

1193551

1. THE NON-EUROPEAN CHARACTER IN
SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH FICTION
-

by

2. Ezekiel Mphahlele, B.A. (HCNS.) (S.A.)



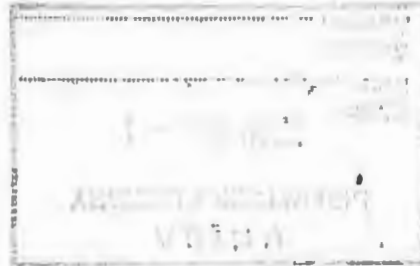
3. Submitted to satisfy the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department of English
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

4. Date handed in: December, 1956
-

DECLARATION

This dissertation represents the writer's own work both in execution and conception, under the supervision of Professor E. Davis, head of the Department of English, Division of Studies, University of South Africa.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX



823.009 MPHA



0001871547

CHAPTER I (a)

INTRODUCTION: The growing scope and significance of the "Non-European" in English fiction: a rapid survey of works of writers about countries where the enigma appears.

With the discovery of new countries by European nations, the beginning of colonization, and the migration of European communities to these new countries, a new era in world history begins. It is an era of conflict between white man and aborigine; slavery; the phenomenal growth of capitalist economy fed with raw materials from colonies and supported by cheap labour. It is an era which, at the same time, brings whites and non-whites in close contact and, in particular circumstances, towards better mutual understanding.

The novelist who chooses to tell his tale against this setting finds a good deal of material to draw from: conflict between settler and aborigine because of race, culture, or class distinctions and so on; master-servant relations; administrative problems; black-white love affairs, more often than not against an untamed setting. One novelist will write as one involved in the whole saga of colonization; another will keep aloof from the problems that beset settler and aborigine and allow the drama to take its course; another will neither be completely involved nor completely detached. A novelist using this type of setting has quite a few windows through which to look. Often we find the non-white himself writing about his own people and the white settler or administrator.

I shall list a number of books written about Non-Europeans: about the people of India, China, Burma, Africa, the South Sea islands, the Americas (Indian and Negro), and will give brief comments on the place of the non-white character in these books.

First, a glance at the Oriental character in English fiction. The story of Kipling's Kim⁽¹⁾ is set in North-west India. Kim, a white boy, is fascinated by a Tibetan lama who is passing through Lahore. Out of sheer love of adventure Kim decides to wander about with the holy man, who is looking for the "river of immortality". Kipling's is an India of thousands of castes, dirty

(1) Kim (Macmillan & Co., Ltd. London, 1901)

bazaars, very rich merchants (Rabbub Ali's type) and rulers, very poor peasants and townsfolk; of Sahibs, British administrators, holy men. Apart from restlessness among the northern rulers who want to shake off British rule, and a foiled rising, life goes on very peacefully in the India of Kipling's time. There is nothing to suggest that the British rulers want to change the whole tenor of Indian life. Both the British and the Indians are proud of their traditional way of life, and there seems to be no meeting-point.

Kim's love for the Indian way of life seems to represent Kipling's own reverence for Oriental values which were not ordinarily cared for by the whites of his day.

There is something of this apparent reverence in his story, One View of the Question.⁽¹⁾ Shafiz Ulla Khan, a man in the service of the Rao Sahib of Jagesur, writes to his brother from London, where he is on a business mission. He pours out his sarcasm about British manners and institutions. Their bars open when mosques are shut, "as who should dam the Jumna river for Friday only".⁽²⁾ Having a short time in which to drink, people get abominably drunk and roll in the gutters. The Sahibs in Britain worship many Gods. They speak disrespectfully of their queen; they are bullied by their women: these are the people who govern India.

Kipling's sympathy is, of course, always with the administrator and the man in uniform, and he relies on authority. What can often be sickening in his writing is his superior, half-righteous bullying tone.

In Mulk Raj Anand's Coolie⁽³⁾ we get a vivid picture of modern India's class structure. The story is that of the coolie, Munco, who leaves his home in the hills of the Punjab to work for an Indian government servant. He runs away from ill-treatment at the hands of his master and mistress and his uncle's brutal

(1) In Many Inventions (Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London 1939)

(2) *op. cit.* p. 74

(3) Coolie (Hutchinson International Authors Ltd. London, 1947)

abuse. Munoo lands in a factory at Daulatpur owned by a kind man who has risen from the status of a coolie but is in partnership with a corrupt relative. When the business runs insolvent and Munoo's kind patron is driven out as a coolie might be, Munoo makes his way to Bombay. Together with hundreds of other miserable underpaid and despised coolies, he works at a cotton factory. He survives a riot between coolies and Pathans and is picked up by an anglo-Indian woman who takes him, to be her rickshaw-boy and potential paramour somewhere near the Himalays. Munoo dies at the age of fifteen of a disease caused by the cumulative effects of exhaustion, rains and lack of rest and comfort.

Unand's is an India where religious clashes are at least as frequent as class conflicts. Munoo learns from the hundreds of coolies who sleep on pavements night after night that his being Hindu is less important than his being a coolie, the poor one who does the dirty work. The writer shows how the coolie is fashioned by over-riding social conditions which create so much poverty and so much wealth, the latter being manifest in a small but powerful merchant class which controls the lives of millions.

A Passage to India ⁽¹⁾ by E.M. Forster, tackles the delicate problem of racial adjustment (or maladjustment) brought into relief when the educated Indian and the white man are thrown into each other's company. Cyril Fielding and Dr. Aziz, an Indian, try to reach a common ground of understanding and friendship. Adela Quested, Keaslop's fiancée, brings a baseless charge of assault against Dr. Aziz. But she withdraws this at the trial. His ordeal makes Aziz bitter and he wants to hate all Englishmen. There remains, however, a feeling of love and friendship for Mrs. Moore, Keaslop's mother and, later, he shows the same feeling of understanding and friendship for her two other children, Ralph and Stella (now Mrs. Cyril Fielding). Aziz and Fielding, even after heated argument and cross accusations, solve nothing.

(1) A Passage to India (Fenguin, 1937)

Forster follows up these race relations at mixed tea-parties and picnic trips with a sympathy that does little to alleviate the tragedy he depicts.

The Good Earth⁽¹⁾ by Pearl Buck, is a story set in the China of the late 1920's. Wang Lung, a poor peasant, is compelled by famine to leave his farm and travel south, begging for food with his family. He has also to carry his old father. There is talk of a revolution, and a rich man's house is sacked; in this Wang Lung finds gold and his wife some jewels. They buy more land and hire a neighbour to do work for them. Wang Lung is able to dress like a rich man, and they rear five children. He realizes later how plain, tired and ill his wife has become. So he takes Lotus, a former prostitute, as his second wife, later keeping Lotus's beautiful slave as a concubine. Two of his sons marry and bring home their wives. The youngest son becomes a revolutionary leader. Wang Lung learns when he is dying that his sons dislike the land and want to sell it and move to the city.

Pearl Buck's book, as well as her other stories and novels, is an interesting study of the Chinese farmer, his family life, religion, and love for the soil. The writer is also concerned for the conflict between the old and the new in the lives of the Chinese who are caught up in the coils of a revolution. The book is an important departure from the earlier historical romances about decayed dynasties and lost cities.

William Flomer, who at one time "went native" in Japan, gives a few authentic images and phrases of Japanese life and character in his volume of short stories, Paper Houses⁽²⁾ first published in the 1920's. The first story, A Brutal Sentimentalist, tells of Tonoki, a Japanese government servant, who has struck up a friendship with an Englishman, Wilkinson. The Japanese is from a cold, austere, severe, hard, dry home presided over by a frowning father. Some years before, however, he had discovered

(1) The Good Earth (John Day, New York, 1949)

(2) Paper Houses (Fenguin 456, 1943)

that the father's severity came from a very deep love. Now that he has been in his country's service for many years, Tonoki remembers that everything he has ever learnt and planned has been for Japan, not for Tonoki. Wilmington once said of him that he was too romantic, too orthodox, and not independent enough; that he was relying too much on the Asiatic principles in his nature, believing too much in political dogmas that could easily be justified. What is significant about Tonoki is that, like so many other traditionalists, he is convinced that he can assimilate a foreign culture (in his case, Western ideas) and remain his indigenous self.

Tonoki, who is ill at the time the writer takes up his story, recalls the earthquake of 1923 and its heavy toll of human life; atrocities carried out on the hated Koreans by Japanese, and on men suspected of socialist leanings. All this was done in the name of the Emperor. Tonoki feels that for this reason he cannot blame the guilty persons, because he himself, as part of a brutal system of government, feels guilty.

The story, A Piece of Good Luck, is that of a common Japanese peasant girl, Chiyé, who goes to Tokyo to work there. She looks after her aunt's house and children. Her aunt soon sells her to a hotel-keeper as a servant, pretending all the time that Chiyé will be working for a wage. Chiyé is "not, strictly speaking, a thoughtful or brooding person by nature, but ready enough to be at home where she found herself and to accept happiness without seeking it".⁽¹⁾

She becomes frustrated by the sophisticated city life and unfulfilled love. She falls in love with a man of doubtful means and character, who later leaves the hotel where she works, for good. She sees the tragic end of a love affair between a fellow-worker and confidante, Tsuya, and a student.

A cousin from Osaka offers to adopt Chiyé and marry her. Her aunt hopes to talk the hotel-keeper into releasing Chiyé and making her cousin pay a sum of money under the pretext that it is a premium for Chiyé's release. Her plan fails because Chiyé does not want to return to Osaka.

(1) *op. cit.*, p. 43

Although coming to Tokyo has not been the piece of good luck her mother predicted, Chiyé's stoicism makes her want to stay. She continues to work at the hotel, always hoping she will have a child some day.

Flomer's stories in this volume show the "split personality" of the Japanese of today; the brutal and fatalistic character and the aptitude and will to translate these traits into terrifying industrial power.

Burmese Days by George Orwell⁽¹⁾ tells the story of a white man, Flory, who is destroyed by official intrigue and corruption engineered by a Burmese magistrate, U Po Kyin. The setting is colonial Burma; its bazars; small groups of white administrators and traders who regard themselves as pukka sahibs with a code of their own which they cherish and guard jealously even in their "Kipling-haunted little Clubs"; its educated indigenous people like the Indian Dr. Veraswami who, for all their gratitude for white civilization are regarded by the whites as mere "greasy little habus" not fit to be members of their clubs. The Burmese reply to this treatment with a destructive vengeance, even if it means destroying their fellow-men. And the whites never really understand the Burman, who appears at one corner as a prostitute prepared to indulge their carnal lusts, and at the next corner as an instrument of death. Orwell shows here how Burmese nationalism emerges in conditions brought about by the white man's rule.

Conrad's first two novels, Almayer's Folly⁽²⁾ and An Outcast of the Islands⁽²⁾ deal with the Malay and the Eurasian of the South Sea Islands. The latter novel, in particular, brings out a number of facets of Malay life and character. Willems, a white man who prides himself on having no "colour-prejudice and no racial antipathies", is destroyed by his own susceptibilities to Malayan beauty in the persons of Joanna, his legal wife, and Afssa. The latter shoots him eventually, and he dies.

(1) Burmese Days (Penguin 456, 1944)

(2) Almayer's Folly
An Outcast of the Islands } both in Three Tales Joseph Conrad
(Ernest Benn Ltd. London 1951)

There are scenes of squalor in the compounds where the white traders have encamped the Malays; there is a revolution in Sambir, in which Babalatchi, Lakamba and Abdulla are the main actors. They use Aissa as a destructive bait to lure Willems so that he and Almayer, another white man, should become bitter enemies. Thanks to the cunning of Babalatchi and Lakamba the revolution succeeds, which also means that Sambir is lost to Captain Lingard as a trading centre. Part of the tragedy is that Aissa's love for Willems is real and goes beyond the purpose for which the revolutionaries wanted to use it.

Aissa and Joanna are portrayed as individuals, not as Malay types, and the situation in which they find themselves entangled is one common to humanity in general.

Next, our survey takes us to the emergence in fiction of the Negro (American, West Indian), of the Red Indian, and then the African Negro. Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin⁽¹⁾ tells the story of Uncle Tom, a Christian Negro slave. The Shelbys are forced to sell their slaves, and Eliza, a mulatto girl, and her child escape across a river; but Uncle Tom remains. Young George Shelby undertakes to redeem the slave. Tom's first owner is St. Clair, whose daughter, Eva, he saves from being sold "down the Mississippi". When these two die, Tom is bought by Simon Legree, a tyrannical planter. Legree beats Tom to death when the latter refuses to give information about two escaped fellow slaves. Shelby comes back too late, but decides to work for the abolition of slavery.

Uncle Tom is the type of Negro who adopts the attitude of Christian sufferance to ill-treatment and cringes before the harsh master or mistress. Because of this attitude Uncle Tom has come distinct from the type that becomes resentful and can at least decide to work for some mitigation of his pain.

(1) Uncle Tom's Cabin (Lock & Co., Ltd., London 1852)

The period between the American Civil War (1862) and the First World War is one of propaganda literature championing the cause of the Negro. Although slavery was abolished, the Negro was later disenfranchised and deprived of many other civil rights. In the South a white man might treat his Negro servant with all due consideration but hate Negroes as a group. In the North the white man might like the Negroes as a group and hate the individual; and, of course, either attitude could co-exist in one and the same man, let alone in the same latitude.

Carl Van Vechten, a white author, breaks new ground in American fiction with his Nigger Heaven.⁽¹⁾ He explores the exotic life of Harlem which he depicts as something approaching animalism during the "Roaring Twenties". Van Vechten is intrigued by the cabaret life of this black ghetto, and paints a romantic picture of Negroes intoxicated by jazz and the tom-tom beat of its drums; of Negroes lost in the savage rhythm of their dancing, a rhythm that recalls the dances of the Kottentots and Bushmen and the Bantu "swaying under the amber moon".

Of a two-day orgy of Byron and Lasca, the writer says that there were rages, "succeeded by tumultuous passions hours devoted to satisfying capricious desires, rhythmical excursions to music, cruel and painful pastimes".

In reply to harsh criticism from the Negro intellectual front - that Van Vechten had grossly misrepresented the Harlem Negro - he wrote in a symposium on "The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed?": "I am fully aware of the reasons why Negroes are sensitive in regard to fiction which attempts to picture the lower strata of the race. The point is that this is an attitude completely inimical to art. It has caused, sometimes consciously more than one Negro of my acquaintance to refrain from using valuable material The squalor of Negro life, the vice of Negro life, offer a wealth of material to the artist The question is: Are Negro writers going to write about this exotic material while it is still fresh or will they continue to make a

(1) Nigger Heaven (L.A. Knopf, New York 1926)

free gift of it to white authors who will exploit it until not a drop of vitality remains?"(1)

Countee Cullen, a Negro writer, challenges Van Vechten in the only effective way by presenting a different and what is generally regarded as a more representative picture of Harlem life in his One Way to Heaven.⁽²⁾ It is a sympathetic picture of church life in Harlem: watchnight meetings, communion and other services of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Clarence Johnson, a famous evangelist from Texas, and Aunt Mary are portrayed as credible characters. Aunt Mary is a "pillar of the church, giving of her earthly substance to a degree that was truly sacrificial". She is also superstitious.

Cullen satirizes the upper-class in Harlem, and takes fun of Negro reactionaries, the Booklovers' Society which consists of whites and blacks; inquisitive white writers who mix with Negroes; pseudo-scholars who write disparagingly of darker folk: "indolent, untrustworthy, unintelligent, unclean, immoral, and cursed of heaven".

Contributing to the above-mentioned symposium, Cullen wisely says: "There can be no doubt that there is a fictional type of Negro, an ignorant, burly, bestial person, changing somewhat today, though not for the better, to the sensual habitué of dives and loose living, who represents to the mass of white readers the be-all and end-all of what constitutes a Negro.... For Negro artists to raise a hue and cry against such misrepresentations without attempting, through their artists, to reconstruct the situation seems futile as well as foolish...."(3)

Langston Hughes, like Countee Cullen, falls under the category of fictionists of the Depression decade who departed from the "plantation tradition" and Van Vechten's pseudo-paganism, and tried to treat the Negro with some objectivity. The story of Hughes'

(1) The Crisis XXII, 1926, (National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People)

(2) One Way to Heaven (Harper & Bros., New York, 1932)

(3) The Crisis (August, 1926)

Not Without Laughter⁽¹⁾ Treats of small-town life. The plot and characters are drawn from his personal experiences as a Negro. Aunt Hagar Williams, an elderly laundress of Stanton, Kansas, is a devout Christian with three daughters. Topsy marries a railway clerk; Annjee is the wife of Jimboy Rodgers, a guitarist; Harriett is sensitive to the prejudice of whites and yearns for a richer life. She goes to Chicago. There she rises from prostitution to become a "blues singer". She later undertakes to maintain Sandy, Annjee's son, in school. Harriett is always scornful of her mother's religion. To her Jesus represents the white man's god who does not like "niggers". Right through the narrative we see the corrosive influence of prejudice and segregation on the Negro mind.

Eugene says of his book: "I am interested primarily in life, not local colour, so I have chosen as a setting for this first novel of mine not what have become practically conventional life backgrounds for Negro tales, that is Harlem and the South, but rather what I feel is more truly American - the average, small Main Street town."⁽²⁾

This more enlightened approach to Negro character was also largely due to the work of white writers like William Faulkner. His Light in August⁽³⁾ is preoccupied with the problems of caste and race peculiar to the Deep South. The leading male character, Joe Christmas, is a son of a white woman and a coloured man. He grows up under a bigoted anti-black grandfather and is accepted as white until his real colour identity is disclosed. He develops a consuming self-hate because of his Negro blood and finds perverse delight in seducing white women. Christmas murders his mistress, a descendant of Yankees, because of the hatred of her race. He is lynched for this.

"Of all Southern writers, Faulkner is the one who has been least restrained by regard for convention or for the sensibilities of his own people," writes Joseph Warren Beach.⁽⁴⁾ There is

(1) Not Without Laughter (A.A. Knopf, New York 1930)

(2) Negro Voices in American Fiction, by Hugh M. Gloster (University of North Carolina Press, Richmond, Virginia, 1948, p. 185)

(3) Light in August (Chatto & Windus, London 1952)

(4) Negro Voices in American Fiction, p. 203

none of the sentimental paternal benevolence one finds in the attitude of Margaret Mitchell's white characters towards the Negro, (in Gone With the Wind).

Nancy is a helpless, wasted Negro woman in Faulkner's short story, That Evening Sun, one of the tales in Faulkner's County.⁽¹⁾ She lives in perpetual fear of her husband, Jesus, because she is going to have a child by a white man. Jesus is a violent character, but to no specific purpose, and he wanders away. He is a pathetic creature when he says: "I can't stop him. When white man want to come in my house, I ain't got no house. I can't stop him, but he can't kick me outen it. He can't do that."⁽²⁾ Dilsey is the typical toughened Southern Negro domestic worker who can absorb the white man's insults and his children's.

In another of the Faulkner's County tales, Dry September, Will Hayes, a Negro watchman, is lynched as a result of a rumored indecent assault he is suspected to have committed on a white woman; but not before he resists and struggles to get free.

Richard Wright's (Negro) Native Son⁽³⁾ tells a story that finds an echo in Alan Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country. Bigger Thomas, the tragic hero of the story, is a product of slum life and abject poverty. His status in a white man's world is a source of bitterness to him. Bigger gets a job with Mr. Dalton, a wealthy business man. Dalton and his daughter, Mary, show the Negro boy a great deal of friendliness, but as an object of social welfare relief. Bigger gets drunk and carries Mary Dalton, also drunk, into her room. He kills her by smothering her in order to avoid being found in the room by an inquiring blind white woman. In the grip of fright, he cremates Mary in a furnace, and flees, leaping from roof to roof in Chicago's Black Belt. Out of sheer panic, Bigger murders his Negro girl, Bessie. When he is caught, he acknowledges his folly. He must die, in spite of the defence put up by a Communist lawyer, who tries desperately to show that Bigger is an epitome of the crookedness and corruption of society; his neurosis is the result of lack of an outlet for his ambitions and the most basic human desires.

(1) Faulkner's County (Chatto & Windus, London 1955)

(2) *op cit.* p. 341

(3) Native Son (Grosset & Dunlap, New York 1940)

Wright's Negro characters are invariably victims of brutal violence emanating from racial hatred.

Important West Indian fiction only begins to emerge in the 1920's. Eric Walrond, a Negro writer, tells a number of stories of West Indian life in his Tropic Death.⁽¹⁾ The stories are inter-related in that each tells of a human death which implies that man cannot help himself but is a creature driven mainly by instinct and caprice. Walrond's is a picture of lustful drunken thugs on ships that sail between coastal cities; degradation and conditions of slavery among black labourers in quarries or at the Panama Canal; prostitution and miscegenation in town and outside communities. But Walrond never explicitly indicts anybody for the dark and squalid labour camps and brothels. He is content with the mere objective view of the economic and social disruption in Negro life in the West Indies, and does not draw any conclusions.

