

*Post, Post and Post.*  
*Or, Where is South African Literature*  
*in All This?*

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THERE IS A rupture in South African literary discourse between the practices of literature and of literary criticism on the one hand, and the type of discourse about literature produced by post-structuralist theory and by postmodernism generally on the other. This rupture marks not only an incommunicability, but a mutual mistrust. In a sense, it is the result of South Africa's "post-colonial" status — or rather, of the fact that this status is in itself questionable.

The relation between post-structuralism and postmodernism and South African literary discourse will form the bulk of this article. More specifically, I will be restricting myself to a particular type of discourse within South African literary production, that of criticism and prescription produced under the rubric of liberation and resistance literature. I wish to place this discourse firmly on an institutional basis, as I will those of post-structuralism and postmodernism, particularly in relation to the university department teaching literature or literary theory. These institutions are one of the sites in which claims to culture and "cultural heritage" are being staked, usually along nationalistic lines. (See During, "Cultural Values," and Kistner for critiques of the discourses of nationalism and national philology.) Academics are being challenged here in a way that puts on the line not only the type of material included in the teaching curriculum but the manner in which this is being taught.<sup>1</sup> To some extent, this can be traced back to the different perspectives on colonialism and post-colonialism in South Africa.

I wish to argue then that South African literary production is being tossed about amongst these three "posts," without finding a

particularly comfortable position in any one of them. At the crux of this is the question of the applicability or non-applicability of the post-colonial label. The type of things that are said about South African literary production, what it is, what it should be, stem from the uneasy hold of the post-colonial label on the South African context generally, and in a very specific way, on any form of its cultural production. Attitudes towards the label are differentiated according to linguistic and racial position, and more directly, in terms of political standpoint. If one thinks along the lines of the importance of the consolidation of national language (in South Africa, national languages — Afrikaans and English), and through this of a national culture, including racial, social and religious practices, there is a large part of the (white) population, for whom the label “post-colonialism” is not an issue at all. Post-colonialism, as a desirable state of affairs, has been accomplished, *de facto*, and in a most successful manner. The South African nation exists because of the success of the construction of Afrikanerdom. The only problem now is to defend it.

This is no small problem, when one considers the numbers for whom post-colonialism is not an issue, not because it is a *fait accompli*, but because it never happened. For the black majority, whose literature however has a minority status in terms of the South African and international canon, to speak of post-colonialism is pre-emptive; in terms of political desirability, it is anyhow more useful, and more practical to speak of “post-apartheid”: the colonizer will not be got rid of, precisely because he does not see himself as such. What then is the use of the term “post-colonial” in a context where it is not seen as applicable by either one in the customary colonizer/colonized opposition, and where the terms themselves are in question?

Whether or not post-colonialism is a term which could describe an existing state of affairs in South Africa does not exclude the usefulness of post-colonial discourse for liberation and resistance literature. Firstly, in its recognition of the desire of a colonized or subjugated people for an identity and for self-determination (During, “Postmodernism” 44), it focuses attention on the central position of cultural production in the attainment of those goals in real terms. This is of particular importance in South Africa where

almost every other path of resistance and of reconstruction is criminalized. Although there are evidently a number of similarities between South African cultural productions and those of the rest of Africa and of much of the previously colonized Third World, there is one crucial point of difference: in South Africa there is still a liberation struggle in the true sense of the word. For that reason, and because of the outlawing of other grassroots political activity, there is much at stake in the cultural arena.

Secondly, the discourse of post-colonialism has placed itself in a position to counter, with varying degrees of success, imperialistic strategies be they in the political, economic or cultural sphere. Whereas colonialism may not be an appropriately descriptive term for the way in which subjugation is carried out in this country, neo-imperialism certainly is.

Somewhere between the imperialist in South Africa who effectively says: "we are already there; see our Opperman, see our Van Wyk Louw, see even our Brink, our Gordimer" (and where it is a question only of throwing off the stigma of provinciality), and the resister who says "but we are not — see *your* Opperman, *your* Van Wyk Louw, yes, even *your* Brink and Gordimer," there are bodies, and skins, the *visible* signifiers of either statement, whose identities are being specified, constructed, via a cultural discourse where the pluralism of postmodernism has no place at all, where, above all, it is a question of ultimate hegemony.

