LITERATURE

IDEOLOGY:TEXT:READER:TOWARDS INTERPRETING "COMMITTED" TEXTS[1].

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Summary

Committed literature has been a problematical object of study both for liberal criticism – which has tended to disallow it in principle and ignore it in practice – and for Marxist criticism, which has tended either to subsume a writer's commitment in an all-embracing critique, or to treat commitment as the sole determinant of a revolutionary reshaping of traditional forms and materials. The aim of this paper is to circumvent both these reductionist alternatives by focusing on the writer's commitment as a *formally determining factor*. It will do so by examining a possible model for the interpretation of committed texts, and then briefly investigating the viability of the model by a reading of three South African novels – written by a white English-speaking, a white Afrikaans-speaking, and a black English-speaking South African respectively – dealing with the theme of miscegenation.

1. Introduction

Committed literature has been a problematical object of study both for liberal criticism, which has tended to disallow commitment in principle and ignore it in practice, and for Marxist criticism, which has tended to adopt one or other

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of two opposed strategies: either to subsume the fact of a writer's commitment in an all-embracing ideological critique, within which the element of conscious political purpose has no special status, or to treat commitment as the sole determinant of a "revolutionary" reshaping of traditional forms and materials, often taking too little account of determining influences upon the writer (Buckridge 1985:86-87). In effect, both alternatives deny the specificity of the writer's commitment, or political purpose, as a formally determining factor. The aim of this article is to investigate the possibility of a writer's commitment as a formally determining factor. The basic point of departure is to, on one hand, grant a certain agency to the writer's committed purpose, while on the other hand recognizing the fact that the way by which that purpose is itself both produced by society and modified by the process of literary reception.

The method is as follows: McCormick and Waller's model for the interpretation of committed texts is presented and extended by using Lotman's theory of codification. The model enables the reader to "unmask" a writer's ideology and his use of certain dominant codes which represent his ideological bias. The viability of the model is tested by briefly examining the codification of the theme of miscegenation— and implicitly also the authors' personal or group ideology – in three committed novels, namely *Too Late the Phalarope* (Alan Paton), *An Instant In the Wind* (André P. Brink) and *Mating Birds* (Lewis Nkosi), written by a white English-speaking, a white Afrikaans-speaking and a Black English-speaking South African respectively.

Two key concepts need to be defined at the outset viz. *ideology* and *commitment.*

The concept *ideology* is used in a wide variety of contexts and can therefore easily be misinterpreted if not defined within each context[2]. The following broad working definition will apply in the ensuing discussion:" ...[Ideology consists of] those common values, practices, ideas and assumptions of a particular society that, in fact, hold it together: the deeply ingrained, sometimes only partly conscious, habits, beliefs, lifestyles of a particular time or place" (McCormick and Waller 1987:195-196).

Commitment can be defined as the literary representation of a writer's implicit or explicit ideology and manifests itself in literary texts in which the writer either pleads openly for a particular point of view or ideology of a political, social or religious nature or otherwise subtly tries to manipulate his[3] readers into accepting his particular ideology or point of view with the ultimate aim of affecting a change in his reader's attitude and approach

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[2] I am deliberately using the word *ideology* in a flexible manner, conceding – as Du Plooy (1989:2) does – that it is a fairly "woolly" concept which straddles the spheres of philosophy, religion, politics and world-view.

[3] Read *her* when appropriate.

(Bachrach 1980:372); my translation-AMdeL). Or, in other words: Committed writing is at its centre the selection and arrangement (and implicitly the overemphasis) of certain elements from the reality as perceived by the writer which can either illustrate how corrupt, unjust or immoral a specific political, social or economic system or community is, or portray an idealized version of an alternative system or community either by implication or by expressed opinion. To function effectively as committed literature, the work must represent the selected elements from reality in such a way that they can be meaningfully recognized as such and placed and interpreted in the schemata of the newly constructed "reality"[4] of the text.

The term *commitment* is a pivotal one in the study of the literary communication process as it coincides with the stress on the relation between the text and its external world, and the relation between the reader's perception and decoding of the writer's encoding of his – the writer's – interpretation of reality. It has become the reader and literary scholar's task to

> relate the experience of the writer's imaginary characters and situations to the historical climate from which they derive. He [the reader or scholar] has to transform the private equation of themes and stylistic means into social equations (Swingewood 1972:14).

It is imperative for the committed writer to accept the arbitrary nature of the various codes embedded in a linguistic system. A committed writer invariably invents a new "reality" which has a very definite and recognizable link with reality as perceived by the reader, but at the same time perverts[5] the language to emphasize his interpretation of reality, or to point out why someone else's interpretation of reality is "invalid" or not as "valid" or "truthful".

Having delineated the working definitions for the rest of the argument, it is now necessary to establish the theoretical parameters of the proposed reading strategy.

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[4] While I fully acknowledge that the different kinds of "realities" conjured up by the texts, the different readers and the different times that the three authors address as their primary concern are all aspects which influence the type of reading that theoretical models will evoke, the argument presented here does not pretend to encompass all the possibilities, but rather wishes to focus on the few common elements which committed novels share.

[5] Orwell's description of a writer's skill in manipulating language is particularly apt when considering committed writing. In an essay entitled *New Words* (1940?) he states that "[t]he art of writing is in fact largely the perversion of words, and I would even say that the less obvious this perversion is, the more thoroughly it has been done. For a writer who *seems* to twist words out of their meanings (e.g. Gerard Manley Hopkins) is really, if one looks closely, making a desperate attempt to use them straightforwardly. Whereas a writer who seems to have no tricks whatever...is making an especially subtle flank attack...on positions that are impregnable form the front" (Orwell & Angus 1980:19-20).

2. Theoretical model

Advances in literary theory during the past twenty years have shown that non-literary ideological presuppositions condition the general and critical reception of a text. The majority of the theories stress that there are many ways of reading, and that variations arise when the focus falls on the historical period, cultural and class differences, ideological receptivity, the range of reader' expectations or on the mixture of various codes in one piece of writing (Gloversmith 1984: xv).

