

**SOUTH AFRICAN PANORAMA:
THE NOVELS OF DAPHNE ROOKE**

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis covers Daphne Rooke's eight published "South African" novels: *A Grove of Fever Trees*, *Mittee*, *Ratoons*, *Wizards' Country*, *A Lover for Estelle*, *The Greyling*, *Diamond Jo*, and *Margaretha de la Porte*. It supports the recent revival of critical interest in Rooke, and argues for the continuing relevance of her work in post-apartheid South Africa. This study also broadens the scope of recent Rooke research by including lesser known works like *The Greyling* and *Margaretha de la Porte* in its analysis.

Recent criticism has focused on Rooke's unusual blend of romance and realism. The first three chapters concentrate more on "realism", emphasising the depth and extent of Rooke's engagement with serious social issues. The novels are examined in terms of their handling of the themes of class (chapter one), race (chapter two) and gender (chapter three).

The concluding chapter shifts in focus to "romance" and examines the question of generic identity -- touching on Rooke's gothic, magical realist and "popular" qualities -- within a consideration of the particular "South African-ness" of her work.

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INTRODUCTION

Ian Glenn has referred to Daphne Rooke as "the South African novelist with the widest range of historical sympathy" ("Introduction" 2). Although Rooke has also published short stories, juvenile fiction and novels with Australian and Indian settings, her literary output is dominated by eight novels intimately concerned with aspects of South African history and society: *A Grove of Fever Trees* (1946), *Mittee* (1951), *Ratoons* (1953), *Wizards' Country* (1957), *A Lover for Estelle* (1961), *The Greyling* (1962), *Diamond Jo* (1965) and *Margaretha de la Porte* (1974).¹ In terms of their historical settings these novels cover a period ranging from the eighteen-sixties (*Diamond Jo*) to the early nineteen-sixties (*The Greyling*). In terms of their social range they "[cross] gender and racial and ethnic boundaries" (ibid.).

The choice of the title "South African Panorama" for this thesis was inspired by the author's own use of the words "panoramic background" to describe her work (Letter 1). It suggests the range and variety of Rooke's writing, the extensive historical and social focus, and also captures something of her style and textual methods. The *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* gives the following definition:

panorama... a wide or complete view: a picture disposed around the interior of a room, viewed from within in all directions: a picture unrolled and made to pass before the spectator.... panoramic camera, one which takes very wide angle views....

Rooke's novels have a strongly visual quality and she tends to "show" rather than "tell", implying moral judgements through

action rather than overt comment. Her use of first-person narration in all these novels, with a variety of narrators in terms of race, gender and social class, ensures that each novel offers fictional views of a particular society "from within".

The title also -- with a nice ironic twist -- recalls a propaganda magazine with the same name, published by the former South African government, in which black experience is rendered invisible, the smiling faces are all white, and South Africa is a land of scenery and sunny skies. By contrast, Rooke looks beneath the comfortable surface to uncover the violent reality of conquest and conflict on which the system of white domination was built.

Rooke's novels were popular and internationally acclaimed in the fifties and sixties and *Mittee*, her best-seller, was widely translated, although she was not very highly regarded by South African critics. Her books were later virtually forgotten. The revival of interest began in the eighties with the work of Ian Glenn, and three novels, *Mittee*, *A Grove of Fever Trees* and *Ratoons*, were republished by Chameleon Press. (There has since also been a Penguin edition of *Mittee*.) Critical interest has continued to grow, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, but the focus has been mainly on individual novels, particularly *Mittee* and the works with Natal settings (*Grove*, *Ratoons*, *Wizards' Country*, and to a lesser extent *A Lover for Estelle*).² In this study, I offer an overview of Rooke's work, encompassing all eight novels.

Rooke is a difficult novelist to categorise and her blending of the romance and realist modes placed her out of step with a

tradition of South African criticism which has equated social realism with seriousness and the romance mode with essentially frivolous popular writing. Early reviewers were also uncomfortable with Rooke's frank treatment of sexuality and violence. Her placement of humorous scenes alongside tragic events and her depictions of bizarre incidents in everyday domestic settings prompted the labels "melodramatic" and "macabre".³ Rooke's rediscovery could be seen as part of a general post-apartheid movement to broaden the literary canon and include non-realist forms. Recent criticism has focused on Rooke's use of the romance and gothic modes, arguing that she puts these forms to serious and relevant use. I will swim against the current, in a sense, by emphasising, in fairly traditional fashion, the essential realism of her social vision, the depth with which her novels engage with social problems associated with class, race, and gender.⁴

In Rooke's work an intense focus on the domestic sphere, with colourful characters and finely realised particular settings, is balanced by an awareness of larger social, political and economic processes. I have chosen to begin my analysis by examining Rooke's focus on class, an aspect which has hitherto received very little critical attention, because I feel that her concern with economic exploitation and her understanding of economic pressures in the lives of communities and individuals are crucial elements in her work. On a macro level, Rooke's novels emphasise the economic motives underlying major developments in South African history like the Anglo-Boer War and

the British conquest of Zululand. On an individual level too, Rooke emphasises the importance of economic considerations in the everyday lives of her characters, whether they be rich or poor, and whatever their race. Rooke's depictions of particular societies evidence an awareness of class divisions and conflicts within racial and ethnic groups. More crucially, she emphasises the economic basis of racial oppression. Her focus on gender issues is also linked to economic concerns.

While Rooke devotes particular attention to class, her vision of society is not a reductive materialist one. Her novels examine the destructive personal effects of racism, offering uncomfortably close views of racial prejudice and the workings of racist stereotypes. Two of Rooke's novels -- *Mittee* and *Wizards' Country* -- have black narrators and present imagined black perspectives. On the other hand, her white protagonists (who represent a fairly broad cross-section of society in terms of ethnicity, gender and class) invite the reader to question attitudes which have been associated with whiteness. Rooke respects and enjoys cultural differences and her novels attempt to present diverse cultures on their own terms. At the same time, her vision is an inclusive one, emphasising links and commonalities, the hybrid complexity of South African society.

A notable feature of Rooke's work is the absence of an overt message, the kind of moralising which is evident in some of this country's writing. There is no simple binary opposition between black and white, good and evil, no easy equation of suffering with innocence. The absence of authorial comment means that there

is no enlightened voice to lecture the reader. Rather, in each of the novels we are given an insider's portrait of a particular community, the narrator being a part of that society, reflecting its prejudices and using its language. Reading a Rooke novel can thus be rather an uncomfortable experience as one develops a sympathetic feeling towards the narrator and other protagonists, who are often morally ambiguous figures, and is in a sense implicated in the various forms of suffering and oppression which are made apparent, often in shocking and violent ways.

Rooke is particularly concerned with gender. Her work foregrounds the oppression of women as a major problem in South African society, but also addresses gender alongside divisions of race and class, with an awareness of the particular complexity of gender issues within colonial and apartheid contexts. Patriarchy is a common factor in all the communities Rooke examines, but her focus is on the variety of female experience and she depicts women as participants in, as well as victims of, societal oppression. Her concern with the experience of women is also balanced by an empathetic insight into male experience -- *A Grove of Fever Trees*, *Wizards' Country* and *Diamond Jo* have male narrators.

Ian Glenn views "Rooke's emphasis on sexuality... as a central humanism in her work" ("Introduction" 3). Sexuality is depicted as a powerful force which may be expressed in positive and liberatory ways or abused as an agent of power and domination. In *Mittee* and *The Greyling* Rooke depicts interracial sexual relationships -- between white men and black women --

which function as brutal extensions of racist control, even as they ostensibly contradict the norms of racist society. Generally in Rooke's work relationships between women and men are seriously flawed, if not downright abusive, but she also depicts a few striking exceptions -- enduring and mutually beneficial bonds which transcend societal pressures and limitations. Similarly, Rooke also finds redemptive qualities within families, although her focus on the family as an institution depicts bitter rivalries and she is alive to the ways in which families may function as schools of oppression and violence.

While this study argues for the essential realism of Rooke's writing in terms of the ways in which she grapples with serious social issues, any account of her work would be incomplete without attention to the potent blend of realism and romance which characterises her novelistic vision. It would also be a pity to emphasise the "seriousness" of Rooke's work at the expense of the popular and entertaining qualities of her storytelling. The concluding chapter examines the question of generic identity and looks at the particular "South African-ness" of Rooke's writing. It also, particularly through an examination of the role of humour, attempts to capture something of the celebratory and joyous spirit which pervades her work.

NOTES

1. Rooke has written two further novels with South African settings: "The Seventh Earl" and "Ivory". These unpublished works, which form a trilogy with *Margaretha de la Porte*, are not included in this study.

2. Michael Green refers to Rooke's importance as a regional writer, arguing that "a case can be made for seeing as the core of her real achievement as a writer a set of four novels intimately concerned with Natal" and that "these novels represent perhaps one of the most searching literary explorations of a region in South Africa" ("Difference and Domesticity" 104). My argument is that the four Natal novels, important as they are as a regional exploration, have a wider relevance to the country as a whole, and their particular fictional histories are complemented and extended by an intertextual reading of the novels set further inland.
3. In her introduction to the Chameleon Press edition of *A Grove of Fever Trees*, Rooke writes: "I think it was the varied material combined with humour which prompted some reviewers to call the book macabre" (8). Anthony Delius disapprovingly refers to the "bewildering variety of ferocious event... a trail of rape, miscegenation, straight fornication, child-marriage, drug addiction, heathenish practices, murder, flood, fire and massacre" in *Ratoons* (70).
4. In his afterword to the Penguin edition of *Mittee*, J.M. Coetzee raises the following:

The first question to ask, then, is whether Rooke belongs in the line of Schreiner, Smith, Gordimer and Lessing, writers engaged with moral and political issues of class, race and gender in South Africa, and with the deeper human problems of colonial and postcolonial southern Africa in general, or with Millin (say) and the exploitation for literary/commercial ends of the more spectacularly violent features of South African life, the more picturesque episodes of South African history. (206)

As Jane Fenner has argued in her thesis (ix), my contention is that Rooke does engage seriously, and in an original and thought-provoking way, with structural issues of oppression, and that her novels are far more than racy depictions of the violent and picturesque.

CHAPTER ONE

Social Class and Race

They sent raiders before them to burn the villages and the ripening crops. Indeed the people were hungry, for the king's villages were burnt and the stores of grain taken away. There was desolation in the land. (*Wizards' Country* 266-7)

"I want Magrita to remember the dispossessed when she goes among the English, she must remember what lies behind the fine clothes and fine manners and all the learning." (*Margaretha de la Porte* 85)

Critics involved in the recent revival of interest in Rooke's novels have given very little attention to the role of class conflict in her work. Instead there has been a tendency to focus on violence and sexuality, and on certain romantic and gothic elements. Rooke's writing balances an intense and idiosyncratic focus on particular characters and settings with an awareness of larger socio-political and economic forces. The exoticism of the romantic/gothic elements of Rooke's novels, in the context of a literature dominated (at least until recently) by a morally serious social realism, has perhaps blinded critics to the economic vision which is also crucial in her work.

The critical tendency has been to examine particular novels in isolation -- *Mittee* has certainly dominated -- and there has yet to appear any systematic assessment of Rooke's eight South African novels in terms of the connections between them. An intertextual reading reveals a broad and fairly comprehensive picture of a particular period of South African history, focused on particular regions. The period covered by the novels -- from about 1870 to the early nineteen-sixties -- coincides with the

rise of capitalism and the industrialisation of the economy, the birth process of the country as a unified state, and the steady entrenchment and codification of racism into the era of apartheid proper. Geographically, the novels focus on regions -- the former Transvaal, the Kimberley region of the Northern Cape and KwaZulu/Natal -- which were significantly the areas of the greatest economic change during the latter part of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Of course, Rooke's novels are not always set where the action -- politically and economically speaking -- is; several of them have rural settings seemingly remote from the centres of power. But connections with the wider world are always present and resonate across the texts; the individual experiences are placed within an imperialist and capitalist context.

Michael Green has noted how Rooke "almost programmatically explores South African history from a variety of different subjective viewpoints, fracturing it into disparate perspectives" ("Difference and Domesticity" 112). These "subjective viewpoints" are also clearly and consciously drawn together. A key passage occurs in *Diamond Jo*, which appeared later than the other novels (except for *Margaretha de la Porte*) but precedes them all in terms of historical setting. The aptly named Britt Halden, a supporter of Rhodes-style imperialism, sets out his ideas:

We'll establish the pax Britannica throughout the continent. And the best way to accomplish peace here is to use Britain to annex the Transvaal. From there we go on to defeat the Zulus. We'll make them bring ten thousand redcoats to fight the wars. The defeat of the Zulus will give us a reservoir of labour for the diamond fields. And with the Boers under control we can prospect the whole of the Transvaal for gold. We'll make a dint in eternity.... (*Diamond Jo* 106)

Halden's predictions are hardly accurate -- the Boers do not prove easy to control and it is for the gold mines rather than the diamond fields that the defeated Zulus, along with other conquered people, will be used as cheap labour. The significance of the passage rests in the way in which it links together the regions with which Rooke is concerned and its attribution of a clear economic motive -- rather than any purely psychological urge towards exploration and conquest -- for colonial expansion.

In the fictional world of *Wizards' Country*, the narrator Benge is focused on his own community and does not speculate about the motivations of the colonisers, although there is a general awareness that the whites want all the land. But in the scenes of devastation and destruction following the army's defeat, in which cattle are raided and grain stores burnt, economic submission is emphasised:

All who came brought news of the terror that was in the land, of starvation and disorder and raiding.... There would be taxes and fines, said a chief who had spoken with the English.... (*Wizards' Country* 276)

The overriding importance of gold mining to the South African economy from the eighteen-nineties onwards and Johannesburg's rapid rise to dominance is an important thread in Rooke's writing. Johannesburg provides the main setting for only one of the novels, *Margaretha de la Porte*, but the new metropolis features prominently in the background in most of the novels set in the period following its rise to importance -- namely *Ratoons*, *A Grove of Fever Trees*, *A Lover for Estelle* and *The Greyling*. Green, in his assessment of Rooke as "the Natal writer", seems to draw a connection between her focus on Natal and her neglect by

the literary establishment. He comments that

[the] country's most famous novel may well begin and end in the obscure valley of Ndotsheni in Natal, but the bulk of its action must migrate to Johannesburg to be of significance. Literary reputation too, regardless of its region of origin, must prove capable of migrating to the metropolitan centres to be established. ("Difference and Domesticity" 103)

Certainly, the Jim-comes-to-Joburg theme does not feature prominently in Rooke's work as a whole, but while her protagonists may not go to Johannesburg that often, they very often come from there. Johannesburg is sometimes the source of their wealth, often a place of disappointment from which they seek to escape and begin anew elsewhere; it is also frequently visited.

Johannesburg is of only passing importance in *Mittee*, which is firmly placed in the old and soon-to-be eclipsed Transvaal of the Boers, although it does feature in a humorous scene when Polly describes its wildness to Selina (47). In *Ratoons* gold is a source of both wealth and disappointment for the Angus family. Helen's father, John, had inherited a few hundred acres of land from his father who had once owned thousands of acres but had "gambled away most of it in gold speculation" (11). John also inherits gold shares, worthless at the time, which he divides among his brothers and sisters, only to see their value soar. The novel begins with the sentence: "When Aunt Lucy died she left me her Durban house and thirty thousand pounds in gold shares" (7).

In *A Grove of Fever Trees* the Ashburns, a widowed woman with three young children, become farmers in an area of Zululand recently opened to white settlement, due to the urgings of rich uncle Alec, who remains in Johannesburg himself, leaving his

brother's family to battle with drought and cattle sickness. In *A Lover for Estelle* the Foleys, a wealthy and morally degenerate couple from England who have fled to the colonies in search of excitement and freedom from social constraints, have stopped in Johannesburg on their way to Zululand, where "they [go] through most of Foley's money, gambling on the Stock Exchange" (130).

In *The Greyling* Johannesburg serves both as a symbol of exploitation -- Bokkie's grandfather Sipho had worked there for twenty-two years "on the buildings, first as a concrete-pourer and then as a scaffold boy: his face was marked with deep, tragic lines from the hard work" (34) -- and as a symbol of opportunity. Bokkie, the Greyling of the title, *should* have gone to Joburg. She has been trained for a "good job" in the city but remains on the farm because of her love for Maarten. Johannesburg also represents a moderate and liberal alternative to the extreme right-wing politics of the Rottchers. Ilse's writer father, who "had friends among all sections of the community" (129), lives there; when she visits him they argue about politics because she has turned her back on his views.

Margaretha de la Porte presents a picture of Johannesburg's growth during its early days, from 1887 to the late eightennineties just before the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War. The narrative milieu is one of wealth -- Pauline Edmonds is the daughter of an American mine manager -- but poverty is constantly contrasted with the privileged world of the mining magnates in the depictions of the town. The first description occurs early in the novel. Pauline, who has been at school in the Cape, visits Johannesburg for the first time:

We were on a ridge... when we came in view of Johannesburg. It stood on level ground, unshaded by trees. A great explosion might have taken place here for there were clefts and chasms in the red earth; and dumps of rubble. Men swarmed over the claims, like ants in their busyness. The place did not seem real, appearing so suddenly on the grasslands and this in spite of the clarity of the air. It was only when we drove into the town that I really believed in it for the streets had been laid out and there were large brick buildings going up among the tents and hovels. I became aware at once of the town having an ordered existence. It was something apart from its surroundings, a furtherance of men. (*Margaretha de la Porte* 28)

They stop outside the office of her father's mining company and Pauline walks along the street admiring the signs of wealth -- imposing brick buildings and gold-lettered windows -- but the scene immediately shifts as they stop outside the shed "where the company stored dynamite and machinery", also home to the caretaker, his wife, mother, children and their servant (29).

The fact that a poor white family could have an even poorer black servant leads us back to race, an issue inseparable from class in a South African context. Rooke's work examines race and class in various ways. Races of people are of course exploited as economic classes, but there is not a straightforward convergence of the two categories. Then there are the class distinctions within particular racial groups. The unrealised potential for class alliances across racial lines is also illustrated. The term "illustrated" is used deliberately, since the tendency is to make this point through the juxtaposition of images of poverty and exploitation as experienced by blacks and whites, rather than to articulate it explicitly in the narrative.

Inter-class divisions and conflicting interests within racial groups are important, and Rooke's examination of these

dynamics within settler communities shows a fine awareness of their complexity. Tony Voss in his review of *Mittee* notes that "Rooke's imaginative reconstruction is confirmed by... recent historiography" and highlights her portrayal of "class distinctions among whites" (13). Rooke's novels indeed complement the interpretations offered in Marks and Atmore's *Economy and Society in Pre-industrial South Africa*, confirming her analysis as ahead of its time, but perhaps not quite in step with ours.

Her depiction of pre-colonial Zulu society also illustrates an awareness of economic classes within the community, albeit in a very different and more harmonious context. Benge's family are wealthy but their wealth is fairly recent, based on Gesineke's success as a raiding warrior during Shaka's time. The traditional occupation of the Tshanini clan, whose "ancestor's name is grass" (*Wizards' Country* 7), is basket-making. Benge's uncle, Gweva, is a successful practitioner of this craft and "had earned many cattle" through it but "[this] was a source of annoyance to those of our women who came from great families. It is an underling's work, they said" (183). Memeza, the woman seduced by Benge in his disguise as a "magic dwarf", has a position apart from the other women as a servant to Zembeni: "she was an alien. Her father had given her to old Zembeni to grind his corn" (39). Rooke's awareness of distinctions such as these is part of her depiction of a three-dimensional pre-colonial African society rather than a stereotypical portrait in either the idealised or negative mould; there are complex social distinctions, but all are accommodated and their basic needs provided for.

The Boer society depicted in *Mittee* and *Margaretha* already

shows the cleavages which are to lead to the "poor white problem" of the early twentieth century. Mittee and her husband Paul Du Plessis are wealthy landowners, belonging to families who had brought wealth with them from the Cape, filled official positions (Paul's father is a magistrate) and been the best placed in their communities to accumulate vast tracts of land. Their land is occupied and worked by the less fortunate, the bywoner class who will later be forced off the land in large numbers as agriculture becomes capitalised:

Mittee's grandfather had left her a farm outside Plessisburg and the land was worked by Gouws and his sons, bywoners and distant relatives of Grandpa Van Brandenburg. (*Mittee* 8)¹

In *Mittee* these intra-racial class distinctions are a minor concern, merely part of the societal picture, the major focus being on Mittee and Selina and the relationship between them which is marked by differences of race and class within a common domestic background. Racial distinctions are given prominence in *Mittee*, with Mittee's whiteness emphasised as a sign of superiority over Selina's darker skin; but whiteness here is a sign of wealth and independence, as against Selina's position as servant, as well as of supposed beauty.²

In *Margaretha*, which has a wider social range, the poor white Naude family becomes a visual symbol of human suffering through Margaretha's sculpture, along with the black "mine boy" Fios, murdered while attempting to escape, and Katjie, Margaretha's "Bushman" slave. There is also a significant section in which the European class system is highlighted and the position of the English working class compared implicitly with

that of the black working class in South Africa. Pauline and Margaretha visit the Leightons in England, in a coal mining region where the men emerge from their shifts "[covered] in coal dust... as black as Kaffirs" (164) and old men are carried off to the workhouse (165). Margaretha begins an affair with one of the workers, whom she also uses as a model. Class differences among whites in England are of course more entrenched than in the colonies, and Margaretha is unaware of the extent of the scandal she is provoking; to Pauline's cautioning that Russ Newbery could be punished because of his involvement with her she responds, "They can't shut him up or flog him, he is not a Kaffir, after all". Yet she herself patronises Russ and looks on him in much the same light as she does her slave/sister Katjie, admitting he is "uncouth" but loving him with "that wonderful, pure love you have for an animal" (175). When she sculpts him she actually makes him black, associating blackness with primitive sensuality, "like in the Garden of Eden" (174).

Someone like Russ Newbery is bound very strictly to his class while in England; in a colonial context things are different and a white working-class person acquires additional status because of his race. This point is enunciated clearly in *Diamond Jo*. After describing the extreme poverty of his childhood in England, Mannie continues:

We came as poor people to Africa. Poverty in Africa though was different from poverty in England. Here we were not so greatly despised, for men were judged not only by wealth and breeding but also according to colour; poor Jews we might be but we were Europeans and beneath us were the Indians, the Coloured people and the Kaffirs. (*Diamond Jo* 87-88)

Here class position provides a partial explanation for racism.

Given a step up by their race, Mannie and others like him are anxious to escape poverty altogether and move further up the ladder towards wealth and prestige, to make the gap between them and the racially defined lower classes as wide as possible.

Mannie's success as a diamond buyer rests on the experience of Stokkies Truter, his coloured servant who acts effectively as his mentor and business partner. He and Stokkies get involved in illegal diamond dealing; when Stokkies is caught and publicly flogged Mannie watches and makes no attempt to help him, because of his own fear of exposure (174-176). Mannie becomes a millionaire, "Sir Emmanuel Bernstein", through luck, suspect deals and friends in the right places; Stokkies is eventually able to buy a cottage and "[prosper] to such an extent that he [has] fifteen of his relatives living with him as well" (225).

The existence of poor whites is threatening to the white elite, undermining as it does the myth of racial superiority used as a justification for racist oppression. The particular contempt reserved for the poorest of their race by white South African society is reflected in Rooke's work; the adjective "low" is often applied, as in *Margaretha*: "the place was one fighting heap of Kaffirs, Coloureds and low Whites" (48), or in *The Greyling*: "Plat Anna was White but she was low; like a frog, huge and round, with a frog's downcurving toothless mouth" (98 -- Plat Anna and her cousin are the town prostitutes).

Poverty is expected among blacks, but when it is found among whites there is a tendency to blame it on bad luck or moral inferiority. Poor whites are looked down upon, and the better off would rather avoid the "low", but they also cannot be left alone.

Not only does their very existence lower the prestige and authority of the white race, but their mixing with other poor people who are not white constitutes a threat: a working class united across racial lines could seriously endanger the capitalist system which rests on the exploitation of a racially defined majority of disenfranchised people whose access to land and subsistence has been removed. The "poor white problem" of the early twentieth century was thus largely removed by concentrated welfare programmes and the entrenchment of racist legislation to widen the gap between blacks and whites. This process is visible in Rooke's work as she traces the hardening and enforcement of racial divisions and illustrates the rise to greater prosperity of those who were previously poor whites. By 1960, the setting for the main action of *The Greyling*, poor whites do not really feature (except for the mention of Plat Anna); the subplot in which the Adraanse family of bywoners appears occurs ten years before.

