

François le Vaillant and the myth of the noble savage

A FRENCHMAN IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SOUTHERN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Inheriting a dualistic value system, Europeans often perceived the people they encountered on their voyages of exploration in terms of Manichean polarities of good and evil. Thus, the concepts of the noble and ignoble savage were born. Stereotypes of the ignoble savage dominated writing about southern Africa for much of the colonial period and even later. However, the French explorer and disciple of Rousseau, François le Vaillant, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century temporarily overturned the dominant notion by depicting black subjects beyond the colonial borders as being inherently noble, despite some contradictions in his work. Others, such as the liberal-minded Thomas Pringle, followed his example of portraying indigenous inhabitants positively, but by the 1840s the tradition had largely died out owing to ideological pressures required to justify increased imperial domination of the subcontinent. Only with the revival of Liberalism by writers such as William Plomer in the 1920s, did the enlightened legacy of le Vaillant again begin to assume an important role in South African literature.



hen vastly different peoples who are either wholly or partly unknown to each other meet, each is forced to place the other in a cultural framework in order to interpret the new experience. Therefore, it is not surprising that Europeans, inheriting a dualistic value-system, often perceived people they encountered in their voyages of exploration and later colonization in terms of Manichean polarities of good and evil.¹ As a result, there was a dichotomy between the European self and the non-European Other, which was everything that the European self is not. As colonization progressed, the concept of the Other became fixed, and stereotypes were entrenched. Reproducing the Manichean division, two dominant views of the Other emerged during Western

exploration and colonization. According to Jung, brutish savages were constituted by projecting onto the Other, as the shadow self, all that the subject rejected (Storr 1983:221). In contrast to this, “noble savages” were created by perceiving the Other in terms of European ideals (Whitmont 1969:165). The concepts of the dark savage and the noble savage can accordingly be seen as archetypes or, in so far as they imply a narrative between self and Other, as myths, which are stylized or symbolic expressions of needs to interpret experience satisfactorily.

One of the earliest expressions of the noble savage occurs in the book *Germania* by the first-century Roman historian, Tacitus.² The Germans, with their characteristics of courage,

loyalty, chastity, truthfulness and frugality, are employed by Tacitus in a social critique for they embody Republican virtues that contemporary Imperial Rome had lost (Tacitus 1914:159–70). With the fall of Rome and centuries of Barbarian invasions that culminated with Viking depredations, Western Europe naturally did not take such a sanguine view of the “savage”. However, towards the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance, European self-confidence began to be restored so that notions of the noble savage could be entertained once more. One of the more striking and influential expositions of the concept is contained in Montaigne’s essay, “Of the Cannibals”, in which he says that Brazilian Indians

have no need of political superiority, no use of service, of riches or of poverty, no contracts, no successions ... no occupation but idleness, no respect of kindred but common, no apparel but natural ... The very words that import lying, falsehood, treason, dissimulation, covetousness, envy, detraction and pardon were never heard amongst them ... Furthermore, they live in a country of so exceeding pleasant and temperate situation that, as my testimonies assured me, they never saw any man there shaking with palsy, with eyes drooping, or crooked with age. (Montaigne 1952:146)³

The Indians acquire value because they lack the political corruption and the inequalities of Europe, its moral corruption and European physical deformities owing to their Edenic surroundings. While they may be defined in terms of absence, Montaigne is clearly constructing them in terms of European ideals. The English were more sceptical. For example, Shakespeare, in *The Tempest*, gently satirizes Montaigne, producing in Caliban a savage who has potentially noble attributes, but who is debased by contact with Europeans. While lacking Shakespeare’s complex vision, few English works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries quite depicted savages as noble. It was left to the French, particularly

Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Discourse on science and art* (1750) and *Discourse concerning the origins of inequality* (1755), to fulfil the potential of the myth of the noble savage. In these works, Rousseau argues that the growth of society has corrupted the natural goodness of mankind, leading to the growth of inequality. However, uncivilized man, living in a state of nature is, by definition, good. Furthermore, Nature alone can inspire and elevate the soul and so fulfil human relationships.