In the light of the abovementioned argument, the question arises whether a viable model could be devised which could account for the interaction between reader and a committed text.

McCormick and Waller (1987: 193-208) have developed a model to interpret the interaction between reader and text in *Text, Reader, Ideology: The Interactive Nature of the Reading Situation* [6]. This model provides a useful starting point from which the way in which a reader's reading of a text is guided, can be traced. The model will be dealt with at some length, an adaptation suggested and a brief application made.

McCormick and Waller argue that reading is always "overdetermined" (1987: 193), i.e. that it is produced by a multitude of factors that work in different combinations to produce different readings. The text [7] is seen as the site of a struggle: readers, with their own backgrounds, prejudices and assumptions are in constant conflict with the text with its own make-up of cultural determinants. This sentiment is echoed by Jameson (1986: 194) when he states that

> interpretation is not an isolated act, but takes place within a Homeric battlefield, on which a host of interpretative options are either openly or implicitly in conflct...in our context, only another, stronger interpretation can overthrow and practically refute an interpretation already in place.

The reading process consists of two major elements: firstly, that both readers and texts contribute to this process; and secondly, that both text and reader are "ideologically situated" (McCormick and Waller 1987: 194). *Ideology* is another pivotal concept in the model and refers to the shared though

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[6] The model forms part of a research programme at Carnegie Mellon University on constructing reading models which acknowledge reading as a cognitive process and which aim to be pedagogically and critically useful (Ryan and Ryan 1988: 31 and 33).

[7] The role assigned to the text is reminiscent of that indicated by Iser in *The Act of Reading* (1978). Kantz summarizes the argument as follows:" The text, according to Iser, performs a dual task. On the one hand it conveys an ostensible meaning that conforms to the norms of society. At the same time, however, then alien associations subvert those norms by evoking problematic knowledge. A critical pressure is thus built up which eventually affects the reader's theme-horizon processing, such that the reader constructs new images and revises his expectations of the text. If these expectations are fulfilled by the end of the text, the reader will have constructed an aesthetic object whose meaning has altered his perceptions of reality" (Kantz 1987: 156).

very diverse beliefs, assumptions, habits and practices of a particular society. "Some of these are specifically literary matters ...[which are referred to] as *literary ideology*. We refer to all other, non-literary, matters as *general ideology*" (McCormick and Waller 1987: 194). Texts are produced by combining the general and literary ideologies of its particular cultural environment. A text's particular appropriation of ideology is called its *repertoire*, which can be defined as the particular combination of ideas, experiences, habits, norms, conventions and assumptions which form the basic texture of the text in question. This repertoire is divided further into the text's *literary repertoire*, or matters such as form, plot, characterization, metrical patterns, etc. The *non-literary repertoire* consists of matters such as moral ideas, ethical values, religious beliefs, and so on.

The text's literary and general repertoires provide the means of interface with the readers, who, in turn, are members of a particular society and as such, share that society's ideology, both literary and general; they appropriate from this their own particular repertoires, consisting of literary matters – beliefs about literature, previous literary experiences, etc. – and general matters. And it is again the combination of literary and nonliterary repertoires which provide the readers with their interface with the text.

The crucial issue in terms of responses to the representation of the author's ideology lies in the way in which the general and literary repertoire of the readers interact with those of the text. This process is called a "matching of repertoires" (McCormick and Waller 1987: 195) and is schematically represented in fig. 1.
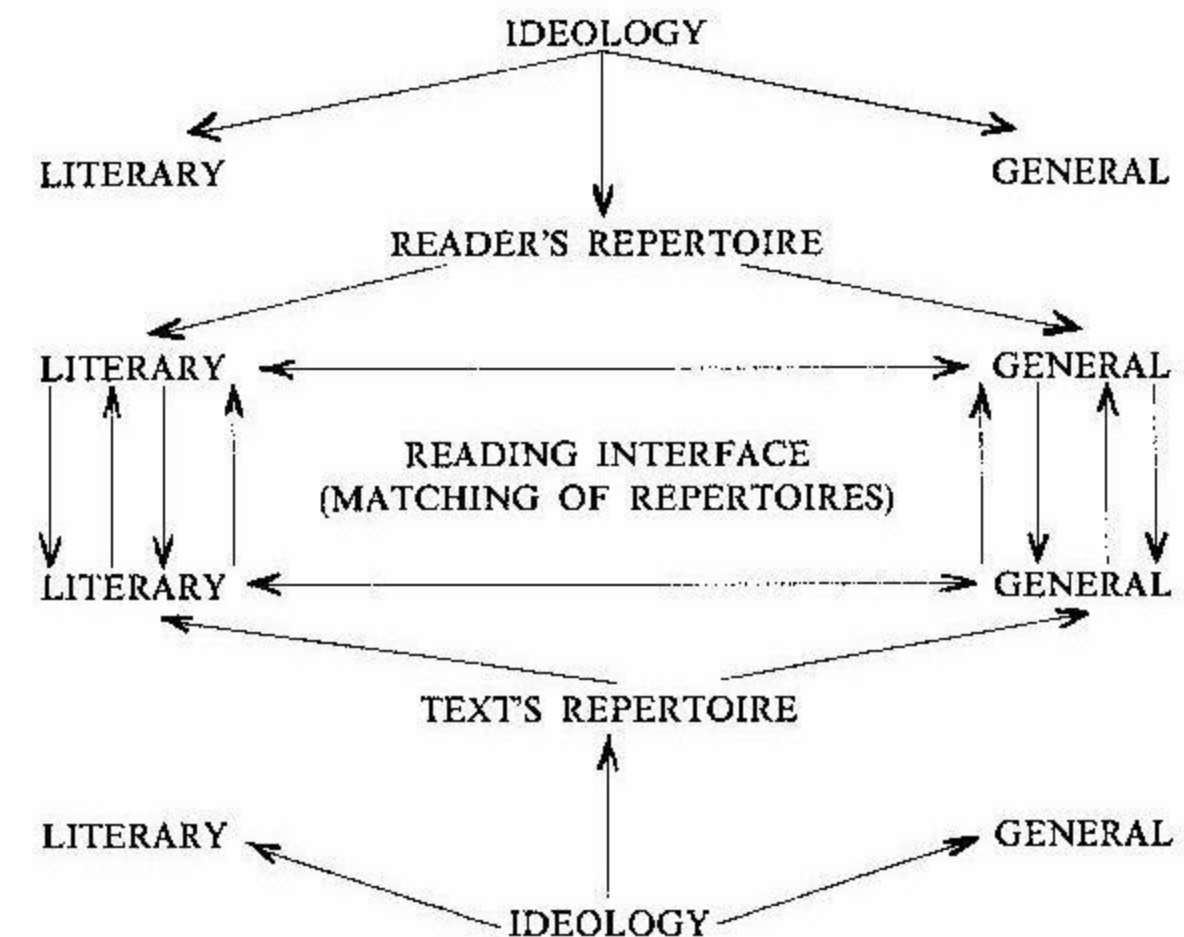

