

also oral in origin and thus may not have been recorded accurately or may express imagery far beyond their superficial nature. These matters are not addressed by Laband in the book and indeed he has unquestioningly made use of such sources. Thus the reader not familiar with the debates may come to regard them as unconditionally reliable.

The inclusion of such issues need not be problematic, however. Laband does manage to include perspectives of the *Mfecane*—the early nineteenth century changes or upheavals in Southern Africa—for example. Assessments of this issue have differed greatly and Laband considers all of these (pp. 13-16).

*Rope of Sand* also tends to focus on 'great men' and 'great events' and thus the Zulu kingdom appears remarkable, never ordinary. There is very little about the life of the 'ordinary' nineteenth century Zulu.

Nevertheless, it can only be said that these sorts of problems are outweighed by the attempt Laband has made to create a coherent narrative, faithful to reality (p. xi). *Rope of Sand* is well written and well researched and accordingly the contribution it makes to KwaZulu Natal's history in the nineteenth century is considerable.

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## **The Construction of Afrikaner Nationalist Identity**

*Constructs of Identity and Difference in South African Literature*

by Johan van Wyk

Durban-Westville: CSSALL, 1995, 122 pp.

ISBN 0 947445 26 9

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In this first number of the CSSALL's 'Re-thinking South African Literature Series' the focus of Johan van Wyk is mainly on the construction of Afrikaner nationalist identity by means of some early Afrikaans texts. His 're-thinking' of these texts is done in terms of some constructs borrowed

from Marx, Freud, Saussure, Vološinov, Lacan, Derrida and others. His plying of these constructs and their application to his target texts generate some stimulating insights pertaining to the discursive constitution of Afrikaner Nationalism.

The book opens with a theoretical chapter in which Psychoanalysis, Marxism and Semiology are brought into an overlapping relation in terms of the constructs of identity (Lacan), sign (Saussure) and value (Vološinov & Marx). The splicing of these concepts results in three valuable insights which need to be further developed: 1) nationalism is seen as a symbolic structure which is based on an imaginary (iconic) form of identification; 2) class consciousness is perceived as indexical because it is motivated by a cause-and-effect continuum<sup>14</sup>; and 3) the insight that the *material* basis of all signification, value and identification is the productive human body.

In the second chapter Van Wyk links up class struggle and class identity with Freud's Oedipal complex as the unconscious layer of H A Fagan's petit-bourgeois drama *Die nuwe wêreld* (1947). He convincingly shows how the ideological *and* the psychological undercurrents of this play find expression in the portrayal of character and events, in the decor, the tensions and conflicts, the forms of address and even in the list of characters. This chapter is proof of the insight enhancing fruitfulness of bringing together aspects of Marxism and Psychoanalysis.

The section 'Slave and Worker' in the third chapter is probably the least satisfactory one in the book. In it Van Wyk attempts to articulate a relation between 'slave' and 'worker' in terms of self-consciousness. The reductive binary opposition he sets up between the worker as being conscious of an inner self in contrast to the absence of such a consciousness in the slave is, to say the least, highly debatable. This section should be rethought. Hegel's discourse on the master-slave relation and Lacan's version of it could contribute to such a rethinking. The supposed link between the above-named section and the main section of this chapter, 'The Worker', is also all but clear. Here Van Wyk indicates the historic relation between emergent capitalism and the production of a nationalist versus a worker poetics in Afrikaans from approximately 1860 to 1948.

In the next chapter Van Wyk explores from a Freudian point of view the psyche of the Afrikaner nationalist as it manifests itself in two plays of J. F.W. Grosskopf, *Legende* (1942) and *Padbrekers* (1947). He grounds his excellent analysis on Freud's explanatory myth of the murder of the primal father by his sons and their subsequent guilt feelings as the psychic structure

<sup>14</sup> One would have liked a discussion of Charles Sanders Peirce's typology of signs (symbol, index, icon) here. A more thorough application of this typology could have deepened these insights.

underlying Afrikaner and other nationalisms. It is identification with the image of this father which lays the 'Foundation of the Nationalist Conscience' and its sublatory ideological and metaphysical discourses. This chapter, arguably the most outstanding in the book, demonstrates the value of a psychoanalytic approach to the rethinking of literature and ideology.