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In my discussion of South African literary discourse, I wish to emphasize its three main thrusts: militancy or the battle-cry for freedom, where the writer reflects and gives voice to an oppressed people; the revaluation of humanism and especially African humanism; and the position of Marxist discourse, especially the notion of consciousness. It will be seen that each of these goes hand-in-hand with the discourse of liberal democracy. In view of the attempt to institute a post-apartheid society in South Africa in terms of a new (but original) national identity, a pre-colonial "innocence," and the urgent need for political intervention in writing, it would seem that post-structuralist and postmodernist discourses on the one hand, and liberation literature on the other,

have nothing to say to one another. Therefore the relation between these would appear rather to be a non-relation: the emphasis on “identity” and unequivocal political standpoint eliminates it — or its very possibility — and would appear to set the one against the other from the outset. Post-structuralism and postmodernism, informed by such theories as the deconstructive and the psychoanalytic, permit neither self-determination nor identity. The trajectories of these discourses would appear then to be profoundly inimical to one another. However, this need not necessarily be the case: indeed dialogue between the two could not only be useful, but could be strategically necessary for the continuation and development of both projects. Post-structuralism and postmodernism are presently locked in a logical aporia as theoretical constructs. Post-colonialism, in its continued subjection to cultural and epistemic imperialism finds itself in the impossible situation of attempting to define itself on its own terms, while an examination of the terms and categories shows that there has been an internalization of Western discursive formations. That is, whereas there may be a difference in content, such categories as poetry and the novel, as well as a whole rhetorical armature, still persist.

In a recent article, the poet Don Mattera, in an outburst of liberation rhetoric, describes what he sees as the political status of the writer:

And through the flow of our blood and our ink in the trenches of struggle, many of us have emerged to cultivate our honour and dignity and so forge keener blades of resistance through a literature of liberation, and by our practical sacrifice in the battlefield. Marching side-by-side with the black working class, and recording their refusal to be bruised down, black writers and other artists have etched for themselves a place of honour. (4)

The attitude towards literary production which underlies statements such as these is one which sees a structural similarity between what writers do in their poetry and stories, and what political or trade union activists do in the political and economic fields. As hyperbolic as it may sound, militant writers, who have often been affiliated with the Black Consciousness movement, have suffered exactly the same harassment as other activists. The authorities must therefore feel threatened by this type of discourse,

although in Euro-American circles the direct political significance of writing is negligible. The reason for its power is precisely that it is at the furthest remove from postmodernism. Nevertheless, the rhetoric which is used to heighten the consciousness of the oppressed, and which should, and usually does purport to, reflect an essentially black experience, is very English and white in character. Its terms could be easily seen as those of a patriot shouting "Rule Britannia!"

The persistence of such discursive strategies is evident in much of black nationalism. One of its forms is the assertion that the "best" of Western liberal-humanism has always been a part of black tradition, which has however disintegrated under pressure from apartheid structures. Thus Es'kia Mphahlele, in *Poetry and Humanism: Oral Beginnings*, makes a case for the compatibility and interchangeability of Western and African humanism, using in particular, the work of Heidegger as a bridging point. This bid to reaffirm the equality of African culture with Western culture is not limited to literature: Nelson Mandela, in his writings against apartheid, states that the basic democratic thrust of liberal humanism is something which he learnt not in Law School, but at the knees of his elders.

The structure and organization of early African societies in this country fascinated me very much and greatly influenced the evolution of my political outlook. . . . There was much in such a society that was primitive and insecure and it certainly could never measure up to the demands of the present epoch. But in such a society are contained the seeds of revolutionary democracy in which none will be held in slavery or servitude, and in which poverty, want, and insecurity shall be no more. . . . (quoted in Derrida 5)<sup>2</sup>

Side-by-side with a discourse which affirms equality via sameness, there is that which revalorizes the difference of Africa. At times, what is to be found here is a positing of oppositionality, such that the binary oppositions of Western systems are affirmed by their very difference from African systems of thought. Thus we often find descriptions of the collective and communal nature of African art and oral literature, as opposed to the highly individualistic Western author-position; communal ownership in African societies as opposed to the materialistic greed of capitalism; Afri-

can sexual expression, free of guilt-producing oedipalizing mechanisms, as opposed to Western sexual pathologies. This type of oppositionality can occur only where Western epistemic systems have become so powerful that they achieve universal value, to the extent that the colonized body identifies its difference in terms of the imperialist's binaries.