Figure 1.   (Mc Cormick and Waller 1987: 195)

One can therefore assume that all writers – but committed writers in particular – must muster all available textual and extra-textual means to align the reader's repertoire with that of the text. The reader cannot be allowed absolute autonomy during the reading process, as this would defeat the purpose of persuading the reader to accept the implicit or explicit ideology of the text.

In order to focus on the interactive process, each of the elements described above will now be dealt with in more detail.

2.1. Ideology

There is a common misconception regarding ideology. It does not merely mean a set of alien or "wrong" ideas, but – as has been stated previously – is assumed to refer to "those common values, practices, ideas, and assumptions of a particular society that, in fact, hold it together: the deeply ingrained, sometimes only partly conscious, habits, beliefs, [and] lifestyles of a particular time and place ...all those practices that most of a society's inhabitants take for granted as 'natural' or 'universal' ...[and] always true" (McCormick and Waller 1987:196). The major function of an ideology is to define and limit the cultural practices of a society and its members by structuring their experience of reality, thereby providing coherence and a "logical" pattern to a society's social and political practices.

The question which follows logically, is: How does a writer's ideology affect or influence his texts? McCormick and Waller see this influence as " ... a powerful force hovering over us as we write or read a text ...[always reminding] us of what is correct, commonsensical, or 'natural'. *It tries to guide ...the readings of a text into what it has defined as coherence*" (1987:197); (my italics - AMdeL). One could thus argue that the underlying ideology of a committed text will attempt to guide a reading much more strongly than would, say, a work with very personal and intimate emotions. This action of "guiding" a reading is assisted by the literary ideology of the particular society as this indicates how a society's general ideology is articulated through its literary practices. If, for example, literature is seen as a means of conveying the practices of a particular society, then the literary text can be regarded as subservient to the ideology of that particular society. The change in emphasis from text to context has as one of its concomitants the acceptance of the idea that literature need not merely be "pure", i.e. dealing only with "artistic" matters. This assumption, in turn, implies that readers would more readily accept committed literature and by implication would then also be more "open" to its ideology.

2.2. The general repertoire of the text

Every time one reads a text that comes from a distant past, or from a different culture, one encounters assumptions, beliefs and perspectives which are different from those in one's own repertoire. The clashes which occur between these repertoires make the reader aware of the historical, temporal and cultural differences which exist.

Another function of the general repertoire of the text is to help the reader discover dominant and counter-dominant cultural practices within the general ideology underlying the text. McCormick and Waller (1987:198) explain this function with an example from *Romeo and Juliet*:

> ...in reading *Romeo and Juliet* readers can readily see the workings of the dominant Renaissance assumption that a father had virtually complete control over his daughter's life – notably over whom she married. Yet readers can also recognize that *Romeo and Juliet* introduces the counter-dominant views that such an assumption is cruel and destructive.

2.3. How is all of this relevant to committed writing?

It is clear that the committed writer has to present the dominant cultural forces in such a "realistic" way that the reader will recognize these forces to be representative of (oppressive?) forces within their own society. But, more importantly, these representations must be made in such a way that the reader will *accept* the implied counter-dominant views that the writer has woven into his text, views might, in a manner of speaking, usurp the reader's privilege to define and attach his own values to these counter-dominant forces. To be effective, these representations must paradoxically be as close to the reader's experience of "reality", while at the same time emphasizing those elements which will support his argument so that the reader will not fail to see them, as "readers are less likely to see ideological contradictions within their own cultural conjunctions [unless these have been highlighted]" (McCormick and Waller 1987:198).

2.4. The general repertoire of the reader

McCormick and Waller argue that different readings of texts are possible because each reader approaches the text with an individualized general repertoire produced by a society's ideology. The influence of this repertoire, or "set of culturally conditioned experiences, beliefs, knowledge, and expectations about such matters as politics, lifestyle, religion, love, education, integrity, and so forth" (McCormick and Waller 1987:201), is often invisible to the reader

until he encounters interpretations which differ from his own. A text will attempt to force a certain reading by providing as many "clues" as possible to force such a reading. While it is true that the interactive process will lead to all readers concretizing the meaning of texts within the frameworks provided by their own repertoires by colouring it with their own associations (McCormick and Waller 1987:201), I want to argue that the committed writer has to ensure that the repertoire or framework of the text is stronger than those of the reader if he is to be successful in affecting a change in the reader's perceptions.

2.5. The literary repertoire of the text

This is made up of literary conventions and follows formal strategies. Stories always have plots and characters; plays are divided into acts with a rising line of tension, a climax, a falling action, etc.

Another very important part of the literary repertoire of a text are the gaps or blanks which the reader must "fill in" to make sense of the text. These allow the reader much interpretative freedom, while actively "taking part" in the textual processes. These gaps are of paramount importance to a committed writer, who must exercise a tight control over the gaps in his text if he is to "guide" and "control" the reader's interpretative freedom. It is precisely also on this point that a great many works deteriorate from works of subtle literary quality to mere propaganda pamphlets. The successful committed writer will carefully allow certain gaps in his text, but will have prepared the ground in such a way that the options open to the reader with which to fill these gaps have been restricted to those which will enhance the reading privileged by the text.