Claude McKay's (Negro) Banana Bottom⁽²⁾ comments on folk life in the writer's native Jamaica. It uses the background of tea-meetings, picnics, dances, house parties, yam-digging, revivals, inter-racial labour disturbances. A black girl, Bita Plant, is seduced by an idiot at the age of 18, and is adopted by a white missionary couple in the wilds of Jamaica. An experiment of Christianization and education is carried out on her by her guardians. But she later develops contempt for it and marries a peasant, with whom she finds happiness. This implies the defeat of Christian civilization by an un-Christian peasant code. The white folk-lorist, Squire Genair, is more successful because he has not, like the missionary, come to educate, conquer, explore, govern, or trade: he has come to learn.

Jamaica is the scene of Brother Man⁽³⁾ by Roger Mais, a West Indian Negro. He portrays life in a Jamaican slum, all ugliness and violence, in which Brother Man, a cobbler, tries to live according to the precepts of the New Testament. His neighbours exploit this. Brother Ambo, an obese man, represents some of the evil forces

(1) Tropic Death (Boni & Liberight, New York 1926)

(2) Banana Bottom (Harper & Bros., New York 1933)

(3) Brother Man (Jonathan Cape, London 1954)

that Brother Man has to contend with.

Another modern West Indian Negro writer is George Lemming. His novel, The Emigrants⁽¹⁾ recreates the lives of West Indian emigrants in London who came to England in search of freedom. There is tragedy for some, disillusion for others. The colour question does not impose itself except indirectly.

Contact between whites and Red Indians during the violent North American pioneering days provided James Fenimore Cooper with much material for his romances - Leatherstocking Tales (1823-1841) - a group of five novels. The Deerslayer (1841), and The Last of the Mohicans⁽²⁾ are two of these. The latter presents Chingachgook and his son, Uncas, as the last of the Iroquois aristocracy. These are stories of inter-tribal wars among Indians and the strife between whites and the aborigines on the frontier. The emergence of the non-white in the North American fiction of the period resembles closely that in South African English fiction of the period between Thomas Pringle and Rider Haggard. The non-white is portrayed mainly as a fighter or a servant.

I am not interested in literature produced mainly for adolescents, such as James Fenimore Cooper's novels were. I merely mention his works because they indicate a distinct period in the history of American fiction.

The Red Indians are a defeated race. They live in small settlements or "reservations" now. Some still cherish bitter memories of their fighting days, but even the descendants of the most warlike, like the Cherokees and the Apaches, are a pathetic people.

One aspect of modern Red Indian life is depicted in John Steinbeck's short novel, The Pearl⁽³⁾. Kino and his wife, Juana, belong to a poor community, some of whose members work in a nearby town and others fish for oysters and pearls in the Gulf. Their child is stung by a scorpion and becomes very ill. The white doctor in town rudely refuses to treat the child, until Kino discovers a rich pearl. Everybody gets to know about the find. People take a communal interest in one another's joys and sorrows

(1) The Emigrants (Michael Joseph, London 1954)

(2) The Last of the Mohicans (The Book League of America, New York)

(3) The Pearl (Heinemann Ltd., London 1955)

in this settlement.

The doctor aggravates the sickness of the child so as to justify the need for a special cure; white pearl traders make an offer for the pearl and Kino, who remembers the hurts his people have for centuries been subjected to by the white man, is filled with anger, fear and hate.

He kills a man who tries to steal his pearl. He, and his wife and child, flee. Steinbeck gives a vivid account of Kino's flight; his native cunning that helps him to delude the equally cunning Indian trackers who are determined to catch up with him. Kino kills the three of them, but not before one has fired a rifle and killed his child. His wife's superstitious belief that the pearl is an evil thing that was bound to bring disaster upon the family is thus justified. The two journey back home and fling the pearl back into the sea.

The last half-century has seen the emergence of a considerable amount of literature on the peoples of Africa north of the Zambezi. In 1890 Joseph Conrad visited the Congo, and his tales, Heart of Darkness and An Outpost of Progress,⁽¹⁾ represent some of the enlightened non-white characterization in this literature. We see in his tales white and black people struggling with one another and with the violent elements of nature - all for the sake of Progress. With the same eye for paradox that Conrad shows in his Malay tales, he sees in this Progress both the "civilizing" and the exploitation of the blacks.

In An Outpost of Progress Makola, the African servant, has the business acumen and diligence and self-reliance which the two stupid and inefficient white overseers lack miserably.

Among modern enlightened writers on the African scene, are Doris Lessing (The Grass is Singing), Basil Davidson (The Rapids) and David Karp (The Day of the Monkey).

There is brilliant portrayal of the African in The Day of the Monkey.⁽²⁾ There are corrupt priests like the old Akar, who

(1) An Outpost of Progress in Tales of Unrest (The Gresham Publishing Co., London 1925)

(2) The Day of the Monkey (Gollancz Ltd., London 1955)

also act as magistrates; the revolutionaries - Young Kusif; the brilliant Dr. Luba and the naive Joseph. Dr. Luba represents the African intellectual who is compelled to study the inner workings of white administration and at the same time be a revolutionary, if he does not want to be ostracised by the nationalism of his people.

"As a nationalist," says Dr. Luba, "I am obligated to be irresponsible. It is not my government. It is yours. It is not my law and order. It is yours. Until the function of law and order is in my hands I must disrupt it..."⁽¹⁾ Dr. Luba is portrayed as a man of sparkling intellect, with a thorough understanding of colonial politics. But the writer tends to make him a thinking machine, void of an emotional life.

And so the modern novelist continues to probe into black-white relations which provide an ever-widening scope for research on an intellectual and an emotional plane. The non-white writer who portrays his own people has the same basic problems of characterization as the white novelist who writes about his own people. As cultural contact and admixture increase, the white novelist will understand the non-white better, and vice-versa.

Chapter 1 (b)

DEFINITION

For purposes of this discussion the word "Non-European" will be used rather loosely to include all peoples who are not of European descent. "European" is related, in a purely geographical sense, to the continent of Europe (including the British Isles). "Non-European" or "non-white" will also include half-castes or "Coloured" people, even although these have European blood. Even so, it is only a political convenience to recognize this or that person as European or half-caste or Coloured. He need only be accepted as such.

In this political context, our discussion will, or rather should cover the characterization of Asian, Arabic, Malay, Negroid (American and African), Eskimo, Red Indian, Hottentot, and Bushman types.

(1) op. cit. pp. 65-68

Chapter I (c)

INTRODUCTION

A list of ten sources most frequently consulted in South African English fiction. The letter preceding the author's name is the symbol given for his/her book. To avoid many footnotes, the symbol and the page number will be given in brackets after every quotation.

- A OLIVE SCHREINER: The Story of an African Farm (Ernest Benn, Ltd., London 1951)
- B SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN: God's Stepchildren (New Edition: Central News Agency, Johannesburg, First Edition 1924)
- C WILLIAM FLOMER: Turbott Wolfe (Leonard & Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, London 1925)
- D ALAN PATON: Cry, the Beloved Country (Jonathan Cape, London 1950-)
- E LAURENS VAN DER POST: In a Province (Hogarth Press, London 1953)
- F GREENFELL WILLIAMS & HENRY JOHN MAY: I am Black (Cassell & Co. Ltd., London 1936)
- G OLIVER WALKER: Proud Eulu (Dassie Books, Central News Agency South Africa 1951)
- E PETER ABRAMMS: Wild Conquest (Faber & Faber, London 1951)
- I HARRY ELCOCK: Episode (Collins, London 1956)
- J NADINE GORDIMER: Six Feet of the Country (Collins, London 1956)

Chapter II

The early emergence of "the enigma" in South African literature from Fringle to Haggard

South African English literature between Fringle and Haggard is characterized by prose and verse of a generally low literary standard. It is pioneering literature written in the heat of brutal historical circumstances. The 1820 British settlers are trying to adapt themselves to new country in which whites and Africans are frequently at war with each other. As Boer and Briton trek farther into the interior to seek better pastures and to shake off what they consider as the shackles of government, they come into conflict with Africans. By 1820 a number of Hottentot and Bushman tribes have been wiped out. Only small bands have managed to move further north to continue a feeble nomadic existence.

Many Hottentots, Bushmen and Africans have been captured and work as slaves on the white man's farms. After the emancipation of slaves, some continue to work for their old masters.

For several years in the history of South Africa the white man gets to know the non-white merely as an enemy on the battlefield or as a slave - whether it be as a labourer on the farm or a carrier on an expedition. Often he knows the non-white as a convert or prospective convert at a mission station. In the first two cases, the emotional circumstances of the contact allow for little more than a tendency on the part of the white man to regard the non-white as one of a group rather than as an individual. The missionary is perhaps at an advantage because he tries to deal with the individual personality. If he fails to understand the convert, it is because his approach is bedevilled by the same overpowering tendency to regard his "ward" as a member of a group whose culture must be completely destroyed as an antithesis of Christian culture.

The writer of the period under review hardly touches the fringe of the problem that lies in the so-called clash of cultures; still less that of the irony that lies in the conflict of cultures that need not always clash, but are in many cases one a supplement of the other. Nor does the writer of the period investigate the contact of a European culture that has had the good luck to produce technical skills with an African culture whose content finds the maximum satisfaction not so much in "doing" (as a Western concept) but in social "being" - in the best human relationships and communal responsibility. The irony of the "clash" should be rich material enough to interest a novelist and a poet; to say nothing of the real clash as it exists in economic and religious systems.

There is something distinctly journalistic in Thomas Pringle's A Residence in South Africa, the prose section of his African Sketches.⁽¹⁾ He came to South Africa with the British Settlers and later became secretary to the Society for the Abolition of

(1) African Sketches (Edward Moxon, London 1834)

Slavery. The non-white does not seem to present an enigma to Fringle. He writes with Humanitarian feeling about episodes in which he encounters Africans.

He tells of an African woman who comes from Uitenhage in the custody of a black constable. She is said to have been one of a Commando on the frontier of a prescribed area which they had crossed without permission. For this the women had to be distributed among white settlers to serve under them.

This woman is to be forwarded by a missionary to a colonist twenty miles away by order of a magistrate. While she pleads her case with finger raised to the sky, Fringle observes what he calls the beautiful flow of the Xhosa language - the music of it - and her natural and graceful gestures.

The writer reports that he could not help feeling that his fello-whites were greater barbarians than savage Africans. Later he is struck by the conduct of a congregation in a religious service; in spite of their lack of "accessories of civilization" they cannot be called "savages", he says.

"There was, even amongst the rudest of the people an aspect of civility and decent respect, of quietude and sober-mindedness, habitually under the control of far other principles than those which regulate the movements of mere savage men". (1)

There is an attitude of surprise in Fringle's experiences. He is also surprised to find that there are respectable peasantry, intellectually advanced. He is amazed to see slaves, congregated round a watchfire and looking more merry than their "phlegmatic masters". (2)

Fringle tells of an incident when a group of Dutch people visited settlers on Sundays. When the visitors were offered seats among Hottentots in a religious service, they (the visitors) found this degrading and left.

There is then the story about Booy, a Hottentot, who was beaten up by a Dutch farmer for claiming his own property.

(1) op. cit. p. 135

(2) op. cit. p. 143

Pringle writes sympathetically about bands of Africans who have been forced into hiding by colonists and later raid the latter's settlements to recapture their cattle; about Hottentots who are under contract of servitude, and about the mellow singing; "sweet, solemn, and pathetic harmony".

He tells the story of a Malay slave who met Dr. John Philip, the London Missionary Society minister, and told him how he (the Malay) and his wife and several children had been sold as slaves to a Graaf Reiniet farmer. The slave had unknowingly been sent to Graaf Reiniet from Cape Town, only to learn there of this transaction. He had left his savings in Cape Town. In spite of repeated application he had been unable to recover his property.

Worse cases, says Pringle, stained the judicial records of the Colony. (1)

Throughout his Sketches Thomas Pringle is preoccupied with slavery; with Hottentots who were not allowed to settle down as communities; with Africans on the frontier who were exasperated by their expulsion from fertile lands. (2)

Thomas Pringle's humanitarianism is sincere, but the non-white in his Sketches emerges as a passive creature of history. His comments on the decency, intellectual qualities, the harmonious singing of the Hottentots and Africans seem to be a deliberate attempt at disproving unfavourable stories about "darkest Africa" which must have been circulating in Europe at the time.

There is a large volume of verse by Pringle that is sheer romantic glorification of the non-white and his way of life. The poem Bechuana Boy, (3) included in the verse section of African Sketches, tells of Marossi, an orphan, who first came under the poet's protection in 1825. The boy had been carried off by the Bergenaars, a Hottentot clan, during a raid, who later sold him off to a Boer for a jacket. The Bechuana Boy accompanied the writer's wife to England. He later died but left a good impression on them.

(1) op. cit. p 359

(2) op. cit. p. 403

(3) Op. cit. pp. 1 - 8

"By Christians we were bought and sold
....And roughly from each other torn," says the boy.

And "Englishmen will never know
The injured bondmen's bitter woe."

The poem sinks into worse maudlinity when Marosso is said to have found a fawn and cursed its wounds, because in "its helpless fate, so like to mine", it was brought to the boy to bid him not to repine.

Pringle hears in a Xhosa song, Afar in the Desert⁽¹⁾ the longing to go out into the desert with "the silent Bush-boy alone by my side". The Xhosa man wants to live away from "scenes of oppression, corruption and strife", which are the bane of his life.

Another longing to escape a life regulated by white people is expressed in The Song of the Wild Bushman.⁽²⁾ The Bushman says that the white man may boast his flocks of sheep, fields of grain. But he, the Bushman, does not have to toil; his home is in the rocks, he is "lord of the desert", and

"I will not leave my bounds,
To crouch beneath the Christian's hand".

The writer uses much of his verse to vindicate the aborigine, to crusade for the freedom of African tribes scattered by the white man's superior war machine, and of the "enslaved Madagass", the "dejected Malay" and the "degenerate Belgian".

He also turns his attention to the other side of the picture - the thoughts that may be going on in the slave trader's mind. In The Slave Dealer⁽³⁾ he depicts a slave-trader tortured by an uneasy conscience. With every stroke that he administered on his slaves, he left a gash from which Negro blood flowed. All the ocean could not wash the trader's soul; the Negro's cry is forever sounding in his ear.

There is a good deal of the romantic in Pringle's attitude to the indigenous peoples of South Africa. But then he was actively engaged on the spot in persuading people's minds to accept the principle of freeing slaves. What romanticism he brought to his writings, I think, was a result of abundant sincerity. It was not the romanticism that is merely prompted by the lust for adventure

(1) op. cit. pp 10 - 11

(2) op. cit. p 14

(3) op. cit. p. 91

a man is expected to have who settles in new country.

Prof. Guy Butler is perhaps right in saying that the British settlers brought to the frontier the concept of the "noble savage" with them: a romantic rebellion against the "too self-conscious 18th century, in favour of primitive, wild, unsophisticated man who lives close to 'mystic nature'". The very nakedness, he says, suggested innocence, a clear morality. This romanticism, Dr. Butler asserts, found excellent expression in Pringle's many poems about Africans. (1)

Be that as it may, Pringle felt himself compelled to side with the Africans, Bushmen and Hottentots, and not with the white frontiersmen. Like every other poet, he brought to his work his personal values. In addition, he brought his sympathy. But Africa is still to him a strange world, and he does not know its inside workings. When he is faced with the necessity of portraying character, he pays attention to group behaviour instead.

A century later Kingsley Fairbridge writes a poem, Songmaker, which is an advance on Pringle. Fairbridge is writing about things he knows intimately, not trying to reach out at the unknown. The blind man in the poem sits at the edge of a kraal all day. The kraal rats peep and go; the dogs sniff him and go; but he sits on and on. That was before the white man came to this country. The blind man's song then set warriors on the warpath. Now he sits all day in the hot sand in the sun -

"The flies think him dead, (2)
The dogs smell him and go".

The Zulu wars towards the end of Pringle's century gave rise to a volume of poems, some quite savage, in which there is much gloating. Zulu armies are said to be coming on like a "herd of black game", with the "speed of flame", making a sound like myriad wings in the sky. But the white leaders are firm. The morning finds "the devils silently gone". The other Zulus are dead, numbering 20 to 1, "And we set up a shout/ That frightened the vultures slow sailing about".

(1) Broadcast lecture on South African Poetry:
South African Broadcasting Corporation,
Lecture No. 2 (October - November 1955)

(2) op. cit.

Robert Michael Bruce writes a lyrical poem, "Nomente", in which he describes her beauty. She has big eyes, her cheeks shine like yellow realies; her lips are "as outspread wings of lories/ In dark kloofs flying". This is a romantic piece.

We get a sympathetic view of Bushman paintings in an extract from William Charles Scully's The Bushman's Cave.⁽²⁾

"Here human creatures hoped and loved,
And feared and hated in their turn...."

Women nursed babies, girls listened to their lovers.

"Here death has thrown a deeper shade
Of darkness o'er the gloomy wood".

There is a good deal of gloating also in Afrikaans writers of about the time of the Zulu wars, although they peg their verse on the Transvaal War of Independence, 1881. For instance, S.J. du Toit Transvaalse Vryheidslied and Nag en Dageraad in Matabeleland. There is a vast contrast between Scully's view of the Bushman and, say, the Afrikaans writer's, the Hobson Brothers, in their book Skankwar van die Duine. This is a much later book in which the Bushman is depicted as a savage animal, or at best sub-human.

In Scully's 'Nkongane'⁽³⁾ the poet tries to get a closer and more intimate picture of African life than the poets of Pringle's time. The old man, 'Nkongane, is honest (perhaps), but the poet doubts. His eye "Snaps at the chink of money".....

"Poor old barbarian, your Christian veneer
Is thin and cracked, and the core inside
Is heathen and natural".

Yet, the poet says, 'Nkongane's face is dignified. Then there is a backflash: "You glow with the ardour of blood-stained days/ And deeds long past....". He has come from a brave past "to this: to cringe for a shilling./ To skulk round the Mission house, hungry and lone - a living death.....".

From this brief glance at verse, which I will seek no excuses for including in "fiction", let us consider some of the novels produced up to the time of Rider Haggard. First, R.M. Ballantyne's The Settler and the Savage,⁽⁴⁾ in which the hero, Considine, meets a Bushman - whom the writer calls "one of that lowest of the human race

(1) Centenary Book of South African Verse 1820-1925 (ed. Francis Slater) p. 30

(2) op. cit. p. 175

(3) op. cit. p. 176

(4) The Settler and the Savage (James Nisbet & Co. London 1877)

the diminutive, black-skinned and monkey-faced creature"... (1)

The novel works in a number of historical events and names and frontier problems. Thomas Pringle is mentioned. Hans, a Boer, says that the frontier problems are to be blamed on Lord Charles Somerset (Governor) - "a domineering fellow" - for entering into treaties with Gaika. "I've no faith in Kafirs. It is their pride to lie, their business to make war and their delight to plunder."

Jan Smit, another Boer, is a violent character who beats his non-white servants, Ruyter, Jemalee, and Booby, the Bushman. They run away and join a rebel group of Hottentots and Bushmen.

It is as fighters and as servants that the writer describes his non-white characters. He makes Sandy Black say: "If they Kawfir bodies we hear about only had chiefs wi' powere of organization, an' was a' united together, they wad drive the hail o' this colony into the sea like chaff before the wind. But they'll niver do it; - for, 'ae see, they want mind - an' body without mind is but a pair thing after a'..." (2)

It is the writer's opinion that "the Hottentot race is a very inferior one, both mentally and physically, but there are among them individuals who rise much above the ordinary level. Ruyter was one of these. He had indeed the sallow visage ... but his countenance was unusually intelligent..." Later, "Ruyter, though by nature a good-humoured easy-going fellow, was possessed of an unusually high spirit for men of his race, and would never listen to any reference to the wrongs of the Hottentots without a dark frown of indignation"⁽³⁾.

Vague generalizations like these tell us nothing about the character of the man Ruyter. Why should it be necessary to mention particularly Ruyter's reaction to unfavourable remarks about his race, as if it were a specifically Hottentot manner to react thus?

The reader is treated to crude descriptions of outward appearances, like Hottentots having tough heads; Africans looking like monkeys; Africans running against mimosa thorns "with impunity"; and "Kaffirs, although savage", being "fastidious".⁽⁴⁾

(1) op. cit. p. 3

(2) op. cit. p. 57

(3) op. cit. p. 126

(4) op. cit. p. 260

Ruyter always threatens to become deep, as when he is in conversation with a white man - Stephen Crpin, the Wesleyan. He tells Ruyter (now one of the bandits) that if all Kottentots in Africa were to unite with the bandits, they would not be strong enough to beat the white man. Why? They are not so well armed, is the reply. Ruyter is a "child and knows nothing"; "God is on the white man's side, because the white man in the main intends and tries to do good". Why should the non-white fight when the white man brings trinkets and so on in exchange for hides, horns and ivory? asks Crpin.

In reply, Ruyter cites Jan Smit's as an example of the sort of cruelty that antagonizes non-whites. When the Wesleyan says that Jesus Christ will not deliver those who wilfully give way to revenge, Ruyter says: "I no want deliverance".

Later Ruyter says: "I not a Christian, but I do tink..... De black heathen - so you calls him - live in de land. White Christian - so you calls him - come and take de land; make slabe ob black man and kick him about like pair ob ole boots....."

