

AMBIGUOUS CONTAGION:
THE DISCOURSE OF RACE IN
SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH WRITING 1890-1930

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THESIS
Submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
of Rhodes University

Grahamstown

1995

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ABSTRACT

This study explores representations of race and racial difference in the writing of white South Africans in English, between the years, approximately, of 1890 and 1930.

The first chapter essays a theoretical and historical investigation of the concept of race and offers a narrative of the rise of Western racialism. Its conclusion, that race has functioned as a vehicle of displacement for other forms of difference in the competition for advantage among social groups, is qualified in Chapter Two by the postulate of an anthropological absolute, the "ethnic imperative", to help account for the strategic emergence of racialism in specific historical circumstances. The role of the ethnic imperative in the moral economy of colonial South Africa in the years 1890-1930 is examined through the analysis of three representative texts. In Chapter Three, a wide range of primary material is canvassed for prevailing views on the "Native Question", the perceived social threat posed by the half-caste, and the "Black Peril", culminating in the detailed examination of a fictional text. A particular concern in both Chapters Two and Three is the imagery of disease and contagion in terms of which racial contact is typically represented.

The following chapter situates the literary works discussed in the study in the context of the South African literary tradition, then uses the example of selected short stories to indicate some narratological problems encountered by the writer with a racialist agenda within the medium of realist fiction. Chapters Five and Six investigate, through the close reading of selected novels, thematic concerns rooted in the intersection of the discourse of race with those of gender and social class. The final chapter reveals how William Plomer's novel, Turbott Wolfe, represents a volatile synthesis of a standard discourse on social class, an

acknowledgement of the ethnic imperative, the imagery of contagion, and a principled repudiation of racialism, in a multi-faceted, modernist, and partially self-aware fashion.

The more salient conclusions reached by this study concern the inadequacy of purely materialist analysis to account for the phenomenon of racialism, the historically determined link between racial attitudes and sexuality, and the manifest incompatibility of racial ideology with the liberal humanism inscribed in the formal requirements of the realist work of fiction.

PREFACE

My initial interest in the subject of this study was sparked as far back as 1981, when, having just joined the staff of the National English Literary Museum, I came upon a copy of The Outspan in the course of preparing a commemorative exhibition on the life of Sir Percy FitzPatrick. My liberal sensibility, long schooled in the principled denial of human difference, was initially shaken by a sense of the difference between my point of view and the way of thinking about race which informed FitzPatrick's stories. I set about reading them against the grain, seeking to recover some common ground buried beneath the alien ideology. The article which emerged from this encounter in 1983 (see Acknowledgements) was quite probably the first piece of South African literary criticism with a reference to Deconstruction in its title.

Although over half of this study was written in the six months prior to its presentation for examination, its lengthy gestation period spans several shifts in my "critical orientation", shifts which have no doubt left their mark in the kinds of discursive attention I bring to bear. For the past couple of years I have been in a state of reaction against poststructuralism, owing in part to a growing sense, as a critic, of its hermeneutic poverty, and, as a teacher, of the way in which its introduction to young minds so quickly engenders a dangerously superficial cynicism. Along with many a much older denizen of Departments of English, I also deplore the way in which the practitioners of poststructuralism (I mean the epigones, especially those in South Africa desperately trying to keep up with their metropolitan counterparts) have institutionalized an arcane critical jargon which seems to have little to do with what matters most in the encounter between a reader and a work of literature -- a rebarbative jargon which has worked further to widen the gulf between the

academy and the reading public. Yet I cannot pretend that this study is altogether free of this way of speaking, because the way of thinking from which it claims to be inseparable has enabled some of the main trajectories of my argument. The study as a whole seems to me to evince a thorough-going scepticism which veers between a commonsensical empiricism in the microcosm, in attention to the job on hand, and a macrocosmic acknowledgement of the postmodern moment in which we live.

Such changes in an individual's thinking are of course an expression of biographical contingency, but they also constitute a form of response to wider forces at work in society. To mention just one example: in the late 1980s a sense of desperation about the political predicament of South Africa drove me into a second honeymoon with Marxism. While one has become aware, in 1995, of a distinct flavour of anachronism in the invocation of "class" in the "explanation" (perhaps an equally obsolescent term) of cultural phenomena, I first read Jan, an Afrikander in the mid-1980s, when the materialist analysis of South African literature, rooted in the revisionist historiography of the 1970s, had taken energetic command of research into South African literary history. Since then, of course, the revolutionary role and the moral high ground of Marxism in South Africa have been overtaken by the ameliorative achievements of negotiation. Intellectual horizons in this country have widened and relaxed, making it easier to think about literature in ways less narrowly political (the concept of the "political" itself metamorphosing rapidly). (Even in Britain, where class analysis had entrenched itself in cultural studies, poststructuralism and a generally postmodern way of reading society have deflected and fragmented the ponderous trajectory of materialist enquiry.) But in the late 1980s, the challenge of finding a plausible "explanation" of a literary text in the immediate material circumstances of its production was hard to resist. Thus it was that the first version of the chapter on Jan, an Afrikander included in this study was delivered as a

paper at a conference of historians, was introduced with a revisionist-by-numbers account of the role of the forces of production in turn-of-the-century South Africa -- and yet could not help but tell a tale of failure. I found myself obliged to concede an inability to find any meaningful causal relation between the novel and the forces supposedly significantly constitutive of its historical matrix. What I had discovered, though, was a discourse which seemed implicit in colonial cultural production anywhere in the British empire at about that time. In retrospect it is obvious that my mistake was to invest too uncritically in a fashionable theoretical orthodoxy which combined the "totalizing" thematics of materialist historiography with a nationalistic thrust toward the development of a system of explanation with a maximum of local content. There remains the more general methodological problem, too, which Edward Pechter has recently summed up as follows:

History speaks in our voice. History does not tell us what the text is, because we decide what history is, and then put history into the text, rather than the other way round. (298)

More specifically, perhaps, my mistake was to have attempted seamlessly to conflate the Marxist meaning of class with the meaning more familiar to writers and readers of English novels, a social category as much to do with manners, taste and morals as with money and power.

Yet of course the Marxist notion of class remains a highly productive category in the explanation of social phenomena, and it is just one of a number of hermeneutic tools used in a study which I hope the reader will find genuinely eclectic. The fact that there is no formal Conclusion attests less to idleness than to a general suspicion of last or final words, and to recoil from the self-inflated authority assumed nowadays by so much academic enquiry of the theoretical sort. The conclusions reached by individual chapters are germane to the textual evidence examined; they do not appear to me to be mutually contradictory, and readers may even find themselves reassured or bored by a degree of repetition. I may add that the

final chapter happens to bring together and recapitulate many of the themes pursued earlier in the study.

But if I am to condense into a few sentences the "wisdom" acquired during my sojourn atop this particular mountain of paper, I would say this: that human evolution has been disastrously uneven, that our evolution in some respects has outstripped our evolution in other respects. We are still enduring the process of what the character Friston in Turbott Wolfe calls "the slow birth of the individual . . . emerging with infinite travail from the womb of time" (138). Although, in an era of practically global democracy dominated by a secular, increasingly homogenous consumer culture, we pride ourselves on our individuality, our rational autonomy, simultaneously, at some level of our being, we still carry some of the attitudes proper to an existence organized along pre-modern, tribal lines. I am referring in particular to racialism, seen as an anthropological or ethnic imperative, basically unchanged since the era in which it mandated the extinction by homo sapiens sapiens of Neanderthal Man, and which -- however successfully repressed -- remains for most of us a tenacious ingredient in the primal soup of our being. (I ought to add that, despite my hopeful attribution of anachronism to this phenomenon, I see about me no real evidence to support Friston's confidence in the eventual emergence of "the individual".)

The rather dense and technical argument in Chapter One yields, I hope, to a somewhat more relaxed and accessible discourse, reaching an extreme of leisureliness in the last (and longest) chapter on Plomer's novel Turbott Wolfe. With regard to coverage of primary material, I have selected for detailed commentary the texts which I have found most interesting. One obvious lacuna is a sustained commentary on the writing of Sarah Gertrude Millin, although a kind of virtual presence is secured for her by a score of references in the text. I have declined a closer encounter with the work of Mrs Millin for two main reasons: first, the fact

that her fiction is already well served by J.M. Coetzee's essay ("Blood") and Lavinia Braun's response; secondly, to quote from the conclusion of Coetzee's Inaugural Lecture at UCT:

Discourse is, from a certain point of view, a rather simple thing, fully described by two simple statements: one, that it goes on; and two, that having gone far enough, it stops.
("Truth in Autobiography" 6)

My thesis seemed to have gone far enough, and so it stopped; the same ought now to apply also to this preface.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Professor J.M. Coetzee, supervisor of this thesis when I was registered at U.C.T., for his careful reading of drafts of Chapters 1 and 6; and to Professor M. Van Wyk Smith, who has supervised me since the beginning of 1994, for his generous and astute direction.

I wish also to record my thanks to the Centre for Science Development at the HSRC for a Doctoral grant which helped to make the research possible, and to Rhodes University for further research funding. The HSRC would have it known that the opinions expressed in this study do not necessarily reflect those of that organization.

Parts or versions of the following chapters have already appeared in print:

Chapter One: "Race as Science, Race as Language: A Preliminary Enquiry into Origins." Pretexts 1.1 (1989): 3-17.

Chapter Four: "FitzPatrick's 'The Outspan': Deconstructing the Fiction of Race." English in Africa 10.1 (1983): 15-28; and "The Early South African Novel of Race." Perspectives on South African English Literature. Ed. Michael Chapman, Colin Gardner, and Es'kia Mphahlele. Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1992. 75-93.

Chapter Six: "Race and Class in a Nineteenth-Century South African Novel." Mfecane to Boer War: Versions of South African History. Ed. Elmar Lehman and Erhard Reckwitz. Essen: Blaue Eule, 1992. 121-41.

CHAPTER ONE

RACE, RACIALISM AND "SCIENTIFIC" RACISM

All is race; there is no other truth.

--Benjamin Disraeli, Tancred (1847)

"race" itself does not exist!

--Tzvetan Todorov (1986)

I

For most readers today, a sustained encounter with English South African fiction of the early twentieth century will be a disquieting experience. Much of this writing either treats Africans and other people of colour as part of a scenic backdrop against which a human drama featuring white characters unfolds; or it speaks about them in an explicitly and systematically racist way. It is a way of speaking which has since been all but erased from public discourse in the West;¹ even in South Africa it remains visible only in etiolated form, assimilated to the political discourse of democracy in the rhetoric of "self-determination". But there is little doubt that this erasure has served more to displace racist speech than to obliterate it, to drive it underground, where -- like the grammar of an unspoken mother tongue -- it continues to inform and structure habits of perception and behaviour. We pay tribute to the absent presence of this discursive unconscious in the ritualistic gestures of negation ("non-racist", "non-racial") which are the very basis of the political discourse now dominant in South Africa.

Racist speech is therefore apt to confront us today (and I speak as a white South African) in the full character of the taboo, charged with the ambivalence of the forbidden; with a flavour of the uncanny, too, meaning something other, also "something old and familiar which has undergone

repression" (Freud, "Group Psychology" 95). As J.M. Coetzee has observed, what is particularly shocking to us about the discourse of race in the West before 1945 is its lack of inhibition, "its nakedness, its shamelessness" ("Blood" 137); and, like Conrad's Marlow recalling the "terrible frankness" of the dancing natives on the river bank, we are apt to be appalled as much by the recognition of "remote kinship" (Heart of Darkness 69) with this phenomenon as by its barbarism. Following the logic of the analogy, if we share Marlow's courage, we should be moved not only vigorously to repudiate this discomfiting reminder of our heritage with "the speech that cannot be silenced" (69) (the speech of the ethical community to which we would belong), but also to attempt to understand its atavistic appeal, its invitation to abjection.

That this should suggest a programme for self-analysis as much as a rubric for historical enquiry is not inappropriate. In the first place, we are not dealing with the remote past, "the night of first ages" (Heart of Darkness 69), as Marlow thought he was, but with a past lapping at our ankles, held at bay by the fragile breakwater of an ethical discourse. Secondly, understanding is presumably to be gained through the interpretative activity of constructing a narrative to "make sense of" the evidence; but the interpretation of the past, as Foucault never ceased to remind us, is a method of domesticating it, of rendering familiar its unfamiliarity. In most historical writing, in the words of Hayden White,

[w]hat appears strange at first glance must be shown in the course of the narrative to have had sufficient reasons for its occurrence and therefore [sic] susceptible to understanding by ordinary informed common sense. Since all things historical are presumed to have had their origins in human thought and practice, it is supposed that a vaguely conceived "human nature" must be capable of recognising something of itself in the residues of such thought and action appearing as artifacts in the historical record. ("Foucault Decoded" 256)

("And why not?" asks Marlow: "The mind of man is capable of anything -- because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future" [69].) It is not necessary to share White's Foucauldian scorn for the humanism of the historiographical enterprise thus characterized to acknowledge that

enquiry into the past cannot but produce a "history of the present," a translation/traduction of the past into the terms of understanding which are presently available. At the same time, the defamiliarizing strategies of the Foucauldian genealogy offer a valuable model for preserving the differentness of modes of representing the human in times other than our own.

The aberrational affront to the narrative of modernity and human progress represented by the blatant racism of Western cultural production during the colonial period -- pointing, in retrospect, so directly towards the Holocaust -- has often solicited a desire to explain as well as to understand. The explanations have been many, though mostly grounded in a master narrative, like that of historical materialism, which is credited with the explanatory/predictive power of a paradigm in the physical sciences. But explanation in the human sciences is something we have increasingly come to see as innately reductive and absurdly pretentious, a relic of modernity's faith in the scientific method. In the epistemology of postmodernism, knowledge and truth are seen as the historically contingent, reified effects of discourses, signifying systems, linguistic protocols. Far from delivering new insights into the real nature of the world, explanations are little more than figurative redescrptions -- re-narrativizations, re-codings -- of the world. The "advance of knowledge" is merely a process of symbolic slippage in which "old metaphors are constantly dying off into literalness, and then serving as a platform and a foil for new metaphors" (Rorty 6).

But if the cause/effect modality of explanation is doomed to be frustrated by the impenetrable opacity of language, does not the same fate await the reasons/results modality of understanding too?

Perhaps the most persuasive exposition of such a Nietzschean perspective in the present context is offered by J.M. Coetzee in his recent essay on the writings of the Afrikaner nationalist Geoffrey Cronje. Arguing that the self-interest served by the ideology of apartheid was essentially

non-rational or unconscious, Coetzee attempts to account for how it came about that Cronje's disgust with the idea of "race-mixture" (which, on the level of individual psychopathology, Coetzee has diagnosed as a form of obsessional neurosis) came to "infect" an entire social group. He is forced to conclude that he is unable, without fudging the issue, to get beyond the metaphor (the "meta-metaphor") of "contagion":

It seems to me that there are only two viable positions one can take with regard to the notion that ideas ("ideological" ideas) are not self-aware constructions used as means to ends, but instead float in the air, ready to infect either whole societies . . . or intellectuals One position is that the whole description is a convenient professional metaphor for a process about whose workings we are more or less ignorant. The other position is that it is philosophically naive to believe that metaphors stand for things that are more real than the metaphors themselves, that if we trace the equivalents back far enough we ultimately come to solid meanings. On the contrary, there is ultimately no "ultimately" in language; metaphors slide into (or interpret) other metaphors which slide into yet others, and so on. If we follow the latter course we may be in a better position to read racism, but we are in no position to eradicate it, not only because it has no root (no "ultimate" root) but because a reading position is not a position at all: it is only what I can call a following. ("The Mind of Apartheid" 30)

Coetzee quite correctly identifies the master or "meta-metaphor" of racialism -- "correctly" in the sense that he offers the most satisfying transcoding of the phenomenon (satisfying to a particular "interpretive community", in Stanley Fish's phrase) -- and his caveat deserves to be taken very seriously. In our attempt to understand a rationality radically different from our own we may well be unable to get beyond a bruising encounter with the discursive formulations by which we infer its existence. Like an uncomprehending witness to the mass migration of springbok in the hinterland, we may find ourselves unable to proceed beyond the activity of following its dust and spoor, of tracking the poetics of a madness. While the argument which follows, in this chapter and others, will often find it convenient to suppress the knowledge that it is merely "following" metaphorical traces and metonymical displacements, the reader is advised never to lose sight of the textual contingency of the horizon towards which it marches.

During the period in question, from the 1890s to the 1920s, racialism

appears to have been sanctioned, even promoted, by the scientific consensus of the day; we might say, following Coetzee's formulation, that racialism at that time appeared to be "rooted" in scientific truth. I shall therefore begin with an exercise in tracking which at once deconstructs the claim to scientific authority of late nineteenth-century racial thought and reveals the primordial slipperiness of racism itself. The following argument seeks to undo the scientificity of racist thought -- to show that it was not erroneous or incomplete science, but not "science" at all -- by recovering its radical metaphoricity. If, by adopting the tactic of tracing the science of race back to a hypothetical founding moment, we find that "it has no root (no "ultimate" root)" (Coetzee, "Mind of Apartheid" 30), we should be in a better position to assess some of the other arguments which have been put forward to account for the phenomenon of racism.

II

Some prefatory remarks on terminology are required. The OED (2nd ed., 1989) offers two definitions of the word "racism": "a. The theory that distinctive human characteristics and abilities are determined by race. b. = racialism." (The word apparently derives from the French racisme, a côinage attributed to Robert, 1935; the earliest English citation is 1936, and the context is the rise of European Fascism. The surprisingly late appearance of the term may be a measure of the extent to which it is necessary to be outside or beyond a discourse in order properly to perceive its existence. Not even "racialism", earliest citation 1907, makes it into the NED of 1910.) "Racism" will be used in the sense of definition (a) in the argument which follows, sometimes with the addition of the word "scientific" in order to distinguish it the more clearly from sense (b), "= racialism", which the OED defines as "Belief in the superiority of a particular race leading to prejudice and antagonism towards people of other races, esp. those in close

proximity who may be felt as a threat to one's cultural and racial integrity or economic well-being". Contemporary thought might question the definition's assumption of the validity of "race" as a meaningful category: the rejection of that meaningfulness was a theme running through the watershed numbers of Critical Inquiry on the topic of "'Race', Writing and Difference" (12 and 13; see Gates). In one of these issues, Tzvetan Todorov defined racism as "a type of behaviour which consists in the display of contempt or aggressiveness toward other people on account of physical differences (other than those of sex) between them and oneself" ("Critical Response" 171). By reducing the category of race to physical difference alone, Todorov stresses the irrationality of racism/racialism (as against the functionalist rationality tentatively assigned to it by the OED) and seeks to rub out all its metaphysical accretions, its metonymic associations. The problem is that cultural difference and ethnocentrism disappear as well, and there is no doubt that these have played their part in the formation of attitudes which may still usefully be described as "racist" or "racialist".

However, the question of the absolute validity of definitions is not what concerns us here. The OED indicates that "racialism" and "racism" in sense (b), above, may be used interchangeably, and idiomatic usage in recent years has increasingly favoured the use of "racism". However, because the distinction between the two senses of "racism" is crucial to my argument, I shall hereinafter in this study make consistent use of the term "racialism" in order to denote the OED's sense (b) of "racism".²

As a historical phenomenon, scientific racism was prominent in Western thought from the latter part of the eighteenth to the middle of the twentieth centuries, reaching a peak of influence during the age of European imperialism; geographically speaking, it was entirely a product of European thought and its diaspora. Whether as scientific truth or, more latterly, as "folk wisdom", racism has provided powerful justificatory support for racialism. Todorov locates racialism within an attitudinal "problematics of

alterity" (Conquest of America 185), a typology of relations between self and other. For a discourse of alterity to be properly racialist, (a) it must be predicated upon a hierarchical opposition privileging "us" over "them" (cf. the OED definition of racialism); and (b) the difference which it articulates must be perceived to be natural, intrinsic and inalienable (cf. the OED definition of racism).

Has the production of a discursive practice of hierarchic opposition always been the necessary result of the encounter between two significantly different groups of human beings? In a famous essay on left and right hand symbolism, the anthropologist Robert Hertz proposed the original existence in primitive communities of a social order governed solely by a horizontal or egalitarian logic of difference:

Given the religious character with which a primitive community feels itself invested, the existence of an opposed and complementary segment of the same tribe, which can freely carry out functions which are forbidden to members of the former group, is a necessary condition of social life. The evolution of society replaces the reversible dualism with a rigid hierarchical structure: instead of separate and equivalent clans there appear classes or castes, of which one, at the summit, is essentially sacred, noble, and devoted to superior works, while another, at the bottom, is profane or unclean and engaged in base tasks. (8)

The hardening of such a social division would have been greatly facilitated by metonymic association with observable physical and cultural-cum-hereditary differences among the classes or castes (Ernest Gellner notes precisely this tendency in the highly stratified, pre-modern, agrarian polity [10]). According to Michael Banton, the evidence of prehistoric cave paintings and decorations in ancient Egyptian tombs suggests that racial differences have been recognized from the earliest periods of human history (12). But the recognition of physical difference in itself, even if coupled with ethnocentric attitudes and the discriminatory treatment of "strangers" -- which appear, as social phenomena, to be of equal antiquity -- does not begin to add up to the fully biologized discourse of race with which we are concerned.

The first recorded attempt to develop a scientific taxonomy of living

organisms was made by Aristotle, who classified "man" as an animal distinguished by such features as his superior intellect and two-leggedness. Aristotle is also alleged to have produced the first racist theory, at least in embryo, when he wrote: "It is thus clear that, just as some are by nature free, so others are by nature slaves, and for these latter the condition of slavery is both beneficial and just" (Politics 1, Ch.5). Although this argument was later to lend itself to use as a rationalization of the political status quo, as a justification for the power which some exercised over the lives of others, just as Social Darwinism came to be used in the heyday of European imperialism, it can hardly be described as a biological theory. Aristotle maintained that there exist differences among individuals which are natural because given, and which seem destined to find social, political and economic expression; in that those whom nature had equipped only to be slaves included Greeks as well as barbarians, the differences between them and their natural masters could hardly be described as racial. And yet the binary logic of dual symbolic classification, the logic of the self/other opposition which is typical of racialism, is undoubtedly present in the classification which Aristotle proposes.³

Although it is widely held that the only human distinction to which mediaeval European Christendom attached importance was that between heathen and Christian, some historians claim to have found evidence of racial prejudice in the middle ages (e.g. Deighton). What is not disputed is that, by the time Western Europeans began to encounter the indigenous peoples of Africa, Asia and the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they were possessed of certain ethnocentric attitudes and beliefs which encouraged them to divide humanity up hierarchically into categories of "superior" and "inferior" which were broader and more radical than the class distinctions of feudal and early capitalist society. The two crucial self/other oppositions, which in their application to non-Europeans tended to be conflated, were those of Christian and heathen, and "civil" and "savage".

The former was intensified by a religious militancy surviving from the long struggle between Christian and Islamic civilizations for dominance in the Mediterranean region. Spanish conquistadores spearheaded the imperialism of a country that was in the forefront of Christian resistance to Islamic power, and it was in this context that Pope Nicholas V, in 1455, authorized the enslavement and seizure of lands and property of "all saracens and pagans whatsoever, and all other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed" (quoted in Fredrickson 8). At a stroke of the pontiff's pen, an awkward dilemma was resolved and a religious difference became also a social, political and economic difference. Although this decree was qualified by the famous bull of Pope Paul III in 1537, which forbade the dispossession and enslavement of indigenous Americans, the Portuguese trade in slaves, principally in Africa, had by then begun in earnest. In 1550, in his great debate with Las Casas in Valladolid, the Spanish jurist de Sepulveda invoked Aristotle's idea of natural slaves in deploying a rhetoric of difference which was recognizably racist. He declared that Indians were as inferior to Spaniards "as children are to adults, as women are to men". Their conquest was justified because of "the rudeness of their natures, which obliged them to serve persons having a more refined nature, such as Spaniards" (cited in Montagu 185).

The other major dichotomy in the conceptualizing of humanity current in European thought at the time was a compound of Classical and Hebraic-Christian tradition. The ancient Greek distinction between civilized men and "barbarians" blended in Renaissance times with the mediaeval mythology of "wildness" -- which ostensibly had more to do with morality and salvation than with cultural refinement -- to create a distinction of both social and eschatological import. The mythical "Wild Man" was an allegory of mankind's repressed "lower nature", beckoning to damnation: Hayden White has used the language of psychoanalysis to suggest that, as a violator of social taboo, the Wild Man embodied a displacement of libidinal interest, "an idyll of unrestricted consumption, oral and genital" ("Noble Savage" 188). The

discovery of strange peoples in distant lands enabled the otherness of the Wild Man (who was believed to live in unredeemable savagery just beyond the periphery of civilized settlement) to be fully spatialized. In the bizarre reports of the early travellers, the Wild Man (who was sometimes indistinguishable from the "Black Man" and hence confused with the devil himself) "was being distanced, put off in places sufficiently obscure to allow him to appear as whatever thinkers wanted to make out of him, while still locating him in some place beyond the confines of civilization" (White, "Forms of Wildness" 174).

Filtered through this ethically and eschatologically charged notion of "savagery", the seemingly utter difference of people like the "Hottentots" or Brazilian Indians evoked in the European mind a response which Hannah Arendt has characterized as one of sheer moral "fright". But because it was the "fright of something like oneself that under no circumstances ought to be like oneself" (Arendt 192),⁴ it was disturbingly interrogative of the nature of the European's own humanity, of his or her "sense of identity". This potentially dangerous ambivalence could -- the argument goes -- only be resolved through the psychic distancing afforded by a discourse of radical alterity. Whether the savages were regarded as a superior breed of animal or as a race of degenerates (descendants of a lost tribe of Israel, or people rendered destitute of reason or moral sense by a hostile environment), the result was the establishment of

a distinction, in the nature of an opposition, between a normal humanity . . . and an abnormal one This opposition is sufficient to transform the native from the merely exotic being depicted in the earliest characterizations into an "object" -- an ontological "other" or "opposite" to "normal" men -- and consequently into a "thing" to be done with as need, conscience, or desire required. (White, "Noble Savage" 188)

To sum up the argument thus far: a hierarchical discourse of alterity can be traced at least as far back as Aristotle, whose notion of "natural slaves" was invoked by the Spanish to justify their treatment of Central American Indians in the sixteenth century. But while it would seem probable that racialism as we know it is a specifically modern (i.e. post-medieval)

phenomenon, scholars have been unable to fix with certainty the point at which this discourse of "natural" difference, aligning itself with older (primordial?) attitudes of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, may be said to have become identifiably racial in character. It seems likely that racialism came to the fore in situations of conquest or conflict between people of different colours as well as cultures, because from the sixteenth century onwards skin colour (rather than culture) progressively entrenched itself as the privileged signifier of human difference. V. G. Kiernan sees this as an aspect of the trend towards secular thinking in Renaissance Europe, and notes that, in the aftermath of Spanish New World settlement, "[i]t was an important element in Europe's collective consciousness that its peoples all looked much alike" (15). But what is to the point here is the fact that the habit of thought which renders the self/other relation as a natural hierarchy existed long before "man" came under the spotlight of recognizably modern scientific enquiry in the eighteenth century. Moreover, it had, in the context of the sixteenth-century conquest of the New World, already assumed specifically racial overtones and, as justificatory myth, performed a similar function to the one for which it was to seem tailor-made in the grand era of European colonialism almost 400 years later. By the time the idea of race was formally biologized in scientific discourse, in other words, the conceptual dualism which provided the scientific theory with its social meaning had long since been fixed in the European popular mind. It will therefore be argued that, far from being a product of racist thought, racialism in fact provided the ground of possibility for its emergence.

III

It was in the Systema Natura (1735) of the great Swedish naturalist Linnaeus that "man" -- as a member of the order Anthropomorpha -- regained the place

among the animals he had occupied in Aristotle's classification, and could therefore become, like any other species of living organism, the object of scientific study. In the tenth edition of his ambitious taxonomy (1758), Linnaeus distinguished four varieties of the human species: "Americanus -- reddish, choleric, erect; Europaeus -- white, ruddy, muscular; Asiaticus -- yellow, melancholic, inflexible; and Afer -- black, phlegmatic, indulgent" (Banton 17). In the light of the fact that much subsequent debate about race has focused on the legitimacy of determinatively linking "outer" human morphology to "inner" human character, Linnaeus's apparently insouciant identification of physical traits with mental traits is most revealing. In the first place it is a reminder that what was initially considered so different about "primitive" peoples was not so much their physical appearance as their social and cultural habits; it was these that earned for them the characteristic epithets "uncouth", "savage", etc. George M. Fredrickson notes that in the sixteenth century these same terms were applied to the Celtic Irish living beyond the Pale, who were both white and Christian (15). The darker pigmentation of non-Europeans in the Americas and Asia was not, to begin with, accorded great significance as a differential factor, and was often accounted for as the result of prolonged exposure to intemperate sunlight. It should be noted, however, that the much deeper skin tones of Negroid Africans, mainly because of the perceptual filter of traditional Western symbolism of white and black -- whether cultural (e.g. clean/dirty) or ethico-religious (good/evil) -- offered a more profound challenge to Western cognition. The myth of the "sons of Ham", with all it entailed, was from the beginning localized in Africa (see Bastide).

Linnaeus's classification also reminds us that in the mid-eighteenth century the classical typology of the four humours remained the dominant "scientific" explanation for the existence of temperamental differences among individual human beings (blood-letting, originally intended to correct the imbalance of bodily humours, was still prominent in medical practice well into the nineteenth century). The fact that Linnaeus's choice of signs

for skin colour -- "red", "yellow", "black" -- is motivated as much by the distinctions of the old theory of humours as by scientific observation is revealingly indicative of their metaphorical character.

Certainly, Linnaeus's successors like G.L.L. de Buffon and J.F. Blumenbach, the "father" of physical anthropology, were a great deal more cautious about the correlation of external and internal human characteristics. In line with the philosophical leanings of the Age of Enlightenment, Blumenbach sought in On the Natural Variety of Mankind (1775) to stress the unity of "man", and to correct -- by the application to his subject of scientific reasoning -- the common belief in the marked inferiority of certain races. Blumenbach squared his egalitarian principles with his scientist's eye for difference -- the basis of taxonomy -- by construing human diversity as a question of degree only, of fine gradation along the Great Chain of Being, and as resulting from modification or "degeneration" caused by habit or external factors like climate. Most importantly, Blumenbach attempted fully to biologize race by restricting the criteria for racial differentiation to purely physical or morphological features. The ensuing argument will seek to show that such an attempt was impossible of success because Blumenbach's project was discursively infected by power relations, by a history of race thinking which had inscribed the meaning of race in another domain of discourse altogether. In sum, it will be maintained that the taxonomist's classification of human race was produced not by the logic of scientific discovery but by the requirements of "knowledge" in obedience to other dictates, perhaps those of certain structures of political power already in place.

Of initial concern is the way in which the "truth" of race offered by the early anthropologists originated in a particular scientific language, a language which was seemingly inseparable from the rationality of the speaking subject and hence "natural", transparent, objective, quite oblivious of the figurality of its formulations. It is not all that difficult for us today to identify the metaphoric element in popular racial

mythology, where "race" can be made to bear the weight of any number of social, cultural and economic differences. It is perhaps not quite so obvious that the meaning of race is "always already" figural, internally constituted by a system of differences whose relation to the world of phenomena is purely conventional.

It will be instructive at this point to attempt conceptually to recreate the discursive preconditions for the emergence of racial science towards the end of the eighteenth century. Michel Foucault has observed that

[t]he possibility for the individual of being both subject and object of his own knowledge implies an inversion in the structure of finitude. For classical thought, finitude had no other content than the negation of the infinite, while the thought that was formed at the end of the eighteenth century gave it the powers of the positive: the anthropological structure that then appeared played both the critical role of limit and the founding role of origin. (Foucault 197)

In aiming to be universally comprehensive, the classification of living things pioneered by Linnaeus both assumed and asserted the finitude of creation. Viewed as a continuum of determinate length divided up into sections, life was defined as the finite sum of its various phenomenal manifestations capable of being observed by "man"; it thus acquired the positivity of limit. More importantly, the discrete categories assorting under the various divisions and subdivisions of "family", "species", etc., were seen as positivities because they reflected real fixed differences inherent in nature (we ignore, for the moment, the fact that taxonomical practice customarily proceeds through the application of binary logic and hence the [temporary] creation of negativities).

In the case of the human species, a second aspect of the concept of finitude has signal importance in this hypothesis of scientific origins. As Foucault has observed in The Birth of the Clinic, modern medical pathology -- which rose in the same epoch as scientific racism -- derives its positivity from its predication on a particular idea of human finitude: once conceived in relation to death rather than nature, "disease becomes openly legible, open without remainder to the sovereign dissection of language and the gaze" (196). And like modern medicine, racial science became possible

through a discursive shift under the aegis of the imperative that "One must, as far as possible, make science ocular" (M.-A. Petit [1797], cited in Foucault 88). As the object of science, the individual was reduced to the finitude of the observable, the space defined by the "ocular" as neither more nor less than that of his or her own body.

Biological "man" -- not anatomical "man", for the dissecting tool of the gaze is the eye, not the scalpel -- a creature bereft of the clothing, the cultural repertoire, the entire social fabric of filiative and affiliative relations hitherto serving to distinguish him from his fellows, was now delivered up to the discriminating discourse of the scientist, whose strategies of observation and classification he simultaneously constituted. There could be no hidden essence, for all that there was, was visible; yet to the extent that the soma is "a truth wholly given to the gaze", there remained an essence to be extracted, a signified "entirely exhausted in the intelligible syntax of the signifier" (Foucault 91) to be read. The nature of this ambiguity is analogous to that which Foucault has identified as characteristic of the relation between the symptom and the disease which it signifies; our argument is therefore a free adaptation of Foucault's account in The Birth of the Clinic (92-93).

Of the various signifiers of race which both racialism and scientific racism invest with meaning, epidermal pigmentation is perhaps the most obvious and decisive, and will here serve to typify racial differentiae in general. In its signifying function, skin colour refers both to the relation among other somatic features capable of being read as racially signifying -- to what constitutes their totality and the form of their necessary coexistence -- and to the absolute difference that allegedly distinguishes one race from another; it signifies, therefore, both the totality of what it is and the exclusion of what it is not. But how is a signifier to signify unless there is already a signifying system in place, unless it is already meaning-bearing, a sign? When regarded as a sign, as signified by itself or by the race which differentially defines it, skin colour "can receive its

meaning only from an earlier act that does not belong to its sphere: from an act that totalizes and isolates it, that is, from an act that has transformed it into a sign in advance" (92). In short, there is a difference between skin colour as a racial sign and skin colour in itself, in that the sign says what skin colour simply is; what makes the sign a sign belongs not to some quality inherent in the signifier itself but to a language which originates elsewhere and is prior to the signifying capacity of the sign.

The nature of the "language which originates elsewhere" and which endows human morphology with the capacity to signify racially is presumably that ethnocentric ur-discourse of "us" and "them", normality and abnormality, as proposed by Hayden White, above. This reinforces the analogy with medical pathology: Sander L. Gilman notes that "[m]edical tradition has a long history of perceiving [black] skin colour as the result of some pathology", and instances the theory -- which reappears with some frequency in the early nineteenth century -- that "the skin colour and attendant physiognomy of the black are the result of congenital leprosy" (231). What makes an attribute like skin colour racially legible is the prior availability of a dualistic discourse in terms of which what is white and European is the privileged point of reference against which the deviance/corruption/degeneracy of what is black and non-European can be measured (and found to be freakish/unhealthy/bestial). What also bears emphasis is that the integrity of the racial sign "European" is putative rather than real, acquiring its identity only in differential opposition to its other(s). The promise of positivity, therefore, held out by the idea of finitude implicit in biological classification, the possibility of transcending the binary logic of similarity and difference, turns out to be illusory. The positivity of the racial sign is already constitutively inhabited by difference and negativity: it becomes what it is by virtue of what it is not.

To identify this binary logic is not, of course, to begin to understand racialism in its various historical manifestations: there must

clearly be an "anterior discursivity" propelling such a logic toward social signification, something to do with political power or social or economic status; and behind that, an economy of desire, which may or may not prove to be susceptible to rational analysis.

It may be helpful to begin to historicize this differential logic by construing it, quasi-symbolically, in terms of the conflict between two, already internally paradoxical, axes of difference. Biological classification proposes a horizontal axis of difference predicative of a series of positivities. Hayden White usefully characterizes the relationship among the categories distinguished by this form of "taxonomical" differentiation as conceived in the "mode of contiguity" ("Noble Savage" 190). But the agency of this horizontal axis is in the eighteenth century countervailed ab origine by the opposite agency of a vertical axis of hierarchic differentiation, projected by the tenacious master-trope of the Great Chain of Being, which assigns to each living thing a position of relative superiority or inferiority on a graduated scale. The key word here is "relative", because this vertical ladder of being interrelates its discriminations in what White terms a "mode of continuity", presupposing

a common stuff or essence shared by the various creatures dispersed across its ranks or some common source from which all of the creatures so dispersed derive, a common goal to which they all tend, or a single cause of which they are all effects. ("Noble Savage" 189)

The inherently ambiguous metaphysics of the chain-of-being idea therefore destabilizes any attempt to establish either an opposition between civilized men and "savages", or any rigidly definitive distinctions between human "races". No one creature or class of beings can enjoy a discrete positivity, being always already contaminated by the negativity of linkage in a common chain. White goes on to argue that because the relational modality of continuity is more productive of toleration and mediation by degree than that of contiguity, the former points in the direction of missionary activity and conversion, and the latter towards war and extermination. But if the latter modality is destructive of the postulate of equality, the

former -- which Todorov identifies as the praxeological "axis of identity or assimilation" (Conquest of America 185-201) -- leads logically to the denial of difference altogether; and thus both contain the ingredients for social antagonism and conflict.

The subsequent career of scientific racism as an institutionalized form of knowledge has been fully treated elsewhere (see, i.a., Harris, Stocking, Baker, Biddiss), and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to rehearse the proliferation of theorizing which accompanied its rise, or to detail the steady gains in legitimacy and popularity which culminated in its role as ideological adjutant of imperialism. It may nevertheless be useful merely to adumbrate the general trend of this development.

To early biologists and anthropologists, the structures of taxonomy suggested an analogy between human race and the sub-species in the animal kingdom, which was then pressed towards conceptual identity, further justifying the extension of the natural scientific method to the study of human beings. The notion of "uniformity" justified a postulated homology of nature and culture:

The nineteenth century took very seriously the view of some eighteenth-century thinkers (e.g. Kames, Smellie) that the laws of human society could be derived from human nature which could itself be studied by natural science. Thus it was thought that nature and culture, being unified by the same basic principles, could be studied by one scientific method. The principle of uniformity, which Newton had established in physics as the ideal of a science, could be extended to bring living nature, and man and society as part of living nature, under the auspices of science. (Weber 267-68)

The observable physical differences among men therefore provided the somatic basis to which cultural and psychological traits could be linked. Until discoveries in archaeology and the advent of the Darwinian evolutionary synthesis complicated matters somewhat, the scientific investigation of "man" leant heavily on the methods of comparative anatomy. For instance, it was for a time widely believed that human ability and temperament could be discovered by measuring areas of the skull. Joseph Gall's phrenology, which became something of a cult in Britain in the 1820s and 1830s, maintained that the precise measurement of cranial capacity could indicate the relative

strengths and weaknesses of some 37 human mental faculties. Once measurement of this sort was linked to race -- for example, via Paul Broca's "cephalic index", which became the favourite diagnostic of racial phylogeny (until the publication in 1912 of Franz Boas's discovery that head form could be altered by environmental factors within a single generation) -- the way was clear to a whole rhetoric of properly racialistic opinion. Thus the famous French biologist Georges Cuvier could observe that the Negro race was distinguished by a "compressed cranium" which doomed it to stagnation, and concluded that it was "the most degraded human race, whose form approaches that of the beast and whose intelligence is nowhere great enough to arrive at regular government" (quoted in Stepan 98).

By the mid-nineteenth century, the prominent Edinburgh anatomist Robert Knox could argue that "race is everything: literature, science -- in a word, civilization depends upon it" (quoted in Harris 99).⁵ Knox was impatient with the work on race by eighteenth-century natural historians because it seemed content merely to observe and classify. The taxonomy of human diversity proposed by J. F. Blumenbach, for example, "led to no results: explained nothing: investigated no causes. It was the external-character naturalist trying 'his method' on man" (quoted in Banton 29). Knox's theory of "transcendental anatomy" therefore attempted to make racial difference meaningful by introducing the element of causality: it was a full-blown theory of cultural determinism which sought to explain the course of human history in terms of the inherited racial characteristics of its protagonists. With the publication in 1853 of Gobineau's Essai sur l'Inegalite des Races Humaines, the idea of race as historical destiny gained greater currency. Gobineau, notorious first champion of the concept of the Aryan "master race", claimed to have established history as a natural science by discovering the natural law explaining the fall of civilizations. He maintained that civilizations waned through the degeneration of race, which was caused by the adulteration of blood through inter-racial procreation. From this point on, blood and an obsession with blood purity

became the signature of all racist thinking.

Both to conclude this brief survey of the ascent of scientific racism up to the mid-nineteenth century, and to underline the discursive constructedness of the racial sign, I shall examine an exemplary parole from the period when the langue of race was supremely confident of its knowledgeable power.

In 1866, J. Langdon H. Down, a medical doctor after whom the chromosomal disorder "Down's Syndrome" is named,⁶ published a paper entitled "Observations on an Ethnic Classification of Idiots," in which he proposed

making a classification of the feeble-minded, by arranging them around various ethnic standards -- in other words, framing a natural system to supplement the information to be derived by an inquiry into the history of the case.

I have been able to find among the large number of idiots and imbeciles which comes under my observation, both at Earlswood and the out-patient department of the Hospital, that a considerable proportion can be fairly referred to one of the great divisions of the human family other than the class from which they have sprung [he proceeds to describe imbecilic "analogues" of Ethiopian, Malay and American Indian "types"]

The great Mongolian family has numerous representatives, and it is to this division, I wish, in this paper, to call special attention. A very large number of congenital idiots are typical Mongols. So marked is this, that when placed side by side, it is difficult to believe that the specimens compared are not children of the same parents. The number of idiots who arrange themselves around the Mongolian type is so great, and they present such a close resemblance to one another in mental power, that I shall describe an idiot member of this racial division, selected from the large number that have fallen under my observation.

The hair is not black, as in the real Mongol, but of a brownish colour, straight and scanty. The face is flat and broad, and destitute of prominence. The cheeks are roundish, and extended laterally. The eyes are obliquely placed, and the internal canthi more than normally distant from one another. The palpebral fissure is very narrow. The forehead is wrinkled transversely from the constant assistance which the levatores palpebrarum derive from the occipito-frontalis muscle in the opening of the eyes. The lips are large and thick with transverse fissures. The tongue is long, thick, and is much roughened. The nose is small. The skin has a slight dirty yellowish tinge and is deficient in elasticity, giving the appearance of being too large for the body.

The boy's aspect is such that it is difficult to realize that he is the child of Europeans, but so frequently are these characters presented, that there can be no doubt that these ethnic features are the result of degeneration. (260-61)

The identity of racial discourse as a parasitical semiotics masquerading as "scientific knowledge" is here immediately apparent. The system of

classification which Down envisages as "natural" is an artificial construct predicated on a prior system of differences. The constellation of facial features which he "reads" in the pure act of observation emerges as a sign only through the language-grid of race, which can then be seen to constitute the act of observation itself. Race, as signified, is itself already the signifier of mental capacity; what conduces the physician to read the physiognomy of the "Mongol" child in racial terms is an anterior system of differences in terms of which mental inferiority is the prerogative of the non-European races. The conscientiously receptive precision of Down's act of seeing -- in reality an act of discursive violence -- belongs as fully to the discourse of race as it does to that of medical symptomology.

What brings together the discourses of medical pathology and racism in Down's theorizing -- and provides its very condition of possibility: how else could Caucasian parents be said to produce Mongolian offspring? -- is the idea of degeneration, a concept destined to play a prominent role in the consciousness of social decay which so obsessed the European mind in the closing years of the century. "Degeneration" can be traced to the "monogenist" theory of human origin, which sought to reconcile biological science with Biblical teaching and Enlightenment notions of human equality in maintaining that the races of men were descended from primordial common stock, upon which environmental influences had acted to create the different racial varieties. In the course of the nineteenth century, the idea hardened into a rigid typology in terms of which some races were seen as irreversibly and intrinsically "degenerate." But the idea of degeneration as a process persisted in the sense of a decay within the limits set by racial type: an unfavourable environment or hereditary indicator such as "mixed blood" could produce an atavistic reversion, a degeneration to more primitive type. If one aspect of the fear of degeneration was the threat which it posed, as transgression, to the stable boundaries of racial type as postulated in the discourse of racial biology, another aspect derived from the discourse of medical pathology, particularly psychiatry. In 1857 Benedict-Augustin Morel

had proposed two "laws" of degeneration theory, the law of heredity which -- by adopting the Lamarckian idea of the inheritance of acquired characteristics -- indicated that any sort of human weakness, defect or disease, psychological as well as physiological, could be passed on from parent to child; and the law of progressivity, which meant that the degenerative process accelerated through the generations in a cumulatively destructive way (Carlson 122).

Through processes of analogy which soon became literalized, the discourses of racial and medical science (particularly in the politico-institutional guise of "public health") were progressively articulated with those of psychiatry, criminology, economics, urban planning, sexuality and moral reform to produce the grand trope of "degeneration" proper:

By the late nineteenth century, the urban poor, prostitutes, criminals, and the insane were being construed as "degenerate" types whose deformed skulls, protruding jaws, and low brain weights marked them as "races apart", interacting with and creating degenerate spaces near at home. (Stepan 98)

It is not difficult to see how the concept could be used to justify and extend social and political control over peoples' lives, to valorize social norms obedient to the prevailing structures of power. The concept of degeneracy served to condense a whole range of differences -- social, cultural, economic -- into a single oppositional structure analogous to that of disease and health. It thus provided the social order with a rationale, invested with the authority of biological science, for isolating and excluding elements which appeared to threaten or subvert its "identity", its ideologies of material progress, "civilization", racial superiority and imperial destiny. The reductive metaphors of degeneration theory provided the societal Other with a putatively uniform identity, thereby enhancing its otherness and rendering it more tractable. The danger to society and "civilization" presented by the degenerate could be averted by systematic containment, exclusion, segregation; it is this logic which underlies ever growing public -- discursive, political, juridical -- attention to

"deviancy", resulting in such various manifestations as the systematic institutionalization of the hospital, the prison, the asylum, the workhouse for paupers, and, through its availability as a convenient rationalization, imperialist domination of "lesser races".

Because the feeble-mindedness of "Mongols" is congenital, "never result[ing] from accidents after uterine life" (261), Down can assign no role to environmental influence in the aetiology of the condition. The "Mongol" must therefore have inherited his degenerate condition, exacerbated by the law of "progressivity," from a degenerate parent. But these parents, on Down's own admission, are -- racially speaking -- "Europeans". It would seem, then, that "race" is not "altogether exhausted in the intelligible syntax" of the signifiers of appearance; there must exist an anterior essence capable of passage from parent to child through the fluids of generation, an essence to which nineteenth-century racism attaches the signifier "blood". Down in fact identifies "the hereditary origin of the degeneracy" as tuberculosis, which he has recorded in the vast preponderance of the parents of "Mongols" (261-62). But blood as blood, although often guilty of disease, is innocent of racial signification. Race is thus revealed as something which can be invisible to the scientific gaze, something which can evade representation in the very terms in which it is defined. Blood is what ostensibly binds together signifier and signified in the sign of race, embodying the necessity and fixity of the relation. But blood also guarantees the survival of the signified in the absence of the racial signifier, and thereby paradoxically releases the order of the signifier from the order of the signified. "Blood" therefore opens the racial sign to the invasion of figurality, to a process of semiotic deferral which is ultimately metaphorical. That is to say, in the language of race, a particular skin colour (hair texture, etc.) appears to stand in a relation of identity/metonymy to a constellation of traits, physical, behavioural, intellectual, moral, etc. But if, according to the mysterious logic of "blood", these traits may be present in the absence of their signifier(s),

the necessity of the relation falls away, revealing only the contingency traditionally associated with metaphor. It is interesting to note that this is more-or-less the conclusion that Dawin comes to in a quite different way. His diagnosis prompts a philosophical reflection reminiscent of the eighteenth-century thinker Blumenbach, the conclusion of which actually anticipates the evolutionary-genetic view of human race prevalent today:

The tendency in the present day is to reject the opinion that the various races are merely varieties of the human family having a common origin, and to insist that climatic, or other influences, are insufficient to account for the different types of man. Here, however, we have examples of retrogression, or at all events, of departure from one type and the assumption of the characteristics of another. If these great racial divisions are fixed and definite, how comes it that disease is able to break down the barrier, and to simulate so closely the features of the members of another division. I cannot but think that the observations which I have recorded, are indications that the differences in the races are not specific but variable. (262)

Disease and race continued to be identified well into the twentieth century: most notoriously, Nazi propaganda argued that a person of "mixed blood" was like a syphilitic and consistently analogized European Jewry both to syphilis and to a cancer requiring excision (Sontag 84). In his first political tract, an anti-Semitic diatribe written in September 1919, Hitler accused the Jews of producing "a racial tuberculosis among nations" (quoted in Sontag 85). Closer to home, the imagery of syphilis and that of the "bad blood" of racial taint were inextricably entangled in the thinking of the South African novelist Sarah Gertrude Millin.

To sum up: I have characterized "race" as a language because it functions as a system of oppositional differences capable of generating "meaningful" predications about human beings. This meaning inheres in the peculiar motivation of the racial sign: a signifier consisting of a set of what a biologist would call morphological features, linked to a signified compounded of a set of behavioural traits indicating intellectual, moral and emotional qualities. However stable it once appeared to be, the racial sign is intrinsically precarious because "race" purports to be a scientific language (rather than the natural language that it is): the bond between signifier and signified, it is claimed, is not arbitrary and conventional,

but "reasonable" and inductively derived. It is for this reason that the meaning of a statement in racial discourse is both self-reflexively circular and additionally deferred, perpetually displaced along the defiles not only of the signifier but also of all its real-world referents, that is, every human being, living, dead, or yet to be born. A useful way of thus characterizing the racial sign is to see it as an instance of that ambiguous, quintessentially ideological mode of differential signification to which we give the name of "stereotype"; a sign at once fixed, closed, absolute -- because it purports to treat of essence -- and subversively inchoate, open-ended, at the mercy of the very experience which simultaneously constitutes it as absolute. Homi K. Bhabha identifies the stereotype as the "major discursive strategy" of colonial discourse,

a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place", already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. (18)

What remains is to account for why racial theory of this sort -- which was hotly debated at first, and consistently dismissed by many as the mumbo-jumbo that it was -- should have arisen at all and, perhaps more importantly, why it should have been steadily assimilated into popular ideology, to the extent that by the end of the nineteenth century it had attained the status of self-evident truth. As far as the latter is concerned, the role of the prestige of science should not be underestimated. As late as 1949, Charles Bullock, author of the ethnographic studies Mashona Laws and Customs (1912) and The Mashona (1927), published a novel of inter-racial love set in Rhodesia, Rina: A Story of Africa. The book ends with an epilogue addressed to the reader in which the author pleads passionately for "objective scientific investigation" into the question of "whether the inferiority of one race, which is generally alleged to obtain today, is due to biological inheritance or to environmental influences" (239-40); what is most urgently needed, he argues, is "experimental enquiry into the genetic factor" (240), so that the "Sword of Science" can "pierce the Veils of

Error" (246). What makes these words from so obscure a source worthy of notice here is not so much their revelation of how the stranglehold of nineteenth-century racism was beginning to slip as the touchingly unshakeable faith they exhibit in the continuing ability of science to provide absolute and final answers to questions of human identity and difference.⁷

I have suggested that although racism derived its authority from science -- from the speculative anthropology of anatomists like Knox, the equally speculative historiography of scholars like the Comte de Gobineau and, later, from that pervasive malappropriation of evolutionary theory known as Social Darwinism -- the meaning to which it gave discursive form was that of racialism, a particular mode of response to human alterity. The next step is to attempt to understand racialism, to follow the slippery metaphor of race outwards, into history and society, and inwards, into the human heart.

IV

I have argued so far that the differences between human beings signified by "race" in the perspective of scientific racism are not objectively "réal", inherent in nature, but constituted by the signifying system which endows the racial sign with its signifying capacity. This signifying system appears to be informed by the mode of response to human difference known as racialism.

In modern times, divisions of race have often coincided with those of nationality, and the attitudes towards other people espoused by the ardent nationalist are sometimes hard to distinguish from those of the racialist. Is it possible that racialism is no more than a particular, perhaps exaggerated, kind of nationalism?

Clearly, both phenomena appeal to an idea of ethnic community or

ethnie, that is, to the felt identity of a human group whose members share common historical memories, cultural values and practices, association with a particular territory, and -- most importantly -- common myths of origin and descent (Smith 709). Anthony D. Smith distinguishes two broad trends in the theorizing of the role of ethnie in the constitution of nationalism, "primordialism" and "instrumentalism". The "strong" version of primordialism holds that ethnic ties are universal, natural and given in all human association; the "weak" version, that "ethnic ties and sentiments are deep-seated and non-rational so far as the participants are concerned" (Smith 707). Instrumentalists, on the other hand, view ethnicity as a resource which is mobilized or exploited by particular social groups in the pursuit of other ends; for both "rational choice" and Marxist theorists, "cultural and symbolic aspects of ethnicity are accessory to fundamental struggles for scarce resources and political power" (707). It should be pointed out, however, that the "weak" primordialist view of ethnie is not, as Smith implies, incompatible with the instrumentalist account, since the two may be articulated through the notion of rationalization or ideology: the difference between them is analogous to the distinction between understanding and explanation. In this section I shall sketch a historical narrative which provides a broadly instrumentalist account of the divergent but interrelated origins of nationalism and racialism in the constitutive moment of modernity. In the light of my opening remarks concerning the contingency of historical interpretation and explanation, such a narrative ought to concede that its claim to validity hinges mainly on the internal consistency of the discourse it deploys. It will find further support in subsequent discussion of specific South African fictional texts, notably Anna Howarth's Jan, An Afrikander (1897).

Most contemporary scholars regard both nationalism and the nation itself as wholly modern phenomena, that is, as products of a process which embraces the rise of "rational" civil states (see Gellner 19-23), the growth of capitalism, the secularization of culture and education, the spread of

the printed word and the introduction of machine technology generally. According to Ernest Gellner's influential account of the origins of the nation, pre-modern "agro-literate polities" were too stratified to permit of the cross-class cultural homogeneity both characteristic and constitutive of the modern nation: in such polities, "both for the ruling stratum as a whole, and for the various sub-strata within it, there is great stress on cultural differentiation rather than on homogeneity" (Gellner 10). The nation comes into being when forces of development bring about the coincidence of state and culture, that is, when the requirements of economic growth and industrial mobility promote the unlimited extension of "clerisy" or literacy, enabling the emergence of a universal high culture.

While accepting this account in broad outline, a "weak" primordialist like Smith would want to preserve a role for the concept of ethnie in this process, so as to see

the first modern nations as products of a complex interplay between the new kind of [rational] state and older "ethnic cores" which gave the population, mainly its upper strata, a sense of community based on myths of shared ancestry and common historical memories, as well as on components of a common culture like language, customs and religion. The new forces of capitalism and secular rationality galvanized this interplay and directed it towards a more politically conscious legal-territorial and civic community or "nation". (719)

But even Smith concedes that the mythomoteur or constitutive political myth of the nation stems largely from the ethnie of the "upper strata" or ruling classes. So important were the "horizontal lines of cultural cleavage" for the stratification on which the power relations in the pre-modern state depended, that its system

may invent and reinforce them when they are absent. Genetic and cultural difference are attributed to what were in fact merely strata differentiated by function, so as to fortify the differentiation, and endow it with authority and permanence. (Gellner 10)⁸

The notion of "genetic and cultural difference" clearly evokes the idea of race, and provides a preliminary indication that racialism may, in a sense to be elaborated, represent the survival of an element of stratified, pre-modern social organization ostensibly at odds with the democratic thrust of

the modern nation and its sustaining ideology. Benedict Anderson observes that racialism -- for example, anti-semitism -- notoriously expresses itself in domestic domination and repression as well as across national boundaries and suggests that "the dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of class, rather than those of nation: above all in claims to divinity among rulers and to 'blue' or 'white' blood and 'breeding' among aristocracies" (136). And Hannah Arendt has argued persuasively that, from the very beginning, race thinking cut across national boundaries in an attempt to biologize class divisions. Racism in France, for instance, appears to have originated in the pre-Revolution writings of the Comte de Bougainville, who -- in the face of the threat posed to the power and privilege of the nobility by the rising bourgeoisie -- proposed that his fellow aristocrats regard themselves as a different race from the commoners. They were Franks, Germanic interlopers who ruled over the native Gauls by the right of conquest, a historical event now construed as the judgment of nature on the inherent qualities and hence privileges of both victors and vanquished. (Gellner notes a parallel case in early nineteenth-century Tunisia, where the ruling class considered itself to be Turkish, "though quite unable to speak that language, and in fact of very mixed ancestry and reinforced by recruits from below" [10]).

What was to become the idée fixe of Germanic superiority thus first appeared in France rather than Germany, where racism developed later, and then in the rather different context of the long struggle to achieve unity among the various German states. Racial thinking in Germany quite obviously derived its symbolic power from the mythology of ethnie, appealing to a folk-myth of tribal origins as the foundation for a virtual modern nationhood. Arendt observes that within the strong tradition of Romanticism, German intellectuals struggled initially not so much on behalf of their social class as for a special status for themselves as a secular clerisy within bourgeois society. They formulated the concept of genius or "innate personality", which "like the title of the heir of an old family . . . was

given by birth and not acquired by merit" (Arendt 169). But soon it was the entire German bourgeoisie who claimed the natural nobility of innate Germanic personality, ascribing to others -- especially Jews -- all the qualities which the nobility despised as typically bourgeois.

A watershed in the history of European racism was reached in 1853 with the publication of the Comte de Gobineau's Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races Humaines (though Gobineau's ideas were only to become widely known and authoritative in the English-speaking world somewhat later). In his theorizing of the "degeneration" caused by the depletion of original bloodstocks, Gobineau regarded social mobility in much the same light as the danger posed by racial "hybridization" (Gilman, Difference and Pathology 197). He was politically motivated to define and create

an "elite" to replace the aristocracy. Instead of princes, he proposed a "race of princes", the Aryans, who he said were in danger of being submerged by the lower non-Aryan classes through democracy. The concept of race made it possible to organize the "innate personalities" of German romanticism, to define them as members of a natural aristocracy destined to rule over all others. (Arendt 173)

In England -- where the official ideology of democracy, as mediated through the Burckian-Disraelian idea of the "natural rights of Englishmen", was able to paper over the gaping inequalities on which the social order was based -- Gobineau's ideas found their strongest echoes in popular appropriations of Darwin's evolutionary theories. In a work like the eugenicist Francis Galton's Hereditary Genius (1869), human superiority is argued to be the outcome, not of political or class forces, but of natural selection, of pure breeding. It was Galton's bourgeois dream to transform the whole nation into a natural aristocracy from which a new ruling elite might emerge without political struggle. His dream was in a sense to be realized -- that is, on the ideological or symbolic level -- towards the end of the century in the context of Imperialism, when the English people would persuade themselves that, more than a mere nation, they were an "unmixed race of a first-rate organization" which was "the aristocracy of nature" (a prescient Disraeli, cited in Arendt 183).

However, it has been suggested that a significant change in English racial attitudes occurred during the 1860s, a couple of decades before the era of Imperialism proper, and largely as a result of domestic class dynamics. The direction of this change had been in steady preparation since the early years of the century, as travellers' tales of "primitive" peoples and salon exotica (for instance, the exhibition of the "Hottentot Venus") were increasingly filtered through the discourse of scientific taxonomy in their dissemination to an avid audience. By mid-century, representations of Africans were hardening into the popular currency of stereotypes. Douglas A. Lorimer has argued that this trend changed gear in the 1860s, when the assimilation of the upper ranks of the bourgeoisie into the social and political elite was accelerating through the medium of the pseudo-aristocratic notion of gentility. Gentility, though often moralized as an ethical category, was a measure of worth or index of superiority based on the self-presentation of the ruling class -- wealth, status, manners, dress -- rather than on breeding alone. As social mobility in the quest for gentle status within English society increased, so the criteria for candidacy became more exclusive. Lorimer documents the simultaneous rise in England of a harshly derogatory stereotype of black people: largely, he suggests, as a result of their continuing association in the popular mind with servitude and slavery. To this factor it seems reasonable to add the growing scientific interpretation of human difference, and reaction to two situations abroad: the setback to race relations in India following the shock of the Indian Mutiny of 1859, and the upsurge of racial awareness and scaremongering in the United States in the aftermath of the Civil War. Forrest Wood notes that in America in the latter 1860s, the "Negro Question" was the issue of the day and "every postwar attempt to give former slaves some of the rights and privileges of citizenship collided with a racist determination to to thwart all efforts to improve the conditions of black people" (2).

In Britain, the result of this hardening of attitudes towards black

people was that

[f]or those mid-Victorians who placed increased emphasis upon the visible signs of gentility, and who perceived race relations as a particular form of class relationship, blacks could no longer qualify as gentlemen . . . gentlemen were now seen to share a common nobility of character which was learned at the public schools, but which they liked to think they inherited. Lacking the common inheritance of aristocratic birth, the seekers of gentility founded a new racial aristocracy. Henceforth, only Anglo-Saxons could be gentlemen. (Lorimer 203-204)

Lorimer cautions that the racial feeling expressed in the dominant discourse of the period was different in kind from that formed in the colonial context. It "accepted the black man's humanity but assumed he would remain the perpetual ward of his superior white guardians . . . [it] was often expressed in social Darwinian terms, but it had links to the evangelical tradition of the past, and appealed to the aristocratic pretensions of a wealthy middle class seeking the attributes of gentility" (205-206).

Importantly, as an "educated" opinion informed to an extent by events abroad as well as the new scientific racism, it was the property of an elite minority and appears to evidence the power of that minority to manipulate the mythology of the ethnie to its own advantage. The racialism of the masses at the time was probably more a matter of straightforward ethnocentric reaction to what was perceived as strange or outlandish. The more extreme formulations of scientific racism only became an ideology, that is, achieved embodiment in a political programme receiving mass popular acclaim, towards the end of the century, when the issue of Imperialism appeared to address the interests of the nation as a whole.