2.6. The reader's literary repertoire

Readers' literary repertoires consist of their knowledge of and assumptions about what literature "is" or "should be" and are based on their previous reading experiences (McCormick and Waller 1987: 204). If a reader is exposed to a type of text previously unknown to him, his repertoire will subsequently be enlarged to include that type of text. Readers' responses to texts will depend on the accumulation of assumptions about texts that they have in their repertoires.

Reading strategies are techniques employed by readers to process a text. These include creating themes, looking for a consistent focus, filing in the gaps, relating the text to personal experiences, etc. What is of major importance, however, is the fact that readers tend to employ certain strategies in response to certain textual strategies (McCormick and Waller 1987:205). It is therefore again a matter of aligning the reader's strategies with those privileged by the text.

2.7. The intersection of repertoires

The literary and general repertoires of the text provide the means of interface with those of the readers, who, in turn, are members of a particular society and as such share that society's ideology, both literary and general. The crucial issue in terms of reader responses to the representation of an author's ideology lies in the way in which the general and literary repertoire of the readers interact with those of the text. This process is called a "matching of repertoires" (McCormick and Waller 1987:195).

There are four types of intersections that can occur between repertoires, viz., a *matching*, a *mismatching*, and a *clashing* of repertoires, as well as *strong readings* (McCormick and Waller 1987: 205-206).

A *matching* of repertoires occurs when readers' expectations are fulfilled by the text's features, albeit literary or general. For example, if readers accept Freud's theories regarding incestuous desires which guide the relationships between parents and children, it can be said that their general repertoire matches that of *Sons and Lovers*.

A *mismatching* occurs when readers are unable to interact meaningfully with the text. For example, if a reader was raised with no religious background, Stephen Dedalus's guilt will not be as significant to him as to the reader with an awareness of religious doubt.

A *clashing* of repertoires occurs when a reader cannot find a way to respond to or make sense of the text. For example, "twentieth-century female readers of Petrachan love poetry may object violently to the sexism underlying its apparent prasing of women" (McCormick and Waller 1987:206).

Strong readings are of particular importance to committed writing as can be be seen from the following explanation:

> Some texts try to privilege certain preferred readings, providing their readers with very explicit directions on how they wish to be read. Readers sometimes resist them, fight back as it were, but often the best enjoyment comes ... from following the direction in which the text wants to take its reader. An insistent text often has a powerful literary repertoire – it may have a very concentrated argument, or use startling accumulated metaphors. Or its general repertoire may be one that is highly charged emotionally – it may appeal to deeply felt common experiences, like death, love, power or ambition. Such strategies may be designed to guide or limit readings – to give readers definite 'boundary conditions' by which their readings, are to an extent, controlled.

> (McCormick and Waller 1987:206)

It is at this point that McCormick and Waller's model needs to be expanded. They refrain from providing a mechanism to answer the next logical question, viz. *How* does a writer "guide" or "limit" readings of his text, or provide "boundary conditions"? The next section will attempt to provide answers to these questions by exploring possible applications of the model[8].

3. The codification of commitment

One possible avenue which might provide useful answers to these questions is to use Lotman's (1977:23-25) concept of codification. In short, his argument is as follows: natural language is the primary linguistic system. Artistic language is based on the primary system and is governed by the same rules. The artistic linguistic system is superimposed on the natural system, thus creating a complex intra-textual web of connotations and associations. The reader has to know both systems if he is to successfully decode the artistic codification of language. The use of various sub-codes makes the text more intricate and therefore open to more interpretations. The ultimate meaning which the reader assigns to the text is then based on the successful decoding of the diversity of connotations and associations linked to each code embedded in the text.

One might now well ask: What will ensure that the reader arrives at the meaning which the committed text wants him to arrive at? If the reader is allowed total freedom of choice, he might attempt to impose his own artistic language on the text, thereby recoding the text and thus destroying the code structure created by the writer. Seen in the light of the aims of committed writing propounded earlier, this would mean an unsuccessful text as it would not lead the reader to change his attitude or to accept the points of view expressed in the text.

If, on the other hand, the reader actually becomes aware that his choice of interpretative options are so limited that the work can only be regarded as propaganda, the whole exercise will also have failed.

The writer must insert a number of codes into the text which will create an illusion of free interpretation. These codes must, however, all be interrelated, thereby creating an intra-textual web of codes. The reader may choose any of the codes and he will, after traveling through the labyrinth of codes, eventually arrive at the point where the writer and text want him to arrive.

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[8] This article has as one of its underlying assumptions a firm belief that literary theory and theoretical models should ultimately be "practical", i.e. these must enrich one's reading by uncovering depths and nuances of meaning which might otherwise not have been observed. If not, they "merely encourage a pointless and self-indulgent academicism...without any real advance in appreciation or understanding (Lodge 1986:18). See also Frye's statement in his famous *Anatomy of Criticism*: "Whatever is of no practical use to anybody is expendable". (1971:3)

