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The journal is the bulletin for the European branch of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. As such it offers information about courses, conferences, visiting scholars and writers, scholarships, and literary competitions.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet, and should be accompanied by a return envelope.

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COVER: The god Ganesh. Photograph by Johan Tell.

We regret the misspelling of Njabulo S. Ndebele in KUNAPIPI, Vol. VI, No 3

Kunapi pi refers to the Australian aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.
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I've been talking to a lot of journalists for the last week, and I've become very expert at summarizing my books. You know, it's very strange that you write something which is 250,000 words long or, in the case of the new book, a mere 100,000 words long, and people say, 'Can you tell our readers in a couple of sentences what it is you’re trying to say?' To be fair to journalists I have to say that it's not only journalists that make these
requests. For instance, I went on a lecture tour to India this year, and I remember in Delhi a girl said to me, 'Look, I've read your book, this *Midnight's Children*; it's very long, but I read it.' And then she said, 'What I want to know is: what's your point?' To my reply, 'Do I really have to have just one point?' she answered, 'Yes, of course. I know what you're going to say. You're going to say the whole book is the point from the beginning to the end, aren't you?' 'Yes,' I said. 'I thought so,' she said. 'It won't do.' So I thought that instead of talking about a point, I would just talk in a more discursive way about the book, and one might come round to something about a point.

I thought I would tell you a little bit about the way in which it was written. And it was written, really, in a manner of complete incompetence, I think. When I began to write it, there was a very very large amount of material. You may not believe this, given the length of the finished book, but the original draft of the book was at least twice as long. So what you have here is *The Reader's Digest* condensed version of *Midnight's Children*. Of the five years of writing, the first draft probably took about two years. And at the end of this time there was that terrible moment, which is when an author reads his manuscript and even the author is obliged to admit to himself that it's terrible, that it doesn't work, and that it's just a complete mess with no organization in it at all. This is a very depressing moment. And I didn't really know what to do about it. The odd thing about this first draft is that it was not written in the first person, yet now it is. I hadn't worked out when I first started writing it that that's what I had to do. So I just wrote it as a third-person narrative, and it wasn't surprising in retrospect that it was a mess. I was wondering what to do about this, and I was also worrying about the Tristram Shandy problem, about the fact that Saleem, the narrator, was not born until 150 pages into the book. And I thought this is a lot to ask the reader to put up with. I know Tristram Shandy actually takes longer to get born than Saleem, but I think I get the silver medal anyway, or rather Saleem does.

But I thought something must be done, nobody will wait 150 pages. And then I thought that maybe what I would do was allow him to narrate the section before he was born so that at least his voice would be present in the book even if he himself was not present in the events of the book, and people would get to know him in that way, and so they would be more willing to wait for his actual birth. And then I thought that maybe once he was born, it would no longer be necessary for him to narrate the book and I could return and take over. This was a terrible mistake on my part. Because the moment he began to talk, it became clear that he was
never going to stop. It was like a coup: he just simply took a deep breath and started talking, and 500 pages later he stopped, much to my relief. This obviously meant that the book was completely re-written and I think every sentence in the first draft went out of the window, and new sentences came in through the door. On the whole I was very grateful to him for taking over, because he was clearly able to do what I wasn’t. So that was one, probably the major discovery in the book.

But there were other things that I was concerned about, one of which is that I didn’t want to write a book which could be conventionally translated as allegory, because it seems to me that in India allegory is a kind of disease. You know, everything, all texts, all statements, are interpreted allegorically. There is an assumption that every story is really another story which you haven’t quite told, and what you have to do is to translate the story that you have told into the story that you haven’t told. This comes back to the what’s-your-point question. Because people read a section and they say, ‘I can read what you say, what the story is all about. But what is it about?’ And you say, ‘Well, it’s about what’s on the page.’ And they say, ‘Well, no, but what’s it really about? One can see that it’s very symbolic and all that, but what does it really mean?’ And the idea that a text should really mean what is in fact on the page in front of you is somehow not easily accepted by Indian readers. And so it seemed to me that I must resist allegory.

The book clearly has allegorical elements, but they don’t work in any kind of exact formal sense; you cannot translate the structure of the book into the secret meaning, the book is not a code. Which many people in India expect books to be, it seems. So I thought that instead of using symbolism in its conventional form, I would use a just slightly different kind of thing, which is the leitmotif. Now the leitmotif, which is basically the idea of Walter Benjamin, is that you use as recurring things in the plot incidents or objects or phrases which in themselves have no meaning or no particular meaning but which form a kind of non-rational network of connections in the book. So for instance in Midnight’s Children there are various objects, there’s a sheet with a hole in it, there’s a silver spittoon, there’s a game of snakes and ladders, there’s a hand with a pointing finger, and other things which recur at various moments in the book in quite different contexts. Now these things have very little meaning in themselves. The meaning of the leitmotif is the sum total of the incidents in which it occurs. So it accumulates meaning the more it is used. And what one is able to do by using the leitmotif is to orchestrate what is otherwise a huge mass of material, which doesn’t always have rational connections, but the leitmotif can provide this other network of connec-
tions and so provide a shape. The book is really constructed around that kind of leitmotif, and not on the conventional Indian allegorical symbolic model.

Now of course one of the key and most seemingly allegorical elements of the book is the title of the book, the idea of the midnight children. I should tell you a little bit about the genesis of this idea. Originally I thought there would only be one child. Foolish me! At first I thought that there was going to be one child who is born at the moment of midnight and who grows up, and we follow him and we follow the country, and that’s it. You see, nice and simple. And then, at some point in the planning, I thought that I’d better have two children, partly because the book has a kind of dualism about the nature of the characters of the two children and partly because there is this very melodramatic device of the babies being exchanged at birth which I liked because it was a genuine kind of Bombay-talkie, B-movie notion, and I thought that a book which grew out of a movie city ought to contain such notions. I liked it also because it was a way of saying what the book’s saying: these are children not so much of their parents, but children of the time, children of history.

Interestingly enough, you discover time and time again that the most bizarre and melodramatic and sort of novelistic things that you do, turn out to be true. I didn’t think that people were really very often exchanged in the cradle in hospitals. But when the book came out, the man who was then India’s cricket captain read the book, and I saw a newspaper interview with him in which he said this was amazing because it had happened to him. And he said that when he was born, just a few hours old at the hospital, lying next to his mother, an uncle had come to visit him, had picked him up and had noticed that there was a tiny sort of natural perforation in an earlobe, a tiny little hole, and he thought about it and then he put the baby down and went away. The next day the same uncle came back, picked up the baby, had a look, and noticed there was no perforation in the earlobe. And the mother had not noticed. It was the uncle who raised this panic saying this is not the same child. And then they had to hunt all round the hospital. And eventually they found India’s future cricket captain, being suckled by a fisherwoman in another ward. So it seems that it is actually impossible to invent anything, the truth always surpasses it.

Anyway, so now I had two children, and I thought that was plenty. I had Saleem and his kind of dark side Shiva, and that was fine. And I was proceeding along that road when I remember I actually woke up in the middle of the night in a kind of cold sweat thinking, ‘It is not possible in a country the size of India that only two children should be born in the
hour'. And I thought, 'If that is so, which it clearly is, then why, the reader will legitimately ask, have I selected these two children?' And it's clear that this was a big problem that had to be solved. So I then had to perform a kind of form of insanity. I had to sit down with a calculator, and demographic charts and try and work out, given the population of India on 15 August 1947, given the rate at which the birth rate was expanding, and allowing for child mortality and all that, what would be a convincing number of children to be born in one hour. And eventually, after sweating blood over this, I discovered that a figure of somewhere around 1,000 was not unconvincing for that time. In fact, if anything, it was a little bit low. The real figure might be around eleven or twelve hundred, that's to say about two a second. So I settled for some reason on the number of 1001. I fail to remember at this moment why that was. But then, you see, I had this terrible problem: how would you write a novel with 1001 major characters? How do you write the novel when you not only have 1001 major characters, but they are divided geographically across a country which is 3,000 miles long and 3,000 miles wide, when they all speak different languages, all come from different social classes, and they have no way of ever meeting? How do you write a book about a thousand people who never meet each other? Well the first problem was to kill 420 of them, which I did by the normal process of child mortality, but to reduce the problem to 581 was not really to solve it. So in the end I had to use this curious device of allowing Saleem, the narrator, to become a telepath so he could become a kind of ham radio and they would all meet in what he calls the parliament of his brain. This was a kind of technical solution to a technical problem of some size.

But I also thought it was probably legitimate because there's a point in the book at which he first starts talking about being aware of the presence of these children. He is a very lonely child, and lonely children invent imaginary friends, and it seemed to me that it was possible at the beginning to read these children as something that really only existed inside his mind, and they were a kind of alternative fantasy world for him. But of course they don’t remain that. They spill over into actuality. However, I thought that was a way of justifying them in what might otherwise seem to be a rather cheating notion of telepathy. However, I was worried about these children. You see, I thought that if the idea of these children was brought too much to the forefront of the book, it would be a very terrible thing. Given that they are all children with various kinds of magical gifts, the book could have meant that if India were to give itself over to these Nietzschean superfigures, they would save the world, but only if they would be like a kind of key for the superman. And
I thought that would be an appalling thing for them to mean. What I found I had to do in order to prevent them from becoming these Nietzschean figures, was to keep them very far in the background of the book, so that in fact, although the book is called after them, only three of them ever really become characters in the book, namely Saleem, Shiva, and Parvati, whom Saleem eventually marries. And the others are just a kind of vague collective entity that is occasionally discussed in the background of the book. They remain what they were always supposed to be, which was just a kind of metaphor of hope and of possibility, which, one day, was destroyed. A metaphor of hope betrayed and of possibilities denied. They were never really supposed to be more than that, and that’s why, although the book is called *Midnight’s Children*, there is actually very little in it about the midnight children.

I want to say one other thing about the way in which this book was constructed which is that I find that I was doing a very strange thing when writing it. Which is that at the time that I began to write it, the events that took place at the end of the book had not happened; I mean, that’s to say that the Emergency rule of Mrs Gandhi had begun in India, but it had not ended and, what’s more, it showed no signs of ending. This was very problematic to me because one thing that I was very convinced about was that I did not want to end with the Emergency. It seems to me that whatever you put near the end of the book gives that thing great status and I really didn’t want that to be the last message of the book. However, I thought, what am I to do? It is not possible to end the Emergency in my book if it’s not ended out there in history. And this was a problem, and so I remember clearly my feelings when Mrs Gandhi called her election and lost. I felt a profound personal gratitude, in fact I began to understand Saleem’s feeling of being responsible for history, you know, I thought that I had somehow been responsible because I needed it for my book, and I felt that I should have sent her a thank-you telegram for having completed my novel for me. And in a way I still feel that I was somehow responsible for the end of the Emergency and that history could occasionally obey aesthetic requirements.

Anyway, having said that, that’s probably enough about the way in which it was written, but I think that when the book is discussed in the West, it seems to get discussed almost entirely in terms of a certain string of writers who always get hung around its neck like a kind of garland, which is, you know, Garcia Marquez, Günther Grass, Rabelais, Laurence Sterne, Cervantes, Gogol, etc. So I thought that instead of talking about all that I’d try and talk about its Eastern literary ancestors and the sense in which it derives out of an Indian tradition which, to my
mind, is much more important in it than this aforesaid list. And I suppose the main thing to talk about is the use of techniques derived from oral narrative. It is really impossible to overstress the fact that the oral narrative is the most important literary form in India. That's to say that the most important literary form is something which is never written down, and the most important writers are people who do not write. And this is because very few people can read and write in India.

The people who really have the mass audience are the people who speak, not the people who write. And the idea of literature as performance in the same way as the idea of music as performance is absolutely central to Indian culture. I can give one example. There's a town called Baroda which is roughly speaking about half way between Bombay and Delhi, where I was this year. Near Baroda there lives one of the more famous Indian story-tellers, and he decided that he would give a performance of his work, of his stories. Basically they are elaborations on mythical tales, but they are embroidered in all kinds of wonderful ways. And when he announced this, the maidan, the big open field in the town had to be prepared, emergency restaurants had to be set up, temporary toilets had to be erected, all the traffic had to be diverted, special buses had to be laid on to bring people in from the countryside. And for this weekend when he was telling his stories, the number of people who gathered to hear him was 600,000. Baroda has a population of 400,000. That's to say the number of people who arrived was 50% greater than the population of the town that he was performing in. And this sea of people sat in a field for a weekend and listened to this man tell stories. If ever there was a way of making a novelist feel humble, that was it.

Listening to this man reminded me of the shape of the oral narrative. It's not linear. An oral narrative does not go from the beginning to the middle to the end of the story. It goes in great swoops, it goes in spirals or in loops, it very so often reiterates something that happened earlier to remind you, and then takes you off again, sometimes summarizes itself, it frequently digresses off into something that the story-teller appears just to have thought of, then it comes back to the main thrust of the narrative. Sometimes it steps sideways and tells you about another, related story which is like the story that he's been telling you, and then it goes back to the main story. Sometimes there are Chinese boxes where there is a story inside a story inside a story inside a story, then they all come back, you see. So it's a very bizarre and pyrotechnical shape. And it has the appearance of being random and chaotic, it has the appearance that what is happening is anything the story-teller happens to be thinking, he just proceeds in that contingent way. It seemed to me in fact that it was very
far from being random or chaotic, and that the oral narrative had developed this shape over a very long period, not because story-tellers were lacking in organization, but because this shape conformed very exactly to the shape in which people liked to listen, that in fact the first and the only rule of the story-teller is to hold his audience: if you don't hold them, they will get up and walk away. So everything that the story-teller does is designed to keep the people listening most intensely.

And it seemed to me that this form was much much more successful than the linear narrative, that if these stories were told in terms of the beginning and then what happened next and then what happened next, people would be bored and fall asleep and go away much much more quickly. And that it was the looping and digressing and swirling shape that kept people listening; it was as much the shape that kept people listening as the content of the stories that were being told.

Now it seemed to me that it must be possible to find a written-down equivalent of that. Obviously one cannot simply write down sentences that were designed to be spoken because everything about them would be different, and one does not speak as one writes. But I thought it must be possible to attempt the creation of a literary form which corresponds to the form of the oral narrative and which, with any luck, will succeed in holding readers, for reasons of its shape, in the same way that the oral narrative holds audiences for reasons of its shape, as well as content. So that's what *Midnight's Children* was, I think, and I think everything about Laurence Sterne, Garcia Marquez, and all that comes along behind that, and that was the thing that I felt when writing it that I was trying to do. *Midnight's Children* is narrated, so its relationship to the oral narrative is very direct. *Shame* also continues that process, although in the third person, not in the first. So one of the major roots of *Midnight's Children* lies in the oral narrative.

Another is the story of the god Ganesh. Ganesh stands behind Saleem, my narrator, very directly, and I suppose for three reasons. I shall talk about Saleem's appearance. Saleem has a very big nose. And the reason Saleem has a very big nose, to be truthful, is that one day I was looking at the map of India, and the map of India all of a sudden for me resembled a very large nose hanging into the sea, with a drip off the end of it, which was Ceylon. Then I thought, well, you know, if Saleem is going to be the twin of the country, he may as well be the identical twin, and so he sprouted this enormous nose. After that I was thinking about the god Ganesh, because the god Ganesh, having the head of an elephant, also has a very large nose, and it seemed to me that he was a proper mythological ancestor to place behind Saleem. Partly for that reason, and partly
for two other reasons. One is that Ganesh is the kind of patron deity of literature, and since Saleem is the story-teller, I thought that he should have as an ancestor the god of literature. And the other thing is the story of Ganesh itself. The legend of Ganesh is the legend of disputed parentage; that's to say the reason he has the head of an elephant is because Shiva and Parvati quarrel over who the father of the child is. Shiva becomes convinced that his wife has been fooling around, that this child is not his, and so in rage he cuts off its head and then, repenting, looks around heaven for a head; and what comes to hand is the head of an elephant. This is stuck on, and so you have a god with an elephant's head. Now it seemed to me that since Saleem's entire ancestry is also very murky and disputed and, as I said, he was exchanged in the cradle, and so, far from being his parents' child, he's actually the child of two other people, it was correct to give him, as a mythological ancestor, somebody with disputed ancestry, with a disputed family line. So in those ways I think the book grows concentrically out of Indian elements. I only say this because this aspect has been somewhat understated in the West.

I thought I'd just say one or two quick things about *Midnight's Children* before talking a bit about *Shame*. One is that one of the things I tried to do in it was to sabotage the form in which it was cast. When it sets out it looks as though what you're going to get is a family saga. You know, the grandfathers, then the parents, then the children, the classic form, the *Bildungsroman*. And I thought this was more or less right, that I had to set it up like that because the family's so central to life in India that it was impossible to conceive of an epic, even a comic epic, which did not have a family somewhere near the centre. One could write such an epic about the Western society which did not revolve around the family, and it wouldn't seem strange. But in India I thought it would be very peculiar if a family was not somehow centrally involved. However, I didn't want to write the Forsythe saga or anything like it, and so I thought I had to do something to undermine this convention, and so I suppose the book contains two time bombs. One is the baby swop where the reader, to his or her intense irritation, discovers after one hundred and fifty pages of reading about a family, that the family that you've been reading about is actually not the family of the child that you're going to talk about, but somebody else's family altogether. So that's the moment when you annoy your audience. And the second moment arrives about two thirds or three quarters of the way through the book. It's not conventional within the family saga to kill the family when there are still one hundred and fifty pages left to go, but in this book just about every member of the family gets wiped out when there are in fact one hundred and fifty pages left to
go. And Saleem is then left on his own. And I thought that was another way of making the reader understand that the book he was reading was not the book he thought he was reading. But also, because I thought that as Saleem is a character who claims all his life to be connected to history, to be controlling history, to be somehow responsible for history, he could not be allowed to get away with that all his life without being dragged out of the comfort of his family. He had to be un-housed, he had to lose the cocoon around him, and he had to be thrown into the middle of all this history that he claimed to be influencing. He then discovers, at the end of the book, that very far from being the controller of history he is a victim of it, and he never really recovers from this discovery.

The book is very long. One reason the book is so long is partly because of the idea of the novel being something that includes as much as possible. It seems to me really that there are only two kinds of novel. There are novels which proceed on the basis of excluding most of the world, of plucking that one strand out of the universe and writing about that. Or there are novels in which you try to include everything, what Henry James called ‘the loose, baggy monsters’ of fiction. And I suppose that my books would fall roughly into the loose-baggy-monster camp, and although I’m not sure about the loose, the baggy monster is probably true. And this conforms again to an architectural idea, which is really the idea of the Hindu temple. If you look at the spire of the Hindu temple, the purpose of this spire is somewhat different to the spire of the Christian church which is a kind of aspiring towards god. A Hindu temple, let’s say the spire of the Khajuraho temples, is a representation of the world mountain. And on the world mountain, the sculptor, the maker of the temple, places as much as he possibly can. The mountain is crowded, it swarms with life, all forms of life. So the idea, the purpose of the temple is to include as much of life as it can. And again I thought that I would do that, to make an echo there in the form of the book with that architectural notion.

You may wonder why I’ve been talking a lot about Hindu traditions when both the narrator of the book and myself do not come out of the Hindu tradition, but out of the Muslim tradition. And you may wonder why it is, then, that the book derives so many of its symbols from other traditions. In fact, in Pakistan where people are not trained to think in terms of mixed tradition, this has disturbed some of its readers. My view is that the Indian tradition has always been, and still is, a mixed tradition. The idea that there is such a thing as a pure Indian tradition is a kind of fallacy, the nature of Indian culture has always been multiplicity and plurality and mingling. Indians have always been good at taking
from whoever comes in, whether they be Arian or Muslim or British or Portuguese. They assimilate the elements that are interesting and reject the rest. So Indian culture is not purist; the people who these days talk most violently about purism in Indian culture tend to be Hindu religious extremists, and in Pakistan, similarly, the people who talk about a pure culture tend to be Muslim religious extremists. I think that the idea of a pure culture is something which in India is, let’s say even politically important to resist. So the book comes out of that, that sense of a mixed tradition.

I’ll give one other instance about how one piece of the book was made. I think one of the things the book discusses is the idea of heroism, what it is to be an individual and whether it’s possible to be a hero in a country of seven hundred million people. I finally got a curious focus for this in a real-life incident that is translated into a fictional incident in the book. The real-life incident was a very famous murder trial that took place in India in the 1950s called the Nanavati case. Commander Nanavati in the book becomes thinly disguised as Commander Sabarmati. Commander Nanavati was a very prominent and well thought-of naval officer who many people thought was going to take over the Navy, and who one day committed a murder. He discovered that his wife was having an affair with somebody, so he went one morning to the naval arsenal, signed out for a gun and some bullets, went round to the flat where he’d discovered the wife and the lover were, rang the door bell, and when the door was opened, he shot the lover, and he shot his wife; he killed the lover but he didn’t actually succeed in killing his wife. He then went down, out of the house, with the gun in his hand went up to the first policeman he could find, and surrendered. There then followed the most extraordinary cause célèbre of a trial that, as far as I know, has ever taken place in post-Independence India. And this gripped the nation. Was Commander Nanavati to go to jail or not? For years, it was probably about two years, it was an absolutely central issue that everybody was talking about. And in the end he did go to jail after many appeals, although the first court, rather interestingly, found him not guilty. There’s one odd thing that can happen in Indian law — well, certainly in Bombay law — which is that if the judge thinks the jury has done something very stupid, he can reverse the judgement of the jury. Which in this case he did. And then of course there were appeals, and appeals, and appeals. Anyway he went to jail in the end.

I was wondering, why was it that the Nanavati case exercised such a hold over the minds of the people, why did it go so deep, and even today, if you talk to anybody who can remember the Nanavati case, they can tell
you every detail, they can tell you every twist and turn of how the case unfolded. Now, why did it go so deep? And then I had this awful and blasphemous notion which I became convinced was true, which is that the Nanavati case was like a kind of re-staging in the 20th century of the Ramayana story. The only difference was that Sita, who in the Ramayana is pure, is abducted by Ravana, but remains pure, was not very much like Mrs Nanavati. Because Mrs Nanavati was a willing partner in the seduction. However, apart from the character of Sita, the characters of Rama and Ravana remain the same. What was happening was that an abductor had made off with the beautiful wife of a famous and prominent man, and the famous and prominent man had then killed the abductor in order to avenge himself. And it struck me that, supposing the Ramayana had happened in the 20th century, supposing that Sita, virtuous that she was, had been abducted by Ravana and that Rama had gone after him and killed him and got his wife back, would Rama have been sent to jail? So it seemed to me what was happening was that in the 20th century India was being asked to decide between two definitions of itself. One was the definition which had dealt with the rule of heroes, you know, which is that a man had a right to do this if this was how another man was treating his wife. That’s the meaning of the Ramayana story. And the other was the rule of law. So it was a choice between the rule of heroes and the rule of law that the country was being asked to make, and my hypothesis was that that was why it became such a critical thing for the country, because we were all in a way being asked to make a choice. And what happened was that legally the country chose to send him to jail and deny him the status of a hero. But in people’s hearts, in terms of the affections of people, there is no doubt that everyone in India thought that it was quite right for Commander Nanavati to do what he did, they were all on his side. He was the injured husband, it was a crime passionel, and he was a popular figure. That’s the thing much of the book discusses, the position of heroes in a society of such size, and a society which is simultaneously ancient and modern. That, I thought, was the kind of moment which crystallizes in the book.

Talking of heroes gives me a way of switching quickly for a few minutes to talk about Shame. One of the things that worried me about Midnight’s Children was its hero. Saleem, who gave me so many advantages, also gave me one big problem which was that there was an assumption that he was me. The assumption of autobiography was partly a game that I’d played. Saleem and Salman are after all, if you look back etymologically, kind of versions of the same name, and Rushdie and Sinai are names which derive from two different great Arab philosophers,
so there are clear, deliberate affinities made in his name with my name; he’s the same age as me more or less, I mean he’s two months younger, he grows up in my house, he goes to my school, some of the things that happened to me happen in a more interesting form to him, so it’s not surprising that people should assume that an autobiography is intended. However, I found, especially as he grew older, that he and I diverged at many points quite strongly. I sometimes found him very irritating, I frequently disagreed with him. The coup having taken place where he’d taken over the text, I realized that it was absolutely impossible for me to say these things. I could not inform the reader that there are moments when the author and his narrator disagree. And I had to accept that that was, if you like, the price that one had to pay for everything that he gave me.

However, I thought, the next time I was damned if I was going to let that happen again. This time I was going to tell the story and not allow a mere character to usurp me. And I also thought that I wanted a character as unlike Saleem as possible. Saleem’s entire personality has to do with the idea of being central to things. And I thought this time I would like to talk about a character who was marginal, a very peripheral figure like the hero, so-called, of Shame. He says I’m a person who’s not the hero of my own life. And I think there are many such people. There are people who are mostly shaped by things that happen around them, not by the things they do themselves, people who are kind of spectators in their own fates. Maybe there are many more such people than actual protagonists who actually shape their own lives. And I thought that it would be interesting to write a book about a character who never really featured at the centre of the main events of his life, who was always at the edges of these events, and for whom the main characters of his life were other people. Writing the history of such a man would seem to me to be writing the history of many other people, but actually all adopt the history of this one man because he was, as he calls himself, a peripheral man. I also thought that it was a way of making sure that he was not taken to be me.

What else shall I say about him? He has three mothers and no father. The idea of the three mothers, I should say, arose out of the discussion. The book is set in Pakistan and it deals, centrally, with the way in which the sexual repressions of that country are connected to the political repressions. Saying that some people are superior to other people in a way permits tyranny. That’s the kind of soil from which dictators can grow. It seemed to me that if you have a country, most of whose thirty-six years of independent life have been shaped by dictators or tyrants of various kinds, that there comes a point at which you can’t say that that is bad
luck, that you have to look deeper into the society as to why that can happen, why it happens there and not, for instance, in India next door. And I thought that the fact that the society itself was in various ways based on repressive social codes which have nothing to do with political codes, was one explanation to that. And that’s one of the reasons why I decided to explore this idea of shame.

Somebody told me yesterday that Arthur Koestler said that the world is divided into two main controlling forces: in the West you have guilt, in the East you have shame, and that these were the things around which the world revolved. And I came to think about this, I’ve never read this in Koestler, but it seems that if he says it, he’s right. Because shame and its opposite, which is honour, seem to me to be kind of central to the society I was describing, to such an extent that it was impossible to explain the society except by looking at it through those concepts. So the book is a kind of series of variations on the idea of shame, and it’s connected, of course, to a political plot. I mean, the shame can be public as well as private, which is closely based on the story of General Zia and his predecessor, Mr Bhutto. Just to remind you, General Zia was the man who had Mr Bhutto executed. And I thought that there was a very interesting thing to write about here, which is not so much the personalities of the two men as the relationship of the two men.

Because when Mr Bhutto took over the government of Pakistan it was just after the débâcle of the loss of Bangla Desh. He found the Army in a demoralized state for they had just had this humiliating defeat, and he was anxious to keep the Army in this weakened condition because as an elected democratic leader — well, that’s a loose term, but he was more elected than the generals were; at least somebody had voted for him — he wanted to make sure that the generals did not become powerful again. So he looked around in the Army for the most incompetent general he could find, and this was General Zia Ul-Haq, who was not the most senior general for the job of commander-in-chief by any means. And Zia Ul-Haq, on the grounds of stupidity, and on no other grounds, was promoted, over the heads of many other generals, to become commander-in-chief of the Army. And after that the Bhuttos would wander round Pakistan and they would say, ‘It’s all right, we have Zia in our pocket.’ The President, Benazir Bhutto, used to say this quite openly. It was difficult to persuade them that in Pakistan you never have a general in your pocket. The idea that a general is likely to remain in your pocket, even if that’s where you put him originally, is a very stupid and dangerous idea. And it was Bhutto’s fatal mistake that he believed that Zia was his man.
So it then seemed to me that the idea that a man you place in power to be your yes-man, should end up as your hangman, was a very odd relationship, both for the protegé who becomes the executioner and for the patron who becomes the executed. And this, I thought, had some of the configurations of high Shakespearean tragedy. However, it also seemed to me that the people involved were not high Shakespearean tragic figures. They were much lower-grade figures. They were not Macbeth, Othello and Lear and Hamlet; they were clowns, goons. And it seemed that perhaps it was a definition of the condition of our age, and this does not only refer to Pakistan, that what one has is clowns and goons playing out the plots of high tragedies. This may be the kind of flavour of the 20th century. If you look at Reagan’s America or Thatcher’s Britain, it seems to me that is self-evidently true, that what you have is very low-grade people, second-rate clowns playing out what are in fact tragic plots. And so I thought this is the way that one should write. It would be very easy to write a tragedy about Pakistan, but I thought that would be dishonest, because these protagonists did not deserve tragedy. What they deserved was farce. And it seemed to me that what one should do is to write a story which in its shape is tragic, because there’s no doubt that what is happening in Pakistan is a tragedy, it’s a tragedy on a national scale. So it was correct to write a story whose form was tragic, but then to write it with all the language of comedy and farce that you could muster, because that was what the people merited, and that would be the way of creating a description of the world as it really was. So that’s what Shame is. It’s about as black a comedy as it’s possible to write. And not for easy satirical reasons, but for naturalistic reasons. Because that seemed to be the only way that one could come somewhere close to describing the world that was there.

