

CENSORSHIP AND THE AUTHOR

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The territory on which the private and the social meet has always been a highly charged magnetic field, and even more so when the private is represented by a creative individual. It cannot be otherwise. The individual needs the safety and security of the organised group; the artist finds in his community the sustenance, the reassurance of a tradition within which to express himself, and the public to which he must inevitably address himself if there is to be any meaning in his work. Society, on the other hand, needs the inspiration, the enterprise, the stimulation, the vision of the creative individual to open up new perspectives and possibilities for the future, a new insight into the present, and a valid interpretation of the past.

More than in any other art form, this relationship assumes particular significance in literature, because the medium in which the writer expresses his intensely individual view of the world happens to be the very medium in which society communicates. Language is a meeting place, a point of confrontation, between the individual and the social.

In primitive society these two worlds generally seem to operate in harmony; they may, in fact, be operating in such close association as to be practically inseparable. The primitive artist (who is, more often than not, also the scientist, the religious leader and even the legislator of his tribe) does not attempt to impose a unique, individual view of the world on his people: on the contrary he tries to act on behalf of his people as a whole; far from challenging the beliefs of his tribe he acts as curator and guardian. His mind and work are the archives, the museum, the temple, the art gallery of his people. He does not act against taboo, but with it.

Problems arise as this primitive and homogeneous tribe begins to grow more complex - on the purely physical level, as a result of numerical growth and territorial expansion, as well as occupational diversification; and on the metaphysical level as a result of accumulation of new experiences, divergence of functions (with the artist, the scientist, the theologian, the philosopher, the law-giver, the judge each developing in his own right, jealously safeguarding his own areas of jurisdiction), and the mental development implicit in this situation. Sooner or later a stage is reached where the private and the collective are no longer automatically in harmony; where tribal taboo may, in fact, threaten the enquiry of the individual mind.

Even in highly developed societies the relationship remains potentially creative and, in fact, indispensable. In the ideal situation the two great organs of society, Church and State, aiming at the commonwealth, maintain order and stability by ensuring the maximum amount of personal fulfilment to the maximum number of people; they honour the past by safeguarding time-sanctioned tradition; they can guarantee security by upholding the "accepted" and "acceptable" values of the group. In this way, society is essentially conservative; its watchword is the status quo. In this same ideal situation the writer (and the artist generally) prevents stagnation by defining new options; he is the agent of change, of exploration, of risk.

Neither can really do without the other. The artist on his own would introduce anarchy; the agents of society, if left unchecked, would impose absolutism, or, defined in different terms, the artist, inspired by the ideal of freedom, would bring about a different kind of tyranny since each indivi-

dual's total freedom would threaten everybody else's; whereas the ideal of justice that inspires society at its best would turn into its very opposite if it becomes an absolute notion overriding the interests of all individuals.

Through an intricate system of checks and balances the artist and his society can find a dynamic form of co-existence ensuring both personal and public growth. Unfortunately, of course, this ideal situation obtains very rarely, if ever. In the few most glorious moments of the history of civilisation the wishes of the individual (as expressed by the writer) did seem miraculously to coincide with the aspirations of the nation and the interests of the group. In the great epics - the works of Homer or Virgil, of Camoes in Portugal or Voltaire in France - this harmony is expressed admirably. But a time arrives when the individual becomes threatened to such an extent and on so many levels, that the artist has no choice but to go against the organisation and the interests of the organs of society: this situation tends to arise especially when these organs lose their function as means to an end and turn into ends in their own right. By the same token, in such a situation the organs of society, notably Church and State, feel themselves threatened by every dissenting voice and institute repressive action to safeguard, not society as such, but their own power-interests. This is when taboo, which forms an integral and possibly an indispensable part of primitive society, expresses itself in the form of censorship; what used to be constructive and wholesome now becomes destructive and a symptom of illness.

