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Etienne Leroux's Sewe Dae by die Silbersteins: a Reexamination in the Light of its Historical Context.*

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Introductory note:

South Africa during the 1960s witnessed the fruition of divergent social and political trends which were to alter radically the nature of white political domination in that country. Black opposition to the apartheid system for the first time erupted in organized violence while, at the same time, South Africa found herself increasingly isolated within an international community in which Third World States and their anti-racist ideals were gaining extensive recognition. But perhaps of greatest significance in terms of the ruling white oligarchy, the 1960s also witnessed the first expressions of Afrikaner social modernization. Symptomatic, on one level, of this social modernization was the emergence of the *Sestiger* literary movement, of which Etienne Leroux's *Sewe Dae by die Silbersteins* was an early issue. Hailed as courageous and revolutionary, this novel came to be regarded as the first and most important ideological breakthrough of the Afrikaner 'New Left'. Critics charmed – and confused – by its stylistic novelty, have consistently failed to examine its deeper ideological and political premises. These premises, far from challenging official conceptions, served to reinforce them by giving literary expression to the Afrikaner nightmare. This study is a re-examination and re-evaluation of a cult book in terms of its historical context.

I

*Sewe dae by die Silbersteins*¹ is the story of Henry van Eeden, a young Afrikaner farmer, who is taken by his uncle, J.J., to meet his betrothed, Salome Silberstein. Henry and J.J. spend seven days on the Silberstein's farm, Welgewonden, during which time they are lavishly entertained by the Silbersteins and their entourage of friends. The major theme of the novel is Henry's passage from ignorance and innocence to awareness and his socialization into the greater Welgewonden society. Henry is introduced to the

* Seven Days at the Silbersteins

¹ Etienne Leroux, *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins*, Human & Rousseau, Cape Town and Pretoria, 1962, eleventh printing, 1978.

reader as, at 27, ‘already trapped in a pattern over which has has no control and which he has no desire to control. With the exception of love he believes in everything: the value of religion, cleanliness, the influence of nature on man, the State, the liberal conscience, the future of mankind, the imperishability of symbols, the good order, courtesy, charity, security and man as the crowning achievement of the divine creation. It is time for him to marry, have children and perpetuate himself. Lovelessness is replaced by universal compassion; love is selfish. Henry van Eeden is an immaculate little robot . . .’² His uncle J.J. has no significance in the story and his character is therefore not developed beyond one or two indications of his base nature.

The Silbersteins are a rich Jewish family who, on their wine producing farm, ‘“try to establish a lifestyle – like in the old Cape. A liberal lifestyle, educated and stimulating.”’³ Their household consists of the ‘Alice in Wonderland Duchess’, the old Mrs Silberstein, whose only distinguishing feature is her opposition to the marriage of her granddaughter to the ‘small aborted goy’;⁴ the slim Mrs Silberstein, a passive character whose sole initiative is her resumed affair with J.J.: the two dark-eyed spinster Miss Silbersteins, and the elusive Salome. These three women are all undeveloped as characters, and are only distinguished by their placid participation in the orgies of extravagant opulence of Welgewonden. The most finely developed character is that of Jock Silberstein, Salome’s father and Henry’s mentor for the duration of their visit.

The Silberstein’s daily routine begins with passive enjoyment of the morning sunshine, followed by a large lunch, an afternoon nap, and culminating in a huge party at night. Henry’s days here are slightly more varied as he is guided around the farm by Jock and initiated into Jock’s private philosophical world. The *rites de passage* into the greater Welgewonden society are by way of the nightly parties, during which Henry is the spiritual outsider, as symbolized by the repeated inappropriateness of his attire.

On the first evening, during the ‘party of the rich’, we are introduced to the constant characters of the Silbersteins’ entourage: Dr Johns and Judge O’Hara, the inseparable and indistinguishable intellectual couple; and Sir Henry and Lady Mandrake, who belong more to the Romantic era than to South Africa of the 1950s or ’60s. The party is dull and heavy and, in the novel, serves only as a base line from which the increasingly bizarre parties of the following nights will proceed.

The ‘party of artists’ on the second night, is a costume party for which all the participants, with the exception of the ignorant Henry, are clad in bathing suits and animal masks. Here again we encounter Dr Johns and Judge O’Hara, both sporting owl masks, who attempt to engage Henry in discussion of innocence and knowledge, good and evil. Lady Mandrake and Sir Henry are here too, behind leopard masks: the two who find this world dull; whose friends have mostly died leaving the few here and there – in villas in Capri, on

² *ibid.*, p.13. All translations from the Afrikaans are my own, and are as literal as possible.