Although in the latter half of the nineteenth century the nation was represented abroad by three broad classes of Briton -- missionaries, settlers and (upper-class) administrators -- it was primarily the interests of the settler class that were served by the racialism of Imperialist policy and colonial government. In her narrative of the rise of Imperialism, Hannah Arendt characterizes this class as a "mob" of socially and economically marginal fortune-seekers, whose existence was a by-product of the thrust of capitalist economic expansion in nineteenth-century Europe. Imperialism,

Arendt and others argue, was born when the ruling class in capitalist production came up against national limitations to its economic expansion. The necessity for the never-ending accumulation of capital produced the ideology of expansion and "progress". In practice, this ideology entailed the export of superfluous capital together with the export of people rendered equally superfluous to the domestic economy by the effects of ongoing industrial transformation; men with few prospects prepared to risk what Conrad called "the merry dance of death and trade" (Heart of Darkness 41). "From now on the mob, begotten by the monstrous accumulation of capital, accompanied its begetter on those voyages of discovery where nothing was discovered but new possibilities for investment" (Arendt 151).

That these possibilities offered opportunities for socially symbolic and libidinal as well as strictly economic investment is clear. The settler "mob" consisted of men who could not claim to be gentlemen at home, possessing neither the noble blood nor the wealth which provided access to the ruling class. But in the colonies they acquired an automatic gentility by virtue of their racial superiority to the "natives", a "natural" underclass of servants and labourers. Nietzsche's characterization of the "slave morality" of the "man of ressentiment" perhaps helps us to understand the social unconscious of this settler class: "slave morality from the outset says No to what is 'outside', what is 'different', what is 'not itself': and this No is its creative act" (Nietzsche 112). We recognize here the basic structure of the social-psychological mechanism we have identified as characteristic of racialism. At the same time as the mythology of the "Anglo-Saxon" ethnie offered the largely symbolic equality of a common national identity, the actual resentment of the "mob" toward the master class was in the colonies exo-nationally displaced: every Briton was a "white man", a member of a superior caste which lorded it over the natives, the caste of serfs.

According to this narrative, then, racism, first useful in Europe as a justification for the inequalities of class, now found great utility as

authority for the politically unifying folk myths of racial superiority which underpinned the national rivalry of the scramble for Africa. Imperial expansion afforded the young European nation-state what appeared to be a common interest for the nation as a whole, moreover an interest ostensibly rooted in the given commonality of a racial ethnie. According to Marvin Harris, the idea of race was importantly instrumental in imparting "to the physical, cultural, and linguistic hodgepodes known as England, France, Germany, etc., a sense of community based on the illusion of a common origin and the mirage of a common destiny" (106). From this perspective, the function of racism in the Imperialist era was to provide the European ruling classes with an effective camouflage -- the ideology of nationalism -- for the deep class divisions on which their political power, and the social stability and economic growth of their respective states, depended.

To sum up, we might attempt to locate the displacement of significant social difference from class to race in the context of the changes registered by the European social order in its long passage to modernity. In this process, the changing economic organization of society demanded a corresponding re-organization of social relations. As feudalism yielded to capitalism, people were no longer defined in terms of lifelong relations with other people but in terms of their (temporary and shifting) relation to the objects of production and exchange. The ideology which expressed these new relations was twofold: it consisted of a legitimizing political philosophy in terms of which the new order could be seen as following from eternal principles of justice and equality, together with a conception of the natural world which reflected the social world that was being built, a machine set in motion by the "invisible hand" of consumer capitalism.

The philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment preached freedom and equality for all, ideals enshrined in the political goal of republican democracy. But the universal and transcendental principles to which the revolutions in France and America aspired in their manifestos were soon traduced by the reality of their achievement. What was eventually attained

was equality of the bourgeoisie with the formerly privileged nobility, not the equality of all. As Stephen Rose et al. sum it up:

The freedom needed was the freedom to invest, to buy and sell both goods and labour, to set up shop in any place and at any time without the hindrance of feudal restrictions on commerce and labour, and to possess women as reproductive labour. What was not needed was the freedom of all human beings to pursue happiness. As in Orwell's Animal Farm, all were equal, but some more equal than others. (65)

This was entirely in line with the class interest of eighteenth-century intellectuals, whose central aim -- insofar as they were social radicals -- was to undermine the very notion of nobility, the notion of privilege as inherited right. In such a context, Hayden White has argued, the concept of the Noble Savage is revealed as "not so much an elevation of the idea of the native as a demotion of the idea of nobility" ("Noble Savage" 191), a concept which the bourgeoisie used "to belabour nobility, not to redeem the savage" (192). White observes that the idea of the Noble Savage was a "fetish" which had no effect whatsoever on the treatment of the natives or on the way they were viewed by their oppressors; its vogue in European ruling-class circles postdates the critical phase in the conquest and dispossession of native Americans, collectively the most frequently cited incarnation of Noble Savagery.

The other major aspect of bourgeois ideology was that of scientific materialism (from a Marxist perspective, of scientific materialism denied its radical potential by the governing idea of the rational, Cartesian subject). Modern science, which flowered in northwestern Europe in the eighteenth century, proposed a model of the world as machine, as consisting of matter blindly obeying irresistible, immutable natural forces. It therefore introduced a new concept of fixity to replace the one in the process of dissolution by economic and political change. As a particular manifestation of this general tendency, scientific racism's biological interpretation of history helped to reassure a continent undergoing a period of profound and unprecedented political change of the existence of an order immanent in the nature of things, an order productive of change but itself

impervious to change, an underlying pattern as urgent and imperious as destiny itself. Although the nineteenth-century European state subscribed, to a greater or lesser degree, to the ideal of democratic equality, it was still riven by gross inequalities. Biological determinism provided a useful explanation and justification for these inequalities (in a mechanistic universe, what is is also what ought to be) by reading class difference as hereditary and therefore innate. At a time when the ethnie of the dominant class in the emerging "imagined community" (Anderson's phrase) required that its myths of origin and identity be widely adopted to avoid social conflict, the ethnic mythology of racialism, formalized in scientific racism, enabled the displacement of social difference onto "apparently irrefutable and 'natural' physical differences" (Todorov, "Critical Response" 173). This displacement was chiefly mediated by imperial expansion. If -- despite the fact that he had the vote and enjoyed equality before the law -- the average Englishman found that he was still not fully the equal of the English Lord, he could console himself with the aristocracy of innate superiority which he enjoyed over the natives in the colonies (as well as the "degenerates" at home). An ostensibly obsolete dynastic power structure was therefore able to maintain its legitimacy in its racial transformation: "the existence of late colonial empires . . . served to shore up domestic aristocratic bastions, since they appeared to confirm on a global, modern stage antique conceptions of power and privilege" (Anderson 137). In sum, fortified by scientific racism's virulent nexus of power and knowledge, racialism provided

a justification for both class and caste hierarchies . . . a splendid explanation of both national and class privilege. It helped to maintain slavery and serfdom; it smoothed the way for the rape of Africa and the slaughter of the American Indian; it steeled the nerves of the Manchester captains of industry as they lowered wages, lengthened the working day, and hired more women and children. (Harris 106)

NOTES

1. Steven Rose, Leon J. Kamin and R.C. Lewontin draw attention to the resurgence in recent years of biological determinism in scientific and popular thought. Influential, accessible texts like E.O. Wilson's Sociobiology: The New Synthesis (1975), and R. Dawkins's The Selfish Gene (1976) have helped to stir a renaissance of popular interest in racial-genetic determinism; the human sciences have taken little notice.
2. The question of nomenclature is to a certain extent an arbitrary one which different writers have resolved in a number of different ways. In his study White Supremacy, for instance, George M. Fredrickson rejects both "racism" and "racialism" as ahistorical, morally pejorative and therefore empty of real referential value; he opts instead for the phrase "white supremacy". Hannah Arendt's "race thinking" is a useful umbrella term which suggests the extent to which the discourse of race dominated the episteme of late nineteenth-century Europe, and it will be used in this study from time to time.
3. It is worth noting in passing, however, that in his Categories, Aristotle would not have included the category of race among the "secondary substances" (ousia, literally, "realities") constitutive of a primary substance's (e.g. Socrates') identity (Flew 24). Aristotle points out that it is characteristic of both primary and secondary substances not to have contraries -- unlike many of Plato's Forms, which represent a kind of typological thinking much closer in spirit to that which gave rise to scientific racism.
4. We are again reminded of Conrad's memorable evocation of this ambivalence in Heart of Darkness:

The earth seemed unearthly . . . and the men . . . No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it -- this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity -- like yours -- the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. (69)
5. These words occur in the opening paragraph of his book The Races of Men (1850), which is described by Michael Banton as "one of the most articulate and lucid statements of racism ever to appear" (29), and, by another commentator, as one of the most influential texts to appear in mid-century Britain (Marshall 158).
6. See the comment on "the triumph of an eponym" in Victor A. McKusick, "Medical Genetics 1961", Journal of Chronic Diseases 15 (1962): 431-34.
7. The scientific consensus today is that human phenotypic expression results from "the continuous biochemical and physiological interaction of the gene complex, cytoplasm, internal milieu and external

environment" (Birch 50). Human "races" are therefore Mendelian populations distinguishable from each other in terms of different distributions of gene frequencies, which may be explained in terms of mutation, genetic drift, gene flow, and the relative fitness of genes in different environments. The degree of genetic variability between the populations of, say, Africa and Europe is not much greater than that among individuals within those populations. The obvious morphological/phenotypical differences between Africans and Europeans are the result of a largely arbitrary "funnel effect" produced by the correlation of independent genetic systems (see Appiah).

8. In a recent review article, Alex de Waal offers just such a narrative of the origins of the tragic ethnic cleavage between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda. See also the response from Jean-Luc Vellut, which proposes a more "primordialist" account of this ethnic difference.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MORAL ECONOMY OF RACE IN SOUTH AFRICA, c.1890-c.1930

I

The narrative sketched in the latter part of Chapter One hinges on the trope of displacement which lies at the heart of most understandings of "ideology". It outlines a historical process in which social groups rationalize their pursuit of advantage by displacing it onto contiguous, justificatory discourses. While gesturing towards the origins of racialism in pre-modern, rigidly stratified forms of social organization, the narrative emphasizes the modernity of the phenomenon as it is generally understood today by construing it as a product of the competition for advantage -- power, status, authority, material well-being -- in a (world) system which is based on such competition, capitalism.

Twentieth-century Marxist theory, at least since Oliver Cox's influential Caste, Class and Race (1948), has followed the same path in treating racialism as an epiphenomenon of class antagonism and exploitation. In the South African context, "revisionist" historians like Harold Wolpe and Martin Legassick have maintained that racial conflict is the mask worn by class struggle, that segregation and apartheid were devices to ensure the super-exploitation of the black peasantry and proletariat. But other writers of a basically Marxist orientation ranging from Leo Kuper to Frantz Fanon have pointed out the difficulty of applying standard economic class theory to what have been become known as "plural" societies. Fanon suggests that Marxist analysis should always be "slightly stretched" in the colonial context, because "[i]n the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich" (40).

Kuper goes further in conceding that in plural societies the causal nexus of base and superstructure appears to be inverted, with race becoming the "encompassing principle" in the determination of social strata (100).

The problem with the standard Marxist account, then, is not that it views racialism as an expression of self-interest but that it construes that interest as primarily or exclusively economic. It sidesteps the obvious: that social classes in South Africa have always been based on race or ethnie rather than on relationship to the means of production. (Even Fanon concedes that, the gross socio-economic "overdetermination" of race notwithstanding, social difference in the colonial context is "legitimized" [justified or constituted?] by appeal to the "divine right" of ethnic identity [40].) But in what way is the idea of self-interest articulated with the notion of ethnie?

I will approach this question by way of a reconsideration of South African historiographical writing on the "frontier": the inverted commas defer to Owen Lattimore's caveat that "frontiers are of social, not geographic, origin. Only after the concept of a frontier exists can it be attached by the community that has conceived it to a geographical configuration" (cited in Legassick 68). I.D. MacCrone is generally credited with providing the first detailed exposition of the theory that racial attitudes in twentieth-century South Africa could be traced back to the Cape "frontier" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. MacCrone argued that, in the isolated and conflictual situation of the frontier, the European social and eschatological distinction between Christian and heathen steadily yielded to a racial distinction between black and white. Conflict and fear fostered a greater sense of group-consciousness among white frontiersmen, which led to greater hostility toward those outside the group, which in turn hardened the in-group/out-group distinction into a strong dichotomy. This dichotomy, intensifying and being intensified by subsequent conflict, culminates in the twentieth-century ideology of segregationism.

MacCrone's thesis has been effectively rebutted by Martin Legassick on two related counts. First, Legassick points out that the frontier was a zone of inclusion as much as of exclusion, a site of trade, negotiation and alliance as well as a theatre for violent conflict. In the sense in which MacCrone uses the term, "frontier" is not only a geographical designation but also an interpretive figuration of the historical interface between the indigenous and settler populations of southern Africa. Secondly, Legassick argues that racialism was imported along with the other European cultural baggage, citing Winthrop Jordan's observation that "[f]rom the first . . . to be Christian was to be civilized rather than barbarian, English rather than African, white rather than black" (53). But, uneasy with this manifest absence of roots, Legassick concludes his essay with a question which is simply a qualified displacement of MacCrone's: "If the stereotype of the African as enemy cannot be traced to the eighteenth century, when and why did it in fact come into existence?" (68). It was precisely the quest for a historical and therefore "rational" origin for an apparently irrational cluster of racialistic attitudes that had mandated the historiographical component of MacCrone's project. Legassick's arguments expose this project as an exercise in displacement mediated by the figure of "frontier": MacCrone's desire to explain has led him to externalize and project into the past the findings of his research into the social psychology of white South Africans in the 1930s. But might not the same be said, mutatis mutandis, of Legassick's project, too?

Reviewing this debate, P.D. du Preez has attempted to recuperate the historicity of the frontier by defining it as a place and time "in which authority is being disputed . . . a historical period in the development of South African racial antagonism in which the change of relations between people was from a multiple state to a single state system" (22). I would suggest, though, that this "change of relations" should be seen as a continuous process stretching from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. The frontier then appears as a phenomenon coterminous with the

rise of South Africa as a modern state, a phenomenon whose contours shifted and firmed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the interior was penetrated and more and more indigenous people were incorporated into the social, economic and juridical systems of a series of colonial polities. (As such, "frontier" is a notion only slightly more specific than Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zone", her designation for "the space of colonial encounters" [6].) Both Legassick and du Preez are right in suggesting, however, that the crunch came with the expansion of British administrative and commercial dominion in the latter half of the nineteenth century. According to Legassick, the racialistic ideas characteristic of the frontier, although "present from the beginning", "hardened into an ideology . . . in response to the nineteenth-century challenge to the system of social relations" (55). This challenge peaked with the discovery of rich mineral deposits in northern Cape Colony and the Transvaal from the late 1860s, which refigured the economic constellation of the sub-continent, ushered in industrialization and accelerated urbanization and the absorption of blacks into the labour market. In a speeded-up rehearsal of the process earlier described as underlying the rise of the European nation state, social and cultural distinctions between rulers and ruled in danger of being eroded were recuperated and absolutized by their re-articulation within the discourse of racism as biological difference. The domestication of the "frontier" as the line between white town and black "location" brought it symbolically closer to where it had been all along, at the interface between two groups defined by the colour of their skins and locked in competition for advantage or what du Preez, following R. Dahrendorf, calls "authority".

For Dahrendorf, social classes are defined in terms of their relation to the exercise of authority rather than in terms of their relation to the means of production (du Preez 23). In his formulation, "authority" means state or executive authority and denotes the exercise of institutional power (du Preez 23). I would suggest, however, that the idea of authority

enjoys in this context a greater validity if it is allowed to retain its ordinary range of association and include also symbolic and moral authority. In this view, groups compete not only for executive power in order to secure material advantage for themselves, but also for symbolic power. To such an end they evolve mythologies of identity and discourses of representation to show themselves as "right" or "good" and others as "wrong" or "bad". This is not the equivalent of ideology in the sense of "false consciousness", nor is it the cognitive imperative of contemporary theories of "othering". Although it is incontestable that a social group constructs the imaginary ideality of its identity largely differentially, in oppositional relation to a perceived Other, this construction can equally be a dialectical, transformative process, as it arguably was for black South Africans undergoing acculturation to Western norms in the nineteenth century. The evidence of the texts which we shall examine suggests that the need to be "right", the need to secure symbolic ascendancy for one's system of beliefs and cultural practices in a discourse of ethical justification, is a determinant of social and political behaviour just as important as the desire for material advantage.

In recent theorizing in the present field of enquiry, the ethical dimension of identity construction and validation is often elided in the generalized notion of a "will to power", frequently construed as itself the veiled expression of economic interest. For instance, Edward Said adopts the Foucauldian equation of knowledge and power in maintaining that the discourse of "Orientalism" affords a "flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the upper hand" (7). Abdul JanMohamed, on the other hand, regards the "manichean allegory" which he identifies as the basic trope of colonial discourse as the derivative product of the "ideological imperatives" (63) of Imperialist economic practices. Yet he is curiously evasive about the relationship of causation assumed to exist here, and is unable to move beyond metaphor and analogy in his explication

of it:

Just as imperialists "administer" the resources of the conquered country, so colonialist discourse "commodifies" the native subject into a stereotyped object and uses him as a "resource" for colonialist fiction

Hence we can observe a profound symbiotic relationship between the discursive and the material practices of imperialism: the discursive practices do to the symbolic, linguistic presence of the native what the material practices do to his physical presence; the writer commodifies him so that he can be exploited more efficiently by the administrator, who, of course, obliges by returning the favour in kind. (64)

Since there is very little evidence in the ethical discourse of colonialist writers of conscious, purposive collusion with exploitative economic forces, JanMohamed ducks the issue of intention or agency, resorting to garbled formulations such as the following (he is dismissing Homi Bhabha's notion of colonial ambivalence on the ground that): "any evident 'ambivalence' is in fact a product of deliberate, if at times subconscious, imperialist duplicity" (61, emphasis added). Or, to take a rather different example, John and Jean Comaroff have given a brilliant account of how nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries in South Africa aimed at nothing less than the comprehensive remodelling of the Tswana people in the image of an idealized version of their own social class (181-213; see also de Kock). Although the missionaries' limited success in this "colonization of consciousness" would serve to render their converts more tractable to colonial administration and labour extraction, the Comaroffs quite rightly reject any idea of a simple purposive or causative relation between the two. They distinguish between the operation of power in "agentive" and "nonagentive" modes (28) so as to make the general point that

[t]he "motivation" of social practice . . . always exists at two distinct, if related, levels: first, the (culturally configured) needs and desires of human beings; and, second, the pulse of collective forces that, empowered in complex ways, work through them. (36)

Their concern as historical ethnographers is with the question of "how collective identities are constructed and take on their particular cultural content" (44); they do not address the question of why, for instance, Nonconformist missionaries in South Africa should have been driven by such

a strong desire not only to convert the heathen to Christianity but also to re-make their converts into subjects like themselves.

Perhaps there is no useful answer to this question, or perhaps the answer is so obvious -- some given of human nature, "given" because irreducible -- that the question is not worth the asking. The generalized notion of a "will to power" will not do because it begs the question of the articulation of individual desire with collective behaviour. I do not wish at this stage to engage the debate about collective psychology so extensively canvassed in the early decades of this century, and so unsatisfactorily addressed by Freud ("Group Psychology"),¹ so I shall simply acknowledge that the "weak" primordialist conception of ethnie to which I now appeal does assume the existence of something like the "group mind" influentially anatomized by William McDougall over seventy years ago. It seems that all social groups and classes of human beings are engaged in a "struggle to achieve categorical self-identity" (Stallybrass and White 194), and that this struggle is as likely to be shaped by the desire to re-make others in one's own image as the urge to exaggerate their difference and exclude them. If only, then, to advert to the logically necessary existence of an underlying motive for such collective human behaviour, and allowing that in so doing we may well have reached the metonymic horizon of all explanatory endeavour (as predicted by Coetzee, "Mind of Apartheid" 30), let us give it a name: "the ethnic imperative". In the perspective framed by such a principle of causation, the discursive projects of "othering" and re-making are two sides of the same coin, complementary aspects of the identity construction and validation of a socio-cultural collectivity or ethnie. And, while the idea of the ethnic imperative may be irreducible, it is by no means ahistorical, its authority to command consciousness and behaviour (and thus to shape history) varying in accordance with the perceived access to authority, whether executive or symbolic, of the group concerned, at a particular moment.

There is, however, an obvious and important rider to this notion,

arising from the fact of social and economic stratification within ethnic groups. The invention and propagation of the self-image of the ethnie is the province of the social stratum with privileged access to the means of representation -- the educated middle and upper classes -- and it is principally their values and interests which are served through the hegemonic distribution of ideology. The pursuit of symbolic authority is often the luxury of those who already enjoy executive authority. For instance, the South African writers with whom we shall be concerned, writers who engaged the subject of race in the ethical discourse of literature, were not people involved in a daily struggle for their bread and butter. Yet it was part of their ethnic project to propound the notion that no member of the "natural" aristocracy of the white race ever should be. Even though the pressure for racially discriminatory legislation came chiefly from the white working class, the idea of race was sufficiently prepotent to unite the several fractions of white society in an imagined community of interest with a single identity.² The existence of class differences within that ethnic group -- never that great in what Olive Schreiner called "a nation of lower middle-class Philistines", anyway -- is therefore ignored in the generalized argument which follows. Nevertheless, it should never be lost sight of that the specific forms of race consciousness explored in this study were the property of a particular stratum of the dominant group within the colonial social order.

What I have suggested is that late nineteenth-century racialism in South Africa was not in the first instance a source of justification for the satisfaction of class greed so much as a reflexive defence or guarantee of the worth of the racialist's sense of identity. The aggressiveness of the ethnic imperative which it served was in direct proportion to the extent to which the racialist's identity was felt to be under threat: both externally (the fear of physical extermination, of political disempowerment, of defeat in the competition for resources) and internally (most notably, a gap between profession and practice, between the identity

as officially represented in discourse and its perceived reality, leading to an anxious knowledge of hypocrisy or inadequacy, the return of a severely repressed sexuality, confusion born of contradiction). The mechanism involved is simple enough: if the beliefs I hold and the customs of my culture define my identity, then if they are not right or not the best beliefs and customs, or if their possession does not entitle me to the position of advantage I occupy, or if my secret conviction is that they are a sham . . . then who am I?

The ethical presentation of the ethnic imperative in discourse is usefully characterized by the idea of "moral economy". I use the phrase not in the restricted sense preferred by some anthropologists to denote the "zero-sum" system of social relations in pre-capitalist polities (see Austen 92-97),³ but in the more general sense of a non-material or symbolic system of social and cultural meaning. It is in this sense, for instance, that John Lonsdale deploys the concept in his impressive analysis of the kind of advantage or authority pursued by the Mau Mau movement in Kenya. Not motivated primarily by political or economic goals (although these were important), the Mau Mau sought to assert an ideal of "civic virtue" of which they felt they had been dispossessed by colonialism. Dipping into the ancient wells of Kikuyu ethnie in its characteristic rituals of inclusion and exclusion, the movement was also forward-looking in that it aimed to establish a common identity of sufficient moral and spiritual stature to meet the challenges of a modernizing Kenya.

What drives moral economies is the desire on the part of a particular group to possess a sense of identity which is felt, in a given and primordial way, to be right and therefore authoritative. What is sought in social and political behaviour is conservation both of the group and of the legitimacy of its sense of identity. When the group experiences, through encounter with others, a threat to this sense of identity, it will generally defend itself by appeal in the ethical terms of moral economy to an ethnocentric discourse capable of representing those others not only as

different but also as inferior to itself. That such a discourse will often serve a justificatory function in respect of the group's pursuit of material advantage -- or may galvanize such pursuit -- does not in itself necessarily mean that the two are causally related.

To recapitulate: if the historicity of what MacCrone describes as the hardening of the in-group/out-group dichotomy in the white South African social consciousness is secured by identifying it with the period in which rivalry and competition for "authority" within a single system intensified, we are still left with the seemingly "primordial", always-already character of racialism (cf. Legassick 68). When I adumbrated a narrative of origins which traces racialism back to the rigid stratifications of the pre-modern polity, I did not address the question of why stratification according to group identity existed then and continues to exist today. I have now suggested that the mechanism of which it is a product -- the ethnic imperative -- is intrinsic in the group's aspiration toward "categorical self-identity", requiring only the trigger of a particular conjuncture of historical conditions to achieve expression in aggressive and apparently irrational behaviour. The racialism with which we are concerned may be construed as reaction on the part of the colonial community to a perceived crisis of authority -- both material and symbolic -- within a common social and economic system, at a time when the understanding of human difference in terms of race was backed by the authority of science.⁴ I shall in due course attempt to substantiate and elaborate this thesis by "reading" the moral economy of documents representing distinct moments in the crucial discursive shift in white South African attitudes towards Africans that occurred around the cusp of the nineteenth century.

Nineteenth-century colonialism in South Africa was by no means a monolithic or even coherent set of policies and practices. Drawing on the evidence of missionary writings, the Comaroffs have distinguished three competing models of colonial rule, each with its own attendant moral economy. They point out that although the ethical construction placed upon

these models by the missionaries was disputed by those to whom they were applied, their substance was not, so we may regard them as essentially valid (200). First there was state colonialism, concerned primarily with bureaucratic administration and increasingly, towards the end of the century, with the regulation of "native labour"; secondly, settler colonialism, the colonialism of the frontier and inter-group conflict, typically patterned on the course of Boer relations with African tribes: war or alliance followed by subordination and (brutal, if necessary) domination; and thirdly, the civilizing colonialism of the mission, which aimed to reconstruct the native ab initio,

to "cultivate" the African "desert" and its inhabitants by planting the seeds of bourgeois individualism and the nuclear family, of private property and commerce, of rational minds and healthily clad bodies, of the practical arts of refined living and devotion to God. (Comaroff and Comaroff 200)

As might be expected, the public discourses of these three fractions of an ethnic group seeking to consolidate itself as the ruling class in a modernizing state were shaped by the perceived interests of the respective fraction, but overlapped and informed each other in a variety of ways. The bureaucratic discourse was the most obviously Imperialist, its ruling class origins reflected in its confident tones of command, aristocratic but not autocratic, tempered by the paternalism of noblesse oblige, the essence of Cape liberalism; it aspired to an objective, principled and impartial ideal of wise governance in its concern with the "pacification" of "refractory tribes" and "measures for the control" and distribution of labour and resources. It depended for its moral authority on the idea of the "civilizing mission", drawn from the missionary discourse of salvation through self-improvement, and accommodated to white supremacy via the notion of "trusteeship". Its own ideal self-image was perhaps most memorably inscribed in Rhodes's formula of "equal rights for all civilized men, irrespective of colour" (cited in Plaatje 189).⁵

But several writers have noted that this discourse underwent a distinct ideological shift in the late nineteenth century. Imperialist

administrators were growing "ever more sceptical of the potential for success of the Victorian 'civilizing mission'", and the "amalgamationist" policies of Sir George Grey, which had sought to promote "civilization by mingling", were in retreat (Dubow 30). Fear of loss of control over "unassimiliable" natives and the strains of a society undergoing rapid industrialization and demographic change boosted the authority of the discourse of "settler colonialism" which, always frankly racist, now had the support of the new race science and its popular ideology of Social Darwinism. By the time of the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903-05, the moral high ground of "state colonialism" had arguably been commandeered by the interests of "settler colonialism". The Report of the Commission invoked the legitimating discourse of "civilized standards" in proposing the resolution of the Native Question through the "territorial separation" of the races. These proposals would in subsequent years be consolidated into the consensual, "sophisticated" and "successful" political ideology of segregation (Cell 18), a "modernizing ideology which sought to defuse the intensity of social conflict that industrialization would inevitably bring" (Dubow 7), and which was, according to Shula Marks,

a many-faceted policy made up of varying components which could be and were subtly shifted in response to circumstance and to the needs of different interests of the dominant white group in South Africa. Indeed its great strength as an ideology was its very elasticity, its ability to serve the needs of very many different interests and to absorb "elements stemming from the way of life of classes and fractions other than the dominant class or fraction". (38)

The unification of these fractions was figured in the metonymic sliding of the "frontier" ever closer to the lowest common denominator of a shared ethnic identity, the colour of the colonizer's skin. If the discourse of mission colonialism had fixed the frontier as the division between civilization and savagery, state colonialism had amalgamated this with the notion of an expanding domain of political, juridical and economic control. The new racist consensus sought to legitimate and absolutize this control by appealing to the fixed categories of race, a discursive biologizing of human difference which contrived to relocate the frontier on

the surface of the white body.

But if this new settler discourse had taken over from mission colonialism the role of collective conscience of the ethnie, the difference was that now the ethical ascendancy of the "civilizing mission" was recast as the sacred duty to preserve civilization from decay through "racial degeneration", usually figured as the contamination of white by black. In her novel God's Stepchildren (1924), Sarah Gertrude Millin cruelly satirized the missionary project in the career of the feckless Rev. Andrew Flood, who is provoked into proving the equality of all God's children by marrying one of his Hottentot "converts". Instead of re-making her into an "angel in the home", he degenerates to her level of "savagery" and sires an unhappy line of half-caste progeny. Two years later, in her bestselling The South Africans, Millin characterized "poor whites" as those who, like the Rev. Flood, "have been overwhelmed by the spaces of Africa, and enervated by its peculiar labour conditions" (164). They are contrasted with "others who have conquered themselves and the land" (164). What is striking about the latter formulation is its resort to the Nonconformist mission idiom of self-fashioning, of the auto-construction of the civilized bourgeois subject through containment of the baser passions and instincts (see Comaroff and Comaroff 188). But what distinguishes both representations is above all a fearful scepticism about the ability of the body of "white civilization" to withstand the onslaught of Africa (and Africans) upon its weaker members. The metaphor, implicit here but elsewhere an explicit structural motif in Millin's work (Coetzee, "Blood"), is that of infection, that "meta-metaphor" of racialist discourse (Coetzee, "Mind of Apartheid" 30).

Clearly, between the era dominated by the optimistic phantasy of the civilizing mission, with its confident patrician condescension towards "lesser breeds", and the time in which an obsessively racist writer like Millin would be acclaimed as the voice of a nation, the group consciousness of whites in South Africa had sustained a shock strong enough to have

decisively -- and permanently -- redirected its moral economy. What this shock consisted in has already been adumbrated and will be further dissected in the course of this study. "External" factors such as the devastating effects of the Anglo-Boer War and a rapidly industrializing economy, the migration of Africans into the cities and the sudden proliferation of a "poor white" underclass, should be considered alongside less obviously measurable, "internal" factors: perceived contradictions or inconsistencies in the mythos of white identity, repressed libidinal impulses, guilt, genuine doubt about the fitness of the race for the evolutionary struggle. These and other factors contributed to a sustained sense of crisis among white South Africans. It was a crisis of power at once political and symbolic which, although fuelled by physical fear and invariably discussed in the political and economic terms of "The Native Problem" or "The Labour Question", was equally propelled by moral panic over the perceived ebbing of the symbolic authority on which the ethnie was based. It was a crisis which was only to be "resolved" piecemeal, as the racist legislation of the future apartheid state was put in place block by block: pass laws, the proscription of mixed marriages, the Natives Land Act of 1913, the Herzog Colour Bar Bills of the 1930s. But at the heart of the rationality of segregationist ideology lay an ethnic imperative, made urgent by fear, which was beyond reason.

II

No treatment of the subject of segregation in South Africa can afford to ignore the fact that the separation of races was the first step in Hitler's "final solution" of the Jewish "problem". The mass executions on the Eastern Front and the later mass transportations to the death camps were made easier, both physically and symbolically, by the prior corralling of Jews into ghettos. The "othering" of Jews did not of course begin with the

ghettos: it had already been achieved by their consistent identification in the hate-speak of Nazi racialism as a disease preying on the moral and economic vitals of the Aryan social body. But once Jews were confined in the ghetto and compelled to wear the badge of their otherness, the six-pointed Judenstern, their dehumanization was greatly facilitated. It is noteworthy that the process of ghettoization was rationalized according to the pseudo-medical logic of what we will later encounter as the "sanitation syndrome" in early twentieth-century South Africa: the construction in September 1940 of the brick perimeter wall in Warsaw, for instance, was "at first disguised as a quarantine measure" (Reitlinger 60).

Evil and madness are far more appropriate descriptions of this sort of social engineering than the academic theorizing with which this chapter is concerned. The famous phrase coined by Hannah Arendt in the aftermath of the Eichmann trial, "the banality of evil", can without much stretching be applied equally to the moralizing myths -- insidious, transparent, often risible -- invented by colonial South Africans to justify the perpetuation of white supremacy. However, historical difference as well as similarity needs to be respected, and the parallel I shall explore -- between Victorian class feeling and racialism in South Africa -- is in my view a much more exact and productive one. Yet what all three situations arguably have in common, apart from a shared vocabulary of race and contamination, is the manner in which they result from an ethnic imperative activated by the ravages of primitive capitalism: in each case, the irrational fear and loathing is a displaced expression of panicked recoil from the abjection of urban poverty, from the human degradation of the modern industrial slum.⁶

However, the first perspective I shall canvass is concerned with the impact of modernization ("civilization") on the rural African community in South Africa. The novelist and poet W.C. Scully delivered a lecture on "The Native Question" to the Lovedale Literary Society on 23 February 1894. He was at that time Resident Magistrate in the Ciskei town of Peddie and thus

an official agent of "state colonialism" during a period when, I have suggested, its confidence in the "civilizing mission" was faltering. Scully's lecture is redolent with the unease of a ruling class no longer convinced either of its ability to direct the course of history or -- importantly -- of its ethical authority to presume to do so. The fear of the possibility of "general insurrection" (35) is compounded by doubt, on the evidence of the manifest "degeneration" of the white race, as to the capacity of the state to prevent or contain such an uprising. The lecture is intended to sound the alarm, to awaken the bearers of civilization from the torpor of habitude and alert them to the precariousness of their purchase, both moral and political, on Africa and her people.

After contemplating the failure of previous attempts by the "Aryan race" to colonize Africa, Scully assumes the voice of "scientific" objectivity:

Our experiment is on a larger scale than any of these, but its ultimate success is by no means yet assured. We have a firm footing here, and we may retain that footing, but, on the other hand, we may easily lose it. Whether we do or not lies with ourselves, but no condition is so dangerous as a feeling of blind security in the face of danger. Races, like individuals, decay under unfavourable conditions, and some developing conditions in South Africa shew a decidedly unfavourable tendency as regards the Europeans. Proceeding pari passu with the enormous growth of the native population, we have the increase of the "poor white" class. (34)

Scully therefore announces the "task to which the civilized people of all races in South Africa should address themselves" as follows:

1. To improve the moral and social condition of those masses of humanity stagnating in savagery, which form such a large proportion of the population.
2. To provide for the distribution of population from unduly congested centres to localities where labour is required. (34)

Our initial response to this formulation may well be to assume that the first "task" is little more than a rationalization of the second, that we are here confronted with a classic laying-bare of colonial cant, of the colonizer's ability to "do one thing and say something quite different" (Naipaul 23) -- which, according to the narrator of V. S. Naipaul's A Bend in the River, remains Europe's principal legacy to Africa. But although

Scully will go on to advocate the "forced removal" of Africans to feed the developing infrastructure's demand for workers, his rhetoric of social and moral upliftment is by no means a cynical smokescreen for an exploitative labour policy. His discourse is firmly rooted in the idiom and ethical register of what the Comaroffs have described as mission colonialism, and for him the discipline of labour is a moral force, an integral element in the project of re-making "savages" into productive model citizens. Scully's proposals are practically identical to those made a few years before by William Booth for the redemption of the urban poor, the "Submerged" or "Sunken Tenth" of England's population. For Booth, "labour" and "salvation" were virtually synonymous; in his book In Darkest England and the Way Out (1890), the founder of the Salvation Army set out an elaborate scheme for the relocation of slum-dwellers or "savages" (12, 16), in a series of City, Farm and Over-sea "work colonies" (92, 271).⁷

Scully sees the social engineering which he recommends as merely an aspect of the process of upliftment or "education", "the only remedy" (35). He identifies a specific element of indirect rule, the "tribal tenure of land", as the chief impediment to progress. For in terms of the master-trope of degeneration which structures his thinking, this "rudimentary" (36) system is conducive to backsliding, the "mixing of civilized and uncivilized Natives, and the consequent relapse of the children of civilized parents into barbarism" (35). He therefore insists on the physical "separation of the civilized from the uncivilized Natives [as the] . . . first principle in any scheme of improvement" (35), with the former being resettled on land set aside for "individual tenure". (Scully's yardstick of "civilization" is modest enough: the ability to write one's name or the possession of a "certificate of church-membership" [35].) His proposed "solution" to the "Native Problem" is hopelessly impractical, but, placed in the context of contemporary thought, is by no means as eccentric as it at first appears. It is similar in principle to that which was being recommended by Charles Booth and other zealous reformers at the time to

deal with the threat posed by "outcast London": physical excision, "the removal of [the] very poor class out of the daily struggle for existence" (Booth, Life and Labour I.154; see also V.207).⁸ Booth made a clear distinction between the "true working classes" and the unregenerate or "casual" poor, who constituted a "residuum" left behind by a "developing race". The residuum was riddled with the vices of pauperism -- "drunkenness, improvidence, mendicancy, bad language, filthy habits, gambling, low amusements, and ignorance" (Stedman Jones 11) -- anathema to the moralized capitalism which is as much the engine of Scully's discourse as it is of the London reformers. Like the "uncivilized natives", the residuum lived "the life of savages . . . degrad[ing] whatever they touch" (Booth, Life and Labour I.38); it was a class reckoned by a Mansion House Committee Report of 1886

a dead weight on the labour market, [interfering] with the opportunities of the better classes of more willing and worthy labourers, upon whom moreover, its contagious influence has a wide and degrading effect. (quoted in Stedman Jones 290)

The solution to the problem posed by the "malefic influence" (Booth, Life and Labour I.155) of these "relics of a departing race" (G.F.G. Masterman, quoted in Stedman Jones 330) eventually recommended by a British Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration in 1904 closely followed the thinking of William and Charles Booth, and, mutatis mutandis, of W.C. Scully (it also anticipated the basic principles of the policy of segregation recommended by the 1905 Lagden Report of the South African Native Affairs Commission):

It may be necessary, in order to complete the work of clearing overcrowded slums, for the state, acting in conjunction with the local authority, to take charge of the life of those, who from whatever cause, are incapable of independent existence up to the standard of decency which it imposes. In the last resort this might take the form of labour colonies . . . with powers . . . of compulsory detention. (cited in Stedman Jones 331)

The focus of Scully's programme is likewise upon the "judicious direction and control" ("Native Question" 45) of the unregenerate, specifically the relief of overcrowding and the pressures of population growth through the compulsory removal from locations of all young men (except the eldest son

in each family) to centres of employment. But what is particularly striking about Scully's lecture as a whole is that his concern with the Native Question is also, or is perhaps primarily -- like the enterprise of contemporary English social reformers -- an ethical concern with the ambiguous results of civilization and "progress", a concern haunted by a sense of shame at the manifest failings of his own race and culture. (Henry Mayhew had deplored the fact that the facts he reported were "gross enough to make us all blush for the land in which such scenes can be daily perpetrated" [62], while William Booth remarked: "What a satire it is upon our Christianity and our civilization, that the existence of these colonies of heathens and savages in the heart of our capital should attract so little attention" [16].)

The moral economy of Scully's discourse is ostensibly structured by the opposition of good and bad represented by civilization and savagery. But when he examines the "evils" of native life his findings are -- and to some degree unconsciously so -- ambivalent. For instance, the custom of lobola is "practically the purchase of girls as wives", and yet it has the signal moral advantage of making "parents careful of the virtue of their daughters" (36). The persistence of superstition is regrettable, but "witch doctors" enjoy a superior medical expertise in possessing "the secret of valuable herbal remedies, which appear seldom to fail in affording relief" for illnesses "which have hitherto baffled all European skill" (45); and Scully doubts "whether the Native is much more superstitious than the Norfolk peasant" in an age when, after all, "many otherwise intelligent persons believe in spirit-rapping, table-turning and astral bodies" (45). He concludes that one cannot "avoid being struck by the apparent deterioration of the Kaffir", who has been rendered "less of 'a gentleman'" (36) through contact with "civilization"; and he lays the blame squarely at the door of the colonizer:

We, the white men, have taken away -- unavoidably, of course -- the natural and hereditary incentives to the development of the Native's higher nature, and as yet have substituted nothing but a religion the precepts of which we ourselves cynically

disregard in most essentials. The gospel of labour, which we have but imperfectly learned, has not yet become intelligible to them Life is, therefore, very objectless to the uncivilized Native, and it is not to be wondered at that he frequents the canteen. (45-46; cf. Davis 54)

What a wealth of guilt and self-doubt is effaced in the invocation of evolutionary necessity in that qualifying phrase -- "unavoidably, of course"! In this revealing passage, Scully acknowledges that Christianity cannot in all honesty be regarded as the authority for "civilization's" mission in Africa; moreover, that his ethnie's purchase on its secular substitute, "the gospel of labour", is almost equally a matter of profession rather than practice. We gain here a fleeting but genuine insight into the extent to which the middle-class British identity which sanctions Scully's entire enterprise is exposed by its Other as little more than an exercise in bad faith, a flimsy sham, a species of originary mimicry.

Scully unflinchingly proceeds to evoke the confusion of the hapless African caught in the contradictions of colonial culture: facing, on the one hand, the mission ideal of "renunciation, self-restraint, charity and labour" (46), and on the other, the example of pioneers "in whom daring is more developed than moral sense", given to "indulgence in strong drink and other forms of intemperance". (Scully dubs them "the legion that never was listed" after Kipling, and his point is precisely that made by Kipling in stories like "Georgie Porgie" [see Kipling 289-90].) The vices which he attributes to the African products of this encounter are exactly those held to be the property of the degenerate English pauper: drunkenness, laziness and improvidence (46).

What we witness here, then, is the deconstruction of "civilization", of a myth of ethnic identity, along the faultlines of its own internal contradictions. Scully's discourse (for the most part, implicitly) acknowledges that "civilization" is not what it purports to be: that its moral authority depends upon an imaginary, ideal self-image and not upon its reality. But in the moral economy of the liberal strain of English

South African writing, this inchoate recognition of an "originary" fissure in the ruling class's myths of identity would soon assume the mask of a moralizing censure of the behaviour of some of its individual members. A colonial equivalent of the residuum was in the process of definition -- poor whites, "white Kaffirs", "miscegenators", unscrupulous traders, illegal liquor dealers and gun-runners -- in the same ambiguous space in relation to the nation/race/ethnie as its metropolitan counterpart, the subject simultaneously of vigorous exclusion and urgent reform initiatives. Yet in the colonial context, the latter tendency would always triumph: to be white was to be indissolubly part of the social body of the ruling class and therefore reclaimable (though ultimately, and paradoxically, by mountains of legislation) to an identity which could not by definition be abandoned.

In the soon-to-be-hegemonic discourse of "settler colonialism", of course, the "residuum" was axiomatically black. An article in the Transvaal Leader (30 Apr. 1903) concerning Charles Booth's work on the London poor, for instance, noted with outrage that "the kafirs are better off than many of the English poor" (6), while a later writer would exclude blacks from the franchise on the ground that "[t]he native is our 'residuum'" (Macfadyen 312). But even writing such as this, in which white colonials inscribed so nakedly their pursuit of advantage, continued to be marked by a strenuous devotion to the ethical task of calling the ethnie to account, in the name of whatever principles were held to constitute "civilization's" claim to superiority. Scully's lecture on "The Native Question" is simultaneously an expression of anxiety over the declining (or inchoate) symbolic authority of an ethnic identity and an urgent appeal for its regeneration (or generation). In this perspective the import of his otherwise obscure epigraph, attributed to Mohammed's "Table-Talk", comes into focus:

Verily ye are in an age in which if ye abandon one truth of what is ordered, ye will be ruined. After this, a time will come when he who shall observe one truth of what is now ordered, will be redeemed. (34)

The historical crisis produced by what Scully calls the "vast and incalculable forces playing through our political life, the new and unknown products being formed in our midst by the mixture of nationalities" (46) -- a microcosm of the drama of entropy and degeneration which, according to writers like Spengler and Max Nordau, was playing itself out in the Western world -- requires for the moment an absolutely disciplined commitment to moral principle and its translation into political action. The alternative is the defeat if not extinction of the race. Scully's implicit appeal to ethnic solidarity would within a decade have hardened, even within the "liberal" tradition of which he is an early avatar, to the extent that the frontier -- the bar of segregation between "civilization" and "barbarism" on which his discourse is structured -- would have permanently shifted to the division between black and white.⁹

Scully continued to pursue the ideals of the social programme adumbrated in his Lovedale lecture; as the Magistrate of Port Elizabeth in 1909, responsible for the administration of an effectively segregated city, he sent a memorandum to the Prime Minister in which

[h]e expressed a typical and eloquent view of urbanization as a social crisis in which the city was a kind of moral and physical cesspool where Africans contracted as a deteriorating virus "the more disreputable side of our (so-called) civilization". There was, however, a salvagable remnant of hundreds, "industrious, frugal and law-abiding", who might be encouraged with limited proprietary rights as an example to the rest. (Swanson 408)¹⁰

The meta-metaphor of contagion reappears in abundance in Scully's last novel, Daniel Vananda: The Life Story of a Human Being (1923), a tragedy in the "Jim comes to Jo'burg" mode pioneered by Douglas Blackburn's Leaven: A Black and White Story (1908). By then, Scully's patience with the pretensions of white "civilization" was exhausted, and the novel is a scathing indictment of its decadence, cruelty and hypocrisy. "The South African savage", he writes in his Preface, "was, before the contamination by the European, a noble one in the broad sense of the term" (x); in the course of the narrative,

[m]ost pathetic it was to mark the efforts made by some of the

Natives towards preserving their children from contamination. But the evil influences were altogether too powerful to contend against successfully Degradation was so common, so widespread, that no one could avoid its soiling touch. The lads and maidens could know of no other world than the one they grew up in. (177)

It is easy to see how such thinking could lead to a principled endorsement of the policy of segregation, as indeed it did for early "liberal" segregationists like Edgar Brookes (see Dubow, ch.1). But Scully recognized that the real problem lay with the migrant labour system on which the whole policy was based (and whose consequences he had failed to foresee back in 1894):

With deepening sadness, [Daniel's people] realized that it was only by sending forth their youth wholesale to the corrupting Rand that they could hope to win the means of bare existence, - to say nothing of paying the taxes imposed by Government. (218)

In his righteous anger, and with 38 years' experience as a public servant behind him, Scully has no political solution to offer: he can make no appeal save a moral one -- for his fellow-countrymen to make "the Natives' welfare a definite object of endeavour" (xiv), or else embrace their own spiritual ruin.

The difference between Scully's deployment of the figure of contagion and that of texts more representative of the aggressively racialist, soon-to-be-hegemonic state-settler discourse, to which we shall now turn, is that, on balance, the infection causing degradation is held by him to pass from white to black, rather than from black to white. This distinction identifies the ethical orientation of the liberal, high-cultural tradition of English South African literature, which would eventually achieve symbolic dominance in the unfolding process of ethnic self-representation. Among the early texts, the contamination of black innocence by white filth is dramatized in Douglas Blackburn's Leaven (1908), in the Rhodesian novels of Arthur Shearly Cripps, The Brooding Earth (1911) and Bay-Tree Country (1913), and -- perhaps most schematically -- in William Plomer's Turbott Wolfe (1925). Beyond these lie Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country, and the work of Lessing, Rooke, van der Post and Gordimer.

Yet although it was the image of the infectious black body that came in the early years of this century to dominate representations of social encounter in the popular writing of white South Africans (and with far-reaching consequences), a guilty awareness of the inner corruption and corrupting role of "civilization" was nevertheless never entirely absent from the texts concerned.

III

During the course of the nineteenth century, the European image of Africa as a generalized place of lurking pestilence was refined by the protocols of biomedical science into a discourse of public hygiene and pollution. The invisible danger of infectious disease came to be located in the dirty, degraded body of the black African. The Comaroffs have observed in the writings of missionaries like Moffat "a persistent association of the African body with noxious organisms that threatened to invade the inviolable world of white order" (224); they suggest that the recurrent description of black skin as "greasy" focuses the notion of a bodily surface that is "porous, dirty, and damp, one that 'gave off' contagion and odour to those with whom it came into contact" (225). A similar belief about the slum-dweller was at the same time entrenching itself in Victorian Britain:

As the orifices of the poor opened to contaminate the purity of bourgeois space (at the turn of the century 44 per cent of poor Glasgow children were defined as "mouth breathers"), so in the bourgeois imagination the slums opened (particularly at night) to let forth the thief, the murderer, the prostitute and the germs (Stallybrass and White 133)

It is not surprising, therefore, that it was in the context of the city that the contaminating presence of the black body precipitated a crisis in the social imagination of white South Africans.

In a widely-cited essay, Maynard Swanson has shown how the bubonic plague scare at the ports of Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in 1900 fed upon

this popular association of blacks with disease to engender what he calls the "sanitation syndrome". The threat of epidemic disease authorized a programme of slum clearance, which, dovetailing with the embryonic ideology of social control through segregation, permanently altered the "racial ecology" of South Africa (391). As Swanson points out, "[i]t was the merest step of logic to proceed from the isolation of plague victims to the creation of a permanent location for the black labouring class" (393). Swanson's suggestion that the "logic" governing the sanitation syndrome is that of economic interest, mediated by metaphor (387), has recently been questioned by J.M. Coetzee:

Strictly speaking, is the infection feared by Swanson's whites . . . a metaphor, something else in the disguise of sickness? I would suggest that, as we examine the sanitation syndrome closely, it is not metaphor we find at work (a shift from one term to another because the two are in some sense equivalent) but metonymy (a sliding of meaning from one thing to the next because the two are adjacent). In a first sequence of metonymic displacements we see the germ of infection suspected of being harboured by the black carrier being displaced onto his breath, his sputum, his mucus, and then on to the black as black who houses that breath, that sputum, that mucus. From being a carrier who is a black, the suspect becomes the black who is a carrier; from being vehicle of infection, blackness itself becomes the infection, therefore subject to public health measures like isolation/segregation. ("Mind of Apartheid" 26)

While Coetzee's tracing of the metonymic chain implicit in the sanitation syndrome is eminently logical, it runs the risk of rationalizing a phenomenon that was itself a rationalization -- of the fact that, in the white social imagination, "blackness itself", as a metaphor for "something else", was from the beginning the contagion to be feared. Let me explain by exploring a parallel suggested earlier.

Like so many of the socio-political developments in South Africa, the sanitation syndrome was a speeded-up reprise of a process that had been unfolding in Britain over the previous half-century. In their book The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, Oliver Stallybrass and Allon White have shown how the Victorian middle classes, in their attitudes towards the slums of London, expressed a generalized fear of the city as a site of promiscuous social intercourse. The geography of the city, where there were

no "architectural barriers or protections of decency or propriety" (Chadwick 1842, quoted in Stallybrass and White 126), allowed rich and poor to mingle indiscriminately, thus threatening to blur the symbolic distinctions between "high" and "low" on which the bourgeois identity was founded. In response, the ethnic imperative of the bourgeoisie in its "struggle to achieve categorical self-identity" mandated a characteristically ambiguous discourse on the problem of the urban poor, a discourse of both reform and exclusion. But it was the latter strand that gradually came to predominate: behind Charles Booth's unreclaimable "residuum" stands a whole tradition of attempts to "other" the urban pauper so as to repudiate the troubling reproach of his claim to a shared ethnic or national identity. In his London Labour and the London Poor (1861), for example, Henry Mayhew found two separate "races" living side-by-side in the mighty city: "the wanderers and the civilized tribes". The "nomad" was distinguished by precisely those qualities regarded in South Africa as characteristic of the African and the half-caste:

by his repugnance to regular and continuous labour -- by his want of providence in laying up store for the future . . . -- by his passion for stupifying herbs and roots, and, when possible, for intoxicating fermented liquors . . . -- by his love for libidinous dances . . . -- by the looseness of his notion as to property -- by the absence of chastity among his women, and his disregard of female honour -- and lastly, by his vague sense of religion. (quoted in Stallybrass and White 128)

Although Mayhew attempted to separate such evidence of "moral wickedness" from the "physical filthiness" of its perpetrators, he was finally unable to prevent the metonymic conflation of the two: the chain of association connected slums to sewage, sewage to disease, and disease to moral degradation. Thus the moral fear of promiscuous urban contact with degenerate paupers was focused in a fear of dirt within a discursive regime of public health: "'Contagion' and 'contamination' became the tropes through which city life was apprehended" (Stallybrass and White 135). But the point is that the poor were feared and loathed not in the first instance because they were diseased, but because they were poor (and thus abject, loathsome, "wicked"). A primitive fear of contagion -- of becoming

like them -- is rationalized through its articulation in the biomedical discourse of disease.¹¹ This idea emerges clearly in the following extract from the late nineteenth-century Dutch work, Goede Manieren, by Mrs Van Zutphen van Dedem:

[one must avoid even] the slightest contact, so far as possible, with the bodies and garments of other people, in the knowledge that, even greater than the hygienic danger of contamination, there is always the danger of contact with the spiritually inferior and repugnant who at any moment can appear in our immediate vicinity, especially in the densely populated centres of the cities, like germs in an unhealthy body. (quoted in Stallybrass and White 136)¹²

The dirt which is the caste-mark of the poor is "always already" a signifier of symbolic pollution, of what Mary Douglas calls "matter out of place", the stigma attaching to "any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications" (Douglas 48). The very existence of the lumpenproletariat threatens to confound the discriminations of the "moral", even of the "human", upon which the middle class's sense of identity is based. The poor are therefore "othered" in the moral economy of the bourgeois spectator as the very antithesis of his ideal self. Furthermore, while Henry Mayhew's discriminations of the "nomadic" identity quoted above are ostensibly ethically motivated, the true psychic motor of his gaze has been revealed to us by Freud (e.g. Totem and Taboo): quae negata, grata -- what is denied is desired. The nomadic underclass freely indulges in exactly the behaviour foresworn and tabooed by the bourgeois subject in his rational pursuit of decency and material prosperity: idling, drinking heavily, dancing wildly, spending improvidently, copulating promiscuously. The sanitation syndrome emerges, in short, as a strategy for consolidating and legitimating the severe repression and denial constitutive of the regime of the body on which the social identity of the bourgeoisie is founded -- "self-culture, self-discipline, and self-control", as Samuel Smiles put it in his best-selling Self-Help of 1859 (Bedarida 54).

Stated so starkly, this is obviously too glib an explanation of the fascination of the slum for the Victorian middle-class moral crusader. But

anyone who has read a writer like Mayhew will concede that inseparable from the outrage and compassion is a certain voyeuristic satisfaction in the obsessive return to scenes of degradation: one recalls especially his descriptions of "juvenile licentiousness" in the "low lodging-houses" of London (Mayhew 51-68). Granting such an account a prima facie validity, then, it seems to me that if "white" and "black" are substituted throughout for "bourgeois" and "pauper", its analysis holds good for the South African context in question. The sign of blackness is metaphorically endowed with all the attributes of human identity disavowed by the white colonial ethnie: the metonymic association with disease merely provides a mediating rationalization subconsciously to legitimate otherwise irrational social and political behaviour.¹³ It would therefore seem that, contra Coetzee, "the infection feared by Swanson's whites" is indeed "a metaphor, something else in the disguise of sickness" (26). In support of such a position I will adduce a textual example in which the sanitation syndrome is elided completely in the apparently metaphorical substitution of blackness for "something else".

In his pursuit of the metonymic traces between the black body and disease, Coetzee is obliged to provide a further link -- a "black essence":

Though black blood is the name conventionally applied to this essence, it is understood in the first place that black blood stands for black semen (a kind of semen possessed by both sexes, however, as Cronje's story of the black woman giving venereal disease to the white baby reveals) (26)

The allusion is to Geoffrey Cronje's claim in 'n Tuiste vir die nageslag (1945) that, through employing blacks as domestic servants, whites ignore their "low standards of hygiene" and thereby expose themselves to "infection" (besmetting), including venereal disease (see Coetzee, "Mind of Apartheid" 25). The identity of servants as infiltrators from the realm of filth, their very presence opening the charmed circle of the bourgeois family to the invasion of contagion, was firmly established in nineteenth-century Europe (Helen Cixous has referred to the maid/governess/nurse figure as "the hole in the social cell" [quoted in Gallop 144]). The

Comaroffs cite a communication from the medical officer in Mafeking in 1890 calling for the inforcement of the Contagious Diseases Act in the "native location": "The public should have some protection against the spread of syphilis which is frequently effected through the servants attending children as nurses" (229).¹⁴ But the text to which I wish now to turn is a cautionary tale about the infection of white children by black servants which makes no reference whatsoever to disease as a medical danger.

The Heir of Brendiford is a novel by Nellie Fincher which was published in Durban in 1909 and proved sufficiently popular to go through two further editions in the same year, the last appearing simultaneously in London under the imprint of a British house (SABIB). It tells the story of Theodore Treloar, born into a family of "landed gentry" in the colony of Natal. As a child he enjoys the companionship of an older Zulu boy, employed by his parents in place of a nurse or nanny. When he is nine years old, his parents, dissatisfied with the circumstances of his upbringing, send him to England, where he matures into a model young gentleman, though marked, outwardly, by a mysterious reserve, and inwardly, by a sense of unworthiness. After the death of his parents, Treloar returns to Natal to see to his family's affairs and is not heard from for two years. When an uncle in England dies, he inherits the title of baronet and with it the estate of Brendiford. An emissary dispatched to the Colony finds him living the life of a recluse as a "white kaffir" with a Zulu woman and a "dun-coloured" child. He resists entreaties to return to England to take up his title and property on the ground that honour forbids it: the disgrace he has brought upon the family name obliges him to remain at the scene of his fall, living the truth of his family motto: "Post Maculam, Extinctio". This is translated in the text as "After Dishonour, Death", but might more aptly be rendered as "once tainted, life is over": once racial purity has been adulterated, identity is permanently annihilated.

The story is obviously informed by the colonial master-plot of moral decay through racial etiolation, a plot whose structure is neatly

summarized in the title of J.M. Coetzee's essay on Sarah Gertrude Millin: blood, taint, flaw, degeneration. But the difference is that in Nellie Fincher's novel the point of contamination is not Treloar's union with a black woman but his experience as a child: the first term in the sequence - blood, the carrier of infection in the metaphor of disease -- is therefore entirely absent from the metonymic chain. The taint is rather a moral one, acquired through contact with the Zulu companion of his boyhood.

Treloar's mother has misgivings about employing the black boy-nurse, remembering her own mother's injunction to

[k]eep the black and white children as much apart as possible. One has a subtle reflex action upon the other's mind. You would not dream of allowing an ancient Briton to take charge of your child, and give a sweet babe first impressions through a savage. The natives are on the same plane of civilization that the ancient Britons were when the Romans first occupied Briton. (25)

(How differently Conrad's Marlow invokes a similar analogy at the beginning of Heart of Darkness!) The fact that Mrs Treloar nevertheless goes ahead and engages the "umfaan" may suggest that the germ of contamination goes back at least a generation. According to Maurice Evans,

The evil effects of contact are more generally recognized in the case of younger children, who are nursed by black boys. Unfortunately at the most impressionable age, young children of both sexes are left in entire charge of natives, who are often engaged specifically for this work in the most casual way, without regard to the state of their health, character, or morals. The irresponsible carelessness on the part of parents, which allows such a state of things, is probably the result of a reaction from the native to the European. The love of ease, the irresponsibility of the native, must have its effect on the average employer, and it seems to be shown in this case, in which the sacred duties of parenthood are evaded, and a responsibility, for which he is entirely unfit, is placed upon the native. (Evans 228-29)¹⁵

The new nanny, Umteuquah, son of a chief, becomes

the background upon which the Heir of Brendiford built up his thoughts. The thoughts became crystallized into acts, and the acts into habits, and the habits formed character. In after years, if one wondered how Theodore had ever arrived at such a conviction or sentiment, it could be traced back to some subtle impression that had been indelibly impressed upon him by Umteuquah. (26-27)

Theodore's mother later wonders "if there were some subtle influence that the natives of Natal had unconsciously wielded upon the Heir of

Brendiford's mind and character, which had dwarfed and repressed the inherited tendency to noble impulses and lofty purposes" (39). What has rubbed off on the young English boy, by "subtle influence" through "subtle impression" and "subtle reflex action", is presumably some of Umteuquah's "blackness", a process "amusingly" anticipated when Theodore is first introduced to his new nurse: "'Don't touch my hand,' he said, with childish dignity, 'the black will come off yours'" (27). The "something else" that this blackness stands for is, broadly speaking, "native philosophy" (25), the culture of an inferior race. But the text is more specific.

Theodore's elders remark that, at the age of nine, he has the look of "a boy well into his teens" (34), with "nothing of the child left in his composition" (36). What Umteuquah -- who is in every other respect a model companion, a loving, brave and loyal protector (46) -- has done is to initiate his white charge into the world of adult sexuality ("the lower interpretation of life", it will subsequently be called ["Out of the Depths" 11]), the realm of the "lower body" disowned by the "lofty purposes" of the bourgeois "upper body". The form of this initiation is innocent enough: the boys swim together in the river naked, and exchange "rude ribald pleasantries" with "kaffir girls . . . in scanty attire" (50,49). Yet this is clearly

not the sort of conversation that a European mother would knowingly allow a child to hear. If the untutored native is not grossly bad in act, yet in his sentiments and conversation he does not recognize anything to be holy or sacred (50)

-- and Theodore, like "many a Natal child . . . had had no childhood! no unsullied years of unconscious innocence!" (52). When his precocious awareness is insouciantly revealed to his parents in conversation, they are horrorstruck by its "baseness" and "obscen[ity]": "Who'd ever have thought", his mother wails, "that our son had been inhaling evil for years! The poison has permeated his moral system drop by drop, and I do not believe it will ever be totally eradicated" (59). Her forecast is vindicated by the plot, though not in the way suggested here: while it is true that Theodore never rids himself of the taint, it manifests itself in

cancerous self-disgust rather than in any "evil" or even immodesty of conduct (aside, of course, from his transgressive marriage).

The first point to be made is that contagion seems a purely imagistic vehicle for the novel's account of African "influence" on the young Treloar. His mother recalls that "not one breath of native philosophy ever reached our inner consciousness" (25, emphasis added); Treloar has been "inhaling evil", his "moral system" permeated by "poison . . . drop by drop"; and an impartial visitor from England makes the following observation of black people in general:

I noticed in Maritzburg when they passed near me that their bodies give off an objectionable smell. In fact one could always tell at the hotel, it seemed to me, if a native had been in a room recently when one entered. Their presence seems most particularly disagreeable, and leaves its effluvia behind. (88-89)

But as I have said, there is no suggestion here of physical disease, and the "effluvia" secreted by the black's noisome body is only a metaphor (and an implicit one, at that) for the baneful moral influence he is capable of exerting; at most, as we have seen, the process of moral corruption is accorded the mystery of a "subtle reflex action" (25).