In *A Lover for Estelle*, set in the 1920s, the Kramers battle to maintain their independence and respectability in the face of the drought which threatens their farm after the Steenkamp family, who have joined them as tenant farmers, are forced to leave. The eldest son, Alwyn, who has bought the local store with money borrowed from his sister's suitor, gets into debt and secretly borrows money from the local Zulu leader, Bokozo, to keep in business. Caroline is shocked when he confides in her; there is a stigma attached to being "in debt to a native":

"If people find out, they won't come to the store, we'll be outcasts."

"If I don't take the money I'll finish in prison

for debt or Pappie will have to sell Rooirand and we'll be poor whites." (*A Lover for Estelle* 119)

The threat of being not just poor but "poor whites", with all the negative associations that term holds, proves greater than Alwyn and Caroline's racism; economic self-interest wins out over separation, although the deal must remain secret to succeed.

Estelle shows a society in flux between the less rigid racial divisions of the nineteenth century and the era of apartheid which is to follow. The two poles are represented by Theuns Prinsloo and his sons, and the policeman Sergeant Trichardt. Prinsloo "lived in a fold of the hills about thirty miles away, with no transport except oxen. His family had been in Zululand for more than fifty years as traders and hunters, and held the land under grant from the great Usibebu". His sons "had grown tall without setting eyes on a white girl" and are more at home "talking to the natives at the back" than socializing with the white community (78). The mention of Usibebu is one of Rooke's intertextual pointers, since Usibebu is a prominent figure in *Wizards' Country*. Prinsloo's history is a reminder that whites as well as blacks had owed allegiance to the Zulu rulers in the area in the not so distant past. Trichardt, on the other hand, although portrayed more as a pragmatist than an idealist, looks forward to the future, when "separate development" will be rigidly enshrined; his idea of crime is of something that happens between blacks and whites and he feels it his duty to prevent contact between the races as much as possible.

A Lover for Estelle is set in the same region of Zululand as *A Grove of Fever Trees* and *Wizards' Country*, where the mountain

peak Tshaneni dominates the landscape. The landscape of the settler novels is however a completely changed one from that of Benge's story -- and the difference is shown to be overwhelmingly negative. The changes wrought by conquest can be seen in the land itself, which is subject to devastating droughts and plagues -- the ecological balance having been upset by the imposition of alien crops and livestock -- as well as in the situation of its people. The "bitter porridge of manhood" (*Wizards' Country* 299) has replaced the previous bounty and sufficiency. Rooke follows her usual method of showing rather than telling and does not drive this point home.

A superficial reading of either *Grove* or *Estelle* could leave one with the impression that Rooke was following typically racist and paternalist attitudes in her depiction of the Zulu people, and merely using them to provide exotic colour as a backdrop to the lives of the white settlers which dominate the narrative. Such an impression could be illustrated with any number of textual examples, one of which occurs early on in *Estelle*:

When we came there were still living many of the Zulu warriors who had fought against the white man in the war of 1879, their children came to work for us, cheerfully, having learned already to prize money. The old ones buried their money but it was the dream of the boys to run to the store to buy a woollen pullover with their months' earnings. Men and boys wore a girdle of cowhide, and monkeys' or wildcats' tails. The women coming to wash our clothes and scrub the floors wore black hide skirts and built their hair into cones with red clay... but the girls wore only a tiny skirt of beads or a silk handkerchief knotted under the armpit. (*A Lover for Estelle* 5)

Here, of course, it is not Rooke "speaking" but her narrator, Caroline Kramer, and Caroline's unthinking repetition of paternalistic racial stereotypes may be uncomfortable for the

reader but is realistic in the light of her time and social context.

Rooke's own comment, that "as a girl my one fear was that the taints of civilisation would spoil [the Zulus]" (Ada Van Niekerk), has been used by J.M. Coetzee to support his view that Rooke *does* follow essentially conventional colonial attitudes with respect to race. Coetzee refers to Rooke reflecting "two commonplaces of Romantic primitivism: that savages and children are Man in unfallen state, that civilization is the great enemy" ("Afterword" 211). One needs to be careful here, and ask whether *Wizards' Country*, Rooke's "lament for the passing of the old Zulu world" (ibid.), does in fact portray an idealised state of pre-lapsarian primitivism; one should also seek to establish just what Rooke is referring to with the term "civilization".

Wizards' Country is a lament for the loss of Zulu independence, but it is also a portrait of a complex society which is neither isolated nor static. In the opening chapter there is a lyrical paragraph which presents an idyllic pastoral picture:

There had been peace in all the Zulu country. From planting season to planting season there was no change on our mountain except that the children and the herds fattened and increased. The time would come when the first rains fell and the grass grew green.... Then the seven stars showed on the northeastern horizon and the women planted.... Then winter fires were lit; aloë flowers bloomed red on the hillsides. The winds came, blowing up dust from the soil amongst the brown tussocks of grass. Again the rain fell, and the grass grew green. Over and over... until a mother lost count of the time when her child was born. (*Wizards' Country* 2)

But Rooke has raised the illusion of a static and self-sufficient precolonial past only to undercut the lyricism with text-book

style language in the next paragraph:

Umpande was king of the Zulu people and though he was not warlike he held the nation together. He was friendly with the Boers in the Transvaal and the English in Natal.

The Zulu people are already active participants in a wider arena, co-existing and competing with other groups. There are also internal problems: the account of Cetshwayo's defeat of his brother in battle contrasts bloodshed within the nation with the previous scenes of birth and planting. Later there is another contextualising passage describing the youth of Gesineke:

When Gesineke was a young man there were no Boers in the Transvaal and there were only a few English traders at the Bay far to the south. He had seen the white men coming closer and closer until they surrounded us; they did not eat us up but nibbled at the land.

He had served under Shaka who had joined all the clans together to form the Zulu nation. Our grandfather and the men of his generation had built up the strength of Zulu. They had fought against the Boers and they had travelled, far far to the north, and brought back many cattle. Our grandfather grew rich on his share of the booty from these raids.

It was of Shaka that the boys liked to hear: Shaka, the mountain of the land. He had seen as in a vision the coming of the white men, and he had united the clans against the days when they would want all the land; yet he was friendly to them since he longed to know the secrets of their wisdom. (*Wizards' Country* 21-22)

Here we have a society which is engaged with wider historical processes and defines itself against processes of conquest already underway. It is not averse to change, but flexible and ready to adapt in the face of changing circumstances. Firearms, for example, are already common and the white trader is a regular and welcomed guest, bringing news as well as goods. Bengé's account of the trader's visit (117-120) connects with Prinsloo in *Estelle*, and with Mannie in *Diamond Jo*, who had been on trading

expeditions to Zululand before his journey to the diamond fields. The account of Gesineke's battles with the Boers also recalls accounts of warfare with the Zulus in *Mittee* and *Margaretha*.

What is really being mourned for in *Wizards' Country* is not the end of a cultural isolation from alien, corrupting influences -- a situation which had not existed anyway -- but the loss of economic independence which forces Benge's people into an inferior, submissive position, contrasted with their previous ability to interact with other groups as equal partners. The loss of land which had produced a surplus for trade means that the Zulus must now sell themselves as labour on the mines (in *Margaretha* there are several references to Zulu workers) or on white farms in order to survive.³ Benge's acceptance of the responsibilities of adulthood at the end of *Wizards' Country* coincides with the military defeat and subjugation of his people:

It was not for me any more, the food of childhood. For me there were the stinging switches, the water into which a red-hot axehead had been dipped and the bitter porridge of manhood. (299)

When considering what Rooke means by the "civilisation" which spoils, it is worth turning to a description of the store which features so prominently in *Estelle*. It follows the description of a Zulu wedding party meeting on the veld, which has struck Caroline as "not just a crowd of natives... dancing on the veld, it was beauty springing from dust to the brilliant sky" (10). Caroline and Alwyn proceed to the store, where Alwyn will apply for a job. The owner, Werner, at first gives them an impression "of joviality, like a khaki-clad Father Christmas" (15), but when two Zulu boys come to buy cardigans he shows his

aggression. Caroline reacts:

All at once I felt a spasm of hatred go through me, and it was not directed at Werner so much as at the store.... I knew what would be on those shelves: beads and blankets and cheap materials, tobacco, cigarettes and a few sweets. Everything in the place was shoddy and dirty, and was sold for a price twenty times as great as had been given for it. The store seemed to me even then like a place of evil that had no part in the veld and the soaring canopy of the sky. (*A Lover for Estelle* 16-17)⁴

The store in *Estelle* is also the setting where the "civilised" Foleys, with their "overseas ways" (45) conduct their sexual intrigues with little thought of the consequences for those they implicate.

The Boer society portrayed in Rooke's Transvaal novels is also complex. There is brutality, epitomised by Paul Du Plessis in *Mittee*, racism and slavery. But J.M. Coetzee's comment that "Rooke's position on black-white conflict is broadly liberal... [siding] with the missionaries as protectors of black interests against the rapacity of white farmers [in *Mittee*]" ("Afterword" 212), is simplistic. *Mittee* may hold up the Englishman Castledene as an ideal when compared to the racist and exploitative Paul -- Zoë Wicomb comments wryly that *Mittee* will "no doubt... learn the fine English habit of saying natives instead of kaffirs" (17) -- but in *Margaretha* there is no simple dichotomy between "good" English and "bad" Boers. The society of "outlanders" (the anglicisation of "uitlander" used by Rooke) -- with its men supporting Rhodes and its women members of the "Ladies' Relief Committee" (30) -- is itself racist, and engaged in economic exploitation on a larger scale and of a perhaps more damaging kind. The Boer society, with all its glaring faults, at least

looks after the basic needs of its dependents, whether they be bywoners or black servants, whereas the new Johannesburg is the scene of poverty and degradation on a scale not previously seen. There is a significant scene where Kruger (portrayed fairly sympathetically in both novels), who is on a visit to the de la Porte estate, speaks to Margaretha and Pauline. Kruger is portrayed as a visionary, dreaming of the "Promised Land", but he is also concerned with economic realities and the consequences of rapid industrialisation:

A change came over him when he spoke of the Witwatersrand, there was a preaching cadence in his voice.

"We journeyed on to the ridge where the waters divide and the land opened out before us, the Promised Land. That the Outlanders should have built their city of the plain here.... Your father brought these plants out of the wild to preserve them, Magritā, and I have made a sanctuary for the animals. We cannot retain the Promised Land but we may make these sanctuaries for the animals and birds and plants. But what sanctuary is there for the Kaffirs? What sanctuary for our own people? Sodom and Gomorrah -- which of us shall escape? In Johannesburg some of our people live in the poorest shacks and the Coloureds are in dog kennels, the Kaffirs have only sacking -- but the Outlanders, the newcomers, are snug and warm." He turned to me. "I say this in front of you, child, knowing your father is a mine-owner, in with the English -- not because I am unkind but because I want you to think of the poor and not take the slums for granted. If the mine-owners had held back as I wanted them to, gone a little more slowly while they prepared houses for their workers, then the people would be living in decency. I want Magrita to remember the dispossessed when she goes among the English, she must remember what lies behind the fine clothes and fine manners and all the learning." (*Margaretha de la Porte* 84-85)

Rooke's distrust of the effects of "civilisation" is expressed, perhaps more explicitly, in a recent letter, where she says that her writing "even today does not represent modern trends in that there is a panoramic background and Industrial Man

looms as a threat". (Letter 1)

Ratoons highlights the subtle but obsessive class distinctions within Natal settler society, the extremes of wealth and poverty within the Indian community, and the volatile racial mix as the Indians, forced into the position of economic middlemen, become the target of attacks by the dispossessed Zulus, deflecting their anger away from the white elite. The Indians are used as a buffer and placed geographically between the whites and blacks; they are restricted to inferior land and forced to build their houses along the riverbank, which causes deaths in times of flood (188-192). *Ratoons* focuses on Durban as well as the rural canefields, and traces the enforcement of urban racial separation as successful Indians threaten white interests. In the character of Mr Bannerjee, who starts off as a caricature but develops into a complex and rounded figure, there is an interesting example of an individual who because of his wealth and western education is able to move fairly freely between white and Indian society.

The Greyling, published in 1962, has the most contemporary setting of Rooke's novels. Set in the context of the riots, protest and state repression following Sharpeville, it is concerned most obviously with the effects of racial classification and the notorious Immorality Act on individuals. The main plot concerns the secret relationship between the white right-winger Maarten Delport and the coloured servant Bokkie Sipho, the Greyling of the title, and its tragic consequences. *The Greyling* highlights the prominence of racial divisions and their rigid enforcement by a fascist state, but it is also,

perhaps more crucially, concerned with class.

Miscegenation and interracial sex have been popular and emotive themes in South African writing. Rooke of course also deals with this theme in *Mittee*, her best known work, although her novels are full of examples of exploitative and problematic sexual relationships, most of them between characters of the same racial group. In *The Greyling* she juxtaposes the relationship between Maarten and Bokkie with a very similar one which also ends tragically, and uses the two stories to raise important questions about the various forms of oppression involved.

The subplot concerns the narrator's husband, Ray, who is in prison for the murder of Hester Adraanse and his child by her. Hester Adraanse belongs to a family of bywoners on one of Ray's farms. The two cases are alike in that both women, already disadvantaged in terms of gender, are also poor and economically dependent. A signal difference between them is that of race, but it makes little difference to them in the end, although it determines the different fates of the men who kill them. Maarten receives the death penalty for Bokkie's murder, but the extremity of the sentence seems to be motivated more by reaction to the contravention of the Immorality Act by an enthusiastic member of the local skietkommando than by the murder itself. It is a question of political expediency since "Maarten's name was loathed, not only by the Coloureds but by the Blacks who also claimed Bokkie; and by the Whites who saw themselves betrayed through a supporter of Apartheid" (155).

Ray, on the other hand, is "found guilty with extenuating circumstances and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment" and

given permission to marry Ilse, who is also pregnant (137). No racial borders have been crossed, and Ray has wealth and prominent Voortrekker forebears on his side, whereas Hester and her family are in an anomalous position, an embarrassment to the "superior" race. She is one of eighteen children and her father, unsuitable for the position of farm manager, is "a small natty man... [who] would stand for hours doing nothing, apparently vacant" while "his mind teemed with visions of love, money and perfect health" (130). Jocchem Adraanse is unconcerned about racial distinctions, sexually licentious and portrayed as a childlike figure.⁵

When Ilse asks Mrs Rottcher to support the Delparts, as she had publicly supported Ray Van Doorn during his trial, the reaction is that "Ray was different from a man who has had a Coloured girl. God forgive you" (126). Although Mrs Rottcher cannot, or will not, Ilse is able to see the essential similarity between Ray and Maarten, in an observation in which the convergence of race, class and sexual oppression is clearly articulated:

It was not enough for Ray that he was the landowner and Adraanse his bywoner. It was not enough for Maarten that he was White, a first-class citizen, a voter; there were still Adraanse's daughter and the Greyling to lie submissively beneath them. (91)

There is ironically more feeling in the relationship between Maarten and Bokkie than between Ray and Hester. Unable to reconcile the attraction and affection he feels towards Bokkie with his role as defender of apartheid, Maarten is dominating and brutal towards her, even as he is continually drawn back. As his mother later realises, "he [considers] it a worse sin to love her

than to take her as if she were a whore" (165). Ray and Hester may not be separated by race, but the social gap is wide enough for Ray to view her in much the same light as Maarten sees Bokkie, without the same agonising since he is violating no law; she refuses to be bought off and wants them to marry but he tells her that "[a] woman like you is only for a man's convenience" (134). Rooke thus places the issue of interracial sex within a class context.

The Greyling is also concerned with economic realities beyond the level of individual relationships. Rooke works into the narrative a scene in which the system of forced agricultural labour and resistance to it is highlighted, and gives this scene a textual prominence, devoting eight pages to it. Ilse, speaking from her position as farmer, explains:

That year it happened that the full force of the slump in timber hit us. The shooting at Sharpeville and the state of emergency aggravated the bad times, yet we were urged to raise the wages of the Natives. Rottcher told us not to do it. Far from raising the wages, we should reduce them to meet our losses, he said. Concessions would only lead to more and more demands and the next thing we would have Kaffirs asking to sit on the Town Council. (*The Greyling* 57)

Ilse, although "accustomed to following [Rottcher's] advice" refuses to reduce wages as "there were too many difficulties already for a woman alone on a farm". This is accepted as long as Ilse does not employ "any native who might leave my neighbours because of lowered wages" (57-58). All wages, except Ilse's, are cut:

Rottcher was safe in doing this because his farm hands were in debt to him and they could not leave; except a man named Tomas. He had kept himself free of debt and as soon as the cut was announced he gave in his notice. Rottcher knocked him down but Tomas was adamant.

There was no legal way of stopping him and his family from leaving so Rottcher thought of a way to trick him. Tomas had hired a lorry in Perelkop to remove his family and furniture. When the lorry arrived at his gates, Rottcher refused the driver permission to enter and the lorry was driven back to Perelkop. Tomas was left waiting at the huts and not until sunset did he find out that the lorry had been turned back. Rottcher sent his boss-boy to lock the huts that Tomas had been living in and a guard was put on them for the night. Tomas was told to clear off the farm with his family and goods before sun-up otherwise he would be arrested for trespass.

Rottcher expected Tomas to come to him for permission to enter the huts for it was a cold night. Then he would give Tomas shelter in exchange for a contract at the new rate. If he refused and spent the night in the open on the farm Rottcher would threaten to have him arrested.... It went without saying that Rottcher's neighbours... would have him arrested if he came on to their land. He did not expect that they would be able to reach the main road before daylight since there were two old women and a pregnant girl in the party. (58-59)

During the night Tomas and his family make their way onto Ilse's farm. Ilse intends charging them with trespassing, although she does give them tea and food, but her son Raymond, whose sympathies are with the workers, persuades her to allow them to light fires while they wait, and not to call the police. The lorry arrives to fetch them and Tomas and his family are able to win a small victory against apartheid.

The Tomas incident is significant in terms of the plot in that it prefigures Ilse's later final parting with the Rottchers over Maarten's case, and the escape of the workers will be echoed by the later escape of Maarten's parents with their coloured grandchild. But it is also significant in highlighting the harsh economic realities of apartheid and providing a social context within which to view Bokkie's story. The quiet dignity of the women in the party and the return of a young girl bringing gifts

of "bead mats... and a hide shield" (60) links their resistance to the world of *Wizards' Country*. Rooke may be using a well-worn theme, but her understanding of oppression goes beyond questioning who is allowed to sleep with whom.

The discussion so far has been dominated by the interrelationship between class and race. Rooke's work also deals extensively with gender, and her exploration of the position of women in society is grounded in economic realities. The inferiority of the female position is a common denominator in all the cultures examined in her novels; women are subject to exploitation across racial and class boundaries, and the violence and frustrations they experience are linked to their economic dependence.

In *Wizards' Country* the grandmother Mastoli remarks: "There is a bitter pleasure in rearing a daughter.... We lose her companionship when she marries or... is given away to the king" (96). The way in which women form part of the economic system of exchange within a traditional African context is one of the sobering aspects of a culture which in many ways seems to be Rooke's ideal. But women become the objects of economic exchange in other cultures as well; they must marry to ensure economic security and even if they possess wealth of their own they lose control of it through marriage. The societal pressure on women to marry determines their continued dependence on male power.

In spite of her wealth, Mittee finds that after her marriage to Paul she is "like a monkey on a chain" (*Mittee* 107). The young Margaretha is pressured into an engagement with the Baron von Zellhausen because her family favours German over British mining

interests. In the same novel the narrator Pauline finds that her husband has spent all their capital and she must borrow from her father, who tells her: "I don't want this sort of thing to start, honey. Your husband must provide for you even if it is only Dutchman's food.... You shouldn't be asking for money" (*Margaretha de la Porte* 190).

In *Ratoons* three of Leela's daughters are "married... off at the same ceremony from motives of economy", their ages being thirteen, eleven and eight, with devastating consequences for the youngest (113). Vera and Prudence in *A Grove of Fever Trees* are both virtually bought for their beauty by wealthy men they do not love.

But if the common subjection is highlighted, the distinctions between women in terms of wealth are shown to be too great for female unity across class and racial lines. Bokkie's "powerful vision" of "a sense of oneness with females, even with the grand White ladies of Perelkop, with her own arrogant relations..." (*The Greyling* 95) is unfortunately illusory.

Rooke's work as a whole evidences a preoccupation with economic issues, whether on an individual or political level. It would be incorrect to label her position materialist, since her novels also portray human concerns and distinctions, whether cultural, religious, sexual or personal, beyond the reach of class. But in common-sense fashion she brings us back to the obvious -- that economic subsistence and security is a physical precondition for the fulfilment of any other concerns -- and her work shows an awareness of the societal tensions created by the unequal distribution of resources and a moral concern with the

exploitation of any group of people by any other.

NOTES

1. Trapido writes of the Boers in the Transvaal: "The leaders of the several parties of pastoralists were already wealthy and they and their kin were as a result in an advantaged position when the original distribution of land took place. The result was the reproduction of relationships of power and property which had existed in the Cape Colony from which they had migrated" (351).
2. In Green's 1992 interview Rooke refers to *Mittee's* realism, within the outward conventions of romantic fiction, and emphasises class rather than racial differences:

You have Mittee who is the beautiful girl with a sparkle; then you have Selina who is the servant.... in the end Selina does find her own man, and she can't live and she isn't satisfied to live Mittee's life; she doesn't want to be an old retainer. But to get romance she must have the servant, the person who looks up [to] the mistress.... (13)

3. Rooke emphasises the economic motive when she states, in the context of discussion on *Wizards' Country*, "You have to realise why the Zulu War was fought; it was fought to get manpower for the mines" (Green, "Interview", 23).
4. This calls to mind Gordimer's description of a shop in *The Late Bourgeois World*:

Black men lingered a long time over the choice of a watch that, paid for out of notes folded small for saving, would be back within a week, I knew, because those watches didn't work properly. I had seen nothing of the product of human skills except what was before me in my father's drapery shop-cum-department store, but I knew there must be things more worth having than these, and an object in life less shameful than palming them off on people who knew nothing better to desire. (60-61)

5. His references to sex enabling one to "enter the garden of Eden" (131) have their textual echo in the passage from *Margaretha* quoted earlier in the chapter. Rooke seems to be taking the sexual stereotypes usually

associated by whites with blackness, and using them ironically. By contrast the world of *Wizards' Country* is one where strict norms are followed with regard to sexual behaviour, which may only be broken by moving outside of the community into the realm of witchcraft.

CHAPTER TWO

Race and Culture

We Kramers are fair to the natives and my father has seldom struck one... (*A Lover for Estelle* 44)

It's always best not to trust a white person too much, no matter who they are. (*Mittee* 173)

In its focus on Rooke's treatment of class, the previous chapter looked at economic aspects of racial division and exploitation. This chapter will examine Rooke's response to questions of race with a stronger emphasis on the cultural and personal aspects.

Rooke deals with ethnicity in a way which emphasises both *difference* and *domesticity*, to borrow Michael Green's phrase. She delights in cultural contrasts, noting the unique particularities of each group as well as their strangeness to each other.¹ But her focus on ethnic and cultural diversity is not nationalistic, and runs alongside a powerful argument against any enforced separation. The novels demonstrate the intimate connections and commonalities of South African experience, the web of relationships across racial lines which cannot and should not be untangled.

Rooke also takes a clear and uncomfortably close look at racial prejudice, representing the ways in which destructive stereotypes are embedded in the psyches of (particularly but not exclusively white) South Africans. This is done without stereotyping the characters themselves; they are depicted for the most part not as racist monsters but as complex individuals who at times repel yet also attract the reader's sympathy and affection.

In what is perhaps the most perceptive of the early local

reviews of Rooke's work, Lily Rabkin writes of *Mittee*:

A great deal takes place in the novel, but it is essentially a subtle analysis through melodramatic action of the relationships between... four people, relationships in which intricate sets of ambivalent emotions, love and hate, are handled with clear-eyed yet delicate skill.

In these relationships the colour attitudes of South Africa play a central and highly relevant part. Daphne Rooke manages this aspect with an admirable objectivity. She does not flinch from, exaggerate or play down the facts. She just recognises them with a detachment that few writers or others could achieve.

