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**The muzzled muse: Literature and censorship in South Africa,  
1963-1985**

**de Lange, Margreet, Ph.D.**  
**City University of New York, 1993**

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THE MUZZLED MUSE:  
LITERATURE AND CENSORSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA 1963-1985

by

MARGREET DE LANGE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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## Introduction

Censorship, i.e. state-organised control of art and all other forms of expression, is a highly appropriate domain in which to study the interaction between literature and society. Censorship is an element in the system of literary communication. Examining how censorship works illuminates a number of other elements of literary communication such as various aspects of the reception of literary texts and questions of fictionality, literariness, and referentiality.

One of the first readers of a literary text produced under censorship restrictions is the censor. The censor is in several respects a special kind of reader. He is a reader with the power to suppress a text and make it unavailable for other readers. He is also a reader who often does not honor the aesthetic conventions for the interpretation of literature. He reads a literary text as a statement about the world, as a message with a referential function, ignoring its poetic function. There is, therefore, a discrepancy between the censorious reader and the literary reader.

Both these readers are important for the author. The censorious reader can suppress the text and the literary readers are the readers the author intends to reach. This fact creates a tension that can shape the literary product. The author has several options with



which to deal with the discrepancy. The extremes are silence and martyrdom (ignore the censor). These have the same result: no communication with the intended readership. He can also give in to the demands of the censor or he can resort to masking ways of telling. In Russian literature, the latter option has been called Aesopian language: "a special literary system, one whose structure allows interaction between author and reader at the same time that it conceals inadmissible content from the censor." (Loseff: x)

What I will hope to demonstrate in this thesis is that the options an author has to cope with censorship depend on his cultural and political position in society and the readers for whom he writes.

Other reception-oriented issues that surface in this study are that the projected size and nature of a work's readership can form a decisive factor in the censor's decision to ban and that the censor himself posits a certain kind of reader when he evaluates a work.

The study of censorship in relation to literature also raises interesting questions about fictionality. What is the status of the literary text in the censorship process? How is the fictional quality of literature appreciated by the censor? As I have already indicated, there is a difference between a literalist reader who has a fundamentalist approach to literature and a reader who acknowledges its fictional nature and allows allegory and symbolism to function.

The literalist assumption of some forms of censorship precludes the allegorical and the symbolic. Such an approach can work in favor of authors who use evasive strategies that remove a text from a political frame of reference that is considered dangerous by the censor.

In a situation of political repression the concept of fictionality itself is also called into question. A committed author, i.e. an author committed to change the status quo through his work, has to believe that his work does more than present a fictional world in which references to the extraliterary reality are irrelevant. Yet, authors whose work has been banned often defend themselves by referring to the fictional nature of their work.

This thesis will examine the influence of censorship on literature in South Africa between 1963 and 1985. The choice of South Africa allows for comparative study. That the South African authorities have divided the population along racial lines in groups whose members have different rights within the system makes it possible to study the effect of censorship from different angles.

Also, in South Africa, as far as publications are concerned, there is no pre-publication censorship. The system is based on the evaluation of books after publication. The result is that the censorship process



partly takes place in the open. Thus, more material on the censorship process is available than would be the case with pre-publication censorship.

In South Africa, as elsewhere, the goal of state censorship is the repression of potentially subversive material. The control of publications is one way to protect the status quo. Those in power dictate the terms of censorship. For the South African situation, I will outline these terms and their ideological foundations. A comparison with the goals and beliefs of South African writers and the way these are expressed in their work will give insight into the clashes that occur between them and the censor.

I distinguish three groups of writers: white writers who write in Afrikaans, white writers who write in English, and black writers who write in English. Each group has had its own relationship with the power structure. This relationship has determined the way it is has been treated by the censor. The different approaches writers have used to cope with the system depend on their cultural and political position in the society.

White writers have had the option to develop evasive strategies. One of these, found in works by Afrikaans writers, is dislocation: changing the setting (time and/or place) of a work that otherwise has strong thematic connections with the contemporary situation in South Africa. In white writing in English one finds

similar devices such as indeterminacy of time and place (a form of dislocation). Allegory and utopia have also been used to move a story to a different level of abstraction.

Black literature in English does not reveal the use of these strategies. Such strategies have not presented an option for black writers to circumvent censorship for two reasons. One, the function of black literature has been primarily political. That function would have been jeopardized if black experience had not been conveyed in a direct way. Also, the devices used in white literature assume a cultural framework on the part of the reader without which the reader cannot decode the message. That framework is not the same as that of black readers. The only option for a black writer has been to ignore censorship even if this has meant that his work would be banned.

Apart from its numerous fascinating aspects, the choice of South African literature as a subject of study also presents certain difficulties. The situation in that country is very much in transition. I have therefore chosen to consider works from a defined period: from 1963, when the South African Parliament adopted the first censorship law, until 1985, when the President of South Africa declared a State of Emergency. More recent material is, however, also discussed if it proved particularly pertinent to my subject.

Despite recent developments, most censorship regulations that are discussed in this thesis remain in effect at the time of writing. And conditions generally, including the dismal economic conditions that affect primarily the black population, are little changed. It is not to be expected that the effects of decades of censorship will wither away from one day to the next. It goes beyond the scope of this thesis, however, to consider the relation of censorship and writing in times of relaxed state control and political transition. What this thesis aims to do is to throw new critical light on the diverse and rich literature of South Africa during the period of active apartheid.

## 1. SOUTH AFRICA AND CENSORSHIP

The period between 1963 and 1985 in South Africa first saw the attempt at consolidation of the policy of apartheid and then witnessed its unraveling.<sup>1</sup> During this period the white Afrikaner minority was in power.<sup>2</sup> In 1948 the Afrikaner Nationalists had won the elections on a platform of racial separation. The Afrikaners used the next two decades to implement apartheid. A number of laws designed to separate the races and ensure white supremacy were adopted over the years. In 1950, the Population Registration Act assigned every person to a racial group and the Group Areas Act determined where each group should live. In 1953, the Bantu Education Act placed African education under government control.<sup>3</sup>

A law to curb the freedom of expression, a necessary element of a repressive system, was one of the last to be adopted. The question of 'publications con-

<sup>1</sup> For detailed historical accounts see: T. Dunbar Moodie. The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion. Berkeley: UP California, 1975; Tom Lodge. Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945; Davenport. A Modern History of South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> In South Africa live approximately 24.1 million blacks, 2.8 million Coloureds and 890,000 Indians, and 4.8 million whites, of whom sixty percent are Afrikaners and forty percent English-speaking. Figures from 1986, The Apartheid Handbook by Richard Omond.

<sup>3</sup> Note that these laws were often based on earlier legislation. The Immorality Act which prohibited extramarital intercourse between Europeans and Africans dated from 1927.



trol' had been studied since the fifties but it wasn't until 1963 that the South African Parliament enacted the Publications and Entertainment Act. Before that date customs officials controlled all foreign publications. Up to 1963, 12,629 foreign publications were seized by customs officials who judged them "on the strength of their jackets or words in titles"<sup>4</sup>. Domestic publications were occasionally banned under the provisions of various laws such as the Suppression of Communism Act.

Under the Publications and Entertainment Act (P & E Act), all publications and objects could be put up for review and banned if found harmful or offensive to the interests of the state and its citizens. A banned book could not be reproduced, imported or distributed. In some cases possession was also prohibited. The P & E Act stated that the purpose of the law was to uphold a Christian view of life in South Africa. It identified six categories of undesirable material:

A publication or object shall be deemed to be undesirable if it or any part of it

- (a) is indecent or obscene or offensive or harmful to public morals;
- (b) is blasphemous or is offensive to the religious convictions or feelings of any section of the inhabitants of the Republic;
- (c) brings any section of the inhabitants of the Republic into ridicule or contempt;
- (d) is harmful to the relations between any inhabitants of the Republic;
- (e) is prejudicial to the safety of the state, the general welfare or the peace and good order;

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Merrett, "A Blinkered Society", in Index on Censorship, 20.9 (1991) : 18.

(f) discloses with reference to any judicial proceedings -

(i) any matter which is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals;

(ii) any indecent or obscene medical, surgical or physiological details the disclosure of which is likely to be offensive or harmful to public morals.

(Section 26 (2) of the Act of 1963 in Statutes of the Republic of South Africa)

The law provided for administration by a Directorate of Publications which appointed publications committees to evaluate each work submitted. The members of a publications committee were chosen from a list drawn up by the Directorate and approved by the Minister of Home Affairs. Works could be submitted not only by employees of the government such as police and customs officials and directorate members but also by members of the public.

A decision by a publications committee could be taken to a court for evaluation. However, this did not provide a practical avenue for appeal, due to the high costs of a court case.

In 1974, Parliament passed a new law, the Publications Act. The categories of undesirability remained the same but the procedure changed. The right of appeal to a court of law was drastically curtailed and replaced by the institution of a Publications Appeal Board (the Appeal Board or PAB) . This meant that judicial review of the censorship process was all but abolished.

Under the new law, the government's grip on censorship became even tighter. The Minister of Home Affairs not only had the power to appoint the members of the Directorate and to designate the persons from among whom the Directorate appointed committees but he could also instruct the Appeal Board to reconsider the decision of a committee and instruct the Directorate to refer a public entertainment to a committee where the Directorate had not done so itself. Moreover, the fourteen PAB members were appointed by the State president. The Directorate could act with or without complaint.<sup>5</sup>

In 1978, the Publications Act was amended after a dispute between writers and legislators occurred over the banning of Magersfontein, O Magersfontein by the highly acclaimed Afrikaner author Etienne Leroux. To avoid a clash with the Afrikaner literary establishment, two new mitigating elements were introduced: a committee of experts to consider the literary merit of a work and the latitude to impose conditions, rather than a complete ban, on distribution. These conditions included age and display restrictions. If a committee of literary experts decided that a work had literary value, that finding could be an attenuating factor for the Appeal Board in evaluating its harmful nature.

Another new element was the 'likely reader'. Until then the 'average man' had been the touchstone for

<sup>5</sup> See J.C.W. van Rooyen, Censorship in South Africa.

undesirability. The question changed from "What will be the effect of this work on the average man?" to "What will be its effect on the likely reader?" The change allowed for the consideration of the size and nature of a work's projected readership.

The introduction in the censorship system of 'literary merit' and the 'likely reader' made it possible to relax the control on certain kinds of literature. The new chairman of the Appeal Board, Kobus van Rooyen, realised that the negative publicity produced by bans on well-known authors did more harm than the works themselves. But the application of censorship also became more arbitrary. Initially only white authors benefited from the new dispensations. The result was a confusing situation in which the ban on a work by a white author could be lifted at the same time as a similar work by a black author was banned (see chapter 8.1).

The period between 1978 and 1983 was a period of transition. The PAB laid down guidelines for the application of the Publications Act but these were initially ignored by the publications committees. As a result many literary works were banned on the committee-level and unbanned by the PAB.

In 1982, the PAB wrote guidelines for black literature, applicable to the 'political' sections of the law. These guidelines expressly extended the relaxed standards already being applied to white writers to



black writers as well. After 1982 there were very few new bannings of literature. But many works that had been banned earlier remained banned. A ban could only be lifted if a publication was resubmitted. Many authors and publishers chose not to do so in order not to cooperate with the system.

The relative freedom of literature by no means meant an overall relaxation of censorship. Even in 1990, more publications were banned than unbanned.<sup>6</sup> Attention also shifted to the media. Obviously the unavailability of information on developments in their own society also had an indirect effect on writers.

Apart from the banning of publications, there was another form of banning, the banning of persons. A person who was banned was served with a banning order. Banning orders were issued in terms of the Internal Security Act of 1976 which amended the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950.

A banning order could contain a number of provisions.<sup>7</sup> The relevant provision for writers was that:

[i]n terms of the Act, all banned persons are prohibited from being office-bearers, officers, members, or active supporters of an organization which in any way prepares, publishes, or distributes any publication

<sup>6</sup> The Johannesburg-based Anti-Censorship Action Group reported that during 1990, 222 publications had been reviewed and unbanned, while 305 had been banned. (Index on Censorship, 20:8, August/September 1991.)

<sup>7</sup> These provisions are described in The Silenced: Bannings in South Africa, by Sean Moroney and Linda Ensor, 3-4.

(except with special permission). Some orders state that the recipients may not be concerned in any way with the preparation, printing, or publication of any newspaper, magazine, pamphlet, book, handbill, or poster. Some prohibit the entry upon the premises where a publication is produced. (Moroney 3)

The ban applied not only to the writer concerned but to third parties as well. Writers who were banned were not only forbidden to prepare a publication but others were prohibited to quote from their work. The human-rights scholar, John Dugard, listed among the groups of people to whom this restriction applied:

ex-residents of South Africa who, in the opinion of the Minister, advocate or engage in activities abroad calculated to further the achievement of any of the objects of communism. (section 10 quin)  
 ...this section had been used to prevent the distribution of literary works by some of the country's most distinguished African writers, notably Todd Matshikiza, Bloke Modisane, Ezekiel Mpaphele, Lewis Nkosi and Can Temba. (Human Rights and the South African Legal Order 158)

Banning was a form of silencing that was used almost exclusively against black writers.

In addition to these legal procedures, there are other forms of harassment that have made it difficult for a writer to work. Pressure on the writer could take the form of visits by the Security Police, confiscation of notes, and interrogation.<sup>8</sup> This study takes account

<sup>8</sup> André Brink gives some examples of harassment: "It begins, for the writer, with the discovery that all his mail is opened and his phone is tapped. And if it is relatively easy to adjust to it, ...it can become agonizing if the pressure extends to others. ...There are other methods, too, all of them extensions of censorship: an 'invitation' to visit the Special Branch and 'discuss things'; and next they are the visitors,

of the effects of these repressive measures but will concentrate on the censorship law.

arriving unannounced and with great show of strength, to search one's house and confiscate notes and correspondence and even one's typewriters." ("Censorship and Literature", in Mapmakers 246-247).

## 2. THE APPLICATION OF THE PUBLICATIONS ACT

Censorship as it developed since the fifties was designed, approved and administered by Afrikaners. Therefore, the ideology of the censor in South Africa has been intertwined with Afrikaner ideology.

To indicate to what extent Afrikaners have controlled censorship one needs only to consider that censorship has been part of the government apparatus and that the South African government has been dominated by the National Party since 1948. The Publications and Entertainment Act of 1963 was promoted by a prominent Afrikaner member of Parliament, Abraham Jonker, and passed by a largely Afrikaner legislature. Similarly, the Publications Act of 1974 was also passed by a Parliament dominated by the National Party.

The pseudo-judicial structure of the censorship apparatus served to enhance the appearance of judicial impartiality but in reality censorship has been government controlled. Moreover, the application of the censorship law has consistently been in the hands of Afrikaner officials.<sup>9</sup> The first decisions on undesirability were taken by ad-hoc committees composed of Afrikaners. When these committees were first formed in 1963, even some Afrikaners complained that they were

<sup>9</sup> See also Dugard in Human Rights: "Political and artistic expression alike are at the mercy of the Afrikaner elite which controls both the legislative and the executive branches of government." (201)

made up of so-called 'verkrampste', the most conservative section of the Afrikaner population.

The Minister of Home Affairs' appointees to the Directorate of Publications and his list of candidates for the publications committees have mostly been Afrikaners. The Minister's own powers to intervene directly in the process by for example resubmitting an approved publication for consideration have been described above. In addition, the President of South Africa, since 1948 a post held by an Afrikaner, has appointed the members of the PAB.

### 2.1. Ideology of the censor

Afrikaner ideology has been directed at the protection of Christian values and morals in order to preserve and strengthen the Afrikaner 'volksgees' (national spirit).<sup>10</sup> This has been considered necessary for the maintenance of the political status quo of white (especially Afrikaner) domination and to carry out the policy of separate development.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> All translations from the Afrikaans are mine unless otherwise noted.

<sup>11</sup> W.A. de Klerk, a prominent progressive Afrikaner, wrote: "The conservative reformists want to maintain the status quo in content, tempo and style. There is a kind of messianism among them - that there is only one way, one truth and one life, and that is the current model." (in Leadership 1987, quoted by Graham Leach, The Afrikaners 55)



Insight into the motives of the censor can be gained from a source that outlines Afrikaner ideology: Credo van 'n Afrikaner (The Creed of an Afrikaner) by Andries Treurnicht. Treurnicht, a prominent conservative spokesman for Afrikaner beliefs and convictions, was a member of Parliament for the National Party from 1971 till 1982.<sup>12</sup> From 1976 till 1980 he held various cabinet posts. In 1982 he left the National Party after a clash over reforms of the apartheid system and founded the Conservative Party. Since then he has been that party's leader.

In Credo van 'n Afrikaner, published in 1975, Treurnicht discusses the issues of apartheid, separate development, language and people, Christian Nationalism, the church, and human relations in the context of Afrikaner ideology. Afrikaner ideology is Calvinist, Treurnicht proclaims. His definition of Calvinism, however, shows that it has little in common with Calvin or the evolution of Calvin's ideas in the Western world.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> There are many Afrikaners less conservative than Treurnicht. Nevertheless, his exposition on Afrikaner beliefs gives insight into the ideological foundations of apartheid.

<sup>13</sup> See W.A. de Klerk, The Puritans in Africa: "The key to the Afrikaners is Calvinism. But the primitive or original Calvin will be insufficient to explain the modern Afrikaners. It is especially the subtle mutations which Calvinism underwent in the Puritan mind of the Anglo-Saxon world which become relevant." (xiv).

For Treurnicht, Calvinism is a totalitarian form of Christianity in which the sovereignty of God is central. For society this means that all spheres of life are determined by a constant relation to God as legislator of all things. There is consequently no separation between church and state. "The Calvinist", according to Treurnicht, "accepts the existence of other spheres of life outside of the church, but he insists on the fact that each sphere has to recognize the kingship of Christ and has to serve his kingdom." (7) Scripture is considered as the word of God and contains the norms for Afrikaner moral life.

For Treurnicht, all facets of society are dominated by this special brand of religion. Treurnicht explains how the policy of separate development and the need for Afrikaner unity and purity are dictated by the Bible. He opposes what he calls "liberal individualism" which would dilute group identity.<sup>14</sup>

How is literature affected? One of the architects of apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd, pointedly stated the traditional Afrikaner conception of a writer's role: "What is required of the writer is not a question but

<sup>14</sup>"The rise of individualist liberalism in Western countries with its exaggerated emphasis on the importance, rights, freedoms, reason, and autonomy of the individual, has led to a weakening of the social organization in which people live, the national community, the nation, the church or any other human organization." (55).

an affirmation."<sup>15</sup> According to Treurnicht, an Afrikaner author should portray the Afrikaner, emphasizing his Christian religion, his resistance against his own weaknesses, his respect for the Immorality Act and his desire for chastity. An author who does otherwise offers a false image of the Afrikaner people. Treurnicht continues:

We can appreciate it when in Afrikaans novels the ugly and disgusting is also portrayed, provided that it does not illustrate a demonic reveling in evil or that it portrays evil itself as though it were normal or desirable.<sup>16</sup>

Treurnicht also comments on the recent occurrence of "chaos" and "dirt" in literature by which he means literature that vilifies Afrikaner society. He concludes that publication control is necessary in order to ban the philosophy of chaos from literature and from the mind of the Afrikaner:

Therefore, while moral persuasion and influencing are the most important weapons, the desire of the Afrikaner to fight degeneration finds its expression in the fact that we protect ourselves legally against undermining publications. (36)

Because the language struggle and the political struggle have been so closely related in Afrikaner his-

<sup>15</sup> Verwoerd made this statement during a clash with the prominent Afrikaans author Van Wyk Louw in 1966. It is quoted in Mapmakers by Brink, 234.

<sup>16</sup> This language "as though it were normal or desirable" is widely used by the censors. For example, in Van Rooyen Publikasiebeheer 82 and 124.



perceived to have their designated places in an order of things which should not be disturbed. The intrusion of the modern world into an existence that has remained largely undisturbed for three centuries are not easily tolerated or absorbed. The stresses involved in supporting the 'laager mentality' are sometimes overwhelming. When the cracks show - when personal inadequacies or problems coalesce with a general feeling of insecurity - then the Afrikaner is inclined to go over the top very quickly, directing his frustration against those closest to him and causing scores of deaths through family murders; there is also a high level of divorce and alcoholism. (The Afrikaners 42)

17 See chapter 3.1.

18 A popular Afrikaans magazine, Die Kerkbode, described the function of literature in the following terms: "The function of literature is on the one hand to positively influence the reader with a conservative and clear message and on the other hand to amuse." (Quoted by Lijphart 64).

In sum, the connection between Afrikaner ideology and that of the censors is demonstrably a strong one. The central elements - dominance of Afrikaner interests, Christian morals, Christian values and the protection of the Afrikaner state - have been reflected in the censorship laws and their application.

## 2.2. Application of the Publications Act

The Publications Act applies to all publications produced in South Africa and to all imported publications. The law does not distinguish among publications according to the race of the author. On the surface it could appear that the law is not discriminatory. But, although it is not as obvious as with the Group Areas Act or the Immorality Act, this law is just as biased in favor of Afrikaner interests as the other legal pillars of apartheid.

This bias becomes apparent in the very first section of the law which states that the function of the law is to uphold the Christian view of life.<sup>19</sup> This in a land where the majority of inhabitants are not Christian, and definitively not Dutch Reformed, the principal Afrikaner church.

<sup>19</sup> "In the application of this Act the constant endeavor of the population of the Republic of South Africa to uphold a Christian view of life shall be recognized." (Section 26 (1), 1963 and Section 47 (1), 1974.)

The central provision of the law is Section 47(2)<sup>20</sup>. This Section lists the possible reasons for undesirability. The letter of the law is vague. The reasons for undesirability are defined in cyclical terms. A publication is undesirable if it is offensive or harmful. The question is of course: offensive or harmful to whom? What have been the standards that have been applied to determine offensiveness or harmfulness? The text of the law itself provides only the most general indications, such as "offensive to the inhabitants of the Republic" and "harmful to the state."

A more precise idea of the standards that have been applied in determining undesirability can be gleaned from Publikasiebeheer in Suid-Afrika by Kobus van Rooyen. This 1978 publication provides a detailed explanation of the workings of censorship and was written by the (then) Vice-president of the PAB. Van Rooyen, who from 1979 till 1989 was Director of the PAB, also wrote Censorship in South Africa, published in 1987. This later, English version of the previous work is however substantially different because of the changes in the application of censorship that had taken place in the meantime.

Publikasiebeheer in Suid-Afrika discusses the law as it was applied during the period of the strictest

<sup>20</sup> The Publications Act of 1974. Section 47(2) is the same as Section 26(2) of the P & E Act of 1963, the text of which appears on pages 4-5.

ensorship, i.e. until 1979, and provides therefore a better insight into the reasons behind censorship. The supposed relaxations or adaptations that were enacted from 1979 on are dealt with in other chapters.

In Publikasiebeheer, Van Rooyen exposes the standards of undesirability for each of the subsections of Section 47(2). In theory, these standards were arrived at by determining what the average member of the South African community would think about a given publication.

My concern here is to discuss who this "average member" of the South African community was for the censor. If we know that, we can then better understand the ideology that informed the censor's actions.

Near the end of his book, Van Rooyen writes:

To determine how the ordinary member of the South African society feels about a certain subject, one does not exclusively look at the opinion of the white man, but one should take into account the whole South African community and question its average member.  
(147)<sup>21</sup>

To look for the average member of a population made up of politically, socially and culturally unequal groups seems difficult.

An analysis of Van Rooyen's treatment of Section 47 (2) shows that offensive to "the South African com-

<sup>21</sup> It is ironic that this statement finds a place in a chapter where Van Rooyen also delineates the necessity of race restrictions on certain public performances. He thus indirectly admits that in South Africa there can be no question of a 'whole community'.



munity" almost always means offensive to "the Afrikaner community" and that "harmful to the state" is synonymous with harmful to Afrikaner interests.

As standardbearer of the South African community, Van Rooyen uses the concept of the "average reader". He cites the description of the average reader from the case against The Dawn Comes Twice by Jack Cope:

The standards are that of the community at large as represented by the average decent-minded, law-abiding, modern and enlightened citizen with Christian principles; not of the libertine or the ultra modern, nor of the prude or ultraconservative, but that of the man of balance with a tolerant view with regard to others. He is not the highly educated man, the lawyer, the literarian (sic), the theologian, the professional man or the philosopher; nor is he the lowly (sic) educated, the prude, the narrow-minded or the debased person. Furthermore it is not how such average citizen himself acts but how he believes, after serious reflection, the average citizen should act in society. (Publikasiebeheer, quoted in English, 66 note 34)

How do the qualities used to define the average citizen betray Afrikaner bias? A few examples should suffice. "Law-abiding" is a charged term in a country with minority rule. One thinks of a law-abiding citizen in the first place as someone who at least has had the possibility of taking part in the legislative process (the power to vote for example). By voting for his representatives he is indirectly responsible for the making of the laws and therefore it may be assumed that they have some legitimacy for him.

It is obvious that in South Africa this could only apply to white people. The notion of a law-abiding

black citizen in the South African context represented almost a contradiction in terms. There were so many restrictive laws that applied only to black people, laws that they themselves had had no say in, that it was almost impossible to comply with all of them even if one was prepared to do so.<sup>22</sup>

The rest of the qualities are also characteristically white, Western, and in some cases typically Afrikaner. The distinction between highly educated and poorly educated can only be made if there exists some kind of functioning educational system. That could hardly be said of the educational system for blacks. As for professions like lawyer, "literarian", or philosopher, who would think of anyone but a white person in such positions?

Finally, two aspects are specifically Afrikaner. First, the average citizen had to have Christian principles, a typically Afrikaner demand in line with the whole structure of the apartheid-state. Secondly, the missionary, idealistic nature of the attitude "it is not how such an average citizen acts but how he believes, after serious reflection, the average citizen should act in society," was an essential aspect of Afrikaner ideology. Just as the average citizen

<sup>22</sup> Nat Nakasa wrote in 1963: "the result [of the apartheid laws] is that many people have the experience of regular imprisonment and lose the status of 'law-abiding citizens' without much choice." (Chapman Soweto Poetry 38)

focussed on how he should act, the censor, in publications, preferred to see reality depicted as it should be rather than as it was. This aspect will be of great importance when we come to the analysis of the effects of censorship on literary works.

Van Rooyen's treatment of the different sections of the law makes it clear that the sensitivities of what he calls the South African community coincide completely with those of the Afrikaner community. The following discussion offers examples from each section.

#### Section 47 (2) (a): morality

A publication is undesirable if it is indecent or obscene or offensive or harmful to public morals.

In his discussion of subsection (a), Van Rooyen describes the feelings of the "South African community" about nudity: "...the South African community is not disposed to tolerate the publication of nudity or semi-nudity." On sexual intercourse Van Rooyen states that:

The South African community considers someone's sex life to be a very private matter which is based on respect for the body of the individual and on the relationship with the spouse. Extra-marital intercourse is disapproved of by the South African community with its pursuit of maintaining a Christian way of life. (74)

In reference to masturbation, Van Rooyen mentions a limerick in which "female masturbation is referred to in a shameless manner." He continues:

Although the limerick was functional, it simply went too far for the South African

community standard. It was meant to shock but the South African community is simply not willing to tolerate this type of shock.  
(80)

The certainty with which Van Rooyen expresses these values without citing any sources leaves the impression that he takes his own opinion as point of departure and that his personal opinion is also that of his group. Words like "shameless" belong to Afrikaner Calvinist vocabulary. <sup>23</sup>

The profile that appears from these quotations is that of a prudish, conservative, idealist community which wanted literature to conform to its view of society with only minimal accommodations to the complexity of a multiracial and multicultural society. This is also illustrated by Van Rooyen's discussion of dirty language.

Among the eight points that Van Rooyen claims deserve consideration with regard to dirty language there are again a number that correspond to Afrikaner notions. Among these are the Christian aspirations of the law and the idealism of community standards. Another interesting point is the consideration that the use of a word among men only could be an extenuating circumstance in the sense that a dirty word used among men only would be more easily tolerated than when "ladies" were present.

<sup>23</sup> For example in Treurnicht: "Pornography, meddling with sex and a trampling on the healthy sense of shame and chastity." (36).



In his discussion of the word 'fuck', Van Rooyen explains what he means by the idealism of the community:

It is well-known that this word occurs frequently in spoken language; especially among soldiers, sailors and primarily male company. The question is not, however, whether this word is in daily use, but if the community, which is idealistic in its approach to publications control, will tolerate the use of such a word in a film or a book. (91)

This example clearly shows the prescriptive nature of at least certain aspects of the application of censorship. In the case of dirty language, realism or truthfulness offer no excuse. Words that "the South African community" would rather not hear, even if they were in common use, had to be eliminated. As Van Rooyen states in the English summary of the chapter on public morals: "Four-letter words are excised from films and the excessive use of such in books leads to findings of undesirability" (95). The novel Magersfontein, O Magersfontein by Etienne Leroux was banned on these grounds.

Section 47 (2) (b): blasphemy and religious offense

A publication is undesirable if it is blasphemous or is offensive to the religious convictions or feelings of any section of the inhabitants of the Republic.

The prominence of Afrikaner interests in the application of the Publications Act is even more outspoken in Van Rooyen's discussion of Section 47(2)(b). A work could be banned on religious grounds either

because it was considered blasphemous or because it offended the religious feelings of a section of the population.

Blasphemy only applied, however, to the God of the Old and New Testaments. Other gods or religious entities received no protection under this heading. "It goes without saying, however," Van Rooyen adds, "that Jesus and the Holy Ghost enjoy the same protection as the Bible's God." (103) That even The Virgin Mary was excluded from protection clearly indicates that a work would only be deemed blasphemous if it attacked the institutions of Afrikaner Calvinism.

The second part of Section 47 (2) (b) applied to all sections of the population. If all sections of the population could be offended, they could theoretically be protected. There was a restriction, however, that severely limited the protection offered non-Afrikaner sections of the population. The ultimate judge of what was offensive to a certain section was not a representative from that section but the community at large. Van Rooyen's explanation shows the limited meaning of "community":

There are, however, limits to the tolerance of the community and it can happen that not all cases of offense to a certain section can be honored. If, for example, a certain section of the population believes as part of their religion that they should trim their ears and if a publication appears which strongly condemns this, it will be hard to argue that one should take seriously a finding of offense by that section of the population. The test is in this sense modified by reasonableness, which has its foundation in

the community's tolerance within the bounds of freedom of conscience. (106-107)

Of the seven examples of transgressions under Section 47 (2) (b), five deal extensively with offense to the beliefs of Calvinists. These examples contain elaborate statements on the feelings of the average Christian about Christ.<sup>24</sup> One example very briefly addresses an offense to Catholicism and one an offense to Islam.

Section 47 (2) (c) : ridicule and contempt

A publication is undesirable if it brings any section of the inhabitants of the Republic into ridicule or contempt.

In theory, Section 47 (2) (c) could apply to any section of the population. The objective of this part of the law, however, was to maintain public order. Public order meant order in the Afrikaner-ruled state where blacks lacked the right to vote and other rights. The maintenance of public order was therefore largely in the interest of the ruling section of the population.

<sup>24</sup> In the case concerning the film Godspell the head of the Appeal Board, Snyman, wrote: "I am satisfied, however, that a substantial section of the inhabitants of the Republic would reasonably take offence on religious grounds, to having Jesus so portrayed, dressed as a harlequin, cracking jokes and dancing. To a large section of the Christian inhabitants in the Republic, Jesus is visualised as a sombre, solemn and superior person, intermingling it is true, with the people, but always as a solemn and dignified personality spreading the Gospel. (Quoted in Van Rooyen Publikasiebeheer 108)

It is not surprising that from the nine examples given by Van Rooyen of the application of this section of the law, seven concern the ridiculing of whites. The two works he mentions that were banned for the ridiculing of blacks are an American movie (Detroit 9000) and an American publication about the Ku Klux Klan (The Klansman). Among the examples of works banned for ridiculing whites are three important literary works by South Africans: Confused Mhlaba by Khayaletu Mqayisa, still banned in 1988, The Dawn Comes Twice, by Jack Cope, released in 1985 after having been banned for 20 years, and Kennis van die Aand by André Brink, unbanned with conditions in 1982.

Van Rooyen admits that a writer takes a risk when he criticises whites:

The Appeal Board has emphasized that the South African community in no way wants to suppress criticism against whites or the government, but writers should realize that they are on delicate ground and that they have to make sure that what they publish does not assume the character of a hateful attack on the white man. (117)

Notice again the use of the concept "South African community" in a context where it can only refer to whites.

The issue of race relations is, as Van Rooyen acknowledges, very important in South Africa (see also Section (d) below). He states that:

It is accepted that one of the most important political and moral principles of the South African community is directed at the peaceful coexistence, cooperation, mutual understanding and the elimination of discrimination between sections of the population. This concerns especially the relations between white,



brown and black people. Any confrontation between peoples has to be avoided. On the other hand the South African community is against biological integration and, although to a lesser degree, against social integration. (...) The South African community is aware of the differences between racial groups and does not envision the abolition of these differences through complete integration. One believes in a separate identity for the black, brown and white sections of the population. (120)

Van Rooyen here gives voice to the National Party ideology of separate development. This is one more example that by "South African community" he means the Afrikaner community.

#### Section 47 (2) (d): race relations

A publication is undesirable if it is harmful to the relations between any sections of the inhabitants of the Republic

In regard to section 47(2)(d) which states that a publication is undesirable if harmful to race relations, Van Rooyen observed that criticism of the government's racial policies was not in itself undesirable. Only if that criticism was meant to harm race relations, directly or indirectly, does it become problematic.

This is obviously a subjective criterion, the more so because in this case it was not the actual effect of the work that was taken into account but the intention of the author. In 47(2)(a) the intention of the author was irrelevant.

In addition, while under Sections 47 (2) (a) and (b), literary value could be an extenuating factor, in



his discussion of Section 47 (2) (d), Van Rooyen explicitly draws attention to the damage that fiction can do:

It is often exactly in the domain of fiction that an author can use facts in such a way that it harms race relations. (121)

He provides The Dawn Comes Twice as an example and quotes from the case against that work:

A work of fiction, because it is not confined to real events, can in fact do so [harm race relations] more effectively, for it can picture fictitious events, often in caricature, so as to raise or heighten the emotions of its readers. In other words a fictional presentation of facts can provide the very sting for an attack by creating fictitious situations of hardship, or unfairness or injustices. (Original in English, 121 note 2)

"Fictitious" has here the meaning of false. This section has been used most often to ban books by blacks (the other example Van Rooyen gives is Confused Mhlaba). These works are realistic. The reality they describe, however, is not one that the white censor is in daily contact with. This reality is also one in which whites seldom have the role of heroes. How could the censor determine whether the "situations of hardship or unfairness" were not real or at least realistic?