The discourse which would most likely seem to approximate that of black nationalism, and which has proved itself as strategically most useful, is that of Marxism. The emphasis on the working class has already been seen in Mattera's statement above, but it is also evident in the flourishing trade union theatre. At times South African and especially black literature is indicted for an over-emphasis on racial oppression to the downplaying of class and economic oppression. In a criticism of the stories of Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Michael Vaughan finds Matshoba's work to be limited because "There is no emphasis upon the positive potentiality of specifically working class consciousness, or working class forms of solidarity" (317).

The assimilation of racially oppressed people to the proletariat is, however, in itself limiting. While the fact that the masses do indeed function as a labour pool for neo-imperialism seems to support such a potential characterization (as does trade-union solidarity), this effectiveness is disputable in the cultural arena, and since an important part of opposition is precisely being played out in the bid for cultural dominance and the part it plays in the forging of national identity, a basis for cultural activity in working-class culture is a limitation and foreclosure of other possibilities which may set in motion the more significant effectiveness of radical difference.

While the usefulness of Marxist strategies for opposition movements should not be minimized, their terms need to be looked at more closely. This very usefulness hinges on the notion of consciousness, the possibility of conscientizing and therefore mobilizing. With this emphasis on consciousness, post-colonialism lays itself open to a re-colonization by its very dependence on the notion of the subject as a *humanist* subject, and therefore inherits the limitations of the *imperialist* subject: in this case it would simply be a matter of replacing one ideology with another, with no dif-

ference in underlying structural relations occurring. Spivak states that "It is the force of a crisis that operates functional displacements in discursive fields" (202). This "falling back" on positivist essentialism would then appear to cause post-colonialism to attenuate the full effect of the crises of post-colonial contexts.

Calls for a return to pre-colonial identity based on just such a view of consciousness are evidently self-contradictory, since they construct identity precisely in the same terms as the bourgeois imperialist subject, cloaked however in a discourse of return and recovery. The conscientizing programme of literary discourse is apparent in prescriptions of what black or opposition literature and criticism *should* look like. Mphahlele has formulated his programme for black writing as follows:

[Black people] need to be told now who they are, and where they come from, and what they should be doing about these things that we're talking about. That's where the scholar comes in; he must exploit that consciousness, the black consciousness, so as to probe deeper into the personality and move forward. (quoted in Manganyi 44)

Such statements, together with calls for a greater realism and reflection of "real conditions" in literature would seem to imply that what the black man *is* (let alone the black woman) is something which is simply recoverable — something essential as yet hidden by the decades of apartheid rule, but which can be recuperated in a pure form, and mobilized against the dominant culture. But original African culture, which would include perhaps a mode of subject-specification different from Western culture, has been eradicated and hybridized to a virtually irrecoverable degree. Furthermore a discourse which includes in an un-ironic and un-parodic way terms such as "identity," "consciousness," "origin" appears both regressive and reactionary from a post-structuralist point of view. But a validation of the one discourse as against the other does not necessarily follow. In the next section, I will argue that it is precisely at the point where post-structuralist theory cannot account for post-colonial discourse, and where postmodernist literary strategies are shown to simply not be up to the post-colonial project, that they themselves collapse as viable discourses aimed at transformation.

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Post-structuralism is often identified almost completely with Derridean deconstruction; the simultaneous development of a critique of humanism in the works of late semioticians such as Barthes and Kristeva is often ignored. In this way, the original thrust of post-structuralism as a contestation of bourgeois structures is attenuated. It is particularly in the project outlined by Kristeva in her reworking of semiotics into semanalysis that the desire for transformation and for a form of political "responsibility" is most evident. That this project finally gave way to an almost neo-romantic emphasis on the subject in her work as well as in Barthes' is symptomatic of the post-structuralist project when it is confronted with the question of the political. Overcome by the multiple and insidious ways in which subjects are determined in a history, and in which modes of action are constrained and constantly compromised, or simply contradictory in terms of underlying theoretical presuppositions, it is the "individual experience" of a subject — albeit split, decentred and fragmented — which comes to be focused on. The culmination of this may in some ways be seen in Barthes' assertion in *The Pleasure of the Text* that "The text is (should be) that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the *Political Father*" (53). Herein lies the entire trajectory of post-structuralist political concerns.