I think, because I’ve spoken longer than I said I would, I will end just by saying one thing. Which is that it will be very easy when reading Shame, as it was for many people when reading Midnight’s Children, to forget that it’s about a real place. Many people, especially in the West, who read Midnight’s Children, talked about it as a fantasy novel. By and large, nobody in India talks about it as a fantasy novel; they talk about it as a novel of history and politics. And memory, which is the other thing that it is essentially about. With this book, too, I’ve already heard in England a professor of English literature saying on the radio that although this appears to be a political novel on the surface, it’s not really a political novel; in fact the political elements are, apparently, quite subsidiary. So I’d like to say that Shame is a political novel and that behind the fantasized or the mythologized country in the book there is a real
country, and behind the dictators in the book there are real dictators.

And finally to say one thing which the book does not say: the book does not make much of the fact that Pakistani politics are badly distorted by outside influence. It does refer every so often to the presence of the Americans and the Russians and so forth. It does not make very much of it, and by and large it uses them for comic effect and no more. Now the reason the book does not do this is because it seems to me that we in those countries quite often use the CIA and the KGB as an excuse for our own problems. And we quite often say that, you know, of course Zia’s in power because the Americans keep him there. Of course there’s an extent to which that’s true, but it’s also a way of saying we do not have power over our own lives, and I think that’s a very dangerous thing for any state to say about itself. So I thought in the book I’d pretend that we did have power over our own lives and that we would assume that the outside influence is very minor and that the internal influence is the important thing. Because I thought that would be more useful, the other thing is too easy to say. However, here I should say that one should remember that the likes of General Zia rule by permission of the Western alliance, that they rule by permission of Europe and America, that Margaret Thatcher and Reagan and the Common Market and all these people are convinced that Zia is the person they should support. And it seems to me that readers in the West who read this book should think about the idea that the freedoms which are so prized in the West are bought at the expense of other peoples’ freedoms; that what seems to be valuable and indispensable for the citizens of the West is trivial and dispensable when one talks about the citizens of the East. You should remember that freedom is a luxury and that freedom, like wealth and political power, is one of the luxuries of the West and it is bought at the price of the existence of the same things in the East. If a book like Shame can do something to convince even eight or nine people that they should attempt to protest against governments which do this in their name — and after all these governments do it in your name — then the book will have served some function. Thank you.

Hans Arndt: I’d like to ask two questions. Where did the widow come in? And, outside the book and its genesis, what’s your alternative?

Well, to talk about the widow. She came in in two ways, really. She came in mainly because it seemed to me that there was a kind of shape in the history of India. In the first thirty years of India, from independence to emergency, it seemed to me that was a kind of age and that there was a
dark irony in the fact that it should be Nehru's daughter who did so much to take the axe to the tree that he planted. It seemed to me that there was in that period a kind of progression from lightness to darkness, from optimism to the absence of optimism, and so the book adopted that shape. There's a nightmare in the book that Saleem has about somebody sitting on top of a stool and rolling up children into little balls and throwing them into the night — I had this nightmare myself, it was very frightening and it was entirely in green and black; and so I gave it to Saleem, and the widow, as a term, emerged from there. And then, when I remembered that Indira Gandhi was a widow, it was too good to miss, really, and so I used it. The thing that's given me great pleasure is to discover that this term every so often crops up in the newspapers, as if it had been in public use before I made it up, and it's always very nice to give an insult to the English language.

As to alternatives: First of all I don't think it's necessarily the function of a writer to be a prophet, but to describe what there is. I have no simple alternative for India or Pakistan, but I would say that the thing about those countries that prevents one being wholly pessimistic is not to do with their politics. If you look at the political life of India and Pakistan, it has always been very corrupt. But I would have thought that the 50% of corruption that might have been present there ten years ago has now risen to 100%, and I think that it is now more or less impossible to be a public figure at any level in India or Pakistan without being corrupt in some sense, without either buying or being bought. So I think if you look for the future of India, the optimism does not reside in its public life. It resides in the people, and I don't think it's a commonplace about India that the people have enormous energy and invention and dynamism, are not passive, and that kind of turbulence in the people is, I suspect, where the optimism lies. A people who refuse to lie down under this terrible yoke of corruption and so forth are not a people about whom one can feel wholly pessimistic.

If you ask me about my politics, my politics would be broadly speaking Marxist, and I would have thought that Marxist politics have much more relevance in India than they have in some Western countries. Some of the Marxist rhetoric which now sounds very passé and dated when you apply it to Western countries still means very important things when you apply it to those countries. So I suppose if you want a simple answer to the solution, I would propose it in largely Marxist terms. I should say, talking of Marxism, that the thing that annoyed a lot of my friends in India most, because Marxists are notorious sometimes for lacking a sense of humour — so are capitalists, this is not exclusive to the left — was a
page in *Midnight's Children* in which the Marxists are described as conjurers and card-sharpers and sword-swallowers and fire-eaters. I thought this was quite affectionate satire, but there are persons on the left who disagree and who think I was quite wrong, I should never have said such wicked things.

Kirsten Holst Petersen: *Can I ask you a question about Shame? Unlike the professor you've just talked about, I took it to be a political novel about a political subject, and I was wondering, as it is a roman à clef, what is the point of telling us that Bhutto was a playboy and Zia a puritanical leader?*

Well, the fact is that Bhutto *was* a playboy and Zia *was* puritanical. There is that reason. The novel is not entirely a *roman à clef*. If one tries to translate the other members of the cast into historical figures, it won't work. I mean, Benazir Bhutto does not correspond to Iskander Harappa's daughter in *Shame*. As much as wanting to discuss the relationship between Zia and Bhutto, I also wanted to write about another thing, which is kinship. The point is, in real life the families of Zia and Bhutto are not connected, whereas in the book there is a very close family network and all the kind of power struggles in the book happened inside a family context. What I wanted to say is that in this society very very small numbers of people are responsible for the making of history and for the controlling of power, and that there is a kind of Gogolian system where the ruling class is minute and politics is a kind of family quarrel. This means that, really, whether it's Zia or Bhutto or whoever happens to be in charge, it's still the same people really controlling it. And these people are very very few in number. What I wanted to say is that this is like a country in the way in which it must have been like to be in the Rome of the Caesars, or the Italy of the Borgias. It's similar to that: in order to take power you have to kill your uncle.

So the book is about that as well. It operates, I think, as a novel, just as a pure novel, more than as a code. And in fact there are various senses in which the dictators Bhutto or Zia are not like Iskander and Raza. In a way what I hoped — I don't know if I achieved it — but what I hoped for is that one would make figures in the book who were somehow bigger than the particular instances of them that history had offered us. You could fit a Botha and an Amin into that; there was not only one application of the archetype. And I was trying to talk about the abuses of military power. But the civilian power can be abused just as totally. And in many ways it seems to me that Bhutto has a much bigger responsibility than Zia for the state of Pakistan. For a start, if you look at the body
count, it was probably higher in the Bhutto period than it has been in the Zia period. More people, I should think, were killed in Baluchistan under Bhutto than have ever been killed under Zia. So in a way he was a bigger murderer for a start. Also he was the one who had an opportunity. He was the one who was actually there because he'd won an election, he actually had a national natural majority in the country, and he could have continued to win elections - he would not have won landslide victories, but he would have won majorities. It was possible for him to tolerate opposition, to tolerate dissent, to allow democracy to take some kind of root in the country. But because he was not a natural democrat, he destroyed that possibility by wishing to create more or less a one-party state, by stamping on everybody who attempted to disagree with him. Then, by fixing an election so extraordinarily that the people wouldn't stand for it, the Army was given its chance to come back in. So it seems to me that Bhutto carries a much heavier share of responsibility.

The worrying thing about the politicians in exile in Pakistan, particularly Benazir and the Bhutto party, is that there is no doubt that if there was an election tomorrow in Pakistan, they would come back with a very big majority. There's no doubt about that. But what is sad is that they appear to have learnt no lessons from the débâcle of Bhutto. There's nobody who's willing to criticize Bhutto's practice. Benazir is busy elevating her father into the level of a saint. There are miracle stories being spread. It is already said that if people go to Bhutto's tomb, if they are lame they will walk, and if they are blind they will see. These stories have been spread very rapidly in the country, so a kind of god has been created. And that is very very unhelpful. So in a way I am more critical of Bhutto than of the generals. Because one knows what to expect from generals. Generals behave as generals behave. To ask a general to be a democrat is, you know, silly. But to ask a democrat as elected leader to be democratic is not silly, and when he fails to be so, he needs to be hit. Hard.
The Flight from the Enchanter. Reflections on Salman Rushdie’s *Grimus*

We live in a disenchanted world. This historical _Entzauberung_ has been linked up with the rise of the bourgeoisie and is described at some length in Karl Marx’ and Friedrich Engels’ [*The Communist Manifesto* (1848): ‘The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations.... It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation....’]

And the rupture with the past and its beliefs — among the latter a belief in the reality of _magic_ — is reflected in numerous ways in nineteenth-century (bourgeois) literature; but at the same time the process of enlightenment and its consequences are contested, for it turns out to be much more difficult to get rid of this past than presupposed, insofar as it is still at work in the unconscious. The French philosopher Michel de Certeau expresses this paradoxical situation in the following way: ‘seeing better’, as far as ‘the relationship of every _Aufklärung_ to the insights that are either prior to or contemporary with it’ is concerned, always represents _both_ ‘a scientific necessity _and_ a new way of getting duped without knowing it’ (‘une nouvelle manière d’être trompé à son insu’).

Whatever you do to escape into a wonderful future or a rational utopia, you cannot escape from the shadow of the father — or from precisely those ‘feudal, _patriarchal_, idyllic relations’ Marx and Engels refer to at the beginning of their manifesto: Faustus always has to sign a (new) pact with the Devil, who is still the _father-substitute_ of our modern, scientific age, if we are to believe Certeau’s interpretation of Freud.

Salman Rushdie’s *Grimus* (1975) is a novel about _magic_ and thus the narrative raises precisely the issues hinted at here — the problem(s) of the uses of enchantment (Bettelheim) or the uses of _disenchantment_. As far as the latter strategy is concerned, the matter may be more complicated...
than suggested above, for in a sense it may be said that the magical world of the fairy tale contains the seeds of its own destruction, that it may bring about another kind of ‘disenchantment’, at least if we attempt to read it in the perspective of Walter Benjamin’s famous essay ‘The Storyteller’. According to Benjamin the fairy tale ‘tells us of the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which myth had placed upon its chest.... The wisest thing — so the fairy tale taught mankind in olden times, and teaches children to this day — is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits....’ Grimus presents a paradoxical solution to the persistence of an enchanted world — resulting from the destructive machinations of an evil magus, the title figure Grimus — insofar as it ends up by getting rid of magic by means of magic. The hero of the novel, the expatriated Amerindian Flapping Eagle, in the end decides to use the magical weapon he has got hold of, the Stone Rose, in order to create a world which contains no Stone Rose: ‘I began to re-create Calf Island, exactly as it was, with one difference: it was to contain no Rose. I had decided that this was a better alternative than physically breaking the Rose....’

Grimus is Salman Rushdie’s first novel, but it has not received the same kind of attention as Midnight’s Children (1981) and Shame (1983). Rushdie himself expresses certain reservations about Grimus: ‘I think Grimus is quite a clever book. But that’s not entirely a compliment. It’s too clever for its own good....’ Uma Parameswaran tends to agree with this judgment and characterizes the story line as ‘a potpourri of Romance and lustful encounters’. Parameswaran makes a number of comparisons between Grimus and Midnight’s Children, and it is true, of course, that an element of magical realism — comparable to what we find in Rushdie’s later works and in Latin American writer’s like Márquez and Asturias — may be discerned in Rushdie’s first novel, even if it is not developed to the same degree as in Midnight’s Children and Shame. However, Grimus is worth studying for its own sake as a formal experiment: a strange blend of mythical or allegorical narrative, fantasy, science fiction, and Menippean satire. According to the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, Menippean satire is characterized by ‘the organic combination within it of free fantasy, symbolism, and — on occasion — the mystical-religious element, with extreme (and from our point of view) crude underworld naturalism....’ This is a fairly exact description of Rushdie’s novel. Or, to quote Benjamin again, Grimus meets ‘the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits’, submitting it to a ritual ‘uncrowning’ or a parodic deconstruction.

Like Midnight’s Children and Shame, Grimus may be said to be based on a
series of ‘wrong miracles’ — or miracles that go wrong — insofar as the ultimate effects of these miracles turn out to be disastrous to the individual(s) or to the community involved. In Midnight’s Children all the wondrous gifts of those born within the first hour of India’s independence come to nothing, thanks to the diabolical machinations of the arch-villainess of the novel, i.e. the Widow alias Mrs Indira Gandhi. The destructive forces of modern history and, more specifically, India under the emergency and the enforced sterilization programme of the mid-1970s, have brought about this peripety, this disillusionment (or disenchantment) on a grand scale, and ‘now fishes could not be multiplied nor base metals transmuted; gone forever, the possibilities of flight and lycanthropy and the originally one-thousand-and-one marvellous promises of a numinous midnight’. In Shame the birth of Raza Hyder’s and his wife Bilquis’ daughter Sufiya Zinobia is characterized as ‘the wrong miracle’ and a series of catastrophes follow in its wake, insofar as this girl develops into an ogre-like, man-killing monster, whose death is as spectacular as her career as a psychopathic murderer. In terms of the allegorical pattern of the novel Sufiya Zinobia is an embodiment of ‘the Beast of shame’ whose power ‘cannot be held for long within one frame of flesh and blood, because it grows, it feeds and swells, until the vessel bursts...’ The monster has become a superhuman, transhistorical force, causing ‘a shock-wave that demolishes the house, and after it [comes] the fireball of her burning, rolling outwards to the horizon like the sea, and last of all the cloud, which rises and spreads and hangs over the nothingness of the scene...’ Thus a world ends in style — not with a whimper, but with a big bang! Incidentally, the cloud image of the passage quoted recalls the cloud poisoning the whole planet in M.P. Shiel’s classic science-fiction novel about the last man on earth, The Purple Cloud (1901).

In Grimus a series of miracles take place: a man (Grimus) finds the Elixir of Life — and its counterpart, the Elixir of Death — and afterwards he creates an enchanted island inhabited by human immortals (the Island of Calf); but all these magical feats come to nothing, insofar as the hero of the novel, Flapping Eagle, finally brings about the annihilation of the island, ‘its molecules and atoms breaking, dissolving, quietly vanishing into primal, unmade energy’ (p. 270). The encounter between Prospero (Grimus) and Caliban (Flapping Eagle) thus leads to a denouement differing in important respects from that of Shakespeare’s play. In The Tempest a strange sense of irreality permeates the very magical feats performed by Prospero and his supernatural aids:
These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
... the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
... We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.... (IV, i, 148-58)

The father figure in *The Tempest* is at once omnipotent and insubstantial, but at least he remains in control of things to the very end, which is no longer the case in *Grimus*; here the story ends with the fall of the magician.

Grimus (the magician of the novel) has withdrawn from his own creation in order to live in splendid isolation on a mountain top on Calf Island. He has created a zone which no one can penetrate without his permission. But in the end he dismantles the barrier he has set up, simultaneously trying to transfer his power as well as his identity to the successor he has chosen for himself, Flapping Eagle, who in this way becomes his 'son'. When Grimus pulls down his own defences, he becomes the object of anger of the inhabitants of K who hold him responsible for every evil that has befallen them from time immemorial and who plan revenge. A lynching party sets out to kill him:

Flann O'Toole, wearing his Napoleon hat, right hand concealed in his buttoned greatcoat, face whisky-red, climbing the steps. At his side, One-Track Peckenpaw, racoon hat jammed on, bearskin coat enveloping his bulk, coiled rope hanging over one shoulder, rifle in hand. And behind them, P.S. Moonshy, a glaring-eyed, unshaven clerk. An unlikely trinity of nemesis nearing its goal.

Grimus stood in the shade of the great ash, beside his home, the particoloured head-dress fluttering in the slight breeze, his birds lining his shoulders, clustered around him on the ground, watching over him from the vast spreading branches. (p. 263)

What follows is, in Freudian terms, a re-enactment of original parricide; the killing of the primordial father by the band of united brothers, the brother horde. 'One day,' says Freud, 'the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father, and so made an end of the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually.' In *Grimus* the title figure is hanged from his own tree, the 'great ash' mentioned above, and afterwards the (mythical) tree is set on fire, and 'around the column of smoke, a great dark cloud of circling,
shrieking birds, swooping and shrieking, pronounced his epitaph' (p. 265).

*Grimus* is structured as a quest, as Flapping Eagle’s search for his lost sister and (later) for the above-mentioned magical object, the Stone Rose, an object that has a seminal function in the text insofar as it bridges the gap between this world and a ‘higher’ level of existence, a level where you may affect reality by means of ‘conceptual technology’ and visit other planets and bring back bottles with the Elixir of Life and the Elixir of Death. Actually, a number of different mythological systems intersect — and interact — in the novel. An obvious parallel, in mythological terms, is Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. The tripartite structure of the novel, and the central position of a figure called Virgil Jones as Flapping Eagle’s ‘guide’ or *psychopompos* as he is climbing the (purgatorial) mountain of Calf Island, certainly recall Dante’s poem, even if *Grimus* emerges as a parodic version of that self-same text — for in *Grimus* there is no successful search for an ultimate or divine truth, even if Flapping Eagle at the end of the novel manages to establish a contact with a higher civilization situated in a different part of the universe, on the planet Thera, viz. the supercivilization of the Gorfs (‘Thera’ is an obvious anagram for ‘earth’ and ‘Gorf’ for ‘frog’). As Flapping Eagle enters a dangerous stage in his quest and has to undergo a series of mental hardships and trials, comprising hallucinatory experiences, Virgil Jones must ‘go in there, into the dimensions of another man’s mind, more dangerous than even one’s own, and *guide* him out’ (p. 79, my italics). Later Virgil explains to Flapping Eagle ‘that the topography of this Dimension’ is ‘a series of concentric circles’ (p. 88, my italics), recalling the geometrical shape of Dante’s Hell. As Flapping Eagle finally approaches his destination, the pinnacle where Grimus has built his impregnable fortress and from where he governs his magical realm, Virgil Jones’s function as a guide is taken over by the Amerindian’s sister Bird-Dog, who was originally abducted by Grimus and whom he has now transformed into a mindless tool, a ‘malcontented but totally subservient menial’ (p. 238). The place is described in terms that recall Dante’s description of the terrestrial paradise and later on, in the *Paradise* section, the angelic orders and saints of the heavenly abodes: confronted with ‘an inconceivably huge tree, an ash’, Flapping Eagle remembers Virgil Jones’s ‘description of the Ash Yggdrasil, the mother-tree which holds the skies in place. And wondered what monsters were gnawing at its roots’ (p. 240). Bird-Dog is a somewhat surly version of the divine Beatrice, and the angelic orders are replaced by swarms of birds, for ornithology turns out to be Grimus’s predominant passion or obsession.
Calf Island is situated somewhere in the Mediterranean, and it belongs to another cosmic dimension which cannot be reached by ordinary mortals, but only by those upon whom Grimus has bestowed the gift of immortality. But the very position of the island suggests a middle point in terms of the symbolic topography of the novel — the place where East and West, in this case an Oriental (Mohammedan) and an Amerindian mythology and cosmology are confronted with each other. Furthermore, Grimus himself is described in Virgil Jones’s diary as ‘evidently Middle-European, a refugee no doubt’ (p. 222, my italics) and he is thus in a position that bears some resemblance to that of Flapping Eagle: just as Flapping Eagle is an exiled representative of the (lost) civilization of a Native American tribe somewhere in the South West, Grimus is an expatriated European; and his position as a powerful magus turns him into a somewhat dubious, but impressive representative of the technological skills and scientific culture of his own continent — even if he may also be characterized as a Gothic villain and has a number of qualities in common with the mad scientist of many early science-fiction novels.15

According to several Native American myths evil enters the world through the intervention of an evil sorcerer, who starts messing things up, creating new beings of his own, etc., etc. In the Walam Olum, the creation myth and poetic record of the history of the Delawares, the work of the great Manito is (partially) spoilt by the activities of ‘an evil Manito’ who ‘made evil beings only, monsters’. And in the Walam Olum there are also references to ‘an evil being, a mighty magician’, who brought countless evils (badness, quarrelling, unhappiness, bad weather, sickness, death) with him when he came to earth. In Grimus the doings of the ‘mighty magician’, the possessor of the Stone Rose, bring about the expulsion of Flapping Eagle and his sister from their native country (tribe), and the world created by Grimus (Calf Island) is clearly also a fallen world compared to the supercivilization of the Gorfs from whom Grimus has stolen the Stone Rose (or at least he is using the Rose against their rules, when he is employing it for his own private purposes, for it ‘was never intended to be a tool for intraendimions [i.e. interdimensional] travel. Nor a magical box for the production of food’, p. 262).

Furthermore, Flapping Eagle may be compared to a number of characters in modern Native American prose narratives. He is an exile inside an alien (white) culture, unable to find his own cultural roots and identity and at the same time incapable of adapting himself to the norms and values of Western consumer culture. Many of these fictional characters are trapped in a vicious circle and tend to exhibit self-destructive traits, but Flapping Eagle’s final destruction of the island — which
entails his own death — must rather be interpreted as his voluntary self-sacrifice, i.e. in the end he is willing to embrace death in order to bring Grimus’s evil scheme to an end, to break the circle. In some respects Flapping Eagle may be compared to the hero of a modern Native American tale, Russell Bates’s ‘Rite of Encounter’, who in the end prefers to starve himself to death in order to save his people from contamination with the white man’s diseases (in this case black smallpox).

The life of the Axonas, the imaginary Amerindian tribe to which Flapping Eagle and his sister Bird-Dog belong, is narrowly circumscribed by rules, prescriptions, and taboos. And both Flapping Eagle and Bird-Dog are regarded as outsiders or pariahs from the very outset, because they are orphans, because their childhood and adolescence are accompanied by ill omens, and finally because they break the rules of the tribe. Their people are leading their lives in total seclusion from the rest of the world on a ‘plateau’, somewhere in the American South West, and when Flapping Eagle is finally expelled and descends into the lower regions of the plains below, he reaches a town called Phoenix, which ‘had arisen from the ashes of a great fire which had completely destroyed the earlier and much larger city also called Phoenix’ (p. 24). This gives us a hint as to the whereabouts of the Axonas, for the place must be Phoenix, Arizona, and the time consequently the near or remote future.

When Flapping Eagle leaves the plateau immediately after his sister’s departure — she has left with an itinerant peddler, Sispy, whose sibilant name is an alias for Grimus — he, like his sister, has drunk the Elixir of Life and thus become one of the immortals. His descent from the heights may be described as a kind of descensus ad inferos, for after his expulsion he has to wander over the surface of the earth in the footsteps of Ahasvérus (the Wandering Jew) for a period of seven hundred and forty-three years, four months, and three days, before he finally manages to reach Calf Island. When he arrives at Calf Island he has lived ‘for a total of seven hundred and seventy-seven years, seven months and seven days’ (p. 38). Whatever one may think of numerical symbolism, this seems to be a great day in his life!

The search for the elixir that bestows immortality upon human beings may also be found in Oriental (Mohammedan) folklore. According to Idries Shah ‘Many stories have been handed down in the East relating to the search for the Elixir of Life, by which immortality could be secured’, and Sispy-Grimus has many features in common with the itinerant sorcerers of numerous legendary traditions in the Middle East. At the same time it must be remembered, of course, that the theme of immor-
tality is well-known in Western literature from Hoffmann’s *The Devil’s Elixirs* (1816) and other Romantic versions of the legend of the Wandering Jew to Borges and modern Latin American magical realism.\(^{19}\) As far away as China the search for immortality has made its appearance in legend and history, for instance in the account of the First Emperor, who ‘grew so obsessed with desire’ to find the fungus of immortality in the Isles of the Blest ‘that he became an easy dupe in the hands of Taoist adventurers, who imposed upon his credulity to further their own ambitious designs...’\(^{20}\) In *Grimus* the legendary notion of the Islands of the Blessed — well-known from Western as well as Eastern folklore — becomes Calf Island; but at the same time the search for immortality is coupled with a strong death urge on the part of the hero (Flapping Eagle).

The name of the island in *Grimus* as well as that of the title-figure contains a number of punning references to themes and concepts associated with Mohammedan and, in particular, with Sufi philosophy and cosmology. Actually, the novel tends to explore — and explain — its own puns, i.e. it contains a number of *hermeneutical* passages where the text is operating on a *metaphictional* level. This is the case, for instance, when Grimus himself refers to the ‘myth of the Mountain of Kāf’, the mountain where the mythical Simurg, the ‘Great Bird’ of Mohammedan legend, is reported to live: ‘There is a Sufi poem in which thirty birds set out to find the Simurg on the mountain where he lives. When they reach the peak, they find that they themselves are, or rather have become, the Simurg. The name, you see, means Thirty Birds’ (p. 223). The poem referred to here is Farid ud-din Attar’s *The Conference of Birds* (*Mantiq Uttair*), probably composed in the second half of the twelfth century A.D., and quoted by Rushdie himself at the beginning of *Grimus* (p. 7).\(^{21}\) Grimus has planned to model the relationship between himself and Flapping Eagle on the perfect relationship between the One Bird (the Simurg) and the thirty birds, but Grimus fails to carry out his scheme because Flapping Eagle refuses to play the role foreseen for him by his adversary. Rushdie’s novel thus represents a degraded or down-graded or *ironic* version of the myth of the Simurg and the mountain of Kāf. In Farid ud-din Attar’s poem we find an allegorical expression of Sufi teachings concerning the perfect relationship between man and God, but in *Grimus* the divine being has been replaced by a would-be demiurge who is incapable of upholding the artificial world he has created.

According to *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* ‘some exegetes of the Ūṣrān interpret the letter kāf, which stands at the head of Sura L, as referring to the mountain Kāf...’,\(^{22}\) and Annemarie Schimmel in her study *Mystical*
Dimensions of Islam (1975) notices the fondness of poets and mystics for ‘expressing their ideas by playing with the first letters of those concepts of which they wanted to convey the deeper meaning to their readers…’, and concerning the letter q (qāf) she emphasizes that it is also ‘the mythical mountain that surrounds the world, on which the Simurgh … has its dwelling place…’

Q is also associated with qurb (proximity) and with quanaät (contentment): ‘the perfect Sufi lives, like the mythological bird, in the Mount Qaf of quanaät…’ Thus the religious concepts are given a parodic twist in Rushdie’s novel, and there is an obvious lack of proportion, an incongruity, between the mythical framework on the one hand and the level of the human characters in Rushdie’s novel on the other.

The disappearance of the Stone Rose at the end of Grimus and the consequences of that event may recall the destruction of the Ring in the crater of Mount Doom at the end of Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings (1954-55). But apart from such fantasy elements there are also a number of science-fiction elements in the novel. The Stone Rose recalls the black monolith(s) in Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey, and the idea of a superior civilization observing our own is present in a great many modern science-fiction texts from Anna Kavan’s Ice to Doris Lessing’s Briefing for a Descent into Hell and her Canopus in Argos series. But there is an even closer resemblance between Rushdie’s Grimus and another science-fiction novel: Angela Carter’s The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffmann (1972, American title: The War of Dreams). The title may refer to the author of The Devil’s Elixirs or to the discoverer of LSD, Albert Hoffmann, both of them disturbing figures and both of them explorers of powerful and potentially dangerous forces lodged in the unconscious. Doctor Hoffmann in Angela Carter’s novel, like the title-figure of Grimus, possesses a diabolical power over the minds of others. Grimus misuses the Stone Rose and Doctor Hoffmann is capable of creating powerful illusions, of disrupting the very sense of reality: ‘I lived in the city when our adversary, the diabolical Dr Hoffmann, filled it with mirages in order to drive us all mad…’

In Rushdie’s novel there are several references to ‘the Grimus effect’, and in Angela Carter’s novel there is correspondingly a ‘Hoffmann effect’ (p. 3). Sexuality plays a seminal role in both novels: in Grimus the whole-sale destruction of the island at the end is accompanied by an outburst of sexual energy, as Flapping Eagle and the ex-prostitute Media are ‘[writhing] upon their bed’ (p. 271), and in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffmann the mad scientist (Dr Hoffmann) by means of his ingenious ‘desire machines’ manipulates human sexuality on a large scale for his own sinister purposes, i.e. in order to destroy the reality principle and create a psychotic state of mind.
in his fellow human beings (pp. 243 ff.). Furthermore, in both novels the *carnivalistic* atmosphere of market places and fun fairs plays a seminal role: in *Grimus* by virtue of the title-figure’s merging with the itinerant peddler Sispy, in Angela Carter’s novel through the introduction of a peep-show proprietor who turns out to be Dr Hoffmann’s former professor. To quote Mikhail Bakhtin once more: ‘Truth’s earthly adventures take place on highroads, in brothels, dens of thieves, taverns, market places, prisons, and at secret cults’ erotic orgies.... The man of an idea — the wise man — is confronted with the extreme expression of worldly evil, depravity, baseness and vulgarity.’ This is precisely the narrative strategy that is characteristic of Angela Carter’s as well as Rushdie’s novel.

From what has been said in the foregoing it is obvious that *Grimus* brings a whole series of different codes — associated with a number of literary genres and conventions — into play. The text is characterized by its very heterogeneity, its refusal to adhere to any *one* particular semiotic code, any *one* narratological scheme. This predilection for code switching — to use a term applied by the historian Peter Burke to the World of Carnival — is characteristic of one particular genre, marked by its lack of homogeneity and its ability to incorporate and assimilate to its own purposes a number of *other* genres. The genre in question is the Menippean satire.

