who were "raving and cursing blue fire after the first editorial", responds with the following poem: "They seek him here, they seek him there,/Those darkies seek him everywhere;/Is he in heaven, is he in hell,/The damned elusive editor" (October 1949:2).

¹³ Mphahlele joined the ANC in 1955, but retained some sympathy with the position of the leftist elements in the All African Convention. See Mphahlele (1980:188-191).

¹⁴ A tongue-in-cheek lament on the death of United Party publication, *The Forum*, comments, "Here lies the Forum...there are few people at the graveside, even fewer to shed a polite tear, and even fewer newspaper reporters" (July 1950:4).

¹⁵ See also, August 1950:2

¹⁶ See, amongst others, an article by 'Pedagogue' written in reaction to the "donkeys" and "doormats" of the Transvaal African Teachers' Association (TATA) (March 1951:6).

¹⁷ Mphahlele, Mothopeng and Matlare were arrested on charges of public violence and inciting the school boycott. They were imprisoned for four days. They were acquitted on the evidence of some of the pupils at the school who testified that they had been forced to sign affidavits incriminating the three teachers on pain of being sent to the reformatory (Mphahlele 1980:169).

¹⁸ For an alternative take on popular culture, see Mngoma's defence of Marabi. His article entitled "We should not look with spite at Marabi" establishes continuities between Marabi and modern swing bands like the Harlem Swingsters and the Merry Blackbirds. An article in *Zonk* had repudiated such continuities (October 1949:10).

¹⁹ This is taken from *The Souls of Black Folks* (1905:109).

²⁰ This issue was also of enormous importance to Bloke Modisane. Modisane makes particular mention of Yehudi Menuhin's efforts to arrange a special series of solo recitals for African audiences in Johannesburg (1986:172-176).

²¹ "[S]ensations sweet, felt in the blood, and felt along the heart" and "feelings too of unremembered pleasure" are from Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"; "Faery lands forlorn" and "amid the alien corn" are from Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale"; "the crystal streams" is a line from Robert Burns's "Young Peggy"; "through caverns measureless to man down to a sunless sea," and "meandering in a mazy motion" are taken from Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and "a god in pain" is a line from Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes"

²² *School in the Bush* (1929:323).

²³ A reader put it this way: "Civilisation is not the birth child of the herrenvolk whites, but a mosaic contribution of many civilisations and peoples" (October 1951:10). What is interesting about this argument is that it problematises the somewhat intransigent stereotype of the assimilated African intellectual as someone who has exchanged his or her own culture wholesale for that of another. This simplistic view of cultural identity cannot provide a satisfactory account of the lived cultural experience of a colonised people. See Fanon (1990:176).

²⁴ Much of this discussion was prompted by a letter expressing the "views of a European reader" which rehearsed the traditional argument that non-Europeans were not quite ready for European civilisation, and argued that instead of "cursing [the white man], Africans should be grateful for the benefits they had already received, not least of which was Shakespeare, Beethoven and 'medical science'" (August 1951:8). For another caustic response, see October 1951:inside cover page.

²⁵ See also, March 1950:2.

²⁶ Interestingly, in the only response to an African-authored text in *The Voice*, Lucas (Lewis) Nkosi's play, *Now I Know*, is described as "an insipid worn out carbon copy of *Cry, the Beloved Country*". Betraying a "complete lack of understanding of the present situation in South Africa", it is strongly condemned for its depiction of Africans as "thieves, rogues, scoundrels, apes of the herrenvolk". This work "teaches nothing" and "most important of all... does not suggest a way by which we can achieve complete freedom and equality for all" (April 1951:8).

²⁷ The study, entitled *The African: Today and Tomorrow* (1934), was critical of the tendency amongst European anthropologists to focus solely on pre-colonial cultures.

²⁸ The revised and updated version of Mphahlele's *The African Image*, published in 1975, includes an explicit engagement with Fanon's arguments in *The Wretched of the Earth* (See Mphahlele 1974:63-64, 91). Since *The Wretched of the Earth* was only published in English by Penguin in 1965, Mphahlele would only have had access to these debates in the mid-1960s at the very earliest.

²⁹ See Pinnock (1993) and Bernstein (1999) for detailed accounts of the trial.

³⁰ For the sake of convenience, and except in relation to specific examples, I will continue to refer to the newspaper by its original name. There are of course strong continuities with the original paper: Brian Bunting remained editor until its banning in 1962, and many of the main contributors (such as Michael Harmel and Lionel Bernstein) remained the same.

³¹ I have not given explicit attention to Congress organ, *Liberation*, which appeared in the late 1950s. A literary-political journal with contributions from Helen Joseph, Hilda Watts and Lionel Bernstein, amongst others, its literary-political aesthetic has much in common with its sister publication *Fighting Talk*.

³² See also "Soviet Culture is the Heritage of All" by Ilya Ehrenburg (*New Age* 23 May 1957:7) and "Soviet Writers Call for Radical Change" by Wilfred Burchett (*New Age* 16 July 1959:4).

³³ While novelist Mary Morrison Webster grants that Schreiner is a "victim of an over-charged nervous system", she refuses to indulge her. "Immature" (*Forum* March 1955:14) and "maladjusted" (15), Schreiner should have "tried to be more reasonable and amenable to circumstance" (14). William Plomer is slightly more generous: "fidgety" and "highly strung", "her life was one long resistance movement, and even if it can be shown that this resistance movement was neurotic in its motive power, that does not invalidate it" (*Listener* 24 March 1955:522). See also Alan Paton (*Forum* March 1955) and Dan Jacobson (*Standpunte* September 1953).

³⁴ There is a significant alternative tradition of Schreiner reception in this country which begins with the work of Cape Town journalist, Ruth Schechter. Many writers on the Left including Clare Goodlatte and

Dora Taylor trace their first interest in questions of social justice in South Africa to the influence of Olive Schreiner.

³⁵ Roger Field's PhD thesis (2001) on Alex La Guma gives detailed attention to La Guma's *New Age* journalism.

³⁶ These titles do not appear in the original "Up My Alley Column". They were added by Odendaal and Field.

³⁷ For a detailed discussion of La Guma's engagement with the arguments of Lenin, Plekhanov and Gorky, see Jabulani Mkhize (1998).

³⁸ Messages of support and encouragement from ANC General Secretary, Walter Sisulu, and President of the South African Indian Congress, Dr. Dadoo, were printed on the front page of the first edition. In November 1952, in fact, it became the official mouthpiece of the Congress movement. Nelson Mandela became editor of the new (now weekly) publication which was now known as *Spark for Congress News* (*Spark* 28 November 1952:7). Rissik Desai had been arrested on the 13th October. The paper was banned soon afterwards.

³⁹ Commercial Trading Company in Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, Azad Café and the Lyric Theatre in Fordsburg, and the Empire Cinema and African Baking Company in Pretoria placed regular advertisements in the *Spark*. Most of these businesses were probably Indian-owned and were clearly supportive of the paper's political position. Azad Café in Fordsburg was also one of the places where people could obtain copies of the paper.

⁴⁰ The only other newspaper I have come across with a similar combination is a Durban Tamil weekly newspaper, the *Leader*. In this case, film reviews are little more than brief plot summaries, closer to advertisements than criticism. See Switzer and Switzer (1979) for more details.

⁴¹ There is also an interesting critique of the American documentary series *March of Time*. For this anonymous reviewer, these documentaries are "sugar-coated propaganda pills" in the interests of American Imperialism (*Spark* 25 April:5).

⁴² For more details, see Simons and Simons (1983:540), Woodson (1992) and Bernstein (1999).

⁴³ Hilda Watts was born in London in 1915 and came to South Africa in 1934. She joined the Communist Party in the late 1930s and is "best remembered as the only Communist Party candidate ever elected to public office by an all-white electorate" (Gerhart and Karis 1977:4). In the 1950s, she was an active member of the Congress of Democrats. She was detained during the 1960 state of emergency. She and her husband, Lionel Bernstein, left the country in 1964 and settled in England.

⁴⁴ Joe Matthews served as national secretary, and ultimately president, of the ANC Youth League. He was born in 1929 and attended St. Peter's Secondary School in Johannesburg. He studied at Fort Hare University as well as the University of the Witwatersrand. He left South Africa in the early 1960s (Gerhart and Karis 1977:79).

⁴⁵ Henry Makgothi was another graduate of St. Peter's Secondary School. He graduated with a BA and a teaching diploma from Fort Hare, but his teaching career came to an end when he was dismissed for participating in the 1952 Defiance Campaign. He was elected president of the Transvaal ANC Youth League in May 1954. A defendant in the Treason Trial, he made an unsuccessful attempt to leave South Africa in 1960. He was arrested and served a long prison sentence on Robben Island (Gerhart and Karis 1977:69).

⁴⁶ M.B. Yengwa was an influential member of the ANC in Natal in the 1950s. The son of a Zulu labourer, he was born in Natal in 1923 and educated in Richmond. He joined the ANC in 1945. He was arrested in 1963 and held in solitary confinement. He left South Africa in 1966 and settled first in Swaziland and then in London (Gerhart and Karis 1977:168).

⁴⁷ Tennyson Makiwane was born in the Transkei in 1933. He became active in the African National Congress Youth League while a student at Fort Hare. Staff writer, and later foreign correspondent for *New Age*, his academic and journalistic career was cut short by the events of the Treason Trial. After his release in 1956, he left the country and settled in London where he played a prominent role in the launching of the international boycott movement (Gerhart and Karis 1977:69).

⁴⁸ Hilda Watt's concern with the role of "folk art" in contexts of struggle also touches on popular political song and dance in South Africa which she describes as "new weapons in the struggle for freedom" (September 1954:15).

⁴⁹ Alfred Hutchinson published his autobiography, *Road to Ghana*, in 1960. Born in the Eastern Transvaal in 1924, he graduated from St. Peter's Secondary School in Johannesburg and obtained a BA degree and teacher's diploma from Fort Hare in 1948. He worked as a teacher in Pimville High School, Johannesburg, but was dismissed because of his participation in the Defiance Campaign. He was co-opted onto the ANC national executive committee in the mid-1950s. One of the accused in the 1956 Treason Trial, he left the

country after his acquittal in 1958 and settled in Ghana. He died in Nigeria in 1972 (Gerhart and Karis 1977:38). For more on Hutchinson's autobiography, see Woeber (2000).

⁵⁰ This is a line from Jacques Romain's poem "When the Tam-Tam Beats" quoted in Mphahlele's article.

Conclusion

This thesis highlights the existence of a rich tradition of radical cultural-political debate in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s that has completely disappeared from the dominant historical record. It draws attention to the existence of a complex network of ‘subaltern counterpublics’ in South Africa – newspapers, magazines, discussion groups, theatre associations, debating societies and reading clubs – which articulated a powerful opposition to prevailing intellectual and political norms. In retrieving this fascinating tradition of cultural-political debate in South Africa, I have been particularly concerned to demonstrate the extent to which it offered an alternative to the discourse of ‘English Studies’ as it was understood at the time. The emphasis in this thesis on the discourse of English Studies in South Africa is clearly informed by my own intellectual and institutional formation (and present location) in the now much broader disciplinary area known as ‘English Studies’. In highlighting the existence of an alternative tradition of cultural discussion, I aim not only to provide a much more nuanced and inclusive sense of the South African ‘public sphere in the world of letters’ in the past, but also to point to a complex history of contestation and struggle which has since disappeared from the dominant historical account.

My investment in an alternative tradition of cultural-political debate in South Africa derives in the first place from the fact that it provides a rare set of examples of a non-mainstream or extra-institutional discussion in South Africa; in other words, that it reflects the concerns, preoccupations, political agendas and interpretive frameworks of those whose intellectual (and political) lives were constituted outside of formal academic environments. My interest in this project is also strongly informed by the fact that these individuals or groups occupied a marginal position in South African society because of their class position, racial categorisation or political affiliation. In this sense, the project explicitly set out to explore (and also to privilege) different kinds of South African ‘marginalities’. Unable (and unwilling) to confine myself to the influential problematic of the colonised intellectual-activist ‘writing back’ to the colonial centre, then, in this study I explicitly engage with a broader notion of ‘subalternity’ than is usually recognised under the category of the ‘postcolonial’. In this regard, I attempt to move

away from what could become a somewhat ghettoised focus on the colonial subject towards a more integrated perspective. The overwhelming emphasis in the project on alternative South African *reading* communities, however, immediately problematises any claims to representivity. What is explored, in other words, is only a particular kind of marginality, one which, in fact, excludes the majority of the South African population. Notwithstanding complexities of class origin, many of the writer-intellectuals explored in this thesis are either petit-bourgeois or middle class. In relation to most South Africans at the time, this is inevitably the position of a more privileged elite.

