Between Satire and Suture: Some Aspects of White Writing in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Erhard Reckwitz
Duisburg-Essen University

Abstract

Since 1994, whites in South Africa have been trying to accommodate themselves to their newly acquired status as minoritarian. In the process, the initial attitude of political correctness *vis-à-vis* the black majority has given way to a more critical stance, which is evidenced by the spate of satirical writings that have emerged in South Africa in recent years. However, exposing the iniquities of the new order is one thing, but it would appear that in some instances, given satire's penchant for invective from a moral high ground, the critique of the way things are is not only motivated by the genuine concern for the well-being of the country but has become infused with a sense of racial superiority. This is counteracted in some instances, however, by the attempt on the part of the authors to somehow find their place in the new order, the psychoanalytical aspects of which can be best explained by drawing on the Lacanian concept of suture.

The Minority Becomes a Minority

According to Deleuze and Guattari, a minority is not determined "by the smallness of [its] numbers but rather by becoming a line of fluctuation, in other words, by the gap that separates them from this or that axiom constituting a redundant majority" (1987: 469). In their view a majority is always denumerable: it is a definite or definable entity as against the infiniteness of a minority that is in constant flux. This confronts the axiomatic of the majority with the non-axiomatic of the minority which is lacking both power and a discursive position from which it can give voice to its concerns. Seen in this light, the white minor-

ity of the "old" South Africa was definitely majoritarian, whereas the numerical majority of blacks was accorded a marginalized minority status. Now, in the "new" South Africa, the tables have been turned, and it is the once-dominating white minority that is being increasingly marginalized—with the attendant problem of finding their place in the new scheme of things. This poses a constant threat to their sense of identity if we assume, in truly deconstructivist fashion, that subjectivity and its by-product, identity, are no longer located in, or produced by, a human consciousness conceived of in the old Cartesian cogito–tradition of self-generating agency; but by the subject being inscribed in certain discourses, which make it into a product of language, something that is discursively constructed:

> It is indispensable to develop a theory of the subject as a decentered, detotalized agent, a subject constructed at the point of the intersection of a multiplicity of subject positions between which there exists no *a priori* or necessary relation and whose articulation is the result of hegemonic practices. (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 31)

This is precisely the position of the white minority: deprived of its hegemonic status and the discourse of power underpinning this status, it is now casting about for a suitable discursive position from which to speak and thereby define its identity as South African. One of the more obvious strategies in order to achieve this is to adopt a more humble tone that is a far cry from the old discriminatory or racist discourse of mastery. Political correctness now seems a way of dealing with the way things are in a changed South Africa, which is a way of: "[c]onforming to liberal or radical opinion on social matters. Political correctness usually consists in the avoidance of the discriminatory and offensive language and behaviour associated with sexism and racism" (Rees 1994: 99).

Satire vs. Political Correctness

There is one area in South African culture in particular where political correctness reigns supreme, i.e. in the implicit assumption that the new black majority government and the political party it draws on, the African National Congress (ANC), is composed of people of immaculate reputation and proven moral worth whose sole purpose it is to serve their country and its long suffering black masses not only yearning to be free, but also wanting to better their economic situation. This has to be seen against the background of generations of white dominance with its blatant injustices that were there for everyone to see and criticise. Hence Boer-bashing has been a long-standing tradition in South Africa, from William Plomer's bitter satires of the perversions and brutalities of the

white colonizers in the 1920s to the decades of black struggle literature which invariably pitted the dignified and brave black freedom fighters against the cowardly and brutal exponents of the apartheid-state. It is this total lack of semantic as well as actantial ambiguity which still largely, as well as positively, determines the worldwide perception of the New South Africa and its ruling class, especially in its incarnation of a figure as unequivocally heroic and full of integrity as Nelson Mandela.