Yet there is nevertheless just a hint here of an unspoken or unspeakable excess, a magical or praeternatural power of contamination invested in the Other which alone makes sense of an otherwise absurd story. I would suggest that what we glimpse here is a moment of moral panic in which the writer seeks urgently to promote the symbolic authority of the ethnie -- or caste, as I shall later argue -- by redrawing the boundaries of its own ideal self-image felt to be in danger of dissolution. The novel should perhaps be regarded as a kind of performative speech act, a ritual of purification which rationalizes its struggle with its own demons in that apotropaic gesture known to psychoanalysis as projection. And yet the corruption to be fended off is neither entirely repressed nor unambiguously externalized. For instance, the moral ascendancy of the ethnie is exposed as being undermined by weaker members of the group on several occasions. First, the "immorality" of Umtequah is indirectly ascribed to fallen

whites: "Many [young Africans] come in contact with bad white men and women, and then their natural modesty takes to itself wings and flies away" (50). Secondly, Treloar blames himself for "ruin[ing]" his native wife "by taking her from her own people" ("Out of the Depths" 10; she subsequently deserts him). And finally, the visitor's remarks on the smell of Africans quoted above are oddly answered by his colonial interlocutor as follows:

The natives are passing through a trying state of transition. The old order is changing and giving place to new as they come in contact with Europeans. Many of them become intoxicated with the sweeping evolution in which they are involved. They cast aside their old morality and take up all the bad habits and customs of Europeans. (89)

Here, as in the writing by Scully discussed earlier, the vector of contamination goes from white to black: barbarism is corrupted by civilization. But, the argument goes, savagery will return the favour with interest unless civilized moral standards are scrupulously upheld through the maintenance of a maximum distance between the races. Of course, such a prescription is merely an exercise in damage control: because it always has the potential to blur the edges of identity, contact itself is the problem, though more especially any contact which occurs outside of the master/servant paradigm inscribed in prevailing political relations. Fincher's attitude is precisely that identified by Philip Mason as characteristic of the British social strategy to retain political control in India -- "imperial aloofness", the "not in front of the natives" syndrome, which explicitly concedes the precariousness and unreality of the official racial identity.

Nellie Fincher wrote a sequel to The Heir of Brendiford, "Out of the Depths", which SABIB dates to 1910. In this brief (18-page) narrative Treloar is redeemed through an improbable encounter with a Trappist monk in the bush. Although the Heir of Brendiford evidently cannot be rehabilitated into white society and is destined "to work out [his] repentance" (18) as an anchorite, the monk concludes that his convert has "strong religious instincts" (5) and "a noble soul" (18): the tale is resolved through a typical gesture of tragic transcendence. Presumably Fincher or her readers

were dissatisfied with the fate meted out to Treloar at the end of the The Heir of Brendiford: the sequel apparently seeks to reassure us that, although the social transgression cannot be repaired, the instincts of blood or race will eventually triumph over the vagaries of circumstance; no white man can ever be entirely "lost to those of his own race and colour" (The Heir of Brendiford 24).¹⁶ In case the message of the novel had been lost on her readers, Fincher has Treloar give the monk his own account of his doom:

I realise now how it was. Any ordinary white child given up when quite young to the care and keeping of a savage people will become uncivilized. The inherent tendencies derived from his own race and people would have little effect, except to cause warfare and confusion within him. The pride of race, and the pre-natal influence are not proof against the lower interpretation of life that a child given up to the tuition of savages would receive. Instincts so enslaved when young are bound sooner or later to wreak confusion in his manhood. Civilization is scarcely ever more than superficial as we come to analyse it (11)

Two points need to be made. First, that "civilization" is acknowledged to be superficial: impliedly, the "instincts" incline the individual toward "the lower interpretation of life"; every child is or has the potential to be a savage, and requires the restraint of a civilized upbringing to be saved for the race (a view of which the later Freud would have approved). This "race" is revealed as merely contingent with no power to determine the fate of the individual; perhaps we are then to conclude that it is not Treloar's finer instincts as a white man that turn him ultimately toward God, but his noble blood, which alone has the magical power to combat the strength of blackness.

Secondly, in the context of Fincher's story, "the lower interpretation of life" is a sensual view of life which frankly acknowledges the power and importance of sex. Blackness is sexuality. This equation should come as no surprise: Sander Gilman has drawn attention to the "commonplace that the primitive was associated with unbridled sexuality", and that in the European popular imagination, "[t]he primitive is the black" (Difference and Pathology 99). The very presence of blacks in the contemporary world "served as an indicator of how far humanity had come

in establishing control over the world and itself" (Gilman 99) -- a control, as scores of colonial cautionary tales never tired of reminding their readers, which remained purely provisional and subject always to atavistic subversion.

It is tempting to speculate that Fincher's strategy as a white woman writer is to stigmatize and repudiate a culture in which women are not placed upon a pedestal and enveloped, as "holy and sacred" (50), in a mythology of purity and goodness -- a status which is the source of whatever power she can command within her own culture (Treloar tells the monk: "It is given to women to have the nobler, lofty task of uplifting mankind" ["Out of the Depths" 12]). Because her own sexual identity is so occluded by the discourse of her culture, the white woman is obliged to use a metaphor for sex -- blackness -- even in its disavowal and repression. Or perhaps there is an element of straightforward sexual jealousy at work: black women are more sensual and more available than their white counterparts and an obvious source of temptation for white men. How better to punish the transgressor than to inflict upon him an endless purgatory of remorse, which at the same time reinforces the myth that gentlemen are "not really like that" and aspire always to the "purity" of their womenfolk.

Yet I am not altogether convinced by this repression hypothesis, in terms of which sexuality is recovered as the "something else" for which blackness stands. For one thing, it hardly needs to be "recovered" because it is so patently on the surface of the text and hence of the implied author's consciousness. Klaus Theweleit was faced by something similar in his investigation of the masculinist mythology of the fascist Freikorps:

Yet what if everything the analyst is inclined to interpret is not the least bit "unconscious" in the patient? If "incest" and castration anxiety constantly haunt his fantasies, daydreams, and diary entries, and if there is no affect stirring inside him, how can the analyst come to speak about (i.e., "interpret") that configuration? (209)

Since Theweleit does not think it makes much sense to label an entire social group psychotic (while the men with whom he is concerned "do not . . . seem to possess the Oedipal form of the ego", neither are they "in

any way 'unadapted to reality', nor do they have 'weak egos' or any other such disorder" [209-10]), he is inclined to reject the Freudian concept of ego psychology in favour of the "machinic" mode of unconscious mental production proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. I do not propose to enter those deep waters, and will merely point out that Nellie Fincher's concern with race and sex is "unconscious" only to the extent that it seems to be automatic, a given of her social identity, the product of an ethnic imperative. There is no doubt that codes of dress and sexual mores in Zulu society appeared to the white colonial community to be far more relaxed and "primitive" (lower class?) than their own. And on the face of it, is there anything so inexplicably irrational about the fear of being influenced by other people who are perceived to be so different from oneself that their influence threatens to turn one into a different sort of person, moreover a lower or lesser sort of person? The most one can say is that the absurd exaggeration of this differentness and of the threat which it poses suggests that the real fear which it masks is the fear of discovering -- or acknowledging -- that one is not "in reality" the person one supposes oneself to be. But again, this insight is available on the surface of Fincher's text, in Treloar's recognition of the superficiality of "civilization". Perhaps Coetzee was not wrong after all in his identification of a metonymic chain underlying the discursive system of colonial representation. In The Heir of Brendiford it is arguably not the case that blackness stands for sexuality (metaphor) so much as that "uncontrolled" sexuality is an aspect of a repudiated ethnic otherness or blackness (metonymy or synecdoche). But a basic question of priority renders such a formulation ambiguous: desire is clearly prior to the social construction of identity, and yet desire is unknowable outside of its representation in such a construction (some would maintain that even the primacy of genital heterosexuality is a social construct [e.g. Dworkin]).

It might be instructive to turn for purposes of comparison to a text of the same era written by a male author, for the control of sexuality, as

a moral problem, was seen at the time to be a masculine affair. The problem of the "sexualized female", as Gilman calls her, was acknowledged only in the domain of medical pathology. (Perhaps the very fact that, by the late nineteenth century, "the idea of black sexuality as pathological was well implanted in European consciousness" [Gilman, Difference and Pathology 113] reintroduces the term apparently elided in the sequence of displacements traced in Fincher's novel: the absent disease whose contagion is to be feared is, after all, sexuality.)

Perceval Gibbon's novel Souls in Bondage (1904) exhibits a similar splitting of desire between "upper" and "lower" domains along the lines of race. It tells the story of Cecilia, an unusually pretty and pale-skinned "off-coloured" (half-caste) young woman, whose manners and morals are a cut above the coarse, vicious ways of the Coloured community in which she lives. (Gibbon's representation of that community is discussed in Chapter 3 of this study.) Cecilia's estimable qualities attract the patronage of the kind-hearted but ineffectual Thwaites, an elderly white lawyer. Thwaites warns her to beware the attentions of Bantam, an "off-coloured" rake with a reputation for violence and debauchery, but to no avail: Cecilia succumbs to Bantam's charms and the two are married. Bantam rapidly drops the mask of tenderness assumed for the courtship and reverts to his vicious ways, ill-using Cecilia and eventually beating her to death.

The text makes it clear that Cecilia's high ideals are undermined by Bantam's sexual attractiveness. Bantam is handsome (106, 113), "slender and erect like a young god in bronze" (235) with a "reckless gait" (83); he "sit[s] finely in the saddle" (116) and: "it was impossible not to take pleasure in his lithe agile beauty" (106). His presence is consistently registered in language evocative of heat and power: his eyes "burn" (51), his glance and his whisper are "hot" (52, 55), his kiss imprints itself on Cecilia's memory as a "burning moment" (94); he is "strong" (75, 93, 113, 118, 229), and his personality, with "some strength she could not withstand" (55), exercises a "semi-hypnotic power" (229) over Cecilia. Yet

Bantam is at the same time

a creature of bestial and criminal tendencies, non-moral by nature, immoral by inclination, sensual, violent, and fickle In him the grossness and evil fire of the half-blood were typified; the axiom anent "the vices of both and the virtues of neither" was borne out to its last letter. (289)

Bantam's sensuality and his savagery are evidently of a piece; his relationship with Cecilia, based on sexual attraction, is intrinsically barbaric and "primeval": "Bantam's instinct guided him unerringly to appeal to what is primeval in all women -- the worship of force" (229).

This troubling authorial generalization has its place also in the other relationship portrayed in the novel, between the white hero George Joyce and his "little Peggy", Marjorie Graham. However, Joyce, being civilized, gratifies his girlfriend's "worship of force" by bullying cheeky and undisciplined "Kafirs". Called upon to rescue Peggy's dissolute father from a drunken orgy in his workers' "kraal", he embarks on a beating whose description is worth quoting at length:

Then the sjambok got to work, coldly, scientifically, remorselessly, with the rapidity of a maxim gun and much of its effect. Joyce worked calmly, without hurry or delay, with no show of passion. He was just a white man exercising his right. The squeals which Peggy heard were vociferous enough, but there were no protests, no questions. The Kafirs knew they were in for it and had to go through with it At last he was done, and stood with arms akimbo and legs wide apart watching the rubbing and whimpering Kafirs. Their empty slavish eyes were all upon him; he was their baas, their master and lord by strength as well as by right. (203-204)

That the author of this revolting passage was within a few years to pen the classic Margaret Harding, with its sensitive and sympathetic portrayal of the black character Kamis, is one of the mysteries of South African letters (see Stewart, Constance). The image of the colonial colossus bestriding his craven subjects, flanked by the symbolic triumvirate of science, might and right, is surely one of the crudest projections of racist Imperial phantasy in all the literature. But what I wish to suggest is that the brutality depicted here may be, in the context of the novel, a displacement -- via the approved codes of representation -- of authorial fear of, and aggression towards, women's sexuality.

The nature of Joyce's relationship with Peggy presents an extraordinary contrast with that of Bantam and Cecilia. Peggy is first described as "a little thing, with brown hair under a battered felt hat, a round freckled face and little brown hands" (133), and her child-like appeal is emphasized by the repeated use of diminutives (e.g. 268, 274). Joyce's attitude towards her is one of affectionate and paternal condescension; on their first meeting, he reflects to himself: "what a jolly little chum a girl like that would make Straight as falling water . . . and clean as the sky. Not an ounce of vice in her" (143-44). What attracts him initially, then, is Peggy's innocence -- her lack of feminine wiles, her callow openness. "Little chum" becomes his term of endearment for her (147, 162, 208, 209, 256, 275). Later, he is moved by her need for protection, mainly from the threatening "Kafirs" made unruly by her drunken father's demoralization: "She was like a bruised and trodden flower, so pathetic and pretty in her distress that his heart bounded to look at her" (268). Peggy's boyish candour enables Joyce to enjoy her company -- "good-fellowship" (146) -- without awkwardness. At one stage, impressed by her skill in inspanning some oxen, he bestows on her what is apparently the ultimate accolade: "'You ought to be a man,' he answered. 'You'd be a good one'" (152); later,

He stood up, went over to her and clapped his hand on her shoulder where she sat. Just such a gesture might have been employed to a man, to any other good chap. There was fellowship and equality in it, and it thrilled the girl. (200)

When sex, in the form of a casual allusion to marriage, finally rears its head, the "frankness and simplicity" (216-17) of their interaction is ruined and an embarrassed Joyce retreats, keeping his distance until summoned to save her from mutinous "Kafirs" after the death of her father. (He in the mean time has risen in the world from transport rider to office clerk, where he is enjoying the attentions of another "boyish girl" (252), his boss's daughter Katje.)

Joyce and his little chum eventually get married and presumably look forward to a lifetime of clapping their hands on each other's shoulders

("'Cheer up, little chum,' whispered Joyce as he led her from the church, 'we're chums for ever now'" [280]). It is a union made not in heaven but in the British public school, purged not only of sexual difference but of the whole threatening world of adult eroticism. In the idealized racial division which structures the moral economy of the novel as a whole, sexual innocence is equated with goodness and whiteness, sensuality with evil and blackness. Such is the tenor of the following exchange between Thwaites and Bantam:

"You are not of my class [says Thwaites]. You belong to the underlife, to the dregs of the dregs. You see, my friend, it is always to be remembered that I am white. . . . We are different people, living in different elements. What could you do to me?"

"No more 'n C'cilia could," said Bantam carelessly. "We's both coloured, yo' know."

"Yes," agreed Thwaites slowly. "But," he continued gravely, "there are other colours than those of the skin. And in certain respects, my man, Cecilia is white, and you are --"

"Off-colour," grinned Bantam.

"No," corrected Thwaites sharply; "you are black. Just black." (181-83)

Yet the passage simultaneously reminds the reader of the metaphoricity of "black" and "white" as indicators of moral worth by drawing attention to the apparent anomaly of Cecilia, a character of whom even our hero Joyce is moved to say: "she's a good sort of girl -- good enough to be white" (221). However, Cecilia is only a limit-case, an imperfect exception which confirms the rule, her purity or inner whiteness compromised by the taint of sexuality -- a taint which, as we saw in Gibbon's characterization of the "little chum", can only be erased through a denial of sexual difference, of femaleness itself. Bantam lets slip to Thwaites, who is bent on preventing their marriage, that Cecilia has already surrendered her virginity to him. This news give Thwaites "a new horror to meet, a strange sorrow and fear, whose very vagueness fixed them as all-embracing, all obliterating" (187). For him, this "dreadful" turn of events represents the victory of "the powers of darkness" over "cleanliness and purity" (187); what is "obliterated" is his belief that Cecilia represented an exception to the rule of colour: "[o]ld Thwaites found his Waterloo in this, that the half-caste girl he had befriended was less than he had hoped" (188).

There is no explicit authorial qualification of this -- to our eyes -- absurd over-reaction, and such subversion of its moral basis as we do find in the novel is in its way even more disconcerting. Having accepted Bantam as a suitor, Cecilia begins to relax her habitually staid demeanour and the narrator comments: "She moved with a gladder alacrity and a less [sic] aloofness, and was a little more human and -- well, off-coloured than had been her wont" (95). The apparent contradiction in this collocation of "human" and "off-coloured" is in reality just another aspect of the implied author's symbolic revenge on women. Whether Mary or Magdalene, virgin or whore, women miss the mark, consigned to a positioning either above or below the category of the "human" that is the monopoly of gentlemen (and de-gendered, asexual "little chums" like Peggy). In response to Bantam's cruel treatment of her after their marriage, Cecilia assumes the pose of a martyred saint, refusing to retaliate or even resist (accepting the consequences, perhaps, of her submission to passion): "I am in hell, but I am satisfied", she tells Thwaites (246). Like a youthful Virgin Mary, she looks

as though an annunciation was yet due to her. Framed in the black entrance of the hovel, with her pale face in high relief among her coiling hair, she made a picture to dwell on and remember. It was her doom to be picturesque to the end. (282)

As a policeman later remarks: "Gad, if she's as straight as she looks, she ought to be painted on a church window" (288). The other coloured women resent the way she "goes on as if [she] was a white school-teacher" (285); "In her presence they felt that she represented a reproach and diffused something of a religious air" (291). Her attitude is a sharp goad to Bantam, who protests: "'I married yo' for a wife,' he said. 'Yo' a swindle. I didn' wan' a dumb white image. I ain't got no use for a picter. I wanted a wife'" (294).

The argument of the novel seems to be that Cecilia is doomed because of the adulterated blood which has made her both a whore and an angel: she is a "soul in bondage" to her mixed racial destiny. But the fact is that, for Gibbon, Cecilia is doomed because she is a woman, unacceptably

suprahuman as the "dumb white image" of saintly Victorian femininity, unacceptably subhuman as one who has "fallen", has once yielded to base physical passion. Since blackness is the sustained metonym for sexuality in the novel, authorial anxiety over the control of desire is displaced onto the scene of colonial phantasy discussed above, Joyce's flogging of the unruly "Kafirs" -- a ritualistic assertion of "civilized" control over barbarous, libidinous savages (at the same time a reinforcement of moral "right" by "strength" so as to appease the atavistic "worship of force . . . primeval in all women"). Sander Gilman has formulated the linkages between male sexual anxiety, political control, "sexualized" women and native colonial subjects in these terms:

Zola [in Nana] sees in the sexual corruption of the male the source of political impotence and provides a projection of what is basically a personal fear, the fear of loss of power, onto the world. The "white man's burden", his sexuality and its control, is displaced into the need to control the sexuality of the Other, the Other as sexualized female. For the colonial mentality that sees "natives" as needing control easily shifts that concern to the woman, in particular the prostitute caste. (Difference and Pathology 107)

Perhaps here we glimpse a key to that slippery question of priority addressed earlier. The white colonial male must negotiate his fear of danger in two forms: the political threat presented by oppressed and rebellious native subjects, and the moral threat posed by his own refractory libido. The fear of losing control conflates the two, by displacement, in the figure of the sexualized black or coloured woman (the descriptions of other "off-coloured" women in Gibbon's novel unmistakably consign them to the "prostitute caste". (Perhaps the most striking evocation of the sexualized half-caste femme fatale is the character of Letty in Douglas Blackburn's Love Muti [1915], who adds to "the mentality of the Western woman" a "strange sensuous orientalism" [17] and an "animalistic" [25] charm which has "a strange potent attraction" [279] for the Englishman, Rabson.) But because the projection is overdetermined, the Other is susceptible of various identification as the black, the sexualized woman (regardless of race), and the white man who has "lost control".

According to Joyce, the degenerate behaviour of Peggy's father (sunken to the level of "Kafirs", contaminated by blackness) is a surrender of power which not only opens the way to insubordination and revolt but is tantamount to "deliberately invitin' your black scum to do what they please with [your daughter]" (211). The half-caste community is described as "the outcome of white supremacy in a black country" (5), while Cecilia herself is simply "the result of some white man's incontinence" (71). The fact that Cecilia's whole tragedy is blamed on her "mission-school education", which has "sundered her hopelessly from her own colour and kind, while giving her nothing in their place" (290) (a reclaimed whore without gainful employ?) completes the moralizing interrogation of the white ethnie at the political level of liberal segregationist ideology.

To sum up, then: Souls in Bondage has several themes in common with both Scully's lecture and Fincher's novel. All three texts deploy a moral economy aimed at conserving the ethical superiority of the writer's ethnic identity through a symbolic process of division or segregation. In Scully's lecture, the threat of contamination is ambiguously located not only in the native "savage" but also in what is done in the name of "civilization". In the later texts, the social and political message is overwhelmingly if at times ambivalently racist: "blackness" is the degrading contagion to be kept at bay through the strict, ethically legitimated, policing of racial boundaries. And although the sanitation syndrome was an important contemporary source of imagery for the representation of blackness, blackness features in these novels as a metonymy not for disease so much as for the "something else" of the realm of "lower body" desire, sexuality, perhaps, as a species of degenerative moral sickness. But, as I argued in the case of Fincher's novel, it would be misleading to suggest that Souls in Bondage is about sex rather than race. The confusion, shame and fear generated by the sexualized woman is rather evidence of an acute vulnerability, a faultline, in the patriarchal construction of British ethnic identity at the time. It is therefore apt to rise unbidden, like the

symptom of an obsessional neurosis, to commandeer the content of narrative explorations of important issues of collective identity.¹⁷ Sexuality itself is no more than a synecdoche for the generalized social and cultural otherness of black people -- primitive, "lower" on the ethical and evolutionary scales -- as perceived (or projected) by colonial whites. Since the body constellates the signifiers of racial difference, the body is the symbolic terrain on which the struggle for political and moral advantage was fought. But the body is an inherently unstable vehicle for any myth of ethnic purity because the body itself is impure and "other" to the (Western?) mind. White bodies no less than black bodies are permeable, porous, their orifices open to the traffic of the metonymic chain identified by Coetzee -- "influence", germ, disease, blood, semen . . . and the degenerative dirt of desire itself. In the next chapter I shall examine the politicized sexuality -- or sexualized politics -- of the "Black Peril" phenomenon, and then move on to representations of the product of inter-racial procreation, the half-caste, that "result of [the] white man's incontinence", that enduring reminder of the lawless promiscuity of desire itself.

NOTES

1. See the section entitled "The Emotional Aspects of the Colour Situation" in the discussion of Plomer's Turbott Wolfe, below.
2. In his fascinating commentary on the ethnic mythology of the German Freikorps in the 1920s, Klaus Theweleit has observed that "neither defensive fantasies nor paradigms for the transmutation of reality seem . . . to be class-specific" (89) -- though maleness rather than race is what he discerns to be at the root of the shared identity represented in both fascist officer narratives and proletarian novels.
3. There are several suggestive parallels to be drawn between Austen's account of the moral economy of witchcraft in early modern Europe and the moral economy of Black Peril panics in South Africa.

4. Another approach which is in broad agreement with our argument but which approaches the issue from the perspective of psychology rather than anthropology -- and which explores the logic of "overdetermination" noted by both Fanon and Jordan, above -- has been made by Chantelle Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. Laclau and Mouffe backtrack from Marx to Hegel via poststructuralism in theorizing the psycho-political mechanism which converts difference into antagonism in human society. They map out the discursive logic of political frontiers in terms of the distinction between the logics of difference and equivalence, which are roughly comparable with Hayden White's logics of contiguity and continuity. An ideally stable society would be governed exclusively by the "logic of difference", which predicates a system of fixed differences within which each social identity is constructed as a positivity. But such a system is an impossibility, Laclau and Mouffe maintain, whether on account of the nature of "difference" itself -- in the structuralist concept of system, positivity is an illusion and meaning emerges only differentially or negatively -- or whether, as some believe, it is innate in human thinking to convert difference into binary opposition: either way, "antagonism . . . is the 'witness' of the impossibility of suture, of creating objective and closed systems of difference" (Norval 12).
 In any event, what happens is that the logic of difference is subverted by the "logic of equivalence", which discursively demarcates a frontier between, for example, different racial groups. The category of race becomes, or is already, hopelessly overdetermined by the overlay of a potentially limitless series of differential oppositions, social, economic, cultural, ethical, etc. "White" and "black" lose their characters as fully constituted identities, and each becomes the indispensable antithesis of the other. The recognition that not all members of each racial group fully fit the composite stereotype helps to ensure that the identity of each group is constructed in terms of the other, which means that there are traces of the other in that identity. A full positivity can be regained only by annihilating the other. Out of a deep sense of insecurity over the precariousness of its identity, therefore, the group in possession of political power sets about systematically negating the identity of the other. The result is political antagonism with profound psychological roots.
5. Plaatje is "sing[ing] the dirge of Cape ideals" when he quotes this "formula". From his perspective (1916), Imperialist colonialism appears ethically exemplary in contrast with the "settler" colonialism of what he calls the "Republicans" of the "Northern States".
6. In the South African context, the association of urban squalour with people of colour, the racial other, is demonstrated by a piece such as "The Slums of the White City" (1908).
7. The idea makes a subsequent appearance in the United State, too: see the arguments of Charlotte Perkins Gilman in "A Suggestion on the Negro Problem".
8. That Scully was acquainted with works like those of Booth and Mayhew is confirmed by a reference in his short story "The Fundamental Axiom" to "certain accounts . . . of the experiences of venturesome persons who explored regions called slums, said to exist to a considerable extent in most large British cities" (Kafir Stories 56).

9. Though not always in a straightforwardly racist way. For instance, the terms of Scully's proposal that civilization be safeguarded by physical separation were to be echoed by the prominent "liberal" segregationist Howard Pim, in his "Note on Native Policy" in 1904, though to a different purpose. Pim argues that strict control of "the Native" in the reserves is necessary because without it,

whatever veneer of civilization he may have acquired will rapidly under these circumstances disappear, and unless he is controlled, he will rapidly relapse into barbarism, in which condition he will be a source of endless trouble and difficulty to his white neighbours. (cited in Dubow 24)
10. It was generally recognized that the deterioration of the Native through contact with civilization was physical as well as moral, e.g.

The result of the native coming into contact with civilization is an enfeeblement of his physique, a great increase of disease, with lessened power of resistance, and a vastly increased mortality in both adults and children. (Bruce-Bays 267)
11. The chronic insecurity of the "honest poor" and lower middle class, for whom the loss of a job could mean a swift decline into "the abyss of misery", meant that this fear was real enough (Bedarida 62).
12. Even when the physical and metaphysical domains are differentiated, there is an implicit metonymic sliding between the two:

If our health is endangered by the native population, if our moral standard suffers and our aesthetical feelings are hurt by the sight of, and unavoidable intercourse with, undressed men and women, we have a perfect right to demand protective legislation. (Hopf 90)
13. The metaphoric dimension of the sanitation syndrome is never wholly effaced in the elaboration of its metonymic displacements. Stallybrass and White make the point that in the writings of the sanitary reformers generally,

the metonymic associations (between the poor and animals, between the slum-dweller and sewage) are read at first as the signs of an imposed social condition for which the State is responsible. But the metonymic associations (which trace the social articulation of "depravity") are constantly elided with and displaced by a metaphoric language in which filth stands in for the slum-dweller: the poor are pigs. (131)
14. The fact that in Britain in the 1880s an estimated 1500 children were dying every year from inherited syphilis suggests that servants and nurses were being blamed for the sins of the father; see Senf.

15. Compare the following, approximately contemporary, sources:

Probably nine-tenths of the white children in South Africa have native or coloured nurses, and many of the children are more under the care of their nurses than their parents. This means that South Africa, for the sake of the rising generation, must concern itself with the moral training of the natives. (Christian Express 1 Jul. 1911:1)

While the young South African enjoys great opportunities of becoming a useful, efficient member of society, he certainly has dangers to face. Perhaps the most obvious of these is that which arises from his daily contact with inferior races. The demoralizing effect of this contact may be seen throughout the country. It has been in progress for many years, and has left its mark upon us. (Shaw 231-32)

Long and intimate contact with a race whose conceptions of life are superstitious cannot fail to produce a debasing effect upon the attitude and beliefs of the higher and originally more enlightened race. A kind of osmosis of ideas is continually taking place by which the two races tend to become equalized in their opinions and beliefs, and the more intimately the races are mixed the more rapid will this process be. The process is, of course, perfectly unconscious, but its effects are already noticeable in many Europeans; and one hardly dares to think what these effects may be in the centuries to come. (Macvicar 668)

16. The epithet "lost" in respect of white men who "go native" is practically universal: cf. Marlow to Kurtz: "You will be lost . . . utterly lost" (Conrad 107).

17. Compare Ronald Hyam:

One thing is certain. Sex is at the very heart of racism. Racism is not simply caused by sexual apprehensions, and there are many other factors involved, such as fear of the unfamiliar, fear bred by memory of historic conflicts, fear of demographic swamping by the superior numbers of a culture perceived as alien and inferior, fear of disease, fear of economic competition for limited resources -- but the peculiarly emotional hostility towards black men which it has so often engendered requires a sexual explanation. (Hyam 203)

CHAPTER THREE

THE LOGIC OF SOCIAL CASTE: THE NATIVE QUESTION, THE HALF-CASTE
AND THE BLACK PERIL

Madness is something rare in individuals -- but in groups,
parties, peoples, ages, it is the rule.

--Friedrich Nietzsche, Maxim 156, Beyond Good and Evil

I

The reader today might be inclined to regard such melodramas of racial contagion as The Heir of Brendiford and Souls in Bondage as the eccentric fantasies of neurotic individuals. But nothing could be further from the case: even a cursory examination of the contemporary public discourse of white South Africa reveals that the concerns of these novels were absolutely central to the social and political thought of the moment.

Gibbon and, particularly, Fincher wrote at a time when the "Native Question" was being more vigorously debated than ever before. The flood of books, essays, pamphlets and newspaper editorials devoted to the topic in the years 1908-1912 no doubt responded to the sense of a fresh start for the country offered by the Act of Union in 1910. But what energized the debate was the rapid elaboration of the startling new political vision of segregation.¹ The policy advocated by early segregationist pamphleteers like H.J. Crocker and Fred Bell was considerably more radical than that which informed any subsequent colour bar legislation, even during the era of grand apartheid. What was envisaged was the absolute territorial separation of the races; as Crocker's version has it, "the occupation and firm settlement of the European in the temperate zone, and the Negro in the tropical zone, of the African continent" (16). Crocker's plan to resettle all black people on land north of the Zambezi was less practical than some,

but it is important to emphasize that segregationist thought in the first three decades of this century sought its primary justification in moral rather than economic terms. So far from advocating a policy to ensure the continuing provision of cheap black labour to meet the needs of the developing economy, most segregationists abominated the migrant labour system as a form of serfdom and openly conceded that adoption of their proposals would mean, initially at least, considerable economic hardship for whites (e.g. Cotton 87). In their insistence on an all-white labour policy, segregationists were admittedly addressing the economic problem of Poor Whites, but the terms of this address were ethical: they protested "the presence of a servile race causing the white man to look upon labour, with its antiseptic medicinal virtues, as a degradation"² (Evans 221) and reviled "the pernicious doctrine that manual labour is degrading to the European" (Crocker 24); their avowed object was ethnic regeneration:

We must, not for immediate economic reasons only, but for the very life of our race, preserve some of the conditions, harsh and severe though they be, which helped to build up our character and fibre in the past. (Evans 215)

Side-by-side with this hope for the spiritual revitalization of the white race one finds expressions of respect for cultural difference and sentiments of regard for African culture which would not be out of place in the relativistic context of recent anthropological writing:

The kafir has evolved a certain social organization. It has grown from and with his character, and true African civilization can only arise from its development

The African problem is insoluble by our intellects. The African alone can solve it. If we disregard the advance that the Negro has already made from savagery -- if we impose on him the trammels of alien institutions, if we cramp him in the social and political framework which seems so natural and inevitable to us, we shall be postponing the day of his real civilization

In a word we have in the true interest of the African people to declare war against those who have hitherto been looked on and who have looked on themselves as the champions of the Negro. For they with one accord advocate the cause not of the African but of the Europeanization of the African. (Buckland, Segregation 5, 6, 10)

However, this principled concern for the preservation of ethnic difference

and cultural independence, which ironically seems to point so directly toward the later emergence of Africanist or "nativist" thought, was steadily traduced by its consistent reduction in popular parlance to the demand that the black man be allowed "to develop along his own lines" (e.g. Bell 3, Palmer 66). Since the goal of complete territorial segregation was never to be realized, this formula in due course became little more than an excuse for apartheid-style discrimination: it has perhaps most memorably been answered by Ezekiel Mphahlele's testimony to colonial hybridity in

Down Second Avenue:

[In the 1940s] greater pressure was exerted by those who have taken it upon themselves to direct the lives of whole communities 'according to their own lines', with all the cynical ambiguity the phrase possesses We retreated to our townships 'to develop along our own lines'. We couldn't see the lines and the footprints. They had got so mixed up with other footprints in the course of time, and the winds had been blowing away some, too. (166)

While the writings of the South African segregationists were far less crudely racialist than contemporary white supremacist tracts emanating from America and elsewhere (e.g. Putnam Weale, Stoddard), it would be both naive and anachronistic to suggest that segregationism was initially inspired solely by a consciousness of ethnic degeneration coupled with enlightened cultural relativism. For instance, against the ethical arguments of Maurice Evans and others, one must set such a contention as: "imported labour is essential to the advancement of a country already overcrowded with a more or less useless parasitical population of blacks" (Pabo 345). Perhaps we are confronted again by the difference between the sophisticated, idealized self-presentation of the ethnie by its intellectuals and the simple prejudice of more ordinary minds. Moreover, concern for the symbolic ascendancy of the white ethnie was effectively indistinguishable from the fear of being worsted by blacks, as one contemporary commentator maintained:

Now if we ask ourselves the simple question "What is at the back of the minds of those who advocate the policy of segregation," I do not think we need look far to find the answer. It is fear. Fear that their own race will not be able to compete with the lower race. At heart they recognise that

what they term the lower race has all the potentialities of a higher race, and purely in self-interest they advocate a policy which they think will prevent them from having to compete with the lower race. (Fletcher 766)³

The expression of this fear was often cloaked in the sub-Darwinian threat of racial extinction in the struggle for survival:

The evidence that where a higher and a lower race come into conflict, the lower must inevitably succeed, is to our mind irrefutable [sic] (Stevens 43)⁴

Gresham's Law, by which an inferior currency ousts a good one, was operating in the remotest wilds of Africa (Curle 16)

[The white race] will be absorbed by the black with no more lasting effect or impression upon the result than a teaspoon of milk in a bucketful of coffee. (Franklin 23)

In South Africa, [whites] must rigidly segregate themselves from the blacks, and from the half-caste fringes which are forming, or the white strain will gradually disappear. (Curle 71)

But the fear expressed over and over again was the fear of that which, it seems, could only be articulated in the metaphor of an overwhelming "tide" or "wave" of blackness, a metaphor which achieves its most complex and resonant expression in the work of Sarah Gertrude Millin.⁵ It was the fear of losing control over a numerically superior subject race; the guilty fear of the oppressor, secretly aware of the justice and inevitability of retribution: "Thus, though we build up our dams of social ostracism and legal disability the invading waters will overtop them" (Drew 2); "the steadily rising tide of the black" (Franklin 25); "For that there will be some day an overflow, an overspilling of black men, seems tolerably certain" (Putnam Weale 235).⁶

The ethnic imperative galvanized by such fear was sometimes frankly racialist in expression, convinced of the insurmountable otherness and inferiority of blacks:

The social fusion of the black and white races in South Africa is impossible. The marked difference in physical aspect as regards colour and odour renders social intercourse not only difficult, but repulsive, and the barrier is so acutely felt and the dislike so profound and instinctive, that even religion seems powerless to uproot these deep-seated prejudices, and the natives, no matter how highly you may educate them, will always be treated and looked upon as an inferior and subject race.

(King 45)

Such notions of absolute and irrevocable difference were somewhat undermined by the facility and rapidity with which Africans assimilated European dress, manners and accomplishments. It was therefore an article of faith among most whites that blacks were natural mimics, adept at imitating the forms of European culture without ever acquiring the substance: the "veneer" of civilization could be shrugged off at a moment's notice:

This advancement or progress is but the skim of cream in a well-watered vessel of milk. At a cursory glance it appears strong and healthy, but if the surface be disturbed the impurities and dangers of the doctored decoction are disclosed to view

and yet behind this thin veneer of education we know and he knows, and he knows we know, lies the true and essential kafir ready to revert, and in his moments of absentmindedness or forgetfulness reverting, to the habits and customs of his innate heathendom . . . utterly repulsive and antagonistic to those teachings and traditions of the Gospel and civilization that he has so rapaciously swallowed and digested. (Pabo 347, 348)

the kafir is peculiarly imitative, and . . . this power of mimicry, which he shares in common with the monkey, parrot, and other birds and animals, is only too frequently mistaken by his sympathizers as a capacity for adaptability; and hence the consequent disappointment when after progressing to a certain point the kafir comes to a dead stop in his education. (De Payre 543; see also Davis 106, Putnam Weale 244-45)

The moral economy of segregationism was indisputably driven by recoil from what was perceived as the mutual contamination and degradation of the races:

Can it be said that contact with the European has been an influence for good? Emphatically, it can not. The palpable result of contact between the white man and the black has been degrading to both. Contact with the Negro, under prevailing conditions, is making the European, judged by European standards, industrially, less efficient; economically, less indispensable; morally, less scrupulous; intellectually, less anxious for self-improvement. Contact with the European, under prevailing conditions, is introducing to the Negro just those elements of our civilization which degrade. The Negro, leaving for more or less extended periods the simple restraints of his tribal system, with his weak mentality, sensuous disposition, physical incapability of restraint, and strongly marked imitative faculty, is rendered, under his present mode of living in labour areas, alarmingly susceptible to vice, intemperance and crime. (Crocker 10-11)

Prior to the growth of mining in South Africa the contact of the native with the white man may, as a rule, have had a

wholesome and educative effect upon the former. The white man merited and retained the respect of the native, as in those days the master -- generally an old-time Colonial, whether a farmer or townsman -- understood the Kafir, and knew how he should be treated. But with the expansion of mining and with the large influx of undesirable Europeans, the white man and woman at the point of contact between the races, on the mines and in the towns, not only by failing to understand the native or to earn his respect, but also by lowering the white race in his eyes, have done incalculable harm. This intermingling in large centres has been injurious to both races. The white man becomes demoralized until he descends to the level of the native, and the native also becomes degraded. (Bell 3)

The worst characteristics of savagery are the last to be dispensed with, and the worst fruits of civilization are the first to be acquired; the result is a mixture of two evils. (Silburn 95)

It was a commonplace that a low class of whites was in large measure responsible for this process of abjection:

but naturally in all social intercourse between the races (excepting the relative positions of master and servant) it is the lowest of the white race who usually contact the black. Thus it is that the native becomes acquainted with the worst aspects of our civilization, and too readily adopts the vices of the higher race, and at the same time, so often, becomes released from the wholesome restraints of tribal rule. (Bell 4)

The contact is largely a contact with things evil -- with drink and debauchery, with new vices and new diseases. Such white company as they do get is not usually of a good class. (Drew 3)

The lowest strata of our civilization . . . on coming into contact with demoralized natives, batten upon their weaknesses while descending to their level (Stevens 34)

The evil starts with the lower type of European of both sexes; these are more or less of the criminal class and prey upon the Native. (Silburn 97)

Africans, on the other hand, in their "raw" state, represented a condition of natural gentility: J.H. Curle speaks of "the Zulus, where every man is born a gentleman" (6, cf.98); according to L.E. de Payre, "the kafir, unspoilt by civilization, often possesses and as often acts upon the natural instincts of the gentleman" (548); while the anonymous author of A Question of Colour (1906) points out that

The Kafir . . . has all those characteristics which we are accustomed to think of, but very seldom to mention, as being those of a gentleman, -- gravity, discretion, loyalty, and fidelity, and with that a certain 'canniness'. (100)

Had such natural gentlemen encountered only upper-class Englishmen, there

would have been no Native Problem. While a writer like Alexander Davis could in 1903 attribute the decline of white prestige to the effects of Native education ("Directly a native begins to look upon himself as an educated being, equal to the white man, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he at once loses all respect for the European, whom he treats in an off-handed, condescending manner" [106]), Curle in 1926 unequivocally blamed fallen whites, "poor white trash" (66):

The two millions, who hand on Britain's redoubtable name, are not lords and ladies and Members of Parliament. High and low, rich and poor, they are found among all sorts and conditions . . . their deterioration . . . is well on the way . . . the white man has no longer prestige. (Curle 62, 63, 66)

We should not be surprised that the phantasy of the successful civilizing mission was most commonly rendered in terms of the due fulfilment of class responsibilities, noblesse oblige:

The ultimate holding by the whites of Africa, therefore, resolves itself into the world "gentleman"; the alternative is the use of machine-guns. (Curle 20)

we know that what we desire for our colonies is . . . that the tradition of ages, the heritage of culture, a true aristocracy, all that makes England's sons brave and good and pure, is to be taken into distant lands and to lift the native races to a higher ideal, a better life. It is a beautiful dream, but is it anything more than a dream? . . .

The native races whom we wish to rule should never see an Englishman who was unworthy of his name

But the possibility of acquiring great wealth in South Africa has introduced an individual who finds no favour in England, and is no gain to Johannesburg. Sir William Butler designates him as the "Bounder"

Now if England had always sent her best to a new country -- her best sons, her best traditions, her best goods -- she might reasonably have looked for a satisfactory return; but we know what has been the case. "Good enough for the Colonies" is a phrase with which everyone is familiar; and goods that were too shoddy for England have been shipped off

A few years ago any white man could get the better of a native in a bargain, but he little realised what he was giving in exchange for his present gain -- the honour of England, the dignity of his race, even the future safety of his children. (Question of Colour 134, 136, 137, 138-39, 140)

Such whites had so deserted their class obligations and racial duty as to be beyond recall: "How can you speak of honour to such men, or coerce them

by an appeal to a code of honour, when they do not know what honour means?" (Stevens 37-38). In Curle's outline of racial decay, these low types are lumped together with "the mentally defective, physical weaklings of all sorts, syphilitics, alchoholics and slumdweller in general" (71), whose presence in Britain is undermining "Aryan" (Curle's term) vitality at source. But the promised re-invigoration of the race in the colonies is threatened by the tendency of these inferior types to mate with blacks: hence a full-blown eugenic argument links the issue of "miscegenation" with a rejection of democracy:

While the masses vote, and rule, it will be impossible for us to return to good breeding, on which everything depends, and to forbid bad breeding. The people among us we should forbid to breed in the interests of unborn generations -- the half-castes, the mental and physical weaklings, the drunkards, the very poor and degraded -- are themselves of the majority. (104)

The degradation of whites was in reality of two sorts: either they were undermined by contamination, becoming more and more like those they deemed their inferiors, or they were corrupted by power and unmerited privilege:

We have seen that the menace to the security of Europeans lies not so much in the proximity of the vast and rapidly increasing Native population, as in its intimacy. It has coiled itself, with strangling effect, round the European population and insinuated itself into every sphere of European life, and, wherever it has touched, it has left the marks of a debasing influence. (Stubbs 22-23)

Our self-preservation calls for a remedy. The danger of slavery is not for the slaves, but for the masters whom it degenerates. And the same is true for our present system, which only hypocrisy refuses to call semi-slavery. It is degrading us, and unless we have a speedy reversal of our present policy, we must prepare ourselves for a steadily accelerating descent, which will mean loss of respect for ourselves and poverty or exile for our children. Adopt the white labour policy and you stop that degradation. (Lucas 36)

And the danger lies not so much in the increasing efficiency of the Native as in the debasement of his White Masters, who, in their characters of arsitocrats [sic], tend more and more to lean upon their servants and, so doing, to lose the only qualities which entitle them to mastery. (Stubbs 4)

The effect of the possession of power over a people, regarded as inferior, on immature or unbalanced natures, may be seen exemplified in the attitude of some white youths towards the natives, whether servants, or dependants, or otherwise. There are many exceptions, but too often a domineering and masterful

tone is adopted, which would be immediately resented by a white man, dependent or not, but which the native puts up with, without outward protest. He is not injured, but the white youth is; I cannot think that the impunity with which discourteous and inconsiderate acts can be committed is likely to be innocuous to the character in the making of those who follow us. (Evans 228)

It is noteworthy that these principles were common cause with those who rejected segregation in favour of assimilation and trusteeship;

If the Bantu imitates the European, does the European never assimilate anything from the Bantu? The more the Bantu is civilized, the fewer objectionable and unnatural traits there will be for the European to assimilate. (Palmer 64; this passage is quoted approvingly in the brief extract from Lord Selbourne's address reprinted in African Monthly 5 Apr. 1909)

it is fatal to a civilized race to live in daily contact with and in dependence on the services of an uncivilized subject race. If the civilized race is to save itself, it must either put its subject and servient race away from it, or it must do what it can to raise that race in freedom, in civilization, and in self-respect. (Patrick Duncan, quoted in "The Native Question" 428)

But what is perhaps most striking about the representation of contact between the races in these tracts is that it is almost invariably envisaged as leading inexorably, through race-mixture or "miscegenation", to racial "fusion":⁷

The more black and white be separated, obviously, the less they will mix. On the other hand, upon the lines along which we are being resistlessly drawn, at ever-increasing momentum, we are destined to become a mongrel race, growing darker all the while, the lowest stratum of the white race sinking to the level of the native, the natives meanwhile losing their own virtues and becoming affected by the vices of the whites. Thus socially and morally present tendencies are for evil rather than good, and are toward the eventual assimilation of the white race by the black.

Unless the two streams flow separately -- like parallel lines which never meet -- so surely as a wine-glassful of ink will absorb a tea-spoonful of water, in the distant future the white element will merge into the coloured mass and South Africa will become in reality a black man's country. (Bell 17)

As a result they either become "poor whites" -- i.e., mere loafers -- or they Kafirize, lounging in the locations and mingling with the natives. In either case they become lost to their own race. We may take it as a safe generalization that drainage into pauperdom is sooner or later a drainage into Kafirdom. When the two races are brought upon the same economic plane, social intimacy is apt to be set up, the end of which is miscegenation Concomitantly with the whitening of the black race from above there is a blackening of the white race from below. The Kafirs Europeanize just as the whites Kafirize, only they do it more honourably to themselves. (Drew 1)

The uncivilized white man comes into contact with the uncivilized black; the restraints that exist in the higher strata of white society are entirely absent in this contact, and the consequence becomes apparent in the rise of a half-caste race. (Stevens 35)

From unemployed [the poor white] becomes unemployable and a mere incubus . . . he will inevitably mix with [the Natives] and our problems will be further complicated by the creation of a new racial entity Contacts lead to fusion, and the process, necessarily slow, almost imperceptible in detail, is already discernible in the slums, where the worst elements of white humanity live cheek by jowl with Natives, and in the remoter rural areas, where the white man is deprived of the restraints of civilized life Continued contact means the utter and irretrievable ruin of the White races of South Africa.

Their salvation lies in the creation of separate areas for the exclusive occupation of Black and White, maintained severally on the basis of an all-black and an all-white economy. (Stubbs 3, 5, 9)

The imagery of disease, rather, of sexuality-as-disease, is infrequent but not entirely absent from these representations, sometimes directly invoked:

For disease goes hand in hand with immorality of this kind, and the children of the white man's infamy are in many cases already doomed to a syphilitic life, a living death, ere they have left their mother's womb. And in their turn they subserve the lowest passions of the uncivilized white man and their children after them; and at length there is reached that stage where there has arisen not a few, not a small class, but a nation of human beings begotten in criminal lust, reared amid the most loathsome home surroundings, foul with a soul-killing disease, their minds too often a sink of abominations. (Stevens 106)

-- and sometimes obliquely, as in these baroque images of unrestrained oral consumption:

[the black man] is the parasite, and it is the European who is providing for his gluttonous and gourmandic appetite [his] greedy acquisition of the vices and ills of lower civilization in all its degrading and dissolute forms those teachings of the Gospel and civilization that he has so rapaciously swallowed and digested the native should not be unduly handicapped in his desire for and striving after learning, yet his voracious and insatiable appetite should be curbed (Pabo 346, 347, 348)

Another author approvingly quotes the American Gertrude Atherton:

"there is something so hideously unnatural, so repulsive, so accursed, in an apparently white person with that hidden evidence in him of slavery and lechery. Paugh! it is sickening. They are walking, shameless proclamations of lust and crime." This is putting it strongly. ("Colour" 406-407)

As we come to the conclusion of this cursory survey of trends in the

debate on the "Native Question" in early twentieth-century South Africa, I would like briefly to ponder the implications of the above passage. Like the symptom of a disease, colour in the half-caste bears witness to a history of "shameless . . . lust". But to attribute the exorbitance of "hideously unnatural . . . repulsive . . . accursed . . . sickening" solely to an official prudery over matters sexual is perhaps to miss the point. Loathing of such intensity surely articulates an anxiety over the power of libidinal desire itself, the "upper body's" fear of losing control over the "lower body". As a white woman, Atherton's animus is presumably consciously directed both against the white men who have committed the "crime" of transgressing the taboo of caste, and against their partners in crime, the lubricious black temptresses. In terms of both race and gender identity, then, white women are implicated in this crime. The anger of the betrayed and jealous spouse may only be a smokescreen for the deeper ambivalence occasioned by unacceptable desire and concomitant self-loathing.

Secondly, in South Africa as much as in the Southern States of America, there is ample ground for contending that the real Other (in the sense of the authentically rebarbative) for the white man or woman was not the "pure Negro" -- the "raw" or tribal African -- but the "corrupted" hybrid, the urbanized, "Europeanized" black; still more, the half-caste or Coloured. It was the person of mixed blood who not only seemed to flaunt his or her origin in the otherwise discursively invisible act of procreation, but also offered the insult of a socially, economically, and morally debased mirror image of the white self: a nebulous, distorted, parodic, potentially contagious and profoundly abject near-facsimile of the idealized ethnic identity on which individual identity was predicated. "I am a part of you," the "yellow" skin of the half-caste announced, "intimately related by blood. A fig for your vaunted superiority! I am what you are."

II

According to Brian Street,

Characters who crossed the racial, national and environmental boundaries were important to the Victorians because they helped define those boundaries Victorians were suspicious, not only of biological hybrids but of cultural hybrids who had inherited one background but tried to adopt another. These characters, the white man in Africa and the black man in European clothes, present a dilemma which is central to Victorian conceptions of race and culture, and popular writers devote a considerable amount of space to them. (111)

South African writers of the early decades of this century were similarly preoccupied with "transracial" character types -- characters who transgressed or attempted to transgress the boundaries of racial identity and destiny. One such type is the acculturated or Westernized ("educated")

African:

If the native happens to be of the well-dressed type so much the worse. A fashionable Native is, to our minds, grotesque, unnatural -- almost indecent and outrageous. ("Colour" 405)

Is there any finer specimen of humanity on the earth than the Zulu in his natural state? Is there any more contemptible than the same Zulu clothed in second-hand European clothing? (Muirhead 562)

Another is the "white Kafir", the white man who has "gone native" and taken a black woman to wife; more shocking still, the rarer instance of the white woman married to a black man, a situation embodying a scandalous clash between the hierarchies of politics and patriarchy, as one contemporary observer pointed out:

The white settler who marries a native woman -- she to cook his food and bear him children and be happy in his kindness -- with his lands and his gun and his cattle, can content himself. Often he may be lonely and sad with memories of a world he has left behind. But as the master in his house, his instincts harking far back, he may find a certain gratification in the due subjection of his mate, whom he has possessed.

With his sister it could never be so. Not only would she, married to an African, feel far more than he the cutting off from the society of her own kindred and all the protective contrivances of her home conditions; not only would she be companioned, in most cases, by one below herself in culture; but whatever the man's merits, and in spite of the status of superiority belonging to her race, she would be confronted with his very deeply rooted conviction of the essential inferiority of her sex. Indeed, as between the white man and the white woman who oversteps the racial bar, the lot of the latter must

be, to any reflecting mind, incomparably the more full of dangers. (Cotton 109)

Despite its racialist assumptions, this analysis is relatively "rational" and largely free of the typical frisson of disgust aroused by such unions and their visible result, the "more horrible reality" ("Colour" 408) of the half-caste or person of "mixed blood".

Writing in the early 1890s, Olive Schreiner reviewed the "popular verdict on the Half-caste" and found its "universality and unanimity [to be] remarkable" (124). The half-caste was everywhere found to be anti-social, mendacious, cowardly, licentious and without self-respect, "possessing the vices of both parent races and the virtues of neither". In South Africa, she observed, "the truth of the assertion of the inherent depravity of Half-castes seems on the surface borne out to the full by the facts" (124). Although she goes on to make some enlightened remarks about the invidious position of the "Coloured" in the South African social formation -- "it must be granted that there do exist in his external conditions causes more than adequate to account for his low development in social feeling" (132) -- Schreiner then gives serious consideration to a genetic theory of regression first applied to anthropology by de Gobineau, whereby the "crossing of different varieties which each breed perfectly true . . . produce[s] . . . unstable creatures with a tendency to revert to the primitive original type of the race" (133). Later, in 1901, she could argue quasi-moralistically against "miscegenation" on the ground that it interfered with "the different distinct human breeds, whom it has taken nature countless ages to elaborate in her workshop and turn out in stable form" (385). And, given the homology of nature and culture posited by nineteenth-century anthropology, it is not surprising that she could conclude: "The true key to the Half-caste's position lay in the past, as it still lies today, in the fact, that he is not at harmony within himself" (127, emphasis in original).

I have quoted Schreiner at some length not only because her name bears some authority but also because, in context, her views are both

moderate and fully representative of the perspectives to which writers of the time had recourse in their characterizations of persons of "mixed blood". From our vantage point, the peculiar "problem" of the half-caste consisted ultimately in the way his very existence undermined the neat binary classification in which the power relations of colonial society were grounded. Between the signs of black and white in the signifying system of political discourse, a third "unnatural" sign insinuates itself, a sign created by the blending of elements upon whose very discreteness the signifying capacity of the system depends. Even if the stability of the parent signs seems unthreatened, the sign of "mixed blood" -- its signifier disseminated over any number of intermediate shades of colour and cultural orientation -- has no logical internal coherence and cannot be "self-identical" because it is "not at harmony within [itself]". How is such an anomaly to be represented?

At the beginning of his novel Souls in Bondage, Perceval Gibbon explicitly presents the "off-coloured" community as an affront to classification:

The town and the location represented recognized and easily defined extremes of the social order: the one was Dopfontein, an appreciable quantity in any equation, a thing that was described in its name, like a Grocer called Smith: the other was also a thing established. The Kafirs lived in the location, and every one knows what Kafirs are. But on the bare earth between the town and the location dwelt yet another community, whose status and rank were matters rather of construction than of acknowledged precedent. (4)⁸

Gibbon's construction of that community's "status and rank" is interesting in the light of the parallels between class and race in the discourse of the Victorian social reformers noted above. For his solution is to exploit a set of images and conventions derived from certain Victorian fictional representations of the urban poor (see Keating). "Off-coloured" society is thus noisy, vulgar, violent, "grotesque" (55); peopled by "yellow hobbledehoy[s]" (36), it "crawl[s] . . . with the multitude and fevered activity of insect life" (190). Its patterns and rituals, marked by drunkenness, coarse humour, brutality and sensuality -- "kisses are cheap

in off-coloured society, and little valued" (82) -- ludicrously parody those of polite or middle-class society (e.g. Minnie Vorster's birthday party 43ff.).⁹ The literariness of this representation is underscored by an explicit reference to Dickens: the character Charlie Bates is at one point described as "something between Uriah Heep and Mr Dick" (103; cf. David Copperfield chapters 13 and 15).

Gibbon's provisional conflation of race and class no doubt reflects the prevalent Victorian "identification of the savage with the poor, the unemployed and the pauper" (Weber 276). Yet unlike the "true savage" -- the "raw native" who was arguably at least moving up the evolutionary scale -- the Coloured, like the "sunken" pauper, is seen as a pathologically deviant degenerate, belonging to a community "all native to no country in the world . . . alien, abnormal, of hell's design" (Souls in Bondage 37). Gibbon elsewhere remarks that "[t]he place crawled with the fevered activity of hell" (5); Bantam has the "evil fire of the half-blood" (289), his beating of Cecilia bears "the devil's hallmark" (312). Such reference to the eschatological is no doubt largely for sensational effect, but it does evoke the sense of a surplus of Otherness subtended by racial difference which the rational, secular calculus of class distinction is simply unable to encompass. The established conventions for the literary representation of European urban pauperdom thus provide Gibbon with a handy but only approximate precedent for his task of "constructing" an identity which is definitionally anomalous, neither one thing nor another, different from itself. There is a differentness about the racially mixed Other, the metaphysical stretch of Gibbon's language seeks to persuade us, which is indisputably real but invisible (aside from the paltry signification of skin colour) and somehow inexpressible in the codes available to him for the inscription of human difference.

This idea is in the present context perhaps most boldly articulated in one of the tendentious sketches by Mary Frances Whalley and A. Eames-Perkins collected in Of European Descent (1909). Their book is a sustained

protest against the metropolitan -- and, to a certain extent, Cape -- tradition of differentiating among human beings in terms of social class rather than colour. Their belief is that biology is the true and absolute arbiter of human quality, and they argue that the purity of the dominant race should be protected by legislation against "miscegenation".¹⁰ The following meditation is occasioned by a frustrated attempt to convey the "baffling" (7) character of a young Coloured boy, Johnnie:

There was always something elusive, that something behind, which a sensitive person is so keenly conscious of in intercourse with the coloured races. And this seems always the case. We live among these people; we have taken their country; we make laws, and insist upon their obedience; we legislate; we organize; we instruct and advise them for their mental and physical advancement; we civilize them.

They ape our dress and mannerisms. They imitate our follies, and, alas! our vices. They learn in our schools, they advance along certain lines, they begin to assert themselves as civilized men, even as our equals. They intermarry with us, to the hideous detriment and disintegration of our race.

But we know as little of the real man -- the ego in the coloured man -- now, as in the time when he was to us merely a savage, seen only by ocean travellers in casual glimpses on long voyages -- a cannibal, a ferocious beast, to be parleyed with, and traded with, only from a safe distance.

The white conqueror may spend a century in the conquered black man's country -- a century spent in striving solely to understand him, and to govern him with understanding; and at the end, know no more of the real heart of the subject race, and have affected and improved their original character as little, as if he had never been there!

The leopard does not change his spots.

There is a sinister something -- a sort of natural barrier erected by nature herself, between her black and white children. A barrier, the essential quality of which ever eludes us, but which is ever insurmountable and impassable, and which in itself is surely prooftoken that the two races can never mingle satisfactorily. (8-10)

There are two striking aspects to this passage, surely a locus classicus among colonial formulations of racial difference. The first is the way in which it so signally fails to define the difference it asserts; the second is its confession of the utter failure of the civilizing mission. Not only have Europeans not succeeded in making a significant or lasting impression on "the coloured man", they have not even begun to understand him. They have tried to remake him in their own image, but all they have effected is a form of sinister mimicry, a shadow show mirroring their own weakness. Buried here are the implications of Hegel's master-slave dialectic: the

conqueror seeks but fails to obtain from the conquered some vindication of his own superiority, some proof of his own reality. The result is the very opposite of Imperialist triumphalism: a situation in which contact leads not to the assimilation of the supposedly inferior Other, but to the "disintegration" of the self; a situation in which the white man, baffled and defeated by an unknowable and implacably resistant Other, must retreat behind a "natural barrier" to lick his wounds and regroup his ethnic forces.

Nowhere is the failure which informs the passage more clearly perceptible than in the evasions and tautologies of its language. Opinions of numbing banality disguised as argument ("[t]he leopard does not change his spots") finally give way to the conjuring of a "sinister something -- a sort of natural barrier" whose existence is proved . . . by the fact of its existence! -- even though the writers cannot say what it is. I doubt that any clearer illustration of the givenness and irrationality of the ethnic imperative is anywhere to be found. The invocation of the uncanny -- of the notion of an "elusive . . . sinister . . . something behind" -- reminds us not so much of Freud's interpretation of Das Unheimliche as of the work of Jentsch and Otto Rank which Freud mentions in his famous paper. For Jentsch "the essential factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness" is "intellectual uncertainty" (Freud, "Uncanny" 341) or undecidability: -- uncertainty as to whether something is one thing or another, for instance, whether a particular individual is a human being or an automaton (ibid. 347). The uncanniness of racial difference is in these terms the simultaneous recognition of sameness and difference, the recognition of the self in the Other and the Other in the self. The work of Rank, which identified the uncanny with "the phenomenon of the 'double'" (ibid. 356), would support such a reading, and help to explain why the problem of racial difference is compounded rather than resolved by the case of the half-caste, the Other-as-doppelganger.

In a later passage, Whalley and Eames-Perkins are more explicit about

the deleterious effects upon whites of racial contact and contamination:

in this intercourse between black and white, it is not the "superior" race which raises the inferior; it is the white which sinks to the coloured level of thought and morality. There is a powerful but baneful force in the black nature which debases and deteriorates the white which comes under its influence. (54)

The inverted commas enclosing "superior" suggest that the authors are aware of the basic contradiction at the heart of this and so much other racist discourse of the time: how is it that a race which claims to be "superior" can at the same time be so vulnerable to corruption, so much at the mercy of its "inferiors"? Whalley and Eames-Perkins actually attempt to address this:

Lord Selbourne, in the course of his speech . . . advocating so strongly the rights and liberties and privileges -- educational, political and social -- of the native, ridiculed as a bogey the extermination of the white race by the black, on the ground that the white race would always prove itself "for all purposes of competition the superior of the black"; and spoke of the various occasions when a mere handful of British troops, or Dutch settlers, had held their own against apparently overwhelming odds of natives. Of course history incontestably proves this to be true. A strenuous white race can, and almost invariably does, hold its own against a large majority of an inferior race.

But our argument is that it is a strenuous white race alone which possesss [sic] this necessary strength of resistance in the face of overwhelmg [sic] odds. And it is this identical white race which it is so vital to maintain pure and strenuous which, for want of proper supervision, is being gradually vitiated, and is dwindling into a brown, whitey-brown, or yellow race, physically and morally incapable of withstanding the sturdier native races, should occasion arise (108)

But again their argument describes a neat circle: whites will not be able to withstand the force of blackness if, or because, their "strenuousness" has been sapped by contamination and adulteration. The question of why they should have been susceptible to vitiation in the first place is neatly sidestepped.

