11. *Staffrider*, Vol.2, No.4, November/December 1979, pp.6–8.
12. *Staffrider*, Vol.2, No.4, November/December 1979, pp.24–8.
13. *Staffrider*, Vol.5, No.1, 1982, pp.22–7.
14. See, for example, Heribert Adam, *Modernising Racial Domination*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971).
15. Mongane Serote, *Tsetlo*, (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1974), p.10.
16. Jeff Guy and Motlatsi Thabane, 'The Ma-Rashea: A Participant's Perspective', in *Class, Community and Conflict*, Belinda Bozzoli (ed.), (Ravan Press, Johannesburg 1987), p.441.
17. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1978), p.65.
18. Mongane Serote, *To Every Birth Its Blood*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981).
19. Lenin, 'The Symptoms of a Revolutionary Situation', in *The Lenin Anthology*, Robert C. Tucker (ed.), (New York: Norton, 1975), p.276.
20. Wole Soyinka, 'The Writer in a Modern African State', in *The Writer in Modern Africa*, Per Wastberg (ed.), (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968), p.15.

3

❖ ❖ ❖

REDEFINING RELEVANCE

Recently, I have suggested that what has been called protest literature may have run its course in South Africa.[1] It is my intention here to probe further into this evaluation by attempting to bring out clearly its theoretical foundations. Basically, the problem is that 'protest literature' appears to have lost its objective basis. The fact that much of the writing produced in the townships of South Africa since 1976 still reproduced this protest tradition, with little modification, reveals what seems to me to be the characteristics of a socially entrenched manner of thinking about the South African reality; a manner of thinking which, over the years, has gathered its own momentum and now reproduces itself uncritically. It is like a train the driver of which has lost control, and it runs dangerously on its fixed rails, passing, with great speed, even where it is supposed to stop. The difference might be that in the case of the train, its driver will know almost immediately that he or she is in trouble. He is, after all, not the train. In the case of the writer of 'protest literature', on the other hand, it may not be so easy for him or her to separate himself momentarily from his mind.

The problem is to be located in the nature of South African oppression and how its unabating pervasiveness has induced, almost universally in the country, a distinctive manner of thinking about the socio-political realities, an epistemology in which reality is conceived purely in terms of a total polarity of absolutes. Such an

epistemology is, of course, entirely understandable: South African society *is* a highly polarised society. It is understandable that its constituent polarities should dominate the thinking of its citizens. This outcome is even more predictable when we realise that one major characteristic of South African society is that the racist rulers have done very little to hide the polarities produced by their terrible form of domination. On the contrary, these polarities have been and continue to be displayed fully. There can be no doubt, for example, about who is in power and who is not; no doubt about who commands vast resources of wealth, and who lives in abject poverty. Nor is there any doubt, in general terms, why things are the way they are.

In general, this situation has resulted in two distinct perceptions of their reality by South Africans. For the oppressed, political knowledge came to be equated with the recognition of the blatant injustice which occurs in various forms throughout the country. To know has been to know how badly one has been treated. Every other thing is irrelevant unless it is perceived as contributing to the extension of this knowledge. Beyond that, having this knowledge implied that one either gave in to the bleak reality revealed, or committed oneself to removing this general condition of injustice. How this was to be actually carried out would depend on the means that are available to the oppressed at any particular moment.

On the other hand, for the ruling white racists, knowledge has been equated with the quest for mastery over the political and economic means of maintaining privilege and domination. To know has been to find ways of maintaining dominance. As a result, the white racists have, over the years, built a complex structure of government and an array of other social and economic institutions, all of which have diversified the sources and the means of acquiring information and knowledge for the preservation of political and economic domination.

In order for us to get a practical sense of this situation, it may be useful to examine a recent drama between African miners and the white mine managers of the Impala Platinum Mine, in that part of

South Africa called Bophuthatswana. This particular drama can be viewed as a telling analogy of the history of the African struggle for freedom in South Africa.

