

A HISTORY OF APARTHEID CENSORSHIP THROUGH THE ARCHIVE

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Abstract

Over the course of 26 years, and using 97 different definitions of what the system considered to be “undesirable,” South Africa’s apartheid-era censors prevented a vast array of literature from being freely circulated in South Africa. The official and symbolic power that they wielded as the gatekeepers of literature seemed almost unmatched, and the system is still discussed today as one of the most comprehensive the world has seen. The history of apartheid censorship has been told using a variety of approaches, focusing on prominent, legislature-defining cases, on experiences of writers or readers affected, or by discussing it as part of a wider system of suppression. This thesis offers another way to understand the system and its corrosive, ongoing effects: a history which foregrounds the censorship archive itself. The archive is inconvenient, banal, strange, and challenging, containing an extraordinary profusion of documents which seem to serve no clear administrative purpose.

The censors left behind a vast body of material relating to their activities, amounting to over a hundred linear metres” worth of documents: dense reports on “subversive” novels; equally detailed reports on throwaway pulp detective thrillers, erotic mysteries, apparently forgettable works of mass-market fiction; letters from members of the public; letters between censors arguing fiercely over the literary merits of a novel; letters from state officials; newspaper reports, book jackets, and other archival ephemera. Histories of the system tend to centre on spectacular cases or moments, which means overlooking the vast majority of what the archive contains, and thus perhaps misrepresenting the nature of the censors’ daily activities. For every report justifying the banning (or passing) of a significant protest novel, there are a hundred reports on works of no literary or political significance whatsoever.

An analysis of the paperwork produced by the system reveals fascinating contradictions, conflicts, clashes between high-minded notions of the literary and base ideas of the function of art in apartheid South Africa. We can understand the excess and profound waste of intellectual energy that the archive represents if we view it as the product of a system’s struggle to politicise literature while stripping it of all references to contemporary politics, to conflate taste with morality, to define without consensus what literature meant.

This thesis will show how these codes and reading strategies developed, examining the complicated connections between censorship, canonisation, validation, and criticism that the censors created. It is reassuring to think that censorship in South Africa ended with the banning

of *The Satanic Verses* in 1989, but immersion in the archive shows how far-reaching and long-lasting its effects are. The literary infrastructure the censors helped to create has not been erased out of existence; their definitions of the literary and the laws of what can be said are repeated in official and unofficial ways. Questions over who “owns” the space of the literary, over who *should* own it, over who has the ability (or even the right) to critique it, continue to reverberate today

Finally, by exploring the ways in which the system was embedded within wider public and bureaucratic culture, this thesis offers a means of viewing contemporary debates around freedom of speech in South Africa. The recent furore provoked by the state’s attempts to suppress Jacques Pauw’s *The President’s Keepers: Those Keeping Zuma in Power and Out of Prison* reveals how fraught these debates continue to be, and this thesis shows how we may understand them in the context of what has come before.

Immersion in the archive – a commitment to analysis of that which is unwieldy and apparently irrelevant – yields insight of great contemporary value, enriching our understanding of apartheid censorship and its poisonous legacy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 A History of Apartheid Censorship Through the Archive

The Western Cape Archives and Records Service is located on Roeland Street, in the centre of Cape Town. It contains public and non-public records considered to be of enduring relevance to the history of the Western Cape and its inhabitants, dating as far back as 1651. In total, its holdings comprise about 40 000 linear metres worth of archival material, including records from government departments, schools, hospitals, photographic collections, slave records, microfilms, and maps. Included in these holdings are the documents related to the activities of the apartheid censorship bureaucracy. A significant portion of the censorship records is held three floors below ground level, in the far corner of a dusty room filled with shelves stacked with brown manila boxes. These records begin in about 1955, and end in 1970, a period during which the apartheid censors banned 11 000 books. Other records are held in outbuildings. In total, records relating to the activities of the apartheid censors make up just over a 100 linear metres of documents.

Over the course of 26 years, and using 97 different definitions of what the system considered to be “undesirable,” the censors prevented a vast array of literature from being freely circulated in South Africa. The symbolic and official power that they wielded as the gatekeepers of literature seemed almost unmatched, and the system is still discussed today as one of the most comprehensive the world has seen, a momentous project of social engineering.

The history of apartheid censorship is filled with spectacular, high-profile cases which attracted both local and international attention. The banning, for instance, of Nadine Gordimer’s *Burger’s Daughter* in 1979 resulted in such widespread condemnation and international pressure that the book was unbanned three months later. Anti-censorship campaigns equated the banning of anti-apartheid works to the imprisonment of anti-apartheid activists, and elevated the status of banned writers to heroic levels. Campaigns and criticisms of censorship also emphasised the absurdity and futility of the system, and the supposed stupidity of those tasked with carrying it out. For instance, the banning of Thomas Hardy’s *Return of the Native* and Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* on the basis of their “dangerous” titles resulted in derision and scorn, confirming the widely held view of the censors as stupid, bigoted pen-pushers. Highly publicised cases of this kind formed part of an attractive narrative in which art inevitably triumphs over violently philistine repression, and they have naturally informed our understanding of apartheid

censorship. However, there are countless other stories in the censorship archive, narratives which are less frequently aired and which complicate the attractive notion that art will always triumph over censorship. The apartheid censors left a considerable trail of their activities – they produced and retained detailed reports on every text they banned, leaving an enormous archive behind them. However, the story of apartheid censorship is often told without recourse to that unwieldy and inconvenient collection of documents. Much archival work on the subject remains an extractive enterprise, centring on illuminating documents or exemplary cases, and forgoing discussion or description of the vast collection of documents from which these exemplary cases are drawn. In the chapters that follow, this study will show that a history of apartheid censorship which foregrounds the compromised and peculiar nature of the censorship archive can provide a deeper and more thorough understanding of the system and its consequences.

Censorship attempts to protect society from the “harmful” or undesirable text. The apartheid censors’ reports repeatedly reveal a conviction that “undesirability” within a text was not limited to obscene or subversive elements; the badly-written book was also seen to represent a threat. As subsequent chapters will show, the censors attempted to devise a set of rules to eradicate or manage that threat, and create a system of aesthetic judgement which nestled uneasily within the guidelines provided by legislation. The application of these official and unofficial rules can be seen as an attempt to forcibly engineer the codes of a culture. As Peter D. McDonald has demonstrated in his comprehensive account of the apartheid censorship system, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences*, the censors had an unwavering belief in “their own authority as guardians of culture.”¹ They strove to give what they perceived to be “literature” the status of a protected species, placing it in a realm distinct from contemporary politics. In “That Monstrous Thing: The Censor as Critic in Apartheid South Africa,” McDonald notes that they derived this so-called intellectual authority from “a robustly theoretical knowledge [which] was the means not just of identifying literature but of protecting it from the censorship system, and thereby of ministering to the mental health of the nation.”²

We can use the archive to deepen our understanding of the censors’ role in defining a South African literary tradition, and look at how those ideas filtered into the public domain, how opposition to those ideas created another kind of orthodoxy, and how these effects still linger.

¹ Peter McDonald, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 380.

² Peter McDonald, “That Monstrous Thing’: The Critic as Censor in Apartheid South Africa,” in *Censorship and the Limits of the Literary: A Global View*, ed. Nicole Moore (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 127.

The “threat or spur of censorship”³ (or what Jonathan Abel describes as censorship’s “literary promise”⁴) has shaped the South African literary landscape in countless ways, and the archive is an invaluable resource in tracing the development and effects of this shaping. For instance, a key area of focus in what follows is the uncomfortable link between censorship and canonisation. What role did the censors play in the canonisation of high-profile banned writers such as Nadine Gordimer? What links can we make between the torchbearers of South Africa’s liberal-literary tradition and the censors’ role as guardians of culture? Their respective roles as gatekeepers of a literary tradition overlap and interact in curious ways, and it is important to interrogate the consequences of this. Exploring the archive is a means of tracing an intellectual genealogy; looking at the censors’ attempts to establish consensus on ideas of “literariness” offers a way of studying the development and politics of a culture’s literary sensibility.

It further offers insight into the role that censorship had to play in the creation and administering of the apartheid regime. The censors frequently attempted to position themselves as somehow “apart,” at least during the first decade of their operations. Their attempt to quarantine literature as something untouched and unaffected by contemporary politics is similar to their attempt to present themselves as an administrative body that was part of the apartheid bureaucratic system, but not of it. On the contrary, they were deeply embedded within the system, and the role they played in shaping South African literature was a crucial part of the apartheid state’s violent, racist nationalistic vision. Analysis of material in the archive exposes the extent of this embeddedness, and shows how necessary the censors’ role was perceived to be. It undermines other apartheid-era myths as well. Apartheid censorship is often remembered today as an efficient, if sprawling, system, one which spared no bureaucratic resources in classifying and banning a vast array of textual materials. Discussions of the censorship system, both contemporary and current, are often in accordance with wider underlying narratives about the apartheid state: while its brutality and violence are acknowledged, the belief that it was efficient persists. An analysis of the censorship archive in all its chaos and redundancy can help to dismantle that destructive and recurring myth.

While the records of the apartheid censors may seem relatively insignificant in comparison to police archives, prison archives, and the other technologies of state terror which facilitated the functioning of apartheid, they are important because they are vivid and material evidence of a

³ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 308.

⁴ Jonathan Abel, *Redacted: The Archives of Censorship in Transwar Japan* (Davis: University of California Press, 2012), 4.

different kind of violence: a violence of small, ugly, intrusive pettiness. There must be a place for such narratives, in order to expose the banal absurdities with which the censors were daily preoccupied. The apartheid censorship archive is inconvenient, banal, strange, and difficult to deal with, containing an extraordinary profusion of documents which seem to serve no clear administrative purpose. We can understand this excess and profound waste of intellectual energy if we view it as the product of a system's struggle to politicise literature while stripping it of all references to contemporary politics, to conflate taste with morality, and to define without consensus what literature meant. An analysis of the paperwork produced by the system reveals fascinating contradictions, conflicts, clashes between high-minded notions of the literary and base ideas of the function of art in apartheid South Africa, resulting in apparently incomprehensible bureaucratic excess. Like all archives, the censorship archive was both an effect of a system and a cause of it. As Abel argues, "the many archives of censorship...can never tell the complete story. But they do provide the ground upon which understanding of the full extent of the censor's effects may be built."⁵ Any understanding of apartheid censorship and its consequences is incomplete without an interrogation of the archive that it produced, and which sustained it.

1.2 A Brief Overview of Apartheid Censorship

The second chapter will provide an in-depth discussion of censorship legislation and the other bureaucratic tools which the censors used to perform their duties, exploring the structure and intent of the 1963 and the 1974 Publications and Entertainments Acts, as well as a 1978 amendment. The archive reveals a complex and contradictory system, where different and sometimes contradictory sets of rules were at play. The censors were adhering to the rules imposed on them by legislation, but they were also attempting to establish and maintain a set of guidelines of their own. Prior to an in-depth analysis of these official rules and unofficial strategies, an overall view of the system is the first step in unravelling these complexities.

Censorship in South Africa predates the rise to power of the National Party in 1948 and the implementation of apartheid. The first statutory Board of Censors was established in 1931 under the Entertainments (Censorship) Act, and covered film, art, theatre, and imported books and periodicals.⁶ No statutory provision was made for the control of texts produced locally, the

⁵ Abel, *Redacted*, 3.

⁶ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 21.

management of which fell under provincial legislation and the common law.⁷ Official concern as regards circulation of texts was focused mainly on monitoring the entry of texts into South Africa, and as such was overseen primarily by Customs.

When the National Party came to power in 1948, and as its leadership began to make the drastic structural changes which would enable one of the most brutal projects of social engineering in history, the question of comprehensive state censorship came to the fore. Mass protests against the emerging order triggered calls from within government for a crackdown on politically seditious publications or anything else which might “inflare” a people being systematically stripped of their human rights. In addition, the conservative Afrikaner churches and their powerful pressure groups were calling for an equally uncompromising approach to the circulation of pornography within South Africa. The “evils” of pornography were decried as a corrosive force which would erode the Christian way of life, compromising the newly emerging apartheid order.⁸

The Internal Security Act of 1950 already gave almost unlimited authorisation for the state to ban political writings. For instance, the Act gave authorisation for the banning of any publication which was “calculated to further the achievement of any of the objects of communism.” More significantly, the Act empowered the state to suppress all writings and utterances of members of banned organisations, individuals banned by the Minister of Justice from attending gatherings on the grounds that they had engaged in undesirable political activity, and South African exiles whose activities were judged by the Minister of Justice to advocate or further the aims of communism.⁹ This extremely repressive piece of legislation was nevertheless seen as insufficiently wide-ranging in its remit, ill-equipped to fight the danger posed by literature. A rigid, capable, and centralised censorship system which covered *all* potentially undesirable material was seen as critical to the security of the state. In 1954, a Commission of Inquiry into “Undesirable Publications” was launched in order to address these concerns. The Commission was chaired by Geoffrey Cronje, a radical Afrikaner nationalist and one of the intellectual architects of apartheid. As J.M. Coetzee observes in “The Mind of Apartheid: Geoffrey Cronje (1907-),” Cronje’s private writings of the 1940s reveal a fixation on the “problem” of “racial

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 271.

⁹ John Dugard, “Censorship in South Africa: The Legal Framework,” in *What Happened to Burger’s Daughter, or How South African Censorship Works*, ed. Nadine Gordimer, John Dugard and Richard Smith (Emmentia: Taurus, 1980), 67.

mixing,” and seek obsessively to find an intellectual rationale for legally enforced separation between races.¹⁰ His role as both rabid nationalist and public intellectual (he was a professor of sociology at the University of Pretoria), made Cronje the ideal candidate to chair a committee inquiring into the feasibility of implementing repressive state censorship. The Cronje Commission ran for two years and was wide-ranging and extensive, gathering information from librarians, publishers, lawyers, members of the church, “literary experts”, and editors.¹¹ The thoroughness of the investigation, and its degree of openness, reflects the mind-set of the state at the time, specifically its desire to establish a solid rationale for the implementation of a repressive system. As Deborah Posel notes in “The Assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd: The Spectre of Apartheid”:

during the 1950s, the apartheid state had emulated its segregationist predecessor in establishing many public commissions of enquiry, on the assumption that these exercises in the public staging of expertise, which in turn framed the authority and objectivity of the commissions’ recommendations, would legitimise the modern, rational, and expert bases of government policy.¹²

The Cronje Commission’s “public staging of expertise,” and its attempt to provide both an intellectual and a moral justification for censorship, laid the groundwork for what followed. Analysis of the censors’ reports in the following chapters will show that however lawless and unpredictable the system was in practice, the censors were consistently concerned with generating the appearance of respectability, continuity, and accountability.

Two years after the Commission was established, it published its findings and made its recommendations. As might have been expected, the findings were overtly politicised and sympathetic to the aims of the newly elected apartheid government. The Cronje Commission advocated strongly for a system of pre-publication censorship, and the creation of a rigorous censorship system which would regulate local and imported texts, removing all jurisdiction from the theoretically impartial courts, and other regulatory bodies.

¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹¹J.M Coetzee, “The Mind of Apartheid: Geoffrey Cronje (1907-),” *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 17, no. 1 (1991), 23.

¹² Deborah Posel, “The Assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd: The Spectre of Apartheid’s Corpse,” *African Studies* 68, no. 3 (December 2009), 337.

Extracts from the published report indicate that the Cronje Commission saw pre-publication censorship as essential, if “Western culture” and a strong nationalist identity were to be kept “pure”. The report also reveals deep insecurity regarding the state’s ability to maintain that purity. The Cronje Commission’s recommendations illustrate the grave threat that literature was perceived to pose. This threat was not limited to pornography or subversive texts which might sow “unrest” in the country. Literature could cause harm in a variety of ways. As Peter McDonald puts it, the Commission was generally hostile to “all forms of mass culture,”¹³ insisting that popular culture imported from abroad had the potential to accelerate the spiritual and moral decline of the Republic.

Ideas of moral and spiritual purity were of course indistinguishable from ideas of racial purity. For the Cronje Commission, protecting and nourishing the literary in South Africa meant protecting and nourishing a literature which would reflect and uphold the values of the newly emerging apartheid state, forming a crucial component of a white nationalistic vision. To that end, the Commission recommended that the new censorship legislation make provision for works of literary merit, arguing that literature deserved special status if a national culture was to thrive.¹⁴

The findings of the Commission were released in 1957, but the newly elected Nationalist government under Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd only responded to it three years later, proposing a Bill which accepted the Commission’s recommendations regarding pre-publication and the creation of a centralised board, as well as restrictions on freedom of the press. This initial Bill was widely criticised as being overtly repressive, specifically with regard to the proposal of pre-publication censorship, and it was only in March 1963 that the Publication and Entertainment Act became law.¹⁵ That the process of implementing a censorship system took just under 10 years from beginning to end should be a clear indication that the issue of censorship in South Africa has always been a fraught one. Equally telling is the ways in which the legislation reflected the recommendations made by the Commission, and the ways in which those recommendations were ignored. From its inception, the apartheid censorship system was a compromised and

¹³ Ibid., 25.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Peter McDonald, “The Politics of Obscenity: *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and the Apartheid State”, *English Studies in Africa* 47, No.1 (2004), 33.

flawed institution, enacted into being by legislation which reflected deep uncertainty in terms of how to handle the problem of literature.

The 1963 Publications and Entertainments Act was divided into 23 sections. The cornerstone of the legislation was Section 5 (2) which stated that:

A publication or object shall be deemed 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;
- (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.

The key features of the Act will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, focusing specifically on the language used in the section above, and showing what these broad, vague categorisations made possible. However, it is important to emphasise here that while the Act made thorough provision for definitions of undesirability, it ignored one of the key recommendations made by the Commission, in that it made no provision for consideration of works of literary merit.

Yet, as the membership of the new Censorship Board established by the Act made clear, consideration of literary merit was of utmost (if unspoken) importance. The head of the Board, Gerrit Dekker, was a highly respected literary critic, and all core members appointed were established literary experts or intellectuals, including T.T. Cloete, a well-regarded poet and professor of Afrikaans literature; A.P. Grové, editor of the Afrikaans literary journal *Standpunte*;

critic and professor of Afrikaans literature; C.J.D. Harvey, professor of English and member of *Standpunte*. Other members were A.H. Murray, a professor of philosophy, who had published books on communism, and was a key witness for the prosecution during the 1956 Treason Trial of Nelson Mandela and H. van der Merwe Scholtz, a professor of Afrikaans literature and a prolific, respected literary critic.¹⁶ As McDonald notes, the appointees of the initial Dekker Board “put the question of literature – what is it and who decides – at the centre of apartheid censorship,” despite the fact that this question was nowhere reflected in the law itself.¹⁷

The creation of the 1963 Publications and Entertainments Act allowed the apartheid state to operate one of the most rigorous censorship systems in the world. The censors banned tens of thousands of novels, magazines, periodicals, and other forms of printed matter. The list of international writers whose work they banned includes James Baldwin, Simone de Beauvoir, Robert Burns, William Burroughs, Italo Calvino, Truman Capote, Jean Cocteau, Colette, Marguerite Duras, William Faulkner, Jean Genet, James Joyce, Joseph Heller, Langston Hughes, Doris Lessing, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Henry Miller, Vladimir Nabokov, Philip Roth, William Styron, and Robert Penn Warren. The list of local writers they banned includes Lionel Abrahams, André Brink, Jack Cope, Nadine Gordimer, Mazisi Kunene, Alex La Guma, Lewis Nkosi, Etienne Leroux, Breyten Breytenbach, André Brink, Todd Matshikiza, Bloke Modisane, Es'kia Mphahlele, Richard Rive, Siphso Sepamla, Mongane Serote, and Miriam Tlali. Clearly, while the censors saw themselves as guardians of the literary, they had a deeply conservative view of what literature was, and worked hard to ensure that these suffocating boundaries were maintained.

However, while the 1963 Act made provision for rigorous control and allowed the censors almost unlimited autonomy, the system was still “vulnerable” to judicial interference and public scrutiny in the sense that it was technically possible for a writer or publisher affected by a ban to appeal to the courts. So, for instance, when the censors banned André Brink’s 1973 novel *Kennis van die Aand*, and the 1974 English translation (*Looking on Darkness*), Brink and his publisher appealed against the decision to the Cape Provincial Division of the Supreme Court. The court ultimately upheld the censors’ decision, but the case drew substantial criticism and attention. In 1974 the government enacted the Publications Act (42 of 74). It abolished the possibility of

¹⁶ McDonald, “Brief Biographies of Some Key Censors,” *The Literature Police*, accessed 19 June 2017, <http://www.theliteraturepolice.com/biographies/>.

¹⁷ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 39.

appeal to the courts and abolished the old Board, and replaced it with a Directorate of Publications, which had the power to appoint committees of censors and readers. Rather than the courts, those affected by bans were required to appeal to the Publications Appeal Board (PAB), an extra-judicial body part of the wider censorship bureaucracy. The PAB's stated role was to act as an impartial arbiter of decisions, a role that should of course have been played by the courts.

The creation of the PAB gave the censors even more control, while, as Kahanovitz and Manoim observe, providing a veneer of "legal respectability"¹⁸ and the appearance of accountability. It was in part intended to assuage anxieties and provide reassurance that the censors were not a law unto themselves, and that there still existed a system of checks and balances. While this was not at all the case in practice, the censors continued to rely on the semblance of accountability, even when there was no real need for them to do so. The extraordinary amount of paperwork generated by the censors is testament to this. The system became less and less efficient, and the censors continued to exceed their legal remit without consequence, but their paperwork shows that, as a group, they were always concerned with *appearing* to follow the letter of the law in the most bureaucratically correct manner possible.

Once more ignoring the obvious, the 1974 Act made no concessions to consideration of the literary as a special category. Among other things, the changes made by the Act were an attempt to provide an even clearer set of rules as to how texts should be judged and assessed. The 1963 legislation required the censor to read over the shoulder of the "likely" reader, and assess a text's potential threat on that basis. The 1974 legislation required, instead, that censors judge a text according to its potential effect on the *average* reader, with highly politicised, racialised notions of "community standards" in mind. So, for instance, in a 1986 report on Erskine Caldwell's 1933 novel *God's Little Acre*, the chairman of the publications committee could write "The book was reviewed by the Committee and it was unanimously decided that according to 1986 standards, it is not undesirable."¹⁹

However, as analysis of the reports themselves reveals, these legislative attempts at clarity and efficiency largely failed. Questions of what literature was, who was qualified to judge it, and what its function was supposed to be, remained central, and led to confusing and unpredictable

¹⁸ Kahanovitz and Manoim, 'Radically Undesirable,' *Research in African Literature* 12. No.4 (1979), 5.

¹⁹ IDP 3/186

decisions. It did not matter in practical terms whether the censors were reading over the shoulder of the likely reader or the average reader, because the problem of literature kept getting in the way. The Directorate of Publications and its decentralised committees still had many writers, professors, and critics in their number. Among them were J.M Leighton, a professor of English, R.E. Lighton, a teacher, novelist, and professor of education; Anna Louw, a highly regarded Afrikaans novelist; and Merwe Scholtz and A.H.Murray, who had both served on the Dekker Board.²⁰

Changes to legislation did little to untangle the difficulties brought into play by the appointment of the initial Board. Reports written after the new censorship Act of 1974 was passed show the same, continued failure to achieve consensus on ideas of the literary, and thus a continued failure to establish firm rules on how to judge literature. As subsequent chapters will argue, we can deepen our understanding of these failures and their consequences by undertaking an analysis of the chaotic and inconsistent character of the apartheid censorship archive.

The first overt reference to the problem of the literary in the legislation itself came with the 1978 Amendment to the 1974 Act, which made provision for the appointment of a team of “literary experts” to the PAB. The Amendment’s purpose in this specific regard was to “amend the provisions of the Publications Act, 1974...for the establishment of committees of experts so as to advise the appeal board in certain circumstances.”²¹ The 1978 Amendment, in other words, finally acknowledged the problem which had complicated the system from its inception. As Chapter Three will show in depth, these expert committees were similarly unable to achieve consensus when it came to making the rules of art, and were prone to competitive intellectual showmanship, leading to reports which were far in excess of bureaucratic requirements. One committee’s decision would often directly contradict a precedent set by another committee, and ideas of the literary remained as conflicted and fraught as ever.

The 1974 Act and its Amendments “marked the beginning of the most repressive era in the history of the system,”²² and a dramatic upsurge in the numbers of books banned. Subsequent protest and controversy resulted in a period of reform, with the PAB under the more

²⁰ McDonald, “Brief Biographies of Some Key Censors,” *The Literature Police*, accessed 19 June 2017, <http://www.theliteraturepolice.com/biographies/>.

²¹ Publications Amendment Act, No. 109, 1978, *Government Gazette*, 112/4426 (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1978).

²² McDonald, *Literature Police*, 61.

“enlightened” or tolerant leadership of Kobus van Rooyen.²³ Reports from the Van Rooyen period show the increasingly convoluted lengths the system went to in order to balance competing demands: to protect the literary, and to serve the interests of the apartheid order as it violently succumbed to its disintegration. The sheer volume of documents produced by the system during this period show that attempts at bureaucratic or ideological reform simply meant more confusion and excess. Many of the files on cases from this period are hundreds of pages long. They are artefacts of a system buckling under the weight of its own inefficiency. The last novel to be banned in South Africa was Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, in 1989. The censorship system was officially abolished only in 1996, with the creation of the new Films and Publications Act (FPA) and the establishment of the Film and Publication Board (FPB).

1.3 Definitions and Narratives

This study aims to expand understanding of the inner workings of apartheid censorship and its impact, then and now, attempting to understand its more insidious effects, and to illuminate some connections between censorship, canonisation, and the construction of the literary in South Africa. Exploring censorship’s effect on the literary landscape means exploring it as a process with ever-proliferating consequences, rather than something which ended with the banning of *The Satanic Verses*. It is important to begin with a definition of terms and an exploration of debates over what is meant by the term “censorship,” in order to arrive at a workable conceptualisation of censorship that accommodates its complexity and reach, as well as its productive effects. Debates over what is meant by the term have tended to split, broadly, into two opposing sides. First, the definition which insists that the term “censorship” must involve a state authority and the threat of direct punishment, if it is to be useful as a descriptor.²⁴ On the other hand, there is a definition which insists that censorship exists everywhere, that it cannot be escaped and is in fact a precondition for speech.

This second definition is most clearly espoused in Michael Holquist’s 1994 essay “Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship.” Holquist argues that “to be for or against censorship as such is to assume a freedom no-one has. Censorship is. One can only discriminate between its more or less repressive effects”²⁵ Following this, Judith Butler defines censorship as that which

²³ Ibid., 62.

²⁴ Robert Darnton, *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Bodies of Literature* (New York: Norton and Company, 2014), 16.

²⁵ Michael Holquist, ‘Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship.’ *PMLA* 109, no.1 (1994), 14.

encompasses all the mechanisms by which “the speakable is differentiated from the unspeakable.”²⁶ Censorship, in this reading, is not only everywhere, but necessary: “an economy of choice governed by principles of selection and regulation; internalised through language, and consequently present in every utterance.”²⁷

The “new censorship” debate questioned “either/or” ideas about censorship that had previously held sway: speech is either free, or strangled; censorship either exists, or it does not. Robert Post, for instance, argued that such oppositions were impossible when “censorship materialises everywhere...Censorship establishes the practices that define us as social subjects.”²⁸ If all speech involves a necessary censoring, state censorship is simply one of many “structures of mediation that police produced and received meaning.”²⁹ Holquist goes so far as to suggest that the either/or conception of censorship is in fact a valuable tool in the hands of those who wish to control cultural activity, because it ignores all other forms of silencing and suggests that only the state has the power to regulate or control speech.³⁰

Scholars such as Robert Darnton and Peter McDonald have cautioned against these broad definitions. McDonald, for instance, argues that “by expanding the conception of censorship in the way that he does, Holquist betrays the actual victims of sometimes brutal regimes. He conjures up a frankly bizarre world in which, say, William Gifford’s attack on Keats is somehow morally equivalent to the Soviet Union’s treatment of Solzhenitsyn.”³¹ McDonald’s criticism of overly broad definitions is echoed by Robert Darnton in *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Bodies of Literature*, a comparative history of three different state censorship regimes: in eighteenth century Bourbon France, in nineteenth century colonial India, and in East Germany before 1989. Darnton describes his students’ responses to the question, “What is censorship?”³² Their answers include the following: outlawing assault weapons, politeness, applying for or issuing a driver’s license, editing and publishing, pledging or refusing to pledge allegiance to the (American) flag, and silence.³³ Pointing out that there is a clear difference between repressive state censorship and

²⁶ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, (Routledge: New York and London, 1997), 145.

²⁷ Helen Freshwater, “Towards a Redefinition of Censorship,” in *Censorship & Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*, ed. Beate Muller, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 220.

²⁸ Robert Post, *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation*, (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1998), 1-2.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Holquist, “Corrupt Originals,” 19.

³¹ Peter McDonald, “‘That Monstrous Thing’: The Critic as Censor in Apartheid South Africa,” in *Censorship and the Limits of the Literary: A Global View*, ed. Nicole Moore (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 121.

³² Darnton, *Censors at Work*, 16.

³³ Ibid.

workplace dress codes, Darnton argues that “to identify censorship with constraints of all kinds is to trivialize it”³⁴ Both argue that it is out of respect for those who suffered under state-sanctioned censorship that we must be precise about how we use the term. McDonald insists that if “censorship” is to be useful as a term, it must involve a state authority and the threat of direct punishment.³⁵

The form of censorship discussed here involves a state authority, and government employees who are paid to censor literature, but a more expansive definition of the term is useful for what follows. An expanded definition allows for an exploration into the insidious effects of state censorship, and a consideration of the ways it led to other, more subtle forms of silencing. One of the many stories told about apartheid censorship is that the state intruded into literature in only the crudest, blundering way, that the censors were stupid bureaucrats doing a ridiculous job, and that the triumph of art was somehow inevitable, or at least possible. Discussions which question this either/or division complicate this narrative, because they illuminate the lengths to which censorship can reach. It is reductive to insist that censorship comes only at the hand of the state. The archive itself contradicts this view, revealing complicities and compromises made by the press, by members of the public, by librarians, and by writers themselves. Censorship is a process that is *begun* by the state, but it does not end with the state. Freshwater’s definition is most apt in terms of the analysis that follows in subsequent chapters: “This definition acknowledges that censorship is a process, realised through the relationships between censorious agents, rather than a series of actions carried out by a discrete or isolated authority.”³⁶

In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot suggests that in “vernacular use, history means both the facts of the matter and a narrative of those facts, both ‘what happened’ and ‘that which is said to have happened.’”³⁷ An exploration of the stories we tell about South African censorship is equally as important with regard to what follows, because the archive contains many stories which contradict or complicate prevailing narratives about apartheid censorship and its effects.

³⁴ Ibid., 17.

³⁵ McDonald, *Literature Police*, xi.

³⁶ Freshwater, “Towards a Redefinition”, 228.

³⁷ Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (New York: Beacon Press, 1997), 21.

Literary historian Nicole Moore states that “the story of literary censorship is a narrative about narrative--one of the most exact examples of stories about the circulation of stories.”³⁸ The story of South African censorship has been compellingly told by a variety of scholars, academics, novelists, lawyers, judges, and even the censors themselves. Five full-length books have been published on the topic: Ted Laros’s *Literature and the Law in South Africa, 1910 -2010: The Long Walk to Artistic Freedom* (2017), McDonald’s *The Literature Police* (2009), Christopher Merrett’s *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (1994), Margreet de Lange’s *The Muzzled Muse: Literature and Censorship in South Africa* (1997), and Theo Coggin’s *Censorship: A Study of Censorship in South Africa* (1983). While narratives and perspectives differ and diverge, there are certain key plot points which remain consistent. Briefly told, the story of apartheid censorship is the story of a complex and comprehensive bureaucratic system that became more sophisticated and centralised as apartheid entrenched itself. Publications Acts were changed and amended in order to meet the state’s demands for more surveillance, more control, as the censors operated in secret, with little to no oversight.

In many histories and overviews of the period, the moments of significant change come when legislation changes. While it is acknowledged that the decisions of the censors were often unpredictable, the story tends to characterise the censors as a collective whose interests were one. Many histories of the system tend toward to a narrative in which the censors were following the rules as laid down by the official legislation, focusing on their role as effective bureaucrats. While these histories are varied, as will be discussed below, it is clear that certain narratives predominate, and that myths about apartheid bureaucratic efficiency and omniscience are often sustained.

In *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa*, for instance, Christopher Merrett outlines the history of apartheid censorship by focusing on key, high-profile cases, as well as changes to legislation. An overview is best given via a discussion of the numbers: so many books banned by such a date, so many publications embargoed.³⁹ When discussing effects, Merrett relies on statistics. The approach is a practical one, a story in which the effects of censorship may be easily seen via stark statistical evidence, drawn from official sources. One potential problem with this kind of narrative is an over-reliance on the numbers as a way to

³⁸ Nicole Moore, “National Parapraxis: Sex and Forgetting in Australian Censorship History,” *Australian Historical Studies* 36, no. 126, (2005), 298.

³⁹ Christopher Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1995).

measure censorship's effects, an over-reliance which implies or insists that the effects of censorship are "knowable, external, tangible."⁴⁰ As Jonathan Abel argues in his history of censorship in Transwar Japan, "we must be wary of taking the numbers of banned items as the best indicator of censorship's violence to discourse."⁴¹

It must be noted that Merrett's work was hampered by lack of access to archival material. During apartheid, as the South African archivist Verne Harris observes, the "fundamental guideline for public access to public records was provided by the Archives Act, which established that access was a privilege to be granted by bureaucrats unless legislation recognised the right of access to specific categories of record."⁴² In describing her difficulty in accessing documents related to the 1976 Soweto Uprising during the immediate post-apartheid period, Helena Pohlandt-McCormick shows how the State Archives Service (SAS)⁴³ ceded to the demands of the apartheid government, "using its executive powers to govern access to documents and to destroy those potentially injurious to the reputation of the state."⁴⁴ While most of the censorship archive remained intact, apartheid-era archival laws nevertheless meant that all state-related material younger than thirty years old was closed to the public. As Harris argues, "in apartheid South Africa state secrecy was a *modus operandi*."⁴⁵ The censorship archives were thus not publicly accessible until relatively recently, and so Merrett and others working during the period were obliged to make do with other forms of evidence, from non-official archives, newspaper reports, and anecdotal sources.

Those histories which rely on sources such as statistics and official legislation tend to take it as implied that censorship (and its effects) is something with limits, something which can be easily defined and understood. Histories which make censorship comprehensible, which outline its effects with clarity, have much in common with another kind of story, where censorship is treated with ridicule. Apartheid censors, in this kind of narrative, are treated as buffoons, as mindless bureaucrats without the slightest capacity to make any sort of judgement about art.

⁴⁰ Abel, *Redacted*, 25.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Verne Harris, "They should have destroyed more': The Destruction of Public Records by the South African State in the Final Years of Apartheid, 1990-1994," *Wits History Workshop: The TRC; Commissioning the Past* (June 1999), 1.

⁴³ The National Archives Service replaced the SAS on 1 January, 1997, in terms of the National Archives Act, no 4. 43 of 1996.

⁴⁴ Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, "In Good Hands: Researching the 1976 Soweto Uprising in the State Archives in South Africa," in *Archive Stories: Fact, Fiction, and the Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 299.

⁴⁵ Harris, "They should have destroyed more," 2.

Merrett, for instance, refers to the censors as “Caligula’s spiritual heirs.”⁴⁶ In the 1974 collection *The Grey Ones: Essays on Censorship*, in addition, the apartheid censors are attacked as the “illiterate, ignorant, embittered guardians of their own morals.”⁴⁷ While many of the essays in *The Grey Ones* display an unmistakable anger, mockery and scorn are also present, as is the assurance that the censors will ultimately be defeated, because they are ridiculous. As Merrett notes, “It has been fashionable at times to discover humour in some of the more bizarre censorship decisions, most of which date from the early days of Customs embargoes — for example, the restrictions on *Black Beauty* and Hardy’s *Return of the native*.”⁴⁸ For instance, the preface of *The Grey Ones* reads as follows: “Many readers will find their arguments (unintentionally) hilarious. There are also several bizarre and/or erroneous expressions in these extracts... All sics in this section have been inserted by the editor.”⁴⁹

A letter in the archive from the novelist James S. Rand to the South African ambassador in London can be read as an articulation of the same contempt:

I take the liberty of directly addressing you on a subject which I trust you will feel justifies investigation, for it involves either an incredible injustice or, more likely, I suspect, a monumental stupidity on the part of a puritanical stuffed-shirt bureaucrat in Cape Town. (And is, either way, a highly ironical slap in the face for a writer and international journalist who has long felt the utmost sympathy to your country as to his friends in Kenya and Rhodesia.) I refer to the banning of my novel, “Run for the Trees”, of which I have just learned. A bureaucratic act about as logical and fantastic as it would be if Robert Ruark’s African works were introduced as compulsory reading by the Government of Mr. Kenyatta! ... Now it is argued that the novel contains - necessarily to the story – an incident of rape of an English woman, by a Kikuyu, as a consequence of which the Kikuyu is hunted down and executed!...Concluding, may I please stress that, certainly, so far as I am concerned, this is not a matter of money...what I am concerned with, Sir, is, with respect, the damn fool aspect of the matter, the juvenile aspect. In journalism I was sometimes called “tough”, “caustic” etc. Here, it seems to me, is a

⁴⁶ Christopher Merrett, “Political Censorship in South Africa: Aims and Consequences,” 3.

⁴⁷ Ampie Coetzee, “The Beginning of a Revolt” in *The Grey Ones: Essays on Censorship*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1974), 12.

⁴⁸ Merrett, “Political Censorship in South Africa,” 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

situation which really calls for some caustic ventilation, nor, I think, would it be difficult to present the Demogorgon responsible for this ban as an international laughing-stock.⁵⁰

Unlike the essays in *The Grey Ones*, Rand's letter registers no moral objection to censorship. On the contrary, it notes that the writer has always felt "utmost sympathy" towards the regime. However, like the essays in *The Grey Ones*, the letter represents the censors as intellectually inadequate, and thus a foe whose stupidity ensures that they will be defeated. One potential problem with such an approach is that it again undermines or otherwise diminishes the damage that the apartheid censors wrought. If the only assault on literature came from the fumbling ministrations of buffoons, it stands to reason that such an assault could be easily countered, and that it was. The history of censorship and its ongoing consequences proves that this was not the case. A story which insists that censorship was comprehensively defeated, while comforting, does not allow for an acknowledgment that we can never replace what censorship took from us, or recover the stories that have been lost. This perception of the censors as mindless functionaries is problematic in further ways – to suggest that the work performed by censors is contemptible primarily because they are "stupid" implies, however faintly, that censorship would be more acceptable if it were performed by people who *weren't* stupid. Rand's letter clearly reveals evidence of this belief – a view which is consistent with other conservative views expressed in the document. That this view is expressed in *The Grey Ones*, however, is more surprising, and reveals something uncomfortable about the close links between criticism, canonisation, and censorship, links which will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Censorship can also be discussed and understood by interrogating the legal implications of the system.⁵¹ In "Undesirability and Criminal Liability Under the Publications Act 42 of 1974," Haysom and Marcus dismantle the 1974 Act for the benefit of their readers, pointing out its contradictions and internal inconsistencies. Like Merrett's approach, Haysom and Marcus's emphasis is on censorship's tangible effects, drawn from official sources. One problem with such an approach is an over-determined analysis of the Acts and the changes they wrought, when the archive reveals, again and again, that the censors operated in an almost deliberately ad hoc fashion, with only a perfunctory acknowledgment of the guiding legislation. To treat the Acts as

⁵⁰ BCS 67 1/13.

⁵¹ Nicholas Haysom and Gilbert Marcus, "Undesirability and Criminal Liability Under the Publications Act 42 of 1974", *South African Journal on Human Rights* 31, (1974); Gilbert Marcus, "The Wider Reaches of Censorship", *South African Journal on Human Rights* 36, (1985); Louise Silver, "Sex, Nudity, and the Average Man", *South African Law Journal* 125 (1980).

reflective of the censors' methods can be misleading, as the next two chapters will clearly show. Abel's argument about censorship's unknowable effects aptly summarises the shortcomings of a narrative which focuses on legislation: "At the moment when censorship seems entirely knowable, external, tangible and therefore archivable, it is ethically imperative to imagine the archive as but a trace of what is beyond the archive, internal, unknowable, and intangible."⁵²

If on the one hand there is a narrative which insists that apartheid censorship is knowable, comprehensible, there is another treatment of its impact which focuses on the psychological. This story is often told from the perspective of the writers and readers affected by censorship, and tends to focus, naturally, on its more elusive impact.⁵³ Coetzee and Gordimer, for instance, discuss how censorship feels for the writer, and do not as a consequence require the evidence of official sources in order to make their case. Statistics, for Coetzee and Gordimer, do not illuminate what is at stake. Official sources, in Gordimer's case specifically, tend to be treated as suspect. While Gordimer urges her readers, on the one hand, to examine *Jacobsen's Index of Banned Books* for themselves, she also insists that all official sources are compromised, that censors lie, and that archival evidence should best be viewed as material evidence of apartheid's warped mindset.⁵⁴ In telling the story this way, Gordimer creates a stark distinction between the "official" story and the non-official one, placing literature on one side of the divide and censorship on the other, arguing that the two have nothing to do with each other: "censorship may have to do with literature, but literature has nothing whatever to do with censorship."⁵⁵ As Peter McDonald has argued, this insistence amounts to a kind of wishful thinking.⁵⁶

Attacks on censorship by high-profile, politically engaged writers can also give a skewed perspective on what it is that the censors were doing. A significant percentage of the reports in the censorship archive contain reports on texts of no political or literary significance whatsoever. Narratives of censorship by writers such as Gordimer and Coetzee can unintentionally obscure this fact, and obscure the overwhelmingly banal reality of the censor's daily activities. A similar skewing can take place when this story is fictionalised, as in Patrick Flanery's *Absolution*.⁵⁷ *Absolution*, with its acknowledged debt to Coetzee and Gordimer, conceives of censorship as a

⁵² Abel, *Redacted*, 16.

⁵³ J.M. Coetzee, *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁵⁴ Nadine Gordimer, "Morning in the Library: 1975", *Index on Censorship* 28 (1999), 18.

⁵⁵ Nadine Gordimer, "New Forms of Strategy – No Change of Heart," *Critical Arts: A Journal for Media Studies* 1, no. 2 (June 1980), 33.

⁵⁶ Peter McDonald, *Literature Police*, xi.

⁵⁷ Patrick Flanery, *Absolution* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012).

form of mind control, and emphasises its deforming effects on the writer's internal landscape. Again, such an approach can place undue emphasis on those high-profile banned writers and cases, thus denying that the most insidious forms of oppression are often rooted in control of that which is mundane, ordinary, and of seemingly no importance. That a book was passed does not mean that its author was not subjected to a process that was unethical and violent. An emphasis on state suppression of renowned works of literary fiction, in other words, can ultimately diminish the wider and more enduring effects of censorship.

Other narratives of censorship can focus on the circulation of banned books in South Africa, as in Archie Dick's *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures*.⁵⁸ Told as a kind of history from below, Dick's work rejects official sources altogether in favour of an accounting of the reading practices of South Africa's "common readers," invoking Woolf's definition of common readers as someone who is "guided by an instinct to create for himself, out of whatever odds and ends he can come by, some kind of whole."⁵⁹ While such histories are valuable in that they offer an alternative to the official archive, Dick's work persists in giving the impression that state censorship is something which can be circumvented, and that its parameters are easily discerned and thus easy to work around. This approach to state censorship, like some of the others mentioned, diminishes censorship's long-term effects. Numbers do not help us to understand this. Palliatives about art triumphing over oppression do not either. South Africa has a long history of protest against censorship, a long tradition of working around it. However, as Abel argues, "the fact that writers can write about, through, or around censorship does not mean that censorship is ultimately ineffectual; rather, this writing itself testifies to its effectiveness."⁶⁰ Another way to manage the narrative is to point to particularly compelling or illustrative cases. By discussing the fate of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the work of Alex la Guma, or *Burger's Daughter*, studies are able to emphasise particular flaws or absurdities within the system, points where the censors explicitly contradicted themselves or acted with especially surprising force.

The most effective and illustrative way to tell this story is to incorporate a number of these narrative methods. This has been most comprehensively achieved by Peter McDonald, the first scholar to make use of the apartheid censorship archive. In *The Literature Police*, McDonald first provides an overview of apartheid censorship as a system, discussing its effects in terms of its

⁵⁸ Archie Dick, *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

⁵⁹ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader Volume 1*, (London: Vintage Classics, 2003), 2.

⁶⁰ Abel, *Redacted*, 20

parts: censors, writers, publishers. In the second half of the book, McDonald focuses on what he calls “singular situations” or “disruptive moments” – high-profile cases which attracted both local and international attention, such as the passage of Nadine Gordimer’s novels through the system, the dispute over the work of Breytenbach and the *Volk* avant-garde, or the dispute between PEN and J.M. Coetzee. An analysis of “the disruptive energies of specific works”⁶¹ is a means, for McDonald, of discussing the “unexpectedly tangled histories of literature and apartheid censorship.”⁶²

Extracting illuminating documents from the vast censorship archive involves sifting through countless documents that seem to tell no story at all. Towering stacks of material are ignored, or set aside, in order that a coherent narrative may emerge. In addition, as Antoinette Burton observes, there is an “ever-growing divide between the multiplicity of interpretive possibilities many historians hope to see the archive yield and the expectations of absolute truth which a variety of more general publics... not only desire but demand.”⁶³ Simpler stories, in other words, are desirable. Any history written from archival evidence must contend with these problems, must choose one story and ignore the rest. But this seems especially difficult, and ironic, when the archive in question is itself concerned with the selection of narrative, of choosing one story above the rest. The censorship archive is a product of the apartheid state’s efforts to make certain stories impossible to read, and furthermore make certain stories impossible to tell. The censors preferred certain types of narratives but it is also true that historians of censorship prefer certain stories as well.

Censorship is about erasure and the elimination of undesirable narratives. Telling the story of censorship would seem to call for a similarly partisan elimination of excessive and messy plotlines from the archival sprawl. But in many ways, this archive is *about* excess. In trying to understand the effects of apartheid censorship, we cannot simply look at the legislation, or the numbers, or the moments of social and political significance. This archive is about *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and *Tropic of Cancer* and *The Late Bourgeois World*, but it is also about *Z-Cars* and Mickey Spillane and *The World in Winter*. It is about lost and unimaginable novels. It is about

⁶¹ McDonald, *The Literature Police*, xiii.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Antoinette Burton, *Archive Stories: Fact, Fiction, and the Writing of History* (Duke University Press, 2005), 6.

bureaucratic surfeit and an inability to pare down, and a system which was always on the verge of undoing itself.

Apartheid censorship was brutally suppressive and cruel, but it was not omnipotent. More than anything else, the vast profusion of documents which make up the archive are evidence of intellectual waste and administrative pointlessness. Subsequent chapters will uncover these failures in depth, but a description of the archival material must be the starting point.

1.4 Description of Archival Material

The majority of the documents relating to the activities of the South African censors during apartheid are housed in the Western Cape Provincial Archives (WCPA). While some are housed in the State Archives, in Pretoria, the records at the WCPA constitute the majority of the archival materials relating to the censorship board. The reports are held in three different archival groupings: BCS; IDP: P series; and IDP: DP series. Archival group BCS contains censors' reports written from the period 1961 to 1973, although most of the reports written after 1970 are missing. BCS runs to 2,25 linear metres, or 102 cardboard boxes. Reports created after this period (after the second Publications Act of 1973) are held in two different groups: IDP: DP series, and IDP: P series. IDP: DP series consists of initial reports from the period 1975-1990. IDP: P series consists of complaints and appeals handled by the PAB, from the period 1975-1997. IDP:P and IDP: DP have not yet been fully inventoried. However, as of 2012, IDP: P series comprised 12,5 linear metres of cardboard boxes, while IDP: DP series comprised 97, 5 linear metres of cardboard boxes. Material from the three separate archival groupings adds up to just over 110 linear metres' worth of state documents, held in volumes.

Generally, the files in each volume are grouped according to the date the reports were submitted. For instance, volume BCS 67 contains files dated from January 1966 to May 1966. Each text submitted to the system has its own file, which consists of a report and all relevant supplementary documents. Each file has its own searchable reference number corresponding to the date of submission, and includes details about the person or government department that submitted the text. Whether a book was banned or passed, a report had to be filed. Writing a report on a submitted text meant filling in a form, either typed or by hand. From 1961 to 1979, the form changed five times. Although these changes were significant, their essential structure remained fairly consistent.

The forms were printed in both English and Afrikaans. They were completed in either English or Afrikaans. The language the forms were printed in had seemingly no effect on which language a censor chose to complete it in. The forms, in fact, were largely ineffective in controlling what the censors wrote, or how they wrote it. Fifteen lines, for instance, were provided for the “Synopsis” section, where a summary of the text was required. The censors routinely exceeded that limit, writing all over the rest of the form, appending handwritten or typed pages with paperclips.⁶⁴ They did the same in the “General Remarks” section, the space where final judgement on a text was to be passed. They wrote sideways across the page, adding asterisks and rebuttals to remarks their colleagues had made. They contradicted and undermined each other, scribbling question marks and exclamation marks next to others’ assessments. The section which required references to pages considered to be indecent, obscene, or objectionable was either ignored or included references to almost every page in a novel.

The archive contains reports on every imaginable sort of text. For every report on a high-profiled banned work such as Breyten Breytenbach’s poetry collection *Ysterkoei moet sweet*, there are thirty detailed reports on issues of *Ladies Home Companion*, six reports on a “satirical magazine” called *Sex to Sixty*, or on the potential danger presented by “metal badges imprinted with cannabis leaves.” For every report written on work by a decorated anti-apartheid novelist such as Nadine Gordimer, there are 40 reports on, in Gordimer’s words, “paperbacks of the kind that are twirled around on wire stands in chewing-gum-and-smokes shops and airports.”⁶⁵ There is often no great disparity between the attention that these works received: reports on pulp detective novels are often as detailed and passionately argued as reports on novels which explicitly criticise the apartheid regime.

The series of reports on Arthur Hailey’s 1965 novel, *Hotel* is a typical example. The first reader, E. Beyers, objected to the novel on a number of grounds, including “the shouting about human rights on the part of the natives.” Beyers recommended that the novel be banned, and marked a high number of pages as offensive. He was especially assiduous in his marking of pages regarding “offensive intermingling.” These pages, when checked, refer to scenes of black and white people speaking to each other. Another report was then ordered, and this time the form was filled out by Harvey, a member of the PCB (as opposed to a contracted reader). Harvey’s report dismisses Beyers’ arguments: “I don’t think the sex episodes, nor the ‘shouting about human rights’ ... are

⁶⁴ See Appendix 1.

⁶⁵ Gordimer, “Morning in the Library: 1975,” 122.

sufficient reasons for banning.” Harvey noted derisively in brackets that Beyers “seems to have a strange notion of what is meant by ‘offensive intermingling.’” He also underlined Beyers’ spelling mistakes.⁶⁶ This exchange is but one example of the conflicts found in many of these files, as well as of the constant attempts to signal superiority of taste and literary judgement as a means of asserting authority, discussed in Chapter Three’s analysis of the censors’ unofficial reading strategies. The censors were often competitive with each other, and used their reports to demonstrate a particular flair for analysis, writing reports which were often indistinguishable from literary criticism.

There are thousands of reports on novels that have been out of print since the 60s, and their presence in the archive is one of the only reminders that they ever existed at all. For this reason alone, the censorship archive is a valuable resource for literary historians, a close look at what has been relegated to South Africa’s graveyard of literature. The sheer volume of these reports is an important reminder of what the censorship board was doing on a daily basis, and the apparent irrelevancies with which its members preoccupied themselves. Being a guardian of the literary meant protecting the “vulnerable” white public from attacks from all sides, warding off the moral and cultural decline brought on by works of popular fiction as well as “subversive” texts. The state feared the impact that a novel such as Nadine Gordimer’s *Burger’s Daughter* (1979) would make, but it also feared the impact of a particularly racy celebrity autobiography.

The archive is full of exceptionally detailed reports, which provide information far beyond what is required by the form. This is one of the most striking aspects of the archive – the seriousness with which texts, all texts, are taken. Whether the novel’s title was *Bourgeois Anonymous* or *Anna Karenina*, the density and heightened emotional pitch of many reports show how seriously the state took the threat of literature. For instance, in a report on *The Fiery Flower*, a racy pulp novel published in 1959 whose blurb reads “A strange and compelling story of earthy pagan passion on an exotic South Sea island”, censor A.P. Grové wrote the following:

An unconvincing tale with no literary assets. John is presented as a European, Vera as Polynesian. They “breed together”. John then prefers Elsa to “breed” with because they couldn’t have children. They force Elsa to dress like them – half naked. These factors may be regarded as objectionable but for me the book has no import whatsoever.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ BCS 71 951/66.

