

# **THE WORK OF G.H. DURRANT: ENGLISH STUDIES AND THE COMMUNITY**

**Elizabeth M.M. Meihuizen**  
991262003

**Supervisor:** Dr. M. Shum

**Discipline:** English Studies, School of Literary Studies, Media and Creative arts.

**University of KwaZulu-Natal**

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## **DECLARATION**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (English Studies), in the Graduate Programme in the School of Literary Studies, Media and Creative Arts, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. I confirm that an external editor was not used. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (English Studies) in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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Student name

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Date

## **ABSTRACT**

This study concerns the writing of Geoffrey Hugh Durrant. Durrant's writing is to a large extent academic in nature, but he also comments on the broader South African society during the course of the 1940s and 1950s. The study has two interrelated objectives, the first archival in nature and the second more theoretical. The archival objective entails bringing to attention Durrant's writing produced during the period he spent in South Africa. At present this archive remains largely unexplored. The second objective is to relate this body of writing to current thinking regarding the mission of university English Studies in South Africa.

The study of languages and literatures in South Africa today finds itself in a complex situation of ongoing changes within the university as an institution, the broader system of education, and a society which in many respects can still be described as becoming a "New South Africa". This is also true for university English Studies. It will be argued that in this process of transition Durrant's writing, informed by the challenge to university English Studies to define itself as an independent academic discipline with an essential educational and social function, offers a valuable perspective.

In defining the task of English Studies at the university Durrant aligns himself with the critical tradition which at a conceptual level originated in the writing of Matthew Arnold by the middle of the nineteenth century, but came to full fruition only after 1917 in the Cambridge English School. Durrant has to be credited for a measure of original thought and for making a personal contribution to this critical framework in for instance his definition of the concept "practical criticism". He also has to be credited for including politics into the cultural analysis implicit in this critical framework, something which was never done by the Cambridge critics. This, for Durrant, means that his duty as citizen is not to be separated from his duty as university teacher. Durrant believes that indifference and failure to judge

unacceptable political developments will ultimately endanger the values of society and make a self-respecting existence impossible. For university teachers an attitude of indifference will eventually leave the universities with no authority, unable to fulfil their essential task.

Durrant sees the university as guardian of a specific type of intellectual activity and therefore as indispensable to society. The essential duty of the university is to cultivate an ability of critical discernment, and it is in this realm that the task of the university and that of English Studies coincide. For Durrant the social mission of English Studies depends on the fostering of a critical ability through engagement with the particular form of language use unique to the literary text. The standards of thought and understanding set by the literary text function as touchstones for life in all its various aspects, and mastery of this type of text affords the level of critical discernment necessary as foundation for a civil self capable of critical judgement.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BACKGROUND AND AIMS OF THE STUDY**

*We do in practice urgently need to know, and to tell the public, what benefits, other than a richer life for ourselves, can be claimed for literary studies at the university.*

*(Durrant 1945a:3)*

#### **AIMS OF THE STUDY**

This study concerns the writing of Geoffrey Hugh Durrant. Durrant lived and worked in South Africa between 1939 and 1961, and during these years made a vital contribution to English Studies, not only at the University of Stellenbosch and the Natal University College in Pietermaritzburg where he was employed, but also to the development of the discipline and the general debates around its purpose. His writing also has relevance for the wider South African society outside the university.

The study has two interrelated objectives, the first archival in nature and the second more theoretical. The archival objective entails bringing to attention Durrant's writing produced during the period he spent in South Africa. At present this archive remains largely unexplored. The second objective is to relate this body of writing to current thinking regarding the mission of university English Studies in South Africa.

The study of languages and literatures in South Africa today finds itself in a complex situation of ongoing changes within the university as an institution, the broader system of education, and a society which in many respects can still be described as becoming a "New South Africa". With regard to university English Studies in particular, this transitional period is marked by a healthy spirit of reflection. It will be argued that in this process of reflection Durrant's writing, informed by the challenge to university English Studies to define itself as

an independent academic discipline with an essential educational and social function, offers a valuable perspective.

### **GEOFFREY HUGH DURRANT**

Geoffrey Hugh Durrant<sup>1</sup> was born in Derbyshire, England, on 27 July 1913. He studied at Jesus College, Cambridge, from 1932 to 1935 with an Open Scholarship in Modern Languages. After obtaining a Teacher's Diploma from King's College, London, Durrant lectured in English, at first as a substitute for one term at the University of Durham in 1937 and thereafter for two and a half years in the English Seminar at the University of Tuebingen, Germany. He was appointed to the post of senior lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Stellenbosch in the second semester of 1939 and as Professor in English Language and Literature at the Natal University College, Pietermaritzburg, in February 1945. Durrant's university career was interrupted by military service during the Second World War. He entered into full time military service with the Tank Corps in October 1940 and served as Intelligence Sergeant in East Africa and Egypt until he was commissioned by the Army Education Service in August 1941. At the time of his application for the chair in English at the Natal University College Durrant held the rank of captain and was acting as Senior Information Officer in Pretoria.

Durrant held the chair in English in Pietermaritzburg until the end of June 1961. He was granted long leave from the beginning of March till the end of June of that year, and on 28 April notified the university by cable from Skirlaugh, East Yorkshire, of his intention to resign since he had accepted another appointment. In a letter dated 24 May he explained that he had been appointed to the Department of English at the University of Manitoba, and that he would like to take up this appointment at the beginning of July. In this letter Durrant expressed his intention to return to South Africa "for a short visit" before taking up the new post, but on 11 July he wrote to E.G. Malherbe, principal of the university at the time: "It is



now certain that I shall not be able, as I had very much hoped, to return to South Africa before going to Canada. As you can imagine, this is a matter of keen regret to me; but the expense of removal is already very considerable and I have been deeply involved in a book which is now nearly complete” (unpublished letter, 11.07.1961).<sup>2</sup> On 19 June the Registrar informed Durrant that the University Council agreed to accept his resignation with effect from the end of that month.

That this hasty and rather unorthodox departure from South Africa was not only a matter of expense and commitments elsewhere is evident from the letter of 24 May in which Durrant wrote to the Registrar of the University of Natal: “Will you please convey to the Council my deep regret at the severance of my connection with the University of Natal, to which I am deeply indebted for many years of happy, and I hope, fruitful activity. It is only the pressure of events outside the University that has led me, with extreme reluctance, to leave the service of the University which has shown me great liberality, and where I have known so much kindness” (unpublished letter, 24.05.1961). The “events outside the University” to which Durrant attributes his leaving here, are the measures taken in the campaign of intensified political repression which the Nationalist government had embarked on by this time, and in particular the law passed in this year whereby individuals regarded as a threat to the state could be placed under house arrest or detained without charge. Durrant’s perception of a real threat of persecution to himself and his family is evident from comments he made in recent private e-mail correspondence. In a letter dated 21 November 2000 Durrant writes that Derick Marsh, a close friend, left for Australia in 1960 after some months in jail without charge or conviction when all office bearers of the Liberal party, except Alan Paton, were jailed. Marsh was secretary to the Liberal Party in 1959. Durrant and his wife, both founder members of the Liberal party, were involved in several ways in opposing the policies and

actions of the Apartheid government, and by 1961 found themselves in a “crisis” as he explains in a second letter dated 30 January 2001:

The emergency of 1960 following Sharpeville created a crisis for us. I had not suggested leaving because I felt that my wife, who had lived in South Africa from the age of one and had a brother and a cousin here, would not wish to be uprooted. But after our friends were imprisoned without charge or trial my wife began to fear that her activity in Freedom Radio – she read the weekly short attacks on the government<sup>3</sup> – might cause her to be jailed indefinitely, and she could not bear the thought of separation from her children. In addition, our son was about to reach the age where he could be conscripted, and we knew that he would refuse to serve, since he knew that former students of mine had been among the troops who surrounded the black villages near Cape Town when the police went in and drove the strikers to work with sjamboks. We thought that we ought to spare him such a dilemma. It was my wife who suggested leaving, and I agreed with her that our first duty was to our children and their future.

Durrant thus left early in 1961 and never returned to South Africa. His only professional engagement with the country that could be traced after this date was the publication of a number of essays in local academic journals and an essay in a festschrift.<sup>4</sup> Durrant’s association with South Africa was then arguably short-lived, and his severance therefrom abrupt and quite final, but a case will be made that the body of writing which remains available to us is of lasting importance, primarily in relation to the current debate on the mission of university English Studies.

Although Durrant’s writing received attention in earlier studies, it has not yet been considered as an integrated body of writing with a central argument. To date Durrant’s writing has received attention in a number of academic studies.<sup>5</sup> In these studies, however, as will become clear in later discussions, often only single texts, or quotations isolated from their proper context, are considered. In other instances, pronouncements have been made from partial or prejudiced viewpoints and thus questionable conclusions have been reached.

## **THE NATURE OF DURRANT’S WRITING**

Durrant’s writing can be divided into two categories. The bulk of what survived is academic in nature, consisting of articles and published conference papers on issues such as

university education, the mission of the English school, the teaching of literature, creative writing, and specific literary texts. Durrant's doctoral thesis *Structural Elements in the Poetry of Wordsworth* (1967) was reworked and published in two books, *William Wordsworth* (1969) and *Wordsworth and the Great System* (1970). The second category of writing is of a more public nature, concerning the broader South African society during the course of the 1940s and 1950s. This commentary on social and political issues of the day consists of pamphlets and newspaper articles. To this category also belong public addresses, although it is problematic to assess these, since with one exception, the only evidence we have of them are newspaper reports or from references in the writing of other people.<sup>6</sup>

Durrant's writing thus, in the first place, concerns the discipline of English Studies at the university. However, a consideration of the writing in its entirety makes it clear that, measured against the typical academic, Durrant is exceptional in the extent to which he moved beyond the realm of academia and entered into the public sphere. More importantly, it becomes evident that the two categories of writing feed into each other, in other words, that the mission Durrant formulates for English Studies is informed by his conception of his duty as a citizen serving a community. It is in this respect that Durrant's writing remains relevant to our thinking about the mission of South African university English Studies today.

## **SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY ENGLISH STUDIES TODAY**

The discipline of English Studies at South African universities today finds itself in a critical situation demanding profound change. This sense of crisis informs recent academic articles, conference reports and other publications commenting on this discipline. So, for instance, Margaret Orr starts her report in *Scrutiny2* on a conference of the Committee of Professors of English (Cope) held at the University of Cape Town in January 1997 as follows:

The topic of this year's Cope meeting at the University of Cape Town was first year courses in English, in all their various manifestations ("Remedial", "Practical" and "Academic"). But the theme which emerged was the struggle for transformation.

Recurring features of most of the presentations were the conflict, chaos, uncertainty, consternation and creativity that attend the adaptation of a species to a changing ecology. Changing students, changing needs, changing times have thrown us back on the big questions: What English do we teach? Whose English do we teach? To whom? What for?

Although some departments are more severely tested by these changes than others, all departments are feeling considerable pressure to adapt or die.

(Orr 1997:51)

Some commentators, however, remind us that the discipline of English Studies has always been controversial and that a sense of crisis is not new. This view is taken, for instance, by Malvern van Wyk Smith in his contribution to a collection of essays entitled *Teaching English Literature in South Africa: Twenty Essays* published in 1990 by the Institute for the Study of English in Africa at Rhodes University. Van Wyk Smith contextualises what he sees as a fundamental crisis of confidence in English Studies in contemporary South Africa with reference to the analysis in Eagleton (1983) which attributes the rise of English as an academic subject in Britain to a situation of crisis:

Few persons active and alert in the area of English studies in contemporary South Africa can be unaware of a growing crisis of confidence in the discipline as to what it *is* and what it is supposed to *do*.

English studies have always been under pressure. University English departments owe their very subject and origin to a state of cultural and socio-political crisis in the mid-nineteenth century. The emergence of a literate proletariat in the course of the nineteenth century at just the same time as the moralizing and socially coercive valency of religion was on the decline, persuaded conservative liberal humanists to promote English literature as a safe repository of traditional humane verities and as a meliorative agency to inculcate such values in the newly educated classes (Eagleton 1983). This is a parody of the very complex and slow evolution of what we now know as ‘’, but it serves to suggest that the discipline of English has never been free of controversy, and has never escaped from founding ambivalences in the subject itself, relating both to what it is, and what it is supposed to do.

(Van Wyk Smith 1990b:1)

In a paper delivered at the 2001 AUETSA conference with the theme “Rebranding English: Disciplinarity, Media and Markets” Michael Chapman sees developments in local English Studies throughout his own academic career as induced by a series of crises:

To suggest that English Studies has to rebrand is, of course, to suggest little that is new. I began my academic career 20 or so years ago amid crisis in English Studies. Then the crisis in a period of political crisis took the form of a Marxist assault on the

Leavisian Great Tradition. At the first AUETSA conference I attended, in 1979, then firebrand Maughan Brown - now the University of Natal's Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor - lambasted the luxury of papers on Plato, Milton, and Wordsworth while on the horizon Soweto smouldered. The inclusion of Mongane Wally Serote in a genteel, mainly British poetry syllabus was something of a revolutionary act.

The 1980s was a decade of continuous change, or rebranding, in English Studies: the Africanisation arguments of Ngugi, the excavation of local literature, the influence of post-1968 theory in deconstructions of the canon, the democratisation of culture in the study alongside dead white males of black voices, women's voices, soap operas, and shopping malls. Today English Studies can argue that we inhabit a text-based world; that all is susceptible to analysis and interpretation.

(Chapman 2000:44)<sup>7</sup>

Although a sense of crisis and the necessity for renewal are thus not always seen as unprecedented or even as undesirable, there is general consensus that English Studies today finds itself in a challenged position. Critics relate this challenge in its widest sense to global educational and social trends, but more specifically to the fundamental changes in South African society brought about by the end of the Apartheid era and the subsequent developments under the democratic government. In order to understand the present position of South African English Studies, it is necessary to take a step back and trace the developments in this discipline since the early 1990s.<sup>8</sup>

The early 1990s generally was a period marked by the expectation of a new political dispensation and wide-ranging transformation in South Africa, and this disposition also informed writing on English Studies. In the introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Literary Studies* of 1992 dedicated to "Current and Future Options: University Language and Literary Studies in South Africa" Teresa Dovey remarks that surprisingly few responses were received to a call for papers, which she interprets as a sign that academics at this point in time appeared "to be existing in a state of limbo, unable to make the shift from the adversarial stance forced on them by apartheid to the proactive position required in the present, for fear that future directives from the new holders of power will render these futile" (Dovey 1992:133). In the same publication Jean-Philippe Wade refers to a lack of the necessary re-positioning amongst "those who are seeking to convince us that the 'new South Africa' will

have all but arrived with the imminent shift to a democratic state” and ascribes this to a naive conservative desire “to leave as much as possible as it is” (Wade 1992:236).

In retrospect it is evident that a fair amount of discussion emerged during this period and that a number of important issues were dealt with, albeit in a provisional, tentative manner. A number of studies reveal a preoccupation with clarifying basic premises, providing definitions, and attempting to formulate an essential mission for the discipline. It is often pointed out that future visions should be considered against the past, and therefore in a number of articles important historical moments in the development of English Studies are identified and discussed. Traditionally controversial issues in local English Studies such as teaching methods, the rival claims of literature and language studies, the status of local literature, theoretical paradigms, and the ideological bases of pedagogical objectives are revisited. At the same time new issues are raised, such as concern about increasing numbers of students whose mother-tongue is not English, whose schooling has left them unprepared for university studies, and whose most urgent need is to learn to read and write English effectively. Proposed solutions to this dilemma take various forms. One of these involves a shift away from an exclusive focus on selected canonical literary texts to the broader terrain of signifying processes in society with the aim of cultivating what is called “cultural literacy” in Shum (1992) and “critical literacy” in Higgins (1992). In contrast, some commentators insist that what is necessary is a reversal of a loss of faith in the essential task of English Studies, which in their view is not to equip students with basic competences, but with the study of the literary text as a unique form of expression. Malvern van Wyk Smith, for instance, points to such a loss of faith as the basis of the acute crisis he perceives in English Studies at the beginning of the 1990s:

Crises of confidence are nowhere more evident or more acute than in ... those approaches which declare or imply that “English” is not primarily a subject or a content at all, but rather a means towards various ends, ranging from such apparently innocent occupations as teaching basic language skills to much more controversial and

reputedly suspect enterprises, such as imparting illumination, or cultural literacy, or the hegemonic values of a western liberal humanism, or the basic procedures of a Marxist dialectic (...) Part of the problem is a loss of faith in both the skills and content of our discipline. We seem especially to have lost confidence in our ability to understand the processes whereby, in a work of literature, subject and means – what the text says and how we experience it – meet in such a way to establish a special kind of meaning. We have lost faith in claims for the epiphanic, restorative, illuminating properties of literature and therefore of language itself. The result has in many ways been a healthy scepticism, but also a debilitating paralysis. In losing faith in some of our frontiers, we no longer know what it is we are defending.

(Van Wyk Smith 1990b:3-4)

An important aspect of the tentative repositioning of literary studies of the early 1990s is a renewed interest in the definition of the canon as taught in syllabuses of English Departments and as defined in literary historiographies. The debate about what constitutes “English Literature” or “South African English Literature” or in a broader sense “South African Literature” raised interest not only in English departments, but in the wider academic community. Indicative of this opening up between the traditionally compartmentalised university departments of language and literature was the colloquium organised by the Centre for South African Literatures and Languages (CSSALL) which took place in May 1995 and had as its theme “Rethinking a South African (National) Literary History”. In her introductory essay to a special edition of the *Journal of Literary Studies* focusing on literary historiography, Helize van Vuuren states that the colloquium was attended by “representatives from all linguistic groupings in the country” and that it resulted in a tentative agreement “to set up a working community of interested scholars and literary historians with the aim of writing a comparative and inclusive South African literary history as a team” (1994:271-272).<sup>9</sup> Rethinking the task of literary historiography and canonization in this period is generally pitched against change in the political dispensation. Discussions are informed by the problematic definition of “nation” with the tension between “unity” and “diversity” in South African society as interpreted by leading public figures such as Albie Sachs in the speech “Preparing Ourselves for Freedom”<sup>10</sup> and Nelson Mandela in his inaugural address in May

1994. Critics point to the fact that literatures written in the various South African languages have in the past been treated and described as separate entities, and suggest different approaches for the future. These range between championing a comprehensive comparative approach and, at the other end of the scale, a faceted approach based on personal perspectives and specialized knowledge of particular selections of literary texts. The typical defence of the comparative approach is to be found in Michael Chapman's article published in the special issue of the *Journal of Literary Studies* of 1994 referred to above. The article provides a preview of Chapman's *Southern African Literatures* which was to be published two years later.<sup>11</sup> Chapman sees his comparative treatment of the literature of the subcontinent "contextualised within the functioning of society" and focusing on points of common reference and shared experience as appropriate "at a time when the intent in southern Africa is to move beyond conflicts of the past and chart new African destinies" (Chapman 1994:319). In opposition to this approach critics warn against constructing a master narrative which could repress alternative views and assume a privileged position for one language. The suitability of a literary history such as the one produced by Chapman is questioned also because it is believed that no single person exists with the theoretical or linguistic skills to produce a unified body of knowledge that could qualify as a description of a South African "national literature". Instead it is proposed that such a project be a team effort guided by a negotiated, unifying theoretical paradigm. Another alternative suggested by studies published in this period is what Ampie Coetzee describes as a "fractured narrative" where texts are read as signifiers of "discontinuity, rupture, instead of the continuity of the period in history" (1994:292).<sup>12</sup> A preference for focusing on specific texts is also suggested in studies which trace the canonical history of particular texts over a given period of time, or which compare the reasons for the inclusion or exclusion of specific texts as a basis for establishing the dynamics of canonisation on a larger scale.



The late 1990s brought greater certainty about the form the new South African society would take, determined by, amongst other things, the emergence and implementation of government policies. Consequently, this period is marked by heightened activity in forums such as conferences, in public speeches, and in academic journals to reposition English Studies in the future environment.<sup>13</sup> In certain respects the writing commenting on English Studies in the period 1996-2000 represents a continuation of the issues identified as important in the early 1990s. So, for instance, the debate on literary historiography continued, and received fresh impetus from important publications in this field, such as Michael Chapman's *Southern African Literatures* in 1996. However, the chief concern in discussions of these and newer emergent issues during the later part of the decade was the new vision for higher education which took form through what Michael Green describes as "a shower of variously coloured papers" (1998:42) and eventually became fixed through legislation.

Writing concerned with the mission and practice of English Studies of the late 1990s is thus dominated by critiques of the new education system, by placing the university and the discipline within this new environment, and by accounts of new courses developed to meet the new requirements and challenges. A very useful summary of the key principles underlying the new educational vision and its implications for universities is to be found in Wendy Kilfoil's article "The comfort zone stops here: OBE, the NQF and Higher Education":

The incoming system is based on the need for socioeconomic transformation, outcomes-based education and training (OBE) and a National Qualifications Framework (NQF), to be put in place by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Universities will henceforth be an integrated part of all formal and informal education and training in South Africa, with the following implications: greater accountability, recognition of prior learning outside formal education, more career orientation, less orientation towards discipline content and more towards critical outcomes or life-role performances.

(Kilfoil 1999:3)

Articles published document the difficult process of coming to terms with the concepts, principles, mechanisms of approval, and processes of implementation which academic

disciplines had to undergo in order to adapt to the foreseen future of the higher education landscape. One of the major problems commented on is the unfavourable ranking of the humanities in general, and the study of languages and literatures specifically, given the government's conception of the priorities of socioeconomic transformation. Within the new funding structures aimed at rectifying past imbalances science, technology and business are recognized as teaching priorities in making them the main recipients of government subsidies. The role of literature and language teaching in career-orientated programmes is defined as preparing students for participation (performing life-roles) in their job environments rather than fostering aesthetic appreciation or critical and cultural literacy. Although it would be possible to argue that literature and language studies in their traditional forms could contribute in various ways towards the life-role outcomes required from education and training (such as developing skills in effective communication and critical analysis, promoting aesthetic and cultural sensitivity, producing a responsible citizenry, and giving students access to lifelong learning) these disciplines lack a clear entrepreneurial value. Language departments in general, but English Studies in particular, are therefore reduced to designing "service courses" teaching functional literacy customized for the market place.

Commentators are mainly of the opinion that Outcomes Based Education (OBE), despite high ideals set for it (such as developing creative potential, an appropriate value system, discriminative abilities, and skills in social co-operation), in practice represents a narrow understanding of the nature of knowledge and learning as measurable, controllable training to produce a workforce in possession of the necessary skills to promote economic growth. OBE is further criticised for facilitating bureaucratic control and administration and for militating against academic freedom. Instead of the progressive reform and liberation claimed for OBE in government policy documents and by its proponents, academics often see OBE as

promoting the opposite. This is argued for instance by Devi Sarinjeive in an article in which she draws on a wide range of critiques of the system:

In the South African type of OBE that is developing educators will, it would appear at times, be operating, to borrow the name of the schoolmaster in Dickens' *Hard Times*, as Gradgrindian "technicians" who will "faithfully implement the prescriptions for practice" (Darling-Hamilton and Snyder 1992:16). And students will represent "standardized 'raw material' that will respond in predictable ways to prescribed standardized practices" (Furman 1994:425). The once controversial term "standards" is being replaced by the politically correct "outcomes". From this perspective, SAQA and the NQF are beginning to look like a bureaucratic monitoring system that will ensure compliance with what is deemed the best system for everyone, come what may to the consideration until recently paid to diversity and difference. The homogenizing OBE impulse to be socially and economically useful becomes, in a sense, a throwback to white, middle class, mainstream values in a materially rewarding outcomes, highstakes environment.

(Sarinjeive 2000:32)

Ultimately, what is at stake in this new environment is not just the teaching of a specific subject but, indeed, the social function of the university as institution. The drive towards compliance and homogenization for material ends commented on above by Sarinjeive is ascribed in Shum (1997) to an international trend, recently joined by South African universities, to identify their function by the entrepreneurial term "excellence". He sees excellence to be best understood "within the larger framework of recent forms of 'governmentality' wrought by liberal democracy and the market economy over the last two decades or so" where it is defined and applied as a mode of measurement and performance with the capacity to facilitate "the incorporation and equivalence of disparate activities by making them all subject to the same ratio of judgement" (Shum 1997:10). Impersonal monitoring mechanisms such as the audit, not bound ostensibly to the state or explicit ideological directives, are employed to enumerate, calculate, monitor, evaluate, and manage a wide diversity of human activity including the viability of academic departments within the new corporate environment of the university. In answer to the question why "universities of excellence" came into being and what the implications of this transition are, Shum writes:

The university of excellence is a university that, at least in its ideal form, can be seamlessly integrated into the economy, and the rhetoric of excellence, and the organizing principles it espouses, are clearly designed to facilitate this process. Given the present globalization of the world economy – which is to say the globalization of the Western economy – it is not surprising that universities in other countries have followed the same path. Now without going into the complexities of this, at least one thing is clear: the old idea of the university as the university of culture and community, the liberal university, is on the decline. And this decline also signals the waning of the organizing principle of the liberal university, which in the final analysis was the nation state or the community and the particularity of its cultural identity. One of the ironies of our situation is that at the very moment when we wish to move towards a new and inclusive national identity, our universities – which have, historically, been a prime site for forging such identities – embrace neutral, technocratic principles to define their practice.

(Shum 1997:11)

Despite the serious concerns raised about the negative implications for English Studies implicit in the OBE system and the changing ethos at universities, academic articles mainly reflect a positive and/or compliant attitude to transformation according to the new requirements. The typical attitude of commentators is evident in the concluding remarks offered by Michael Green (1998) to his account of the development of a first year humanities core course entitled “Language, Text and Context” implemented at the (then) University of Natal, Durban Campus in 1997. After describing the context from which the course stems, pointing out the almost impossible odds against which academics had to work in devising the course, and voicing reservations about the new directions taken by the education authorities, he concludes:

It is in working through problems of the kind set out above that the value of core courses for transformation lies at the moment. I for one am by no means convinced by every one of the new requirements set for tertiary education, but in working through at least some of their major implications on the ground, we are able to develop a practical and informed response to them. I have been frank about the difficulties we encountered, but I must also mention that the exercise has been positive in many respects ... Out of the difficulties and accomplishments alike, then, courses of this sort have forged many of the new relations, structural, educational, and personal, which will define the emerging and future shape of South African universities. The University of Natal recognised this in conferring, collectively, the Distinguished Teacher Award for 1997 upon the core course co-ordinators. We trust this acknowledges the value of both our failures and achievements for what lies ahead.

(Green 1998:53)

Although the positive pragmatism of Green's position is laudable, the simple fact following from his account (as from many others about curricula transformation during this period) is that, despite not being "convinced by every one of the new requirements set for tertiary education" he and his team felt obliged to implement these requirements.

An indication of the position English Studies would come to occupy in the tertiary environment which became a reality after the turn of the century is to be seen in another article by Green entitled "Nouns for the Adjective: New Directions in English Studies" published at the end of 2000. Green points out that, although his article deals with the restructuring of English Studies within the specific circumstances of his university, aspects of it apply to any consideration of the changing status of English as academic subject. Taking their cue from Rob Pope's *The English Studies Book* (1998), the English department organized their courses around the three interrelated fields of language, literature, and communication and media which for them reflect the main interests of their discipline. While the language track, which constituted a writing course grounded in language acquisition, attracted sufficient numbers of students, Green notes:

... we, like most other humanities programmes, are in the grip of a drastic decline in recruitment. The reasons for this are many ... But even within the reduced numbers in English, the track system we have introduced makes it plain that some areas of English Studies have less appeal than others. The Literature track I have just described, for example, barely maintained our decimated intake in relation to a little less than four years ago, and the biggest problem we have in the track system is keeping literary studies alive within it. No matter how interesting, relevant, or challenging we make the literary modules, their attraction pales in relation to the most mundane offerings in the one clear growth area of the humanities: cultural, or even more specifically, media and communication studies.

(Green 2000:61)

But, also with regard to this track of offerings in his department, Green registers "worrying signs". He explains that, as part of the restructuring of the Human Sciences Faculty at his university, a new and separate Media and Communications Programme has been set up, in which the main emphasis is placed on a production-oriented approach opposed to the more

scholarly and academic one favoured by the English Department in their cultural studies track. Since students are interested in courses that can lead directly to professions, it is the more production-oriented approach that is in greater demand. Green sees it as important for English Studies not to cede their interest in culture and media in the face of this state of affairs, since what is at stake for him is not just his department's claims on areas now being absorbed into a more popular field of study, but the very nature of university study. He believes that promoting the new English department courses, committed to analysis and critique, amounts to an assertion of the defining features of the discipline, and by implication, also of university studies:

I hope the three track approach to the discipline developed by our programme will enable us to go far beyond the relatively simple issue of choice of subject matter in relation to extra-disciplinary needs. If English Studies at the University of Natal, Durban, is to maintain a core commitment to the defining features of its discipline and, at the same time, make a true contribution to other fields of study or employment, then it must look beyond marketing itself in terms of the kinds of secondary attributes usually cited as making up its use value as a discipline. If the discipline as a whole is to sell its soul, or at least make enough out of its soul to preserve its viability in an academy beleaguered as it is by market forces, then let it truly put forward its soul, and not fall back on simply panhandling its fringe benefits. Expressive competence and perhaps a little analytical command with a touch of high cultural top dressing may be the most that is asked of us, but we have so much more of real civic, professional, and – dare one say – even market value to offer in the area of a wide cultural literacy and deep discursive critique. In short, English Studies has not been freed of its obligation to offer the truly critical literacy that is its ultimate defining feature.

(Green 2000:63)

One of the interesting features of this concluding paragraph of Green's article is that the assertion of belief in the core commitments of English Studies is couched in language borrowed from the market place, the very force seen as responsible for the "beleaguered" state of the commodified academy. Is this done on purpose, sardonically, sarcastically? Or has the rhetoric of big business become fixed in all forums of the academy, even in arguing the case for the ultimate defining features of a core humanities subject in an academic journal? An interesting question also arises regarding how much is left to English Studies of the "soul" Green seems willing to barter in

securing viability. As pointed out before, of the three fields identified as constituting English Studies by the English department at the University of Natal in 2000, only the language acquisition track was successful in attracting satisfactory numbers of students. Green states, however, that this endeavour was “led by a highly qualified person in the field of language acquisition brought in especially for this purpose” which perhaps gives weight to the view of those who consider “members of a ‘literature’ department [...] amateurs in the field of language teaching” (Green 2000:58). Regarding the literature track, the quotation given earlier makes it clear that, despite efforts to make it relevant, interesting and challenging, it lacks the necessary attractiveness to students and therefore, were the department to accept literature as its main focus, Green is of the opinion that English Studies would shrink back to only its most traditional, conservative, most under-recruited track of study. This leaves the Culture and Media track, but it is contested ground, and the indications are that English Studies have already lost the contest, or are at least in for a very unequal fight in their stand for academic values as embodied in their teaching approach. This becomes clear if one considers Green’s description of the capricious attitude of the executive at his university:

Reports from our executive indicate that they are happy with the kind of kudos the excellent research record of the Human Sciences Faculty lends to the ethos of our institution; one off-the-record comment indicated that without our research output the university – with its flourishing business and marketing programmes – was in danger of becoming a business school. The real danger for the human sciences as they attempt to stake their claim to the study of media and communication is that they avoid becoming merely the cultural wing of a business school or, in an even more service-oriented capacity, a management communications centre.

(Green 2000:63)

Although it is not clear with what degree of sincerity the last observation is made, and although the position of all English departments are obviously not the same, Green’s article does echo the sense of crisis commented on at the beginning of this section.

## STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

As indicated earlier, this study has two interrelated objectives: to explore the largely unknown archive of the writing of Geoffrey Hugh Durrant, and to relate this body of work to current thinking regarding the mission of local university English Studies. In order to achieve these objectives it is in the first place necessary to give an exposition of what Durrant published. To this end Chapters two and three deal with Durrant's writing concerning English Studies, while Chapter four has as its focus his writing concerning the wider South African society of the 1940s and 1950s. In the concluding chapter a critical assessment is made of the contemporary relevance of Durrant's work.

### Notes: Chapter One

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<sup>1</sup> The biographical detail provided here was obtained from archival material housed at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus.

<sup>2</sup> The letters quoted from in this section are housed in the *G.H. Durrant* Collection in the Archives of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

<sup>3</sup> In another e-mail letter (14 February 2001) Durrant indicated that these attacks were written by himself. Durrant writes: "By the way, I wrote all the broadcasts for Freedom Radio, but these were all carefully destroyed after each recording. They were broadcast from remote farms, a different one each week; though one broadcast was made from a building next door to police headquarters in Longmarket Street."

<sup>4</sup> See Durrant (1962), (1963), (1964a & b), (1968), (1969a & c).

<sup>5</sup> Durrant's work received attention in Penrith (1972), Doherty (1989), Doherty (1990), Johnson (1996), Sandwith (1998b), Wright (1996), Sandwith (2005), and Barker (2006).

<sup>6</sup> Durrant's speeches are discussed in chapter 4. Efforts to locate the speeches to which references were found have been unsuccessful, except in the case of one. A typescript version of this speech, housed in the Msunduzi Municipal Library (formerly the Natal Society Library) in Pietermaritzburg, is provided at the end of the study as Addendum A.

<sup>7</sup> The paper was indeed published in volume 17 of *The English Academy Review* which bears the date 2000. The explanation for this anachronism is probably that the journal, as is often the case with academic journals in South Africa, fell behind with its publications and brought out this specific issue at a date later than that of the AUETSA conference of 2001. The title of the article is also problematic. In the table of contents of the journal it is given as "Rebranding English till It Burns" while on p. 44 of the journal it is given as "Rebranding English till It Hurts". The latter version has been used in the Bibliography for this study.

