

**A DIALOGUE OF TWO SELVES: THEMES OF ALIENATION AND
AFRICAN HUMANISM IN THE WORKS OF ES'KIA MPHAHLELE**

by

RUTH ELIZABETH OBEE

submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the subject

ENGLISH

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: MR M K HOLLOWAY

NOVEMBER 1994

Student number: 768-226-3

I declare that * A Dialogue of Two Selves: Themes of Alienation..
..and African Humanism in the Works of Es'kia Mphahlele my own work
and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and
acknowledged by means of complete references.

(Mrs) RE Obee
SIGNATURE
[Obee, R E (Mrs)]

October 24, 1994.....
DATE

- * The exact wording of the title as it appears on the copies of your dissertation, submitted for examination purposes, should be indicated in the open space.

Dedicated to the memory of my father

George Croshaw Young

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the true spirit of African humanism, I wish to express my deep gratitude to kin and extended family of friends and mentors without whom the writing of this dissertation would not have been possible. I am grateful to Dr. Louise Attebery at Albertson College of Idaho for his encouragement over the years. I wish to thank Dr. Donald Herdeck of Three Continents Press in Colorado Springs, Colorado, Dr. Peter Thuynsma at University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and Leon de Kock at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in Pretoria as well as John L. Collier, Associate Dean of the School of Area Studies at the Foreign Service Institute in Washington, D.C., for helping to plant the seed of the idea for this dissertation. I also wish to thank Dr. Thuynsma for his fine lecture on Down Second Avenue, his moving and highly useful anthology Footsteps Along the Way (1989) and for his generosity in sharing out-of-print manuscripts. My gratitude extends to Professor Gerald Chapman at University of Denver in the Western Rockies for his insightful interview.

I am more grateful than I can say for the "ubuntu" with which Professor Es'kia Mphahlele has given of himself and of his time in interviews, casual chats at the dinner table; as well as in the exchange of letters and telephone calls over the past five years. Most of all I am grateful for the largeness of spirit and the gift of language which rendered Professor Mphahlele in his essential being an African humanist. To my mentor Myles Holloway I owe a debt of deep gratitude for his having stretched me in unexpected directions in learning and research. I am in awe of his high standards, infinite patience; his profound knowledge and wise guidance. His abundant scholarly attributes have enriched and expanded me. A warm thank you also goes to UNISA Research Librarian Dawie Malan for his superb assistance and for his friendship. I wish to thank my long-suffering family, in particular, Kent, Brock, Kiran and Lucy for their unstinting support. Last but not least, a special word of thanks to Judy Stafford, Nelda Bravo and Carol Baldwin who encouraged me, in the words of Martin Luther King, to "keep your eyes on the prize."

SUMMARY

A DIALOGUE OF TWO SELVES: THEMES OF ALIENATION AND AFRICAN
HUMANISM IN THE WORKS OF ES'KIA MPHABLELE

Es'kia Mphahlele's concept of African humanism was a seminal influence on Black Consciousness thought and provided the philosophical basis for a landmark body of South African criticism and aesthetics with roots in Africa. African humanism as a black ethos, combined with rich metaphoric speech, symbols, values and myths resurrected from the deep African past, afforded the author a powerful cultural weapon with which to criticize centuries of colonialism, racism, and state apartheid, related Western industrial forces of economic exploitation and alienation. Moreover, the counterweights of African humanism and alienation in the dialogue of two selves -- one that is Western-educated and colonized and the other African -- contribute key elements of realism, vitality, humour, insight, cultural identity, and characterization to Mphahlele's most effective protest writing which, in turn, has helped to shape a black nationalist vision which has surprising relevance to South Africa in the 1990s.

* * * * *

KEY TERMS DESCRIBING THE TOPIC OF THE DISSERTATION

Es'kia Mphahlele, South Africa, South African Literature, African humanism, alienation, African nationalist vision, Black Consciousness, colonial, Negritude, apartheid, criticism, autobiography, African aesthetics.

CONTENTS

TITLE.....	i
DECLARATION.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHRONOLOGY.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1 From Social Darwinism in the Early Works of Es'kia Mphahlele to African Humanism: A Divided Self.....	17
CHAPTER 2 From Black Stereotypes in English Fiction to Black Consciousness in Mphahlele's <u>The African Image</u> : Making the Label Stick.....	44
CHAPTER 3 <u>Down Second Avenue</u> : The Autobiography of an African Humanist.....	90
CHAPTER 4 "Mrs Plum:" A Paradigmatic Dialogue of Themes of Alienation and African Humanism.....	148
CONCLUSION.....	182
ENDNOTES.....	202
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	206

CHRONOLOGY

- 1919 Born 17 December in Marabastad township, Pretoria.
- 1924 At age five taken to live with paternal grandmother at Mphahlele.
- 1932 Returns to Marabastad and attends school.
- 1935 Enters St. Peter's Secondary School in Johannesburg.
- 1939 Qualifies as a teacher at Adams College, Durban.
- 1941 Works as a clerk, short-hand typist and instructor at Enzenzeleni Blind Institute. Studies for matriculation by correspondence.
- 1942 Matriculates by correspondence.
- 1945 Death of mother, Eva. Joins Orlando High School, Johannesburg, as teacher of Afrikaans and English. Marries Rebecca Mochadibane.
- 1946 Publication of Man Must Live.
- 1947 Birth of first son Anthony.
- 1949 Awarded Bachelor of Arts, University of South Africa (UNISA).
- 1950 Birth of daughter, Teresa Kefilwe.
- 1952 Banned from teaching in South African government schools because of active lobbying against Bantu Education Act.
- 1953 Birth of son, Patrick Motswiri.
- 1954 First exile in Basutoland [Lesotho]; joins staff of Basutoland High School in Maseru. Returns to Johannesburg; teaches at St. Peter's.
- 1955 Awarded Honours degree in English literature from UNISA.
- 1955-1957 Joins Drum magazine as fiction editor, sub-editor and political reporter. Publishes "Lesane" Stories in Drum. Is awarded M.A. in English with distinction from UNISA.
- 1957 Embarks for Lagos on occasion of second exile. Serves as lecturer at University of Ibadan.
- 1959 Publication of Down Second Avenue (Faber & Faber, London). Birth of son Chabi Robert Dichaba.
- 1961 Helps establish Mbari Writers and Artists Club in Ibadan. Edits and contributes to Black Orpheus literary journal. Birth of son Puso. Is later that year appointed Director of the African programme of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Paris. Departs Nigeria for Paris, France. Is visiting lecturer in October at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States. Publication of The Living and the Dead; banning order gazetted.
- 1962 Publication of The African Image (Faber & Faber, London).
- 1962-1963 Tours and works in such African countries as Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal and Sierra Leone. Also attends professional seminars in Europe and the United States.

- 1963 Leaves Paris for Nairobi, Kenya, to serve as Director of Chemchemi Creative Centre under auspices of Congress for Cultural Freedom.
- 1964 Publication of Modern African Stories (Faber & Faber, London).
- 1965 Joins the University College in Nairobi as lecturer in English.
- 1966 Publishes pamphlet A Guide to Creative Writing (East African Literature Bureau). Receives Farfield Foundation Scholarship to work toward Ph.D. at the University of Denver.
- 1967 Publication of African Writing Today (Penguin Books) and the second collection of short stories, In Corner B and Other Stories.
- 1968 Awarded Ph.D. for novel The Wanderers. Leaves Denver for Lusaka to serve as Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Zambia.
- 1969 Elected to Phi Beta Kappa and nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature. Awarded first prize by African Arts/Arts Afrique magazine, University of California, for the novel The Wanderers.
- 1970 Returns to the United States as Associate Professor of English at the University of Denver. Edits Thought, Ideology and African Literature (University of Denver).
- 1971 Publication of The Wanderers by Macmillan.
- 1972 Publication of Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays by Hill and Wang.
- 1974 Joins University of Pennsylvania as fully tenured professor. Publication of the second edition of The African Image (Faber & Faber, New York).
- 1977 Returns permanently to South Africa. Fails in 1978 to secure chair of English at the University of the North. Accepts employment as inspector of schools in Lebowa.
- 1979 Awarded Ford Foundation grant to record oral poetry in North Sotho, Tsonga and Venda languages. Appointed Senior Research Fellow and Professor of African Literature, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand.
- 1980 Founding member of the African Writers' Association in Johannesburg; Published Chirundu (Ravan Press, Johannesburg; Thomas Nelson, New York; Lawrence Hill, New York (1981)). Founding member and director of the Council for Black Education and Research in Johannesburg.
- 1981 Publication of The Unbroken Song: Selected Writings of Es'kia Mphahlele (Ravan Press, Johannesburg). Published Let's Write a Novel, a Guide (Maskew Miller, Cape Town).
- 1982 Awarded Honorary Doctorate in Humane letters, University of Pennsylvania, United States.

- 1983 Inaugurates Division of African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand; is appointed its chair. Receives Honorary Doctorate of Literature from the University of Natal.
- 1984 Publication of Afrika My Music and Father Comes Home (both Ravan Press, Johannesburg). Visiting Professor of African Literature, University of Pennsylvania. Receives the Ordre des Palmes Medal from the French government in recognition of contribution to French language and culture.
- 1985 Receives Honorary Doctorate of Literature from Rhodes University. Published Let's Talk Writing: Prose (Skotaville Publishers, Johannesburg).
- 1988-89 Awarded a Fulbright Professorship at University of South Carolina, United States. Continues as Emeritus Professor in African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The Present:

Professor Emeritus Es'kia Mphahlele continues to write for numerous periodicals, including a regular column for Tribute magazine and is currently the Director of the Council on Black Education and Research and Chairman of the Board of Funda Centre. In May of 1994, he received an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the University of Colorado in Boulder, Colorado in the United States of America, his fourth such honorary degree.

Introduction

Who is Es'kia Mphahlele -- the erudite gentleman of warm and unpretentious demeanor frequently seen about town at Johannesburg cultural events in fashionably faded American blue jeans and colourful embroidered West African dashiki?¹ Who is this self-professed African humanist and why is it important to study his works? The fact such questions might with any legitimacy be asked today about one of South Africa's foremost black writers is tragic proof (if any were needed) that the Verwoerdian scheme of apartheid has succeeded beyond anyone's wildest imaginings. Banning, listing, censorship and exile -- all have exacted their toll in terms of the published works of Es'kia Mphahlele that are currently out-of-print, are still for all practical purposes banned² or otherwise are unobtainable either in South Africa or abroad. As a result, several key works, including Mphahlele's autobiography Down Second Avenue (1959) as well as his novel Chirundu (1980) and the second edition of The African Image³ (1974) are in danger of being condemned to an early and undeserved obscurity.

The apartheid-induced literary disjuncture between past writers and present as well as between black writers and their legitimate and intended audiences is but one of the many forms of alienation -- intellectual, cultural and historical -- that has beleaguered black South African writers such as Es'kia Mphahlele for the past several decades, and which in turn, has deprived black youth of mythic heroes and role models of their own. As Mphahlele himself notes, black writers have been cut off from their literary past, particularly from the writers of the 1950s. They have been cut off from the literature that

captures the agony of the moment They don't even know it existed. They think that literature begins with them. So there is no resonance echoing the past, foreshadowing the future (Mphahlele in Thuynsma, ed., 1989: 140).

The malign neglect and active muzzling of black South African writers is among the numerous reasons why any study that

undertakes to re-examine their place and importance in the body of South African literature is itself of value. When the subject of study, as in the case of Es'kia Mphahlele, also happens to be an eminent scholar much in demand on the international circuit, a community leader, the doyen of African letters, and a philosopher who may have contributed inspiration to the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, then the need to argue the importance of the study becomes secondary to the need, instead, to do the study full justice.

Es'kia Mphahlele's life, from 1919 to the present, spans major periods in South African history and parallels the lives and development of other important black South African writers. His prodigious oeuvre comprizes some fourteen volumes of essays, criticism, short stories, autobiography and poetry as well as numerous articles. In 1946, Mphahlele published Man Must Live and Other Stories, the first collection of short stories ever to be published by a black South African. His widely acclaimed autobiography Down Second Avenue (1959) has been translated into close to a dozen languages, including Japanese and Serbo-Croatian. In 1968, he was nominated for the Nobel prize for literature. Three years later, his novel The Wanderers was awarded the Best African Novel Prize by Arts Afrique at the University of California. With the publication of his landmark critical work The African Image in 1974, Mphahléle became one of the first South Africans to have completed a "systematic theoretical and critical overview of writing in South Africa" (de Kock, 1987:36). Furthermore, as Samuel Omo Assein has observed, Mphahlele as teacher, writer, scholar and pater familias, has also been a "moving spirit in the entire process of nurturing the emergent tradition of written English in West and East Africa" (1980:38). In June of 1994, Mphahlele received an honorary doctor of humane letters from University of Colorado in Boulder, the fourth honorary doctorate in humanities and literature to be conferred upon him⁴.

X

It was with the support, selfless sacrifice and monumental labour of his mother and aunt that Mphahlele was able to overcome the twin obstacles of racial discrimination and dire poverty to secure an excellent mission school education first at St. Peter's Secondary School near Johannesburg and then at Adams College outside Durban in Natal where he qualified as a teacher in 1940. Because of his vocal and fearless opposition to the Bantu Education Act, however, Mphahlele was banned from teaching in 1952. In his capacity as secretary of the Transvaal Teachers Association (TTA), Mphahlele lobbied actively against the implementation of the Act, speaking out against it from the Transvaal to the Cape. Not only did his courageous appeal to justice and reason based on the liberal's belief in the possibility of change through persuasion fail utterly, it resulted in Mphahlele's being permanently banned from the teaching profession.

Despite Mphahlele's banning, he continued to profess liberal humanist sentiments some three years later in his dissertation for the University of South Africa (UNISA) entitled The Non-European Character in South African English Fiction, (December 1956) for which he earned a Master of Arts with distinction, the first black ever to do so, and from which his landmark work of criticism The African Image is a direct lineal descendant. Mphahlele's deep-seated humanism even at that early stage in his career as a scholar and writer declares itself in the following passage:

The non-white who portrays his own people has the same basic problems of characterization as the white novelist who writes about his own people. As cultural contact and admixture increase, the white novelist will understand the non-white better, and vice-versa (Mphahlele, 1956:15).

In view of his recent banning, this passage reflects an unshakeable optimism and an abiding faith on the part of Mphahlele in the power of knowledge and education to bring about change, thus overcoming centuries of cultural, literary and intellectual alienation and bias. Mphahlele thus approaches white racism from the position of a need to

understand its root cause which he attributes to ignorance and an inclination by whites either to view blacks always in terms of membership in the group or to typecast and stereotype individuals as being run off on an assembly line in such moulds as the "degenerate," "servant," "man with the halo" and so on. Mphahlele's approach is clearly, at this early stage, still one of protest rather than of resistance.

After his banning as a teacher, it became necessary for Mphahlele to seek out a means of support for his growing family, including his wife Rebecca and three small children. Mphahlele went to work, first as a messenger; and later as a reporter on Drum magazine, a career not of his choosing. Mphahlele had no desire to become a journalist, nor did he approve of a separate press -- one for whites; the other for blacks (Mphahlele, 1959:187).

Among the various forms of alienation experienced by Mphahlele, one of the most poignant and tragic is surely that of his professional alienation as a banned teacher, particularly in view of the immense loss it represented to the black community, his mother Eva's heroic sacrifices and the fact that teaching is Mphahlele's first love. Mphahlele told students at Denver University in the American Rockies, where his novel The Wanderers (1968) earned him a doctorate, that he considers he does nothing so well on his own terms as teach the discipline he loves (Mphahlele, 1973:33).⁵ As Gerald Moore has noted, it is

supremely ironic that Mphahlele's entire life had been an "unrelenting struggle to achieve the way of life for which his urban upbringing and liberal education had prepared him. ... [and] to achieve that life he had finally to become an exile " (Moore, 1969:93).

In addition to Mphahlele's banning, related political developments in South Africa pointed to ominous changes on the political horizon that did not bode well for the black majority. Just four years earlier, in 1948, the Nationalist

Party was voted into power. The election of the Nationalists signaled a triumph for the forces of alienation in South Africa, transforming the country into a malignant paradise and extinguishing all hopes of ending an era of racial discrimination and segregation. Despite growing wealth from mining and industry, South Africa still "rested on the presumptions of slavery." Abundant privileges and luxury enjoyed by whites, did not go hand-in-hand with the self-confidence to examine seriously

their actions or ideas. On the contrary, their political retreat into a 'white fortress' continued year by year ... (Davidson,1991:341).

Indeed, under the premiership of Dutch-born social engineer, Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, "apartheid became the most notorious form of racial domination the postwar world has known" (Thompson,1990:189). The four main pillars that supported the super-structure of state apartheid were: the Population Registration Act (1950), which "provided the machinery to designate the racial category of every person"; the Immorality Act (1950), which made marriage and sex across the colour bar illegal; the Separate Amenities Act (1953), which legalized segregation in public places; and Bantu homelands legislation, which provided for the creation of reserves and authorized the government to grant homelands independence (Thompson, 1990:190-191).

Of the many pieces of apartheid legislation, surely the "Bantu Education Act" was the most invidious in its devastating effects on future generations. Based on a blueprint drawn up by the Eiselen Commission and completed in 1951 (Davenport,1989:372), it resulted in an entire "lost" generation of black youth. Under this Act and subsequent legislation that amounted to "educational genocide" (O'Brien,1992:73), the government seized control of schools. While school enrolment was increased, cost per pupil was diminished and teaching standards were lowered. By 1978 black classes were twice the size of white ones, with the government

spending ten times more per capita on whites than blacks. Black teachers were poorly trained and compulsory education for blacks was non-existent (Thompson,1990:196). In addition, a "tribalized" syllabus was introduced, using African languages as a medium of instruction (Lodge,1993:116-117). The goal was to ensure that blacks remained hewers of wood and drawers of water, for in Verwoerd's scheme of social engineering, "There is no place for him [the African] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour" (quoted by Thompson,1990:196). As we shall see later, it is against the backdrop of this legislation that the fate of the youth Fanyan and his sister Diketso in the Lesane stories (1955-57) published in Drum magazine are best understood. Furthermore, The Bantu Education Act dealt a mortal blow to English as a medium of instruction and to black writing in general (Barnett,1985:15), especially when such excellent mission schools as St. Peter's that had educated writers of the stature of Es'kia Mphahlele, Peter Abrahams, Alfred Hutchinson, Todd Matshikiza and Arthur Maimane (Visser,1976:II.1:122-123) were forced to close their doors.

This brief historic and biographic sketch lends substance to and provides the context for the dialogue of two selves between African humanism and themes of alienation in the works of Es'kia Mphahlele -- the subject of this dissertation and one I intend to explore in depth. Throughout there is the voice of the disenfranchised, disaffected black exile, who has experienced and written about myriad themes of alienation on three levels: political, personal and professional. Racism and apartheid is the backdrop of the first, the abandonment of the Mphahlele family when Mphahlele was still a youngster by Moses, Mphahlele's alcoholic father, provides one subtext of the second; and the professional alienation and political exile of both writer and teacher comprise the third. Last but not

least, there is the insistent dialogue between "the indigenous consciousness and the consciousness derived from western civilization" (Mphahlele, 1974:281). These dialogues parallel and inform Mphahlele's works providing the contrapuntal themes to his personal odyssey, a self-imposed flight into exile that took him to Nigeria, France, Kenya, Colorado, Zambia, Pennsylvania and, finally, some two decades later in 1977, "back from the wilderness" to South Africa.

Mphahlele's banning and his disillusionment with political developments, along with the failure of white liberals to provide an effective means of countering them, sent Mphahlele on a life-long quest for meaning, self-definition and a politically effective mode of national consciousness with which to answer to the self-obliterating negations of state apartheid. Mphahlele, steeped in a liberal education in the Western humanities when he started, by the end of the search had become a self-declared African humanist. By fusing African values to his fundamental humanism, he achieved a cultural and political synthesis that equates with black nationalism.

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze and define Mphahlele's unique concept of African humanism within its African and Western historical context and to assess its impact as a powerful cultural weapon and tool in resurgent black nationalism in South Africa. I intend to establish the timely and strategic importance of African humanism as a launching pad for such political movements as Black Consciousness. I will define African humanism and identify its evolving thematic presence in selected works by Mphahlele including his early stories, Man Must Live; the Lesane stories; his autobiography Down Second Avenue; and his critical work The African Image. I intend to demonstrate how well and effectively the theme of African humanism counterpointed against themes of alienation in "the dialogue of two selves" serves the functions of structure,

aesthetics, and education. I shall show that African humanism posited against alienation in the dialectic searching for a synthesis contributes balance, warmth of tone, and in short, an human-ness that often makes the works of Es'kia Mphahlele more rewarding and pleasurable as well as instructive to read than those of his white liberal counterparts whose works, by comparison, frequently strike the reader as being unrelentingly grim, humourless and beset by guilt. I will demonstrate that Mphahlele's concept of African humanism has contributed significantly not only to South African politics and literature, but to a body of aesthetics that has its roots in Africa.

There is in all of Mphahlele's works an insistent dialogue at work not only between Africa and the West, but also between the political exile -- be it internal or external -- and the African humanist. Urbanization, the breakdown of the family, state oppression and state-lessness, racism, fatherlessness, and other forms of alienation, conflict and loss, are constantly balanced against the voice of communal culture. This communal voice with its emphasis on the importance of people and on human capabilities -- on caring and compassion; on humour and love -- imbues Mphahlele's work with a full-blooded vibrancy and a fireside warmth that comes as a welcome relief in the often grim face of stark privation, struggle and tragedy; and, indeed, in the face of the ultimate form of alienation to which life is reduced under state apartheid; that is, of meaninglessness, itself.

In Mphahlele's works, humanism more often than not triumphs because people are always people and their lives have meaning even when racial oppression and state apartheid work to deny that meaning. Such meaning is further validated by the reader as witness who, despite differing circumstances and regardless of colour, nationality or gender, nonetheless finds it possible to identify with and share in the common humanity

of the people and characters whom Mphahlele brings to life in his works.

African humanism, to which Mphahlele has devoted the aforementioned monograph Poetry and Humanism: Oral Beginnings and which is a constant underlying theme in his autobiography and critical works, is Mphahlele's answer to Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's African personality, a form of cultural nationalism that emphasized the "spiritual side of 'Africanness'" (Gerhart, 1978:201), Leopold Senghor's Negritude which avers that the "worth of Africans" lies in their being "emotional, experiential and humanistic" as opposed to Europeans who are "mechanistic, rational and calculating" (Khapoya, 1994:207); and Kenneth Kaunda's Zambian humanism, an expression of African nationalism influenced in equal parts by the Christian church, socialist principles of economics and humanistic thought⁵ -- all concepts to which he was exposed during his twenty years of exile.

Indeed, when Mphahlele lived in Paris between 1961 and 1963 and was organizing writers' centres and literary conferences in Africa and Europe, he "rubbed shoulders with" such leading exponents of the Negritude movement as Leopold Senghor and West Indian poet, Aime Cesaire. Thus, Mphahlele's African humanism as a uniquely black South African expression of cultural nationalism was most certainly shaped by his pan-African and cross-continental wanderings, just as it most certainly evolved as a response to the alienating forces of colonialism, segregation and apartheid. Indeed, it was in the interest of state apartheid to depersonalize and to convert individuals into faceless stereotypes since it is easier in good conscience to exploit that which is essentially non-human. Mphahlele fought back by affirming African values and reaffirming his essential humanity. But like another "ardent nationalist," Frantz Fanon, Mphahlele rejects exotica in Africa's cultural revival and believes that there is "no single political context for Africa" (Wauthier, 1979:174-5).

In my analysis of the works of Es'kia Mphahlele I shall, through close attention to the texts, examine elements of structure, style and content as they tie in with and are promoted by the unifying binary themes of alienation and African humanism and as they resonate against their historic socio-economic context. I believe there is a close interconnection between text and context which cannot be ignored, particularly in South Africa where, among other issues, "an obsession with the question of race has never ceased to make itself felt" (Klima et al.,1976:263). Various critics have noted the "close connection between politics and literature" in South Africa which has frequently meant that "the content of South African literature has usually been examined more carefully than its form" (Klima et al.,1976:263). To avoid this pitfall I believe a more thorough, in-depth, broad-based humanistic approach is entirely appropriate. It is insufficient in works of literature, for instance, merely to "raid a work" (Eagleton,1986:534) for its sociological content, in relation to themes of alienation and African humanism. Indeed, a more comprehensive approach demands that the critic not only "discuss ideas and the social milieu of a writer," but also examine "the language in the text" (Mphahlele,1973:35) as a means of communication and a carrier of culture (Ngugi,1992:15) as well as a vehicle for artistic expression and aesthetics.

In order to accommodate the full range of textual signification, while bearing in mind the shaping force of context, my critical approach will also draw periodically on aspects of what Mikhail Bakhtin in The Dialogic Imagination (1981) calls the "heteroglossia" or "social speech types" of a text. These include "social dialects," "language of generations and of age groups," "language of the authorities," "characteristic group behavior," as well as such elements as

skaz or "the down-to-earth voice of a narrator" and "the stylistically individualized speech of a character" (Bakhtin, 1981:259-262) that make up the diverse social voices given expression in the narrative of the text. As Bakhtin rightly observes, verbal discourse is permeated "from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning" with "social phenomenon" (Bakhtin,1981:259). By examining the "heteroglossia" in the narrative discourse of a text, it is possible better to understand the social phenomenon that informs it as well as to put it in its proper historic context. In Man Must Live (1946), for example, one discerns Mphahlele's alienation from his community and his black readership in his use of stilted, Victorian speech patterns inappropriate to the characters he portrays. Through close analysis of the language of the text or its "heteroglossia" one is immediately able to understand why the text itself might legitimately be regarded, at least in part, as being the very embodiment of the author's alienation.

In my analysis of the historic and socio-economic context of Mphahlele's works, I shall examine ways in which Mphahlele resurrects African history, values, symbols and myth "from a preceding level of consciousness ... [to] validate new realities" (Amuta,1989:65) or, just as often, to criticize those new realities. By expanding the definition of context to include the deep African past, I hope to avoid the biases and parochialisms associated with a too rigidly applied formalistic Eurocentric focus. Indeed, Mphahlele, himself, draws increasingly in his works on the deep African past in order to define an African aesthetic, a nationalist vision and to register protest against the alienating forces of a three-hundred-year history of colonialism, racism and state apartheid in South Africa.

Thus, in works as far-reaching as Mphahlele's criticism, in The African Image (1962 and 1974), his poetry and his unforgettable novella, "Mrs Plum" (1981), I shall demonstrate

how historic, socio-economic and political events helped shape Mphahlele's writing and how this, in turn, is reflected in his works from the point-of-view of stylistics and the choices made in both form and content. Similarly the myriad themes of alienation that Mphahlele explores and develops in all of his works, including his prose and criticism, are seen to take on a life of their own as measured against a background of an increasingly oppressive political climate in South Africa. In focusing on Mphahlele's search for balance and meaning as a writer and a thinker through the resurrection of symbols, myths and values from the African past, I shall seek to identify and analyze specific examples -- ranging from rich metaphoric speech to ideologies such as negritude and concepts such as African humanism.

In short, I shall pursue a fundamentally socio-economic and historic analysis of Mphahlele's works, occasionally drawing on elements of "sophisticated" and "radical" Marxist theory, while not ignoring such important literary elements as diction, style, plot, narrative voice and characterization. Indeed, I share Mphahlele's belief that synthesis can expand and enrich one's literary and critical horizons. Moreover, I am in fundamental agreement with Nigerian critic Wole Soyinka who believes that the imposition of "strict categories" of literary ideologies on an essentially creative process in order "to facilitate digestion" by the "modern consumer mind" may limit a critic's ability to assess and to engage in "non-prejudicial probing" (Soyinka, 1992:61). This is particularly true, it should be noted, when it is Eurocentric methodologies that are being superimposed on African works.

A blended and modified application of the critical tools just described, however, proves useful, for example, in the examination of such works as Mphahlele's second novel Chirundu (1980) in which, indeed, Mphahlele adheres to Amuta's model, resurrecting such classic pan-African myths as the python to

criticize the existing order. The python serves as a "compelling concrete image for exercise of naked power" (Johnson,1984:115) in a novel that concerns itself with class struggles and the corrupting influence of power on a neo-colonialist black "tin-pot dictator." Rejecting Western imperialism and racism is clearly no longer enough in this forward-looking novel. Indeed, in Chirundu, class conflicts occur according to a classical Marxist dialectic between the emerging black elitist middle-class and the masses (Ngara,1987:35). This conflict, in turn, parallels the theme of the clash between materialistic Western individualism and African-based community values. Thus, Mphahlele in Chirundu, as well as in his other works of both fiction and prose, resurrects African symbols, myths, dialect and metaphors as well as African humanist cosmology and social codes to criticize the existing order of colonialism, racism and state apartheid while re-affirming the validity of a black ethos and the richness and meaningfulness of African civilization.

Marxist criticism addresses, in addition to questions concerning the interaction of text and historic context, related socio-economic issues affecting how art is produced and consumed. In this respect, Mphahlele's haunting phrase "tyranny of Place" immediately comes to mind. This phrase encapsulates Mphahlele's belief that state apartheid acts as a "paralyzing spur" in which the "battle" in South Africa between the "ruling class" and "the Africans" has become a "stock response" for writers. Thus, context both dictates the content and structure while limiting the artistic potential of a text, which is why Mphahlele suggests:

You won't get a great, white novel, I don't think, and you won't get a great black novel until we get to a point where we ... [are] integrated ("African Writers of Today." National Educational Television, Program No. 3:1964).

Mphahlele's frequently quoted phrase "tyranny of place" also embraces the entire range of experience of black writers as politically alienated exiles -- be it internal or external.

Whether it relates to draconian censorship laws, limited publishing outlets, the problems of creating art in an environment where amenities are lacking and police raids are frequent or the very choice of subject on which the black author writes, this peculiar tyranny exerts its never-ending pull.

"The tyranny of place" equally describes Mphahlele's sense of being severed from his African roots, cut loose from his moorings. Because he could not feel "the texture and smell" of place outside South Africa, during part of his exile he ceased to write fiction altogether, concentrating instead on literary criticism. Although active and engaged as a teacher, writer, and scholar while living abroad, he never could feel a deep, abiding sense of commitment outside his own community in the "painful South" (Mphahlele, 1979:37-44). Political exile had ironically transformed a deeply caring, warm and vibrant, people-centered, community-loving African humanist into the ultimate outsider and alien.

Mphahlele's resurrection of ancient indigenous African cultural norms, values and symbols, to criticize the existing order, in itself, constitutes an ongoing dialogue between context and text; past and present that requires the active participation and involvement of a self-aware, self-reflexive, multi-culturally attuned "peripatetic reader." Such a reader, according to Reader Response theorist Wolfgang Iser, is like a traveller (albeit not a tourist) through the text, who accumulates and interacts with meaning, bringing along the personal baggage of contemporary history, values and norms. The text (not unlike travel in foreign countries) is meant to correct "deficient realities." (Iser quoted in Freund, 1987:246). Certainly it is the aim of Mphahlele in works such as the Lesane stories, Down Second Avenue and The Wanderers to correct deficient realities -- to reveal the alienating harshness of life for the oppressed black majority and to re-affirm the vigour and meaningfulness of African

humanist black culture.

The "peripatetic reader," as previously noted, must ever remain vigilant, while travelling through the text, about not superimposing inappropriate Eurocentric critical modalities and doctrinaire approaches to the reading of a text. Simultaneously the culturally sensitive critic should stay sharply attuned to the interplay of text and context in the Marxist sense as well as to cultural nuances and dialogic "heteroglossia," symbols, metaphoric language, characters and setting that may diverge from familiar Eurocentric norms because they are, in fact, rooted in an African aesthetic. Since Mphahlele's writing is centered on the retrieval and preservation of community history and well as the development of Black Consciousness thought, my critical approach in this dissertation will logically follow along historic lines, but will, periodically, draw on aspects of Marxist theory along with Reader-response theory as manifested in the multi-cultural persona of "the peripatetic reader."

To summarize, Mphahlele's people-centered, egalitarian, value-laden African humanism, which is itself "blessedly family and kin-centered, organic and sacral" (Butler in Daymond, Jacobs and Lenta, eds., 1986:8) is incapable of being forced into an orthodox Marxist approach and in fact defies being forced into any rigidly defined Eurocentric critical mould since it is anything but systematized, predictable, materialistic or historically deterministic. Yet, the very topic of this dissertation and of Mphahlele's life-long search constitutes a dialectic of sorts in which the antitheses of alienation and African humanism create enormous tension. This tension eventually drives Mphahlele on a metaphysical quest like an African Parsifal -- at the end of which, after two decades of wandering over several continents, Mphahlele arrives painfully at a synthesis. Thus, the syncretistic peripatetic reader, both figuratively and literally,⁶ follows the equally peripatetic narrator, both geographically and philosophically,

through the text, bringing personal experience, historical analysis and aspects of the previously outlined critical theories to bear on its reading without necessarily superimposing any of this Eurocentric "baggage" on the text itself.

Chapter 1: "MAN MUST LIVE:"

From Social Darwinism in the Early Works
of Es'kia Mphahlele to African Humanism --
A Divided Self

In South Africa, the white controlled capitalist economy dominated and exploited the black labour force. Blacks, no matter how competent, were invariably subordinate to whites, no matter how "feeble," whether in mines, factories or on the farm. Class and colour, thus were nearly indistinguishable. (Thompson,1990:155). The human impact of racial domination is clearly articulated in the title story "Man Must Live" from Mphahlele's first ever published work, his short story collection, Man Must Live and Other Stories (1946). In "Man Must Live" the story's black protagonist Zungu, although occupying a supervisory position, cringes before and seeks favour from his "European employer:"

Zungu knew that most of the workers under him disliked him. They murmured complaints among themselves that he was 'driving them like oxen.' Some even went so far as to say that he was only strong in appearance but weak and cowardly within. They said he showed this in the way he cringed before his employer and the European workers to seek favour (Mphahlele,1946:3).

Debasement and self-alienation is further compounded when a black worker becomes "a willing tool of the system." Zungu, however, is clearly powerless in the face of controls exercised over black wages, the freedom of labour to organize and bargain, and land ownership by blacks. Such controls formed a deliberate strategy on the part of white politicians during the "Botha-Smuts period" to safeguard a plentiful, cheap supply of black labour (Davenport, 1989:258). Thus, separate reserves and artificially created land shortages forced increasing numbers of Africans into the service of white industry and agriculture. By 1946, white income was ten times that of the average black and most blacks were "preoccupied with day-to-day survival" (Thompson,1990:156), a theme that is reified in Mphahlele's Man Must Live and Other Stories (1946).

Among the pieces of legislation that served as a cornerstone to de jure segregation was the Natives' Land Act of 1913, which prohibited African land ownership and share-cropping and which enforced segregation. In addition, the benign-sounding but pernicious Natives (Urban Areas) Act, originally mandated to control endemic diseases, led to the

establishment of "locations," and resulted in slum clearances on a massive scale with removal of "black spots" designed to keep "urban areas in white hands" (Davenport, 1987:260).

Efforts to control influx of blacks into urban areas, in turn, led to a series of increasingly restrictive and humiliating Pass laws, the first of which was the 1937 Amendment to the Urban Areas Act (Thompson, 1990:330). The Pass laws created enormous hardship and, over time, effectively criminalized thousands of otherwise law abiding citizens rendering blacks stateless in their own country. Under the Pass laws, blacks were restricted to the impoverished "homelands" (where 80% of the population occupied 13% of the land) unless black labour was needed in the cities (Thompson, 1990:330).

As the black labour force continued to expand in part due to a boom economy stimulated by World War II, the 1940s saw the resurgence of black unionism and -- with the rising aspirations of an emergent black middle class, made up of professionals, teachers, landholders, businessmen, and journalists (whose members founded the African National Congress in 1911) -- the revitalization of the African National Congress (ANC) as a political force (Lodge, 1990:1).

It was in this important epoch that Mphahlele's Man Must Live and Other Stories, a 60-page volume with pen and ink drawings published by African Bookman's Julian Rolnick, who risked a run of 700 copies at a time when publishing opportunities for black were scarce to non-existent (Mphahlele, 181:2), rolled off the press.⁷ The collection of five stories including "Man Must Live," "The Leaves Were Falling," "Out, Brief Candle," "Unwritten Episodes" and "Tomorrow You Shall Reap" made its debut in the heyday of segregation in the post-war era. Townships were as squalid and violent as ever and tensions were building on the eve of historic elections that ushered the National Government into power (Manganyi, 1983:91). In 1945, Marabastad township where Mphahlele spent his childhood

his childhood described in his autobiography Down Second Avenue was leveled "to satisfy the greed of white Pretorians" (Manganyi, 1983:84).

Against a context of increasing white oppression and growing black opposition, the criticism leveled against Mphahlele's early stories, the first such collection published by a black South African writer, is that they fail accurately to mirror prevailing socio-economic conditions and instead fall under the sway of Victorian prose, the English literary tradition, romantic pulp fiction and the mission press. One of the most smugly sermonizing blasts directed at the stories was that of Brian Bunting, reviewer for the Cape Town weekly Guardian and member of the Communist Party. Bunting excoriated the work for superimposing European values on "aboriginal raw culture." The reviewer further suggests that its author "has had the gods of his fathers exorcised by missionaries. He has forgotten he is African" (Popken, ed., 1978:313).

The Guardian critic, however, in evaluating the text fails to consider, in addition to questions of content and "pure craft," "values it urges on readers" (Chinweizu et al., 1983:140) in terms of a nascent black ethos already in evidence. Moreover, even when plots are contrived and dialogues marred by artifice, characters frequently undergo the harsh real-life experiences one would expect of impoverished slum dwellers. On one level, that of stylistics, the author does appear at times alienated from his text, his potential black readership and his white-black characters. Yet on still another, that of emergent African humanist, he already shows signs of being engaged in a dialogue of two selves -- one that is Western and colonized; the other with roots in Africa.

Indeed, Mphahlele cannot be blamed given his background and education in the Western humanities for showing signs of a culturally colonized and divided self in the text. In examining the reception of the text by critics I note here at work an extra-textual level of reader-author alienation that Njabulo Ndebele comments on in Rediscovery of the Ordinary

-- that is, that the white liberal audience for whom the text was intended "was schooled under a Eurocentric literary tradition" to reject that same work on grounds of either "the methods of representation" or "the content" (Ndebele, 1991:45). This harsh reception thus may owe something to the application of inappropriate European "theories of style and genre [and] assumptions about the universal features of language" (Ashcroft et al. 1991:11) based on the fact Mphahlele's chosen tongue is English.

What can be fairly and accurately said about the stories in Man Must Live is that they have a workshop quality about them. In them is evidence that "the dialogue of two selves" is just getting underway, the vision of the African humanist is still being hammered out, and the narrative voice, while beginning to project, has not yet seized the upper hand. Nonetheless, behind the narrative with its underlying vein of realism, suggested themes of alienation and nascent humanism overlaid with Victorian prose and elements of romance, is the compassionate voice of an observant, empathetic, engaged narrator who will emerge later as a fully self-realized, self-aware African humanist.

Mphahlele later all but rejects his first-born literary offspring which he regards with a mixture of embarrassed amusement and outright disdain. Indeed, one could argue that the collection in itself is, in part, the very embodiment of Mphahlele's self-alienation -- cultural, literary and political. In defence of the stories Mphahlele explains he never studied the short story form and was "writing for the joy of it" (Couzens, 1987:122). At the same time, Mphahlele finds it galling to be criticized by a white man for failing to describe such things as "pass laws ... pick-up vans ... the insolence of the white man ... or beer raids" when the same white had never experienced the things he was so incensed by and that a black South African could ill afford a single moment to forget (Manganyi, 1989:93). Perhaps, the lesson was not

entirely lost on Mphahlele, however, for in his autobiography Down Second Avenue, not only are such things described with consummate skill and artistry, they eventually became conventions in their own right in the genre of the black township autobiography

By examining themes of alienation and African humanism in Man Must Live it becomes possible to identify evidence that refutes one of the Guardian critic's more egregious statements, that is, that Mphahlele as a member of "the African intelligentsia has become isolated from [his] people" (Popken, ed., 1978:313). Not only does Mphahlele portray working-class protagonists in an urban setting, such as Zungu in "Man Must Live" and Annah Seripe in "Out, Brief Candle," who, moreover, is also a woman, but several key episodes reflect vividly on the harsh, brutal existence of urbanized slum dwellers.

The self-abasement and alienation Zungu in "Man Must Live" undergoes from alcoholism, the loss of Annah in "Out, Brief Candle," when Sello her adopted son commits suicide, the dilemma of Sylvia Direko in "Unwritten Episode" as an unwed mother is not, by any stretch of the imagination, the stuff of escapist literature. Indeed, in his detailing of such scenes with reference to such realistic details as Annah's ability to support Sello primarily because her property is freehold, Mphahlele reflects the awareness of an author who is both empathetic and fully in touch with the harsh daily existence of his own people. In short, he is not by virtue of his education an intellectual living apart from his community -- either spiritually or geographically. Indeed, he has begun to document the lives of a marginalized black world, the first step in the flowering of social commitment and a black aesthetic.

Nonetheless, in the story "Out, Brief Candle," in both its biblical overtones and signs of confusion about the author's intended audience, there is clear evidence in the text

of a divided voice -- one that is mission school trained and steeped in the Western humanities and the other with roots in Africa. The story, with its title that is reminiscent of Macbeth's soliloquy and suggestive of despair, is about the foundling Sello discovered by Annah Seripe in the bulrushes by a river, a biblical allusion to Moses reflecting Mphahlele's mission school education. Furthermore, Man Must Live was originally published with an African readership in mind (Hodge, 1986:47), yet the author interrupts his narrative in "Out, Brief Candle" to provide an anthropological description of "women, old and young [who] obtain good soft soil to be mixed with water and cow-dung" for hut-building. The distracting tour-guide presentation is clearly aimed at a white readership. By contrast, in Mphahlele's later works, such as Down Second Avenue, "local colour" is so well integrated into the body of the text that it serves to enhance rather than to interrupt and distract from the narrative.

The plot of "Out, Brief Candle" revolves around the consequences of Annah's decision to adopt the orphaned Sello. Following classic patterns of rural to urban migration, Annah seeks employment in Johannesburg. In the meantime, it is upon Sello that Annah lavishes all her pent-up affections and on whose behalf she even sacrifices a chance to marry, but from whom she asks little in return. While Annah is both strong and caring, "... a woman who gave much, and, asked for little," one of her shortcomings is that she has isolated herself from her own community and thus from a built-in source of moral support and strength that could serve as a strong bulwark against the harsh alienating forces of industrialization and poverty in the city.

Even though Sello cares deeply for Annah, perhaps at some level he resents the fact she gives so much and expects nothing in return -- making Sello feel emasculated and guilty. Annah, in her isolation from community, displays a Westernized rugged individualism that is perhaps not totally consistent with the more African generosity of spirit or ubuntu that

prompts her to come to the rescue of Sello in the first place. She, like Zungu in "Man Must Live," appears to be living according to such dictates as "survival of the fittest." Thus, Mphahlele has his characters conforming to Eurocentric norms and conventions in order to survive. They do not behave according to a "true self" in the African humanist sense where reliance would ideally be placed more on kinship and community, as it is, for example, in Down Second Avenue. In this respect, Mphahlele shows a "divided" self as author-narrator.

Annah's adopted son Sello, in "Out, Brief Candle," moreover, feels that society from the start has rejected him and he lashes out in anger and scorn, withdrawing into himself, another of the city's alienated lost youths. While Sello does care deeply for Annah, he is sufficiently dehumanized and hardened by life that he knows only one way to express that caring and that is through violence. The story's denouement comes when Sello murders a youth who insults Annah. Sello then takes flight with the police in hot pursuit. Ultimately, he throws himself from a tall building, shouting "Catch me if you dare." Alienation in the form of meaninglessness and violence is one of the strongly unifying themes that infuses the story with despair. Because the African humanist voice in this story is not as strong as it is in such stories as "Tomorrow You Shall Reap," the tone tends to be monochromatic and bleak, lacking in hope.

In "Out, Brief Candle" Sello's violence and Annah's overweening sacrifice and generosity represent two extreme responses to forces of urban alienation and poverty. Mphahlele shows that there are dire consequences to be paid when life is lived according to a Social Darwinist code instead of an African humanist one. Annah's vulnerability is significantly worsened by her personal isolation from community and in the end she knows tragedy -- a leitmotif in the themes of racial and urban alienation running throughout Man Must Live. Neither Sello's nor Annah's response to the struggle for survival in an urban setting is tempered by the humanism of kin and community.

The African proverb says: "It takes a village to raise a child." Sello, who exhibits symptoms of Western-style existential alienation has only Annah. Annah, however, as in a Western-style nuclear family, has forsaken community.

In Annah and Sello's struggle to survive in an urban setting they, in short, respond in ways perhaps more Western than African humanistic, revealing the divided and alienated voice of their creator. But the operative word here is "divided." What Bunting misses entirely in his review is that Mphahlele has always had two voices; not simply one. Bunting focuses exclusively on the culturally colonized voice that reflects superimposed European values. He ignores totally the African humanistic voice, as yet dimly heard in Mphahlele's works but struggling to establish its separate identity and presence.