In comparison to the discourse of English Studies in South Africa (the emerging discourse of ‘practical criticism’ in particular), the alternative intellectual traditions described in this thesis are marked by an overt entanglement with the socio-political realities of the South African context. In contrast to the idealising, universalising and apolitical tendencies of mainstream approaches, the cultural-political debates of an alternative tradition are ones which engage directly with the South African socio-political scene, most frequently from a left-wing or anti-colonial perspective. Literary-cultural debate in these traditions becomes an important means of articulating an overt political critique: of confronting, addressing and exposing the material realities of deprivation, exclusion and oppression in contemporary South African society. In addition, in contrast to the solitary or personal engagement of a mainstream approach (where the close reading of literary texts is understood to effect a powerful inner transformation), the cultural-political debates of South African radicals tend to have both a more politicised and a more *public* or collective character. In this regard, individual critics might argue over political strategy, contest colonialist histories, or consider the problem of American cultural imperialism. Frequently the occasion for lively public intellectual exchange, debate and contestation, literary-cultural debate itself becomes a significant form of oppositional political intervention and activity. To borrow Nancy Fraser’s formulation, this is a kind of ‘political participation enacted via the medium’ of radical cultural debate.

For the Communist Party and the NEUM in particular, literary-cultural debates of this kind become one of the primary means through which counter-hegemonic ideas are circulated in the broader society. In groups like the Left Book Club and the New Era Fellowship, for example, literary-cultural debate is regarded as an important politicising and educational tool: a means whereby individuals and groups can come to a deeper understanding of social processes and clarify their political aims. In this sense, literary-cultural discussion becomes an essential part of a wider-ranging political contestation and

critique. An important aspect of this counter-hegemonic project – and one which again marks an important difference in relation to normative practices – is the circulation of an alternative literary canon. In newspaper such as the *Guardian* and *The Torch* and discussion groups such as the Left Book Club and the New Era Fellowship, an alternative canon includes writers as diverse as C.L.R. James, John Steinbeck, Sinclair Lewis, Howard Fast, George Orwell, Erskine Caldwell, Eugene O'Neill, Arturo Barea, Jack London, Ignazio Silone, Richard Wright, Berthold Brecht, Anton Chekov, Vladimir Dudinstev and Maxim Gorky.

Unlike the tendency in mainstream debates of the 1940s and 50s to erase the material contexts of literary-cultural production and consumption, and to prefer an artificial separation between culture and the political realm, an alternative South African tradition understands these areas as inevitably intertwined. In a related move, the radical traditions of cultural-political debate in South Africa also repeatedly contest the political or ideological neutrality of literary-cultural texts. Culture, in other words, is understood as central to the operations of colonial and class rule: a powerful means of securing consent for existing social hierarchies, it can take particularly pernicious forms in colonial and semi-colonial contexts. For black South African intellectuals writing in publications such as *The Voice*, *The Citizen* and *Fighting Talk*, for example, the ideological function of literary-cultural texts is particularly noticeable in examples of racist stereotyping in school text books as well as in the distortions of historiography and historical fiction. In their acute awareness of the role of culture in supporting and rationalising their own oppression, black reading communities in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s, in other words, have already anticipated the 'cultural imperialism' arguments of influential critics such as Edward Said.

A similar scepticism is reserved for the ostensibly 'objective', 'neutral' or 'non-partisan' operations of mainstream literary-critical approaches. What is emphasised instead is a dominant literary-critical practice which conceals its conservative political agendas beneath the disingenuous guise of a disinterested stance. In this regard, George Marsden's scathing attack on Christina van Heyningen's tendency to 'hypostasise morality' at the expense of material contexts, Jack Cope's sense of the conservative operations of canon-formation, and A.C. Jordan's criticism of the way in which the character-driven preoccupations of conventional criticism obscure the political implications of literary texts are just a few examples of an alternative literary-critical

practice which seeks to expose the deeply conservative and largely coercive politics of a mainstream literary-critical approach.

One of the central concerns in the project has been to consider the impact of a politicised approach in relation to the interpretation of particular texts. How are texts refigured, reshaped and redeployed in the overtly politicised reading communities into which they travel? What are the dominant reading strategies, aesthetic assumptions, interpretative conventions and socio-political agendas of these alternative South African traditions? What happens, for example, when Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, or Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* enter alternative interpretive communities such as the South African Left Book Club, the New Era Fellowship or the Bantu People's Theatre?

Complexities and variants notwithstanding, if there is one interpretative practice that unites the diversity of critics and critical traditions I describe in this thesis, it is a preoccupation with content rather than form. What this means in this context is a tendency not only to respond directly to the socio-political realities invoked in the texts (and in this sense, to treat the text as a direct 'window' onto the world outside the text), but also to adopt an explicitly politicised approach, one which foregrounds the implicit ideological and political assumptions of the ostensibly transcendent literary-cultural artefact. In many cases, politics is made the central measure of literary worth. Not surprisingly (and this is, of course, the dominant stereotype), there is a strong preference for literary-cultural texts which – using the language of the time – are 'socially conscious'. When it comes to literary texts which articulate conservative political views, the task is to make these views explicit. If, as Martin Orkin (1987) has argued, a preoccupation with abstract moral truths plays an important role in the operations of hegemonic rule, an explicit focus in these alternative traditions on the particulars of history and politics provides a powerful tool with which to contest it.

As the above comment suggests, these overtly politicised readings differ substantially from the formal, moral or ethical preoccupations of normative English Studies models. Where critics such as Geoffrey Durrant, J.P.L. Snyman and Edward Davis strongly repudiate, even ridicule, what they regard as the too-earnest political preoccupations of writers like Stephen Spender, Olive Schreiner or Doris Lessing, for South African Communists such as Michael Harmel, Hilda Bernstein, Joe Matthews and Henry Makhoti, a progressive politics is one of the chief determinants of literary value. Where mainstream critics either deny the *literary* significance of overtly political texts

(or refuse to acknowledge the *political* significance of literary texts in general), the intellectuals of an alternative South African tradition routinely foreground the politics of *all* literary texts, and are particularly partial to those which articulate a progressive position.

An overtly politicised literary-critical response means that, in many cases, texts are read through, and into, local material struggles. Regarded less as the transcendent objects of a privileged realm of 'High Culture', literary-cultural texts are directly interpolated into a broader political and material field, and appropriated for explicitly political ends. These alternative reading practices take a number of different forms. For literary critics in *The Torch*, for example, literary-cultural debate is an important site of public political discussion, a place where political questions are elaborated and contested, a place where community divisions and political disagreements are 'performed' or staged. For Mphahlele writing in *The Voice*, literary criticism takes the form of a radical interrogation of the politics of racial stereotyping in South African fiction: for many black South Africans, this is an important element in a broader contestation of oppressive colonial rule. Another striking example of the political uses of literary criticism in these contexts is A.C. Jordan's efforts to read *The Tempest* in relation to the anti-colonial struggles of the petit-bourgeoisie in the Western Cape. Finally, in the work of Jack Cope, literary criticism also becomes a way of rescuing and reinventing an oppositional literary canon as inspiration for an on-going political struggle.

An overtly politicised reading of literary-cultural texts is closely connected to the privileging of notions of fictional verisimilitude and 'truth-telling'. Across all the examples, in fact, verisimilitude emerges as the most consistently applied aesthetic criterion. Working from a reflectionist model of literature (reality is knowable, and literary texts can 'tell it like it is') the texts that are privileged in this tradition are those which reveal the 'truth' about contemporary socio-political reality, those which unmask or expose aspects of society which are denied or hidden in the dominant culture. In this regard, there is a strong valorisation of realist fictional modes, and much less patience with modernist experimentation. The brand of realism which is endorsed is also a very specific one: there is a marked preference for the documentation of collective rather than individualist concerns; a concern with the valorisation of working class experience; and a strong preoccupation with what Andre van Gysegem describes as the 'big issues' of contemporary socio-political experience rather than 'trivial' bourgeois abstractions. Even more interesting, the particular kind of realism which is endorsed is very close to a

Lukàcsian view. For many writer-intellectuals (following Engels) artistic fidelity is not enough: what is favoured is a more comprehensive or ‘totalising’ realism, one which is able to extract the pith or essence from an amorphous and complex socio-political reality; a realism which probes below the surface to reveal the larger social processes and patterns which underlie the minutiae of everyday experience. In many cases, this particular understanding of ‘realism’ is one which accords closely with a Marxist interpretation of history.

For most of the writer-intellectuals discussed in this thesis, fictional ‘truth’ is understood in overtly political terms. In the case of South African Communists such as Michael Harmel, Betty Radford, Hilda Watts and Leonard Bernstein, ‘truth’ is largely understood in accordance with the aesthetic and political conventions of Soviet socialist realism. In this perspective, a ‘faithful’ record is one which depicts the archetypal struggle between ‘progress’ and ‘reaction’; one which tells inspiring stories of socialist advance and determined working-class resistance; one in which protagonists are heroic, ‘positive types’; and one in which material forces are privileged over individual agency. These aesthetic preferences are not peculiar to white South African Communists: in the work of *Fighting Talk* critics such as Joe Matthews, Henry Makhoti and M.B. Yengwa, for example, there is a similar preference for fiction which resists either Romantic themes or ‘art for art’s sake’, and concentrates instead on documenting the struggles of African people for a better life.

Dora Taylor’s take on the question of fictional ‘truth’ is somewhat different. Drawing in the first instance on the intellectual and political traditions of classic European Marxism, Taylor works from the Hegelian view of art as a privileged mode, one which is able to reveal the ‘truth’ about society long before economics, politics or historiography. In this sense, she shares the opinion of her Communist counterparts that literature can cast a sharp illuminating light on social processes normally obscured by the dominant or ‘common sense’ view. Where she parts company with South African Communist traditions, however, is in her contention that it is not (what she describes as) the “sledgehammer” approach to artistic creation which is necessarily the most politically effective. Echoing Engels’s more circumspect approach to the ‘tendenzroman’ – and drawing on his view that “realism...may creep out in spite of the author’s views” (Solomon 1979:68) – Taylor works from the assumption that the illuminating function of art can occur independently of the author’s conscious purpose. A preoccupation with the

process rather than the *intention* of art is clearly a significant departure from the position of most South African Communists.

In making these claims for a radical tradition of cultural-political debate in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s, I wish to emphasise that this is a rich and varied tradition (especially its more overtly Marxist or leftist tendencies) which cannot easily be dismissed as ‘vulgar determinism’ or Stalinist prescription, an attempt at an unnatural ‘forcing’ of politics into the world of the arts. Even in the more obvious examples of Stalinist-style critique, there is evidence of subtlety, complexity and nuance which undermines any such dismissive claims. Given the practical exigencies of political circumstance in South Africa, these intellectual traditions tended to have a more instrumentalist or pragmatic emphasis, to regard themselves primarily as a form of practical intervention in contemporary socio-political affairs. In this sense, with the exception of the work of Dora Taylor, this tradition is less about the application or elaboration of existing critical theory (as was the case with British Marxists like Christopher Caudwell or anti-colonial theorists like Frantz Fanon) than about developing a critical practice which would facilitate the more immediate aims of political struggle against the emerging apartheid state.

Dora Taylor’s literary journalism in *Trek* and her public lectures to the NEUM, in particular, provide rare examples of the effort to elaborate or develop the implications of a Marxist problematic in the South African context. As Maynard Solomon and others have argued, there is no Marxist theory of art; rather “the history of Marxist aesthetics has been the history of the unfolding of the possible application of Marxist ideas and categories to the arts and to the theory of art” (1979:5). Dora Taylor and, to a lesser extent, Jack Cope and Sam Kahn are a few of the South African critics to take up this challenge. Where Kahn employs a materialist method to take on formidable European figures such as T.S. Eliot and Sigmund Freud, for Cope it is a less about the concrete application of Marxist ideas than a general informing principle. Taylor’s work offers by far the most developed example. Her emphasis on the class roots of art and her careful elucidation of the material contexts of literary production and consumption provides an illuminating angle on literary-cultural forms which is wholly absent from the dominant English Studies tradition. In particular, Taylor’s materialist analysis of South African literature offers a cogent account of its routine ideological distortions and blind spots. Similarly, her encyclopaedic and wide-ranging investigations into the rise and fall of European literary movements are an ambitious attempt to refigure the ostensibly

spontaneous operations of literary 'fashion' in terms of a much more concrete, less idealised material and social practice. On the basis of this evidence, it would appear that a position outside of, or more marginal to, Communist Party circles provided opportunities for theoretical experimentation and creative innovation which may not have been available to the same degree to those who were located within international Communist Party circles. As I have argued, however, there was also a strong emphasis amongst South African Communists on *practical struggle* which would certainly have taken precedence over a more solitary or abstracted kind of theoretical engagement.