In contrast to ideals concerning the noble savage, cultures – from Ancient China to Greece – that wanted to stress their degree of civilization, abhorred the dangers presented by the brutish savage. It was, however, the Portuguese who formulated the concept of the dark primitive as it is applicable to southern Africa. The first Portuguese visit to the Cape – that of Vasco da Gama in 1497 – resulted in an unfortunate skirmish. The Cape area acquired a bad reputation from which it never recovered when, in 1510, the Viceroy of India, Francisco d’Almeida and more than fifty of his men were killed by the Khoi. Thus, it is understandable that Luis de Camoens chose to present a negative portrait of the Cape in his epic of Portuguese exploration, *The Lusiads*. The guardian deity of the Cape, Adamastor, is described by Camoens as being “disfigured, with a huge sunken face ... His expression was evil and menacing” (in Gray 1973:3); “Revenge and horror in his mien combined” (Lloyd 1988:2). Adamastor represents all that is brutish, threatening, disgusting and debased in humanity. Naturally, his children, the aboriginal inhabitants of the Cape, are like him.

Although French ships rounded the Cape as early as 1503 (Strangman 1936:1), sixteenth-century accounts of southern Africa were largely Portuguese, so Portuguese views about the territory were dominant. But, in the last

decades of the century, English, Dutch and French mariners increasingly visited the Cape of Good Hope, leading to the establishment of a Dutch colony in 1652. Responses to Adamastor and his “children” differed. The English established the most cordial relations, even transporting an inhabitant, named Cory, to England in 1613; however, this was not appreciated by other nations. When Cory returned, he communicated to his fellow Khoi how cheap copper, the principal currency at the Cape, was in England. This immediately led to spiralling barter prices. Nevertheless, it is an Englishman, Captain John Davis, who, in 1604, voices the opinion about the Khoi that was to dominate the seventeenth century when he maintains that “the inhabitants of the country [the Cape] are some of the most base and brutal in the whole universe. Human nature is here so rough and unpolished, so sordid, mean and unlike itself, that ‘tis hard to know it through the disguise” (Harris 1705, I:55). The Adamastor figure no longer has the challenging menace that the Portuguese perceived, but is simply savage and debased.

Apart from the Dutch, who established their market gardens at the Cape, accounts of the region were largely written by casual visitors, such as L’Abbe de Choisy, deputy French ambassador to Siam, who remarked, in 1687, how beautifully the Cape gardens would fit into a corner of Versailles (Sienaert 1994:72). It was only really in the eighteenth century that Europeans came to southern Africa as explorers, travelling for years in the interior and writing highly influential accounts of the sub-continent. The more important travellers were the German, Peter Kolbe (who came to the Cape in 1705 and remained until 1712), the Frenchman, Nicolas Lacaille (who stayed from 1751 till 1753), as well as the Swedes, Carl Thunberg and Anders Sparrman, and the Englishman, William Paterson, all of whom travelled in the interior in the 1770s. As all of these visitors were scientifi-

cally inclined, their writings about the inhabitants of the sub-continent attempt to be scientifically objective. Naturally, many of the more pejorative depictions of the Adamastor figure disappear and he is reduced to an anthropological specimen, who nevertheless occupies the lowest position in the family of humanity. Mary Louise Pratt (1985:120–21) argues that

The portrait of manners and customs is a normalizing discourse whose work it is to codify difference, to fix the Other in a timeless present where all ‘his’ actions are repetitions of “his” normal habits. Thus, it textually produces the Other without an explicit anchoring in an observing self ... [The Other] is a *sui generis* configuration, often only a list of features.