Recently in South Africa some 23 000 African miners were summarily dismissed from their jobs. This figure is so immense that it is by itself a measure of how spectacular the play of South African oppression can be. The figure, however, is small when we consider the fact that the dismissed men came from families who depended on them for a livelihood. So there is a real sense in which it was not just the miners who were dismissed, but also at least 100 000 other people. But the drama of South African oppression is such that it has become customary for its observers, both those involved and those on the sidelines, to focus on its most observable aberrations. We concentrate on the 23 000 men, the most observable proof of injustice, and consequently, the most immediate in terms of the imperatives of political activism. The other hundred thousand maintain a blurred presence, seldom becoming a serious factor of analysis and reflection. They were not there at the scene of the action. This point I shall come back to later.

The two parties involved in this labour dispute reveal their perceptions of the problems before them in the following manner. Following their dismissal, a representative of the striking miners observed: 'Management does not have sympathy for people. They don't listen to what we have to say. They regard us as animals. That is why it is possible for them to do this.'[2] On the other hand, a representative of the mine management observed: 'you run into a point where they get completely unreasonable. The alternative is to get rid of the whole labour force and replace them. There is a condition of massive unemployment in the country and that encourages us to take this kind of action.'[3]

Firstly, at the most immediate pre-critical level, we cannot fail to recognise the 'them-us' polarity. There is no need even to state that the management is white and the miners are black. The 'them-us' polarity already exists within that other larger polarity. Secondly, the miners seem to be almost completely powerless against the massive

power of the management. The management controls the entire means of livelihood; it controls a complex organisation which is itself firmly placed within the even more complex structure of exploitation characteristic of South African society. Furthermore, the habit of working within a complex system develops the manipulative capacity of those in control of the system to take advantage of the laws of that system for their own exclusive benefit.

Against all this, the miners, having been effectively denied the opportunity to create comparable adversary systems of their own, have had no opportunity to develop their own manipulative capacity.[4] They have nothing of comparable organisational status to set in motion in order to defend and project their interests. Indeed, all they have is their voice, and the capacity of that voice, under the circumstances, is limited largely to articulating grievance. It draws its strength and validity from the moral law: 'Management does not have sympathy for people.' But, as this instance shows, the moral law can be tragically impotent in the face of economic laws that do not recognise its intrinsic validity.

It seems clear that in this situation the structural position of the miners (the 'aggrieved') permits them, in response to their terrible ordeal, very few options besides the mere articulation of grievance. The structural position of the miners in this case, is identical, it seems to me, to the structural position of the oppressed majority in South Africa during the time in the country's history when protest literature flourished: the period between 1948 and 1961. It was a period characterised by a greater institutionalisation of repression. There was much organised resistance, but it was often brutally crushed. This increased repression created a charged atmosphere in which the resulting articulation of grievance, at both organisational and personal levels, became most ironically the very index of powerlessness.

The result of this situation was that, increasingly, the material dimensions of oppression soon assumed a rhetorical form in which the three chief rhetorical aspects were: one, the identification and highlighting of instances of general oppression; two, the drawing

of appropriate moral conclusions from the revealed evidence and, three, the implicit belief in the inherent persuasiveness of the moral position. The identified outward evidence of oppression then, prompted a rhetoric which emphasised the moral embitterment of the oppressed. The rhetoric began to dominate the consciousness of the oppressed in such a way that they could easily lose the sense of the actual mechanisms of their own oppression. In other words, the rhetoric of protest began to replace the necessary commitment to engaging the forces of oppression through paying critical attention to the concrete social and political details of that oppression. This kind of replacement can have devastating effects on the capacity of the oppressed to develop a creatively analytical approach to their predicament.

For example, the pervasive images of wealth and poverty, of power and powerlessness, of knowledge and ignorance, of form and formlessness, may easily lead to the simplification and trivialisation of moral perception. The oppressed need only cast their eyes around to see a universal confirmation of their status. Evil abounds. There is no need for further analysis. The mere pointing of a finger provides proof. In this situation, the rhetorical identification of social and political evil may easily become coincident with political and intellectual insight. In reality, the recognition of a source of grievance does not necessarily imply that one understands a possible range of political implications which that recognition may entail. This problem, as has been hinted above, might give us some understanding of the effect of oppression on the general intellectual development of the oppressed.

