QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

[Questions posed without identification of the questioner are paraphrased or excerpted, below. The complete question-and-answer sessions are not reproduced here, for reasons of both space and poor audio recording.]

Question: Can you tell us more about how young black South Africans use people's courts and people's education?

Ndebele: Much that is negative has been said about people's courts, people's education and street committees. Much of it has come, of course, from antiresistance government propaganda. They have been charged with being instruments of organized violence, intimidation and indoctrination. All, of course, from the point of view of the state's aim of discrediting emergent and popular forms of democratic participation.

In reality, these emergent democratic institutions are genuine efforts at replacing oppressive apartheid institutions. Where they have been successful they have brought about a large measure of social cohesion and organized racial conduct in the townships. Obviously, at this point, being relatively new, they may still be very much at a low level of development. But they have a potential to be a viable alternative to the present forms of mass oppression.

One of the things that one can say immediately is that obviously these alternative grass-roots institutions have been the target of insistent opposition by the government in an attempt to stamp them out altogether. I think if most of us in here who are readers of the South African situation will be witnesses to the fact that some people who have actually been involved in some of these trials, in these courts, were brought to trial, and

heavily sentenced. The idea, I think, is basically to stamp them out as far as possible. A similar situation occurs with regard to people's education. Because basically these are grass-roots organizations which are attempting to confront the state, not with rhetoric as such but by actually creating practical alternatives, practical civic institutions that will replace the institutions of apartheid. And one might possibly suggest that there has been a setback in this area, but I think the seed has been sown, and I think this is something that is likely to grow in the future. Similarly, the People's Education Project, which has a lot of broad-based support, has had its leadership under constant harassment. Most of them are in detention; some of them virtually live in a state of hiding all the time. So, practically, one would say that there are tremendous organizational problems, which we have to face; but I think that, as I said, the seed has been sown, and these are likely to be entrenched in the consciousness of people over a period of time. I can see them finding other ways of rearing their heads up once more.

The concept of people's education is organizationally symbolized or embodied in a national movement called the National Education Crisis Committee, which is the one that is organizing this project, which wants to realize this concept in practice. And I have already made reference to some of the difficulties. This enjoys a tremendous amount of support throughout the black community.

In the course of 1985, I think, young people came up with a slogan: "Liberation now; degrees later." This slogan occasioned much anxiety and controversy. However, the slogan, like all slogans of this nature, should really be understood in the context of the events out of which it emerged. I think it should be understood as the *mobilizing* slogan rather than that we have no need for education anymore. I think it should be understood in context; it was, at the time, a mobilizing device to focus our concerns on a particular

problem–Bantu education, and the need for us all in South Africa to adopt a critical stance towards education and the manner in which education in South Africa has been institutionalized to the disadvantage of black people. But I don't think that it should be understood as meaning that there is no room for education; on the contrary–or we would not have a National Education Crisis Committee grappling with the issues of alternative education.

Kgositsile: I'd like to make a comment on the education thing–the Bantu education issue, the whole education crisis. It has to be understood in the context that, whether Bantu education existed or not, education in South Africa does not exist–any more than much of it exists in this country, for that matter. O.K.? I just want that to be clarified, from the very beginning.

But there are a few things in connection with fiction which have been said which puzzle me very seriously– give me problems. There is the question, for instance, of storytelling and fictionality. I do not understand the demarcation line. What I mean is, even if you were talking about fantasy, even if you were talking about mermaids or things like that, anyone's imagination is rooted in reality, to start with. If you were going to create a monster, with the head of a buffalo, the hooves of some other animal, a woman's huge boobs, a tail of a cat, all of that, what might make that fantastic fictional storytelling is that those things exist in reality, all of them exist, but they do not exist in that kind of relationship. So whether you are storytelling or whether you are fantasizing or fictionalizing, it seems to me basically if your imagination is healthy you are doing the same thing.

Ndebele: I'm glad that my colleague Kgositsile has asked the question, requesting to have a clarification, because obviously he has misunderstood what I was trying to say. Basically I am referring to the context of

storytelling; I make the distinction between storytelling and fictionality in the context of one being a tradition basically oral in nature and the other being a matter of the written word. The way in which people are socialized into storytelling is largely informal, historical, community-based. I learnt many folktales in the context of the family–stories being told by my grandmother, and we competed in the business of storytelling among ourselves. I'm making reference basically to an informal cultural practice which over the years has been sustained in the context of the family. When I'm talking about storytelling I'm talking about people in buses, in trains, everywhere, at the corners of streets–gathered there and talking about the day–telling stories of all kinds. And I'm trying to suggest that the range of interests in this context of storytelling has been very, very broad and continues to be so even today. What distinguishes the storytelling tradition from the tradition of fictionality in the context of the history of black South African fiction is the abiding human interest that you find there in the former–that basically is it. The range of interests is very, very broad. And I think it is germane at this point to refer to the situation with regard to fiction writing in the indigenous languages. There the human interest has remained broad, but this has not been the case as far as fiction writing in English has been concerned. Because the fiction writing in English has been very much a battlefront fiction. Fiction in the indigenous languages has been very much under the control of the system–publications for the school, for example; the publishing situation there is dominated by the Afrikaner publishing houses and various church interests. By and large, with many notable exceptions, the human interest is very broad, but not as politically engaged, in many ways, as fiction writing in English.

