

1991

Forums and Forces: Recent Trends in South African Literary Journals

Andries Walter Oliphant

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Oliphant, Andries Walter, Forums and Forces: Recent Trends in South African Literary Journals, *Kunapipi*, 13(1), 1991.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol13/iss1/14>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Forums and Forces: Recent Trends in South African Literary Journals

Abstract

Literary journals are important sites of cultural production. They perform a variety of roles which include providing forums for new developments in literature by publishing emergent voices. They help mediate and shape the direction in which a national literature develops by means of critical essays, reviews and debates. In most societies journals are often the barometers of the general literary life.

Forums and Forces: Recent Trends in South African Literary Journals

ANDRIES WALTER OLIPHANT

Literary journals are important sites of cultural production. They perform a variety of roles which include providing forums for new developments in literature by publishing emergent voices. They help mediate and shape the direction in which a national literature develops by means of critical essays, reviews and debates. In most societies journals are often the barometers of the general literary life.

What is required, especially in a survey of literature journals, is to remain alert to general cultural developments and the particular historical context in which literary production occurs. The production and dissemination of cultural products, information and opinions are socially based activities involving a wide range of processes which constitute, reproduce, oppose, resist, and transform the socio-cultural environment. As Bernth Lindfors has indicated, many journals have a short life span, and so they tend to be of a transitory nature.¹ This means that their function in a particular context is inevitably linked to the concerns of a particular time.

In the current context of social and political ferment, where the hegemony of the racial domination is confronted with the unstoppable rise of non-racial democratic forces, it is important to be alert to the ways in which journals relate and respond to, as well as participate in socio-cultural change. Journals, it must be said, do not merely reflect certain social and cultural trends but also deflect, resist, displace, silence and contradict the actual and symbolic practices in a society. The conflicting social groupings and the rival ideological and cultural perspectives inherent in South African society therefore invariably enter into the production and function of journals.

Over the last forty years, since the rise of the Afrikaner Nationalists to power in 1948, up to the present crisis and the impending demise of apartheid, the conflict which has marked the history of South Africa acquired particularly intense and violent forms. This conflict turned around the contradiction between the anti-democratic monopoly of political and economic power by a white minority on the one hand, and the struggle for national liberation and the desire for a non-racial democratic state by the majority of the population on the other. Cultural production in general, and literary life in particular, have had to establish their places and roles in relation to

these forces. In this regard the struggle between the cultural imperialism associated with the colonial history of apartheid and the national democratic movement has resulted in attempts by the opposing forces to develop a 'confluence of cultural levels of the various social categories' for the purposes of domination or liberation.²

A survey of some of the publications in circulation today reveals that they can be located within clearly discernible interest groups with particular, if often unarticulated or deliberately obscured ideological perspectives on literature and culture. Generally speaking, these interest groups consist of a white English liberal tradition, a non-racial democratic tradition, a black Africanist tradition, a white Afrikaans conservative and racist tradition, and a liberal white and black Afrikaans tendency. While these groups have their own internal contradictions and conflicting class components they, generally speaking, also stand in conflict with each other on a wide range of matters.

From a literary point of view a number of journals can be identified in relation to these groupings. Three journals with predominantly white liberal and English speaking contributors and readership are in circulation at present, namely *New Contrast*, *New Coin* and *Sesame*. In addition, there is *Staffrider*, established in 1978. It has a black and white readership and both black and white contributors and, although politically unaligned, it is supportive of the non-racial democratic movement. In 1988, a year after the establishment of the non-racial Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), which also subscribes to the national democratic struggle, a number of regional journals were established in the Cape, Natal and Transvaal. The content, orientation and readership of these COSAW journals vary from region to region while adhering to the broad democratic, non-racial and non-sexist perspective of the organization. Presently there are also attempts by the African Writers' Association which adheres to broad Black Consciousness and Africanist perspectives, to revive *The Classic* which has not been published since 1985. Progressive Afrikaans interests are catered for by the magazine *Stet*.

Most of these publications have a relatively small circulation, printing between 500 and 1000 copies. They therefore belong to the genre of little magazines. *Staffrider*, which in the 1970s had a print run of 10,000 and currently prints 4000 copies, is an exception. The content of most magazines consists mainly of creative and discursive writing covering the traditional literary genres. In this respect *Staffrider* is also much more broadly constituted. It publishes popular history, social documentary photography and art and hosts an annual exhibition of photography and art.