More often than not the change is slow and imperceptible: for that very reason it is usually not perceived before it has gone so far that a violent confrontation is unavoidable. In South Africa, as far as the Afrikaans writer is concerned, the moment of change was announced quite dramatically in the historic clash between Verwoerd and Van Wyk Louw when the latter's commissioned play for the Fifth Republic Festival elicited such a fierce attack by the Prime Minister. Why, asked Verwoerd, should a writer open his play with the words: "Wat is 'n volk?" - "What is a nation?" What is required of the writer is not a question but an assertion. While Verwoerd believed that we were still living in the epic age, Van Wyk Louw knew that we had progressed beyond it. And it can be no accident that this clash practically coincided with the introduction of official, codified censorship in South Africa.

It would be impossible fully to evaluate the impact of the threat of censorship to literature unless one has defined more clearly the function of the writer in society. Obviously aspects of this function may vary quite widely from one society to the other, but it could not prove too difficult to reach consensus on the essence of that function. In the light of the brief historical view, offered above it would seem to me that the writer has retained something of the original function of the magus or shaman. Certain aspects of this role have been taken over, in the process of diversification and specialisation imposed by the development of civilisation, by the scientist, the theologian, the philosopher, the teacher etc. But, at the very least, the writer exercises his functions with a very special awareness of his allegiance to two essential dimensions of existence as defined by Camus: truth and liberty.

The writer may be seen as an expression of society's need for truth and liberty. It is his responsibility to guarantee access to these basic realities, by constantly exploring the data of his world and comparing these with the fundamentals. His action is that of a cartographer. Having traversed that section of the territory of human experience available to him he draws a map of it, changing terra incognita into patria. It is a map that has to be drawn and

redrawn all the time, ever more accurately as the aim is to create as close a correspondance as possible between what has been set out on paper and what exists out there. Map and territory can never be entirely identical; but the one can be made to reflect as truthfully as possible the contours of the other.

The map makes known what has been either unknown or only partly known before; and it is based on an act of exploration. In this respect the writer fulfills the need of society to know, to find out what is hidden, and to record that discovery. It is a paradoxical need, since society as a body might prefer to be left in peace and not to know too much, since it is so much easier to accept the status quo than to be forced to change and adapt to new realities. But if the writer should fail in his duty, or if he should be restrained from exercising his function, society would eventually stagnate into total inertia, and die.

It is a hazardous undertaking, not only for the writer, but for the society that permits him to undertake his explorations. He may come up with uncomfortable facts that those in power might have preferred to remain hidden - either to prevent panic, or to strengthen their own position. In addition, the writer has no official mandate, no validity beyond his own allegiance to truth and liberty - and that can be easily manipulated by the unscrupulous to further their own ends. But even if our explorer is as honest as can be, his report remains a highly personal one, based only on what he himself has witnessed. And apart from the fact that he might have missed the wood for the trees his vision may be impaired by personal shortcomings. His eyes may be affected by the sun; he may grow lame; he may fall prey to strange fevers and see hallucinations.

But this is the risk society must take if it allows the artist in its midst. It is either that - with, at least, the possibility of a more or less trustworthy map - or total ignorance about the territory. A healthy society can face this risk; but if it is sick it may dread the vision of truth and liberty offered by a daring individual. In this case its very sickness may remain undiagnosed, if a certain amount of mixed metaphor may be introduced here. If this general definition of the writer's function is acceptable, several aspects of the serious threat posed by censorship become clear.

i) Whereas the writer is committed to a process of discovering, uncovering, probing, bringing to light, opening up, censorship operates from a premise of prohibition and closing down. In South Africa it forms part of the all-encompassing cover-up syndrome which has become painfully evident, inter alia, in the neurosis following the disclosures about the Department of Information scandals (and how revealing that in the centre of it all should be a department of information!). This neurosis, this near-psychotic urge to cover up at all costs may, in the long run, prove to be worse than the scandals that originally came to light.

Censorship in South Africa cannot be seen in isolation, but as part of an overall authoritarian strategy which also expresses itself in such divergent forms as detention without trial, arbitrary bannings, the awesome web of secret activities of the Security Police, the Group Areas Act, State Security, normally a means to an end, has become an absolute end in itself, precluding the search for truth and liberty.

ii) As such, censorship in South Africa, as elsewhere, forms part of a political system and is by no means prompted primarily by moral or religious considerations. It seems to me that a specific application of censorship is a natural function of educational authorities and the church, as it belongs

to the domain of religious doctrine, ethics and education. It would seem to me normal for a parent or a teacher to "grade" the reading matter of growing children in order to fulfil the real and normal needs of such a child at successive stages of development. Likewise, it would appear normal to me for a church to warn its members against the possible pernicious influence of certain writings conflicting with the religious or moral teaching of that church. However, the jurisdiction of a religious authority should end at that point: to overstep it by actually banning works, or by prohibiting individuals from exercising their personal judgement would very soon become an untenable infringement with personal liberty.