Returning for a moment to continuities rather than differences, another abiding aesthetic preoccupation across the many examples discussed in this thesis is a tendency to privilege the depiction of contemporary urban African experience over what many writers and critics regard as the misguided or nostalgic search for pre-colonial 'African' roots. Beginning with articles by Frederick Bodmer and R. Feldman in *The South African Opinion* in the late 1930s, reappearing in the activities of the Bantu People's Theatre, and continuing in Dora Taylor's articles in *Trek* in the early 1940s, this issue is also of enormous concern to African delegates at the 'Conference of Non-European Writers' held in Johannesburg in 1945. The theme re-surfaces in Jack Cope's 1950s column "Art and the People", and is also of central importance in the cultural-political debates of both *The Voice* and *Fighting Talk*. Much of this argument concerns an insistence that white South African artists and writers retreat from what amounts to a racist and stereotypical preoccupation with so-called 'traditional' African life and culture. The other strand in the argument is the forthright assertion of African modernity in the face of on-going government efforts to institute apartheid segregation under the guise of protecting a traditional African way of life. To linger in "ancestral fields" (*Fighting Talk* 1960:11), as Mphahlele put it, is to confirm the racist myths of the dominant society, and to provide powerful ideological support for apartheid policies.

Another consistent emphasis which unites these discourses (and distinguishes them from mainstream approaches) is an awareness of the material obstacles in the way of indigenous cultural expression in South Africa during the period. For many, this translates into an explicit concern with the creation of a more inclusive, democratic and non-racial South African culture. Unlike the 'benevolent' cultural imperialism of critics like Christina van Heyningen, this is not understood as a process of gentle assimilation into 'higher' Western cultural forms. Instead it is a practice which builds on and recognises the value of all cultural contributions. In a context in which racial division is

actively fostered and enforced in the dominant culture, these efforts to achieve some kind of solidarity across race and class groups – however limited – are a noteworthy attempt to go against the dominant cultural grain. In their emphasis on the creation of a popular radical theatre, discussion groups, film societies, public lectures, debating clubs, and workers' educational projects, organisations like the Left Book Club, the New Era Fellowship and the Johannesburg Forum Club, in particular, played an important role in forging a more inclusive, egalitarian and participatory South African cultural practice.

For many of the writer-intellectuals in an alternative South African tradition, then, culture is regarded as an important 'weapon in the struggle' against oppression, a significant additional ideological 'front' in the broader struggle against the state. A powerful politicising and educating tool, it is also a means of exposing injustice, restoring dignity, inspiring solidarity, and creating the conditions for the more egalitarian society to come. These concerns with developing a 'fighting culture' – one which is explicitly tied to an anti-colonial or leftist political project – might appear to be completely remote from the preoccupations of South African Leavisities such as Christina van Heyningen and Geoffrey Durrant. Despite their unhappiness with the insistent foregrounding of politics in the cultural debates of an alternative South African tradition, their efforts in the public sphere are nevertheless directed by similarly ambitious socio-political aims: what they sought to achieve through literary-cultural discussion, as Durrant put it, was a kind of covert operation against the threatened values of a minority culture. In both traditions, then – despite their substantially different political aims – culture is granted a privileged place in a broader project of social transformation and change. This tendency to make inflated claims for the transforming effects of culture is especially true of South African Communists. A particularly strong emphasis of the Popular Front period, this assumption is summed up in the Left Book Club slogan, "revolution by reason". Other Marxists such as Dora Taylor, as we have seen, were much more circumspect. In Taylor's case, while culture is a fruitful starting point for political discussion, a productive way of engaging with the contemporary socio-political scene, the engine of social change is always primarily a material or economic one. Similarly, while many black South African writer-intellectuals are equally convinced about the importance of culture as a force for radical social change, they are more likely to regard issues such as mass illiteracy, poverty and malnutrition as of greater importance.

When it comes to issues such as the denigration of 'non-Western' cultural identities or apartheid-style exclusions in the cultural sphere, however, the political stakes for black South Africans are clearly much higher. In this regard, the more general cultural-political discussions in newspapers such as *The Torch*, *The Citizen*, *The Educational Journal*, *CATA* and *The Voice* bear vivid testimony to an on-going concern amongst black South Africans with the 'politics of culture' in South Africa, a debate in which issues of cultural access and identity take on enormous symbolic and material importance in relation to a broader set of socio-economic and political exclusions. While these issues of cultural exclusion and marginality go to the heart of what it meant to be oppressed, it would be a mistake to assume that all black South Africans experienced them in exactly the same way. The position of relative privilege occupied by Indians and coloureds in relation to Africans, for example, would have militated against any such uniformity of response. That said, however, there is a surprising amount of congruity. Of particular importance in this regard is the vigorous claim on the part of many black South Africans to equal participation in all forms of South African cultural life and a firm rejection of segregated cultural institutions. In making this argument, writer-intellectuals in *The Torch* and *The Voice*, in particular, strongly contest a view of culture which remains tied to national or ethnic boundaries. Repudiating the notion of cultural 'purity' – even the idea of 'Western culture' itself – they highlight instead the much more complex processes of cultural exchange, cross-pollination and 'contamination'. The demand for access to the privileged domain of 'white' or Western culture, then, is not the expression of a desire to sit at the cultural feet of one's colonial masters, but to claim a 'world' culture as a legitimate human inheritance.

For many writer-intellectuals in publications such as *The Torch*, *The Educational Journal* and *The Voice*, one of the most effective ways in which to contest the routine racial denigrations of the dominant culture was to underline the cultural barbarism of a civilisation which had arrogated to itself all the powers of the moral high-ground. Drifting at times into an affinity with the arguments of Aimé Césaire (1972), Walter Benjamin (1973) and Raymond Williams (1973), these arguments underline a violent history of imperial conquest and appropriation, and point to continuing race and class oppressions in the present. For many, this critique is only strengthened by the awareness that Western culture itself (particularly the very proximate examples of racist distortion and stereotype in South African poetry, art and fiction) is deeply implicated in the exercise of racial oppression. A related issue concerns the participation in those cultural

events and activities which fell under the auspices of liberal cultural organisations such as the Eoan group and the Hyman Liberman institute. Here, while sheer physical presence can clearly be an effective way of challenging the political exclusions of the dominant culture, many of the black intellectuals of a radical South African tradition also make the point that participation in racially segregated cultural activities such as the ‘Coon Carnival’ or the productions of the Eoan group can in fact have the effect of ghettoising and denigrating black experience even further.

In this regard, a particularly controversial theme in the cultural-political debates amongst Unity Movement leaders such as Ben Kies, Goolam Gool and A.C. Jordan is the explicit rejection of what Ben Kies described as the ‘cult of respectability’: the powerful colonialist equation which makes economic and political rights attendant upon the conspicuous demonstration of a particular degree of Western ‘civility’. Instead of pursuing an ultimately futile political strategy of deferential cultural accommodation – one which powerfully confirms the existing hierarchies of the dominant culture – the more politically effective solution, Kies and others argued, is the promotion of a radical education which actively contests ruling class norms. These debates emerge as an explicit rebuttal to the cultural and political strategies of a more conservative black petit-bourgeois elite. In drawing attention to these interesting cultural-political contestations, I make a point about the heterogeneity and complexity of anti-colonial resistance in South Africa during this period.

The Voice critics such as Es’kia Mphahlele, Isaac Matlare and Khabi Mngoma do not offer an explicit engagement with these ‘culture as civilising’ debates; however, their strong opposition to snobbish leaders, ‘boot-lickers’ and political ‘sell-outs’ suggests a similar repugnance for those who work the codes of civility for their own pecuniary or political advantage. In both cases, the anti-colonial critique is not registered in exclusively racial terms, but also includes a powerful repudiation of class rule, one which is based on an explicit identification with the poor majority. However, in the context of government efforts to resuscitate a (largely invented) pre-colonial African culture in the interests of more effective apartheid rule, the far greater challenge for African intellectuals during this period lies in contesting a reified African ‘tribal’ identity with a defiant assertion of African modernity. The conspicuous demonstration of Western cultural proficiency in South Africa in the 1950s, then, should not be seen as an example of colonial ‘complicity’, but rather as a demand for political and cultural inclusion and a

claim to 'world' culture which represents a significant challenge to existing cultural-political 'truth'.

While the right to cultural access is naturally of less importance to white South African intellectuals, there is a developing awareness – stimulated by a greater degree of co-operation amongst white and black intellectuals as a result of the Congress movement – of the rich possibilities of cultural integration and exchange. In this regard, white and black South African intellectuals during this period demonstrate an awareness of the shifting, ambiguous and potentially transformative character of the 'transcultural' space which anticipates a far more contemporary debate.

As I have argued, the more politicised discourses of an alternative South African cultural-political tradition represent a substantial departure from normative university-based models. In the case of the Communist Party and the NEUM, in particular, this approach is informed by an oppositional politics which owes much of its inspiration to European Marxism. For South African Communists, this was a version of Marxism which had come under the heavy influence of Stalin; others on the Left, however, drew from the more open forms of classical Marxist traditions. In the cultural-political debates of an alternative South African tradition, therefore, lies a pioneering effort to apply the insights of a Marxist critical method which precedes the more famous Marxist interventions in the South African academy of the 1970s by at least twenty or thirty years. Without the benefit of European critical theory, this work is clearly locked into the more naïve cultural paradigms of a previous age. Nevertheless, it makes an important contribution to the development of Marxist thought in South Africa which ought to be acknowledged.

Like the counterpart traditions in Britain, however, it is interesting to note to what extent an embryonic South African Marxism continues to register the influence of other, more conservative critical paradigms, notably those of European 'Kulturkritik'. In the work of Dora Taylor and Jack Cope, in particular, Romantic perspectives continue to exert a strong pull: Taylor's sense of art as a special kind of cognition; the recurring image in Jack Cope's work of the heroic writer-artist figure raging against social injustice; and a tendency amongst those on the Left more generally to romanticise working class experience are just some of the more obvious examples. There is also a pervasive hostility amongst South African leftist critics towards popular commercial culture (with the notable exception of journalists writing for the *Spark*), and a strong emphasis on developing the skills of critical thinking which comes very close to the

concerns of South African Leavisities. Similarly, the emphasis amongst Communists on art as a weapon of struggle derives, to some extent, from an idealist understanding of the social function of culture which has clear affinities with an Arnoldian and Leavisian view.

In all cases, however, the manifest preoccupations are propelled by very different socio-political agendas. With regard to commercial culture, an alternative cultural theory concentrates on exposing both its structural underpinnings and its conservative ideological role, an approach which aligns it more closely with the Frankfurt school than the *Scrutiny* project. South African Leavisites, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with the steady erosion of traditional values in the face of an ever-expanding and powerful commercial culture. The same is true in the case of the shared emphasis on critical thinking. For South African Leavisites, as I have argued, an emphasis on critical thinking provides a way of ensuring the effective dissemination and continuation of the values of a privileged elite. In an alternative South African cultural discourse, on the other hand, the emphasis on critical thinking derives from a concern with unmasking the ‘truth’ about exploitation and oppression and is therefore primarily directed at creating the conditions for a more effective political opposition.

These differences in political emphasis, of course, turn on the very well-known polarities of reform versus revolution, gradualism versus rupture, an idealist as opposed to a materialist understanding of social change. In other words, whilst a South African Leavisian cultural project is concerned with the steady improvement of existing society through the preservation and more widespread circulation of traditional values (enshrined in the great works of the English Canon), South Africa’s alternative traditions are more likely to favour far-reaching and fundamental social change, a radically altered social existence in which the inequalities of race and class have been completely eradicated.

A more troubling overlap between the cultural discourses of the South African Left and those of South African Leavisites is a reliance on what Raymond Williams has described as “dominative techniques”, the attempt to effect a radical transformation of the “mass mind” which, he suggests, is rooted in a fundamental “distrust of the majority”, an inability to “trust the process of majority discussion” (1958:301). As I have argued, this is one of the defining preoccupations in the work of Geoffrey Durrant. To what extent is it also true of South African leftists? There are clear examples of a ‘dominative spirit’ in the alternative intellectual traditions discussed in this thesis. The authoritarian and hierarchical tendencies of the South African Communist Party are

perhaps one of the more obvious examples; Guy Routh's desire to stage plays which would make Africans "less confused" is another. Certainly a vanguardist approach to the circulation of counter-hegemonic discourses in the NEUM was also not altogether free from charges of arrogance and elitism. That said, there was also a significant pull in the opposite direction. This is most noticeable, as I have already suggested, in the attempts – in organisations like the Left Book Club, the Bantu People's Theatre, the Pretoria People's Theatre, and Unity Movement discussion forums such as the New Era Fellowship and the Progressive Forum – to encourage more open and egalitarian forms of cultural participation in South Africa.