According to Northrop Frye the Menippean satire ‘deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes. Pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds, are handled in terms of their occupational approach to life as distinct from their social behaviour....’ The citizens of the town of K on Calf Island in Rushdie’s *Grimus* may be said to belong to the above-mentioned company of pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, etc.; furthermore, what characterizes them is their narrow adherence to one predominant passion or ‘prime interest’: ‘We in K,’ explains one of the characters, ‘...like to think of ourselves as complete men. Most, or actually all of us have a special area of interest to call our own...’ (p. 130). According to Frye the *philosophus gloriosus* is a recurring figure in the Menippean satire, and in *Grimus* this function is performed by the local philosopher and pillar of society, Ignatius Q. Gribb, whose ‘all-quotable philosophy’ cannot be taken as a serious contribution to Western thought, but is rather a series of disconnected observations and trivial *bonmots* decked out in a pompous language. When Gribb dies all of a sudden — from the emotional shock incurred when his wife transfers her love from him to Flapping Eagle — the whole community of K immediately begins to fall to pieces.
Mikhail Bakhtin stresses, among other elements, the predilection for ‘scandalous scenes and scenes of eccentric behaviour’ as well as a ‘crude underworld naturalism’ (cf. above) as characteristic of the Menippean satire — a genre that has survived from antiquity (the age of Lucian, Petronius, and Apuleius) to the present day. In *Grimus* the middle section of the novel with its presentation of low-life scenes in Flann O’Toole’s bar room (the ‘Elbaroom’) and the town’s brothel, punningly called the House of the Rising Son, is in accordance with the above-mentioned conventions. Philosophical universalism, ultimate questions, and a metaphysical quest are thus combined with underworld naturalism, and Flapping Eagle’s sexual adventures or ‘lustful encounters’ (Parameswaran) also contribute to the intellectual ‘meaning’ of the novel (cf. the function of the last sexual scene). Furthermore, Bakhtin identifies a ‘tri-levelled construction’, consisting of Olympus, earth, and nether world, as characteristic of the Menippean satire. In *Grimus* this tri-levelled structure may be found on Calf Island, which consists of three levels: the beach with Virgil Jones’s house, the town of K, and the mountain top with Grimushome, corresponding more or less accurately to the above-mentioned cosmic levels.

In *Grimus* the clash between different systems of values and between the people of the third world and their European colonizers is largely carried out in metaphorical terms, as part of a literary experiment with time, space, and language (cf. Rushdie’s fondness for puns). In Rushdie’s later novels, however, the outsider (Saleem, Sufiya Zinobia) is placed within a narrowly circumscribed historical space, i.e. the space ‘left’ by the Europeans (the English) when India and Pakistan obtained their independence. In *Grimus* the hero belongs to another despised minority: the Amerindians, and his fight for recognition in K as well as his final battle with Grimus may be regarded as various stages in an ideological quest. The town of K represents European mediocrity and middle-class self-complacency, and it turns out to be impossible for Flapping Eagle to become integrated into this narrow-minded, prejudiced and profoundly racist community. Grimus, on the other hand, represents the (patriarchal) centre of power of this sham society — a particularly vicious embodiment of the Zeitgeist, it might be argued. The attempts on the part of the citizens of K to flee from the enchanter by simply denying his existence turn out to be futile, and when the fall of the magician in the end brings about disenchantment, it is not only a false civilization, but a complete human world that is annihilated.
NOTES

3. Certeau comments on Sigmund Freud's 'A Neurosis of Demoniacal Possession in the Seventeenth Century' (1923). Cf. also on the case-story taken up by Freud — the story of the painter Christoph Haizmann and his compact with the Devil — Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter's *Schizophrenia 1677* (Dawson & Sons Ltd., 1956).
12. Ibid., p. 286.
13. Cf. M.P. Shiel, *The Purple Cloud* (Warner Paperback Library, 1973). In the above-mentioned interview Rushdie expresses his interest in science fiction as a genre: '...I was taken with the liberty to discuss ideas that science fiction can give you' (p. 25).
17. Ibid., pp. 343-52.
Prabhu S. Guptara

THE MOONIES

Cheesy grins
even when embarrassed
or enraged

answering
logical questions
by intuition

believing in an earthly salvation
by faith in the Reverend Moon

always in little frightened groups,
making dutiful forays into the crooked world,
slaving eighteen hours per day
selling peanuts and pamphlets
joss-sticks and armaments
and making good money for their master.

QUESTIONS FOR THE BUDDHA

Psyched out or extinguished?
Passed-on or reborn
were you, sir,
or did you find yourself awake?

How do you rate the dividend now
against the risks you took:
is any of us switched on
d’you reckon, to what you were about?

Did your enlightenment perhaps magnetize
and pattern the random iron
of old rebellion
against our scriptures, priests & God?

We burn for your easy peace
inside the kingly palaces you forsook;
or crave the sweat, the blood, the cry
of peace won through to by the anguish
we identify as ours.

Are you a little weary now, Sir,
of the half-smile you’ve sported
these bitter years?
In 1936, after travelling through Liberia, Graham Greene confronted a perennial problem for travel writers: how to write an interesting account of an unbearably tedious journey. In *Journey without Maps* Greene solved the problem, as Paul Fussell remarks in his *Abroad*, by ‘conceiv[ing] the journey as a metaphor for something else’.

Greene turns the African coast into an immense moralized landscape. In other words, he makes the topography of Liberia stand for a map of the human mind, much as Auden did with the map of England in the thirties.

*Journey without Maps* is very much of the thirties with its interest in revolutionary politics, public-school life, Kafka, psycho-analysis, travel and comparative methods of manufacture. But Greene’s map of the mind has more in common with Conrad’s in *Heart of Darkness* (1902) than with Auden’s. Greene’s ‘country of the mind’ has both the simplicity and the resonance of Conrad’s original metaphor. It is not cluttered with the familiar Audenesque trappings: rivers, mines, borders, railways, mountains, all with specific, if obscure, psychological and political reference. *Journey without Maps* has the symmetry and the sparseness of feature of Conrad’s novella: there is a departure from Europe, a sea journey round the African coast, penetration of the unknown continent, a discovery or conversion and the return to Europe.

It is the formal elegance of Greene’s journey, the disposition of significant details, that makes us think of the work less as a travelogue, a mere factual record, or a diary, than as a novel: a slyly plotted imaginative version of events. Greene, like Conrad, is concerned to draw up a map whose few essential features describe the crucial points in the contact of...
Western civilized consciousness with the primitive, with otherness. Consequently, his map cannot be as detailed as Auden's because the territory it delimits is unfamiliar, not England but Africa which Greene conceives in advance as 'a shape, a strangeness, a wanting to know.... The shape, of course, is roughly that of the human heart.'

Greene's words recall those in Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* (1947) where the Consul suggests a Conradian connection between a journey into an uncivilized country and a journey into the enigmatic heart of Western man: 'And this is how I sometimes think of myself, as a great explorer who has discovered some imaginary land from which he can never return to give his knowledge to the world: but the name of this land is hell. It is not Mexico of course but in the heart.' Greene and Lowry both employ Conrad's topographical metaphor to make a journey into an uncivilized place simultaneously a journey inwards. Yet their attitudes towards the primitive peoples are quite different to Conrad's.

For Greene and Lowry the recognition that the primitive world lies not simply in the savage place but also within the heart of civilized man is less horrified than it is for Conrad. Greene, of course, is simply echoing Conrad when he observes that 'Africa is not really strange. The «heart of darkness» is common to us both.' But consider the difference in tone in which this discovery is recorded in the two works. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlowe's chief emotion on recognizing his fellow humanity with the savages is one of repugnance:

...the men were — No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it — this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity — like yours — the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you — you so remote from the night of first ages — could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything — because everything is in it, all the past as well as the future.

Greene merely observes that Freud has shown us all our own 'heart of darkness'. Nor do his natives posture and grimace. Their dances are less savage rites than drab versions of a maypole dance in an English village. Greene observes the savage practice of the natives — their superstitions and occasional cruelties — with the detached eye of the cultural anthropologist. In the lives of the natives in the hinterland of Liberia he discovers an image of what Europeans had once been, and his response to
these people is conditioned by his anguished knowledge that contemporary European civilization is capable of savageries undreamt of in African villages.

The worst aspects of Greene’s natives are occasioned by their imitation of European vices. Once away from the coast and the corrupting influence of European civilization, Greene finds in the African villages of Liberia the primitive virtues of community, love, and trust. It is civilization, not barbarism, that occasions disgust. In Mexico in 1938 as Europe stumbled into a second, infinitely barbaric, war Greene was to find in the most isolated villages glimpses of precisely these virtues when he wrote *The Lawless Roads*. The rest of Mexico, which he loathed, disclosed the images of a European mode of violence: gas masks and Lewis guns worked into the indecipherable designs of Mexican architecture.

Malcolm Lowry was intent on more than what Greene called ‘a smash-and-grab raid into the primitive’. Lowry showed a lifelong preference for the primitive over the civilized and in Haiti actually had himself initiated into a voodoo cult. Lowry’s Mexico, for all its hallucinated, surreal and violent qualities, has much in common with that of Stuart Chase: the Mexico of handicrafts and little villages in which peasants lived out their simple lives rounded by organic virtue. Chase’s book, *Mexico* (1931), was well known to Lowry who, like Chase, valued the traditional Mexico and deplored the modern one which was in the thirties overwhelming it. Mexico, for Lowry, was a land not yet made over wholly in the image of Manchester or Detroit. The unattractive elements in Lowry’s Mexico are essentially European features: the brutality and mechanical force of fascism imposed on the older, purer, still visible Mexico.

Both Greene and Lowry share a characteristically thirties nostalgia for the primitive and the organic and both have a fixed belief that European civilization in its contemporary state is exhausted and on the point of being swept forever down the gutter of history. However much they loathe the actual Mexico or Liberia, the corruption and oppression and the sheer discomfort, they cannot suppress a thirties conviction that simplicity is preferable to sophistication. Their somewhat naïve faith in the uncivilized may be understood more readily if we recall F.R. Leavis’s championing of the organic throughout the decade and note that *Scrutiny* regularly held up Mexico as an example of a place where ancient handicrafts and peasant ways were still to be found.

Behind this change in attitude towards the ‘savage’ peoples lie all the vast changes that occurred in Western civilization and its idea of itself between 1902 and 1936: the modernist discovery of the primitive, the
twenties cult of the Negro, the development of new towns and ribbon developments in English rural areas which increased dissatisfaction with industrial civilization and, of course, the Great War which exposed the rot beneath Edwardian confidence, the direction in which progress and material development had been heading all along. It is not surprising that in 1936 Greene is interested in finding his way back to a less troubled childhood, personal as well as cultural, whose terrors are the simple ones of superstition and whose pleasures are those of belonging. Nor is it surprising that he confuses the childhood he seeks beneath all the layers of deception and corruption with the lives of Africans in the hinterlands of Liberia. Time stops, he discovers, fifty miles away from the coast. And away from the coast he no longer finds seediness, imitation, the Alice-in-Wonderland sense of unreality that go with European civilization in its contemporary state.

*Journey without Maps* asks what sort of innocence lies behind the seedy littoral of the present state of European civilization, of the present state of the author, representative of a seedy generation. The device which makes possible this multi-layered exploration is a simple one: memory. The journey into the hidden Africa releases memories which take us deeper and deeper into the mind of the author. Greene was not the only thirties writer to adopt this method of making a journey by a sophisticated traveller into a primitive country bear back ironically on the civilization of the journeyer. Evelyn Waugh does precisely this in *A Handful of Dust* (1934) where Tony Last travels absurdly into the heart of the primitive and discovers there a mad, fundamentalist Christian who forces him eternally to read Dickens. Lowry takes up the method in *Ultramarine* (1933) where the further the novel’s hero, Dana Hilliot, moves from his ship behind the littoral of the docks in Tsjang Tsjang — a kind of Shanghai with Liverpudlian details — into the heart of the brothels, the more tantalizing become the memories of youth and innocence and the more improbable his dreams of future domestic bliss with his girlfriend back in Liverpool. As with Conrad and Greene, the journey into the unknown continent releases memories which take us deeper and deeper into the mind of the narrator and into the divided heart of his civilization. Greene and Lowry find an image of what we have come from in what we meet. Beneath the layers of civilized self-consciousness they discover glimpses of a lost innocence.

All this indicates no advance for those representatives of otherness, the natives. Whether grimacing savages or Wordsworthian simpletons, they are equally captives of the categories imposed on them by their viewers. We may observe that Conrad, for all his rhetoric in favour of English
imperialism, keeps the economic motive of imperialist adventure firmly in mind. The appalled vision in *Heart of Darkness* is rooted in a profound understanding of imperialism: the English variety recalls the Roman, and both find their brilliant ideological self-justifications reflected back in the tarnished Belgian variety. Greene and Lowry, for all their thirties gestures towards political economy, have dressed their savages up in the silly costume of organicist nostalgia.

Patrick White returned to Australia in 1947 and he has not ceased to grumble about what he found to this day. Behind his sometimes hysterical attacks on his native land we may hear the voice of one educated in an English public school and at Cambridge, accustomed to what he calls 'polished minds in civilized surroundings', regarding with horror what he sees as the unrelieved ugliness and banality of the Australian scene. The Australia White depicts in 'The Prodigal Son', an essay written in the mid-fifties, is a land where 'the mind is the least of possessions'. Australia is White's Africa: his dark continent, devoid of civilization. Nevertheless, it is the Australian world that White chose to explore in the post-war period. His fiction from *The Tree of Man* (1955) on has encompassed more and more of the Australian experience, social and historical. White has incorporated an astonishing variety of dialects and classes into his novels, making raids on more and more exotic features of the Australian scene.

This achievement has been made possible above all by *Voss* (1957) which is another version of the Conradian journey into the 'heart of darkness'. Voss journeys from the littoral into the interior of an unknown continent. He discovers the darkness within his own being. He is changed. But White does not merely stage a 'smash and grab raid on the primitive' as does Greene. Where Conrad and Greene follow the pattern of descent and return White does not allow his journeyer to return to the coast, far less to the European world from which he came originally, Voss remains in the country itself. His being becomes part of the landscape. He is in a sense swallowed by the primitive world he had hoped to subdue by virtue of the superiority of his will. Thus White changes the simple outline of the Conradian journey. In so doing, he intimates how the unfamiliar continent may be read, how its strange writing may be deciphered.

The Australia which confronts Voss is not yet a world. It is a circle whose circumference is ungauged, on the edge of which huddles a tiny outpost of English people clinging to the conventions of 'home'. It is a blankness waiting to be written on. To read this place in terms of the models provided by the traditional realistic novel, particularly the
Victorian novel with which the action of *Voss* is contemporaneous, is to imitate the imitators: the huddling English. The colonial social world is one in which the fixity, hierarchy and air of permanence of the Victorian class structure can appear only as travesties. White is prepared in *Voss* to question this structure in terms of the 'realities' it excludes, in terms, for instance, of the ways in which the aboriginals construe their world. It is indicative of White's break with the assumptions of his class and with those of the nineteenth-century bourgeois novel with which his writing is often compared that the Blacks in *Voss* are allowed to read the world in a consistent, structured and conventional manner. They are not, like the gypsies in Victorian romances, simply placed outside the circle of prejudice that defines the limits of reality for the colonial bourgeoisie, as though their response to the world were one of naïve wonder unmediated by social convention. The Blacks are as disconcerted by departures from convention as the Bonners. They are shocked, for instance, when the comet refuses to act within the bounds of a certain convention. They compete on more or less equal terms with the Bonners, the Pringles and with Voss himself to decide where the real begins and ends.

The Blacks in *Voss* have their own contradictory and complex inner lives as the Blacks in *Heart of Darkness* or *Journey without Maps* do not. In White's novel the indigenous people, so long convenient representatives of primitiveness, savagery or otherness, begin to live outside the categories which the mind of the Western explorer imposes on them. Voss, who seeks to impose the map of his spiritual arrogance on the blank continent, discovers the writing of the Blacks already there. Voss, who hopes to conquer the savage peoples by virtue of his innate superiority and thus understand their world, cannot penetrate their language. Nor can the novel's other explorer, Colonel Hebden, 'apprehend' the native guide Jackie, which he seeks to do in a vain effort to interpret the meaning of the original expedition. Jackie, who is associated in the novel with Hermes, god of interpretation, eludes him.

In *Voss* 'reality' must be fought over rather than taken for granted. Hence White introduces the familiar Victorian forms and confidences only to debunk them. Yet, while he has scooped out the stuffing of the Bonners' world, the safe world of the littoral, he has not done so merely to endorse Voss's equally confident, and equally narrow, construal of the real.

It was necessary for White to make as opposed as possible the worlds of Voss and Mr Bonner. These worlds are competing interpretations of Australia: the Scylla and Charybdis between which the novel steers its deft way. Each is a totality, something complete within itself, that claims
to ‘contain’ the continent (the suggestive pun is Richard Poirier’s with American novelists in mind). The merchant ‘contains’ the country as a totality of material facts and things, a whole that can be mapped, carved up, and turned to profit. Voss ‘contains’ the continent as a metaphysical totality, a pure idea which his will imposes on reality. ‘The map? ... I will first make it’, he tells Mr Bonner. Both views rest on self-serving notions of perception. Each sees only what serves his epistemological purposes: Voss sees only the architecture of matter; the merchant sees only its flesh. The problem is, whose eye is sufficiently encompassing to see the continent as a whole without excluding whatever fails to fit neatly into his system?

White has created in Voss a figure who chooses the most extreme isolation of mind open to him: radical exile from the community and rejection of its materialistic vision of the land. Unlike ordinary Australians, Voss refuses to settle for no more than a small square of the country’s unprepossessing face. While merchants like Bonner set up stone monuments to an unobtainable permanence on the fertile periphery of the continent, Voss is determined to pit the vastness and ugliness of his own nature against the identical qualities he expects to find in the central deserts. While squatters like Sanderson and even smallholders like Judd attempt to enclose themselves within their acres, Voss is determined to contain within the compass of his skull the entire resistant continent. First, however, he must cleanse ‘the doors of perception’.

Voss ‘cleanses’ his perception by adopting the Blakean policy of closing the eye which passively receives sense data and opening the living eye of the imagination. His object is to create not to see a world. Unfortunately, Voss’s mind plays Lockean tricks on him, storing up images of the German castles of boyhood as abstract generalizations which he foists on the Australian landscape. Voss has an unBlakean disdain for particulars. He is also, in a sense in which Blake was not, a mystic. Voss’s mysticism is of a particularly crazed and blasphemous stamp. As such it is exactly suited to White’s sly aesthetic purpose.

Voss’s heresies are essential to his — and White’s — scheme. If the land is to be grasped as something more than a geographical presence, a first and ultimately daring leap of the imagination must be made. The man who would make such a leap must reject not only the materialism of a community which reduces landscape to economic units but also its conventional religiosity which is complicit with this reductive way of seeing. Mr Bonner’s God is as limited, as conventional, and as boring as his garden. He never tempts the merchant to visualize the world through the eye of the imagination. Voss’s God is utterly beyond restriction: He is
his own self unbound. ‘Atheismus’, he sententiously informs Laura Trevelyan, is ‘self-murder’. Voss will deify the self. Such divinity is to be attained by unseating the pale God of Christianity and installing the human will on the vacated throne.

In this endeavour the empty land will prove both collaborator and reward. Its very ugliness, its absence of the sensuous, will encourage the spirit to attempt the infinite. Only when the spirit (in Voss’ terms ‘spirit’ may be equated with either genius or will) has become as limitless as the Godhead it has toppled, will it prove equal to the metaphysical possibilities of the continent. The scope of Voss’s daring is thus commensurate with his task: the making out of the bare bones of the country a version of Australia that is agreeable to visionary and artist rather than farmer and merchant who rule the colonial roost.

If Voss is to supplant the straitened interpretation of Australia propagated by squatter and merchant, he must first dispatch their comfortable deity. Orthodox, materialistic Christianity serves the purposes of those who read in the scrutable face of their God approval of their proprietary and utilitarian conceptions of the world. The world to them is not a text to be read in search of metaphysical disclosures but a topography to be mapped, divided, and farmed. Nature to them is not a book between whose lines are intercalated moral lessons and anagogues but a blank slate which, once inscribed with the cartographer’s coordinates, offers commercial opportunities. Such a megalomania as Voss’s does not hesitate to wrestle with divinity. It is tempting to connect Voss with the favourite romantic figure of the God-opposer: Prometheus interpreted with a gnostic gloss as by Byron or Shelley. Voss, however, is locked in struggle not with a still potent Jehovah but with the deity of the colonial bourgeoisie who is merely a windbag full of platitudes. This unworthy opponent must be done away with not because he retains the power to terrify mens’ hearts, but because he supports the structure of conventions which holds together a thoroughly materialistic society. This God throws an unendurable limit around the imagination.

Voss, then, offers us not so much an ‘interpretation’ of Australia as a denial of the possibility of ever arriving at any final interpretation of Australia, of the world, or of literary texts. The expedition is thwarted in its desire to inscribe its legend on the country by the discovery everywhere of writing: of messages, languages, inscriptions that resist decipherment as the marginalia in the nautical manual that Marlowe discovers in the course of his penetration of a dark continent resist his attempts at decipherment. A definitive interpretation of the cave drawings or the aboriginal dialects or the meaning of the comet is as
unlikely as the discovery of a key to the Revelation of St John on which Palfreyman’s uncle is working. The new world is discovered as a palimpsest of meanings already written in the minds of its discoverers. Homer may serve to chock a table leg in Brendan Boyle’s shack, but his writing surrounds the expedition. *Voss* is the expedition of the broken modern world in which there can be no homecoming, no *nostos*.

Wilson Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock* (1961) completes the movement of these several texts away from an imperialist reading of the experiences of confronting otherness and being elsewhere towards a national one. In Harris’s version of Conrad’s metaphor the members of the expedition comprise a single national consciousness made up of layer upon layer of racial memories. Harris’s aim, in his own words, is to ‘visualize a *fulfilment*’ of the fragmented psyche of the West Indian, particularly the inhabitant of Guyana.¹⁸ He seeks no homogeneous cultural myth or set of absolutes in whose terms the diverse experiences of the peoples of Guyana might be read. He seeks rather to show how the fossils of these various experiences, of exploiter as well as exploited, may be restored to vital existence and creative interplay within the individual. He seeks to take division and antagonism out of history and throw them into the psyche.

Harris considers himself formally obliged as a novelist to move beyond the frontier at which, in his view, Conrad was stalled in *Heart of Darkness* by the limits of his own ideology. Conrad’s novella closely follows the paradigm of descent and return. Marlowe moves from Europe to the coast of Africa before penetrating by degrees the interior of the continent. Finally, Marlowe returns to Europe with the booty of his dark knowledge about what horror lies beneath the false consciousness of imperialist self-justification. Having returned, Marlowe is unable to convey the knowledge he has acquired to Kurtz’ fiancée. What Harris calls an ‘eclipse of the word’ occurs here that signals the helplessness of those in Marlowe’s and Conrad’s position: able to see the horror, they cannot do anything about it.¹⁹ The mute closure of *Heart of Darkness* signals the strickenness of sensibility that gave rise to the work. Conrad, according to Harris, is unable to break with the enclosed, monolithic ego of Western civilized bourgeois consciousness.

In *Voss*, according to Harris, White breaks with the exhausted paradigm of penetration and return by his formal ploy of allowing only a modified return. Voss himself does not return to the coast and to civilization. It is Judd, the former convict and victim of power, who returns with his memories about the fate of the expedition and the role of Voss tellingly jarred. Harris considers that this displacement of Judd’s
memories, among other qualities, qualifies *Voss* as one of the great novels of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{20} The reason for this high estimation is not far to seek. Judd's dislocated framework of memory deals a complex blow to *Voss* as saviour and leader. This is precisely what Harris seeks to do with Donne who occupies a complementary position to *Voss* in *Palace of the Peacock*. In Harris's novel the expedition is initiated by Donne with the traditional imperialist motive of ruling the land and exploiting the folk. But in the end Donne's expedition is contained by what it sought to contain and exploit.

This reversal is achieved as Harris progressively breaks with the static, predictable ego of the bourgeois and with the bourgeois realism as White does progressively in *Voss*. In both novels, to move into the hinterlands is to move away from the old fixed ego of the individual and away from linear notions of time and crudely causal historicity. It is to stage, forty years after Joyce and Lawrence, the breakthroughs of modernism which have finally caught up with fiction in the Commonwealth. In both novels, also, the moralized landscapes through which the expeditions move signal the stages in a ritual descent towards a discovery and a change or breakthrough in the assumptions that had given rise to the expedition. In both novels, vision supercedes mere perception as a means of construing the world. The perceiving eye, tricks of light, and the object world collaborate so that a marriage is effected between the imaginative eye that views and 'the goodly universe of things'.\textsuperscript{21} It is this visionary capacity that throws a line, what Harris calls 'a metaphysical outline', around the new worlds, 'filling in blocks where spaces stood'.\textsuperscript{22}

Thus is overcome the great danger of ruling as a way of responding to and understanding the external world. The ruler is severed from what he rules. He inhabits an abstract universe. He imposes a map of conquest on the actual world. The ruled, the folk or 'native' peoples, remain part of the world they inhabit. In *Palace of the Peacock* the expedition journeys towards reconciliation with the folk, the joining of the 'civilized' invader's consciousness to that of the 'savage' people. Thus Harris 'visualise[s] a fulfilment' of the broken pieces of the West Indian psyche and community. He seeks a means of binding the mind of the Western hero of imperialist adventure and exploitation to the world from which his own lust for conquest has separated him. Harris seeks to show how the antagonisms between ruler and ruled, exploiter and exploited, civilized and savage, self and other, even rapist and victim, might be healed.

The close of the novel achieves the desired resolution by invoking a myth of wholeness and oneness that is outside time. Memory, the means
by which Conrad, Greene, Lowry, and White traced the links between past and present, here and elsewhere, is repudiated in favour of a timeless moment in which vision discloses the unity of the basis of being. The landscape of Guyana is moralized by a mystical insight that discovers in the 'material nexus' of the perceived world signs of the spiritual reality on which it rests.

Harris's need to appeal to such a myth suggests the centrifugal force of the tendencies he seeks thereby to contain. The vision which closes the novel, like that of Stan Parker at the end of White's *The Tree of Man*, discloses an aesthetic desperation on Harris's part. White and Harris each employs a myth to give order to what he sees as the 'immense panorama of futility and anarchy' that is the contemporary world: 1950s Australia or post-colonial Guyana. But Harris, unlike White, offers his myth of healing as a consolation for the real fragmentation of history, for the real losses that imperialism has inflicted on native cultures, for the real antagonisms that economic exploitation causes. By making the 'savage' peoples part of a community capable of unifying exploiter as well as exploited, Harris moves beyond the impasse Conrad reaches in *Heart of Darkness*. In doing so, however, Harris blunts the sense of what the exercise of power over these people actually meant and means. For all the limits of his ideology, we feel that sense most strongly in Conrad.

NOTES

DEREK WRIGHT

Fragments: The Cargo Connection

Gareth Griffiths has written of Ayi Kwei Armah’s second novel, *Fragments*:¹

Although the traditional value systems persist they persist in altered and debased forms, and are often as potent a source of pressure and corruption as the new. For Armah then there is only a marginal comfort in the past. There is no nostalgia in Armah’s treatment of Naana. Her world cannot be restored. Its systems and patterns were effective and valuable, but they have been perverted into the modern myth of the ‘shiny things’ of consumer dreams.²

This is an accurate account of the outcome of an old process in a new world. There has to date, however, been no attempt in the criticism of Armah’s novel to examine the course of developments by which this state of affairs was arrived at. The dangerous transitional area glimpsed here, across which the corruptive energy of alteration moves between ‘tradi-
tional value systems' and 'the modern myth', has been little explored and the dynamics of the process of perversion, especially as regards the warped mentality of cargoism, have gone largely uninvestigated. Naana's monologues and reported conversations insist upon the superiority of a lost order of value which, because it is a past and a failed order, is problematic as a moral centre in the novel. But she remains a repository of valuable information about this traditional past and her poetic reveries give some guiding indication of the seriousness with which the novel's implied continuities between beliefs about ancestors and a contemporary cargo mentality are to be taken.

Discussion of the cargo phenomenon needs to distinguish between cargo cults, tied up with the shame of colonialism, and the cargo mentality which, as in the independent Ghana of Armah's novel, may be shamelessly neo-colonial in outlook. Although cargo cults proper usually break with and destroy the native religious traditions of the past, they paradoxically look to the benefits of Western commodities to recover some of the past's lost dignity, and their concern to wrest the white man's possessions from him goes hand in hand with the openly hostile demand for his expulsion. Cargo cults — in colonial Melanesia as in Central Africa — were explicitly anti-colonial. But the white man's exit also removed the animosity which caused it, even to the extent of inviting him back. Post-colonial cargoisms erected around the new black gift-bringers are less literal in their faith than their cult-prototypes but they are more slavishly worshipful in their attitudes towards white values and are more truly degraded in their undignified dependency upon the West. Armah's Ghana appears to be afflicted by many of the requisite conditions for a modern cargo-faith: an oppressed or dissatisfied mass of people awaiting a miraculous deliverance as a reaction to unequal access to newly-acquired power and European-style prosperity; a post-colonial black-white reversal which produces 'a new man, a black man with European abilities and capacities of understanding, a black man enjoying European conditions of being'; a readiness in the popular consciousness to believe in America as an 'ultimum bonum', a land 'far away and beyond the seas where everything could be learned and the good things of this world obtained'. Moreover, the returning been-to fits with deceptive ease into the prototype of the cargo-prophet, 'a well-travelled man who has had experience of other kinds of assumptions'. But underlying these superficial similarities, the cargo mentality makes another significant divergence from the cult proper. It has become a commonplace of studies of millenarian activities that cargo-faiths must be cast in traditional moulds if they are to take root in indigenous cultures:
All prophets take on themselves the task of renovating tradition, of seeking into the familiar and accepted in order to reach forward into the new, of so phrasing the new that it emerges as a more appropriate expression of what had always been agreed to be true.... The millenium is expressed within a particular cultural idiom; in this case access to European goods and forms of power are brought into line with traditional assumptions about power.