It needs to be stated that the moral position, when we consider the overall circumstances in which recourse to it was taken, was, of course, entirely valid and correct. What one is attempting to do here is hint at its possible limitations. This task is essential when a particular way of viewing reality gathers its own momentum over a period of time and becomes a predominant mode of perception even when the conditions justifying its existence have passed. At that point the mode of perception, by failing to transcend its own limitations, can become part of the oppression it sought to understand

and undermine. It does not do so intentionally, of course: it simply becomes trapped. Such entrapment may even lead to the development of a dangerous predisposition to reform rather than to radical change.

Indeed, the entrapment of resistance in an unreflective rhetoric of protest could easily be one of the sources of reactionary politics even among the oppressed. Where the dialectic between good and evil has been simplified, the predisposition, on the part of the powerful, to satisfy the moral sense of the oppressed with minimum concessions asserts itself. This happens at those moments when the oppressors feel that it is in their own interests to make concessions. Such concessions, if they can be perceived as significant gains, particularly by the oppressed, can lead to the politics of reform. Reform easily appeals to the moral sentiment; whereas radical change relies on continuous critical engagement with reality. Not only is nothing taken for granted, in addition, the reformist manipulations of the oppressor can be anticipated and neutralised. That the oppressed can easily fail to recognise the manipulative intent of their oppressors can be attributed to the fact that an uncritical rhetoric of protest can easily impair the capacity of the oppressed to think strategically. Easily believing an abstract moral code, they become victims of false hopes. However, that the moral sentiment can be severely compromised, does not invalidate it; it is simply that the conditions in which it can continue to inspire confidence ought to be brought into being.

I have so far devoted much of this paper to a discussion of the general situation in order to suggest the unenviably onerous position of the writer in it: to indicate how writers can themselves be encapsulated by the material and intellectual culture of oppression, and how difficult it can be for them to achieve a transcendence. For example, the writers of the fifties and sixties, being part of the political climate that they wrote about, codified the predominant modes of political perception by transforming those perceptions into literary figures. This led to the predominance of certain themes, characters, and situations which were welded into a recognisable grammar of what came to be called 'protest literature'.

We were shown in this literature the predictable drama between ruthless oppressors and their pitiful victims; ruthless policemen and their cowed, bewildered prisoners; brutal farmers and their exploited farm hands; cruel administrative officials in a horribly impersonal bureaucracy, and the bewildered residents of the township, victims of that bureaucracy; crowded trains and the terrible violence that goes on in them among the oppressed; and a variety of similar situations. Of course, what we are looking at here is a trend. There were other writings that handled the issues very differently.

For the bulk of the writings, however, the grammar of protest inherent in them is, as has been suggested above, entirely understandable when we consider not only the structural position of the oppressed African population as a whole, but also the social position of the writers within the oppressed population. Many of them were either teachers or journalists or both, more often than not with a protestant (usually Anglican) educational and/or religious background. It is understandable that they should express the predicament of the oppressed not in terms of what structurally produced it, but in terms of its implied opposite: white political and economic power and privilege. There, lay the moral problem. The writing sharpened the moral sense which, under the circumstances, may have been the only effective way by which to validate and maintain the sense of legitimate political opposition. From this perspective, moral opposition should properly be regarded as both historically and politically apt.

If protest writing in the fifties was in tune with protest politics, protest writing in the sixties and seventies was not entirely in tune with political developments. Protest politics *effectively* ends in 1968 with the establishment of the South African Students Organisation (SASO), and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM).[5] But protest writing, significantly, did not end with the end of protest politics. It simply assumed a different form of protest. Certainly, it reflected the militancy and confrontational attitude of the new movement, but while the new movement represented a decisively new political orientation, the writing that it inspired represented no remarkable

contribution to literary figuration. The new writing did not appropriate the new analytical sophistication of the BCM into its own handling of literary form.