Van Rooyen limits his discussion of race relations to the relations between black and white. Undesirable works were those that tried to eliminate segregation in an unconstitutional way and those that stimulated animosity between black and white. In relation to the first point it should be noted that it was impossible

to work for the end of apartheid in a constitutional way because the principles of apartheid were laid down in the constitution. As far as the stimulation of animosity is concerned, this is again an entirely subjective evaluation.

The result has been that the determination of undesirability under this section has been highly subjective. The boundaries were vague and arbitrary. It was, for example, not forbidden to depict a black and a white person in the same scene. A work would be banned, however, if it stimulated transgression of the Immorality Act which prohibited sexual relations between the races. In the words of the Publications Control Board: "[If] sexual intercourse between White and Coloured persons is represented to the public as normal, natural, satisfying and right" (124), the work is undesirable.

This was judged to be the case with The Dawn Comes Twice. The Appeal Board found that:

Hudson's and Miriam's conduct is clearly in contravention of the Immorality Act but the book's approach to this is to condone it and to condemn the Immorality Act. ...Although there are those who disagree about the need for legislation on the matter, there can be no doubt that the average decent minded man in South Africa strongly disapproves of miscegenation. The book treats of the relationship between Hud and Miriam...not only as normal and natural, satisfying and right but as commendable. (125)

Even within South Africa, however, the Immorality Act and the Mixed Marriage Act, both pivotal apartheid laws, have been controversial for a long time. They

were finally repealed in 1985 because even in the eyes of the National Party they did more harm than good. They were often seen as the most inhuman and discriminatory aspects of apartheid legislation. The idea that one is not free to love whom one wants, apparently speaks more to the imagination than the restrictions on where one can live or work.

The Dawn Comes Twice was also banned on the grounds that it stimulated hostility. Its theme, according to Van Rooyen, shows how unreasonably and oppressively the white community behaves towards the black community. This was simple, straightforward political censorship. Descriptions that did not conform to the idealist version of the ruling minority or that contradicted the utopian idea of separate development were forbidden.

#### Section 47 (2) (e): state security

A publication is undesirable if it is prejudicial to the safety of the state, the general welfare or the peace and good order.

The safety of the state referred to the continued existence of the state as laid down in the constitution. The peace and good order clause was applied primarily to protect the institutions that had to maintain peace and good order, the police and the army. Criticism of the police or the army was undesirable.

The publications banned under this subsection included publications which propagated communism or

similar ideologies. Communism had a very broad definition in South African law. The Internal Security Act (formerly Suppression of Communism Act) states that:

"Communism" means the doctrine of Marxian socialism as expounded by Lenin or Trotsky, the Third Communist International (the Comintern) or the Communist Information Bureau (the Cominform) or any related form of that doctrine expounded or advocated in the Republic for the promotion of the fundamental principles of that doctrine and includes, in particular, any doctrine or scheme-

(a) which aims at the establishment of a despotic system of government based on the dictatorship of the proletariat under which one political organization is recognized and all other organizations are suppressed or eliminated; or

(b) which aims at bringing about any political, industrial, social, or economic changes within the Republic by the promotion of disturbance or disorder, by unlawful acts or omissions or by means which include the promotion of disturbance or disorder, or such acts or omissions of threat; or

(c) which aims at bringing about any political, industrial, social or economic change within the Republic in accordance with the directions or under the guidance of or in cooperation with any foreign government or any foreign or international institution whose purpose or one of whose purposes (professed or otherwise) is to promote the establishment within the Republic of any political, industrial, social, or economic system identical with or similar to any system in operation in any country which has adopted a system of government such as is described in paragraph (a); or

(d) which aims at the encouragement of feelings of hostility between the European and non-European races of the Republic, the consequences of which are calculated to further the achievement of any object referred to in paragraph (a) or (b). (This section was deleted in the 1982 Internal Security Act). (Quoted by Roger Omond, The Apartheid Handbook 203-204)

The vagueness and sweep of this definition ensured that it spread a net large enough to catch all publications



hostile to the government. Only subsection (a) treats communism as such. The other sections are tools to suppress criticism in the South African situation and have nothing to do with Marxist doctrine.

The reason for the broad definition of communism was, according to Van Rooyen, that:

[i]n a state in transition like South Africa, with its politically developing and often undeveloped peoples, the organization which enacts this transition has to have the respect of the citizens. ...The transitional character of the South African political system makes the room for tolerance for political civil disobedience in general extremely limited. (131)

The result of suppressing all 'subversive' material was the further polarization of society, which the law was supposed to avoid. Van Rooyen indirectly acknowledges this problem. He wonders whether "the South African reading public is thus not isolated from knowledge about the enemy." (132) The distinction between the reading public of law-abiding citizens and the enemy is significant. The enemy was not some threatening outside force, but the disenfranchised in South Africa itself, those who did not benefit from the status quo.

Again it is obvious that the standards applied were those of the lawmaker. Van Rooyen: "In this paragraph too, we use the community standard as norm. The content of the community standard is necessarily determined by the reigning circumstances and by the position of the legislature vis-à-vis issues of state security." (133 emphasis added). The censor has adapted the community standard according to his needs.



If one considers that in this section again The Dawn Comes Twice and Confused Mhlaba were offered as prime examples of subversive publications, one understands the seriousness of the application of Section 47 (2) (e) for literature. "The enemy" were not only foreign agents and bomb-throwing radicals but also highly acclaimed (outside the Afrikaner community) authors.

There were further aggravating factors as far as literature was concerned. In the first place, what determined the undesirability of a publication was not the actual reaction of the reader but its potential danger. That put judgment in the hands of the censor instead of relying on the more objective consideration of the actual effect.

Secondly, under Section 47 (2) (e), literary value was an aggravating factor. In connection with the banning of The Dawn Comes Twice, Van Rooyen states that:

The police have the difficult task of preserving peace and good order in the country and when they are treated contemptuously, in a direct or indirect manner, the maintenance of state authority is undermined. This was the finding of the Appeal Board with regard to The Dawn Comes Twice, in which the police are portrayed as ruthless and unscrupulous people. In this case is also indicated that literary merit in this sort of circumstance can be an aggravating factor. (136)

What van Rooyen means by "aggravating" is explained in the discussion on Section (d).

## Conclusion

A remarkable aspect of Publikasiebeheer is the discrepancy between the space allotted to the different subsections of Section 47 (2). The discussion of the standards applied for 47 (2) (a) covers 36 pages, 47 (2) (b) covers 18 pages and (c), (d), and (e) together only 21 pages. There is no correspondence between the space allotted by Van Rooyen and the number of publications submitted to the censors for consideration under each category. In 1976, for example, there were 432 publications or objects submitted that were possibly endangering State security, or of a communistic nature. In that same year only 44 pornographic publications were submitted. (Source: report January to December 1976 of the Publications Act, 1974, and the Publications Appeal Board.)

There are several possible causes for the disproportionate attention given to subsections (a) and (b) by Van Rooyen. One of them lies in the desire to comply with the image that was given to the Publications Act from its inception: that it was there to keep pornography out of the hands of innocent children. Even though the statistics belie this intent of the law (many more publications were banned for political reasons than for moral reasons), politicians and censors alike preferred to emphasize their role as crusaders for moral purity rather than admit political repression.

Another reason is that sections (a) and (b) have been applied primarily to Afrikaans literature and Publikasiebeheer was a work written in Afrikaans directed at Afrikaners.<sup>25</sup> Almost all Afrikaans publications that were submitted to the censor were considered offensive under (a) or (b). The so-called political sections (c), (d), or (e), were generally reserved to suppress the work of political opponents. There was an enormous reluctance among the censors to consider one of their own, an Afrikaner author, as politically hostile.

The standards that have been used to judge publications for undesirability have been determined by Afrikaner ideology. The application of censorship has therefore been necessarily discriminatory. All authors have been judged by the norms of a small minority.

As far as literature is concerned, literary value could be an extenuating factor. This has been the case with Sections 47(2) (a) and (b). In the English summary of his chapter on public morals, Van Rooyen states that "[l]iterary, scientific and artistic values are taken into consideration, but then only as equal values amongst other values. These values therefore have only

<sup>25</sup> Publikasiebeheer appeared in the middle of the Magersfontein controversy, the biggest controversy in Afrikaner literature since its beginnings. This battle pitched one group of Afrikaners against another, writers versus politicians. In a sense what Van Rooyen did was to read the writers their rights. He explained the rules of the game in the hope of preventing further difficulties like Magersfontein.

an extenuating effect." The literary merit of the work could increase the tolerance for some moral and religious transgressions.

The fictional nature of a work could, however, also be an aggravating factor, as has been the case with subsections 47 (d) and (e), sections used mainly to ban English literature written by whites or blacks.

The standards as elucidated by Van Rooyen entailed a limited tolerance for sexual descriptions of any kind and for anything that would have been considered morally abnormal by the church-going, law-abiding, family-oriented Afrikaner. In the domain of religion, there has been a limited tolerance for attacks on the institutions of Afrikaner Calvinism. As far as law and order are concerned there has been no tolerance for criticism of the state, its policies and institutions.

In the eyes of the Afrikaners, the necessity for strict control lies in their perception that South Africa was a state in transition, working towards the completion of apartheid. This Afrikaner utopia still seemed an attainable goal in the seventies. Literature was therefore called upon to comply in large measure with the vision of Afrikaner utopian society.

Because the standards, as applied, have been so clearly ideologically biased, censorship affected each group of writers differently, depending on its relation with the ruling elite. The next chapter will examine how the strictures of censorship have affected Afrikaans literature.



### 3. CENSORSHIP AND AFRIKAANS LITERATURE

Afrikaans literature is literature written in Afrikaans by Afrikaners. This chapter outlines the involvement of Afrikaans literature with censorship. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 briefly indicate the special role of Afrikaans language and literature in Afrikaner society. Section 3.3 presents a short censorship 'history' of Afrikaans literature.

In chapter 4, I will examine works by four Afrikaner novelists, two of whom have been banned, focussing on one of the evasive strategies that has been used in Afrikaans literature. This strategy is the distancing of a work's setting from contemporary South Africa. The strategy has been employed in reaction to the censor's sensitivity to descriptions of reality that deviated from his own.

#### 3.1. Afrikaans language

Derived from Dutch, Afrikaans is the language that developed among the first group of settlers on the Cape. For a long time it was only a spoken language, the official language being Dutch. Initially Afrikaans was considered a bastard language but it became increasingly important in the nineteenth century both in reaction to the rise in power of the English-



speaking settlers and to decreasing contact with Holland. Under increasing pressure from the English, the Afrikaners felt the need to define themselves as an 'African' people as opposed to a group of colonists with strong ties to the motherland.

The language struggle and the political struggle have always been closely intertwined for Afrikaners. Thus one can say that their rise to power did not start with the foundation of a political party but with the foundation of the First Language Movement in 1875.

Vernon February writes that:

The cardinal aim of the GRA [Genootskap vir regte Afrikaners] was "to stand for our language, nation and our country." From the aims it is quite clear that this was not just a language movement. The first germs of Christian nationalism and Christian national education were already there in embryonic form. (Mind Your Colour 30)

The preservation of Afrikaans was seen as the sine qua non of Afrikaner survival.

### 3.2. Afrikaans literature

Due to the special place of Afrikaans, literature has been very important in Afrikaner society. Especially in the early years of written Afrikaans, books in that language were indispensable for its development and preservation. Against the background of the political struggle for survival and the relative youth of the language, literary works and their authors acquired an elevated, almost holy status. Each work was important

because there were so few. Each work was also turned to immediate use in schools for language instruction. This was in a time when the English had not completely given up their effort to wipe out Afrikaans. Thus, historically, each work in Afrikaans is a brick in the edifice of Afrikaner identity.

In the course of the twentieth century, Afrikaans literature developed a certain amount of independence from its political role. At first, Afrikaans writers identified closely with nationalist concerns, and Afrikaners, striving to develop a national identity, highly valued their writers. Writers and poets provided the images and myths necessary to establish and strengthen that identity.<sup>26</sup>

It wasn't until the 1930s that Afrikaans literature started to free itself from its nationalist subservience. The spokesman of that generation, the poet

<sup>26</sup> February writes about this period: "It is understandable that the earliest literary, or quasi-literary, efforts should concentrate on factors such as pride and religion and the forging of an Afrikaner myth strong enough to provide an answer to the English influence. The early writings are thus less important as literature but fundamental in the establishment of an Afrikaner ethos and nationalism. Scanning through these writings, one is struck by the didactic tenor, the nationalistic and religious tone and the anti-English bias, especially towards the close of the nineteenth century (with its Boer war and the Jameson raid and the increasing attempts at the Anglo-saxonization of the Afrikaner). (Mind your Colour 30)

Van Wyk Louw, rejected the notion that the poet was a servant of his people.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1940s, D.J. Opperman went one step further and approached political criticism. He was, according to Brink, "the first Afrikaans poet openly to explore and expose the racial complexities of South Africa and to reveal in unforgettable and concrete imagery the essential humanity of all who inhabit this land, be they black, or brown, or white." (Mapmakers 25)

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the sixties, literary authors were still considered to be the protectors of cultural identity. The laager had closed ranks. Then a group of writers, the 'Sestigers', started to break out of the mold. Although their subjects were not political, their aesthetic iconoclasm was so strong that they soon came into conflict with the established Afrikaner values.

"The vehemence of the cultural collision and the extent of its reverberations", according to Brink, one of the Sestigers, "cannot be fully understood from the outside unless the real horror at the thought of anyone

<sup>27</sup> Brink writes: "The first persistent questioners of the system, the generation of Van Wyk Louw, made their appearance in the 1930s and opened the windows of Afrikaans literature to the outside world: the philosophies of Schopenhauer, of Nietzsche, of Hegel (with a sound dose of Mein Kampf thrown in for good measure) invaded Afrikaans poetry; sexual love, including homosexual love, was introduced as a theme; above all, this generation rejected the notion of the poet as mouthpiece of his people and insisted on the primacy of the individual's perception and experience of the world." (Mapmakers 24)

leaving the laager is appreciated." (Mapmakers 26)

Still, it wasn't until the 1970s that Afrikaner authors started to write about the contemporary political scene.

### 3.3. Afrikaner reactions to censorship

Until the early 1960s, Afrikaner authors had little reason to be concerned about censorship. There was no law curbing domestic publications and no work in Afrikaans had ever been banned under other laws.

In 1960, however, the Cronjé commission, installed in 1954 by the Nationalist government to study the question of domestic publications control, presented far-reaching recommendations that included pre-publication censorship. Under this proposal, it would have become a punishable offense to print or publish a book or periodical without the prior consent of the censors.

This draft Undesirable Publications Bill encountered opposition from all sides, especially because it also applied to the press. In a pamphlet called Censorship and Press Control in South Africa, Alexander Hepple, an authority on South African political and economic history, wrote in 1960 "There are unmistakable signs that we are heading for a political censorship of the most restrictive kind"(7). The Bill was withdrawn and reshaped into the Publications and Entertainment Bill.



The new Bill was accepted by the government in January of 1963 and was passed by parliament later that year. In the spring of 1963, a lively discussion about the proposed censorship regulations was conducted in the Afrikaans newspapers. Established writers like Van Wyk Louw and Opperman opposed the bill. They voiced the concern that literature, and Afrikaans literature in particular, would be hard hit under the new law. Van Wyk Louw wrote in a letter to the editor of Die Burger, a leading Afrikaans daily newspaper,:

I doubt whether even Lord Milner could have thought of a more effective way in which to stultify Afrikaans and give English free reign in South Africa. ... Truly, as an Afrikaner who never (here or in Europe) denied my Afrikaner-Nationalism, I cannot understand what motive the Nationalist Government might have had to be led to this highly questionable "moral", but essentially anti-Afrikaans legislation. (Die Burger, 10 March 1963)

Even though this was a severe attack by a member of the Afrikaner establishment it had little effect. The politicians defended the introduction of the legislation with the argument that pornography should be curbed and denied that the law would have any effect on literature. In Die Burger, the sponsor of the Bill, Abraham Jonker, claimed:

This proposal has nothing to do with serious literature. The Bill is directed against filth, pornography, blasphemy, offensiveness and the distribution of communistic propaganda. Everyone who opposes the regulations is in favor of these wrongs. (Die Burger, 30 January 1963)

The Bill was passed without changes.



During the first ten years of its application, not one literary work in Afrikaans was banned under the Publications and Entertainment Act. In this period there were more protests against the working of the law from church ministers who lobbied for the banning of several literary works that after consideration had not been banned than from authors. This happened for example with Sewe Dae by die Silbersteins by Etienne Leroux and Lobola vir die Lewe by André Brink.

There are several reasons for the protected status of Afrikaans literature. Among the censors and politicians there was clearly a reluctance to ban one of their own authors. There were other ways in which publications could be controlled without having to denounce them publicly and thus jeopardize unity in the laager.

Pressure to conform, for example, continued to exert a strong measure of pre-publication social control.<sup>28</sup> Afrikaner writers had first to extricate themselves from these influences while they were writing. Perhaps even more importantly, publishers too had to act independently and publish a potentially controversial work. In the 1960s, however, there were no

<sup>28</sup> Graham Leach writes in The Afrikaners: "The pressure to conform is exerted from an early age with a demand for complete allegiance to Afrikaner culture, the church and the National Party....Afrikaner family life is authoritarian and strict; there are well-defined community pecking orders. Conformity is encouraged from the Afrikaner's first day at school." (43)

independent publishers. All publishers had ties with the government.

For example, pressure could be exerted to suppress unwanted material even before it appeared in print as, happened with the poem "The Child that Died at Nyanga" by the Afrikaans poet Ingrid Jonker (the daughter incidentally of the man who had sponsored the P & E Bill). The title of the poem referred to an incident where a young child was shot in the township of Nyanga. The poem is part of the collection Rook en Oker (1965). After the collection had been accepted for publication and Jonker had received a signed contract, the publisher asked her to withdraw two poems. A church minister on the board of the publishing house had objected to the political nature of the poems. Jonker refused and referred to her contract. The publisher told her that they could honor the contract by printing only ten copies. Jonker still refused to withdraw the poems but did agree to shorten the title. It became "The Child." When the book appeared, it was revealed that the publisher had even further diminished the political meaning of the poem by moving it from the main body of the collection to a section of children's poems near the end.

Another example of how publishers' interference changed the course of literature occurred with the novel Om te Vlieg by Breyten Breytenbach. Om te Vlieg was written in 1965. Two publishing houses, the

Afrikaanse Pers and Human en Rousseau were afraid to publish it. Four years later it was published by Buren but by then the work had lost its innovative aspect. This was later acknowledged by André Brink and Daantjie Saayman, the publisher:

André Brink agrees that if Om te Vlieg had been published in 1965 it would have been the most important novel of the sixties. Mr. Saayman continues by saying that writers like Chris Barnard and Brink, who read the manuscript of Om te Vlieg long before it appeared in print, are strongly influenced by it. When Om te Vlieg finally appeared, the direction in Afrikaans literature that Breytenbach took was not new anymore. (Rapport, 17 August 1975)

Another reason that no Afrikaans work was banned was that the new generation of writers that appeared on the scene in the sixties was more interested in aesthetics than in politics. The Sestigers were perceived as iconoclasts but mainly in the domain of the structure of literary texts. The formal experiments of the Sestigers were received with mixed feelings in the Afrikaner community but they were not threatening enough to justify a ban. Few felt that these works would reach beyond a small, elite, well-educated public.

The first work in Afrikaans that was banned was Kennis van die Aand by André Brink. This happened in 1974, just before the new Publications Act was to replace the P & E Act. In chapter 4.1., I will examine this case in detail: the stated reasons for the ban, the reactions, and an analysis of the work.

The banning of Kennis van die Aand made clear to the Afrikaner cultural community that its works were no longer exempt from censorship. The ensuing heightened awareness of their vulnerability led to a sharp reaction from Afrikaner authors when the new censorship bill was introduced. The revered poet D. J. Opperman wrote in Die Burger:

They [the government] have achieved the power they have thanks to our language movement and Afrikaans literature. And as a sign of gratitude we are not even allowed the appeal to a court of justice.

We are humiliated. They make laws that reduce us to a toddler literature. (Die Burger 30 July 1974)

Opperman warned, however, that the government's strategy would not work:

But good writers never lose in the long run against the government. They make a plan and start a new movement: use the world of the fairy-tale and the fable. But it is a sad day when your government declares war on its own writers. The government never wins. Wait and see how things are ten years from now... (Die Burger 30 July 1974)

The "them" and "us" in this passage were not used for Afrikaners on the one hand and others/the rest on the other but to designate groups of Afrikaners, writers and the government.<sup>29</sup> This indicates a split in the laager.

In an article that appeared a week later, sixteen leading Afrikaans authors declared themselves in agree-

<sup>29</sup> See Brink, Mapmakers, "In most Afrikaans writing there is an irksome awareness of 'them' and 'us', a denial of the humanity of the Other."



ment with Opperman. Etienne Leroux, a loyal supporter of the National Party, conceded that there were problems:

At the moment there is an estrangement between the state and the writer. It seems to me that the state with its elaborate legislation on the subject of the arts tries to force writers into a certain mold.

The so-called will of the people that the state uses to justify its strategies is a terrifying, vague, dangerous, naive and unidentifiable figure that is capable with its shrewdness of shackling every writer. (Rapport, 6 October 1974)

With the banning of Kennis van die Aand and the introduction of the new law, the censorship debate among Afrikaners had finally started and would not quickly die down. Moreover, soon after the new system was put into place, four more Afrikaans works were banned.

One of the victims was Breytenbach's collection Skryt. The work was banned in June of 1975. The banning created an uproar because the work had been published in 1972 and was not in print anymore. The ban, therefore, served no practical purpose. What it did do was send a message to Afrikaner writers that their work was under close scrutiny.

In reaction to the tighter control, the Afrikaans Writer's Guild, an organization that was formed after the banning of Kennis van die Aand, organised a conference on censorship. The symposium was closed to the public and the press. This led to fierce speculation on what was being discussed. One of the rumors was that

the writers would decide to go underground and create a "samiszdat" literature.

Consternation was caused when a report appeared in a paper on Saturday which stated that Afrikaans writers will decide at the closed symposium how to exploit and circumvent the current censorship legislation. The report also stated that Afrikaans writers, illegally, want to go underground. (Hoofstad, 7 July 1975)

No single strategy emerged from the meeting, however. Instead there were a number of contradictory suggestions. In addition to the idea of creating an underground literature, André Brink suggested a reverse approach. Instead of withholding works from the censors, he proposed to clog the system by writing with the purpose of being banned and submitting every work to the censors.

The proposed strategies were not so much practical solutions for a problem as indicators of the turmoil that existed within the Afrikaner literary community.

One very effective initiative did come out of this meeting. A group of writers, including Ampie Coetzee, Ernst Lindenberg, and John Miles, founded Taurus, a publishing house intended to publish works by Afrikaner authors who ran the risk of being rejected by the established publishers.

Taurus was started with the money collected for the appeal of the banning of Kennis van die Aand. The new publisher set up a distribution system that reduced the financial risk of publishing "censorable" material. Taurus used a subscription system to sell the works it

published. A new work was sent to all readers on Taurus' readers list. In this way many potential readers were already in possession of a work before it could be submitted to a publications committee.

Taurus had a huge impact. It put works into print that would otherwise not have been published. It guaranteed their distribution and it even forced the established publishers to take greater risks in order not to lose their prestige.

Censorship was a recurrent issue in the Afrikaans press and among writers all through the seventies. The application of the Publications Act and the tough treatment of Afrikaans literature were a constant source of anger and irritation for the literary establishment.

This period of turmoil found its culmination in 1977 with the banning of Etienne Leroux's Magersfontein, O Magersfontein (hereafter Magersfontein). Magersfontein occupies a pivotal position in the relationship between Afrikaans literature and censorship. In the first place the censorship history of this work illustrates the growing discord within the Afrikaner community. In the second place, the protracted battle around Magersfontein led in the end to significant changes in the censorship law and in the way the law was applied.

The novel, written by a Nationalist Afrikaner, is a satiric account of the expedition of a film crew to

the battlefield of Magersfontein. The film crew intends to recreate the historic battle between the English and the Boers that took place at Magersfontein on 12 December 1899. As is characteristic of Leroux's writing, the work abounds in hyperbole and irony. The victims of his biting sarcasm are among others: war, the apartheid system, the English, and academics.

Magersfontein had already been screened and approved by a publications committee when a group of moral vigilantes, the Aktie Morele Standaard (Action for Moral Values), started a campaign to have the book banned. This small group of activists against the moral pollution of South Africa had already conducted a number of significant actions in the past. The AMS had been instrumental in dictating the changes in the law in 1974 and, in November of 1975, its members had organised widely reported bookburnings.

According to his own account in the newspaper Hoofstad of 24 November 1977, the leader of the AMS, van Zyl, had read Magersfontein three times without understanding what the book was about. While reading van Zyl made a list of all the words and expressions that he considered immoral or blasphemous. The AMS then sent this list to 2500 Afrikaners, mostly farmers, housewives and church ministers, with the request to write to the Minister of Home Affairs if the recipient found the list to contain offensive material. On September 14, 1977 Minister Connie Mulder asked the Appeal Board to reconsider Magersfontein.



The publications committee that had initially considered the work had ruled that its literary value outweighed its uncivilised language and that it should not be taken out of circulation. The Appeal Board overruled that decision, declaring the work undesirable on moral and religious grounds (Sections 47 (2) (a) and (b)).

Leroux's reaction was one of shock. He was most appalled that his work had been dissected in public by people without any literary inclination. He feared a lasting influence on his writing although he vowed to continue.<sup>30</sup>

As was to be expected, Minister Mulder welcomed the ban in the light of the protection of South Africa and the survival of its people.<sup>31</sup> More surprising was that the Afrikaner newspapers, usually supportive of the Nationalist government, sided with the writers this time. The day the ban was announced, Beeld ran a strongly worded editorial:

When a brilliant novel by what may be our greatest writer - a satire whose literary value is not doubted - is summarily banned, our censorship system has become a monster; a

<sup>30</sup> Leroux in Oggendblad, 23 November 1977: "I think the damage is done for what writer can write with the blue pencil of the Minister over his shoulder?" Leroux wondered how it was possible for a writer to create freely in those circumstances. But he stated also: "I will not stop writing. I will have to close my eyes and ears and go on writing."

<sup>31</sup> In Volksblad of 22 November 1977, he stated that: "We are probably out of step with certain Western countries but in view of what is permitted in those countries, South Africa is gladly out of step for the benefit of its people and its survival."

threat to the creative artist, our intellectual life and the Afrikaans press. (22 November 1977).

A day later Die Burger, in milder words, also denounced the ban and indicated how the law might be changed to avoid similar cases in the future:

The banning of Magersfontein by Etienne Leroux by the Appeal Board for Publications has provoked protests of a magnitude seldom experienced in South African literary circles. This is different from some of the objections that have been heard in the past against everything that reeks of censorship. This time we are not dealing with clowns of whom one may suspect that they are enemies of the South African way of life or want to bring down conservative walls. If one considers those that speak up one sees among them the most prominent members of the Afrikaans cultural elite. This includes men and women who believe in control over things that can harm the citizens' moral values and who are willing to administer this control. If the problems can be summed up in one sentence, we believe it is that a work of generally acknowledged and even outstanding qualities can be banned. This means that other existing and future works can be banned on the ground of some isolated words or expressions. What is apparently needed, is a protection in the law for works of acknowledged literary value. (emphasis added) (23 November 1977).

This editorial brings up two important points. First the notion that this case was different from previous bannings. The banning of Magersfontein hit home in the Afrikaner camp. The bans on works by Brink and Breytenbach had provoked reactions among writers but were hardly deplored by the conservative Afrikaans press. This time the silenced author was not only an Afrikaner but also a Boer and an avowed loyalist of the National Party.

The second point is the recommendation made for changes in the law. The banning of Magersfontein actually did have far reaching legal consequences. The Supreme Court, to which Leroux's publisher had appealed, ruled that with regard to moral offense (Section 47 (2) (a)) the Appeal Board should have taken the "likely reader" into account instead of the "average man".

Magersfontein did not immediately benefit from this decision because the Court also ruled that religious offense should not be related to the "likely reader" but should be determined in general. The ban under Section 47 (2) (b) (blasphemy) remained therefore in effect. But the introduction of the "likely reader" into the application of censorship was the first step in a process of relaxation of the rules for some literary works.

Two years after its publication, Magersfontein received the most prestigious Afrikaans literary award. The book was still banned and this renewed the original controversy. Leroux's own reaction to receiving the Hertzog prize gives an insight into the effect censorship can have on an author:

In answer to the question whether he was discouraged by the ban, Mr. Leroux said: "I have to say that, when the book was banned and I was asked whether I would continue to write, I bragged terribly when I said that I would write as though the law didn't exist. Don't kid yourself. This surely has an effect on a person. One cannot suppress the feeling: maybe these people were right? And then you start to check your style, your way of writ-

ing. You are very insecure and I believe all people whose books are banned feel the same."  
(Die Burger, 8 May 1979)

The Hertzog Prize may have constituted a moral victory for the writers, but the fact is that the work remained banned. Even when resubmitted in 1979, Magersfontein was again considered blasphemous. By that time, however, significant changes in the censorship machinery were taking place. The new chairman of the Appeal Board, Kobus van Rooyen, introduced a different approach to literature. He realized that the negative publicity surrounding some literary bans was more harmful to Afrikaner interests than the contents of the books concerned could ever be. In order to end the protracted stand-off between Afrikaans writers and the political establishment, Van Rooyen introduced changes making some forms of literature less vulnerable to banning.

Three months after the PAB had declared Magersfontein undesirable for the second time, the ban was lifted. This rather sudden change in judgment was explained by van Rooyen in Hoofstad:

Two factors have made the new decision possible. This is the Supreme Court's ruling on Magersfontein that now forces the Appeal Board to take into consideration the likely reader instead of the average man, and the institution of expert committees that advise the Appeal Board during the evaluation of a work. (Hoofstad, 24 March 1980)

The amendments were a direct consequence of the Magersfontein case. Their function was to give "recognition to the minority rights of literature, art and



language." (Van Rooyen Censorship 9) They began to take effect in 1980 when the ban was lifted on a number of literary works.

The changes in the application of the Publications Act appeared to indicate a relaxation of censorship. This was true only to a very limited extent. First of all, the new guidelines only applied to works of so-called literary and artistic merit. Secondly, the purpose of the new rules was not the stimulation of an unfettered literature but the deflation of tension within the laager between the literary and the political establishment.

As a result, the system became more arbitrary. The amendments added two highly subjective criteria: literary merit and the likely reader. These criteria could be used and abused to serve the interests of the government. If the banning of a work was expected to create unwanted commotion, the censors now had the tools to avoid an outright banning. Instead the censors could severely restrict a work's distribution in the hope of satisfying both the literary "minority" and the easily offended "majority" of the Afrikaner community.

In the case of an author without literary or political clout, however, the censors retained all their existing powers. The result was a highly confusing situation in which one work was banned while a similar one was not. The same week that André Brink's novel A Dry White Season was unbanned under the new

rules, the story collection Call Me Not a Man by the black author Mtutulezi Matshoba was banned. The reason for the ban was the censor's objection to one of the stories which is about prison labor. Nadine Gordimer stressed the arbitrary nature of this decision:

Death in prison or detention; the abuse of farm labour. Both are subjects whose factual basis has been exposed and confirmed in the proceedings of court cases and, in one instance at least, a commission of inquiry. Two writers, each of whom can make with Dostoevsky a statement of the writer's ethic: "Having taken an event, I tried only to clarify its possibility in our society." The work of one is released, the other banned. (Rand Daily Mail, 6 August 1980)

In the South African context, Brink and Matshoba could not count on equal treatment. Even if they had written exactly the same book, that one is white and the other black altered the status of their work in the eyes of the censors. (See further, chapter 8.1.)

Even for white writers, the changes in censorship that took effect in 1980 were not as positive as they may seem. The special treatment they received, being the first whose work was unbanned, created the impression that they could be bought off by the government. This undermined the solidarity between white and black writers.

#### 4. AFRIKAANS AUTHORS AND CENSORSHIP : DISLOCATION AS STRATEGY

In this chapter I will discuss four Afrikaans authors and a selection of their work, focussing on the repercussions of censorship for the shape of the literary product.

I will examine André Brink's Kennis van die Aand (1973) because it was the first work in Afrikaans that was banned. I will look at the reasons for its banning against the background of the work's content. A comparison with Brink's next novel, 'n Oomblik in die Wind (1976), which was not banned, will lead to the conclusion that the more directly a work described the South African contemporary situation critically, the more vulnerable it was to censorship. My hypothesis is that writers will resort to a change of setting in time or place to reduce the risk of a ban on their work.

I will test this assumption by analysing two works with themes relevant to South Africa at the time of writing but that have been set in a different country: By Fakkellig (1966) by Karel Schoeman and Die Skerpskutter (1981) by Louis Krüger.

Finally I will show how John Miles' novel Donderdag of Woensdag (1978) illustrates the existence of dislocation as a conscious authorial technique to evade the censors. In this novel Miles parodies the use of a far-away setting for writing about South African prob-

lems. Donderdag of Woensdag was banned from 1978 until 1983.

4.1. André Brink: Kennis van die Aand and 'n Oomblik in die Wind

In Kennis van die Aand (hereafter Kennis), published in 1973, Joseph Malan, a Coloured actor, tells his life story from prison, as he awaits execution for the murder of his white lover. He starts with his family history, a tale of generations of slavery and oppression. Joseph continues with the account of his own life, the last link in the chain. He has grown up on a farm where the 'baas' decided to send him to school. Thanks to his education, Joseph is able to escape rural life and he becomes an actor. With a scholarship he travels to London where he lives for almost a decade.

However, Joseph does not merely want to save his own skin from the system in South Africa. He wants to speak up and therefore returns to his country to form a theater group. Initially, he has the protection of a white industrialist but when the group starts to put on more committed performances, the Publication Board intervenes and the support is withdrawn. Performing becomes impossible due to censorship and sabotage. This means the end of Joseph's dream of being an actor and having his own group in his own country.



Parallel to the story of Joseph's professional life runs his relationship with Jessica, a white English woman. Even though this relationship ultimately leads to Joseph's death, it is not the main focus of the novel. Joseph had already died in various other ways, in his professional life and through the fate of his tragic ancestors. Central in Kennis are the following themes: the struggle against the system of apartheid, oppression and repression, discrimination, and sex across the color line (still prohibited at the time of publication).

