

Sequel to best-selling Afrikaans novel

EEN VIR AZAZEL by Etienne Leroux (Human and Rousseau), reviewed by Israel Pinshaw.

And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats: One lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. (Lev. 16-8).

Down the ages man has sought a scapegoat to save his conscience and explain away his inadequacies and perpetual inhumanity to his fellow-man, and how well Etienne Leroux, Hertzog Prize-winner with his controversial "Sewe Dae by die Silbersteins", has portrayed this in this sequel to that book.

The setting is the same: Jock Silberstein's contemporary show-piece Boland estate, now donated to the Foundation.

Terrifying reality

Some of the characters, 18 years older, still people the farm: Jock, his wife the willowy Mrs Silberstein, Henry van Eeden who had to experience evil before he could enter the portals of heaven to win the hand of Salome, their daughter.

She has since died in giving birth to the grotesque idiot-giant, Adam Kadmon Silberstein-Van Eeden.

A murder has been committed and is being investigated by the stuttering Detective-Sergeant Demosthenes H. de Goede, a product of the South African Police College, assisted



by the ever-green, garrulous philosopher, Dr Johns' ellipsis. A latter-day Azazel is created.

This book confirms Leroux's stature with added maturity. It is a literary improvement and he is more articulate in his usage of mythology and medieval incantations, and in the craftsmanship of language he is most accomplished.

The macabre cloak with which he has clothed an underlying terrifying reality of moral decay reminds one strongly of William Golding's "Lord of the Flies".

Sense of humour

Leroux's imagination, irony and incisive contrasting of good and evil, order and chaos, is masterly.

His ever-present sense of humour never deserts him: the symbolism of the organisational man through the calisthenics-obsessed detective and the super-pedigreed bull Brutus III, is priceless.

But with all this Leroux is deeply aware of the sociological problems of our times, be it religion, sex or colour.

As Dr Johns says: "We protect fantasy when it clashes with reality, and we protect the symbol of reality when it

clashes with the fantasy of our time."

He does not preach, but shows a deep understanding for suffering mankind. Again I quote Dr Johns: "And that is why man is always seeking a scapegoat. He cannot validate his hates and griefs without a scapegoat ellipsis; the less we are able to do so the more is our need for a scapegoat."

As announced on this page last Wednesday, "Sewe Dae by die Silbersteins" will shortly be available to the English world. If "Een vir Azazel" is similarly treated, Afrikaans literature will surely have become contemporary, and whilst English readers may be unfortunately deprived of the beauties of the Afrikaans language, they will nevertheless be able to appreciate the achievements of an Etienne Leroux.