The reason for this situation is not hard to recognise. The political analysis of the role of literature in the struggle for liberation did not go beyond the general agreement that literature must be committed. A rhetorical attitude toward literature was adapted which did not analytically spell out how literature could express its commitment. What we have, as a result, is protest literature that merely changed emphasis: from the moral evil of apartheid, to the existential and moral worth of blackness; from moral indignation, to anger; from relatively self-composed reasonableness, to uncompromising bitterness; from the exterior manifestation of oppression, to the interior psychology of that oppression. That may be why the bulk of the writing was poetry. But while the poetry turns its attention towards the self, it is still very conscious of the white 'other' Although the new writing has begun to make a move away from that preoccupation with the 'other', it is still rooted in the emotional and intellectual polarities of South African oppression as discussed above. And that is the point at which protest literature turns into a pathology: when objective conditions no longer justify or support an entirely emotional or moral attitude.

There is much to indicate that the structural position of the oppressed in South Africa has altered significantly, particularly from the time of the labour strikes that shook the country from 1973 onwards.[6] The phenomenal growth of the economy up to that time is clearly responsible for a significant change in relations of power between the oppressed and the oppressor. Increased industrialisation had enhanced the capacity of the working people to assert their collective power. The intensity of the labour disputes, for example, led eventually to the capitulation of the state to demands for the legal unionisation of labour. Meanwhile, the events of June 1976 also helped to consolidate the new relations of power. Clearly, the structural position of the oppressed now was such that they could no longer be cowed into a submission reminiscent of the fifties. The

inevitable growth and consolidation of this new power would definitely lead to new general perceptions of what was possible. While previously the range of what was possible had been severely limited by the condition of powerlessness, now the newly found power could extend that range considerably in all kinds of directions. Suddenly, the possibilities became immense.

The rest of this essay is premised on the belief that the greatest challenge of the South African revolution is in the search for ways of thinking, ways of perception, that will help to break down the closed epistemological structures of South African oppression. Structures which can severely compromise resistance by dominating thinking itself. The challenge is to free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from the laws of perception that have characterised apartheid society. For writers this means freeing the creative process itself from those very laws. It means extending the writer's perception of what can be written about, and the means and methods of writing.

It seems to me that a redemptive approach can begin to be formulated when South African writers ask the question: where is the struggle in South Africa at the moment? Many recent events in the country have led inevitably to that question. For example, the prolonged school boycott that began in 1976, and still continues today, has finally led to similar questions with regard to education: where do we go from here? What kind of education do we want for the future? Beyond that, questions have been asked in relation to other aspects of society: what legal system do we envisage for a new South Africa? What system of public health will adequately cater for the health needs of all citizens? What kind of cultural policy are we going to evolve? What are we going to do with ethnicity? All these questions and more, have been prompted by the momentum of current events in which the state has been found to be increasingly unable to manage society without recourse to more repressive measures even as it speaks of reform: a situation that reflects a near total bankruptcy of vision on the part of the ruling Nationalist Party.

Significantly, the act of asking such questions already suggests that the closed structures of thought under the culture of apartheid

oppression are cracking. A vast new world is opening up, for the possible answers to the questions are as infinite as the immensity of the questions themselves.

It seems to me that these are the most important questions that have ever been asked by our people in recent times, and they are questions that can only be answered fully from as complete an understanding as possible of the position from which they have been asked. For example, as far as education is concerned, the oppressed have reached a position at which an aspect of the structure of domination has, through their own actions, been rendered largely inoperative. The question is: what next? A point has been reached, therefore, at which the oppressed have to ask themselves some fundamental questions about the future of education and its contribution towards a new and free society. What is at issue now is no longer the moral condemnation of Bantu Education; rather, it is the creation of a new kind of education. This change in understanding is reflected in the fact that initially, the political act of challenging the legitimacy of education under apartheid was carried out under the slogan of 'liberation first, education later'. However, following further reflection on developments, this slogan was rejected. It was replaced by one which recognised the need for education even during the process of struggle: 'people's education for people's power'.

The overall significance of these questions is that they indicate the beginning of the freeing of the oppressed social imagination from the constraints of attempting to envision the future under the limitations of oppression. The future, at this point, is perceived as being possible only with the contribution of the oppressed themselves as decision makers. That attitude of the oppressed brings with it heavy responsibilities for them. It suggests the appearance of challenging yet daunting tasks, amenable to no easy solutions, for in it are springs of a new society. One of the central tasks of an alternative ideology, in this situation, is to provide, among other things, new ways of thinking about the future of the country.