Indeed, there are invariably two opposing forces present in all of Mphahlele's stories -- the mission-school-educated Eurocentric voice is still relatively fresh and is, as yet, linked uneasily to an emergent true African humanist voice. In the divided self there are elements of both, each gaining strength to the benefit of the other, as Mphahlele continues to grow and mature as a writer and as he seeks to achieve an effective working synthesis. In Man Must Live Mphahlele has just begun to document and define the problems of a collectively alienated people. But in this act, he demonstrates both his growing social commitment and his deep community involvement. Moreover, he has yet to present a solution in terms of a unifying African humanist vision beyond showing that people suffer in direct proportion to the degree of isolation they experience from community, with Zungu in the title story "Man Must Live" being the most extreme example.

"Unwritten Episodes" similarly concerns an episode that bespeaks the author's first-hand knowledge of and concern about the harsh realities of life for black slum dwellers. The main character in this story is Sylvia Direko, an unwed mother who

is forced to give her daughter up for adoption in order to be free to seek some form of employment. While the socio-economic causes of Sylvia Direko's plight are not fully explored, underlying themes of isolation, victimization and survival are strongly suggested. Yet in Sylvia Direko's dilemma and its handling by the author are clear signs of Mphahlele's divided self as a culturally colonized writer attempting to divest himself of superimposed European values while writing about African subjects. For instance, the motivation for Sylvia to give up her child is only partly economic. As an unwed mother, she also fears the censure of "gossip-mongers." This concern is arguably more reflective of Christian mission and Victorian social norms and moral biases, than African ones.

The author's divided self further manifests itself in the triangular love story and predictable happy ending with which the story concludes. The suprarational feelings Larry Maphoto entertains toward Sylvia, described as "awful, terrible, mysterious," clearly reflect Victorian ideals of romantic love. African norms would tend rather to define love more in terms of commitment to family and spouse and "much less as an exclusive attraction and affection between two individuals" (Khapoya, 1994:32). However, even the love story has elements of realism and alienation as it deals with a conflict reinforced by social and class distinctions. Thus, prior to meeting and falling in love with Sylvia, Larry was engaged to the better educated, more socially acceptable Joyce Xaba, who is the preferred choice of Larry's parents. In short, the pendulum-swings in the text -- between Eurocentric romantic and African realist as the African humanist narrator searches for his voice -- help explain its unevenness despite its evident promise in terms of characterization, realistic themes, and a nascent black aesthetic.

If "the bullet" in Africa was the means of its physical subjugation, then language, as a cultural carrier, asserts Ngugi wa Thiong'o, equally might be said to be "the means of

spiritual subjugation" (Ngugi,1991:9). When the language, or what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the social voices and "heteroglossia," in the text are not suitable to the culture, the character, the plot or the reality of the setting, a glaring discrepancy jars the reader's sensibility and points back to authorial alienation. Thus Annah addresses her suitor with, "You men are such selfish brutes; you speak of love and try to exhibit it by clothing it in gorgeous and dazzling robes of splendour" (Mphahlele, 1946:34), a speech better suited to a Victorian heroine in a popular romance. The dialogue does not correspond to the character or with the universe she inhabits. Yet, the "subjugation" here is far from total. In the same passage, Mphahlele shows a more imaginative approach in a line that describes Larry as "chaf[ing] restlessly like a lion caught in a trap" (Mphahlele,1946:44). Here the description has vigour and originality and resonates against an African landscape. Thus, the linguistic textual evidence of alienation is ambiguous.

I have demonstrated in stories such as "Unwritten Episodes" that there are contradictions in style, diction and in the treatment of social and cultural norms that bespeak an alienated and a "divided self." Similar contradictions and polarities are apparent in plots which tend either toward the bleak and the tragic or the sentimental and romantic. Thus, "Unwritten Episodes" ends with Larry successfully overcoming his father's objection to his marriage to a woman from a lower economic stratum. Then, the happy lovers ride off romantically into the sunset in a formulaic and contrived ending in which "love conquers all," including class conflict, as the wheels

... of the train rolled down their course, carrying them to a new life.... Only they felt it. No mortal man outside their own world could fathom the depth of their inner hopes, joy, peace No pen can put it in writing (Mphahlele,1946:47).

In the concluding half of "Unwritten Episode," Mphahlele reflects the alienation of the Westernized, colonized narrator for whom there is a lack of "correspondence" between his "world

vision as an experienced reality and the universe" he creates; as well as between "this universe and the specifically literary devices -- style, images, syntax, etc. used by the writer to express it" (Goldmann, 1964:315). The story's romantic ending stands in dramatic contrast to such themes as Sylvia's dilemma as a poor unwed mother, Sello's suicide and Zungu's brutalization and debasement which are, as previously suggested fundamentally not the stuff of escapist romantic pulp fiction. Indeed such episodes as these convey the harsh realities of township life in sufficiently convincing and realistic detail that they are, in a Marxist critical sense, imprinted with the history of their era.

Whereas Mphahlele's tendency in Man Must Live to rely on artificial diction, contrived plots and stock white-black characters affords evidence of a Eurocentric mission school voice getting the upper hand, the same cannot be said for Mphahlele's overall choice of subject matter. Like Sol Plaatje before him, Mphahlele is a graphic chronicler of the alienating effects on the black majority in South Africa of three centuries of colonialism, segregation and state apartheid which bracket socio-economic transitions from

pre-literary to literacy, from pastoralism to industrialisation, from pre-capitalism to capitalism, from a measure of political optimism to increasing pessimism, from hopes of equality to stricter segregation (Couzens in Parker, ed., 1978:62).

For example, Zungu Khalima the protagonist in "Man Must Live," which is undoubtedly the strongest of the stories in the collection by the same name and the only one to have been subsequently republished (Hodge, 1986:47), is a variant on the theme of "Jim goes to Jo'burg." Indeed, Zungu typifies the flow of black labour from rural to urban areas. At the age of fifteen, Zungu quits school, seeks employment in the city and works his way up the social-economic ladder from construction worker to railroad policeman. As a member of the railroad police, Zungu is proud of his "thundering" voice, "broad" shoulders and his smart uniform. Zungu also enjoys the sense

of power it gives him to "herd" the crowds of people as they board the train. The railroad station provides a dramatic backdrop that allows the author to describe the poor masses of relatively unsophisticated urban blacks, who are dependent on public transport to get them to jobs in white cities and who in their ignorance sometimes end up on the wrong train.

Zungu in an interior monologue continually compares himself with the people he helps direct and to whom he feels himself superior. The commuters remind him of the cattle he once herded in his Zulu village as a boy. Zungu makes repeated use of animal imagery to describe his fellows. For example, earlier on, as a foreman, he drives the labourers like "oxen;" and now, as a policeman, he "looks on the commuters as 'cattle' or 'sheep'" (Hodge,1986:50). In short, "the animal imagery reinforces both this sense of superiority and [Zungu's] denial or repudiation of humanity" (Hodge,1986:50). Zungu's class-based denial of the humanity of others is the very antithesis of African humanism -- a denial which, in turn, reflects both communal and self-alienation.

Mphahlele's effective use of interior monologue in "Man Must Live" represents an early attempt on the part of the author as African humanist narrator to present a rounded character from the inside out and to probe psychological motivations in behaviour. Zungu's smug sense of superiority is undoubtedly rooted in a deep-seated sense of insecurity set against a background of economic exploitation and isolation from his community. Brutal market forces, unequal work opportunities, urbanization and Zungu's adherence to a rigid Social Darwinist ethos have driven a wedge between Zungu and his community. Zungu's isolation stands in dramatic contrast to the throbbing life at the train station. The opening paragraph in the story is evocative and makes imaginative use of local idioms to set the scene:

FIRST STOP MAYFAIR, LANGLAAGTE, IKONA WESTBURY, New

Clare, Randfontein Train! all stations,
Randfontein! U ya phi? Nkosi yam? (Where are you going
to -- My lord!) (Mphahlele,1946:1)

This passage is a good example of how when Mphahlele's divided self resolves itself into a working synthesis between his mission-educated Eurocentric voice and his Afrocentric humanistic voice, memorable writing is the result. The integration of the author is mirrored by the integration of the text. Thus, there is in Mphahlele's use of local idioms the intimation of a rich, polyglot culture in the mix of Zulu, English and Afrikaans names. Yet, at the same time, we are conscious that this is an exclusively black scene as, indeed, it remains throughout, except for the reference to Zungu's cringing before and seeking favour from his "European employer" in a "weak and cowardly" manner while "driving" the workers under him "like oxen." Class analysis of the forms of economic alienation is relevant here, as we see the rich and powerful, invariably white, the aspiring middle stream, and the urban poor and slum dwellers who toil for a pittance (Amuta, 1989:68).

In Zungu's tendency to cringe before white bosses to gain favour, we gain insight into socio-economic as well as racial divisions -- with the white invariably cast in the superior position or overseer. The overall mood is one of loneliness and isolation -- of a man uprooted from his rural background, but unlike Paton's passive "man with the halo" Reverend Stephen Kumalo, in playing out the theme of "Jim comes to Jo'burg," Zungu does not manifest a noble mien of Christian patience, love and passivity, serving as a living sermon on the theme that "'so in my suffering I can believe.'" (Mphahlele,1962:131).

In short, the African humanist narrator has stepped forward, while not totally losing sight of his Westernized persona which also affords valuable insights. In his evocation of setting, Mphahlele draws imaginatively on the "heteroglossia" of "open places, of public squares, streets,

cities ... of social groups, generations and epoch" as well as "social dialects, characteristic group behavior," and "language of the authorities" (Bakhtin,1981:259-263). Mphahlele's use of "diverse social voices" in the narrative enables him to describe and thus to validate a marginalized black world and characters consistent with the universe he inhabits. In short, the divided self shows signs of a more syncretic, and hence, more effective, better integrated and more harmonious approach to his art.

When Mphahlele synthesizes his two voices and develops the related theme of alienation, he then moves into a realistic mode of speech patterns and character types that possess the power to condemn and indict even as they document. While Mphahlele's authorial voice is showing signs of integration, however, his philosophic vision is to some extent still divided. In Zungu's dilemma is seen the conflict between two opposing world views.

Zungu's dehumanization, as I have shown, is driven by his Social Darwinism. A process of dehumanization sets in the moment Zungu begins to internalize and enact this essentially Western ethos that is amoral, ruggedly individualistic and self-serving, rather than cooperative and community-centered. In short, Social Darwinism is the very antithesis of "ubuntu" or "participatory communalism" (Sparks,1990:14). Zungu thus exemplifies the prototypical black male who has become as brutalized as the market forces of which he is a victim. Furthermore, he is twice-alienated, since there is no real political consciousness on the part of Zungu as to the true nature of these forces.

Indeed, "Man Must Live" might be viewed as a satiric parable on the consequences of living according to such Eurocentric and dehumanizing precepts as those derived from the teachings of Charles Darwin, Adam Smith and the Reverend Malthus which sanction the view that in society as in nature

the principle that applies is "survival of the fittest." Taken to its logical conclusion this view is opportunistic, nihilistic and pessimistic. A more optimistic and affirming African humanist world view sanctions the return to community, not to tribalism or ethnicity in its narrowest sense, but rather to urbanized African community as it is later depicted in Down Second Avenue. Mphahlele suggests in the tale of Zungu's rise and fall that the brutal, impoverished life of the black slum dweller does not result in nobility of spirit by virtue of suffering as Paton's hero Stephen Kumalo would suggest. Rather it brutalizes in a truly self- and community alienating Hobbesian sense.

Zungu's Social Darwinism dates from the moment when he departs from his Zulu village for the city. First he severs all connections with family and community. Then the process of urban alienation, as he is cut off from his ancestral roots, begins and is reinforced by racism. An analysis of the discourse reveals the presence of a divide between the races in the unapologetic use of such terms as "European workers" to define workers by what they are not in the case of blacks, who are "non-European," rather than by what they are. Herein lies evidence of racial labeling that was in practice even before the Population Registration Act (1950) was on the books. The casual use of such terminology suggests the author himself has been momentarily co-opted by self-alienating forces of colonial imperialism.

Zungu, as I have shown, is not an entirely flat character. Through interior monologue and interaction with others, we learn that besides being vain and having a capacity for hard work, he is shy and uncertain of himself with women (an autobiographical note here). As noted, he is no passive victim like Reverend Kumalo: he is instead a survivor full of a stubborn determination. To some extent, he is a role model that speaks more to black pride than does Kumalo. Yet at the same time his actions and choices are determined by market forces over which he had no control and of which he has little

understanding. Thus, he is not a man in full charge of his destiny. Further his vanity and his social ambitions make him easy prey for the wealthy widow, Sophia Masite, who eventually marries Zungu for her own selfish reasons, while Zungu himself is attracted by the widow's social standing and the "riches and splendours" that surround her. Thus socio-economic and political issues define the themes of alienation along with a subtext of class conflict.

The sensitive reader is reminded here that in black slums people of all classes are pressed together willy-nilly; regardless of differences in socio-economic backgrounds. Without putting too fine a point on the class analysis, the reader understands that market forces bring Zungu to the city in the first place, while simultaneously shaping and defining the socio-economic aspirations that, in turn, place him at the widow's mercy. Ultimately it is these same forces -- in themselves alienating, meaningless and chaotic -- that further contribute to Zungu's dehumanizing downward spiral and that prove his undoing.

In the end the marriage between Zungu and Sophia Masite begins to falter when Zungu starts to drink (like Mphahlele's father Moses) -- at which point Sophia and her children, who never had much use for Zungu in any event, walk out. Zungu then, in a state of despair, decides to burn down the house which deprived of its inhabitants is like an empty shell -- a fitting symbol for Zungu's own empty life. In the process of rural to urban migration, Zungu has severed community roots and is an example of how members of the majority culture have been fragmented by a derivative culture from the West that is "spiritually bankrupt" (Mphahlele in Thuynsma, ed.1989:144).

Just as Mphahlele commences in "Man Must Live" to describe and document themes of alienation such as spiritual extinction, communal isolation and breakdown of the family structure, so he begins to integrate his conflicted and polarized narrative voices. In short, the author in this

episode of "Man Must Live" no longer speaks in a divided voice. He deals instead with the harsh realities of slum living. Moreover, Zungu's abasement and loss of humanity serves as a blistering commentary on acquisitive Western materialism and its devastating impact on an ancient indigenous African culture and society. Thus, in the very process of the author's divesting himself of inappropriate superimposed Eurocentric values, he takes a major first step toward arriving at a positive working synthesis in the dialogue of two selves.

In addition, Mphahlele speaks in his true African humanist voice, reflecting a degree of authorial integration with his world vision, when he reaches back into the deep past and resurrects cultural symbols and myths to criticize the existing order. One example of such a cultural myth being resurrected is seen in Zungu's act of burning down his own house. This example of culturally derived symbolism rests on the fundamental "precept of all Southern Bantu societies that, once established, a house should not be allowed to die out" (Preston-Whyte quoted by Johnson, 1984:6). The burning house serves as a powerful metaphor for the disintegration of the individual, the breakdown of the family, and by extension, the fragmentation of the larger community as a result of alienating forces of urbanization, racism and economic exploitation.

But African humanism, while as yet not fully defined, does find prominent expression in the story's final episode, suggesting a mode of Africanization or way of being that can help bridge the gap both between the rural under-educated African and the alienated city dweller and his community. This is the authentic "value" being urged on the reader by the ideology of the text and one which is given full reign in the final scene of "Man Must Live." Thus, neighbours in a strong spontaneous expression of community spirit and of "ubuntu" come to Zungu's rescue. Pulling Zungu from the burning house, they wrap him in sacking, roll him on the ground; and then take him

to hospital. Later they provide him with food to eat and a place to stay. Even when Zungu has chosen to remain aloof and had isolated himself, African community steps in. Such compassion and community support is what can sustain a man in an otherwise hostile and alien world. While Zungu is a victim, he is also a survivor and unlike Reverend Kumalo he resists stubbornly to the end as is clear in the following cameo:

[Zungu's] eyes are expressionless, whether he be happy or not. That twinkle is gone. But there is something in that stolid blankness ... something of stubbornness. When he looks at you, you cannot help but read the stubborn words: What do you expect me to be -- a magician or a superman, or a soft learned genteel animal? My Lord -- I must live, man!

While Zungu has been reduced to the amoral ethos of Social Darwinism, even that, the author intimates, is preferable to being a passive victim and grist for the "legal machinery" set up "to control the influx of Africans into the towns and cities." Zungu may be a "wretched picture of frustration" in the city (Mphahlele, 1962:37), but unlike Alan Paton's hero, Reverend Kumalo, he cannot be accused of being a "man with a halo," the South African equivalent of the American "Uncle Tom." While Kumalo ultimately returns, hat in hand, in a state of passive defeat and resignation to his rural Zululand, Zungu, debased but still endowed with fighting spirit -- establishing something of a precursor role model for Black Power and Consciousness -- is clearly determined to stay where he is in the city, to resist and to endure.

Thus in "Man Must Live" Mphahlele has crafted a story that corresponds to the universe he inhabits, imprinted with the history of an era during which, as historian Leonard Thompson states, most blacks were "preoccupied with day-to-day survival" (Thompson, 1990:156). In this story, it is accurate to say that Mphahlele, far from being "isolated from his people" has begun in a rudimentary fashion to be engaged with the issue of black oppression. The African humanist narrator as black nationalist has begun to speak out here.

Although the character Zungu is alienated, the author Mphahlele at this moment in the text is not, which is why "Man Must Live" surpasses the other stories in the collection in terms of plot, diction, believable characters, writerly skill and narrative impact. Furthermore, while Brian Bunting alleges that the characters in Man Must Live are seriously flawed as they all "believe in ideal love, heavenly justice, patience and other delectable virtues," (Bunting quoted in Popken, ed. 1973:313) in the case of Zungu's character the allegation is patently untrue.

Even as "Man Must Live" is closely linked to socio-economic concerns of the era, "The Leaves Were Falling," the second story in Mphahlele's collection Man Must Live, has a strong historic basis in the politically significant "Africa for the African" movement that became the battle cry of black ministers in the church. Here again is proof that Mphahlele's divided self is neither isolated from the black ghetto world with its social ills nor has the author forgotten for a moment that he is historically "an African in South Africa" (Manganyi, 1983:93).

In short, as can be seen in "The Leaves Were Falling," Mphahlele, as emergent African humanist, is neither politically nor intellectually isolated and alienated from the burning black political issues of the day. Thus, he documents a conflict that arises when the Methodist church decides to raise baptism fees (another event with the clear imprint of history) at a time when the people are, as it is, economically hard pressed. In addition, "...there was already a widespread feeling of resentment to European supervision of African churches" (Mphahlele, 1946:19).

Ironically, it is the rascally Reverend Mushi, and not the reliable Reverend Katsane, who preaches against the raised fees and the "european tyranny in our churches" (Mphahlele, 1946:20) and who subsequently manages to stir up mass action in

the form of peaceful demonstrations. In a narrative aside, laced with wry humour, the author lets the reader know of his own deep skepticism and growing alienation from the church -- whether in the hands of overbearing whites or those of unscrupulous black preachers like Mushi who can stop beer drinkers in their tracks with his fiery oratory, but who cannot put an end to drunkenness: a man, in short, with a strong promotional flare, who cynically uses the "donkey church" to advance his own self-seeking interests.

The comic juxtaposing of these two preachers, one of whom is clearly a bit of a scoundrel, is a measure of Mphahlele's narrative restraint, balance and objectivity. He pokes fun at the church, draws attention to racism, and, at the same time, does not overcompensate for a negative colonial perception of Africa by "literary re-creation of an alternate, more just picture of indigenous culture" (JanMohamed, 1988:8) in which all blacks in a world of Manichean aesthetics are "white." The story foreshadows Mphahlele's own disillusionment with the church, whose influence is seen in the biblical overtones and moral biases of such stories as "Out, Brief Candle," and in such episodes as Annah's discovery of the orphan Sello in the bushes near the river like a biblical Moses.

Humour brings the dialogue to life as a sub-text of alienation is developed in the observation of one villager that Katsane is just the sort of "young well-read man who can preach, instead of howling against our sinfulness." This comment also hints at a difference in moral biases between traditional African values and Christianity. Yet while the villagers respect Katsane's learning, they feel he will not be a real man until he produces children -- for in the African humanist sense ancestors are reborn in the present generation and the perpetuation of lineages has metaphysical import.

The Reverend Katsane, like Mphahlele, himself, struggled

hard to secure his education, but his book learning to some extent sets him apart from his community. Thus there are elements of intellectual alienation -- as opposed to isolation -- between the literate and semi-literate; between the educated black and the white liberal; and finally between the culturally colonized black and a prospective black readership. Mphahlele himself, feeling alienated and divided, sought a bridge in African humanism to link his divided self (or selves).

An alienation that emerges at times in Man Must Live is the inappropriate tenor of the stories. Harking back to days of a Tennyson rural idyll and a gentle pastoral English countryside and utilizing an ornate Victorian English, such stories as "The Leaves were Falling," describe settings alive with "lowing calves," "golden sunset [s]" and "eternal abode[s]," at odds with both the vivid crudity and humanism of a rural African setting.

However, the African humanist narrator begins to make his presence more boldly felt when he switches from third to first-person narrative voice in "Tomorrow We Shall Reap" -- a story that claims strong patrimony to Down Second Avenue. In it the African humanist begins to mark his territory. Certain places and sequences, such as the reference to the cruel Lapelle River which divides the Christian village and the "heathen" one where people "believed that their lives were regulated by an "All-powerful and All-knowing force, a force that was "vested" in their ancestors (Mphahlele, 1946:51), reappear later in more sophisticated form in Down Second Avenue. Moreover, frequent metaphysical references to a divine force vested in ancestors suggest that, contrary to Brian Bunting's statement, Mphahlele has not entirely "had the gods of his fathers exorcised by the missionaries" (Bunting in Popken, 1978:313).

"Tomorrow We Shall Reap," in contrast to such stories as "Out, Brief Candle," with its biblical overtones and

Shakespearean title reminiscent of Macbeth's soliloquy, moves a step closer towards reifying an African humanist world view. For instance, there are references to "a sense of communal unity" which is concretely illustrated in the reaping festival and in the symbolic return of Stephen and Mariah to her village to seek Shikwane Makwe's, Mariah's father's, approval of their marriage. Moreover, there is an African humanist reference to "the sacred ancestral gift" of being able to create (Mphahlele, 1946:50) -- a pleasing turn of phrase that hints at spiritual values rather than at what a mission mentality might mistake for sheer animism or exotica. In such African humanist references, Mphahlele, like all humanists -- whether Western or African -- operates on the principle of the "golden mean." He thus affords in his disquisitions on ancestors in various texts, both balance and a necessary corrective to foreign missionaries in Africa who "became obsessively interested in ancestral spirits and spirits in general -- as though that was all there was to African spirituality" (Khapoya,1994:52).

The reaping festival reveals an increasingly well-integrated authorial voice insofar as it largely escapes the trap of the anthropological, tour-guide approach. Instead, the authorial voice encapsulates an African humanist spirit and celebration in which local colour comes to life in authentic detail, and we find plausible characters consuming food as real and as African as "roasted mealies" (Mphahlele,1946:57). The passage is evidence that while book learning may raise a barrier of sorts, it does not mean that Mphahlele, as author and Western-educated intellectual, is in any meaningful sense isolated from or disengaged from people in towns or villages who are only semi-literate. Indeed, he is, in the African sense, very much "there." And, as a result, the reader is there with him -- brought in from the cold, as it were; no longer an alien.

In sum, themes of alienation as counterpointed against nascent African Humanism in the collection Man Must Live point to a divided self on primarily the aesthetic literary level.

Narrative conflicts are frequently resolved through the escape of romance, rather than the succour of community. Diction and style are too often marked by artifice. Social norms and moral biases reflect a Christian mission upbringing. Authorial alienation is, however, perhaps most poignantly echoed in the semi-autobiographical flight of Reverend Katsane Melato in "The Leaves Were Falling." Melato's is a harrowing mystic journey in which, unlike for the African humanist for whom "the all is now," Melato "feared the future" and "hated the morrow" (Mphahlele, 1946:15). Slightly more than a decade later Mphahlele makes a similar flight himself and has expressed similar sentiments about it with regard to his personal feeling of betrayal towards his own community and his overall disillusionment with mankind -- that is:

"You have left them. ...You distrust mankind ... [and] your own self -- of the same species. You are an exile" (Mphahlele, 1946:25).

Here Katsane shows some promising characteristics and the beginning of political will and self-awareness as he ponders the seeds of his own alienation from church, congregation and self, which at root is a factor of the continuing and oppressive racial alienation that informs the dialogue of two selves.

Katsane continues to be torn, moreover, between his agreement with the need to protest the raised fees and his disagreement with the methods used to attain these ends -- a dilemma Mphahlele later faces himself when he agonizes over how to protest effectively against the evils of apartheid (especially when peaceful methods seem to have failed) without the use of violent means that are contrary to his own personal beliefs and temperament.

Katsane, failing to take a stand and mirroring the self-restraint of the narrator, then finds himself at odds with the congregation who turn against him and from whom he takes flight, isolating himself from the community which affords him his only hope of salvation. At the end of a long

"mystic" flight, in which God appears to have deserted him and he sees a symbolic virgin Mary ironically represented by an emaciated black mother (with little milk to give) attempting to nurse her child, Katsane collapses and ends up unconscious in hospital. Again, the theme with its telling symbol of the emaciated virgin Mary (a touch that shows the promise of the aspiring author) is one of alienation from a Christian God and a religion that builds churches and preaches about helping the poor, but which, in reality, has done little to alleviate the suffering of the masses in the face of racism, colonialism and rampant capitalist exploitation. The conflict is not resolved, however, through political action or a conclusion expressive of a nationalist consciousness. Instead, Lindi, who has all along encouraged Katsane to stand firm on his own principles, manages to track Katsane down in hospital and the two are happily reunited in their love, bringing the story to its somewhat mawkish and predictable romantic ending -- in the best tradition of escapist pulp fiction.

On a purely aesthetic level the reader can readily trace Mphahlele's progress, from a culturally colonized and therefore alienated writer to one who arrives at a distinctive idiom fusing two streams of consciousness that speak from the authenticity of his own experience. The author's rapid progress as he divests himself of his colonial baggage is impressive and can be clearly seen by comparing the following three descriptive passages, starting with "The Leaves Were Falling" in which

It was sunset, the big sun was about to rear his head beyond the horizon. His long rays were shooting out fan-like to bid farewell to the world. Hilltops and treetops were flooded with a soft red glow
(Mphahlele, 1946:13)

Here the sun is personified in the manner in which Percy Bysshe Shelley might, for instance, personify the moon in his lyric poetry. The tone is romantic. The reader is transported to a bucolic European countryside.

In "Tomorrow We Shall Reap," however, there is substantial evidence of the author's beginning to divest himself of colonial influences and to engage instead with the immediate reality of his own universe. The reader, too, gains a commensurate sense of a specific geographic locale as mountains rise up out of the "Low Veld." These are

the high, lofty mountains, fearful in appearance, but which kindly gave me shelter under their huge crags many a night" (Mphahlele, 1946:51).

The mountains are realistically described as "high," "fearful," having "huge crags," but they are also romantically personified as being "kindly" when they "gave me shelter," again reflecting the divided self -- with realism on the ascendance and a more believable aesthetic and cultural correspondence between the universe the author inhabits and the world he creates. In Down Second Avenue, as I shall demonstrate, Mphahlele leaves off such devices as the personification of nature altogether. The tone is consistently one of foreboding and the effect is one of naturalism in what is quite possibly one of Mphahlele's most effective openings, notable because unlike in the Eurocentric descriptive passages in his early works, this is Afrocentric and humanistic. People are a part of the landscape in the village of Maupaneng where:

My grandmother sat there under a small lemon tree next to the hut, as big as fate, as forbidding as a mountain, stern as a mimosa tree (Mphahlele, 1959:11).

In view of the frequent lack of correspondence in Man Must Live between the universe he inhabits and the world he creates, it is perhaps understandable why Mphahlele, in his epilogue to Down Second Avenue, says of his first published collection of stories:

I can never summon enough courage to read a line from any of the stories that were published in 1947 under the title, Man Must Live again. In ten years my perspective has changed enormously from escapist writing to protest writing, and, I hope, to something of a higher order, which is the ironic meeting between protest and acceptance in their widest terms (Mphahlele, 1959:217).

Nonetheless, the nascent African humanism evident in the stories along with countervailing forces of alienation belie Brian Bunting's statement that characters only believe in "ideal love, heavenly justice and other delectable virtues" (Popken ed., 1978: 313). There is a rising vein of realism apparent in these stories in which we are made aware of the black man, isolated in separate amenities and group areas; and brutalized by a Social Darwinist code of conduct untempered by the humanizing benefits of community. Indeed both Zungu and Katsane survive by remaining true to a set of principles strictly of their own making, rather than that of the community. This polarity in Mphahlele's characters between Western individualism (which contains the seeds of its own alienation) and African communalism recapitulates Mphahlele's own internal "dialogue of two selves" and the personal conflict he seeks to resolve through the synthesis of African humanism.

Thus, this first collection of South African stories by a black writer represents a transition point from rural to urban living as well as from colonialism, segregation and racism to growing political awareness, apartheid and urbanization. But despite their socio-economic concerns, the stories are flawed by a tendency to rely on romantic escapism to resolve dramatic conflicts, which is why, for example, a character like Reverend Katsane remains essentially unchanged even while he undergoes great inner turmoil.

Mphahlele's frequently stated desire to disown his first literary offspring validates what the text itself bears out that the collection Man Must Live, both in an aesthetic and ideological sense, is in part the very embodiment of the author's philosophical and literary alienation -- reflective of a divided self living in a world in which Social Darwinism and racism prevail; where education is Eurocentric and possesses a strong overlay of Victorian English, Romantic literature and Christian belief and where such influences are on a direct collision course with an African world view.

Indeed, Man Must Live is an example of the forces of cultural alienation as shaped by Eurocentric language and learning and of how colonialism controlled not only the people's wealth, but more invidiously:

the entire realm of the language of real life. ...its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world (Ngugi,1992:160).

But in all fairness to the author, it must also be acknowledged that in these early stories Mphahlele is still an unseasoned young writer learning to master his craft. As Norman Hodge, writing in English in Africa observes, Man Must Live and Other Stories belongs to an earlier era before the full flowering of the black South African literary renaissance. It is the work of a writer serving his "apprenticeship ... yet many of the basic themes and concerns of the later fiction are clearly discernible" (Hodge,1986:63), including, it should be added, the counterpunctual themes of alienation and African humanism in an embryonic state. Yet, the collection occupies an important place in the history and development of Black South African fiction because prior to its publication in 1946 only three other fictional works with urban settings had been published by black writers -- R.R.R. Dhlomo's An African Tragedy and Peter Abraham's Song of the City and Mine Boy (Barnett,1976:27).

Chapter 2: From Black Stereotypes in English Fiction
To Black Consciousness in Mphahlele's The African Image--
Making the Label Stick

We are born into a world where alienation awaits us.
(Ronald David Laing: 1967)

How could we not return
when this is where
the afterbirth was buried for rebirth? --
Afrika my music. (Mphahlele, 1984)

In the preceding chapter, my analysis of Mphahlele's first published collection of short stories Man Must Live reveals the alienation of an author for whom the text and its dialogue fail to reflect accurately the universe he inhabits. Indeed, the alienated author exemplifies the wide-ranging symptomatology of colonial alienation as described by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. Such alienation, rooted in mission school education, manifests itself in a disassociation between the "colonial ... sensibility" and one's "natural and social environment" -- which, in turn, is reinforced by Eurocentric teaching and writing in the humanities (Ngugi, 1992:17). Words frequently thus do not serve to express an authentic inner voice. Characterized by artifice and deception, they instead tend to raise a barrier of alienation between author and readership, while simultaneously diminishing the meaning and effectiveness of a given work.

Themes of alienation occur in both the external structure and internal content of the stories in Man Must Live, which suffer from a weakening imbalance in which the voice of the African humanist is as yet only dimly heard. Characters in these stories for this reason are not as alive; as fully realized for example as they are in the later "Lesane" stories to be discussed later in this chapter. Within the context of Man Must Live characters such as Zungu and Annah's son, Sello, as well as Reverend Katsane are portrayed as isolated and alienated, if not passive, victims of harsh socio-economic forces beyond their control. It is implicitly understood that such individuals are more vulnerable precisely because of their failure to identify and participate with the group. As becomes increasingly clear in subsequent works by Mphahlele, such as the bridging "Lesane" series and even more in his autobiography Down Second Avenue, the remedy for such self-defeating alienation is African humanism where the community acts as a strong bulwark against the impoverishment, oppression and violence of an apartheid culture and "people take a communal interest in one another's joys and sorrows" (Mphahlele, 1956:13). Thus, "it is those individuals who are strengthened

C
L.S

through dedication to a group ... who are enabled to act it is in this way that the impotence, debilitation and alienation of the isolated subject is overcome." (Barboure,1986:176). This "collectivist ethos" in which survival is "dependent on people living together ... sharing tasks, and protecting and comforting each other" (Khapoya, 1994:43) gains increasing definition and clarity in Mphahlele's works as he moves steadily away from a derivative style and subject matter and more confidently into an African mode of expression with a more community-centered focus. When Mphahlele manages to divest himself of Victorian prose, Christian-mission morals and plots and characters out of 19th century romances, he concomitantly overcomes authorial alienation and contributes on a broader scale to an emergent national consciousness based on a cultural revolution. As Essop Patel asserts, "For an authentic revolution there has to be an aesthetic revolution, only then will there be cultural revolution" (Patel,1986:85).

Mphahlele began to lay the groundwork for his own personal aesthetic and cultural revolution and what later became a broad-scale black nationalist revolution in his Master of Arts dissertation written at the University of South Africa (UNISA) entitled "The Non-European Character in South African English Fiction" (1956)¹. The first in a three-part trilogy, this ambitious and imaginative survey is the ancestor and progenitor of Mphahlele's landmark work of criticism The African Image, of which the new and revised editions published in 1962 and 1974 respectively are direct lineal descendants. Mphahlele's early attempts to define an African aesthetic resulted in a rising self-awareness that in turn is reflected in his works and which eventually had far-reaching effects in helping to shape a national consciousness on the part of black South Africans. According to Jane Watts, "Mphahlele's intellectual explorations of the function of culture ran so closely parallel to the practical aspiration of the black consciousness writers that it is difficult not to assume that a number of them had read his critical writings ... (Watts,

1989:86). Mphahlele sets as his task in his critical works -- including his essays Voices in the Whirlwind -- the establishing of a "sociological aesthetic" which examines the "relationship between ... world visions and the universe of characters and things created in a particular work" (Goldmann, 1964:316).

The very writing of his dissertation "The Non-European Character in South African English Fiction," is not only a first step towards breaking away from a Eurocentric and therefore self-alienating world vision, it moreover marks Mphahlele as a liberal, a humanist in the broadest Western anthropocentric sense (Maritain, 1938:19) and, finally, as an emergent black nationalist commencing to identify and spell out his own particular world vision. What marks Mphahlele as a liberal is that "... like it or not, liberalism is the common disease that afflicts all writers of real ability" (Ebersohn, 1986:17). What establishes him as an humanist is that Mphahlele's survey of "non-white characters" in English literature centers on the exploration of human character within the framework of an African world vision, society and culture, rather than with stylistic or structural concerns of setting, plot, or theme.

The choice of topic, in sum, with its focus on humanity and culture within the framework of racial alienation is an eminently apposite one for a self-proclaimed humanist living in a racially segregated society. Moreover, there is very little doubt that the rigorous exercise in poetics of criticizing white and black writers in English literature across a broad canvas -- particularly ones who dealt in political cliches and stereotypical characters -- acted as a corrective to Mphahlele's own initial tendency to deal in stock characters and situations. It is thus in Mphahlele's dissertation that the dialogue between themes of African humanism and alienation and the resultant search for synthesis makes its first real start.

But Mphahlele's humanist stance is perhaps both more forgiving and more Western-oriented in his dissertation than in later critical works. Mphahlele does, however, afford a penetrating critical analysis characterized by both balance and realism of ways in which white writers of English fiction all too frequently portray black characters as stereotypes cast in such molds as that of the "reprobate," "the servant," "the barbarian on the battlefield" or the "noble savage," a concept British settlers may have brought to the frontier (Mphahlele quoting Butler, 1956:21). Mphahlele understands that such historic and literary stereotypes lead to alienation and promote misunderstanding and incipient racism between whites and blacks. While in the 1990s it is deemed "politically correct" and rather commonplace to look for evidence of racial stereotypes which reinforce bigotry in linguistics and works of literature, Mphahlele was well in advance of his times in undertaking to do so in the South Africa of the 1950s. It is ironic that his dissertation title, perforce, employs the self-alienating racist label "non-European" then in usage to identify persons of colour, thus identifying blacks not in terms of what they are, but in terms of what they are not.

Faye's Cottons

The importance of Mphahlele's dissertation for purposes of this study is twofold. First, it establishes him as an original thinker as well as a man of letters. Secondly, in it is found clear evidence that elements of African humanism were already beginning to play an important role in his critical thinking -- which would also help shape his future discourses on questions of negritude, Black Consciousness and African humanism. And as previously suggested, the dissertation is the clear forerunner and first in a critical trilogy that includes the first and second editions of The African Image. Mphahlele's essays in Voices in the Whirlwind are also closely related thematically to this three-part series of literary criticism. In a sense, Mphahlele's dissertation is the seminal prototypical ancestor of this important literary family tree of critical writing.

In the course of his dissertation -- for which, Mphahlele explains to his biographer N. Chabani Manganyi in Exiles and Homecomings, he needed a wide canvas in order to bring into relief the South African literary scene -- he came to the conclusion that "the problem of a national culture is always also a problem of a national literature" (Manganyi,1983:146). Racism not only divides and separates people, it finds its way into literary works and it limits what is written about. South African writers' obsession with the race problem means literature is also subservient to some political message or "preachments as bedevil South African fiction" itself and thus must "remain sectional and sterile as long as such conditions prevail" (Mphahlele,1959:195-196) -- such alienating constraints do not make for either a unifying national consciousness or a great national literature.

Nonetheless, and despite his banning from teaching four years earlier in 1952, Mphahlele remains optimistic about reconciliation -- thus showing his true humanistic stripes. Mphahlele opens his dissertation with the unequivocal statement that in the post-colonial era of economic and political exploitation of Africa by Europe, there arises the opportunity to build understanding between "whites" and "non-whites." From the first paragraph, Mphahlele, thus, defines the terms of black-white alienation. At the same time, he expresses an humanistic vision -- that is as much Western as it is African -- in the clear assertion that colonial conflicts can be bridged with closer contact and "better mutual understanding" (Mphahlele,1956:1).

Mphahlele then proceeds to a survey of fiction by such well-known English and American writers as Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster, Joseph Conrad and Pearl Buck in whose works he avers are to be found "non-white" characters effectively and believably portrayed in the round. By contrast black characters in white South African fiction are often, he argues, lacking in any third dimension and their "response-mechanism

... is not half as complex as human life is in general" (Mphahlele, 1956:87). Rather they are frequently flat and stereotypical. This Mphahlele believes can be attributed to the fact that separation of the races means whites only have limited contact with (and thus limited understanding of) blacks and what little they do have is based on knowing blacks as the enemy, a servant, or a convert. Furthermore, race issues in South African fiction drive and dominate plot to the exclusion of character development. Characters become of only secondary importance -- in effect, they serve as message carriers.

Mphahlele, however, considers that there are two early South African writers who are important exceptions to this rule -- William Plomer and Laurens van der Post. Mphahlele cites the example of the character Tonoki in Plomer's short story collection about Japan, Paper Houses. In it Tonoki articulates a theme central to Mphahlele's own works and to the continuing dialogue between themes of alienation and African humanism. Indeed, Plomer's character Tonoki, who is described as being able "to assimilate a foreign culture (in his case, Western ideas) and remain his indigenous self" (Mphahlele quoting Plomer, 1956:5) may have suggested something of the ideal model on which Mphahlele himself could fashion his recreated self as author, academic and newly evolving African humanist.

Mphahlele's survey of American literature starts with Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin and its portrayal of "... the type of Negro who adopts the attitude of Christian sufferance to ill-treatment and cringes before the harsh master or mistress" (Mphahlele, 1956:7). Other stereotypical black literary types include the noble savage, complete with tom-tom drums and all the exotica that entails; and the black as debased, stupid, shiftless, and brutish, such as are depicted in Carl Van Vechten's Nigger Heaven. However, black writers such as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and Richard Wright, who depart from the "plantation" and "pseudo-paganism" tradition do

succeed, states Mphahlele, in creating multi-dimensional black characters that help counter widely-held racial stereotypes. Clearly, in his analysis Mphahlele is relying on critical standards and a "poetics" of interrogation of the text (Mphahlele quoted by Manganyi, 1983:147) which are based on "humanism" and "realism," but increasingly are beginning to be tuned to a more specifically African focus. The fact that Mphahlele also examines the social basis of form and content insures that his "broad canvas" avoids the merely superficial.

Mphahlele, the African humanist, is not himself a racist even in his literary criticism. In the first chapter of his dissertation he makes a definitive African humanist statement, reflecting on the "so-called clash of cultures" in which a colonizing technological culture has contact with an African culture which is more humanistic (Mphahlele, 1956:17). He sees the "clash" as offering rich material for the poet and writer; just as he bemoans the fact that the literary theme of "evangelizing the native" is "... a theme that hardly ever suggests what the African can teach the white man" (Mphahlele, 1956:44). The implication here is that a cultural synthesis could be enriching and beneficial; that Africa does have something to teach the white man (and woman) and that whites would be welcome participants in the process of educating themselves. Such African humanistic statements concerning racial alienation and potential reconciliation in academe and in the arts provide balance and credibility to Mphahlele's criticism and spare the text from any taint of polemics.

Indeed, Mphahlele implicitly and in the fundamentally generous spirit of the African humanist invites the white writer or critic to participate in the venture of learning about African humanistic culture. The critic, as "peripatetic reader," while aware of bringing to the task cultural values that are highly subjective and also suspect, is immediately relieved of the guilt-induced burden of being of the race of

the oppressor -- or the fear of showing undue ignorance or being accused of white patronage. Potential Black-white alienation between reader and author is overcome, in this instance again, by the generosity and compassion of African humanism. This antidote to alienation is necessary. For just as a black audience may be alienated by the culturally-colonized black author, so the white reader may, as Njabulo Ndebele observes, experience the "spectacular 'alienation effect'" of black protest literature "since it shows up the ogre to himself" (Ndebele in Chapman, 1991:442).

If the white critic feels inexcusably ignorant about certain aspects of black arts and culture, now that critic feels empowered in the inclusivist spirit of the "journey" to take a first tentative step forward in the pursuit of new understanding. In the realm of literary criticism as in life itself, it is clear that Mphahlele the African humanist is free from racism. He believes moreover that whites are fully capable of creating rounded black characters and that the southern American writer William Faulkner is a notable example of an author who has done so. In early South African fiction, however, the black character often appears only as an organic part of the setting or is portrayed in works such as those by Thomas Pringle or Rider Haggard as either "a fighter or servant" (Mphahlele, 1956:13).

Long before it became fashionable to criticize the patronizing brand of white liberalism found in Alan Paton's internationally acclaimed novel Cry the Beloved Country, Mphahlele in his dissertation took Paton to task for his portrayal of Reverend Kumalo, a South African version, perhaps, of Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom." Kumalo, Mphahlele suggests, is remarkable chiefly for his eternal fatalism and his passive acceptance of his lot; as well as for his willingness to "uphold the law" even when that law had outrageous built-in inequities -- even when it "hurts."

Mphahlele suggests that Reverend Kumalo's character is deliberately flat because Kumalo serves as a message-carrier for the sermon Paton is preaching to his readers with its theme of "comfort in desolation."

Kumalo's story is a variant on the "Jim comes to Jo'burg" theme. Mphahlele had explored that theme himself in his first collection of stories, Man Must Live, in which Zungu comes to the city, is brutalized, but endures despite everything. In the "Lesane" series, Fanyan comes to the city and is changed by the experience, not always for the better; but he too shows every indication of being a survivor. Mphahlele, the prototypical hero of his autobiography, Down Second Avenue and its fictive sequel The Wanderers, is anything but a passive survivor. Both in real life and fiction characters are much less passive and much more complex than Kumalo. While Reverend Kumalo is merely a fictional character, the fact that his passive acceptance of the status quo is presented as close to the ideal and as exemplary by an eminent white liberal of the stature of Alan Paton may have suggested to Mphahlele that white liberalism itself could not ultimately rescue the black from oppression. Hence the early signs of Mphahlele's political and literary alienation from liberal white writers and politicians can be seen taking root in his pioneering and, in the 1950s even radical, analysis of Alan Paton's well-known work.

In his effort to probe the historical reasons behind the South African writer's inability to portray rounded black characters, Mphahlele eloquently summarizes some of the sources of stereotypical thinking that, in turn, help foster tensions, black-white alienation, and a widening gulf in understanding between two streams of consciousness -- African and Western; between a colonized people and the colonizer:

For several years in the history of South Africa the white man gets to know the non-white merely as an enemy

on the battlefield or as a slave -- whether it be as a labourer on the farm or a carrier on an expedition. Often he knows the non-white as a convert or prospective convert at a mission station. In the first two cases, the emotional circumstances of the contact allow for little more than a tendency on the part of the white man to regard the non-white as one of a group rather than an individual. The missionary is perhaps at an advantage because he tries to deal with the individual personality. If he fails to understand the convert, it is because his approach is bedevilled by the same overpowering tendency to regard his "ward" as a member of a group whose culture must be completely destroyed as an antithesis to Christian culture (Mphahlele, 1956:17).