⁶⁷ BCS 69 742/66.

The words are underlined with a force that is at striking odds with the censor's professed indifference: the pen has almost torn through the page. Grové was the editor of an acclaimed Afrikaans literary journal, and highly respected as a critic. It could be assumed that a text like *The Fiery Flower* would be beneath his notice or contempt. If Grové or any other censor decided that *The Fiery Flower* should be banned, he did not actually need to provide a detailed reason for that decision. Technically, he would have needed merely to highlight the novel's objectionable features in the space provided, provide an illustrative quotation, and recommend banning the novel on the grounds that it was obscene. *The Fiery Flower* is seemingly a work of little literary or historical significance, and it could be assumed that it would not take up much of the system's time. Grové's report, however, is long, dense, earnest, and must have taken hours to write. There is no real indication in this document that *The Fiery Flower* is a work of pulp fiction. Using the length and detail of the report alone as a guide, it could as easily be assumed that Grové was dealing with a potentially subversive masterpiece. The archive contains thousands of reports just like this one.

As well as the reports, the files include letters from members of the public. These letters could be as long as three typed pages, and as short as a hastily scrawled memo. If a letter from a member of the public was handwritten, it would be retyped by a secretary, and multiple copies would be made. Letters from the public usually contained a demand to know why a given text had not been banned, as in the following letter concerning J.D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* (the first of a sustained correspondence between the letter writer and the censorship board):

I wish to draw your Board's attention to the dangerous filth emanating from a certain class of writer in the United States of America and masquerading as "Culture". I was alarmed to find that not only is this dangerous en [sic] foul quasi-literature entering the country at the cost of our foreign exchange (dollar) reserves, but is actually getting into the hands of the youth of our country.⁶⁸

Letters like this one, many of which display a remarkable similarity in tone and content, will be discussed further in Chapter Four as part of a deeper interrogation of the censorship system's embeddedness within wider apartheid policy and culture, and the extent to which the public participated in the process. Other letters from the public are also present in the archive, containing requests for information on why a certain book was declared undesirable. A reply

⁶⁸ See Appendix 2.

from the board is usually present in the files (a reply which often includes the reminder that the board was not required by law to furnish any reason for their decisions). Letters from members of the public, and the censor's replies to them, form an important and under-discussed component of the story of apartheid censorship. They are infrequently discussed because the censorship archive itself is infrequently discussed, but they show us that the censors played a visible role in public life, and they help us to understand the various and complex means by which official censorship bled into unofficial forms of silencing.

The files also include correspondence between censors and contracted readers, as well as between clerks and secretaries in other government departments. These memos are sometimes typed and sometimes handwritten, with the tone ranging from jaunty to official. There are sometimes three or four copies of each memo, and other times no copies exist at all. Some letters are marked "confidential", and some are not, and it is difficult to tell why the "confidential" label is applied in many cases. Attached to some of the reports are missives emanating from the Ministry of Information, often stamped "GEHEIM,"⁶⁹ but not always. Every file begins with a form detailing the source of the submission.

After the 1974 Publications Act, the first page of every report was a form that requested the applicant to state their personal details, as well as the details of the publication they were submitting for review. Affixed to the front of the reports, occasionally, are details about the contracted reader: an official document stating how much the contracted reader will be paid per text, and what her duties are.

While the first archival grouping is organised chronologically, documents produced at later periods are less logically managed. In the IDP:P cluster, for instance, there are boxes which contain only complaints from members of the public. There is, for instance, a volume which consists exclusively of complaints received about *Jesus Christ Superstar* from the period 1990-1994.⁷⁰ There are whole volumes which consist exclusively of the PAB's decisions regarding the fate of one text.

Other files are not so full. There are many reports in which nothing is filled in but the name of the publication (for example *Amnesty International Magazine*, all editions of which were banned), and the Board's decision (ban). While some files consist of fifty or more typed pages, there are

⁶⁹ "Secret" in Afrikaans.

⁷⁰ See Appendix 3.

some which consist of just two or three. Some of the files contain newspaper clippings. Others contain the covers of books, presumably sent by publishers in anticipation of a decision. There are typed copies of song lyrics, and reports containing descriptions of policemen listening to those songs in government offices. There are typed copies of speeches by the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., and poor translations of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*. There are reports which contain short descriptions of greeting cards or “undesirable objects.”

This vast, complicated archive presents various methodological challenges. This thesis uses the archive to enhance understanding of the censorship system’s role in shaping a South African literary tradition, looking at how internal efforts to establish orthodoxies of taste influenced the wider structure of the literary field. Because of this focus, most of the primary material discussed in what follows concerns reports on printed books determined to be literature, as well as on letters and correspondence relating to that subject. Documents were selected with the intent of providing as wide an array of archival material as possible, with a deliberate focus on what may have initially been dismissed as inconsequential. Analysis of the contents of the documents, alongside their form, structure, and the way they have been used and grouped, illuminates how the censors attempted to establish and protect a particular version of the literary as aligned with a wider vision of apartheid culture. Even within these parameters, the methodological challenges of the archive are significant.

Its complexity makes it difficult to comprehend, and even to describe; its tonal instability makes it difficult to narrativise. Using the material it contains and producing a story with beginning, a middle, and an end, presents a formidable prospect. This is perhaps one reason that the great majority of the material in the censorship archive tends to be overlooked. As discussed in the section above, writing a history of apartheid censorship often involve a streamlining, a focus on bigger stories and a discarding of the less apparently significant ones. For instance, a history of censorship will tend to focus on the banning of a “literary” text such as Breyten Breytenbach’s *Ysterkoei*, or the ramifications of the banning and unbanning of Etienne le Roux’s *Magersfontein, O Magersfontein!* There is little space, in these histories, for an analysis of the reports on apparently unremarkable texts. Narratives of apartheid censorship have tended to focus on cases concerning texts of political, legal, or literary significance, cases which cover only the smallest fraction of what is actually present in the archive. Most narratives of apartheid censorship focus on high profile, literary writers who were banned, as these cases are taken to be more illustrative of the violent absurdities of the system. With the notable exception of the work of J.M. Coetzee, far less attention is given to works which were passed by the censors. Reports on books which were

passed are just as long, detailed, and revealing as those that were banned. They take up more space in the censorship archive, and can tell us just as much about the inner workings and logic of the system. For this reason, many of the documents discussed in what follows concern books that were passed. In examining the censors' conception of the literary, it is not enough to interrogate only what they considered to be unacceptable. Similarly, in attempting to surface the voluminous mess of the archive and provide a sense of what the censors did on a daily basis, it is insufficient to focus only on reports which ended in a recommendation to ban. As the discussion of my efforts to identify the pseudonymous author of *An Act of Immorality* will demonstrate in detail, all archival work is subjective, and influenced by a range of often unacknowledged pressures. The documents discussed in what follows tell the story of apartheid censorship, but they also tell the story of a personal encounter with the archive. In spite of this necessarily subjective approach, the primary material under discussion was selected with the aim of providing as wide and detailed an overview of the system as possible.

Comprehending the censorship archive and what it contains demands equal consideration of what it doesn't contain, what has been lost, removed, or destroyed. Any archive is compromised and incomplete, consisting of, in Carolyn Steedman's words, "mad fragments" and remnants of the past.⁷¹ The censorship archive is no different. Harris acknowledges that "in any circumstances, in any country, the documentary record provides just a sliver of a window into the event,"⁷² but goes on to say that this is especially true of apartheid state archives. As Harris observes, "between 1990 and 1994, huge volumes of public records were destroyed in an attempt to keep the apartheid state's darkest secrets hidden,"⁷³ and that "the tools of forgetfulness, of state-imposed amnesia, were crucial to the exercise of power in apartheid South Africa."⁷⁴ Records relating to apartheid's security establishment were being destroyed as late as November 1996, in what Harris describes as "a large-scale sanitisation of [the state's] memory resources designed to keep certain information out of the hands of a future democratic government."⁷⁵

Access to state archives, attempts to understand what has been removed from them, and contested narratives about what lessons can be learned from them, have been a highly politicised issue since South Africa attained democracy in 1994. One of the mandates of the Truth and

⁷¹ Caroline Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, (Paterson: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 68.

⁷² Verne Harris, "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory and Archives" *Archival Science* 2 (2002), 65.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Verne Harris, "They should have destroyed more," 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was to “determine what articles have been destroyed by any person in order to conceal violations of human rights or Acts associated with a political objective.”⁷⁶

The TRC focused its investigation on the security establishment,⁷⁷ but as recent investigative work on apartheid economic crime has shown, the state had a vested interest in concealing or forbidding access to a much wider range of archival material from other state structures and records systems. In *Apartheid, Guns and Money: A Tale of Profit* (2017), Hennie Van Vuuren uses recently declassified documents to expose the corrupt networks of profit, complicity and support which sustained apartheid, networks which remain remarkably robust in the post-apartheid era.⁷⁸ That these ugly truths about the private sector’s role in enabling apartheid have only recently come to light can be attributed to the fact that the state destroyed or suppressed documents with near-total impunity, in order to avoid exposure and prosecution.

Yet, as a lawyer for the South African National Defence Force pointed out to Harris during the TRC’s investigation into the destruction of documents: “they should have destroyed more.”⁷⁹ Despite the assiduousness with which the state purged classified material, Harris notes that “surprising pockets of public records survived the process, even within the security establishment.”⁸⁰ For instance, the records generated by the Department of Justice’s Security Legislation Directorate remained intact, owing to the Directorate’s “impeccable” records management, and the fact that the Directorate appears to have ignored a 1993 recommendation from the head of the Security Secretariat that classified records be disposed of.⁸¹

Among the “surprising pockets” of surviving documents are those relating to the activities of the censors, which in fact remain almost miraculously intact. With the notable exception of files from the period 1970-1974 (nearly all of which are missing), there is nothing else in the archive to suggest that significant numbers of files have been destroyed or removed. It is not necessarily easy to understand why this is the case. Given that the activities of the censors were globally derided and reviled, and given that the archive contains thousands of reports which expose the cruelty and pettiness at the heart of the system, it could almost have been expected that these

⁷⁶ *Functions of the TRC*, <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/legal/justice.html>, accessed 5 July 2017.

⁷⁷ Harris, “They should have destroyed more,” 1.

⁷⁸ Hennie Van Vuuren, *Apartheid, Guns and Money: A Tale of Profit*, (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2017).

⁷⁹ Harris, “They should have destroyed more,” 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

documents would have been destroyed. The apartheid censors were aware of the contempt in which they were held, and their reports often reveal a reluctance to acknowledge what it is that they were doing. For instance, in an extended report on a book of cartoon illustrations titled *Luminous Animals and Other Drawings*, published in 1983, two censors discussed the potential impact of unbanning the text. Affixed to the file is a newspaper clipping, which discusses the initial banning. In the report, the censors object to the tone of the newspaper article, which is critical of their methods, and of censorship as a whole. They objected particularly to the article's use of the word "banning": "the word 'banning' reminds me of the burning of publications which, even in this century, often occurred."⁸² McDonald observes that because censorship happened post-publication, its defenders "denied that they had a censorship system at all. What happened in apartheid South Africa was for this reason always officially euphemised as 'publications control.'"⁸³ As Freshwater notes, "the title of 'censor' is applied, it is never claimed," because the act is held in such near-universal contempt.⁸⁴ When the 1963 Publications Bill was before Parliament, a member of the National Party, Blaar Coetzee, suggested that be retitled "A Bill to provide for the rule of law in dealing with publications."⁸⁵ Given this apparent awareness of how censorship was perceived, it would be unsurprising if the archive had been (illegally) destroyed.

In discussing the survival of other records, Jacob Dlamini argues that "the attempt to wipe away the stain of history was stymied by the problem of sheer volume. The archive was simply too big to be destroyed in toto."⁸⁶ Dlamini's reasoning could certainly explain the survival of the censorship archive; as discussed in the previous section, it is inconveniently large. There is, however, another possible explanation: the archive was thought too valuable an intellectual and cultural resource to destroy. The censors spilled litres of ink arguing about literature: how to recognise it, define its opposite, designate its audience, isolate it, and read it. It is plausible that these debates were thought to be worth preserving for posterity. The intellectual posturing seen in many of the reports certainly seems intended for a wider audience. These arguments are a significant literary resource, of course, but not in the way the censors might have intended. In *The Singularity of Literature*, Derek Attridge argues that "all attempts since the Renaissance to determine the difference between 'literary' and 'non-literary' language have failed – and this is a

⁸² IDP 3/153 P84/8/109.

⁸³ Peter McDonald, "That Monstrous Thing': The Critic as Censor in Apartheid South Africa," in *Censorship and the Limits of the Literary: A Global View*, ed. Nicole Moore (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 128.

⁸⁴ Freshwater, "Towards a Redefinition," 238.

⁸⁵ (Hansard, 1963, Vol 2, 447).

⁸⁶ Jacob Dlamini, *Askari*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

necessary failure, one by which literature as a practise has been continuously constituted.”⁸⁷ This aspect of the censorship archive is important not because of any cogent literary analysis the censors might have believed the reports contained, but because it exists as an astonishingly vivid part of the history of attempts to pin down the nature of the literary, to define it as a concept. Immersion in it increases our understanding of apartheid censorship as a specific project intended to create and shape a national literature, rather than viewing it simply the brute exercise of power.

1.5 Myths and Contradictions

Much can be learned from treating the archive as a subject as opposed to a source, and these lessons remain significant today. The myth of apartheid bureaucratic efficiency is stubborn. Prime Minister Verwoerd’s technocratic and bureaucratic ambitions were far in excess of what the state was ever able to accomplish, but the idea that the system was governed by a cohesive inner logic is persistent. The notion that apartheid “worked,” that although it was barbaric it was “clean” and efficient, can be clearly seen in this extract from a 2012 interview with Wendy Woods, widow of the renowned anti-apartheid journalist and activist, Donald Woods. The British *Guardian* asked for Woods’ response to the proposed Protection of State Information Bill (commonly referred to as the Secrecy Bill, and which was placed before parliament in 2011 by the current government), which would severely curtail press freedom to circulate state information. Woods responded that the proposed Bill was “more harmful than apartheid-era censorship.” She went on to say that it was “more insidious” than the laws her husband was forced to work around:

There were many laws in his time restricting journalists, but they knew what they were... It's worse than the apartheid era because it's so unspecific...[It will] disempower journalists because they won't have a working knowledge of what they can or cannot say, which is more or less what they had during the apartheid era.⁸⁸

Woods’ implication here is clear: it was possible to work around press censorship during apartheid, because those in charge played by the rules. This suggestion is manifestly untrue;

⁸⁷ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.

⁸⁸ Julian Borger, “New South African press law 'more harmful than apartheid-era censorship,” *Guardian*, 6 June 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/06/south-african-press-law-harmful>.

historians of apartheid censorship have repeatedly shown that the censors operated in an atmosphere of “officially sanctioned lawlessness.”⁸⁹ However destructive the Secrecy Bill is, it is nonetheless damaging and disingenuous to compare it unfavourably to a piece of apartheid era legislation, so much of which was vague, unspecific, and open to abuse. Dismantling myths of apartheid-era bureaucratic efficiency is critical, and can be done in a variety of ways. The apartheid censorship archive offers vivid, documentary evidence of the state’s administrative failures and missteps. In all its chaotic materiality, the archive is proof that the system didn’t work, and that it was undermined by both legislation and those tasked with carrying it out.

The centralised censorship system had much in common with other repressive technologies of apartheid rule: it was created in order to make suppression more efficient, doing away with previous systems which were thought to be unreliable, and relying heavily on the tools and technologies of bureaucracy to do so. The legislation also granted wide-ranging discretionary powers to the people tasked with administering the policy. In his study of the implementation of the Abolition of Passes Act of 1952, “one of the legal pillars of apartheid,” Keith Breckenridge discusses the extent to which the state’s technocratic ambitions informed policy-making, as well as the ways in which implementation of policy fell far short of these ambitious goals.⁹⁰ Breckenridge describes the “political, and emotional, investment” that bureaucrats made in attempting to issue a new, centralised system of identification for black South African adults. The new Reference Book (better known as the “Dompas”⁹¹) was supposed to provide comprehensive information on black adults: “names, locale, fingerprints, tax status and their officially prescribed ‘rights’ to live and work in the towns and cities of South Africa.”⁹² Attempts to implement the new system were hampered from the beginning by bureaucratic mistakes, and the centralised bureau which managed it was almost immediately overwhelmed by the volume of documents. In addition, it lacked the technologies and resources to implement the fingerprinting index, supposedly the cornerstone of the new registration system. While the system was disastrously managed and maintained, officials continued to implement the new laws, with “appalling consequences” for those affected by it⁹³

⁸⁹ Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship*, 12.

⁹⁰ Keith Breckenridge, “Verwoerd’s Bureau of Proof: Total Information in the Making of Apartheid,” *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 59, 83.

⁹¹ “The stupid pass” in Afrikaans.

⁹² Breckenridge, “Verwoerd’s Bureau of Proof,” 83.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 93.

As Breckenridge puts it, “the Dompas was a failure, but the form of its failure defined the character of the Apartheid state, and much of its democratic successor.”⁹⁴ Something similar can be said about the censorship system and its ongoing consequences: in many respects, the system was a failure, and the way it failed came to define it. Clear parallels can be drawn between the Dompas, as analysed by Breckenridge, and the censorship system’s bureaucratic ambitions and inadequacies, and further comparisons will be made in analysis of legislation in Chapter Two. As subsequent chapters will detail, analysis of the archive reveals an order which saw threat everywhere. The incoherence and chaos of the archive reveals the impossibility of neutralising that ever-present threat. Its character is a stark rebuttal to the persistent myth that apartheid bureaucracy was efficient.

Sustained analysis of the archive’s structure and form exposes the system’s futilities and failures, as well as the means by which it succeeded. In *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Ann Laura Stoler describes her project as follows: “This book is about ... a colonial order of things as seen through the record of archival production.”⁹⁵ Stoler asks what insights might be gained from “attending not only to archival content, but to the principles and practices of governance lodged in particular archival forms.”⁹⁶ Following Stoler and Wolfgang Ernst, one of the key questions for this study is what, if anything, a “structural reading of archival architecture”⁹⁷ tell us about apartheid censorship? Stoler has argued that much of archival work remains an extractive enterprise,⁹⁸ and insists on the value of considering “archiving-as-process, rather than archives-as-things.”⁹⁹ Similarly, in the introduction to *Refiguring the Archive*, Hamilton, Harris, and Reid argue for an analysis of archive as a figured thing, and insist that attention be paid to “the fault lines of the archive which reveal their processes of construction,”¹⁰⁰ as well as attending to the “particular and sometimes peculiar form of specific archives.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 20.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Wolfgang Ernst, “Archival Action: the archive as ROM and its political instrumentalisation under National Socialism,” *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2, (1999), 14.

⁹⁸ Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science* 2, (2002), 87.

⁹⁹ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Grame Reid, “Introduction” in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, (Cape Town: David Philip), 16.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 14

The challenges and oddities presented by the apartheid censorship archive underline the value of this approach. It is important to analyse not simply what the censors said, but how they operated as a bureaucratic body, and how their administrative practices informed their operations. For instance, the system seems to have been fixated on generating the *appearance* of accountability, at great administrative cost, when there was often very little need for them to do so. In “Reading Banned Books,” for instance, Andrew van der Vlies discusses the censors’ handling of the work of Alex La Guma. As a result of his anti-apartheid activism, La Guma, a defendant in the 1956 Treason Trial, was banned, placed under house arrest, and forced into exile. His status as a banned or “listed” person meant that nothing he wrote could be read or reported on within South Africa.¹⁰² Nevertheless, as Van der Vlies observes, “while it was already clear that nothing La Guma published abroad could legally be read in South Africa, apartheid bureaucracy clung fervently to the performance of due process, insisting on full reports by appointed readers of each new work.”¹⁰³ As the following chapters will show, the staged performance of due process can be understood as one of the most demanding of the censors’ unofficial duties.

They did not need to write the kinds of reports that they did, and it is necessary to look at the archival structure and architecture in order to understand why they did so. In *The Making of Law: An Ethnography of the Conseil d’Etat*, Bruno Latour insists on “set[ting] aside vague propositions on rights, laws, and norms in exchange for a meticulous investigation into dossiers—grey, beige, or yellow; fat or thin; simple or complicated; old or new—to see where they lead us.”¹⁰⁴

The approach taken here is not so stark, in that it aims to do both: to pay attention to what is said as well as how it is said, on what kind of paper, in what sort of file, and where. Matthew Hull argues that bureaucratic organisations are *precipitated* by documentary artefacts, that they organise themselves around documents.¹⁰⁵ Ben Kafka makes a similar argument, describing documents as “the raw materials of power,” and he urges increased attention to these apparently tedious bits of official paper.¹⁰⁶ A look at the paperwork produced by the apartheid censors illuminates the way the system organised itself, and shows the extent to which it was embedded within the wider bureaucratic culture – insights which can only be gained by immersion in the archive. In his discussion of the difference between studies of policy and studies of

¹⁰² Andrew Van der Vlies, “Reading Banned Books,” *Wasafiri* 22. No. 3, 2007, 56.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Bruno Latour, *The Making of Law: An Ethnography of the Conseil d’Etat* (London: Polity Books, 2009), 83.

¹⁰⁵ Matthew S. Hull, “The File: Agency, Authority, and Autography in an Islamabad Bureaucracy,” *Language & Communication* 23 (2003): 287.

¹⁰⁶ Ben Kafka, “Paperwork: The State of the Discipline,” *Book History* 12 (2009), 341.

administration, Ivan Evans states that “the specific subject of *administration* has not enjoyed the attention which it clearly deserves.”¹⁰⁷ Many studies of censorship focus on legislation, as opposed to the way that it was carried out. There are good reasons for this: the system was opaque, and the censorship archive was not publically accessible until relatively recently. However, analysis of legislation and official discourse does not illuminate as much as it could or should.

Kafka argues that an analysis of paperwork itself allows us to understand both a state’s ambition, and its failures. He argues that “we have been unable to reconcile our theories of the state’s power with our experience of its failure,”¹⁰⁸ and suggests that an analysis of bureaucratic paperwork allows us to reconcile these incompatibilities. In the case of documents produced by the censors, it is important to examine where they succeeded in presenting themselves as a collective whose interests were one, and where they failed. Matthew Hull, for instance, argues that: “the construction of collective agency from the agency of individuals... is a central task of bureaucratic activities”¹⁰⁹ This is a difficult task to achieve in all bureaucracies, but it is especially difficult when the task the bureaucrats are expected to perform is one that simply cannot be collectivised, because it is so subjective. In the following chapter, a brief discussion of the history of obscenity law as it applies to literature will show that the complicated connections between aesthetics and morality means that decisions of this nature will always be unreliable and unpredictable.

In Max Weber’s formulation, “bureaucracy develops... the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation.”¹¹⁰ Both Stoler and Hull discuss the Weberian model of an ideal bureaucracy in relation to their own research. In discussing bureaucratic systems in Islamabad, Hull argues that “successful bureaucratic processes result in action that is not dissolvable into the agency of distinct individuals”¹¹¹ Stoler, similarly recalls Weber and argues that by his formula, the Dutch colonial bureaucracy was “an imperfect success.”¹¹² If the work of Stoler’s Dutch bureaucrats was “an imperfect success”, then the work of the apartheid censors must be judged a failure. According to Weber’s formulation, the censorship board was hardly a

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (New York: Zone Books, 201), 11.

¹⁰⁹ Hull, “The File,” 288.

¹¹⁰ Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology* (New York: Routledge. 2007), 261.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Stoler, *Archival Grain*, 40.

bureaucracy at all: the personal, subjective, and emotional were at the heart of all its decisions. Yet it was a government department, which filled in forms and responded to official demands, which produced records upon records and which continued to present itself as a collective whose interests were one.

Taking in these contradictions is critical to a “reading” of the censorship archive and its structure. Reports spill out of files, and censors scrawl over the lines and onto the back. There is no sense of scale. It is a flood of words, of documents and files and copies upon copies, both legible and illegible. Instead of treating archival work as an extractive enterprise, immersion in the archive shows that these qualities are not “outside the archival field,”¹¹³ and that they must be included in the story of South African censorship. The archive exists as an artefact of a process which attempted to make certain stories impossible. It is fitting, then, that its very unreadability makes it difficult to extract a coherent narrative about censorship itself. Achille Mbembe argues that “the final destination of the archive is...in the story that it makes possible.”¹¹⁴ The character of the archive itself stands as testament to the censors’ efforts to obscure certain stories, and make others impossible. We can learn from its unreadability, which can be read as a kind of metaphor; its tonal instability and material excesses can be seen as a result of the paradoxical nature of the censors’ task.

The architecture of this archive reveals a system trying and failing to eliminate the personal, the emotional. If the personal and the emotional cannot be eliminated from official business, they must somehow co-exist with it. “Judging” a text will always involve a subjective decision on the part of the reader. The entire archive is a record of subjective readings: what is acceptable literature to one person is not acceptable to another, despite the fact that an entire administrative system was created as a straightforward denial of this obvious truth. Obscenity law (the ostensible basis for the censors’ decisions) by its nature exists in an uneasy space where the personal and the political collide. In *The Censors’ Library*, a history of censorship in Australia, Nicole Moore writes that “obscenity itself as a term is perhaps one of the best examples of a loose signifier, if not an empty one....Its legal definition is as an affect: offence as a produced state of feeling or experience.”¹¹⁵ Obscenity law uses the disgust or offence of the legally imagined reader as a basis for law-making, simultaneously denying and accommodating the

¹¹³ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 24

¹¹⁴ Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and its Limits,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, 23.

¹¹⁵ Nicole Moore, *The Censor’s Library: Uncovering the Lost History of Australia’s Banned Books*, (St Lucia, Queensland.: University of Queensland Press, 2012), 101.

subjective and the personal. As Coetzee observes, there is no way of defining the reasonable reader, except as reader who does or does not find the publication obscene.¹¹⁶ Administrative censorship will always be helplessly at war with itself: it must both deny and accommodate the personal, the irrational, and the emotional. An analysis of the files and documents themselves reveals the effects of these queasy denials, these unhappy accommodations. They add up to an archive of excess and insecurity. All that paper, all those words, document the system's attempt to create a cohesiveness, credibility, and legitimacy that it could not attain. Far from being an omniscient bureaucracy, the censorship system had only the image of efficiency to sustain it.

Eric Ketelaar argues that “In all totalitarian systems—public and private—records are used as instruments of power, of extreme surveillance, oppression, torture, murder...the records themselves are dumb, but without them the oppressor is powerless.”¹¹⁷ This is presented as a self-evident truth, but this dictum becomes more complicated when applied to the case of the censorship archives. Much of what is written in the reports is bureaucratically useless or irrelevant. Although files were dutifully cross-referenced, there is surprisingly little evidence of censors using previous decisions as precedent. The PAB often referred to previous cases by way of adding a veneer of legality to their proceedings, and some individual censors backed up their judgements with an appeal to precedent, as in the following report on Charles Pike's pulp thriller *The Golden Dead*, the seventh in a series: “The main characteristic of this book is violence, brutality, and callousness...It is the seventh in a series in which none of the previous editions have been judged to be undesirable. One must accept this assessment and just pity those souls who can find enjoyment in such a book.”¹¹⁸

More often, however, the system proceeded as if each case were unique. As Peter McDonald and others have shown, the censors' decisions were erratic, capricious. There is very little in the archive to suggest that the censors referred back to their own decisions with any real predictability. And yet, every decision is there, dutifully present in the archive, a record of apparent futility and bureaucratic waste. Every report is signed and dated. Every document has a provenance. Immersion in the archive reveals that the primary function of many of these documents was not bureaucratic in nature. Instead, they can be read as the products of attempts,

¹¹⁶ Coetzee, *Giving Offense*, 28.

¹¹⁷ Erich Ketelaar, “Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection”, *Archival Science* 2, no. 3 (2002), 221.

¹¹⁸ IDP 1/12 P76/9/70.

both collective and singular, to define and categorise the literary, to establish orthodoxies of taste, and to define the parameters of a national literature.

An exploration of this chaotic, irrational archive, and an acknowledgment of the methodological challenges that it presents, is a useful lens through which to view the censorship system and the realities of its operations. Immersion in the censorship archive demands that one pay close attention to that which is apparently irrelevant or extraneous, to wonder at the intent behind the production of so many reports which were immediately filed away and never referred to again, to take note of the emotional tone of those reports, which is so often disproportionate to or in excess of what is being discussed. In trying to tell the story of apartheid censorship, the archive itself can occasionally be more of a hindrance than a help, in that this profusion of paper and words can make it difficult to select a straightforward narrative. The sheer size of the archive, its tonal instability, the array of materials that it contains: these factors complicate an easy, linear understanding of a system at work. It is difficult, at times, to “read” this material, to understand the stories it can tell us. This very unreadability, this incoherence, is an inherent part of the archive’s character, and thus of the censorship system itself.

Documents within the archive are occasionally quite literally unreadable in that handwriting is in parts impossible to make out, or that papers have been torn, or carbon copies have been smudged.¹¹⁹ However, the archival material can be said to be unreadable in a variety of other ways. Even when a text is legible, it can still be difficult to understand, categorise, or classify. While the censors had 97 different definitions of undesirability, their reports cannot even be classified into 97 different categories. Their variety and the degree to which they differ from what legislation demands seem almost limitless. That some sections of the archive are difficult to “read” can be conceived of as both methodological challenge and advantage for the researcher. The very difficulty of the archive hinders smooth, easy retellings of the story of apartheid censorship. This aspect of its character should be emphasised, as opposed to elided or massaged into a legible, linear narrative. To relate the story without including that which is messy, or inconvenient, is to diminish the damage that censorship wrought. A focus on politically or socially significant cases tends to give the impression that apartheid censorship had a clear beginning and an end, and that its effects can be easily understood. But these cases make up only the smallest fraction of what the archive contains, and are insufficiently illustrative of a

¹¹⁹ See Appendix 4.

system of suppression which is more difficult to fight against, and thus more difficult to be free of.

1.6 Conclusion

Apartheid censorship was a bureaucratic system that resisted bureaucratisation. Although the system was enacted into being by a set of rigidly defined laws which attempted to eliminate the personal from official business, these rules could only ever be haphazardly applied.

As further chapters will show, the censors applied the blunt instrument of the law in conjunction with tools of their own making, devising as they went along a set of codes and rules to define the literary, to put it in its place and keep it there. Both McDonald and Coetzee agree that the apartheid censors had no overarching aesthetic theory on which they based their decisions.¹²⁰ However, as McDonald argues, “though the archival evidence shows that blinkeredness, the vagaries of taste, and crude arbitrariness often affected their decisions, particularly on the question of what warranted protection as literature, it reveals that ‘aesthetic theory’ of a sometimes fairly sophisticated sort played its part too.”¹²¹ Some of the key questions for my work are how or why those theories were used, what kind of perceived need they were constructed in response to, and how we might read their impact on the South African literary landscape. Understanding these unspoken rules and how they developed is a route to understanding the true and lasting impact of censorship. The censors’ decisions, and the public response to them, did an extraordinary amount to shape the way literature is defined in South Africa. The internal tussle to define the literary created uneasy links between censorship and canonisation, while the system’s near-total suppression of the work of black writers meant that the voices of white writers such as Gordimer and Coetzee were amplified and acclaimed, with their work informing international audiences’ perception of what South African literature could do and be. Black writers’ response to these conditions led naturally to questions of literature’s function and value in an unequal, racially divided society, and these questions remain more relevant than ever. Post-apartheid, there has been increasingly vigorous debate about the place of the “white literary system” in South Africa, with pushback to it led by novelists such as Thando Mgqolozana, who announced at the 2015 Franschhoek Literary Festival (FLF) that he was “quitting the white

¹²⁰ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 10.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

literary system.”¹²² While Mgqolozana’s intervention prompted a seemingly unprecedented level of public engagement with these questions, the view of the white liberal-literary system as exclusionary and irrelevant to the lived existence of most South Africans is not a new one, and Chapter Five will provide a foundation for examination of current debates.

The system’s impact continues to reverberate in other ways. While many critics of censorship were adamantly opposed to it in all its forms, there were other equally vociferous critics whose objections lay elsewhere. Their problem was not with censorship *per se*, but rather with the kind of books the censors were banning. Their doubts were not about the morality of censorship itself, but rather whether those tasked with carrying it out were up to the job. The notion that some kind of censorship was necessary was pervasive. Chapter Five explores the ways in which the system was embedded within a wider bureaucratic and public culture, and shows how a significant portion of even liberal white South Africa evinced a broad acceptance regarding the necessity of some kind of censorship. This acceptance is in many ways still evident today, as will be discussed in the concluding chapter in a final interrogation of the ugly legacies left by the system.

Ambivalence about censorship and arguments over where the final decision rests continue to fuel debates around free speech in post-apartheid South Africa. The recent furore over the State Security Agency’s (SSA) attempts to suppress Jacques Pauw’s *The President’s Keepers: Those Keeping Zuma in Power and Out of Prison* is an illuminating and recent instance of this.¹²³ The final chapter of this book will discuss the case in more depth, alongside an account of the protracted controversy over the FPB’s attempts to suppress Brett Murray’s painting *The Spear*, exposing some of the connections made between past and present forms of publications control in South Africa.

These documents are an invaluable resource. The censors positioned themselves as both literary critics and as literary “guardians,” writing reports which indicate their tendency to conflate and combine these two categories. Their reports show attempts to establish discursive and generic codes by which literature could be defined, judged and assessed. Subsequent chapters will

¹²²“Look at Yourself – It’s Very Abnormal”: Thando Mgqolozana Quits South Africa’s “White Literary System,” *Books Live*, May 18 2015, <http://bookslive.co.za/blog/2015/05/18/look-at-yourself-its-very-abnormal-thando-mgqolozana-quits-south-africas-white-literary-system/>.

¹²³ Kyle Cowan, “Spy agency bid to block explosive book ‘The President’s Keepers,’” *Sunday Times*, 3 November 2017, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2017-11-03-spy-agency-bid-to-block-explosive-book-the-presidents-keepers/>.

explore these categories and definitions in greater depth, and thereby attempt to sketch an outline of what the censors thought “South African literature” could or should look like. Through close analysis of reports and accompanying documents, Chapter Three will provide an in-depth analysis of how the “literary” was classified and named, and how different strategies of reading were used to police the space of the literary. Readings of reports reveal how “realism” and “craftsmanship,” for instance, came to be conceived of as almost mutually exclusive modes of expression, and how the latter was understood to be self-evidently superior. Stark distinctions were drawn between “plain” language and “ornate” language, between that which is specific to a time and place and that which is universal, with clear preference given to the latter in both instances.

Exploration of these modes of reading reveal a great deal about the limited conceptions of culture during apartheid, as well as exposing the insecurities, anxieties, and fears which underpinned so much of apartheid policy, and which informed so many of its laws. These anxieties, in the case of the censors at least, were not limited to fear of subversion or of the power of literature to disrupt the general order. Intellectual insecurity often played a significant role. As their reports on literary works show, the censors (especially the first group), aligned themselves broadly with the Leavisite tradition, and insisted that South African literature, in English at least, should take its place within a wider Western aestheticised tradition, forming part of the general body and tradition of English literature while at the same time retaining something of a unique national character.

The literary-minded censors had very clear ideas as to the duties of South African writers, many of which stemmed from the Cronje Commission’s vision of the “literary artist” who acts as a “mirror in which a community can see itself,” as well as a belief that art’s function was aesthetic as opposed to social. In a report, for instance, on J.M. Coetzee’s *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), the censor noted that while “sex across the colour line is described,” this was not sufficient reason for its being declared undesirable, because the book was likely to be “read and enjoyed only by intellectuals.” “Intellectuals,” in other words, did not pose a threat to state security. They existed in an entirely aestheticised sphere, and were unlikely to be “influenced” by potentially subversive political content. Views like this are frequently repeated in the reports, in which an absolute distinction between “intellectualism” and “politics” is drawn to the point that they become mutually exclusive terms. Some anti-apartheid writers opposed this view with the notion that the function of literature was to instruct, that to focus on “craftsmanship” was to ignore what was important. Fraught and conflicting notions about the social utility of literature in

apartheid society meant that “the literary” came in some senses to be tainted with collusion, and that craftsmanship amounted to complicity. Questions over who “owns” the space of the literary, and over who *should* own it, over who has the ability (or even the right) to critique it, continue to reverberate today.

The apartheid censors conceived of themselves as guardians of the literary, and it is striking to note the degree to which opposition to censorship utilised the concept of guardianship as well. The censors and those opposed to it often employed the same kind of reasoning. The banning of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* or *Burger’s Daughter* provoked outrage because they are of a high literary standard and therefore valuable. The banning of *Andy, Sexy Nurse* would cause no such outrage, because it was “trash,” disposable. It is uncomfortable to take this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, which says that we should only protest the banning of “good” books. This can amount to a tacit acceptance of censorship to some degree, and we must consider what this means for the connections between literary censorship and literary criticism, and how these connections continue to warp the literary landscape.

In “The Mind of Apartheid,” Coetzee warns that “the more cautious among us may want to draw lines between apartheid legislation, which can indeed be dismantled, apartheid practices, which cannot be dismantled but can be combated, and apartheid thinking, which is likely to resist coercion, as thinking generally does.”¹²⁴ The literary infrastructure the censors helped to create has not been demolished; their definitions of the literary and the laws of what can be said are repeated in official and unofficial ways. The archive offers a clear insight into this, and the following chapters seek to illuminate these insights, and consider what we may learn from them today.

¹²⁴ Coetzee, “The Mind of Apartheid”, 2.

Chapter 2: Official Rules

2.1 Introduction

In carrying out their task as “guardians” of literature, the censors might be said to have worked with two separate frameworks: one official and one unofficial, one prescribed in law and one which they were obliged to construct as they went along. The chapter which follows this one will examine the construction of the unofficial framework, using an array of documents from the archive in order to trace the censors’ futile but persistent attempts to achieve consensus on the nature of the literary. Using the official power conferred on them by legislation, and the unofficial authority granted to them in their role as guardians of culture, the censors worked to shape a national literature that would uphold and reflect the values of the apartheid state. The volatile combination of official power and unofficial cultural authority gave rise to a wildly unpredictable system, and resulted in the chaotic archive that is the object of this study.

This chapter examines the officially sanctioned source of the censors’ power, and the performance of rational efficiency it enabled. A thorough overview of the censorship laws shows that the system had irrationality and contradiction built into its very foundations, in spite of the briskly efficient image it fostered. Even as legislation became more rigid, it remained liable to misapplication, especially since the censors were afforded so much discretionary power. As the censorship system changed and adapted, this disjuncture between law and its application remained a definitive characteristic of the system. It was a bureaucratic and legislative system which relied heavily on the appearance of efficiency and omniscience, but was at the same time full of loopholes and characterised by excess, oversight, and inefficiency.

Discussing the censorship legislation, Merrett points out that “as with other areas of apartheid legislation it is pertinent to query the degree of congruence between the intent of the law and its implementation by bureaucrats.”¹²⁵ The apartheid censorship archive is a valuable resource for a number of reasons, one of which is that it exists as a very thorough documentary record of an apartheid bureaucracy at work. This chapter focuses on the ways in which legislation, and the vast bureaucratic system it enabled, legitimised and normalised a violent and repressive process, and draws conclusions which can perhaps be applied to other kinds of apartheid legislation.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 6.

A brief example, one which will be explored in more depth in Chapter Four: throughout its existence, the censorship board dealt only with publications which were submitted to it. Submissions came from a variety of sources: the police, Customs, publishers, and members of the public. As McDonald notes, the overwhelming majority came from agents of the state, as opposed to offended individuals or groups.¹²⁶ In 1964, in an attempt to improve the rate of submissions and diversify their sources, Gerrit Dekker (the first chairman of the Censorship Board) employed a full-time “Publications Inspector,” Johannes Blom. One of Blom’s duties, in his capacity as Inspector of Publications, was to scan incoming consignments of publications at the Cape Town Harbour, identify those ones which looked “doubtful,” and forward these to the Publications Board for a decision. In other words, the Board’s solution to the systemic problem of low submission rates was to employ a single, elderly man to “scan” the thousands of texts that entered the country daily, and decide which ones looked, to him, as if they might be offensive. The examples that follow in this chapter and the next will further emphasise the fact that the system which projected an image of such thoroughness and competency was in fact inefficient and directionless at heart.

Histories of apartheid administration evince a range of views regarding the coercive powers of the state, and of the role that bureaucracy and record-keeping played in the enforcing of those powers. Verne Harris, for instance, emphasises the apartheid state’s “obsession” with record-keeping and describes apartheid bureaucracy as “huge, complex, and intrud[ing] into almost every aspect of citizens’ lives.”¹²⁷ In Harris’s view, the state’s suppressive powers were rooted in its fanatical record-keeping, which, he argues, allowed for near-total surveillance of the citizenry. Cherryl Walker insists, similarly, that “the system of apartheid can be summed up in one word – control.”¹²⁸ Evans, additionally, argues that apartheid’s sophisticated bureaucracy allowed for violent, “obsessive” control over its citizens.¹²⁹ In Evans’s view, “the feasibility of apartheid came to rest on the pervasive presence of the state in every facet of life.”¹³⁰ For these scholars, apartheid-era bureaucratic efficiency was at the heart of the state’s brutal systems of suppression.

This view of the technocratic capacities of the state and the uses to which they were put stands in opposition to that of Breckenridge, who argues that “most of the historians and political

¹²⁶ Ibid., 33.

¹²⁷ Harris, “Archival Sliver,” 2.

¹²⁸ Cherryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (Johannesburg: David Phillip, 1991), 123.

¹²⁹ Ivan Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa* (Davis: University of California Press, 1997).

¹³⁰ Ibid., 1.

scientists who have written about this period have taken the state at its own public word, and massively overstated its coercive abilities in the process.”¹³¹ Dlamini, additionally, makes note of “the myth that confuses legality with the rule of law” when speaking of the perception of the coercive abilities of the state.¹³² This perspective can be sustained and supported with evidence from the censorship archive. The censors projected an image of competence and predictability. They presented themselves as efficient, and the public took them largely at their word. Even those who were opposed to them and derided them as stuffed-shirt bureaucrats tended to perceive the system as operating with near-omniscient effectiveness. Material from the archive and a thorough reading of legislation, however, paint a different picture altogether.

This dissonance between the appearance of omniscience and the reality of ineffectiveness can be seen in other kinds of apartheid bureaucratic administration. There are interesting connections to be made between the above instance of bureaucratic ineptitude and the circumstances which led to the assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd in Parliament, in 1966. In her analysis of the report by the commission of inquiry into the death of Verwoerd, Deborah Posel argues that “the notion that the apartheid system gave expression to the systematic, coherent and unifying vision of a group of powerful, charismatic men, with Verwoerd at the helm, is part of apartheid’s mythic self-presentation, rather than an accurate rendition of how it was produced and reproduced.”¹³³ Posel reads the report as the state’s attempt to make meaning and ideological significance out of Verwoerd’s assassination, and the events which led to it.

Despite the state’s attempt to shape the events of his death into something approaching mythical status, the report was unable to conceal the fact that Verwoerd would not have been assassinated if the apartheid bureaucratic machine were even a fraction as efficient as it presented itself to be. As Posel states, “the story of [Verwoerd’s assassin] Dmitri Tsafendas’ murderous proximity to the body of Verwoerd is a story of the fatal ineptitude and incoherence of the body of the apartheid state.”¹³⁴ The report produced by the Inquiry found that Tsafendas, born in Mozambique, had been repeatedly banned from even entering the country, on the basis of his “communistic leanings” and the problem of his being a “half-caste.”¹³⁵ As Posel observes, “the fact that Tsafendas was in the country at all – let alone on that fateful day – testified to the lapses

¹³¹ Keith Breckenridge, “Verwoerd’s Bureau of Proof,” 104.

¹³² Jacob Dlamini, *Askari*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 14.

¹³³ Posel, “The Assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd: The Spectre of Apartheid’s Corpse,” 331.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 342.

¹³⁵ Republic of South Africa, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Circumstances of the Death of the late Dr The Honourable Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, p 3 para 25.

in the very apparatus set up to secure the country's borders against any potential menace."¹³⁶ Posel discusses the "authoritarian, patriarchal fashioning of authority within the apartheid state," and the crucial role this kind of authority played in the administering of apartheid. This chapter offers further insight into the legal and quasi-legal means by which that authority was constituted, looking at how the performance of legality and respectability provided a legitimising cover for the system's excesses and abuses.

In *Bureaucracy and Race*, a study of the Department of Native Affairs and its role in entrenching apartheid, Evans argues that study of the South African state is "unavoidably, a study of bureaucratic growth and its fusion with coercion."¹³⁷ He further argues that "Verwoerd was a persuasive ideologue and a martinet without peer – but above all he was a brilliant administrator."¹³⁸ The idea that the apartheid leaders had a genius for bureaucracy is persistent. However, as Posel's analysis shows, and immersion in the censorship archive reveals, this "brilliance" was not a feature of all government departments. The censorship system was full of holes, but projected an image of functionality and near-omniscience, bolstered by a complex legislation and an opaque decision-making process. An exploration of the inner workings of the censorship system can both offer a rebuttal to myths of its omniscience and attempt to explain why it still had such a profound impact.

This exploration will also allow for a discussion of the "character" of censorship administration and bureaucracy as a key feature of apartheid legislation, showing that while the violence enacted by the system was of a different nature and type, this violence should be understood as forming a crucial means of the state's oppressive technologies, and is a lucid example of how apartheid used the veneer of legality to operate lawlessly and with impunity.

2.2 Madness and the Law

As I suggested in the opening chapter, one way to account for the extraordinary excess of the censorship archive is to view it as the overcompensating efforts of a system that cannot function efficiently. Censorship law attempts to deny interpretive ambiguity, and insists that objective analysis of a text is a simple matter. As Freshwater argues, censors are "motivated by a desire to fix meaning...and to fill the vacuum into which interpretation rushes."¹³⁹ A glance at almost any

¹³⁶ Posel, "The Assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd," 341.

¹³⁷ Ivan Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race*, 3

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³⁹ Freshwater, "Towards a redefinition," 221.

report in the archive reveals the impossibility of fulfilling that desire. Before beginning an analysis of the reports themselves, however, a closer reading of the legislation and accompanying documents is important. Myths of apartheid bureaucratic efficiency crumble when looking at the handwritten censors' reports – they are excessive, emotional, apparently beside the point, and represent an astounding squandering of intellectual effort. It is not enough, however, to say that the censors *responded* to the legislation in ways that were irrational, overly emotional, confused, or misguided. It is important to begin first by pointing out that the legislation itself was irrational and contradictory. In 1991, J.M. Coetzee wrote that

if there is an orthodoxy among historians of apartheid today, it is that apartheid was not different in nature from the policies and practices of segregation that preceded it; furthermore, that apartheid legislation was a by no means irrational response to social developments which threatened the expectations of Afrikaners and the privilege of white South Africans in general.¹⁴⁰

Coetzee proposed a contrary perspective: that the men who “invented and installed apartheid were possessed by demons,” that they were illogically driven by deeply irrational, not to say crazed, fears and anxieties.¹⁴¹ He posits that is insufficient and reductive to view apartheid as an economic policy primarily based on the white minority's self-interest and greed. Alongside these supposedly “rational” concerns, Coetzee suggests, apartheid “flowered out of desire and out of the hatred of desire.”¹⁴² He argues that the architects of apartheid were obsessed with “mixture and the desire for mixture,” and suggests that apartheid policy was at least partially premised on the attempt to suppress the baffling, frightening threat of desire.¹⁴³ In the writings of Geoffrey Cronje (the head of the Cronje Commission mentioned in the previous chapter), Coetzee sees apartheid “nakedly thinking itself out,” and argues that this self-fashioning is rooted in obsession and fear, as opposed to putatively rational self-interest.¹⁴⁴ A close reading of the censorship legislation exposes similar obsessions and irrationalities, particularly in the form of the fraught themes and metaphors that emerge from apparently dry “officialese.” The recommendations of the Cronje Commission aimed at providing a scientific, intellectual rationale for the practice of censorship. The legislation based on these recommendations similarly attempted to provide a

¹⁴⁰ J.M. Coetzee, “The Mind of Apartheid: Geoffrey Cronje (1907-),” 2.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

systematic, logical guide to the banning of books. But underneath this performance of rationality lay the madness and delirium to which Coetzee refers, a desperation to manage desire which could not be fully hidden behind the legitimising mask of bureaucracy. Seemingly straightforward legislative references to the likely or probable reader reveal deep-seated racial anxieties and fixations, and attempts to pin down the obscene and the unsayable expose the unspeakable, unnameable fears behind apartheid policy.

2.3 The 1963 Parliamentary Act

The censors' judgements and decisions took place at the intersection of morality and taste, where defining the literary also meant defining an imaginary community. In order to understand the convoluted and sometimes contradictory legal basis for these definitions, it is necessary to outline in this chapter some of the issues regarding obscenity law, the legislation of morality, and the history of obscenity law from a legal perspective in South Africa. In obscenity law, the attempt to legislate morality rubs up against the attempt to legislate taste. Scholarship which focuses on the contradictions of this law has been included below in order to provide a framework for understanding the peculiar difficulty of the censors' assigned task.

Censorship legislation relied first on conceptions of "the likely reader," moved onto the notion of the "reasonable" or average reader, and finally, in its begrudging concessions to the literary, privileged the response of the likely reader once more. In drawing up both the 1963 and the 1974 Publications Acts, lawmakers were influenced by judgements resulting from prominent obscenity cases in both England and America, as well as the findings of two South African Commissions of Inquiry into "Undesirable Publications." As McDonald notes, the 1963 Act based its definition of obscenity on the findings of the judge in the 1868 English case, *Regina v. Hicklin*, which involved the statutory interpretation of the word "obscene."¹⁴⁵ The judge found that obscene material could be defined as that which had "the tendency ... to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall." The court also found that "intention" of the creator of the work was immaterial; whether or not they meant to corrupt public morals was irrelevant if the publication was judged as obscene in fact. The court's finding also specified that a publication could be judged as obscene if it *or any part of it* had the tendency to corrupt or deprave. It made no provision for assessment of literary or artistic merit. The Hicklin test famously informed the

¹⁴⁵ 3 L.R.-Q.B. 360 (1868).

original legal decision regarding the banning of Joyce's *Ulysses* in the United States. The judge ruled that because the "Nausicaa" episode contained a depiction of masturbation, the book as a whole must be banned. In *Girls Lean Back Everywhere: The Law of Obscenity and the Assault on Genius*, the legal scholar Edward de Grazia discusses the *Ulysses* case. Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap were the publishers of *The Little Review*, the magazine in which episodes of *Ulysses* originally appeared. They were charged with obscenity. Defending the "Nausicaa" episode in court, Anderson said "I state clearly that the quite unnecessary defense of beauty is the only issue involved. James Joyce has never written anything, and will never be able to write anything, that is not beautiful." But, as de Grazia points out, the law "did not concede that beauty could be a defense against an imputation of obscenity; most English and American judges refused even to admit evidence of literary or artistic merit."¹⁴⁶ By the 1950s in America, the Hicklin test was considered outdated, and judges were permitted to consider the artistic merit of the work as a whole. The apartheid censorship system made no such concessions.

In his discussion of the 1963 Act, McDonald comments on the significance of conceptions of public morality in the drawing up of the legislation. He notes that the South African legislation's emphasis on public morals "drew inspiration from the anti-liberal tradition articulated most notably by Patrick Devlin in his influential lecture *The Enforcement of Morals*."¹⁴⁷ In this lecture, Devlin argued that "society is justified in taking the same steps to preserve its moral code as it does to preserve its government and other essential institutions," a position notable for its conservatism as well as its absolute conviction that consensus could be achieved on so subjective a matter.¹⁴⁸ *The Enforcement of Morals* was delivered in response to the findings of the Wolfenden Report, or Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution (1957), in England. In response to the conviction of a succession of men on the basis of "homosexual offenses," the report concluded that "homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence."¹⁴⁹ In his subsequent attack on the findings of the report, Devlin stated that "We should ask ourselves in the first instance whether, looking at it calmly and dispassionately, we regard it as a vice so abominable that its mere

¹⁴⁶ Edward de Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere: The Law of Obscenity and the Assault on Genius*, (London: Vintage, 1993), 401.

¹⁴⁷ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 58

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ The Wolfenden Report: Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, (New York: Stein and Day, 1958).

presence is an offense. If that is the genuine feeling of the society in which we live, I do not see how society can be denied the right to eradicate it.”¹⁵⁰

He argued that the law needed to make provision for the natural feelings of “intolerance, indignation, and disgust” which would arise in “the reasonable man” in response to something as “abominable” as homosexuality.¹⁵¹ Martha Nussbaum notes that Devlin’s focus was not on “intolerance” or “indignation,” but on disgust. She asks “why does Devlin think disgust a reliable basis for law-making? Even if we grant him that there are some vices that, sufficiently disseminated, would erode society’s capacity to function, why should we suppose that disgust is a reliable index of which activities have that property?”¹⁵² Nussbaum argues that disgust is a particularly unreliable index for the identification of society-eroding vice, embodying as it does “magical ideas of contamination, and impossible aspirations to purity.”¹⁵³ As Coetzee argues in “The Mind of Apartheid,” a fixation on and terror of “contamination” and a dedication to maintaining racial purity was at the heart of much apartheid law-making, and the censorship legislation was not exempt from this.