The starting point is the need and demand of the oppressed for liberation. The political imperatives of that demand are the positing

of an alternative future followed by the seizure of state power. For the political activist, the task seems clear. For the producer of cultural artefacts, on the other hand, the situation may not be so clear because his role as well as that of his work, has not been as clearly defined. The South African writer, in particular, has not begun to ask some fundamental questions about his role, as well as that of his artistic practice. By and large, he appears to have handed over this task to the political activist, who may not himself have articulated a comprehensively analytical position on the role of the arts in the struggle. This situation, it seems to me, has been responsible for the rather slow growth of South African literature.

The problem has been that questions about art and society have been easily settled after a general consensus about commitment. This has led to the prescription of solutions even before all the problems have been discovered and analysed. The writer, as a result, has tended to plunge into the task of writing without fully grappling with the theoretical demands of that task in all its dimensions. Armed with notions of artistic commitment still constrained by outmoded protest-bound perceptions of the role of art and of what constitutes political relevance in art, he set about reproducing a dead-end. Consequently, the limited range of explorable experience characteristic of writing under the protest ethos has continued to plague much of South African writing. We can perhaps begin to edge away from that situation by addressing the issue of the nature of art as well as the question of what constitutes relevance under a situation of radical flux such as obtains in South Africa today.

One accusation that has often been levelled at writers, particularly in those countries hungry for radical change, is that many of them have not offered solutions to the problems they may have graphically revealed. It seems to me that this accusation has been based on a set of premises by which the nature of the relationship between art and society could never be adequately disclosed. More often than not, the accusation has been premised on the demand that artists produce works that will incite people to political action, something which, most people will agree, is strictly speaking the task of the professional

propagandist. The propagandist generally aims at immediate action. His intentions are entirely practical.

The artist, on the other hand, although desiring action, often with as much passion as the propagandist, can never be entirely free from the rules of irony. Irony is the literary manifestation of the principle of contradiction. Its fundamental law, for the literary arts in particular, is that everything involving human society is in a constant state of flux; that the dialectic between appearance and reality in the conduct of human affairs is always operative and constantly problematic, and that consequently, in the representation of human reality, nothing can be taken for granted. If the writer has an ideological goal, and he always has, he has to reach that goal through a serious and inevitable confrontation with irony, and must earn his conclusions through the resulting sweat. And when he has won that battle, he will most likely leave us, the readers, more committed, but only on the necessary condition that we have been made to reflect deeply on the nature and implications of our commitment in the context of the compelling human drama presented before us.

The relationship between politics and art is by definition always mediated by reflection. With this understanding, we distinguish only between immediate action, on the one hand, and delayed action, on the other. But this distinction does not necessarily enable us to make a mechanical choice between politics and art: rather, it enables us to participate in the dialectic between the two. To understand this is to understand the creative possibilities of both.

The way seems clear now for us to deal with the question of 'relevance'. The more limited understanding of the relationship between politics and art would define as relevant any subject or act that is perceived to contribute dramatically to the struggle for liberation. The operative word here is 'dramatic'. What is dramatic is often defined according to the imperatives of *real politik*. According to this definition, the dramatic can easily be determined: strike action, demonstrations; alternatively, the brutality of the oppressive system in a variety of ways.

It should not be difficult to realise that from the point of view of the South African writer today, the range of what is traditionally regarded as relevant is tragically limited in comparison to the complex structure of the oppression itself. The system does not only send tanks into the townships. It does a lot more as its strategies for domination have diversified to take advantage of a complex industrial society. It works at subtle co-optation; it tries to produce a middle class; it sets off a series of diplomatic initiatives, overt and covert; it seeks to create normalcy by insidiously spreading a hegemony that the oppressed are designed to absorb without being conscious of actually doing so through film, radio, television and a range of publications. It may even permit a controlled 'experimental' opening up of white private schools to African children where the latter can absorb a wide range of largely liberal hegemonic practices that may ultimately not be in their own interests. Central to all these sophisticated strategies of containment is the rampant growth and promotion of consumerism ranging from fashion through cars right up to houses. In other words, the system mobilises its own range of extra-governmental institutions in an attempt to impose and propagate its hegemony. In this sense, it responds as a total system.

