



Hein Willemse Redaksioneel

*Tydskrif vir Letterkunde:*  
'n Aaneenlopende rekord van 75 jaar

Toe die stigters van die Afrikaanse Skrywerskring hul stigtingsvergadering in September 1934 in Johannesburg byeengeroep het, was die Bybel pas die vorige jaar volledig in Afrikaans beskikbaar gestel en die Afrikaanse letterkunde was in sy kinder-skoeene. Die romanskrywers Jochem van Bruggen, D. F. Malherbe, die Hobsons en C. J. Langenhoven was besonder gewild. Die bekendste digters was Totius, A. G. Visser en C. M. van den Heever en 'n debutant, die 21-jarige W. E. G. Louw, het in die loop van daardie jaar met *Die ryke dwaas* 'n pertinent individualistiese stroming in die Afrikaanse poësie aangekondig. In 1936, die oprigtingsjaar van die *Jaarboek van die Afrikaanse Skrywerskring*, die voorloper van *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, het Suid-Afrika soos die res van die wêreld steeds die slegte nagevolge van die groot depressie gevoel met derduisende plattelanders wat na stede gestroom het. Die Wet op die Verteenwoordiging van Inboorlinge, Wet 16 van 1936, is ook in daardie jaar gepromulgeer en die stemreg van swart mense in die Kaapprovinsie is ingekort – 'n voorspel tot 'n politieke en ekonomiese bestel wat die res van die 20ste eeu in Suid-Afrika sou oorheers.

Uit die vroegste uitgawes van die *Jaarboek* is dit duidelik dat die tydskrif opgerig is om as barometer te dien vir 'n ontlukende letterkunde: die koestering van literêre voorlopers, die optekening van letterkundige wetenskaplike waardighede, die vestiging van internasionale bande, die publikasie van jong skrywers en die ontwikkeling van 'n toepaslike kritiese diskoers. Die rol wat die *Jaarboek* en *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* die afgelope 75 jaar in die Afrikaanse letterkunde gespeel het, kan nie oorskat word nie. Die blad bied 'n aaneenlopende rekord van ingesteldhede vanaf die vroeë Afrikaanse letterkunde en die verweefdheid van 'n veranderende sosiale omgewing met die veranderende ingesteldhede van skrywers en literatore.

Oor die gang van 'n driekwart eeu het elkeen van die vorige vyf redakteurs – C. M. van den Heever (1936–57), Abel J. Coetzee (1957–66), Coenie Rudolph (1966–72), Elize Botha (1973–91) en Henning J. Pieterse (1992–2002) – sy of haar stempel op *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* afgedruk. Wat vir een geslag van nasionale of letterkundige belang was, was vir 'n volgende een verdag; wat vir een geslag prestasie en bereiking was, was vir 'n daaropvolgende geslag onhoudbare eenselwigheid; wat ook al 'n mens se persoonlike siening *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* staan as getuie van die arbeid van hierdie

voorgangers. In die loop van sy bestaan het ander letterkundige tydskrifte gekom en gegaan, maar *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* is deurlopend gepubliseer, dikwels met betreklik skrapse finansiële middele, maar altyd met die ywer van die onderskeie redakteurs en hul redaksies. Dit is ook die regte plek om hulde te bring aan die borge en adverteerders wat *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* oor soveel dekades ondersteun het. Vandag maak hoofsaaklik outeursbladgelde die uitgee van die blad moontlik. Ons is daarom baie dank verskuldig aan elke navorsers wat hierin publiseer, want dit is hulle navorsings- en geldelike bydrae wat die blad se voortbestaan verseker.