When the State itself imposes censorship it becomes, as I have suggested, a political activity. And it comes as no surprise to note that censorship is invariably imposed by an authoritarian regime uncertain of its own chances of survival either because it has just acceded to power, or because its power is threatened in some way. It was just as natural for Castro, or Mao, or Salazar, or Franco, or Verwoerd to impose stringent censorship (under the pretence of "moral" considerations) as soon as possible after they had come to power as it was for the new "open" regimes of Portugal and Spain in the mid-seventies to relax censorship. The fact that pornography is branded as "Communist infiltration" in South Africa and as "Western propaganda" in Russia suggests that morals as such have very little to do with the matter. The moment a political regime wants to impose uniformity of ideology and demands total submission the need arises to control, above all, the thoughts of the people; and since political liberalisation more often than not goes hand in hand with moral - notably sexual - liberalisation, censorship becomes the accepted weapon of the authoritarian regime.

It may be regarded as suppression of the individual's right to thinking and deciding for himself; as aggression against the free enterprise of the mind. In this way censorship is part and parcel of the institutionalised violence employed by the State to keep itself in control.

That censorship, in this framework, is essentially amoral is suggested by fact that - most spectacularly in South Africa - the one area of expression which has been proved to have an undermining influence on society, namely violence, is generally regarded as much more innocuous by the censors than phenomena like sex, religion, philosophy and politics. Small children in South Africa are constantly exposed to insidious forms of violence, but the moment a man and a woman dare to make love, the scene is cut.

The history of censorship in South Africa upholds the belief that it is primarily a political weapon. My own Kennis van die Aand (1973) explored sexual, moral and religious taboos in basically the same way as, say, Lobola vir die lewe (1962) or Die Ambassadeur (1963), the major difference was the introduction of a political motive (a Coloured man's futile efforts to transcend the colour bar) - and the book was banned, its predecessors left untouched. Nine of Etienne Leroux's novels were passed by the censors; the only one to have a more or less explicit political theme, Magersfontein, O Magersfontein (1976), was banned. In the case of Nadine Gordimer even a black-white love relationship was regarded as acceptable - An Occasion for Loving - but not the political dimension of The Late Bourgeois World or Burger's Daughter (1979). And the fact that the writings - including lyrics and love poetry - of a whole generation of black South African writers are banned simply because the authorities disagreed with the politics of those writers, surely speaks for itself.

The violence inherent in censorship is well illustrated by a small sample of literary corpses from the battlefield of some twenty thousand titles pro-

hibited in South Africa: selected quite at random by scanning Jakobsen's black Index, are names like Carlos Castaneda, Francoise Mallet-Joris, Emile Zola, John Updike, Robert Penn Warren, Joseph Heller, Erskine Caldwell, Jack Kerouac, Junichiro Tamizaki, William Styron, J P Donleavy, D H Lawrence, Vladimir Nabokov, Norman Mailer, John Masters, Henry Miller, Alberto Moravia, Mary McCarthy, Brendan Behan, Nathaniel West, Guy de Maupassant, Andre Pieyre de Mandiargues, Colin Wilson, Jean-Paul Sartre, Alain Robbe-Grillet, William Burroughs, Jean Genet, Bernard Malamud, Gore Vidal, Andre Maurois etc etc - excluding the names of South Africans.