Kennis was the first political novel in Afrikaans. Its setting is contemporary South Africa and according to one critic in it "every possible taboo in this politically complex country (...), the Immorality Act, petty apartheid, revolutionary violence, black power, censorship, 180 day detention, murder, torture," has found a place. (Volksblad, 27 November 1973)

This notwithstanding, the work was well-received in the Afrikaner press. Die Burger, Volksblad and Rapport, among others, reviewed the book. The reviewers all recognized Kennis as committed literature and pointed out its politically controversial nature. Ampie Coetzee wrote in Rapport that Kennis was "Afrikaans' first great political novel in which South African race relations form one of the main themes." (7 October 1973). E. Lindenberg, in Die Burger, called it "a grand attempt at thematic innovation, a courageous

novel in many respects for which Brink deserves our admiration." (27 November 1973).

Still, Kennis was treated as a literary event and not as a potentially political one. None of the reviewers even mentioned the possibility of a ban. It probably wasn't on their mind as to that point an Afrikaans work had never been banned.

Within weeks rumors started to spread, however, that a publications committee was reviewing the book. In the first week of February 1974, the Government Gazette published the ban of Kennis under Section 5(2)(b) of the P & E Act. This meant that the work was declared undesirable on religious grounds.

The law did not require a publications committee to give reasons for its decision. Therefore, not even the author or the publisher received an explanation for the ban. From the appeal case of the English version of Kennis in 1980 we can, however, get an idea of what the problems were:

With regard to the question of religious convictions or feelings the relevant aspects are: the analogy with Jesus, the juxtaposition of sex and religion and the vain use of the Lord's name. (...)the taking of the Lord's name in vain in this book is contextually justified and not offensive within the meaning of the Act.

When, however, the passages are read in context and Joseph engages in sexual affairs and these are considered together with analogies to the world or the life of Christ and/or the taking of the Lord's name in vain by the characters concerned, the matter moves into the realm of the repulsive or mortifying within the meaning of the words set out in Pub. Contr. Board v. Gallo (Africa) Ltd 1975 (3) SA 665 (A)." (Decision no. 64/80 3-4)

It is noteworthy that in the reviews of Kennis, hardly any mention had been made of the religious aspects of the work. It was clearly a minor element.

The P & E Act provided the censors with many sticks to beat undesirable dogs. In this case they used one that was not closest at hand. By choosing to base the ban on a religious offense instead of the more obvious political offenses, they tried to avoid a discussion of the political contents of the book.

One censor, in this case one of the Supreme Court judges who heard the appeal lodged by author and publisher against the ban of the Afrikaans version, was not so careful to avoid the appearance of political censorship. Judge J.T. van Wyk declared in the Transvaler that Kennis violated all sections of the P & E Act but especially the political ones because it ridiculed the white section of the population.

In his article with the headline "Kennis despises the white man in South Africa", the lawyer for the Publication Board, Viviers, gave seven examples of what he called the central theme of the book: "the portrayal of the white section of the population as the ruling class which is sterile, destructive, spiritually dead against a virile, strong, creative non-white group." (2 October 1974). Only at the very end did he devote two sentences to the supposed blasphemous character of the book.

The appeal was not successful and the ban was upheld on the same grounds as before. This meant that

Judge van Wyk's desire to ban Kennis on all possible grounds was a minority opinion.

The English version Looking on Darkness was also banned in 1974 and again in 1980. The appeal in 1980 was denied by the Publications Appeal Board. This time, the PAB explicitly stated that Kennis was not banned on political grounds:

The book is not undesirable within the meaning of the so-called political paragraphs (Sections 47(2)(d)+(e) of the Act). (...) The fact that accusations are made against the police or the procedure followed in courts does not necessarily bring a work within the ambit of these paragraphs. It is indeed of the utmost importance that matters of a political nature and especially with regard to race relations should be described and criticized openly - and in this regard, strong, biased and even derogatory language is a typical feature of the South African political scene. (Decision no. 64/80:4)

The addition of such a noble statement in a case where the work in question has already been banned on other grounds, sounds at least hypocritical. However, it is not completely meaningless. In the first place, censorship works as a quasi-legal system and the decisions of the various bodies constitute jurisprudence which can be referred to in later cases. Secondly, if Kennis were to be reevaluated chances are slim that the work would be declared undesirable on political grounds if these had been explicitly excluded in an earlier decision.

When Kennis was reconsidered in 1981, a publications committee declared the work not undesirable. The Directorate of Publications lodged an appeal. The



PAB upheld the decision of the committee. Kennis was unbanned, albeit under the conditions that it "may only be sold, hired out or lent out by lending libraries in hard cover and it may not knowingly be sold, hired out or lent out by lending libraries to persons under the age of eighteen." (Jakobsen's Index 160)

The reason for banning Kennis was officially religious but unofficially political. Why was it necessary to suppress this work? According to Breyten Breytenbach, "[T]he book reflects a South African reality, but the Government does not want the people to know about it. The ban indicates absolute panic and clearly shows the climate of fear and repression." (The Star, 26 January 1974)

Breytenbach touches the heart of the matter. As I have explained above, the censors have a certain world view that they need to protect in order to assure the position of privilege of their group. Kennis consciously and provocatively set out to portray a different reality. That made the work potentially harmful to Afrikaner interests and in conflict with Afrikaner ideas about literature and its function.

That questions of referentiality were an important factor in the evaluation of the work is also apparent. As Judge Van Wyk wrote at the time of the first appeal: "Even though the author says that the story is fiction, there is enough evidence that the book has been deliberately written in a way to convince the reader

that important incidents, albeit fictive, are a reflection of reality." And: " I believe that a large majority of probable readers will get the impression that the author has tried to write a historical novel which pretends to be based on facts." (Die Transvaler, 2 October 1974)

The supposed realism troubled Van Wyk because he did not like the images that resulted. He stated that "the author consciously exaggerates enormously and in many instances [he] creates a totally false picture...[H]e has thrown together a great number of distasteful, immoral and disgusting scenes which falsely give a complete image of the white man as a licentious, sadist, lawless, immoral and irresponsible creature." (Die Transvaler, 2 October 1974)

Van Wyk's reaction elicits two questions: What literary factors make Kennis a realistic novel? and Why is the world view put forth by Brink called false by at least one of his censors?

Among the realistic features of Kennis is its setting. The story takes place in contemporary South Africa. Important facts from the country's recent history find a place in the novel, for example the 1960 massacre at Sharpeville. Joseph, when describing the events that preceded his departure for England, observes:

First there was Sharpeville, that March. We heard about it in the street, Dulpert, and I, late that afternoon, on our way back after a rehearsal in the Little Theatre. The first

rumours were so extravagant that we refused to believe a word. All we knew was that something had happened, that a number of people had been shot by the police, that something had begun to erupt. (143)<sup>32</sup>

Another example is the destruction of District Six, a colorful neighbourhood in Cape Town where Joseph lived before he left for England. Upon his return to South Africa he discovers that the demolition is almost complete:

As I went higher, the district grew more silent and sordid: several of the houses were empty, windows and doors barred and boarded up; many had been demolished, bulldozers were roaring in the open spaces, and the outline of the buildings looked like a mouth in which some teeth were missing and others badly filled. (195)

Events like Sharpeville and the destruction of District Six were generally known in South Africa. For readers they could function as reference points.

One last example of realism that borders on the prophetic is Joseph's problem with censorship. Joseph's dealings with the Publications Control Board foreshadow what would later happen with Brink's own work.

That was the first time we opened in the Little Theatre. Perhaps it was a mistake, for two days later there was a letter in an Afrikaans newspaper complaining about 'blasphemy'; the same afternoon a telegram arrived from the Publications Control Board to stop the play. After a week of urgent negotiations we were allowed to go on, provided all references to God were cut and the rest more or less emasculated. (243)

<sup>32</sup> The quotations from Kennis are taken from Brink's own translation of the work in English, Looking on Darkness.

The censors called the world created in the novel "false" because they could not identify with the experiences of the Coloured protagonist. Kennis is a first-person account by someone who is not white. The autobiographical style enhances the possibilities for sympathy and understanding of the protagonist by the reader.<sup>33</sup> In the South African context however, a Coloured "I" automatically makes whites (including the reader, most probably) into "others", in most cases enemies. Identification with the protagonist is, if not impossible, at least dangerous because it could lead to difficult conclusions about the political situation.

The reactions of others to the ban have been discussed above. Now I want to turn to Brink's own reaction in the form of his next work 'n Oomblik in die Wind (An Instant in the Wind, hereafter Oomblik).

In this novel, published in 1976, a white woman from a respectable Cape Town family joins her husband on an expedition into the interior. The expedition fails and the woman, Elizabeth Larsson, is left behind alone. She is rescued by a runaway slave, Adam Mantoor, who guides her back to Cape Town. On their journey they

<sup>33</sup> Mineke Schipper in Beyond the Boundaries: "The ideological facet of the focalization, or the norms of the text, consists in the evaluation of events and characters. It can be presented "through a single dominant perspective, that of the narrator-focalizer." The latter's ideology is then considered as "authoritative". (110)



overcome their mutual fear and fall in love. For a while they live in paradisiacal circumstances. When they approach Cape Town, however, it becomes clear that their love was only possible in isolation. The last image of the novel is that of a group of soldiers who come to arrest Adam who is waiting for Elizabeth on the beach.

There are many similarities between Oomblik and Kennis.<sup>34</sup> In this novel too, a relationship between a white woman and a black man is described as "satisfying and right."<sup>35</sup> The sexual aspects of the relationship are treated with, for Afrikaans literature, great openness. Also, as in Kennis, there is a distinct analogy with the Bible. The story of Adam and Elizabeth is clearly based on the story of Adam and Eve. Both novels derive a certain authenticity from their autobiographi-

<sup>34</sup> The similarities are not so surprising. As Brink stated in an interview with Hans Neervoort in Bzzlletin 164, March 1989, Kennis contains so much material that most of his ensuing works are elaborations of aspects of Kennis.

<sup>35</sup> See Van Rooyen Publikasiebeheer 124, "The Court acknowledges the right of an author to criticize the Immorality Act, but "if the author of this play brings this law into contempt and creates a state of mind in the audience which may induce some members of the audience not to observe the prohibitions of the Immorality Act, or to be more amenable to possible temptation to commit a contravention thereof, the play will be undesirable....It undermines respect of this law by holding it up to ridicule. Sexual intercourse between White and Coloured persons is represented to the public as normal, natural, satisfying and right." Van Rooyen quotes from Pillay v Publications Control Board 1971 (4) SA 208 (D).

cal style. Oomblik is presented as based on Elizabeth Larsson's diary and other archival material.

Still, Oomblik was not banned. There are a few differences that make Oomblik less "harmful" to Afrikaner interests. The main difference is that the novel takes place in the eighteenth century and not, like Kennis, in contemporary South Africa. The second difference is that the narrator is not, like Joseph Malan, Coloured. The narrator in Oomblik is either Elizabeth (in the quotations from her diary) or a nameless observer who describes both Adam's and Elizabeth's feelings.<sup>36</sup>

One can thus point to several mechanisms that reduce the immediacy of the text and make it seem less political. Here I want to focus on the first aspect. The historical setting precludes direct references to the world of the censors and the readers. The eighteenth century South Africa created in the novel is so far removed from the world of the censors that the question of competing world views is hardly relevant.

Assuming that Oomblik does not deal with the eighteenth century Cape but with South Africa now (see

<sup>36</sup> According to Mineke Schipper: "The device of shifting the focalization among the different characters or from narrator to character always affects the meaning of the text. When the focalization shifts regularly in the text, we may get a rather broad idea of the various aspects of a conflict or problem. This technique may produce the suggestion of the narrator's neutrality vis-à-vis the various characters and their relations." (111)

Bzzlletin 164, 20), Brink has strongly decontextualized the contemporary problems and thus made them less recognizable for the censors and for the readers. Perhaps for this reason, this novel was never banned.

In my view, the more directly a work described South African reality critically, the more likely it was that the work would be banned. Dislocating a work either in time or in place from the actual South Africa could be used as a means to reduce the risk of banning.

To further test this view I will next discuss two novels, written by Afrikaners, that do not take place in South Africa but whose themes are relevant to South African reality. The first is By Fakkellig by Karel Schoeman, set in eighteenth century Ireland and the second Die Skerpskutter by Louis Krüger, set in contemporary Northern Ireland.

#### 4.2. Karel Schoeman: By Fakkellig

By Fakkellig was published in 1966. It was Schoeman's first novel. The two novellas he had published earlier had earned him a reputation as promising young author. Schoeman owed his positive reception in the Afrikaner press to the fact that he did not belong to the "Sestigers". He was seen as an author who wrote

'normal' prose without formal experiments.<sup>37</sup>

The events of By Fakkellig take place in 1798 in Ireland, which at that time was ruled by the English. It was a time of turmoil in Europe caused by the reverberations of the French revolution. Inspired by its success and in the hope that the French will come to their aid, the Irish plot to drive out the English.

By Fakkellig tells the story of David, a young English lord, who lives on his estate, Donore. David, who leads an isolated life, reluctantly, under the influence of his sister-in-law Alice, comes in contact with the Irish who live on his estate. At first he is disgusted. He is convinced that total separation between the English and the Irish is desired. Then a friendship develops between David and the Irish schoolteacher Liam. Liam is involved in plans for the Irish revolt. Slowly David undergoes a transformation and starts to help Liam. He is caught delivering weapons for the Irish cause and executed. By that time he has become an "Irish" hero.

This novel has at least three levels: historical, psychological and political. On the historical level, it describes an episode in the history of Ireland. On the psychological level, it is the coming of age story

<sup>37</sup> W.E.G. Louw wrote in his review of By Fakkellig: "Already the first two [works] have made me appreciate the author as someone who handles Afrikaans well and who above all has something to say. Something that does not always apply to his contemporaries." (Die Burger, 2 December 1966)



of David. The novel is written from his perspective. By Fakkellig is as much a story about loneliness and friendship as it is about historical events.

But most important for us is the political level. First, there are the political aspects of the historical Irish events. The struggle of the Irish against the English, the attempts of the English to hold on to their privileges, the religious, national and class differences, and the legitimacy of violence, are subjects explored in By Fakkellig.

More generally, these themes can be transposed directly to the South African context at the time of writing (1966). If one leaves out the English and Irish names, any contemporary reader (the readers were presumably Afrikaners), would place most of the dialogue in South Africa. The parallels are obvious.

In South Africa, a minority ruled over a majority. The two groups had a different culture, language, religion, and skin color. This created fear, discrimination, unrest and violence, all important elements in By Fakkellig. The following examples from the text reflect a South African atmosphere.

The environment in which the protagonist has grown up is described as one of turmoil:

Daar was altyd onrus gewees: die Rewolusie in Frankryk, oorlog op die Vasteland, en geheime organisasies en agitasies onder die

boerevolk, sodat hy grootgeword het te midde van bedreiging en geweld. (40)<sup>38</sup>

(There had always been unrest: the Revolution in France, war on the continent, and secret organisations and agitations among the people, so that he grew up amidst threat and violence.)

Elsewhere his brother Arthur says to his wife Alice, who was born in England and has only recently come to Ireland, : "Jy beseef nie hoe gevaarlik die lewe in Ierland is nie. Ons leef dees dae teen die hange van 'n vulkaan." (50) (You don't realise how dangerous life in Ireland is. We live nowadays on the slopes of a volcano.)

One of the causes for the sense of threat is the proximity of a "strange" people. Although the Irish don't have a different skin color, everything else alienates them from the English. The Irish are portrayed by the English, initially also by David, not even as second class people but as animals. When David and Alice are surrounded by beggars in the village, the scene is described:

David en Alice is vasgevang tussen die uitgestrekte arms en oop hande, die geskreeu, die stank, die vodde. David staan regop in die rytuig en probeer om los te kom uit die bende, maar hulle hou die perde vas. Hy kyk neer op die maer gesigte, die brutale oë, die blinde oë, die littekens en verminking, en daar kom walging in hem op, walging en vrees tesame. Soos diere, dink hy, en hy lig die sweep op om hulle los te slaan, op die hande, die arms, die skouers, blindelings asof hy 'n pad oopkap deur kreupelhout. (42)

<sup>38</sup> Quotations from primary literary sources in Afrikaans are given both in the original and in translation. The translation is mine unless otherwise noted.

(David and Alice are caught between the outstretched arms and open hands, the screaming, the stench, the rags. David stands up in the carriage and tries to break away from the crowd, but they are holding the horses. He looks down upon the thin faces, the impertinent eyes, the blind eyes, the scars and mutilation, and he feels nausea, nausea together with fear. Like animals, he thinks, and he lifts the lash to beat them loose, on the hands, the arms, the shoulders, blindly as if hacking a way through undergrowth.)

This is written from David's perspective. Later, when he has overcome his nausea and even wants to bridge the gap, Liam explains why that is impossible:

"[Jy kan] ten spyte van jou goeie bedoelings en jou gewilligheid tog nie verstaan wat ek jou probeer verduidelik nie, want Ierland is vir julle 'n vreemde land en ons 'n vreemde volk, mense wat buite julle lewens staan, waarin julle nie eers belangstel nie. (149)

("In spite of your good intentions and your willingness, you still cannot understand what I am trying to make clear to you, for Ireland is a strange land for you and we are a strange people, people who have no part in your lives, in whom you are not even interested.)

Liam continues:

"Maar besef jy hoe 'n handjievool is julle, David, afstammelingen van die Engelse veroweraars? Julle het julle leer, julle predikante en onderwysers en magistrats, julle staatsdiens en Parlement, julle mag en geld en invloed, maar julle is 'n blote handjievool wat hier in ons midde lewe. En óns is vier miljoen - óns is Ierland." (149)

("But do you realise that you are only a handful, David, you descendants of the English conquerors? You have your army, your ministers and teachers and magistrates, your civil service and Parliament, your power and money and influence, but you are a mere handful living in our midst. And we are four million - we are Ireland.")



This speech was directly applicable to the South African situation. The numbers were different but the essence was the same. The whites were in power but they were only a handful compared to the blacks.<sup>39</sup>

All dialogue between English landowners in By Fakkellig sounds like talk between Afrikaner boers.

This speech by the church minister for example:

"En dit gaan nie net om ons eie veiligheid en ons eie besittings nie," sê die dominee. "Ons het die plig om ons beskawing te verdedig - ons kan nie dat alles wat ons en ons voorvaders hier tot stand gebring het, vernietig word deur die ongeletterde horde nie. Ek wil vrede hê, die hemel weet dit, maar as jy nie volslae wanorde verlang nie, moet jy bereid wees om die bestaande orde te handhaaf, al is dit tot die dood toe. Dis die orde wat deur God ingestel is, en mens durf dit nie omverwerp nie -" Hy beduie driftig. "Al die gepraat oor gelykheid - 'n boer op die landerye is nie die gelyke van die Koning nie, òf van een van ons, menere!"(180)

("And we are not only concerned with our own safety and our own possessions," says the minister. "We have the duty to defend our culture - we cannot allow that everything we and our forefathers have achieved here to be destroyed by an illiterate horde. I want peace, heaven knows, but if you don't want total chaos you should be willing to defend the existing order, even until death. This is

<sup>39</sup> There are other examples of discussions in By Fakkellig that have their equivalents in contemporary South Africa, such as the discussion between Mr. Hardinge and Lady Elizabeth whether they, the English landowners, should be called "Iere" (Irish, noun). Lady Elizabeth refuses to think of herself as Irish because for her the Irish are "the women who wash their clothes in the river, and these terrible half-naked children, raw barbarians!" Mr. Harding insists that, even though there are big differences between the two races (sic!), to be born in Ireland makes one Irish.

This recalls the discussion of whether white South Africans are Africans and the distinction between Afrikaner and African.



the order God has created, and man dares not overthrow it -" He gesticulates wildly. "All this talk about equality - a farmer in the fields is not the equal of the king, or of one of us, gentlemen!")

How does this analysis fit in the context of Karel Schoeman and his work? In his address upon receiving the C.N.A. prize in 1973, Schoeman deplored the lack of commitment in Afrikaans literature. In one of his rare interviews that same year, he voiced his admiration for Breyten Breytenbach for having openly taken a stance.<sup>40</sup> The conclusion that Schoeman thinks a writer should be committed seems justified. In that same interview he stated that "Daar is dinge die gesê móet word, daar is tye wanneer stilsweye sêlf 'n misdad word." (There are things that have to be said, there are times when silence itself becomes a crime.) Still he did not choose South Africa as the setting for his work.

Schoeman dislikes publicity. He rarely gives interviews, he doesn't want his picture taken and he spent more than a decade in voluntary exile.

These two positions create a dilemma. On the one hand, the desire for commitment, and on the other the desire to stay out of the spotlight. The two didn't go very well together because in Afrikaans literature commitment, if it involved criticism of the status quo, necessarily drew attention. It also increased the pos-

<sup>40</sup> En nou Breyten Schoeman ook... (And after Breyten now Schoeman...) (Rapport 29 July 1973.)

sibility of a ban and a ban produced an avalanche of publicity.

Dislocation in Schoeman's work was therefore a protective measure. It allowed him to treat certain contemporary problems while avoiding a public discussion stirred by controversy. Schoeman could put certain messages about the current situation in his texts but interpretation was necessary to extract them.

The strategy has worked. No work by Schoeman has been banned to date. If time and/or place are different there is no question of competing world views. The connections with South Africa are not made in the text but have to be made by the reader. Even though my examples of parallels suggest otherwise, it is possible to ignore this level of the text. The author W.E.G. Louw in his review of By Fakkellig wrote only one sentence about a possible connection with contemporary South Africa. His first association was with the English domination of the Afrikaners.<sup>41</sup> In that sense By Fakkellig was perhaps too non-committal.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> 'n Geestelike Ontmoeting van Twee Wêreldes, W.E.G. Louw, 2 December 1966. "What did the British colonial administration of the nineteenth century know of the feelings of the Afrikaner Boerevolk in Colesberg or Cradock?"

<sup>42</sup> More committed was his novel Na die Geliefde Land (To the Promised Land) published in 1973. This novel takes place in a future South Africa. It portrays Afrikaners who are subject to unidentified rulers after a bloody revolution. The novel was vague enough to escape the censors but was subject to considerable criticism in the Afrikaner press. Schoeman's characters were called caricatures and he was accused of disloyalty to Afrikanerdom.

#### 4.3. Louis Krüger: Die Skerpskutter

Die Skerpskutter (The Sharpshooter) takes place in Northern Ireland and describes the last days of Malcolm Owen, sharpshooter in the Irish Republican Army. Malcolm's I.R.A. cell is setting up a scheme to transport weapons from Derry to Ulster. This action provides the background for Malcolm's psychological and physical disintegration. Two months before, he has made a fatal mistake while carrying out a job. He waited too long and shot the wrong person. This has made him suspicious and insecure. Slowly he starts to realise that he is not only the hunter but also the hunted. Flashbacks outline the spiral of violence that Malcolm has been part of from the days of his childhood and that for him will come to an end with his own death.

Louis Krüger is an author who has openly admitted that dislocation is a form of self-censorship. In answer to the question "why did you choose Northern Ireland as the location for your first novel?", he stated that:

Op sigself is dit 'n smal idee, maar dis 'n tipiese verskynsel in die Afrikaanse letterkunde. In die sestigerjare, met die ont-ploffing van skeppende energie, waaroor het die ouens gaan skryf? Nie oor apartheid, nie oor die land nie, nie oor die situasie in Suid-Afrika nie. Brink het geskry oor 'n ambassadeur in Europa. Etienne Leroux het Griekse mitologie gaan betrek. Maar met Die

Skerpskutter was dit 'n aanloop, waarskynlik 'n soort selfsensuur. (Die Suid-Afrikaan, 21 (1989) :47)

(In itself this is small idea, but it is a characteristic feature in Afrikaans literature. In the sixties, with the booming of creative energy, what did the old guys write about? Not about apartheid, not about the land, not about the situation in South Africa. Brink wrote about an ambassador in Europe. Etienne Leroux turned to Greek Mythology. But with Die Skerpskutter it was a beginning, probably a sort of self-censorship.)

With this answer Krüger at the same time acknowledged the tradition and maintained his distance from it. The choice of a different location itself was very common in Afrikaans literature, even before the Sestigters. The reason behind it, however, has not always been the same. In that area, Krüger distinguished himself from the Sestigters who did not write about South Africa. Despite its foreign location, Die Skerpskutter is about South Africa. Krüger's interest in the problem of violence, the novel's central theme, stems from his concern about South African society:

Ek weet nie hoekom ek geïnteresseerd geraak het in geweld nie maar ek dink dis 'n belangrike verskynsel in die Suid-Afrikaanse situasie en mens moet dit probeer verstaan. As jy geweld verstaan, verstaan jy ook 'n stuk van die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing. (Die Suid-Afrikaan 21(1989):47)

(I don't know how I became interested in violence but I think it is an important phenomenon in the South African situation and one should try to understand it. If one understands violence, one understands a part of South African society.)

His reason for choosing a different location for a subject that, according to Krüger himself, is South



African, was at least in part to avoid controversy and thus increase his chances of being published. "Had Krüger placed his story in South Africa, it would have been welcomed immediately in the all-embracing category of "committed" literature, especially because it centers around the battle between violent rebels and a cynical government," wrote the reviewer for Vaderland. As we have seen above, committed literature is most vulnerable to censorship, first from the publishers, and, once published, from the censors. A young unknown author who had just finished his first novel took some precautions to see his work in print.

The most obvious reference in Die Skerpskutter to South Africa is thematic: violence caused by civil war. Die Skerpskutter shows how a society and its members disintegrate due to an inescapable spiral of violence.

Even though Krüger denied that there were intentional parallels in the text (Die Suid-Afrikaan 21(1989):47), there are elements in the novel that strengthen the congruity with South Africa.

Throughout the novel there are signs of tension and unrest. Like David in By Fakkellig, Malcolm has grown up in an atmosphere of violence. When Malcolm talks with Meagan, his half-sister, about the night his parents were killed, he says: "Vandaar die aand af was ek altyd onrustig. Ek verwag gedurig dat iets gaan gebeur." (42) ("From that night on I always felt restless. I always expect something to happen.")

In the background there are constantly sounds and rumours of clashes:

In Fallsweg sien Malcolm weer tekens van die broeiende onrus: groepe kinders wat singend met baniere en plakkate verbymarsjeer terwyl die voetgangers hulle afgetrokke dophou. 'n groep loop reg in die middel van die straat en swaai gebalde vuiste in die lug, sodat Malcolm noodgedwonge in 'n systraat moet afdraai. (56)

(In Fallsway, Malcolm again sees signs of the brewing unrest: groups of children march by, singing and carrying banners while the pedestrians watch them warily. One group walks in the middle of the street and waves fists in the air, which forces Malcolm to turn off and take a side street.)

...  
Vader Hindley weet dat sy gemeente teen hierdie tyd al verveeld is, dat daar diegene is wat opsien teen die preek en die eucharistie. Hul gedagtes is by die dinge wat hulle oor die nuusbuletins gehoor het; hulle dink aan die petrolvure, die kordonne om die Falls en onluspolisie met gasmaskers, traanrook en perspeksskilde. (86)

(Father Hindley knows that his congregation is bored now, that there are those who dread the sermon and the eucharist. Their thoughts are with the things they heard on the news; they think about the petrol fires, the cordons around the Falls and the riot police with gas masks, tear gas and plexiglas shields.)

This last quotation illustrates the similarity between the Catholic neighborhood Falls and a black township. Other examples of this similarity are that strangers are not welcome in the local pub (17), that the police are afraid to come to Falls so that the people resort to their own execution of justice (20) and that Falls is an unhealthy place where many people die (34).

Apart from such parallels, there are two odd hints in Die Skerpskutter. Twice a black person is mentioned very casually. The first time it is a man from Surinam who is beaten up in The Red Lion ("Vreemdelinge is nie welkom by die Rooie Leeu nie" (17), "Strangers are not welcome in The Red Lion"). The second time it is a small black boy, Malcolm notices in the same pub, "'n lang maer klong met krullerige bruin hare en 'n astrante uitdrukking op die gesig." (18) (a long skinny black boy with curly brown hair and an impertinent look on his face)

What is so remarkable about this second example is the use of the word "klong". It is a parochial, colloquial Afrikaans word that one would never expect to be used in a different context than the South African. In the version of Die Skerpskutter that I borrowed from the Afrikaans library, a previous reader has underlined the word and written in the margin "In Ireland?".

The connections are there but were not so obvious that the work was considered "committed". Krüger's strategy of dislocation succeeded. Die Skerpskutter was published, well received and not banned. The work established Krüger as a young and promising author.

#### 4.4. John Miles: Donderdag of Woensdag

While Louis Krüger admitted that dislocation was a form of self-censorship but denied the use of inten-

tional references to South Africa in his work, John Miles went further and parodied the strategy in Donderdag of Woensdag.

Formally, Donderdag of Woensdag (Thursday or Wednesday) is different from the novels discussed so far. It is not a linear, straightforward, realistic account. It is a picaresque novel, a satire and a thriller with a cyclical time-structure and changing perspectives.

The novel describes the actions of a group of Afrikaner intellectuals who plan to kidnap the President with the help of the head of the Security Police. After the kidnapping the President will be brainwashed and for four days his place will be taken by Wuras, one of the plotters, who during that time will make some constitutional changes.

The plan fails because the head of the Security Police is a traitor and seizes power for himself. Only two of the plotters survive the action: Eksteen and Duvenhage. The latter writes down the story ten years later, using the perspective of Eksteen.

The novel's intricate play with time, point of view, and literary quotations, are all of interest. Here I will limit the discussion to the role of censorship in relation to Donderdag of Woensdag.

Censorship and ways to avoid it are subject to the author's irony in Donderdag of Woensdag. Miles makes fun of the usual precautions writers use to appease the censors. The common disclaimer: " Any resemblance to



real life persons is coincidental" <sup>43</sup> is transformed in Donderdag of Woensdag to: "alle gebeurtenisse is waar; ook 'n koekblik met kiekies is waar, maar nog is dit nie die werklikheid nie." (All events are true; a cookie jar with cookies is also true but still it is not reality.)

Duvenhage's preface is largely directed at the censors:

Ook het ek nie gekroom om die grofste mistastinge en ander eensydighede van Eksteen in 'n meer gebalanseerde lig te stel nie. Tog sal daar steeds diegene onder u wees wat erg in die gesig gevat gaan word. As troos, versoek ek die uitgewer om 'n bylaag aan hierdie werk te heg: iets soos Die pluskant van genl. Franco se greep op Spanje, of: Die bydrae van die blanke belastingbetaler tot die swart onderwys.

Op advies van die uitgewer het ek sommige karakters onder ander name laat optree. Uitgewers hou klaarblyklik nie daarvan om spesiale toestemming te vra nie; hulle vrees bes moontlik dat - soos Eksteen dit op 'n keer gestel het - vra, en aan jôu sal gevra word.

... En dan moet ek u, geagte leser waarsku: indien u sommige karakters al te waarskynlik vind, is dit volkome vir u eie rekening. Waar die politici dalk in 'n swak lig gestel word, is die bedoeling dat dit in die algemeen opgeneem moet word: politici in die algemeen. Word daar egter goedkeurend of op gemoedelijke wyse naar politici verwys, moet dit asseblief betrek op spesifieke persone. (3)

(Nor have I hesitated to show in a more balanced light Eksteen's biggest mistakes and other biases. Still there will be those among you who will be terribly offended. As comfort, I request that the publisher add an appendix to this work: something like The positive side of General Franco's hold on Spain, or: The contribution of the white taxpayer to black education.

<sup>43</sup> For Example, Sipho Sepamla, A Ride on the Whirlwind, Heinemann: 1981).

On the publisher's advice I have chosen different names for some of the characters. Apparently publishers don't like to ask special permission; they are afraid that -as Eksteen once put it - ask, and you will be asked.

... And then I have to warn you, dear reader: if you find some of the characters too realistic, this is entirely your responsibility. If politicians are shown in a disadvantageous light, the idea is to take that generally: politicians in general. If, however, politicians are referred to in an approving or positive manner, please consider this as referring to specific persons.)

Several evasive strategies are ridiculed here, for example the use of a balanced approach and the changing of names. Most interesting for us is Miles' play with dislocation. Where does the story take place? The logical assumption of an Afrikaner reader is that it takes place in South Africa. There are enough signs that point in that direction, such as the names of the characters and the descriptions of the landscape. On page 10, however, Eksteen says that he is on his way to Madrid. From then on the setting is ambiguous. It is supposed to be Spain but it is made obvious that it isn't. Eksteen says for example: "As ek nie geweet het ek is in Spanje nie, sou ek dit moeilik kon raai; die hele omgewing het eerder na Afrika gelyk" (14) (If I hadn't known I was in Spain, it would have been difficult to guess; the whole surroundings looked more like Africa).

The game, are we in Spain or in Africa?, ends halfway through the novel when the narrator addresses the reader to disclose:

Ja, geagte leser, Eksteen het vir julle gelieg. Dis Afrika hierdie. Eksteen het gelieg en ek het julle laat mislei.... Ek wou julle aan die slaap sus met die veraf romantiese Spanje. (70-71)

(Yes, dear reader, Eksteen has lied to you. This is Africa. Eksteen has lied and I have cooperated in misleading you....I wanted to rock you to sleep with faraway romantic Spain.)

The reason for the deception is given too:

Onthou gerus dat iemand wat soveel jaar in opsluiting was, soveel kere verhoor is, natuurlik 'n behoefte ontwikkel om sy beweeglikheid, sy ruimtelike beweeglikheid uit te brei. ... En in die hitte van die oomblik kon Eksteen dalk gevrees het die (toenmalige) Publikasieraad sou beslag op sy wedervaringe kon lê. (71)

(Please remember, that someone who was in jail for so many years, who was interrogated so many times, obviously has developed a need to expand his movements, his spatial movements. ...And in the heat of the moment Eksteen may have feared that the (then sitting) Publication Board would confiscate his notes.)

In Donderdag of Woensdag, dislocation becomes an element in the author's ironic analysis of contemporary South Africa, more specifically, Afrikaner society. Because the technique is not only a technique, but becomes a subject, it loses its function as evasive strategy. Donderdag of Woensdag was banned. It was banned on religious grounds just like the previously banned Afrikaans works.

The PAB, after an appeal by the Directorate of Publications, ruled that

The divinity of Christ is pertinently denied and a typically Marxist view of religion is taken: namely that religion is the opium of the people. Also the attitude towards the



church is marxist (sic). If these parts are read together with other pronouncements in the book, the total becomes deeply shocking for the Christian section of the population. (Decision no. 70/78 : 3-4)

Religion, however, plays only a minor role in Donderdag of Woensdag. The examples of religious transgressions given by the PAB are isolated and unimportant instances.