Her novel is no propaganda tract -- it is a story of people, some of whom are white and some of whom are not, a factor which has to be taken into account and related to its human implications. (Rabkin 37)

Rabkin's review provides an interesting point of departure for a discussion of Rooke's treatment of racial issues, and the critical response to this aspect of Rooke's work. As she points out, Rooke is concerned primarily with human relationships, and in exploring these she allows her characters to speak and act for themselves; there is no explicit authorial stance, no stepping in to tell the reader what is right or wrong. Rabkin also takes pains, however, to emphasise the central importance of racial attitudes in *Mittee*, which sets her apart from other early reviewers like J.P.L. Snyman, who preferred to view Rooke as a storyteller unconcerned with "contentious issues" (Snyman 153).

More recently, Rooke's handling of race and racism in *Mittee* has also evoked contrasting critical responses. On the one hand she has been praised for "[showing] an imaginative sympathy which is rare in white South African writing" (Glenn, "Introduction", 4) in giving voice to the colonised "other" through Selina's narrative;² on the other hand, Christine Barsby argues that "Rooke's attempt to give voice to Selina"

is "occasional and fraught with tension... [and] lapses at times into a patronising portrayal of her" (Barsby 100). Zoë Wicomb goes further and argues that "a black reading will necessarily problematize the notion of Selina as protagonist" (Wicomb 16). Wicomb views Selina as the stereotypical "Tragic Coloured who deserves better treatment at the hands of her white progenitors", and as "the debased servant, the product of institutionalized racism, who has difficulty in constituting herself as a subject", and takes this as evidence of Rooke's own racial bias when she goes on to say that "one suspects that the author too has difficulty in portraying her as such" (17).

Wicomb feels that she, and other black people, "are excluded as readers" (17), and while this would not, I think, have been Rooke's intention, the author's own background, specifically her membership of the dominant racial group, in itself dictates a certain bias, and perhaps a leaning towards an imagined white readership.³ (With a writer who has chosen such disparate narrators to tell her stories, however, it is difficult to imagine her writing with any particular readership in mind.)

Certainly most of Rooke's novels, *Mittee* included, are largely concerned with exploring social contexts which reflect aspects of the white colonial experience, which is also Rooke's own. *Wizards' Country* is the exception to the above: here she writes from an opposing perspective, and allows Benge to tell his story without reworking it for a white readership. The oral narrative structure framing *Wizards' Country* implies an audience that shares Benge's cultural perspective and his experience of conquest. The Zulu people are at the centre; it

is the whites who are alien, "other". But this does not imply the substitution of an opposite form of racism, for the characters' attitude towards individual whites, such as the visiting trader, is one of acceptance and there is no assumption of inherent superiority on the part of the Zulus.

Jane Fenner mentions Rooke's "new South African" credentials, which rest on the values of "plurality, multiculturalism, and tolerance", and views these as explaining a post-apartheid "new and receptive context for [Rooke's] work" (Fenner viii & ix). But Rooke's exploration of ethnic and cultural differences was a dangerous project for the apartheid era when her novels were written and could all too easily have been construed as a justification for racial separation.⁴ Rooke's work as a whole demonstrates a concern with presenting varied and different social points of view; with *Wizards' Country* she took this concern furthest and found that the imaginative effort required exacted an enormous personal toll. After completing the novel she shelved her initial plan to write a trilogy continuing her narrative of the Tshaneni clan. Commenting on this, Green writes:

Rooke abandons the attempt to domesticate the historical difference that is her concern because the price is a threat to her own sense of identity.... This I think is an effect of her historical moment, however, and her achievement is all the greater for her acknowledgement of it. She was writing as the full force of grand apartheid was getting underway, and the traps that lay before her in exploring historical difference on ethno-national terms are obvious. But the differences she does explore, the history of the other she does achieve, the past represented in its discontinuity, are all perhaps more materially important than we allow for in the face of the ideology that dominated the period in which this book was written. 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. ("Difference and Domesticity" 134)

Some might object to the idea of a white writer presuming to present a black South African history, although similar objections could be raised regarding the adoption of different gender and class positions. With *Wizards' Country*, however, the intensity with which Rooke pursues her project is significant: she absorbs herself in the Zulu experience, as she knows and imagines it, so far as to feel her own cultural identity threatened, her stance as author one of relinquishing rather than keeping control. The result is "no trilogy, but one powerful work achieved" (Green, "Difference and Domesticity", 136).

The perspective offered in this "powerful work" informs an intertextual reading of novels such as *A Grove of Fever Trees*, *Ratoons*, *A Lover for Estelle*, and *The Greyling*, where Zulu people are presented through white eyes. The fact that Rooke chose to explore black South African experience primarily through the Zulu framework is not, I think, a mere continuation of the fascination of Victorian writers such as Haggard with this particular group, but a result of her own Natal background and the opportunity she had in Zululand to acquaint herself with Zulu culture, language and customs. But her focus on the black culture she knew best can stand as representative of a more general African experience, and is also relevant to the depictions of Shangaan people in *Mittee*, and the references to black mineworkers in *Diamond Jo* and *Margaretha de la Porte*.

To return to *Mittee*, there Rooke explores Boer society in the nineteenth century through the eyes of one on the edges of that community but nonetheless a part of it. Selina is, like her mistress Mittee, an orphan, and the two women are bound by

strong emotional ties reaching back to early childhood; Selina's mother, a servant to Mittee's family, had hidden the two children and saved their lives when "the Kaffirs killed [Mittee's] parents on the Wolkbergen" (22). They are brought up in the staunchly Calvinist household of the Van Brandenbergs, Mittee's grandparents. Selina speaks the same language as the Boers she is raised to serve; she shares their customs and has internalized many of their attitudes.

Wicomb is disturbed by the way in which *Mittee*, although narrated by a black protagonist, is concerned primarily with the Boer community in terms of its plot. However, Selina has a dual heritage, formed by the early memories of her black mother and equally strongly by Mittee's grandmother Ouma van Brandenburg. Then again, to call Selina's a dual heritage is too simplistic, just as the straightforward labelling of her as black is problematic. For the point about Selina is that she is neither black nor white, but both, and something more. For as well as being a subordinate member of Mittee's household, Selina is also a part of a small community of coloured people, its existence entwined with that of its masters, but with its own unique history, stretching back to the days of slavery at the Cape. Auntie Lena, who stands at the heart of this group, is described early in the novel:

Though she was small and frail, with a face as wrinkled as an ape's, there was in her the warmth of motherliness. Not even a dog would walk by her without receiving a caress. She had reared fifteen children of her own, besides Fanie who was the child of her imbecile sister; and she claimed that she could number two hundred living descendants and that she was related to half the families in Plessisburg, both white and coloured. She was related to me in an obscure way on my mother's side and she certainly bore a resemblance to the Van Brandenburg family. She was born a slave but she served Grandma Van Brandenburg forty years after she was freed and she

was the only one from whom the old woman ever took advice. (41)

This passage highlights the contradictory nature of Auntie Lena's position. The first sentence, in which she is compared to an ape, recalls the casual racism of the Boer characters so evident throughout the novel. The use of animal imagery to describe human characters is common in *Mittee*, with chained monkeys in particular serving as symbols of human captivity, and black and coloured characters are often admonished with the word "creature" -- a translation from the racist Afrikaans term "skepsel" which suggests one less than fully human.⁵ Yet for all her meekness Auntie Lena also has the paradoxical power of the old and trusted servant -- partly through respect for her faithfulness and also because of what she knows about the truly powerful. She remains steadfastly loyal -- towards the end of the novel she "[waves] the Flag in all the bravery of its four colours when the English [parade] in Plessisburg Square" (174) -- but her submission is not without a certain pride.

Auntie Lena is "related to half the families in Plessisburg, both white and coloured" (41). Slavery was frequently a system of institutionalized rape, and the sexual exploitation of black women by white men continued long after the era of formal slavery had passed. Such behaviour was of course unsanctioned officially, and contradicted the ostensible values of the white community, so it could not be openly acknowledged, although its results were plainly visible. Selina's husband Fanie is born after the rape of his retarded mother by a white man, "[yet] you could look the men of Plessisburg over a hundred times and not see one capable of

such an act" (123). In the light of this kind of violence and exploitation it is odd that Auntie Lena boasts of her white relatives, while there is no mention of any black, rather then coloured, relations. On the other hand, her assertion of biological connections with the white community is also a way of asserting her place in it and her right to recognition, and could be seen as her own limited way of subverting authority. But the coloured people in *Mittee* cannot be seen merely as victims of an exploitative system, just as white women cannot be completely excused for their complicity by their subjection to patriarchy. They are part of a hierarchy, and just as they are considered inferior to whites they are also treated as, and often consider themselves to be, superior to blacks. Coloured servants have better jobs within the Boer households, better living conditions and are presumably better paid. Selina and Polly, for example, are personal servants to Mittee and Andrina and have time to sit and gossip while the black women get on with the heavier menial work (47-48). The system is a divisive one, with exploitation experienced in varying ways and degrees, and results in resentment and distrust rather than a common front against oppression. The coloured people cannot be blamed for their difficult and often ambiguous position, but the novel does raise uncomfortable questions about the extent to which individuals like Selina can be held responsible for perpetuating racist attitudes.

Selina's racism is apparent in her disparaging treatment of Anna and the other black servants. She also shares in the white fear of black hordes waiting to attack the homestead. As Glenn remarks:

Selina is an attempt to reckon the cost of living in

a slave-holding culture's aftermath. Identifying, perforce, with the whites with whom she grows up, keeping her superiority from the "kaffirs" (it should be clear from what happens later, and particularly from Castledene's explicit rebuke, that this vocabulary and this source of self-esteem are things Selina has to learn to dissociate herself from), Selina makes us register the personal dehumanising effects of the condescension of racism. ("Introduction" 5)

Selina may begin to overcome her prejudices but this is a difficult process and one that has not been completed by the end of the novel. Even when she has been helped by black people and lives among them she is unable to escape her own background and continues to hold herself apart; the description with which *Mittee* opens suggests that Selina and Fanie are isolated "in [their] hut on the mountaintop" (7), but in fact they have been befriended by the local community, and Selina lives for months with the women while Fanie accompanies the men on a hunting expedition (191).

The rape of Anna by two black men highlights the particular vulnerability of black servants in situations of conflict. The aftermath to this incident, when Paul publicly humiliates Fanie and then leads a brutal revenge attack on Castledene's mission station and the nearby kraal, marks a turning point in Selina's allegiance, and helps, along with his assault on Mittee and the following scene in which Selina offers herself to him in Mittee's place and is raped, to finally destroy the attraction she has felt for Paul. From then on she and Fanie function as independent individuals rather than subordinates, and Selina and Mittee's relationship becomes one of greater equality and friendship, particularly on their last journey together. Equality is easier away from society's pressures, however, and the sisterhood which the two

women share while facing the same dangers and difficulties, equally dependent on Fanie's skill as wagon-driver and hunter, would be unlikely to survive a return to the kitchen and drawing-room. They part as equals, and Selina continues to yearn for her earliest companion, but their relationship remains a tense and ambiguous one. The novel may open with Selina, on her mountaintop, remembering the "sparkling girl" who often called her "Sister or Dear Selina when [they] were alone"(7), but it ends on a different and somewhat bitter note, with Selina recalling her own lost youth and Mittee appearing in less flattering guise:

For me the shine of the stars and the colour of the sky have grown dimmer. When I was twenty I would sometimes stand alone on a kopje and reach my hands to the sky or lay my heart against the veld for I saw God in all the world about me. I used to laugh so loudly then that Mittee would shake me to quieten me. (207)

When Selina and Fanie encounter Paul, after their parting from Mittee and Castledene, they must pretend that Mittee had died when their waggon was swept away. Paul forces them to take him to the place, even though Fanie's mother Rebecca is wounded and desperately in need of care, and Fanie makes a cross onto which Paul carves Mittee's name. Selina and Fanie's freedom must be bought by killing Paul, but it is also necessary for Selina to symbolically kill off the "nonnie" she both loves and hates.

Rooke explores the emotional bonds of servitude in several of her novels. Of the three racially oppressed servants in *Mittee*, *Margaretha* and *The Greyling*, Selina is unique in being narrator and survivor. The other two, Katjie and Bokkie, are denied recourse to self-defence. Katjie is killed by Margaretha, in an act of euthanasia with sinister

overtones, while Bokkie is murdered by her white lover and master, Maarten.

Margaretha de la Porte and *Mittee* are set in the same period in the Transvaal. Although there are obvious similarities between the mistress/servant relationships in the two novels, the picture in *Margaretha* is a more sombre and disturbing one and the position of Katjie makes Selina's lot seem almost enviable in comparison. The power of speech which is given to Selina is denied Katjie, a San woman who has been "bought" by Margaretha's uncle as a young child and given to his niece as a gift. Because slavery has been officially outlawed, she is legally adopted by the family. The white South African habit of referring to black servants as members of the family thus finds literal and extreme expression here. Katjie's "adoption" offers her no protection but increases her dependence and places her completely at the mercy of the de la Porte family, allowing them to exploit her labour from childhood without paying her even a basic wage. As with Selina and Mittee, there is a strong bond between Katjie and Margaretha, but the love between them is obsessive and the exploitation of Katjie extreme.

Glenn's observation that "Rooke is in some ways a shocking novelist, not so much in writing about sex and violence, but in showing so little surprise at them" (3) is well illustrated by the scene in which Pauline first meets Katjie and Margaretha, at this stage still children. The white girls are unconcerned about the violence meted out to Katjie, in contrast to the way in which they are treated, and what is clearly child abuse is related in an offhand manner:

[Katjie] shrieked suddenly: "Mud on your dress. O

God, mud on your beautiful dress - I'll get a hiding."

"Hold your mouth", said Margaretha.

She rushed at Katjie but the girl dodged her and fled into the garden. Margaretha flicked a speck of mud off a flounce.

"My mother hammers her sometimes, she is supposed to look after me. Come with me now and I'll show you an interesting place." (*Margaretha de la Porte* 14-15)

Margaretha, like Mittee, is capricious in her treatment of her servant, alternating between affection and anger. The affection which coexists with violence may make Katjie's situation easier to bear, but it also binds her closer and increases her dependence. Servants whose earliest memories connect them to the households in which they are considered racially inferior, and charged with the care of the other inhabitants, are particularly vulnerable psychologically; their oppression is strengthened to the extent that they participate in it. Katjie cannot bring herself to break her ties with Margaretha, just as Bokkie in *The Greyling* cannot bear to leave her master/lover Maarten, and continues to serve her voluntarily even after her marriage to Stoffel.

With Katjie the emotional exploitation is particularly brutal, since she has had all ties with her cultural and geographical background forcibly severed. As a "Bushman" she is considered an amusing oddity and treated as an object to be labelled and studied. The novel opens with Pauline's description of her:

They named her Katjie, little cat, because there was a resemblance. She had a wedge-shaped face with high cheek-bones, a flat nose and a thin-lipped mouth turning up at the corners. Her skin was yellow: how beautiful she was when you got used to her -- a strange little creature whose hair did not grow out like ours in long stands but clustered on her head in tight whorls.... She had slanting eyes, dark and watchful.

I think of her as a tragic being and so

Margaretha has sculptured her; yet more often than not Katjie was lively and ready to spring about and clap her hands.... But I do remember that she sometimes stood in that attitude of grieving, as alien to us then as was a pet monkey chained to a pole in the back yard. I cannot say whether she was lonely; among the White people who had reared her and the Coloureds to whom she gravitated. There were a few Bushman families working for farmers in the Wolkbergen, and in Johannesburg one saw Bushman stable hands riding on the race track. Katjie always ignored them. She claimed to have no memory of the wild people from whom she came; hunters who used poison-tipped arrows, desert-dwellers who had given way to the migrating Bantu from Central Africa and the Europeans from Cape Colony. (7-8)

Since Katjie does not speak for herself we are only given white impressions of her, and these are imbued with nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific racism, with its emphasis on and exaggeration of physical differences between races, inherent value judgements and assumption of European superiority. Margaretha, when first displaying her sculptures for Pauline, remarks that "Katjie is different from us" and

[shows]... how the little creature's buttocks protruded and that a fold of skin fell across her thighs. (18-19)⁶

Unlike Selina, who is (I think) a vibrant and memorable individual, Katjie never comes to full life, remaining strange and silent, the ultimate "other". What Rooke is portraying here, however, is not Katjie as she is, but Katjie as she is perceived and interpreted by the white characters in the novel, who do not grant her fully human status. They are only really interested in her in so far as she serves their needs and desires; she inspires a certain amount of curiosity and concern but there is no real empathy involved and they do not *listen* to her. Even Margaretha, who is closest to Katjie and feels the most for her, cannot conceive of forming an equal relationship with her; theirs is by definition one of

dominance and submission.

When Katjie is injured (presumably fatally) in a dynamite explosion, Margaretha strangles her (with the hands that have sculptured representations of Katjie's body). The motivation which is accepted by Margaretha herself and Pauline as narrator is that of euthanasia in the context of an extremely painful and terminal condition. Euthanasia of course raises serious moral difficulties: Pauline's explanation to Margaretha's brother Ignatius that

Katjie was hurt badly and she screamed -- you heard those others -- Margie had to help her, she had to bring her peace.... as you would bring peace even to an animal. (261)

is not acceptable to him -- Katjie is not an animal and in determining her death Margaretha usurps the role of God. But the description of the accident scene raises the possibility of another subliminal motivation on Margaretha's part:

There was a scream so terrible that it blotted out all thought. It was Katjie who screamed like that. A piece of corrugated iron had cut her in two. Margaretha bent over her and with her hands on Katjie's throat stilled her cries. (256)

Katjie has been effectively silenced all her life and her scream can be read as a response not only to her immediate agony, but to all the agonies of racial oppression she has suffered. This is another example of Rooke showing more than she tells, for in the immediate description Margaretha does not end Katjie's pain but "[stills] her cries". At the moment when she is expressing her grief and protest, Katjie is silenced by the mistress who cannot bear to listen, or to lose control of her.

In *Mittee and Wizards' Country*, Rooke adopts the perspectives of two (very different) victims of racist

domination. Her other novels, although narrated by white characters, also offer portraits which examine various aspects of black experience, through characters like Katjie, Bokkie in *The Greyling* and Sowa and his family in *Ratoons*. Still, it is the portraits of white South Africans which dominate her writing. In her relentless recording of the pervasive racism of white society Rooke raises questions of culpability which are particularly relevant in this era of the Truth Commission, with its communal delving into our past.

The ghosts which haunt Rooke's white occupiers of the land are a way of representing the inescapable hold history has over the present, despite efforts to rewrite that history. As Glenn writes in his introduction to *Mittee*:

The Gothic elements of Rooke's work and the juxtaposition of violence, sexuality, and a tedious domestic surface respectability become a view of South Africa founded on violence and conquest and subsequently covering up that knowledge. In *Mittee* the motif of the skull in the hole, which in turn becomes the skeleton of what has been killed and repressed, seems to work quite as logically and thoroughly as the corpse in Gordimer's *The Conservationist*. (2-3)

In *The Greyling* Ilse describes the curse on her husband's family:

There are bushveld farms that are only a stretch of grass and trees beneath the sky: you always have the feeling that they are waiting for you to move on as others did before you. All sorts of people have been here: a million warring Natives, Voortrekkers, hunters, missionaries, English soldiers, prospectors, miners, storekeepers. The land was wide, people only tasted of it and trekked on. Not so Paulus Raymond Van Doorn, my husband's greatgrandfather. He outspanned here in 1840 and died here twenty years later. In the cemetery at the foot of the hill there is a monument to him, an obelisk visible for miles around. He is a hero in this district: he fought the Zulus at Blood River and he was a great hunter. When he was magistrate, he bought vast tracts of land from the chiefs and they say he and his descendants were cursed by an old Native woman whose village he burnt down when

taking up Banghoek. The Van Doorns believe in the curse and in every generation, it seems to me, do something to bring disaster on themselves: old Paulus Raymond himself, hunting alone at night as though seeking death, was trampled by an elephant. He was paralysed for six years before he died. He considered this as part of the price he paid for Banghoek and that was why he entailed it. "Destroy the heathen and let Van Doorns drink for evermore from the fountain in the hollow as I did": he had these words written into his will which is preserved in the museum at Perelkop. (*The Greyling* 73)

The history of bloodshed and dispossession cannot be obliterated and demands recognition. Sadly, however, white society as depicted by Rooke is generally unprepared to take any action to make amends.

When faced with historical evidence of large-scale social evil one asks "How could they have done it?" or, at least, "How could they have allowed it to continue?". Rooke's novels provide no clear answers, but illuminate the questions in disturbing ways. She does not write about "political" people: her characters are neither revolutionaries, nor (with a few exceptions) active campaigners for apartheid. Most of the white characters, even the more sympathetic ones, are frustratingly non-committal in their attitudes towards the racist system; the only clearly oppositional stance is found in the unlikely figure of Tante at the end of *The Greyling*. Other characters, like Mittee, Margaretha, Helen in *Ratoons*, Mannie in *Diamond Jo* and Ilse in *The Greyling*, have flashes of critical insight into the status quo, and express sympathy and sometimes friendship for black people, but seem incapable of stepping outside the system to challenge it and are indeed themselves frequently active racist participants.

The racist language frequently used by Rooke's narrators has an embarrassing quality for the contemporary reader,

although it is surely an example of realism at work. (There are very few who admit to being, or to ever having been racist in present-day South Africa, but one doesn't have to dig very far to see that racism is still active and prevalent, even if it is now usually disguised with euphemism.) The previous government enjoyed a very high level of support among the white community, serious white opposition was weak in numbers, and Rooke's white characters are representative of this situation.

In *A Lover for Estelle* there is a scene in which Caroline, at a social disadvantage while visiting Madeleine Foley for the first time, attacks the Foleys' "houseboy". She first encounters him while approaching the house, and admiring Mrs Foley's washing on the line:

I wiped my hands carefully on my handkerchief and I was letting the lace blow like foam over my fingertips when I had the feeling that I was being watched.... I walked as though carelessly towards the shed. There was nobody on one side but as I turned the corner I came upon a native boy who had been stalking me from the back of the shed. He was a houseboy, dressed in a white suit with red facings. I knew this devil had been watching me, for his lips were closed up tightly to prevent a burst of laughter. I lifted my hand to give him such a hit but there was no catching him, he was off like a lizard. (42)

She then plucks up her courage to go into the house, where Mrs Foley and some friends are playing poker. Later she is asked to turn over a record:

There was the cursed native boy staring at me. I ignored him and wound up the gramophone, but when I turned the record over I dropped it. It broke. The native boy's face was alight with joy. I went after him, for I could stand no more. I was so determined that he did not get away from me this time. When I caught him I held him fast to smack him. (44)

Caroline is a generally sympathetic character, and none of the previous interracial encounters prepare one for the unpleasant

brutality of this scene. Feeling embarrassed and ill-at-ease in the presence of wealthier and more sophisticated people, she perceives (or imagines -- since it is her description and he does not speak throughout the encounter) his enjoyment at her discomfort and is enraged by it. There is none of the social decorum which would prevent her from striking a white person in the same context and her reaction is automatic: clearly she comes from an environment in which this kind of behaviour towards black people is common and acceptable. The childishness of the teasing boy and angry girl becomes nasty in the context of the unequal power relations between them, which she does not hesitate to use. The humorous aspects of the scene (since on one level it *is* funny) serve to highlight its painfulness. The boy's cries bring Mrs Foley and her guests out onto the veranda. Their reaction is one of bored amusement:

"Tinkie has broken 'Yearning' and lost you your umfaan," said one of the men, Bellew.

"And bust up the game," said Mrs Foley. (44)

Caroline's explanation of her behaviour to the group only heightens their amusement, as she brings out the stock phrases with which white South Africans attempt to excuse their actions:

I spoke in a loud voice to them standing on the veranda looking down at me: "I shall send a half-crown for the boy. I should not have hit him. We Kramers are fair to the natives and my father has seldom struck one, you must not misjudge him because of me, nor my mother, she will put up with anything from her servants...." I knew I should stop, they were beginning to smile, but the words came tumbling from me as though I had no control over them; I was ready to give our pedigree, from the baron who founded our family in South Africa right down to that day: there was still a Kramer in Parliament. (*A Lover for Estelle*, 44-45)

Estelle, like Rooke's other novels, is narrated from a

later perspective -- an older Caroline reporting on the events of her youth -- and the narrating Caroline does not comment on her own attitudes or those of her younger self, much as the reader may wish she would. Caroline remains, like Ilse in *The Greyling* and Helen in *Ratoons*, frustratingly enigmatic; the reader is not reassured by easy explanations and apologies.