The Other becomes an object, often of thinly disguised condescension, in an apparently objective account in which the author is largely effaced. Pratt argues further that scientific enquiry, as found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travelogues, performs the same function as ideology: both place phenomena in a given system. This process is especially important on the colonial frontier where the traveller encounters unfamiliar peoples, and where it is imperative that the unfamiliar be reduced to the categories of the familiar.

When the young Frenchman, François le Vaillant, bounded onto the Cape shore in 1781, many previous notions about the savage and the scientific narrative were about to be overthrown. Whereas previous writers tend to be self-effacing, le Vaillant flamboyantly struts across the African stage, accompanied by a tame baboon, Kees, and at times as many as a hundred followers with almost as many domestic animals. He often wore a hat with enormous white ostrich feathers. On special occasions he donned a powdered wig, a velvet coat with polished silver buttons, knee-breeches and silver shoe-buckles, as if he were on his way to an audience in Versailles, rather

than presenting himself to a host of awed Khoi. Le Vaillant is unique not only for his appearance, but for the way in which he subjectively reveals himself, which makes his work *Travels into the interior parts of Africa* (1790),⁴ read like a sentimental novel of the period, such as Bernadin de Saint Pierre's Mauritian idyll, *Paul et Virginie* (1788; Gray 1979: 48–50). Yet, of all eighteenth-century travellers, le Vaillant was the most influential and widely read.

Le Vaillant left Holland for Cape Town with the ostensible aim of collecting specimens of flora and fauna, especially birds. However, it becomes clear in his narrative that he also entertained a Rousseauesque desire to escape from the confines of European civilization, to be free and encounter uncontaminated Nature (Knox-Shaw 1984:15–16). He specifically wanted to meet mankind in its natural state for, like Rousseau, he believed that in “an uncivilized state man is naturally good” (le Vaillant 1796 II:124–25). Thus motivated to see beauty in Nature and to appreciate the goodness of natural man, he made two journeys in southern Africa between 1781 and 1785. In the first journey, he travelled eastward, crossed the colonial border (the Great Fish River), and met the Gonaqua and the Xhosa peoples. During his later expedition, he claims to have crossed the Orange River, and to have met numerous hitherto unknown tribes, including the Houzouana Bushmen, near present-day Keetmanshoop in Namibia.

Le Vaillant, not surprisingly, generally evinces positive attitudes towards African scenery and people, which he believes to be untouched by European influences. Accordingly, Pampoenkraal, one of his camps (near Knysna) on his first journey is described as a veritable Eden. He compares the landscape with the artificially natural “English” gardens, then fashionable in France:

Ye sumptuous grottoes of our financiers! Ye English gardens twenty times changed with the wealth of the citizen! Why do your streams, your cascades, your pretty serpentine walks, your broken bridges, your ruins, your marbles and all your fine inventions disgust the taste and fatigue the eye, when we know the verdant and natural bower of Pampoenkraal. (I:183–4)

However attractive the products of European finance, taste and invention may be, they cannot, in the traveller's eye, compete with natural beauty. As his many exclamations and elaborate comparisons indicate, le Vaillant rather self-consciously revels in the beauty of untouched nature. His inflated rhetoric, emphasized by the unconscious bathos of his paradise's name, Pampoenkraal, does not necessarily mean that he is insincere. Le Vaillant's excesses bear witness to his excitement on discovering what he came to find.

Man in his natural state is also found to be appealing. The Gonaqua people, whom le Vaillant encountered on the eastern side of the Great Fish River, are seen as noble savages:

I had here the opportunity of admiring a free and brave people [the Gonaqua], valuing nothing but independence: never obeying any impulse foreign to nature, and calculated to destroy their magnanimous, free and truly philanthropic nature. (II:14)