Contrast, established in 1960, is the oldest journal in circulation. In 1990 it amalgamated with *Upstream Magazine* and is now known as *New Contrast*. This Cape Town based magazine has served a sector of South African writers for the past thirty years. Its founders consisted of authors such as Guy Butler, Jack Cope, Alan Paton and Uys Krige. While predominant-

ly English and liberal in its orientation the magazine also publishes work in Afrikaans. This bi-lingualism to some extent explains the title of the journal. This confluence between the relatively strong English liberal editorial strands and, the until recently feeble impulses of liberalism in white Afrikaans cultural circles, has given the magazine a progressive profile in the context of overwhelming white conservatism. Despite this, black writers, with the exception of Richard Rive, have over the years featured only marginally in the magazine which published poetry, fiction, play-texts, literary reviews and cultural essays as well as reproductions of graphic art, mainly as illustrations or to provide some visual variation to the literary material.

On examining the statements made by some editors of the magazine, one is struck by the persistence of an unbending insistence on vaguely formulated 'universal aesthetic principles'. This is buttressed by claims of ideological independence and objectivity. For instance, in a review of a celebration issue of *Contrast* after its first year in circulation, C.J. Driver cited the claim of the editors that the magazine is politically, 'independent, unfettered and unbiased'. Driver argues that this claim of non-alignment is a ruse and points to the hidden policy, bias and ideological affiliations of the magazine, discernible in the financial institutions and individuals who sponsor it, as well as the editorial statements and kind of work selected for publication.

The preoccupation with cultural upliftment and civilization which dominates liberal English discourse is, for instance, evident in the 'Comment' of Volume 1, Number 3, of the magazine. It states that the philosophy of the journal is based on the notion 'that writers dealing with the "race theme" will not last because until the artist can touch all humanity with compassion he has not advanced beyond the blundering steps of a primitive'.³

A number of assumptions are disclosed and concealed in this statement. It avers that a concern with the social and political realities of the South African society is a trap which denudes literary works of their universal human and aesthetic value. Socio-political concerns are equated with cultural primitivism. At the heart of it lies a contradiction and an implicit derogatory reference to the indigenous people of South Africa. This is the contradiction: If primitives are human, and aesthetic values timeless and universal, then surely the earliest and least developed societies, including the 'primitives' must have had access to these values. If not, then the category of 'humanity' in this statement is unconsciously reserved for a particular middle class individual of European origin. Thus the European in his liberal guise becomes the epitome of humanity. The hidden racism which governs the unconscious of this position is evident.

The editor is so blinded by his own assumed sophistication that he completely fails to understand that there are no inherent inferiorities in the various themes writers choose to explore. What gives writing a lasting

quality, are not the themes chosen by the writer but the content and form given to a specific theme. Shakespeare's treatment of the psychology of racism in *Othello* is sufficient to explode the fallacy of thematic prejudice. Nor for that matter does the concern with the history and consequences of colonialism in African literature, for example, render it inferior to European literature concerned with the processes and effects of industrialization.

Despite the fact that the liberal views referred to here have been under attack since the seventies they still persist. Thirty years later a similar statement is made by the poet Douglas Reid Skinner, the previous editor of *Upstream* and present editor of *New Contrast*. In his first editorial of the amalgamated magazine he writes: 'The editorial standpoint will not differ from those previously held by the editorial staff: a belief in the centrality of tried and tested aesthetic and moral values in the creative enterprise, yet remaining open to a diversity of opinions and understandings.'⁴

This conception is clearly ignorant of the extent to which socio-historical circumstances and the material culture of a particular society are inscribed in the aesthetic practises of its writers and artists. It postulates a static unchanging notion of beauty and morality. It reveals a typical liberal tolerance towards divergent 'opinions' and 'understanding', and an authoritarian refusal to concede that different, differing, opposing or rival aesthetic traditions do exist in South Africa and elsewhere. Readers are told without any substantiation that certain aesthetic and moral values are not only central to the magazine but also to the creative enterprise. What are these central and mysterious values? Why are aesthetic and moral values conflated here? These nagging questions remain unanswered. A strategic silence, which elevates ignorance and mystification to the realm of a special inaccessible kind of knowledge, prevails.