As the following chapters will show, the basis of many of the censors’ decisions was simply disgust or, as they put it “mortification and repugnance,” and it is clear that they considered this feeling to be a reliable index for the identification of obscenity in a text. Disgust was occasionally projected onto the “likely reader,” and at other times, a censor’s own disgust was invoked as the basis for her assessment of a text. In these assessments, the line between aesthetic and moral judgement became indistinguishable. That which was “disgusting” to the censors was deemed to be “unreadable”: both morally reprehensible and aesthetically flawed. The censors themselves used this term quite frequently, as in the comments made on Clyde Allison’s *Have Nude Will Travel*: “This is really a lurid, repulsive, decadent book. It is unreadable.”¹⁵⁴ In their reports, the censors repeatedly demonstrated not only that they considered disgust a reliable basis for their judgements, but that such responses were indicative of high aesthetic standards. In *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, Nussbaum shows how disgust “has been used throughout history to exclude or marginalize groups of people who come to embody the dominant group’s fear and loathing of its own animality and mortality.”¹⁵⁵ This perspective is, of

¹⁵⁰ Devlin, “The Enforcement of Morals”, 17.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 18.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁵⁴ BCS 30/29517.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 14.

course, strikingly applicable to any analysis of apartheid South Africa, and provides a valuable theoretical foundation for what follows.

These key features of the ruling in *Regina v. Hicklin* were replicated in the 1963 Act. The cornerstone of the Act was section 5 (2), outlined in Chapter One. The language of Section 5 (2) is unexceptional. While there are coded references to a preoccupation with segregation and the possibility of insurrection, and an overt concern with “the safety of the state”, the subsections of 5 (2) are, as McDonald observes, a “fairly neutral set of formulations.”¹⁵⁶

The next section of the Act, however, which defined obscenity in statutory terms, might be seen as a particularly striking instance of the kind of “madness” Coetzee refers to in “The Mind of Apartheid,” as well as an example of the way disgust and shame were legislatively invoked:

If in any legal proceedings under this Act the question arises whether any matter is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals, that matter shall be deemed to be:

- (a) indecent or obscene if, in the opinion of the court, it has the tendency to deprave or to corrupt the minds of persons who are likely to be exposed to the effect or influence thereof; or
- (b) offensive to public morals if in the opinion of the court it is likely to be outrageous or disgusting to persons who are likely to read or see it; or
- (c) harmful to public morals if in the opinion of the court it deals in an improper manner with murder, suicide, death, horror, cruelty, fighting, brawling, illtreatment, lawlessness, gangsterism, robbery, crime, the techniques of crimes and criminals, tippling, drunkenness, trafficking in or addiction to drugs, smuggling, sexual intercourse, prostitution, promiscuity, White-slavery, licentiousness, lust, passionate love scenes, homosexuality, sexual assault, rape, sodomy, sadism, sexual bestiality, abortion, change of sex, night life, physical poses, nudity, scant or inadequate dress, divorce, marital infidelity, adultery, illegitimacy, human or social deviation or degeneracy, or any other similar or related phenomenon; or

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

(d) indecent or obscene or offensive or harmful to public morals if in the opinion of the court it is in any other manner subversive of morality.

It is an extraordinary piece of legislation, as remarkable for what it doesn't say as for what it does. Firstly, Section 6 (1) reveals an overt concern with the potential effects of exposure to subversive material. It uses the definition of obscenity as provided by *Hicklin v. Regina*, but does so in a way that exponentially exaggerates the threat that "obscenity" poses.

The *Hicklin v. Regina* judgement defined obscene material as that which has "the tendency ... to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall." Section 6 (1) repeats this formulation, but divides it into two separate sections, and takes it a step further. In (a), a publication can be judged as obscene if it has the tendency to corrupt the weak. In (b), a publication can be judged as obscene if it is likely to be "outrageous or disgusting" to *anyone* who might read or see it. The original Hicklin test specifically targets readers whose "minds are open to such immoral influences." That is, the original Hicklin test, or at least its phrasing, is not concerned with *all* readers, only the ones with potentially immoral minds.

The wording of the 1963 Act changes this, and reveals the fear that *all readers* can be potentially corrupted. The 1963 Act is not concerned with "minds open to immoral influences," in other words, a certain class of corruptible person. It is concerned with *all* minds likely to be "exposed." The wording of the Act suggests that all inhabitants of the Republic are vulnerable, not just "young or immature persons." The wording of Section 6 (1) (a) and (b) is suggestive of extreme anxiety, and is acutely pitched in its perception of the threat that "obscenity" poses.

If (a) and (b) work to provide a definition of obscenity that is broad enough to justify the banning of almost any text, the following subsection seems to define it in startlingly specific terms. Section 6 (1) (c) provides 44 examples of obscene material, and seems to provide a taxonomy of offence by which the censors can assess a text. It is so apparently thorough and wide-ranging in its categorising of offense that its omissions go almost unnoticed, at first.

Coetzee argues that apartheid, in its greed, "demanded black bodies in all their physicality in order to burn up their energy as labour. In its anxiety about black bodies it made iron laws to banish them from sight. Its essence was therefore from the beginning confusion, a confusion

which it displaced wildly all around itself.¹⁵⁷ This confusion and anxiety is on full display in subsection (c), which is remarkable for what it refuses to say. Subsection (c) addresses the problem of “improper reference” to “tippling,” to “smuggling,” to “lust,” to “divorce,” but it does not make any explicit reference to race, beside inclusion of “white-slavery.” To point the following out seems redundant, but the project of apartheid was based on racial separation. Its architects created laws to prevent black people and white people from living in the same place. They made it a criminal offense for black people and white people to sleep together, and they said that to do so was not only illegal but immoral. Every aspect of South Africans’ lives was governed by the state’s attempts to segregate the races, and yet there is no direct reference to these efforts in the wording of the 1963 Publications and Entertainments Act.

The “problem” of race was, of course, embedded into the foundations of all apartheid policy, and so its absence in the censorship legislation deserves consideration. The “problem” is only indirectly alluded to, as if “racial intermingling” is a crime so grievous it cannot be addressed by name, so frightening as to be unspeakable, so obvious that it does not need to be mentioned, or perhaps a combination of all three. The reluctance to explicitly mention race in a piece of legislation that is about race as much as it is about the attempt to uphold a so-called “Christian way of life,” is typical of the kind of displacements and evasions which characterised the censorship system.

These evasions, of course, helped to disguise the true nature of the censors’ active political role in apartheid’s monstrous project of social engineering. The disguise proved remarkably effective. As late as 1974, for instance, Nadine Gordimer asked a question that now seems easy to answer: “How does censorship work as part of the grand design of apartheid? And how effective has it been? Far more than we realise, I think.”¹⁵⁸ Gordimer’s framing of the question is telling; her suggesting that censorship was a crucial part of apartheid’s “grand design” might now seem self-evident, but this fact was evidently unclear to many observers at the time. A reading of the legislation’s wording can help us to understand how this obvious truth was obscured.

The “problem” of race is indirectly addressed only in 6 (1) (d), wherein a publication can be judged to be “obscene or offensive or harmful to public morals if in the opinion of the court *it is in any other manner subversive of morality.*” It must be assumed that this is a reference to depictions of

¹⁵⁷ Coetzee, “Mind of Apartheid,” 2.

¹⁵⁸ Nadine Gordimer, “Apartheid and Censorship,” *The Grey Ones: Essays on Censorship* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1974), 3.

“racial intermingling,” a remarkably vague allusion in comparison to the otherwise exhaustive specificity of the cataloguing of vices. This vagueness was clarified in the drafting of the official forms which the censors were required to fill in it. “Offensive intermingling” as a category of offense is mentioned by name in the forms, but as the following section will discuss, the official forms were as contradictory and confused as the Act was.

The 1963 Publications Act was far stranger than its seemingly anodyne official scaffolding would suggest. In spite of the array of rules and standards it presented, it failed to provide any real operative guidelines for the practical functioning of the system. The censors, in their everyday duties, were tasked with two duties: reading literature through the lens provided by apartheid policy and judging it on that basis, and assessing the literary merits of a given text. The 1963 Publications and Entertainments Act provided some guidance as to how to go about the former task, but it made no specific mention of the issues which underpinned apartheid policy: race, and racial segregation. More significantly, it provided no guidelines whatsoever about how the censors might go about assessing the literary merits of a text. While the legislation went into extraordinary detail concerning how a censor or reader might identify morally offensive material, it was officially mute on the question of how aesthetically offensive material might be identified.

In other words, the Act either elided or ignored the basic realities of the censors’ duties, and laid the foundation for the chaos and unpredictability that was to follow. The Act, like so much of the system itself, was far less efficient and effective than it appeared to be. It was also, like the system itself, far more based in emotional response than its language would initially indicate. On close reading of the words on the page, the apparently neutral legislative language reveals some of the fears and fixations which characterised apartheid thinking: fear of “contamination,” obsession with “purity,” and a determination to legislate desire. The words which are absent are equally revealing: “bestiality” and “tippling” are there, but miscegenation is absent. In some ways, the entire Act is structured around a problem that its creators seemed reluctant even to name. In its contradictory assumptions and underlying incoherencies, the Act established a system which would become progressively more incoherent and contradictory over the years, all the while obscuring the nature of the censors’ role in the implementation of apartheid policy.

Analysis of the Acts reveals some the contradictions and inadequacies of the rules the censors were required to follow, and a “reading” of the censors’ response to the forms generated by the Acts yields even more insight into the incoherencies of the official legislation. The section that follows will focus on how 1963 Act was rendered in bureaucratic terms, and how the censors

responded to those directives. It will also focus on how the system attempted to deny the possibility of interpretive ambiguity even as it was unwittingly encouraged, and reflect on the results of the violent clash between official rules and unofficial strategies.

2.4 The 1963 Censors' Report Forms

As in all other aspects of official documentation relating to censorship, the forms were in both English and Afrikaans. The 1963 form was divided into three broad sections. First, the censor or reader was required to give a short "synopsis" of the publication, an apparent demand to simply summarise the text. When the text being scrutinised was a magazine or periodical, the summaries the censors gave would usually be brief: "June 1964 issue of *Scope* magazine," or "Amnesty International pamphlet." However, when the text under assessment was a work of literature, the summaries were generally much longer. An "ideal" response should have looked something like the following:

Hubert Phipps in the colonial service in Hong Kong, although married for two years, fell in love with a girl and had sexual intercourse with her on more than one occasion. He found that she was a whore and became intrigued. He became estranged from his wife. Eventually, after having shocked his wife by his confession, he rushed to Anna and was overtaken by a typhoon and saved Anna's life. He went back home and he and his wife became reconciled with one another.¹⁵⁹

Here, the censor summarised the plot of the novel in relatively objective language. The use of the word "whore" is perhaps unexpected in an administrative document, and is certainly indicative of the censors' conservative sexual morality. The synopsis is otherwise free of overtly subjective or personal analysis, however, and simply sums up the novel's content. Summaries like the one above were not necessarily the norm. Here, for instance, is a plot synopsis written by C.J.D. Harvey, prominent member of the Board and Professor of English at the University of Stellenbosch from 1962-1984:

It is impossible to summarise the meanderings of the "plot" of this upper-middle-class "novel"...The book is likely to be highly popular among educated non-literary people as it is packed with literary allusions of the obvious kind and has great pretensions to seriousness, even profundity i.e. it is not conceived of as mere entertainment, though, in

¹⁵⁹ BCS 65.

my opinion, it is superficial and the characters, especially the bohemians, stereotyped...It is very much a middle-brow book and will probably not attract the innocent or the young.¹⁶⁰

Harvey, here, is not summarising the plot of the novel but summarising his opinion of its literary merit, and flagging his own ability to evaluate it on this basis. These assertions of good taste and judgement can be seen as forming part of the unofficial rule-making which will be discussed in the next chapter. Harvey's dismissal of "literary allusions of the obvious kind" and his objection to the work's "pretensions" are typical instances of the censors' constant attempts to establish themselves as discriminating readers. This was not, of course, part of their job description. In purely administrative terms, it is the first censor who is doing his job properly: summing up a text and flagging its potentially undesirable features. However, countless reports in the archive indicate that many censors found it almost impossible to restrict themselves to this task alone. Even if they did actually summarise the plot (something which Harvey, in the synopsis above, refuses to do), they added their own subjective responses, assessments of literary merit, personal opinions, and scrawled asides.

The following synopsis, written in a report on Bill Naughton's *Alfie*, is worth quoting at length:

A first-person narrative describing sordid details of a young Londoner's sexual life. This is a main subject of the book. From time to time the author squeezes in amongst the most stereotyped and crude descriptions, as though in effort to redeem and justify his novel, half-hearted glints of a bit nobler reactions by his 'hero', which only helps towards creating a wholly unnatural and repulsive impression e.g. a description of a useless life of a won'twork [sic] who likes like a pimp, behaves like one and inspires nothing but negative values in the young reader...There is no clear or intelligent thought running through this narrative bar a bit of a period of a clearly abnormal young individual's life which is neither healthy nor interesting to anybody but inexperienced youngster-reader or mentally retarded grown-up, for whom the book was expressly written.¹⁶¹

Here, the censor attempts to summarise the plot, assess the novel on the basis of its ethical merits, assess it on the basis of its literary merit, speculate on its intended audience, and speculate who it might have an untoward effect on. While the assessment of *Alfie* is unusually venomous

¹⁶⁰ BCS 65 104/66.

¹⁶¹ BCS65 37/66.

(censors did not routinely refer to readers as “mentally retarded grown-ups), it is an otherwise characteristic example of the confused, tonally unstable reports the system reliably produced.

After the synopsis section of the form, Section 2 required the censor to make specific reference to “pages on which appear passages considered to be indecent, obscene or objectionable in terms of the Act.” In the first form drafted after the 1963 legislation was passed, for instance, Section 2 grouped categories of offense as follows:

- (i) Crime; Violence; Description of murder; Sadism; Ill-treatment to women
- (ii) Intimate descriptions of women’s bodies; Passionate lovemaking; Sexual relations; Loose morals
- (iii) Traffic in drugs; White slave traffic; The drug habit; Other vices
- (iv) Offensive intermingling (sic) between Europeans and non-Europeans; Objectionable language; other objectionable features
- (v) Subversive propaganda

All that the censors were technically required to do, in section 2, was to write down the page numbers where such offenses appeared. Here, again, they went beyond or against what was required. In some cases, for instance, censors added their own categories of offence – features of a text which they believed to be obscene but which were mentioned neither in the legislation nor the administrative form. There are reports in the archive in which censors crossed out the typed words “considered to be offensive” and wrote “SHOULD BE CONSIDERED.” They filled in their own categories of offense, changing “Crime,” for instance, to “gas murders,” “sadism” to “lesbian lusts,” “passionate love-making” to “homosexuality,” “other objectionable features” to “murder purge of opponents.”¹⁶² They affixed pages to the form where they had created their own categories of offense, such as “gruesome castration of hog,” “schoolgirls pregnant,” and “suggestion of incest.”¹⁶³

In most cases, though, they simply noted the offending pages. But close examination of even apparently uncomplicated sections of the form reveals contradictions, confusion, and exposes the particular fixations of the racist state. As mentioned in the previous section, while the Act refused to directly address the question of race, the form itself does so, in subsection (iv) above.

¹⁶² See Appendix 5.

¹⁶³ See Appendix 6.

“Offensive intermingling between Europeans and non-Europeans” was a direct reference to literary depictions of miscegenation. In other words, the structure of the form puts depictions of sex between black and white in an entirely different category of offense to any other depictions of sex, and forces the censors to discriminate between the two. The form puts “offensive intermingling” in the same category as “other objectionable features.” Again, this can be seen as an instance of the kind of “madness” to which Coetzee refers, yet another attempt to legislate against even the possibility of inter-racial desire. To place depictions of sex between black and white in the same category as depictions of “passionate lovemaking,” for instance, would be a tacit admission that such desire could exist, even in fiction. Placing it in the category of the simply “objectionable” consigns it to a different realm altogether – not an offensive description of sex but of something actually unspeakable – and represents the same kind of evasion seen in the legislation’s refusal to directly acknowledge the issue of race. The form required the censors to look at literary depictions of sex between black people and white people from a different perspective, and place such depictions in a specially quarantined category, one which had nothing to do with “passion” or “lovemaking.” The structure of the form shows that while scenes of “passionate lovemaking” were undesirable because of the lust they were likely to produce in the reader, scenes of sexual relations between black and white were undesirable simply because they were “objectionable,” liable to produce disgust as opposed to lust. Discussing Australian censorship, Nicole Moore argues that “censorship mediated the very possibilities through which sexuality could be imagined, and thus practiced. It defined sexual morality – the notion of a shared ethics of bodily engagement – and attempted to enforce the representation of that morality as a national ideal.”¹⁶⁴ The listing of categories of offense, above, is a clear example of similar attempts at enforcement. Including “offensive intermingling” in an entirely separate category indicates the ways in which the censors, and thus the reading public, were encouraged to imagine sexual relations between black and white as belonging to a different category of “sexual morality.”

The form drafted in response to the 1963 legislation was updated a few times during the 11 years it was used by the Board, but “offensive intermingling” always remained in a separate category of offense from other potentially undesirable depictions of sex which violated a Calvinistic system of morality. In later iterations of the form, for instance, it was placed between “blasphemous and objectionable language” and “subversive propaganda” – a shockingly clear example of what sex

¹⁶⁴ Moore, *The Censors’ Library*, 50.

between black and white meant to the apartheid state in ideological terms, as both a political and a moral issue. In the apartheid imagination, “offensive intermingling” resided at the intersection between blasphemy and subversion, both a crime against God and a threat to the security of the state.

Close analysis of the 1963 form reveals other latent moral anxieties about sex and its literary treatment. In a later iteration of the original form, for instance, the following objectionable features are grouped together as one category: (c) White slavery and prostitution; Passionate love scenes; sexual intercourse; Loose morals; Sex perversion; Description of women’s bodies.

This taxonomy suggests that a “description of a woman’s body” represents the same kind of threat as a scene of “white slavery and prostitution.” While one might be “worse” or more dangerous than the other, the form still grouped them together in one category, a clear example of the state’s anxieties about female sexuality, and the threat it represented to “Christian” morals. Sex and its treatment in literature was a hugely important factor in censors’ attempts to pin down the nature of the literary and accordingly define its opposite. The question of “functionality” was key – how was sex “used” in a text? What was its purpose? Could scenes of “passionate lovemaking” be viewed as “essential”? Could an argument for passing a novel which included a graphic description of sex be based on aesthetic grounds? How was such a subjective assessment to be determined? How was the line drawn, and when? Again, the legislation was largely based on the notion that a text should be declared offensive if it *or any part of it* had the tendency to corrupt or deprave. Some censors’ efforts to take this into consideration when arguing for the literary value of a text including a graphic description of sex meant that they were obliged to perform an absurd and contradictory balancing act. As the following chapter will demonstrate, attempts to answer these questions resulted in judgements in which ideas of morality, and ideas of aesthetics became hopelessly blurred. The structure of the form itself, the way it isolated sex and its literary function, encouraged this kind of blurring.

In the third and final section of the form drafted in response to the 1963 legislation, censors were required to pass final judgement on whether the text should be banned, under the heading “General remarks and opinion.”

Part 3 asked the censors to give their final judgement on whether a not a text should be banned. In the form drafted after the 1974 Publications Act, the censors were required to fill in this section by basing their recommendation specifically on one of the definitions of undesirability provided by the Act. The 1963 form was far more open to interpretation. It asked the censors to

give general remarks as well as their “opinions,” without specifically linking this assessment to one of the definitions of undesirability provided by the Act. Among other things, this requirement encouraged the view that a censor’s “opinion” was as important a factor in decision making as the legislation itself. For instance, in the same report on Donald Moore’s *The Striking Wind*, a censor wrote the following, in full, as justification for his recommendation that it be banned: “Phipps was a teacher estranged from his wife. Sick of everything and everybody and he had taken to excessive drinking, all on account of his relationship with Anna the whore.”¹⁶⁵

The censor did not link these alleged offenses to any definition of obscenity outlined in the Act, nor did he specify how Phipps being “sick of everything and everyone” was relevant to his decision to ban the book. It is worth noting that this decision was unanimously supported by four members of the Board, who seemed to require no other justification or specificity as to how the book had violated the terms of the Act.

Even as the law attempted to deny interpretive ambiguity, the structure of the form showed that this was in practice impossible. As the reports demonstrate, a censor’s “opinion” was not limited to his opinion on whether a novel should be passed or banned, but on his subjective assessment of its literary merit and lack thereof. For instance, in a report on Norman Mailer’s *An American Dream*, the prominent censor Harvey wrote the following under “General Remarks and Opinion”:

A most unpleasant book that deliberately and almost literally stinks. It seems to be mainly concerned with the exploitation of sex, cruelty, perversion, and superstition: there is a lot about Satanic powers and an apparent belief in Black magic... I suggest it be banned. (added in pen: In spite of its pretentious manner it seems to me to be without literary merit.)

As well as expressing his “opinion” of the novel’s undesirability without specifically linking it to any of the categories of obscenity outlined in the previous section, and using highly emotive language to do so, the censor makes an entirely subjective assessment of its literary merit and, again, flags his own erudition by turning his scorn in particular on the novel’s “pretentiousness.”

The Board’s handling of literary “pretension” will be discussed in more depth in following chapter. Harvey’s report is important to record in full here, however, because of the way it

¹⁶⁵ BCS 65 37/66.

conflates moral and aesthetic judgement, specifically regarding the way it handles the problem of sex. For Harvey, Mailer's use of sex is deliberately exploitative; it is there to titillate the reader and serves no higher aesthetic function. In this judgement, *American Dream* is judged to be aesthetically bad *because* it is morally offensive – a means of assessment which would influence many decisions throughout the existence of the system.

In a 1976 article titled “Censorship: one or two points in favour and some against,” another prominent censor, J.M. Leighton, tried to justify his role. In it, he compared a censor to a critic or a judge, insisting that the primary task for each was to “separate in himself the mind that judges from the personal beliefs he holds.”¹⁶⁶ The question of what was meant by the term “personal beliefs” was at the heart of many of the censors’ more unpredictable or surprising decisions. As can be seen from Harvey’s assessment above, the problem was not simply that Harvey was unable to “separate in himself the mind that judges from the personal beliefs he holds.”¹⁶⁷ It was that the personal beliefs he held were not limited to moral or ethical beliefs about how society should conduct itself. They were beliefs about the rules of art, and about what good literature looks like, and they had an equally significant impact on his decisions. Harvey was not alone in his convictions, and the following chapter will explore the different, contradictory ways in which questions about the nature and function of “good literature” were raised and addressed.

A close reading of the language of the 1963 Act and the accompanying administrative documents shows that even the most apparently straightforward legislative guidelines were open to interpretation and encouraged responses in which the censors went far beyond what the law apparently required of them. Close reading also reveals how the apartheid state’s anxieties and obsessions were rendered in coded, bureaucratic language. Something as apparently simple as the ways in which categories of offense are laid out on the page can illuminate the state’s attempts to legislate against the possibility of desire between black and white, for instance, or to deny that such possibilities could even exist.

The 1963 legislation was irrational in many respects, and encouraged irrational responses. While the Act itself made no provision for the consideration of literary merit, the analysis in the above section has shown how the form’s structure made room for such considerations, even if this was

¹⁶⁶ J.M. Leighton, “Censorship: One or two points in favour and some against”, *Index on Censorship* 5, 1976, 41.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

not officially acknowledged. As the following section will show, the 1974 legislation was in some senses simpler, or at least less apparently open to interpretation, closing off many of the loopholes present in the first Act. However, the damage was already done. The original censorship board, headed by Dekker, understood themselves as guardians of the literary, and this perception influenced the operations of the system throughout its existence. As McDonald observes, “adopting the literary defense...however erratically and inconsistently ... created a disjuncture between the day-to-day practice of censorship and the actual legislation that was never fully eradicated.”¹⁶⁸ Dekker’s successor, J.J. Kruger, was far more conservative and “pointedly lacked Dekker’s [literary] credentials.”¹⁶⁹ However, Kruger inherited the original members of the Dekker Board, and continued to recruit figures from the literary and academic world. Even as the legislation became more oppressive, the issue of literary merit disrupted the workings of the system. The effects of that disruption can be clearly seen in the chaos and excess of the censorship archive, as Chapter Three will discuss.

2.5 The 1974 Parliamentary Act

Like the 1963 Act, the 1974 Act was passed subsequent to the findings of a Commission of Inquiry, this time headed by J.T. Kruger (then deputy Minister of the Interior).¹⁷⁰ As McDonald observes, the Commission was established by a government that was becoming increasingly security-conscious and increasingly determined to protect the Republic from internal threats (the rise of Black Consciousness and the trade unions), and external ones (international communism, pornography, and the corrosive effect of American popular culture).¹⁷¹

The Kruger Commission’s findings were based on similar concerns, advocating for a stricter system of censorship which would protect the vulnerable white South African public against, among other things, an international communist conspiracy responsible for the erosion of public morals.¹⁷² It recommended that an entirely new Publications Act be introduced (as opposed to amending the old one) and, in McDonald’s words, “proposed a wholly new bureaucratic and partly new legislative system designed to tighten the government’s already firm hold on the vestigial public sphere.”¹⁷³ Like the Cronje Commission, the Kruger Commission defined ideas

¹⁶⁸ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 52.

¹⁶⁹ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 52

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Report by the Commission of Inquiry into the Publications and Entertainments Bill (A. B. 61-’73) (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1974).

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

of obscenity and public morality through an entirely politicised, racialised lens, and extended these definitions in ways that were even more obediently aligned with wider apartheid policy. While the Cronje Commission stressed that “account must be taken of the artistic merit of the literary material,”¹⁷⁴ the Kruger Commission argued that “even if art should be judged by purely artistic norms, care must be taken not to absolutise it as the expense of true morality and decency.”¹⁷⁵ The Commission made a number of other recommendations which seemed explicitly designed to abolish any protection which had been unofficially afforded to literature under the previous Act. A key proposal, which was accepted, was that the new legislation make it impossible for a banned writer to appeal to the courts. This change is seen by legal scholars such as Gilbert Marcus and Nicholas Haysom as a turning point – the moment at which any pretence of impartiality was abandoned, and the censorship system became an overt instrument of government suppression.¹⁷⁶

The new legislation and accompanying documents made even more strenuous attempts to deny interpretive ambiguity, and to provide an explicitly clear set of rules regarding the assessment of literature, rules which had nothing to do with literary merit and everything to do with highly politicised ideas of morality. However, these newly clarified (and newly repressive) official rules did not prevent the censors from continuing to develop reading strategies of their own devising, nor did they make it any easier to reach consensus on matters of literary assessment.

The Publications Act of 1974 became law in October of that year, revising the system of publications control in significant ways. It replaced the Board with a Directorate of Publications and gave the director the power to appoint and oversee censorship committees, who were one step down in the hierarchical structure. In keeping with the recommendations of the Kruger Commission, the new Act denied a banned author or publisher the right of judicial appeal, introducing “a system of publications control that expressly excluded the power of the courts to monitor or determine findings of ‘undesirability.’”¹⁷⁷ Banned writers and authors could make their case instead to the newly established Publications Appeal Board, which was required to

¹⁷⁴ Geoffrey Cronje et al., *Report of the Commission of Enquiry in Regard to Undesirable Publications* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1957).

¹⁷⁵ Report by the Commission of Inquiry into the Publications and Entertainments Bill (A. B. 61-'73) (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1974).

¹⁷⁶ Nicholas Haysom and Gilbert Marcus, “‘Undesirability’ and Criminal Liability Under the Publications Act 42 of 1974,” *South African Journal on Human Rights*, Vol. 31, (1974).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

publish in full the reasons for their decisions, and whose reports would be made available to the public upon request.¹⁷⁸

In terms of Section 13 (5) (c) of the new Act, the PAB was “the final arbiter of undesirability and may confirm, or set aside, the decision of the [publications] committee.”¹⁷⁹ Despite this pretence of transparency and accountability, particularly regarding the requirement that the PAB publish reasons for their decisions in full, the new Act was more repressive in every way. The attempt to make the system appear to be more accountable led to decisions by the committees which were more unpredictable, more repressive, and which revealed less evidence of adherence to guiding legislation. Further, while the PAB was in legal terms the superior tribunal, the committees often failed to follow guidelines set in previous decisions. The PAB was not established only to deal with appeals from writers and publishers affected by bans. It was also required to deal with internal disputes between various publications committees over a decision on a novel. For instance, a publications committee in 1982 took the decision to unban Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*. The report, which stated that *Lolita* was “not undesirable” because it was not “salacious” or vulgar, is itself a masterpiece of salaciousness and vulgarity. The case will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter, but it is relevant here to note that the Director of Publications submitted an appeal to the PAB, asking the Board

- (a) To confirm that the novel *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov is not undesirable within the meaning of section 47 (2) of the Act; but
- (b) To consider by virtue of section 13 (6) (a) to impose such conditions in regard to its distribution which would not make it freely accessible to young persons.¹⁸⁰

The above is a useful illustration of the ways in which the establishment of the PAB also gave the various censorship bodies and committees an opportunity to conduct internal disputes without any external scrutiny, and to cloud and obfuscate an already bewildering process.

In “Undesirable Publications and Criminal Liability,” Haysom and Marcus discuss a specific case, involving a publication titled *Work in Progress*, in which the publications committee refused to abide by precedent-setting guidelines established by the PAB, and recommended that the publication be banned. The PAB, in response, appealed to the Directorate of Publications, asking them to overturn the decision of the publications committee. The committee in question

¹⁷⁸ Section 36 6 (a).

¹⁷⁹ Section 13 5 (c).

¹⁸⁰ IDP 3/124 P82/9/94.

replied that they were “under no obligation to accept or follow the guidelines which the Appeal Board may offer where it feels that the Board is out of touch with the situation which is involved. Section 37A expressly prohibits the exercise of any form of outside pressure on the Committee.”¹⁸¹ The PAB in turn stated that “if a committee does not apply the Publications Act as interpreted by the Appeal Board the Directorate would be obliged to appeal.” As Haysom and Marcus noted at the time, the “instruction to committees to follow precedent has since been reiterated. It is suspected that the warnings have not been heeded.”¹⁸¹ They further observed that “there are many examples of committees employing reasoning which has been expressly disapproved by the PAB.”¹⁸² In a manner typical of apartheid thinking and apartheid administration, the staged performance of legal accountability ultimately allowed the censors to operate in a system of “officially sanctioned lawlessness,”¹⁸³ using the scaffold of bureaucracy as an obfuscating shield. Laws were obeyed when it was convenient, and ignored when it was not, appearing to exist primarily in order to project the impression of authority so crucial to the administering of apartheid.

Other overtly repressive measures were included in the new Publications Act. Section 8 (1) of the new Act made it a criminal offense not only to produce or distribute an undesirable publication, but to possess it.¹⁸⁴ Section 9 (1) (a) gave the Directorate and the committees the right to “declare every edition of a publication to be undesirable if the publication is published periodically and if, in its opinion, every subsequent edition of that publication is likely to be undesirable.”¹⁸⁵ Again, the Act made no concessions to consideration of the literary as a special category, specifying that members of both the Directorate and the publications committees would be appointed only on the basis of “their educational qualifications and knowledge fit to perform the functions entrusted to the directorate/committees under this Act.”

While many changes were made to the Act, it retained, in full, the five definitions of undesirability outlined in the 1963 Act. The 1974 Act differed in that it did not retain section 6 (1) of the previous Act, which concerned the legal definition of obscenity (a variation on the Hicklin test), as well as references to the likely reader. By 1974, the Hicklin test was no longer considered to be a workable definition of obscenity, even in South Africa. Legislators took note

¹⁸¹ Haysom and Marcus, “‘Undesirability’ and Criminal Liability,” 43.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Christopher Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship*, 12.

¹⁸⁴ Section 8 (1).

¹⁸⁵ Section 9 (1) (a).

of this, and provided a definition which was partially in accordance with the findings of the 1972 Longford report in England.

The Longford Report was a self-funded investigation by Lord Longford into pornography. The 500-page report suggested that obscenity be defined as follows: “An article or a performance of a play is obscene if its effect, taken as a whole, is to outrage contemporary standards of decency or humanity *accepted by the public at large*” (emphasis mine). Apartheid legislators took note of this conservative definition, with its assumptions about consensus on matters of public morality, and adapted it so that it aligned with their particular vision of an “ideal” South African society. All references to the “likely reader” were removed from the 1974 Act, and censors were required instead to read over the shoulder of “the reasonable man.” This alteration meant the law changed its focus to “community standards” as “represented by the average decent-minded, law abiding, modern and enlightened citizen with Christian principles.”

The first section of the Act reads, in full, “In the application of this Act the constant endeavour of the population of the Republic of South Africa to uphold a Christian view of life shall be recognized.” The 1974 Act’s definition of undesirability differed from the Longford definition in one significant way. The Longford definition stressed that the effects of a publication must be looked at *as a whole*. The 1974 Act, however, retained a definition of undesirability wherein a publication could be banned if “it or any part of it” was judged to be obscene or otherwise harmful to public morals. As with the previous Act, in legal terms at least, this meant that a novel could be banned on the basis of one offensive passage. As significant as these legislative changes seemed on paper, they did not necessarily effect change in the censors’ day-to-day operations, and did almost nothing to bridge the gap between what the law said, and what the censors did with those instructions. Decisions made by publications committees tended to “follow an ad hoc development, without pattern or discernible guidelines of their own.”¹⁸⁶ This unpredictability made it almost impossible for a writer or publisher to determine what sort of standards the censors were working with, if any. Moore argues that “censorship’s measure of success is an actualization of a consensus on offence.”¹⁸⁷ In this most elementary and basic sense, apartheid publications control was a failure. As Abel stresses, there has never been a censorship system “so rational that it renders every decision of the censor understandable and consistent.”¹⁸⁸ Analysis

¹⁸⁶ Haysom and Marcus, “‘Undesirability’ and Criminal Liability,” 44.

¹⁸⁷ Nicole Moore, “Surrealism to Pulp: The Limits of the Literary and Australian Customs” in *Censorship and the Limits of the Literary: A Global View*, ed. Nicole Moore (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 107.

¹⁸⁸ Abel, *Redacted*, 16.

of the particular irrationality of the apartheid legislation shows that consistency, or predictability, remained ever out of reach.

2.6 The 1974 Report Forms

As with the 1963 form, the form was divided into three main sections.¹⁸⁹ The censors or readers were first required to give a “synopsis of contents.” An ideal response would, as under the previous system, look something like this:

deals with two normally totally unrelated scenarios: the inside story of the routine work of a Los Angeles police department with all the interrelated ambitions, idiosyncrasies and phobias of its detective force, and the harsh reality of dog shows where owners, trainers and handlers are all motivated by the sole desire to win. These worlds become connected and intertwined when a trainer, Philo Skinner, who really loves dogs and in his own words never hurt anyone in his life is forced by the necessity of paying his gambling debts, to snatch a champion bitch and attempt to extort ransom money from its owner.¹⁹⁰

The report (on Joseph Wambaugh’s *Black Marble*) manages to deliver a relatively neutral account of the plot, while flagging a text’s potentially undesirable features as regards the law. While the synopsis is perhaps over-detailed, and betrays too much of the reader’s personal sympathy for the protagonist, it retains at least the appearance of objectivity. Such responses were not necessarily the norm. Despite legislative changes intended to introduce more objective standards of assessment, censors continued to write synopses which displayed a wide array of personal beliefs as regards both morality and aesthetics, and continually betrayed their inability to achieve consensus on where “obscenity” ended and “literature” began.

R.E. Lighton’s report on Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby* displays these confluences and confusions in full:

The writer, appropriately a mulatto, is academically highly competent, with clear literary ability. See especially dustcover comments. The first 75 pages proceed smoothly, portraying the serene life on a sequestered semi-tropical island just S. of U.S.A – in the luxury home of elderly Valerian Street with Margaret (50) his 2nd wife (an absent student

¹⁸⁹ See Appendix 9.

¹⁹⁰ P75/5/78.

son, 30), their outspoken Negro butler, Sydney, his wife Ondine; their attractive niece Jadine, educated per Valerian at the Sorbonne, a good artist and now on a visit from Paris. But their trance-like state of affairs breaks abruptly one night – see dust cover, third paragraph. The sophisticated Jadine and the shrewd but crude Negro intruder “Son”, (with many aliases) gradually are drawn together and go off to the locale of his Florida backwater origins. But her sophisticated and cultured Europeanised outlook cannot adapt to the blue-black Negroes legend, superstition etc, so she escapes and from New York to brief return to Valerian’s island she flees to Paris, while the bewildered “Son” vainly seeks her in her place of origin. The finale of this complex story is obscene as is the vain reconciling of irreconcilable beliefs.¹⁹¹

The minute specificity of the plot synopsis begins as an apparently neutral recounting of events, and then falters as Lighton’s racism skews his perspective (“the writer, appropriately a mulatto”; “sophisticated and cultured Europeanised outlook cannot adapt to the blue-black Negroes legend”), and as his aesthetic preferences and insecurities reveal themselves. His assessment of Morrison’s ability as a writer, for instance, seems largely to be based on the presumably lavish praise on the novel’s dustcover. As the report progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate Lighton’s moral judgements from his aesthetic ones. His assessment of the first 75 pages’ “smoothness,” for instance, could be taken either to be a comment on the quality of the writing or a comment on the absence of what he perceives to be obscene. The report ends with his identification of obscenity in “the vain reconciling of irreconcilable beliefs.” Lighton’s description of an abstract notion as “obscene” is a striking example of the way disgust was used and invoked in the censors’ assessments, and of the way aesthetic and moral assessments became indistinguishable from one another. The idea that a mindset could be “obscene” shows how lurking fears of “contamination” and fixation on purity influenced censors’ assessments even as they gestured toward objectivity. It is also an indication of how readily the censors sought and defined obscenity within a text, and how little they were bound by legislation.

This expansion of the boundaries of the obscene can be observed in the structure of the form itself. In the next section of the form, part 4, the censor or reader was again required to mark specific pages with could be regarded as obscene. However, unlike part 2 of the 1963 form,

¹⁹¹ IDP 1/71 P81/11/79

which was drawn from Section 6(1), the corresponding portion of the 1974 form was drawn from Section 5 (2) of the 1963 Act.

The difference is significant, both visually and symbolically. Instead of the previous form's wide-ranging categories of potential threat from which to choose, the 1974 form offers just six categories, in pared-down bureaucratic format.¹⁹² The appearance of bureaucratic simplicity here belies the fact that this rendered an already opaque system even more open to interpretation and abuse. Section 47 (2) (a), for instance, referred to material that was "indecent or obscene or offensive or harmful to public morals," a wide-ranging category under which almost any kind of offense might be recorded. Section 47 (2) (d) concerned material that was "harmful to the relations between any inhabitants of the Republic." Reports indicate that this category was understood to cover potentially undesirable references to race, racial tension, criticism of apartheid policy, reference to anti-apartheid activism, descriptions of inter-racial relationships, and depictions of police suppression or prison conditions, among other things. 47 (2) (d) gave the censors license to ban a book for the most spurious of reasons: almost any mention of race could be perceived as inflammatory, dangerous, and harmful. The inclusion of these broad categories of obscenity on the forms themselves made the system even more unpredictable, and, as Haysom and Marcus observed, made it almost impossible for writers and publishers to gauge the reasoning behind censors' decisions.

In the next section of the form, the censor was required to record her final recommendation as follows, "I recommend that the publication is not undesirable/ undesirable within the meaning of section 47 (2)... of the Publications Act, 1974, for the following reasons." While the forms drafted under the previous Act asked the censors to record their "general remarks and opinions," the new form demanded that the censors pass final judgement on a text with specific reference to the terms of the Act. Under the new legislation, the censors were required to base this assessment on the imagined response of the "average reader," as opposed to the "likely reader," who featured so prominently in Section 6 (1) of the 1963 Act.

An "ideal" response would be similar to the conclusion of a report on *Tendrils*, a science fiction novel by Simon Childer. The censor recommended that the book be declared undesirable under 47 (2) (a) ("indecent or obscene or harmful or offensive to public morals"), and gave his assessment as follows:

¹⁹² See Appendix 7.

- a) The use of words such as fuck, fucking, piss, pissing, shit, shitting, lifted up his penis to show her...is not sufficient to declare this publication undesirable.
- b) The use of Christ, God, Jesus...will not hurt the feelings of the average reader.
- c) HOWEVER...explicit descriptions of cunnilingus, fellatio and other forms of sexual intercourse which must be considered harmful to the community, make the book undesirable.¹⁹³

Here, the censor appears to have made his assessment based on the (imagined) feelings of the average reader. He has abided by the letter of the law, making reference to “community standards,” and using those (ill-defined and overtly politicised) standards as a means of judging the text. He has made no explicit reference to his own “personal beliefs” regarding either morals or aesthetics.

The 1974 Act and the accompanying documents were intended to make it easier for the censors to do their jobs, by clarifying the nature of their duties, dismissing the issue of literary merit, and simplifying the process. The following scolding letter, from the head of a publications committee to a contracted reader, shows how clear this new set of rules was intended to be:

Dear Mrs Soloman (sic),

1. When you submitted your report on the above mentioned publication, you recommended that it should be declared not undesirable, stating that you “personally did not find it so.”
2. Committee members are required not to give personal, subjective opinions, but, see numerous AB guidelines, to assess what the reaction of the average, responsible, informed citizen of this country is. This is what the committee members did when they, after studying your report and the publication, decided unanimously that the publication was undesirable within the meaning of Section 47 (2) (a) of the Act.¹⁹⁴

The book in question was Joan Collins’ *Past Imperfect*, and the marked pages referred to scenes which took place in “a nightclub in Paris.” Although they were specifically instructed and indeed required by law to read over the shoulder of “the average decent-minded, law abiding, modern and enlightened citizen with Christian principles,” the censors reliably proved themselves incapable of doing so. The censors continued to base their assessments on the imagined

¹⁹³ IDP 3/186 P85/11/4.

¹⁹⁴ IDP 3/186 P85/16/2.

response of the likely reader. As the letter above reveals, they also continued to use their own personal responses as a guide. They did this especially in cases where the literary merit of the text was foregrounded, further conflating questions of morality with notions of aesthetics.

The following final assessment (also written by Lighton) on Philip Roth's *The Ghost Writer* is typical:

I recommend that the publication is not undesirable for the following reasons.

1. The book has clear literary merit. It is written in exquisite prose – a masterpiece of craftsmanship.
2. The possibly offensive elements are virtually sub-minimal and completely necessary in content. They are not lust-provoking nor would they offend any sensible reader. To my mind this book will be read only by discerning readers.¹⁹⁵

Lighton's judgement goes against the directives of the Act in at least three different ways (and can be interestingly compared to Harvey's assessment of *American Dream* discussed in the previous section). He prioritises the literary merits of the novel; he speculates on its effects on the likely reader (in this case a "discerning" one) as opposed to the average reader; and he ignores the key guideline for passing judgement on a text, which is that a novel must be declared undesirable if it *or any part of it* is likely to offend or disgust the average reader. It is difficult to over-emphasise how erratically the censors followed the directives of the new Act, and how frequently they made high-handed decisions based solely on their own convictions. The writer of the above report, for instance, is the very same censor who scolded Mrs. Solomons for writing a report which had broken exactly the same rules broken by his report. Lighton was a prominent censor and therefore, by (self) definition, a discerning reader – his contributions are judged as valid on this basis.

An emphasis on "discerning readers," and on what qualifications were necessary for someone to be assigned such a title, was one of the key preoccupations of the system, and one of the chief causes for the blurring between literary censorship and literary criticism which occurred within the system and outside of it. As will be shown in the following chapters, the question of what kind of reader was fit to engage critically with a text was one that occupied both censors and those opposed to the system. For 25 years, censorship legislation did not address this question in

¹⁹⁵ IDP 1/50, P79/11/164.

any official way. However, the 1978 Publications Amendment Act changed this, and acknowledged the issue head-on for the first time.

2.7 1978 Publications Amendment Act

In *The Literature Police*, McDonald traces the sequence of events which led to the implementation of the 1978 Publications Amendment Act. In January 1977, a publications committee which included a number of high profile Afrikaans writers and intellectuals (including Anna Louw and Merwe Scholtz) took the decision to pass Etienne Leroux's novel *Magersfontein, O Magersfontein* (published in 1976).¹⁹⁶ The decision inevitably attracted attention: *Magersfontein*, written and published in Afrikaans, focuses on a small town's doomed and state-funded attempts to re-enact the battle of Magersfontein, a famous Boer victory during the Anglo-Boer War.

The publications committee argued that the novel should be passed because although sections of it could be read as undesirable (including scenes which were potentially pornographic, blasphemous, or racially charged in nature), these features were acceptable because they were not explicit, they were functional, and the novel was satirical.¹⁹⁷ The final report of the committee acknowledged that the novel could cause offense, due to Leroux's insufficiently reverent handling of an almost mythical moment in Afrikaner history. However, each of the committee member's individual reports focused on the literary merit of the novel, arguing strongly that its artistic strengths acted as a mitigating factor. As McDonald notes, the novel had an "explicitly metafictional quality," a quality which the committee members also used in their case for its defence as they argued that the novel would be read and understood only by the sophisticated literary elite. One individual report, for instance, began as follows:

In my opinion, this satirical work will be inaccessible and uninteresting to the average reader, and therefore it cannot be judged by the effect on the (improbable) "average decentminded (sic) citizen with Christian principles who, at the same time, is not a "highly educated" man. If such a man attempted to read the book, he would seize only on what so-called offensiveness he could find. This approach would be ... highly unfair to this particular work, and to literature in general.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Etienne Leroux, *Magersfontein, O Magersfontein!* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1976).

¹⁹⁷ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 270.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

In other words, the 1974 Act's most significant alteration – a change in focus from the effect on the “likely” reader to the effect on the “average” reader – had had no effect. The reader's adamant insistence here is that novels like *Magersfontein* could *only* be assessed in terms of their effect on a sophisticated, highly educated reader, and that it would be unfair to do otherwise.

The “undesirable” elements of the novel, however, attracted a great deal of public attention and outrage. Six months after the novel was passed, a pressure group linked to the Dutch Reformed Church mounted an aggressive, populist campaign in an effort to have the decision overturned by handing the case over to the PAB. In response to what McDonald describes as political and clerical pressure, the PAB duly banned the book.¹⁹⁹ The head of the PAB, Judge Snyman, referred repeatedly to the “average man” in his recommendation, and insisted that the novel must be judged from his perspective. His decision to ban relied on a particularly faithful interpretation of the 1974 Act, and especially singled out the role of “the literary experts [in the initial publications committee]” for being “in conflict with the Act.”²⁰⁰ Snyman's conservative decision led to the resignation of Anna Louw and Merwe Scholtz, and “alienated a wide spectrum of Afrikaans literary intellectuals” who were still committed to the protection and nourishment of Afrikaans literature, and who felt betrayed by the turn events had taken.²⁰¹ The banning of *Magersfontein* was seen as a new low for the apartheid censors, who seemed to have abandoned whatever commitment they might once have had to the protection of a nascent national literature. Leroux's publishers appealed to the Supreme Court. Because of the power given to the PAB, the Court's judgement rested entirely on procedural interpretation of the law. The judgement did not take into account the question of literary merit, something which the courts had been required to do before the 1974 Act expressly excluded the power of the courts to monitor findings of undesirability. The Court accordingly rejected Leroux's publisher's appeal, and judged that the PAB “was wrong to privilege the average...reader in the case of obscenity, but right to take the views of the average Christian into consideration when it came to deciding what was blasphemous.”²⁰²

The condemnation provoked by the affair led to official recognition of the need to address the problem of literary merit, resulting in the 1978 Publications Amendment Act.²⁰³ The

¹⁹⁹ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 271.

²⁰⁰ IDP 3/82 79/12/30.

²⁰¹ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 271.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

Amendment enabled the chairman of the PAB to “appoint a committee of experts to advise the Appeal Board in respect of a publication.” The 1974 Act had stated that the members of the PAB would be appointed only on the basis of “their educational qualifications and knowledge fit to perform the functions entrusted to the directorate/committees under this Act,” and so the introduction of “literary experts” represented a significant concession. The Amendment meant that for the first time, there was some unity between what the law instructed, and how the censors responded to those instructions.

The size of the previous gap between the legislation and its application can clearly be seen in the following 1977 judgement, on Donald Barthelme’s *Amateurs*:

Reading the collection, one realises that this is the work of a real artist. The elements of the sexual (pp127, 142, 176) and religion (p182-183) are used for symbolism, but they do not go down to the level of pornography or blasphemy...this collection, as well as the separate sketches, are not undesirable in terms of the Act.²⁰⁴

The above report was written by Judge Snyman, the head of the PAB, and the same person who in his banning of *Magersfontein* dismissed the committee’s literary defence of the novel, on the grounds that it was in conflict with the law. Judge Snyman was widely perceived to be highly conservative and anti-literary in his approach, but his judgement here of a complex postmodernist text reveals that he was also inclined to reach for the literary defence when it suited him to do so. Snyman’s *Amateurs* report shows, again, that censorship legislation was never anything more than haphazardly applied, a set of rules to be applied or discarded depending on the case. The 1978 Amendment did not dramatically alter this situation, but it was nevertheless a moment of legislative significance, in that it afforded at least some protection to literature for the first time.

The appointment of Kobus Van Rooyen to the head of the PAB in 1980 led to a period of further reform. The most significant of these reforms was the shifting of the criterion of assessment back to the “likely” reader, as opposed to the average reader. This meant that many novels would come to be defended on the basis of their limited likely readership, a defence that was to prove particularly popular when dealing with the novels of J.M. Coetzee. As with previous changes, however, shifts in legislation or leadership did not necessarily signal similar shifts in day-to-day operations. As the previous sections have shown, legislative attempts to turn

²⁰⁴ IDP 1/24 P77.

ensorship into a systematic and predictable bureaucratic exercise were flawed, contradictory, and ultimately confounded by the censors themselves.

2.8 Conclusion

In 1974, a Mrs. D.W. van Rooyen wrote a letter, directly addressed to J.J. Kruger, the Chairman of the Board at the time. The letter ran to four dense, handwritten pages and began as follows:

In writing to you I write hoping that you are a fellow Christian and by Christian I mean a true follower of the faith one delivered to the saints (separated ones) by Christ our Lord, and not a follower of the Social Gospel or any other of the man-made doctrines. My reason for writing is that we are very disturbed that your board saw fit to ban Joan Hofmeyr's article titled Hear of the Lord's apartheid, for this article is the truth. Truth's [sic] such as this are needed to undo the myths taught by religiosity or churchianity and the anti-Christian overseas News Media.²⁰⁵

Kruger replied as follows: "While it is correct that an article by Joan Hofmeyr was rejected, it was done advisedly in the light of the provisions of the Publications and Entertainment Act. No persons unacquainted with the provisions of the Act can properly gauge, let alone understand, the reasoning of the Board."²⁰⁶

In this chapter, I have tried to show that even those persons who *were* acquainted with the provisions of the various Acts might find it difficult to "properly gauge" the reasoning of the Board, to understand the censors' decisions or predict their responses. In light of what has been discussed in this chapter, it is useful to return to Coetzee's argument: that the men who "invented and installed apartheid were possessed by demons," and that the fears and obsessions which possessed them were written into apartheid policy and rationale, lurking under the "punctilious arrangement of chapters and subchapters, numbered points, thesis sentences separated out typographically."²⁰⁷

The perception of apartheid as primarily an economic policy rooted in the rational self-interest of the white minority is, for Coetzee, both insufficient and misguided, failing as it does to take into account the underlying delirium which drove apartheid's construction. Coetzee's argument

²⁰⁵ BCS 57 758/65.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

takes in apartheid policy as a whole, but it is valuable to consider it specifically in terms of how it applies to the censorship legislation.

Beneath the seemingly neutral and objective official language of the Publications Acts and Amendments, irrational anxieties and obsessions can be detected. In the legislation's omission of explicit reference to race, we see the confusion which apartheid "displaced wildly all around itself."²⁰⁸ In the way the structure of the form puts depictions of sex between black and white in an entirely different category of offense to other depictions of sex, we see apartheid's futile attempts to manage desire between black people and white people, to control it, to legislate it out of existence. It is important to draw attention to these underlying irrationalities, because any understanding of apartheid censorship must proceed from an acknowledgement of the madness that underpinned the legislation itself.