Vandag sien *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* anders daaruit as wat die oprigters in gedagte gehad het. Sedert 2003 is die blad omvorm tot 'n "Tydskrif vir Afrika-letterkunde". Hierdie visie maak dit vir ons moontlik om mee te doen aan die beskrywing, teoretisering en ontleding van Afrika-letterkundes en kulturele praktyke. In 1936, net meer as vier dekades na die Berlyn-konferensie waartydens Afrika onder verskeie Europese moondhede verdeel is, het die begrip "Afrika-letterkunde" nog nie bestaan nie. Trouens Joseph Conrad se *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Edgar Rice Burroughs se *Tarzan's Quest* (1936) en die rolprent *Darkest Africa* (1936), net soos S. J. du Toit se *Di Koningin van Skeba* (1898) het koloniale perspektiewe oor die kontinent verder verdiep en selfs meegehelp om dit te vestig en te versprei. Die oprigters van die *Jaarboek* was mans van hul tyd wat uitsluitlik op die onmiddellike eise en behoeftes van 'n ontluikende taal en letterkunde gekonsentreer het. Hulle sou min vanselfsprekende gemeenskaplikheid met landgenote soos Sol Plaatje en sy outobiografiese protesgeskrif, *Native Life in South Africa* (1914) óf sy roman *Mhudi* (1930) óf R. R. R. Dhlomo met sy *African Tragedy* (1928) óf Thomas Mofolo van die Basoetolandse protektoraat met sy *Chaka* (1925) gehad het. Nog minder kan 'n mens verwag dat hulle verwantskap moes betuig met die bekende pan-Afrikanis van die Britse Goue Kus (vandag: Ghana), Joseph E. Casely-Hayford, die skrywer van *Ethiopians Unbound* (1911), wat die ontplooiing van 'n Afrika-gerigte skoolleerplan en universiteit voorgestaan het.

Vir die grootste deel van sy bestaan was *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 'n Afrikaanse letterkundige tydskrif gemik op plaaslike behoeftes; vandag het dit daardie visie ontgroe. Vandag word dit as akademiese tydskrif hoog aangeslaan en op van die vernaamste internasionale navorsingsindekse opgeneem. Naas Afrikaans verskyn navorsingsartikels sedert 2003 ook in Engels, Frans en Nederlands, en ons bydraers kom uit verskillende wêrelddele soos hierdie gedenkuitgawe getuig. Artikels en spesiale uitgawes bied ons sedertdien verbluffende insigte op die rykdom van ons eietydse kontinentale omgewing. Om oop te staan vir die kontinent, sy mense, tradisies, kulturele praktyke en tale verryk ons almal of soos 'n voormalige adviesraadslid van *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, Es'kia Mphahlele (2002: 10), dit gestel het: "When we know who we are as South Africans and where we are going, which we hope will lead to a clear sense of our relationship with the rest of Africa – real and ideal – we can move toward universal humanism."

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Soos in die verlede staar sensuur en publikasiebeheer Suid-Afrikaanse koerante, insluitende akademiese media, joernaliste en skrywers in die gesig. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* spreek hom onomwonde uit teen enige maatreël wat ons vryheid van spraak aan bande lê. Alhoewel ons toegee dat die regering ter wille van nasionale veiligheid inligting moet kan klassifiseer of, om die eufemismes van die Wetsontwerp op die Beskerming van Inligting te gebruik, “sensitiewe” of “kosbare” kategorieë inligting moet kan skep, is ons grondig gekant teen enige vorm van publikasiebeheer wat die wese van ons demokrasie aantast. Die voorgestelde wetsontwerp gaan ons brose demokrasie oneindige skade berokken, omdat die rede vir die wetsontwerp eerstens onduidelik is en tweedens vermoedelik verband hou met die drukmedia se uitwys van wanpraktyke in die verlede wat die regering in die verleentheid gestel het. Die oordadige geheimhouding wat die wetsontwerp voorstaan, herinner aan die apartheidstaat, terselfdertyd is dit teen die aard van ’n oop en deursigtige demokrasie – ’n demokrasie waarvoor talle hulle lewens opgeoffer het.

Die instel van ’n media-appéltribunaal is kennelik ’n poging van die huidige regering om toesig oor die pers, joernaliste en publikasies te verkry. In ’n demokrasie is dit ’n onding. Die uitgangspunt wat ons voorstaan, is dat vryheid van denke, spraak en inligting die verstekopsies is. Afwykings hiervan moet slegs by hoogste uitsondering toegelaat word. Hierdie voorgestelde wetgewing gaan op die lange duur skrywers en navorsers se reg van onbelemmerde toegang tot inligting en, met ’n maksimale strafmaatreël van 25 jaar gevangenisstraf, hul vryheid van spraak beïnvloed. Laat ons sonder om doekies om te draai, sê: Ons eis die reg om te weet; ons wil nie hierdie Wetsontwerp op die Beskerming van Inligting of die daarstelling van ’n media-appéltribunaal hê nie. *Phantsi!*