This is definitely the world of romance, which according to Robert Scholes' definition of literary modes, "offers us superhuman types in an ideal world" (Scholes 1974: 39) where all the old injustices no longer exist. At the opposing end of the mimetic spectrum he places satire, which "presents subhuman grotesques enmeshed in chaos"(ibid), and even if one does not entirely subscribe to the antonymic see-saw movement of literary development evolved by Russian formalists like Tynjanow or structuralists like Barthes, the assumption is a legitimate one: that a supposedly ideal world which falls short of its own high aspirations provokes criticism, which in turn makes it the ideal butt of satire with its linguistic strategies of irony, ridicule, sarcasm, mockery, hyperbole and invective. The opposition of romance to satire can be seen as the attempt to achieve a more realistic or empirical assessment of the world, and because of this, the two modes stand in a relation of complimentarity with each other. This opens the way for another discursive mode for the white minority in South Africa, which, with its critical or polemical stance, has recently flourished because it provides a safety valve from the enforced niceties of political correctness by endowing the disempowered self with a sense of imaginary power and plenitude *vis-à-vis* the black majority. The satirical animus is largely directed against the once sacrosanct ANC and the government recruited from among its ranks, which suddenly finds itself embroiled in all kinds of dire realities of political life. Let us hear what the South African comedian and satirist Pieter Dirk Uys, in his drag-queen *alias* Evita Bezuidenhout, the fictional wife of an ex-apartheid politician, has to say on this matter:

> ANC. Used to stand for African National Congress and is our present government in action, after being a government in exile for many comfortable years while fighting The Struggle. ... It stepped into the warm slippers of power from the Moral High Ground ... that has been quickly levelled to a morass through expected corruption and carelessness. ANC can also stand for A Nice Cheque, as it has become the best government money can buy. ... Now longing for the good old days of opposition, the ANC has never had to rule a real country, or take any responsibility for its action. Then it could always blame apartheid. It still does. When will someone tell them? The buck stops at the gates of power. Will the ANC

> acknowledge it? Or just eat the buck and turn its skin into yet another traditional cultural outfit? (Uys 1997: 6)

This is a caustic send-up of professed ANC innocence, of the unabashed *enrichissez-vous* mentality of many of the so-called "fat cats" now holding office, plus the tendency always to fall back on the old excuses. The superb irony of this passage resides in the multiple significance of the word "buck" and in the way "the buck", now meaning bribe money, becomes part of the indigenous culture that is often invoked as a primary source of ethnic identity – so with one fell swoop Uys manages to be strictly (un)politically correct on several counts. Until recently, corruption had been considered to be the exclusive province of the Afrikaners who were running the apartheid state as their private property, (and indeed nepotism in the most literal sense was rife among a small nation where every elderly person is routinely addressed as "oom" ["uncle"] or "tant" ["aunt"], just as every younger person gets called "niggie" ["niece"] or "neef" ["nephew"]). This tightly woven network of mutual familial support in all matters of state business, aided and abetted by the notorious institution of the secret "Broederbond", formed the object of quite a few satires, most notably Douglas Blackburn's satirical novel *Prinsloo of Prinsloodorp: A Tale of Transvaal Officialdom* from 1899. Now that the power stakes have become reversed, however, it is the black majority government that is exploiting the state in the same manner, or as Pieter Dirk Uys has his *alias* Evita Bezuidenhout define it—under the heading *Affirmative Action*, arguably one of the most cherished items of politically correct terminology:

> A radical way to rebalance a badly listing ship of state. To a civil service top-heavy with Bothas, De Villierses, Van der Merwes, Steyns and Smits, add an equal number of Mzibukos, Mbathas, Nkosis, Khumalos and Zwanes. A necessary way of bending over blackwards. Early retirement and lavish golden handshakes will see a departure of some Bothas, De Villierses, van der Merwes, Steyns and Smits. The ship will sink back into a familiar list, this time to the left. (Uys 1997: 7)

This satirical analysis is based on a number of cases of corruption in the parastatal sector where private business interests and lucrative state contracts enter into an unholy alliance. So nothing has really changed, except that the pigmentation of corruption is now of a darker hue.

Double Ironies

The next text I want to deal with is of a similarly playful nature, which among other things, is indicated by the blurb hailing it as both "Pynchonesque" as well