Later in the novel, however, there is a strange, gothic-flavoured scene in which Caroline encounters an old Zulu woman at the mission hospital. The old woman, a Christian, believes she has been bewitched (describing her bewitchment in terms closely reminiscent of passages from *Wizards' Country*) and has since had thorns growing from under her fingernails (167). With the old woman Caroline is quite different from the young "madam" attacking the "boy" in the previous scene: she speaks respectfully, showing an awareness of and sensitivity towards Zulu cultural norms. While still thinking of the woman as "a native" (169), she calls her "mother" and "old woman" as a Zulu woman would. Once again we are offered no explanation for this apparent contradiction; somehow we must come to terms with the paradox that the Caroline who can assault a young boy because of his blackness and boast about her family's colonial connections is the same Caroline who seems culturally in tune with the old woman's world, who seems closer to the old woman's culture than to that of the Foleys from England. But although Caroline's racism, and that of white South Africa in general, is never explicitly denounced or even discussed in the text, the powerful symbolism of the scene with the old woman accords it a far greater importance than its peripheral placing in terms of plot would suggest:

"Have the cocks crowed?" the old woman asked

without moving.

"Twice. The nurse was here."

The cocks crowed again. Jupiter was in the sky. Then came a flapping of wings as the fowls descended from their roosts. It was just possible to see. Beneath a fig tree on the veld beyond the Mission garden, a little doe began to feed, like a creature in Eden.

The old woman sat up, spectral in her white robe and turban. For eyes she had great hollows and her mouth was a hole in her face.

She held out her right hand to me. On the index finger there was a gathering of pus. She squeezed it and there shot out a long black polished thorn. I was afraid and I could not pick up the thorn to place it in the bottle left for the purpose.

"You must. The doctor will want to see it." The old woman was pointing to some forceps on the washstand.

I was ashamed that she, a native, should see me afraid of a thorn. She began to chant: "Kristo Kristo Kristo..." and did not stop until I had placed the thorn in the bottle.

Then she put a silk-fringed shawl over her shoulders as one might do an act of homage. She knelt to pray. Her voice soared up with the singing beauty of Zulu words. I prayed with her. (168-9)

The religious symbolism -- the thorn, the cock crowing three times -- recalls the crucifixion and Peter's repudiation of Christ. The woman is clearly being identified with Christ, Caroline with those who have failed him but are being called back to repentance. Caroline can be forgiven -- she is allowed to pray with the old woman -- but first she must acknowledge her guilt and perform an act of atonement: removing the thorn. Although the Christian symbolism is relatively orthodox, this is not the Christianity of white colonialism, but a Christianity which the old woman has made her own by a synthesis of traditional and "Western"⁷ beliefs. The old woman tells Caroline that

A witch rode past my village. She was mounted on a hyena and rode with her back to the hyena's head, therefore she could see danger from the back while the hyena could see it from the front. (*A Lover for Estelle* 167)

This compares very closely to Benge's description of the witch

in *Wizards' Country*:

The witch came to fetch me. She rode alone, on the big hyena, she sitting with her back to its head: in this way all things were visible to her, for she saw through the hyena's eyes as well as through her own. Long before I saw her I heard her laughter which silenced the people who had been talking in their field shelters. The hyena laughed too, silencing little goats that bleated. (168)

Rooke's treatment of witchcraft is ambiguous, however, declining to endorse the standard colonial opposition between the negative forces of witchcraft, associated with traditional African culture, and the positive forces of (European) Christianity. The old woman in *Estelle* is delivered from her bewitching (188), just as Benge is cured of his, but these triumphs over witchcraft do not imply a rejection of Zulu culture. For although the witch is undoubtedly connected to Benge's culture, she is also a force destructive to it -- she has killed the ancestors' spirits within her and wishes Benge to do the same. His refusal breaks her power over him:

Tshanini [the spirit of Benge's clan] came into the cave. He was of majesty and not only of himself but of the dead who had been added to him: he was strong from the blood of sacrifices given through the generations. He was a storm wind quenching the witch's fire. (*Wizards' Country* 170-1)

The witch clearly also stands for something else; her fire is that of the novel's last pages when

Liyana... was burning, and the light of the flames showed in the stream. The men who had set it alight were still there, watching the flames as children do.... The fire went quickly through the dry grass, crackling in it and sending out flames in many directions. The fear of our ancestor was upon us.

We fled to the stream, to cool banks where moisture lay on the grass and bushes. But we could not escape the smoke. The smell of burning grass shrivelled our spirits and we vomited, trying to rid ourselves of the poison. I put my face into the living grass that grew along the riverbank. I wound my fingers into the grass, feeling its strength as it clung to the earth. How lovely is the grass that withers but never dies.

No sound came from me; but my spirit rose up in a last struggle crying within me, "Tshanini, do not forsake me. Tshanini Tshanini! Do not forsake your child!" (*Wizards' Country* 294-5)

Clearly here, in the aftermath of military defeat, it is the colonial system which has unleashed the baneful forces associated with witchcraft, just as the ambiguous figure of the "magic dwarf" in the novel's opening lines, who may "come innocently, to frolic with the children" or "come to steal a maiden or to work some mischief in the crops" (1) suggests the subtle beginnings of the British colonial process in Zululand.⁸

Danny Ashburn, the mad narrator of Rooke's first novel, *A Grove of Fever Trees*, is unique among Rooke's white protagonists in that he feels no racial prejudice and is able to cross racial and cultural barriers to the extent that he feels more at home as a "white Zulu" than as a member of the settler farming community. Though Danny's actions are violent and dangerous, his madness functions as an ironic comment on the restrictive and hypocritical colonial society in which he finds himself. Myrtle Hooper argues that Danny's madness "[rather] than succumbing to community... represents an escape from it, hence something liberating and even enviable" (71). The "madman" whose "relations with black people are one of the saner aspects of his character" (Hooper 70) shows up the "madness" and prejudices of his settler society, but the limitations of his irresponsible slipping back and forth between two worlds, fulfilling obligations to neither, are also apparent.

Danny's contact with the local Zulu community begins when he and his sister Vera are aided by the mysterious Jatu, after

two accidents have befallen the Ashburn family. Mrs Ashburn is seriously injured and driven to hospital by the eldest child, Edward. In their absence Vera is bitten by a snake and Danny in his terror and helplessness experiences his first entry into the "dark places" (38) of his madness. Thus the rescue by Jatu is linked to Danny's descent into madness, and seems to function ambiguously, as both a healing escape from the terrifying experience of complete dislocation and a kind of extension of it. Jatu provides a refuge and communal acceptance, but although Danny spends much of his time with him and his family, staying with them for periods of months and even years through the course of the novel, he never describes much of his time there. His other life as a "white Zulu" seems to be something he lacks the language to express, just as language cannot describe his frequently homicidal bouts of madness.⁹

There are interesting parallels between Danny and Benge, the narrator of *Wizards' Country*. Both are marginalized within their families and communities and Danny's bouts of madness can be compared with Benge's incursions into the witch's territory. At the same time, Danny's periods with Jatu, escaping the constraints of his own community, parallel Benge's use of the witch's country as a means of escape. But Benge ultimately resists the egotistical temptations of life in the witch's world and accepts the responsibilities of communal life, becoming fully integrated into his community by the novel's end. Danny, on the other hand, remains accountable only to himself and continues to evade all the usual responsibilities of adulthood.

Part of the difference between the two characters and

their diverging paths rests of course in the contrasting natures of their respective societies: while Benge's community has its faults, it is ultimately inclusive and provides a more tolerant space for the individual within the dominant ethos of communalism, whereas Danny's settler society is built on exclusion, domination and extreme anxiety over any perceived deviance from the norms of "civilisation". But Danny seeks escape not only from the negative constraints of his whiteness, but also from universal obligations to family and friends. His time with his Zulu friends does not instil in him any of the communal values which permeate Benge's world, and his view of the Zulus is in many ways a stereotypical white one. Danny turns to the Zulus for adventure and excitement and seems to associate their lifestyle with macho bravado, sexual promiscuity and freedom from moral constraints -- so that Jatu's poisoning of his young wife and her lover seems perfectly acceptable -- in crucial respects the antithesis of the complex and ordered social system portrayed in *Wizards' Country*.

Of course, Rooke is quite clear about the fact that Danny is a madman, and though he has many fine qualities he is certainly not being offered as a moral example. His view of the Zulus is a distorted and exaggerated one, seen through the prism of his weird consciousness, his "sufficiently strange and beautiful" world (50). Danny uses the periodic option of escape which Jatu offers him to feed his personal psychological needs, not least in relying on a father-figure to counter his dominating mother, but he remains completely oblivious to the larger societal picture. While opposing prejudice on a personal level, Danny remains conveniently

ignorant of the larger forces of exploitation acting upon Jatu and his people. His view of their world is one of dances, weddings and hunting parties, a bitterly ironic vision of ease and plenty in the light of the impoverishment of indigenous peoples taking place in the period of the novel's setting. Danny shares in Zulu joys, but never depicts their hardships or shares in Benge's "bitter porridge of manhood" (*Wizards' Country* 299).¹⁰

In *Ratoons*, which is very intimately concerned with the racial tensions between white settlers, Indians and Zulus, Helen's stance as narrator is an ambiguous one. She feels a cultural affinity with the Indians, has close relationships with Leela and her daughter Amoya, and gets involved with the training of Indian nurses; but the thought of her son Nicky's relationship with Leela's other daughter Chanjaldi so angers her that she wants to have Chanjaldi killed. Generally the attitudes of the whites towards the Indians fluctuate between admiration and denigration. Early in the novel Helen describes the labourers recently hired by her father:

The Indians took root at once. We heard their chanting and the bleating of a goat when they sacrificed at the new moon, we watched the smoke rise from a funeral pyre by the river, we saw them at a wedding-feast; and smiled at the bridegroom garlanded with marigolds. These were their flowers loved for their sacred colour. We did not grow marigolds in our gardens, for their very scent belongs to the Indians. At times they took the Awetuli River for their own and made of it another Ganges. Afterwards we were to remember how softly they came amongst us. (*Ratoons* 9)¹¹

In the above description the Indians are seen as exotic and picturesque, bringing beauty to their surroundings, and non-threatening to white interests. But they are also, throughout the novel, humiliated with racist terms like "coolie" and

stereotyped as dirty, thieving and dishonest. The fact that the Indians are not prepared to remain long in the roles of servants and labourers arouses white anger, particularly when some of them begin to prosper with independent businesses. The picturesque "coolie" becomes the "stinking... coolie" (226) when he dares to move outside the space the whites have marked off for him.

In *Ratoons* racism is also not an exclusively white practice. The Zulu servant Zetke allies himself with white interests, and seems to model himself on Helen's father, John. As a black man he is the victim of racism (the Angus family think nothing of making him sleep on the kitchen floor, for instance) but he delights in the power which his position as "Induna" gives him over the Indian labourers. Once again, as in *Mittee*, the colonial system is shown to be a divisive one; nevertheless, Zetke's experience of dispossession and oppression cannot excuse his violence against similarly oppressed people. The attitude of the whites (who are indirectly culpable) towards the violence at the end of the novel, when Zetke and other Zulus attack the Indian settlement, is one of complacency, with a hint of enjoyment -- "the policeman... says there is no danger from the Zulus if we just sit tight, they're after the Indians" (234) -- and they are content to sit back and watch the conflict, taking no responsibility for it.

Although *Ratoons* is narrated from a white perspective, it does allow Sowa, Leela's son, a moment of revenge against the dying John Angus, who has subjected him to so much racist humiliation throughout the novel. Forced to take refuge in the Angus's house during the attack by the Zulus, and left alone

with John, Sowa makes him believe that Nicky has been killed in the fire:

"He is saying, 'You stinking coolie, get me daughter, tell her I want to see Nicky, answer me you bloody fool, I didn't kill your sister, I was waiting for the other one. Your sister ran away from me, she falling like they say at the inquest. Now getting my daughter.' 'No, Master, she will not come, she is not liking to tell you what is happening to Nicky. You never seeing your son, master, he is burnt in the fire and Drew's Pride too and all the peoples living there.'" His voice swelled with passion. "'Your son and his wife and the big house are burnt. Looking through the window, master.' He is trying to sit up and his face is turning blue all over. 'But Sowa's wife and child they safe in Durban, master, my daughter she is born on the same night you killing Amoya...' But he is not hearing any more. He is trying all the time to shout for Nicky, but can't doing it." (237)

Sowa's action may be cruel, but as a reader one can hardly condemn him; indeed there is something satisfying about this scene, as there is in *Mittee* when Selina and Fanie kill Paul. This brings one to the question of responses to racial oppression. Rooke does not encourage violence but writes with an understanding of it; her novels are explorations of the violence of the colonial system and she seems to accept its inevitability as the only available course of defensive action at times. Rooke does not really explore organised political action against racism, perhaps because this was an area with which she was not very familiar, but her novels certainly seem to demonstrate the need for it. Another response is that of exile, followed by Selina and Fanie in *Mittee* (who are still able to escape the system within the borders of the colony at the turn of the century) and by Tante and Oubaas at the end of *The Greyling* (who must leave the country in order to adopt their coloured grandchild, there being no place left to hide in the era of Verwoerd).

From a historical perspective, Rooke's novels demonstrate that apartheid was alive and active long before it was officially enshrined as state policy. Official apartheid does bring a change, however, in that the status quo can no longer be taken for granted, but must be justified and argued for. In *The Greyling*, set in a context of resistance and repression, essentially a state of civil war, the white characters are preoccupied with defining and legitimising the system and there are arguments about how best to implement apartheid. Ilse overhears the Delports discussing Bokkie (this after Bokkie has been caught using the "white" toilet and has been beaten as punishment by her grandfather Sipho):

There were footsteps on the concrete path at the side of the house. They stopped at the edge of the house wall.

"It's Sipho, baas. Bokkie asks if she is sacked or must she come to light the fire tomorrow?" There was a shattering sob from Bokkie.

"Let her come," said Tante. Then, "Heaven, ag sis tog, I'll get some vaseline for the bruises." She went inside but Sipho and Bokkie had gone when she came out again.

"He said the girl would learn more quickly if she felt what he had done to her."

"They're hard, Kaffirs," said Tante.

"Yet he was right," said the Oubaas. "Of what use is it to be soft with her after such a bad fault? Let Sipho do it his own way, he knows how to handle her."

Tant Bertha settled herself in bed, sighing.

"Hypocrites," said Maarten suddenly.

"What?" cried the Oubaas.

"I said you were hypocrites. You talk about Apartheid but you don't begin to understand. The Greyling should never have been allowed to live with the Natives. She is separate from them, she's a Coloured. Why didn't you see that she was sent to live with Coloureds? She doesn't belong to the Natives any more than she belongs to the Europeans...." (*The Greyling* 39-40)

The irony of this scene, as we discover later in the novel, is that Maarten is secretly sexually involved with Bokkie.

Bokkie, whose black mother abandoned her as a baby, and whose

father was "some low White man in Joh'burg who ran away before she was born" (66), does not fit into apartheid's racial categories. She spends the first part of her life wanting to be black so as to be more acceptable to her relatives, and later wants desperately to make herself white in the hope that she might win Maarten's love.

In the portrait of the Rottchers in *The Greyling*, Rooke gives a chilling portrayal of fascist racism. Wife of the leading farmer in the district, Mrs Rottcher takes on the task of regulating the behaviour of the inhabitants of Perelkop:

Mrs Rottcher... liked to point out to the community where its Christian duty lay and she liked to see it following that path. Indeed her charity seemed all-embracing. (50-51)

The following scene takes place outside the church, where Ilse and Mrs Rottcher are standing:

The Kinders passed. They had with them their youngest son who had turned out to look like a Coloured; crinkly hair, thick lips and flat nose, he had them all. But his hair was reddish and his skin freckled so he would have no difficulty in being registered as White. His parents brought him to church every Sunday in a neat dark suit and highly polished shoes. He was accepted in Perelkop, with a tug at the heartstrings. The reminder of a Hottentot wife taken by a lonely Dutch pioneer? A freak perhaps? Whatever he was, young Kinder rested in the shade of our compassion. A harsher community might have argued that God had set the curse of Ham on him for some divine purpose and that he must suffer accordingly; elsewhere I have heard such an argument in the case of a Coloured-looking child born to White parents. But the Perelkop community, led by the Rottchers, was not unnecessarily cruel. Apartheid there must be but let there be charity too. I think Mrs Rottcher looked upon the youngest Kinder boy with the pity one feels for a deformed person. Not by a look would she betray that she noticed his features and hair, any more than she would have stared at a cleft lip. If there had been the slightest suspicion of the boy's mother having been betrayed into a moment's lust with some Coloured man, Mrs Rottcher would have destroyed her and her son too; I am more than ever aware of that now. (*The Greyling* 50-51)

The use of religion to justify racial separation and oppression was, of course, a major feature of the apartheid system. Mrs Rottcher has no problem with reconciling her extreme racism with her version of state-sanctioned Christianity, but a character like Tante has more difficulty coming to terms with the contradictions involved. A conversation between Oubaas and the evangelist reveals a problem at the heart of apartheid racism -- the clash between the concept of "separate but equal" and the idea of white superiority versus black servitude:

God meant people to be different... Who was it but God who ordained the Tower of Babel?... there was authority for Apartheid in the Bible... it was a sin for White and Black to marry... the White man's task was not to bring riches to the Kaffir, he must bring the Kaffir to Jesus... that was the real community of Man, all souls were equal... but God meant people to be different... there was authority for Apartheid in the Bible... (*The Greyling* 35-36; ellipses in original)

Here the indirect speech, which contrasts with Rooke's usual method of narrating dialogue, the frequent ellipses and repetition of phrases emphasise the representative nature of the "conversation" as one occurring over and over between white South Africans desperately trying to justify their actions. The repetition of the phrases "God meant people to be different" and "there was authority for Apartheid in the Bible" suggests a stubborn defensiveness masking a deeper anxiety and insecurity.

As far as Rooke's treatment of "miscegenation" is concerned, a character like Maarten in *The Greyling* serves as a perfect illustration of Malvern van Wyk Smith's observation that

[the] act and motif of miscegenation... generates in the racist imagination a profound schizophrenia and

becomes an emblem of an unresolvable tension between desire for a difference on which continued racial hegemony depends, and for an intimate but illicit occupation which expresses and confirms control. (van Wyk Smith 55)

Maarten's relationship with Bokkie may be forbidden, and go against his public position as loyal member of the local commando, but it also allows him to practise his idea of whiteness, power and domination, in a very particular way. Rooke demonstrates both the potential for real tenderness between them, and the actual brutality of the relationship. Bokkie's plight is heartbreaking, since she has a personal history of violence and abuse, and willingly accepts Maarten's brutality, loving him in spite of it. After the birth of their child, Bokkie is amazed by Maarten's show of affection for the baby, and begins to want that kind of affection from him for herself. She tells Ilse:

"When I saw Martie with the baby for the first time, I was surprised, he was so nice with her. He took her on his hands, holding her as though his hands were a tray, it made me laugh. And when he put her down again, he had a look at her toes and fingers. There was a loving expression on his face. Nonna, he has never been nice to me like that, even when we were children. I was always the Coloured. Even the first time... God's witness I was a virgin... he broke into me as if he wanted to smash me up for life. And he thrashed me when I told him I was going to have a baby. Do you remember that black eye I had?

"After he found me in the valley here, he often came hunting and he would come late at night and sit on a box in my room paring off biltong and tell me about the hunt. He would give me some of the biltong. If he had shot anything, I'd cook and we would eat together. Once or twice he slept with me, only sleeping, nothing else, because I suddenly got very big. But I must always remember I am a Coloured. If I called him Martie, he wouldn't say anything sometimes, other times he would tell me to shut up and call him Baas. But it is different when he looks at the baby. That first time I cried. I did not know that he could look like that at a Coloured." (*The Greyling* 92-93)

Unlike Sarah Gertrude Millin who "consciously and

deliberately contributed to the developing myths of racism", Rooke's novels belong rather with those "more serious works dealing with the damages wrought in our socio-political fabric by the obsession with miscegenation" (van Wyk Smith 55,57).

The pressures of racism, both from without and within, prove too much for Maarten and Bokkie, but their child becomes a symbol of hope. Through the trauma of Maarten's trial and execution, Tante is able to overcome her own racism and come to the realisation that

from first to last we taught him to love his Whiteness above everything else, above Christ, above his own need of a woman... we put him in hell; not only Rottcher but all of us who brought him up. They looked for his motive for killing her: nobody knew that he considered it a worse sin to love her than to take her as if she were a whore. (164-5)

But although *The Greyling* ends on a positive note with the Delports' escape, and Sipho's completion of the unfinished church on their farm, this optimism is tempered by the unresolved tensions associated with Ilse's narration. Ilse, unlike Tante but like Rooke's other white narrators, never makes a clear declaration of her views, and her stance remains ambiguous and disturbing: on the one hand she keeps Bokkie and Maarten's secret, allows Thomas and his family refuge and supports Tante at the end of the novel; on the other hand, she reveals racist (and sexist -- which will be explored more in the next chapter) attitudes of her own, and further than that demonstrates a pragmatic support for a system she does not really support, because it furthers her own personal aims. Ilse's racism, though less violent, is perhaps more disturbing in some ways than that of a character like Maarten, who believes in apartheid with a kind of religious fervour. Ilse does not "believe" in Apartheid in the same way -- indeed she

is able to analyse, even satirize, the attitudes of the Rottchers and their ilk -- and yet she takes no open stance against it, and indeed supports it. Although her sympathies are clearly with the Delports and Sipho at the novel's close, there is no indication that she will herself cross the line from passive and silent to active opposition. The narrative finally (and appropriately, for one written and set in the early sixties) resists closure on this point: there can be no easy solutions, and individual epiphanies like Tante's are not enough, without fundamental social, as well as individual, change.

Rooke is, of course, not alone in her concern with race, for obvious reasons the central preoccupation in South African writing, but she stands apart from her fellow writers in her handling of the theme. While her work is free of the social Darwinist ideology which permeates the novels of Sarah Gertrude Millin, she also differs from other contemporaries. Rooke's concern with inequalities has always informed her writing, but her suppression of an authorial voice and concentration on action rather than narrative to emphasise moral truths, combined with her relative lack of political and theoretical sophistication, have resulted in a very different style of "protest" from Gordimer, say. (While Gordimer's novels are self-consciously protest *writing*, Rooke's ostensibly more neutral works lend themselves just as effectively to protest *readings*.)

With Rooke's work it is particularly important to distinguish between representations of racism and authorial attitudes towards those representations. The "freedom" which Rooke grants her characters to be themselves means that *their*

racist attitudes are very apparent, while a clearly oppositional voice may often appear to be absent, at least in terms of conventional narrative. (Although there are many oppositional voices to be found, particularly among the black characters.) Rooke is also uneasy with the idea of imposing her own moral standards on the reader -- also, perhaps, with the concept of fixed and clear moral distinctions *per se*. In my interview I asked her about the absence of moralising in her work and she replied:

I suppose it's because in myself I have no very strong feelings of what is right and what is wrong, but I should think I know what is good and what is bad. But I can quite see that what is good to me might seem bad to somebody else. I have this feeling that I have no right to tell anybody what is good and what is bad. And bringing out the moral through action seemed as good a way as possible of stating your own opinion. (2-3)

The "action", the juxtaposition of contrasting scenes which emphasize striking inequalities, and the (frequently self-damning) words of characters themselves, provide fertile grounds for readings which subvert and question the ideology of racism, but these readings are not overdetermined by the author -- like her characters, Rooke's readers are given a great deal of freedom.