There are enough reasons why the work could be considered politically offensive. The subject of an Afrikaner revolutionary cell that tries to overthrow the government was rather subversive. According to André Brink, the President in Donderdag of Woensdag would be easily recognizable to even the most casual reader as Prime Minister Vorster (Mapmakers 27). Yet Miles' novel is one more example of the reluctance of the censors to ban an Afrikaans work on political grounds.

The narrator states, after the kidnapping has failed:

"Dit wys net weer, niks is so erg in die oë van dié mense as hy wat een klassifiseerbaar onpatriotiese daad gepleeg het nie. Wat het hy...wat het hulle gedoen teen die MENS? Dit is nie belangryk nie, maar wat jy doen teen die lokale fokken volk, waarvan die bloudruk iewers in die laai op die twaalfde verdieping van 'n Broederbond-kantoor lê... Die grootste woede ontketen jy as jy "jou" mense se taboereëls oortree; dis sonde-teen-god-en-mens nommer-een..." (137)

(This just proves again, nothing is so terrible in the eyes of those people as he who has committed a classifiably unpatriotic act. What did he...what did they do against MAN? That is not important, but what you do against the fucking local people, of whose



every member lies a blueprint in the drawers on the twelfth floor of a Broederbond office...You cause the biggest anger if you violate "your own" people's taboos; this is sin-against-god-and-man number-one...)

An unpatriotic act, that is what the plotters against the president are guilty of in Donderdag of Woensdag and what John Miles is guilty of because he wrote the book. Miles saw his book banned, which he may have anticipated by publishing it through Taurus which distributes its works before a ban can be pronounced.

## 5. CENSORSHIP AND WHITE ENGLISH LITERATURE

The previous chapters have discussed Afrikaans literature in relation to censorship. This and the following chapter will treat literature in English written by whites. The white English-speaking section of the South African population is the smaller part of the white minority. The difference between the Afrikaans and the English-speaking groups is more profound than just a difference of language. I will, therefore, begin with a profile of the white English-speaking South Africans, their history in South Africa, and their position on the political and cultural scene.

### 5.1. White English-speaking South Africa

The British<sup>44</sup> were the second group of white settlers to arrive in large numbers on the Cape of Good Hope. They first arrived at the end of the eighteenth century. Their arrival set off a power struggle with the first group of settlers, the Dutch or Afrikaners, that has lasted till the present day.

After two British occupations of the Cape, Holland ceded the territory to the British in 1814. That

<sup>44</sup> Until the independence of South Africa in 1910 the English in South Africa were British. After that they were English-speaking South Africans. In contrast to the Afrikaners they have never coined a name for themselves. I will refer to them as English to avoid the cumbersome 'white English-speaking South Africans'.

started what Afrikaners consider the "century of wrong".<sup>45</sup> The Afrikaners who had felt their strong desire to be left alone first thwarted by the rules and regulations of the Dutch East Indies Company, suddenly were confronted by British imperial rule which impinged on their freedom even more.

English became the official language in 1828 and in 1834 the British Parliament abolished slavery. The freeing of slaves with only a theoretical compensation was the direct provocation for the Great Trek. It was not the last usurpation of Boer property by the British, however. British expansion continued with the annexation of Natal in 1843 and of Transvaal in 1877.

The numerous skirmishes between British and Boers culminated in two full-fledged wars, the first in 1880 and the second from 1899 till 1902. The latter especially still defines relations between Afrikaner and English-speaking South Africans. An Afrikaner interviewed in Vincent Crapanzano's Waiting states that an Afrikaner child grows up with the idea that:

...the English [are] interfering with our system: abolishing slavery in 1834, giving the land the people fought for back to the Xhosa, putting our women and children in concentration camps and burning down our houses in the Anglo-Boer War...But we're still trying to get the British out of our blood.  
(49)

<sup>45</sup> Title of F.W. Reitz' history of the Afrikaners, A Century of Wrong, London: Review of Reviews, 1900.

Crapanzano calls the second Anglo-Boer War the summary event of South Africa's history (as far as the white population is concerned, I would add):

It describes the hostility that existed - and still exists - between South Africa's two great white populations. It describes the bitterness, the frustration, the sense of having been wronged, the defeat of the Afrikaner. It describes the outrage of the Afrikaners at having been made into lower-caste citizens and having their cultural heritage, their language, ignored, denied, or eliminated. It also describes the arrogant shame of the British, their sense of being enmeshed in a conflict that sullies them, their imperial aspiration and its demise, a threatened sense of superiority, and their victory in a war in which it makes little sense to talk about victory. (51)

An English woman in the same work feels that she is still treated like an enemy by Afrikaners:

They have never forgiven us for winning the Boer War, and I don't think they ever will. It runs in their blood. You can't understand them without understanding the war. It has given them an inferiority complex. They don't like us. They blame us for their problems. They don't consider us true South Africans. They say we always call England home. (55)

The woman describes, from the English perspective, what she thinks Afrikaners think of the English. This is typical. The English, unlike the Afrikaners, rarely describe themselves. On the one hand this stems from their rather weak group identity and on the other hand their identity has become so enmeshed with their relation to the Afrikaners that it has become difficult to disentangle.

Ironically, the war that was so divisive was followed by an extended period of Anglo-Boer cooperation.



From 1910, when the Union of South Africa was formed, until 1948, when Malan became Prime Minister with an all-Afrikaner Cabinet, South Africa was governed by Anglo-Boer coalition governments. According to Van Den Berghe "[t]he South Africa Act of 1909 marked...a decisive turning point in British policy. Great Britain hoped that the 'Compromise of Union' would maintain an even balance of forces between Afrikaners and English, and would create a friendly self-governing White Dominion on the Southern tip of Africa." (101)

That hope was crushed when in 1948 the Afrikaner National Party won the elections by a narrow margin. The NP's victory marked the end of cooperation with the English. The Nationalists lost no time in consolidating their position not only on the political level, but on all levels of public life.

The Afrikaner redefinition of the South African state was crowned with the declaration of the Republic in 1961 and South Africa's simultaneous exit from the British Commonwealth. This meant that the last official ties with colonial Britain were severed.

In the last decades the English have become politically increasingly passive and have as a group not constituted an effective opposition. That brings us to the contemporary political, social and cultural position of the English. To understand that position we first turn to the question of which ideology determines English identity.

### 5.1.1. The ideology of liberalism

In a previous chapter we have seen that Afrikaner Calvinism stresses group identity and assigns minimal importance to the qualities of the individual. With the English we see the reverse. As a group they are defined by historical and political circumstances, not by self-definition. In Waiting, Crapanzano writes:

The "vague communion," as one South African described South African English identity, cannot measure up to the Afrikaners' monolithic nationalism. The English do not have a composed tradition, a secure world picture, and an articulate ideology. ... They have no interpretation of history. They do not share the Afrikaners' self-conscious mythology or the communal fear and outrage of the Blacks, Coloureds, and Asians. They are left only to comment. (35)

If, however, the picture of English beliefs and attitudes is not as clear as that of the Afrikaners, the reason is not the absence of ideology but the nature of that ideology: liberalism. As Leatt points out in his chapter on liberalism in Contending Ideologies in South Africa, "historically liberals have given scant attention to group identity." (57) It is therefore more difficult to find definitions or descriptions of the English than of the Afrikaners.

Leatt nevertheless lists a number of convictions shared by liberal South Africans:

All men share a common humanity; differences between men are secondary.  
Each individual has the same dignity and should be granted the same basic human rights

without regard to race, culture, sex, or creed. This precludes discrimination.

There should be freedom of thought and conscience, speech and the press, movement and association, freedom from arbitrary arrest and undue interference in personal life.

Each person should receive the benefits of education and equal opportunity in all spheres.

By man's efforts, society will progress towards greater social justice, economic prosperity and political stability, and will minimise suffering. This progress ought to be achieved by evolutionary rather than revolutionary means.

In politics the power of reason and compassion should prevail over irrational attitudes and violent practices.

The individual is of supreme importance and his legitimate interests should not be overridden by the community. Individual initiative rather than reliance on the community is emphasized. The role of the state is to nurture this individualism.

Individual freedom should be linked with the emancipation of disadvantaged groups in society, and with independence for the nation-state.

Arbitrary and authoritarian government can best be prevented by a multi-party democracy, in which every adult should ultimately have a voice and a vote, either in a unitary or a federal state. But majority rule is no guarantee of liberty. The Rule of Law is necessary to protect both the individual and minorities, and can be safeguarded by a rigid constitution which includes a Bill of Rights and an independent judiciary. (53-54)

It is not difficult to discern the differences between most of these beliefs and those of the Afrikaners as embodied in the apartheid system. A few examples: "differences between men are secondary." The guiding principle of apartheid is that differences between people are of primary importance. This basic discrepancy in outlook leads to a number of the other clashes. It is clear that Afrikaners do not agree with basic human



rights regardless of race and equal opportunity in all spheres.

Moreover the "individualism" so highly praised above is for Afrikaners close to invective (as is liberalism by the way). The veiled plea in the last point for one man, one vote was until recently enough grounds for a conviction on charges of endangering state security.<sup>46</sup>

Based on these evident ideological differences one would expect a strong social and political commitment on the part of the English to oppose the Nationalist government and its policies. This is not the case, however, as the findings of Lawrence Schlemmer's elaborate survey<sup>47</sup> of the English population show:

The general picture which emerges is one of political pragmatism, coupled with a feeling of social justice (although this sentiment is very easy to endorse) but also with a surprisingly high emphasis on the superficiality of social niceties. In this author's view, furthermore, the proportions selecting the statements indicative of a negative, apathetic sociopolitical orientation - 'Minding one's own business' and 'Leading a quiet respectable life' - are high, and provide a further indication of the strength of politi-

<sup>46</sup> It is interesting, however, that while most of the liberal convictions sound revolutionary in the South African context, other points stress the non-revolutionary nature of liberalism, thus alienating not only Afrikaner Nationalists but most blacks as well.

<sup>47</sup> This survey was conducted in 1974. The results were presented at the conference 'English-speaking South Africa: an Assessment', held in Grahamstown from 15th to 19th July, 1974. They have also been published in the Proceedings of the conference English-speaking South Africa Today, edited by André de Villiers, Oxford University Press: Cape Town, 1976, 91-135.



cal apathy or introversion among English-speaking Whites. (123)

Schlemmer's results generally characterise the situation of the English in the period here under study. The position of the English is one of political impotence, economic comfort, and cultural marginality. On the political level, the largely Afrikaner National Party <sup>48</sup> has strengthened its dominant position since it took over in 1948.

The size and effectiveness of the opposition parties, supported by the English, have greatly diminished since 1948. One reason is the pragmatic and materialistic approach to life of the English-speaking community. They may disagree with the ideology of Nationalist policies, but being white they too benefit from the material profits of apartheid.

The advantageous economic position of whites is dependent on the political status quo of apartheid. The Afrikaners do a better job of preserving that status quo than the English would. If the opposition parties came to power the enactment of only a few of the liberal convictions outlined above would lead to a substantial change in the distribution of wealth. As it is, the English do not want to be responsible for apartheid policies but they do want to share in the profits.

<sup>48</sup> Schlemmer: "75 % or more of urban Afrikaners support the National Party compared with a minority of 16% to 18% of English-speakers", 129.

That culturally the English-speaking South Africans are in the margin of their society may seem odd. Their language assures them of a much vaster (world)audience than the Afrikaners can count on. Still Afrikaans culture is dominant in the sense that the English are not well-represented on social, cultural and political decision-making bodies.

The pervasiveness of English-language culture does prevent cultural suffocation for it presents a link with the 'world', a link that for Afrikaans culture is much harder to establish.<sup>49</sup>

## 5.2. White English Literature in South Africa

Literature written in English by white authors is one of the several literatures in South Africa. In the following paragraphs I will give a brief history of white English literature in South Africa and discuss the role of language and the English experience with censorship.

### 5.2.1. History

White English South African literature, hereafter English literature, began as a colonial literature in

<sup>49</sup> Note that the 'natural' cultural link to the Netherlands was broken for years due to the cultural boycott of apartheid.

the early nineteenth century, around the same time as Afrikaans literature.

Thomas Pringle is generally considered the first English author although he only stayed in South Africa for six years, from 1820 till 1826. He was a poet who in his writing anticipated several modern themes. He left South Africa after the Governor of the Cape colony had suppressed several of his publications. The censorship of literature in South Africa has deep roots, one might say.

The second important author was Olive Schreiner. Her Story of an African Farm appeared in 1880 and is considered a starting point in several respects. In the first place it introduced the English novelistic tradition in South African writing. Before then English readers had only novels from 'home' to read. From this point on there has been a continuous emphasis on prose in English literature, in contrast to Afrikaans literature in which poetry was central (at least in the first century of its existence).

More specifically, Story of an African Farm was the first work to disseminate what critic Kenneth Parker calls "liberal concern", a "marked creative sensibility allied to and informed by a deep compassion." (The South African Novel in English 7)

According to another scholar, Arthur Ravenscroft, Olive Schreiner established the central tradition of South African writing in English: "realism rooted in

the local scene, which, thanks to an open, vigorous compassion, results in the numinous vision that invests local concerns with insights that speak to people everywhere." (English-speaking South Africa Today 324)

Transcending the local scene to arrive at a more abstract level of truth is a specific feature of importance in the literary analyses of later English literature which follow in chapter 6.

Inspired by notions of compassion and justice, English literature developed into a literature of dissent during the first three decades of the twentieth century. William Plomer, Laurens van der Post and Roy Campbell are examples of writers who worked in this vein.

This tradition was continued by Alan Paton after WW II with Cry the Beloved Country which appeared in 1948, the same year the National Party came to power. In the following decades the dissent in English literature became more and more outspoken, in step with the implementation of discriminatory policies by the government.

The increasingly adversarial role of English literature is illustrated by the growing numbers of writers to be exiled or banned in the 1960s. Among the writers whose works were banned are Nadine Gordimer, Mary Benson and Jack Cope.



### 5.2.2. Language

In several respects, the status of English in South Africa is the reverse of that of Afrikaans. Afrikaans is parochial, spoken by a small community. The language itself is a unifying element within the group<sup>50</sup>, but at the same time assures the group's isolation from the rest of the world. Authors have a limited audience and little competition.

The English language is the opposite of exclusive, being shared by many peoples. On top of that it is also the world's current lingua franca and is thus shared with the world community. White English writers in South Africa write in a language that does not have a monopoly within their group like Afrikaans.

Literary works can be a commercial success without a South African readership. English authors have an enormous potential audience since their works can be published and read outside South Africa. Successful authors can obtain an international status like Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee.

Another difference with Afrikaans is the literary tradition. Authors writing in English can tap into a centuries-old tradition of English language and litera-

<sup>50</sup> Coloureds speak Afrikaans too of course and they have often pointed to that fact in order to emphasize the cultural ties between Coloreds and Afrikaners. That has had little effect however. Despite the importance of their language to Afrikaners, color precedes everything.

ture. J.M. Coetzee who is Afrikaner-born but writes in English said on this subject: "What I like about English and what I certainly don't find in Afrikaans, is a historical layer in the language that enables you to work with historical contrasts and oppositions in prose." (Interview with Jean Sévry, in: Commonwealth 9.1 (1986)).

On the literary level, there is an advantage to acquaintance with sophisticated works of art. There are also challenges such as stronger competition and the difficulty of creating an independent South African literature.

### 5.2.3. Censorship

This section will explore the extent to which white English literature has suffered from censorship, from the years immediately preceding the adoption of the first censorship law in 1963 until the 1980s when the focus of the censor shifted away from white English literature.

In his famous anti-censorship letter to Die Burger, written in 1963 to oppose the introduction of the Publications and Entertainment Act, Van Wyk Louw wrote:

At a recent prize-winning ceremony I happened to find myself in the proximity (spiritually at least) of a compatriot who writes in English. She publishes her books abroad and apparently earns good money with them; no South African censorship can touch her (it

may even be to her advantage!); she can bring her royalties into South Africa from all over the world and the government will welcome this 'influx of capital'. It occurred to me: She can ignore our censorship. (Quoted in Brink, Mapmakers 101-102)

Van Wyk Louw, Afrikaans' most prominent author at the time, asserted here that his (presumably white) colleagues writing in English could ignore South African censorship. His assertion is at least partly wrong, however, for the English author who wished to reach a South African as opposed to a foreign readership manifestly could not ignore the censor.

How could authors whose books (or those of their colleagues) had been banned in South Africa ignore censorship? Before 1963, only imported books were subject to censorship. For a South African author writing in English to be read in his own country, his works had to be approved by South African customs officials<sup>51</sup>. As most English works were published abroad<sup>52</sup> English authors were faced with censorship long before Afrikaans authors started to be interested in the subject.

This form of censorship constituted more than a mere threat for English authors. Numerous works were actually banned in this way. Although not many of these

<sup>51</sup> These and other officials had the power to refer publications to a Board of censors.

<sup>52</sup> Nadine Gordimer wrote in 1963: "English-language publishers in South Africa are few, and they stick mainly to graceful, gift-book Africana and adventure yarns." (reprinted in The Essential Gesture 59)

works were literary, a few were; enough to make censorship a reality. In her article "Censored, Banned, Gagged" (1963), Gordimer mentioned among others Harry Bloom, Hans Hofmeyer, Daphne Rooke and herself as "South African writers who share the experience of having had books banned in our own country." (reprinted in The Essential Gesture 58).

The practice of censorship before 1963 is outlined by John Tucker, a literary critic, in an article in the Star of 12 December 1961. In 1961, he wrote, 717 books, magazines and other publications were banned. Among these were large numbers of paperbacks with erotic cover illustrations, all Soviet publications, and also some South African novels in English.

Among these, some were banned promptly upon publication or arrival in South Africa. Marion Friedman's The Slap, for example, was banned before the book was even published but such prompt action was the exception rather than the rule. More often the censor took on works that had been in circulation for years. Tucker cites the example of a novel by Harry Bloom first published in 1956 with the title Episode. It attracted the censor's attention however only after it had been reissued as a paperback in Britain under the title of Transvaal Episode.

Tucker doubts the effect of such a belated ban:

Indeed, if bans of this nature do have any effect it is probably to cause people who still have copies of the book lying forgotten on the backs of their bookshelves to dust



them off and start them circulating again among relatives and friends who would never have bothered to read them if they had not been officially declared to be in some way objectionable or indecent. (Star 29 December 1961)

What Tucker describes may have been true but he ignores an important reason the censors may have had when they banned the paperback edition of Transvaal Episode. Paperbacks are usually cheaper than hardcovers. Bloom's novel is about black township unrest in the 1950s. A paperback edition might reach a different and broader audience (i.e. a black audience) than the one Tucker had in mind. The ban thus may have had little or the reverse effect for white readers but for the less prosperous reader who could not afford the hardcover it would be very effective.

In the case of the banning of the paperback edition of Gordimer's A World of Strangers<sup>53</sup>, the censors actually admitted that such were their reasons. "Reasons advanced for the banning<sup>54</sup> are that the cheaper issue may reach a far bigger number of readers and buyers and so subvert the 'traditional racial policy' of the country." ( The Star 9 March 1962).

<sup>53</sup> The work was first published in 1958. The Penguin edition was banned in 1962.

<sup>54</sup> In "Censored, Banned, Gagged" Gordimer wrote "I think I am the only one who has ever been favoured with an explanation for a book banning." Until the Act of 1974, no reasons for bannings were required. (reprinted in The Essential Gesture )

It is obvious that the risk of literature reaching the masses is much greater with works in English than with works in Afrikaans. Moreover, the contents of those works are more likely to meet with objections from the censors because of the oppositional nature of the social and political position of the English in the South African spectrum.

Although the number of books banned was relatively small there can be no doubt that pre-1963 censorship of English literature definitely existed. The casualties of the "hot war of censorship" (Gordimer, The Essential Gesture 63) often seemed to have been chosen at random as the censor did not supply reasons for bannings. The direct effect of censorship was however reduced since many bannings occurred long after the works in question had been published.

The indirect effect, what Gordimer calls "the cold war of censorship", was all the greater. Writing in 1963, Gordimer said:

...there is also a cold war going on all the time, outside the statute books, and as it is likely to get colder and colder with the new Act, I should like to explain it. One hears a lot (quite rightly) about the effect the new internal censorship will have on South African (virtually, Afrikaans) publishers: how they will hesitate to publish if they feel there is a risk of banning, so prejudicing the chances of existing or aspirant writers who publish in the Republic. But this censorship cold war began long ago for writers with a wider public, that is abroad as well as in their own country, whose books are published in England and imported to South Africa as part of the literature of the English-speaking world.

South African booksellers are wary of books by serious South African writers who deal

with the contemporary scene. Whatever the interest of the book, whatever the selling power of the author's name, the booksellers risk only very small orders, perhaps a third of what they know they could sell, because they fear to find themselves burdened with hundreds of copies of a book that may be banned either on arrival in the country, or later. (Some publishers ship copies on the understanding of return in the case of banning; others do not.) Publishers are afraid to risk advance publicity for the book in the Republic; the general idea is that it is better to have the book slip in quietly and sell modestly than to be unable to sell it at all. If the book is subsequently banned, the author has the satisfaction of knowing that at least it has had some chance to be read, if not widely. If it is not banned, its potential distribution and readership have been limited by the intimidation of censorship to an extent that, especially in the case of lesser-known writers, cannot easily be made up by subsequent sales. By the time the bookseller feels 'safe' to re-order (remember, anyone can submit the book to the Board at any time<sup>55</sup>), interest in the book may well have died down.

Gordimer here contemporaneously refutes Van Wyk Louw's assertion that English writers could ignore censorship. Not only had there been actual bannings (recall that for Afrikaners the threat remained theoretical until the banning of Kennis van die Aand, in 1974), the preventive actions of publishers and

<sup>55</sup> This applies to the P & E Act of 1963. Before that only government officials could submit publications to the Board of Censors. From 1963 on, the hazard that anyone could submit a work was an extra threat although in actual practice the large majority of works continued to be submitted by various ranks of officials. In 1977, for example, 1807 publications or objects were submitted by customs officers, the police and the Directorate of Publications while only 314 were submitted by publishers and members of the public. (Report of the Publications Appeal Board, 1977) See also André du Toit "The Rationale of Controlling Political Publications", in Coggin 84.



booksellers had a direct influence on the size of a writer's audience and therefore on the effect of his work.

As Gordimer explained, even if the work of English writers was published (albeit abroad), the chances of it reaching its intended audience were rather slim. Such was the situation even before the adoption of the Publications and Entertainment Act in 1963. While for Afrikaners this new law meant their first encounter with the possibility of bannings, the white English authors were already familiar with bannings and for them not much changed in 1963.

The Publications and Entertainment Act, however, was the first step the government took to build a censorship apparatus; an apparatus with officials, committees, decisions, appeals, jurisprudence, in short, a whole pseudo-legal network. Over the years as the censorship edifice was built, there were changes for the position of white English literature.

In 1963 there was the letter of the law but no clarity as to its application. The roads that led to findings of undesirability were unmapped. Not until the Publications Act of 1974 could explanations be requested and standards formulated. The latter was done in decisions of the Appeal Board and in the two works by its chairman Kobus van Rooyen. Previous chapters have discussed these works and these constantly changing standards and how the PAB's decisions were not



based on the law or the standards but were only justified with them.

Still it would be interesting to see what the censors themselves have to say about the importance of the language a work is written in. I have not found any specific pronouncements on this subject in either the PAB decisions or the books by Van Rooyen. Nor have I found specifications about the group of white English South African authors in particular as there are for Black South African authors (see: Van Rooyen, Censorship in South Africa 109).

But the numbers speak for themselves. From 1975 through 1977, for example, roughly 1500 English publications were submitted each year against 25 in Afrikaans and 4 in Bantu languages (report of the Publications Appeal Board). As approximately two-thirds of the submitted materials were found to be undesirable (not specified according to language) one could say that for each Afrikaans work that was banned, 60 English publications or objects met the same fate.

There are some obvious reasons why publications in the English language have received more attention from the censors. The majority of all publications are in English and they reach a bigger audience. As the goal of censorship is to protect readers from certain ideas, the more potential readers a work has the more necessary a ban will be. That is also how the law has

been applied in South Africa. Almost every decision of the Appeal Board mentions the expected size of the audience.

The language a work is written in is never explicitly named as determining element. Usually it is the difficulty of the text that has been the deciding factor. The more difficult the fewer readers. In the appeal decision of Wessel Ebersohn's novel Store up the Anger the Board found that:

This book, although not popular, is not difficult to read and even though it deals with a political subject, this fact is not sufficient to guard it against a wider readership. On the other hand it is not the sort of book that will be read by revolutionaries or potential revolutionaries as bedtime literature. (Digest of Decisions, 80.1-101)

Members of the PAB would be very welcome employees for publishers as they can predict who will read a work. They even claim to know what books revolutionaries have on their nighttables (do revolutionaries have nighttables?).<sup>56</sup>

From the above it will have become clear that censorship could be a major obstacle for a white English author. A number of banned white English authors have chosen not to appeal the decision of the publications committee. They felt that to appeal was to

<sup>56</sup> Another example is A Ride on the Whirlwind by Siphso Sepamla. In decision 114/81 the PAB said, "the likely readership of the present novel would come close to a popular readership, but on the other hand, revolutionaries and potential revolutionaries find their inspiration in publications of a more direct and inciting nature." (Digest of Decisions, 114/81.2)

recognize the legitimacy of the system and to cooperate with it. With Burger's Daughter for example, it was not the author, Gordimer, who appealed the ban but the Directorate of Publications. Gordimer stated her reasons for not appealing in What Happened to Burger's Daughter:

I had had the right of appeal on my own behalf, against the original committee's decision to ban, but did not exercise this right because I am opposed to censorship and do not associate myself with any tribunal provided under censorship legislation. (2)

The case of Burger's Daughter was well publicized and would have been so with or without an appeal. But for a less famous author the election not to appeal is a choice for silence. If there is no appeal, the work does not get a second chance to reach its audience and also fails to receive any attention the appeal process itself may generate.

Nadine Gordimer is one author who consistently and over a long period of time has analyzed and criticized censorship in a number of articles. The fact, however, that the English have never been able to mount a general debate on censorship illustrates the marginality of their cultural position.

Public discussion of censorship occurred in 1963, when Afrikaans literature was for the first time involved, in 1973 when the first Afrikaans novel was banned, and in 1977 when Magersfontein O Magersfontein was banned. These discussions took place between writers, politicians, critics and newspaper columnists,

mostly in the Afrikaner press. In the case of the Magersfontein discussion, the outcome significantly changed the practice of censorship with regard to literature (see chapter 3.3). That change, even though triggered by the banning of an Afrikaans book, benefited white English authors especially.

Since 1980, the grip of the censor on literature has relaxed. According to J.M. Coetzee, "it is undeniable... (a) that the authorities' attention has shifted away from books to newspapers and the electronic media, and (b) that under the state of emergency the police have taken over a proportion of the censors' work." That mostly works by white and well-known writers were unbanned has already been discussed in chapter 3.3. That the effect of this relaxation was not unreservedly positive has also been noted. For one thing, as Coetzee pointedly observed, the status of writers in the eyes of the censors changed from "subversive force" to "harmless dabblers." ("André Brink and the Censor" 68)



6. ENGLISH AUTHORS AND CENSORSHIP : MOVING TO  
DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ABSTRACTION

Everything about the English is less defined and definite than about the Afrikaners and the Africans. The group itself is more fluid and the literature is less trapped in the snares of ideology because it has the possibility of access to a world audience. In order to appeal to a wider audience, authors may pay more attention to the universal aspects of their work.

In regard to censorship a greater universality presumably reduces the threat of censorship. One has to keep in mind though that white English literature has been more vulnerable to censorship to start out with because the system of censorship was in Afrikaner hands and infused with Afrikaner values. These values included an antipathy to the English, making English literature in the censor's view presumptively hostile, a hostility which many English writers did in fact express.

Discussing Afrikaans literature, I have focussed on one technique writers have used to reduce the chance of being silenced: the dislocation in place and time. In this chapter, I will broaden the focus to include other textual features that increase the distance from South African factuality. These features are utopianism (a form of dislocation in time), satire and allegory. In selected works by Nadine Gordimer, Christopher Hope

and J.M. Coetzee I will analyse how these levels of abstraction function.

These three writers represent a spectrum of commitment. Gordimer has always been actively involved in the struggle, Hope has chosen exile to be better able to attack the status quo, and Coetzee has kept a fair distance from the political debate. Characteristic of their respective positions are the three non-fiction works these authors published in 1988. Gordimer published a collection of essays that offers an overview of three decades of personal and political commitment. Hope wrote an autobiography mixed with political commentary that combines his fixation on his own life and his desire to comment on the political situation. Coetzee published an academic study on literature up to World War II by white South Africans, its prose "dry as the Western Cape."<sup>57</sup>

Three of the works discussed below: A Sport of Nature, A Separate Development, and Life and Times of Michael K., also have a thematic resemblance in that they all have a freak as a protagonist. This theme of the outsider is a well-known feature in modern Western

<sup>57</sup> From George Packer's article "On the Edge of Silence" in The Nation, 26 December 1988, in which he reviewed the three works: The Essential Gesture, White Boy Running, and White Writing.

literature that has a special significance in the South African situation.<sup>58</sup>

#### 6.1. Nadine Gordimer: Burger's Daughter and A Sport of Nature

Writers write to be read. Nadine Gordimer is no exception. In her essay, "The Gap between the Reader and the Writer," Gordimer examines her usual answer to the question "For whom do you write?" Her response: "For anyone who reads me."<sup>59</sup> It is not that simple, however, because among the first readers of her books are the South African censors. These readers have the power to deprive her of her South African readership.

The risk that censors may cut a work off from its natural readership has a bearing on what and how a writer writes. Self-censorship is hard to expose, but it should be acknowledged as a force in the creation of a work if that work is produced under severe censorship restrictions.

<sup>58</sup> Stephen Gray in Southern African Literature notes that: "the literature of this kind has as a basic tenet the theme that its characters do not - cannot - belong. We are confronted with a coherent and continuous stream of fiction that is about permanently alienated beings, white beings who are not part of, and can never be part of, a land which offers them no harmonious sympathetic growth. (151)

<sup>59</sup> Nadine Gordimer. "The Gap between the Reader and the Writer." The New York Review of Books. 28 September 1989: 59-61.

Nadine Gordimer herself has written extensively about censorship.<sup>60</sup> There has been little attention paid, however, to the influence of censorship on Gordimer's own literary work. This section will focus on two recent novels, Burger's Daughter and A Sport of Nature. Published eight years apart, these novels both center on the lives of female protagonists growing up in South Africa. Though similar in subject and structure, there are crucial differences between the works. I will examine these differences and explain how they can be related to the effect of censorship on the author.

Burger's Daughter was published in London in June 1979. A month later, it was banned in South Africa by a publications committee. The committee deemed Burger's Daughter offensive on moral, religious, and political grounds (Sections 47 (2) (a), (b), (c), (d), and (e) of the Publications Act). In October 1979, however, after

<sup>60</sup> Nadine Gordimer. "Censored, Banned, Gagged." Encounter vol. 20 no. 6 (1963): 59-63. Rpt. in The Essential Gesture: 58-67.

---. "A Writer's Freedom". New Classic 2 (1975): 11-16. Rpt. in The Essential Gesture: 104-110.

---. "The Books They Ban Along with Underpants." Rand Daily Mail 6 Sept. 1975.

---. "The Unkillable Word." Rpt. in The Essential Gesture: 244-249. First published as "Censorship and the Word." The Bloody Horse 1 (1980): 20-24.

---. "Censors and Unconfessed History." Rpt. in The Essential Gesture: 250-260. First published as "New Forms of Strategy - No Change of Heart." Critical Arts vol. 1 no. 2 (1980): 27-33.

---. "Censorship Changes - A Victory for Whom?" Rand Daily Mail 6 Aug. 1980.



considerable public comment and an appeal brought by the Director of Publications, it was unbanned.

The report of the publications committee, which listed the offensive passages of the work, stated that:

The authoress uses Rosa [Burger]'s story as a pad from which to launch a blistering and full-scale attack on the Republic of South Africa: its government's racial policies; white privilege; social and political structure; processes of law and prisons; forces for the preservation of law and order; black housing and education; the pass law; etc. The whites are the baddies, the black (sic) the goodies. (What Happened to Burger's Daughter 6-7)

One of the censors added, "The book is an outspoken furthering of communism" and "The effect of the book on the public attitude of mind is dangerous in all aspects." (15)

The report was heavily criticized. Gordimer herself wrote a detailed, point by point rebuttal of the committee's charges, which she published in What Happened to Burger's Daughter or How South African Censorship Works.<sup>61</sup> In addition to this publication, which treats the censorship history of Burger's Daughter in particular, Gordimer wrote a number of articles criti-

<sup>61</sup> This booklet is a collection of the documents pertaining to the banning and unbanning of Burger's Daughter. It contains an account of the reasons for the ban by the Director of Publications and Gordimer's reaction, the reasons for lifting the ban by the Publications Appeal Board, what the literary press thought of the novel, an explanation by the legal scholar John Dugard of how censorship works in South Africa, and a short list of recently banned books.

cal of the supposed relaxation of censorship that was behind the unbanning of her book.

More unexpected was the criticism from another source. In a rather unusual procedure, the Director of Publications appealed the ban imposed by his own committee. Pursuant to newly adopted rules (discussed in chapter 1), he appointed a panel of literary experts to evaluate the literary merit of the work. This panel accused the committee responsible for the banning of "bias, prejudice, and literary incompetence." As a result of the testimony of the literary experts, the ban on Burger's Daughter was lifted in October 1979. The Appeal Board gave the following reasons for its decision:

The conclusion which the Appeal Board has reached in the light of the advice of the Committee of Experts and of Mr C J van der Merwe is that the said reasonable member of the South African community would, considering the literary merit of this publication and its limited readership, regard it as a book which goes far in its attack on whites and which is derogatory of the South African Government's policies, but that it is not a book which would in actual fact lead to or contribute towards the prejudicing of the interests which are guarded in sec 47(2)(e) of the Publications Act. As a result of its one-sidedness the effect of the book will be counterproductive rather than subversive. (What Happened to Burger's Daughter 39, emphasis added)

As explained earlier the consideration of the literary merit of a work and its readership was a recently introduced element in the practice of censorship. The intended effect was to defuse the growing tension between writers and the government by allowing

for the unbanning of selected works by well-known white authors. The conclusion of the Appeal Board that as "a result of its one-sidedness the effect of the book will be counterproductive rather than subversive" must be interpreted in this light.<sup>62</sup>

The committee that had banned Burger's Daughter had found that the work was close enough to South African reality to be potentially subversive. In the novel there are, in effect, several strong links between fiction and reality. One of the novel's important characters is based on a prominent anti-apartheid leader. In addition, the emergent Black Consciousness movement and recent historical events strongly influence Rosa's conduct and thoughts. Further, Gordimer makes extensive use of quotation from banned writings.