Whalley and Eames-Perkins' thesis as a whole is that whites, "surrounded by vast hordes of blacks" (110), are in enough trouble as it is without committing the racial "suicide" (101) inevitably consequent upon "unrestrained sexual intercourse" (101) with blacks. Such an eventuality would be "a moral and therefore a political crime" (101) because whites

would thereby be prevented from fulfilling their "mission . . . to maintain a supremacy of highest civilization throughout the world", obliged to "abandon the subject races" to their fate (101). It is in the name of such cant that the authors formulate a series of "suggestions for . . . legislation" at the end of their book, which include the "declaring illegal of mixed marriages", the "prohibition of intercourse" between coloured women and all soldiers and sailors, and the racial segregation of schools (118). Who would have thought that all these demands, and more, would be met by future South African governments? Certainly not the contemporary reviewer in The Cape, who dismissed Whalley and Eames-Perkins' arguments as "incompetent", "childish", even "ludicrous" ("Of European Descent" 4). But the writing was soon to appear on the wall. On 14 December 1911 a full bench of the Union Appeal Court handed down a judgement, "the importance of which it would be difficult to overestimate" ("European Descent" 79), specifying that the phrase "of European descent" in the South Africa Act was intended to mean "of wholly European parentage or extraction" (80). At a stroke the colour bar was erected at the highest level of the Constitution, and the social fate of millions of South Africans of colour, henceforth excluded from all facilities and institutions reserved for "Europeans only", was sealed.

The textual subconscious of Of European Descent consists in the suspicion -- or conviction -- of inadequacy and, above all, fear: segregation, the colour bar, is proposed as a desperate strategy for survival, a lifebelt thrown to a castaway drowning in a sea of blackness. But, we are entitled to ask, is not this fear (of racial extinction, "suicide", being "swamped by the black" [109]) greatly, grotesquely exaggerated? Certainly the demographic profile and statistics for mixed marriages at about that time would indicate as much.¹¹ And if so, is this fear then not a figure, a metaphor enabled by the discourse of Social Darwinism, for something else? I.D. MacCrone thought so. Towards the end of his comprehensive survey of South African racial attitudes, he pointed out

that "the objective source of anxiety ["being swamped by blacks" is the cliché he chooses for illustration (308)] . . . can hardly be regarded as a sufficient explanation for the entire fund of anxiety" (309), and suggested instead that the "morbid fear of miscegenation" was "a rationalization [whose] real aim is to keep sexuality in the form of the potentially superior rival at bay" (304, 301).

J.M. Coetzee's analysis of the horror of race-mixture in Geoffrey Cronje's writing also suggests that something else is at work. Appealing to psychoanalysis in a different way from MacCrone, Coetzee suggests that the narcissistic insularity and abhorrence of "dirt" typical of the racist is a reaction formation against anal regression, against the desire to reduce the world to the primordial undifferentiation of faeces; he quotes Elaine Chasseguet-Smirgel:

isolation in obsessional neurosis is a more generalized mechanism that tries to fight off the anal-sadistic desire for muddle and confusion At a certain level the anal-sadistic universe of confusion and homogenization constitutes an imitation or parody of the genital universe of the father. ("Mind of Apartheid" 21, 22)

In other words, the discourse of apartheid and segregation, of each thing separate and in its proper place, is just what it seems, an elaboration of the law of the father. But the extraordinary libidinal excess, the exaggerated loathing and terror, which informs the writing of Whalley and Eames-Perkins as much as it does Cronje's -- "fascination with and reactive horror of the mixed, of the breaking-down of boundaries, the dissolution of difference" (Coetzee 22) -- is a disguised rebellion against the universe of the father, a primordial lurch toward (maternal) abjection.

Coetzee's suggestion is persuasive but not terribly useful because it is unable to account satisfactorily for whatever specificity in the white South African social psyche was responsible for the development of a system of racial discrimination unique in the world: the appeal of the abject, the yearning for what Coetzee imagines Cronje saw in Africa -- the promise of the "warm, liquid, idle" (20) -- is presumably universal. Mention of the Calvinistic, severely patriarchal culture of Afrikanerdom takes us part of

the way there, but only part, for (if we are to remain within the paradigm of psychology) we are then obliged to countenance something like the "authoritarian personality" constructed by Theodor Adorno et al. to explain racialism, in particular, anti-semitism. The inadequacy and inappropriateness of Adorno et al.'s hypothesis in the South African context has been powerfully demonstrated by several of the papers in Patrick Heaven's collection Authoritarianism: South African Studies, which suggest that personality type has little to do with racialism in South Africa and that "sociocultural factors are more important" (Orpen 1) in the genesis of prejudice. Perhaps the "problem" with Coetzee's approach lies not in the impeccable logic of its performance but in the chosen paradigm of investigation: it offers a description or diagnosis -- what Coetzee calls a "reading" or a "tracking" -- rather than an explanation.

I would question the utility of Coetzee's normative gesture in dubbing both Cronje and the entire electorate which bought the National Party package in 1948 as "crazy, or at least crazed" (30), the Nietzschean epigraph to this chapter notwithstanding.¹² Secondly, and more importantly, Coetzee's psychoanalytical perspective has been extrapolated from the hidden life of the individual, and -- applied to an entire society or ethnie -- cannot but be an account of a phenomenon in terms different from or foreign to that phenomenon. My own inclination is to return to MacCrone's suggestion that sexual jealousy may lie at the root of the fear of "miscegenation", because it points in the "sociocultural" or anthropological direction of kinship relations, which seem to constitute an altogether more appropriate source of explanation than the generalization of private obsessional neurosis. I shall proceed via a consideration of the "Black Peril" phenomenon.

III

Running like a refrain through the South African debate about the Native Question in the early decades of this century was the phrase "Black Peril". Although it was invoked as the signifier of a range of emotions, ranging from the sexual jealousy of white men over the seduction of white women by black men (e.g. Hardy, "Black Peril"), to a general apprehension of native rebellion, it most commonly denoted the fear of black rape.

The Black Peril was an important constant in the moral economy of the white South African ethnie -- indeed, as a rallying point for English and Afrikaners, it helped to constitute that ethnie -- because what was at stake was the integrity of the white (female) body, that final and most intimate frontier of all. As Fanon noted, in the colonial context the literal and the symbolic are indistinguishable, the individual body and the ethnic body are one. In the patriarchal construction of the sexual act, whether forced or not, the male is dominant and the female is subordinate: the political scandal of the Black Peril is the subjection of a woman of the dominant race to the power of a man of the subordinate race; the penetration of a white vagina by a black penis is an act of insurrection.

It is therefore tempting to construe the fear of black rape as a mere symptom of a more general political fear. This is the conclusion reached by Norman Etherington in his investigation of the earliest documented Black Peril "moral panic"¹³ in South Africa, the rape scare which gripped the colony of Natal in the early 1870s. Etherington advances the hypothesis that

fear of losing control was a constant undercurrent in the thinking of the settler minority. This substratum of anxiety rose to the surface in the form of a moral panic whenever disturbances in the economy or the body politic were severe enough to unsettle the mask of composure worn by the face of public authority. In a patriarchal society where women were part and parcel of property to be defended against threats from below, fear of rape was a special concern of white males. (36)

Etherington cites several factors which were working to increase fears of losing control at the time of the Natal rape scare: powerful forces of

change, including the emergence of Africans as "formidable competitors" in agriculture and transport in Natal, and the migratory labour pattern established by the rush for diamonds at Kimberley, where a "peculiarly lawless and wild society" unprecedented in South African experience was springing up (50). Etherington does not discount psychological explanations -- for instance, the idea that "fear of competition from more virile, potent black rivals has been deep-seated in the psyches of white males for centuries and that white women in colonial situations encourage such fears to revenge themselves on men who impose chastity on them while freely enjoying sexual connexions with females of the subject people" (52) -- but maintains that the supposition of a persistent anxiety does not "in itself offer an adequate explanation for outbreaks of limited duration" (53).

Etherington's point is well made, and he himself does an excellent job of dredging up some specific causal factors from the muddy flux of history. But these factors are not always easy to identify, and seem sometimes to have been present and sometimes absent in subsequent Black Peril scares, the major ones being in Natal in 1886, in the Cape, Natal and Transvaal in 1902-3, and in the country generally in 1906-8 and 1911-12. The moral panic immediately after the Anglo-Boer War, for instance, seems largely to have been provoked by the influx of white prostitutes with their eye on soldiers' pay-packets. These women injected a political flavour into their immorality by failing to discriminate between black and white clients, and the scandal which ensued -- especially as the prostitutes' ranks were swelled by poor white women drifting to the towns from the war-torn platteland -- resulted in legislation in the Cape (Act 36 of 1902), the Orange Free State (Ordinance 11 of 1903), Natal (Act 31 of 1903) and the Transvaal (Ordinance 46 of 1903). The account given in the 1937 Report of the Commission on Mixed Marriages in South Africa makes interesting reading:

During the South African War (1899-1902) and for some time afterwards the presence of large bodies of troops in the country attracted numbers of loose European women, mostly of Continental origin, to the seaports and larger inland towns, to

which they resorted for the purpose of prostitution. The brazen manner in which they paraded the streets and accosted men, extending their attentions also to natives and other persons of colour, became a public scandal and in 1902 and 1903 brought about legislation for the suppression of immorality, not only in the Colonies of the Capè and Natal, but also in the two new Crown Colonies. The general purpose was to check immorality, but it was also regarded as a matter of particular importance that the white women of the country should not, through the example of easy virtue given by this disreputable sisterhood, be brought into contempt in the estimation of native or coloured males, as appeared to be the case from the number of sexual assaults occurring at the time. This purpose was eloquently proclaimed by the exceedingly drastic penalties imposed both upon the white woman, who voluntarily allowed illicit intercourse with herself for gain, or (as that circumstance was generally not easily provable), without any qualification, and upon the native or coloured male participant, who was liable also to lashes and was punishable equally for the attempt to commit the offence. (13-14, emphasis added)

It is surely significant that these measures were introduced by British administrations and were aimed at preserving the prestige of whites through the conservation of the symbolic virtue of their womenfolk. As the Report points out, "[a]s women of the class concerned were well acquainted with the methods of contraception, there was little, if any, chance of offspring resulting from this traffic, so that these provisions cannot be said to have been directed against miscegenation" (14).¹⁴ The first legislation avowedly directed against the dynastic implications of race mixture was the Immorality Act of 1927, but even this Act contradicted its stated aims by allowing for "miscegenation" within matrimony. There seem to be adequate grounds for supposing that reiterated fears about the disappearance of the white race through race mixture were merely a rationalization of the demand of white men for exclusive access to women of their caste. The claim that there was a concomitant increase, during 1902-1903, in the number of sexual assaults by black men on white women was entirely spurious, as the statistics given in the Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into Assaults on Women of 1913 attest (11).

The next Black Peril panic of 1906-1908 may well have been fuelled by general anxiety of the sort described by Etherington following the events known as the Bambata Rebellion in Natal in 1906: certainly a spate of

reports of "Native Outrages" followed hard on its heels (e.g. Daily Dispatch 28.2.06), and the Report of the Native Affairs Commission in Natal of 1906-07 made specific mention of sexual relations between the races as a significant factor in the Native Question (25-26). But the major public convulsion of 1911-1912, which led directly to the appointment of the Sixth Commission of the General Missionary Conference of South Africa to investigate "the incidence of so-called Black Peril cases" (1912), and the State Commission of Enquiry into Assaults on Women, which reported in 1913, had neither basis in objective fact nor ostensible historical "cause" (again, see the statistics cited in the Assaults on Women Report, 3-11).

Tim Keegan's useful investigation of this moral panic, particularly as it manifested itself through the columns of The Friend newspaper in Bloemfontein, endorses the general trend of our argument in identifying an irrationality "which cannot be explained in terms other than a crisis in consciousness" (Keegan 3). The fear of the "lessening of sexual respect of the servant for his master" (6) was precipitated mainly by the burgeoning problem of degenerate "lapsed whites":

The significance of poor whiteism was that it threatened the psychological underpinnings of the control culture at a time when it was at its most vulnerable and insecure. If the prescription for reasserting psychological distance, submissiveness and deference between "superior" and "inferior" races lay in the magic formula, "segregation", then that too was the first step toward moral rehabilitation of whites. (Keegan 10)

Compare these extracts from the Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into Assaults on Women:

The condition of the debased poor whites with whom the natives are brought into contact, cannot but have an evil effect on the mind of the natives in diminishing the respect in which the white race is held by them It has been pointed out that a class of poor whites is becoming more and more degraded; poverty drives them to seek their living by undesirable methods. On the other hand, it is asserted that, whilst these whites are sinking in the scale, the natives are rising, and that the poor white children are becoming the dregs of the population disreputable and unscrupulous persons of the white race . . . are one of the causes of the native losing that respect for the white race, which is one of the strongest factors calculated to restrain him from even entertaining the idea of the possibility of having any sexual relations with a white woman. (23, 16)

In addition to the consequences flowing from the status of poor whites, the Commission identified the consumption of alcohol by black men (15-20) and the employment of black men as domestic servants (24-26) as major contributing factors to the incidence of assaults on white women.

Almost all the themes of the discourse on the Native Question are recapitulated and elaborated in The Black Peril, a novel by George Webb Hardy published in 1912. Hardy was a journalist who had achieved some notoriety for publishing an article containing graphic details of sexual misconduct at a prominent girls' school in Durban ("The Black Peril"). The public outcry which greeted this article led to his prosecution and imprisonment for obscenity.

The literary merits of The Black Peril are few, but its form -- eccentric and hybridized, treading an uncertain line between fiction and autobiography -- exhibits to a marked degree the heterogeneity typical of colonial texts of the time (see Shum 100-101). Like many of the texts discussed in this study, it is a roman à thèse, actively seeking to vindicate a set of ideas or beliefs and intervene in the real world. But what sets it apart from the run of colonial racial melodrama is the searching honesty of its attempt to come to terms with the realization that "the 'native question' . . . is an emotional 'question' and not a political one" -- as Roy Campbell was later to remark of William Plomer's Turbott Wolfe ("Significance of Turbott Wolfe" 40). In the way the narrative plays off rational belief and ethical commitment against "instinctive" emotional reaction, The Black Peril in some ways anticipates the story of Plomer's eponymous protagonist. For what Hardy's tale seeks to dramatize is the conversion of its autobiographical hero -- by dint of an intense emotional conviction which defies his reasoned political judgement and moral principles -- to elements of the policy of segregation.

Raymond Chesterfield arrives in the colonial town of Mosquito (Durban) where, increasingly dismayed by the spineless cant which serves for journalism in the colony, he starts his own paper, The Argonaut,

dedicated to the pursuit and exposure of Truth. His uncompromising integrity loses him advertizers and makes enemies in high places, but wins him the respect of a wide readership. Believing he is acting in the public interest, he publishes an expose of the sexual shenanigans between some white schoolgirls and a black labourer. He has been led to regard sexual relations between blacks and whites as a major social problem by the narrow escape of a woman to whom he is attracted, Mary Roseberry, from the lustful attentions of a "houseboy" she has befriended. Chesterfield's article causes a sensation and he is successfully prosecuted under an obscenity law. The next section of the narrative consists of a series of letters written by Chesterfield from gaol in Durban, mainly about the appalling conditions there. After his release he returns to England, where he and Mary Roseberry are reunited. The tripartite structure of the book -- the sections are entitled "The Ideal", "The Truth" and "The Reward" -- reflects its argument that liberal ideals are incompatible with the reality of race relations in South Africa, and that the reward of the prophet bearing this truth is martyrdom.

The text, particularly in Part One, is peppered with satirical deflation of the hypocritical pretensions of Imperialism and the civilizing mission, construed as the "self-imposed task of grabbing country from the natives" (9). "If the Chinese [mineworkers] were in a state of slavery in the Golden City", the narrator remarks, "so were the natives before the [Anglo-Boer] war and so they are today" (16) -- "slaves who have become partially free and cannot be got rid of. It is a crime to be a black man in a 'white man's country' that was originally stolen from black men" (21). Claims to the contrary were "all hypocrisy and sham and cant . . . masking as respectability and holiness among the civilized nations" (101), and "[i]f the flogging that goes on in Mosquito Gaol is a necessary part of the Christianizing of the natives, our boasted civilization is a farce" (283).

Living his own life in the kraals, free from the whiskey and the vice of the white man who is supposed to set him an example of the things which are pure and of good report, [the native's] morality is at least equal to that of the civilized races. And

when, as a raw and uneducated creature, he comes into the circle of men and women ennobled, as he has been taught, by two thousand years of the Christian religion, in a land where, to say the least, morality (using the word in its broadest sense) is not exactly conspicuous for its altruistic tendencies -- is it any wonder that the simple native, child that he is, does as all children do -- imitates like a mummer the worst phases of the people with whom he has suddenly been brought into contact? It has taken two thousand years of civilization to bring the white man to the point at which his gaols are full to overflowing, his workhouses redolent of broken-down manhood, his factories stained with the bloody sweat of underpaid human machines, his miners and his railwaymen ground down until they have to stop the commerce of England before they can get a living wage, and the streets of the proud metropolis the refuge of outcast women, manufactured into poor lost souls by the very white men who will lie to you until they are black in the face about the immorality of the native races of the Empire. (161)

But as we have seen, this rhetoric of shame and contagion services the conscience of the principled segregationist as nicely as that of the liberal assimilationist. Although Raymond remains a champion of "the slaves of industrialism" (133), he finds his universalist socialist beliefs increasingly subverted by the "ethnic imperative" attaching to the colour of his skin in South Africa. Initially he conceives of two possible solutions to the Native Problem: "segregation of the blacks or, in the end, the social and political equality of the races" (135). The former seems "outside the range of practical politics" (135) because "nothing could possibly stop the blacks from rising higher and higher in the social scale" (136). But it begins to dawn on him that the full racial equality which reason prescribes as both desirable and inevitable would merely preface "a third possibility from which he shrank, like a boat-load of wrecked men and women who fear to return to save one or two of hundreds of moaning souls, hanging on to their life-belts as a great liner takes her final plunge . . . [South Africa as] a veritable black man's land" (138). Most whites are blinded by their conviction of racial superiority to this presentiment of disaster (the "wreck" of Western history which Plomer's Turbott Wolfe will later attribute to the triumph of "the hidden force" [Turbott Wolfe 128, 129]); and Chesterfield realizes that as a journalist he has a special responsibility to tear the scales from their eyes and alert them to "the great Black Peril . . . the real shadow that hung over the land" (142). His

particular mission is to raise

the subject that nobody likes to think about -- let alone talk of -- . . . the phase of the Black Peril question that, more than any other, needed determined action, without any squeamishness or false modesty, if anything was to be done to place the social relations of black and white on a proper footing. Raymond saw the danger under which the white woman had to live in the country -- a danger inseparable from a land that contained a mere handful of whites as against millions of blacks, the majority of whom were only in the first stages of human evolution. He knew of these blacks, what many white women did not appear to know, that they were men of like passions to white men and were very far from being the mere automatons that, apparently, they were thought to be, judging by the way in which they were handled by white women. (143-44)

How is it that the same signifier -- the Black Peril -- can be invoked simultaneously to designate the distant prospect of political defeat and social absorption, and the immediate threat of black rape (here somewhat coyly qualified as a "phase of the Black Peril question")? One answer is that the two are linked by the notion of retribution through revolution (see 140), the idea of the black man's exacting a symbolic revenge on the white man by violating his most sacred possession (this is more-or-less the argument of Etherington). Klaus Theweleit suggests that this is simply a projection of the typical bourgeois fantasy of mobility in a class-stratified society:

the boss's wife as object of desire in the masturbation fantasies of men In this context, "making revolution" also means taking the "high-born" woman by force. That explains why on the day after a revolution is reported, bourgeois newspapers are full of rape stories. The reporters are simply reporting what they would have done in a similar situation. It's not even the case that they are lying; they are merely translating the report of the revolution into their own system of relations, in which "revolution" means taking the boss's wife. (372-73)

Agreeing to take this with a pinch of salt, we should nevertheless be mindful of the connection it proposes between political power and/or symbolic ascendancy, and sexual access. Hardy is at some pains to stress that the African is not "a wild and lustful savage, roaming the land seeking whom he may devour . . . [indeed,] it is doubtful whether he is more a creature of animal passion than the majority of the superior race" (160). Most vice "was foreign to the native soul until he was tampered with

by the whites" (188), and the "debased" native is exclusively a product of urban contamination (189).¹⁵ The problem is not the difference of the black man from the white but his similarity to him: as Raymond's friend Mark Shepherd (John Shepstone) puts it, "Human nature is human nature . . . and there's a good deal of the animal in it, whether black or white" (188). Under the influence of Shepherd,

Raymond was led to modify his views regarding the native races. He abated not one jot of his passion for the cause of absolute justice to them, of political equality of whites for educated men with coloured skins. He gave up nothing of his opinion that blacks ought to be allowed to sit in Parliament and enter into the commercial life of the country that was their home -- just like a white man, whether the country were natural or adopted. He still held fast to the opinion that Christian civilization was for the black man as well as the white, and that it was the bounden duty of the white man to educate and civilize the coloured peoples of the world, whether Kafirs or Indians, Hottentots or Chinese. But he had got to the point where social equality between blacks and whites was an impossibility. He did not believe, with Mr Mark Shepherd, in segregation of the blacks. But he did believe that it was for statemen to find some way in which whites and blacks could live together as members of the same community, interested in the same things, striving for the welfare of their country with equal chances and equal rights, and yet apart as the poles on questions of marriage and the relations of the sexes. He admitted he found it difficult to explain precisely why mere colour should place a definite line between, say, a highly educated Indian and an English girl. Some of the prejudice of the land might have got into his soul -- he quite admitted that -- but there it was, and the situation had to be faced. The prejudice might be cowardice, it might be lack of charity, it might be supremely illogical. But when Raymond faced the idea of a Kafir kissing the girl he loved, and, with his strong imagination, pictured that Kafir becoming an educated civilized being and capturing the soul of one who was dear to him, perhaps his own sister, his whole being revolted against intimate relations between black and white in any shape or form. (194-96)

For a character like Raymond Chesterfield, who prides himself on his hard-nosed rationality, this confession of an unconquerable, "supremely illogical" emotion is embarrassing and demeaning, and redeemed only by the authenticity of the personal experience which informs it. Scientific racism provides affective rather than intellectual support: urged by Shepherd to study the "anthropo-sociological superior-race theories of Gobineau, Lapouge, and Galton", he is sensible enough to reject "their conclusions in their European aspects"; however, "they bore for him a psychological interpretation under the peculiar sociological conditions of the land of

the Southern Cross that he was compelled to acknowledge" (196). The political formula that would square Raymond's "instinctive" aversion to blacks with his democratic principles and translate the contradictions in his heart into a workable policy is no doubt chimerical, as the whole sorry subsequent history of South Africa attests.

But what this lengthy passage reveals with perfect clarity is that, for Chesterfield, the Black Peril has ultimately little or nothing to do with the crime of rape. The Black Peril is in fact the threat of sexual competition from black men, and the fear is really the fear of "losing" willing white women to black suitors. This, and the fact that Hardy had an enormous and deeply ambivalent libidinal investment in the scene which so revolts Chesterfield -- "a kafir kissing the girl he loved" -- is confirmed by the article which appeared in The Prince in 1904 and got Hardy into so much trouble.

"The Black Peril" is an hysterically racist document pitched at a level of emotional intensity which nothing in Hardy's novel would lead one to expect. A portentous preamble alerts the reader to the existence of young, well-bred white schoolgirls in Durban "who are cognizant of the most filthy form of immorality that can be practised by womankind"; and, "not content with knowing of methods of vice that would do honour to a Parisian brothel, these girls have actually brought their hellish knowledge into practice, and have disgraced the image of God in which they were made by giving themselves over to the most loathsome of all sins" (607). Lest the imagination of today's reader run riot, let me intervene to point out that Hardy is just beginning to warm to his subject, and has so far only told us that the girls have been indulging in sexual intercourse.

But, horrible as are revelations of bestial immorality on the part of young and beautiful girls who, to look at, are among the finest flowers of human culture, they are a million times worse when they betray what must be the unknown sin against the Holy Ghost himself. What this sin is, in very truth, the Almighty alone can tell. But if it is anything worse than the carnal and mental corruption involved in the willing prostitution of merry maidens before the loathsome lust of the natives of South Africa, then God help the miserable souls who are guilty of it. (607)

The cat is out of the bag. Hardy has evidence that the girls have been having secret trysts with a black school gardener. Tipped off by a pharmacist who has been supplying them with contraceptives, a detective hides himself in the school grounds and observes one girl "openly and with consent seduced by the kafir boy" (607), the others keeping cave. "Horrorified and almost paralyzed at the sight he had seen, the detective hardly knew what to do". What he does do, though, is make sure he gets another look by procuring a group of male witnesses "to see for themselves a corner of hell dumped right down amid the sanctity of Durban life"; the spectacle is duly re-enacted for their benefit. The notion of several "reliable gentlemen" crouching in the bushes watching a black man having sex with a white girl, too fearful of scandal to apprehend the miscreant, may well have been as ludicrous to Hardy's contemporary readers as it is to us today: certainly, he failed to prove his allegations in the legal proceedings which ensued. (See Rees 12-24.)

Whatever its basis in fact, the scene is obviously a voyeuristic phantasy in which the father witnesses the seduction of his daughter, his sexual titillation and excruciating jealousy cathected into outrage against the seducer. Hardy's constant invocation of the participants in the taboo-laden family romance help to displace the intensity of his own ambivalent response: the girls concerned "are to be the mothers of the generations that are yet unborn" (607); and he defends his exposure on the following grounds:

The turning loose into society of girls who have been defiled, and have consented to be defiled, by the black wretches who are the most cursed things that God ever made? Is not that a matter of public interest? The marriage of your brothers and sons in years to come with those who are not what they seem, with girls who have reeked of vice in the past and will, as sure as God made them, reek with it in the future? Is that not a matter of public interest? (608)

Clearly there is more at stake in the "defilement" of white girls by blackness than the jealousy of the man who discovers that his wife is not a virgin or has been unfaithful to him, although I would suggest that the feeling of revulsion which informs Hardy's article as a whole is

indistinguishable from the visceral pang of sexual jealousy, and I shall return to this later. What bears stressing here is that, although, quite illogically, the threat of rape arises in Hardy's peroration, ostensibly "justifying" the call for lynching that he (and his fictional counterpart, Raymond Chesterfield) later so regretted (see Black Peril 218), for him the real threat of the Black Peril is the sexual response of the white woman to the man of colour, that "consent to be defiled". The Black Peril has even less to do with "miscegenation", the adulteration of racial bloodstock: the girls concerned use contraceptive devices, there is no mention of procreation in the article whatsoever, and the contamination which is so deplored is entirely invisible (the "reek of vice").

Hardy's attitude towards women in The Black Peril is not unlike that of Perceval Gibbon in Souls in Bondage. Chesterfield

didn't understand women. They were strange, unknown, and fathomless creatures to him. Perhaps it was because the necessities of civilization have covered them with an unnatural veneer that hides their souls from all but the inspired. Perhaps it was because he thought that there was about that veneer a suspicion of the hypocrisy and affectation that he loathed more than anything in any phase of life. (40)

His feelings are confused, to say the least. The fact that the language he uses to evoke the strangeness of women is identical to that typically used at the time to explain the otherness of blacks is no coincidence, for the affective structure -- of despising someone for pretending to be something other than something you would despise them for being anyway -- is identical. When Raymond meets Mary Roseberry, a professed Radical and Socialist (55) who has a "hatred of the squeamishness and pseudo-propriety of the Victorian era" (67), he is relieved to find that he can be frank with her, as man to man: "For the first time in his life he felt on common ground with a woman he felt that he was talking to a human being, and not to a dressed-up doll He felt that he had met a friend" (57, 59: shades of Joyce and his "little chum"). Hardy's resentment of women is sometimes overtly misogynistic: for instance, the narrator refers to "married women who fancied themselves immensely because foolish men had

taken them out of the rut, and had attempted to make human beings of them" (65, cf. 71); but typically it expresses itself in the time-honoured double standard: Mary is "to a really wonderful extent for a good woman, a woman of the world" (176) -- virtue and experience remain at opposite poles.

Mary's "Exeter Hall" principles induce her to take an interest in the "houseboy" Jim, and she tries to teach him to read. This is how Hardy describes him as seen through her eyes;

The Kafir was a young strapping fellow of about twenty years of age, although he looked older. He was of fine, athletic build, the sort of physique that would have received early attention from the captain of the boats if it had belonged to a freshman at Oxford or Cambridge His bull-like neck and chest and splendid limbs were visible for all to see (73)

She loved to hear him laugh, even when he was obviously laughing at her. And she could not help but admire his fine physique (164)

Mary could not conceal her admiration of his magnificent manhood, although she treated him as a boy and could not get it out of her head that so he was. He had a chest as wide and deep as that of a champion bull-dog, a neck like an Ayshire Bull, a loosely built frame as erect as a soldier in uniform, and thighs and calves that would have delighted the heart of Hackenschmidt. His bare feet had nothing of the repulsiveness that so often attaches to the pedal extremities of the white man, cramped and crushed by the clumsy footgear of civilization. Rodin would have delighted in them. They were as hard as leather, yet they had all the beauty of form that belongs to one of the most beautiful bits of Nature's work. (165)

Although the narrative insists that Mary merely "admires" the young man, Jim certainly thinks that her interest in him is more than platonic, and the meaning of the eroticism in the description quoted above is spelled out by the narrator:

And virtuous and holy as [Raymond] knew the majority of white women to be, and deeply as he revered the sanctity that rightly clings to the mothers of men, as a man of the world he was compelled to put two and two together, whether he liked the arithmetical results or not. In his travels all over the world he had seen women in almost every phase of civilization, of evolution, of savagery, of temptation. And he knew that after all women were human beings, and that Nature, in all her beauty and in all her ugliness, had not passed them by. And then the gruesome discovery came to him, as it has come to all the whites of the Southern land, although they will not admit it, that there is a small minority of white women in the country who, to put it in plain words, encourage Kafir immorality. And the more he lived in the country the more he discovered that so-called assaults of blacks on whites were, in a minority of

the cases, due, directly or indirectly, to the lasciviousness of white women. (147)

The problem with women, no less than with blacks, is not after all their difference from (white) men, but their similarity, their endowment "with like passions" (11) -- a recognition that the discourse on gender and sexuality in which both Chesterfield and Hardy are implicated is simply not equipped to deal.

The "relationship" between Mary and Jim, which culminates in a feebly dramatized attempted rape (well, actually a kiss, during which Mary obliges with the conventional swoon, 178-80), is exploited by Hardy to convey a warning about the consequences of undue familiarity between "madam" and servant. This was a tirelessly reiterated commonplace in the public discourse of white South Africa at the time, replete with images of "Jim" scrubbing his mistress's back in the bath or buttoning up her dress (cf. Daniel Vananda 201-204).¹⁶ The link between "Black Peril" panics and domestic service has been thoroughly investigated by Charles van Onselen, who speculates that the incidence of consensual sex between white mistress and black manservant was considerable in the Johannesburg area at this time. Van Onseleen finds an interesting correlation between economic recession and rape scares, suggesting that in depressed economic conditions the coercive nature of black employment became more obvious, inducing among whites a greater awareness of the fragility of the social system and a greater fear of black reprisals -- an argument which usefully complements Etherington's.

Raymond thus concludes that "Mary, by her kindness and consideration for a black man before he had arrived at a definite stage of civilization, had herself contributed involuntarily towards the natural result [the sexual assault]" (191). But the point that Hardy is concerned to make is that Mary and others like her have erred in not treating their male servants with full respect for their humanity -- as men "with like passions", rather than as boys ("Why, 'Tom' is a harmless, useful boy" Mary's friend Mrs Armitage remarks of her children's "nanny" [97]). But,

here as elsewhere, Hardy endeavours to have his cake and eat it. He makes it utterly impossible for Mary to recognize the full equivalent humanity of Jim by having her instinctively repelled by his colour, and, especially, smell:

Then a feeling of utter repulsion came over her. For the air around the bed was suddenly suffused with an aroma that sent a sickly feeling through her. Instinctively she turned on her left side, and crept to the other side of the bed The fact was, the sickly aroma of the perspiring Kafir hung on to her and permeated the room like the vilest scent. (72, 74; cf. 244)

the colour of [Jim] . . . made her shudder a little and gather the bedclothes around her. (73)

Since Mary's reaction is shared by Raymond (216) and, on the evidence of his letters from prison -- which are in fact edited extracts from the series of articles Hardy published in The Prince after his release (Rees 76) -- by Hardy himself, we have no reason to doubt that it is being put forward as serious evidence of insurmountable racial difference. Raymond is appalled by the racial promiscuity of prison life:

In a civilized country, in a tiny exercise yard about twenty yards by ten, white men and semi-savages, many of the latter reeking with dirt, disease and filth, were herded together like the Christians of old waiting for the lions (257)

my miserable little cell, that reeked with the malevolent odours rising from the bodies of the Kafirs and blacks quartered just below me. (264)

a horrible tin dish used promiscuously by blacks and whites . . . the prison razors, which were used alike by blacks and whites, healthy and diseased . . . a sure way of conveying loathsome diseases from one prisoner to another. (270, 273, 274)

Three in a cell -- think of it -- with the same bucket of water from which to drink, the same bucket to use as a latrine, the same blankets continually interchanged, the same filth, and insect-life creeping and crawling from white to black and from black to white! (275)

(This underworld which respects no distinction of race or rank is strongly reminiscent of Kipling's memorable projection of that authentic colonial nightmare of abject promiscuity, the mysterious pit in "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes".)

Although there may well have been reasonable grounds for

Chesterfield/Hardy's fear of contracting illness, I would reiterate my argument of the previous chapter that the notion of disease is only a vehicle for the objectification and rationalization of a primitive and "instinctual" fear of contamination by the different and inferior. Like the powerful taboos which sustain the system of caste in India, the racial consciousness has an enormous investment in the notion of kinship as a discrete essence or shared bodily substance. The ingestion of bodily substance -- whether in the form of smell, "germs" or especially, semen -- from a member of a lower caste is experienced as a pollution which compromises the very identity of the polluted. In a useful recent reappraisal of the parallels between caste in India and race in America, Andre Beteille has argued that

inequalities of caste are illuminated in the same way as those of race by a consideration of gender. There are two aspects of the problem. There is, firstly, the sexual use and abuse of women, which is an aspect of the inequality of power, seen in its most extreme form in the treatment of women of the lowest rank by men of the highest There is, in addition, the unrelenting concern with the purity of women at the top, associated with ideas of bodily substance (491)

(I have deliberately held over the question of "the sexual use and abuse" of black women for discussion in a subsequent chapter, and suffice it to observe for the present that discussion of the Black Peril in South Africa in the early years of this century was increasingly linked, especially by white women, to the far more widespread problem of the unscrupulous exploitation of black women by white men.) I would concur with Beteille that it is far more accurate to view a social order like the South African one as a caste system, rather than as a class system crazed by the idea of race. The iron rule of endogamy at the heart of the notion of caste explains why "miscegenation" was such an obsession amongst white South Africans, and confirms that the old racialist chestnut -- "Would you like your daughter/sister to marry a kafir?" -- is a lot closer to the crux of the matter than conventional liberal wisdom would allow. As we saw in Hardy's "Black Peril" article, when it comes to the exchange of intimate bodily substances, every high-caste woman is the high-caste man's mother,

sister, daughter or potential sexual partner: ethnicity is kinship, race is a family affair.

NOTES

1. The many extracts quoted in the following pages are drawn from books, pamphlets and articles published between 1903 and 1926, although the focus is on the years 1908-1912. There seems to have been hardly any development in the ideologies expressed during those years, so chronology is ignored in favour of a thematic exposition. This writing is generally middlebrow, aimed at an educated general audience.

Although it is slanted toward the segregationist point of view, the best introduction to the issues at stake is provided by J.M. Buckland's "Four Points of Native Policy", an imagined conversation involving, among others, W.P. Schreiner, John Shepstone and Olive Schreiner.

2. Crocker saw segregation as "a policy of radical cure, designed to prevent the growth in the future of an incurable fester in South Africa" (24).
3. Trevor Fletcher went on to deliver a sustained critique of the notion of "developing naturally along one's own lines" (768-69); so did Howard Pim in his review of Fred Bell's pamphlet, concluding with a classic statement of the liberal position on social engineering:

Is it not certain that the native problem can only be solved as we each solve the problems of our own life -- namely, by living it from day to day and in the light of day, guided by whatever knowledge we can obtain of honour and of truth? (Pim 30-31)

Other contemporary voices of liberal dissent worth noting were those of J.W.M.; A. Werner, who argued for the right of blacks to assimilate and participate in whatever European institutions and aspects of European culture they chose (230-33); and, perhaps most notably, Peter Nielsen. But these views were in the minority and increasingly drowned by the rising chorus of segregationist orthodoxy.

4. Compare Trevor Fletcher: "The fear that we shall be absorbed by a primitive [race] is a pure bogey and quite unsupported by history" (767).
5. Like so much of her fiction, Millin's contribution to the debate on the Native Question, The South Africans (1926), is dominated by the image of a swelling underground tide, a submerged or invisible danger to order and reason which serves variously, and simultaneously, to represent the threat of black insurrection, the aspirations of the working class, and the irrational in the human psyche (i.e.

sexuality). In an early story by Millin, the river is associated with the "poison" of black blood: "But onward flowed the black drop. Unto the fourth generation!" ("The Barrier"); in her first novel, The Dark River, the Vaal river becomes a symbol for the unceasing flow of (tragic) life, for the irresistible passion of sexual desire, for a force of loss, entropy and degeneration awaiting those who lose self-command, for Africa, for black blood, for the fluids of generation, even for syphilis.

The key to Millin's entire oeuvre undoubtedly lies in her life-long, obsessive disgust with sex and the human body (which for her were generally cathected to the colonial Other, the black man, via the trope of degenerative inter-racial sexual intercourse and the taint of black blood). See, for example, the pieces "Simple Souls" (41), "Sex in Art" (86-87) and "Love and the Middle-Aged Novelist" (88-95) in Men on a Voyage (1930); or compare this sample culled at random:

In the Turkish bath I sat with two American women, who had not only red lips and finger-nails, but also red toenails. Toes have, in any case, the ugliness of members degenerate and undeveloped, and to redden the nails for a sensual provocation is, I think, an indecency. (The Night is Long 218)

6. Compare the title of Lothrop Stoddard's The Rising Tide of Colour. The widespread popularity of the book is attested and satirized in Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby: Tom Buchanan asks Nick Carraway if he has read "The Rise of the Coloured Empires by this man Goddard . . . if we don't look out the white race will be -- will be utterly submerged" (18).
7. Most writers liked to present the alternatives for Native policy in stark and dramatic terms: "fusion, legislation [segregation], extermination, serfdom" (Crocker); "fusion or segregation" (Wybergh); "extermination, assimilation, segregation" (Bell); "Repression, Fusion, Segregation" (Drew).
8. For a brief description of the miserable living conditions of urban Coloureds at this time, see Marais 256-59.
9. Compare George Webb Hardy's description of Durban street life in The Black Peril (18-19), "including white, semi-white, fractional white, black, brown, yellow, and every other colour that is bestowed upon the human form", and featuring:

hideous grimaces which are the Kafir's substitute for the facial humour of a London comedian . . . hats which seemed to mere man not altogether unworthy of Bond Street models, but which makers of the latter might possibly have considered to be the grossest caricatures. . . . a hat that might have made envious hearts beat if it had been seen in the East End of London. (19)
10. Forrest Wood (53-57) gives a full account of the origin of the word. "Miscegenation" was a coinage of the American journalists David Goodman Croly and George Wakeman, who in December 1863 anonymously published a 72-page booklet "Miscegenation: The Theory of the

Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and the Negro". The booklet advocated race mixture in order to improve the national stock: purporting to represent Republican policy, it was a hoax perpetrated by Democratic Party lobbyists. G. Duncan Mitchell's New Dictionary of Sociology observes: "Use of the word is to be avoided since, apart from its disreputable origins, it reinforces a pre-Darwinian theory of human variation" (127). Agreed.

11. I have been unable to locate figures for mixed marriages prior to 1926; but for the eleven years 1926-1936, the Report of the Commission on Mixed Marriages in South Africa (3) lists a total of 1073, or an average of fewer than one hundred per year, the vast majority between "European Males and Coloured Females": hardly an objective cause for ethnic panic.
12. Cf. Michael Wade:

the white English-speaking group may be understood as a community gripped by a collective neurosis which displays all the defensive systems of the classic neurotic structure, including the emphatic perception of the cardinal nature of its environment as threatening. (x)
13. The notion of "moral panic" elaborated by Stanley Cohen in his study of British media treatment of the Mods and the Rockers is invoked by both Etherington and Keegan. Cohen's work is useful in its insistence on the degree to which moral panics are created and sustained by the mass media, and it should be stressed that the role played in the Black Peril phenomenon by sensational journalism in South African newspapers cannot be overestimated. The phrase "The Black Peril" itself (why not simply "danger" or "threat"?) smacks of journalistic hype.
14. The fact that in the Transvaal Republic, inter-racial marriage was illegal while cohabitation was not, suggests that Afrikaners at this stage had a more pragmatic, class-based attitude toward sexual liaisons between blacks and whites, the crucial question being the legitimacy of the offspring and their entitlement to parental status and property. The British, on the other hand, were more motivated by an upper-caste aversion from the idea of "immoral" contact, but were obliged by religious principle to recognize duly solemnized marriages. Pure speculation.
15. Compare L.E. de Payre:

As a clinching argument that our civilization may have a tendency to demoralize the native, take that terribly grave feature of town life -- owing its origin in Johannesburg and Durban to the kafir, and in Cape Town to the coloured population intermixing with the white -- the Black Peril (a theme it is impossible to ignore, as it cuts at the roots of our public morality, the sacredness of family life, our national honour, and the future prestige and purity of our race). That this is the direct outcome of our attempts to foist civilization on the native is only too evident by comparing him in his

natural surroundings. (546)

16. See, for instance, the responses to Question 9 in the protocol for evidence submitted to the 1912 Commission of the South African General Missionary Conference: "Are there any circumstances in the mode of life of the native in the part of the country with which you are familiar which might be regarded as predisposing to such crime [sexual assault]?" Respondent after respondent brings up the instance of the lax, careless or wanton white housewife and the virile young black "houseboy".

Hardy also tackles the related question of employing black male "nurses" to care for young white children of both sexes (e.g. 95, 97, 230-31).

CHAPTER FOUR

NARRATIVE FORM AND THE DISCOURSE OF RACE

Ah! What avails the classic bent
 And what the cultured word,
 Against the undoctored incident
 That actually occurred?

And what is Art whereto we press
 Through paint and prose and rhyme --
 When Nature in her nakedness
 Defeats us every time?

-- Kipling, "The Benefactors" (1919)

I

So far in this study I have been concerned mainly with the social meaning of the discourse of race in South Africa in the years 1890-1925, making no distinction between fiction and non-fiction in the range of texts examined. In this chapter I wish to consider certain formal features and problems which appear to be engendered in the attempt to give narrative expression to racist thought within the established genres of prose fiction.

It is only in the past fifteen years that the emergence or "rise" of the South African novel in English has begun to receive its due measure of critical attention. The period had long been something of a blank in the national literary history, measuring as it did a forty-odd year gap in the novel tradition between The Story of an African Farm (1883) and Turbott Wolfe (1925). Until relatively recently, the only novel of the period still in print was J.P. FitzPatrick's Jock of the Bushveld (1907); now there are paperback editions of Perceval Gibbon's Margaret Harding (a vital missing link: a work of stature in the liberal-humanist mould reaching back to Olive Schreiner and forward to William Plomer), Sarah Gertrude Millin's God's Step-Children, two of Douglas Blackburn's novels, and collections of stories by FitzPatrick and

W. C. Scully. Literary criticism has kept pace: there are now monographs on Scully and Blackburn, and theses and critical articles on Gibbon, John Buchan, George Webb Hardy, FitzPatrick and Millin, among others. Meanwhile the explosion of reinterpreted forays into colonial discourse, especially those fuelled by feminism, has ensured that the romances of writers like Rider Haggard continue to enjoy a high critical profile.

Despite the fact that this scholarly activity has been driven at least in part by a postcolonial nationalistic impulse, its results suggest that a traditional literary history of the period, either in the strict Formalist sense of an immanent-evolutionary history of forms,¹ or in the sense of a system deriving its coherence from specific geographic and cultural parameters, is unlikely to be written. The metropolis was too powerful, the literary culture too overwhelmingly imported, the texts too few. The period in question may nevertheless be construed as marking a transitional stage in the development of the South African novel in English usefully described as its phase of domestication. The term denotes the process of the adaptation of the European realist novel to local conditions, and acquires additional resonance from a distinction proposed by Martin Green. Green suggests that in the latter part of the last century, the "novel of adventure", the literary adjutant of Empire, steadily conceded any claim it might have had to literary "seriousness" in favour of the "domestic" novel, or novel of courtship, the other broad stream of nineteenth-century English fiction. In turning its back on the grosser myths of imperialist capital, and thus registering a protest -- either overtly or by default -- "against the crudest expansive thrusts of the modern system", including imperialism and industrialism, the domestic novel won for itself a privileged position of moral seriousness in the English literary system (Green 57). Comparably, in a land hitherto defined in literary terms by the adventure romance or "exotic novel",² the South African novel of race might be said to have intervened as conscientious "domestication" -- as an attempt to win the privilege of moral seriousness for an embryonic national literary tradition.

Stephen Gray has argued that in order "to make sense of the otherwise unshaped mass of novelistic proliferation on hand", the critic should resort to some "determined tradition-plotting" (Gray 135). Conceding that "tradition" in this context does not denote "development in the normal sense of the term" (136), but rather a common ideological matrix "based . . . on the uneasy feeling of the white man's failure to belong to the land, and his guilt at being an interloper, a colonizer" (158), he concludes that

the logical and coherent tradition of the realist novel in South Africa is a very narrow, but highly organized one. What begins with Schreiner's novel as the liberal tradition in Southern African English fiction does continue in Turbott Wolfe, is endemic to Cry, the Beloved Country, is reviewed in Lessing's The Grass is Singing, and meets its culmination in later novels. (136)

Persuasive as it is, Gray's tradition-plotting hinges on a snap equation between "realism" and "liberalism" which it is worth pausing to question. To ostracize Sarah Gertrude Millin, for instance, "on the grounds of illiberality" (Gray 136), is to exclude a writer once described by Ethelreda Lewis as "the truest living realist" and the author, in the words of Nadine Gordimer, of "the first novel to reveal the morality South Africa has built on colour", a morality from which South Africans have derived their own "sense of sin" and "form of tragedy" (Gordimer 39). If any account of a developing realist novel tradition in South Africa is to acquire the historical dimension lacking in Gray's essentially synchronic systematizing, it must be capable of accommodating the role played by the novel of race or "tragedy of colour".

We might begin with Dan Jacobson's memorable evocation of the fundamental artistic dilemma of the colonial novelist:

it isn't only the hitherto undescribed, uncelebrated, wordless quality of the life around him that makes it seem implausible to the colonial as a fit subject for fiction; it is also . . . its appearance of drabness, its thinness, its lack of richness and variety in comparison with what he has read about in the books that come to him from abroad. (Jacobson 18-19)

The absence of local literary precedent was an obvious handicap for the early South African novelist, but hardly in itself a disabling one: after all, there were any number of examples of how to render experience into fiction "in the books that [came] to him from abroad". As Jacobson suggests, what really made

the novelistic enterprise seem implausible was the nature of the experience on hand, the raw material of colonial life itself. For the colonial novelist's conception of the relationship between art and life derived, inescapably, from the literary form which had dominated Europe in the latter part of the nineteenth century: the realist novel. The basic challenge was thus to find, in the apparent drabness and thinness of colonial society, subject matter amenable to mediation according to the conventions of formal or classic realism; to find, in short, "a social field rich enough to bear the transplanted European novel", to serve its "need for rich metaphoric systems and diverse typologies of character" (Coetzee, "Blood" 161, 145).

It is from this perspective that J. M. Coetzee has investigated Sarah Gertrude Millin's development of a "poetics of blood", showing how Millin's solution to the problem of social field involved recourse to a typology of character based on ethnicity rather than social class. From our point of vantage, the systematic racialism which informs Millin's fiction would seem to be evidence of a sad failure of the imagination, a symptom of the paranoid mentality of the colonial enclave, an artistic dead-end. To Millin herself, it was an aesthetic breakthrough leading to a liberating affirmation of identity.

In the aftermath of the Treaty of Vereeniging and in the years leading up to the Act of Union in 1910, a new patriotism stirred the collective imagination of white English-speaking South Africans. In the literary culture at the time -- in the middlebrow magazines and journals read by educated men and women -- this growing sense of national identity was often articulated in tandem with expressions of regret about the superficiality and paucity of local cultural achievement. In 1907 Sir Harry Johnstone berated South Africans for their "ignorance and indifference" to the enormous potential for cultural activity offered by their own country:

South Africans! There is room for shame in your national reflections. As a civilized community you have been in existence since the 17th century, and there has not yet sprung from your soil any native poet, painter, man of science or musician. You have had one great novelist -- a prose poet, perhaps -- Olive Schreiner, many lawyers (not one of whom has enunciated any great law for the benefit of the human race), a few divines, whose theology has been utterly barren of beneficence, several great

generals, and one or two notable statesmen. It is time that you ceased to import your politicians, your missionaries, philologists, scientists and journalists from abroad, and that you developed them from your own soil, instinct with your own traditions. (265)

(In a sharp response to Johnstone's criticism, Sidney Caxton argued that South Africans had hitherto been far too busy pacifying the Natives and building up the social and economic infrastructure of the country to have had the leisure for poetry and botany.) The close connection between the mood of nationalism and the evolution of a local literature is perhaps most clearly articulated in an article by J.A. Greer, also published in 1907:

it must not be forgotten that the development of a South African literature and the creation of a South African national spirit will act and react on each other. The literature will be, in large measure, the outcome of the national spirit, which in turn will be fostered and strengthened by the literature. (10)

Like several other commentators (e.g. Forrest 73, D.L. 190), Greer bemoans the absence of a distinctively South African quality in much of the writing about or emanating from the country, and gives the following description of a literature adequate to the national genius loci:

South African literature is not necessarily that which deals with South African things or scenes, but that which is inspired by the South African spirit -- the spirit and the mystery of veld and kopje and mountain range, of vastness of outline and structure, of blazing sun and the violet intensity of night, of sudden storm and hurricane, of marvellous fauna and flora, of diverse types of native races with their legends and superstitions, and the countless other things that speak of South Africa, and of her only, to those who know and love her. (10)

The most viable answer to the question of the particular nature of this "South African spirit" was arguably already being provided by the treatment in fiction of the national obsession, race. And the writer who recognized this, and who built her career on that recognition, was Sarah Gertrude Millin. In one of her earliest published essays, Millin had remarked of the protagonist in The Story of an African Farm that "Lyndall is no more a child of the veld than if she had been born in Alaska. She has certain views; but she would just as surely have had them on an English or an American, as on an African farm" (Liebson, "Heroines" 46). The implication that what was most authentically South African had eluded Schreiner and other writers is developed in an essay

published in the following year, 1912, in which Millin drew attention to the absence of a coherent tradition of realist fiction in South Africa; instead, there were

many South Africas in fiction: the Romantic South Africa of Rider Haggard; the Black South Africa -- allied to the Romantic -- of Bertram Mitford; the Dutch South Africa of Perceval Gibbon; the Pioneer South Africa of Sir Percy FitzPatrick; the Emotional South Africa of Olive Schreiner; and the South Africa of the War, as Richard Dehan sees it. There is also, of course, the real South Africa, which may be any or all of these. (Liebson, "South Africa of Fiction" 135)

She is scornfully dismissive of "the book of the year", The Dop Doctor by Richard Dehan, mainly on the ground that "[w]ith all its realism, it never approaches reality", and concludes, with characteristic arrogance and acuity, that

[s]oon it too will join the ranks of the Lost Legion -- of the once-read, and leave the South African shelf of fame decked, as before, with only one book -- The Story of an African Farm. (139)

By 1926, with four successful novels behind her, she could paint a very different picture: "in not one of the other Dominions is there so significant, so deep and wide, a creative impulse as in South Africa" (Millin, "South African Literature"). Far from being intractable to the intentions of the novelist, the South African social field -- where "[n]othing happens and yet anything may happen" -- was charged with the twin potentialities of "loneliness" and "ferment". "What", she asks, "are the excitements of Europe and Asia and America compared with the volcano at the very base of our existence, our colour problem?" Millin is at pains to point out that she is not advocating a meretricious sensationalism:

There are people in South Africa who complain because South African authors choose to write about colour. And they complain with justice when those who have never been genuinely stirred by the dark profundities of race presume to make vulgar and superficial play with it. Colour can be treated as cheaply as nationality, sociology or sex. But when they think that the subject is in itself unpleasant then their mentality shows like that of morons. Race is of all themes in the world the greatest. The distinctions between black and white are of all human problems the most poignant.

Two aspects of this extraordinary statement -- surely a decisive moment in the history of the South African novel -- require special notice. The first

is that it is in the name of realism that Millin trumpets her queasy excitement about the literary possibilities of race; the second is that her essay constitutes one of the most emphatic statements of literary nationalism we have on record. Race and nationalism are related in this context in a way which Hugh Ridley has adumbrated in a discussion of nineteenth-century German fiction: "The search for a realism in the novel was therefore inseparable from a nationalism which aimed at providing a national life major enough to serve as the object of fiction" (Ridley 49). Through Millin, the white or colonial South African novel tradition articulates its discovery of a national life major enough to measure up to the demands of the imported form of the realist novel. David Rabkin has pointed out that by the 1920s the South African novel's period of innocence -- "the perspective of Olive Schreiner, which could leave the question of colour aside, while remaining morally relevant" -- was over: "The colour problem had become acute. Neither the intellectual nor the artist could ignore it" (Rabkin, "Race and Fiction" 79). Race indeed becomes the South African theme, both enabling the writing of serious fiction and providing the pivot on which the writer's attitude to the dominant political and social morality of the nation will turn. Henceforward, virtually every major South African novel will deal with some aspect of the "colour question". The colonial apologist like Millin discovers in the theme of race a moral vindication, a source of social and political identity with the emerging nation-state, a sense of independence from European cultural and intellectual tradition. The liberal opponent of the colonial order makes a comparable but different discovery of identity, responds with a gestural compassion and moral anger, learns to live with guilt, ambivalence and alienation.

Several critics have credited Millin with the injection of a new realism into the English South African novel: "She broke away from the romantic and descriptive manner, the anger and anguish of Olive Schreiner and other earlier writers, substituting realism and representing a new direction" (Quinton 65). Millin herself saw her contribution in terms of the colour question. In the 1926 article she repudiates her predecessors -- Haggard, Glanville, Mitford,

Scully and Buchan -- for their "romantic" or "childish" treatment of the Native in presenting him for the consumption of those "who are, and remain, boys at heart". By the 1920s the claim to moral seriousness of the exotic or adventure novel, if not its imaginative force, was indeed exhausted. The chauvinistic superficialities of the adventure story could no longer be an adequate response to inter-racial encounter in a South Africa which had changed almost out of recognition in the previous half-century. As was noted in Chapter Two, the discovery and exploitation of valuable mineral deposits in Kimberley and on the Reef had rapidly transformed the basis of the South African economy from agrarian-mercantile to industrial-capitalist, causing massive social and demographic upheavals. The processes of industrialization and urbanization, and the beginnings of the proletarianization of the African masses, had brought South Africans of different colours together in relationships -- social, political, personal -- which the adventure romance, with its ethos of noble savagery, frontier and conquest, could simply not address.

Millin regarded her own treatment of race as radically innovative, a modern response to a new era. But in what sense? She was by no means the first local novelist to face the problem of "finding a social field rich enough to bear the transplanted European novel", and by no means the first to appeal to "the dark profundities of race" for a solution. To begin with, as David Rabkin has pointed out, this was also in a sense the stock response of the "novelist of the exotic": "It is easy to see how racism solves the problem [of characterization]: only attribute immutable characteristics to the races, and you can fashion characters true to your ideology" (Rabkin, "Ways of Looking" 32). Thus the individuality of any "tribal" African is reduced to a function of the supposed characteristics of his race -- gullible, superstitious, childlike, savage, courageous, blood-thirsty, cunning, etc. (see Street ch.1). On this level the difference between the romance and the realist novel of race is merely one of degree, depending on the relative crudity of the stereotypes invoked. There are other differences of degree: a greater measure of general

verisimilitude, of individuation in character portrayal, of detail in description. Setting tends to move from the frontier or outspan to the mission, farm, digging or town, where the interaction between characters is naturalized within the structures of a recognizable community. Women enter the presented world as fully-fledged protagonists rather than absent symbols of "home" or "civilization" (in King Solomon's Mines the narrator Allan Quatermain had boasted "I can safely say that there is not a petticoat in the whole history" [Haggard 9]). Popular racial stereotypes are typically proposed, explored, tested and reaffirmed in the context of new social relationships and cultural forces, and with the authority of the new science of racial difference. The narrative act is if anything more firmly locked within the paradigm of racial determinism and thus within a moribund colonial literary tradition.

Sarah Gertrude Millin should therefore be seen as the mature heir of a tradition rather than the progenitor of a new one. In novels such as The Dark River (1919), Adam's Rest (1922) and God's Step-Children (1924), she brought refinement to a genre whose discursive conventions had already been established in texts such as Scully's "Kellson's Nemesis" (1895), FitzPatrick's "The Outspan" (1897), Howarth's Jan, an Afrikander (1897), Gibbon's Souls in Bondage (1903), Bancroft's Of Like Passions (1907), and Fincher's The Heir of Brendiford (1909). But Millin's understanding of the realist project and her gifts as a writer enabled her to extrapolate, sophisticate and authenticate a crude typology of character inherited from the adventure writers in such a way as to create a fictional world of a social and moral depth, shot through with tragic possibility, comparable to that subtended by class distinction in the European novel. The "realism" which she brought to the tragedy of colour stemmed ultimately from the added rigour of an elaborate pseudo-scientific "poetics of blood", which enabled her to dispense with the trappings of romance and, in the name of realism, invest corporeal fluid with absolute power over human destiny.

However, such a project was not without certain, potentially

problematic, consequences. Characterization by biological determinism is, after all, a notion altogether alien to the liberal humanist heritage of formal realism, which accords a considerable autonomy (or illusion of autonomy) to its representations of humanity (see Belsey 74-75). In the remainder of this chapter, I propose, through an examination of selected short stories, to lay bear some of the ways in which the discourse of racialism is undermined and disabled by the discursive requirements of the realist text. I shall go on to argue that, in the more extended genre of the novel, particularly, these requirements obliged the colonial writer of realist fiction to thematize what was ostensibly merely a device for character differentiation. I shall suggest that the thematization of race was a direct consequence of attempts to adapt the classic realist novel to South African conditions and ideological requirements, at a time when biological theories of history and personality were intellectually hegemonic, or at least widely respected.

II

In addition to his classic of children's literature, Jock of the Bushveld, and a number of works of nonfiction, Sir Percy FitzPatrick was the author of a volume of short stories. First published in 1897, The Outspan: Tales from South Africa proved popular enough to have gone through two editions and four impressions by 1912. It also attracted some kind critical notice,³ and a commentator in 1907 rated the stories the best to have come out of South Africa (D.L. 188), ranking the book alongside The Story of an African Farm as one of the major milestones in South African literature (190). FitzPatrick himself apparently always considered it a "truer book" than his best-selling The Transvaal from Within, remarking to his publisher, Heinemann: "one is only a record of public affairs which I had the luck to compile; the other's the life I lived."⁴

The short stories gathered in The Outspan draw, like Jock of the Bushveld, on their writer's experiences as a young transport rider on the Transvaal lowveld in the 1880s. In the title story of the volume, FitzPatrick uses the device of the tale-within-the tale to good effect. A group of men sitting around a camp fire swap anecdotes; the focus of their desultory talk gradually narrows until, like Conrad's Marlow, a sage old "Barbertonian" contributes a long narrative which leads inexorably to disclosure of the burden of the story as a whole. The strategy of the embedded tale allows the theme of the story (roughly, that attempts by the white man to flout "civilization" by "going native" are doomed to "fiasco -- tragedy, trouble, ruin, call it what you like" [10]) to emerge with the minimum of authorial mediation. The first-person narrator invites the reader to share the subject-position which he himself occupies within the narrative: that of observer and listener. And from the outset he is at pains to establish the innocence of his role as recorder and relater of true events.

The opening sentence of "The Outspan" is an aphorism uttered by a character within the presented world: "There is no art in the Telling that can equal the consummate art of the Happening" (italics in original). These words, which assume the function of an epigraph, are soon after repeated by FitzPatrick's narrator, who, by way of introduction to the main body of his story, adds: "And I only recall the remark because it must be my apology for telling plain truth just as it happened" (2-3). Recourse to this sort of disclaimer has long been a standard ploy of the writer of fiction, but it was especially useful to the colonial writer anxious to impress the sceptical reader "back home": he sought to enhance the cogency of his story and to compensate for the strangeness of its setting by claiming literal truth on its behalf. The brusquely defiant tone of this particular disclaimer suggests that the "apology" being offered is in the first instance an explanation or vindication rather than an expression of regret. It is part of the colonial pioneer myth for the writer to claim amateurism, artlessness, as a virtue because "he feels that art bamboozles (instead of clarifying) . . . he

believes that life itself should be shown as the reality and the educator" (Gray 107). One of the more obvious ways in which FitzPatrick signals his authorial naivety is in the informal, conversational tone of his narrative voice, in particular the sense in which it seems to depend for its characteristic effects upon the personality and experience of its owner rather than upon the resources of language and rhetoric he is able to muster. "The Outspan" is indubitably a written story, and yet FitzPatrick has gone to some lengths to pretend that it is a spoken one. As this calculated use of literary technique suggests, and as Stephen Gray has convincingly argued, the pioneer-amateur posture was for many writers more conventional than real (Gray, ch.5). It functioned as a form of insurance, anticipating the response of a sophisticated metropolitan readership: by assuming the gruff diffidence of a man of action venturing into unfamiliar territory, FitzPatrick is claiming the pioneer writer's "right to have no literary pretensions" (Gray 102) and to be judged accordingly.⁵

Taking the disclaimer at face value, however, we can infer on the part of the narrator not only a keen loyalty to "plain truth", but also a strong sense of the inadequacy of Telling itself, seen as a vain attempt to emulate the "consummate art" of Happening, a parasitical imitation redeemed only to the (inevitably partial) extent to which it succeeds in capturing "plain truth". To accept the good faith of such a perspective in view of the purely verbal exercise of storytelling which is to follow of course requires of the reader a willing suspension of disbelief: all we can ever know of the Happening which is the occasion of FitzPatrick's story is produced by his act of Telling. So it will perhaps come as no real surprise to discover that the narrative logic of "The Outspan" serves to invest the formulation "There is no art in the Telling that can equal the consummate art of the Happening" with a subversive paradox which renders it at once an assertion and denial of the privilege of Happening over Telling.