But of course, we are told that Ruyter is not true to the Kottentot type. It seems that the writer is unwilling to credit him with common sense, because the Kottentot, a bandit, actually meets the Wesleyan within a few yards of a fair and does not appear to be sensible of any danger. Or perhaps the "ordinary Kottentot" would not do this!

Except for this attempt to understand Ruyter, Ballantyne seems smug in his generalizations and in the dismissal of the non-white characters he has merely labelled, like Booby and Jemalee.

Two other novels produced towards the end of the 19th century are The White Chief of the Caffers by A.W. Drayson⁽¹⁾ and Glanville's Among the Cape Kaffirs.⁽²⁾ They are both poor works for non-white characterization. They tell us a good deal of African lore. The African characters are not seen as individuals but as members of communities.

In the first of these books, a European who has survived a

(1) The White Chief of the Caffers (George Routledge & Sons, London 1887)

(2) Among the Cape Kaffirs (Sonnenschein, London 1888)

shipwreck "goes native" and becomes a chief of the tribesmen. He shares their war and hunting adventures. He later escapes and goes back to European life. The thought and emotional life of the white man in the process of "going native" evades the writer. All we know of the African characters is the wildness that is typical of their habitat.

J. Percy Fitzpatrick writes South African tales which make up the volume, The Cutspar.⁽¹⁾

The title story tells of a white man who "goes native" and comes to ruin when he returns to his own people. This end is supposed to follow a particular pattern of life which constitutes the theme of the story. "It seems like - like a sort of judgement".... "civilization, scorned, and flouted, being the instrument of its own revenge". In this story the white chief dies suddenly.

The writer makes a white character say: "Even in the urchins of the race there is the instinct of evasion which enables them to baffle the closest inquiries".⁽²⁾ This sounds like defeat on the part of Fitzpatrick. African character, insofar as we can label character, evades him, and he slips into the easy gear that gets him careering down to the land of myth. We shall never know what this mystical power is that destroys the white man. When morning comes, we realize that we have been listening to a hunter's story or a transport-rider's, in which plot is everything and character counts for nothing.

More interesting than these novels and short stories, from the point of view of intimate study of Africans and of variety in characterization is William Charles Scully's volume of short stories Kaffir Stories.⁽³⁾ The feeling one gets on reading these stories is that Scully has at least observed African life at close quarters. His characters are not all distant, shadowy creatures of epic events like wars and rebellions - the common type in the novels of his time. In his stories he comes to grips with the enigma that emerges from contact between the Christian outlook and the non-Christian.

(1) The Cutspar (William Heinemann, London 1898)

(2) op. cit. p. 85

(3) Kaffir Stories (T. Fisher Unwin, London 1895)

We do get the passive servant in Maliwe in the story, The Eumenides in Kaffirland. Maliwe becomes the dumb victim of fate when Jim Gubo, the policeman and Kalaza, an ex-convict, plot to have him convicted by a magistrate. The policeman will be paid for the arrest. Maliwe's weakness lies in his goodness and gullibility. In typical African style, he must slaughter a sheep to entertain one man. This is all bound up with his error of judgment. Yet Maliwe is a universal character: any similar human could suffer in the same way in any other part of the world. That he suffers excessively when he gets an additional penalty of twenty lashes at the hands of his former sweetheart's brothers, is an error in Scully's construction.

The Fundamental Axiom tells of Samuel Gozani, at one time a probationer in evangelism at a mission station, and Martha Kawa, a light-complexioned woman of mixed parentage, at one time a pupil at the mission school. Her father was English, her mother African.

"When five years previously she was sent to the mission, she was in a condition of absolute savagery," says the writer. "In the mission school her Aryan blood told; she kept easily ahead of the girls and took all the best prizes."⁽¹⁾

Gozani begins as an efficient student, but a change comes over him when a Miss Blake, a white woman, joins the teaching staff at the mission. From then onwards his studies fall behind, and he broods most of the time over his love for Miss Blake.

He tells Miss Blake that when a black man follows the ways of whites, he becomes a stranger to his own people. However nearly he approaches the white man's ways, there still remains a gulf. He feels lonely. "Even you only tolerate me because you think it pleasing to God that you should do so; but you would never be my friend or let me be yours," says Gozani. Miss Blake, against her own convictions, protests that she likes Gozani as well as if he were white. He avidly holds out his hand to her, obviously flattered.

(1) op. cit. p. 39

But a Rev. Robley Wilson visits the mission, and falls in love with Miss Blake. In the meantime Martha has fallen in love with Gozani, but she keeps it painfully secret, with the hope that he will take the initiative and make love to her. She knows that he loves Miss Blake. Gozani is driven by jealousy to kill Robley Wilson. The only other witness to the murder is Martha, who, for the sake of the man she loves, conceals the truth.

Subsequently Martha and Gozani leave the mission station and go to live elsewhere as man and wife. From then on an inexplicable decay sets in. Gozani becomes insane, kills his wife, and himself.

Scully in an effort to explore the emotional and intellectual make-up of both Martha and Gozani, makes certain assertions about their character, which indicates that he is at least trying to fathom what must be to him an enigma.

"It was for Miss Blake that he (Gozani) was striving to qualify as a minister; it was of her that he thought all day and dreamt all night. Into his wild and elemental nature, in which hereditary savagery was simply covered by a thin veneer of civilization, this strong love for a woman of an alien race had struck its roots deep down. But instead of the savage element being transmuted into gentleness, his love absorbed into itself the savage and thus became savage in its character. This resultant was a highly explosive psychic compound."

Later, "In Martha, the Aryan element manifested itself mainly in force of character, and ability; for in her tastes and desires, as in her physiognomy, she followed her mother's race. Whilst Samuel was secretive by nature, she was rendered so by force of circumstances."

The trouble with Scully's assertions is that we are never sure what he means by "savage" or "Savagery". As far as he is concerned there is a hereditary savagery in Gozani. At one time we get the impression that this "savagery" is merely a state and can actually form some compound with love. We do not see it as an overt phenomenon, except when Samuel Gozani kills his rival. But what is so hereditary about jealousy?

Again, we do not find anywhere in the story actions which we may ascribe to Martha's tastes and desires as taken over from her African mother. And what is so inherently Aryan about a person's ability? Is one to believe that Martha's not being secretive by nature is due to the Aryan strain in her?

Clearly, Scully has started off on the wrong foot: with certain stock ideas about "Aryan superiority" and "African savagery". From the time Martha and Gozani leave the mission station, neither the former's "Aryan ability" nor Gozani's missionary education saves them. Their life degenerates into something near animal behaviour. She and her child die a dog's death and he, a depraved creature, commits suicide.

The "fundamental axiom", says Scully, is that the "average barbarian" is fully the "equal of the average civilized man". We do not know the terms of reference in the phrases, "average barbarian" and "equal of the average civilized man". So we need not waste time trying to analyse the "axiom".

In the story Kellson's Wemesis⁽¹⁾ we meet Rachel Arends, who has had a child by a white public servant. She is just a meek, anxious woman who can be of no particular interest to anyone.

The last writer of the period under review is Sir H. Rider Haggard. He came to South Africa at the age of 17, and became familiar with men who knew much about Zulu people, their history, customs and heroes. He heard much of what he wrote from storytellers.

Haggard writes romances - adventure tales that often interest teen-agers, like James Fenimore Cooper's tales about Red Indians. The romantic in Rider Haggard overwhelms historical fact in his Nada the Lily⁽²⁾ and King Solomon's Mines⁽³⁾ lives anaemically in its own realm - the fake-legendary.

I must pass on, because I am not considering fiction for juvenile minds.

(1) op. cit.

(2) Nada the Lily (Longmans, Green & Co., London 1892)

(3) King Solomon's Mines (Pan Books Ltd., London 1951)

CHAPTER III

South African Novelists of First Importance

The literature reviewed in the last chapter has as its main characteristic either a romanticized version of the Non-European character or a realistic one marred by preconceived ideas. The constant strife that marks the period covered, and the master-and-servant relationship between black and white in which the latter regarded the former merely as a type (not as an individual) made it impossible for any writer to create memorable Non-European characters.

As we get to the four most important realists in South African fiction, the enigma becomes even more complex. The African is being more and more integrated into a European farming and industrial economy. It is in this context that the novelists approach their non-white characters. Let us consider the fiction of Clive Schreiner, Sarah Gertrude Millin, William Plomer, and Alan Paton.

Clive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm is not predominantly about Non-Europeans. The non-white character appears as a butt for the wrath of Tant' Sannie, the Dutch woman of the farm and for the wicked Bonaparte's intrigue; or as the trusted servant of Tant' Sannie or as the object of the German overseer's tender mercies.

There is a touching reference to the Bushman by Waldo when he and Lyndall see Bushman paintings. It makes the reader feel, as does Waldo, the presence of the artist whose work they are contemplating. "...and it seems that the stones are really speaking - speaking of the old things, of the time when the strange fishes and animals lived that are turned into stone now, and the lakes were here; and of the time when the little Bushmen lived here, so small and so ugly, and used to sleep in the wild dog holes, and in the 'sloots', and ate snakes, and shot the bucks with their poisoned arrows. It was one of them, one of these old wild Bushmen, that painted those," said the boy, nodding towards the pictures - "one who was different from the rest. He did not know why, but he wanted to make something, so he made these. He worked hard, very hard, to find the juice to make the paint; and then he found this place where the rocks hang over, and he painted them. To us

they are on strange things, that make us laugh; but to him they were very beautiful".

"He us c kneel here naked, painting, painting, painting: and he wond at the things he made himself," said the boy, rising and moving hand in deep excitement. "Now the Boers have shot them all, so at we never see a yellow face peeping out among the stones." (1)

Bonaparte arrives on the farm and pleads with the adamant Tant' Sannie to give him shelter. The German overseer, his interpreter, advises him not to look at the Dutch woman so much: that may be the reason for her hostile attitude. Following the advice, Bonaparte "turned his nose full upon a small Kaffir of two years old. That small, naked son of Ham, became instantly so terrified that he fled to his mother's blanket for protection, howling horribly". (2)

The phrase "son of Ham" indicates Tant' Sannie's attitude towards black people and also sticks an ominous label on Bonaparte. He is going to develop the same attitudes as Tant' Sannie's - spitefulness, contempt and utter brutality.

The African servants are kept away from the Sunday services on the farm, "because Tant' Sannie held they were descended from the apes, and needed no salvation. But the rest were gathered for the Sunday service..." (3). The "coloured" servants received a somewhat preferential treatment.

How different is the German overseer's behaviour towards the servants. He simply cannot disbelieve the herd who is accused of stealing twenty sheep. "How can I think he lies?" says the German, like a child. He cannot believe the African herd to have stolen the sheep, and explains that he must have fled in fear. "I know his heart. It was," says the German, "under my words that he first felt his need of a Saviour." (4)

(1) A pp. 35 - 36

(2) A p. 38

(3) A p. 55

(4) A p. 70

Of Tant' Sannie's coloured maid, the German says: "I have confidence in her. There is that in her which is pure, that which is noble. The rich and high that walk this earth with lofty eyelids might exchange with her."⁽¹⁾

Later the herd's wife and child are thrown out of the farm by the Boer woman. The German gives her food and shelter. He holds services for the African servants, and his paternal interest in them never changes; just as Tant' Sannie's contempt for them remains fixed. In reprimanding Waldo she says of his late father: "He had more sins than all the Kaffirs in Kaffirland."⁽²⁾

There is so much mute suffering among the other servants on the farm that it is a relief to see the Hottentot maid, who is closest to Tant' Sannie, laugh so often when other people become victims of the Boer woman's lashing tongue or maltreatment. She is so intimate with Tant' Sannie that she seems to represent the light-hearted and more humorous side of the Boer woman. She can even go so far as to say slyly, when Tant' Sannie is about to go up a ladder: "There's one would be sorry if you were to fall," leering at Bonaparte's pipe. This is just what Tant' Sannie might be expected to say to herself, considering Bonaparte's high standing on the farm and his somewhat affectionate regard for her.

Otherwise, Clive Schreiner's non-white characters are either victims of maltreatment at the hands of white people or, like many of Charles Dickens's down-trodden characters, enjoy the little that individual philanthropy can afford. In another novel, Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland,⁽³⁾ too, the only time an African character appears in flesh and blood in the story is as a dumb sufferer, who is tied to a tree, ready to be shot for "spying" by the English. It is Peter Halket who releases him, and dies for it himself.

And so our novelist continues to talk about Non-Europeans, and hardly makes them talk. Through Lyndall, talking to Gregory, Olive Schreiner points to an African at the foot of a hill and remarks his dignity.⁽⁴⁾

(1) A p. 71

(2) A p. 160

(3) Trooper Peter Halket (T. Fisher Unwin, London 1897)

(4) A pp. 214/215

Again, through Waldo in his letter to Lyndall: "There was one respectable thing in that store - it was the Kaffir storeman. His work was to load and unload, and he never needed to smile except when he liked, and he never told lies."

Because of this apparently mute response to suffering, sometimes the African and Hottentot servants on the farm move about like shadows. Sometimes the reader feels the agony of their lot in their very reticence.

Olive Schreiner's championing of the underdog is perhaps a South African version of the liberal spirit that was sweeping through Europe in the 19th century. The suggestions for the betterment of black-white relations are to be found mainly in her political theses, not in her fiction. There is a suggestion of the Christian approach in her sermonizings in the Trooper Peter Halket novel; as there is in the musings we find in The Story of an African Farm.

"When the drunken Kaffir lies by the road in the sun we draw his blanket over his head, and put green branches of milk-bush on it. His Kaffir; why should the sun hurt him?" (1)

"There is no justice...The black man is shot like a dog, and it goes well with the shooter...." (2)

Olive Schreiner is in a different element when she writes, for instance, the story, Dream Life and Real Life.⁽³⁾ Her non-white characters here are full-blooded villains - Dirk, the Hottentot herd, and the Bushman who steals a Boer farmer's kid. With the help of an English navy they plan to steal a goat from the Boer's farm. The ill-treated Jannita, who looks after part of the flock (Dirk looks after the other) chances to overhear the three men conspire to steal the goat. Although she has decided never to go back to the hateful farm, she runs back to warn the farmer. They intercept her, kill her, and hide her body in a cave.

The Hottentot and the Bushman, evil though their deeds are, have a lively intellect; the former, being the farmer's servant,

(1) A p. 131

(2) A p. 135

(3) In South African Short Stories, ed. by E.B. Seary (Oxford University Press, Cape Town 1947)

may be stealing from him out of sheer spite or even vengeance for his abject poverty. They are not like the passive sufferers in the two novels reviewed above, though their form of activity is hardly admirable or in any way significant either of their own characters or of Clive Schreiner's understanding of them.

Sarah Gertrude Millin tackles a different problem in her book, God's Stepchildren, from that with which Clive Schreiner is pre-occupied: the problem of mixed blood. She shows how people of mixed blood degenerate in social and political conditions that outlaw miscegenation between white and non-white. These external conditions are not defined explicitly in the story: they are merely suggested and understood.

The story begins with the missionary, the Rev. Andrew Flood, who marries a Hottentot woman in order that the people to whom he has come to preach Christ's gospel may better understand its content. But he does this, as it were, at a moment of desperation. He had been asked several rather difficult questions by some of the Hottentots about God and His ways. Apparently because he has been brought up in a theology that states unquestioned beliefs, he has been begging the question all the way while attempting to reply to the Hottentots. On the other hand there are others who have not the slightest intention of taking the missionary's word seriously or of being converted to his religion. None of these Hottentots is depicted as giving deep thought to religion and the meaning of existence (apparently none is capable of deep thinking). There is an atmosphere of sustained sarcasm in the tone of their questions.

It is after Titus, a Hottentot servant, has suggested that his people think that "God does not feel the same for a brown man as for a white man" that Andrew Flood seeks means to prove the argument that the Hottentots are his equals in the sight of God. The result is that he marries Silla, his servant.

There is much that is naive and unconvincing about the manner in which the missionary forsakes the European standards of cleanliness as part of the programme to convince his charges that whites and non-whites are equal in the sight of God.

We learn that the community in which he has come to live are an extremely indolent, dagga-smoking crowd, who seem to thrive best in filthy conditions. They have incorrigible habits, like that of resorting to witchcraft. In fact "the Hottentots did not regard him (Flood) as a brother. They regarded him as a fool",⁽¹⁾

Flood degenerates. "He was himself in many ways a savage",⁽²⁾ and he dies in miserable circumstances.

Deborah, his daughter, goes to live with Mr. Thomas Eurtwell of another mission station, which is flourishing, in contrast with Canaan, Flood's station.

We are under no illusion that Andrew Flood has, by marrying a Hottentot, decided the fate of future generations. External conditions have from now on no relation to character. Sarah Gertrude Millin cannot save her characters from the "curse" of mixed blood.

Deborah, although she lives with a family that has not "gone native", cannot go straight. She has no hold on her animal instincts. She falls in love, first with a Hottentot, and then with Kleinhans. The writer is fond of labels and shallow generalizations. "She (Deborah) had, as most half-caste children have, a capacity for imitation",⁽³⁾ (the italics are mine) as if the capacity for imitation were not common to all humanity. Deborah tries to learn, but "inevitably the point would be reached where a solid barrier of unreceptivity would hinder all further mental progress".⁽⁴⁾ Another label, if not a libel. We are also told that "native children arrived at their full capacity very early... at fourteen or fifteen they would begin to falter, to lag behind, to remain stationary while their white competitors went ahead."

Another label is stuck on to Adam Kok, half-caste leader of the Griquas and Hottentots among whom Deborah and her son, Kleinhans subsequently go to live. "This short, stout, almost literate half-caste.... this leader of shamefully born savages and fugitives and outlaws and emancipated slaves".⁽⁵⁾

(1) B p. 49

(2) B p. 57

(3) B p. 63

(4) B p. 63

(5) B p. 82

Kleinhans is said to be by nature a husbandman. "Heaven knows what germ in his distant white ancestry had quaintly chosen to establish itself in Kleinhans' character".⁽¹⁾ The suggestion is that if he had not had that "germ in his white ancestry" he would not have so rigorously farmed his land - "in that community where work was universally despised". He hates the "meek, dark bearers of shame".

Kleinhans tries to annul his coloured blood by embarking on money-making enterprises, which he hopes will improve his social position and thus enable him to stand his own among whites.

But then he encounters ugly experiences in his contact with whites. They simply do not accept him as a white man and spurn him. After a beating-up by whites the enterprising man in him collapses. We are back to the fate of half-castes who, the writer wants to impress upon us, can never develop a firmness of character or anything beyond very ordinary intellect. He ends up as a farm manager and marries a coloured girl.

Elmira, their eldest daughter, leads a miserable life in a European school, "trying for white". Kleinhans cuts a rather quaint figure when he first accepts the fact that he cannot cross over to white society but still does not want his children to go to a school for Africans. Elmira excites our sympathy, as do her parents while she attends the school for whites, keeping up a precarious existence on a wobbly colour standard. The standard topples over in a gale, as it were, and her personality crumbles. A circumstantial gale, because if she had not fallen ill, her parents would not have been hard pressed to visit her and thus reveal her colour identity. But Elmira never puts up a fight during her stay at the school. She languishes in her shame - ashamed of her parents. From the time she gets ill, Kleinhans, Lena and their daughter resign themselves to their ill luck, the accident of colour that forms the motif of the whole novel.

(1) B p. 83

importance. A black man might, without the political, industrial and social advantages the coloured man enjoys, climb up and struggle as far as an English or Scottish university. He might fail to compete favourably with whites, but he would have done what the average half-caste could not do.

The author ascribes their failure to their Kottentot blood. They remain "imitative and monkey-like...". Something of that blood still lived in Barry. And he could not see past it. And yet there was something else to see. This "something else" is the fact that there are South Africans who are apparently white, but have some coloured blood in them. Yet they are by no means hopeless. Mrs. Millin says this, and one wonders why all her characters are doomed to crumble in the way they do.

Edith tries to bring Barry to the realization that an ancestor of his once made the mistake of marrying a Kottentot. Because of this, generations of mixed blood followed, which meant the continuation of an evil. It is Barry's responsibility to see that he does not allow others of mixed blood to be born. For a brief period he tries to fight back. But then his character is tied to the millstone of some formula. He must succumb. He decides to become a minister of religion. "It would be some recompense for what his ancestors had done".⁽¹⁾

Going to Oxford and joining the army in the first world war appear to have deepened Barry's personality and enriched his experience and knowledge of people. He seems to have benefited from his years in Europe, where colour distinctions are not an obsession with the people. He even marries an English woman. Goaded by Edith he tells his wife, now expecting a child, of his mixed parentage, something he hoped he would never have to do. His nightmare returns when he has gone to see his mother, Elmira, to whose sick-bed he has been called. There he sees his dying mother, his great-grandmother - all coloured folk living in circumstances of disgraceful poverty.

Moved by their helpless condition, Barry vows to start missionary work for the uplift of Coloured people. It is a triumph

(1) B p. 258

in that he has, by dedicating himself to the service of his less privileged people, to give up his wife. More important and more poignant is the defeat Barry is in effect admitting. His defeat began when he took refuge in the ministry in order to expiate the "Sins" of his forebears.

His final vow is a symbol of defeat. In him the urge to propagate the human race is defeated by the fear that his children will be dark in colour. According to Mrs. Millin, mixed blood wreaks vengeance on coming generations. Deborah, Kleinmans (her son), Elmire, and now Barry, all fall back on the community that produced them, feeling ashamed, allowing themselves to be crushed because they were "unluckily born".