The character of Lionel Burger is based on the real-life figure of Bram Fischer. Gordimer greatly admired the commitment and integrity of activists like Fischer.<sup>63</sup> In his chapter on Burger's Daughter in The

<sup>62</sup> Gordimer was among the first to point out that the unbannings were a mere gesture and constituted no real change. In "Censors and Unconfessed History" she draws attention to the fact that simultaneous with the unbanning of her work (and that of André Erink and Etienne Leroux) at least two comparable works by black authors were banned, Call Me Not a Man by Mtutuzeli Matshoba and Muriel at Metropolitan by Miriam Tlali.

<sup>63</sup> At the time of his imprisonment, Gordimer wrote two articles about him: "Why did Bram Fischer choose Jail?" New York Times Magazine 14 Aug. 1966: 30-31, 80-81, 84. Rpt. in The Essential Gesture: 68-78 and "The Fischer Case" London Magazine March 1966: 21-30.

Novels of Nadine Gordimer, Stephen Clingman gives a detailed account of the facts of Fischer's life and the way they are transposed in the novel. The first part of the novel portrays Burger as a hero who has sacrificed himself to the cause and can be read as a eulogy for Bram Fischer. Gordimer does more than merely borrow from the deeds of Fischer's life. In the novel, she extracts and uses his public statements. In his speech from the dock, Burger's words are those used by Bram Fischer at his own trial.

It is not a violation of the censorship law to write a novel based on real-life characters. However, Bram Fischer was a member of a banned organization, the Communist Party, and was sentenced to life in prison on conspiracy charges. The South African censors saw it as their task to shield the public from reading a sympathetic portrayal of such a man.

The protagonist of Burger's Daughter is not Lionel Burger, however, but his daughter, Rosa. If the father stands for a certain kind of white activism practiced in the fifties and early sixties, the daughter represents the next generation which was impelled to search for new forms of action. Burger's Daughter is, among other things, the portrait of an important and painful episode in the history of white involvement in the black struggle, Black Consciousness.

The Black Consciousness movement that became prominent in the 1970s excluded whites from its ranks



because they were seen as intrinsically involved with the system of oppression. For many whites, Gordimer among them, the feeling of being sidelined was difficult to accept. In the novel, the nightly telephone conversation between Rosa and "Baasie" captures the exclusion and alienation felt by whites. Rosa has not seen "Baasie", the black boy with whom she grew up, since he was nine years old. She addresses him as a long-lost friend and automatically assumes the child-like intimacy that existed when they shared bed and bath as children. But "Baasie," who points out to her that his real name is Zwelinzima Vulindlela ("Baasie" is an Afrikaans word meaning "little boss", a name given to him by the Burger family) does not allow Rosa to adopt a naive color blindness:

Why should I see you, Rosa? Because we even used to take a bath together? - the Burger family didn't mind black skin so we're different for ever from anyone? You're different so I must be different too. You aren't white and I'm not black. -....  
 - I'm not your Baasie, just don't go on thinking about that little kid who lived with you, don't think of that black 'brother', that's all. - (321)

This confrontation makes Rosa literally sick, but it also has a more positive effect. It makes her aware of her responsibility towards her 'brothers', and she decides to return to South Africa. She arrives in time to be of immediate help by providing physical therapy for the victims of the Soweto Revolt, the 1976 student uprising in the townships. The novel thus incorporates a contemporary event whose reverberations were still

strongly felt at the time of publication. The story-time almost catches up with the real time.

Burger's Daughter thus abounds in realistic depictions of the current situation, including its portrayal of whites acting against apartheid. The censors, who have traditionally been most sensitive to such factual descriptions, saw this as grounds for their assessment that the work meant to threaten the status quo in South Africa.

Reality also finds a place in Burger's Daughter in the use of quotation. Lionel Burger's courtroom speech, mentioned above, contains extensive passages of Bram Fischer's speech. Toward the end of the novel, Gordimer reproduces a pamphlet that was distributed during the Soweto revolt and was attributed to the Soweto Students Representative Council. Throughout the book, remarks, statements, and parts of conversations can be traced back to African National Congress leader Joe Slovo's banned essay "South Africa - no middle road", published in 1976.<sup>64</sup>

Most of the quotations used in Burger's Daughter are taken from material that was at the time banned in South Africa. According to the law, this in itself constitutes grounds for banning the book. It is worth noting that the publications committee only cited the

<sup>64</sup> Clingman, who calls the novel a "textual collage" (187), identifies the sources of numerous quotations. I am indebted to him for his insightful discussion of the function of quotation in Burger's Daughter.

pamphlet attributed by Gordimer to the Soweto Students Representative Council. Unattributed passages incorporated into the text from works by Marx, Lenin, Steve Biko and Joe Slovo passed the censor's eye unremarked.<sup>65</sup>

Quotation as Gordimer uses it in Burger's Daughter places political language in the context of fiction. The incorporation into the novel of statements taken from political texts changes the nature of those statements. It makes them less recognizable as political language. The fact that the quotes are unattributed obscures who is responsible for the utterance. The original authors go unmentioned and the author of the novel can hide behind the screen of fiction and say: "It's not me, it's the character who says that." If the statements are not traced back to their source, if the fictional context succeeds in 'hiding' them, quotation becomes a clever subversive strategy because it makes banned statements available inside South Africa.

<sup>65</sup> The consequences of detection can be severe. This is illustrated by an announcement concerning a non-fiction publication in Index on Censorship Sept. 1989: 40 : "Vrye Weekblad editor Max du Preez was found guilty in June of contravening the Internal Security Act and sentenced to six months' imprisonment, suspended for five years, by a Johannesburg court. Vrye Weekblad's publishers were also fined R1,000, suspended for five years. Passing judgment the magistrate said: 'All people who are a threat to national security must be silenced in each and every way.' The charges related to an article published in the newspaper in 1988 which indirectly quoted senior African National Congress member and 'listed' person Joe Slovo."

Quotation also politicizes literary language. Through its injection of political reality into the fictional text it makes it necessary for the reader to bring the two together. This is what helps make the novel politically effective. It forces readers to connect fiction with reality.

The role the censors of Burger's Daughter played in connection with quotation is noteworthy. The committee that banned the novel read it as though it were non-fiction. It considered what impression the work would have if read by the average man. It decided that Burger's Daughter was a launching pad for an attack on the status quo in South Africa and that it would therefore have a detrimental influence on the average reader. The political statements in the novel were taken literally and attributed to Gordimer. In her rebuttal, Gordimer pulls up the screen of fiction and places every quote mentioned by the committee back into the fictional context. The Appeal Board considered what effect Burger's Daughter, as a literary work, would have on the likely reader. These censors decided that the fictional context and the limited readership reduced the effectiveness of the political rhetoric.

Having attempted to deal with the situation in South Africa in one way in Burger's Daughter, Gordimer takes another approach in A Sport of Nature. A Sport of Nature is a subtly different novel which, on one level,



may be understood as merely a step in the development of Gordimer's novelistic range. Arguably, however, the step chosen has been influenced by the censorship battle over Burger's Daughter.

A Sport of Nature, published in 1987, was never banned. One explanation for its success in evading the censors is that the link between the novel and South African reality is less distinct than in Burger's Daughter. In the first place, Hillela, the protagonist, is a character more removed from reality than Rosa Burger. Secondly, history takes on a different value in the novel. History as historical reality functions only as background and is replaced toward the end of the novel by a new concept of history, history as utopia, the history of the future.

The epigraph of Burger's Daughter is "I am the place in which something has occurred." A Sport of Nature begins with the definition of a "sport of nature": "a plant, animal, etc., which exhibits abnormal variation from the parent stock or type ... a spontaneous mutation; a new variety produced in this way." If her engagement in the struggle makes Rosa Burger "the place in which something has occurred," Hillela is "a spontaneous mutation."

For the reader, Hillela appears, first and foremost, to be strange and different. While in Burger's Daughter a variety of perspectives contribute to the objective construction of Rosa's identity (Clingman

191), in A Sport of Nature the same narrative technique creates a measure of indeterminacy that makes Hillela into a floating character. In A Sport of Nature, Hillela has no voice and is only seen from the outside, through the eyes of other characters. She is herself the text to be deciphered, both by the characters and by the reader. There is no anchor of perception as there was in Burger's Daughter in Rosa's discourse.

Hillela's aunt Pauline reflects: "Hillela could have been like anybody else. She had the opportunity." (59) Earlier, puzzled by Hillela's behavior, she has concluded: "She's a-moral. I mean, in the sense of the morality of this country." (45) Hillela has no historical or political consciousness, and, what is highly unusual for a girl growing up in South Africa, no color consciousness.

Comparison is used by the narrator to describe Hillela. The narrator sets Hillela apart by juxtaposing what she does at any given moment with what happens around her: "Hillela had her first driving lesson on the day a republic was declared." (67). On the one hand, this strategy allows the narrator to introduce historical facts into the narrative. At the same time these facts are relegated to a second plane: "That year when Hillela was living in the city with some man was the same year when torture began to be used by the police." (117) The information about the introduction of torture is given while the focus stays on Hillela

for whom "newspapers are horror happening to other people." (25) Historical reality is the background against which Gordimer creates what turns out to be a utopian character.

Hillela moves through life driven by a strong, bodily instinct. She knows the language of the body, and she is oblivious to the shade of that body or the political convictions of its owner. Hillela's list of partners is consequently diverse. It includes a Coloured boy in high school; her cousin, Sacha; a Swede who turns out to be a spy for the government; a black ANC leader in exile; and a president of a neighboring country. In one of the rare moments where Hillela seems to be aware of the discrepancy between her motives and how they are perceived by others, the reader gets a glimpse of what goes on inside this elusive character:

The man they call a double-dealer, who lied about Sweden and Germany: the place he told the truth was in bed, with his lovely body, the feelings he gave me were not his fantasies or his boasts. Those others, on the beach; they have no home - not out of clumsiness, a tendency to break what is precious - but because they are brave and believe in the other kinds of love, justice, fellow man - and inside each other, making love, that's the only place we can make, here, that's not just a place to stay. (147)

Unhindered by personal, moral or political qualms, Hillela easily adapts to the different situations in which she finds herself. When she marries Whaila Kgomani, a black ANC leader, she unintentionally enters the realm of history. In her marriage, Hillela, who is totally uninterested in politics, finds something her

activist aunt and uncle have been looking for all their lives: "If Pauline and Joe had known it, the daughter of feckless Ruthie had what they couldn't find: a sign in her marriage, a sure and certain instruction to which one could attach oneself and feel the tug of history." (206) This is not the history of the past or present, so important in Burger's Daughter, but the history of the future, history in the sense of utopia. Pauline and Joe have always been engaged in the political actuality inside South Africa. Hillela becomes part of a team that is preparing for the future.

With Whaila, Hillela espouses his cause. She does this not out of political conviction but out of an instinct for survival. She recognizes that Whaila's path leads to the future. After his assassination, she continues his work. The novel ends with a utopian scene. A change of power has taken place in South Africa, apparently without creating major chaos and bloodshed. The country that once was South Africa now has a black president. Whites have not been driven into the sea. Two of Hillela's conservative cousins have already secured jobs in the new country.

Hillela herself occupies a place of honor at the ceremonies that mark the proclamation of the new African state. Sacha, Hillela's politically most authentic relative, has not returned from exile yet. But he is the one who, earlier, in a letter to his mother, has given the key to this scene:



Reformers are (take pride in being) totally rational, but the dynamic of real change is always utopian....

Utopia is unattainable; without aiming for it - taking a chance! - you can never hope even to fall far short of it.

Instinct is utopian. Emotion is utopian. But reformers cannot imagine any other way....Don't you see? It's all got to come down, mother. Without utopia - the idea of utopia - there's a failure of the imagination - and that's a failure to know how to go on living. It will take another kind of being to stay on, here. A new white person. Not us. The chance is a wild chance - like falling in love. (194)

In this passage, Sacha formulates the central vision that underlies the novel. While he puts it into words, his cousin lives it. Hillela is that new white person. She is the wild chance of a mutation. She is not a reformer like her aunt and uncle; she is not rational. Instead, she, in Sacha's words, "receives everything through [her] skin." (330) That is why she is a white who can give birth to a perfectly black child and that is why she has a place on the platform of the new South Africa.

The role of realism in Burger's Daughter and utopianism in A Sport of Nature is underlined by the novels' endings. Rosa Burger ends up in solitary confinement, in the same cell her father once occupied.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup>. The last paragraph of Burger's Daughter paraphrases a letter Rosa sent from prison to Madame Bagnelli: "In a passage dealing with the comforts of a cell as if describing the features of a tourist hotel that wasn't quite what the brochure might have suggested .... there was a reference to a watermark of light that came into the cell at sundown every evening, reflected from some west-facing surface outside; something Lionel Burger once mentioned. But the line had

Hillela's story culminates with her embracing the wife of the first black president of South Africa. Rosa is a person whose task it is to come to grips with the past and to find a place in the present. Hillela, a sport of nature, is by definition a person of the future.

With respect to the question of readership raised earlier, I have suggested that writing a novel more removed from the reality in South Africa at the time of writing advanced Gordimer's desired goal of securing her readership. The utopian character of Hillela, as well as the other aspects discussed above, served to increase the distance between the work and reality and thereby made it less vulnerable to banning. With A Sport of Nature, Gordimer avoided the sort of bruising battle with the censors that followed the publication of Burger's Daughter and succeeded in delivering her work to her South African readers.

Confrontation with the state censorship apparatus entails many costs, even if the censors relent, as they did with Burger's Daughter. Although Burger's Daughter was banned for only three months, the process of censorship itself was damaging and enmeshed Gordimer in politics and publicity on terms not of her own choosing. The committee that banned the novel, while it

been deleted by the prison censor. Madame Bagnelli was never able to make it out." (361)

publicly dissected and maligned the book, at least accorded it the respect of believing it to have a politically subversive effect. In defending her work against the charges of the committee, Gordimer, to a certain extent, did injustice to the significance of her own book by making it seem more innocent than it really was.

The unbanning of the novel itself was a qualified victory. There is a certain irony to the judgment of the Appeal Board that the work was so unbalanced as to be unconvincing. Therefore, the Appeal Board found the work likely to be politically ineffective and not threatening enough to warrant banning. In addition, Gordimer became a pawn in the hands of the Nationalist authorities since the ban was lifted for reasons that served the government's interests. Gordimer's international reputation made her a perfect example to illustrate the regime's supposed relaxation of censorship. The author herself saw the unbanning of her work and that of a few other white writers as an attempt to divide white and black writers by creating the impression that white writers could be coopted by the government.

One positive effect of the unbanning was that Burger's Daughter became available to readers in South Africa. Even though she has a worldwide audience, being read in her own country is of primary importance to Gordimer. She is convinced that "we can be 'read' only

by readers who share terms of reference formed in us by our education, [who share] our cultural background."

("The Gap" 59)

In addition to being an attempt to secure a South African audience, A Sport of Nature also tries to increase the group of readers outside South Africa that can "read" the novel. Its utopian character places the novel closer to the realm of the mythic and that makes it more universal. As Gordimer points out in "The Gap between the Reader and the Writer":

What can the writer count on if she/he obstinately persists that one can write for anyone who picks up one's book? .... The writer can count on the mythic perhaps.... [Fairy-tales and fables] can be "read" by anyone, everyone. (61)

She emphasizes also how difficult it is to produce the kind of literature that allows for universal understanding:

But how few of us, the writers, can hope ever to create the crystal ball in which meaning can be read, pure and absolute: it is the vessel of genius, which alone, now and then, attains universality in art. (61)

In A Sport of Nature, Gordimer has expressed her belief in the value of attempting to achieve utopia. The same applies to the attempt to be universal. "Without aiming for it you can never hope even to fall far short of it." Although each work is politically inspirational on its own terms, A Sport of Nature, the more utopian of the two, was the less susceptible to banning and therefore, more likely to reach its intended audience. Whether this variation in approach



from the one work to the other was consciously devised or not, the possible roots of such variation in censorship should not be overlooked.

## 6.2. Christopher Hope : A Seperate Development

Christopher Hope is a South African poet and novelist who has lived in England since 1974. His exile is voluntary. As he explains in his autobiography White Boy Running, he left the country for reasons that have much to do with his being a white English-speaking South African:

...I felt the growing irrelevance of my position as that increasingly threatened species, a White English-speaking South African caught between the entrenched nationalism of the White Afrikaner and the rising nationalism of the dispossessed majority of Blacks. We were out of sympathy with the Government, yet out of touch with Black aspirations, caught somewhere in the middle, not waving but drowning, outnumbered, outgunned and, worst of all, outmoded. It seemed to me that the English-speaking liberal had made a considerable contribution to his own irrelevance. You might say that people of my persuasion were damned by the very qualities and ideals which they most admired and strove to uphold; a sense of fairness and tolerance were precisely the qualities which prevented us from attacking the everyday idiocies of our Government with proper ferocity. (260,261)

Hope left South Africa, "a country more bizarre than anything a writer could dream up" in order to find a new vantage point from which to attack it. In an interview for a Dutch newspaper, Hope explained that he wanted to create the biggest possible distance between himself and the country he writes about, "on the one

hand because my work is rather politically committed but especially because I see South Africa as a madhouse." (NRC Handelsblad, 15 June 1990, translation mine).

Hope has characterised his move to England as an escape. He could not adequately describe life in the madhouse as long as he was locked inside it. His objective was to "convey something of the horrifying comedy of the place" (261).

For Hope, the way to do that was:

...to attempt to set down one's experience with as little elaboration as possible. It occurred to me that if only I could hold up a mirror, we might glimpse in it a vision of ourselves - unexpected, ridiculous, sad, and quite laceratingly amusing. By this method one might also hope to expose the nursing staff who patrolled the wards of our asylum pretending to be angels of sweetness and light for the hard-faced harridans they really were. (262)

The concrete realisation of this goal was the novel A Separate Development, published in 1980. It was Hope's first novel after several volumes of poetry. The title refers to one of the euphemisms for apartheid<sup>67</sup> and the color bar is one of the themes of the novel. The subject is not treated in general but is related to a specific case; A separate development, one life in a color-coded society.

<sup>67</sup> See e.g. The Apartheid Handbook: "The policy has been given a variety of names: baasskap ('domination'), 'white leadership', 'separate development', 'parallel development', 'multinational development' and 'co-operative co-existence.' (11)

The specific case is Harry Moto. A Separate Development is his life-story told from jail (cf. Kennis van die Aand). Harry Moto is a special case because he steps outside the neatly drawn lines between the races and becomes a "unique specimen", not white, not black, a "white kaffir". Through the eyes of this 'sport of nature', Hope wants to show the absurdity of South African racialism.

At the outset Harry Moto is a white catholic English-speaking adolescent who enjoys all the privileges of a white boy in South Africa. The time is the end of the fifties and Harry is about to graduate from high school. Harry suffers from normal teen anxiety about his appearance. He worries about his flat feet, his crinkly hair, and his well-developed breasts. For Harry the breasts are the biggest embarrassment but his hair will give him bigger problems.

His hair and his dark tan arouse suspicion. Even though he has white parents, he has no papers to prove his white ancestry. At sixteen he can, therefore, not get an identity card that identifies him as white. This makes him vulnerable. A bus driver, for example, throws him from a whites only bus, calling him a white kaffir.

Harry, who has always felt an outsider, identifies with that label: "'White Kaffir': the words have a ring to them. I came to be grateful for them. Up until then I hadn't any proper idea what I was. What the conductor gave me was an identity. Ever since, I've been an identity in search of a group." (31-32).

He only needs one more push to effect his exit from the white world. The push comes when he is expelled from school after having been falsely accused of rape by his date to the matriculation dance, Mary. From that moment on Harry is on the run. His goal is to be unnoticed, invisible. Acting as if he were Coloured, he works at a series of three different jobs. Consecutively, he serves as a runner for an Indian shopkeeper, Raboobie, as an assistant to a salesman in skin lighteners, and as a tray collector at a drive-in cafeteria.

Each time questions of color decide his fate. Running for Raboobie ends when Raboobie's business closes down due to the rezoning of the area for white business. The skin lightener salesman, Epstein, is very satisfied with Harry, the man with the perfect skin to sell his products:

Now you know why I'm happy to take you on Harry. You're light enough to pass for white in the country hotels and yet dark enough to impress my customers who would give their livers to look like you. (126)

Nevertheless, Harry has to quit when the police pursue Epstein for inspiring infraction of the Immorality Act. (His products have worked so well that the white men in a rural town have sexually assaulted their black servants.)

As a tray-collector, his former classmates do not recognize him because he has now simply become "the boy". For a moment Harry thinks that he has reached his



goal: invisibility. But Mary, the girl from the dance, has recognized him after all and comes after him. She forces Harry to have sex with her, in her car. They are discovered and arrested by the police for what looks to them like an infraction of the Immorality Act (Harry is still wearing his 'boy' uniform).

Once in jail it becomes clear that the chief of police is interested in Harry for another reason. He sees in Harry an interesting object of study because he is a "living link between separate but equal races." He demands that Harry write down his life story because he wants to "understand the racial currents as they affect the ebb and flow of things here." (194) He explains his special interest to Harry:

"given the way we are- our people in this country fall naturally, we believe, into separate groups. Not because they are forced to, mind you. Not at all. Though that's what the outside world believes. No, the fact is that they like it that way. They stick to their own. Same holds to same. Black to black, white to white, Asian to Asian, etcetera. But you, Harry- you're not like anyone. Who are you the same as? You don't belong to anything. (...)It's not that you're a stray, a common-or-garden outcast. No. You've made a whole damn career out of being different. I want to know why. And who is Harry Moto, exactly? A separate development, or parallel freedoms or equal opportunities, in the sense of groups- that we understand. (195)

Faced with torture Harry gives in and starts to write his biography. The circle is closed and we are back at page one where we read Harry's own interpretation of the project:

A country which has based itself absolutely on the sacred belief in sundered, severed,

truncated, fractured, split, divided, separate selves now craves a detailed account of my development in the deluded hope that once all the facts are known the odd case that I am will swim into focus, there will be an intermingling, an intermeshing of parts and their insanity will be miraculously proved to be wise policy. (5)

A Separate Development is the story of Harry Moto as separate development. On a stylistic level it is a first person account of an adolescent protagonist whose language is reminiscent of Holden Caulfield in Catcher in the Rye. This conveys a comical tone of exaggeration but also of aloofness and cynicism. These stylistic characteristics support the theme of being an outsider. An innocent example of playful description is Harry's opinion of the public swimming pool:

Most afternoons, except for Wednesdays, along with some of the girls from the Convent of Our Lady of Sorrows, we'd go swimming at old Wyner's shack up on the Ridge. A damned sight better than risking the public baths, a real pit of a place, used during the week only by snotty-nosed infants and octogenarians in bathrobes and purple rinses whose first impulse on entering the water was to piss the place yellow as jaundice. The Superintendent fought back with double-strength chlorine. Result? Open your eyes under water and you went blind for five minutes, arriving home with flamingo-pink eyes that would have done an albino proud. (7)

The combination of subject matter and form make the novel into a satire on South Africa's apartheid society. But the interpretation of A Separate Development depends very much on the position of the reader. The censors themselves gave it two very different readings.

As with Burger's Daughter, the reading of the members of the publications committee was very literal. They read Hope's novel in order to find offensive passages and treated the text not as fiction but as a description of reality. They found enough elements that did not correspond with their world view to justify a ban. On the basis of a few isolated passages, A Separate Development was banned under Publication Act Sections 47 (2) (d) and (e).

The committee's three reasons for the original ban are enumerated in the decision on appeal:

1. The book is harmful to the relations between sections of the population of the Republic. It is whites and in most instances Afrikaners who humiliate the blacks. Non-whites are reviled as "crinkleheads", "black baboons" and "kaffirs".
2. The book is harmful to state security, general welfare, and good order. The revolution that has to come is simply regarded as self-evident.
3. The police are presented in an extremely poor light. (Digest of Decisions, 104/80.1)

The first argument is in itself not false but it is difficult to imagine that one could write a book about the color bar in the fifties to which this argument would not apply. The implication is that the whole subject is off limits. The same holds for the third argument. Moreover, one can question whether in comparison to other books the police really come off so poorly. They play a minor part and although there is a threat of torture it is not executed. I will address the second argument below when I discuss the PAB reading.



The PAB reading, in contrast to that of the publication committee, did take the literary nature of A Separate Development into account. The board referred the work to a committee of literary experts. The members of this committee decided that the book had some literary merit but not extraordinary literary merit.

The PAB decision seems to display a more sophisticated approach. It recognized that the work is a satire, for example. There are also terms like "narrator" and even "the willing suspension of disbelief." The PAB also reached a very different conclusion from that of the publications committee. Because A Separate Development is a satire and the narrator an outcast, the PAB decided that the work should not be taken too seriously and could therefore not be subversive:

The effect of the satire is actually weakened by the story which, in a sense, loses touch with reality. It is not a Coloured or a Black who becomes the victim of race laws but a white youth, over-conscious of his dark complexion as of his apparently abnormal breasts. By trying to escape into or, rather, to lose himself in the world of Blacks and Coloureds, he creates an entirely fanciful or unreal situation for himself. It is this that makes the willing suspension of disbelief, so necessary in all convincing fiction, difficult for the reader and makes the story unfunny and rather silly at times. To read incitement to disorder and subversion into all this is to bring a kind of seriousness into the reading of the novel that the novel itself does not warrant or to ascribe to it an effect that it simply does not achieve. (Digest of Decisions, 104/80.3)

That a white boy becomes a victim of apartheid makes the story unrealistic for the PAB. The fact that Harry does not possess the proper documents to prove



that he is white, is overlooked. In fact, Harry's story could easily have happened in South Africa and it probably has in various forms. Hundreds of people are reclassified each year. In 1984, for example, 795 South Africans were reclassified. Most were Coloureds who became white but there were also two whites who became Chinese and one white who became Indian. (The Apartheid Handbook 27)

Roger Omond in The Apartheid Handbook gives an example of a case that resembles Harry's but is even more absurd:

In the 1960s Sandra Laing, born to white parents in the eastern Transvaal, was asked to leave her white school at the age of 11 because she 'looked Coloured'. She was reclassified Coloured, but after a long legal battle the decision was reversed. She then lived with an African man and applied to be reclassified African so that the relationship could be legalized. (27)

Omond also mentions that as recently as 1984 two small children were held in detention for three years while waiting for the government decision on their race.

The discrepancy between the interpretations of the publications committee and the PAB is also illustrated by the different readings given the words "when the revolution comes". There is only one passage in the book where these words appear. Harry and his friends sit around the pool when the following exchange occurs:

"Oh, Harry's fine," van Dam allowed. "I'll say this. He'll be all right when the revolution comes."  
 "There won't be one," Yannovitch said flatly.  
 "Oh yes? Says who?"

"Stands to reason. In the first place, nothing ever happens around here. And secondly, who'd clear up the mess afterwards?" "Oh yes," Mina said, "Harry'll be all right when the revolution comes. It's just that I don't see how he's going to hold out till then. That's the trouble with Harry." (20-21)

The publications committee's concluded that "the revolution that has to come is simply regarded as self-evident." I can see no justification for that conclusion in this passage and this is the only place in the 200-page novel where there is mention of a revolution. There are several speakers and they clearly disagree on the likelihood of a revolution. The person who does not believe that the revolution will come is the only one who gets to explain his point of view. It is also unclear whether a revolution, if it were to come, would be welcomed by this group of white teenagers.

The PAB, in reaction to the report of the publications committee, had a completely different interpretation:

To regard the expression "Come the Revolution" as a political slogan that has the function of incitement is to be unaware of its general use. It falls in the same category as "When my Ship Comes Home", in that it serves to introduce an over-optimistic or over-idealistic wish, though it carries the kind of irony and sarcasm there is in the proverb "The Heavens May Fall and We May have Lark-pie for Supper". (Digest of Decisions, 104/80.2)

This reaction sounds very much like a rebuke of the publications committee. It is questionable however, whether the rebuke is entirely justified. In the first place the expression "Come the revolution" does not

appear in the book. Secondly, to compare the discussion about a potential revolution with an expression that "serves to introduce an over-optimistic or over-idealistic wish" is inappropriate because in this case the coming of the revolution is not something that is wished by the speakers. The assumption that Harry will be all right implies that the rest of the group will not. Finally, although A Separate Development is definitely not devoid of irony and sarcasm, the PAB completely ignored the political potential of the novel when it compared the quoted passage with the meaning of the proverb "The Heavens May Fall and We May have Larkpie for Supper."

With its analysis the members of the PAB reduced Hope's book to a lighthearted farce with few links with reality. They had reason to do this. In 1980, their new guidelines, drawn up after the Magersfontein battle came into effect. They were meant to relax the censor's grip on certain kinds of literature, especially literature by white and well-known writers. Even though the new rules should also have been followed by the publications committees it took some time before the officials at the base of the censorship apparatus began to apply the revised guidelines.

In the early 1980s, therefore, it happened several times that literary books were banned by publications committees still operating under the strict rules of the seventies. The ban would then be reversed by the

PAB, which more than once scolded the responsible committee for poor reading.<sup>68</sup> The case of A Separate Development is a good example. The publications committee, after realising that on the whole the novel meant to vilify the system, read to find offensive passages that could justify a ban. The PAB, for which a ban on a white English author did not fit in the new policy, read to counter the arguments of the publications committee. They argued that the book was not very serious, even "rather silly at times", and was therefore not undesirable.

In this case, as in the case of Burger's Daughter, the question arises who does more justice to a work: a publications committee whose literalist reading ignores all subtleties but at least takes the work seriously and attributes some subversive power to it, or the PAB that with the help of literary arguments dismisses the work as irrelevant. The irony is, of course, that the result of the first approach is a ban and of the second approach a lifting of that ban. Hope himself has expressed similar mixed feelings in reaction to the ban on A Separate Development:

"The banning orders on my novel were very cruel. It would incite to racial hostility. The ban gave me on the one hand the feeling of having said something useful. There was at least one person who had read it thoroughly. On the other hand I was overwhelmed by sadness because the book could not be read in my

68 cf. Burger's Daughter



own country." (NRC Handelsblad 15 June 1990, translation mine)

In White Boy Running, Hope writes on the same subject: "I felt sorry about the disappearance of my novel, of course, but perversely grateful that if all else failed I found in the censors careful readers and when starting out a writer is grateful for readers wherever he finds them." (262)

In White Boy Running, Hope not only expresses his own mixed feelings, he also leaves the reader confused about his own interpretation of A Separate Development. He calls the reading of the publications committee "thorough" and "careful", suggesting that he agrees with their interpretation. But in the same breath he characterises the novel in a way more in line with the interpretation of the PAB:

Although I had taken the precaution of setting my story back a quarter of a century, and despite the anonymity of the town, what I had considered to be a gentle little tale, with one or two comic gleams, aroused considerable feeling. (...)  
The reasons given for the banning were large and excessively weighty for what was, after all, a little comedy. (262, emphasis added)

Why take precautions against banning when all you want to write is "a gentle little tale"? Behind all this confusion, the real nature of the book goes unobserved: its autobiographical character. A Separate Development is a colorized autobiography. Of course, the novel exposes some of the absurdities of apartheid, but what it is really about is the personal anxiety of being an outcast, of not fitting in. The autobiographi-

cal elements actually undermine the potential political effect of the novel.

Usually an autobiography entails the conflation of author, narrator and protagonist. In this case there is no reason for a reader to assume that these three agents are identical. There is no autobiographical pact between author and reader. A Separate Development is a novel, fiction not fact.

But when one compares the novel with Philippe Lejeune's definition of autobiography, "a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his own personality,"<sup>69</sup> one can detect some connections. From a vantage point within the text, the novel is Harry Moto's autobiography. Harry, however, is not a real person outside of the novel. A Separate Development is then a retrospective prose narrative written by a fictive character, etc.

The suggestion of autobiography arises from the resemblance between this fictive character, Harry Moto and the author Christopher Hope. Eight years after his first novel, Hope published his autobiography White Boy Running. The life he describes in this book resembles Harry's. First of all, both belong to the same small section of the South African population: Roman

<sup>69</sup> In On Autobiography. Eakin, Paul John (ed). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Catholic, English-speaking, white South Africans. What it meant to belong to that minority within a minority of the minority is one of the things Hope tries to convey:

The sense of exile we felt within our own country is something which has never left me. We were a generation who went into exile before we left home. Leaving does not increase the sense of loss, returning does not cure it. To some extent, I suppose we were a little like the Indians of Station Street in Balfour, an alien minority on the periphery of things (...) Like the Indians of Station Street we pretended to lead perfectly normal lives, even though we knew by the way passing students averted their eyes that a community which believes in black frocks for men, bells and incense cannot, and will not ever be normal. The assertion of normality was vital; we were rejecting the view that we represented some monstrous sub-species of the human race. (92)

This strong desire to be normal finds a place in the novel in Harry's concern about his physical appearance. Also, Harry's school life overlaps with Hope's. Both are in school in the same time period (which makes the "precautionary" displacement in time much less arbitrary) and a lot of details from Harry's life in school are mentioned in White Boy Running.

One can see Harry's and Hope's biographies as parallel lines. Not all the facts match of course but they do describe the same development of personality. From the day of the matriculation dance forward however, the facts of Harry's life are not those of Hope. Hope's whiteness was never questioned but he was just as much "caught in his skin" as Harry. His belonging to a "detested minority" (90) gave him an imagina-

tive grasp of what blacks felt but the only blacks he knew were servants. Hope never presented himself as white kaffir in order to escape the white world but he does describe himself as "on the run":

We were all a little mad, all on the run. Quite what we were fleeing was never mentioned, but there was enough fear to keep us edgy; there was mortal sin and the massing Black hordes and the Calvinist ascendancy. (113)

Harry runs literally, he runs away from home, away from school, for Raboobie. Hope runs figuratively, he leaves the country. Where Harry tries to escape from the white world, Hope escapes the whole setting. But neither of them can completely escape. In the end, Harry's only recourse is to write down his life. Hope does the same from his position in exile.

