

## Revelation and Veridiction: Modes of Disclosure in Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Season's End* and Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*

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# Revelation and Veridiction: Modes of Disclosure in Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Season's End* and Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*

This paper examines how the semiotic category of veridiction, which underpins the narrative structure of two South African novels, Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Season's End* and Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*, serves to construct a picture of the true nature of South Africa's apartheid regime through different forms of modality and a series of dramatic disclosures. It further seeks to analyse the nature and impact of these revelations in terms of event and affect as defined by Gilles Deleuze, and to assess the historical relevance of each text.

South African fiction whether by black or white writers has always shown a concern for moral issues in connection with the veritable nature of the apartheid regime. This concern has often been expressed through a metaphoric vision of reality in which the visible, the banality of everyday life, of law and order, conceals invisible forces operating in secret. Thus South African fiction offers narratives often geared towards the disclosure of the hidden evils of apartheid through dramatic representations such as scenes of torture or of sexual perversion as in Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (1972) and Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1995). The rationale of both novels is premised upon a system of narrative devices which seek to establish clear-cut differences between the deceptive façade and values of the regime and the lies and horrors they conceal. As J.M. Coetzee points out "The response of South Africa's legislators to what disturbs their white electorate is usually to order it out of sight" (Coetzee 1986: 361). This paper first examines how the narrative and semiotic strategies used in both novels articulate a system of modalities or "veridiction" which exposes and subverts the discourse and practice of apartheid, then analyses how the notions of event and affect as defined by Gilles Deleuze account for the manner in which these revelations shape the narration and finally scrutinizes the different ideological stances which underpin the semiotic strategy of disclosure, in each novel.

The semiotic category of “veridiction” is related to the expression of modality in a narrative. It helps to assess the truth value of a “state utterance”, i.e., a relation between a subject and an object, a theme and a predicate which characterizes a statement, a situation or an attitude. Semiotic analysis uses two interpretive instances operating on two correlated levels of perception. The first level, called level of “manifestation”, brings into play an interpretive instance (character, reader or narrator) whose judgment is based on the state utterance as it is given to interpretation in the narrative. The second level, called level of “immanence”, refers to the actual sequence of events in the narrative: it may either confirm or contradict the interpretation defined on the level of manifestation. The truth value of any state utterance is determined by the interplay between the two levels of definition. If, for instance, a narrative produces the following sequence: “Everybody believed that Paul was poor, but in fact he was a rich man”, the connection between the subject, /Paul/, and the object, /poverty/, is conjured up at both levels: manifestation with the interpretive instance “everybody”, and immanence with the evidence provided by the narration itself. The state of the relation /Paul/ – /poverty/ is defined differently at each level. On the level of manifestation, it is perceived as a conjunction (/Paul/ ^ /poverty/), whereas on the level of immanence it is posited as disjunctive (/Paul/ v /poverty/). Thus whenever a narrative produces a state utterance, one examines it on each level and sees whether it is defined negatively or positively on each: “the combination of both definitions on these levels constitutes the veridiction of this utterance” (Groupe d’Entrevernes 42). For example, if Odysseus can pass as a beggar in the eyes of the suitors when he returns to Ithaca, the reader knows from the narrative that he is a king. The negative definition of the character on the level of manifestation is contradicted by the positive definition provided by the narrative which, furthermore, delivers the proof of his true identity: the scar on his thigh. The discrepancy between the two correlated levels of perception modalises the connection of Odysseus to his identity through a figure of veridiction called secrecy. The correlation between manifestation and immanence is more frequently referred to as one between /being/ and /seeming/ and their negations /not-being/ and /not-seeming/. Being and seeming do not constitute values in themselves but are relative positions in a narrative to express different forms of modalities. Together with their negations they constitute a four-term system – /being/ and /not-being/, /seeming/ and /not-seeming/ – which generates different modalities or figures of veridiction: truth [/seeming/ +/being /], lie [/non-seeming/ + /not-being/], falsehood [/seeming/ + /not-being/] and secrecy [/not-seeming/ + /being/]. For example, Molière’s play *Tartuffe*, is organised around the eponymous character’s strategy of deception which corresponds to the figure of veridiction called falsehood, combining /seeming/ and /not-being/. However within this overall paradigm other forms of modality are introduced such as

truth: Orgon and Orgon's mother believe that Tartuffe is true to his words (truth = /seeming/ + /being/) until events finally prove them wrong.