As I have said, this study has examined a rich tradition of radical cultural-political debate in South Africa which is not available as part of the existing literary-cultural archive. This project of archival recovery, however, is not motivated by a purely arcane or antiquarian interest. While this may be an important aspect of the research, a far more pressing concern has been the re-adjustment of existing definitions of the past – a desire for historical accuracy, in other words – which in the South African context is also an act of (very limited) historical redress. In this regard, my aim has been to recover those arguments and intellectual traditions which were designated illegitimate and hence not available for 'archival' preservation. In this sense, one of the foremost concerns in this project has been to consider the implications of this archival refiguring for existing South African literary-cultural history. In the first place, the recognition of a pre-1970s South African radicalism disrupts the dominant literary-political narrative in a number of ways. A substantial body of Marxist literary-cultural response from the 1930s onwards challenges an accepted teleology which places the first emergence of a South African Marxist criticism in the early 1970s. In this regard, by highlighting the existence of alternative cultural-political debates in South Africa, I hope to establish a greater sense of the long history of Marxist literary-cultural discourses in South Africa than has hitherto been understood. However much the early British Marxists may have been ridiculed and dismissed by later commentators, the fact remains that they were there as models to either reject or improve upon. In the South African case, no such earlier efforts were remotely available. A similar picture emerges in the case of the cultural-political debates of those classified as 'non-European'. In this regard, the project highlights a rich and heterogeneous history of radical critical response amongst black South Africans from the late 1930s onwards, the extent of which is only just beginning to be understood.¹ One of the factors which has contributed to this significant historical omission is a tendency in

South African historiography to foreground the history of the African National Congress. This has inevitably had the effect obscuring the contributions of others on the radical Left in South Africa. A vigorous tradition of anti-colonial debate and contestation in publications such as *The Torch*, *The Educational Journal*, *CATA* and *The Voice* provides ample illustration of a significant challenge to the dominant regime which, interestingly, has been waged primarily on the grounds of culture itself.

If the South African 'public sphere in the world of letters' is a great deal richer, more diverse and, in many cases, more radical than was previously understood, it is also a place where South African women have played a far greater role than has hitherto been recognised. While women's history has not been an explicit focus of the present project, it has been striking to observe the role women have played in the development of the institutions of the South African 'counterpublic' sphere. Apart from their enormous contribution as journalists, editors and managers of a range of oppositional newspapers and journals, women have also been involved in the establishment of film clubs, theatre groups, reading circles, public lectures, debating societies and informal literary *salons*. These more invisible positions as hostesses or organisers of literary-cultural events have, of course, had the effect of obscuring much of this involvement. Women's contribution to the South African 'counterpublic' sphere is another fascinating aspect of South African history which has yet to be fully explored.

The historical contexts which provided the specific 'conditions of possibility' for the emergence of an alternative South African tradition have inevitably disappeared. I draw attention to this rich and eclectic history of radical debate in South Africa not out of a sense of nostalgia for a vanished past but in order to foreground the multitude of competing discourses which characterised South African intellectual life during the period. In other words, I highlight a greater spectrum of intellectual choice and hence historical possibility – beyond the dominant English Studies model – which has since disappeared from the historical record. What this investigation points to is that the history of the South African 'public sphere in the world of letters' is a history of vigorous discursive struggle and contestation, much of which has been completely forgotten. In drawing attention to this lively tradition, I make a claim for its continuing purchase in the present. The act of retrieval, in this sense, is also a means to keep these ideas 'afloat'.

A related concern has been to reflect on the largely invisible and ephemeral processes by means of which certain discourses in South Africa were designated 'legitimate' and others marginalised or discarded. If the story of the South African public

sphere during this period is the story of the gradual shrinking of the opportunities for a free and independent public discussion, it is also a story of the gradual disappearance of a leftist or anti-colonial discourse in the 'public sphere in the world of letters' and the corresponding ascendance of a more conservative, apolitical discourse. This growing conservatism, as I have argued, is not just a consequence of apartheid censorship and repression – a more dramatic shift to the right in the post-war period which echoes a growing conservatism in other parts of the world – but also speaks to the increasing influence of the interests of capital in the regulation and control of the South African public sphere. Even more important is a gradual, but inevitable, 'outlawing of politics' from the cultural sphere during the period which is best exemplified in the demise of *Trek* and its reconfiguration in the early 1950s as an exclusively cultural magazine. Another striking symbol of this important intellectual and political shift lies, of course, in the history of English Studies itself. I have already made a case for the fundamental continuities between the conservative socio-cultural projects of South African Leavisites, such as Geoffrey Durrant and Christina van Heyningen, and those historicist and philological approaches which they sought to displace. In both cases, as I have suggested, the strongest emphasis falls on the transmission of a particular set of social and cultural values which are granted the legitimacy of 'universal' or 'objective' truth. That said, the gradual ascendancy of the more ahistorical, de-contextualised and explicitly apolitical discourses of a South African Leavisian cultural project (and the corresponding marginalisation of a more radical cultural debate) provide even more spectacular evidence of the emerging trend towards the wholesale exclusion of political debate from the South African cultural sphere.

In some ways, then, this project offers an interesting confirmation of Barbara Herrnstein Smith's argument (1983) that cultural artefacts are treasured – and remain in canonical circulation – only to the extent that they continue to fulfil what is regarded at the time as a useful social function. What has been examined here, of course, is not the longevity of prized cultural artefacts, but the continued purchase of particular intellectual traditions. I do not wish to make anything but a tenuous and carefully qualified connection between cultural discourses in South Africa and the rise of a more conservative political ethos. Nor do I underplay the many compelling material circumstances which would only have accelerated the demise of a radical South African debate: banning, censorship, Cold War repression, and even simple disillusionment were clearly important factors in this regard. It is nevertheless possible to make the case that

the increasing marginalisation of a leftist or anti-colonial cultural discourse in South Africa from the early 1950s onwards – and the corresponding rise to prominence of a much more apolitical cultural debate – at the very least provided a fitting or useful ideological counterpart to the emerging apartheid state.

Notes:

¹ See, for example, Ursula Barnett's important history (1983) of black writing in South Africa. In the section entitled 'Critical Writing', A.C. Jordan and Es'kia Mphahlele are the only writers listed for the early apartheid period. Isabel Hofmeyr's recent examination of the African travels of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (2004) goes a long way towards unearthing some of the more ephemeral and difficult-to-access public debates amongst black South Africans during the period. Her work on the Lovedale Literary Society, for example, is particularly interesting in this regard.

Bibliography

1. List of Newspapers and Periodicals Consulted

- African Liberator*, September 1935 – January/February 1936 (Johannesburg)
Africa South, October/December 1956-October/December 1961 (Cape Town)
Bantu World, April 1932 (Johannesburg)
Contact, January 1954-December 1967 (Cape Town)
Call, January 1940-April 1942 (Durban)
Cape Standard, May 1936-November 1947 (Cape Town)
CATA/The New Teachers' Vision, September 1934-June 1956 (Umtata)
The Citizen, March 1956-May 1958 (Cape Town)
The Critic, 1932-1939 (Cape Town)
The Democrat/Die Demokraat, April 1939-December 1949 (Johannesburg)
Discussion, June 1951-December 1952 (Johannesburg)
Educational Journal, May 1915 to date (Cape Town)
Fighting Talk, February 1942-February 1963 (Johannesburg)
The Forum, April 1938-1964 (Johannesburg)
Forward, December 1924-December 1957
Guardian and successor papers, *The Clarion*, *People's World*, *Advance*, *New Age* and *Spark*, February 1937-March 1963 (Cape Town)
Ikaka Labasebenzi, July-August 1931 (Johannesburg)
Ikhwezi Lomso, July 1958-February 1960 (Queenstown)
Ilizwi Lesizwe, September 1961-May/June 1962 (Durban)
Indian Opinion, June 1903-August 1961 (Durban)
Indlela Yenkululeko/The Road to Freedom, February 1933-June 1934 (Johannesburg)
Inkundla ya Bantu, April 1938-November 1951 (Durban)
Inkululeko/Freedom, 1915-June 1950 (Johannesburg)
Liberation, September 1953-December 1959 (Johannesburg)
The Liberator, Feb/March – September 1937 (Cape Town)
Left Monthly, March-April 1941 (Johannesburg)
The South African Opinion, November 1934-August 1937 (Johannesburg)
The Spark, March 1935-June 1939 (Cape Town)
Spark, February 1952-February 1953 (Johannesburg)
The Spur, 1952-1956 (Caledon)
The Sun, August 1932-September 1956 (Cape Town)
Trek, August 1939-April 1947; May 1947-1952 (Cape Town)
The Torch, February 1946-December 1963 (Cape Town)
The Voice/The Voice of Africa, September 1949-May/June 1952 (Orlando)
The New African, January 1962-July 1964 (Cape Town)
Umlilo Mollo/The Flame, 1936 (Johannesburg)
Umsebenzi/The South African Worker, 1928-1938 (Johannesburg)
Umvikeli-Thebe/The African Defender, January-July 1936; March 1937-September/October 1938 (Johannesburg)
Workers Voice, irregular, 1944-1946 (Cape Town)

2. Interviews

Interview with David Adelstein (Cape Town 25 January 2001).
Interview with Sheila Belshaw (Cape Town 26 January 2001).
Interview with Gwen Wilcox and Norman Traub (Cape Town 26 January 2001).
Interview with Ronnie and Chrystal Britten (Cape Town 29 January 2001).
Interview with Doreen and Michael Muskett (England 24 February 2001).
Interview with Richard Dudley (Cape Town 17 July 2002).

3. Collections

Brian Bunting Collection, Mayibuye Centre, University of the Western Cape.
R.K. Cope Papers, Historical Papers Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
Fanny Klenerman Papers, Historical Papers Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
Unity Movement of South Africa Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Department,
University of Cape Town Libraries.

4. References: Primary Sources

Where I have been unable to ascertain the names of particular reviewers, I have used whatever signature appeared in the original publication (either initial or pseudonym). Articles or reviews published anonymously do not appear in the Bibliography.

- 'A.I.' 1946. "Review of *Black Boy* by Richard Wright". *Torch* 29 April:4.
1946. "Review of *The Iron Heel* by Jack London". *Torch* 20 May:4.
- 'A.O.D.' 1954. "Review of *The Lying Days* by Nadine Gordimer". *Fighting Talk* April:13.
- 'B.F.' 1950. "A Dying Culture". *Guardian* 16 March:4.
- 'F.' 1958. "Review of *A World of Strangers* by Nadine Gordimer". *Fighting Talk* August:14.
- 'H.B.' 1955. "The Way Out? Review of *The Thaw* by Ilya Ehrenburg". *Fighting Talk* July:15.
- 'J.M.' 1950. "Hamlet and 'Hamlet'". *Educational Journal* September:5.
- 'S.R.' 1952. "Review of *Jim Comes to Jo'burg*". *Spark* 29 February:4.
1952. "Review of *Desert Fox*". *Spark* 28 March:5.
1952. "Review of *The Proud and the Free* by Howard Fast". *Spark* 23 May 1952:4.
- 'M.M.J.' 1952. "Review of *Fixed Bayonets*". *Spark* 5 September 1952:5.
- 'N.J.J.' 1954. "Memoirs from a Distant Shore". *Fighting Talk* August:15.
- Altman, Phyllis. 1955. "Zambesi Marriage: Review of *A Proper Marriage* by Doris Lessing". *Fighting Talk* March:12.
1955. "A Sweet Jube-Jube Called Joobie Abrahams". *Fighting Talk* July:10.
1958. "Plays of Protest". *Fighting Talk* November:13-14.