Here Mphahlele shows himself a humanist trying to understand rather than categorically condemn. He ascribes white bigotry to the failure of whites to meet and know blacks as individuals rather than as members of a group. This spatial and geographic separation in place, culture and time results in stereotypical perceptions, both in real life and literature. Mphahlele then proceeds to the antithesis in the dialectic of alienation and African humanism, making a key statement on several profound philosophical differences between the West and Africa. Such passages as the one just cited reveal Mphahlele as an incisive, original thinker with a felicitous turn of phrase, a true critic in the making. The previous statement of alienation balanced against early affirmations of African humanism, seen in the passage to come, helps establish a metronomic rhythm, polarity and creative tension that immediately draw the reader in and serve to illuminate.

Mphahlele clearly distinguishes between a world view that focuses on "doing" (and, one might add, which measures self-worth in terms of materialist values such as work, earning power and personal achievement) and an African world view that emphasizes the importance and value of "being" (with the communal self being as important, if not more important, than the individual self). Mphahlele suggests that the South African writer in the 1800s, in particular, lacked the vision to ... investigate the contact of a European culture that has had the good luck to produce technical skills with an African culture whose content finds the maximum

satisfaction not so much in "doing" (as a Western concept) but in social "being" -- in the best human relationship and communal responsibility. The irony of the "clash" should be rich material enough to interest a novelist and a poet; to say nothing of the real clash as it exists in the economic and religious system (Mphahlele,1956:17).

Mphahlele's prose takes a lyrical turn as he elaborates on the richness and value of an ethos deriving from traditional African society, with its communal responsibilities, customs such as harvest festivals and "beautiful" patterns of family life in which "the whole structure of African traditional life which places the accent on 'being' -- could tone down and supplement the white man's highly acquisitive urges" (Mphahlele,1956:45). It is interesting from an historic perspective to note that one of Mphahlele's most affecting statements on African humanism and the potential for synthesis between two streams of consciousness is to be found in his earliest critical work, his dissertation "The Non-European Character in South African English Fiction" (Unisa:1956).

The irony as well as the reality of the cultural clash between Africa and the West did in fact become rich material for the novelist, short story writer, essayist and poet Es'kia Mphahlele. In effect, he threw down the gauntlet, then picked it up again himself. Indeed, the irony of the "clash" became Mphahlele's life-long study.

Mphahlele concludes his dissertation with the observation that "African character" is in itself a fiction (Mphahlele, 1956: 100). This hypothesis along with the admirable example of writer William Plomer, whom Mphahlele credits with "simply writing about human beings with human problems" (even when writing about a foreign culture) later serves as an important literary standard for Mphahlele in his classic autobiography Down Second Avenue and other works. Here, too, people are more than mere victims of a racist regime. They are also human beings with human problems, laughing, living and loving as well as suffering and sharing a common humanity with people everywhere.

In 1956 while Mphahlele was still at work on his dissertation for UNISA, he began his "brief and unhappy career as a journalist" and literary editor for Drum magazine -- a popular journal that featured muckraking exposes, romantic fiction and cheesecake photography and that gained a reputation for being one of "the most authoritative newspapers on the life of Black South Africans" then in existence (Nkosi,1983:21). Drum was more than just a slick magazine, however. It was almost a state of mind that gave its name to the "fabulous fifties." With the advent of Drum black writers had begun to forge a jazzy new urban idiom (the verbal equivalent of township jazz such as mbaqanga) to match the fast-paced life of the city slums. The style was fresh, upbeat and innovative -- in marked contrast to the stiff Victorian prose of the mid-19th century mission presses (Visser,1976:12). While the so-called "Drum decade" was an era of "the truncheon and boot" and of police raids and mass action, it was also an era of optimism and of a great creative outpouring by blacks in the arts, music and literature.

Despite the panoply of repressive legislation that had been passed, including the aforementioned Bantu Education Act and the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), "which defined communism in sweeping terms and gave the minister of justice summary powers" (Thompson,1990:198) under which Mphahlele was banned, it was an era when blacks and whites still intermingled and when there was still a wide-spread liberal belief in the possibility of peaceful change through education and persuasion. The white-led Liberal Party, founded in 1953, was indeed beginning to cooperate politically with the African National Congress (ANC). Mphahlele himself joined the ANC in the early 1950s when Bantu Education arrived in primary schools and the clearance of Sophiatown was started (Mphahlele,1959: 191-194). Moreover hope of peaceful change was fueled by the success of such mass actions as the bus boycotts and the march of 20,000 African women to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in

1955 to protest pass laws, both of which stories Mphahlele covered for Drum (Mphahlele, 1959:193-4). Finally, it was not until 1958 that Netherlands-born social engineer Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, who "plugged" every hole in the dike of legalized segregation, was elected prime minister (Thompson, 1990:189).

For purposes of this study, the previous historical sketch is important for several reasons. Mphahlele's experience on Drum meant that he was not culturally isolated and alienated as he wrote his dissertation in what figuratively amounted to an Eurocentric ivory tower. Rather he was in daily contact with the disenfranchised, dispossessed, impoverished black community, both in urban and rural settings, where he gathered some of the raw material for later works such as his first novel The Wanderers. Mphahlele was further stimulated to find his own African voice through constant exposure to and encouragement of other talented black writers. Historically, it is more than empty speculation to suggest that in the process Mphahlele became the de facto father of the black South African short story. Indeed, Drum magazine, according to Michael Chapman, "marks the substantial beginning, in South Africa, of the modern black short story" (Chapman, 1983:183). In a Marxist theoretical sense, it is also true that the exigencies of life in poor, overcrowded, noisy townships where police raids were frequent and privacy and security non-existent, made the short story as protest literature (and as a means of lighting a high velocity charge in a short time) a logical choice of literary medium for black writers.

This choice was determined in part by the constraints placed on the means of production by censorship, by separate amenities and a segregated press, and by the fact that "forms are historically determined by the kind of 'content' they have

to embody" (Eagleton,1986:546). The short story was, in addition, a natural choice for black writers with deep roots in a rich African oral tradition of story telling. While socio-economic conditions favoured such a birth, a catalyst and an outlet were also needed. Mphahlele was, arguably, that catalyst; Drum was the outlet. Not only did Mphahlele, himself, publish the first collection of short stories by a black South African, but also according to Richard Rive (quoted in an interview before his death), Mphahlele as fiction editor of Drum was "father of it all" since "he decided to push the short stories for Drum" and since he encouraged so many talented writers such as Peter Clarke, Can Themba, and Rive himself, he in effect "made us writers," (de Vries,1989:47). "The father of it all" thus as an editor and reporter as well as a critic contributed significantly to the cultural decolonization of himself, his fellow writers, and African literature in general.

Mphahlele made an important contribution to African literature and to Drum in the publication of his "Lesane" series between the years of 1953 and 1957, at a time when Drum provided the sole outlet then available for black fiction writers (Barnett,1976:34). There are already clear signs in the "Lesane" stories of Mphahlele's reaching back into oral traditions for inspiration, a first step in the process of resolving the "clash" between two cultures by building a synthesis.

Furthermore, in the "Lesane" stories Mphahlele not only shows a greater mastery of the short story form, but his stories are now more boldly stamped with the imprint of their historic epoch. Themes of alienation tie in more directly with what is happening to people and, in consequence, "with moral and social questions" (Chapman,1989: 183). The author in turn is commencing to describe with greater accuracy in terms of style, form and content, the universe he inhabits, thus overcoming his culturally colonized persona. As the African

voice grows stronger, the stories gain in meaning and interest as well as effectiveness. While concerned with moral and social issues, the "Lesane" stories do not fall into the trap of didacticism. Instead in their detailed realism, they hold up a mirror to the 1950s with its pass laws, Bantu education, beer raids and slum clearances (a reference to which provides the ironic conclusion to "The Lesanes of Nadia Street") which disrupted families and obliterated entire communities and their histories. Indeed, the "Lesane" stories have extraordinary value as "an account of locale and period which cannot be found elsewhere in such detail" (Barnett, 1976:46). They are not, in short, as in Man Must Live, the embodiment of the author's alienation.

Whenever African idioms and customs enrich the texture of Mphahlele's prose the implied theme is African humanism since these customs and rituals are a part of the total African human experience -- the rituals that connect people to one another and to their ancestors. It is these idioms that lend warmth, interest, humanity, texture, colour and movement to Mphahlele's writings. And he is already in the "Lesane" stories learning to weave such idioms deftly into the texture of his writing so that the reader does not feel treated to an ethnographic treatise.

In the "Lesanes of Nadia Street" Mphahlele opens the story with a favorite narrative device of swooping down on the scene with a wide-angle lens, panning it, then focusing a long lens on a particular scene. Nadia Street, like Second Avenue in Mphahlele's autobiography, functions both as stage set and as an African humanist emanance rather like a character, itself. (It is an emanance notably absent in the earlier collection Man Must Live, in which, in a more Western vein, individuals rather than community have prominence.) Nadia Street, says the narrator, is the "quietest street in Newclare." Yet there is also a great deal going on there. The street indeed is as full of humanity and movement as it is of gossips.

It is typical of Mphahlele's African humanism that he often chooses as his subject real-life experiences that are shared in common with all humanity rather than specific political events. In African townships, weddings are an important communal celebration, as they are everywhere, and it is a wedding that opens the story "The Lesanes of Nadia Street:"

Midday. Nadia street was bright and gay. Lu-lulu-lu-li-li-li-li! the women shouted. Crowds of people converged on Lesane's place.... Women shouted and stamped on the street. Spectators nudged and jostled one another. The crown was lovely; the bride's face might have been a little shorter; the bride seemed much younger than her husband; the groom's dress had a rustic flavour about it; the bridesmaids were perfect. Shame, how pathetically beautiful they looked A tiny man stood like a sentinel at the door, forbidding them to enter. Custom. He had to be there. And it didn't look funny to the spectators that the forbidding majesty of custom should be personified in such a tiny man (Mphahlele in Chapman, ed. 1989:132).

In this passage, it is clear Mphahlele has wrenched himself free from mission-press, Victorian prose. Sound effects include African ululation. Sentences are short and punchy. The scene is urban; yet distinctly African. Customs and people are described with wry humour, (the bride's face is too short; a tiny man is the doorkeeper for "the forbidding majesty of custom"). Customs repeatedly in this and other stories are documented in detail and with humour and pride -- in an implicit and yet profound statement of Black Consciousness. Mphahlele, the emergent African humanist writer, is now able to draw effectively on ironic contrasts between two cultures. His optimism of will allows him to engage in humorous asides while depicting scenes of grim realism. Here as elsewhere humour and hope serve as counterweights to balance pain and desolation, suggesting that there is more to life for blacks than the fate-driven presence of state apartheid and white oppression. Such counterweights permit Mphahlele to avoid the monochromatic effect of tone that occasionally mars works of such eminent white liberal protest writers as Nadine Gordimer and Andre Brink.

The communal African humanist scene continues with a

cross-dialogue among half a dozen wedding celebrants who speculate on such questions as the receipt by the bride's mother of a new shawl from the Lesanes because, says Ma-Siviya, it is "'custom, didn't you know stupid? It's the Xhosa way. The bride is Xhosa. Where I come from we don't do such things." There is also much discussion about what meat will be served, whether goat or oxen will be slaughtered for, "What's a wedding without food?" (Later when the smaller children are eating, we discover just how impoverished life is -- for counter to dictates of African humanism and the hospitality that goes with it, they have learned to take turns eating their food in privacy if guests show up at their house so they do not have to share.)

The above vignette reflects back on its context in an implicit commentary on how state-imposed apartheid fragmented and alienated what was becoming a black urban humanistic culture. Ma-Siviya, for instance, is a Basotho. She is at once curious about, but accepting of Xhosa customs and the two tribal groups here are living comfortably side by side together with other tribal groups. However, in slum clearances people were grouped according to ethnicity in the divide-and-rule formula of the apartheid system under which Africans were viewed as belonging to "ten distinct nations," making whites the largest "single nation" (Thompson, 1990:190). The effect of such government policies on African humanist culture was divisive, alienating and resulted in ethnic strife.

Mphahlele contrasts the wedding as a joyous celebration with the grim reality of its setting in the impoverished township. The streets are full of flies, dirty water and "rows of dilapidated houses that stood cheek-by-jowl as if to support one another in the event of disaster" (Mphahlele, 133:1989). A roll-call of some of the guests provides a quick indictment of the system. Ma-Ntoi came from a mining town in the Free State "from which she had been expelled because she couldn't own a house as a widow;" Shigumbu, the soft-hearted bachelor "was

trying desperately hard not to annoy the authorities lest he be sent back to his homeland."

"Custom" itself becomes one of the leitmotifs of African humanism. For instance, there are comments on marriage and the groom's responsibility that reflect group-held values. "'He's marrying,' people always say in the continuous tense," comments the narrator, "which implies a long, long process" (133). The groom is reminded by his elders of his duty in life in a definitive African humanist statement and admonished not to forget "... a man is a man because of other men." At the same time, the new order suggests it is good for the groom to move out of the house: "If you can rear your own cow, why let others do it for you." The African humanism inherent in the litany of communal obligations, the importance of producing children, and in the lively interaction among extended family and friends at the wedding as well as the repeated comments on customs helps to set up the tension in the story and establish a dialectic between old ways and new. The expression of an African humanistic ethos also enables Mphahlele to probe the psychology and motivation of individual characters.

In the meantime, the story's conflict arises when Diketso, the groom's younger sister, begins to jive with her lover, openly defying convention. Later in the story, the mood turns ugly when Diketso's father sjamboks (horsewhips) her brutally for continuing to see her lover, who lives in a squatters' camp out-of-town. Mphahlele does not overlook the potential for violence in the African character here nor the socio-economic reasons behind it. Psychological motivation is provided for these destructive and self-alienating actions. Diketso's father is suffering from ill health brought on by work in the mines. He is also emasculated by his rather too domineering wife and thus beats his daughter to feel more like a man. Diketso, in turn, is deeply unhappy and frustrated because she is not in school. Through the African humanist

voice of Ma-Lesane, who continues to insist that one day Diketso will be as straight as her little finger (which ironically happens to be quite crooked), the reader learns that the Lesanes cannot afford to keep Diketso in school, although Diketso "loves schooling so, poor girl, and since she left it she's like a door on one hinge." Diketso, rebellious though she is, is self-aware enough to realize that she continues to meet her lover in large part out of deep frustration as well as her personal sense of loneliness and inadequacy. In the end, the hurt and alienation extends to the squatters' camp itself when the story ends with the camp's demolition against a "violent background" over which hangs a "pall of smoke." Diketso, however, still clings to the hope that one day she will return to school and perhaps even train to be a nurse.

By forefronting community and the African humanist commentaries of Ma-Lebone and "Old Mbata," who sits with his peers "coughing and sneezing out the last years of their lives" ... reflecting on "the broken purposes of human lives that littered the street" (Mphahlele, 1989:135), Mphahlele is better able both to dramatize and to highlight themes of alienation and to devise more realistic plots and rounded characters. For instance, Diketso, who is Rebone's forerunner in Down Second Avenue, comes to life through the eyes of several other characters (her father, mother, siblings and her lover) through interactions with them and events in the narrative as well as through interior monologue. Because Diketso is seen as a part of African communal life, but also with a life of her own, she is more than a mere message-carrier. She is, in short, a much more rounded, multi-faceted character than either Sylvia Direko or Annah in Man Must Live. But they like Diketso, Rebone, Eva, Dora, and Karabo and, indeed, all of Mphahlele's strong women are

girls in the slums who are moved by an inner strength to try and drag themselves out of their circumstances. Sometimes, tragically, they fail, but they do not despair. [Mphahlele's] older women we can often imagine as the mature version of the younger girls. Ma-Lesane in Drum and Aunt Dora in Down Second Avenue

no longer have ambitions for themselves, but the toughness and refusal to give into circumstances is still there. They rule their families with a hand of iron, but with tremendous affection, and thus give their children a sense of mental stability in an unstable world (Barnett,1976:38).

Mphahlele's concern with socio-economic issues affecting the self-alienating, psychological oppression of blacks (women as much as men) stands out as an early indicator of his fundamental black consciousness. Long before Steve Biko articulated Black Consciousness as a political philosophy, these concerns are identifiable in such works as the "Lesane" stories and act as commentaries on the context. They include inferior black education or lack therein, the powerlessness of the black masses and working class, and the breakdown of traditional African values and the family structure due to apartheid economics and white oppression.

Education, for example, is compulsory for white children. The same is not true of blacks (Thompson,1990: 196), however, as witness the fact neither Fanyan nor Diketso has secured a secondary education. Furthermore, the government whom Ma-Lesane refers to as "a strange person," does not provide her husband, whose health has been ruined by long years of hard labour in the mines from which he "had been discharged owing to his kidney trouble," with a "sick pension" nor would it grant Fanyan a pass. The "Lesane" stories, in short, bear out the socio-economic realities of an era in which

the social dislocations resulting from colonialism and the migrant labour system helped to disrupt family life and undermine both women's rights and status in patriarchal rural societies. The insecurities of urban existence would have also contributed to a weakening of traditional patriarchal controls (Lodge,1990:140).

In her warmth and compassion and in her insights Ma-Lesane, along with "Old Mbata," provides the positive African humanist counterweight that keeps the sequel from becoming unremittingly grim. It also enables Mphahlele simultaneously to probe psychological motives such as Fanyan's fears and inferiority, Diketso's frustration and unhappiness, their father's low self-esteem and emasculation, and to link motive

to the interplay of themes of alienation.

In the conversational tone of the narrative in the text of the "Lesane" stories and in his use of wise sayings and proverbs Mphahlele draws effectively on the African oral tradition (Ngugi, 1992:77). The metaphoric language is also alive with African imagery. Thus language as "both a means of communication and a carrier of culture" and of values as a part of national identity is beginning to overcome colonial alienation. In the Marxist critical sense Mphahlele's language is commencing to reflect "real life" concerns of "how people interact with each other in the labour process" (Ngugi, 1992:15-17). We learn from the stories about the disruptive effect on society of colonialism and economic exploitation as well as of a judicial system that is fundamentally bankrupt and that, in turn, corrupts. Thus Fanyan, age eighteen and fresh from the country where his education in bush schools was inadequate and spotty, much like Mphahlele's own early education, is sent to school in part to circumvent the system and in order to secure a pass. It is also widely acknowledged and accepted that Seleke the shebeen queen regularly bribes the police -- for as wise Old Mbata observes, "In town here your honesty can only carry you to the end of Nadia street."

Because Fanyan is fearful, awkward and shy, he is intrigued by Seleke who is anything but. With her arms that are "shaped like a constable's baton" and breasts "that parted where they united" she is perceived by Ma-Lesane to be "a hundred Sodoms and Gomorrahs put together" (here a Christian allusion creeps in that is effectively "tamed" and Africanized to achieve a humorous effect in Mphahlele's vividly sketched cameo portrait of Seleke). Fanyan asks Seleke how she can show such a "strong heart" with the police coming in and out all the time. Seleke in a variation on the man-must-live theme, replies that one must have a "tough heart" to survive. Fanyan then asks, "How did you begin?" Seleke's reply amounts to her township-style resume as shebeen queen. It becomes a

short telling lesson in apartheid economics and thus serves as an indictment. She tells Fanyan: "Like most of us in the townships. School, no money, school, no money, out, factory, out, no money, out, lie, cheat, bribe, live. Nothing more. Never!" Seleke's reply details a life lived by thousands like her. In order to survive, considerable wit and resourcefulness are needed. There is, for instance, an entire tribe employed in the profession of "hole-diggers" -- men who dig holes in people's back yards so as to hide illegally distilled beer (brewed by women to supplement incomes) from police during raids (Mphahlele, 1959:142-143).

Eventually Fanyan quite innocently falls foul of the law for carrying dagga, after being set up by Seleke, and is arrested by the the police whom he fears, much in the manner of Dinku Dikae in Down Second Avenue, as a dreaded symbol of the system. Mphahlele shows himself to be firmly in control of the narrative here, using dialogue and character description to advance plot and to foreshadow the trouble Fanyan will find himself in when he makes the dagga pick-up from Shigumbu "who went about the room like a cat The set of false teeth he had gave him an evil, snarling appearance"

Dialogue is lively and humorous. The wily Shigumbu (a highly suggestive name) tries to make certain the gossip about dagga is squelched by suggesting to neighbors that the packet was, in fact, an herbal remedy for colds. The use of humour, African idioms and dialect and making the toothless Shigumbu speak are clever rhetorical devices:

I bought the herbs at Mai Mai myself, bludder. For a cough. Well, if people want to think it's dagga let them, my bludder. Look at the moon and say it's a woman's breast, you can fly up and kiss it if you want it bludder. I can't help it if the moon is not a breast, can I? I didn't make the moon what it is. Solly, bludder.

It is a part of the narrator's humanism, and his broad perspective, that his characters are not in the Manichean sense either all black or white. There are bad blacks and at least

one white policeman who shows signs of compassion when he remarks of Fanyan, "Poor fellow, how green he is still" (Mphahlele, 1989:141). Because of his arrest, Fanyan is now forced to quit school altogether and to look for a job. When he eventually finds a job he soon loses it because of tension between him and the foreman. These events further exacerbate the father-son alienation that builds throughout, a theme that is taken up again in Down Second Avenue. In a sense, Fanyan is the ultimate outsider -- taunted by classmates, persecuted by the police and exploited by the shebeen queen Seleke, a hardened survivor, herself, whose tough armour was forged in the cauldron of township life and the need for man to survive. In short, Fanyan undergoes a process of psychological alienation. In his brief encounters with the white bureaucrat who denies Fanyan a pass because he fails to answer questions accurately about landmarks in the black township and the lift operators who address him as "John" and send him to a separate lift, we witness the corrosive effects on the mind of racism and prejudice. Mphahlele documents this self-destructive change in Fanyan as follows: "He was beginning to see city life in clearer perspective. Certain mental habits were forming in him: suspicion, for instance, and a timid alertness" (Mphahlele, 1989:147.) Fanyan in his psychological alienation and loss of innocence is a metaphor for the insidious alienation of township youth.

One of the sadder episodes of alienation that occurs in the "Lesane" series illustrates the class-caste alienation between the Asian and black communities, who for the most part live amicably but between whom there is friction due, in part, to the fact that the Asians comprize the commercial class and under the caste system of apartheid they also enjoy better amenities and greater privilege. Again Mphahlele uses the African humanist voice in Ma-Lesane to comment on the scene which begins when Indian fruit hawker Ahmed Moosa arrives and cries out his wares. People are returning home at the end of the week. They spew out of the train "like the ... vomit of some monster" full of the "conflicts that raged in them during

the week when "tough nerves ached and the flesh longed to hurt itself" (Mphahlele, 1989:15).

Mphahlele shows a good ear for dialect as he replicates Moosa's accent. Moosa is fond of repartee and likes to crack jokes. The women go into peals of laughter when Moosa says, "See my hoss? My hoss and all its pleas (fleas) and plies (flies) on it love you, love you love you!" (152). The scene, however, turns ugly when a patron discovers a worm in his apple. Suddenly and without warning, an angry crowd gathers and upends Moosa's cart, beats the horse and sends it crashing down the street. The episode hints at ones to come in Down Second Avenue, when Aunt Dora takes on Abdool. Again, Mphahlele shows the potential for violence in the black character, suggesting that a cruel existence makes people cruel. In the compassion of Ma-Lesane and her stance of African humanism Mphahlele, however, has a ready-made foil and commentator to enlarge on mob motivation and psychology. People act this way, she explains to her son in the story "Neighbours," because "there is something big on our shoulders, and so we stab and curse and beat one another."

While it is clear that communalism in the slums is not all "ubuntu" and caring, Ma-Lesane in her distinctly African humanist cooperative effort to help Moosa recover his losses saves the episode from becoming too brutish, grim and meaningless. Sometimes, however, Ma-Lesane is overly generous in her desire to accept and help others. Ma-Lesane, indeed, is not a one-sided character. Despite her African humanism, she is tough enough to intimidate her husband; and single-minded enough to overlook the obvious. When Reverend Anton Katsane, a man of the cloth, arrives under questionable circumstances and rumours about his irregular use of church funds, Ma-Lesane nonetheless encourages Diketso to clean for him. Town gossips judge this to be inappropriate and unseemly. However, as Ma-Ntoi comments: "It wouldn't have happened in the old days ... because we were human beings. And nothing would have

happened because we were clean" (Mphahlele, 1989:15).

This is a poignant statement on the devastating effect of urbanization, poverty, colonialism and white oppression on the indigenous culture and its ancient humanism. It is also a commentary on the conflict between old ways and new and between generations with regard to manners, morals and questions of social conduct. Diketso, upset by the beatings her father administers and frustrated by her lack of education, seeks comfort from the pastor, who is only too happy to oblige with a warm embrace. (In this episode, Mphahlele as satirist holds up a magnifying glass to the church and finds it wanting.) Ma-Mafate, stumbling across the scene, suspects the worse. She issues a warning. In a scene foreshadowing, Rebone's actions in Down Second Avenue, Diketso, enraged, slaps Ma-Mafate in the face -- an action so unthinkable that Old Mbate, like a Greek sibyl, proclaims: "The world is coming to an end, brother!" (Mphahlele, 1989:161).

And so goes the process of dehumanization with its lost opportunities -- for education, for personal growth, for purposeful employment; the massive dislocation, the breakdown in relationships between family members and communal groups, leading, in turn, to ethnic strife and youth alienation, to acts of violence and a loss of morality; to a loss of traditional ways and values -- to a loss, in the final analysis, of humanity and humanness. In his evocation of setting, Mphahlele documents a synthesizing process of "elements of old and new," by which "a distinctive African urban subculture" has come into being, "but underneath its often vibrant and gay exterior lingered a continuing crisis of the spirit" (Gerhart, 1979:32). Yet not all is without hope. Characters, in the "Lesane" series are not so hopeless as Zungu is in "Man Must Live," primarily because, despite alienation and conflict, they remain rooted in community.

Ursula Barnett states that Mphahlele's Drum stories

are as "rich a source of information about black city life in South Africa in the 1950s as are the works of Dickens and Gorky about their period. These are two writers whom Mphahlele admired in his early years" (Barnett,1976:47). They are also bridging stories in that related themes, characters and events reappear in Down Second Avenue and that the stories in terms of form and content and social heteroglossia also reflect an enormous growth process in which cultural decolonization has taken place and the African humanist voice has strengthened. In the "Lesane" stories, Mphahlele has begun "to exorcise the African's image of himself as the perpetual imitator and underling, the 'non-white' in a white world," enabling "Africans to find a new sense of cultural identity" by placing "their own history, achievements, and standards of beauty and worth at the center of the psychological universe" (Gerhart,1979:201)

In 1957, Mphahlele left South Africa to take up a teaching position in Lagos and it was not until ten years later, in 1967, that he was again to publish more works of fiction. It was during the "Drum decade," between 1955 and 1965, that such a flowering of black talent occurred that N.W. Visser refers to it and its premature demise due "to a torrent of restrictive legislation" and to Draconian censorship laws of banning, gagging and muzzling as "the Renaissance that failed" (1976:118). In short, just as blacks were beginning to seek out and define a national myth and political consciousness embodied in literature, it was dealt a mortal blow resulting in a form of spiritual alienation that even to the present continues to afflict South African black literature.

It was in 1961, under the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), after Mphahlele had departed for Lagos, that as a writer in his own country he received the ultimate coup de grace. Under this act any action was outlawed that "aims at bringing about political, industrial, social or economic change within the Republic by the promotion of disturbance or disorder, by unlawful acts or omissions." In other words, "any political action by the disenfranchised nonwhites constitutes a crime" (JanMohamed, 1988:80). As has been noted previously, Mphahlele's "crime" was that he lobbied actively against the promulgation of the Bantu Education Act. Anyone under banning orders was in turn prohibited from entering educational institutions and could not be quoted in the country. In Voices in the Whirlwind, Mphahlele writes that by 1968, more than 500 people, black and white, were under banning orders (Mphahlele, 1972:205). For more than three decades all of Mphahlele's important works, including Down Second Avenue and The African Image, were published and read abroad. Not until 1980 did Mphahlele publish again in South Africa. That publication was his second novel Chirundu; the publisher, Ravan press. Mphahlele's voice, in short, had been effectively silenced. Thus, was he twice-alienated: first, as a teacher; then as a writer.

Mphahlele's pan-African travels as well as his admiration for such black American writers as W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes and Richard Wright helped shape his thinking on questions concerning the African personality, Negritude and Black Consciousness. Indeed, Mphahlele's entire intellectual and spiritual life -- that was, at times, a fragmented lonely journey in which his sense of "the tyranny of place" drove him in efforts to recover "an effective identifying relationship between self and place" (Ashcroft, 1985:) -- became in itself an oeuvre in progress. But in the end, Mphahlele was able to contribute significantly to the struggle to "move the center," a struggle that was most dramatic in African countries and the Caribbean

where the postwar world saw a new literature in English and French consolidating itself into a tradition. This literature was celebrating the right to name the world The new tradition was challenging the more dominant one in which Asia, Africa, and South America were always being defined from the capitals of Europe by Europeans who often saw the world in color-tinted glasses (Ngugi,1993:3).

In his memoir AfriKa My Music (1984), Mphahlele, an active participant himself in this "celebration," observes that he left one literary renaissance behind him in South Africa to find himself in the midst of another "a west African one, which was in full swing" In Lagos, where Mphahlele worked with such writers as Wole Soyinka and Amos Tutuola (Mphahlele,1984:23) and helped establish the Mbari Centre for writers and artists, he found freedom exhilarating and Africa being "revived for me" (Makgabutlane,1990:36).

Shortly after his arrival in Lagos, Mphahlele completed his well-known autobiography Down Second Avenue which constitutes not only community history, but stands as an affirmation of the great "I am." Like Chinua Achebe in his fiction, Mphahlele had begun to transform "the African's status from that of an object to that of a subject" (JanMohamed, 1988:273). This process was taking place at both the literary and personal levels, where Mphahlele was celebrating not only the right to "name the world" through literature but also to name himself. In his struggle to resolve the tension-inducing dialectic between his more individuated persona steeped in the Western humanities and his more communally-oriented, spiritually-inclined, poetic-voiced self, Mphahlele eventually stuck a new label on himself. He did this despite his numerous protestations earlier on to the effect that so many labels had been stuck on him that he "itched all over" (Thuynsma,1989:7).

Unlike past labels, however, which were mostly negative and told blacks what they were not and could never aspire to

be, this new label was positive, upbeat and held moral clarity. It was shaped by Mphahlele's pan-African travels and by his scholarly and academic pursuits. It acquired a voice of authority through such works as his volume of essays, Voices in the Whirlwind (1972), gaining even clearer definition in The African Image (1974). While Mphahlele's life provided raw material for the evolution of this concept, his literature became for him a "building block for identity" (Bates, 1993:215). The label, of course, was that of "African humanist." And while a tiger (to paraphrase Wole Soyinka) may not feel a need to declare its "tigritude," the African humanist did feel compelled to shout back his essential humanity in the face of colonialism, the white liberal establishment and the brutally dehumanizing system of apartheid. In his formulation of a socio-political and aesthetic philosophy that is the theoretical equivalent of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania's Ujamaa (family-based) socialism, past-president Kenneth Kaunda's Zambian humanism, Steve Biko's Black Consciousness and Leopold Senghor's Negritude, Mphahlele joined the ranks as a standard bearer and "cultural liberator," scoring against the self-alienating forces of Eurocentric cultural imperialism operating out of Western capitals.

Three years after Mphahlele fled into exile, the Sharpeville shootings took place in which a line of armed white police fired into a crowd of unarmed Africans gathered in an anti-pass protest demonstration outside Vereeniging on 21 March 1960. Sixty-Seven Africans were killed. Most had been shot in the back. One hundred and eighty six were wounded, including women and children (Gerhart, 1979:238). This event combined with the banning of political parties, such as the African National Congress (ANC), and episodes of police raids, terror tactics, brutality and detentions without trial, with jails filled to bursting, further convinced black resistance movements that violence not

peaceful protest was the only effective means to bring about change (Thompson,1990:210). In short, Sharpeville proved to be an important historic watershed in black politics as well as in black literature, transforming resistance into active protest.

In the post-Sharpeville era, Mphahlele had begun to search for more forcible ways of affirming black values and community culture. The African Image (1963) was an attempt to portray images of Africans: who they are within the context of a brutal history and an ancient humanism and how they give artistic expression to their ontology. Mphahlele's endeavor to "re-create an image" of Africans "from the disparate elements of their culture ... [and] the debris of their shattered pre-colonial past" is sometimes, states Lewis Nkosi, "too joyous an affirmation, it seems to me -- that such an image has been fragmented almost beyond recognition" (1983:129). Yet it is through Mphahlele's conceptualization of African humanism that he is eventually able to impose a meaningful organizing principle on the chaos of the pre- and post-colonial past. Mphahlele, in his critical review, distances himself from the African personality because it is too narrow a concept for the diversity of Africa and from negritude -- albeit not from negritude's historical relevance but rather its tendency to oversimplify, to "not tell us the whole truth," to falsify and to overlook the need in Modern Africa for modern solutions (Mphahlele,1974:80). Mphahlele by way of example quotes the following stanza by poet Jacques Romain from Guinea:

Your heart trembles in the shadows
like a face reflected in troubled waters.
An old picture rises from the tomb of the night,
You feel the sweet magic of yore;
A river carries you away from the shore,
Carries you away into ancestral fields.

Mphahlele then comments on the fact that much Negritude poetry

is nothing more than "sheer romanticism, often it is mawkish and strikes a pose" (Mphahlele, 1963:27). However, he recognizes that such poetry also stands as a statement of "revulsion," on the part of Negritude poets, to cultural imperialism and assimilation. Mphahlele later himself wrote a poem about rivers and ancestral fields entitled "Death" (1987:274-277), but in its concrete allusions to historical context it does not ignore the harsh political realities of modern Africa, and specifically of the "painful South." Hence, it avoids the pitfalls of "sheer romanticism" and of striking a pose even while utilizing nearly identical imagery.

In short, Mphahlele in his search for meaning finds negritude and the African personality distinctly wanting, particularly in the South African context. In similar vein he examines white liberalism in both The African Image and in his essays, Voices in the Whirlwind (1973) and likewise finds it wanting. The alienation Mphahlele feels toward white South African liberals is doubtless frustrating to him, since under more normal circumstances such thinkers, writers and educators would be among his natural peer group. (Indeed, some of his best friends and most admired mentors, such as Norah Taylor¹ and Professor Edward Davis of University of South Africa (UNISA)² to whom he dedicated the African Image (1963), were white liberals). This element of Mphahlele's growing political alienation is doubly ironic since Mphahlele is himself a liberal. However, in chapter five of the African Image (1963), Mphahlele begins with a categorical denial that he is a liberal since in the South African context to be called a liberal would be "to describe a white man who believes in redressing political wrongs by constitutional means" (Mphahlele, 1963:67). Mphahlele's liberalism (in the broadest sense) is, however, clearly manifested in the high value he places on individual free expression, his dislike for arbitrary authority and violence; his belief in the right of man by reason of his

humanity "to order his life as seems good to him"
(Weiner,1973.III:36).

As Mphahlele continues to make plain in the African Image and other works there were several significant problems with white liberalism in South Africa and with the Liberal party itself. Founded in 1953 by whites, the Liberal party boasted a multi-racial membership. But it was gradualist and frequently elitist in its approach. Such gradualism is best illustrated by its advocacy of only a limited franchise, a qualification that was not dropped until 1959 (Lodge,1990:87). Thus, it was entirely possible prior to 1959 in South Africa to be a self-professed liberal while not being a true democrat. Mrs Plum, in the story by that name, is the paradigm of such a a "bossy" white liberal -- a voluble advocate of a limited franchise who presumes both to speak on behalf of blacks and also to tell them what is best for them. In the revised African Image Mphahlele, by now giving full vent to his disillusionment, states that he finds it galling, for instance, that such advocates of "enlightened" liberalism as Professor Hoernle urged blacks to "accept statutory councils [set up by the apartheid state] as a training ground in democratic processes " (Mphahlele, 1974:51).

In Voices in the Whirlwind, Mphahlele questions the moral courage of the white liberal press, for failing to take an unequivocal stand against apartheid, observing that it "hardly requires moral courage if he [the reporter] merely reports the facts, or protests within the law." Mphahlele avers that

This is in the true tradition of South African white liberalism, which has always accommodated itself in the safe capsule of legality, and that means white legality, since the laws are made by whites (Mphahlele,1972:200).

Indeed, it was arguably the ideological incompatibility between black and white liberals, as much as apartheid itself,

that led Mphahlele in works such as the African Image to search out a new world vision. As Themba Sono states, "Black Consciousness has its roots located primarily in the African liberals' disenchantment with (white) liberalism which could be looked upon as the creation of black liberals shorn of their 'white liberalism'" (Sono, 1993:6). As the pendulum began to swing to the extreme limits of alienation, there was an even greater need for a counterweight to restore balance. The limits of this alienation were being plumbed in such works as the African Image where an African nationalist world vision and a new aesthetic were also taking shape.

Thus in the original and revised editions of The African Image, we see a narrative voice that functions on several planes: autobiographical, anecdotal, literary, socio-economic and political. First, the increasingly aware political self states in the first edition of the African Image the need to evaluate "the sense and nonsense that is often said and thought by whites and blacks, top dogs and underdogs, about each other and about themselves" (Mphahlele, 1962:16). Then, the critical self analyzes the treatment of black characters in English fiction by white writers who deal in such stereotypes as the "Noble savage," "The degenerate," "the Man with the Halo," and "the Menacing servant" (Mphahlele, 1962:chapter 7). Ironically, certain trace elements of these very stereotypes outlined by Mphahlele are identifiable in his own first collection of short stories. The character Zungu in Man Must Live, for example, falls rather neatly into "the degenerate" mould, suggesting both how pervasive were the stereotypes and how self-alienated and culturally colonized was the author at the time of the story's writing. But Mphahlele readily profited from and took to heart his own criticism. Not one of these fictional black stereotypes is to be found in Mphahlele's subsequent Lesane series. Finally, the communal narrative self in African Image affirms values and beliefs consonant with African humanism --

the very same that are vividly documented and come to life in Down Second Avenue.

There is also in the African Image a Westernized, individuated persona, who rather like an African Rembrandt, portrays himself often and well, so that the reader feels a warmth of rapport with the author quite unexpected in a work of literary criticism. Jane Watts describes The African Image as an "intellectual autobiography" (Watts, 1989:62). Ursula Barnett suggests that it is an "emotional autobiography" (Barnett, 1976:117). British critics charged Mphahlele in his analysis of "isolating character from context" and others suggested he "was practising unorthodox literary criticism" (Mphahlele, 1974:10). The African Image is incontestably both autobiographical and unorthodox. Perhaps it is best described as an "aesthetic autobiography" with its roots in Africa which combines anecdote with scholarly style along with gnomic insights and a warmth of tone that sets it apart in an uncatalogued genre of its own. Thus it is not a "transplanted fossil of European literature" adhering to standardized critical norms. It has broken out of the "strait-jacket" (Chinweizu et al, 1983:239) and becomes in its own right a self-affirming Africanist statement against Eurocentric literary imperialism.

Even in literary criticism, the African humanist narrator never loses sight of the human in the critic's play of abstract thought. One example of the personal used to make a political point about the literary and critical occurs in "Black and White Cameos" in the final chapter of the first edition of the African Image (1963). Mphahlele is at a social function in London where he encounters Afrikaner South Africans connected with the Dutch Reformed Church and the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs, "who cause so much suffering among non-whites" (Mphahlele, 1963:222). Mphahlele is torn between wanting to say something hurtful and wanting to project a friendly, but

assertive presence, to show that he is "out of reach of the government." He is also besieged with guilt for even talking to the Afrikaners. Suddenly in a "neurotic tremor" he sees everything in split images and immediately leaves the party. Later he analyzes the episode and his own response to it and decides "after that bit of therapy, I was quite all right. Another of my failures to live with freedom?"

I've tried to read Britain -- or what part of it I've seen -- letter for letter, like a child learning how to read. Each letter has been a huge impression, and the sum total has left me a bundle of agitation. How long freedom is going to intensify my hatred of those who have denied me it, I don't know (Mphahlele,1963:223).

Here the alienation documented is psychological as well as political. It reflects the Black Consciousness emphasis on a move from the "exterior manifestation of oppression, to the interior psychology of that oppression "(Ndebele,1991:64). The fragmented self is brought forward by the humanist narrator and given pre-eminence over the realm of abstract thought and its "thinginess." Mphahlele thus documents the fragmentation and alienation, the psychological oppression, that Steve Biko later identifies as being central to Black oppression. Mphahlele describes with remarkable candor in a work of literary criticism his personal experience of "an acute sense of radical disparity" between self and consciousness and the external world. The loss of identity is "reflected back" in "the loss of a live sense of a relationship between himself and the world" (Irele,1990:172). In the literary act of his therapeutic confessional, Mphahlele's fragmented self is once again recreated. The inclusion of such an unorthodox human cameo in a critical work is textual proof not only of Mphahlele's psychological oppression and alienation, but also confirms his earlier statement that "Africans have always been more interested in human relations than in gadgets.... [they] have always gravitated towards people, not places and things (Mphahlele,1963:91). Here the personal experience of the human narrator is showcased as being of greater value and significance, in this instance, than purely theoretical

concerns of abstract critical thought.

The painful cameo stands out in dramatic relief, drawn all the more sharply in its sincerity and poignancy by virtue of its contrast to earlier passages of the text in which is projected the voice of the inclusivist, wry-humoured African humanist narrator. Mphahlele, for instance, had earlier stated that in his non-racial, democratic liberal definition of "African nationalist," he includes "everyone born in Africa, who regards no other place as his home ... be he black, white, Coloured, or Indian. Even the self-styled 'Afrikaners' in South Africa [are included] -- for their own good, if not mine as well" (Mphahlele, 1963:73). Again, this tongue-in-cheek political statement, serving as an African humanist counterweight to themes of racial bitterness and alienation, is like the highly personalized cameo sketch itself an unorthodox addition to literary criticism.

Between the first and the second editions of the African Image the narrative voice shifts across the political spectrum from that of the educated, African middle-class, Christian liberal to the position of "deviant from the Christian Liberal frame of reference." This shift is characteristic of black thinkers, writers and political leaders "who have been essential catalysts of change in black politics" (Gerhart, 1979:39). The shift, as seen in Mphahlele's critical work, in the broadest sense is one from negritude, emerging in the first edition of the African Image, to a more hardened political stance (and one might add, a more acerbic tone) closer to Black Consciousness in the revised African Image (1974). Moreover, in the revised African Image there is much greater emphasis placed on "black nationalism as an instrument for freedom and fulfillment" (Barnett, 1976:116).

In chapter three entitled "The African Personality" of the revised African Image (1974), Mphahlele defines his terms, succinctly managing to illuminate and clarify such complexities

with a few deft strokes, observing that:

The African Personality or negritude: the distinction is unimportant. Each concept involves the other. They merely began at different times in different historical circumstances. But they share the same mood, the same utopian fervor. Negritude claims the whole of the black world, the African Personality refers only to Africa. Historical negritude laid emphasis on the arts and "l'ame noir," the African Personality began as a sociological concept and moved on to political liberation and presence (Mphahlele, 1974:67)

By now, Mphahlele writing in the post-Sharpeville era, has "overhauled" his thinking. He no longer speaks of Negritudinist "creepy-crawlies" or dismisses the movement's practitioners as "jungle boys," albeit he remains "critical of the literary positions of historical negritude" (Mphahlele, 1974:1). Nor does he view negritude as a "form or degree of black consciousness" or the African personality as necessarily irrelevant to the needs of an urbanized black culture in the painful South. Instead, he "accepts the social thought" such movements and concepts "claim[s] to inform," viewing them as positive insofar as they make a valid historic contribution through self-affirmation to black empowerment.

Before turning the spotlight solely on African humanism, it is instructive briefly to compare and contrast it with other African nationalist, humanist movements to which it is related by primogenitor. Negritude with its emphasis on stylistics and its locus in the Caribbean and West Africa, the principal founders of whom were Aime Cesaire, Leopold Senghor and Leon Dumas, (Kennedy, trans. in Kesteloot:1991:xiv), Black Consciousness with its political content and links with America and South Africa, and African humanism with ties both to Africa and the West are all fundamentally humanist movements. A major difference is that as previously stated, African humanism does not share either Negritude's or Black Consciousness's preoccupation with blackness as a defining attribute of its ideology. It thus avoids either movement's divisiveness or potential for reverse racism. Indeed, it was "the brutal

contact with the West since the fifteenth century ... [that] modified original negritude" (and what today is still in America referred to as "soul") and added to it "the idea of race" (Kesteloot, 1991:108). Jean Paul Sartre, moreover, sees in Negritude the antithesis of white supremacy, working in turn, toward a dialectic synthesis (Kesteloot, 1991:111) that by definition is not racist.

This line of thinking suggests that the intent of negritude is not to renounce whites, but rather to affirm with equal zeal black culture and black pride in order to effectively counter the impact of white supremacists. When oppression disappears reconciliation and synthesis will be possible. (If one were to substitute in Sartre's formula, African humanism for Negritude, "dialogue" for dialectic and equate white supremacy with alienation, the result is a recapitulation of the subject of this paper and of Mphahlele's life-long search.) Negritude according to the dialectic outlined by Sartre "exists in order to be destroyed" (Sartre quoted in Kesteloot, 1974:111). However, the black "awareness of self is ... a definitive conquest" (Kesteloot, 1974:111). Negritude, in short, answered to the needs of assimilated Francophone Africans and a major thrust of the Negritude movement is stylistic; whereas a major thrust of Black Consciousness, as articulated by Steve Biko, is political and was addressed to the South African Realpolitik. In this respect, African humanism with its broader social and historic scope, its awareness of self and unifying human focus will theoretically outlast either of the other two movements in the dialectics of history.