The underlying reason for the difficulty that much of post-structuralism has in dealing with the political, or modes of political intervention, lies in the form which its critique of humanism, intertwined with the critique of Western metaphysics and of rationality, has taken. Postmodernism, as a cultural phenomenon, is generally theorized from a post-structuralist perspective. For this reason, and also because it shares the epistemic conditions of post-structuralism, it ultimately finds itself in the same position with regard to the political as does post-structuralism.

The metaphysical tenets of transcendence, closure and rationality are subverted in various ways by post-structuralism. The closure of dialectical negation, of binary oppositions in which the terms have always already been marked as positive or negative, the finitude of the Logos and of Rationality, the unity and transcendence of the subject of a teleological History: none of these has escaped the attacks of post-structuralism. Lacan's fragmented



and split subject, constituted not in fullness but as a lack, Kristeva's significance, which constantly overflows and subverts the limits of the Logos, Derrida's *différance*, which reduces Meaning to a trace of absence/presence, Deleuze's desiring machines which attack the underpinnings of any Rational action, these are just some of the forms in which the foundations of a metaphysical Truth and the humanist subject which is concomitant with it have been radically undermined.

The post-structuralist project can in many ways be seen as the affirmation of difference as pure negativity, giving way to an infinite pluralism or dispersion: the index of its failure is the point at which it erupts into a positivity. With projects of overt political commitment, such as that of Kristeva, it is this very commitment, this desire for transformation which marks the point of the eruption into positivity. This is the point at which the theory becomes incoherent and self-contradictory. This is also the reason why every attempt to engage deconstruction in the service of a political agenda is immediately doomed to failure. This failure is at the same time the very proof of deconstruction.

If difference is to be followed through to its most radical conclusion, there is no possibility of marking a point in a signifying chain as just or unjust, no possibility of judging at all or even of deciding which is the "better" of two alternatives: in the terms of *différance* alternatives are textual traces endlessly open to deconstruction; no finality is possible. The subversion of Truth then brings with it a complete instability of rationality, with the consequence of the untenability of any political position. Western post-structuralism, despite its anti-humanist and transformative stance, offers neither a foundation for political action, nor any type of rationalization for a particular type of transformation.

The same conditions can be seen to hold true when one carries this argument into the realm of postmodernism. If postmodernism is characterized by a crisis of legitimation — which has also been shown to be a crisis of rationality<sup>3</sup> — in which social and cultural narratives co-exist in a utopia of equality and in which no narrative hegemonizes another, the political effectiveness and even desirability of any intervention is called into question. Undecidability, multiple and endless possibilities of meaning, the parody

of the past which Linda Hutcheon places at the crux of the political effectiveness of postmodernism (“Beginning,” “Politics”) have no place in a context of real political urgency, where there is a need not for endless self-reflexivity, but for definite decisions to be made: in post-colonial literature the past is called upon, not as a parody, but in deadly earnest.<sup>4</sup>

If one takes only these aspects of post-structuralism and post-modernism into account, it is small wonder that Habermas has relegated them to the realms of neo-conservatism. Post-structuralist difference in this sense makes no difference at all.

However, to stop here and simply dismiss the project as irrelevant and politically ineffectual is over-hasty: its critique of humanism cannot simply be brushed away; one cannot continue as though it had never been. Something has changed in the discourse of the human sciences, and this change must be acknowledged and dealt with. Post-structuralism has made it impossible to continue simply on the road of self-present Rationality and Enlightenment; however, it is at the same time impossible for post-structuralism to continue in an indefinite affirmation of difference.