McCormick and Waller's *strong readings* can then be translated as readings which create an interface between the reader and the text and which guide the reader by means of the diversity of codes encoded within the text. The reader's "straightjacketing" is schematically represented in fig. 2.
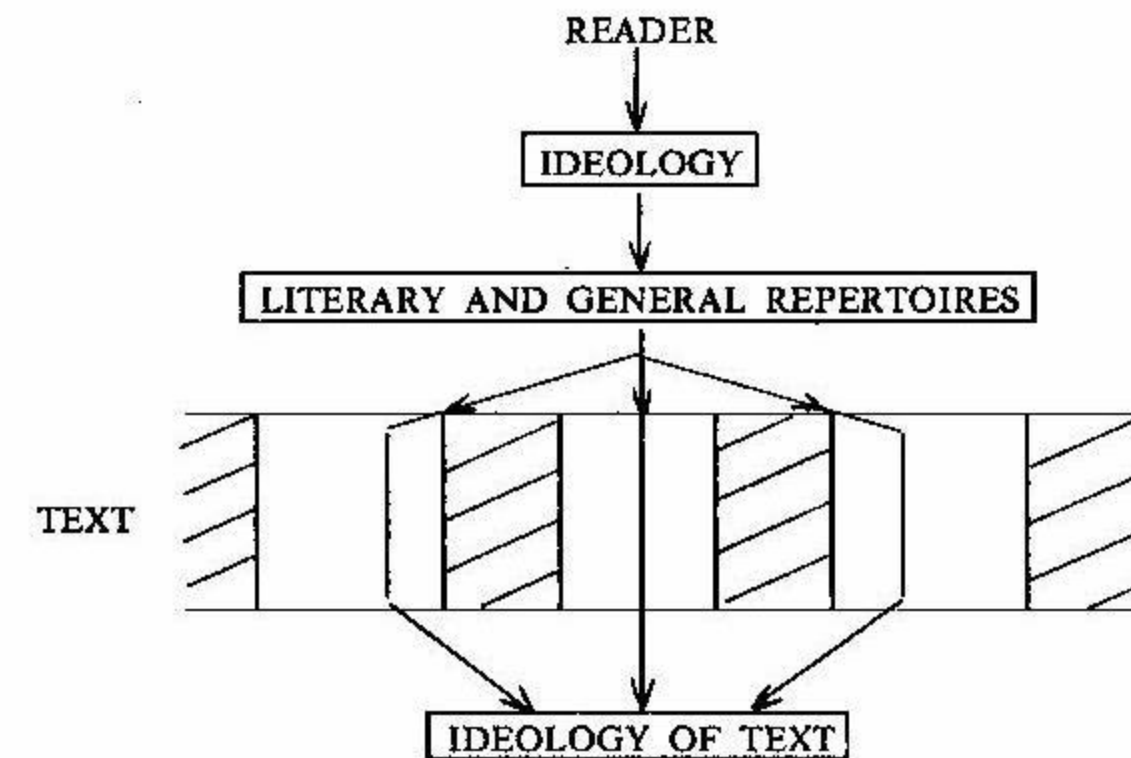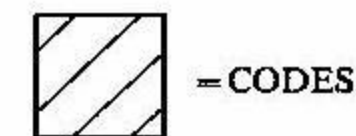

Figure 2

If one were to "unmask" a text, or a writer's ideology, the process can then be reversed. By decoding the intra-textual web of codes, one is able to arrive at a reconstruction of the ideological assumptions which these codes represent.

As the majority of South African novels in English register "their protest against *apartheid*" (Klima 1974:193) and as such can be classified as committed novels, an application of the theoretical parameters outlined previously by means of an exploration of the interplay between and active political purpose and the use of traditional literary forms and conventions seems called for.

4. The Codification of Commitment in Paton, Brink and Nkosi

Seen against the context outlined above, it is clear that a definite *matching* of repertoires will result when South African readers, or informed foreign readers read these novels. This can clearly by seen in the reviews cited in the references at the end of this article.

It is theoretically possible (but – given an informed readership – highly improbable) that a *mismatching* can occur when readers, who have no religious background read Paton or when those who have never heard of the South African political system read Brink or Nkosi's novels.

While it is highly improbable, it is theoretically also possible that a *clashing* of repertoires can result from the interaction between the texts and ultra-conservative and racist readers who disagree completely with the fundamental idea of equality as expressed in all three novels.

What is a more important consideration in evaluating the viability of the proposed model, are the numerous possibilities of *strong readings* which these novels can evoke and which can be determined by using the model.

The three novels in question not only share a similar theme, but face similar problems. Before they can contemplate any kind of human action, they first have to "locate it within a precise *social framework* of racial conflict" in which the "... colour differences provide the ultimate symbols which South African writers have always considered their business to explain" (Nkosi 1981:76; my italics-AMdeL). They also have to overcome what Klima (1977:194) calls "sensationalism" with its features of a strong appeal to emotion, a tendency to surprise, the author's interest in individuality and a close relation to journalism.

If one were to consider which of these novels are the most likely to succeed in changing their readers' attitude without letting the readers feel dictated to or being patronized (especially now that the immediacy of the topic has disappeared with the scrapping of the relevant Act), certain interesting correspondences and differences now claim priority. I want to argue, in agreement with Lotman (1977:25) that only that work which is a complex web of codes and which simultaneously creates the illusion of a free play of interpretative options and as such generate a greater number of possible interpretations, will stand the test of time and transcend the level of mere didacticism or cheap moralizing.

The manipulation of codes and various sub-codes forms a system of representations which are rooted in each writer's ideology and which reveal something of the social consciousness of each writer in relation to his class and cultural group. In order to provide and indication of how the adapted model allows the reader to investigate and evaluate some of the differences and correspondences between the texts, I will therefore briefly focus attention only on four issues, viz. the use of a *dominant* code, a brief *summary* of each writer's ideological stance, each writer's *rendering* of the codes of actuality, setting and character, the thematic code of betrayal and. finally, each writer's use of *language*.

Before attempting this, however, it is necessary to state clearly – as indeed Du Plooy (1986:294) does – that no theoretical model can be superimposed in its entirety onto a narrative text. Narrative texts are not produced according to logical plans or recipes. It is also possible to find a narrative text to suit one's model or interpretative strategy and thereby not testing the model honestly[9]. My assumption is therefore that theoretical models might provide a way into a text, or might allow a reader to explore avenues which he might otherwise not have seen. It is also possible that the model may lead the interpretative process up to a point, before a weakness in the model leads to a false interpretation or a dead end. It is then necessary to re-examine the model. However, this inherent characteristic of all theoretical models should not prevent one from examining the practical applications that each model may have.

The dominant code that each writer uses guides and directs the reader and gives definite "boundary conditions" by which they force and control strong readings of the text. Paton focuses on a religious and didactic code; Brink's main code combines history and the epic while Nkosi works within the parameters of a psychological code.