In the rather loosely constructed fifth chapter, 'Social Concerns in Afrikaans Drama in the Period 1930-1940', racism, family conflict and the problem of 'the poor whites' for Afrikaner nationalism are addressed. Probably the most important insight gained by this chapter is that most of the plays of this period were written from outside the reality of the poor whites themselves, that is, they were written from the perspective of the nationalist petit-bourgeoisie. To them the poor whites, as an upcoming class open to racial hybridisation, seemed a threat to Afrikaner unity and purity. They were therefore experienced as the potentially dangerous Other, the difference that had to be 'returned to the same of the nation'. Consequently the sympathy towards the poor white characters present in most of these plays was motivated not so much by altruism as by nationalism.

Using the constructs of identity and difference, chapter eight explores the role printed language played in the discursive formation of Afrikaner and African nationalisms. Van Wyk substantiates his stimulating argument rather well by drawing on the history of printing presses at missions, the publishing activities of the *Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners*, ethnographic texts, Olive Schreiner's *Thoughts on South Africa*, Erasmus Smit's *Diary*, N.P. Van Wyk Louw's *Die Dieper Reg* and H.I.E. Dhlomo's *Dingane*. The discursive strategies of these texts—stereotyping, essentialising and the construction of sovereignty and subjectivity—reveal the correspondence and difference between these two nationalisms.

Structurally the last chapter of the book links up with some of the themes of the first chapter thereby establishing a frame within which the other chapters could be read. Here we find a return to some of the theoretical aspects of Saussure and Lacan explicated in chapter one, but now more practically applied. Some of the ideas of Derrida are also used here. The main theme of this chapter is the relation between the construction of Afrikaner nationalist identity and the printed Afrikaans word. The historical development of this relation is traced broadly from approximately 1875 to 1940. The application to this history of Saussure's distinction between the material and value aspects of the sign and Lacan's diachronic perspective on the unconscious make for fascinating reading, so much so that one would have liked more of it. It is therefore a pity that the last section dealing with the printed word as frame of reference derails somewhat on a rather eschewed interpretation of Derrida's conception of logocentrism: Derrida does not see the written/printed word as logocentric. On the contrary, to him

it is the metaphysication of the *spoken* word in Western philosophic discourse that constitutes logocentrism: in this discourse the spoken word is privileged as more essential, more true, more original, more logos, more real and present than the printed/written word which is relegated to the rank of mere supplement to it. Because this supplement is divorced from its supposed origin (the *presence* of the spoken word being uttered by a speaking subject present to his/her own meaning within a concrete immediate context) it is open to an endless process of deferment, displacement and misplacement. As such it becomes the dangerous supplement representing the *absence* of logocentric meaning. Within this context Derrida's phrase 'metaphysics of phonetic writing' refers to the privileging of this type of writing by logocentric thinking *because of it supposedly being nearer to speech* than other types of writing. Nonetheless, it remains a suspect supplement. A re-reading of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, especially the second part on Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and his *Positions* should be clarifying in this respect. That nationalism uses *both* the spoken and written word to establish logocentric notions such as unity, centre, essence, essential nature, origin, race, purity of blood, the same, the own, the God-inspired leader, the equivalence of language, culture and nation, the uniqueness of nationality, etc. is of course true.

Some final remarks: One feels that Van Wyk—given his use of Marxist ideas in this book—should have given much more space to one of the prime historical forces behind the formation of Afrikaner nationalism up to 1948, namely British imperialism. However, to a certain extent Jean-Philippe Wade's excellent introduction does compensate for the backstaging (repression?) of the role of British colonialism in the constitution of early Afrikaner nationalism.

The most striking aspect of Van Wyk's book is his flair for linking up constructs from a variety of discourses and then putting them to work on specific texts generating stimulating insights which just beg to be further researched. In this way he makes a valuable contribution to the deconstruction of Afrikaner nationalist discourse. This is a book worth reading.

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