Clearly, if it is the entire society that has to be recreated, then no aspect of that society can be deemed irrelevant to the progress of liberation. Clearly, the broader the focus, the more inclusive, then the more manifold and more complex the attack. In this context, relevance, for the post-protest South African writer, begins, as it should, with the need for the seizure of state power. For the writer, this need also fragments into a concern with an infinite number of specific social details which are the very objects of artistic reflection; and, it is such social details which constitute the primary reason why the struggle occurs in the first place.

Most paradoxically, for the writer, the *immediate* problem, just at the point at which he sits down to write his novel, is not the seizure of power. Far from it. His immediate aim is a radically contemplative state of mind in which the objects of contemplation are that range of social conditions which are the major ingredients

of social consciousness. Exclusion of any on the grounds that they do not easily lend themselves to dramatic political statement will limit the possibilities of any literary revolution, by severely limiting the social range on which to exercise its imagination.

What are the practical implications of all this? We have already seen how the structural status of the oppressed within South African society has altered radically. The implications of this newly found power are the writer's starting point. That power is clearly aware of itself, and that self-consciousness is destined to grow. But, judging from the fundamental questions being asked, as shown above, that power is still not fully aware of what it can actually achieve. Details still have to be worked out. And this is where the writer's role becomes crucial. It is his task to contribute effectively to the consolidation of that power, by consolidating consciousness of it at all levels of society. He can do so in a number of ways.

First of all, there must be a freeing of the imagination in which what constitutes the field of relevance is extended considerably. What is relevant is the entire community of the oppressed. For example, politics is not confined only to the seizure of state power; it can also be the decision by members of a township women's burial society to replace a corrupt leader with a new one. The significance of the moral and ethical issues that may be involved in this matter, together with whatever insightful revelations may be made about the interplay of human motives, ought not to be underestimated. They have a direct bearing on the quality of social awareness.

This whole issue is so important that a few more examples are in order. Firstly, for a highly industrialised society such as South Africa, there is a tragic paucity of imaginative recreations of the confrontation between the oppressed and the tools of science. Supposing a character wants to study science: what goes on in his mind when he makes that decision? What is his vision of the social role of the scientific endeavour? Turgenev, for example, in *Fathers and Sons*, provides a compelling view of the impact of the scientific method on human behaviour in the context of nineteenth century Russia. Alternatively, what kind of relationships are created between

a worker in a factory and his machine? The answer to this question is not necessarily obvious. Will he necessarily feel oppressed and alienated, as traditional radical wisdom would suggest? There is much to suggest that this confrontation is much more problematic than is often assumed.

Secondly, we have, for better or for worse, a group of politicians in the so-called independent states of South Africa. Stooges, no doubt in the total scheme of things. But what are the intricacies of their flawed diplomatic practice? We have no literature of diplomacy which can reveal the human dimension of this barren politics. The artist should help the reader condemn a stooge while understanding something of his motivations. That way the reader learns something about the psychology of the co-opted. The aesthetics of protest would be content to kill off the man, thus enacting what might be necessary, from the point of view of natural justice but leaving us with no knowledge.

Thirdly, the pressures of modern life on the family have been immense. We know some of the causes: migrant labour, influx control laws, and political exile, for example. Protest literature, commendably, has kept these causes in our minds. But what, really, has happened to the family itself? Currently, a most painful clash of generations has emerged in the townships between parents and children. It appears in the main to result from the perception by the youth that their parents did not do enough to combat their oppression. This situation has momentarily catapulted the youth into the forefront of the liberation struggle with some agonising consequences for the structure of authority not only in the community at large, but also in the family itself. Many values that have governed family relationships have been changed. What happened to those values, and how have new emergent ones helped to bring about either relief or more misery to families and the community?