In her recent interview, Jane Fenner asks Rooke about Millin, and receives the following reply:

Well, I think her work is the work of a racist and I think her emphasis on the blood of the coloureds is something that is completely foreign to me -- if I had a friend who was a coloured woman, I would never consider her as a person of mixed blood or anything, I would think of her as a woman. And I couldn't see that the coloured person -- you know, a person who has black and white parents -- I couldn't see that that was a curse. They were people, they could be marvellous people or they could be terrible people but I hadn't her view of race -- I had no feeling at all but rather a distaste for it. (6)

But while Rooke finds Millin's racism repugnant, her attitude also differs from those who tend to single out (South African) racism and to privilege racial above all other forms of injustice. In the same interview Fenner asks if living in South Africa "[compelled Rooke] to write":

Well, I was who I was. I mean, my mother was a writer, my uncle was a writer, so transpose to any country in the world genes like that one would write. I feel sure, being the sort of person I was then, if I had been born in England I would have seen the differences between the rich and the poor and I would have seen the horror of the class distinctions. If I had been born in India, I would have seen -- giving... that I remained the same sort of person -- I would have seen the horror of the caste system. (2)

While affirming that the injustice of racial inequalities in South Africa was an important influence and consideration in her writing, Rooke refuses to separate either racism or South Africa from a world in which suffering and domination by the powerful proliferate in various forms.

A characteristic of Rooke's writing is her ability to cross boundaries in terms of her characters and narrators, and works like *Wizards' Country* and *Mittee* demonstrate an awareness of black South Africans as historical agents rather than merely the objects of (white) representation. It is also worth noting, however, that Rooke's black narrators are both nineteenth-century figures. Her inability to bring them into the twentieth century, despite her plan to make *Wizards' Country* the first of a trilogy, is perhaps an apt recognition of the limitations of her own whiteness. Her historical setting for Benge and his people, during the last days of Zulu independence, allows them full equality as independent agents, and although Selina's position is one of servitude it is also fairly fluid and she and Fanie are eventually able to "call no

man Baas" (*Mittee* 7). But, despite Rooke's ability to imagine herself into very different situations, the gulf of experience between herself as a white woman and black South Africans under apartheid was perhaps too wide for her to sustain the voice of a black narrator within this later period setting.¹² What she does here instead is to interrogate whiteness to an uncomfortably close degree.

NOTES

1. According to J.A. Kearney,

Rooke is, implicitly, what theorists such as Peter McLaren now call a Critical Multiculturalist, as distinct from a Conservative Multiculturalist who is likely to preserve "whiteness as an invisible norm"..., or a Liberal Multiculturalist who will tend to treat "difference as an 'essence' that exists independently of history, culture, and power".... ("Indians and Whites" 339)

2. In her feminist reading of *Mittee* and *Too Late the Phalarope* Margaret Lenta contrasts Rooke's choice of Selina as narrator with Paton's denial of a black woman's voice.
3. This kind of bias is also evident in a great deal of white South African writing. In Rabkin's review, for example, she is clearly speaking for and to whites when she writes that "[the] black man or woman with whom one works all day in office or factory... remains an enigma, a mystery. And it is impossible for a writer to pretend, as easily as does the politician, that the answer is to limit one's vision to those who have votes" (36).
4. Ian Glenn makes a similar point with regard to *Mittee* when he writes that "Selina and Fanie find a kind of separate peace at the end that may, ironically, justify separate development as a necessary escape from the psychic battering of the colonial 'family', but it is less a peace than an armed truce, and can only occur after an act of violent self-defence against the master" ("Introduction" 7).

5. It should also be noted, however, that animal imagery is commonly applied to white as well as black characters in *Mittee*.
6. One thinks here of Bessie Head's *Maru* where she writes:

In Botswana they say: Zebras, Lions, Buffalo and Bushmen live in the Kalahari Desert. If you can catch a Zebra, you can walk up to it, forcefully open its mouth and examine its teeth. The Zebra is not supposed to mind because it is an animal. Scientists do the same to Bushmen and they are not supposed to mind, because there is no one they can still turn round to and say, 'At least I am not a - ' Of all things that are said of oppressed people, the worst things are said and done to the Bushmen. Ask the scientists. Haven't they yet written a treatise on how Bushmen are an oddity of the human race, who are half the head of a man and half the body of a donkey? Because you don't go poking around into the organs of people unless they are animals or dead. (11-12)

7. Christianity is not in itself Western, but became so in practice through its long association with European cultures.
8. Green quotes Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, in their introduction to *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, who write that

in Natal, where the forces of colonisation were weak and had to come to terms with existing structures, utilising the pre-colonial forms and ideology for its own purposes of surplus extraction, but not totally restructuring it, [this] led to the development... of a policy and ideology of segregation which were to provide late nineteenth-century policy-makers with useful precedents. (quoted in "Difference and Domesticity" 135)

Green goes on to note that

[traditions]... are all too often the links we forge to the past to manacle it to our present concerns.... The materiality of the past often reasserts itself through the contradictions generated in its domestication, however.... The real aim of the Witchcraft Suppression Act was to loosen the hold of the witchdoctors on the chiefs, thus strengthening the power of the local

tribal authorities in terms of the Bantu Authorities Act. In the process, however, it became increasingly obvious that the chiefs were no longer primarily answerable to their communities, but rather to the Native Affairs Department. This has resulted in, on the one hand, the legitimacy of the chiefs being eroded as they came increasingly to be seen as government agents and, on the other, the related problem of the most dangerous aspects of witchhunting being cut adrift from their traditional controls and becoming a horrific force in the struggles emerging from collapsing communities. In Rooke's novel, a communal effort balancing history and magic frees the protagonist from the evil elements of the *Wizards' Country*, and forges a minimal base from which to translate the values learned in this into a struggle against a new and even more destructive world. ("Difference and Domesticity" 136)

9. J A Kearney writes that

[since] Rooke does not attempt to render Danny's inner experience, she gives it the status of an inexplicable territory that cannot be traversed in words but must be borne in mind: the unspeakable is unspoken. Danny's mad actions may thus be Rooke's way of expressing in extreme form her sense of the disturbing mystery of violence, of actions that reveal a gap in one's expectations or logical understanding. ("A Comparative Study" 114).

10. By contrast, in *A Lover for Estelle*, set in the same area and period, Caroline's father comments during the drought, "I saw the misery of the Zulus, it is greater than our misery" (106).

11. In his conference paper on *Ratoons*, J.A. Kearney writes:

Early in the novel Helen reports that "The Indians took root at once" and, more ambivalently, "Afterwards we were to remember how softly they came amongst us" (9). Part of the ambivalence of "softly" lies, of course, in the latent suggestion of cunning and duplicity on the part of Indians, a belief that is so dominant in the consciousness of her father, her Aunt Lucy, and Mrs Lambert, the midwife, and which rises to a kind of crescendo as the novel unfolds. The other part suggests a mode of being in the world which is non-

aggressive and non-competitive, a kind of acceptance or tolerance of diversity. An old Indian woman whom Helen watches from the balcony of her Aunt's house in Durban gathers carrots that have fallen out of a passing cart, and immediately afterwards scoops up the droppings of the cows that pulled it (121). When Helen runs out of Leela's hut because she has seen a puff-adder in the thatch, Leela gleefully responds: "It good. It eating rat" (188). Both of these tiny incidents seem to exemplify an attitude which embraces aspects of reality that in white consciousness are preferably kept separate according to a tyrannical binary code of moral and aesthetic discriminations. ("Indians and Whites" 340)

12. Of course, Bokkie in *The Greyling* is a vividly-drawn character who is given considerable space to speak, but the placement of Bokkie rather than Ilse as narrator might have entailed a greater leap of the imagination than either *Mittee* or *Wizards' Country*, despite (perhaps because of) the immediacy of its contemporary setting.

CHAPTER THREE

Gender, Sexuality and Family

"A woman like you is only for a man's convenience."
(*The Greyling* 134)

Mother wheeled me out on to the veranda this afternoon because I was having one of my 'good days'. She spread a rug over the place where my legs used to be and told me to behave and not make a noise else she would bring me in. (*A Grove of Fever Trees* 9)

In its discussion of Rooke's treatment of the themes of gender, sexuality and family, this chapter will focus at length on Rooke's concern with the position of women within society, examining the ways in which she presents varied female experiences and depicts women as both victims of and participants in societal oppression. It will also touch on her concern with and insight into male experience. With regard to sexuality, I will argue that Rooke writes with awareness of both the positive aspects of sexual expression and its potential for abuse through domination and violence. Similarly, in examining Rooke's response to the family as the site of both conflict and love, I will argue that she presents interpersonal relationships as fraught with tension while also offering the possibility of transcendence through a genuine mutuality.

Gender issues are of primary importance in Rooke's work, and are handled with an awareness of their complexity within the South African context. While Rooke does not privilege gender above race and class, her work foregrounds gender oppression as a vital element in the social equation. The prominence of gender issues in Rooke's novels, the frequent juxtaposition of images of female suffering under patriarchy

with images of racial and class injustice, suggest an awareness of the importance of tackling problems of gender alongside the problems of race and class with which they are intertwined.

While gender is foregrounded in Rooke's work, the particular complexities of patriarchal oppression and the roles of women and men within various patriarchal societies are explored. For gender is a trickier issue than either race or class, although these are complex enough. Women and men cannot be separated into groups as easily as members of different races or members of different social or economic classes: while individuals may be relatively isolated within a particular class or race it is extremely rare to find an individual who does not experience intimate ties across gender boundaries. In her concern with families, Rooke highlights also the ways in which ties of affection and shared experience complicate -- sometimes to entrench and sometimes to mitigate -- the oppression of women within patriarchal systems.

Many of Rooke's female characters feel frustrated and stifled by their confinement within a narrow domestic sphere, by their lack of education or career opportunities. But it is through sexuality and violence, and particularly where these categories overlap, that male power over women is most strikingly evident. Rooke's fictional world is one where sexual violence is common: in *Mittee*, *Ratoons* and *Diamond Jo* female characters are raped, while consenting seductions like those of Selina in *Mittee*, Margaretha in *Margaretha de la Porte* and Bokkie in *The Greyling* are borderline in their brutality. Women are also beaten by their fathers, and murdered by rapists, lovers or husbands; others are forced to

kill to avoid this fate.

But Rooke also writes about women who are powerful within the system and themselves the agents of women's oppression, just as they are also active participants in racial oppression; Mrs Rottcher in *The Greyling* is a prime example. The differences between Rooke's female characters are as striking as the similarities, while her intense focus on male experience also militates against any simplistic view of patriarchy as a system where men are oppressors and women victims.

In three of her novels Rooke assumes the voice of male narrators; she also offers insightful portraits of male characters in the female-narrator novels. Danny (*Grove*), Bengie (*Wizards' Country*) and Mannie (*Diamond Jo*) are all to some extent marginalised figures who, along with more conventional male characters like Paul Du Plessis and Maarten Delport, reveal the extent and influence of stereotypes associated with "maleness".¹

Still, female narrators and protagonists predominate in Rooke's writing, and a concern with women's experience is a thread running through all of her work. Reading Rooke's novels creates an overwhelming sense of the extent to which women are patronised and treated as second-best, of the ways in which they are stifled and frustrated and subjected to humiliating and hurtful behaviour. As Zoë Wicomb writes with regard to *Mittee*,

Rooke is resolute in her exposure of the bullying male. The consoling words of an Afrikaner matron -- 'Don't be upset by the boys. All girls have to put up with it, Selina, probably he meant no harm' -- reveal to what extent sexual harassment is institutionalised in that society. (Wicomb 17)

Economically, even women from the privileged classes are generally dependent on their fathers or husbands.

Opportunities for work outside the home are severely limited, and where female labour is drawn upon in the sphere of business, for example, it is usually exploited. The humorous tone of the following passage from *Margaretha de la Porte* emphasises the extent to which sexist attitudes are taken for granted:

I was the only member of the family who did not go to the Witwatersrand at that time. I remained at the Seminary for Young Ladies at Wynberg in the Cape because Father was determined that I should be well educated: I was to assist him in the business. He would have preferred it if I had been a boy but at least I wasn't pretty so that my head might not be crammed with nonsense: he needed somebody close to him who could calculate, write a good hand and listen intelligently to his plans. The only boy in our family was Magnus and he was still in arms so I would have to fill the gap, said Father.

My eldest sister, Fanny, was too good-looking to be of use in the business. Even if she had been able to add up, she would have complicated things at the office, clerks being notoriously susceptible on account of not getting enough exercise. (*Margaretha* 9)

While Rooke is sensitive to the ways in which women like Pauline are subject to male control, she is also aware of the contradictions inherent in the position of privileged white women within the colonial system. When Mittee tells Selina that "Paul is like Grandma. You are never free from him. I have to do only what he tells me, I'm like a monkey on a chain" -- she does not consider the irony of bemoaning her fate to Selina, who has had to follow Mittee's orders, despite Selina's bitter question, "Would you rather be Selina, who has no home and no people?" (*Mittee* 107). Still, Mittee's position of power over her black servants does not invalidate the suffering she experiences in her marriage: Paul kills their

child because he cannot bear his deformity (178) and viciously beats her with a sjambok (176).

Of course, Mittee is also unaware of Selina's relationship with Paul, a cruel and exploitative one which causes Selina much suffering through the course of the novel. Selina also suffers abuse at the hands of the bully Jansie, who harasses her sexually and assaults her when he discovers that she is pregnant, causing her to miscarry (81). By contrast, Selina's marriage to Fanie brings her happiness, despite the continuing sexual attraction she feels for Paul. Fanie's tenderness and empathy for women and their suffering make him a model of positive masculinity in contrast with Paul's violence. When Selina asks him, "where did you learn such gentleness and grace?", he replies:

"There are some people who say that Fanie is as soft as a woman. That is why they spoke against Frikkie and me. If I am gentle, Selina, it is because I pity women. I first learned that pity for them when I was a little boy. I was in the house with Auntie Lena when her last child was born. I learned that night that love for a woman means blood and pain and sweat. I was ashamed of being a man, when I grew older and understood. I am ashamed of the man that fathered me...." (Mittee 119)

For Selina, Fanie's love is healing and enriching, a love of equals, whereas Paul dominates and flaunts his power over her and she is always left feeling debased after their sexual encounters. She says of Fanie:

I was not afraid of the darkness when I was with him. I was not afraid of anything when I was with him. I wanted to say, You've set me apart from the brute beasts of the field, Fanie; but I was tired of words and we walked in silence until we saw the light Auntie Lena had set in the peach tree to guide us. (Mittee 119)

Mittee also eventually finds a fulfilling relationship with Castledene, who shares Fanie's qualities of compassion

and gentleness. Positive relationships like these are the exception rather than the norm, however, where marriages are contracted according to social and economic pressures and male power over women is seldom questioned.

Selina and Mittee both suffer gender oppression, but their experiences differ markedly because of their contrasting positions with regard to race and class. In *A Lover for Estelle*, Rooke looks at the different experiences of two women within the same family. Caroline, the narrator, longs to continue with her education and is bored and frustrated on the family's Zululand farm. Her father "[approves] of education for girls: it was one of the things he liked to hold forth about" (30) but he cannot afford to pay for her to matriculate, although her elder brother has been given the opportunity. Charged with looking after her younger siblings, Caroline prefers to leave them with her sister Estelle and go off to read and study by herself. While Caroline is proudly labelled "the intellectual one" by her mother, Estelle is typecast as her mother's "little housewife" (22), and introduced thus to visitors. As a young child she had lost out on her mother's attention after the birth of Caroline (187), and during her childhood she had suffered the emotional abuse of her elder brother Alwyn who would lock her up for hours (212-3).

Her family consider Estelle to be rather stupid because of her lack of success at school and they take it for granted that she is content within the domestic sphere where she excels. Her later transformation and rebellion, through her love affair with Julian Foley, takes them all by surprise, although there are earlier signs of her discontent, often

expressed through jealousy of her sister who has greater freedom. Early in the novel when Caroline tells her about a visit to the mission station on the mountain, Estelle replies, "You get everything.... I wish I could have gone on to the mountain" (5). When Caroline goes to help Alwyn at the store, Estelle is jealous of her contact with the Foleys and eager for any details of her sister's experiences.

Estelle does not love her suitor, the uninspiring and rather ridiculous Manie du Toit, but feels that she is not good enough to attract anyone else. She tells Caroline

"I think we should suit each other. If I marry someone clever, think how he will despise me. I know nothing. Manie thinks I am clever and beautiful, he's the only one except Mamma and Pappie who has ever praised me." (*A Lover for Estelle* 54-55)

Estelle is placed under further pressure to accept Manie's proposal when her brother borrows money from him in order to buy the store (62-64). But other events intervene and Estelle takes Caroline's place helping Alwyn at the store, where she gets to know the Foleys and begins an affair with Julian which results in pregnancy. At this stage she is still the passive victim of events as the Foleys take advantage of her naivety and her feelings for Julian: he loves his wife rather than Estelle, while Madeleine encourages the affair as a cover for her own affairs with Starrett and Alwyn. But after the climactic scene where Julian Foley murders Madeleine in the store (197) -- Alwyn and Foley have fought over Estelle's pregnancy and Caroline tells Foley about his wife's affairs -- Estelle takes charge, persuading Foley not to kill himself but faking his suicide and engineering a plan to allow him to escape (225-6). Her singleminded determination in making these arrangements contrasts with the meekness and placidity her

family have always associated with her; not even the death of her prematurely-born son can deter her. Caroline comments that

[in] a few weeks changes had happened in Estelle that ordinarily would have taken years. No fat remained on her bones and you could now see the fine modelling of her body and face. Our Estelle was gone. This was a stranger, a tall slender woman who had taken the place of our plump sister.... In spite of her thinness she did not give the impression of fragility; rather did it seem that she was immensely strong. (215-6)

Estelle eventually escapes with Foley to Portuguese East Africa (240). Her transformation from the plump "little housewife" has not resulted in independence but in a dubious alliance with a disturbed and possessive man who has abused and killed her predecessor. Nevertheless it has provided the ultimate escape from the strictures of her generally loving but stifling and complacent family.

The relationship between the ill-fated Madeleine and Julian Foley is, however, not a straightforward one of victim and violent aggressor. For Madeleine Foley seems to encourage her husband towards aggressive behaviour and even to experience a strange kind of affirmation and excitement through it. From the first, the reader is alerted to the fact that this destructive relationship will end tragically: when Caroline and Alwyn meet Mveli at the Foley's house early in the novel he tells them that

"He chased her across the veld, he was going to shoot her: I saw this. She turned round and walked right up to him, laughing with her teeth clenched. Of course one day he will shoot her." (*A Lover for Estelle* 8)

Then there is the incident when Julian Foley returns to find Madeleine with Starrett:

"Here I am, Julian." It was a taunting cry. Foley swung himself into the driver's seat again. He turned the lorry onto the narrow mountain

road. Mrs Foley came right into the middle of the road and stood still while he drove towards her.

It was a terrible thing that they did. He drove at her again and again, but always pulled up to avoid hitting her. She would not move but yelled at him: "Come on," and swore.

It was only a game they were playing. Suddenly Foley leaned from the truck and pulled her into the cabin with him. We could hear the scrape of her leg on the mudguard. She gave a thin scream, almost a laugh. Foley drove on....

That night when we returned to the store Alwyn told me that they had found the lorry near the Zulu dipping tank. The Foleys were lying in each other's arms at the back of the lorry. (133)

The depiction of this kind of relationship, where the woman encourages and almost enjoys violence, could provoke the charge that Rooke is subscribing to the conventional sexist view that "women ask for it". But an examination of the many other incidents of gender violence in Rooke's work provides a strong defence, for Madeleine's situation is very different from that of other female characters such as Mittee, Selina and Bokkie. Also, to admit that some women do indeed "ask for it" is not to say that all women do. More important is to ask why a character like Madeleine encourages her husband's possessiveness and jealousy. Her conditioning within a sexist society seems to have created a desperate need within her for male attention, even negative attention. Her sense of self-worth seems to be dependent on her physical appearance and her ability to attract men sexually, and she seems to view her husband's aggression as a sign of her "success".

If *Estelle* depicts a complex abusive relationship, in which the fault cannot be said to be completely one-sided, *Ratoons* portrays, through the story of the young Chanjaldi, a particularly horrible case of child/woman abuse within an arranged marriage. Chanjaldi is married off by her mother, Leela, at the age of eight:

The arrangement was that she should be looked after by her mother-in-law until she was of age for her husband; but Ramlagen wouldn't wait. She was safe enough at night, for she slept with the old woman, but one hot summer's afternoon Ramlagen seized her. Mr. Bannerjee came to her help, but Ramlagen knocked him down and dragged Chanjaldi into the cane. For many months she lay in her mother's house while her body healed, and Mr. Bannerjee spoiled her with sweets and pictures and trinkets. (*Ratoons* 113)

Later, when the teenaged Chanjaldi is sent back to live with her husband, the abuse continues:

"I have listened to her weeping night after night," said Mr. Bannerjee. "But how could I interfere again between them? They are husband and wife and besides Ramlagen, as everybody knows, is a much stronger man than me. I went away to Durban for a week and when I came back this afternoon her sister Amoya told me that she had been tied up in the hut without food and water. He has done indescribable things to her, Miss Angus, but nobody would interfere, for they say she deserves it because she answers Ramlagen back and she must learn to respect him. Only Amoya helped her...." (125)

Eventually Ramlagen is convicted of assault and Chanjaldi is able to leave him to live with Mr. Bannerjee (126). Almost as disturbing as the rape and abuse which Chanjaldi suffers is the lack of concern shown both by members of the Indian community and by Helen Angus -- a lack of concern which amounts to society condoning such behaviour. Helen may refer to "the terrible hour which [Ramlagen] had spent with her when she was a child" but she also refers to Chanjaldi as "troublesome" (113). Chanjaldi is later branded promiscuous, with no sympathy or understanding for the way in which her early experiences have affected her.

But Helen herself suffers violent abuse at the hands of her father, John, which is similarly condoned by her settler society. There is also the suggestion of an incestuous aspect to the relationship between John and Helen. Early in the novel Helen becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son, soon after

the birth of her own brother and the death of her mother. As J.A.Kearney comments,

In a curious twist of fate it becomes possible for her choleric father, John, to substitute her baby for his own sickly one when it dies, and at the same time to blame her for the death of his wife, Helen's mother. Thus Helen has the very ambivalent status of daughter, yet quasi-wife, while her child, Nicholas, has to be treated as her brother (which he grows up believing himself to be). ("A Comparative Study" 108)

Although one could argue that Helen's own experience of male violence ought to make her more sympathetic towards Chanjaldi, she reacts with virulent hatred to her discovery of an affair between Chanjaldi and Nicholas later in the novel. However, as Kearney also writes,

[for] Helen one cannot help having some degree of sympathy. Chris, when he discovers that Helen has kept hidden the fact that Nicky is actually his son, sleeps with Chanjaldi as an act of revenge. Helen's own marginalised and ambivalent status also makes her fiercely resistant to any threat that threatens to cut her off from Nicky. In her community, miscegenation on the part of her son/brother would make her life more unbearable than it already is. ("Indians and Whites" 343)

Recent debates within the fields of feminism and post-colonial studies have focused on the contradictory position of white women within the imperialist enterprise. On the one hand imperialism was by definition overtly patriarchal, and (white) women, along with black people, were assigned a submissive role, making them co-victims in a sense. On the other hand, white women, by virtue of their position in terms of race and class, were co-agents, along with white men, of oppression. Thus, as sufferers under male imperialism (so the theory goes) white women are inclined towards a mediatory and sympathetic role towards the dispossessed, whereas as white people (albeit second-class ones) they are concerned with maintaining, even

extending, the privileges and power associated with whiteness. As Dorothy Driver puts it, with reference to white women's campaigning in the twenties for the franchise for themselves while denying this right to black women (and men), "[the] 'woman' in 'white woman' acts one way, then, and the 'white' another" (Driver 14). While the argument outlined above accepts responsibility, on behalf of white women, for complicity in racist imperialism, it also implies some kind of innate moral position associated with femaleness -- as if the acknowledged complicity as *whites* involves a betrayal of more benign values associated with their position as *women*. Considered from this standpoint, Rooke's novels make interesting reading. Although Rooke is concerned with the plight of women, her female characters tend to resist categorisation and to work against the assumption that being a woman, or being a victim, inclines one towards a morally superior position.