By the time the revised African Image (1974) was published, Mphahlele had already been living in exile for nearly two decades. As time went on, his bitterness against whites grew and festered and the clamp down in South Africa of state apartheid grew increasingly violent and iron-fisted. Not surprisingly, then, in the revised African Image, Mphahlele

both anticipates and articulates ideals of Black Consciousness that were concomitantly being voiced in South Africa in the early 1970s by Steve Biko. The direct link between Black Consciousness and psychological oppression forms an integral part of Mphahlele's experience of alienation as delineated in all of his works, including the African Image, and that range from the Jamesian "divided personality" (James, 1990:161) to the "segregation of imagination [that] has as its starting point the division of races" (Rabkin in Parker, ed. 1978:93). As with Western alienation, there is increasingly sounded in Mphahlele's documentation of his own alienation as a writer and teacher in political exile a pessimistic note. But whereas Western alienation reflects an often solitary, nihilistic, cold and even anti-humanistic landscape (elements not uncommon in works by such white liberal writers as J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer) the opposite is true of African writers

whose works are created from the perspective of the struggle of the people for social justice [which] will always have an inner buoyancy and hope denied the writer who feels himself entirely isolated from the people (Nkosi, 1981:74).

Mphahlele also makes a distinction between the alienation of the "indigenous self and the one that is superimposed by the new culture" that all colonized people experience and the Westernized lonely existentialist alienation of the individual. The alienation experienced by the colonized people in Africa is not the same, says Mphahlele, because in Africa there are always the many "voices" around you of the community (Mphahlele, 1986:24). Yet at the same time Mphahlele believes that from the 1950s on "industrialization and migrant labour have played havoc with traditional values:"

We have lost sight of the myth that could stabilise our spiritual and mental life and save it from the religion of the desperate, the poor, the helpless, the downtrodden that the missionaries left us hanging on to while a pretty noisy and powerful segment of the western world was asserting a completely different set of claims for Christ from what we had been hoodwinked into believing (Mphahlele in Chapman, ed. 1992:57).

Mphahlele then goes on to say that "as present-day writers we need to go out in search of the myth and redefine it" (Mphahlele in Chapman, ed.1992:57). However, as a writer and an exile Mphahlele was for long years separated from the source of that myth. This is why Mphahlele's phrase "tyranny of place" has such meaning. Places have a way of defining an author and of determining the content of writing; of assigning roles. We know, for example, that after Mphahlele left South Africa, much of his work was devoted to prose works of literary criticism such as the African Image in which he did "go out in search of the myth and redefine it," but in a much less concrete fashion than he might have done had he not been separated from its source. At the same time, Mphahlele as an alien living in foreign lands, was effectively severed from his past -- which comprizes the sum total of one's personal identity. Thus, the themes of alienation converted into text began experientially. In a review of Mphahlele's African Image, Lewis Nkosi movingly and perceptively writes:

Ezekiel Mphahlele is a black South African writer now living in Paris. To be a black South African is to be both unspeakably rich and incredibly poor: and also, it means to live in perpetual exile from oneself, which is worse, since to know who one is today one must be able to relate oneself in a dynamic manner to what one was yesterday (Nkosi,1983:129).

Africanist and writer Gerald Moore also bears eloquent witness to the tragedy of forty years that "alienated every South African writer of any compassion or sensitivity from the society developing around him. Most ... have taken refuge in exile, others are prematurely dead, banned or in prison" (Moore,1969:xi).

Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel Laureate, supports both the view of Mphahlele and Nkosi when he asserts, with disarming simplicity, that the difference between European alienation and African is that one is located within its subject and the other is seen as external and is recognized in the form of an oppressor (de Wall,1991:29). To this internal schism,

experienced by the colonized and Westernized Africa, Mphahlele devotes an entire chapter, appositely entitled "Dialogue of Two Selves," in the revised African Image (1974). In this chapter, Mphahlele rather humorously describes the colonized self and the indigenous selves as being " ... apt by turns to fight, quarrel, despise each other, hug each other, concede each other's roles" (Mphahlele, 1974:281).

From 1972, as Mphahlele was about to bring out his revised African Image, Steve Biko began to articulate his views on Black Consciousness (Davenport, 1989:418), stating that the black man lives in a state of alienation due as much to psychological oppression as to such external factors as exploitation of labour and unequal education which keeps him powerless. Some thirty years previously, in "Man Must Live" Mphahlele had already begun to depict characters living in a "state of alienation" due to psychological oppression. In the "Lesane" series, such characters as Fanyan and Diketso are prime examples of black men and women living in a state of alienation that starts with external causes and becomes internalized. The black man "rejects himself," said Biko, "precisely because he attaches the meaning white to all that is good ... " (Biko, 1979:22). Mphahlele recognized this self-rejection right from the start, devoting his UNISA dissertation to the debunking of white stereotyping of black characters in English literature which promotes such Manichean self-rejection. Biko stated that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor was the mind of the oppressed" -- to counter which it was crucial to raise black pride and help blacks "attain the envisaged self" (Arnold, xx:1979). By documenting community history in his short stories, novels and autobiography and memoir and by defining a black aesthetic and a nationalist vision in the African Image, Mphahlele was enabling blacks both to rediscover and to "attain the envisaged self." Thus, all of Mphahlele's works reflect an increasing degree of black consciousness in the broadest sense which eventually formed part of his conceptualization known as African humanism. The revised African Image not only reflects

Black Consciousness values, it goes beyond describing and documenting the problems of colonialism, racism and impoverishment to proposing solutions -- thus moving from a mode of peaceful protest to a mode of active resistance in the most positive sense. Written in the post-Sharpeville era marked by increasing repression in South Africa and after long years of exile, it is a work that bears the imprint of its "historical conditions." Metaphysically as well as socially, it extols African thought and values as providing useful tools for overcoming white oppression and political and psychological alienation.

In the revised African Image, for example, Mphahlele states that Africa was "ambushed" by "Muhammad," and "Jesus." He asserts that spiritual colonization and conversions was the price paid for schools and hospitals. He suggests that African humanism can fill the spiritual vacuum since it is true that "No man is complete in himself. No Man is a palm nut, (a fitting use here of African imagery to supplant the standard 'no man is an island') self-contained..... Ancestors will keep you and carry your wishes... to the Supreme Force...." (Mphahlele, 1974:44). Already having defined the problem of black oppression, political, economic and psychological, Mphahlele proposes solutions. He discusses, for example, the need of "our humanism ... to try to deal with the problems of power, of a national army, of education, the arts, land and land ownership, poverty, medical care and so on" (Mphahlele, 1974:36). He asserts the need to teach African literature, music and history in the schools (Mphahlele, 1974:30-36) and to develop "traditional African humanism"... for the benefit of blacks. While in the first edition of the African Image, Mphahlele spoke of the West learning from Africa in a dialogic exchange, he expresses pessimism about such a prospect in the revised African Image. Furthermore, the author is no neo-colonist himself. While Black Consciousness is more political and exclusive with its emphasis on "blackness" than is African humanism as defined in Mphahlele's Poetry and

Humanism: Oral Beginnings (1986), both are practical philosophies with broad appeal and are understandable to the under-educated masses.

Mphahlele's political alienation both from white liberals and Afrikaners in South Africa takes on new levels of awareness and articulation in the revised African Image as compared to the original edition. In the first edition of the African Image, as previously noted, the white liberal, for instance, is criticized by Mphahlele for his gradualist approach and his insistence on "making use of statutory bodies" within the apartheid state to bring about change. But Mphahlele ultimately lets the white liberal off the hook by saying, he is "at least sincere in his own screwy fashion" (Mphahlele, 1962:67). In the revised African Image, Mphahlele, by contrast, expresses deep frustration and despair over what he describes as "garden-party liberalism" and asks what those same liberals were doing when we blacks

fought "Bantu education," removal of whole communities away from the fringes of city centers, all unjust laws, liberals were telling us that we should accept what we were given and work for reforms from within. That we should not break the law. We had seen this for the wretched idealism it was (Mphahlele, 1974:27).

It is this sort of anger, bitterness and frustration, no doubt leavened by guilt since many white liberals were Mphahlele's friends and benefactors, that found its most productive outlet in the writing of Mrs Plum. Written a full decade earlier, Mrs Plum both anticipates and typifies Steve Biko's call to Black Consciousness in the early 1970s and his statement that white liberals were the worst racists of all because "they refuse to credit [blacks] with intelligence to know what we want" (Biko, 1979:299).

Similarly, in the revised and subsequently banned edition of the African Image (1974) several passages were perhaps considered sufficiently incendiary to constitute a threat to

the Republic (although history has recorded no known cases of revolution brought on by literary criticism). Doubtless some of the text might well have qualified as being, at the very least objectionable, particularly when seen through Afrikaner eyes. The Censorship Board, which banned the revised African Image some nine years after its publication in England, was made up of nine members of which a quorum consisted of four, none of whom was required to have literary training (Gordimer, 1988:6) and all of whom presumably claimed strong ties to the Dutch Reformed Church. Such a board would not have taken kindly, for instance, to the sharp criticism leveled at Christianity by Mphahlele for keeping blacks powerless by teaching them to be submissive and to turn the other cheek. Mphahlele scoffs at the proposition that the poor and meek shall inherit the earth, dismissing it in a single deft line that says more than volumes of bombastic protest: "Though many are invited, few are chosen ..." (Mphahlele, 1974:45). Furthermore, Mphahlele several times in the text extols an African ethos that involves prayer to ancestors as intercessors to the Supreme Force to which even progressive white liberals in their Eurocentricity might take strong exception.

Indeed, the revised African Image, in several key passages, positively vibrates with the fresh assertive, bitter stridence that is one of the hallmarks of Black Consciousness thought and writing. One riveting and unexpected example is a passage which is essentially a dream sequence (again a literary device not standard in criticism). The passage begins with Mphahlele's dream that he has returned to South Africa. Arriving at the Johannesburg airport, he tells a "Boer" official he is surrendering because he wants to teach in South Africa. He promises not to make trouble and to stay out of politics. Then, he signs an agreement as the "Boers" wave goodbye smiling "like mannequins." The rest is interior dialogue in which Mphahlele says:

I'll poison the minds of our youth, I think. I promise you that you stinking Boer bastards. You can take that agreement I've just signed and tear it up into pieces enough for you to stick a few pieces up each of your pink and purple asses. I fought your stinking educational politics in the fifties and I'll fight them again (Mphahlele, 1974:43).

The foregoing passage reflects the Black Consciousness shift from "moral indignation to anger: from relatively self-composed reasonableness, to uncompromising bitterness" (Ndebele, 1991:64). Moreover, there is no alienating disjuncture here on the part of the author. External action or expression mirrors internal reality. The need for pretence to being, feeling, expressing something completely opposite from what is going on inside has been suspended. In this way self-alienation is overcome. Writing permits Mphahlele to express interiority at least in print, even though he was unable to do so when he confronted Afrikaners at the party in London. The dikes are breached in this assertive, bitter flood of vituperation and mockery. It is a Black Consciousness outpouring that any black audience could easily relate to and feel empowered by. Its message is clear. The humiliation, dishonesty and powerlessness of being forced to live the lie the apartheid state tells itself violates one's sense of personal integrity; fragments one's sense of what is real and what is not and destroys hope itself. As Ndebele states, "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" (1991:64). Once more, alienation has ascendance as the pendulum swings back and forth in the dialogue of two selves.

While the "Boer" censors could not have been happy about such a passage, if, indeed, they troubled to read it, they might at least have resonated to its fundamental earthiness and humour that serves in an African humanist sense both to highlight the burning pain and bitterness and to make it seem all that much more real.

Finally, Mphahlele in the revised edition of the African

Image makes still one more pointed political statement surprising for a work of literary criticism. He throws down the gauntlet and engages in fighting talk, asserting that one day the tables will be turned and the white man will have to choose

to quit or adopt the majority African culture or be marooned by history, go the way of the Saan (sic), those poor victims of benign neglect (Mphahlele, 1974:35).

Mphahlele, again anticipating and echoing Black Consciousness, concludes that in a world where "might makes right" and people are treated as units of production; in short, "a world in which power operates on assumptions that resist traditional humanism, we need to develop this humanism for Africa, for our own edification" (Mphahlele, 1974:35).

Thus, the dialogue of two selves and between themes of alienation and African humanism

never ends. The pendulum swings between revulsion and attraction, between the dreams and the reality of a living past and the aspiration, the imperatives of modern living. Ambivalence ... (Mphahlele, 1974:41).

In this case, the swinging of the pendulum is measured by Mphahlele's keen insights, his humour and his gift for the epigrammatic turn of phrase. It is measured by the intimacy of the dialogue between African humanist narrator and reader, and the bursts of poetic lyricism amidst prosaic analysis. It is also measured in the radically unorthodox nature of both content and structure of the African Image. The pendulum's swing is finally measured by events such as Sharpeville, movements such as Black Consciousness and the need to let go of the anger and frustration of the dispossessed in order to live. One way to restore balance is to re-affirm and practise an African humanist ethos, with its greater spiritual, moral and historic meaning and relevance than Western materialism with its power politics and greed. African humanism can act, as Mphahlele demonstrates, as a unifying principle -- whether in literature or life -- in an otherwise chaotic and alienating universe.

Chapter 3 DOWN SECOND AVENUE:
The Autobiography of an African Humanist

The traveller has to knock at every alien door
to come to his own ... Tagore (1912:17).

Down Second Avenue is a masterpiece ... written out of an
authenticity of (human) experience -- Gerald Chapman (Obee, 10
September 1991).

One of the least self-indulgent autobiographies one can find.
Considering the facts of the life reported, that achievement is
indeed genius -- Robert Powlowski (Obee, 21 November 1991).

Autobiography in South Africa has emerged naturally from South African conditions, and in fact, we are seeing it emerge all over Africa as a literature of self-definition. It has become a peculiar genre in Africa, a genre that depicts the very social conditions that have given rise to it (Mphahlele in Lindfors, ed., 1976:28).

Writing in the Journal of Commonwealth Literature, N.W. Visser describes autobiographical writing in South Africa, a trend started by Peter Abrahams with his publication Tell Freedom (1974), as being "South Africa's most singular contribution to black literature (1976:136). Not only did Mphahlele help pioneer this "most singular contribution" -- the black South African township autobiography, with its novelistic textures and elements of social and community history based in an urban setting -- but, as Visser and other critics have suggested, Down Second Avenue (1959), "is the most widely known autobiography by a black South African writer" and is quite possibly Mphahlele's most successful work to date (1976:127). Down Second Avenue was followed in 1963 by Bloke Modisane's Blame Me on History, the third in an historic triptych of some of the best-known works in the canon.

As discussed earlier, both the short story and autobiography were literary forms particularly well suited to the "special circumstances" of black South Africans writing in the 1950s, for whom leisure, comfort, privacy, economic security and even safety (in short, all those conditions that lend themselves to the production of a lengthy work of fiction) were at a premium. By the genre is also a natural choice for a professed humanist and dedicated educator. The underlying assumption of humanism is that man is at the center of being. Thus, the very act of writing an autobiography is an humanistic one, placing the author squarely at the center of his own "self-discovery and self-creation" (Eakin, 1985:3), shouting "I am." In addition, and according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, there is a need in post-colonial society to affirm "a valid and active sense of self [that] may have been eroded by dislocation or destroyed

by cultural denigration" (Ashcroft et al.,1989:9). What renders this process uniquely African is that the "I" is inevitably deeply rooted in the community. On the anvil of pain and necessity, thus were forged two of South Africa's best and most unique gifts to English literature in Africa.

The flowering of autobiographical writing in South Africa among black writers in the early 1950s occurred at a time when the National Party government had begun to practise "applied apartheid in a plethora of laws and executive actions" (Thompson,1990:190). All three autobiographies just cited describe the authors' "special circumstances," detailing lives of poverty and privation, hurt and abuse suffered while growing up in the black ghettos and locations during the heyday of apartheid, and culminating in flight into exile in search of political freedom and a new life. All three deal with certain recurring motifs and themes of alienation, such as a rejection of the Christianity that was used by authoritarian whites, who have set themselves up as demi-Gods (Olney,1973:272), to rationalize their power in terms of a Christian-Calvinist covenant with God. All three also document and describe the community in such a way as to constitute an act of cultural and literary biography.

James Olney notes that while black writers were "oppressed by politics" they have written "not political manifestoes but literary autobiographies" (1973:42). The fact that Down Second Avenue is, indeed, a literary and cultural autobiography concerned with people and community, and not a political manifesto, further defines it as humanistic. Its method and purpose is to educate, rather than propagandize, through a social and political message embodied in art. This is incontestably the approach of the educator and humanist, not the revolutionary. Down Second Avenue is both the autobiography of Es'kia Mphahlele, as "panel-beaten by the community" (Thuynsma:1991) and that of the urban black slum of Marabastad, where Mphahlele spent his youth. It represents the definitive statement of an avowed African

humanist insofar as it is reflective of such things as strongly held community values, caring and compassion, and reverence for (as opposed to worship of) ancestors as a source of strength and moral guidance -- those same values that were absorbed early on in Mphahlele's boyhood when he was herding goats in the countryside near Maupaneng and imbibing the wisdom of African sages and story-tellers around the communal fire.

And yet Down Second Avenue, like the works of Abrahams and Modisane, also comprizes an individual narrative that, in the more traditional autobiographic mode, is "essentially an exploration of consciousness" (Watts,1989:109). This individuated self never lapses into sheer vanity or egoism because it is balanced against the narrator as witness (Watts,1989:124) who interprets life in the black slums and townships for, among others, the uninformed Western reader, but equally important fulfills a need on behalf of blacks "to respect and preserve, at least in record, a fast-disappearing past of unique glory" (Olney,1973:330). Such a reverential attitude toward the communal African past, toward community history as it were, is, indeed, a key element in Mphahlele's humanism. The fusion between the "I-am-us" (Thuynsma in Chapman, ed.1992:228) and the more individuated narrator echoes and parallels the dialogue between two selves in which a Western consciousness joins with an African sensibility to produce the structural synthesis of a fresh, innovative genre, "the township autobiography."

In autobiographic writing the overlap between history and literature has subsequently resulted in an understanding of truth defined best by the statement that "every fact has its fiction." As James Olney states in Studies in Autobiography, before the 1950s, autobiography as a literary form was regarded as a mutant of biography, itself the poor "stepchild of history and literature" (1988:xiii). And while the novel is usually considered to be closer to art than autobiography, there are works, such as Down Second Avenue, which in their unique blend of

art, history and social document "must be called works of art while being, nevertheless, autobiographies" (Olney,1973:20).

As both historic record and act of imagination, autobiography arises out of a concept of the evolving self and a of self-discovery based on received models of selfhood from the surrounding culture. When that received model involves the African humanist communal voice, then certain events or people while true-to-life may also serve as dramatic representations of the group experience (Watts,1989:125). Thus, one finds in Down Second Avenue an individual like Ma-Lebona whose character looms up novelistically larger than life, who engages in extended dialogue and who is involved in dramatic events, much like in a novel. Yet, at the same time, Ma-Lebona is a composite of an authentic type, serving in the assigned role of cultural carrier and spokesman of traditional values, but who is nonetheless real and believable.

White readers encountering Ma-Lebona for the first time might label her correctly as a busy-body and mischief-maker or incorrectly as a practitioner of witchcraft in her meddling and idiosyncratic ways, rather than seeing her in a more nuanced sense as ombudswoman and social commentator. Such generic labelling is inevitable when racial divisions exist and leads inevitably to the stereotypes of a divided imagination, characterized by political, social, intellectual and artistic alienation. The tendency to think in sweeping generalities and deal in generic labels feeds into Manichean dominated allegories of "white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation, civilization and savagery, superiority and inferiority, intelligence and emotion, self and other, subject and object" (JanMohamed,1988:4). Thus, Mphahlele could be labelled a Communist simply because he resisted the implementation of the Bantu Education Act.

Historic realities have served further to solidify and strengthen the barricades of the divided imagination. Corroborating this view, Tim Couzens quotes De Kiewiet as stating

that

at least two generations of settlers grew up in ignorance of the ingenuity and appropriateness with which the natives in their tribal state met the many problems of their lives, in ignorance of the validity of many of the social and moral rules which held them together (Couzens in Parker, ed., quoting De Kiewiet, 1978:67).

Furthermore, what little whites did see of blacks and what most often caught their attention was largely the negative side -- such as ignorance, superstition and witchcraft (Couzens in Parker, ed., quoting De Kiewiet, 1978:67). This statement holds equal validity for the 1950s, in the heyday of apartheid, when the Pass Laws and Group Areas Act meant that whites saw Africans only as domestics in their own homes and a majority of whites rarely, if ever, set foot inside an African township. Even in the year 1994, it is still possible for a white Afrikaner living in Verwoerdburg to say of her black domestic, "I have had a maid for nineteen-and-a-half years, and I think of her as family; but I still don't know what goes on inside her head" (Taylor, Washington Post 9 March 1994:A14).

This form of alienation, the division of races leading to the divided imagination, also affects Mphahlele's knowledge of and ability to depict white characters because as he says, he first came to know the white man at the point of a boot and then at the point of an index finger -- as a servant to him. I know there is much more to him than his fear of me, and I want to explore this other side. But then he won't let me! (Mphahlele, 1962:29)

Thus, very few white characters of lasting import appear in Down Second Avenue and those who do, such as Ma Bottles, Mrs Reynecke and Mr Goldstein do not leave a favourable impression. At the same time, much of what is of value and adds cohesion to traditional black society including an ancient and indigenous humanism is being eroded away by state apartheid, poverty, industrialization and a proliferating culture of violence. By documenting life in the township and its foundation of community values, Mphahlele has served to bridge the alienating gulf of ignorance. He has added to the understanding of enlightened, but uninformed white and black

readers (and even not-so-enlightened ones, if they are willing to learn) whose interests transcend mere matters of skin pigmentation. These include, over the past several decades, readers in German, Hungarian, Czech, Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian, French, Swedish, Japanese (Barnett, 1983:220) and several African tongues. Clearly this unique South African account of the "author's special circumstances," with its recurring motifs of alienation and African humanism has captured the imagination of listeners well beyond the African communal fire. Both endeavors on the part of the author -- to preserve community history for black youth who are in danger of losing touch with their cultural heritage and to enlarge the understanding of readers everywhere -- with their implicit reverence for the past and desire to teach, are humanistic undertakings.

Not only in intent, but also in style and structure, Down Second Avenue is a quintessential expression of African humanism utilizing, as it does, colloquial banter, African myths, tales and proverbs and distancing itself from the Victorian prose and conventional romantic plots that, as I have demonstrated, characterized Mphahlele's earliest published work, Man Must Live. Structurally, Down Second Avenue has a circular jazz-like contrapuntal form, relying heavily on five fugue-like interludes written in the present tense that recapitulate poetically and philosophically the main body of the text which is set in the past. This structure replicates the African habit of mind that views life as a cycle in which events and ancestors are reincarnate in the present that, in turn, is "a ritual repetition" of the past and "a precise rehearsal of the future" (Olney, 1973:28) The five innovative chronological breaks in the narrative, at once lyrical and reflective, examine meaning; while advancing the story-line of the narrative. These stream-of-consciousness and poetic ligaments serve to connect episodic chapters that like folk tales could very nearly stand alone as individual, well-crafted, semi-autonomous units. The break in style and structure from Western models represents an affirmation of Mphahlele's African voice in which "African literature has its own traditions, models and norms" (Chinweizu et al, 1983:4)

against the alienating forces of apartheid and Eurocentric cultural imperialism.

Indeed, Down Second Avenue helped establish certain literary conventions that later came to be regarded as hallmarks of the township autobiography such as description of the local bioscope, of police raids on illegal home distilleries and of communal life around the local water tap. There is also frequent and effective use of extended dialogue, character description, rendered thought, flashbacks, foreshadowing, use of story line with motifs and thematic juxtaposition, and strong characterization in a manner reminiscent of the novel. Critic Ursula Barnett states that Down Second Avenue was, in fact, originally conceived as a novel (Barnett, 1976:51). However, this does not detract from its credibility as social document. With scenes set and events reported in realistic and accurate detail and "characters" presented in the round (there are good whites and bad blacks) the authenticity of the narrative itself is never in doubt, despite the book's novelistic textures and larger-than-life characters.

Down Second Avenue as the autobiography of the community of Marabastad, a slum that grew out of the rural to urban migration caused by the 1913 Land Act, introduces a colourful cast of memorable characters, each of whom manifests aspects of African humanism and most of whom are strong women. These women, including Mphahlele's mother Eva, his Aunt Dora, his maternal Grandmother Hibila and a host of others, work tirelessly to hold the fabric of the community together. South African historian Leonard Thompson has written that "there is a story to be told by social historians of the ways in which black people not only survived under apartheid but also created their own social and economic worlds" (Thompson, 1990:201). Down Second Avenue is that story -- although the work may not be as widely recognized as it deserves to be primarily because it was banned in South Africa between the year of its publication in 1959 and until the time of Mphahlele's return in

1977, some two decades later. Indeed, of the many women who create "their own social and economic worlds," Mphahlele's mother was an outstanding example. Working her way to an early grave while still in her mid-40s, she was the sole support and provider for her family on a meager income earned as a dressmaker, domestic and producer of "illegal" home brew:

Mother did dressmaking for an African tailor just outside town. In the evenings she brewed beer out of corn malt to sell. The family's budget was all on her shoulders. She was hard-working and tough. She never complained about hard work (Mphahlele, 1959:24)

In short, it was tough resourcefulness along with a viable community support network, based on a deep humanistic concern for one another, that was one of the secrets to the survival of the oppressed majority under state apartheid. There was compassion, caring and love amidst struggle -- of which Eva's back-breaking toil stands out as but one of the many silent, yet eloquent statements of an heroic nature.

But because Eva must work in the city and be away much of the time, Aunt Dora and Grandmother, Mphahlele's uncles and teachers, Mathebula, the Shangana witch doctor, and even Ma-Lebona, who takes the children from time to time, provide the daily support and guidance Mphahlele and his siblings need growing up, operating on the principle "that it takes an entire village to raise a child." Thus, in Down Second Avenue the author bears witness to the importance of the formidable African network as well as the centuries old development of

social forms and cultural traditions that colonialism, capitalism, and apartheid have assaulted, abused, and modified but never eradicated. One cannot understand how Africans have endured the fragmentation of their family life by migrant labour unless one has knowledge of their customary social values and networks (Thompson, 1990:2).

What is of interest here is not only that such social forms and cultural traditions exist -- all of which are manifestations of the philosophy of African humanism -- but how well they worked in the face of that constant assault, especially when on top of it there is a dehumanizing and punishing overlay of poverty of unprecedented magnitude.

This poverty is fully documented in vivid, realistic detail in Down Second Avenue, which, indeed, serves as a running indictment of such facts as those outlined in the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in South Africa. The inquiry conducted in the early 1980s (when conditions presumably should have improved over the 1950s when Mphahlele was writing) mentions, for example, that two-thirds of Africans were living below the Minimum Living Level, with conditions even worse where large numbers had been relocated, particularly in the homelands. In 1978, in Soweto up to twenty people were found occupying the crowded rows of small, individual four-room box houses under conditions similar to ones Mphahlele describes in his own childhood home on Second Avenue (Thompson,1990:202).

One can best appreciate Mphahlele's autobiography as social document and work of art by examining it in its proper socio-economic and historic context which provided its genesis. In this case, the context is to the text as a base is to a sculpture. Thus, before proceeding further it is essential briefly to review certain historical details, major pieces of repressive legislation, acts of government and news-making events that have changed and disrupted countless black lives from the early part of the century to the present and that figure in all of Mphahlele's prose works, both of fiction and non-fiction. Down Second Avenue as the biography of a community gains in poignance and meaning, for instance, when it is read in the light of the slum clearances and one realizes that Marabastad had long since been obliterated even as Mphahlele was bringing it to life again in his autobiography.

Mphahlele's autobiography was published ten years after the coming into power of the Nationalist Party in 1949, which put an end to any hopes of extinguishing racial discrimination. Apartheid policies implemented by the Nationalist party in effect codified and enforced the racism and segregation that already existed. The Natives Resettlement Act (1954), an offshoot of the Urban Areas Act

(1923), led to the rezoning and bulldozing of townships in the Western Areas such as Sophiatown where blacks had once owned their own land (Thompson, 1990:194). The Suppression of Communism Act (1950), with its sweeping definition of 'statutory communism,' "spearheaded the state's sustained attack on civil liberties" (Chapman, 1989:185). It was under this act that Mphahlele was banned as a teacher for his opposition to the Bantu Education Act. With the subsequent passage in 1965 of the Suppression of Communism Act, Mphahlele and fellow Drum writers Bloke Modisane, Can Themba, Todd Matshikiza and Lewis Nksoi were "silenced as 'statutory communists,'" and their writings and speeches prohibited (Chapman, ed., 1989:185). The superstructure of apartheid was further secured with the enactment of such legislation as the Population Registration Act (1950), the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages (1949) and Immorality Act (1950), and the Separate Amenities Act (1953). Because there would have been a time lag between passage and full implementation of these draconian acts and because Mphahlele left South Africa in 1957, after which he completed his autobiography, it was arguably the era of segregation as much as that of apartheid that affected his writings up to and including Down Second Avenue. Moreover, as much as three-quarters of Mphahlele's autobiography is concerned with his childhood, youth and young adulthood. Since at the time of the book's writing, Marabastad had already been bulldozed under, one must look back further in history to the "segregation era" in order to place the evolution of this location and community in its proper historic context.

Mphahlele was born into an era in which segregation (a precursor of apartheid) was the rule of the day -- and as much a product of British officialdom as of Boer generals. According to historian T.R.H. Davenport, in the "Botha-Smuts period" from 1910 through 1924, both the South African and the Unionist parties were in total agreement on their fundamental views regarding "native policy." "Both disapproved of racial miscegenation; both regarded the idea of a black political majority as unthinkable...; both

desired to see the restriction of African land ownership to the Reserves, and both wished to see African urban immigrants segregated in locations." The overriding motive in the controls exercised over the level of wages, the freedom of labour to organize and bargain, and the ownership of land by blacks was, on the part of both politicians and the white electorate that supported them, to preserve and "to safeguard their supplies of black labour" (Davenport,1989:258).

The amalgam of racism and economic exploitation that helped determine government policy was blatantly and crudely spelled out by Sir Godfrey Yeatman Langden, who headed the South African Native Affairs Commission. Arguing in favour of the policy of establishing separate reserves for blacks in which there was an artificially created shortage of land "in order to force more and more rural Africans into the service of white industry and agriculture," Langden said:

A man cannot go with his wife and children and his goods ... on to the labour market. He must have a dumping ground. Every rabbit must have a warren where he can live and burrow and breed, and every native must have a warren too (Oakes,1988:313).

Several laws passed during this period were of such far-reaching effect that in the judgment of Davenport the "Botha-Smuts period" was the most formative until the era of Verwoerd." As previously noted, the Natives Land Act of 1913, which preceded Mphahlele's birth by six years, effectively ended African land ownership and share-cropping with whites and enforced the segregation of Africans onto reserves where they could be recruited for labour in the mines (Davenport,1989: 259). Another important piece of legislation was the more benign sounding, "Natives (Urban Areas) Act" -- an act that was much amended through to the early 1970s. The "Natives (Urban Areas) Act was "a portmanteau law covering a great variety of issues. One of its objectives " ... was to clear Africans out of the mixed residential areas that had grown up in some of the larger town, notably Johannesburg, and re-house them in locations" (Davenport, 1989:548). Initially, however, its intent was to "promote public health" through the control of endemic diseases such as tuberculosis. But "alongside the

clearance of slums, there developed a campaign to keep urban areas in white hands" and to eliminate what later came to be known as "black spots" (Davenport,1989:260).

Such acts were the beginning of the psychological oppression of blacks that Frantz Fanon had noted, stating that "for a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread, and above all dignity" (Fanon,1963:44). In the case of urbanized blacks living in South African slums, locations and townships, the urban community arguably had supplanted land as "the most essential value" and to obliterate it was to destroy its history and its soul.

The forms of political and psychological, as well as spiritual, alienation blacks had begun to experience included the wrenching away of the land, obliteration of the community and government control of black movement in order to implement the Urban Areas Acts. Influx control resulted in a series of Pass laws whereby blacks were restricted to the impoverished "homelands" (in which 80% of the population occupied 13% of the land) unless black labour was required in the cities (Thompson,1990:93). Between 1937 and 1976, the Pass laws had been tightened and refined to such a degree that blacks were not allowed to visit "urban areas for more than 72 hours without a special permit." This in effect made aliens and criminals out of thousands of otherwise law-abiding blacks were were arrested for not having a pass (known as the "dampas" or "damn pass"), thus rendering them stateless, illegal visitors in their own country (Thompson,1990:193).

As I have indicated in the "Lesane" stories, Mphahlele had already begun to address the theme of blacks as stateless aliens and the related issue of the much-hated passes, specifically in the case of the character Fanyan, whose entire course of action was dictated to by the fact he was living in an urban area without a pass. As a jobless black male his sole reason for being in the city was perforce to work as a labourer.

According to the law, without either a pass or a job he had no right to be in a "country" not his own, regardless of whether his family lived there or not. Similarly, Mphahlele's work of juvenile fiction Father Come Home (currently out-of-print) deals directly with the conditions that were set in motion by the Natives Land Act. His first novel, The Wanderers, concerns, among other themes of alienation including the rootless wanderings of the political exile, the fact that an abundance of cheap labour in reserves and of unemployed job seekers in the cities put blacks in a position of great vulnerability. Such job-seekers, as documented in The Wanderers, then became prime targets for exploitation by unscrupulous straw bosses and white farmers in the platteland. Issues such as slum clearance, which disrupted families and obliterated entire communities and their histories, as well as the illegal brewing of traditional beer by women to supplement incomes in households where men were often unemployed or absent -- thus provoking periodic raids by police on an activity that was "forbidden by the authorities who derived a substantial income from their beer monopoly" (Lodge, 2990:97) -- are also dramatically portrayed in vivid tableaux and poignant vignettes in Down Second Avenue.

Indeed, the alienation between self and place described by Mphahlele in all his works can be traced back to the original loss of ancestral land, with the slum of Marabastad growing out of rural to urban migration caused by the 1913 Land Act and subsequent legislation. The aforementioned Natives (Urban Areas) Act (1923) -- which reached the statute books when Mphahlele was still a goatherd in Maupaneng -- not only restricted land purchase by blacks and allowed for racial segregation of urban communities, it also failed to provide for middle-class blacks and it "placed the whole cost of black housing on black communities through rents and fines" (New Nation, vol.1, 1989:63). The massive rural-to-urban black diaspora brought about by demands for labour in mining and manufacturing industries parallels Mphahlele's childhood move from rural Maupaneng to urban Marabastad in the fall of 1924. Three decades later in 1957 Mphahlele moves down Second Avenue

and out of South Africa altogether as a result of his political banning and the "progressive alienation that, forced to the extreme, became, spiritual and physical exile"

(Olney,1973:20). In commenting in one of the final "interludes" of Down Second Avenue on the obliteration of Marabastad, wiped out like so many other "black spots," Mphahlele says:

Marabastad is gone but there will always be Marabastads that will be going until the screw of the vice breaks. Too late maybe, but never too soon. And the Black man keeps moving on, as he has always done the last three centuries, moving with baggage and all, for ever tramping with bent backs to give way for the one who says he is stronger (Mphahlele,1959:157).

Thus, the razing of Marabastad becomes a powerful symbol for the author's and the community's spiritual death as well as for the history of black Africa in the colonial and post-colonial eras in which dislocation and exploitation (in the name of land and labour) are primary themes. The picture of the stateless alien, the political exile, the disenfranchized and dispossessed; in short, of the black man who is beaten down, but not defeated, is sketched out in a few lines. The prose is at once muscular and lyric. The narrative with its unique format of chapters clustered around events or characters like folk tales, interspersed with philosophic and poetic interludes, gathers momentum with its inevitable movement down Second Avenue -- a street itself serving as metaphor for life as it is lived by impoverished blacks in rural slums and townships throughout the country.

What adds to the irony and poignance of this inexorable denouement is that, based on substantial internal evidence, it is clear Mphahlele was just beginning to find his African voice, in the process of decolonizing the already detribalized, Westernized African (as the author has frequently described himself). Like a python shedding its old skin of colonialism, the author emerges in a new shiny African humanist skin that is self-confident, marked with artistry, and a far better fit -- in fact, that is his own. Thus, Mphahlele presents conclusive supporting evidence for J.M. Coetzee's persuasive

case on behalf of the necessity of an African idiom to describe the "real Africa." Mission-press and Victorian English rooted in Europe with its European metaphors, imagery and vocabulary is frequently inadequate and inappropriate in its efforts to capture African landscape. It is rather like trying, Coetzee avers, to use a palette and techniques better suited to the romantic pastoral landscape school of English art (Coetzee, 1988:163-177). Nothing could be more alienating thus than the artist standing outside himself to describe a scene that seems unconnected to any sense of immediate reality in place, time and idiom.

Down Second Avenue, for example, which was begun in South Africa, with the last two chapters having been completed in Nigeria (Mphahlele in Manganyi, 1984:39), illustrates how well Mphahlele was beginning to put into practice the literary dictum Coetzee articulates some years later. By comparing the opening descriptive paragraph from his autobiography with a similar passage from one of Mphahlele's early short stories from Man Must Live (1946), it is possible to see the dramatic transformation the author underwent, as it were, from the English painter of the romantic school to an effective and original African writer describing a real African scene, drawing on a lively palette of colours better suited to the terrain. The veracity of the latter description can never be in doubt. As opposed to gentle, lyric and ideal, the landscape at times is harsh, threatening and impoverished, set against the ominous backdrop of apartheid and of a grim fate symbolized by Grandma and by the mountain, on which "the village clung like a leech" that is a dark and brooding presence but never totally despairing and that has the ring about it of unvarnished truth.

The first passage is taken from the story "The Leaves Were Falling" and describes a rural town, in all its "rustic simplicity" to which the central character, Reverend Katsane Melato, a city-bred and educated man, is sent to work:

The cows were lowing for their calves; the goats were

bleating for their young. The Reverend Katsane Melato felt he was on the very edge of the world. Further than this, he felt there could be no other peace, no other joy. These streams, these trees, these valleys, those interlocking spurs seemingly stretching away and further away from him. Yet how calm and firm they were in their never-ending beauty! Eternity, in all its mystery, he thought, had painted a portrait of breath-taking marvel here, on a canvas of golden sunset (Mphahlele,1946:14).

The foregoing lines might have been composed "a few miles above Tintern Abbey" and have a Wordsworthian, romantic aura to them, reflecting, no doubt, Mphahlele's earlier training in the English classics. It should be noted here that it is not entirely fair to these early stories to isolate such descriptive passages without giving due credit to the stories' stronger points, which include a promising facility to depict character -- a reflection, perhaps, of Mphahlele's perennial interest in the human element. Later on in his autobiography, Mphahlele uses the rural image of "the muted lowing of a cow" humorously to describe his snoring uncle (Mphahlele,1959:44). However, the opening lines to Down Second Avenue in the following passage, which are strikingly different in tone, with the description so closely identified with place, reveal how successfully the author has overcome the colonial alienation of an exclusively Eurocentric focus:

My grandmother sat there under a small lemon tree next to the hut, as big as fate, as forbidding as a mountain, stern as a mimosa tree. She was not the smiling type. When she tried, she succeeded in leering muddily. But then she was not the crying type either: she gave her orders sharp and clear. Like the sound she made when she pounded on the millstone with a lump of iron to make it rough enough for grinding on (Mphahlele,1959:11).

This passage could as easily have been taken from a work of fiction as non-fiction. What it illustrates is that Mphahlele has used an African idiom "to capture the flavor of African life, past and present, for an African audience" (Chinweizu et al,1983:241). The passages evokes a rural pre-colonial past, not romantic, but real and alive. Grandmother is a grim presence, "big as fate," incapable of a smile that is more than a "muddy" leer. Far from being a source of comfort, grandmother symbolizes a menacing fate defined by chaos and meaninglessness,

bitter as the lemon tree beneath which she sits. The theme of alienation, of fear and displacement is further suggested by the ominous hills and by "mountain darkness, so solid and dense" (Mphahlele,1959:11). Nature is, indeed, not gently pastoral and worthy of romantic contemplation, but unpredictable and threatening like the nearby Leshoana River in spate that carries away the heathen girl with whom the Christian boy Thema is in love (Mphahlele,1959:17) in a tragic tale that has the ring of a folk story or ballad to it. Hence, the cruel harshness and unpredictability of nature accentuates the need one has of people, of reliance on others and of community support. With fate as a stated and apartheid an implicit backdrop, people are foregrounded even in natural settings. In keeping with Mphahlele's African humanism, any given scene "always has a human content" (Watts,1989:44).

Thus, in terms of content, idiom and identification with place, Mphahlele has clearly found his own voice, and a highly original and gifted voice at that. In the dialogue of two selves between the West and Africa, the author has managed successfully to face down the problem of colonial alienation. It is ironic that he managed this feat at precisely that juncture when a new form of alienation awaited him -- that of political exile. One wonders what course Mphahlele's writings might have taken had it been possible to remain in South Africa under circumstances other than those obtaining at the time. As it was, however, his choices were, simply put, between "a rock and a hard place," between external or internal exile.

The closing scene of Chapter One and the opening of Chapter Two in Down Second Avenue is set at the village fire-place with such sages and story-tellers as Old Modise and Old Segone (Mphahlele,1959:14-16). The fire-place is an evocative symbol of African humanism and helps establish the fire-side warmth of the narrative. Just as the choice of autobiography as a medium of self-expression is consistent with

the stance of a self-professed African humanist, the authorial stance and tone is in keeping with the same aesthetic and philosophic world view. The "I" is not only deeply rooted in community, but there is no sense of the more highly educated and, hence, superior outside observer of that community looking in. Instead, there is warmth, compassion, identification -- the presence of a man, at once sensitive and brave; of uncompromising principle, but invariably down-to-earth and approachable -- even though the narrator is himself an educated member of the small, elite black intelligentsia. In 1935, only 193 Africans, for example, were registered in standards nine and ten of missionary-run schools country wide (Thompson,1990:172). This close identification with community as well as with the African oral traditions of story-telling are arguably themselves structural expressions of a deep-seated African humanism.

It is at the fireside, as Mphahlele describes it, that the reader can also observe the African humanist philosophy as it is lived. There is an historic sense of ancestors as a source of strength and moral guidance. While listening to the African sage one imbibes his collective wisdom through proverbs, tales and the recounting of tribal history and myths. It is here gossip is exchanged and manners and morals are imparted in such a way as to confirm James Olney's statement that

In African autobiography ... the ancestral-descendant motive is something infinitely deeper than curiosity [and] ... the present repeats the past and rehearses the future (1973:27-32).

References to "The Tribe," as one manifestation of the ancestral-descendant motive, are elaborated on in both Chapters One and Five, where we learn of Mphahlele's Mopedi origins as well as the extended family and community of some 5,000 inhabiting Maupaneng village. These are among the "social relationships [that] constitute a formidable network in Africa" (Mphahlele,1986:9) along with such strong women and cultural carriers as Mphahlele's mother, Eva, his maternal Grandmother Hibila, who always checks on Eski's friends and sends them off if she does not approve; and Aunt Dora, who in an amusing and

lively encounter takes on "Big Eyes," Mphahlele's school principal, when the young "Eski" is not allowed to participate in a concert for the Prince of Wales because he missed choir practice as a result of having had to pick up white people's laundry for his aunt. Humanism, it should be noted, despite its root, is not gender-specific; and often the women are better exemplars of it than the men. Above all this network of kith and kin is not only a leading precept of African humanism as it is actually lived, but it represents stability and a defensive bulwark against the alienating forces of apartheid and the poverty that accompanies it.

If the warmth and kinship experienced at the village fire is a metaphor for African humanism, the "brutal" Leshoana River "carrying on its broad back trees, cattle, boulders; world of torrential rains" (Mphahlele, 1959:18) symbolizes the divisive and alienating impact on indigenous culture of a harsh and aggressive colonial culture as well as the larger conflict all colonized peoples may experience between traditional ways and Western modes of thought. The resulting conflict between Christian and "heathen" communities is seen at work in the stark vignette of Christian boys beating up "heathen" boys in the school. Gerald Moore put it most eloquently when he observed of this passage: "As if their poverty and ignorance were not enough, Mphahlele's companions were so bigoted by mission teaching that they would not step in a pagan footprint, let alone live within reach of the "heathens" -- their own brothers of a saner day" (Moore, 1962:94). Such Christian-inspired alienation, conflict and cruelty, stands in dramatic contrast to the serene and peaceable gathering at the communal fire where standards of conduct are imparted through the African oral tradition of talk and story telling. As a spokesman himself for African humanism, Old Modise consistently advocates tolerance and compassion in human conduct, for "'We all have our secret little gods, Christians or none'" (Mphahlele, 1959:14).

Furthermore, the "communal fire-place" illustrates the co-operative nature of African humanism. Here men and boys gather. Even the man whose wife is sick is given food, while the women tend to the sick wife. The boys, however, if they wish to sit at the fire must bring back wood from the veld when they return with their goats. Shirkers are not tolerated. Those who are "too lazy to carry wood" are told to return home:

We learned a great deal at the fire-place, even before we were aware of it: history, tradition and custom, code of behaviour, communal responsibility, social living and so on.