Baako’s inspired cargo-exposition stumbles upon and surprises into existence what is really a set of bizarre correspondences between African cargo mentalities, loosely grounded in increasingly remote beliefs about ancestor-intermediaries, and the cargoist logic of the Papua New Guinean ‘Mansren myth’ of the black and white brothers, which also features in Randolph Stow’s novel *Visitants*. Baako muses:

The idea the ghost could be a maker, apart from being too slow-breaking to interest those intent on living as well as the system makes possible, could also have something of excessive pride in it. Maker, artist, but also maker, god. It is presumably a great enough thing for a man to rise to be an intermediary between other men and the gods. To think of being a maker oneself could be sheer unforgiveable sin.... Did the Melanesians think of this? (pp.224-5)

Evidently they did, according to Burridge’s outline:

Because of an act by a mythical ancestor ... one of the brothers was well endowed with brains, ability and inventiveness, whilst the other was dull and could only copy. The clever brother was the ancestor of white men, and seems to have represented white men as a class; the duller brother was the ancestor of black men, representing black men as a class.

Nevertheless, these polarities, along with the type of the well-travelled prophet and the concept of the ‘ultimum bonum’, have no roots in traditional assumptions. For Baako the cargo parallel is an ingenious conceit, not a literal reality, and the divisions of black and white, inventor and copier, are not seen to be magically inherent in traditional myth but are part of the historical inheritance of colonialism, which myth neither anticipates nor rationalises: ‘The most impressive thing in the system is the wall-like acceptance of the division. Division of labour, power, worlds, everything. Not inherent in the scheme, this acceptance. Inherent mainly in the INTERPRETATION people give the system. Saves thought, I suppose’ (p.225).

Caught up in a dependency complex inherited from colonialism, Armah’s Ghanaians readily alienate to the white world god-like powers of invention and innovation which they are unwilling to develop themselves, an apathy summed up in the attitude of the Public Works Engineer at the ferry: ‘I was patient, and waited, that’s why I have my
present post’ (p.200). He represents a whole nation which waits for things to be done for it, whilst mindlessly taking over colonial routines which leave it incapable of constructive thought and without energy for independent enterprise. There is nothing ‘traditional’ in any of this — Baako’s capitals emphatically insist that the slave mentality derives from the interpretation people give the system and does not inhere in the scheme itself — and the origins of its occurrence in the novel are to be found not in cargo-myths but in Fanon.

The apparent cargo-potential of Naana’s dream, which analogises America to the ‘other world’ of the Akan ‘samando’, is more subtly disquieting, however, and warrants special attention:

...I saw Baako roaming in unknown, forbidden places, just born there again after a departure and a death somewhere. He had arrived from beneath the horizon and standing in a large place that was open and filled with many winds, he was lonely. But suddenly he was not alone, but walking one among many people. All the people were white people all knowing only how to speak the white people’s languages. Always, after saying anything, however small or large, they shook their white heads solemnly, as if they were the ones gone before. Some touched hands, slowly. But Baako walked among them neither touched nor seen, like a ghost in an overturned world in which all human flesh was white. And some of these people bore in their arms things of a beauty so great that I thought then in my soul this was the way the spirit land must be. Only it was a beauty that frightened also, and before I could remember again that he was not yet gone I had made in my fear a hurried asking for protection on Baako’s head.... We did not go with him inside the airplane ... but parted company in a room large as Nyankom, Esuano and Patase all put together, and in this place also we had the amazing brightness all around us ... after a long time we saw the line of people, many many white people but also others who were black, go like gentle ghosts into the airplane. When it swallowed Baako in his turn, I could look no more. (pp.15-16)

There are many beguiling resemblances here between traditional Akan beliefs about the spirit world and cargoist credulities. The stock cargo-motif of black men departing to be reborn as white ghosts carrying ‘things of beauty’ is not inconsistent with the Akan belief that the ghosts of the recently departed are, when visible, always dressed in white, and act as intermediaries between the living and the ancestors. Naana’s imagination transfigures the airport lounge into the Akan royal palaces and, in the third chapter ‘Akwaaba’ ('Welcome'), Baako materialises her metaphors of the ‘samando’ — traditionally a place of cold and ‘many winds’ — into the unwelcoming windy whiteness of a European capital. Naana’s spirit-analogies even slip into the cargoist phraseology of the ‘overturned world’, echoing the idea that returning ancestors bringing ‘white men’s somethings’ would ‘make the world turn over’, the
prophet’s announcements that ‘the whole world would be turned upside down’. The swallowing of ghosts by the aeroplane and Naana’s earlier reference to Baako being ‘taken up into the sky to cross the sea and go past the untouchable horizon itself’ (p.4), anticipate Efua’s cargo-minded expectations of her son magically appearing either from the sea or ‘out of the sky, in a plane’ (p.50). Naana admits that she herself has not been immune to the ‘things of heavy earth’: ‘I have known that if riches and greatness should ever cross his path and walk with him to the end of his days … I am not one he will choose to forget’ (p.4). Preparing at the end to cross to the spirit world, she asks forgiveness for ‘the thousand things I had gathered around my body to give it comfort’ (p.286).

Nevertheless, the reader would be ill-advised to embark upon a search for the roots of cargoism in Akan religion. Firstly, a historical caveat. The devotees of Congo cults such as the Bashilele and Kimbango, who combined the Christian Apocalypse with native beliefs about ancestors and waited in prophetic idleness for the collective rising of the dead (either white or half-white) to bring untold riches, end oppression and expel the white man, had no equivalents in the British colonies of West Africa. In the latter, messianic prophet-cults were more religious than political, more specifically Christian-centred, and made little or no reference to ‘ancestor worship’. In most West African beliefs the intermediary role of the ‘living dead’ who have recently joined the ancestors entails the conveyance of prayers, not the things prayed for: the spirits are a transmission line for requests and responses, not for the goods themselves. Such requests to the newly departed, in Akan dirges and laments, are sometimes materialistic ones: ‘Mother, if you would send me something, I would like parched corn. So that I could eat it raw if there was no fire to cook it…. I would like a parcel and a big cooking pot that entertains strangers.’ But the blatant and frequently farcical nature of the supplications usually implies realistic doubts about the spirits’ power to confer bequests, or even to convey requests, often expressed in the attendant refrain: ‘If the Departed could send gifts/ They would surely send something to their children.’ In Abraham’s view, the dirge’s sceptical irony and dismay extend to the general view of spirit-messenger roles:

There is a half-cynical, half-reverent attitude … illustrated in the saying that if the spirit world has nothing to it, at least it has its name behind it. Each man has to go there himself, messages are neither sent nor carried. Nor does one go there oneself and return as one pleases. If Orpheus had been an Akan, he would not have known any route save death to the underworld.
Secondly, Naana’s conflation of the human and divine worlds, and material and spiritual journeys, is perfectly in accord with the Akan world-view and has little to do with the idolatrous materialism of cargo-faiths:

The supernatural and the natural, man and society, and in fact all things, according to the Akan, exist in dynamic correspondence, whether they are visible or not.... In Akan thought, creation is going on all the time, and did not stop with the original creation at the beginning of time, in the dim past.... Festivals, rituals and ceremonies re-enact the unending nature of the universe, and life itself is a cycle of birth, death and rebirth, a rhythm which is in conformity with the reality of the universe.\(^{22}\)

In the seamless fabric of this universe, where one world is always immanent in and contiguous with another, the equality of humans and spirits and the inter-relatedness of all experiences within the cycle are a matter of course: ‘The Akans did not conceive the world in terms of the supposition of an unbridgeable distance between two worlds, the temporal and the non-temporal, in terms of the supposition that of the two the latter was infinitely the better and the more important.’ It is natural and proper for Naana to give to Baako’s journey between earthly locations at least an analogical continuity, if not a wholly common identity, with the spirit’s passage between lives for the reason that all journeys, like the pilgrimage in medieval Christian thought, are typologically-bound microcosms of the one great journey of the soul through ‘the passing flesh of ... this world’ (p.286). ‘Spirituality’ is a dimension of all travel because departed spirits are thought to watch over the passage of travellers both into and within this world and to intercede to the ancestors for their safety. Thus every voyage is a rebirth into the experience of a new reality and returns the voyager wiser than when he went: ‘But what is a traveller just returned from far journeys started years ago if not a new one all again?’ (p.4). The spirit world which Baako steps in and out of in Naana’s imagination is not reduced to the literal immediacy of cargo spirits or reincarnated ancestors.

Thirdly, the removal of the spirit world to distant realms by Naana’s dream is quite untypical of her customary expression of belief in the closeness of the invisible world. Naana’s direct communications with the ‘Great Friend’ and ‘Nananom’, the community of ancestors, penetrates the ritual ‘veils’ which exist between worlds in the traditional cultures described by van Gennep: since ‘seeing is itself a form of contact’,\(^{24}\) her blindness in the visible world carries her closer to the unseen one. Akan religion visualises no geographical separation between worlds: there is
only 'one internally contiguous order'. 25 'In the whole great world,' says Naana, 'all things are living things' (p. 1). In Akan myth death is represented in terms of the geography of this world, usually as crossing a river or climbing a hill, 26 not as skybound travel, which is probably a cargoist offshoot of a missionary Old Testament Christianity. Abraham argues convincingly that only by the remotest metonymy is Onyame, the Akan Supreme Being, turned into a sky-god. 27 For Naana, as for all traditional Akan who live very close to their dead, the ancestors are a constant and contactable presence. None of the periodic visitations of revenants in Akan belief — the return of the dead at New Year and to watch over newborn lives, or the 'reincarnation' of elders' characteristics in their grandchildren (which links Baako with Naana) — amount to the miraculous airborne return of ancestors from remote regions.

Fourthly, Naana's supposed materialism. J. S. Mbiti writes:

For the majority of African peoples, the hereafter is only a continuation of life more or less as it is in its human form. This means that personalities are retained, social and political statuses are maintained, sex distinction is continued, human activities are reproduced in the hereafter, the wealth or poverty of the individual remains unchanged, and in many ways the hereafter is a carbon copy of the present life. 28

The Akan, in fact, favour this life over its 'carbon copy' but the familiar notion of parallel worlds — 'The spirit world has a social organisation complete with chiefs and subjects' 29 — encourages a corporeal conception of spirits. The latter are kept posthumously alive by nourishing food offerings and libations — 'Nananom' puns on the plural for 'ancestor' and 'the ancestor drinks'. These material offerings are apparently prompted by imperatives stronger than the ethical one of self-denial, for the spirits are in turn accosted by the living, albeit half-believingly, for material returns. Although she later has reservations about the 'perfect words' at the departure-libation, Naana sees nothing fundamentally wrong with Foli's mundane exhortation of the spirits for such returns:

Watch over him, fathers.
Watch over him
and let him prosper
there where he is going.
And when he returns
let his return, like rain,
bring us your blessings and their fruits,
your blessings
your help
in this life you have left us to fight alone. (p. 8)
The interdependency of ‘spiritual’ and ‘material’ in African thought has been seized upon by Western commentators who have been quick to deny asceticism to African spirituality. Gerald Moore argues that ‘Africans were never spiritual in the same sense as that understood by a monk, a yogi or a fakir; they did not seek to transcend materiality but to obtain material ends by spiritual means, in the belief that these were the most effective’. Apparently in line with these observations, Armah is reluctant to obscure continuities by erecting diametric oppositions between a grossly selfish Western materialism, on one hand, and a pure, selfless African spirituality, on the other. In the light of these interdependencies, G.C.M. Mutiso’s bald declaration that ‘Old Africa ... by definition spiritual and the negation of materialism ... is represented by the grandmother Naana’, will not do. But the apparently cynical exploitation of spiritual channels for material gain is counterbalanced by the reciprocating spirituality of much apparent materialism. This is evident from Nketia’s researches into the Akan dirge, which a number of common elements — incantatory repetition and assonance, journey-motifs, compressed allusions to remote traditional lore — identify as the model for Naana’s reverie. These show that, in traditional religious practice, gifts requested of the ancestors are motivated less by material greed than by the desire for an expression of continued fellowship and solidarity between the living and the dead. The dominant wish is for some specific proof that the ‘ones gone before’ have not broken contact with the living but are still watching protectively over them in return for the libations and other acts of communion which recognise the continuing life of the dead and invite them to share and participate in human rejoicings.

Another dirge refrain captures this reciprocity: ‘Send me something when someone is coming/ Father, you and I exchange gifts.’ Moreover, the funeral address to ancestors seeks not only personal but corporate gain. It is ‘a corporate act of the whole community of both the living and the departed’, expressing sentiments that ‘bind the living and the dead together in fellowship’. Materialism diffused into a communal property ceases to be materialism in its most crude and naked form. The real change in modern practice, Baako discerns, is not from the spiritual to the material but from the dispersive communalising of materialism in the traditional culture to its intensifying privatisation by the Western nuclear family. It should also be noted that the dirge’s main emphasis falls not on the motif of the returning ancestor but on the reverse passage of the spirit’s circular return from this world to the next, the ‘going’ here which, Naana insists, will be a ‘coming’ there. Naana adheres to tradi-
tional practice in each of the foregoing particulars. Her faithful observ-
ance of prayer and libation is more mindful of obligations than of dues
and places the insignificant self at a mere stage in a vast cycle traversed
by a community of souls. Her moral horror at her family’s avarice is not
diminished by the occasional failure of her own immunity to material
temptation. Naana’s vision constitutes an exemplary model of African
ascetic spirituality, in which the novel’s two senses of the word ‘spiritual’
— on the one hand, pertaining to the ‘okra’, the encapsulated spirit or
ongoing human essence recycled through a variety of incarnations, and,
on the other hand, the Western meaning of moral self-denial and
unworldliness understood by Baako — come very close.

In the light of Naana’s traditional beliefs, it is quite incorrect to allege,
as does Ron Rassner, that ‘she is helplessly drawn into the cargo
spectrum’, that, like Efua, she ‘confidently awaits the return of Baako to
bring richness and greatness’, and that her ‘awaiting the return of the
prophet-hero, the been-to, can be interpreted within a religious context,
within a millenarian belief’. Naana’s values are not ‘sucked in’ to
cargoist practice except as sacrificial victims to the new god of material-
ism, on whose altar Baako’s last remaining writings, in parodic cargo-
fashion, are also offered up. It is she, as clairvoyant, who has the
monopoly on prophecy in the novel whilst Baako, in the naivety of his
expectations, foresees very little. Neither, incidentally, is Baako a Pro-
methean ‘forethinker’, except in the most distantly ironic way: he is, by
his own admission, a mediator not a liberator, a deliverer of goods, not
people. Most importantly, there is nothing millenarian about Naana’s
patient faith in Baako’s return. Such faith is intrinsic to a system of
properly ritualised behaviour which, measuring out gifts and rewards,
duties and dues, governs the cycle of departure and return in traditional
belief. Naana’s final anticipation of her rewards from the spirit-
community she is about to enter — returns worked for, not waited for —
could not be further removed from the slavish dependency and fatalistic
apathy of the cargo mentality, given its most extreme form in the
providentialist faith of the ‘nexologist’ and roundly condemned by an
Akan culture which prizes thrift and personal independence. ‘I am in
need, please do this for me,’ runs one Akan proverb. ‘That is how some
men become slaves.’ Naana’s discovery of a common origin for the
slave-trade and the modern unproductive consumerist mentality in the
psychology of dependency follows a traditional habit of thought: ‘The
origins of slavery were traced by the Akans to the loss of independence by
shiftless persons, who depended on others for their livelihood and
security.’
To return to Naana’s dream. Another striking similarity between the Akan dirge and Naana’s reverie is the play of a material-based imagination around tenuous hopes, vague yearnings and wishful projections. The Western-induced cargo mentality concretely vulgarises these into specific expectations and requests, perverting the uncertain and gestural into the explicit and material. Drawing naturally upon the devices of analogy and parable from Akan fable, Naana’s materialising imagination plays around Baako’s American exile as a figure for the spirit’s sojourn in the ‘samando’. The ‘strange lands’ crossed in her mind are no doubt partly prompted by the increasingly strange, foreign Ghana in which she herself has ‘become a stranger’ (p.14), but essentially Naana thinks — and dreams — in metaphor and, as in many dirges, the similes and conditional expressions confirm the figurative status of the envisaged reality. Foli’s ceremonial speech poetically identifies the two worlds: Baako is in ‘lands of the ghosts/ alone in white men’s lands’ (p.8). But the white people in Naana’s dream ‘shook their white heads, as if they were the ones gone before’, Baako is ‘like a ghost in an overturned world’, and Naana speculates that ‘this was the way the spirit land must be’ (my emphases). Naana’s mystical intuitions about the words of the Afro-American singers, who by extension of the poetic analogy are the ghosts to whom she is the closest, are also given the conditionality of hypothesis: ‘It was as if I understood what they were saying ... I shook my head with the perfect understanding that was not in it. I had not understood the words at all...’ (p.13). Her final proviso about the deadly soul-killing material beauty which Baako needs ‘protection’ from — ‘Only it was a beauty that frightened also’ — undermines the analogy of the two worlds almost as soon as it is made. In her closing monologue Naana will admit to the roaming poetic licence which fosters subjective correspondences between the spirit-journeys of Baako and herself: ‘the habit those about to travel have of seeing a like readiness to go in all else around themselves’ (p.283).

When her grandson and companion-spirit, exhilarated by his own ingenuity, reiterates such correspondences in the more discursive form of the cargo conceit, it is with an awareness that the connection is a preciously poetic, not a solidly historical one. Baako maintains a clear distinction: first, there is the original ‘unelaborated system’ where the departed ‘intercede on behalf of those not yet dead’, ‘where the been-to has yet to make his appearance, and there is no intermediary between the earth below and the sky above, no visible flesh and blood intermediary at any rate’; second, the warped modern equivalent in which the been-to, ‘the ghost in person returned to live among men ... fleshes out the
pattern' of the distant prototype. The unseen ancestor is visibly vulgarised into flesh, replacing a spiritualised materialism with a spiritless materialism. In the new version the community awaiting succour has shrunk to the 'narrower ... gaining circle' of the family, moved by a 'rockbottom kind of realism', the 'reality principle' of 'quick gains' (pp.223-4). 'There are two communities, really,' Juana later remarks of the modern order — the family and the larger society — 'and they don't coincide' (p.275). As noticed earlier, Baako's exposition cautions the reader that the cargoist twist is a matter of modern interpretation, not something inherent in the traditional scheme. Only in his madness does he literalise these parallel excursions into metaphor, trying to convince himself that the cargo mentality is genuinely compatible with African traditions and that, in disappointing the family, he has failed the whole community — a community which, in his first communication with Juana, the family is seen as 'a concave mirror ... a closer, intenser, more intimate reflection of...' (pp.145-6).

African religious faiths have no more nor less cargoist potential than any other faiths and what there is only becomes evident when put to certain pernicious uses. The closeness of the poetic analogies indicate how less discerning sensibilities than those of Naana and Baako could be deceived into finding unholy continuities between the two. In a faithless age the surviving religious emotions of awe and wonder are driven to find their correlative in modern technology's glittering profane paradise of material objects. The novel's 'unconnected eyes', unable to see beyond surfaces, crudely materialise the narrators' metaphors, turning the returnees into reborn cargo-spirits. 'Oh, they have made you a white man.... And you have come back to us, your own,' cries Sissie Brempong. 'The big man has come again.... The air where he has been is pure, not like ours' (pp.81,85). Efua beholds her newly-arrived son as a semi-supernatural being, inquiring after his car 'in a near-whisper filled with wonder and gladness' (p.101). The demented fantasy of Bukari's mother, who cannot wait for her son to 'come again' with his 'many things', is seen to transplant the Western world of commodities visited by the been-to into the spirit world: by the pseudo-logic of the new magical materialism, her unseasonable death is a sign of her impatience to get into these regions of purer air (p.132). Both Efua and the old woman at the airport act out the pathetic faith of Baako's surreal nexologist, respectively squandering savings on house foundations to get back the return of the whole edifice and spending a 'last cedi ... to come and welcome someone's swollen peacock' (p.85). 'Kill the pigs, burn the crop and wait with faith,' comments Baako. 'Throw the last coins, brokeman'
(p.229). These welcomers who come 'with a ceremony in their hearts' follow 'no mere laid-down ceremonies', however, but the promptings of private greed (p.88).

If the cargo mentality has anything at all to do with traditional faiths, then it is a perversion of very limited elements and is not an emanation from the whole. Rather, Armah prefers to lay it at the door of the West, out of which, in his tendentious fictional polemic, nothing good ever comes. Cargoism is another ex-colonial product designed by the West to make Africa more like and more tied to itself: its samples are skin-lightening creams, wigs, American jargon and neon advertising. It is another of the received, consumed ideas aimed by Euro-American powers at the markets of under-developed countries with a view to keeping these slavishly, magically dependent upon themselves by creating demands for products which the buyers can ill afford. In Naana's mind, cargoist dependency is an inverted continuation of slavery in which white vendors and black buyers replace black salesmen 'selling, gaining, spending till the last of our men sells the last woman to any passing white buyer and himself waits to be destroyed by this great haste to consume things we have taken no care nor trouble to produce' (p.284).

Regrettably, the characters' unthinking materialisation of the novel's metaphors is a vice of which some Western commentators cannot be acquitted. If a too drastic dichotomy of the human and the divine, the spiritual and the material, leads to over-simplified distinctions between Naana's 'Old Africa' and an unashamedly materialistic new one, an opposing critical tendency to take the figurative thinking of Naana's dream and Baako's cargo-mythology at their literal face value has resulted in the confused 'spiritualisation' of America, Baako's exile, and, implicitly, the Westernised Africa which looks to America as if it were really the land of the 'blest'. Rassner writes of Baako as 'one who has been to Europe or America or the spirit land of the unknown' as if these were really as interchangeable as cargo-credulities would have them, and Larson crassly concludes:

Out of her faith in the unseen world there can be hope for Baako too.... Naana's thoughts suggest that for Baako, too, the only release will be exile to a place where there will be new eyes, new faces.... As it is suggested in Naana's poignant dialogue with herself, Baako/Armah later left his native Ghana, and has since continued his writing in other African countries, the United States, and Europe. The passage of Naana's human essence into the spirit world and Baako's psychological-cum-spiritual crises during and after his American sojourn
are, of course, logically distinct experiences which involve quite different readings of 'spirituality'. Naana’s final hopeful exodus is not meant to be, in some sense, Baako’s solution too and its contrastive apposition with his slow return from madness makes its relevance to his predicament problematic. Certainly, it is not used to recommend analogically his return to Western exile in an earthly spiritual haven, fatuously identifiable with America. Richard Priebe’s more subtle reading of affirmation into the ending also treads perilous paths, and Rosemary Colmer comes dangerously close to suggesting that America, in the novel, is the location of a higher spiritual consciousness and the source of Baako’s spiritual values. Referring to Baako’s ‘gifts of vision’, she writes:

In the novel, Baako has received these gifts during his training in the United States, but his family rejects such spiritual offerings.... In the United States he attained the expanded consciousness which separates him from other been-tos. It is his experience of the ghost world across the sea which is the source of his artistic inspiration, which proceeds from the clarity of his new expanded vision.\(^4\)

Although his American training gives Baako the technical means and power to express his vision, only in indirect and inverted ways can it be seen as the source of his inspiration. His doubtful visionary gift clearly has its origin in his mental suffering abroad: it appears to have been formed in opposition to America’s material vulgarity and received its birth from the tension between his American training and his rejection of American values, instanced in his revulsion from the Americanised culture he finds on his return to Ghana. In their confusion of the material and the mythological, these critical misreadings — crudely in Larson’s case, subtly and perhaps unintentionally in the others — fall into the trap of the very cargoist thinking which is the novel’s target.

NOTES

1. Ayi Kwei Armah, *Fragments* (London: Heinemann, 1974). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
6. Ibid., p.69.
7. Ibid., p.57.
8. Ibid., p.52.
9. Ibid., pp. 32, 52.
17. Ibid., pp.45-54.
20. Ibid., p.120.
23. Abraham, p.52.
27. Abraham, p.53.
32. Nketia, pp.48-49.
33. Mbiti, pp. 26, 82-84.
34. Nketia, p.189.
35. Mbiti, p.70.
37. Ibid., pp.200-203.
40. Abraham, p.73.
41. Ibid., p.75.
42. Rassner, 62.
THE PAKISTAN ACADEMY OF LETTERS AWARD, 1981-1982

The Pakistan Academy of Letters (Islamabad) selected Alamgir Hashmi's *My Second in Kentucky* (Vision, 1981) for its 1981-1982 (1402 A.H.) prestigious national literature prize, the Patras Bokhari Award. The award is named after the famed writer and scholar, the late A.S. (alias Patras) Bokhari, who made a lasting contribution to both English and Urdu letters. This is the first time that the award has been given for English poetry. The award was announced on 16 May 1985. *Kunapipi* wishes to congratulate Alamgir Hashmi.

Ezenwa-Ohaeto

THE POET WHO WAS SILENT
(For Odia)

On the stage
His voice rang clear
Prompting lusty cheers from the sheep-audience:
The Chief Celebrant
At the unscheduled ceremony,
But he broke the magic circle,
As he stepped beyond.
Did he know
Truth need fists
When he unclasped his clenched fingers
Choosing the company of lions?
HOPE

The Ikoro* booms
The Ekwe* echo
And flutes weave intricate rhythms.
Tense, expectant eyes
glue on market paths.

It's time, for
Leopard Killers
Proceed to market

They come
In artificial splendour
Draped with leopard skins
Matchets flashing
Raffia skirts dancing in the breeze.

But are the Leopards dead?
Leopards who devour in the slums
Leopards who hustle in the towns
Leopard pen-butchers.
While our leopard killers celebrate unheeding.

Perhaps the leopards are now bold
Perhaps the killers are tired
Perhaps the ovations are deafening.

Our eyes searched
beyond the market place
And in the distance
We glimpse approaching
Luminous shape of Nemesis.

*Ikoro and Ekwe are hollowed-out wooden instruments. The Ekwe is used for sending messages and as a musical instrument while the Ikoro is used for the most important messages or as alarm.
Third World Meets First World: The Theme of ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ in South African English Fiction

The purpose of this paper is to trace some of the extent and the implications of what is popularly known as the ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ theme in South African English fiction. This description, which became a catchphrase in the literary history after the release of a film of the same title in the late 1940s, has loosely been used to categorise works which are essentially concerned with the rural black man’s encounter with the white-controlled industrialised city. Alan Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country* of 1948 — which is still today the most-read single work by any South African writer — is certainly the best-known example to deal with this type of material; part of my purpose is to describe the literary context in which it arose, and how, far from being a ‘first’, it significantly altered a debate in the fiction which had been strenuously under way for half a century.

In literature Johannesburg has always received a controversial, mixed and often bitter press. Consider the implications of its demography: one hundred and fifty years ago the area was part of Mzilikazi’s Riemland, a well-treed, big-game hunting zone which supplied meat and hides; one hundred years ago, a cleared ridge of veld pasture was occupied by cattle and sheep, with a land-holding population of a few dozen Boer farmers whose chief occupation was the supply of livestock and green produce to the markets of Pretoria, some 80 kms. to the north. Just over the Vaal River in the South African Republic, controlled by President Kruger and his Volsraad, the territory had been annexed by the British from Natal Colony, and abandoned as economically unviable just before 1886. But after the British left, prospectors who had moved from the diamond bonanza of Kimberley in the Cape discovered what became known as the richest goldfields in the world, along the Ridge of White Waters — to be exact, beneath the widow Petronella Oosthuizen’s farm at Langlaagte.
The change of way of life which ensued was, like everything else in Johannesburg’s brief story, to be dramatically rapid and exaggerated, taking on proportions which, even in our modern world of mass population flows, seem unbelievable, even wondrous. By its first census, ten years on, in 1896, a population of 102,000 was recorded, and for our purposes the significant feature is that half that population was black. Ninety years later — today, that is — the black population of a black satellite area of Johannesburg like Soweto is over 1½ million. It is the story of that sizeable migration from the rural areas to the industrial nexus that the ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ works tell. From a set of statistics like that one knows immediately that most of the literature will record not only how ‘Jim comes to Joburg’, but why he stays there; we are talking about the saga of several million people who, within a period of only three generations, have transformed their lifestyle — or have had it transformed for them — in previously unimaginable ways. It has been the burden of the ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ chroniclers to record this, to make the event be felt imaginatively as one of the main experiences of modern South African life.

Without being too schematic about it, the evidence in the literature is that the saga falls into four main historical phases, as follows:

i. The first blacks came to Johannesburg following an adaptation of the practices employed for raising farm-labourers; that is, as contract workers recruited in the rural areas for limited terms to provide manual labour, this time on the mines. Following this arrangement the system of compounding arose, with its dormitory accommodation on mine property.

ii. Other blacks on the Rand found employment in domestic jobs, or in the industrial or service sectors, residing in their vicinity of employment. This second phase gave rise to shanties on white plots, landlordism and the system of rack-renting in the city centre and its close suburbs, like Doornfontein to the east and Vrededorp to the west, and ultimately the phase of townships in the sky atop city skyscrapers; it also gave rise to distinctive slumyard cultures, the characteristics of which were poly-ethnic, providing the ‘melting pot’ lifestyle which is much celebrated in the literature.

iii. The third phase, the passing of which is much mourned in the literature, is the freehold situation, evident until the 1950s in townships such as the Sophiatown complex, and today partially evident in
Alexandra, in which black freehold rights were secured by leasehold tenure. In 1950, as a result of a renewed influx into the city of people illegally in search of work, thanks to the World War II industrial boom, the suburbs of Sophiatown contained 40,000 people on 1,700 plots, while Alexandra held 98,000 — half of the families occupying one room each.

iv. The fourth phase, which through a number of systematic legal acts, like the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 and the Native Resettlement Act of 1954, often undertaken in the name of health regulations or of 'urban renewal', has overtaken the previous phases, resulting in urban segregation and the removal of blacks to what are now known as townships, Soweto, some 20 kms. outside Johannesburg, being the most famous and largest of them all. These are racially determined ghettos which exclude the black population from residence within the city limits, huge dormitory complexes in which leasehold rights have only recently been re-established, leaving the central business district 'white by night', and the black population subject to administration boards and superintendents.