³ *ibid.*, p.12.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.11.

small islands, on a ship to the East, etc. While Henry searches in vain for Salome among the guests, he hears only one theme in the conversations around him: 'an almost pathological adoration of what is coloured or black, an obsession about the purifying effect of poverty, an abhorrence of order, a surrender to anarchic vitality as symbolized in the raw awakening of the black man in the calcified West, a longing for the daring of chaos, the intensity of violence, the provocation of the primitives against the varnished hide of civilisation (sic). They carry in themselves guilty feelings in relation to their own saturated culture; the nihilism before the ruins of their crumbling gods; the godlessness in the quiet of the Great Silence; the formlessness at the grave of the dying New Time; the unsureness of the nature of the Being.'⁵ And out of this universal longing for the beginning, the party climaxes in a nude swimming party, which is interrupted by the automatically-timed emptying, filtering and refilling of the swimming pool.

On the third night of Henry and J.J.'s visit, the Silbersteins hold a 'Boere party' during which it is revealed that the young engaged couple are to be presented with the bull Brutus. What follows is a pagan parody of homage to Brutus and his creator Oom Giepie Ollenwaar; Brutus, the undefiled two-coloured, his forequarters red, his hindquarters black, whose only colour blemish is a white spot between his eyes the size of a *tiekie*; Brutus, the superior being:

There is the last attribute, the mystery for which even Oom Giepie can give no clarification. Length of vocal chords? Deviation in structure? Who knows? But Brutus, the Ollenwaar race, our beloved red-blacks, the animal that does not bellow. Bellows, yes, but at a pitch above the capacity of our human ears. Is this a fault? NO!

Is it a deviation of which to be contemptuous?

NO!

Is it a blemish on the race?

NO!

Does Oom Giepie deserve the derision of jealous breeders?

NO! and rumble. Again NO! and rumble . . .⁶

And of all the guests participating in this farce, Judge O'Hara's is the only dissenting voice. 'Evil came with the fall of angels. A will has been raised contrary to the will of God. It was a moral evil. A shock went through the universe and the whole world became overcast. Perfection was shattered into thousands of fragments. Lucifer shot through the firmament like a star . . .'⁷

On the fourth evening a racially-mixed party is held, which is a grotesque sham, in particular when viewed by an outsider, like Henry, who is not captivated and enchanted simply with the idea of such a gathering.

And everyone is so friendly that they can burst. People with teeth, false and natural; whites with rubies; whites and yellows; whites and two dark holes where the fores are deliberately missing. Overall friendship which grins at death; teeth until death;

⁵ *ibid.*, p.44.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.66.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.69.

jokes of passion; tombstones of sex, religion and goodwill. People with thick lips which curl up like sensuous ones; people with thin lips which open and their coldness doubles; people with spittle between their teeth and lips which suck love; people considered to be good, come what will; people with teeth shamelessly exposed – exhibitionism of the heart; schmaltz with gums and teeth triumphantly over the colour bar. The good God is our Maker: his teeth sneer across the horizon like an enormous building. Teeth of meaning, of love, of commiseration, of weakness, of steel, of silver fillings, of Dada-paper, of longing. Teeth in the rondawel of Welgewonden; of the Republic of South Africa; of Jesus Christ who loves us all. Teeth, teeth, teeth and teeth until everything is sowed and teeth, teeth, teeth until everything dies away in frustration because we seek COURAGE and STEEL POWER and BELIEF and SELF SACRIFICE and that's more than teeth, teeth, teeth . . .⁸

A Kenyan in this group 'looks hard in the face of a disintegrated civilisation, in a museum-piece which unfeelingly experiences the glance of tourists, in a history book with pretty pictures, in a piece of furniture in a dusty loft, in the dust which to dust returns'.⁹ To deliver the tribute speech to Henry and Salome, an albino, the ultimate racially unclassifiable, has been chosen. And as the party draws to an end, fires in the school, church and administration buildings of the African compound flare up, ignited by Julius Jool, the hermaphrodite 'arch-Communist'.

Despite the chaos of the day's incipient rioting and strikes on the farm, on the fifth evening a party of intellectuals is held. While some are discussing the day's events in terms of whether the albino child shot in the rioting could be considered white or native – and therefore worthy of the journalist's interest or not – others are considering more universal questions, like the ecumenical conference in New Delhi.

One of them, with the help of an American accreditation, attended the conference. They are all enthusiastically trying to find formulae and knock together dogmas in the interest of a greater unity. One must think cosmically, the churches must be united, their domain must enhance economic, political and other aspects. The formulae expand; the religious are excited by their greater domain, the programme begins to get the look of a declaration of principles of an international socialist movement. A single one pleads for the restoration of demonology and angels, but this is of minor importance. A new empire of Protestantism is in the making, a spiritual colonization, a U.N. in religion to free the world. The weakest become at once stronger, it's superior mission work with all the prestige and adventure – no one is any longer isolated in a small community where he has to work with individual souls. It's Marxism turned around. Who knows, maybe here one day the two extremes will be reconciled. The poor Republic! And they laugh. The poor Republic which labours under the illusion that the Almighty is well-disposed towards it. It is not a single people that counts, but peoples. It's not a single soul, but souls. It must be learned to think big.¹⁰

And in the background, Sir Henry is slowly dying, on his own terms, unsedated and fully aware of all his painful sensations. When Henry, at the

⁸ *ibid.*, p.82.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.86.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 110 – 11.

end of the evening, returns to his room, he finds the fruit near his bed rotten, a fat worm wriggling out of a putrid apple, and his surroundings generally fungoid and decrepit.