From a desire to overturn and transform the metaphysical tenets which underlie structuralism as a theory, as well as bourgeois institutions, post-structuralist thought has arrived at a point where it is incapable of transforming itself. Its radicalization of the tenets of structuralism, with its implicit transcendental subject and belief in the possibility of developing descriptive models for any system of signification pitted post-structuralist thinkers against the last avatar of metaphysical humanism. While its critique proved effective at each point at which it inserted itself, it has also consistently come up with the same limit to thought in each of its forms: the endless duality of the subject-object relation, an effect of the empirico-transcendental doublet posited by Foucault as being the condition for the modern concept of Man. That is, with the modern episteme and the collapse of classical categories of representation, man becomes at once the object of knowledge and the knowing subject (Foucault 323).<sup>5</sup> At the moment of this redoubling, finitude becomes the condition, as well as the limit of knowledge. The negative relation of the infinite — ultimately another figure of finitude — presents itself as anterior to the empiricity of man, as well

as to the knowledge he could gain thereof. The result is "the interminable play of a redoubled reference: if knowledge of man is finite, it is because he is caught, within possible liberation, in the positive contents of language, of labour and of life; and inversely, if life, labour and language present themselves in their positivity, it is because knowledge has finite forms" (327). The result of this redoubling, in turn, is the introduction of the unthought, and the unthinkable, in modern forms of knowledge. "A form of reflection is installed . . . where for the first time the being of man is in question, in this dimension wherein thought addresses itself to the unthought which articulates itself within man" (336).

The closure of the subject-object relation may be the goal of post-structuralist critique, but the attempts to account for this relation, and more specifically to posit something which is neither subject nor object (but which allows for the underlying process of infinite difference, for example) results in the postulation of something which resembles a zero-degree but which comes dangerously close to a repository for the ineffable, the transcendent. The forms which it takes are many: the unnameable, the unrepresentable, the abject, the unknowable; in the language of psychoanalysis the lack; in the language of deconstruction, the blank space; in the language of the early Foucault, death. Each of these terms can also be used to describe what for post-structuralism and all modern thought, is unthinkable: the otherness of the Other, which is by definition nothing in itself, but simply all that we project onto it, the repository of our desires (337). The Other remains entirely refractory to intelligibility; it becomes and remains the specular image of the Same (345). The naming of the Other *as Other* can be seen as a thetic and logocentric gesture on the part of post-structuralism whereby otherness is foreclosed. The fact that I continue to use the term here is a result of the embedding of my discourse in that tradition, and the impossibility of finding another term which is not simply a euphemism. The implications of this are the impossibility of breaking with Western systems of thought, of doing something different, of operating a radical transformation. This is the point beyond which post-structuralism as critique of humanism, cannot go. It is the one closure which it cannot undo.

This is at the same time the reason why when faced by the post-colonial or forms of neo-imperialism, while post-structuralism can account for the mechanism of imperialism, it cannot account for that which counters it. While Lyotard's notion of the *différend* at first appears as a tempting model to account for "injustice" in post-colonial discourse, where the victim is forced to express him/herself in the terms and the discourse of the oppressor, During has shown that the theory collapses when faced with something which is untranslatable, a residue which remains because of the particularity of natural languages: "In its flight from categories of totality, Lyotard's linguistic turn evades the one totality — so-called 'natural' language — which it cannot reduce or ignore *on its own terms*. It is precisely to this totality that post-colonialism today appeals" ("Postmodernism" 44).<sup>6</sup>

A radical transformation is unthinkable in post-structuralist terms, because the site of "otherness" is a hole in its discourse. It would thus give ample reason for the suspicion and hostility it arouses in those who would set in motion a discourse which moves away from imperialism and seeks to replace it. Enter the post-colonial: what can be more irreducibly "other" to Western thought, and to those developments which problematize it, than the colonized body?

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My discussion of post-colonial liberation literary discourse above underscores the irretrievability of "otherness" and pure difference even to the victim of imperialism; this does not, however, mean that there is no "otherness." What it does mean is that historicism must be repositioned; it needs to be brought in relation to present and future conditions rather than to the search for origins, and it needs to be brought in relation to a *reconstructive* programme. In his address at the Writers' Forum Conference, Njabulo Ndebele outlines such a programme:

They [the oppressed of South Africa] will want nothing less than the writing of their own texts.