as "Pythonesque". Another indication is the anonymous author-*cum*-protagonist's pseudonym Ben Trovato, which of course is an ironic reference to the Italian saying: "*Se non e vero, e bene trovato*" ("If it is not true, it is well invented"). This indicates the truth status of a book which is entirely made up of the fictional correspondence of Ben with a large number of individuals and organisations, both private and public. They range from the Unabomber, Ted Kaszynski *via* petrol companies, airlines, sports associations to sundry ministries. All of these are the addressees of his letters, most of which are of a grousing or whingeing nature because Ben, a white male chauvinist and an inveterate racist, is totally out of tune with the "New South Africa" that is evolving around him. As the blurb informs us, the sketches first appeared in *The Cape Times* and were subsequently collected under the title *Will the Real Ben Trovato Please Stand Up*. In due course, according to the back cover, Mr Trovato "managed to incur the wrath of gay men, feminists, transvestites, former soldiers, fishermen and the Spanish. He has also been reported to the Commission of Gender Equality ..." (cited in Trovato 2002). Not surprisingly, the "New South Africa", with its numerous conflicting ethnic sensitivities, is anxiously intent on being politically correct, which, on a constitutional level, is ensured by all kinds of checks and balances, plus a number of watchdog commissions set up to invigilate the observance of racial and gender proprieties. In the light of this, satirical pieces whose fictional author comes across as a "racist, sexist, homophobic misogynist" (cited in Trovato 2002) do touch a raw nerve. The letter in which he complains to the local FM Classics radio that their playing Bach may offend old soldiers who fought against Rommel in Northern Africa can still be counted among the more harmless ironies, but when he never contacts any official authority without including a bribe in the hope that this will expedite matters, his satire cuts a bit closer to the bone of political correctness. Out of literally hundreds of such exchanges, I have selected one in particular which is very clever in its double-edgedness: It concerns a letter to André Viljoen, the then President and CEO of South African Airways (SAA), in which Ben expresses his concern over SAA's having appointed the first black person as a flight captain. The argument develops as follows:

> South African Airways has always been our carrier of choice. Brenda [his wife] and I have never been anything but satisfied with the service. The only exception was during a trip to London when a steward reached for my tray and "accidentally" grabbed my willy instead.

So far so good, but then he lets the racist cat out of the bag:

> We are due for a trip soon and I was about to call my travel agent when my neighbour, Ted, said he hoped that we got

> there safely now that SAA had begun hiring pilots from the townships. He was surprised that I did not know about your new policy. He said there is one man who worked as a baggage handler at Lesotho Airways and who is now captain of a SAA jumbo jet.

Of course he is sufficiently aware of things having somewhat changed in post-apartheid South Africa, so he adds the usual disclaimer that only goes to confirm that he actually is what he is claiming he is not:

> I am not a racist, but Brenda is decidedly nervous about flying overseas on an aircraft captained by a man who might have been up all night beating his wife and carousing in a shebeen. (Trovato 2002: 112)

Ben conforms to all the old racist stereotypes that are still rampant among the white middle class: that blacks are naturally inferior and incapable of performing more complex tasks like flying an aircraft, and that they all belong to a proletarian underclass whose only purpose in life is violence and boozing. The ironies are so blatantly obvious that every argument advanced by Ben can immediately be turned against him by exposing him for what he is—an arch-racist. This kind of satire is definitely in keeping with the strictures of political correctness, especially in view of the dignified mock reply from the spokesperson for SAA's executive office, which runs as follows:

> Dear Mr Trovato,… it seems to us that you have been misled through wrong information which could cause a serious effect upon South African Airways. I just happen to have a copy of our Wings edition [the SAA in-flight magazine] where we announced the first appointment of our very qualified Captain, Mpho Mamashela. I am enclosing a copy of this report. You will see that Captain Mamashela is a fully qualified pilot and through his commitment to aviation and personal success he managed to become one of our best pilots through skill, enthusiasm and passion. (Trovato 2002: 114)

This is toeing the line of political correctness very nicely and duly puts Ben in his place because the joke is now definitely on him. Furthermore, the effect of parodying this type of jargon is heightened by the use of SAA's official letterhead, which lends it the appropriate degree of verisimilitude. This is in line with what Wayne Booth, in his study of ironic technique, refers to as "stable ironies" whose obviousness makes it very easy for the reader to reconstruct the underlying

truth (Booth 1974: 233–235). However, the matter does not rest there because Ben has had notice of a serious incident, as he states in another letter to SAA:

> If you recall, I was seeking assurances that it is safe to fly with one of your darker-skinned pilots. Since then, my fears have been exacerbated by the news that one of your Previously Disadvantaged Pilots was caught with a pound of Bolivian cocaine in his underwear. I appreciate that he may well be telling the truth when he says he does not know how it got there. Do you know how it got there? Are you planning to introduce random testing for the staff? The idea that your pilots indulge in sex-soaked drug orgies the moment they reach cruising altitude does not inspire confidence in your airline. (Trovato 2002: 113)