1956. "Blind Spots and Colour Bars". *Fighting Talk* August:6-7.
- Beeton, Ridley. 1948. "Olive Schreiner and Realism". *Trek* August:28-29.
- Bergman, R. 1945. "Approach to Literature". *Trek* 23 February:14.
 1945. "Agate vs. Sitwell: Review of *Noblesse Oblige: Another Letter to Another Son* by James Agate". *Trek* 23 March:16-17.
 1945. "Adolescence: Review of *My Days of Anger* by James T. Farrell". *Trek* 18 May:17.
 1945. "Ignazio Silone". *Trek* 27 July:16-17.
- Bernstein, Edgar. 1936. "There IS a Growing South African Culture". *S.A. Opinion* 14 November:11-12.
 1950. "Steps to a South African Culture". *Trek* March:24-25.
 1950. "South African English Writers". *Trek* May:26-28.
 1955. "South Africa's First Great Writer: The Centenary of Olive Schreiner". *Jewish Affairs* April:15-18.
- Bernstein, Lionel. 1951. "Peter Abrahams's Novel of the Great Trek". *Guardian* 9 August:6.
 1952. "Road to Nowhere: Review of *The Path of Thunder* by Peter Abrahams, *Barbary Coast* by Norman Mailer and *The Bicycle Thieves* by Luigi Bartolini". *The Clarion* 24 July:4.
 1953. "Revolt of the Slave: Review of *Spartacus* by Howard Fast". *Advance* 16 April:7.
- Bodmer, Frederick. 1935. "The Black Man and His White Artist". *S.A. Opinion* 11 January 1935:15.
- Bosman, H.C. 1944. "An Indigenous South African Culture is Unfolding". *S.A. Opinion* April:25-26.
 1944. "What is Poetry?" *S.A. Opinion* August:24-25.
 1945. "Should We Have Art Competitions?" *S.A. Opinion* October:26-27.
 1946. "S.A. Novel Competition". *S.A. Opinion* July:26-27.
 1948. "Aspects of S.A. Literature". *Trek* September :24-25.
- Bunting, Brian. 1947. "Book Review of *Man Must Live* by Ezekial Mphahlele and *This Thing Has Got to Stop* by J.B. Khafula". *Guardian* 9 January:3.
 1958. "*Dr. Zhivago* – A Good Book With a Bad Philosophy". *New Age* 6 November:6.
- Butler, Guy. 1949. "Discussion of Professor Haworth's Paper". In: Proceedings of the Second Conference of University Teachers of English held at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 5-7 July:19.
- Caldecott, Oliver. 1944. "Ethics and Politics". *Trek* 15 November:14.
- Cope, Jack. 1943. "Who Prints the News?". *Trek* 24 September:11.
 1943. "No Tears Please". *Trek* 3 December:13.
 1946. "H.G. Wells". *Trek* 6 September:14.
 1950. "Prospects for South African English Prose". *Trek* March:8-10.
 1950. "South Africa's Greatest Book". *Guardian* 5 January:4.
 1950. "Writer of African Transition". *Guardian* 26 January:4.
 1950. "Poetry of T.S. Eliot". *Guardian* 2 February:4.
 1950. "The Houses We Live In". *Guardian* 9 February:4.

1950. "Culture and the Platteland". *Guardian* 16 February:4.
1950. "Poet of S. African Liberty". *Guardian* 16 March:4.
1950. "English Poetry in South Africa". *Trek* April:18-20.
1950. "Literature and Big Business". *Guardian* 20 April:4.
1950. "Charles Dickens, the Radical". *Guardian* 20 July:4.
1950. "Blackout on Books". *Guardian* 3 August:4.
1950. "Poet of Resistance". *Guardian* 10 August:4.
1950. "U.S.A. Honours a Great Writer". *Guardian* 17 August:4.
1950. "Art and Reality". *Guardian* 24 August:4.
1950. "Pablo Neruda". *Guardian* 31 August:4.
1950. "Art – On Whose Side?". *Guardian* 28 September:4.
1950. "African Sculpture, Old and New". *Guardian* 12 October:4.
1950. "Characters in Literature". *Guardian* 19 October:4.
1950. "Poet of Democracy". *Guardian* 26 October:4.
1950. "George Bernard Shaw". *Guardian* 9 November:4.
1950. "An Artist Among Bywoners". *Guardian* 16 November:4.
1950. "Dream and Nightmare". *Guardian* 23 November:4.
1950. "Artist or Saint". *Guardian* 30 November:4.
1950. "Is Art Necessary?". *Guardian* 21 December:4.
1951. "The Negro as a Novelist". *Guardian* 11 January:11.
1951. "How to Produce Kultuur". *Guardian* 25 January:11.
1951. "In Rescue of Robert Burns". *Guardian* 1 February:11.
1951. "God of the Proletariat". *Guardian* 8 February:11.
1951. "Indian Art Today". *Guardian* 8 March:11.
1951. "Songs of Liberty". *Guardian* 15 March:11.
1951. "The Iron Heel". *Guardian* 22 March:11.
1951. "Art of the Short Story". *Guardian* 29 March:11.
1951. "The Language of Synge". *Guardian* 19 April:11.
1951. "Cultural Armaments". *Guardian* 26 April:11.
1951. "Real Negroes and Fables". *Guardian* 24 May:11.
1951. "Imperial Culture". *Guardian* 7 June:11.
1951. "Maxim Gorky". *Guardian* 14 June:11.
1951. "Peretz Centenary". *Guardian* 5 July:11.
1951. "Art and the Sales Curve". *Guardian* 12 July:7.
1951. "Coons and Minstrels". *Guardian* 2 August:3.
- Davies, R.E. 1949a. "Discussion of Professor Haworth's Paper". In: Proceedings of the Second Conference of University Teachers of English held at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 5-7 July:17.
- 1949b. "Problems of Research in South Africa". In: Proceedings of the Second Conference of University Teachers of English held at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 5-7 July: 49-57.
- Davis, Edward. 1946. "English Writers of South Africa: Pringle". *S.A. Opinion* December:22-23.
1947. "English Writers of South Africa: Olive Schreiner". *S.A. Opinion* January:22-23.

1947. "English Writers of South Africa: Sarah Gertrude Millin". *S.A. Opinion* February:26-27.
1947. "English Writers of South Africa: William Plomer". *S.A. Opinion* March:24-25.
1947. "English Writers of South Africa: Roy Campbell". *S.A. Opinion* April:22-23.
1948. "The South African Short Story". *Trek* January:32-34.
1949. "The Need for a Practical Theory of Meaning". In: Hopwood, D (ed). *Practicable Criticism*. Bloemfontein: The University College of the Orange Free State:6-8.
- Doyle, Alan. 1956. "This Book is Dynamite: Review of *Episode* by Harry Bloom". *New Age* 10 May:6.
- Durrant, Geoffrey. 1944. *Propaganda and Public Opinion*. South African Affairs Pamphlets. Johannesburg: Society for the Friends of Africa.
1944. "Strategy Against Racism". *Common Sense* October:64
1945. "English Studies and the Community". Inaugural Address at the Natal University College. Pietermaritzburg: Natal Witness.
1945. "Cast a Cold Eye". *Trek* 4 May:16-17.
1945. "The Teaching of English". *The Mentor* October:10-11.
- 1946a. *Adult Education for Citizenship*. South African Affairs Pamphlets. Johannesburg: Society for the Friends of Africa.
- 1946b. "The Teaching of Poetry". In: Proceedings of the First Conference of University Teachers of English held at the University of the Witwatersrand, 10-12 July:1-8.
1946. "The Poetry of Aragon". *Trek* 3 May:16-17.
1947. "Notes on the Teaching of Literature". *Theoria* 1:3-7.
1947. "Review of *The Living Tradition* by T. Tyfield and K. R. Nicol". *Trek* 10 January:17.
1948. "The Place of Practical Criticism in the University Curriculum". In: Mackie, W.S. (ed). *Practical Criticism*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town:4-8.
1949. "Discussion of Professor Haworth's Paper". In: Proceedings of the Second Conference of University Teachers of English held at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 5-7 July:19.
1952. "Literary Criticism Today". *Forum* April:40-41.
1952. "The Living Word". *Forum* November:57-58.
1952. "A Plea for Imaginative Literature". *South African Libraries* 19 (January):68-70.
1956. "The Work of the Joint Matriculation Board, the English Common Language Syllabus, and the Proposed University Entrance Examination". In: "Proceedings of a Conference of University Teachers of English". Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press:11-20.
1957. "Literature and Tradition". *South African Libraries* 24(4):122-125.
1959. "Review of 'Proceedings of a Conference of University Teachers of English'". *Standpunte* 13 (October):60-63.
- Eglinton, Charles. 1951. "S.A. English Culture: Reply to 'Times' and 'Burger'". *Trek* October:6-7.

- Ehrenburg, Ilya. 1957. "Soviet Culture is the Heritage of All". *New Age* 23 May:7.
- Feldman, R. 1935. "'Idylls of the Black': An Appreciation of the Work of Irma Stern". *S.A. Opinion* 17 May:10.
1936. "Themes: A Problem of South African Literature". *S.A. Opinion* 22 February:6.
- Gardner, W.H. 1948. "Practical Criticism". In: Proceedings of the Second Conference of University Teachers of English held at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 5-7 July:21-29.
- Gill, H. 1948. "Politics and the Writer". *Trek* May:32-33.
- Gonnema, M. 1946. "Novel by Coloured Writer: Review of *Song of the City* by Peter Abrahams". *Torch* 1 April 1946:4.
1946. "Farewell to Silone: Review of *And He Did Hide Himself* by Ignazio Silone". *Torch* 13 May:4.
1946. "Review of *The Cry for Justice* edited by Upton Sinclair". *Torch* 22 July:4.
1946. "Review of *Swing Low* by Edwin A. Peeples". *Torch* 29 July:4.
- Gool, Jane. 1952. "Education for Citizenship". *CATA* December 1952:12-20.
- Grieg, J. Y .T. 1935. "D.H. Lawrence". *S. A. Opinion* 25 January: 20-22.
1935. "Literature and Criticism in South Africa". *S. A. Opinion* 1 November:17.
1944. "This Indigenous South African Culture". *S.A Opinion* June: 22.
1945. "The Artist and Society". *S.A Opinion* March: 22-23.
- Gulston, Charles. 1946. "S. African Poetry". *S.A. Opinion* November:24.
- Harmel, Michael. 1947. "Review of *Mine Boy* by Peter Abrahams". 16 January:4.
1955. "Olive Schreiner, South Africa's Greatest Creative Writer". *New Age* 24 February:7.
1955. "Olive Schreiner – Fearless Fighter Against Injustice". *New Age* 10 March:7.
1955. "Olive Schreiner and the Non-European People". *New Age* 17 March:7.
1955. "Olive Schreiner's Writings are Part of the Inheritance of South Africa". *New Age* 24 March:7.
1956. "The Shaw Centenary". *Fighting Talk* July:8-9.
- Haworth, P. 1949. "Co-ordinates of Criticism: Part Two". In: Proceedings of the Second Conference of University Teachers of English held at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 4-7 July: 2-16.
- Hopwood, D. 1949. "Discussion of Professor R.E. Davies's Paper". In: Proceedings of the Second Conference of University Teachers of English held at the University Teachers of English, held at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 5-7 July:61.
- Hopwood, D. (ed). 1949. *Practicable Criticism*. Bloemfontein: The University College of the Orange Free State.
- Hutchings, Geoffrey. 1958. "Nadine Gordimer's Worlds Again". *Fighting Talk* November:15-16.

- Hutchinson, Alfred. 1957. "Open Wide the Doors". *Fighting Talk* December-January:10-11.
- Jacobson, Dan. 1953. "The Story of an African Farm: An Approach". *Standpunte* September 8(1):68-74.
- Jordon, A.C. 1946. "...That Our Children May Live". *Educational Journal* August:4.
1950. "Civilisation and Mankind". Address delivered at the CATA Conference. *CATA* September:13-19.
1973. *Towards an African Literature: The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ka Nelani, Joe. 1950. "Review of *King of the Bastards* by Sarah Gertrude Millin". *Torch* 24 April:6.
- Ka Tshunungwa, Thembekile. 1957. "Freedom Songs". *Fighting Talk* August:13.
- Kahn, Sam. 1950. "Sam Kahn Writes to T.S. Eliot". *Guardian* 26 January:4.
1953. "Put Sex in its Proper Place". *Advance* 8 October:7.
1954. "Poets of Reaction". *Advance* 14 January:4.
- Kantor, Cyril. 1937. "*The Hairy Ape*". *S.A. Opinion* 6 February:12-13.
1937. "Review of *Famine* by Liam O'Flaherty". *S.A. Opinion* 17 April:14.
1937. "Review of *Straw Without Bricks* by E.M. Delafield". *S.A. Opinion* 1 May:8.
1937. "Review of *The Road to Wigan Pier* by George Orwell". *S.A. Opinion* 15 May:14-15.
1937. "Review of *Great Laughter* by Fannie Hurst. *S.A. Opinion* 12 June:14.
- Kies, Ben. 1938. "The Revolt of Youth" *Cape Standard* 7 June 1938:9
1938. "The Background of Segregation". Address delivered to the National Anti-CAD conference. In: Drew, Allison (ed). 1996. *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History. Volume 2: 1943-1964* Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Lipman, Alan. 1954. "What is Wrong With Local Art?". *Fighting Talk* July:14.
- Lynn, D. 1942. "Review of *Dragon's Teeth* by Upton Sinclair". *Trek* 11 September 1942:15.
- Mackie, W.S. 1946. "The Honours School in English". Proceedings of the First Conference of University Teachers of English held at the University of the Witwatersrand, 10-12 July:1-7.
- Mackie, W.S. (ed). 1948. *A Symposium on Practical Criticism*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Makgothi, Henry G. 1957. "Among the Sothos". *Fighting Talk* March:15-16.
- Makiwane, Tennyson. 1958. "They Call Us Jim...". *Fighting Talk* December:9.
- Malan, H.C. [Herman Charles Bosman]. 1944. "Art and Feudalism". *Trek* November:24-25.
- Malan, Jacques. 1943. "Social Symptoms". *Trek* 5 November:5
1944. "The Burden as Before". *Trek* 24 March:5.
1944. "Restricted Records". *Trek* 16 July:5.
- Manson, E. E. 1944. "The Teacher and Politics" *Educational Journal* September XIX(3):3-4.
- 'Masque'. 1950. "New Writers and the Colour Problem". *Trek* June:2-5.