<sup>8</sup> This overview is mainly based on articles published since 1990 in the following academic journals: *The English Academy Review*, *Scrutiny*<sup>2</sup>, *English Studies in Africa*, *English in Africa*, *Journal for Literary Studies*, *Alternation*, *Pretexts*, and *Current Writing*. I also consulted the essays taken up in Wright (1990) and considered the views expressed in Barker (2006). The articles taken into account for the overview here are: Chapman



(1990), Hooper (1990), Doherty (1990), Hutchings (1990), Lickindorf (1990), Lenta (1990), Palazzo (1990), Titlestad & Addleson (1990), Van Wyk Smith (1990b), Wright (1990), Clarence (1992), Dovey (1992), Foley (1992), Glenn (1992), Higgins (1992), Ryan (1992), Shum (1992), Wade (1992), Chapman (1994), Coetzee (1994), Johnson (1994), Roos (1994), Sandwith (1994), Thompson (1994), Thornton (1994), Van Vuuren (1994), Van Wyk (1994), Greig (1995), Malan (1995), Olivier (1995), Olivier-Shaw (1995), Samuel (1995), Swanepoel (1995), Wade (1995), Wood (1995), Heyns (1996), Murray (1996), Parr (1996), Ryan (1996), Attwell (1997), Byrne (1997), Carusi (1997), Chapman (1997a), Chapman (1997b), De Jong (1997), De Kock (1997), Green (1997), Moodie (1997), Orr (1997), Phelps (1997), Serudu (1997), Shum (1997), Van Vuuren (1997a), Van Vuuren (1997b), Van Wyk (1997), Carusi (1998), Green (1998), Hooper (1998), Holloway (1998), O'Dowd (1998), Ryan (1998), Sandwith (1998a), Switzer (1998), Van der Walt (1998), Horn (1999), Kilfoil (1999), Mkuti (1999), Green (2000), Mqquashu (2000), Quirk (2000), Sarinjeive (2000), Swart (2000), Kissack (2001), Martin (2003), Van der Hoven (2003), Cornwell (2005), Wentzel (2005), Gaylard (2006), Beatty (2006), Van der Vlies (2006), Barker (2007), McKinney & Soudien (2007), Scott (2007), Stein & Newfield (2007), Wright (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Van Vuuren's article was published in the *Journal of Literary Studies* 10(3/4), December 1994. Again, the explanation for this illogical state of affairs is probably the same as the one offered in endnote 7.

<sup>10</sup> The speech was originally written in 1989 for an in-house ANC discussion in Stockholm. It was published in the *Weekly Mail*, February 1990 and later that year in De Kock & Press (1990:19-29).

<sup>11</sup> See Chapman (1996).

<sup>12</sup> Coetzee offers his ideas regarding the concepts of "rupture" and "discontinuity" with reference to Foucault (1985).

<sup>13</sup> The following themes chosen for three conferences all held in 1997 are indicative of this type of activity: "The Millenium Approaches: (w)ither English?" (AUETSA); "Literature at the Crossroads" (Unisa); "First-Year Forum" (Committee of English Professors). The future of (English) literature and language studies also formed the focus of three consecutive annual "Academy Lectures" of the English Academy of Southern Africa in the late 1990s. These were: "Negotiating our Way out of Chaos: English in the New South Africa" delivered by Robert Greig in June 1996, "From Shaka to Shakespeare: The Study of English in South Africa Today" delivered by Michael Chapman in May 1997, and "A New Curriculum for African Renaissance South Africa" delivered by Taban lo Liyong on 23 September 1998. My own finding that there is an increase in the number of articles published in academic journals dealing with the repositioning of English studies in the late 1990s is supported by Barker (2006). Barker reviews articles published in 11 academic journals over the period 1958-2004 with the aim, inter alia, of uncovering the historical shifts in approach and choice of disciplinary objects in English Studies in South Africa. One of the categories of writing Barker comments on is "pedagogy" defined as "discourse ... which characterizes the discipline" (p. 132). Although Barker indicates a growth in pedagogical writing throughout the 1990s, and although the motivation for this is not detailed enough to distinguish between the early and later stages of the decade, the few articles he does refer to were published in the late 1990s.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DURRANT AND THE TASK OF ENGLISH STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY

*It falls to the English teacher, not only to cultivate literary taste, but to rescue the university student from illiteracy and barbarism, both of the mind and the heart.*  
(Durrant 1948:8)

#### INTRODUCTION

Instruction in the English language in South Africa dates back to the supplanting of a Dutch colonial power by a British one early in the nineteenth century when knowledge of English was declared an indispensable condition for appointments to civil office.<sup>1</sup> Opportunities for proficiency in the English language became available through educational institutions set up by government as part of their program of Anglicisation, as well as through private tutoring by individuals who capitalised on the demand created by the government's language policy. This era was marked by efforts to improve the general level of education in the colony, resulting, inter alia, in the establishment of the South African College in Cape Town, which can be regarded as the first institution of higher education in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> The South African College opened in 1829 with three instructors, known as professors, one of whom was a professor of English and Classics with the responsibility to teach English grammar and literature. English was thereby established as a subject suitable for academic study and retained its status in the subsequent development of South African institutions of higher education such as the Board of Examiners in 1858, the University of the Cape of Good Hope in 1873, and the fully fledged universities established after 1916. Since teachers of English in South Africa were recruited from Britain, these educators brought with them the

teaching practices and assumptions formed in the mother country, and British institutions served as models for developments in local institutions of higher education. So, for instance, until 1873 colonial students could only obtain qualifications at university level by writing examinations set by London University under the supervision of the South African Board of Examiners. Even when the role of examining was taken over by the University of the Cape of Good Hope after 1873, degrees awarded were modelled upon the syllabuses and standards prescribed by London University.

Given the tradition of British influence in South African tertiary institutions, it is only to be expected that the major transformation of English Studies in England known as the “Cambridge Revolution” during the course of the second and third decades of the twentieth century would have a far-reaching effect on local university English Schools. Of the Cambridge movement and of the attitude of its architects Terry Eagleton says the following:

No subsequent movement within English studies has come near to recapturing the courage and radicalism of their stand. In the early 1920s it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all; by the early 1930s it had become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else. English was not only a subject worth studying, but *the* supremely civilizing pursuit, the spiritual essence of the social formation. Far from constituting some amateur or impressionistic enterprise, English was an arena in which the most fundamental questions of human existence – what it meant to be a person, to engage in significant relationship with others, to live from the vital centre of the most essential values – were thrown into vivid relief and made the object of the most intensive scrutiny.

(1992(1983):31)

It was during this period of intense belief in the essential role of English Studies in “the most fundamental questions of human existence” that Geoffrey Durrant, educated at Cambridge in the early 1930s, came to South Africa. When Durrant delivered his inaugural address at the Natal University College in Pietermaritzburg in June 1945 he chose as his theme *English Studies and the Community* and at the outset of the address told his audience:

... all I am doing tonight is to make public, for better or worse, the assumptions upon which I shall act in my conduct of the department of English, and the aims which I shall set before myself during my tenure of the Chair of English at the Natal University College. By doing this I shall, I hope, not only clarify my own

mind and make clear to myself what my beliefs are; but I shall also be making them public and exposing them to the healthy cold wind of criticism.

(1945a:1)

The focus of the address that follows is an answer to the question “Why is English studied at the University?” and the essence of Durrant’s answer is that English Studies is capable of bringing about “a generally higher standard of human life” (1945a:3). The boldness of this answer and the conviction with which it is motivated in the rest of this address and in subsequent publications echoes the characteristic attitude of the Cambridge School captured in the Eagleton quotation above. Furthermore, Durrant’s writing on the task of English Studies is in important aspects marked by the basic tenets of the Cambridge School and by ideas developed by the two leading critics of this school. It is therefore necessary to provide, as basis for a critical evaluation of Durrant’s writing, an outline of the essential aspects of the Cambridge School.

## **THE CAMBRIDGE SHOOOL**

### **General characteristics**

The Cambridge English School was founded in 1917 when English was separated from Medieval and Modern Languages and established as an independent Tripos.<sup>3</sup> In 1926 revisions were made to the original Tripos so that it became possible to do an entire degree in modern English.

Critics commenting on the importance of the formation of the new School<sup>4</sup> highlight the fact that it represented a move away from Philology, which was still included in the syllabus but no longer compulsory. This meant that “English Studies” became the study of English literature<sup>5</sup> with linguistic studies being relegated to other disciplines.

Another important characteristic of the new syllabus was its broad-based interdisciplinary nature. In his study *F.R. Leavis: A life in Criticism* (1995) Ian MacKillop (1995) says the following in this regard:

On the structure of the English Tripos, *The Student's Handbook* makes a surprising remark, almost in passing, about the two parts of the tripos. Undergraduates who took both, modern and 'early', would have a comprehensive curriculum. However, taking both sections was not really what the designers of the tripos wanted. Each section could, just as well, be used as an alternative to a part from another tripos. The handbook observed approvingly that 'the majority of students will probably take only one section'. The new sections were *meant* to go with other studies and the English tripos to be a focus for them. This was one of its special features, one thoroughly endorsed by Leavis. Although most academics prefer students to stay within their subject and cannot have them do enough of it, Leavis and Cambridge English were pleased for pupils to pass from one subject to another. It was in the original Cambridge English, in its first six years, that he learned English was an enhancement or even a meeting-point of other disciplines. This aspiration became part of the theory for English studies he developed in the early 1940s.

(McKillop 1995:60-61)

The aspiration for English Studies to be "a meeting point of other disciplines" should be understood in the sense of becoming the central discipline in the humanities. This intention of the founders of the School is formulated as follows by Michael Goldman in an article published in *English Studies in Africa*:

A.C. Chadwick, Professor of Anglo-Saxon in Cambridge, was a great power, politically the most important one, behind the changes of 1917, and it was his belief, as Dr. Tillyard says, "that English was destined to take the place of Classics in humane education." This belief in the centrality of English studies is the key assumption behind the whole purpose and power of the Cambridge School. The men who created the English Tripos were not primarily concerned with establishing a new trend in criticism, or with turning out promising academic recruits. They were offering what they considered the best education available to the young intellect coming up after the Great War. The new criticism was but an offspring of this belief.

(Goldman 1958:97)

English literature was now not only an independent discipline in its own right, but was to become a touchstone for other disciplines such as science, politics, philosophy, or history.

Critics writing on the Cambridge "Revolution" are in general agreement that it was prompted by social changes in Britain. One of the major forces of change identified is the First World War. So, for instance, Terry Eagleton attributes what he describes as "The Rise of English" to a surge of nationalism during the war but also to the psychological needs of a society shaken by the war experience:

England's victory over Germany meant a renewal of national pride, an upsurge of patriotism which could only aid English's cause; but at the same time the deep trauma of the war, its almost intolerable questioning of every previously held cultural assumption, gave rise to a 'spiritual hungering', as one contemporary commentator described it, for which poetry seemed to provide an answer (...) English literature rode to power on the back of wartime nationalism; but it also represented a search for spiritual solutions on the part of an English ruling class whose sense of identity had been profoundly shaken, whose psyche was ineradicably scarred by the horrors it had endured. Literature would be at once solace and reaffirmation, a familiar ground on which Englishmen could regroup both to explore, and to find some alternative to, the nightmare of history.

(Eagleton 1983:29-30)

Although he acknowledges that World War I provided the necessary momentum for the establishment of the new English School, Francis Mulhern contends that the forces favouring this new departure and explaining its powerful influence were already present before the war and only became operative during the exceptional conditions of wartime. He points to changes in the world market leading to the reorganization of British industry after the war. These included: the formation of monopolies; more scientific and mechanized production and management strategies; an extension of the division of labour; and the cultivation of a mass market for cheaper, standardized goods. Mulhern sees these changes, accompanied by political instability and the creation of new phenomena such as the mass media, as symptomatic of a broader crisis in British society:

The condition of British society in the 1920s was, then, one of crisis, defined at the economic level by a complex unity of innovation and decay, and politically, by a related dislocation of the inherited political order. Within the national culture, the effects of this crisis were pervasive. The economic and social developments of the period led directly to the transformation, or effective creation, of modern Britain's most powerful cultural media, and, at the same time, undermined the habits and assumptions of the established humanistic culture, casting it into confusion and self-doubt.

(Mulhern 1979:7)

Within this society marked by anxiety the literary text (often specifically poetry) is proffered as a source of traditional wisdom and moral values and therefore as a remedy for the crisis in society. This was accompanied by the belief that how one evaluated literary works was bound up with deeper judgments about the nature of history and society as a whole. In this respect

the Cambridge School can be seen as revival of Matthew Arnold's<sup>6</sup> belief in the importance of poetry as instrument of social stability.

Another characteristic of the Cambridge School is their repudiation of the amateurism and subjectivism of the belletristic practices which constituted English Studies before 1917. They stressed the intellectual professionalism of literary criticism which for them required rigorous critical analysis and disciplined attention to the literary text or the "words on the page." They also insisted on the most rigorous discrimination between different literary qualities. This method of detailed analytic interpretation associated with the Cambridge School came to be known as "practical criticism" or "close reading". Adherents of this method believed that literary texts could be studied, understood, and assessed ("placed") in isolation from their cultural and historical contexts.

Several people were instrumental in establishing the new English School, but it was in the writings of I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis that the important motifs were worked out.

### **I.A. Richards**

I.A. Richards, trained in Moral Science (a combination of psychology and ethics), was one of the first lecturers to be appointed in the new English Tripos and the major formative influence on Cambridge English. His most important contribution was made through a series of literary-critical works published in the course of the 1920s. These were: *The Meaning of Meaning* (co-authored by C.K. Ogden) (1923), *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), *Science and Poetry* (1926) and *Practical Criticism* (1929).

*The Meaning of Meaning* provides an overview of attitudes to and theories of language, a critique of tracts on "meaning", and a guide for the improvement of the everyday use of language. The work was written against the background of World War I, and directed in particular to the exploitation of language in wartime propaganda. The authors express the belief that, in remaking the world after the war, clarity and precision of expression is essential

for successful communication. For them a precise manner of saying what one means provides a basis for mutual understanding, agreement on goals, and an avoidance of catastrophe. In order to improve communication, a greater awareness of the instrumentality of language is necessary. Language performs various functions in the same way as instruments such as the telephone, telescope or microscope and, for clear understanding, the context in which language is used is of central importance. Richards and Ogden propose several functions of language use, the two most important of which are the referential function (used to describe something or to make an assertion about something that can be proved true or false) and the emotive function (used to communicate or elicit emotion, intention, mood, attitude, or appraisal). Scientific and expository uses of language are referential in nature while poetic language is marked by a mix of functions. Although the improvement of everyday language is stated as the general objective of *The Meaning of Meaning*, the larger hope is that an increased awareness of language will promote its intellectual uses and foster conditions for the revival of poetry. Ultimately more alert and efficient language use is seen as a way of ordering the mind.

In both *Science and Poetry* and *Principles of Literary Criticism*, the general theme is the drastic change brought about by scientific developments, the dangers which this poses for our psychological, economic, social, and political well-being, and the role of poetry as a conciliatory agent.<sup>7</sup> Richards argues that “Tradition” backed by “belief”, which in the past acted as ordering forces, could not keep pace with scientific advancement. By the early twentieth century, life has become complex and fragmented resulting in moral and mental chaos for which “poetry” can be the cure:

In the past, Tradition, a kind of Treaty of Versailles assigning frontiers and spheres of influence to the different interests, and based chiefly upon conquest, ordered our lives in a moderately satisfactory manner. But Tradition is weakening. Moral authorities are not as well backed by belief as they were; their sanctions are declining in force. We are in need of something to take the place of the old order. Not in need of a new balance of power, a new arrangement of conquests, but of a League of Nations for the moral ordering of the impulses; a new order based on conciliation, not on attempted suppression.



It is very probable that the Hindenburg line to which the defence of our traditions retired as a result of the onslaughts of the last century will be blown up in the near future. If this should happen a mental chaos such as man has never experienced may be expected. We shall then be thrown back, as Matthew Arnold foresaw, upon poetry. It is capable of saving us; it is a perfectly possible means of overcoming chaos.

(Richards 1970(1926):82-83)

It is evident from the metaphors in which Richards couches his arguments here, that his characterisation of society should, like his concern for improved communication in *The Meaning of Meaning*, be seen against the disruption and instability following the First World War. Richards' general view of the social order by the early 1920s was that it was facing an imminent threat of chaos brought about by the decline of standards imposed by a growing population, commercialism, and the effects of scientific inventions and modern media. His main concern was for the psychological effects of these "dangers" of contemporary society on the emotionally immature masses. Science characterised as "autonomous", "indifferent", and "emotionally neutral" is seen as unable to assist mankind in its predicament. Religion and philosophy are equally unsuitable because they tend to be dogmatic and to overstate their powers, presenting themselves falsely as sources of "perfect knowledge".

The ability of poetry (and other arts such as music, painting and sculpture) for "saving us" lies in the effects it has on the human mind engaging with it. In *Principles of Literary Criticism* Richards put forward a "Psychological Theory of Value" in which he argues that value judgements such as "good", "bad", or "indifferent" can be made on a purely psychological basis. Within this theory "the conduct of life" is seen as "an attempt to organise impulses so that success is obtained for the greater number or mass of them, for the most important and the weightiest set" (Richards 1963(1924):46). Impulses can be either "appetencies" or "aversions" and anything "which will satisfy an appetency without involving the frustration of some equal or *more important* appetency" (Richards 1963(1924):47) is seen as valuable. Basic physiological needs (impulses) have to be satisfied to sustain life, but since

man is a social creature his need for sustaining normal relations with his fellow men is equally important:

Some needs or impulses must be satisfied in order that others may be possible. We must eat, drink, sleep, breathe, protect ourselves and carry on an immense physiological business as a condition for any further activities (...) Man for the most part must exert himself half his life to satisfy even the primitive needs (...) In their turn they involve as conditions a group of impulses, whose satisfaction becomes only second in importance to physiological necessities, those, namely, upon which communication and the ability to co-operate depend. But these, since man is a social creature, also become more directly necessary to his well-being (...) It is hardly necessary to remind the reader that for a civilised man, activities originally valuable as means only, often become so important through their connections with the rest of his activities, that life without them is regarded as intolerable. Thus acts which will debar him from his normal relations with his fellows are often avoided, even at the cost of death.

(Richards 1963(1924):48-49)

For Richards the essential function of the mind is to co-ordinate, to systematise, to bring about order. He sees the most valuable states of mind as those which involve the widest and most comprehensive co-ordination of activities and the least curtailment. This ideal situation is described as a state of equilibrium. Customs and moral codes are too restrictive and not adaptable enough to function as ordering principles for the highly varied human activities necessary to cope in a rapidly changing world, and it is in this regard that the effects of the arts on the human mind can come to our aid:

Customs change more slowly than conditions, and every change in conditions brings with it new possibilities of systematization (...) Human conditions and possibilities have altered more in a hundred years than they had in the previous ten thousand, and the next fifty may overwhelm us, unless we can devise a more adaptable morality (...) We pass as a rule from a chaotic to a better organized state by ways which we know nothing about. Typically through the influence of other minds. Literature and the arts are the chief means by which these influences are diffused. It should be unnecessary to insist upon the degree to which high civilisation, in other words, free, varied and unwasteful life, depends upon them in numerous ways.

(Richards 1963(1924):56-57)

The characteristics of the work of art, the artist, as well as the creative act are defined in terms of ordering, reconciling, and balancing impulses which outside this realm seem to be conflicting and confusing. The following quotations, taken from *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, typically illustrate this position:

The arts are our storehouse of recorded values. They spring from and perpetuate hours in the lives of exceptional people, when their control and command of experience is at its highest, hours when the varying possibilities of existence are most clearly seen and the different activities which may arise are most exquisitely reconciled, hours when habitual narrowness of interests or confused bewilderment are replaced by an intricately wrought composure.

(Richards 1963(1924):32)

Compared with (the poet) the ordinary man suppresses nine-tenths of his impulses, because he is incapable of managing them without confusion. He goes about in blinkers because what he would otherwise see would upset him. But the poet through his superior power of ordering experience is freed from this necessity. Impulses which commonly interfere with one another and are conflicting, independent, and mutually distractive, in him combine in a stable poise.

(Richards 1963(1924): 243)

The equilibrium of opposed impulses, which we suspect to be the ground-plan of the most valuable aesthetic responses, brings into play far more of our personality than is possible in experiences of a more defined emotion. We cease to be orientated in one definite direction; more facets of the mind are exposed and, what is the same thing, more aspects of things are able to affect us. To respond, not through one narrow channel of interest, but simultaneously and coherently through many, is to be *disinterested* in the only sense of the word which concerns us here. A state of mind which is not disinterested is one which sees things only from one standpoint or under one aspect. At the same time since more of our personality is engaged the independence and individuality of other things becomes (*sic*) greater. We seem to see “all round” them, to see them as they really are; we see them apart from any one particular interest which they may have for us. Of course without some interest we should not see them at all, but the less any one particular interest is indispensable, the more *detached* our attitude becomes. And to say that we are *impersonal* is merely a curious way of saying that our personality is more *completely* involved.

(Richards 1963(1924): 251-252)

The focus is thus on the health of the mind, capable of managing a complexity of impulses without confusion, and in this way helping us to broaden our perspective and to come to new ways of “disinterested” understanding. This is seen as “imaginal” or “incipient” action as opposed to “overt” action which involves actual muscular movement. For Richards imaginal action is the more valuable behaviour in the well-developed human being and this is equated to what happens in the process of interpreting a work of art:

Indeed the difference between the intelligent or refined, and the stupid or crass person is a difference in the extent to which overt action can be replaced by incipient and imaginal action. An intelligent man can “see how a thing works” when a less intelligent man has to “find out by trying”. Similarly with such responses as are aroused by a work of art. The difference between “understanding” it and failing to do

so is, in most cases, a difference between being able to make the required responses in an imaginal or incipient degree, adjusting them to one another at that stage ...

(Richards 1963(1924):111)

The value of such imaginal responses lies in the fact that they inhibit rash, inappropriate action which can be damaging and disruptive, as opposed to the peaceful self-adjustment of mental activity

Richards characterises *Practical Criticism* as being in part a record of a piece of field-work in comparative ideology which presents the reader with an instructive collection of contemporary opinions, presuppositions, theories, beliefs, and responses, but also as an attempt to make some suggestions toward how these aspects of our lives may be better controlled. In the introductory section Richards explains that the method followed in collecting his data involved issuing printed sheets of poems to audiences which were requested to comment freely on them. No contextual information was provided for the poems and the authors were not indicated. The commentators remained anonymous to ensure complete freedom of expression, and they were given a week to write their comments (“protocols”) in order to ensure a well-considered response. Most of the respondents were undergraduates reading English at Cambridge in preparation for an Honours degree.

Richards motivates the use of poetic texts in his experiment by contrasting them with other types of language use, such as those found in mathematics, physics, law, and commerce. In these contexts language has a formulaic character guided either by verifiable fact and precise hypothesis or by accepted conventions. Poetry, on the other hand, forms part of a corpus of communications concerned with abstract opinion and disputation. For the purpose of “advancing our knowledge of what may be called the natural history of human opinions and feelings” poetry therefore provides “eminently suitable *bait* for anyone who wishes to trap the current opinions and responses” (Richards (1976(1929):6). Although the discussion of poetry and the ways in which it may be approached, appreciated, and judged, forms the prime

purpose of the investigation, Richards regards his study as a contribution towards finer, more precise, and more discriminative communication in general. He indicates that he employs psychology as an “indispensable instrument” in his enquiry.

In the second section of the book the comments on the poems are documented, while the third section consists of Richards’ analysis of the responses based on the difficulties encountered by the readers. The foci of the analysis correspond to a great extent with the concerns of earlier works, in particular *The Meaning of Meaning* and *Principles of Literary Criticism* which can be seen as the theoretical basis for the more practical approach in *Practical Criticism*.<sup>8</sup>

One of the key issues taken up in the analysis is the importance of distinguishing between different types of language use and different kinds of meaning and the view that in poetry “feeling” is paramount. This is dealt with primarily in the first chapter of the analysis entitled “Four Kinds of Meaning”, but several other issues of interpretation discussed later rely on or develop the lines drawn here. The value of the use of figurative language, for instance, is linked to the generation of emotional impulses which for Richards constitutes the “sole justification” of the poem, or “which in another sense *is* the poem” (1976(1929): 204). Formal aspects of poetry such as sound and rhythm are also related to their emotional effects: “The mysterious glory which seems to inhere in the sound of certain lines is a projection of the thought and emotion they invoke, and the peculiar satisfaction they seem to give *to the ear* is a reflection of the adjustment *of our feelings* which has been momentarily achieved” (1976(1929): 229).

A particularly interesting aspect of Richards’ preoccupation with the different types of meaning is the way in which he links this to his psychological approach and to his arguments regarding the value of literary criticism. The departure for his argument here is the premise that, in our responses to poetry, discrimination between sense (literal meaning) and feeling,

despite being “sometimes an impossible and always an extremely delicate and perilous operation” can help us “to see why misunderstandings of all kinds are so frequent, and to devise educational methods that will make them less common” (1976(1929): 209). The more difficult of these two kinds of meaning to deal with is “feeling”, but this is not impossible. Our ability to discuss our feelings appropriately lies in the psychological record of human nature captured in language, a source which becomes accessible to us only through “literary penetration”:

We do somehow manage to discuss our feelings, sometimes with remarkable facility and success. We say things about them sometimes that seem to be subtle and recondite, and yet true. We do this in spite of our feebleness in introspection and our ignorance of the general nature of feelings. How do we come to be so knowledgeable and so clever? (...) Put shortly, the answer seems to be that this knowledge is lying dormant in the dictionary. Language has become its repository, a record, a reflection, as it were, of human nature.

No one who uses a dictionary – for other than orthographic purposes – can have escaped the shock of discovering how very far ahead of us our words often are. How subtly they already record distinctions towards which we are still groping (...) But our understanding of them is improving – psychology has notably helped here – and our power of interpreting the psychological records embodied in words is increasing and capable of immense increase in the future (...) As geology, in the early stages of inquiry into radio-activity, came to supply evidence that experiments could not elicit, so the records, hidden not in rocks but in words, and accessible only to literary penetration, may combine with groping psychological analysis to produce results as yet unprofitable to conjecture.

(Richards 1976(1929):218-219)

Another basic premise of Richards’ writing which resurfaces in his analysis of the protocols is his view of culture as being under threat in modern society. In his discussion of stock responses he expresses the opinion that they originate from the fact that “[n]ine-tenths, at the least, of the ideas and the annexed emotional responses that are passed on – by the cinema, the press, friends and relatives, teachers, the clergy ... – to an average child of this century are – judged by the standards of poetry – crude and vague rather than subtle or appropriate” (1976(1929):248). For Richards this state of affairs can be explained by “(a) very simple application of the theory of communication” which shows “that any widespread diffusion of

ideas and responses tends towards standardisation, towards levelling down” (1976(1929):248).

The common occurrence of stock responses in the protocols is therefore seen as a reflection of the lowering of standards common to modern mass society.

In his analysis of the protocols Richards also returns to his premise that the healthy mind is characterised by an ability to integrate and order, to find equilibrium, and create new wholes from a complexity of impulses and experiences. The arts are regarded as models of the finest mental organization, and the genius of the artist lies in his possession of this capacity. This idea is worked out in relation to various aspects of interpretation dealt with in the later part of *Practical Criticism*. In its most general form it is applied in his definition of the nature of mental activities such as thinking or holding assumptions. Thinking, for Richards, involves “a thorough attempt to compare all the aspects of an object or situation, to analyse its parts, to reconcile one with another all its various implications, to order it in one coherent intellectual fabric with everything else we know about everything connected to it” (1976(1929):249). He distinguishes between two forms of assumption, both rooted in a desire for order:

... there are clearly two ways in which we may entertain an assumption: intellectually, that is in the context of other thoughts ready to support, contradict, or establish other logical relations with it; and emotionally, in a context of sentiments, feelings, desires and attitudes ready to group themselves around it. Behind the intellectual assumption stands the desire for logical consistency and order in the respective side of the mind. But behind the emotional assumption stands the desire or need for order of the whole outgoing emotional side of the personality, the side that is turned towards action.  
(1976(1929):274)

The essential value attributed to holistic order also forms the basis for the more personal and idiosyncratic views of critical activity which Richards puts forward in *Practical Criticism*, specifically in the chapter “Doctrine in Poetry”. The concern here is with the tension between “intellectual beliefs” and “emotional beliefs” in the reading of poetry, where the poem has as its basis firm and definite beliefs about the world. Richards argues that the reader does not need to subscribe to the intellectual belief in order to benefit from experiencing the emotional belief afforded by reading poetry. However, he is concerned that in such cases there is an

appearance of incompleteness which is problematic, since sincerity “is the quality we most insistently require in poetry” and which “we most need as critics” (1976(1929): 283). A discussion of various definitions of the concept “sincerity” follows in which Richards suggests that we can turn to the writings of Confucius in which “self-completion” is suggested as equivalent:

The most stimulating discussion of this topic is to be found in the *Chung Yung* (The Doctrine of the Mean, or Equilibrium and Harmony), the treatise that embodies the most interesting and the most puzzling part of the teachings of Confucius (...) Sincerity ... appears here as the beginning and end of personal character, the secret of the good life, the only means to good government, the means to give full development to our own natures, to give full development to the nature of others (...) it may be possible to see what general conditions will encourage sincerity and what steps may be suggested to promote this mysterious but necessary virtue in the critic.

We may take self-completion as our starting point. The completed mind would be that perfect mind we envisaged above, in which no disorder, no mutual frustration of impulses remained.

(1976(1929):283-285)

Later in this discussion Richards suggests a “technique or ritual for heightening sincerity”, the nature of which is similar to devotional practises: “Many religious exercises and some of the practises of divination and magic may be thought to be directed in part towards a similar quest for sanction, to be rituals designed to provide standards of sincerity” (1976(1929): 291).

The last section of *Practical Criticism* is called “Summary and Recommendations” but this does not provide anything fresh. The section that deals with “The Teaching of English” is disappointing since it is basically a mere restatement of the need to distinguish between the four different types of meaning.

The methods and principles worked out in *Practical Criticism* became the basis for “practical criticism” incorporated into the examinations papers of the Cambridge School and a method for the teaching and examining of English literature in general both inside Britain and elsewhere for decades to come. Richards himself left Cambridge in 1930 and spent long periods of time in America and China where he devoted his energies to the improvement of communication and the promotion of English as a world language.



## **F.R. Leavis**

F.R. Leavis moved from History to English as a student, became one of Richards' "freelances" in the Cambridge School in 1925 and taught in various capacities in this school until 1964. He inaugurated his critical career with a number of pamphlets, the most important of which was *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930). These early publications were collected in *For Continuity* (1933) and were individually included in publications of Leavis' later work.<sup>9</sup>

The dominant theme in *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* is the effects of industrialism on society and culture. Leavis prefaces his discussion with a quotation from Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* and introduces his own views on the "desperate plight of culture" with reference to Arnold's writings. He also quotes a passage from *Principles of Literary Criticism* in which the idea is expressed that artists and critics represent the vanguard of society. Leavis reformulates this idea in his own terms:

In any period it is upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is (apart from cases of the simple and familiar) only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgment. They are still a small minority, though a larger one, who are capable of endorsing such first-hand judgment by genuine personal response. The accepted valuations are a kind of paper currency based upon a very small proportion of gold. To the state of such a currency the possibilities of fine living at any time bear a close relation (...) Upon this majority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition (...) In their keeping ... is the language, the changing idiom upon which fine living depends, and without which distinction of spirit is thwarted and incoherent. By "culture" I mean the use of such language.

(Leavis 1965:143-146)

Leavis argues that the traditional relationship between "civilization" (the totality of social relations) and "culture" (the values on which fine living depends) has been strained to the point of rupture by the advance of 'the machine' and "processes consequent upon the machine" (1965:146-147). As examples of the influence of the machine Leavis points to: an increased pace of life; the automobile which has in his view affected religion, broken up the family, and revolutionized social custom; a damaging insistence on greater efficiency, better

salesmanship, and more mass production and standardization; and the levelling-down influence of the Press, films, and broadcasting. The changes in habit and circumstances of life had been so rapid and profound that society was now threatened with a breach in continuity:

It seems unlikely that the conditions of life can be transformed in this way without some injury to the standard of living (to wrest this phrase from the economist): improvisation can hardly replace the delicate traditional adjustments, the mature, inherited codes of habit and valuation, without severe loss, and loss that may be more than temporary. It is a breach in continuity that threatens: what has been inadvertently dropped may be irrecoverably forgotten.

(Leavis 1965:146)

In the equation of “culture” to “language” Leavis has in mind “the finest idiom” of language, by which he means the literary text, and therefore the minority he has in mind is essentially a literary minority which has to keep alive the literary tradition. Leavis concludes that within the dark prospects for culture which emerged from his discussion there is not much hope of a recovery, and that all that can be done is “for us to be as aware as possible of what is happening” (1965:171).

The cultural analysis offered by Leavis in *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* remains in essence unchanged in his later publications and in the work published by himself and other critics in *Scrutiny*. In addition, Leavis links his definition of a limited canon for English literature as worked out in *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), *The Great Tradition* (1948), and in a number of his essays to his views on modern civilization. An example is the following passage from *New Bearings in English Poetry*:

... not only poetry, but literature and art in general, are becoming more specialized: the process is implicit in the process of modern civilization. The important works of today, unlike those of the past, tend to appeal only at the highest level of response, which only a tiny minority can reach, instead of at a number of levels. On the other hand, the finer values are ceasing to be a matter of even conventional concern for any except the minority capable of the highest level. Everywhere below, a process of standardization, mass production, and levelling down goes forward, and civilization is coming to mean a solidarity achieved by the exploration of the most readily released responses. So that poetry in the future, if there is poetry, seems likely to matter even less to the world.

Those who care about it can only go on caring.

(Leavis 1972(1932):157)

Concern for the cultural situation of his times also informs *Education and the University* (1943), Leavis' most important analysis of university English Studies. In the first section of this work Leavis identifies his specific concern as that of a liberal university education, but immediately gives this a wider application by asserting that it is the function of serious education to resist and counteract those tendencies of civilization which subvert essential human needs manifested in the cultural tradition. Universities, specifically the "ancient" universities, are capable of providing the type of education necessary:

The universities are recognized symbols of cultural tradition – of cultural tradition still conceived as a directing force, representing a wisdom older than modern civilization and having an authority that should check and control the blind drive onward of material and mechanical development, with its human consequences. The ancient universities are more than symbols; they, at any rate, may fairly be called foci of such a force, capable, by reason of their prestige and their part in the life in the country, of exercising an enormous influence (...) "Humane tradition" may seem a vague concept. I don't think that an attempt to define it by enumeration of its contents would help. It seems to me better to point to English literature, which is unquestionably and productively "there" ...

(Leavis 1965:16-17)

For Leavis the restoration of a "humane tradition" is thus linked to knowledge of the "literary tradition". Through the study of literature in a specific way and under specific conditions students can pick up a sense of the continuity of an essential English way of life.

The program of making literary studies the central focus of a university education is necessitated by the social and cultural disintegration of "modern life". Modern life is marked by a process of disintegration brought on by rapid change, mass-production, levelling down and specialization, as well as the tyranny of the inhumanly complex machinery strengthened by the Second World War. The ancient universities can be employed in counteracting the disintegrating tendencies in society since they can function as centres of co-ordination and restoration:

A university of its very nature ... asserts ... a cultural tradition as representing the active function of human intelligence, choice and will; that is, as a spiritual force that

can direct and determine. The promoters of *Scrutiny* ... were consciously appealing to the idea that it was more than ever the *raison d'être* of a university to be, amid the material pressures and dehumanising complications of the modern world, a focus of humane consciousness, a centre where, faced with the specializations and distractions in which human ends lose themselves, intelligence, bringing to bear a mature sense of values, should apply itself to the problems of civilization.