Because it is white men who have been the major power-holders, sexual relationships between white women and black men have taken on a particular significance in South African fiction. Driver writes:

William Plomer's novel, *Turbott Wolfe* (1926), which has as its subject the breaking of the colour bar, gives this task to the white woman, Mabel van der Horst. The novel suggests that white men cannot bridge the gap created by colonial racism: were Turbott Wolfe to copulate with the beautiful black woman he admires, Plomer would thus inevitably characterize him as the colonizer-figure. There is what Plomer calls a "steely intangible barrier"... between black women and white men, which is the sword of colonization and power. No such sword exists between the black man and the white woman, for *she is innocent of the power that colonialism and racism imply*. (Driver 12; my emphasis)

Nadine Gordimer's treatment of interracial couples consisting

of black men and white women, in novels like *Occasion for Loving* (1963) and *A Sport of Nature* (1987), presents these relationships as utopian signs of a non-racial future. The implication seems to be that racial and gender oppression cancel each other out, resulting in a relatively balanced and equal relationship.²

By contrast, Rooke does not write about sexual relationships between white women and black men: the interracial relationships she deals with are between black women and white men, in *Mittee* and *The Greyling*, and these are the opposite of idyllic, the vector of power being strongly evident. In adopting this particular focus Rooke is following the more realistic path, since the latter type were historically far more prevalent than the former. But although there is no overt sexual interaction between white women and black men in Rooke's novels, this issue is hinted at in *Margaretha de la Porte* and *The Greyling*.

In *Margaretha*, the title character seems to find blackness sexually attractive. Margaretha's love for her "Bushman" servant Katjie has lesbian overtones which are explicitly raised in a conversation between Pauline and the Baron von Zellhausen:

"Anyway, Maŕgie says she will not marry. She is determined to handle her own fortune and live the life of a Bohemian. She will be free. As for love, sometimes I do believe she understands love only through Katjie, Baron --"

"That's it. She is a Lesbian", the Baron said too loudly. (*Margaretha de la Porte* 205)

Margaretha spends hours examining and sculpting Katjie's naked body; she also watches secretly (with Katjie's knowledge) while Katjie and Stoffel make love. With Margaretha and Katjie it is always Margaretha who owns the gaze, while Katjie is the

object to be looked at, so that the conventional heterosexual pattern is preserved rather than challenged, with the mistress always in the traditionally male (or, obviously, white) role. Margaretha's feelings for Russ, the working-class Englishman who becomes her lover and model, mirror her feelings for Katjie. Although Russ is fair, Margaretha sculpts him black, associating blackness with sexual freedom and "the garden of Eden" (174) but also, perhaps, with subservience to her own power, since her attraction to Russ is undoubtedly linked to his socially "inferior" position.

The young Margaretha is attracted to her intended husband, the Baron von Zellhausen, until they consummate their relationship and she is shocked by his selfish aggression:

"As for me, I'll tell him I'd rather marry a Kaffir than him." She examined herself for signs of bleeding. "Pauline, I hear my blood whispering out of me. I thought something glorious would happen to me and it was nothing -- he forgot about me, he only hurt me...." (127)

Marriage to von Zellhausen would necessarily involve Margaretha's submission, and the idea becomes hateful to her and is resisted until her capitulation at the novel's end, after Katjie's death. Her relationships with Katjie and Russ, however, suggest that her own experience of gender oppression does not make her different or better -- she seems to be excited by her own power over the objects of her sexual affection.

In *The Greyling* the narrator Ilse has the unusual profession, for a woman, of farmer. Her farm is worked by convict labour and managed by a coloured man named Luke:

I needed somebody responsible on the farm to keep guard over the convicts: they were not dangerous men but short-term prisoners who had been sentenced for offences against the pass laws or had been caught

drinking illicit liquor. As a rule they worked well, anxious to get back to their jobs, but they had to be locked in the shed at night and kept under surveillance during the daytime. I had tried White managers but they took all control from me or drank or came courting me; a Coloured overseer suited me. (77)

The irony here is all too apparent -- Ilse's own understandable will to keep control over her farm and her life contrasts painfully with the position of the black men (who cannot be called criminals in any just sense), locked up, "kept under surveillance" and used as forced labour. In the light of such extreme exploitation Ilse's difficulties as a white woman wishing to be taken seriously as a farmer seem relatively unimportant, and one can think with some sympathy of Nadine Gordimer's comment, in her review of First and Scott's *Olive Schreiner*:

Yet the fact is that in South Africa, now as then, feminism is regarded by people whose thinking on race, class and colour Schreiner anticipated, as a question of no relevance to the actual problem of the country -- which is to free the black majority from white minority rule. (97)

Ilse and Luke's working relationship is a good one -- bordering almost on friendship -- but it never approaches equality, and Luke is always quite clearly a servant, though a superior one. There is also no sign of any attraction between them; rather the sense one gets is that though each is in need of sexual companionship they simply do not view each other in that light, having been conditioned from childhood to see members of other races in a sexually neutral way. Luke falls in love with Bokkie, who agrees to marry him, and it is Luke who finds Bokkie's body after Maarten has murdered her. In the scene following the discovery of the corpse, when Luke forces Ilse to phone the police and confess what she knew of Maarten

and Bokkie's relationship, the power relations are temporarily reversed, and Luke is dominant, through the implicit threat of sexual violence. Ilse feels "a tremor... a threat to my whole body" (115) and is unable to stop herself from shaking. Later the following dialogue takes place between them:

"Nonna, I've had bad thoughts," he said, holding his face up to the rain.

"Why do you want to hurt me, Luke?"

"I don't know, nonna I want to hurt somebody." He shook his head like a confused beast. "When I saw Bokkie lying here, I wanted to hurt somebody but my knees grew weak. So I went to my room and smoked some dagga I took from one of the boys. After that I was strong. I was going to hurt you badly, nonna, you know what I mean...." (*The Greyling* 118)

Luke is clearly referring to rape -- this passage also recalls an earlier scene in the novel when Bokkie tells Ilse that she had "longed for the rape and the death" of Eila, Maarten's fiancée (110) -- and the idea clearly has everything to do with vengeful violence and little to do with lust. Luke does not, however, "hurt [Ilse] badly", but he keeps the threat alive until she has followed his instructions and telephoned the police. Luke's only means of countering Ilse's racial dominance seems to be through his relative physical strength -- in order to overcome her power over him as white employer he must play the gender card and threaten her with his maleness.

Earlier I commented that the contrast between Ilse's position and that of her convict labourers could lead one to sympathise with Gordimer's famous statement about feminism being irrelevant to the real struggle in South Africa. With regard to Ilse, privileged not only by her race but also by her class, the demands of feminism may seem unnecessary, even indulgent. But the stories of Bokkie Sipho and Hester

Adraanse, by contrast, emphasize the extent to which (particularly marginalised) women may suffer male dominance and violence, and the need for special attention to be given to female liberation. *The Greyling* as a whole is crucially concerned with gender, but in a way which emphasizes the complexity and multiplicity of women's experiences.

As an adolescent experiencing menstruation for the first time, Bokkie has an elated, though short-lived, vision of female unity:

She was once sitting alone when she was eleven years old.... She was a little woman for the first time that day, and she was just sitting there thinking: I'm Bokkie Siphon. She wished she could step outside herself and have a look. It did not matter then that she was a Coloured living on sufferance in a kraal, she felt elated by this gentle secret whispering of her blood. She knew in a dizzying flash a sense of oneness with females, even with the grand White ladies of Perelkop, with her own arrogant relations and with the low Black tarts who sold themselves for ninepence at the bus terminus, with bitches and lionesses... it was a powerful vision. She belonged in female nature. When she put her hand between her thighs it came away sticky. She was proud of herself and showed an old woman who was passing.

"Better for you if it never happened," said the Black woman, "what can you ever breed but bastards?" (*The Greyling* 94-95)

Ironically, while Ilse as narrator relates Bokkie's experience, it is Ilse more than any other character in the novel who stands in opposition to Bokkie's vision. The previous chapter commented on the "unresolved tensions associated with Ilse's narration", and nowhere are these tensions more apparent than in her disturbing attitude towards her husband's murder of another woman. Although Ilse reveals early on that her husband is in prison for killing Hester Adraanse, the full story is only recounted in chapter eight, after the account of Bokkie's murder. The chapter begins with

Ilse's description of her youth, her mother having died when she was born:

Johannesburg was only twenty miles away and my father was generous. I had lovely clothes, many books; and two Boxers, Samson's parents, to occupy me. There was the companionship of my father and his friends. Yet I remember that I was bitterly unhappy sometimes; every friend that I had, girl or boy, my father took from me by his witty criticisms.

At twenty-one I was lonely. I felt that I was lost, only a mark on the vast plateau beneath the sky. (129)

Ilse falls in love with Ray, the owner of a neighbouring farm, despite, perhaps because of, her father's disapproval:

I knew how he would appear in my father's eyes: as bone and muscle and a handsome face; as a Bible-banging exploiter of the Natives.... (130)

Ironically, Ilse's reaction against paternal authority leads her to reject her father's "moderate" views (which presumably extend to gender as well as racial issues) and align herself with Ray, the typical macho white South African male for whom dominance over women is an unquestioned part of life.

Unbeknown to Ilse at the time, Ray has also been involved with Hester Adraanse, the bywoner's daughter, who is pregnant with his child and who threatens to inform Ilse, by now also pregnant. The description of Hester's murder is worth quoting in full:

Ray asked Hester how much she wanted. He could not believe that she was not to be bought off, that she had any real hope that he would marry her, Adraanse's daughter. She cried and he sat there stolidly until she was quiet again. Then he showed her the money he had brought for her, a hundred pounds in notes. He told her that he would maintain the child, he promised to get her father into a better job.

She made a scene and he said: "A woman like you is only for a man's convenience."

At that she sprang out of the car and ran to the top of the falls. She stood with the water round her ankles, shrieking that she was going to kill herself. Ray left her there and drove a few miles down the road. He intended to wait an hour and then

go back to the falls to see whether Hester had come to her senses. Halfway there he met her struggling along the dusty road. She was carrying her coat. Her dress was tight on her swollen body and he saw with horror how close to her time she was.

She threw herself in front of the wheels. He tried to swerve but the mudguard caught her left leg; it was broken.

The last words she said to Ray were: "I'm going to that bitch of yours, I'll tell her..."

He stamped on her until she was silent. Then he drove back to the falls and threw her from the highest rock. She was still breathing when he threw her down.

He intended to give himself up at once but suddenly realized that he might be safe since she would drown in the pool and her broken bones would be attributed to her fall. If he had to, he could produce the letter in which she had threatened suicide.

He stayed at our house that night. When my father was asleep he came into my room and slept all night in my bed, for the first time. He imprinted his body on mine and for years afterwards in my loneliness I was able to recall the shape of him. (*The Greyling* 134-5)

Far from reacting with the horror one would expect to his subsequent arrest, Ilse "[rejoices] because Ray had killed for love of [her]" and marries him despite her father's pleading (137). Ilse's contemptuous attitude towards the murdered Hester is clear from this description:

I did not ever see her though I once heard her speaking.... I can recall her voice now. It was undisciplined and would grow hoarse if she were shy or frightened.... I saw a newspaper photograph of Hester, after she was dead. She had a heavy face and dark hair and a thick neck; she looked as if she would have big legs and a wide bottom. (132-3)

It is only after Bokkie's death that Ilse feels any sorrow for the earlier victim:

For the first time I could say that I pitied Hester Adraanse and her baby. I remembered them when I sat that afternoon beside poor little Bokkie's corpse. (137)

Ilse's attitude, which seems such a moral aberration that the reader shares her father's "horror of [her]" (137), is never properly explained. Ilse remains an enigma, a character

we never really know, who must still be hiding the deepest parts of her own story. Her sympathetic understanding of men like her husband and Maarten is also disturbing in the light of her position towards their victims, and it is hard to reconcile her shrewd intelligence and the sexist implications of her sympathies. Of Maarten she says:

I pitied him. I saw him as a doomed man. Some men express joy in their possession of woman; not only men like Adraanse who had no ambition except to enter his garden of Eden but men like Rottcher who gloried in his attainments, lands and race.

Rottcher was a simple man who accepted his power as a badge of masterhood. But it seemed to me that Maarten like my husband was more complex and had used his body to express his masterhood; as a feudal lord might have done, or a soldier fresh from battle. (*The Greyling* 91)

The image of "a soldier fresh from battle" suggests someone who is a victim as well as a perpetrator of violence; the complexity of men like Maarten and Ray seems to arise out of a tortured struggle within themselves to assert the qualities of domination and power which they have been taught to associate with maleness in a society built on violent conquest. Although it may be more comfortable to see murderers as simply evil, Rooke emphasizes the social context of gender violence, linking male violence against women to the roles men are called upon to play in the broader context of the wars continually being fought within colonial and apartheid society. At the same time, Rooke's presentation of Ilse's narrative invites the reader to question the extent to which Ilse is in fact condoning violent, sexist behaviour: Ilse's pity for Maarten stems from her recognition that he and Ray have finer qualities which are debased as they struggle to assert "masterhood", but the attraction and pity which she feels for these men, while showing less concern for their

female victims, perpetuates the cycle of male dominance by elevating the problems of the perpetrators over those of the victims of abuse.

With regard to *Mittee*, J.M. Coetzee comments on Rooke's portrayal of the prevailing ethos of maleness, also primarily concerned with expressing dominance even when it takes the form of pranks and practical jokes:

Crude and eager too are the young Afrikaner men who surround Mittee: great laughers and jokers and pinchers of bottoms and players of pranks. With a difference, however: Rooke has an eagle eye for the sadism indulged by a male culture of pranks, and for the sinister latitude allowed to prank-players in a country where a white skin means invulnerability (the prank-players set an Arab's beard on fire and pass on, laughing at his anguish). In a telling comment on these same young men, now become fighters in a war against the British, she writes: "Their eyes had grown watchful. Sometimes they spoke of the War; of the stealthy rides across the veld, of the blowing up of trains, as exciting as a vicious practical joke." Practical jokes and sabotage: two sides of the same coin, the first a training-ground for the second, turning boisterous boys into hard men. ("Afterword" 211)

Following the negative response Rooke received to *The Greyling* (banned in South Africa and refused publication by her American publisher) she turned away from the contemporary, more overtly political path she had taken with that novel and returned to the historical, adventure fiction which her publishers wanted from her. Her next novel, *Diamond Jo*, has received very little critical attention, and on the surface it is a conventional rags-to-riches story. There is a lot more to it than that, however, particularly from the perspective of gender.

Diamond Jo tells the story of narrator Mannie Bernstein's rise to wealth through diamond mining and dealing, and his relationships with the two women in his life, his wife Leah

and the title character Jo Carr, singer, compulsive gambler and occasional prostitute. Crucial to the plot is the rapist and murderer Tungay, whom Mannie encounters on his first journey to the diamond fields. While Mannie is travelling with Tungay, the latter informs him that he has raped and killed a young black woman, a servant from a Boer wagon travelling behind them (40-41). Mannie's reaction to this news is one of fear because of his own marginal status - "They will blame the Jew" (41). He does, however, inform the woman's employer once he has managed to get away from Tungay, but neither of the men is prepared to break his journey and travel back personally to report the crime. A written report is sent by runner to the magistrate, but the case is later dropped because the woman's body is not found (44-45). After this initial report, Mannie never again refers to Tungay's crime, although he encounters the latter once more shortly after arriving at the diamond fields. His silence about his knowledge of Tungay's evil means that he fails to warn the women he loves of the extent of the threat which Tungay poses. Tungay could be seen as Mannie's doppelgänger: while Tungay rapes women, Mannie and other men like him help to sustain a culture of rape.

Diamond Jo's climax hinges on Tungay's rape of Leah and Jo's killing him in Leah's defence. Mannie is ill and feverish at the time and remains unaware of what has happened until years later. The reader is only fully informed of events at the novel's close, but the earlier scenes suggest that Mannie's ignorance is due to denial on his part and a failure to read the all-too-clear signs. This is the first account of the events leading up to the rape, from Mannie's delirious perspective:

I was put in the Benekes' double bed. Outside on the veldt a bird was calling. It had only one note, a clear sound that I thought became solid as soon as it left the bird's throat. The sounds then took on the shape of cigars and were of a dull metallic substance. They floated just clear of the long, tawny grass. Leah ran outside to find the bird and to seize the cigar-shaped sounds. Then she was back in the room, sponging me down with vinegar and water.

And Jo was there. It was night time now and the bird had ceased calling. Jo wore her bowie knife strapped to her hip....

Tungay came. I heard him say: 'I've come for you, Jo. I've travelled three hundred miles looking for you, my girl.'

'You keep your hands to yourself or I'll run you through again.'....

'I'm warning you. Leave her alone.'

Throughout my delirium there was a corner of my mind weighing and appraising what was happening. The bird's notes were unreal, I knew. Tungay was real, gaunt like a man who has travelled far.

I know he said to Leah: 'There's a shrub grows on the veldt round about here. If you boil the leaves, it cures fever.'

'Tell me where it is,' Leah said. (*Diamond Jo* 193-194)

The descriptions of Leah's subsequent behaviour also make it clear that she has been severely traumatised. Initially silent and listless, she later launches herself into frenzied activity:

She could never be still, I remember.... At home Leah sewed or knitted or worked in the tiny garden; and if by chance a moment came when she had nothing to do or if she had to listen to anybody talking then her hands were constantly moving; clenching, rubbing, even pinching the flesh at her wrists. I would shout at her to be still.

Kisses from her at that time were feverish, insincere; when we made love she smelled of wine. And, besides the wine, she was forever drinking concoctions to hasten pregnancy.... Occasionally I was made to swallow some vile brew on the pretext that it would clear the fever out of my blood; but I knew that she suspected me of sterility.

I remember one night when Leah tore herself from my embrace and rushed away to drink a glassful of wine. When she came back to me, I felt no desire for her.

She began to sob, it was terrible to listen to her. (206)

Years later Tungay's body and Jo's knife are found and Jo

is accused of murdering him to obtain the diamonds he had been carrying. (Jo *had* found and taken the diamonds after his death and had later asked Mannie to sell them for her.) She initially tries to save Leah from being publicly humiliated as a victim of rape and says that Leah had killed Tungay because he was threatening to rape herself, Jo. When Leah denies this, Jo tells the true story which Leah also denies. Mannie gives evidence about the diamonds against Jo, but withholds his supportive evidence about the rape and murder of the woman on the way to the diggings. Thus both Leah and Mannie betray Jo, who has risked her own life to help them (240-6).

Leah later tells Mannie that Jo's story is true and the two of them agonise over the question of whether or not to make a submission. After they have decided to hand in a statement they find that Jo has killed herself. The novel's last line reads "There was no longer any need to tell the truth" (254). In the light of this ending, the sentimental beginning seems unpleasantly false and Mannie's assertion that "Jo had the best of me" (9) cruelly ironic.

Mannie Bernstein is a likeable character, but an essentially conventional one. Although he relates well to women in general, he lacks sufficient self-awareness to overcome the tendency to divide women into two categories -- the sexually available but not respectable "bad" ones (like Jo) and the marriageable "good" ones (like Leah). Although Mannie's relationship with Jo encompasses friendship as well as lust, his narrative defines her mainly in terms of sexual availability and attractiveness, while the passion he also feels for Leah is at odds with his preferred vision of her as essentially pure. Early on in the novel, soon after his first

meeting with Jo, Mannie is troubled by disturbing dreams:

My waking thoughts were of Jo and these thoughts merged into dreams. I thought of Jo wearing the stockings and catching up her dress to show them to me. But when I dreamed, Jo became Leah: we were walking in some far-off place with blue rocks under our feet. We were children again... but it was a vile dream of lust. I forced myself to wake up from it. Now I imagined dancing with Jo. Her skirt would fly out and the stockings would be seen. We would dance away somewhere out of sight.... These imaginings whirled into a dream of vultures. One of the vultures was encrusted with jewels. It turned into Leah. (26)

Sexual fantasies which are untroubling when they involve Jo become "a vile dream of lust" when associated with Leah.

With regard to rape, while Mannie undoubtedly abhors the crime he nonetheless seems to subscribe to the conventional view that only certain classes of women are at risk: rape victims are black, servants or prostitutes, not respectable wives like Leah. His subconscious awareness of Leah's trauma is too disturbing for conscious recognition, and must remain submerged.

A woman like Jo enjoys a degree of freedom, sexual and otherwise, not available to Leah who is strictly bound by conventional mores. (Early on Leah complains to Mannie: "I'm a prisoner. Even getting dressed in the morning.... Think what I have to do. Skirts and hoops and stays, and tight boots to keep my ankles small" [81-82].) But Jo's freedom also limits her to a narrow social sphere: later she has the opportunity to gain social acceptance -- "there were many women in Kimberley who had lived fast lives but were now respectably married" (232) -- but she refuses to deny her past life and give up her friendship with the tragically maimed Bonnie. By contrast, Leah finds compensation, for both the everyday restrictions she has suffered as a woman and the trauma of her

experience of rape, in wealth and social prestige. She is prepared to deny the reality of her own and other women's experiences and accept patriarchal authority in order to enjoy the power and comforts of wealth. Jo of course is the casualty, and the image of the vulture "encrusted with jewels" proves prophetic.

Rooke does not however judge Leah or Mannie harshly: they have experienced the hardships of poverty and their elation and anxiety over their newfound wealth is poignantly and sympathetically described (215). Nonetheless, the picture finally painted in *Diamond Jo* is one in which structures of power are based on hypocrisy and exploitation. In choosing Mannie Bernstein as her protagonist, essentially decent and despite his marginal Jewish status the most conventional of all her narrators, Rooke emphasizes the extent to which ordinary, non-violent men may be implicated in a culture in which women are abused and finally denied a voice.

Although sex is often subverted through violence in Rooke's writing, her novels also celebrate positive sexuality. Her fictional world is a sensual and unashamedly physical one: she writes with understanding of the experience of sexual desire from the perspective of both female and male characters. And, although Rooke writes of many unhappy marriages, she also creates memorable exceptions (like the relationships between Selina and Fanie, Mittee and Castledene mentioned earlier in the chapter), enduring bonds of understanding and mutual support which include but also transcend the physical expression of love. J.M. Coetzee defines Rooke's writing as essentially juvenile in character,³ but the two outstanding examples of successful marriages in

her novels both involve older characters: Tante and Oubaas in *The Greyling* and Mastoli and Gesineke in *Wizards' Country*.

Although Tante and Oubaas are not always sympathetic characters, their love for each other is always evident and their support of one another is particularly touching in the aftermath of Maarten's arrest and execution. Both are able to overcome their earlier racism, and together they make the decision to adopt their grandchild and leave the country. When Tante says goodbye to Ilse she gives her a sculpture of a pair of naked lovers (167).

In *Wizards' Country* the love between the old couple Gesineke and Mastoli, Benge's grandparents, is a fine example of respect and understanding which has grown and strengthened over the years, despite setbacks and difficulties. The two are intellectually evenly matched and frequently argue far into the night to settle some dispute between them (21). Although officially excluded as a woman from meetings of the chief and his councillors, Mastoli ensures that she "overhears" all such deliberations and plays an active role in decision-making. Their relationship is also filled with laughter and fun.

The death scene of Gesineke is perhaps the most moving passage in all of Rooke's writing:

At first cockcrow she spoke to him for the last time though he still slept. "Tshanini, I have planted more than forty times since we were married, it is fifty times.... Do you remember the grief you have caused me, you have pushed me away from your heart time and again when you took other wives, you did not want to exult me as the mother of the heir.... Maye, I think of these things now, they are nothing. Your other wives were not your friends. I never ceased from loving you, never, since the first time I saw you. It was a sudden pang. I left all the people who were dear to me and forgot the song of my clan, I wore the hide skirt of marriage which chafes: it was for you.

"Where will I find a friend to speak to me of

past days? One word to you, and we remember many things that happened long ago. We have been friends, Tshanini. A man's life is as a journey across a plain and over mountains. His grandchildren will listen when he tells them how he climbed the mountains but they do not want to hear of the tedious journey across the plain. He likes to speak of the whole journey. I am your old wife and I have listened for I have been with you for most of the way, step by step, and I remember the pathways of youth. Here is my sadness, that I do not go with you now...."

He opened his eyes. She sat looking at him, tearless now, and with such tenderness in her face as is in the whole world. Then he said, "Beloved..." as though a young woman sat beside him, and she was silent, still. He spoke his last words: "Mastoli... hau... valelisa." (*Wizards' Country* 221)

This is a good point at which to turn our attention once more to family. In Ian Glenn's interview Rooke says that "[all] men... have that family thing which to me is man's bitterest fruit and there is no getting away from it" (122). Rooke sees conflict at the heart of any family situation -- apart from conflict between men and women there is conflict between parents and children and rivalry between siblings. Conflict results naturally through siblings competing for parental attention and jealousy over looks and abilities which are never handed out evenly. Conditioning into gender roles also plays its part here -- one thinks of Caroline and Estelle labelled as the brains and the housewife,⁴ and the tension between Danny and his brother Edward in *A Grove of Fever Trees*, which has a lot to do with Danny's inability to fit the conventional male colonial role.