To these four phases of the demographics of Johannesburg a fifth should perhaps be added — that of illegal squatting, which is a feature throughout the saga, and strongly dramatised in Paton's work in the Shanty Town sequence, which in real life involved 20,000 dispossessed rural people living in 250 shelters made of packing cases and hessian — it was then one of eleven squatter camps containing in 1943-44 some 90,000 people. A further comment is that I do not mean to imply anything like a neat developmental model, for phase one — the compound phase — is still in use, phase two persists (usually illegally) in some pockets, phase three is returning in a new guise, albeit in a completely controlled geography, and so on. And one point on which the literature is emphatic, anyway, is on how Jim, once he is in Joburg, never stops learning how to beat the system. No control, all the writers agree, works quite in the way intended, although this broad pattern of population management is indeed in evidence as a background to all the literature.¹

The first literary work to tell the 'Jim Comes to Joburg' story in prose fiction is a great and neglected one — perhaps the most conscientious in the range of its concerns and the scrupulousness with which it probes the mechanics of the system which causes the saga. It is Douglas Blackburn's *Leaven: A Black and White Story*, published in 1908, but dealing with the
pre-Second Anglo-Boer War 1890s. Blackburn’s novel connects with the previous phase of South African English literature, that of the British Imperial romance, and his intention is to swing the South African novel away from the adventure of exploration of darkest Africa into the new mode of satirical, materialist realism. This is tackled quite schematically: we now have a book which begins in darkest Africa (Bulalie’s family’s Native reserve in idyllic Natal) and propels its questing hero in the reverse direction to that taken by Allan Quatermain et al. What drew the British outward bound was hidden treasure; for Bulalie it is a concertina, better than a mouth-organ, symbols of the lure of civilisation. Blackburn invites his urbanised readership to enjoy a new type of adventure, one more apt for his times, one which leads from Africa into the heart of their darkness.

The stages of Bulalie’s progress are these. First, he is a parricide, and in fleeing his home valley and the magistrate’s office, is lured into a Natal roadgang. The process is hardly voluntary, for there was in Natal, in Blackburn’s words, a law which provides that the native chief who occupies a small slice of the land taken from him by his white masters may continue to live on it if, among other tributes and services, he supplies a certain amount of labour for the public roads. The Natal government is careful to explain that the servitude is not obligatory, for the native ‘called out’ has perfect freedom of contract. He has the alternative choice of working for three months with pick and shovel on the roads for tenpence per diem or for an equal or longer period in preparing road material in the local jail for mealie pap and free water.

The second stage is domestic service in Pietermaritzburg, with its pass regulations and 9.00 p.m. curfew for blacks, where he earns £1.0.0 a month as a ‘kitchen boy and general factotum’ (p. 101) in a boarding-house. This episode ends in a Black Peril scare, during which the innocent Bulalie is sentenced to three years and 23 lashes for attempted rape, the victim of his scheming employer, Mrs Hopgood, who defrauds him of his earnings. Even before Bulalie reaches his great goal, he is jailed, and sjambokked senseless.

The third episode features his encounter with the other major character of the work, the missionary priest, the Rev David Hyslop, newly out from England, and known through Natal as ‘the Kaffir disintegrator’, this in retaliation on the part of the labour-hungry colonists averse to his gospel of equality and fraternity, particularly in respect of equal pay for equal work. Bulalie, an escaped convict, now lives under Hyslop as his only convert, submitting to Christianity in exchange for shelter from the law.
The fourth episode features an event which is not elsewhere recorded in the literature — the occurrence of blackbirding, or illegal labour recruitment, by which Bulalie is smuggled across the Natal border, impressed in a lot of 50, purchased by the mines at £2.0.0 a head. Here is this expert slave-dealer, Weldon, at a wayside canteen en route:

He made a little speech while the boys fed, consisting of well turned Zulu phrases depicting the joys awaiting the weary pilgrims in the City of Delight, Johannesburg. Puza, first; money, more puza; skoff (food), unlimited skoff, with sheep meat, bullock meat, every day; puza all day. Intombis (girls). Then fights with Basutos, Shangaans — dogs of every tribe whose heads they could break with their kerries — dogs who could not throw an assegai, or knobkerrie. A kafir paradise!

He repeated the paean with judicious variations, flourished his sjambok, made cuts and thrusts, stamped his foot and uttered old tribal war cries, till the boys, their mouths bulging with baking-powder-inflated bread, took up the cries and hailed him Inkoos! (Chief).

Weldon had not lied when he boasted that he knew kafirs. He did know them, their weakness, their docility, their credulity and their easily stirred enthusiasms. (pp. 201-2)

In Blackburn the entry into Johannesburg is unremarkable, unlike the later works where it is always a watershed experience. Bulalie simply moves into yet another wicked colonial institution, where there are ‘compound managers who have saved a hundred pounds a month out of their salary of forty or fifty; but that has necessitated very strict, almost grinding economy and self-denial’ (p. 206). On the mine Bulalie receives 53/- a month and this is his response to Johannesburg city: ‘Wonder on wonder, in the streets of Johannesburg men and women as plenty as mealie stalks in a big garden, and in the shops — ow! That is the only word that described them — ow! drawn out long and lingeringly through the fingers held over the mouth’ (pp. 217-8). To which Blackburn adds the comment:

He neither knew nor cared to know that the conditions amid which he lived were unique, abnormal; that they represented only the sordid, brutal side of the white man’s civilisation, as unlike the phase of existence the philanthropist imagines when he talks of civilising the native as the London viewed through the atmosphere of an East-End slum is like the city of luxury and refinement pictured by the romantic village maiden with the aid of a ‘high-life’ novel. (p. 218)

Blackburn’s low-life novel then proceeds to demonstrate how readily Bulalie learns to survive and, indeed, prosper, avoiding the eye of the ‘Protector of Natives’, an official appointed by the mines specifically to curtail abuses. There are three — and the ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ works are unanimous on these — illicit liquor-running, extortionate money-
lending and gambling, and prostitution. In collusion with his shift-boss, Bulalie the 'boss-boy' and mine policeman becomes a skilful entrepreneur in all three, multiplying his meagre wages ten-fold.

Hyslop, the recipient of his ill-gotten gains, finally deserts his failed mission reserve and sets off with great expectations for Johannesburg; he is saved by Bulalie during a faction-fight, and in his place Bulalie is killed. The novel concludes that mindless violence, fomented with the multitudes of compound dwellers to let off steam, is encouraged along artificially maintained tribal lines to destroy the chance of their uniting in common cause against their crooked overlords. Blackburn’s analytical indictment of the compound system concludes his record of a process of interlinked injustices, and the Johannesburg mines for him are only a further step in a British colonial system of labour management. There is no fuller record of labour relations in South African literature, at least up to that first phase of the black man’s saga of Johannesburg life; and subsequent phases Blackburn could not foresee. Nevertheless, in the examination of class and crime, Blackburn was an extremely accomplished writer, and his Leaven makes all the subsequent works seem gauche and naive in this respect.

The next full-scale work to tell the 'Jim Comes to Joburg' story is W.C. Scully’s Daniel Vananda of 1923. Subtitled The Life Story of a Human Being, Scully’s work has one intention — to exemplify this thesis:

That the Native is being demoralised and degraded morally and physically, is literally and awfully true. This is apparent to any unbiased observer on the outskirts of any city or large town where the Bantu congregate — in the slums of Cape Town and Port Elizabeth and in the locations controlled by the godly and British City of Grahamstown, where the death-rate has been over fifty per thousand. It is most terribly apparent in and around Johannesburg, where the Bantu population averages some 200,000, more than nine-tenths of which are males. Most of these people left their homes in a state of comparative innocence; they usually return post-graduates in some of the worst forms of vice.

Scully remarks further:

This degradation — this exploitation — have not been effected of set purpose; they are more the result of ignorance — of lack of imagination than of malice prepense. They are probably due to the essential infirmity of human nature, and afford an additional illustration of the truth of Hazlitt's principle: — that no one people is fit to be entrusted with authority over another, and that any relation falling short of equality between two races occupying a given area, leads to what is practically the enslavement of the one by the other. And if history teaches anything it is this: that in the final result the enslaver is more accursed than the enslaved. (p. vii)
The lesson given in Scully's document is lengthy and leisurely, showing a black case-history in the person of Vananda, nicknamed Daniel who, with the breaking of the Eastern Province tribes, moves to a mission education, petty crime in King Williams Town, a spell as a tenant farmer under a good land-owner, a trick played on him by a bad black policeman, a broken marriage — and then, for the penultimate chapter, Johannesburg. He travels in the bare train: 'At length they reached the Rand ... without whose output of lubricating gold the axles of those wheels which drive the mill of the world's commerce might long since have burnt at their bearings and fallen into ruin' (pp. 187-8). These wheels are literal, those of a mineshaft headgear. Daniel 'stepped into an iron box, which clonked down and down into the murky depths' (pp. 189-90) — and his descent into hell is complete.

In his after-hours Daniel meets the big three — gambling, 'nameless vices' (p. 192) and brandy; there is a rockfall, which renders Daniel lame; worst of all, there is miner's phthisis, the wasting lung disease, which stalks the underground galleries of the mine and its hospitals, and which Daniel contracts. Scully is the only novelist to deal with this aspect of the hazards of deep-level mining in detail. In the end Daniel is to die of phthisis, dumped in his home valley on his hands and knees, unable to breathe and uncompensated.

But Daniel has a streetwise half-section friend, as most of the main characters in the 'Jim Comes to Joburg' series have — he is the actual 'Jim' of the novel, Jim Coki, a 'huxter' (p. 199), employed by a Chinese laundry in the service sector. Daniel, in effect, escapes from phase one to phase two life, from the compound to the slumyard, by breaking his contract. In livery as a domestic servant, he lives off one Mrs Flotov, a financier's wife in Joubert Park. Jim, incidentally, makes some of his income as a gigolo to bored, white housewives (and Scully is the only writer to mention this possibility), but Daniel falls foul of Mrs Flotov, an unjust Black Peril trial ensues, and he escapes to 'a galvanised iron warren close to the Ferreira mine' (p. 207) in which cubicles are rented for two pounds per month. As Scully would have it, 'He was now one of the many victims marked for immolation in the pit beneath the out-stretched palms of Moloch' (p. 216).

Melodramatic and overstated though Scully's method is, his work gives an early illustration of the curiously unracial feeling of Johannesburg in the 1920s. In the slumyards blacks and whites (usually non-British) cohabit, and charity among thieves is the norm. But, unlike Jim Coki, Daniel is no profiteering rogue; the former survives like a picaresque hero, the latter merely succumbs — is reduced to jetsam — and
returns to a ruined ancestral home to die before his youth has ended. Scully is indignant that such cynical reduction of men’s lives should exist, but the reader backs Jim Coki as the character to come.

The third work in this series — although its author, lacking a scrupulous sense of literary origins, was given to puffing the notion that it was the first — is William Plomer’s *Ula Masondo*, a novella first published in the collection *I Speak of Africa* in 1927. Here the story is briskly and deftly told, with a certain daring of style — Plomer is the first, and one of the very few, to give his ‘Jim’ some interior monologue, so that the effect of the work is less documentary, more intimate. *Ula Masondo* is coterminous with his novel of the same period, *Turbott Wolfe* — it, too, begins in Lembuland — so that it extends Plomer’s personal cosmography. Like all Plomer’s Lembus (Zulus), Ula Masondo is immensely appealing physically, and it is his vanity which is stressed — he leaves his family kraal in an expensive, beautifully woven blanket, and returns on the Kaffir Mail as a ‘prodigal Bantu dandy’, as follows:

Ula Masondo was wearing as many of his best clothes as he could. The rest were contained in a suitcase of plum-coloured cardboard embossed to look like leather, which he carried in a hand resplendent with cheap rings. He was perched on high-heeled shoes which made him look as if he was standing on tip-toe. He wore voluminous tweed trousers fastened at the ankle with a buckle, and a wide scarf of purple silk under his coat.\(^4\)

Plomer’s novella illustrates the colonial policy which is discussed in Blackburn and Scully, as well, the ‘gospel of forcing the native to work by fostering a desire for the luxuries and trivialities of civilisation’ (*Leaven*, p. 4). Thus the work is framed by conversation in a Lembuland ‘Native’ store, where the white trader encourages Ula’s extravagance, while at the same time deprecating the way in acquiring trashy knick-knacks he, in fact, sells out his own birthright and his family. When Ula returns to Lembuland, he denies his mother as being uncivilised in the ways of the world, which leads to her suicide and the dissolution of the clan.

Here is Ula’s first sight of Johannesburg:

The passengers crowded to the window to see these peaks ... a dump as big as a hill, quite near, rising sheer and white from the ground, with tiny trucks running along the top ... on the other side of it the steel and iron and stone of the mine buildings stood drab and stern, bitter citadels of unreasoning industry....

Dirty children were playing in a donga; they could be heard stirring with a stick among old tins in an ashpit. Some women were drinking tea on a veranda.... A native was playing a concertina.... Rows of gaudy posters on a hoarding ran past as if on wheels....

‘Here’s an omen,’ said Ula Masondo, who knew what he felt but not what he meant. (pp. 55-6)
And in Plomer there is one image of privilege and wealth that resonates through the series from here on: Ula ‘saw a grey motor-car gliding down an avenue of gum trees to the manager’s office, and catching the sun between the shadows. A white borzoi dog was sitting at the back, and its long snout gave it a stupid and puzzled expression’ (p. 57). There it is, at once the pampered pet of white class, and its vicious watch-dog.

Ula is befriended by a skebenga or ‘boss-boy’, Vilakazi, who pampers him and — by now the pattern is established — introduces him to gambling (the first of many three-card tricks), liquor (methylated spirits sold illegally at the price of French brandy), and women, specifically Emma, ‘who lived with a white man during the week and supported him by her earnings from black men on Sundays’ (p. 58). Vilakazi is a confidence trickster, and literate; he falsifies Ula’s letters from home to read as if all were well there, whereas the truth is that the Masondo family has been reduced by drought, erosion and disease in Lembuland to depend on trading store credit and on Ula’s earnings. Plomer also introduces a new factor into the story, appropriate to the 1920s: the matter of amalaita gangs, formed in secret prison brotherhoods. Ula, Vilakazi, Emma and their associates spend their off-hours in the mine-dumps, avoiding the gangs, and as in most of the series from here on crime is no longer laid at the white man’s door, but at the door of an intermediate criminal class who so screen our ‘Jim’ from the white world that he is never really to see that it exists. They drink meths, fight, and the lonely mission bell rings over the industrial wasteland unheeded.

There is a rockfall underground, and Ula is entombed. While he is asphyxiating, Plomer releases the interior monologue which is one of the most memorable features of the work: it is an invitation to the reader to share some of the beauties of precontact rural life, which gives the work a sense of lost glory, doom and despair. Although Plomer sees the tribe is broken — and indeed illustrates how this occurs — this Edenic nostalgia for a lost paradise merely underscores the inadequacies of the alternative. Ula is rescued, takes to crime to clear his debts, and eventually flees home with Emma; she is pregnant with another man’s child which she will dump in Lembuland before returning to her career. In the brief time Ula has been away, a canteen has been established near the station in his valley, and it is to this that he repairs. We last see him dancing: ‘His earrings were swinging and the streamers of pink wool at his wrist were describing flying curves in the air’ (p. 80).

After Plomer’s work, in 1931, comes the first in the series by a black African, R.R.R. Dhlomo — it is a novella entitled An African Tragedy,
published by the Lovedale Press. If Johannesburg has had a bad image to date, now meet Sodom and Gomorrah. *An African Tragedy* was intended to sound a call that our Jim thus far has not heard — that of the church as a redeemer and rescuer in this situation, set to reverse the drain from the tribal areas to the big city, and to preserve the rural character in harmonious, traditional familial productivity. In common with many other calls of ‘back to the land’, Dhlomo’s tone is monitory and his tactics are polemical, pamphleteering. Hence, the lurid portraiture in *An African Tragedy*, and its shocked sense of outrage. Hence, also, its dedication: ‘To all those who have not found God’s all in all this story — the humble effort of my inspiration — is with my innermost and fervent feelings dedicated!’

Dhlomo’s ‘Jim’, Robert Zulu, is no adolescent tribal youth wanting to find his fortune and sow his wild oats; he is a teacher in a village school who cannot raise sufficient money to pay lobola for his intended bride, Miss Jane Nhlanzeko. So he sets off for ‘the most unreliable city of Johannesburg’ (p. 1). He falls in with a bad companion, John, into drink, ‘faithless women’ and ‘gullible mine boys’ (p. 5). And, in Johannesburg, Robert himself hands Dhlomo his story, so that, for the first time, we have a participatory narrator, one who recounts the tale not as ‘fiction’, but (supposedly) as living testimony. And Dhlomo’s motive is new, too: ‘For after all is said and done what is the use of trying to unite our people when their offspring wallow in the mud — so to speak?’ (pp. 6-7).

The rest follows swiftly: Dhlomo introduces a skokiaan queen, a figure who dominates from here on, and much of the feel of being black in Johannesburg — segregated trams, curfews, exemption certificates, illiterate, crooked black policemen, and the Blantyres, Malawian gangsters who in Dhlomo’s version are even more immoral than indigenous ones. Robert evades a murder rap and Marshall Square, where most other heroes reside for lengthy periods, but it is the alcohol which gets him. And syphilis.

When he returns home to purchase Jane’s hand, it is the syphilis he bequeaths her; their first-born dies of what is euphemistically called ‘ophthalmia’, and Robert dies, too, after a spree of seducing the wives and daughters of his community, beaten to death by the sober, God-fearing parishioners who do not accept his city ways. With his death, the drought breaks and Dhlomo concludes that ‘God moves in a mysterious way...’ (p. 40).

The message and the impact of another work in the series is similar, although the presentation is less bald — in Frank Brownlee’s novel, *Cattle*
Thief, of 1929. Although this work predates Dhlomo’s by two years, it belongs in spirit to a later phase which, while it has the same intention of spreading the message of ‘back to the land’, has gone past the Christian motivation for this. Brownlee is intent to argue a case that ‘back to the land’ is not only morally correct but, in the end, more profitable for ‘Jim’, when ironically it was to be the very Depression which succeeded the work which gave the rural areas their strongest reasons yet to move to the cities for bare survival.

Brownlee’s work is subtitled The Story of Ntsukumbini, and it is he who (supposedly) tells his own story through the agency of Brownlee, who visits him, chapter by chapter — a man in his seventies in the Transkeian Native Territories, one who has ‘through courage and determination’ maintained his ‘tribal entity’. The work is a magically beautiful and persuasive one; by now labour recruitment is regularised, mine conditions relatively safe and healthy and, as Ntsukumbini talks, the next generation of strapping youths is excitedly taking off for their initiation into manhood — not in the mountains and forests, but in the famous mines. The work makes clear that this, as a wage-earning method, is preferable to working on whites’ farms, an opinion endorsed unanimously by the works to follow.

Ntsukumbini recounts the financial lessons he has to learn with great wit. He, too, is forced to entrain for Johannesburg because of a prospective father-in-law’s extortionate dowry demands: ‘The journey to the mines was long and confusing, but we managed to reach there safely. I said the first thing we must do was to buy spades and dig for ourselves; why should we work for any master and give him the gold’ (p. 120). Instantly Ntsukumbini’s team is conned — by a Zulu ‘foreman’, who gives his name as Kumalo and who promises them employment for a bribe, ‘If we would meet him the next day at the same spot ... he would meantime have arranged everything for us. Nkosi [he says to Brownlee], I am still looking for that man’ (p. 121).

Then the descent, the rockfall and — this time a twist — a loutish, white shift-boss named Jim. Brownlee is being tongue-in-cheek here, reversing the ‘Jim’ appellation for ironic effect. When Ntsukumbini rescues Jim in the rockfall, the latter has this line to deliver: ‘You may be a damned black nigger, but you are a white right through’ (p. 129). Such are the techniques of an author who prefers his fictional mouthpiece to his increasingly colour-conscious readers. Ntsukumbini is the first to escape Johannesburg unscathed, leaving the city behind where the ‘white men ... seemed to be tired of looking at black people’ (p. 124).

The great ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ novel set in the 1920s — and here

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one may merely speculate — seems never to have been completed. It is Herman Charles Bosman’s *Johannesburg, Christmas Eve*, abandoned shortly before his death in 1951. A fragment of it survives, published posthumously as the short story, ‘Jim Fish’, in which Bosman intends to pursue every possible irony derived from his character’s by now traditional nickname:

He was an African from a kraal in the Waterberg, and he had not been in Johannesburg very long. His name was Mletshwa Kusane. That was his name in the kraal in the Waterberg. In Johannesburg he was known as Jim Fish. That name stood on his pass, too.

In those days a black man didn’t mind what sort of ‘working name’ he adopted. He had not come to Johannesburg to stay, anyway. At least that was what he hoped. And while he stayed in the city, saving up money as fast as he could to take back to the farm with him, he didn’t particularly care what name his employer chose to bestow on him, provided that his employer handed over his wages with due regularity on pay day.

This Jim’s employer owns a bakery, in the back yard of which Jim lives, so that ‘he received back as rent a not inconsiderable part of his employees’ emoluments’.

Afterwards [Bosman continues], when Johannesburg took on more of the external characteristics of a city, the owner of the bakery was to find that this arrangement did not pay him so well, any more.

For the city council began introducing all sorts of finicky by-laws relating to hygiene. In no time they brought in a regulation making it illegal for the owner of a bakery to accommodate his black servants on the bakery premises. The result was that, at a time when business wasn’t so good, the owner of the bakery found himself with a municipal health inspector on his pay-roll. Afterwards it was two health inspectors. (p. 142)

Had Bosman been able to sustain this vein of satire we would at least have had another first — a ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ novel written from within Johannesburg, with an intimate knowledge of the city and its history. For, up to this point, the city itself has been more symbolic than real.

The same is true of the next work, and after Paton’s it is probably the best known of the series. First published in 1946, and thereafter as No 6 of the Heinemann African Writers Series, Peter Abrahams’ *Mine Boy* has remained continually in print. Set back from its date of publication in the 1930s and almost entirely located in the Malay Camp of the Vrededorp (second phase) development of the city, *Mine Boy* is the first of the series to raise some hint of a mine-worker beginning to take his destiny into his own hands — and in a significant way. On the mines Abrahams’ hero,
Xuma, has an influential friend, but this time he is a white miner, Paddy O'Shea, nicknamed the Red One. In the final sequence, when a rockfall causes the death of their fellow workers, O'Shea orders a spontaneous strike; in sympathy with his friend, ostensibly his boss, Xuma chooses to go to jail as a strike organiser, and thus the spirit of revolt is translated into a united gesture of defiance, and immediately imprisoned.

But this incident is merely the tail-end of a novel that is not very carefully organised to announce this new direction. For the most part, Xuma from the north is our orthodox hero, falling foul of the standard items. Most of Mine Boy illustrates how, left homeless in the north by his mother's death, he finds a surrogate mother in Leah, an older friend in Johannes the induna, an impossible love in the teacher, Eliza, and a true love in Maisie. Xuma has also emphatically come to stay, and after the standard newcomer's adventures he finds himself at home in Malay Camp, with its drunken brawls, Saturday night bioscopes, pass raids and police chases.

As Leah instructs him:

Listen to me Xuma. I will try to make you understand. In the city it is like this: all the time you are fighting. Fighting. Fighting! When you are asleep and when you are awake. And you look only after yourself. If you do not you are finished. If you are soft everyone will spit on your face. They will rob you and cheat you and betray you. So, to live here, you must be hard. Hard as a stone. And money is your best friend. With money you can buy a policeman. With money you can buy somebody to go to jail for you.... It may be good, it may be bad, but there it is. And to live one must see it. Where you come from it isn't so. But here it is so.8

Tough, also, is the labour itself; Xuma's first day on shift is a tour-de-force description (pp. 66-8) of men of prowess being reduced to mindless machines. 'So it went on...' is Abrahams' devastating refrain.

At this point in the 'Jim Comes to Joburg' story we reach Paton's novel, though in Cry, the Beloved Country the Jim of our theme is hardly like the foregoing gallery of proletarian country bumpkins, what Nadine Gordimer aptly calls the Dick Whittington figures of African fiction.9 Paton's main character is the elderly black priest, Rev Stephen Kumalo. Kumalo is a new character in the saga, one whose 'Jims' have already left the Ixopo hills — his brother John (into politics), his sister Gertrude (into shebeening), and his son Absalom (into housebreaking). Thus we now have an innovation that probably accounts for the novel's immense success — put simply, Paton's readers can now identify with his hero in a way that might not have been possible had he made John, Gertrude or Absalom the bearers of the tale.
And as for our ‘Jim’, in Paton he hardly appears, or if he does Kumalo treats him with uneasy scorn. Here is Kumalo’s train departure:

Kumalo climbed into the carriage for non-Europeans, already full of the humbler people of his race, some with strange assortments of European garments, some with blankets over their strange assortment. The day was warm, and the smell strong in the carriage. But Kumalo was a humble man, and did not much care. They saw his clerical collar, and moved up to make room for the umfundisi. He looked around, hoping there might be someone with whom he could talk, but there was no one who appeared of that class.

Now, in Paton’s story, it is Kumalo who is the novitiate, not the mine-workers.

— There is the wheel, umfundisi. There is the wheel.
A great iron structure reaching into the air, and a great wheel above it, going so fast that the spokes play tricks with the sight. Great buildings, and steam blowing out of pipes, and men hurrying about. A great white hill, and an endless procession of trucks climbing upon it, high up in the air. On the ground, motor-cars, lorries, buses, one great confusion.
— Is this Johannesburg? he asks.
But they laugh confidently. Old hands some of them are....
— Johannesburg, umfundisi.
He sees great high buildings. They go on and off. Water comes out of a bottle, till the glass is full. Then the lights go out. And when they come on again, lo the bottle is full and upright, and the glass is empty. And there goes the bottle over again. Black and white, it says, black and white, though it is red and green. It is too much to understand. (pp. 16-17)

This amazed naivety — ‘It is too much to understand’ — persists throughout *Cry, the Beloved Country*, so that one almost wishes for the rapid disabuses of the earlier works, in which the careers of figures like John, Gertrude and Absalom would be considered triumphant successes over adversity rather than morally questionable lapses into compromise and sin. Paton’s mode is reformist and his motive is to prove, as Rev Theophilus Msimangu says, that ‘The tragedy is not that things are broken. The tragedy is that they are not mended again’ (p. 25). With memorable vividness, Paton proceeds to demonstrate this, revealing a Johannesburg condition to the world which might not have heard of it before, but which would certainly hear of it again.

Looking back at *Cry, the Beloved Country* now, from the perspective of thirty-seven years on, it remains memorable for its portrayal of the Sophiatown complex and the third phase of Johannesburg black residence, of resilience and poetic appeal. Out of that milieu in the 50s was to
arise the work of the black 'Sophiatown renaissance', the school of jazzy, fast-talking city-slickers, published most notably in *Drum* magazine, which found a readership among the urbanised black population. In Paton's work there is little evidence that this was becoming possible.

Nor does Paton exhibit much of the economic base of the sociological plight of the people Kumalo encounters. When the narrative collapses into an impassioned appeal to — of all people — Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, whom one would have thought part of the cause of the problem rather than part of its solution, Paton's fiction becomes too transparent. Nor does the novel foresee that once British capital is taken over to a large extent by Afrikaner nationalism in the same year (1948), the freehold areas in which a new urban African personality was forming were simply to be razed to the ground. With Sophiatown forcibly removed to Soweto, a new phase begins for which Paton's world can offer only sentiment and holiness.

Nevertheless, Paton's legacy is immense. It promised that vision of a new sunrise that was not to be seen yet, and which many readers would see as the coming of a new, just dispensation which through brotherhood and toil would release the black man from enslavement. Everyone after Paton writes in the lea of this promise.

Then, in 1953, comes *Blanket Boy's Moon*, in many ways the most frank of the 'Jim Comes to Joburg' works. Written by Peter Lanham, based on an original story by A.S. Mopeli-Paulus, the novel is the first to be written set in National Party times, and also the first to present a convincing history from below. '...when a Mosotho leaves his beloved Lesotho for the first time to travel to the Union, it is, for him, what it would be for a white man suddenly by black magic to be flown to the moon' — hence the title. Blanket boys themselves have received a standard press in the story — they are the butts of practical jokes galore at the hands of other blacks, admired by whites for their stately aloofness. But this blanket boy, Monare, is a new figure; he is already married back home so that the plot is not a quest for dowry story, but hinges on the necessity for him to maintain his domestic circle.