The path towards the new text should begin with the understanding that it is precisely where the official culture of South African oppression runs aground and becomes decadent and manipulative that the oppressed must come up with a reconsti-

tutive political and intellectual culture that will recreate and re-energize civilization in this country. (10)<sup>7</sup>

In statements such as these, there are the glimmerings of a sense in which the strategies deployed by what can be called "cultural workers" are not as far removed from the post-structuralist critique of humanism as they would at first seem. Spivak has begun to show the way to just such a rapprochement: speaking of the subaltern, she states that such cultural activity as that carried out by the Subaltern Studies Group is in a position to reveal the limits of the critique of humanism as produced in the West by a commitment to the subaltern as the *subject of his history* (209) and therefore, by implication, to develop this notion further.

What does this commitment to the subaltern as the subject of his/her history imply? Firstly, it forces us to re-evaluate the historicism of post-structuralist thought, an important element in the work of Althusser, Barthes, Kristeva and Foucault. The accusers of post-structuralism have claimed that this historicism is yet another mechanism of relativization, which leaves no space for eternal and universal Truths. This is all the more reason to take it into account. This historicism allows for the conceptualization of subject-effects *embedded* in a socio-historical configuration rather than simply of a *subject*. The concept of subject-effects, as opposed to that of subject, allows for an understanding of the materiality of a "body," traversed by plural and sometimes contradictory lines of determination, which constitute it as a subject capable of action, in those socio-historical configurations. The subject-effect thus provides for the positioning of a subject as a discursive instance which is the effect of a variety of structures or discursive practices. The subject-effect is also a material instance, where the materiality has shifted from its localization in the unconscious and its language (as in Kristeva), to discourse (as in Foucault). Radical heterogeneity need not therefore be limited to unconscious processes or the semiotic disposition; its full effect can be felt instead in discursive clashes.

Therefore a subject-effect traversed by a line of conscientization and politicization does not find a unity in this line, but can use it — or be used — strategically. This does not diminish the heterogeneity of this (colonized) body to this line (the discourse of

consciousization with its roots in humanism). At the same time it does not imply a compartmentalized view of a "subject" in which one line of determination is separable from the other — these would necessarily inflect one another in their effects.

This heterogeneity would thus be a difference that *does* make a difference, but it is not, for all that, a difference that can or should be named. The Other, theorized from a post-structuralist perspective (and at present we have no viable alternative), is irretrievable, unlocatable, refractory and by definition unnameable; it is there not as a positivity, but as an *effect*. And its effects are deeply felt in a society such as South African society. One of its effects, for example, is the very possibility of constructing a consciousness able to withstand Western homogenization. The traces of this are everywhere in black literature written in the language of the imperialist, where that language finds itself distorted, violated and transformed. Another of its effects is the very discomfiture of white writers and critics faced with the task of writing in South Africa. Yet another is the very fact that in this country I am forced to define myself as a white person: this very Whiteness constitutes me in this country as it would not do in another. And yet another effect is the group neurosis of the AWB<sup>8</sup> and its supporters.

The heterogeneous, as Kristeva has shown,<sup>9</sup> is in terms of the Logos a negativity; transformation is possible only where there is an unassimilable heterogeneity, and its concomitant negativity. Where that heterogeneity is not located in unconscious processes set in place by the exigencies of the Symbolic, but rather in other discursive possibilities, the potential of transformation becomes something real, with real effects. In this way, post-structuralist anti-humanism may find its only possible path of development with a view to transformative effect in post-colonial context, where the colonized body becomes the subject of its own history and turns the table on the imperialism of that humanism by *appropriating* its positivism from the position of its own negativity and heterogeneity. This is what we see at work in the appropriation of, for example, the categories of Western literature (realism, responsibility, etc.) by a "subject-effect" which is at once both within and without that tradition and that culture. There is here the possibility of transforming the sameness of the duality between same and

other by the radical heterogeneity negatively inscribed in a subject-effect straddling a plurality of discursive positions. Consciousness is here only an effect, with *strategic* usefulness, of a plural and hybrid subject in a position eminently suited to appropriation of different discursive strategies, and therefore to turning each one against itself. Thus it is possible to foresee an appropriation of postmodernist strategies, in addition to and perhaps in the same place as various forms of realism, in black literature, which could be strategically useful to this literature and also mobilize postmodernism as a politically effective tool.