The words are first spoken by a character recounting a prefatory "true" tale of improbable coincidence. Coincidence also plays a decisive role in the

main strand of the narrative, which consists largely of Barberton's tale about a white man who chooses to opt out of civilized society and live among the Swazi. When Barberton first meets "Sebougwaan", the renegade is living in an isolated kraal in the Lebombo mountains and leading a thoroughly decent existence, a living rebuttal of the view advanced by one of the other characters that "a man must deteriorate horribly under such circumstances" (10).⁶ However, Barberton is telling the story to illustrate another aspect of his "philosophy" (13). Despite first-hand evidence that a white man can live an essentially worthwhile life "among savages and in the wilds" (10),

"I do think that the end is always fiasco -- tragedy, trouble, ruin, call it what you like. We can't throw back to barbarism at will. For good or ill we have taken civilization, and the man who quits it pays a heavy toll on the road he travels, and, likely enough, fetches up where he never expected to From my own experience of such men, I can say that the return to their own colour almost invariably means their doom and ruin. I don't know why, but I've noticed it, and it seems like -- like a sort of judgement, if you believe in those things."

"And you know", he said, after taking a few pulls at the pipe again, "there's a sense of justice in that, too. Civilization, scorned and flouted, being the instrument of its own revenge!" (10, 12)

Barberton is a personal witness to the eventual "doom" of Sebougwaan. Some time after the encounter in Swaziland, he arrives in his namesake town of Barberton to discover that his friend is "the most popular, important, and indispensable" member of the social and business community there:

"You can just imagine -- at least, you can't imagine -- my surprise when I found that my naked white Kaffir sailor-friend, Sebougwaan, was the man of the hour. I couldn't believe it at first, and then a while later it seemed to be the most natural thing in the world; for, if ever I met a man who looked the living embodiment of mental, moral, and physical strength, of good humour, grace, and frankness -- a born King among men -- it was this chap." (27)

However, a mere "three or four days" after their second meeting, Barberton hears word that Sebougwaan has taken ill, and arrives to find him on his deathbed, wearing "a terrible look of suffering in his eyes"; after a few moments Sebougwaan groans "Oh, my God! my poor wife!" (28) and slumps back, dead. That is the end of Barberton's tale; he has no light to shed on the mystery of Sebougwaan's last words, and he rounds off his narrative sententiously: "Yah, it's a rum old world, this of ours! I've seen

civilization take its revenge that way quite a lot of times -- just like a woman!" (29).

This is not the end of FitzPatrick's story, however. Silence descends upon the company gathered around the camp-fire, and the narrator confesses to feeling "depressed by Barberton's yarn" (29). "But round the camp-fire long silences do not generally follow a yarn, however often they precede one. One reminiscence suggests another . . ." (29), and soon another character, "the surveyor", launches into a tale. Prompted by the "talk of chaps going away because of something happening", he recalls an old navy friend of his, "an ideal sort of chap" apart from "one perfectly miserable trait. He never -- absolutely never -- forgave an injury, affront, or cause of quarrel" (30). Acting on the merest suspicion of a marital indiscretion, this man

"left his wife and child, settled on them all he had in the world, handed over his estates and almost all his income, and his right to legacies to come, went out into the world, and simply erased them from his mind and life." (32)

Although the reader has already guessed the identity of the man, its disclosure brings closure to the narrative:

"I have never heard of or from him since he left the service, and yet I believe I was his most intimate friend. Oliver Raymond Rivers was his name. Musical name, isn't it?"
Barberton dropped his pipe.
"Good God! Sebougwaan!" (33)

Thus for FitzPatrick's narrator and his companions the unforeseen becomes the inevitable and the "art of the Happening" is fully consummated. It is an appropriate juncture to return to the "epigraph" of "The Outspan" and to reconsider the narrator's claim to be "telling plain truth just as it happened".

"There is no art in the Telling that can equal the consummate art of the Happening" establishes a hierarchy expressing, variously, the precedence of Happening over Telling, the poverty of human (as opposed to cosmic) invention, the inability of discourse fully to contain and discharge the burden of experience. In short, Happening is privileged in respect of independence, priority and plenitude. (I ignore, for present purposes, the obvious artifice of this hierarchy, which is after all the product of a Telling devoted to the

concealment of its own necessary priority: as well we know, every storyteller is in a sense a liar.) The Happening which is the occasion and source for FitzPatrick's Telling consists of a sequence of irreducible, "self-identical" events enacted prior to the act of Telling, while the Telling itself is a straightforward rendering of those events; the relation between the two is expressed by the concept of "plain truth". Yet paradoxically, the signifying system of FitzPatrick's narrative relies upon the agency of another, contradictory logic simultaneously at work in the text, undermining and inverting this hierarchy.

The Happening which Barberton's story reports -- a white man lives for a time in a remote tribal village, returns to a European community, takes ill and dies -- does not in itself constitute a plot or bear significance. But experience of several such Happenings, Barberton claims, has taught him to recognize a sequence of events interconnected in a casual, necessary way.⁷ As a result, the events in the Sebougwaan story as he presents them are no longer independent of that presentation; on the contrary, they are produced by the discourse of his "white kaffir" theory. And the same logic governs the production of meaning in "The Outspan" as a whole.

Barberton's narrative construes the events in the Sebougwaan story as elements in a text composed by some cosmic authority or Ultimate Author. The characters are the recreant white man and "civilization", his woman scorned; it is a cautionary tale of injury and inexorable revenge, an elaborate parable, a tropological drama. The audience consists of Barberton and anyone else who is prepared to accept his signifying system and co-construe the events in the Sebougwaan Happening as discourse. The theme of this discourse is that a man's role in life is determined by his skin colour and that any attempt to change that role is doomed to failure and retribution. Underlying and enabling this theme is the basic postulate of a structured, deterministic universe constantly communicating its nature to men through the medium of the experience which they undergo. In such a world contingency is impossible: coincidence is revelation. And this, precisely, is the premise implicit in the

project of FitzPatrick's narrator.

The "coincidence" which effects the disclosure of Sebougwaan's secret is evidence of "the consummate art of the Happening"; it is no chance occurrence but the product of a discourse, the discourse of the real as proposed by Barberton. It functions as a rhetorical device to reinforce the cautionary message of Barberton's story, by emphasizing to him and his interlocutors -- and, by extension, the reader -- that Happening is discursively motivated, that they themselves are characters in the plot of reality. But if Happening is thus after all a form of Telling, the hierarchy the narrator establishes at the beginning of the tale must be reversed. Telling must be privileged in respect of priority and plenitude, and Happening must aspire to the pure art of the narrative.

On the one hand then, the events which FitzPatrick's narrator relates are ostensibly a given, merely reported by his discourse. It is important that they are interpreted as such by the reader, for their unassailable givenness is precisely the source of their authority, the writer's apology for "telling plain truth just as it happened". On the other hand, such authority depends equally upon our viewing the events as the product of discourse, for otherwise the story would have no "point", no thematic integrity. These two irreconcilable logics meet head-on in the concluding movement of "The Outspan", and the collision yields several interesting insights, some of them beyond the purely narratological.

On one level, it is clear that the conventions of the mode of representation in which FitzPatrick is working demand that he supply a solution to the mystery of Sebougwaan's last words -- more accurately, that he create a mystery in order to solve it and thus bring closure and completeness to the story. Yet, although Barberton's tale is incomplete in the sense that he is unable to explain the import of the dying Sebougwaan's exclamation, the trope which the tale exemplifies is complete. Civilization has exacted its revenge from the wayward renegade: the obscurity surrounding that revenge is not only superfluous to Barberton's tale, but also indicative of a major

dissonance between his narrative project and that of "The Outspan" as a whole. This dissonance derives from the fact that the logic of Barberton's narrative eschews the causality of individual character and event which is the basic premise of meaning in the classic realist text. Barberton tells a "Just So" story which is reminiscent in some ways of early Greek tragedy: a "born king among men" commits an offence which invites cosmic retribution. The sequence of cause and effect which characterizes this trope is deceptive: in reality, the initial term is an effect -- human suffering or calamity -- for which a cause must be found. Thus Sebougwaan's "going native" is not in itself wrong; it becomes wrong because it is invariably punished through the agency of what Barberton calls civilization. The closing movement of "The Outspan", however, while serving in one sense to reinforce Barberton's deterministic world-view, simultaneously rejects that world-view by substituting for the effect-cause modality of the "Just So" story the cause-effect modality of human character and action.

Let us first consider a subsidiary act of supererogation performed by the conclusion of "The Outspan". In divulging the background to the moribund Sebougwaan's moment of self-confrontation, the narrative also purports to explain why the man deserted "civilization" for "savagery" in the first place. Oliver Raymond Rivers is presented as a tragic figure, a man of otherwise admirable character undone by one fatally decisive weakness -- a total incapacity to forgive. From what the surveyor tells us of Sebougwaan's past, this failing could assume grotesque proportions, and it is roundly condemned as a flagrant transgression of the moral norms shared by all present. That Sebougwaan is revealed to have been something of a freak all along presumably helps to explain the freakishness of his decision to abjure civilized society and go native. But neither the character trait nor the exact circumstances of his departure from England really explain why he should have chosen such an extreme course of action: a fresh start in the Colonies within the society he knew would have been a far more plausible resort. Thus for all the air of revelation which surrounds it, the reason FitzPatrick's narrator supplies for

Sebougwaan's self-exile takes us no further than the surveyor's gruff allusion to "a sort of clap-trap romance, I know -- the mystery trick, and so forth" (30). Just as in the case of Barberton's inability to explain the tendency of "white kaffirs" to return to their own kind, we are left with a mystery, an imponderable apparently intractable to accommodation within the discursive practices of which FitzPatrick could avail himself.

This lacuna in the text is implicitly occupied by a silent acknowledgement of the individual's freedom to make an effective choice, a choice between the narrow proprieties and bustle of colonial society and the tranquil simplicity of Swazi society, or howsoever the alternatives might present themselves. Such an acknowledgement could never be articulated in view of the overt commitment of the story to the belief that identity is an incontrovertible function of skin colour. To do so would be to question the assumed automatic superiority of white over black, an interrogative which is in fact whimsically suggested by Barberton: "for good or ill, we have taken civilization" (10). But this inchoate doubt is meaningless in the face of Inevitability, and besides, Sebougwaan never really opts for a cultural transplant. In his retreat in the Lebombo mountains, he surrounds himself with books and papers, the "civilized" trappings of his previous existence.

Since the concluding movement of FitzPatrick's story purports but fails to identify a real motive for Sebougwaan's decision to go native -- a motive which might have rendered his action morally accountable in the usual sense -- the moral code which he infringes in performing that action can only be the one which informs Barberton's "philosophy". Why, then, does "civilization" revenge itself upon Sebougwaan? It does so because of his action in rejecting it in favour of "savagery", Barberton has told us, and there is no evidence of any deliberate attempt by the narrator to distance himself from this point of view. Yet the moral logic of what is presented essentially as a moral problem in the closing movement of the story implies that Sebougwaan's crime against civilization is the pathological intolerance which has led him to abandon his wife and children. Certainly his last words indicate remorse not for his

sojourn among the Swazis but for his treatment of his family. "My poor wife!" alludes ambiguously also to Barberton's fanciful personification of "civilization scorned" -- "just like a woman" -- but the identification of the two exists in Barberton's discourse and not in the mind of Sebougwaan.⁸ It is not, after all, some inscrutable cosmic force which punishes Sebougwaan, but his own stricken conscience.

What has happened is that despite the overt attempt to give substance to a cultural myth by invoking the authority of *Happening*, FitzPatrick's narrator has been obliged, in deference to the integrity of his narrative project and the discourse which frames it, to provide a psychological explanation for the dark night of Sebougwaan's soul. In so doing he implicitly rejects Barberton's pseudo-scientific ideology of racial determinism.

The denouement of the Sebougwaan saga unwittingly undermines Barberton's thesis in another, perhaps more obvious sense. Oliver Raymond Rivers is totally deficient in the Christian virtue of charity; he is unable to forgive the merest injury, and reprobates those whom he considers to have slighted him with relentless judgmental rigour. Yet this is precisely the trait which "civilization" displays in vengefully persecuting those who have slighted "her":

"Civilization, scorned and flouted, being the instrument of its own revenge! If one could vest the abstract with personal feelings, what an ample revenge would be hers at the sight of the renegade -- sickhearted, weary, and shamefaced -- coming back to the ways of his youth and race, and succumbing to some one part of that which he had despised and rejected in toto!" (12)

"Civilization" thus responds to that which is immoral in terms of its own system of values by perpetrating the same immorality: the authority for Barberton's "philosophy" is beginning to look more than a little shaky.

Such paradoxes are symptomatic of the dissonance between the racist ideology of Empire and the liberal-humanist tradition of the discursive mode in which that ideology achieved literary expression, a tradition which locates meaning not in some invisible cosmic principle but in the mind of the individual subject. This dissonance is a dislocating presence in another story of FitzPatrick's which focuses on the phenomenon of the white apostate.

The eponymous protagonist of "Induna Nairn" lives in a small tribal settlement in Swaziland. He explains his choice of lifestyle to a visitor thus:

"Do you know . . . I sought out this spot and I chose this life because here there is no nineteenth century, no struggle, no ambition, no unrest. Here is absolute peace and content for me because I need take no thought of the morrow It may appear unnatural to you, but it is a fact, that I dislike the society of civilized men, and most of all that of the pioneers -- the sappers and miners of civilization -- who think a white skin a warrant for anything. Odd as it may seem to you, I do not regard each white man as a friend or a brother." (FitzPatrick 95)

The persuasiveness of Nairn's argument in this and other passages implies at least a measure of authorial sympathy, and yet the story as a whole is a demonstration to the contrary. One stormy night on the Kimberley road, Nairn encounters a white man accompanied by two English ladies. His approach spooks the horses pulling their trap; there is an accident, one of their horses is injured, and Nairn is obliged to lend them his own horse and guide them to safe refuge for the night. While they are crossing a dangerously swollen river, the horses lose their footing and Nairn courageously saves one of the women from drowning. He himself is injured in the process and rescued in the nick of time. The woman, Kate, helps to nurse him back to health. One night Nairn disappears from his convalescent bed; another character who encounters him on the road soon after reports that "he was looking ghastly, poor devil!", and that when asked "where he was going to escape civilization", had replied "Zambezi, or hell" (124). Then comes the explanatory revelation of Nairn's background:

"It seems he's quite a great gun among the niggers -- a real Induna. Did you know that? I thought it was only a nickname, but it isn't. He's a sort of relation of the king's, etc."

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"Eh? what? A -- a relation of the king's, I said."

"A relation! Nairn?"

"Well, a connection. You know what I mean. He married the king's favourite daughter."

"Great God!"

"Yes. You see, we were quite on the wrong tack. By George! I did laugh when I heard it."

Heron walked out on to the gravel path for a breath of air -- out to ease the choking feeling in his throat; and he saw his sister [Kate] rise from her chair, draw a shawl over her head, and move away to her own room. (125)

Next morning, a note from Nairn is delivered to Kate by a little black boy. It reads: "I had forgotten what a good woman was. Heaven bless you, Kate! It is not that I am ungrateful, but I wish to God Piet had left me to the river" (125).⁹ The return to "civilization" has spelt the doom of Nairn, just as in the case of Sebougwaan. His idyllic existence in tribal society is exposed as a delusion; while the taint of his relationship with the Swazi woman makes it impossible for him to remain in white society, his escape from that society is now an empty evasion. He wishes he were dead, for his life has become an agony of regret and self-recrimination.

"Induna Nairn" is thus a cautionary tale in much the same mould as "The Outspan". Yet once again, contradictions implicit in the discursive forces which produce meaning in the narrative issue in a paradox. The woeful predicament of Nairn at the end of the story follows upon his realization of just what he has forfeited in his renunciation of "civilization". To make this realization convincing, it is incumbent on FitzPatrick to demonstrate that Kate, the paragon of white womanhood who supposedly embodies the virtues of civilization, is significantly superior to Nairn's Swazi wife. But this he conspicuously fails to do. In her behaviour and conversation -- "Good-bye, Ursa Major with the sore head, and don't ask questions" -- Kate displays a coquettish sophistication which has the simple, unfailingly direct Nairn floundering out of his social depth. No attempt is made to develop a moral dimension to her character; in the role of nurse, her ministrations to Nairn consists of supercilious banter which, if anything, reveals a lack of sympathy and even a streak of cruelty. Kate is a frivolous tease whose only demonstrated virtues are her cleverness, her white skin and (presumably) her tantalizing virginity. Yet Nairn is made to perceive her as the epitome of a "good woman", in comparison with whom, we infer, his Swazi wife is a mere drab. Yet the narrative has demonstrated just the opposite. The woman revealed to be Nairn's African wife is earlier described as "a tall and remarkably good-looking Swazi woman" (91); she is consistently respectful and deferential to her husband, yet retains her dignity in the face of his anger. She is also

an excellent cook and housekeeper, and on one occasion shows herself to be more magnanimous than her husband by extending hospitality to some white strangers Nairn has turned away from their door, secretly sending them food and drink. In short, she is the very embodiment of Victorian female virtue, and, on the evidence of the text, unquestionably a better woman than Kate.

Thus once again the sheer irrationality of racial mythology comes into conflict with the moral-psychological logic of the realist narrative, hopelessly compromising its integrity. In formal terms, the plot which produces meaning from the events of the story depends for its coherence not upon presented Happening but on another, extra-literary plot, the race-theory discourse which the narrator assumes he shares with the reader. In fact the story of Induna Nairn as it is presented has nothing to do with race. A happily married man is bewitched by a "femme fatale" whose exotic allure is a painful reminder of the world of emotional and sensual experience his domestic situation must perforce exclude; an old and familiar tale, to be sure. Much the same may be said of W.C. Scully's short story "Kellson's Nemesis", to consider one further example.

The title of the story dramatically evokes the ineluctability of the fate which awaits those who transgress the laws of racial separation. The elderly magistrate Kellson returns to the South African town where he began his career many years before. One day he sentences a young offender to prison and throws in thirty-six lashes for good measure. But in the evening he is visited by the youth's mother, a Coloured woman, who pleads for remission of the flogging. When Kellson rejects her plea, she reveals that the convicted youth is Kellson's son, the fruit of a forgotten union between them when Kellson was sowing his oats rather too wildly years before. Smitten with shock and incipient self-loathing, Kellson ushers the woman from his chambers. Feeling that "he could no longer live" (Scully, Kafir Stories 86), he commits suicide by taking an overdose of a sleeping draught.

Jean Marquard remarks that

Kellson . . . kills himself when he realizes that in an episode from his past he had failed to preserve racial purity. An

ambiguity germane to this story makes two interpretations possible: either miscegenation is degrading and perpetuates degradation or a mixing of races is natural and thus desirable. In "Kellson's Nemesis" the tone is delicate and Scully does not allow either interpretation to confer a final philosophical solution on the issue. (Marquard 33)

This is a fair description of the effect of the story on the contemporary reader, and yet both "interpretations" are questionable. There is nothing in the story to suggest that the depravity of Kellson's illegitimate son stems from the mixed blood in his veins, the thesis which Sarah Gertrude Millin was to make her hobbyhorse a couple of decades later. We might choose to infer that a deprived, fatherless upbringing has been the cause of the boy's degradation, a disability compounded by the invidious position of the Coloured in the South African social formation; but at no point does the text specifically address itself to this question. The interpretation that "mixing of the races is natural and thus desirable" is equally strained, for the story insists that the child has been casually conceived out of wedlock and the father is morally accountable for this irresponsible act. The plot of "Kellson's Nemesis" undoubtedly tells us that Kellson commits suicide because he has fathered a coloured child, and the reader is entitled to speculate as to the authorial view of the presented events -- but the denouement of the story in fact has nothing to do with race. When the identity of the boy is revealed, Kellson is struck dumb with horror because "He had sentenced his own son" (85). We then enter the stream of consciousness which leads to his decision to take his own life:

He wondered where the keys of the Office were kept. He would go down to the Office, find the record, and strike the lashes out of the sentence. No -- the sentence must stand. The one stainless record which his conscience held up to him, was that of his public life. He had never yet done a deed in his official capacity of which he was ashamed. He must not, at the close of his career, be guilty of a dishonourable action. The prisoner richly deserved his sentence. Let him undergo it. (86)

The story thus turns on Kellson's decision to preserve his professional integrity and condemn his own son to flogging and imprisonment "at the convict station amongst the other human animals, and becoming lower and more degraded every day" (86). It is not a real resolution of the situation, and Kellson

decides that the only course of action is to escape through suicide. But significantly, it is a situation to which the colour of the boy's skin (or that of his mother) does not contribute. Had the illegitimate son been white, the moral dilemma would have been exactly the same.

As in the case of "The Outspan" and "Induna Nairn", the moral-psychological logic which propels the narrative is at odds with the plot of racial determinism which purports to provide coherence and significance. Discussing the production of meaning in classic realist fiction, Catherine Belsey has commented:

In Heart of Darkness, Marlow is appalled to find in the jungles of the Congo a recognition of his own remote kinship with primeval savagery: "And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything, for everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future". "The mind of man", infinite and infinitely mysterious, homogeneous system of differences, unchangeable in its essence however changeable its forms, is shown in classic realism to be the source of understanding, of action and of history. (Belsey 74-75)

Although the incomparably lesser fiction of FitzPatrick, Scully and other writers of this period may attempt to place "the source of understanding, of action and of history" outside of the individual (though universal) subject, the nature of the discursive mode in which they are working simply does not permit it. The postulated source of meaning in the stories we have examined is a determinism based on race, intellectually informed by the evolutionary model of social Darwinism and lent respectability by ideas of white trusteeship and Christian civilization (although in "The Outspan" civilization is depicted as an amoral natural force, red in tooth and claw). In each case, the attempt by the author to seal off the narrative in the envelope of this determinism results in a falsifying contradiction, for the epistemological premises of classic realism must inevitably come into conflict with a priori theories of human nature.

For the writer intent on portraying racial (as distinct, of course, from environmental) determinism, there would appear to be two ways out. On the one hand, he or she would have explicitly to repudiate the epistemological premises of realism and substitute those more commonly encountered in the romance, the genre of what Fredric Jameson has called "magical narrative". And

this the colonial writer was frequently apt to do, producing a generically hybridized text incorporating Nature or Fate or Destiny -- usually propelled by the invisible agency of Blood -- as a principal actant¹⁰ in the narrative, an actant inherent in the nature of things and beyond the sphere of human influence (cf. Of Like Passions).

On the other hand, the writer could attempt to "prove" the validity of characterization by race by making the idea of racial determination the thematic focus of the narrative. I am not suggesting that colonial writers set out to produce a metafiction of character, but rather that their work tended to embody in varying degrees the artistic (and ideological) problem they encountered in attempting to portray characters whose attributed habits of perception were both the same as and entirely different from their own, whose attributed capacity for development was both identical with their own and also severely circumscribed by an alien genetic destiny. Recourse to a mixed typology of character was consequently common: J. M. Coetzee aptly suggests "an ethnic typology for those parts of the novel set in the wilderness, a class typology for those parts set in society" (Coetzee, "Blood" 162), and yet the relationship between the two was frequently an uneasy, shifting one, tending towards hierarchical resolution with ethnicity superordinate to class or caste.

It may be instructive to offer an illustration of how the discursive requirements of the realist text behave the writer deploying a racial psychology of character to inscribe that psychology in the events of the narrative to the extent that it becomes thematized, that is, becomes a dominant principle of unity or coherence. "The Fundamental Axiom" by W.C. Scully is unusually explicit as to the cultural codes to which it refers and the intellectual capital on which it draws. The story features a character type which we may call the "hopeless suitor", a black man with a doomed passion for a white woman. Samuel Gozani is the mission-educated son of a chief of the Gcaleka tribe, "the kafir aristocracy" (Scully, Kafir Stories 42), who falls in love with a European fellow-teacher at the mission school,

Elizabeth Blake. In a frenzy of jealousy and unrequited passion, Gozani murders his white rival for Miss Blake's affections. The authorial explanation for Gozani's crime reads thus:

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, and absorbed all into itself. 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. (50)

In the face of the presented evidence for this view of human character, the value of "the fundamental axiom" to which the the old missionary Gottlieb Schultz subscribes is nugatory:

One illusion he still retained. This was the firm belief that the average barbarian was fully the equal of the average civilised man -- an illusion so common amongst the missionary fraternity early in this century, that this equality was almost, if not quite, a fundamental axiom in all missionary reasoning. (42)

According to the young Reverend Wilson -- Gozani's victim, who belongs to "the more modern school" -- "The equality idea is quite an exploded one, and the black savage, superficially civilised, is no more the equal of the European, than a Basuto pony is equal to a thoroughbred horse" (54). Of Gozani's romantic attachment to Miss Blake, Wilson opines that "he is not so much to blame as is the system which filled his head with nonsense. These old missionaries have done a lot of harm in giving the native false notions as to equality, and making them generally conceited" (54).

Scully's presentation of the Reverend Wilson is tinged with irony, and, as Marquard's sensitive analysis has shown, his story as a whole is more complex than the above extracts would imply (Marquard, "A Neglected Pioneer" 209-32). But this has no material bearing on the argument which follows.

The old missionary's egalitarian principles are traceable not so much to Biblical authority as to ideas propounded by eighteenth-century European philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment. Yet it is in the ideology of the Enlightenment that the representational conventions of classic narrative realism, the mode in which Scully is ostensibly working, arguably have their roots: most especially in the notion of the free, rational, autonomous

individual. It is the universality of such a view of humanity that the Revd Wilson rejects. To the extent that Scully concurs with Revd Wilson's point of view, he is presumably obliged to dramatize in the character of Gozani a different kind of human nature, a nature radically deformed by racial difference. Such a project is in a sense discursively enabled by science, and modelled on its inductive logic.

The century since the Enlightenment had seen the rise to prominence of biology, ethnography and anthropology, disciplines which sought to study man not philosophically but scientifically, as an objective phenomenon amongst other natural phenomena. The "fundamental axiom" predates also the Darwinian synthesis of these disciplines, which in its vulgar application as Social Darwinism had by the end of the nineteenth century become such a powerful justificatory myth for imperialist expansionism. It is important to realize that for a writer in Scully's day, the theory of racial determinism had the prestigious authority of both the modern and the scientific. The scientific observation of differences between the races had resulted in the formulation of biological or natural laws "proving" the inherent inferiority of the darker races.

Evidence for this proof of inferiority was to be derived not from theological or philosophical doctrine but empirically, from practical experience. South African novels of this period abound with examples of the naive and irresponsible assumptions of expatriates being shown up by the hard-earned wisdom of colonials who have come "to know the native". This helps to explain why (as noted earlier) the South African novelist at the turn of the century -- whose audience was a predominantly metropolitan one -- frequently went to considerable lengths to impress on the reader the authenticity, if not the literal truth, of his story. As was the case in "The Outspan", a clear priority is thus accorded to the "facts" of a narrative, the sequence of events narrated, independent of the manner or purpose of that narration. In Scully's story evidence for the inherent savagery of Samuel Gozani consists in the presented effects of his desperate love for Miss Blake

-- his mutinous apathy, obsessive behaviour and, above all, his killing of Reverend Wilson. But many men, including a great number of characters in Western literature before Gozani, have been driven by excess of passion to commit murder. On the level of the events of the story alone, that Gozani was born a "primitive" African is neither here nor there. The putative priority of these events is in fact established by the priority of the narrator's racist interpretation of them; that is, by the discursive requirements of the story's overall structure of signification. Of course, as Jonathan Culler has pointed out, this double logic produced by conflict between story and discourse, fabula and sjuzhet -- Gozani commits brutal murder because he is a savage; Gozani is a savage because he commits brutal murder -- is in a sense present in every narrative (Culler 178). But, as I have argued, a typology of character by race is essentially foreign to the deepest impulse of the classic realist text, which grounds its representations of human action in the individual consciousness and accords no necessary privilege to origins over environment or experience. For the colonial novelist deploying such a typology, each narrative act must itself embody a substantiation of and justification for that typology, or else it ceases to be determinative and becomes merely contingent. It is the author's fulfilment of this formal or artistic contract that I have described as the thematization of race. But no matter how assiduous that fulfilment, the contradictions remain. In what is undoubtedly the most perspicacious concise commentary on Millin's oeuvre, for instance, Malvern van Wyk Smith concludes that the residual appeal of her novels

may be found in the ambivalence between Millin's humane sympathies and her racial beliefs: the novels, while espousing abhorrent ethnic theories, also expose their viciousness. It is as if Millin on the level of individualized pity cannot accept the inhumanity of the theories of "blood purity" she believes she has to expound on an ideological level. (59)

"Individualized pity" is a typical effect of characterization in the classic realist text.

Before we take our leave of "The Fundamental Axiom", I should like to point out that the story as a whole is a threnody on the failure of the

civilizing mission, filled with the pessimism which informed Scully's 1894 address on "The Native Question" (see Chapter 2), and shot through with profound sympathy for the hapless victim of the unsuccessful experiment.

Gozani addresses these remarks to Miss Blake:

"When a black man walks in the ways of the whites, he becomes a stranger to his own kind, and he really has no friends. The white man says 'Come here to us', and when the black man comes as near as he can, there is still a gulf that he cannot pass. I am a lonely man, Miss Elizabeth; I have left my own people, and there is no one that I can call a friend." (46)

Although Gozani escapes after the murder, he is driven away by his own people, and about three years later is found living in "a hut far from other men" (62) with Martha Kawa, a girl from the Mission, and their ailing baby. Gozani's brooding bitterness has rendered him effectively insane, and in one of his rages he gives Martha a beating from which she fails to recover; his child dies soon after, and he buries mother and baby side-by-side in the veld. He then "divest[s] himself of every article of clothing and ornament" (66) and goes to the edge of a deep pool in the nearby river. And this is how the story ends:

Upon this bank stood Samuel Gozani, naked as he was born, and he lifted up his voice and spake:

"The white men told me about a God that died for all men, and that rewards the good and punishes the wicked, but the white man lied about other things, so I cannot believe him. My father told me about Tikoloshe, who lives in the water, and pulls people down by the feet into the darkness. I never knew my father to lie; I want to reach the darkness, so I will go to Tikoloshe."

He sprang into the pool, and Tikoloshe pulled him down by the feet into the darkness. (66-67)

This seems to me a rare imaginative achievement for a colonial writer of the time. It may be true that lurking in the shadow of the sheer difference evoked here is the inchoate doctrine of Segregation. But what is far more striking is the compassion which Scully evinces for this abject victim of colonization. His life destroyed by the hypocrisy of white civilization, Gozani regains a sovereign integrity of being at the moment of his death by returning to the embrace of his own gods. The full validity of his belief and the culture from which it springs is unflinchingly countenanced by the final sentence of the story.

All in all, the example of "The Fundamental Axiom" demonstrates that no degree of logical inconsistency necessarily cancels out the dramatic or emotional force of fiction informed by race-thinking. It is not simply a question of, with the wisdom of hindsight, allowing the deluded the validity of their delusions. It seems that it matters little -- and here we are talking, I suppose, mainly of aesthetic effect -- whether or not the reader is prepared to accept the truth-value of the postulates of racial difference on which the plots of such fiction manifestly turn. What actually matters is whether the writer has done his or her job properly in evoking a world sufficiently credible for the reader's disbelief to be suspended for the duration of the represented action. For this job to be done properly, I have argued, for the effect of realism to be achieved and sustained, the attributed otherness of the black protagonist cannot simply be assumed but must be "proved" in the process of representation. And the success of such a process appears, somewhat paradoxically, to entail granting that Other a sameness of psychological verisimilitude sufficient to satisfy the implicit universality of humanist ideology.

Nevertheless, it must be reiterated that the overall effect of Scully's story and other South African racial fiction of the period is to invent or elaborate, justify and perpetuate a racially determined hierarchy of class and caste, by demonstrating that the black and white races are not only different, but -- because the difference is biologically inscribed -- permanently and incontrovertibly so. The influence of education, environment, acculturation, is superficial and temporary: as a character in Douglas Blackburn's Leaven has it, "the transient alteration effected on a mirror by breathing on it" (253). The value of this myth to the white colonial bourgeoisie in South Africa at the time, intent on consolidating the ethnic basis of the social order and entrenching itself as the ruling class, is obvious, and has been fully treated in earlier chapters.

NOTES

1. See Jurij Tynjanov, "On Literary Evolution", in Matejka and Pomorska, Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views; and Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique", in Lemon and Reis, Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays.
2. These two forms are distinguished by Hugh Ridley in Chapter 1 of Images of Imperial Rule.
3. Favourable reviews appeared, inter alia, in African Review 17 Feb. 1897; African Star 17 Apr. 1897; Literary World 23 Apr. 1897; The Bookman May 1897; The Times 12 June 1897; The Spectator 19 June 1897; and Athenaeum 7 Aug. 1897.
4. Quoted in Wallis, 79. See also Wallis 19, 64; and Cartwright 99, 151.
5. In King Solomon's Mines, Haggard has Allan Quatermain remark:

And now it only remains for me to offer my apologies for my blunt way of writing. I can only say in excuse for it that I am more accustomed to handle a rifle than a pen, and cannot make any pretence to the grand literary flights and flourishes which I see in novels (Haggard 6)

David Bunn comments:

Through the character of Allan Quatermain, Haggard reasserts his preference for plainly told adventure stories, for accounts which issue from the pen of one unfamiliar with a narrator's normal disguises. In the truest Derridean sense, there is a logocentric urgency behind this desire for a narrative which is like a hunter's tale, which is authentic, unembellished, and unimpeded by the feminine "flights and flourishes" of narrative indirection. (10)

Bunn goes on to suggest that this romance defiantly constructs for itself a specifically male audience, another index of the divergence of the adventure tale from what Martin Green calls the "domestic" novel, with its high proportion of female readers. Lawrence Millman describes Haggard's novels as "male fiction . . . written by men, for men or boys, and about the activities of men", construing the genre as "a conservative backlash to an overwhelming association of the Victorian novel with women, often made by people who neither liked novels or women", celebrating homosocial bonding (quoted in Stott 90).

6. In John B.C. Lambourne's novel The White Kaffir, a character expresses the settler community's general opinion thus:

A "white kaffir", I think, is a man who has partly reverted to the brute. It was only yesterday, comparatively speaking, that man worried at all about clean clothes, a clean house, or being clean himself. He's lived longer in a cave than he has in a house, and he's lived longer in a dirty house than he has in a clean one. A "white kaffir", therefore -- his

filthy clothes and person, the filthy way he eats and lives -- is not so entirely unnatural as he appears. Under certain conditions when man is segregated from his kind it is easy for him to slip back into the old ways of the brute, and live the lives of the kaffirs around him. (50-51)

7. Barberton makes no attempt to establish the obvious physiological causality of Sebougwaan's dying of a fever contracted during his spell of furlough from "civilization". But perhaps the occluded metaphor here is that of contagion and disease: contaminated by "blackness", Sebougwaan has been rendered unfit for permanent re-entry into "civilized" life.

8. The identification of women with civilization was a commonplace of patriarchal discourse at the time: compare the symbolic role of Kurtz's Intended in Heart of Darkness. This is how a character in Lambourne's The White Kaffir puts it:

"White women have civilized man. Civilization is entirely due to them -- and all its evils", he added, unwilling to over-laud the weaker sex. "To please women man has learnt to dress decently, to shave, and to brush his hair. He has learnt to build good houses for them. I doubt, in fact, if he'd have ever left his cave if it hadn't been for women At home men are always under a woman's eye. They have no chance to relapse. But when one of them comes out to a country like Matabeleland . . . the impetus of civilization is gone. The women around are kaffirs he allows himself to sink down to the level of those around him." (51-52)

9. Implicit, again, is the imagery of defilement. We saw in Chapter 2 how Theodore Treloar in The Heir of Brendiford felt untouchable and unworthy to return to "civilization"; in The White Kaffir, the character Lincoln recoils from the woman he believes is his abandoned fiancée thus: "He shrank from her. 'Don't touch me! Don't come near me! I'm defiled . . . I'm unclean. Ruth, I'm a "white kaffir"!'" (Lambourne 299)._

10. Greimas's term; see Rimmon-Kenan 34-36.

CHAPTER FIVE

RACE AND GENDER

Love heeds not caste nor sleep a broken bed. I went
in search of love and lost myself.

-- Kipling, "Beyond the Pale" (1888)

I

The signs of authorial gender affiliation noted earlier in texts by Nellie Fincher and Mary Frances Whalley did not seem sufficiently salient to warrant an enquiry into the politics of gender in colonial South Africa. In this chapter I wish to examine a novel written by a woman in which these politics are determinative.

"Francis Bancroft" was the nom-de-plume under which Frances Charlotte Slater published eighteen works of fiction between the years 1903 and 1933. Of Like Passions (1907) was Bancroft's third and most successful novel, reaching a ninth edition by 1911 and eliciting this tribute from a reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement:

It is a fine book showing sympathy and wisdom and it is not without deliberation that we say that since the story of the "South African Farm" we have read no book on South Africa so startlingly true in its representation of South African humanity. ("Of Like Passions")

Bancroft was born in 1862 on the farm Carnarvondale near Grahamstown, one of 13 children in a family which in the next generation produced an outstanding poet, Francis Carey Slater (1876-1962). She worked as a governess and schoolmistress before training as a nurse, subsequently serving with the Ambulance Department of the British South Africa Company forces in Bulawayo. During the Anglo-Boer War she worked in a military hospital in Francistown. While taking convalescent leave at Carnarvondale in 1903, Bancroft turned her hand to writing fiction. The successful

publication of a first novel persuaded her to try to earn a living from her pen, and she moved for a time to England. Returning to the Eastern Cape just before the outbreak of the First World War, she continued writing into her seventies; she never married, and died at Carnarvondale in 1947.¹

Writing provided Bancroft with a physically undemanding occupation yielding an income superior to that of a teacher or nurse; it also offered a medium for prosecuting the several causes to which she became so passionately devoted: Purity, Temperance, social and political equality for women, and -- in later years -- Pacifism and Socialism. Although her career was unusual for a woman of her day, it would have been recognized as the path followed by a "New Woman", a woman whose choice of economic independence and useful work almost inevitably entailed the sacrifice of a traditional home and family life.

Typically of Bancroft's "mature" work (e.g. An Armed Protest, Great Possessions), Of Like Passions is a novel written for a purpose, as the prefatory Author's Note makes clear:

In the cause, and for the safe-guarding, and protection of the Daughters of Greater Britain -- the white womanhood of our Colonies, this Story mirrored in its essence from events now exercising a direct bearing on life and legislation abroad, has been penned.

What the "Daughters of Greater Britain" need protection from is the Black Peril, (the threat of) rape by black men. Yet it is not black men but white men who are the primary object of Bancroft's social criticism: the novel exposes the moral duplicity of a social order in which assaults by black men on white women are hysterically reviled while the debauchery of black women by white men is ignored or swept under the carpet. The argument of the plot is that Black Peril incidents are acts of revenge for the casual seduction of black women by white men. The novel therefore proposes that in order to protect both black and white women, legislation must be enacted to prohibit all inter-racial sexual liaisons.

At the time that Bancroft was writing, the notion that the Black Peril was complemented and even "caused" by a generally unacknowledged

"White Peril" was beginning to enter public discourse. In the Report of the Native Affairs Commission set up in Natal in the aftermath of the "Bambata Rebellion" (1906-07), for instance, two lengthy paragraphs are devoted to the matter.

No nation can tolerate members of an alien race tampering with their women, and nothing is more calculated than the debauchment of their girls to stretch the endurance of even the most submissive people to the breaking point. The evidence teems with references to this unpalatable subject, the cumulative effect of which cannot be disavowed or ignored. It constitutes one of their principal grievances, and was emphasized by them, with an intensity of purpose and warmth of feeling, which showed the extent of the evil, and its resultant injury to themselves. Moreover, the mischief is not confined to the Natives. It is recoiling upon the race most guilty of such practices, especially in the direction of concubinage. We are distinctly losing in moral reputation, and, at the same time, producing a harvest of legal, social and political problems by an ever increasing number of bastards The Morality Act imposes severe imprisonment upon Native men going with white women, who also may be penalized, but avoids the converse, and they do think, and frequently say, in reference to this law, with telling scorn, "If your men may, with impunity, go with ours, why may we not go with yours?" (Colony of Natal 25, 26)

During the Black Peril panic of 1910-11, Sol Plaatje published an article in the Pretoria News in which he remarked that

it would be interesting to hear what the superior race feels about the other phase of the social pest -- the white peril.

By this I refer to the young gentlemen who follow and coax unescorted native girls on their way home from work, or from week night prayer meetings, to the employer who seduces his black servant girl when the mistress has gone to the coast with the children; it may be that a master is entitled to greater liberties than his wife; but from my humble point-of-view a white master is no more entitled to a criminal conversation with the black servant girl than the mistress would be to a tete-a-tete with the native boy. (Plaatje, "Miscegenation" 83)

Later in the same year, no less than three separate items on a single page of an issue of The Christian Express drew attention to the hypocrisy of white outrage, e.g.:

Looming behind this unhappy case is the Black Peril -- a grave and loathsome peril indeed, to be dealt with effectively yet justly -- every case on its merits. We may not forget, however, that from the side of the native there is a White Peril. It is common knowledge that in these parts native women are not immune from the attentions of men whose skins may be white, but who are white men in no other sense. The shame of this, as of the kindred vice, the willing victims of which are white women, we should feel as keenly as the dread danger of this other peril. ("The Lewis Case")

The "black peril" would not be half as great as it is -- probably, it would not exist at all -- if there was not a white peril. The native girls have ten times more reason to dread the majority of unmarried white men, than the white women have to fear the natives. (Sandstrom)

The White Peril sub-discourse achieved its fullest articulation in Plaatje's pamphlet of 1921, "The Mote and the Beam: An Epic on Sex-Relationship 'Twixt White and Black in British South Africa". Here Plaatje added to his moralizing a historical dimension consonant with the revisionist project of the novel he had just written, Mhudi: "before the European invasion there were no prostitutes in South Africa . . . no mothers of unwanted babies, no orphanages because there were no stray children. The Natives had little or no insanity; they had neither cancer nor syphilis and no venereal disease because they had no prostitutes" ("The Mote and the Beam" 85, 88). Yet although Plaatje spoke with the powerful oppositional voice of a black South African, it was still a male voice, sharing with the dominant colonial discourse a full measure of patriarchal prejudice: "fancy salaries, free education and preferential treatment have not succeeded in keeping white people's fingers off other people's goods" (85) (meaning black women). In Of Like Passions, however, what we hear is the voice of a white woman keenly aware of the discrimination to which her sex is subjected within a social and political order which simultaneously confers upon her the very real privilege of an unquestioned racial superiority. As we might expect, its speech is a complex blend of "complicity and resistance",² riddled with contradiction and paradox.

II

The novel is set in a "Dutch" village, possibly in the Orange Free State, prior to the Anglo-Boer War. It opens with the death in childbirth of an African woman, Noyale (also called Lassie), attended by the physician Dr Devine. The twin daughters born to her have been fathered by Devine's

friend Bryan Trevanor. Devine and Trevanor are led to believe that the babies, too, have died; in fact they have been spirited away to "the mountain homeland" by Araska, a former mistress of Devine. In a dream on her deathbed, it is revealed to Noyale that Fate has decreed a destiny of suffering for her daughters, in the service of a higher purpose.

The scene moves forward 25 years. Dr Devine's daughter, Mary, has developed a distaste for men since being told by a friend -- the aloof, mysterious Irene Mabilie -- of the sexual adventures of the young white men of the village with women of the "location". Mary's increasing indifference towards her suitor, Trevanor's son Bryan junior, induces the hitherto "pure" young man to join a party of revellers bound for a night's entertainment in the location. Among the party is young Trevanor's sister's fiance Philip Rooyen, who makes off with an African girl, Nichinette. The girl's sister, Noyale (they are later revealed to be the twin daughters of Bryan Trevanor senior), is comforted and reassured by Bryan. Later that same night, Nichinette's husband, Andries -- Devine's half-caste son by Araska -- attacks another white man, believing him to have been his wife's seducer. Andries is convicted of assault, lashed and sent to prison for six months, while Rooyen continues his liaison with Nichinette.

Noyale has been devoted to Trevanor since his kindness on the night of her sister's abduction, and has taken to following him about. Mary Devine glimpses the two of them together one evening, misconstrues the scene, and will have nothing more to do with Trevanor. In cynical despair, he yields to Noyale's charms, thereby unwittingly becoming the lover of his own half-sister. Rooyen marries Kathleen Trevanor and breaks off his relationship with Nichinette.

Fresh out of prison, Andries sees Noyale with Trevanor one night and mistakes her for her twin sister, his wife Nichinette. In a jealous, drunken frenzy he bludgeons Nichinette to death. After being arrested for this murder, he escapes with the aid of Araska and rapes and murders Kathleen Rooyen (nee Trevanor) in a further act of revenge for the

seduction of his wife. He is eventually recaptured in a routine "pass raid", tried and sentenced to death. Meanwhile Devine and Trevanor senior have discovered the truth of their relationship to the half-castes Andries, Noyale and Nichinette, and are stricken with guilt and horror. Trevanor is paralyzed by a stroke on hearing of his daughter's murder.

The aged missionary Jeremiah Hall visits Andries in gaol the night before his public execution and fights for his soul; Noyale commits suicide, Araska dies. In a long sermon the following Sunday, Hall interprets these tragic events as the working out of divine purpose and natural justice, castigating the authorities for their failure to make laws forbidding all mingling of white and black blood. Rooyen leaves Africa for good, Trevanor junior and Mary Devine are reconciled and marry, and they and their parents move to Johannesburg. In a dream, Irene Mabilie is summoned by the spirit of Kathleen Trevanor to campaign for legislative intervention to avert a repetition of this unhappy chain of events.

The narrative's twisted skeins of ironic coincidence are made meaningful by its repeated insistence that the pattern so revealed is not authorially imposed but inherent in a reality which it is concerned merely to record: in the terms of FitzPatrick's story "The Outspan", Happening is accorded an absolute privilege over Telling. But because, as an effect of its own verisimilitude, the narrative is obliged to acknowledge that the sequence of events it portrays offends against ordinary criteria of plausibility, it must resort to the constant invocation of an invisible cosmic authority for its representations. This authority is labelled "Fate" (138, 175, 249, 251, 268), "Fate the Unseen" (146, 170, 275, 277, 282) "Destiny" (175), "Providence" (179), a controlling "Higher Power" (194), an "unseen Potentiality" (228), "the Unseen Agency men call Coincidence, or Fate, or Destiny" (261). Relatively early in the story, this "agency" is characterized as the true author of the events to unfold:

Peer as we may into the dark womb of Futurity, our eyes are holden from piercing its darkness, from reading the handwriting which God Almighty has written on its walls. (118)

-- an image which recurs much later, when a birth register is described as "the accusing Book, skin-covered, and hoary with age and constant use, but written as with the finger of the Recording Angel" (311). By then it has become quite clear that "fate the unseen" is nothing less than the will of God:

"Look up, Lucas Devine" -- a stern, insistent voice breathed in his ear -- "See your Maker in the Heavens above you; in the Earth around you! Acknowledge His Hand in this! Unbeliever! have you forgotten Retribution? Faithless one! dost not remember, I will repay?"

This was Retribution, Nemesis, Fate! call it what he may
. . . . (259-60)

Who after this would defy the workings of that strong Unseen Agency, those "Mills of God", which, we are told, grind slowly, but with exactness? (261)

In his fiery sermon, the Revd Hall -- whose credentials are unimpeachable, "the very essence of the divine in man; the type that redeems humanity"

(271) -- adds another (surely redundant) element to this ineffable

Identity: "the unalterable laws of Nature" (300), "Nature, or nature's God" (303):

Hear the Message! Own in this dire calamity a Higher Power whose dealings ye cannot know! Own the unfailing laws of Nature . . . the careless action . . . leading -- step-by-step, link-by-link -- to Nature's solidly-wrought unbreakable chain; to the wide-reaching Consequence (303-04; cf. Bancroft, Great Possessions 151)

God Himself, the reader is given to understand, elaborating His aims through His own discourse of Nature, is the author of the tragic events portrayed in the novel. (That "fate the unseen" should thus be identified with the Christian God is somewhat surprising in view of the pagan mythological apparatus which sets the plot in motion, the "three spirits" of Lassie's dream [28-30].) The human characters in the novel are therefore deprived of real agency, reduced to the role of puppets manipulated according to the directions of a divine script, and Bancroft is presumably under no obligation to invest their actions with conventional psychological motivation or moral significance. But of course she does, and the collision of these opposing logics is most conspicuous in the portrayal of the half-caste characters.

The "careless action" which forges the first link in "Nature's solidly-wrought unbreakable chain" is the sexual congress of white men with black women (Devine with Araska and Trevanor with Noyale/Lassie). The wrongness of this behaviour is ostensibly demonstrated by the fact that Trevanor's half-caste daughter Noyale subsequently lures Trevanor's white son into an incestuous relationship, while Devine's half-caste son Andries rapes and murders Trevanor's white daughter. The confusion in the narrative becomes apparent when the reader pauses to analyse the logic which purportedly holds these events in causal connection. The novel is obliged to insist that "by the mysterious threads of the Unseen Agency men call Coincidence, or Fate, or Destiny, they had been brought together" (261), precisely because there is no rational or visible connection between them whatsoever, or at least no connection in terms of the discourse of race -- Nature as biological destiny -- which is consistently privileged by the text.

The young Trevanor's relationship with his half-sister is the result of ignorance and, apart from the fact that he is attracted to her because of her European looks (161), has nothing directly to do with the fact that she is of mixed racial parentage. Blame for the unfortunate liaison is effectively ascribed to Mary Devine, whose obdurate rejection of Trevanor's attentions has induced him to find an alternative outlet for his romantic passion. By having Trevanor senior believe that Noyale and Nichinette had died soon after they were born, and by stressing his otherwise exemplary character (14), Bancroft virtually exculpates him too. In fact the logic of the plot proposes that, on the contrary, what makes "miscegenation" wrong is a social attitude which refuses to regard mixed-race coupling with sufficient moral seriousness and denies a legitimate social position to its half-caste progeny. Thus Noyale/Lassie is "the girl whom [Trevanor senior] had callously drawn within his influence, whom he had carelessly taken away from her daily drudgery" (14, emphasis added). Trevanor's solicitude for Lassie is in fact unusual; as Dr Devine reflects, "[m]ost fellows roughing

it out here wouldn't think a brass button of this -- careless devils where human life is concerned" (22). Twenty-five years later, the ranks of these "careless devils" have been swelled by a "rougher element who had overflowed the country of late" (55), a "cosmopolitan population" (46) of adventurers whose sexual exploits in the "location" are regarded by them as a mere "sport" or "spree" (54).³ It is worth pointing out that the moral irresponsibility of these men's casual seduction of their social inferiors would be no less blameworthy were the women white: the power relation which lies behind the moral laxity that Bancroft is protesting is in the first instance a function of gender difference, not racial difference.

Similarly, the circumstances which permit the incest between the younger Trevanor and Noyale have nothing to do with her mixed blood as such, but with the way in which people of mixed blood are treated by the white community -- more especially, perhaps (although it does not apply in this particular instance), with the way in which white men fail to assume paternal responsibility for their children by black women. Denied the formal identity and human order of a legitimate lineage, the "nameless progeny [of such unions] swarmed over the length of the land" (260).⁴ With blood-relations among individuals thus unknown or unacknowledged, what prevails is a nightmarish promiscuity in which human beings couple randomly like animals, untrammelled by the customary sanctions against in-breeding. The degree of exaggeration is absurd, even pathological; but there is no doubt that for colonials like Bancroft inter-racial breeding indeed represented what Cixous has called "the hole in the social cell": a more than symbolic fissure which threatened to dissolve the discrete integrity of identity, permitting simultaneously a random leaking out of white ethnic capital and a secret seeping in of black contagion.

However, there is no doubt that the incest motif is introduced by Bancroft for another reason also.⁵ One might accuse her of collocating the act of "miscegenation" (which infringes a law of endogamy) with the act of incest (which infringes a law of exogamy) in order sensationally to enhance

the transgressive stature of the former. Indubitably, something of the horror purportedly evoked by the incest seems metonymically to extend to, or derive from, the fact that Noyale has "black blood", that Trevanor is repeating the error of his father. The narrative alludes to "the revolting hidden meaning of Bryan's unnatural revolt against the ties of Blood, and of Kin -- against the laws of God, and of nature" (261). The implication, though unintended, is unmistakable: although incest supposedly comprises "the revolting hidden meaning" of Bryan's conduct, this conduct is already "unnatural", in contempt of racial and therefore divine and natural law. It is perhaps possible to argue that Bancroft is cleverly exploiting the association of "miscegenation" with what is probably the most universal human taboo in order to convey to the metropolitan reader the sheer power of the social sanction against race-mixing as experienced by the colonial. However, it is more likely that this attempt to invest "miscegenation" with a super-added abjection (demonstrably spurious because simply not supported by the evidence of the text) is not wholly deliberate. The author seems overcome by a sense of disgust which, defying rational explanation or representation, is accorded the post-hoc rationalization of the incest taboo. It is a disgust most vividly dramatized in the experience of Mary Devine:

"something stronger -- greater than myself -- forced me here to drive her away -- to save Bryan from -- I hardly know what. But there it was, before my heart, before my eyes -- a dark hideous shadow -- a destruction of body and soul -- a frightful unnatural crime --". (200-01)

All else being equal, Noyale seems a good catch for Trevanor: she strikes him as "an inherently clean-minded savage" (82), with a "low musical voice" (82), a "graceful careless figure" (107), and a supple body bedecked with clothing "arranged with that wonderfully correct artistic touch, that is so marked among their people" (143). In all her dealings with Trevanor she is a model of modest propriety and devotion, and in the confrontation with Mary Devine, Mary is obliged to acknowledge "a higher soul, a loftier nature in [Noyale's] solemn eyes. She felt small before her

ignorant rival" (197). In fact almost everything we learn about both Noyale and Nichinette contradicts the epithet "savage" which the narrator insists on attaching to them. However, their difference from white women is signalled in two (largely unrelated) ways. The first is in terms of the way they speak. In so much colonial fiction, blacks are cruelly patronized by being made to express themselves -- and signal their inferiority, make fools of themselves -- in a pidgin version of the conqueror's language. But in Of Like Passions, the black characters are accorded the dignity of their own language, which "in translation" acquires an elevated, archaic and poetic register. Such a rendition of African speech -- which we might call "Haggardese" after the author with whose romances it is chiefly associated -- is of course ideologically ambivalent. Having its origin, as Jeremy Cronin has remarked, in the Enlightenment myth of the Noble Savage, it allows its speakers to be presented as "possessors of a full speech whose seamless plenitude contrasts with the stuttering hesitancy of the Whites . . . a primal and transparent speech in which word and meaning are indivisible" (Cronin 27). The juxtaposition of such language with the "normal" prosaic utterance of the whites serves to emphasize the difference, the otherness of its speakers. In the same way in which the text insists that the proper home of blacks lies in "the mountain Homeland" and not in the Dutch village (e.g. 17, 246), so does the manner in which they speak suggest that Africans inhabit a different world of meaning from whites, a world seemingly remote in time and place. Exchanges between African and white characters are curiously discontinuous, as though conducted in mutually unintelligible tongues; a feature of the text is the long narrative monologue, delivered by a black character and represented by linear division on the page as a poem, which intervenes in the unfolding of the story to impart an important revelation. These speeches or songs are inward-turning, seeking no direct engagement with an interlocutor and uttered in an apparent state of trance. Most of them are given to Araska (254, 267, 297), but here Noyale has picked up the word "Lassie" in the

white men's conversation:

"Lassie" -- She had caught the name, and now idly improvised her song:

"Lassie, called by her people Noyale;
Who dwelt in the hut outside of this village
Five-and-twenty years ago;
The beloved of the blue-eyed White Man;
The mother of his twin daughters;
Who died in giving them birth.

Here dwell I in the house of my lord;
I am his slave: The Child likewise is his slave:
O White Men! Noyale's tale is told."

She closed her lips, and instantly sank once again into dreamy immobility. (205)

Not all indicators of difference work to the disadvantage of the differentiated, and my view is that the conventions for the representation of speech adopted by Bancroft in this novel serve to evoke the sense of an indigenous culture encountered as strange and mysterious, admittedly, but as whole and rich and civilized, rather than as negative or absent. To commend such a romanticizing strategy is probably to place oneself at odds with the perspective of the dominant liberal tradition in South African literary historiography, whose oppositional political stance has consistently mandated the denial or domestication of difference. Yet it is the conclusion recently reached in an analogous context by Michael Green, who remarks -- apropos of the "magical" ("tribal") elements in Daphne Rooke's mythopoeic novel Wizards' Country -- "Perhaps difference needed to be more strongly guarded in a different way, even as it was politically proclaimed in every corner of South African life" (134).

The other way in which the half-caste sisters Noyale and Nichenette are distinguished from their white counterparts is by their sexual complaisance. What they seem to share with full-blooded black women is their sexual availability, but this has little to do with the stereotype of the lascivious negress. While Noyale's full red lips and "deep inscrutable eyes . . . blackly blue, fathomless and slumberous, yet full of hidden fires in their untamed depths" (162) hint at the sensuality bequeathed by her black blood, there is not the slightest trace of salaciousness in the way in which she and Nichinette comport themselves. The only evidence of

sexual licentiousness is indirect, to be inferred from racial generalizations by the narrator and white characters. For instance, white sexual adventurers in "the location" whet their appetites by watching the natives dance, a "massed circle of black nudity and frank unblushing barbarism . . . hot palpitating bodies" (81). Or two white characters display their knowledge of the native:

"But these Natives have not got susceptibilities and feelings like other races. Why, I have heard the very word love does not occur in their lingo."

"That is perfectly correct. There is no such word known to them. The only interpretation of our word love is in their language defined as sexuality -- animalism. Marriage is barter -- pure and simple -- with them." (133-34)

A considerably more salient aspect of the twins' sexuality is their seemingly absolute submissiveness to men, as witnessed by Noyale's description of herself as Trevanor's "slave". This is a racial characteristic to the extent that it is seen as archaic, atavistic: when Andries succumbs to the raging fury in which he murders Nichinette, he reverts to primitive type,

the aboriginal brute-beast man pure and simple, who for untold Ages had held sway over the lower creation of brute-beasts, one phase of that lower scale of creation being woman. Man, to him, as to his pre-historic ancestors, was lord of woman. She was his property, his possession; bought, possessed; punished if disobedient, and invariably slain if unfaithful. In his madness he saw the reddened axe of his people for generations past. "Would'st thou be less than a man?" they giped at him. "Would'st let thy heifer sport with another? Thine! Thine?" (152)

Clearly the narrator disapproves of the lowly status of women in African society, but not entirely for reasons of altruistic fellow-feeling, because the docility of black women renders them easy pickings for the sexually predatory white male. The narrator's presentation of black women is thus not unmixed with an element of sexual jealousy, especially to the extent that the women are "orientalized" as denizens of the seraglio of Victorian fantasy (e.g. "their dark slumbrous eyes -- wise as serpents'" [143]; "deep inscrutable eyes" [162]): what is presented as submissiveness in the text may well be a displacement for an imagined female sexuality, passive but luxuriant, from which the prevailing discourse on gender shrank in fear.

Clues to its nature are to be found in scattered references, free of gender qualification, to the natives' "free, unconventional habits . . . their frankly sensual lives" (139), "their frankly unconventional customs" (272, see also 80).

The second tragic event in the novel adduced as evidence of the wrongness of "miscegenation" is the rape and murder of Kathleen Rooyen, nee Trevanor, by Dr Devine's half-caste son Andries. To the extent that the novel, like Jan, an Afrikander, offers an extended narrative definition of the half-caste, Andries -- rather than Noyale and Nichinette -- is the focus of Bancroft's attention. Andries is also the primary vehicle for the novel's explanation of Black Peril crime in general, and these two interrelated elements will be considered in tandem.

The tragedy to unfold is adumbrated in an exchange between Dr Devine and Trevanor the elder in the first section of the novel. A grim irony attaches to their conversation because both men at this point have not only cohabited with black women but also, unwittingly, sired half-caste children. (Devine's curious remark that the matter of sex between the races is "the business of the Nation not of the individual. Individual cases don't count", presumably registers an authorial attempt to mitigate the irony and thus shore up Devine's reliability as a social commentator.)

"Here are we condemned to live our lives out under unusual conditions. There are niggers in their thousands. The country is now getting more thickly peopled with Europeans through the influx of a new cosmopolitan population of whites -- principally men, prospecting, mining, trading; mostly men in fact. The result of this unequal condition of things we see exemplified daily, that is the system of bargaining between white man and native; both, mind you, both, keen on the exchange . . . this sort of legalized bargaining -- one might almost call it -- will hit back on us in the shape of a scourge twenty or thirty years hence. The Governments don't care, and after all it is their business, the business of the Nation not of the individual. Individual cases don't count." (37-38)

"I can draw the picture. A new race in the country, overflowing the country. A new race of half-breeds, making their presence felt in every community. We know what half-breeds are -- vicious, cunning, idle, thoroughly worthless; inheriting the instincts of the White, and the savagery of the Black. But there they will be, unacknowledged by the white man and despised by the kaffir. It is not a healthy picture for the future of the country, is it?"

"Indeed, it is not, and that is just my argument, Bryan. Why are there not laws -- why have there never been laws, to prevent and check this traffic in undesirable intercourse between the races? -- laws so essential for the future of both races Only legislation can save the future of the nation. Wise legislation can guard against mixed-breeding and dog-selling, both fatal to the Kaffir . . . I tell you there will arise another evil from this neglect of our legislators, a far graver matter. The Native is both imitative and revengeful. Twenty years hence there will be a fine harvest of retaliatory acts hitting back, I am afraid, on the Europeans. There will be more families in the country then -- more women and children."

Trevanor started and stared at his friend.

"You don't mean that!" (38-39, 39-40)

And "that", precisely, is the tragedy that overtakes the men twenty-five years later. Dr Devine has not ceased to wax sententious, here to some young men planning a "spree" in the "location":

"Take my advice and keep away Because . . . there is no sense in needlessly irritating the natives, and exposing ourselves to their vengeance. They are outwardly submissive to a certain extent, yet capable if once roused beyond that limit, of the deepest, most savage passions. Passions lead to acts of vengeance, murder, bloody death They may not harm you or any of us men . . . but it is our duty as men to remember our womenkind -- our wives, our sisters, our daughters." (89, 90)

It is of course Devine's own son, Andries, who is "fated" to fulfil this dire prediction.