(Leavis 1965:30)

Leavis' "Idea of a University" thus ascribes a profound social mission to education, since it becomes linked to the concepts "culture" and "civilization". Nevertheless, the study of literature still remains "the centre of the work" to be done in order to combat the disintegrative powers of modern society. Following this line of thought, Leavis deems a School of English to be the supreme representative of his idea of what a university education should be, and in the second section of *Education and the University* sets out "to say very clearly what an English School could, under the right conditions, propose as the scope and profit of a literary training" (1965:34).

For Leavis the essential discipline of an English School is literary criticism, a distinct discipline with definite aims, at the heart of which is the fostering of an advanced "intelligence" and "sensitivity":

It trains, in a way no other discipline can, intelligence and sensitivity together, cultivating a sensitiveness and precision of response and a delicate integrity of intelligence – intelligence that integrates as well as analyses and must have pertinacity and staying power as well as delicacy.

(Leavis 1965:34)

... there must be a training of intelligence that is at the same time a training of sensitivity; a discipline of thought that is at the same time a discipline in scrupulous sensitiveness of response to delicate organizations of feeling, sensations and imagery. Without that appreciative habituation to the subtleties of language in its most charged and complex uses which the literary critical discipline is, thinking – thinking to the ends with which humane education should be most concerned – is disabled. And the process of evaluative judgment ... is inseparable from the use of intelligence in that discipline ...

(Leavis 1965: 38)

Intellectual skills such as thinking, analysis, integration, precision, pertinacity, responsiveness, and evaluative judgment gained in dealing with the complexities and

subtleties of literary language also come to bear on the achievement of maturity and value judgements in actual life:

What is in question is how the ability to profit by experience, and with it the achievement of maturity, may best be furthered. The kind of work advocated entails, in its irreplaceable discipline, a most independent and responsible exercise of intelligence and judgment on the part of the student. The more advanced the work the more unmistakably is the judgement that is concerned inseparable from that profoundest sense of relative value which determines, or should determine, the important choices of actual life.

(Leavis 1965:35)

Although very ambitious and probably only attainable under ideal educational conditions, Leavis' aspirations for the discipline of literary criticism are in accordance with the key role he assigns to literary studies in a liberal university education. This discipline, not only assumes responsibility for producing an "educated man" in the field of literature, but also equips him to make the "important choices" in life itself. The scope and influence of literary studies is further broadened by Leavis' conviction that a literary education would not be satisfactory by itself. He regards it as one of the virtues of literary studies that they constantly lead outside themselves, and states that while these studies should be controlled by a concern for the essential discipline, it should also count on associated work in other fields.

Leavis' statement of principles for an English School is put into practice by his proposal for a scheme of work for the second part of the English Tripos at Cambridge. The course should ideally be taken by a small number of students and it would be assumed that the student has knowledge of English literature from Chaucer to the present day. Leavis points out that the course would be essentially designed for an elite and that severity of standards would be one of its attractions. Student numbers would not be a criterion for success, but rather the fact that a course like this would set a standard, provide a "centre and a source of stimulus and suggestion" (1965:42).

In order to reach the goals foreseen for the proposed English School, the old system of examining and instruction would have to be adapted. Leavis describes the existing

examination system in the Tripos as “a race against the clock” which entails “a string of essays to [be] scribble[d] down in three hours, with journalistic facility and that athletic endurance which has nothing to do with the qualities that should properly be tested” (1965:43). Although students would be required to take papers of a “Practical Criticism” kind, this end-of-course-examination would not be the general means of testing and placing. Students would be tested mainly by work done during the course which would entail various exercises testing perception, judgment and powers of critical analysis. The desirable method of instruction is through discussion and seminar procedures which would equip the student to conduct independent work more profitably. For Leavis it is not just the contents to be studied, but also the way in which studying is structured. From the outset the student must be guided to an awareness of the inclusive and unifying purpose of his studies by means of preliminary discussions at the end of the year preceding his formal instruction.

The proposed curriculum entails the study of the seventeenth century seen as a key phase or passage in the history of civilization in relation to contemporary society. This would involve studying the relationships between the vital systems (such as economic, political, moral, spiritual, religion, and art) of the two societies and an evaluation of standards and key-concepts pertaining to issues such as order, community, culture, and civilization. With the use of specialist guidance the student should study certain aspects of seventeenth-century civilization in depth, but also gain an overall perspective of the main aspects of the century in their mutual relationships and complexities. It is of the essence, Leavis insists, that the work to be done in his scheme, is done by the “literary mind”, so that the type of intelligence gained through literary studies becomes the prerequisite for the development of “the class of the educated” (1965:55).

The third section of *Education and the University* is Leavis’ answer to a critic’s observation that his sketch for an English school shows more concern for history than for

literature. In his reply Leavis points out that the student enrolling for his “revolutionized” Part II of the Tripos should already have acquired the skills of critical analysis and critical expression, but he nevertheless indulges his reader by commenting on the nature of literary studies.

Leavis identifies the proper function of an English school as the training of reading capacity and then defines this capacity in terms such as perception, judgement and analytical skill. He acknowledges both the vagueness of these terms and his inability to present anything more concrete, but he also implies that it is improper to ask for such a clarification:

That the question will be asked by some of those to whom my ‘sketch’ must be thought of as being addressed has now to be recognized, though there is no way of giving a convincing answer here to the most sceptical kind of asker (...) That the problem of demonstration should arise as such brings home how little, in the way of performance of their function, is commonly expected, or to be expected, either of literary critics or of English Schools.

(Leavis 1965: 69)

Instead of demonstrating a method of teaching, Leavis thus condemns those who dare to ask for such a demonstration as incompetent and uninitiated into the secrets of his trade. In a more positive, clarifying manner, a distinction is made between reading and analysis. For Leavis analysis is a profound way of reading, an appropriate response to the words on the page, a constructive and creative process, and an appeal for corroboration from other readers. Analysis would then be “the process by which we seek to attain a complete reading of the poem – a reading that approaches as nearly as possible to the perfect reading” (1965: 70). The “method” for achieving this complete or perfect reading is described, rather disconcertingly, as follows:

... what we are doing is to bring into sharp focus, in turn, this, that, and the other detail, juncture or relation in our total response; or (...) to dwell with deliberate, considering responsiveness on this, that or the other node or focal point in the complete organization that the poem is, in so far as we have it.

(Leavis 1965:70)

In addition to this description of analysis as a random and arbitrary process we are cautioned against technical procedures, a laboratory method, and of seeing the literary discipline as “the elaboration of technical apparatus and drill” (1965:71). Leavis’ censure here is directed against William Empson and I.A. Richards. He regards both Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity* and Richards’ *Practical Criticism* as a “mixed provision of the stimulating and the aberrant”, and while he regards Empson’s work as lacking the ability to interpret the poem as an organic unit and to make value judgements, Richards’ work is criticised for its “ambition to make analysis a laboratory technique” by which it becomes “little more than show” (1965:72).

By way of compensation for not being able to give a positive account of his literary critical method, Leavis offers an interpretation of Matthew Arnold’s sonnet “To Shakespeare” and a scene from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. His interpretation is aimed at illustrating the difference between these two texts regarding the “realization” of “complex verbal organization” reflected by “metaphors, images, and other local effects” (1965:77). While Arnold’s metaphor is “completely and betrayingly unrealized”, in the Shakespearean text it is “in the complete realization of the metaphors that the realizing gift of the poet and the ‘realized’ quality of the passage are manifested” (1965:78).

From his treatment of these texts it is evident that Leavis operates from very definite theoretical conceptions about issues such as the nature of the literary text and the critical process. However, he insists that it is not desirable to use these theoretical principles as a premise for nurturing the type of advanced “intelligence” and “sensitivity” which is the aim of his “essential” discipline of literary studies. It is only through illustration, and not through the explication of theoretical principles, that the student will acquire the “trained reading capacity” to deal with the “vast and speedy consumption of the printed word nominally expected from him” (1965: 84).



Critics writing on the contribution of F.R. Leavis to the Cambridge School and to the teaching of English literature in a more general sense are in agreement about his vital influence despite the fact that his views and the manner in which he offered them remain contentious. About the magnitude of Leavis' influence Terry Eagleton, for instance, makes the following judgment:

Whatever the "failure" or "success" of *Scrutiny*, however one might argue the toss between the anti-Leavisian prejudice of the literary establishment and the waspishness of the *Scrutiny* movement itself, the fact remains that English students in England today are "Leavisites" whether they know it or not, irremediably altered by that historic intervention. There is no more need to be a card-carrying Leavisite today than there is to be a card-carrying Copernican: that current has entered the bloodstream of English studies in England as Copernicus reshaped our astronomical beliefs, has become a form of spontaneous critical wisdom as deep-seated as our conviction that the earth moves round the sun.

(1992(1983):31)

#### UNIVERSITY ENGLISH STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE CAMBRIDGE APPROACH

By the time of Durrant's appointment at the University of Stellenbosch in the middle of 1939 some university English departments in South Africa must have been following the Cambridge approach, or must at least have been experimenting with it. This is evident from Durrant's inaugural address *English Studies and the Community* (1945) in which he champions the teaching method of detailed examination of verse and of prose extracts, and which, he points out, has been tried out successfully in several university English schools in England, Australia, and South Africa. With regard to South Africa he adds in a footnote that he "had the good fortune to see something of the very successful work done in the University of Stellenbosch under the inspiration of the late Professor Kirwood" (Durrant 1945a:7). By the middle of the 1940s, when Durrant returned to the academic scene after four years of military service in the Second World War, the definition and implementation of the

Cambridge approach (or, “practical criticism”) seems to have become a major concern of local English departments.

In 1948 a symposium on practical criticism was held at the University of Cape Town. In his preface to the published proceedings of this symposium W.S. Mackie indicates that it was the result of a need expressed at the first conference of university English teachers held in Johannesburg in 1946, attended by nearly all the teachers of English in the various South African Universities and University Colleges. The disposition of English departments towards practical criticism as a teaching method at the time is summed up as follows:

Since Dr Richards published his book upon it in 1929, in which he exposed the astounding inability of even advanced students in English in the University of Cambridge to evaluate, and indeed to understand, poems that they were asked to judge, no method of teaching English has been a more urgent subject of discussion or a more interesting object of experiment. It has had to endure both ecstatic panegyric and querulous depreciation; but at least there can be no doubt that its technique and its possibilities have been developed by Dr Leavis and the Cambridge School with quite amazing success. Whether it will do all that its most enthusiastic disciples claim for it, whether it will go on producing bright-souled missionaries to spread the light of a new culture in our schools and colleges, whether it will eventually make a victorious breach in the fort of the long-battered world, the older among us may be inclined to doubt. But any university school of English that should still neglect it, or should continue to teach English literature as a solemn and dreary procession of names and dates and periods and influences and tendencies, interspersed in text-book fashion with summary, dogmatic, and often traditional judgements, would at once stamp itself as antiquated.

(Mackie 1948:1)

A consideration of the papers delivered at this symposium makes it clear that the method of teaching English informed by Richards’ *Practical Criticism* and “developed by Dr Leavis and the Cambridge School” did indeed not, as Mackie points out, find approval with everyone on the local academic scene. Of the seven papers delivered by speakers representing the English departments at institutions of higher education, only two could be seen as being in unconditional support of practical criticism. The other five speakers, despite welcoming a departure from old approaches, express their unease about implementing practical criticism in the South African context. Of general concern was how to handle

students from different language backgrounds, but more serious questions were also raised regarding conceptual and practical issues. A typical response is the following from a paper entitled “An Essay in Practical Criticism” delivered by R.E. Davies from Potchefstroom University College:

I may say that I welcome the elimination from our English courses of the old dogmatic ‘study of periods’; but I do feel that we should not replace it by an approach to literature which, in the first fury of its reaction against the unimaginative precision of an outmoded method, tends to be deliberately vague in conception, unsystematic in practice, and so subjective as to depend entirely for its success on the personality of the man or woman responsible for teaching it, and thence to vary to an unhealthy extent from one university institution to another.

(Davies 1948:24)

Despite reservations such as these, the Cambridge approach, or “practical criticism”, won acceptance in our university English departments and remained in practice unchallenged until the early 1980s.

## **DURRANT AND THE TASK OF ENGLISH STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY**

In order to make a critical evaluation of Durrant’s writing, and especially for the purpose of determining to what extent he made an independent contribution relevant to the South African situation it is necessary to provide an exposition of the key elements of his views on the essential task of English Studies.

### **Disinterested pursuit of knowledge**

Durrant’s definition of the mission of the English school should be seen against the background of his conception of the essential task of the university as institution. This conception is most clearly spelt out in a speech entitled “The University in a Technical Society” delivered at an Education Conference called by the National Council of Women in Pietermaritzburg in 1958.<sup>10</sup> The basic premise of the speech is indebted to Henry Newman’s distinction between education as an end desirable for its own sake and the cultivation of skills to a particular “useful” end. University education for Durrant, as for Newman, lies in instilling

in students an appreciation for a “disinterested” pursuit of truth which transcends the mastery of skills for particular jobs and of serving particular needs:

... in a university, whatever the individual purposes of the students may be in seeking instruction there, the institution itself has as its chief aim, and as its essential principle of being, a purpose that transcends all the individual reasons that students and staff may have for being there. That principle is commonly acknowledged to be the pursuit of truth (...) In the past universities have succeeded in imbuing most of their students and teachers with a strong sense of the institutional aim, so that even those who came merely to get a particular training have felt the pressure of the institution’s essential principle, and have learned a respect for scholarship and disinterested thought (...) The value of the ‘university product’ ought, in short to lie in his distinctive power of subordinating immediate interests to the broader view, and of seeing himself and others in terms of general truth. He ought not to be swayed by momentary opinions, by the immediate love of gain, or by the passions of the hour. The man who values knowledge will proportionally tend to despise the search for power, including the power that money confers.

(Durrant 1959:12-13)

Durrant’s focus on “truth” and on the ability to “subordinate immediate interests to the broader view” seems to resonate with I.A. Richards’ use of the term “disinterested” in *Principles of Literary Criticism* quoted earlier. Richards employs the concept in relation to the aesthetic experience which brings about a state of “equilibrium” in the mind with the effect that “[w]e cease to be orientated in one definite direction” but that we see things “‘all round’ ... as they really are ... apart from any one particular interest which they have for us” (1963(1924):151-252). The ideal “university product” in Durrant’s view will be someone who has gained his own equilibrium in the sense that he will not be “swayed” by fleeting and petty interests, and is not susceptible to the corruptive influences of power.

The university cannot fulfil its proper task in isolating itself from the world outside, but by ensuring “a continual interchange of ideas, a continual interplay of influence between [the] university and the community around it” (Durrant 1945a:8). For Durrant this essential influence of the university lies in retaining its unique function as guardian of a type of knowledge that is “useless” in its disinterestedness, and for that reason more valuable than knowledge which serves a particular interest. This kind of knowledge forms part of a system

of values indispensable and vital to a community of human beings, and it is in this realm, rather than in that of practical and material matters, that the true function of the university resides. The modern university fails in its duty to society when this essential principle of being is corrupted:

... I must briefly sum up the present situation in the universities as I see it. It is one in which the central purpose of the university as an institution – the disinterested pursuit of truth – is increasingly mixed with and adulterated by other preoccupations. These other preoccupations – the desire to ‘serve the community’, to be helpful to the State, to practise leadership, to improve men’s health, or to breed better cattle, or even to help business men to make money – are not in themselves undesirable in a university. Indeed they show a healthy desire to make the University a part of the community. But the university ought to do more than merely reflect the preoccupations of society. It should offer a contribution of its own. And my claim is that the peculiar contribution which the university (and the university alone) can make is increasingly lost sight of in the desire to be generally helpful. Many institutions exist to help man in his pursuit of health, money and power. The university, and the university alone, exists with the chief purpose of cultivating intellectual clarity and detachment.

(Durrant 1959a:17)

Durrant ascribes the shortcomings of the modern university, and especially South African universities of the 1940s and the 1950s, to various factors within the university and in society as a whole. He points to increased specialisation in modern society which forces the university to train students in a large number of technical skills. In appointing teaching staff the university is faced with the fact that experts in the various specialist fields are few in number and hard to attract. The result is that very few appointments can be made who possess the required technical knowledge as well as the ability to develop in students the disinterested love of truth that the university exists to foster. Furthermore technical faculties of universities are often financed by industry and government, both primarily interested in immediate results and obvious usefulness.

The insistence of a technological society that knowledge must be practically useful or experimentally verifiable is in Durrant’s view supported by attitudes inside the university community of his day. He singles out American pragmatism and English logical positivism as the dominant philosophic doctrines in Anglo-Saxon universities and as a strong influence

in local universities.<sup>11</sup> Durrant believes that the influence of these doctrines lies at the heart of the disregard for the Arts as modes of perception and thought:

Two very influential philosophic doctrines today dominate Anglo-Saxon universities, and strongly influence us here ... American pragmatism and English logical positivism have a strong appeal to the practical American and the empirical Englishman. In the mind of many university men they encourage the notion that knowledge must be practically 'useful', or that the only knowledge that can be called knowledge is that which can be experimentally verified. To such minds, the arts of literature and painting, for example, appear as purely aesthetic activities, and the notion that they can offer anything more than immediate delight strikes the modern social scientist as an outdated challenge to his own field of inquiry. The traditional wisdom recorded in the arts, and re-discoverable by all who will give their minds patiently to the task, is therefore neglected ...

(Durrant 1959a:16-17)

Durrant is of the opinion that it is this attitude which lies at the heart of the view that it is no longer necessary for professional people to be 'educated' in the traditional sense. In the specialised sciences and technologies which dominate the university, future professionals are trained only to know their jobs, leaving them ignorant of history, religion, philosophy, literature, and even their own language.

If it is crucial for the university to resist the pressures of a technological society in order to preserve a higher form of knowledge (or truth) than that which serves merely a practical or particular purpose, then it follows logically that any other force or influence representing an equal threat should also be resisted. In his definition of the "university product", quoted earlier, Durrant sets up a dichotomy between the love of truth and the love of power. Later in his speech Durrant laments a tendency in South African universities to exalt the group at the expense of the scholarly individual. He condemns an overdeveloped gregarious habit which produces conformity to majority attitudes at the expense of the autonomy of the individual mind and intellectual liberty:

South African universities ... have a thoroughly bad tradition in this matter. From their first appearance in the university, newcomers are systematically subjected to organised moral suasion by the student body as a whole. The aim of this is partly, no doubt, to give the senior students a feeling of superiority, of which they may

have a desperate need. But the effect is to teach all but the most independent minds that they must conform with the majority attitude ... The result ... is to make the South African student a thoroughly conformist person. With all his many virtues, he suffers from a tendency to accept what he is told, and to think what others think. Worse still, he often believes it to be his duty to prevent the minority from saying what they think.

(Durrant 1959a:15)

The opposition between “truth” and “power” set up at the beginning of the speech is thus linked to a tension between the individual mind and majority attitudes. This line of argument is consolidated in the concluding paragraph of the speech when, in an overt criticism of the Apartheid government, Durrant points out that the greatest danger for South African universities in the late 1950s lies in being subjected to the political demands of the State:

And I cannot conclude without a warning that the greatest danger at present is from the omnivorous State, which claims the right to order all things to its own purposes. The cry is now for ‘co-ordination’ – which to me brings back memories of German ‘Gleichschaltung’. The universities – and the schools for that matter – can never perform their true function if they are subject to the political demands of the modern state, for the State represents Power, and the University represents Truth.

(Durrant 1959a:22-23)

Durrant’s concern with politics here is not limited to his comments on the essential task of the university as institution and on the situation in South African universities of the 1950s, but is a dimension present in all his writing. In his sustained public criticism of the Nationalist government, or what might be seen as an earlier version of the now well-known dictum of “speaking truth to power” which emanated from the work of Edward Said, Durrant remains exceptional in the South African academy. This political dimension of his work is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

### **Critical studies**

The idea of “disinterestedness” as the essential quality of a university education is contained in the answer Durrant provided to the question “Why is English studied in a university?” asked in his inaugural lecture *English Studies and the Community* (1945). For Durrant the

study of English, like that of any great literature, does not render useful products to society in the same way as practical and profitable fields of study such as science. Since he regards the study of good literature as sufficiently justified by its benefits to the individual mind engaged with it, he argues that this discipline is essentially not in need of social justification:

I personally hold that the study of English, and indeed of any great literature, is justified by its immediate fruits in the minds of those who study, and is not in absolute need of a social justification. There is a grain of truth in Oscar Wilde's dictum that '*All art is perfectly useless*'; at any rate, we should not expect literature to be useful in the way that we expect applied science, or a new cork-screw, to be useful. The use of poetry and of great books is for Delight; to extend the frontiers of human joy, not merely to increase the sum of pleasure and entertainment. The knowledge of good art, then, is an aim that is worth following for itself ...

(Durrant 1945a:2)

Durrant is, however, also fully aware of the fact that as a university professor he is serving a community to which he is accountable and therefore he adds:

But though we who study may not as individuals feel the need for any social justification of our activity, we cannot very well carry on without making some account of what we are doing to the fellow-citizens who work and pay taxes to keep us, both teachers and students, at our pleasant activity. Even if reasons of policy were not pressing, most of us would feel uneasy to be dallying on the slopes of Parnassus whilst our fellow-citizens earn the money to keep us there. We do in practice urgently need to know, and to tell the public, what benefits, other than that of a richer life for ourselves, can be claimed from literary studies in a university.

(Durrant 1945a:3)

Durrant goes on to provide an outline of the cultural situation of his time as background against which to formulate the task of English Studies. During the course of the inaugural lecture he has put it to his audience that their traditional (Western European) culture is diseased and declining due to "mechanisation of life, the drift to towns, and the development in central planning in almost every phase of our lives" (1945:3). Durrant's main concern with the cultural situation in a mechanised mass society is his perception of the mental and emotional regression of the ordinary individual. He laments the fact that millions spend their working hours on routine jobs where their creative instincts are inhibited and where they have little opportunity for the development of the total personality. The majority lack the type of



education to provide them with resources of their own, and therefore, outside their work environment, they rely upon industries of mass culture such as the cinema, the weekly magazine, the popular press and organized sport to provide them with a substitute life and a “refuge from the blankness of their own minds” (1945a:4). This emotionally and intellectually defenceless population easily falls prey to what Durrant calls the “professional persuaders” of political propaganda and commercial advertising. His real concern lies not with the ability of the professional persuaders to convince people to purchase inferior products or to follow incompetent political leaders, but with the hardening sensibilities and emotional attitudes which the modern citizen adopts as a survival strategy:

... modern propaganda works not so much by manipulating facts as by exploiting emotions. To exploit effectively the feelings of the largest number of people, it must make its appeal as crude as possible; the result is of course that advertisement and political propaganda, even as their techniques become subtler, foster an increasingly crude organisation of emotional life. Love is degraded to Sex, patriotism to hatred of other races, our natural sense of life to admiration for brute power and violence ... Above all, advertisement and propaganda live on the unconscious fears and neuroses of our machine-society. These fears ... are so consciously played upon that if the ordinary man did not develop a tough outer skin of indifference and scepticism, he would soon collapse of nervous exhaustion. But this hardening of the sensibilities means a hardening not only towards advertisement and towards political propaganda, but also to the respectable sources of a fuller emotional life, to poetry, music, and serious political thought.<sup>12</sup>

(Durrant 1945a:5-6)

It is interesting to note the psychological basis of Durrant’s analysis here, reminiscent of the behaviouristic analyses of human nature in the work of I.A. Richards. This explains, for instance, Durrant’s view of the adoption of “indifference” and “scepticism” as protection against the effects of propaganda. Within Richards’ Theory of Value in which the satisfaction of basic needs will take preference this “hardening of sensibilities”, although not conducive to a “fuller” emotional life, becomes necessary for survival.

It is in the context of this process of degeneration in the “organisation of emotional life” that English Studies can come to the aid of society. It would be easy, Durrant argues, to define

his discipline in terms of the practical usefulness of the subject to the community, but his aims are set much higher:

It would be easy to make out a case for the study of English as an *Aid to Business* efficiency. *The Art of the Ad.* could then be studied instead of the poetry of Wordsworth, and *How to Make Friends and Influence People* would take the place of *Paradise Lost* as a set book. But I don't intend to take that line of argument. I do not see the Community only as *Commerce*, nor the social usefulness of English studies as lying in increasing somebody's profits. The social aims of English studies should be set somewhat higher, and my claim is that they will make possible, if rightly followed, a more intelligent political activity, a clearer set of ultimate values and a generally higher standard of human life.

(Durrant 1945:3)

Durrant maintains that this fundamental influence on society can be achieved by insisting on the very highest standards in critical studies. English Studies should equip students with knowledge and understanding of literary texts, and with the ability to guide others to the same competence. These abilities must grow out of a personal experience of great works of literature which the student will learn to distinguish from the "second-best". Discrimination of this kind can only be cultivated through detailed examination of verse and of prose extracts, and not through discussions "round about" literary questions.

With regard to the methods to be used for fostering the type of literary discrimination he sees as the core function of the English school, Durrant says in his inaugural address: "I have purposefully refrained from dwelling on the methods by which we may work towards these ends; it would be presumptuous in me to attempt any such discussion at this stage of my work" (1945a:18). He hints at a "new technique", at "methods" which have been tried out with success in university English schools in England, Australia and South Africa, and at "tests for literary discrimination". However, the closest he comes to defining this new technique is in saying that it entails a "detailed examination of verse and of prose extracts", that it requires "less discussion round about literary questions", and that any student who leaves the university with a degree in English should be able to "distinguish, for example, between the quality of a passage of Swift and the quality of a passage from H.G. Wells"

(1945a:7). In spite of the scientific aura created here and elsewhere in the address by the use of terms like “method”, “technique”, and “tests”, Durrant declares himself to be against what he calls “apparatus” in teaching poetry. He expresses the hope that his teaching approach will “get rid of the kind of student who goes out into the schools to inflict on poor innocent children the apparatus of *figures of speech*, *onomatopoeia*, *iambic pentameters*, and so forth, under the illusion that he is teaching them something about poetry” (1945a:7).

From Durrant’s definition of the central task of the English school in the inaugural address it seems as if he has in mind the study of literary texts exclusively. He does acknowledge the fact that the student of English will have to deal with popular art produced for mass entertainment and with propaganda. However, this influence from the outside world is seen as harmful, and “[i]f university education is to have any chance at all against the professional persuaders and against mass entertainment” it is “the tools of analysis we apply to the understanding and evaluation of good art” which must be employed in the offensive against these enemies “so dangerously seductive to young minds” (1946a:9).

The literary text also seems to be Durrant’s only concern in a 1947 article published in *Theoria* in which he asserts that the study of literature teaches a distinct kind of knowledge which gives it the right to assume the status of an independent discipline. He describes this distinct kind of knowledge as “a complex but unified experience expressed in words” and the task of literary study is then “to discover those successful patterns of symbols that we call “good poems”, to live the experience of them as fully as we can, and to help others to the same experience” (1947c:4).

This definition of critical studies as knowledge and understanding of the literary text exclusively is qualified by the paper entitled “The Place of Practical Criticism in the University Curriculum” which Durrant delivered at the symposium on practical criticism held

at the University of Cape Town in 1948. Durrant starts his paper by defining practical criticism as:

... the art of judging rightly the efficacy and value of any communication. It is an art which we all practice, with varying success, every time we read and pass judgment, every time we write and make a correction. It is an activity we pursue at the cinema, whilst reading the newspaper, or listening to the wireless. Where the activity is absent, communication becomes a process of automatic response to suggestions and stimuli, becomes in fact a sub-human process.

(Durrant 1948:4)

He tells his audience that if skill in this activity can be taught, it would be of the greatest importance to any society, especially to any society based on free criticism and public discussion, since all forms of everyday human communication involve judgement. The rules of logic, accepted as an important part of university education, can deal with formal statements such as those used in mathematics or the natural sciences, but fail to provide a key to the intricacies of communications such as casual talk, public speeches, poems, or stories, that cannot be related to any logical system. Practical criticism then deals with such communication.

The question arises whether a study which admits of no formal criteria can find a place in a university curriculum. Furthermore there is the obvious danger of imposing personal judgment in the absence of formal criteria. Durrant addresses these possible objections to practical criticism as a method of study by asserting that in the study of all arts we have to accept subjective measurement. He, however, regards this subjective element to be balanced by the human ability to make sound, reasoned judgements based on experience:

... a man who can play billiards well on Monday will probably be able to play well on Tuesday. We know too, that a good billiards player will not be outstandingly bad at snooker.

We may take it then, that those who are skilled readers of one book will probably be skilled readers of another. And we can test skill in reading by tests, which though not infallible, will at least show a clear difference between the skilled and the unskilled. Can Smith, who is majoring in English, tell after careful reading whether the passage before him was written by Donne or Herbert? If so, he is a good reader. Can he distinguish between Pope and Keats? If not, he has not learned to read.

(Durrant 1948:5)

For Durrant the methods of practical criticism are thus not unlike what is traditionally practised in all arts studies, and they can also be likened to the everyday practice of judging people which takes place in selection committees.

For Durrant, the role of practical criticism in the university curriculum is not restricted to a select few students to be turned into skilled readers capable of detecting good or bad writing, but to provide the average student with critical tools that he may use in the ordinary business of living. This is regarded as essential since, for the individual who has to respond critically to the complexities of everyday communication, there is no immediate system of thought and knowledge to turn to, no universal or fixed standards of judgement.

In addition to being a means of judging the efficacy and value of everyday communications, Durrant sees practical criticism as a method suitable for developing a fuller perception of the nature of poetry. Exercises in the discipline of reading should be chosen in such a way that they enlarge and clarify the student's conception of poetry as well. Durrant's appeal is for the study of communications of various kinds, drawn from as broad a field as possible, and graded in difficulty as the study proceeds to facilitate a gradual unfolding of critical powers. In this process poetics will gain from being studied in close connection with other forms of communication. Durrant foresees that such a union may give to literary studies a similar importance among the Arts to that of the study of Physics among natural sciences:

For other "arts" subjects, like Psychology, Politics, and Economics, though they provide students with the handling of theory, suffer from obvious defects in their application to practical affairs. The psychologist, for example, may notoriously go astray in applying, to the infinitely complex problems of a human being in society, the general "laws" that he has mastered in the text books. But a poem though very complex, is to some degree autonomous, and it is comparatively stable. We can read and reread it, improving our skill and understanding at each stage. Wrong judgments can be corrected before the situation has completely changed ... Indeed, we may claim that the study of literature through practical criticism provides a very valuable safeguard against the crude application of general theory to complicated situations.

(Durrant 1948:7)

A disregard for the intricacies of the individual case due to an exaggerated confidence of experts and specialists is for Durrant the typical “hubris” of the modern world. This amounts for him to a disregard for “life”. Practical criticism offers a corrective since “one of the chief jobs of practical criticism is to restore that respect, that piety that commands us to attend before we judge, to chew before we swallow, to look before we leap, and, above all, to respect the autonomy of the other lives around us” (1948:7).

What Durrant was putting forward at the symposium in 1948 was thus a definition of practical criticism as a strenuous, verifiable academic activity, integral to the main task of the English school, essential as a core activity in the university curriculum in general, and indispensable for restoring the ability to exercise balanced judgement in society. The English school and the English teacher acquire a vital role in the university and in the community:

The more the modern university commits itself to the training of specialists in various techniques, the more it produces “experts” whose job is to apply to the complexities of real situations knowledge drawn from a narrow field of study, the more we shall have need of English studies; to awaken students to the dangers of a simple or one-sided approach to reality; to subtilise and refine their minds; to make them more generous and open in their feelings ... It falls to the English teacher, not only to cultivate literary taste, but to rescue the university student from illiteracy and barbarism, both of the heart and the mind.

(Durrant 1948:8)

This vitally important role for the English school as defined in the 1948 paper had already been asserted in Durrant’s inaugural address in the claim that English Studies is capable of making possible “a more intelligent political activity, a clearer sense of ultimate values and a generally higher standard of human life” (1945a:3). It is also echoed elsewhere, such as in the article on the teaching of literature published in 1947 in *Theoria*. Durrant insists that the study of literature has the right to exist as a separate branch of study and not as a subsidiary of other disciplines. However, since knowledge of other disciplines is often necessary for providing the context for an understanding of the total meaning of a literary text, or for the study of a period, Durrant proposes “the teaching of History, Sociology, or Politics through the study of

literature” (1947c:4). It is not clear from the article how this arrangement should be implemented in the university system, but what is clear is that Durrant intends the study of literature to serve as a centre for other disciplines. This conviction is, of course, not unique to Durrant but can be seen as a principle tenet of the Cambridge School, as was pointed out earlier.

### **Popular forms of art**

Durrant believed that popular art produced for mass entertainment was harmful:

... there is no getting away from the fact that both university teachers and university students are subjected to very powerful influences from the social life of the community. We all read the daily papers, and we all go to the bioscope; we all breathe the air of a cultural milieu which is very different from that of our studies, and it is bound to have its effect on us. We must therefore, as I see it, come to grips with these outside influences. To do that will enable us to understand them, to defend ourselves against them when they are bad, and to take our full share in the task of modifying them.

If university education is to have any chance at all against the professional persuaders and against mass entertainment, it must arm itself with all the technical weapons it can seize, and it must also be prepared to take the offensive, to carry the war into the enemy's country. The tools of analysis which we apply to the understanding and evaluation of good art must be turned simultaneously on popular art which, because of its ease and technical perfection, is so dangerously seductive to young minds.

(Durrant 1945a:8-9)

Despite the combative metaphor used here, it is the need to understand and modify modern forms of art which concerns Durrant in his writing in general. His position is that English Studies should include criticism of popular art forms such as films, magazine stories, advertisements, and best-sellers using the yardstick of the best in literature, while also recognising appropriate modern standards of thought and feeling. With regard to film in particular, Durrant holds the following progressive view:

The film, for example, is the real living popular drama of our time, and to study drama only in terms of stage plays (which are scarcely a living form in South Africa) is almost useless. Film criticism should be an essential part of our dramatic studies. Not only should the current films be visited from time to time by English classes, and discussed in detail, but an English department ought to have at its disposal a library of good films which can be used as touchstones to test the quality of the fare provided in

bioscopes. Studies of this kind might in time, one may hope, lead to the development of a really vigorous indigenous cinema which could tell us something about ourselves, and free us from our present bondage to the dream-fantasies of Hollywood. In the meantime, a more conscious and critical attitude to film-going can preserve us from most of the ill-effects of this particular drug.