The two South African writers, Alex La Guma and Mark Behr, have used the possibilities offered by the system of veridiction to expose the devious strategies of the apartheid regime and evaluate its pernicious effects. Alex La Guma's novel *In the Fog of the Season's End* (1972) and Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1995), first published in Afrikaans in 1993, seek to give an insight into the true nature of apartheid and its incidence on people's mentalities and behaviour. The story of each novel is set in the same locale – Cape Town and its vicinity – but at different historical moments: the post-Sharpeville era in La Guma's novel, during which black resistance movements were trying to reorganize themselves at home and abroad; the early seventies for Behr's novel which saw a period of intense black trade-union militancy and police repression, along with the resurgence of black political activism in the wake of the victories scored by African liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau (Omer-Cooper 223). In each novel the narrative is constructed in such a way that the story builds up to a climax, a dramatic scene, whose violence or sexual perversity is meant to jolt characters and readers into a moral or political awareness. Both novels seek to restore the true picture of apartheid South Africa by exposing the state's and individuals' strategies of deception. The structure of both novels is predicated upon the use of the different figures of veridiction analysed above. For instance when one of La Guma's characters, a black activist named Hazel, is first confronted with the senior police officer who interrogates him before he is carried off to the torture chamber, the narrator and/or the character himself describe/s him as a man "who could have been an advertisement for good cheer" (La Guma 3). The figure of deception opposes the apparent bonhomie of the officer (level of manifestation) to his real ruthlessness – he is the one who gives the order to torture Hazel –, a fact which is confirmed by the narrative itself (level of immanence). Both La Guma's and Behr's novels use veridiction to shape and orient the narrative so as to lay bare the official lies, betrayals and manipulations of the apartheid regime. One should add however that if the forms of veridiction depend entirely on semiotic combinations, their content depends on the moment of narration. In other words, veridiction is also a function of discursivity insofar as it is anchored in an ideologically oriented discourse determined by a historically bound moment of enunciation.

In both *In the Fog of the Season's End* and *The Smell of Apples* the climax of the story is staged as a dramatic, even crude, scene of revelation: a scene of torture in the first case, one of sexual assault committed on a child in the second. There is only a few years' interval between La Guma's novel, written in 1972 while the writer was in exile in London and his story's time frame, whereas Behr's, set in the early seventies, was written over twenty years after

the events it relates, just prior to the first general elections in April 1994. La Guma's novel involves an extradiegetic narrator and uses the two major protagonists as focalisers. One, called Beukes, is a young activist in an underground resistance movement whom we follow during the space of one week, distributing politically subversive leaflets, meeting one of the underground leaders of the movement and monitoring the departure of three future freedom fighters. The other is Elias Tekwane, whose code name is Hazel, the underground leader who meets Beukes in a secret place but who finally gets caught by the police and is tortured to death. Behr's novel is told by a first person narrator – a child called Marnus Erasmus – who relates, in the present tense and in the manner of a confession, the major events which take place during the week preceding the end of the school year in December 1973. The Erasmuses belong to what may appropriately be called the Afrikaner establishment as they are closely linked to the Afrikaner political and military apparatus. Significantly Marnus's father has just recently been promoted general-major in the South African army. Moreover they all seem to abide by the creeds and values that supposedly weld together the Afrikaner community, i.e., those which are rooted in the ideology of Christian Nationalism. Accordingly, the Erasmuses want to project the seamless image of a perfectly happy and conventional Afrikaner family. However, some of the outstanding events of the week which Marnus records – the secret visit of a Chilean general who has been invited by his father to stay at their place, the brutal assault on their Coloured domestic servant's son by three white men, and finally the shocking discovery of his father sexually assaulting his friend Frikkie in the guest bedroom – point to the underlying forces and contradictions which undermine the outward appearance of social propriety.