Paton's ideological stance can loosely be termed Christian-Liberalist. He was strongly influenced by religion[10]. *Too Late the Phalarope*[11] (1955) concerns the tragic downfall of a hero in the small rural community of Venterspan and hinges on four dominant concepts within Afrikaner culture in general but which had particular significance in post-war years, viz. *church, language, nation* and *race*. The concepts form an intra-textual web which, in turn, provides the reader with the basic codes with which to interpret the novel. It is also this emphasis on contemporary actuality which dates novel, with its references to "the red oath" (Paton 1987:29), "Louis Botha ..and Jan Smuts" (Paton 1987:30).

Pieter van Vlaanderen is almost a modern Renaissance man: "...scholar and man of action, strong and gentle, brave and sensitive, briliant soldier and rugby

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[9] Conrad's *The Secret Agent* is a case in point. Seymour-Smith summarizes the notion of laying claim to Conrad on the basis of a particular ideology as follows: "Critics of both the left and the right have tried to claim Conrad as one of their own or, alternatively, have laid into him for being politically obtuse – usually reactionary. But *The Secret Agent*, of all his novels, is the one which shows both factions to be wrong" (1986:9). See also Terry Eagleton's reading of the same novel, entitled "Form, Ideology and *The Secret Agent*" (1986:23-32).

[10] In the first part of his autobiography, Paton stresses the influence that religion had on him from an early age: "Our home was a deeply religious one. This left an abiding mark on my sisters and myself" (1980:11).

[11] There is an interesting parallel between Paton and Nkosi's use of bird images in their titles. In both instances, the birds referred to represent something which is unattainable. According to Harvey, the phalarope " is a bird ...which [Jacob van Vlaanderen] knows is to be found in their district. He plans an expedition with his son to demonstrate the fact to him and, more important, though never acknowledged, to try and re-establish some understanding and sympathetic contact between them. But 'the phalarope' is 'too late'" (1953:186). Nkosi uses the bird image in his title to represent the freedom of sexual encounters which his protagonist has been deprived of.

player, and, at the time of the story, lieutenant in the police" (Harvey 1953:186). The destruction of Van Vlaanderen and his family results partly from his uncontrollable lust for a black girl, but also partly from his complete isolation from his community. Paton chose this kind of rural Afrikaner community because it exemplified the rigid and traditionalist way of Afrikaner dogmatism which he wants to expose. There are interesting formal parallels with the code of the classic Aristotelian tragic hero. Van Vlaanderen is isolated from his community because of their hero-worshipping. The overwhelming sense of isolation which he experiences is further enhanced by his having studied and travelled widely and therefore having a much more refined and developed sense of morality than the members of his family or community. However, the frigidity of his wife Nella and temptation in the form of Stephanie lead him to a point of crisis. He inevitably makes the wrong choice and goes through moments of intense mental anguish. Yet he repeats his actions and eventually destroys himself.

But the real theme of the book is the diversity of interpretations that each of the principal characters in the book gives to the Christian ethic of forgiveness. Muller (1984:100) summarizes Paton's aim with the novels as follows:" [As a Christian Paton] feels called to force his fellow countrymen to see the dangers of separatism and the necessity for forgiveness and change unless they wish to re-crucify Christ in crucifying their fellow man. He is stressing the need for understanding, love and forgiveness before there can be hope of redemption, either in personal relationships; or in the wider socio/political context". The religious code is emphasized by the juxtaposing of Jacob Van Vlaanderen and the Captain. Jacob Van Vlaanderen's lack of forgiveness and rigid dogmatism is exemplified in his action after he hears of his son's deeds. The theme of betrayal is very significant in this episode. Pieter betrayed the nation by joining the British Forces in the War and accepting the DSO; but with his act of miscegenation he betrays the race and commits the unpardonable sin in his father's eyes:

> [Jacob]... said to me, 'Sophie, the Book'. So I brough him the Book, and he put it between his arms...but he did not read at all, he opened it at the beginning where are all the names of the van Vlaanderens, for more than a hundred and fifty years...So he took the pen and ink, and crossed out the name of Pieter van Vlaanderen from the Book, not once but many times (Paton 1987:185).

The Captain, on the other hand, acts with true forgiveness and compassion:

> The captain looked at him, and then again at my sister-in-law, and he said to her: I'll stand by the boy'. Then he looked again at my brother and said to him, 'I'll stand by the boy'. (Paton 1987:185).

Paton's language strongly enforces the religious code of the novel. It has many Biblical allusions, as this example from the end of the first chapter illustrates:

> All these things I will write down, yet it is not only they that trouble my mind; nor is it only that I may show that though one neither entreated nor repented, the other did both entreaty and repent; nor is it only that men may have more knowledge of compassion. For I also remember the voice that came to John in Patmos, saying, what thou seest, write it in a book, yet do I dare to claim a knowledge of some voice. (1987:10)

To conclude: Paton uses a fairly simple web of codes which directs the reader's interaction with the text, but which also limits the range of interpretative options. Paton's didacticism is sometimes too obvious to create the illusion of a wide range of interpretative options. The reader might easily feel as if he is reading a sermon.

Brink outlines his ideological stance in an autobiographical essay entitled "A Background to Dissidence" (1983). He associates himself with the "Sestigers" [the writers of the sixties] who had been influenced by the student revolts in the 'sixties. The Sestigers' experience of the turmoil brought home one thing, viz, "the relationship of the individual with his society, and his need to assume responsibility within that society" (Brink 1983:34). Since his return from Europe, he has become " ever more deeply involved, in what is happening in this country" (Brink 1983:35). He summarizes his views about *apartheid* as follows:

> Apartheid, as I see it, denies what is best in the Afrikaner himself. If reveals only that side of him which is characterized by fear, by suspicion, by uncertainty, hence by arrogance, meanness, narrowmindedness, pigheadedness. What it denies is the Afrikaner's reverence for life, his romanticism, his sense of the mystical, his deep attachment to the earth, his generosity, his compassion. (1983:19)