J.M. Coetzee ends his "Afterword" by saying that

[the] generative energy for Rooke's fictional project comes from a shadowy family ur-romance whose outline is only dimly discernable at the surface level. It includes siblings locked in murderous rivalries, revered but treacherous fathers, engulfing, devouring mothers. The family in Rooke's imagination is the site of a war of all against all; those who escape alive refrain, perhaps wisely, from

reproducing it. (213)

This view certainly echoes Rooke's own stated feelings on the family as inevitable site of struggle, and there are many supportive examples from her work -- one thinks of the image of the children with cotton tied to their ankles by their overbearing mother early in *Grove* (12), of Danny's murder of his brother in the same novel, of Andrina's dreadful mother Mrs Van Brandenburg in *Mittee*, of John's treatment of Helen in *Ratoons*. But there is another side to the picture, for Rooke recognises the family as a source of strength and love as well as conflict. In her fiction, love and conflict are entangled within all families, with varying balances being struck.⁵

In *Wizards' Country* there is also conflict within the family, the polygamous system throwing in another element in the form of rivalry between wives. *Wizards' Country*, however, seems to escape the worst aspects of familial violence depicted in Rooke's settler novels, and the system is ultimately a more harmonious one. Whether this is due to Rooke's romanticising traditional African culture is unclear -- similar sentiments have been expressed by the Black Consciousness Movement and recent proponents of Ubuntu. Another explanation may lie in the fact that the family in *Wizards' Country* is an extended one -- grandparents for example play an important role -- and this extra, communal element to the family situation militates against the frequently unbalanced insularity of the nuclear family which predominates in the settler novels. The claustrophobic confines of the nuclear family household certainly seem to result in an unhealthy intensity of emotions in Rooke's work -- this applies particularly to *A Grove of Fever Trees*, where

Danny's intense feelings of jealous hatred for his brother Edward lead to murder, and *Ratoons*, where the violent and unbalanced John Angus has such a powerful and stultifying hold over his daughter Helen that she only feels free to marry after his death, when she is already well into middle age.

The depiction of women in *Wizards' Country* is interesting. The culture is strongly patriarchal and yet the women are far from submissive. The grandmother Mastoli, who effectively rules the clan in many ways, has already been mentioned. Another interesting character is Benge's sister Mangala, who participates successfully in the usually male pastime of stickfighting (86-87), accompanies her brothers on their mission to capture Cece and Inyakathi (113-141) and leads the party of women and children who leave the village to hide during the war (288). Mangala's unconventional behaviour is tolerated and even encouraged. In Rooke's representation of Zulu culture there are strict social rules to be followed, but there is also flexibility in dealing with the individual.

Coetzee mentions Rooke's childless protagonists, but childbirth is also important in her novels. She writes with an understanding of the ways in which women are victimised through the reproductive process in a society which seeks to control their sexuality, describing the social stigma attached to unmarried pregnancy in *Estelle* and *Ratoons*. Her frank descriptions of female characters using contraception and abortion in *Mittee* would be welcomed by any campaigners for reproductive rights. Helen describes her own traumatic experience of childbirth in *Ratoons* (65) and later, as a nurse, becomes involved with the training of Indian midwives. There is a chilling birth in *Grove* -- Danny's wife Elsie dies

after giving birth to their son, due to Danny's failure to obtain help for her (175). Here the limitations of Danny's juvenile sensibility are evident -- the playing house in which he and Elsie have indulged comes to an abrupt end and he cannot handle the all-too-adult reality, abandoning her during her labour. Rooke also writes movingly and sympathetically of the strength of the maternal bond, and provides an idyllic picture of a mother and child early in *Wizards' Country* (5-6).

In Rooke's writing children are often a powerful sign of hope: in *Ratoons* Sowa's daughter, born in the midst of rioting and death, becomes the Dr Naidoo whom Helen meets on the novel's first page, in *Wizards' Country* Bengé and Cece are to raise up a son for his beloved brother Thunzi, while in *The Greyling* Ilse's son Raymond counters the racism of his community and Bokkie and Maarten's daughter Diamant represents an escape from the narrow confines of the past to new life.

Rooke writes with feeling of the injustices suffered by women in a male-dominated society. She also has empathy for male experience. She is alive to the conflict which lurks within all interpersonal relationships -- between parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives. Her novels also hold up the possibility of transcendence through these very relationships -- the possibility of understanding, enduring friendship and love.

NOTES

1. J M Coetzee comments that

[one] of Rooke's more engaging features as a writer is a robust familiarity -- or at least the appearance of such -- with the wider world. She crashes boldly into such

preserves of the male writer as public-school life, warfare, sport (even boxing!) and casual philandering. ("Afterword" 211)

2. A problem here, of course, is where this leaves black women, the doubly oppressed, as

these idyllic white/black love affairs expose... the white women's lack of bonding with the black wives and lovers of these men. Until Hannah confronts her lack of sisterhood near the end of *My Son's Story*, the white female characters' love for the black men, victims of racism, does not extend adequately to the black women, victims of both racism and sexism. (Nancy Topping Bazin 31)

3. Coetzee writes that

[in] fact it can be argued that for Rooke the fundamental conflict is not between black and white, not between man and woman, but between young and old. The narrator-heroes and -heroines of her books are all young; even when they are nominally looking back on their youth from a distance (as in *Mittee*), this distancing device is purely nominal: the narrating, experiencing sensibility is young, indeed juvenile. ("Afterword" 211)

4. Rooke's own mother used to introduce her daughters in a similar way: Edith as "the beauty", Rose as "my little housewife" and Daphne as "the brains of the family" (Glenn, "Interview", 125).
5. Mark Behr, speaking about his novel, *The Smell of Apples*, comments that "[there's] a way in which love stands accused... an abuse of love to make children conform... It was a complex situation, a mixture of racial nationalism, patriarchy AND love. The book tries to show that it's nice people like that who were and are racist and who committed crimes against humanity. There was a tacit acceptance of those things. All the horrors within the family are held in a kind of love" (O'Hara 1).

CHAPTER FOUR

Rooke as a South African Writer

At last we would become bored and ask for a story.
(*A Grove of Fever Trees* 12)

I thought of the beings in my grandmother's stories:
the princess of the sky who gave us corn and who
listens to the maidens' songs; the old old one, the
Creator, who lives beyond the sky; giants and magic
dwarfs. (*Wizards' Country* 12)

The critical rediscovery of Daphne Rooke has been anchored in a project of strategic re-reading seeking to establish the seriousness and continuing relevance of her writing. Because of a general presumption equating realism with the serious and romance with the (merely) popular, Rooke's recuperation has focused mainly on her "problematic" use of the gothic and romantic modes. Michael Green has argued that it was Rooke's non-compliance with essentially realist norms which resulted in her being ignored by the critical establishment ("Difference and Domesticity" 106); and indeed, recent reassessments of her work seem to be part of a more general post-apartheid revisionist project aimed at broadening a national canon hitherto dominated by a realist literature of witness. In this perspective, it is on traditional grounds that this study has based its defence of Rooke's seriousness, arguing for the essential realism of her writing, for its demonstrable fidelity to (often unpalatable) social, economic and political realities. But no account of Rooke would be complete without advertence to the unusual blend of realism and romance which characterises her novelistic vision. This chapter examines the question of generic identity within a larger consideration of the inclusive "South African-ness" of

Rooke's writing.

There is, perhaps, a certain irony to this concern with classifying Rooke's work, since she herself is such an untheoretical writer. Fenner comments that

[Rooke's work] is unapologetically theoretically naive, being motivated more by autobiographical events and an imaginative identification with South Africa's colonial past than any systematic intellectual programme.

Despite this lack of theoretical awareness -- and she is perhaps overstating the case when she says that Rooke "lacks any conscious political or theoretical agenda" -- Fenner goes on to justify continued interest in Rooke's work, pointing to "thematic continuities" which reveal that "the author is deeply engaged in an artistic quest; a quest that, particularly in South Africa's newly established 'postcolonial' context, is capable of being re-read in constructive and socially relevant ways" (64).

Like Fenner, I feel that Rooke's work is particularly interesting and relevant in post-apartheid South Africa, when examining and coming to terms with our various histories has become crucial to the process of forming a new society. Rooke's novels, with their emphasis on violence and conflict, conquest and injustice, explore colonial and apartheid history from various standpoints and offer insights both into the psyches of those who ran and supported the system of domination, and into the experiences of dispossessed and subject peoples. At the same time, Rooke's work illustrates the complexity of the socio-political system and the inadequacy of any analysis based on simple binaries.

But Rooke's writing may also contribute in another way to the formation of a "new South African" consciousness: her

novels, as well as emphasizing historical conflicts and multicultural experiences, also celebrate a common South African-ness. This celebration of a difficult-to-define but unmistakably South African identity emerges in Rooke's distinctive use of humour, in the delight with which she captures qualities of various languages and varieties of local English, and in the characters themselves who, whatever their differences, share an attachment to and rootedness in South African soil.

Despite the fact the Rooke has spent much of her adult life abroad, and wrote several of her novels in Australia, the bulk of her literary output has been South African in setting, and these works have been written very much from an insider's point of view. *Mittee* was translated into several languages, and Rooke's novels were popular in both Britain and America, but they do not give the sense of having been written for a metropolitan readership -- they do not give the impression of seeking to explain and interpret South Africa for foreign readers. I have already commented on the way in which Rooke redefined the centre in her presentation of the world of *Wizards' Country* on its own terms; the same may be said for all her novels in the sense that it is South Africa which is central in the minds of her protagonists, while Europe is essentially strange and foreign. In *Mittee* Basil Castledene's idealised and clichéd description of his English boyhood is brought into sharp relief by Fanie's reaction:

Then Doctor Besil began to talk about his boyhood. He drew a map on the ground to show us where he was born. We all said the name after him; Yorkshire. He told us of a little town hundreds of years old, where a man took up the pattern that his father had woven and repeated it in his own life, where he could say, My great-grandfather was born in

this house and my children will be born here. He told us of misty skies and grass as short and thick as a carpet, sweeping over low hills to the sea; a place like Eden where a man could set his foot without fear. He told us of a boyhood passed within sound of church bells; of white men who worked like Kaffirs and of cities so great that Pretoria would be swallowed up inside them.

"My God, it frightens you when you think how different the English are," said Fanie, drawing his blanket about him. (Mittee 193)

In *A Grove of Fever Trees*, Mrs Elliot's longing for an English Christmas is presented satirically and the reaction of Danny and his siblings is one of mocking incomprehension (77-78). A character like Danny Ashburn may have many problems but angst about his national or cultural identity is not one of them. In this sense it seems inaccurate to describe Rooke's writing as speaking for and about a settler society, since most of her major white characters are almost as firmly and unselfconsciously rooted in their South African realities as Benge or Fanie are in theirs. In the white "settler" novels, there is a pronounced difference between insider South African-born protagonists like Danny and Caroline Kramer and outsider characters like Mrs Elliot and the Foleys who still owe their primary allegiance to the "mother country". This cultural difference may, in a strange and paradoxical way, even outweigh the racial divisions within colonial society. Danny's close relationship with Jatu may be a special case, but his siblings also revert to speaking Zulu-accented English in moments of stress (46), while their mother's and Mrs Elliot's longings for a mythical England are part of "a past in which [they] had no part" (77).

It is only in Rooke's later novels *Diamond Jo* and *Margaretha de la Porte* that sections are set "overseas", and even then these sections lack the vigour and authenticity of

the South African settings. In most of the novels characters who do leave for Europe, like Mittee, or Nick during the war in *Ratoons*, are not followed by their narrators -- their time away is shadowy and formless, suggesting that Europe is unknown and unimaginable, rather than the Africa of conventional imperialist narratives.¹

While Rooke's fiction has been overwhelmingly concerned with particular histories and experiences of the country of her birth, she has followed a different path from that of the social realism which has characterised the "serious" writing of her compatriots. What were perceived negatively as melodramatic and improbable plots led to Rooke's being sidelined by members of the critical establishment; more recent critics like Michael Green, Judith Allen and Myrtle Hooper have argued that it is because of and not despite her use of the romance, gothic and melodramatic modes that Rooke is of interest and value as a writer, and that she puts these modes to serious and insightful use. I too contend that Rooke's novels offer challenges, questions and insights to the critical reader, that her work deserves wider and more serious attention than it has hitherto received. But another, equally powerful, argument for reading Rooke's novels is that they are, quite simply, enjoyable. In focusing (well-deserved) "serious" attention on her work it should not be forgotten that Rooke is also a popular and accessible writer: her novels are written as much to entertain as to probe the realities of her society. A study of Rooke's work calls into question rigid distinctions between realism and romance, the serious and the popular.²

Judith Allen's thesis on *Mittee* examines the ways in

which Rooke puts the romance and gothic modes to "serious use":

In *Mittee*, Rooke grapples with the oppressive nature of the South African patriarchal, colonial context, as it operates in terms of the social categories of gender, race, and class. She achieves this by drawing on the adventure and sexual love that are the domain of the romance and the desire for transcendence of the material world that characterises Romanticism. The narrative erupts with the bizarre, the horrific, and the violent which belong typically to the gothic mode. The concern with transcendence and horror, however, is grounded in a firm domestic realism that describes the ordinary round of domestic life in an Afrikaner farming community of the late Nineteenth Century.... It is the joining of the romance, Romanticism, and the gothic with realism that lends the novel its full force. The longing for transcendence brings home the dissatisfactions of everyday, material life: ordinary existence is shown to be disturbed by a perpetual anxiety which is manifested in a fear of ghosts, as well as being represented by the grisly unearthing of human relics. (Allen 5)

These characteristics -- the romantic longing for transcendence and the macabre horror associated with the gothic -- are found not only in *Mittee* but in all of Rooke's novels to some extent. Romantic love, often unrequited and unfulfilled, is a perennial theme, while many of the protagonists are dreamers in the romantic mould, transcending, or at least sensing the possibility of transcending, their everyday lives through their experience of the natural world. The gothic is expressed through an ever-present threat of violence and disaster.

In *Wizards' Country* Benge describes his intimations of the transcendental:

In those times too it seemed to me that Liyana was the largest village in the land. I used to like standing on top of the mountain where I could see it in all its beauty. But if I stood there long enough my gaze would leave me and I would stand there as though waiting for a message. If there was a message in that landscape or in the vaster glittering sky, I did not catch it ever; but the memory of an

expectation of a message is with me yet. (11)

In the same novel, the evil, supernatural territory of the wizards is typically gothic -- horrifying and yet strangely fascinating and enticing. However, as in *Mittee*, the romance and magic in *Wizards' Country* is set against a realist attention to the everyday and the commonplace.

Allen's point about Rooke's use of the gothic and romance modes to represent the entrapment of individuals within society is very appropriate to a novel like *A Lover for Estelle*, where the violence and adventure into which the Kramer sisters are drawn can be seen as a reaction to the repressed position of women within their society. It also -- particularly with regard to Estelle's eventual "escape" -- answers the romantic desire to transcend and escape stifling daily reality. Jane Fenner has made a similar point about *A Grove of Fever Trees*, arguing that Danny's madness can be read as symptomatic of the broader madness of his settler society which is built on lies and denial. But analysis in terms of political symptomology seems to miss something by drawing too much on the negative while ignoring the positive, even joyful qualities of Rooke's writing. Myrtle Hooper picks up on these more positive aspects in her article on *Grove*, seeing Danny's madness as not merely symptomatic but "liberating" (71) and finding in the novel "a carnivalesque celebration of possibilities of life" (72). Hooper also comments on

[Rooke's] deliberate play with narrative technique [which] takes her into a fictional world that is by no means constrained by realism, coming close at times not just to the 'romance' of which Paul Rich speaks... but also to melodrama and farce, to the bleak and vicious humour of the Jacobean dramatists. (61)

These qualities in Rooke's work could be seen as having much

in common with a postcolonial form which also draws on the romance, that of the magical realist novel, which grants, perhaps, more agency to society's victims and has a certain celebratory aspect to it.³

Brenda Cooper defines magical realism as essentially characterised by transition and hybridity:

Magical realism finds particularly fertile ground in which to flourish where it encounters transition, the process of change, borders and ambiguity. The two most fundamental transitional zones are, firstly, that between burgeoning capitalist development, which mingles with older precapitalist modes in postcolonial societies. Secondly and linked to the first, in such societies there is the mingling and mixing of human characteristics and cultures, as Creole populations are born. (209)

Cooper quotes Fredric Jameson's suggestion that "magic realism depends on a content which betrays the overlap or the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features" (209) and stresses that

these traces of older precapitalist modes... are the seam that is mined for the magical raw material itself. Magical realism has very often been conceived of as steeped in the beliefs, the point of view, of an indigenous peasant class.... The magic, however, is not exclusively derived from such communities, and is also spun out of the writer's creative imaginings. (210)

Rooke's writing also emerges out of a transitional context, in both the economic and cultural senses. The period in which these novels were written, from the forties to the seventies, spans of course the political transformation from separate development to the height of formal apartheid, and *The Greyling* deals specifically with this transition and its attendant increase in and change in the nature of political protest. Most of her fiction, however, draws on an earlier time-frame, based on her mother's reminiscences and her own childhood experiences. The novels are set in the period which

saw the rise of capitalism in South Africa and, as we have seen, they focus on economic forces and pressures with serious concern.

Culturally, the societies she writes about are characterised by contrasts -- often resulting in fierce divisions but leading also to mixing and the blurring of margins. Rooke is herself a cultural hybrid, with an Afrikaans mother (who rejected her own cultural roots and became firmly Anglicised) and an English father. To these influences can be added those of the Zulu and Indian cultures with which she came into contact in her formative years. Most notably in *Wizards' Country*, but also in other novels, Rooke draws on indigenous belief systems to create fictional worlds tinged with magic and the supernatural. Like Marquez, she elevates "the village world-view above the urban one" (Salman Rushdie quoted in Cooper 210), and her sympathies clearly lie with precapitalist societies threatened by urbanisation and the growth of capitalism.

In *Wizards' Country* magic appears in both positive and negative forms: the negative magic associated with the witch and the positive magic associated with Magwaza, the diviner of the Tshanini clan. The evil magic is linked to a selfish desire for power.* The witch

was mysterious with the black power of a king. But she was more unapproachable than a king who has counsellors and who honours his ancestors. She had no counsellors and she did not call up the spirits of her ancestors. It seemed to me sometimes that she was a force in herself, like the Lord of Death.
(166)

Benge is eventually able to overcome the temptation the witch offers -- to seek to satisfy only his own desires and put aside the interests of his community -- and he masters the

witch's spirit within him while Thunzi "kills the witch who has haunted Benge and draws Benge finally away from witchcraft and into history" (Green, "Difference and Domesticity", 132).

But, as Green goes on to emphasize:

This movement does not dispel the positive power of the magic that preserves the sense of difference which pervades the novel; if witchcraft's evil and isolating effects on Benge are defeated, he continues to experience the magic that is a part of his community. By the time his clan is engaged in the war against the British, Benge is entirely integrated in both the clan and the war.... Magic is... an integral part of the community and its rites, and Benge's involvement in it is entirely a communal one; no longer is he the lonely servant of an antisocial and malevolent witchcraft. (132)

The positive magic is part of a religious belief system which holds communal interests paramount and emphasizes links and debts to the past through the reverence accorded to ancestors. The world-view depicted in the novel is an inclusive one, lacking the rigid distinctions associated with Western thought: religion, magic and science, the physical and the spiritual, are all incorporated into one whole.

Rooke's respectful and accepting depiction of traditional religious beliefs in *Wizards' Country* also encompasses the expression of doubt. When Gesineke lies dying, Mastoli whispers to Benge:

"Benge, they say that men live again beneath the earth as they have lived above it, they say that when your time comes you will find them there, all your loved ones. Do you think, Benge, that the finding of them will be a difficult thing? I have mourned many people, even my beloved son Yaluyalu, and it has seemed to me that the parting would be short, and the meeting of spirits a happy thing, like a wedding feast. But is it true? Will I see him again? I feel doubt now where I never doubted before. Might this not be all that we have here, earth sky grass? Maye, the grave is the end and his bones are all that will be left.... I tell you I feel that I will never see him again...." Her sorrow was awe-inspiring: it was as though the lizard came for the first time with the message of death from

the Creator. (220)

There is a balance in Rooke between a respect for cultural difference and an emphasis on universal human concerns. The above passage from *Wizards' Country* recalls one in *A Lover for Estelle* where Caroline experiences religious doubt during the drought:

I raised my aching eyes to the metallic sky. A prayer was beating with my heart: Almighty God, Jehovah... Merciful Father.... Venter, who had been a deacon in the church at Vryheid, had stood on that hilltop during a dry thunderstorm, crying out to God to strike him dead, taunting God to show His power. The storm had raged and died in its appointed time and Venter had lain on the veld, broken; unharmed by the lightning but stricken by the majestic indifference of the skies. Nowadays he spoke timidly as though he stood not in the presence of an eternal Father who might be moved to strike him in rage, yet who loved him, but in the presence of some stupendous force that was blind to him or his blasphemy. His wife told us that he raved at times, seeing himself as a worm walking upright.

A terror came upon me that I too would be forced to challenge God and so be deprived of him.
(*A Lover for Estelle* 110)

Doubt and fear in the face of death and destruction seems to be an inescapable part of the human condition; but in both these cases faith is reaffirmed. In *Wizards' Country* Gesineke's spirit is called home after his death:

He came. The ashes of his sacrifice stirred. His spirit drifted past us; it was a slight movement in the dust, a small wind. There burst from us all as from one heart a deep sound of welcome and love: our spirits strained against our bodies to meet him. It was joy to find him again, greater than the joy at the birth of a child: we let him hear our clan song.
(237)

In *Estelle* Caroline is afraid that her mother will lose faith after the deaths of the children Jacoba and Nell. But Mrs Kramer "could believe in God's love because her love for us was of eternity, growing neither greater nor less in the light of events. It was her suffering only that grew or diminished,

through our sorrows or sins" (163).

Mrs Kramer's deeply-felt Christian belief is, however, an exception in Rooke's depiction of settler societies -- in *Ratoons* and *A Grove of Fever Trees*, for example, Christianity seems to be a purely superficial phenomenon. *The Greyling*, of course, ends with the symbol of Oubaas's church completed by Siphso, but this could be seen as a sign of Christianity strengthened and transformed by communal, African elements as opposed to the narrow and sterile religion of the Rottchers which has supported racial separation and oppression.

In Rooke's work generally the white inhabitants of Africa are strongly influenced by aspects of African culture and belief. Transference of culture is not a one-way process, even where power relations are as unequal as they have been in South Africa. Of course, traditional beliefs are often transformed in a negative way as they are transferred, and once again an intertextual reading of Rooke's novels proves useful in this regard. The positive image of the sky princess in *Wizards' Country* -- "beautiful and calm and kind... the face of a mother, neither young nor old, but filled with wisdom and patience... made of bushes and earth and rock... lovely beyond all telling" (148-49) -- becomes a fearful image in *Margaretha de la Porte*. Margaretha, in one of the strangest, most gothic scenes in that novel, strips naked in the moonlight and "frenziedly" sculpts a model from clay, "something like a human body, womanlike, uncouth, part landscape too" (77). She senses a spiritual presence which is not her father but something far older, just as her mother fears that the ghosts of the kraal on which the de la Porte's house was built return at times of grief (75). Here the

beliefs of the indigenous inhabitants are a source of fear for those who have usurped their place in the land.

Cooper writes that the

plots of [magical realist] fictions tend to be hybrid, dealing themselves with issues of borders, change, mixing and syncretising. The authors, themselves very particular products of these social and cultural mixes, often write ambiguously, from an authorial point of view that is muffled and ambivalent. (210-11)

We have already noted that Rooke's response to race has resulted in widely differing readings; her own position as a white writer, privileged by race and class, is an ambiguous one with regard to some of the subjects of her fiction. Cooper observes that

magical realism veers between being an oppositional device against cultural imperialism, on the one hand, and a potentially reactionary mechanism which perpetuates this cultural enslavement via the retention of the Western stereotype of the exotic Other, on the other hand. In other words, magical realism and its associated styles and devices are alternatively characterised as transgressive mechanisms that parody Authority, the Establishment, the Law but are also the opposite of all these - as generator of safety valves for the Rich and Powerful, who can let off steam through play, desire and fantasy. (213)

Critics like J.M. Coetzee and Zoë Wicomb have similarly interpreted Rooke's work as veering uncomfortably between the reactionary and the progressive. But Rooke's strong focus on class, for example, balances and mitigates the potentially reactionary nature of her use of the gothic and magical realist modes. Nevertheless, tensions arising out of the particular position of a writer like Rooke (indeed perhaps of any writer) are inevitable; there is no doubt that Rooke's novels *could* serve as "safety valves for the Rich and Powerful", and that they lend themselves very often to ambiguous readings. Acknowledging these ambiguities and

ironies need not detract from the probing of serious issues which the willing reader will find in Rooke's work.