In La Guma's novel, Beukes moves from hiding-place to hiding-place, adopting the attitude and clothes of any ordinary city-dweller so as to pass unnoticed. He partakes of the semiotic figure of veridiction defined above as secrecy: his banal and implicitly negative appearance belies the positive value of his political commitment. Different motifs and metaphors linked to the figure of secrecy are woven into the text. For example, one of the fancies which often flashes through Beukes's mind is to picture himself in a detective film, a thriller or a spy novel, thus projecting upon his situation a sense of unreality, mystery, danger and suspense. The reader sees with the gaze of Beukes who carefully scrutinises the world to detect the slightest sign of danger. In his position the world is deceptive simply because the political system in which he lives is a web of lies. The role of Beukes and Hazel as interpreters is precisely to show up the world created by apartheid as a mendacious one by methodically disclosing its hidden secrets. The paradigm of deceptiveness in the novel boils down to the image of ordinariness, of the spurious innocence of an orderly world which conceals a frightening reality, as Hazel remarks after his arrest: "Behind the ugly mask of the regime was

an even uglier face which he had not yet looked on [...] here behind the polished windows, the gratings and the Government paintwork, was another dimension of terror” (La Guma 3).

Behr’s novel also displays a world of lies and make-believe. It is certainly no coincidence that the author has chosen for his setting a neighbourhood situated near False Bay, east of the Cape peninsula, whose name was given to it by Portuguese sailors who mistook it for Table Bay on the western side of the peninsula. Marnus does not understand everything he sees and hears and a lot of what he records is a matter of inference left for the reader to understand. He is as a whole an obedient child properly brought up along Christian and nationalist lines, who takes his parents’ teachings and recommendations for granted. He adores his mother but truly admires his father whom he hopes to emulate one day. His father is represented in his narrative as the model of masculinity, a handsome officer and a man who wields a natural authority. The world the child sees and depicts is an ideal one or more precisely it represents the ideal image which his parents would like to give of their family life, i.e., one of beauty and harmony – the physical beauty they are endowed with and the beauty of the setting in which the Marnuses live, the harmony of private and social lives under the wise guidance of his mother who sees a sign of God in daily events and a moral to be drawn from each of them. But for the reader, the world as seen by Marnus is clearly one of false appearances, obviously undermined by contradictions which the child is unable to grasp. He doesn’t understand why his mother is at pains to explain why their maid-servant’s son aged ten was deliberately burned by three white railway men for allegedly stealing some charcoal: “Then someone caught him. They took off his clothes and rubbed lard or something all over his back. And [...] they held him in front of the locomotive fire” (Behr 130-131). The only explanation she can come up with to answer her son’s queries is: “But all white people aren’t Christians. Remember, there are also lower-class whites. Railway people aren’t all that educated as a rule, either” (Behr 139). The child never questions the neat class and racial divisions endorsed by his parents. When a conflict erupts among his relatives for political reasons he always chooses the side of his parents although he feels affectively close to the person they reject, as in the case of his young aunt, Tannie Karla, who is no longer welcome at the Erasmuses’ because her so-called “liberal” opinions are equated with communism in the minds of his parents. Yet the seamless façade of this ostensibly harmonious world cannot occasionally resist the thrust of the lies it conceals. Thus Marnus lies to his teacher to protect his friend Frikkie when he swears that he gives him maths lessons whereas in fact he allows him to copy his home assignments. He also lies to his mother on another occasion to hide the fact that he has stolen flowers from one of his neighbours’ garden. His mother herself keeps meeting Tannie Karla secretly for fear she might be reprimanded by her husband and

even asks her children to keep mum. Nor does she really tell the truth when she answers the Chilean general that, although she enjoyed being an operatic singer in the past, she is perfectly happy with being a housewife and mother. The greatest liar of all is, of course, the father, who in spite of his ostensible moral righteousness and military dignity is a child molester.

