

The New Criterion

Letter from Capetown

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The silence in South Africa: writers chuck it in

by [Sarah Ruden](#)

On the state of literature in South Africa

Peter Horn is a poet and critic who spent decades in outspoken opposition to apartheid. His fights with the establishment in the universities, his patronage of young black writers, and the total publication ban under which he worked for a time evoked so much domestic and international sympathy as to make the quality of his writing--and he happened to write extremely well—irrelevant. His academic reputation was comfortable, and he received actual— even literal—acclaim. He remembers poetry readings at political rallies, with cheering audiences of several thousand. Now he is thinking of emigrating. Part of his frustration has been the five-year wait for prize money owed him by a writers' organization which moved mostly on political energy and is now stumbling like a wino.

J. M. Coetzee is one of Horn's colleagues on the faculty of the University of Cape Town. Some of Coetzee's novels are set in apart ...

Sarah Ruden

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