The reader must therefore infer what these values are. If one concludes that the values evoked here are a particular brand of South African liberal humanism with all its colonial implications, then Skinner is likely to protest. In a recent interview I probed some of these issues. Skinner explained his editorial approach by referring to his experiences as editor of *Upstream*, started by the poet Allen James in 1983 as a journal exclusively devoted to poetry. Skinner took over the editorship in 1987. He explains: 'I expanded the magazine to include other literary genres. I had no specific or coherent editorial policy. Selection was made by personal choices, schooled reading, taste, education and a history of choices based on a recognition of traditional aesthetics.'⁵ These values, still vaguely articulated but clearly rooted in the personal and social background of the editor, were transferred, or more correctly, found a congenial forum in the merger of *Upstream* and *Contrast* to *New Contrast* in 1990.

Scrutinizing the creative contributions, reviews and critical essays published in *Upstream* under Skinner's editorship, a liberal humanist aesthetics fiercely hostile to socially oriented literary practices emerges. Thus,

Stephen Watson, a current associate editor of the magazine, charged with selecting critical essays, takes the following self-damning view of the poetry produced by black writers since the 1970s:

Overwhelmingly, the black poetry of the last two decades consists of a number of half-assimilated European conventions which are frequently patched together in so confused and piecemeal a fashion that one thinks, reading the work not in terms of a 'renaissance' or 'breakthrough', but rather with anger and dismay at what has happened in this country that such beginnings should remain largely unfulfilled. The more one absorbs this poetry, the more one is reminded of the old truism that declares bad art always to be totally determined by its socio-historical context, good art never.⁶

The sweeping nature of this statement, its ethnocentricity, masks a profound aversion to a significant current in South African writing and would qualify it for dismissal as sub-standard in any critical discourse. The aggressive postulation of 'European conventions' at the centre of evaluation, or as the criterion, norm and measure of fullness, of which local black writing is but a 'half assimilated' version, suggests a discursive process in which racist attitudes are displaced into the field of literary aesthetics. If this interpretation seems uncharitable, or even unfounded, let us recall the reactionary epistemology of racism and its corollary of cultural supremacy. According to Tzvetan Todorov the concept 'racism' signifies a pattern of 'behaviour which consists in the display of contempt or aggressiveness toward other people on account of physical differences (other than those of sex) between them and oneself'.⁷ This inability to deal with difference lies at the heart of the problem. For Watson 'European conventions' are superior to any other literary traditions. This aesthetic authoritarianism requires that all literature be measured against some unspecified European tradition. Consequently he fails to understand that the model he invokes is not universal. It is a cultural specific reference which he wishes to enforce with all the coercive aggression and violent negations associated with colonialism.

This is all rather distasteful. But given what is at stake in South Africa it has to be pursued to its logical conclusion. Brushing this under the carpet, as has been done for so long, would amount to critical expediency. Unfortunately this view, despite its historical obsolescence, persists. It is representative of those white English-speaking liberals, who constitute a sector of South Africans, who seek to control cultural discourse by arrogating to themselves, their language and writings some fabled universal aesthetic referent. This myopic attitude of exclusion underpins the past cultural practices, referred to by Albie Sachs, in which attempts were made 'to force everyone into the mould of the English gentleman, projected as the epitome of civilization, so that it was even an honour to be oppressed by the English'.⁸

The 'old truism' concerning the inherent inferiority of socially determined 'art' is indeed a tired liberal cliché. The relationship between the warnings to early writers who concern themselves with the 'racial question' and work 'totally determined by socio-historical context' should be evident. This stagnant cultural perspective is what constitutes Skinner's 'tried and tested aesthetic and moral values'. This tradition which dominates institutionalised academic literary practices has been criticized by Mike Kirkwood, one of the founders of *Staffrider*, in the 1970s. Kirkwood exposed the complicity of South African liberalism with the racial arrogance and human negations associated with colonialism and called for a radical liberatory literary approach.⁹

More recently Rory Ryan criticized the aesthetic and moral absolutism which inheres in South African English liberalism by drawing attention to the political imperatives which govern such practices of cultural exclusion:

One of the most seriously hegemonic and repressive gestures produced by humanism has been to offer its socio-cultural goals as 'truth', and its methods (of self-perpetuation and glorification) as 'truth-seeking'. The recoverability of transhistorical truth is thus at once demonstrated and subordinated to humanist authority, so creating the idea of real knowledge beyond time and ensuring that no unauthorized personnel ever 'find' this knowledge.¹⁰

The complicity of liberalism with the oppressive techniques associated with cultural domination in South Africa is evident. This hegemony within English literature, although not in complete agreement with the more extreme conservative forms in Afrikaans culture, has nevertheless established fields of exclusion to the disadvantage of black writers. This is also the case with the magazine *Sesame*, edited by the poet Lionel Abrahams. Abrahams has been involved with a number of journals since the late 1950s. Between 1957 and 1971 he worked on *Purple Renoster*. In the 1970s he produced a number of issues of *Quarry* published by Ad Donker. In the 1980s he was associate editor of *The Bloody Horse*. Since 1982 he has produced *Sesame*.