Andries's crime is remarkably "overdetermined" in the novel. Apart from "fate the unseen", three other interrelated or mutually reinforcing causative factors are adduced. The first and most important is the revenge motif. This is most clearly insisted upon in a lengthy section in which Bancroft points out how misguided the typical public response to the Black Peril crime has been:

The ferocity and brutality of the Natives were alarmingly depicted [in the Press]. There was a general petition for sterner measures, stricter laws, and more stringent prohibitive regulations to be introduced by Parliament in their dealings with the Black Races, who remained savages at heart, despite all attempts to civilize them, barbarous, and a danger to Europeans. The murderer in question was a type of his race -- idle, drunken, savage, irresponsible, who, for want of something to do, had clubbed his wife to death. This was the root of the matter, the very elemental essence of the shocking tragedy -- the idle roving lives led by the native population. The want of a Vagrant Act to restrain their movements was insisted on. The need to enforce habits of industry upon them was a serious need. The natives as a people should be compelled by law to labour. (235-36)

The opportunistic linking of the Black Peril issue with the "Labour Problem" is further satirized on p.237, and is in any case effectively undermined within the text by the fact that what has brought Andries and Nichinette to the village in the first place is his job with the Railways (82). On the contrary, the narrator insists,

[t]he real cause of the first murder -- jealousy, and of the second -- revenge, were either totally unknown to the Press, or else carefully suppressed and entirely ignored by it. But the roaming, thieving, intractable disposition of the kaffir -- as was perhaps natural -- was insisted on with marked repetition; and the insult, the affront, the menace to every white inhabitant of South Africa were vehemently dwelt upon. (236)

But these two rather ordinary human motives -- jealousy and revenge -- are typically qualified in the way in which they here present themselves to the mind of Dr Devine:

Oh these blanketed barbarians! these blanketed barbarians! with their deep savage resentments, never appeased except by a swift and sure revenge! -- When would men learn to understand their natures, and cease trifling with them and theirs as with a match to gunpowder? (231)

In other words, it is the impact of strong emotion on the "savage" natures of such as Andries that results in crimes of violence: it is not only the motive of revenge but also Andries's racially-determined propensities that are responsible. On the question of whether these propensities are the result of his "black" blood, or because his blood is "mixed", the text equivocates. The attack on Kathleen Rooyen is at one point explained in terms of a notion of phylogenetic regression to which half-breeds were held to be vulnerable and which, as mentioned in Chapter 3, even Olive Schreiner was prepared to take seriously ("the crossing of different varieties which each breed perfectly true . . . produce[s] . . . unstable creatures with a tendency to revert to the primitive original type of the race" [Schreiner 133]):

Inherited instincts, inherited tradition, handed down through countless generations of primeval animal heathen, awoke within this poor child of Nature, with overwhelming force, turning him to the aboriginal brute-beast man pure and simple, who for untold Ages had held sway over the lower creation of brute-beasts, one phase of that lower scale of creation being woman. (152)⁶

The behavioural implications of "mixed blood" are elsewhere canvassed, but with scant consistency:

"I've known cases . . . where these Natives are as jealous as their white sisters -- even more so -- and won't relinquish their particular claims; especially the nigger with white blood in his or her veins. These half-breeds are the very devil -- it's the white blood telling, I suppose, with its sentiment and passion." (135-36)

The woman [Andries] loved as white men love their women -- the young bride he had bought, it seemed but yesterday . . . his woman, his wife, whom he had loved with all the higher powers and sentiments accruing to him from his white blood, combined with the savage passion of the blood of the black barbarian. (150)

The Natives are an unemotional people. Their ideal of manly strength is indifference, passivity, contempt of the emotions. Women are their purchased property. Sons never embrace mothers, nor husbands wives, nor brothers sisters. Yet Andries, breaking through the binding traditions of long generations, with a stirring, perhaps, of the white blood in his veins, took his Mother's wrinkled, knotted hands between his own hard, youthful palms (248-49)

At other times, all distinctions between half-caste and full-blooded "savage" are conveniently elided (e.g. 91-92, 155, 231).

However, the narrative repeatedly emphasizes that not even psychological motive and racial proclivity are sufficient to set off the chain of events which culminates in the murder of Kathleen Trevanor. The factor that converts Andries's jealousy into the murderous rage in which he murders Nichinette is alcohol, a fact agreed by virtually every character in the novel, including Andries himself:

"Thinkest thou that I fear the man? It is but the brandy that makes of him a senseless, savage beast, with lust to fight and to slay." (Nichinette, 145)

"A savage lot at heart when roused", he [Devine] remarked.

"But what roused him, father dear?" . . .

"Brandy . . . and bad brandy, such as that infernal stuff they sell to inflame the blood of these poor blanketed barbarians Will the legislation of this, a so-called Christian Country, never make laws to prevent this disgraceful traffic? -- this pysical and mental and spiritual destruction, this demoralization and death and everlasting perdition to the native in South Africa?" (155)

"I have heard . . . that these canteen-keepers -- and they are like flies all over the country -- steep rolls of tobacco and other fiery ingredients, in kegs of vile stuff, horribly bad brandy, to sell to the natives. No wonder the poor wretches get maddened whenever they get drink." (Irene Mabile, 155)

"You have often told me, after the blacks have got hurt and killed, fighting like madmen among themselves, that it is the bad brandy sold to them -- bad, poisonously-adulterated and fiery stuff -- that inflames and maddens the brain, and makes them so fierce and dangerously quarrelsome." (Mary, 155)

"for I feared lest the jealousy born in the man would be turned by the brandy of the white man into madness" (Noyale, 165)

"the brandy turning thee to madness, and driving away thy senses, made thee slay her." (Araska, 170)

"I . . . have drunk and drunk of the fiery brandy to make this man mad -- that in my madness and heat I might have fierceness to slay her and I drank of the Brandy, that I might have the fierceness to slay her had drunk of the white man's brandy that taketh away the senses, and maketh the heart as the heart of a fierce, bloodthirsty beast" (Andries, 171, 283, 284)

The context makes it quite clear that in the last cited passage, Andries is referring to his attack on Kathleen Trevanor: brandy therefore plays a role in both murders. Moreover, it is not just brandy, but bad brandy sold by unscrupulous traders who "take the kaffir's money, and cheat him, just because he is ignorant and untaught" (156); a wicked trade conducted "by the permission of the paternal government, to aid in the completer demoralization, and more expeditious extermination of the black man" (149). As himself a victim, Andries is in a measure exculpated: the blame shifts the more decisively onto the shoulders of white men, who not only provoke the black man by abusing his women but profit by trade in a substance which is capable of converting the cuckold's anger into savage violence.

The ironic reversal, or at least mutual subversion, of the roles of violator and victim is adumbrated by the reaction of the whites to the murder of Kathleen Trevanor, when Andries is made to face "the oaths and hoarse exclamations of horror and vengeance from the rough, madly-incensed [Dutch]men" (224) (to these same whites, news of the murder of Nichinette brought "no intense feelings of horror or shock -- it was merely a Native" [155]); and Rooyen responds "O Lord, what cruel devils they are . . . Oh, I should like to strangle that brute -- to kill him like a mad dog!" (175). The reversal is consummated on the day of Andries's execution, when he is led out to face the crowd of colonists,

vengeful, passion-pale, lusting for the blood of the murderer of their country-woman. There before them, towering in a huge isolation above the right bank of the river, stood the black, frowning, fearsome Monster, the murderous Gibbet, with its primitive swinging noose. Ghastly and sickening it rose and fell in the pale rays of the rising Sun.

A howl of execration -- a long, swelling, wolfish cry -- a great roar of curses, threats, hisses and hootings arose as those nearest the prison caught the first glimpse of the condemned man being led forth to his doom. (292)

As Andries, that "child of Nature" (243), is led forth before this inhuman mob, he metamorphoses into a latter-day Christ, the very paradigm of suffering humanity:

There, between a body of armed police -- sunken, inert, crouching -- with bared head and stalwart limb, now palsied and trembling -- the wretched Son of Humanity moved forward on his last earthly journey He was goaded along at every stumbling step, and was roughly pushed head-foremost into the van hearing as in a dream those wild, vengeful cries, those wolfish howls, and frenzied screams, as the crowd rushed together They longed to rend the palsied criminal limb from limb -- to tear his living body in pieces. (293)

The liberal paternalism which seems here to triumph over the less benign racialism in evidence elsewhere in the novel informs also the conclusion to the Revd Hall's sermon, which provides the most direct statement of Bancroft's message in the entire text:

"Think of wild blanketed barbarians -- Nature's untamed children! Think of primitive instincts, primitive passions, handed down through countless generations of rude primitive man -- instincts which cry only 'an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth'! Think of retaliation; revenge; primitive savage retributive justice!

My brethren, think of these evil passions, warring within tameless breasts, and savage hearts, increased and inflamed by the poison of drink, made fiercer and more ungovernable by the brandy, which he has bought, and with which he has besotted and brutalized himself Nay, my brethren, heathen the people are, and as children, knowing not that which is for their welfare, and as children shall ye guard them, making wise provision, wise laws, protecting them from the evils that ye yourselves have brought among them say not, 'It was because the man was a worthless vagabond; or because he with his people should be forced to work; or because he was a drunkard, and a savage; untameable and lawless' -- Nay People say not so labour for the amendment of your laws, and cause the agitation to spread to all parts throughout the Land, until by every Assembly of law-makers in the vast Southern Continent, shall be framed a code of Laws, my Brothers, wise, all-embracing, restraining, prohibitive -- protective alike to the diverse Races of our Land!" (302-03)

This little exercise in self-deconstruction encapsulates the tortuous,

compromised logic of the narrative as a whole. The epithets "savage" and "tameless" are simply conventional markers for human difference, difference which is social or cultural (e.g. the "heathen" [Old Testament!] idea of retributive justice) rather than racial, because the behaviour of individual blacks is not to be accounted to their race, that is, to any inherent or biological difference. Blacks are only a threat to whites to the extent to which they have been contaminated by the evils of "civilization", corrupted by the bad moral example and the even worse brandy purveyed by white men. They are as harmless as children who "[know] not that which is for their welfare" and require "protecting from the evils that [whites] have brought among them". And yet the text has earlier insisted that, until the growth of the towns and the influx of undesirable immigrants -- the sort of men whom Dr Devine describes as "those who are indeed of my colour, but never of my race" (265) -- the African had "proved himself to be faithful to a trust reposed in him, honourable to his own limited idea of honour, and harmless where white women and children were concerned" (238; see also Bancroft, "White Women" 263). This is hardly the description of an unruly child who requires firm laws to show him right from wrong; on the contrary, the erring children in need of protection from themselves are white men. Thus the final effect of Of Like Passions, a novel written with the express purpose of raising consciousness about the need to keep the races apart, is to unsettle the very notion of a fixed and hierarchic difference between those races. This subversive ambivalence is conveniently focused in the novel's title.

According to a contemporary reviewer, the significance of the title was to be found in the fact that "Mr Bancroft contends that the elemental passions -- revenge and jealousy, lust, love -- are as strong in the black race as the white" ("A New Novel"). And indeed, as I have argued, the novel delivers a strong plea for the recognition of the full, (in some ways different but) equivalent humanity of black people, for their right to be accorded the same social dignity and legal rights as whites (see, i.a., Of

Like Passions 23, 165, 231, 241). In the comparison implicit in this reading of the phrase "of like passions", the primary term is "white" and the secondary, "black". As Dr Devine formulates a sentiment reiterated in the novel, "the native is both imitative and revengeful" (39) -- a phrase repeated word-for-word in later essays by Bancroft on the subject of racial purity (Bancroft, "White Women" 263; "Race Purity" 838). In the latter piece, the author actually adduces her own novel as supporting evidence for her thesis: "For the native, as we have shown in a former work on this subject -- 'Of Like Passions.' 9th Edition. (Gardner and Co.; 1s) -- is both imitative and revengeful He will follow where we lead".

Yet the source from which the novel's title is drawn in fact reverses this priority. The phrase is lifted from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Acts 14 v.15: "We also are men of like passions with yourselves".⁷ The setting is Lystra, where the Apostles are performing miracles in the Holy Spirit. The astounded local inhabitants have assumed that these followers of Jesus are gods descended from the heavens, and have taken to calling Barnabas, Jupiter, and Paul, Mercury. St Paul speaks to them to reassure them that he and his companions are mere mortals like themselves. White men, the title of Bancroft's novel suggests, are not gods, although they have arrogated to themselves the arbitrary power of gods and, as bearers of light to the Dark Continent, they may claim to come in God's name.⁸ In essence, they are no different from black men, all too human, vulnerable to the same passions, frailties and temptations. In the comparison implicit in the novel's title, then, "black" becomes the primary term, and "white" the secondary or derivative term -- a reversal which seriously compromises the whole discourse of white trusteeship in which the novel is grounded. It is the same reversal which informs the disturbing core of Marlow's experience in Heart of Darkness and on which that novel's strategy of subversion is based: Marlow's recognition in the "savages" of a more truthful image of his culture than the lies which it tells itself, and the consequent collapse of any meaningful distinction between

"civilization" and "savagery".

In the preceding paragraph, I deliberately restricted racial reference to the male gender because men would appear to be the subject of Bancroft's agenda: in the presented world of the novel, it is not women who are accused of abusing their racial privilege for selfish sexual gratification, nor indeed is it women who commit rape and murder. However, in the remainder of this chapter I wish to argue that there is another dimension to the novel which is concerned with the politics not of race but of gender, and which suggests another sense for the novel's title: a sense in which the notion is explored that women are human beings "of like passions" to men.

III

In the colonial writings of men, white women feature largely as symbols or signifiers (rather than as producers of signification), as "potent objects of purity and symbols of home" (Mills 58). The real challenge which confronted the late nineteenth-century movement for the liberation of women was, arguably, to disturb the discursive relationship which relegated their gender to the role of represented object, the soft currency of a patriarchal symbolic enterprise. The recurrent images in which women were imprisoned arose from inter-related habits of perception which were at the time distinguished as the "domestic" theory, the "intention-of-nature" theory, and the "pedestal" theory of feminine identity (Fernando 2). This cluster of entrenched perspectives on the proper place and role of women is contested or at least scrutinized in Of Like Passions, but in ways marked by ambivalence and indeterminacy and shaped by the colonial context.

According to the "pedestal or pinnacle theory", as the Women's Suffrage Journal called it, woman was "a minor goddess to be worshipped from afar" (Fernando 3). The veneration of women -- which presumably had

much to do with sexual mystery and the survival of the tradition of courtly love -- was rationalized by women's representation, in a world beset by religious doubt, as a kind of spiritual absolute, as the morally superior guardians of symbolic value. Lorna Duffin writes that

[a]s an image, the moral and spiritual influence of women provided a counterbalance to the ruthless, competitive economic world of men. The woman appeared as the good conscience of Victorian society. The burden of moral responsibility in a society where religion and sanctity seemed in decline, was conveniently shifted from the shoulders of men. (70)

The consequence of such representation, which assumed also the validity of the "domestic" and "intention-of-nature" theories, was another manifestation of the notorious double standard: men were different from women, they faced different sorts of difficulties and temptations, and could not be expected to live up to the same high standards that they demanded of their women. Besides, as Duffin points out,

Most men did not in fact believe that women were their moral superiors. In any case there is little evidence that they believed in any special capacity possessed by women. It was, I suggest, a negative view of women linked to the more important belief that women lacked sexuality. Woman might be morally superior in the negative sense that she lacked the corrupting sexual drives but she was always morally inferior by virtue of her weaker nature. (70)

Of course, there was no way out of this discursive double bind: if a woman did dare to display any sign of sexual initiative, she was immediately toppled from her pedestal and labelled a whore. As was argued in Chapter 3, the Victorian discourse on gender was driven largely by an economy of male sexuality:

Women were classified into polar extremes. They were either sexless ministering angels or sensuously oversexed temptresses of the devil; they were either aids to continence or incontinence; they facilitated or they exacerbated male sexual control. Although apart, these polarities shared an attitude of disguised masculine hostility toward women In its disguised hostility the world of respectability admitted and lamented the latent depravity of women, but exalted them in their angelic innocence. Superficially, it placed women upon a pedestal In summary, the respectable ideal of purity represented unadulterated femininity; her opposite represented the projection of those rejected and unacceptable desires and actions that must be rejected to keep women pure beings. (Cominos 167, 168)

In Of Like Passions, the "pedestal" idea is indirectly challenged

when Bancroft has a sage old man say:

"Take my advice and learn to know women. It is you youngsters, who fight shy of knowing the sex intimately, and ignorantly imagine them to be a higher creation than mere man, who invariably get into the devil's own row over them." (89)

Women, he seems to imply, are not goddesses but creatures "of like passions" to men. But it is important not to misunderstand the nature of the "feminist" point being made here. For Bancroft and the majority of nineteenth-century feminists, the postulate of equality did not mean the extension to women of the moral latitude (and sexual opportunities) already available to men: "Rather, it demanded from men the sexual repression that nineteenth-century morality required from women" (Banks 63). The angry response of women to the Contagious Diseases Acts, for instance, is generally understood to have been provoked by the unfairness of the way in which the legislation discriminated in its measures between prostitutes and the men who used them. But Josephine Butler's primary objection to the Acts was that they provided men with "a licence to sin", and her whole campaign for their abolition had a decidedly Evangelical bias (Banks 65). The association between feminism and moral purity was strengthened in the latter part of the nineteenth century by the prominent role played by women in the great Purity crusades, spearheaded by religious organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

Useful insight into Francis Bancroft's position on the Woman Question is therefore provided by the fact that she was an active member of the WCTU in South Africa. We learn from her correspondence that as early as 1894 she was attending meetings of the local branch of the WCTU or "Band of Hope" in Kroonstad (NELM 88.3.1.16). The WCTU had three departments, Temperance, Purity and -- from 1907 in South Africa -- Enfranchisement (Stapleton 17). Bancroft's views on the abuse of alcohol, especially by blacks, require no further discussion;⁹ but it is as well to point out that the causes of Temperance and Purity were closely allied: "both drunkenness and sexual immorality were interpreted as a failure of self-control, and, because drunkenness weakens judgment and will, it was seen not simply as analogous

to sexual immorality but one of its major causes" (Banks 80). (When Trevanor turns to drink in Of Like Passions, the brandy is described as "working in his veins, pouring its hot, tempting, maddening breath through every fibre, nerve, and muscle of his passion-laden frame" [124]; his resistance to Noyale is overcome.) As far as the Purity aims of the WCTU were concerned, some indication of the discursive use to which women put an assimilated version of the "pedestal" theory of female moral superiority is given by this extract from an address by Mrs John Brown to a Band of Hope meeting in Grahamstown in 1898: "I want you girls to be strong, to be brave, to be pure. The greatest thing you can bring to this country is a pure, brave womanhood As we women raise the ideals, so will our men climb" (Stapleton 14). F.C. Stapleton describes the impact of a speech on Purity by the same Mrs Brown some years later:

The speaker had been down into the depths; she had seen impurity and its awful uncleanness and held it up for us to see. We saw it in the light of a woman's purity, and its uncleanness amazed and affrighted us . . . a noble speech . . . fired with a woman's passion against all forms of impurity.
(19)

All these "forms of impurity" in fact boil down to sex, and "purity" is in this context a euphemism for chastity. In Of Like Passions the apostle of purity is Irene Mabilie: the impurity which is her sole concern is the sexual dalliance of young white men with black women.

Irene Mabilie is something of a mystery figure in the village, a "woman with a past" dismissed by the men as "a prude, and severely 'down' on our sex" (108); "a dangerous woman of the secretive type -- one who sought to know too much; one who enquired too closely into the lives and habits of others . . . intrusive, bold, unfeminine . . . unnatural" (210). She is described as having

a tall, graceful figure with the rounded but slim development of perfect womanhood . . . the tender passionate eyes, and the curving red lips with their suggestion of a real though suppressed knowledge of the heights of bliss and depths of suffering. (61, emphasis added)

Irene Mabilie was one who had, through the depths of a bitter experience, gained knowledge. She understood the attitude of the flatterers and their veiled insinuations inviting to

friendship and folly. (63)

As one who has presumably been used and betrayed or discarded by some selfish man, the "knowledge" that Irene has gained is ostensibly about "the ways of men", men's sexuality. And indeed, the knowledge which she imparts to Mary Devine with such fateful consequence concerns the sexual adventures of white men in the "location". But before we explore the representation of her role as the purveyor of such information, I would submit that Bancroft's contemporary reader would have been alerted to the fact that the "knowledge" that Irene has gained includes also the knowledge of her own sexuality: her obvious but restrained sensuality and the coy reference to her "repressed" acquaintance with "the heights of bliss" suggest a woman who has had some experience of sexual passion.

The ideal of Purity brought together the "pedestal", "domestic" and "intention-of-nature" theories of feminine nature in the late nineteenth century via the doctrine of "separate spheres". The greater moral purity of women fitted them to be the spiritual inspiration and moral guardians of their husbands and children; home was where they belonged and exercised their uplifting influence, domesticity their "natural" and proper sphere; their biological destiny as mothers precluded their participation in the wider world. More than this, it was feared that the sphere of male experience was dangerous for them,

that their special characteristics of tenderness, affection and moral purity were a consequence not so much of innate differences between men and women as of the protection from the wickedness of the world that allowed the maintenance of that state of innocence on which women's nature depended. (Banks 87)

Hence the repeated insistence that the innocence of women be protected, encountered in texts of the period ranging from Heart of Darkness -- "They -- the women I mean -- are out of it -- should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse" (84; cf.39) -- to Stoker's Dracula --

Mrs Harker is better out of it. Things are quite bad enough for us, all men of the world, and who have been in many tight places in our time; but it is no place for a woman, and if she had remained in touch with the affair, it would have infallibly

wrecked her. (256; see also 235, 242)

Purity imposed on women the "duty" of innocence, and -- particularly in the case of young women -- ignorance about matters sexual. The profession of innocence was no doubt often enough the result of a tacit contract between the sexes in which agreed roles were played. In Of Like Passions, the subject of his black mistresses has never arisen between Rooyen and his mother:

Between mother and son words had never passed on the subject; it had been strictly tabooed; the old lady affecting entire ignorance of the bare knowledge of evil, of the darker side of life; the son holding her to this position. (48)

But when the hitherto genuinely innocent young Mary Devine is told by Irene Mabilie just what the young white lads get up to at night, she is devastated. Taxed by Trevanor as to why she is spurning his attentions, she responds that she has been "turned against [his] sex" by her discovery that men are guilty of "objectionable doings [she] can't put into words" (58). Just how important it is that they are doing these objectionable things with black women is never spelled out: the "knowledge" that Mary gains from Irene is effectively the knowledge of male sexuality and the "facts of life".¹⁰

Naturally Trevanor is angered by this turn of events, demanding to know who has "poisoned" Mary's mind and filled it "with unprofitable ideas" (58). Mary's response in this confrontation is interesting:

"It is not fit," his voice rose emphatically, "it is not right that your innocence and purity should be sullied by the mention of these sordid subjects."

"No, it is not fit," retorted Mary, plucking up spirit. "Still, Bryan, my innocence and purity must put up with knowledge at some time of my life, I suppose. . . . I am not a child, Bryan . . . Remember I am a woman now -- I must learn, sooner or later, what lies below the surface -- the sooner, perhaps, the better. Believe me, it is right. Yes, it is a woman -- a woman who has reason to know her fellows -- who has opened my eyes."

She went on slowly.

"Think how deeply this knowledge, unwisely hidden from us, affects us, when -- when -- in the future -- a woman has to make her choice -- I have never said a word of the trouble to Kathy."

"God keep her ignorant," Kathleen's brother cried hastily. "God forbid she ever knows -- never breathe a word of this knowledge to her."

"If you wish it I will not," Mary returned coldly.

"If I wish it!" he cried passionately. "I would give ten years of my life to make you forget what you have learned -- to make you as ignorantly innocent, as unknowing, as before some fiend of a woman poisoned your mind."

The girl stiffened perceptibly.

"What are you saying? My innocence is unchanged -- I am just as innocent -- just as pure-minded, just as good as I ever was," she cried quickly, "it is only my ignorance, my former denseness and blindness to realities, that has gone." (59-60)

However warmly we would applaud Mary's spirited defence of her right to know, or later, of her personal autonomy -- "She was, so she would remind Irene, at an age when wisdom comes, and a woman learns the value of her own independent existence, and the absolute right which is hers, of belonging entirely to herself should she so please" (65) -- the response of narrator and implied author of the novel remains equivocal.¹¹ Part of the problem is that the narrator seems not altogether convinced by Mary's distinction between innocence and ignorance: the evidence of the text is that Mary's new-found knowledge does indeed undermine and corrupt her character. The narrator remarks that "[o]ne, perhaps, of the saddest things in life is the fatal ease with which the knowledge of evil once acquired pursues us" (66): Mary's knowledge of "what lies below the surface" (59) of life is a contaminating poison. While Mary will subsequently refuse to stand by Bryan's side at Rooyen's wedding "for fear . . . of being contaminated by him" (138), she is already critically infected by her knowledge of "the mud and slime beneath the fair surface of the stream of life" (64).¹² This imagery recalls the figuration of the enduring dichotomy of upper and lower body which was discussed in Chapter 2 of this study: the problem to which its use gives expression is outlined by Lloyd Fernando:

[By the 1890s] Victorians could avoid no longer the conclusion that the challenge of the movement for the freedom of women had become at last a challenge on sexual issues, for it induced, more than any other movement did, a fresh consciousness and acknowledgement of individual sexual motivation in human relationships. They were unable to fit this discovery into their traditional scheme of value, and thus found themselves saddled with the seemingly unresolvable, and therefore morally disconcerting, dualism in love which had plagued Christian societies for many centuries. (23)

Now that "into Mary's brain and body and soul [there] had entered an

insidious poison" (65), she abjures the company of men and causes Bryan Trevanor some distress. Ironically, it is Irene Mabilie who pleads his case with her, pointing out that Trevanor is drinking excessively

because you will not make it up with him. Life is hard enough, my dear, without suffering, and a man can't bear suspense and suffering as we can. It drives him to badness -- or suicide He is not the man to deceive a woman; and Mary dear, a woman can forgive a man anything -- everything, but that Forgive him because he was too manly, too noble, to deceive a woman." (114-15)

Irene's persuasion and Mary's "womanly" compassion gradually bring her around to an acceptance of her moral responsibility as a woman to "save" Trevanor:

She felt as only a strong nature could feel, that she was the murderer of her lover's better nature, that she was driving him further and further from all good influences, and nearer and nearer to those things whose end is destruction Was she responsible for this man's soul? Had he given it unto her keeping, and had she thrust it into wretchedness and sin? . . . She must be reconciled to Bryan. It was clearly her duty. For his wasted powers, for his lost soul, God would hold her responsible . . . [she ought to be] helping him to live the strenuous manly life (116)

Convinced that he is "the man for whose soul she was responsible" (117), Mary will later confess to Kathleen Trevanor: "I have murdered Bryan . . . murdered his soul! . . . I have wronged Bryan" (184, 185); and to Irene: "Oh Irene! I felt myself to have been unspeakably to blame. I felt God would condemn me for his lapse into sin; his wasted life; his lost soul" (187). She has been abetted not a little in reaching this conclusion by the accusations of Trevanor senior (129), Dr Devine (200) and Bryan himself (181, 182, 201). Eventually she confronts Irene in a set-piece recantation:

"Oh, Irene, you have taught me a lot . . . I have learned to distrust men . . . I am not the same . . . God knows I don't wish to reproach you -- but, if I had never known -- if I had remained in ignorance --" (189)

Bitterly reflecting that she has thrown away her chance of married happiness "for a fancy -- a trifle", she berates Irene:

"Yes," she cried harshly, "a trifle Irene, because even if true -- and it was not true in Bryan's case -- but if it had been, I ought not to have known of it; I ought not to have noticed it; I should have treated it as a myth, a matter best undwelt on, a part of man's life which a woman cannot understand."

Her voice rose defiantly.

"Because men and women can never be classed alike. You forget that, I think, Irene, when you dwell so bitterly and insistently on men's selfish characteristics. They have been created with different natures, different instincts, stronger feelings, more intense developments, bigger hearts, bigger passions than women. A woman bears children, and her stronger emotions naturally centre on them. We must accept these laws of inheritance as they stand. Shall we endeavour to pit our puny ideas, our puny wills, against Creation, and against the great Creator?" (190)

At this point, the reader is apt to be more than a little bewildered. Although Bryan was "innocent" at the time of Mary's initial accusation, by the time he forgives her (316) he has become incestuously involved with Noyale. Despite Mary's earlier suggestion that the mere suspicion that a man had been having sex with a black woman would disqualify him as a suitor (59, 100), the affair with Noyale now presents no impediment to her marriage to Bryan whatsoever ("Too late! Too late!", Trevanor says, "Dear, I am not worthy to touch you now"; to which Mary replies: "Yes, Bryan, yes, you are. Only forgive me, only forgive my unkindness" [182]). This tolerant attitude, incidentally, is encountered -- with no sign of authorial disapproval -- elsewhere in the novel: Rooyen's "wild oats did not trouble the practical colonist [Kathleen's mother, Mrs Trevanor]. He would be a good husband, she argued, these wild natures invariably are" (73; see also 193). But if having sex across the colour line is a mere "trifle", the entire project of the novel is rendered nonsensical. What is this discourse that has intervened to upturn and trivialize the earnest, racist evangelizing we focused on in the previous section of this chapter?

What Mary must effectively beg forgiveness for is her refusal to accept Bryan's masculinity, his male sexuality, and this is something the text makes easy for her by repeated insistence on the difference between men and women when it comes to sex:

[Kathleen's] innocence . . . seemed to Bryan . . . to be as an angel's spotless whiteness and icy purity, compared with the man's sensual nature, and gross passions -- her innocence to be fastened with iron rivets in closest intimacy with man's selfish desires, man's profligacy, man's coarse sexuality (136-37)

There are scattered references to "the strong carnal passions of the Sons

of Men" (30), "manhood's temptations in life" (47), the "bigger passions" of men (190); when Bryan is considering joining in a "spree" at the "location", the narrator reflects that although he was

too fastidious, perhaps, to delight in these questionable amusements of a rough crew, [he] was still brimming over with vigorous manhood, and life and energy, and ready enough for fun. He hesitated -- then the longing to see life, as his comrades did, in all its phases, swept over him, and he resolved to join them. (54-55)

Boys will, after all, be boys. The novel thus endorses the standard late nineteenth-century orthodoxy on sexual difference and on the role of women in helping men in the difficult task of keeping their animal passions in check. Yet this insistence on difference is simultaneously undermined in a delicate but distinctive way, through the presentation of the sexual awakening of Kathleen Trevanor.

Although the language eschews all overt reference to sexuality, it is clear that Rooyen recognizes Kathleen's potential in this direction:

The pure child-like heart was his, and with the innocent heart of a child, he recognized and valued the knowledge that there was in her nature a vast unprobed depth of generous, all-surrendering affection, and hidden gulfs of an as yet undreamt-of love. His it would be to awaken, and to teach and possess; his in fullest measure. (71)

When Rooyen declares himself to her,

The man's being was a-glow. He felt the intensity of the emotion that ran through Kathleen's slender frame, and made her tremble in his arms.

In a moment she had slipped from him, unconsciously afraid of her great happiness -- of something dread and intangible -- her innocent heart knew not what. She ran panting, shuddering with a strange little shudder and wonder of ecstasy, thinking herself grown unfamiliar to herself by her late marvellous experience, thinking she had never before realized how dear Philip was to her. (71, 72)

And when, after their wedding, the narrator comments --

Newly-wedded couples are, under every circumstance, best left to themselves . . . Best left alone to enjoy the first full brief spell of wonder and happiness -- and supreme content. Above all, best left alone to all that must follow -- the inevitable disillusion, the necessary descent -- often particularly rapid -- from blissful Cloudland to commonplace Reality. (132)

-- she is expressing not so much a cynical view of marriage as the pattern

assumed by most marriages at that time, in which -- as pointed out by Freud in 1908 ("Civilized' Sexual Morality" 201-02) -- after the honeymoon, long periods of sexual abstinence were enjoined on couples by pregnancy or the fear of pregnancy, resulting in mutual resentment and unhappiness. When Bryan asks after her marriage a few weeks later, Kathleen's enthusiastic response cannot but be inferred to include the element of sexual pleasure:

"Are you quite happy, Kathleen?" -- his voice was serious -- "as happy as you dreamed of being?"

She looked up at him, her beautiful face full of an exquisite sympathy.

"Ah Bryan, I pray your turn will come! . . . The dream has fallen short of the reality, dear! . . . Sometimes I wake . . . and am afraid -- afraid --"

Her voice faded away. (176)

In fact the text appears to be endorsing the contemporary discourse on "sexual hygiene", which prescribed regular "emissions" for men for the sake of their health. After Bryan Trevanor commences sleeping with Noyale, several characters comment on his obvious well-being: for instance, his father comments on "how bright he looked . . . have you noticed, Alice, his eyes have lost their heaviness, and his face that clouded look" (174). What is more, sexual intercourse seems to have the same beneficent effect on Kathleen Rooyen:

with the free firm swing of healthy vigorous womanhood, life seemed to leap and intensify with fresh pulsations in every fibre of her youthful frame. . . Her married happiness -- but that was still too marvellous -- too sacred for bare analysis. (208)

Perhaps women, after all, are creatures "of like passions" to men.

Bancroft's novel evidences the convergence and uneasy juxtaposition of a late-nineteenth century ideology of Purity and an emergent (and in the text, inchoate), more radical strain of feminist thought which interrogated the principle of general repression which had hitherto been a corollary of the rejection of the double standard in sexual morality. It is revealing that Irene Mabilie, the "New Woman" heroine of the novel, who has proclaimed her enlightenment of Mary Devine "a duty women owe to their sisters" (75), is by the end of the novel a figure of pathos, not far removed from the stereotype of the unfulfilled spinster: "But she -- she

had no one -- devoid of kin, set apart, with no close tie, no special duty; no home she could claim a right in -- with nothing but the self-same self of whom she was already so weary" (322-23): "'I seem to be waiting, waiting for something, I know not what'", she says (323). Fortunately, "something" arrives, not in the form of Mr Right, but perhaps the next best thing: a "Mission" (330), a vocation to campaign for legislation to keep the races apart in South Africa and so avert the looming threat of the Black Peril.

If even the central theme of the novel breaks down into a set of gender rather than racial issues -- the sexual jealousy of one class of women for another class of more available and therefore "advantaged" women, the injustice of the double standard which winks at men's sexual indulgences, the patronization and "keeping ignorant" of women by men, the abuse of power by men who casually seduce and abandon their "inferiors" and refuse to acknowledge responsibility for their own children -- is there any sense in which race can be said to be crucial rather than contingent in respect of Bancroft's project?

To answer this question, we must look ahead to two articles Bancroft published in 1911, at the height of the last and most sustained Black Peril panic in South Africa. In "Race Purity for South Africa", Bancroft rehearses the argument of Of Like Passions in some detail, perhaps placing greater stress on the sordid abjection of "miscegenation" as practised by "poor whites", and on the necessity for all white men to set a proper moral example for their black counterparts to follow. In "White Women in South Africa",¹³ Bancroft draws attention to the "recrudescence of the question of the safety of the white woman in South Africa" (262), and offers a history of the phenomenon whose narrative logic, again, is identical to that which informs Of Like Passions. She points to "the imperative need for a series of legislative Acts prohibiting in every shape and form both promiscuity and legalized union between the races" (266), and warns that "the effect of the Black Peril is to bar the way to the greatly-needed influx of white women into South Africa today" (267) (one might insert the unspoken

corollary, that so long as white men can enjoy ready access to black women, there is no need for an influx of white women). But then Bancroft gets to the core of her argument, which links the "elimination" of the Black Peril with the enfranchisement of white women:

The Kaffir is essentially and entirely a creature of logic, he reasons towards an end. That which he sees he sees plainly, and his mind informs him that this is so. He sees today, as in the past, the spectacle of the white master standing above his woman, the white woman standing below her master. The Kaffir respects -- up to a certain point -- the white man's possessions, but he will occasionally take chances. The white man's possessions number, in the black man's opinion, his horse, dog, woman, tobacco, grog. The Kaffir covets these and occasionally he takes, and risks even death in the taking. He sees too that he -- the black man -- has a vote, because he is a man. Woman, therefore, is but an inferior, a possession. Her deprivation of the coveted power to vote amounts to a public proclamation of the fact that her status is on a par with the status of the ordinary black man, and below the par of the status of the black man voter. (267-68)

Bancroft's project, then, both here and in the novel, should be seen in the light of a protest about the low status and powerlessness of white women even within the racial hierarchy of colonial South Africa. The vulnerability which white women feel before the Black Peril is no doubt real enough, but it is also an expression of their vulnerability before men generally. The pecking order of colonial society makes it natural that the black man should be the immediate target of Bancroft's polemic, especially in the light of the attribution to his culture of a particularly low estimation of the status of women. But her real animus is directed against the colonial patriarchy which has assigned her a political and constitutional status lower than a "kaffir".¹⁴ Race and sex are closely intertwined in Bancroft's intervention in the politics of gender, an intervention which, drawing on a variety of current racial stereotypes, finds it convenient to make a scapegoat of the black man; but, at bottom, for Bancroft, race is a white herring.

NOTES

1. Biographical information gleaned from the Bancroft holdings at NELM, especially Rosalind Slater's privately printed Carnarvon Dale Papers, a ten-volume collection of Slater family documents. See Cornwell, "Francis Bancroft".
2. This is the subtitle of Chaudhuri and Strobel's collection of essays Western Women and Imperialism. The essay in the collection most apposite to the case of Bancroft is probably Nancy Paxton's study of Flora Annie Steel and Annie Besant.
3. Compare Trevor Fletcher, on the crass materialism of the "cosmopolitan" population of Johannesburg:

No, it's not the Black Peril that need be feared; there is something far more dangerous which comes from no contact with the native, but has its life and movement in the heart of the dominant race. Look where you will, it is hard to find any ideal that is stimulating this cosmopolitan people. ("Some Impressions" 598)

4. In "White Women in South Africa", Bancroft refers to "a race of half-breeds . . . overflowing the country, their miasmic presence felt in every community" (264). The imagery of contagion is revealing.
5. Though not relevant to Of Like Passions, Calvin Hernton's explanation for the apparently irrational identification of inter-racial sex with incest is worth mentioning. Pointing to the fact that every white American Southerner has effectively two mothers, a white and a black (the "mammy" or maid), he proposes a "Dual Oedipus" complex for such men:

In every southern white man, whether a racist or not, there is, just below the level of awareness, the twilight urge to make love to a black woman, sleep with the alter mother, to consume her via an act of intercourse, thereby affirming his childhood affinity for black flesh and repudiating the interracial conflict of his masculinity. (99)

A similar line of argument is interestingly developed by Stallybrass and White, in the context of class distinction rather than racial difference. They re-read the sexual problems of Freud's Wolf Man in terms of his struggle with a virtual incest-prohibition on lust for the peasant matron, the lower-class nurse or mother figure (156-68).

A few years ago, I argued that Kipling's story of transgressive love, "Beyond the Pale", was structured by the symbolism of Oedipal phantasy (Cornwell, "Beyond the Pale").

6. C.J. Ingram concludes a contemporary essay on "Criminalism" which acknowledges the influence of Lombroso, thus:

If the above hypothesis be correct, we have the true

criminal mental type, a case of atavism to savage instincts; and, remediable or not, it is in accordance with such a definition of the criminal that we must base our criminal system. Whatever we may do, the atavistic nature is always there, non-apparent perhaps, but innate, and tainted with the microbe of crime, which only awaits a suitable environment of . . . influences . . . such as alcoholism or poverty, in which to germinate. (50)

7. The identification of this source is put beyond doubt (although the referencing is inaccurate) by the following inscription in the author's hand on the flyleaf of the Rhodes University Library copy of the novel:

F.B. Slater
7 Glebe Place
Chelsea S.W.

22.5.1907.

"We also are men of like passions with yourselves:" Acts of the Apostles X Ch.VI verse.

8. Tzvetan Todorov describes how Franciscan monks in sixteenth-century Central America were more easily accepted by the Indians than other orders because of their readiness to adopt the native way of life; so much so, that the first words put into the Franciscans' mouth in the Dialogues of ancient Mexican tradition are these:

Let us not disconcert you as to something, take care lest you see us as something superior, indeed, we are only your peers, likewise we are only common people, furthermore, we are men, such as you are, we are surely not gods. We are also inhabitants of the earth, we also drink, we also eat, we also die of cold, we are also overwhelmed by heat, we are also mortal, we also can be destroyed. (Conquest of America 200)

Compare Conrad's character Kurtz, in his Report for the "International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs":

He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, "must necessarily appear to them (savages) in the nature of supernatural beings -- we approach them with the might as of a deity" (Heart of Darkness 86)

9. In 1907, the year in which Of Like Passions was published, the women of the WCTU "were stirred to white heat" by the introduction of the Cheap Wine Licensing Bill; their opposition culminated in a march on the Houses of Parliament early the following year (Stapleton 16).
10. It is almost as if Mary finds out for the first time how babies are made:

the girl now painfully understood the reason, and turned pale at the sight of the white-skinned children, running nude and happy, among their black companions. The sight revolted her and added to the gloomy intensity of her

bitter thoughts. (66)

11. It is considerably less so in Bancroft's later novel, An Armed Protest, where there is a vigorous attack on the differentiated educations of boys and girls and an insistence on the right to know as a function of full personal majority (19-24).
12. Trevanor snr. knows "almost everything of [the village's] inner life -- the life going on so steadily under the smooth surface" (93); when Dr Devine discovers the truth of Noyale's parentage, he "[feels] nothing, but the sense of a hideous, slimy horror that had risen from beneath his feet, and now enveloped him in its hellish folds" (255).
13. The article was deemed topical enough to have been translated as "La femme blanche dans l'Afrique de Sud" and published in the very first number of the Paris journal Le Monde (1.1 [1911]: 75-81).
14. A comparable resentment is felt by a character in Sarah Gertrude Millin's novel What Hath a Man?, although the motivation is rather different. Mrs McGreevy considers her status cravenly demeaned by her husband's infidelity with a black woman:

she never stigmatized men without remembering the degradation a man had brought her: rendering her one with a savage woman, no more than an animal to himself; giving his blood alike to her child and the children of this savage woman whom he thought of as an animal; making her son a brother to those animal-children in a kraal." (108)

The passage rehearses several of the sentiments we have encountered in Bancroft's novel; the essential difference is that neither Bancroft's narrator nor any of her characters consider blacks to be mere "animals". What shows here is Millin's incurable disgust for sex itself.

CHAPTER SIX

RACE AND SOCIAL CLASS

I

This chapter explores the intersection in a fictional text of the discourses of class and race. The term "class" is here used less in the Marxist sense than in the popular sense of a social category as much to do with manners, taste and morals as with money and power. Within the semantic field subtended by this latter, more elusive and contested meaning, attention is focused on the vital role played by the notion of the "gentleman" in the way in which the British saw themselves -- constructed their national identity, defended their way of life and justified their military and political role -- during the era of Empire.

The lustrum of 1891-96 was a period of massive immigration into South Africa, principally from Britain.¹ There was a stampede for gold and diamonds, and many of these new South Africans were presumably temporary sojourners of the type whom Joseph Conrad was a couple of years later to capture so memorably as the venal "pilgrims" in Heart of Darkness. There were also many genuine settlers or "colonists" (see Howarth 12), and a number of so-called "surplus women", the permanency of whose relocation seems to have depended partly on their marriageability in a shifting economy of supply and demand.

It is in this latter category that it is tempting to find a place for a clergyman's daughter by the name of Anna Howarth. Her father had for many years enjoyed a good living as rector of the fashionable parish of St. George's in London and chaplain to Queen Victoria (T.H. Lewis, 140); but with his death the fortunes of the family declined, and his forty-year-old spinster daughter looked toward the colonies. She initially found work as a nurse-aid in Grahamstown before forming a close friendship with one of her patients,

Selina Kirkman, and going to live on Miss Kirkman's father's farm in Steytlerville (Gutsche).² There, she wrote four novels between 1895 and 1902.³ Especially when measured against her relatively obscure and lowly colonial destiny, Howarth's British class origins -- upper class, though not aristocratic -- go a long way toward explaining her treatment of social class in Jan, an Afrikander. For what the narrative argues is the extension, via an ethically motivated substitution of race and nationality for money and manners, of upper-class status to the English-speaking South African colonist.

By the late 1890s, there was a rapidly expanding demand for cheap labour on the Transvaal goldmines which mandated the acceleration of black proletarianization. In the rural hinterland of the Cape at that time, presumably only faint ripples of the economic and demographic upheavals which were busy shaping the future of the country up north could be felt. But steady economic growth and the extension of Cape colonial rule to increasing numbers of hitherto "tribal" Africans meant that the "Native Question" -- always virtually synonymous with the "Labour Question" -- was already exercising the minds of Eastern Cape colonials. Partly as a consequence, according to Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, the racist ideology of British imperialism (emboldened by the new social Darwinist intellectual orthodoxy) was on the rise, and the progressive, if paternalistic, liberalism of the Cape political tradition -- never exactly strong in the frontier consciousness of the Eastern Cape anyway -- was in retreat. "The prospect," they write, "of being 'swamped' by the 'tribal' African peoples who were manifestly less amenable to the 'civilizing mission' eroded any confident belief in the inevitability of human progress" (6).

It is tempting to view Jan, an Afrikander in the context of this historical moment: certainly the novel can be argued to "dialogize" the discourses of scientific racism and liberal humanism. But the relation between Howarth's novel and the (materialist) narrative of South African history, a narrative which makes plausible sense of so much that happened in turn-of-the-century South Africa, remains an opaque and multiply mediated one. The stories

that people tell themselves about who they are and what matters in their lives have often little or nothing to do with what a later generation will aver to have been palpable and salient historical reality. It is not as though the text of Jan, an Afrikander comes sealed against local "contamination" within an envelope of collective British imperialist phantasy, although its engagement with this country and its people is largely rhetorical and reflexive. It is more that what preoccupied Howarth and other writers of this time was a need to define and conserve for themselves an identity in a social field which lacked historical precedent and seemed doomed to progressive destabilization by rapid historical change. The truth they sought was the cultural equivalent of a bid for political power, against, it must be remembered, the general loss of confidence and fear of decline which characterized the latter days of Empire. According to Paul Kennedy,

Late nineteenth-century imperialism, so far as the British were concerned, was increasingly an imperialism of fear, of Weltpolitische Angst and a growing "seige" mentality (albeit superficially hidden behind a Kiplingesque assertiveness) -- which makes it altogether different from the decades prior to 1870, when the empire's trade and territories were expanding in a power-political vacuum. (34)

Unlike so much other colonial fiction of this period, Jan, an Afrikander has not been altogether forgotten. Almost forty years ago, J.P.L. Snyman noted that it was "the forerunner of a number of novels which deal with the problem of miscegenation and mixed marriages between Natives and Europeans", and thus represented a "new development . . . in the 'Native' novel" (39). I see no cause to dispute that finding. It does seem to be the first extended South African avatar of the colonial exemplary tale which warns of the consequences of interracial love, dramatizing the hubris and doom of those who flout the 'natural laws' of racial separateness.⁴

The novel is also an early -- if eccentric -- example of the "tragedy of colour", a prominent sub-genre of the South African novel in English usually associated with the liberal tradition (see Coetzee, "Man's Fate" 17-18). Jan, an Afrikander takes its place in that transitional stage in the development of the South African novel which we have earlier characterized as its phase of

domestication, and which gathers momentum with the discovery of race as a theme worthy of a new national literature. J.M. Coetzee's memorable investigation of Sarah Gertrude Millin's fiction from the point of view of the practising artist alerts us to the essential difference between Jan, an Afrikander and the novels of writers like Haggard, Mitford, Henty and Glanville. Anticipating its function in Millin's work, race in Howarth's novel is more than just a convenient device for (stereotypical) characterization; it becomes a thematic and structural principle, integral to the work's composition and effects: the work's subject, in the fullest sense of the word.

And yet, as I have already suggested, Jan, an Afrikander is as much about social class as it is about race. The question of the conceptual and historical relation between race and class (theorized as a major agent in the historical process) was addressed in Chapter 2; it remains such a complex and fiercely contested one, that to speak of a consensus of opinion even within specified ideological parameters is dangerous. Broadly speaking, there is a traditional or liberal position which is content to regard the relationship as one of close analogy, mediated by similar psycho-social structures: Philip Mason's well-known study of the parallels between British class feeling and what he calls "imperial aloofness" from the natives is perhaps typical of this perspective in the present context. On the other hand, within materialist thought it is orthodox to regard racialism as a kind of secondary or surrogate discourse which rationalizes, justifies or resolves existing power relations and conflicts. According to Hannah Arendt, nineteenth-century "race-thinking . . . sharpened and exploited existing conflicting interests or existing political problems, but it never created new conflicts or produced new categories of political thinking" (183). Perhaps so; but our recognition of the "ethnic imperative" as a factor in collective human behaviour would entail the rejection of a formulation such as the following: "race relations are at bottom a class question into which 'the race question intrudes and gives . . . a special force and form but does not constitute its essence'" (Legassick 51,

quoting Eugene Genovese). I prefer the way V. G. Kiernan puts it, when he observes that the "[m]ystique of race was Democracy's vulgarization of an older mystique of class" (230), because he implies that what race and class feeling have in common is a shared social function.

The racial arguments of the late-nineteenth century imperialist, which were articulated on the basis of the innate superiority of the white man, were no different in essence from those which had been used a century earlier to justify the continuation of aristocratic class privilege in the context of a rapidly democratizing Europe. Perhaps a crucial point to be made is that the concepts themselves are not fixed and immutable: social class, for instance, is not a static thing but "the consciousness of a developing relationship" arising from the "confused, ambiguous experience of real individuals in specific situations" (Cell 16). A useful, if reductive, formulation of the relation between these categories for our purposes is therefore one which adverts to their articulation as an effect of power relations at a particular historical conjuncture: in the words of Abdul JanMohammed, "in the colonial situation the function of class is replaced by race" (Manichean Aesthetics 7, emphasis added). A symptomatic reading of Jan, an Afrikander lends solid support to this view. No reader of the novel can fail to be struck by the unusual clarity with which the text effects, under the aegis of popular evolutionary ideology, the discursive substitution of race for class, apparently in response to the requirements of existing (and threatened) colonial power relations. The novel appears to demonstrate the extent to which the sort of race-thinking of which the colour bar was later to become the legislative embodiment was for some South Africans the product of a kind of mass transfer of race-inflected British class ideology. A more precise way of putting this would be to say that English-speaking South Africans tended to read and construe racial difference in terms of the only received vocabulary for the articulation of social difference at their disposal, the vocabulary of social class.

Since Jan, an Afrikander is not widely known and has been out of print

for almost a century, a brief plot summary seems appropriate. A young Englishman, Reginald Carson, arrives in South Africa in search of his uncle, the black sheep of the family who had emigrated many years before. Reginald's grandfather, an English baronet, has died, and the missing uncle stands to inherit his title and the family property in England. After discovering the corpse of a murdered man in Port Elizabeth whilst walking in the company of a young colonist woman, May Robertson, Reginald is befriended by her family and pays them a visit at their farm in Petrusville. While he is there, he meets a young man, apparently of Dutch extraction, by the name of Jan Vermaak, and the two become friendly. Through a series of connected disclosures, it is revealed that Reginald's uncle is dead, but that Jan Vermaak is the assumed name of his eldest son, and therefore -- as Sir John Fairbank and Reginald's cousin -- Jan is heir to the family title and property. It also emerges that Jan's mother, who is still living, is an African woman; and that the man whose body Reginald discovered had been murdered by Jan for revealing the secret of his mixed parentage to a young Englishwoman he had been courting.

Reginald decides that his duty lies in keeping quiet about this last discovery, and brings Jan, or Sir John, back to England to assume control of the family estate. After a series of events, including Jan's attempted murder of Miss Lisle (the girl who jilted him after being told that his mother was black), Jan returns to South Africa, confesses to his crime, and commits suicide. Reginald marries his South African sweetheart, May Robertson.

What does not emerge from this summary of events is the extent to which the novel engages with that perdurable and peculiarly English question: what is it that makes a gentleman? Although seldom explicitly addressed, it is arguably the question around which the entire moral economy of the nineteenth-century English novel is organized. The notion of aristocratic virtue had an obvious utility for the defender of the status quo, but even ardent critics of the English social caste system appear to have recognized that the idea of the gentleman (if not its reality, which was fair game) remained one of the finest achievements of British civilization, somehow contriving to blend Christian

values with those of an older ethic of chivalrous nobility in a way which seemed naturally consonant with the nationalist agenda of contemporary Imperial endeavour. The problematic source of its discursive power was that the notion of gentility was notoriously difficult to pin down, and, while most Englishmen would claim to be able instantly to recognize its signs, there was wide disagreement as to what these were. In a useful essay on Conrad's Victory, Tony Tanner has pointed out that

One of the most common features of the discussion of the gentleman is that the concept defies definition . . . it clearly meant something, and something important, in Victorian England, at the same time as the word was getting more imprecise and its connotations more diffuse and uncertain, if not contradictory. (Tanner 112)

That the idea of the gentleman had become a site of energetic contestation was the result of a decisive semantic shift it had undergone between the middle of the eighteenth and the end of the nineteenth centuries, a shift usefully adumbrated by a contributor to the Cornhill Magazine of 1862:

[the word gentleman] implies the combination of a certain degree of social rank with a certain amount of the qualities which the possession of such rank ought to imply; but there is a constantly increasing disposition to insist more upon the moral and less upon the social element of the word, and it is not impossible that in the course of time its use may come to be altogether dissociated from any merely conventional distinction. (Vol.5, 330; quoted in Tanner, 111-12)

This "constantly increasing disposition" is the product of a purportedly ethical discourse which sought to sever the notion of gentility from its dynastic connotations of inherited worth and privilege, to redefine or "democratize" it in the interests of the mobile class, the bourgeoisie. It is a discourse which accommodated a wide spectrum of ideological needs: at one Romantic and potentially revolutionary extreme, it insisted that true gentility was a measure of human worth with no respect for social class; like Rousseau's idea of the Noble Savage, gentility was in this sense a quasi-pastoral concept used by the bourgeoisie "to belabour nobility" (White, "Noble Savage" 192), to attack the notion of privilege as inherited right. At another extreme, it amounted to little more than an ironic probing of the extent to which admission to the ranks of the ruling class could be obtained

by the acquisition of money and manners.

In Jan, an Afrikander, Howarth is concerned to show that the geographical expansion of Empire requires a commensurate expansion of the notion of gentility, which in turn involves a redefinition of the occupations which qualify as gentlemanly (cf. Ranger 218):

Reginald had been long enough in the colony to find out that class distinctions are not as in England, and that gentlemen take to every kind of occupation, and are found behind the counter and in the workshop without undergoing that mysterious process known as "losing caste". Nevertheless, he was aristocrat to the backbone, and it gave him a disagreeable shock to learn that the pleasant, lady-like girl he was walking with had two brothers who kept a shop. (13)⁵

Through his acquaintance with the Robertsons, the colonials who befriend him and who are "poor and make no pretence of being anything else" (30), Reginald must learn to adjust his conventional English ideas of human worth. His discovery that his wayward uncle Sir John Fairbank had been married to a black woman completes the deflation of his metropolitan presumption:

Reginald remembered, with a sudden pang, that on his first introduction to them he had been aware of a certain social gap between himself and a storekeeper -- a certain superiority of birth and connection in his own favour. To whom was he superior now -- he, whose nearest kin, save his mother, were half Kafirs? (118)

He has even come to suspect that the colonial experience in itself might be conducive to the acquisition of manly virtue, the raw material of gentility: "He was beginning to see that a life in which nothing was provided for you without your own effort, might be beneficial in the formation of character" (33). Informing this seemingly innocuous remark is the imperialist idea that the vitality of the race could be renewed, its degeneracy arrested, by exposure to the rigours of frontier life. In the same year that Jan, an Afrikander was published, Lord Bryce recorded his observation in Rhodesia of "personality developing itself under simple yet severe conditions, fitted to bring out the real force of a man" (Impressions of South Africa, quoted in Ranger 217), while influential thinkers like J.A. Froude "felt that the vigour of the colonies could still be made to circulate through the dying heart of the system" (Trotter 145); the codifying of the idea in Baden-Powell's *Boy*

Scout movement is not far off.

Reginald's shedding of his metropolitan effeteness is part of a process in which gentility is apparently being reconstituted as a measure of quality regardless of rank:

"Mrs Robertson is a thorough lady," said Reginald, rather warmly. "She could not be more so if she were a duchess."

"Yes; well," said his mother, "I have often thought lately that it is a great fault to be too exclusive. After all, on what grounds can we set ourselves above any one who has right feeling, and tries to do his duty? Now, especially," she concluded with a sigh.

"I quite agree with you, mother," said Reginald, for these sentiments were after his own heart. "A gentleman can be nothing more than a gentleman, if he is a king; and a lady can be nothing more than a lady, if she is a queen. I learned that, if I learned nothing else, on my travels." (198)

The peculiar tautology of these formulations should caution us, however, that what is being proposed is by no means the radical democratization of gentility -- still less the dissolution of the concept itself -- but rather, a strategic redefinition of its constituency. The new delimitation serves to enlarge the preserve of entitlement to automatic privilege by admitting all Englishmen and women, regardless of rank, provided they are of "right feeling" and "[try] to do [their] duty" (which is presumably to uphold the values of the ruling class). Beneath the moralizing veneer, then, we see the criterion of exclusivity sliding from class to race, or rather, to race as a version of social class mediated by the concept of "nation". When Reginald reckons it a "pity when persons of different nations intermarry", Mr Robertson replies: "I don't see any objection to it in the case of equals . . . but I do where one is distinctly inferior to the other; as when a white man marries a Kafir woman, for instance" (26). What we witness in this novel, in other words, is the dramatization of the construction of a new social field in which whites (strictly speaking, the British), regardless of birth or wealth, constitute a superior class and blacks an inferior underclass. The fact that the basis for differentiation continues to be that traditional guarantee of aristocratic distinction, the notion of "blood" or breeding, strongly indicates the recuperative function of racial difference in the novel as "a displaced or surrogate class system" (Brantlinger 184). In other words, the function of

racial discourse in the narrative project of Jan, an Afrikaner is predicated upon a normative, class-stratified metropolitan model of social organization.

Jan, the son of an English nobleman and a "Kafir princess", is, we are told, "practically white, and would pass for such in English society" (87) -- as he indeed proceeds to do. Jan is "practically white", but of course not completely white, because appearance remains the privileged sign of racial identity. (Compare the narrator's remark in Millin's King of the Bastards: "Coenraad saw the blood rise beneath Regina's almost white -- but not quite white and therefore not white at all -- skin" [133].) The colonials, who are versed in the nuances of racial signification, have access to a visual code capable of unlocking the secret of Jan's mixed heritage:

"You can see some signs of the intermixture in [Jan Vermaak], too, if you know how to look for them. That very crisp hair, for instance, although it is light-coloured, and his eyes, when he is excited, betray him. Look at his fingernails if you get a chance."

"I have heard of that," said Mrs Robertson. "The arch at the base of the nail is dark-coloured, is it not?"

"Yes, it has a blue tinge instead of being white," said the doctor. (51-52)

Reginald, who up to this point in the novel has been unaware of Jan's "mixed blood", has thus far "found it very difficult to 'place' his new friend" (47). Jan's manners and personality evince a bewildering combination of traits and qualities: for instance, he is simultaneously "brusque . . . to the point of rudeness" (48) and generously hospitable (47). "Sometimes", Reginald remarks, "I cannot make him out at all" (50). But now,

The discovery that there was something of the original savage in Jan's nature was a help to Reginald in understanding his character. It was comprehensible to him that hospitality was the highest virtue, while truth was no virtue at all. His sudden and uncontrollable bursts of passion were also accounted for (54)

And from this point on, any sign of inconsistency in Jan's behaviour is naturalized in terms of the warring factions in his blood, just as all his shortcomings, whether moral or social, are explained in terms of current stereotypes of the uncouth, cruel, violent or deceitful Native. In the discourse of racial determinism, no facet of human identity can elude the signature of blood; biology is destiny.

As was suggested in Chapter 4, the mythology of race thus provides the colonial novelist like Howarth with a device for characterization which is to a certain extent new to the literary tradition, and which opens up some new narrative possibilities. For instance, the notion of character development, intrinsic to the narrative project of the classic realist novel, might appear to be incompatible with the rigidities of biological determinism. But the "conflict of blood" in the veins of the half-caste actually affords the novelist the narrative possibility of dynamic change. What this change consists in is not development but atavism, phylogenetic regression, the triumph of "black blood". At moments of crisis, the half-caste's inherited savagery irrupts to overwhelm and supplant the precarious dominance of the civilized admixture of "white blood".

Thus in a moment of passionate anger, the "strange mixture of qualities in Jan's nature" (54) resolve themselves via a "sudden transformation" into "the towering form and convulsed features . . . [of] the primeval savage, abandoning himself to his ungoverned emotions" (115; cf. Bancroft 152). A similar unpredictability, whose "tragic" consequences Sarah Gertrude Millin was later to exploit, governs the half-caste identity in its dynastic dimension: "'It is an indelible stain on the family that can never be effaced or forgotten,' said Mr Robertson. 'The black blood will show itself for generations to come, and no one ever knows where it will appear'" (93).

Apart from Jan's propensity to violent cruelty and the immediate gratification of his appetites, his character is most clearly distinguished from that of his English cousin in terms of the distinction between truthfulness and mendacity, integrity and duplicity. Of all the desirable qualities which Reginald embodies -- he is described as "manly and self-controlled" (16), "sweet-tempered . . . a stoic in bearing pain" (47), possessed of "refinement of feeling" (18), and so on -- it is above all his "extraordinary simplicity" (9) or straightforwardness that is emphasized. Reginald is a fine example of what Lionel Trilling calls a "moral type which England was thought uniquely to have produced" in the nineteenth century, a

type whose chief qualities were "probity and candour" (110; cf. Tanner 112). These were aspects of "the trait on which the English most prided themselves, their sincerity, by which they meant their single-minded relation to things, to each other, and to themselves" (111). Trilling goes on to argue that in the nineteenth-century English novel, "sincerity" was above all a function of the acceptance of one's class position "as a given and necessary condition of [one's] life" (115). In other words, the truth which resides in the identity of seeming and being is served by a man's being (and remaining) in reality what his station in life indicated him to be (and had determined for him at birth).