'When the Swazis clashed with Bapedi....'

'As things were when we lived under Boer rule....'
(Mphahlele,1959:15).

Old Modise as a prime spokesman for African humanism, in turn, suggests the African habit of mind that connects all living things as a part of a unifying Vital force (Mphahlele, 1986:13). For example, he commences his story-telling with a reference to spring as a time when "You know you are part of that which dies and yet doesn't die" (Mphahlele,1959:16) and thus he continues dispensing wisdom around the fire to the next generation.

In dramatic contrast to the community spirit felt around the village fire, the contrasting chill of the Leshoana further serves to dramatize and make palpable the alienating racial conflict between the Christian white man and his/her black brother/sister. In a brief monologue of less than a paragraph, there is a searing indictment of apartheid with its codified racial discrimination as well as cold-blooded economic exploitation and Christian hypocrisy when Thema says that it cannot be true that "Christ died for us all, and he was our brother" for in the cities men are not brothers:

The black man must enter the white man's house through the back door. The black man does most of the dirty work. When a white man who hasn't gone far in school is given such work he says I'm not a kaffir! Black man cleans the streets but mustn't walk freely on the pavement; Black man must build houses for the white man but cannot live in them; Black man cooks the white man's food but eats what is left over. Don't listen

to anyone bluff you and say Black and white are brothers (Mphahlele,1959:16-17).

This brief, damning indictment of apartheid and the Christian Nationalist state is lightened by the quick humorous rejoinder, "You read too much ... and believe too little." At this juncture, we catch a brief glimpse into the self-alienation experienced by the author, himself. While the rejoinder is addressed to Thema, it equally could apply to Mphahlele, as does the following description which foreshadows the progressive alienation we see the author undergo as the autobiography unfolds:

We were afraid for Thema's mind. Something seemed to have happened to him in the city. Something terrible and dark (Mphahlele,1959:17).

A poignant part of Mphahlele's early personal history of self-alienation is that of a sensitive young man who grew up virtually without a childhood. His was not the idyllic childhood made up of loving parents, sibling rivalries, innocent schoolboy pranks and lazy summer days spent on fishing expeditions that many of his white peers would have experienced. Mphahlele instead looks back over the first thirteen years of his life and sees them as wasted years with "nobody to shape them into a definite pattern" (Mphahlele, 1959:18). Herein lies another sub-theme of alienation -- with the autobiographer writing in the present moment from the perspective of someone who has been shaped into something quite different from his childhood self by the forces of history as well as by a Western education and who perceives in this earlier self no one with whom he has any immediate sense of identification.

One of the most dramatic episodes in Down Second Avenue occurs when Mphahlele's alcoholic father, Moses, in a drunken rage, throws a heavy pot of boiling curry at Mphahlele's mother, Eva. The event is recounted in a perfectly crafted episode that utilizes place setting, dialogue, a flashback and mounting tension. It also appeals strongly to the senses in the use of highly sensual, realistic detail. Thus Moses shouts, "I'll show you who I am!" and then the highly charged action scene unfolds:

'What is it with you, Moses? What are you standing up to do?'

'Get up!'

'I can't -- I can't -- my knee!'

'This is the day you're going to do what I tell you!'

He limped over to the pot on the stove. In no time it was done. My mother screamed with a voice I have never forgotten till this day. Hot gravy and meat and potatoes had got into her blouse and she was trying to shake them down. ...

Only then did I have the wits to go and ask for help. I came back with Aunt Dora. An ambulance had already been and carried my mother to hospital. ... That was the last time I ever saw my father, that summer of 1932. The strong smell of burning paraffin gas from a stove often reminds me of that Sunday (Mphahlele, 1959:28).

Thematically, the scene not only underscores Mphahlele's early sense of self-alienation but painfully compounds it with his experience of "fatherlessness." To add to the feeling of powerlessness and impending doom, both father and son are hopelessly entrapped by broader socio-economic forces beyond their control. Like so many others their lives have been affected, directly or indirectly, by such draconian laws as the aforementioned 1913 Natives Land Act, the notorious Pass Laws and the much-amended Natives (Urban Areas) Act as well as subsequent legislation such as the Bantu Education Act (1953), which limited work and educational opportunities, controlled the movement of blacks, determined in which "warrens" they could live and which placed strict controls on land ownership and sharecropping by blacks and increased the size of reserves in order to guarantee farmers, industry and the gold mines of Johannesburg a plentiful source of cheap labour (Davenport, 1987:259).

In short, with jobs scarce and wages low, with exploitation rampant and large numbers of blacks migrating into cities, a breakdown in social norms and family structure was all too predictable. This is seen at work in Mphahlele's own family. Eva, the author's mother -- hard-working, tough, uncomplaining and someone who would "fight like a tigress to defend her cubs" (Mphahlele, 1959:26) -- became the family bread winner. Mphahlele's father, Moses, on the other hand, drinks away his income and is prone to fits of violent anger. Thus

we have the beginning of the father-son alienation that reaches a climax when Mphahlele's father picks up the heavy pot of curry boiling on the paraffin burner and assaults Eva with it. The hatred and fear aroused by Mphahlele's father, together with the related themes of father-son alienation and breakdown of the family structure, is balanced by the nurture and love provided by Eva, the archetypal strong African woman. Eva's story, indeed, bears out Leonard Thompson's observation that "by 1936 the disruption of African families meant women were beginning to assume responsibilities as head of the household" (1990:172) and that as a result of the migratory labour system and its negative impact on family life, large numbers of black South African men experienced "social powerlessness" and "a frustrated rage that all too often manifests itself in domestic violence, particularly against women" (Thompson,1990:202). Eva and Moses are classic examples of Thompson's observation.

Mphahlele continues to draw comparisons between his present life in the urban slum of Marabastad and his early years in rural Maupaneng, offering a commentary on the ways in which urbanization has altered the lifestyle and fundamental humanism of city dwellers. In urban Marabastad people relieve themselves in buckets, rather than in nearby fields. Houses are lined up in a straight row rather than in a circle. People no longer visit back and forth nor do they sit around the "communal fire" and tell stories. Nonetheless, Mphahlele avers, people still speak "with a subtle unity of voice. They still behaved as a community" (Mphahlele,1959:34). Thus, urbanization has eroded certain traditions, but it has not destroyed the strong sense of community.

As an urbanized member of a dysfunctional family and the eldest son in an African family being educated and living in the city, Mphahlele finds himself under tremendous pressure to succeed. But in the beginning as he starts school in Marabastad he thinks of himself as being merely a "backward" child -- evidence of the urban alienation he experiences as a country "skapie" (sheep) coming to the town (Mphahlele,1959:40):

The class teacher said I was backward. The principal said I was backward. My aunt said I was backward. So said everybody. Mother didn't know. I had no choice but to acknowledge it (Mphahlele,1959:47).

Mphahlele, however, despite this humble, humorous and slightly rueful sketch, soon proves everybody wrong. Not only is he the eldest son in an African family, but he is unusually gifted and hard-working. He possesses all the qualifications, in fact, to play the "hero" role in his dysfunctional family: striving to excel, to help his mother, to make something of himself; and to be everything, in short, his father is not (Gravitz,1985:23). At the same time, the entire family is dependent on Mphahlele's success and his mother has virtually given her life's blood to educate him. The combined pressure on Mphahlele of his need to succeed and the guilt he feels over his mother's burden and his father's failure result in a breakdown at St. Peters where he "lost the half-yearly tests." However, he makes a rapid recovery and goes on to obtain a first-class pass in the 1937 examination.

Thus the reader can observe in Mphahlele's early life an insidious ripple effect in the forms of alienation generated by the system, affecting first the society, then the community, next the family, and finally the individual. A careful reading of the text suggests that Moses's alcoholism had another effect on the temperament of his already shy and sensitive son. It may be that Mphahlele was afflicted by the fear of intimacy that is still another, highly personalized form of alienation typical of adult children of alcoholics (Gravitz,1985:72). For instance, during visits to his home in Marabastad while employed at Enzenzeleni Institute for the Blind, Mphahlele finds that his mother, with all her great sacrifice and love, overwhelms him so much that he is unable to express his own deeper feelings and that

I felt most bitter about my inability to thank her substantially for all she had done for me and the others. Her abundant love made me wish we could quarrel. Meantime, I noticed her strength was flagging (Mphahlele,1959:153).

Clearly the pressures of living in the midst of poverty, under state apartheid and with the scars of alcoholic behaviour, place enormous burdens on even the most loving of relationships. Mphahlele's inability to communicate his gratitude to his mother for the magnitude and heroism of her sacrifice represents another form of interpersonal alienation that has its roots in historic and socio-economic conditions as well as in personal and psychological ones.

From an individual focus, the narrative now shifts back to a communal one as, in Chapter Four, the citizens of Marabastad parade past the communal water tap. Indeed, in this chapter Mphahlele helps establish what became one of the better-known conventions of the township autobiography -- that of the communal gathering at the water tap. Even the water tap on Second Avenue, however, serves to reflect the polarity of the themes of alienation and African humanism. On the one hand, it is a lively community gathering point; on the other it symbolizes a life of deprivation under a harsh and discriminatory system where "Time ran out with the same slow, relentless and painful flow [and where] ... we all waited with dry patience" (Mphahlele,1959:30).

Poised at its center, skillfully wielding the artist's brush, Mphahlele paints a moving cameo of African humanism in its most humanized form. The gathering at the tap allows Mphahlele to introduce such notorious township types as Boeta Lem, the tsotsi (thug) about whom Old Rametse remarks "'You can light a match on his big red eyes'" (Mphahlele,1959:31). Ma-Lebona also puts in an appearance as does Ma-Janeware, who claims to be the widow of a Portuguese trader. In a cross-cultural exchange that reveals racial and skin biases within the black community, itself, Ma-Janeware ironically refers to the others as being as black as soot when she herself is as "'black as Satan's pit'" (Mphahlele,1959:3). Mphahlele's sharp eye and his broad-based humanism lends balance to his observations and prevents him from falling into the Manichean trap. His portrayal of cross-cultural,

inter-racial bias and bigotry makes a significant point -- that is, that there are no easy black-white, urban-rural, Western-African dichotomies. Life is both richer and more complex than that. Here at the tap gossip is traded, along with news of local witchcraft and one gets the sense of a "sacred organic unity" in which "I am because you are, you are because we are" (Mphahlele, 1984:9).

The dialogue bristles with colloquial banter, rendered proverbs, broken English, literal translations, Afrikaans and Sotho words, all tossed into a rich broth that bears little resemblance to the stilted dialogues and Victorian English found in Mphahlele's earlier writings such as Man Must Live. Mphahlele no longer, in the words of Mikhail Bakhtin, "ignores the social life of discourse outside the artist's study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations and epochs" (Bakhtin, 1981, 259). Such "heteroglossia" indeed become the unique voice of Mphahlele's African humanism. In breaking away from the cultural imperialism of the West by way of an English that has been tamed and "domesticated," and by replicating the "heteroglossia" of Second Avenue, Mphahlele is not only affirming African values, he is coming into his own as a writer. Yet despite the humanism, the abundant humour and the strong sense of community, life on Second Avenue is a constant struggle for the Mphahlele family, crowded into a two-room hut with bucket toilet and no heating -- a tableau brought fully to life of a Saturday night as described in the following impressionistic interlude that balances the lyric and ideal against harsh reality:

I know the cold air coming through the hole in the flooring boards will whip us out of sleep My sister also on the floor is kicking the leg of the table Grandmother and three of Aunt Dora's children are lying quiet on the old double bed. With two frayed blankets on us it's good to feel hot. ... And then the boxes containing old handbags and hats and trinkets given by some long-forgotten missus a police whistle, the barking of dogs ... heavy booted footsteps, it's sure to be a person running away from

the law, the police cells, the court and jail. Saturday night and it's ten to ten. I can hear the big curfew bell at the police station peal 'ten to ten, ten to ten, ten to ten' Black man must run home and the Black man must sleep or have a night special permit (Mphahlele,1959:44-55).

In this passage, the degradation and deprivation of poverty is highlighted by the kind, but utterly futile gesture of the white "madam" who gives the family her useless trinkets. The oppression of the apartheid state is emphasized with whistle, curfew bell, and heavy booted footsteps. We can hear it, just as we can smell the dust, feel the heat and cold and the frayed blanket. The law reaches out into the black man's life and controls his every move, even at 9:50 of a Saturday night. He is constantly being pursued by the law that exists not to protect but to prosecute. The black man, in short, is on the run. In this page-and-a-half interlude of stream-of-consciousness prose, we have an entire cinema verite picture of life as it is lived on Second Avenue. Marabastad is a slum with a soul, but it is nonetheless a slum where "dirty water and flies and dead cats and dogs and children's stools owned the streets" and where whites are seldom seen and only then if they are the location superintendent, police or a white minister serving in some official capacity (Mphahlele,1959:33).

Mphahlele concludes his interlude on "Saturday night" with the statement "I feel so weak, inferior, ignorant, self-conscious" (Mphahlele,2959:46) and he tells his psycho-biographer N. Chabani Manganyi, that the conditions of tyranny under which black people live of poverty and police brutality result in the lost childhood of a forced precocity. Mphahlele states that he thinks he felt more than most the anxiety and fear not only of adolescence but of adolescence for a black growing up in an apartheid state. Moreover, he is tormented by self-consciousness about his smallness and other perceived inadequacies, particularly around women. Thus, when he meets at school one of the loves of his life, another strong woman, Rebone, he is overwhelmed with shyness. Because of the importance of strong women in his life, Mphahlele attributes

his preoccupation with "compassion" as an "important value" to the fact that all his role models were women. He concludes that, "At the end of the tunnel of time, I see the women of Marabastad and say to myself: there was a noble chance for a feminine identification on my part" (Manganyi,1983:46-49).

One of the strongest, most insistent -- one could without hyperbole apply the adjective "shrill" -- voices in Down Second Avenue is that of Ma-Lebona, a figure who is full of complex ambiguities and contradictions. One of the subtexts of Down Second Avenue is the theme of change. While Mphahlele validates the philosophy of African humanism and the lifestyle that goes with it, he is not averse to change itself, nor does he ever intimate that all African traditions, customs and values are by definition "good". He is much too balanced to fall into this Manichean trap by reversing old stereotypes. Ma-Lebona is an example. She is a spokesman for community values and customs and in her personage and interaction with others can be seen the conflict between old ways and new; African and Western in the process of urbanization. She is the sort of African woman who acts as a self-appointed, "unpaid social worker" and ombudsman, articulating traditional values and advising anyone who will listen on such matters as how to clean the house and prepare food, particularly such unwilling listeners as her assorted daughters-in-law whom she manages thoroughly to antagonize.

At her best, Ma-Lebona's involvement recalls a time when Africans still behaved in traditional African humanist ways -- offering condolences in a death, supporting young women in childbirth, and preparing food for a wedding (Mathiane,1990:99-100). At her worst, Ma-Lebona is a professional busy-body. But in both instances, Ma-Lebona embodies one of the chief tenets of African humanism. Of her it can be truly said:

'She's there!' When Africans say a person 'is there', they mean you cannot but feel she is alive; she allows you no room to forget she was born and is alive in flesh and spirit (Mphahlele:1959:59).

The ambiguities and conflicts of the life and times of the author find expression in Ma-Lebona's character in various ways. She is first and foremost a strong personality, like so many of the women in Mphahlele's life. She has that "unsinkable" quality that Mphahlele also attributes to his wife Rebecca in his memoir. Like Grandmother Hibila, she is "clean as a cat in a white man's house" (Mphahlele,1959:64). She is preoccupied with education and the cachet it gives her like Mphahlele's mother. She is also very controlling, in the manner of Aunt Dora. For instance, she manages to drive away her son-in-law and describes him and her daughter, Nkati, as being "just hippo-headed" because they refuse to live with her in the traditional African way. Her first husband left after three years when "'the bell rang for stopping work', as Africans say when relations are severed" In another case, Ma-Lebona "... kept a rough twig between the husband's buttocks long enough to drive him mad and out of the house" (Mphahlele,1959:61).

It is quite clear that living together with the traditional mother-in-law is not an African custom Mphahlele would necessarily celebrate or want to preserve and by implication Mphahlele is suggesting that preserving old customs for their own sake is not always desirable, nor is change itself necessarily bad. Sometimes, in fact, change is necessary and good. Beyond that, it is entirely possible, given his own innately shy, reflective and sensitive nature, that at times in his life Mphahlele felt himself to be something of a slave to the strong-willed women he was surrounded by and that (at the risk of sounding sexist here) at times he even felt himself to be hen-pecked, driven and emasculated by their "thereness." If so, perhaps some of that frustration was vented in the creation of the character of Ma-Lebona who is a multi-dimensional and memorable composite of the many strong women Mphahlele has known.

Another manifestation of alienation that is vested in the persona of Ma-Lebona is that between the educated and

un-educated blacks in the township. While Mphahlele professed to feel no such alienation when the author of this dissertation interviewed him, nonetheless, it is hard to imagine that he never experienced some of its ramifications as he, himself, describes them. For instance, Ma-Lebona was forever mentioning that she was a school teacher (like Mphahlele, himself) trained at Kilnerton Institute. Such references, invariably, provoked among the other women sentiments at once "jealous, envious, annoyed and humble" (Mphahlele, 1959:60).

Ma-Lebona, in short, contributes dramatic tension and textual balance by providing the focus for the dual themes of urban alienation and African humanism. In her articulation of the conflict between the modern present and traditional past and in defining and elucidating the individual's right relationship to society Ma-Lebona sometimes gets it right, but quite often, too, she gets it entirely wrong. In her militantly traditional insistence on playing the old-fashioned mother-in-law who demands that the daughter-in-law be "obedient" and in her contemptuous dismissal of modern daughters-in-law as being "thick-headed and stubborn" (Mphahlele, 1959:59), Ma-Lebona further serves to dramatize the conflict between the old generation and the newly urbanized, modern youth. This alienating conflict reaches a climax when her daughter-in-law Anna does the unthinkable. Rather than displaying veneration for elders in the traditional African humanist manner, Anna, instead breaking all strictures, slaps Ma-Lebona on the cheek. This is a most shocking development! The slap symbolizes the breakdown in relations between the two generations, another theme of alienation.

Finally, Ma-Lebona calls down the wrath of the ancestors on her daughter Nkati and husband. Here the author breaks into the narrative, defending Ma-Lebona's gesture with a recapitulation of one of the precepts of African humanism which is clearly intended for an audience who may not fully understand, explaining that

... about eight out of every ten educated Africans, most of whom are still professed Christians, still believe firmly in the spirits of the ancestors. We don't speak to one another about it among the educated. But when we seek moral guidance and inspiration and hope, somewhere in the recesses of our being, we grope around for some link with those spirits (Mphahlele, 1959:64).

It is of interest to note here that even the gods (and ancestors) are reflective of a "pre-colonial Africa [that] was essentially humanistic ... [the] existence of human society was the pre-condition for existence of religion and gods. Gods "were imbued with humanistic attributes" They "in turn influence social action in a dialectical process" (Amuta, 1989:39). In short, the gods are approachable and man-centered, tied by the "umbilical cord" of past and present generations to the here and now. They derive attributes from man in society striving after the highest good. Man perceives in the gods the best he is capable of combined with his own self-knowledge. Having imbued the gods, or what Mphahlele refers to as the "Vital force," with such humanistic attributes man is in turn influenced by these same attributes. Mphahlele speaks of a "pipe-line" to the ancestors who are a source of "moral guidance and inspiration and hope" which suggests two-way reception -- in short, a metaphysical humanistic dialogue in which the gods are not in the Islamic or Christian sense abstract, monolithic and authoritarian, occupying some unknown fourth dimension.

An essential part of Mphahlele's humanism, in addition to his quest for meaning in the midst of chaos, his awareness of the larger picture beyond black and white issues in the human condition, his poet's vision that lifts the text to the level of art rather than mere reportage and the value he places on people and community as well as on ancestors as a source of moral guidance and inspiration, is his fireside gifts as a story-teller. Direct, down-to-earth and accessible, he has a

feel for dramatic action and an eye for the telling detail and picturesque turn of phrase that befits an African Chaucer -- that is fresh, original, earthy, and, at the same time, uniquely African. Thus, the woman next door is vividly described with wry humour as being "fat, like a bag of mealie-meal spreading over the back of a donkey" (Mphahlele, 1958:78).

Although Marabastad and Second Avenue are repositories of African humanism, the alienation its inhabitants experience is not always external or directly attributable to black/white racism and/or the segregationist rule of whites. Within the township itself there is rampant thuggery and a proliferation of gangs due in part to unequal administration of criminal law, economic disparities, and the inability of the churches to stop them. There is also underlying racism and bias exhibited in the cross-cultural conflicts between African and Asian communities and further aggravated by such conditions as rapid urbanization, ignorance, overcrowding and poverty.

Thus, while black-white alienation is one of the paramount themes of Down Second Avenue, although never overtly stated as such, Mphahlele in his broader awareness of the human condition -- beyond mere stereotypes or easy dichotomies -- does not hesitate to shine the spotlight on the darker side of life in Marabastad. We see the ingrained humanism of an ancient culture afflicted by a tragic, urban blight in the form of township thuggery as "boys of our age were getting rough and knife-happy." For such youths, Boeta Lem (Brother Blade) who "collected a nice bunch of hangers-on" who "hero-worshipped him as an ex-convict" (Mphahlele, 1959:90) serves as a prototype. Boeta Lem, the township tsotsi who victimizes his own people and who breaks his father's heart, symbolizes a generation of lost, brutalized black youth and a proliferating culture of township violence. So destructive and alienating is this culture of violence that it ultimately begins to destroy the very humanism Mphahlele records, preserves and celebrates.

Rebone's father Dinku Dikae, the vegetable seller, stands as the ultimate tragic metaphor, almost a case study, of brutality triumphing over humanism. Dinku Dikae's daughter, Rebone, is Mphahlele's childhood sweetheart -- the memory of whom is "like lace of a petticoat ... [which] is all right as long as it doesn't show" (Mphahlele, 1959:155). Like Ma-Lebona and Grandmother Hibila, Rebone also symbolizes the conflict and "the dialogue between ... the present and the living Past."

Initially, Rebone displays customary respect for and support given African elders by children in that she behaves like a dutiful, caring daughter, even to the extent of teaching her father to read and write. But later she fails altogether to show this respect, becoming more modern in her defiant attitude. Going against her father's wishes, she scandalizes both Grandmother Hibila and Ma-Lebona by attending dances at The Columbia Dance Hall and, although a good student, she also begins to skip classes.

Dinku Dikae, in the meantime, has a deeply ingrained fear of the police that goes back to a riot during a slum clearance when he watched a policeman shoot a boy (Mphahlele, 1959:117). One night a white policeman forces his way into Dinku Dikae's hut and hurls brutal and indecent insults. In a moment of sudden, violent rage and fear, Dinku Dikae kills the policeman. So alienated has Dinku Dikae become, in short, that the only means of self-actualization he can find is through violence. After the murder, he appears "more composed, stronger and surer than I have ever seen him" (Mphahlele, 1959:141-142).

Thus, does the system not only reinforce economic and social inequities, but it also fosters a culture of violence and of self-alienation that reaches across racial, ethnic and geographic barriers into black townships, destroying the very ethos of African humanism. In Dinku Dikae is repositied the definitive form of alienation in that violence against others is ultimately violence against oneself.

Unlike Dinku Dikae, Aunt Dora is in charge of her own destiny. She is caring, but she is also tough. The polarity in temperaments between Mphahlele's paternal and maternal grandmothers -- one representing forces of fate and alienation and the other the caring and compassion of African humanism -- is echoed in the dramatic contrast between gentle, quiet Eva and big, strong, boisterous, domineering, meat-eating, life-loving Aunt Dora. A presence to be reckoned with, she is "there," in the African sense, fully inhabiting and engaged in the archetypal ghetto world of the now, with no past; and no future:

For Aunt Dora the past never seemed to hold any romantic memories; she never spoke about the future; she simply grappled with the present (Mphahlele, 1959:107).

Aunt Dora's knock-down, drag-out battle with Abdool, the Indian shop-keeper, over monies owed for goods, provides comic relief and reveals Mphahlele's remarkable ear for dialect, but it also has its darker side in that it illustrates still another sub-theme of alienation -- the antagonism felt between Asians and blacks. While this conflict can, in part, be traced to socio-economic inequalities built into the apartheid system of economics insofar as Indians and so-called "coloureds" often enjoyed better prospects for education and employment as well as significantly higher wages than their African counterparts (Mphahlele, 1959:135), it is also clear that lack of understanding, racial prejudice and cultural biases enter in.

For instance, when she tackles Abdool, Aunt Dora gives free vent to her own prejudices, and bars no holds, either physically or verbally. As for Abdool, he proves himself a worthy adversary, able to give as good as he takes:

'Stamp that book I say, coolie! You come from India to make money out of us, eh!'

'aldight aldight I come from Hindia what he's got do with book? No-no-no a-a-a!'

'Abdool I don't want any dusty nonsense!'

'If hum coolie ju Kaffier ten-times ju-self' (Mphahlele, 1959:109).

As an African humanist writing about alienation, Mphahlele

remains fair-minded and objective, never losing sight of the broader human canvas. Blacks may be oppressed, but they are not by virtue of their oppression automatically blameless. Boeta Lem, for instance, perpetrates violence against his own people as Moses does against Eva and Dora against Abdool. Unlike apologists for negritude, Mphahlele does not omit the potential for "violence in the African character" nor does he simplistically present only "warm, loving, caring, socially-oriented" black characters as opposed to the "cold technology-oriented whites" (Watts,1989:75).

Characters such as the two Grandmothers, maternal and paternal, are also used to symbolize and counterpoint themes of alienation and African humanism as well as to heighten dramatic tension and advance the narrative. On the one hand, Mphahlele's paternal grandmother is as "grim as fate" and is a reminder of the hostile and alienating forces in his early life in Maupaneng. His maternal Grandmother Hibila is a more complex figure. She is a "consummate combination of the toughness associated with the rural peasantry and the defiant cheek of the semi-literate grand old ladies of African townships" (Manganyi,1983:49). In addition, she is the perfect exemplar of ubuntu, the spirit of generosity, compassion and sharing that defines African humanism.

In a sense she is a living practitioner and role model of the synthesis Mphahlele seeks in two streams of consciousness: African and Western. A woman of uncompromising principle, Hibila is perfectly at ease in her own skin, and entirely comfortable holding on to some of the old beliefs while praying to a Christian God daily. Indeed, she had a "fetching way of talking about the Christian God and the gods of the ancestors in the same breath" (Barnett,1976:61). She frequently invokes the name of her deceased husband, swearing "by Titus who lies in his grave" (Mphahlele,1959:91). She may be a Christian herself, but she feels no compunction about offering hospitality to Mathebula, the witch doctor. It is true, of course, that Mathebula as an herbalist can, in return, offer

his medical services to the family. So there is a good deal of pragmatism in Grandmother Hibila's ubuntu.

Grandmother Hibila, like Eva, and in the best tradition of classical Western humanism, also entertains a fierce belief in the redeeming power of education. Even as the family is being raided by police for selling home brew and a white policeman strikes the youthful Mphahlele, forcing him to the ground and calling him a "stinking kaffir," Grandmother Hibila continues to implore God to help her "make money to send my children to college" (Mphahlele, 1959:43). And, indeed, she does succeed in educating three sons. The dedication to family and community exhibited by these strong-willed, resourceful women in Mphahlele's life provides the necessary counterpoint in an alien and hostile world to enable him to survive and endure, and eventually, to realize some of his mother, Eva's, fondest dreams.

While there is friction and bickering amongst the denizens of Second Avenue, with Dora and Abdool, for instance, exchanging racial epithets as freely as fisticuffs, the black community stands in stark contrast to the isolated whites in their posh suburbs. Treating Mphahlele "like a tool" and with a certain grim impersonality, Mr. Goldstein works at the museum with Aunt Dora's husband but never thinks to carry the laundry there himself. Self-absorbed Miss Foster or "Ma Bottles" is the white counterpart to Mphahlele's father, preventing Moses from being typecast a "degenerate" since drunkenness is clearly no respecter of race or gender. Then there is the Singer family, who give the dog tea and fire "the girl" for beating the dog. Mrs. Singer is hence "christened ... Chobolo (shrew)" (Mphahlele, 1959:68-69).

In short, the isolation and alienation of Pretoria whites from their own humanity and that of their fellows is profound, providing a commentary on the suffering of blacks who may be poorer materially, but are ahead of the game spiritually. This

is not to suggest that "poor blacks are the 'authentic' blacks [because] fearsome poverty has granted them deeper truths and wisdom" (Staples, Washington Post 17 March 1994:D2). None in this cast of characters, black or white, is free from defects; all are unforgettable, in keeping with Mphahlele's humanism, where people matter more than things.

In the meantime, a building series of episodes show Mphahlele's progressive political alienation based on harsh personal experience and his mission-school education at St. Peter's. First, there is his skirmish with some white boys in Pretoria with whom he collides, after losing control of his bicycle which was loaded down with laundry. The boys, in turn, thrash him soundly and with all the self-righteous indignation befitting demi-gods who are a law unto themselves:

"Bastard!" shouted the boy who had fallen first. His friends came to me and about three of them each gave a hard kick on my backside and thighs. And me with the cold, the pain, the numbness, and a punctured and bent front wheel (Mphahlele, 1959:39-50).

Then, there are the continual slights and humiliations he suffers at the hands of such Pretoria whites as Mrs. Reynecke, the Afrikaner women, who address him as "boy;" the whites he encounters working as a messenger for a law firm who either put on "superior airs" or are coldly distant, such as the firm's proprietor, a "tall forbidding colossus" whom Mphahlele came "to regard ... as a machine who generates power but only from somewhere on the fringe of one's awareness;" the "anemic" secretaries with long red nails who send him on private errands and address him with a string of "You hear? You hear? You hear?" and the heavy-set typist who sits knitting and makes him "think of Madam Defarge." Throughout the day Mphahlele is "Jim'ed and Johned to death" and is subjected to constant affronts which cause him to wake up at night in a cold sweat (1959:136-143).

In the revised edition of the African Image, Mphahlele says of the white man: "I wanted my portrait of him in my fiction to be fuller so I myself could begin to understand him. ... over the

last ten years I have ceased to care. It is not worth the trouble. The white man's inhumanity in South Africa has proved that much to me." Frequently Mphahlele comments on the racial alienation that has prevented him from getting to know the white man except at the "point of a boot or the point of a gun." This being the case, Mphahlele suggests that if he merely succeeds in caricaturing whites that will, at least, constitute some form of "poetic justice." Finally, he declares: "If any critic tells me my white characters are caricatures or only monsters, he is welcome to the opinion." While it may be true that Mphahlele's series of pen and ink sketches of Pretoria whites lacks "light and shade, angles of vision, images and symbols" (Mphahlele,1962:15), they nonetheless cleverly and believably depict plausible types while mildly satirizing them. The truth of the matter is that in real life certain "types" fit the description, right down to the painted red nails. In playing out assigned roles these "types" master their parts so well they become caricatures of themselves. State apartheid provided a milieu that readily fostered such extremes in manners and morals associated with caricatural behavior.

The anti-humanistic indifference and lack of compassion of Pretoria whites who appear to be "clean, quiet but either dead or neurotic" in their separate suburbs (Mphahlele,1959:174) stand in dramatic contrast to the humanism of Mphahlele's family members who may be members of the oppressed majority but who are never mere helpless victims -- who in short, exhibit hope and caring; rather than impersonality and a sort of disgruntled and existential despair, often seen in their white counterparts. Aunt Dora, Eva and Grandmother Hibila are, on the contrary, active, alive, energetic, fiercely determined people who take charge of their own destinies. Even as they sacrifice and suffer from hard work and deprivation, they are expressive of their African humanism. That is, they are not like whites "all bottled up." Rather they and others on Second Avenue "sing, dance, touch and laugh" (Thuynsma:1991) and they live very much in the "now," which is a vital part of their humanism.

While African humanism, is the common thread that holds the fabric of the text of Down Second Avenue together, the theme of "rootlessness" and fragmentation, of literary exile and alienation, slips over the seams of the text into its very structure, into what James Olney refers to as the "shape" of an autobiography -- "because any autobiography is in one sense a psychological and philosophical imitation of the writer's personality" (Olney,1973:52). Down Second Avenue does not unfold so much as it develops and is shaped by "historical contingency" (Shear quoting Weintraub,1981:41). This helps explain why, for example, there is a marked and unsettling change of mood mid-way through Down Second Avenue. Those chapters composed on home soil, which the author states comprize the first half of the book (Mphahlele,1959:218) reflect, in turn, the author's sense of immediacy and closeness to his subjects as opposed to later chapters that reflect more his state of mind. Initially, the narrative crackles with action and the characters are very much "there" in an African humanist sense -- larger than life and believable. By contrast, the mood of the final chapters written during Mphahlele's exile in Nigeria are brooding, ruminative, and, at times, bitter.

This disjuncture in mood and structure is echoed in the narrative itself. The chapter on Mphahlele's schooling at St. Peters represents a critical turning point in his increasing political awareness and hence alienation from the white liberal establishment with its humanistic and Christian leanings. St. Peters is in itself the very statement of a liberal, humanist approach, teaching a liberal arts curriculum based on Western classics that implicitly endorse the "commitment of a set of methods and policies that have as their common aim greater freedom for individual men" and the "spread of attitudes hospitable to individual enterprise and the creed of individual responsibility" (Smith,1968:276-277). At St. Peter's Mphahlele and his peers were being taught about civil liberties, egalitarian principles, the right of an individual to realize his highest potential, but the students were not, as Mphahlele remarks, encouraged to put these

precepts into effect beyond the walls of St. Peter's. Increasingly, Mphahlele began to see the self-alienating discrepancy between the ideal and the real -- between what he was being taught (and at the same time told not to apply) and the harsh illiberal, non-democratic reality of the world beyond the cloistered halls of academe. Furthermore, none of these grand Western liberal humanistic principles which had helped raise the level of his own political awareness seemed to hold out the promise of effectively changing the current order. Thus, it was at St. Peter's that Mphahlele, whose predilections were not naturally toward politics, nonetheless began to put all his past experience in its proper historic context -- from the poverty his family suffered to his "mother's resignation," Aunt Dora's toughness, grandmother whose ways bridged the past with the present ... the police raids; the ten-to-ten curfew bell; encounters with whites; humiliations" (Mphahlele, 1959:128). Ultimately, however, Mphahlele's humanities-steeped liberal education would equip him with the tools to fight as a liberal for the egalitarian civil liberties being denied him.

Mphahlele, also, began to realize that while debate on political issues was encouraged inside St. Peter's there was a double standard on just how far these principles of liberal individual free expression and responsibility should be carried beyond its gates. At the same time, there was an enormous and unsettling difference between the whites on the faculty with whom Mphahlele and his fellow students, such as the noted writer Peter Abrahams, "enjoyed complete harmony" and those on the outside whom Mphahlele was learning to hate. (Eccentric Brother Rogers, for instance, seems to have been an unforgotten favourite, despite his hard canings. He comes amusingly and dramatically to life in a manner various generic Pretoria whites do not.) Thus, a white tram driver might abuse Mphahlele and a school chum trying to ride into the town of Johannesburg, forcing them to walk the four miles back from town because it was, after all, a "white" tram. It was a difficult and frustrating dichotomy continually to bridge -- particularly since the respected and even likeable whites on the

inside of St. Peter's, professed an idealism that has much to recommend it but seemed to have little practical applicability in the real world.

Thus, there would be no recourse, no outlet for Mphahlele's anger and humiliation, and no support either from that, in many ways, admirable bastion of white liberal Christian humanism, St. Peter's. The reality was that no one on the faculty was prepared directly to confront the issue of how their young charges should behave in the brutal world of racial segregation and poverty outside the cloistered halls of St. Peter's (Mphahlele, 1959:126), aside from keeping a low profile. For example, when Mphahlele curses a pair of white motorcyclists who try to run him off the sidewalk, hurtling the expletive "Voetsek" at them like a bullet, the Yorkshire headmaster of St. Peter's reprimands him saying, "Do you want us thrown out by the European people from this place?" (Mphahlele, 1959:127). The Western humanism and liberality of the headmaster and faculty appear a pale thing in comparison to the African humanism of Grandmother Hibila, Aunt Dora and Eva, who are willing to stake their very lives on their commitment to those they care for. But at St. Peter's humanism and liberal thought apparently stopped at the gates. Thus, Mphahlele concludes that the liberalism espoused in school does not "extend to the attitude they [the faculty and administration] thought we should adopt towards whites and white authority outside school. Slowly I realized how I hated the white man outside St. Peter's" (Mphahlele, 1959:126).

Mphahlele's progressive political, spiritual and racial alienation provides the foundation on which he subsequently: first, makes a break from the Anglican Church, in turn paving the way to seek out a spiritual and philosophic ethos to fill the void; and second, takes a brave and unequivocal stand against Bantu education and the syllabus it prescribes -- one that he as a trained educator himself immediately recognizes has been deliberately designed to create "a race of slaves." It is supremely ironic that Mphahlele, a dedicated teacher steeped in

the humanities and Western classics and by implication in Western humanism itself which implicitly subscribes to "the belief in the unity of the human race and man's potential to perfect himself by his own efforts" (Fromm,1965:viii), was now being required to teach a syllabus, based on a recommendation of Dr. Eieselen, that was founded on the counter-humanistic premise that blacks are inferior and that the education they receive should be commensurate with that inferiority. Furthermore, the texts by which these insidious goals should be achieved were not designed to enlarge understanding and bring truth to light, according to liberal-humanistic principles, through scientific and scholarly inquiry, but instead they consciously distorted truth. These included, among others, such examples as "a history book with several distortions meant to glorify white colonization ... [and] Afrikaans grammar books which abound with examples like 'the Kaffir has stolen a knife; that is a lazy Kaffir'"(Mphahlele, 1959:167).

Long before the passage of the Bantu Education Act in 1953, legislation such as the so-called Hertzog Bills in 1936 had been passed, removing black voters from the rolls, providing them with communal representation by a single white, and restricting the purchase of land by blacks (Mphahlele,1959:138). But, as an educator, it was the Bantu Education Act that caused Mphahlele to revolt. It was because of the Bantu Education Act that South Africa's 4,500 mission schools fell "under the hostile gaze of the National Party Government. At these schools, ideologues claimed, 'dangerous, liberal ideas were being fed by outsiders into untrained minds.'" The schools, said Hendrik Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs, must prepare the Bantu for his "proper place." There was no point, for instance, in teaching a Bantu child mathematics "when it cannot use it in practice" (Oakes,1988:379). Mphahlele as secretary of the Transvaal Teachers Association, "travelled during school vacations to the districts to crusade against the recommendation of the Eiselen report." Shortly thereafter, Mphahlele was summarily dismissed from the teaching that was his "first love," with no reasons being given for his discharge (Mphahlele,1959:168).

Political and professional alienation was followed by spiritual. In 1947 Mphahlele decided no longer to attend church. Christianity, Mphahlele believed, was being used to encourage blacks passively to accept their lot, meekly to turn the other cheek and nobly to endure. Mphahlele felt vindicated in his decision not to attend church any longer when, in 1947, the Nationalist Party was voted by whites into parliament. After this event, Mphahlele states, his belief in such humanistic and liberal values as "fellowship," "love," and "obedience of the law" were challenged. "Suddenly I did not know what these meant in terms of my place in society" especially as white voters had voted into parliament "a bunch of lawless Voortrekker descendants whose safety lies in the hands of sten-gun-happy youngsters" (Mphahlele,1959:163).

In his efforts to lobby against the Bantu Education Act, Mphahlele, as I have demonstrated, took positive action in a manner for which his education had prepared him: in short, he attempted to put into effect liberal humanist precepts of individual responsibility and free speech. He actively committed himself to the classic liberal endeavor of bringing peaceful change about through education and persuasion, campaigning against the Bantu Education Act in his elected capacity as Secretary of the Transvaal Teachers Association. Ultimately, as previously noted, he was fired for his good faith efforts and thence forbidden to teach in all government schools. By this time Mphahlele was also married to Rebecca and the couple had a young family to support. When he discovers he is dismissed as a teacher at Orlando High for "subversive activities" ... "bitterness ate into me like a cancer" (Mphahlele,1959:169). Initially as a black and despite his education, Mphahlele is able only to find a job as as a factory invoice clerk. He must now also live in fear of the pass laws "and [at] the risk of being whisked off to a Bethal prison farm, I decided to go and queue up for a reference book" (Mphahlele,1959:170).

At a time when Mphahlele is subsequently very short of personal funds and when a black youth who sought his advice had just been severely beaten by white police, an Anglican priest, one Father Wardle, appears on Mphahlele's doorstep to remind him of a sum owed the church and to bring up the subject of Mphahlele's attendance. Mphahlele has begun, however, to question the double standard of Christianity -- used on the one hand to justify the position of the apartheid government and on the other to ensure that blacks remain meekly, passively and humbly in their place. Here Mphahlele makes an eloquent and definitive statement of his alienation from Christianity and the "longings" that that sense of loss triggers:

Just now, I don't think it's fair for anybody to tell me to expect a change of heart among a bunch of madmen who are determined not to cede an inch or listen to reason. It is unfair to ask me to subsist on mission school sermons about Christian conduct and passive resistance in circumstances where it is considered a crime to be decent; where a policeman will run me out of my house at the point of a sten gun when I try to withhold my labour. For years I have been told by white and Black preachers to love my neighbour; love him when there's a bunch of whites who reckon they are Israelites come out of Egypt in obedience to God's order to come and civilize heathens; a bunch of whites who feed on the symbolism of God's race venturing into the desert among the ungodly. For years now I have been thinking it was all right for me to feel spiritually strong after a church service. And now I feel it is not the kind of strength that answers the demands of suffering humanity around me. It doesn't even seem to answer the longings in my own heart (Mphahlele, 1959:178).

By the late 1940s, Mphahlele's progressive spiritual alienation (not totally dissimilar from early Western humanists who broke away from the church) continues to build as he begins to see, not only the church, but also the parliament and the white press as among the white liberal institutions that have "become a symbol of the dishonesty of the West" (Mphahlele, 1959:221) all of which "babbled their platitudes" about the "native emerging from ... primitive barbarism" and of "white guardianship" while the church, in particular, continues to teach the non-white to love his neighbour and while the white

preacher

... felt committed to an ethic he did not dare apply to the necessity of group action against the forces of evil in a setting where such forces have worked themselves up into a savage national attitude said to be based on a Christian sense of justice (Mphahlele, 1959:163).

At the same time, the church practises an insidious cultural imperialism in which African customs and religious practices are deemed primitive and inferior and where black Christians themselves are treated as second-class citizens. Thus, Mphahlele comes to realize that "my outlook on the church has decidedly changed" (Mphahlele, 1959:179); hence, the spiritual, metaphysical alienation of the educated Westernized African exposed to Christian modes of thought.

In short, the forces of spiritual and political alienation had for the moment won out, setting in motion "a terrible conflict" whose resolution would come in the form of a decision which would give meaning to all that had preceded it and that of itself lacked meaning. Mphahlele would feel compelled to exit the prison of self-alienation in which he believed he had given life nothing; and where it seemed even life "resented your efforts" (Mphahlele, 1959:202). There appeared to be only one choice for someone with so much to give and yet so tormented by his inability to do so -- and that was political exile.

In the meantime, death hangs like a pall over the narrative. We learn, in one of the final interludes, that Marabastad has been razed; but the black man keeps moving on with "bent backs" (down Second Avenue, out of the "painful South" and finally out of Africa altogether). Siki, the tubercular guitarist, had died as has Mphahlele's mother Eva. Ma-Lebona also dies, a symbol of the harshness of ghetto life and its spokesman even in her death. She does not receive the burial she had hoped for. Instead, there are thorn trees, no tombstone and an ant-eaten cross and "[the] smell [of] poverty from far away" and

More mothers will come and pass on but the African sage will tell you pain defies comparison. There are many more second avenues with dirty water and flies and children with traces of urine running down the legs and chickens pecking at children's stools (Mphahlele, 1959:159).

In the end, there is the angry, bitter and frustrated self-alienation of a teacher who cannot teach; of a writer who cannot write, and the alienation from a world that rejected all your "strivings and desires," but that "continued to torment you" until "you knew it was your soul that was imprisoned" (Mphahlele,1959:202). And there is no hope of putting those skills to work on behalf of the poor, under-educated blacks on the many Second Avenues throughout the country. Perhaps, of the many forms of alienation, Mphahlele, the teacher, writer and scholar undergoes and describes in Down Second Avenue and other works, that which is most cruel, most ironic and ultimately most meaningless is that Mphahlele's

... whole life had been an unrelenting struggle to achieve the way of life for which his urban upbringing and liberal education had prepared him. But to achieve this life he had finally to become an exile (Moore,1962:93).

Thus, the themes of alienation embrace the dehumanizing effect of life for blacks under apartheid, the philosophic and cultural conflict between Christian and African modes of thought; between old ways and new; the breakdown of the family structure and father-son alienation, political, socio-economic and racial alienation and; finally, the lonely and bitter self-alienation of the exile and writer separated from the very community that forms an integral part of his unique humanism. Herein the groundwork is set for Mphahlele's quest for a philosophic approach that will fill the spiritual vacuum, that will re-affirm black values; and that will provide an answer to the inadequacies and hypocrisy of white liberalism.