The following chapter will discuss the unofficial codes and reading strategies that the censors developed in their efforts to establish consensus regarding the boundaries of the literary. Unlike the official legislation, these aesthetic guidelines were not even technically enforceable. They were also far vaguer. Nevertheless, they played as influential a role in determining the operations of the system as the official legislation did, and made it even more difficult for a writer or publisher to determine what kind of standards the censors were using in their assessments. But it is not enough to blame the system's unpredictability on a failure to adhere to the guidelines provided by the legislation. As this chapter has demonstrated, the legislation itself was irrational and contradictory, flawed from its inception. These incoherencies ensured that there would be an ever-widening gap between the law on paper, and the way it was applied. The inadequacies of official legislation, and its failure to address the problem of literature, led inevitably to the development of an array of interpretive techniques.

The next chapter traces development of some of these strategies by looking at a wide range of material, the majority of which has not yet been used in any history of apartheid censorship. In "Censorship: one or two points in favour and some against," the censor J.M. Leighton stated that "I had, during my term of office, read an enormous number of books, 90 percent of which I would not normally have chosen to read."²⁰⁹ Out of necessity, studies of apartheid censorship have tended to ignore this "enormous number" in favour of a focus on particularly illustrative or

²⁰⁸ Coetzee, "Mind of Apartheid," 2.

²⁰⁹ J.M. Leighton, "Censorship: One or two points in favour and some against", *Index on Censorship* 5, 1976, 41.

significant cases. Among other things, the following chapter can be read as an argument for the value of analysing the reports on texts that not even the censors wanted to read, the ones which Gordimer describes as “sub-literature” – the pulp, the throwaway, the forgettable.²¹⁰ Looking at these reports allows for a more expansive comprehension of the array of aesthetic assumptions held by the censors. A history of apartheid censorship which highlights the censors’ interpretation of a text like *Magersfontein* or *Burger’s Daughter* can help us to see how the censors tried to define literature, but it does not necessarily illuminate how they comprehended literature’s opposite. The array of material presented in the next chapter will show that the scrutiny of “sub-literature” played a hugely significant role in the development of the system’s aesthetic assumptions, for the simple reason that the scrutiny of “sub-literature” consumed a significant percentage of the censors’ time and effort. They tried to define what literature was primarily by attempting to establish what it *wasn’t*, reading “enormous numbers of books, 90 percent of which [they] would not normally have chosen to read.”²¹¹ Reports on out-of-print detective novels do not tend to feature in histories of South African publications control, but as the following chapter argues, the system’s handling of the pulp and the throwaway played a definitive role in that history. It is important to find a place for these otherwise forgotten documents, and read them alongside reports on novels like *Lolita*, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, and *Down Second Avenue*. In *Censors at Work*, Darnton makes a similar argument, by demonstrating that thorough archival work is crucial in order to write a history of censorship, and draw some definitive conclusions about how it works: “A few, isolated manuscripts won’t suffice. Hundreds are needed, and the run must be rich enough to show how censors handled their ordinary, everyday tasks.”²¹² The next chapter similarly looks at the ordinary and the everyday, that which comprised the vast majority of the censors’ duties, in order to make sense of their decisions, the impact of those decisions, and the results of the clash between wildly divergent standards of assessment.

²¹⁰ Gordimer, “Morning in the Library: 1975,” 84.

²¹¹ Leighton, “Censorship: One or two points in favour,” 41.

²¹² Darnton, *Censors at Work*, 17.

Chapter 3: Unofficial Strategies

3.1 Introduction

In “Morning in the Library: 1975,” an essay about her encounter with *Jacobsen’s Index of Objectionable Literature* (“the bible of South African censorship”), Gordimer described the experience of poring through the lists of banned texts: “There is a great deal of trash, of course...the titles of the banned ones don’t sound any different from those I see on sale everywhere.”²¹³ Because judgements were only made public in the event that a case went to the PAB, and because the archive was not publicly accessible, the only way to keep track of the censors’ activities and make sense of their decisions was to study *Jacobsen’s Index*, or to look for announcements on banned texts in the Government Gazette. These publications did not, of course, include any information about the texts the censors had *passed*, meaning that even the most determined researcher would only ever acquire a partial sense of the censors’ daily activities. As Gordimer points out above, the titles of banned books alone provided exceptionally limited insight into the workings of the system. For this reason, many contemporary accounts of apartheid censorship emphasise the confusing incomprehensibility of the censors’ decisions. As Haysom and Marcus noted at the time, the system’s lack of transparency made it almost impossible for a writer or publisher to determine what, precisely, the censors considered to be unacceptable. This chapter uses a wide variety of archival material in order to enlarge our understanding of the system’s rules and limits, and show how the censors’ efforts to demarcate the boundaries of the literary informed their decisions. In *The Rules of Art*, Pierre Bourdieu argues that taste is a form of violence perpetrated by the strong on the weak where the strong have the power to make the rules of art and literature.²¹⁴ Bourdieu’s conception of habitus is a useful theoretical lens through which to examine how the censors attempted to create and maintain these rules, and in trying to understand the extent to which their efforts were successful. Habitus is “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them.”²¹⁵ With this in mind, Chapter Five will

²¹³ Gordimer, “Morning in the Library: 1975,” 85.

²¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

²¹⁵ Loic Wacquant, *International Encyclopedia of Economic Sociology*, ed. Jens Beckert and Milan Zafirovski (London: Routledge, 2005), 316.

examine the traceable impact of the censors' efforts on the structure of the literary field, and on the reading public's conception of the function and place of literature in apartheid society.

In Stoler's *Along the Archival Grain*, she reads archives as "condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed and biased sources."²¹⁶ Stoler's attention to the affective properties of archive demonstrates a mode of reading the censorship archive that does not simply analyse the contents of the do. She reads archives as "condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed and biased sources."²¹⁷ She registers in the smallest shifts and scribbled asides a kind of suppressed emotion, indicative of epistemic anxieties: "Against the sober formulaics of officialese, these archives register the febrile movements of persons off balance – of thoughts and feelings in and out of place."²¹⁸ Much of the censorship archive, too, registers feelings "out of place," where responses to a given text are shockingly disproportionate, and where emotions seem in danger of spilling over. Mirroring this affective quality is the fact that much of what is written in the reports is literally "out of place:" words run up the margins, paragraphs spill well over their allotted fourteen lines. It is difficult not to view these reports as sites of profound political anxiety. Paying close attention to the scribbled lines and throwaway asides yields fascinating insight into the reasoning behind apartheid policy and into the fear and madness which underpinned it. For instance, a report on Simone de Beauvoir's *Djamila Boupacha: The Story of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl Which Shocked Liberal French Opinion* contains the following sentence: "It relates (repetitively) her maltreatment (kicking), torture by electricity and deflowering with the neck of a bottle while in Algerian prison during the civil war there."²¹⁹ The use of the word "deflowering" here could be interpreted as prudishness. That the scene is later described in the same report as the "bottle-in-the-vagina incident" could simply indicate unwillingness to include the word "rape" in a government document. However, a quick comparison reveals that the word "rape" is often used in these reports, but generally only in reference to white women.²²⁰ The delicacy of the word "deflowering" takes on a different meaning here. White women are raped against their will, non-white women are merely "deflowered," implying startlingly racialised attitudes regarding virtue and consent. Similarly, in a report on Newton Thornburg's *Gentleman Born*, a now out-of-print 1967 detective novel, the

²¹⁶ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 20.

²¹⁷ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 20.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

²¹⁹ BCS 30/29516.

²²⁰ A report on 972/66: A report on Peter Saxon's *The Darkest Night* begins: "An English officer hanged a Maharajah whom he found raping a young English girl at a ritual orgy for the goddess Kali..." (BCS 67 972/66).

ensor's synopsis of the text included the following: "What I would call a depraved story with some really filthy bits thrown in...He murders a Negro at the end, and also a man called Carr, who owns a brothel."²²¹ The distinction the censor makes here between "a Negro" and a named (presumably white) "man" is as stark an example of apartheid thinking as the reasoning behind the Group Areas Act.

In *The Life of Infamous Men*, Michel Foucault describes his project:

The documents I have gathered together here are homogenous and they strongly risk appearing monotonous. Yet all function on disparity. A disparity between the things recounted and the way of saying them ... a disparity between the language of ceremony and power and the one of furies or impotence.²²²

This "disparity" is one of the key features of the reports, and is most strikingly evident in reports of apparently little significance, because it is initially hard to see why such effort and energy has been expended. The censors' responses often seem disproportionate, so that everything matters, and every problem or threat is amplified. Excessive emotion is poorly contained in the censorship archive. There is a gravity and intensity in reports on books which seem insignificant, and which the censors themselves did not necessarily want to read. In reports on apparently trivial works of mass-market fiction, there is often a shocking disparity between the things recounted and the way of saying them. The censorship archive registers as excessive: too much paper, too much feeling contained within the collapsing boundaries of bureaucratic efficiency. Despite, or perhaps because of, a lack of consensus as to what constituted literature, the censors worked all the time to define it, and one of the central contentions of this thesis is that it is this disjuncture between legislation and enactment, between spoken and unspoken rules, which produced such documentary excess.

It is important to note that many censors and official readers were supremely unconcerned with these questions. They read novels and wrote reports in which they flagged potentially undesirable features in accordance with the rules prescribed by legislation. For instance, in a report on *The 19th Pan Book of Horror Stories*, the censor recommended banning on the grounds that one of the stories featured "homo-sex," and argued that "because of the detailed and somewhat unsavoury description of the homosexual act... I feel that this would prove more than distasteful (actually

²²¹ BCS 80 551/67.

²²² Michel Foucault, "The Life of Infamous Men" in *Power, Truth, Strategy* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1979), 88.

repugnant) to the average decent-minded citizen... *One cannot take account of the quality of the writing when judging desirability*” (emphasis mine).²²³ Many reports in the censorship archive make absolutely no mention of a text’s literary merit or lack thereof – the most they might do is mention that the book is “dull” or “uninteresting.”

However, questions of the literary remained a chief preoccupation for many, as censors tried to develop and maintain rules on how to assess a text on its literary merits, the credentials required in order to perform that kind of assessment, the ideas about what a good book looked like, what a bad one looked like, and about the kind of harm they could cause, or the impact that they would have. If the censors and contracted readers had been capable of following the official rules, the censorship archive would be manageable, orderly, governed by a detectable inner logic. It is not. It is messy and irrational, chaotic and unstable, a site which registers unofficial feeling.

The analysis of legislation in the previous chapter showed that the censors were not officially required to write the kinds of reports that they so often did. The system was structured in such a way that the censorship bureaucracy was accountable to almost no-one, but their excessive, dense reports are evidence that the censors expended great energy in generating an appearance of accountability that was rarely called to account, wasting far more intellectual energy than seems possible. In *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*, Coetzee discusses the relationship between censorship and interpretation; in the efforts of the censors to divine what a given text is *really* about, Coetzee sees an attempt to insist on a single meaning, a single truth which can be divined only by the select, capable few who are capable of reading deeply enough (Coetzee refers to this as “a regime of over-reading”).²²⁴

A concerted effort to pin down meaning is expected when the stakes are high, when the text under scrutiny is of political or literary significance. A body which purported to be guardians of a nascent white South African literary tradition needed to tread carefully when dealing with Afrikaans literature – for instance, a novel like Brink’s *Miskien Nooit* would need to be dismissed on artistic grounds as well as political or moral ones. In his discussion of the Dekker board’s reluctance to ban Leroux’s novel *Die Derde Oog* (1966), for instance, McDonald notes Dekker’s insistence that banning it would seriously damage “our literature and the intellectual life of our *volk*.”²²⁵ Attempting to protect or nourish Afrikaans literature, even in the case of novels that

²²³ IDP 30 P78/10/44.

²²⁴ Coetzee, *Giving Offense*, 161.

²²⁵ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 43.

were critical of the state, was a strenuously demanding balancing act. The system developed a range of aesthetic assumptions in order to meet these demands, and attempt to define what literature was.

This effort can be clearly seen in the censor's response to Coetzee's work in particular. In the report on *Waiting for the Barbarians*, for instance, the censor applied an almost frantic level of over-reading. He argued strongly that the book should be passed; suggesting that there were no real "parallels" to be drawn between the novel's plot and the South African political situation, but acknowledging that the "symbolism" might pose a problem. The "symbolism," however, could only be "extracted" with a great deal of diligence, nullifying any potential threat.²²⁶ The report is lengthy and exceptionally detailed, complete with scribbles in the margins and appended pages. Coetzee's growing local and international reputation made this perhaps inevitable. A researcher would be unsurprised to find a detailed file on *Life & Times of Michael K*, for instance, a file laden with memos and appendices, dense with meaning and emotion. Such effort and emotion are more startling when we see it expended on a text such as Louise Belcher's *Ayo Visits America*, as follows:

Synopsis: English-French story suitable for young children's mind's understanding.

Description of a visit to America by a young Negro girl, her travel through the U.S.A, the way she was received by whites etc. Among apparently naïve frazes [sic] one comes across very frequently on thoughts pertaining to politics.

General remarks: A work of a propagandist character. Although there is nothing to object to as far as choice of words in the text is concerned – the whole subject is designed to do its fragmentary psychological bit towards breaking down the natural barriers in whites against miscegenation. Definitely objectionable.²²⁷

Ayo Visits America was a textbook written for students of English. Common words and phrases found in the book include "nice", "sandwiches", "welcoming hand", "nations", and "meeting." In the report, the censor admits that there is nothing to object to *as far as choice of words is concerned*, and gives no examples of phrases that could be considered offensive or dangerous. The vehemence of the report, with its vigorous emphasis, however, shows that threat posed by *Ayo Visits America* was understood to be very real indeed, dangerous enough to tear a society apart.

²²⁶ IDP 1/61 P80/11/205.

²²⁷ BCS 67 451/66.

Taken on its own, a report like the one on *Ayo Visits America* is difficult to understand, or use as part of a wider narrative. However, a wider look at the inconsistent and excessive character of the archive makes it more intelligible. The official rules and what Stoler calls “the studied ineloquence of bureaucratese”²²⁸ combine with the flamboyant outbursts of individual censors, to unsettling effect. A report like the one on *Ayo Visits America* is only fully legible when it is understood that as well as the official rules, the censors were following guidelines of their own devising, developing strategies of reading that went deeper than simply policing “the choice of words.”

This chapter looks at the various ways in which that system of judgement developed, and how it was utilised when the official rules were judged inadequate or irrelevant. It involves an examination of the strategies of reading developed by the censors, looking closely at ideas of the literary as they developed, and interrogating the ways in which the censors, both individually and as a body, sought to establish themselves as “discriminating readers” and authoritative guardians of what they perceived to be South African literary culture. Arguments over what literature looked like, and over who was fit to judge, preoccupied the censors and those opposed to the system, and these preoccupations made an indelible imprint on South Africa’s literary field. Chapter Five will trace some of the means by which we can read that impact, and show how the “process” of apartheid censorship was realised through relationships between various censorious agents, enabled by a range of accommodations and complicities. As the conclusion will demonstrate, the results of these uneasy engagements continue to register on the literary field today, particularly with regard to disputed conceptions of literary guardianship, and who is fit to judge.

Censors frequently wrote reports which make their self-perception as “taste-makers” clear. A disdain for and hostility to mass culture was integral to the initial Board’s perception of its mandate. While the legislation became progressively anti-elitist and even anti-literary as the system established itself, hostility to popular culture continued to inform many censors’ approaches to literature.. This attitude was neatly summed up in Leighton’s defence of “enlightened censorship”: “Mass taste is, I suggest, more unreliable and indeed more limiting to the artist than state control – it is the other form of censorship.”²²⁹

²²⁸ Stoler, *Archival Grain*, 23.

²²⁹ Leighton, “Censorship: one or two points in favour and some against”, 45.

Leighton appeared to see it as his duty to protect the South African public from popular culture, believing that it leads inevitably to a decline in public morals and corruption of the youth. Many, if not all, censors shared this view. For instance, in a letter protesting a ban on *The Selected Letters of James Joyce*, J.H. Titlestad (one of the “literary experts” which the 1978 Amendment Act made provision for) wrote that “what needs curbing is commercial, exploitative trash, not serious literature. One of the great defects of the present Act and its application is that works by serious writers are lumped together with inferior literature...”²³⁰ As will be discussed in Chapter Five, this belief in the destructive capacities of mass taste was held by many, including many who were vehemently opposed to censorship. As McDonald notes, the censors’ thinking was informed by “an implicit assortment of cultural doxa, all of which had a theoretical dimension and some of which the censors shared with other contemporary guardians of the literary both inside South Africa and elsewhere.”²³¹ Some of those guardians, needless to say, were opponents of censorship, and Chapter Five will explore in depth the similarities of some of their most strongly-held views, and explore the impact of this on the structure of the literary field.

McDonald, like Coetzee, points out that the censors certainly had no overarching aesthetic theory. They were, however, working with what McDonald calls a set of aesthetic tools. He describes the “guiding assumptions” of the original Board’s understanding of the literary:

1. Literature ... constitutes a privileged aesthetic space set apart from more mundane forms of discourse, including pornography, mass-market fiction, journalism, and political writings.
2. A particular literature achieves greatness only when it takes its place within a series of larger spheres, construed variously as “European”, “Western”, or, ultimately, the “universal”.
3. Literature can be appreciated only by a limited and sophisticated public or, in effect, to make the circularity clear, only by literary readers.²³²

²³⁰ Letter from J.H. Titlestad to Malan, 6 June, 1979.

²³¹ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 12.

²³² McDonald, *Literature Police*, 163.

In his article, Leighton emphasises the importance of such guiding assumptions, and of the censors' role as guardians of literature. He argued that to be totally against censorship was to be an "extremist," a "fundamentalist," someone who:

upholds no values at all...He recognises warts on nose, flat or rotund breasts, modes of behaviour, but never proposes for himself any idea of beauty, any concept of right or wrong in an ethical system...he can conceive of no transcendental ordering principle that might provide an objective standard for the ordering of society.²³³

For Leighton, the opposite of such a person is the ideal or enlightened censor. As an apologia for so-called "enlightened censorship," it is impressively wide-ranging. His absolute equation of aesthetic principles with moral ones is a lucid definition of what it meant to be a "discriminating reader" for many censors. It seems that for Leighton, "ideas of beauty" are inseparable from concepts of right and wrong. In his view, the ability to discriminate from an aesthetic perspective is the same thing as being able to conceive of an "objective standard for the ordering of society."²³⁴ The previous chapter discussed the role of legislation in providing "an objective standard for the ordering of society." This chapter examines the other ways in which the censors tried to conceive of and enforce an objective standard for the ordering of society, this time from an aesthetic point of view. As with Darnton's history of censors at work, this chapter demonstrates the value of poring over as rich and varied an archival run as possible. While this chapter will include analysis of the censors' response to two high-profile, "controversial" novelists (Vladimir Nabokov and James Joyce), it will also make use of reports on apparently inconsequential novels and texts to show how the censors tried to develop a particular set of guidelines by which they could demarcate the boundaries of the literary.

3.2 De Gustibus non est Disputandum

The dispute over *The Selected Letters of James Joyce* is a useful entry point into these efforts. The book was declared undesirable on the grounds of obscenity by a committee of publications in May of 1979. In response to news of its banning, Titlestad (one of the "literary experts" appointed as a result of the Publications Amendment Act) wrote a letter to E.G. Malan, the director of the publications committee that had banned the book. Titlestad asked whether the book was submitted to the committee of literary experts before being banned, and added that

²³³ Leighton, "Censorship," 44.

²³⁴ Ibid.

“the last three books with which I have had to deal as a member of the above committee have been totally trivial and devoid of literary merit. If the committee of experts is to be involved with trivia while books connected with people like Joyce are banned, we shall be fiddling while Rome burns.”²³⁵ It is necessary to highlight Titlestad’s perspective on censorship here, because of the way it echoes the views of many people who were vehemently opposed to it. The problem, for Titlestad, was not with censorship *per se*, but with the way it was enacted. The problem was not that books were being banned, but that the wrong *kind* of books were being banned.

Malan replied, in a letter notable for its finicky distinctions and tussling over terms. He quoted, at length, from extracts which the committee had found to be undesirable: “Please do not take it amiss that I quote the following, one of many such passages:...or to lie heads and tails with you feeling your fingers fondling and tickling my ballocks or stuck in me behind, my hands clutching the round cushions of your bum and my tongue licking ravenously up your rank red cunt.” He concluded by stating that “the undesirable elements in the book did not, apparently, outweigh either their functionality, or their literary and research value in the view of the committee of publications.”

Titlestad responded as follows::

It seems a pity that such a work should be banned because of only a handful of letters in a fairly thick volume. (I was, by the way, acquainted with the letters concerned.) ...It is highly unlikely that such a book as the above would be read by anyone but an academic or somebody seriously interested in James Joyce. Indeed, I hope that the complaint over this volume was not from a self-appointed watchdog over public morality.

Titlestad’s aside (in which he puts Malan in his place regarding his acquaintance with even the most outrageous of Joyce’s letters), and his assessment of the book’s likely readership are typical attempts to establish literary credentials, as will be shown in further sections. It is worth quoting here, however, because of Malan’s reply:

Whether a person submitting a complaint about a particular book may be, as you suggest, “a self-appointed watchdog over public morality” or a responsible citizen or body seriously concerned with the growing proliferation of publications involving nudity,

²³⁵ IDP 3/69 P79/3/79.

explicit sex, blasphemy and violence, depends on the point of view of the observer and –
de gustibus non est disputandum!

Malan, clearly coming down on the side of the “responsible citizen” in this matter, concluded by saying that in matters of taste, there can be no disputes. It is debatable whether Malan intended this closing note to be taken entirely seriously. It is a strange point to make – a prominent censor prioritising “the point of view of the observer” (as opposed to his own, superior perspective) and then going on to say that it is futile to argue over that imaginary observer’s opinion, because there is no accounting for taste, making use of a Latin maxim that shows off his own breadth of learning as he did so.

Titlestad’s reply, however, shows how seriously he took Malan’s parting note, and exposes one of the many rifts which prevented the censors from achieving any kind of consensus on matters of aesthetics. Titlestad’s final letter to Malan begins: “The tag ‘de gustibus non est disputandum’ is a dangerous one for a censor to use. This is precisely what a censorship system does.” The letter, 2 densely typed pages in length, concludes with “This letter has become rather longer than I intended. Please do not bother to reply unless you find it absolutely essential.” The discussion was effectively ended at this point, with Titlestad indicating that he felt he had said all he needed to say. Unwilling or unable to continue his dispute with Titlestad, Malan then annotated Titlestad’s letter, taking up all available space in the margins to refute his various arguments, point by point, and engaging in vigorous intellectual competition with a theoretical interlocutor. At the top of Titlestad’s letter, Malan wrote “Some remarks: Not for publication in a reply!” In the margins on the following page, he addressed his colleagues directly on the importance of dealing tactfully with people like Titlestad, because “he is the sort of person who can go to the press with his confused ideas, or include them in his English lectures at the University of Pretoria.” Malan’s “remarks” were presumably intended for the benefit of his colleagues and as a kind of insurance; should Titlestad “go to the press,” Malan would have a set of rebuttals already prepared. The rebuttals, eight in number, range in tone from pettiness to forceful vehemence. Malan begins, for instance, by quibbling with Titlestad’s description of the Latin maxim: “It’s not a ‘tag.’ It’s a famous Latin literary allusion.” This urge to show himself to be more learned than Titlestad seemed to be behind many of his “remarks”, as in when Titlestad referred to an analogy made by Malan: “Your paragraph 3 uses various analogies. Argument by analogy is always dubious as the analogy has to fit the case precisely.” Malan’s annotation reads as follows: “Nonsense. Analogy does not fit a case precisely. He should study...the Aristotelian syllogism to

establish the difference between analogy and identity. I find it shocking that a Professor of English does not know the meaning of a basic figure of speech!”

Malan tempered these feints towards literary elitism and shows of erudition, however, with stern reminders of his views of the censor’s duty, and the role of the “literary expert” in the system. In an earlier letter to Titlestad, he wrote:

I do not think ...that only literary experts should decide on who should, or should not, read the works of recognised writers, as that would be analogous to stating that only gun manufacturers should decide who may possess guns... In all such matters, the public also have a right to have their views considered.

The irony in Malan’s statement is, of course, that the public’s views were not considered or consulted in any meaningful way. In pronouncing on public morals, and determining the (white) South African public’s threshold for disgust and offense, the censors confidently created an entirely imaginary figure, the average South African reader, and decided what she would find acceptable and what she wouldn’t. They invoked her when they saw fit, as in a report on *The Entrepreneurs*: “It would pass in a less conservative country than South Africa, but where most of the population is of a clean and natural background, I believe that they would uphold my contentions.”²³⁶ In some cases, reports invoked the legally imagined reader in even more self-assured terms, as in the report on Wambaugh’s *The Black Marble*, mentioned in the previous chapter, which found the book undesirable because of the “excessive use of the unsavoury word ‘fuck’ and its variants... Their use mortifies and pains the reader, and contributes to the undesirability of the publication.”²³⁷ In his use of “the reader” here, the censor refers not to himself but to the one imagined by the law. The views of the legally imagined reader were consulted often, but as far as the actual public went, their views were considered only insofar as their submissions or letters of complaint were dealt with by the Board, and in the one reader survey commissioned during the system’s existence.²³⁸ Submissions from members of the public made up only a small fraction of the cases the censors dealt with. The legal fiction of the reasonable man, whose thoughts and views were invented by the censors, had the final say.

²³⁶ IDP 3/60 P78/10/116.

²³⁷ IDP 3/53 1 P78/5/78.

²³⁸ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 74.

In his annotations on Titlestad's letter, Malan went further in defining the role of the censor. After his stern corrective regarding *de gustibus non est disputandum*, he wrote "Censors don't dispute about tastes but seek to apply the law." This remark (countering Titlestad's earlier assertion that "disputing about tastes" is *precisely* what a censorship system does) is disingenuous at best.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, many censors "sought to apply the law" only when it suited them to do so, and frequently went beyond their legal remit. Malan's previous letters to Titlestad show that he himself was concerned with far more than merely "seeking to apply the law," as can be seen in his quoting from William Sansom's *The Birth of Story*,²³⁹ a now-forgotten work of literary criticism:

Very well, people go to bed with each other. But it seems to me dull, dull to describe in intimate detail what they do with each other there...No, sex is only interesting, like anything else, in as much as it illuminates life...²⁴⁰

The above quotation shows that Malan *was* concerned with "disputing about tastes," whatever his statements to the contrary. Whether or not fictional representations of sex are "dull" or "interesting" is not a legal question, but an aesthetic one. Even as he sought refuge behind (inadequate and contradictory) legislation, Malan's views and arguments relied just as much on aesthetic principles as it did on legal ones.

The Malan-Titlestad letters can be read as a kind of miniature representation of, or introduction to, the character of the censorship archive. Malan's annotations serve no real bureaucratic or administrative purpose – Titlestad would never read them, and if the case had been sent to the PAB (which it was not), it would have been handled by a different set of censors and readers altogether. The annotations are, in practical terms, a waste of time and an unnecessary expenditure of intellectual effort, for the benefit of Malan's colleagues and Malan himself. And yet it is impossible to dismiss the Malan-Titlestad exchange as being somehow outside of or extraneous to the functioning of the system. To ignore these documents is to ignore how much time and intellectual energy went into their creation. The work being performed here, whatever Malan asserts about the duties of the censor, is the same work being done in so many of the reports in the censors' archive – the work involved in defining the boundaries of the literary, in defining what it meant to be a censor and what that role entailed, in defining what it meant to be

²³⁹ William Sansom, *The Birth of a Story*, (London: Chatto and Windus), 1972.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

a discerning reader and what *that* role entailed, and in (futilely) striving for an objective and agreed upon aesthetic standards by which literature could be assessed.

The Malan-Titlestad letters are excessive in length and disproportionate in emotion for these reasons. The legislation concerning the creation of the Boards, in their various incarnations, essentially gave the censors free rein: they were accountable to no other governmental or judicial body. The freedom with which they operated was unusual even as part of a wider state system which was structured to ensure “an extraordinary degree of opacity in government,” as Harris observes.²⁴¹ Harris describes the apartheid state as having a “disregard for accountability,”²⁴² yet the letters between Titlestad and Malan seem to be precisely concerned with providing a traceable record of accountability. And, as a wider perusal of the archive makes clear, a preoccupation with what Van der Vlies describes as “the performance of due process” characterises the vast majority of the reports therein, even or especially when it was unnecessary.²⁴³

Chapter One’s discussion of the purge of incriminating or inconvenient archival material shows that the state *could* have destroyed the censorship archive, if it had wanted to. Yet the archive remains mostly untouched. The care and attention to detail with which these records were kept and maintained must at least raise the possibility that they were thought too precious to be destroyed. It is difficult to entirely disregard the idea that files like the Malan-Titlestad letters were kept because they were believed to have important literary value, that they were documents of intellectual significance which future scholars might find a use for. A similar sense of futurity characterises other reports, and might be read as evidence of the censors’ belief in the importance of their task, as well as their anxiety or resentment about how that task was widely understood. Many reports seem to be written with an audience in mind, an audience whose members included readers other than the censors’ fellow bureaucrats.

These letters serve here as an introduction to the chaotic, vast, excessive character of the censorship archive, and the conclusions drawn above can, in many ways, be applied to a wider overview of it: If the censors simply abided by the official rules laid down by legislation, the archive would be an orderly, manageable collection of documents. The difference between the pro-forma bureaucratic duties and the handwritten reports by the censors, which sometimes

²⁴¹ Harris, “They should have destroyed more,” 2.

²⁴² Harris, “They should have destroyed more,” 2.

²⁴³ Van Der Vlies, “Reading Banned Books,” 56.

went for pages beyond their allotted space, sharply expose the state's failure to turn the censoring of literature into just another routine aspect of surveillance. Official legislation's failure to address the problem of literature meant that the censors were obliged to work with guidelines and theories of their own. The construction and maintenance of these guiding assumptions was an overwhelmingly complex task (and a futile one, because consensus could and would never be achieved), one which might be said to have resulted in the extraordinary excess of the censors' archive.

3.3 Discriminating Readers

In its almost-intact preservation of the inner workings of an apartheid bureaucracy, the archive is unusual. In its preservation of wide and varied accounts of reading experiences, it is even more unusual. Personal accounts of reading experiences are notoriously rare. David Perkins argues that "for most times and places, we lack the sources, such as accounts of reading experiences, from which a history of reception could be written."²⁴⁴ The censorship archive offers a remarkable opportunity in that the documents within supply a substantial and diverse array of accounts of reading experiences.

The reading and book historian Leah Price has noted "one of the central difficulties of a history of reading: how to analyze an activity that's too close for critical distance, and perhaps for comfort."²⁴⁵ It is hard to analyse or understand *how* someone read something. Short of telepathy, it is nearly impossible. This is why historians of reading frequently rely on the accounts of individual readers. The account of one person's reading experience can never be representative, but it is often all that historians of reading have to go on. For instance, one of the most recent and significant contributions to the history of reading in South Africa is Archie Dick's study, *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures*.²⁴⁶ In it, Dick has relied on a range of sources: "bits and pieces from official records, slave wills, travel journals, newspapers, annual reports, readership surveys, biographies, autobiographies, letters, diaries, library records, educational records, illustrations, and interviews were pieced together to tell these hidden stories of South Africa's common readers and their books."²⁴⁷ His approach in this is similar to Jonathan Rose's in *The Intellectual History of the British Working Class*, where to construct a reading

²⁴⁴ David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 25.

²⁴⁵ Leah Price, "Reading: The State of the Discipline", *Book History* 7 (2004), 303

²⁴⁶ Archie Dick, *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Cultures*, 3.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

history Rose used “memoirs and diaries, school records, social surveys, oral interviews, library registers, letters to newspaper editors (published or, more revealingly, unpublished), fan mail and even in the proceedings of the Inquisition.”²⁴⁸ By using unofficial sources and disparate archival scraps, historians of reading have exposed what once seemed to be hidden or elided: the reading experiences of ordinary people.

The material contained in the censorship archive does not bring to light the reading experiences of ordinary people. Instead, it tells us how the state attempted to regulate those habits, and about the ideals and values that were projected onto the legally imagined reader in apartheid South Africa. These documents expose the frailties and deep insecurities of the apartheid state as it went about its elaborate project of wish fulfilment. They show how the censors conceived of the intellectual nature of their undertaking, and the lengths they went to in order to indicate that they were discriminating judges of literature. The censors were not “ordinary” or “hidden” readers; they were state-appointed bureaucrats reading on behalf of the nation. They were also subjective readers, however, possessing differing tastes, differing levels of learning and sophistication, of differing ages and backgrounds. Yet legislation required them to act as a collective whose interests were one, seemingly relying on what they had in common as both apartheid state officials and as “literary experts.”

As has been well documented, the appointees of both the original Publications Control Board and the Directorate of Publications were often members of apartheid South Africa’s academic or literary elite. This was the case even during the most repressive era of the system, when the head of the PAB was the highly conservative and anti-literary Judge J.H. Snyman, who headed the Board from 1975 – 1980 (and who wrote the reports on *Magersfontein* and *Amateurs* discussed in the previous chapter). Even during this period, as Attwell notes, “despite Snyman’s disparagement of the literary elite and the overall tilting of the system towards control over political agitation, the panels that scrutinised literary publications did include a number of writers, mainly of Afrikaans, and academics who were socially connected or affiliated to conservative institutions.”²⁴⁹

Despite these supposed intellectual credentials, immersion in the archive reveals that even the most apparently “qualified” censors were anxious to prove their ability to apply themselves to

²⁴⁸ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 1.

²⁴⁹ Attwell, *Coetzee and the Life of Writing*, 86-87.

the task at hand. They wrote reports in which they took pains to flag their own erudition and learning, made constant assertions of good judgement, and continually referred to their own self-appointed authority as guardians of the literary.

In the same article discussed in this chapter's introduction, Leighton provided a definition of his duties as a censor, beginning with questions he was "forced to ask himself as a member of the Publications Control Board."²⁵⁰ These questions included the following: "Are all people who write books artists? Is artistry the only criterion for such control as I was required to exercise under the Act?"²⁵¹ He attempted, in his article, to answer both questions in his own way, without directly acknowledging at any point that the answer to the second question, in legislative terms, is a categorical "No." Tacitly admitting that his job involved more than assessing "artistry," Leighton defined his role while serving on the Board as that of a discriminating reader, one whose task was to protect the public from the devastating effects of "psychological propaganda" and to "exert a balanced control, so that no one set of ideas is propagated at the expense of others."²⁵² The trouble, for Leighton, was that "not all people are discriminating readers. Not all people are able to judge for themselves what is, or is not, worthwhile reading matter."²⁵³ Similar sentiments are expressed in a dispute over the fate of Wilbur Smith's *The Dark of the Sun*. The initial report (written by A.P. Grové) argued strongly for banning on the grounds that Smith's book was offensive from a moral *and* aesthetic point of view: it contained badly written depictions of rape. Harvey wrote a longer report in response to Grové's, making a strongly worded assertion of his and his colleagues' superior taste and judgement:

People who have no literary taste, judgement or training (and that could include even Supreme Court judges) cannot distinguish between the use of bad language, description of sex and violence etc by essentially non-serious "entertainers" like Smith (who exploits them) and their use by a writer of genius like Faulkner.²⁵⁴

What did it mean, then, to be a discriminating reader, a person of literary taste and training? How did censors and state-appointed "literary experts" show that they were capable of the task? Reports are peppered with laboured literary references and quotes, a particularly striking example being R.E. Lighton's opening remarks in his report on J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*

²⁵⁰ Leighton, "Censorship," 41.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid., 42.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ BCS 52 158/65.

(1981): “This is a somewhat Kafkaesque type of narrative, with the narrator an elderly somewhat Quixotic magistrate posted to a frontier outpost who has sought a *modus operandi* if not *vivendi* with the nomadic tribe (barbarians).”²⁵⁵ Later in the report, he described the novel’s setting as “obscure as Erewhon,” in reference to the Samuel Butler novel of that name. These kinds of references occasionally strained credulity, as in a report on Andrew Sinclair’s *The Surrey Cat* (1977), the plot of which concerns a panther on the loose in the English countryside and which the front blurb advertises as being “as gripping as *JAWS!*” The censor recommended passing the book, noting that while it contained “undesirable” language, “the use of the words ‘fuck’ and ‘fucking’...is deliberately taking off D.H. Lawrence”²⁵⁶ – perhaps misattributing high-minded motives to the author of a throwaway mass-market thriller. In a similar vein, a censor recommended the passing of Alexander Fullerton’s *A Piper’s Leave*, an erotic thriller whose cover advertises it as concerning “the bawdy adventures of a roguish Scot,” because the “bawdiness” had “an almost “Canterbury-Tales”-like (Chaucer) style.”²⁵⁷

Another method of establishing credentials was to write a report which created sufficient distance between the censors’ taste and that of the wider reading public, as in the following report on *The Thief Who Couldn’t Sleep*, a 1966 spy thriller: “An exciting and fast-moving story which should go down well with readers of a less sophisticated nature. Throughout the book one gains the impression that the writer is inwardly laughing at the ridiculousness of various ‘secret societies.’”²⁵⁸ Some censors went much further in demonstrating their ability to assess a book’s likely effect on the woefully indiscriminating reader. For instance, in a report on a book titled *God is For Real, Man* (“Kids from city streets reveal startling insights into Bible passages...as they translate them into their own language”), the censor wrote: “Anyone who, having got over whatever moral shock he might have suffered, still thinks that the book is blasphemous is, in my opinion, merely stupid or narrow-minded to the point of stupidity.”²⁵⁹ Interestingly, this particular attack seems directed both at the possibly-offended public and at the contracted reader who wrote the first report on *God is For Real, Man*, recommending it be banned on the grounds that it was “mocking of Christian traditions.” Clearly, competitive signalling of taste and sophistication was not limited to discussions of significant literature. The archive shows that the writing of a report on *any* book, whether it was *Ulysses* or *The Thief Who Couldn’t Sleep*, represented

²⁵⁵ IDP 1/61 P80/11/205.

²⁵⁶ IDP 1/12 P76/9/71.

²⁵⁷ IDP 1/12 P76/8/113.

²⁵⁸ BCS 67 981/66.

²⁵⁹ BCS 80 581/67.

an opportunity for a censor to show her colleagues how capable and discriminating she was, and how well-placed to judge. In his synopsis of a 1965 paperback titled *Satan's Saint: The Life of the Marquis de Sade* (the cover blurb of which advertised it as being “a real shocker”), the censor wrote the following: “Not really a ‘novel’, as claimed, nor a proper biography... There is nothing remotely new or interesting about Sade’s sociological or religious beliefs.” In his general marks, he recommended banning on the grounds that the writer’s primary motive “seems undoubtedly to exploit an unhealthy interest in sex perversions.” He added in brackets that the book made “no contribution to an understanding of Sade or sadism.”²⁶⁰

The report, and the censor’s positioning of himself as something of an authority on the sociological and religious beliefs of the Marquis de Sade, shows how even an erotic paperback represented a chance for a censor to show off his breadth of learning, and assert his views on literature’s aesthetic and moral function. Similarly, in a report on *Dig A Dead Doll*, a 1960 pulp thriller starring a bullfighter, a pair of lesbian strippers, and a private detective named Honey West, the censor wrote “A typical ‘penny-horrible,’ innocent of proper continuity and discernible plot... Any person moron enough to pursue this book to the bitter end would be unmoved by it.” The censor objected not so much to the “indelicate innuendo” contained in the book, but rather to the fact that it was so badly written. There was nothing in the legislation which required a censor to apply his literary-critical skills to a work of “trash” like *Dig A Dead Doll*. Nevertheless, countless reports show how the task of scrutinising literature for the state, and defining its parameters in the process, provoked in the censors an insecurity and drive to excess, an apparent need to display learning at every opportunity.

Anxious awareness of a writer’s reputation (and how banning would affect the Board’s reputation) is characteristic of many reports. Occasionally, a writer’s being well-known or well-regarded was enough reason for the book to be passed, as in a report on James Baldwin’s *Another Country*: “Baldwin is undoubtedly the best-known Negro writer of our time... Although I have certain reservations about certain small sections, the book is generally acceptable and can be passed.”²⁶¹ The logic here, that a novel must have artistic merit because the writer was well-known or well-regarded, reached its apotheosis in the circular logic on display in a report on

²⁶⁰ See Appendix 8.

²⁶¹ IDP 1/12 P76/8/171.

Elizabeth Bowen's *The House in Paris*: "There is nothing objectionable in this book. As it is written by the distinguished authoress Elizabeth Bowen, there hardly could be."²⁶²

There is abundant archival evidence which reveals that the censors were highly sensitive to the international criticism that the banning of renowned works would attract. Much of this sensitivity seems to stem from an advanced case of "colonial cringe," an embarrassed awareness of the perceived cultural inferiority of the South African literary scene. As Titlestad warned Malan, banning a book such as Joyce's letters would "be seen in a very ridiculous light by publishing houses overseas and the ridicule is likely to spread to wider circles in the intellectual and business worlds."

A similar acknowledgement, and sensitivity to ridicule, was made in the recommendations to pass Spike Milligan's *Adolf Hitler: My Part in His Downfall* (1971). One censor wrote "it was first published in 1971, reprinted in 1972, and again (three times) in 1973.... It is accordingly obvious that the publication has already been read by hundreds of thousands of people. Will declaring it undesirable after so many years not evoke a reaction one would wish to avoid?"²⁶³ Another reader wrote, hopefully, "Can it not be ascertained how many copies have already been sold, before taking a decision to ban it, which at this stage might seem a bit silly?" (underline his).

The censors' occasional insight into how they were perceived seems to have engendered powerful feelings of insecurity. This sense of inferiority or defensiveness was often on anguished display in reports which expressed doubt regarding a work's literary merit, or lack of it, and doubt about the ability to discern it. The censors often appeared to mind deeply about how their decisions would be perceived by the public, and were thus often concerned that their judgements were in accordance with wider opinion on a book's literary merit. A report on J.P. Donleavy's *Saddest Summer of Samuel S.* shows how this awareness could weigh on a censors' sense of his ability to confidently and definitively discern literary merit: "I am afraid I don't get the point of this book. It is not obscene. The undressing scene is curiously detached and only fleetingly erotic. Hardly enough reason for banning. Some scatological talk in passing. I say tentatively 'pass' in case the book by a good writer has some real merit that I have missed – it is finely descriptive in parts."²⁶⁴ The same censor (Harvey) attached comments to a report on Oscar Lewis's *The Children of Sanchez*, where the first censor had recommended banning, stating that, "I

²⁶² BCS1 26015.

²⁶³ IDP 3/75 P75/6/69.

²⁶⁴ BCS 79 485/67.

see that the author is a Professor and his first book on the Sanchez family is regarded as a classic. I don't think this very sexy book is a classic."²⁶⁵ In his dissenting comments, Harvey corrected the first censor by establishing his superior knowledge of Lewis's work and motivation for writing: "Oscar Lewis is a serious sociologist with an international reputation... The sexual episodes are important for the insight they give. Simply recorded, they are not pornographic. It is well-known that sex is a vital factor in the 'culture of the poor.'"²⁶⁶ Harvey's awareness of Lewis's "international reputation" seems to have played a definitive role in his recommendation that the book be passed.

Signalling of erudition (and sensitivity to ridicule) was not, however, only apparent in reports on well-regarded or politically sensitive texts. Censors often applied the same strategies when dealing with works of little apparent significance, as in the following report on Alexis Lykiard's *Zones*:

Though full of literary allusions, it is not (in my opinion) a successful work of art. The sex descriptions are lurid and detailed...and although the book is not in a popular or easy style the book might attract pornography seekers. Its 'hero' is totally immoral and is not held up for disapproval at all. Ban.²⁶⁷

In this report, Harvey asserts his good taste and literary judgement by first identifying the literary allusions and then by dismissing them as "obvious." In accusing the novelist of intellectual posturing, he engages in intellectual posturing of his own.

In addition, the above extract is illustrative because of the equivalencies it draws between a "popular" style and an "easy" one, and its dismissal of both. Many reports in the archive reveal a conviction in the difference between, and sometimes mutual exclusivity of, that which is "popular" and that which is "good." The censors' overall hostility to popular or mass culture clearly revealed itself in their suspicion of that which they perceived to be "easy" and a concomitant, albeit qualified, admiration for the difficult. In a report on Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*, for instance, Harvey argued for it being allowed to pass, because although it contained scenes of homosexuality, it was "a very serious and complex novel."²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ BCS 52 134/65.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ BCS 67 471/66.

²⁶⁸ BCS 49 1682/64.

The same reasoning was employed in report on Robert Musil's *Young Torless*, which contained "homosexual scenes" but which was a "complex and profound book which would only interest educated adults,"²⁶⁹ and in a report on Gore Vidal's *The Judgement of Paris*:

There are many allusions to sexual intercourse and homosexuals, but there are no actual or detailed descriptions which would tend, in the terms of the Act, to corrupt or be considered obscene or offensive. No one seeking enlightenment as regards these activities would be rendered any the worse by the perusal of this novel. Only the sophisticated section of the public would read this novel in any case.²⁷⁰

A report on P.D. Ballard's *End of a Millionaire* (a pulp mystery thriller) shows how these assumptions expressed themselves even in works of no literary or social import: "Though not a serious work of literature it does not seem to me pornographic."²⁷¹ The implication here is that a "serious work of literature" could not possibly be pornographic, an assumption which is also evident in a report on Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*:

But these descriptions, although of sexual relations, are not sexy or pornographic: they are woven into the characters and the drama of the story and retain their objectivity. Although I would like to ban a book such as this from my personal standpoint, it is too integrated and coherent to be banned.²⁷²

Murray's reluctant passing of Lessing's work here shows the distinction the censors tried to make, again, between that which was art and that which was pornography, and that the former immediately negated the presence of the latter.

An urgently written report on popular thriller writer Robert Ludlum's *The Chancellor Manuscript* espouses this theory in full, and exposes some of the limitations in the censors' view of what "true art" looked like. The report noted the book's "purple passages," but insisted that a "masterpiece" of its quality had to be passed: "A book of this calibre has sufficient merit to indicate that the purpose of the author is not moral corruption and it consequently minimises the impact of [potentially harmful] passages."²⁷³ As the following section will show, the censor's reverence for "art" had profound limitations, vividly exposed in their treatment of Nabokov.

²⁶⁹ BCS 80 137/65.

²⁷⁰ BCS 73 1191/66.

²⁷¹ BCS 53 199/65.

²⁷² See Appendix 9.

²⁷³ 1DP 1/19 P77/6/106.

That the censors fought to clear the name of *The Chancellor's Manuscript* on literary grounds, but dismissed or misunderstood the oeuvre of one of the twentieth century's most revered authors, is just one indication of the absurdity of the task they set for themselves.

However flawed, subjective, and limited their ability to assess artistry, the censors continued to rely on it in their judgements. A text's "difficulty" or inaccessibility rendered it harmless, as in the recommendation for the passing of Norman Kagan's *The Cinema of Stanley Kubrick*, which drew attention to the photograph of the "massive phallic sculpture" that appeared in *A Clockwork Orange*, but insisted that "the publication will be restricted, by natural selection, to readers interested in the technical side of the cinema and this will lessen the possibility of offense."²⁷⁴ or the report on Gordimer's *The Black Interpreters*: "Although it is clear where the author's sympathies lie, there is little danger that the book will incite action," on account of the "narrow" specialisation of the topic: the work of black South African writers.²⁷⁵ For the censors, a discriminating reader who could comprehend a difficult text or would seek out a specialised subject (even if that allegedly "specialised" subject in fact concerned the output of a wide range of writers) was unlikely to be corrupted by pornography, energised to political action, or have their views significantly altered.

The report on Jan Morris's *Destinations: Essays from Rolling Stone* (1980) lays this logic bare. The censor remarked on the potentially destructive effects of Morris's highly critical essay on the apartheid state, but saw a mitigating factor in the "fact" that the book was "not likely to be read by the ordinary average reader...but only by more or less intelligent persons, intellectuals who will not be unduly swayed or persuaded by Jan Morris, having already determined their attitude toward the racial realities of the country."²⁷⁶ The implication here is that any "intellectual" would understand the political realities of late 1970s South Africa through the same lens that the censors did, another indication of their strained self-image as arbiters of artistic, moral, and political "truth."

In their efforts to indicate that they were discriminating readers of taste and training, the censors unwittingly revealed a host of other, embarrassing qualities. Their fractiously competitive assertions of taste and petty squabbles over texts of little significance speak of an insecurity and emotionality that is at odds with the way they were publicly perceived. Why were these trivial

²⁷⁴ IDP 1/19 P77/6/198.

²⁷⁵ IDP 1/12 P76/9/163.

²⁷⁶ IDP 1/57 P80/8/79.

matters so important? What could it matter that a bureaucrat had dismissed *Dig A Dead Doll* with a finely crafted, world-weary set of sentences? The reports discussed above, and the thousands just like them that the archive contains, represent a waste of intellectual energy and a waste of bureaucratic resources. At times, the censors seemed anxiously aware of the absurdity and futility of their task, and about their own fitness to carry it out. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated in their treatment of the work of Vladimir Nabokov.

3.4 The Difficulty of Nabokov

Vladimir Nabokov's work was often submitted for scrutiny by the system. That his novels were perceived as a potential threat could have been due to *Lolita's* evergreen notoriety, or simply the fact that he was Russian. Cold-War fears over the spread of Communism meant that the works of Tolstoy, Gogol, and Pushkin were submitted by police and customs officials, alert to the danger posed by a Russian surname. *Anna Karenina* was placed under embargo by customs as late as 1979.²⁷⁷ *The Defence*, *The Gift*, *Pale Fire*, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*, and *Lolita* were all submitted to the censors, some of them repeatedly. An analysis of the passage of Nabokov's novels through the system allows for an exploration of the different forces brought to bear on debates regarding literary merit. Nabokov seems to have represented a kind of aesthetic outer limit for even for the most avowedly sophisticated censors, those who took pains to flag their erudition in their reports and continually focused on questions of literary merit when assessing a text. What aesthetic theories they adhered to could not accommodate his work. Even those censors who were normally so confident in judging the aesthetic value of a text, and who had definitive ideas over who was a "first-rate" novelist and who was not, backed away from judging Nabokov from this perspective. Analysis of many of the reports on his work reveals that the censors simply did not know how to read him. The following report on *Pale Fire* demonstrates this succinctly:

Pale Fire is a poem of 999 lines, written by John Francis Slade [sic]. The preface tells us how the poem came about. Then follows the poem, and after that most part of the book is devoted to a commentary on the poem by Vladimir Nabokov.

The commentary is an explanation of every single line, with endless explanations which

²⁷⁷IDP 1/50 P79/11/112.

enhance understanding of the poem's context. This book will only be read by the serious student or those interested in poetry.²⁷⁸

The above is, clearly, a misunderstanding of *Pale Fire* on a basic level, reading it as a "poem" as opposed to a novel, and misattributing that poem's authorship to the apparently real-life personage of John Shade, as opposed to Nabokov's fictional creation. That the report has entirely failed to mention Charles Kinbote (the other fictional author whose commentary on his colleague's poem makes up the bulk of the novel) is perhaps a more damning example of the extent to which the censor has failed to grasp the metafictional nature of the text.

The censors had a complicated relationship to what they perceived as technical or rhetorical complexity. The more "sophisticated" of the censors often commented approvingly on the "devices" used by an author, but other censors dismissed such "devices" as "game-playing", "pretentiousness", a cheap act of literary trickery. Nabokov's "devices", on the other hand, were mostly ignored or misunderstood, as in part of this 1964 report on *Lolita*:

The novel is indeed world-famous and has been made into a film (with James Mason in the starring role). However, I don't find it to be any kind of masterpiece, in spite of the glowing introduction by doctor of psychology John Ray.²⁷⁹

Again, the censor has mistaken a fictional character (John Ray) for a real one, and has catastrophically misread the tone of the foreword, which is intended as purposefully absurd and funny, as opposed to the sober recommendation of a psychologist. A later report on *Lolita* similarly misunderstood the purpose of the foreword: "Humbert, however, remains horrible, abject, and a shining example of moral leprosy as described in the forward [sic]."²⁸⁰ This extract comes from a 1982 report by the PAB, which argued for *Lolita's* value as a work of art, but which nevertheless referred to John Ray as if he were an objective authority on the morality of the novel and its protagonist, instead of an invented figure of fun by an author whose disdain for psychoanalysis as a profession was well-documented.²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ BCS 30 29654.

²⁷⁹ BCS 43 1031/64.

²⁸⁰ IDP 3/124 P82/9/94.

²⁸¹ Nabokov referred to Freud as "the quack from Vienna," and stated in *Strong Opinions* that "Freudism and all it has tainted with its grotesque implications and methods appears to me to be one of the vilest deceits practiced by people on themselves and on others. I reject it utterly, along with a few other medieval items still adored by the ignorant, the conventional, or the very sick." Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 22-23.