On the sixth evening, the Silbersteins have organized a 'witch's sabbath', which is a grotesque theatrical performance, and a sort of group purge. The first scene is bathed in green, with Black Jan, totally naked with a scaly body and a paper maché tail, on a platform, satanically laughing at the audience. As the light grows brighter, a naked woman becomes apparent, riding on a buck and swinging a black cat around by its tail. The guests all double up with laughter as the tormented animal screams in agony. The light dims and all the women crowd around the central figure of Jan, kissing him in the most obscene ways and calling him 'grand seigneur', 'nostre dieu', 'domineus deus'. In return, they are all bitten by him and take great pleasure in comparing their wounds. The light fades into darkness.

In the second scene, bathed in red, Black Jan listens to the inverted confessions of the half-naked guests. There is a glorification of sin and clear pleasure in perversity. The meaning of good is inverted, and concepts of love, truth, freedom and order all become devilish notions. Those who are not sufficiently convincing in their confessions are flogged by Black Jan, their pain being a form of self-castigation. And as the light dims, Jan sadistically lashes out at all the figures who squirm on the floor pleading for mercy.

The third scene, under a blue light, is the enactment of the sexual sacrifice of the Queen of Purity to a priest. As the lights are extinguished, a collective scream of women's voices fills the room.

The final scene is that in which Black Jan, the ape of God, tries in vain to achieve incarnation. As he struggles and his actions become more barbarous, the guests participate with him in his endeavour. There is a feeling of complete abandonment and freedom, of openness without sanction or criticism, as, together with Satan, they take revenge on their partners for their partners' defects, lack of attention, love, monotony of their lives, etc.

This witch's sabbath is the climax of the series of the more and more bizarre gatherings to which Henry was exposed at the Silbersteins. At all of these, he remained an outsider, a spectator, shielded by his innocence. But by the seventh and final night his isolation has ultimately been broken, his innocence and ignorance banished, and he has become a Silberstein (as symbolized by his appropriate dress on the last evening).

While these parties provide the comprehensive framework into which Henry has become socialized, they themselves are not the agents of his socialization. Rather it is Jock who leads Henry through his initiation, and it is through his bond with Jock that Henry becomes transformed.

The first compact between them is forged on the second day of Henry's visit when Henry follows Jock's example by spitting in the maturation tank for the wine manufactured on the farm. It is also a highly symbolic move for Henry, being his first conscious break with the credo of cleanliness and good breeding with which he arrived. The second bond of brotherhood is achieved on the

third day when Henry experiences a kind of purge of anguish screaming with Jock in Jock's room of seclusion – a cellar which absorbs all sound and which mysteriously elicits a degree of spiritual release never experienced by Henry before. The third bond is Henry's accompaniment of Jock to the house of Mrs Dreyer, with whom Jock is having an affair, followed three days later by Jock escorting Henry to the 'accademia d'amore' where Henry undergoes his sexual initiation.

But it is not only these shared experiences which draw Henry to Jock and bind them in a spiritual union – albeit an unequal one. Jock is a skilled master and frames his particular philosophical outlook in terms which are pertinent to Henry (as opposed to the intellectual dryness of O'Hara and Johns).

Jock is an individualist, a self-styled renegade Jew who, in the arranged marriage between Henry and Salome, will enact the ultimate surrender – “‘mankind without the ornamentation of race, the total anonymity’”.¹¹ In his lament over the loss of the individual in the greater mass of mankind, he illustrates his point with the issue closest to Henry's heart: “‘Your search for Salome is doomed to failure’”.¹² Jock's outlook on the question of good and evil also seem particularly real to Henry, given his experiences on the farm. Unlike O'Hara and Johns who relate to evil as something outside of ourselves which must be kept at bay, Jock rather sees good and evil as two equal and positive forces, both contained within our spirit: “‘Heaven and hell lie within ourselves, and further back, in eternity. The antichrist is the shady side which takes revenge, formed by the complexity of our psyche . . . The battle between the great forces is within us.’”¹³ And the diseased spirit of Welgewonden, to which Henry is exposed, is indeed indicative of the evil within us and of an internal degeneration.