The object of the quest driving this African Odysseus, however, was there all along. Strong women like Eva, Aunt Dora and Ma-Lebona are the walking, talking, living, breathing manifestos of the abstract ideal of African humanism -- a

concept that was simply waiting to be named and articulated. African humanism as seen in Marabastad lived out on a daily basis is not so much "a philosophic contention that has been argued ... as a way of life. The African lives it and does not stand outside it to contemplate the process" (Mphahlele, 1986:10). It is a working philosophy that like African art itself fulfills a purpose within the community. In its fundamental humanism and ubuntu, it made life supportable for blacks in slums and townships like Marabastad throughout the "painful south," providing stability against chaos; humour and love against denigration and hate.

While apartheid valued power, affluence and privilege more than people; African humanism valued people more than places and things. Where apartheid oppressed, African humanism shared and showed compassion. While apartheid fostered guilt; African humanism gave evidence of sacrifice and courage; it afforded hope and an ability to savour what life has to offer in the now.

There is more to life, the author tells us, than the white man's technological achievements and there are truths that the white man [and woman] could learn from Mphahlele's forbears if he, the white man, would but keep an open mind:

I admire the white man's achievements, his mind that plans tall buildings, powerful machinery. ...[But] I think now the white man has no right to tell me how to order my life as a social being, or order it for me. He may teach me how to make a shirt or to read and to write, but my forbears and I could teach him a thing or two if only he would listen and allow himself time to feel. Africa is no more for the white man who comes here to teach and to control her human and material forces and not to learn (218).

Nigeria, where Mphahlele landed in September 1957, with its rejuvenating freedom and its Africanness afforded fertile ground on which he could embark on his spiritual quest. It enabled him, in short, "... to be African, to rediscover the real dimensions of my selfhood" (Manganyi, 1983:169). But Mphahlele also discovers that life in exile can lead to a

profound sense of dislocation, especially if alienation is defined as having no roots in the community. This sense of being rootless and thus of being no one can obtain even in another African country. Mphahlele, thus, tells his biographer, N. Chabani Manganyi, that writing Down Second Avenue helped him to "clear the air," "take stock," to place life in exile on a "firmer foundation" and to bring "coherence where chaos had raged" (Manganyi, 1983:163).

Even while uprooted and exiled, Mphahlele, however, remains strongly tied by the umbilical cord to the land of his birth. He still feels the African connection and the responsibility to a people he has left behind in a condition of "collective spiritual exile" (Manganyi, 1983:163). And he says of himself as a writer and educator separated in space and time from his own community, "You are not an outside observer; you are committed to the very society you criticize and commend, the tragedy and comedy of its thought and action are your tragedy and comedy" (Mphahlele, 1974:77).

Through the writing of an extended praise poem that celebrates his people, Mphahlele is able to replenish his own roots; reaffirm his commitment, feel the connection. Down Second Avenue, in short, becomes for Mphahlele a "literature of self-definition" (Mphahlele in Lindfors, 1985:28), the theme of which is the search for the lost and alienated self within the framework of his own community -- where the alien and the exile find meaning and affirmation through a humanism that is uniquely African.

I began this chapter by citing the classic black township autobiographies of two other noted black autobiographers of the 1950s, that is, Peter Abrahams and Bloke Modisane. In order better to appreciate Mphahlele's unique achievement in terms of his contribution to an "anticolonial movement" based on restoring "confidence in the native culture and tradition" and his efforts "to revive submerged mythologies ... resurrect dead

languages and ... restore old habits of ... behavior...." (Obiechina, 1990:68), it is instructive to compare his autobiography with Abrahams's' Tell Freedom (1954) and Modisane's Blame Me on History (1963). A brief comparative glance at the three writers will serve to support my contention that Mphahlele is both more concerned with documenting what Charles Larson's calls the "group-felt experience" (Larson, 1972:116) and is, at the same time, more profoundly engaged in an aesthetic and philosophic sense with resurrecting "submerged" myths and reviving African humanistic black culture and traditions with the implicit objective of reclaiming alienated black youth, unifying the community and reviving black pride, thereby helping to pave the way for Black Consciousness in South Africa.

Autobiographical writing in the 1950s in South Africa reflects both in content and form a fragmented reality and a journey toward meaning in which the search for self and its remaking is pivotal. While the choice of autobiography as a genre of protest was, as I have shown, dictated to large extent by historic contingencies, in a literary and cultural sense it was also arguably an appropriate and natural choice. It is perhaps more than coincidental, for example, that in African folktales, the "quest hero" is a popular character. In a sense each of the three autobiographic narrators fits quite naturally into the traditional mode of the African quest hero "who goes in quest of something or some ideal (in this case freedom) and usually undergoes harrowing ordeals before attaining his objective He owes his escape from disaster and defeat to personal courage, chance, divine intervention or magic" (Obiechina, 1990:27). In the case of the three autobiographers under consideration, personal courage is the common denominator and the harrowing experiences documented include descriptions of police brutality, denial of fundamental civil and human liberties, state-sponsored oppression and violence, white cruelty and indifference, cross-cultural conflicts and premature death of friends and loved ones. All three

autobiographies also resort to novelistic devices such as flashbacks, dialogue, and characterization while simultaneously evolving what later became accepted conventions of the township autobiography, including descriptions of the local bioscope, shebeens and the communal tap; as well as such major township events as weddings and funerals.

In each autobiography the narrator represents in both an allegoric and dialectic sense the larger community -- whether it be Vrededorp in the case of Abrahams, Marabastad in the case of Mphahlele or Sophiatown in the case of Modisane. Each of these townships has been bulldozed, symbolizing the spiritual and cultural demise of the community itself. The narrator personalizes and refracts the losses suffered by the community in an ongoing dialogue. Each narrator, to some degree, documents an increasing political awareness combined with a growing sense of alienation -- starting at one end of the spectrum with Peter Abrahams and ending at the other with Bloke Modisane. Political, spiritual and intellectual alienation culminates in a tension-filled flight out of South Africa either by boat, train or air and thence into political exile.

Similarly, all three autobiographers are concerned with related socio-economic themes of alienation -- ranging from fatherlessness and the breakdown of traditional values and family structure to the utter meaninglessness of a society in which the final arbiter in each and every human endeavour and relationship is that of skin pigmentation. The theme of fatherlessness is related to the parallel theme of psychological oppression and self-alienation. Fathers, it would seem, are invariably missing. For instance, Mphahlele's father is an alcoholic and abandons the family; Abraham's father dies when he is a child; Modisane's is killed in a meaningless act of township violence -- although, for all practical purposes, Bloke's father dies as a person in his son's eyes when he, powerless to resist or fight back, is

treated with contempt by a much younger police constable during a pass raid. Bloke in a sense becomes his father in this symbolic act of emasculation by the police constable in which the father is reduced in his son's eyes to a nobody. Bloke sees this as the death-knell of the father-son relationship that ultimately climaxes in his father's equally meaningless and violent death in a township murder so brutal that his father's face bears no semblance to the man Bloke once knew. When the funeral takes place, Bloke's own name by mistake appears on the coffin. This becomes for him the definitive symbol of his own lost identity:

The de-personalization of the African has been so thorough that I have no name, none of them care to know whether I have one, and since there was very little point in having a name -- in any case, I have no name, the only one I had was buried on the coffin of my father -- I adopted the label Bloke; it was a symbolic epitome of the collective thing I was made to be. The African is a collective which cannot be classified and distinguished apart, or hated apart, as an individual (Modisane, 1990:242-243).

The very title of Modisane's autobiography Blame Me on History differentiates it in degree and focus, if not in actual substance, from that of either Abrahams or Mphahlele. Modisane sees his fate as historically determined. In his irony and bitterness, he takes the self-obliterating realities of life in a black township -- which puts him as an educated black with an appreciation for Western culture at odds with other blacks, with himself and with his unfulfilled dreams -- a step further. With Western nihilism, that stands as the antithesis of Mphahlele's African humanism, Modisane declares himself a faceless, nameless "bloke," -- a nameless pawn of history, an invisible man. Modisane takes the "I am nothing" and turns it into "I am invisible."

His divided self is in essence a profound split between his intellectual, self-analyzing, self-aware persona and that of the African community. Modisane's "individuated intellectual self yearns to be accepted in the world of white

culture, but finds it impossible to sever connections completely with a subcultural ethos characterised by the jazz, bioscope and shebeens" (Ngewenya, 1989:71). This theme of the culturally colonized divided self is also, as I have demonstrated, played out in the works of Mphahlele. But the split in Mphahlele's work is rarely so profound, self-analytical and despairing (in the more Westernized sense of the alienated hero) as it is in Modisane. Mphahlele manages to bridge the crevasse, turning negation into self-affirmation. Returning to the community for self-identification and for a vision that can offer redemption both to self and community, Mphahlele begins by affirming "I am" and eventually completes the statement with "an African humanist." Modisane's mental, physical and spiritual annihilation is, by contrast, equated with the levelling of Sophiatown with which he opens his autobiography, stating that: "Nothing ... seemed to have any meaning,

all around me there was the futility and the apathy, the dying of the children, the empty gestures of the life reflected in the seemingly meaningless destruction of that life, the demolition of Sophiatown
(Modisane, 1986:117).

Thus, a major difference is seen between Mphahlele and Modisane in tone and emphasis -- which, in turn, indicates an increasing degree of alienation and bitterness, both psychological and historic, on the register of black consciousness, with Modisane representing an extreme in anger, self-loathing and alienation.

While Peter Abrahams in Tell Freedom describes a more intact community of nuclear and extended family than does Modisane in Blame Me on History, neither the community, the place, nor the people are as vividly or memorably portrayed as are those in Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue. Because the place setting shifts in Abrahams's Tell Freedom from urban to rural; from Vrededorp to Cape Town and District Six, the canvas in Abrahams's work is neither so crowded nor so immediate and central as Mphahlele's. More significantly, there is in Tell Freedom no sense at work of a black aesthetic. There is, for instance, scant evidence in the text of African metaphoric speech, proverbs or

dialect. Traditional activities and practices, such as the cooking of mealie pap or the wearing of a doek (woman's head scarf), are documented, but little else is suggested of underlying customs and values whether of the black or of the "Cape Malay" community from which Abrahams's mother sprang. Abrahams describes the problems of apartheid well and affectingly. But ultimately his solution is to go into exile in order to write books to change the minds of the white oppressor. He expresses the liberal humanist view "that perhaps life had a meaning that transcended race and colour there was the need to write, to tell freedom, and for this I needed to be personally free.... (Abrahams,1981:311).

In short, unlike Mphahlele, Abrahams does not advocate the retrieval of black myth (albeit he does take considerable pride in his Ethiopian heritage through his father's line) or the affirmation of black culture and values to empower blacks. In terms of "home" as community, it is significant that Mphahlele's title Down Second Avenue is, itself, exclusively place-centered. It does not embrace such sweeping abstractions as either history or freedom. Because of Mphahlele's intense focus on his growing up years in Marabastad, community on Second Avenue takes on a vibrant life of its own. The past becomes present in a fresh, innovative way that enables the reader to learn from it.

While one of Modisane's pre-eminent themes is that of historic determinism; one of Abrahams's is that of the liberal humanist message that change will be brought about through persuasion. Abrahams believes that by his telling of the story of the gross inequities and human rights abuses perpetrated by white supremacists, his predominantly white liberal audience will rally around the cause of freedom. While both Abrahams and Modisane tend to document, it is Mphahlele who puts the most human face on the outrages perpetrated in the name of racism, colonialism and apartheid. Indeed, it is this human face given expression by such superb communicators as tough Aunt Dora, "she [who] could be midwife to a lioness, we say in Sesotho" (Mphahlele quoted in Manganyi,1983:21), Grandmother Hibila, and Eva

that gives Down Second Avenue's protest message its secret power. While Mphahlele as African humanist narrator merges harmoniously and unselfpityingly with community; Modisane, despite his protestations of being nameless and invisible, is an ever-present, highly individual and deeply anguished narrative voice, who stands apart.

In short, Mphahlele sees the need for something more than decrying one's history or telling freedom. That is what defines his autobiography, Down Second Avenue; adds balance, depth and sweep to the pendulum's swing, distinguishing it from the others. Mphahlele's deeply rooted African humanist stance, his vivid, realistic documentation of community history and his sense of a black aesthetic are the magnets that keep the pendulum swinging back and forth; that maintain the tension and forward the plot; that add depth to character portrayal and interest to text. It is this that contributes to polarity between negation and alienation and affirmation and hope in the continuing dialogue of two selves.

Whereas in Modisane's Blame Me on History the pendulum, by contrast, tends to get stuck at the negative pole, in Abrahams's Tell Freedom the pendulum very simply lacks the power of a black aesthetic. While Abrahams's writing commands a certain old-fashioned, stately dignity in its biblical style, reliance on parallel structure, very much in the manner of Alan Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country (1948) and echoings of mission press prose, it is more beholden to Eurocentric modes. Thus, Abrahams describes the meeting and marriage of his parents:

To this street and this house came the Ethiopian.
There, he wooed my mother. There, he won her. They
married from that house. They found a house of their
own further down the street. They made of it a home of
love and laughter. From there they sent their boy and
girl to the Coloured School above Vrededorp. From
there the Ethiopian went to work on the mines each
morning (Abrahams, 1988:11).

Abrahams, however, must be credited for helping to pave the way in the evolution of a new literary genre, the black township autobiography. Writing a "full decade" before many of his contemporaries Abrahams "has been acknowledged as an obvious

influence on subsequent African writers."

Nonetheless, some critics (perhaps unfairly) do not regard Abrahams as "a part of the African literary tradition," viewing him instead as a writer who "sought only to meet Western literary demands." He is seen, in short, as someone who, unlike Mphahlele, "was hardly interested in traditional African aesthetics," and who furthermore was a "champion of Western liberalism" (Ogungbesan in Chapman, Gardner and Mphahlele, eds., 1992: 166-167).

With regard to text, Abrahams clearly had not undergone the decolonization process Mphahlele underwent. Yet thematically and structurally in the use of certain conventions and literary devices in the development of an entirely new genre, the black township autobiography, Abrahams was an important forerunner. Moreover, there are far too many similarities in episodes and conventions between the works of Abrahams and Mphahlele to overlook the indebtedness of the latter author to the former. For example, like Mphahlele's mother, Eva, Abrahams's mother also suffers a severe burn -- in this instance from boiling water while doing laundry. Her heartless white employers subsequently send her home alone without proper medical attention and with no pay. We are reminded at once of the episode in which Eva is severely burned when Moses heaves the scalding pot of hot curry at her. While these events are true-to-life, it is with their actual selection and retelling that I am concerned here. Both episodes are tied in with subsequent separations and with resultant breakdown of the family structure, one of the strongly interwoven themes of alienation documented in both the works of Modisane and Mphahlele. Indeed, it is at this juncture that Abrahams comments: "it seemed to me there is no meaning in life. Things happened and no one seemed to know why" (Abrahams, 1988:72).

Modisane, as we have seen, has already commented on such

meaninglessness. His narrative is heavily underscored by his anger and self-hatred, serving as evidence of psychological oppression in the sense of Black Consciousness -- a type of self-alienation largely missing in Abrahams's autobiography, and only sporadically in evidence in Mphahlele, who continues to insist that blacks are not just victimized, impassive objects, but are also subjects who enjoy a rich meaningful life of their own beyond apartheid. Since Modisane is writing a decade after Abrahams, we can see proof herein not only of progressive alienation in an inter-textual sense, but in an extra-textual sense as well. The progression -- as "history" continues to wreak its havoc -- applies as much to the narrators as to the texts themselves.

Thus, we become far more intimate with Modisane's psychological landscape than with either that of Mphahlele or Abrahams. Furthermore, while the prospect of community offers inspiration and succour to Mphahlele, one sees in Modisane's intense ambivalence towards whites, his promiscuity and his profound bitterness a form of self-alienation from which even the community itself seemingly cannot rescue him. Modisane's alienation strikes the reader as being ultimately too lonely, isolated, debilitating and potentially self-destructive for community to operate as an effective counterweight in the same way it does for Mphahlele. When he thinks about his past, he says, "Remembrances of that life made me feel dirty, I longed for Christ and Fiki to come and wash the corpse of my body before it is finally lowered into the grave, so that I could appear before my God clean and sanitary" (Modisane, 1990: 285). Modisane's alienation, in short, is both more Western and existential and, at the same time, closer to Black Consciousness in its interiority and psychological cast than is either Abrahams's or Mphahlele's.

Modisane unlike Abrahams does show evidence of a black aesthetic at work in his writing. His description of his discourse with Ma-Bloke over the need to pay lobola (bride price) when he and Fiki plan to marry is lively, funny and steeped in a black aesthetic and ethos. It documents one of

the themes of alienation informing Mphahlele's work -- that is the conflict between contemporary youth and traditional society. Thus, Bloke tells Ma-Bloke "There's no lobola

Mama, Fiki and I don't believe in ... Ma-Bloke, Fiki is not a cow; I won't buy her, we don't think it's right. Besides, I haven't got the money." (Modisane, 1990:256).

Sadly Bloke's marriage, like everything else in his life, also breaks down. Ultimately, when Modisane finally decides to leave South Africa for good, he turns his attention to questions of human rights and justice, much as Abrahams did. His position in the concluding passages of the text, like Abrahams's is, to define the problem in an abstract (as opposed to a concrete human and humanitarian) sense and to address its political inception. He asks: "Does a wrong become less immoral because it is written into the constitution"? Am I to believe that only white men are created equal?" (Modisane,1990:310). Thus, he defines the problems pointedly, eloquently and even unforgettably. Unlike Mphahlele, however, Modisane does not move beyond the level of protest to that of resistance. While Mphahlele not only criticizes, he affirms and his affirmation is in the form of a black aesthetic and a vision which he chooses to call African humanism: a vision that has ramifications in every realm of human endeavour -- the arts, education and politics itself.

Ultimately, Mphahlele says, and this quote bears repetition -- that the white man "may teach me how to make a shirt or to read and to write, but my forbears and I could teach him a thing or two if only he would listen and allow himself time to feel"(1989:218). Thus as an African humanist narrator caught up in the dialogue of two selves Mphahlele, unlike either Abrahams or Modisane, takes a significant and even (for the times) radical first step forward beyond that of merely defining the problem in the best tradition of protest literature. Mphahlele does this by unequivocally affirming the spiritually redemptive and healing power of a black ethos.

Thus, as poet Mongane Wally Serote has suggested is necessary in the struggle for liberation, Mphahlele has developed "two tongues, one to expose and fight against the fallacy which the oppressor creates in order to justify his position of dominance ...another to inspire the oppressed" (Serote,1990:8). Mphahlele has developed two tongues, but neither is forked. Such a development is a major step forward in the affirmation of Black Consciousness. Whites, moreover, are also invited in the inclusivist spirit of African humanism, to come along on "the journey" if they are willing to listen, learn and feel. Critic Charles Larson eloquently interprets the passage previously quoted with which Mphahlele brings Down Second Avenue to a close as meaning that: "Only when the white man is willing to learn as well as to teach can he reap the benefits of cultural syncretism" (Larson,1972:218). Accepting the invitation to do precisely that is one of the primary objectives of this dissertation. But in accepting the invitation, the critic is aware that it is essential to "resist available self-definitions and generic paradigms," while remaining "vigilantly self-reflexive, making 'our own terms' subject to change," and to continue the "journey" as an alert peripatetic reader while not falling into the mode of "tourist" (Nussbaum,1991:17).

Chapter 4: "MRS PLUM" -- A PARADIGMATIC DIALOGUE OF THEMES
OF ALIENATION AND AFRICAN HUMANISM

The violence with which the supremacy of white values is affirmed and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the ways of life and of thought of the native means that, in revenge, the native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him (43).

For a colonized people the most essential value ... is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread, and above all, dignity (44).

Perhaps unconsciously, the native intellectuals, since they could not stand wonderstruck before the history of today's barbarity, decided to back further and to delve deeper down; and, let us make no mistake, it was with the greatest delight that they discovered that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory, and solemnity. The claim to a national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate the nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture. In the sphere of psycho-affective equilibrium it is responsible for an important change in the native (210).

----- Frantz Fanon
1963

Next to Down Second Avenue, Mphahlele's novella "Mrs Plum," first published in Corner B in 1976, is his best known work and unquestionably one of his most effective and memorable pieces of fictional protest writing. It has appeared in at least three anthologies (Hodge, 1981:33) including the collection African Short Stories edited by Charles Larson (Barnett, 1976:110). Written in the post-Drum, post-Sharpeville era after the author had left Nigeria for Paris, it illustrates in its searing shock tactics and scathing depiction of the white liberal establishment in the persona of Mrs Plum the point that:

Exile released me from bondage: the knot of bitterness that had always stuck in my throat. Wholesome and purer emotions like anger became possible. I was free to be angry (Mphahlele quoted in Manganyi, 1983:195).

And while "Mrs Plum" may represent in Mphahlele's words a "fragile bridge" between his short stories and the novel (Manganyi, 1983:218), it is strong enough to sustain the full force of Mphahlele's anger in the fiery, eloquent crossing. Indeed, "Mrs Plum" is considered by critics such as Ursula Barnett to be "Mphahlele's most serious attempt to explore the relationship between white and black in South Africa (Barnett, 1983:176). The fact the chief white protagonist is in this instance a high-minded, well-meaning liberal, symbolizing a group and movement that at one time "seemed to provide an answer to South Africa's problems. ... [and] represents the culmination of the heyday of white liberal optimism and confidence " (Watson, 1982:232) adds enormous irony to a story already fraught with tension, a break-down in communication and fundamental alienation.

One of the failures of vision of white liberalism that resulted in black/white alienation and set liberals of the Mrs Plum school up as worthy objects of derision, mockery and satire, as Mphahlele states in Voices in the Whirlwind, is that

... protest within the law is in the true tradition of South African white liberalism, which has always accommodated itself in the safe capsule of legality; and that means white legality, since the laws are made by whites only (Mphahlele,1972:200).

The sanctity of the law, Mphahlele suggests, logically is called into question when it has been designed to uphold, validate and perpetuate a racist, authoritarian regime that denies people of colour their fundamental human rights. Lending further irony to this failure of liberal vision is that despite a theoretical overlap between white liberalism and black humanism where one might normally have expected a meeting point between the races, one finds instead only bitterness, anger and ultimately alienation. The dynamics of this alienating and tragic dis-connect are explored in "Mrs Plum," not only politically and culturally, but in greater psychological depth than in any of Mphahlele's previous works.

The story opens with a humorous, satiric cameo sketch accomplished in three short, punchy, introductory sentences. Immediately, the reader is apprized of what sort of patronizing liberal Mrs Plum might be and where her priorities lie. It is both what the author states in a pared down, biting economy of words and what he leaves unsaid that gives this mocking portrait its power:

My Madam's name was Mrs Plum. She loved dogs and Africans and said that everyone must follow the law even if it hurt. These were three big things in Madam's life (Mphahlele,1981:216).

Thus, while it is not unreasonable to expect that a professed African humanist might give the white liberal a more sympathetic hearing and vice versa, this cannot be the case when the liberal, like Mrs Plum, is so incredibly myopic that she fails to recognize that the law she insists one must follow "even when it hurts" (216) is morally bankrupt. In her insistence on the need to follow the law, Mrs Plum, indeed,

articulates an important precept of liberalism -- in that

... anyone who breaks the law has no right to the benefits -- security, respect, recognition in an ordered world -- that the law confers, since breaking the law threatens everybody else's right to those benefits. However, this axiom has an important corollary -- that everyone should have equal access to the same law (Ruth:1986,78).

Laurens van der Post best describes this "classic liberal double-bind" (Ruth:1986,78) in his novel In a Province: "We [whites] forbid them [blacks] the sort of life their law demands, and give them our law without the sort of life that our law demands" (1984:191). The juxtaposition of dogs, Africans and the law, in the order of values cherished by Mrs Plum underscores Van der Post's observation and is pointedly suggestive of both a patronizing attitude on the the part of the white liberal and the absence of any true understanding and compassion, let alone sense of equality, particularly when it comes to the individual person as opposed to the group abstraction or principle. How far Mrs Plum's caring (and by extrapolation that of all white liberals) extends remains an implied question throughout the story and is one of the important sub-themes of alienation.

While Mrs Plum is not as rounded a character as the story's narrator and chief black protagonist Karabo, who is employed by her as maid, she is nonetheless plausible. Indeed, one is tempted to label Mrs Plum a "flat" character since as E.M. Forster says in his Aspects of the Novel when a writer wants "to strike with direct force it is convenient for him to use 'flat' characters; characters who can be easily labelled and therefore managed" (Mphahalele quoting Forster,1962:131). And it is clearly Mphahlele's aim in this story "to strike with direct force." On the other hand, Mrs Plum does successfully pass one of the critical tests, according to Forster, for qualifying as a "rounded" character in that she is "capable of surprising in a convincing way" (Forster quoted by Chinweizu,1983:115). Here again we have the problem of the divided imagination. In a society which labels and catalogues

people by pigmentation; in effect assigning roles, writing scripts and pre-determining destinies by something so arbitrary and meaningless as skin colour, people in turn, have a tendency to become typecast.

The geographic distances set up by the Group Areas Act (1950), and the educational distances and mind control reinforced by the Bantu Education Act (1953) further lend themselves to racial stereotyping and white paranoia. Thus, it might be argued, Mrs Plum is believable precisely because she is something of a caricature of herself. Indeed, she is markedly similar to such real-life types as the English-speaking mother of South African writer Rian Malan, about whom he says: "She loved blacks, but she loved dogs, too, and I am not sure the distinction was all that clear in her mind" (Malan,1990:238). For the white liberal of the Mrs Plum school, self-deception and hypocrisy are raised to an art form -- ultimately becoming an insidious form of psychological self-alienation leading to guilt and paranoia in addition to raising roadblocks to friendships with and serving to alienate the very blacks whom she wishes to befriend and support.

While themes of alienation and African humanism are the strong glue that add cohesion to the story, "Mrs Plum" can stand on its own as a well-crafted tale with beginning, middle and end; unified by time, place and point-of-view. The fact Karabo, the black protagonist, narrates the story adds an intensity of focus that further helps connect various episodes.

Karabo herself emerges as a dynamic character, believable and empathetic, one who draws the reader immediately into the narrative. We see Karabo from the inside-out as well as the outside in as opposed to how black characters, primarily servants, are portrayed by such white liberal writers as Nadine Gordimer. As Mphahlele writes in his dissertation:

Miss Gordimer's characters do not talk or think about

these relations [with whites]. They simply feel the little world around them narrowing and crowding in on them as a result of their class prejudices, fears and doubts (Unisa,1956:75).

Gordimer was not happy about this verdict rendered by Mphahlele on, among other works, her short story entitled "Six Feet Under." When he received "a stinging and indignant letter" from Gordimer expressing her displeasure, Mphahlele, ever the humanist, is sufficiently concerned about the friendship that he lets "scholarship ... wait in abeyance" while he takes time out to write "Nadine" in order to explain (Mphahlele in Manganyi,1984:40).

By contrast to Petrus, the black "farm boy" in Six Feet of the Country (Gordimer,1987:7-20) who rarely speaks unless spoken to and then only in rather laconic one or two-sentence responses and who takes concrete action only once when he collects money for his deceased brother's exhumation, Karabo is a multi-dimensional personality whose interiority is made accessible through her first-person narrative of the story. The reader is able to get inside Karabo's head, seeing things through her eyes -- an African story, told by an African. Not only does Karabo embody the tenets of African humanism, she speaks with its voice. Possibly because of the close identification between her and the author, Karabo is arguably one of Mphahlele's most interesting and successful fictional characters. She is pro-active; rather than reactive. Her character is developed through the use of idiomatic as well as interior dialogue and in the course of the narrative she undergoes growth and change.

The multi-cultural critic likes Karabo for her unique brand of humanism -- which includes examples of community involvement, respect for elders, loyalty and compassion -- and admires her for the fact she is also a thoroughly modern woman. Karabo learns, for instance, how to assert her economic needs and is inspired early on by the leadership of her sewing teacher Lilian Ngoyi -- one of the real-life organizers of the

Federation of South African Women (Thompson,1990:209). Karabo comes to realize the truth of Ngoyi's words in a hard-hitting and realistic talk in which she tells her listeners, "A master and servant can never be friends" (Mphahlele,1987:227). Karabo also shows a growing political and social awareness and is interested in Ngoyi's vision of what the political future might hold for the majority black population. Despite her hard-headed pragmatism, Ngoyi's vision reflects the inclusiveness and generosity of African humanism as opposed to what might be viewed as a justifiable position of reverse racism on her part (had she taken such a stance) that excluded whites at the helm of government altogether.

If it is true that "on one level Lilian Ngoyi serves as a mouthpiece of Mphahlele -- her social and political goals may be taken as his" (Hodge,1981:35), then it is an indicator of Mphahlele's amazing prescience and wisdom that Ngoyi's vision is an almost identical blueprint for what is today being negotiated as a foundation for the "new South Africa." Indeed, Ngoyi's words are in line with African National Congress policy as outlined in the Freedom Charter, which states that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people" (Benson, 1987:66). Thus Ngoyi echoing the aims of the ANC Freedom Charter says:

... the world would never be safe for black people until they were in the government with the power to make laws....
We asked her questions and she answered them with wisdom....
Shall we take the place of the white people in the government?
Some yes. But we shall be more than they as we are more in the country. But also the people of all colours will come together and there are good white men we can choose and there are Africans some white people will choose to be in the government
(Mphahlele,1987:226).

By comparison, Mrs Plum's objective is merely to allow a "few" of the black majority into the government and to insure that they get "more money to do what they do for white men" (Mphahlele,1987:221) which despite her liberal stance strikes

one as being more feudal and patronizing than truly egalitarian. Indeed, Mrs Plum is, while being a liberal, not a true democrat. Like the Liberal Party itself, until 1959, she advocates a qualified franchise (Lodge,1990:87).

In his characterization of Karabo, Mphahlele breaks away from stereotypes that grow naturally out of the South African situation. On the one hand, Karabo represents the "common man" [or woman] in whose "ordinary everyday life" one can find "the real African personality" and in which there is a "dialogue between two streams of consciousness: the present and the living past" (Mphahlele,1974:70). On the other, Karabo is an example in her life of what Mphahlele means when he says in his most pragmatic voice:

Our humanism must bring about the second productive revolution. ... Instead of shouting about African values, we should translate them into educational and economic planning (Mphahlele,1974:36).

While Karabo serves as the female counterpart to the theme "Jim goes to Johannesburg" unlike either "Jim" or even Sylvia Direko in Mphahlele's earlier story "Unwritten Episode" from Man Must Live (1946), she is no naive and hapless victim from the rural areas whose morals are corrupted and who fails to make a go of it in the city. Although employed as a domestic, she is not conventional in the sense of being "obsequious and almost inconspicuous" (Hansen,1989:248). In short, Karabo

... is a vital part of the continuum from past to future in Mphahlele's African Humanism, an "answer:" to the severe problems involved in the clash of traditional -- modern, rural -- urban values (Hodge,1981:37).

Thus, Karabo affirms her humanism while asserting her economic needs. She has, for instance, already left two previous jobs in the white suburbs of Johannesburg, once in Parktown North where her employers drank too much and forgot to pay her, making it difficult to contribute to the support of her ageing parents in Phokeng and; a second time, in Belgravia where she was sexually harassed.

The first part of "Mrs Plum" details Karabo's life in Johannesburg over a period of three years, but towards the end it shifts from the painful, and sometimes humorous episodes of daily life to the tragic mode of loss and suffering. Perhaps one of the most frightening of the many forms of alienation confronted by either blacks or whites in this tale is what Mphahlele identifies as the "consuming fear of annihilation" or "spiritual extinction" (Mphahlele quoted in Manganyi, 1983: 132). There are many factors contributing to this sense of being annihilated or swallowed up. Among them is the fact that Karabo "is a migrant labourer and faces the fragmented sensibility of an exile." Furthermore, as a black migrant worker she enjoys almost no worker's rights. Even though she has had previous work experience she is, nonetheless, in the Madam's home -- in an alien space with unfamiliar routines, "unknown artifacts and procedures and [the need] ... to cope with a different classification of reality" (Ruth, 1986:83). At the same time, the Madam has even less knowledge of Karabo's home and her cultural and personal ways of being.

This, then, is the socio-political and cultural context in which the story's conflict arises. Karabo receives a letter from home informing her of her uncle's death. She requests leave, but is refused and is told if she does take leave it must be without pay. Why, Mrs Plum asks, must Karabo go since the uncle died three days previously. Because responds Karabo, "My uncle loved me very much.... [and] to take my tears and words of grief to his grave and to my aunt, madam" (255). Karabo in this statement personifies the African humanist showing compassion for her aunt and respect for her ancestors as well as love for her uncle. Karabo's humanism stands in stark contrast to Mrs Plum's materialism which preempts any deeper interest in understanding Karabo's culture or personal needs. Indeed, Mrs Plum's chief concerns appear to be her own personal convenience and the issue of money. While Mrs Plum

espouses equal rights and respect for blacks as a group, she fails to apply it at the individual level. Yet she is an activist all the while writing books, attending meetings and doubtless "verbalizing all the complaints of the blacks beautifully while skilfully extracting what suits [her] from the exclusive pool of white privileges" (Gerhart,1979:264).

In her inability to recognize Karabo's cultural, spiritual and psychological needs to grieve in ways that are both traditional and community-based as well as her rights to reasonable pay and leave as a valued employee Mrs Plum is denying Karabo a separate identity other than one of inferiority and dependency. In short, Mrs Plum suffers from a moral blind spot which enables her to espouse liberal ideals with great conviction on the stump while behaving like a feudal at home. She is an example of the failure of liberal vision insofar as "it could never provide a solution because it failed to take into consideration the African's spiritual plight" (Gerhart,1979:271).

The absence of mutual respect and lack of equality in the relationship, both at the employer-employee and personal levels, is indicated by Mrs Plum's failure to listen. In the first instance, Mrs Plum's denial of Karabo's request for leave time to attend the funeral of her much-beloved uncle illustrates Mrs Plum's ignorance of kinship practices in the African community network, which reflects an underlying lack of interest in blacks as people, despite her stated interest in promoting their well being. Since this favoured uncle is also Karabo's mother's brother, he occupies an important position in the extended family structure. Moreover, in African society, such funerals are an important rite of passage. However, Mrs Plum refuses to listen or understand, turning a deaf ear to Karabo's request for leave. Karabo then does the unexpected. She leaves.

Thus alienation takes the form of cross-cultural conflict, the self-centered materialism of the white and a total break-down in understanding and communication due to conflicting social, economic and personal needs. But in the end, it is Karabo who triumphs, for Mrs Plum in an unprecedented gesture drives herself all the way to Phokeng, finding a villager to guide her to Karabo's house. Mrs Plum then swallows her pride and asks Karabo to return, although she offers no apology to Karabo. While her motives are, no doubt, to some extent self-serving, there is a glimmer of humanity in Mrs Plum's implicit need after the mysterious disappearance of her two dogs Monty and Malan for human companionship. At the same time, she is beginning to see Karabo in a different light after Karabo herself establishes boundaries in their relationship.

Karabo's self-empowering departure and Mrs Plum's drive to the village are important first steps in the promise of a changing new relationship. Thus, when Karabo eventually agrees to return, Mrs Plum "was very much pleased and looked kinder than I have ever known her" (261). But Karabo does not immediately agree. Instead, she establishes a set of guidelines, thus asserting her own human needs and employee rights and managing the negotiation. When Karabo eventually does agree to return to work, she does so only after first, consulting with her parents as a courtesy and in the manner of a well-brought-up African showing respect to elders; and second, negotiating both a higher salary and liberal leave time.

"Mrs Plum," therefore, is a story not merely of alienation and suffering under a brutal system, but of survival and hope. Karabo overcomes alienation by affirming African values and adopting some Western ones -- identifying and clearly stating her needs and rights and actively seeking economic empowerment. Mphahlele through her and other

liberated characters, such as Lilian Ngoyi, gives flesh, bones and voice to a form of political resistance involving cultural affirmations expressed in the world of the arts and humanities. Indeed, the episode just described is illustrative of Mphahlele's belief stated in his own dissertation that

there are a great number of things in the traditional social codes of the African -- also reflected in his political organization -- which it would be a pity to lose. There are beautiful behaviour patterns within the family, in public gatherings, during festivals like communal harvesting and so on. These, together with ... the whole structure of African traditional life which places the accent on "being" -- could tone down and supplement the white man's highly acquisitive urges (Unisa, 1956; 45).

Clearly Mrs Plum could stand to learn something more about African traditional life and would also benefit by having her "acquisitive urges" toned down as well by placing the accent on "being" rather than always doing. Apartheid has also robbed her of her own Western humanism and warped her moral fibre. Karabo on the other hand has clearly profited by learning not only from Lilian Ngoyi, but quite possibly from Mrs Plum as well to be a bit more acquisitive and to articulate her needs, personal and economic. It is a promising symbiotic exchange that stands to enlarge both participants and might even be viewed allegorically as a recipe for a national melting pot in which the whole is greater and richer than the sum of its parts.

"Mrs Plum" is a story charged with bluntness and anger and it anticipates and affirms Black Consciousness in that through the example of Karabo it interlinks consciousness of self with black pride and emancipation, while affirming the black community's "value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook on life" (Thompson quoting Biko, 1990:212). Black Consciousness, according to Steve Biko who founded the movement in South Africa, "implies a desire to engage people in an emancipatory process, in an attempt to free one from a situation of bondage" (Biko, 1979:141). Biko believed that part of this process called for making a break with white liberals,

especially those pressing blacks for dialogue. In addition, he believed blacks were oppressed psychologically and were in a state of self-alienation as well as being oppressed by external forces such as exploitative labour conditions (Ibid:22), of which Karabo and millions like her serve as a case study.

Since Black Consciousness came into its own in South Africa in the early 1970s (Gerhart,1979:259-284) and "Mrs Plum" was published in the late 1960s, the novella is arguably on the cutting edge of the Black Consciousness literary movement. Indeed, it may accurately be viewed as an early pioneering expression of black pride and consciousness, one that exercises greater restraint, without necessarily sacrificing greater effect, than is seen for instance, in the raw wounds and gun-shot expletives that characterize the early works of poet Mongane Wally Serote -- but a strong and unequivocal expression of black pride, nonetheless. Jane Watts states that the "evolution of black consciousness in South Africa" owes much to "the ideas broadcast long before by Ezekiel Mphahlele" and that Mphahlele's

exploration of the function of culture ran so closely parallel to the practical aspirations of the black consciousness writers that it is difficult not to assume that a number of them had read his critical writings, banned though they were (Watts,1989:86).

But Mphahlele is never just an ideologue -- the resistance of the alienated writer is balanced by the affirmation of the African humanist. In "Mrs Plum" is found "the ironic meeting between protest and acceptance;" (Mphahlele,1959:217) between Africa and the West -- a meeting point that is to some extent internalized in the person of Karabo and in her reclaiming of self. However, this internalization process is preceded by a disturbing identity crisis, lending support to Steve Biko's idea that psychological oppression leads to fragmentation, loss of identity and subsequent self-alienation. Karabo, sickened by "the smell of madam" and the "dirt from Madam's body," throws away all the cosmetics she owns that are the same as Madam's (thereby

symbolically affirming her own self-worth, separate identity and value system) and finally looks into the mirror and wonders "is this Karabo, this?" (247-8).

Here we have the alienation and "spiritual extinction" caused by the sense of loss of one's personal identity. This loss occurs in part because there is so little that confirms or acknowledges either a servant's or a black's identity in the first place and so much that, on the contrary, diminishes it. This terrifying and diminishing sense of loss of personal identity is closely related to the break-down of communication between black and white; employer and employee (of which there is either too much and it is one-sided, didactic and superior; or too little). Thus, there are failures in communication between Mrs Plum and Karabo, Dick and Mrs Plum, Kate and Karabo, Karabo and other English-speaking blacks, and whites and blacks in general. Such failures lead to alienation which in turn leads to stereotypical thinking which results in conflict, violence and fear.

Mrs Plum, for instance, frequently underestimates or fails to notice Karabo's wit, humour and grasp of issues. While she readily defends Karabo's and black people's right to have a say in government, she also patronizingly assumes a need to speak on their behalf. The respect articulated becomes an abstract principle rather than an internalized reality. Thus, Mrs Plum, as her daughter Kate tells Karabo, is a member of Black Sash who also writes books and holds English classes for servants and who attends many meetings on behalf of Karabo's people. Karabo, in turn, wonders why Kate's mother finds it necessary to speak for her people who

... are in Phokeng far away. They have got mouths, I say. Why does she want to say something for them? Does she know what my mother and what my father want to say?
(221)

This tongue-in-cheek observation was echoed nearly two decades later ("Mrs Plum" was written in Paris in the early 1960s) by Steve Biko who said that liberal whites pressing blacks

for dialogue "are the greatest racists because they refuse to credit us with intelligence to know what we want" (1979:299). Mrs Plum fits the description. She is an example of the sort of white liberals who, Nadine Gordimer asserts, see but do not see and who "don't want to be boss (or baas, rather)" but who "have become used to being bossy" in their role as tutors and guardians and as spokesmen (Gordimer,1988:35) on behalf of Africans as a group to enjoy free expression and the franchise (albeit qualified).

It is noteworthy that Mrs Plum is not only a typical "bossy" white liberal activist, but she is also the author of books and tracts, which, it is clear, she is free to write and distribute at her pleasure unlike her black counterparts. There may be a subliminal need at work here for Mphahlele to twit the white liberal writer who, as he points out in his essays Voices in the Whirlwind (1972), "can still get away with a lot in South Africa. A black man who wrote the same things ... who represented the same liberal and egalitarian ideas, would most likely be banned" (Mphahlele,1972:214).

Mphahlele, writing in the early 1970s, further comments that while it was true that restrictions were placed on travel by Alan Paton and Athol Fugard, their works were not banned. Nor was Nadine Gordimer restricted, although two of her books were banned. Nadine Gordimer, addressing the censorship issue in a talk presented in 1980, herself refers to the release from banning of her novel Burger's Daughter along with Andre Brink's A Dry White Season and a volume (just in time for Easter, wryly notes Gordimer) by Afrikaans writer Etienne le Roux. These releases were a part of a new "reform" strategy in censorship. However, the Censorship Act remained in place, unaltered on the statute books. As Gordimer remarks the release from banning of books by liberal whites carried the "sinister implication(s)" that white liberals "can be bought off by special treatment" since books by blacks were not being accorded similar treatment (Gordimer, 1988: 250-251). Such inequities feeding into intellectual apartheid no doubt aggravated Mphahlele's own

personal sense of disaffection, frustration and alienation. Thus, he has a certain amount of perverse pleasure poking fun at Mrs Plum's writing endeavors. Karabo, for instance, wants to know why her madam is "always writing on the machine" (221) and Dick, the garden man, would sometimes do humorous imitations of Madam at the table when writing (233). Mrs Plum, as a symbol, takes the flak for Black Sash, members of the white liberal writing establishment and possibly even Mrs. Hoernle, a prominent liberal who played a part in Mphahlele's dismissal from Orlando High, and who unwittingly (one hopes) but in her "liberal arrogance" (Manganyi, 1983:104) provided the smoke and mirrors to cover what was essentially a witch hunt to get rid of Mphahlele after his protest against the "Bantu Education Act."

This then, the theme of the alienated writer, is but one of several significant examples of themes of alienation -- contextual and external that serve as catalysts for subsequent inter-textual themes of alienation. The boiling anger and frustration Mphahlele no doubt feels is vented like steam off a pressure valve in the story and person of Mrs Plum, the white liberal book-writing, political activist invariably operating within the letter of the law. Ironically, Mrs Plum as a character is just the sort of person in real life whom white readers are most inclined to admire -- high-minded, hard-working, devoted to a cause.

However, it is the glimpse through the keyhole that reveals the shocking truth behind the public image -- even though this view is a symbolically restricted one just as Karabo's own view of Mrs Plum is limited by misunderstanding, unequal status and a relationship of close proximity in which nonetheless Karabo is at best nothing more than what Karen Hansen in her book by the same title refers to as a "distant companion" (1989). The keyhole as a symbol of black/white alienation

... is an extraordinarily rich metaphor with complex implications to do with spatial access and spatial control, containment and penetration, mysteries and insight, and of course the channelling of vision, partial vision and perspective (Ruth, 1986:76).

Clearly, Karabo does not know the person behind the madam (although she has more insights on this score than her employer does about her) just as the madam does not know or understand the person behind the maid. But the glimpse into truth the reader eventually obtains through the keyhole suggests that behind superficial appearances of normalcy lies a sick reality.

Then, come the shock tactics that galvanize the reader into a more probing assessment of the story and its deeper meaning. Because Mphahlele is notably restrained in the use of sex and violence throughout his writing, there is additional impact to the reader's riveting glimpse through the keyhole where she/he makes the voyeuristic and disturbing discovery that Mrs Plum is, in fact, masturbating with her dog Malan.

Bestiality was the last thing the reader had come to expect or was prepared for, especially from the exemplary Mrs Plum. After the high-voltage shock, comes the explosive belly laugh -- at an author who pulls off rather effectively what amounts to the literary equivalent of a ribald practical joke and gets away with it. This is the act of a lettered and humane revolutionary with a down-to-earth sense of humour who does not throw bombs, but who chooses to make his points in other ways. After laughter comes the shuddering after shock in the chilling realization that we have reached what Ruth describes as

... a realm laced with the evidence of psychosis. The paranoia that whites show over their pets and which leads to Dick's dismissal is psychologically consistent with psychosis. Mphahlele has structured the story in terms of recent psychoanalytic theory. From an era of neurosis we have been moved to a concern with the narcissistic phase marked by images of mirrors and cosmetics and ultimately masturbation, characterized by rapid reversals from one side of the keyhole to the other, which is followed by paranoia (1986:82).