Sarah Gertrude Millin's non-white characters do not grow up. They crumble. Elmire allows herself to be married by old Lindsell. She has never really cared - in a filial way - for her parents, so that she does not marry Lindsell because she is afraid that he may expel them from his farm. We are made to understand that her slavish acquiescence is the same as that of her grandparents, of her parents, of her tribe - a grovelling, defeated breed of "God's stepchildren", "who must always suffer".⁽¹⁾

While Clive Schreiner does not present non-white characters who dominate the scene in action and dialogue, Mrs. Millin does. There is, however, a serious weakness in her kind of realism. Her characters have nothing to say or think about the politics that determine their miserable lot. What part does religion play in their lives? What do they think of God and the scheme of things in which they are the living paradox of the white man's contempt for the aboriginal? Her historical accounts of the conflicts between the Hottentots and the whites imply that the former had some thoughts about the changing modes and tenor of their lives. But we never know what Mrs. Millin's characters think. Barry tries to think. But, like Elmira's, his brain reaches a point where it "soon tired and lagged behind, so that the time came when it fell altogether out of the running". And he becomes one of the stereotypes that people the scene before and during his life-time. In

(1) B p. xii, Preface

this lies the weakness of the authoress' characterization marred as it is by the strong element of fatality, and the accent on cause and effect of an order that rightly belongs to an historical record and not to creative or interpretative work.

Mrs. Millin's The Herr Witchdoctor⁽¹⁾ picks up the story of Barry Lindsell where she had left off sixteen years before in God's Stepchildren. We find Barry still trying to expiate the "sin" of his forefathers - miscegenation. He fails. He steers a rigid course in his response to diverse situations. Observe how, for "the sake of a selfish idea" Barry rejects the golden opportunity of returning to his family. Yet he is aware of his failure even as a missionary.

Barry's defeat does not evoke much pity from the reader: he is the kind of person who, in the author's imagination is born for failure. "Had he ever in his life stopped crying: 'Don't let the brown people take me!'"⁽²⁾

At first, John (Nsingasi) impresses the reader as a character who is going to grow into someone big. A number of questions worry John's mind - mainly those relating to the position of the African in the polity. He strives for his people's uplift. But clearly he cannot carry the weight of the intellectual arguments the author introduces. John breaks down eventually and joins the Germany missionary church. "He knows that by so doing he is throwing himself from stony earth into uncharted, immeasurable space. But that space still lay his dream... whomever he betrayed, whatever he risked, he had to pursue it."⁽³⁾

Aaron, the leader of the Levite sect in Mrs. Millin's The Coming of the Lord⁽⁴⁾ is another stereotype. He moves about and speaks as in a daze, drunk with fanatic religious passion. Nothing and no one can help him see reason. His stock reply to all who beg, persuade, order, urge him to leave the Heights is: "God will fight on our side."⁽⁵⁾

(1) The Herr Witchdoctor (William Heinemann Ltd., London 1941)

(2) op. cit. p. 74

(3) op. cit. p. 279

(4) The Coming of the Lord (Constable & Co., Ltd. London 1928)

(5) op. cit. p. 294

For the rest, the Levite masses are described as people who love an idle life, the implication being that they mean to enjoy themselves on the Heights while they wait for the coming of the Lord - the Revelation.

Mr. Tetyana is no religious fanatic. But he is a lonely man who is hyperconscious of the social status his education has raised him to, above his fellow-men. He is an uninteresting character.

The ending of Sarah Gertrude Millin's book is an inevitable one, thus limiting the range of characterization. We know long beforehand that the authorities will use force and the Levites will offer "passive resistance".

@@@

@@@

@@@

We are on totally different ground in William Flomer's Turbott Wolfe from that in God's Stepchildren. In the former the intellectual interest is more intense than ever before in South African English fiction writing. Inasmuch as the stuff of living fiction is people, the novelist cannot ignore ideas. Perhaps more than any other modern novelist, D.H. Lawrence realized this fact. He could not but give expression, through his characters, to the intellectual systems of his day.

William Flomer's African characters feel they have something to contribute to the polity. There is a third dimension to them, as it were, unlike the two-dimensional characters in God's Stepchildren, who are but creatures of fate. We see Flomer's African characters through a window pane - Turbott Wolfe's. But the pane is not opaque. He is a bit of a romanticist himself, but we never lose focus, any more than we confuse Flaubert's Madame Bovary's romantic impulses with the realistic setting and events surrounding her life.

Turbott Wolfe sees Nordalgaard, the Norwegian missionary and the Africans surrounding him through a kind of glass where there is interplay of the cynical and the romantic. Nordalgaard is a gentleman "looking to his work to reward him only with the affection of the half-awaking consciousness of the simian, mystical childlike,

man-like and the woman-like obscure attractive soul of the African".⁽¹⁾ According to this view the African is no more just another human being who will always have obscure features in his character. No, the African, in the context of Wolfe's report, is something of the anthropoid ape emerging from a pre-historic fog. What is so child-like about the African? one may ask. Wolfe here speaks like the traditional, doting, eccentric and fawning missionary whose superior-familiar airs can be sickening. Perhaps Plomer intends a skit on this type of white man.

The same view is expressed in Wolfe's intention to train his eye "to admire to excess the over-developed marvellous animal grace of each Lembu individual"; in his ecstasy "over the bright-eyed ingenuousness of every child, over the patriarchal grace of each old man, over the youthful grace of every young one..."⁽²⁾

There is romantic nostalgia again in his description of African beauty. He says of the African girl he fell in love with: "She was a fine rare savage, of a type you will find nowhere now: it has been killed by the missions, the poor whites and the towns.The missionaries brought them the sacrament, but syphilis too. They took away everything from the natives - all those vague mysterious savage ways of mind on which their lives are conducted, often very honourably and even nobly".⁽³⁾ And he goes on to say how the African soul became the battleground for white denominationalism.

Much of this is true, especially about the war between the denominations for the capture of the African's soul. It is also true that the towns and missions have destroyed a good deal of the beauty of Africa. But is it not also true to say that the industrial revolution brought syphilis, tuberculosis, thrombosis, and diabetes to the whites? If Wolfe uses "syphilis" to symbolize

(1) C p. 22

(2) C p. 32

(3) C p. 53

the evil that has replaced the tremendous amount of what was good in African life, we agree with him. But a realist should not burst out into hysterics and say: "But it is too late now."⁽¹⁾

Again, it is romanticizing Nhliziyombi, the African girl, when Wolfe sees her as a symbol of "that beauty (it might be called holiness) that intensity of the old wonderful unknown primitive African life.... a living image of what has been killed by people like Flesher, by our obscene civilization".⁽²⁾ The realistic approach would be to regard her as an individual. We see her as a person with some individualism when the two meet face to face (she and Wolfe). She receives a present of a gold pin from him. She is overwhelmed and her only exclamation is, "O, white men!" She runs off. And then also when Wolfe happens on Nhliziyombi in a banana grove. He declares his love for her, and she takes his head between her hands; obviously out of sheer pity and gratitude.

Caleb Msoni, Wolfe's servant, is an educated, faithful and trustworthy man. Wolfe talks to him and behaves towards him as he would to any other respectable person, black or white. He stands in sharp contrast to the Fleshers, the Bloodfields, and the Sopers. The fact that he can be moved by music is not startling; the musical impulse in man is almost as old as time. Apart from his role in the society of Young Africa and the subtle manner in which his solid character influences Wolfe's, Msoni is not a virile character.

The manner in which the aboriginals, without doing anything at all, influence the relations between white and white, is something of an enigma. Friston begins talking about the world's becoming quickly and inevitably a "coloured world"; Flesher degenerates into a monstrous and grotesque hater of negrophilists - perhaps he even hates them more than he hates Africans; Soper shrivels up in the acid memory of a ghastly murder he committed when he castrated an African; he becomes a mere inconsistent,

(1) C p. 53

(2) C p. 55

vitriol-spitting creature. Soper says he nearly married the coloured Alfredson's daughter; but he thinks Africans are nothing more than animals. At another time he instructs an African to destroy his neighbour's sheep - Romain's, his accomplice in the murder. Old Frank D'Elvedere has also something to tell Friston: "Never suppose that you can elevate the black man to your own level. You can't But it is very easy for a white man to lower himself to the level of the native.... It (South Africa) can never be anything but a black or at least, a coloured man's country".⁽¹⁾ And almost in the same breath, he says he cannot claim that no black woman has ever shared his bed

Bloodfield remains a constant hater of blacks and the likes of Turbett Wolfe. The Schwerts take to gruesome acts of witchcraft. The Fotheringhay vicarage is literally maintained by Alfredson, the coloured tradesman, who has guaranteed a stipend. Nhliziyombi's beauty and Caleb's trustworthiness overwhelm and humble Wolfe. Eabel van der Horst's racial pride "what little of it she had" breaks down in the graceful presence of the silent Zachary Msoni.

Romaine's servant, a drunken African, conquers the farmer's white governess. He passes her room one night, and she calls him back, because she loves him (as she later confesses to Soper and Romaine).

Friston becomes neurotic. All these facts, including the tropical thunderstorms, Flomer suggests, point to the dominant presence of an abstract character; a character that bullies or breaks or taxes or anaesthetizes, or destroys the live characters. This character is "the violence of Africa". Flomer also suggests that the same character has defeated the old-world missionary, Nordalsgaard. "I look back. I wonder what I have accomplished?" (he says). His old eyes had tears. He had gone out, this old man to conquer Africa.... It was not a wreck; you could not call it a failure, this. It was defeat".⁽²⁾

(1) C pp. 118/119

(2) C p. 110

This unseen character eclipses even would-be "round" characters like Caleb and Zachary Msozi. They are trusting towards those whites who credit them with human intelligence and dignity. But we do not know how they would behave towards a Flasher or a Soper, or a Bloodfield. We feel that, given enough scope by the novelist, they are capable of much more.

The society of Young Africa turns out to be a farce. Caleb becomes a caricature when he writes the contradictory nonsense which purports to be the "nutshell" of the contents of his letter to the Press:

"To put it in a nutshell, WE BELIEVE:⁽¹⁾

1. That Africa is not the white man's country.
2. That miscegenation is the only way for Africa to be secured to the Africans.
3. That it is inevitable, right and proper.
4. That if it can be shown to be so, we shall have laid true foundations for the future Coloured World.
5. That we are pioneers".

Zachary, by marrying Mabel van der Eorst, pretends to a certain amount of roundness.

The non-white is an enigma to William Flomer. The one lesson he has learned during his life with them seems to be that implied by Turbott Wolfe's warning following upon his comment on Msozi's letter: "That document shows you what you're up against when you approach the native point of view with an air of discovery". If Flomer has not succeeded in clearly portraying individual character, he has succeeded in building an interesting story around that "force" which combines elements of character. The sustained irony and cynicism tell the other side of the story of missionary endeavour and Christian civilization: its defeat; a fresh view, considering the volume of literature and talking that harps on the perpetual theme of "evangelizing the native" or "missionary endeavour". It is a theme that hardly ever suggests what the African can teach the white man.

(1) C p. 132

(2) C pp. 132/133

There are a great number of things in the traditional social codes of the African - also reflected in his political organization which it would be a pity to lose. There are beautiful behaviour patterns within the family, in public gatherings, during festivals like communal harvesting and so on. These, together with the African's strong sense of communal ownership and responsibility, - the whole structure of African traditional life which places the accent on "being" - could tone down and supplement the white man's highly acquisitive urges. The African's political organization cannot fit so well into the complex pattern of modern systems. He can retain them if he is to be cut off from the general stream of world economic and political systems and placed in a nook by himself. Many of the behaviour patterns I refer to have survived missionary teaching and still influence the African's outlook on life.

Laurens van der Post says in his The Dark Eye in Africa:⁽¹⁾ "I do not think of the European as a being superior to the black one. I think of both as being different and of the differences as honorable differences equal before God. The more I know of primitive man in Africa the more I respect him and the more I realize how much and how profoundly we must learn from him.... I see us as two halves designed by life to make a whole... We need the good that is in the values of primitive man in Africa ... We force the African continually to take from us and prevent him from giving to us in his own rich way..." Van der Post explains elsewhere in his book that he uses the word "primitive" as a convenient term to indicate the kind of difference that exist between whites and blacks.

This is Plomer's theme in his Turbott Wolfe. He is keenly aware of the truth expressed by Van der Post: Plomer's fault is that he is inclined to romanticize the African and his tribal life in order to expose the white man's inflated sense of self-importance.

(1) The Dark Eye in Africa (The Hogarth Press, London 1955)
pp. 19/20

"The characteristic work of the novel is to record the illusion that snobbery generates and to try to penetrate to the truth which, as the novel assumes, lies hidden beneath all the false appearances. Money, snobbery, the ideal of status, these become in themselves the objects of fantasy. The greatness of Great Expectations begins in its title: modern society bases itself on great expectations which, if ever they are realized, are found to exist by reason of a sordid hidden reality. The real thing is not the gentility of Fip's life but the hulks and the murder and the rats and decay in the cellarage of the novel".⁽¹⁾

"The novel, then, is a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the material of its analysis being always manners as the indication of the direction of man's soul... Its classic intention ... is the investigation of the problem of reality beginning in the social field".⁽²⁾

Snobbery, in the context of Lionel Trilling's lecture, is born of class pride. Manners are "that part of a culture which is made up of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the arts of dress or decoration, sometimes by tone, gesture, emphasis, or rhythm, sometimes by the words that are used with a special frequency or a special meaning".⁽³⁾

Lionel Trilling's lecture on manners and morals in the novel is particularly relevant to a discussion of Alan Faton's Cry, the Beloved Country. For the first time in the history of South African English fiction we find a novel of the rank of Faton's book in which the African character looms large before our eyes, and we are able to feel his pulse in a dynamic situation. We shall see what chords in the story of the novel under review some of Trilling's remarks touch off.

The theme of Cry, the Beloved Country has to do with an aspect of class conflict in which racial groups are involved.

(1) Lionel Trilling: The Liberal Imagination
(Secker & Warburg, London 1951) p. 211

(2) op. cit. p. 212

(3) op. cit. p. 206

It has also to do with the "sordid hidden truth" which is fear - a truth that is to be found under the illusion of class pride within the structure of white society and African society. The field of Paton's research is the social structure of South African life. Although the story never dwells long enough on the social life of an African community for us to feel the atmosphere of manners peculiar to African modes of life, we feel the atmosphere through snatches of dialogue in which Paton tries to capture the idiom of simple folk. This he tries to do in pseudo-poetic and pseudo-biblical style. Many other features indicate manners, but then Paton has not found a way of penetrating deeper into African life.

Paton's African characters are drawn mostly from Christian communities.

In Clive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm, there is close connection between setting and character, the setting being a Boer farm. The Hottentots and the Africans on the farms behave as one would expect farm servants should. There is a subtle suggestion of the larger setting: spacious country where people live in isolated family units, vast distances apart. This isolation has a terrible effect on character. Tempers fly high, people turn into neurotics, and so on. Clive Schreiner uses her non-white characters as an organic part of this larger setting. That laughing Hottentot maid of Tant' Sannie's is a subtle suggestion of the part of the setting that is in sympathy with her mistress.

William Plomer also uses his African characters as an organic part of his setting - a colonial setting in Southern Africa. The "violence of Africa" which he mentions is personified in the quiet, educated Caleb Msoni, in the reticent Zachary Msoni who bursts through colour barriers to marry a white woman with terrifying composure, and in the beautiful Mhliziyombi. This personified setting creates vibrations of various types among the European characters.

In Sarah Gertrude Millin's novel we are only aware of the setting in historical perspective - the setting of the Adam Koks,

the diamond diggings, but in the story itself the characters live a separate existence from their immediate setting.

Alan Paton puts all he can into constructing a setting and a plot and very little into portrayal of character. The story means everything to him. He must tell it in order to preach a sermon, the text of which is "Comfort in desolation". The novelist's point of view or perspective forces itself upon the reader's attention all the time.

E.M. Forster says that when a novelist wants to strike with direct force, it is convenient for him to use "flat" characters; characters who can easily be labelled and therefore managed. (1)

Paton's characters are nearly all flat. They are types who are easily managed because they do not have to develop. The Rev. Stephen Kumalo can be summed up by "so in my suffering I can believe". (2) His wife is the typical submissive rustic African woman. Msimangu is Paton's commentator. For all the sensible and weighty things he says, he remains untouched by the events in the story. His is always a bird's eye view of the South African situation. He is one who does not want any bloodshed in the country. (3) Sometimes he becomes the impatient commentator. During his wanderings with Kumalo they have found Absalom's lover and she cannot tell them when the boy will return. Msimangu says impatiently: "I tell you you can do nothing. I tell you there are thousands such in Johannesburg. And were your back as broad as heaven, and your purse full of gold, and did your compassion reach from here to hell itself, there is nothing you can do." (4) It is he who remarks: "I have one great fear in my heart, that one day when they (whites) turn to loving they will find we are turned to hating." (5) As events near the tragic climax, Msimangu is silenced. There is then no need to comment. He is easily summed up by: "It is the law, mother. We must uphold the law". (6)

Kumalo also remains the same suffering, Christlike, childlike

(1) Aspects of the Novel (Edward Arnold & Co. London 1949)

(2) D p. 208

(3) D p. 172

(4) D p. 68

(5) D p. 252

(6) D p. 78

character from beginning to end. He is always teebing with
humility. He accepts the scheme of things: "No, nothing, only
more fear and more pain. There is nothing in the world but
fear and pain".⁽¹⁾ He is always bewildered. Even after his
bitter experiences in the city, he can still address the white
boy from Jarvis' farm as "inkosana" - little master. He can
still say to the boy: "When you go, something bright will go out
of Ndotshezi."⁽²⁾ The priest can still end his letter of condolence
to Jarvis: "Your faithful servant"⁽³⁾ Kumalo represents the Africans
of the older generation who behave ordinarily in the presence of
their fellow Africans, but with self-effacement in the presence
of white people; the long-suffering type that gets all the kicks
and wishes to give none; the type that gives a stock response to
violent situations: bear and suffer. It absolves them from the
responsibility of reacting humanly. But it also makes for a tough
hide that can absorb the cruder processes of life while they move
about on the spiritual plane.

Futon has thought fit to use this type for Kumalo's role, for
highly sentimental reasons. In the midst of so much pain, fear and
dishonesty, he seems to say: 'here is a man who does not hate, who
harbours no bitterness. And he is a black man, too, one of a race
that is often despised. Have you no reverence for such dignity?...'
and so on; a variation upon the theme of "comfort in desolation".

Mrs. Lithebe of Sophiatown is also the sweet, tolerant, church-
going type that hardly ever says a bad word for anybody. When she
does, it is only about Gertrude's laugh, which she does not like.
She is another variation upon the theme: a light in the desolate
darkness of Sophiatown slum life. Some of the people around keep
brothels, others are men and women of questionable character. The
streets are peopled with sluts and men in dishevelled dress, all
eking out a debauched or dissipated existence in backyards. But
Mrs. Lithebe is immune to it all. Hers is another sentimentalized
role that fits neatly into the sermon: a lantern that burns gaily
and steadily in a gale. That is what she's there for. She cannot

(1) D p. 85

(2) D p. 227

(3) D p. 235

get out of hand, because she is a flat character.

Gertrude, Kumalo's sister, is supposed to be a hardened shebeen queen. But, strangely, the very first time her brother visits her she bursts out crying as a sign of remorse. She is in fact superfluous; she adds nothing to the desolation, Paton seems to say. So she is removed.

John Kumalo, the priest's brother, is a little more interesting than the others as a character. He pretends to a roundness. He is a political speech-maker; he can speak to one person, even to his brother, as though he were addressing a crowd; he has contempt for Christian convention. For instance, he is not married to his second wife by Christian or civil rites. John Kumalo is at least sensible of the restlessness and insecurity of life about him. He is not the long-suffering person his brother is. In fact he does not want more pain than he already feels has been inflicted upon him and his fellow-men by the white man's rule. He will do anything to avoid pain, if it means getting a lawyer to prove that his son did not do the actual killing of the younger Jarvis. Because of the manner in which John Kumalo plays his political game - that of inciting people to violence and yet avoiding arrest - Paton seems to suggest that he is a moral coward. Maitangu remarks to Stephen Kumalo that if the politician were not corrupt, he would precipitate a blood-bath.

But even John Kumalo is a type, or at best a caricature of a politician. Before you have gone far in the study of his character, you know he is a flat character. The novelist does not need to keep a vigilant eye on the development of such a character.

Paton makes the most of his setting. Without it he would not have a story. Beneath the illusion of progress and prosperity Johannesburg is a sordid city, a city of disgraceful slums like Shanty Town, Sophiatown and Alexandra; a city of bus boycotts and industrial strikes; a city where the crime machine spits a bullet here and a knife there to take human life; a city in which a man from a rural area may lose his sense of values and either take to crime or waste away in the gambling and drinking dens. But all these features of city life do not develop in a vacuum. They can only mean something to us in the context of the larger social setting of South Africa. This argument is in the writings of the younger Jarvis. Paton might have attempted to study the characters

of people in a process of change in such a setting. As it is, we get "ready-made" characters, because he wants with a swift stroke to convey a message. We merely hear about the deterioration of Absalom's morals from those he has been in contact with. But those who tell us are not a very informative lot. Even the reformatory official is not very helpful. Absalom's lover is a dumb, bashful girl who has been so ravished by slum conditions that she has developed as disposition to allow things to happen to her, as if she were held down by something too big for her to understand. We do not actually see Absalom's demoralization in process. We do not even know what he thinks about himself and the social order he finds himself in. When we come face to face with him, he is just a fear-stricken creature being sacrificed.