The imposition of silence is one of the most pernicious forms of institutionalised violence the State has at its disposal.

iii) Censorship, by its very nature, springs from a need to impose mass values and is aimed most especially against those highly individualist questionings of mass values which are a hallmark of the work of truly creative writers. Censorship cannot make exceptions: it is not in its nature to do so: the legislation from which it derives is inevitably based on a consideration for the "generally accepted", the largest available common denominators - i.e. the most insidious enemies of the creative mind which guarantees growth and development and mental health to a community.

iv) To make it worse, these mass values are interpreted by a small group of bureaucrats who have to act on behalf of others. In other words, in the administration of censorship there is, per definition, an absence of integrity in the most basic sense of the word: not the true convictions of the administrators are involved, only their vicarious experience, their - necessarily inadequate - interpretation of "community needs" or "community values" or "community standards". The motto of the censor is: "I have no complaint against it personally, but think of all the others who may be harmed by it". There is certainly no evidence that any of the multitude of elderly gentlemen and ladies spending weeks, months or years on end viewing X-rated films or reading pornography has ever been depraved by it. But invariably "all the others" are used as a pretext.

By the same token there is no validity in the claim that censors actually do no more than to impose what society as a whole wishes, banning only those works society would reject of its own accord. If Playboy were to be allowed into the country without restrictions, there would be very few, if any, copies left on South African newsstands after the first day or two. Yet the censors ban it in the firm conviction that they are simply heeding the vox populi.

The most important aspect, however, remains the simple fact that censorship rests on the premise that a handful of people have the right to decide what an entire society should read, see, discuss, and, in the final instance, think.

v) In practice, therefore, censorship is administered by officials, by civil servants, strengthening the total hold of bureaucracy on the minds of people. The handful of persons who perform this task include only very, very rarely, creative people (and then, experience suggests, only faded, failed or burnt-out ones at that). In addition there may be "specially selected" persons from other fields, usually education and religion - almost never from the arts. (Which is only natural, as preciously few artists would be prepared to act against the very impulse from which they derive their raison d'etre.) But even if a few broad-minded and well-meaning individuals do find themselves in this group, the problem remains that they act purely in an "advisory capacity". And whereas the exercise of a limited form of censorship within their own

domains (school and church) might come natural to them, they do not seem to appreciate that in their capacity of official censors they are performing a radically different task, operating on the territory of the State whose primary concern is the maintenance of its own power, and the elimination of its enemies and of tendencies harmful to its "security".

vi) The moment official censorship is introduced, as happened in South Africa in 1963, followed by the stringent Act passed in 1974, a large minefield surrounding its official operation is activated. The actions of the first Publications Control Board and its various successors (the numerous small committees, the Directorate, and the Board of Appeal) form only the nucleus of a cancerous cell which divides and subdivides and multiplies rapidly to endanger the whole body.

Because the codification of censorship is, inevitably, extremely vague, no one can be sure in advance what will be banned and what not. The immediate result is that publishers grow exceedingly cautious (after all, they are the ones who run the greatest financial risk), and it may happen - as it has happened several times in South Africa - that manuscripts of particular merit or promise are turned down. Even when publishers may decide to risk publication, printers may be wary - or may be subjected to pressures of another kind. When Human & Rousseau decided to publish Lobola vir die lewe in 1962 (when the original censorship act was being debated in Parliament) at least one of the printers who turned it down did so because of pressure from a church that threatened withdrawal of its business from the printer in question.

Writers themselves may become inhibited. For the last fifteen years or so I have received an average of two or three manuscripts per week from young aspiring writers in need of advice and comments: and by far the most alarming trend I have witnessed in recent years (notably since 1974) is that the first question a young writer puts in his accompanying letter is no longer: "Do you think it's any good?" but: "Do you think it will get past the censors?"

Self-censorship is one of the most invaluable attributes of anyone in the writing business. It is, in fact, entirely indispensable. Once a work is written, once one has ridden oneself of it, clearing oneself of personal hangups or vendettas or fears or loves in the process, it becomes imperative to sit back - either on one's own or with the help of a trusted friend or guru - and make sure that everything one has put on paper is really necessary. And "necessary" may have more than merely aesthetic implications. Every work is a meeting-point between writer and reader; and it would be useless for a writer to put to paper his most exquisite thoughts if they cannot be understood by a reader. (He may, of course, decide how high he is prepared to aim: whether he prefers ten thousand enthusiastic readers - or a mere handful of intelligent, dedicated persons prepared to contribute as much to their reading of the work as he has contributed to the writing.) His objective correlates must "work out". And for this to happen, he has to be aware of the entire cultural tradition he works in. In other words, he must be aware of the likelihood that certain readers may be put off and antagonised by what he writes: consequently he must make quite sure that that is precisely what he needs to say. Does he believe in it so fervently that the hostility of certain sections of readers can be shrugged off? Or would he jeopardise the very effect of his work in the process? (What does "effect" mean? Is he interested in immediate response - or in the hope of light filtering through slowly, gradually?) These are agonising questions to work out. And in the process the writer may have to censor himself. In the final analysis it is the intrinsic demands of the work at stake which are decisive: does this novel, or poem, or play really require this line - is the line utterly indispensable for it -

or can it do more or less comfortably without it?