Surveying Abrahams' past and present projects one becomes aware of the extent to which he has consistently tried to establish outlets for local writers. He preferred working in intimate and close-knit circles where his literary authority is deferred to. The advantages of personal intimacy thus afforded are, however, undercut by its broader social disadvantages and the inevitability of exclusion which accompanies it. The work published in the magazines edited by him drew material from a circumscribed and predominantly white group. Where black writers such as Oswald Mtshali, Mafika Gwala, Wally Serote and others managed to penetrate this laager of exclusivity it was strictly on the terms set by the editor. In the case of Serote the programme of the white liberal editor and the radical black poet clashed to such an extent that Serote sought the advice of Steve Biko

to ensure that his work was not diverted, and his integrity as a poet was not compromised.¹¹

Abrahams explains his editorial approach as follows:

If I have an editorial policy at all, it is to follow the writers who display a degree of talent rather than to follow the trends. I am a pragmatic editor. I don't select the creative work because of the time or historical circumstance although some of the non-creative work I chose to publish is, however, a reaction to specific issues raised at a given time.¹²

This insistence on timelessness and talent as well as its function within liberal aesthetics has been discussed. Abrahams has, in line with this timeless preoccupation, consistently attacked writers and organizations who actively support the Cultural Boycott against the white minority state, by equating the boycott with censorship. While the censorious dangers inherent in the boycott should not be brushed aside, Abrahams has shown little understanding of its local and international role in bringing about change in South Africa. Consequently, he has defended the right of the artist to 'ignore political matters or to be politically out of step'.¹³ This freedom, as far as my knowledge of South African literature is concerned, has never been threatened by writers opposed to cultural domination. There is nothing objectionable in artists who choose political irrelevance in times of social injustice and crisis. It is, however, rather dubious when those, who insist on artistic freedom, elect to attack writers committed to political and socio-cultural change as well as freedom for all. Here the agenda of the liberals, whether they are conscious of it or not, coincides with the forces of repression. Blinded by the desire to retain the cultural high ground, their refusal to participate in the struggle for social change is directly related to a disabling and narrow view of freedom. This ironically serves to undermine the very values apparently cherished by liberalism.

A welcome change, within the predominantly liberal forums, has been Robert Berold's editorship of *New Coin*, the poetry journal established in 1960 by the Institute for the Study of English in Africa at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. Berold has remoulded this dull and conservative journal into a lively forum which publishes a wide range of South African poetry. He has given space to poets preoccupied with inner contemplation as well as to those concerned with wider public issues. His openness to aesthetic diversity and not a mere tolerance to different opinions concerning poetry is evident in the following passage: 'We do have poets who can speak with voices of a whole people. But there are other voices, the secret colour of joy, of those who lost love somewhere and don't know where (and those who know exactly where). All these voices have a place in our poetry, and not only these.'¹⁴

The dominance of liberal forums has over the years been challenged by radical writers. Forums seeking to articulate the experiences of black and

white opponents of Apartheid have been established in the process. In 1951 *Drum*, a news and feature articles magazine aimed at the black urban population, published short stories and gave rise to writers such as Es'kia Mphahlele, Can Themba, Richard Rive, Bloke Modisane, Casey Motsisi, Alex La Guma and others. In the context of the ascendancy of Verwoerdian Apartheid, it is hardly surprising that many of the stories encode aspects of the socio-political process. Michael Chapman, in this respect, correctly asserts: 'Most of the writers were concerned with more than just telling a story. They were concerned with what was happening to their people and, in consequence, with moral and social questions.'¹⁵