II

For an obscure, enigmatic and heavy novel, which warranted a supplementary explanatory study,¹⁴ *Sewe Dae by die Silbersteins* has enjoyed remarkable success (having gone through 11 printings by 1978). When it was first published, it reportedly 'caused a stir of outrage'¹⁵ amongst Afrikaners. Stanley Uys suggested that this was because it was seen as a 'norm-less' work': 'The main complaint against the book was that it contained "suggestive and pornographic descriptions", and that it "cannot be aligned with Christian ethics"'.¹⁶ Tom Hopkins proposed that 'Mr Leroux's novel gave readers the kind of shock the Russian visitors to the Leningrad museum received from the paintings of the Impressionists. Simply by being different, they posed a

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.34.

¹² *ibid.*, p.53.

¹³ *ibid.*, p.129.

¹⁴ J. C. Kannemeyer, *Op Weg na Welgewonden*, Human & Rousseau, Cape Town & Pretoria, 1972.

¹⁵ Tom Hopkins. 'High Jinks at Welgewonden', *New York Times Review of Books*, 24/9/67, p.48.

¹⁶ Stanley Uys, 'The Writer's Revolt', *The Spectator*, 4/12/64, p.772.

challenge to orthodox values. And the mere fact that the book is an allegory sets minds following dangerous paths – if Africans are black, and so-called Europeans white, where does the albino African belong?’¹⁷ In the same vein, Leroux himself asserted that ‘Our writings came as a tremendous shock to people used to the old Afrikaans prose, and they see us as part of a campaign to break down the old way of life. *In fact, we are letting them see the twentieth century for the first time in Afrikaans prose!*’¹⁸

Too true. But the literary art form aside, the image of the twentieth century presented by the author bears little resemblance to reality. Rather it is one which echoes the perceptions of the South African Anti-Communism Movement, itself a Christian-Nationalist revivalist movement which sought to reverse the effects of modernization on and of the Afrikaner community. While the Anti-Communism Movement may have failed to effect the reinstatement of Christian-Nationalism to its previous normative predominance, it did convince the majority of white South Africans of the reality of a ‘Communist’ threat to South Africa.¹⁹ It is suggested here that it is only in terms of this collective self-delusion and the fears it evoked that the novel, as well as the shock-waves it engendered, may be understood.

The picture painted in the novel is easily recognizable, and the issue addressed was one of vital concern to the Afrikaner community, particularly during the 1960s. The Silbersteins are a liberal family whose value system and life style are portrayed in the stereotypic images which orthodox Christian-Nationalists in that decade identified with their arch-enemy: liberalism-communism. The picture of the pure Afrikaner youth, subjected to concerted and subtle undermining to the extent where he is ultimately won over to demonic liberalism, was one of the most constant, powerful and terrifying visions of the conservative South African Afrikaner establishment.²⁰ And this sequence, played out in the novel, fed directly into that awakening paranoia. At the beginning of the novel we are told:

¹⁷ Hopkins, *op. cit.*, p.48.

¹⁸ quoted in S.K. Oberbeck, ‘Swinging Sestiger’, *Newsweek*, 11/9/67, p.58. (emphasis added).

¹⁹ At the beginning of the 1970s, after nearly a decade of anti-communism activity, 73% of respondents in a survey of ‘power elites’ held that ‘international communism’ ‘posed the greatest threat to South Africa and to the successful realization of the policy of separate development’, while only 9% saw ‘the rise of black nationalism’ to be a threat. Cited in C. David Dalcanton, *The Afrikaners of South Africa: a Case Study of Identity Formation and Change*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1973, p.242.

²⁰ Francis Grim of Action Moral Standards – an organization established in South Africa for the express purpose of countering liberalism – wrote: ‘The responsibility to care for our young people devolves upon us, and woe to us and to them and to our country if we fail them at this time. Before long they will require all the morale, courage and energy to defend our country against an enemy closing in upon us.’ Francis Grim, *Peril in South Africa*, Action Moral Standards, 1973, p.31. Dr J. D. Vorster, Actuary of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, South Africa, stated in 1966 that ‘The essential feature of Liberalism is that it rejects the authority of God and seeks for freedom in and through the will of man. It is the philosophy of life of the unbeliever who either openly or disguisedly raises the cry: ‘No God and no master’. The liberals are the fifth column of the enemy in our midst. They destroy our ability to defend ourselves by undermining our spiritual foundations, sabotaging our morals and our traditions. They confuse our youth . . .’, J. D. Vorster, opening address to the International Symposium on Communism, *Battle for the Mind*, National Council to Combat Communism, Joubert Park, 1966, p.15.