The reply from SAA to this communication is much more tortuous:

> The recent incident involving one of our pilots was an unfortunate one indeed and will be dealt with the seriousness it deserves. Safety at South African Airways is of paramount importance and will not be compromised at any cost. You have my emphatic assurance that all precautions humanly possible are taken to ensure the safety of you, our valued customer, our crew and equipment at all times… Signed Michael van Niekerk, Senior Manager. (Trovato 2002: 115)

There is a deft double irony in this: the airline official's letter touches upon the drug smuggling incident only in passing and obfuscates the issue with the usual claptrap about safety being the airline's primary concern. What it is impossible for him to admit in a climate of political correctness is that crew members of "Third World" airlines are somewhat prone to improve their income by illegal means—something that is common knowledge world-wide and has led customs officials to keep a special eye on certain airlines, especially those from South America and the African continent. Now that SAA are no longer lily-white they have joined this club, and they find it difficult to admit this. The irony is taken to a different level because of these facts, since now it is Ben, who, after having previously been exposed as an arch-racist, is proven to be—at least partly—right; and SAA stand exposed as turning a blind racial eye on a serious problem. Such an "unstable irony" (Booth 1974: 233–235) causes accepted standards of truth to opalize, depending on the satirical light shed on them. In the last resort the laugh is now on political correctness itself, because it stands exposed as an ide-

alisation that fails to acknowledge reality. The same multiple irony is at work in those cases where Ben, assuming this to be common practice with blacks, encloses a bribe and then is forced to realise that the bribe has indeed been taken without the goods subsequently being delivered.

Satire on the Wild Side

Whereas the previous texts were quite demonstrably written within the tradition of classical satire—which grants them a considerable amount of leeway with regard to hyperbolic or aesthetic deviations from the constraints of realistic mimeticism—a South African *émigré* like Breyten Breytenbach, when reporting about the country of his birth on the occasion of his repeated visits, seems, at least on the surface, to conform to the realistic conventions of the travelogue, predominantly his chosen genre of prose writing. The first text in this series is *A Season in Paradise* (1979), which is a record of the author's visit to South Africa after a period of thirteen years spent in his Parisian exile. Basically, it is the diary of his attempt to regain the idealizing version of his South African childhood—which he only manages to recall in strangely distorted bits and pieces—by coming back to what for him still is "home". Of course the title invokes Rimbaud's *Un Saison en Enfer*, and consequently, his visit turns out to result in a highly complex mix of emotions. On the one hand, the South Africa of his childhood is still there, and he feels deeply drawn towards a land that he still recognises as his own—and where he feels lie the roots of his self. At the same time, however, he experiences a strong feeling of alienation because of the nastier aspects of his country where racism, injustice and schizophrenia are rife. Put differently: the paradise he sought for—and which he at least partly regained—turns out to be, as he puts it, "a screaming hell" (Breytenbach 1979: 32) and therefore his three month stay is a season both in paradise and in hell. This duality is maintained by a constant palimpsestic reference to Rimbaud's infernal vision. Because of its negative qualities, he repeatedly denounces the South Africa he experiences on his visit as "Shit Africa" and this assessment of his is completely in line with the negative world opinion of the apartheid state.

Fourteen years later he returns to a South Africa that is, in 1993, on the verge of shedding the fetters of the past and is gearing up for its first ever democratic election. Everyone is wondering what his reaction is going to be: will he join the general optimism about the so-called interregnum, the uneasy in-between time before the demise of the old government under F.W. de Klerk's ruling, National Party and power being handed over to the black majority? The dire reality of the interregnum, however, is marked by violence and terror on a scale that is unprecedented, even by South African standards. There are bomb attacks everywhere, whether committed by the disgruntled Afrikaner right wing, the Zulu nationalists of the Inkatha Freedom Party, or the semi-criminal and

uncontrollable ANC Youth League exercising their reign of terror in the townships. Let us hear what he has to say on this matter:

> Some violence gets exposed in the country's newspapers, as blood seeping through bandages. Not that the moral authorities, the church leaders and the journalists—politicians know nothing about morals—could until recently be bothered about the massive bloodshed. The "hard politics" of inhuman laws and repression, the pragmatism needed to live on this continent, made everybody insensitive to the worth of human life, or simply to suffering. The ANC cannot admit that some of its militants are involved in intimidation and murder, even if only in retaliation to attacks upon the organisation, or that they helped bring about the present climate through the policy of "making the townships ungovernable" and the mythical expectations of "armed struggle". (Breytenbach 1993: 13)

This way of holding the ANC accountable for the state the country finds itself in is certainly not politically correct at a time when everyone is still blaming apartheid for everything that is going wrong. Breyten Breytenbach is certainly endowed with the exile's sharp perception—"exile is coming face to face with the self as mirror" (Breytenbach 1993: 222)—when it comes to seeing through the veneer of posturing among the new black political elite, whom he characterizes as "guilty rich and professional strugglers adept at milking the guilt" (ibid: 215); but the use of irony, the delicate foil of satirical fencing, is definitely not his weapon of choice. Fired by a *saeva indignatio* of truly Swiftean proportions, he uses maximum force when he is wielding his verbal battle axe. Accordingly, he describes the famous Easter 1990 Wembley concert in honour of the recently freed Nelson Mandela, which had the entire world of political correctness literally in tears, as follows:

> There were opportunists and arse-talkers and boot-lickers and pop singers and banana politicos and exiles who'd grown white in those foreign climes. ...As befits such an occasion (or any other) most expatriate South Africans were already visibly moved. ... Sam Ramsamy, filled to the brim with the importance of his task ... , Father Trevor Huddlestone in his purple cassock ... , small, like a figure from a Punch and Judy show ... ready now to announce the coming of the Lord—or was he Pilate to hand Him over to the Mob? (Breytenbach 1993: 22)

All the venerable figures of the struggle are exposed as being involved in this sacrificial passion play of betrayal, and Nelson Mandela himself, to all the world a Hegelian agent of History, a "weltgeschichtliches Individuum", is represented as "the white-haired Easter lamb" (Breytenbach 1993: 22) who is nothing but the object of political interests beyond his control. Breytenbach is absolutely relentless in his exposure of what is going on in South Africa. He is fascinated by some graffiti he comes across in Cape Town, to which he can only subscribe most wholeheartedly: "WE HAVE MOVED FROM THE INTERREGNUM TO THE INTRARECTUM" or "VICTORY HAS AIDS" (cited in Breytenbach 1993: 132). But he can go one better than this when he is summing up the current situation in South Africa towards the end of this travelogue:

> This is the new Sarth Efrica—no money, no leeway, margins mopped up by the centre, more broadly based hegemony but same mechanism and same sadness. The shit has hit the fan but it doesn't matter since the fan no longer works. (Breytenbach 1993: 215)

About his own involvement as a writer in the game of politics he is absolutely disillusioned. After having initially imagined that "consciousness to ethical positioning which could be fashioned to an aesthetical surface reflecting creative action" (Breytenbach 1993: 132) might be his contribution to the "New South Africa", he realizes, after some mingling with politicians and some meddling in politics, the futility of being *un écrivain engagé* in the Sartrean sense:

> If one wants to sleep under the electric blanket of politicians with chalk-whitened bung-holes, one ought to refrain from pissing in bed. Now I know the first and essential usefulness of the writer is to think up beautiful stories. I must try. One can teach a frog to forget that he's a frog, but by throwing him from the tower it is not certain that he will learn to fly. (Breytenbach 1997: 132)

That lesson terminates his involvement in politics. A few years later he is even more pessimistic about the role of the artist in society. In his surrealist tragedy *Boklied*[1], written in Afrikaans, the white author, named "Maker" (i.e. "maker", which is a direct translation of the Greek "poietes"), asks Adam, the character metonymically representing the blacks: "Meneer? Sal ek jou van Suid-Afrika vertel, meneer?"[2] (Breytenbach 1998: 156). In answer to this, the knife-wielding Adam forces him to jump to his death. In other words, his poetical voice as that of a white South African is utterly unwanted. Breytenbach's critique of the ANC is distinctly and most emphatically (un)politically correct. It flies in the face of

left-wing liberalism and its affiliated ideology, especially since he doubts that the whole South African project of an equitable multi-ethnic and multiracial society will ever come off—or, as one critic, R.W. Johnson, has put it:

> Ironically, his [Breytenbach's] brand of nihilism will be most strongly criticised by the thousands of politically correct South Africans who have chosen exile, who vote ANC or SACP in Golder's Green and Highgate. South African Whites feel they have almost cornered the market on guilt and it can make them wondrously self-righteous. It is safe to predict that their collective strictures, even amplified a hundred-fold, would not succeed in parting Breytenbach's hair. (Johnson 1994: 1–2)

Where political correctness tends to shy away from uncomfortable truths in its effort to redress the real or imagined ills of the past, this remedial aspect is entirely lacking in *Return to Paradise*; and, as in the title of Breytenbach's first travelogue on South Africa, the negative verdict that this is a hellish place—even though it may be under the erasure of its alleged paradisiacal qualities—is distinctly manifest. Despite his professed nihilism, however, like every satirist before him Breytenbach must, of course, be pursuing a positive didactic purpose very much in the vein of Pope's dictum: "to heal with morals what [satire] hurts with wit". Even when giving free rein to his incisive wit in the way he does—withholding the salutary ethics required by politically correct thinking—Breytenbach stands in the satirical tradition wherein the critique, negative though it may be, always implies some kind of standard or ideal against which a deficient reality is measured. That he is careful, however, not to hold out any promise of South Africa's ever being able to live up to this ideal is what makes his text so brutally honest. Sometimes his discourse comes uncomfortably close to the stereotypical prejudices of Europe *vis-à-vis* Africa, the semantic code and stereotypical prejudice of which has been analyzed by Roland Barthes in his "Grammaire Africaine" (Barthes 1957: 137–144)— according to which nothing ever works on the doomed continent. What makes his critique palatable, severe though it is, is his genuine concern for, and love of, the country of his birth; and his disappointment about yet another revolution's having gone awry in the end.

Satire and Suture

This is precisely the juncture where satire starts becoming contiguous with suture. Suture is a term coined by Jacques Lacan, the meaning of which can be developed as follows. Based on the Freudian insight that the Ego is no longer master in its own house, Lacan sees the subject as subjected by language and the

symbolic order, which are both embodied in the emblem of the phallic law of the father. Through this law, unconscious desire is indissolubly tied to its ultimate lack— to the unattainability of its object, and an unreachable self-destined forever to remain an imaginary one; in the process sliding along an endless chain of signifiers of the desired Other, whose signified can never be secured. Therefore, the subject is forever divided from itself by the gap between its self-projection of imaginary plenitude and its insertion into the realm of the symbolic order. This separates its enunciation, i.e. what it wants to say, from the enounced, i.e. the actual meaning of its utterance. The deficiency can be remedied, according to Lacan, by suture, which literally means "stitching". This can be summarised as follows:

> Subjectivity is achieved in discourse *through* suture and *as* suture. Like the surgical closing of a wound, the suturing of the divided subject involves both the operation, the binding of subject to signifier, and what the operation produces, the binding that leaves a trace of their division. This is why suture results in a conjunction of the imaginary and the symbolic registers. (Cohan & Shires 1988: 162)

Placing itself at the seam between the imaginary and the symbolic in order to bridge the split in its identity, a subject like Breytenbach attempts to derive a new sense of identity through "reconciling" its own idiosyncratic vision of the world with the discourse of society at large. This poses a difficulty for the satirist, because one can safely assume that the satirical mode itself is a highly divisive one, since it is uttered from a position of moral superiority where the subject's view, the imaginary, is pitted against that of the prevailing discourse of power, the symbolic. How, then, can these become reconciled or sutured? How can the old overtones of racial condescension—of which there is invariably more than just a vestige in satires directed against black majority rule—become merged with the acknowledgement that this is what is ultimately justifiable or desirable in ethical, political or economic terms? The satirical mode, in spite of all the unstable or double ironies mentioned above—that tend to undermine its unidirectional impact in a post-colonial context like the South African one—is ultimately inscribed in the old discourse of white mastery, whereby the whites impose a rigid canon of sense on the signifier of the Other, in this case the blacks: "The master tries to appropriate the slave's knowledge in order to satisfy his desire [of the Other]. The master has rigidified the symbolic" (Wright 1999: 76).