1950. "Truth and the Creative Artist" *Trek* July:4-7, 46.
- Matthews, Joe. 1957. "African Literature". *Fighting Talk* February:11-12.
- Mbete, Woodroffe. 1946. "Non-European Writers". *Trek* 25 January:14.
- Morrison Webster, Mary. 1955. "Strange Genius". *Forum* 3(12):13-16.
- Mngoma, Khabi. 1949. "From Ragtime to Swing". *Voice* October:10-11.
1949. "Indigenous Music and the African Composer". *Voice* November:10.
1950. "On Art Criticism". *Voice* January:7.
- Mphahlele, Es'kia. 1950. "About Books: Review of *The African: Today and Tomorrow* by Diederich Westermann". *Voice* 14 August:8.
1950. "About My Library". *Voice* October-November:5.
1960. "...Away Into Ancestral Fields?". *Fighting Talk* February:11-12.
1962. "I'm For a Total Boycott by Overseas Artistes!" *Fighting Talk* July:12-13.
1962. "Writers of Africa". *Fighting Talk* September:12-13.
- 'Naledi' [Es'kia Mphahlele]. 1950. "Yehudi Menuhin: True Artist, True Man". *Voice* April:10.
1957. "South African Fiction: The Non-White Character". *Fighting Talk* September:11-12.
1957. "S. African Fiction: The Non-White Character". *Fighting Talk* November:11-13.
- O'Shea, Raymond. 1951. "Is There a South African Culture?". *Trek* February:4-6.
- Partridge, A.C. 1937. "Against Democracy". *S. A. Opinion* 20 February:7-10.
1937. "The Fascist and the Nazi Philosophies". *S. A. Opinion* 17 April: 7-8.
1937. "The Fascist and the Nazi Philosophies". *S. A. Opinion* 1 May: 5-6.
- Paton, Alan. 1955. "Olive Schreiner – The Forerunner". *Forum* April:26-29.
- Peck, Anthony. 1947. "S.A. English Literature". *Trek* November 1947:32-33.
- Pfaff, Isaac. 1948. "Brilliant South African Novel: Review of *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton". *Torch* 27 September 1948:5-6.
- Plomer, William. 1955. "Olive Schreiner: Her Life and Ideals". *The Listener* 24 March: 521-522.
- Postumus, H. 1945. "Realism and Romanticism". *S.A. Opinion* January:22-23.
- Poyurs, H. 1944. "Indigenous Literature". *S.A. Opinion* October:27.
- 'Quicksilver'. 1951. "African Drum". *Voice* August:2.
- 'Rabelais at Large' [Es'kia Mphahlele]. 1950. "Monsters, Gorgons, Dragons, Hybrids of Rooikop". *Voice* April:4.
1950. "The Vision of Judgement". *Voice* July:3.
- Radford, Betty. 1942. "'Dark Testament': Stories by a South African". *Guardian* 31 December:5.
1948. "Review of *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton". *Guardian* 4 March:4.
- Rabkin, Lily. 1948. "A Note on Criticism in South Africa". *Standpunte* 3(3):53-55.
- Routh, Guy. 1941. "We Want a National Literature". *Guardian* 10 July:3.
1950. "The Bantu People's Theatre". *Trek* October:20-23.

- Sachs, Joseph. 1950. "The Soul of the Drum". *Trek* June:25-27.
 1950. "Primitive Negro Sculpture". *Trek* July:21.
 1950. "The Art of the Bushman". *Trek* August:25-27.
 1951. "The Short Stories of Gordimer, Lessing and Bosman".
Trek November:15-16.
- Segal, Philip. 1948. "Practical Criticism and Critical Practice". In: Mackie,
 W.S. (ed). *A Symposium on Practical Criticism*. Cape Town:
 University of Cape Town:9-13.
- Sinclair, Frank. 1949. "On the Spirit of South Africa". *Trek* May:26-27.
 Snyman, J.P.L. 1950. "The Rise of the South African Novel". *Trek* August:4-7.
 1950. "Olive Schreiner". *Trek* September:16-18.
 1950. "The Modern South African Writers". *Trek* October:7-
 10.
 1950. "The Work of Sarah Gertrude Millin". *Trek* November:7-
 11.
 1952. *The South African Novel in English: Essays in Criticism
 and Society*. Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for
 Christian Higher Education.
- Taylor, Dora. 1935. "Poetry Past and Present" *The Critic* 3(2):75-85.
 1939. "War and Ourselves". *Trek* 31 August:19-20.
 1939. "When Politics are not Politics". *Trek* 28 September:14.
 1940. "Is our Education...?" *Trek* 19 December:14.
 1941. "What have we Done For Democracy?". *Trek* 2 January:7.
 1941. "Education for Democracy – First Stage". *Trek* 16
 January:7.
 1941 "The Proper Goose for Propaganda". *Trek*. 27 February:6.
 1941. "Challenge and Warning I". *Trek* 23 May:9.
 1941. "Challenge and Warning II". *Trek* 6 June:8.
 1941. "Facts and Fancies in Education". *Trek* 18 July:9.
 1941. "A Study of Roy Cambell I". *Trek* 10 October:13.
 1941. "A Study of Roy Cambell II". *Trek* 24 October:13.
 1941. "A Study of Roy Cambell III". *Trek* 7 November:13.
 1941. "Our Colonial Complex". *Trek* 21 November: 8.
 1942."Olive Schreiner: A Challenge to Today I". *Trek* 30
 January:13.
 1942. "Olive Schreiner: A Challenge to Today II". *Trek* 13
 February:13.
 1942. "Olive Schreiner: A Challenge to Today III". *Trek* 27
 February: 13.
 1942. "Olive Schreiner: A Challenge to Today IV". *Trek* 13
 March:13.
 1942. "They Speak of Africa I". *Trek* 22 May:10.
 1942. "They Speak of Africa II". *Trek* 5 June:13.
 1942. "They Speak of Africa III". *Trek* 19 June:12
 1942. "They Speak of Africa IV". *Trek* 3 July:13.
 1942. "They Speak of Africa V". *Trek* 17 July:13.
 1942. "They Speak of Africa VI". *Trek* 31 July:13.
 1942. "Africans Speak". *Trek* 28 August:10.
 1942. "Africans Speak II". *Trek* 11 September:10.
 1942. "The Churches Cash In". *Trek* 23 October:9.

1943. "Review of Proletarian Literature in the US". *Trek* 26 March:15.
1943. "Peter Abrahams: A Study of *Dark Testament*". *Trek* 7 May:12.
1943. "Sarah Gertrude Millin: South African Realist". *Trek* 7 May:12.
1943. "Sarah Gertrude Millin: South African Realist II". *Trek* 21 May:13.
1943. "Sarah Gertrude Millin: South African Realist III". *Trek* 4 June:12.
1943. "Pringle: Pioneer of Freedom". *Trek* 24 September:12.
1944. "Ivory Towers: New Models II". *Trek* 19 May:13.
1944. "Poets in Crisis". *Trek* 2 June:11.
1945. "Pamphlet-Novelist" 1 June:16-17.
1945. "Dragon's Teeth". *Trek* 15 June:16-17.
1946. "James T. Farrell". *Trek* 31 May:16.
1953. "The Function of Criticism". Unpublished Lecture. (Doreen and Michael Muskett's Personal Collection).
- Uys, Stanley. 1958. "Nadine Gordimer's Worlds". *Fighting Talk* September:15-16.
- Van Gysegem, Andre. 1937. "The Playwright and his Time". *Cape Guardian* 19 February:2.
- Van Heyningen, Christina. 1940. "A Notable Death". *Trek* 19 December:7.
1941. "The Totalitarian Danger: Threat to the Afrikaner Heritage". *Cape Argus* 15 April:5
1942. "Non-Europeans Only". *Common Sense* August:12-14.
1945. "On Reading Modern Verse". *Trek* 13 July:16-17.
1946. "Palinurus, or the Half-Artist". *Trek* 19 April:16-17.
1946. "Non-Europeans in a Performance of Shakespeare". *Common Sense* May:134-135.
1946. "Sentimentality and Dickens". *Trek* 12 July:16-17.
1946. "A Comment on Henry James". *Trek* 7 September:16-17.
1946. "*The Outsider*: Another View". *Trek* 20 September:16-17.
1946. "Shakespeare's Sonnets". *Trek* 1 November:16-17.
1946. "Entering a New World". *Vandag* November:9-14.
1947. "The Poets' Poet". *Theoria* 3:93-109.
- 1948a. "A Performance of *The Flies* by Jean-Paul Sartre". *Standpunte* 3(1): 46-53.
- 1948b. "The Technique of Practical Criticism". In: Mackie, W.S. (ed). *A Symposium on Practical Criticism*. Cape Town: University of CapeTown:14-18.
1949. "The Theatre in England". *Standpunte* 4(2): 66-74.
- Van Heyningen, Christina and A.W. Van der Horst. 1935. *A Practical Course in English*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller.
1938. *English: Intelligent Reading and Good Writing*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller.
- Walker, Oliver. 1948. "Literature and the Native". *Trek* October:7.
1948. "P.S. On 'Cry, the Beloved Country'". *Trek* December:7.
- Warner, Alan. 1945. "Primitivism in Literature". *Trek* 5 April:16-17.
1945. "E.M. Forster and the Liberal Spirit". *Trek* 19

- October:16.
 1945a. "Education and Language". *Trek* 30 November:16.
 1945b. Education and Language. *Trek* 30 November:16.
 1949. "Discussion of Professor Haworth's Paper". In:
 "Proceedings of the Second Conference of University Teachers
 of English" held at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 5-
 7 July:18.
- Watts, Hilda. 1954. "Kill! Kill! Kill! Review of *The Game of Death* by
 Albert Kahn". *Fighting Talk* June:12-13.
 1954. "Old Arts are New Weapons". *Fighting Talk*
 September:14-15.
 1955. "The Passionate Materialist". *Fighting Talk* April:5-6.
 1955. "Literary Stock-Taking in the U.S.S.R.". *Fighting Talk*
 July:14-15.
- Williams, Cecil. 1954. "Apartheid is Bad for Art". *Fighting Talk* April:8-9.
 1956. "Theatre in South Africa". *Fighting Talk* September:12-
 13.
- Yengwa, M.B. 1957. "Zulu Writing". *Fighting Talk* May:15-16.

4. References: Critical Works

- Abrahams, Peter. 1981. *Tell Freedom*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Adey, David; Ridley Beeton, Michael Chapman and Ernest Pereira. *Companion to South African English Literature*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker.
- Adhikari, Mohamed. 1993. "*Let us Live for our Children*": *The Teachers' League of South Africa, 1913-1940*. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Alexander, Neville. 1986. "Aspects of Non-Collaboration in the Western Cape, 1943-1963". *Social Dynamics* 12(1):1-14.
- Ali, Tariq. 2003. "Tariq Ali on Edward Said". *New Left Review* 24(November-December):59-65.
- Anderson, Perry. 1976. *Considerations on Western Marxism*. London: Verso.
 1992. *English Questions*. London: Verso.
- Andrews, Geoff; Nina Fishman and Kevin Morgan (eds). 1995. *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party*. London: Pluto Press.
- Arnold, Matthew. 1965 (1932). *Culture and Anarchy*. Edited by R.H. Super. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Adorno, Theodore and Max Horkheimer. 1972 (1944). *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by John Cumming. London: Verso.
- Ashcroft, Bill; Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back*. London: Routledge.
- Atteridge, Derek and Rosemary Jolly (eds).1998. *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy, 1970-1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Attwell, David. 1997. "Intimate Enmity in the Journal of Tiyo Soga". *Critical Inquiry* Spring:557-577.