The truth is finally discovered through a sign shift and the motif of the peep-hole, which places the reader in the position of a voyeur. Marnus's room is situated right above the guest room in which the Chilean general sleeps. In the floor-boards of his room there are two holes where the knots of the wood have come off. A few days before, peeping through the holes, he had discovered that the General has a long scar on his back. He had also noticed, on several occasions, the striking resemblance between his father and the General. On that dramatic morning, when peeping again through the holes in the floorboard, he becomes a witness to the scene of sodomy involving his friend Frikkie and a man he can only see the back of. He immediately infers that it is the General who is the perpetrator, although he can see neither his face nor his bare back, since he wears a pyjama vest. His first reaction is to warn his father and he accordingly rushes to his parents' bedroom only to discover that his mother is sleeping alone in her bed. Going back to his room and peeping again he discovers that in the excitement of the action the man's pyjama-shirt has moved half-way up, but to his surprise, he sees that the sign he is expecting is absent: "the scar [was] gone from the General's back" (Behr 177). When the true identity of the man below dawns on him the revelation comes as a shock whose traumatic impact can only be expressed in the form of a paradox: "I feel like someone who is scared of everything and scared of nothing" (Behr 177).

Both novels thus culminate in a moment of painful revelation which shatters an entire system of delusion. On the face of it, the two novels adopt two different narrative approaches. While La Guma's novel adopts a strategy based on analepses, Behr's introduces a proleptic perspective. La Guma's novel opens with a prologue which relates the arrest of Elias Tekwane by the police and the preliminary phases of his torture. The prologue constitutes a framing narrative for the rest of the novel which practically ends with the death of Hazel at the hands of his tormentors in the penultimate chapter. Around this event the narrator frames the rest of his narrative by delving further back into the past of his protagonists. He methodically maps out the lives of Beukes and Hazel through several series of analepses. As it unfolds, the novel also displays a fairly wide range of characters and situations which together constitute a paradigm of how racial segregation has affected the majority of the population at different social levels. Behr's novel, on the other hand, gives the impression of being steeped in the present. The use of the present tense in the child's narrative seems to abrogate the temporal gap that separates the action from the narration. This choice perfectly tallies with the

ostensibly naive and restricted vision of a child who takes almost everything for granted and blindly follows his parents' teachings, as he chronologically details his and his parents' lives. But this main narrative is also combined with another one, told by Marnus fifteen years later as a military officer in the South African Defence Force involved in a fierce battle in Angola, which grimly adumbrates the character's future. Hence its proleptic dimension. However on closer examination, La Guma's and Behr's narratives present similarities. The most striking of them is their fragmentation and their teleological orientation. The two moments of revelation are meant to upset the moral consciousness of the reader and turn them into "events" with the meaning Gilles Deleuze gives to the word. An "event" is not simply something that happens but something that possesses a virtual content which exceeds the impact of its immediate perception. Through an event a society "suddenly [sees] what [is] intolerable and also [sees] the possibility of something else" (Deleuze 2003, 215).<sup>1</sup> Thus the meaning of an event is not entirely contained in its effectuation but in the fact that something of it remains even after its empirical occurrence. Gilles Deleuze also defines an event as something that happens on a frontier which separates the thinkable from the unthinkable, the known from the unknown.

The representation of torture and sexual perversion as events is not really meant to satisfy the voyeuristic pleasure of the reader, as J.M. Coetzee contends in his article "Into the Dark Chamber". He asserts that as long as apartheid prevails there is a form of obscenity in representing torture in fiction in the sense that under these conditions the writer is forced "to play the game of the state" (Coetzee 364). He further claims that torture will cease to be an object of horrible fascination only "once human acts are returned to the ambit of moral judgment" (Coetzee 368). But one could just as well claim with Gilles Deleuze that "a great novelist is an artist who invents new affects and brings them to light [...] in relation to the percepts or visions he gives us" (Deleuze 1991, 165-166) so as to give an insight into something that does not exist yet. This is why each of the spectacular scenes mentioned earlier does not really exploit a fascination for horror but aims to create an entity which exists by itself and exceeds both the act of representation and that of perception and which Deleuze calls "affect". An affect is an act which transforms an artistic representation into an autonomous entity by transcending its purely referential status, it is a process whereby "the mix of created sensations persists on its own" (Deleuze 1991, 155).

