

projects that have been successful, the models proposed do indeed warrant more serious consideration. Therefore I hope that this publication may encourage many readers, in all fields of education, to give the notions advocated a fair chance, to try out and to experiment with some of the ideas and as such to contribute to the on-going search for creative and humane but also functional and practical models for meaningful transformation in our educational institutions.

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## Breaking Barriers - and Methodological Rules

*Breaking Barriers. Stereotypes and the Changing Values  
in Afrikaans Writing 1875-1990*

by C.N. van der Merwe

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A book such as C.N. van der Merwe's *Breaking Barriers. Stereotypes and the Changing of Values in Afrikaans Writing 1875 - 1990* brings with it a dilemma which periodically surfaces with regard to minority discourses such as Afrikaans literature. One is grateful when anything substantial is published in English on Afrikaans literature, seeing the dearth of such criticism. The problem comes with striking a balance between the two audiences which might benefit from such an undertaking, i.e. 'outsiders' with various degrees of familiarity with Afrikaans literature and the 'in-house' participants, sensitive to all the finer and variously obscure nuances of the discourse. Since the book attempts to address these two audiences, concentrating on one at the expense of the other in a review such as this one would be an injustice to the impulse behind Van der Merwe's study.

Van der Merwe explicitly states that he wrote the study in English to communicate with scholars in other South African literatures, aiming '... to start breaking down the barriers which have existed between students of the

different literatures of South Africa' (p. 13). To this end he focuses on three 'categories' of stereotypes in Afrikaans prose and drama—ethnic, gender, religious—as an alternative approach to what he sees as the 'formalist' bias of Afrikaans literary historiography (p. 10). His study of the changes ethnic, gender and religious stereotypes undergo in the course of the development of Afrikaans literature is thus also an attempt to provide an alternative perspective on Afrikaans literature, which he characterises as a 'story':

The story of Afrikaans literature is one of changing values. The combination of religion, patriarchy and nationalism, so boldly proclaimed in the earliest Afrikaans writings, was tested, nuanced and adapted throughout the years; and ultimately discarded (p. 8).

With regard to ethnic stereotyping Van der Merwe discusses the image of English, Jewish, black and Afrikaans people in Afrikaans literature. He argues '... that views on racial differences gradually change in Afrikaans literature, the prejudices disappear, as a common humanity is discovered' (p. 14). In a similar manner, the depiction of women in Afrikaans literature moves across a number of 'stages' from the veneration of an idealised 'volksmoeder' (p. 50), through more nuanced depictions such as that of Fransina in *Bart Nel* (p. 58), Ana-Paula in *To Die at Sunset* (p. 72), Poppie in *Poppie Nongena* (p. 73), and others, to the 'inversion' of stereotypes in André P. Brink's work and culminating in a rejection of patriarchy by female authors such as Ingrid Jonker, Wilma Stockenström, Jeanne Goosen and Rachelle Greeff. Van der Merwe includes a discussion of the debunking of traditional sexual roles in Afrikaans gay literature such as in certain texts of Jeanne Goosen, Hennie Aucamp, Marlise Joubert and Koos Prinsloo. This part of Van der Merwe's study clearly forms part of an established literary approach, namely 'Imagology' which focuses on images of peoples and groups in literature.

With regard to the 'religious' stereotypes which Van der Merwe discusses under the heading of 'villains and heroes' in Chapter 4, the situation is however less clear. The problem here might be that 'religious' stereotypes, unlike ethnic and gender stereotypes, are relatively rare. It is easy to think of the stereotypical Jew, Afrikaner, woman, and so forth, but the image of the stereotypical Christian, Calvinist, Roman Catholic, comes to mind less easily. What Van der Merwe, in fact, focuses on is not such figures but rather how certain aspects of Christian doctrine are associated with characters in the form of villains and heroes. The study thus edges closer to an ideological analysis, which is also possibly why this part of the study is more stimulating than the rest. This is especially true of the discussion of a 'tension between nationalism and Christian humanism' in

Afrikaans literature (p. 84f) which he speculates could be linked to '... a crisis in the Afrikaner psyche, leading to political reforms in the eighties and especially the early nineties' (p. 85). Here, I think, he touches on an aspect of Afrikaans literature which promises rewarding study.