(Durrant 1945a:9)

In order to gain insights into issues such as reading habits, popular literary forms, and propagandist aesthetics Durrant suggests that English departments should also include magazine stories and advertisements into their syllabi. He foresees that when a sufficient number of students have been trained in literary analysis it will become possible to undertake collective research in these fields. It is interesting to note here Durrant's careful balancing of "standards of thought" from the past and that of the present:

... without a continual reference to the best work of the past, to the classics of our literature, such a study would of course soon become mere collection of dead facts, and would be useless.

It would of course be a great pity if the standards of thought and feeling which have derived mainly from the past were to be applied mechanically to the modern scene, and if we developed an academic snobbery which disdained the wireless, the bioscope, and the magazine. Although there is a great deal in these popular forms that is pernicious, there is also a good deal of vitality in them. Our aim should be to try to train students who will be conscious of the highest standards as a result of their literary training, but who will be adventurous enough to enter the field of popular art and raise the level. This is indeed just as important a task for the university as the fostering of discrimination in schools, since the most carefully trained judgment will break down in the long run if it is permanently exposed to bad influences. If an English department is to do its job properly, it must provide potential broadcasters, actors, writers, and critics, as well as teachers for universities and schools. In all these fields it should make its voice heard, and be prepared to use its influence everywhere to raise the standards of letters and criticism in South Africa.

(Durrant 1945a:10)

It is also important to note here the concern for the community and for the university's task of raising levels of judgment for the good of society in general.

### **Language studies**

In the introductory chapter of this study the judgement was made that although Durrant's writing received attention in earlier academic studies, his views are often presented in too simplistic a manner. A case in point is the treatment of Durrant's position on the value of



language studies by Penrith (1972) in her MA thesis *A Historical and Critical Account of the Teaching of English Language and Literature in English Medium Universities in South Africa*. Penrith traces the development of the academic study of English language and literature from its origins during the first part of the nineteenth century up to 1971. In Penrith's view early English Studies in South Africa are notable for their liberalism, vigour, flexibility, and pioneering spirit of inquiry, as well as an open-minded inclusiveness in attitudes and teaching practices. In the conclusion to her study Penrith expresses the opinion that by the time of her investigation English Studies had lost its early strength and depth. She ascribes this to an inability or unwillingness to accommodate various teaching approaches and teaching focuses. Her discussion of Durrant's views on language studies is couched in these terms. Durrant is judged to have had a low estimation of language studies because of his preoccupation with the entrenchment of practical criticism to the exclusion of other teaching approaches and teaching focuses. Except for this general assumption guiding her judgement, her only substantiation is a quotation from Durrant's article "Notes on the teaching of Literature" (1947). Penrith asserts that Durrant "states his opposition to language work unequivocally" (p. 113) when he writes: "The barrenness of a study that is rooted in the sandy soil of Germanic Philology needs little demonstration. The discipline that such a study offers is usually the discipline of mechanical learning by rote; and it has no longer much power to stimulate original thought."<sup>13</sup> Durrant's general focus in this article is the claim for the study of literature as an independent discipline, and he advocates a move away from older approaches in which the literary text was not the priority. His reference to philology here should be seen in this light, rather than as a denunciation of language studies in general. For his views on this issue a more detailed and careful consideration of his writing is necessary.

The position Durrant takes in his inaugural address is that one of the main tasks of the university English School must be the improvement of language as a vehicle for

communication. He points out that traditionally schools of English literature were influenced very strongly by the methods of philology, where the linguistic component of the English course consisted of the study of old English. Durrant now recommends that advances which have been made in semantics should be employed, not only in the immediate field of English Studies, but in the whole organized life of society. Durrant thus links the academic concern with language studies to the needs of the wider community, and specifically to the need for a healthier political life. He quotes from I.A. Richards' *The Meaning of Meaning* (1929) in support of his view that an understanding of language is not a purely theoretical matter but affects all forms of social and intellectual life. In a society where propagandists are allowed to "whip up partisan feelings about words" and in which "[p]ublic speakers and journalists can be pretty sure that no matter how inefficiently or how cunningly they misuse the language, they will not be taken to task for it" (Durrant 1945a:13), there can be no hope of a healthy political life.

In the section of the inaugural address dealing with the importance of language in clarifying political discussion, Durrant refers to the usefulness of Basic English<sup>14</sup> to clarify the rhetorical obscurities of language used by politicians and in newspaper reports on political issues. He does not express himself to be either in support of or in opposition to the uses of Basic English, but is merely interested here in the ability of this variety of English to clarify meaning.<sup>15</sup> In a later section of the speech Durrant returns to the issue of language variety. He holds the view that we need to preserve the universality of English and should not "allow our language to diverge very far into South Africanese" (1945a:18). He comments on the problem of defining the term "Standard" and of determining who the speakers of this variety are, and expresses the opinion that standardisation should not be enforced artificially. However, the standardising forces at work in language development through the influence of the mass media are to be welcomed in cultivating a "common speech":

The film and the wireless have introduced entirely new factors into the normal development of languages; and it is quite conceivable that a new common English standard will gradually evolve which will be acceptable to the majority of English speaking people all over the world ...

I do not suggest that this standardising influence is all for the good, and that we do not borrow much that is inferior both from the American film and from the B.B.C. But by and large I think we should welcome the chance that we now have to cultivate a common speech for the English speaking world, by working gradually and moderately in our universities and schools towards an acceptable mean.

(Durrant 1945a:17)

This view, Durrant is careful to explain, does not derive from a snobbish dislike of the South African accent, but from the strategic need to keep in mind that “if we are not to be driven into a benighted provincialism we must keep the lines that connect us with England and America in good working order” (1945a:18).

In his inaugural address Durrant also expresses himself on the issue of studying Old English. He explains to his audience that when schools of English literature were first founded, they were strongly influenced by German philological methods which dictated that the obvious line of descent of a literature, a nation, or a culture, is linguistic in nature. Hence English literature traced its descent from Old English literature, through Middle English Literature to New English literature. This, for Durrant, is a naive and untenable view of the English literary tradition. He maintains that the main stream of English literature flows from Mediaeval Latinity and Catholicism, from Renaissance Italy and from France and therefore regards the study of French or Italian, which will give the student access to these literatures, as intrinsically more valuable than a study of Anglo-Saxon. He thus sees it as appropriate for English Studies to “jettison, for all but the exceptional students who have a special interest in the by-ways of knowledge, the apparatus of traditional grammar and a good deal of traditional philology” (1945a:12).

A survey of the syllabus for English at the Natal University College<sup>16</sup> during the period Durrant taught there makes it clear that he put his views on historical language studies to

practice soon after his appointment as professor in 1945. The syllabus for 1945 reads as follows:<sup>17</sup>

#### COURSE I.

1. Essay Writing. Biaggini: *The Reading and Writing of English* (Hutchinson).
  2. Introduction to the study of English Literature:
    - (a) Verse. *The Albatross Book of Living Verse*. L. Untermeyer (ed.), Collins.
    - (b) Prose.
      - Defoe: *Journal of the Plague Year* (Everyman).
      - Jane Austen: *Northanger Abbey* (World's Classics).
      - A modern novel, from a list to be prescribed.
      - A modern play, to be prescribed.
  3. Shakespeare: *As You Like It, Macbeth, The Tempest*.
  4. History of the Language. L. Pearsall Smith: *The English Language* (Home University Library).
- Recommended:* Hudson: *Outline History of English Literature* (Bell).

#### COURSE II.

1. Essay writing and Criticism. Denys Thompson: *Reading and Discrimination*.
2. English Literature, 1785 to 1832.
  - (a) English Verse, (ed.) Peacock, World's Classics, O.U.P. Vols. 3 and 4.
  - (b) Prose works to be prescribed.
3. Shakespeare: *Much Ado About Nothing, Richard the Second, King Lear, Cymbeline*.
4. Modern works, to be prescribed.
5. Old English and History of the Language.  
Wyatt, *The Threshold of Anglo-Saxon*. C.U.P.  
Bradley, *The Making of English*. (Macmillan).

#### COURSE III.

1. Essays and Criticism. English Critical Essays (2 vols.). World's Classics, O.U.P.
2. Shakespeare (as for Course II.).
3. Chaucer, *Selections*, (ed.) Cowling, Ginn & Co.  
Sisam, *Fourteenth Century Prose and Verse*.
4. English Literature since 1832.
  - Tennyson, Oxford Standard Texts. O.U.P.
  - Browning, Oxford Standard Texts. O.U.P.
  - Carlyle: *Heroes and Hero Worship* (Collins).
  - Dickens: *Bleak House*.
  - Ruskin: *Unto this Last*, World Classics, O.U.P.
  - Modern works to be prescribed.
5. Phonetics.

#### TEXT-BOOKS.

(In addition to works previously mentioned).  
Courses II and III: Dowden. *A Shakespeare Primer* (Macmillan); W.H. Hudson, *A Short History of English Literature in the Nineteenth Century*. (Bell).

Since Durrant took up the post as professor and head of department at the Natal University College only on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February in 1945,<sup>18</sup> and since university calendars usually go to the printers well in advance of the start of the new academic year, it can be assumed that he had no input in this syllabus, but in the syllabus which came into effect from 1946.

In the syllabuses for 1946 and 1947 it seems that two opposite principles were at work: that of extension and retraction. The 1946 syllabus takes up three pages in comparison to the former one and a half pages, due to the addition of prescribed texts in the different sections, the building out of sub-sections into independent sections, and the adding of new sections. In Course I a second text is prescribed under “Essay-writing” and a fifth section “A Modern Play” is created. In Course II section “2. (b)” becomes “English Essayists and Novelists from Defoe to Jane Austen” and lists five texts as “Special Works” while “Modern works” disappears and two new sections “4. Chaucer” and “5. English Drama to 1640” with specified prescribed texts appears. In Course III section 2 now prescribes “(a) English Verse from Wordsworth to the present day” and lists three volumes of poetry while under “(b)” nine prose works are listed for studying. In section “3. Shakespeare – (Tragedy)” four texts are prescribed, section 4 becomes “English Drama since 1660” with four prescribed works listed, section 5 becomes “Middle English Literature” with three prescribed works listed, and section 6 becomes “Old English” with four prescribed works listed.

In the 1947 syllabus, which takes up only three quarters of a page, different sections in the 1946 syllabus are collapsed into one, such as “Shakespeare” and “A modern play” which becomes “Drama” in Course I, and the grouping together of “Chaucer” with “Phonetics” and “Introduction to Old English” instead of the separate sections on “Chaucer” and “Old English” in Course II. Furthermore no prescribed texts were specified in the syllabus, but instead a note at the bottom states that a list of prescribed books will be supplied on request by the Head of Department. From 1947 onward the syllabus thus takes on the form of an

indication of the fields of study in the papers to be taken for the English courses rather than that of a study guide. The process of change in the fields of study was settled by 1950,<sup>19</sup> so that from 1951 until Durrant left, the syllabus remained in essence unchanged. The following syllabus for 1951 could then be seen as the general outcome of Durrant's influence on the English syllabus:

#### COURSE I

1. Introduction to the study of literature: English poems and novels.
2. Introduction to the study of drama: plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries; a modern play.
3. History of the English Language.
4. Exercises in writing, comprehension, and criticism.

#### COURSE II

1. Poems by Milton, Pope, Blake, Wordsworth, Keats.
2. The Eighteenth Century Novel, with a special study of novels by Swift, Richardson and Fielding; and a study of Jane Austen.
3. A study of plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.
4. An introduction to the study of Chaucer.
5. Exercises in literary criticism.

#### COURSE III

1. The poetry of Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot, Auden and Owen.
2. A study of Victorian and modern novels, with a special study of novels by Dickens, George Eliot, Samuel Butler, Hardy, Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and E.M. Forster.
3. A further study of plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries.
4. Chaucer: *The Canterbury Tales*, and  
*Troilus and Criseyde*. The Mediaeval Lyric.
5. Exercises in literary criticism.

In considering the curricular changes regarding historical language studies under Durrant's leadership, it is significant to note that the first major shift was effected already in the 1946 syllabus, thus as soon as Durrant had the opportunity to do so. It is further significant to note that Durrant never did away with historical language studies entirely, but that they were assigned a restricted position in the syllabus. In Course I, "History of the English Language" continued to occupy a separate section. In Courses II and III, however, the position of historical language studies was weakened in 1946 when it was specified that this type of study

was intended “For those students only who, with the approval of the Department, wish to specialise in language study”. At the same time the prescribed books were changed to include literary texts such as *An Anglo-Saxon Verse Book* at second and third year level and *Beowulf* as well as *The Cambridge Book of Prose and Verse* at third year level. In the 1947 and 1948 syllabuses the study of Old English was restricted further when it became available “only for those students who wish to proceed to post-graduate studies in English” which, at this stage, meant a Masters degree. In 1949, the first year in which the B.A. (Honours) degree appears in the English syllabus, historical language studies were removed altogether from the second and third year level and were offered henceforth in the Honours syllabus as “EITHER (a) Old English OR (b) Translation into English of unseen passages of literature, both prose and verse, from ONE of the following languages: Greek; Italian; German; Latin; French.”

After 1949 historical language studies thus became only an introductory course at first year level and an option in the Honours course, pitted against the study of a range of foreign languages. This arrangement could be seen as expected, given Durrant’s views on historical language studies as expressed in his inaugural lecture. What remains lacking, however, based on expectations raised in the inaugural lecture, is the implementation of the studies in “recent advances in semantics [which] have laid the foundations of a linguistic science that will be of real value” (1945a:12) which Durrant so confidently proposes as a replacement for Old English and philology.

A serious concern about Durrant’s views on language studies is his apparent lack of first-hand knowledge of, or a disregard for, the complexities of the language situation in South Africa and for the language needs of the South African student with a mother-tongue other than English. This results in highly questionable pronouncements, such as the proposal in his inaugural address of a “division of labour” between Afrikaans and English as vehicles of different types of expression. In this section of the address, Durrant emphasises the

importance of improvement in the use of language as a vehicle of communication. This, he says, requires close attention to the theory of language as it has been developed in the new study of Semantics, as well as a continual practice in analysis which gives recognition to the complexities and subtleties of language. He then continues:

In the division of labour which I have already hinted at between English and Afrikaans,<sup>20</sup> I foresee that a thoroughly bilingual population will turn to Afrikaans for the fullest and most idiomatic expression of South Africa's own life and environment. English, on the other hand, will have the function of linking South Africa with the world beyond her own borders, of opening windows, on a wider world.

(Durrant 1945a:16)

In reality, of course, a “thoroughly bilingual population” has never existed in South Africa, even if you take into account only Europeans – whom it seems Durrant has in mind here. Furthermore, it is contrary to the nature of language and of communication that neat divisions can be made between different types and their functions of expression.

Durrant's failure to make allowances for variations in basic competence in English among students from different language backgrounds is particularly evident when we consider the severity of this problem. We find, for instance, evidence of this teaching situation in the contributions to the Symposium on Practical Criticism of 1948. Examples are a paper delivered by C. Johnman of the University of Stellenbosch on “Practical Criticism with Afrikaans Students” and one by D. Stuart of the South African Native College of Fort Hare on “Non-European Students and Practical Criticism”.

Johnman relates his experience of conducting classes in practical criticism for Afrikaans-speaking students in the English Special classes (of only one year) and also in the English courses I, II and III. Johnman's judgement is that the competence in English of the typical Afrikaans-speaking student is on the level of a foreign language rather than that of a second language. He itemises the problems encountered by these students as follows: limited vocabulary inhibiting the comprehension and expression of English; an inability to recognise clichés or to appreciate the subtleties of literary and literary critical language; a lack of



response to the sound texture of verse and prose; and difficulties in judging stylistic differences in literature and in assuming an appropriate style in their own writing. In addition to these language deficiencies, most of Johnman's Afrikaans-speaking students come from a rural environment which means that they are more conventional and less sophisticated than their English counterparts, usually from an urban background. He points out that these differences in mentality and values should be taken into account if the student is to benefit from a practical criticism approach.

Stuart indicates in his paper that "non-European" students in the classes at Fort Hare included black students with an African language as mother-tongue, coloured students mostly with Afrikaans as their mother-tongue, as well as Indians, and that there were great inequalities in the home background of these groups. Poor appreciation of literary passages amongst these students could be caused by factors such as that "the author's vocabulary is wide, or his style colloquial, or his constructions ... unconventional" and "[it] is always difficult for a lecturer to know whether a student is in genuine trouble over the difficult language of an author, or whether he is the sort of student who would not understand the significance even when that difficulty has been removed" (Stuart 1948:32).

Johnman and Stuart lack Durrant's clear conception of practical criticism as a teaching method and his vision in giving definition to the social importance of this method. However, the knowledge of their student's abilities and shortcomings regarding basic language competence, as well as the sympathetic acknowledgement of this through adjustments in their teaching strategies, are elements lacking in Durrant's writing on the task of the English school.

It needs to be pointed out, however, that Durrant was not entirely unsympathetic to the need for language studies, judging from a letter written to Guy Butler in July 1959<sup>21</sup> in which he expresses the hope "that there will be some discussion at the next conference of English

teachers of the problem of Grammar”. Durrant declares himself in agreement with the view that English Studies can only focus on literature exclusively where English is the home language. He writes that he has been considering for some time what could be done to provide teachers with the grammar they need. He further tells Butler that he is busy working out a course for B.A. students on the history and structure of the English language with an introduction focusing on the philosophy of grammar and elementary semantics. It is not clear what became of these intentions, but they came rather belatedly given the fact that Durrant took long leave from the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1961, and never returned to his position in Pietermaritzburg after this date.

It also needs to be pointed out that the scant attention paid to language studies in the English syllabus under Durrant’s leadership should not be seen as a disregard for language as a tool of thought and for the need (in the words of I.A. Richards quoted by Durrant in his inaugural lecture) “to examine critically the most important of all the instruments of civilisation” (1945a:13). On the contrary, Durrant is concerned throughout his writing with effective, correct use of language and with the important role of language in a healthy social life. He also often expresses the conviction that through education the ability of a society to use language efficiently can be improved. In addition, evidence exists that, for his time, Durrant held surprisingly progressive ideas on language issues, as expressed for instance in an article published in 1947 in Afrikaans in the magazine *Fleur* under the title “S.A. sal Vyftalig word” (Five languages will be recognised in South Africa). Here he poses a future scenario of language diversity in South Africa in which not only Afrikaans and English, but four or five (unspecified) languages will be recognised. He urges his readers to accept this fact and to gain a thorough competence in these languages other than their own mother tongues in the interest of harmonious co-existence amongst South Africans.<sup>22</sup>

While it would be inaccurate on the one hand to say that Durrant had a low estimation of language or language studies, it is on the other hand clear that, as has been pointed out in this section, he scaled down traditional historical language studies and neglected the introduction into the English syllabus of courses dealing with linguistic matters.

This contradiction is cleared up when we consider what Durrant has to say about the study of language in the university English School in the *Natal Mercury* of 13 May 1949. Under the heading “What do You Know of English? Language as the Tool of Thought” Durrant defines English Studies as the study of communication, and then goes on to say that without proper skills in spoken and written language as the primary medium of communication “man would cease to be a social being, and would become a solitary animal, deprived of all that we now associate with humanity.” He insists that, contrary to the popular notion that language comes naturally, language study in schools and universities is necessary. At university the study of English should mean the improvement of skill in expression and in understanding, developed by practise in speech, in reading and in writing. Up to this point in his article it seems as if Durrant is making a case for language studies, usually understood as exercises in grammar as the basis for an improvement in general competence. However, the “improvement of skill” Durrant has in mind has a different basis, since he continues:

Most of all, it is attained by the close analytical study of those writers who have shown the greatest skill in the use of language (...) 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. To do this gives us a more comprehensive and delicate understanding of the life around us, and at the same time gives us a better control over the intricacies of language, so that we can think more clearly for ourselves.

The study of language and literature is a single study, like a coin with two faces. If we attempt to separate them we get dead dry-as-dust philology on the one hand, and vague “appreciation of literature” on the other. Combined, they provide a discipline as exacting and as invigorating as any philosophical or scientific study.

(Durrant 1949)

For Durrant English Studies thus involves both the study of language and of literature, but the basis remains the literary text. Durrant's views on the nature of the literary text and of literary criticism are discussed in the next chapter.

## Notes: Chapter 2

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<sup>1</sup> See Rosenthal (1959).

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these early developments in education in South Africa see Rosenthal (1959), Brookes (1966:1-3), Penrith (1972) and Doherty (1989).

<sup>3</sup> McKillop (1995:51) points out that the word “tripos” is archaically associated with an examiner’s three-legged stool and explains the nature of a Cambridge Tripos as follows: “A Cambridge Tripos is a collection of examinations under a broad subject heading, divided into two groups, Parts One and Two. For the degree of BA it is necessary to take two parts, but they do not have to be from the same Tripos ... Part One is usually taken after the first two years of study and Part Two after the third. The first part is usually a survey course and the second part more specialized. A student could take two Part Ones, that is, two introductory courses; two Part Twos would not, understandably, be admissible.”

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of the historical background and the basic tenets of the Cambridge School see Geffen (1948), Krook (1948), Tillyard (1958), Goldman (1958), Mulhern (1979), Williams (1983), Baldick (1983), Eagleton (1983), Russo (1989), Doherty (1989), Mackillop (1995), Mulhern (1998).

<sup>5</sup> Although English literature had been introduced in working and middle-class educational institutions in Britain and the British colonies after the middle of the nineteenth century, the Classics still continued to occupy the centre of the humanist education provided by Oxford and Cambridge. When these universities became subject to pressure towards modernisation after 1850 it was not English literature, but philology, the comparative study of the historical relationships between languages systematised at the German universities, which was introduced. In the introduction to his study, *The Formation of College English: Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the British Cultural provinces*, Miller (1997) points out that universities in Scotland, Ireland and America were more progressive in this regard, and that professorships in English were already founded in these countries by the middle of the eighteenth century to teach composition, rhetoric and literature.

<sup>6</sup> This belief was the main thesis put forward in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) and in essays such as “The Literary Influence of Academies” and “The study of Poetry” (collected in Arnold (1964)).

<sup>7</sup> Russo (1989:146-147) points out that the division between science and poetry has its roots in the classical rationality of the seventeenth century in the work of thinkers such as Descartes and Locke. In varying forms, it also constitutes an important theme in later intellectual movements such as the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The natural and social sciences, associated with “reason”, grew steadily in prestige throughout the nineteenth century, but this situation became challenged by the turn of the century under the influence of schools of thought such as relativism, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics and irrationalism so that the traditional dualism between science and art seemed to be breaking down. This, however, changed again in the first quarter of the twentieth century when science in all its forms (“rationality”) came to characterise modernity. Russo expresses the opinion that it was therefore not antiquated of Richards to think in terms of the split between the scientific and aesthetic worldviews, though some of his arguments had a nineteenth-century flavour modelled on the writings of Matthew Arnold.

<sup>8</sup> This correspondence is for instance marked by footnotes in which Richards refers the reader to discussions of key concepts in his earlier works. In some cases he provides a summary of theoretical positions worked out in detail elsewhere. These synopses are quite helpful to the reader since in them Richards captures the essence of his positions more succinctly than in his often opaque longer discussions.

<sup>9</sup> *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* and *How to Teach Reading* were, for instance, combined with *Education and the University* in the 1965 Chatto & Windus edition used for the discussion here.

<sup>10</sup> The speech was published in *Theoria* in 1959. For full bibliographical details see Durrant (1959a).

<sup>11</sup> American pragmatism was developed by philosophers such as C.S. Peirce, William James and J. Dewey early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was influential in American philosophical circles and in universities such as Harvard. According to Honderich (1995) the characteristic idea of pragmatism is “that efficacy in practical application – the issue of ‘which works out most effectively’ – somehow provides a standard for the determination of truth in the case of statements, rightness in the case of actions, and value in the case of appraisals.” Logical positivism, also called logic (or linguistic) empiricism, was developed by the Viennese Circle in the 1920s and in a broader sense includes the work of non-Viennese thinkers such as A.J. Ayer, Arne Naess and Ernst Nagel. Logical positivism is primarily concerned with the verification of the truth value of sentences but in a wider context refers to an emphasis of that which is logically and scientifically verifiable.

<sup>12</sup> The effects of propaganda on political life is dealt with at length in the two pamphlets “Making up our Minds: Propaganda and Public Opinion” (Durrant, 1944a) and “Propaganda Tricks: Good and Bad” (Durrant, 1944b). These pamphlets receive attention in chapter four.

<sup>13</sup> See Durrant (1947c:3).

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<sup>14</sup> Basic English is a reduced form of English devised in the 1920s by C.K. Ogden in cooperation with I.A. Richards. McArthur (1992:107) gives the following definition: “Basic was an exercise in language planning, intended to extract from Standard English the minimum grammar and vocabulary needed for everyday communication. Ogden saw it as serving three ends at the same time: an international medium in its own right, an introduction to ‘full’ English, and a kind of plain English.”

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting, however, that Durrant involves himself in correspondence on the uses of “Easy English” for mass education which followed an article published on this subject by Edward Roux in the journal *Trek* of 26 January 1945. Roux explains in his article that Easy English was developed as an alternative to Basic English. Easy English differs from ‘normal’ English only in the sense that it has a limited vocabulary of 1 000 words. In the *Trek* column for letters from readers named “The Editor’s Uneasy Chair” of 23 March, Durrant satirises in verse the efforts of a correspondent named R.K. Cope to shoot down Roux’s recommendations of implementing Easy English as a strategy of erasing illiteracy in South Africa

<sup>16</sup> The issues of the Natal University College *Calendar* containing the syllabuses for these years are housed in the University Archives of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus.

<sup>17</sup> This syllabus is given here exactly as it appears in the *Calendar* for 1945. Inconsistencies in the format (for instance in letter types and punctuation) and in bibliographical detail (for instance in providing the names of publishers for prescribed texts) are those of the compilers of this document.

<sup>18</sup> According to letters kept in the Archives of the Pietermaritzburg Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durrant applied for the post in July 1943 and was informed officially of his appointment in May 1944. The appointment date is specified as 1 February 1945, but when Durrant wrote to the registrar of the Natal University College on 3 November 1944 he was still in military service and did not foresee the immediate possibility of a release. He was granted a release from these duties only on 16 January 1945 after representations made to the Secretary of Defence by the Minister of Education, J.H. Hofmeyer, as requested by the registrar and the principal of the Natal University College.

<sup>19</sup> Exceptions to this: Milton was dropped from the list of poets under section 1 in Course II after 1952, but reappears in 1953 as a separate section “The poetry of Milton” in Course III; “The Mediaeval Lyric” disappeared from section 4 in Course III after 1954; in 1955 “Hopkins and T.S. Eliot (*The Waste Land*)” was added to section 1 in Course II, and in the same year the study of poetry in section 1, Course III became “Modern Poetry, with a special study of Yeats and T.S. Eliot”; in 1955 Hardy, Virginia Woolf, and E.M. Forster were dropped and Conrad, Joyce, and D.H. Lawrence were added to the novelists singled out for special study in Course III; in 1955 “a modern play” was added to “3. A further study of Shakespeare and his contemporaries” in Course III.

<sup>20</sup> This “hint” at a division of labour was that “the South African student who wishes to concentrate on Germanic studies can do so profitably through the medium of Afrikaans” which would then, conveniently, remove for English Studies the “vexed question of Old English” (Durrant 1945a:11).

<sup>21</sup> The letter is housed in the Butler collection in the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown (reference: 94.2.3.84).

<sup>22</sup> Despite the fact that Durrant deserves recognition for the progressiveness of his vision and for his confidence in our ability to learn a range of local languages, aspects of what he puts forward in this article are problematic. In the first place, he speaks from the point of view only of the mother tongue speakers of Afrikaans and English, as is evident for instance in his proposition that, as a first stage of the process of gaining competence in languages other than our mother tongues, we will have to start with two languages. He does not name these two languages, but he clearly has in mind English and Afrikaans since he makes the observation that these two languages are so similar in structure and in vocabulary that protestations of difficulty seem somewhat laughable. His propositions also seem to rest on an underestimation of the complexities involved in language acquisition. Durrant writes, for instance: “Ons sal moet begin met twee tale; in struktuur en woordeskat is hulle so eners dat die bohaai oor die aanleer daarvan en die voortdurende mislukking van ons skole om dit te onderrig, werklik bietjie belaglik is ... ‘n Bietjie goeie wil en intelligenter onderwys is ons grootste behoefte. Wanneer hierdie eenvoudige probleem opgelos is, kan ons die ernstiger en moeiliker probleem van die Bantoetale aanpak” (1947b:3). In translation this reads: “We will have to start with two languages; in structure and vocabulary they are so similar that the fuss made about their acquisition and the constant failure of our schools to teach them are really somewhat ridiculous ... A little goodwill and more intelligent teaching strategies are our greatest needs. When this simple problem has been solved, we can tackle the more serious and more difficult one of the Bantu languages.”

## CHAPTER THREE

### DURRANT AND THE NATURE OF LITERATURE AND LITERARY CRITICISM

*The distinct knowledge that we seek in literature may be described in general terms as a complex but unified experience expressed in words, and of a kind that is recognised as being specially valuable to man ...*

(Durrant 1947c:4)

#### INTRODUCTION

For Durrant the task of the university English school is in the first place to maintain the very highest standards in critical studies, as he states in his inaugural address, or as he reminded the delegates to the Conference of University Teachers of English held in Pietermaritzburg in 1949, in saying: “We claim to be critics, and if criticism is not the aim of teaching literature, what is?”<sup>1</sup> It is therefore necessary, in discussing Durrant’s writing on the task of the English school, to consider his definition of the concepts “literature” and “literary criticism” as underpinnings for literary studies.

Durrant expresses himself on the nature of literature and literary criticism in his inaugural address, in articles in literary journals and newspapers, in speeches and papers read at conferences and seminars, in reviews published in journals and broadcast over the radio, in poetry readings and interviews with writers on the radio, in correspondence columns of journals such as *Trek*, and in his two published books on the work of Wordsworth. For the researcher the location of these publications is problematic, particularly in the case of speeches and papers (of which a record only exists if it was published or if it survived in some archive), and of

publications in newspapers where the researcher would have to search through an immense amount of material (if it still exists) to make any claim to comprehensiveness. Even the tracing of reviews is difficult, as is evident from the scrutiny of a Curriculum Vitae, supplied on request by Durrant himself, in which he deals with reviews under a separate heading in the following way: “These are too numerous to list. I have written 200-250 book and play reviews, in the following: Claremarket Review, London; Tribune, Durban; Standepunte (sic), Cape Town; Africa South, Cape Town; Journal of Commonwealth Literature; Trek, Cape Town; Natal Witness, Pietermaritzburg; Winnipeg Free Press; Wascana Review; University of Toronto Quarterly, etc.”. The Curriculum Vitae also contains a heading “Broadcasting” which includes an entry “Many book reviews for S.A.B.C. not listed here.” Of this vast number of reviews only a small number have been identified and could be obtained for discussion in this study. Under “Broadcasting” Durrant further lists participation in discussion panels, talks on literary works and literary figures, and interviews with writers, broadcast by the S.A.B.C. from 1946 to 1959. Some of these were one-off performances, but in other cases involved a series of panel discussions and talks as reflected for instance in the entries: “Member of Round Table – radio discussion panel – for 1946-1949 (weekly)”; “‘The English Muse’ – Eight talks on English Poetry, nationally broadcast by S.A.B.C., 1951, published in Radio, 1951”; “‘The English Novel,’ Eight talks, nationally broadcast, 1952, published in Radio, 1952; and “‘South African Poetry,’ Eight talks, nationally broadcast, 1953”. Also after he left South Africa Durrant remained active in performances on Canadian radio and television up to 1977, according to his Curriculum Vitae. Only one item of this extensive body of broadcast material could be identified, namely a transcription of Durrant’s introduction of poems by Sydney Clouts broadcast by the S.A.B.C. on 24 February 1955. The transcription is published in a 1984 issue of *English in Africa* dedicated to the work of Clouts.<sup>2</sup> The published version of the broadcast is entitled “New Soundings: Broadcast of the S.A.B.C”,



and Durrant starts the broadcast by saying “The poems that we are broadcasting in New Soundings tonight are the work of a Cape Town poet ...” which gives the impression that this reading formed part of a series. However, Durrant does not list the Clouts broadcast, or a series called “New Soundings” in his curriculum vitae, which raises questions about the completeness of his list of broadcastings. Inquiries made to the archives of the SABC about archival material of broadcastings in which Durrant was involved, yielded nothing. The reply to an initial telephonic inquiry was that it was very unlikely that any material from the 1940s and 1950s still exists. To a later enquiry in which the archivist was provided with the details of the broadcastings listed by Durrant in his curriculum vitae as well as the Clouts broadcast, the following answer was received: “I did an extensive search now, and unfortunately couldn’t find any of the recordings you mentioned. In those days there wasn’t any official Archive, and tapes were re-used, so a lot of the material got lost in the process.”<sup>3</sup>

The discussion of Durrant’s views on the nature of literature and literary criticism in this section is based on those sources which could be located. For a more comprehensive treatment of this aspect of Durrant’s work, substantial archival research would be necessary. Furthermore, this discussion focuses on general principles of the concepts “literature” and “literary criticism” in Durrant’s writing, and does not attempt a critique of his work on particular literary texts or on particular literary figures. In addition, the comments made in this section deal only with publications dating from the South African period of Durrant’s career.

## **LITERATURE AND LITERARY CRITICISM**

The essence of Durrant’s definition of “literature” and “literary criticism” is already formulated in an early article entitled “Notes on the Teaching of Literature” published in *Theoria* in 1947.

Here he argues that the study of literature has the right to be recognised as an independent discipline since it pursues a distinct kind of knowledge:

The distinct knowledge that we seek in literature may be described in general terms as a complex but unified experience expressed in words, and of a kind that is recognised as being specially valuable to man (...) The task of our study, then, is to discover those successful patterns of symbols that we call “good poems”, to live the experience of them as fully as we can, and to help others to the same experience.

(Durrant 1947c:4-5)

From these statements the following basic tenets can be inferred:

- The literary text is the source of a distinct kind of knowledge pursued in the study of literature.
- The distinct kind of knowledge that we seek in literature concerns a unique experience expressed in words.
- The critical ability developed through literary studies involves a value judgment since the reader has to “discover” the “good” or “successful” literary text.

These issues are at the heart of Durrant’s writing on the nature of literature and literary criticism, and the rest of this discussion will explore the manner in which they are formulated.

