Preface

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IT HAS BEEN a pleasure to read the varied and interesting contributions that came in for the special South African issue of *ARIEL*. The different locations of the critics and the reviewers whose work is collected here say something about the reconfiguration of boundaries, as does the informed and politically aware critique of South African culture which now crosses old insider/outsider binaries both in and between nationalities. At the same time many of the critics here reveal a steady refusal to dramatize or exaggerate the politics of change and reconciliation, so that the burden of the past can be remembered and honoured as old myths and master narratives are signposted, challenged, and dismantled.

Recent publications on South African history and politics have stressed that racist South African policies, notorious and destructive as they have been, have been a part of the "'combined and uneven development'" of imperialism (Sprinker 4), while South African historiography has "portrayed a distorted colonialist and racist view of the past" which has to be corrected (Pampallis, "Foreword"). Deborah Posel has argued that a monolithic and linear view of apartheid has tended to ignore the role of opposition and resistance "in fashioning the contours of state policy" and that "the simultaneous pursuit of white political supremacy and white economic prosperity," with its engine of influx control, has had conflicted and uneven results. Her more pragmatic and less instrumentalist view of the state helps to break down earlier conceptions which have been ideologically loaded but less sensitive to the play of contesting forces "on the ground" (Posel 8). This view also helps to contest the universalizing tendency of

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postcolonial theory by contributing to the "more flexible typology of postcolonial state forms" which Aijaz Ahmad has recently called for (22).

Adam Ashforth similarly emphasizes the centrality of migrant labour in South Africa and its links with exhortations to "preserve cultural authenticity" while denying "membership of the political community" to the majority (170). He argues that the sequence of South African commission reports which framed the "Native question" set up "two categories of political subjects—the 'Native' and 'European'" (246). This "Grand Tradition" of official discourse reified society and legitimated forms of social control by the state through the "twin metaphors of mechanical and organic systems," which imposed their own logic (247, 254). Thus the stories, histories and metaphors by which a society tells itself the narrative of its past are shown to be crucial.

These articles and reviews are offered in the hope that they will illuminate some of the new stories South Africans tell about themselves, or which can be read off from past, present, and future, though often these "new stories" are revealed as hard-won understandings of past losses, returns by exiles to a changed home (Mzamane), new perspectives on indoctrination and irrelevance (Govinden), the elegiac traces of a naturalized European presence in Africa (Lewis), the persistence of colonial norms , white economic power and cultural control. In this very hybridity, though, there is a sense of indigenous mutations of genre (Coullie and Daymond), a turning towards the inner world no longer stigmatized by political irrelevance (De Kock and Tromp), an easier conversation across community borders and national divisions, a will towards new forms of mutuality and reciprocity and thus the beginnings of the "civil society" which Frank Schulze-Engler traces through different moments within the fiction of Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee. Critical paradigms, too, are shown to mutate under South African conditions where authoritarian and military norms become the conditions of father-son bonding, particularly within Afrikaner patriarchy, so that Eve Sedgwick's thesis on triangular desire and homosocial bonding shifts to reveal a more sinister system in which homosexuality functions more ambiguously and complicitously with state

power (Heyns). "Gay writing" in Afrikaans, as Heyns describes it, becomes another way of making space for story out of "no place," that "nowhere else" to meet, which is one of Gordimer's early titles, laden with irony and difficulty, which Alice Knox shows to be the place she has progressively created within her fictions, a symbolic space which becomes a meeting-place beyond sexuality. Louise Viljoen's discussion of a new tradition of Afrikaans writing which charts the Afrikaner psyche and creatively confronts the past adds to Heyns's portrait of the "dark underside of South African society."

"Coloured" and "Indian" voices and experiences emerge with a new centrality and strength, both within fiction and criticism in South Africa: in the figure of Aila in Gordimer's *My Son's Story*, in the centrality earned by Zoë Wicomb's stories and critical reformulations, in the progressive understanding of the significance of Bessie Head's life and oeuvre—a writer who stepped out into a wider African space before any political conditions existed to foster such a space within South Africa—and in Devarakshanam Govinden's reflections on the effects of education under apartheid. As Alice Knox suggests, it may be that women of mixed racial heritage who add "a gendered twist to the no *man*'s land" of "coloured" society, those previously forced to live in the interstices of apartheid society, "hold the ultimate power of the revolution." Certainly, in Bessie Head's case, multiple deprivations were a forcing-house for both writerly talent and the forging of new communities of feeling (Nixon 1995).

Many of the writers here reflect upon memory and amnesia, the need to remember, and ways of remembering which will be constructive without bitterness, memory as a weapon to reconstruct from within and without. In the recent comprehensive work done by critics like Isabel Hofmeyr in retrieving oral histories and traditions in South Africa new routes towards an understanding of the past, and the stories which create the past, are revealed. Hofmeyr's study of the gendered domain of a localized African storytelling, reviewed here by Bill Nasson, fills in "significant gaps in the material on culture and consciousness, the most notable of which concerns orality" (Hofmeyr 8). A further dismantling of boundaries occurs with the crossing of old genre

borders and elite/popular divisions in Sally-Ann Murray's discussion of Sol Kerzner's "Lost City": such "built spaces" show exactly how imperialism continues to work hand in hand with capitalism, fantasy, and exploitation. Murray's essay resonates with the investigative project of Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather*: to explore the "contradictory liaison between imperial and anti-imperial power; money and sexuality; violence and desire; labor and resistance" (4).

In *Writing and Being*, Gordimer speaks of having to "be part of the transformation of my place in order for it to know me" (130). All of the writers discussed here, and the critics who contribute to the description and understanding of such writing, begin to create that new culture of reciprocity which transforms and rewrites us all as we write it. I am grateful to Mbulelo Mzamane for sending submissions from South Africa and for contributing his own perspective as a returned South African. The exchange of views represented here has certainly helped me to go on building that syncretic platform in symbolic space which we all need when we have moved outside originary place, and which is, as in the old and new South Africa, always under review, always under construction.

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