Hope's intention as a writer was "to set down one's experience with as little elaboration as possible.", "to hold up a mirror". (261) His goal was to expose the cruelty of the rulers of South Africa. "Accordingly" he wrote "many miles from home, a novel about a teenager who did not know what colour he was." (262) Being in exile, far away from day-to-day experience of the world he wanted to expose, he necessarily used his own recollections. But realising that his personal story would not be enough to fulfill his second goal of political relevance, he added the aspect of



race to give the personal a larger political meaning.<sup>70</sup>

He didn't quite succeed because the vantage point in the novel remains that of a white. The book is divided in three parts called "In", "Out", and "In Again". These titles refer to Harry's position vis-à-vis the white world.

Harry doesn't represent any group, least of all Coloureds or blacks. Throughout he is much more privileged than a member of those groups. In Part one he is white; in Part two, he has the privilege of being lightskinned and well-educated; in Part three he is privileged to be of more value to the police alive than dead. To a Coloured or black person Harry must seem crazy for not fighting his rejection from a world of privilege. It is true that the system brings him into trouble but he doesn't even bother to apply for an identity card or the proper papers.

Returning to the censor's two interpretations, I would like to conclude that even though a story like Harry's is not unthinkable in South Africa, it is far from realistic as a story of a non-white because it stays too much inside the psychology of a white person. In addition, the satiric tone focuses attention on the absurdity of the system under attack but also serves as

<sup>70</sup> Even in his "real" autobiography White Boy Running, Hope adds political commentary and history to his personal memoir.

an excuse to deny the seriousness of the book and reduce it to a comic entertainment.

Satire is therefore a dangerous technique. The object of a satire is to make a person or an object look ridiculous without exposing the writer to too much danger. One tool to do that is exaggeration. To blow certain aspects of a subject out of proportion exposes the absurdity already present. But exaggeration can at the same time undermine this effect. On the one hand, it can go unrecognized as such and be taken literally (which is what the publications committee did), and on the other hand, what is written can be taken with so large a pinch of salt that it reduces the serious foundation of the satire to a joke (which is what the PAB did).

It can be difficult to determine where description of fact stops and satire begins. In the first chapter of the novel, the narrator discourses on the development of a new identification technique:

The ID card was a stippled green plastic rectangle about four inches by three, showing a grainy snapshot of the owner and his registration number, followed by a capital W for "White". At one time there were fears of forgeries among unscrupulous non-Europeans "trying for White", and the Government considered using a double-check system: the idea was to tattoo the ID number on the wrists or forearms of all bona fide Europeans with a special invisible ink developed by a Cape wine farmer, Tony "Babelas" van Breda from the skin of the Tokai grape. The number showed up only under infra-red light and the idea was that once the population had been tattooed, teams of inspectors equipped with portable scanners would police the system by making random checks among ID card carriers.

(...)In fact, in the end the plan failed. What killed it was the discovery that with the application of Babelas Ink to human flesh, a chemical reaction took place, whether of the infra-red rays with the ink, or the ink with perspiration was never decided. (24-25)

The narrator goes on to describe in outrageous detail how the plan failed. My reaction upon reading the passage was that only the first sentence was possibly true. In order to discover whether there was a factual basis for this hilarious description I consulted a South African legal scholar. To my surprise he reacted rather seriously when I read him the passage. He had not actually heard of these plans but he judged them not unthinkable. I asked him to indicate where he thought fact slipped into fiction. He said he wasn't sure about the grapes but for the rest, it could have happened.

Christopher Hope's stated goal as a writer was to attack the government. In order to achieve this goal, he has placed himself at the greatest possible distance from South Africa: he has chosen exile. Exile offers him a perspective from outside and (he hopes) makes his work less vulnerable to censorship.

As a consequence of this choice, he has to use his own experience as material for his novels because he lacks the contact with day-to-day reality in his country. That the material is limited and dated undermines the potential political effect of a work

based on this material. In A Separate Development Hope tries to make up for this shortcoming by adding the theme of race and choosing the form of satire. Through satire Hope magnifies the absurdities of the system. This increases the novel's force as an indictment and at the same time it creates the possibility of an interpretation in which the novel is treated lightly, as comedy and therefore harmless.

### 6.3. The novels of J.M. Coetzee

J.M. Coetzee was born in an Afrikaans family but writes in English. He says he prefers English because linguistically it is a richer language. Apart from his six novels, he has written numerous scholarly articles and a study on South African novels. He has lived abroad for long periods of time (mainly in the United States) and currently teaches literature at the University of Cape Town.

Coetzee's first novel Dusklands was published in 1974, and although this was a period of severe censorship, neither this nor any of his following works have been banned. This is not surprising for his novels have at most a tenuous relation to South African factuality. They are allegories about philosophical questions. The plots contain references to the South African situation (except in the novel Foe) but these references are characterized by indeterminacy. Thematically, these



novels treat ideas, some of which can be related to South Africa, such as the implications of colonialism or master-servant relationships, but at the same time the works apply to the human condition in general.

This section will consider Coetzee's novels concentrating only on those elements in the texts that point towards the ideological pressures under which they were written. <sup>71</sup>

Both work and author clearly resist such a historical and political approach. The second novella in Dusklands carries the epigraph "What is important is the philosophy of history" (Flaubert), not history itself, often the focus of Gordimer's novels. Teresa Povey quotes Coetzee as saying:

And what I am now resisting is the attempt to swallow my novels into a political discourse. Because I'm not prepared to concede that the one kind of discourse is larger or more primary than the other. So that attempts to swallow up the intention that lies in or behind a book of mine - let's assume for the moment that there is an intention there - into some wider or more all-embracing, more swallowing, notion of social intention - I have to resist them because, frankly, my allegiances lie with the discourse of the novels and not with the discourse of politics. (55)

<sup>71</sup> Coetzee, being an internationally acclaimed author, has inspired a considerable critical literature. It goes beyond the scope of this thesis to consider the criticism at length. In recent years, several book-length studies have been published on his literary work. Among these are Teresa Dovey's Lacanian interpretation The Novels of J M Coetzee, and Dick Penner's Countries of the Mind: The Fiction of J.M. Coetzee.

Dutifully, Povey's analysis remains "firmly within the novelistic discourse." It is understandable that the author of highly complex, multi-layered novels dislikes the reductionist evaluation of his work in terms of political relevance alone. This has been and still is, however, the fate of every writer in South Africa. Coetzee himself acknowledged this when he accepted the Jerusalem prize for Life and Times of Michael K in 1987:

Each act of writing in such an extremely politicised situation as South Africa has become a politicised act. The writer who consciously turns his or her back on politics, has taken a political decision. One cannot escape that. (Beeld 10 April 1987, translation mine)

Still much of Coetzee's work can be read as an escape from the strong political pressures surrounding him. History, South Africa's or his own, does not play an important role in his novels<sup>72</sup>. Nor do his novels

<sup>72</sup> More than once Coetzee's indirectness vis-à-vis South Africa has been compared with Gordimer's directness. Roland Smith writes:

Whereas [Sheila] Fugard and Coetzee are oblique even when dealing with history, Nadine Gordimer confronts the situations in her novels even when they involve future, imagined trauma. The stunning power of her fiction, especially in contrast with the oracular mode of Sheila Fugard and J.M. Coetzee is a demonstration of the truism that fictional attempts to 'explain' life are less convincing than attempts to recreate it. ("The Seventies and After: The Inner View in White, English-language Fiction", in Olive Schreiner and After, Cape Town: David Philip, 1983: 204)

And Kelly Hewson, more appreciative of Coetzee, notes that:

reflect the here and now in a direct way. These absences relieve him already of one important pressure: censorship. (see Kelly Hewson, note 66)

However, as that pressure decreases another mounts: the demand that a writer be relevant. This demand has come from writers and critics opposed to the government. Lewis Nkosi, for example, has stated that "[w]hat social problems in under-developed countries do is force a writer to strike a balance between life as it is lived and life as it is intellectually and metaphysically ordered into a formalised artistic expression. In short the pressing social problems order the writer to be relevant." (Home and Exile 105) Coetzee's efforts to resist this pressure have brought him harsh criticism. Penner gives quite a few examples of critics who have taken offense at Coetzee's "lack of a clear Leftist political stance." (22-24)

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Gordimer shows us one way (to break through the screen) in her commitment to critical realism and the reliance in her novels on actual history, a reliance no doubt, that has been responsible for the fact that several of her works have been banned in South Africa. Coetzee gives us another variation on responsibility. By its autonomy, its freedom from any distinctly political programme, a novel like Life & Times of Michael K. can slip through the censor's net to help remind us, his Western audience, that oppression and injustice are not limited to South Africa, that, in some sense, they are eternal. ("Making the 'Revolutionary Gesture': Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee and some variations on the Writer's Responsibility", in Ariel 19.4 (1988))



The writer in South Africa has been pulled in at least two opposite directions. On the one hand, official censorship has made certain demands. On the other hand, those opposed to the government have demanded a political stance against the status quo. With regard to Coetzee's reaction to official censorship, Penner writes:

Asked...if censorship affected his creative process, John Coetzee responded in 1982, "Definitely not. And I would think that you would get the same answer from any serious writer in this country. I think you act as if it didn't exist while you're writing."<sup>73</sup> Four years later, in 1986, Coetzee was less sanguine: "For the writer the deeper problem is not to allow himself to be impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state, namely either to ignore its obscenities or else to produce representations of them. The true challenge is how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one's own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one's own terms." (16)

Penner sees the problem that censorship poses to the writer reflected in Coetzee's work:

There is a suggestion in [the above] statement that the fiction writer should turn away from the tangible, the evanescent present to draw from the imagination the kinds of archetypal representations that have characterised some of Coetzee's works, particularly Waiting for the Barbarians. Yet there seems to be in Coetzee a contradictory desire to confront South Africa's present agony with all of the candor that realism and naturalism can summon, as he did in Life & Times of Michael K. (16)

Clearly, to turn away from the tangible can decrease the risk of a confrontation with the censor but can

<sup>73</sup> This is a very common denial among writers. cf. Leroux, Brink, Gordimer.



also be an affront to those that demand commitment. The realisation of the "contradictory desire to confront South Africa's present agony" does the reverse. It means giving in to the demand of commitment at the cost of a higher vulnerability to censorship. To see how the dynamic between the two contradictory demands operates in the literary text, I will first discuss two aspects that reduce the tangible in Coetzee's first three novels: the setting and the narrating voice.

Dusklands consists of two novellas: "The Vietnam Project" and "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee". The first is set in the United States approximately at the time of writing and the second is set in eighteenth century South Africa. In "The Vietnam Project" there are no references to South Africa except for the name of the protagonist's boss: Coetzee.

Both stories are interior monologues by highly articulate, obsessed (deranged?) characters. This gives the narration an "inward" quality, especially in "The Vietnam Project". There is no interlocutor and no outside perspective on the action. There is even a suggestion that what we are reading takes place in the narrator's head only. The protagonist, Eugene Dawn, a researcher writing a report on the effectiveness of psychological warfare in Vietnam, says "Vietnam, like everything else, is inside me, and in Vietnam, with a little patience, all truths about man's nature." (14)

"The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" has the form of a pseudo-scientific edition of the diary of an eight-

eenth century frontiersman complete with a translator's preface, an afterword, notes and an appendix. This formal realism is however countered in the main text by Jacobus' modern vocabulary of philosophy and linguistics. Although the character Jacobus is based on a historical ancestor of the author, the historicity of the story is undermined in many other ways. (Penner 49-52).

Jacobus' inquiry is not historical or geographical but psychological. He tries to define and distinguish the people he encounters that are not like him, to know the OTHER in order to better oppress him. And that is what Eugene Dawn, the protagonist of "The Vietnam Project", does too. Both fail because of the inadequacy of language and the consequent lack of communication.

This is also the subject of Coetzee's next novel In the Heart of the Country (1977). When asked to compare the two works Coetzee said that in both books the situation is that "of living among people without reciprocity, so that there is only an 'I' and the 'You' is not on the same basis, the 'You' is a debased 'You'." (quoted in Penner 52) In the Heart of the Country is again an interior monologue of an obsessed woman, Magda, who lives in total isolation on a remote farm.

There is no mention of time and place but they are not completely impossible to determine. Coetzee described it "as a novel set perhaps roughly around the turn of the century in South Africa on a rather iso-

lated farm." (Penner 73 note 6). Indications in the text that support this statement are the lack of isolation-breaking devices like telephone, radio, etc., the landscape and the use of Afrikaans for all dialogue (at least in the South African edition).

Magda is extremely articulate in analysing her situation using a vocabulary of someone educated in philosophy and linguistics.<sup>74</sup> To give just one example of Magda's reflections I cite her reaction to one of the many unsatisfactory dialogues with her Coloured servant Hendrik:

I cannot carry on with these idiot dialogues. The language that should pass between myself and these people was subverted by my father and cannot be recovered. What passes between us now is a parody. I was born into a language of hierarchy, of distance and perspective. It was my father-tongue....I have no words left to exchange whose value I trust.  
(97)

The novel, then, is not a depiction of any historical reality. But it even subverts the possibility of psychological realism because Magda as a narrator is unreliable. Not only time and place but everything outside the philosophical debate on language that Magda carries on is uncertain. Penner quotes Coetzee saying: "In the course of the action people get killed or raped, but perhaps not really, perhaps only in the overactive imagination of the story-teller." (56)

<sup>74</sup> Penner paraphrasing Stephen Watson : "...Magda's thoughts betray not only an "urban" consciousness, but a familiarity with French surrealism as well as structuralist linguistic theory." (57)

Of course In the Heart of the Country is not solely an essay on language. There are other themes like master-slave and father-child relationships. One can even read it, as Penner does, as a parable on the difficult contemporary position of the white liberal:

Coetzee's novel suggests that the apartheid consciousness of the father, and of the old Afrikaner order, is dead, that it is a concept whose time has passed. This story suggests as well that the long suppressed anger of blacks like Hendrik is primed to explode in inarticulate violence, as indeed it has. Nothing alive exists in a state of stasis; the South Africa of the present is in a period of vital bloody ferment. Those who, like Magda, wish to be neither master nor slave, parent nor child, await a more problematic future. (72-73)

Without denying the possibility of such a "politically relevant" reading, it is definitely not in evidence on the surface of the text.

In Waiting for the Barbarians (1980), the nature of allegory is at the same time more pronounced on the surface and less abstract in its implications. Place and time are completely indeterminate and undeterminable.<sup>75</sup> The story is constructed so that it can take place anywhere or anytime which emphasises its allegorical nature. The same is true of the generic names used in the book like 'frontier', 'barbarians', 'magistrate', and 'Empire'.

<sup>75</sup> Penner quotes Coetzee on the subject: "The setting is not specified for Barbarians, and very specifically is not specified....I just put together a variety of locales and left a lot of things vague with a definite intention that it shouldn't be pinned down to some specific place." (76)



Despite its universal character, Waiting for the Barbarians lends itself more than the earlier works to a political reading. Its themes of institutional violence and torture, the threat of a different people and war, bring it closer to contemporary South Africa than any of the previous novels. Of course there are also more abstract levels, such as the magistrate's search for truth and justice and his attempt to know the torturer (Captain Joll) and the tortured (the Barbarian girl) which need not to be seen as "South African."

The narrative is again an interior monologue (with no interlocutor) by an articulate and self-reflective character.<sup>76</sup> There are no direct indications of unreliability as in the previous book but there is also no outside perspective to corroborate the Magistrate's words. His position as an elderly man in a position of power, at least to start out with, lends him a certain credibility.

The Empire is undoubtedly evil and the Magistrate becomes one of its victims but that does not make him a revolutionary hero. He describes himself as someone who wanted to live outside of history, "the history that Empire imposes on its subjects". (154) This desire to

<sup>76</sup>povey has suggested that the articulateness of Coetzee's protagonists and their tendency to deliver instant interpretations of their states of mind can be understood as a resistance of the text to outside criticism.

find a place outside of history, to be left alone in paradise can hardly be called a revolutionary gesture.

In Life & Times of Michael K. Coetzee has developed a character who is perhaps even less suitable as a hero. Michael K. seems to succeed in escaping "his times" by offering passive resistance in the form of refusing food while in captivity and tending his garden. This novel is rather different from the first three in several respects. The setting is South Africa (specified with place names like Cape Town and Prince Albert) in the not too distant future. This is more threatening than the allegorical setting in Waiting for the Barbarians. While the latter indicates "this can happen anywhere", the former says "this will happen here". But to go so far to say that Coetzee here confronts "South Africa's present agony with all of the candor that realism and naturalism can summon" (Penner 16) is not justified.

The indeterminacy is not found in the setting (although the future is in essence not determined) but in the protagonist. Here we do not find the articulate self-analysing protagonist of the first three novels but a slow-witted gardener of undetermined color with a harelip who does not tell his own story. Michael K.'s life and times are narrated by an omniscient narrator who "doesn't actually tell you very much" (Coetzee in Penner 94) in Part one and three and by a medical officer in Part two.

The omniscient narrator mostly adopts K.'s point of view but K. is not often given to analysing himself or his surroundings. The reader then is confronted with a blank gaze upon events that gives an unexpected perspective on a country in chaos due to a horrible civil war.<sup>77</sup> In a sense this attempt to let the facts speak for themselves is more effective in stirring the reader than the intellectual explanations present in the previous novels. This is underlined in the novel itself in the section narrated by the medical officer. His sophisticated linguistic and intellectual abilities do not bring him any closer to K. While K. with his silence has the officer in his grip, the officer with all his words cannot get a grip on K.

Life & Times of Michael K is the first novel by Coetzee that contains disturbing pictures of chaos and anarchy, concentration camps and road blocks, in a recognizable South Africa. Still it is not a blueprint for action or a call to arms. The moral, on the contrary, hints at withdrawal, introspection, a return to nature. K wonders in the end "Is that the moral of it all...the moral of the whole story: that there is time enough for everything?" (183) And just before that:

<sup>77</sup> In one review of the work in South Africa this is seen as a literary alibi. Hans Pienaar writes that the retarded Michael K. "serves the author as a filtre through which the description of a "future" collapse of the South African regime becomes a much easier task, which enables an appealing indefiniteness and intangibility in the novel." (Beeld 16 January 1984, Volksblad 4 February 1984.)

"Perhaps the truth is that it is enough to be out of the camps, out of all the camps at the same time."

(182) K has managed to escape the camps due to his capacity to live outside history, or at least to roll through it unaffected, something the Magistrate longed for but could not obtain.<sup>78</sup>

It is not surprising that this moral was rejected by "engaged" writers and critics.<sup>79</sup> George Packer, among several others, accuses Coetzee of a type of quietism. ("On the Edge of Silence", The Nation, 26 december 1988). Ironically, the censor found the novel disturbing enough to embargo it until a decision on its

<sup>78</sup> The medical officer observes:

He is like a stone, a pebble that, having lain around quietly minding its own business since the dawn of time, is now suddenly picked up and tossed randomly from hand to hand. A hard little stone, barely aware of its surroundings, enveloped in itself and its interior life. He passes through these institutions and camps and hospitals and God knows what else like a stone. Through the intestines of the war. An unbearing, unborn creature. I cannot really think of him as a man, though he is older than me by most reckonings. (135)

<sup>79</sup> Penner quotes two reactions:

Stephen Watson asks, "What sort of model does he provide for we, readers, who have to live in history and could not survive elsewhere?...Similarly Nadine Gordimer praises Coetzee's moving depiction of "what white has done to black" in South Africa, but questions his putting such a passive individual at the center of this novel: "For is there an idea of survival that can be realized entirely outside a political doctrine?" (99-100)



desirability had been reached by a committee of the Publications Control Board.<sup>80</sup>

Coetzee's next work, Foe (1986), has no direct connection with South Africa at all. It is a rewriting of Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, an allegory of the creative process. In his review Neville Alexander characterises Foe as "a novel about the word, about the vagaries of communication and above all about the writer's craft. It is a novelist's novel, so that those who search in it for relevant references to South Africa, or even to the world, as it is today, will search in vain." (Die Suid Afrikaan 10 (1987): 38). With this novel, Coetzee seems to turn his back completely on the demands of relevance and enjoys an excursion in the territory of writing about writing.

That Foe was only an excursion and not an emigration is shown by Age of Iron (1990), Coetzee's first political novel. Time and place are contemporary South Africa. There are still several levels of abstraction but they do not overshadow the narrative as in the previous novels.

<sup>80</sup> "The South African 1983 Booker prize winning novel, "The Life and Times of Michael K" by J M Coetzee has been found to be "not undesirable" by a committee of the Publications Control Board.

A spokesman for the directorate of Publications yesterday said that the book would now be available without any restrictions.

The novel was embargoed last week and bookstores have been keeping it on ice pending a decision by the board." (Cape Times 16 november 1983).

Age of Iron is a letter written by an elderly lady who is dying of cancer to her daughter who has long since fled to America. The lady, Mrs. Curren, is a prototypical liberal, opposed to, but insulated from, the horrors of apartheid. That changes in her last days. She sees the utter grimness and misery in the township where she goes to look for her servant's son. She sees his bullet-ridden body and witnesses how the police shoot his friend to pieces in her own backyard. From then on she tries to find an act of protest that will make up for her life of ignorance. She thinks of burning herself in front of a government building but doesn't do it. She falls back in self pity wondering:

[W]hy should I bear the blame? Why should I be expected to rise above my times? Is it my doing that my times have been so shameful? Why should it be left to me, old and sick and full of pain, to lift myself unaided out of this pit of disgrace? (116-117)

So Mrs. Curren does not make the revolutionary gesture, at least in part because that would mean the end of her writing ("Death may indeed be the last great foe of writing, but writing is also the foe of death." (115-116). But the novel comes closer than any of Coetzee's works to the "essential gesture" a white writer should make: "to raise the consciousness of white people, who, unlike himself, have not woken up." (Gordimer, The Essential Gesture 293).

Just like Michael K, Coetzee tries to stay "out of all the camps at the same time". He seeks to withstand

the ideological pressure from the side of the state and from the side of the opposition by setting his own rules instead of playing by someone else's. It is very difficult, maybe impossible, however, to find a place outside of the ideological debate.

Coetzee has not chosen a position as critical commentator like Brink or Gordimer. His non-fiction publications are almost exclusively on literary subjects. He avoids confrontation and as far as the state is concerned he has been successful. That none of his books has ever been banned has spared him the public debate on their merit and desirability, a debate that Brink and Gordimer were both forced into several times. In fact, the allegorical nature of Coetzee's work brings to mind the exhortation to writers by a former censor, J.M. Leighton:

Don't stop writing, and don't run away. Literary art has means at its disposal to say anything it likes....You have a mission to sensitise a nation to its situation, to extract the universal from the particularities of one of the most complex cultures in the twentieth century....If you are not allowed to criticise the Government or its agencies, then describe the antics of pigs, as Orwell does in Animal Farm. (Index on Censorship 5.1 (1976):41)

On a thematic level, censorship finds a place in Coetzee's work in the omnipresent subject of thwarted communication and the ensuing ignorance of the other. In South Africa, publications control and press censorship severely restrict the flow of information about the other. Whites do not know blacks because, among

other reasons, blacks are not allowed to write about their circumstances. In Gordimer's words:

As South Africans we do not know what the rest of Africa is thinking, just as, as whites, we do not know what the black and coloured population is thinking....All this intellectual isolation, isolation of ignorance among white people about the inner life of their countrymen of another colour - this is the blunting of human faculties that control of communication is steadily achieving. (Index on Censorship, 1. 3/4 (1972))

While Coetzee's works have been within the range of what is acceptable to the censor, they seldom have answered the demands for relevance (Nkosi) and the revolutionary gesture (Gordimer). Coetzee has reacted in several ways. In an interview with Penner he stated:

I seem to have two sorts of critical publics, one of which is in the United States....The other is in South Africa. And the terms in which these two publics operate...are rather different....On the one hand the body of people in the United States read these books in the general terms in which books are read by intelligent, mainly academic type critics in the U.S. Back in South Africa, there is another type of framework in which they are read, which is very heavily influenced by Marxism, by general Third World thinking....The primary question...is, "Where does this book fit into the political struggle?" It is a dominating question there. Those are actually the people I live among. I don't want to disparage them at all...they are serious, intelligent people, but they are reading the books in a particular way. (Penner 75).

Coetzee rejects the idea of exile but here a preference shines through for the American reading public. The use of English not only place the work in a long and rich tradition, it also gives Coetzee access to an international scene where books are "read in general terms".



Coetzee has also issued a plea for the autonomous novel as part of his attempt to rescue the novel from the claws of history. Quoting from the Cape Town literary journal Upstream Penner says Coetzee's topic is "the tendency of contemporary events, 'history,' and 'ideological pressure' to 'subsume the novel,' to reduce fiction to a supplement to history." (133) Coetzee's point is that autonomous stories "survive the rules of ideological censorship" while works that are "stuck in a particular social and historical situation" become obsolete "as soon as history moves even a centimeter." ("An Interview with J.M. Coetzee", in Commonwealth 9.1 (1986))

It is precisely because he is white and writes in English that Coetzee can take the stance he does. White writers using English have this flexibility. The position of blacks as the prime target of oppression precludes for them the possibility of art outside of history, as we will see in the next chapter. They cannot escape the historical and political discourse.

## 7. CENSORSHIP AND BLACK LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

In this chapter we turn to literature written by black writers, by whom I mean all writers who are not white in South Africa's legal terms. To begin, I will give a short overview of the history of black South Africa and the development of black nationalism in the twentieth century.

Then I will discuss black literature. First the question of language will be addressed: why English is the language of choice for most black writers. Then, before turning to a consideration of black writing in English, I will discuss the relationship between aesthetics and politics because it is pivotal to an understanding of black literature.

The political position of blacks throughout the twentieth century as a disenfranchised and oppressed majority, losing eventually the few rights they had, has determined the function and the nature of their literature. It is my contention that this should be expressly considered in order to adequately study and understand black literary works. To describe this literary history, therefore, as an autonomous tradition of authors and works is not appropriate. The political situation has interfered with the creation of such a tradition. Legal sanctions have wiped out complete generations of writers. Consequently, political history, literary history, and black literature's relation to censorship are closely intertwined.

## 7.1. Black South Africa

### 7.1.1 History

In the history of black South Africa, three stages can be distinguished: the period before the whites settled, the period of colonization which ended in 1898 with a victory for the whites, and the twentieth century as a period of increasing oppression and resistance. In this chapter the emphasis will be on the third phase.

Contrary to what Afrikaner historians have long asserted, there were blacks in the Southern parts of Africa before the whites landed there in 1652. There were the Khoikhoi and San peoples on the Cape and several black tribes from the North had settled in other parts of Southern Africa. These groups have a history that goes far back but we know very little about it. The recorded history only starts with the encounter of whites.

The Khoikhoi and San were the first to 'enjoy that pleasure'. They were practically eliminated and those that were left were turned into slaves. The whites moved inland where they met a number of other peoples. That resulted in the Kaffir Wars which lasted almost a century, from 1779 till 1877. The black tribes lost their land and in 1898 the whites completed their conquest of the African population.

The history of black South Africa in the twentieth century is a history of oppression and resistance. The

domination of the whites was expressed in an avalanche of legislation that limited the rights of blacks. In 1910 South Africa became a self-governing British dominion with the formation of the Union. In the period before 1948, when a government came to power on an openly segregationist platform, a number of discriminatory laws had already been adopted. In 1913, for example, the South African parliament limited black land ownership to the Reserves and in 1927 adopted the Immorality Act which prohibited extramarital intercourse between whites and blacks.

Following the victory of the National Party in 1948 and the formation of the first all-Afrikaner government, the most pivotal apartheid laws were enacted. (see chapter 1). In the following decades, more and more refined legislation imposed apartheid policy on South African society.

Resistance to this oppression of the majority of the population started soon after the Union was formed. In 1912, the African National Congress (ANC) was founded. "[T]he new group aimed to become a national voice overriding tribal differences and pressing for inclusion of Africans within a common nonracial society."<sup>81</sup> The ANC did not become a mass movement until the 1950s when it staged a number of national protest campaigns against the government. Before that

<sup>81</sup> In "Black Politics: the Road to Revolution" in Apartheid in Crisis, Mark Uhlig, ed., 115-116.



the organisation reacted to the assault on black rights with the moderate means of delegations, petitions and public meetings.

After 1948, the ANC's tactics changed. Karis writes that "the ANC responded by adopting a program of illegal but nonviolent tactics of civil disobedience, as well as boycotts, strikes and noncooperation." (116) The next important step was the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1956. This blueprint of the beliefs and aims of the organisation led to the breakaway of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1959. The members of the PAC did not agree with the Charter's statement that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white." The PAC insisted that the Africans were the indigenous owners of the soil and they protested against the influence of whites. These issues of competing African ideologies will be analysed in more detail in the next chapter.

South Africa's most recent history is dominated by two bloody events: the massacre in Sharpeville on March 21, 1960 and the riots in Soweto in 1976. In the aftermath of Sharpeville, where 69 peaceful demonstrators were shot dead and 186 were wounded, the ANC and the PAC were banned. Many of their leaders were arrested or went underground. Abandoning its nonviolent strategy, the ANC founded a military wing in 1961, Umkonto We Sizwe (Spear of the Nation).

In Soweto in June 1976, students who protested against mandatory instruction in the Afrikaans language

were shot by the police. At least 575 people died in the ensuing riots. An important element in the conflict was the new ideology of Black Consciousness that had gained ground in the 1970s. The Black Consciousness movement opposed the ANC's multiracialism and its ties with the communist party.

The government responded to the unrest with the Internal Securities Act, a law which greatly extended the powers of the old Suppression of Communism Act. It also banned all major Black Consciousness organizations. Black leaders were arrested, shot and exiled. Steve Biko, the leader of the Black Consciousness movement, died in detention in 1977.

Since then several new political organizations have been founded to fill the void left by the banings. Among them are the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) in 1979 and the United Democratic Front in 1983. The institution of Coloured and Asian parliaments in 1983 was not considered an improvement of relevance by the black majority. In 1985 riots led the government to impose a state of emergency (extended powers of suppression and oppression, among which were severe press and television restrictions) that was renewed several times. The state of emergency wasn't lifted until 1991 and then not even for all regions.

A more positive development was the release of the ANC's legendary leader Nelson Mandela and a few of his colleagues together with the unbanning of the ANC in

February of 1990. Since then South Africa has seen the incongruous developments of, on the one hand, the CODESA negotiations which offer a glimmer of hope and, on the other, the ongoing and escalating spiral of violence in the townships which destroys black lives every day.

#### 7.1.2. The Ideologies of African Nationalism

As the history outlined in the previous paragraphs indicates, there is not one univocal African ideology that aligns all black South Africans in their fight for freedom from white domination. Further evidence for this can be seen in the recent strife between black ethnic and political factions. Different views on which road to take to freedom have existed since the first African political organizations were formed at the beginning of this century. The last three decades have seen a further polarization but for a long time these divergent views coexisted within one organization, the ANC.

The essence of ANC ideology was expressed in the Freedom Charter of 1956. It addressed all people of South Africa: "We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: 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." (quoted in Leatt, 97)

This inclusivist stance was the direct cause for the Pan Africanist Congress being formed. Its leaders argued against multiracialism and emphasized the need for African unity without the interference of whites. This ideological split between Charterists and Africanists is visible to this day. The ANC is, albeit painstakingly, negotiating with the government while the PAC has until now been reluctant to take part in CODESA.

In 1961, both the ANC and the PAC were banned. In the vacuum they left behind a new ideology emerged: that of Black Consciousness. The Black Consciousness movement (BCM) developed within the ranks of the South African Students Organization. It was disillusioned by the liberal multiracial approach and it opposed the political strategies of the ANC and the PAC. According to Leatt: "The BCM believed these strategies were premature and thus doomed to fail. Instead, Black Consciousness held that in order to play a positive role in the liberation struggle, blacks had to develop a sense of solidarity through the concept of group power, and in this way build a broad base from which to counter the divide-and-rule strategies of whites." (107-108)

It was believed that this solidarity could be achieved by creating a positive self-image among Blacks with slogans like "Black is beautiful" and "Blackman, you are on your own." With its emphasis on the roots of



the alienation and psychological servitude of blacks, the BCM was more a psychological movement than a pragmatic political movement directed toward the white world. It believed that psychological liberation through conscientisation should precede the struggle for political liberation.

After the banning of most organizations within the BCM in 1977, new organizations like AZAPO started to seek ways to turn the results of the BCM into political action. In exile the BCM more or less dissolved, its members joining either ANC or PAC.

Despite its slightly intellectual image the BCM has had a strong influence on the lives of blacks in South Africa. The enhanced self-confidence that resulted from its practices allowed for a refusal of white cooperation. In literature also Black Consciousness made a great impact. (discussed in section 7.2.2. below).

## 7.2. Black English Literature

In this section I will focus on several distinguishing aspects of black literature in South Africa. The majority of black writers prefer the use of the English language over that of the vernacular African languages. The reasons for this phenomenon are the subject of section 7.2.1. In section 7.2.2, I will address several issues that have been raised in the

critical debate about black literature. Black literature has often been criticised as not 'good' according to 'objective' aesthetic standards. I question the usefulness of these standards in this context and argue that the political nature of black literature demands a less 'Western' approach. In section 7.2.3, I will elaborate on the relationship between black literature and censorship.

### 7.2.1. Language

Language is an issue for black writers in several respects. The first question is in which language to write: in Afrikaans, in English, or in one of the African languages (Xhosa, Zulu, Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho, Tsonga, Tswana, and Venda).

Afrikaans is rejected by all but a few writers. Afrikaans carries the stigma of being the language of the oppressor. The small group of writers who do use Afrikaans are Coloured writers for whom Afrikaans is their mother-tongue.<sup>82</sup>

The African languages are also rejected by the majority of black writers. Even though the use of the vernacular could strengthen an author's cultural

<sup>82</sup> The position of black writing in Afrikaans is the subject of two articles by Hein Willemsse: "The Black Afrikaans Writer: A Continuing Dichotomy" in From South Africa, Bunn and Taylor eds. and "'Maa' die Manne Waver Nog": Jonger Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers", in Ras en Literatuur, Charles Malan, ed.

identity, it is felt that it would at the same time play into the hands of the government whose divisive policy seeks to break up the black majority into smaller ethnic groups. For the author it also means a severe limitation of the potential audience. Each language is spoken only by a fraction of the total black population and not at all by the white population.