Without the intricate process of self-censorship no important work of art can come into being. At every step of the way choices are involved - this word rather than that; this rhyme, this character, this scene, rather than another. But this is a wholly different process from arbitrary and authoritarian censorship imposed from without - by persons not interested in the nature of the work as such, but with something as vague as "community standards" or as ominous as "State Security".

I have outlined my view of the writer's function in society, and of some of the ways in which censorship threatens that function. It is necessary to return from a more or less philosophical discussion to a close, if brief, look at the actual co-existence of the writer and the censor in the world as we experience it from day to day. For it must be admitted that there is practically no society in the modern world where at least some form of censorship is not in operation. And the same applies to societies of the past, including such licentious ages as those of, say, Plautus and Terence, or Boccaccio, or Rabelais. In fact, these writers operated within some of the most stringent censorship systems the world has ever known. Nor should it surprise, bearing in mind the historical view offered at the beginning of this essay. To recapitulate briefly: society and the creative individual are indispensable to one another. Each inevitably threatens the territorial integrity of the other - yet at the same time each offers a challenge and a stimulus necessary for the healthy growth of the other.

The operative word, it seems to me, is "challenge". And it may be a good idea to bring back into circulation the Toynbean concept of "challenge and response" in terms of which that great, if often maligned, historian interpreted the rise and fall of civilisations. Provided the social body is healthy, the explorations of the writer offer a challenge leading to constant reassessment of values and the possibility of growth. A sick body is too weak to respond effectively. Or, in other terms: should the explorations of the individual offer a challenge too great for society to respond to, the result is not growth and development but destruction. This, in effect, is the rationale usually resorted to by those who impose censorship. It should be emphasised, however, that the challenge offered by a single individual can hardly ever become too awesome for an entire society to respond to - unless that society is already weak or sick; unless its values are so tenuous that they cannot stand up to public examination.

It is the opposite relationship that appears more significant in the present context: the challenge of society and its instruments to the ingenuity, the will-power, the creative resources of the writer. When this challenge is reasonable it acts as an important stimulus to writers and other artists.

Shakespeare did not only survive the threat of stringent censorship imposed by his society, but triumphed over it in such a way as to become the most glorious product of that very society. Chekhov succeeded in writing his masterpieces not only in spite of the challenge of czarist censorship but probably to some extent because of it: it was a threat which forced him to refine his sensibilities and to compose some of the subtlest plays in the history of the theatre. Solzhenitsyn represents yet another stage in the relationship between social or authoritarian challenge and artistic response: he was effectively barred from publishing and eventually banished. The success of his response lies in the fact that the very measures taken against him have contributed towards turning him into a major writer in the rest of the world; moreover - and more important for the present discussion - Russian censorship led to the widespread distribution of his work in Russia itself,

in the form of zamishdat.

Another point may be reached when the forces of repression or oppression become so powerful that paralysis ensues: when, in other words, the challenge becomes so great that no response is possible. Even if this is only temporary, and effective only on the public level (i.e. by making it impossible for authors to publish), it means that an important form of mental nourishment for society as a whole dries up in the process, threatening the vitality of that entire society.

Ever since Plato it has been all too easy for authorities to underestimate, or even to ignore, the real function and contribution of the writer: to the censor the writer is a luxury, not an essential component; an appendix, not a vital organ. And if that mentality prevails the very life and growth of the community is threatened.

Within this general framework, a more specific investigation of the situation of the South African writer in his censorship system becomes necessary. And it is immediately obvious that South African writers find themselves in different categories.