During the 1950s and 1960s there were also a number of other journals open to blacks and social critical writing. *The Classic*, edited by Nat Nakasa, and *The New African*, a radical monthly based in Cape Town, which began to circulate in 1962, provided forums for anti-Apartheid writing. Other outlets for counter-hegemonic writing included publications such as *New Age* and *Fighting Talk*. These developments in radical indigenous writing came to an abrupt end in the wake of the proscriptions which followed the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress in 1961. Many of the writers productive at this time were banned, prohibited from writing or left the country. In many cases it became a crime to circulate and read their work. This resulted in a situation where South African literature in English, in the wry words of Richard Rive, 'virtually became White by law'.¹⁶

Against this background of repression and white domination black writing re-emerged in the course of the seventies, initially under white liberal patronage. Later the Black Consciousness Movement gathered momentum, and its tenets of black self-reliance stressed the need for black autonomy in all spheres of life. Thus, in 1978, in the aftermath of the Soweto uprisings of 1976, *Staffrider Magazine* was launched by Ravan Press. The journal sought to provide a forum for the various community-based cultural groups which sprang up in the urban townships. It also published the work of individuals drawn towards the establishment of post-Soweto culture.¹⁷

To implement the concept of self-reliance and move away from the traditional top-down editorial style the notion of 'self-editing' was introduced by the editorial group. This practice was premised on the assumption or expectation that the various community organizations would select and edit the work of their members before submitting it to the magazine based in Johannesburg. These ideas proved rather difficult, if not impossible to implement. Given the centralized nature of the magazine, extensive secondary selection, editing and the entire production had to be undertaken by a series of unacknowledged, behind-the-scene editors and production personnel employed by Ravan Press. In the first ten years a succession of individuals edited and produced the magazine. They included Mike Kirk-

wood, Mothobi Mutlostse, Jaki Seroke, Rose Zwi, Dorothy Wheeler, Mzwakhe Nlabatsi, Chris van Wyk and many others.

As for the communal projections of the publication Mike Kirkwood, one of the founders of the magazine, recalls the early years of the magazine in the anniversary anthology *Ten Years of Staffrider*. He writes somewhat nostalgically:

It used to be suggested, in the pages of *Staffrider*, that a writer was in some sense the voice of a distinct community, which thus spoke to other communities via a network of those interlocutors and their readers. Banners appeared over bundles of poems and stories ascribing the milieu of Sebokeng, Katlehong Mamelodi, etc. to the work presented. Often enough the writers had indeed formed themselves into groups. As often, the universal application of this layout principle conferred 'community' on writers living in a state of blissful anomy. Our failure to think this issue through, or rationalize it as a proper operating principle, was the clearest indication of our populist tendency. In the end, as the groups withered away, we simply dropped a rubric which had always been somewhat symbolic.¹⁸

The accentuation of the social location of the artist, the social origin and reference of literature and art which dominated the early years of *Staffrider* was largely a reaction to, as well as an attempt at breaking with the ahistorical and universalizing aesthetics of liberalism and its narrow framework of the isolated individual as the basis of creativity. *Staffrider* attempted to locate the writer and the work within a collective context, defined as a community, more specifically, an oppressed community, involved in a cultural and political struggle against apartheid. This radical orientation was grafted on to a mixture of Africanist populism and inchoate revolutionary tendencies based on somewhat romantic notions of collectivism.

Staffrider, nevertheless, published a variety of cultural work ranging from poetry, fiction, drama, and essays to social documentary, photography, art and popular history. During the seventies and early eighties it pioneered and supported a new movement in social documentary photography led by figures such as Omar Badsha and Paul Weinberg. By means of the *Staffrider Series* it established a new generation of writers such as Njabulo Ndebele, Mbulelo Mzamane, Miriam Tlali, Mutuzeli Matshoba, Athmat Dangor, Jeremy Cronin, Wally Serote, James Matthews, Daniel Kunene, Donald Parenzee. In addition writers such as Gladys Thomas, Jayapraga Reddy and Gcina Mhlophe were first published in this magazine. It also reinserted writers from the previous decade, such as Es'kia Mphahlele, Can Themba, Casey Motsisi and Nat Nakasa into the contemporary literary discourse. It evolved from the early Black Consciousness period of the seventies to participate in the revival of the non-racial democratic movement of the early eighties, inaugurated by the launch of the United Democratic Front in 1983, to play an important role in the providing a forum for upsurge in working class culture which developed under the

auspices of the labour movement.¹⁹ Today, steered by an editorial board consisting of Njabulo Ndebele, Nadine Gordimer, Gcina Mhlophe, Ivan Vladislavic, Paul Weinberg, David Koloane, Luli Callinicos, Gary Rathbone and Jeff Lok, and faced with the challenges to reflect and direct the new transformative concerns within social and literary circles, it stands as a monument to the processes of cultural resistance, renewal, affirmation, and inclusiveness in the context of a repressive past.