According to modern psychiatry the causation of such ritualized, narcissistic, compulsive-obsessive psychoneuroses may include not only deep-seated inner conflict, but also socio-economic and cultural factors. Mrs Plum is clearly caught in the grip of an irreconcilable inner conflict between her strong desire to have the competitive edge as "baas" and her equal, but contradictory

wish to gratify her desire for "belongingness," in this instance with the black majority whose cause she champions. There is, moreover, a strong, anxiety-ridden conflict at work between Mrs Plum's head and her heart -- what she believes and what she feels; what she professes in terms of egalitarian liberal values of "love," "brotherhood" and "justice" and what she actually does, which is made even more complex by the guilt she feels as a privileged white. Additional layers of tension are added by cross-cultural conflicts and lack of understanding between whites and blacks, in this instance as represented by Mrs Plum and Karabo, due in part to class differences and geographic separation. Inner conflict and socio-economic and cultural fault lines are further stressed by the ever-present potential for violence and political instability that infuses the social climate with an insistent low grade tension.

Neo-Freudians such as Erich Fromm and Karen Horney aver there is a direct link between culture and personality disturbance. Thus, ethnic groups, organizations, class position, urbanization, dramatic changes in social codes and "prejudicial attitudes toward minority groups affect the development and content of neuroses." The very fact Mrs Plum does not believe blacks should govern or be allowed an equal franchise suggests the presence of deep-seated bias that takes the form of white patronage and ultimately of narcissistic neurosis as Mrs Plum turns her inner conflicts and her frustrated desire to belong and to care for someone inward. In Mrs Plum's efforts to resolve her conflict-induced anxiety, she falls prey to obsessive-compulsive responses that focus on "sexually perverse impulses," and which in turn induce fear (Trosman, 1967:296-298). To relieve this fear she engages in the aberrant ritualized act with Malan.

Of course, the not-so-coincidentally named dog Malan symbolizes apartheid, taking its name from D. F. Malan who claimed that Afrikaners had been "divinely appointed to their task" of governance of South Africa and that they could lay "historical claim" to having founded "South African civilization" (de Villiers, 1987:247). In view of such a mind-set, it is not

surprising that Mphahlele feels inspired to resurrect national myths and African values in the form of African humanism. To counter the myth of Afrikaner nationalism and its claim to civilization, there was a need to affirm an equally powerful and empowering myth that affirmed in equally unequivocal terms the civilization being denied to blacks. White liberals were inclined to be so entrenched in abstract ideals on behalf of the group that they tended to lose sight of the individual black and his purely human needs. In the process liberal whites tended, moreover, to lose sight of their own essential humanity, as we see both literally and figuratively in the story of Mrs Plum. The Afrikaner nationalists had forfeited their own claims to an humanistic culture -- since to do violence to the other is to do violence to one's own humanity. In effect, Mphahlele steps into the void by affirming the self-same values that blacks have been denied and that whites have lost. Thus the emphasis is placed on caring, compassion, kinship, the valuing of people over things -- whether material goods that fostered the greed of apartheid economics or abstractions of the sort to which liberals like Mrs Plum are wedded, frequently at the cost of "heart".

It is also not surprising Mphahlele was attracted to a cosmology that would establish his separate identity from the Christian church with which white liberalism as well as Afrikaner nationalism was associated. Finally, it is to Mphahlele's lasting credit as thinker and visionary that he recognized in the retrieval of African myths, values, and modes of behaviour a means to reclaim history as well as alienated black youth and the rural masses. Beyond its cultural and historic appeal, Mphahlele sees African humanism as a powerful unifying tool serving "to critique" the barbarism of the West and the "the new order" (Bravo, 1991:60) of state apartheid while re-affirming the ancient indigenous "civilization" and the rich culture of Africa. In a very real, positive and historically significant sense, Mphahlele becomes himself a cultural nationalist and liberator, well in the vanguard of such other notable political leaders and thinkers as Steve Biko.

In "Mrs Plum," Mphahlele has made a strong enduring political statement that is heavily underscored with Black Consciousness thought and aesthetics. The fact that Mrs Plum, a white liberal, masturbates with Malan, symbolically suggests that she and, by extension, the white liberal establishment are masturbating with the system -- lending it credibility through their outspoken but measured criticism, their organized protest within the letter of the law, their advocacy of a qualified franchise, and their implicit endorsement of "universal" Eurocentric values, while never actually posing any serious threat to the system's continued existence. As J.M. Coetzee's magistrate suggests, "I was the lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy" (1980:135).

Thus we glimpse the white liberal through the keyhole and find a pervert and hypocrite -- and the view although restricted is shocking and unexpected. It is the jaundiced, unvarnished view as seen through the keyhole (for contact has always been limited between black and whites) by an alienated and angry but never totally humourless or uncaring author. The shock tactics work effectively to make the reader reflect about the warped perversity of the white liberal's stance as well as the brutish immorality of the system of apartheid symbolized by Malan and the equally perverted coupling of the Afrikaaner nationalist and the English-speaking liberal.

While Ursula Barnett dismisses the episode of bestiality with a fastidious shrug (perhaps of distaste or denial) as being "completely out of character" (Barnett, 1976:109), such dismissal is tantamount to endorsing as true the predictably stereotypical character of the do-gooder upright white liberal. But the yardstick of consistency, predictability and normalcy does not necessarily apply in the South African context. The author seems to be telling his reader here that where the system is sick and dysfunctional; the people frequently are as well. Deviant or excessive behavior is symptomatic of the alienation that afflicts the oppressor as much as if not more than the oppressed.

The issue of dogs in this story is critical to the understanding that the conflict and alienation that exists between blacks and whites affects not only questions of fundamental civil liberties, which are Mrs Plum's chief concern, but the whole of the black person's humanity. It is the hurtful rejection and debasement that is felt when black men are called "boy;" when there are "dogs with names and men without" (234) and when dogs, with maddening perversity enjoy greater luxury and privilege than people do. Indeed, white farmers have been known to kill farm labourers over the death of dogs and to receive light sentences while the uncompensated widow is left as the sole means of support of several small children (Tsedu, Sowetan 1991 April 11:6).

Thus, in winter when white suburbanites from Johannesburg travel to Durban for the holidays, dogs in effect become as Karabo wryly observes, "the masters and madams. You could see them walk like white people in the streets. Silent but with plenty of power" (Mphahlele, 1987:238). That kind of conduct by white liberals toward dogs followed to its logical conclusion leads to perversion.

Mphahlele describes in realistic detail the rich, fat, be-ribboned comforts enjoyed by Mrs Plum's Monty and Malan. "Mrs Plum" itself the bridge between Mphahlele's short stories and his first novel, The Wanderers (1971), was in part inspired by watching the "French upper class ladies with their pets [who] could, in a way that Nigerians could not, remind me about the dehumanising potential of class privilege" (Manganyi, 1983:218). In this case, class and colour are inextricably linked. And while it is not stated, it is clearly understood that such luxuries as are enjoyed by Mrs Plum's dogs are not often enjoyed by the average black person, let alone by Dick, the gardener, whose job it is to look after Monty and Malan and the garden. Dick fears whites, but he is also "long hearted" (231) and, recognizing the fundamental absurdity in the situation, he knows how to laugh. Dick says to Karabo that

...one day those white people will put ear rings and toe rings and bangles on their dogs. That would be the day he would leave Mrs Plum. For, he said, he was sure she would want him to polish the rings and bangles with brasso (232).

A part of the perversion that occurs in the disproportionate distribution of wealth, privilege and power is a corruption of values in all areas of life. There is no sense of proportion or of appropriate priorities. There is no common sense. There is no heart. There is instead a desperate yearning for genuine affection which has been somewhere lost in the pursuit of material goods. Thus dogs are lavished with the affection of children in a manner that is both funny and grotesque. The issue of how whites treat blacks as compared to how they treat their dogs is raised several times in Down Second Avenue and finally and definitively is dealt with in "Mrs Plum."

If the keyhole is a metaphor for alienation, the frequent mention of "heart" and use of such idiomatic phrases as "long-hearted" to describe Dick equally stands as a metaphor for African humanism -- so that metaphoric language as well as style, characters and themes, all reflect the tension and polarity between alienation and African humanism that are the warp and woof of the text and that are extant in society at large.

Norman Hodge suggests that indeed "heart" is the "dominant image of the story." While the reader only knows how Mrs Plum and Kate think, we know both how Karabo thinks and how she feels about events as they transpire. Mrs Plum and Kate are less than human because they only think; Karabo, on the other hand, is fully human because she has a heart as well as a mind. Apartheid itself is heartless, dehumanizing and inhumane. The answer, the author seems to say, is to fight back affirming the very humanity being denied, which ironically exists in greater abundance with blacks than whites. Though I cannot agree with Hodge that the "heart" symbol serves as the only didactic function in the story, it is true that the story

does "center" on the "heart symbol more than any other, including the obverse symbol of the keyhole. As Hodge notes

... those who have a "heart that can carry a long way", pelo e telle, show a basic humanism through their compassion for others; those who have a "short heart" or "no heart no sense" are dehumanized, more like machines than human beings. When Dick is unjustly sent away by Mrs Plum, who fears that he might poison her dogs, Karabo has "an open sore" in her heart; ironically, Dick is one of the innocents of the world, one who has a "long heart". One might say that for Mphahlele "heart" represents African humanism, the only alternative to violence (Hodge, 1981:42).

Thus, the pendulum swings back and forth between the "heart" of African humanism and the "keyhole" of alienation, each of which serves a "didactic function" as well as an artistic one. It is characteristic of Mphahlele's humanism that the pendulum is consistently more heavily weighted in the direction of "heart," to which there are repeated references in the text itself.

In addition to racial, spiritual and psychological forms of alienation, blacks, as the story suggests, have long been treated as dispossessed, displaced aliens in their own country. Thus, they are caught in the limbo of being deprived of productive farm land in the country; while they are also unwelcome in the city unless they have verifiable jobs and carry one of the hated "daampasses" (damn passes). So, when the police come around to search servants' quarters, looking for men without passes (241), Mrs. Plum, in a rather humorous episode showing considerable pluck, turns the garden hose on them. She is then sentenced either to pay a fine or go to jail. The irony here is that Mrs Plum decides to suffer out a jail term over so trivial a matter because a principle is involved.

However, she does not later hesitate to fire Dick whom she mistrusts and fears will harm the dogs -- this, on the basis of a rumour circulating that servants had plans to poison white people's dogs (and possibly even the dogs' owners as well) -- indicative of the level of paranoia among Johannesburg

whites who felt threatened by the very system designed to insure their privilege and comfort. In this instance, the human and very real needs of the individual black person, on behalf of whose community Mrs Plum spent time in jail, is totally ignored. In Mrs Plum's book, principles are more important than people. However, this time not only humanitarian concerns, but also the liberal principle of "innocent until proven guilty" is sacrificed.

Karabo, under close questioning from her employer, reassures Mrs Plum that Dick is, in fact, a "long-hearted" person, a genuinely good, big-hearted man who is totally harmless. Karabo's assurances, however, carry no weight. Mrs Plum is so caught up in causes and so unaware of people as individuals that she fails to notice that Dick is the sort who sends home all his pay in order to support a much beloved younger sister. Because she is so "heart-less"; because principles concern her more than people, Mrs Plum represents the very antithesis of the African humanist for whom people are paramount to places and things.

One of the most poignant episodes in the novella -- an episode that is the very paradigm of themes of alienation and African humanism -- reads like a case history of the devastating socio-economic and cultural impact of apartheid, verifying the truth of Frantz Fanon's statement that "for a colonized people the most essential value ... is ... the land which will bring them bread, and above all, dignity" (1963:44). Karabo's friend Chimane who works as a maid next door falls pregnant and resorts to a fly-by-night abortionist in the black township of Alexandra because she cannot afford both to support her ageing parents -- who are now totally dependent on her earnings since they no longer own their own small plot of land -- and keep the child. Thus, Chimane's parents have been denied their dignity and Chimane her own child. In the old days, the grandparents would have cared for such a child on their small plot. Karabo listens, supports and

cares. She also takes time out of her own limited leave to pay Chimane a visit at the abortionist in Alexandria, a harrowing experience.

Karabo, in short, exemplifies the compassion of the practising African humanist; just as she did previously in gossip exchanged with Chimane over the back fence, providing news round-ups of people at home -- mentioning father, mother, sisters, teachers, friends -- that illustrates the inclusiveness of African society which is "implicit in all tenets of African humanist thought" along with "mutual aid, acceptance ... co-operativism, egalitarianism, ... respect for human dignity, respect for age and for authority and hospitality" (Meebelo, 1973:11). Karabo demonstrates the tenet of mutual aid and co-operativism when she collects money to help Chimane pay for the abortionist in Alexandria. Karabo's humanism is juxtaposed to the selfishness displayed by Chimane's employer who forces her own mother-in-law to cook on separate facilities and gives the cat preference in the use of the only chair in one of the living areas.

Mphahlele gives a grimly realistic description of Chimane's abortion as well as an explanation for its underlying causes, which is both an indictment of the system of apartheid as well as the skewed priorities of the white liberal of the Mrs Plum school. The painful and dangerous procedure which involves the use of a long, sharp needle in order as Chimane's aunt puts it for "a worm to cut the roots" and for which no anaesthetic is provided causes Karabo to swear in compassion on the "spirits of our forefathers" (250). Just as Chimane is a victim of the system, the township with its lawless tsotsi culture is another of its products and helps to set the stage. Karabo describes how she finds Chimane in bed

.... in that terrible township where night and day are full of knives and bicycle chains and guns and the barking of hungry dogs and of people in trouble. I held my heart in my hands. She was in pain and her face, even in the candlelight, was grey (249).

As previously noted, in the old days when Chimane's parents still owned a small plot of land,⁹ they would have been able to provide for Chimane's child, sparing Chimane both the pain and the indignity of her loss, but no longer is this the case. Moreover, it is clear that Chimane is exploited and powerless, herself, as an underpaid worker. Thus, are seen the far-reaching and devastating socio-economic effects of apartheid, which, in turn, lead to a break-down in personal values and family structure. That evening Mrs Plum and Kate discuss the prospect of a plan by whites to purchase a dog cemetery so dogs like "Monty and Malan could be sure of a nice burial" (250). In short, blacks must suffer economic deprivation, the loss of human dignity, even the loss of a child's life because the land was taken from them, but dogs will be buried on precious urban land in posh pet cemeteries -- a situation surely as warped and perverse as Mrs Plum's act of bestiality.

Karabo experiences both alienation and friendship in the course of her "growing up" as a domestic working for whites in the metropolis of Johannesburg. Initially, it appears that she and Mrs Plum's daughter, Kate, might become friends. They are the same age and there is a seeming rapport. But the employee/employer relationship and the unequal levels of education as well as the fact that Kate and Karabo are attracted to the same young black doctor which makes Kate seem like a "thief" to Karabo; like "a fox that falls upon a flock of sheep at night" (237) -- all prevent the realization of true friendship. In short, the romantic conflict as well as socio-economic and intellectual alienation between Karabo and Kate appears for the foreseeable future too great a chasm to be easily and immediately bridged by age and mutual liking.

An unbridgeable distance also exists with the English-speaking blacks Mrs Plum entertains who are better educated and from a different socio-economic class than Karabo. Here is still another stratum of alienation -- that of

black on black, stemming from social, economic and educational origins rather than racial ones. Karabo, being sensitive and intelligent, is aware of the discrepancy and under a more equitable system she realizes she, too, might have enjoyed the benefits of an education and a better life and, perhaps, even the love she now longs for. As it is, she knows she is no match for the young black doctor she likes and admires. In this area, she can never compete with Kate. The pain of Karabo's alienation becomes almost palpable as she says:

I shall never forget that night, as long as I live. He spoke kind words and I felt my heart grow big inside me. It caused me to tremble. There were several other visits. I knew that I loved him, I could never know what he thought of me, I mean as a woman and he as a man. But I loved him, and I still think of him with a sore heart. Slowly I came to know the pain of it. Because he was a doctor and so full of knowledge and English I could not reach him (236).

Sorrow, however, is balanced by laughter; pain and loss by affirmation and caring. Another key identifying feature of the African humanist way of life is, indeed, hospitality -- generosity and sharing, whether in good fortune or bad. As Meebelo notes:

Hospitality, by implication, is a negation of selfishness. It was part of the general communalist social code in the traditional society and the altruism which was manifest in African hospitality among other aspects, impressed the European observer (1973:7).

There is irony, humour and survivor strategy seen in the manner in which some of the aforementioned tenets of African humanism were adapted to the urban setting in the context of the grave economic disparities that existed as a result of apartheid. Despite everything, Africans found ways to express their joie de vivre and their humanistic belief that "I am because you are because we are;" in short, to practice ubuntu. To be inhospitable in the African humanist world view is to be selfish in the way that Chimane's employers were selfish towards their mother-in-law. Such selfishness, in the African humanist view, is tantamount to immorality and is contemptible, especially when directed at elders and/or relatives. Perversions of values, however, occurred on both sides of the

racial barricades -- some with serious consequences and some with humorous, understandable, and possibly even, applaudable ones.

Thus, one is amused, for instance, when "home-girl" Naomi's boyfriend who enjoys a winning streak at the races decides to share his good fortune by entertaining his friends royally with sweets, soft drinks only (so things do not get too far out of hand) and gramophone records featuring pennywhistle music and singing by the likes of Miriam Makeba at his employer's home while they are off on holiday. He welcomes his guests with a speech befitting an African humanist aware of old ways and new and in a purely African idiom:

... now my brothers and sisters enjoy yourselves. At home I should slaughter a goat for a feast and thank our ancestors. But this is town life and we must thank them with tea and cake and all those sweet things. I know some people think I must be so bold that I could be midwife to a lion that is giving birth, but enjoy yourselves and have no fear (241).

Time after time the reader is allowed to see the difference between "a society that reifies systems at the expense of humans" (Ruth, 1986:67) and that subsequently pays the price in loneliness, conflict and alienation and a society that does just the opposite and enjoys the benefits of mutual support, love, fun, laughter and caring -- even and especially in the midst of great privation and great pain.

In short, "Mrs Plum" is nothing less than a fictive treatise on themes of alienation and African humanism. The alienation experienced by whites is identified with the totality of their value systems and beliefs. It is internal as well as external. Relatives, for instance, are treated with selfish disregard; dogs are more important than people; principles are glorified, while individuals are treated as expendable. We see the difference between white alienation and black humanism in the interaction between generations and family members as illustrated by Karabo's relationship with her parents and the fact

There is harmony between the two generations which does

not exist between Kate and Mrs Plum, nor between Chimane's employers and their mother-in-law. Nor has Karabo been estranged from her family and rural background by her years in Johannesburg. She goes to the city with certain fixed values of right and wrong which act as a foundation for her growth in the story, regardless of environment (Hodge,1981:37).

In The African Image Mphahlele differentiates between the Afrikaner who dislikes blacks as a group but tolerates the individual so long as he knows his place and the Englishman who accepts the group but despises the individual (Mphahlele, 1962:42). Indeed, the Afrikaner's attitude toward the group helps explain the "laager mentality" based on the fear of extinction and being under siege by the swartgevaar (black danger), in short, of being swallowed up by the overwhelming black majority. But being African himself the Afrikaner is better able to maintain a certain easy rapport with individual blacks and, even in a paternalistic fashion, to treat his servant with decency. The Englishman, on the other hand, with his class consciousness and his cultural insularity, exhibits a more conflicted and even, alas, hypocritical approach to blacks as seen in that of Mrs Plum. The Briton, Mphahlele avers, defends the rights of the group against discrimination, yet finds it difficult to relate to the black on a purely personal level, as an individual. Yet it is contradictory and illogical to support group rights, while maintaining an attitude of superiority and failing inherently to respect the essential humanity of those individuals whose cultures and skins differ. (Such inner conflicts as this led to Mrs Plum's psychoneurotic episode.) From the black perspective, the Englishman, states Mphahlele, is perceived as "maintaining a tacitly superior pose in his dealing with me as an individual. I think he despises and distrusts me" (Mphahlele,1962:42).

This conflict between white liberal beliefs as ideals and their actualized expression in human interactions is one of the central themes of alienation in Mrs Plum. It is also a manifestation of what is clearly Mphahlele's own frustration at his inability to "dynamite his way in" when it comes to getting to know the Englishman on a purely human and personal level.

The conflict, moreover, may help explain the gulf between professions of liberal sentiments and the relative failure, on the part of the white liberal establishment, to mobilize in any long-term, meaningful and effective manner against the regime during high apartheid. In short,

... abhorrence of the individual seems perverse in those who espouse liberalism, which has as its cornerstone the rights and protection of the individual (Ruth,1986:80).

Thus, the story of Mrs Plum concludes with this meaningful and supremely ironic exchange between Karabo and Mrs Plum:

Mrs Plum says to me she says, you know, I like your people, Karabo, the Africans.
And Dick and me, I wondered.

White alienation because of such contradictions is cosmic, existential and lonely. Whites may enjoy great luxury and privilege, but, suggests Mphahlele in the allegoric tale of "Mrs Plum," they live under a social system that serves to pervert rather than promote morality. (Indeed, "Mrs Plum" is the unforgettable symbol of that perversion.) Their greed and materialism isolates whites and they have lost their ability to recognize another because they are out-of-touch with their own humanity. Blacks, on the other hand, are alienated largely because of external factors, but they have not lost touch with their quintessential human values, in short with their African humanism. By continually juxtaposing the two opposite and parallel themes of alienation and African humanism Mphahlele achieves balance, tension and meaning as well as humour; writing memorable literature of protest without ever having to resort to polemic or self-pity. Mphahlele, thus, "sets up a certain rhythmic pattern" in the view through the keyhole

... of the white world as impersonal, sterile, estranged, abstract, a world of economically independent individuals [which] is contrasted with the black world of communal support, birth and death, practical issues and individual economic dependence (Ruth,1986:82).

In conclusion, "Mrs Plum" stands as one of Mphahlele's most definitive statements on African humanism, as both a philosophy and as a way of life manifested in the characters of

Lilian Ngoyi, Karabo and Dick, among others. In the words of Frantz Fanon, Mphahlele, the author, has thus managed in his writing to "delve deeper down" and lay claim to and rehabilitate a part of a "national culture" (Fanon,1963:210). By the end of the story, Karabo has similarly reclaimed her own sense of personal identity, serving as a model and an inspiration for thousands like her. Her equilibrium has been restored as a result of personal growth and change and of identifying and affirming values that are uniquely those of a self-professed African humanist.

The author himself was pleased enough with his success in this area that he wrote in a letter to Ursula Barnett that he regarded "Mrs Plum" as "the best thing I ever pulled off" (Barnett,1976:110). As Norman Hodge notes, "Mrs Plum" probably comes as close as any fiction Mphahlele has written to providing an "index of the writer's tone and how he views human behavior" (Hodge quoting Mphahlele,1981:33).

Mphahlele's elation over "Mrs Plum" is well deserved. Not only did he write a beautifully crafted story, with strong narrative line, believable and interesting characters, dialogue that crackles and serves to advance the narrative and shed light on characters, but he has also written a piece that is stamped with the historic imprint of the time. He has, in depicting inter-racial and class struggles between Mrs Plum and Karabo and between Karabo and educated blacks "link [ed] individual[s] to the social whole" and created "'representative'" characters that "incarnate(s) historical forces without thereby ceasing to be richly individualized" (Eagleton in Kaplan,1986:550). In "Mrs Plum," Mphahlele has produced a story that in the Marxist sense both reflects and is a product of its "social and historical milieu." He has also in the Platonic sense created a moral vision in which the aim is to teach (Beckson & Gantz,1990:51-52). Moreover, he has accomplished these ends without sacrificing artistry or his uniquely African humanist voice. This, indeed, is a major achievement.

The story as an index to how Mphahlele views the human condition suggests an author, as he himself has periodically stated, with a strongly optimistic streak laced with a deep pessimism. African humanism, as a world view is essentially optimistic and in "Mrs Plum," it triumphs over forces of alienation. Primarily because Karabo herself changes and grows in strength, Mrs Plum also takes a small tentative step in the direction of change.

Mrs Plum, in fact, is not a character without redeeming strengths and virtues. Perhaps as a result of his first-hand knowledge of and intimacy with certain "good" liberals as well as the myopic and arrogant ones, Mphahlele was, as Mrs Plum's creator, better able to endow her with a realistic balance of both defects and assets. He makes her more rounded and plausible, a messenger of hope rather than one of total doom and gloom. At the top of the list of probable negative role models for Mrs Plum's predominant character defects would have to be Mrs G. W. Hoernle. Mrs Hoernle, an arrogant and short-sighted white liberal, was involved in a commission enquiry report into Mphahlele's teaching that "scathingly" attacked him, among other places, in the press on the grounds that his teaching was "unsatisfactory" when in fact the administration, including the school principal at Orlando High who was in cahoots with the state, wanted to get rid of the three principal agitators, including Mphahlele, against the "Bantu Education Act" (Manganyi, 1983:104-105).

Here was another instance in which Mphahlele was being punished and even criminalized by "adding a political dimension to what was initially a professional concern" for behaving in ways his liberal education had prepared him for -- that is "seeking and telling the truth" on the basis of a "belief in the supremacy of reason and human compassion."

While there is definitely a great deal of the Mrs Hoernle in the character of Mrs Plum, Mphahlele in creating her persona was also able to endow her with a few assets (such as pluck,

a desire to be useful and to "care," an interest in government and black rights) to offset her considerable defects -- some of her assets being modeled on the likes of such outstanding individuals as Norah Taylor. Norah Taylor, a gifted white drama teacher in Johannesburg and one of Mphahlele's greatest friends and supporters, was his "mentor in literary matters," a "full-blown confidant" and someone whom he fully trusted (Manganyi,1983:101-110). One might say that the Norah Taylor in the character of "Mrs Plum" helps to balance the admittedly more dominant character of Mrs. Hoernle in the character of Mrs Plum, rendering Mrs Plum, given her evident capacity to learn, a possible force for good over the long term.

Moreover in her own changing, Karabo never for a moment, despite all the corrupting influences of the city, loses sight of her fundamental self-defining and self-empowering values, that are founded in African humanism. In the process of synthesizing and assimilating from the West, she never forfeits her personal identity or her deeply-ingrained humanity and instead she becomes stronger personally and economically, serving as a role model for others like her.

Ultimately, Mphahlele, despite the extent of his own great suffering as a result of apartheid, dire poverty, unjust socio-economic conditions and racial bigotry, reveals himself to be entirely free from the "moral cynicism" that had, for example, pervaded much of the thinking of South African Marxists from the 1950s on (Gerhart,1979:9). And while in its more pessimistic or perhaps realistic sociological vein Mphahlele tells a story that shows that

... whites in Africa live in fat feudal comfort which the servant class affords them. And even although they do not pay the workers well, the whites loose heavily: their humanness. A kind of moral corrosion has set in in this privileged society. And what is more they are never sure, by virtue of this master-servant relationship, what goes on in the mind of this seeming black automaton. But it is a menacing automaton (Mphahlele,1962:145).

Mphahlele does, however, conclude the story of "Mrs Plum" with a

coda that is positive and upbeat -- implicit in which is a belief in the possibility of change, based on reason, compassion and a just universe. Thus, as a self-professed African humanist, Mphahlele shows his true colours. He reveals, in short, his own inclination towards the "liberals' optimistic faith in the triumph of generous impulses over the forces of economic determinism" (Gerhart,1979:9).

In addition, Mphahlele has become, to quote Mongane Wally Serote "two tongued," insofar as he both defines and documents the problem of white exploitation and oppression and presents both a social vision and practical solutions to help empower disaffected blacks and give them hope. In short, in "Mrs Plum" Mphahlele moves definitively beyond a literature of protest to a literature of Black Consciousness and resistance in which the old order is criticized in a style that it is, at times, both angry and bitter. Thus does Mphahlele triumph over Eurocentric cultural colonization and self-alienation both at a personal and at a literary level, with African humanism providing the ever-present and essential counterweight and helping to fill the void.

Mphahlele's approach in "Mrs Plum" is, to summarize, at one level philosophic, aesthetic and visionary in his affirmation of a black ethos; and, at another, it is pragmatic, down-to-earth and solution-oriented. We see this practical side clearly expressing itself in Mphahlele's portrayal of Karabo who becomes a hard-headed realist; but who, at the same time, remains likable and compassionate in her African humanism. Karabo serves as an admirable working role model for ways in which blacks effectively can seize responsibility for their own economic, political and social empowerment.

Indeed, Mphahlele's "two-tongued" approach stands in direct opposition to other notable black writers of the era, such as Alex La Guma, whose A Walk in the Night (1963), "makes no social visionary claims but restricts itself to a near obsessive delineation of the physical, particularized reality

of a South African ghetto existence" (Soyinka,1992:65). Similarly, stories such as Bloke Modisane's "The Dignity of Begging" (Chapman, ed., 1989:10) tend to document, without presenting a transforming redemptive vision. Indeed, Nathan, the beggar and central character in Modisane's story, unlike Karabo, is a rather debased figure who has been co-opted by Western materialism symbolized by Nathan's much-coveted piano. While there are elements of African humanism evident in such stories, for example, as Richard Rive's African Song (Chapman,ed.,1989:114), it fails stylistically to incorporate those elements into the "heteroglossia" of the text. Thus, does Mphahlele in his novella "Mrs Plum" stand apart both as visionary and African humanist narrator. Notable for the depth of his human understanding and the sweep of his canvas, Mphahlele ultimately manages to achieve both personal equilibrium and literary balance as the pendulum swings back and forth between themes of alienation and African humanism in the continuing dialogue of two selves.

Conclusion:

BACK FROM THE WILDERNESS

The African sage says you cannot compare pain.

-- Es'kia Mphahlele

This quality of compassion has a lot to do with African humanism ... I am attracted to an existence in which people treat each other as human beings and not simply as instruments or tools (Mphahlele in Manganyi,1983:49).

....Your mind operates in a foreign language, even while you are actually talking in your mother tongue ... (Mphahlele,1972:127).

The dialogue between two selves never ends. The pendulum swings between revulsion and attraction, between the dreams and the reality of a living past and the aspirations, the imperatives of modern living. Ambivalence (Mphahlele,1974:41).

February 11, 1990, marks the unforgettable day in South African history when African National Congress (ANC) leader Nelson Mandela was set free after being held political prisoner on Robben Island for 27 years. As this dissertation is being written, South Africa is at a major crossroads, after a "forty-year detour against the tide of post-war history, when ... many whites and blacks could not communicate properly, as equals, because of the years of apartheid ..." (Heard, 1990:228). Even as a new democratic constitution has been hammered out and elections based on a universal franchise have taken place, questions are being raised about multi-culturalism in the arts and education, particularly in view of the alienating intellectual apartheid that has long existed among the three tribes of Afrikaner, English and blacks in South Africa (Butler quoted by Mphahlele, 1960:342). At such an historic juncture any dissertation, including the one under consideration, that purports to examine the works of Es'kia Mphahlele in terms of literary and philosophical synthesis based on a black aesthetic and a nationalist vision is timely indeed.

In order to overcome cultural and intellectual apartheid which, in turn, breeds fear and ignorance and leads to conflict and alienation amongst differing ethnic groups, it is important to climb out of of the "closed circuit" of studying and reading only about one's own culture where preconceptions have a way of confirming themselves while lending themselves to the appearance of "universality" (Bates, 1993:226). What is needed now is wise and imaginative leadership in the cross-cultural endeavour to decolonize the arts and education (possibly by fostering a more multi-cultural approach) as well as to promote better mutual understanding and to heal the ancient wounds of racial strife and antagonism.

In this regard, Mphahlele, with his strongly integrationist approach -- regardless of his post-Sharpeville shift in emphasis away from non-racism to black identity (Mphahlele, 1984:255) -- stands out as an eminently qualified

thinker, role model and mentor.

In the course of his life-long search for a synthesis in the dialogue of two selves, Es'kia Mphahlele has dealt in richly paradoxical dichotomies, such as West versus Africa; individual versus communal self; and equally thorny dualities in themes of alienation counterpointed against African humanism. There has always been a spiritual struggle involved in the search -- at once, nuanced, complex and contradictory -- and arising out of the progressive alienation of the teacher, writer and scholar as political exile.

Affirmative though it is, Mphahlele's man-centered unitarian African philosophy is not the easily-arrived at, oversimplified, absolutist answer of a Pollyanna. Mphahlele does not, to quote Wole Soyinka, revel in a "dangerous hara-kiri humanism" (Soyinka,1992:75). Mphahlele steers clear of the romanticism of Negritude. Balance and realism are his hallmarks. While professing African values and espousing an African humanistic metaphysics and way of life, he never, for instance, overlooks the potential for violence in the black character as I have shown in both the Lesane stories and Down Second Avenue. Like many West African thinkers and writers, Mphahlele has "thought through [his] culture deeply and [is] able to take new root in it " (Kesteloot,1991:325). Thus he is able to explore opposite poles of north and south without fatally tumbling into the yawning crevasse of polemics. Eventually, in the movement back to Africa, Mphahlele arrives at the "ironic meeting point" between total acceptance of the West and outright rejection.

From a position of negritude, "as a quality of revolt which derives from the political and cultural oppression the negro has known" (Wallerstein,1961:132-133), Mphahlele moves to a position of Black Consciousness, a movement he anticipates by at least two decades in his criticism and in his novella "Mrs Plum," a story forged on the "white-hot anvil" of anger that

galvanizes readers into political awareness through sheer shock tactics.

Mphahlele's African humanism is a broad-gauged concept that he was the first on the continent to articulate, embracing elements of both politics and culture, a South African equivalent to Leopold Senghor's Negritude, Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa socialism (minus the strong economic component) and Kenneth Kaunda's Zambian socialism. The African Image represents African humanist aesthetics applied to literary criticism. Down Second Avenue illustrates African humanism as it is lived; while the unforgettable "Mrs Plum" is the most definitive socio-economic and psychological expression of Mphahlele's African humanist stance and the one most strongly informed with Black Consciousness thought.

Mphahlele's writings, as I have shown, both define the problems created by intellectual and racial alienation and propose a solution, which is why they are especially relevant to the process of conflict resolution and healing. Without exception, all of Mphahlele's works of prose and fiction document myriad themes of alienation. While Western alienation stems from internal causes and is often marked by existential despair, the alienation described by Mphahlele in all his works stems from largely external causes. Alienation wins out when Mphahlele goes into political exile. African humanism, strongly motivated by a desire to serve his community,¹⁰ triumphs when Mphahlele returns "from the wilderness," despite the cries of "sell out" from certain intellectuals (Mphahlele, 1991:144), to once more cast his shadow on ancestral soil. This decision, at age 57, to give up a full professorship in English at the University of Pennsylvania, "to return to a depressed Bantustan" in Lebowa "surprised his friends" and "amazed his five children" (Lelyveld, 1980:3). Moreover, it was still a criminal act to quote or publish any of Mphahlele's works in South Africa since

he remained a "listed person."

Thus, of the myriad themes of alienation, including professional alienation and censorship, there are at least three that can be singled out as being paramount. These begin with that of the political exile (both internal and external) who as a writer, teacher, scholar and visionary discovers in his Pan-African, trans-continental wanderings that placelessness itself is a form of exile. Indeed, it is Mphahlele's desire to recover a self-identifying sense of place where he can "cast his shadow" that drives him back to South Africa in 1977. Inextricably bound up with political exile, is the theme of racial oppression and alienation, as expressed in its world-wide context by the words "race" and "colour." These two words, Mphahlele states, are "the most emotive ... in the dictionary of human relationships" (Mphahlele, 1984:154). The third strand in the rope of steel is the continuing "dialogue" of a "divided self" -- one that is Western-educated and colonized and the other with roots in Africa.

While Mphahlele's writings, in detailing these recurrent themes of alienation, at times, reflect deep bitterness and anger, they also demonstrate an open-ended desire to synthesize, to preserve the best, to continue the "dialogue" of what Mphahlele referred to in an interview with the author of this dissertation held at the Funda Center in Soweto as two streams of consciousness: the African and the Western (Obee, 1992:5-6). Indeed, Mphahlele is the living prototype of what he defines the writer and artist as being: that is "a rebel who has the gift of language," "an activist(s)" and someone "who is engaged in a revolution of mind and feeling ... he is a teacher, an interpreter...." (Mphahlele, 1990:17-18).

Two of Mphahlele's more recent works, one the novel Chirundu (1979) and the other his memoir Afrika My Music (1984), both of which were published after his return to South Africa in 1977, are sufficiently forward looking, visionary and experimental that they constitute important literary and

philosophic roadmaps to the future in a new South Africa. Both in terms of pointing the way to the building of a post-apartheid body of South African literature and in the practical application of Mphahlele's African humanist vision, the two volumes are virtual gold mines. These volumes along with other works are also testimony to Mphahlele's amazing output after his controversial return to South Africa at the end of a twenty-year period of exile in West and East Africa, Europe and the United States.

Moreover, Mphahlele's creative output affords substantial proof of his personal triumph over the intellectual, spiritual and political alienation of the internal exile, vindicating the perennial optimism of an African humanist. Thus following through on his interest in African culture and community history, Mphahlele conducted research into oral poetry in the North Sotho, Tsonga and Venda Languages in 1979 and served as a founder member of the African Writers' Association in Johannesburg. He then accepted the offer of a professorship at the University of Witwatersrand at its Center for African Studies becoming, in 1983, the Chairman of the Division of African Literature. In addition, Down Second Avenue (1959) and The African Image (1963) were unbanned; and Chirundu (1979), The Unbroken Song (1981) and Afrika My Music (1984) were published. In short, Mphahlele was able partially to realize two of his most cherished cultural goals -- that of teaching and of writing. Indeed, Mphahlele considers that the teaching of African literature in itself "... should be the starting point... [for] a culture striving towards a synthesis that will be truly African" and that will "promote the black man's aspirations" (Mphahlele, 1984:7).

Initially, however, Mphahlele is subjected to a continual turning of the screw. First, he is subjected to a daily barrage of hurtful insults by white petit-bureaucrats. Then, he witnesses "what twenty-five years of Bantu Education has done to the standard of English. Just flattened it." (Mphahlele, 1984:5). He is also reminded of the countless lives lost in the struggle for liberation and; finally, this

award-winning novelist and Nobel-prize nominee fails to secure the Chair of English at the University of the North in 1978 after five years of negotiation with the powers that be. Indeed, a considerable section of Afrika My Music is devoted to a lyric lamentation over lost lives that reads like a veritable "Who's Who in Black South African literature," as death itself becomes the ultimate adjudicator of alienation.

This recurrent theme of futility; of death-dealing loss and alienation is elaborated on in Afrika My Music as it is throughout Mphahlele's works, including his poetry and his criticism The African Image. Thus Mphahlele writes in Afrika My Music that "one felt diminished every time another exile or refugee was diminished. Oftentimes it was diminution by death.... Like Todd Matshikiza.

His mound stands in a Lusaka graveyard. Short little man. Unpredictable temper. A coil of barbed wire beneath the cultured, jovial, even-tempered exterior. Don't take it ill, Toddy-boy. I'm telling my fellow-mortals -- aren't we all inscrutable mortals, even the most predictable fool? (Mphahlele,1984:119-121)

And Can Themba. He lies in Swaziland. Canadocea -- what a name for an unclassical fellow like you. When I say this to you in the Fordsburg shebeen, you turn round and say, how come a barefoot boy wallowing in the dust of Marabastad with two large holes in the seat of his pants found himself saddled with a Hebrew name like Ezekiel? (Mphahlele,1984:123).

Thus writes the African Shakespeare. Pain swaddled in laughter, in the best tradition of the African humanist narrator, lends depth of feeling to such passages in their shadings of light and shadow. Mphahlele's humanistic and epithetic roll-call and lamentation of the demise of so many of South Africa's most talented black writers in the prime of their flowering is moving, precisely because of his admirable self-restraint, the absence of any self-pity, the abundant presence of compassion and the writerly skill with which it is handled. As with all of Mphahlele's works, African humanism leavens the need for social reportage, the natural concern "with what [is] happening to [his] people, counterbalancing themes of alienation with that liberal

quantity of aesthetic pleasure and elusive truth one hopes to discover in great literature. While liberal whites write polished satire, they had no counter-system with which to fill the void left by the guilt-plagued negatives of apartheid. Mphahlele came up with a counter-system, which could balance that self-obliterating negation with hope, love, courage, humour; optimism as well as artistry. African humanism, as counter-balance, serves thus effectively to heighten the dramatic intensity of themes of alienation that under state apartheid affected every realm of human experience.

In Mphahlele's African humanist aesthetic there is no separation between art and function. While it is true that content may dictate form and that when apartheid is the enemy, plot often supersedes character, in the case of Mphahlele's works, rarely is this the case. Ever the humanist, people and characters are showcased by Mphahlele over places and things. Just as often in his works, theme transcends and supersedes plot in importance. Thus, the dual themes of alienation and African humanism frequently become the single most important unifying elements in any given plot, narrative, poem or piece of criticism. Not only do these contrapuntal themes provide cohesion, they are vital to Mphahlele's social vision, unifying the twin aims of artistry and education.

Indeed, for a brief moment in Afrika My Music, Mphahlele brings the vanished black writers, one by one, back to life in his thoroughly African humanistic portraits of them. The reader is made to share the pain of the loss in a way that makes protest more effective than volumes of bitter propagandistic satire. We learn as much about the writer and his humanity as about his works and often also about his violent or debased demise from alcoholism or suicide, the tragic finale for a disproportionately large number of exiles. This approach enhances the pain of loss while not requiring a single drop of poison in the palette to get the word across, serving to exemplify ways in which African humanism balances and yet adds depth and meaning to the themes of alienation in Mphahlele's writing.

As is true in Mphahlele's earlier works, his later works such as Chirundu and Afrika My Music exemplify ways in which themes of alienation and African humanism function as strong unifying counterweights. Furthermore, they reflect the creative synthesis between Africa and the West Mphahlele seeks and promotes. Africa My Music in its lyric prose documents Mphahlele's years as a pan-African and trans-American writer and teacher. It also presents a series of fascinating miniatures of some of the best-known African writers of English on the continent between the late 1950s until the present. These include, to name but a few, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, Amos Tutuola, Christopher Okigbo, Kofi Awoonor, James Ngugi (now Ngugi wa Thiong'o) as well as Lenrie Peters, "another second-rounder, landing on African soil like a parachutist ... coming through condensed time, hitting the ground with a jolt, then lugging his paraphernalia across the field -- his new cultural equipment" (Mphahlele, 1984:40). This sketch of Lenrie Peters could equally well serve as "portrait of the artist Mphahlele upon his return to South Africa."

Since Mphahlele knew, encouraged, worked with and inspired most, if not all the writers he describes, these portraits are also highly personalized. They are, in fact, straight from the heart and in the best African humanist tradition they highlight the man as much as his literary achievements. Aside from Mphahlele, there are few, if any, living African authors who could have penned these portraits, both from the point-of-view of style and of first-hand intimacy with the remarkable roll call of African writers. As a document of African literary history, the memoir itself would serve to enhance and enrich any college syllabus on African literature. The roll-call is also proof that while Mphahlele left South Africa as an exile and alien, he continually found ways to overcome that alienation as a writer, teacher and scholar. In this instance Mphahlele reveals himself as an insider among the true greats in African literature -- not only

an insider, but, indeed, a pioneer, leader, role model and friend.

Afrika My Music is, in short, the most recent chapter of a life in process that recapitulates "themes of alienation and African humanism in a dialogue of two selves." Read on a philosophical level, the critic is able to see how the concept of African humanism when integrated into a philosophy of and used as a tool for living promotes the author's personal growth, his will to survive and his self-healing at the end of a long difficult journey full of travail and loss which had already claimed far too many casualties. As a teacher, Mphahlele leads the way. In this sense, he is not only a cultural carrier but an exemplar and message carrier. Thus Mphahlele places reliance on African humanistic compassion, the "superior spirit" and love as opposed to self-destructive forces of hate and fear to overcome alienation in all of its manifestations -- be it in the form of personal insult, political banning, fatherlessness, communal breakdown and loss, tyranny of place and placelessness, intergenerational alienation within the family structure, censorship, meaninglessness, itself; and a long litany of bereavements through state-sponsored violent death, suicides and drunkenness. Indeed, Mphahlele's African humanist philosophy is key in two vital decisions: his decision to return to South Africa in the first instance; and his decision on how to respond to continued insults and white oppression experienced after his return.

Perhaps the first step toward synthesis in the dialogue of two selves and between countervailing themes of alienation and African humanism must involve healing. Thus, Mphahlele observes, "Rightly or wrongly, anger becomes a compulsive way of asserting our ethnic or racial or political identity" (Mphahlele, 1984:156).... I feel enriched by love and impoverished by obsessive hate" (Mphahlele, 1984:221). Finally, he says that "we have come back and are involved in

the creation of something bigger and more splendid than the wretched creatures who spend some part of their waking hours debasing and humiliating black people (Mphahlele, 1984:237).