Then we have it all. The recruitment, the memorable first journey on the Kaffir Mail, the wise friend, Koto, the mine disaster. But Monare's stay in Johannesburg, which occupies only the first quarter of the narrative, is really about leaving the labourer class for street-trading, hawking. This upward social mobility from work unit into salesman of home-made trousers corresponds to leaving the compounds for a tenancy in the freehold areas; in the former he is a mine policeman, and in the latter he falls foul of the civil police with predictable reliability. These worlds are a
matter of a few miles apart, too, Third World and First World, a bus-ride between them in the civic sprawl.

*Blanket Boy’s Moon* is also more astute on the mechanics of oppression, for it is the first work fully to explain how white power co-opts black strength into the process of suppressing other blacks. The police are pervasive here, and it is black detectives and spies who arrest Monare, on the grounds of drinking white man’s liquor, but really for entering the clothing market in legal competition. Late night raids by Afrikaner policemen making their first appearance, torture, forced confessions now enter the saga as features of normal procedure; tsotsis with narrow-bottomed trousers are also introduced. So are more intimate sexual matters, as the breaking of families is highlighted. As Monare’s cell-mate says:

‘...best off are those African men or women who work as house-servants; for sometimes the white Baas will allow a man’s wife to live with him in the quarters in exchange for her labour in the washing of clothes. And if the woman is employed in the house, sometimes is her husband permitted to sleep with her, should he agree to cut the white man’s grass and wash his car.’

The two men lay silent for a while.

Monare then said, somewhat diffidently: ‘Yes, boys, or the friendship of the hand — these are what many of us Africans are reduced to. Yet the truth is that this friendship of boys leads one to a lonely path in the end. There is little chance of living in such a manner in the homeland.’

His cell-mate laughed again.

‘Women, boys — I have tried them all.... But this companionship of boys is against the white man’s law. Should you see your Orlando Moruti again ask him how the white man can condemn us for a crime which they themselves have forced on us by separating us from our families...’ (p. 36)

Thus the personal dilemma of the migrant labourer and the adult ‘Jim’s’ enforced polygamy, with the arrival of the second family in town. This is not the case with Monare, in point of fact, but the single-sex hostel system dates from here in the chronology.

Dating from 1960, Sharpeville and the State of Emergency on the Rand comes a novel which contains all the structural violence of what has become the characteristic image of apartheid South Africa. Not published until 1979, it is Athol Fugard’s thriller, *Tsotsi*. The action plays out in the week of the demolition of Sophiatown — the images of power are now bulldozers, police dogs, whistles, over which toll the mournful bells of Father Huddleston’s naught-for-your-comfort church and social centre. *Tsotsi* is almost totally given over to urban violence — gang-wars, racketeering, muggings on crowded trains — the sharpened bicycle spoke shoved into the living tissue of the heart.
For our purposes *Tsotsi* is especially interesting for it is one of the last works to use the ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ story in the version with which we are familiar, although now it is a concealed part of a far larger panorama — in fact, only pp. 9-12 of the Penguin edition. Fugard’s ‘Jim’ is Gumboot Dhlamini, murdered on the 5.49 train (always ten minutes late), and throughout the rest of the novel he is literally a dead man. And in the final sequence he is buried in a desolate, unmarked graveyard, unattended, and unidentified by all except the reader.

In *Tsotsi* this early trope of the South African novel is laid to rest as well, because the focus in the fiction now shifts dramatically. In post-Sharpeville there seems no room left for the comedy of manners that centred on a naive come to town; there are no more gaping clowns set to be mildly ripped off in educative adventures. The picaresque exploits of rapscallions are now over; we are into life-and-death manoeuvres, organised crime, and wholesale criminal violations of human dignity. Tsotsi himself is the new hero; born in a slumyard, an ashpit scavenger — one of those twilight children Ula Masondo saw from the train a quarter of a century before. Above all, the South African novel that deals with urbanism can no longer treat Johannesburg as a strange, new phenomenon, as most of its characters are now born there and living there — its history is now their past.

But in an adapted form the ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ theme survives effectively enough; after all, many Johannesburg workers do support families in the rural areas, though no longer as courtiers and spouses, but as children or grandchildren. For the Johannesburg nexus the homelands are no longer such reservoirs of labour as holding grounds in which surplus populations, the retired and the unemployable, are maintained or to which they are returned after a working life. Such is the situation in Es’kia (Ezekiel) Mphahlele’s novella *Mrs Plum*, first published in 1967 in his collection *In Corner B and Other Stories*.

As Norman Hodge has suggested, *Mrs Plum* is a ‘Jane Comes to Joburg’ work, for Jane is the ‘working name’ of Mphahlele’s heroine. Her real name, however, is Karabo, and Mphahlele makes significant play out of names as identities Karabo recalls:

> I must remember never to say boy again when I talk about a man. This makes me think of a day during the first few weeks in Mrs Plum’s house. I was talking about Dick her garden man and I said ‘garden boy’. And she says to me she says Stop talking about a ‘boy’, Karabo. Now listen here, she says, You Africans must learn to speak properly about each other. And she says White people won’t talk kindly about you if you look down upon each other.

> I say to her I say Madam, I learned the word from white people who know...
nothing, just low-class whites. I say to her I say I thought white people know everything.

She said, You’ll learn my girl and you must start in this house, hear? She left me there thinking, my mind mixed up.

I learned. I grew up.¹³

In Mphahlele’s version of the story there is a Jim, slipped in for the amusement of those in the know — he is the boyfriend of Mrs Plum’s daughter, a white. But Karabo’s story of her relationships in the domestic service arrangement is hardly just one of sly in-references; rather, it is an imitation of a black woman’s hesitant, faltering and proud monologue, an expression of learning to come to terms with the Johannesburg world that is her only option. Mphahlele is witheringly satirical of white liberal pretensions to achieving a ‘fair deal’ for blacks; Mrs Plum’s Black Sash-type protests are seriously contradicted by the actual home situation. Dogs are the pervasive symbol — loved pets, pampered protectors, and all the strays that have wandered through the series seem to coalesce in Mrs Plum’s revoltingly privileged Monty and Malan. Karabo’s status is weighed besides that of these symbols of decadent middle-class luxury, and in the ‘maids and madams’ relationship the comparison works with devastating effect.

But Karabo’s lesson in how to bargain with the system, achieve self-help, self-education, despite her remaining a dependent figure, unprotected in the workplace and without the most basic rights, sets the tone for much urban black writing to come. For Karabo facing Johannesburg is her only way through to a life better than a dog’s, and she is there really because dependent on her are the relatives in a now non-viable ‘homeland’. Her story is the story of many millions of people, who had to come to Joburg, and had to stay. The railway bus connects her with her origins, but her life begins at the terminus where thousands of work-seekers and commuters mingle in the modern metropolis.

The ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ strain in the South African novel stops here in the late 60s as a recognisable, pristine form. Its chief movement — the first step taken from a pre-industrial rural world to an industrialising urban one — is no longer a dominant experience in South African life as a whole, and thus the magnificent works that reflected it are no longer felt to be of urgent interest.

The interface between these two worlds, which I have rather facilely called a Third World-First World encounter, cuts no longer between so-called ‘civilised’ whites and so-called ‘precivilised’ blacks. Even Blackburn at the start of the trail showed that neither side was particularly entitled to claim any particular virtue, and innocence disabused is
not likely to endure where the learners are as skilful and masterful as those in this series. And with urban sophistication, the fiction that deals with the black experience has grown up, too. We have come a long way from Sol T. Plaatje’s hero’s lament in *Mhudi* of 1930, addressed to the white reader: ‘Give back the palmy days of our early felicity/ Away from the hurly-burly of your city…”

In a work like *The Marabi Dance*, first published in 1973, the writer, Modikwe Dikobe, turns a modern perspective back on the Doornfontein slumyard culture of the 30s, revealing an attitude to knowing urban survival which would have been inconceivable to Scully or Abrahams, for example. In her *The Collector of Treasures* of 1977 Bessie Head examines the ripple effect of industrial labour practices developed in the City of Gold moving back outwards to the tribal areas across the border in Botswana, showing how the process of societal transformation on the Rand has spread its tentacles throughout Southern Africa. Stocktaking of this, the major socio-economic event in the subcontinent’s recent history, is indeed unending.

To conclude, I can find only one further work of fiction which consciously uses the ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ formula and which expects the reader to know it through allusion to it in the title — it is Mbulelo Mzamane’s short story, ‘My Cousin Comes to Joburg’, the first in a sequence called *Mzala*. The new tone is knowing, even world-weary, and the point of view is of a gleeful belonger, a ‘township kid’ precocious in worldly wisdom beyond his years:

My cousin, Jola, comes from Tsolo in the Transkei. He has the stature of an adult gorilla and walks with his arms flung far out and his hands curving in, like a cowboy ready to draw. He has a protruding chest which seems to lead him wherever he goes. Overall, he gives the impression of a well-constructed tower. He can carry both our rubbish bins, full, with the ease and dignity of an educated man carrying a newspaper. His is not the delicate walking-cane amble of office workers who walk for relaxation, but the easy gait of one to whom walking is as customary as it is necessary.

He’s been in the city for years now. But there was a time when he was as green and raw as a cabbage.

But he’s been in the city for many years now — and his name is no longer ‘Jim’. As Mbuyiseni Mtshali writes in his poem, ‘The Watchman’s Blues’, the name is now ‘not John or Jim/ but Makhubalo Magudulela’. Origins, identities, in black consciousness days, are reasserted; assumed names are rejected.

In Mzamane’s story, ripe with nostalgia, sharp with comedy, the perspective has utterly changed. The past may be reviewed, not as an
instructive document for the present, but as a tale told by the extended family of ‘Jim’s’ descendants, those wise enough to inherit the very City of Gold he built with the strength of his arm.

NOTES

1. I am particularly indebted to Deborah M. Hart, *South African Literature and Johannesburg’s Black Urban Townships*, M.A. dissertation (unpublished), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1984, for information about Johannesburg. No other Southern African city seems to have caused such fiction; the only exception is Salisbury-Harare, as reflected in Doris Lessing’s novella, *Hunger* (1953).


The Seed

I

The seed should have been planted along with the rest in the arid, rust-red soil. Instead it lay gleaming on the toughened skin of the old woman’s palm like a hardened black tear-drop. She had held it back.

She was stooped in the manner of a large old woman, feet set wide apart, legs awkwardly bent, with an arm along the sloping length of a thigh supporting her weight. All morning she had moved up and down the rows in this half-bent posture forcing each seed into the soil with her thumb, while the sun rested shimmering on the earth. Now, with the sun poised regally in the blue overhead her hand clenched tightly around the one remaining seed while she stretched forward to draw the rust-covered implements she had been using, towards her. When she straightened up she brought with her a shovel and hoe, brushed her hand on the loose heavy cotton blue dress she wore, then stood quite still.

Was it the frustration of planting seeds where none would grow that had made her hold this one back? Slowly the clenched fingers relaxed. The fist unfurled. Cradled in her palm, the black seed glistened with perspiration from her hand. Of the seeds she had planted, some would not swell with water; some would grow stunted; some would look sickly with disease; and all would wither with the first sign of drought. Having held it back, would she want to force this seed’s passage through life, uncovered by the soil? With a decisive movement she delved into a pocket of the serge-like blue dress she wore, groping for a handkerchief into a corner of which she knotted the seed with brisk, determined fingers. The shovel and hoe she carried to the end of the field where she had begun sowing, propping the shovel up on its blade in the soil near a metal bucket of water. She returned to the field taking the hoe with her. Then, moving backwards along the rows in a slow, pre-occupied way, drawing the hoe towards her as she moved, she covered the newly-sown black seeds with the dry red soil.

When she paused during the blistering heat of the midday sun it was to ask herself, was it perhaps the irony of planting seeds at her time of life
that had made her hold this one back? For wasn’t she like this homeland, the life ebbing from her? She too could no longer retain life in her. She touched the handkerchief in her pocket. Then again, wasn’t she also like the seed, tough and resistant?

She resumed her work, walking up and down the rows; stamping firmly down on the newly-covered seeds; sprinkling water in handfuls from the bucket onto the soil; stopping only when there was just sufficient left for her to cool her face and neck with, and to rinse the sand off her feet.

At the end of the day when the old woman left the soft-surfaced red field with the tools on her shoulder, and the empty bucket in one hand, she wore a man’s old, inflexible white cricket boots. As she walked she sang to herself in a soft, mellow voice, while the sun receded indifferently into the background.

II

That night, with red and violet streaks in the sky where the sun had been, the old woman drew the child on her lap closer to her, as they sat around a communal fire. But he wouldn’t have her sing him to sleep. Her own drowsiness she fought off, in response to his plea, ‘Make a story, Armah. Make a story.’ A plea which was soon picked up and tossed from one voice to another across and around the crackling fire until the old woman began to weave a story about a seed that failed to grow.

‘The seed,’ she said, ‘was buried with many, many seeds just like it — in rich dark earth — where all seeds grew in the way that was expected of them. But, of all the seeds buried in the earth that season — only this one failed to grow.’

‘Say what seed it was, Armah,’ the child said, in an encouraging tone, as if she needed to be coaxed to elaborate on any detail.

‘To make what difference, Jelani?’ a voice spoke querulously from the darkness.

The child turned an uncertain, uncomprehending look towards the speaker while the light from the fire played across his face. The old woman, observing the child, remembered the little girl who had sat like this on her lap years ago asking the same question. Then the old woman had said the seed was just like every seed that grew in the way every seed grew in that part of the province. The girl’s need for detail remained unsatisfied. Like the boy she believed they all knew the name of the seed, but, in the manner of adults, withheld it from her. Now the old woman said, ‘If I name a woman, that woman could grow to be powerful, she
could grow beautiful, she could grow wicked, she could grow kind. If I name the seed, it can only grow to be one kind of plant.'

The child thought about this, then reached up and kissed her cheek.

'Now, where the seed should have grown — there was a wide gap in the row,' she continued. 'Each time the planter passed the gap, he became — a little bit anxious — a little bit cross — and a little bit disappointed.'

'Was he worried about the seed, or was it just the gap was untidy?' the child asked.

'He was a tidy man! He swept the field each day!' someone shouted with delight.

The others joined with him in laughing and teasing the boy. They were a group of middle-aged men and women sitting on unmatched chairs and makeshift stools, some smoking tobacco in pipes, some drinking coffee, others drinking home-brewed beer.

When the laughter subsided, someone added, 'Listen, Jelani. If the planter spaced the seeds when they were sprouting he would lose more. Not so, Armah?'

'But he did wonder about the seed,' said another.

'Did he need every seed to grow?' the child persisted.

'Isn’t it important that everything grows, Jelani?'

'Not if the planter was rich!' the child retorted.

'He had enough to eat,' the old woman said quietly.

'Did he own the land, or was he just a worker on someone’s land?' he asked.

'Jelani!' someone answered crossly. 'The man was just a planter. Where do you find this boy, Armah?'

'Why did the seed bother him, then?'

'Because the planter’s life lacked interest,' the old woman said. 'And the seed was different.'

They all waited, expecting the child to want an explanation. Someone stood up to add more charcoal to the glowing fire. When it seemed that he accepted the answer, perhaps without understanding it, the old woman went on, 'So, the planter — he began giving the seed special care.'

'Can he have a name?' the child asked.

'You say a name for him.'

'Je-la-ni!' he pronounced, without hesitation.

'Yo! Yo!' someone laughed. 'Jelani is a boy! A naughty boy,' he added. 'The planter is an old man.'

'Wait! Wait!' he called. Then, with his eyes closed, he searched for a
name while they waited, indulging him.

‘Mo-le-ah, then!’ he pronounced.

The old woman looked around the faces of those listening, wanting their approval. ‘Moleah?’ she asked.

They murmured assent.

‘On his way home each day — Moleah — gave the seed a little more water. When the days became warmer he shaded the ground from the sun with leaf mould. Moleah waited. Nothing happened. He looked more closely at the earth — and it seemed to him — that spot where the seed would not grow was too sandy. So — Moleah added some manure to help the earth hold on to the water. He gave it more water. Still nothing happened. Some time later — Moleah began to fear the water was clogging up the earth — just where the seed failed to grow. So — he worked some sand into the soil to help the water flow through. And still — nothing happened.’

‘The seed was dead, Armah,’ the child prompted.

‘No, no. The seed was waiting,’ a woman corrected.

‘By now, the field was covered with new growth — the leaves just about to turn green. But still — walking carefully between the rows to water the seedlings, the planter — he could not close his eyes to the gap. He fretted and he fussed over this one seed that failed to grow. At night — the planter — he would lie in his hammock wondering will the seed come up through the earth the next day. In the morning he would run out to the field only to find the ground undisturbed.’

‘Someone stole the seed, Armah!’ the child whispered.

‘The planter — he even feared that,’ someone said, ‘but who steals something with no value, hey Jelani?’

‘Knowing the seed had no value — the planter — he nevertheless took his blanket — which was striped red and orange like the sun — and slept alongside the seed — waking with the sun to look upon the earth. Still — nothing happened.’

‘Only an old man spends so much time with one seed when there are so many,’ one woman laughed derisively.

‘Even a woman,’ the old woman corrected, ‘when she values what is unusual.’

‘In the end — Moleah — he just had to find out what happened to the seed. So — he went down on his knees — and with his hands — he began to dig into the earth — with all his friends standing around laughing and pointing at him. He scooped the earth up — he rubbed it between his palms — he sifted it through his fingers — he repeated this — until he found the seed. Now Moleah — he expected to find a rotting seed —
because he gave it so much water. But the seed — it was just the way he buried it in the earth — smoothskinned and shiny. His friends — they stepped back from him — a little bit frightened, when he held up the seed for all to see. While they looked in wonder at the seed — a strange idea began to shape in Moleah’s mind.’

‘The seed was special, Armah?’ the child suggested with a sense of wonder.

‘The planter — he began to believe the seed was resisting growth.’

A stillness and attentiveness came over the group gathered around the fire.

‘Out of respect for the seed’s resistance — the planter — he polished the seed until it shone like a semi-precious stone. Then — he walked into the town and asked a silversmith to twist an ancient design to hold the seed. The seed in the silver setting was placed in a glass box. The glass box was hung over the fireplace in the planter’s cottage.’

They waited in silence in a circle around the glowing embers, until one by one they began to grow restless.

‘Poke the fire, Nason. Pour coffee for Armah,’ someone whispered, wanting her to continue.

When the old woman spoke it was as if from some distance, ‘You sleep now,’ she said.

‘Armah!’ they complained. ‘Why does Armah always do this? Please Armah, that’s not the end.’

‘There are many endings,’ she murmured, smiling.

The child’s arm crept upwards around her neck. Its softness and warmth reminded her of the hardness of the black seed in her pocket. While he slept on her lap she rested her face on the roughness of his hair and felt an indescribable warmth for the child. Of all the children who had sat like this on her lap, this child — perhaps because of the way he questioned everything — perhaps because he seemed to come alive in the company of older people — it seemed to her this child would expect authority to justify itself. This seed she held back, was it her resistance? Should new life not be planted here? In soil where dormant life is imprisoned within its crust; where the roots are choked; the rising sap stifled; where it seemed appropriate for old women and men to be sent into exile to die.

III

In the field the next day, the old woman laboured without rhythm, halting frequently to stare across the bleak, even landscape. Close to the
ground a thick haze given off by the heat, appeared like a distorting liquid suspended in the air. The air itself felt dry and still. It seemed to her the grains of red sand also hovered over the ground waiting for the first arid breeze to sweep them away exposing the thwarted life buried in the earth. With this image of her surroundings, she went about her work shut in with her thoughts, staring every now and then momentarily towards the horizon, until at last, she sensed more than saw movement in the distance. With her hands resting on the handle of the shovel she focussed on the disturbance until the movement took shape and she recognized the boy running towards her waving a letter.

The letter was simple. ‘Armah, how would the child be housed? How could the child be hidden?’

The boy waited near her, panting harshly, while looking up to watch her face. It was only when she had folded the letter and put it back into its envelope that her eyes, resting on him, lost the anxious, concentrated expression that had excluded him. She took his hand and led him away from the field. Near the metal bucket of water she settled down on the ground, before extending both hands to him.

‘The seed,’ she murmured, as if there had been no break in the story, ‘hung by the fireplace in the planter’s cottage for many seasons. Then one day, a thief came to the village. He went from one cottage — across the land — to the next — calling through the door to find — was there any work in the fields? He found no-one home. It was the day for a wedding feast in the village. All the planters had walked to the bride-groom’s home. Since there was no custom to lock doors — the thief — he wandered unmolested — in and out of each cottage. He was free to pick and choose whatever he wished to steal. When he came to the planter’s cottage —’

‘Moleah.’

‘Moleah’s cottage — the thief — he couldn’t close his eyes to the glass box hanging by the fireplace. You see, Moleah — he had nothing of value. The cottage was completely bare except for the hammock and the glass box. In the quick manner of a thief — he reached for the box — forced open the glass and slipped out of the cottage with the jewel.’

‘No, no, Armah! He knew it was a seed,’ the boy said laughing in disbelief.

‘How so, Jelani?’

‘It looked like a seed!’

‘Do you put seeds in silver? The thief — he couldn’t help it. He believed it was a jewel. You would believe it was a jewel.’

‘What name did he have?’
The thief? — Seroko.

Is something bad going to happen to him?

She looked uncomprehendingly at him. ‘For stealing the jewel,’ he added.

‘Who has that power to make something evil happen? The thief saw the jewel. He wanted the jewel. He believed it would enrich his life. So — he took the jewel. And — everywhere he went — he carried the jewel with him in a soft cotton wallet. Each time Seroko stopped to rest — he unwrapped the cloth, polished the silver and the jewel, then left the jewel to lie in the sun. He travelled from place to place — picking fruit — chopping trees — digging wells — and thieving, travelling into and out of each province — always taking with him the jewel. When he had put together enough money from his work — and from thieving, he asked a jeweller to shape a ring for him — in symbol of an ancient God — with the jewel placed in the centre.

‘Why steal and also do work?’

‘If he did no work they would know he was a thief!’

‘Who?’

‘Those who are not thieves.’

‘Couldn’t he only do work?’

‘Work was not as interesting — as thieving.’

‘Now, people seeing the ring — they whispered amongst themselves — the thief must be the son of a rich chief travelling in disguise through our province. So — they treated him like a prince. He was the guest of honour at weddings and festivals everywhere he travelled. Sometimes they asked him to judge a case that needed an outsider if the people were not to become angry with the chief. They allowed him to buy goods just by showing his ring. Soon — through clever trading — he was a rich man.’

‘He’ll be punished when they find the jewel is only a seed.’

‘Who will punish him if everyone is a little bit evil and a little bit good?’

The child said nothing.

‘Some years later — the thief settled in a community where he was well-respected. One day he hurried to the next town on business — but in his hurry — forgot his ring near the bowl where he washed each day. A few days later, he returned home to find the jewel had begun to sprout. The appearance of the jewel filled him with horror. It seemed to be struggling to grow out of the ancient silver design. He wasn’t able to understand what it meant. His first thought was that the ring was bewitched. Although he had never before been without the ring, he now
feared if he wore it — something terrible would happen to him. When his family and friends asked him — where is the ring? — he said — it is stolen — because he suspected that something evil would happen to them if they looked at it. It seemed to him a sign that he was to lose all his wealth and the people he loved. With all these fears in his mind, he spent a great deal of time running back to his room to look at the jewel. As the days went by he began to worry that the sprouting jewel might need some water. So — very reluctantly — he sprinkled a few drops of water on the seed. Then he placed the ring on the window-ledge where the sun would fall on it. Very slowly — he began to consider that the jewel was a seed. Now he feared that if he tried to remove the growing seed from its silver design — that it would be damaged. So — he left the seed in the silver. All the while the seed grew — the thief remembered the planter — and the glass box. At last — when the leaves were just about to turn green — the thief went to the centre of the busy trading town — followed by his friends — who now knew about the seed. He dug a hole in the ground and planted the silver ring with the seed twisted all round it, in the earth. The seed grew slowly into a tree, with silver sprinkled on the underside of its leaves.

'He could take the seed back to the planter,' the child said.
'The seed didn't belong to the planter.'
'He would be glad to know the seed did grow.'
'He might be hurt to know the seed wouldn't grow for him.'
'Was the thief a good thief because the seed grew for him?'
'He was like any thief who steals what someone else values.'
'Did he stop thieving?'
'He thieved in unseen ways.'
'Can you say a name for the tree now, Armah?'
'I don't know a name, Jelani, but I know where a tree grows with silver on its leaves.'

She kissed him. 'Run home quick.'
She remained sitting on the ground watching the child run, then turned to wave, until she lost sight of him. How would the child be housed? How could the child be hidden? What did she mean? Where was she that she could ask these questions? Was she told she could have work if she lived in a room at the back without her child? If she were, then she could ask 'How would the child be housed? How could the child be hidden?' So what did she mean? That she didn't want the child with her? She couldn't see the value of the child. She couldn't know he would enrich her life. How could the child go to her if she didn't value him? How would the boy understand? How could he understand when he was
too young to understand the myth. She could see how he struggled to find the meaning of the myth. But the meaning would never be his while he struggled. It would only be his when he had lived out his life. And he might not have the patience to wait for his life to unfold before the meaning came to him.

IV

‘Jelani! Jelani! Jelani!’

The boy had spread on the table before him a meticulously ironed, clean white cotton handkerchief, in the centre of which, conspicuous and isolated, lay Armah’s black seed. He looked up from the cloth without a single flicker of anticipation. First he located the voice. Then he identified a woman waving excitedly from the crowd. Only later did he recognize with an effort and then only vaguely, his mother. He had folded the handkerchief and slipped it away by the time she reached him. Still with excitement and anticipation in her manner, she greeted him with an exuberance that did not falter even when she felt him stiffen unresponsively. She smelt of flowers, not earth, was his first assessment of her.

He accompanied her solemnly through the city, checking himself from responding with wonder at the mechanical movement around him. He watched a door slide open when he stepped in front of it. He stood in a train where there seemed to be only standing room. It stopped every two or three minutes — and there was nothing wrong. The doors opened as if by magic. People poured out and scrambled in. The doors closed and the train hurtled on to stop again and again. He was carried to the next level on a moving stairway. On the street he was surrounded by noise, people, cars, and buses. Everyone was in a hurry. They even walked up the moving stairway.

She kept up a flow of information about the city and questions about his home. His responses to her were monosyllabic. She talked too much. She couldn’t hold his interest.

He dozed off on the train, trying not to lean too close to her. He woke to find her arm cradling his head. But he didn’t feel safe with her. There was something of the hardness missing when she held him. She was too young.

The house she took him to had a neat compact garden in the front. She showed him a room that was to be his own. Left alone, he placed the cotton handkerchief under his pillow and slept.

In the morning he woke and slipped out of the house. He found a bottle of milk on the doorstep, and no sun in the sky. He walked around
to the back of the house but couldn’t find a trace of blue in the sky. A long
plot at the back had been dug over.

He asked her, ‘What are you growing at the back?’
‘Just weeds,’ she said.
‘What about seeds?’
‘Seeds take up too much space.’
‘There’s space at the back.’
‘I mean inside.’

He was baffled by this reply. She didn’t think of telling him that seeds
were planted in pots and then put outside.

She took him to the park and played with him on the grass. She bought
him toys. At night she read to him from illustrated books about fairies,
witches and magicians. But when she turned off the light and left him
alone, he lay in his bed in the dark with the seed in its cotton handker-
chief under his pillow, remembering Armah and the still, bright
landscape of his home.

One day he asked, ‘Do you have any jewels?’
‘Not valuable jewels,’ she laughed.
‘Do you have any jewels from home?’
‘No.’

He could not bring himself to ask her if she knew Armah’s story about
the seed; or if Armah had also given her a seed. So he maintained some
distance from her. Whenever he was alone he would remove the handker-
chief from the top drawer in his room and spread it on the carpet. He had
travelled all the way from Armah to his mother with the handkerchief
spread before him. He was not like the thief because Armah had given
him the seed when she kissed him goodbye. Nor was he like the planter
who had removed the seed from the soil. If he was neither planter nor
thief, what should he do with the seed? Should he place the seed in a glass
box or wear it as a ring? He should have asked Armah, but she had been
crying.

They lived like this for two months in the house, the young woman
carefree and the boy maintaining his distance from her, unable to call her
‘mother’. At night when longing welled up in him for the comfort of the
old woman’s arms, the warmth of the fire, and the stories created around
the fireside, he hardened himself against such weakness, holding back the
tears. She had chosen to live here, he hadn’t. They had decided he should
live here. He hadn’t.

Then one day a plain white card was slipped through the letter-box
and landed on the red carpet. She rushed around the house hiding every-
thing that belonged to him. She packed all his clothes into a suitcase;
picked up every toy and bit of toy that she could find; packed all these into plastic carrier bags which she then locked in the garden shed. She stripped his bed down to the mattress; the bedding was folded away in the airing cupboard; she even packed his pyjamas away each morning so that his room appeared unoccupied. All the curtains were kept drawn during the day, even the one across the front door. This routine she stuck to with scrupulous attention to detail. When the doorbell rang he knew as if by instinct that he should tip-toe out the back door. 'Is he the Group Areas man?' he whispered on his way out. It puzzled her. Did he imagine they were in South Africa?

She opened the door and stood there in the manner of a thief who opens the door to the proprietor. And with the air of a proprietor, the man confronted her without speaking a word. He knew who she was. She had approached him personally for a house. He knew to whom the house was let. He was the housing officer. He had both the power to provide her with a house, and to evict her.

Without a word he stepped past her through the door, down the passage into the kitchen and without any preamble began opening cupboards, drawers, the oven, the grill, and the pantry door. She stood to one side of the kitchen with her back to the two mugs of steaming tea on the worktop.

He walked into the lounge, ran his finger across the polished table-top, looked fixedly at the carpet then turned to go upstairs. She followed him mutely.

