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**Entry: Leroux, Etienne (1922-1989)**

Etienne Leroux was the pseudonym of Stephanus Petrus Daniël le Roux. He was an innovative and eccentric writer, considered to be the greatest novelist among the Sestigers and in Afrikaans literature generally. His influence can be seen in many later novels by younger writers and his novels are still required reading at universities.

S.P.D. le Roux was born in Oudtshoorn in 1922 where he also grew up. He came from a distinguished family who owned a large estate in the southern Free State. He studied law at the University of Stellenbosch and worked with a firm of attorneys in Bloemfontein for a short time. He went to manage the farm *Ja-Nee* in 1946 and from that time onwards he was a full time writer and farmer.

Leroux published ten novels during his lifetime; his final, unfinished novel was published as a facsimile edition after his death, *Die suiwerste Hugenoot is Jan Schoeman* (*The Purest Huegenot is Jan Schoeman,* 1990). The first nine novels can be grouped into three trilogies of three books each. Leroux made his début in 1955 with *Die eerste lewe van Colet* (*The First Life of Colet*), followed by *Hilaria* (1957) and *Die mugu* (*The Misfit*,1959). The second trilogy consists of *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* (*Seven Days with the Silbersteins*, 1962), *Een vir Azazel* (*One for Azazel*, 1964) and *Die derde oog* (*The Third Eye*, 1966), and the final trilogy is made up of *18-44* (1967), *Isis Isis Isis* … (1969) and *Na’va* (1972). *Magersfontein, o Magersfontein*! appeared in 1976, and in 1982 *Onse Hymie* (*Our Hymie*) was published.

Etienne Leroux believed that in modern Western societies man had lost contact with the metaphysical beliefs of the past and was looking for ‘a new life-giving myth’. This theme of psychological and spiritual regeneration is explored in most of his work and yet every novel is unique. Leroux is a master improvisor, experimenting with the generic features of the novel and incorporating an enormous amount of cultural references in his novels. His first novel can be described as a Bildungsroman, the second as a myth, the third as a peregrination story. *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* is a parody on the traditional ‘plaasroman’ (the farm novel), *Een vir Azazel* a detective story and *Die derde oog* a secret agent story. *18-44 is* an epistolary novel, *Isis* a travel book and *Na'va* an elegy. In *Magersfontein* the historical novel is parodied, while *Onse Hymie* is like an extended dark joke.

These novels all contain social and political commentary and criticism, and often employ satire and parody. The esoteric references in Leroux’s novels, including Greek and Norse mythology, Jungian psychology, the Kabbala, and contemporary history and culture, caused readers to describe the novels as obscure and as inaccessible, too European and even as immoral. Two of his books (*Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* and *Magersfontein, o Magersfotein!*) were banned by the Publication Board, though the banning was lifted on appeal. In actual fact Leroux was far ahead of his time for a local writer, and an extensive culture of analysis and interpretation developed around his works. Critics and academics are still fascinated by these novels, which address universal issues and the human condition but are at the same time directed at the South African situation, exposing and undermining the social, political and ethical flaws of the past and the present.

Leroux’s work can be described as inherently modernist but in many ways it is postmodernist as well. He engages in textual experimentation, which includes the ingenious use of intertextual frameworks, a unique personal style reflected in structure and formulation, as well as a wry use of humour, and a variety of moods and tones.

**References and further readings**

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Van Coller, H.P. (ed.) (1998) *Perspektief en Profiel: ’n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis. Deel* 1, Pretoria: JL Van Schaik.

**List of works**

*Die eerste lewe van Colet*(1955)

*Hilaria* (1957)

*Die mugu* (1959)

*Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* (1962)

*Een vir Azazel* (1964)

*Die derde oog* (1966)

*18-44* (1967)

*Isis Isis Isis* … (1969)

*Na’va* (1972)

*Magersfontein, o Magersfontein*! (1976)

*Onse Hymie* (1982)

*Die suiwerste Hugenoot is Jan Schoeman*(1990)