His views on literary commitment are equally important. The only "literary cause" worth pleading for, is that of "a literature wholly committed to humanity, which requires a peculiar *awareness* in those who write in this country...; [an] awareness of the country as a whole and of its relation to the fierce world around us" (Brink 1967:52)

An *Instant in the Wind* (1976) combines the code of the epic with that of history with an almost "documentary degree of verisimilitude" (Berner 1977:669). He places the action in the colonial past, but universalizes it by a setting of "primal innocence, a kind of Eden by the sea..." (Berner 1977:669)[12]. Strongly reminiscent of Patrick White's *Voss*, it takes the few recorded facts of an episode in the past to evoke the history and relationship of a white woman, Elisabeth Larsson, and Adam Mantoor, a runaway slave. At first it is an account of "a relationship between a black man and a white woman and a landscape, and between them and the historical currents which have set them together, almost at opposite ends of the social scale, in an

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[12] Brink's use of nature as a catalyst to bring out man's inner feelings and passions remind strongly of Golding's method in *Lord of the Flies*.

embryonic civilization in Southern Africa" (Pike 1976:1147). By placing it within the historical framework of the early settlers in the Cape, he implicitly attacks the political mythos of the present. The trek through the interior is also a discovery of each protagonist's complicated spiritual interior and is far more complicated than that of Pieter van Vlaanderen. Although his use of dialogue is not without weaknesses, as Totton (1976:29) indicates when he raises the question: "Could black slave and white mistress have shared such a sophisticated vocabulary in which to communicate?", Brink's use of multidimensional symbols and metaphors (the maps and letters, the journey, the cyclical time, etc.) makes his use of language far more complex than the simple language used by Paton's narrator.

For example, Brinks's concern with the harsh landscape in the novel has a number of connotations. It not only parallels the protagonists' interiors, but is also a metaphor for the act of committed writing as being the committed writer's calling to rouse the social consciousness of a nation. In an essay entitled "Mapmakers" (1978), he argues in geographical metaphors, stating that the committed writer "is slaving away in his ceaseless attempt to draw the map of his vision of truth, risking his liberty in order to offer to the world a view of itself" (1983:167).

But it is Brink's representation of the theme of betrayal which best displays the the novel's intricate web of symbols and codes and as such proves it to be far more complex and superior to both the other novels in question. Adam experiences a number of betrayals: in his childhood, he is betrayed by his friend Lewies and is flogged while Lewies comes off free; he experiences the sale of his first love, the slave girl from Java, as a betrayal; he betrays his parents and his grandparents by "playing white". "They have tamed me and drawn me under the yoke. Forgive me, Grandfather, Grandmother Seli, Father, Mother. All of you. I no longer know my rightful place" (1979:236). The worst betrayal is that of Elizabeth. She often thinks that "love is the beginning of violence and betrayal" (1979:101), but her thoughts become deeds when they meet the first white person on their journey. She is invited in while Adam is sent round to the kitchen; she eats at the table, while he has to crouch with the other servants on the floor. She is invited to sleep in their bed, while "your slave can sleep here in the kitchen with the others" (1979:255). What makes Elizabeth's betrayal even worse, is the fact she has ample opportunity to tell De Klerk about their relationship. It is only when she needs Adam when De Klerk tries to rape her, that she speaks up: "Leave him alone...He is my husband...He's come all the way with me" (1979:227).

Nkosi's ideology is summarized by Niven (1987:148), who calls him "one of the architects of contemporary black consciousness in South Africa, though it

is more than twenty years since he lived in his own country"[13]. His view of commitment is of particular importance to this paper. His primary concern, according to Klima (1974:196) is that of creative freedom and the writer's full possibility of self-expression in the the broadest sense of the word. Nkosi is skeptical of "political commitment".

> A writer's special commitment is to language and its renewal and to the making of a better instrument for the delineation of human craftsmanship – it is a commitment to craftsmanship. This is not at all a romantic notion. After all, language is not unrelated to those concerns that we speak of as freedom, preservation of human life, etc. I certainly find no contradistinction between language as a method or form and the content of what is being expressed - these two are inseparable. If a writer were to write a poem about slavery and I found in it an image like 'as happy as a slave', I shound judge that poem a failure, especially if it were full of lines like that. (1968:48)

The *Mating Birds* (1986) deals with the well-worn and outdated theme of misceganation in a psychological mode, noticeable for "its eschewal of naturalism for a more expressionistic register, evocative of irresolution and moral uncertainty" (Lazarus 1987:113). In contrast to other South African works which tend to the question of how *apartheid* can be defeated, Nkosi sets out to render "the *experience* of life under *apartheid*" by tracing the terrain of obsession and psychopathology as social indices and as such", exploring the extent to which *apartheid* as a discourse is capable of penetrating the consciousness of a character (Lazarus 1987:14). The novel is encoded with a black man's reflection in his prison cell on his traumatic consummated relationship with a white girl. The cliched setting is emphasized by the image of the mating birds:

> The mating birds caw, they whir and whirl outside my window and the smell of fresh spring sharpens the air with its lush, acrid promise. All the same, it is mostly the birds pairing in the open sky that remind me with a vivid poignancy I rarely feel these days why I'm locked up in this tiny cell (1987:2)

The narrative consists of a series of controlled flashbacks interspersed with several discourses which Nkosi employs to create a sense of authenticity: there is the report of the criminologist, the victim's version, the cathecism in court and the verdict of the newspapers (Dyer 1986:23). The dominant metaphors in the narrative are the contrast between "Black" and "White" and the emphasis on the by foul and derogatory language used by whites. The prosecutor's name, "Kakmekaar" (1987:33) literally means defecating on someone else and as such

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[13] Nkosi's absence from his country of birth is clearly visible in his novel. He depicts a kind of *apartheid* through his choice of words and descriptions which no longer exists. As such he is running the risk of either being accused of using his art as a means of propaganda, or, in McCormick and Waller's terms, he might run the risk of causing a mismatching between the reader who is unfamiliar with the old-style of *apartheid*, and the text.

is completely meaningless and without function. Although Nkosi's novel was published after many of the discriminatory laws had been repealed, he dates the novel by using the psychological mode in referring to Vorster, the Minister of Police in the 'sixties and to the segregated classes at the University of Natal in his flashbacks. It is precisely this inversion of historical time which prevents the novel from transcending the level of mere actuality. It is important to note that, in contrast to Brink's use of a historical code, Nkosi's use does not succeed in defamiliarizing actuality, and does not thereby strengthen his argument. It is also important to note that – although Nkosi uses certain dominant codes to align his readers' – these are too obvious and stereotyped. They also do not have multidimensional levels of interpretation.