This message Paton wants to convey is constantly imposing itself upon the reader's mind. It is that juvenile delinquency demands sympathy rather than vengeance; that boys need to be kept busy by means of club activities; and that we should patiently wait for a change of heart in the white ruling class, represented by Jarvis and his son. Bound up with this is the suggestion that a political approach can often misfire.

Like Charles Dickens's, Paton's "vision of humanity" makes the flat characters in his book "vibrate a little", although hardly any of the author's chief characters are as significant as Dickens's characters. The ideal method, says E.M. Forster in Aspects of a Novel, would be to use "a proper mixture of characters" (flat and round and perhaps neutral).

XXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXX

There are two devices the foregoing four South African novelists of the first rank use in the characterization of Non-Europeans. They either regard the Non-European as an organic part of the setting (e.g. Clive Schreiner and William Blomer) or present flat characters who are a mechanical instrument for the execution of plot and the communication of a clearly defined message (e.g. Sarah Gertrude Millin and Alan Paton).

In the first device the characters are the personified aspect of the setting. If the white man's civilization destroys the black man's, he is also destroying part of the setting. Lyndall's observation to Gregory⁽¹⁾ about a passing African is but a commentary on the setting: "He has nothing on but a blanket; he is a splendid fellow - six feet high with a magnificent pair of legs. In his leather bag he is going to fetch his rations, and I suppose to kick his wife with his beautiful legs when he gets home. He has a right to; he bought her for two oxen. There is a lean dog going after him, to whom I suppose he never gives more than a bone from which he has sucked the marrow; but his dog loves him, as his wife does... Will his race melt away in the heat of a collision with a higher? Are the men of the future to see his bones only in museums - a vestige of one link that spanned between the dog and the white man? He wakes thoughts that run far out into the future and back into the past."

On the other hand, if the Africans defeat the white man's civilization it means that the setting is in revolt and constitutes what Flomer calls "the violence of Africa".

This device uses a romantic element in that there is some mystical bond between character and setting. It is a bond that either succumbs to or defeats the white man's civilization. Because of the mystical haze through which we see the characters, we can never really know them. Henry James explains this point clearly when he says in a preface to his The American: "The romantic stands, on the other hand, for the things that, with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never can directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and desire". (2)

Mrs. Millin's characterization is a mechanical device that is intended to steer the plot to a conclusive end: children of mixed blood will always suffer the scorn and derision of both black and white.

(1) A. pp. 214/215

(2) In The Art of the Novel (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1953) pp 31/32

Paton's characters are adapted to a story that carries the message: patient, Christlike suffering on the part of the black man can move the adamant heart of a white man to philanthropic deeds that will bring the black man hope.

CHAPTER IV

Six lesser novelists who write about South Africa

Laurens van der Post's novel, In a Province⁽¹⁾ rings an echo of Plomer's Turbott Wolfe (reviewed in Chapter III). Johan van Bredepoel is another version of Turbott Wolfe. In a less spectacular manner Van der Post's hero is sensible of the defeat Western Civilization has suffered in its self-imposed mission of changing Africa. Both heroes are haunted by a sense of failure, and the tragedy of their lot is not so much to be read in their individual horoscopes as in the fact that they are the only characters in their fictional world who have an insight into this failure. The others of their colour, with a few exceptions, are stupid brutes.

Kenon Badiakgotla, a native of Bambuland, leaves his home, like so many other blacks before and after him, to seek work in the city. The land cannot produce enough food for the family. He later finds himself in Port Benjamin, where he enters the service of Mrs. Harris, a boarding house proprietress.

Van Bredepoel, also a "fugitive" from the country and now Mrs. Harris's lodger, takes an interest in Kenon (alias Joseph), who is a happy youngster with a zest for life. Van Bredepoel breaks through the outer crust that is Kenon's reserve, and wins his confidence and trust. He is "surprised to find how little influence one mission school has exercised over Kenon's mind and imagination",⁽²⁾ which still revels in the poetry of folklore. The lad is the ingenuous, singing, gullible child of nature when Van Bredepoel meets him.

Although Kenon and his fellow-workers clean the boarding house thoroughly, no one is interested in seeing to it that they clean

(1) In a Province (The Hogarth Press, London 1953)

(2) *op. cit.* p. 81

their own living quarters.

But soon Xenon's way of life must change and his emotional fibre must be adjusted to the tempo of town life. He buys a cheap gramophone from a white hawkier. Van Bredepoel saves Xenon from the tangles of an unwritten hire-purchase agreement thrust upon the latter by the white vendor. "He (Xenon) had also a genuine and deep desire to improve himself which exposed him to all sorts of dangers of which he was not aware, and made him particularly vulnerable to the disdain of his more sophisticated companions by creating in him an acute consciousness of his shortcomings. It did not take him long to realize that, in the strange and complex life in which he found himself, the traditions of his people were no longer certain guides. All pride and self-respect are based ultimately on personal achievement ... He could no longer take any pride in the fact that he was taller, faster, stronger and better at hunting than most young men of his age". (1)

Xenon's life takes a completely new turn from the day he allows himself to be taken by friends to a brothel. Because of the Greek brothel-keeper's astuteness in eluding the police, the latter decide not to lay a charge, although Xenon was arrested in the brothel. Instead, the boy appears in court on a trumped-up charge which has nothing to do with his assault on the police. Xenon's remorse overwhelms him and he places himself at the mercy of the magistrate, who sentences him to six months. He refuses to implicate any of his friends by affecting ignorance of them and their whereabouts.

He can never again be his old cheerful self after this incident. He is taken back at Mrs. Harris's boarding house. He disappears and comes back only to collect his luggage. He is still the ingenuous Xenon: he believes Mrs. Harris when she tells him that Van Bredepoel will not want to see him again. All these events warp Xenon's mind and create a dissipating bitterness in him.

The writer sympathetically traces Xenon's character and assesses it with the same vividity and acuity as Van Bredepoel

(1) I p. 97

possesses. But it is a timidity that is born not of a reluctance to face the painful fact that Kenon has lost all faith in the white man; but out of a hesitancy in evaluating the forces that go to fashion an African townsman like Kenon. Van Bredepoel has no ready-made arguments. He finds such dialectics as Burgess indulges in too facile to provide a clue. Even after the day of the second riot, when Kenon tells Van Bredepoel that he knows him (the white man) but that his assegai does not, the writer does not pretend to see beyond Kenon's disillusionment.

The doctor who drives the Europeans mad and precipitates the first riot is an example of how real the danger is of a blind hate growing in the black man for everything the white man stands for, whether good or bad.

One argument Vander Post presents is that which comes from the lips of the magistrate of Faulstad. It centres on the incidence of ritual murder and other acts of witchcraft among Africans. Says the magistrate: "... We don't allow the black people to enter into the system of living for which our justice was obviously devised. By refusing to do so, we imply that they are psychologically and racially in a different class. Yet we proceed very logically to inflict our system of justice on them as if they were like ourselves ... We forbid them the sort of life their law demands, and give them our law without the sort of life that our law demands." (1)

How much more sensible Van der Post is on this issue than the multitude who reduce the problem to vague terms like "clash of cultures" and sit back complacently.

Kenon is denied that "system of living" for which the white man's justice was devised. We see clearly, even through the haze of Van Bredepoel's thoughts, the process of defection in Kenon's character: his addiction to isangu; (2) his sense of inadequacy; his roving habits; his lust for violence. Since the first jail sentence his life has been swinging like a door on one hinge.

(1) E p. 259

(2) Dagga (from Xhosa word, "intsangu")

Is Kenon merely another victim of what Burgess would call "the system"? Van Bredepoel debates the point at length. Much as he recognizes the evils of the system that creates the conditions in which Kenon must live, he wants to feel that a man still has the individuality to accept responsibility for his anti-social behaviour. "The system is only an approximation, a reflection of the rules that govern the little acts of each one of us. Only it's an approximation so big that if you place all the emphasis on it, the individual loses the sense of responsibility for his little share in it. It seems to me fatal. The starting- and finishing-point is in the heart of each man. At one time the responsibility for action was placed on the individual, and I think the world was relatively a good deal happier". (1)

This type of reasoning, of course, serves to sharpen Van Bredepoel's sense of guilt. He is a sentimentalist himself. Van der Post, in his enthusiasm about individual responsibility, fails to realize that individual philanthropy often breaks against the wall of a mighty social system that works in a negative direction, even when the philanthropist has shed all colour-prejudice, like Van Bredepoel.

The questions and arguments Van der Post poses will exercise the novelist's mind for a long time to come yet, because they do not arise from a problem that is peculiar only to South African race-prejudice: they are bound up with a universal problem - that of the relation between the "haves and have-nots", "privileged" and "under-privileged", "the ruling class" and "the underdog", man's individuality and socio-economic systems.

In this context the theme of In a Province and its portrayal of non-white characters are important. Van der Post says in The Dark Eye in Africa: (2) "This period of the hush and suspended indigenous development in Africa was a moment of immense potentiality and hope in the contact between black and white. It contained great opportunity and possibilities for good, which the European at the time had not the power to understand. Often have I seen this period of innocence in the personal relationships between human beings. I have seen it once or twice, too in the histories of people

(1) E p. 332

(2) The Dark Eye in Africa (The Hogarth Press, London 1955)
pp. 44-45

In Africa, too, I see this moment of innocence and opportunity rapidly vanishing. I think it began to disappear after the First World War. I noticed then that the spell we had over the black man was broken, and I was so perturbed with this first intimation that later I wrote a book about it." (cf. In a Province)

I am Black,⁽¹⁾ by Granfell Williams and Henry John May, reads like a folk-tale. It is the story of Shabala, son of a Zulu chief, who leaves the reserves to work for white people, first on a farm, and then in the city. Later his father dies and he succeeds to chieftainship.

In the place of Shabala we could easily imagine the prince in a fairy tale; the hero who goes out to seek a fortune and collect wisdom. The city may represent a forest where one may encounter angels without wings and cannibals. Whatever ugly experiences the prince may go through, he must remain incorruptible. The Prince Valiant must go back and rule his people with great wisdom and live happy ever after with his faithful wife and children.

The white man is a perpetual source of wonder for Shabala. A hundred-and-one things happen to the hero. But he merely witnesses them and does not really experience them. The encounters with the ever-present police and with the judges who seem always to believe the wrong-doer is not the guilty person; the fearful experiences deep down in the mines; the period on the farm during which he is initiated into some of the white man's ways - all these and other things do not seem to teach Shabala much about life and human beings. The mines are to him a perfect home. A policeman is somebody he must always run away from.

Shabala is like the hero of a puppet show. He says to Dimba: "My arm is gone, what kind of man am I?"

"You must not let this thing trouble you," said Dimbu. "You have only now become a man. I have good news for you. Your wife Mopani has borne you a son."

"Shabala's heart was glad; and he forgot his sorrow. He asked: 'Is he a fat baby?'" (2)

(1) I am Black (Cassell & Co. Ltd. London 1936)

(2) F p. 181

The change from one emotion to the next is incredibly fast.

In order to point up Shabala's character sharply, as a romantic hero, the authors put him in situations that are meant to startle the reader. Some of the characters, therefore, become unnecessarily brutal, e.g. the man who kills a black man in a mine and the judge who tries the case.

Shabala works for a white man after losing his arm. The master abuses him. The children of the house play tricks on him and pour water on his bed, sand into his tea and throw stones at him, calling him ugly names. When he has to go, his employer refuses to pay him.

Another time Shabala gets to a white man's house. He knocks at the kitchen door, and an African worker shows his head and says: "There is no work for such as you in this house. You are only a black Kaffir."⁽¹⁾

Dimbu, the politician, is a weak character. At first we are given the impression that he accepts his lot and that of his people as something one cannot do anything about, as a sort of albatross that must for ever hang on the black man's neck. Then suddenly, as if out of a magician's hat, he emerges as a leader. His mission comes to a stop when he is arrested at a meeting. But the authors make him linger awkwardly until after a space of three months. He goes back home. It is obvious that we are intended to have the last glimpse of Shabala's character as a chief who, in spite of his recent elevation, does not forget his friend Dimbu. He buries Dimbu, who has at last succumbed to a chronic lung sickness.

Shabala is too noble to be real. He is always behaving like a man who is obviously fated to become chief one day.

Evangi, the hero's first lover, is a more credible character. But we do not know anything about her in tribal surroundings. We have only a conventional picture of her as a member of a rural community. She talks about tribal customs and the difficulty of adapting them to city life; but she does not feel any conflict over this. She talks about customs in the same way that Shabala speaks about religion: "In the Big City," says Shabala, "the black man is

(1) F p. 200

only the servant of the white man, why then should he have the same God? That is why I sing the songs of my people. Perhaps, when I go home, I will follow the Preacher again, and sing songs to Jesus, because among my people He is a Great Chief and very mighty."⁽¹⁾ Shabala merely implies frustration, but has not felt it before or at the moment of speaking.

The story of I am Black takes up the theme begun by Laurens van der Post in his In a Province, which investigates the problems that beset a man who forsakes tribal life to live and work in the city. What makes Van der Post's book more valuable and important is the fact that his book explores the forces that go to make and destroy Kenon. The book has a far greater emotional and intellectual appeal. Shabala has to preach in order to explain himself, and Kenon does not need to. Van der Post selects only those incidents that have a dynamic influence on man's character and does not waste time contemplating the passing show, which interests the writers of I am Black very much. There is naturally much bigger scope for characterization where the hero of the piece is spiritually cut off from his tribal moorings while the fibre of his being still vibrates to the tune of his past. Unlike Kenon, Shabala must, as a fictional character, move within the romantic idea of a glorified past which is ever-present with him.

Cliver Walker's Froud Zulu⁽²⁾ is mainly about John Dunn, the white chief of the Zulus, whose rise to fabulous power and wealth dominated the fateful years of Cetewayo's rule. The writer has woven Dunn's story into that of the decline and fall of the House of Shaka, "beginning with Cetewayo's emergence as successor to Mpande and ending with Dinizulu's exilement". And Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 brings to a close the saga of Zulu military power.

The major historical incidents in the novel are correctly documented: the clash between Cetewayo and his half-brother, Umbuyazi; Cetewayo's accession to the Zulu throne in succession to his father, Mpande; the entry of the Boers into Natal; the

(1) F p. 205

(2) Froud Zulu (Dassie Books, Johannesburg 1951)

Zulu War of 1879; the defeat of Cetewayo by the British and his deportation to Cape Town; his return to Zululand, his denotion to petty chieftainship; the fall of the House of Shaka; John Dunn's rise to power.

Mr. Walker has succeeded in bringing into relief a good deal of Zulu custom and lore, although I think the translation of praise songs is often faulty and trite and fails to capture the lyricism of the originals.

There is, for instance the custom of "ukupana", by which Mpande, the king, feels bound to give the Boers land in the hope that they will also return the courtesy in kind. Because of this, Sirayo, one of Mpande's chiefs, refuses to sign a pact allowing Potgieter's party to settle on the land. "I cannot touch the pen," says Sirayo. "I have no instructions from the king. This land is the people's. The king alone cannot give it away. We give you the right to live on it. Is that not enough?"⁽¹⁾ The operative sentence here is the last one.

Mpande's kindness is always interpreted by Cetewayo as a sign of weakness. Cetewayo raves when he observes that the Boers are encroaching further upon Zulu territory. "They gnaw and gnaw like rats," Cetewayo says.⁽²⁾

The statement that "the Zulus had... few inhibitions about sex"⁽³⁾ is an idle one which Mr. Walker does not substantiate. Nor has it anything to do with the history of Shaka's House.

Both Mpande and Cetewayo are indulgent towards John Dunn, who acts as a liaison between them and the British administration.

Cetewayo is a convincing character on the whole. He chafes under British rule, like a man who knows that the might of the Zulu nation is on the wane but refuses to accept the fact. Like a toothless dog he can only snarl. He says to John Dunn: "The time is coming when we Zulu men must deal with the Amabunu." Then suddenly he bursts out: "Ah! you white men! Nothing conquers you but death! You are strange people, Jantoni, and I cannot read

(1) G p. 48

(2) G p. 50

(3) G p. 51

your hearts. You want us Zulu men to labour like women for you. The Amabuzi seek our land, and our labour. The unfundisi - missionaries, they tell us about love. If we love you do you not still take our land and our lives?"⁽¹⁾

Because of his secret fear of Shepstone, Cetewayo is sensitive about anything the former does which he interprets as a slight upon his royal person. And this is how he thinks back of the coronation: "What did he give me - the king?... Was it not merely a lecture of advice such as a missionary gives to his class? Because I call him 'baba' (father) must he treat me like a child wrapped in its mother's blanket?...."⁽²⁾

Shepstone himself wrote of Cetewayo in his minutes on the coronation: "Cetewayo is a man of considerable ability, much force of character and has a dignified manner: in all my conversations with him he was remarkably frank and straightforward and he ranks with every respect far above any native chiefs I have ever had to deal with... He is naturally proud of the military tradition of his family, especially the policy and deeds of his uncle and predecessor Shaka to which he made frequent reference. His sagacity, however, enables him to see clearly the bearing of new circumstances by which he is surrounded and the necessity of adjusting his policy."⁽³⁾ It is this "necessity of adjusting his policy" that constantly irritates Cetewayo and makes him say at one stage: "Did I ever tell Santsu (Shepstone) I would not kill? Did he tell the white people I made such an arrangement? Because if he did so he deceived them. I do kill; but do not consider that I have done anything yet in the way of killing... I have not yet begun; I have yet to kill; it is the custom of our nation and I shall not depart from it. Why does the Governor of Natal speak to me about my laws? Do I go to Natal and dictate to him about his laws..."⁽⁴⁾

He precipitates the 1879 war which proves to be his undoing. "Let me remain a prisoner," he says to Shepstone. "Just let me stay and sweep away ashes and put up other huts."⁽⁵⁾

(1) G p. 80

(2) G p. 127

(3) G p. 127

(4) G p. 147

(5) G p. 215

The episode of Cetewayo's life in exile gives us another glimpse of the Zulu King beyond the historical field of vision. He feels humiliated by his banishment. "I was king of the Zulus," he says, "and I will not go out guarded by those common police."⁽¹⁾ He remembers his old friends, Dunn and Sebantu. He is haunted by the fear that he may die in Cape Town. The letters he writes to Mr. Gladstone and to Lord Kimberley have a conciliatory and contrite tone. For instance, he writes: "I am writing to you, Mr. Gladstone, to ask you why you keep quiet, and do not talk (speak) for poor sufferers like me. To whom can we poor sufferers resort, if you, so great a man and the great chief of the nation, will not talk kindly for us? ... Talk kindly for me to the Queen ... Put me back with some good and discreet men, if you do not trust me... Make me a greater friend of the English nation...." ⁽²⁾

Back in Zululand, Cetewayo accepts an inferior chieftainship within an administrative framework created by Sir Garnet, who has set out to destroy the House of Shaka. Yet Cetewayo remains unconverted to Christianity up to the end. "Does a man keep a cow for another to milk?"⁽³⁾ expresses his attitude to the idea of converts. "A Zulu christianized is a Zulu spoilt," he adds.⁽⁴⁾

Mr. Walker has tried in his novel to prove a case which he makes in his prefatory note: "Only forced civilization will spoil the Zulus," he says, quoting John Dunn. "That 'forced civilization'", he comments, "was their doom as the foremost warrior race in Africa as surely as it was the doom of Jonteni, the white Zulu chief, once the Imperial programme of African conquest and confederation manufactured in London was set on its way."⁽⁵⁾ What Mr. Walker has actually succeeded in proving is that, apart from missionary work, there was little or no "civilizing" process at work in Zululand during the period he treats of.

History tells us that Shepstone adopted a laissez faire policy in his rule over the blacks by leaving intact Zulu tribal institutions. Sir George Grey, once Governor of the Cape, did the opposite by

(1) G p. 232

(2) G pp. 238-239

(3) G p. 54

(4) G p. 85

(5) G p. 11

Breaking down tribal institutions in the Eastern Cape in an attempt to "civilize" the Africans. And so we should rather talk of "white man's rule" than "civilization".

The author's method in this novel is to record historical events and introduce thought and feeling by way of speculating on the reactions of his characters to such events. There is no drastic "introduction of a new will into past time"⁽¹⁾ here, (to use a phrase from Chamber's Encyclopaedia). So history does not have to bend much, if at all. In other words, "everything is authenticated and the author merely proposes to tell more of the truth than historians."⁽²⁾ Mr. Walker has tried to do this in his portrayal of Cetewayo's character.

In Peter Abraham's Wild Conquest the non-white character appears as a slave, as a citizen in an ever-widening and powerful empire, and as a victim of the deadly Boer war machine.