Halfway up the stairs, she suddenly remembered the toothbrushes, and couldn't recall if she had put the boy's away. She could only reassure herself when the man moved out of the bathroom doorway, that she had.

She was afraid he would notice the suitcase alongside the wall in one bedroom. He seemed to ignore it. He was almost through inspecting the house. She had nothing to fear now except that he would ask when she would vacate the house to the students to whom the university had let it. Then he seemed to pause more than was necessary in what was the child's room. She knew it was as empty as the spare bedroom, and worried about what could have caught his interest. She turned from the room, not wishing to look inside, not knowing what he would say.

He remained silent, giving her a false sense of security. He descended the stairs, at a casual, leisurely pace, then paused to look up at the curtain which had come down from the rail, and reached up to slide it back.

'I couldn't reach it,' she mumbled.

Reaching up to slide the curtain back, and without looking at her he
said, 'You don’t happen to have your child with you, do you?'

'Oh, no. I wouldn’t dream of doing that,' she said with a clear note of shocked disapproval in her voice.

'The university doesn’t cater for women with children. You know that.'

She should have remained silent, after all she had broken university regulations about sub-letting. Yet, she couldn’t allow the opportunity to pass. 'But the university accepts registration from women with children. What does it expect us to do with our children?'

'That’s not for me to say. The university is geared to the needs of teenagers. You’ll be hearing from me.'

He left the front door wide open and she was alone. She ran up the stairs to the child’s room to find out what the man had seen. On the bedside cabinet, perched with a distinct air of provocation, was a child’s pair of cricket boots.

She didn’t know what the boots signified. He didn’t play cricket. She didn’t recall that he had a pair of cricket boots. Why had he put it there? What did it mean to him? Would he be able to explain to her, or would she have to wait until he was older? Would he have forgotten, by then?
LISTEN TO THEM TALK

What are they saying?
those fashionable nudes with beads on their necks
handprints around their boobs & rum cocktails
about the wages of sin
what are they saying now?

What are they saying?
those coral-sweepers of the Club Med
raking up the bones of the broken reef
about the dog-shit on the lawn
what are they saying now?

What are they saying?
the surf-sail rider & his leaning mast
the frogman & his elongated flipper
about the credit & the loss
what are they saying now?

What are they saying now?
the acting vice-consul from Pretoria
& the cancer victim in her nylon wig
about Soweto 76
what are they saying now?

& what are they saying?
the parrot-fish & angel-fish & prawns
now that the tide has begun to turn on them
now that the tide has turned
what are they saying now?
DIVERS, REUNION ISLAND

From the concrete jetty jump
one two ten children
into a pale space out of gravity
buckle like hinges on
impact with the bomb-shell sea —
a zone of volleyballs &
belly-flops & inflated tubes
is claimed by each of them —
despite their various-coloured origins
the thrust across the open sky
the plunge over the sloppy wave
grabs them down the same —
& the preteen muscle games always
land in nuzzles down the reef
& gasps & bursting salty eyes —
they wade ashore glistening —
the dark prefect points in a child
kicked beyond the perimetre —
the tame black half-Alsatian dog
charges with a new batch brakes
as they go over holding noses hands air
aloft & legs awry before they
crash inevitably downwards yet again —
one girl's hair pulls across
the peel of the lagoon like a spider —
the less defiant contemplate
the fish beneath the squeaking lilo
whose eyes enlarge such beings
into the dumb thunder of invasion —
the black dog barks decides
the golden-headed baby may prop
her small bikiniied hip on his
warm fur his over-excited side —
there is no end to children
diving off the jetty evermore
no end to shaping summer
in your own image perpetually.
BEFORE SPRING

The leafbuds are seeds inching through air quick with the sun’s new warmth, ready to unfold their story;

they are innocent green eyes — rain-cradled, magnified — trembling twigs into beehair, softly curled.

Wind-dazzled trees... The day expands in swaying, shimmering rings, each drop a gourd bouncing and bellying down the long dark branch, then whirled through clay reef, fibrous root-frond, to shine again in the leaf — now

a silver wind-tongue playing — and — oval and thin as a child’s fingernail — the sudden pink blossom.

LAMPLIGHT

Glasshouses flash crystal, platinum-white, against green hills, one warmly intruded upon by setting sun, as though it held some radiant bloom which, opening into dusk, glowed with all the day’s spent energy...
Nearby, brown horses in a field, dense bodies 
you would think impervious to light, haloed by an old gold 
haze their eyes seem to offer, share, the mystery of... Hooves still, 
or slow as shadows moving in lengthening grass.

I watched in late winter, watched the flickering through glass, 
through brown transparent eye, of a thinning radiance, a deepening 
sea-darkness. And my breath was a mist I looked through, and the horses’ 
breath a further mist through which the sun, upyielding, 
sank its bright ghost.

Later, the driving home, darkness a settled thing 
but for the streetlights — cold, distinct; counterpart of night — 
with them no yielding, softening, as in the breath of lamplight 
with its hazy edge: a buzzing corridor between brightness, void.

WIDOW

Mouth flapping like a shutter in the wind. 
Irritating, but remember, hers is an empty house.

She can wash or sweep till the cows come home 
but he’ll never ruffle sheet or tablecloth again.

Dailiness, with its silly habits of perfection...

Sometimes, she just gives up and sits there quietly, 
feeling the dust fall, watching the leaves blow in.
WALLABIES AT DUSK

On this beach of dead shells, sea bones,
the estuary’s cemetery, a pair of them lap.
Startled, the nervous ears come up
forked and twitching like a diviner’s rod
dowsing the shoreline for lethal sounds — those
faint steady fumblings before the rifle-crack.
Twin Bennet’s wallabies, unshot and ignorant of Bennet
and now, as it turns out, lovers.
My approach lifts their ears, then their shoulders erect.
Will they trust me as part of their gentle world
to lap on side by side?
or bound from the hellish thunder stick?

Now they forget me, and stare on out
— at their lake where the sun darkens into extinction.

SHYNESS

The forest is full of well-kept paths
going all the right ways
but you need to stoop to use them.
And always in the distance are the shy ones,
hiding in bushes or crouching in disused barns,
lying up in dry creeks, and waiting
for you to go away.
At twilight they hobble into the open, upright and brazenly watching you, twinned ears notched against the sky. The feeding ones lower their arms with a rower's shrug, drop their heads behind round rumps and shoulders, and become brown stones on a dry grass plain, stones that multiply at dusk, small mobile hummocks snatching at grass.

After the dark you will hear them making great paddock-long trips with steady elastic thumping — that sound of Australian soil slapped hard by double pads. Darkness has come, the old folk rule again.

Witi Ihimaera

INTERVIEW


Waituhi is the first Maori opera. Do you feel there is a contradiction in expressing the need to preserve traditional Maori values in an art form that does not exist in traditional Maori culture, or is this an indication that in order to survive Maori values and culture must to a certain extent undergo a metamorphosis and absorb elements of Western culture?

Perhaps it's strange to call Waituhi an opera because what we've tried to do is to adapt the operatic form to Maori music and to New Zealand, so
it's not as if we've tried to use the operatic format and then squeeze cultural beliefs into that particular format. It is music theatre and it's political theatre: it's about the dilemma of all minority cultures within a majority system and it's a very critical work. The definition we've given it at home is that it is Marae music theatre. It's simply what you would see on a marae or a Maori meeting place in New Zealand, except that instead of being supported by one instrument it's supported by an orchestra.

We've always believed that Maori culture is a very flexible culture and because of that it has been able to survive. It hasn't concretized itself into something that we call contemporary as opposed to traditional: it's still developing. I'm very pleased that we take that attitude because then we do not have the sort of psychological dilemma that often comes to minority cultures where they have to make a choice between what is traditional and what is not. Although some people would look at that and say 'Ah, but you're just adapting to European ways', what we're in fact trying to do is use European formats to reveal ourselves to a wider audience. So Maori composers and Maori writers have, for instance, taken breakdancing as a cultural pursuit and begun to compose songs for breakdancing teams on Maori themes. It's a way of reaching a new and youthful audience because, let's face it, with American influences and the whole pervasive subjection of all cultures to internationalism, what you've sometimes got to do is to give your own culture a new currency, a value which young people can respect — and they certainly cannot respect something which they might regard as being out of date. So we've moved into the electronic age. Some of our cultural groups now incorporate songs about space invaders, space invading machines, and that might also seem to be a little bit strange but we have a young Maori population in the cities which is shiftless, which is unemployed, which, for its leisure activities, plays the machines, plays cards, gets into trouble. We've not said to them that they are wrong, what we've had to do is go to them and say 'Even these machines, we can still put Maoritanga into them'. Again, the whole business of writing is not a traditional pursuit either. In the beginning I had a lot of difficulties trying to persuade people that written literature was as valid after all as oral literature. The thing is that a lot of Maori people have lost their Maori tongue but they have learnt how to read. So writing is my way, even if the vehicle is English, of trying to transmit Maori concepts.

Is much Maori literature written in Maori or is most of it in English?
There is a lot of work written in Maori but it is mainly for young children, it is designed to help the new urban Maori child to grow into awareness and pride of himself or herself. At other, more academic, levels we are still mainly collecting our waiata. The function of Maori writing in English — and most of the current crop of Maori writers write in English — is to provide a context, a wider context, using the majority language, for those Maori children and Pakeha children who will be growing up into the 1990s and the year 2000. It is a sad fact that many of us are in fact first language speakers of English.

The rediscovery and reappraisal of the past in its relation to the present and the future seem particularly important for the so-called ‘new literatures in English’. One of your stories is about the laborious piecing together of a village genealogy, the ‘whakapapa’, by an old man who dies at the end of the story. The other protagonist of the story, a young, urbanized Maori, gradually comes to realize how this genealogy ensures his ‘union with the universe’. Could you expand on this in relation to Maori literature and culture?

All Maori people believe in what we call te taura tangata, which translates as being the rope of man. In that particular rope are woven all the generations of man from creation to the present day. It’s that rope which forms the basis of the search for whakapapa, the union with the universe that we talk about. It becomes difficult when a population like ours has moved from its rural hearths to an urban area because then there is a discontinuity, a dislocation, in the transmission of the whakapapa and so journeys like ‘In Search of the Whakapapa’ have become extremely vital for the older generation to take the younger generation on, and it’s a way also of ridding ourselves of Western, urbanized traits and concentrating on oral techniques. We believe that the word is a very sacred thing. Most genealogies are only learnt orally and they are the means of cultural continuation for Maori people: we never ever consider ourselves to be just ourselves at this moment; we believe ourselves to be the inheritors and possessors of thousands and thousands of years of a wonderful cultural legacy. That is what the young man learns, in a very difficult way, but he becomes possessor of a key. Because the word is sacred, because the matter of whakapapa is sacred, it is this key which enables him to see the sacredness of the universe and puts him into a frame of mind where he can see into the essence of things, into trees and into life and into clouds.

Why trees and clouds?
Because the sap that flows in trees is exactly the same as the blood which flows in the veins: that's what the union with the universe is all about. The wind you feel is the same as the wind you breathe out or that you breathe in. One of the most exciting things is when you can feel yourself merging into the landscape. One of our customs is to bury the child's afterbirth in the earth. When that happens it's a two-way connection. It's not only a connection of yourself with the earth but it's also an acceptance by the earth of yourself as coming from the earth.

What effect has urbanization had on all this and on Maori culture? Is it possible for this feeling to continue even when the great majority of the Maori population is urbanized?

The effect that it's had has been one of absolute tragedy. I think we all have to look very very closely at what urbanization does. In New Zealand's case it means that our people are confronted with European methods and culture: they are confronted with a majority culture that sees the world in its own terms of reference and most times those terms of reference exclude Maori culture so that Maori children will watch, exactly as children do around the rest of the world, programmes like Dallas and other American TV series and they will value those above anything cultural which is Maori. Urbanization has transferred the population from its rural hearths to the cities, has taken them away from traditional ways of thinking about the world, from earth to concrete, from marae concepts and community concepts to concepts of individuality. All this has meant the gradual death of our culture.

It's only lately that we've begun to react. We now have a system of urban maraes which have been built in our major cities as centres of Maori cultural activity for the young who are growing up there. We have also organized language learning units, supported by the Department of Maori Affairs, for pre-school children who come every day to learn Maori language and it's very successful. We've also established another scheme whereby older people adopt young people for two or three hours a day and talk to them totally in Maori.

I've already mentioned that when you get 85% of any population transferred to cities in the space of 20 or 30 years this is tremendously disruptive to cultural continuity. It also holds economic problems for us because most of the Maori people who have moved into the cities have become part of the lower economic base of that population. If we don't watch out within the future we will have tremendous racial problems: they've already started to surface and they will continue to surface. We
have the largest population in jail in New Zealand: we are 10% of the population but about 70% of the prison inmates are of Maori descent. The fact that the crime rate is bigger among the Maori population is not always our fault, it's that the Pakeha don't understand our own concepts of behaviour. Politically, too, what has happened is that urban drift has left us in a landless and cultureless situation. So at present we've begun to protest about land issues, issues of housing, of better political representation in cities for our people, and all this has tended to make the situation in New Zealand rather intense and sometimes very racially inflammatory. Pakeha civilization, no matter where it is, unfortunately still believes that English or French or Russian or whatever is the dominant language and when you are on a small island like our own, Maori culture in all its facets becomes undervalued. In the last two years we have decided to push for Maori sovereignty. Maori people should be able to say for themselves what they want and not have that interpreted for them by the Pakeha in power.

Wouldn't this tend, though, to lead to increased separation between the two components of New Zealand?

Well, I guess that what we're talking about is survival and we have looked at the path that we have attempted to walk for integration. We don't see Maori sovereignty as being a risk to Pakeha people, but what we are simply saying is that for so long now you have told us what we should be doing and we want to retain that right for ourselves. Now this may mean increasing political representation in Parliament; it may also mean positive recruitment programmes in Government Departments and taking very firm steps to improve the social and economic standing of Maori people in New Zealand. It means that a number of Maori representatives should be included in Government committees on questions like justice or women's rights.

Surely one of the basic aspects of the whole problem of the survival of Maori culture but also of the development of New Zealand as a truly bi-cultural country lies in education. Maori is beginning to be taught in schools — to all New Zealanders?

Yes, it is. At the moment, though, it's still on a non-compulsory basis. The interesting aspect about Maori language is that it wasn't until the 1960s that Maori people themselves actually woke up to the fact of this population shift and became very concerned about engineering the education system to take account of Maori language and the need to
teach the children Maori language in the urban areas. But in 1970, for instance, which isn’t too far back, New Zealand television hadn’t any credence in Maori language and it was only last year that new broadcasts were acceptable in both Maori and in English. We now have a growing body of Maori people and bi-cultural people who are continuing to widen the opportunities for more Maori language programmes.

What is your identity as a writer? Do you consider yourself first and foremost as a Maori writer?

I’ve gone through various stages. I still think of myself as a Maori writer, but now that there are many more Maori writers — in the 1970s there were only three of us but now we seem to have entered a period of great cultural rejuvenation when a lot more people are beginning to write — I’ve become a little bit more selfish. I am becoming less and less a person who is writing on behalf of a culture and believes he has a role in articulating their concerns and not his own; I have now become more a writer who is articulating selfish concerns. But they are selfish simply in that they are my own feelings about being Maori rather than the community’s. The result is that they are more aggressive: they are not more European at all, they are more pro-Maori than they ever were.

What works and authors have you been influenced by or do you feel affinity with? And, generally speaking, how do you see the problem of relations with other writing and other literatures?

I feel an affinity with any writer who comes from a tribal background. There was a critic in New Zealand who said that Pakeha readers would never be able to understand my novel *Tangi* because it was way outside their experience. I wrote back saying ‘Look, all you need to do is to go back to your own tribal roots and to Anglo-Saxon. If you read Anglo-Saxon literature you will find exactly the same feeling for the hall, the community obligation to the lord, it’s all naturalistic imagery and it’s virtually the same sort of world as we have now, except that you have forgotten your own tribal roots!’ Now I’ve gone into Italian opera — Italian opera of the sort that has its roots in Sicilian village life, like *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Those are the people who have mainly influenced my work, those tribally oriented people. But because New Zealand culture has got to be distinctive, or Maori culture has got to be distinctive in New Zealand, I’ve tried not to read too closely African literature or other emerging literatures because I’m sure that if I did I could possibly use
some of them without my knowledge and turn my own work into what could very well be plastic African, and I'm not into that.

What is the relationship between New Zealand Pakeha literature and Maori literature?

New Zealand Pakeha literature has provided all of us with a sense of narrative and a sense of style, but the Maori oral tradition is not a narrative tradition and what we've had to do is to try to adapt the Western tradition to our own uses. This has caused us some difficulties in publication because people say your story has got to have a beginning, a middle and an end and most of our writing is in fact circular — it doesn't begin and it doesn't end, it's just circular. In the early days this caused a lot of confusion. People didn't really like it, they thought it was too simple. Well, simplicity is part of our myths and our culture. The work was also felt to be rather sentimental — well, I'm very sorry but Maoris are people who tend to cry and tend to laugh, they are our basic human emotions and we have not been westernized to the extent that we find it difficult to cry because someone has told us that we should not do it.

This brings us to the way your work is structured and to the genres you have adopted. Do you think that the novel is suited as a genre to the expression of the Maori experience?

No, I don't, because even though, now, anything goes in the novel and you can structure a novel the way you wish, Maori culture is a living experience, not one that you read about, and the realm of the theatre is more appropriate than the realm of the novel to fully explore and to enable people fully to understand what a living culture is like. Reading about it is more analytical. We depend a lot on people’s emotions, we like to involve ourselves directly in emotion, and there is no such thing as an ‘audience’ among the Maori people. You are all participants. Whenever you go onto a marae you are welcomed into the tribe and you become a tribesperson, but the novel doesn’t allow you to do that. The novel simply keeps the reader as a reader and simply keeps you as the writer. Your emotions might be engaged as a reader but there is still that last final link of aroha which can only be done when you’re in each other’s presence.

Another reason why I don’t like the novel as a vehicle is that editors have peculiar presumptions about what is required and if you are
concerned about doing things culturally so that your work maintains its integrity then you often have to make decisions which are extremely difficult to keep and it’s not just a matter of whether or not you have a glossary or whether or not words are italicized, it’s also a matter of saying or acknowledging that we are not an individualized society so the critics who complain about lack of characterization are correct, it’s just that we don’t have that I-focus in our work. One of the criticisms of my work and of most Maori writers’ work is in fact that it doesn’t conform in terms of characterization. It took me a long time before I suddenly realized that I don’t characterize because we don’t do that in our culture: we regard each other as being equal and to characterize someone in the way that European literature does is not correct for us. What I fear sometimes is that because the novel format is so strong, and because most of us are such very young practitioners of the novel art, we can easily be persuaded to adopt particular European narrative traditions which, while they might interpret us in a way that Pakeha people can then understand, isn’t appropriate for us.

A recurrent theme in your work is death, but a death that is always linked to life, to rebirth or to the dawning of knowledge, the coming to awareness, to an understanding of life.

In Maori culture the occasions of death are the very important times when you hear stories and because in Maori culture death requires you to travel from wherever you live to your marae where the ceremonials are held, that is the occasion when everybody starts to talk about whakapapa and about relationships. So although someone has died that is the occasion for the continuing transmission. The other thought goes back to that whole concept of ‘the rope of man’. While death is extremely tragic in terms of the destruction it causes, at the end of the ceremonials there is this gratefulness and there is this still caring: it’s not as if a person is in the ground and that’s the end of it, there is still the understanding that he continues to be here — he or she is in my blood — and while there is of course physical separation, there is still no emotional separation whatsoever.

Another feature, particularly on the linguistic level, in your use of images, symbol and metaphor, is the presence of nature, a very elemental nature, the wind, the sky, the earth, the sea, the greenstone — although stones and jewellery, particularly the greenstone and the emerald, make up an independent image system.
We are people of the land. We have always lived with the earth beneath our feet and we feel the rhythm of the land and the rhythm of the elements. I don’t think we’re any different from any other culture which names rocks and names mountains and names rivers and gives them animation so that they are not just a river but they are a god or a person. The earth is our mother and the sky is our father and we are the people who live between them, so we are the inheritors of a natural world, not a superficial one at all.

Greenstone is our most prized possession. It’s such a beautiful, luminous, glowing stone and I’ve always used it to symbolize Maori culture, while I use hard, brittle, glittering emeralds to symbolize the attractions of Pakeha culture.

Another theme is that of the journey, frequently not from A to B but from A back to A again.

I think the emphasis on journeys is mainly caused by the fact that Maori people continue to go backwards and forwards and backwards and forwards from their marae to their place of work. I’m always travelling back to my marae, it’s a continual journeying from Pakeha culture to Maori culture to Pakeha culture again, but it’s always like a rebirth when I go back. The journey, too, is symbolical of the journey of Maori people, which they’ve all taken over the years, and I guess the journey is what might be called an allegory on Maori development. We aren’t at the end of the journey, and certainly the nature of my work where it involves journeys is saying really that our journey is in fact back to the sort of people that we used to be. We might have to manage that journey by using different techniques, but as long as we return to our identity and carry that identity with us then we’ll be fine. I’ve never really written about the end of any journeys because I think that is a Western concept: it’s a narrative concept that requires you to give an ending, which must be either happy or sad, but Maori people don’t look at time like that, or journeys like that, and it is again that whole concept of te taura tangata, an unfolding of culture through the years. That unfolding might mean that we become less Maori but it might also mean that we become more Maori, but whatever it is, whatever sort of people we are by that time, we are still Maori. We may have lost some cultural concepts along the way but we’ll have developed our sense of Maoriness in other ways.

Music is present throughout your work. It’s present in language, in theme, it becomes structure. And it’s both Maori and Western music. What would you say is the importance of music to you?
Well, the Maori language has been called 'the singing word'. Speaking is such a flat way of communicating and most chanting and reciting of whakapapa is in fact done not in the speaking way at all, it's always sung, and so singing has always appealed to me as being the best way to mirror one's emotions. I've found a lot of compatibility with the music of the Italian tradition. It is potent, it is forthright, the words that are sung are words that come from the heart. I think that Maori music is heart music; we are a people who believe very very much in emotional expression.

Could you talk about the transposition of your work into opera and the staging of Waituhi, the problems it posed, the solutions you adopted, the traditions you had in mind?

We have a very strong tradition of marae theatre. I called the opera Waituhi and subtitled it The Life of the Village — it has no main characters at all, the main character is the village itself — so what you see and the journey you are taken on is the journey of this particular village, why it exists and what is happening to it in this present day. We had a number of staging problems with it and also we needed to be sure that the music was not too European oriented. All of the music is original, but the composer I worked with and I had to be absolutely meticulous about the kind of voices and the kind of emotions we wanted them to carry. In most of the opera there is what we call a Maori sound: it's not an operatic sound and it's not staged in an operatic way; the people act very naturally and they sing very naturally, but it isn't a touristy glamour show and it is nothing like some of the travesties I have seen of black American and black African musicals. In fact it is not a musical, it's a serious work which comments on the Maori condition in New Zealand. It sets out to entertain, certainly, but its main message is that this village has as much right to live as anything else in the world because all of the people who live in this village are descended from man. Now he might be different from your man, i.e. Italian man, or European man, or whatever, but Man is the most important creature in the world and no one is going to say that our ancestor, the ancestor of the Maori, is less important.

Do you think your theatrical experiences are going to influence your work in fiction?

I came to the realization about theatre rather than the novel being a better vehicle three years ago and so most of my work from now on will be appealing to that sort of audience. I hope to write a play shortly and
also to begin writing for television. I used to think that television was the absolute pit of superficiality, but it is the communications medium that all our kids are watching — it's just a plain fact of life — and the only way in which we can control that medium is to write for it, so whether I like it or not I'll be writing for television.

You are writing your latest novel after a very long leave off from literature. Is it going to represent a breakaway from your previous work?

My latest novel and all of the work that I have done since and including the opera is aggressive because I believe that we are running out of time and that I am running out of time, that there is a great need to try to stop the communications overload that all of our younger generations are getting from other cultures and that someone has got to be fairly stern and fairly rigid and say what I'm proposing to say in all of my work from now on, which is that there is very little of worth if you want to remain a Maori in any other culture.

Women play an important role in all your work and judging by the title this role is going to continue in The Matriarch.

Our women are just amazing. They are the ones who are going to be at the forefront of every breakthrough that Maori people will make within European society in New Zealand. It's already started to happen: they are much more radicalized, they have more to lose than the men because they are the ones who bear the children and they are usually the ones who bury them too. They are highly articulate, these women, they are not scared to speak out, they bring a warrior attitude to Maori issues which has long been needed. Maori men still tend to work within the narrow confines of traditional behaviour and I'm very excited about the role of Maori women.

What is the future of Maori literature? In an attempt to analyse and forecast phases in the emergence of another new literature of the Pacific, that of Papua-New Guinea, William McGaw indicates four stages through which, he says, most new literatures seem to proceed: a 'cultural erosion' stage marked by the re-examination of the conflicts between traditional and western life, beliefs and customs and aiming to 'set the record straight'; a second stage moving from cultural adaptation and adjustment; a third stage in which the urban and social focus replaces the regional and cultural; a fourth phase, in which the individual and personal focus replaces the social. Will Maori literature follow the same pattern, do you think?
It all sounds very familiar and I would say that I have followed those steps fairly closely except that there is one central stabilizing force and that is that no matter what stages the literature has gone through, the fact of being Maori and of having a social and economic and political purpose never changes: the individual purpose is still to identify oneself as a Maori and try to interpret the world from that central point. Now this is probably peculiar to New Zealand and to our writers because we are such a small population. There are 500,000 Maoris on a population of 3,000,000 in a small island down at the bottom of the world. I have never heard Pakeha people saying that what they are doing is for the Pakeha people of New Zealand, but if you ask any Maori person why he is doing what he is doing he will tell you he is doing it for the Maori people of New Zealand. So that is the central stabilizing force to our literature. The way in which we approach that might be through music or through art or whatever, it's simply an expression of that central Maoriness.

Papua-New Guinea is an interesting case because its literature was in fact stimulated by Ulli Beier. Many Papua-New Guinea writers will now not acknowledge Ulli Beier's creative force and the way he pushed the literature and although some people say it was a good thing for the literature, others say it had a negative effect in that most of the books that came out were really not too dissimilar from black African writing. I think that what has now happened in Papua-New Guinea is a moderation from that first impulsive creation into a literature of their own and it could only have happened because of that initial push into independence. In New Zealand we didn’t have that push. What we had to do was to create for ourselves a way of talking and a way of speaking and there has been some disappointment by people who have expected it to be more radical than it is. But all that we can say is that these are our words and this is how we say them; we don’t say them your way and we can’t accept your assumptions about the way we should be saying what we are saying.

The pattern you mentioned applies to us too in the sense that our literature is now moving out of the phase where we have been talking about ourselves as Maori into the much more coming-to-grips phase of race relations and I think that’s because we are now seeing the rise of Maori writers who’ve lived in cities and have no rural roots at all. What I’ve attempted to do so far has been to try and catch up because my literature has always been a literature of Maori people interacting with themselves. I think this is an exciting development in New Zealand because it is only now that we are able to say to the Pakeha ‘These are the good things that have happened to us and these are the bad things that have happened’ on his terms and in language that he understands. This inter-
action is exciting, it's critical, it's inventive, it's creative, it's also complementary with Pakeha literature, and as long as Pakeha people don't regard this as a threat, then we will survive. If they start to regard Maori literature of the radical kind as a threat, then we are in trouble, or they are in trouble: we have a saying in Maori culture and that is 'If you stand, you live; if you lie down, then you die' and these days Maori people are not prepared to lie down.
1984 was the year the Canadian short story came into its own. After years of critical acclaim, it has finally broken into the popular international market with four Penguin releases. Rosemary Sullivan has written the introduction to the reissue of a collection of Sara Jeannette Duncan’s stories set in India, *The Pool in the Desert*, first published in 1903. The authors themselves introduce the other three collections. W.P. Kinsella’s *The Thrill of the Grass* capitalises on the mix of baseball and magic that made *Shoeless Joe* such a success. Norman Levine’s *Champagne Barn* covers the wider range of his work, while remaining in his own words largely ‘autobiography written as fiction’. Duncan holds a special appeal for Commonwealth scholars with cross-cultural interests, Kinsella is a competent entertainer and Levine an elegant stylist. But none can compare with the extraordinarily fine writing of Timothy Findley in *Dinner Along the Amazon*.

These twelve stories, arranged chronologically, chart Findley’s development in ‘pursuit of an obsession through the act of writing’ as he moves away from ‘Cheeverland’ into Findleyland. Besides the brilliant title story, my favourite is ‘Out of the Silence’, inspired by the lives of Tom (T.S.) and Vivienne Eliot. Here Findley dramatizes his ‘thought that two people could live together so long, endure the same history and the same painful experience of marriage, and yet the same history and experience could produce madness in one of them and poetry in the other’.

These stories are dedicated to Marian Engel, whose death this year is a great loss to Canadian literature. Findley has published an appreciation of Engel’s work in the Special Issue of the journal *Room of One’s Own* (9, 2, June 1984) on Engel’s life and work — along with articles by Alice Munro, Jane Rule and George Woodcock, several Engel stories, an interview and a bibliography. A fitting tribute to an important writer.