As strange as it sounds, fear, after love, is one of the emotions he (Henry) least knows. Anxiety, yes: that feeling that sometimes seizes you without reason, which emerges from deep within the unconscious world, which makes no sense – this but not fear, because fear needs a danger-object and, if you are protectively raised, free from ambition, surrounded by the security of earthly possessions, supported by your intellect, protected by your God, then you can avoid all danger-objects. It must be added that Henry had no knowledge of war and other forms of violence, was not yet threatened by any disaster, had no conception of the subtle menace of the modern state, had no belief in the devil. Belief and love are almost synonymous; to believe in something means also to love something. Henry *believes* in his God and for him this means only: God is there to protect him. In that sense, then, he is as innocent as a child and shares with a child the ignorance of love and the curtailment of belief to within the limited. Henry will be joined in marriage with Salome and, as the slim Mrs Silberstein justly remarked: ‘His innocence must be destroyed. How else can he marry?’ And how else can you be corrupted so as to meet as many people as possible?²¹

Jock, too, on the second day, reveals his designs with regard to Henry’s innocence: “‘I truly think that they are already part of the framework. It’s amazing how quickly young people abandon their individuality . . . You must only get rid of your innocence.’”²²

This conspiratorial framework which the author constructs, then, was one which was recognizable and must therefore have seemed very relevant and true to its Afrikaner audience’s perceptions.²³ In the novel, Henry *is* subjected to subtle undermining and does finally surrender.

Henry is not a child. He is 27 years old, is a prototype Afrikaner, and embodies Afrikaner values of Christian-Nationalism. By portraying him as a child, the author is appealing to the Afrikaners’ trepidation of their own unpreparedness for the liberalism-communism onslaught, of which they saw themselves as the target and victim. It was for this very reason, to spiritually and morally arm themselves for this battle, that two permanent institutions were established, and three anti-communism conferences and countless anti-communism/anti-liberalism symposiums were held in South Africa in the 1960s. Moreover, by depicting Henry as a child, the author is invoking the view of the moral and ideological purity and innocence of this prototype Afrikaner, as opposed to the spiritually depraved Silbersteins.

²¹ Leroux, *op. cit.*, pp. 21 – 2.

²² *ibid.*, p.31

²³ In 1964, Dr J. D. Vorster stated: ‘Needless to say, from a study of Communism it is manifestly clear that it is not a theory or ideology that leads to paradise, but an evil conspiracy, born of the basest urges of man, which results in the destruction of all higher spiritual values, the enslavement of mankind, . . .’, J. D. Vorster, ‘Communism in Action’, paper read at the National Congress to Combat Communism, *Christian Civilization against Communism*, National Council to Combat Communism, Pretoria, 1964, p.78. At the 1966 Symposium, General H. J. van den Bergh, then Chief of the South African Security Police, talked of the physical and moral onslaught on South Africa. ‘Moral sabotage is intended to undermine and weaken a nation on the moral (psychological) and spiritual level to such an extent that it no longer has the will or ability to resist the physical onslaught of the Communists and falls into their hands like an overripe fruit’, H. J. van den Bergh, ‘Sabotage in South Africa’, *Battle for the Mind*, *op. cit.*, p.38.

The brand of liberalism portrayed in the novel, however, lived only in the minds of Afrikaner South Africa, and would not be recognized as Liberalism by any outsider. In this image, liberal and decadent are synonymous, and thus the liberal Silbersteins are also totally decadent and fully degenerate. In fact, the Silbersteins are stereotypic liberals in the vein of the Afrikaner reactionary image of liberals and communists prevalent in the 1960s.

To begin with, the Silbersteins are Jewish and, like other reactionaries, the South African anti-communists were quick to identify the Jews as the carriers of modernism and liberalism.²⁴ The Silbersteins are also totally a-moral. In Jock's affair with Mrs Dreyer, J.J.'s affair with Mrs Silberstein, Henry's sexual initiation in the 'accademia d'amore', the nude swimming party, the obscenity of the play, and the inversion of values at the Witch's sabbath, the full extent of the degeneration (in Afrikaner terms), is reemphasized. This too was a pet theme of the Afrikaner establishment of the time, and fitted very neatly into their version of the undermining of South Africa's moral fibre.²⁵

Throughout the novel, Henry is subjected to this type of subtle brainwashing, with the resultant erosion of his confidence in his own powers of judgement. By the third night it has been demonstrated to him, by his repeated wrong choice of clothing, that life has an unfathomable logic of its own. Jock, O'Hara, Dr Johns, the very lifestyle of Welgewonden, are slowly and subtly weaning him away from his previous convictions to the point where, on the sixth evening 'Deep within himself something had happened without him being aware of it. The fact that he is not a seeker is, at the same time, an indication that he accepts the religious order too easily and can easily fall prey to curiosity, and, in the wake of curiosity, the search for other possibilities and flights of imagination. But, even more than this, that in his negativity is concealed the secret longing for self-justification – the resistance to God and order, the prickling of satanic adventure – the repetition of the ambition of the fallen angel: I AM, . . . against the authority of God.'²⁶

That Henry, in his new 'awareness' following his capitulation to the value system of the Silbersteins, should rise up against God, was another favourite theme of the South African conservative establishment. Liberalism and

²⁴ In 1964 *Antikom*, a newsletter issued by the Interchurch Commission of the Dutch Reformed Churches, 'proved' that Jews were behind the Russian Revolution and the spread of world communism. It stated that Lenin was a Jew, was married to a Jewess, and his home language was Yiddish. It also quoted an extract from a statement by the Czarist Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1918, stating that the Jews organized and directed Bolshevism and that Jewish money financed the 1918 Revolution. *Sunday Times*, 11/10/64.