The black writer lives in direct danger of life and liberty. A young black playwright writes and produces a play about the "confusion" of the black man ensnared in a maze of the white man's laws; for some time, while the play is performed in the black townships on a fly-by-night basis, it escapes the attention of the authorities. But the moment it is published it is banned outright; and soon afterwards the author is arrested and detained without any charge for several months; and released only after his health has deteriorated badly, resulting in urgent enquiries from outside. Another young black poet submits some of his work to the enterprising magazine Staff- rider and is invited to join PEN in Johannesburg. Immediately afterwards he is picked up by the Security Police, interrogated and insulted, and warned to "steer clear of bad connections". He related the experience to other members of PEN and a few prominent writers lodge an official protest. This results in another swoop on the young poet's house: it is "searched" and left in a shambles; once again he is insulted and humiliated, and a final warning is issued: "If you complain to your white friends about this, you will be detained indefinitely." A third black writer, a leading voice in the younger generation, who has already attracted a measure of attention from abroad (which means that it is not quite so easy to detain him without evoking an outcry), is awarded a scholarship to the U S - but his application for a passport is turned down three times.

For obvious reasons white writers can breathe much more easily. But a special category seems to be reserved for dissenting Afrikaans writers, because of the threat they pose to the monolithic structure of power politics in the country. During the Sixties the Afrikaans writer appeared to be allowed more scope for criticism of the regime than his English speaking colleague, presumably because the government was reluctant openly to crack down on what was regarded as "a member of the family". But once a certain point had been passed, once the first Afrikaans novel had been banned, the consequence was easy, and predictable. Certain clearly marked stages characterise the process: the first reaction from the authorities, when a white and particularly an Afrikaner writer shows signs of protest and dissent, is paternal concern with a prodigal or recalcitrant son; if this does not help, official organs and publications are used to chastise, berate and hopefully destroy the writer's credibility. He is termed an "outcast" and "an enemy of the people"; and his work is banned; in addition he is denied access to government-con-

trolled media like radio and TV.

Many writers find this a painful experience, as group ties are particularly strong in South Africa and have, in the course of history, acquired the form of mystique characteristic also of, say, Russian and African societies. There is one compensation however, since writers "cast out" in this manner nowadays tend to retain the support and sympathy of a considerably readership, notably in the younger generation.

But this is really only an early stage in the process: what follows, includes the constant interception of one's mail, the tapping of one's telephone and indefatigable scrutiny by the Security Police. In my case this has included the ransacking of my house, detention at an airport to establish whether I was "trying to smuggle copies of my own book out of the country", interrogation, various forms of subtle and overt intimidation, and even, at one stage, the confiscation of my typewriters. (And all these actions, I repeat, are extensions of the same process and system to which censorship also belongs.)

It should be added that, certainly where overt or "simple" censorship is involved, playwrights are hit even harder than other writers. Professional theatre in South Africa is almost wholly subsidised by the State; and the Performing Arts Councils in the provinces find themselves in an extremely vulnerable position. As a result, the emphasis in our theatre is shifting more and more towards "imported" productions of either moneyspinning musicals or "safe" classics. In less than two decades a very promising renaissance in indigenous theatre has almost ground to a halt: playwrighting, after all, is aimed directly at performance; a novel can still be circulated clandestinely.

Clandestinity is precisely one of the important options writers have started considering very seriously. This may take the form of tamishdat, or publication abroad resulting in clandestine importation; or of zamišdat, underground publication, or in various forms of oral distribution which is a practice widely adopted in the black townships. But obviously these are extreme remedies to be resorted to only in the most extreme circumstances, and although writers have reached a stage where they are considering the option, they are understandably reluctant to commit themselves to what may prove a course of no return.

A certain halfway station was marked by the publication of my Droe wit seisoen (1979). After the novel had been turned down by my regular South African publisher solely on the basis of a fear of censorship, it was published secretly by the enterprising Taurus group in Johannesburg, founded after the ban on Kennis van die aand (1978) with the R6 000-odd contributed by the public to defray legal expenses in that trial. Some 2 000 copies of Seisoen were dispatched to subscribers who had bought previous publications from Taurus and by the time the censors pounced the first two editions had been sold out and were enjoying active clandestine circulation. This venture was widely publicised in practically all countries in the West (and even in Russia!), and may have been one of the contributing factors towards what appears to be a change of direction in South African censorship since October 1979.