However, the deep love for South Africa, mentioned in the case of Breytenbach's satire occasionally manifests itself in surprising acts of humility and in conciliatory gestures in which he tries to come off his high satirical horse and find a place for himself in the interests of the new political order. Such

moments occur when, elsewhere, he expresses his hope that one day "artistic creativity and politics are bonded" (Breytenbach 1996: 73)—a state of affairs which would constitute the ultimate suture. The personification, for him, of all that is good in the "New South Africa" appears to be Nelson Mandela, a figure who towers above all the mediocrity and corruption within the ANC which Breytenbach is otherwise at such pains to castigate. Mandela seems to personify the focal point where the imaginary world of the critical poet is capable of being joined to the symbolic realm of the new socio-political order. He observes in an almost panegyrical style:

> Mandela has a moral dimension, he rings true, he engenders sentiments of goodwill and brotherhood and justice . . . . He is the repository and the embodiment of a movement of profound expectations and aspirations, of a break with the past. (Breytenbach 1993: 152–153)

In passages like these, one has the impression that it would only require Mandela to appoint Breytenbach as poet laureate or cultural commissar of the "New South Africa" in order to win him over entirely. Since this, however, is not the case, he resigns himself to occupying the middle ground of a distanced loyalty that consists in a "vigilant opposition" (Breytenbach 1996: 86). Otherwise he abdicates any complete allegiance to the cause by henceforth wishing to be nothing but "a footloose painter of metaphors and scribbler of colours" (ibid: 86). To remain within the surgical metaphor, the wound separating the poet and the "New South Africa" refuses to heal over entirely; but at least it is not festering. In psychoanalytical terms this is ultimately the discourse of the hysteric since, "it is the subject … divided against itself which addresses to the master signifier [in this case the new South Africa] questions about the signifiers of identity offered to the subject by its culture" (Wright 1999: 71). As these remain unanswered in the case of Breytenbach, his position *vis-à-vis* the country of his birth cannot be but highly ambivalent in the sense of the *odi et amo*—paradox.

That this is a typically minoritarian problem can be seen from the deep sense of insecurity evinced on the part of another Afrikaner writer, namely Antjie Krog in her *Country of My Skull* which is comprised partly of her journalistic documentation of the sessions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and partly of a highly poetical account of her coming to terms with her Afrikanerdom. Realizing her unwitting complicity with the apartheid regime, she seeks solace by withdrawing to her parents' farm in the Free State. In doing so, she invokes the old Arcadian myth of the farm being a place of security far removed from daily strife—only to discover that things have changed for the worse and that the ancient myth has been completely invalidated. The farm is no longer the safe haven remembered from her youthful days but, in an era of

frequent farm attacks and cattle raids, she experiences the eruption of almost nightly violence as having put an end to an entire white lifestyle of leisurely peace. When she talks to her brothers, who now run the farm, after they come back from pursuing the perpetrators of yet another cattle raid, one of them informs her of his feelings of alienation, both internal and external—of himself having become brutalized as well as realizing that,

> … we [the Afrikaners] have nowhere to turn. Some years ago we could pick up the phone and talk to the highest power in the country. Now my home town is run by a guy whose name I can't even pronounce. (Krog 1998: 273)

Her mother feels "that this farm, this lifelong haven, this place that has always been the safest place we know, has turned into an island under threat" (ibid: 273). And her brother concludes his musings on the future of the rural Afrikaner: "But to a certain extent I suppose this is more real. This is more in step with the country than the paradise of our youth. What we had could not last ... the question is will *this* last?" (ibid: 273). Krog's text, half documentary, half *bildungsroman*, leaves the question unanswered, not only on the thematic but also on the formal level by consciously avoiding anything resembling narrative closure. Not only does she end with a poem in which she states "I am changed forever", but to her plea for forgiveness she adds the appeal: "You whom I have wronged, please/take me/with you" (ibid: 279).

Whether her plea will be answered in that the black majority will somehow accommodate the white minority – and in the process enabling it to form a new sense of identity – remains open. What Afrikaners can possibly hope to attain is something that is, at best, neither their old white colonial identity nor a wholesale embracing of the majoritarian "New South Africa", but something that comes close to what Homi Bhabha has called a "Third Space"—some kind of "in-betweenness" (Babha 1993: 36) that is neither the one nor the other. This is evidenced by the way the conflicting discourses of satirical superiority and of involvement or suture are leaking into each other.

Notes

1 Translated as "Goat Song".

2 Translation: "Mister? Shall I tell you something about South Africa, mister?"

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