²⁵ In 1964, J. D. Vorster claimed that 'Once the norm for distinguishing between good and evil has been removed, the soil is ready for the dissemination of ideas and doctrines which corrupt the people and prepare them for the collapse. . . . Home life is broken down in a subtle way. Conjugal fidelity and chastity are undermined.' J. D. Vorster, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

²⁶ Leroux, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

Communism were conceived and consistently portrayed in terms of the Anti-Christ.²⁷

In the novel, the most obvious portrayal of liberals as the Anti-Christ incarnate is in the play on the sixth night when the guests all act out their devotion to Black Jan – the devil – calling him ‘grand seigneur’ and ‘nostre dieu’. Further and more subtle proof of the anti-Christian nature of liberalism is in the charade of Brutus. All the guests at the ‘Boere party’ pay homage to Oom Giepie, creator of the ‘Ollenwaar race’ (which is moreover, the perfectly ethnically-mixed breed). Christian-Nationalism’s major charge against liberalism and communism is that they entail the usurpation of God’s role by man, which blasphemy is precisely what the Silbersteins and their guests are celebrating.

Another facet of the Afrikaner establishment’s conception of liberalism was, and is, that liberals basically oppose order and aim at chaos and anarchy.²⁸ Thus, at the party of liberal artists, Henry encounters among the guests ‘an abhorrence of order, a surrender to anarchic vitality . . . longing for the daring of chaos, the intensity of violence, . . . the nihilism before the ruins of their crumbling gods’.

The fantasy of communism using liberalism to further its own malign aims, also features in the novel. The ‘arch-communist’ Julius Jool, who is also a hermaphrodite no less, uses the liberal racially-mixed party to gain access to the African compound where he performs his deeds of destruction. The author emphasized this point by describing both the mixed party and the rioting at the compound as ‘chaotic’,²⁹ thus stressing his view that liberal chaos leads to communist chaos. And to further ensure that this point is not lost to the reader, the author has Prof Dreyer state “Villains broke into my laboratory. From your own workers Mr Silberstein. And drank everything dry. DRANK DRY! Can you believe it! People in your service, Mr Silberstein. Your

²⁷ Mr B. J. Vorster, then Minister of Justice, said in Parliament that Communism was essentially anti-Christian and anti-national, and that he who cut himself loose from his religion and his own people was the easiest prey of Communism. He also said that although not all liberals were communists, he did not know of a single communist who did not also pretend to be a liberal. *Rand Daily Mail*, Johannesburg, 7/3/64. Dr J. F. Allen, vice-chairman of the 1964 anti-communism conference, spoke of ‘this evil which is of the devil himself’, J. F. Allen, *Christian Civilisation against Communism*, *op. cit.*, p. 13; and in 1972, the then Minister of Defence, P. W. Botha, said that ‘from its birth Communism was pledged to the Devil’, *Rand Daily Mail*, 19/12/72.

²⁸ In 1966, Dr J. D. Vorster stated that “. . . Liberalism is in essence nihilistic, negative and destructive, and cannot build up anything; because by criticism liberals attempt only to break down the existing structure, they do the bulldozer work which communists should have done. By their destruction of the religion and values, the standards and traditions of the people, those liberals who refuse to join the communists act at least as a vanguard of the red forces.”, J. D. Vorster, (1966), *op. cit.*, p. 16; In 1968, Dr J. A. Heynes stated that “. . . the typical characteristic of our time is . . . that of anarchism. And now come the Communists, who do not propose anarchy as their ultimate goal – let us understand this well. But communism uses anarchy for its purpose of revolutionary change in society”, J. A. Heynes, in discussion, *Bewaar jou Erfenis; referate gelewer by die Simposium oor Kommunisme*, Antikom, Potchefstroom, 1968, p.50.