Fourthly, the energetic and creative world of sport and fashion has seldom been treated beyond the sensationalism of the popular press. Consequently, we have no body of imaginative fiction that explores how popular culture in the hands of the state and big

business can compromise severely a revolutionary consciousness. Sport and fashion as subjects of serious fiction have been dismissed too easily as irrelevant to politics. Indeed, since Mphahlele's 'Griek on a Stolen Piano',[7] that particular theme has not received much imaginative attention.

Lastly, I have commented in the past on the lack of compelling imaginative recreations of rural life in our literature.[8] All we know about are dejected peasants, suffering pathetically under a tyrannical Boer farmer. Alternatively, the peasants are the focus of Christian evangelism. Clearly, rural culture as a serious fictional theme needs to be revisited.

Beyond these five examples, the settings as well as the themes that can be imaginatively explored are infinite.

One other way by which the South African writer can move effectively into the post-protest era is by working towards a radical displacement of the white oppressor as an active, dominant player in the imagination of the oppressed. This tactical absence will mean that the writer can consolidate the sense of a viable, psychologically self-sufficient community among the oppressed. This attitude can only work, though, if the writer genuinely believes in the oppressed, in the first instance, as makers of the future. This implies a radical rearrangement of the dialectical poles. Where the thesis was the oppressor, it is now the oppressed confidently introducing new definitions of the future to which the oppressor will have of necessity to respond. The latter, no longer having the intellectual and imaginative capability to initiate redemptive action, has to be relegated to the reactive pole of the dialectic. He is no longer in possession of the initiative.

Finally, there must be an accompanying change of discourse from the rhetoric of oppression to that of process and exploration. This would imply an open-endedness in the use of language, a search for originality of expression and a sensitivity to dialogue. The complexity of the daily problems of living in fact coincides with the demands of the creative act. As the writer begins to work on that story, he may not know where it is headed, and how it is going to

work towards its conclusion; but he has to find a way. That means a search for appropriate form and technique, which would enable him to grasp the complexity and render it understandable. Here, the question of technique does not mean a rarefied, formal, and disembodied attempt at innovation for its own sake. On the contrary, technique implies the attempt to find the best possible ways of extending social perception through appropriateness of form. Technique, then, is inseparable from the exploration of human perception.

Earlier, in my discussion of the mine dispute, I made reference to the fact that at least 100 000 people were dismissed by the mine management. It is towards the silent 100 000 that our writers must now turn their attention. I mean this analogically, of course. The operative principle of composition in post-protest literature is that it should probe beyond the observable facts, to reveal new worlds where it was previously thought they did not exist, and to reveal process and movement where they were hidden. This way, the social imagination of the oppressed can be extended considerably and made ready in concrete terms to deal with the demands of a complex future. The aim is to extend the range of personal and social experience as far as possible in order to contribute to bringing about a highly conscious, sensitive new person in a new society. This, it seems to me, is the function of art in, and its contribution to, the ongoing revolution in South Africa.

These observations, it should be stated, are put forward not as laws, but as possible guidelines by which our writers can conduct a debate and bring to bear further analysis on the tasks of writers and the role of their art in the unfolding revolution in South Africa. The tasks themselves are immense and challenging; I believe a vigorous discussion of them will, in itself, be a significant act of freedom.

NOTES

1. See Njabulo S. Ndebele, 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.12, No.2, 1986.
2. *Weekly Mail*, Johannesburg, January 10 to 16, 1986.
3. Ibid.
4. Although miners outside of the Bantustans have access to trade union organisations, those working in Bophuthatswana at the time of this incident in 1986 could not legally form unions.
5. Of course, the major liberation movements, ANC and PAC, in opting for the armed struggle immediately following their banning in 1961, had declared the end of the politics of protest. But, at the time, the new approach did not have a lasting impact in the country.
6. See for example, The Institute for Industrial Education, *The Durban Strikes, 1973: 'Human beings with Souls'*, (Durban-Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1974).
7. Ezekiel Mphahlele, 'Griek on a Stolen Piano', in *In Corner B*, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967), pp.37–61.
8. Njabulo S. Ndebele, 'Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Literature', *Staffrider*, Vol.6, No.1, 1984.