The first part of the novel, Bible and Rifle, is an episode of the Great Trek. News that slaves have been freed by government Decree reaches the outlandish Boer farm of the Jansens. When their slaves hear it there is restlessness among them.

Foul, Old Johannes's son, is an impetuous young man who has the fateful urge to fight it out with the Jansens in order to gain freedom. He is impatient of his father whose wisdom and caution Foul takes for cowardice.

There is noticeable a sharp change from Old Johannes the humble slave who had earned a position of trust on the farm to the man of decision who shows silent but cold defiance of the Jansens after the news has come that slaves are to be freed.

But the old man is never vindictive. His son is killed in a rash act, but Old Johannes shows able leadership as he gives his people instructions to kill only if Jansen should shoot him. "Kill them and then go to the house but do not touch the woman or the

(1) Chamber's Encyclopaedia, New Edition Vol. I (George Newnes Ltd. London 1956) Page 168

(2) *op. cit.* p. 168

child. They have not harmed or spilled our blood," he says. (1)

The slaves have the valley to themselves when the Janssens have left to join the northward trek.

Bayete!, the second part of the book, is the story of Mzilikazi and his people, the Matabele, at the peak of their military power.

Oliver Walker's Fred Zulu is cluttered with historical events, and we get only such glimpses of human character as the events would obviously suggest. There is not enough play of the imagination. Right from the beginning we get the impression that Cetewayo is just an instrument of some historical fate and not a maker of history. And we only begin to see him as an individual during his exile. What goes on in Cetewayo's mind and in the minds of his councillors when he plunges his country in a disastrous war? One gets the feeling that in Oliver Walker's book "the pedestal proved too big for the statue." (2)

Peter Abrahams's method is different and more effective. The "unhistorical will" operates within a short space of time in history, so that a number of characters produce short-lived unhistorical effects. Thus, for a time, we forget that we are as it were, traversing historical space. The main historical events are the Emancipation of Slaves and the Great Trek; Mzilikazi's conquest of the Barolong and other tribes; the clash between the Matabeles and the Boers, and Mzilikazi's escape northward.

The unhistorical will is particularly dominant in Part II, Bayete! The novelist is determined to break down the traditional-historical image of the African of Mzilikazi's time - as an unfeeling, unthinking savage who merely revelled in beer, war and women.

Dabula and Gubusa throw custom to the winds by keeping one wife each, at the risk of public censure. The Fedi chief whose territory Dabula visits extends the improbable courtesy of entertaining Dabula and his aide to his own wives. Dabula is stricken with remorse after sleeping with one of the chief's young wives. It rankles until he tells his wife about the incident. He is continually

(1) ibid. p. 43

(2) Chamber's Encyclopaedia, p. 168

plagued by the picture of the chief beating his wife who he finds is no more a virgin. Babala feels his own sense of decency outraged. It is inconceivable for him to have more than one wife. Often, however, Babala's broodings become tedious sentimentalism. But we never lose sight of Babala the man: the man who knows fear even before a sex experience with a strange woman and before a battle.

"Oh, what have I done? Oh, Ntonzi! What have I done?... He felt guilty with a sense of sickness. But he felt good too..."⁽¹⁾

Gubuza is an old wily general who made Nzilikazi's army the powerful and dreaded institution it was. When Nzilikazi sends a punitive expedition to destroy the Barolong tribe of Kunama he does it not because the Barolong are a menace to his peace. The author imagines that the Intabele king is prompted by a greater force than he (the king) can understand. Nzilikazi is thus a symbol of power that corrupts.

Gubuza does the almost incredible thing of speaking his mind at a mass meeting on the destruction of Kunama, and that in the presence of the king. At any moment, while he speaks, the snarling and growling warriors may dig their spears into him. But he is undaunted.

"Wise men of different tribes and nationalities are agreed," Gubuza says, "that cheap successes are nearly always followed by the shadow of tragedy. Wise men are agreed that nations should in their strength tread carefully."⁽²⁾

Nzilikazi comes down from the pedestal of popular history and says to his people: "Without you, I cannot be king. Without me, you cannot be a nation. Without Gubuza our armies would not be so powerful."⁽³⁾

Gubuza is an idealist. "Perhaps," he says to his wife, "my head is turned by power. How does a man know? All I know is, if I seek power, it is for what I can do with it, not merely that I should be powerful. But how does a man know the secret motives of his heart?"⁽⁴⁾

(1) K p. 801

(2) K p. 818

(3) K p. 820

(4) K p. 831

Here we are listening to Gubusa the philosopher - somewhat theoretical, though, as Gubusa is often inclined to be for a soldier. He hero-worships Moshesh, the Basotho King from whom he once learned a few things about life. He feels bitter after the witch-hunt during which forty-one innocent people were butchered. "Why is it so with our people?" he asks in conversation with Mzilikazi and his witchdoctor, Mkenosi.

"We are cursed by a bloodlust," Mzilikazi said.

"I am afraid of the darkness of our people," Gubusa said."⁽¹⁾

The men realize between them this mystical, seemingly insatiable something that drives people to devour one another like animals. Mzilikazi has the power to put a stop to it, but he regards it as a curse from which he cannot free himself and his people.

Gubusa, however, is not going to dissolve in his tears over the "darkness of my people". He regards the approach of the Beers and their attack on part of a clan of the Eulus as a direct challenge against the right and dignity of his people and his own generalship. Once he has decided to declare war on the Beers, there is no turning back, in spite of Moshesh's warning. The old man in him rules out any possibility of appeasement. But even when he leads his warriors into the battlefield, Gubusa knows he has had his innings. Although he may love his only wife and domestic life and peaceful sport, and meditate about life and the destiny of his people, he is, in the final analysis, a soldier. And he is realistic enough to let the matter rest at that.

Mzilikazi cuts a pathetic figure when he moves northwards with the remnants of his people.

Bakula does not pretend to be anything but a soldier. He is always ready to pick up his shield and spear to fight for his king and country. He also learns much from Moshesh. When he returns to his home from fetching Mmandi, the king's wife, his own wife and Mkenosi notice a change in him. "New life is real for you, my son," Mkenosi observes. "It will never again be just a spear and a battle cry." "The world is so big", Bakula replies.⁽²⁾

(1) E p. 357

(2) E p. 365

Ikomozi, the king's witchdoctor, towers above everybody else in the book. He is the commentator, a much-travelled, cosmopolitan man. He seems to have the answers to all the problems of life. He defies the typical tourist's version of a witchdoctor. Sometimes Ikomozi excels himself. He speaks like a psychiatrist to Ntombi when she is in Ntongolwane's spell. "Ntombi! Listen, child, listen!" he says. "There is no spell on you. The spell is in your mind only. It is because you believe it that it is so. Do not believe it. It is not real. It is in your mind only. In your mind only."⁽¹⁾

Here, I think, Peter Abraham oversteps his mark in the characterization of Ikomozi. Evidently the writer is trying to break away from the Rider Haggard tradition of bloodthirsty witchdoctors (Ntongolwane in Wild Conquest is like Gagoel the witchdoctor in King Solomon's Mines). A commendable effort. As in the rest of the novel the author gives the "unhistorical will" free play. I think that Peter Abraham should have been content to make Ikomozi announce, as he later does to the spectators after he has triumphed over Ntongolwane's charms that there are good and bad doctors. "For the bad doctor gets drunk with power. He does not think of the comfort of the people but only how to have power over them."⁽²⁾

As it is, Ikomozi is represented as some sort of psycho-analyst when he suggests to Ntombi the workings of the mind. Witchcraft and witchdoctors are all bound up with the system of morals in traditional African society. Even if Ikomozi suspected a connection between intellectual man and moral man, it is hardly likely that he would have spoken as he did to Ntombi.

"Why do you mourn for forty-one, my friends?" the witchdoctor asks after the witch-hunt. "I will tell you. It is because the darkness that you cry of in these others, is in you too... These matters are the scheme of things. If you must mourn, mourn for our world that is in darkness..." When Gubuzo asks for the reason for all this, Ikomozi says: "Perhaps in the distant ages that are to be, there will be among our descendants, those who can answer your questions, my good Gubuzo. And when they can do that, perhaps

(1) H p. 250

(2) H p. 250

the darkness will be lifted from the minds of people, and there (1) will be only good medicine men and no bloodlust and no witch-hunts."

In this last statement the witchdoctor is in effect saying: When people know why there is evil in the world, perhaps they will not be ignorant any more, and then perhaps evil will disappear. This does not make sense. In trying to make Lkomozi bigger than he really is, the writer often fails to control his character, and then Lkomozi degenerates into a gasbag. The witchdoctor is a failure when he tries to take the cosmic view of things; credible when he contemplates life within the boundaries of his community, as when he says of Gubuza (to Babula): "He made instruments of people. And always, that is wrong."⁽²⁾

Within these boundaries Lkomozi is well conceived as the conscience of his people. He feels sore that Gubuza has decided to lead an army against the Boers. There in the council chamber, while all the other men are itching for war, Lkomozi is overwhelmed with pity. He wishes he could hate somebody, but he feels only pity.

Although Lkomozi, Gubuza and Babula always border on the idealistic and sentimental and sometimes become theatrical, Peter Abrahams has tried to understand the humanness of the Latabele.

He tries to represent Mzilikazi, Gubuza and Lkomozi as life-size figures. The historical saga in which they are cast gives them a bigness which the main characters of The Path of Thunder (3) fail to attain. Lanny Swartz and Sarie Villiers remain parochial. The reason is not far to seek. The subject of "mixed marriages", in a society where it is a criminal offence for black to marry white, limits the emotional and intellectual range of a novel that tries to tackle the problem. The characters in such a story have to move within a small circle of ready-made attitudes and response. This is the pattern of response: two people, Lanny Swartz, coloured, and Sarie Villiers, white, fall in love with the full knowledge of the possible consequences. The communities from which they stem respectively are not as educated as they both are, and

(1) II pp. 258-259

(2) II p. 333

(3) Peter Abrahams: The Path of Thunder (Harper & Bros., New York 1948)

will cling to their traditional racial prejudices and segregation. Even although the love between these two follows the "path of thunder" that cuts across age-old racial barriers which run deep, the reader cannot help anticipating the end disaster. It could not be otherwise, against a South African setting. The characters are bound hand and foot by a fate, and their experience is but a small fraction of life.

"It's something inside I'm afraid of," says Lanny to Sarie. "Something that will burst one day and then I shall be lost."⁽¹⁾

Mako, the African teacher, enjoys greater inner freedom than Lanny, and he can afford to say: "This fatal, inevitable love is nonsense."⁽²⁾ But because of his attachment to Lanny, Mako cannot free his talk and thought from the fate of race identity.

Pieta, the Coloured woman who finds refuge from a life of dissipation in her martyred love for Mad Sam, the "tortured husk" of a man, is a more interesting character than the rest. She can come and go freely, and her love-life is not circumscribed by overt racial prejudice. Her prejudices are a mere memory - hinging on the assault that crippled Mad Sam.

On the whole Peter Abrahams's characterization has improved since his Mine Boy.⁽³⁾ The hero of this novel, Kuma, is not well conceived. His life hardly ever rises above the physical level. When it does, he becomes a character of melodrama. All of a sudden, towards the end of the novel, Kuma realizes his manhood and becomes aware of his dignity as a human being. He sets off a spark which causes a mine strike and a riot between mine-workers and the police. He runs away, only to go to the police station later, forsaking a relatively secure life, to give himself up, so that he can join his white friend who had played an important role in initiating the strike against resuming work in an endangered mine.

The range between Kuma the rustic lad and Kuma the sophisticated man, is a steep and rather vague one. He goes through love and sex experiences as if he had not recently emerged from tribal

(1) op. cit. p. 157

(2) op. cit. p. 170

(3) Mine Boy (Dorothy Crisp & Co. London 1947)

life with its many social values. becoming organized is an effortless and almost meaningless process with Xuma. It is as painless with him as frustration is with Shabela of I am Black.

The lesser non-White characters in Mine Boy have no individuality either. Bliss, the schoolmistress, tries to live above the small existence of her community, but we do not know what it is she really wants out of life. In any case, she is an odd character in the company of the Lechs, Kaisys, La-Flonks and the Xumas. More odd still is her love affair with Xuma. A schoolmistress would not try to explain her aspirations to a man of Xuma's standard of literacy (if he has any) in such terms as these: "And it is because I want the things of the white people. I want to be like the white people and go where they go and do the things they do, and I am black...."⁽¹⁾

Peter Marshans's characters loom large in The Path of Thunder, and still larger in Wild Conquest. In his latest works his focus is sharper on individuals.

Harry Bloom's book, Episode, treats of a location riot. At the beginning we are made to think that the entry of Walter Mabaso is all-important. His arrival at Nelstroom has been awaited by a certain group of people in the location. He is highly esteemed by this group as a tried leader. Mabaso is met by Elliot Nkomo the deformed teacher, whose mental picture is also set in a big and imposing frame. The two men contrast sharply: Mabaso is the type that easily becomes a hero - he has the physical build and presence for it. Nkomo is deformed, and he dreads the prospect of imprisonment in goal. "The work, the beatings, the kicks," he says, "without my boots, without a chance to rest when I want to. My trouble is that I'm scared of pain."⁽¹⁾

Nkomo is a bitter man. There is bitterness in the irony and cynicism of his words: "And these laws, which make us grieve and weep, why they're for our happiness too, only we're too stupid and backward to see it. You see, we're only children and we don't understand. I hope Da Jibey hates us, hates us so much it would never enter his head to try and make us happy."⁽²⁾

A mad boy is skulking in the location for fear of being seen by the superintendent who will evict him for not possessing a permit to live in the location. The thought of it is partly responsible for Nkomo's bitterness. Mabaso's father was kicked to death by a white man. That decided him to go into politics.

A washerwoman precipitates a riot in a conflict with a white woman who does not want to pay her. From then onward Mabaso and Nkomo are unimportant. The writer is swept away by the epic of the riot and the wanton destruction of human life and property. It doesn't matter what one's political convictions are in an epic of this kind. The writer pretends, however, that it does matter: he is careful to explain that Mabaso took part in the "Defiance Campaign" - a campaign of civil disobedience carried out by a political organization in 1952 against South African laws it considered unjust to Africans, Indians and Coloureds.

(1) I p. 25

(2) I p. 27

The only other occasion on which the writer tries to define Mabasa's character is on the night when Mabasa walks and talks with his son in the location during the early stages of the riot. He feels very strongly about the position of the defenceless and underprivileged Blacks, and sees the police as a fear-stricken group of people who "lead unhappy, cruel lives", whose "hate poisons their lives".⁽¹⁾ He has not fallen into the common folly of thinking that all whites hate Blacks. "We have friends among them," he says, "and we get more every day."⁽²⁾ But this is really the writer's commentary on the riot and police raids going on in the location.

All the other characters in the book are submerged by the events in the location and are too helpless to direct them one way or another.

Gwebu, the superintendent's clerk, is a most entertaining character. He is a caricature, an artistic device for comic relief. In translating Du Toit's instruction - "that from today women must carry passes", Gwebu says: "Listen what is this new law. Prepare yourselves. No longer will our women merely carry babies. From now on they will also carry passes Wives. Daughters. Mothers . . . Aunts and sisters. Shebeen queens, whores, brides, nurses, schoolgirls. Desirable elements - undesirable elements. All elements. Old elements, pregnant elements, young elements with firm breasts. Yes, this is the way for the female elements."⁽³⁾

Du Toit instructs municipal police to announce a meeting of residents in the location and to tell the people in every street the purpose of the meeting. If he finds any constable missing out streets, he will deal with him. Gwebu interprets: "How are your voices? For you must take this great news on your voices down every street. Down each side of every street. Down every lane, each side, and into every yard. Down all the sides of all the yards. Into every room of the yards, and down the sides of the rooms. And in the room, down and around the sides of the tables. You must take the news everywhere. Nobody must miss this news of the meeting, and the news of the great honour of carrying passes that has today fallen on the female elements.

(1) I p. 108

(2) op. cit.

(3) I p. 113

And if any of you gold-buttoned eagles fail at this job, you must understand that you will burn. You will be cut short."⁽¹⁾

Even allowing for the element of circumlocution that characterizes Bantu speech, Gwebu is overacting. This makes Du Toit look more pathetic when he thinks his clerk's interpreting most efficient.


Nelstroom location has gone through a ghastly nightmarish experience in which more life has been shed and outraged than appears credible. Yet Gwebu turns up after it all to speak to Du Toit. The clerk's dress is more untidy than ever before. "Gwebu had washed neither himself nor his clothes since the night of the riot."⁽²⁾ His clothes still have the blood stains on them which he gained from rubbing against Du Toit after the latter's injury during the first incident with the residents. Like a Dickensian character the clerk still bears the label the writer stuck on him when he first appeared on the stage: he can still infuriate Du Toit with his awkward and artless humour. He is perhaps more grave than before. The writer brings him back as Du Toit's conscience. For instance, Gwebu reminds Du Toit that the people did not say: "Kill him" (the superintendent), but that they shouted: "You want to kill us." Those who are going to be tried will be defended by an able advocate, Gwebu volunteers. Then again, he reminds Du Toit that the latter identified the woman Sarah Komane who was killed by the police under the pretext that she was going to stab a constable with a knife. She was not at the riot, Gwebu tells Du Toit. "She was at a church meeting in Witkeba."⁽³⁾

Still engrossed in the delineation of the nature of the forces that have combined to destroy the location in an ever-spreading fire of hate and wrath mingled with bitterness and frustration, Mr. Bloem falls into the error of generalizing. About tsotsis, for instance. These thugs are said to have taken

(1) I p. 144

(2) I p. 314

(3) I p. 317



control of the location in the final stage of the riot, "and exerted a spell that drew hundreds of normally calm and sober people after them.... The tsotsis were the incarnation of the black sinister forces that had come on this night out of the dark past. They had a kind of mystic significance, and from this came their power over the location."⁽¹⁾ Again, "one could tell they were tsotsis by their fancy clothes, by the way they took command, and by their weird mystical unison of minds and limbs".⁽²⁾

Apart from trousers with narrow pipes this group of delinquents have little in common in their manner of dress. Tsotsis in fancy clothes are a romantic version of the group. Why should they have a "kind of mystic significance"? Why should a "mystical unison of minds and limbs" be a distinctive feature of tsotsis? The mistake Mr. Bloom makes is to regard this class of people as an absolute quantity. These delinquents are created by adverse social and economic conditions. A boy may be well behaved today and turn anti-social tomorrow. He owes no absolute allegiance to society or his kind. There need be nothing mystical about the make-up of a delinquent or his group instinct or his reform, or his decision to unleash the forces of destruction in his control.

Hate and fear are the two most important elements that contribute to the riot. Such mass suffering overwhelms one to the extent that one loses the significance of characters as individuals. The shock is too great and we remember not so much the characters involved as the incidents in the story; no one is capable of checking the fatal downward movement of the wheel of fire, as it were.

Du Toit is better defined than either Swanepoel the constable chief or the African characters.

(1) I p. 273

(2) op. cit.

Nadine Gordimer's short stories are mostly sketches which could never be expanded into a novel. Her African characters feature mostly as domestic workers. Their reaction to situations is always related to black-white relations. They behave as we would expect them to, within a distinct class such as theirs.

When Lerice's husband brings Petrus word that his brother's corpse cannot be retrieved ⁽¹⁾ Petrus first looks at him, "Out of his knowledge that white men have everything, can do anything; if they don't, it is because they won't". ⁽²⁾ Superimposed over the master-servant relationship is colour consciousness.

Miss Gordimer's characters do not talk or think about these relationships. They simply feel the little world around them narrowing and crowding in on them as a result of their class prejudices, fears and doubts. Her characters find themselves helpless in these circumstances. Says Lerice: "You would think they would have felt they could tell us, once the man was ill." ⁽³⁾ The writer suggests that the fact that the deceased was an illegal immigrant is no adequate reason why Petrus did not confide in his employers. More than this, she suggests that there is a secret, tacit conspiracy among domestic workers in general not to confide in their employers. The servants move about the house like ants, doing their work with a non-committal efficiency or inefficiency. It is an easy thing for one to pile work on a servant, as the McClearys do in the story Horn of Plenty. ⁽⁴⁾ But it plagues one not to know what the attitude of the worker is towards the work and the employer. Rebecca is a non-committal character in this story.

(1) Six Feet of the Country (title story) in J

(2) J p. 14

(3) J p. 12

(4) in J

"Rebecca always waited to be spoken to; it was as if she had decided that hers would never be the responsibility for opening verbal negotiations of any kind. She did not flinch while she waited; she was, it often appeared to Ito, without nerves".⁽¹⁾ It exasperates Mrs. McCleary when Rebecca cannot get used to calling her by her name. Evidently Rebecca does not attach any importance to her mistress's insistence. "She didn't even say it was a nice dress," says Mrs. McCleary of Rebecca.⁽²⁾ It doesn't occur to her that 19 years in white people's employ have conditioned Rebecca to conventional master-servant relations.

Then there is Lena in the story, Happy Event.⁽³⁾ She hardly ever says anything. We know what Thomas, the house servant, thinks of her - he has nothing but contempt for her. But we don't know what she thinks of him or her employers. She is one of those people to whom things just happen: a defenceless creature of circumstance. Ella does not know her. But Miss Gordimer's point is that not many employers want to know anything about their servants except that which directly affects their work. Even then, this must not be as much as may spoil the employer's pleasure and convenience.