²⁹ Le Roux *op. cit.*, pp. 88, 89, 98.

workers. Do you expect that I must submit a life's work to barbarians who *are allowed* to stretch out their hands? What you allow, Mr Silberstein, with all your little parties (I was there last night) where there is no colour bar?"',³⁰

On the fifth evening, at the party of intellectuals, the discussion of the ecumenical conference of the World Council of Churches flows very smoothly with the anti-liberalism, anti-humanism, anti-communism flavour of the times in South Africa '... the churches must be united, their domain must embrace economic, political and other aspects ... the programme begins to get the look of a declaration of principles of an international socialist movement ... a single one pleads for the restoration of demonology and angels, but this is of minor importance ... a U.N. in religion ... it's Marxism turned around ... it's not a single people that counts, but peoples ...'.³¹ To have these liberals moreover link the New Delhi conference to the U.N. would have struck a particularly receptive chord, especially in the early 1960s with the acceptance of the newly-independent African states to the U.N.³²

The internationalist image of liberalism also features in the novel and is, in fact, the theme of the quotation the author chooses to precede his book. At the mixed party, which is for 'spiritual rearmament' – the 'spirit' obviously being the internationalist spirit – there are Indians, Canadians, Swedes, Swiss, Mauritians, Mexicans, Sierra-Leoneans, Congolese, Swazis, Brazilians, Burmese, Liberians, Kenyans, Chinese, Coloureds, Nigerians, all forming a 'sterile world of group love'.³³ (If this is not enough, there is also a former

³⁰ Leroux, *ibid.*, p.100.

³¹ Prof B. J. Englebrecht, in his paper to the 1964 anti-Communism conference, said, 'I wish to state that in the World Council there are certain persons who play a part in it which has (sic) strongly socialistic trends, and some of whom may even have outspoken communistic sympathies and affiliations. Despite this, I would never go so far as to say that the World Council is a Communist organization, or that it is Communistically infiltrated and controlled. ... But despite all this, one cannot escape the question as to whether the World Council in its social thought and activities does not degrade the church to a social institution and whether the church does not degrade the Gospel of Jesus Christ into pure, simple "social gospel"?'; and further on, 'It is clear that this modernizing invites the Church and Theology to become socialized ... It aims at destroying the authority of God's word', B. J. Engelbrecht, 'The Communist onslaught on the Church', *Christian Civilization against Communism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 43;55. In 1973 Dr J. D. Vorster did go even further and stated that the World Council is a Communist front organization, *Argus*, Cape Town, 10/11/73.

³² In 1960 it was lamented that 'On the platform of the U.N.O. any protest against the enslavement of Poland, East Germany, Rumania and the rest is hardly audible. In contrast therewith South Africa, because of its effort to retain its Western characteristics, is damned loudly into the abysmal darkness ... What makes one intensely sad is that a body like the World Council of Churches also sings in this choir. This gathering has made known its conviction that segregation on the ground of race, colour and ethnic origin in all forms is against the Gospel', Prof S. du Toit, *Holy Scripture and Race Relations (with special reference to South African conditions)*, Pro Rege-Pers, Potchefstroom, 1960, pp. 17 – 18. In 1964 it was stated: 'The new African States are now being used by the communists as their smoke-screen and mouthpiece, with the U.N.O. as their stage, or, I should say, soap-box. Here they are making a huge fuss of "one man one vote", independence, suppression, etc., which all form part of the psychological warfare on the free world. It is ironical and tragic that many of the free world nations are being misled by this shameful and subtle technique of undermining – and this means that the psychological warfare against these nations has been successful', Com-Genl. S. A. Melville, in discussion, *Christian Civilization against Communism*, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

³³ Leroux, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

Mau-Mau leader, a former African National Union leader, and, of course, the hermaphrodite 'arch-communist'.) The internationalist character of liberalism in this extreme form, was also a favourite accusation of the conservative South African establishment of the time.³⁴ Aside from Jock who is constantly reiterating the theme of the unity of mankind; and the guests at the mixed party who say 'The poor Republic. And they laugh' to emphasize their lack of patriotism; in Lady Mandrake and Sir Henry we have been supplied with the perfect international citizens.

Part of the denigratory image of liberals and communists of the time in South Africa, is their underhand tactic of arousing guilt to advance their purportedly nefarious aims.³⁵ Thus, the one and only opinion that Henry expresses in the novel, after being indoctrinated at the Silbersteins, is a guilty one. Commenting on the fire and rioting at the African compound, Henry states: "'The fault lies with us Whites. . . . We must learn to shed our old established ideas. We must put our hands on our hearts. We must learn to think courageously.'"'³⁶ And the guests at the party of artists also 'carry in themselves guilty feelings in relation to their own saturated culture'.