On the whole, the image of an Afrikaans literature moving from the adherence to and propagation of traditional views and values to a more 'enlightened' position, would accord with the general view that a significant number of Afrikaans literary scholars have of the literature. For scholars from other literatures the study will thus provide some insight into the perspective of Afrikaans scholars—and in addition convey valuable information about a large number of texts, as well as about authors and groups of texts, in addition to information about links between Afrikaner culture and literature. The real value of the study therefore probably lies on a 'pedagogical' level, that is, on a level where it can impinge on the image 'outsiders' have of Afrikaans literature. This approach can play an important role in breaking down any prejudices which might exist by adumbrating the variety and heterogeneity of Afrikaans literary texts. In this respect the study admirably serves the end Van der Merwe envisaged for it.

As a 'serious' literary study, that is, seen from the perspective of Afrikaans scholarship and literary scholarship in general, the study has to be approached much more circumspectly. Good intentions and an abundance of information doesn't guarantee conceptual coherency. In the case of Van der Merwe's study, the good intentions behind the study seems to be undermined by hubris of a special kind. Van der Merwe was seemingly not satisfied to limit his study to the analysis of stereotypes. Instead, he attempted to position his analysis within a much more ambitiously constructed frame, that of 'ideology'.

The basic point of departure on which the study is based is that there is a link between stereotypes and ideology and that the changes which take place in these two spheres are related:

Stereotyping seems to be very common in a time of conflict, uncertainty and transition. Literature then forms part of a struggle, and the stereotypes must support an ideology trying to gain the upper hand. When the conflict is over and stability sets in, the world can be examined from different angles with disinterested curiosity. In Afrikaans literature stereotypes initially support an ideology of Afrikaner nationalism and ultimately supports the breaking down of this ideology; between the beginning and the end we find a time of relative stability (p 44).

Although this theoretical frame seems to be elegantly—even disarmingly—simple, it plays havoc with Van der Merwe's study. The main culprit seems to be the term 'ideology' which brings in its train a number of other,

extremely recalcitrant terms such as 'nationalism', 'calvinism', 'identity', as well as issues such as the relation between the social and the textual. The issues which the use of these terms raise cannot be addressed in a study with the scope of Van der Merwe's. The result is that the complexity accompanying these terms—and their referents—disappear from view. The resulting simplification might be elegant and make for accessible reading—or a gripping 'story'—but it obscures just too much.

One example which might be mentioned is the extended debate which occurred with reference to the 'civil religion' of the Afrikaner in which the representation of the Afrikaner as—amongst other things—a 'chosen people' was criticised (see Du Toit 1983, 1984, 1985<sup>5</sup>). Van der Merwe's discussion of the role played by Calvinism in Afrikaans culture (p. 81), because it takes no note of the debate, reverses time and takes us back to where we were before the debate, resurrecting precisely those views which were convincingly criticised.

The inclusion of the term 'ideology' in the study—and the fact that the problematic(s), developments and current state of the question which accompanies it is not engaged with—creates other problems of which the study appears to have little awareness or method to deal with. Some of the texts which Van der Merwe includes and discusses such as *Di koningin fan Skeba* by S.J. du Toit (p. 83f) and *Die laaste aand* by C.L. Leipoldt (p. 25) actually disproves his hypothesis of a 'cyclic' development of Afrikaans literature because these texts are not 'synchronised' with the rest of Afrikaans literature as represented by Van der Merwe. To circumvent the problem which these texts represent, Van der Merwe characterises the one as being 'ahead of its time' (p. 25) and the other as the product of a 'progressive mentality' (p. 84). The curt explanations which Van der Merwe advances with regard to these anomalous examples are not satisfactory and clearly point to the need for a more nuanced conception of the development of stereotypes and their interrelation with concepts such as 'ideology', 'society', 'identity', 'nationalism', 'calvinism', and others not included in Van der Merwe's view, such as 'capitalism'.