Now Jan is simply baffled by Reginald's sincerity, which renders his cousin in his eyes "some new kind of being" (78). Jan's whole nature is built on the duplicitous exploitation of the gap between seeming and being: he initially shocks Reginald by admiring a clever swindler (48), proceeds to prove himself a natural and plausible liar, and in England reveals himself the consummate master of role-play, as he effortlessly impersonates an English baronet returned from the colonies to enter into his title and property. But although this role is a deception in that its successful performance depends on the concealment both of the murder he has committed and his true parentage, the character he is impersonating is, after all, himself, Sir John Fairbank. Howarth has thus contrived a potent alignment of the ethical and the socio-political. Jan's immoral/amoral duplicity, which is such that Reginald is moved to reflect that "the very foundations of morality seemed altogether lacking in him" (288), is motivated at a deep level (which we might call, after Fredric Jameson, the text's "political unconscious") by the duplicity of his class position, of not being authentically the person he appears to be. Within the novel's terms of reference, Jan can never sincerely be himself, because that self itself has no integrity. Forever split, sundered in two by the circumstances of its origins, Jan's very existence threatens the binary classification of social field which the novel simultaneously constructs and assumes. In Jan, an Afrikaner, "mixed blood" is the sign of subversive

threat, while the word "purity" is loaded with value; it is significant, for instance, that Jan's mother, according to one of the characters, is "a superior native, a pure Kafir . . . which is, I suppose, better than being of mixed race" (100).

If the half-caste, then, is the Other who poses a threat to the binary opposition on which the power relations of colonial society are grounded, what are we to make of Jan Vermaak's "Afrikander" identity, which after all furnishes the title of the novel? Dictionaries, including the OED and Branford's Dictionary of South African English, gloss the word as an obsolete or obsolescent version of "Afrikaner". Yet there is clear evidence that in the nineteenth century the term had applications both more general and more specific, serving to denote, on the one hand, any African-born person of European descent (i.e., a "creole"), and on the other, a person of mixed African and European descent, nowadays styled a "Coloured". The "Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles" (in process) includes scores of citations of the word in all three senses, and all appear to have been idiomatic at the time that Howarth was writing. The word appears in the title of Howarth's novel, but nowhere in its text: the Afrikaners whom we encounter in the novel are "Dutch", and the English-speaking settlers, although distinguished as "colonists", remain unequivocally "English". It seems likely, therefore, that Howarth intended the sense of a person of mixed race or a "Coloured", and the novel can be seen to function as an extended definition of the term. Yet, inasmuch as this appears to have been mainly a Cape provincial usage -- and an obsolescent one at that -- we can perhaps assume that Howarth's British readers would have inferred from the book's title that its hero would be an Afrikaner, a white South African of Dutch descent (which indeed is what the characters in the novel assume Jan to be until the secret of his ancestry is revealed). It is quite possible that Howarth was deliberately exploiting the ambiguity of the term to denigrate the racial status of Afrikaners, to cast aspersion on their racial "purity". The Bergmanns, the "Dutch" couple who pay a call on the Robertsons, are degenerate

rural bumpkins whose pretensions to gentility are simply ludicrous.⁶ Not only are they grotesquely crude in manners and appearance, but the colour of their skin is the same as that of their Khoi, touleier, and Mr Bergmann has a face "like a baboon" (127). The characterization simultaneously invokes the "Hottentot" racial stereotype and standard literary conventions for the portrayal of the uncouth English peasant, an equivocality which apparently responds to Howarth's perception of the Afrikaner's ambiguous position in the black/white caste hierarchy of the colony. Marks and Trapido note that

As the [nineteenth] century wore on there was a growing tendency to see the non-English settlers, who were contemptuously referred to as "Boers", as members of an "inferior race". This was to reach its apogee in the jingoism which accompanied the struggles between the British and the Afrikaners before and during the South African War of 1899-1902. (7)⁷

Like Jan the half-caste, the Afrikaner awkwardly inhabits an imaginary, "other" space somewhere between white and black. It was arguably only in the post-war era of Reconstruction, when the "Native Problem" replaced the "Race Question" (i.e., of relations between English and Afrikaner) as the issue of the day, that the Afrikaner secured a firm place on the white side of the colour bar in the popular representations of English-speaking South Africa; or perhaps it was only then that the very division between black and white acquired the stability and fixity upon which all modern South African political discourse came to depend. It is significant that in his novel Souls in Bondage (1903), Perceval Gibbon makes use of descriptive conventions to evoke the identity of "off-coloured" (Coloured) South Africans which bear a striking resemblance to those which Howarth deploys in her depiction of the "Dutch".

Howarth's construction of the social identity of the Afrikaner is by no means the only area of indeterminacy in the novel. The resolution of the story of Sir John Fairbank, alias Jan Vermaak, is itself fraught with ambiguity.

Jan eventually shoots himself after confessing before a Magistrate to the murder of the Dutchman Van der Riet. The moral of the story as a colonial cautionary tale is clear: marriage between black and white is wrong because there is no "place" in society for the children of mixed unions. For a

half-breed like Jan, the promptings of whose inherited better nature are persistently overwhelmed by the baser instincts of his maternal ancestors, death is the only solution. He must die also in order that he should not have any children and thus bequeath his personal tragedy to subsequent generations. But Jan's confession and suicide in themselves represent not the defeat but the triumph of that better nature. In Jan's farewell letter to his cousin, he speaks of making "expiation" through confession; and the Magistrate's opinion that "he sacrificed himself in that terrible manner for the very purpose of sparing . . . his . . . relatives the disgrace of a public trial and execution" (295) is endorsed by Reginald's view of his suicide as a "noble, if perverted idea of sacrifice" (304). By publicly confessing to the murder, Jan brings his hidden self into the light and thus resolves the duplicity of his identity into the "singleness" which the text constructs as the primary moral basis for the possession of gentility.

The farewell which the novel takes of Jan is one commensurate with the stature he finally gains as a tragic hero. According to the legend Reginald has inscribed on his headstone, Jan selflessly "Laid down his life" (309) for his fellows: a quasi-religious affirmation of the value of the life so surrendered is thus proposed. The process of redemption which culminates in Jan's suicide actually begins when Reginald realizes he has obtained an "extraordinary ascendancy" (152) over his cousin which is repaid with "dog-like affection" (151). This aspect of their relationship comes to a head when Reginald thwarts Jan's attempt to shoot the fickle Miss Lisle and is able to render his powerful cousin docile by dint of "superior moral strength" (246). Jan is overawed by his English cousin's "force of character", his "pluck and coolness" (252), and confesses to him:

"You are the bravest man I know, Reginald You are also the best. I never thought there were any good men till I knew you. I thought they all humbugged one another, and did the best they could for themselves. I am not a good man, and I never shall be: but you have made me believe in goodness." (253, 257)

Reginald has in the mean time been lecturing Jan on how to "govern [his] desires" (251) by "trying to gratify every one's desires except [his] own"

(229). Soon after, Jan returns to South Africa and, before giving himself up, revisits the farm where

he had learned to know the only white man whom he loved, and who loved him; the only man who had shown him what real manhood is, and had made him admire and care for what is good and right
 (275)

The pattern of moral development is therefore complete: Reginald as Jan's good angel has shown him by precept and example the way of moral probity and led him by the hand from the darkness of savagery into the light of civilized behaviour. In this pattern we discern nakedly enacted the optimistic phantasy of enlightened imperialism, the phantasy of the civilizing mission and white trusteeship.

It would be wrong to conclude that this plot of amelioration and assimilation has therefore gained final ascendancy over the countervailing plot of fatal degeneration, because Jan's "conversion" may still be accounted for by the presence of "white blood" in his veins. It is nevertheless true that the liberal impulse in the novel frequently undermines the logic of biological determinism. This liberal impulse emerges most unequivocally in the sympathy and compassion evinced for Jan's invidious position, and in the characterization of his African mother, Nampetu. Nampetu's home in Port Elizabeth is modest, but clean and neat; she herself is gracious, well-spoken, sensible and dignified; and her appearance is rendered thus:

A tall and very graceful Kafir woman came to meet them . . . her form, in its lithe and undulating grace, was perfect. Although her features were of the most marked negro type, her countenance bore, in repose, an expression of mild and dignified sadness, often noticeable in the faces of a subject race, and which gave it a certain beauty independent of type. (105)

It would take another chapter to unravel all the disparate and ambiguous discursive strands woven into this description; the image evoked is one that recurs in South African literature from Pringle to Campbell, and even beyond; it owes as much to the pastoral idiom of the nineteenth-century emancipatory discourse on servitude as it does to the new racial science. But it is worth pointing out that nowhere here or elsewhere in the text of the novel does any of the black characters evince one shred of the "innate savagery" which is

blamed for the woes of Jan Vermaak.

On the subject of the marriage between Nampetu and Sir John -- its circumstances and the quality of the relationship that it embodied -- the text is understandably silent: we are told that Reginald's uncle was in his youth a "wild and dissipated" (6) man, and yet he seems to have been a good husband to Nampetu and a loving father to her children. If we are enjoined to attribute the fact of the marriage to a flaw in his character, an incipient degeneracy, then Howarth is taking another swipe at the pretensions of the aristocracy to have a monopoly on innate superiority. And yet, apparently in order to render the unthinkable thinkable ("It seems incredible that any white man could do such a thing" [26], says Reginald when first informed of the fact of mixed marriages in the Colony), Nampetu is characterized as herself an aristocrat, the daughter of an African chief, who bears herself "like a queen" (39). In also allowing Nampetu an emphatic integrity, and implicitly exonerating her from blame for the tragic consequences of her mixed marriage, Howarth makes an ambiguous move. Sir John's transgression is perhaps further mitigated, but at the same time the racial thesis of the novel's plot is undermined in two ways: on the evidence of the text, the "bad" blood flowing in Jan's veins must be attributed to his wayward father, not his African mother -- though even Sir John, it seems, turned out all right in the end, settling down in a good if somewhat unusual marriage. (In which case Jan's deficiencies of character are a freak; but then such contingency makes a mockery of the notion, which the text as a whole insists upon, that "all the life of the world, past and present, is one great chain of cause and effect" [94].) Secondly, the example of Nampetu would suggest that, in the case of the "savage" races -- unlike the "civilized" -- noble blood remains a guarantee of superiority; but no reason is given for this anomaly.

But there is a strong sense that, in her characterization of Nampetu, Howarth is also extending to her, across the line of colour, a fellow-woman's sympathy. If this is so, then it is one of only two signals of authorial gender-affiliation in the entire text. The other consists in the set of

qualities attributed to Reginald which works to undermine his adult masculinity and render him the Victorian mother's ideal son. I refer to his absolute yet unsophisticated refinement (2), his boyishness (3), his "extraordinary simplicity" (9), his transparent candour (48); the insistence that he is "singularly pure-minded" (73), "really pure-minded" (125). Much of this can admittedly be accounted to the idea of the perfect English gentleman, but there appears to be an exorbitance of characteristics conducive to feminine management. For a romantic hero he is notably lacking in masculine sexuality, which -- in the automatic excess of "ungovernable passion" -- is instead displaced onto the racial Other, Jan Vermaak (no full-blooded black male character appears in the novel). Howarth has Reginald explain his divergence from type in these terms:

You see, my mother was so unhappy about her brother -- she thought it was going to public school and college that led him into evil ways. She had only me, and she was so terribly afraid that I should grow up like him. I think that would have killed her. So she never sent me away, but always kept me at home, and had a tutor for me. (9-10)

Interestingly, this detail is remarked by an anonymous (female?) reviewer of the novel in The Atheneum (3655, 13 Nov. 1897): "There is also a very good and upright young man whose character has never been subjected to the unbecoming influences of an English public school and university" (669). Denied his rites of passage through these masculine institutions, Reginald remains like a child within the charmed circle of Victorian domesticity, uncorrupted by the threatening world of male endeavour, watched over by a jealously adoring "angel in the home". When Reginald returns to England, we are told that he and his mother "sat down, like two lovers, in a big armchair by the fire and talked freely, fully, confidentially, far into the night" (147). While the repressive absorption of the sexual into the maternal was a persistent theme of the patriarchal Victorian discourse on women, here the eroticizing of the maternal, empowering the mother as it disempowers the son, seems to signal an oblique resistance, an inchoate counter-appropriation.

A still more revealing set of contradictions emerges in the encounter between Reginald and Nampetu, when the Englishman finds that the sincerity

which is his -- as the narrative as a whole insists -- by racial prerogative, is in fact compromised by the exclusivity of its own determination. When the two are introduced, "Reginald bowed to her in exactly the same manner as he would have done to a duchess, and readily clasped the slim black fingers that Nampetu extended to him" (105) . . . "His manner was perfect; not the slightest outward sign betrayed his sickness of heart" (107). Reduced to a question of manners, Reginald's integrity is exposed as a sham, a mere matter of convention and outward seeming. When coffee arrives,

It was nicely served, everything was scrupulously clean, and the very fact that there was nothing to find fault with, added to an unreasonable sense of self-reproach which had suddenly fastened on Reginald. Why had he come to see these people, when they knew so well that he loathed his connection with them? There was no thought in his mind of patronage or condescension, but no doubt his visit appeared to them in that light. (109)

Reginald's moral scrupulosity therefore enables him to recognise his own bad faith in performing what he nevertheless regards as a "very trying duty" (110, emphasis added). Predictably, however, the narrative declines to explore the implications of this collision between the demands of the code of gentility and those of the racial exclusivity which finds, the novel insists, its ample and entire justification in that code. Reginald's embarrassment is occasioned by a generous consciousness of having possibly put his hostess at a disadvantage by appearing to condescend to her. But the source of his bad faith lies elsewhere, and it is a measure of the unquestioned authority of the racial discourse in which the novel participates that neither character nor, apparently, author is able -- or willing -- to acknowledge it. Despite the fact that there remains, as the presented facts are measured against his own exacting expectations, no objective basis whatsoever for Reginald's "loath[ing] his connection" with Nampetu, he does not begin to question the propriety of the racial prejudice which gives rise to that feeling.

This incident, then, finally lays bare a telling ambiguity at the centre of Howarth's discursive project. Gentility, Mrs Carson has authoritatively pronounced, is the preserve of those who "[have] right feeling, and [try] to do [their] duty" (198). In other words, it is a measure of value distributed

between the private arena of moral sensibility (right feeling) and the public arena of conduct (doing one's duty), much in the manner in which the identity of a sign emerges in the traffic between signified and signifier. Since "right feeling" can only be recognized and achieve social valency in its outward expression, sincerity, as the stabilizer of traffic between the orders of signifier and signified, naturally becomes the novel's moral lodestar. But the code of gentlemanly conduct has never required that one should feel as one behaves; indeed, not to betray one's true feelings in the name of a higher decorum is of the very essence of the code. (Early in the novel "courtesy" is practically defined as the disguising of personal feeling out of consideration for others [5].) The correctness of Reginald's conduct in his courtesy call on Nampetu is entirely independent of his personal feelings (which although in conflict with his behaviour persist in being "right"). Gentility is therefore a question of conduct whose relation to inner disposition or "innateness" is entirely arbitrary: a genuine vindication of what we have earlier characterized as Howarth's attempt to "democratize" the concept, to liberate it from its lingering metropolitan associations with inherited aristocratic privilege. But the success of this project simultaneously disables the larger project of the novel, which is to dramatize the necessary relation between race and gentility. The relation which the text attempts to fix is precisely that which it is concerned to undermine: the relation between moral conduct (as the proper measure of human value) and inherent or innate capacity. In fact the focus of the text's racial discourse has, logically speaking, nothing to do with either conduct or the "sincerity" which putatively guarantees its value: it is concerned solely with the innate (hereditary) capacity for "right feeling". The necessary ambiguity, adumbrated above, attaching to the sign of conduct within the economy of gentility extends also to the sign of identity in the economy of racial difference, which, as we have seen, in this text derives its sanction by analogy -- or catechresis -- from the ethico-politics of gentility. Race is of decisive importance because of a necessary relationship of identity between the visual signifiers of race and the moral

signified of determinate character traits and tendencies: the outward guarantees the inward. Yet, as we have seen, no such legitimating guarantee obtains within the sign of gentility from which the significance of race is analogously derived: the novel's discourse collapses in a tangle of logical circularities and contradictions.

The historical narrative to which the narrative of Jan, an Afrikander appears to stand in metonymic relation might be summarized thus: The British middle class in the late nineteenth century moralizes its empowerment by rejecting the notion of aristocratic privilege in the name of a revisionary ethics of gentility, thus undoing the traditional signifying code of socio-political elitism. But lest the repudiation of "class" jeopardize in turn that class's own automatic privilege in the colonies, the code is merely displaced and reconstituted within the field of race and racial difference. Because it is originary -- biologically determined at the moment of conception -- the racial sign is accorded an authority and fixity that the sign of social class could never hope to lay claim to. It is almost as though, in the colonial context, metropolitan class prejudice at last confronts its true image in the glass provided by the racially other, and -- now as race prejudice -- experiences an access of both relief (the moral achievement of sincerity) and confidence (through the apparent stability of racial signification). In these terms, class consciousness -- as the median term in a historical process spanning half a millenium -- becomes simultaneously a derivative of race consciousness and its imperfect prototype; class consciousness discovers its own perfection as a tool for political domination in the rediscovery of its origins.

To sum up, Jan, an Afrikander (whose racial plot appears to point directly towards segregationist ideology, and ultimately towards the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts) is essentially a narcissistic idyll of identity construction and validation, as much for the middle-class metropolitan reader as for the white, English-speaking, especially immigrant, South African reader.⁸ Its thesis is seriously undermined by contradictions between the two

discourses it attempts to align: a progressive, liberalizing reading of social class and a biologically determinative treatment of race.

II

A Question of Colour is a short novel by F.C. Philips published in 1895. It is set in the early 1880s in England and the diamond fields of Kimberley, and tells a tale not unlike that of Jan, an Afrikander, though to a markedly different purpose.

Briefly, it is the story of a young London barrister of modest means, Jack Collier, who falls in love with the beautiful but calculating Miss Mamie Bruton. She accepts his proposal; but he is persuaded by her parents, who have determined that she make a wealthy match, to try his luck on the South African diamond fields. While he is abroad, Mamie makes the acquaintance of another South African Jan, one Jan Umgazi, the son of a "Kafir king", who had been sent to England to be educated at the age of seven. Fabulously wealthy, with a public school and Oxford education behind him, Umgazi is every inch the perfect English gentleman -- with the salient exception of the colour of his skin, which is to him a constant source of harrowing sorrow:

It is not too much to say that Jan Umgazi, with the habits and thoughts of an Englishman, and the skin of a negro, envied the poorest of the clerks whom he passed behind his thousand guinea bays. To them marriage and a home were possibilities; to himself they were as unattainable as a white face. (76)

Hitherto more-or-less reconciled with the status of perpetual outsider to which English race prejudice has consigned him, he falls head over heels in love with Miss Bruton. Showered with expensive gifts and egged on by her mercenary mother, she suppresses her "instinctive loathing" and accepts his proposal (after draining a bottle of eau-de-cologne for Dutch courage!).

Meanwhile in South Africa, where he is busy amassing a tidy fortune, Collier has received news of these developments and, overcome with horror at the prospect of "so foul an act", immediately starts for England to try to

prevent the wedding. He arrives too late.

In the mean time, Mamie and Jan's wedding night has proved a disaster. Revolted by his embrace, she grows hysterical and seems about to lose her wits. The mortified Jan promises never to lay a finger on her again; heart-broken, he commits suicide shortly after.

Details of the Umgazis' brief married life have come to the attention of Collier via Jan's diary, discovered after his death and sent to him by Mamie -- presumably to prove that the marriage was never consummated. Collier, whose infatuation with the now wealthy widow is again being enthusiastically encouraged, changes his mind about the liaison after perusing the diary with a friend.

"If you want to know what I think", murmured [his friend], "the only sentiment this diary awakens in me is a profound compassion for the negro."

"That is precisely the case with me", said Collier, "though it was hardly the purpose for which the lady lent it to me. I am writing to her that I return to the Cape by the next boat." (139)

Jan Umgazi, like Jan Vermaak, must die because there is no place in the existing order of society for a "hybrid" like himself. But in this novel, unlike in Jan, an Afrikander, the blame is laid squarely at the door, not of "blood" or race, but of society and social conditioning, racial prejudice. The text goes to considerable lengths to establish that Jan Umgazi is a genuine gentleman, that his taste and manners are not only impeccable but "sincere" -- to the extent that he is repeatedly smitten with self-reproach that he is buying Mamie with his wealth, "buying her just as I should have bought wives in Zululand if I had been reared in the country of my birth. Isn't it loathsome to contemplate?" (132). On the contrary, it is the "authentic" article, Collier, whose jealous rage for a time threatens his gentility as he "develop[s] into an almost unbearable egotist" (119). And the egotist, or egoist, as George Meredith defined the type, is the modern savage, "our fountain-head, primeval man; the primitive . . . born again, the elemental reconstituted" (The Egoist, chapter 39, quoted in Tanner 115). Jan Umgazi's "difference", as the title of the novel insists, is merely "a question of colour". And although A Question of Colour makes only one direct reference to

the Christian teaching that "[i]n the sight of Heaven all our souls are equal" (94), it has about it a general flavour of the evangelical exemplary tale.

Of course, the text is by no means free of a prejudicial racial discourse: the verisimilitude of the presented action depends, for instance, on the reader's acceptance of the "naturalness" of Mamie Bruton's hysteria on being finally made to face up to being embraced by a Zulu. But it is not clear to what extent the implied author participates in Mamie's disgust, or in Collier's horror when he first discovers the race of his rival ("He sprang to his feet wildly; he felt as if he were choking and there were blood in his eyes" [105-106]). It is as though the author is made to confront the irrationality of his own racial prejudice through its representation in realist fictional discourse, and thus to submit the development of his plot to the moral logic characteristic of that mode of representation.

While Jan, an Afrikander and A Question of Colour are equally emphatic in their dismissal of wealth as a criterion for gentility, they differ strikingly in the alternative criteria that they advance. And if we are to seek beyond the contingency of authorial biography some explanation for the diametrically opposed resolution in these two novels of approximately the same question, we must presumably look to the fact that Howarth's is a "colonial" novel and Philips's a "metropolitan" one. In the colonies, the presence of large numbers of "uncivilized" but rapidly acculturating blacks was perceived to be a threat to an all too recently acquired imperial British ascendancy, which therefore required "fixing" in the language of blood and biological determinism. But back in London, the danger seemed to lie within, in a middle class degenerating morally through an obsession with money and status. This could be combated in realist narrative by simply allowing the logic of the liberalizing moral version of the discourse of gentility to unfold without self-contradictory intervention.

NOTES

1. See the immigration figures for the 1890s cited by John Stone, 114.
2. Anna Howarth and Selina Kirkman, the latter slightly mentally enfeebled as a result of severe concussion, remained inseparable until Miss Kirkman's death in Port Elizabeth in 1927 -- an association lasting more than thirty years. It is tempting but crudely speculative and probably anachronistic to construe this relationship as a lesbian one. Howarth returned to England in 1935 and died in London during the Second World War (Gutsche).
3. These were Jan, an Afrikander (1897), Katrina: A Tale of the Karoo (1898), Sword and Assegai (1899), and Nora Lester (1902).
4. The locus classicus is probably Kipling's story "Beyond the Pale" (1888; see Cornwell). Various South African short fictional antecedents -- W.C. Scully's "The Fundamental Axiom" and "Kellson's Nemesis" (1893), J.P. FitzPatrick's "The Outspan" and "Induna Nairn" (1897) -- are discussed in Chapter 4.
5. Compare Perceval Gibbon, Souls in Bondage:

In that kind land, however, a man is what he proves himself, not what others call him [Joyce's] relations with his employer were characteristic of the country. His work did not require the constant realization of the fact that he was a subordinate and a paid servant; he was rather an equal, giving good value in exchange for his salary. And this principle, common to all South Africa a few years ago, makes good men of young men, and makes them quickly. (254, 255)
6. Malvern van Wyk Smith has pointed out to me that "bergman" was also another name for "bosjesman" or Bushman.
7. The origins of the derogatory stereotype of the Boer can be traced at least as far back as Barrow's Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa (1806). Dubbing the Boers "African peasants", Barrow wrote:

Unwilling to work, and unable to think, with a mind disengaged from every sort of care and reflexion, indulging to excess in the gratification of every sensual appetite, the African peasant grows to an unwieldy size
 (quoted in van Wyk Smith 4).
8. David Bunn has noted that "we must admit the possibility that colonial texts attempt to produce 'audiences' as one of their effects" (6).

CHAPTER SEVEN

RACE, CLASS, AND "EMOTION"

There the passions cramp'd no longer shall have scope and
 breathing space;
 I will take some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky race.
 -- Tennyson, "Locksley Hall" (1842)

The text is (should be) that uninhibited person who shows his
 behind to the Political Father.
 -- Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text

I

Turbott Wolfe (1925) was indubitably the most controversial South African novel of its day, and -- whatever their opinion of its merits -- contemporary reviewers were unanimous in recording the excitement, shock or at least discomfort of a revelatory experience.¹

Almost seventy years later, the novel's stylistic exuberance and formal eccentricity, its grammatica jocosa, seems as fresh as ever. And while we cannot hope to recover an adequate sense of its original iconoclastic impact, historical distance offers us the compensation of perspective: specifically, a perspective in which Turbott Wolfe appears as by no means as politically radical a text as at first supposed.

Turbott Wolfe follows Jan, an Afrikaner in the sequence of texts discussed in this study for a particular reason. The two novels do not at a first glance appear to have much in common. Jan, an Afrikaner is a popular, melodramatic, artistically naive romance which conscientiously advocates British racial superiority. Turbott Wolfe, on the other hand, is famed for its searing excoriation of colonial racial prejudice. But what the novels do share to a significant degree is a particular form of social class consciousness: the habit of judging persons according to categories of worth sanctioned by the class stratifications of metropolitan British

society. In Plomer's much richer and more complex text the interface between race and class is a concern less patently thematized than it is in Howarth's. Furthermore, the hierarchic privileging of race over social class in Howarth's novel is ostensibly reversed in Turbott Wolfe, as the colonial "democratization" of gentility which drives the plot of Jan, an Afrikander becomes the major target of Plomer's satire. The system of merited privilege expressed in the notions of gentlemanly conduct and noblesse oblige has for Plomer become utterly perverted in a country in which degenerate "poor whites" lord it over an innately superior underclass of blacks. Through the attempts of Turbott Wolfe to repudiate his structurally defined colonial identity, Plomer seeks to reimagine such a system of natural order in non-racial terms. Significantly, the project fails: bemused by a typically Modernist experience of entropy, Turbott Wolfe succumbs to neurosis and returns to Europe a broken man.

The affective split between Turbott Wolfe's principled allegiance to a social ideal and his recognition of his own inability to act upon it involves the narrative in an intense probing of the psychology of race feeling, of what Roy Campbell called "the emotional aspects of the colour-situation" ("Significance of Turbott Wolfe" 44).

What follows is a detailed reading of the text which the reader may be apt to find excessively leisurely and diffuse. I would beg his or her forbearance and hope that, while the argument as a whole retains a core of redemptive integrity, the supporting material will not be without its own interest. In mitigation I would point out that prolixity has been a feature of recent commentaries on the novel (monographs by Shum and Adler; Lockett; compare the length of Van der Post's 1965 Introduction), and would seem to register a certain principle of diffusion or dispersion in the text, which is intrinsic to its meaning but which renders it recalcitrant to tidy interpretive capture.

II Turbott Wolfe Comes to Africa

In a playful gesture of the sort we have come to associate with postmodernist fiction, Plomer establishes a mock-documentary status for his novel by naming its narrator "William Plomer". However, "William Plomer's" presence is a mere framing device for the story of the eponymous protagonist, told almost entirely in the latter's own words. At the commencement of the narrative, Turbott Wolfe is "about to die, at no great age, of a fever that he had caught in Africa" (57), and sends word for the narrator, an old school friend, to call at his lodgings in a coastal town somewhere in England. The fever, it will be the burden of the novel to reveal, is as much psychological as physical, a terminal spiritual malaise contracted during Wolfe's sojourn in Africa.

Wolfe's sickroom is

so tawdry as to be grotesque. Patterns of flowers, sewn or painted or printed in smudgy colours, decorated the walls, the curtains, the linoleum on the floor, the linen, the furniture; and they were all different. (57)

This florid maculation is a proleptic image of the "erratic" (58), overblown narrative which Wolfe is about to deliver; the narrator feels "obscured" by the delirious excess of "all those scentless bouquets", but Turbott Wolfe is "so little obscured" that the room becomes for him "an ideal background" (57).

Against this background Wolfe outlines the circumstances of his transplantation to Africa. His early life, he says, had been "a structure that had grown steadily without the least deviation from the architect's plan" (58). But illness intervenes, and Wolfe is ordered to Africa to convalesce. He seizes this as an opportunity to wrest control of his life from its "invisible constructor" (58) and become the master of his own destiny, avidly anticipating the freedom he associates with the (thoroughly literary) role of the trader-adventurer: "I could think of nothing more thrilling than a small business, under my own eye, under my own hand" (58). The reader should be sceptical, already being apprized that what happens to

Turbott Wolfe in Africa is destructive rather than regenerative; it is precisely the hubris of this desire for self-restoration and mastery, mediated by a favourite trope of popular fiction in the age of Empire, that the ironic structure of Wolfe's narrative will work to expose.

Recent critics of Turbott Wolfe, notably Cecily Lockett, have made much of the novel's Modernist aesthetic and insisted on the author's ironic detachment from his fictional protagonist, whose shortcomings come to embody a trenchant "critique of liberalism" (Lockett, "A Failed Novel" 30). I think the truth is that Plomer was somewhat more ambivalent about Turbott Wolfe, and that the character carries a great deal of autobiographical freight. For instance, Wolfe's move to the trading station at Ovuzane not only rehearses the Plomer family's move to exotic Entumeni, it also enacts Plomer's decision to rebel against what he liked to disparage as "the done Thing", or simply "the Thing" (South African Autobiography 41, 51, 80, 87, 144) -- the edifice of social convention in which as a youth he felt himself imprisoned -- and commit himself to art, the Dark Continent of the imagination where he might hope freely to express himself in a practice conducted "under [his] own eye, under [his] own hand". After remarking that "trade is like art", Wolfe delivers a commercial credo:

I think the greatest illusion I know is that trade has anything to do with customers if you are to be a success in trade, in art, in politics, in life itself, you must never give people what they want. Give them what you want them to want.
(59)

This is a thinly-disguised caricature of precisely the sort of avant-garde, Romantic-Modernist aesthetic that the young Plomer espoused and which Turbott Wolfe in its way embodies. This ambivalence, underscored by the manifest absurdity of the manner in which Wolfe aestheticizes his mercenary avocation, does point to an ironic gap between character and implied author which -- now narrowing, now widening -- will be exploited throughout the narrative, contributing to one of its major hermeneutic challenges: the question of the extent to which its author shared the present-day reader's awareness of the protagonist's limitations and the multiple ironies of his

experience. My own view is that Plomer used Wolfe in much the way that Conrad used Marlow, to dramatize an important part of his personality so as to subject it to the sympathetic yet searching scrutiny of another part.² In Turbott Wolfe, authorial personality appears to be distributed among Wolfe, Friston, d'Elvadere and a generally sardonic implied author; the fragmentation this division connotes is adumbrated in one of the novel's appendices, Friston's sketch of "The Politico-Aesthete" (212-13), and is central to the text's purposes and effects.

Certainly there is irony aplenty in the next stage of Turbott Wolfe's narrative. Installed at his Ovuzane trading station, Wolfe devotes himself to realizing ideas he has for a "co-ordination of all the arts", for turning his life into an integrated artwork with facets variously assigned to "trade and folk-lore and painting and writing and music . . . sculpture and religion and handicrafts . . . [and] landscape-gardening" (60).³

This passage surely confirms Plomer's Johannesburg artist friend Edward Wolfe as a source for the fictional character. Plomer was later to write that Edward Wolfe "made his own world and lived in it", and describe Wolfe's "work and his talk and the vivid environment which, like a bower bird, he had created for himself" as akin to an oasis in a desert (South African Autobiography 132). But in the novel, Turbott Wolfe's experience suggests the impossibility of so quixotic yet precious a solution to the problems of an artist in an uncongenial environment. The "co-ordination of all the arts" which Turbott Wolfe achieves is specious because it serves merely to surround its creator with a system of mirrors giving back a version of himself and his imported culture; it fails to engage with the reality of Africa. Whether or not Plomer is having a dig at late nineteenth-century Aestheticism -- one is reminded of the vapidly romantic verses Plomer sent to Harold Munro from March Moor⁴ -- he is surely giving expression to the frustration of his own early attempts to "be an artist" in what seemed to him the cultural vacuum of colonial South Africa.

In Lacanian terms, the reader is obliquely alerted to Wolfe's having

pitched the tent of his art in the narcissistic realm of the Imaginary through his own description of the way in which he sets about his project: "I turned with immense enthusiasm to an immense number of different activities. I went from one to another, how restlessly you cannot imagine" (60). Wolfe seems to harbour a dangerously unappeased desire which he displaces from demand to demand in sterile circularity, contriving to hold at arm's length the Other, the Real.

Nevertheless, to European eyes his achievement is such that a distinguished publisher arrives from London to record it for a metropolitan audience: "Tyler-Harries, man of means, emerged on long and pointed feet from the Rochester Castle, polished and distant and distrustful, a maker of editions-de-luxe . . ." (61). The ironic deflation of this cultivated avatar of European civilization is swift and savage. On the voyage home, Tyler-Harries' ship is wrecked and he drowns, taking with him the manuscript of his book on Wolfe. What is more, it is clear that his brush with Africa has somehow undone him: he had chosen "to return in a rotten cargo-boat round the East Coast instead of a first-class liner by the West" (60), and "had last been seen with a coloured stewardess . . . very far gone in raw cane-spirit, kindly supplied by the lady" (61-62). The sordid farce of Tyler-Harries' end, Wolfe will conclude when he has learnt to take his new environment more seriously, puts him "with those who had been broken or beaten or besotted with the almighty violence of Africa" (117). As the epitome of the English gentleman who has nonetheless contrived to "go native" almost overnight, Tyler-Harries serves as a minatory cameo of the corruption and degeneration which, in a variety of ways, will stamp almost all the white characters in the novel as victims alike of Africa's "Hidden Force".

The one remark of Tyler-Harries which Wolfe recounts -- "My dear man . . . how many fish are here out of water!" (61) -- provides the reader with perhaps the only clue as to the significance of Turbott Wolfe's unusual first name. The turbot is a species of fish, and Turbott Wolfe --

an over-sophisticated European artist in the back of beyond -- is a fish out of water. The collocation of first- and surnames neatly expresses the division in his identity: Turbott, the gasping (European, intellectual) fish at the mercy of the unfamiliar elements both of Africa and of his own carnal appetites; Wolf(e) (via Edward Wolfe the painter), the conscious craftsman, the detached and deliberate predator on experience. The conjunction of "Turbott Wolfe" suggests that the novel will record the protagonist's (failed) attempt to build what E.M. Forster in Howards End famously called "the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion". "Without it," Forster warns, "we are meaningless fragments, half monks, half beasts, unconnected orders that have never joined into a man" (Forster 174).

Tyler-Harries' remark about fish out of water is of course also an ironically perverse anticipation of his ludicrous fate, and chimes with the note of farcical inversion, of carnivalesque reversal, so resoundingly struck by his encounter with Africa. The flavour of carnival, introduced as early as the description of Wolfe's sickroom, is immediately intensified by Wolfe's description of "a kind of fairground in the slums" (62) that he visits in Dunnsport.

III The Fairground Scene

Although the account of "Schonstein's Better Shows" occupies less than three pages of the text, a proper understanding of its function is crucial to an appreciation of the nature of Plomer's project in the novel as a whole. In a paper entitled "The Semiotic Theory of Carnival as the Inversion of Bipolar Opposites", the Russian scholar V.V. Ivanov writes:

One may propose the hypothesis that this combination of the the 'signifying' carnivalization (in the surface structure of the images), which is based on a real prototype (whether it be the traditional carnival in Boll or the carnivalized atmosphere of "The Stray Dog" in Akhmatova), and of the 'signified' archetypal carnival character in the deep structure of the

images is typical of all writers for whom the idea of carnival is a fertile source of creativity. (23)

Ivanov contends, in short, that texts which work to invert or neutralize on a symbolic level semiotically significant oppositions, tend also to dramatize this process at the level of representation or surface imagery. This seems to be true of Turbott Wolfe, although a qualification is necessary. For Plomer's novel does an excellent job of simulating carnivalesque inversion, while actually in large measure recouping the South African social field for a standard British discourse of social class; and it seems to me that this state of affairs is clearly figured in the fairground scene, where the carnival is observed from the disapproving perspective of a non-participatory narrator.

The fairground scene in Turbott Wolfe acts as a threshold that both character and reader must cross to get to the real matter of the narrative. For the reader, the liminal scene affords an interpretive frame for the narrative as a whole, adumbrating the limits of the narrator's sensibility and self-awareness; for Wolfe, the spectacle he witnesses at the fairground is a revelation which will shape all his subsequent experience in Africa:

Round us as we talked circulated a crowd of black, white and coloured people: English, Dutch, Portuguese, nondescript were the whites; Bantu, Lembu, Christianized were the blacks; and the coloured were all colours and all races fused. It came upon me suddenly in that harsh polyglot gaiety that I was living in Africa; that there was a question of colour. (62)

How is it that Wolfe can confess to a sudden awareness of the reality of Africa and the "question of colour"? After all, he has been living and working among the Lembus at Ovuzane for several months at least. The answer would appear to lie in the emphasis in the quoted passage not only on the variety of racial types present at the fair but also on their mingling, their mixture, for which the coloured people, who are "all colours and all races fused", serve as the climactic embodiment.

The fairground spectacle, it seems, has achieved the effect of delivering Wolfe into an unsettling awareness of his own identity as an historical agent or participant. His experience thus far in Lembuland has

been construed as a pastoral idyll, a static tableau featuring an outsider's encounter with an unchanging, primitive way of life. Wolfe's sense of his identity has remained perfectly intact, even invigorated, in this glancing contact with a people for him so entirely Other as to inhabit a different world. It is a world not only with its own separate and largely opaque social organization and cultural codes, but one which for Wolfe exists in a different time, the "prehistoric" or timeless "past", as opposed to the "present" of his evolved European consciousness.⁵ Of course he has been fooling himself: his activity as a trader is a microcosm of the colonial enterprise, and his desire for independence and self-mastery -- "a small business, under my own eye, under my own hand" -- is not easily distinguished from the imperial phantasy of untrammelled self-realization, of self-inscription upon demographically blank space. His recipe for commercial success -- "you must never give people what they want. Give them what you want them to want" -- is seemingly oblivious to its mandarin, coercive condescension and to the fact that his activity in creating a demand for Western consumer goods is helping to rend the fabric of a society he otherwise assumes to be so remote and changeless.

But at the fairground Wolfe is made abruptly aware of the existence of different races of people in the same place and time, moreover, of people simultaneously engaged in the same pursuit of sensuous pleasure. It is the rising into consciousness both of the fact of difference and of its precarious and contingent nature which creates a disturbing conflict, pointing as it does in the direction of the obliteration of difference in the figure of the mixed-blood, "all colours and all races fused". At the same time, this subliminal awareness delivers Wolfe into history, into a consciousness of identity as a process in time, of becoming rather than being. Wolfe concludes the diary entry recording his response to the fair by describing the gesture of a man after "[a] sally in the darkness" with a coloured girl, "fluttering one hand high above his head in lewd farewell". He asks: "Is it a flag on a ruin, that hand? a portent, preceding a half-

caste world?" (64). Wolfe's new consciousness of colour has reminded him of the racial responsibilities of his European identity. The gesture is ambivalently figured: to what extent does he or will he be able to share in the triumph of that symbolic flag, because presumably the "ruin" it surmounts is the wreck of the civilization which has made him the man he is?

Wolfe will later in the narrative devote himself for a time to the pursuit of the goal of "a half-caste world" by helping to establish a political organization advocating miscegenation. But the contradictory feeling he retains about that "solution" to the "Native Question" is here prefigured by the wholly negative portrayal of the miscegenous act itself - as a kind of tawdry exploitation in which the white man conducts himself in a manner unbecoming a gentleman, perpetrating a vulgar breach of the courtesy and respect due to the other (it matters little whether she is seen primarily as a woman or as his social inferior). Wolfe's initial construction of miscegenation here, then, adumbrates it as a compromising descent from high to low, an abrogation of propriety and responsibility resulting in a "ruin": the ruin not only of the discrete positivity of identity, but perhaps of Western civilization itself.

In The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, an intriguing book indebted to Bakhtin's study of Rabelais, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue that European cultural discourse is predicated upon interlinked hierarchies of representation in what they isolate as the four cardinal symbolic domains: of psychic forms, the human body, geographical space and the social order. These hierarchies, which serve to organize the discriminations integral to identity construction and validation, are in most instances reducible to the vertical binarism of opposition between "high" and "low". Furthermore,

The primary site of contradiction, the site of conflicting desires and mutually incompatible representation, is undoubtedly the "low". Again and again we find a striking ambivalence to the representations of the lower strata (of the body, of literature, of society, of place) in which they are both reviled and desired. Repugnance and fascination are the

twin poles of the process in which a political imperative to reject and eliminate the debasing "low" conflicts powerfully and unpredictably with a desire for this Other. (4-5)

A recurrent image of the "low" in the dominant European cultural tradition from Mediaeval times has been that of the fair, the scene of the carnival festivities of popular culture. Stallybrass and White adduce abundant evidence of the way in which the fair finds consistent representation as "the antithesis of order, civility and decorum" (32). The response of the middle classes to the fair has nevertheless been deeply ambivalent, for the fair is one of the sites at which political and libidinal impulse necessarily repressed in the formation of the social self may find symbolic expression. Representation of the fair therefore provides opportunity for both confirmation and transgression of the hierarchic symbolic ordering of a society.

The relevance of this analysis to Plomer's presentation of the fairground scene in Turbott Wolfe is obvious: for Turbott Wolfe, the slum-situated "Schonstein's Better Shows" has a typically ambiguous appeal, simultaneously threatening and provocative. But before we proceed to investigate the implications of this, I would like to deal briefly with some revealing evidence of Plomer's interest in the carnivalesque, particularly in the cultural style derived from the popular entertainment known as Music Hall or Vaudeville. It was an interest not at all unusual for an artist in Plomer's day. In France and Germany, cabaret was from the outset a medium for the artistic avant-garde. The first cabaret venue established in 1881, Le Chat Noir, adopted for its emblem a black cat placing a disdainful paw on a pathetic goose, and "this graceful, magical cat, born from the pages of Edgar Allen Poe, represent[ed] art; its unworthy prey, the sullen, squawking, silly bourgeois" (Appignanesi 152). Young French, German and Swiss artists and intellectuals, rebelling against the standards of taste and cultural forms of polite society, were drawn toward the iconoclastic, anarchic, Dionysian humour of the Cabaret, which Lisa Appignanesi sees as the origin of the Dadaists' programme of

liberation through laughter. Marinetti and the Futurists, associated with the Lapin Agile, recognized the origins of cabaret in the folk carnival and argued for the appropriation of popular culture, with its variety, excitement and humour, for the purpose of serious artistic experiment and socio-political critique (Appignanesi 72).

That the cabaret translated into the considerably tamer popular entertainments of Music Hall in Britain and vaudeville or burlesque in the United States was doubtless because these were more open, democratic societies with no need for so specific an outlet for dissent. But the very offensive vulgarity (to middle-class sensibilities) of these variety shows recommended them to intellectuals impatient of Victorian social propriety and hypocritical morality. Even T.S. Eliot was a great admirer of the most famous Music Hall artiste, Marie Lloyd, describing her as "the most perfect, in her own style, of British actresses" (quoted in Farson 55). From the 1890s on, Marie Lloyd enjoyed the reputation of a scandalous woman, a kind of pre-motion picture sex-symbol: "Nice, middle-class families forbade their children to see her" (Farson 58). An idea of polite society's response to such entertainment as late as 1920 is given in this humorous extract from F. Scott Fitzgerald's first novel, This Side of Paradise. The young hero Amory Blaine is attempting to impress a girl with his worldliness:

"I've done a lot of things that if my family knew" -- he hesitated, giving her imagination time to picture dark horrors -- "I went to the burlesque show last week."
Myra was quite overcome. (19)

According to Daniel Farson, "the great tours for Music Hall stars were South Africa and Australia" (77); Marie Lloyd's first visit to South Africa was in 1896, and she returned several times, making a last tour in about 1919 (Farson 117). It is by no means impossible that Plomer saw her show, or at least something similar, in Johannesburg, Cape Town or Durban.

Among the poems which Plomer sent to Harold Munro under a covering letter dated 30 October 1922 was one about a family of circus tumblers, "Famille Arlequin". The poem is a celebration of athletic sensuality,

rhythmically evoking the poise and skill of the performers. (One is reminded of Marsdon Hartly's delight in the acrobat's "superb arabesque of the beautiful human body" in his widely-read tribute to "Vaudeville" of 1921 [172].) But in the second stanza of his poem, Plomer seems to recognize the otherness of his acrobats' devotion to the purely physical and the subversiveness of its appeal, because it connotes the slumber of the rational mind:

Swift time they keep
 With sudden vaults
 And somersaults;
 Juggle and spin.
 Their eyes seem half asleep,
 Silken their skin

Underneath the poem Plomer wrote: "I believe you will like this. It exhibits my almost congenital love for any sort of vaudeville" (NELM 86.2.7.2). He had earlier (2 April 1922) sent Munro a clutch of poems that included a bizarre piece of narrative prose, of which he wrote: "It is, I think, a sort of vaudeville landscape . . . I wrote this thing quite against my will. I suppose my EGO or something else went and did it" (NELM 86.2.6.1). And indeed, the Dadaesque little narrative of the muffin man reads like automatic writing, unfolding uncannily by pun and free association, according to the impenetrably private, grotesque, comical yet sinister logic we associate with the dreamwork (it is quoted in full in Alexander 64). It happens to bear a strong resemblance to the tales of that "consummate absurdist" Alphonse Allais, chief raconteur of la belle époque of cabaret (Appignanesi 24). But what is significant is that Plomer, although he perhaps gets his Freudian terminology wrong, recognizes that the sources of the piece lie in a domain of his mind thrillingly beyond both conventional narrative logic and his own rational control; and although he is all too aware of the strangeness of the story, he remains confident of its artistic validity. It seems to offer him evidence of the potential of the word to express that Other that invisibly shadows the self in every moment of its conscious exertions. This idea will be crucial to the fate he invents for Turbott Wolfe.

Plomer's delight in the subversive potential of the vaudeville mode is visible also in the cartoons and caricatures preserved from his Marsh Moor days, especially that of the gross Music Hall "diva" seated at a piano. Stephen Gray reproduces the drawing in his illuminating essay "Turbott Wolfe in Context", noting that the song she is singing, "You called me baby-doll a year ago", is the same as that which Cossie van Honk "assist[s] the piano to deliver itself of" in Turbott Wolfe (201). Nor was Plomer's attraction to the grotesquerie of vaudeville merely a passing enthusiasm: it would surface many years later in poems like "The Dorking Thigh":

Ah yes, it was meat, it was meat all right,
A joint those three will never forget --
For they stood alone in the Surrey night
With the severed thigh of a plump brunette
(Collected Poems 145)

Cabaret, vaudeville, Music Hall: what they share with Bakhtin's idea of the carnival is the consecration of inventive freedom in defiance of official taste. With its bizarre characters and black, stagey humour, Turbott Wolfe seems to offer itself as a sustained exercise in the carnivalesque -- "call it a phantasmagoria, a stream-of-consciousness, a dream-memoir, a negrotresquerie", suggests Stephen Gray, "but not a rational realist novel" ("Turbott Wolfe in Context" 197).

If the carnival is that symbolic arena in which the repressed returns to mock at its rulers, the psychic division in Turbott Wolfe suggested above may just as well be rendered as the split between conscious and unconscious, provided the terms are allowed some latitude. Turbott Wolfe's desire is split by the policing activity of his psychic defences in two major domains, the body and the body politic: the censors are sexual inhibition and social class prejudice, powerfully inter-cathected.

The tragedy of Wolfe is anticipated by the fairground scene most notably in the fact that he is an onlooker rather than a participant, a middle-class voyeur fascinated and disgusted by the uncouth antics of the "polyglot" rabble. According to Bakhtin,

Carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates While carnival lasts there is no other life outside it. (7)

Wolfe provides his own footlights through the textual mediation of his diary entry, which gives a version of the city by night typical of the Decadent poets of the 1890s (see Scott 218). In the vocabulary of Stallybrass and White, Wolfe retains the upright posture of the "classical body" amid the seething, sensual chaos of ritualistic inversion about him.⁶ His reaction to the fair is not unlike that of Axel Heyst to Zangiacomo's female orchestra in Conrad's Victory, and with similar implications of ambivalence:

In the quick time of that music, in the varied, piercing clamour of the strings, in the movements of the bare arms, in the low dresses, the coarse faces, the stony eyes of the executants, there was a suggestion of brutality -- something cruel, sensual, and repulsive. (Conrad, Victory 69)

Unable, apparently, to explain to "William Plomer" the peculiar impact of the scene, Turbott Wolfe reads aloud from his diary. He is to use this tactic again later when he is floundering for words to convey the intensity of his feelings for the Lembu maiden Nhliziyombi. On both occasions, the evasion of direct communication is exacerbated by the highly stylized, self-consciously literary manner of the diary entries. "I planted words around my emotions as you plant trees around a house: they draw attention to the white walls of truth within, which at the same time they partly conceal" (98), Wolfe confesses. And thus these moments of possible self-confrontation and revelation are deferred by displacement onto a conventional literary persona. In this instance, Wolfe's diarized emphasis on the aftermath of the orgiastic whirl and clamour of the merry-go-round, which serves to expose the meretricious illusion of its excitement, is a clear sign of retreat into the "classical body" with its socially conditioned responses. The vision of the crowd is of a collection of grotesques, "marionettes", dehumanized by their surrender to what Plomer in

an early poem called the "swift subhuman yearnings" of sensuality ("Amanzimtoti", NELM 86.2.7.4). The observer registers this appeal to the passion of "the lower body" as a threat from outside, a shabby and sinister invitation to illusion and disorder (the set-piece seems to owe as much to Conrad as to the Decadents):

It is the steam-organ's function to bewitch the merry-go-round with noise: wailing and palpitating, to drive the prancing figures faster and faster; to produce a final din, brandishing a tune like an insult; and then of a sudden to leave the scene silent and deserted.

The merry-go-round, brightly lit and brightly coloured, is garishly desolate, while the empty voice of the dago who summons people to ride upon it is as its own voice, articulate, pleading for a tawdry misery to be soothed. The clamour is dead that drugged the brain and excited the nerves, so one man throws away a cigarette, and another turns with a shrug. Another talks in confidence with one of the dollish women who sell tickets for side-shows, sitting here and there, each in a kiosk like a monstrous hood, dark without and light within.

Above them the great wheel towers and clatters with coloured lights, its passengers two by two in little cars soaring pathetically into the night, lapsing swiftly to earth, people obsessed with an illusion; now as they appear leaning out to watch a dispute at one of the games of chance, where a cheap-jack with custard-yellow hair and a false buttonhole is at blows with an Indian youth because of sixpence. After a moment the game proceeds, electric light upthrown on vivid faces -- white, yellow, black -- set like masks, or moving like the faces of marionettes. (63)

The sweep of Wolfe's gaze is eventually arrested by a scene which, as we have already noted, he chooses to invest with emblematic significance.

Esoteric movements stir the crowd, at one place ribald, watching a gross European in one of the swing-boats with a girl sitting facing him, her back to those watching. The man propels the boat to a great height, laughing whitely under a small black moustache at the girl's evident fear; but the swing is soon finished, and she stands up, the man descending to help her out. Even when she is on the ground he holds fast her hand, and suddenly stoops to kiss her. Quickly she turns her head -- the idle crowd breaks out with lascivious comment, seeing her to be not white -- and the kiss falls on her neck.

She is enraged. She flings away from him, momentarily defiant under an arc-lamp. Plainly to be seen are the faint pallor of her ashen-yellow skin and the tip of her mulberry-pink derisive tongue.

Bawdy laughter. A sally in the darkness. A pursuit by the crowd. And after a time the man saunters back to his friends, fluttering one hand high above his head in lewd farewell.

Is it a flag on a ruin, that hand? a portent, preceding a half-caste world? (63-64)

The onlookers' brutish enjoyment of the girl's terror on the swing becomes explicitly sexual when they notice that she is "not white". Their

interpretation of the scene immediately switches registers, from the playfulness of courtship ritual to the implicit violence of animals squaring for rut. Moreover, the equation of blackness with sexuality, or even of sexuality with power, is one which Wolfe -- and possibly Plomer, too -- seems unable to contest.⁷

But there is more at issue here than the standard colonial stereotype of the lax-principled, concupiscent black, and it has to do with the social class hierarchy which informs Wolfe's perception of the fairground scene. The challenge to Wolfe's sense of himself in Africa posed by the melange of racial types at the fair, especially by the coloured folk, "all colours and all races fused", is the threat of category confusion, the blurring of distinction between self and other on which the construction of the subject depends. "The deep structure of our own sense of self and the world is built upon the illusionary image of the world divided into two camps, 'us' and 'them'" (Gilman 17; compare Lacan's view of the Other as the creative force in shaping the consciousness of the self, *Ecrits* 58, 86). Wolfe is made to realise that he has up to this point unreflectively absorbed the colonial discrimination of identity according to skin colour, which is also inevitably a hierarchic division between high and low, superior and inferior. In his or her very existence the coloured or mixed-race person embodies the carnivalesque subversion of this categorical discreteness. And what appals Wolfe's sense of "moral" propriety is the indiscriminate indulgence of people of all races in the lowlife of the fair. In the encounter between the "gross white man" and the coloured girl, what disgusts him is the obscene behaviour of the white man, who is clearly the aggressor, the sexual predator. Because of his automatic identification with the white man as a consequence of the colonial construction of the subject -- as with a putative fellow-gentleman -- his sense of selfhood is subjected to severe stress, and the splitting process which it is the concern of the remainder of the narrative to record, has begun. This process is outlined by Sander Gilman:

Because there is no real line between self and Other, an imaginary line must be drawn; and so that the illusion of an absolute difference between self and Other is never troubled, this line is as dynamic in its ability to alter itself as is the self. This can be observed in the shifting relationship of antithetical stereotypes that parallel the existence of "bad" and "good" representations of self and Other. But the line between "good" and "bad" responds to stresses occurring within the psyche. Thus paradigm shifts within our mental representations of the world can and do occur. We can move from fearing to glorifying the Other. We can move from loving to hating. (18)

Turbott Wolfe's experience will suggest that this affective reorientation is by no means as easily achieved as Gilman intimates; nevertheless, the next section of the narrative will register Wolfe's sustained moral shock at his incipient loss of a stable and coherent sense of identity, and record, in a series of encounters with other characters, his attempts at first restoring, then reconstructing his sense of self via identification with those characters.

IV Wolfe in Search of Social Distinction

Turbott Wolfe recalls that he now began "to concern [him]self with the colour of people's skins" (64), to interrogate the signifying capacity of skin colour; thereafter he will set about dismantling the colonial racial sign which forcibly yokes together colour and human worth.

Apparently as a consequence of his sympathy with the coloured girl at the fair, he finds himself "looking at the natives with new eyes" and suspects himself of "taking sides with them" (64). He is at once to have his suspicion confirmed and to be pushed further in this direction by the rudeness of a white acquaintance, who rejects the hand which Wolfe has extended in "an attempt to act the hearty Colonial" (64). To discover that he is already considered an outsider by his own caste is both shocking and obscure to him. In search of an explanation he approaches the missionary Karl Nordalsgaard, "the only white man of quality I had so far come across in Lembuland" (65). The answer Wolfe seeks is already implicit in this

discrimination, and is simply confirmed by Nordalsgaard's housekeeper Rosa Grundo:

"It is only jealousy. They know you are better than they are. That is all. It is the same with Mr. Nordalsgaard. They know he is better than they are, too . . . they know you have culture. They know they haven't." (65)

Most of the white colonials, then, are of inferior quality and possess the slave morality which for Nietzsche characterized the man of ressentiment, the man whose smouldering rancour can only "[say] No to what is 'outside', what is 'different', what is 'not itself' . . . this No [being] its creative act" (Nietzsche 112). There is ample precedent in nineteenth-century English fiction for the representation of class antagonism in these terms. One recalls, for instance, the would-be mutineer Donkin -- bitter and vengeful but cowardly, the very antithesis of the gentleman -- in Conrad's The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' (1897). The social distinction suggested by Rosa Grundo is subsequently confirmed by Wolfe's encounters with his neighbours Bloodfield and Flesher. Bloodfield is "an ugly fellow" without "manners or brains", "gauche", the expression on his face at one stage resembling that of a charwoman (69). Flesher is even less prepossessing:

I may be a coward myself, but I have never seen a man with smaller courage and less manliness about him. Everything to do with him was mean and puny and contemptible. He wore a beard and strutted like a mountebank (but without a mountebank's style) in breeches and leggings, carrying his five feet of wretchedness as though he wished you to believe that the responsibilities of a continent were transported about on those two thin legs . . . too poor a thing to be any man's friend . . . (72)

The conceptual vocabulary invoked by Wolfe in his condemnation of these men and their type derives from two interrelated sources. The first is the discourse of English class feeling, of gentility: woefully lacking in manners, courage and manliness, these men are not gentlemen. Having "never known a generous feeling or done a generous action in all their puny lives" (86), they are "mountebanks", false pretenders to the superior rank guaranteed by their skin colour in the colonial order. (We may recall that it is precisely this economy of distinction which informs Jan, an

Afrikander.) The second, related source is a symbolic discourse of the body, in terms of which what is honourable and noble is identified with the non-corporeal "upper body", the mind and heart, and what is base and contemptible with the (grossly) physical "lower body", especially the "lowest" stratum of concupiscible desire (we later learn that both Flesher and Bloodfield are casual "miscegenators"). The clearest indicators of this division are Flesher's name and his revolting appearance: "his blood must have been in a rotten state, for his face and hands were covered in scorbutic sores" (73). The relation between the discourses of the gentleman and the body is here negotiated by the trope of "blood" (cf. Bloodfield) in the figure of degeneration. While the original settlers and voortrekkers were "large gross" men and women (74), they had at least the distinction of their courageous enterprise as pioneers. As an original warrior class in Turbott Wolfe's version of colonial history, their circumstances mitigated their lack of the superficial requisites of an aristocracy: "guns served for grace, powder for polish, and meat for manners" (75). But their descendents had subsequently "degenerated, lacking balance, into poor whites" (75).

By distancing himself from these abject colonial wretches, Wolfe is substituting for the racial hierarchy of colonial Africa the discriminations of the late-Victorian social class system, overlaid with a veneer of the popular science of degeneracy. If the urban poor were commonly regarded as degenerates, Wolfe's bold move is to have found and identified the type not in the heart of Soho but in the supposedly wholesome colonial environment: "Give me a good old criminal lunatic any day," says Wolfe, "rather than ask me to breathe the same air as Flesher and Bloodfield" (73).

But because identity construction can only proceed by binary logic, the process of shifting the barrier line between Self and Other which began for Wolfe at Schonstein's Better Shows cannot simultaneously accommodate two alterities. And so we witness Wolfe's attempts to embrace the

conventional Other of colonial discourse, the native Africans.⁸ But alas, he finds himself poorly equipped for this challenge.

One of his difficulties is focused in his attempts to redefine the term "animal" as an epithet for the Lembus. After the encounter with Bloodfield and his sister-in-law causes a permanent estrangement between the men, Turbott Wolfe reflects: "I began to learn the hard lesson that in Lembuland it is considered a crime to regard the native as anything even so high as a mad wild animal" (71). But Wolfe's behaviour during the incident in question is revealing. When Bloodfield's sister-in-law has refused to pose for him alongside a "Native girl", Wolfe remonstrates with her: "Good Lord . . . what's wrong? I suppose the native girl is human?" But after the white woman has departed in high dudgeon,

The native girl came to me pathetically and sat down at my feet. I thought for a moment that she might compensate me -- but I suddenly felt as cold towards her as if she had been a monkey. I got up and walked away. (71)

Wolfe's championing of the idea of the Lembus' equal humanity is at this stage precisely that, merely an idea, an image -- in this case, the symbolic image of two women side-by-side, one white, one black. His real feeling seems to be that Africans are in some sense too different from him to be fully human. And we have been warned that this feeling is not going to change: when Wolfe the narrator has earlier recalled the work of Nordalsgaard, he has spoken without irony of "the half-awakening consciousness of the simian, mystical, child-like, man-like and woman-like obscure attractive soul of the African" (66). Wolfe nevertheless tries valiantly to accommodate this view of Africans within his changing axis of identification. Surrounded by so many sorry specimens of white humanity, he admires the "marvellous animal grace of each Lembu individual" (73); and a little later in the narrative, he approves d'Elvadere's readiness to shake hands with a native by imagining the probable response of Flesher and Bloodfield: "'Shake hands with a native!' they would have shrieked. 'Why they are just like animals!' If they are like animals, I reflected, in that is their chief charm" (87). But valorizing the animality of the Lembus to

thumb his nose at the likes of Flesher and Bloodfield is a far cry from accepting their full, equivalent, humanity. Wolfe's remark is really only a verbal trick which fails to transform his metropolitan condescension to the exotic.

And so Turbott Wolfe finds himself a victim of the antagonistic force-fields of two opposing alterities, being pulled first this way and now that in reaction to two kinds of otherness. "I turned my feelings", he explains, "in escape from the unclear idea of Flesher and Bloodfield, far too much into sympathy with the aboriginal" (73). It is a proximity that he finds overwhelming:

I was losing my balance. I remembered that every civilized white man, who considers himself sensitive, in touch with native peoples in his daily life should hold in his heart an image of the failure of Gauguin. Was it a failure? I asked myself: and in the question itself I suspected danger. I found myself all at once overwhelmed with a suffocating sense of universal black darkness. I was being sacrificed, a white lamb, to black Africa. (73)

Frightened at the prospect of "going native" and seeking to regain the "balance" of a stabilized identity, he permits the pendulum of his emotions to swing him back toward the white community at Aucampstroom.

V "Miscegenation" and Gentility, Dirt and Cleanliness

This time he explores -- via the Reverend Fotheringhay and his wife -- a different symbolic possibility for self-definition, but he is soon disappointed. Fotheringhay is little more than a caricature of "the type of old gentlemanly priest . . . stranded on the rock of his own consciousness in that bewildering sea that is life in modern Africa" (76). In the Fotheringhays' home in Aucampstroom, time has stood still and the passage of the years is measurable only in the thickness of the layer of grime accumulating on the front of Mrs Fotheringhay's dress and the Victorian bric-a-brac over which she presides. Wolfe will later reflect that although the Fotheringhays "had spent nearly all their lives in Africa, they had

never begun to think of Africa" (114). In its inward turning, its feeding for survival solely upon habit and memory, an obsolete idea of itself, the Fotheringhays' insular existence is presented as another type of degeneration (perhaps through the metaphor of inbreeding, the progressive depletion and enfeeblement of once vigorous stock). The domestic regime in the Fotheringhays' household is thoroughly carnivalesque, with the feeble-minded old couple entirely at the mercy of their cynically condescending servant Alice, who is steadily depleting their resources by making off with their silverware, a fork at a time.