Another problem is that the production of literature in African languages is completely controlled by publishers and school boards. Publishers are only interested in works that will be prescribed for use in schools by so-called language boards. In order to receive language board approval a work has to be suitable for school children and not deal with controversial topics like sex, politics or religion. The writer and critic Ezekiel Mphahlele has sketched the consequences these constraints connected with the use of the vernacular have on the literature:

Those of us who write in African languages tend to maintain what one might call a philosophical distance from setting and events. This is because they were first published by missionary presses who did not encourage a militant political point of view not sanctioned by the missionary notion of Christianity. (...) Now that the Afrikaans presses publish writing in African languages, authors have to censor their own protest or indignation, seek refuge in satire turned on their own people, and at times even depict black life in the way that pleases the Establishment. ("The Tyranny of Place and Aesthetics. The South African Case", in Ras en Literatuur, 52)

It is not surprising, therefore, that there is very little written literature.<sup>83</sup> The first work in Venda, for example, did not appear until 1957 and there were, according to Ntuli a total of only twenty works in that language at the time of writing "Writers in Shackles".

English, then, is the language most often used by black writers. Even though English shares with Afrikaans a certain imperialist taint<sup>84</sup>, that has not prevented it from developing into a lingua franca in South Africa. It is the language of industry and commerce and of urban blacks. English is the most effective medium of communication because it is understood by a larger group of people than any of the other languages. The awareness of the necessity to use English is echoed by numerous writers and critics over the years. One of them is Ezekiel Mphahlele who stated in 1962 that:

Now because the Government is using institutions of a fragmented and almost unrecognizable Bantu culture as an instrument of oppression, we dare not look back. We have got to wrench the tools of power from the white man's hand: one of these is literacy and the sophistication that goes with it. We have got to speak the language that all can

<sup>83</sup> An interesting discussion of the literature in African languages can be found in D.B. Ntuli's "Writers in Shackles?" in Ras en Literatuur, Charles Malan ed., pp127-138)

<sup>84</sup> An elaborate discussion of the role of English as language of the colonizer can be found in "The English Language and Social Change in South Africa." by Njabulo Ndebele in From South Africa, Bunn and Taylor, eds., pp.217-236.



understand - English." (quoted in Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984, 4)

Under the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement in the seventies there was a renewed interest in the vernacular languages but it did not lead to a rejection of English. An author like Oswald Mtshali decided to write both in English and in Zulu. He explained in 1976:

Wherever I go I try to collect the debris of my shattered culture and try to immortalize it in my poetry. That is why I have now more than once before let the Muse dictate to me in English and Zulu. I write in English for my present state of reality or unreality and I write in Zulu to establish my identity which will be translated by posterity." (In Heywood, 124)

Once the language question has been decided in favor of English, the second issue is what kind of English to use. English is originally the language of the colonizer. It carries connotations and traditions recalling that. Yet this is the language the black writer must put to use in his own context. This dilemma has been elegantly phrased by Brink:

The black writer who uses English because it is the lingua franca of black solidarity; because it is the only widely accessible medium in which he can communicate (and simply be published if he does not want to be restricted to a schoolmarket), realises to a certain extent, like Ngugi wa Thiong'o has said, that "to choose a language is to choose a world", and that he involuntarily exposes the language in which he writes to "the world as seen, analyzed, and defined by the artists and the intellectuals of the western ruling class". And this even regardless of the fact that through the use of language, of literary genres, and traditions, he also goes against much of his own oral tradition. ("Die dubbele

werklikheid", in Malan, 227, translation mine)

However, because of its usefulness, English "should be wrenched from the white man's hand" and turned into an African language. Initially black writers wrote in standard English because their works were primarily directed at a white audience. But as the intended readership shifted, so did the language. Mtshali stated that:

...the English that we use in our poetry is not the Queen's language that you know as written by say Wordsworth and Coleridge. It is the language of urgency which we use because we got an urgent message to deliver to anyone who cares to listen to it. We have not got the time to embellish this urgent message with unnecessary and cumbersome ornaments like rhyme, iambic pentameter, abstract figures of speech, and an ornate and lofty style. We will indulge in these luxuries which we can ill-afford at the moment when we are free people. (Heywood, 127)

Black authors need to appropriate the English language, to make it their own. When they do this, however, 'Western' criticism sees the language as faulty and deviant.<sup>85</sup> These and other problems of critical evaluation will be discussed in the next section on aesthetics and politics.

<sup>85</sup> David Maughan Brown paraphrased one of these critics: "Some black poets...apparently produce flat and clichéd lines as a result of a lack of familiarity with the second language they write in. Where "good" lines are produced...this may, Ulliyatt suggests, be more by chance, by fortuitous ignorance of syntax, idiom, connotation, and so on, than by deliberately artistic intentions". ("Black Criticism and Black Aesthetics", in Soweto Poetry, 46)

### 7.2.2 Aesthetics and politics: the place of literature in the liberation struggle and issues of critical evaluation

In the case of black literature it makes little sense to present a literary history of autonomous authors and works. It is much more rewarding to first address a few issues that have been central to the debate about the status of black literature. One of these issues concerns the place of aesthetics and politics. Black literature was, and still is, often dismissed, primarily by white critics, because it is of lesser quality by their standards. It does not fulfill their expectations of what 'good' literature should be according to their 'objective' aesthetic criteria. Other writers and critics, mostly black, have condemned this attitude and have pointed out that the standards applied are white and Western and as such inadequate or even useless in the evaluation of black literature.

The two positions in the debate represent two essentially different attitudes towards literature: on the one hand a belief in the eternal and autonomous character of literature and on the other hand a conviction that the value of literature is largely derived from its context and its capacity to effect change. To clarify the terms of discussion I will first give two examples of how the terms aesthetics and politics are used in the debate.

One way to define aesthetics and politics is as opposites, two concepts which exclude each other. The term aesthetics then refers to literature with a clear poetical function (in Roman Jakobson's sense) and the term politics to literature with a strong referential function. Black writing belongs to the latter but is often judged according to standards developed to analyse the former. A critic like André Brink attempts to reconcile aesthetics with politics in "Towards a redefinition of Aesthetics" but his point of departure is still to understand the concepts as mutually exclusive. Another critic who has addressed the issue is John Povey. In "South African Writing: Critical Approaches", he gives an overview of a number of important positions in the debate. But in his conclusion it is clear that he firmly sticks with his "white, Western, academic" approach:

In continuing to stress this inescapable obligation to art, in arguing for standards of subtlety, complexity and control as essential virtues, one is confirming only the eternal qualities common to all great literatures from all continents. Such art, far better than spasms and howls of angry pain, will provide the most dramatic protest, which will confirm to readers everywhere the horrendous nature of the system under which the South African writer must labour. (163)

Povey's belief that objective standards for literature exist appears from his use of terms like "essential virtues", "eternal qualities", and "great literatures". He also speaks of an audience, "readers everywhere", that seems to be located outside South Africa.



He does not consider the black audience even though that is the intended readership of most recent black literature.

A different perspective is presented by David Maughan Brown in "Black Criticism and Black Aesthetics". For him it is not aesthetics or politics but the aesthetics of politics. He argues that for the study of black literature one should formulate an aesthetics different from the dominant Western one. Black literature is written from a completely different background and with a radically different goal than most white literature and that should be acknowledged in the critic's assessment. Maughan Brown argues for a black criticism that understands the black aesthetics under which the works by black writers are produced.

Important elements of black aesthetics are that art in Africa has traditionally been functional and that the traditional African context places a greater emphasis on community than on persons. Furthermore the critic has to be aware of different cultural modes of perception that exist among black writers. Maughan Brown cites the example of plagiarism which in the African context does not have a negative connotation because works of art are considered to be communal property.

In addition to acknowledging the existence of a black aesthetics, black criticism should, according to Maughan Brown, not apply critical standards that

predate the literature it attempts to assess but let these standards arise from the works. Far from fostering the illusion of being capable of black criticism, I nevertheless want to take these recommendations to heart. I will give a short overview of the development of black literature in English in the second part of the twentieth century focussing on its function within the social context.

Just like white literature in South Africa, black written literature is very young. The first novels in English did not appear until the 1930s. A useful general characterisation of the literature that has been written since then appears in Richard Rive's article "Books by Black Writers". Rive distinguishes three periods: early literature (1928-1942), Protest writing (1942-1976), and Black Consciousness writing (1976-present).

The early literature was strongly influenced by the missionary school education of the authors. It was written for a white audience and according to white aesthetic standards. In Rive's words "[the] writing was imitative of writing by Whites and tended to be stilted and banal. The chief motive behind its creation seemed to have been to impress on a patronising White readership the measure of sophistication achieved by the Black author." (12)

The second period, Protest writing, is divided into the Drum school (1942-1970) and the Soweto school

(1971-1975). The essence of Protest writing is that it described the situation of blacks to a sympathetic white audience, an audience that had the political power to effect change.

The Drum school consisted of the writers who contributed to Drum magazine, established in 1951. Among them were, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane, Can Themba, Casey Motsisi and Arthur Maimane. The preferred genre of these writers was the short story and their writing was strongly influenced by black American writing. The political unrest of the late fifties and early sixties and the ensuing repression had severe repercussions for black writing. Most authors were forced into exile. This exodus may have had the positive side-effect of sparking interest abroad for South Africa but this did not outweigh the negative effect of so many writers finding themselves cut off from their material and their readership. Due to these conditions the dominant genre changed from the short story to autobiography (autobiography is a common genre for writers in exile, see also chapter 6.2). Rive states that "by 1966 the ranks of Black writers had been severely decimated by political pressures.... South African writing in English virtually became White by law." (13,14)

The thread was picked up by young writers in Soweto. In 1971, Oswald Mtshali's collection of poetry Sounds of a Cowhide Drum appeared. It was an enormous

commercial success. Ironically Mtsali's indictment of the South African situation was avidly bought by an unprecedented number of white readers. The nature of the writing was still the same as a decade earlier but the genre was now poetry. It is often suggested that this change was a reaction to censorship because poetry could conceal more. I agree with Rive who remarks that Soweto poetry is generally very direct and not metaphorical at all. More likely reasons can be found in Mtshali's success and the good communicative qualities of poetry. In section 7.2.3. below I will elaborate on this relationship between genre and censorship.

After 1976 black writing changed. Under the influence of the Black Consciousness movement, writers aimed their work at a black audience and the function of the literature changed from protest to conscientisation. Not the description of victims of the system but the analysis of the life of blacks for black readers became central. The goal was to thus create the unity and the awareness necessary for effective political action. Rive calls this group of writers the Staffrider school because they found a platform in the magazine Staffrider. Staffrider first appeared in 1978 and was an important outlet for black writers. Even though it was itself banned several times, it often presented the only possibility for publication at a time, just after the Soweto riots, of severe political repression. (on the position of Staffrider and its relation to censorship see section 8.2.)



This literature is characterized by a desire for black unity and collectiveness. The pronoun is "we" not "I" or "you". The result is a one-dimensionality that has lately come under attack from several sympathetic critics (as opposed to critics who dismiss black literature on pure aesthetic grounds altogether). Njabulo Ndebele, for example, in "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa" characterized most recent black literature as "dramatic representation". The social context presents such an absurd spectacle that the writer cannot help but reflect the spectacle in all its exteriority, exhibitionism, and dramatic contrast. As Ndebele defines the spectacular:

The spectacular documents; it indicts implicitly; it is demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority; it keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, obliterating the details; it provokes identification through recognition and feeling rather than through observation and analytical thought; it calls for emotion rather than conviction; it establishes a vast sense of presence without offering intimate knowledge; it confirms without necessarily offering a challenge. It is the literature of the powerless identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness. (149-150)

Ndebele deplores this literature's "tendency either to devalue or to ignore interiority" and is pleased to see an emerging new kind of writing that pays attention to the details of everyday life and also moves beyond the mere documentation of repression by suggesting ways to change the situation. He discovers a development from reflecting reality to analysing it in three stories "The Conversion" by Michael Siluma, "Man

"Against Himself" by Joel Matlou, and Mamlambo" by Bheke Maseko (all three appeared in Staffrider). His conclusion is that:

[t]hese three stories remind us that the ordinary day-to-day lives of people should be the direct focus of political interest because they constitute the very content of the struggle, for the struggle involves people not abstractions....  
By rediscovering the ordinary, the stories remind us necessarily, that the problems of the South African social formation are complex and all embracing; that they cannot be reduced to a single, simple formulation.  
(156)

A similar though not identical conclusion was reached by Martin Trump in a contribution to Staffrider. He regrets that, under the influence of black populism, Wally Serote's novel To Every Birth its Blood ignores differentiations within the black population. The one-dimensionality that results does not allow for meaningful analyses of problems within the liberation movement. Trump does not, like Ndebele, identify literature within South Africa that moves beyond oversimplifications but he contrasts Serote with two authors from Angola and Zimbabwe, two countries where the liberation struggle is in a different (more advanced?) phase than in South Africa.

Finally, I want to mention the contribution of ANC representative Albie Sachs to the debate on aesthetics and politics and the direction of literature in a new South Africa. Sachs is not a literary critic but one of the ANC's most influential intellectuals. In a paper

published in 1990, Sachs questioned the ANC's dictate of art as a weapon of struggle:

The first proposition I make, and I do so fully aware of the fact that we are totally against censorship and for free speech, is that our members should be banned from saying that culture is a weapon of struggle. I suggest a period of, say, five years. (Weekly Mail, 23)

Sachs's opening statement contains the essence of the whole paper. It shows his willingness to confront an accepted dogma of the ANC, i.e. that art should be a weapon of struggle, head on. He goes on to delineate the consequences for literature of the dogma he himself once enthusiastically endorsed:

Our artists are not pushed to improve the quality of their work, it is enough that it be politically correct. The more fists and spears and guns, the better. The range of themes is narrowed down so much that all that is funny or curious or genuinely tragic in the world is extruded. Ambiguity and contradiction are completely shut out, and the only conflict permitted is that between the old and the new, as if there were only bad in the past and only good in the future. (23)

Sachs's arguments echo those of Nbebele and Trump. What is remarkable is that they come from a person who was co-responsible for the rigid but influential cultural policy of the ANC. Instead he now argues for cultural variety and a non-hegemonic approach. He concludes by warning against replacing the old strictures of censorship by new ones: "Certainly it ill behoves us to set ourselves up as the new censors of art and literature, or to impose our own internal States of Emergency in areas where we are well organised. Rather let us write

better poems and make better films and compose better music." (23) Unfortunately Sachs does not explain what he means by "quality" or "good art" but that notwithstanding his piece has meant an important development in the discussion about black literature.<sup>86</sup>

### 7.2.3 Censorship

In contrast to white writers, for black writers banning and interference with their work has been the rule rather than the exception. While the former can at least write and publish their work in relative calm before entering the censorship arena, the latter have many hurdles to take before coming into contact with the reader.

To start with, the black writer is part of the underprivileged majority in South Africa. His living conditions are poor. He encounters material obstacles like poverty, the countless rules that affect the lives of all black people, violence and poor housing. In

<sup>86</sup> Sachs's paper "Preparing ourselves for freedom" has already generated a massive amount of criticism. From Brink's "Towards a Redefinition of Aesthetics": "The publication of Exchanges, edited by Duncan Brown and Bruno van Dyk (1991), marks yet another stage in the unfolding cultural debate prompted by Albie Sachs's by now notorious paper. Its predecessor, Spring is Rebellious (edited by Ingrid de Kok and Karen Press, 1990) collected twenty-two widely different responses from the first few months following the dissemination of the Sachs paper; the new collection comprises eighteen interviews structured around the debate already in progress." (105)



addition to these material obstacles there are also immaterial ones like inadequate schooling due to Bantu education and literary isolation due to the banning of precursors. The author Miriam Tlali has on several occasions remarked on the devastating effect of literary isolation. In "In Search of Books" she wrote:

They say writers learn from their predecessors. When I searched frantically for mine, there was nothing but a void. What had happened to all the writings my mother had talked about?...

My search for books by Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, La Guma, Brutus, Tabata, Soyinka, Luthuli, Mandela, Sobukwe and others was fruitless because these were considered anathema by the authorities. I was frustrated. (in Chapman, 45)

Every writer is forced to start all over again without the examples of a tradition that he/she can connect with. Tlali wrote: "[b]ecause I had no base I had to change and find inspiration from within myself." (45).

When a writer, despite these difficulties, has written a literary work, he faces the problem of reaching his audience. Finding a publisher for a book that will almost certainly be banned is not an easy task, especially before the establishment of black publishers in the 1980s like Skotaville and Blac Publishing House. Before that time there were publishers like Ravan Press who published works by black authors but not without censoring them. As Miriam Tlali explained in an interview with Mineke Schipper:

It took five years before the book [Muriel at Metropolitan] was published. The publisher

wanted many changes because he feared a ban. For a long time I refused until my mother said that she would probably die without having seen my novel. Only then did I approve that censored edition. (Ongehoorde Woorden, 65-66, translation mine)

Another major concern for black writers who want to reach black readers is the price of the eventual publication. In order to reach as many people as possible the price should be very low. Realising this objective can be one more cause for delay, as Mthobeni Mutloatse explained in the preface of Forced Landing:

One of the factors that delayed the publication of this anthology for two years, was the lack of an ideal publisher. Ideal in the sense that as editor I was concerned about two important aspects of book publishing in South Africa: distribution and the book's price.

Since I believe in the Staffrider dictum that black literature is the property of the people loaned to creative writers, I had to ensure that Forced Landing was accessible to the masses. Not only that, but the price of the book had to be reasonably within the reach of even the casual reader. Meaning, in short, a drastically cut price not exceeding R3. (6)

A low price, however, while a necessity for the black writer and reader, is at the same time an important reason to ban for the censor. The advantage of a low price for the writer, a larger audience, is a severely aggravating factor for the censor. Dorothy Driver remarked on this:

How differently the censorship system treats books that are less expensive and more 'readable' isn't hard to guess. The publisher to attract the most banning is Ravan Press, which seems to have a Robin Hood policy towards its market, charging astonishingly low prices for well-produced paperbacks likely to have a wide readership (I paid

R2,85 for the 200-page Forced Landing, for instance) and standard prices for its hard-cover editions of these books likely to be read by limited, and richer groups. (13)

Once published, the work was very likely to be evaluated by the censor and ran a considerable risk of being banned, at least until 1983 when special guidelines for black literature were issued by the Publications Appeal Board. The details of how black literature has been treated over the years under the Publications Act will be discussed later. First I want to focus on another form of silencing that may have had a bigger impact than censorship per se.

That special form of repression is the banning of persons. According to John Phelan, banning is a form of punishment unique to South Africa. He stated that:

[b]anning admits of different degrees, but it is fundamentally a form of house arrest and a stripping of political rights. In some cases the banned person may not be with more than two people at once. It is a crime for anyone to quote him or her, even from the unbanned past. The banned are nonpersons....It makes the entire country a prison. (Apartheid Media, 5)

Each banned person is served with an individualised banning order that contains the specific restrictions imposed on that person. The list of possible provisions is long but the one that most directly interferes with the writer's profession is the one that outlines that:

[in] terms of the Act, all banned persons are prohibited from being office-bearers, officers, members, or active supporters of an organisation which in any way prepares, publishes, or distributes any publication (except with special permission). Some orders state that the recipients may not be con-

cerned in any way with the preparation, printing, or publication of any newspaper, magazine, pamphlet, book, handbill, or poster. Some prohibit the entry upon any premises where a publication is produced. (The Silenced: Bannings in South Africa, 3)

A writer served with a banning order is then affected in many ways. First of all he is physically and emotionally isolated. As far as his work is concerned, what already exists may not be quoted and is automatically banned. The writer is also not allowed to prepare any new publications. He is truly silenced.

Many black writers have suffered under these excessive conditions. The whole generation of writers who were in exile in the 1960s was banned. They were free to write but their work could not enter South Africa. The authorities also had the practice of banning people, writers included, for example the poet Don Mattera who was banned immediately after being released from prison.

Publications control then begins for a black writer with the government's almost complete control over his life. The introduction of the Publications and Entertainment Act in 1963 was therefore much less of a shock than it was to white writers. Many black writers had left the country in the wake of Sharpeville and even before that the authorities used a variety of other laws to ban their work. I will now examine the application of the censorship law to black literature and outline how the literature has been affected over the years.



Until 1982, the censors made no mention of black literature as a special category. Their attitude was that South Africa was a white country and that those who wanted to live there had to comply with the white rules. This attitude can be illustrated with an excerpt from an interview in Rapport with Undersecretary of Internal Affairs Jimmy Kruger:

Rapport: And what about black audiences? The committee says something about their constitutional development and that "expert advice" will be sought when doubts arise, but they don't say whose advice.

Kruger: I think very little is known about the Bantu's psychology, how he watches a movie, which role the visual has for him. It is recommended that a special committee will study this subject...

In the mean time I feel thus: the government has decided that the Bantu is not here temporarily but our Republic is "white" and we have the fullest right to prescribe what we and they are allowed to see. In the homelands they are free to decide what they and we are allowed to see.

Rapport: Soweto?

Kruger: I'm afraid that there the same rule applies. You can come to the white man's country on the conditions that the whites in their country set, or stay away. (3 February 1974)

In the same vein, the man who had been the chairman of the Publications Appeal Board from 1975 until 1980, Judge Snyman, said in The Star "Of blacks, I have no knowledge at all." and blacks are "inarticulate people, who, I am sure, are not interested" in censorship. (8 April 1980)<sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup> quoted in "Censorship Changes - a Victory for Whom?" by Nadine Gordimer, Rand Daily Mail, 6 August 1980.

From 1963 until 1980, the rules of censorship were primarily directed at control of white literature within South Africa and imported literature. There were so many other repressive measures that were used against black writers that hardly any of their work reached the status of publication. This was especially true in the sixties when the massive bannings of persons and the resulting exodus of writers had all but removed black writing from the South African scene.<sup>88</sup>

In comparison with white writers, black writers lose in all respects. Mphahlele wrote in 1969: "The white writer can still get away with a lot in South Africa. A black man who wrote the same things the liberal-minded among the whites write, who represented the liberal and egalitarian ideas, would most likely be banned." ("Censorship in South Africa", 15). Nadine Gordimer offered a possible explanation for the inequality in 1972:

Literature by black South Africans has been successfully wiped out by censorship and the banning of individuals, at home and in exile. But white writers have been permitted to deal, within strict limits, with the dis-

<sup>88</sup> Richard Rive: "By 1966 also all writings by Alex La Guma and Dennis Brutus were proscribed since the writers were banned persons. Then in the Government Gazette Extraordinary of 1 April 1966, the names of six writers, living in exile, were published as banned under the Suppression of Communism Act. Thus in addition to the two writers above, all writings by Mazisi Kunene, Bloke Modisane, Lewis Nkosi, Todd Matshikiza, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Can Themba were banned. ("Books by Black Writers", 13-14) He goes on to list all the works produced by these writers between 1966 and 1970 that were automatically banned.

abilities, suffering, hopes, dreams, even resentments of black people. Are such writings perhaps tolerated because they have upon them the gloss of proxy - in a strange way, although they may indict white supremacy, they can be claimed by it because they speak for the black man, as white supremacy decides for him how he shall live? ("Apartheid and the primary homeland")

The crucial issue is of course that books by white and black writers in South Africa cannot be compared as though they are completely equal entities even at a time when black writers still addressed a white audience. The new writing in the seventies would more and more emphasize this point.

The generation of black writers that emerged in the seventies was initially rather successful in getting its work published and approved by the censors. But the more attention shifted from reaching out to a white audience to an appeal on their own people, the harder the literature was hit by the law. The reason for this is obvious. In order for a writer to be authentic what he writes has to be recognizable to his readers. That means that he has to describe their lives and experiences. The world that he thus recreates presents a side of reality that is rejected by those in power. As we have seen in chapter 2, the Afrikaners have an idealistic concept of reality. In literature the world must be portrayed as it should be. That image does not coincide with the black images of township life, violence, destitution and dreadful conduct of whites.

Quite often this black reality is flatly denied as untrue or unrealistic. This becomes almost understandable when one realises that not only the images of reality are completely different but that the physical worlds they reflect are in effect separated. Whites do not go to black townships and can probably hardly imagine what life is like there. Black writers portray a radically different South Africa than the censors know or envision and they do not want to acknowledge its existence.

In 1979 the influence of the man who would officially replace Judge Snyman in 1980, was already becoming apparent. Kobus van Rooyen gradually introduced a more sophisticated application of censorship. More sophisticated does not necessarily mean more relaxed, but eventually the result of Van Rooyen's appointment would be a reduction in the number of literary bans.

The first step was the amendments that came after the Magersfontein case. As discussed above, these changes involved the introduction of the notions of literary merit and the likely reader.

Neither of these "relaxations" were beneficial to black literature. The standards that were applied to establish literary value were never made explicit but black literature was invariably judged of little or no literary merit. This is an example of how application of Western standards hurts black literature. Literary value could therefore not be advanced as a redeeming factor.



The consideration of the likely reader had an equally detrimental effect. For white literature, the conclusion that the readership would be limited due to the difficult nature of the work represented a possible redeeming factor. The fear that black literature would be read by a large black readership increased its potential harmfulness.

The discrepancy in the effect of the new amendments on black and white literature can be illustrated by actual decisions. Van Rooyen's tenure as chief-censor started with a rather tumultuous period of transition that lasted for several years. During that time there was a heated internal debate between the two levels of censorship administration. Many books were banned at the committee level, the bans were then appealed by the Directorate of Publications, and they were lifted by the PAB. In its decisions, the PAB tried to lay down new guidelines for the use of the committees. But it proved difficult to change an ingrained mentality. There were several hard clashes (for example over Burger's Daughter see, chapter 6.1).

Van Rooyen started with the unbanning of several works by white English and Afrikaans authors. Black authors did not benefit from this special treatment as Gordimer emphasized in the Rand Daily Mail:

André Brink has pointed out that the week that his novel, dealing with the death by police brutality and neglect of a black man in prison, was released from ban, Mtutuzeli Matshoba's story collection Call Me Not a Man (1979) was banned. The reason for banning

supplied to Matshoba's publisher was the objection to one of the stories only. "A Glimpse of Slavery", dealing with the experience of a black man hired out as prison labour to a white farmer. (6 August 1980)

The reason for the different treatment should not be sought in the subject matter: Brink's A Dry White Season was clearly more radical than "A Glimpse of Slavery". Gordimer concluded:

Why may white writers deal with inflammables? It is because the new censorship dispensation has understood something important to censorship as an arm of repression - while white writings are predominant critical and protestant in mood, black writings are inspirational, and that is why the Government fears them.

The decisive factor was that white literature is written for a white audience and that black literature is written for a black audience.

After most white literature was unbanned, Van Rooyen turned his attention to black literature. He took a number of steps that replaced repression with repressive tolerance. One of his main arguments for relaxing censorship on black literature was that it was wiser from the Government's point of view to let blacks express their pent-up feelings of frustration in a relatively innocent medium than to put the lid down tight and wait for the explosion.

A number of bans by publications committees were appealed by the Directorate and most of these were overturned by the PAB. This resulted in a new set of guidelines for the application of the political sections of Act 47 (2), the categories under which most

black literature was banned. In Censorship in South Africa Van Rooyen listed 19 new guidelines for the interpretation of 47 (2), (c), (d), and (e). Some of these applied to specific symbols or references in texts that were no longer in themselves undesirable, like the clenched fist or reference to the Freedom Charter. Others have a more general meaning, for example:

(c) The mere fact that anti-government emotions are voiced is not sufficient for a finding of undesirability.

(e) One-sidedness as such is not sufficient.

(h) Blacks have few political platforms and therefore it is of the utmost importance that they should have a means of communication.

(j) The use of emotionally loaded words within the context of revolution, such as 'suffer', 'oppressed', 'struggle' is an aggravating factor, but such use is not undesirable per se. The excessive use of such words may, however, in certain contexts lead to a finding of undesirability.

(o) Mere speculation about a future black government which may take over by means of violence at some future date is not undesirable as such; the emergency regulations of 11 December 1986 as amplified in January 1987 may, however, be applicable. (108-110)

On the one hand, this partial list shows a change in attitude from the previous decade when every excuse was valid to ban a text by a black author. On the other hand, the guidelines also contain a great amount of vagueness. Every item that is not 'in itself' undesirable any more can still be undesirable when used excessively or in combination with other transgressions. In addition, none of these guidelines are actually laid down in the law. This gives them only a

limited validity. In the case of expression of political grievances, there are other laws that more immediately apply and permit banning even if the Publications Act does not (this is especially true under the State of Emergency).

From the examples Van Rooyen supplied to illustrate the new way of thinking it becomes clear, however, that the restrictions on literature were in fact relaxed:

Literary magazines with a sophisticated likely readership have been found to be not undesirable in spite of poems and other material expressing hatred against the authorities. Such publications were regarded as a useful safety-valve for pent-up feelings in a milieu where they would be understood not as a call to political violence but as a literary experience. Various politically controversial novels, almost invariably siding with the cause of black resistance against the authorities, have been found to be not undesirable since they do not generally provide a plan of action and are in fact a typical part of the political scene which is characterized by strong differences of opinion concerning subjects such as detention without trial, black education, police action in the quelling of unrest, segregation, the political future of black people, and forced removal. (114)

The positive aspect of Van Rooyen's attitude was that he acknowledged that South Africa was a country with severe political problems. Van Rooyen served at a time when fissures were starting to appear in the apartheid front. All was not well and even those in charge had to admit that.

The way in which he opened the door for literature, however, shows a great deal of paternalism. One



could say that he tried to suffocate black writing with an embrace for he denied its potential political influence. Van Rooyen found Staffrider to be an example of a magazine with a sophisticated likely readership while the magazine's own objective was to reach as many people as possible, especially the man in the street.

One also has to keep in mind that the works that Van Rooyen listed as examples of material not undesirable under the new guidelines, were all works that were first banned by publications committees and were only unbanned on appeal. This means that at least for some period of time the work was unavailable. This can have a disastrous effect, for example in the case of a magazine or when that period is six years as with Matshoba's Call Me Not a Man.

In 1983, the PAB also used one of its decisions to lay down guidelines for the evaluation of crude language and sex descriptions in black literature (defined by the board as a "developing literature"). The PAB's conclusion was that in respect to Section 47 (2) (a), "evidence with regard to literary value, the likely readership, and other aspects not specifically within the Board's own knowledge" was allowed. This led to the introduction of black experts into the censorship system. The Chairman ruled "that the evidence of black experts is admissible, and it plays a substantial part in a decision as to what the reactions of likely readers will be." (case 79-81/83, 2-3)

In this decision the undesirability of three works was evaluated, among them Why Are We So Blest? by Ayi Kwei Armah. Ezekiel Mphahlele was consulted as black expert. He gave advice on the likely effect on the likely reader. A sense of cooptation is difficult to avoid when reading Mphahlele's comment, reproduced as such in the PAB decision:

The history of black political activism in this country displays no signs that a black readership would be incited by Armah to kill off whites. Even were these signs present, we have no justification to infer a one-to-one relationship between events, characters, ideas in a literary work and life experiences. People do not wait for a novelist or poet or playwright to play around with images and symbols to incite them to strike or march in the streets or revolt. There are more immediate and direct forces that impel to act against authority. Moreover, a novel like Armah's is too complex to push readers into the streets to burn and kill. It would not be read by a large population. (4)

This presentation of literature as rather autonomous and placed outside the sphere of political action is difficult to reconcile with the idea of literature as a weapon in the struggle.

One justification for cooperation with the censors is the hope that through direct influence as many books as possible might be unbanned. Cooperation is problematic, however. In this case for example, one of the three works under consideration was declared undesirable (after having been passed by a publications committee) because the experts (all black) were divided. One could say that due to the advice of the experts one work was banned.

In general, however, the attitude of black writers towards censorship has been one of defiance. Mthobeni Mutloatse spoke for many when he stated :

It doesn't matter what the censors say or what they do with black South African literature, the die is cast.  
 And our slogan is: never backwards! Pamberi ne chimurenga. To hell with censorship. To tell the truth we are going to celebrate each book that is banned- to begin with Forced Landing (banned last week)  
 We are pleased that the government at least appreciates black art and dignity. (Die Transvaler, 24 April 1980)

Compromise and cooperation are for most writers not viable options. Instead they have boycotted the censorship system by not appealing decisions to ban. They have also convinced their publishers not to appeal banings. Only parties with a direct financial interest in the publication can appeal a decision so, if the writer or the publisher do not appeal the ban stays in place. This strategy can significantly prolong a ban especially in the period of the early eighties when many bans were overturned on appeal.

Some black writers have felt the pressure to conform to the standards of committed literature also as a form of censorship. The demand that literature should be a weapon in the struggle (as defined in the ANC guidelines) also limits a writer's freedom to express himself. It may not be a formal system of censorship but it does constitute a strong psychological and sometimes material barrier to write and publish.

The effect can be that a writer feels so torn between all the contradictory criticism directed at him

that he gives up writing altogether. Melvin Whitebooi describes this process in "Writing isn't nice anymore".<sup>89</sup> He cites the example of a friend who writes love stories. Her work has been rejected by the writers organization because it is not political enough. When he runs into her a little while later she tells him she doesn't write anymore.

Another effect can be a certain uniformity in the literature produced by the writers who do conform to the demand to be political. It is against this trend that intellectuals like Ndebele and Sachs directed their criticism, as I have explained above.

The effect of official censorship on black literature and a number of examples of clashes between black writing and the censor will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>89</sup> "Skryf is nie meer lekker nie", Melvin Whitebooi, in De Kat, November 1988, 97.



## 8. BLACK AUTHORS AND CENSORSHIP : NO PLACE TO HIDE

The effect of censorship on black literature has been quite different from that on white writing in English and in Afrikaans. There are several reasons for this. Black writing has been banned on a much larger scale and black writers do not have the alternative to conform to the demands of the censor.

One finds that the evasive strategies that were discussed in the chapters on white authors are not present in the works of black writers, suggesting that these strategies are not options available to black writers. Distancing in time and space, for example, would remove a text from the immediacy of the black situation to such an extent that it would become unrecognizable to its primary audience. It would lose its function of inspiring pride and self-respect.

The use of allegory has the same disadvantage. In addition, most black writers and readers do not have the Western frame of reference that would be necessary to decode the allegory. The black writer does not use Aesopian language. If he wants to expose the injustice of situation X, the struggle demands that he does so by describing situation X in a recognizable manner. If he were to choose a detour, a masking way of telling, he would lose touch with his audience and with the black political framework.

The adoption of evasive strategies as individual response to censorship is therefore uncommon. Of course

authors sometimes feel forced to agree with changes made by the publisher in order to get their work published but that is not the same. The developments in black literature are not directly related to censorship but to historical developments. The repression, for example, and the emergence of Black Consciousness thinking in the seventies led to a more radical, outspoken literature. This is in contrast to a more masked literature that could have been the result of the almost complete silencing of the sixties.