### **The literary text as the source of a distinct kind of knowledge**

In his inaugural address Durrant states that maintaining the highest standards in the university English school means more than gathering facts about the life and times of a great author such as Wordsworth, or accepting someone else’s judgement that he is a great poet. The type of knowledge valued in literary studies “must grow out of a personal experience of the greatness of Wordsworth’s poetry” which can only come from “a continual immersion in what Wordsworth actually wrote, a continual grappling with his actual words” (1945a:7). In subsequent publications this view forms a basic point of departure for Durrant, although he points out that

judgement arising from a process of personal discovery is difficult to achieve, takes time, and is not highly esteemed in a society which rewards progress and visible practical results.

Durrant's position is not that the literary text should be studied in isolation, but that it should be recognised as the primary focus. In the 1947 article "Notes on the Teaching of Literature" he commends the efforts of university teachers of literature who "have already broadened and liberalised their English syllabuses in order to give more attention to the background of thought and social life" (1947c:3). He discusses the importance of finding a way to make connections between the study of literature and the study of subjects such as history, philosophy or psychology. These connections are "[t]o some extent ... unavoidable for all teachers of literature, since the context in which a work is written partly determines its total meaning" but at the same time poses a threat in the sense that it "may crowd out the direct practice of the art of reading" (1947c:6). While Durrant, thus, does not rule out the importance of bringing external knowledge to bear on the interpretation of the literary text, it is the literary understanding which grows out of the direct study of texts that is of primary importance:

For, after all, without the special gift of literary understanding, without the power to achieve, from a set of printed symbols, a unified and rich poetic experience, all our ancillary knowledge is so much dead wood. We can pile it as high as we like, and it will never light a fire. But experience has shown, I think, that this special skill can be developed by patient teaching, by reading and by discussion of actual poems, to a degree that has not in the past been thought possible. We should not allow the admitted necessity of relating literature to its historical background, and the admitted necessity of studying literature in its social implications, to obscure the even greater need for a direct approach to books.

(Durrant 1947c:7)

Central to Durrant's argument for the literary text as the focus of literary studies, is the view that the text is autonomous and constitutes an organic whole. This view is for instance expressed in his reaction to a comment made by Guy Butler at the Conference of University Teachers of English held in Pietermaritzburg in 1949. Butler comments on a paper delivered by Prof. P.

Haworth of Rhodes University College and expresses the view that a poem is rooted in a particular time and that criticism is not a constant, but that it suits its age and environment.

Durrant's reacts as follows:

I disagree with the assumption of Mr. Butler. 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 ... All knowledge is conditioned by its time; we need historical humility, but this does not dispose of criticism as a human activity ... the poem is so highly organised internally that though it has a link with the outside world, yet it has an internal wholeness of its own.

(Proceedings: Conference of University Teachers of English, Pietermaritzburg, 1949:19)

The view that literary studies should in essence be a critical reading of the literary text also underlies Durrant's studies of specific literary texts or the broader studies of particular authors. In for instance his critical work on Wordsworth or in his articles on Shakespeare's plays the text is always taken as the basis, and the analyses show the internal cohesion of the text. While this approach generally functions as a presupposition in Durrant's critiques, and is not spelt out, we have a formulation of the principle in two articles on Shakespearean texts. The first article is "Prospero's Wisdom" published in *Theoria* in 1955. In this article Durrant observes that *The Tempest* is one of the most puzzling plays in the Shakespearean canon and that some critics who find the play intractable and difficult "have been content to suggest that it is concerned with an ineffable vision" and others "have escaped from their critical responsibilities by agreeing with Lytton Strachey that the work is to be taken as a product of Shakespeare's incipient senility" (1955a:50). About the tendency of critics to deal with the play in this manner, Durrant comments:

So long as *The Tempest* can be taken as a direct utterance, through Prospero's mouth, of Shakespeare's own personality, there is an easy answer to any doubts. Prospero, noble or priggish, wise or sententious, is just Shakespeare, according to your view of him as an inspired bard of the ultimately ineffable, or a weary old gentleman looking forward to retirement and botching up one last pot-boiler. In either case, there is no room for criticism, for Prospero then transcends the play; and, being Shakespeare himself, becomes an object for biographical and psychological studies for which the material is somewhat

scanty. My own view is that Prospero is after all a character in the play, and that his part in it is therefore susceptible to examination by the ordinary methods of literary criticism.  
(Durrant 1955a:51)

Durrant goes on to explore the portrayal of Prospero in relation to other characters and to the central theme of the play. In the second article entitled “What’s in a Name?”, published in *Theoria* in 1956, the principle of the autonomous text as object of study is presented by means of a simulated class situation in which the lecturer asks the students to report on their prescribed reading on *Romeo and Juliet* since he has “frequently impressed on [them] the need to consult the best critical opinion before forming [their] own judgment” (1956:23). It is obvious from the reactions of the majority of the students that studying existing critiques does not do much for their own understanding of the play. In contrast, a student who read the play but not the critiques, is more capable of giving an opinion motivating her views from the text.

### **The literary text as the source of a unique experience**

The study of literature is distinct in nature from studies such as history, politics, psychology or philosophy, and this distinction lies in the pursuit of a unique experience:

The distinct knowledge that we seek in literature may be described in general terms as a complex but unified experience expressed in words, and of a kind that is recognised as being specially valuable to man. Though there is no reason to suppose that it is in any way mysterious, or that it contains any unknown ingredients, such an experience is difficult of achievement, both for the writer and for the reader. For every successful poem written there are also a great many failures; and (though we often forget this) for every successful reading of a poem there are also a great many failures. The validity of literary studies lies in the stability of the poetic experience once it has been successfully evoked, and in the apparent general similarity between the responses of different skilled readers. We can experience the stability of the poetic response for ourselves; the similarity of responses in others can only be guessed at from the pointers and approximations of criticism, and from the general similarity of make-up of most human beings ... The justification of the study is to be found in the immediate enjoyments that it makes available; and further in the claim (which I cannot establish here) that these enjoyments open the way to further enjoyments, by acting as a stimulus or a guide to future experience.

(Durrant 1947c:4-5)

Two important elements of this definition are developed further in Durrant's writing, namely the notion that the poetic experience is not something that is available to everyone, but has to be achieved, and the conviction that this experience is of special value to mankind.

In the first place the poetic experience has to be achieved, and the difficulty of the challenges involved cause a lack of appreciation for this experience. Such a deterrent lies in the first place in the unsystematic and unpractical nature of the art of reading a poem:

The art of reading a poem (or the arts of listening to music or looking at a picture)<sup>4</sup> are not highly esteemed today because they are not systematic. Unlike the natural sciences, they have to begin from the beginning with each new student, and the advance made by one student cannot be handed on to the other. It is for this reason that no "progress" is made in the arts, and we cannot claim to be any better off today than we were a hundred years ago. Indeed, it may well be that the art of reading efficiently has lost ground. In an age which values systematic advance so highly, the arts must necessarily be a waste of time. Moreover, these arts produce no visible results in the practical field, and this alone is enough to make them seem a waste of time to many people.

(Durrant 1947c:6)

In addition, the lack of estimation for the art of reading poems is heightened by the subjective element inherent in this experience. Durrant defines the task of literary studies as the discovery of successful patterns of symbols that we call "good poems" and he reminds us that for every successful reading of a poem there are also a great many failures. The notion that we can distinguish a "successful" poem or a "successful" reading of a poem from "failures" seems to presuppose a standard of judgment. The standards of judgment involved in literary criticism is one of the issues Durrant deals with in the paper "The Place of Practical Criticism in the University Curriculum" delivered at the symposium on practical criticism of 1948. He defines practical criticism as "the art of judging where there are no sufficient formal criteria" since it is not concerned with formal propositions which can be examined by logic, but with communications such as "casual talk, public speeches, poems, stories, and so on – that cannot be immediately related to any logical system" (1948:4). Durrant then poses the question whether the

teaching of practical criticism does not amount to imposing arbitrary personal judgment on students, and whether we may suppose that a study which admits of no formal criteria can find a place in a university curriculum. He provides the following answer:

I think we may, unless we wish to exclude the study of all the arts, of human personality, and of history, for all share in the general uncertainty. Nor is the uncertainty as complete as it seems at first sight, for the instrument with which we record such a communication as a poem, though it is not standardised by a Bureau of Measurements, may yet be tested empirically. Our recording instrument is the whole personality, including all our memories, our past history, our nervous system, breath, and pulse. The instrument changes continually, but we know from experience that it has some continuity ...

As with all arts, then, we are brought back to the necessity of accepting subjective measurement.

(Durrant 1948:4)

The subjective, unfixed nature of the judgment involved in practical criticism, is not only inevitable, but essential:

We are chiefly concerned with utterances that depend not on an immediate system of thought and knowledge, but on the whole past history of the individual, on his prejudices, hopes, and fears, as well as on his ideas and his language. The standards by which such utterances are judged can never be fixed, for each utterance must be referred to an ever-changing sum of experience. Our judgment of Gulliver's Travels or the Rape of the Lock would probably be an unsound one if it were held as final. It is not possible to be "right" about books and poems, though it is possible to judge well or badly.

(Durrant 1948:5-6)

The subjective, tentative nature of the judgment involved in practical criticism is what makes this art unique and valuable. It is when the individual has mastered the art of judging where there are no formal criteria to rely upon, and has accepted the validity of his own necessarily subjective, tentative, but discriminating response that his capacity for the poetic experience is advanced. While Durrant recognises the necessity of precise measurement in the natural sciences, he regards it as undesirable in the study of humanities, and laments the disregard for this distinction in humanistic studies in the universities of his day:

The chief activity – or at any rate the most highly valued activity – of the university today is no longer scholarship, but "research". Where scholars once were content to achieve a catholic and discriminating knowledge of literature and wisdom of the past they are now

expected to apply in the field of literary study the methods, or something like the methods, of the natural sciences. The accumulation, detail by detail, of exactly measurable fact, the framing of new hypotheses, the creation of a new language of special terms, have all been imported from the natural sciences into what used to be thought of as “humanistic” studies.

The cultivation of the spirit of mensuration is necessary in the sciences, and is a valuable help in dissipating the cloud of vague thinking that hangs around most of our experience. But we must beware of simply importing analytical methods of study into fields where no complete analysis is possible. In the study of literature there is everything to be gained by bringing to consciousness all the elements that compose the poem or novel, since that must enrich the total response. But the final response itself is a matter for the whole personality, and is not easily accounted for or measured.

(Durrant 1952b:68-69)

The second element of Durrant’s definition of the poetic experience which is developed further in his writing is the conviction that this experience is of special value to mankind. In the quotation given earlier from the 1947 article Durrant claims that the justification of literary studies “is to be found in the immediate enjoyments that it makes available” (1947c:5). This notion of the value of the poetic experience as providing pleasure or “delight” in the classical sense is restated in several other publications, such as in Durrant’s inaugural address in which he claims that “... the study of English, and indeed of any great literature is justified by its immediate fruits in the minds of those who study” and where the nature of these “fruits” is further specified in the statement that “[t]he use of poetry and of great books is for Delight; to extend the frontiers of human joy ...” (1945a:2). This idea is also to be found in the address “A Plea for Imaginative Literature” delivered to a library conference in Pietermaritzburg in September 1951<sup>5</sup> which Durrant opens with the following observation: “The climate of the age is in several ways unfavourable to the propagation of imaginative literature. In the first place, the immediate aim of poetry is to give pleasure, and this is no hedonistic age. Indeed, so obsessed are we with the technical means by which we hope to make life more comfortable and more prolonged that we are inclined to be puritanically suspicious of the arts which offer delight as an immediate result of their practice” (1952b:68).



Although Durrant defines the value of the poetic experience in terms of the immediate effects on the individual mind, he sees this effect as the basis of values and capacities which are of crucial importance to society. This belief is developed in a series of correspondences between Durrant and other readers of the journal *Trek*<sup>6</sup> published in 1945. *Trek* was published in Cape Town, and later in Johannesburg between 1941 and 1952, called itself “A Critical Fortnightly Review”, and featured articles of a wide-ranging nature. The journal seems to have had attracted (or at least aspired to attract) interest not only in South Africa but also in the rest of Africa and in Europe, since subscription rates are given for “the Union, South-West Africa and the Protectorates, Southern and Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Kenia, Uganda, Mocambique and the Belgian Congo, overseas”. Besides articles, the journal also included regular columns such as the two to which Durrant made contributions, namely “Books” in which reviews and readers’ reactions to the reviews were published, and the column dedicated to readers’ letters called “The Editor’s Uneasy Chair”. Durrant’s earliest contribution to *Trek* is to be found in the issue of March 23, 1945 when he joins in on the discussion of the article “Easy English and Mass Education” by Edward Roux, published on January 26 of that year. After this date Durrant makes regular contributions to the journal in the form of articles, book reviews, and letters. This activity, however, wanes towards the end of the 1940s, maybe because of Durrant’s increasing commitments elsewhere, but probably also because by this time *Trek* found itself in some difficulties which eventually lead to its demise in August 1952.<sup>7</sup>

The sequence of correspondences which is of particular interest regarding Durrant’s views on the value of the poetic experience to society was sparked off by a review in the “Books” column of *Trek* on 23 March 1945 by R. Bergman of the book *Noblesse Oblige: Another Letter to Another Son* by James Agate. Bergman starts his review by saying “The Sitwell-Agate controversy has turned into quite a storm in a teacup – with all the stir about whether the artist

has or has not the right to claim exemption from active service. Sitwell says he has, Agate says he hasn't; and both assume that the matter can be settled one way or the other by absolute decree." Bergman then suggests as a third alternative to dismiss the whole problem as meaningless in the context of the war where the artist, like everybody else, is forced legally and also as a matter of conscience, to do military service. He goes on to say: "The artist as such has no special problem; his problem is the problem of all humanity today: to make a recurrence of the unspeakable sufferings of the past five years for ever impossible. And only intelligence, resolution and organised resistance to these forces that have a vested interest in human suffering can solve this universal problem." Durrant's reaction to this was published on 6 April in the "Books" column under the heading "The Artist and Society". Bergman's rebuttal also appeared in this column on April 20, but then the subsequent letters on this issue were published in "The Editor's Uneasy Chair" on May 4, May 18, June 1, June 15, June 29, July 13, and July 27. The relevant responses from Durrant elucidating his views on the importance of the poetic experience to society are the following:

For surely the whole point about poetry is that it "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate;"<sup>8</sup> it breaks down all accepted categories and imposes new ways of thinking and feeling ...

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 remake our minds, give us clearer aims, and provide the basis for a healthy political life.

...all creative workers .. are invaluable in a mass-producing society ... But the most urgent need is to protect the poet, whose raw material is Thought itself, and whose craft is, therefore, of the greatest social importance

"For (sic) our concern was speech,  
and speech impelled us  
to purify the dialect of the tribe"

Until the tribe has its dialect purified of words like "progressive" and the other sloppy expressions which we all use daily, the tribe will go on blundering. A badly made and ugly chair harms 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.

The Editor's Uneasy Chair, *Trek* May 4, 1945, pp. 1-2

R. Bergman accuses me of agreeing with Shelley that poets are “the unacknowledged legislators of the world”. I do.

... let me quote what Dr. I.A. Richards, a most careful and scientific critic, has to say on this subject. “The basis of morality, as Shelley insisted, is laid not by preachers but by poets. Bad tastes and crude responses are not mere flaws in an otherwise admirable person. They are actually a root evil from which the other defects follow. No life can be excellent in which the elementary responses are disorganised and confused.”

... If I am right in thinking that poetry is responsible for the ways in which we think and feel, then it is determinative of our political action.

The Editor’s Uneasy Chair, *Trek* June 1, 1945, p. 1

Obviously poetry is not the only determinative of political action ... My contention is that in our present political situation, the most significant factor (i.e. the factor to which we can most usefully pay attention) is the problem of values, or preferences. Poetry, drama, propaganda, advertisement are all concerned with the modification of preferences

...

While science can increase our control over our environment, it cannot tell us how to use that power. My own belief (I don’t pretend to be able to prove it) is that the good poets have a clearer mental picture of the way men’s lives interconnect than have most of us, and because they express this vision concretely, they are able to make it prevail.

The Editor’s Uneasy Chair, *Trek* July 13, 1945 p. 2

For Durrant poetry can modify the elementary responses of the individual, it can “remake our minds” and is therefore the basis of essential social values and capacities such as innovative and regenerative thought, sound values, refined taste, and discriminative preferences. It is interesting to note the correspondence between Durrant’s views in this regard and the terms in which the literary experience and the character of the artist are seen by I.A. Richards, particularly in the final sections of *Practical Criticism* commented on earlier.

### **Literary criticism involves a value judgment**

The task of literary studies is “to discover those successful patterns of symbols that we call “good poems”, to live the experience of them as fully as we can, and to help others to the same experience” (Durrant 1947c:5). This conviction that the poetic experience involves a judgment of what is “good” or “successful” and what is not, informs Durrant’s notion of literary

discrimination, or the ability to distinguish “the very best” from the “second-best”, which should be fostered in the students of the university English school:

The student’s job is not merely to enjoy good writing, but to learn to know and understand the very best, and to be prepared to guide others towards the same understanding. 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, 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.

(Durrant 1945a:6)

The idea that the critic can, and indeed should, apply the “standard of the best” underlies the idea of a limited canon, an assumption which is subscribed to in Durrant’s writing generally, and which underlies the changes made to the English syllabus under his leadership, as discussed earlier. If the critic has to judge what constitutes “valid works of literature” (Durrant 1957c:123) then it would be reasonable to expect the criteria of judgment to be specified. Although these criteria are not always spelt out in Durrant’s writing, two publications can be singled out as helpful in this regard. The earliest one is the article “Cast a Cold Eye” published in *Trek* of 4 May 1945, and the other one is an address to the Annual Conference of the South African Library Association in Durban on 24 September 1956 and published as “Literature and Tradition” in the journal *South African Libraries* in 1957.

In “Cast a Cold Eye” Durrant quotes from an essay (without providing full bibliographic details) in which T.E. Hulme objects to the kind of sloppiness which requires a poem to ‘whine’ or “moan” about something, and then says:

With the support of T.E. Hulme’s criticism (retailed during the years between the wars, by T.S. Eliot and many minor critics) there has been a general change of taste in poetry. Fewer people now admire the typical work of Victor Hugo, Shelley, or Rupert Brooke; preoccupations with the infinite, with Destiny, Eternal Sorrow, Death, with a capital D, the Future of Man and other vague solemnities are no longer thought of as essential “poetic” states of mind. The poet needs no longer be continually filled with solemn grief or no less solemn joy. A poem nowadays may be written in conversational tones, it may be flippant or ironical, it may use any images that have not been staled by the romantic

poets of the last hundred years, and it may use any words it likes. The poetic diction and the poetic machinery of the romantics have been thrown on the rubbish heap. The poetic revolution has been accomplished, and the poets can draw free breath again.

(Durrant 1945b:16)

Although Durrant approves of such a general change of taste, and predicts that this trend will develop further towards greater “clarity, precision, and coolness, to a new classicism” (1945b:17) in modern poetry, he perceives of a threat to this desirable development in a prevailing type of “religion”. He again defines his view with reference to Hulme’s ideas on the effect of the French Revolution on poetry. Hulme says that the root of all Romanticism lies in Rousseau’s belief that man as an individual is by nature good and an infinite reservoir of possibilities, and that if oppressive measures could be removed from society, these possibilities will have a chance and you will get Progress. The devotees of Progress cannot any longer believe in Heaven, so they begin to believe in Heaven on earth, and you get Romanticism. Concepts that are right and proper in their own sphere are messed up, falsified, and the outlines of human experience are blurred. Hulme then likens Romanticism to a pot of treacle being spilt over on the dinner table and characterises it as “spilt religion”. Durrant regards Hulme to be prophetic here, since:

The chief danger to the integrity of the poet comes from the suppressed unconscious kind of religion that T.E. Hulme described when he said that Romanticism was “*spilt religion*” (...) while the romantic chase of personal happiness (in love, or in 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 personal maladjustments to another level. Instead of bemoaning their own unhappy lot in the strain of Werther, René, or Childe Harold, 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. The romantic belief in “happiness” is still strong in them; but they have no longer the courage, in a world so obviously miserable, to parade their own unhappiness openly and deliberately. They disguise the activity as the pursuit of Human Happiness (more commonly known as Progress) and under that flag they can be as maudlin, sentimental, and dreamy as they like.

(Durrant 1945b:16)

For Durrant “good” poetry “show[s] to the world the true face of things”, sees experiences “in a sharp, clear light” so that “[i]f we want to see truth, the world as it really is, stripped of lies and

sentiment, then we shall turn to the poets” (1945b:17). This criterion is also set elsewhere in Durrant’s writing. In his inaugural address he says that “[t]he best poetry is not that which expresses the strongest emotion, but that in which the emotion is most subtly interfused with thought; indeed, poetry is best described, I think, as *passionate thought*” (1945a:8). Furthermore, in his reviews of particular works or of the work of a particular author, Durrant often bases his judgment on the yardstick of clear perception and vigour of thought instead of a romantic outlook. He has, for instance a high regard for the work of Anthony Delius since he regards this poet’s work as representative of a tendency amongst South African poets who have “... evolved a verse style which ... escapes from the facilely romantic view of Africa as a land only of parching drought, Zulu “maidens” and heavily rhythmic war songs” which for Durrant “implies the abandonment of a well established vein of false sentiment” in favour of “honest perception of the world around us” (1955b:66). He also expresses great appreciation for the poems of Sydney Clouts in the 1955 “New Soundings” broadcast<sup>9</sup> since:

... these poems are astonishing pellucid; rather like the rock-pools that we find on our shores, each poem is a little world of its own, through the clear water of which we see with an intensity that is unknown to the dry land around us. And yet each poem, like the limpid waters of a pool, is a mirror of the greater world around it. Reading these poems for the first time, I am delighted by the purity of their tone, the delicacy of their phrasing, and above all by the strength of mind – the firm foundation-rock of thought which makes the purity and the delicacy possible.

(Durrant 1984:38)

In “Literature and Tradition”, the second address in which Durrant provides criteria for his conception of the “standard of the best”, he summarises his main concern as follows:

What I have to say concerns chiefly the classifications used by critics and teachers of literature ... One of the most difficult of the questions to be answered by those who teach a “literature” – for example, English literature or French Literature – is to know what exactly a “literature” is, where its boundaries are to be drawn, and what is to be included within its territory. This decision, in itself often accidental or arbitrary, or perhaps dictated by religious, political or national pre-suppositions, will in turn have a very important influence on the value accorded to individual literary works.

(Durrant 1957c:121)

He points out that the assumptions upon which we base our ideas of what constitutes “a literature”, are by no means fixed. So for instance the term “English Literature” can denote the literature produced anywhere in the English language. On the other hand, if a national or geographical interpretation is given to the term, “English Literature” becomes the study of the literature of England, to be distinguished from, for instance, American Literature, South African Literature and Irish Literature. Apart from regional considerations in defining “literature”, different standards can also be applied at different points in time depending on the dominant literary mode of that time. So, for instance, the standard of the Ancients, once set universally as a touchstone for all literature, was replaced by the Romantic notion of the great poet. Durrant’s own view is that “literature” can only be seen as an aggregation, forming a contemporaneous order:

The fact is ... that books actually exist as an aggregation. Every new book adds to the total, but apart from a few losses by accident, the total is always there and is always growing. The works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dante, Joyce, and P.G. Wodehouse all exist now, and form a contemporaneous order. It is only by an act of extreme abstraction that we can roll them out along the railway line of literary history (...) Watching the historical graph of literary ‘progress’ we may forget that each addition to the whole mass of books becomes less important and less revolutionary, since the bulk of great literature establishes a stability of its own.

(Durrant 1957c:123)

Durrant here acknowledges in a footnote his indebtedness to the essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” of T.S. Eliot. In terms of judging the merit of a literary text, the belief in literature as an aggregation implies that every text will be judged with the same standard and against the “sum total of all valid works of literature” (Durrant 1957c:123). For Durrant “great literature” as a single phenomenon also acquires a stable character, as is evident from the quotation above and in a statement like: “If this view is accepted, it will be well understood that no violent innovation can seriously revolutionize our poetry, novels, or plays. The best that a

new writer can hope for is to replace the whole planetary system only minutely, by the creation within it of a body which will slightly alter the pattern of the whole" (1957c:123).

The stability which "literature" acquires when seen as a systematic whole is for Durrant threatened in his day by three major heresies which he calls "Provincialisms": the provincialism of Time, the provincialism of the Sociological and the provincialism of the Regional or National mind. The threat from the provincialism of Time lies in over-emphasising the importance of contemporary texts at the cost of "classics":

There is a great movement for the study of contemporary authors in schools and universities, and in general this is a sign of health. But it is a very bad sign that the study of contemporary writers is sometimes urged on us by those who talk of "hoary old classics" and "getting out of the rut".

The "hoary old classics" are non-existent. A classic is a work which has been found not to be "hoary" or "musty". It retains its freshness and validity, its relevance to our own experience, no matter how old it gets.

(Durrant 1957c:123)

By the provincialism of Sociology Durrant refers to a tendency to require writers to be socially "useful". Durrant agrees with the notion that literature is "useful" but not in the sense of addressing social problems:

... all good books are useful. They give delight, and what is more useful than that? They also teach us to understand many things, and that too is useful. But the sociological critics want something else. They want books to *do good* in the more obvious sense. They want them to help to solve our problems, to tackle the difficulties we meet as a nation, 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.

I believe that this kind of earnestness, although it is understandable and even praiseworthy, is misplaced when it seeks to diminish the value of poems, novels, and plays that do not deal with social problems, or with political difficulties.

(Durrant 1957c:124)

The third provincialism, that of the Regional or National mind, concerns the tendency to regard of special interest to us only those works of literature produced in the local environment and



directed to local objects. Durrant does not deny the importance of encouraging and valuing local literature, but insists that it should be done within the context of a Tradition:

Of course we must always be especially interested in the works of literature which are produced in our own day, and in our own language and our own country. Such works are closer to us in every sense and are more obviously relevant to our immediate lives than are the classical works of distant lands, which must always call for a greater initial effort of imagination. Nor can we be considered a civilized people if we do not foster and encourage the poets, playwrights and novelists in our midst ... But no English reader and no English writer, wherever they may be, can read or write without a consciousness, however second-hand or confused, of the great classical works of the European Tradition.

(Durrant 1957c:125)

All three of these “provincialisms” are informed then by criteria of judgment which do not subscribe to the view of “literature” as an aggregation, where every work should be judged by the same standards and with reference to an entire system (or Tradition).

Durrant’s third “provincialism” raises the issue of his views of local South African English literature. Both Penrith (1972) and Doherty (1989) attribute to Durrant a low estimation of local literature and a hostile attitude towards the idea of including such texts into the English syllabus. Penrith’s discussion of Durrant’s views on this issue is limited to one paragraph in which she makes the judgement that he “sweeps aside the emphasis on South African literature as a separate branch of study” (1972:115). In his discussion of the development of this debate Doherty points out that although questions on South African literature occasionally appeared in examination papers of some local English departments from very early on in the twentieth century, the general attitude was that because local literature was inferior to the great works of English, it was unsuitable for inclusion into the syllabus. He views this attitude to be hardened by the influence of the Cambridge-educated university teachers after the 1930s, and singles out Durrant in this regard:

With the arrival of the Cambridge-educated practical critics, with their emphasis on the undivided “organic community” of English language and culture, the exclusion of South

African literature became even more stringent. Their insistence on a limited canon of English classics, derived from a militantly anti-Romantic aesthetic, limited the syllabus to metropolitan texts. As Geoffrey Durrant proclaimed: “we should concentrate upon making students familiar, through the most intensive study, with the really great works in English.”

(Doherty 1989:130)

In his subsequent discussion of Durrant’s position on this matter, Doherty presents it as a matter of fact that “Durrant, as a leading voice among local exponents of practical criticism, was predictably outspoken in his hostility towards the concept of a South African literature” (1989:135). These judgments are not completely accurate, as becomes clear when Durrant’s position on the issue of South African literature is considered more carefully.

In July 1956, a Conference of Writers, Publishers, Editors and University Teachers of English was held at the University of the Witwatersrand. The speakers at this conference included academics as well as writers such as Alan Paton, William Plomer, Guy Butler and Uys Krige. The main focus of the conference was local literature, evident in papers such as “Indigenous Literature and its Place in University English Studies” (R.G. Howarth), “South African Writers and English Readers” (William Plomer), “Has Africa, like America, a Characteristic Contribution to make to Literature” (Uys Krige), and “The South African Novel in English” (Alan Paton). Durrant’s review of the published proceedings of the conference, published in *Standpunte* in 1959, is a valuable indication of his views on the inclusion of South African English literature in the university curriculum as well as on criteria for judging the merit of these texts.

The status of South African literature seems already to have become a very contentious issue at the time of the 1956 conference, as is evident from the last sentence entered into the published proceedings. Under the heading “Concluding Business” it is recorded that the chairman, Professor D. Hopwood has “[i]n view of the wide range of opinion revealed by the conference

... pleaded for tolerance and sympathy among English scholars.” This impression is confirmed by Durrant’s review. He summarises the dominant theme of the conference as “the place of South African English in the world” with regard to questions such as whether it was to be regarded as “a local product, to be ignored, or patronized ... [or] to be elevated to a special status as a ‘national’ literature, and by virtue of that status to achieve the final apotheosis which would make it a special course of study in the Universities” (1959b:61). He continues:

This, unless my recollection of the discussions is totally false, is what in fact was warmly debated throughout the Conference.

A cooler appraisal of what was actually said by the speakers on South African literature reveals how little ground there was for the supposition that either of these propositions was being advanced. In fact, on reading in cold print what was said by the speakers in the course of their “papers” – as opposed to their impromptu contributions to the discussion – I find it hard to discover anything that ought of itself to have given rise to so much sharp division of opinion.

(Durrant 1959b:61)

Durrant expresses understanding for both sides of the argument in a very diplomatic manner. He argues that in any discussion of literature, and especially with reference to a university curriculum, there is the tendency towards conflict between “catholicity” and “immediacy” – between those who advocate a concentration upon the classical writers and those who place greater emphasis on literature when it bears upon the actual situation in space and time in which the reader finds himself. He also expresses understanding for the dilemma of the university teacher whose task it is to maintain a balance between these points of view:

Each experienced teacher has evolved his own notion of this balance, and is necessarily aware that the balance is dearly bought. What must be left out, if the study of literature is to be effective, must always be painful to contemplate. The teacher who has omitted T.S. Eliot to make room for Milton has usually, one supposes, done so after deep consideration, and with much regret. It can only infuriate him to be thought guilty of mere indifference, not only to Eliot, but to modern poetry in general.

Much the same may be said of the problem of deciding how much of Campbell, Olive Schreiner, or Alan Paton to include in an English Literature syllabus. Those who advocate the fuller study of these authors have the right to be heard, not as advocates of a narrow cultural nationalism, but as wishing to bring literature to bear more directly upon the lives of its students. And equally, those who have decided that there is little time to

be spared for the study of these authors may be supposed to have arrived at this belief for serious academic reasons, and not as enemies of an “indigenous” South African culture.  
(Durrant 1959b:62)

Durrant suggests that a future discussion of the problem may be helped by a more careful definition of terms. He suggests that “indigenous literature” may be understood as a number of writers writing in a particular area, or, alternatively, as a body of literature with certain common characteristics or concerns. He finds both definitions problematic when applied to South African writing since only the “bare bones of the South African landscape, and much of the flora and fauna are indigenous” and “almost all South Africa’s inhabitants, and many of its trees, crops, and animals, are ‘imported’” (1959b:63). Durrant also rejects the notion of a unifying linguistic style and idiom, interest in natural objects, or a vague appeal to emotions such as “love of one’s own” because of the South African diversity in all these respects. A clear sense of the term “South African literature” lies for Durrant in the following considerations:

What unites millions of people of different races and languages, what makes possible for them a common experience and a common literature, is the simple fact that they exist in a society whose structure is maintained by the South African state. The texture of our lives is increasingly dominated by this fact; and it is not to encourage “political” or “propagandist” literature if one agrees with Alan Paton that “nothing could be more a product of the South African scene than the South African novel in English”. His example makes it clear that he has in mind the readiness of the novelist to reflect human experience within the framework of South African society as a whole ... In Mark Twain’s descriptions of the Mississippi in *Huckleberry Finn* there is a sense of all the United States and their peoples, black, red, and white. In Jane Austen’s social comedy there is implied a consciousness of a stable and assured social order, guaranteed by sea power. And in such poems as Campbell’s “The Serf” or “Rounding the Cape”, and Delius’s “Vision in Southend” there is a similar recognition of the social order that underlies the daily pattern of our lives. A national literature is slowly unfolding in South Africa, but one cannot inaugurate such a literature as one opens a flower show. A nation and its literature are not so painlessly born.

(Durrant 1959b:63-64)

In the light of the review of the 1956 conference, it would not be fair to see Durrant as unsympathetic to the inclusion of South African literature in the English syllabus or as

unappreciative of the merit of local literature. It is, however, evident from the last two sentences of the quotation given above that he is not willing to do so uncritically. This is also the picture which emerges from his reviews of South African literature. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the nature of Durrant's critique of local writing.

In some instances Durrant is very critical of general characteristics of South African literature. For instance, in his review of the anthology *A Book of South African Verse* published by Oxford University Press in 1959, compiled and introduced by Guy Butler, Durrant appreciates the inclusion in the anthology of the "genuine poets – Campbell, Plomer, Prince, Madge, Wright, Clouts, Fuller and Butler" but also laments space being occupied by "dismal stuff, still-born when it was written, long-dead today" (1960b:123). In general he criticises South African poetry for a limiting self-consciousness:

The plague of English South African poetry is a recurrent self-consciousness, an awkward worrying about ancestors, environment, and social problems ... This is by no means to assert that poets should not deal with the complexities and the pain of personal experience. Nor would I suggest that they should be indifferent to the "social problems" around them, or to the facts of history as they persist in the life of today. What I complain of is an exaggerated concern for oneself as a member of a particular group, as a Christian among heathens, a White man among Blacks or Coloureds, an Englishman among Afrikaners, a European in Africa, or a South African in Europe ... The White South African is at the mercy of history, which at the same time is politics. The poet is forever worrying about his place in space and time, in South Africa and in her history. It becomes difficult for him to see other people as persons, and to forget himself in that contemplation.

(Durrant 1960b:124-126)

Besides pointing out general strengths and weaknesses of South African English writing, he also pinpoints the merits and shortcomings of individual authors. Two examples of the latter type of criticism are a review of two novels by Dan Jacobson and a review of a volume of poetry of Anthony Delius. In the review of Dan Jacobson's *The Trap* and *A Dance in the Sun*, Durrant judges Jacobson as a writer of unusual merit in his portrayal of the dangers of an unjust South African society, his ability to suggest vividly the "atmosphere of the veld, the wretched sub-

human existence of natives, the cruelty and hardness of the life in which the pattern of human relations are set", and in infusing "the parts of his story with the spirit of the whole" ( 1957b:64).