The rationale behind the narrative composition of both novels is to precisely create such affects which exceed the empirical details of their narration. It is as though the temporal or discursive dislocation which characterizes both novels were premised upon the anticipated impact of the

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<sup>1</sup> The translation of all Deleuze's quotes is mine.



dramatic events which bring them to a close. If La Guma's novel is predominantly analeptic, as we have seen above, its fairly complex temporal discontinuity is also endowed with a proleptic value in the sense that its compositional disorder, which stands as a metaphor for the social anomaly and conflicts brought about by apartheid, announces a return to chronological order and an opening onto the future. But this can be achieved only once the fate of the hero is sealed by an ordeal of tragic dimension. The tensions and contradictions of the story find their resolution in a scene of torture which, not unlike the climax of a tragedy, is a sacrificial scene followed by a catastrophe which ushers in a new vision.

In Behr's novel there is also a form of temporal dislocation. The novel, as we have noted above, is made up of Marnus's narrative as a child and of seventeen interpolated short sections, written in the present tense and in italics. In this second narrative, Marnus nervously jots down the details of the battle, his feelings, souvenirs and thoughts until he dies. The interweaving of the two narratives raises a question as to their editorial status and creates an interesting resonance. The voice of Marnus as an adult comes as a bitterly ironical echo, as from beyond a mirror, of the innocent voice of Marnus as a child whose final remark brings the novel to a deceptive idyllic end: "While Dad is praying, I open my eyes and look out across the bay. I don't know whether there is a more beautiful place in the whole world... It's a perfect day, just like yesterday. One of those days when Mum says 'the Lord's hand is resting over False Bay'" (Behr 200). The two narratives' co-occurrence results in an aesthetic combination which creates an affect. The second narrative by the older Marnus can thus be seen as the transcendental limit with which his first narrative must be contrasted so as to disclose the dire and ineluctable consequences of the mendacious world so complacently depicted in it and which Marnus's final remark perfectly encapsulates. This metaphorical or textual frontier also recalls the real frontier beyond which South Africa was waging an absurd war in the mid-eighties: both represent the ultimate limits against which meaning and heroes flounder. In La Guma's novel, the idea of transcendence is also present in the hallucinations of Hazel on the brink of death. He sees the image of his ancestors looming on the horizon in the form of a Zulu army: "But the ghosts waited for him on some far horizon. No words came, only the screaming of many crows circling the battle-field [...] Far, far, his ancestors gathered on the misty horizon, their spears sparkling like diamonds in the exploding sun" (La Guma 175). But in this more conventional evocation, the hero's death simply spells out the continuation of the African struggle against the colonial invader.

In both novels, the events which are so dramatically staged finally serve to unveil the two real forces behind the South African political system: power politics and desire. In La Guma's novel political power is shown to be arbitrary and exercised without restraint. Physical and verbal violence is

systematically meted out to those who are opposed to the regime; in Behr's novel, if the violence of the regime is somewhat attenuated by a child's gaze, it is just as destructive and pernicious. The reader understands what the presence of the military means, whether Chilean – immediately after the military coup staged by Pinochet in September 1993 – or South African, at a time when P.W. Botha was an adamant Minister of Defence under J.B. Vorster. Violence is also perceptible in the way it pervades society: the burning of Little Neville or the sadistic pleasure the two boys Frikkie and Marnus derive from bullying a little girl for the simple reason she was awkward and belonged to a lower social class.

Desire also pervades the novel but its expression is always subdued or repressed. It is clearly intimated by Marnus's fascination for the beauty of his mother. One evening, while he looked on as she was dressing up for a function, her dress fell open slightly and, Marnus notes, "I could see into the dark valley between her breasts. They looked big, white and soft" (Behr 17). This rapid glimpse nevertheless immediately fills him with a feeling of guilt as he "shot a quick glance at Ilse [his sister] to check whether she saw what I was looking at" (Behr 17). Marnus also suspects there is a love affair between the General and Ilse, aged seventeen. The brutal eruption of desire in the form of sexual perversion at the end of the novel takes on a symbolic value, as it clearly connects political power to sexual perversion by associating the father's outward appearance of respectability, strict morality and his proclaimed belief in the necessity of law and order, to hidden and reprehensible sexual drives.