But the Fotheringhays' dirt is not of the same order as Flesher's, being more a product of conventional literary metonymy than a metaphor for violent moral recoil. The Fotheringhays are "charming innocuous anachronisms" (114), and Wolfe's treatment of their shabby gentility is exuberantly satirical, yet affectionate, taking a Dickensian delight in the allegorical potential of the exaggerated detail (the reader's view of these characters might well be less benign):

There was no view from the window of the Rev. Justinian Fotheringhay's Dressing Room, because it was like an eye that is bleary. It seemed to have been deliberately tarred and feathered. The room was eerie with a greyish light, made stranger by the shifting layers, the drifts, the plumes and bouquets of dust that blurred every projection and filled every hollow. It seemed to me that the room was haunted. Something had died there, choked with dust -- perhaps an idea. (78)

The extinct "idea" is presumably that of the civilizing mission, the notion that Africa might be re-made in the image of England under Imperial dominion. (This may be one of several glancing references to Conrad's Heart of Darkness in the novel: one is reminded of Marlow's opening remarks about the importance of "an idea at the back of" colonial endeavour [Conrad, Heart of Darkness 32].) Later, Wolfe will reflect that

[t]here was a chance, at the time when the blacks were first taught to stop fighting, there was a chance then to build up a new Christianity. The right men could have built their New Jerusalem. I have seen not a little of the natives, and I have an immense faith in their character. But it is too late now. The missionaries brought them the sacrament, but I could give you more than one instance where they brought them syphilis too. (87-88)

The "idea" has long been suffocated by the venality and corruption spreading like a blight from European settlement.

At the Fotheringhays Wolfe has obtained temporary relief from his oppressive dilemma. But an incident occurs which drives him "thankfully to stay more contentedly at home at Ovuzane, watching and admiring the natives" (84):

I stepped off the stoep almost into the arms of a woman called Cossie van Honk, nicknamed locally Aucampstroom's Wife. Her nickname was a guide to her profession. She was the wife of the whole dorp. She wasn't an ordinary prostitute. She was as much a public institution as the Town Hall. In the warm dusk I saw that her wrinkled face was ghastly with cheap powder, heavy with paint, pouting vilely. A hideous mask. She stank of scent, and in the quiet dark street I heard as I stood the patter of her feet and the rustling of her silks, as she went deliberately and purposefully about her business, with a cachou on her tongue.

The greatest obscenity was that in the daytime she was a certificated midwife. (84)

Wolfe's seemingly exaggerated reaction to the woman is clearly symbolically charged. He is disgusted to realize how close he has come to being enfolded in the meretricious embrace of white colonial society. An index of the debased desire of the entire community, "Aucampstroom's wife" is a painted whore whose corruption is elaborately but imperfectly masked. No-one within the community is exempt, the passage implies, not even newborn babies, for their innocence is tainted at source by the touch of this singular midwife.⁹

"It was a very strong emotion", Wolfe concludes, "this spasm of disgust at close proximity to the creature. I may not be fastidious, but I hope I am clean" (84). This is the most direct expression so far of the symbolic polarities in terms of which Turbott Wolfe is groping for a social identity in Africa: cleanliness and dirt, purity and adulteration. They embody a perfectly straightforward moral opposition; what is perhaps not so immediately obvious is the precise nature of the filth that summons forth Turbott Wolfe's deepest disgust and assumes the unspeakable aura of the taboo.

The Schwerdts, Wolfe's nearest white neighbours, are indubitably the

most unclean characters that he has the misfortune to encounter (Mrs Schwerdt, Wolfe is later to discover without surprise, is a blood-relative of Cossie van Honk). Schwerdt's father had been "murdered by a native woman to whom he had given a disease that shall be nameless" (107). Schwerdt himself is "unclean", "meanly built", with "pale untrustworthy eyes . . . [and] a peculiar expression of cunning" (106). His wife is "gross, but handsome in an evil unhealthy way, with a very full, very loose mouth . . . [and] unaware of the uses of soap" (107). There are rumours that their home at Silver Hill, frequented by natives of "bad character", is "a house of ill-fame" (107). Wolfe eventually obtains proof of this via "a grimy shapeless parcel" (108) that he intercepts and finds to contain "certain illegal articles of commerce"; he is "aghast", feels "unclean from contact with the parcel" (109), and subsequently concludes:

I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that the house at Silver Hill had seen the most abandoned exhibition of the beast in man that I had ever heard of. I had got incontestable proof that the Schwerdts had mixed up with their filthiness various manifestations of the worst and most degraded aspects of certain old African customs connected with sorcery. (111)

It makes little sense to ask what the parcel actually contained, or in what "the most abandoned exhibition of the beast in man" consists. Like the "unspeakable rites" over which Conrad's Kurtz was wont to preside, it is not merely the narrator's sense of delicacy which spares us the details. For we have reached, to use Marlow's words, the "farthest point of navigation" of our narrator's moral imagination: the transgression of the most fundamental taboos upon which his sense of self, of his very humanity depends. Unlike Marlow, though, Wolfe's reaction is unambiguous, for Schwerdt is no hero of the questing human spirit and is alone accountable for "whatever powers of darkness had claimed him for their own" (Heart of Darkness 85).

Unclean, I said to myself, unclean. Now, at the first opportunity, I would 'interfere or intervene' on behalf of the natives. I felt that I did not care whether it should be openly or secretly. I felt ready to sacrifice a very great deal in order to preserve for the natives a little of the quality that had been almost lost to them before the combined ruthlessness of the poor white and the missionary and the official. The

unfortunate natives, as Nordalsgaard called them, had had their bodies and souls exploited too long. Frankness, innocence, dignity, quality -- were they to go down before the affected mincing tread of Flesher's canary legs? before the sub-bestial unimaginable indecency of a blear-eyed snotty-nosed Teuton? (111-12)

Schwerdt's crime, his "uncleanness", then, is that he is an exploiter, a corruptor of the natives. The chief expression of his filthiness is his lewdness: Schwerdt is a "miscegenator" who defiles the "purity" of the natives in the most intimate and degrading way. The intensity of the repugnance which Turbott Wolfe feels for missionaries and "poor whites" like Flesher becomes clearer, for all have abused their position of power to take sexual advantage of native women: the missionaries have given their converts the sacrament, but syphilis too (88); "even the immaculate Bloodfield had a black mistress and coloured children" (89).

Yet Wolfe's response to race-mixture is by no means unambiguous. The conflict of feeling which informs it will become clearer when we come to consider his abortive romance with Nhliziyombi, but a proleptic outline might be useful. Wolfe has attributed the moral shock he sustained at the fairground principally to the presence of people of mixed race and the threat of "a half-caste world" portended by the couple on the swing. There the shame of the identity which he shares with the "gross white man" precipitates a profound reassessment of his sense of self. And here his anger against Schwerdt is, at a largely unconscious level, similarly motivated. Schwerdt has let the side down, committed the generic crime of white men who "go native": he has exposed the moral frailty of his race and betrayed the values by which Turbott Wolfe defines himself as a representative of "civilization" in Africa.

The debate about the role of "civilization" in the "spoiling" of the natives was by the 1920s a hoary one in South Africa. One important aspect of it concerned the role of the "poor whites" in demeaning the prestige of the race and making the case for white supremacy less morally defensible.¹⁰ Another aspect was the universal preference of colonials for the "raw" native, and the blaming of their "corruption" on missionaries, liquor

traders or, more generally, on the impact of a civilization with which they were insufficiently "evolved" to cope (cf. Plomer's story "Ula Masondo"). For decades, liberal reformers had been invoking the notion of noblesse oblige to recall white South Africans to the moral responsibilities incumbent on them as representatives of a superior race.¹¹ The following extract from "An Open Letter to the White Boys of Natal" by Lewis Hertslet (author of The Native Problem: Some of Its Points and Phases [1912]) is typical:

you boys have work to do and a duty to perform that is given to nobody else in the world.

We Whites, in this Province, live among a million black people, most of whom are still savages, and thousands of whom are getting civilized.

Everyone of us has an influence for good or bad over all the Natives with whom we come into contact. From our speech and actions they get their idea of the "White man."

So, boys, it is our duty to treat them properly. If we are rude, or mean, or unfair, if we bully or kick them, they will naturally think that all white people are like that.

You are proud of being white, are you not? So am I. Well, let us see to it that we don't lower the good name by what we do and say to the Natives We must never forget that we are a part of the splendid British Empire, and to us has been committed the duty of doing all we can to uplift and help the backward races of the world. (Hertslet 141)¹²

This simple ethic of privilege and responsibility is in its essentials identical to that which informs Turbott Wolfe's moral indignation and resolve to act. He is outraged both by the way in which "unclean" whites have sullied the "purity" of Africans, and by the fact that, as a white man, he is implicated in this degenerative abrogation of racial responsibility. But his response to "Africa" remains deeply (and unconsciously?) ambivalent, even contradictory: for he now articulates his resistance to the spreading stain of "uncleanness" as a determination "that Africa should never master [him]" (118). Now the colonial violators are seen as the victims, "those who had been broken or beaten or besotted with the almighty violence of Africa" (117); the victim, Africa, becomes the violator whose sheer otherness has confounded the interlopers, "so many fish out of water":

I could see plainly that Tyler-Harries was in the same category as the Schwerdts, whose beastliness had been turned against

them by witchcraft: as the Fotheringhays, who had been drugged with Africa, so that their brains could not cope with it, caressing only the ghosts of memory and tradition: as Flesher and Bloodfield and their kind, whose vulgarity only emphasized the colossal disastrous significance of their background: as Nordalsgaard, whose conquests were like land reclaimed for a time, and afterwards choked with weeds. It was not the same with d'Elvadere, the voluptuous pioneer, who was his own master: it had not been the same with the voortrekkers -- only with their descendants, the poor whites, broken by colour, climate and disease. (117-18)

This narrative of colonial degeneration rehearses the larger narrative of the decline of the West popularized by Gobineau, Spengler and Nordau, a story of descent from greatness and of the progressive enfeeblement of European racial stock. It is noteworthy that the social and moral values deemed to have been threatened or obliterated in this process -- "[f]rankness, innocence, dignity, quality" -- though deemed to be the "natural" property, in the first instance, of the natives, are precisely those on which Howarth bases her construction of gentility in Jan, an Afrikander. For Turbott Wolfe (and Plomer), the only discourse of human quality available as an alternative to the colonial pigmentocracy is that of the gentleman and the British social class system generally. But whereas Howarth was concerned to valorize colonial dominion by "democratizing" gentility as the province of all English "colonists", Plomer is attempting exactly the opposite, to expose the absurd pretensions to superiority of colonial whites so as to redistribute "aristocracy" -- with the lion's share going to the Lembus. But before we investigate the rhetoric of this exposure and redistribution, some notice of Francis d'Elvadere, the one exception to Wolfe's catalogue of decline and defeat, is due.

The "voluptuous pioneer" is a solitary survivor of the noble warrior class of trailblazers and adventurers.¹³ His manners are "as ducal as his ancestry" (cf. 162), and his manliness declares itself in his huge frame and luxuriant copper-red moustaches (85). He is known as "old Frank", and his cardinal virtue is frankness, the direct sincerity which is the primary quality of a gentleman. And, as we noticed in the case of Reginald Carson

in Jan, an Afrikander, his perfect courtesy never betrays the condescension he feels in association with his inferiors. When d'Elvadere is introduced to Zachary Msomi, he "[shakes] hands with him quite frankly, as man to man" (86), which delights Turbott Wolfe; but he later gives his opinion on the "Native Question" as follows:

Never suppose that you can elevate the black man to your own level. You can't. I wouldn't give two straws for all this rubbish about 'uplift'. But it is very easy for a white man to lower himself to the level of the native. And, for that reason, do not allow yourself to believe that, because South Africa is painted red upon the map and has at present a white population of a million and a half, it is in consequence a white man's country. It is nothing of the sort. It can never be anything but a black, or at least a coloured man's country. (134)

D'Elvadere's view that South Africa is a black man's country anticipates the opinions of Mabel van der Horst and Friston (137), but with no overlay of principled egalitarianism. While he makes no bones about his belief that the white man's civilization is superior to the black man's, experience has taught him to recognize the relentless power of Africa to wither and destroy the European transplant. Thus he can endorse Friston's condemnation of the activities of Nigel Blades's Dark Continent Exploration Company (Rhodes's British South Africa Company) in Bladesia, but not for humanitarian reasons:

"I should call it the Dark Continent Exploitation Company. It's a blind alley. Can't you see that Blades is a murderer? He's helping to kill the white race."

"You mean the brandy-bottle?" they said.

"No," [d'Elvadere] told them, "I mean the excuses you bring forward for the brandy-bottle." (139)

D'Elvadere's point is that Blades is ruining the prestige of the white race by conducting his mercenary campaign in the name of the Civilizing Mission, and thus behaving in a devious, unscrupulous and ungentlemanly manner. It is worth pointing out that neither Turbott Wolfe nor the implied author allows an iota of irony to attach itself to d'Elvadere's words; nor is his authority as a character anywhere qualified in the narrative, from which we must assume that his patrician views carry authorial approval. By the time Wolfe takes his leave of the "mediaeval" (163) aristocrat, he is practically apotheosized: "a demigod", a "brooding titan" working the forge

with super-human strength (161).

As for the other whites, Bloodfield and Flesher are damned for their ill manners, indiscretion, meanness of spirit, hypocrisy and duplicity, a set of attributes which come to resort, as we have seen, under the label of "unclean". If, as was argued in the previous chapter, the primary quality in the representation of gentility is sincerity, then these men are clearly not gentlemen. The collocation and implied identity of uncleanness and shiftiness or insincerity (of Schwerdt, Wolfe says: "He, too, was unclean. Shifty." [106]) expresses a traditional metaphoric association of the immoral with the maculate and polluted. But its force, within the context of the social and political terrain mapped out by the novel, is more specific. The primary uncleanness of Schwerdt and company, their primary insincerity, is that they profess to a quality which they do not possess. Or rather, the colonial order confers on them -- automatically, by virtue of the colour of their skin -- a privileged status which they do not deserve and to which they have no legitimate title. I have already had occasion to remark that Turbott Wolfe's moral revulsion seems to derive its peculiar intensity from the shame he feels at being associated, via the badge of skin colour, with these men. By their very existence, the likes of Flesher undermine the integrity of Wolfe's sense of identity. Hence the urgent need for their othering, for their vigorous and (through narrative repetition) ritualistic expulsion from the field of the self.

In her famous anthropological study, Purity and Danger, Mary Douglas argues that "rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience" (2), and that "reaction to dirt is continuous with other reactions to ambiguity or anomaly" (5). This not only provides a useful psycho-anthropological explanation of Wolfe's recourse to the metaphorical binarism of filth and purity; it also warns us of the possibility that his attempts to deal with the split in his sense of himself and to restore unity to his experience might have a strongly recuperative or conservative as well as a radical tendency. In the novel, this conservatism is expressed

chiefly in Wolfe's persistent construction of the social field in terms of the discourse of British social class distinction. But the conservation of gentility, its redemption from adulteration, is not without its problems. For instance, in a contraction which serves -- whether consciously or not -- to disguise the class origins of the term, the idea of the gentleman is usually rendered in the narrative simply as "man". Thus Wolfe can say that "Flesher was too poor a thing to be any man's friend" (72), or that "there are a few men doing missionary work, but they are few and far between" (88, emphasis in original). The degenerate colonials, with their puny physiques and illiberal natures, are caricatures of unmanliness. The problem, as we shall see, is that gentility remains a culture-bound concept, dependent in part on manners and mores, and the Lembus are too "other" to be judged in terms of it. Their "nobility" is savage and instinctual; they are pure, but they remain essentially animals rather than "men".

VI Nhliziyombi and Wolfe's Temptation

After his close encounter with the execrable Cossie van Honk, Turbott Wolfe is glad to get back to Ovuzane. Assuring "William Plomer" that he had never "been really out of sympathy with the natives", but had simply found "their existence, their blackness, if you see what I mean" (85) too much for him, he can now countenance this otherness with an access of relief. Ironically on the day he learns that the Lembus have nicknamed him "Chastity", he finds himself strongly attracted to a native girl, "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" (87). As Cossie van Honk's symbolic antithesis, Nhliziyombi is "perfectly clean and perfectly beautiful" (88);

an ambassadress of all that beauty (it might be called holiness), the intensity of that old wonderful unknown primitive African life -- outside history, outside time, outside science. She was a living image of what has been killed by people like Flesher, by our obscene civilization that conquers everything. (89)

It is significant that the desirability of Nhliziyombi is from the outset pre-eminently a function of her remoteness from all that Wolfe has come to loathe about the colonial presence in Africa. This provides a sound prima facie basis for our argument that the trajectory of Wolfe's journey of self-discovery is ultimately reformist rather than revolutionary, driven, as we shall see, by the need to purge his social identity of unacceptable elements, and thus to recuperate it, rather than transgressively to abandon it.

Turbott Wolfe now finds his emotions in dire turmoil. He has fallen in love against his better judgement and is appalled at the puniness of the resistance his will is able to muster against the onslaught of his passions: "Reason is like an urchin making a long nose at Buckingham Palace. It is nothing but sheer bravado. Love is the king, inviolable within" (91). But whence this conflict of head and heart?

What I knew fundamentally was that if I abandoned my determination I should lose my own opinion of myself I was in love with Nhliziyombi not only against my conscience, but against my reason; against my intellect; against my plans; against myself to abandon myself to being in love with this so lovable woman would be to run counter to my vanity. That is where I want you to be quite clear. I saw that I should be sacrificing my own opinion of myself.

I suppose you think I mean that I was white and the girl was black. My good William Plomer, pray accept my assurances that that had nothing whatever to do with it. I am too much the humanitarian to be colour-blind. There was no question of pigment (I was in love, remember) but there appeared to be a great forbidding law, like all great forbidding laws, subcutaneous. Conscience, did I say? What had conscience to do with it? There may have been a mystery. There may have been an illusion. (92-93, emphases in original)

Despite his expressed desire to communicate his feelings at the time as clearly as possible, Turbott Wolfe is obliged to concede that there was something about them which continues to elude the ratiocinative net of retrospection. What are we to make of this "mystery", this "illusion"?

Wolfe would have us believe that his conscience is stricken because for him -- as the reluctant representative of an "obscene civilization" -- to pursue and consummate his attraction to Nhliziyombi would be to compromise her purity, to violate the "holiness" (89) of her noble

savagery. It would also be to render himself indistinguishable from the "gross white man" at Schonstein's fair, from Bloodfield and the other poor whites, "miscegenators" all. In this way, Wolfe's behaviour would "run counter to [his] vanity", would sacrifice his own high opinion of himself.

This is surely the first confirmation we encounter in the narrative that Wolfe's transgressive quest for an alternative personal identity is doomed. By effectively characterizing any erotic transgression of the racial divide as pollution, as sexual predation and despoliation, Wolfe is implicitly embracing the very identity conferred upon him by the colonial system which he has purposed to repudiate.

Part of the problem is that both Nhliziyombi's purity and Wolfe's desire for her are "overdetermined" in the realm of the socially and politically symbolic. Wolfe assures us that the Lembu girl is as chaste as a nun (92), although her purity as an "unspoilt native" is already symbolically guaranteed by his Romantic view of the primitive and his ethico-political discriminations of "cleanliness". Wolfe, of course, is also "clean", a monk to her nun: but his passion for Nhliziyombi is decidedly not chaste, a fact he prefers to convey obliquely in metaphor: "I longed to swim into a large smooth haven, and to drown the dangers of desire in the delights of content" (92). Although he speaks only of love, never of lust, it is the guilt of the very desire he has conceived for Nhliziyombi rather than the consequences of its consummation that afflicts his conscience. Part of Wolfe's dilemma, then, is that when his distribution of social identity according to an economy of moral hygiene is deployed within the boundaries of the individual body, the "lower body" function of sexual desire finds itself projected onto the "other" side, disowned by the ideal self. If we reflect for a moment on the extent to which this hierarchy is itself overdetermined by the division in official Christian morality between the "higher" and "lower" passions, and by post-Darwinian sensitivity to the continuity of human and animal life, we recover some idea of its authority and power. The self against which

Wolfe's desire for Nhliziyombi offends is conspicuously composite of "upper-body" attributes -- "my conscience . . . my reason . . . my intellect" (92) -- which he collectively styles his "vanity".

In one of the diary entries which he reads to "William Plomer" a little later, Wolfe evinces his awareness of this division within himself: "It is I that triumph and I that am bound captive to the wheels exultant" (italics in original); whereupon he demands of his listener,

Isn't it ludicrous to consider that it is possible for a man's vanity to be bound captive to the wheels exultant of his triumphing heart? It seems utterly absurd. Your civilization may be obscene, but it is remarkably intricate. (99)

"William Plomer"'s response is revealing, because it exposes the nature of the "illusion" that continues to cloud Turbott Wolfe's understanding of what it is that kept him and Nhliziyombi apart:

I was amused at the way Turbott Wolfe said "your civilization". It was no more mine than his: in fact, it was less mine than his. But I thought it would be unkind to remind the slave of the tyrant, and said no word. (99)

So mysteriously powerful does the veto on his attraction to Nhliziyombi seem to Wolfe that he is driven to abandon psychology for metaphysics, to supersede the authority of the individual conscience with that of a "great forbidding law", suprapersonal and universal. What he is unable or unwilling to recognize is that the law which interposes a "steely intangible barrier" (105) between the Lembu girl and himself is simply the official taboo against inter-racial sex of the colonial social order he so despises.

The "great forbidding law", whose intervention Turbott Wolfe experiences as the prompting of "subcutaneous" instinct, is the social equivalent of the paternal interdict. Explaining the utility of the body as an image in the representation of social identity, Mary Douglas points out that it is "a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (115). By proscribing sexual commerce with its Other, then, the colonial social order seeks symbolically to defend that boundary of its identity which it

perceives to be most threatened: the signifying capacity of skin colour.

If Wolfe's sense of the boundaries of his identity (as a gentleman) is imagined through the implied model of the body, we can see that the negating gesture, the expulsion of the filthy waste of Flesher, Schwerdt and company is a comparatively easy matter. But the absorption into the self of the hitherto external and Other is obviously quite another, because it involves not the defence of existing boundaries but their dissolution and reconstruction. Turbott Wolfe may imply that his fear of loving Nhliziyombi is the fear of contaminating her purity. Yet his real anxiety is aroused not by what may pass out from his body, but by what may invade it from without and wrest control of it. "Is it truly because I am afraid of myself that I am afraid of loving her?", asks Wolfe. "Is it not perhaps that I am afraid of her?" (95). Earlier he has described how he found himself "overwhelmed with a suffocating sensation of universal black darkness. Blackness" (73), coupled with a sense of "losing [his] balance" and "being sacrificed, a white lamb, to black Africa" (73). And later, as we have seen, he will articulate his resolve to embark on political action (somewhat surprisingly) in terms of a determination that "Africa should never master [him]", that he might "with moral violence . . . conquer Africa" (118). The remainder of the narrative will dramatize the hubris and miserable failure of his Imaginary ambition, which is nothing less than to re-make Africa in his own image, to annex the Other to the territory of the self. It is a profoundly imperialistic ambition, scarcely distinguishable from that of the missionaries and colonizers he so despises.

The class basis of Wolfe's project is perhaps most clearly revealed in a passage in Plomer's autobiography, in a sense parallel with the Nhliziyombi episode, in which Plomer describes how the free expression of his youthful feelings of "admiration and affection" for Africans was inevitably frustrated in South Africa by

the Berlin Wall of racial and social segregation which barred any but furtive or guilt-burdened intimacies. A feeling of guilt might arise, on the part of a white, from knowing that, presuming on his status, he was exercising, with impunity, some

sort of droit de seigneur. (South African Autobiography 166)

While the "steely intangible barrier" of Turbott Wolfe's "illusion" is here unmasked as "the Berlin Wall of racial and social segregation", the guilt associated with transgression is rationalized in much the same fashion as it is in the novel. One would not wish to abuse the power conferred by a privileged social status, to take advantage of the vulnerability of one's inferiors. ("How can I touch, perhaps to injure," asks Turbott Wolfe, "that frail divine humanity, or human divinity?" [95].)

Plomer's observation is precise and has considerable validity in explaining the awkwardness of condescension experienced by the liberal white in South Africa. But the implicit core of the passage is an acknowledgement of the impossibility of a genuinely intimate relationship between individuals across the colour bar. There is no concomitant attempt, of the kind we find in Turbott Wolfe, to redefine Africans as a natural aristocracy of "pure" blood, degenerate only in proportion to the degree of infection from white civilization. The only relationship possible is one analogous to the feudal class relationship of lord and vassal; to refrain from demeaning one's social inferior is simply a question of noblesse oblige.

The Nhliziyombi episode closes with Wolfe's discovery that the girl had all the while been "engaged to a man she loved" (103). He naturally declines to dwell on what this reveals of his own self-absorption, of his arrogant "imperialistic" assumption of her availability: that she was simply waiting upon her Master's pleasure, the reified vehicle of his desire, an externalized symbol of his psychic conflict.

The repressed ambivalence of Turbott Wolfe's feelings about inter-racial sexuality is soon to surface irrevocably, when the theoretical resolve which secures his founder-membership of the Young Africa Society falters and collapses before the fact of Mabel van der Horst's desire for Zachary Msomi.

VII "The emotional aspects of the colour-situation"

Writing in Voorslag in 1926, Roy Campbell praised Plomer for being the first South African writer to realise that "the 'native question' . . . is an emotional 'question' and not a political one" ("Significance of Turbott Wolfe" 40), and remarked that "[w]hat has made Turbott Wolfe such a portent is the manner in which Mr Plomer has seized on the emotional aspects of the colour-situation" (44). Many years later, in his "Conversation with My Younger Self", Plomer himself claimed that the novel's distinction lay in its realization that "racial relationships were not merely political or economic, but emotional" (Electric Delights 36).

Why Plomer here echoes Campbell so exactly is a matter for conjecture: perhaps the young writer did not have a clear idea of what his novel was about until his forceful friend did him the favour of enlightening him; perhaps Campbell's review was in part the result of discussion between the two men. At any rate, it is a judgement which has recently been contested by Matthew Shum, whose Master's thesis has furnished us with quite the most exhaustive account of the novel to date. From his materialist position, Shum excoriates both Plomer and Campbell for "sacralizing" the emotional at the expense of the economic and political, thus "mystifying the real historical forces at work in producing racial phenomena" (86-87). These remarks occur in the context of an argument which takes Plomer to task for the progressive "derealization" of the presented world in his novel. According to Shum, referentiality is all but swallowed up in an aesthetics of representation which endorses style as an end in itself. Although he later invokes Fredric Jameson's reading of Conrad to recuperate Plomer's project as a utopian gesture toward the "libidinal transformation of [a] . . . repressive reality," Shum's objection to Plomer's emphasis on "emotion" is bound up with, and might be reduced in essence to, the standard social-realist attack on Modernism; and I have no wish to enter those lists.

My own view is that in Turbott Wolfe Plomer puts his finger on a problem which although universal is apt to confront South Africans with particular force. And the problem is this: however conscientiously rational our moral and political convictions may purport to be, most of the time it is not reason that inspires and regulates our social and political behaviour. Elizabeth Thompson, in her recent essay on Plomer's poetry, puts this succinctly:

Plomer had the intelligence in his novel Turbott Wolfe to realise that liberal principles of non-racialism may not easily survive the test of actual individual experience in South Africa. (69)

Plomer arguably goes further, by suggesting that individual experience in South Africa is ultimately impossible, because the subjective quality of experience is itself determined somewhere beyond the volitional control of the individual. And it is this "somewhere", this other domain of influence, that Campbell chooses to label "emotion", thereby indicating its unarguable non-rational givenness.

Plomer's novel is still to be valued today for the witness it bears to the power of the "emotional" in the formation and maintenance of human identity. Turbott Wolfe is finally the tragedy of a man who comes to realise that his conscious will is no match for other forces that seem to emanate from an alien but more authentic self within. This is of course an insight we take to be quintessentially modern, capable of interpretation according to various psychological, sociological, ideological and institutional models of subject-formation. In Chapter 2 of this study I invoked an anthropological model in nominating the "ethnic imperative" as a given of human social behaviour. While I would not argue that the "emotion" at issue here is reducible solely to this imperative, clearly the two are related. In the novel, as we have seen, the character Wolfe finds himself impelled to repudiate his white colonial identity and subsequently to embark on a doomed transgressive quest for an alternative socio-cultural identity. But when he attempts to cross over to the natives with whom he sympathizes, he finds his way blocked by a "steely intangible barrier"

(105) comprising both the "great forbidding law" (93) against miscegenation and the "Hidden Force" of Africa -- which Wolfe experiences as "a suffocating sense of universal black darkness" (73), and which (however much we today object to the dehumanization of Africans the formulation implies) we would merely traduce with the bland label of "Otherness". Neither Plomer nor Campbell, particularly, would be at all surprised at the continuing frustration of the liberal narrative in South Africa by the resurgence of "irrational" ethnic chauvinism or "wanton" acts of violence and destruction, nor by the impotence of political leaders significantly to lead: as Campbell put it in his essay "Fetish Worship in South Africa", "The mass-leader only leads the mass in that he goes in front of it -- [harnessed] between the shafts" (5).

I propose now to have a closer look at the models of human psychology with which Plomer in his novel and Campbell in his review appear to have been working, so as the more sharply to define what they intended in their references to the "emotional aspects of the racial issue".

The first point to be made is that although both writers announce their acquaintance with Freud's work (Turbott Wolfe 213; Campbell, "Significance" 42), and despite the fact that recognizably Freudian themes are explored in Plomer's novel, neither writer is working with an explicitly or exclusively Freudian understanding of the psyche. Rather, Freud appears as a source primus inter pares, and he sometimes seems to be read through the filter of a range of slightly older and more thoroughly assimilated thought.

Campbell's view of human psychology seems to combine Nietzsche with Freud. This is not to say that either he or Plomer had necessarily read Freud; the ideas, as the phrase has it, were at that time "in the air":¹⁴

individually we see man as a creature, far more emotional than rational, trying to impose the laws of his reason on the more powerful emotions and lusts which tow him through life . . . a small and desperate figure warring with the titanic shadows of his own heredity, superstition and imagination. Collectively we see him as an irrational and purely emotional creature: capable of far greater acts of heroism and self-sacrifice: capable too of far more violent inconsistency, panic, cruelty and stupidity

-- than when considered individually. (Campbell, "Significance" 42)

For Campbell, the "emotional" interest of Turbott Wolfe lies not in the "family romance" of the individual but in the psychological dynamics of social or racial groups. Although he is writing some years before Freud's most memorable enquiries into group psychology, Civilization and Its Discontents (1930) and Moses and Monotheism (1939), it seems probable that he had encountered Freud's first statement of the "primal horde" hypothesis in Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921). In that work Freud noted that when an individual acted as member of a group, his "liability to affect becomes extraordinarily intensified, while his intellectual ability is markedly reduced, both processes being evidently in the direction of an approximation to the other individuals in the group" (33).

Apparently what Campbell values about Turbott Wolfe is the recognition it accords in its portrayal of race-relations to the determining force of supra-personal, collective instinct: what he calls elsewhere "group-sentiments", "the race-mind", "the mob-soul" ("Fetish Worship" 10, 11), and in the following excerpt, "crowd-emotions" (cf. "crowd-emotion" in Conway, 87 and passim):

Political histories are merely the spoor and dropping of those vast inscrutable impulses, the crowd-emotions These impulses are not rational they are generated emotionally and instinctively and they are as primitive as the bison-herd or the wolf-pack. It is these vast submerged emotions that make history; they surge through the minds of nations almost unconsciously ("Significance" 40)

(Campbell's prose is here driven at least in part by the modernist primitivism and vitalism of his own artistic project; he will go on to affirm that "It is only in the more individualistic walks of life that an outside view can be obtained of those terrific phantoms which mould the destiny of empires and peoples -- only in science, art or religion that we can escape far enough away from the collective emotions of humanity to be able to see what they really are" ["Significance" 41].)

What we find in Campbell but not in Freud is repeated reference to the categories of race and nation. Campbell's ideas on collective instinct

or "crowd-emotion" derive mainly from Gustave Le Bon (The Crowd, 1895), mediated through books like Martin Conway's The Crowd in Peace and War (1915) and Wilfred Trotter's Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War (1916), as well as other late nineteenth-century thinkers inspired by Darwin's synthesis of evolutionary theory.¹⁵ Much of this work -- Le Bon's elaborate theorization of the "hierarchy of races" in The Psychology of Peoples, for instance -- was saturated in the biologized world-view of Social Darwinism (cf. The Crowd 38-39, 81-82); but Campbell ("to his credit", as we like to say), while recognizing the importance of race as a source of group identity, explicitly refuses any racial qualification to his theory. In fact his notion of the tribal determinism of "emotion" is sufficiently rigorous for him to take Plomer to task for the satirical excess of his "strong bias against the white colonist" ("Significance" 41), on the ground that "we in our mental bondage are almost as much the victims of circumstance as the natives in their physical bondage" (42).

Turning to Turbott Wolfe, it is not only the automatic racial prejudice of characters like Flesher, Bloodfield and Soper that Campbell's notion of collective instinct helps to "explain". It is also crucial to an understanding of what happens to Wolfe, the politically committed member of the pro-miscegenation Young Africa society, when he discovers that a white woman of his acquaintance is sexually attracted to a black man:

I did not seem so much to be seized with a mental realization of a plain fact as with a cold physical terror. I was intestinally sick, as at a catastrophe. It was clear that Mabel van der Horst was attracted, how slightly it was hard to measure, towards Zachary Msomi. It was one thing to talk glibly about miscegenation, to fool about with an idea, and another to find oneself face to face with the actual happening
(142)

Plomer's evocation of the gut-level at which the sanction of social taboo operates is both vivid and authentic: Wolfe is overcome by a "crowd-emotion" so immediate and seemingly instinctive as to bypass his conscious mind.¹⁶ The gap between emotion and intellect or will, which began with Wolfe's "falling in love" with Nhliziyombi, and which will increasingly be rendered in the narrative as (analogous with) the split between unconscious

and conscious, has with the discovery of Mabel's attraction to Zachary opened irreparably for him. That the "unconscious" race-emotion has finally burst into consciousness does not of course affect its potency one iota. This is how the character Ford in Perceval Gibbon's novel Margaret Harding describes the irresistible sway of the same "crowd-emotion":

Well, the ordinary person knows all right that a matter of tar-brush in the complexion doesn't make such a mighty difference in two human beings. He sees they're both bustling along to be dead and done with it as soon as possible, and that they'll turn into just the same kind of earth and take their chance of the same immortality or annihilation -- as the case may be. He sees all right; he even sees a sort of romance and beauty in it, and makes it welcome when it doesn't suggest the real thing too clearly. But all that doesn't prevent him from barring niggers utterly in his own concerns. It doesn't stop his flesh from creeping when he reads of the woman in Cape Town, and imagines her sitting on the Kafir's knee. And it doesn't hinder him from looking the other way when he meets her in the street. It isn't reason, I know. It isn't human charity. But it is a thing that's rooted in him like his natural cowardice and his bodily appetites. (195)

Although Wolfe's thinking and behaviour from this point on veer unpredictably between the irrational (e.g.153) and the cynically disillusioned (e.g.199-200), it is his friend and alter-ego Friston who actually goes mad. Friston's dementia has been catalyzed by consumption of the native narcotic "S---.", but its theme is the shock of his loss of Mabel to Zachary. In Friston's schizophrenic ravings -- "'You call yourself Friston? Let me introduce you to the other Mr Friston'" (167), etc. -- Plomer deftly dramatizes the split between reason and "emotion" at the heart of Wolfe's own dilemma and exposes the sham of his psychological integrity:

"As for you, Wolfe, you ought to be called Sheep. You don't believe one thing you think. I don't believe one word you say. O, you slimy coward. Your God's Fear. So is mine. But wait till you see 'HORROR,' my child, written on the sun." (168)

There are two passages in the novel, however, in which Wolfe and Friston actually discuss aspects of psychology. In the first, Wolfe responds to Friston's forecast of a racially mixed world by pointing out that "psychologists say that there is in the white race an unconquerable aversion from colour" (138). Friston replies: "My prophecies belong . . .

to the world of dreams, which is the actual world In this I see no call for reason. It is not a rational matter, but an emotional" (138).

The collocation of dreams with the domain of affect or intuition -- as Friston later terms it, "understanding with the nerves" (138) -- and its equation with the "actual", evokes the Freudian primacy of the instinctual Id, and even bizarrely anticipates Lacan's label for the unconscious, the Real.¹⁷ Despite its opaque exorbitance, Friston's divination does have a central theme, however, and this concerns "the slow birth of the individual . . . [who] is emerging with infinite travail from the womb of time" (138).¹⁸

This is the basic phantasy of "progressive" creeds, including liberal humanism as well as Bolshevism; a vision of the ultimate triumph of reason as the individual (whom Campbell allowed to be the defender of rationality against the herd instinct of the tribe ["Significance" 43]), his blood presumably sufficiently diluted through race-mixture, is eventually enabled to shrug off the emotional tyranny of the "race-mind" or "mob-soul" and become the enlightened master of his own destiny. The narrative is essentially modern but in some respects pre-Freudian: there is the appeal to blood as the guarantor of collective identity, while the instinctual programming suggested by the phrase "understanding with the nerves" recalls the severely physiological emphasis of nineteenth-century psychology (c.f. W.B. Carpenter's Mental Physiology [1874]); and the notion of a long upward struggle toward self-consciousness evokes an evolutionary framework for Friston's "vision" with Hegelian rather than Darwinian or Freudian overtones.

The second exchange occurs after the wedding between Mabel and Zachary, at which the Reverend Friston has delivered a sermon. The sermon itself originally ran to fifteen pages in Plomer's manuscript, but was cut completely at the suggestion of Hogarth's Leonard Woolf and has not survived (Alexander 86). The editorial intervention may have been artistically right, but one suspects that the reader's hermeneutic task

would have been greatly facilitated had the sermon been retained, because we gather that it took for its theme the subject of "habit and instinct".

Here Turbott Wolfe tells Friston what he thought of the sermon.

"It was a hazy mixture of sophistry, confused thinking and Bolshevism. I don't know what on earth you mean by all that about habit and instinct. After all, what are instincts but concentrated subconscious hereditary habits? It seems to me that instinct is only a higher form of habit, instead of something quite opposite, as you seem to suggest." (186)

The relation between habit and instinct in the determination of human subjectivity was widely canvassed by natural historians and psychologists in the late nineteenth century. A typical study was Lloyd Morgan's Habit and Instinct (1895), which works upwards from the migratory habits of birds to the human species. Both Morgan and William James in Principles of Psychology debate at length Lamarck's theory, propagated in the English-speaking world by Herbert Spencer, that evolutionary change included the inheritance of acquired characteristics; that is, that acquired habits could be passed on to offspring as instinct. Both writers joined a growing consensus in rejecting the notion on empirical grounds (see James 2.678-88; Morgan 323-46). Plomer may have enjoyed the irony of providing his protagonist with a by then widely discredited theory, although some years later he was to endorse an essentially Lamarckian view of the relation between heredity and environment (Double Lives 234-35; see below). But there is another, quite different agenda implicit in Turbott Wolfe's remark.

Friston has in his sermon presumably sought to sanction the marriage as a triumph of (natural or God-given) "instinct" over the (man-made) "habit" of racial prejudice and segregation. Wolfe's inversion of this priority recasts instinct as a habit become so habitual over time as merely to seem innate and therefore natural. The implication is that while Wolfe can on one level accept that the "great forbidding law", threatened by his attraction to Nhliziyombi and broken by Mabel and Zachary, is only a matter of social "habit", he has discovered to his cost that its sanction has all the authority of instinctual veto. And if obedience to instinct may be

legitimated by appeal to Nature, so too may conformity with habit.

This is obviously a profoundly conservative perspective appropriate to a character whom the narrator has earlier described as the "slave" of Western civilization (99). Moreover, Turbott Wolfe here seems to express a point of view shared by Plomer himself which, by the time he came to write his autobiography, he could conceptualize as "determinist":

It seemed to me that the world was ruled by natural laws, some of the less important of which were known, and though even these, in their purpose, were incomprehensible, one had to accept them without enquiring too vainly into their significance It is not habit that makes the world go round, but habit is an expression of the forces that do, and in the balance or conflict of opposing or varying forces [the determinist] seeks to discover evidence of the design of life. (Double Lives 234, 235)

What both Wolfe in the novel and Plomer here imply is that both habit and instinct give expression to natural law, which is simply given and more-or-less inaccessible to reason. Plomer's reference to habit seems to echo William James's famous tribute to the power of habit in his functional view of psychic adjustment -- e.g. "Habit is thus the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent" (1.121) -- and to endorse James's argument both that people are endowed with an over-supply of often competing instincts, and that it is the essential function of habit to inhibit and regulate instincts (2.383-441).

For Friston, the marriage of Mabel and Zachary symbolizes a grand reconciliation of opposites:

"I look forward to the great compromise between white and black; between civilization and barbarism; between the past and the future; between brains and bodies; and, as I like to say, between habit and instinct." (188)

Friston's determinedly optimistic vision of the demise of the colour bar envisages also a general healing of division through the convergence of opposing forces (some of which are definitionally mutually exclusive). It is worth noting that in Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud was to argue that civilization was maintained at the necessary cost of a massive and sustained repression of the instinctual drives ("barbarism", "bodies", "instinct"); so that Friston's hoped-for "reconciliation" is, like his

Bolshevism, pure Utopian phantasy.

Turbott Wolfe's dismissal of this vision seems -- in context -- perfectly sound. The oppositions which Friston nominates are all versions of the basic hierarchy according to which Wolfe's sense of self is differentially constructed. In their dissolution he decries not compromise but defeat, loss of control, self-annihilation. A child of his time, the conceptual figure in terms of which he naturalizes Friston's prophecy is the post-Darwinian trope of degeneration and atavism. White will be swallowed up by black, civilization will regress to barbarism, the present will return to the past. And he does not need J.A. Froude to remind him, via Friston, that "the morality of habit, though the most important element in human conduct, is still but a part of it" (189). For above all, he has learnt from his own bitter experience of the puniness of rational volition when it is pitted against the instinctual urges of the body (his love for Nhliziyombi -- "I am bound captive to the wheels exultant [of desire]" [99], etc.). But greater than either, it seems, is the suprapersonal force of the "crowd-emotion," of habit-instinct, intervening in Wolfe's narrative as the "steely intangible barrier" of a "great forbidding law."

Wolfe eventually leaves Africa a broken and beaten man. His various attempts to realize himself in engagement with the Other -- Africa, Nhliziyombi, the collectivity of political activism -- have all failed; he is left to confirm his own despised existence reflexively, in the mirrored prison of the self. His life has come full circle to the condition of terminal isolation -- "as lonely as it is possible to be" (58) -- in which he languished at the outset of the narrative. He resigns his fate to the "invisible constructor of [his] life" (58), because he has learned, in the words of Friston's poem, that

Time will not give what time has lacked.
I am constrained to play a part --
An actor, only free to act. (216)

All that remains for him are "illusions" (200), because he has learned that he has no real control over his own destiny: that the deepest, most

powerful forces which author the script of his life are not his to command.

This is the dark side of Plomer's "determinism":

If I must give myself a label, I will call myself a determinist. When, in Japan, one is woken up in the night, as often happens, to feel the house rattled or rocked by an earthquake, one does not shout or even murmur that one is the captain of one's soul. An interest in heredity and some perception of its power would in any case have prevented me from believing much in the independence or self-command of the individual. Heredity makes a man what he is, and what is environment but a phase of heredity? (Double Lives 234-35)

To describe environment as a phase of heredity is presumably to invoke again the conservative power of habit as the arch-determinant of human capacity.

It is perhaps important to emphasize that we are not here countenancing a version of racial determinism -- in the late nineteenth-century sense of a set of biological imperatives -- but rather a recognition of the power of "habit" predicated on filiation to social and cultural institutions. If this is the "truth" of "the emotional aspects of the colour-situation" that Turbott Wolfe has to offer, then it is a sombre truth, to be sure. But it requires qualification.

VIII The "Hidden Force"

Turbott Wolfe is, of course, an inveterate creator of symbols, in the terms of whose lurid, larger-than-life patterns of signification he finds it easier to make sense of his experience. For instance, his multifarious, even contradictory intimations of the otherness of Africa and Africans are -- in the meditation consequent on the Schwerdt incident -- forced together under the rubric of "the almighty violence of Africa", "that violence which was the tropical thunderstorm raging on the roof; which was the grace of Zachary; the beauty of Nhliziyombi; and even the trustworthiness of Caleb" (117).¹⁹ This "violence" Wolfe comes to recognize as the invisible signature of every human activity in his African world, whether personal, social or

political: like the submerged section of an iceberg, its very existence is an ironic mockery of the visible or rational, defining the limitations of the latter's claim to represent the real. As what Wolfe, quoting Louis Couperus, calls "the hidden force", it presides at Nordalsgaard's wedding reception:

But above the droning could be heard, with a distinct and awful and unceasing significance, the loud roar of *chãos*. And there could be felt that which Couperus found in Java, weighing down on his senses, "the hidden force". (129)

Nordalsgaard's marriage, both for Wolfe and for the old missionary, is a mournful occasion celebrating nothing but the waste of forty years' futile endeavour. In an atmosphere of debased ceremony and asinine conviviality, in a room distinguished by "a secret accumulation of dirt", Wolfe is "suddenly filled with the madness of vision":

What was it before me? The encroachment of Africa? Was it not the nineteenth century, slowly distintegrating? The eighteenth, the seventeenth century; the Middle Ages? This old man was time. He was more than time. He had set out once, how finely. He had been purposeful. O, he had gone out with gifts and weapons, this man. His blood had been tradition; his brain, knowledge; his body purpose. He had gone out, this old man, this old-world man, with a deliberate, elegant, mincing step to conquer Africa, to conquer the world, to conquer time. It was not a wreck: you could not call it a failure, this. It was defeat. (128)

In Wolfe's devastating vision, Nordalsgaard's life incarnates European history meeting its doom in Africa: its nemesis, its carnivalesque antithesis, its ultimate Other. Like the S.S. Titanic, the ship of Europe's destiny has foundered on a fatal object lurking in the sea of time, the Dark Continent: centuries of progress and tradition are undone in a defeat as comprehensive as it is final and irremediable.²⁰ Plomer's judgement on the failure of the "civilizing mission" responds to Marlow's remark about another disabled European vessel in *Heart of Darkness*: "I did not see the real significance of that wreck at once" (49); it also anticipates V.S. Naipaul's sombre vision of the failure of the West in Africa in *A Bend in the River*.

But Wolfe is not yet done with Nordalsgaard:

So he had come to the wilderness then, and now he was weeping

with childlike rage and fear; with the ineffectual, the disillusioned, the unnoticed, the helpless, the hopeless, the uncontrolled, the quiet and utterly abandoned despair of old age. What had he done? What had he done? He had wounded history. The high-bred gentlemen had left for his monument Olaf Shaw, a middle-class half-caste, second-rate. And what else? (128-29)

That the embodiment of the wound sustained by history in the example of Nordalsgaard should be the issue of his loins, the half-caste Olaf Shaw, is entirely consonant with the figure of degeneration in terms of which the European presence in Africa is naturalized throughout the novel.

"Miscegenation" is in the first instance the sign of dynastic carnival, where in the embrace of its other the self finds itself othered -- ludicrously compromised, confused, parodied, inverted and perverted -- where the boundaries of heritage blur and dissolve in "chaos".

Of course, for Wolfe it remains emblematic of desire as well as danger, the desire for the other concentrated in his passion for Nhliziyombi and frustrated by the "great forbidding law" of the culture he has attempted to disown. The prospects for Wolfe's attempt to strike back at history through the Young Africa movement are hardly promising, then, since it is predicated on a double repression, a rationalization of the taboo which forbids the fulfilment of his own desire coupled with a recognition that that desire is itself an affront to the history it would save or amend. Thus when the repressed returns with the revelation of Mabel's affair with Zachary, Wolfe finds himself becoming increasingly irrational and racially paranoid. Observing Soper's child at play, he reflects:

Soper's child was playing on a dungheap with a little native boy, his small mean soul getting coloured with the monstrous intangible darkness of the native point of view. The child was in danger. His birthright was being sold over his head. (153)

Such racist metaphysics would have been unthinkable for Wolfe before this crisis. The description of Soper's child is juxtaposed with a bizarre invocation of the uncanny. Wolfe looks up and catches sight of an empty rocking chair on the verandah moving "as one moves in a tearless grief":

Unfortunate chair; what was moving it so? It was not this

slightest of winds. No, it must be one of those stranger winds that rise and lapse in the imagination, stirring with the slightest uneasy wings something that cannot reveal itself, something supernatural. (153)

The "hidden force", presumably. While the very physical world is starting to dance to the mad tune of Wolfe's imaginings, his friend and alter-ego Friston has collapsed in a state of utter derangement. Friston's ravings act out the state of Wolfe's psyche: for example, the hallucination in which he opens Pandora's box, while the portraits of his ancestors look on in dismay; the imagery of the steam-organ and merry-go-round (181), the kaleidoscopic chaos of the fair. Significantly, Turbott Wolfe's narrative closes with a similar invocation of carnivalesque disorder, the mountains "turning and turning like roundabouts as the train turns round and about. They are turning on turntables. The moon and a few stars are flying and turning" (211).²¹

But if the narrative ends with Wolfe fleeing to Europe, utterly confounded by the baneful "hidden force", Plomer's attitude -- the implied authorial attitude informing the text as a whole -- remains elusive and equivocal. It is impossible to attach anything approaching a precise meaning to the thing named as the "hidden force". The quotation from Couperus's novel of that name (De Stille Kracht) which serves as epigraph to Turbott Wolfe suggests that the hidden force is the moral authority secretly commanded by the native, as he cynically and ironically goes through the motions of servitude, biding his time. Elsewhere in Couperus's novel, as Plomer himself noted in his 1945 tribute, the phrase connotes the hatred and political retribution invited by imperialistic oppression, the inevitable accountability which shadows its every measure. It is also used to evoke the sheer impenetrable otherness of the "subject race":

deep in its soul, despite a cringing reverence, it lived in freedom its own mysterious life, hidden from western eyes, however these might seek to fathom the secret (quoted in "Louis Couperus" 63)

And finally the hidden force describes something occluded from or denied by the Westerner's consciousness, "things stronger than the human will and

intellect" (quoted in "Louis Couperus" 62). It is this last sense which seems particularly apposite to our reading of Turbott Wolfe's experience, especially as it is formulated by Plomer in his own summary of the predicament of Couperus's protagonist: "A man, a thoroughly just and estimable man, like van Oudijck, denies the alien, the unconscious, the uncomfortable, and in the end they break him" ("Louis Couperus", 65). Turbott Wolfe, too, is broken by something beyond the demesne of his conscious volition. And our reading has attempted to show how the narrative tries valiantly to restore the "hidden force" to its proper place (?) within the white colonial psyche, from whence -- as "the image of all that was natural and rejected" (van der Post 43) -- it has been projected onto the African Other. In this perspective, the hidden force comes to be associated with "the great forbidding law" of social taboo, the "habit" to which Wolfe can give no other name than "instinct". But in the novel the hidden force is most obviously identified with the mysteriously alien, the externally Other, the "universal black darkness" which threatens Wolfe with suffocation (73). And in the scene in which the phrase actually appears, with due acknowledgement to Couperus, the hidden force is associated with "the loud roar of chaos" against which Nordalsgaard's efforts have proved futile, the mysterious destructive presence which promises to confound the whole history of Western civilization.

It is possible, I suppose, to dismiss this vision as the hallucinatory product of the disordered nerves of a fictional character, and keep Plomer out of it. This is admittedly the view encouraged by the brisk corrective to Couperus's excesses delivered in his essay on the writer: Plomer allows that the Dutch novelist might

take too extreme a view of the incompatibility of the natives of the East Indies and their white rulers; and that he comes perilously near the claptrap about East being East and West being West and the twain never meeting. The answer to that claptrap is that they'd better meet, and until they do there'll be trouble; and that they must meet on the ground of their affinities, their common human nature, which is far more important in the long run than their differences. ("Louis Couperus" 64)

And we have to remember that, while Plomer apparently shared his fictional character Wolfe's sense of personal helplessness in the face of the "colour-situation" in South Africa, he did dramatize that character's specific weaknesses and limitations, and offered as an antidote the fearless goddess-like figure of Mabel van der Horst. And van der Post reminds us of the demystifying impact of Turbott Wolfe as a novel in which black people for the first time

take their place in their own right as individual human beings beside the white persons in the story. Some people in Europe today might think that this was obvious enough; but forty years ago it was a pioneering achievement of courage and originality as great as any in our history. ("Introduction", Turbott Wolfe 33)

Yet one cannot help recalling the abiding images of the "complex and violent revelation" of Africa (South African Autobiography 179) to which Plomer returned in later years, images of something monstrous, barbaric, beyond the ken of the European mind: the bloated corpse of the black woman hurled downstream by a river in flood (in the poem "The Scorpion"); or the story, recounted in the Autobiography, of the African woman who, desperately ill and maimed by small pox, is driven from her home by her relatives and gives birth alone at night in the bush, only to have her child dragged from her arms and devoured by a hyena (South African Autobiography 179-80).

The grotesque scale of the horror and human suffering here, Plomer implies, is such as almost to defeat the sympathetic imagination. He comments:

This hellish happening has fixed itself in my mind as an image of Africa, almost as clearly as if it were a memory. It is easy enough to remember the wrongs of Europe's incursions into Africa -- the slave trade, commercial exploitation, racial contempt, and social injustice: but it is as well to remember that the wrongs done by Africans to Africans, out of greed, cruelty, callousness, superstition, and ignorance, are beyond computing. What seems to me now far more worth remembering is all that has made less likely the solitude of that woman under the tree -- compassion, charity, disinfectants, education, art, literature, even a measure of lawncorder; the idea of personal responsibility; the lives given to understanding, to forgiveness, to moral and material betterment; the scope given to pleasure and playfulness; the grounds given for hope. (180)

The fact is that Africa never became sufficiently "civilized" or "ordinary" for Plomer: in his autobiography he makes it clear that he felt a perpetual outsider there (South African Autobiography 11), and had no option after leaving but to devote himself to the acquisition of a thoroughly English identity. And yet what he most despised about white South African society and colonial life generally was precisely its attempt to make Africa ordinary, its arrogant refusal to be intimidated by, or even to acknowledge, the sheer difference of the land and its people.

Conversely, Plomer's somewhat unfashionable tribute to the civilizing achievements of colonialism does serve to remind us that, while his first novel is a violent ejaculation of outrage and protest, it is also an ironic elegy for what van der Post calls "the failure of an important aspect of civilization in Africa" ("Introduction" 47), not unmixed with regret for what might have been. Plomer satirizes the hypocrisy and turpitude of white colonials not out of any hope that they will mend their ways, but in a spirit of repudiation and personal disavowal. As Frank d'Elvadere puts it in the novel, what is being done in Africa in the name of white civilization is both shaming and dangerous because it is "helping to kill the white race" (139), to undermine its self-respect and destroy its prestige. (There is no doubt that Plomer inherited and adhered to a belief in the natural ascendancy of a mandarin class, access to which was at least facilitated by biological pedigree.) Perhaps the most telling image in the novel of this wholesale dereliction of noblesse oblige is the scene witnessed by Turbott Wolfe while paying a visit to the Fotheringhays:

Out of the window I could see two little unwashed white girls, four or five years old, mocking at a drunken native in the street.

"That is why this is going to be a black man's country," I suggested to the Rector. (113)

The implication is that this could have been a white man's country (too), if only white men had all been gentlemen and comported themselves with the decency apposite to their civilized heritage.

Thus while the white colonial reader will not find in the pages of

Turbott Wolfe any neat solution to the problem of how to be in Africa, neither will he find (as Plomer's South African contemporaries apparently did) only abuse and despair. There is in the end considerable authorial sympathy for the fate of the protagonist, a man equipped with the best intentions in the world who yet finds it impossible to escape the limitations of a socially constructed identity (which he construes as the doom of an implacable alterity). Turbott Wolfe's heroic failure is an object lesson in the power of social and political institutions to shape the lives of individuals, and as such strikes a peculiarly contemporary note. All that the white colonial reader might hope to salvage from this lesson is a purified, reconstituted idea of himself and the responsibilities which this idea entails -- the notion of a human status won over centuries of civilized endeavour, not lightly to be squandered in the degeneracy fostered by the artificial privilege of colonial life. For the South African reader of today, the example of Turbott Wolfe provides a useful caveat. We are reminded that in the extract from Margaret Harding quoted earlier, the character Ford was giving the view of a self-confessed "ordinary person" (195), and Margaret warns him that they are going "to quarrel before long":

"Oh!" said Ford. "Why's that?"
 "Because you're such an ordinary person," retorted
 Margaret. (196)

In times of rapid social change, "habit" -- in the guise of what we might prefer to call cultural identity -- wields great conservative and even reactionary power through the emotions of ordinary people, and should not be underestimated. But perhaps a realistic awareness of just how extraordinary a transgressive adjustment is required will render that adjustment more conceivable, and help avert the cynical disillusion that overtakes poor Turbott Wolfe.

NOTES

1. For instance, The Nation found the book "Volcanic, disturbing, almost devastating" (quoted in Alexander 96); Plomer himself seemed well satisfied with another critic's judgement that the world of the novel was one "of shattered perspectives and perverse stimuli, of lascivious gods and outer darkness" (Double Lives).
2. Peter Alexander comments that in Turbott Wolfe Plomer "was in fact attacking something of himself" (100).
3. Compare the Comaroffs' description of Ludorf's project at Thaba 'Nchu:

he joined in the task of making Thaba 'Nchu into a new Eden, replete with cultivated gardens and fenced properties, printing press and pulpit, and other accoutrements of yeoman life -- indeed, into a "perfect republic of peasants" reminiscent of Wordsworth's romantic idyll. (210)
4. Plomer's letters to Munro, a prominent man of letters associated with the Georgian poetry movement, are held at NELM. The eagerness with which the young writer reaches out from his colonial obscurity for intellectual companionship, the gauche self-consciousness with which he voices his need for recognition, are so intense as to make painful reading.
5. This central trope of colonial discourse has been incisively indicted by Johannes Fabian in his historical account of anthropological theory, Time and the Other.
6. From Judy Frenkel's admission that "he wore no underclothing" (62) to Wolfe's attention to "the tip of [the girl's] mulberry-pink derisive tongue" (64), it is clear that we have entered the underworld of the lower body.
7. In a useful discussion of Plomer's sexuality, Alexander notes that "[h]e had always been attracted to those he considered his social inferiors, whether Zulus or his Japanese pupils" (168). In his sexual response to the appeal of difference coupled with power, Plomer was typical of upper-class British homosexuals of his time (e.g. J.R. Ackerley, Stephen Spender), who invariably sought out youthful, working-class consorts.
8. Malvern van Wyk Smith suggests that the manoeuvre of playing off "noble savages" against degenerate whites is traceable at least as far back as Barrow (see Grounds of Contest 4).
9. Compare William Blake's "London":

But most thro' midnight streets I hear

How the youthful Harlot's curse
 Blasts the new-born Infant's tear
 And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

10. Compare this extract from the Annual Report for 1929 of Dr J.T. Dunston, South African Commissioner for Mental Hygiene:

The tendency of one socially and spiritually bankrupt to gravitate towards inferior racial levels i.e. coloured and natives, is a feature that has often been observed. Now the South African born rightly regards himself as separated from the coloureds and the natives by an unbridgeable gulf created in the history of our country and our people. When therefore we find some of our poor mixing intimately with these inferior ethnic types, we may justifiably conclude that they by doing so sacrifice the heritage of race through a certain community of interests with them. It will thus be seen that Mental Hygiene concerns itself with much more than mere intelligence and mental deviation. It deals with economic inadequacy, social mindedness and adaptation to approved standards of living. (cited in Foster 18)

11. Compare this extract from an unsigned editorial piece which appeared in The Christian Express in 1911:

Now what is it that differentiates between the civilization of the European and the Native? Is it not that the European has many generations of a high civilization behind him, a civilization which owes most that is morally high and worthy in it to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. From this source come the noblesse oblige, the "decency forbids", which, notwithstanding the many breaches, are the compelling and restraining forces operating in Christendom today. ("Who 'Spoils' the Raw Native?" 51)

12. Compare the companion piece by Hertslet's wife Jessie, "An Open Letter to the White Girls of Natal".
13. In The Descent of Man, Darwin spoke of "the restless who will not follow any steady occupation -- and this relic of barbarism is a great check to civilization -- [who] emigrate to newly-settled countries, where they prove useful pioneers" (quoted in Tanner 137).
14. We know that even during his sojourn at Marsh Moor in the Stormberg, Plomer was kept in touch with the latest artistic and intellectual trends abroad through correspondence with his old school friend Darcy Gillie (Alexander 59-60).
15. Campbell refers to "the work done by Sir James Frazer, Freud, Trotter, Le Bon and others" ("Significance" 42).
16. There may be evidence here that Plomer was familiar with William James's Principles of Psychology (1890), because the description

reads like a text-book illustration of the James-Lange theory of emotions: that emotions are preceded and therefore caused by physiological, nervous processes and not mental or psychological ones. According to James, the coarser emotions, particularly -- grief, fear, rage, love and jealousy -- are "constituted and made up of those bodily changes which we ordinarily call their expression or consequence" (2. 452).

In his recent book Listening to Prozac, Peter D. Kramer mentions the current resurgence of interest in James's psychology, occasioned by, i.a., Donald Klein's work on panic anxiety (Kramer 211).

17. That Plomer had some understanding of the dynamics of the dreamwork is humorously revealed in Friston's dream recounted on 187-88: for instance, Plomer has Tyler-Harries (of the Pomegranate Press) toss Friston a pomegranate -- hoary literary symbol of sensuality -- to pass on to the sexually-repressed "Chastity Wolfe" (188).
18. This notion is precisely the theme of Conway's The Crowd in Peace and War: see especially chapters 19 and 20.
19. Similar symbolic resonance invests the storm in the companion piece to Turbott Wolfe, "The Child of Queen Victoria" (Selected Stories 99-131).
20. It is tempting to associate the idea of the "hidden force" with Jean Baudrillard's notion of the "fatal strategy": as something which signals modernity's doom, the end of progress, of systems; the triumph of the Object, the impenetrably other.
21. Compare the closing lines of Breyten Breytenbach's A Season in Paradise, also a story of psychic fragmentation and the loss of identity:

I shall take off in this blackened aircraft
provisionally free
and deprived finally of genealogy and memory and security
in search of the frontiers of the night.

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