But he also says:

Mr Jacobson is already a good enough writer to deserve to be criticised by the highest standards. Judged by these, his novel may appear to many readers to be insufficiently "solid"... Intelligent, sensitive, and accurate within its limits, it affords only a fleeting and perhaps a superficial glimpse of the situation which it attempts to illuminate ...

The idea of the book, then is an impressive one. The aim seems to be to exhibit the hysteria from which the White man must suffer if he denies the humanity of the black man. Louw's drunken fury and Fletcher's senile talk of "White civilisation" are not merely personal; they are offered as illustrations of the degradation which follows upon any attempt to treat our fellow-men as inferior ...

The point is neatly and intelligently made. But it is scarcely enforced, for the novel is a glimpse from the outside at the lives it evaluates, and the reader is left with the sense that this intelligent and perceptive author is perhaps too ready with enlightened political and social ideas, and not ready enough with human sympathy and insight ...

The humanitarian writer is too easily led into the belittlement of those whom he regards as cruel, wrong, or outdated. It may well be that the African scene demands a greater respect for all who play their parts in it, if "sociological" writing is to be more than intelligent documentary. In this novel, it seems that a theme for tragedy has been too lightly handled. The satire is blended with humanitarian propaganda, and the novelist's vision is restricted by the intellectual's readiness to make a "point".

(Durrant 1957b:65-66)

To apply criticism of the "highest standards" is for Durrant evidently not a lack of appreciation or a sign of blank hostility, but the acknowledgement of an achievement worthy of the most strenuous discernment. This position is clearly evident from a review of *An Unknown Border* by Anthony Delius. Durrant praises Delius for producing poetry which, through an almost surgical exactness of the language, and a heightened self-awareness, assumes the quality of "a mirror in which its readers can achieve a clearer realisation of themselves and their place in the world" (1955b:66). However, his final judgment is that Delius' poems lack a sense of musical delight, indispensable in the best poetry:

I mean by this not that they ought to display "verbal music", onomatopoeia, or even the harmonies that we admire in Milton and Spencer. But the unifying influence of the imagination, in the best poetry, impresses upon the language itself a harmony which is intimately connected with the sense of the whole. This is a rare quality, but it is one that

most readers of poetry have learned to look for even in those poets who are not normally thought of as “musical” – in Donne, for example. To say this may seem ungracious, for there are many invaluable qualities in Delius’s work that South African poetry in English has sadly lacked. But it is a measure of the respect that his work commands, and of the promise that it holds out, that a standard of comparison from the local verse of the past will not suffice. We are compelled by the quality of these poems to measure them by the standards of the wide English tradition.

(Durrant 1955b:69)

Delius is a poet for whose work Durrant has a high regard in general. However, for Durrant there is only one standard to apply, and to deviate from that would be unfair and disrespectful, especially when dealing with “good” literature. This paramountcy of critical judgment is also central to Durrant’s definition of the task of English Studies and to his formulation of the essential task of the university as institution.

## Notes: Chapter 3

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<sup>1</sup> This forms part of Durrant's reaction to comments made by Guy Butler in a discussion of a paper delivered by P. Haworth of Rhodes University College entitled "Co-ordinates of Criticism" as reflected on p. 19 of the *Proceedings of the Second Conference of University Teachers of English, Pietermaritzburg, 1949*, published in Pietermaritzburg by the University of Natal.

<sup>2</sup> See Durrant (1984).

<sup>3</sup> E-mail message from Retha Roux, Archivist: English/Afrikaans Requests, SABC Sound Archives, dated 2 February, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> This grouping of the study of music and painting with literature is consistent with other definitions in which Durrant argues for a distinct kind of knowledge to be obtained from the study of literature. Compare for instance: "The pursuit of an integrated experience of a special kind is the one point in which the arts of literature, painting, and music are distinct from the studies of history, politics, psychology, philosophy, etc. ..." (Durrant 1947c:5).

<sup>5</sup> The address is published in the journal *South African Libraries*. For the full bibliographic details see Durrant (1952b).

<sup>6</sup> The details about *Trek* given here are based on a survey of the issues housed in the Msunduzi Library and on their publication records for the journal. For a further discussion of the history of *Trek* and its significant role in the South African political and cultural sphere in the 1940s see Sandwith (1998) and (2005:61-80).

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the events leading to the demise of *Trek*, see Sandwith (1998:33-34) and (2005:78-79).

<sup>8</sup> Durrant often uses quotations such as this one from the chapter "On the Imagination" of Coleridge's *Biographica Literaria*, without providing a reference. Another example is the quotation from "Little Gidding" II lines 126-127 of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* used towards the end of this same letter.

<sup>9</sup> Published in *English in Africa*. See Durrant (1984).



## CHAPTER FOUR

### DURRANT AND SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY

*... I can only point to the political and social state of the world as the obvious expression of a spiritual disease.*

(Durrant 1945a:6)

#### INTRODUCTION

Durrant's definition of the mission of English Studies at the university formulated in his inaugural address *English Studies and the Community* (1945) is made against the backdrop of his view that traditional (Western) culture finds itself in a threatened position. The mission foreseen for English Studies is to counteract this cultural situation.

Durrant seems to use the term "culture" in both a narrow and a broad sense in his address. In motivating the necessity for spelling out the social function of his discipline, he uses the term in the narrow sense as referring to activities and phenomena associated with the arts, which belong to a high level of sophistication, are practised by an elite group of people, and the value of which is not necessarily appreciated by society at large:

Already the pursuit of "culture", once held in popular esteem, is losing much of its radiance, and the ominous "highbrow" is widely applied to those who show an interest in the arts. The community might well, at no very distant date, ask itself why it should spend so much money on salaries to lecturers and subsidies to students who can do nothing to make motor-cars go faster or to make money go further.

(Durrant 1945a: 2)

It is, however, clear that the mission of English Studies which Durrant has in mind is much more profound and far-reaching than a justification of culture in this narrow sense. What is at stake, Durrant argues, is to influence and modify "culture" in the broader sense in which it denotes an entire way of life as is evident from his claim that English Studies "will make possible, if rightly followed, a more intelligent political activity, a clearer sense of

ultimate values and a generally higher standard of human life” (1945a:3).<sup>1</sup> This envisaged role for English Studies is not only reiterated in the rest of his inaugural address, but also acted out in Durrant’s sustained engagement with social and political issues between 1945 and 1961 when he left South Africa. In order to make an evaluation of this engagement it is necessary to consider the broader socio-political context of this period.

## **SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT**

The two decades during which Durrant lived and worked in South Africa were marked by two major historical events which had an important influence on both his academic work and his wider engagement with social and political issues. These were the Second World War and the coming into power of the Nationalist Government in 1948 with the subsequent implementation of the policy of Apartheid.

### **Durrant’s war experience**

The Second World War started in September 1939, a few months after Durrant commenced his academic career in South Africa, and ended in 1945, the year in which he was appointed to the Chair in English at the Natal University College. As pointed out in chapter one, Durrant entered the war in October 1940, served as Intelligence Sergeant in East Africa and Egypt and, after August 1941, as Senior Information Officer in the Army Education Service in Pretoria.

Durrant regards the Second World War as a successful defence of democratic values embodied in institutions such as parliament, a free press, and practices such as the liberty of assembly and free speech. At the same time, however, Durrant regarded the war as setting up strains which could endanger the democratic social order. He expresses this view in the pamphlet *Making Up our Minds: Propaganda and Public Opinion*, published towards the end of the war:

Parliament, a “free Press”, the liberty of assembly, and liberty of speech, have been won in the past after a hard struggle and have so far been preserved against all attacks. With the defeat of Nazism in the war the immediate external danger to such institutions will be removed.

But nobody seriously thinks that success in the war and the preservation of free institutions automatically guarantee the future of democracy. On the contrary, while democracies have shown a vigour in the prosecution of the war that has surprised both their friends and their enemies, we are all very much aware that new and urgent problems have arisen. War sets up internal strains which do not end with the signing of the peace, and the post-war period may well be more dangerous to freedom than the war itself.

(Durrant 1944a: 2)

Durrant further argues that the best way of safeguarding the democratic system is to define public issues in a clear and accessible manner in order to counteract what he regards as the bewilderment, confusion, cynicism and indifference caused by the problems of modern society. He again formulates this belief in a lecture entitled *Challenge to Us as Citizens*, delivered to the Women’s League for the Defence of the Constitution in Johannesburg:<sup>2</sup>

I think it was Bismarck who said that “experience is a hard school, but it is the only one a fool will learn in.” But there is in fact a place for hope; and what I, at any rate, believe (or otherwise I could not be a teacher) is that men and women have a capacity for learning through imagination, through intelligence, and through thought; that we need not, in fact, wait to learn by bitter experience. We can imagine what will happen; and those of us who are articulate, who have the power of speech, who can teach and talk to other people, have an overwhelming duty laid upon us to encourage thought and imagination, and to try to show our fellow citizens what the end of this road is likely to be. To do that, if we are going to speak to our fellow citizens with force, authority and clarity, we have to be clear ourselves about what we think is wrong.

(Unpublished Address)

Durrant’s conviction that such an approach can serve as an educational tool for the problems of post-war society was undoubtedly strengthened by his involvement in Army Education during the war. According to Malherbe (1946) this service came into being at the initiative of Alfred Hoernlé, who was president of the South African Institute of Race Relations from 1934 to 1943. In the early stages of the war Hoernlé convinced the army authorities that the fighting efficiency of troops, and specifically of the South African volunteer army, was related to their understanding of the ideals and beliefs for and against which they were fighting, and that it was therefore necessary to give shape and expression to

the vague and inarticulate ideologies existing in their minds. The Army Education Service ran short courses for troops, originally in camps in Cape Town but later also in overseas locations, and these were continued in prisoner of war repatriation camps after the end of the war. The courses consisted of daily lectures during which well-informed lecturers provided the soldiers with facts regarding social, economic and political questions and encouraged free discussion of these issues. Malherbe describes his experience of the dramatic effects of this method on the attitudes of the soldiers as follows:

At the end of the course the men are asked to complete voluntarily and anonymously a sort of “quiz” which, *inter alia*, allows them to say what part of the course they liked least, liked most; in what matters they received new insights and changed their attitudes, etc., etc. What is most interesting is the frequency with which men admit a change of attitude or confess that prejudices previously held were not justified in the light of the facts. What was almost touching at times was the testimony given privately to the course captain or sometimes even before the group of a change of heart, a process which, in the field of religion, would be called conversion.

(Malherbe 1946:17)

A similar experience is reported by Durrant in his inaugural lecture as part of his discussion of the role English Studies has to play in the improvement of language as a vehicle of communication. He points out that advances in semantics have laid the foundations of a linguistic science that can be of value not only in the immediate field of academic studies, but in the entire organised life of society, where language is often manipulated by propagandists for emotional exploitation and to obscure facts. With reference to the work of I.A. Richards, Durrant claims that the precise use of language forms one of the cornerstones of a healthy social and political life. He expresses the opinion that it lies within the brief and the ability of the English School at the university to clear up controversies which arise from the imprecise use of language, a belief that was strengthened by his work in Army Education:

My experience in conducting democratic discussion of public affairs in Army Education has only served to strengthen my original conviction that Dr. Richards is right. Many of the questions about which disputants get most heated, and over which they may be ready to give each other bloody noses, can be resolved with a little patience into purely verbal disagreements. Once the verbal difficulty is removed, it is

seen that the disputants are essentially in agreement. I believe that many of our quarrels, both domestic and foreign, are of this nature.

(Durrant 1945a:14)

Both in terms of the aims set for a socially justified department of English and in terms of performing one's duty as a citizen, Durrant regards it as crucial to engage in public issues, to use "the power of speech" to formulate "with force, authority and clarity" the problems in post-war society.

### **The implementation of Apartheid**

The most important force shaping South African society during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the coming into power of the National Party in 1948. After their election victory they embarked on a program to entrench their political control by setting up a bulwark of restrictive racial legislation which left hardly any aspect of South African society untouched. This implementation of the Nationalist Government's policy of white Afrikaner supremacy during the course of the 1950s ignored principles of civil liberty, violated constitutional assurances given in the Act of Union of 1910, broke with the traditions of democratic government and ultimately created a totalitarian society dominated by the nationalistic aspirations of one minority group. Opposition to this unrelenting process of change took the form of organised action by political parties, resistance groups and cultural organisations, but also of individual protest by citizens not necessarily committed to a particular organised group but objecting to the policy of Apartheid on the grounds of its violation of the general norms and principles underlying a free and civilised society.

### **DURRANT'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC DEBATES**

Durrant's conception of his duty as a private citizen and as the holder of a public office ensured that he would take an active part in the public debates of the 1950s. His contribution

to political and social issues was acknowledged by Johnson (1996) and Doherty (1989) but these assessments are problematic, as will be shown later in this section.

Durrant's role as public intellectual is admittedly not easy to assess due to the fact that his views on social and cultural matters were often not published, or not published in forums traditionally regarded as sources of academic research. In this regard two sources have proved to be of value. The first of these is a collection of documents comprising Durrant's official correspondence with the Natal University College (now the University of KwaZulu-Natal), some photographs and also a number of newspaper reports of public speeches delivered in 1949, 1950 and 1951, housed in the Archives of the Pietermaritzburg campus of this university. The second source, which proved to be even more valuable, is Professor Durrant's private collection of his publications and press cuttings of his activities as a public figure, which I gained access to through correspondence with him. Through his generous collaboration I was able to obtain copies of publications which I knew existed but which could not be located in libraries. These sources filled in hiatuses regarding bibliographic and biographical information pertaining to this study, and provided relevant material or references to material of which I was unaware and which would be impossible to locate and procure in any other way.

The most significant category of material brought to my attention by Professor Durrant is that of the leading articles which he wrote for the Pietermaritzburg publications *The Natal Witness* and *The Leader* during the course of the 1950s. He has kept copies of a large number of these leading articles and could supply me with the dates when they appeared. This enabled me to identify and analyse this extensive body of material.

The research for this study has yielded material pertaining to Durrant's participation in social issues in the form of pamphlets, public speeches and leading articles. These hitherto

neglected sources must be taken into account in assessing Durrant's role as public intellectual.

### **Pamphlets**

The earliest evidence of Durrant's concern with public issues is the publication of the two pamphlets entitled *Propaganda Tricks – Good and Bad* and *Making Up our Minds: Propaganda and Public Opinion*, both published towards the end of 1944. Although these documents predate his inaugural address, similar concerns are expressed regarding the capacity of commercial and political propaganda to control the channels of communication. In the inaugural address the mission foreseen for English Studies is directly concerned with the effects of propaganda on a community which lacks the emotional and intellectual ability to deal with it, and with the task of the English School to equip students with the “tools of analysis” for combating this “dangerously seductive” offensive :

Those who exploit the community by flattering or manipulating it .... here I come to the immediate problem which English studies have to face. The lack of any real education in the past has given us a population that is emotionally unstable and intellectually defenceless. These people are the natural victims of a class which is becoming increasingly numerous and increasingly efficient .... the professional persuaders. Both in the field of political propaganda and of commercial advertising the advances in recent years have been considerable.

(Durrant 1945a: 4-5)

The pamphlets, published only months before Durrant delivered his inaugural address, represent a public version of Durrant's analysis of propaganda as a serious cultural problem. While the inaugural address was directed at a relatively limited academic circle, these pamphlets were meant to reach a much wider audience. *Making Up our Minds: Propaganda and Public Opinion* forms part of the series “South African Affairs Pamphlets” and was published by the Society of the Friends of Africa, an organisation which came into being under the auspices of the League of Nations in 1926.<sup>3</sup> *Propaganda Tricks – Good and Bad* was published by Army Education which formed a branch of Military Intelligence at the

time, and which brought out regular publications of this nature on issues such as racial prejudice, social security, and democratic institutions.

*Propaganda Tricks – Good and Bad* warns about the unprecedented “epidemic” of propaganda employed in popular media. Durrant’s aim is to illustrate the mechanisms through which propaganda works in order to enable the public to discriminate between “good propaganda” which is “constructive, informative, and helpful”, and “bad propaganda” used to “mislead and hoodwink people” (1944b:1). Although it is pointed out that propaganda is used both in commerce and in politics, the real concern is with the harmful effects of bad propaganda in the political realm. Fictitious commercial advertisements are employed to illustrate the tricks used in bad propaganda such as: exploiting people’s fears by creating bogeys like the native, the communist, the capitalist or the Jew; appealing to people’s sense of superiority; asserting that policies and actions are justified and “normal” because they are carried out in the name of a majority such as “the nation” or “the volk”; establishing conceptions and ideas by sheer repetition; and reverting to the use of sweeping statements and name-calling. Durrant’s final appeal to the South African public is to approach what is communicated to them with an open mind and to use their “good sense” to distinguish between good propaganda, which he regards as necessary in both business and government, and bad propaganda, which aims at selling “a lot of junk, both in our private lives and in our politics” (1944b:20).

*Making Up our Minds: Propaganda and Public Opinion* is also concerned with the escalation of propaganda due to developments in the mass media:

During the last fifty years, the development of the modern newspaper, of the wireless, and of the film, has made possible an entirely new and dangerous technique for controlling the opinions and behaviour of large groups of people. The new propaganda is designed not to convince an individual or a small group by argument and discussion, but to change the attitude of a large number of people by psychological pressure in the shortest possible time. This can be done most effectively by appealing to group prejudice and to the basic human passions, for these are held in



common by the large groups which can be reached by modern methods of communication.

(Durrant 1944a: 21)

Here the influence of propaganda is, however, linked to the much more fundamental issue of the loss of free public opinion, which Durrant regards as eroding the bases of democracy:

But today we are faced with two unpleasant developments. Public opinion is to an increasing extent not the opinion of the people, but that of the business interests which control the channels of communication; and it has moreover become possible to manufacture opinion through the use of modern propaganda techniques. These two awkward facts make any discussion of opinion on the old liberal democratic lines a waste of time. We must consider how thought can be made free, not only from government tyranny, but also from the more subtle and pervasive tyrannies of a commercial society. It is no longer enough to teach our people to read and write, and then leave the rest to Reason; we need a positive programme for democracy.

(Durrant 1944a: 1)

Against the backdrop of the threats which post-war industrial society pose to a democratic system, Durrant perceives an urgent need for the opening up of the channels of knowledge and discussion. What emerges from the ensuing consideration of the press is a picture of society in which the individual finds his passions and insecurities exploited by big business and politicians, and in which he can no longer trust the media or the government to provide accurate information.<sup>4</sup> In Durrant's view the individual has lost the ability to make his own voice heard, is continually subjected to a projection of life as crude and one-dimensional, and above all, is unable to recognise his own position of disadvantage.

Such an interpretation of *Making Up our Minds: Propaganda and Public Opinion* is fundamentally different from that of Johnson (1996). Johnson sees strong similarities between this pamphlet and the programmes for social reconciliation via state intervention put forward after the Second World War in Britain, such as the Beveridge Report of 1942. Here the state was seen as a benevolent "mediator" between the different social classes, adjudicating their opposed interests by, inter alia, eliminating poverty, guaranteeing equality of opportunity in education and employment, and expanding meaningful participation in the political decision-making process. After summarising Durrant's discussion of the ailments of

modern industrial society, of the malfunctioning of the mass-media, and of the educational remedies which he suggests for these problems, Johnson argues that *Making Up our Minds: Propaganda and Public Opinion* can be read within the broad framework which he adopted for analysing Shakespeare criticism during the 1950s. This framework derives from the Marxist view that a mediating between two opposed social extremes tends to accrue the greatest power to itself. Johnson is of the opinion that during the 1950s humanist English-speaking South African critics (such as Durrant and D.R.C. Marsh<sup>5</sup>) offered Shakespeare criticism as mediation between the Afrikaner Nationalist Government and black South Africans. He regards this, in the case of Durrant, as a withdrawal from the role of political commentator and a revision of the schema of opposition and mediation which he sees in *Making Up our Minds: Propaganda and Public Opinion*. He interprets Durrant's suggestions for a defence against the effects of propaganda in this pamphlet as an insistence that the government should act as mediator between the rich and the powerful on the one hand, and the ordinary citizen on the other hand. To substantiate his interpretation he quotes a passage in which Durrant says that "in these days of great capital accumulations, of monopolies, and of mass movements, the isolated individual is almost helpless" and that "[i]t is therefore the duty of the government, not merely to act according to democratic principles, but to act so that these principles will live and be strengthened" (Durrant 1944a: 26-27). This is, indeed, what Durrant says, but it is not all he says. This passage should be read together with others, like Durrant's summary of what he suggests for unclogging the channels of communication:

This pamphlet has suggested several ways in which this can be done. New educational methods, improved government publicity, a revitalised broadcasting system, a national film corporation, are all measures which can be carried out satisfactorily only by the central government or the provinces. But to be afraid of them for that reason would be a profound mistake. Our government, after all, with all its defects, is our Government; it represents ourselves. When it is weak or inefficient, it is our own weakness and inefficiency that it reflects; we elect it, and, we can remove it.

(Durrant 1944a: 30)

and with the concluding paragraph of the pamphlet:

As things are at present only the government can guarantee the conditions for full and free consultation; but to accept that is only to say that we must make our arrangements centrally through our elected representatives. It does not mean that we hand over our minds to a dictator. In many ways we take for granted the part that a democratic state plays in fostering the liberties of its citizens; it guarantees the freedom of public speech in Parliament and elsewhere, it protects the individual from personal violence, and guarantees the right of anyone to start a newspaper. But these functions of government, valuable as they are, are largely negative. The work of isolated individuals and of voluntary societies is still of great importance. But to compete with the highly organised business of persuasion carried on by monopolies and interest groups, the need to-day is for positive government action to create a free opinion. This, however paradoxical it sounds, is the only way out of the propaganda maze. We must demand such action and see that we get it.

(Durrant 1944a:30-31)

Durrant's ultimate appeal here, is not, as Johnson would have it, to a naïvely imagined and benign government committed to democratic reforms:

His benign view of government as an agency that would 'guarantee the conditions for full and free consultation' derives from a long tradition of liberal political thought in which the neutral state is seen to mediate between capital and labour, balancing the interests of both and thus ensuring social equilibrium. Durrant's ability to imagine a government committed to democratic reform contrary to the interests of capital rests less on an analysis of contemporaneous South African political history than on his borrowing of projections plausible in England: Beveridge and his ilk conceived a benevolent state for post-war Britain, and Durrant simply took over this ideal and imposed it on (the very different) South African social polity.

(Johnson 1996:151)

Durrant's appeal is to the individual to exercise his rights and utilise the power afforded him by the democratic system in which the actions of government cannot be separated from the will of the individual.

Johnson also claims that Durrant retreated from active social critique in 1944 to the "safer" ground of literary criticism in the course of the 1950s. Johnson characterises *Making Up our Minds: Propaganda and Public Opinion* as a distinctly left version of the *Scrutiny* analysis and as anticipating the analysis of culture struggle undertaken by Raymond Williams in the final section of *The Long Revolution* published in 1965. However, such engagement in social reconstruction was in his view short-lived:

The fate of Durrant's ideals of post-war social reconstruction can perhaps best be measured in an article he wrote on *The Tempest*. Published in 1955 in Natal University's literary journal, *Theoria*, 'Prospero's Wisdom' reveals no glimmer of the democratic fervour that characterized *Propaganda and Public Opinion*, setting out instead a tepid defence of Prospero's actions on the island.

(Johnson 1996:152)

Johnson acknowledges continuities between Durrant's article<sup>6</sup> and the earlier pamphlet, but then adds:

What is most striking in comparing these two texts, however, is the dramatic narrowing of Durrant's political ambitions, from optimistic pamphleteer in 1944 seeking to reach a wide audience and influence national education policy, to literary critic in 1955 arguing about Shakespeare's humanist ethic in a small circulation academic journal.

In the years between the two texts, Durrant directed his energies primarily to arguing for the introduction of practical criticism into South African English departments, a campaign that was largely successful.

(Johnson 1996:153)

When Durrant's writing throughout the time he spent in South Africa is taken into account, however, there is ample evidence that he remained active in his contributions to the political debate of this period. This becomes clear in the following section dealing with Durrant's journalism and public speeches.

Durrant's contribution to public discussion of political-cultural issues also receives attention in Corinne Sandwith's doctoral thesis *Culture in the Public Sphere: Recovering a Tradition of Radical Cultural-Political Debate in South Africa 1938-1960* (2005). She is primarily concerned with the articulation of radical political views by marginalised individuals and groups excluded from the sites of 'legitimate' public discussion 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. She sees South African versions of the critical-cultural project associated with F.R. Leavis and the *Scrutiny* school as providing a cultural discourse against which an alternative South African cultural discourse can be read and understood. The writing of Durrant and Christina van Heyningen is taken as case studies representing the "South African Leavisian discourse" (2005:20) which for her is

typically marked by the “almost complete absence of direct engagement with socio-political concerns” (2005:59). Sandwith takes into account a number of Durrant’s publications<sup>7</sup> in the light of which she concludes that “there is an astonishing lack of engagement with South African society and politics, and a careless arrogance about values of Western culture which gives no space to the cultural values, or democratic rights, of the South African majority” (2005:58). The pamphlet *Making Up our Minds: Propaganda and Public Opinion* is judged in terms similar to those of Johnson (1996):

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 his 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.

(Sandwith 2005:49)

### **Public speeches**

Despite the difficulty of giving an exhaustive account of Durrant’s public speeches, a number of them delivered during the course of the 1950s are available to us and we can examine the issues addressed and the nature of the audiences. Transcriptions of these speeches, or reports on them, can be found in the following places: the university archives at the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal have in their possession newspaper clippings of reports on a number of Durrant’s public speeches dating from 1949 to 1951; Professor Durrant has drawn my attention to a report of a speech made late in 1952 published in *The Natal Witness*; in *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988* by Laband and Haswell (1988) a reference is made to a speech which Durrant made at a public meeting of a group of liberals in December 1952; the Msunduzi Municipal Library (formerly the Natal Society Library) in Pietermaritzburg is in possession of an undated typescript copy of the full text of a speech

delivered under the auspices of the Women's League for the Defence of the Constitution in Johannesburg; and a speech delivered at an Education Conference called by the National Council of Women in Pietermaritzburg in 1958 was published under the title "The University in a Technological Society" in *Theoria* in 1959.<sup>8</sup> In some of these speeches Durrant addresses the cultural deficiencies of South African society while in others he deals with political issues.

The speeches in which Durrant voices his misgivings about the cultural situation coincide closely with the views expressed in his inaugural address. In a speech delivered at a conference of the National Council of Women in Pietermaritzburg on 25 April 1950 and reported the following day in both *The Natal Witness* and *The Natal Mercury*, Durrant made the provocative statement that South African universities were turning out barbarians. From his classification of these "barbarians" (Christian Nationalist, artistic, scientific and technical) and his motivating arguments it is evident that his main concern is with the aims of university education which he sees as being hampered by ideology as well as a disregard for the humanities disciplines such as literature, history and religion. It is also reported that in answering questions on this occasion Durrant deplored the fact that the mass media are only commercial undertakings with the aim of selling to the biggest market, rather than assisting with intellectual needs or education. This speech must have elicited some public reaction as reflected by two short reports published in *The Natal Mercury* on 29 April and on 5 May. The first one is an explanation by Durrant, apparently in reaction to objections, of his description of science professors as "illiterate", while the second one is a report of a letter published in a Port Elizabeth newspaper which supported Durrant's views on the need for the S.A.B.C. to employ educated and cultured radio announcers. In the second speech delivered to the National Council of Women in 1958, published in *Theoria*, Durrant gives his views on the essential nature of a university education.<sup>9</sup>

Durrant is also reported in *The Natal Witness* of 10 May 1951 to have spoken at a civic reception in honour of the centenary of the Natal Society Library, warning that an inherited literary and written culture was being endangered by the “new visual language of the picture magazines, the comic strips or the films.”

The earliest of the speeches with a political focus was delivered at a luncheon of the Pietermaritzburg Services Club on 20 April 1949. According to a report in *The Natal Mercury* on 21 April Durrant “sharply criticised and satirically commented” on the “pamphlet recently issued under the auspices of the Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Societies (F.A.K.), in which a Christian-Nationalist basis for education in the Union [was] propounded”. It is further reported that Durrant identifies this pamphlet, which proposes a complete separation of languages, races and cultures as representing the official policy of the National Party and the Broederbond. He warns that the implementation of the educational system it argues for “would result in South Africa being split from top to bottom both from the sectarian and racial points of view”, and strongly disapproves of the educational principles put forth, since he regards them as a total departure from traditional European education. He also exposes the propagandistic nature of the pamphlet.

Three of the later speeches are similar to this one in that they represent attempts to alert the public to the effects of the implementation of Apartheid. Two of these were delivered at meetings of the Pietermaritzburg City Parliament Debating Society. *The Natal Witness* reports on 20 March 1951 that Durrant addressed the debating society the previous evening on the Government’s intentions of overriding the Entrenched Clauses of the South African Act which guaranteed the Coloured Franchise and pointed out that “[t]here could be no ordered government of any kind if there was no security of contract”. Durrant is further reported to have said that the proposed action of the government means that for the first time in the history of the Union the moral authority of the Act of Union would be repudiated,

which would mean that the country was left entirely at the mercy of the fluctuations of party strife.

The second contribution to the debating society, reported on 12 November 1952 in *The Natal Witness*, represents a more severe attack on the policy of the National Party and its effects on the South African community. This is reflected by the heading which quotes Durrant as saying that South Africa is being “ruled by the whip and the gun”. The report further summarises Durrant’s observations about Europeans living in permanent fear as a result of the repressive non-European policy followed since 1936<sup>10</sup> in South Africa, which, for him, brought non-Europeans together in a solid block against Europeans.<sup>11</sup> According to Durrant, Europeans could expect nothing but hatred and rebellion from the enforced policy of Apartheid which the Natal politicians did not have the courage to denounce, and towards which the United Party<sup>12</sup> displayed an ambiguous attitude. He regarded the political parties as out of touch with a growing belief in South Africa, especially in the educated urban circles, that non-Europeans should be handled more fairly, and contended that political parties were competing to appeal to the racial fears of the voters for their own gain. Against this background Durrant is reported to have moved for full political rights to be granted to all civilised men and women in South Africa immediately. It is not specified what Durrant meant by “civilised”. This raises the question as to whether Durrant included people of colour in his demand for voting rights, and, given the fact that he was a member of the Liberal party, it is possible that he did, although a definite interpretation of his intention is not possible.

Apart from the newspaper reports of Durrant’s public speeches, Peter Brown (in Laband and Haswell 1988:200) refers to the fact that Durrant was one of two speakers at the first public meeting of a group of liberals which resulted in the formation of the Liberal Party, held in the Pietermaritzburg City Hall on 8 December 1952. Brown indicates that this group was formed when it became apparent to the liberal-minded in Pietermaritzburg that hopes for



the creation of a non-racial society after the Second World War would not be realised under the Nationalist government, that it was very unlikely that the United Party, which represented the strongest opposition to the Nationalists at that time, would win the next election, and that, even if they did, they would probably not embark on such a course. Brown gives no indication of the content of Durrant's address, and the text of this speech could not be traced either. In reaction to an inquiry Professor Durrant wrote in an e-mail correspondence that the "chief theme of the meeting was the need for the extension of the franchise to all persons". This response seems to support the tentative judgment made above regarding his interpretation of "civilized".

The reports of Durrant's speeches, however useful as an indication of the nature of his views on political issues of the day, are cursory in nature and it has to be kept in mind that we are not dealing with Durrant's own writing but with second hand reports of what he said. In this regard the full text of his speech entitled "Challenge to Us as Citizens"<sup>13</sup> delivered to the Women's League for the Defence of the Constitution (commonly known as The Black Sash) is much more valuable in determining Durrant's views on the political situation. The delivery date of this speech is also significant in terms of Johnson's claim that by 1955 Durrant had withdrawn from his role as political commentator. Although the typescript copy of this speech bears no date, it had to be delivered after May 1955 when the Black Sash was established.<sup>14</sup> A more precise dating seems possible in the light of references which Durrant makes in the course of his address. In the first instance he expresses his sympathy with the cause of the Women's League by referring to a cold evening during the previous winter when the organisation was already active:

I remember that during last winter I was in Pretoria for a meeting. On a bitterly cold night – I think I went to the cinema that night – waiting at the bus stop in an icy wind, I was very conscious of the women who were waiting in their "laager" outside the Union Buildings to present their petition to the Government over the Senate Act.

This puts Durrant's speech at the earliest somewhere in 1956, the year after "last winter" which could not have been earlier than 1955. This date also seems accurate if we take into account Durrant's references to the adoption of the Senate Act, one of the actions of the Nationalist government causing the constitutional crisis which forms the focus of the Durrant speech and which instigated the establishment of the Black Sash. In one of the references to the Senate Act Durrant says:

My own belief is that the Senate Act, when it is put into operation, will have destroyed the Act of Union. It will be a Senate established in contravention of the Entrenched Clauses, which were an integral part of the agreement of Union (...) With such a Senate in existence, I consider that Parliament is also fundamentally affected, because in the most important legislation in the coming sessions, Parliament will consist, for the purpose of dealing with the Entrenched Clauses, of the two houses sitting together – the House of Assembly and the Senate.

The constitutional crisis<sup>15</sup> dates back to 1951 when the National Party tabled the Separate Representation of Voters Bill with the purpose of removing the Coloured voters in the Cape from the common voters roll. In order to do this, they would have to get the Bill approved by a two-thirds majority in a joint sitting of Parliament, since the voting rights of Coloured people in the Cape formed part of what were commonly referred to as the "Entrenched Clauses" in the constitution of the Union. After initial attempts by the Nationalists to achieve their goal by amending the constitution through manipulation of the High Courts failed, and after they met with public protest such as that mounted by the Torch Commando, they dropped the issue towards the end of 1952. It was, however, taken up by J.G. Strijdom after he replaced D.F. Malan as Prime Minister at the end of 1954. Strijdom appointed judges who favoured his desired constitutional changes in an enlarged Appeal Court and enlarged the Senate by giving the larger provinces proportionately more members than the smaller ones (in defiance of the federal principle of equal representation written into the Act of Union) to ensure that the Government would get a two-thirds majority in a joint sitting of Parliament. These tactics enabled Strijdom to validate the Coloured vote legislation in the parliamentary

session of 1956. Since Durrant talks about the effects of the Senate Act in terms of “when it is put into action” and “in the coming sessions” of Parliament, it can be assumed that he delivered his speech early in 1956.