Nabokov's self-reflexivity, his modernist and postmodernist "devices," confused even the most avowedly erudite members of the Board. For instance, in the report below on *The Gift*, the censor attempts to signal his own erudition but admits that comprehension ultimately eludes him:

It is impossible to summarise the multiple small incidents of this plot. On p8 Nabokov himself describes the plan of the book. The writer about whom Fyodor writes his book Chernyevski [sic] actually existed but whether this account is accurate or not I don't know.²⁸²

That Nikolai Chernyshevsky "actually existed" cannot have any bearing on an assessment of whether the book is undesirable in terms of the Act, nor can it make any difference to a consideration of the text's literary merit, especially since the censor here admits that he cannot vouch for the accuracy of the pseudo-biography in Chapter Four of *The Gift*. No comment is made at all on the book's literary merit, an interesting omission considering that the report is written by the same censor (Harvey) who so often made judgements on other writers on the basis of their "genius" or lack thereof (as seen in his confident assessment of Faulkner as "a writer of genius.")

Nabokov's plots, in particular, seemed to confound the censors. The 1964 report on *Lolita*, described the plot as follows: "And the plot of the novel – if one can even call it that – is extremely thin – an unending repetition of stereotyped exaggerations of what people experience in normal relationships."²⁸³

The plot of *Lolita*, in particular, was a matter of ongoing dispute between different individual censors, as well as between different sections of the censorship bureaucracy. Analysis of the novel's treatment reveals a great deal about the system's handling of questions of the literary. The novel was banned in 1964, with Dekker describing it as "pathological!"²⁸⁴ The report's plot summary was as follows:

Humbert Humbert's autobiography, written in prison. He marries his second wife with an eye on her nymphomaniac daughter. His wife is thoughtful enough to die ten weeks after their wedding. To his delight, HH discovers that the twelve year old Lolita is already

²⁸² BCS 71 693/66.

²⁸³ BCS 43 1031/64.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

adept at the love game. Their relationship lasts three years, and then she “disappears” After a few years, she asks for money, and he shoots the man she left him for.²⁸⁵

The more avowedly sophisticated censors prided themselves on their ability to distinguish between “art” and “trash,” and it is clear from the above description that in this case *Lolita* had been relegated to the trash pile. The plot synopsis reads like the description of a racy pulp thriller: Lolita is a “nymphomaniac” who is “adept at the love game.” Her abduction by Clare Quilty is described in disparaging quotation marks as her “disappearance,” and Humbert’s murder of Quilty is framed as the justifiable response of a man who has been abandoned by his lover. That Lolita is twelve at the novel’s beginning and seventeen at its end does not overly trouble the conscience of the Board, nor does Humbert’s own description of his actions as “rape.” According to the Board, the plot of *Lolita* is simply “an endless repetition of stereotyped exaggerations of what people experience in normal relationships.”²⁸⁶ The novel was banned again in 1974, presumably for similar reasons, although no report exists from that period.

Eight years after the 1974 banning, when Nabokov’s status as a revered novelist was firmly established, *Lolita* was submitted to the PAB on review. The 1982 report, written by a Professor CW Mostert, deserves quoting at length:

Humber [sic], an elderly “Professor” from Europe takes up lodgings with a widow and her 14 year old daughter, Lolita. He falls in love with the girl and marries the mother in order to be near Lolita and enjoy her...His wife is killed in a motor-car accident and he goes to fetch Lolita. She is precocious beyond her age and seduces him and they travel practically across the USA.

Humber is completely entranced by her, spending lavishly to satisfy her whims. It becomes clear to him that she was having clandestine affairs with other men and, under extreme provocation, he shoots and kills her and her unborn child after she had finally abandoned him.

In spite of its theme/topic the novel is NOT salacious. It is the pathetic, even tender story of a middle-aged man totally in love with a teenager, who exploits his deep love for her. The inability of the “father-lover” to cope evokes compassion because he is ensnared beyond redemption. The only objection is that the girl is about 14 years old,

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

but physically and emotionally she is mature in the pejorative sense...It is an unusual love story, evoking compassion and an impressive 'tour de force' in English literature.

In this vulgar report, with its reprehensible logic, the censor has taken the conclusions drawn by the previous Board, extended them, and turned them into a case for the defence.²⁸⁷ *Lolita* is still a nymphomaniac who seduces a middle-aged man, except she is now "about fourteen years of age" and "mature in the pejorative sense." Her actions are still framed as those of a wanton, adult woman, instead of a child, and Humbert's response to them is still described as entirely justified and worthy of compassion. By 1982, *Lolita's* place in the canon was well-established, and the committee's decision to unban the novel would have been undertaken with this in mind. In attempting a literary defence, however, the censor not only performs a stunningly un-literary interpretation of the novel (Humbert, the self-described monster, is simply a helplessly ensnared and deeply devoted lover), but one that is factually incorrect. Humbert does not "shoot and kill [Lolita] and her unborn child." Lolita dies in childbirth after Humbert himself has died in prison, awaiting trial for the murder of Quilty. The report, in fact, never even mentions that Humbert is in prison, thus further framing him as a tragically ensnared innocent. The censor here seems to have invented an end for *Lolita* that is more in line with his interpretation of the text: murder at the hands of the man she has abandoned. In his argument that the novel is "NOT salacious," the censor performs the most salacious interpretation imaginable.

The censors' treatment of Nabokov is worth examining in detail because of the way it succinctly reveals one of the boundaries by which they defined the literary. While they often praised works for their "seriousness" or complexity," there were limits to their grasp of, and tolerance for, those qualities. Close analysis of their treatment of Nabokov succinctly reveals the limits of their understanding of narrative and literary technique. For most of the censors, Nabokov's "game-playing" was so advanced as to be incomprehensible. Even those censors who were quickest to take up the literary defence shied away from doing so in the case of Nabokov: for them, his work was in some sense indefensible on literary grounds simply because they could not understand it.

Nabokov's work was treated warily, misinterpreted, misread, and misunderstood. In writing reports on his work, the censors were either cautious and diffident, or confident and wrong. It is

²⁸⁷ A similar perspective was used in a defense of *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*, where the censor argued that the novel was not "off-putting, lewd, or lust-provoking" because Van Veen's "satyriasis" was "sad" and deserved compassion (IDP3/324 P91/09/381).

to be assumed that his reputation meant that the censors felt obliged to take his work seriously; the reports reveal that they were not up to the task.

3.5 Passing the Universality Test

If Nabokov's work did not square with the system's idea of what "good literature" looked like, then what did? As has already been shown, the censors associated artistic merit with literary complexity, as they were able to define it. "True" literature was that which would be out of reach for the masses. Inaccessibility, of course, was not the only criterion by which the censors judged and assessed literature. McDonald notes that the censors often "invoked a narrative of cultural progress in which the literary is gradually purged of the political and finally achieves its teleological destiny in a purely aesthetic sphere."²⁸⁸ He argues that the censors' "aestheticist assumptions" meant that novels were let through if they passed "the universality test," and banned if they did not.²⁸⁹ It is clear that the system displayed a preference for works which were "purged of the political," or where the political remained at a safe distance. In an impassioned report arguing for the passing of the English translation of Brink's *Oomblik in die Wind*, for instance, the censor admitted that the novel contained potentially undesirable scenes, but that "the relationship between the white woman and the black slave must be viewed in relation to the milieu and the time in which this narrative is set – the first half of the eighteenth century. Miscegenation, although frowned upon by society, was not uncommon then."²⁹⁰ For the censor, the politically controversial elements of the novel were excusable because of the temporal distance from which they could be viewed.

That they viewed literature and political discourse as distinct entities, and that they saw the first as self-evidently superior to the second, is revealed even in reports on novels which had nothing to do with South Africa, as in the following report on Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1877). Remarking that he found it "grotesque" that the novel had been placed under embargo, the censor (Murray) made a case for its merits:

This famous masterpiece is about the social life in Moscow in Tolstoy's times: the end of the century. The difference between the lifestyles of different classes is clearly shown.

The novel must be passed. No offensive sex scenes are described, and the artistic

²⁸⁸McDonald, *Literature Police*, 164.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ IDP 3/26 P76/10/37

references to the difference between classes, etc., are very light and do not force any kind of message, and are in any case well-known.²⁹¹

Murray's defence of *Anna Karenina* rested on his contention that the potentially problematic references to "class difference" were of no consequence because the references bore no particular ideological load. For Murray, Tolstoy's masterpiece could only really be understood and appreciated as such if the novel's political commentary was minimised or dismissed as "light," and, in any case, utilised primarily for aesthetic purposes. As with Brink's novel, *Karenina's* "message" was also acceptable because it was well-known, or universal in theme, and could comfortably be viewed at a safe distance: the end of the nineteenth century.

This unease with the contemporary frequently extended to narrative and literary technique. Reports and other writings show that the censors had little patience with what they perceived as contrivance, or "trying too hard." In a report on Brink's *Miskien Nooit*, for instance, Dekker argued that the novel lacked literary merit and that "we have before us the pathetic spectacle of an author squandering his unmistakable talent and stylistic gifts on a playfully contrived, extremely sophisticated novel without the driving force and therefore also without the deeper synthesis of a serious life-study."²⁹² He honed in on the novel's stylistic complexity, complaining that it was a cheap trick imported from "overseas writers."²⁹³

One "overseas writer" whose techniques the censors were particularly impatient with was William Burroughs. In a report on *Dead Fingers Talk*, the censor wrote that the novel's "redeeming feature is that only about 10% of the reading public will go beyond the first 10 or so pages. Very difficult to comprehend. A great part of it is also written in Beat dialect."²⁹⁴ The implication that "Beat dialect" is an unnecessary and unwelcome stylistic tic is characteristic of the censors' resistance to what they perceived as shallow attempts to be "modern." For many of them, timelessness was a desirable quality that could be found in both form and content. Imported stylistic tricks could only hamper the growth of a nascent South African literary culture.

In 1955, before he became a member of the PCB, Harvey wrote an article in which he registered a similar objection to what he viewed as stylistic games. In "Local Colour' in South African

²⁹¹ IDP 1/50 P79/11/112.

²⁹² BCS 52/68.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ BCS 65 136/66.

Poetry,” he praised the work of T.S. Eliot as that of a “true poet” and congratulated him on his effective inclusion of “‘modern’ mechanical images and subject matter” in his work.²⁹⁵ Eliot included such things “naturally,” Harvey argued, because “he was not working to a preconceived theory of what was poetic and what was not.”²⁹⁶ Although the article was published eight years before he became a censor, Harvey continued to display a signature hostility to what he perceived as pretension or “working towards a preconceived theory,” as in the report on Mailer’s *American Dream*, mentioned in the previous chapter, in which he disparagingly dismissed the novel’s “pretentious manner.” Harvey expressed similar contempt, and similar effort, in relation to works whose banning would attract a great deal less attention than the work of someone like Mailer, as in this report on the much less well-known *All the Naked Heroes*, by Allen Kapelner (a 1959 pulp novel about a bohemian community):

The technique is “modern”, disjointed, impressionist, sometimes ‘Joycean.’ ... But it doesn’t succeed and merely makes one impatient with its nihilistic posturings and futile obscenities and half-baked “beat” talk. If it were a literary work of merit, it might pass, but as it is not, I suggest banning.²⁹⁷

Harvey, and censors like him, often saw “modern” technique as nothing more than an unnecessary distraction, a pre-conceived and pretentious theory whose use was only tolerable in the hands of what they perceived to be writers of the first rank, although their reports show that they never achieved consensus on what entry into the first rank required. Pressures of the contemporary moment, a constantly changing literary field, subjective interpretations by individual censors, and wildly different approaches to their duties, meant that a set of universally agreed-upon aesthetic standards would never be established. This does not mean that many of those working within the system were not constantly engaged in the attempt, or that some working suppositions about literary artistry and what it meant for a work to be timeless or universal in theme did not consistently repeat themselves. These working suppositions proved especially useful when dealing with the work of Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee.

In *Literature Police*, McDonald examines the censors’ “strangely selective” response to the work of Nadine Gordimer.²⁹⁸ Six of her novels were submitted for scrutiny by the censors. Three were

²⁹⁵ Harvey, “Local Colour,” 95.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ BCS 65 149/66.

²⁹⁸ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 224.

banned: *A World of Strangers* (1958),²⁹⁹ *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966),³⁰⁰ and *Burger's Daughter* (1979).³⁰¹ Three were not: *Occasion for Loving* (1963),³⁰² *A Guest of Honour* (1970),³⁰³ and *The Conservationist* (1974).³⁰⁴ McDonald asks "If all her novels ... engaged with the historical circumstances of apartheid South Africa in especially powerful and critical ways, then why were they not all deemed equally threatening to the established order?"³⁰⁵ For McDonald, these decisions were especially perverse because Gordimer's "oeuvre displays a remarkable consistency on a number of levels. With the exception of *A Guest of Honour* ... all the novels from the first three decades of her career have a more or less contemporary South African setting; and all focus on the struggle various white protagonists... have coming to terms with themselves, their histories, and their responsibilities within the shifting politics of the resistance from the 1950s to the 1970s."³⁰⁶

It is worth examining this "strangely selective" decision in terms of the rules discussed in this chapter, by looking at the censors' response to Gordimer and some of their responses to Coetzee, showing how they brought their aesthetic assumptions and strategies to bear on scrutiny of the work. The censors were willing to expend a great deal of time and energy in generating the appearance of accountability, writing reports that no other person was likely to read, and which would immediately be filed away for good. This same extraordinary energy was brought to bear on reports concerning the work of Gordimer and Coetzee. The reasons for this are perhaps easier to understand. Both novelists transcended what Wittenberg refers to as South Africa's "narrow national literary culture," receiving stunning international acclaim, something the censors were very much aware of.³⁰⁷ Although their work is very different, both novelists wrote against the apartheid regime, attacking the grotesque order in overt and subtle ways. Knowing that a banning of a revered writer critical of the regime would draw public notice and contempt from some quarters, both locally and internationally, the censors worked very hard to justify their decisions.

²⁹⁹ Nadine Gordimer, *A World of Strangers* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1962).

³⁰⁰ Nadine Gordimer, *The Late Bourgeois World* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1982).

³⁰¹ Nadine Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980).

³⁰² Nadine Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving* (London: Gollancz, 1963).

³⁰³ Nadine Gordimer, *A Guest of Honour* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002).

³⁰⁴ Nadine Gordimer, *The Conservationist* (London: Penguin, 1978).

³⁰⁵ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 224.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 220.

³⁰⁷ Herman Wittenberg, "The Taint of the Censor: J.M. Coetzee and the Making of 'In the Heart of the Country,'" *English in Africa* 33, no. 2 (2008): 133.

The files concerning Gordimer's and Coetzee's works are dense and detailed, with lengthy reports attached, as well as anguished arguments between censors. Disputes over literary merit, the ideal of universality, the novelist's duty to the "truth," the value of literary complexity and difficulty, and anxious assertions of taste and discernment all come to the fore in these reports. While their decisions were never predictable or consistent, it is still possible to discern some recurring patterns in the censors' approach to the two novelists, especially concerning the concept of "universality," and how it was used and warped to fit the system's ends.

The first work of Gordimer's to enter the system was *A World of Strangers*. The plot of the novel was described in a report as follows: "Toby Hood comes to Johannesburg for a book firm, from Britain. He mixes freely in the two worlds: wealthy white and poor black."³⁰⁸ The novel was banned in paperback edition, on the grounds that its "predictions" were "false and biased, while racial mixing, immorality and incidents occur which are designed to cause hatred among the races."³⁰⁹ The censors' wavering and intermittent commitment to the "truth," or rather to the truth as they distorted it, will be discussed further in the following section. What is important here is that the novel was perceived to be undesirable because of its contemporary, urban setting, and its explicitly political "themes." *World of Strangers* deals with the political awakening of the protagonist, Toby Hood. Over the course of the novel, he transforms, from a determinedly unaffiliated sophisticate who sees "race and politics" as meaningless "abstractions,"³¹⁰ into someone who is politically and socially engaged. *World of Strangers* ends on a note of commitment, with Hood promising to return to South Africa and describing his moral epiphany as follows: "I felt myself suddenly within the world of dispossession, where the prison record is a mark of honour, exile is home, and family a committee of protest, that world I had watched from afar, a foreign country since childhood."³¹¹

The plot of *Occasion for Loving*, the next novel submitted to the system, seems at first to represent the same kind of "threat" that *Strangers* did. The novel's plot centres on the relationship between a black South African man, Gideon Shabalo, and his white English lover, Ann Davis. Of the six novels that were scrutinised by the system, *Occasion* is the only one to contain frequent descriptions of sex between a black man and a white woman: "They began to kiss and please

³⁰⁸ BCS 20 416.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 34.

³¹¹ Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 253.

each other with some rivalry, like a pair of peacocks showing off their feathers.”³¹² Jessie Stilwell, the novel’s white protagonist, views their relationship without condemnation: “Wrapped in their warmth, she thought: they’ve been making love out there.”³¹³ The love affair between the two is the driving force of the narrative. All these features were noted in the initial censors’ report, which ended with a recommendation that the novel be banned.³¹⁴

After some dispute, however, *Occasion* was passed. McDonald notes that the censors were reluctant to provoke the same bad publicity that the banning of *Strangers* had occasioned, and further observes that the novel’s “lukewarm reviews” served as another mitigating factor, with the Board concluding that *Occasion* was unlikely to make much of an impact.³¹⁵ It is interesting, however, to note that while *Occasion* is relatively explicit as regards sex, it is far less explicit about political commitment. *Strangers* is set almost entirely in Johannesburg, with Hood’s political awareness growing as he moves between “the two worlds: wealthy white and poor black.”³¹⁶ In contrast, Ann and Gideon’s relationship unfolds within a world that belongs only to them, with the couple traveling outside of the city to places emptied of people: “The village stood on a hill faceted with rocks gleaming in the sun ... there was no witness but the personage of baobab trees.”³¹⁷

Ann and Gideon’s relationship takes shape only in these desolate spaces. When the couple returns to the city, their relationship unravels, and Ann returns to London without making any promise to return. She remains politically disengaged and committed only to a private destiny, in stark contrast with the protagonist of *Strangers*. In *Occasion*, the political is relegated to a safe distance, and the potentially undesirable features of the novel occur almost in a vacuum – a timeless space that could be anywhere. While the final report did not remark on this aspect of the text specifically, it is not difficult to see how the novel’s use of the desolate, cloistered countryside might have served as a neutralising, de-politicising factor.³¹⁸

The Late Bourgeois World makes a much more definitive political statement, and is far more rooted in Johannesburg’s urban milieu. As with *World of Strangers*, the censors remarked specifically on

³¹² Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 107.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 242.

³¹⁴ BCS 29087.

³¹⁵ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 226.

³¹⁶ BCS 20 416.

³¹⁷ Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 230.

³¹⁸ Rosa Lyster, “Space and Censorship in Nadine Gordimer: A Literary Geography” (Masters Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2013), 13.

the characters' movement between "the two words: "the nonchalant acceptance of political and social hobnobbing between white and non-white" was what made the novel unacceptable.³¹⁹ As with *Strangers*, various forces exert themselves on the politically disengaged protagonist, Liz Van Den Sandt, so that by the end of the novel, she makes a commitment. Like *Occasion*, the novel depicts scenes of attraction between a white woman and a black man. *Bourgeois* is far less explicit, however, with Liz merely contemplating an affair, as opposed to acting on it: "Oh yes, and it's quite possible he'll make love to me, next time or some time."³²⁰ Censors cited this "nonchalant acceptance" as an undesirable feature, but it is interesting to note that *Occasion* evinces a similar "acceptance," and that *Occasion's* affair actually takes place, instead of being floated as a theoretical possibility. Like Toby Hood in *Strangers*, however, and unlike Ann in *Occasion*, Liz is the novel's protagonist. As McDonald observes, what made *Bourgeois* "undesirable" was "not so much the fact that it depicted subversive activities or interracial desire, but that it presented them through the eyes of a white woman ... who considered such things as 'wholly normal'."³²¹ The novel ends with Liz offering the use of her bank account as a conduit for funds to support the liberation movement: a political commitment that *Occasion's* Ann does not make. The political, in *Bourgeois*, is central to the novel's development.

No report exists for *A Guest of Honour*, but the reasons for the book's being passed are not hard to guess at. It is not set in South Africa, but in an unnamed African country. Gordimer described the setting as "a nonexistent, composite central African country."³²² Whatever undesirable content the novel might have contained was presumably neutralised by the fact that it took place at a safe distance.

The Conservationist's complex narrative modes had the same neutralising effect. Most of *Conservationist* takes place in a countryside that, like the countryside in *Occasion*, is largely bereft of other people and which possesses a kind of timeless quality: "This place absorbs everything, takes everything to itself and loses everything in itself. It's innocent."³²³ Discussing the system's treatment of Coetzee, McDonald argues that "for the censors, the anti-realist elements of his writing simply obscured... the relationship between his fictions and the contemporary realities of apartheid South Africa and, as such, contributed to their saving aesthetic qualities."³²⁴ There is a

³¹⁹ BCS 272/66.

³²⁰ Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 90.

³²¹ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 230.

³²² E.G. Burrows, "An interview with Nadine Gordimer", *Michigan Quarterly Review* IX, (Fall 1970), 233-34.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 189.

³²⁴ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 313.

parallel to be drawn here with *Conservationist*. For the censors, the main mitigating factor was that the novel was not as “clearly and explicitly written”³²⁵ as Gordimer’s earlier novels. They remarked that “the line between fact and fiction, reality and imagination in the central figure is not always easy to draw.”³²⁶ Its setting, and its “difficulty,” rendered it innocent in the eyes of a system that was fearful of the explicit and disdainful of the accessible.

Burger’s Daughter made use of similarly complex strategies. While the novel deals with the rise of Black Consciousness and makes a sustained attack on apartheid, it would be reasonable to assume that its fragmented narrative mode would have worked in its favour. The novel was initially recommended for banning, however, at which point the head of the Directorate of Publications intervened and asked for the decision to be reviewed by the newly created PAB and its panel of literary experts. The initial report, which recommended banning, described the novel as launching:

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.³²⁷

The committee of publications which examined *Burger’s Daughter* concluded that it did not warrant protection as a work of literature, and recommended that it be banned under all five clauses of the new Publications Act as a dangerously seditious work. When the decision was sent to the PAB, this interpretation was rejected. In their lengthy report recommending that the novel be passed on the basis of its literary merit, the PAB’s “literary experts” emphasised the novel’s “universal” qualities, moderated its political message, and emphasised the protagonist’s private destiny rather than her social integration: “It is, in fact, a tragic novel. It requires sympathy for black suffering... However, all human suffering is a wider theme suggested.”³²⁸ Titlestad, whose reports are mentioned in the previous chapter, argued that it was not Lionel Burger’s political beliefs that the reader was asked to admire, but rather “his great qualities of courage and compassion.” Similarly, the report argued that “it is Rosa Burger’s story, and it is her personal dilemma rather than a general political issue which constitutes the thematic interest” and stressed

³²⁵ P76/2/103.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ IDP 3/73 P79/6/73.

³²⁸ Ibid.

that “the novel is primarily concerned with an individual destiny.”³²⁹ In addition, as with *Conservationist*, the novel’s “difficulty” worked in its favour, with one of the “literary experts” claiming that the novel would appeal only to “literary specialists,” and as such could do no real damage.

In their treatment of Gordimer, the censors made their preference for the “universal” and the “difficult” clear, relying on a series of assumptions about the absolute distinction between art and politics, and a belief in the apolitical outlook of the discriminating reader. They applied the same reasoning in their treatment of Coetzee. In a report on Coetzee’s *In the Heart of the Country*,³³⁰ for instance, the censors stressed that “sex across the colour bar occurs, but the characters are historico-geographically so situated that it is perfectly acceptable.”³³¹ Similarly, in a report on *Waiting for the Barbarians*,³³² the censor approvingly noted that the setting was “obscure; some oasis in an arid region north of the equator, where winters are icy.” The same defence could not be made for *Life & Times of Michael K*³³³, the setting of which is explicitly South African and which deals with, as the censor admitted, “sensitive political issues” in the country. The report, however, worked hard to place *Michael K* in the realms of the universal, using the same strained reasoning as the report on *Burger’s Daughter*, and similarly wilfully ignoring much of the novel’s content: “This rich novel could be read on many levels – as a fable, as a comment on the human condition in South Africa, or as a protest novel: in the sense that it protests the way in which people are caught up in events beyond their control.” As with the final recommendation to pass *Burger’s Daughter*, the *Michael K* report argued that the novel would only be read by discriminating readers, who would “experience the novel as a work of art and realise that although the tragic life of Michael K is situated in South Africa, his problem is a universal one not limited to S. Africa.”³³⁴ This report combines many of the censors’ key aesthetic assumptions, the most significant of which was that the discriminating reader is “safe” from the pernicious influence of the protest novel. Similarly, in the report on *Barbarians*, the censor argued that it “lacked popular appeal,” and that “the likely readership will be limited largely to the intelligentsia and the discriminating minority.” In the *Michael K* report, the censor makes a clear distinction between “a work of art” and a call to arms, and determinedly plays down its

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ J.M. Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country* (London: Vintage, 1999).

³³¹ IDP 1/19 P77/7/103.

³³² J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980).

³³³ J.M. Coetzee, *Life & Times of Michael K* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983).

³³⁴ IDP 1/96 P83/10/168.

“undesirable” political themes, insisting that it was protesting only “the way people are caught up in events beyond their control,” if it was protesting anything at all.³³⁵

The durability of these preferences and their impact will be explored in Chapter Five, but the brief example below can be seen as a fascinating instance of their staying power. J.M. Leighton (prominent censor and author of the article discussed in the introduction to this chapter) is, at current time of writing, an enthusiastic reviewer of novels on Amazon.³³⁶ His “reviews” display belief in a near-identical set of literary rules as the ones developed by the censorship system. Leighton’s review of *Les Misérables* includes the following:

One of the great classic stories of all time. Themes of justice and forgiveness are embodied in the most believable (sic) characters, and cover individual as well as civic actions. Consideration of different kinds of love - parental, romantic, and the general love of mankind - are interwoven with the primary themes to give them a human dimension.

As in so many of the reports in the archive, the above review reveals the belief that literary style is separable from “theme,” and that style’s main function rests in its conveyance of theme. In the review above, Leighton’s emphasis is on the universal and “classic” qualities of the novel; its value is not in what it teaches the reader about the French Revolution, but in what it teaches her about the timeless questions of justice and forgiveness.

Leighton’s report on *The Moonstone* is similarly revealing:

The Moonstone is often regarded as the first detective novel, although this is open to question. It is never-the-less [sic] a very early example of the genre, but more importantly it is written with all the skill of a major story teller, and narrative, as Aristotle tells us, is the most important part of any work of fiction. The story of an iconic jewel taken by a colonial invader, and ultimately returned to its true home, is only one aspect of the narrative. What is of consuming interest is how the “ownership” affects the personalities and actions of those who gain temporary possession of it.

The above review reads as a succinct summary of some the censorship system’s key aesthetic beliefs, and displays the same kind of literary posturing involved in establishing them. Leighton

³³⁵ See Appendix 10.

³³⁶ https://www.amazon.com/gp/review/RNYICELGF1B2V?ref =glimp_1rv_cl.

begins by mentioning *The Moonstone*'s reputation, and then reminds the reader of his own, superior knowledge. As in Murray's report on *Anna Karenina*, Leighton draws attention to the book's potentially undesirable political "theme" – "the story of an iconic jewel taken by a colonial invader, and ultimately returned to its true home" – and then dismisses the relevance of that aspect of the novel by reassuring the reader that it is not of paramount importance. What *is* of consuming interest, again, is the alleged timeless universality of its themes. Equally significant is Leighton's praise of Collins as "a major story teller," and his evocation of Aristotelian ideas of narrative and form. Narrative, for Leighton and many of the censors, was of utmost consideration when weighing up a work's literary merit, as can be clearly seen in a report on Philip Roth's *Zuckerman Unbound*: "This intellectual novel will enjoy a very limited sale as the plot is non-existent and terribly boring,"³³⁷ or on the dismissal of *Lolita* on the basis of its allegedly thin plot. Other elements ran a distant second. For many censors, the ideal narrative was universal, relevant for all people at all times. Their investment in this aesthetic principle allowed them to protect the work of some South African anti-apartheid writers, such as J.M. Coetzee. Their consistent prizing of universal "themes" above all else meant that they had a set of shaky assumptions to fall back on when attempting to guard and nourish South African literature.

Finally, Leighton's Amazon review of Gordimer's *A World of Strangers*, ably summarises many censors' position regarding political discourse and its place in literature: "Gordimer has never known the difference between a novel of political propaganda and one with politics merely as a background. Her dialogues become political speeches, and one looks in vain for a genuine human response."

For Leighton, neither style nor politics must be allowed to distract from narrative; both must remain in the background in order for a work's artistry to be clearly communicated. Leighton's reviews and the reports discussed in the sections above show how the system conflated morality and aesthetics in their efforts to define ideas of literariness and universality. For the censors, an excess of "style," or the intrusion of pornography or politics, could only detract from a novel's value. The convoluted rules they created as they worked meant they could dismiss the intrusion of politics or pornography as a moral *and* an aesthetic sin. This tortured reasoning, and the "rules" which governed it, is evidence of the system's attempts to aestheticise the blunt

³³⁷ IDP 1/72 P81/11/17.

instrument of apartheid policy, developing a set of artistic values which were in keeping with the racist, sexist, bigoted, violent conservatism of the apartheid state.

3.6 Other Approaches

The shaky, ill-defined codes and standards which the censors used to categorise “true” literature proved equally useful when they required extra-legal excuses to exclude a text from that category. For instance, the system’s established preference for literary difficulty and inaccessibility gave some censors a convenient means of banning contentious works without having to abandon their image as high-minded arbiters of artistic merit. Their efforts to establish themselves as discriminating readers gave them the opportunity to ban “dangerous” books for any number of spurious reasons, using unofficial approaches in order to arrive at a destination which the law itself had cleared a path for.

Even in reports on work whose “undesirable” content offered the censors a clear, legally prescribed reason for banning, the censors chose to attack the work on artistic grounds, writing long, emotionally charged reports which make up a significant percentage of the chaotic archive. The same un-bureaucratic disputes over literary merit, appeals to the ideal of universality and the novelist’s duty to the “truth,” arguments over the value of literary complexity and difficulty, and anxious assertions of taste and discernment appear in reports on politically contentious work. The presence of these disputes can be as jarring as when they appear in reports of no political or social significance whatsoever. In both cases, it can be difficult to fathom why the censors expended the time and energy that they did, why the reports are so long and so emotional. In the case of reports on throwaway mass-market fiction, it is hard to understand why the system would expend so much intellectual effort giving reasons for a decision (banning or passing) which was highly unlikely to attract any notice whatsoever. In the case of reports on anti-apartheid novels, it can at first be equally difficult to understand why so many of the reports are as detailed and excessive as they are, because the legislation specifically made it possible for a work to be banned on political grounds alone.

As explored in the previous section, the censors often used a broadly-sketched concept of universality as justification for passing or banning a work. A host of other codes and strategies were also used, however, as this section will show. When recommending banning an avowedly anti-apartheid work, the censors often worked to find what can only be described as a loophole, trying to locate a reason why a given work could not properly be called “literature.” As well as associating accessibility of style with mass taste, censors associated it with interventionist or what

they called “committed” literature, and often used this logic as a reason for banning, on the grounds that such works did not warrant protection. For instance, in a report on Richard Rive’s *Emergency* (1964), an anti-apartheid work set against the backdrop of the 1961 Sharpeville Massacre, censors remarked on its topicality, noting that it dealt with “highly explosive” material. While the head of the PCB at the time argued against banning, and worried that the Board might be “exceeding their rights” if they did so, he also stressed his view that the novel was not a work of literary quality, and that it perhaps did not merit saving, because Rive was a middling, mediocre writer. Murray argued that the novel should be banned because of its scenes of “race-mixing” (noting that *South Pacific* was declared undesirable for similar reasons), and that *Emergency* was not worth protecting in any case, because it was just “popular stuff.”³³⁸ Murray also wrote the following in a report on *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs*: “in the future someone might make a study of books banned by the Board ... and then accuse us of banning a work merely on political grounds.”³³⁹ Sachs’ book was, of course, banned on “political grounds,” but in Murray’s report, he tried hard to argue that it did not deserve any special protection, because it was not literature.

A similar logic was put to use in the lengthy report on Mothobi Mutloatse’s *Forced Landing*, an anthology of black South African writing. The censor praised the work in anthropological terms (“almost all the ‘stories’ are readily acceptable and worth reading, especially as they would give the wider South African reading public intimate insight into the black urban and peri-urban way of life”), but concluded with feigned regret that the collection would have to be banned because of the inclusion of a piece titled “Here I Stand” by the Namibian anti-apartheid activist Herman Andimba Toivo ya Toivo: “Toivo’s contribution is unfortunate in that it is simply his statement in court when he was convicted. It has no literary value of note and can only serve to discredit the state in the eyes of the black man.” *Forced Landing* is explicitly critical of the apartheid regime, something which the censor noted but appeared to excuse on the grounds that the picture it painted would be “interesting” to the “reading public”: “It may seem a pity to ban the book for, as the editor rightly remarks, the white reader will be denied the opportunity to see what the black man thinks of his situation in the RSA.” The censor ended by disingenuously appealing to the supposedly objective guidelines of the legislation: “Would the experts re 47 (2) regard the

³³⁸ BCS 1084/64.

³³⁹ BCS 25/670.

‘message in ‘Here I Stand’ as prejudicial within the meaning of the relevant section? If so, the whole publication must be rejected.’³⁴⁰

Ignoring the fact, as a state-appointed authority, he himself was the expert in question, the censor thereby laid the blame for banning at the foot of the supposedly lucid and inflexible legislation. Previous sections have shown that the censors only used the legislation when it suited them, that they frequently ignored it, and, moreover, that it was deeply contradictory and open to abuse. For instance, the censors routinely ignored one of the key directives of the 1974 Publications Act, preferring to continue reading over the shoulder of the “likely” reader as opposed to the average reader. When dealing with controversial works, however, the censors occasionally used the legislation as it was intended to be used, falling back with relief on the inconsistent guidelines it offered. More often, they opted for an approach that was neither prescribed or admitted by legislation, and which required more effort, choosing to dismiss a politically subversive work on artistic grounds. For the censors, political discourse did not warrant protection in the way that literature did, and so when they wished to ban a particularly inflammatory work, they worked hard to strip it of its status as a member of a protected species. In this way, the system attempted to absolve itself of accusations of cowardice or rank conservatism, while at the same time retaining its self-image as guardian of the literary.

For instance, in a report written on the script of a play about the Immorality Act, titled *When You Mix White With Black*, the chairman of the committee wrote, “In the first place, this publication is neither, as it is labelled – a proper play, nor a satire. It is merely a rotten, erroneous, vulgar, vituperative jumble of words aimed at the existing Government, laws and the white population of South Africa.”³⁴¹ For the committee, the play’s overtly political message and handling of contemporary events meant that it could not even be called a play, and therefore that it did not deserve the protection that might otherwise be extended.

Other approaches came into use. The censors often banned politically contentious works on the grounds that they were “unrealistic.” As well as stripping it of its status as a play, the report on *When You Mix White With Black* also condemned the work on the grounds that it was distorting the facts:

³⁴⁰ IDP 3/86 P80/3/113.

³⁴¹ IDP 3/7 P75/6/30.

It is...ridiculous in that it is a self-declared wealthy, prosperous Indian poses as a black man at times solely in order to stir up hatred and trouble by disobeying a practically dormant law (the Immorality Act) where, nowadays, a suspended sentence is mostly imposed.³⁴²

The censor's assertion that the Immorality Act was "practically dormant" by 1975 and that mention of it was irrelevant is somewhat undermined by another report in the very same volume, which bans a book titled *A Pictorial History of Sex in the Movies* for the reason that "a full page colour photo of a negro man embracing a white woman in a state of undress must ... be harmful to relations in the Republic where miscegenation is against the law"³⁴³ – yet another example of the system's tendency to invoke or ignore laws as the situation demanded. Further contradictions and fantasies are revealed in the report on *When You Mix White with Black*, which went so far as to declare the play undesirable on the grounds that its author was betraying his race, whose members would be appalled at its content: "The fact that an Indian has the impertinence to endeavour to foist this seditious and immoral work on the SA scene, is in itself an undesirable act, as the Indian people in their own milieu would never allow it, and be shocked."³⁴⁴ For the committee, the play was both too realistic, and, in their entirely imaginary invocation of "the Indian people in their own milieu," somehow not realistic enough.

The censors raised similar objections to Gordimer's *World of Strangers*, which was declared undesirable primarily because it gave "a false impression of the African in South Africa – also of the average white person and their way of life."³⁴⁵ Similarly, the minority report from the publications committee which initially banned *Burger's Daughter* (1979) complained that the "The whole concept of *Burger's Daughter* [was] unrealistic" and "far-fetched," and the main reader's report claimed that, "in launching her attack, the authoress often adopts the literary technique of presenting what are in truth expressions of personal opinions as statements of fact."³⁴⁶

When *Burger's Daughter* was unbanned on appeal, the Chairman of the PAB gave a public statement: "Don't buy it – it is not worth buying. Very badly written...This is also why we eventually passed it. We knew our people wouldn't read it anyway. You know us boere find it a

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ IDP 3/7 P75/6/85.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ IDP 3/73 P79/6/73.

bit irritating when someone practises politics so badly.”³⁴⁷ This argument is characteristic of the way some censors utilised ideas of the literary in order to ban politically controversial works. While previous sections have shown that, in general, the overt “practising of politics” was seen to diminish a work’s merit, the censors forwarded a more contorted line of reasoning when dealing with high-profile South African literature – a change of tack wherein a novel’s politics were attacked not because they were anti-apartheid, but because the events depicted in the novel were unrealistic, false, or exaggerated. The Chairman’s implication above is that the book was stylistically bad because it was politically inaccurate, that it lacked artistic truth because it lacked political or social truth.

A similar focus on the writer’s duty to the truth and what the system insisted were facts can be seen the report on Bloke Modisane’s *Blame Me on History*, which was banned on the grounds that it was “bitter and biased,”³⁴⁸ and in one of the justifications for banning Rive’s *Emergency*: “The story gives an exaggerated account of the unrest of those years,”³⁴⁹ or the banning of Alex La Guma’s *The Stone Country* because “the story gives an exaggerated image of what happens in prison.”³⁵⁰ The system’s reluctance to be accused of banning a work “merely on political grounds” meant that the censors needed to find other avenues of attack; dismissing a work on the basis of its purported “untruths” was one way of doing so.

What is so surprising, of course, is that the legislation explicitly allowed for and encouraged the banning of works on political grounds alone. The censors went to increasingly convoluted lengths to avoid being accused of something that the law gave them the unfettered ability to carry out, apparently anxious to retain their intellectual and moral authority as guardians of culture. The system’s avowed commitment to realism and representation of “the truth” allowed for the banning of many texts with undesirable or inflammatory themes, and the same logic was used in scores of reports which recommended passing potentially questionable writings. This performance of reverence for the facts, or for the facts as the censors perceived or desired them, was frequently summoned, as in a report on Richard Gordon’s *The Private Life of Jack the Ripper*, where the censor acknowledged that the book contained “crude” language, but recommended passing because “the book gives a good picture of life in London under Queen Victoria and of

³⁴⁷ Johan Bruwer, *Rapport*, 7/10/79.

³⁴⁸ BCS 30 29461.

³⁴⁹ BCS 1084/64.

³⁵⁰ BCS 68 210/70.

the medical achievements of the time e.g. use of chloroform and carbolic spray in surgery.”³⁵¹

Reports often excused texts on the basis of their educational or didactic value, as in the overwrought recommendation for passing Dennis Eisenberg and Eli Landau’s *Carlos, Terror International*, a sensational account of Carlos the Jackal’s life and capture:

The publication lifts the veil on the ramifications and diabolical activities of international terrorism, mainly as directed against the state of Israel. The information given... will have the effect of advancing their preparedness and stiffening their resilience and resistance. It does not pose a threat to the State.³⁵²

Here, the censor discusses a sensational thriller, “of the kind that are twirled around on wire stands in chewing-gum-and-smokes shops and airports,”³⁵³ in the same tones one might expect to be reserved for discussion of a serious and seditious political manifesto. Again and again, the censorship archive reveals the system’s difficulty in establishing a hierarchical category that distinguished between “art” and “trash,” as well as the censors’ drive to confer meaning and significance where the author might not have intended. This uncertainty and misplaced zeal often exposed itself in surprising, unintentionally humorous ways, as in the report on a Simon Ian Childer’s *Tendrils*, which includes the following plot synopsis:

A drilling machine struck a kind of cocoon of some prehistoric animal and soon people in the Harpenden district were killed by mysterious tendrils coming out of sewers etc. The scientist Clive Thomas had his theories about this “extraterrestrial” creature ... when the London Underground had been brought to a stop by this creature, Thomas and a group, dressed in watertight overhauls (sic) descended in the Underground and killed the creature with the supertoxic “Boxine.”³⁵⁴

The outlandish events described above were, the censor approvingly noted, “based on biological, physiological and medical facts,”³⁵⁵ and it was on this basis that she recommended the novel be passed.

This dogged performance of commitment to the truth as the censors saw it, and the bizarre arguments it allowed them to invoke, is perhaps most tellingly expressed in the dense, detailed

³⁵¹ IDP 1/57 P80/8/76.

³⁵² IDP 1/12 P76/9/15.

³⁵³ Gordimer, “Morning in the Library: 1975,” 85.

³⁵⁴ IDP 3/186 P75/11/4.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

file concerning Jan Morris's *Destinations* (mentioned in section 3.3) The collection is made up of Morris' essays on a diverse range of places and political moments, including Watergate-era Washington D.C., Delhi during the Indira Gandhi presidency, and Cairo during the Israeli-Egyptian peace talks. The eighteen-page censor's report, however, concerns itself "primarily with only one essay: "South Africa, 1977."

The report begins as follows:

The essay on South Africa, a country in a state of siege, according to Jan Morris...starts with the writer's subjective, slanted, negative and biased interpretation of the symbolism of the Voortrekker monument, the meaning of the Great Trek and of the Day of the Covenant: the divine privilege of being white and the divinely sponsored triumph of the whites over the blacks.

Calling the essay "bad journalism," the censor went on to bewail Morris' "warped perspective and initially wrong point of departure, not based on truth and historic facts." As evidence of "bias," the censor cited the following: Morris' "taking it for granted" that apartheid would come to an end, her "misleading, untrue, inflammatory, and harmful" depiction of "the treatment given by the police to the young blacks," and her "negative" interpretation of the symbolism of the Voortrekker Monument. At no point in the crammed report did the censor offer any significant rebuttal to Morris' descriptions and predictions, or give any reason other than his own opinion for the assessment that it was "biased."

In spite of this, he attempted to frame his response to the essay in coldly rational, almost scientific terms. It was "unfortunate" that Morris did not reach her conclusions "after having presented prior, relevant, convincing and representative facts, she does not provide objective and ample proof to substantiate her views...but superimposes her subjective, one-sided and biased interpretation." It was further "unfortunate" that "her false picture of Soweto and the security police will be read and most probably be accepted by overseas readers." On the other hand, however, "local persons (white or black) who are likely to read the book will be able to evaluate her superficial, hasty and emotional exaggerations and falsehoods, while enjoying her scintillating style." The censor did not offer any evidence to contradict Morris' description of the Soweto Uprising: his implication being that it was false and biased simply because he said it was, and because any sensible person reading the report would view matters in the same light. It perhaps goes without saying that the censor did not apply a similar scepticism to any of the other essays

in the collection, whose value and veracity he accepted without question, describing them as “well-written,” “well-researched,” and of a high journalistic standard.³⁵⁶

There may be no better example of the contradictory and dissonant thinking which characterises so many of the reports. Morris’ essay was “bad” because it did not confirm the fraudulent version of reality which the censor took to be self-evidently correct. Finally, the censor concluded his report by recommending that *Destinations* be passed, using two aesthetic rules of thumb that were repeated in countless other reports. First, the censor found a mitigating factor in the “fact” that the book was likely only to be read by discriminating readers: a depoliticised class of person who would never be unduly swayed or corrupted. The other reason behind his recommendation was less high-minded, evidence of the rankling and resentful awareness that many in the system had of their own unwilling role in the success of certain writers. The censor recommended that the book be passed because banning would give Morris undeserved publicity: “Most probably she wants the book to be banned, so as to gain free publicity.”³⁵⁷

The notion that a text could be devoid of artistic merit or truth because it lacked what the censors determined to be political or social truth can be seen as one of the system’s fundamental aesthetic assumptions. These codes may have been shaky and inconsistent, but the censors always had the apartheid state’s version of reality to guide them: a version of reality in which the black majority was not brutalised, and where the future of white minority rule was secure. Apartheid thinking influenced every decision that they made, even and perhaps especially on texts of little apparent political or social consequence. Looking at the aesthetic assumptions explored in this chapter, it is possible to trace the system’s haphazard and contradictory efforts to shape a national literature, and Chapter Five will track some of the ways we might detect the registering of these efforts on South Africa’s literary landscape.

3.7 Conclusion

A grasp of the censors’ conception of the literary, and why they made the decisions they did, cannot be gleaned simply from looking at the list of banned titles in *Jacobsen’s Index*, or only at the outcomes of spectacular cases. Rather, it is gained from looking at what made up the censors’ everyday duties, which means examining as wide a range of archival material as is possible. As Darnton observes, “no historian can get inside the dead – or, for that matter, the living, even if

³⁵⁶ IDP 1/57 P80/8/79.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

they can be interviewed for studies of contemporary history. But with sufficient documentation, we can detect patterns of thought and action.”³⁵⁸ Given “a rich enough run of evidence,” he argues, we can “tease out the underlying assumptions and the undercover activities of the officials charged with the policing of print.”³⁵⁹ Most of the evidence presented in this chapter has never been brought to light, and highlighting it can only enhance and clarify perception of the system, and what it was that the censors did all day.

Gordimer’s response to the list of banned books in *Jacobsen’s Index* is worth repeating here: “There is a great deal of trash, of course...the titles of the banned ones don’t sound any different from those I see on sale everywhere.” The “trash” of the archive has often been overlooked, perhaps because of a perception that it cannot really matter why *Sabres of the Reich* was passed, while *HADON OF ANCIENT OPAR: A Forgotten Empire Rises Out of the Mists of Time* was banned (“over-exploitation of the naked female form”). It is by looking at these apparently inconsequential decisions alongside the more obviously significant ones, however, that the censors’ ideas of literature and its rules come more sharply into view. The archive reveals that the scrutiny of “sub-literature” took up a good deal of the censors’ time and effort; through the writing of thousands of reports on otherwise forgotten works of literature, they honed their ideas of literature’s function and value.

One of the censors’ “duties” was to protect the supposedly vulnerable public from the danger posed by politically inflammatory material. Another duty involved protecting that public from the morality-eroding effects of imported popular culture, guarding the youth in particular from depravity and corruption. Leighton’s defence of an “enlightened” form of censorship is also worth restating here: “Mass taste is, I suggest, more unreliable and indeed more limiting to the artist than state control – it is the other form of censorship.”³⁶⁰ The censors were deeply suspicious of mass-market fiction, and viewed the concept of “reading for pleasure” with disdain. As the material discussed in this chapter reveals, they believed that literature must have an elevating effect, perform a didactic function, impart an immutable aesthetic or moral truth. In their dismissal of mass-market fiction for its failure to meet these standards, and in their reports on these texts, with their protracted wrangling over the difference between art and obscenity, we can see how their underlying aesthetic assumptions developed. Considering the lasting damage

³⁵⁸ Darnton, *Censors at Work*, 14.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ Leighton, “Censorship: one or two points in favour and some against.” 45.

done by the system, the range of documents presented in this study are worthy of sustained scrutiny for this reason alone.

They are additionally valuable because can use them to dismantle persistent and destructive myths about apartheid bureaucracy, myths which continue to be evoked today, significantly with regard to current state attempts to suppress freedom of speech. Those spurious comparisons will be discussed in more depth in the conclusion, but it is important to reflect upon them here, in light of the material discussed above. Those who saw the censors as authoritative guardians of culture might have been startled by the childish irrelevancies contained in these reports, and alarmed by the insecurities and anxieties they expressed. Similarly, opponents of censorship who painted the Board as a mighty adversary capable of thought-policing might have been surprised by how preoccupied the censors were with appearances, and by how much of their energy was devoted to presenting themselves as sophisticated, discriminating readers. Commonly held stereotypes of the censors as either stuffed-shirt bureaucrats or omniscient mind-readers crumble, when looking at the archive itself. As the two case studies in the next chapter will further demonstrate, the system was unpredictable and opaque, founded on legislation that was poorly conceived from an administrative standpoint as well as, of course, a moral one. It was also highly inefficient, utterly unafraid of expending unnecessary energy.

In narrating the history of South African publications control, it is important to reiterate that a system which produced a detailed report recommending the banning of *Lolita* or *Burger's Daughter* also produced a report such as the following, on Paul Virdell's *Mirror Man: Adventures of a Roving Sensualist* (1978):

The novel would have had some redemption if the following aspects had received more prominence:

- 1) The World War II background. It could have been used to justify Brent's immoral adventures. However, he is not seen as a poor soul being mixed up by a cruel war.
- 2) Brent's character; his mental make-up. A deeper exploration of his motives may convince the reader that his excessive sexuality has some root cause. However, this is absent. Genuine repentance in the end.³⁶¹

³⁶¹ IDP 3/186 P85/12/14.

Reports like this one are by no means extraneous to an understanding of the system. A prying over-industriousness applied to an insignificant erotic thriller report is characteristic, rather than an archival oddity. Some of the reports discussed in this chapter concern works of literary or political significance, while others are concerned with works long out of print. All the reports show evidence of engagement in crafting, defining, and attempting to maintain some guidelines by which literature could be assessed. While nothing close to consensus was ever reached, certain rules and ideas persisted, and this chapter has outlined some of the more significant of them: ideas about “truth” and universality, admiration for a certain kind of literary “difficulty,” contempt for accessibility, and the notion that literature and political discourse constituted mutually exclusive modes of representation.

Understanding this means gaining a more nuanced grasp on the consequences of such a wide-ranging, monumental project of social engineering. Perhaps the most durable and consistently applied of all the censors’ varied aesthetic tools was the idea that art and politics were entirely distinct from one another, a view explicitly stated in the report on Coetzee’s *In the Heart of the Country*, where the censor noted that while “sex across the colour line is described,” this was not sufficient reason for its being declared undesirable, because the book was likely to be “read and enjoyed only by intellectuals.” For many censors, “intellectuals” did not pose a threat to state security. They existed in an entirely aestheticised sphere, and were unlikely to be “influenced” by potentially subversive political content.³⁶² Views like this were endlessly repeated, in which an absolute distinction between “intellectualism” and “politics” was drawn to the point that they become mutually exclusive terms. The establishment of such categories has had long-lasting consequences for both those who were complicit in the system and those who were opposed to it.

The censors’ project made itself felt within public life in a number of surprising ways, with a number of surprising effects. Writers and readers responded to the censors’ official and unofficial edicts, and these responses had an incalculable effect on South Africa’s literary landscape. For instance, this chapter’s discussion of the censorship system’s established preference for literary difficulty and inaccessibility can help to explain the subsequent comparisons, drawn by many black South African writers, between craftsmanship in writing and

³⁶² There are, of course, some notable exceptions to this rule. In the report by the Publications Appeal Board recommending that *Burger’s Daughter* be unbanned, one of the committee of “experts” noted that “A revolution stimulated by works of outstanding literary value is just as bloody as any other revolution” (P79/64/79).

complicity with the apartheid regime. For these writers (whose number included Keorapetse Kgotsile, Oswald Mtshali, and Sipho Sepamla), there was something unsound or amoral about so-called “literary fiction.” The censors’ whole-hearted embrace of the traditions of the Western literary canon, and their attempts to shape a national literature along similar lines, was met with the adamant insistence that to work within such traditions was to comply with the white nationalistic vision of the apartheid state. Chapter Five will discuss the implications of this in more depth, but this chapter’s articulation of the censors’ aestheticist vision is crucial to an understanding of many black writers’ rejection of that vision.