1999. "Reprisals of Modernity in Black South African 'Mission' Writing". *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25(2) June:267-285.
2005. *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Baldick, Chris. 1983. *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848-1932*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
1996. *Criticism and Literary Theory: 1980 to the Present*. London: Longman.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1984 (1965). *Rabelais and his World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana.
- Barnett, Ursula. 1983. *A Vision of Order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English, 1914-1980*. London: Sinclair Brown.
- Batsleer, Janet; Tony Davies, Rebecca O'Rourke and Chris Weedon. 1985. *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class*. London: Methuen.
- Battersby, Christine. 1989. *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*. London: The Women's Press.
- Baym, Nina. 1979. "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Woman Authors". *American Quarterly* 33:123-139.
- Beinart, William. 1994. *Twentieth-Century South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Belinsky, V.G. 1948. *Selected Philosophical Works*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1973. *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. London: Fontana.
- Bernstein, Hilda. 1992. Foreword to Woodson, Dorothy. C. *Decade of Discontent: An Index to Fighting Talk, 1954-1963*. Madison: University of Wisconsin. Madison.
- Bernstein, Rusty. 1999. *Memory Against Forgetting: Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics, 1938-1964*. London: Viking.
- Berthoud, Jaques and Colin Gardner (eds). 1969. *The Sole Function*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bickford-Smith, Vivian; Elizabeth van Heyningen and Nigel Worden (eds). 1999. *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Bosman, Herman Charles. 2002. *A Cask of Jerepigo*. Edited by Stephen Gray. Cape Town: Human and Rousseau.
- Bosman, Herman Charles. 2003. *My Life and Opinions*. Edited by Stephen Gray. Cape Town: Human and Rousseau.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986 (1979). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- Bowen, Barbara. 1993. "Writing Caliban: Anticolonial Appropriations of *The Tempest*". *Current Writing* 5(2):80-99.
- Butler, Guy. 1977. "Some Random Observations on the Teaching of English in South African Universities since 1948". *UCT Studies in English* 7(September):2-11.

- Calhoun, Craig (ed). 1992. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Callinicos, Alex. 1990. *Trotskyism*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Callinicos, Luli. 1990. "The Communist Party During the War Years". *South African Labour Bulletin* 15(3) September:101-5.
- Calpin, G.H. 1941. *There Are No South Africans*. London: Nelson.
- Caudwell, Christopher 1973. (1937) *Illusion and Reality: A Study of the Sources of Poetry*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Ceriog Jones, Elizabeth. 1997. "Inkululeko: Organ of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1939-1950". In: Switzer, Les (ed). *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880s-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Césaire, Aimé. 1972 (1955). *Discourse on Colonialism*. Translated by Joan Pickham. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Chapman, Michael. 1996. *Southern African Literatures*. London: Longman.
- Chrisholm, Linda. 1991. "Education, Politics and Organisation: The Educational Traditions of The Non-European Unity Movement, 1943-1986". *Transformation* 15:1-24.
- Clark, Jon; Margot Heinemann, David Margolies and Carole Snee (eds). 1979. *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*. London: Lawrence and Wishart..
- Claudin, Fernando. 1975. *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform*. London: Penguin.
- Clayton, Cherry (ed). 1983. *Olive Schreiner*. Southern Africa Literature Series. No.4. South Africa: McGraw-hill.
- Coetzee, J.M. 1988. *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Collini, Stephan. 2001. "Culture Talk". *New Left Review* 7(January-February):43-53.
- Conforth, Maurice. 1978. *Rebels and Their Causes: Essays in Honour of A.L. Morton*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Cooper, Brenda. 1980. "Some Generalisations about the Class Situation of the Writer-Intellectual from Independent Africa". *Africa Perspective* 16:60-79.
- Cope, Jack. 1960. Editorial. *Contrast* 1(1):9.
- Cope, R.K. 1943. *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers' Leader*. Cape Town: Stewart Printing Company.
- Coplan, David. 1985. *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*. London: Longman.
- Couzens, Tim. 1971. "The Dark Side of the World: Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi*". *English Studies in Africa* 14(2):187-203.
1977. "Criticism of South African Literature". *Work in Progress* 2 (November): 44-52.
1985. *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Croft, Andy. 1995. "Authors Taking Sides: Writers and the Communist Party 1920-1956". In: Andrews, Geoff; Nina Fishman and Kevin Morgan (eds). *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party*. London: Pluto Press.

- Daymond, M. J; Dorothy Driver, Sheila Meintjies, Leloba Molema, Chiedza Musengezi, Margie Orford and Nobantu Rasebotsa (eds). 2003. *Women Writing Africa: The Southern Region*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- De Kock, Leon. 1988. "The Sjabok Era: Johannesburg's Popular English Press". AUETSA Conference Proceedings. Potchefstroom University:353-364.
2001. "Sitting for the Civilisation Test: The Making(s) of a Civil Imaginary in Colonial South Africa". *Poetics Today* 22(2):392-412.
- De Kok, Ingrid and Karen Press. 1990. *Spring is Rebellious: Arguments about Cultural Freedom by Albie Sachs and Respondents*. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Deutscher, Isaac. 1979. *Stalin*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Dobrolybov, N.A. 1952. *Selected Philosophical Essays*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Doherty, Christopher. 1989. "A Genealogical History of English Studies in South Africa, with Special Reference to the Responses by South African Academic Literary Criticism to the Emergence of an Indigenous South African Literature". MA Thesis, University of Natal (Durban).
1990. "Research Versus 'Prac. Crit.': The Pedagogical Vacuum in the Radical Critique of South African Literary Studies". In: Wright, L. (ed). *Teaching English Literature in South Africa*. Grahamstown: ISEA.
- Drew, Allison. 1991. "Social Mobilisation and Racial Capitalism in South Africa 1928-1960". PhD Thesis. University of California, Los Angeles.
- Drew, Allison (ed). 1996. *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History. Volume 1: 1907-1950*. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
1997. *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History. Volume 2: 1943-1964*. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Drew, Allison. 2000. *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1905. *The Souls of Black Folk*. London: Constable.
- Dubow, Saul. 1987. "Race, Civilisation and Culture: The Elaboration of Segregationist Discourse in the Inter-War Years". In: Marks, Shula and Stanley Trapido (eds). *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa*. London: Longman.
1989. *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-36*. London: Macmillan.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1981. *Walter Benjamin: Or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*. London:Verso.
1983. *Literary Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Erasmus, Zimitri (ed). 2001. *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*. Cape Town: Kwela.
- Everatt, David. 1991. "Alliance Politics of a Special Type: the Roots of the ANC/SACP Alliance, 1950-1954". *Journal of Southern African*

- Studies* 18(1) March:19-39.
- February, Vernon (ed). 1983. *From the Arsenal: Articles from the Teachers' League of South Africa, 1913-1980*. Leiden:African Studies Centre.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1990 (1961). *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin.
- Field, Roger. 2001. "Alex La Guma: A Literary and Political Biography of the South African Years". D.Litt Thesis. Department of English in the Faculty of Arts, University of the Western Cape.
- Forman, Lionel and E.S. Sachs. 1957. *The South African Treason Trial*. London: J Calder.
- Forman, Sadie and Andre Odendal. 1992. *A Trumpet from the Housetops: The Selected Writings of Lionel Forman*. London: Zed Books.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1992. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy". In: Robbins, Bruce (ed). *The Phantom Public Sphere*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Friedgut, A.J. 1944. "Trek to Army". *Forum* 7(21): 21.
- Gerhart, Gail. 1978. *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gerhart, Gail and Thomas Karis. 1977. *Political Profiles: 1882-1964*. Volume 4. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press. In: Karis, Thomas & Gwendolyn M. Carter (eds). 1987. *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*. Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press.
- Gentle, Roy. 1978. "The NEUM in Perspective". B.Soc.Sc (Hons) Thesis, University of Cape Town.
- Goldberg, David Theo and Ato Quayson (eds). 2002. *Relocating Postcolonialism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Goldin, Ian. 1987. *Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa*. London: Longman.
- Gray, Stephen (ed). 2002. *A Cask of Jerepigo*. Cape Town: Human and Rousseau.
- Green, Michael. 1984. "The Manifesto and the Fifth Column". *Critical Arts* 3(2): 9-19.
- Guillory, John. 1987. "Canonical and Non-Canonical: A Critique of the Current Debate". *ELH* 54(3):483-527.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1999 (1962). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hamilton, Carolyn, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graham Reid and Razia Saleh. 2002. *Refiguring the Archive*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Harmel, Michael. 1943. "The Truth about Trek". *Inkululeko* October-November:5-7.
- Hendricks, Cheryl. 2001. "'Ominous' Liaisons: Tracing the Interface between 'Race' and Sex at the Cape". In: Erasmus, Zimitri (ed). *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*. Cape Town: Kwela.
- Herrnstein-Smith, Barbara. 1983. "Contingencies of Value". *Critical Inquiry* 10 (September):1-35.

- Himmerlfarb, Gertrude. 1997. *The New History and the Old: Critical Essays and Reappraisals*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Hingley, Ronald. 1979. *Russian Writers and Soviet Society, 1917-1978*. London: Methuen.
- Hirson, Baruch. 1989a. *Yours for the Union: Class and Community Struggles in South Africa*. London: Zed Books.
- 1989b. "Spark and the 'Red Nun'". *Searchlight in South Africa*. 1(2):65-78.
1992. "Ruth Schechter: Friend to Olive Schreiner". *Searchlight in South Africa* 3(1):47-71.
1993. "The Trotskyist Groups in South Africa: 1932-48". *Searchlight in South Africa* 3(2):72-115.
- 1995a. "A Short History of the Non-European Unity Movement – An Insider's View". *Searchlight in South Africa* 3(4):64-93.
- 1995b. *Revolutions in my Life*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
2001. *The Cape Town Intellectuals: Ruth Schechter and her Circle, 1907-1934*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1978. "The Historians' Group of the Communist Party". In: Cornforth, Maurice (ed). 1978. *Rebels and Their Causes: Essays in Honour of A.L. Morton*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
1994. *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*. London: Abacus.
- Hofmeyr, Isabel. 1977. "Problems of Creative Writers: A Reply". *Work in Progress* 2 (November):31-37.
2004. *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of The Pilgrim's Progress*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Hugo, Pierre. 1978. *Quislings or Realists: A Documentary Study of Coloured Politics in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Hommel, Maurice. 1981. *Capricorn Blues: The Struggle for Human Rights in South Africa*. Toronto: Culturama.
- Jay, Martin. 1973. *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Jaffe, Hosea. 1991. "Signposts of the History of the Unity Movement". Two Lectures presented at the University of Cape Town History Department, September – October 1992. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town.
- Jameson, Frederic. 1971. *Marxism and Form*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jeppie, Shamil. 1990. "Popular Culture and Carnival in Cape Town: The 1940s and 1950s". In: Jeppie, Shamil and Crain Soudien. *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Jeppie, Shamil and Crain Soudien (eds). 1990. *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*. Cape Town: Buchu Books.

- Johnson, David. 1996. *Shakespeare and South Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, Shaun. 1987. "An Historical Overview of the Black Press". In: Tomaselli, K; R. Tomaselli and J. Muller (eds). 1987. *The Press in South Africa*. London: James Currey.
- Kannemeyer, Jan. 1983. *Die Koléperas van Kees Konyn*. Emmerentia: Taurus. 1990. *Die Dokumente van Dertig*. Juta: Kenwyn.
- Karis, Thomas & Gwendolyn M. Carter (eds). 1987. *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*. Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press.
- Kavanaugh, Robert Mshengu. 1985. *Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa*. London: Zed Books.
- Kayser, Robin. 1997. "The Struggle for Land and Liberty in South Africa: The Revolutionary Path of the NEUM/UMSA 1933-1970". BA (Honours) Thesis, University of Cape Town.
- Kirkwood, Mike. 1976. "The Colonizer: A Critique of the English South African Culture Theory". In: Wilhelm, P. and J. Polley (eds). *Poetry South Africa*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker:102-133.
- Kipnis, Laura. 2001. "(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*". In: Harrington, C. Lee and Denise D. Bielby (eds). *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Klugman, James. 1979. "The Crisis of the Thirties: A View from the Left". In: Clark, Jon; Margot Heinemann, David Margolies and Carole Snee (eds). *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Kruger, Loren. 1999. *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics since 1910*. London: Routledge.
- Kuper, Leo. 1965. *An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa*. Newhaven: Yale University Press.
- Laity, Paul (ed). 2001. *Left Book Club Anthology*. London: Gollancz.
- Lazerson, Joshua. 1994. *Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid*. Belville: Mayibuye.
- Leavis, F.R. 1933. *For Continuity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leavis, Q.D. 1932. *Fiction and the Reading Public*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Lecker, Robert. 1990. "The Canonisation of Canadian Literature: An Inquiry into Value". *Critical Inquiry* 16:656-671,
- Lessing, Doris. 1958. *A Ripple From the Storm*. London: Michael Joseph. 1975. *A Small Personal Voice: Essays, Reviews, Interviews*. New York: Vintage Books. 1995. *Under My Skin: Volume 1 of my Autobiography to 1949*. London: Flamingo
- Lenin, V.I. 1963. *What is to be Done?* Edited by S.V. Utechin and translated by S.V. Utechin and Patricia Utechin. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Lenta, Margaret. 2003. "White South African and Latter-day Bohemian: Two Editions of Herman Charles Bosman". *Current Writing* 15(1):109-122.
- Lerumo, A [Michael Harmel]. 1971. *Fifty Fighting Years: The Communist Party of South Africa, 1921-1971*. London: Inkululeko.