If the inclusion of texts in an imagological frame (as Van der Merwe's study purports to be) which should properly only have been included in an 'ideological frame' (such as the two texts mentioned above) leads to a

<sup>5</sup> See Du Toit's articles: 'No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology' which appeared in *African History Today* 88, 4.920-952; 'Captive to the Nationalist Paradigm: Prof. F.A. van Jaarsveld and the Historical Evidence for the Afrikaner's Ideas on his Calling and Mission' in *South African Historical Journal* 16 49-80; 'Puritans in Africa? Afrikaner "Calvinism" and Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism in Late Nineteenth-Century South Africa' published in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27 209-240.

representation of the development of stereotypes which can only be described as 'muddled', an even more fundamental flaw in the study can be traced to a related problem, namely the procedure by which texts were selected for the study.

Apart from a number of vague statements about the differential value of texts for formalist approaches and sociological approaches such as imagology (pp. 12, 119), Van der Merwe doesn't specify which criteria were used for the selection of the texts discussed. He bluntly states that only 'key texts in the development of stereotyping' (p. 11) were selected for analysis. How did he arrive at his list of 'key texts'? What makes a certain text a key text? What are the criteria according to which a 'key text' can be identified? These are important questions which cannot be glossed over in the manner which this study does.

As the study stands, it would seem that the criteria for selection were relatively random and arbitrary—where Van der Merwe wished to make a particular point, for example that Afrikaans literature had progressive tendencies from its incipience, an ideological criterium sufficed, and where a more general statement about a general tendency had to be made, an imagological or sociological criterium was operationalised.

The vacillation between a purely imagological description and an ideological analysis could arguably have been prevented had Van der Merwe followed a more conventional approach in the construction of the theoretical frame he uses. If he had started with a critical engagement with the basic approach, namely imagology, his ambition to make general statements might have been tempered. Such an engagement might also have contributed to sharpening the focus of the study.

As we have seen above, Van der Merwe's basic thrust is to correlate changes in literary representation with social change, be it as reflection or causation of this change, showing Afrikaans literature to be implicated in processes both of a nationalist struggle and humanistic enlightenment. The linking of textual forms and social reality has always been a highly controversial activity and imagology hasn't escaped criticism in this regard.

One of the most trenchant problematisations of imagology is that of Paul Voestermans (1991:221<sup>6</sup>) who sees in imagology's 'preoccupation with epistemology and ideology' a central conceit, namely that finished products (texts) can be meaningfully related to social reality. Voestermans argues that the 'preoccupation with literacy' which accompanies this conceit disqualifies imagological studies from being taken too seriously. Instead, it

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<sup>6</sup> See his 'Alterity/Identity: A Deficient Image of Culture' which appeared in *Alterity, Identity, Image. Selves and Others in Society and Scholarship* edited by Corbey, Raymond & Joep Leerssen (1991) published by Rodopi, Amsterdam

needs to be supplemented with a perspective which makes room for other factors:

My point is that reflection on 'ourselves' whenever we presume to confront ourselves with 'others' is not just matter solely of texts and critical analyses of discourse. Self-reflection is not solely an epistemological affair, and I do not believe that the fabric from which our dealings with 'other' people are made will be properly elucidated that way (Voestermans 1991:222)

A critical engagement with the problematic as Voestermans sets it out could have benefited Van der Merwe's study, and would have tempered the tendency to generalisation in the study, which is one of the functions critical theoretical engagement is supposed to fulfil.

But maybe one should also not be too critical of Van der Merwe, seeing his study in context. Afrikaans literary scholarship is still struggling to free itself from the grip of formalism, a painful process for most (aesthetically inclined) literary scholars. Just at this level a lot of opposition still exists with regard to sociologically orientated study, and if Van der Merwe's study helps to break this barrier, it would have served its purpose, despite its shortcomings.

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## Introducing Literature Criticism and Theory

*An Introduction to Literature Criticism and Theory:  
Key Critical Concepts*

by Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle

London, Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995, 238 pp

ISBN: 0-13-355215-2

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This text has been prescribed for the first time for the English I students at the University of Durban-Westville as their text for the literary theory part of their course. It is a very different text from the usual introductions to literary