But it is especially because Nkosi refutes his own views regarding an artist's commitment to craftsmanship and use's of language that his novel fails. It fails because it is emotionally and stylistically overheated, or, as King says, because it is "preposterously overwritten, with phrases like 'ground to dust by a nameless lust' and 'raindrops as large as the breasts of a young Zulu virgin" (1986: 21). Wilson (1989: 25) also criticizes Nkosi for using the stock image of the pale evil seductress, the eternally corrupting female. This image is linked to the theme of betrayal. In the build-up to their ill-fated physical encounter, Sibiya experiences insignificant events like an accidental collision as an act during which their mutual attraction is becomes a bond between them:" [in our eagerness to retrieve her property]...the two of us [were] crouching together ...our faces nearly touching...Our heads were lowered together at the exact moment...our face nearly touching...excited by such close proximity...I felt as though I had plunged naked into a disturbed pool of water..." (Nkosi 1987: 115). The very same girl later betrays him when a white man asks her: "'What does the kaffir want? Do you know him?' And Veronica lied. 'Some vagrant native, I suppose'" (Nkosi 1987: 135). Lazarus feels that Nkosi's handling of the female destroys any sympathy which the reader might have had for Sibiya. In attempting to portray the ambiguous role afforded by certain critics to white women in a racist society. Nkosi attempts to create in Veronica the simultaneous emergence as the agent of Sibiya's destruction and herself as a pawn in the service of then overarching racist order. She is to be puppeteer and puppet at the same time. She is, however, not credible as the *subject* or active bearer of domination. Lazarus (1987: 118) summarizes this aspect of the novel as follows:

> In ...*Mating Birds*... this lack of credibility is acute: for Nkosi so *naturalizes* culturally constructed gender relations, he so relentlessly sexualizes Veronica, that the reader is invited to see her archetypally as Woman, the natural and fitting object of Man's lust.

Nkosi's juxtaposing of two major codes, Black and White, and their connotations provide a simplistic and limited web of intra-textual codes with a restricted number of interpretative options which, as in Paton's case, often smacks of overt didacticism.

To conclude: the three novels in question all use certain codes by means of which they attempt to guide the readers' interpretations. Each writer tries to affect a *strong reading*. The obvious connotations and simplicity of the web of codes used by both Paton and Nkosi may lead to either to a *mismatching* or a *clashing* of repertoires. Brink's multidimensional web of codes creates the illusion of allowing the reader a free play in *matching* his repertoires with that of the text. Yet it is exactly in creating this illusion that Brink can effect *strong readings*.

5. Conclusion

If one were to evaluate the viability of the model, certain elements need to be taken into account. The most obvious shortcoming of the model is that it ignores a considerable body of sophisticated Marxist theory. This has obvious disadvantages for its status as theoretical model, each of which can be argued at length. On the other hand, by ignoring some highly philosophical and prescriptive models about literature and its effect on readers, this rigorously constructed model is eminently more practical[14] than many of the sophisticated Marxist models.

The need for constructing useful models for interpreting texts is an important area for further research now that the extreme objectivism in literary studies has been renounced (Ryan and Ryan 1988: 31). Seen in this light, McCormick and Waller's model and the adaption suggested have two positive contributions to make. It firstly provides a workable model and a practical point of departure for the reading of committed texts, and, secondly, provides a set of critical terminology with which the complex interaction between text and reader can be described in a fairly objective and scientific[15] manner.

At the beginning of the article some of the problematic issues concerning committed writing in general, and the representation and "unmasking" of a writer's in particular were raised. The adaptation and application of McCormick and Waller's model suggest that one of the major problems, viz. denying the specificity of the writer's commitment or political purpose as a formally determining factor, can be addressed in a responsible and scientific manner by using their concept of *strong readings*. Paradoxically, it is also by analyzing the codes that a writer uses in creating that one can, *a la* Jameson, "unmask" the writer's ideology, therefore exposing a major weakness of

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[14] Its possibilities in the teaching of literature has not been investigated, but appears to me be quite considerable. Considering the current debate on the role of theory in the teaching of literature, there seems to be a need for such an investigation. See also note 8.

[15] The word "scientific" is used in the sense of "Literaturwissenschaft".

committed texts, viz. that texts which have been written with an explicit ideological bias are ultimately more vulnerable to ideological unmasking than texts which have been written without any explicit ideological bias. However, this is a subject for a more detailed discusssion and has been dealt with elsewhere[16].

The success of a writer's representation and "masking" of his ideology can perhaps ultimately be measured by his ability to defamiliarize actuality and to weave a multidimensional web of codes. Committed works which have the best chance of being and remaining canonized long after the actuality of their subject matter has disappeared, are those which create credible and strong "boundaries" within the text which "guide" each reading. Strong readings are ultimately a matter of their use of language, or, in the words of Orwell, that master of committed language, those texts of which the web of codes consist "largely [of] the perversion of words, and... the less obvious this perversion is, the more thoroughly it has been done" (1980: 19-20). When using McCormick and Waller's strategies as criteria for interpreting the three writers' "masking" of their ideologies, only Brink's "perversion of words" seems to me to qualify his novel as successfully defamiliriazing actuality and creating the boundaries for a strong reading.

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[16] This issue has been dealt with in some detail in my article entitled 'The Representation of Ideology: Orwell's (Re) Reading of "Boys' Weeklies",' Literator, 11(3), 1990. 108-120.