It is often suggested that the emergence of poetry as the dominant genre in the seventies was a collective strategy to evade censorship.<sup>90</sup> I doubt that for a number of reasons. First of all the poetry was hardly metaphorical and therefore just as outspoken as prose. Sipho Sepamla stated in an interview with Stephen Gray:

I don't think it is true that poetry is less vulnerable than stories. If you were to take the stuff that is written today by young Black writers you'd find they says it like it is, as they say in America. And because of this very way of saying things, their poetry has become as vulnerable as any other form of writing. (Index on Censorship, vol. 7, no. 1, 3)

<sup>90</sup> Nadine Gordimer: "Out of this paralytic silence, suspended between fear of expression and the need to give expression to an ever greater pressure of grim experience, has come the black writer's subconscious search for a form less vulnerable than those that led a previous generation into bannings and exile. Seeking to escape the 97 definitions of 'undesirable', among other even more sinister marks of official attention, black writers have had to look for survival away from the explicit if not to the cryptic then to the implicit; and in their case they have instinctively turned to poetry." The Black Interpreters, 51.

Evidence for Sepamla's opinion can also be found in the PAB's decision to ban Mtsali's collection of poetry Fire Flames. The PAB concluded that:

We also have to keep in mind that black languages are extremely rich in figurative speech and that poetry will therefore be especially well received by the black man and that it will more easily excite him than prose. (decision 2/81, 1,)

Here poetry is considered even more harmful than prose. As literature became more radical during the seventies it was harder hit by the censors. If some poetry in the early seventies escaped banning it was more likely due to its allegiance to the old form of protest writing directed at a white audience than to the implicitness of the genre itself.

There are other reasons that can explain the dominance of poetry. As Richard Rive suggested, the success of Mtshali's Sounds of a Cowhide Drum in 1971 may have had a big influence. Poems are also generally short which is an advantage when the conditions for writing are poor. Also poems can be more easily communicated by being read aloud at gatherings.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>91</sup>The larger emphasis on orality that goes hand in hand with the dominance of poetry could be seen as an evasive strategy that affects the medium more than the message. Oral literature falls outside the scope of this study as is the case for most studies by white critics. White and Couzens recognized this in the introduction to Literature and Society: "So much of black creative activity is largely inaccessible to whites - the oral performances at funerals of apartheid's victims, the street theatre, the duplicated broadsheets, the clubs: so much is happening from which even the most concerned white observer is excluded by the facts of a divided society." (16)

The conclusion is that the effects of censorship on black literature have been more external than internal. The threat of censorship has not been internalized and transformed in forms of adaptive or preventative self-censorship as was the case with white writers. Instead the literature has been maimed by the external effects of the silencing of so many authors. An individual work is not changed at the level of writing but the fact that it is banned and never reaches its audience influences the literature that follows. The lack of models and the scarcity of books are mentioned by every black author as severe obstacles.

In the next two sections I will give a few examples of clashes with the censor. The differential treatment of white and black writers will be highlighted in a discussion of Muriel at Metropolitan by Miriam Tlali and Call Me Not a Man by Mtutuzeli Matshoba. Then I will focus on Staffrider magazine and its dealings with the censor.

8.1. Miriam Tlali: Muriel at Metropolitan and Mtutuzeli Matshoba: Call Me Not a Man

Miriam Tlali's Muriel at Metropolitan and Mtutuzeli Matshoba's Call Me Not a Man were banned at the same moment that Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter and André Brink's A Dry White Season were unbanned. The novels by Gordimer and Brink benefited



from the Magersfontein-amendments. They were the favored tokens of the new mentality in censorship under PAB chairman Van Rooyen that meant to relax the grip on literature with a high visibility.

The simultaneous banning of two black authors indicated that black writing was not to benefit for the time being from the new dispensation.<sup>92</sup> This deliberate gesture of the censor, unbanning books by whites and banning books by blacks, was generally seen as an attempt to divide writers and to send a message that blacks did not have the same latitude as whites as far as the desirability of their work was concerned.

Muriel at Metropolitan was published in 1975 by Ravan Press. As I have mentioned before, publication had been delayed because the author was reluctant to approve the changes suggested by the publisher to avoid a ban. In 1979 Longman in London published an international edition of Muriel and almost fully restored the original text. When this edition was introduced in

<sup>92</sup> The discrepancy between banned and unbanned books was more extensive than just the examples given in the text. Consider this list published in the Annual Literary Survey Series of 1980: "On the day that the Publications Appeal Board released Magersfontein, O Magersfontein, a black-edited literary magazine, Wietie was banned. In the same week that A Dry White Season was unbanned, Mtutuzeli Matshoba's Call Me Not a Man was banned. Wessel Ebersohn's Store Up the Anger and Christopher Hope's A Separate Development have been unbanned on appeal. Call Me Not a Man, Amandla and Muriel at Metropolitan by Miriam Tlali, The Soweto I Love and A Ride on the Whirlwind by Sipho Sepamla, Matsemela Manaka's Egoli, and works by Mtsali, Madingoane and Mda - to name some of the more recent victims - remain banned. (79)

South Africa, it attracted the attention of the censor and it was banned. At the same time, the first South African edition which had been in circulation for four years was also banned.

Arguments for the ban are not easily available. Out of principle the publisher did not appeal the decision. That means that there was no decision published by the PAB.<sup>93</sup>

Fortunately, Gordimer mentioned the case in her speech at the acceptance of the C.N.A. prize in 1980:

Miriam Tlali's novel Muriel at Metropolitan, in the version found inoffensive and left for sale for several years, was banned last year on the sole objection of three offences under the same Section of the Act [Section 47 (2) (c)], the principal being the reference by the narrator-character to an Afrikaans-speaking woman as a 'lousy Boer'. (The Essential Gesture, 255)

Gordimer had previously drawn a parallel with her own novel Burger's Daughter which was banned under all sections of the law. In a letter to the publisher, the publications committee quoted 36 passages that were harmful. One of these resembled the 'lousy Boer' citation from Muriel. In Gordimer's novel, a few English schoolgirls refer to Afrikaners as "Bloody Boers, dumb Dutchmen, thick Afrikaners."

In her defense against the allegations of the publications committee Gordimer calls it "[a]nother case

<sup>93</sup>Since 1978, this is the only publicly available official material from the censorship process. The decisions of the PAB have been published by Louise Silver's Digest of Decisions.

of selective quoting." According to her "[t]he irony of the passage is absolutely clear, in context: the racially prejudiced English-speaking children don't seem to realize that Rosa herself is an Afrikaner." (What Happened, 22).

The publications committee reacted only to the invectives and concluded that they brought Afrikaners into ridicule and contempt. The Appeal Board came to a completely different conclusion. It stated that:

[t]hese remarks are said by pupils of a wealthy English private school. Gordimer makes qualifying comments to show that these children express the opinion of their parents and milieu. Parents and milieu are criticised. The passage is an attack on English prejudice against the Afrikaner. (What Happened, 42)

The same passage represented for one censor unacceptable contempt for the Afrikaner while for another it was a defense of the Afrikaner against attacks by the English. The result in this case was that in spite of the large number of offensive passages quoted by the publications committee, the book was unbanned by the Appeal Board.

Compare this procedure with what happened to Muriel. As far as the offensive passage is concerned the challenged words are not spoken by the narrator-character, as Gordimer stated, but by Douglas, a Coloured radio mechanic who introduces Muriel on her first day at Metropolitan, a furniture store. This is an important distinction. The novel is clearly autobiographical which makes confusion of narrator and

author easier especially for the censors who are generally not very sensitive to such literary differentiations. If Muriel had uttered the words, the link with Tlali would have been understandable if not justified. In this case the context shows, however, that putting the words 'lousy Boer' on the count of the author is a deliberate misreading. Muriel and Douglas are discussing their colleagues. Muriel says:

And I like Mrs Kuhn, she is always so friendly and kind. I think she likes me too. I don't know how Mrs Stein feels about me, though; she never greets me when I greet her, and she sulks when I ask questions."  
 "What do you expect?" said Douglas. "She is a lousy Boer like this fool here." He pointed to Lennie's empty chair. (14)

Douglas is an embittered man, quite the opposite of Muriel who has an open and curious attitude. My point here is not, however, to refute the committee's arguments to ban. In the case of Burger's Daughter, a committee also drew up a list of similar offenses. The significant difference is that in that case the Directorate of Publications felt impelled to appeal in order to give the Appeal Board an opportunity to overturn the decision to ban. The result was a painful public repudiation of the publications committee that had, according to the committee of experts, "not even begun to read the novel." (What Happened, 37)

In the case of Muriel, the Directorate did not appeal even though there seemed to be ample reason to do so. The usual reason for the Directorate to appeal a decision of one of its own committees was to ask the



advice of a committee of experts on the literary value of a work. As Muriel is a novel that reason would apply. Also the attention of the Directorate could have been drawn by the controversial nature of the ban in the first place. A book that was considered harmless for years, years of severe unrest and repression, was suddenly banned when a different edition was imported into the country. Finally, the Directorate liked to give the PAB the opportunity to instruct the publications committees on the correct application of the latest guidelines. Muriel was banned on the basis of an isolated passage, something that was supposedly not permitted after Magersfontein.

Gordimer's conclusion about the motive behind the unequal treatment of white and black literature was:

that the Censorship Committee regards it as necessary to prevent black readers from reading their own prejudices, their own frustrations, given expression in the work of a black writer;...[black writers] may not say what white writers say because they are calculated to have a wider black readership, and to speak to blacks for the centre of the experience of being black, to articulate and therefore confirm, encourage what the black masses themselves feel and understand about their own lives but most cannot express.  
(255-256)

The appeal of Tlali's novel for black readers must have been a deciding factor for the censors for the contents of Muriel can hardly be called subversive. It is the story of a young black woman who takes an administrative job in a white business. She describes how it is to work with white colleagues and inevitably some of

the more ridiculous aspects of petty apartheid get attention. Overall, however, the tone is far from defiant. Whites are not only vilified but are also described with understanding and even sympathy (See the quotation above, 49). The novel is a psychological rather than a protest novel. It deals with the protagonist's feelings about her own difficult position. She feels sandwiched between her white colleagues and the black people who buy Metropolitan's goods at exorbitant prices.

Muriel fits into the tradition of the early seventies because it is clearly written with a white audience in mind. It is a subtle analysis of the relationships between black and white in the workplace. The setting is completely on white territory. There is no mention of Muriel's personal life. Another practical reason why the novel reached a primarily white audience when it was first published was the price of the book. It was prohibitively high for black readers. The author mainly received reactions from white readers. The fact that the high price effectively put the work out of reach of the black readership might also explain why the novel was not banned when it was first published in 1975.

Tlali's next novel Amandla, published and banned in 1981, was much more defiant and openly political. The fact that her first novel had been banned did not lead Tlali to take a more moderate tone. On the con-

trary, the experience of the ban made her vow never to agree to prepublication changes again. Historical circumstances, the events in Soweto in 1976 and the rise of the Black Consciousness movement inspired her to more radical writing.

Her defiant attitude, not only vis-à-vis the political situation in general but also towards the censors in particular, is immediately apparent even before opening the book. The title and the cover were probably enough to alert the censors, as Tlali herself assumed.<sup>94</sup> The title means 'power' and is often used as a rallying cry together with 'ngwathu', "power is ours". The cover showed a raised black fist against the background of barbed wire.

In Amandla, Tlali describes the events in the year after the riots broke out in Soweto on 16 June 1976. The setting this time is the black township and whites are completely absent from the book. Tlali highlights several aspects of life under conditions of tension and violence in Soweto by following the whereabouts of an extended family. The novel documents, on the one hand the very human aspects of life under repression with relatively much attention for the position of women, and on the other hand it presents a platform for long political speeches.

<sup>94</sup>"I assume that the title of the book alone was sufficient to alarm the Censorship Board", Ongehoorde Woorden, 66, translation mine.

Before publishing Amandla, Tlali had started to contribute pieces to Staffrider. These pieces show a trend toward abandoning fiction and concentrating fully on the goal of inspiring self-respect in black readers. Under the title Soweto Stories, Tlali related the stories, based on interviews, of ordinary black people from Soweto.

Tlali has suffered greatly from censorship. As she herself pointed out "a book is doomed even after the ban is lifted." She continued:

Muriel and Amandla are unbanned since 1985 but they are still unavailable. The booksellers simply do not take the books in their stock. The self-censorship of booksellers presents a significant barrier for the free flow of information. (Afterword Amandla, Dutch edition, 294-295, translation mine)

She has never been imprisoned but she has repeatedly been harassed by the Security Police. In spite of this her work has not moved away from South African reality but rather closer to it - even to the point where fictionality is abandoned altogether and her work becomes oral history and journalism. In a moving appeal, she has herself best explained her position:

To the Philistines, the banners of books, the critics....We black South African writers (who are faced with the task of conscientising ourselves and our people) are writing for those whom we know are the relevant audience. We are not going to write in order to fit into your definition of what you describe as 'true art'. Our main objective is not to receive ballyhoo comments on our works. What is more important to us is that we should be allowed to reach our audiences. Our duty is to write for our people and about them. ("Remove the Chains", 26)



Mtutuzeli Matshoba's Call Me Not a Man is a collection of stories that was published in 1979. It was declared undesirable on 9 April of that same year. The ban stayed in place for six years, until 15 March 1985. All but one of the stories were first published in Staffrider.

As was the case with Muriel the publisher did not appeal. There are therefore no official documents that state the reasons for the ban. These can again be partly reconstructed, however, from Gordimer's C.N.A. address. She asserted that the collection was banned for one of the stories only, "A Glimpse of Slavery". This story deals with the experiences of black prisoners who are hired out as labourers to a white farmer. It had already been published in Staffrider 1.4 (1978), an issue of Staffrider that was not banned.

The publications committee found that there was "not inconsiderable merit in much of the writing...with regard both to the quality of writing and to the author's insight in the human situations he interprets" (in Gordimer, Essential Gesture, 254). In spite of this rather favorable evaluation of the collection as a whole, they still banned the book because one of the stories was judged "flatly written" and its accumulation of events was found "improbable". The committee added that "even if all these situations...had occurred in this context in which they are set in the story, the

presentation of these scenes in a popular medium would be undesirable." (255)

Several aspects of this decision deserve attention. In the first place, the book was banned on the basis of only one of the stories. The acknowledged quality of the collection as a whole was not used to balance the effect of a 'weaker' part. The committee reverted to an old method that was put aside with the specific purpose to protect literature.

Arguments for the judgement that "A Glimpse of Slavery" is poorly written were not given. That is unfortunate for, in my opinion, it is one of the best stories in the collection. The protagonist is one of the prisoners. With his sharp and analytical mind he guides the reader through the humiliating experiences that laborers undergo at the hands of the white farmer and his black helper. The laborers are at the mercy of the farmer but because they are portrayed as articulate and intelligent they emerge as the moral victors nevertheless. The victory for the protagonist is real. He manages to escape and return to the city to confront the man who caused his (unjust) imprisonment.

Again, as with Muriel, the point here is not to refute the committee's judgment but to show that the Directorate had evident reasons to appeal the ban. The mere mention of literary quality should have been enough to cause consultation of a committee of experts in this case even more clearly than with Muriel because

literary value played a crucial part in the decision to ban.

Other reasons why the Directorate could have been expected to act are two inconsistencies that make the ban problematic. The first lies in the reasoning of the committee itself. On the one hand, the committee stated that the accumulation of events was improbable but on the other hand they argued that if these things had actually happened they should not be written down. First they denied the validity of this particular experience of reality and subsequently they conceded that what really concerned them was to keep this unpleasant side of life in South Africa off the record. According to Gordimer the "factual basis [of the abuse of farm labour] has been exposed and confirmed in the proceedings of court cases" (254) so the assumption that the events are improbable can easily be proven invalid. She concluded therefore that "[t]he standard used by the censors here is that of political control over reading matter likely to reach the black masses." (255)

The other inconsistency lies in the fact that "A Glimpse of Slavery" had already been published in Staffrider. Staffrider could count on serious perusal by the censors, two previous issues having been banned. It is unlikely that Matshoba's story had escaped their attention.

The Directorate's decisions not to appeal must then be seen as a deliberate acts of omission intended

to silence black writers at a time when white writers were unbanned.

## 8.2. Staffrider Magazine

Having analysed a number of works by individual authors, I now want to turn to a different kind of literary product, a magazine. Staffrider was established in 1978 as a literary magazine written primarily by and for blacks.

The magazine has been very important to the development of black literature. It provided a platform for writers after the bannings of political and cultural organizations in the wake of the Soweto riots. When it began, Staffrider had no editorial policy which meant that the threshold for publication was very low. An editorial board was later established but in its first years virtually everything submitted by the many community groups found a place in the magazine. Even though the contributions were of uneven quality, the result was a fascinating image of the creative productivity in the townships.

The distance between author, publication and reader was much smaller than when a black author would try to publish a work on his own. Community groups sent in work from affiliated authors and that work was published under the banner of that community. Staffrider was also distributed via these groups at a low price.



This assured a close connection between the black writer and readers in the community.

The emphasis on community and the lack of an editorial policy are signs of the populist influence of the Black Consciousness movement in these early years. In the early 1980s, when Black Consciousness was on the wane, the banners naming the various communities disappeared and an editor was appointed.<sup>95</sup>

Staffrider is also interesting from the point of view of censorship. It was itself a creation of censorship, as Andries Oliphant, the current editor, has pointed out:

Following the Soweto uprising, the government banned virtually all progressive black organizations. To fill the gap created by these bannings, Mike Kirkwood, the newly appointed manager of Ravan Press, and Muthobi Muthoatse, a journalist and current manager of the black publishing house, Skotaville Publishers, perceived the need for a community-oriented magazine to fill the gap created by these bannings. (358)

The magazine was also a victim of the censors. In the first six years of its existence, six issues were banned of a total of seventeen. The ban on some of these the ban was lifted after an appeal by the Directorate, but other issues are, according to Jakobsen's Index, banned to this day.

<sup>95</sup> See, for a more detailed history "Staffrider Magazine and Popular History: The Opportunities and Challenges of Personal Testimony" by A. W. Oliphant in Radical History Review 46/7, 257-268. See also "Staffrider and Directions Within Contemporary South African Literature" by Michael Vaughan, in White and Couzens, 196-212.

There is more material on the bannings of Staffrider than on most other publications. The publishers entered into debate with the Directorate on several occasions. They requested reasons for the bans and defended themselves. They published these communications in the magazine. In addition, in the cases where there was an appeal, there are the decisions of the PAB. Here I will focus on the exchange between the Directorate and the publishers that was published in Staffrider 2.2 (1979), and on the PAB decisions regarding 3.1 and 3.3 (1980), and 5.3 (1982).

In general, one can say that the censor's attitude was one of hesitation. In the case of a periodical, the law provides the possibility to ban all future issues. That provision was not used for Staffrider. According to Mike Kirkwood, the founder, the magazine profited from the changes in the application of censorship, "surviving its early string of bannings without making any concessions on what it chose to publish" (7.3/4 (1988):3)

Still a number of issues were banned especially in the first years when the guidelines for black literature were not yet being consistently applied. To get a better idea of the background of the bans, I will now discuss the reasons behind the banning of 2.1 (1979).

In the next issue of Staffrider, 2.2, two letters were published. The first letter was from the Publications Directorate to the publishers. The second one

was an open letter from the publishers to the Director of Publications. In the first letter the Directorate, responding to a request by the publishers, supplied its reasons for having declared the previous issue of Staffrider undesirable.

The letter started with a few general remarks about Staffrider. Among other things the magazine's censorship history was outlined:

This is the fifth consecutive issue to come before the committee. The first one was found to be undesirable under section 47 (2) (a), (d) and (e). Several of the subsequent issues were found to contain material of a doubtful nature, but the committee decided that, on balance, they could be let through. The present issue, however, does not fall into this category, and the committee has found it to be undesirable under section 47 (2) (e). This does not, however imply that every article, poem or illustration is necessarily undesirable, and does not prohibit them being published separately or in another publication. (2)

The Director continued with a list of favorable factors that were taken into account when the committee evaluated the publication. These were:

that protest literature is an acknowledged literary genre; that the publication is not without literary merit and could, divested of its undesirable aspects, be an acceptable medium of literary expression for, particularly, Black writers; that the threshold of undesirability is less easily crossed in the case of Blacks who do not have the same avenues of public protest as Whites; that poetic license generally applies to publications of this nature; and, finally, that the probable reader in South Africa would mainly include persons interested in the development of Black literature. (2)

Then followed a general characterization of the undesirable material as "unfair, one-sided and

offensive portrayals of police actions and methods, calculated to evoke hatred and contempt of them." (2)

What is most interesting, however, is the treatment of the offensive material itself in the last two paragraphs of the letter. The two most offensive contributions were identified as the story (significantly called 'article') "Awakening" by Amelia House and the poem "Tribute to Mapetha" by Bafana Buthelezi (2). Their main offense was the negative portrayal of the police but an aggravating factor was that both authors were writing from exile and Staffrider thus was "offering a medium of expression for virulent attacks on South Africa's institutions by hostile persons living abroad." (2)

In the last paragraph, the Director mentioned "other poems or articles which contain undesirable matter under section 47 (2) (e) but which, on their own, could have been balanced by the favourable factors" mentioned before (2). These are: "Why, Tumelo My Son?" by Mandla Sibeko, "Staffrider" by Matime Papane, "Silence in Jail" by Peter Horn, "An African Woman" by Shimane Maoka, "A Son of the First Generation" by Mtutuzeli Matshoba, and "Notes on the Steps" by Essop Patel. Finally, there was a special mention of Sheila Fugard's poem "The Voortrekkers". Fugard was accused of a "sour attitude" that has led to a negative portrayal of Afrikaners. The committee found "such racist attacks most deplorable" but "believes that the average



Afrikaner can absorb and adapt this particular piece of incentive (sic) coming from the indicated source." (3)

Of the works mentioned, two are by white authors (Horn and Fugard). I will not consider these here except to note that the subject of Horn's poem is not police brutality but censorship. The poem lists a number of authors who are banned so that there will be silence, "but unaccountably/ music crosses the border/ on waves of ether/ through every crack/ between the heavily armed border posts." The theme of support coming from abroad provides a striking link with the committee's objection against Staffrider as platform for exiles. Anti-government forces that operate from outside South Africa are a source of anxiety for the authorities. What happens outside of the borders is more difficult to control.

Let us now take a closer look at the two contributions whose undesirability could not be balanced by the favourable aspects of the publication. "Awakening" by Amelia House appeared under the banner of "Kentucky USA". As I have explained above, Staffrider grouped the various contributions according to the geographical location of the authors. Usually the place names designated a community of writers inside South Africa. With House this was not the case. There was no community of South African writers in Kentucky. There was a marked incongruity between the very local nature of the story and the distant geographical identification of

Kentucky, USA. This incongruity led the members of the committee to question the identity of Amelia House. In the letter the Director stated that "it is not improbable that this may be a pseudonym for someone more closely connected to South Africa." (2)

The story itself is short, a little over two pages. The subject is that of the terrible injustice done to a man as a result of a situation in which bad people have power and good people are powerless. A Coloured teacher, a hardworking studious man called Eric Peterson, is falsely accused by policemen of being drunk. He is beaten up, arrested and thrown in jail where he shares a cell with "a collection of drunks, junkies, prostitutes, robbers - a gathering of human débris." (8) As if this is not humiliating enough, a policeman incites the other prisoners to urinate on Eric.

The role of the police in this story is reprehensible and in that respect the objections of the censor cannot be denied. The same is true of the poem by Buthelezi. According to the Director: "[t]he poem is calculated to approve of subversive deeds; and to present Communist victories as laudable, as well as being a foretaste of what is to come in South Africa. The poet also accuses the police of murder." (2) These elements are all present in the poem.

Looked at from the censor's point of view, his disapproval of these pieces can be no surprise (in con-

trast to Muriel for example, which could hardly be called offensive from any point of view.) The question then is not whether these contributions can be called offensive within the law but whether different perceptions of reality are permitted in the light of the favorable factors that are said to be taken into account and that can balance offensiveness to a certain extent. "Awakening" and "Tribute to Mapetha" are rather characteristic for Staffrider writing. Questions like what exactly makes the scales tip or why these pieces and not others are undesirable are not answered in the Director's letter.<sup>96</sup>

The reason for singling out these two contributions might have been the fact that the authors were writing from exile. That was at least what the publishers assumed. Their reaction to the Director of Publications, which was polite and not confrontational, centered around two issues, exile and the portrayal of the police. The publishers made a strong objection against the exclusion of exiled South Africans. They found it "an aggravating factor that, deprived of the significant exile voices, our internal art and dialogue through art will lack credibility." They continued:

<sup>96</sup> Why, for example, did the censor not object to the passage from "black trial" by Ingoapele Madingoane which appeared in the same issue. This poem contained the same elements to which the censor objects in Buthelezi's poem. It even had a much wider appeal as it had already been read to thousands of people. The book in which it was later published, Africa My Beginning, was banned.

It must be acknowledged too that a high proportion of established black South African writers are exiles. We had hoped that in time their voices would be heard in Staffrider; your letter is, to say the least, a blow to that hope. (3)

The publishers' defense against the 'police' argument was phrased rather carefully:

the perception of the police as brutal by black writers, who are in rapport with the community at large, is a sad fact of South African life which cannot be wished away. To disguise it by censorship can only exacerbate, not alleviate the problem. We accept that this perception must be deeply galling to some fine officers and men, but we believe that they would be the last to advocate sweeping the problem under the carpet. (3)

Note that the letter stated that "the perception of the police as brutal is a sad fact of South African life" not police brutality itself. According to the publishers, the works in question:

convey fresh and genuine feelings: the impression they make is not one of cynical propaganda. They are clearly not intended as thorough and factual reports on reality: they are perceptions of reality, about which the reader can say, "This is honestly felt" or "I am not convinced that these feelings are genuine." When honestly felt perceptions of reality are not permitted a hearing, we argue that the peaceful future of our society is endangered. (3)

The concept of the existence of different perceptions of reality is pivotal to South African censorship. In principle the system of censorship was established to suppress deviant representations of reality. At the time of this exchange on the banning of an issue of Staffrider, however, the system was in transition.



It was moving toward a greater latitude toward some forms of literary representation.

The juxtaposition of works that express feelings and works that are propaganda is significant. By stressing the personal and the individual, an attempt was made to downplay the political meaning of the works. One can question whether this approach met with the approval of the majority of Staffrider authors who highly valued the collective and political nature of their work.

The letter of the publishers was not an appeal of the ban. Neither they nor any other party officially appealed and according to Jakobsen's Index the issue was still banned in 1990. The next two issues of Staffrider that were banned were 3.1 and 3.3 (1980). In those cases the Directorate of Publications appealed the bans. There is also a PAB decision on Staffrider, 5.3 (1982). In that case the Directorate appealed the decision of a publications committee not to ban.

The three PAB decisions show a discernible trend from considering the desirability of one specific issue to evaluating the value of the magazine in general. In the first decision the specific contributions that had led to the ban were still mentioned. The last decision only contained assessments of Staffrider in general. As these were overall positive, the decision left little room for future bannings of the magazine.

Staffrider 3.1 was banned under Section 47 (2) (d) and (e) (race relations and state security). The ban

was appealed by the Directorate and subsequently lifted by the PAB. The factors that were most important for the unbanning were the likely readership and the fact that Staffrider was a literary publication (Digest of Decisions 70/80.2). The Appeal Board considered the readership as consisting of the "literate and the converted." (70/80.2). It assumed that the group of readers would consequently be small and not easily impressed with new and subversive ideas.

The Appeal Board also recommended that the magazine should be judged in literary terms although, in the introduction to the decision, Staffrider was called a "publication of a political or semi-political nature." (70/80.1). What the PAB meant was that the contributions should not be judged for what they say for "the fact is that the black masses, even the illiterate, have heard at gatherings, like funerals, the things that have been re-uttered here" but that Staffrider should be judged in literary terms as "a publication of prestige quality" and "a medium for established and emergent writers." (70/80.2). The Appeal Board specified that "[e]ven though Staffrider itself may regard literary standards as "elitist", the fact that it includes items of literary merit and validity serves to advance black culture, and that is, indeed, a mitigating and even commendable consideration." (70/80.2).

Staffrider 3.3 was banned under section 47 (2) (d). The Directorate appealed and the ban was lifted.

The PAB decision emphasized the favorable qualities of the magazine in general whereas in the previous decision the content and form of three specific contributions was primarily discussed. One of the factors taken into account was:

that black literature cannot at all times avoid voicing a protest, justified or not, against allegedly discriminatory actions or conditions. It is common cause between white and black that unnecessary and unfair discrimination should be progressively illuminated (sic!). This cause can only be furthered if blacks are given the opportunity of indicating what they regard as unfair treatment, as is done, on more than one occasion in this Staffrider. (122/80.1-2)

New in this decision was the acknowledgement of the existence of different aesthetic standards. According to the Appeal Board, the objections in black literature against discrimination:

are often clothed in exaggerated and over-colourful language which sound (sic) strange to Western ears. Exaggerated political invective however, is almost an art formed amongst Third World nations. ...Western man, who believes in under- rather than over-statement, is often unnecessarily perturbed at these verbal onslaughts which, through their very exaggeration, lose a measure of their effectiveness. (122/80.2)

Note that this decision did not mention any individual contribution. For those too optimistic, about the future of the magazine the Appeal Board concluded that "should the publication... preach violence or revolution, or agitate for the overthrow of the State by sabotage, terrorism or subversion, it would be another, and much more serious matter." (122/80.2)

Staffrider 5.3 was evaluated but not banned by a publications committee. The Directorate appealed this decision on the grounds that the publication contained potentially revolutionary material. The decision of the PAB centered around the issue of readership.

The publications committee had not banned because it had recognized that "though certain poems may be calculated to arouse ill feelings between the races, more can be tolerated in such a literary magazine of quality with a sophisticated readership." (206.83.1) The Appeal Board quoted the committee in agreement but consequently claimed that Staffrider had no impact on its readership:

[a] revolutionary will find nothing in this publication that he has not heard before in the line of grievances and complaints and nothing to inspire him to action or to indicate what action, not already suggested, is to be taken. An unsophisticated reader is not likely to acquire the publication and, if he does, he is not likely to find anything in it to hold his interest. Sophisticated readers will recognise the poor quality of much of the writing and find it simply boring and irritating. (206/83.2)

The Appeal Board concluded that if there were hardly any readers interested in the publication there was no reason to ban. The appeal was dismissed. The Board warned however, that it would not have done so "if this publication were to have a more popular appeal." (206.83.2) A more popular appeal, however much the Staffrider publishers would have wanted that, was almost out of the question. The circulation had diminished considerably after the channels of distrib-



ution through community groups were cut off. Mike Kirkwood described Staffrider's 'demise' during the early 1980s in his introduction to the tenth anniversary issue:

Quite quickly, as political and labour organisations established themselves and developed cultural programs with clearer ideological positions, it lost the special significance it held for a while (at its height, the print run touched 10.000 copies). Soon enough, it became a relic, something that reminded its readers and contributors (many of them now engaged in organised forms of struggle) of a particular stretch of road behind them. (Staffrider, 7.3/4 (1988): 3)

The fact that Staffrider had partly lost its political function was recognized by the censors. No more issues were banned.

## Conclusion

In a country like South Africa, or in any country with repressive censorship laws, to ignore the role of censorship in the creation of a literary work is to overlook a critical element in that work. To date there has been surprisingly little work done in the area of literature and censorship in South Africa. Studies on censorship in general focus almost exclusively on control of the media. Studies on South African literature often avoid the question of censorship altogether. Authors of literary surveys consider a corpus of works, taking the publication of these works for granted. Although they sometimes complain that censorship has made their own research more difficult, they seldom consider when and how the works they study have passed the censor. <sup>97</sup>

In this thesis I have tried to show that the role of censorship in the literary system is a legitimate and even necessary field of study. Not only is it important to expose the immediate effects of censorship on literature but the study of censorship also provides

<sup>97</sup> In her history of black South African literature in English, Ursula Barnett, for example, remarks in the introduction: "It is no easy task to study black writing comprehensively inside South Africa. At every turn one is frustrated by the ever-changing censorship-laws." (A Vision of Order 8) However, in the more than 300 pages that follow, censorship is not a subject in relation to the works studied.

a vantage point from which to investigate certain aspects of the process of literary communication.

In this thesis, an assessment of the effects of censorship has been made using representative examples of works and authors. Further, the various results of bannings on literature, such as the influence on literary tradition, the polarization of the literary community, and the role of self-censorship in the process of literary creation have been considered.

Self-censorship is a difficult subject to write about. It can not be positively proven. While a certain aspect of a work may be explained as a reaction to censorship, one can also think of different arguments that might explain it. I do not think that it is possible to devise an unequivocal method to detect and describe the occurrence of self-censorship in literature. This does not mean that the attempt should be abandoned. Self-censorship is too important to be ignored simply for lack of conclusiveness in the formal research strategies.

I suggest that the interpretation of a work produced under censorship restrictions is incomplete absent an awareness of potential self-censoring strategies. In order to recognize these strategies, it is necessary to know the specific restrictions that apply to the work in question. Questions such as "Have earlier works been banned and if so, for what reasons?" "What was the practice of censorship at the time of

writing and publication?" "Where does the author stand in relation to the ideology of the censor?", and "For whom does the author write?" need to be asked and answered.

These are among the questions that have emerged as essential in examining the influence of censorship on the works of three groups of authors in South Africa. The answers to these questions have led to some tentative conclusions about the influence of censorship on the literature of each group. For white writing in Afrikaans, I have introduced the concept of distancing to describe an evasive strategy found in a number of works (Chapter 4). Distancing is the choice of a place and/or time distant from the 'here and now' for a story that has strong thematic links to the 'here and now'.

To reduce the similarity between the real world and the fictional world, white writing in English, with its access to an international audience and its more diverse and sophisticated literary tradition, often uses a more abstract form of distancing such as allegory (Chapter 6). For black writers, a similar reduction of the referential elements in fiction has proven not to be a viable option (Chapter 8). Their position in society demands a political commitment that can only find its expression in literature that closely reflects the real world of black readers. As a consequence black literature has suffered more from censorship.



Censorship as vantage point from which to study the system of literary communication gives insight into a number of interesting issues. When political motivations are dominant factors determining the reception and evaluation of literature, this may suspend certain literary conventions, e.g. that statements in literary texts need not be true. Some groups of readers ignore the fictionality of literature. When such readers are the censors, the result is confusion. This confusion provides rich material for the study of problem areas in literary communication.

Another element worth attention is the existence of clearly distinguishable interpretive communities within one literary system at one time. The function of literature for Afrikaners, English, and blacks is quite different so the expectations the respective audiences have about a literary work are also different.

This study makes a beginning of these subjects and their theoretical foundation. I look forward to more detailed exploration and elaboration of these themes in my further work.

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