Further, interrogating the censors’ quest to define and police the boundaries of the literary means interrogating who they believed literature was *for*. In a 1980 interview with the Johannesburg newspaper *The Star*, Judge Snyman stated that “blacks” are “inarticulate people, who, I am sure, are not interested” in literature or its censorship.³⁶³ He further stated that he had “no knowledge” of black people “at all.”³⁶⁴ Despite their belief that black people were not interested in literature, the censors banned almost the entire output of black prose writers. The censors’ vision of South Africa’s reading public excluded the majority of South Africa’s population and suppressed the work of its writers. As Chapter Five will show, the work of white liberal writers took on enormous significance because of this silencing. The connections between censorship and the canonisation of white liberal writers have been under-explored, but they are an important part of the story of apartheid censorship nonetheless. In Wittenberg’s phrase, the intervention of the censor could form a “bizarre and insidious circuit of simultaneous repression and endorsement,”³⁶⁵ and the occasionally positive benefits conferred by a banning will be discussed in the two chapters that follow. That they played a role in the success of some anti-apartheid writers was perhaps unavoidable, but they nevertheless consistently attempted to dodge or reject that role. Their reports show that they frequently worked hard to ban potentially controversial novels on aesthetic grounds, rather than political or moral ones. They knew that a banning would not only “arouse public interest” but lead to the assumption that the book was well-written. Among other things, their attempts to dismiss controversial works as unworthy of protection can be read as an expression of deep defensiveness regarding their public image as reactionary philistines, and a resentment about the role they occasionally played in the endorsement of banned texts and the valorisation of banned authors. In their attempts to deny

³⁶³ Quote in “Censorship Changes – a Victory for Whom?”, Nadine Gordimer, *Rand Daily Mail*, 6 August 1980.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ Wittenberg “The Taint of the Censor,” 142.

literary protection to politically controversial works, the censors invoked an array of aestheticist assumptions, in spite of the fact the legislation gave them the “right” to ban a work for its political content alone.

The material presented in this chapter and the one before it has shown that there was a vast, unbridgeable gap between the legislation and the way it was applied. One of the tangible results of this difference is the character of the censorship archive, in all its chaos and excess, its registering of “thoughts and feelings in and out of place.”³⁶⁶ The excess can be read as the product of a system’s persistent, futile attempts to define itself, its role, and how that role might be carried out. Kafka argues that

bureaucratic organizations are, to use Latour’s term, “object institutions,” collectives of people and artifacts, graphic artifacts in particular. These collectives are not reducible to sociologically defined coalitions that put artifacts to use; rather, these collectives are formed in part through encounters *precipitated* by artifacts.³⁶⁷

The material discussed in this chapter and the one before it suggests that the chaos and excess of the censorship archive was not simply a by-product of the system, but rather a constitutive feature of it. Lengthy reports encouraged the writing of lengthier ones. Arguments about literature’s function led to arguments about literature’s value. Attacks on a novel’s literary quality led to vehement disagreement, which led to the writing of reports that went on for pages longer than they needed to. A report containing a considered literary analysis of a 1959 pulp novel about “naked bohemians” led inevitably to the perception that this kind of effort was necessary or required, and so the documents produced by the censors grew ever more expansive, ever more emotional, ever more at odds with what the legislation seemed to require.

By presenting as expansive an array of material as possible, this chapter has aimed to enhance understanding of what the censors did all day, provided an explanation for why their reports exist in the form that they do, and teased out some of their underlying aesthetic assumptions. In the chapter that follows, two specific case studies will be used to provide more insight into the operations of the censors, and further, to confront the material and methodological complexities

³⁶⁶ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 2.

³⁶⁷ Matthew S. Hull, “The File: Agency, Authority, and Autography in an Islamabad Bureaucracy,” 314.

of the censorship archive, and the challenge of using and narrativising the variety of material it contains.

Chapter 4: Two Case Studies

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated the advantages of taking in a wide range of documents and asking what themes or ideas are repeated, and how they may be grouped together. In looking at a wide range of reports on “pulp” fiction, for instance, we begin to see the complexities involved in negotiating the boundaries between “art” and “trash.” Similarly, in examining the censors’ attempts to grapple with the novels of Vladimir Nabokov, the limits of their conception of the literary come sharply into view. Determining what the censors meant when they referred to “discriminating readers” helps us to see how blinkered their view of the reading public was, and exposes the absurdity of their intellectual posturing.

Alongside this kind of analysis, however, a close focus on one or two illuminating cases has obvious benefits. Close case studies of specific documents in the apartheid censorship archive have yielded illuminating insights: Wittenberg’s examination of the reports concerning Coetzee’s *In the Heart of the Country* and Van der Vlies’s look at the passage of La Guma’s work through the system have already been noted. Worth drawing attention to here, in addition, is McDonald’s exhaustive analysis of the censorship bureaucracy’s response to D.H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. In “The Politics of Obscenity: *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and the Apartheid State,” McDonald traces the system’s response to Lawrence’s novel over a 20-year period “in order to reflect on the place and problem of obscenity in any assessment of censorship under apartheid.”³⁶⁸ This chapter analyses two cases to similar effect, using them to draw out some surprising conclusions about apartheid bureaucratic (mis)management, and offering an alternative to the frequently repeated vision of the heroic ant-apartheid novelist facing off against the state,

The first case study concerns the documents relating to the work of Johannes Jacobus Blom, a “Publications Inspector” appointed by the Dekker Board in the administration’s early years. Even in an archive so crammed with surprising, difficult-to-categorise material, the Blom papers stand out as unusual. In *The Allure Of the Archive*, Arlette Farge describes “the physical pleasure of finding a trace of the past,” a pleasure which is “succeeded by doubt mixed with the powerless feeling of not knowing what to do with it.”³⁶⁹ The Blom papers present an exemplary instance of

³⁶⁸ Peter McDonald, “The Politics of Obscenity: *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and the Apartheid State,” *English Studies in Africa*, Vol. 47, No.1, (2004), 31.

³⁶⁹ Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 11.

the kind of challenge Farge describes. Because Blom was not a censor himself, his output was not shaped by the same rigid, formal strictures demanded of the censors. The Blom papers are thus far more obviously intimate and personal than other documents in the archive, moving constantly between official and unofficial registers, and blurring distinctions between the public and the private. Undisguised by the legitimising presence of “officialese,” the Blom papers offer a vivid insight into the realities of the daily life of one apartheid civil servant.

The second close study concerns documents relating to *An Act of Immorality*, the first locally produced novel to be banned in South Africa. The case invites consideration of how the censors’ dealt with the vexed question of “literariness” and its putative opposite, and further prompts interrogation of the censorship system’s role in the canonisation of banned writers. In addition, like the Blom papers, the *An Act of Immorality* documents sharply expose some of the differences between the system’s image and the reality of its functioning. Finally, a discussion of the case allows for an extended reflection of some of the methodological challenges presented by the apartheid censorship archive, including a consideration of the researcher’s subjective position, and, in Burton’s words, “the necessity of talking about the backstage of archive.”³⁷⁰

4.2 Mr. Blom

Mr. Johannes Jacobus Blom (born 1892 in Cradock, educated at Cradock Boys High, employed for 35 years at the Afrikaans magazine *Die Huisgenoot*, where he wrote stories under the pseudonym Ester Maritz) was not a censor, but an Inspector of Publications, a title reserved for him alone in the two years he worked for the PCB.

As discussed in Chapter One, the documents relating to the activities of the censors are held in three archival groupings. The first file in the first volume of the BCS grouping contains the reports of Johannes Blom – part travelogue, part work-schedule, part memoir, and part lament. They consist of detailed monthly reports in which his activities are listed, running usually to two typed pages, from the period 1964 – 1966. Other documents in the Blom file include correspondence between censors concerning Blom, as well as letters from customs officials and importers.

In the early years of the PCB’s existence, submission rates were relatively low. In an attempt to change this and perhaps to get a sense of what the public was actually reading, Dekker employed

³⁷⁰ Burton, *Archive Stories*, 7.

a full-time “publications inspector” to check on bookshops and newsagents around the country. Working with a junior clerk and a customs official, another part Blom’s job was to scan or screen incoming consignments of publications at the Cape Town Harbour, identify those which looked “doubtful,” and forward these to the Board for a decision. Even if he confined himself to this task alone, the flaws in such a system are obvious: Dekker’s appointment of a Publications Inspector effectively meant that it fell to one elderly man to “scan” the consignments that entered the country daily, and decide which ones looked, to him, as if they might be offensive. The impossibility and futility of this task is clear. The system, which projected an image of such thoroughness and competence, had porosity and looseness built into its foundations. In his reports, Blom continually mentions the “huge consignments” entering the country on a daily basis, as well as his frantic efforts to keep track of them. Blom, even with the best of intentions, could not possibly “catch” every consignment, every book, and it is clear from his reports that he felt this burden very deeply: “because the mail boat was late, and therefore also the offloading of the cargo, it was a rushed and confusing day, and we had to work very hard...”³⁷¹ “December, with all its public holidays and subsequent interruptions to the usual routine, was a difficult month...Publications...are distributed as they arrive, and there can be no delay. It takes fine calculation, time-delegation, and very hard work to manage everything between the public holidays;”³⁷² “In the first week of the month, there were two public holidays. The publishing world takes no holidays, and this meant long and hard work in order to manage everything. The arrival of the post boat on a public holiday just made everything harder.”³⁷³

The reports are a record of a Sisyphean struggle, of one man’s manifestly futile attempt to scan every consignment, and cast his eye over every text. In one of his reports, Blom observes that “a few months after my appointment as an inspector at the port, I noticed that large consignments of books arrive by freight mail and through the post office.”³⁷⁴ In the few months before this fact had come to Blom’s notice, in other words, those consignments were entering the country without attracting much attention at all. The system was destined to fail; in order to “catch” all the literature which came into the country via the ports and the post office, the Board would have had to hire 100 Bloms. It is clear, however, in the correspondence between various Board members, that they intended to hire only one.

³⁷¹ BCS 1 1/1, letter dated May 1965, translation mine.

³⁷² Ibid., letter dated December 1965, translation mine.

³⁷³ Ibid., letter dated April 1966, translation mine.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., letter dated 21 June 1966, translation mine.

In a letter from A.J. Van Wyk (Deputy Chairman of the Board) to Chairman Dekker, Van Wyk outlined some of the issues with hiring an Inspector: the problem of expense, in that, “the salary-scale will make it difficult to find suitable people, besides from pensioners. The salary scale is actually intended for a junior person, with a period of five years before the maximum of the scale can be reached”; and the problem of susceptibility:

In addition, we will not appoint a person who has no experience in life. Strangely enough, Mnr. Dickerson at Customs never appoints young men for the screening of publications. This is understandable, as they must look through publications which will titillate the youth, and the influence on them could be highly detrimental.³⁷⁵

Van Wyk concluded the letter by pointing out that, despite Mr. Blom’s “advanced age”, his health was very good, and ended with a recommendation for his appointment. The letter also included a proposed list of tasks that the Inspector of Publications should be authorised to carry out: he should be allowed to go into any bookshop and remove a book which he believed to be suspicious, if the bookseller refused to forward it to the Board himself; he should be authorised to visit the Post Office to cast his eye over the incoming consignments; and he should be allowed to go to the cinema and the theatre for free, providing he entered with his Inspector Of Publications pass.

Most of these authorisations were not given. Mr. Blom was allowed to do nothing but “scan” the consignments at the harbour: he was not allowed to remove books, he was refused access to the post office, and he made no mention, in his many reports, of being allowed to go to the cinema for free. Mr. Blom, intended to be part of the first line of defence against the flood of literature entering the country, was given almost no official powers to perform this task. This did not prevent them from doing it anyway, however – the reports consistently reveal the belief that his role was too important to be hindered by approved limits: “I have no authorisation to go into a bookshop and inspect books ‘as an inspector,’ so I am very careful to buy a newspaper and even drink tea, etc;”³⁷⁶ “I spent a brief private holiday in Knysna over the long New Year weekend. At every place on the road where we stopped, I looked at publications... In Knysna, I saw two

³⁷⁵ Ibid., letter dated March 1964, translation mine.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., letter dated May 1965, translation mine.

banned paperbacks at the only place I stopped (it was a Sunday). They were immediately removed.”³⁷⁷

The vagueness of the latter extract is characteristic (Blom provides no details as to how, precisely, the publications were “removed”), as is the seemingly willed obliviousness to the futility of his task – the “removal” of two banned paperbacks would do nothing to stem the tide of “undesirable” literature, and yet Mr. Blom continued his work with a solipsistic intensity.

Mr. Blom, who was so conscientious in providing evidence of accountability in his reports, seemingly saw nothing contradictory in going well beyond what was required and, in effect, breaking the law, when he felt the situation called for it: “This work falls completely outside of the original terms of my employment, but I do it with pleasure.”³⁷⁸ As must be clear from the documents in the previous chapter, Blom’s misplaced zeal is characteristic of the efforts of many censors. The censors kept the same laborious records as Blom did, and held the same stated reverence for the letter of the law as they worked to provide a record of accountability; however, when the law did not authorise them to make a certain decision, they simply did it anyway, producing countless unnecessary documents in the process. In their tireless efforts to meet real and (far more often) imaginary demands, both the censors and Mr. Blom produced documents and reports which far exceeded anything a perusal of the legislation could have predicted.

There are further illuminating similarities, in the way the absurd futility of Mr. Blom’s efforts was replicated throughout the system. His task was impossible, because although it was undertaken with great energy and enthusiasm, it was poorly planned from the beginning. Blom’s lack of official powers and the vague terms of his mandate can be compared to the failures and contradictions of censorship legislation discussed in Chapter Two. The legislation refused to acknowledge the problem of literature, gave conflicting guidelines regarding the legally imagined reader, privileged the performance of bureaucratic competence over the genuine execution of it, and seemed almost deliberately open to interpretation and abuse. The appointment of Blom followed a similar logic, in that while the position of Publications Inspector seemed to have been created with the appearance of competence and efficiency in mind, there seemed to be an official disregard as to how that competence and efficiency might actually be executed. Blom’s appointment introduced a bagginess into the system from its earliest inception: who is to say

³⁷⁷ Ibid., letter dated March 1966.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

how many books the Inspector of Publications let through, because he could not possibly scan them all? The Blom papers are evidence of a system that is both enamoured of the accoutrements of bureaucracy (forms, lists, work schedules, authorisation passes) and proofed or inured against bureaucracy's beneficial effects.

As Posel argues in "The Assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd," "even at the peak of its power, however, the apartheid state was wracked with a series of internal contradictions, that impeded the powers to implement its grand designs, subverted a coherent version of apartheid policies, and corroded the bureaucratic capacity of state institutions."³⁷⁹ Posel's observation is in relation to the assassination of the country's Prime Minister, a politically cataclysmic event, with social and historical consequences. The same conclusion, however, can also be drawn by looking at the Blom – another argument for a wider perusal of the censorship archive, and a commitment to using and narrativising what is found there.

As well as going beyond what was required, or even desirable, in terms of his visits to bookshops, Mr. Blom performed the work of a censor on many occasions- something he was also not permitted to do.

Of the four books which Customs in Windhoek sent to Cape Town, only one was sent to the Board for a decision on its admissibility. This means the elimination of a great deal of unnecessary work, particularly for the Board. On the other hand, it places much more work and responsibility on the shoulders of Customs in Cape town, which actually means on *my* shoulders.³⁸⁰

Several characteristic features of Blom's reports are present in the above extract, such as his insistence that he would be able to work better if he was simply left alone, his dedication to providing the smallest of details, and his stated desire not to "burden" the Board. Blom's reports reflect an unwillingness, or an inability, to work as part of a team, despite clear proscriptions against operating alone – this is, as discussed in previous chapters, a problem intrinsic to the system as a whole. In their general disregard for precedent and their petty internal squabbles, the censors proved themselves incapable of acting as a collective whose interests were one. Like the censorship system, the position of Inspector of Publications had futility and inefficiency built into its very foundations, yet both the papers of Mr. Blom and the censors' reports work

³⁷⁹ Posel, "The Assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd", 327.

³⁸⁰ BCS 1 1/1, letter dated November 65.

strenuously at maintaining an impression of bureaucratic might. The system did not work, in many respects, and yet it *looked* as if it did. As the next chapter will discuss, this performance of efficiency was to a large extent accepted as fact by the public, and this acceptance played a significant role in censorship's success.

Other qualities of the Mr. Blom papers find echoes in the archive: their grievance-mongering, their pettiness, their humanness. His reports often ended on a wry note of complaint: he still does not have an office, he is writing yet another report at home, at night, the lack of curtains in his new office allow a most uncomfortable glare into the room. This strange admixture of laughter and peevishness can make it difficult to know how to “use” the censorship archive, or how to address and understand its affective qualities. In “The Life of Infamous Men,” Foucault describes his work with documents retrieved from the Bibliothèque Nationale, urging a consideration of their less accessible affective qualities, or what he calls their “intensity,” and says that “the dream would have been to restore their intensity in analysis.”³⁸¹ The “intensity” of the Mr. Blom papers resides in those features which cannot or will not be smoothed over by bureaucratic repetitiveness. That they are funny, that they are, for lack of a better word, relatable, is a methodological challenge – these features cannot be stripped away in analysis.

The documents can be used as an illustration of the contradictions which seemed to characterise apartheid bureaucracy as a whole, but is it possible to use them in other ways as well, and to include in a narrative of apartheid censorship that which is funny, pathetic, and insignificant, as well as that which is large and violent in scope? As the previous chapter demonstrated, looking at a report on *Dig a Dead Doll* alongside a report on *Lolita* does not trivialise or downplay the ugly realities of apartheid censorship. Drawing attention to these smaller wounds does not in any way mean downplaying or diminishing the extent of the violence done to literature as a whole. “Humanising” the censors or Blom does not excuse their actions, not mitigate the consequences of those actions. It simply means acknowledging that a loathed system of repression was carried out by ordinary people, preoccupied with a range of ordinary concerns. The Blom files, and the material discussed in the previous chapter, are presented as part of an argument that it possible to write a history of the system which simultaneously acknowledges its petty absurdities as well as its large-scale destructiveness.

³⁸¹ Michel Foucault, “The Life of Infamous Men,” 70.

The next case study under discussion adds another element to that question: can we write a history of apartheid censorship which focuses on that which is awkward and, for lack of a better word, embarrassing?

4.3 What Happened to *An Act of Immorality*?

The case of *An Act of Immorality*, its passage through the system, and the results of its banning complicates the story of apartheid censorship in a similar way to the case study above, in that it firmly negates often repeated ideas about apartheid bureaucratic efficiency. Close analysis of the particulars of the case additionally works to contradict established myths concerning the *de facto* heroism of banned writers. More than that, the case of *An Act of Immorality* might be read as a repudiation of the notion that censored material has intrinsic value.

Like the countless works of “popular stuff” banned by the system, *An Act of Immorality* has, effectively, disappeared from view: it is long out of print, and almost never discussed. When it is discussed (mentioned in only two sources), it is only in passing, its only relevance seeming to be that it was the first locally produced novel banned by the state. The novel’s themes or plot are not mentioned in any detail, and only described in the terms used on the front cover: “A Startling Exposé of Sex Across the Colour Line” featuring a lawyer who “prosecutes offenders of the Immorality Act by day” and, “under neurotic compulsion”, seeks out sexual encounters with black women “by night.” Both sources which discuss *An Act of Immorality* (McDonald’s *The Literature Police* and Merrett’s *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa*) note that the book was written under a pseudonym, Des Troye, and that the author purports to be a “Johannesburg attorney.” Neither of these sources mentions any publicity surrounding the banning of this book, the first by a South African author. Neither source mentions whether or not the true identity of the author was uncovered at any point, and what the consequences of this unmasking might have been. The fact that the novel is almost never discussed is worthy of interest in itself, and opens up interesting questions on canon formation, literariness, and usable pasts. While it is not always possible, or even desirable, to speculate on the reasons for a novel’s obscurity, this section will propose some potential answers as to why it has been relegated so thoroughly to what Franco Moretti refers to as “the slaughterhouse of literature.”³⁸²

³⁸² Franco Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature,” *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 61, no.2 (March 2000), 207.

The reasons for this lack of attention are not immediately clear. *An Act of Immorality* sold 40 000 copies upon publication, breaking previous records on South African sales by 25 000. In 1963, an American film company attempted to secretly make a film using the book as the basis of the screenplay, but the production was shut down by the security police. Paratextual material presents the author as an embattled opponent of apartheid: “The Author is a Johannesburg Attorney who holds a degree in psychology. His identity is purposely not revealed. He writes under the pen-name “Des Troye” to avoid victimisation and publicity,” and the cover artwork was done by noted anti-apartheid artist Harold Rubin.³⁸³ The Security Branch launched an investigation into the identity of the author, and that pressure was applied to his publishers (Transworld) and to the office of the Johannesburg Magistrate’s Court, to which he was believed to have been attached. The *Act of Immorality* file contains letters between the National Commissioner of Police, the Private Secretaries for the Ministers of Justice and Interior, and the head of the PCB discussing the decision on the book, as well as the purported identity of the author. It is clear from documents related to its banning that it was officially treated as a seditious threat to national security, initially submitted to the Board by the Police Commissioner acting on a tipoff by the wife of one of his detectives.

In the 1963 decision to ban it, it was described as “an attack on the ‘National Party’ and on ‘Apartheid.’”³⁸⁴ Dekker stated in his report that the writer (who he referred to throughout by his pseudonym) was so “outspoken” that he “repeatedly tears off the mask of the novel form and inserts parliamentary debates and newspaper reports and sometimes appears himself with his message of a slashing attack on the Immorality Act and apartheid.”³⁸⁵ Dekker further argued that on top of its being seditious, the book had no artistic merit whatsoever, and that there was no case for its being passed.

These and other details make for an interesting story, one which has not attracted the attention it might be assumed to have merited.³⁸⁶ *An Act of Immorality* was the first novel to be banned under the auspices of a system which had attracted ferocious criticism and condemnation from the

³⁸⁴ BCS163/63.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Rosa Lyster, “Where bad books go to die and why no one will admit to writing them,” *Sunday Times*, 24 July, 2016, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/lifestyle/2016-07-24-where-bad-books-go-to-die-and-why-no-one-will-admit-to-writing-them/>.

moment it was conceived of. More than that, the novel was touted as a scathing attack on the Immorality Act, which made sexual relations between white and non-white an offense punishable by up to seven years in prison, and which was widely perceived to be one of the most disgraceful and inhumane of all apartheid's brutal policies. Given this, it would not be unreasonable to expect that the banning of *An Act of Immorality* would have become a political issue at the time, or would have at least resulted in a certain degree of notoriety, which might have resulted in some name recognition, even today. However, silence concerning the novel seemed largely to be total, and the author's true identity appeared to be a mystery. The decline into obscurity of a novel which had once broken sales records in South Africa, and which moreover was the first locally produced novel to be banned by the censors seemed to be a story worth telling in itself. Why did *An Act of Immorality* disappear?

Firstly, *An Act of Immorality* and the related official documents are difficult to find. The book, as mentioned, is long out of print. The documents related to its 1963 banning are, strangely, not listed on any of the National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System (NAAIRS) databases, searchable records which are normally thorough and reliable in terms of the apartheid censorship archives. That they are an apparent anomaly in a user-friendly system could, perhaps, be one of the reasons that this case is so rarely discussed. Extracting the file from the archive means, in practical terms, spending days sifting through the contents of stacked manila boxes whose labels provide no insight into what they contain. The decision on its banning would have been gazetted, but the apparent disappearance of the records within the system means that few people would have had the opportunity to view the documents themselves, or even been aware that they existed.

Secondly, some of the confusion over the novel's current obscurity is resolved upon reading its content. Throughout her career, Gordimer argued that "the poor piece of work has as much right to be read - and duly judged as such - as the work of genius."³⁸⁷ That *Act of Immorality* had a "right" to be read is unquestionable (although the occasional and violent racism of its content complicates this seemingly easy question, as will be discussed further); that literary worth is difficult to assess goes without saying. It is important to note, however, that Gordimer wrote acclaimed novels that were "easy" to defend, and that did not demand an excess of principled

³⁸⁷ Gordimer, Nadine. "New forms of strategy — No change of heart," 36.

opposition to publications control. One of the reasons that *Act* has disappeared from view might be the difficulty of mounting a similar defence on its behalf.

Despite the high-minded claims made in the paratextual material, much of the novel reads like a work of erotic fiction: “Johannes gazes at the African girl as she nears him. He breathes deeply and quickly as he notices the rippling muscles in her thighs showing through her tight skirt. Already in anticipation he has calculated her possibilities.”³⁸⁸ The book’s tone moves awkwardly between salaciousness and polemic, as in the following description of spectators waiting to view an Immorality trial reveal: “Eager, hungry-eyed, sex-keen spectators, morbid men, frustrated women, waited hungrily for the public strip-tease of the sex lives of fellow humans.”³⁸⁹ One of two central relationships in the book is between the white protagonist, Johannes Burger, and a black welfare officer named Felicity Kumalo and again, the author struggles between earnestly depicting the difficulty of their love and slipping into another register altogether: “ ‘How old are you, Miss Kumalo? I would say about 22. And that would be a fair estimation of your waist measurement, as well;”³⁹⁰ “Suddenly they were both breathing excitedly. The same thought stunned them. He was white. She was black.”³⁹¹ This tonal instability persists throughout. The novel’s cover and blurb market it as both a racy paperback and a principled stand against the Immorality Act, and the text itself is equally inconsistent in terms of genre or intellectual register. Arguing for the intrinsic value of *Burger’s Daughter*, its “right to be read,” is easy; arguing for the rights of *An Act of Immorality* represents the same kind of abstract challenge as arguing for the rights of the throwaway pulp thrillers discussed in the previous chapter.

Thirdly, and most importantly, while the novel might have been difficult to defend on artistic grounds, it is impossible to defend on moral ones. *An Act of Immorality* continually expresses views which are repellent, all the while presenting its protagonist as an exemplar of liberal humanity. On the one hand, the novel inveighs against the Immorality Act, calling it “an act of death,” “evil,” an “act of immorality,” and provides countless scenes of the damage the act wrought. Scenes of packed courtrooms, for instance, depict clearly the terrible violence, and the terrible pettiness, of such legislation: “Apartheid wound its pure patterns, weaving isolated colours on the whole fabric of life in South Africa. The wooden barrier in the court gallery, too,

³⁸⁸ Ibid, 21.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 69.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 67.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 68.

was a structure of apartheid. To the left, sat the whites, to the right, sat the non-whites,³⁹² and gives a valuable account of the absurdities of such a trial.

For every description like the one above, however, there are ones like these: “It was obvious to all present, even to the most ignorant African onlooker, that here was a man different from other men;”³⁹³ “even the most illiterate non-white in the gallery could see that Johannes was a man of conviction;”³⁹⁴ “her voice, poise and attire were extremely sophisticated for a black woman.”³⁹⁵

The protagonist’s desire for black women is described as a “neurotic compulsion”, and it is strongly implied that the root of this “compulsion” is his sexual abuse at the hands of his mother, as well as the double suicide of his parents. It is further intimated that they are driven to suicide by their own, “neurotic” desire for black men and women. White people’s sexual or romantic desire for black people is continually depicted as pathological, the product of a troubled mind. White people who “cross the colour bar” are described as “people who went for the forbidden flesh,”³⁹⁶ as compulsives, as victims of their own “obscure lusts.”³⁹⁷ Sexual or romantic desire for black people is described as the root cause of the suicide of at least four white people in the novel; it is literally what kills them. This third point, perhaps, offers the most compelling argument for why the novel has “disappeared.” While the case may have seemed, at first, to present the prospect of an attractive cause celebré, similar to the protest surrounding the banning of *The Late Bourgeois World* only three years later, the contents of the novel itself would have made this difficult. Perhaps, in other words, it was better to simply pretend that it didn’t exist; perhaps this strange, bad book was simply too awkward and was better forgotten, or at least refigured as something slightly more palatable. As mentioned, it is discussed in only two academic sources. While McDonald does not shy away from describing the novel as falling short of certain standards of literariness, Merrett describes it simply as “a novel about love across the colour line.”³⁹⁸ It is worth noting here that Merrett has used wording similar to that on the novel’s front cover, but replaced the word “sex” with the word “love,” and downplayed the salacious tone of the blurb. This choice on Merrett’s part can perhaps be viewed as an instance

³⁹² Ibid., 27.

³⁹³ Ibid., 35.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 30.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 63.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 27.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 33.

³⁹⁸ Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship*, 62.

of the valorising discourse which casts banned writers in a heroic light, and ascribes to them noble motives that they may not necessarily possess.

Asking “what happened to *An Act of Immorality?*” means considering “one’s personal encounter with the archive,” as well as “the serendipities of archival holdings, their invisibilities blinding when right in one’s face.”³⁹⁹ The further I researched this case, the more I believed that I understood why no one had heard of it, and why the foremost authority in the field had been unable to uncover the author’s identity. The further I researched, in fact, the less I expected to find anything at all. I spent a week in the National Library looking at microfilms of the Cape Times and the Rand Daily Mail from late 1963 to 1964. I came across a number of articles and letters to the editor concerning apartheid censorship and the Immorality Act, almost all of them critical of both, but nothing concerning *An Act of Immorality*. I dug through the rolls of registered Johannesburg attorneys, as well as registered psychologists, of the period. Every avenue proved fruitless. Before giving up, I spent one final morning at the archives on Roeland Street, looking at the same set of documents I had scanned so many times before.

In *Archive Stories*, Burton speaks of her conviction that that “the material spaces of archives exert tremendous and largely unspoken influences on their users.”⁴⁰⁰ In the course of my research, I found no more compelling example of this tremendous and unspoken influence than the fact that the apparently anonymous author is in fact clearly identified by name in the documents relating to the case. The name of the author was hidden in plain sight, neatly typed in a memo from the Private Secretary of the Minister of the Interior to the PCB: “It may be mentioned that the ‘Sunday Express’ of the 29th September contains a report to the effect that an American film company is secretly filming the novel...According to the Press report, the author is Mr. Simon Meyerson.”⁴⁰¹

The peculiarities of archival work are clearly revealed here: the name I had tried so hard to find was exactly where it should have been, and yet for a long time, I failed to see it. Perhaps the expectation that it would not be there made it harder to find; perhaps the belief that the author had yet been unmasked made it easier to believe that he would not be. In “The Power of the Archive and its Limits,” Achille Mbembe argues that “however we define archives, they have no meanings outside the subjective experience of those individuals who, at a given moment, come

³⁹⁹ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 241.

⁴⁰⁰ Burton, *Archive Stories*, 10.

⁴⁰¹ BCS 163/63.

to use them.”⁴⁰² Again, the case of *An Act of Immorality* and my attempt to “solve” it represents an illuminating enactment of this argument. Mbembe further discusses the distance, in the archives, “between what is sought and what is found.”⁴⁰³ My own internalised expectations, and the pressure of the contemporary moment, informed my expectations of research to a startling degree. When ordering the *Sunday Express* article from the National Library, for instance, I expected to find a small article, towards the back of the paper.

I found, instead, a full front-page article in one of the leading liberal newspapers of the period, with a headline that spanned the page: “SEX BOOK IS FILMED SECRETLY ON RAND: AMERICAN UNIT “SHOOTS” “ACT OF IMMORALITY””⁴⁰⁴ The article begins by describing the author in the same terms used on the book jacket and states that “until today, his identity has remained a well-kept secret.” The writer goes on: “I am now able to disclose that the author is Mr. Simon Meyerson, a 27-year-old student at the University of the Witwaterstrand.”

The subsequent interview of Meyerson makes for revealing reading, and undoes many of the suppositions that might have been held about a book which would go on to be banned by the censors for the way it “attacked” the National Party and apartheid. The writer of the article, Gordon Winter, quotes Meyerson as insisting that the book was not “political” and instead was an interrogation of “the underlying psychological reasons...why people broke the Act in spite of its disastrous consequences.”⁴⁰⁵ In a follow-up report a week later, Meyerson insisted again that his motives were not political. The article notes that Meyerson’s brother had twice been questioned by the Security Branch as to the whereabouts of the American film crew. Meyerson is quoted as saying, in response, “I intend asking for an interview with the Minister of Information, Mr. Waring, to discuss certain matters concerning the film.”⁴⁰⁶ Discussing an upcoming trip to London in order to negotiate world film rights for the novel, Meyerson stated that “I also wish to tell [Mr. Waring] that I do not intend being a bad ambassador for South Africa when I go to London on Thursday.”⁴⁰⁷

The identity of the author of *Act of Immorality* was never a secret. Simon Meyerson was unmasked in 1963, moved to London, worked as a senior psychologist at the Tavistock Institute, founded

⁴⁰² Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and its Limits”, 23.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ See Appendix 11.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Gordon Winter, *Sunday Express*, October 6 1963.

⁴⁰⁷ See Appendix 12.

The Dream Institute with R.D. Laing, and is currently the head of The Institute for Psychology, whose offices are listed in North West London.⁴⁰⁸ Meyerson appears frequently on the BBC, speaking about sports psychology, adolescence, the psychology of torture, and unwanted compulsions. Although he has a considerable internet presence, no mention is made, in any of his articles or on his website, of his connection to *Act of Immorality*. His efforts to dissociate from the book seem to have largely been successful. The book, then, seems not to have been disappeared, as to have been wilfully forgotten by everyone associated with it. The story of the novel's banning might have been forgotten simply because no one wished to remember it, but a resurrection of it involves more than simply solving a mystery that was never really a mystery at all. The *Act of Immorality* file exists as a direct rebuttal to the notion of apartheid-era bureaucratic omniscience. The memo identifying Meyerson was appended only after four powerful government departments, between them, spent months struggling to uncover the identity of a man whose name and face had been published on the front page of a national newspaper. This lucid example of deep administrative incompetence somewhat tarnishes the image of the banned writer as David versus the state's Goliath, an image which will be discussed further in the next chapter. Additionally, Meyerson's immediate capitulation, his public promise to be a "good ambassador" for the apartheid state, is a dispiriting counterpoint to the image of the banned writer as automatically "honourable" or self-sacrificing. It is difficult to construct an attractive narrative about the heroic actions of banned South African writers and include the fact that the author of the very first locally produced novel to be banned by the state announced his intention to fully co-operate with apartheid officials.

4.4 Conclusion

In contrast to objects of study in the previous chapter, this chapter takes in a wider range of material than that which is contained in the archive on Roeland Street. It uses newspaper reports, private correspondence, and literary analysis, as well as reports and other artefacts from the archive. Like most of the material discussed in the previous chapter, almost none of the documents relating to the case of *An Act of Immorality* or the Blom papers have ever been used in any official history of apartheid censorship. By bringing to light material which had previously been undiscovered or undiscussed, this chapter thus constitutes a necessary reflection on *how* stories like this are told. As noted in the introductory chapter, South African archival laws kept

⁴⁰⁸ "Staff of the Institute of Psychology," Institute of Psychology, accessed July 15 2017, <http://www.instituteofpsychology.com/>

the censorship archive closed to the public until relatively recently. This fact can help to make sense of how Des Troye's identity remained "unknown" for so long. However, other contingencies are at play. The story of uncovering the documents related to Des Troye's real identity is, perhaps more than anything else, a story of what Stoler calls "the serendipities of archival holdings, their invisibilities blinding when right in one's face."⁴⁰⁹ Both case studies in this chapter rely on these kinds of serendipities, drawing attention to the backstage of archive and the challenges involved in narrativising the awkward archival ephemera that histories of apartheid censorship have tended to overlook. Stories like the ones above go untold not only because they are inconvenient, but because the archive in which they are contained is so vast, so sprawling. In *Dust*, Steedman compellingly describes archives as

made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there... And nothing happens to this stuff, in the Archive. It is indexed and catalogued - though some of it is unindexed and uncatalogued, and parts of it are lost. But as stuff, it just sits there until it is read, and used, and narrativized.⁴¹⁰

It is easy to miss the stuff of the Blom case, or the Meyerson case, and it is impossible not to consider what else remains to be uncovered, used, and narrativised. A consideration of my own subjectivity as a researcher is an important component of this thesis. A consideration of the "complex processes of selection, interpretation, and even creative invention – processes set in motion by, among other things, one's personal encounter with the archive, the history of the archive itself, and the pressure of the contemporary moment on one's reading of what is to be found there,"⁴¹¹ is crucial for the two case studies above, specifically. A consideration of one's subjectivity in the archive means acknowledging that one is choosing a particular story to tell. That I picked the Meyerson and Blom stories is evidence of my own preoccupations and notions about the kind of stories that are worth telling. Working with the censorship archive is not, simply, a process of fact-retrieval, but an encounter with narrative in many forms, an encounter which demands the creation of a narrative of one's own.

The case of *An Act of Immorality* is an unattractive, seemingly unusable feature of the wider story of apartheid censorship. It cannot be used to tell a story about the heroism of banned writers, or

⁴⁰⁹ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 241.

⁴¹⁰ Carolyn Steedman, "The Space of Memory: In an Archive," *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no 4, 1998, 67.

⁴¹¹ Antoinette Burton, *Archive Stories*, 6.

about the omniscient power of the apartheid state's mechanisms of surveillance, or about the stupidity of pen-pushing bureaucrats who suppressed works of great South African literature. Hayden White suggests that the "value attached to narrativity in the presentation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary."⁴¹² The case of *An Act of Immorality* does not immediately offer itself up for inclusion in a well-made story: it has a strange beginning, a misunderstood middle, and an unsatisfactory ending, but it is important to find a place for it, and to consider the ways it might change our perception of the period. Similarly, the Blom file makes it clear that, despite the system's performance of efficiency and accountability, it was poorly administered from the very beginning, and relied far more on the appearance of efficiency than the results of efficiency. Every official involved was aware that Blom could not possibly complete the tasks he was apparently assigned to do, yet despite this awareness, no-one took any steps to rectify it. The Blom file reveals the workings of an inefficient and chaotic system, and must therefore contradict the claims made by scholars such as Ivan Evans, who have argued so persuasively for the coercive and administrative powers of the state.

This chapter began to trace some of the ways that we might understand apartheid censorship as a process carried out by a range of censorious agents, rather than "a series of actions carried out by a discrete or isolated authority."⁴¹³ For instance, the Blom file shows that the Publications Inspector worked alongside customs officials and booksellers in order to prevent the spread of dangerous literature, and the *Act of Immorality* case similarly demonstrates that a range of government officials preoccupied themselves with the problem of seditious material. Darnton argues that "state intervention in the literary realm went far beyond the blue-penciling of texts. It extended to the shaping of literature itself as a force at work throughout the social order."⁴¹⁴ The next chapter provides an in-depth look at some of the ways in which the project of apartheid censorship was realised and enacted throughout the social order, exploring some of the more intangible of its effects: uneasy accommodations made with the system, the censors' unwitting or unwilling role in the canonisation of banned writers, and the durability of certain myths regarding the heroism of banned writers and the staying power of art.

⁴¹² Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (Autumn, 1980), 24.

⁴¹³ Freshwater, "Towards a Redefinition," 228.

⁴¹⁴ Darnton, *Censors at Work*, 20.

Chapter 5: Unofficial Silencing

5.1 Introduction

With the notable exception of the work of Peter McDonald, narratives of apartheid censorship have tended to rely on a somewhat limited imagining of the censor as either a dry, dutiful bureaucrat, a tyrannically powerful mind-reader, or a combination of the two. Gordimer witheringly described the censorship system as being peopled by “white civil servants and school teachers,”⁴¹⁵ a dull-witted group who was nevertheless capable of thought-policing. This image is incomplete. The censors were far too preoccupied with un-bureaucratic concerns to operate with any real bureaucratic efficiency, and far too fractiously competitive to succeed as mind-reading tyrants. However, these myths have proved durable. They are sustained by equally robust myths, one of the most persistent being the degree of independence they had from the rest of apartheid’s bureaucratic machine, and the secrecy with which they operated.

While it is certainly the case that only the PAB was required to provide full, publically accessible reasons for their decisions, and equally true that the legislation gave the censors an extraordinary degree of autonomy, archival evidence reveals that the system was a vital and deeply embedded feature of apartheid’s sprawling bureaucracy, something which a significant portion of the public was in fact very much aware of. The persistent narrative in which the censors feature as somehow distanced or quarantined from the rest of the apartheid system means that they were often viewed as a faceless, unseen force, operating without civil, judicial, or government oversight. This image is unhelpful for many reasons, not least of which is that it compounds some of the seeming paradoxes regarding censorship’s enduring power and reach, and because it means sustaining the fantasy that censorship was enacted only by specially appointed bureaucrats, and no one else.

If, as Gordimer insisted, “censorship may have to do with literature, but literature has nothing whatever to do with censorship,” then how did the censors wield such influence on the way literature was shaped, produced, and consumed?⁴¹⁶ This question, and others like it, can be approached by attending to those features of the archive that narratives of censorship have tended to overlook, and making connections that expose the various complicities and accommodations made with the system. As Abel cogently observes, “censors’ success depends

⁴¹⁵ Gordimer, “Apartheid and Censorship,” 4.

⁴¹⁶ Nadine Gordimer, “New Forms of Strategy – No Change of Heart,” 33.

on authors, editors, and broadcasters voluntarily internalizing the regulations and suppressing their own texts.”⁴¹⁷

This chapter offers insight into the way censorship, as both a notion and an active force, loomed in the public imagination, and traces how official publications control led to other forms of silencing. Some of the apartheid censors’ successes in encouraging self-censorship and suppression have been documented. As Gordimer noted, “picking up a daily newspaper, one may be reassured...to see reporting and open debate on contentious subjects. In fact, there is no ‘censorship’ as such of newspapers; as the editor of one of them pointed out recently, there is no need, because ‘all the censoring the government requires is done by the newspaper staffs themselves and their lawyers.’”⁴¹⁸ Wider public complicity with the system is not as frequently remarked upon, but is an important part of the history of apartheid censorship. As will be explored in the following sections, this complicity ran deeper than linear narratives of resistance might strive for. Belief in the destructive capacities of mass culture was shared by many South Africans, including those who were volubly opposed to censorship. There are uneasy connections to be made between what some censors perceived their role to be, and what the liberal literary establishment perceived as its role, a connection that McDonald describes as “the ease with which liberal protests against censorship could slide into complicity.”⁴¹⁹ Tracking these complicities means acknowledging, in Abel’s words, that “censorship continues even when it is difficult to track, even when no offices of censorship exist.”⁴²⁰ Beginning with a discussion of letters from members of the public to the censors, this chapter’s exploration of censorship’s more insidious effects encourages a reckoning with how they linger, even today.

5.2 Letters and Replies

Submissions and letters from members of the public are rarely, if ever, discussed, but the archive contains thousands of letters from members of the public, some addressed to the censorship Board, and some addressed to the offices of a wide range of government departments. Typed, handwritten, formal, intimate, disengaged, cheerful, furious, imperious, deferent, demanding, courteous, clipped, lengthy, difficult to categorise: these documents are a vivid and disruptive archival presence, and further evidence of the quirks and eccentricities of the system. The tone

⁴¹⁷ Abel, *Redacted*, 79.

⁴¹⁸ Gordimer, “Apartheid and Censorship,” 151.

⁴¹⁹ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 133.

⁴²⁰ Abel, *Redacted*, 15

of the letters ranges from jauntily informal to imperious. Both pleas and commands are made. A touching and largely misplaced faith in the efficiency and scope of the system is often evident, as in the following letter, sent to the Board in 1976:

I am writing to ask for your help in a matter which is of great concern to myself and many other South Africans today... Can I ask the Publications Board to do everything in its power to check permissiveness in South Africa?⁴²¹

Among other things, the correspondence between the censors and members of the public undermines the notion that the censors operated in total anonymity, or that the public was unaware of their role. These documents differ in style, tone, and mode of address, but considered together, they reveal a great deal about how the system was perceived, as well as providing a starting point for an understanding of how official publications control bled into the unofficial forms of silencing discussed in this chapter.

As with the reports, there is often an alarming disparity in the letters between, in Foucault's phrase, "the things recounted and the way of saying them."⁴²² The same tonal instability which characterises the reports can also be found in many censors' letters, in which bureaucratic language suddenly gives way to much more direct, challenging modes of address. For instance, this can clearly be seen in the correspondence between the head of the PCB and a librarian who had enquired about the reasons for the banning of John Winton's *H.M.S. Leviathan*, a 1967 novel about life aboard a "troubled aircraft carrier." In response to the librarian's request, the chairman of the PCB replied as follows:

With further reference to your letter no B/1/36/2/3, I have to advise you that it is not the policy of the board to give any reasons for banning a publication. The Board was asked to investigate a complaint that the book was filthy and that pornographic language was used therein.... I may mention that the complainant borrowed the publication from a library. It appears that he was astonished to find such a book in a library and that it had been published by such a reputable firm as Michael Joseph, Limited, London.

Like the reports in which the reader or censor appears unable to prevent herself from indulging in un-bureaucratic feelings, the letter above is a lucid example of the strange mix of official and unofficial which characterises the documents contained in the censorship archive. First, the

⁴²¹ IDP 1/12 P76/8/57.

⁴²² Foucault, "Life of Infamous Men," 88.

editor tersely reminds the librarian of his power and position, as well as the system's legally mandated lack of transparency. As he reminds his correspondent that he is not required to give a reason for the Board's decision, he gives several. Finally, he ends with an entirely unnecessary piece of information, which can serve no purpose other than to shame and censure the librarian. In this final paragraph, the mask of the anonymous bureaucrat seems to drop, as it so frequently does in the reports. While the mask may have been very useful in presenting an image of plodding efficiency to the public, it is clear that the censors were not always able to sustain it for very long.

Similarly, the language and emotion of many of the letters from members of the public often seems disproportionate to the subject matter at hand, as in the following letter addressed to the Minister of Information, concerning John Christopher's *The World in Winter*, a 1962 science fiction novel:

Excuse me taking the liberty of writing to you to congratulate you on your being promoted to Cabinet Rank...What I really want to bring to your notice is whether the Board of Censors is satisfied with the last quarter of the book "The World in Winter" by John Christopher, 1962. In this part of the book English ladies, who had fled from England on account of the intense cold, gave their bodies to African negroes for shelter and money. I don't think this book could pass the Board of Censors. I feel like drowning the writer.⁴²³

The letter took a few weeks to be redirected (from the Ministry of the Information to the Ministry of Publication to the Publications Board), and the *World in Winter* file contains multiple copies of each document involved in the redirection process. Also included in the file is the letter from the chairman of the Board at the time (Dekker) to the secretary for the Ministry of the Interior, which notes that "On receipt of the book I perused same but could by no means find anything to justify banning. I referred the publications to a very reliable reader, Mr. W. A. Joubert M.A. and to a member of the Board, Mr. J. Sutton. Both of them found the publication not objectionable."⁴²⁴

The tone and content of the above letter is characteristic of many found in the archive. First, there is the startling disparity between the thing recounted and the way of saying it, a disparity

⁴²³ BCS 26 22846.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

which must be seen as intrinsic to the functioning of the system. The violence of Scott's stated wish to "drown" the author seems at odds with the supplicating, deferential tone of the rest of his letter. Equally violent sentiments are expressed in many such documents, containing pleas to have authors flogged, arrested, or banished from South Africa. Some letters contained a request for the censors to return the copy of the book, so that the letter-writer could exact his own punishment on it, as in a follow-up to the *Franny and Zooey* letter discussed in Chapter One: "If you are unable to obtain a copy of the publication complained of, I shall be glad to send you the copy that was presented to my son under the circumstances mentioned in my previous letter, provided that when you have finished with it, you return it to me so that I may burn it."⁴²⁵

Second, there is the unstated belief in the censors' judgement, a conviction on the part of the letter-writer that the system would share his views on the novel, and apply a punishment that was the bureaucratic equivalent of drowning the writer. Third, the role that the letter-writer assumes for himself as a kind of unpaid guardian of public morality, filling in the gaps left by the censors and drawing attention to material which they overlooked, a role also assumed by the writer in the following:

May I respectfully bring to your notice a book on sale in our country which I feel must have escaped the notice of the usually very careful censors. The book is "Occasion For Loving" by Nadine Gordimer and is published by Victor Gollancz Ltd. 1963 (London).⁴²⁶

The letters above, and the hundreds like them, can help to clarify one of the most puzzlingly paradoxical features of the system. In many ways, the censorship archive is a monument to inefficiency and waste of intellectual and bureaucratic resources. Yet it is also an artefact of a system that "worked," in that it was widely perceived as effective. There are of course notable exceptions to this view, but it is important to stress that both opponents and supporters of the system tended to view it as effective. The letters from members of the public provide an insight into that perception, and account for some of the censors' influence. The system derived some of its power from the public belief in that power, and an equally adamant conviction that censorship had a critical role to play in maintaining peace and order. This conviction can clearly be seen in the following, concerning Harold Robbins' *Stiletto* (1960):

⁴²⁵ BCS 67 33/55.

⁴²⁶ BCS 28 29/087.

The worth of this novel is, in my opinion, minimal and the inclusion of gratuitous scenes of an unpleasantly sexual nature adds nothing to the value of this piece of trash. Heaven knows how much of this stuff is purveyed cheaply to an indiscriminating public regrettably eager to be titillated rather than educated! More power to your arm!⁴²⁷

As with the previous document, the letter reveals the writer's belief that she and the censors share a worldview. Equally apparent is the writer's willingness to conscript herself as an unpaid protector of public morals, reading over the shoulder of a vulnerable public. The conviction that the censors would concur with the letter writer's interpretation of a text, if they had only had the chance to read it, is repeated with varying degrees of vehemence in hundreds of letters written to the Board. This belief in a common worldview, however, was not one which was necessarily shared by the system.

In fact, the majority of letters from members of the public did not have their intended effect. There is very little in the archive to suggest that letters from members of the public were ever used as a basis for other decisions, or that the views expressed therein were ever invoked in arguments between censors over the fate of a given text. The views of the legally-imagined reader were consulted by the censors on a near-constant basis, but they were far less interested in the views of actual readers. Correspondence between censors and the public makes it clear that the censors had little interest in the actual reading habits and responses of the white public, to say nothing of their utter failure to take into account the responses, or even the existence, of black readers.

While many public letters evince a confidence in the censors' omniscient capabilities, other letter writers were less reassured. Some letters in the archive were not addressed directly to the censors, but to the offices of a wide variety of government departments.⁴²⁸ This occasionally happened because the writer did not know where their letter should be sent, but more often, it was because the writer appeared to lack faith in the censors' judgement, a lack of faith which can be clearly seen in the following (addressed to Hendrik Verwoerd, the Prime Minister at the time):

I enclose a copy of the book "Trial at Monomoy" by John Masters which I obtained recently from the library at Plettenberg Bay.

⁴²⁷ BCS 67 305/66.

⁴²⁸ See Appendix 13.

After reading it I was so disgusted at the filth and obscenity that I complained to the Hon. Sec. and offered to pay for the book so that I could destroy it or forward it to the appropriate Government Censor Authority with a view to it being 'banned'... The Honorable Secretary, however, informed me that the book was ... allowed to pass.

If such is, in fact, the case I am extremely surprised that such a filthy, immoral and pernicious book should have been allowed into the Republic as I consider it detrimental to the morals and upbringing of the adolescent youth of the land...I trust you will forgive me troubling you but I see no other means of drawing attention to matter which has, apparently, passes [sic] the censorship authority and which never should have done so.⁴²⁹

This letter was forwarded to the Board by the Secretary for the Minister of the Interior, who was forwarded the letter by the Secretary for the office of the Prime Minister. The system's passion for the accoutrements of bureaucracy can be clearly seen in study of correspondence of this kind. The *Trial at Monomoy* file is very thick. It contains three copies of Stuart's letter, two copies of a letter from the Private Secretary for the PM (Olivier) to the Private Secretary for the Minister of the Interior (Engelbrecht), two copies of a letter from Olivier to the letter-writer, two copies of a letter from Engelbrecht to the letter-writer, and three copies of a letter from Dekker to Engelbrecht. Also attached is a copy of the reader's report on the relevant book. Despite Stuart's attempt to go above the head of the Board, the letter ended up precisely where he did not want it: with the censors. A similar attempt was made in a 1988 letter complaining about the absence of pre-publications control in South Africa, addressed to the Secretary for the Minister of the Interior: "I urge you not to refer the letter to the publication board for reply, as I am not convinced that it would be well received."⁴³⁰ In spite of this urging, however, the department for the Interior forwarded the letter directly to the Directorate of Publications.

Many of the letters above didn't have their intended effect, and it is difficult to determine what impact they had on decision-making. It is tempting, then, to consider them as on an odd personal intrusion, a telephone ringing unanswered in a busy office. Hull's argument about the way bureaucratic organisations organise themselves around documents is worth restating here. Documents, for Hull, "are not simply the instruments of already existing social organizations;

⁴²⁹ BCS 67 296/66.

⁴³⁰ IDP 1/61 P80/11/101.

rather, they precipitate the formation of shifting networks and groups of people inside and outside the bureaucracy.”⁴³¹ His formulation is especially valuable here because it takes into account the role of outside agents in determining the structure and functioning of a bureaucracy. These letters, in other words, are not outside of the institution; rather, they are essential to the forming of the institution, part of what Kafka describes as “the raw materials of power.”⁴³² The letters above thickened the archive considerably; they acted as connective tissue between the Board and other government departments; they required the Board to define itself and its objectives: we will do this, we cannot do this, please do not consider this as a precedent. Paging through these files, one sees an institution in the act of creating itself. The letters are also important in that they allow for an envisioning of the censors as working within a larger system. Far from being a discrete body unconcerned with the base demands of politics, the system had a critical role to play in apartheid’s grand design. The letters set off a chain of reactions that stretch into other office corridors, other desks. Envisioning Stuart’s letter as it bounces from desk to desk, picking up attachments, means envisioning a whole system of government at work. The censors’ efforts to quarantine literature as something untouched by contemporary politics can be compared to their attempt to quarantine themselves as an administrative body that was a *part* of the apartheid bureaucratic system, but not *of* it. The letters comprehensively expose this attempt as disingenuous; exchanges between various government offices and the censors reveal how critical the censors’ role in maintaining order was perceived to be. As well as enabling us to see the censors scurrying through the halls of power, the letters help us to see the censors at work *as bureaucrats*: as makers of copies, as dutiful cross-referencers, fetching a letter from a 1974 file and placing it carefully for reference in a 1966 one. The letters give an even more material sense of the day-to-day operations of the institution. The reports are simply dated, but the letters come with addresses. Suddenly, it is possible to see the censors at their desks.