Every facet of the Silbersteins' lives is fitted very neatly into the stereotyped image of liberalism-communism. Even the scientific precision of the layout of the tulip garden³⁷ and the dogmatic and senseless regulation system at the factory³⁸ form part of the caricature.³⁹ Thus the entire structure of Welgewonden is made easily recognizable to Leroux's audience. And the moral of the story is stated by Jock, the liberal who, like all liberals, sows the

³⁴ Prof. du Toit stated, 'This principle /of righteous conduct and giving everyone his due/ must always be regarded in conjunction with the principle of neighbourly love. If this is not borne in mind there is the danger of adopting the extreme attitude of the consistent Liberalist or Communist, according to whom love implies the obliteration of all boundaries.', S. du Toit, *op. cit.*, p. 8. In 1964, Blyth Thompson elaborated on this point: 'Thus the typical liberal of the sort with which we are concerned, whether he calls himself a liberal or not, is anti-nationalist. True patriotism is not part of his nature . . . The liberal thinks of himself not as part of a nation but as part of mankind. All men are one.' Blyth Thompson, 'The illusion of kindness', *Christian Civilization against Communism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 109–10. Dr C. P. Mulder also stressed this view, here with specific reference to Communists. 'In the first place the communist's objective is to free the individuals from the bonds of the past, from the bonds with his people, his traditions, his background. He must become an international citizen, untrammelled by whatever is his own.', C. P. Mulder, in discussion, *ibid.*, p. 144.

³⁵ Dr A. P. Treurnicht in 1964 talked about the inculcation of false feelings of guilt as the principle tactic of communist infiltration and national undermining, A. P. Treurnicht, in discussion, *ibid.*, p. 69. In 1966, General van den Bergh identified guilt as a facet of moral sabotage, H. J. van den Bergh, *op. cit.*, p. 144; and Com.-Gen. H. B. Klopper warned in 1964: 'Don't allow doubt to enter your mind; it is the communist's weapon and we must keep it away from our people. We should believe that our ideology is the best and adhere to it, as our ancestors did during the past three centuries.', H. B. Klopper, in discussion, *Christian Civilization against Communism*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

³⁶ Leroux, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 71.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 48.

³⁹ ' . . . the communist's idea is that science should be overstressed. Science is glorified and other basic subjects practically minimized and left in the background', C. P. Mulder, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

seeds of destruction without being aware of his role in the process. “‘The change comes certainly and surely not in destruction. It’s Welgewonden, philosophers, priests, artists, writers . . . All these products of Western Shame . . . Not the antics of bushbabies across our borders. The New Order is more subtle than the unsubtleness of bare chaos and bare order. We need knowledge, belief, fear, trust, pride and courage.’”⁴⁰

Sewe dae by die Silbersteins is thus an indictment and a warning. Liberalism is portrayed in a denigratory manner and as having demonic tactics to which Henry, already vulnerable after agreeing to marry out of the fold contrary to the precepts of Christian-Nationalism, falls victim. It is a call to vigilance and spiritual resistance against an insidious adversary.

III

It is not surprising that a novel like this should have appeared when it did, in Afrikaans, in South Africa. The 1960s was a decade of social and political modernization in reaction to which there was a hysterical and paranoid backlash by orthodox Christian-Nationalists. The Afrikaner-Broederbond launched an unprecedented reign of terror against the satanic duo: liberalism-communism,⁴¹ which it identified as its primary ideological foe. Thus this was certainly a novel of its times, so much so that it was awarded the Hertzog Literary Prize in 1964 by the Broederbond-controlled *Akademie van Wetenskap en Kuns*.

But what *is* surprising is that it should have been regarded as revolutionary, both by the Left and by the Right in South Africa.⁴² This misconception perhaps arose from the fact that its form and content straddle Afrikaner politics during the 1960s. At the one extreme, its stylistic innovations brand it as an expression of the modern Afrikaner urban culture which came to fruition during the 1960s. At the other, its thesis espouses the ideology of reactionary opposition to the emergence of this urban culture. Both the Left and the Right in South Africa therefore recognized its form as a symbol of social modernization. Neither, however, looked through the artistic garb, and thus neither perceived the patently reactionary Emperor stalking thereunder. In context, even the sexual allusions, which are mild to say the least, posed no challenge to official norms since they come within the universally-accepted framework of liberal perversity.

The novel nevertheless provoked response and obviously struck a deep chord in its Afrikaner audience. This perhaps may be related to its story line and the fact that Henry’s transformation into a Silberstein is presented as almost inevitable. Given the nature of the anti-liberalism/anti-communism battle of the 1960s, this story was indeed shocking and must have played havoc with the subconscious fears of the Afrikaans-speaking population, all the more so since the stereotyped ‘enemy’ was so faithfully drawn.

⁴⁰ Leroux, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁴¹ A. N. Pelsner. *Die Afrikaner Broederbond: Eerste 50 Jaar*, Tafelberg Publishers, Cape Town, 1979, p. 173.

⁴² Uys, *op. cit.*, p. 772.

This is not to say that this is not an important novel. For the scholar interested in Afrikaner psychology during the 1960s at the height of this last stand of traditional Christian-Nationalism, the novel provides rich visual insights into the conservative establishment's perception of its enemy.

Mr Leroux's work thus merits study, not as an expression of rebellion against his times, but rather as a phenomenon of them.