Mphahlele's decision to return to South Africa in 1977 was in part determined by his growing conviction as a self-professed African humanist that it was irrelevant to try to teach people, in this case Americans, whose cultural goals were so different from his own. Moreover, as he grew older he preferred to be among his own people amongst whom growing older, where age is still venerated in an African humanist sense, could be a much "gentler" process. Ultimately, however, Mphahlele as a visionary, thinker, educator and writer, came back to participate in the building of a "new South Africa" which encompasses Mphahlele's vision of an education system "based on this philosophy of African humanism," which will "truly express our independence of mind, a decolonized mind" (Mphahlele, 1984:209). Mphahlele's concludes his African humanist odyssey with the statement that:

I was an agnostic when I left [South Africa] in 1957. Now I am a confirmed African humanist. I have said that West Africa gave Africa back to me. The difference between me and western humanists is that I cherish the African's belief in the Supreme Being as a vital force, a dynamic presence in all organic matter and in the elements, in Man, where those of the western world feel uneasy with belief in the supernatural and dismiss African religion as magic. My God is not a product of Hebraic-Christian culture but of African culture. Like Rabindranath Tagore's, my religion is a poet's religion (Mphahlele, 1984:248-249).

Thus it is possible on the basis of the critic's understanding of African humanism as Mphahlele defines it expressly or implicitly in all of his works to suggest that African literature like African art is representational insofar as it deals with the communal rather than the particular, the Platonic ideal rather than the Aristotelian real. It posits "its ultimate reality in pre-existent and transcendent Ideas rather than in the appearances and the categories of the created world" (Olney citing Jean Laude, 1973:180). Yet at the same

time African humanism besides encompassing a metaphysical philosophy, a nationalist vision and a black aesthetic is a concrete way of life, one that is amply illustrated, for example, as I have already shown in Mphahlele's autobiography Down Second Avenue.

Chirundu (1979) as seen in the dialogic context of themes of alienation and African humanism as they affect the formulation of a new South Africa is as much a ground-breaker in a literary sense as Afrika My Music is in a philosophic and educational one. In Chirundu, Mphahlele is, in short, once again in the vanguard. Indeed Chirundu is an interesting novel to read and comes as a relief. For once, apartheid is not the ever-present oppressive backdrop, although it is hinted at since two of the minor characters Pitso and Dr. Studs Letanko are South African exiles.

While Chirundu exhibits moments of Drum-type escapism and racy dialogue in its theme of triangular love, in its counterpointing of the theatrical and lyric, use of parallel plots and sub-plots along with a three-part narrative, it is highly sophisticated. Moreover, it abounds in conflicts, ironies and themes of alienation of the sort that have become, as I have shown in other of his works from Man Must Live (1946) to "Mrs Plum" (1973), Mphahlele's trademark. These include alienating conflicts between father and son; old and new, Africa and the West, traditional, tribal and Christian as well as between husband and wife. Furthermore the dichotomies never extend to stereotyping of characters. Not all whites are "bad guys" nor all blacks good. Indeed, Chirundu, the black cabinet minister and corrupt politician, who is the chief protagonist in the novel by that title, exhibits some of the same pigheadedness and greed that whites have displayed in the "painful South."

Mphahlele's fictive universe as re-created in Chirundu with its cross-cultural conflicts between tribal practices and Western laws and its finely tuned balance between Africa and

the West is not Manichean. Mphahlele is absolutely fearless and unconcerned in his satiric presentation of Chirundu as a corrupt, tin-pot dictator -- a genuine "bad guy" whose resemblance to several real-life models was, at the time, uncanny enough that Mphahlele initially had some problems getting the novel published (Manganyi, 1984:173). Yet Mphahlele could so easily have yielded to the temptation to reverse age-old stereotypes and substitute a reverse mirror image. Ever the African humanist, however, Mphahlele is not driven to "correct a negative, derogatory image of Africa " promoted by colonialist literature (JanMohamed, 1983:8) by going to the other extreme. His humanistic canvass is much too balanced, sweeping and honest to allow for such made-to-order stereotypes.

Published in 1979 after his return to Johannesburg, as I have previously noted, Chirundu marks a shift in Mphahlele's thinking from the progressive alienation that found its lowest ebb in the days after Sharpeville in March of 1960. This change is reflected in Mphahlele's choice of subject and presentation of characters. Structurally Chirundu is also of interest since it combines dramatic forms with the genre of a novel. Some of Chirundu's chapters, for instance, the court and prison scenes, read like plays. In narrative terms it is more sophisticated than earlier works insofar as it involves the interweaving of three narrative voices -- that of Chirundu, Tirenje and Moyo. Indeed, Chirundu is best described as a parable on how a modern post-colonial African state should and should not govern itself and how Africans could ideally live by incorporating an African humanist ethos with contemporary Western values. Moyo, (which means heart in Kiswahili), and Chirundu represent opposite ends of the spectrum. Chirundu, in his borrowing from Western and African laws and customs on marriage, hopes opportunistically to savour the best of two worlds. He makes nepotism into a virtue in the African way by hiring his nephew without a second thought, but finds that in Western institutions and with a modernized nephew such an approach works against him.

Chirundu has, in the meantime, discovered what James Olney refers to as "pleasurable polygamy" and justifies it in terms of traditional ancestral ways. But Western law, government and politics look askance at a Cabinet Minister who openly insists on keeping a town wife and a country wife -- and, at least, one of the wives balks at the arrangement in a tragic way. Chirundu personifies the proverbial "tin-pot dictator" whom power corrupts and whose humanism is diminished as a result. Moyo, Chirundu's nephew, on the other hand, combines the best of two worlds. He is a political activist who gets involved in trade unions. He is African enough not to want to criticize his uncle and modern enough to see the need to do so. Moyo is therefore engaged in a realistic and modern way with building a new order. He also adheres to the best African humanistic values, revering his grandfather, respecting his aunt and showing compassion for his fellows. Moyo serves as a paradigm for how the new generation can assert black values while becoming thoroughly modern. Chirundu, on the other hand, demonstrates how it is also possible to combine the worst of two world orders.

Just as Chirundu is Moyo's opposite, Monde (meaning "world" in French) is Tirenje's counterfoil. She is materialistic and shallow, having absorbed some of the worst of Western ways. Tirenje by contrast is less well-educated and unsophisticated. She is "uncultivated" but not lacking in culture in her rural African roots. Thus, she, like Karabo in "Mrs Plum," never loses track of her values nor her sense of personal worth and integrity. Ironically, she is a village girl, who in growing from strength to strength, becomes more liberated and liberal than her book-read husband, Chirundu. Tirenje like Moyo borrows the best from two streams of consciousness -- African and Western -- and is a working prototype of what the new generation can become. The conflict between husband and wife in their views on the sanctity of marriage as it reflects back on traditional versus modern customs and law raises highly relevant, contemporary questions revolving around issues of women's liberation and equality. At the same time, it is Tirenje, at her most eloquent, who

comments on one of the gravest risks to the indigenous African humanistic culture posed by a modern Western industrialized society, saying: "Something strange has touched us in the white man's school and church, in the white man's town and we make loneliness in our selves as the factory makes clothes --" (Mphahlele, 1973:89). Thus, she gives voice to the self-alienating sense of loneliness Africans feel when caught between old communal ways and new ways.

Nonetheless, Mphahlele is ever balanced, clear-eyed and realistic in his African humanism. Looking ahead to the future, Mphahlele has written a cautionary tale about the dangers of an emergent black neo-colonialist ruling class being corrupted by absolute power. Thus, the existing order Mphahlele now criticizes is no longer white but black -- a revolutionary change indeed!

In the on-going dialogue of two selves, the eternal -- and equally real and immediate -- question remains: What to preserve of the old and traditional and what to assimilate of the new; how to modernize without losing some of those ancient values which are worth preserving -- in short, how to modernize without being culturally colonized by the West. African humanism continues to provide a tool with which to approach synthesis and assimilation from a psychological position of strength, after the pain of colonial domination (Wallerstein, 1961:122-135) while also contributing to a movement of cultural nationalism.

In the past African humanism, by calling attention to an indigenous culture of great richness, diversity and value and by demanding its just preservation for no other reason than its intrinsic worth, served as a useful cultural weapon with which to confront the brutality and daily humiliations of state apartheid. While apartheid denied the black man's humanity, African humanism affirmed it. African humanism also provided a tool for criticizing the existing order, while simultaneously reintegrating the intellectual with his African past and bringing the under-educated rural masses into the dialogue.

In Chirundu, Mphahlele as African humanist narrator demonstrates the continued usefulness of such a tool. Just as he did in such early stories as "Man Must Live," Mphahlele draws imaginatively on symbols and myths from the deep African past to criticize the existing order; in turn, reflecting his own successful decolonization as an African humanist author. However, the mythic elements are more developed and potent in the later works. Thus in Chirundu the classic pan-African myth of the python (Davidson, 1991:16) appears repeatedly throughout the text as a powerful metaphor to symbolize the strength of old values, as well as sexual virility and the abuse of raw power. In the act of having Tirenje burn down the house Chirundu has built, Mphahlele again resurrects a culturally derived myth from Bantu societies which believe that an established house should never be allowed to die out (Preston-Whyte quoted by Johnson, 1984 :6). The message is clearly that Chirundu and all such tin-pot dictators will ultimately destroy themselves -- that decadence, oppression and exploitation contain the seeds of their own conflagration.

Several critics, including Bernth Lindfors writing recently in Cross Cultures, have raised the timely question of what black South Africans returning from exile will begin to produce in the way of a new post-apartheid body of literature. Lindfors further observes that "nearly all of these long-term expatriates -- Dennis Brutus, Mazisi Kunene, Lewis Nkosi, Keorapetse Kgositsile, to name only the most prolific -- have focused almost exclusively on one subject: South Africa" (1994:63). Just as Mphahlele led the return back to South Africa and the exodus into exile, he leads in this area as well. In Chirundu he has already planted a major literary landmark. He has written a novel that is refreshingly free from the cliché apartheid had long since become as a literary subject. Mphahlele, indeed, has provided a revolutionary model for a novel written against something other than an apartheid backdrop and has demonstrated it can be done.

Apartheid has for so long provided the made-to-order modular plot and dictated the themes in South African

literature, that the related question of whether authors would be able to fill the post-apartheid vacuum with their own inventiveness is also frequently raised. Nadine Gordimer, addressing this very question, once said that a good author can make even the death of a canary affecting. This Mphahlele has achieved in his believable and moving portrait of the suffering that Tirenje experiences as a result of her bigamous betrayal by Chirundu. In so doing Mphahlele has furthermore effectively modernized, up-dated and redefined the terms of conflict.

The new arena of alienation and conflict in Mphahlele's Chirundu can be considered a harbinger of what the future holds may not be racial at all. Instead, it may be gender-based and dear to the hearts of feminists. Indeed, the new themes of alienation in a post-apartheid body of South African literature may revolve not only around such cross-cultural clashes as those defined in Chirundu but also the highly apposite issue of equal rights and opportunities for women like the character Tirenje, particularly in areas where traditional practices, not to mention Western biases, have resulted in well-entrenched oppression and exploitation.

In Chirundu, Mphahlele shows that in the synthesis between Western ideals of love and that of a communal ideal based on procreation and the continuation of the ancestral line there may be a built-in clash between Africa and the West, one that lends itself to exploitation by the unscrupulous. Such themes as this demonstrate that in a body of post-apartheid South African literature the possibilities in terms of subjects to be explored are ripe for the picking and exist in an unlimited supply. Moreover, there are no easy dichotomies. Indeed, just as there are good whites and bad blacks, there are good Western values and bad or at least impracticable traditional ones arising out of vanished agrarian societies and related economic constraints. Thus in themes of alienation and African humanism there can be no Manichean absolutes. But there is the realistic and hopeful possibility as demonstrated by Moyo in Chirundu of a positive working synthesis being achieved between Africa and the West in the continuing dialogue.

Occasionally as an artist, Mphahlele in the dialogue of two selves -- African and Western; communal and individual; alien and humanist -- must reach down inside his individual as opposed to communal self to process, recollect and synthesize. In an unpublished poem entitled "Silence" acquired recently by the author of this dissertation, Mphahlele makes a lyric recapitulation of this truth when he writes:

I cherish the silences in my life
when I can think
and feel the texture and content
of my being

When I can silence this chatterbox
I call my mind

Silence is the workshop of my mind
Where I'm making this poem (1992-1993).

In the same poem Mphahlele refers to all the world's major religions, as well as the African belief in a Vital Force, showing a multi-cultural approach to spirituality that is xenophilic. This approach, being accepting and inclusive, is typical of African humanism, an approach that equally carried over into Mphahlele's politics as Secretary of the ANC, an organization that itself repudiates racism and has never been anti-white (Benson, 1986:26).

In a symposium on black literature in South Africa held at the University of Texas in 1975, Mphahlele makes a number of statements that sum up his position as a writer, educator and scholar defined by his African humanism. He begins by commenting on one of the principal themes of alienation in his work as well as one of the burning political issues of this century. He states: "There is a big barrier between us and whites. We are looking at each other through the keyhole all the time." He then counterpoints this against the following statement of a self-professed African humanist:

I would like to be recognized in any literature as a person with a distinctive way of life, a distinctive way of dying, a distinctive way of being born ... those are the particulars that lend color and meaning and authenticity to any work of fiction (Mphahlele in Lindfors, 1985:53).

The emphasis on the "I" in this statement as separate from the "ego center" suggests an individuated self at odds with the communal. Yet it is the "distinctive way of life" that defines the meaning of that "I" which in turn finds meaning and self-validation in the communal, the source of renewal from which the "I" has been cut off. The statement gains added poignance from its dramatic juxtaposition to the poetic fragment that follows it. Mphahlele's poetic fragment is a cleverly rendered take-off on Samuel Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." In this instance, the "stately pleasure dome" is a contemporary glass house and the "cavern" a suburban basement. The "ego center" is at the controls and narrates. Glass, which is frequently cold, sterile and anonymous and with all the sense of geographic locale about it of a suburban shopping mall, is a good choice of textural mediums. What is striking about this poetic-prose fragment is that Mphahlele's previously expressed desire for an African identity in his works and the immediate expression of the self in this piece are in opposition. It is difficult, at first, to locate the African humanist anywhere in his glass house. Only after a careful search, do we eventually catch a glimpse of him:

.....I live in a glasshouse, the one I ran into 17 years ago. It's roomy but borrowed. I can live in it as long as I pay the rent and as long as I don't start kicking things about scratching or staining the walls, I'm told. I can see the change of seasons light tints patterns of shade clearly when the rain is gone. In a way I could never have done in the painful south. I go down in the cellar often to sharpen ... generally train the panzer division of my mind. I'm here not because I'm invisible. Sometimes it's cold in here sometimes warm sometimes full of light sometimes shadows come down upon me. There are no ultrabright light bulbs not one Always I hear a river.... I could if I chose renew my lease indefinitely in this glasshouse, quite forget write off my past take my chances on new territory. I shall not. Because I'm a helpless captive of place and to come to terms with the tyranny of place is to have something to live for to save me from stagnation, anonymity.

Time to take stock of the ego center wait and listen to the river washing its shores, to the echoes of the hounds across Limpopo and Zambesi ... (Mphahlele in Lindfors, 1985:33-34).

Given the "cultural wilderness" of political exile, the alienation of having no roots in the community and the loss of the African humanist writer in his glass house in a Denver suburb, it is necessary to return to the wellspring of inspiration, to seek renewal in a place where one can meaningfully serve one's community -- and to grow old in a society where elders and ancestors are respected and revered.

There is little doubt Mphahlele, in the unfolding dialogue of two selves, will be remembered as a writer with a distinctive way of life, transformed into a body of literature. He will be remembered for his landmark works of criticism and as the primogenitor of the black South African short story and township autobiography. He will be remembered for his contribution to the cause of black education. Perhaps the day will also come when Chirundu is given the attention it deserves, Voices in the Whirlwind and The African Image appear on university syllabuses, and the 1974 edition of The African Image sees the light of day. It is time this Nobel-prize nominee, internationally known scholar and writer who has been "at the very hub of a burgeoning literature" (Thuynsma,1989:93); this pioneering figure and catalyst in South Africa's black literary renaissance becomes a role model and household word, even and especially among the black youths in South African townships.

Finally, Mphahlele deserves recognition for his imaginative and liberating act of cultural retrieval in bringing to light and adapting a concept of African humanism particularly well suited to the needs of the time, one that, in turn, has served as an inspiration and stimulus for black nationalist thought. In literature as in life, African humanism serves to equalize painful forces of alienation.

Mphahlele says he admires "the white man's achievements, his mind that plans tall buildings, powerful machinery," but that his "forebears and I could teach him a thing or two if only he would listen" (1985:218). Thus, we have an example of "Aryans" defined by their doing, not to mention their strong acquisitive urge, while "southerners" are more at home in their

"being." Balance is achieved by resolving this dialectic into a synthesis -- and north and south would profit each by learning from the other. Mphahlele cites one of his favorite poets, Rabindranath Tagore, to make his point. Tagore writes that balance is achieved by understanding man in his entirety. Says Tagore, "... we must not reduce him to the requirements of any particular duty. To look on trees only as firewood, is not to know the tree in its entirety" (Tagore quoted by Mphahlele, 1986:24).

In literature, a dialogue of two selves embraces the need "to strike and hold the delicate balance between immediate social relevance and the act of language as a vehicle of truth" while, metaphysically, it involves a need for balance between "attachment to material life with its social demands and detachment from it in order to attain spiritual or intellectual freedom" (Mphahlele, 1986:24).

Thus in the dialogue of two selves African humanism serves not only as an effective and illuminating thematic counterpoint to themes of alienation, spilling over into style, narrative techniques, plot and characterization, but it also serves as an affirmation and bridging point, a meeting place between Africa and the West, where African communalism and Western individualism meet -- a coming together of the Renaissance, the English language and a humanism that is purely African.

ENDNOTES

1. Swahili word for the embroidered African shirt worn in both West and East Africa.

2. After conducting a thorough search over several months of South African used book stores and the UNISA library, I was informed that the UNISA library has a banned book section and that I might discover a copy of the to-date unobtainable revised edition of African Image in safe keeping there. The detective work paid off. I, at long last, secured the much desired and sought after book. This was accomplished with the aid of a signed note to the effect that permission was granted the signee for The African Image be taken out of the "Banned Collection" for a period of 42 days. The date of issuance of the special permit is March 19, 1991. Further research revealed that the first edition of The African Image (1962) had been banned on January 14, 1977; and the ban lifted on April 4, 1987, as listed in the voluminous Jacobsens Index of Objectionable Literature, in which thousands of banned book titles were printed and updated monthly. The revised edition of the African Image (1974) was banned on January 7, 1983, under Gazette #8506, notice #20 in section 4, paragraphs c,d, and e of the 1973 Publications Act. Since it is difficult to imagine how a work of literary criticism might be either "harmful to the relations between any section of the inhabitants of the Republic" (d) or "prejudicial to the safety of the state" (e), the question arises as to what rationale the censorship board had in mind when it banned the book. The rationale, in this event, was quite likely based on paragraph "c" which prohibits literature that "brings any section of the inhabitants of the Republic into ridicule or contempt." In Chapter two, I will explore this question further and cite what may well have been viewed by the censorship board as the offending passage.

The fact is that, regardless of legalities and rationales based on the Publications Acts, all of Mphahlele's works were, in any case, automatically banned, along with those of countless other black writers who left the country, because black writers who left the country were declared "'prohibited immigrants' and listed as writers whose utterances and writings cannot be quoted or read in the country" (Mphahlele, 1967:213).

Equally puzzling is the question as to why it took nearly ten years for the revised edition of The African Image to be officially proscribed. According to Lawrence Berman in the English Department, UNISA, the membership of the Censorship Board was secret, any member of the reading public could call attention to a book deemed questionable (perhaps, in this case, it took ten years for the right person to stumble across the offending passage) and what was desirable or undesirable was not clearly defined. A book, for example, might be deemed undesirable according to the Moralities Act simply because it

described interracial intercourse, "but there was no way you could arrest characters in a book."

Furthermore, anyone could institute a banning at any time, even years after a book's publication. The author, however, was not informed of the banning, but notice was "merely published in the Government Gazette," (Gordimer, 1988:62) so that a month might transpire before the author came to know of it. Moreover, the censorship committee had no literary or legal training and the "appellant had no right of audience" (Gordimer, 1988:252).

A call to the Censorship Board in Cape Town, elicited no further information about the current status of the revised African Image. The person answering the call was unable to locate any listing of a work by that title.

3. Although copies of Don Mattera's Memory is the Weapon are available in some U.S. bookstores in Washington, D.C., efforts to find copies of Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue either in public libraries or bookstores in Colorado, San Francisco and Washington, D.C., proved fruitless. Mphahlele's novel Chirundu and The African Image (1962) are out of print. After a considerable search at used bookstores in Johannesburg and Capetown, copies of both the novel and the criticism were eventually secured. It was only after a search of several months that I located a copy of The African Image (1974) in the banned book section of the UNISA library. No copies were available in bookstores in Pretoria, Johannesburg or Cape Town.

4. The degree conferred on Es'kia Mphahlele was the Doctor of Humane Letters at University of Colorado in Boulder, Colorado. Information concerning the honour was received in a personal letter dated April 30, 1994, and addressed to the author of this dissertation from Professor Mphahlele.

5. In an interview conducted by the author of this dissertation with Professor Gerald Chapman, Head of the Department of English, at University of Denver on 10 September, 1991, Professor Chapman has this to say about Mphahlele's popularity as a lecturer: "At DU Zeke was a very popular lecturer. I recall a public lecture series where people came from all over the region to hear Mphahlele. I have never seen such a worshipful crowd. He was the spokesman for the writer in exile and I was really very moved by the expression I saw on their [the students'] faces. That was the kind of teaching that I remember most. He had a way of reaching students' hearts."

For a short time when Zeke came back here we had a very strong graduate program in African studies at DU. Zeke brought out large numbers of very gifted black students. I don't know whether this had anything to do with his [Zeke's] African Humanism or not, but I think it surely must have had something to do with it."

6. In this instance, the "peripatetic" reader enjoys the advantage of having lived for extensive periods in many of the same places as Es'kia Mphahlele - such as the American Rockies, the East Coast of the U.S.A., East Africa and South Africa, including three years in Pretoria in a suburb mentioned by Mphahlele in Down Second Avenue. While living in Tanzania, in the era of "Ujamaa" socialism under the presidency of Julius Nyerere, she made an extensive study of Kiswahili over a four-year period, translating and retelling oral folk tales (recorded for the first time in Kiswahili) three of which which were subsequently published in Short Story International published in New York. She also studied collections of proverbs in Kiswahili. Moreover, she travelled extensively throughout rural parts of East Africa in the early 1970s and through Southern Africa in the early 1990s, including Lesotho (formerly Basutoland) where Mphahlele in 1954 experienced his "first exile." While in Colorado in the American Rockies, she interviewed Professor Gerald Chapman, chairman of the Department of English, at University of Denver, where Es'kia Mphahlele registered for his PhD in 1965. Chapman, one of the foremost Elizabethan scholars in the USA, (Thuynsma, ed., 1989:267) is a long-time colleague and close personal friend of Mphahlele's. Presumably the "peripatetic" reader with first-hand knowledge of a Bantu-based African language, oral literature and village living as well as experience of some of the key people and places that have influenced Mphahlele's writings will be able to bring to the close examination of a text some special insights and a deeper appreciation not available to the purely abstract theorist who has not had the same advantage of such enriched particularized experience of the context that forms the background of the texts under consideration. Last but not least, in this instance the "peripatetic" reader has met with the author under consideration on several occasions, heard him speak, exchanged letters and telephone calls and conducted an extensive interview with him. These are among the concrete literary tools that will serve to complement and add substance to those that exist primarily in the realm of critical theory, abstraction and academic discipline.

7. Man Must Live is out of print. The copy I secured was through the courtesy of Dr. Peter Thuynsma at the University of Witwatersrand. Two chronologies I have seen in books devoted to the life and works of Mphahlele incorrectly list the date of publication as 1947. On the title page of Man Must Live, the date of publication of this first collection of short stories to be published by a black South African writer is given as 1946 -- that is, "designed and published in 1946 by the African Bookman ... Cape Town."

8. Mphahlele dedicated his dissertation to his promoter who was then head of the Department of English (UNISA), Professor Edward Davis. Mphahlele tells his autobiographer Chabani Manganyi that he recalls Davis as being " a short little man, unorthodox in many ways, and [as someone who] had decidedly independent views about literature. He had studied in South

Africa and at Oxford.... I remember him as a very astute scholar -- a stimulating person and the most outstanding professor I ever had the pleasure to study under.... I profited from his incisive criticism" (Manganyi,1983:146). Mphahlele describes the commencement exercise, a segregated event with separate tea services and separate seating, in Down Second Avenue (Mphahlele,1959:198).

9. Chimane's parents were clearly victims of the Land Act which, as historian T.R.H. Davenport writes, "imposed a policy of territorial segregation with a very heavy hand. It aimed specifically to get rid of those features of African land ownership and share-cropping which white farmers found undesirable" (1989:259).

10. When I asked Professor Gerald Chapman in the English Department at the University of Denver, Denver, Colorado, during my interview with him on September 10, 1991, whether Mphahlele might have entertained the idea of staying permanently in America, Chapman replied that, while one could not always be certain whether Mphahlele might or might not have entertained the idea of U.S. citizenship, it was Chapman's belief that Mphahlele always had in mind that "larger purpose," the commitment to the community at home.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

- Mphahlele, E 1947. Man Must Live and Other Stories. Cape Town: African Bookman.
- _____. 1955-57. (Lesane) short stories. Johannesburg: Drum magazine.
- _____. 1955. "The Non-European Character in South African English Fiction." MA Diss. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- _____. 1959. Down Second Avenue. London: Faber and Faber.
- _____. 1962. The African Image. London: Faber and Faber.
- _____. 1964. Modern African Stories. London: Faber and Faber.
- _____. 1966. A Guide to Creative Writing: A Short Guide to Short Story and Novel Writing. Dar-es-Salaam: East African Literature Bureau.
- _____. (ed.) 1967. Introduction. African Writing Today. Harmondsworth: Penguin: 11-13.
- _____. 1967. In Corner B and Other Stories. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- _____. (ed.) 1970. Thought, Ideology and African Literature. Denver: University of Denver.
- _____. 1971 The Wanderers. New York: Macmillan.
- _____. 1972. Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays. New York: Hill and Wang.
- _____. 1974. The African Image. New and rev. ed. London: Faber; New York: Praeger.
- _____. 1980. Chirundu. Johannesburg: Ravan Press; New York: Thomas Nelson; New York: Lawrence Hill (1981).
- _____. 1981. The Unbroken Song: Selected Writings of Es'kia Mphahlele. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- _____. 1981. Let's Write a Novel, a Guide. Cape Town: Maskew Miller.
- _____. 1984. Afrika My Music. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

- _____. 1984. Father Come Home. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- _____. 1985. Let's Talk Writing: Prose. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers.
- _____. (ed. with Chapman, Michael and Colin Gardner) 1992. Perspectives on South African Literature. Parklands: AD. Donker.

ARTICLES, LECTURES AND INTERVIEWS

- Mphahlele, E. 1960. "Black and White." New Statesman. 342-343, 346.
- _____. 1973. "Why I Teach My Discipline." Denver: The University of Denver Quarterly. XVIII:1:32-43.
- _____. 1979. "Exile, the Tyranny of Place and the Literary Compromise." In UNISA English Studies: Journal of the Department of English. XVII.1:37-44. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- _____. 1981. Written Introduction to Conversations with African Writers by Lee Nichols and taped interview with Lee Nichols. Washington, D.C.: Voice of America.
- _____. 1984. Poetry and Humanism: Oral Beginnings. Johannesburg: Institute for the Study of Man in Africa, U. of the Witwatersrand. (The 22nd Raymond Dart Lecture, 20 June).
- _____. 1990. "Publisher at Your Doorstep." Johannesburg: Tribute magazine.
- _____. 1990. "The Art of the Writer and His Function." Pretoria: UNISA African Studies Forum. 33:2-19.
- _____. 1991. "Decolonising the Mind." New Nation. 1-7 November:8.
- _____. 1993. "Educating the Imagination." College English. VV.II February:179-186.

Secondary Sources

BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND BIOGRAPHIES

- Woeber, C. and Read, J. 1989. Es'kia Mphahlele: A Bibliography. Grahamstown: National English Literary Museum.
- Manganyi, N. C. (ed.) 1984. Bury Me At the Marketplace: Selected Letters of Es'kia Mphahlele 1943-1980. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers.

- _____. 1983. Exiles and Homecomings: A Biography of Es'kia Mphahlele. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Thuynsma, N. P. (ed.) 1989. Footprints Along the Way: A Tribute to Es'kia Mphahlele. Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers.
- CRITICAL BOOKS, TEXTS, ARTICLES AND SYMPOSIA
- Abraham, W. E. 1962. The Mind of Africa. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Amuta, C. 1989. The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Ashcroft et al. 1991. The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1981. Ed. M. Holquist. The Dialogic Imagination. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Barboure, Dorian 1984. "Mongane Serote: Humanist and Revolutionary." Momentum: On Recent South African Writing. M.J. Daymond, et al. (eds.). Pietermaritzburg: Natal UP: 171-182.
- Barnett, Ursula A. 1976. Ezekiel Mphahlele. Boston: Twayne.
- _____. 1983. A Vision of Order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914-1980). Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman (Pty) Ltd.
- Beier, U. (ed.) 1979. Introduction to African Literature: An Anthology of Critical Writing. Harlow: Longman.
- Butler, Guy 1984. "A Search for Synthesis." Momentum: On South African Writing. M.J. Daymond et al. (eds.) Pietermaritzburg: Natal UP.
- Chinweizu, Jemie Onwuchekwa and Ihechukwu Madubuike 1983. Toward the Decolonization of African Literature. Washington, D.C.: Howard UP.
- Coetzee, J.M. 1988. White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa. New Haven: Yale UP.
- Dathorn, O.R. 1974. African Literature in the Twentieth Century. Minnesota: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Eagleton, T. 1986. "Marxism and Literary Criticism" (Chapters 1-2). In Kaplan, 1986:532-554.
- Eakin, John Paul 1984. Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP.

- Ebersohn, W. 1986. Momentum: On Recent South African Writing. M.J.Daymond, et al. (eds.). Pietermaritzburg: Natal UP: 16-19.
- Gravitz, Herbert L., and Julie D. Bowden 1985. A Guide for Adult Children of Alcoholics. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Freund, Elizabeth 1987. The Return of the Reader: Reader-response Criticism. London: Methuen.
- Goldmann, Lucien 1964. Trans. Philip Thody. The Hidden God. New York: Humanities Press.
- Gordimer, N. 1988. The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Holub, Robert C. 1984. Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction. London: Methuen.
- Irele, Abiola 1990. The African Experience in Literature and Ideology. Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- Iser, Wolfgang 1975. The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- James, William 1990. The Varieties of Religious Experience. New York: Vintage.
- JanMohamed, Abdul R. 1988. Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa. Amherst: Massachusetts UP.
- Kaplan, C. (ed.) 1986. Criticism: The Major Statements. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Kesteloot, Lilyan 1963. Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude. Trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy. Washington, D.C.: Howard UP, 1991.
- Klima, V. and Ruzicka, K.F.; Zima P. 1976. Black Africa: Literature and Language. Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co.
- Larson, C. 1978. The Emergence of African Fiction. London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press.
- Lindfors, B. 1985. "Symposium on Contemporary South African Literature." University of Texas at Austin on March 20-22, 1975.
- Makgabutlane, Sol. 1990. "Mightier than the Sword." Tribute 32-38.
- Malan, C. (ed.) 1987. Race and Literature. Pinetown: Owen Burgess Publishers.
- Mbiti, John 1985. Prayers in African Religion. New York: Orbis Books.

- Meebelo, Henry S. 1973. Main Currents of Zambian Humanist Thought. Lusaka: Oxford UP.
- Moore, G. 1962. Seven African Writers. London: Oxford UP.
- _____. 1969. The Chosen Tongue: English Writing in the Tropical World. London and Harlow: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Ndebele, N. S. 1988. "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction." In Ten Years of Staffrider (1978-1988), 1988:318-340.
- _____. 1991. Rediscovery of the Ordinary. Johannesburg: COSAW.
- Ngara, E. A. 1987. Art and Ideology in the African Novel: A Study of the Influences of Marxism on African Writing. London: Heinemann.
- Ngugi, wa Thiong'o 1992. Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature. London: Heinemann.
- _____. 1938. Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms. London; Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1993.
- Nkosi, L. 1981. Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature. Essex: Longman.
- _____. 1983. Home and Exile and Other Selections. Essex: Longman.
- Ogungbesan, Kolawole 1991. "A Long way from Vrededorp: The Reception of Peter Abrahams' Ideas." Perspectives on South African English Literature. Michael Chapman et al. (eds.). Johannesburg: AD. Donker.
- Obiechina, Emmanuel N. 1990. Language and Theme: Essays on African Literature. Washington, D.C.: Howard UP.
- Olney, J. 1973. Tell Me Africa. Princeton: Princeton UP.
- _____. 1988. Studies in Autobiography. New York; Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Parker, Kenneth (ed.)1978. The South African Novel in English: Essays in Criticism and Society. New York: Holmes & Meier.
- Patel, Essop 1986. "Towards Revolutionary Poetry." Momentum: On Recent South African Writing. M.J. Daymond, et al (eds.). Pietermaritzburg: Natal UP: 83-89.
- Pereira, E. et al. (ed.) 1987. South African English Literature: 1900-1950s; South African English Literature: 1950s-1980s. I.II. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

- Serote, W. M. 1990. On the Horizon. Fordsburg: Congress of South African Writers.
- Suleiman, Susan R. and Inge Crosman 1980. The Reader in the Text. Princeton: Princeton UP.
- Shava, P. V. 1989. A People's Voice: Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Soyinka, Wole 1992. Myth, Literature and the African World. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Watts, J. 1989. Black Writers from South Africa. Houndmills and London: The Macmillan Press.
- Wauthier, Claude 1964. The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1979.
- ENCYCLOPAEDIAS, REFERENCES, HISTORY
- Abbagnano, Nicolo 1967. "Humanism." The Encyclopedia of Philosophy. New York: Macmillan. Vol.III:69-72.
- Beckson, K. and Ganz, A. 1990. Literary Terms: A Dictionary. New York: The Noonday Press.
- Cole, S. and Lindemann, J. 1990. Reading and Responding to Literature. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.
- Bates, Mudimbe , and O'Barr 1993. Africa and the Disciplines. Chicago: Chicago UP.
- Biko, Steven 1979. Black Consciousness in South Africa: Steve Biko. Ed. Millard Arnold. New York: Vintage Books.
- Butler, Jeffrey, Richard Elphick and David Walsh 1987. Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect. Connecticut: Wesleyan UP.
- Davenport, T.R.H. 1989. South Africa: A Modern History. Bergvele: Southern Book Publishers.
- Davidson, Basil 1991. Africa in History. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co.
- Fanon, Frantz 1963. The Wretched of the Earth. New York: Grove Press.
- Fromm, Erich 1965. Socialist Humanism. New York: Doubleday.
- Gerhart, Gail M. 1979. Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology. Berkeley: University of California

Press.

- Hansen, Karen Tranberg 1989. Distant Companions: Servants and Employers in Zambia, 1900-1985. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP.
- Heard, Tony 1990. The Cape of Storms: Johannesburg: Ravan.
- Herde, Peter 1973. "Humanism in Italy." Dictionary of the History of Ideas. Philip P. Wiener, (ed.). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. Vol.II:515-524.
- "Humanism" 1967. Encyclopaedia Britannica. Chicago: William Benton: XI:825-826.
- Kane-Berman, John 1981. Soweto: Black Revolt White Reaction. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Khapoya, Vincent B. 1994. The African Experience: An Introduction. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Lodge, Tom 1990. Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945. Braamfontein: Ravan Press.
- Malan, Rian 1990. My Traitor's Heart. London: The Bodley Head.
- Maritain, J. 1950. True Humanism. Trans. M. R. Adamson. London: Geoffrey Bles.
- "Nobel Prizes". 1967. Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 26. Chicago: William Benton 548-552.
- Popken, Michael (ed.) 1978. Modern Black Writers. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.
- Saunders, C. et al (ed.) 1988. Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story. Cape Town: The Reader's Digest Association.
- Sono, Themba 1993. Reflections on the Origins of Black Consciousness in South Africa. Pretoria: HSRC Publishers.
- Smith, David G. "Liberalism." Dictionary of the History of Ideas. Philip P. Wiener, (ed.). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. Vol.III:276-282.
- Sparks, Allister 1990. The Mind of South Africa. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Trosman, H. 1967. "Neuroses." Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol.16. Chicago: William Benton 295-301.

- Thompson, L. 1990. A History of South Africa. New Haven: Yale UP.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel 1961. Africa: The Politics of Independence. New York: Random House.
- Weiner, Philip P. (ed) 1973. "Liberalism." Dictionary of the History of Ideas. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 36-61.
- Zell, M. Hans and Silver, H. (comp. and ed.) 1972. "Ezekiel Mphahlele." A Reader's Guide to African Literature. London: Heinemann: 154-156.

JOURNALS, PERIODICALS, NEWSPAPERS

1989. "Autobiographies Tell a Rich Story." New Nation: People's History! I:123-124
- Barnett, U. 1984. "Africa or the West? -- Cultural Synthesis in the Work of Es'kia Mphahlele." Africa Insight. XIV.1:59-63.
- Brink, A. 1991. "'A Culture of Reading.'" The Weekly Mail. XII.41. 18-24 October:1.
- Couzens, T.J. 1971. "The Dark Side of the World: Sol Plaatje's 'Mhudi.'" English Studies in Africa. Vol.14, No.2: 187-203.
- _____. 1973. "Sol Plaatje's 'Mhudi.'" The Journal of Commonwealth Literature. Vol. VIII, No. 1:1-18..
- _____. 1974. "The Continuity of Black Literature in South Africa before 1950." English in Africa 1 No. 2: 11-23.
- _____. 1978. "Printers' and other Devils: The Texts of Sol T. Plaatje's 'Mhudi.'" Research in African Literatures. Vol.9, No.2:198-215.
- _____. 1987. "Sol T. Plaatje and the First South African Epic." English in Africa. Vol.14, No.1:41-63.
- Couzens, T. et al. 1987. "Looking In: Interviews with Es'kia Mphahlele." The Council of the English Academy. IV:114-141.
- Damian, R. 1986. "Through the Keyhole: Masters and Servants in the Work of Es'kia Mphahlele." English in Africa. Vol.13, No.2: 64-88.
- De Kock, L. 1987. "Literature, Politics and Universalism: A Debate between Es'kia Mphahlele and J.M. Coetzee." Journal

- of Literary Studies. (3.4): 35-48.
- De Vries, Abraham H. 1989. "An Interview with Richard Rive." Current Writing. Vol.I, No.1:45-56).
- Dunn, A. 1991. "PW Still Fears 'Hellish Reds.'" The Pretoria News. 16 November:1.
- Gray, S. 1990. "The Long Eye of History: Four Autobiographical Texts by Peter Abrahams." Pretexts. 2.2:99-115.
- Gray, S. 1991. "Basking in Gordimer's Reflected Nobel Glory." Weekly Mail. 6 October:1.
- Gwala, M. 1989. "Es'kia Mphahlele: A Divided Self?" Third World Quarterly. 11.3:198-202.
- Hodge, Norman 1981. "Dogs, Africans and Liberals: The World of Mphahlele's 'Mrs Plum.'" English in Africa. Vol.8, No.1: 33-45.
- _____. 1986. "The Way I Looked at Life Then: Es'kia Mphahlele's Man Must Live and Other Stories." English in Africa. Vol.13, No.2: 47-65.
- Johnson, Joyce 1984. "Culturally Derived Motifs and Symbols as Structural Features in Es'kia Mphahlele's Chirundu." Kunapipi. Vol.VI, No.2: 109-119.
- Lelyveld, J. 1980. "Black South African Goes Home Again." New York Times. 16 November:3.
- Lindfors, Bernth 1994. "Many Happy Returns? Repatriation and Resistance Literature in a New South Africa." Cross/Cultures. 14:63-72.
- Moody, C. 1991. "Authors Mindlessly Denigrated." The Star. 23 October:13.
- Ngwenya, Thengani H. 1989. "The Ontological Status of Self in Autobiography: The Case of Bloke Modisane's Blame Me on History." Current Writing. Vol.I, No.1: 67-77.
- Nussbaum, Felicity A. 1991. "Autobiographical Spaces and the Postcolonial Predicament." Current Writing. Vol.3, No.1:24-31.
- O'Brien, Anthony 1992. "Literature in Another South Africa: Njabulo Ndebele's Theory of Emergent Culture." Diacritics. 22.1:67-85.
- Oliphant, A. W. and Vladislavic, I. (eds.) 1988. Ten Years of Staffrider (1978-1988). Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Omo Asein, S. 1980. "The Humanism of Ezekiel Mphahlele."

- _____. Journal of Commonwealth Literature. 15.1:38-39.
1991. "Major Easing of Some Security Laws Planned." The Star. 3 May:6.
- Shear, Keith 1989. "Depictions of Childhood in South African Autobiography, with Particular Reference to the 1920s." English in Africa. 16 No.1. May:39-69.
- Visser, N.W. 1976. "South Africa: The Renaissance that Failed." Journal of Commonwealth Literature. II.1:42-57.
- Watson, Stephen 1982. "'Cry the Beloved Country' and the Failure of Liberal Vision." English in Africa. Vol.9, No.1:232-248.
- GENERAL WORKS OF FICTION AND NON-FICTION
- Abrahams, P. 1946. Mine Boy. Oxford: Heinemann International.
- Abrahams, P. 1988. Tell Freedom. London: Faber and Faber.
- Achebe, C. 1991. Things Fall Apart. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Allen, N. R., Jr. 1991. African-American Humanism: An Anthology. Buffalo: Prometheus Books.
- Brink, A. 1979. A Dry White Season. London: Collins.
- _____. 1988. States of Emergency. London: Collins.
- Chapman, M. (ed.) 1989. The Drum Decade: Stories from the 1950s. Pietermaritzburg: Natal UP.
- Chapman, M., Colin Gardner and Es'kia Mphahlele (eds.) 1992. Perspectives on South African English Literature. Johannesburg: AD. Donker.
- Coetzee, J. M. 1980. Waiting for the Barbarians. London: Penguin Books.
- Du Plessis, M. 1983. A State of Fear. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Gordimer, N. 1982. Six Feet of the Country. London: Penguin Books.
- Gordimer, N. 1990. My Son's Story. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Gray, S. (ed.) 1984. Modern South African Poetry. Craighall: AD. Donker.

- Head, B. 1987. When Rain Clouds Gather. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Kuzwayo, E. 1985. Call Me Woman. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Lelyveld, J. 1986. Move Your Shadow. Great Britain: Michael Joseph.
- Lessing, D. 1950. The Grass is Singing. London: Heinemann.
- Malan, R. 1990. My Traitor's Heart. London: The Bodley Head.
- Mathabane, M. 1986. Kaffir Boy. New York: Plume, New American Library.
- Mathiane, N. 1990. Beyond the Headlines: Truths of Soweto Life. Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers.
- Matshikiza, T. 1961. Chocolates for My Wife. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Mattera, D. 1987. Memory is the Weapon. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Modisane, B. 1990. Blame Me on History. Parklands: AD Donker.
- Ndebele, N. S. 1983. Fools and Other Stories. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Paton, A. 1953. Too Late the Phalarope. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- _____. 1961. Debbie Go Home. London: Penguin Books.
- _____. 1988. Cry, The Beloved Country. London: Penguin Books.
- Plaatje, Sol T. 1989. Mhudi. Parklands: AD Donker.
- Plomer, W. 1925. Turbott Wolfe. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985.
- Rive, R. 1986. 'Buckingham Palace,' District Six. Cape Town: David Philips.
- Serote, M. 1981. To Every Birth Its Blood. London: Heinemann.
- Schreiner, O. 1978 (first publ. 1883). Story of an African Farm. New York: Schocken.
- Smith, P. 1925. The Little Karoo. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Tagore, R. 1913. The Gardener. New York: The Macmillan Co.

Walker, S. (ed). 1989. Stories from the Rest of the World.
St. Paul: Graywolf Press.

INTERVIEWS, LECTURES, LETTERS AND OTHER SOURCES

Gerald Chapman, Professor of English and Department Head,
Denver University, Denver, Colorado, personal interview
on Mphahlele's pursuit of doctorate and teaching at
University of Denver, 10 September 1991.

Bravo, Nelda Emery 1991. "The Agrarian Manifesto and the Plan
Espiritual de Aztlan: Cultural Nationalism and American
Literary Tradition." Diss. Texas A & M. U.

Es'kia Mphahlele, Professor Emeritus of African Literature,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, personal
interview on African Humanism and related topics, Soweto,
23 January, 1991.

Peter N. Thuynsma, Professor of African Literature and former
acting head of department, University of the Witwatersrand,
Johannesburg, class lectures on Mphahlele's Down Second
Avenue, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 18, 21,
25 May, 1990.

Unpublished letter from Dr. Robert Pawlowski, Professor of
English and Department Head, University of South Florida,
Tampa, Florida, to Ruth Obee, dated November 21, 1991.

Unpublished letter from Dr. Es'kia Mphahlele, Professor
Emeritus of African literature, University of Witwatersrand,
Johannesburg, South Africa, to Ruth Obee, dated March 31, 1993.

Unpublished poem "Silences" (August 1992-1993) from Dr. Es'kia
Mphahlele, Professor Emeritus of African literature,
University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, to
Ruth Obee, dated March 15, 1994.

Unpublished letter from Dr. Es'kia Mphahlele,
Professor Emeritus of African literature, University of
Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, to Ruth Obee, dated
April 30, 1994.