"She is not a motherly figure," Ella thinks. "One cannot imagine her mother to anything."⁽⁴⁾ She decides, however, that she knows nothing about Lena when the latter looks at her, "suddenly, directly, without a flicker of evasion, without dissimulation or appeal, not as a woman looks to another woman or even a human being to another human being".⁽⁵⁾

Again, the non-white characters interest the writer only as far as they help elicit and define group attitudes and ignorance among whites. "You never know with them.... You can send them to a doctor to make sure you aren't harbouring someone who's diseased, but you've no way of finding out what sort of person

(1) J p. 129

(2) J p. 132

(3) in J

(4) J p. 43

(5) J p. 43

a servant is ... Ah, Thomas, someone would murmur, now he's a good old thing".⁽¹⁾ But these non-white characters remain catalytic agents, unaffected by the uneasiness they cause by presenting such an enigma to whites.

The white detective investigating the murder case adopts a manner that has "changed to the impatient one customarily used for Africans by all white persons in authority - a manner that arose perhaps quite legitimately in defence against the circumlocution of the rather poetic Bantu languages, with their delicate formality, and now has hardened into indiscriminate use".⁽²⁾ Here, as often happens in the reading of Nadine Gordimer's stories that include non-white characters, one's attention is drawn to the white man's reaction to the black man's presence.

In the title story of this collection, until we get to the catastrophe, our eyes have been focused on Leric's and her husband's reaction to the whole problem of locating the corpse of Petrus's brother. For a short but significant moment we pause to watch the awkward behaviour of Leric's husband who goes to play golf on the burial day. Out of sheer embarrassment he joins the procession.

When Miss Gordimer shifts the scene to the circle of intellectuals she becomes equally cynical. Jake Alexander is cynical in his attitude towards Jennifer Tetzl, the white girl of the Congress of Democrats.⁽³⁾ She is the kind that want to make the black man feel that they are equal to him, and that they feel his longings and frustrations. But Jake Alexander and his friends have no existence of their own, really. They only serve to explain Jennifer Tetzl and the group to which she belongs, as Miss Gordimer interprets them.

(1) J p. 45

(2) J p. 48

(3) What New Era Would That Be? in J

Miss Gerliner's treatment of non-white characters in her latest volume of short stories reviewed above is not one step removed from that in her earlier volume, The Soft Voice of the Serpent.⁽¹⁾ The Indian who fishes during his vacation in the story, The Catch, is important only as a member of a non-white race, not as a human being with an individuality. The writer is more interested in the indignation, the anger, the laugh, the indifference, the desire to patronise, the longing for some entertainment and other shades of emotional change, which a member of a certain race evokes when he comes among those of another race. She sensitively depicts these shades.

The white holidaying couple find this Indian on the beach. First, he is something like an animal to them. As they get used to him they regard him as "their Indian". "And as an animal becomes more human every day, so every day the quality of their talk with the Indian had to change; the simple question-answer relation that goes with the celluloid prop of a ping-pong ball and does so well for all inferiors, foreigners and children became suddenly a toy".⁽²⁾

The moment the same couple with their friends finds the Indian stranded the writer follows the behaviour of the white party in the car. "Don't think we're crazy. This Indian is really quite a personality,"⁽³⁾ apologises the woman who "discovered" the Indian. There is a sharp change in the emotional current when the white couple and the Indian meet outside their somewhat romantic holiday setting. But we only see the change in the whites, not in the Indian.

In The Train from Rhodesia, a black vendor sells a carved article that causes a brief moment of indignation and almost precipitates a quarrel between a travelling couple in a train.

(1) The Soft Voice of the Serpent (Victor Gollancz, London 1953)

(2) op. cit. p. 18

(3) op. cit. p. 21

The frightened woman in Is there Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet? is the predominant character, not the African who snatches her handbag.

"Ah, woe is me, she said, and that was her comment on life".⁽¹⁾ That is all we know about Sarah, the domestic servant's thought life in the story, Ah, Woe is Me. Moving as this story is of a domestic servant who struggles against ill-health in order to maintain and educate her three children, we are told only the bare facts of what happens in the life of this African family. Always we are made aware of a mighty social barrier between the well-meaning white employer and her servant. Miss Gardiner seems to represent herself in the character of such an employer who is anxious to help Sarah, now bedridden, in an impersonal sort of way - the only way she is capable of in South Africa's social set-up - but who can give only very little relief. Like Miss Gardiner in her other stories, this employer strives to understand the background of the servant's life but cannot reach out to it.

Sarah's children come to see their mother's former employer. They stand in the yard until she notices them. The barrier rises between her and them again. She finds she can only communicate with the children by means of questions. She says: "I always had the curious feeling that they were embarrassed, not by me, but for me; as if their faces knew that I could not help asking these same questions, because the real state of their lives was unknown and unimagined by me, and therefore beyond my questioning."⁽²⁾

From the beginning of the story to the end, when Janet comes to see the white woman to tell her how very ill her mother is, the employer is continually telling us her own response to the presence of Sarah and her children. Their response to her kindnesses and failures leaves much for conjecture.

(1) op. cit. p. 133

(2) op. cit. p. 138

Sometimes Liss Gordimer, perhaps in a gesture of despair over her unsuccessful attempts to delve into the intellectual and emotional life of her non-white characters, tries to suggest a crowd of thoughts and feelings in a single sentence. Of Janet she says: "Then she lifted her head and looked at me, without interest, without guile, as if she looked into the face of the sun, blinded."⁽¹⁾ The same way in which she describes how Lena looked at Elias: "suddenly, directly, without a flicker of evasion, without dissimulation or appeal, not as a woman looks to another woman or even a human being to another human being".⁽²⁾ We do not know what really goes on in Lena's mind.

Somehow Nadine Gordimer's shortcomings are reflected in her white characters. Even within the limited circle of domestic workers she leaves a great deal unexplored: what the domestic worker says, feels and thinks in relation to his work, his employer and in the larger context of his local setting. The scope of Jane Austen's work was limited by the social and economic conditions of her time - calm, easy and settled. Nadine Gordimer cannot have the same excuse for her limited range. She deliberately and perhaps conveniently retires to suburban and peri-urban middle class society which she cynically represents in terms of their reactions to the presence of the only black man they have to meet - the domestic servant.

(1) op. cit. p. 141

(2) F p. 43

CHAPTER V

Conclusions: A Comparative Note

Commenting on a lady critic's statement that writers who sought a setting for their work in far-off countries produced "uncivilized" tales, Josef Conrad writes in a prefatory note to Almayer's Folly: (1)

"The critic and judge seems to think that in those distant lands all joy is a yell and a war dance, all pathos is a howl and a ghostly grin of filed teeth; and that the solution of all problems is found in the barrel of a revolver or on the point of an assegai. And yet it is not so... The picture of life there as here is drawn with the same elaboration of detail, coloured with the same tints. Only in the cruel serenity of the sky, under the merciless brilliance of the sun, the dazzled eye misses the delicate detail, sees only the strong outlines, while the colours, in the steady light, seem crude and without shadow. Nevertheless it is the same picture. And there is a bond between us and that humanity so far away. I am speaking here of men and women - not of the chattering and graceful phantoms that move about in our parlours and stocks and are softly luminous with the radiance of all our virtues; that are possessors of all refinements, of all sensibilities, of all wisdom - but, being only phantoms, possess no heart... I am content to sympathise with common mortals, no matter where they live... Their hearts - like ours - must endure the load of the gifts from Heaven, the curse of facts and the blessing of illusions, the bitterness of our wisdom and the deceptive consolation of our folly."

This statement is basic to Conrad's writings on the Malays and Arabs. In this respect, his greatness as an artist

(1) In Three Tales (Ernest Benn, London 1955) P. vii

lies in his disinclination to recognize boundaries in human character. Mrs. Almyer's superstitious beliefs and depravity have nothing to do with the fact that she is half-caste. Nor has her daughter Nina's disillusionment in Christian teachings. We understand Nina's character against the background of human development. Her mixed parentage is an incidental matter. She behaves in all situations as Nina the individual. This treatment of non-white characters makes Sarah Gertrude Millin's knowledge of human beings and her compass of human experience look utterly amateurish. The fate that hangs over Conrad's characters is a subtle and inscrutable one. Mrs. Millin claims to know the fate which dictates the lives of the Floods, the Deborahs, the Kleinhenses, the Elmiras, the Barrys and the rest of the line. The solution she suggests to the problem is to stop producing Coloured children!

Mrs. Millin's Coloured folk cringe and grovel or try to shake off their race identity as a response to the "whips and scorns" of white opinion. Nina (in Almyer's Folly) is fascinated by the recital of "savage glories, - those barbarous fights and savage feasting" peculiar to her people's past. She "saw with vague surprise the narrow rattle of civilized morality, in which good-meaning people had wrapped her young soul, fall away - and leave her shivering and hopeless as if on the edge of some deep and unknown abyss... Her teachers did not understand her nature, and the education ended in a scene of humiliation, in an outburst of contempt from white people for her mixed blood".⁽¹⁾

This delineation of character helps us clearly to realize the thought and emotional processes that have gone to make Nina's character. "Her young mind having been unskillfully permitted to glance at better things, and then thrown back again into the hopeless quagmire of barbarism, full of strong

(1) Almyer's Folly, P. 41

and uncontrolled passions".⁽¹⁾ And this going back to barbarism is not necessarily a process of degeneracy, or depravity; least of all does it indicate an inherent weakness in Nina's race. On the other hand, we never know the part education plays in the lives of, say, Deborah, Elmira, Kleinhamm in Mrs. Millin's chronicle. Nina's failure in the end is at least tragic and credible, because she has turned to the "uncompromising sincerity of purpose shown by her Malay kinsmen" as an escape from "the slick hypocrisy, the polite disguises, the virtuous pretences of such white people as she had had the misfortune to come into contact with".⁽²⁾ No such conflicts (the very stuff of fiction) exist for most of Mrs. Millin's characters because the trouble lies in their stars.

The portrayal of Nina's character, like that of Missa in An Outcast of the Islands, is cleverly woven into the larger fabric of Arab-white relations and intrigue. "She (Nina) is like a white woman and knows no shame,"⁽³⁾ is Dabalatchi's verdict. Although Almyer thinks Malays are rascals and savages, he himself is a weak man, especially when one puts him beside his wife, who is a resolute woman when she has a purpose. Her advice to Nina is that, if the man she is going to marry has another wife who claims more attention, Nina should show her no mercy, "and if you strike, strike with a steady hand".⁽⁴⁾ Poor Almyer cannot even understand, let alone sense, the currents of thought and feeling that run in his daughter. He wants to know why Nina has given herself up to Dain who he regards as a savage. "I am not of your race," Nina replies. "Between your people and me there is also a barrier that nothing can remove.... You wanted me to dream your dreams, to see your own visions - the visions of life amongst the white faces of those who cast me from their midst in angry contempt." ⁽⁵⁾

(1) op. cit. P. 42

(2) op. cit. P. 43

(3) op. cit. P. 131

(4) op. cit. P. 153

(5) op. cit. P. 153

"I have been rejected with scorn by the white people, and now I am a Malay," she says later.⁽¹⁾

These are the cross-currents of human experience that Sarah Gertrude Millin misses, which give a work of art powerful intellectual and emotional appeal.

Conrad carries the theme of Almayer's Folly further in his An Outcast of the Islands.⁽²⁾ Black-white relations have reached a crucial stage. The Arabs and Malays, headed by the wily Babelatchi and Lokamba, mean to gain ascendancy over the white traders in the Macassar area. A revolution is brought off successfully in Sabir by the two leaders. Captain Lingard, whose power has held sway in those waters for a long time with the help of Almayer and later of Willens, warns Babelatchi that the white man will yet prove his undoing (Babelatchi's).

"This is a white man's talk," Babelatchi says. "I know you. That is how you all talk while you load your guns and sharpen your swords, and when you are ready, then to those who are weak you say: 'Obey me and be happy, or die!'.... You think it is only your wisdom and your virtue and your happiness that are true. You are stronger than the wild beasts, but not so wise. A black tiger knows when he is not hungry - you do not. He knows the difference between himself and those who can speak; you do not understand the difference between yourselves and us - who are men. You are wise and great - and you shall always be fools."⁽³⁾

The Arab woman Aissa is used by Babelatchi and Lokamba to entice Willens into what is hoped will be a make-believe love affair. Then Almayer will lose Willens' assistance and allegiance. This is bound to break Lingard. But the love between Aissa and Willens reaches passionate heights never dreamed of by the two political schemers. She proves to

(1) *op. cit.* P. 184

(2) *vide* P. 6 of this thesis

(3) An Outcast of the Islands (in Three Tales) P. 106

have depth of feeling, acuteness of sensitivity and intensity of will. "You are a woman whose heart, I believe, is great enough to fill a man's breast," Lingard admits. ⁽¹⁾

"How can you know?" Missa says to Lingard. "How can you know? I live with him all the days. All the nights. I look at him; I see his every breath, every glance of his eye, every movement of his lips. I see nothing else! What else is there? And even I do not understand. I do not understand him! - Him! - My life." ⁽²⁾

She continues, always with intensity of feelings: "And I knew then he would not fight you! Before - many days ago - I went away twice to make him obey my desire; to make him strike at his own people so that he could be mine - mine! O calamity! His hand was false as your white hearts. It struck that strong hand, and - O shame! - it killed nobody!Round me all was lies. His strength was a lie. His strength was a lie... And to meet you - you, the great! - he had no one but me! But me - with my rage, my pain, my weakness. Only me!" ⁽³⁾

The novelist presents an experience here which is deeply human and therefore obeys no prescriptions such as colour and race distinctions often tend to dictate. Such boundaries as classify human behaviour into racial compartments evidently do not matter to Conrad. Here he is preoccupied with the character of Willers, a white man, who from the start is proud of his European descent and has superior airs. He carries a Malay woman, but misuses her, partly because there is no real love between the two, and partly because he continually tells himself, in his own conceit, that his wife ought to be grateful for the mere fact that her union with him has enhanced her social and economic status. As a result of misdeeds Willers has to leave his present station.

(1) op. cit. p. 181

(2) op. cit. p. 184

(3) op. cit. p. 187

His wife does what he never suspected she would do: she expels him from home. He joins Almayor. From the time Willens lands at Sakhir, he becomes a slave to the charm of Missa, at the same time nursing a bitter anger against his own race and perhaps against himself for having fallen from grace. Missa on the other hand is mistress of the situation from beginning to end. But she is seldom coarse or vulgar in the expression of her love. She shares her passions, foibles, strength with the rest of universal womankind. "She, a woman, was the victim of her heart, of her woman's belief that there is nothing in the world but love - the everlasting thing".⁽¹⁾ It is for love that she kills Willens, rather than allow him to return to his Sirani wife, Joanna. But it is love that has curdled into hatred because of a sense of defeat: she fought like a cat to keep him, but in vain. Her love has suddenly turned into a "hate of race, the hate of hopeless diversity, the hate of blood; the hate against the man born in the land of lies and of evil, from which nothing but misfortune comes to those who are not white. And as she stood, unaided, she heard a whisper near her, the whisper of the dead man's voice saying in her ear: 'Kill! Kill!'"⁽²⁾

Nothing approaching this kind of characterization of Non-Europeans has yet been attempted in South African English fiction.

William Faulkner's Light in August⁽³⁾ is another novel outside South Africa that is most interesting from the point of view of character development. Like Conrad's, Faulkner's art is not hampered by preconceived ideas about non-white behaviour. Joe Christmas commits crime not inherently as a man of coloured blood. We see his personality beginning to twist under the guardianship of his foster-parents, the McEacherns. Christmas has never known the love and care of parents. Thanks to McEachern's ascetic principles and utter brutality, Christmas develops several anti-social habits and crashes through social barriers with a vengeance. He lives like a hunted animal

(1) op. cit. p. 249

(2) op. cit. p. 249

(3) vide p. 18 of this thesis

that has little time or sense to think of and seek the decent things of life. The shadow of his dark childhood never lifts from his life. Whatever he desires he wants to get by brute force. He kills McEachern and runs away, until he reaches Jefferson. His sex life is no less violent, if somewhat erratic, whether it be with white or negro women. Because of the tormenting sense of inferiority caused by the knowledge that he has negro blood Christmas delights in seducing white women. Matters reach a crucial point in the orgies he has with Miss Burden, a white woman who comes of Yankee parents. His strange nature revolts when Miss Burden begins to be possessive of him, to make plans for his welfare and to pray for him. By that odd twist in his personality he kills his lover in a savage manner. Joe Christmas is tracked down and lynched, because by now it is widely known that he has negro blood. In fact there were times when he lived with negroes, "skinning white people. He ate with them, slept with them, belligerent, unpredictable, uncommunicative."⁽¹⁾

Faulkner never at any moment suggests that Joe Christmas's character is prescribed by an erroneous comprehensible schema according to which it may be supposed blacks and whites behave differently by virtue of colour distinction. Nor is Joe Christmas an Uncle Tom or an even simpler and stouter character conceived within the narrow boundaries of Deep South life with its very parochial and stouter attitudes which constitute a passing political phase. The portrayal of Christmas is enriched by Faulkner's depth of feeling and an acute poetic sense of irony which South African writers lack, with the possible conservative exception of William Flomer and Laurens van der Post. Van der Post's Kemon⁽²⁾ is a victim of injustice; so are Flomer's Caleb and Zachary Msoni;⁽³⁾ Patch's Absalom and Clive Schreiner's African and Hottentot characters. But the response-mechanism in each of these characters is not half as complex as human life is in general. Flomer's and Van der Post's sense of irony

(1) Light in August p. 212

(2) vide In a Province p. 53 of this thesis

(3) vide Turbott Wolfe p. 40 of this thesis

comprehends only the general situation of black-white relations and very little the thoughts and feelings of their characters. Both these writers have the keen sense of irony to perceive in the superior posturings of Western culture and in what E.M. Forster calls "talkative Christianity" a gaping hollowness, and something of immense value and richness in the quieter and humbler cultures of Africa. The difference between the two South Africans is that Flamer does not seem to hold out much promise for a reconciliation between European and African culture,⁽¹⁾ whereas Van der Post suggests that the African should not be denied entry into the structure of white culture and at the same time be expected to obey its laws. But of course the limitation in Van der Post's message⁽²⁾ lies in the fact that he envisages only one movement - that of blacks assimilating white culture without their influencing it and without whites assimilating African culture. He amends this view in his The Dark Eye in Africa, when he says that the two cultures are halves of a whole.

Here is an example of how Faulkner's sense of irony penetrates the character of Joe Christmas in his response to Mrs. McClachern's show of benevolence towards himself:⁽³⁾

"It was not the hard work which he hated, nor the punishment and injustice. He was used to that before he ever saw either of them. He expected no less, and so he was neither outraged nor surprised. It was the woman: that soft kindness which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard and ruthless justice of men. 'She is trying to make me cry,' he thought, lying cold and rigid in his bed, his hands beneath his head.... 'She was trying to make me cry. Then she thinks that they would have had me.'"

It is a long distance to travel between Kipling's view of India and E.M. Forster's. Kipling, with his fanatic sense of

(1) vide p. 44 of this thesis

(2) vide p. 55 of this thesis

(3) Light in August (1952) p. 158

authority, sees the British club in India as an exclusive institution that must rightfully protect the British way of life against the alien influence of the Indian people and perhaps the almost corrosive fierceness of the Indian sun.

But interests Forster here ⁽¹⁾ is the pathetic manner in which the Anglo-Indian maintains a pipe-smoking complacency that pretends to transcend the isolation of club life, to which Indians are not admitted.

Forster is out to depict the various shades of attitude, the slights, the hurts (big and small), the interchange of pride and humiliation, the violent hates and the comforting sense of companionship, when Indians and Europeans are thrown together - especially Indian intellectuals. There are sharp contrasts in this picture. The Indians have their own caste prejudices. But these are never given prominence over race prejudices between the British and the Indians. This is the motif of Forster's book.

Dr. Aziz is the meeting point of East and West at their best: an interesting mixture of the mystic idealist, the poetic sentimentalist, and the cynical materialist. He can go out of his way in his zeal to please and entertain those he admires and respects, like Fielding, Mrs. Moore, her children Ralph and Stella - even when it is not important for him to display such hospitality. He responds to their respect and friendship with all the warmth and depth of feeling and bubbling spirits he is capable of. He goes to great trouble and expense to conduct Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested to the Malabar Caves. In the same abundant measure he has nothing but the lowest regard for those who despise him, like the Callenders, the Bennys, the Turtons and, later, the Questeds. Here is a picture of Aziz:

(1) A Passage to India (1937) vide p. 3 of this thesis

(2) *op. cit.* p. 126

"Like most Orientals, Aziz overrated hospitality, mistaking it for intimacy, and not seeing that it is tainted with the sense of possession. It was only when Mrs. Moor and Fielding was near him that he saw further, and knew that it is more blessed to receive than to give. These two had strange and beautiful effects on him - they were his friends, his for ever, and he theirs for ever; he loved them so much that giving and receiving became one. He loved them even better than the Mamidullas, because he had surmounted obstacles to meet them, and this stimulates a generous mind. Their images remained somewhere in his soul up to his dying day, permanent additions"

After the farcical trial of the Indian doctor, during which Miss Quested withdraws her charge of assault and indecent advances, Aziz becomes bitterly anti-British. He is determined to claim damages from Miss Quested, and gleats over his victory. This is how he views the situation: (1)

"It disgraces me to have been mentioned in connection with such a hog".