Wanneer ons sê wat ons sê ten opsigte van voorgestelde wetgewing in Suid-Afrika kan ons ook nie nalaat om ons te beywer vir optimale inligtings- en spraakvryheid in die res van Afrika en die Diaspora nie. In byna die helfte van Afrika-lande is persvryheid beperk en ons weet, waar hierdie basiese vryheid beperk word, gedy menseregvergrype. Volgens algemene opvatting is daar in state soos Angola, Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire, Djiboeti, DRK, Ekwatoriale Guineë, Eritrea, Ethiopië, Gaboen, Gambië, Kameroen, Madagaskar, Rwanda, Sentraal-Afrika Republiek, Soedan, Somalië, Swaziland, Togo, Tsjad, Zambië en Zimbabwe nie werklik sprake van persvryheid nie. Laat ons dit luidkeels verkondig: Dié beperkings ondermyn ons potensiaal as Afrikane en ons opkomende demokrasieë. Slegs ’n handjievol lande soos Ghana, Kaap Verde, Mali, Mauritius en São Tomé en Príncipe kan enigsins daarop roem dat hul burgers spraakvryheid op vlakke hoër as gemiddeld geniet. Ons verbind ons ook tot die grootste mate van burgerlike vryheid in die res van ons kontinent, want ons

fundamentele vryhede is die wese van durende demokrasieë; en dit moet onderhandelbaar wees.

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**Verwysing**

Mphahlele, Es'kia. 2002. Alternative Institutions for Education for Africans in South Africa – 1990. In Es'kia Mphahlele, *Es'kia*. Kaapstad: Kwela Boeke in medewerking met Stainbank & Associates, 3–14.



Hein Willemse

Editorial

*Tydskrif vir Letterkunde:*

A continuous record of 75 years

When the founders of the Afrikaanse Skrywerskring (Afrikaans Writers' Circle) held their founding meeting in Johannesburg on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1934, the complete Afrikaans translation of the Bible was only published the previous year and Afrikaans Literature was in its infancy. At the time the novelists Jochem van Bruggen, D. F. Malherbe, the Hobsons and C. J. Langenhoven were particularly popular. The best-known poets were Totius, A. G. Visser and C. M. van den Heever and earlier that year a debutant, the 21-year old W. E. G. Louw, introduced with *Die ryke dwaas* (The Rich Fool) an obviously individualist tendency to Afrikaans poetry. In 1936, the founding year of *Jaarboek van die Afrikaanse Skrywerskring* (Yearbook of the Afrikaans Writers' Circle), the forerunner of *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* (Journal for Literature), South Africa, like much of the rest of the world, experienced the dire consequences of the Great Depression with thousands of people migrating from the rural areas to the cities. The Representation of Natives Act, Act 16 of 1936, was promulgated in that year, restricting the franchise of black people in the Cape Province – a prelude to a political and economic dispensation in South Africa that would dominate the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

From the earliest issues of *Jaarboek* it was clear that the journal was to serve as a barometer of an emerging literature: cherishing literary ancestors, recording literary happenings, fostering international linkages, publishing young writers and developing an appropriate critical discourse. The place of *Jaarboek* and *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* in the past 75 years can hardly be underestimated. The journal gives us a continuous record of early Afrikaans Literature onwards and its connectedness to an ever-changing social environment as well as the changing attitudes of writers and literary critics.

In the preceding three-quarters of a century each of the five previous editors – C. M. van den Heever (1936–57), Abel J. Coetzee (1957–66), Coenie Rudolph (1966–72), Elize Botha (1973–91), and Henning J. Pieterse (1992–2002) – has left his or her imprint on *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*. What amounted to national or literary importance for one generation may have been suspect for a subsequent one; what was for one generation a sign of achievement, may have been insufferable onesidedness for another; whatever

one's personal views *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* has been built with the toil of those who have gone before. Throughout the time of its existence several other South African literary journals had been established with much promise only to flounder a few issues later. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* continued to be published, mostly with little secure financial backing; although always produced with diligence by successive editors and editorial committees. This is the appropriate time to thank the sponsors and advertisers who have supported *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* over all these decades. Today, mainly authors' page fees fund it. We therefore thank every researcher who publishes in the journal, for it is their research and financial contributions that ensure its continued existence.

*Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* may today appear somewhat different from what was initially envisaged. Since 2003 the journal was transformed into "A Journal for African Literature". This vision enables us to participate in the description, theorization and analysis of African literatures and cultural practices. In 1936, only four decades following the Berlin Conference where Africa was divided among several European powers, the concept "African Literature" did not yet exist. Indeed, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan's Quest* (1936) and the film *Darkest Africa* (1936), along with S. J. du Toit's *Di Koningin van Skeba* (The Queen of Sheba, 1898), deepened and even contributed to the establishment and distribution of colonialist perspectives on the Continent. The founders of *Jaarboek* were men of their age who, to the exclusion of everything else, focused on the immediate demands and needs of an emerging language and literature. They would have felt little obvious commonality with compatriots like Sol Plaatje and his autobiographical protest publication, *Native Life in South Africa* (1914) or his novel *Mhudi* (1930) or R. R. R. Dhlomo with his *African Tragedy* (1928) or Thomas Mofolo from the Basotholand Protectorate with his *Chaka* (1925). Neither would we have expected them to express kinship with the well-known Pan-Africanist from the British Gold Coast (today: Ghana), Joseph E. Casely-Hayford, the writer of *Ethiopians Unbound* (1911), who propagated the development of an African-based school curriculum and university.

For the greater part of its existence *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* was positioned as an Afrikaans literary journal catering for local needs; today it has outgrown that initial vision. It is today a widely recognized academic journal indexed in some of the more significant international research indices and it draws its contributors from across the world as this anniversary issue testifies. Since 2003, research articles are published, besides Afrikaans, also in Dutch, English and French. Articles and special issues have provided us, ever since the change in vision, with amazing views of the riches of our contemporary continental environment. To be open to the continent, its people, traditions, cultural practices and languages enrich us all, or as a former member of the advisory council of *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, Es'kia Mphahlele (2002: 10), once said: "When we know who we are as South Africans and where we are going, which we

hope will lead to a clear sense of our relationship with the rest of Africa – real and ideal – we can move toward universal humanism.”

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As in the past, South African newspapers, including the academic media, journalists and writers face imminent publication control. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* unequivocally expresses itself against any regulation that restricts our freedom of expression. While we agree that the government should be permitted to classify information or, to use the euphemisms of the Protection of Information Bill, to categorise information as “sensitive” or “valuable”, we are emphatically opposed to any form of publication control that would erode the essence of our democracy. The proposed bill will cause tremendous damage to our fragile democracy since, firstly, the reason for its implementation is unclear and, secondly, there seems to be a connection between it and the print media exposures of maladministration in the past that have embarrassed the government. The emphasis on excessive secrecy reminds one of the apartheid state; at the same time it is against the spirit of an open and transparent democracy – a democracy for which many have sacrificed their lives.

The envisaged media appeals tribunal is obviously an attempt by the current government to gain oversight of the media, journalists and publications. We cannot allow this in a democracy. Our point of departure is that the right to freedom of thought, expression and information should be the default option. Only with the strictest exception should exclusions be allowed. In the long run, the proposed legislation will influence the right of journalists and researchers to access information and the maximum penalty of 25 years in prison for transgressors will certainly limit their freedom of speech. Let us say it bluntly: We demand the right to know; we do not want this Protection of Information Bill or the establishment of the media appeals tribunal. *Phantsi!*

When we say what we are saying with respect to the proposed legislation in South Africa we should not forget to strive for the optimal freedom of information and speech across the Africa continent and the Diaspora. In more than half of the countries on the continent press freedom is significantly restricted, and we know that where this basic right is constrained, human right abuses thrive. It is well known that media freedom does not really exist in countries such as Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central-African Republic, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Madagascar, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Let us therefore proclaim it loudly: these restrictions subvert our potential as Africans and our fledgling democracies. Only a handful of countries such as Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali, Mauritius and São Tomé and Príncipe have established societies where their citizens have higher than average

standards of freedom of speech. We commit ourselves to the greatest possible levels of civil freedoms on our continent for it is clear that the protection of our fundamental freedoms is the lifeblood of enduring democracies; and those freedoms must be non-negotiable.

*16 June 2011*

**Reference**

Mphahlele, Es'kia. 2002. Alternative Institutions for Education for Africans in South Africa – 1990. In Es'kia Mphahlele, *Es'kia*. Kaapstad: Kwela Books in association with Stainbank & Associates, 3–14.