The concept of nature is central to this passage: as nature is in essence good, human beings who obey natural impulses must also be good. This is why the Gonaqua are a free, noble and humane people. The concept of freedom is also vital: unlike Rousseau's civilized man who is born free, but is everywhere in chains, the Gonaqua, who are faithful to nature, retain man's original freedom and, hence, are free to enact their “truly philanthropic” selves. The personification of everything which is fine in the ‘savage?’ is found in le Vaillant's beloved Narina. With

her, he engages in a rather too charming flirtation on the wooded banks of the Great Fish River. His pastoral idyll is, as far as I can ascertain, unique in southern African travel literature for he frankly and with great sensitivity describes his love for the girl. In the process, we see Narina playing and dancing with her friends, delicately teasing the writer and with gentle dignity enjoying her everyday life. Le Vaillant's subjective involvement and his obvious joy in Narina are quite removed from the rigid detachment of previous (as well as subsequent) travellers. Moreover, his Gonaquas are no ethnological abstractions who occupy the lowest position in the human family.

Other people who are perceived as noble savages, if not quite as pure as the Gonaqua, are the Xhosa and the Houzouana Bushmen. However, before le Vaillant can admit the Xhosa to the ranks of savage nobility, he has to account for their apparently warlike temperament. (He was travelling on the borders of the Cape Colony during a period of great tension between the Dutch frontier farmers and the Xhosa, owing to the fact that the First Frontier War of 1780–81 had ended only a year before.) He complains that the nation had been slandered by the Dutch farmers in an attempt to justify their own rapacious actions. If the Xhosa had pillaged, burned farms and murdered some of the inhabitants, it was only done out of self-defence. Le Vaillant argues:

What I had learned confirmed me in my own opinion that the Caffres in general are a harmless and peaceful people, but that having been continually oppressed, plundered and massacred by whites, they had found themselves reduced to the necessity of taking up arms in their own defence. (I:316)

He is "convinced that they were incapable of deceiving me, attempting my life, or robbing me of my effects" (II:24). The

Houzouana in Namibia are another much maligned people. If they had robbed and killed neighbouring tribes, it was only because they were driven to do so by dire famine. That they were essentially a dignified, unacquisitive, peace-loving people was demonstrated by the fact that he lived with them on friendly terms for many weeks.

As indicated by his comments on the frontier Dutch farmers, le Vaillant praises the aboriginal people of southern Africa at the expense of whites. White "planters", as he calls them, are condemned for being avaricious, deceitful and cowardly (I:325). Unable to contain their greed after settling near the Xhosa, they set about stealing the tribesmen's cattle, burning their villages and slaughtering them, committing the most atrocious barbarities (I:317–20). When the blacks retaliated, a delegation was sent to the Governor to obtain permission to organize a commando against them. The Governor, unaware of the true state of affairs, granted the necessary permission and the wholesale killing of blacks began (I:321). This, in essence, is le Vaillant's account of the causes of the First Frontier War. Elsewhere he has little good to say about whites outside the urban and semi-urban areas of Cape Town. The inhabitants of the Outeniqua district are castigated for having abandoned the niceties of Western civilization – which is rather ironic in a man who decries the influences of the same civilization. In one of the few instances where he describes an actual encounter with Dutch farmers on the colonial borders, le Vaillant writes disparagingly of the Van der Westhuizen family because of their racial prejudices, peasant lifestyle and drunken festivities (IV:122–24).

Because human reality is too complex to be reduced to neat Manichean polarities such as the noble savage and the vicious, corrupt Westerner, le Vaillant's text contains many contradictions that undermine his claims. For

example, it is interesting to see how one noble savage views another. Habaas, chief of the Gonaqua, advised the Frenchman against an expedition into the country of the Xhosa, although these people had given the traveller assurances that he would not be harmed, as “he [Habaas] placed little confidence in the fine speeches of the Caffres, since not long before they had obliged him to enter into hostilities with them” (II:215). If Habaas is correct, then the Xhosa are neither “harmless and peaceful”, nor incapable of deception, as le Vaillant had previously claimed; if, on the contrary, he is lying, then the Gonaqua are not entirely honest. Le Vaillant himself betrays contradictory sentiments about the purity of one of his favourite groups of people, best illustrated by his reflections on the wreck of the “Grosvenor”, an English ship wrecked off the Pondoland coast in 1782:

I was told that ... an English vessel had been shipwrecked on the Coast, that being driven ashore, a part of the crew had fallen into the hands of the Caffres, who had put them all to death, except a few women whom they had cruelly reserved [for their own use]. (I:306)

The authenticity of this report has been challenged (Kirby 1960:131–32) but, true or not, the point is that le Vaillant has chosen to include in his narrative an account of an incident which portrays the Xhosa as viciously slaughtering helpless men and raping innocent women. His sympathy for the suffering victims involves him in a moment of conflict between his Rousseauesque ideal and his penchant for the exaggerations of eighteenth-century sentimentalism. In effect, he dismisses the noble savage in order to pander to European fantasies about Adamastor.

Le Vaillant’s attitude to African nature, so important in his exposition of his concept of the noble savage, is also not without contra-

dictions. While he can enthuse about the superiority of untouched nature to artificially constructed gardens, he can also regret a lack of European influence when he contemplates the Outeniqua mountains, near Pampoenkraal:

I was climbing the mountain on foot and forming vain wishes for the conquest of this beautiful country, which the indolent policy of the European nations will perhaps never gratify ... One could not choose a more agreeable and advantageous spot for establishing a thriving colony. (I:201)

Africa is reduced to a component in European colonial policy. The fact that the development he advocates will surely destroy the natural scenery he claims to love seems to leave him unmoved. He also neglects to take into account the influence colonization will have on the area’s aboriginal inhabitants. Apparently, the significance of Africa lies in the challenge it offers to the European entrepreneurial spirit: it is to be brought under European domination.

The various contradictions in le Vaillant’s views partly arise from his underlying perception of Africa and its peoples as the Other, despite his ability to be intimate with its noble savages. As has been indicated, for le Vaillant, the Other was essentially the natural man who embodied the ideals of simple dignity, freedom and goodness which Western civilization had betrayed. Accordingly, where circumstances permitted, he projected his ideals onto the non-European people of Africa, reconstituting them in terms of the myth of the noble savage. He should not be seen as presenting a wilfully distorted picture of Africa and its inhabitants, but as responding to inner promptings to find living embodiments of ideals he believed were no longer vitally represented in the West. Given his views on European culture, it is not

surprising that le Vaillant should have developed such negative attitudes towards the Dutch frontier farmers. By implication, they were debased representatives of a corrupt civilization. Lacking urban refinement and far beyond the rule of law, they appeared to embody some of the more unappealing traits of the West. What le Vaillant was registering was what postcolonial criticism has termed the dichotomy between the metropolitan centre that maintains Western standards and the colonial periphery where these standards are debased.

Le Vaillant's self-representation also, at times, contradicts his views on nature and the natural man. For all his doubts about Western culture, he does not deny himself the benefits granted by Western technology, especially when he wishes to impress the indigenous peoples. Thus, we witness him eagerly bedazzling the awed Gonaqua with his European finery so that he becomes a demi-god to them. He uses his fire-arms not merely to provide food, but also to prove his superior hunting skills. Indeed, when a curious Gonaqua, Amroo, tries to find out the secret of the white man's weapons, le Vaillant thwarts the young man to prevent his own prestige from being diminished. In his second journey, he casts himself in the role of the heroic saviour when he travels over a blistering desert to improve relations between the Kabobiqua and Houzouana tribes. Nor is he without desire to impress Europeans. In order to make his journeys appear even more daring than they were, he largely refrains from mentioning that the border areas were inhabited by frontiersmen who provided him with sustenance. As the later traveller, John Barrow remarks: he makes himself "the hero of every little tale" (Barrow I 1806:15). In many ways, le Vaillant seems to resemble the insecure colonial figure, outlined by Mannoni (1956:103), who goes out to the colonies to achieve a positive image of himself. However, le Vaillant's projections

of his self-image cause ideological confusion for, in attempting to demonstrate his superiority to the noble savages he encounters, he demonstrates the superiority of the West as he is a Westerner, albeit of an unusual type. Thus, he contradicts his ideal of the natural man.