This speech, thus, represents a clear contradiction of Johnson’s claim of a ‘dramatic narrowing of Durrant’s political ambitions’ so that by 1955 he had become merely a “literary critic ... arguing about Shakespeare’s humanist ethic in a small circulation academic journal” (1996:153). Although I have found no evidence of public speeches later than this date, it seems unlikely that Durrant would stop public comments of this type for the rest of the time he spent in South Africa. On the contrary, in this speech Durrant stresses the fact that a situation has come about where, as a matter of self-preservation, it has become inevitable for every ordinary citizen to take part in politics – and it is a duty from which he does not exclude himself. On the contrary, he expresses the view that this duty “to say what [he] think[s] is wrong” in South African society weighs more heavily on him in his capacity as a university teacher with previous experience of the consequences of indifference towards politics:

As a university teacher, I feel this all the more strongly because before the Second World War I spent some time in Germany,<sup>16</sup> where the tradition of non-interference in political questions by university teachers was deeply rooted. There I saw the bitter fruit of a century of indifference on the part of intellectuals, and especially university teachers, to the political problems of their country.

For Durrant the historical roots of the political problems in South Africa lay in the inability of the English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking population groups to overcome their differences, and on a more fundamental level in the “failure of all European South Africans to face with courage and realism the problem of their relationship with the non-European”. He is of the opinion that the exploitation, and even cultivation, of these problematic relations by the National Party has facilitated their coming into power in 1948. This event, furthermore, represents for Durrant not an ordinary change of government but a

revolution through which a totalitarian government has set out to gain control of every branch of society and to eliminate opposition by destroying the mechanisms by which a democratic system functions:

Now, as I see it, the revolution of 1948 – because I regard it as a revolution, not as an ordinary change of Government – represents a fundamental change in the whole pattern of development in South Africa. It was no momentary, accidental happening, caused by the bad luck of the United Party. It was the expression of a deep-rooted historical process which will not be reversed easily, and which offers a challenge to those of us who think differently from the Nationalists. That revolution, preceded by intensive cultivation, on all levels and through every possible agency, of Nationalist ideals among a particular group of the population, has consolidated its power by the “purging” of government agencies – the Civil Service, education, the Information Bureau, Railways – through the typical totalitarian pattern of making a change of government into a change in the whole pattern of economic and social life. It has proceeded to destroy what machinery existed for free consultation with the advanced and educated leaders of the non-Europeans, and substituted dictatorial government in a field where discussion was beginning to take the place of force (...)

The revolution has proceeded (...) through the steady abolition of the rights of the individual (...)

Along with this removal of the rights of the individual goes the steady increase in executive powers – powers to proclaim a state of emergency and abolish almost all laws, and to allow policemen, any officer of the state, to act with impunity against any of us as he thinks it fit. Powers of inspection, powers to raid our houses, powers to make us reside elsewhere than where we want to reside – there is hardly any power you could imagine that has not been given to the executive arm. And finally, this revolution has been sealed by the deliberate manipulation of the electoral system and the constitution to ensure that there can be no reversal of the revolution of 1948.

The political convictions and actions of the National Government are then put into a wider context by measuring them against the principles of Anglo-American or Western traditions of democracy. Durrant concludes that, while the Nationalists pretend to adhere to these principles, theirs is a “democracy” (not unlike the doctrine of Jacobinism which manifested itself during the French Revolution) that has both the political power and the moral conviction to impose its laws, even to the extent of destroying its opponents. Furthermore, the “majority” in the name of which the Nationalists profess to act is a manufactured and not a genuine majority. Durrant warns his audience that the Nationalist leaders are sincere in the belief that they are right and that they must enforce their will on other people. He illustrates

the power of such a morality of nationalism by reminding them of the effects it had in Nazi Germany and Central Europe and adds that such a morality manifests itself in “even more vicious forms in modern Europe in the disguise of Marxism and National Socialism.” Durrant does not foresee a reversal of the political situation resulting from the actions of opposing political parties and professional politics, but argues that it remains the duty of the individual to exercise his power in effecting change:

But it isn't any use for us to blame our political leaders, or to blame the political parties. The political parties, as they exist, are the result of our own action, or lack of action! In other words, it rests with the ordinary citizen, since in spite of an obvious tendency towards a tyrannous state in South Africa, our liberties – most of them, still remain to us, and our political machine can still be worked in many respects. It remains to us to see that these parties are transformed, and the citizen who says that politics are “a dirty game” is not doing his duty.

This is no new message, but a reiteration of the principles of liberal democracy which inform Durrant's contributions to debates on socio-cultural issues. Even at this point where he clearly understands that only the appearance of democracy remains in South African politics, he believes in the power of “standing up for what we believe to be right, and by speaking up at every possible opportunity, in private or in public” as he urges his audience at the end of the speech.

### **Leading articles**

As was pointed out earlier, the existence of the leading articles which Durrant wrote for the Pietermaritzburg newspapers *The Natal Witness* and *The Leader* during the course of the 1950s was brought to my attention by Durrant himself. These leaders can be identified since he kept copies of a large number of them and could supply me with the dates on which they appeared. According to the dates supplied (see Bibliography) Durrant wrote these leading articles during the period 1951 to 1960, but there are certain years for which none are reflected. The years for which we do have dates are 1951, 1952, 1953, 1958, 1959 and 1960. Within these years there are some months during which Durrant wrote for the newspapers on

an almost daily basis, some months when only a few contributions are reflected, and other months when nothing at all appears. These hiatuses and variations might point to the fact that Durrant's archives do not constitute a full record of these publications. If one considers the extent to which he wrote for the newspapers during the years for which we do have dates and during those months in which he contributed regularly, it seems unlikely that there would be entire years or months of no, or virtually no, activity. It should thus be acknowledged that there can be no exhaustive account of Durrant's contribution to public debates in this category of writing. Furthermore, within the scope of this study, it is only possible to report on the content of a representative sample of the leaders identified. The main reason for this is the conditions under which old newspapers are kept in the Msunduzi Municipal Library in Pietermaritzburg. In the case of both *The Natal Witness* and *The Leader* no reproductions exist, and the original copies of the newspapers are in such a frail condition that photocopying is not permitted. This means that the researcher either has to spend enough time in the library to get acquainted with this extensive body of writing to such an extent that an analysis can be made, or has to make expensive reproductions through means other than photocopying for analysis at a later stage. The strategy I followed was in the first place to limit the scope of work by focusing on *The Natal Witness*, and in the second place to scrutinise only the first two years (1951, 1952) and the last two years (1959, 1960) for which I have dates. I read through all the leading articles which Durrant wrote in these years in order to gain a general idea of the nature of the views he expressed, and at the same time identified those leaders which I regarded as central to these views. The identified leaders were then typed out on a portable computer.

The leading article is generally considered to express the views of the newspaper rather than those of an individual, and therefore the question could arise as to how legitimate it is to regard these texts as an expression of Durrant's own views. The conviction that this is indeed

the case is in the first place based on information supplied by Durrant himself. In answering an inquiry as to whether he was directed by the newspaper to respond to certain issues, he replied:

I never had a whisper of a suggestion as to what I should say, or any comment from any newspaper owner or staff. I did once find out that I had embarrassed the newspaper, and that they tried to ensure that no hint of this reached me. The elderly Scot who owned the paper took the view that the only reason that his little paper could compete with the big dailies was that it was known that the leaders were completely independent. He insisted on an absolutely free hand for his editorialists, and preferred academics because they did not fear dismissal from the job.

(e-mail message from Durrant, 13 November 2000)

This would then mean that not only did *The Natal Witness* allow Durrant complete freedom in expressing his own views, but that they regarded his independence of opinion as an asset. In the second place an acquaintance with the content of the leaders reveals a similarity in preoccupations, arguments, and underlying value system to those found in Durrant's other writings.

The news items on which Durrant commented in the leading articles include general world affairs such as hostilities between different nations or the threat of the atomic bomb, national issues affecting South Africa as a whole, as well as developments in the domestic affairs of the Pietermaritzburg community. In reading through the leading articles, it soon became apparent that they could not be treated as self-sufficient texts, and that one had to acquaint oneself with the broader contexts of the issues which Durrant commented on in order to evaluate the positions taken by him. In the process of identifying the specific news items commented on, it was found that Durrant did not always react to the main events of the day. Except for periods of crucial political developments his comments would often single out minor reports, often not reported on the same day, but the day before or even two days before. In scrutinising the issues dealt with in the news reports Durrant commented on, it is clear that they fit in with the broad underlying theme concerning the symptoms of cultural deterioration expressed in the inaugural address, pamphlets and public speeches. So, for

instance, Durrant comments on the exploitation of the emotional needs of the masses through political propaganda, as reflected in the following two comments on, respectively, the “loud and hectoring” tones of an exchange between the leaders of India and Pakistan and the Russian reply to a statement by the British Foreign Secretary in the columns of *Pravda*:

Mr. Nehru and Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan are not personally to be held to blame. It is probable that these gentlemen are accustomed in their private lives to civilised language and courteous tones. But like almost every prominent national politician today, they are victims of the spirit of the age. The half-educated masses of the modern state demand from their leaders the gratification of their feelings, and they are impatient of any leader who fail to give expression to the intolerances and passions of the group. Diplomacy must therefore be loud-mouthed, violent and abusive. It must assume an air of injured innocence, and must continually present a quarrel with the neighbour as a matter of clear black and white, with all the right on one side, and all the wrong on the other. A politician who fails to provide these gratifications of national arrogance, and refuses to appeal to the mob, is likely very soon to be supplanted by a more popular figure.

“The New Democracy” in *The Natal Witness*, Thursday, 2 August 1951

In Western eyes, the Russian reply must seem astonishingly crude and naïve. We see easily enough through its untruths and its specious arguments, and find it hard to imagine that there can be a single Russian, outside the ruling circles of the Kremlin, who is not at least half-persuaded by Mr. Morrison’s appeal. But unfortunately such questions are not settled by reason. A nation that has been trained by modern totalitarian propaganda is not to be turned from its course by the kind of argument that would sway the London County Council or influence a school debating society. Its thinking has been perverted at the roots and the very language in which its concepts are framed is a prison-house from which only the most adventurous minds can even imagine an escape. Nor are these concepts held in a coolly intellectual way; they are the centre and focus of the most powerful feelings of loyalty and self-respect that have been created and confirmed by a lifetime of exposure to propaganda.

“A Waste of Words” in *The Natal Witness*, Friday, 3 August 1951

Durrant’s concern with the deterioration in the precise use of the English language is expressed in comments such as the following:

The reference in an overseas news message to the ceremonial burial of “Italy’s Unknown Deportee” draws our attention painfully to the growing corruption of the English Language.

Before the Second World War it was usual to use English words like “fugitive” and “exile” when referring to those who had been driven from their homes by political oppression or war. The term “refugee”, originally used of the Huguenots became popular during the First World War, since it seemed a less offensive word to use of the Belgian exiles than the commoner word “fugitive”. But the Second World War, which exiled and enslaved so many, produced a whole crop of euphemisms for



transportation, exile and slavery. Such expressions as “refugee”, “displaced person” and “deportee”, although they may claim some official recognition in the dictionaries, are undesirable intruders, because they obscure the simple human experience which they denote. Words like “evacuee” and “detainee” – for “political prisoner” – are barbarisms which should never have been coined.

These barbarisms are the result of official slovenliness, combined with a vague desire to avoid using any word which might possibly offend anybody. It might be thought that to complain of them is to be guilty of pedantry, since “everybody knows what they mean.” But corruption of languages is also corruption of thought; such terms as “refugee,” “internee” and “deportee” are used because we do not wish to face the ugly facts of exile, imprisonment and slavery. The language used by officials is often bad not only because it is barbarous English, but above all because it substitutes for the living language of human experience a dead, vague and cold jargon in which plague, famine, war and death, become “infectious diseases,” “malnutrition,” “hostilities” and “fatality.” Slang is much to be preferred to this dead lingo: it is at least human to “sack a workman,” but if we “find that we are experiencing a redundancy of employees” we are merely using language to hide from reality.

“The Steep Descent” in *The Natal Witness*, Tuesday, 24 June 1952

Other issues which receive attention are the harmful effects of mass media and organised sport, the lack of professional freedom and funding for the teaching profession, and the deterioration of civil liberties.

Durrant’s leading articles are written in a distinctive style of carefully reasoned, logical arguments for or against the event or action he is commenting on, and, although his criticism is often harsh, even scathing in nature, it always retains a sensitivity to and consideration for the opposite point of view. An interesting deviation from this typical Durrant style is a type of sardonic comment in which he pretends to put forward a sincere argument for or against some absurdity in a news report. Through this mock sincerity he underlines the absurd nature of the action or attitude. A typical example of this is the following comment on a brief report from Sapa Reuter that the Spanish Youth Front has offered cash prizes for poems expressing the suffering of the Spanish soul over the fact that Gibraltar is not in their possession:

If poets are indeed, as Shelley enthusiastically declared, the “unacknowledged legislators of the world”, the British Foreign Minister and the British War Office have grave reason to be perturbed. The Spaniards, having failed for two centuries to redress their wrongs through force of arms, have now mobilised their poets to celebrate “the pain and hopes that are aroused in the Spanish soul by the absence of Gibraltar.” Spanish poetry, stimulated by the offer of prizes of ten and twenty pounds, may be expected to rise to new heights of inspiration. If they cannot rain down atom bombs,

they will certainly call upon Jove to strike with his thunderbolts, and will do their best to mobilise angels and archangels against the common enemy.

It is to be hoped that the British Foreign Office (in collaboration, of course, with the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Poetry League, and the British Council) is not remaining inactive in the face of this threat. British poets - we may no longer talk of "English" poetry - are not to be despised, and they should be able to put up a stout defence of the Rock. We hope that they will be invited to portray in stirring verses the pride and determination that are aroused in British hearts by the retention of Gibraltar. They should if possible be offered prizes of from fifteen to twenty-five pounds.

"The Rock" in *The Natal Witness*, Thursday, 2 August, 1951

With regard to political issues Durrant remained unrelenting in his criticism of the implementation of Apartheid policies throughout the 1950s. Initially he comments on the manoeuvres of the Nationalist government with the assumption that their disregard for the constitution could be counteracted by the people exercising their democratic rights and fulfilling their duties as citizens of such a society. Typical of this type of comment is the following, written during the emergence of the constitutional crises early in the 1950s in which Durrant urges the Natal Provincial Council not to direct their protest to the Government, but:

... to the people of South Africa and they must call for a steeling of the will and a strengthening of the mind against the moral disruptions with which the nation is now threatened. The Government proposes to set aside, by a deliberate act, a covenant upon which the Union is based; we must call upon the people to defend that covenant. The agreement which was solemnly concluded by the four Provinces is to be cynically torn up, and pledges which have publicly been given, are publicly broken. We must call upon the people of all four of the Provinces to unite in an affirmation of the principles without which there can be no ordered society ...

"A Call to the Nation" in *The Natal Witness*, Saturday, March 17, 1951

During this period the individual citizen is also reminded of his duties, as in the leading articles of 12 June and 8 July 1952. In the first of these, entitled "Little Men", Durrant points out that a situation has arisen in South Africa in which no-one could afford to stay aloof from political strife. The individual shares with institutions such as the Churches, Universities and Trade Unions the duty to raise his voice in his own defence and in the defence of a civilised way of life, since "... if he fails to take an open stand upon the fundamental encroachments

on both individual and corporate rights, he is a moral coward, or worse". In the second comment Durrant writes:

The present situation in South Africa, however difficult it may be, has at least one advantage: it compels even those who have in the past been indifferent to political questions to pay the most earnest attention to them. In South Africa our young people have in the past grown up in a society in which the basic principles of law and Western civilisation have been taken for granted, at least so far as civilised men are concerned. Freedom from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, the liberty of the Press, the sanctity of the Law, and the other fundamental conditions of a civilised existence have been simply taken for granted as a natural inheritance. All these are now threatened by a ruthless and determined group of men, supported by a powerful and highly organised group of voters. South Africa, almost alone save for the members of the Soviet group within the United Nations, has refused to sign the Declaration of Human Rights which protects these elementary liberties; the daily list of political arrests demonstrate to the whole world what politics our Government is committed to. There is no possibility of misrepresentation or "propaganda" here. The Government has quite clearly chosen repression as its policy for South Africa.

"No Compromise" in *The Natal Witness*, Tuesday, July 8, 1952

As early as 1952 Durrant seems to realise, however, that the Apartheid machinery could not be stopped, and that it did not make sense anymore to react to the policies and actions of the government on the basis of liberal democratic principles. In his assessment of the political situation he now urges the people as well as political parties to recognise the revolutionary and dictatorial nature of the government:

The political education of South Africa goes on apace. The present crisis has brought to the light of day many Nationalist attitudes and aims which have been carefully concealed from public gaze. We now know without the possibility of doubt what the Nationalist Party means by the "volkswil" – it means not a majority of the electorate, but the will of that part of Afrikanerdom which supports the Nationalist Party. We also know what the Nationalist Party thinks of the courts, and how much respect it has for their decisions. We have, moreover, learned exactly how much reliance can be placed on assurances made by spokesman of the Nationalist Party.

"Now We Know" in *The Natal Witness*, Tuesday, May 15, 1952

The present session of Parliament has already confirmed the worst fears which were aroused by the choice of Dr. Verwoerd as Prime Minister. Highly contentious Bills are being rushed through the House with ruthless speed, and the arguments of the Opposition are treated with contemptuous indifference. It is not too much to say that the whole purpose of Parliament is being radically subverted by the dictatorial and wholly unreasonable attitude of the Government, and the time has clearly come for the Opposition to reconsider its attitude to the work of Parliament.

Mrs. Helen Suzman put the point very well when she said in a recent debate: “I sometimes wonder whether the United Party is not rendering a disservice to democracy by sitting here. South Africa is not enjoying a Parliamentary democracy in the full meaning of the word today.” We believe that she speaks for a large and increasing body of opinion. There has too long been an almost pathetic eagerness to pretend that politics is a sporting venture in which a cheerful acceptance of defeat and a willingness to abide by the rules is the chief virtue of an Opposition. This may be a useful and even admirable attitude when normal parliamentary conditions prevail. But the rules of the game have been deliberately perverted in order to deny the representatives of half of the White population, and of the whole non-European population, even the slightest vestige of an influence on the conduct of affairs in South Africa. Dr. Verwoerd has done the country a service in making quite plain the essential revolutionary and anti-democratic attitude of this party. Even the most blinkered and self-deceiving of Opposition politicians must by now begin to see the reality of the situation and to wonder whether the United Party’s participation in the affairs of Parliament is not doing more harm than good.

“The Crisis in Parliament” in *The Natal Witness*, Monday, May 4, 1959

Another development in Durrant’s understanding of the political situation in South Africa during the 1950s is the realisation that a common denominator such as “the people”, “the electorate”, or “the citizen” no longer applied to South African society. He therefore became, to an increasing extent, an advocate for minority groups excluded from full citizenship. In principal he assumes the role of spokesman for the liberally minded English-speaking South African in censuring the dictatorial policies and actions of government. He appeals to this group to find the courage to face the fact that the future lies in the hands of an extreme and illiberal Afrikaner dictatorship, and arguing that their strength in facing the dangers of this future lies in their inherited traditions and values, since:

...the chief of these dangers is that we may, in our anxiety not to offend moderate Afrikaner opinion, begin to deny, or at least, “play down” our own inherited values. Our political leaders seem to be afraid to speak up for the ideals of Magna Carta, for the Anglo-Saxon political tradition which has inspired both the British Commonwealth and the United States, for the system of law which we have inherited, and for the values which spring from our religious beliefs, from our literature, and from our tradition. There has been too much jingoistic flag-wagging in Natal in the past; but in the reaction against this we have allowed ourselves to feel ashamed of our best traditions. No good can come of abnegation and self-abasement. We must be true to ourselves if we do not wish to become slaves.

“Face the Facts” in *The Natal Witness*, Wednesday, June 18, 1952

Although the plight of the English-speaking South African remains Durrant's first concern, and he often comments on the developments regarding the political status of the non-European from this point of view, he is not insensitive to the unjust manner in which non-Europeans were treated by the Apartheid government. Typical of his treatment of this issue are the following two excerpts, the first of which is a comment on the report of an outbreak of riots in Cato Manor in June 1959, and the second a report of a discussion in parliament early in 1960 of the Population Register Act for racial classification:

The rioting at Cato Manor, shocking though it is, comes as no surprise. Social workers and others have again and again drawn the public's attention to the evils that flourish in this enclave of misery within one of the most prosperous cities in the world. Overcrowding, grinding poverty, insecurity and disease make anything like a decent human existence impossible for most of the inhabitants of this great slum; and when to these brutalising evils there are added the constant fear of eviction, of the breaking up of family life, or of arrest for some technical offence, there can be little reason for astonishment at the outbreak that has occurred. Admittedly some progress has been made in the improvement of slum conditions since the riots of 1949, but much more is needed if a whole generation were to be saved from brutalisation. The rioters were for the most part women; yet in their blind fury they destroyed the very institutions created to help them. It is hard to imagine a more striking proof of the effects of ignorance and poverty upon a people which once was law-abiding and disciplined. These, it must not be forgotten, are the mothers of the new generation. It is clear that in permitting such conditions to exist the nation is sowing dragons' teeth, and will reap a harvest that will be bitter for both Black and White alike.

"The Cesspool" in *The Natal Witness*, Monday, June 22, 1959

For many individual persons the results of a new classification may be heart-breaking; but this is as nothing to the degradation involved – both for the official and his victim – in the examination of a human being to determine whether his skin colour, the shape of his nose, the growth of his hair, and other biological characteristics require that he shall be classified in a particular section of the immutable racial groups into which Nationalists fanaticism has now by force of law divided mankind in South Africa.

Differences of class and caste are known to exist in most countries, and it is generally agreed that governments cannot remove this, but it is increasingly agreed that it is the duty of a government to lighten the burden of social prejudice and discrimination. In South Africa alone in the whole wide world can we observe the spectacle of a government deliberately tightening the fetters of social discrimination on its victims. This is bad enough in the eyes of the world, but what makes it even more horrifying is its racist nature. South Africans and the South African government have failed to realise what a profound impression was made on the conscience of the world by the National-Socialist experiment in Germany and occupied Europe where racial principles and racial classification led to horrors previously unimaginable. But the ultimate horror of National-Socialism was made possible only by a gradual diminution of the sense of common humanity in large sections of the German people and in

German officialdom. How else could anybody have been found, in so civilised a nation as Germany, to man the gas chambers and carry out the orders of Hitler – it was by means of racial classification and the systematic but gradual introduction of racial discrimination that the elementary principles of humanity were undermined. South Africa has already gone further than Nazi Germany in making the carrying of the African racial identity card compulsory. South Africa has chosen to fly in the face of world morality and of the world-wide hatred of racialism.

“Our Human Stud Book” in *The Natal Witness*, Friday, February 12, 1960

As in his speeches, Durrant analyses the situation of the non-European in terms of its broader social and moral implications and appeals to the individual to stand up and speak out against encroachments on elementary liberties underlying a democratic society. This connection between self-interest and the general good of society informs Durrant’s writing in general, whether he is defining the aims of an English School or addresses an audience on political issues.

## Notes: Chapter 4

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<sup>1</sup> The use of “culture” in both with a narrow and a wide sense, coincides with the definition of this concept by Raymond Williams. Williams indicates that the meaning of “culture” changed during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and he defines this change as follows: “Before this period, it had meant, primarily, the ‘tending of natural growth’, and then, by analogy, to a process of human training. But this latter use, which had usually been a culture *of* something, was changed, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, to *culture* as such, a thing in itself. It came to mean, first, ‘a general state or habit of the mind’, having close relations with the idea of human perfection. Second, it came to mean ‘the general state of intellectual development, in society as a whole’. Third, it came to mean ‘the general body of the arts’. Fourth, later in the century, it came to mean ‘a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual’” (1958:16).

<sup>2</sup> This lecture remained unpublished and is undated. A copy of the typescript version of the lecture housed in the Msunduzi Municipal Library in Pietermaritzburg is attached at the end of this study as “Addendum A”.

<sup>3</sup> The society provides information about themselves on their publications. On the back page of *Making up our Minds: Propaganda and Public Opinion* they state their aims and objectives as “[t]he promotion of the social, economic and political organisation and advancement of all races in Southern Africa” and “[t]o work through the people it is designed to help to teach them to organise their Trade Unions, to stimulate and encourage Co-operative effort of all kinds.” They appeal to the general public for support “on the ground that the organisation is a practical experiment in guidance and help to the under-privileged section of our community, to save them from the counsels of irresponsible extremists, and to instruct them in the arts of peaceful relations and lawful negotiation.”

<sup>4</sup> Durrant’s view of the South African press of the 1940s as being exploited by big business and government is supported in the analysis of Sandwith (1998b) of the significance of the journal *Trek* during this period. With reference to studies of Lindsay Smith and G.H. Calpin, Sandwith points to the fact that the English daily press

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of the 1940s was largely controlled by the South African mining industry. She singles out *Trek* as exceptional in its independent and outspoken criticism of this situation and credits Durrant for taking a similar position in *Making up our Minds: Propaganda and Public Opinion*: “In characteristically outspoken style, *Trek* 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 interest of the gold mining trusts” (24 September 1943:11). In a more general examination of South African commercial culture and its deleterious effects Geoffrey Durrant (1944) makes much the same point, at the same time commending both *The Forum* and *Trek* for their more independent position” (1998:18).

<sup>5</sup> Johnson identifies Geoffrey Durrant, D.R.C. Marsh and Christina van Heyningen as the three most prolific Shakespeare critics of the 1950s (Johnson 1989:147).

<sup>6</sup> For the full bibliographic details of the article Johnson refers to here see Durrant (1955a).

<sup>7</sup> In the section dealing with Durrant as representative of a “Leavisian discourse” Sandwith discusses Durrant (1944a), (1945a), (1945b), (1949) (1952a), a speech entitled “Problems in the Teaching of Poetry” delivered at the First conference of University Teachers of English held at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1946, and the following newspaper reports of speeches by Durrant: “S.A. Universities are Turning out ‘Barbarians’ says Natal Professor” *The Natal Witness*, 26 April 1950; “Announcers given Broadside” *The Natal Mercury*, 6 May 1950; and “Substitutes for Cultures” *The Natal Witness*, 15 May 1951.

<sup>8</sup> See Durrant (1959a).

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter two for a discussion of these views.

<sup>10</sup> Durrant is probably referring to the policy regarding the voting rights of non-Europeans adopted by the United Party government after 1936. The ‘Native Bills’ which were passed in Parliament in this year determined that non-Europeans could participate in central government only through three white representatives in the Assembly.

<sup>11</sup> Although the terms “European” and “Non-European” could be seen as outdated today and as a simplification of the racial and cultural divisions of South African society, they are used here in summarising Durrant’s arguments since these are the terms used in the newspaper reports of his speeches as well as in his own writing.

<sup>12</sup> The United Party became the official Opposition in Parliament after the election victory of the National Party in 1948.

<sup>13</sup> See “Addendum A”.

<sup>14</sup> See Davenport (1992:343).

<sup>15</sup> See for a discussion of this crisis Davenport (1992:29-332, 342-343).

<sup>16</sup> Durrant is referring to the two and a half years (1937 to the middle of 1939) which he spent as lecturer in the English Seminar at the University of Tübingen, Germany.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EVALUATION

*Those who are engaged today in the criticism of literature, whether as teachers in schools and universities, as reviewers, or merely in the course of conversation at cocktail parties, must often have occasion to ask themselves why they bother to do it ...*

(Durrant 1952a:1)

*The true 'community' is a community of human beings, whose needs are just as much for an adequate system of values as for bread and cheese.*

(Durrant 1959:17-18)

### INTRODUCTION

In the introductory chapter of this study two objectives have been formulated, namely to bring to attention the writing of Geoffrey Hugh Durrant, and to relate this body of writing to the present situation of university English studies in South Africa. The first objective has been realised in the exposition provided in chapters two, three and four of Durrant's views on the task of English Studies at the university, the nature of literature and literary criticism, and on South African society. It remains, in conclusion, to make a critical assessment of the relevance of Durrant's writing to the orientations of English Studies in South Africa today.

### THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT OF DURRANT'S WRITING

Durrant's primary concern is the task of English Studies at the university. In defining this task Durrant aligns himself with the critical tradition which at a conceptual level originated in the writing of Matthew Arnold by the middle of the nineteenth century, but came to full fruition only after 1917 in the Cambridge English School, and in particular as defined in the critical work of I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis. The essential premise of this tradition is that in a rapidly changing modern society traditional culture is threatened, and that literary studies can provide a cure for this situation. At the heart of this belief is the assumption that the literary



text represents a form of language which is unique and intrinsically more valuable than other forms of language use. The singularity of the literary text lies in its superior complexity and in its unitary internal organisation. Competence in this type of discourse equips the individual, and by extension a community of human beings, with the critical abilities requisite to sustaining a particular, valued way of life through which continuity with the past is kept alive.

The specific formulation of this critical position by different critics is coloured by factors such as historical circumstances, social position, educational environment, and personal disposition. In some cases these factors are spelt out, but more often than not they operate as unspoken assumptions.

Durrant's literary critical alignment is clearly evident from his inaugural address in the mission he formulates for English Studies, the manner in which he motivates this mission, and in his acknowledgement of influences. Durrant's role in establishing the critical assumptions and teaching approaches of the Cambridge School in South African universities has been acknowledged in critiques of his work in earlier academic studies.<sup>1</sup> In earlier sections of this study it has been pointed out that aspects of these existing critiques are problematic. This is also true with regard to judgements made about the specific nature of Durrant's indebtedness to the Cambridge School.

Durrant's approach to English Studies is often characterised by the blanket term "practical criticism", as in the pronouncement in Penrith that "Practical Criticism had become firmly entrenched at Natal with Professor Durrant" (1972:128), and the judgement by Doherty that Durrant has to be credited with "unquestionably the most coherent application of practical criticism in a social context that was ever produced in South Africa" (1989:107). In other instances Durrant's views are equated with those of Leavis or in a broader sense with the Leavisian approach. Doherty, for instance, judges Durrant's inaugural address as "plainly indebted to Leavis' position as it was articulated in the *Education and the University*

pamphlet of 1943” (1989:107). In similar fashion Johnson both (1996) and Sandwith (2005) characterise Durrant as a “Leavisite critic”.

Although it is certainly true that Durrant’s general approach is coterminous with that of Leavis as the then dominant voice of the Cambridge School, a closer consideration of Durrant’s writing makes it clear that to label him as “Leavisite” is an oversimplification. Such a closer consideration reveals in the first place that Durrant’s primary indebtedness is to I.A. Richards, and in the second place that he has to be credited for a measure of original thought.

With regard to Durrant’s inaugural address, which represents his most comprehensive formulation of the task of English Studies, the dominance of Richards’ influence is immediately evident from the reading list provided in the published text. It includes two Leavisian works, namely *Culture and Environment* (1933) co-authored by Denys Thompson and *Education and the University* (1943). These are, however, outweighed by the inclusion of I.A. Richards’ *Practical Criticism* (1929), *Interpretation in Teaching*<sup>2</sup> (1938), *How to Read a Page* (1942), as well as *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923) and *Basic English and its Uses* (1935) written in co-operation with C.K. Ogden.

In a more general sense Durrant is indebted to Richards in matters such as: the identification of mental and emotional regression as the primary concern in the analysis of modern culture; the definition of the nature of the literary text and critical activity in terms of the concepts of “experience” and “value”; the definition of “disinterestedness” as the ideal state of mind connected with the benefits of literary study; and a preoccupation with clear, effective language use as the basis for improved mutual understanding.

With regard to crediting Durrant for independent thinking and for making a personal contribution to the critical framework within which he wrote I would like to single out two matters. In the first place Durrant should be credited for his interpretation of “practical criticism” as presented in the 1948 paper entitled “The Place of Practical Criticism in the

University”. Although essentially indebted to Richards’ concept, Durrant presents his definition with clarity and precision, qualities often lacking in Richards’ writing, without compromising the intellectual force of his argument. In arguing that the essential mental activity involved in practical criticism is “an art which we all practice”, Durrant’s definition escapes the elitism of the Leavisian position. At the same time practical criticism is identified as an integral task of the university English School and Durrant argues convincingly that as such it can be practiced as a strenuous, verifiable academic activity in which understanding and judgment of the literary text remain essential.

The second, and more important, aspect of Durrant’s writing to be singled out is his willingness to point out the logical consequences of the cultural analysis implicit in the literary critical tradition to which he subscribes, where “culture” includes politics, something which was never done by the Cambridge critics. Durrant’s first publications are not literary critical in nature, but are the two pamphlets which appeared in 1944, cautioning the general public that the survival of democracy cannot be taken for granted in the conditions anticipated in the post-war period:

Parliament, a “free Press”, the liberty of assembly, and liberty of speech, have been won in the past after a hard struggle and have so far been preserved against all attacks. With the defeat of Nazism in the war the immediate external danger to such institutions will be removed.

But nobody seriously thinks that success in the war and the preservation of free institutions automatically guarantee the future of democracy. On the contrary, while the democracies have shown a vigour in the prosecution of the war that has surprised both their friends and their enemies, we are all very much aware that new and urgent problems have arisen. War sets up internal strains which do not end with the signing of the peace, and the post-war period may well be more dangerous to freedom than the war itself.

(Durrant 1944a:2)

For a post-war South Africa these words of Durrant proved to be prophetic, given the consequences of the coming into power of the National Party in 1948 for the democratic institutions Durrant has in mind here. In chapter four it has been established that Durrant remained active in his criticism of Apartheid until he left South Africa in 1961. From the

discussion of the circumstances surrounding this departure in chapter one it is clear that it was necessitated by Durrant's conviction that, in the context of intensified political repression by 1960, he and his family were in personal danger. The explanation for Durrant's sustained public resistance, despite these consequences for his personal life, lies in his conception of his duty as citizen, which for him is not to be separated from his duty as university teacher. Durrant's conviction of the inextricable nature of these two aspects of life is most explicitly motivated in the speech "A Challenge to Us as Citizens":

The situation in South Africa has been developing so slowly, by such small degrees, that we are often tempted to imagine to ourselves that nothing serious has happened. There is the continual pressure of our daily routine. Most of us have preferred to get on with our jobs as business men or teachers, to pursue with our amusements, and our sports, and leave political questions to the politicians. We certainly do not want to become, as certain unfortunate people have become in modern times, obsessed with problems of power, obsessed with politics, and incapable of living a private life. On the contrary, if most of us take part in politics, it is because we are now convinced that a decent private life, a self-respecting existence, is likely to become impossible unless we do take an active interest in politics and learn to safeguard the values by which we and our children can live.