Many of these letters mentioned above do not concern any works of political or social significance. Like the reports, the sense of urgency they express seems out of all proportion to their content. There is the same alarming disparity between what is said and how it is said. Like the reports, these letters can be read as a stunning waste of intellectual energy, an extraordinary focus on the inconsequential. They are important, then, in that they require us to think about what the chaotic and internally contradictory institution summoned them into existence, as well

⁴³¹ Hull, “The File,”

⁴³² Ben Kafka, “Paperwork: The State of the Discipline,” 340.

as asking us to think about the relationship between the censors and the members of the public. Histories of apartheid censorship have tended to focus on resistance to censorship. These letters, on the other hand, require us to think about public complicity – a less appealing story.

The majority of the letters mentioned above evince broad acceptance as to the necessity of censorship. What is startling is the ways in which this acceptance was occasionally voiced by those who were apparently opposed to publications control on principle, a testament to the success of the systems' ideational aims. For some members of the literary establishment, protests against censorship had less to do with defence of freedom of expression, and more to do with the plea that writing and writers be afforded special protection.⁴³³ As the following section discusses, the goals of some censors and the goals of the liberal-literary establishment were not as dissimilar as might initially be assumed.

5.3 Grounds for Defence

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that white liberal attitudes toward censorship were far more yielding and ambivalent than widely publicised anti-censorship campaigns would indicate. This ambivalence expressed itself from the earliest days of official publications control under apartheid. For instance, when the Cronje Commission released its recommendations in 1957, the liberal newspaper *New Age* published Albert Luthuli's (then President-General of the ANC) response. Luthuli attacked the commission's findings in the strongest possible terms, describing them as an "unwarranted attack on the liberty of expression," and warning that the "proposed measures of control and punishment" were "likely to suppress literary talent and isolate the country from the progressive and stimulating influence of world art and literature." Luthuli's response did not qualify his opposition to censorship in any way. In contrast, the editorial published in the same edition evinced a much less uncompromising view. It focused on the threats posed to the freedom of the press, and on the commissions' recommendations regarding political censorship. Its only explicit mention of literary censorship was as follows: "That there is undesirable literature circulating in the Union, no one will deny. And many would support measures to protect the community against the flood of pornographic and horror trash which is undoubtedly circulating in the Union in large quantities." As this section will show, many subsequent critiques of censorship were similarly tempered, containing implicit and rigid

⁴³³ Ibid., 144.

assumptions about the superiority of literature as an elevated discourse worthy of special protection.

In *The Literature Police*, McDonald describes an event that some observers viewed as a “fatal compromise”: a petition signed by 133 writers and fifty-eight artists in April 1963, the period in which the new censorship legislation was enacted.⁴³⁴ Although the petition strongly protested against the new Publications Act, it did so in terms that were “anti-political, individualistic, moral, and aestheticist.”⁴³⁵ The petition, whose signatories included Nadine Gordimer, Alan Paton, Etienne Leroux, André Brink, Ingrid Jonker, and Athol Fugard, was “less a protest against censorship than a plea for the protection of literature.”⁴³⁶ It accepted that some legal controls were necessary (specifically with regard to the spread of pornography), and focused concern on the signatories’ “specific interests as writers, and defended the distinctiveness of the literary.”⁴³⁷ Looking at the terms of the writers and artists’ petition, it is important to question what, exactly, was being defended - the right to make art or the right to protest against a brutal regime? The rights of the individual or the rights of a society?

The issue for many opponents of the system was not about whether guardianship was necessary, but rather about who was fit to play the role of guardian. At a 1975 public symposium on the 1974 Publications Act, Gordimer summarised this attitude in scathing terms:

In 1963, when the Publications and Entertainments Act was promulgated, South Africans were assured that the censors would be people of the highest literary judgement. As the years went by and the banned books piled up, those who had been reassured by this promise read in the titles of certain works banned ... the pathetic absurdity of that impossible promise.⁴³⁸

Carefully distancing herself from “those who had been reassured,” Gordimer identified a key ambivalence in public attitude toward publications control. The argument of those opposed to censorship often centred on the assertion that the censors were uniquely ill-equipped to make any sort of judgement about art. “The dark-suited, bald-headed censor, with his pursed lips and red pen and his irritability” was unfit for duty as a literary guardian, incapable of assessing a book

⁴³⁴ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 170.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁸ Gordimer, “Banned in South Africa,” *Index on Censorship*, Vol. 5, 1976, 42.

on its merits.⁴³⁹ In other words, it was not censorship per se that was the problem: it was that the censors were banning the wrong books (a sentiment very similar to the one expressed by Professor Titlestad in Chapter Three). In “The Writer, the Critic, and the Censor: J.M. Coetzee and the Question of Literature,” McDonald outlines Coetzee’s objections to censorship, noting that “he bases his objection not on matters of principle but on judgements about the censors’ quality of mind and the pernicious public effects of their authority.”⁴⁴⁰ In a characteristic utterance, Coetzee described censorship as “not an occupation that attracts intelligent, subtle minds.”⁴⁴¹ In signing a petition that demanded special consideration for the rights of South African writers and insisted on the distinctiveness of the literary, vocal opponents of state censorship invoked an image of a national literature that was in some ways remarkably similar to that invoked by many censors: a frail, nascent thing hampered by a numerically restricted market, which needed to be protected from the flood of “trash” from overseas. Was some kind of censorship “necessary” in order for “art” to flourish? Even the most vigorous contemporary criticism of censorship from the left reveals a certain ambiguity as regards the answer to this question.

In 1974, the censors broke what McDonald describes as “the pact safeguarding Afrikaans literature,” and took the decision to ban André Brink’s fourth novel, *Kennis van die Aand* (1973), as well as Brink’s own English translation, *Looking on Darkness* (1974).⁴⁴² The banning marked a turning point which had been coming for some time, as Brink himself appeared to rankle under the paternalistic protection afforded to Afrikaans writers. Brink stated as much in an article that appeared in the anti-apartheid newspaper *Rand Daily Mail* of June 20, 1970: “If it is true that Afrikaans writers do have greater freedom vis-à-vis censorship than others ... what have they done with this freedom? How have they used it? The depressing answer is: no Afrikaans writer has yet tried to offer a serious political challenge to the system.” *Kennis* can be read as Brink’s attempt to offer that challenge. The novel’s plot turns on the relationship between the first-person narrator, a coloured man, and a white woman, and is explicitly critical of apartheid and its historical foundations.

⁴³⁹ Coetzee, *Giving Offense*, 38.

⁴⁴⁰ McDonald, “The Writer, the Critic, and the Censor: J.M. Coetzee and the Question of Literature,” in *J.M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, ed. Jane Poyner (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 43.

⁴⁴¹ Coetzee, *Giving Offense*, vii.

⁴⁴² McDonald, *Literature Police*, 68.

The book's banning caused an outcry in the Afrikaans literary community, and galvanised many writers in protest. The terms under which they defended the book are interesting. For instance, the writer A.J. Coetzee passionately argued against its banning as follows: "For literary reasons we cannot look upon the burning of this book without protest. We are serious, we aren't anarchists, we know a little about literature; it is our training, it is our love, it is our job."⁴⁴³

There is a much to unpack in Coetzee's statement, beginning with the opening phrase: "for literary reasons." Placating an Afrikaans audience in placing the literary beyond the sphere of politics, Coetzee positioned himself as a protector of the craft as opposed to an "anarchist." For Coetzee, *Kennis van die Aand* needed to be protected for its aesthetic value, which was more important than its political message. In the same attack, Coetzee outlined a potential future path for South African writers:

Brink has written a book which can be read with relative ease...The objection against our recent prose was that our writers didn't have enough contact with the people. Brink tried to bridge this – and what was his gain? One feels inclined to advise our authors: be cryptic, write complicated, go underground.⁴⁴⁴

Here, Coetzee presciently and insightfully identified some of the censors' key aesthetic mandates: "be cryptic, write complicated, go underground." In "Censorship: one or two points in favour and some against," Leighton spelled this out in definitive terms: "The writer who is totally destroyed by censorship law is not a writer, but a mediocrity," and suggested some potential avenues of expression:

If you are not allowed to criticise the government or its agencies, then describe the antics of pigs, as Orwell does in *Animal Farm*. And if religious fanatics don't like your particular brand of religion, a-religion, or anti-religion, then create new worlds in fantasy. Separate in yourselves the man that suffers from the man that creates."⁴⁴⁵

Turn away from the contemporary situation, create new worlds, strip suffering (or politics) from your art. While A.J. Coetzee himself rejected such an approach, his identification of it is

⁴⁴³ Coetzee, "Beginning of a Revolt" in *The Grey Ones*, 11.

⁴⁴⁴ Coetzee, "Beginning of a Revolt," 11.

⁴⁴⁵ Leighton, "Censorship: one or two points," 45.

nevertheless significant, in that it identifies a path which other writers might have found attractive.

In the same way that letters from members of the public are indicative of the system's embeddedness within public life, shared notions about what literature should do or be show that the censors' ideas tended to be replicated in surprising and uncomfortable ways. Even in the case of a novelist like Gordimer, whose avowed opposition to censorship was total, there are instances of that vision being replicated, where an argument against censorship reveals itself to be, instead, an argument for the protection of the literary as a prized category.

When the PAB unbanned *Burger's Daughter*, in 1979, the decision attracted attention both locally and internationally. In 1980, Taurus Press published a collection of essays (by Gordimer and others), official documents and collected press coverage, entitled *What Happened to Burger's Daughter, or How South African Censorship Works*.⁴⁴⁶ The essays in the collection have titles such as "What the Book is About," "What the Literary Press Thought of the Novel," "Censorship in South Africa: The Legal Framework," and "What Happened to Burger's Daughter." The collection, intended as an analysis of one book's passage through the apartheid censorship system, is fiercely critical of censorship in principle. It is interesting, however, to note that while the essays in *What Happened to Burger's Daughter* argue repeatedly for the principle that all books have the right to be read and that literary merit or its lack should have no bearing on that right, they also make a case for *Burger's Daughter* as exceptional.

Censorship, in other words, should never exist, but in the unfortunate event that it did, *Burger's Daughter* should nevertheless be defended, exempt, due to its literary value. *What Happened to Burger's Daughter* tracks the fate of a novel that is easy to defend, a novel whose banning represents a beautifully illustrative example of the blunt stupidities of the apartheid censorship system. One section of the pamphlet (titled "What the Literary Press Thought of the Novel") is devoted to overwhelmingly positive reviews of the novel, drawn mostly from high-profile international publications. Many of the reviews selected by Gordimer and her co-publishers praise *Burger's Daughter* in terms that emphasise its universal themes, and which strive to minimise the centrality of its political message. For instance, in journalist R.W. Johnson's review for the U.K.-based journal *New Society*, he praised the novel as follows:

⁴⁴⁶ Nadine Gordimer, John Dugard and Richard Smith. *What Happened to Burger's Daughter, or How South African Censorship Works* (Emmarentia: Taurus, 1980).

Its range and power across the broad canvas of contemporary (Southern African) history brings immediately to mind the works of the great 19th century Russian novels...It is certainly the most powerful and illuminating novel about South Africa that I have ever read, but its ambition – and achievement – runs far, far beyond that.

Johnson's implication, that an aesthetic achievement is by definition more significant and more valuable than a political achievement, is, of course, one that chimes with a view held by many censors. The censors insisted that it was possible to draw a clear distinction between the aesthetic and the political. In the case of *Burger's Daughter*, the liberal guardians of the literary seemed to favour the possibility of a similar distinction. For instance, in Anatole Broyard's review for *The New York Times*, the novelist framed Gordimer's achievement as one which "enabled [readers] to discover all women, for the first time." *What Happened to Burger's Daughter* unintentionally registers an ambivalence about censorship in the case it makes for *Burger's Daughter*, and in its attack on the censors' stupidity. In drawing attention to the censors' lack of reading comprehension (the pamphlet's opening essay is devoted to a point by point dismissal of the censors' report recommending that the novel be banned, focusing particularly on where the novel had been misread or misunderstood) and dismissing their capability as literary guardians, the pamphlet's authors make a case for their own suitability as guardians.

Over the course of her career, Gordimer herself gave several strident critiques on this line of thinking. In "Apartheid and Censorship," she continued her attack on those who had been "reassured":

Many people allowed themselves to be reassured. Those who were not were frowned upon as extremist. Couldn't they see that it was unreasonable to oppose censorship totally, on principle? Couldn't they admit that there were some publications and films that were simply filthy, a raw incitement to sexual or political violence, without any artistic merit?⁴⁴⁷

She answered these critics by stating that "there was only one way to oppose censorship if one doubted censorship at all, as there has always been only one way to oppose other apartheid legislation, if one doubted apartheid at all: on principle, totally, and from the beginning."⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁷ Gordimer, "Apartheid and Censorship," 4.

⁴⁴⁸ Nadine Gordimer, "Apartheid and Censorship", *The Grey Ones: Essays on Censorship* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1974), 4.

Gordimer's participation in the celebration of *Burger's Daughter's* literary merit does not necessarily undermine her insistence that opposition to censorship should be total. Rather, her participation can be seen as an indicator of just how difficult total opposition to censorship was in practice.

It is difficult to imagine an outcry resulting from the decision to ban *Dig A Dead Doll*, or *Satan's Sleuth no. 2*, or *An Act of Immorality*. Yet, as we have seen, it was the banning or passing of "paperbacks of the kind that are twirled around on wire stands in chewing-gum-and-smokes shops and airports" which took up the majority of the censors' time, and which comprises the bulk of what is present in the archive. If opposition to censorship really was total, then outrage should have resulted from the banning of any novel. Pamphlets should have been written about the passage through the system of Peter Way's *Super Celeste* (1978), whose cover describes it as "THE ULTIMATE THRILLER OF THE AVIATION BUSINESS." *Super Celeste* was initially passed by a publications committee who determined that although "the relatively unknown writer has tried to make himself popular by indiscriminate use of a lot of dirty words in modern idiom...the story is at times gripping and has some literary merit. It is written in a popular style and will accordingly appeal to all sections of the community." This decision was subsequently appealed by the Directorate of Publications, and the decision was sent to the PAB for review. Overturning the initial committee's decision, the PAB strongly recommended banning *Super Celeste*, citing its "excessive" swearing, repeated instances of blasphemy, undesirable scenes of a sexual nature, and overall lack of artistic merit.⁴⁴⁹ *Super Celeste* has been relegated to "the slaughterhouse of literature,"⁴⁵⁰ seemingly unworthy of discussion, but a close analysis of its passage through the system yields illuminating insight into how the system worked. From the language of the PABs' report, with its absurd pretensions to faux-legality, to the tussle over the novel's literary merit, to the appended letter from the head of the committee that initially passed the novel ("In spite of the final recommendation by our committee, I personally had serious doubts about the value of this book"): these documents are, in their way, just as significant as the documents relating to the fate of *Burger's Daughter*, in that they sharply expose the petty violence and contradictions of an absurd system. *What Happened to Burger's Daughter* strives to expose the mindless idiocies of the censors, but such an exposure could equally be made by holding the *Super Celeste* file up to the light. While opponents of censorship may have been entirely neutral as

⁴⁴⁹ IDP 3/35 P77/4/113.

⁴⁵⁰ Franco Moretti, "The Slaughterhouse of Literature," *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 61, no.2 (March 2000), 207.

to the eventual fate of *Super Celeste*, the archive reveals that the censors were deeply invested in that outcome, and were capable of sustaining that over-zealous investment for longer than seems possible. It is arguable that the *Super Celeste* file tells the researcher *more* about the failures and futilities of the system than a file on any high-profile novel of political or social significance, and represents an equally forceful argument against the existence of censorship.

A resounding silence on the fate of what both the system and its opponents viewed as “trash” means casting aside the vast majority of what the archive contains, and repeating a story which is partial at best. A focus on novels which are easy to defend can unthinkingly replicate the terms of what McDonald calls a “fatal compromise,” wherein a difficult-to-mount argument against censorship per se is abandoned in favour of an argument which privileges the special rights of the writer and the distinctiveness of the literary as a category. Looking only at the spectacular or worthy contributes to the popular image of the banned writer as heroic, embattled truth teller, and unquestioningly continues to work in the service of what Ciraj Rassool has called “relatively unmessy narratives of resistance.”⁴⁵¹

The role of censorship in the canonisation of certain banned writers is an important, if unpleasant, part of the history of publications control in South Africa. Many publishers “used” the controversy provoked by a ban, viewing it as an opportunity to boost sales and cement the heroic reputation of the writer. It is important to dismantle these myths. As Freshwater argues, “evidence that authors and artists may occasionally exploit the condemnation of the authorities (or indeed even trade upon it) presents a healthy challenge to the moralising discourse which often surrounds discussions of censorship.”⁴⁵² A discussion of the manifold connections between censorship and canonisation need not be read as a cynical assault on the integrity of those canonised writers or their publishers. Rather, it can be viewed as an exploration of censorship’s far-reaching effects, and an acknowledgement that the history of South African literature and the history of South African censorship can never be untangled from one another.

5.4 Censorship and Canonisation: Unintended Effects

In one of his many pronouncements on official censorship and its web of unnameable effects, Coetzee stated: “I regard it as a badge of honour to have had a book banned in South Africa.

⁴⁵¹ Ciraj Rassool, ‘Rethinking Documentary History and South African Political Biography,’ *South African Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2010), 29.

⁴⁵² Freshwater, “Towards a redefinition,” 228.

This honour I have never achieved nor, to be frank, merited.”⁴⁵³ This “honour” bestowed on a banned writer was often more than a moral one, of course. International publishing houses often capitalised on the controversy provoked by the banning of a high-profile novel, viewing it as a valuable opportunity to boost both sales and their reputations as high-minded defenders of art. As McDonald notes, for instance, Brink’s British publishers used the controversy around the banning of *Looking on Darkness* to make Brink’s name internationally.⁴⁵⁴ Small South African publishing houses such as Taurus, Ravan Press, David Phillips, and Ad Donker took significant risks, financial and otherwise, in choosing to publish works that had a likelihood of being banned. As Attwell describes it, “it was always a case of publishing beneath a guillotine.”⁴⁵⁵ But even brave enterprises like theirs formed part of the strange web of repression and valorisation which characterised South Africa’s literary landscape during the censorship era. It was impossible to proceed as if censorship did not exist. Small, non-profit publishing companies would suffer financially if one of their titles was suppressed, but a banning could also cement the worthy reputation of a writer and her publisher. International and local publishers thus often participated in a valorising discourse that painted publishers as defenders of courageously outspoken novelists fighting a formidable enemy.

This kind of discourse allows for the waging of a grand battle. On the one hand, the censors’ violence and unfettered power is emphasised, as in A.J. Coetzee’s protest against the banning of Brink’s novel: “if *Kennis van die Aand* is not acquitted, it is indeed a funeral...we are burying the freedom of the Afrikaans writer.” From this perspective, literature itself is on trial, and the suppression of a book represents as grave a threat to freedom as the imprisonment of a human being. Similar sentiments were expressed when Gordimer was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991, when the Swedish Academy lauded “her continual involvement on behalf of literature and free speech in a police state where censorship and persecution of books and people exist.”⁴⁵⁶ Although it is well-intentioned, this perspective can register as overblown: the rhetorical funeral of literature seems somewhat less dramatic when compared to the funerals of murdered activists; the censorship of books pales into insignificance when compared to the persecution of people. Nevertheless, this attractive and exaggerated narrative persists. Another, equally

⁴⁵³ J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 298.

⁴⁵⁴ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 57.

⁴⁵⁵ Attwell, *Coetzee & The Life of Writing*, 92.

⁴⁵⁶ Craig R. Whitney, “Nadine Gordimer is Winner of Nobel Prize in Literature,” *New York Times*, October 4, 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/10/04/books/nadine-gordimer-is-winner-of-nobel-prize-in-literature.html?pagewanted=all>.

persistent narrative frames the censors as violently stupid. In this framing, apartheid censors are buffoons, mindless bureaucrats without the slightest capacity to make any sort of judgement about art, who ban what they are too stupid to understand. In their different ways, both narratives lay the groundwork for, in White's words, "a well-made story with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see the 'end' in the very beginning."⁴⁵⁷ It is a story that begins with the writer's David facing off against the censor's Goliath, and ends with art triumphing over suppression, a story about, in Darnton's words, "the children of light against the children of darkness."⁴⁵⁸ In this view, writers become beacons of light and truth simply by virtue of their profession. A kind of *de facto* heroism is conferred on many writers banned by the state by way of a binary view which insists that because the censors are oppressive, amoral, stupid, every writer whose work is banned is morally as well as intellectually above reproach.

In his essay "Turkish Tales," Njabulo Ndebele describes the less seemly, self-serving aspect of this narrative: "I once met a writer who gleefully told me how honoured he felt that his book of poetry had been banned by the South African censors. What I found disturbing was the ease with which the writer ascribed some kind of heroism to himself, almost glorying in a negation."⁴⁵⁹ The suggestion that literature has nothing whatsoever to do with censorship does not accommodate the ways in which a writer's interaction with the censorship regime was related to their entry into the canon. Discourse which encourages the deification of banned writers assumes or implies that censored material has an intrinsic value, or what Freshwater describes as "a quality which is inherently beneficial and liberatory."⁴⁶⁰ In her 1975 address at a public symposium on censorship, Gordimer gave a thorough, if not exhaustive, list of revered international writers who had been banned in South Africa:

Kingsley Amis, Vladimir Nabokov, Norman Mailer, John O'Hara, James Baldwin, Bernard Malamud, Edna O'Brien, John Updike, Frederic Raphael, Joseph Heller, Robert Penn Warren, Gore Vidal, Han Suyin, James Purdy, William Burroughs, Erica Jong, Langston Hughes, Doris Lessing, Paul Theroux, Truman Capote, William Faulkner, Allan Sillitoe, Sinclair Lewis, William Styron, Alison Lurie, Philip Roth, Jakov Lind, J. P. Donleavy, Kurt Vonnegut, Jack Kerouac. The list of books from the literature of Europe

⁴⁵⁷ Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," 24.

⁴⁵⁸ Darnton, *Censors at Work*, 18.

⁴⁵⁹ Njabulo Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 31.

⁴⁶⁰ Freshwater, "Towards a Redefinition," 227.

includes some by Joseph Kessel, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Romain Gary, Alberto Moravia, Carlos Fuentes, Roger Peyrefitte, Jean Genet, Françoise Mallet-Joris, Junichiro Tanazaki, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Colette, Nikos Kazantzakis, Jean Cocteau, Alfred Jarry, Italo Calvino, Vasco Pratolini, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Marguerite Duras.

She concluded by observing that there were “at least two Nobel Prize winners among those names, and several writers who have long been accepted as among the makers of modern literature.”⁴⁶¹ Writers who had been banned in South Africa, including Gordimer herself, were in exceptionally good company. In *Giving Offense*, Coetzee explores the effects of this kind of discourse on public perception: “The more draconically the state comes down on writing, the more seriously it is seen to be taking writing; the more seriously it is seen to be taking writing, the more attention is paid to writing; the more attention is paid to writing, the more the disseminative potential of writing grows.”⁴⁶²

However, the assumption that all, or even most, banned material was worth “taking seriously” is conclusively overturned upon exploration of the censorship archive itself: a huge amount of what was banned had little intrinsic value, and certainly possessed no overtly liberatory qualities as such. Were the censors extending the same “honour” to the author of *Super Celeste* that they were to André Brink or Miriam Tlali? The answer is no, of course, but immersion in the archive puts high-profile banned writers in slightly less desirable company than prevailing narratives of censorship would have it. This fact is perhaps one of the reason why research into the censorship archive remains an extractive enterprise, relying on particularly illuminating or exemplary records. The “trash” or detritus of the archive asks the researcher to tell a more complex, less appealing story, where banned literature is not automatically worth reading, and banned novelists are not automatically worthy of praise.

The dim regard in which the apartheid censors were held internationally gave publishers a lucrative route to the moral high ground. That the system frequently did suppress works of high artistic merit meant that banned writers were in good company. The sheer scale of the archive, and its chaos, somewhat muddies this perspective. The censors banned thousands of works of no clear literary merit whatsoever, and expended considerable administrative and intellectual energy in the process. What would have happened if the public perception of the system was

⁴⁶¹ Gordimer, “Banned in South Africa,” 42.

⁴⁶² Coetzee, *Giving Offense*, 43.

more closely aligned with the reality of what the censors spent much of their time and effort engaged in? Would the “honour” of banning carry the same social and political cachet if the knowledge of the censors’ daily activities was more widespread? It is very difficult to separate Coetzee’s international literary reputation, or Gordimer’s, or Brink’s, from their reputation as benighted authors fighting against a brutally efficient engine of suppression. The story of Gordimer’s struggle against a powerful foe takes on a slightly different cast when it is understood that that same foe spent considerable amount of energy and time on the crafting of a report on *The Soulsucker*, a novel about a galactic spider “who can change into a beautiful woman at will.”⁴⁶³ Properly situated in an archive of the tawdry and the banal, would the story of *Burger’s Daughter’s* banning and unbanning have the same triumphant quality?

Of course, there is no way to definitively gauge the precise effects of a banning on a writer’s reputation; there are too many variables which make it difficult to isolate this factor, too many phases in “the circuit that books follow.”⁴⁶⁴ Still, it is worth asking the pertinent question posed by Coetzee in *Giving Offense*, enquiring into “whether writers under censorship are wholly disinterested in presenting themselves as embattled and outnumbered, confronting a gigantic foe.”⁴⁶⁵ As with Gordimer’s seemingly contradictory statements and actions discussed in the previous section, Coetzee’s publishing history shows how difficult it was to avoid this kind of self-presentation, because of the way censorship insinuated itself into the process.

In a 1975 letter that Coetzee wrote to Peter Randall, the editor at Ravan Press, Coetzee asked about Ravan’s potential response in the event that his upcoming novel, *In the Heart of the Country*, were to be banned. Coetzee noted the novel’s “potentially undesirable” elements, anticipating that it would be banned on the grounds that it “(1) impairs race relations (2) it is obscene etc.” His questions to Randall included the following:

If you were not prepared, in principle, to submit any MS to the PCB, would you be prepared to publish a book which...stood a good chance of having official action taken against it? To what extent would considerations like these influence your decisions on form of publication, size of printing etc. To what extent would the (presumably

⁴⁶³ See Appendix 14.

⁴⁶⁴ Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 122

⁴⁶⁵ Coetzee, *Giving Offense*, 44.

beneficial) repercussions of banning on overseas publications and sales enter into consideration?⁴⁶⁶

As David Attwell observes, “as early as 1975, before he had completed his second novel, censorship was a factor in a web of interrelated issues that he was pondering.”⁴⁶⁷ For Coetzee, it seems to have been self-evident that banning would have a positive impact on overseas sales. In the same letter, Coetzee asked Randall “to what extent would such a risky act of publishing have to be insured by prior agreements with publishers overseas? (There is a moral tightrope one has to walk here.)”⁴⁶⁸ The publishing history of *In the Heart of the Country* has been discussed in detail by McDonald, Attwell and Wittenberg, but some particulars are worth recounting here. After a sustained correspondence with Randall, in which Coetzee appeared to struggle to balance “political calculation on one hand and profitability on the other,”⁴⁶⁹ Coetzee informed Randall of his decision to publish with the London-based Secker & Warburg, a decision which meant reaching a wide international audience.⁴⁷⁰ Secker & Warburg was initially unwilling to properly distribute the novel in South Africa if there was a possibility that it would be banned,⁴⁷¹ but in mid-1977 they sent a consignment to Cape Town, where it was embargoed and referred to the Directorate of Publications for a decision.⁴⁷² In response, Secker released a sensational press statement that was immediately picked up by the South African media. As Wittenberg observes, “In highlighting the politically incendiary aspects of the book in their press release to the South African media ... it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Secker & Warburg were deliberately attempting to foment public controversy.”⁴⁷³ While conceding that it is impossible to definitively ascertain Secker’s motives, Wittenberg hazards that “a high-profile confrontation with the state along the lines of the *Magersfontein* debacle would enable them to occupy the moral high ground - and generate publicity for international sales.”⁴⁷⁴ Secker, in other words, was participating in the kind of valorising discourse which paints censored writers as heroic, and which relies on the assumption that a publication is worth reading because it has been banned.

⁴⁶⁶ Coetzee Papers, Letter to Peter Randall, 27 June 1975, quoted in Attwell, *Coetzee and the Life of Writing*, 89.

⁴⁶⁷ Attwell, *Coetzee and the Life of Writing*, 89.

⁴⁶⁸ Coetzee Papers, Letter to Peter Randall, 27 June 1975, quoted in Attwell, *Coetzee and the Life of Writing*, 89.

⁴⁶⁹ Attwell, *Coetzee & The Life of Writing*, 89.

⁴⁷⁰ Wittenberg, “The Taint of the Censor,” 139.

⁴⁷¹ Attwell, *Coetzee & The Life of Writing*, 90.

⁴⁷² Wittenberg, “The Taint of the Censor,” 141.

⁴⁷³ Wittenberg, “The Taint of the Censor,” 142.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

The story of Coetzee's facing "the dark-suited, bald-headed censor, with his pursed lips and red pen and his irritability" is easy to use, and easy to follow. As McDonald observes, this story is premised on the widely held perception that that censorship bureaucracy was "primarily a manifestation of the government's paranoia about the printed word and that the censors were simply unlitrary bureaucrats."⁴⁷⁵ On the other hand, the story of Coetzee facing a squad of writers and "literary experts" who were determined to pass his books is slightly more complex, and requires a reconsideration of some long-maintained ideas. As noted by Wittenberg, the publications committee that examined *In the Heart of the Country* "comprised university academics (F. C. Fensham, a retired professor of Semitic Languages, and H. van der Merwe Scholtz, professor of Afrikaans, and colleague at UCT), as well as the well-known Afrikaans writer Anna M. Louw."⁴⁷⁶ Louw and Scholtz had both campaigned vigorously for the passing of *Magersfontein*, and were similarly assiduous in their handling of Coetzee's novel.

In considering the links between censorship and canonisation, it is crucial to stress that while censorship or the threat of it might have had an unexpectedly positive impact on the reception of a writer like Coetzee, it had an unmitigatedly negative affect on the careers of countless black South African writers. Gordimer, Coetzee, and Brink were all white, and public outrage over bannings was generally provoked by the suppression of a white writer (as in the outcry over *Magersfontein*, or *Kennis van die Aand*, or *Burger's Daughter*). A white writer did not have to contend with the forces that a black writer did. For many black writers, censorship was not a discrete entity, but rather one part of a system that existed to oppress them. As de Lange observes, "the different approaches writers used to cope with the system depended on their cultural and political position in the society,"⁴⁷⁷ which was, of course, determined largely by race. It is crucial to acknowledge this when discussing the canonisation of banned writers under apartheid. Acknowledging censorship's occasionally beneficial effects for white writers means considering the devastating impact on the hundreds of black writers who were subject to a far more vicious and comprehensive level of suppression, and acknowledging that white writers' success necessarily came at the cost of black writers' success.

The following section further delves into differences between censorship's effects on black and white writers and their respective outputs. It examines some vexed and contradictory notions

⁴⁷⁵ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 316.

⁴⁷⁶ Wittenberg, "The Taint of the Censor," 144.

⁴⁷⁷ De Lange, *Muzzled Muse*, 3.

about the “place” of literature in apartheid South Africa, looking at how arguments for the protection of literature as a prized category were met with equally forceful arguments regarding literature’s social utility, and showing how craftsmanship came, in some circles, to be equated with complicity, or what Bethlehem calls “the crime of escapism.”⁴⁷⁸ That the censors and some sectors of the white liberal-literary establishment shared some ideas of literature’s function is not in itself a condemnation of that establishment, of course. It does, however, demand an inquiry into what the backlash or response to this might have been among black writers and readers.

5.5 Craftsmanship and Complicity

Perhaps the best entry point into this discussion is a consideration of the question of audience, a query forcefully prompted by writer Adrian Mitchell’s 1966 review of Gordimer’s *The Late Bourgeois World*:

It is probably impossible to write a novel about South Africa which will be directly useful to South Africans. Under the present censorship such a book would be unobtainable, except by political exiles who are usually too busy campaigning or collecting plain facts to worry much about literature.⁴⁷⁹

With presumably the best of intentions, Mitchell’s review unwittingly restated one of the censors’ key governing assumptions: that “literature” existed in a realm entirely distinct from politics and as such would only be “used” by those who had no interest in political matters. This section looks at the ways in which this aestheticist assumption expressed itself across South Africa’s literary landscape, where a stark division was made between “plain facts” and “literature,” between that which was useful and that which was beautiful. The review made this putative distinction plain: “In attempting an almost direct assault, rather than the more oblique approach of her short stories, Miss Gordimer has taken a necessary risk, both in the social and literary sense. It is when she abandons precision for rhetoric that the book sags stylistically.”⁴⁸⁰ In his review, Mitchell summarised the two distinct perspectives from which the value of anti-apartheid works were often assessed: from a didactic perspective or from an aesthetic perspective; as a document of injustice or as a work of art.

⁴⁷⁸ Bethlehem, “A Primary Need,” 373.

⁴⁷⁹ Adrian Mitchell, “The Late Bourgeois World,” *New York Times*, 11 September 1966, <http://www.nytimes.com/1966/09/11/books/gordimer-bourg.html?mcubz=3>.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Many black writers entirely rejected the vision which underpinned this argument. The insistence that the literary existed within an aestheticised sphere, stripped of politics, was met with the equally adamant insistence that the function of literature was to instruct, that to focus on “craftsmanship” was to ignore what was important. This position was starkly articulated by the poet, Keorapetse Kgositse: “In a situation of oppression, there are no choices beyond didactic writing: either you are a tool of oppression or an instrument of liberation.”⁴⁸¹ The poet Oswald Mtshali asserted a similar stance, and took it further, associating writerly embellishment with passivity at best, complicity at worst: “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.”⁴⁸² Siphso Sepamla, the poet, put the imperative to truth-telling in direct opposition to the imperatives of the Western canon: “It is important to be aware that the present-day Black south African writer always expresses immediate experiences. Your Dostoyevsky, your Kafka are people we are not exposed to. And again it should be borne in mind that writing relates to tradition.”⁴⁸³ The novelist Miriam Tlali drew a similar distinction between scholarly learning and lived experience, stating that “so-called critics labour under a misconception in that they say that in order to write you have to be a literary scholar.”⁴⁸⁴ For these writers, there was something specious or irrelevant about “literary fiction,” or at least literary fiction as it was defined by the censors and much of the white liberal-literary establishment. For them, the only way to tell the truth about South Africa was to reproduce the real as faithfully as possible, without “decorative” aesthetic adornment.

In “South African Writers at the Barricades,” Lewis Nkosi argued that the “naïve realism” of writers such as Siphso Sepamla and Miriam Tlali “owes a great deal to a frustrated desire to abolish any space between literature and the horrible reality of life under apartheid.”⁴⁸⁵ In an earlier, frequently-cited essay, he described the work of black writers as “journalistic fact parading outrageously as imaginative literature...it is difficult to see why we should give up the daily newspaper in favour of creative fiction, for the newspaper would tell us just as much about

⁴⁸¹ Bernth Lindfors, *Contemporary Black South African Literature: A Symposium* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1985), 81.

⁴⁸² Oswald Mtshali, “Black Poetry in South Africa,” in *Aspects of South African Literature*, ed. Christopher Heywood, (London, New York: Heinemann, 1976), 127.

⁴⁸³ Jaki Seroke, “Black Writers in South Africa: Jaki Seroke Speaks to Miriam Tlali, Siphso Sepamla and Mothobi Mutloatse after a Steering Committee Meeting of the African Writers’ Association at Khotso House” in *Ten Years of Staffrider 1978-1988*, ed. Andries Walter Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavic (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1988).

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁵ Lewis Nkosi, “South African Fiction Writers at the Barricades,” *Third World Books Review* 2, 1-2, 1986, 43.

life.”⁴⁸⁶ Almost 20 years later, Ndebele would describe the work of “the average African writer” in similarly stark terms, arguing that the writer “produces an art that is grounded in the negation of social debasement, where scenes of social violence and a host of examples of general social oppression become ends in themselves...the only reader faculty engaged is the faculty of recognition.”⁴⁸⁷

In Louise Bethlehem’s “‘A Primary Need as Strong as Hunger’: The Rhetoric of Urgency in South African Literary Culture under Apartheid,” she describes in perhaps over-generalised terms what she perceives as “the overwhelmingly realist dominant of South African literary culture in English,” apparently referring primarily to the vision espoused by writers such as Kgositsile and Tlali.⁴⁸⁸ Examining debates over the morality of style in the context of what she calls “the revelatory thrust of South African literature,”⁴⁸⁹ she argues that “black criticism used the trope of urgency to counter the depoliticization of black literature in the name of a rarefied “aesthetic” allegiance.”⁴⁹⁰ Bethlehem discusses, and dismisses, the assumption that “the transparent rendering of South African life is a type of “resistance” to apartheid,”⁴⁹¹ and interrogates the assumption that the adoption of complex narrative or stylistic technique constituted a moral failure, “the crime of escapism.”⁴⁹² She views this “commitment to literary truth-telling” as inherently restrictive, arguing that the moralising framing of questions of style severely constrains “the range of discursive forms available to literary production in English.”⁴⁹³

Wittenberg views this imperative as thoroughly destructive, in fact explicitly comparing it to the pressures applied by the censors. In his discussion of Coetzee’s work, Wittenberg argues that “as a South African author pressures impinged on his writing either in the form of repressive state censorship or, equally problematically, in the call to arms for a more politically engaged artistic practice in the service of the anti-apartheid ‘struggle.’”⁴⁹⁴ While it is perhaps inappropriate to draw any kind of moral or practical equivalence between official censorship and unofficial expectations, it is clear that the urgency of the political moment resulted in the pressure on

⁴⁸⁶ Lewis Nkosi, “Fiction by Black South Africans,” in *Still Beating the Drum: Critical Perspectives on Lewis Nkosi*, ed. Lindy Stiebel and Liz Gunner (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 246.

⁴⁸⁷ Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, 32.

⁴⁸⁸ Louise Bethlehem, “‘A Primary Need as Strong as Hunger’: The Rhetoric of Urgency in South African Literary Culture under Apartheid,” *Poetics Today* 22:2 (Summer 2001), 365.

⁴⁸⁹ Bethlehem, “A Primary Need,” 367.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 366.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 375.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 365.

⁴⁹⁴ Wittenberg, “The Taint of the Censor,” 134.

writers to put their talents to use in the service of the struggle. For those (mostly) black writers and critics who argued that the urgency of the political situation under apartheid meant that “craftsmanship” was not an immediate priority, and that there was a distinction to be drawn between “plain facts” on the one hand and “literature” on the other, writers who *did* evince a commitment to craftsmanship were viewed with suspicion.

A.J. Coetzee’s despairing exhortation is worth restating here: “One feels inclined to advise our authors: be cryptic, write complicated, go underground.”⁴⁹⁵ These tactics, for Coetzee, would assist writers in evading the censors’ gaze. In other words, the aestheticist assumptions held by the censors *and* some liberal-literary custodians can be seen to have led to the establishment of an opposing literary orthodoxy. “Write complicated” and comply, or tell the truth and resist. In this forced, false binary, “discriminating readers” are by definition apolitical; “serious” people who “love literature,” in A.J. Coetzee’s revealing formulation, cannot simultaneously be “anarchists.”⁴⁹⁶ Similarly, Mitchell’s assumption that political exiles were “too busy campaigning or collecting plain facts to worry much about literature” is a telling indication of the role literature was seen to play in South Africa, and an even more telling indication of who literature’s audience was perceived to be.

It can be difficult to trace the censors’ impact in a field that is already so riven with conflicting demands and ideologies, but the intervention made by Mqolozana at the Franschhoek Literary Festival shows how, in post-apartheid South Africa, the term “literary establishment” is still, to a large extent, synonymous with “the white literary establishment.” We can read this as evidence of the durability of the literary infrastructure the censors helped to create. This durability has long been perceived as indestructibility. However, as the concluding chapter will discuss in greater depth, recent campaigns to build an alternative to the infrastructure associated with “the white literary establishment” have suggested a future in which that institution can indeed be dismantled.

5.6 Conclusion

In *Redacted*, Abel describes the ultimate goal of the censor: “Though in practice they work on material, their true aim is always ideational.”⁴⁹⁷ It is clear that apartheid censorship’s effects were

⁴⁹⁵ Coetzee, “Beginning of a Revolt,” 11.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

not limited to those delineated by the legislation. Many South African writers have spoken of how the censor “forces his way into the intimacy of the writing transaction,” encouraging self-censorship and throttling expression in unnameable ways.⁴⁹⁸ This chapter has named some of those unnameables, looking at some of the system’s various silencing and distorting effects, and attempting to dismantle the myths which enabled them. A variety of complicities were made in order to live with censorship, accommodations that range from active participation with the regime (in the case of the letter-writers) to compromises that reveal an underlying ambivalence about the necessity of *some* kind of censorship. The previous chapter argued that the censorship archive can be viewed as a monument to inefficiency and waste of intellectual and bureaucratic resources. Its chaos and excess are, among other things, an insight into the state’s inability to turn the censoring of literature into a routine aspect of surveillance. Through analysis of previously undiscussed material, this chapter argued that the archive it is also an artefact of a system that “worked,” in that it was widely perceived to be effective. The correspondence between the censors and members of the public, and the censors and members of other government departments, form part of what Ben Kafka calls “the raw materials of power,” and may tell us more about how the system actually operated than legislation or official statements can.⁴⁹⁹ In *The Demon of Writing*, Kafka describes paperwork as “all those documents produced in response to a demand – real or imagined – by the state.”⁵⁰⁰ Much, if not most, of the primary material discussed in this thesis was produced to meet a series of imaginary demands, and this chapter has constituted an exploration into what some of those demands might have been, and why they were so difficult to resist.

Coetzee’s warning is worth restating here:

the more cautious among us may want to draw lines between apartheid legislation, which can indeed be dismantled, apartheid practices, which cannot be dismantled but can be combated, and apartheid thinking, which is likely to resist coercion, as thinking generally does.⁵⁰¹

Beginning with an interrogation of censorship’s embeddedness within wider public and bureaucratic culture, and ending with a discussion of opposing literary orthodoxies, this chapter

⁴⁹⁸ Coetzee, *Giving Offense*, 38.

⁴⁹⁹ Kafka, “Paperwork,” 341.

⁵⁰⁰ Kafka, *The Demon of Writing*, 10.

⁵⁰¹ Coetzee, “The Mind of Apartheid”, 2.

has shown the difficulty, or impossibility, of resisting censorship's coercion. It has also looked closely at some persistent myths, notions sustained by a valorising discourse which insists on the heroism of banned writers and the brutish stupidity of the censors. The idea that that which is censored has intrinsic value collapses upon exploration of the censorship archive, as does the burnished image of the writer facing off against a mighty foe. Continuing to repeat these myths, which reside so amiably within linear narratives of resistance, can be seen as another form of silencing. Well-turned stories about the inevitable triumph of art over philistine repression do not acknowledge the havoc the censors wreaked. We might wish that censorship's effects are no longer felt, but this chapter shows how deeply the censors worked themselves into the fabric of South African public and literary culture. Mark Sanders argues that throughout "its lifespan, apartheid generated a common ensemble of complicities. These range from support of specific policies and participation in certain institutions, to mental colonization."⁵⁰² We might wish that complicity with the system was limited only to the kind of people who wrote letters to the Board demanding that *Franny and Zooey* be removed from the shelves, or who expressed the wish to drown the author of a science-fiction novel. However, this is quite evidently not the case, and it is important to refute these myths, in order that we may attain a deeper understanding of censorship's consequences. Suggesting that the effects of censorship are limited to the past means allowing the censors to erase themselves out of history.

The censorship archive is one of the more overtly material results of the state's effort to make some stories impossible to read and, more destructively, make other stories impossible to tell. Abel argues that "the realms of discourse obliterated by censorship can never be known; our only access to the deep havoc inflicted by censors is what remains after they have done their work."⁵⁰³ It is important, then, to look at "what remains." Starting with material from that archive, this chapter has moved on to examination of the less tangible evidence of their project's footprint. In contemplating these effects, we are obliged to reflect upon the immeasurable loss of "the unwritten words, poems, essays, and novels that would never come into being because of the existence of censorship."⁵⁰⁴ We are further, and perhaps more uncomfortably, obliged to examine the shape and character of what remains, the words, poems, and essays that *did* come into being because of, or in spite of, the existence of censorship, and ask how the censorship

⁵⁰² Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 5.

⁵⁰³ Abel, *Redacted*, 1.

⁵⁰⁴ Jonathan Abel, *Redacted: The Archives of Censorship in Transwar Japan* (Davis: University of California Press, 2012), 20.

system's attempts to establish orthodoxies of taste and literary value registers in those works. To assess the damage they have done, we are required to acknowledge their role in the canonisation of some banned writers, and accept that their literary reputation might be impossible from their presentation of themselves as "embattled and outnumbered, confronting a gigantic foe."⁵⁰⁵ The nature of the "deep havoc" wreaked by the apartheid censors is usually assessed by looking at their more overt efforts of suppression, and at the names of the writers they silenced. This chapter has demonstrated how that violence was enacted through a variety of channels, and how the effects or materialisation of that violence is far more difficult to isolate, expunge, or eradicate.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 44.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In her recounting of her efforts to uncover documentary artefacts of the Soweto Uprising, Pohlandt-McCormick describes an experience that will be familiar to many researchers who have spent time in South African state archives: “There are many brown manila files in the archives that, while retaining the shape of the documents they must once have held, are now filled with only a small slip of paper upon which are written the ominous words ‘Vernietig/Destroyed.’”⁵⁰⁶ While the brown manila files in the censorship archives are filled to bursting capacity with documents, the message “written” on those files is, in some ways, the same as what is written on the files discovered by Pohlandt-McCormick. In the most practical terms, many of the censorship files contain a record of what has been destroyed: the literature that the apartheid state deemed it necessary to suppress. Unlike the files described by Pohlandt-McCormick, however, the censorship files also contain a record of *how* that destruction was enacted. Instead of a few ominous words, there are thousands of words describing, in detail, how the suppression of literature took place: the rules used, the guidelines ignored, the assumptions invoked, the decisions made. They also describe, or make visible, the anxiety, insecurity, and sense of futility that the duty of suppressing literature provoked in those tasked with carrying it out. The files in the censorship archive make visible the results of the clash between official mandate and unofficial feeling; the clash between the conviction that “in matters of taste, there can be no disputes,” and the conviction that it was possible to establish an authoritative means of adjudicating such disputes. These clashes resulted in an archive that is characterised by material and emotional excess, a particularly dramatic instance of what Stoler describes as “the surplus archives produce in spite of their voiced intent.”⁵⁰⁷

Moore argues that “censors of literature need to know what [literature] is, and ‘successful’ regimes of censorship can be seen to conscientiously set in place institutional and administrative taxonomies of classification that produce working definitions of literature”⁵⁰⁸ Even without taking into the account the fact that the architects of the system never provided any guidelines as to how the censors might go about establishing those taxonomies, or even fully acknowledged

⁵⁰⁶ Pohlandt-McCormick, “In Good Hands,” 299.

⁵⁰⁷ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 252.

⁵⁰⁸ Moore, “Surrealism to Pulp,” 107.

the need for them, the character of the apartheid censorship archive is testament to the difficulty of producing a working definition of literature. While the censors managed to establish some key guiding assumptions and reading strategies, they were rarely mutually agreed upon, and never instituted in a way that would make the system predictable. Despite their energetic attempts to establish themselves as discerning arbiters of the literary, the documents they left behind reveal the emptiness of their claims, as well as the small, petty insecurities which underpinned them. They were unwilling to act, or incapable of acting, as a cohesive bureaucratic body. That they were *unwilling* to act as a collective might perhaps be attributed to their personal disagreements and resentments, and their differing aesthetic outlooks. That they were *incapable* of acting as a collective can be attributed to the inadequacies and incoherencies of the legislation which guided them. As we have seen, this is but one way that the system can be seen as unsuccessful.

In spite of their image as efficient bureaucrats working under the auspices of a brilliantly administered system, the censors were ineffective in many ways, most strikingly in their embrace of the trivial and their willingness, or even compulsion, to expend unnecessary energy. Close analysis of censors' judgements on texts of little political or social consequence is an important way of communicating the zeal with which the censors embraced the trivial. Although the "trash" of the archive might appear to offer an unattractive yield, full of excess and waste and irrelevancies, it is a valuable and irrefutable counter-argument to the claim that apartheid bureaucracy was efficient above all else. It is additionally valuable for what it tells us about the nature of the taxonomies and classifications the censors tried to establish in order to assess literature. In their reports, we see the censors determinedly hunting down offence, but we also observe them attempting to identify and isolate literary value. Moore argues that "in working to define offence, censorship inevitably identifies, limits, and polices what can be seen to defend itself self-evidently against such charges, that is, literary merit."⁵⁰⁹ As previous chapters have shown, the question of what constituted a self-evident defence was rarely answered to unanimous satisfaction, but it was one that was asked throughout the system's existence as the censors developed and maintained their putative status as guardians of literature.

These notions of literary guardianship were in many ways echoed by those who professed themselves to be opposed to censorship on principle. Looking at those instances in which an argument against censorship revealed itself to be an argument for the protection of the literary as a prized category means acknowledging what McDonald describes as the "tawdry ...

⁵⁰⁹ Moore, "Surrealism to Pulp," 106.

compromises some self-declared South African liberals were willing to make to protect their idea of literature.”⁵¹⁰ It also means conceding that, for many writers, censorship’s coercive effects were far more powerful than we might wish to acknowledge. At least some of censorship’s power resided not necessarily in bureaucratic efficiency or the application of force, but in the series of settlements and accommodations made with it. Similarly, when considering the occasionally beneficial effects that a banning would have on a writer, as well as the ways in which international publishers capitalised on this opportunity, we confront the fact that we cannot separate censorship from canonisation, as much as we might wish to.

In *Along the Archival Grain*, Stoler asks what a “rough and charmless” colonial history might look like. It might, she suggests, “linger over marginalia that neither fits nor coheres.” It might “dispense with heroes.”⁵¹¹ Stoler is of course referring to the challenges of narrativising the material held in the Dutch colonial archive, but her suggestions are equally applicable here. The difficulty of the archive hinders smooth, easy retellings of the story of apartheid censorship, but to relate the story without including that which is messy, or inconvenient, is to misrepresent it. The censorship archive is far more banal and disorderly than the popular image of the censor allows. The realities of complicity with the system are far less heroic, far less charming than linear narratives of resistance would have it. The idea that that which is censored has intrinsic value collapses upon exploration of the censorship archive, as does the burnished image of the writer facing off against a mighty foe. The censors banned thousands of works of no clear literary merit whatsoever, and expended considerable administrative and intellectual energy in the process. What would have happened if the public perception of the system was more closely aligned with the reality of what the censors spent much of their time and effort engaged in? Would the “honour” of banning carry the same social and political cachet if the knowledge of the censors’ daily activities was more widespread?

A focus on high-profile cases does not tell us enough about the nature of the censors’ daily activities. A focus on legislation is similarly insufficient, because the censors so frequently departed from what that legislation instructed them to do. A focus on numbers of books banned is inadequate, because it gives the impression that censorship is something that can clearly be comprehended by an examination of the numbers. It has a beginning and an end; its effects are

⁵¹⁰ McDonald, *Literature Police*, 171.

⁵¹¹ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 252.