The problem seems to be centred on the fact that intellectually le Vaillant remains within the polarity of Self and Other. Africa and Africans are categorized according to predetermined criteria. Thus, because he came to Africa to find the Other in the form of the noble savage, it is not surprising that he did find noble savages. Essentially, he was interpreting Africa in terms of a Western ideology and making it serve the demands of that system of belief and thought. Ironically, when he stresses the innate nobility of the Gonaqua and the Xhosa, he makes them icons of virtue and denies them their full humanity. He forces on them a role of providing an ideal of that which is complementary to the Western psyche. The problem is that by mythologizing people such as the Gonaqua as noble savages, le Vaillant transforms them into ideological abstractions. They are denied the freedom to exhibit contradictory human impulses. In this, le Vaillant ironically comes close to his predecessors' (and successors') predilection for portraying blacks in terms of anthropological specimens and "a normalizing discourse whose work it is to codify difference" (Pratt 1985:120).

If there are contradictions within le Vaillant's concept of the noble savage and his self-concept, there are also discrepancies in his portrayal of his own culture. When he came back from his first journey, he found the quiet little port of Cape Town buzzing with activity. It had become known as "le Petit Paris" when, from 1781–83, a large French garrison was established in order to protect the town from possible British attack during the American

War of Independence, in which France and Holland were allies against Britain. The *Marriage of Figaro* had already had its premiere in Cape Town, a year before it was performed in Paris, and *The Barber of Seville* was currently on stage (Sienaert 1994:76). He found the French had corrupted the Cape Dutch to such an extent that they had become caricatures of their former selves. Moral laxity and licentiousness prevailed (Meiring 1973:98–99). Here was ample proof of the debasing tendencies of civilization. Nevertheless, le Vaillant could not help but be “gratified that a certain degree of culture had been brought to Africa” (Meiring 1973:98–99). Far more serious was the fate awaiting him in France. Soon after he returned to Paris, the French revolution broke out. During the Reign of Terror, from 1793–94, le Vaillant was imprisoned, daily awaiting execution. It was only the death of Robespierre that saved him. No reason was ever given for his imprisonment. One writer suggested that he may have appeared a royal lackey in so far as he sent a stuffed giraffe to Louis XVI (Meiring 1973:229). No one really knows. However, the Terror must have confirmed le Vaillant’s suspicions about civilization for, in the last sentences of his account of his second journey, written while he was imprisoned, he concludes his work with a stinging attack on his fellow Europeans: he states that his four years in southern Africa constituted “the only period of my life of which I truly feel the loss, where the cowardice of mankind never affected me, where I could safely defy their injustice, their benefits, and their tyrannic sway” (V:420).

Where le Vaillant made a unique contribution is in his helping to establish a tradition of thought that transformed the Manichean polarities between black and white in literature about southern Africa. Previously, the whites had been seen favourably and black people negatively. Le Vaillant overturned this perception, presenting black people in south-

ern Africa in a favourable light and the frontier white farmers negatively. Here he initiated what was to become the Liberal view of the inhabitants of southern Africa. Despite Barrow’s criticism of the Frenchman, the Englishman himself was to perpetuate the myths of the noble savage and the debased European, even if the later writer did not enjoy le Vaillant’s closeness to his subjects but portrayed them as ethnological abstractions and moral exemplars in his 1806 travel book. Other noted liberals such as Thomas Pringle in his *Narrative of a residence in South Africa* (1834) and Dr John Philip in his *Researches in South Africa* (1828) also portray blacks as noble savages oppressed by rapacious whites. But never again does one find such intimate representations of the Other as in le Vaillant’s glowing depiction of Narina.