He cynically anticipates Fielding when the white man visits him: (2)

"I knew what you are going to say next: Let, oh let Miss Quested off paying, so that the English may say, "Here is a native who has actually behaved like a gentleman; if it was not for his black face we would almost allow him to join our club! The approval of your compatriots no longer interests me, I have become anti-British, and ought to have done so sooner..."

There comes a symbolic moment of parting between Fielding and Aziz. Can they continue to be friends? No, not yet, says the Indian. The English must clear out of India. "We wanted to know you ten years back - now it's too late. If we see you and sit on your committees, it's for political reasons. Don't you make any mistake," says Aziz. (3) And he ends on a prophetic note, predicting the day the British will quit India.

E.M. Forster has a wholesome respect and admiration for Eastern religions and does not share the stock bogey that any religion that is not Christianity has little or no spiritual

(1) op. cit. p. 313

(2) op. cit. p. 323

(3) op. cit. p. 334

or moral value. He sees Christianity as a creed that supplements Hinduism, and vice versa. He has no message to give through his novel, no solution or reconciliation to suggest. He is content to tell his story, explore human character and depict it in the round, like Conrad and Faulkner, untrammelled by labels and provincialism, leaving us to our emotional catharsis. And yet Dr. Aziz does not lose his racial identity: he is no less Indian than the Rev. Stephen Kumalo of Cry, the Beloved Country is African, than the characters in God's Stepchildren are coloured. Aziz is a product of centuries of culture, and to this extent he is a child of Indian soil. He responds to conditions peculiar to the social organization of India. But there is nothing about his character one can label Indian or Asian, because Forster's vision of human beings stretches far beyond the local problems of British India. Hence the big scale on which Aziz is conceived. There is implicit in the story an indictment against group attitudes, isolationism and other social and political evils to which the Indian is subjected.

Aziz, Joe Christmas, Conrad's Nina and Missa are memorable literary creations because they cannot be hewn and carved to fit into the frame of local politics; because they are endowed with the human characteristics which have permanence and which suffer and endure historical change.

Both Richard Wright's Native Son⁽¹⁾ and Alan Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country are propaganda novels. They both depict the non-white as a victim of social evils and colour prejudices. Each novel has a strong message to convey to society. It is that a man does not commit crime in a vacuum. Society is very much responsible for man's anti-social conduct, because it creates conditions which in turn give rise to the need to kill or steal or rape. Both Paton's Absalom and Wright's Sigger are driven to crime because society denies them the opportunity to do anything nobler; because there is a rottenness in the

(1) vide page 11 of this thesis

heart of society which arises from ignorance and the desire of one section of a community to oppress another and the mutual hate and prejudice that result from it between black and white. There is sheer blind unreasoning hate in both Bigger and Absalom, although in the latter it is only inferred.

The difference between Eaton's treatment of his problem and Wright's is that the South African conceives his delinquent's character only in terms of the un-Christian, domineering attitude of whites in this country. The way he suggests out of the impasse is a change of heart in the individual personality, as happens in the case of the once hard-hearted and indifferent Jarvis, father of the murdered man, who turns philanthropic. Eaton's work has a strong ethical bias, and his characters move in well-defined categories: Stephen Kumalo, and his wife; Mrs. Lithebe; Msimangu (although neutral in the action of the novel) are in one class. One cannot imagine their behaving divergently even in the most dissimilar circumstances. They move on a horizontal, never on a vertical, plane. Absalom; John Kumalo, the political agitator; his son and Gertrude are in another category - an antithesis - over which a dark cloud hangs. Absalom's sudden repentance after a life of crime sounds a note of reconciliation on which Eaton rounds off his story.

Wright's Bigger Thomas is bitter to the very last. He spurns the services of a minister in the death cell. The Negro author looks at the problem through Max's spectacles - Bigger's attorney. Here are bits of conversation between the two in Bigger's cell.

"Bigger, don't you know they (whites) hate others, too?"

"Who they hate?"

"They hate trade unions. They hate folks who try to organize. They hate Jan."

"But they hate black folks more than they hate unions," Bigger said

"Oh yes, they do. You think that because your colour makes it easy for them to point you out, segregate you, exploit you."

But they do that to others, too!"

The development of Bigger's character is not bounded by ethical limits. We are shown various hues and shades of his hate: hatred of white folks in general and the more complex and ironic hatred of Mary, his victim, who tried to be kind to him.

"I don't understand, Bigger. You say you hated her and yet you say you felt like having her when you were in the room and she was drunk and you were drunk" (Max says)

"Yeah," Bigger said.... 'Yeah, that's funny, ain't it? I reckon it was because I knew I oughtn't've wanted to. I reckon it was because they say we black men do that anyhow. Mr. Max, you know what some white men say we black men do? They say we rape white women when we get the clap and they say we do that because we believe that if we rape white women then we'll get rid of the clap.... They believe that. Jesus, Mr. Max, when folks say things like that about you, you whipped before you born."⁽¹⁾

Unlike Absalom, Bigger says in his cell: "...But I ain't worried none about them women I killed. For a little while I was free. I was doing something. It was wrong, but I was feeling all right. Maybe God'll get me for it. If He do, all right. But I ain't worried. I killed 'em because I was scared and mad. But I been scared and mad all my life" (3)

Wright looks at Bigger's problem as part of the larger universal problem of "haves and have-nots", vitiated by colour differences in a multi-racial society.

E.M. Forster's A Passage to India is mainly about Indian intellectuals. Mulk Raj Anand writes mainly about common folk, the workers. His Coolie teems with scenes of poverty, disease, bazaars, and hundreds of coolies lying on street pavements for lack of shelter.

(1) Native Son p. 295

(2) op. cit. pp. 297-298

(3) op. cit. p. 300

Here we have a story of Munco, the coolie, who starts life as an orphan and has heart-rending experiences till his death. Anand's view of India in this book is that of a country that is a slave to itself, and of millions of people living in an age-old class system; a system they are too impotent to change and too stoical to want to change. The pathos of Munco is the pathos of India.

"And, like every child in the world, like most (1) grown-up even, he had been blinded by the glamour of greatness, the glory and splendour of it, into forgetting that he was condemned by an iniquitous system always to remain small, abject and crab. The biological expedient, however, which made him want to live, was forcing the multi-coloured cells in his body to reach out instinctively to the space about him, even for a breath of the foul air in his master's dingy little kitchen, and for the need of love in his orphan's body. But he was as yet essentially an intellectual 'pawn on the chessboard of destiny' such as the village priest had declared all men to be, with perverted ambitions in a world of perverted ideas, and he was to remain a slave until he should come to recognize his instincts".

In the course of time it seems to Munco that "there must be only two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor". (2)

The Indian as a fictional character worth considering has not yet featured in South African literature; this, in spite of the fact that the Indian has long become scenically integrated into South African life. Again, the people Sarah Gertrude Millin, William Klorer and Alan Paton write such about are the educated class of non-whites. Laurens van der Post, Peter Abraham, Nadine Gordimer, Henry John May and Grenfell Williams, and Harry Bloom write as such about the simple illiterate folk as they do about the educated class. But even their illiterate characters are urbanized. Peter Abraham's and Harry Bloom's non-literate characters have more vitality than we find in any other South African novelist's work. Their characters live a social and communal life as location people. Van der Post approaches his Khenkhen as a domestic worker. So

(1) Coolie (Hutchinson International Authors, London 1947) p. 37

(2) op. cit. p. 56

does Nadine Gordimer approach the non-white. Peter Abraham, because he is Coloured, knows his simple folk better than any other writer; he comes of such folk. He writes about them with greater intensity of feeling - at any rate in his earliest works - although more often than not his works lack intellectual appeal. The characters of his Molay Camp and Vrededorp and of the village dorp in Rath of Thunder, the village from which Lanny Swartz stems and to which he returns as a teacher. In fact Peter Abraham draws his simple location folk with greater feeling and understanding than he does his intellectuals. Pieta and Lou Swartz and Lanny's mother and sister have a vitality and robust shape Mike and Lanny do not have in Rath of Thunder. The illiterate Molay Camp and Vrededorp characters are more real than the schoolmistress in Line Day who falls in love with Luce.

Since Olive Schreiner's and Willina Scully's scanty if sympathetic portrayal of the rural character, we have not had a novel about African or Indian peasants or farm workers. Those who have the urge and means to write about Non-European life come in contact with the non-white primarily on an intellectual plane. For the rest they have to write from instinct because the white author (who has so far been practically alone in the field of English fiction here) has no means of contact with Africans other than on an intellectual plane, and that on a limited scale owing to social barriers. He does not speak their language and he has to contend with social barriers. Non-whites live in locations, or in the Reserves, or work for whites in towns and suburbs and on farms, where they are either labour tenants or squatters. There can hardly be a healthy common culture in conditions that isolate whole communities and make social and economic intercourse difficult or impossible. And the problem of a national culture is per se the problem of a national literature. It must remain sectional and sterile as long as such conditions prevail. Before that happy day of a common culture comes, black and white writers

will have to try to understand and appreciate each other's cultures. This is necessary if they are to portray convincing and round characters. D.H. Lawrence had intense admiration for cultures outside his own. He writes with warmth and understanding about Mexicans. (1) The European, D.H. Lawrence says, goes to entertainment as a sort of abstraction. He sits at the movies "a very god, in an orgy of abstraction, actually dissolved into delighted, watchful spirit. And if his best girl sits beside him she vibrates in the same ether". (2) But the Red Indian has a different attitude towards entertainment. There is always a note of sentimentality in a white writer's approach of the Indian, D.H. Lawrence goes on to say. In the anthropologist's and myth-transcriber's, too. The common white man abhors Indians and the highbrow "lapses into sentimentalism".

Unlike the white man's music, the real Indian song is non-individual, and has no melody. And the writer describes vividly how the Indian becomes religiously wrapt in his dance song. It is, to the Indian, not entertainment, not a performance. "It is the dance of the naked blood-being, defending his own isolation in the rhythm of the universe". (3)

This reverence for Indian culture prompts D.H. Lawrence categorically to say that the white man may forsake his "stream of consciousness" for the African's or the Hindu's or the Polynesian's or these races may take to the white man's. One cannot "express one stream in terms of another, so as to identify the two ... The only thing you can do is to have a little Ghost inside you which sees both ways, or even many ways. One man can belong to one great way of consciousness only. He may even change from one way to another. But he cannot go both ways at once. Can't be done". (4)

(1) Mornings in Mexico (Willier Weinstock Ltd. London 1927)

(2) op. cit. p. 80

(3) op. cit. p. 93

(4) op. cit. p. 88

South African English literature has been moving between two extreme poles: the gloating literature of the period between Thomas Fringle and Rider Haggard where the non-white is regarded as a nonentity or a positive entity, and the other extreme where the non-white is sentimentalized, in the same way that D.H. Lawrence maintains the Indian has been. In between these two extremes we find works like those of Mrs. Millin, some of Peter Abrahams, Miss Gerlener, Harry Bloch.

Certain South African writers try to discard D.H. Lawrence's theory as unwelcome when he speaks in terms of absolutes and irreconcilables; they may think he oversimplified the whole issue because he was not involved in the social set-up of the Mexicans and was not committed to anything, whereas the South African writer is a citizen here and therefore involved. Other writers may agree with D.H. Lawrence. But still that would not exempt them from studying and knowing and appreciating cultures outside their own. Then there are those who may suspend argument and remain content for the time being with keeping a "little Ghost" inside themselves which sees both ways, or even many ways.

Considering the actual position as it stands, the question may arise: why is A Passage to India or An Outcast of the Islands or Light in August a better novel than, say, Cry, the Beloved Country or The Story of an African Farm or God's Stepchildren or Turbott Wolfe with regard to non-white characterization? Forster's Liz, Conrad's Missa, and Faulkner's Joe Christmas have much greater freedom of movement than their South African counterparts. They are not tethered to any sort of didactic standard. They are not there to justify themselves, to vindicate themselves and their race. They are not direct carriers of a message. As a result they can be carried through several emotional states and react to different situations in various ways that indicate a development. Note the delicate changes of mood and temper Liz displays when he meets his own people, Fielding and Mrs. Moore as distinct from his manner of behaviour when he meets Renny, Major Collender and the Turtens.

In spite of his disillusionment after the Malabar Caves incident which embitters him, Aziz still loves Mrs. Moore's children and Fielding. And then he resolves that there cannot yet be a meeting point between East and West until the English quit India. We see the other side of Aziz in his domestic surroundings - among his children and with the constant memory of his late wife. Aissa's love for Willens has many subtle aspects to it, so has her hate eventually. Joe Christmas is not just a simple character whose lynching is predictable.

These three characters suffer and endure a good deal because of their frailties. They are not just victims of external circumstances. Faten's Karamelo suffers as a result of external conditions, and his outlook is rigid, immutable in any situation. Flomer's view precludes any development of character because his non-whites represent the inviolability, if not the violence, of Africa.

As I have already stated, most of Nadine Gordimer's Non-European characters emerge only to disappear into the background. Compare any of her domestic servants with Faulkner's, like Nancy in the short story, That Evening Sun.⁽¹⁾ We know Nancy's background, the hotel she goes back to after working for whites; we know her fears, doubts. She lives in mortal, neurotic fear of her husband, Jesus, whom she has wronged because she is with child by a white man. We know Jesus' attitude of helplessness in relation to whites. "I can't stop him," he says, "when white man want to come in my house, I ain't got no house. I ain't got no house. I can't stop him, but he can't kick me outen it. We can't do that."⁽²⁾ But we know very little about the inner lives of Nadine Gordimer's servants. They are not meant to talk or perhaps even to think. Faulkner records a considerable amount of cross-

(1) in Faulkner's County (vide p. 11 of this thesis)

(2) *op. cit.*

communication of feeling and thought in this story between servant and master and his children, as much as one can expect within the limits of a short story. We miss this cross-communication in all of Miss Gordimer's stories, primarily because the presence of non-whites in her stories are an artificial device used for reflecting the attitudes and behaviour of her white characters. Faulkner's short stories have thus greater breadth and depth.

Perhaps the main weakness in South African writers is that they are hyper-conscious of the race problem in their country. They are so obsessed with the subject of race and colour that when they set about writing creatively they imagine that the plot they are going to devise, the characters they are going to create and the setting they are going to exploit, must subserve a frightfully important message or important discovery they think they have made in race relations. They fail to see that race and colour consciousness is temporary and at most but a fraction of the bigger and eternal phenomenon of human relations. When William Koker, for instance, wrote his Turbott Wolfe, he was writing as a white man who had discovered a new continent with a distinct type of violence, a people with a beautiful culture that was resisting a domineering white culture, and the race attitudes and relations peculiar to such a set-up. When he writes his Paper Houses ⁽¹⁾ much later - a collection of short stories set in Japan - he is more experienced and race contacts no longer arouse in him a romantic revolt or admiration and desire to suggest a solution. He simply writes about human beings and human problems as seen against a class structure which is to be found anywhere outside Japan. For this reason the stories are more important than his novel for their characterization of non-whites. That conflict or reconciliation there is between the Orient and the West is merely implied in the character of Chiyé and the young student in the story A Piece of Good Luck. ⁽²⁾

(1) vide p. 4 of this thesis

(2) in Paper Houses

Such Orient-West relations are not a sermonising outside Plomer's characterisation as in Turbott Wolfe. There the old missionary, Nordalsgaard, feels he has been conquered by Africa; there is talk of the violence of Africa; the bestiality of Romaine, Soper; of Bloodfield's neurotic hate and the marriage between Mabel van der Horst, a Hollander, and Zachery the African. But these passions and attitudes become mere topics, because there is not one African character built around them.

It is beyond the scope of a dissertation such as this to suggest a remedy for the shortcomings here gestured at in South African fiction. My work will have served its purpose if it demonstrates that these shortcomings exist and that they consist mainly in a failure to realize that "African character" is itself a fiction and that the imagination which cannot inhabit the life of others than its owner would be better employed in the compilation of blue books about Africa than in the attempt to generalise artistically about an unknown.

Chapter VI

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- OLIVE SCHREINER:** The Story of an African Farm (Ernest Benn Ltd, London 1951)
Trooper Peter Halket (T. Fisher Unwin, London 1897)
- SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN:** God's Stepchildren (New Edition: Central News Agency, Johannesburg, 1st ed. 1924)
The Herr Witchdoctor (William Heinemann Ltd., London 1941)
The Coming of the Lord (Constable & Co., Ltd., London 1928)
- WILLIAM PLOMER:** Turbott Wolfe (Leonard & Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, London, 1925)
Paper Houses (Penguin 456, 1943)
- ALAN PATON:** Cry, the Beloved Country (Jonathan Cape, London, 1950)
- LAURENS VAN DER POST:** In a Province (Hogarth Press, London 1953)
The Dark Eye in Africa (The Hogarth Press, London 1955)
- GRENFELL WILLIAMS & HENRY JOHN MAY:** I am Black (Cassell & Co. Ltd. London 1936)
- OLIVER WALKER:** Proud Zulu (Dassie Books, Central News Agency, South Africa, 1951)
- PETER ABRAHAMS:** Wild Conquest (Faber & Faber, London 1951)
The Path of Thunder (Harper & Bros., New York 1948)
Mine Boy (Dorothy Crisp & Co., London 1947)
- HARRY BLOOM:** Episode (Collins, London 1956)
- NADINE GORDIMER:** Six Feet of the Country (Gollancz, London 1956)
Soft Voice of the Serpent (Gollancz London 1953)
- THOMAS PRINGLE:** African Sketches (Edward Moxon, London 1834)
- FRANCIS SLATER (ed):** Centenary Book of South African Verse 1820-1925
- R.M. BALLANTYNE:** The Settler and the Savage (James Nisbet & Co. London 1877)
- A.W. DRAYSON:** The White Chief of the Caffers (George Routledge & Sons, London 1887)
- GLANVILLE:** Among the Cape Kaffirs (Sonnenschein, London 1888)
- PERCY FITZPATRICK:** The Outspan (William Heinemann, London 1898)
- WILLIAM CHARLES SCULLY:** Kaffir Stories (T. Fisher Unwin, London 1895)

- RIDER HAGGARD: Nada the Lily (Longmans, Green & Co. London 1892)
King Solomon's Mines (Pan Books Ltd. London 1951)
- RUDYARD KIPLING: Kim (Macmillan & Co., Ltd. London 1901)
Many Inventions (Macmillan & Co. Ltd. London 1939)
- MULK RAJ ANAND: Coolie (Hutchinson International Authors Ltd., London 1947)
- E.M. FORSTER: A Passage to India (Penguin, 1937)
Aspects of the Novel (Edward Arnold & Co. London 1949)
- PEARL BUCK: The Good Earth (John Day, New York, 1949)
- GEORGE ORWELL: Burmese Days (Penguin 456, 1944)
- JOSEPH CONRAD: Almayer's Folly } in Three Tales
An Outcast of the Islands } (Ernest Benn, Ltd., London 1951)
- An outpost of Progress (in Tales of Unrest: Gresham Publishing Co., London 1925)
- HARRIET BEECHER STOWE: Uncle Tom's Cabin (Lock & Co., Ltd., London 1852)
- CARL VAN VECHTEN: Nigger Heaven (A.A. Knopf, New York 1926)
- COUNTÉE CULLEN: One Way to Heaven (Harper & Bros., New York 1932)
- LANGSTON HUGHES: Not Without Laughter (A.A. Knopf, New York 1930)
- WILLIAM FAULKNER: Light in August (Chatto & Windus, London 1952)
Faulkner's County (Chatto & Windus, London 1955)
- RICHARD WRIGHT: Native Son (Grosset & Dunlap, New York 1940)
- ERIC WALCROFT: Tropic Death (Boni & Liveright, New York 1926)
- CLAUDE McKay: Banana Bottom (Harper & Bros, New York 1933)
- ROGER MAIS: Brother Man (Jonathan Cape, London 1954)
- GEORGE LEMMING: The Emigrants (Michael Joseph, London 1954)
- JAMES FENIMORE COOPER: The Last of the Mohicans (The Book League of America, New York.)
- JOHN STEINBECK: The Pearl (Heinemann Ltd., London 1955)
- DAVID KARP: The Day of the Monkey (Gollancz, London 1955)
- The Crisis XXXI, 1926 & August 1926, (Journal of National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People)
- HUGH M. GLOSTER: Negro Voices in American Fiction (University of North Carolina Press, Richmond, Virginia, 1948)

- GUY BUTLER: Broadcast lecture on South African Poetry:
South African Broadcasting Corporation,
Lecture No. 2 (October - November 1955)
- E.R. SEARY (ed): South African Short Stories (Oxford University
Press, Cape Town 1947)
- LIONEL TRILLING: The Art of the Novel (Charles Scribner's Sons,
New York 1953)
- Chamber's Encyclopaedia, New Edition Vol. X (George Newnes Ltd.,
London 1950)
- D.H. LAWRENCE: Mornings in Mexico (William Heinemann Ltd.,
London 1927)
-