I speak then, I think, for the ordinary "unpolitical" citizen; that is, the citizen who does not want to be "political" but who realises that a situation has come about where it is impossible to remain aside from the struggle. As a university teacher, I feel this all the more strongly because before the Second World War I spent some time in Germany, where the tradition of non-interference in political questions by university teachers was deeply rooted. There I saw the bitter fruit of a century of indifference on the part of intellectuals, and especially university teachers, to the political problems of their country. A situation where, not merely had the universities no influence, but where they were in fact compelled to introduce the doctrines of their political rulers, into the very heart of their teaching in the classrooms ...

(Unpublished Address)

It is thus Durrant's belief that indifference, failure to judge and resist unacceptable political developments, to "leave political questions to the politicians", will ultimately endanger the "values by which we and our children can live" and make a self-respecting existence impossible. For university teachers in particular such an attitude of indifference will eventually leave universities with no authority, "compelled to introduce the doctrines of their political rulers into the very heart of their teaching in the classrooms ...".

It is in this fusion of the essential duty of the ordinary citizen and the university teacher that I see the central argument of Durrant's writing. He made the claim in his inaugural address that "English Studies ... will make possible, if rightly followed, a more intelligent political activity, a clearer sense of ultimate values and a generally higher standard of human life" (1945:3). This social mission of English Studies depends on the fostering of a critical ability through engagement with the particular form of language use unique to the literary text:

The study of poetry, of drama, and of the novel at its best (...) 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. To do this gives us a more comprehensive and delicate understanding of the life around us, and at the same time gives us a better control over the intricacies of language, so that we can think more clearly for ourselves.

(Durrant 1949)

The standards of thought and understanding set by the literary text become the touchstones for life around us in all its various aspects. For Durrant the political dimension of life cannot be excluded from intellectual scrutiny, especially when traditional values become threatened by the actions of political leaders or groupings.

### **DURRANT AND ENGLISH STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY**

The general conception of crisis and the nature of this crisis in the discipline of English Studies at South African universities today have been outlined in chapter one by drawing on recent academic articles. The crisis in English studies is commonly seen as symptomatic of a more fundamental crisis in the definition of the nature of university study. This definition is in essential aspects determined by the Democratic government's vision for higher education which emerged in the latter half of the 1990s. Within this framework the study of literature and language in their traditional forms has been scaled down considerably.

Critics commenting on the current position of English Studies generally criticise the Outcomes Based Education system and the broader ethos characteristic of South African universities for defining knowledge and understanding in terms of measurable, controllable criteria and for facilitating measures of bureaucratic monitoring which militate against academic freedom and are aimed at homogenizing compliance. It is in this environment where the university has become just another bureaucratic system facilitating a trade in information that Durant's definition of the essential task of the university and of English Studies needs to be reasserted.

For Durrant the university as institution is indispensable to society because of its unique function as guardian of a specific type of intellectual activity. Durrant specifies this activity to be a "disinterested pursuit of truth" which he defines as fostering "a distinctive power of subordinating immediate interests to the broader view, and of seeing [one]self and others in terms of general truth" (1959:13). This task cannot be fulfilled when the university isolates itself from the world outside but only when there is "a continual interchange of ideas, a continual interplay of influence between a university and the community around it" (1945:8). The intellectual activity which is the unique contribution of the university to the community, the "general truth" which forms the basis of judging oneself and others, lies for Durrant in "cultivating intellectual clarity and detachment" (1959:17). It is, in other words, an ability of critical discernment, and it is in this realm that the essential task of the university and that of English Studies coincide. Durrant sees the primary task of English Studies as maintaining the very highest standards in critical studies by equipping students with knowledge and understanding of literary texts. The ensuing kind of discrimination cultivated in them provides the norm for judging all forms of communication.

It is important to point to the essential difference between this position and that of recent defences of English Studies as a form of general "communication studies", taking as its object

any type of writing. In the fostering of this type of “critical literacy” as propounded, for instance, by John Higgins, literature is understood in its original sense as being derived “from the Latin *littera*, a letter of the alphabet ... a condition of reading, of being able to read and having read, a sense much closer to contemporary literacy” and literary studies is seen as “the development of the analytical skills which enable one to take critical distance from what is written” (1992:198-199).<sup>3</sup> Higgins argues that in this approach, in contrast to defining English Studies as a canonical body of texts, the focus is on the methods, practices and techniques used for training students in skills in reading and analysis. He aligns himself with the work of Raymond Williams and Edward Said in which language is assigned a fully dialectical function which enables the development of a critical consciousness. To substantiate his position Higgins quotes from Said:

... the individual consciousness [is] placed at a sensitive nodal point, and it is this consciousness at that critical point which [I] attempt to explore in the form of what I call *criticism*. On the one hand, the individual mind registers and is very much aware of the collective whole, context or situation in which it finds itself. On the other hand, precisely because of this awareness – a worldly, self-situating, a sensitive response to the dominant culture – the individual consciousness is not naturally and easily a mere child of the culture, but a historical and social actor in it. And because of that perspective, which introduces circumstance and distinction where there had only been conformity and belonging, there is distance, or what we might also call criticism.

(Said 1983:15)

Durrant would be in agreement with Said’s idea of the role of the individual consciousness and with Higgins’ insistence on the importance of cultivating in students a critical consciousness which renders them not just products of culture, but agents in it. Durrant would, however, not agree with Higgins’ position that such a critical facility can be developed with equal effect by examining passages from *Othello* and from a *Cape Times* editorial. For Durrant only the literary text contains language with the necessary complexity and unitary internal organisation suitable as the object of study. Mastery of this type of text affords the level of critical perception and thought suitable as a yardstick for “judging rightly the efficacy and value of any communication” (1948:4) and thus lays the

foundation for a civil self capable of the critical judgments essential for the higher standard of human life Durrant has in mind when he writes about the contribution of English Studies to the community. It is interesting to note the similarity of Durrant's position regarding the unique value of the literary text to that of Said, in contrast to the position taken by Higgins in his definition of "critical literacy":

To read a book, and especially a literary work, is in the full sense of the word an expenditure of a highly concentrated and disciplined energy during a protracted period of time. This is a unique activity for which there is no real analogy; it is not like watching a screen or walking on the beach ... In no verbal artefact is language used to greater effect and with more complexity than in literature and this is why the heart of the cultural enterprise has always been organised around works of literary, figural art.

(Said 2001:14)

In critiques of the current position of English Studies within the broader ethos of contemporary South African universities such as those considered in chapter one, it is not uncommon to find characterisations of the value and role of literary studies very similar in nature to those offered by Durrant. Compare, for example, the following:

Literature provides a means for comparison, for the appreciation of difference, as well as the affirmation of the self (one's own culture and traditions). Reading about other cultures does not mean one has to endorse their traditions, but acknowledge them, attempt to accommodate them and adjust one's perceptions. If we wish to educate versatile thinkers and innovators, we do not want them to strive for uniformity that would incur mediocrity, but to celebrate difference and individuality, that would stimulate social and intellectual development ...

(Wentzel 2005:75)

What literature affords us above all is the opportunity to encounter other minds in their full complexity, to imagine and to empathize with a range of human thought and feeling that it is simply impossible for us to experience directly (...) The core business of the Department of English, in South Africa no less than elsewhere, should be in "the cultural enterprise" of humanity through the teaching of literature. This remains the subtlest yet most effective way of producing "critical readers" – men and women well prepared to "grasp and dissent from (their) fate as citizens in society".<sup>4</sup>

(Cornwell 2005:52-53)

Arguments like these for the vital importance of the unique contribution of literary studies towards a critical consciousness, or in Durrant's terms the ability to see oneself and others in



terms of general truth are, however, today mainly put forward by academics within the discipline of English Studies to their (often like-minded) colleagues through the pages of literary critical journals or at academic conferences. Although such a process of reflection within the discipline is necessary and healthy, academics have to assume a greater responsibility in trying to influence general opinion. Academics have to, as Durrant cautioned in his inaugural lecture “urgently need to know, and to tell the public, what benefits, other than a richer life for ourselves, can be claimed from literary studies in a university” (1945:3). The urgency of this duty has become greater in our own times and in our own community, given the deepening disregard for the traditional conception of the nature of university study, and in particular the disregard for the importance of this institution as guardian of a unique type of knowledge indispensable to a community of human beings. It is therefore today, even more so than in Durrant’s time, necessary to publicly insist that literary studies, traditionally the core business of the university English School, remain indispensable in our endeavours towards attaining a higher standard of human life.

## Notes: Chapter 5

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<sup>1</sup> These studies are: Penrith (1972), Doherty (1989), Johnson (1996), and Sandwith (1998b) and (2005).

<sup>2</sup> The title is given erroneously as *Interpretation and Teaching* in Durrant (1945a:21).

<sup>3</sup> Higgin’s definition of “literature” draws on Williams (1977).

<sup>4</sup> Cornwell quotes from Said (2001:19).

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## ADDENDUM A

### CHALLENGE TO US AS CITIZENS

by Prof. G.H. Durrant

As has been explained to you, my contribution to the series of lectures is different from those that you have already heard. It is not, as were the speeches by Dr. Thompson and Mr. Franklin, the speech of an expert in a particular field. They have given you the constitutional and legal aspects of our present situation, and they have been able to do so authoritatively as experts in those particular fields. When I was asked by the Women's League for the Defence of the Constitution to come to Johannesburg to speak in a series of lectures, I was very highly honoured, because it seems to me that this particular movement has succeeded in quickening the imagination and touching the hearts of the people of South Africa in a remarkable way.

I remember that during last winter I was in Pretoria for a meeting. On a bitterly cold night – I think I went to the cinema that night – waiting at the bus stop in an icy wind, I was very conscious of the women who were waiting in their “lager” outside the Union Buildings to present their petition to the Government against the Senate Act. And so to be invited to speak at this organisation was to me a very great honour, and an unexpected one. I did not see what I personally could contribute. Then I thought that it would be wrong to refuse such an invitation and that I should come to speak to you, not as a university professor, not as a specialist in any field of politics, because I am not; but as a citizen who is deeply concerned, as you all are, about the threat to our liberties and to the future of our children.

The situation in South Africa has been developing so slowly, by such small degrees, that we are often tempted to imagine to ourselves that nothing serious has happened. There is the continual pressure of our daily routine. Most of us have preferred to get on with our jobs as business men or teachers, to pursue with our amusements, and our sports, and leave political questions to the politicians. We certainly do not want to become, as certain unfortunate people have become in modern times, obsessed with problems of power, obsessed with politics, and incapable of living a private life. On the contrary, if most of us take part in politics, it is because we are now convinced that a decent private life, a self-respecting existence, is likely to become impossible unless we do take an active interest in politics and learn to safeguard the values by which we and our children can live.

I speak then, I think, for the ordinary “unpolitical” citizen; that is, the citizen who does not want to be “political” but who realises that a situation has come about where it is impossible to remain aside from the struggle. As a university teacher, I feel this all the more strongly because before the Second World War I spent some time in Germany, where the tradition of non-interference in political questions by university teachers was deeply rooted. There I saw the bitter fruit of a century of indifference on the part of intellectuals, and especially university teachers, to the political problems of their country. A situation where, not merely had the universities no influence, but where they were in fact compelled to introduce the doctrines of their political rulers, into the very heart of their teaching in the classrooms, and where relationship between teachers and student were poisoned by the political spy.

Now that, you may think, is a situation that could not come about in South Africa because, as we are told, South Africans are a liberty-loving people. I think that is a very poor consolation for the actual loss of our liberties. The love of liberty is really a matter of habit, and those who have been accustomed to freedom may gradually become accustomed to its loss, and, if the process goes far enough, will be perfectly happy to remain unfree. For these reasons then I felt it was right for me to accept the invitation to speak in Johannesburg, even though I am painfully conscious that I have no particular qualification for this task. What I propose to do then this evening is to outline to you the situation as I see it. It is not the official view of the organisation that I am putting to you, it is my own; and it is designed not to persuade you to agree with me, but rather to stimulate you to questions and discussion, which I hope will follow when I have finished speaking.

The other speakers have outlined to you the way in which the Union of South Africa came into being from the four separate colonies or states of which it was composed; and how the constitution given to us at Union was based upon the belief that undertakings freely entered into would be honoured, and that there would be a gradual amalgamation of the provinces into a single nationhood upon the basis of the agreement entered into at Union. That great ideal is perhaps one to which the Province of Natal subscribed more reluctantly than the other provinces, but the ideal seemed at one time to be in the process of realisation. Many thought that, in two world wars, and in spite of many differences, South Africa had learned how to go forward in freedom and confidence to a hopeful future.

How many of us foresaw before 1948 the bitter path of division, darkness, steady loss of liberties, that lay ahead? Some did; very few. My colleague, Prof. Keppell-Jones, saw the great tragedy that lay ahead; he wrote it all down before the actual catastrophe, and he not only accounted for the immediate future, but provided an estimate of what would happen for some years ahead. That estimate has been proved wrong in only one respect, -- in that it proved to be more optimistic, or shall we say less pessimistic, than it would have been if he had in fact written down exactly what was going to happen.

What has brought us to this state where instead of unity, growing freedom, improved relations with the non-European people of South Africa, we have precisely the opposite process going on? As I see it the causes are deep-rooted, and will not be eradicated by any victory of a particular party at the polls, will not be eradicated by any trick or by any immediate success of a superficially political kind. They are so deep-rooted that I fear that they may only be eradicated by the bitter experience of the consequences that must follow from this division. I think it was Bismarck who said that "experience is a hard school, but it is the only one a fool will learn in." But there is in fact a place for hope; and what I, at any rate, believe (or otherwise I could not be a teacher) is that men and women have a capacity for learning through imagination, through intelligence, and through thought; that we need not, in fact, wait to learn by bitter experience. We can imagine what will happen; and those of us who are articulate, who have the power of speech, who can teach and talk to other people, have an overwhelming duty laid upon us to encourage thought and imagination, and to try to show our fellow citizens what the end of this road is likely to be. To do that, if we are going to speak to our fellow citizens with force, authority and clarity, we have to be clear ourselves about what we think is wrong. I am going to say what I think is wrong, what I think are the causes of this; though you may very well disagree with me.

I think we must see that both European population groups are deeply to blame. There was the great wrong of the Boer War – one which was bound to leave scars, bound to leave bitterness behind – and I think there has been some failure on the part of English-speaking South Africans (again I think especially in Natal) to realise how inevitable and how deep the scars and the bitterness must be. But equally, having said that, it seems to be plain – as I think it was plain to Smuts and Botha – that if this great experiment of a united South Africa was to succeed, there must also be deliberate attempt on the part of the intellectual leaders of Afrikanerdom to combat this bitterness and to help their people to overcome it. The reality is that the intellectual leaders of Afrikanerdom, or those who have so established themselves, have set themselves to the very opposite task of kindling that bitterness and feeding it for their own political ends. Behind that failure of both parts of the European population of South Africa in their relationship to each other I believe lies something still more fundamental – the failure of all European South Africans to face with courage and realism the problem of their relationship with the non-European.

I believe that to a very large extent our quarrels amongst the white people are the products of uneasy conscience, of fear, of doubt, and self-mistrust, that arise from our knowledge that a dreadful problem is spreading around whilst we are in fact failing to tackle it. Let us take a particular example to illustrate this.

We seem to forget that the present crisis over the Senate Act is the product of our fear of the non-European. The entrenched clauses that are affected by the Senate Act are those protecting the equality of the two official languages and the right of the coloured voter to vote on the common roll. It was in 1951, I think, that the Government, after being elected upon the policy of “apartheid in order to protect white civilisation” introduced a bill to place the coloured voters on a separate roll by a bare majority. Their claim to do this was the legal situation as it appeared to be to many people at the time. When this legislation was found invalid by the Appeal Court on the grounds that it had not in fact been performed in accordance with the Entrenched Clauses (which required a two-third majority of the two houses sitting together) the decision was accepted by the government in law, but not as morally and politically binding. The Government then proceeded to attempt to set aside the findings of the Courts by establishing its own High Court of Parliament. From the government’s defeat on that particular issue the Senate Act was born – an even more flagrant repudiation of constitutional principles, and like the high Court of Parliament, an attempt deliberately to set aside pledges which have been given most explicitly, in the strongest terms, by the very leaders of the party who are now proposing to enact its legislation.

This Act involves the Government in the repudiation of both Entrenched Clauses; and undoubtedly those of us who are English-speaking must feel alarm that the protection which the English language enjoys in our Constitution is now being threatened. But if we are honest we must admit that the purpose of the Government in the passing of the Senate Act and in introducing the High Court of Parliament, was not to attack the English language. The immediate purpose was to attack the rights of the coloured voters, and that purpose arises from the fear that if the franchise spreads further among non-Europeans the position of the white man will become intolerable. In other words, at the root of our constitutional crises, as I see it, lies a failure to establish clarity and confidence in our relations with the other peoples of South Africa.

Now what is the Government’s answer to this problem?

The first step towards the preservation of white civilisation, in the view of the Government and its supporters, is to create within the European population of South Africa an Afrikaner-volk, a nation within a nation, which is to be the “culture-bearer” of western civilisation, is to protect South Africa against liberalistic notions, and is to uphold the ideal of “baasskap”. Now those of us who think that this particular plan is going to be destroyed by – shall we say? – a victory for the opposition parties in the next election, are, I believe, living in a fool’s paradise. There is a general tendency amongst “progressives” and among the people who belong by sentiment to the “Left” to under-estimate the power of nationalism, because they themselves feel emancipated from national morality; and they are inclined to under-estimate the power of those passions amongst mankind at large. That is an error which has occurred over and over again in history since nations began to exist. I have no doubt it will go on occurring. The nationalist leaders understand very well the force and the strength of this feeling, and the Nationalist Part is merely the one-seventh of the iceberg that shows above the surface. The Opposition parties are political parties in the Victorian nineteenth century sense. They are concerned only with putting before the voters certain political programmes designed to attract voters of different kinds, different languages, religion and outlook. They appear not even to understand the political methods by which a single way of life is imposed upon a whole people.

We know how education, the churches, our cultural activities, commerce, - every branch of life, - is a field of activity for the nationalist politician; and it is in consequence of this that we are not dealing with an ordinary political “trend”. We are dealing with young men and women who have been indoctrinated with a whole set of values which, as I see it, are utterly alien to those held by the rest of European South Africa. So we now have the terrifying situation, as a result of a generation of teaching and intensive cultivation by the nationalists of two nations in South Africa (two European nations, quite apart from the Zulu nation, the Basotho nation and the Swazi nation). I don’t mean the English-speaking and the Afrikaans-speaking, because if anything, the rift between the Nationalist and the non-Nationalist Afrikaner is even deeper than that between the Afrikaner and the English-speaking South African. The rift lies between the Nationalist and the Non-Nationalist, and it is a rift which is becoming steadily deeper as the “nationalising” of education proceeds at every level.

Well now, you may say, what future do the Nationalists see in a South Africa so divided? The answer is quite clear; and if you talk to them they admit it quite frankly – if you talk to them intimately. They see the future of South Africa in the assimilation of ourselves and our children into the pattern of thought and behaviour which they have imposed upon their own young people. For them the answer is to have a monolithic, single European Volk in South Africa.

Now, as I see it, the revolution of 1948 - because I regard it as a revolution, not as an ordinary change of Government – represents a fundamental change in the whole pattern of development in South Africa. It was no momentary, accidental happening, caused by the bad luck of the United Party. It was the expression of a deep-rooted historical process which will not be reversed easily, and which offers a challenge to those of us who think differently from the Nationalists. That revolution, preceded by intensive cultivation, on all levels and through every possible agency, of Nationalist ideals among a particular group of the population, has consolidated its power by the “purging” of government agencies – the Civil Service, education, the Information Bureau, Railways – through the typical totalitarian pattern of making a change of government into a change in the whole pattern of economic and social life. It has proceeded to destroy what machinery existed for free consultation with the advanced



and educated leaders of the non-Europeans, and substituted dictatorial government discussion in a field where discussion was beginning to take the place of force. That has a further advantage for the Nationalists, because the greater the tension between the Europeans and the non-Europeans, the more likely it is that the voters will turn to the Nationalists as the one party which can guarantee to keep order at all costs.

The revolution has proceeded, as you have seen in the lectures you have already heard, through the steady abolition of the rights of the individual. If I speak to you now, it is a liberty I enjoy, not as a right, but by permission of the Minister of Justice, who could at any moment “deem” me to be a Communist, and could silence me from speaking in public. If I were to make a slip, and the “slip” need not be intentional, it has to be legally “calculated” (that means, “likely to provoke a breach of the law”) I could be sentenced to a fine of *f*500, be whipped, and imprisoned – imprisoned for five years I think it is. A newspaper now exists only because the Minister of the Interior decides not to suppress it. When we have to say that our liberties are held on sufferance, we cannot say that we are free. And the lesson of history is quite plain – that powers of this kind are always abused in the long run by those who have taken them.

Along with this removal of the rights of the individual goes the steady increase in executive powers – powers to proclaim a state of emergency and abolish almost all laws, and to allow policemen, any officer of the state, to act with impunity against any of us as he thinks fit. Powers of inspection, powers to raid our houses, powers to make us reside elsewhere than where we want to reside – there is hardly any power you could imagine that has not been given to the executive arm. And finally, this revolution has been sealed by the deliberate manipulation of the electoral system and the constitution to ensure that there can be no reversal of the revolution of 1948. Those who think otherwise, who believe that the appearance of democracy that goes on offers a real possibility of reversal in the immediate future, in the next election, are, I believe, living in a fool’s paradise.

We see, from the very highest level to the lowest, the determination of the Nationalist Party to play the game with us according to the rules which they will manipulate as the game goes on, to ensure that there cannot be any possibility of their losing it. The Senate Act, of course, which is the example which is the most clearly in our minds. It is perfectly simple, really, although the principle might be obscured by arguments about the will of the majority and arguments about the democratic right of the majority to rule. The simple fact is that according to law, a two-third majority of both Houses sitting together is required, and the Nationalists are by a bare majority of both Houses sitting separately, voting themselves the necessary votes to get the two-thirds majority. They have simply, to use a metaphor, forged a cheque. It is precisely the same, in politics, as if I were to take a cheque for *f*10 which somebody has given to me and simply added a nought to the end of it to make it *f*100. The morality is just as simple.

Now the same process is visible on the lowest level. There is no single person, including the Nationalists, who doubts that the reform of the School Board in the Transvaal is obviously intended, quite clearly and simply, to give greater chances for Nationalist candidates at the actual polls. Principle is entirely subordinated to opportunism and to the consolidating of the Nationalist revolution.

Now we are told Mr. Strydom and the leaders of the Nationalist Party are sincere men, and those of us who have talked to Nationalists know they are sincere men. They feel very strongly that they are doing right. They feel that they are right and that we are wrong. It would be very foolish to deny that. And they are sincere in another

sense. They are sincere in that they will stick to what they believe and they will fight for it. It is a pity we cannot say as much for all the political leaders of the Opposition. But “sincerity” is a dangerous word. I have heard Hitler speak, I have heard other Nazi leaders speak, I do not doubt for a moment that they were utterly sincere, if by sincerity we mean that they feel “in their guts” that they are right, and that they must enforce their will on other people. But there is the other kind of sincerity, the only kind of sincerity that is valuable, and that is intellectual sincerity, which consists of criticising yourself, questioning what you are doing, and allowing full force for your opponents’ arguments. That, and not the “voice of the guts”, is what I understand by Western Civilisation – the capacity to act according to reason, according to the highest convictions of man, and not according to human passion.

But this irrational, tribal view of politics which is advanced by the Nationalist Party is not purely a South African phenomenon. It is most important that we should recognise that. The doctrine that the voice of the people, of the “volk”, the populace, whatever you like, is the voice of God, is not a new doctrine. It is merely disguised in South Africa as the traditional voice of democracy.

There are two traditions of democracy. There is the Anglo-American tradition, the Western tradition if you like, which has ripened for many centuries, and which at its heart contains the doctrine that the majority have the right to rule, so long as they do not outrage the fundamental conviction of the minority over which they rule, so long as they take the reasoned arguments of that minority into full account, and so long as they rule by methods which have been agreed, upon the broadest possible basis, to be the right method of ruling.

Every single one of those conditions has been violated by the Nationalists. Even if we admit – which is not true – that they had a majority even of the White voters of this country, even if we were to admit that, it would still be true that the majority party in parliament ignores the fundamental convictions expressed, for example, by the Black Sash women – of a large proportion of the European population. More than that, I will say that they take deliberate pleasure in flouting those convictions and in demonstrating that they can act without taking those convictions into account. And part of their pride and joy in governing is in demonstrating that they can do that with impunity.

Secondly, by their contempt of Parliament, for the arguments of the Opposition, (let us admit that they are sometimes contemptible, but still they are not all contemptible) and by their complete disregard of the reasoned arguments brought against them, they are rapidly bringing the whole institution of Parliament into contempt.

I do not know, because I have not heard him, how impressive the Leader of the Opposition is when he speaks; but for a government party which packs the benches to talk, to read newspapers, and to laugh, and openly to ignore the Leader of the Opposition, is clearly an attitude which must, in the long run, make parliamentary government impossible. So that readiness to listen to the reasoned argument of the opposite party is certainly not evinced by the Nationalist Party.

And finally, is there any readiness to abide by Laws that have broadly been agreed upon? The lack of any such readiness is overwhelmingly demonstrated by their record on the Entrenched Clauses.

The Entrenched Clauses are a very good example, because they represent the only element of rigidity in our Constitution, the only element which requires this broad agreement before a change can be made; and here they have deliberately destroyed the possibility of going forward constitutionally in agreement with their fellow citizens.

I need not demonstrate further, then, that in one sense the government of this country is no longer democratic. it is “democratic” in another sense.

The leaders of the French Revolution, led by philosophers like Rousseau, taught and believed that the voice of the people as expressed by the majority was absolutely divine, that it had not only the political power, but the moral right and duty to impose its laws, even to the extent of destroying its opponents. Jacobinism is the right name for the doctrine that the majority is entitled to go ahead and do what it likes, irrespective of the views of the minority. And it is not democracy that that we have in South Africa today. It is Jacobinism in the sense, the tyranny of the majority – this time a manufactured majority, not even a genuine majority. That is Jacobinism as I see it, and it has taken even more vicious forms in modern Europe in the disguise of Marxism and National Socialism. It has subdued the peoples of Eastern Europe to a system which also produces its overwhelming majorities by artificial manipulation and by propaganda.

Through the reign of one particular “volk” it produced devastation in Germany and in Central Europe in the form of Nazism, where again the basic doctrine is that the interests of the volk are supreme, that the majority, by electing its Feuhrer – and again we have overwhelming majorities – had taken to itself the right to do as it wishes with its opponents, and to change the rules as it chose.

So that we have in South Africa no longer the parliamentary system of democracy of the kind that we knew before the Nationalist revolution of 1948. We have a new kind of democracy, a parliamentary system no longer working according to rules of British, American, Dutch, Danish, Swedish or Swiss democracy, but a parliamentary system rapidly being dashed into pieces, rapidly being destroyed in authority and freedom until it is approximating to the status of the Reichstag, or to the organisation which now governs Soviet Russia.

This, I think, accounts for the bewilderment of our professional politicians. I think, without wishing to criticise them unduly, that we must admit that the Opposition in Parliament are completely at sea because they have not yet realised —they dare not realise – that a revolution has taken place. They still think in terms of opposition to a particular measure, campaigns in the country, manifestos to electors on specific points, and the “swing of the pendulum.” And, consequently, when they are faced with the choice between a stand upon principle against a particular measure as part of the general development towards this new kind of Jacobinism, this new kind of “democracy,” when they are faced with a choice between that and a limited opposition, a temporising opposition, an opposition which has one eye on the marginal voter all the time, they nearly always choose the temporising appeal to the marginal voter. They do not, of course, win over the marginal voter. The marginal voter is not looking for a party of that kind. But they do, each time, sacrifice principle. Each time they do it they weaken our rights, they weaken those who want to stand against this tyranny in South Africa.

Now, I have spoke critically about the Opposition. I do not think I need to do it, because I imagine every member of this gathering knows in his heart that this is true. He has seen it, he has felt, with every move the Opposition parties have made recently, a sinking of the heart. Compare the feeling you get, for example, when you hear the action the Black Sash women have taken. You feel – “Ah! they’ve got something, they’re doing something.” When a politician comes along you feel – “Oh, he’s let us down again; or he will do.”

I think you will recognise that this is so, and the reason I give is that because they are professional politicians, because their bread and butter depends upon it, our

political leaders dare not admit the facts of the situation. They would like to pretend that they are living in the world of pre-1948, the pre-revolutionary world, and they are not.

But it isn't any use for us to blame our political leaders, or to blame the political parties. The political parties, as they exist, are the result of our own action, or lack of action! In other words, it rests with the ordinary citizen, since in spite of an obvious tendency towards a tyrannous state in South Africa, our liberties – many of them – still remain to us, and our political machine can still be worked in many respects. It remains to us to see that these parties are transformed, and the citizen who complains about politics, who says that politics are “a dirty game” is not doing his duty. If politics are a dirty game, it is because those of us who think in that way about politics are not doing our share to make them otherwise. If the political Opposition is unsatisfactory, it is because we fail to belong to political parties, because we fail to discuss our problems with our fellow citizens, and because we fail to take responsibility ourselves. That, I think, is always very dangerous – to get up and criticise professional politicians either in public or in private, without recognising that they are placed in a very difficult situation. They have to make their living from Parliament and they frequently lack the support of vigorous and enlightened public opinion.

I have painted a picture which, I think you will agree, is quite a black one; but I do not believe that the admittedly dark picture in South Africa is a reason for despair. On the contrary, as I have said elsewhere, though it is quite customary in private conversation to hear the Nationalists described as Nazis, I do not share that view myself. I consider the Nationalists bear much the same relationship to Nazis as mice bear to rats.

The world has been faced in the past with many such threats to liberty. There have been totalitarian parties before, many of them much more formidable, much more securely entrenched than the Nationalist Party can ever hope to be. Those totalitarian parties have never lasted. They have always disappeared, either by internecine strife or rejected by a people which can no longer bear arbitrary government. And I have every faith, from what I know of my fellow citizens, that South Africa will in the long run not tolerate a Government which systematically and increasingly restricts liberties.

But, of course, the damage that can be done in the long run to ourselves and to our relationships with the non-European peoples of South Africa may prove fatal to our future. That is why there is an urgency about this question, why we cannot sit and wait until the Nationalists have got us all into a fearful mess, as undoubtedly they will do if they are to go ahead destroying the Constitution and destroying public good faith.

My own belief is that the Senate Act, when it is put into operation, will have destroyed the Act of Union. It will be a Senate established in contravention of the Entrenched Clauses, which were an integral part of the agreement of Union. Even if it is found to be legal by the Courts, it cannot be constitutional in the political sense, since it involves the systematic overriding of conditions which were explicitly written into the Constitution of South Africa. The Senate Act, moreover, destroys that equality of the provinces in the Upper House, which again was one of the conditions that made Union possible. It is a breach of faith on the provincial level, and particularly with Natal, which took an explicit decision about its entry into Union by means of a referendum, and which would certainly not have done so if it had known at the time that allegiance to the Crown, for example, or the equality of representation in the Senate were ever likely to be endangered in the future. And, of course, it is a

flagrant breach of ordinary democratic principle, since it obliterates the representation of large minorities and simply, by a stroke of the pen, manufactures an artificial majority for the government party.

With such a Senate in existence, I consider that Parliament is also fundamentally affected, because in the most important legislation in the coming sessions, Parliament will consist, for the purpose of dealing with the Entrenched Clauses, of the two Houses sitting together – the House of Assembly and the Senate. And, moreover, the purpose of that legislation will be to jerrymander membership of the House of Assembly to suit the Nationalists by excluding the Coloured voters from the Common Roll. So that the whole purpose of the Senate Act, as I see it, and its whole effect, will be finally to undermine Parliament as the accepted constitutional debating chamber of the nation, to reduce it to a kind of South African Reichstag, in which the Government have assured themselves of a two-thirds majority by passing a law that they shall have such a majority.

Now there is only one answer to that. We cannot, we must not appeal to illegal action. We Cannot rebel, and violence is wrong. But, ladies and gentlemen, if you find you are playing cards with a card sharper you don't have to knock him down. You may not even be able to call in a policeman; but at least you can stop playing cards with him. And that seems to me the elementary condition of future political action against Nationalism, that the Opposition party should say: "You can corrupt Parliament, you can debase Parliament if you want to, but we will have nothing to do with it. We will not touch it."

Now let us not suppose that is going to happen. Our professional politicians are of a calibre, and of a habit of mind, to make them quite incapable of seeing the necessity of such a step. I do not blame them for this. We are to blame, because we have put them there. We must see to it in the future that we do not make this mistake again. For whatever party we work – United Party, Labour Party, Federal Party – we must see that the men who represent us in Parliament are men and women of real moral force and intellectual force and vigour, who will be capable of seeing that point. The great majority of our professional politicians see only one thing, and that is in the Senate Act there are jobs going at f1, 4000 a year, and many supporters who have faithfully helped them who badly need to be recompensed for disappointments and for efforts in the past. And that is as far as they can see. Let us not blame them for not seeing further, but as I see it, we ought to use our influence as citizens, and say to them we must not permit the Opposition parties to lend themselves to an appearance of democracy and parliamentary government where in actual fact no democracy exists.

I want now briefly to summarise what my argument has been, so that there should be complete clarity about it. First of all, I would say the view I have expressed tonight are not those of this organisation. I am here to stimulate you to discussion and thought, not to express the view of this organisation. Secondly, that they are my own views as a private citizen, with no claims to special knowledge. I speak simply because I have been honoured to be asked, and because I feel that one has a duty, if at all articulate, to speak on such a question. Next that I consider that our troubles are much more serious than is generally admitted in public. I feel that we are faced with a great national movement among many of the Afrikaners that is very deep indeed, with deep roots in history, and which has created a division in South Africa, not between the English and the Afrikaners, (it may come to that, though I hope it won't) – but at present between Nationalist Afrikaners and the other Europeans that goes very deep and is becoming deeper. The only solution the Nationalists see to that is our giving in to them. The only alternative to our giving in to them is for us to stand out morally, to

say we won't give in, and hold out longer than they can. It is the only answer, and consequently the only answer is not by any electoral tricks – we haven't any hope, we'll never beat the Nationalists at that – it is by sheer guts, by facing the facts, by digging in our heels, by standing up for what we believe to be right, and by speaking up at every possible opportunity, in private or in public.

The situation has been made, as I see it, much worse by the political revolution which followed 1948, and which is still in progress, a revolution which makes it increasingly difficult for parliamentary government to proceed in accordance with what I regard as the true tradition of parliament. And, as I see it, if the Senate Act is put into force, a point will have been reached where the game of parliamentary government will in fact no longer be worth the candle. We should do far better to tell our representatives not to lend themselves any longer to the appearance of democracy, where none in reality exists.