The representation of blacks in southern Africa as noble savages did not much outlast the early 1830s. With Britain’s increasing imperial role, which could not endorse the conquered as noble, and the destructive Frontier Wars, in which British citizens were on the receiving end of the assegai, came the return of a sense of the black person as an Adamastor-type figure. The sense of blacks as brutal savages is already present in one of the earliest novels about southern Africa, *The Travels of Sylvester Trumper* (1813), written by an anonymous author who savagely parodies le Vaillant. Echoing his predecessor, Trumper moves away from civilization “with an ecstasy of pleasure” (Anon 1813:22). Like le Vaillant, Trumper takes “much pleasure in first contemplating the little, but important enjoyments of man in a wild state” (38). However, as Trumper penetrates deeper into the subcontinent he finds the inhabitants far from noble and on more than one occasion he has to flee for his life. While the hostility of the parody may have partly been inspired by the Napoleonic Wars, the account of the reaction of a young lieutenant in the Royal Engineers,

Cowper Rose, to le Vaillant's sentiments clearly indicates fundamental changes in ideology. In his 1829 book, *Four years in Southern Africa*, Rose describes a visit to le Vaillant's Pampoenkraal in which he recalls:

I read his [le Vaillant's] travels when I was a boy ... and even now I can sympathize in his enthusiasm for nature ... but when he sentimentalizes in downright earnest on a Hottentot girl, and minutely describes all the little palpitations of affection for a capacious-mouthed, small-eyed, snub-nosed, fuzzy-headed female, I will own that he gets beyond me. (Rose 1829:271)

This was the attitude that was to dominate the colonial period. This denigration was actually a prerequisite for colonialism.

However, with the rise of the Liberal novel during the 1920s and 1930s, once again a depiction of blacks emerged with which le Vaillant would agree. There is nevertheless a difference. In the novels of William Plomer, Ethelreda Lewis, Laurens van der Post and, later, Alan Paton, there is a barrier between black and white. A century of imperialism had left its mark. In le Vaillant's fondness for his Khoi waggon-driver, Klaas, after whom he named the Klaas's cuckoo, and his affection for Narina, whom he endearingly remembered in the name of the Narina trogon, one of the most beautiful of South African birds, le Vaillant managed to some degree to break down that barrier. However problematically, he regained an element of Innocence. That his was not the way followed by South Africa and its literature, for so long, is surely one of the tragedies of the country.

Notes

- 1 Although the perception of Manichean polarities in the dynamics of colonialism largely derived from the work of Frantz Fanon, it was Abdul JanMahomed's *Manichean aesthetics*

(1983) that firmly established the concept in post-colonial critique.

- 2 It has come to my attention that Herodotus in his *Histories* had already given sketches of noble savages.
- 3 I have used the 1603 translation by John Florio (with modernized spelling) because, considering what I subsequently mention concerning Shakespeare, this rendition seemed most appropriate as it was the one that Shakespeare read when writing *The tempest* (1612).
- 4 The first English translations of le Vaillant's *Travels* appeared in 1790 in two volumes. These retold his first journey. His second journey was published in English by Robinson of Paternoster Row in 1796 in three volumes. Robinson also published a combined edition which included their rendition of the first journey and the second journey in five volumes in 1796. It is this edition that I use. To be consistent, I have dated both accounts 1796, although the two volumes about the first journey had, in fact, appeared in 1790. The English translations toned down some of le Vaillant's risqué explicitness to suit English taste. Far from detracting from my contention that le Vaillant is the most open, sensational and confessional of southern African explorers, this muted quality actually endorses my point; for, if he is colourful in English, how much more so must he be in the original French. My justification for using English translations is that it was in this form that he was largely read and formed part of depictions of the subcontinent – which after 1795 were largely couched in English.

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