There is also a certain tension between the witches and ghosts which haunt her novels and the scientific, rational views (denying the existence of the supernatural other than as psychological manifestations) which she ostensibly holds. Rooke's fictions are at once weird, wonderful and strange and very practical and down-to-earth -- but one could argue that it is this tension between solid realism and the fanciful world of gothic romance which gives them much of their depth and appeal. Of course, one of the strengths of the magical realist mode is that it allows modern writers to present the experience and point-of-view of pre-modern societies and individuals without judging their validity or imposing the writer's own world-view. (Modernity here has the sense of the triumph of 'scientific' rationality.) Thus, although Rooke does not share her character's belief in witchcraft and magic, Bengé's 'preternatural' experiences are presented as entirely consistent with his own, rather than his author's, cultural beliefs. As Green writes,

[in *Wizards' Country*] we are drawn into a different consciousness, drawn into the bewitchment Bengé undergoes, and in this fashion enter the sublime centre of the novel that the wizards' country represents. The world of difference is [not] just a matter of idiom and metaphor, no matter how striking; we are now submerged in the perspective of magic, and the difference it represents envelops us in Bengé's telling of the tale. ("Difference and Domesticity" 129)

Cooper contends that magical realism is strongly influenced by Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque:

If the desire for a national politics of revolutionary commitment accounts for the recovery of Frantz Fanon, then the embrace of magic, the improbable and the blasphemous has brought Mikhail

Bakhtin and the carnivalesque back to life.... Krystyna Pomorska... suggests that Bakhtin wrote in defiance of the "official prohibition of certain kinds of laughter, irony, and satire" that was "imposed upon the writers of Russia after the revolution". Or, as Michael Holquist... suggests in the Prologue, "grotesque realism" is a "point-by-point inversion of categories used in the thirties to define Socialist Realism", adding the following:

In the prim world of Stalinist
Biedermeier, that world of lace curtains,
showily displayed water carafes, and
militant propriety, Bakhtin's claim that
the folk not only picked their noses and
farted, but enjoyed doing so, seemed
particularly unregenerate...

The privileged site, the ultimately symbolic space, in which all this farting, nose-picking, irreverent laughter, fornication and defiant defecation takes place, is at the carnival. (Cooper 212)

This calls to mind J.M. Coetzee's observation that "[in] the context of the high-minded but rather prim South African liberal novel, Rooke's world of pissing and farting, of menstruation and masturbation and orgasm... is a welcome relief" ("Afterword" 210). Of course, the often crude and earthy laughter of Rooke's novels contrasts not only with "the high-minded but rather prim South African liberal novel", but more particularly with the official constraints, taboos and repressions which characterised apartheid society.

Laughter and play are essential elements of carnival, which combines joyfulness with the macabre, the crude and the grotesque. Norms are challenged, roles are reversed: the carnivalesque can be a profound form of resistance to prevailing authority. A scene from *Mittee*, describing a visit to the circus, perfectly illustrates the carnivalesque in Rooke's work:

We had not much time to look about but we picked out Andrina and Mittee. They had their parasols with them and leaned on the rail elegantly. They were on the ground and I did not think that

their seats were as good as ours but Polly said they were sitting amongst the important people. While we watched, the man behind Andrina touched her on the shoulder. A look came on her face as though somebody had put bad meat under her nose....

The circus began. You could have marched a hundred miles to the glorious music, you could have fallen off the seat at the antics of the clown whose boots were yards long. Then up went a big cage and an Outlander, all shiny and with a buttonhole in his lapel, began to put the tigers through their tricks. The music stopped and there was not a sound to be heard from the crowd as they watched this wonderful thing. The tigers growled and showed their teeth but the brave man in their midst treated them like tame cats.

That was all Andrina and Mittee saw of the circus. A big tiger lifted its tail and sprayed through the bars on the two proud girls. Of all the people in the circus it had to be those two, so eaten up with vanity, and all over their parasols. It caught each one equally. At first I thought they would faint but no, they were both healthy girls. All they did was scream and spring up from their seats but, of course, it was too late. Everybody was laughing at them. They swept out of the tent, holding their parasols away from their dresses with the tips of three fingers as though the handles were hot. Mrs. Van Brandenburg, with an anguished look at the entrancing tigers, followed the other two slowly. (Mittee 61-62)

There are many other examples of carnivalesque incidents in Rooke's writing: Mrs Ashburn's experiment with python breeding, at once grotesque and ridiculous -- the snakes "festooned on the window-sills like Christmas decorations in a nightmare" (*A Grove of Fever Trees* 21) -- or the ridiculous but slightly poignant antics of the inebriated tutor Reginald Starke in the same novel. Even *The Greyling*, generally the most sober and realistic of Rooke's novels, has its moments of carnivalesque humour, although of a darker and more sombre kind. The scene describing Jocchem Adraanse, father of the murdered Hester, combines magical realist qualities with bleak humour and bitter realism:

Adraanse was married to a hefty woman who had given him eighteen children; a small natty man. He used to wear patent leather shoes on the veld. My father

said that he must have hook-worm because he would stand for hours doing nothing, apparently vacant.

But I knew he was not vacant. His mind teemed with visions of love, money and perfect health.

"You know, niggie, what I saw last night?" he said to me early one morning: "I was giving the dogs a breather before riding home.

"What was it, oom?"

"A tall Indian. Now he had a head, now he didn't. He was standing there under that willow tree over there. Jocchem, he said. How do you know my name? I asked. I know everything, says the Indian. There's a big treasure for you, I'll come back and tell you in two weeks' time. Then he was gone. I could only see the willow tree. Man miss, I've seen some strange things. I saw a cat in the air once, standing up like you and me but in the air, and it shit, that's how real it was. Go to the Coloured herbalist in Jeppestown, it said, you'll be cured of your rheumatism. So I was until the herbalist died. I've tried to see that cat again but it's obstinate. So I suffer." Adraanse was lost in the contemplation of a knotted fist.

I mounted my horse. He smiled at me, showing one rotting fang. (*The Greyling* 130-131)-

The force of such scenes in Rooke's work lies in the way they are juxtaposed with more serious events: the passage quoted above is followed by the description of Hester's murder, quoted in the previous chapter. It could be argued that it is the juxtaposition of discordant scenes, the playing out of striking and uncomfortable contrasts, that constitutes the compositional strategy chiefly responsible for the particular character of her fiction -- rather than the events of the plots themselves, improbable though these may often seem to be.

In her introduction to *A Grove of Fever Trees*, Rooke describes her method of writing:

I convey the background not so much by descriptive writing as by recording episodes, a technique that might mislead some readers into thinking that the book contains irrelevancies. But each episode is put in for the purpose of establishing background or character; or for working out the plot....

All my work thereafter has the same blend of fact and fiction presented in a stylized story. By stylized I mean there is a cohesive plot woven round

the characters. I have tried as I did in *A Grove of Fever Trees* to write down my observations of beauty, humour, compassion and love, as well as the violence of everyday life. (One of my brothers used to call me Mamba-Eyes.) I think it was the varied material combined with humour which prompted some reviewers to call the book macabre. (7-8)

Humour is a vital aspect to Rooke's work, and her humour is of many different shades -- ranging from satirical to slapstick, the "bleak and vicious" (Hooper 61) to the purely joyous. No matter how unpleasant their circumstances, Rooke's characters share an enjoyment of life. It is perhaps this celebratory aspect to her novels, her assertion that there is "beauty, humour, compassion and love, as well as... violence", even under circumstances of social injustice and economic hardship, which also sets her work apart from the single-minded moral crusading of some of her compatriot writers. (Interestingly, however, in asserting the right to celebration in defiance of authoritarian injustice Rooke has much in common with many of South Africa's black writers -- people like Mphahlele, Head and Mda.)⁴ Selina, for all her suffering, is a character who loves to dance and to laugh, for whom the "shine of the stars and the colour of the sky" (Mittee 207) are never completely dimmed. This laughter and zest for life make her a vibrant and memorable character in her own right and make her story really her own, despite the fact that it is ostensibly that of her paler mistress Mittee.

Rooke's humour, as has already been noted, is one of the features which defines her work as unmistakably South African, even when it deals with recently arrived settlers and immigrants. In *Margaretha de la Porte* there is a satirical scene in which a visiting English poet is thrown into a political debate:

He was a small-boned man. His poetry matched his delicate appearance: he could make much of the sound of a cricket in the grass or the stirring of a mouse in a wheatfield. When he addressed us after tea, he exhorted us to found a literary magazine. Jos Pemberton who had written a novel about South Africa was chosen by Fanny to give a talk after Salamans and she thought he would speak in praise of the poet.... Nothing of the sort occurred. Pemberton was devoted to Rhodes: he was one of the young men who had marched to Rhodesia. He nodded cursorily at Salamans and then launched himself into a tirade against the government of the Transvaal Republic. This was well received and every mention of the franchise for Uitlanders was clapped until Pemberton with a sweeping gesture declared that the day was not far off when the Union Jack would fly not only over Johannesburg but over Pretoria.

Protests rang out in German, French, Dutch; and in English from some Americans.

Fanny herself pushed the young man down into a seat. Her frantic eye lit on Mevrouw Goossens, a huge old auntie in black, one of the strongest supporters of the Bond; there was a tower of common sense surely. But Mevrouw Goossens cherished a hatred of missionaries whom she now declared had ruined the black creatures with whom they came in contact -- everybody knew that an educated Kaffir was an abomination in the sight of the Lord. Throw out every last missionary!

When she had subsided, Fanny looked at Etienne: it was hopeless, he spoke of the mystical relation of his language to the valleys and highlands of the Transvaal....

I edged my way to the chesterfield where Salamans sat. Mrs Ramsey-Smythe was next to him. She was instructing him to sound a clarion call throughout England when he returned home, to bring their countrymen to the defence of Johannesburg where English women and children were at the mercy of the Boers.

"I guess you have been discussing the literary magazine", I said brightly, "Mr. Salamans no doubt will help us to formulate plans."

"I was talking about rape and murder", boomed Mrs Ramsey-Smythe: the words flattened Salamans against the back of the chesterfield. Happily I had brought my autograph album with me and now presented it to the reeling poet. He took it gratefully. He had a flair for sketching and was able to occupy himself in drawing a benign lion framed by the branches of a thorn tree which had red flowers, and copying out neatly a poem he had written about the veld; withdrawn from the voices that exploded in fury about him as the assembly argued over politics. (*Margaretha de la Porte* 206-208)

Here Rooke satirises the "veld and vlei" school of South

African writing and asserts the complexity and range of opinion to be found even amongst the colonists. The English poet who has come to Africa with the romantic idea of escaping civilisation for the (unpeopled) beauty of the veld cannot cope with the political and social realities thrust upon him. The whites-only politics of the privileged debaters "is" also brought home through subtle touches which make overt comment unnecessary: the presence of the "hired Indian waiters" (208) moving silently amongst the guests, and the episode which follows this scene, where Pauline goes outside and hears

the yodelling of a wood vendor.... This was his last call for the day. I saw him go by a few moments later. I knew him, the Mozambiquey who came to town once a week to sell firewood gathered by Coester's sons in the kloofs beyond Bitterfontein. (209)

While Rooke's humour is unmistakeably South African, South African humour is concerned by its very nature with negotiating cultural differences, and the humour in Rooke's work reflects the multicultural range of her society. The sophisticated satire of the scene quoted above -- or, as Coetzee notes, "the malicious exchanges of gossip in *Ratoons* [which] are worthy of Patrick White's Sydney suburbs" ("Afterword" 212) -- contrasts with the slapstick and very physical humour to be found elsewhere which, while it may appeal "to a child's sense of humour" ("Afterword" 211), is also of a type which seems to have immense popular appeal -- one has only to think of Leon Schuster's movies which are enjoyed by "ordinary" South Africans across racial divides. If this type of humour often verges on cruelty, and has more than a touch of sadness to it, reflecting the society from which it comes, it is nonetheless funny for members of that society. In *A Lover for Estelle* Estelle's suitor, Manie du Toit, is

wealthy but looked down upon by her family socially:

Manie's trousers had come down to him on his father's death ten years before. Too young to wear them then, he had packed them away in mothballs until now; Alwyn swore he could smell him coming to the store from a mile away. We could smell camphor distinctly now, for Manie was dressed up in his father's tight blue serge suit. He wore the high collar that went with it, and a bow tie; it was almost like fancy dress since the men's styles had altered so much....

At supper Manie was more talkative.

"I like the milk tart, Auntie," he said to Mamma.

"Have plenty then." Mamma beamed.

"At New Year I had so much tart I was sick."

"Well, that's better than getting sick on drink. Were there many at New Year on your farm?" She was polite to Manie because everyboday else at the table, even Pappie, ignored him.

"Auntie, there were fifty people in the house. The drink was kept in a corrugated iron shack which was a toolshed, that was the bar, Auntie. It was not big but more and more people went in. It burst."

"The toolshed burst?" said Alwyn, interested in spite of himself.

"It opened at the corners and fell apart. It was all those people inside pressing on it."

"But you weren't in there," said Pappie with a faint sneer.

"No. I was outside, Uncle. I saw it burst though."

"You were no doubt standing there holding a piece of milk-tart in your hand," said Alwyn gently.

"No, man. It happened after I was sick."

"Fatherland!" said Pappie. "Excuse me now, I need air." (*A Lover for Estelle* 37-39)

J.A. Kearney notes that in *Ratoons* humour is used both to mark the cultural differences between Indians and whites, and to suggest the possibility of sharing across the cultural divide:

Sowa has a comic story about frogs riding on snakes for his white friends; their not understanding acts, in a minor way, as a reflection of very different cultural assumptions. Nevertheless it... reveals at least a potential for genuine multicultural sharing.... White humour when in contact with the Indians, on the other hand, mostly takes the form of scorn or mockery. ("Indians and Whites" 341)

In *Wizards' Country* Rooke portrays a kind of humour which is communal and life-affirming, and quite different from the

(often racially) barbed humour to be found elsewhere. Very early in the novel there is a scene where the child Benge makes his grandparents laugh, after their grieving for the death of his uncle, Yaluyalu:

It was I, Benge, who made her laugh again at last. We used to go to her dwelling every evening to cheer her, and one night we were sitting silent for we had spoken all the words that came into our mouths. There was no sound, not even the stamp of a hoof from the cattle fold. Then a frog croaked. I said aloud the three sounds of the frog's name, and this sounded like the croaking of the frog. I said the word again, delighting in this likeness.

"Again," cried my grandmother, laughing suddenly: her laughter went from one to the other.

I clicked and clicked, like a frog. Then my grandfather must try.

"It is only the young ones who can do it," said Mastoli, laughing greatly.

"I?" said my grandfather. "Why, I am young. I am only two years old and I am so young that I cannot even wear skins. I wear a little string of beads about my belly, put there by my mother."

(*Wizards' Country* 3)

When I interviewed Daphne Rooke, she was very pleased that I had brought up the subject of humour in her novels:

I'm glad you've raised this question of humour because I feel that the humour in my books is a very vital part of them. It is a celebration of the possibilities of life. Also, I have a great belief in contrasts in writing. I feel you must have contrast: you must have contrast in characters, you must have contrast in action. You must also have contrasts in mood. If you don't have the humour, you can't have the true tragedy. (9)

The contrasts which are so important to Rooke are also evident in the visual aspect to her novels -- in terms of the way her stories are "seen" there are frequent juxtapositions of interior, close-focus shots of characters and long-shots which encompass distance, placing her characters in a wider context.⁵ Landscape features prominently in Rooke's writing -- to the extent that Lynne Bryer has argued that her "overwhelming response to landscape... tends to make it (as in

Hardy or Emily Brontë) the most important character in the book" (1). Rooke's focus on landscape, however, sets her apart from many of her fellow white South African writers, for whom writing the land has also been a major preoccupation.

In *White Writing*, J.M. Coetzee sums up a tendency among English South African landscape poets:

In all the poetry commemorating meetings with the silence and emptiness of Africa -- it must finally be said -- it is hard not to read a certain historical will to see as silent and empty a land that has been, if not full of human figures, not empty of them either; that is arid and infertile, perhaps, but not inhospitable to human life, and certainly not uninhabited. (177)

In Rooke a romantic appreciation for vast and beautiful natural spaces is balanced by an approach to writing the landscape which emphasises the movements both of people and of the land itself as it changes, and is changed by human hands, over time. The land, as she represents it, is never static but always showing contrasting moods -- droughts followed by rain, heat and cold, barrenness and fertility. More significantly, her landscapes are never unpeopled but filled with characters who journey through them and interpret them. She also writes with an awareness of layers of previous inhabitants and travellers, reaching back into the past.

In *Diamond Jo* the myth associated with the South African farm novel -- of the farm which assumes the characteristics of static impermanence⁶ -- is comically undercut by the hordes of travellers to the diamond fields passing through Van der Spuyt's farm early in the novel (31). Van der Spuyt decides to trek on in disgust, only to be encountered again later -- his new farm lies en route to the gold fields (187-9). But, also in *Diamond Jo*, the land is littered with the remnants of the

destructive, wealth-hungry travellers as vultures peck at the carcasses of mules that have died on the way (183).

In the three novels which use the same Zululand setting, *Wizards' Country*, *A Grove of Fever Trees* and *A Lover for Estelle*, Rooke charts the changes wrought to the land through conquest and misguided settler farming practices. The mountains which feature prominently in all three novels have profound symbolic meaning for the major characters in each, and accumulate layers of myth and meaning through time. Bengé loves to survey the countryside from the mountaintop, but across the mountains also lies the dangerous and magical wizards' country. For Danny, the mountains are where he lives his other life as a Zulu with Jatu. Caroline has a longing to climb the mountain peak where she is sure she "would hear the voices of history: of Zulus killed in battle, of hunters triumphing, of missionaries saying the name of Christ for the first time in a pagan land" (*A Lover for Estelle* 3).⁷

The ghosts of previous inhabitants which haunt the white occupiers of the land -- the curse on the Van Doorn family in *The Greyling*, the de la Porte's mansion built on the ruins of a destroyed kraal, and also, perhaps, the skull which remains defiantly unburied in *Mittee* -- suggest a very different history from that of the myth of the open and empty land waiting for white occupation. The land which is often, on the surface, empty of human occupation has, in fact, a rich human history -- recognised by Ilse when she thinks of the "million warring Natives, Voortrekkers, hunters, missionaries, English soldiers, prospectors, miners, storekeepers" who had previously occupied the area of her husband's farm which is ostensibly "only a stretch of grass and trees beneath the sky"

(*The Greyling* 72-73).

In as much as her novels offer the reader a fictional history of South Africa, Rooke's purpose may be seen to be twofold: through Benge's story and characters like Selina, Katjie and Zetke, she asserts the histories and rights of the country's indigenous black inhabitants; on the other hand, with regard to the country's white inhabitants, she asserts that they too have valid histories in Africa and as Africans -- despite their culpability, which she readily acknowledges. As a post-colonial novelist, Rooke thus falls between and encompasses elements of both the work of writers from Africa and elsewhere who have captured the indigenous experience of colonialism, and writers from countries like Australia and Canada who have written of the colonial experience from the point of view of a settler-descendant population.

Rooke's novels have a strongly visual quality which includes movement, and this cinematic quality also very definitely encompasses sound. Her writing creates the sense that the reader is seeing and hearing rather than merely reading text on the page. As written texts her work has much in common with oral literature, having links with both indigenous and settler traditions of storytelling.⁸ Her work in fact emerges out of an oral tradition: much of the material Rooke draws on for her novels comes from her mother's storytelling or from the stories of others, and she has also commented on the fact that she reads her novels aloud as she writes them (Fenner, "Interview", 11). Similarly, storytelling features prominently in the novels themselves -- one has only to think of Mrs Ashburn recounting the family history to her children, the epic tales told by the Hindu characters in

Ratoons, or Benge's grandmother's tales of religion and myth and his grandfather's stories of his youth as one of Shaka's warriors. The novels are also narrated in a way which calls to mind an oral storyteller rather than a written text -- one thinks particularly of the dramatic beginnings which are also conversational and convey a sense of immediacy. This quality is of course particularly strong in *Wizards' Country* -- "A movement in the reeds, a river pebble rolling on the stones... the people stop to listen" (1) -- but is also apparent in novels like *Margaretha de la Porte*, which begins: "Today I saw in a private collection a life-size bronze of Katjie, a Bushman girl who was Margaretha de la Porte's slave" (7).

This oral characteristic is also linked to a "way of approaching history because to [Rooke] it has been made up, quite literally, of stories" (Fenner, "Interview", 11). Rooke comments that her novels did not seem historical to her because they were dealing with events which were still fairly recent in her youth and were based on the reminiscences of people she knew. Thus for Rooke there is no absolute separation between the past and the present -- the past continues to live in the multiplicity of stories which make up her fiction.

In this chapter I have tried to capture something of the methods and characteristics of a writer who, finally, eludes any rigid classification. Rooke's work involves the constant crossing (and questioning) of borders: she is a woman writer intimately concerned with female experience who writes also through the eyes of male narrators; as a white writer she dares to imagine black experience from within; privileged by class she captures, without sentimentality, the frustrations

of poverty; drawing on her own family history she writes with understanding of both the Afrikaner and the English-speaking experience. Her work encompasses aspects of the colonial and post-colonial, blends romance with realism, juxtaposes laughter with extreme violence, is both serious and popular. In many ways her books were ahead of their time; but one postmodern tendency in which they do not indulge is to interrogate and agonise over the act of writing itself. Rooke's novels offer themselves unselfconsciously as stories, asserting the importance and pleasure of storytelling and hearing.

NOTES

1. This study is, of course, confined to Rooke's adult novels with South African settings. Her fictional output includes works like *Apples in the Hold* (set in Australia) and *Beti* (set in India and East Africa).
2. Rooke herself seems to consider her writing as falling well within the realist mode, and has argued that everything in her novels is based on events that happened or could have happened. She doesn't believe in the supernatural: when I asked her about the magic in *Wizards' Country* she replied that all "supernatural" manifestations could be explained with reference to psychological states (Letter 2). Her particular brand of "realism" is one which sees below the surface respectability to the anger, frustrations and madness which families and societies seek to keep hidden.
3. The magical realist qualities I have sensed in Rooke's writing, which set her apart from most of her contemporary South African writers but are perhaps shared by Bosman, are similar to the blend of the fantastic, the macabre and the humorous in Zakes Mda's recent novels.
4. Attending a Truth Commission hearing in Grahamstown, I was surprised by the laughter which was part of the event: one man's really tragic story was very funny in the telling - humorous enough in

translation but even more so in the original Xhosa, judging from the responses of people around me.

5. The language of film is appropriate to Rooke's work: while it is difficult to imagine her novels transferred to the stage it is very easy to picture them as films. While reading them I often have the sense that I am watching a movie on a big screen.
6. As J.M. Coetzee says in *White Writing*, "[in] South Africa pastoral art... is essentially conservative... it looks back, usually in a spirit of nostalgia, to the calm and stability of the farm, a still point mediate between the wilderness of lawless nature and the wilderness of the new cities; it holds up the time of the forefathers as an exemplary age when the garden of myth became actualized in history" (4).
7. In terms of her writing the landscape, Rooke also blends the romantic and the real: Michael Green writes of the way in which Rooke manipulates the geographical setting for *Wizards' Country* by moving Tshaneni's location from its Northern setting to South of Ulundi, so that the "fictional area carries both the magical connotations of Tshaneni and the historical connotations of Isandhlwana" ("Difference and Domesticity" 115). However, to Jane Fenner Rooke gives a more prosaic explanation for this blend of fictional and real geography in several of her novels -- "the landscape works for me and, if the landscape gets in the way, I change it. You see, not change a character... but change the landscape to fit the human characters and to fit the plot" ("Interview" 29).
8. I think this oral quality may explain why I have found it so difficult to quote short passages from Rooke - sections seem to demand quotation at some length to capture their particular theatrical quality.

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