In conclusion I should like briefly to consider this ostensible change of direction, which coincided with the disappearance of Mr Snyman from the scene.

The first indication of a possible "rethinking" of the Mulder system of

censorship was the "unbanning" of Burger's daughter, a novel which had been branded, hardly three months earlier, as so insidious and so dangerous to the security of the State, that at least one member of the banning committee felt that even possession of it should be prohibited. What made this unbanning more remarkable was that the novel contains the full text of a pamphlet of the Soweto Students Representative Council which remains banned from possession. (This follows the decision of the Appeal Board, in May 1979, after a record "detention without trial" of six months, to allow distribution of my own Rumours of Rain which contains long passages quoted verbatim from Bram Fischer's declaration from the dock - a document which also remains banned and possession of which is a punishable offence. Decisions like these may indicate a change for the better, but at the same time introduces new and bewildering forms of confusion and an utter lack of logic and consistency.

Hard on the heels of the unbanning of Nadine Gordimer's novel, came the unbanning of my Dry white season (1979) and again, this book had been regarded as so dangerous, only two months earlier, that the head of the Security Police announced that steps against me personally were being considered; it was also regarded as so dangerous that I was not allowed to take copies of it out of the country to Britain where it was being published. Yet all of a sudden it became "counterproductive" and innocuous, and because the author was branded as "malicious" and the book as bad, it was given the green light: with the obvious inference that in future only good books by creditable authors would be banned.

In this respect the unbanning of Etienne Leroux's Magersfontein was an even more important indicator: for at last the Board of Appeal seemed to have reached a stage of maturity which made it possible for them to unban a book without slandering the author. Again, however, the issue was clouded by the strong suggestion that the unbanning was more against Mulder than for Leroux.

Still, these decisions would have been unthought of only a year earlier. And for whatever positive value they may have, they are to be commended. However, at least two cautionary factors deserve one's attention:

i) The Act of 1963 caused relatively little trouble while it was interpreted and administered by the late lamented Prof Dekker - but the same Act became a monstrous instrument in the hands of the late unlamented Jannie Kruger. A parallel situation obtains where the Act of 1974 is concerned: administered by Snyman, it became an abomination; administered by Van Rooyen, it has acquired a hint of maturity. This demonstrates all too clearly the untenable nature of censorship in general and our present situation in particular: as long as decisions depend on the views and idiosyncracies of an individual or a small group of individuals, abuse and evil will remain a distinct reality. By the same token, no writer in this country can rest at ease while an instrument of torture devised by those two masters, Connie Mulder and Jimmy Kruger (who were left cold by so many things), remains in force. Only if legislation as such is changed - and preferably abolished outright, as behaves an adult community - will a guarantee of goodwill be demonstrated.

ii. Secondly, even while the short series of unbannings caught the headlines there was a small notice in some newspapers to the effect that Mtutuzeli Matshoba's Call me not a Man (1979) had been banned - a seminal work of the young black generation, which ought to be compulsory reading for all South Africans. In this case the Directorate of Publications, who had been so eager to appeal in the cases of Donerdag of Woensdag (1978), Burger's Daughter and Dry white season did not deem it necessary to submit their case to the secretary of higher authority. And since Matshoba only too understandably, would not appeal himself - very few self-respecting authors would

soil their hands by using the infernal machinery from the Mulder/Kruger era - no one else is allowed to. The implications are sinister. Are exceptions being made of the work of a few white authors with some international standing, some international platform from which they can "talk back"? If this were so, a new definition of obscenity would obtain; and the system, in trying to "contain" some critics, would be even more repulsive than before. Unless every single author in the country, notably young beginners and even more especially black authors, can be assured of a "square deal" there can be no peace of mind for anyone else. The unfreedom of only one author endangers the freedom of all others. And once again the only remedy would be a total overhaul of this monstrous and outdated apparatus, and preferably its relegation to oblivion. Unless the government is prepared to approach this situation sincerely and go to its very roots, not only its attitude towards literature would be suspect, but the integrity of its entire much-publicised "new deal" in politics as well.

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