- Lewis, Gavin. 1987. *Between the Wire and the Wall*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Lewis, John. 1970. *The Left Book Club: An Historical Record*. London: Gollantz.
- Lodge, Tom. 1983. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*. Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Loomba, Ania. 1998. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. New York: Routledge.
- Lukács, Georg. 1963. *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. London: Merlin Press.
1971. *The Novel in Historical Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. London: Merlin Press.
- Majeke, Nosipho [Dora Taylor]. 1983 (1952). *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest*. Cumberwood: APDUSA.
- Mally, Lynn. 1990. *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. 1996. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Manganyi, N. Chabani. 1983. *Exiles and Homecomings: A Biography of Es'kia Mphahlele*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Margolies, David. 1979. "Left Review and Left Literary Theory". In: Clark, Jon; Margot Heinemann, David Margolies and Carole Snee (eds). *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Marx, Karl. 1992 (1859). "Preface to a Contribution to the Culture of Political Economy". In: Coletti, Lucio (ed). *Karl Marx: Early Writings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Matlaw, Ralph E. (ed). 1978. *Belinsky, Chernichevsky and Dobrolyubov: Selected Criticism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mkhize, Jabulani. 1998. "Alex la Guma's Politics and Aesthetics". *Alternation* 5(1):130-168.
- Meli, Francis. 1988. *South Africa Belongs to Us: A History of the ANC*. Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.
- Modisane, Bloke. 1986 (1963). *Blame Me on History*. Cape Town: Ad Donker.
- Mokone, Sarah. 1978. "Majority Rule: Some Notes (VIII)" In: February, Vernon (ed). 1983. *From the Arsenal: Articles from the Teachers' League of South Africa, 1913-1980*. Leiden: African Studies Centre: 59-71.
- Mphahlele, Ezekial. 1974 (1962). *The African Image*. London: Faber and Faber.
- 1980 (1959). *Down Second Avenue*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Mulhern, Francis. 1974. "The Marxist Aesthetics of Christopher Caudwell". *New Left Review* 85:37-58.
1981. *The Moment of Scrutiny*. London: NLB.
- Mulhern, Francis (ed). 1992. *Contemporary Marxist Literary Criticism*. New York: Longman.
- Mulhern, Francis. 2000. *Culture/Metaculture*. London: Routledge
2002. "Beyond Metaculture". *New Left Review* 16(July-August): 86-104.

- Murphey, Paul Thomas. 1994. *Toward a Working Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals, 1816-1858*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Murray, A. Victor. 1929. *School in the Bush: A Critical Study of the Theory and Practice of Native Education in Africa*. London: Longman's Green.
- Nasson, Bill. 1990. "The Unity Movement: Its Legacy in Historical Consciousness". *Radical History Review: History From South Africa* 46/47:189-209.
- Ndebele, Njabulo 1991. *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays in South African Literature and Culture*. Johannesburg: Cosaw.
- Newall, Stephanie. 2002. *Reading Cultures in Colonial Ghana*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Nixon, Rob. 1987. "Caribbean and African Appropriations of *The Tempest*". *Critical Inquiry* 13 (Spring):556-578.
- Non-European Unity Movement. nd. Tribute to Jane Gool. UMSA/Tabata Collection BC925. African Studies Library, University of Cape Town.
- Ntantala, Phyllis 1992. *A Life's Mosaic*. Bellville: Mayibuye Books.
- Odendaal, Andre and Roger Field (eds). 1993. *Liberation Chabalala: The World of Alex la Guma*. Cape Town: Mayibuye Books.
- O'Neill, Eugene. 1988. *Complete Plays 1913-1920*. Edited by Travis Bogard. New York: Literary Classics of the United States.
1988. *Complete Plays 1920-1931*. Edited by Travis Bogard. New York: Literary Classics of the United States.
- Orkin, Martin. 1987. *Shakespeare Against Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker.
1991. *Drama and the South African State*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press
- Orwell, George. 1962 (1938). *Homage to Catalonia*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Palmer, David J. 1965. *The Rise of English Studies: An Account of the Study of English Language and Literature from its Origins to the Making of the Making of the Oxford English School*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Patterson, Sheila. 1953. *Colour and Culture in South Africa: A Study of the Status of the Cape Coloured People within the Social Structure of South Africa*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Pechey, Graham. 1985. "Scrutiny, English Marxism, and the Work of Raymond Williams". *Literature and History* 11(1):65-75.
- Penrith, Mary. 1972. "A Historical and Critical Account of the Teaching of English Language and Literature in English-Medium Universities in South Africa, with Particular Reference to the University of Cape Town and the South African College". MA thesis, University of Cape Town.
- Peterson, Bhekisizwe. 2000. *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Plaatje, Sol T. 1989 (1930). *Mhudi*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker.
- Pinnock, Don. 1993. "Writing Left: Ruth First and Radical South African Journalism in the 1950s". PhD Dissertation, University of Rhodes, Grahamstown.
1997. "Writing Left: The Journalism of Ruth First and the

- Guardian in the 1950s*". In: Switzer, Les (ed). *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880s-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Podbrey, Pauline. 1993. *White Girl in Search of the Party*. Pietermaritzburg: Haded Books.
- Poovey, Mary. 1984. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Posel, Deborah. 1991. *The Making of Apartheid 1948-1961*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Potgieter, D.J. (ed). 1970. *Standard Encyclopedia of South Africa*. Cape Town: NASOU.
- Potter, Elaine. 1975. *The Press as Opposition*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.
- Rassool, Ciraj 1994. "Notes on Gender in the Making of Isaac Bangani Tabata" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20th Anniversary Conference, University of York, 9-11 September.
- Reid, Betty. 1979. "The Left Book Club in the Thirties". In: Clark, Jon; Margot Heinemann, David Margolies and Carole Snee (eds). *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Robbins, Bruce (ed). 1993. *The Phantom Public Sphere*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rosenberg, Valerie. 1976. *Sunflower to the Sun: The Life of Herman Charles Bosman*. Cape Town: Human and Rousseau.
- Roux, Eddie. 1964. *Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Roux, Eddie and Win Roux. 1970. *Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux*. London: Collings.
- Bernard Sachs. 1949. *Multitude of Dreams*. Johannesburg: Kayor Publishing House.
- 1973 . *Mists of Memory*. London: Vallentine, Mitchell.
1971. *Herman Charles Bosman as I Knew Him*. Johannesburg: Dial Press.
- Said, Edward. 1983. *The World, the Text and the Critic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Sandwith, Corinne. 1998a. "The Moment of *Trek*: Literary and Political Criticism in the South African Periodical Press, 1941-1947". *Current Writing* 10(1): 18-38.
- 1998b. "Two Women Critics and South African English Literary Studies". *Alternation* 5(1):169-190.
2002. "Dora Taylor: South African Marxist". *English in Africa* 29(2):5-27.
2005. "The Importance of Being Educated: Strategies of an Urban Petit-Bourgeois Elite, South Africa, 1935-50". In: Salm, Stephen J. and Toyin Falola (eds). *African Urban Spaces in Historical Perspective*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

- Sachs, Albie. 1990. "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom". Paper Prepared for an ANC in-house Seminar on Culture. In: De Kok, Ingrid and Karen Press. *Spring is Rebellious: Arguments about Cultural Freedom by Albie Sachs and Respondents*. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Saunders, Christopher. 1986. "'Mnguni' and *Three Hundred Years* Revisited". *Kronos* II: 74-81.
1988. *The Making of the South African Past*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Saunders, Christopher (ed). 1994. *Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*. Third Edition. Cape Town: The Reader's Digest Association.
- Schreuders, Thecla. 1988. "The Social and Intellectual Life of the Left in Cape Town During the Second World War". In: Bradford, Helen and Bill Nasson (eds). *Student Research Papers 5*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town:5-30.
- Simons, Jack and Ray Simons. 1983. *Class and Colour in South Africa: 1850-1950*. London: International Defence and Aid Fund.
- Sinfield, Alan. 1992. *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sitas, Ari. 1990. "The Sachs Debate: A Philistine's Response". In: De Kok, Ingrid and Karen Press. 1990. *Spring is Rebellious: Arguments about Cultural Freedom by Albie Sachs and Respondents*. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Smith, Ken. 1988. *The Changing Past: Trends in South African Historical Writing*. Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers.
- Smith, H. Lindsay. 1946. *Behind the Press in South Africa*. Cape Town: Stewart.
- Smith, Stan. 1994. *The Origins of Modernism: Eliot, Pound, Yeats and the Rhetorics of Renewal*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Sole, Kelwyn. 1977. "Problems of Creative Writers in South Africa: A Response". *Work in Progress* 1:4-25.
1994. "Democratising Culture and Literature in a 'New South Africa': Organisation and Theory". *Current Writing* 6(2):1-37.
- Solomon, Maynard (ed). 1979. *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary*. Sussex: Harvester Press.
- Steiner, George. 1967. *Language and Silence*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Switzer, Les. 1997. "Socialism and the Resistance Movement: The Life and Times of the *Guardian*, 1937-1952". In: Switzer, Les (ed). *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880s-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Switzer, Les (ed). 1997. *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880s-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Switzer, Les and Donna Switzer. 1979. *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: A Descriptive Bibliographic Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers, Newsletters and Magazines, 1836-1976*. Boston: Hall.
- Switzer Les, and Ime Ukpanah. 1997. "Under Siege: *Inkundla ya Bantu* and the African Nationalist Movement, 1938-1951". In: Switzer, Les (ed). *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and*

- Resistance, 1880s-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tabata, I. B. 1950. *The Awakening of a People*. Johannesburg: People's Press.
- Terras, Victor. 1974. *Belinsky and Russian Literary Criticism: The Heritage of Organic Aesthetics*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Tomaselli, K and P. Eric Louw (eds). *The Alternative Press in South Africa*. Belville: Anthropos. London: James Currey.
- Tomaselli, K; Tomaselli, R and Muller, J. (eds).1987. *The Press in South Africa*. London: James Currey.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1991 (1925). *Literature and Revolution*. London: RedWords.
1938. "Art and Politics': A Letter to the Editors of *Partisan Review*". *Partisan Review* August/September:3-10.
- Van der Merwe, Hendrick and C.J Groenewald (eds). 1976. *Occupational and Social Change among Coloured People in South Africa*. Cape Town: Juta.
- van der Ross , R. 1986. *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid: A Study of Political Movements among the Coloured People of South Africa, 1880-1985*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Vaughan, Michael. 1984. "A Critique of the Dominant Ideas in Departments of English in the English-Speaking Universities in South Africa". *Critical Arts* 3(2):35-51.
1985. "Literature and Populism in South Africa: Some Reflections on the Ideology of *Staffrider*". In: Gugelberget, Georg (ed). *Marxism and African Literature*. London: James Currey.
- Visser, Nic. 1984. "The Critical Situation and the Situation of Criticism". *Critical Arts* 3(2): 2-8.
- Viswanathan, Gauri. 1989. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Von Kotze, Astrid. 1988. *Organise and Act: The Natal Theatre Movement, 1983-1987*. Durban: Culture and Working Life Publications, Department of Industrial Sociology, University of Natal, Durban.
- Walshe, Peter. 1987. *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress, 1912-1952*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker.
- Wellek, René. 1986. *A History of Modern Criticism*. Volume 6. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Wicomb, Zoë. 1987. *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. London: Virago.
1998. "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa". In: Atteridge, Derek and Rosemary Jolly (eds). *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy, 1970-1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Widdowson, Peter (ed). 1982. *Re-Reading English*. London: Methuen.
- Wieder, Alan. 2002. "Informed by Apartheid: Mini Oral Histories of Two Cape Town Teachers". In: Kallaway, Peter (ed). *The History of Education Under Apartheid, 1948-1994* Cape Town: Pearson Education South Africa: 197-210.
- Williams, Enid. 1944. "The Intelligentsia". *Educational Journal* November/December XIX(5): 9-10.

- Williams, Raymond. 1958. *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*. London: Chatto and Windus.
 1973. *The Country and the City*. London: Chatto and Windus.
 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Witz, Leslie. 2003. *Apartheid's Festival: Contesting South Africa's National Pasts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Woeber, C. A. 2000. "The Contribution of St Peter's School to Black South African Autobiography". PhD Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
- Woodson, Dorothy. C.1992. *Decade of Discontent: An Index to Fighting Talk, 1954-1963*. Madison: University of Wisconsin. Madison.
- Yovchuk, V. 1948. Introduction to *Selected Philosophical Works*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House.