A significant development on the literary front in recent times has been the formation in 1987 of the Congress of South African Writers. This is a nationally constituted organization with branches in the Transvaal, Natal, Free State, Eastern Cape and Western Cape. Although not formally affiliated to any political organization, it sees its work as part of the broad national democratic movement. One of the immediate goals of the organization is to provide a home for writers with education and training as its main activities. It also produces and disseminates written and oral literature in all the languages of the country, which reflect the heritage and visions of all South Africans. Regular workshops are held and a number of regional publications have been established in the course of 1988 and 1989. *Writers' Note Book* in Natal, *Ingolovane* in Transvaal and *Akal* in the Western Cape have been compiled and edited by members elected to the publications committees in the various regions. These journals display a sensitivity to the language clusters within the different regions, such as the Afrikaans, English, and Xhosa groupings in the Cape, the Zulu and English clusters in Natal and the cosmopolitan diversity of the Transvaal. Despite this sensitivity to multilingualism English is predominant.

The regional nature of the magazines implies that the forums can move closer to local communities and emergent writers than any centralized national publication such as *Staffrider*. This, however, has not eliminated the problem whereby academics and the established writers dominate the regional forums at the expense of emergent voices. Nor have the magazines succeeded in high-lighting the regional particularities of the contributors and readership in relation to their context. According to Abduragheim Johnstone, the Western Cape publications officer, 'this top down initiative ran counter to the democratic principle as posed by the organization and has resulted in a gap between established and aspirant writers. To correct this imbalance it has been decided to establish publishing forums for members in the various local branches in the region'.²⁰ In 1990 the first edition of *Local: Western Cape Region* appeared. It is a cheaply produced journal which provides space for writers who might otherwise be overlooked by journals drawing material from a larger membership of the general public.

Two other significant forums representing important cultural tendencies remain to be outlined, namely developments in the black Africanist and Afrikaans journals. The Africanist forces and values espoused by the African Writers' Association have been articulated in their journal *The*

Classic. The journal was originally founded in 1963 by Nat Nakasa and later edited by the playwright and director Barney Simon. It became defunct but in 1976 it was resuscitated and edited by Sipho Sepamla who renamed it *The New Classic*. It again disappeared to resurface under the name *The Classic* edited by Jaki Seroke and was published by the African Writers' Association in the early 1980s. This organization was formed in 1981 after the dissolution of the multiracial Johannesburg centre of PEN. The literary programme of the African Writers' Association, governed by broad Africanist principles, seeks to provide an organizational and publishing forum as well as 'to establish bonds of fellowship among African writers in South Africa'.²¹

This perspective is rooted in those streams of African Nationalism associated with the Pan Africanist Congress of the 1950s and the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s, both of which are still significant currents in South African politics today. It centres around a reaction to, and rejection of, white domination. Its programmes are based on a call for black exclusivity embracing Africans, so-called Coloureds and Indians on the basis of their shared oppression.

The Classic has, however, appeared infrequently and went out of circulation in the mid 1980s. A recent advertisement in a local newspaper calling for contributions indicates that the magazine is to be revived once again under the sponsorship of the African Writers' Association. According to the organizing editor, Nhlanguisio Dlala, the revival of the magazine is underpinned by a desire to combine an anti-apartheid orientation with deliberately African sensibilities in cultural expression and a strong opposition to European cultural traditions.²² Going over some of the back-issues one is left in no doubt about the emphasis in *The Classic* on the literary and cultural experience of blacks and their relationship to traditional and emergent nationalist cultural forces specific to Africa and the diaspora.

In Afrikaans the conservative journal *Standpunte* was closed by its sponsors, Nasionale Boekhandel, in 1987 when there was a possibility of its radicalization with the appointment of the author and academic, André Brink, as editor. Brink planned to widen the purview of the magazine to include black Afrikaans writing, as well as social critical tendencies. At the moment, apart from the conservative *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, the only vibrant Afrikaans outlet for literature is *Stet*, sponsored and published by Taurus Publishers, an independent anti-apartheid publishing house based in Johannesburg. The magazine has an iconoclastic orientation and a distinctly non-elitist attitude to literature. It serves as a forum for the new rebellious voices in Afrikaans which began to emerge in the early eighties at a time when the upsurge in the national democratic movement coincided with a growing radicalization among certain sectors of Afrikaner intellectuals. *Stet* is clearly opposed to the conservative values which have dominated Afrikaans literary circles for decades, and its opposition often

takes on the form of subversive humour and a calculated indifference to reactionary morality.