So what I'm talking about is that fiction writing is a technique of writing that is attached to, that is developed in, formal institutions of education. To know how

to write, and read, is a conscious act of education. And to master the tradition of fictionalizing, in the written word, involves mastering, being exposed to, the history of fiction writing, in the same way that in the tradition of storytelling you learn within that tradition itself. So I think the distinction is there, and maybe one can even use a very simple example here–that when I speak I have a lot of freedom to use my voice, to use my facial expression, to use my hands, which is not there when I am writing. The business of writing is inherently different from the business of speaking, and if you move from that premise, then you arrive at different art forms that have a lot in common that they share, but basically the approach to the use of those forms is very different.

Question: How does trade unionism act as a catalyst to connect storytelling and fictionality?

Ndebele: The panel this afternoon, I presume, will be dealing specifically with this issue, so maybe you want to be there. From my perspective, what I was trying to point to is that within the trade-union movement, as we will hear this afternoon, there is a concerted cultural activity–very self-conscious. People who previously had no voice–because literature was defined very narrowly as the English novel, poetry was defined very narrowly as English poetry–suddenly you find people now in the factories, most basically workers, with a worker background, who have found a voice in the context of the emerging political activism in the country. What they have to say is important, has always been important, but is now assuming even greater importance because it is taking place within the context of organized political activity. And it is this that is happening, which we are going to get more details about, later today.

Question: I'm not sure what the purpose of fiction writing is–to change the culture? I guess it is. What can you say after we have had *Cry the Beloved Country*?

You can write it five hundred different ways and it still comes out the same. The white South African doesn't particularly want to read any more because he's tired at ten at night. Perhaps ten percent of the whites recognize something's got to be changed, and they want to change, but you've got eleven tribes; what can happen if you've got eleven tribes, all speaking eleven different languages? Every tribe has its own purposes, and they want to be the king or the head of the blacks. What can you realistically do about it? Because I think that the white South African–he doesn't want socialism; anyone who's got property doesn't want it taken away.

Roberts: That is a dilemma that perhaps we could talk about afterwards. What the confusion here is, is what a reader expects from fiction, from a novel, from an artistic experience or a literary experience. And because South African literature has been focusing on this problem in a kind of repetitive way, readers are looking for something fresh. But what I'm talking about is, Why do we read? What do we expect? We expect a certain kind of pleasure, a certain kind of freshness. And what the South African novel has to do if it wants to have South Africans read it, is get beyond the same old churning out of problems. But I think we have no more time for this particular discussion.

D. P. Kunene: I want to respond to one of several rather startling, strange statements made by the last questioner. I would like to know–maybe I shouldn't say I would like to know, but I am surprised, I'm wondering where the questioner gets his information about tribes–"eleven tribes." You see, this is the kind of thing that the South African government is feeding people outside all the time, saying that there are tribes who are warring, who have to be separated all the time. That is why you have your "bush colleges," one for Xhosa, one for Zulu, one for Basotho, and so on, and you have Bantu homelands, which are not working pre-

cisely because they are based on false premises. And so I just have to express my surprise that you don't seem to have marched with the times–that what you are saying isn't at all in accordance with the facts.

Question: Given what Daniel Kunene just said, do South African writers strive to address this flow of misinformation or disinformation or misconceptions which comes out of the country and is received outside it? Is that an issue for South African writers?

D. P. Kunene: First of all, about the issue of trying to write something to entertain–I believe everybody would agree, we'd like to read a book that entertains us–but apart from that, on the issue of the political situation, the relevant issues, in South Africa, I would say that writers who are conscious of applying themselves to these, don't necessarily select one thing as against another. They do sometimes, let's say in a short story–I'm thinking again of Mtutuzeli Matshoba–pick up one of those things, it is true: for example, "Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion" details how the first-person narrator in the story visits the Transkei after it's declared so-called "independent" under Matanzima. Another story, "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana," a visit of the speaker of the story to his younger brother, who is incarcerated on Robben Island, and so on. And so I suppose the answer to your question is, "Yes, they do"–without saying "We are trying to disabuse those who don't know or those who refuse to know of their fantasies of the South African situation by simply talking about it in those terms." There's a lot of different things that Matshoba does in his book–"A Glimpse of Slavery," a story detailing how three young black men are arrested on technical things, like the pass not being right, and one of them has just fought with a white co-worker. They are taken to a Boer's farm, where they are virtually slaves. So really, I think the answer is yes, the writers do address those issues.

Roberts: Could I add to that? I don't want you to get the suggestion from me that writing should simply entertain and be a pleasurable activity without a serious social concern. I'm making a distinction between white writing and black writing. And as someone pointed out, the white writer can only sympathize with the black suffering, and that is where the repetition comes. The white writer isn't in that situation of suffering, and it seems to me we've come to where white writers have stated and restated that sympathy or empathy. The black writers–it's their business to fight this battle and fight it through their literature. Another point I'd like to make is that there is writing that is not necessarily fiction–essays and other forms can also clarify for the outside world what's happening there.