In both novels the revelation of what lies behind the scenes of normality, order, respectability and social harmony boils down to a semiotic manipulation, that is to say, a procedure which aims to convince the reader of the validity of the modalities of action which the heroes are made to carry out in the narrative (Groupe d'Entrevignes 54-55). La Guma's novel is obviously a novel written by a committed writer who clearly wants to deliver a severe indictment of apartheid. It is relentless in its attacks on the white ruling class and is clearly Manichean. It is a problem novel meant to serve a cause and conscientize its readers. Mark Behr too manipulates his reader. The child's narrative for all its ostensible naivety is a confession which, in the political context of the 1990s, is implicitly meant as an act of contrition, indeed even an admission of guilt. Behr's approach is essentially ironical and oblique but also one fraught with ambiguity. The main characters in his novel can be despicable, irritating and revolting, but also occasionally lovable, surprising, fragile, and mysterious, as when Marnus's father, after thrashing his son for refusing to put on a camouflage suit, regrets it and weeps while embracing him. The enigmatic title of the novel *The Smell of Apples*, epitomises the ambiguity of Behr's manipulation. The apples the title refers to are those grown by one of his father's uncles, Uncle Samuel, a bag of which Marnus

and his father fetch from his farm. Uncle Samuel, like all the other members of the family, was a former colonial farmer in Tanganyika before it became independent; They all fled the country to settle down in South Africa. Symbolically the apples are thus associated with colonial attitudes and mentalities. The smell of apples alluded to in the title is not only the real or natural smell of apples but also the sour smell of sex which still sticks to Frikkie's hands and spoils all the apples he picks up from the fruit bowl at breakfast the following morning: "These apples are rotten or something," says Frikkie, and he turns his apple around in his hand after sniffing at it. 'They stink, Smell this,' and he holds the apple to my nose. I smell the apple in my hand. It smells sour'" (Behr 179). It takes some time for Marnus to realize that it is not the apples that smell rotten but his friend's hands: "What smells like that?' I ask. But he shakes his head and pushes his hand under the open tap" (Behr 179). It is not the apples which are rotten – that is the symbolic end product of a long tradition of pioneers and colonial farmers – but an external factor which taints their natural smell. We do not therefore find in the novel a downright condemnation of Afrikaners but an exposure of the excesses and contradictions of the exercise of power by the Afrikaners. More significantly, Behr's novel is ambivalent on account of its relation to history. In La Guma's novel, the sacrifice of Hazel opens up a vision of the future. At the end of the novel Beukes comes up with a prophetic statement: "Beukes stood by the side of the street in the early morning sun and thought, they have gone to war in the name of a suffering people. What the enemy has created these will become battle-grounds, and what we see now is only the tip of an iceberg of resentment against an ignoble regime, the tortured victims of hatred and humiliation" (La Guma 180). Whereas La Guma's perspective is firmly rooted in the belief that history is geared towards victory, Behr's ends on an aporia: the grim resignation consigned by Marnus as an adult in his final pronouncement "Death brings its own freedom, and it is for the living that the dead should mourn, for in life there is no escape from history" (Behr198) contradicts the ostensibly confident optimism of Marnus's remark at the very end of the novel: "I don't know whether there's a more beautiful place in the whole world" (Behr 200). The novel's discursive structure undermines the unity of a single narrating subject. Although the two discourses logically proceed from the same narrator at different moments in history, their unaccounted for textual co-occurrence obfuscates the possibility of a common discursive origin. Behr's choice thus subverts the assumption of a centred white South African identity, grounded in moral self-righteousness, racial superiority and political hegemony.

La Guma's and Behr's novels offer two different manners of exposing the atrocities and hypocrisies of apartheid. La Guma's is a blunt attack on the racist regime, when the struggle was beginning to pick up and gather momentum. Behr's novel, speaking from the heart of his community, lays

bare the fallacies, illusions and moral bankruptcy of the political and social milieu in which he and other white writers have been brought up. Both novels end with categorical pronouncements on history and the future of South Africa, whereas La Guma subscribes to the empowerment of black people as agents in the shaping of South African history, Behr records the disempowerment of whites as they stand condemned by history: they “cannot escape history”.

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