This overview has indicated that many literary journals in South Africa are related to a variety of social tendencies. Given the crucial phase of cultural re-evaluation and the challenges of transformation facing writers and cultural workers in South Africa at present, the continued availability of publishing forums open to a wide range of cultural practices and forces is vital. For, as argued at the outset, journals constitute a site in which the forces at work in a given society are reflected, articulated, analysed, recreated and developed. What has become urgent for South Africans is the challenge to give greater space to a diversity of ideas and forms of expression, to subject this to evaluation and criticism in ways which will free the South African society of all forms of cultural arrogance and oppression. This freedom is necessary for the development of a new multi-dimensional literature and democratic culture in which the experiences and visions of all South Africans are reflected. The emergence of new voices and ideas which will contribute new directions out of the present cultural crisis cannot happen without the forums provided by journals.

NOTES

1. Bernth Lindfors, 'African Little Magazines', in *The African Book Publishing Record*, Volume 13 Number 3. (Oxford: Hans Zell, 1987), p. 87.
2. Amilcar Cabral, 'National Liberation and Culture', in *Unity and Struggle* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 151.
3. C.J. Driver, 'No Politics is Politics: A Review of Contrast', *The New African: The Radical Monthly*, Volume 1 Number 4, April 1982.
4. Douglas Reid Skinner, 'Editorial Notes', *New Contrast* 69, Volume 18 Number 1, p. 3.
5. Douglas Reid Skinner, Interview with A.W. Oliphant 1990. Unpublished.
6. Stephen Watson, 'Shock of the Old: What's Become of "Black Poetry"?', *Upstream*, Volume 5 Number 2, 1987, p. 23.
7. Tzevetan Todorov, '"Race", Writing and Culture', in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Race, Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 370.
8. Albie Sachs, 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom', *Ingolovane*, Number 2, 1990, p. 27.
9. Mike Kirkwood, 'The Colonizer: A Critique of the English South African Culture Theory', in Peter Wilhelm and James Polley, eds., *Poetry South Africa: Selected Papers from Poetry '74* (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1976).
10. Rory Ryan, 'Literary Intellectual Behavior in South Africa', in Martin Trump, ed., *Rendering Things Visible: Essays on South African Literary Culture* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1990), p. 2.
11. Jaki Seroke, 'Poet in Exile: An Interview with Mongane Serote', *Staffrider*, Volume 4 Number 1, 1981, p. 30.
12. Lionel Abrahams, Interview with A.W. Oliphant, Unpublished 1990.
13. Lionel Abrahams, 'Concerning Sesame', *Sesame*, Number 11, 1988-1989, p. 1.
14. Robert Berold, 'Editorial', *New Coin Poetry*. Volume 25 Number 2, 1989.

15. Michael Chapman, 'More Than Just Telling a Story: *Drum* and its Significance in Black South African Writing', in Michael Chapman, ed., *The Drum Decade: Stories from the 1950s* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1989), p. 183.
16. Richard Rive, 'Books by Black Writers', *Staffrider*, Volume 5 Number 1, 1982, p. 14.
17. 'About *Staffrider*', *Staffrider*, Volume 1 Number 1, 1987, p. 1. Reprinted in A.W. Oliphant and I. Vladislavic, eds., *Ten Years of Staffrider* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), p. 4.
18. Mike Kirkwood, 'Remembering *Staffrider*', in A.W. Oliphant and I. Vladislavic, eds., *Ten Years of Staffrider* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), p. 4.
19. Frank Meintjies, Mi Hlatshwayo, A.W. Oliphant and I. Vladislavic, eds., *Staffrider Worker Culture*, Volume 8 Numbers 3&4, 1989.
20. Abduragheem Johnstone, Interview with A.W. Oliphant, Unpublished 1990.
21. See 'African Writers' Association: Aims and Objectives', *The Classic*, Volume 2 Number 1, 1983, p. 48.
22. See 'Fifties Literary Magazine Revived', *New Nation*, Volume 5 Number 33, 17-23 August, p. 9.