

THE ALLEGORY OF THE APPLE IN MARK BEHR'S
THE SMELL OF APPLES:
THE BURDEN OF THE PAST AND THE SENSE OF GUILT

Richard Clouet

Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

RESUMEN

La elección de *The Smell of Apples*, la primera novela de Mark Behr, como objeto empírico de este estudio puede parecer poco convencional. *The Smell of Apples* se puede considerar como una obra muy compleja que nos hace entrar en la mentalidad Afrikaner, una mentalidad también compleja, con sus puntos débiles y sus contradicciones. Es un libro sobre la pérdida de la inocencia y la importancia de la memoria, sobre la indoctrinación comunista y las abominaciones racistas. Mark Behr concibió su historia al principio de los años 90, una época cuando el país hacía frente a cambios radicales. Después de cincuenta años de supremacía blanca, el país se estaba transformando, poco a poco, en una democracia, pero la mayoría de los escritores, al igual que Mark Behr, quisieron enseñar a sus lectores los horrores del pasado Afrikaner.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Sudáfrica, narrativa contemporánea, apartheid, culpabilidad.

ABSTRACT

Mark Behr, the author of *The Smell of Apples* (1993), epitomises a new generation of writers in the post-apartheid literary landscape of South Africa. These writers, in a reconciled nation still in limbo, refer to the excruciating past to explore it and search for answers and keys to the present. Prior to 1990, most of the Afrikaners relied on what they had been taught both at home and at school to justify the colour bar. The acceptance of democracy, however, implied re-evaluation of the past and of Afrikaner dogmas. The feeling of guilt made Mark Behr unveil the Afrikaner myths through the symbolical and allegorical portrayal of Marnus' family, revealing the destructive power of the past and its effect on the present.

KEY WORDS: South Africa, contemporary fiction, apartheid, guilt.

The choice of *The Smell of Apples*—Mark Behr's first novel—as a field of research may appear rather unconventional. Not that South African literature has hitherto remained beyond the academic path. On the contrary, since the demise of apartheid, it has caught the world's attention as never before. Yet, in the light of the latest studies on the state of literature in South Africa such as *Writing South Africa, Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, *The Smell of Apples* despite its immediate popularity and its positive reception when it was published in 1995, seems to have, strangely, become forgotten.