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This article has been an attempt to set post-structuralist and postmodernist discourses in motion in a context of urgent cultural contestation, and to restore to them their political significance. At the same time, post-colonial liberation literary discourse stands to gain from such an inter-articulation in order to counter the reactionary tendencies implicit in any type of nationalism, while continuing to use certain notions for strategic effect. It must be reiterated, however, that the discourse I am using has its place in a particular institution. There are many who will point out that what I have said, and what anything that theory may say to the struggle against apartheid, has nothing to do with people living in the squatter camps, or under detention without trial. This argument, arising from the political urgency of opposition, is, however, a specious argument. Foucault provides us with the tools to understand strategies and counter-strategies of power. Although power may be everywhere and therefore inescapable, he has also shown that no-one is completely without power. Grassroots activists in the townships do not need Foucault, or any theorist to tell them this, but academics working in university institutions perhaps do. There is a rupture between what we do in universities and what activists are doing, but this is not necessarily unhealthy. Speaking of the “ancient quarrel” between history and philosophy, Spivak points out that “it is incumbent upon us to realize that as *disciplines* they must both remain heterogeneous to, and discontinuous with subaltern social practice” (208). The usefulness of a discipline lies in its knowledge of the institution in which it works,

and in its willingness to assume the power that goes with it. Commenting on the impossibility for modern thought to propose a morality, Foucault goes on to say that the reason for this is not that it is purely speculative, but rather that modern thought is "from the outset, and in its very thickness, a certain mode of action . . . for since the 19th century, thought has already 'exited' from itself and from its own being, it is no longer theory; from the moment it thinks, it wounds or reconciles, it draws closer or distances, it breaks, disassociates, ties or unties; it cannot stop itself from liberating or oppressing" (339). Those involved with the teaching of literature need to bear this in mind when they choose what is to be included in the curriculum, and the type of discourse that will accompany it.<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> It should not be forgotten that educational grievances were the central issue of the 1976 Soweto riots, and they remain potentially explosive.
- <sup>2</sup> Within South Africa, Mandela's writings are banned and may not be quoted; for this reason I have had to rely on quotations by Derrida.
- <sup>3</sup> See Watson. Love locates a similar notion of crisis in modernity and not in postmodernity, the latter not being perceived as a radical shift from the former.
- <sup>4</sup> This does not of course mean that there is no use at all of postmodern strategies. When used, however, the standpoint remains decisive. See, for example, Nadine Gordimer's *A Sport of Nature* where postmodern effects are evident, but do not ultimately interfere with the political standpoint of the novel, which therefore, from an epistemic point of view, overrides the postmodernism. J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, on the other hand, is blatantly postmodernist, and achieves an ironic critique of colonialism thereby. The result, however, is much more ambivalent, for which he, as well as his post-structuralist commentators, has been heavily criticized. See Dovey as well as Chapman's review thereof for an example of the virulent attack to which post-structuralist critiques and postmodern literature are subjected.
- <sup>5</sup> All translations from *Les mots et les choses* are my own.
- <sup>6</sup> However, the return to a national natural language is foreclosed in South Africa, where there are a multiplicity of languages. This makes the problem of the choice of official and literary language extremely complex. This problem has not been tackled here, but obviously requires attention.
- <sup>7</sup> In this paper Ndebele also addresses the question of the written word, which Mphahlele, in his paper on oral literature, does not include. Evidently, when an oral culture is transcribed into print, a very definite transformation occurs, and a new problematic sets in. See also During, "Post-modernism."
- <sup>8</sup> Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging, a far-right group which advocates the return of the Afrikaner to supreme control in the two previous Afrikaner republics, i.e., the provinces of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.
- <sup>9</sup> See, amongst others, *révolution*.



- <sup>10</sup> This article is a revised version of a paper read at the SAVAL Conference, Potchefstroom, South Africa (April 14-15, 1989). I would like to thank Marianne de Jong, Simon During and Teresa Dovey for their critical readings.

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