“knowable, external, tangible.”⁵¹² This kind of clear definition of censorship is attractive, a comforting story we tell ourselves about the past. It reassures us that censorship is *in* the past, and that while its effects may linger today, it is something that can be consigned to history. By telling the story of apartheid censorship through high-profile cases, or legislation, or numbers, or by telling ourselves that the censors were stupid, we tell ourselves in different ways that censorship was defeated. In examining some of censorship’s more insidious effects, and the ill-fitting marginalia that the archive contains, this study questions that comforting story. In suggesting some ways we can trace the impact of censorship on today’s cultural and political landscape, the next section unsettles it further. As Abel argues, “the implicit effects of the censor will have a spectral afterlife even after the censor and the censored have presumably passed. This is another way of saying censorship never dies.”⁵¹³

6.2 Using the Archive Today

One of the most important tasks for my study has been to use the archive as a means of examining how censorship and opposition to it shaped the conditions of literary possibility in South Africa today. In their reports, it is clear that the censors reliably envisioned the South African reading public as white. Their duty, as they saw it, was to protect the legally imagined white reader from harm, guard her against radicalisation, and nourish a national literature that would ideally reflect and enhance her legally imagined values. A preoccupation with the reading habits of legally imagined white readers was contrasted with an abiding lack of interest in the views of black readers, real or imagined, to the point where some censors evinced a disbelief that such views could even exist. As well as silencing black writers the censors invisibilised black readers. As late as 1980, when the system was widely believed to be pursuing a more tolerant or “enlightened” form of control, it was possible for a censor to write the following, about a short story collection written by a black South African writer: “almost all the ‘stories’ are readily acceptable and worth reading, especially as they would give the wider South African reading public intimate insight into the black urban and peri-urban way of life.”⁵¹⁴ As late as 1980, the censor’s definition of “the reading public” did not include those who might have first-hand experience of “the black way of life.”

⁵¹² Abel, *Redacted*, 37.

⁵¹³ Abel, *Redacted*, 14.

⁵¹⁴ IDP 3/86 P80/3/113.

The near-total suppression of work by black prose writers meant that anti-apartheid literary fiction written by white liberal writers was perhaps given disproportionate attention. The heroism conferred on a white banned writer sometimes meant that her account of South Africa's political situation was taken as authoritative, and the mode of expression she chose to use was taken as the most appropriate means of telling the story she needed to tell. Whatever their intention, the censors amplified the voices of white liberal writers, to a local as well as an overseas audience. One of the many consequences of this is that, as Ndebele suggests, "one can possibly assert with some confidence...that the average literate African's perception and conceptualisation of the African's predicament in South Africa has been fashioned by the white liberal establishment."⁵¹⁵ Chapter Five discussed the censors' role in tainting or contaminating notions of the literary, so that these ideas came to be associated with passive complicity and liberal acquiescence to a white supremacist system. It is important to view the current condemnation and rejection of South Africa's "white literary establishment" and the traditions of "white literary fiction" in light of this.

Mgqolozana's intervention at the 2015 Franschhoek Literary Festival (FLF), in which he commented on the overwhelming whiteness of the festival's audience, was far more extensive than a critique of the demographic make-up of one literary festival. As he stated in an interview a year later, in response to a question regarding the audience at Durban's Time of the Writer Festival (TOTW), "there might be 20 more black people in the audience at time of the writer, but that's not it, we are talking about a system here. A system within which TOTW existed and still exists. One which I chose to define as the colonial literary system."⁵¹⁶ Mgqolozana's call to "decolonise" the system is similar to the demands made by student movements such as Rhodes Must Fall, whose focus is on the decolonisation of the tertiary education system. At a panel at the FLF, Mgqolozana explicitly made this comparison:

It's the same argument as the Rhodes Must Fall kids are making at UCT. They are not asking the university to change, because that would mean tweaking a few things and it remains the same, fundamentally. So now they are talking about the complete decolonisation, and that means a demolishing of the entire system, which would provide

⁵¹⁵ Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, 30.

⁵¹⁶ Sosibo Kwanele, "Thando Mgqolozana on how we can decolonise SA literature," *Mail & Guardian*, 14 March 2016, <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-03-14-author-mgqolozana-how-can-we-decolonise-sa-literature>.

us with an opportunity to imagine something new, something different. For me, that's what I wish and hope will happen to this system.⁵¹⁷

As previous chapters have demonstrated, the boundaries of the colonial or apartheid literary establishment expanded to include many white liberal writers, even as they evinced their opposition to apartheid. A rejection of “the colonial literary system” is not thus limited to a denunciation of the work of apologists for the apartheid state. It is, instead, a rejection of the literary infrastructure that the censors helped to create, and which many liberal writers participated in. That Mqolozana makes no distinction between pre-and post-apartheid white literary systems can perhaps be seen as evidence of the durability of that infrastructure, and of the lingering footprint of censorship.

The study of literary censorship is one way of studying the means by which a national literary sensibility or orthodoxy is created – studying the apartheid censorship system from within has shown how we may trace a particular South African intellectual genealogy. Literary analysis of contemporary novels about South Africa provides another means of continuing to trace the politics and morality of literary taste as they develop. The following brief analysis of the structure and narrative strategies of Patrick Flanery's *Absolution* considers how we may read or register censorship's afterlife in literature. There are many contemporary South African novels which could be utilised in a literary analysis of this nature, but *Absolution* might be seen as a particular apposite object of study, because it is *about* apartheid censorship, and evidently in close dialogue with the work of Gordimer and Coetzee.

The novel centres on the life of Clare Wald, a celebrated anti-apartheid novelist with a strong resemblance to Nadine Gordimer. At the beginning of the novel, Sam Leroux, a South African journalist living abroad, comes home to write the biography of Clare Wald. As well as the interviews, Sam is doing his own research into state censorship, examining reports in the Public Archives (and offering a further reason for *Absolution's* suitability as a case study here.) This conscious reference to the system is emphasised by deeper resonances and modes of representation, which fascinatingly echo and mirror some of the censor's key aesthetic assumptions, and demand that we look closely at the modes of representation being performed. As we have seen, the censorship system displayed a clear preference for works which were “purged of the political,” where the politically controversial was neutralised via temporal or

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

spatial distancing, or where narrative complexity rendered it “inaccessible” for most readers. It is fascinating to examine the ways in which the structure of *Absolution* has gestured towards these preferences, shifting into universal, timeless modes of representation precisely at moments where the politically controversial is rendered.⁵¹⁸

In contrast to the brief moments of spatial or temporal distancing, the novel is on the whole spatially specific. But in key moments to do with prisons and imprisonment, a formal shift occurs. One of these moments takes place in the present, while the others take place in the past. In the present, Wald’s house is broken into. She calls the police, who come and investigate, and suspicion falls unexpectedly on Wald. She is taken to a prison and interrogated for hours, without being given a reason why she is being held there. The person who manages these “interrogation” scenes is, at first, a faceless police officer: “the uniformed officer who was leading the investigation.”⁵¹⁹ It could be read as significant that, in stark contrast to the detailed physical descriptions of the novel’s other characters (“her unruly squall of blonde hair has silvered, and though it’s thin and brittle it still has some of the old luster. Her abdomen has spread”⁵²⁰), the police officer is not described in any physical detail at all. There is something anonymous about the character, something which compounds the surreal quality of the scenes. It is interesting to compare this to the description in the report on *Waiting for the Barbarians* (discussed in Chapter Three), where the censor argued that while the “symbolism” might pose a problem, it could only be “extracted” with diligence, nullifying any potential threat; or the report on *The Conservationist*, where the novel was judged to be undesirable because “the line between fact and fiction, reality and imagination in the central figure is not always easy to draw.” The surreal atmosphere of the scene marks an abrupt departure from the texture of the rest of the novel. This departure from realism is striking when we consider what is being depicted; the novel uses a series of distancing devices in a scene of police abuse – something the censors might have viewed as a politically controversial moment.

In the scenes set in the past, Wald imagines what has happened to her disappeared daughter, an anti-apartheid activist. These sections detail the circumstances of the daughter’s capture and imprisonment and use a number of formal devices are used which seem to place the “political” at a distance. It is not clear *where* the daughter has been taken. In a novel full of specific

⁵¹⁸ Lyster, “Space and Censorship in Nadine Gordimer: A Literary Geography,” 55.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

descriptions of place (We drive around into the City Bowl, park on Kloof Street...we decide to walk up the hill to Saigon...we pass Hoerskool Jan Van Riebeeck’),⁵²¹ the scenes featuring the daughter’s torture and imprisonment seem to take place nowhere, or in the realm of the universal. Like the present-day prison scenes, these ones have a kind of timeless quality: “You could not recall how many days it had been, perhaps five, perhaps as many as fifteen hundred. You had been deprived of any means of recording the passage of time.”⁵²² Time in these scenes is oddly suspended and non-specific.

In a scene toward the novel’s end, Wald’s daughter’s death is described in the future tense – she is going to be dragged out to sea in a cage, and drown. The chapter ends as follows: “Is this how you end? It is my nightmare. I dream it every night, every hour, have dreamed it for two decades now. It is all I can see.”⁵²³ It is at this point in the novel that it becomes clear that all of the scenes featuring Wald’s daughter took place only in Wald’s imagination. The scenes which are most concerned with political activity, and most concerned with the crimes of the apartheid state, are also the most “universal,” with the most oddly timeless, placeless quality. These scenes stand in stark contrast to the realism of the rest of the novel. Examined in light of the censorship system’s treatment of Gordimer in particular, these moments might be read as an allusion to the coercive power of censorship as South African writers perceived it.

The censors left an ineradicable stain on South Africa’s literary landscape. This is not, of course, their only legacy. Ambivalence about censorship and arguments over where the final decision rests continue to fuel debates around free speech in post-apartheid South Africa. As McDonald observes, public response to the so-called “Secrecy Bill,” as well as the proposed Media Appeals Tribunal means that direct comparison to apartheid-era censorship laws has become a feature of local and international headlines over the past seven years.⁵²⁴ McDonald asks, “Is it really the case that the most recent threats to the freedom of expression constitute a return to apartheid censorship or worse?”⁵²⁵ Though he argues that “there is, quite evidently, no moral equivalence between what happened then and what is happening now,”⁵²⁶ these comparisons continue to be made, significantly with reference to the following two cases: the May 2012 furore over the

⁵²¹ Ibid., 66.

⁵²² Flanery, *Absolution*, 182-183.

⁵²³ Ibid., 185.

⁵²⁴ Peter McDonald, “The present is another country: A comment on the 2010 media freedom debate,” *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 32, no.2, 122.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 123.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 123.

attempt to classify Brett Murray's *The Spear*, and the November 2017 controversy over, and response to, the state's attempts to suppress the circulation of Jacques Pauw's *The President's Keepers: Those Keeping Zuma in Power and Out of Prison*.⁵²⁷ It is disingenuous and alarmist to suggest that post-apartheid attitudes towards freedom of expression are "as bad as" apartheid-era publications control, but, if nothing else, the public response in both cases is a sharp reminder of censorship's place in the public imaginary, and of the way the spectre of it prompts a valorising discourse very similar to the one propounded during the era of the apartheid censors.

The Film and Publications Board (FPB) today is managed by the Department of Communication (and before this the Department of Home Affairs), instead of being under the guardianship of the judiciary – an unfortunate reiteration of the apartheid-era insistence that the final decision over the fate of a controversial text should not rest with the courts, but with other self-appointed guardians. The controversy over *The Spear*, for instance, is a relatively recent example of the consequences of this reiteration. *The Spear*, which satirically references the iconographic style of Soviet propaganda posters, depicts former President Jacob Zuma standing in heroic Leninist pose with his genitals exposed. The painting was exhibited at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg as part of Murray's exhibition *Hail to the Thief II* – a title understood to be a reference to perceived corruption and looting by the country's ruling party. While all of the pieces in the exhibition were critical of the ANC, *The Spear* attracted the most attention. On the 13 May, three days after the opening of *Hail to the Thief II*, an article about the exhibition was published in the Johannesburg newspaper *City Press*. Four days later, the ANC issued a press release which expressed strong condemnation of the work, describing it as obscene, vulgar, indecent, and defamatory.⁵²⁸ The ANC, and lawyers acting for Zuma in a personal capacity, announced their intention to appeal to the High Court to have the painting removed from the gallery. The jurisdiction of the 1996 Film and Publications Act specifically excludes both newspapers and the broadcast media. Despite this, the press release also demanded that *City Press* remove the image from its website. When the newspaper refused, the ANC released a statement in which it condemned *City Press*'s decision in language that echoed apartheid-era pronouncements, describing the decision as one that "did not belong to our shared democratic dispensation and values."⁵²⁹ Like the apartheid censors, the ANC insisted on the importance of a

⁵²⁷ Jacques Pauw, *The President's Keepers: Those Keeping Zuma in Power and Out of Prison* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2017).

⁵²⁸ Jackson Mthembu, "ANC outraged by Brett Murray's depiction of President Jacob Zuma," African National Congress Spokesperson, 17 May 2012.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

politicised “shared” public morality and system of values when judging art, amplified the threat posed by a text, and emphasised the vulnerability of a public who needed protection from the improper or indecent. As *The Spear* case progressed, yet more similarities were revealed.

The FPB announced its intention to “classify” the painting. The FPB’s authority to ban or suppress works is, in theory, minimal. According to the 1996 Act, the FPB is empowered to appoint teams of “classifiers” to provide a rating for a film or publication, designating the audience for which the text is appropriate. As noted above, the FBP has no jurisdiction over the press. The 1996 Act was intended to severely curtail the power of state-appointed authorities to suppress a text, and the FPB’s legislative mandate primarily concerned child pornography and protecting the rights of the vulnerable. While the 1996 Act was seen to be a triumph for freedom of expression, it was still open to abuse by those tasked with carrying it out. The 1996 Act empowers members of the FPB to evaluate submissions made by the public, and it was on this basis that they justified their move to “classify” Murray’s painting, in a denial of the accusation that the decision was politically motivated. As during apartheid, an imaginary public was invoked in order to serve the interests of the ruling party. Further similarities followed. Throughout its existence, the apartheid censorship system relied on the advocacy and vocal support of the Dutch Reformed Church, whose officials praised the system as playing a crucial role in upholding “Christian values.” The deeply conservative Afrikaner church was highly influential, and had close ties to the state. Similarly, some of the most aggressive calls for the removal of *The Spear* came from the church, or linked pressure groups. Enoch Mthembu, a spokesman for the Nazareth Baptist Church (commonly known as the Shembe church), issued a statement calling for Murray to be stoned to death for insulting the entire nation. The Shembe church has five million members, and Mthembu’s statement led to an outpouring of conservative sentiment, and threats against Murray’s life. Pressure from a religious group, and the hostile populist sentiment it stirred, impacted heavily on the FPB’s decision to have the work removed, exerting the same pressure that church groups did during the apartheid era.

The painting was classified 16N, which meant that it could not be displayed in the gallery when children were present. By this point, the painting had already been defaced by two members of the public. After the defacement (which covered up the ostensibly offensive elements of the work), the Goodman Gallery removed *The Spear* from the exhibition, meaning any “classification” of the image was moot, as it was no longer on display. However, the FPB persisted in their attempt to suppress circulation of the image, demanding that *City Press* remove it from their website.

Lawyers for the newspaper pointed out that this demand was beyond the remit of the FPB. Their subsequent comments were once again reminiscent of apartheid-era pronouncements, in their invocation of a legally imagined viewer, and in their insistence that this viewer needed to be protected. In a hearing, the FPB's chief operation's officer, Mmapula Fisha, responded to lawyers' remarks by saying that "we have always known that we don't have the authority over newspapers. But we don't fold our hands. We have to protect the children of this country."⁵³⁰ Another member of the FPB went much further, admitting almost outright that the FPB's decision was politically motivated: "If we say the committee should allow these views to stand," asked FPB legal manager Siphon Risiba in response, "what message are we sending to the entire population? ... Are we then not opening the floodgates to allow criticism of our political leaders?"⁵³¹

The Goodman Gallery immediately announced that it would appeal the decision, citing grave concern regarding freedom of expression. The case was ultimately taken to the Film and Publication Tribunal Board (a body similar to the PAB), which upheld the gallery's appeal. However significant and lasting damage had already been done to the FPB's reputation, and the spectre of censorship intruded into the cultural landscape in a way that many people had believed was impossible in a democratic South Africa. Commentators at the time pointed out that the controversy brought more attention (much of it positive) to Murray's work than it might otherwise have attracted, and that the ANC had unwittingly raised the value of his work. This final irony is one that apartheid-era banned writers and their publishers were, of course, familiar with.

The Spear case provided unsettling insights into the current leadership's attitudes regarding the necessity or inevitability of censorship, as well as public agreement with that attitude. With all its echoes of the past, the case provoked widespread discussion regarding free speech, public morality, and reanimated old questions about public vulnerability and the dignity of public office. To suggest that there is any moral equivalence to be drawn between current attempts to suppress free speech and what happened for 30 years under one of the most brutally repressive censorship regimes in history would be an act of wilfully ahistorical forgetfulness. In drawing comparisons between the two, the above has instead demonstrated the durability of the bureaucratic

⁵³⁰ Jonisayi Maromo, "Classification of 'The Spear' unnecessary, says lawyer," *Mail & Guardian*, 29 May 2012, <https://mg.co.za/article/2012-05-29-spear-hearing-not-needed>.

⁵³¹ Phillip De Wet, "The Spear: It's classified, and now up to the ombud," *Mail & Guardian*, 30 May 2012, <https://mg.co.za/article/2012-05-30-fpb-its-our-duty-to-classify-the-spear-and-suppress-criticism>.

structures that empowered apartheid censorship. It has also shown how some features of the censorship system were replicated in post-apartheid law-making, particularly the fact that the Film and Publications Board is not managed by the judiciary, a reiteration of the apartheid idea that the assessment of material potentially harmful to the state should not be handled by the theoretically impartial courts.

The 2017 controversy over attempts to suppress *The President's Keepers* did not arise from a decision made by the FPB, but nevertheless summoned the spectre of apartheid era publications control. *The President's Keepers* describes the activities of the network of aides and allies that kept former President Jacob Zuma in power. It alleges that the president and his allies abused intelligence networks and irreparably damaged the capacities of South Africa's law enforcement agencies, specifically the State Security Agency (SSA). It further alleges that Zuma failed to submit tax returns in his first five years in office, failed to declare all sources of income, and attempted to evade a vast tax bill. Much of the book focuses on allegations of lawlessness and corruption at SARS, South Africa's revenue service.

The book was published on 29 October, 2017. Three days later, the SSA's lawyers sent a "cease and desist" letter to Pauw's publishers, Tafelberg. The SSA's letter demanded that the book be recalled, in language that was at times reminiscent of apartheid-era statements:

While we do not wish to traverse each and every part of the book which is of concern to our client, as these are too many, we record that the book contains parts that are in contravention of the Intelligence Service Act, Act 65 of 2002. While our client notes the inaccuracies contained in the book, it is more concerned with those parts which are of a criminal nature and constitute a violation of the relevant intelligence statutes and thus compromise the security of the State.⁵³²

The statement that the book was both inaccurate and dangerous, echoes claims made in reports by the censors, who often banned a book on the grounds that while it was inaccurate, it could still pose a threat if it fell into the wrong hands, and thus posed a threat to the safety of the nation. The letter demanded the withdrawal of the book within five days, so that Pauw could "retract all those parts which are inaccurate, reveal our client's agents, operational methods and

⁵³² Khanyisile Ncgobo, "SSA hits #JacquesPauw, publisher with cease and desist letter," *Iol*, 3 November 2017. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/ssa-hits-jacquespauw-publisher-with-cess-and-desist-letter-11847832>.

classified documents and information.” The letter threatened to take the issue to the High Court for the purposes of granting an interdict, and to institute criminal proceedings against Pauw, in the event that the SSA’s demands were not met.

Lawyers for Pauw responded by stating that the author and his publishers would “not desist from making the book available to the public, will not withdraw the book from the market and will not retract anything therein contained.”⁵³³ Press coverage of the event suggests that the state’s threats were read as a tacit admission of guilt. Despite the fact that the book was not withdrawn, the attempts to suppress it were immediately compared to apartheid-era censorship, a rhetorical summoning of a brutish system of suppression. The anti-corruption organisation Save South Africa released the following statement: “Once our government starts ‘banning’ books and acting against authors, we are on a slippery, apartheid-style slope to full-blown censorship, the suppression of freedom of expression and the violation of our Constitution,” and the International Publishers Association described the attempts “to harass and intimidate Mr Pauw and his publisher [as] reminiscent of the old apartheid regime in South Africa.”⁵³⁴ Local and international headlines made similar comparisons.

The day after the SSA’s lawyers submitted the “cease and desist document,” pirated copies of *The President’s Keepers* began circulating on social media. Pauw’s publishers commented on this in a statement which further strengthened the connections made to apartheid censorship: “We assure the public the book is not banned and we are printing more to meet the overwhelming demand and working to get them to the shops as soon as possible.”⁵³⁵ While Pauw himself observed that there was no possibility the High Court would grant an interdict, fears that the book would be “banned” persisted. In the wake of the controversy, *The President’s Keepers* sold over 100 000 copies in print and e-book format in three weeks, breaking local and international records for sales of South African non-fiction.

Again, there can no moral equivalence between the apartheid-era banning of literature and a law enforcement agency’s failed attempt to have a book withdrawn. McDonald describes these direct historical comparisons as “just so much media polemic.”⁵³⁶ Nevertheless, *The President’s Keepers’*

⁵³³ Mhlali Ntsabo, “The President’s Keepers and apartheid-era silencing tactics,” *Daily Vox*, <http://www.thedailyvox.co.za/the-presidents-keepers-and-apartheid-era-silencing-tactics-mhlali-ntsabo/>.

⁵³⁴ Alison Flood, “South African security services move to ban exposé of Jacob Zuma government,” *Guardian*, 7 November, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/nov/07/south-african-security-ban-expose-jacob-zuma-government-jacques-pauw-the-presidents-keepers>.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ McDonald, “The Present is Another Country,” 124.

case led to grave alarm over government attempts to curtail freedom of expression, a hard-won right once seen to have been constitutive of the new South African democracy. It is impossible not to draw connections between the canonisation of banned writers during apartheid, and the fact that sales of *President's Keepers* soared in the aftermath of the controversy, with Pauw being repeatedly compared to an apartheid struggle icon. That there was no real possibility of the book being “banned” was mentioned only by the author himself, while his publishers and the press participated in a discourse discussed in the previous chapters: banned writer facing mighty foe; state as both omnisciently powerful and fathomlessly stupid; the written word as weapon; literature as resistance.

Other similarities are more disquieting. The fearful public response to the attempts to suppress *The President's Keepers* is indicative of the panic that the rhetorical summoning of censorship invokes. We are ethically obliged to make use of resources like the apartheid censorship archive in order to understand the basis for that panic, but we must also use the material in the archive to expose the fraudulence of any claim which suggest that what is happening now is as bad, or worse, than what was happening then. The scale of the archive refutes this claim. The numbers of books banned refutes it. The vicious racism and ugliness of the views espoused in countless reports refutes it. The apartheid censorship bureaucracy was expressly created to serve the interests of one of the most inhumane political regimes the world has seen. The censorship archive can be used in many ways; one of them is to serve as an enduring reminder of the evils of the past, and as refutation of any comparisons made between then and now.

6.3 Conclusion

In *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala*, Weld observes that “No transition out of authoritarian or military rule has failed to include significant debate about how to deal with the surviving records of past regimes.”⁵³⁷ In South Africa, that debate has tended to centre on how to deal with surviving records that illuminate the more overtly suppressive and brutal aspects of apartheid policy. That such archives are compromised and that many of them were destroyed in part or altogether is all the more reason to consider their use thoughtfully. Prison, police, and other records of state surveillance were initially used as weapon against those opposed to autocratic regimes, but now, as Weld argues, the function of these archives is “one of democratic opening, historical memory, and the pursuit of justice for war crimes—again using

⁵³⁷ Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 238.

archives as a weapon, but to very different ends.”⁵³⁸ The censorship archive has not yet been used in the same way. There has been no Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Literature. No prosecutions will result from immersion in the archive; nothing will be learned about where the bodies are buried. Nevertheless, we can use it to tell us something crucial about apartheid administration. We can view the archive’s material and emotional excess as an artefact of a system that was always on the verge of undoing itself, and we can perhaps take some of these conclusions and apply them to our understanding of apartheid bureaucracy in general.

The semblance of legality, of a regime being *seen* to be fastidiously implementing the law, is one way to understand why the archive was created in the first place. In this, its function was highly political, as were the operations of the censors, despite any claims made to the contrary. That it was inefficient did not matter; its usefulness lay in the fact of its existence. Looking at how a system persists in spite of its manifest futility and unfeasibility is one way of understanding how apartheid continued to function. The records produced by the censorship bureaucracy can be “read” in terms of the wider characteristics of the apartheid state; specifically, the limited ambition and capacity of the state to understand its population. Documents which are retained for little apparent practical purpose, except to provide a record of accountability that is never called to account, can be interpreted as products of an institution which wants to record, but not to know. The archive shows us how integral the technocratic ambitions of the state were to the establishment of apartheid policy, and it also shows us how these ambitions were doomed to failure. The apartheid state was brutal and violent, and produced archives which reflect that. It also produced archives which contain documents like the following, taken from a letter from a member of the Directorate of Publications (E.G. Malan) to one of the PAB’s “literary experts” concerning the letters of James Joyce (discussed at length in Chapter Three):

The word ‘banned’ which appears to have been used in the press report you read on the above publication is actually a misnomer, since it could also include a reference to books whose possession has been totally prohibited under section 9 (3). This was not the case with the ‘Selected Letters’, which a committee of publications found to be undesirable under section 47 (2) (a). This decision means, inter alia, that the book can still be consulted, under the prescribed conditions, at university and legal deposit libraries in terms of the Copyright Act.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 6.

In his discussion on the writing of Geoffrey Cronje, Coetzee argues that we must make “an effort of projection, listening closely to what he says and even more closely to what he does not say, is afraid of saying. Above all, we must be sensitive to his *language*.”⁵³⁹ Being sensitive to language, in the way that Coetzee means it, means picking up on sustained metaphors of blood and contamination, of a fixation on and horror of “racial intermingling.” Being sensitive to the language of reports like the one above means picking up on that which is less overtly violent, or which speaks of a different kind of violence. It is pedantic in its quibbling over terms, its insistence that the book has not really been “banned” because it has not been “totally prohibited.” It is fluent in unnecessary legalese, with its reference to “prescribed conditions” and its repetition of finer points of the Act. Most of the correspondence between Malan and Titlestad was a wholly redundant diversion, the purpose of which seems to have been primarily for Malan to engage in intellectual showmanship. This is a violence of pettiness and banality, an assertion of cultural authority just as crucial to the functioning of the apartheid state.

The process of censorship makes certain stories possible, on an obvious level. Some stories are deemed “unreadable” and some are not. A text can be “impossible to read” because it is badly written, or it can be “impossible to read” because it is impossible to get hold of, due to it being banned. It is important to enlarge an understanding of the censorship archive as a place where the censors attempted to make certain stories literally impossible to read, firstly by banning them, and secondly by trying to creating a literary environment which did not accommodate such stories from their inception. Censorship makes some stories possible while erasing many others, and the archive has great value as a site where such lost stories might be retrieved, stories about how censorship worked or didn’t work, about the effects that it had, about how the censors went about doing their jobs, where they succeeded and where they failed. We can use the censorship archive as a repository of stories available to us about the past, and provide an inquiry into conditions of literary possibility and impossibility, and into what sort of stories may emerge under these circumstances. It is exciting to consider what remains to be discovered, contemplating the thousands of stacked manila boxes, many of which contain files that have not been opened since they were created. The censorship archive matters, and there are many valuable ways for it to be used. It exists as a record of small and petty violence, and as a site of lost stories which can still be retrieved. It is inconvenient both in scale, and in the ways in which it disrupts linear narratives. It is important to make room for it, to foreground it when writing a

⁵³⁹ Coetzee, “The Mind of Apartheid,” 24.

literary history of this country, because without it, we cannot fully grasp the consequences of censorship.

It is my conviction that this study will be the first of many, and that it will form a useful addition to explorations of reception history in this country, reading history, the history of attempts to pin down the nature of the literary and define it as a concept, current explorations of South Africa's literary establishment, a history of the impact of the American counter-culture on apartheid South Africa, a history of Nabokov's reception in South Africa, a history of bureaucratic organisations, an analysis of the way an apartheid bureaucracy operated and how "apartheid thinking" has replicated itself in contemporary South Africa, a history of literary criticism during apartheid and a tracing of how that has impacted literary criticism today, or a history of texts which have been consigned to the slaughterhouse of literature.

The task of "wandering through the archives" and "picking at the document where it is most opaque"⁵⁴⁰ is an opportunity to expose the moments at which the story doesn't make sense, where the documents themselves contradict what the legislation demands, or what the narrative of apartheid censorship insists on. Looking closely at the documents reveals the gap between apartheid's self-presentation, and the way that it functioned in the everyday, as I have shown. It reveals, also, what is lost when we pick a story and stick to it. Telling the story of apartheid censorship without discussing the archive gives the censors a coherence and an identity as a collective which they never really had. It frames the operations of the censors as being guided by the legislation, when in reality the legislation existed only to give the proceedings a veneer of legitimacy. It sustains apartheid myths of bureaucratic omniscience, as well as the myth that the effects of censorship are no more than a lingering memory. It is not the full story. Housed three floors underground in a building on Roeland Street, there is an archive which provides profound insight into the past, as well as into the present. I have attempted to bring some of these stories to light, and I hope that this study encourages the retrieval of many more.

⁵⁴⁰ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 5.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Censor's Report on Walk Softly, Walk Deadly

G.P.-S. 42957-1960-61-5,000.

PHONE: 27206.
Ref. No. 24861.

D.I. 160.

OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF CENSORS,
ROOM 101, FEDERAL BUILDINGS,
TULBAGH CENTRE,
CAPE TOWN.

18.7.63

Kindly furnish below your report and views on the undermentioned publication which has been submitted for censorship:

WALK SOFTLY,
WALK DEADLY -
LEE BERGMAN

J.A.A.
Secretary.

BCS
27

REPORT OF READER.

(a) Synopsis of publication dealt with:-

Evans (Arthur) had lived with his mother in a shabby apartment and on the kids wandering the streets and forming gangs, he had felt the inclination to help improve the morals of these kids and the way they lived. So when he was sent back from the army he looked for a job. He was appointed a road club member with the law for duty with boards. His duty was to establish sound contacts with gang members in his area, become acquainted with their leaders, learn their ideas and thus present a wholesome influence on the groups he would work with. At first the teens looked upon him with distrust and believed he was a cop, but when he started off as a street worker there was a change of heart in the minds of his area. Soon he learned that a rumour was going to take place between the Guardians of the Streets. The Guardians had to go. Artie noticed that Oswald's influence and great influence on the Guardian gang, so he decided to win the friendship and confidence of this Guardian by winning Oswald's trust. The members of the gang are acceptable as they work in the long

(b) References to pages on which appear passages considered to be indecent, obscene, or objectionable:

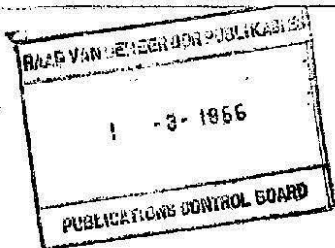
- (i) Crime p. 105 Violence p. 105 Sadism p. 105
- Description of murder p. 105
- Ill-treatment to women p. 139
- (ii) Intimate description of women's bodies p. 139
- Passionate love-making p. 139
- Sexual relations p. 139
- Loose morals p. 17, 81, 118
- (iii) Traffic in drugs p. 17, 81, 118 White slave traffic p. 17, 81, 118
- The drug habit p. 17, 81, 118 Other vices p. 17, 81, 118
- (iv) Offensive intermingling between Europeans and Non-Europeans p. 17, 81, 118
- Blasphemy p. 17, 81, 118 Objectionable language p. 17, 81, 118
- Other objectionable features (specify) p. 17, 81, 118
- (v) Subversive propaganda p. 17, 81, 118
- (c) Coverage p. 17, 81, 118
- (d) General remarks and opinion p. 17, 81, 118

This is a striking story about the teen-agers who played, fought and mostly lived in the streets day to day in their homes or inadequate accommodation in their dilapidated apartments. Lots of violence took place between the gangs of the Guardians of the Streets. There is a striking incident of a shooting one when a man was killed. The kids got into trouble with the police. It I think the book suitable to be passed on to the public.

Date 30/7/1963.

Signature of Reader

24

Appendix 2: Letter from Member of the Public regarding *Franny and Zooey*

#1872
27/3/66
P.O. Box 23,
BENONI, Transvaal,
24th February, 1966.

The Secretary,
The Board of Control over Publications,
541 Barrack Street,
CAPE TOWN.

Dear Sir,

I wish to draw your Board's attention to the dangerous filth emanating from a certain class of writer in the United States of America and masquerading as "culture". I was alarmed to find that not only is this dangerous and foul quasi-literature entering our country at the cost of our foreign exchange (dollar) reserves, but is actually getting into the hands of the youth of our country.

Your Board's attention is specifically drawn to the inane and foul writings of one "J.D. SALINGER" published by William Heinemann Ltd., of London, Melbourne, Toronto, Cape Town, Auckland and The Hague. The particular book which has come to my notice bears the title "Franny and Zooey." I see from the book itself that it was printed in the United Kingdom, so apparently did not cost us dollars in this instance. However, it would cost the self-respect and Christian virtue of our young citizens, if they chanced to read it.

It is this devilishly inane and corrupt imitation of true literature that is so largely responsible for the catastrophic decline in public and private morals and the accompanying collapse of true values in Britain and America. We dare not risk our future going the same way.

I would earnestly prevail upon your Board to ban this writer's foul outpourings totally. I am amazed that a large and reputable firm of publishers should be ready to stoop to the publication of such a mass of corruption. If this kind of thing had been written 20 years ago, the writer would have been incarcerated in a lunatic asylum.

Yours faithfully,

KENNETH C. BAYMAN.

hnd. van huyk.

*No Record of Franny and Zooey.
JMA 2/3/66.*

Appendix 3: Request Concerning *Jesus Christ Superstar*

8/1/70.

1/1

Confidential

Publications Control Board,

Private Bag 9069,

CAPE TOWN.

12-5-1971

RE: JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR

The South African Police require a written report from the Publications Control Board regarding the gramophone record "Jesus Christ Superstar", giving reasons why the single record was banned whereas the long-playing record was passed.

1. (a) The small record "Seven Single" was submitted to the Publications Control Board in August 1970. The words of this record were printed on the back of the record cover. These words were read to representatives of various religious denominations. Relevant comments are quoted briefly:

Anglican: "a Considerable element would consider it blasphemous; but it does not mean an awful lot and he (Canon Hodson) would not ban it for he was not offended, even though he felt the writers had failed in their ability to appreciate the Christian message."

Baptist: The record's words revolted him: "there would be a tremendous outcry in South Africa; it could do nothing but harm the Christian message".

Dutch Reform Church (an ex-moderator):

"Dit sal geweldig aanstoot gee; dit is heiligskenis"; hy sou nie wil sien dat die plaat op die mark kom.

Comment: It was apparent that in terms of the Act, Section 5, sub: section 2 (b) "is blasphemous or is offensive to the religious convictions or feelings of any section of the inhabitants of the Republic of South Africa".

Kyk Regger 38/71
 met langspulplaat (6571) 2/.....

Appendix 5: Censors' Form with own Categories Added

G.P.-S.429957-1960-61-5,000.

D.I. 160.

PHONE: 27206.

REF. No.

28917

OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF CENSORS,
ROOM 101, FEDERAL BUILDINGS,
TULBAGH CENTRE,
CAPE TOWN.

Mr. H. Gordon Bagwall

13/3/63

Kindly furnish below your report and views on the undermentioned publication which has been submitted for censorship:-

TRUE TALES OF HITLERS

REICH - RICHARD HANSEN

Secretary.

REPORT OF READER.

(a) Synopsis of publication dealt with:-

Recapitulatory accounts of the seamy side of the Hitler regime, including sex scandals and Jewish pogrom horrors. Also, something of the spy and counter-spy episodes, and of the attempts on Hitler's life.

(b) References to pages on which appear passages considered to be indecent, obscene, or objectionable:-

- (i) Crime Gas murders: 187. Violence Tortures: 185
Description of murder. Section "Lesbian lusts": 185
Hit treatment to women Gruesome massacres of Jews: 178-179.
- (ii) Intimate description of women's bodies
Passionate love-making Homosexuality: 10, 19, 21, 83.
Sexual relations.
Loose morals Pornography and pornographic posing: 17.
- (iii) Traffic in drugs White slave traffic
The drug habit 78, 79. Other sins Prostitution 16, 17.
- (iv) Offensive intermingling between Europeans and Non-Europeans
Biasphemy Objectionable language
Other objectionable features (specify) Murder "purge" of opponents: 84

(v) Subversive propaganda

(c) Cover: Hitler photograph (unobjectionable)

(d) General remarks and opinion

I have noted passages dealing with subjects which, in fiction, might be regarded as objectionable. Being factual — and, although gruesome sometimes, not deliberately sadistic — they do not necessarily condemn the book.

I can find no distortion of the known facts in these accounts. With the disappearance of the Hitler regime, there can be little international objection.

Date

April 4, 1963

Signature of Reader

21

Appendix 6: Appended Page with Categories Added

"THE WANDERING OF DESIRE"

This earthy novel includes passages of description or implication which - taken by themselves - can be considered highly objectionable.

The following are cases in point.

Grossome castration of hog (32); Castration of man (235)

Tearing out of woman's womb (114)

Murder by shooting (114, 116, 132)

Schoolgirl pregnant (197) . Schoolboys party with prostitutes (199-201)

Illicit relations - and bastard children - with negro women
(40, 90, 98, 146, 159, 113)

Veneral disease (63, 97)

Suggestion of incest (92)

Sexual relations (97, 100, 101)

References to sex (119, 168) (41)

Indecent language (32, 41, 53, 63, 134, 169)

But all this is part and parcel of a primitive story in a far-off land - a story which, in its intent and language, is not lascivious, erotic or pornographic. Not lecherous.

The passages referred to are naturally shocking to more civilized people. And the relations between whites and Negro women are anathema among us in South Africa.

On the other hand, it seems doubtful whether the book would corrupt morals among us both because the whole scene is so foreign and unreal here and because its telling - largely impressionistic and in the vernacular - is so difficult and complex that few South African readers would get past the first dozen pages or so.

There is some - somewhat primitive - discussion of God and Religion (one character is a religious maniac); but I find no real objectionable matter in that connection.

The dilemma remains that the objectionable passages condemn a book which is hardly worth condemning, having regard to its foreseeable effects.

A Gordon Regnall.

Appendix 7: 1980 Censors' Form

DP 1E



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Serial No. 80/3/113..

PUBLICATIONS ACT, 1974
 PUBLICATION OR OBJECT
 *READER'S/EXPERT'S REPORT

1. Name and/or description of publication <i>Forced landing</i>	2. Name of reader or expert <i>Prof R.E. Lighton</i>
--	---

3. Synopsis of contents:

The book comprises a somewhat challenging to provocative introduction - pages 1-6; this is followed by 20 short stories depicting many facets of black living (7 concerning) in Johannesburg, Soweto (etc.); District Six, etc. (pages 10-179). These are followed by three articles headed "Columbus" and three finally by two "Messages" one from a politician (Nannibean) interview and one from Bishop Tutu to Mr. P. J. Vorster.

Please refer Annexure A attached.

4. Portions that may possibly be regarded as undesirable:

- (i) Sec. 47(2)(a) : Pages *5, 29, 42, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 2/3, 67...*
- (ii) Sec. 47(2)(b) : Pages *63, 4/5, 6/9, 160/1/3/8*
- (iii) Sec. 47(2)(c) : Pages *162*
- (iv) Sec. 47(2)(d) : Pages *1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 37, 60-71, 116/119*
- (v) Sec. 47(2)(e) : Pages *127, 192-198(2)*
- (vi) Sec. 47(2)(e) : Pages *127, 192-198(2)*

Appendix 8: Censor's Report on *Satan's Saint*

3. General remarks and opinion:

though not outrageously obscene or pornographic
 the primary motive seems undoubtedly to
 exploit an unhealthy interest in sex perversions
 so I recommend: Bar

(The book makes no ^{now} contribution to an understanding
 of fade or racism.)

Signature of Reader.

den Kk
 27/5/66
 M. Deacon

Bevestig
 M. Deacon
 27/5/66

Quorum	Passed	Rejected
		X
		X
		X

Decision: Passed/Rejected.

Dust Cover.

This Edition.

All Editions.

Chairman: ..

Date: 27.5.66

Appendix 9: Censor's Report on *The Golden Notebook*

960-61-5,000.

27206.

29175.

D.L. 160.

OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF CENSORS,
ROOM 101, FEDERAL BUILDINGS,
TULBAGH CENTRE,
CAPE TOWN.

8.4.63

Kindly furnish below your report and views on the undermentioned publication which has been submitted for censorship:—

THE GOLDEN NOTE BOOK -DORIS LESSING

Secretary.

REPORT OF READER.

(a) Synopsis of publication dealt with:—

This book is a novel on the life of the unattached women.

(b) References to pages on which appear passages considered to be indecent, obscene, or objectionable:—

- (i) Crime _____ Violence _____
Description of murder _____ Sadism _____
Ill-treatment to women _____
- (ii) Intimate description of women's bodies _____
Passionate love-making _____
Sexual relations _____
Loose morals _____
- (iii) Traffic in drugs _____ White slave traffic _____
The drug habit _____ Other vices _____
- (iv) Offensive intermingling between Europeans and Non-Europeans _____
Blasphemy _____ Objectionable language _____
Other objectionable features (specify) _____
- (v) Subversive propaganda _____

(c) Cover _____

(d) General remarks and opinion: ^{are} Considerable sections of the story ~~is~~ concerned with the sex life of women, based on dream-analysis and psycho-analytic conceptions. Some of the descriptions are as intimate as it is possible to make them, e.g. pp. 276 - 279; also the descriptions of the two homo-sexuals are direct: pp. 334, 346; and similarly the approach by men to "free" women: e.g. p. 340 ff. But these descriptions, although of sexual relations, are not sexy or phonographic: they are woven into the characters and the drama of the story and retain their objectivity. Although I would like to ban a book such as this from my personal standpoint, it is too integrated and coherent to be banned; anyway, if it were banned about 50% of all novels would have to be banned.

Date 20th April, 1963

Signature of Reader.

and 492-520.

Appendix 10: Censor's Report on *Life & Times of Michael K*

- 2 -

5. I recommend that the publication is -

 ~~not~~ undesirable; undesirable within the meaning of section 47(2)
of the Publications Act, 1974, for the following reasons:

This brilliant novel deals with sensitive political issues in South Africa. It contains derogatory references to and comments on the attitudes of the state, also to the police and the methods they employ in the carrying out of their duties. The likely readers of this publication will be sophisticated & discriminating with an interest in literature. These readers will experience the novel as a work of art & will realise that although the tragic life of Michael K. is situated in South Africa his setting today is a universal one not limited to S. Africa. 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.

There are ~~some~~ crude words in this novel (~~such as~~ "fuck" & "pussy") - They are completely functional. The description of fellatio is not in the least offensive - when Michael K. submits to this act it is the ultimate stage that he has reached as an object of pity. The probable reader will only feel compassion & sympathy when reading this

READER / EXPERT

two pages X

DATE

83.11.8.

* Delete whichever is not applicable.

I fully agree with excellent report of reader. A book of such merit can carry the curmudgeon's description on p. 242-244. The likely readers will only be those with a literary interest. *Theron* 1983-11-14.

Fully in agreement with the well-motivated report of my reader. Book of obvious literary merit throughout. Not undesirable. *Theron* 14/11/83

Stem saam met die aanbeveling van die leser, die motivering daarvoor en die berediging van die ander komiteede. NIE ongewens NIE. J.H. Uys. (14.11.83)

Appendix 11: Report from Publications Inspector

Afskrif

Die Voorsitter,
Raad van Beheer oor Publikasies,
KAAPSTAD.

VERSLAG VAN DIE INSPEKTEUR VAN PUBLIKASIES
VAN DIE MAAND APRIL 1966.

1. In die eerste week van die maand was daar twee vakansiedae. Die publikasie-wêreld ken nie vakansies nie en dit het beteken dat daar hard en lank gewerk moes word om alles afgehandel te kry. Die aankoms van die posboot juis op 'n vakansiedag, het dit nog moeiliker gemaak.
2. Die volgende week het ek met vakansie gegaan. My werk is hier in oorleg met die Adjunk-Sekretaris, deur 'n senior doeanse-inspekteur waargeneem.
3. Pas voor ons terugkeer het 'n vragmotor op die ope pad onverwags van regs voor ons ingedraai. Ons motor is erg beskadig. Ek het niks oorgekom nie, maar mev. Blom, wat aan die kant waar die stampslag plaasgevind het, gesit het, is aan die arm beseer. As gevolg van haar ongesteldheid na die ongeluk, wou die dokter wat haar behandel het, nie toelaat dat sy op reis gaan nie. Ek het Doeanse dadelik in kennis gestel van die vertraging en gevra dat my plaasvervanger moet voortgaan met die werk. Ons het drie dae laat gekom.
4. Op ons reis het ek oral waar ek die geleentheid gehad het, boeke-uitstallings in kafees en winkels bekyk. Op Laingsburg het ek enkele eksemplare van Candid Pin-Ups wat eers verbode was, gekry, maar nie een van die tydskrifte wat deur 'n beslissing van die Hof toegelaat is nie. Die eienares hier het gesê dat hulle gereeld kennis kry van publikasies wat verbode is en van die handel onttrek moet word.
5. Op Beaufort-Wes, in 'n kafee in die hoofstraat, het ek 'n besonder groot uitstalling, ook van koerante, besigtig, maar niks gekry wat verbode is nie, wel 'n paar plaaslik gedrukte publikasies waarvan ek nie hou nie en wat ek in Kaapstad nader sal ondersoek.
6. Op Britstown het ek 'n heel keurige uitstalling gevind, en ook op Boshof, in die Vrystaat, waar ons 'n paar dae vertoef het. Hierdie mense verkoop nie graag publikasies met naaktfigure nie.
7. Op Bloemfontein in 'n groot kafee, vier strate van die Twee-toringkerk, het ek nog die grootste uitstalling van publikasies gevind. Slapbande wat deur Kaapstad en regstreeks deur die C.N.A. in Johannesburg versprei word, het ek min of meer almal reeds tevore gesien; en ook die gewone blaadjies wat maar oral te koop is. Maar daar was 'n hele aantal groter en kleiner tydskrifte en blaadjies wat ek nie ken nie en wat vir my twyfelagtig lyk. Dit kom van Durban en Johannesburg, het die Griekse eienaar gesê. Ek sal hier in Kaapstad probeer om meer te wete te kom van die publikasies. Maar dit sal moeilik wees.
8. By my terugkeer hier was hier 'n klomp lees- en keurwerk wat my ^{vir} opsy gesit was. Ek is nou daar amper mee klaar.
9. Terwyl ek weg was, is hier 'n toesluit-kas in my kantoor gesit, waaroor ek baie bly is.

Geteken: J.J. BLOM.
Inspekteur van Publikasies.

Kaapstad.
3 Mei 1966.

(25)

PRICE 5c
Saturday ... 6d
Sunday ... 1/-
Rhodesia 1/8

SUNDAY EXPRESS
JOHANNESBURG, SEPTEMBER 29, 1963.
* Registered at the G.P.O. as a newspaper.
* 1-10-1963
* 10-1-1963
* 10-1-1963
* 10-1-1963

SEX BOOK IS FILMED SECRETLY ON RAND

American unit "shoots" "Act of Immorality"

By GORDON WINTER

AN American unit is secretly filming the controversial South African novel, "An Act Of Immorality."
The book tells of the secret life of a Johannesburg public prosecutor who, by day, prosecutes offenders under the Immorality Act and, by night, breaks the Act.

The film, based on the book, will have the same "sex across the colour line" theme. The son of a prominent Nationalist leader is said to be paying the male lead. The female lead is an attractive Coloured girl from Cape Town.

Scores for the film have been shot in Hillbrow streets and other areas in Johannesburg. The film is being shot by a unit from the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court.
Other scores, which were filmed in Durban, show the white actor playing the Coloured actress.



that the author is Mr. Simon Meyerstein, a 27-year-old student at the University of the Witwatersrand.
Mr. Meyerstein, who holds two degrees in psychology, is said to be paying the male lead. At one time he worked as a reporter on the Sunday Express, but kept his authorship of the novel a secret even from his colleagues.
He resigned from the Sunday Express to study for a full-time student at the University.
"Infringed"
Mr. Meyerstein conceded that his book is not political. "It is a psychological assessment of facts which undeniably exist and which

during psychological reasons which created the Immorality Act and his offenders.
"I was particularly interested in the reasons why people broke the Act in spite of the disastrous consequences."
The film began as pure research for a newspaper, but something intriguing factors to the start ended as a novel.
"The characters in the book were a composite of real-life stories of people, court records and fantasy."
Mr. Meyerstein conceded that his book is not political. "It is a psychological assessment of facts which undeniably exist and which

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SUNDAY EXPRESS, Oct. 5, 1943

IMMORALITY FILM: HUNT FOR CAMERA TEAM

A TOP-LEVEL investigation has been launched by the Security Branch in its search for the American film unit which recently started filming the controversial novel, "An Act of Immorality," in secret.

Security Branch men have said that they are determined to trace the film unit before it leaves South Africa. The book tells of the secret life of a Johannesburg public prosecutor who, by day, prosecutes offenders under the Immorality Act, and by night is the author of the novel.

To date, Mr. Meyerson has not been interviewed by the Security Branch. Lewis, a Johannesburg lawyer, was questioned last week.

On both occasions he told them he knew nothing about the American film unit or its plans. The detectives told him they were determined to trace the film makers before they left South Africa.

The police are also searching Johannesburg to be held at the offices of Johannesburg on Friday and Saturday. Anna is not sure what she will do after she has graduated. It may be a career in films, a career in journalism, or a year of study overseas. "I can't make up my mind," said Anna.



Twenty-one-year-old ANNA CONRADIE, of Johannesburg, stars in both the film world and on the Johannesburg stage. Last week, Anna — by request — showed the Sunday Express some of her work as an actress. She will perform in the South African symphonic drama film, about 18 months hence.

SUNDAY EXPRESS REPORTER

Mr. Meyerson, who is said to be the author of the book, is said to be in Johannesburg. He is said to be in Johannesburg. He is said to be in Johannesburg.

NOT INVOLVED

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Quiet man found gassed in car

A quiet man, who lived alone in a flat in Pritchard Street, Johannesburg, was found gassed in his car early yesterday morning. He was Mr. Jack Stokes, who had lived at 54 Langham Court for about a year.

Girl died: Braken driving charge

Mr. Stokes was found about 3.30 p.m. yesterday, and the owner of a parking lot appealed to Mr. Stokes' relatives to fetch his small German car.

Mr. Stokes was found about 3.30 p.m. yesterday, and the owner of a parking lot appealed to Mr. Stokes' relatives to fetch his small German car.

Appendix 13: Letter from Member of the Public

51 Broadway Court,
Broad Street,
DURBAN.

25th September, 1963.

The Director,
Education Arts & Science Department,
Union Buildings,
PRETORIA.

Dear Sir,

I have to bring to your notice a book called
"The Thin Red Line", author James Jones.

This book is pure unadulterated filth and should
never have been passed by your Censor Board.

If I used the language contained therein in any
public street I would be promptly arrested (and rightly so)
for using foul and indecent language.

I have endeavoured to have the book withdrawn
from the Public Libraries here without result, the several
committees stating they are guided by the National Censors
in regard to books not regarded as being suitable for reading.

Your immediate action will be appreciated and con-
sider that departmental enquiries should be made with a view
to severely censuring the persons responsible for passing
such a deplorable and disgusting book.

An early reply will oblige.

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd). E.J. THOMPSON.

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COPY/WB

Appendix 14: Report on *The Soulsucker*

REPUBLIEK VAN SUID-AFRIKA

Volgno. 175/4/295

WET OP PUBLIKASIES, 1974

PUBLIKASIE OF VOORWERP

*LESER/DESKUNDIGE SE VERSLAG

1. Naam en/of beskrywing van publikasie <i>The Soulsucker</i>	2. Naam van leser of deskundige <i>Dr J.G. van Jaarsveld</i>
3. Kort weergawe van die inhoud: <p>.... Andy, a giant spider from galaxy M31 in outer space -- 24 million light years away from our earth, escapes unhurt when their airship crashes in America.</p> <p>.... Her race is scientifically far more advanced than the "duopeds" -- as she calls the human beings. Inter alia, Andy is able to read minds to the point of "total nakedness" to do thought-control tricks and thus force her will onto anyone. Moreover, she can change into a beautiful woman at will.</p> <p>.... The trouble is that she is also a vampire, and in her lust for blood she kills dogs, her host, and even investigating detective Adam Burns, whom she first seduces. Eventually she is cornered near the Pentagon, but not before suggesting to detective Yellow Horse to help her to escape. He resists, but eventually yields. Andy is thereby able to get her transmitter and get help from outer space. Yellow Horse does not get off so lightly.</p>	
4. Gedeeltes wat moontlik as <u>ongewens</u> beskou kan word: (i) Art. 47(2)(a) : Bladsye 92, 119. (ii) Art. 47(2)(b) : Bladsye (iii) Art. 47(2)(c) : Bladsye (iv) Art. 47(2)(d) : Bladsye (v) Art. 47(2)(e) : Bladsye (vi) Art. 47(2)(f) : Bladsye	

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