Leon Rooke’s new collection, *Sing Me No Love Songs I’ll Say You No Prayers* (Stoddart) contains eight stories previously published in Canadian collections and eight published in book form for the first time.
comic and character-centred, these are good value. Commonwealth readers may enjoy 'The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta', in particular, with its satiric look at misplaced imperial ambitions. In a different vein, Bill Schermbrucker's autobiographical Chameleon and Other Stories (Talonbooks) explores the Mau Mau uprising and the British response to it as filtered through his adopted Canadian perception. His approach to the ambiguities of his position deserves our attention: a native of Kenya, his skin is the colour of the colonizers; a Canadian writer, his memories are of growing up in Africa.

The emotional anguish of growing up in a rural Ontario town characterizes newcomer Isabel Huggan's The Elizabeth Stories (Oberon), while sketches of maritime life best describes Alden Nowlan's posthumously published Will Ye Let the Mummers In? (Irwin). Betty Bednarski has translated Selected Tales of Jacques Ferron (Anansi), thirty-five tales taken from the twenty-year writing career of Quebec's best known tale teller.

Anansi has also brought out a translation of Roch Carrier's novel Lady with Chains and McClelland & Stewart of Michel Tremblay's Therese and Pierette and the Little Hanging Angel. With the exception of Findley's brilliant new novel, Not Wanted on the Voyage, a re-writing of the story of Noah's Ark, that archetypal Canadian myth, the novel in English breaks little new ground this year. Matt Cohen's The Spanish Doctor turns away from his usual rural Ontario settings to focus on Jews in medieval Europe. Moving in the other direction, Josef Skvorecky turns away from his usual Czech settings to focus in The Engineer of Human Souls on contemporary Canada. Narrated by a middle-aged writer in exile who works as a professor of English at a Canadian college, as Skvorecky himself does, the novel functions as a vehicle for its author's impatience with North American liberalism. Guy Vanderhaege's My Present Age (his first novel and second book after winning the Governor General's Award for Man Descending, a short story collection, in 1982) develops the hackneyed male menopause theme so prominent in last year's list.

Atwood's latest book of poems Interlunar (Oxford) maintains familiar stance and themes. Other notable women's collections include Catherine Ahearn, Luna-Verse (Aya); Mary di Michele, Necessary Sugar (Oberon); Leona Gom, Northbound (Thistledown); Daphne Marlatt, Touch to my Tongue and Sharon Thesen, Confabulations, poems for Malcolm Lowry. The bilingual Women and Words Anthology (Harbour), following from the successful national conference in Vancouver, features the work of 81 writers. Other individual collections included Leonard Cohen's Book of Mercy, Douglas Barbour's Visible Visions and David Helwig's Catchpenny Poems, while Ken Norris edited the anthology Canadian Poetry Now: 20
Poets of the '80s (Anansi). Probably the best value for anyone trying to keep up to date in a hurry, it represents an intelligent and wide-ranging selection of poets and contains a biographical note and photograph for each.

On the critical scene, four lively if flawed books by younger critics, brought out by small presses, suggest that debate about our critical heritage is not quite as absent as their authors argue. Paul Stuewe, in Clearing the Ground: English-Canadian Literature After Survival (Proper Tales) attacks Frye and thematic criticism for encouraging simplistic literary analysis, while failing to escape it himself. B.W. Powe, in A Climate Charged (Mosaic) makes similar points in a more ambitious attempt to find an alternative. Arthur Kroker’s Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant (New World Perspectives) takes a more celebratory approach to our philosophical heritage, while Max Dorsinville places it most thoroughly in the comparative post-colonial context in Le Pays Natal: Essais sur les Littératures du Tiers-Monde et du Québec (Nouvelles Editions Africaines).

DIANA BRYDON

NEW ZEALAND

The book of the year was undoubtedly Keri Hulme’s awe-inspiring first novel The Bone People (Spiral). It is an immense, spiralling book that unwinds from the tower of isolated individuality that Kerewin Holmes has built herself, through the necessary, transforming pain which she and her two fellow voyagers (Simon, the beautiful, mute, European child found washed up on a West Coast shore, and Joe, the culturally adrift Maori who rescues and adopts the boy) endure as they forge a new social understanding. This process is described in terms of a mythic structure which covers huge areas of cultural and psychological ground; the result is a (limited) new society which embraces ideals of commitment and community.

In the Australian Book Review Peter Simpson argues that this novel might be ‘not only ... a cultural document of immense significance to New Zealanders of all races and ... a major novel in its own right, but also ... an important advance in the development of New Zealand fiction, effecting a new synthesis of the previously distinct Maori and Pakeha fictional traditions’. He could well be right. The first edition sold out
almost instantly; it has been reprinted for world-wide distribution by Spiral in association with Hodder and Stoughton.

With this novel, her book of poetry, The Silences Between (Moerakic Conversations) (AUP, 1982) and her short stories (The Windeater, to be published later this year by Victoria University Press), Keri Hulme has established herself at the forefront of New Zealand writing. C.K. Stead has been there for some time. All Visitors Ashore (Collins) is his second novel (Smith’s Dream (1971) was his first) and recalls youth (exuberance, naivety, loss), 1951, Auckland, the Waterfront Strike, from the perspective of a contemporary professor of English remembering his twenty-one year old self, Curl Skidmore. Like Hulme’s protagonist, this one has a name which echoes its author’s. But this is a novel which winds not into a vision of the future but into other people’s autobiographies — especially Janet Frame’s (here Cecelia Skyways) and Frank Sargeson’s (Melior Farbro). Looked at as a whole, it’s clear there is a mythologising process going on.

Stead provides accurate and entertaining social comedy as does Merilyn Duckworth with Disorderly Conduct (Hodder and Stoughton). She describes the trials of a woman facing the possibility of middle age, her past strewn with various semi-discarded lovers and her present beset by their lingering demands and their demanding offspring.

Philip Temple has written a semi-autobiographical account of an English childhood called Sam (Hodder and Stoughton), and other novels included three by first time novel writers: Waiting for Einstein (Benton Ross) by Nigel Cox, High Country Weather (Allen and Unwin) by Lauris Edmond, and Ratatu (Benton Ross) by Keith Overdon.

There were two fine collections of short fiction — The Day Hemingway Died (McIndoe) by Owen Marshall and Real Illusions (VUP) by Russell Haley. While these writers exercise their talents in different modes — Marshall is what is conventionally called a realist, Haley a post-modernist — reading these stories in tandem suggests that these are merely convenient categories for the critic rather than closed shops for the writer.

Both of these writers appear in Some Other Country: New Zealand’s best short stories (Allan and Unwin), chosen by Marion McLeod and Bill Manhire, and so they should. Other selections among the twenty-two stories (each author represented only once) aren’t so obvious but the provocative title is not undermined by any foolish choices. Look here for Keri Hulme’s great story ‘Hooks and Feelers’. Another anthology was New Zealand Short Stories: fourth series (Oxford) selected and with an introduction by Lydia Wevers, also successful. Short fiction here is clearly well able to come up with the goods: an appropriate place to note that
Antony Alpers has produced the definitive edition of *The Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (OUP).

There were a good number of verse collections. For me, the outstanding book was Ian Wedde’s *Georgicon* (VUP). It demands, it gives, it exhilarates. The cover has a photograph of a child struggling to escape through the window of a car parked in front of a building crowned with the Kiwi Bacon kiwi (check *Kunapipi*, VI, 2) and the ride just takes off from there. Another Wedde collection also appeared — *Tales from Gotham City* (AUP/OUP). You can’t get too much of a good thing.

The other notable collections were Bill Manhire’s *Zoetropes, Poems 1972-82* (A&U/PNP), C.K. Stead’s *Poems of a Decade* (Pilgrims South Press), both of which bring together previously published work with some new material, Stead’s *Paris* (AUP/OUP), with lovely drawings by Gregory O’Brien, Leigh Davis’s *Willy’s Gazette* (Jack Books), his first collection, and Kevin Ireland’s *Practice Night at the Drill Hall* (OUP).

Robin Hyde is an excellent writer — of poetry, fiction, journalism, autobiography — whose verse in particular has been somewhat overlooked. This should be remedied with the publication of Lydia Wever’s edition of Hyde’s *Selected Poems* (OUP) where the strength of her work (particularly her last book *Houses by the Sea* (1952)) is forcefully demonstrated. Hyde’s autobiography *A Home in this World* (Longman Paul) with an introduction by her son Derek Challis and the autobiographical fragment ‘A Night of Hell’ has also appeared and other material is being reprinted including *Dragon Rampant* (1939), an account of her experience in China. Altogether, this adds up to a necessary rehabilitation for this extraordinary woman.

To continue the autobiographical theme, the Janet Frame trilogy continues with *An Angel at my Table* (Hutchinsons) which takes us through the experience of Dunedin Teachers’ College, the rigours of hospitalization and the liberation into Frank Sargeson’s bach at Takapuna. The final instalment will be out by the time this article is published. There has also been Alistair Campbell’s *Island to Island* (Whitcoulls), a very interesting account of a man striving still to unravel the threads of a complex whakapapa, while Denys Trussel’s biography *Fairburn* (AUP/OUP) is the long-awaited and welcome work on one of the first of our ‘national’ poets.

With the publication of Frank Sargeson’s *Conversation in a Train and other critical writing* (AUP/OUP), selected and edited by Kevin Cunningham, the process of getting the bulk of the Sargeson oeuvre into book form seems almost complete (will there be a *Letters*?). The persona of Sargeson as critic is marked by generosity, magnanimity and encourage-
ment but beneath the surface there is plenty of evidence that there was a sharp and discerning critical intelligence at work. Cunningham, too, meets the highest standards as an editor.

Also out is *Introducing Witi Ihimaera* (Longman Paul) by Richard Corballis and Simon Garrett, the eighth in the series, while *New Zealand Drama 1930-1980: an illustrated history* (Oxford) by John Thompson further continues research into this area of our literature.

Finally, periodical activity. *Landfall* continues with a change of editorship: David Dowling now works with Hugh Lauder as Poetry Editor. *Islands* and editor Robin Dudding have resurfaced with two issues in a new series. *Pacific Quarterly Moana* had a general issue along with numbers devoted to specialized topics; *Rimu*, also from Waikato, demonstrated that a hard look at a particular region serves to polish a facet of the national literature. *And 3* continues strongly, joined (in Auckland and in format) by *Splash* 1 and 2 which focusses on imaginative writing with a post-structuralist bent. *Splash* is edited by Wystan Curnow, Tony Green, Roger Horrocks and Judi Stout. Further south, Simon Garrett and John Newton edited *Untold* 1 and 2: fiction, verse, literature and art criticism.

Essentially, though, the book of 1984 was *The Bone People*.

SIMON GARRETT

PAKISTAN

From the standpoint of literature it was the most productive year in decades. As there was no new novel, I should mention first the four new volumes of poetry, comprising two individual collections and two anthologies. Mahmood Jamal, who migrated from Pakistan in 1967 and now lives in London, brought out *Silence Inside a Gun’s Mouth* (Kala Press), a first book. The other collection was by Alamgir Hashmi, *Neither This Time/Nor That Place* (Vision), his fifth collection of poetry. Peter Dent’s compilation, *The Blue Wind: Poems in English from Pakistan* (Interim Press), comprises work by five poets: Daud Kamal, Adrian A. Husain, Mansoor Y. Sheikh, Salman Tarik Kureshi and Alamgir Hashmi. It is the only anthology of Pakistani poetry to have been published in England. (For reviews of this book and Alamgir Hashmi’s collection, see *Kunapipi*, Vol. VI, No 3, 1984.) *Next Moon: Five Pakistani Poets* (Quaid-e-Azam Library Publications), compiled by M. Athar Tahir, includes poems by Khwaja Shahid Hosain, Waqas Ahmad, Taufiq Rafat, Inam ul-Haq and M. Athar Tahir; again brought together in a volume for the first time.
No new novel, but paperback editions of recent novels by several Pakistani writers were published and these had a wide circulation. Zulfikar Ghose’s *Don Bueno* and *A New History of Torments* were brought out by Black Swan (London), Salman Rushdie’s *Shame* was issued by Pan Books (London), Bapsi Sidhwa’s *The Bride* appeared as a Futura Macdonald paperback (London). Similarly, no new plays, but there was one reissue in drama: Hanif Kureishi’s *Outskirts, The King and Me*, and *Tomorrow — Today!* all in one volume, was brought out by Riverrun Press (Dallas/New York). The plays were published earlier by John Calder in England.

The English reader has access now to some more fiction and poetry originally written in the other Pakistani languages. Only a few selected titles can be mentioned: *Abdullah Hussein: Night and Other Stories* (Orient Longman/Sangam Books), translated from Urdu by Muhammad Umar Memon; *Fifty Poems of Khawaja Farid* (Bazm-e-Saqafat, Multan), introduced and translated from Siraiki by C. Shackle; *Faiz in English* (Pakistan Publishing House), selected poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, translated from Urdu by Daud Kamal; and the second edition of *Panjabi Lyrics and Proverbs* (Panjabi Adabi Laihr), translated by C.F. Usborne. Further items in English translation from Urdu may be seen in the Annual of Urdu Studies (Chicago) No 4, which also contains scholarly and critical material as well as the useful feature, ‘Bibliographic News’, pp. 117-9, about translations into English and criticism of Urdu literature.

There are at least four fine volumes of non-fiction. *Jawan to General: Recollections of a Pakistani Soldier* (East & West Publishing Co.) follows Mohammad Musa’s book on the subject of the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965. But the present book is autobiographical, the fascinating life and career of the man who, recruited as a soldier in the British Indian Army, rose to be Pakistan Army’s Commander-in-Chief. Mohammad Asghar Khan’s *Generals in Politics* (Vikas) is of topical yet complementary interest as observation, by a man who retired as Chief of Pakistan Air Force and has been in active politics since. *Reflections on Islam* (Islamic Book Foundation/al-Maarif), by Hamoodur Rahman, is a collection of speeches and discursive, thoughtful essays by a former Chief Justice of Pakistan. Sher Ali Pataudi’s *Quest of Identity* (Al-Kitab) is another volume mixing memoir with socio-political observation and reflection, by a former general-politician.

Scholarly and critical writing has numerous items of use. First, Zulfikar Ghose’s *The Fiction of Reality* (Macmillan, UK/Salem House, USA). The Second Edition, revised and enlarged, of Muhammad Sadiq’s *A History of Urdu Literature* (OUP) was published in Delhi and it

Among journals, *Explorations* published its biennial issue, with a sharp editorial by Professor Rafiq Mahmood about the place and teaching of English in Pakistan. *The Journal of the English Literary Club* also published a substantial issue (Session 1983-1984), edited by Ali Shehzad Zaidi. *Ariel* published its annual number. *Viewpoint* continued to publish original poetry, translations and critical comment on literary subjects. *The Ravi*, apart from its recent *Azad Number*, has hardly published anything of a literary nature, at least in English. The weekly magazines put out by the English dailies were rather general.


ALAMGIR HASHMI

SINGAPORE 1983/84

Singapore writers are certainly making their mark: Ho Min Fong in 1983 and Ovidia Yu in 1984 won the prestigious *Asiaweek* Short Story Competition. Ho, whose earlier novel *Singing to the Dawn* had gained recognition almost the moment it was published, had written a nostalgic story about the Singapore she knew but which no longer existed. In a fast-changing environment, nostalgic comment is bound to feature as a writer’s lament. Yu — whose story ‘A Dream of China’ was commended by all the judges and till date has received the highest marks in the Competition — has publicly commented that she wrote to win: hence her story was written almost to a formula. It is a rich, evocative story, moving and sometimes very sad — the reader is left to wonder how a
twenty-year old actually managed it. Both Ho and Yu are not stopping either (unlike several other winners!) — they are busily writing yet more fiction (Ho, indeed, has finished another novel) and one hopes that their new works will reinforce the quality discerned in these prize-winning stories.

Another interesting event was the publication, in 1983, of James Villaneuva’s *Space Encounters* — the first real science fiction to come out of Singapore. Though there exists an anthology of science-fiction stories from Singapore (*Singapore Science Fiction*, ed. K. Singh et al.), Villaneuva’s is a novella with possibilities of continuation in the space opera genre. The novella is about the adventures of the spaceship *Ventura*, with its very human crew and its interesting mission. Written essentially for youngsters, the book should prove enjoyable to everyone. Imagination and skill combine to render *Ventura*’s encounters suspenseful. If a little over-done the novella should, nevertheless, find a permanent place in Singapore’s literature.

Catherine Lim, whose first book of short stories (*Little Ironies*) received rave reviews, published a collection of stories about the supernatural: *They Do Return*. Ghosts and preoccupations with the ghostly are common to Asia, and it is not surprising to find an author who has finally put in writing tales and anecdotes one becomes familiar with through word of mouth. The collection is meant to be read and enjoyed; there is little to recommend it for formal or academic analysis. The same has to be said of Sit Yin Fong’s *Tales of Chinatown*, a witty collection dealing with saucy and spicy life styles. Sit used to write for a paper now defunct (*The Singapore Weekender*) and through his journalistic career was able to observe life in certain quarters more perceptively than most. His book is to be recommended; if only because it is so readable. Woo Keng Thye’s *A Question of Time and Other Stories* is an unpretentious collection of eighteen stories that prove, on occasion, quite engaging because the author (perhaps because he is a medical consultant) cares little for such things as form, narrative skill, poetic justice. The stories are literally told in a straightforward way and the reader is not burdened with complexities of characterisation or of theme.

A major literary event in 1983 was the publication of *An Anthology of Singapore Chinese Literature*, edited by Wong Meng Woon and Wong Yoon Wah, two very well-known Singapore writers. This is an ambitious work, containing English translations of some 35 poems, 21 stories and 10 essays originally published in Chinese. For the first time there is now a fairly comprehensive anthology of Singapore Chinese literature available in English. It is hoped that the Malay and Tamil writers will follow this
lead and attempt to translate their works into English so that readers who do not know these languages but who want to familiarise themselves with the Singapore literature in these languages may be able to do so through the English translations. Translations are actively encouraged by the National Book Development Council of Singapore and by the Ministry of Community Development.

A good deal of controversy surrounded (and continues to surround) the publication of two anthologies by the Society of Singapore Writers. *Poets of Singapore* and *Stories from Singapore* (both edited by the Society's President, George Fernandez) received mixed reviews in both the Singapore and foreign press. While the aim was more than commendable, the achievement leaves a lot to be desired. For some reason the editor seems to have been harrassed by time and lack of professional support. Both anthologies feature the well-known names of Singapore literature but do not always contain the better works of these writers. Of the two, *Stories* is by far the more enjoyable because of the variety of the short stories included. *Poets* could have been deferred till a later date: as it stands the collection seems weak and not very well edited. However, no one who wishes to follow the literary scene of Singapore closely ought to miss out on these anthologies for they do represent a significant publishing event.

The literary highlight of 1984 was the publication of *Rice Bowl*. This novel, written by Christine Lim Su-Chen, bravely and provocatively documents some interesting events that occurred at the University of Singapore in the late sixties and early seventies. It is about a group of convent girls who meet with their former teacher at the University and get mixed up in her political and romantic involvements. Though presented as fiction (and some of the writing is very good) Singaporeans may well be able to connect the facts that produced this fiction. Precisely for this reason the book invites reading and then comment: no other novel published in Singapore by a Singaporean has so far succeeded in fictionalising reality so closely to the bone. Lim does not always display literary skill in her work (the style could be improved and the substance condensed) but she is certainly able to draw the reader into her world. We wonder what Lim's next work will be, for Singapore lacks works of candour.

Candour, however, is not usually lacking on stage. Clara Chua — newly returned from her studies in Australia — wrote a play called *The Life and Times of Mr X* which was staged as part of Singapore's twenty-five years of independence celebrations. The play was directed by well-known theatre personality Chandran Lingam. The play received plenty of media coverage because it dealt with 'Mr Average Singaporean' and tried,
through Mr X's history, to trace the history of post-independent Singapore. Chua is not a real playwright and the flaws were only too apparent — however, Chandran Lingam's excellent directing managed to bring the play alive and audiences went home feeling they had witnessed something worthwhile, if not brilliant.

Two articles that appeared in Ariel in 1984 might be of relevance to any critical study of Singapore literature: Kirpal Singh's 'An Approach to Singapore Writing' (Vol. 15, No 2) and Jan Gordon's 'The Second Tongue Myth' (Vol. 15, No 4). The first is both a critical survey of the literature produced to date as well as an attempt at methodology while the latter is an attack on the chief advocates of writing in English in Singapore. It is a shame that criticism lags so severely behind the literature that is being produced.

At the University a Seminar entitled 'The Writer's Sense of the Past' was held in October 1984. This drew scholars and writers from seven countries and some excellent papers were delivered. The undergraduate magazine Focus continues to come out annually with the odd poem and short story of literary merit. Singa, the official government literary magazine, struggles to survive amidst scarcity of worthwhile contributions as well as poverty of funds. It is distressing that Singa no longer publishes those wonderful art photos it did in its early issues. Literary-wise some newer contributions show a degree of experimentation not frequently noticed in the works of more established writers. Singa, because of its status, is potentially the most powerful magazine that Singapore has.

Thus 1983 and 1984 were mixed years for the literary scene in Singapore. While the economy forges ahead, the literary arts in Singapore continue to extract a precarious existence, relieved, every now and then, by blessings from unexpected quarters.

KIRPAL SINGH

SOUTH AFRICA

For only the second time in its history the premier South African literary prize, the CNA (Central News Agency) Award was given to a poet. Douglas Livingstone's Selected Poems (Johannesburg: Ad Donker) is a deserving winner, representing twenty-five years of poetry-making in southern Africa. Few have stamped the violence, beauty, fear and
terrible joys of Africa so memorably on the imagination as has this poet from Durban:

Under the baobab tree, tressed
death, stroked in by the musty cats,
scratches silver on fleshy earth.
Threaded flame has unstitched and sundered
hollow thickets of bearded branches
blanched by a milk-wired ivy. Choleric
thunder staggers raging overhead.

('Stormshelter')

If one recent poet has rivalled Livingstone's verbal magic it is Sydney Clouts, who passed away in London in 1983. His Collected Poems appeared from David Philip of Cape Town, while individual volumes by two established poets, Patrick Cullinan's The White Hail in the Orchard (from David Philip) and Lionel Abrahams' Journal of a New Man (from Donker), were reminders of the continuing richness and variety of poetry from this country. Sipho Sepamla's Selected Poems also appeared under the Donker imprint, as did a first volume, baptism of fire, by 27-year old Dikobe wa Mogale, who is currently serving a 10-year sentence on political charges. In addition to the various volumes of poetry, two critical works appeared: the English translation of Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre's study, The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa (London: Heinemann) and Michael Chapman's South African English Poetry: A Modern Perspective (Donker).

Several other critical works were published during 1984. Brian Willan wrote a biography of the early twentieth-century author of Mhudi, Sol T. Plaatje (Johannesburg: Ravan Press) and Stephen Gray researched a neglected novelist of the first years of this century, Douglas Blackburn (Boston: Twayne). Similarly the black poet, dramatist and critic of the 1940s, H.I.E. Dhlomo, at last received his due, with the appearance of his Collected Works (ed. Tim Couzens and Nick Visser) and a biography by Couzens entitled The New African (both books are from Ravan Press). Other early writers were republished in David Philip's valuable Africa-south Paperback Series, namely William Plomer (Selected Stories and the deflating biography Rhodes), Es'kia Mphahlele (The Wanderers — now unbanned), Peter Abrahams (Path of Thunder) and Ethelreda Lewis, whose novel Wild Deer first appeared in 1933 and tells the story of a black American singer who discovers his soul in South Africa.

Of particular note among new works were Es'kia Mphahlele's second volume of autobiography, Africa My Music (Ravan), Nadine Gordimer's collection of stories, Something Out There (Ravan), Bessie Head's fiction-
alized history of Botswana, *A Bewitched Crossroad* (Donker), and Miriam Tlali’s ‘township’ novel, *Mihloti* (meaning ‘tears’), published by Skotaville Publishers (the new and only black publishing house in Johannesburg). Rose Zwi’s novel *Exiles* (Donker) deals with Jewish South Africans in Israel, while Ann Millar’s first novel is something of a *tour de force*, and one which will probably raise the question of the South African writer’s ‘right’ to ignore the political immediacies of his or her situation. Utilizing modernist techniques of narration *Ariel Rose* explores a world of music, literature and art, as Millar traces the ambitions and fears of the Serineau family (the father, of French extraction, is the conductor of the Johannesburg symphony orchestra) in South Africa and Europe. More pointedly ‘South African’ are Christopher Hope’s satire *Kruger’s Alp* (London: Heinemann) and Breyten Breytenbach’s *Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (Johannesburg: Taurus), the latter telling of this Afrikaans poet’s experiences in a South African prison. (Hope and Breytenbach were runners-up to Livingstone in the CNA stakes.)

A perceptible trend on the literary scene has been towards the ‘worker perspective’, and Ravan Press’ ‘Worker Series’ has offered several cheaply produced, simply written, non-fictional accounts of factory life, trade union activity and what are usually seen as the repressive responses of white Capital. With Black resistance increasingly being located outside of the cultural paradigms of Black Consciousness, it seems as if ‘workers’ literature’ is about to become the next emotional and imaginative construct. In fact, a recent advertisement, placed by Ravan Press in a Labour bulletin, called for submissions by ‘worker-poets’.

MICHAEL CHAPMAN

WEST INDIES

1984 saw more reissues than new works by the established novelists. V.S. Naipaul’s *Finding The Centre: Two Narratives* (London: André Deutsch) is new, but only marginally so, since its two constituent essays, ‘Prologue to an Autobiography’ and ‘The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro’ were both previously published in journals (though the book version of ‘Prologue’ adds an extended account of a trip Naipaul made to Venezuela in search of the man on whom he based Bogart of *Miguel Street*). Naipaul’s foreword to *Finding the Centre* makes clear that he intended ‘Prologue’ as a complete, integral essay, not — despite what the title had led many of us
to believe — as an introduction to a full autobiography. As it stands, the piece is nevertheless quite significant to students of Naipaul’s work. It provides an intimate account of his relationship with his father and of his early days in London where he wrote *Miguel Street*. It enables us to confirm — what has always been suspected — that Naipaul draws heavily on his own personal experience for *A House for Mr Biswas*. And it allows us a glimpse of how Naipaul transforms this experience into art. The other essay also reveals Naipaul’s creative process. It is an account of life in the Ivory Coast, one of the more ‘progressive’ African countries; however, as in most of Naipaul’s travel pieces, it says much about the author. Naipaul states: ‘The reader will see how the material was gathered’ and how it ‘could have served fiction or political journalism or a travelogue’, but was used primarily to show the author’s recollection and contemplation of his experience: ‘However creatively one travels … it takes thought (a sifting of impulses, ideas and references that become more multifarious as one grows older) to understand what one has lived through.’

Shiva Naipaul’s *Beyond the Dragon’s Mouth* is a collection of reports, memoirs, and stories previously published in magazines and journals over the last ten years. The introductory piece, a loose autobiographical sketch of his early years in the West Indies, conveys his consciousness of his lack of national and ethnic identity. ‘Every day,’ he says, ‘I have to redefine myself.’ His portrayal of the Trinidad of his youth is unfavourable, often sardonic. And so are his reports on other areas of the Third World, such as Puerto Rico, Iran, Africa, Seychelles, India, and Morocco. The sardonic tone in the journalism becomes sympathetic in the short stories, which are fine studies of domestic relationships in Trinidad.

Samuel Selvon’s *Moses Ascending* was reissued in Heinemann’s Caribbean Writers Series, with an introduction by Mervyn Morris. (The sequel to this novel, *Moses Migrating*, published in 1983, won the Writer’s Guild of Alberta Howard O’Hagan Award for best fiction in 1984.) *While Gods Are Falling*, Earl Lovelace’s earliest novel (Collins, 1965), which describes a youth’s crisis when faced with unemployment in Port of Spain, was reissued in the Longman Drumbeat series, and so was Sylvia Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron*. George Lamming’s *The Pleasures of Exile* was reprinted by Allison and Busby. André Deutsch published Jean Rhys’s *Letters, 1931-1966* and *Jean Rhys: The Early Novels*, which includes *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), *Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr MacKenzie* (1930) and *Good Morning Midnight* (1939). New Beacon reissued *Black Fauns*, Alfred Mendes’s study of a Trinidad communal yard of the 1930s, with an
introduction by Rhonda Cobham. New Beacon published also an account of the experiences of a Jamaican who served in the Royal Air Force during World War II: *Jamaica Airman: A Black Airman in Britain 1943 and After* by E. Martin Noble.

The Guyanese novelist, Roy Heath (who is perhaps best known for *The Murderer*, winner of the 1978 Guardian Fiction Prize) published a new novel, *Orealla* (Allison and Busby), which was runner-up for the Whitbread Prize. Set in Georgetown, Guyana, the novel tells of the protagonist’s relationships with two women of antithetical temperament and with an Amerindian whose hinterland village, Orealla, comes up against the alien forces of civilization. Three earlier works by Heath were reissued in paper: *From the Heat of the Day*, *Genetha*, and *One Generation* (London: Flamingo). Ralph De Boissiere, of Trinidad and Australia, reissued his social realism novel *Rum and Coca-Cola* (Allison and Busby). The Guyanese writer, Grace Nichols (whose *I is a Long Memoried Woman* won the 1983 Commonwealth Poetry Prize), wrote *Leslyn in London* ( Hodder and Stoughton), a collection of stories for children.

In poetry, Derek Walcott published another outstanding volume, *Midsummer* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux). The fifty-four poems are all set in midsummer, the heat and stasis of which Walcott captures brilliantly. But midsummer is also a pervasive metaphor for various conflicting attitudes and moods. Several poems examine the role of the poet caught between the metropolitan and the island worlds. Some portray him at mid-life wondering ‘what if the lines I cast bulge into a book/that has caught nothing?’ Others show him in temporary exile experiencing the pull of family, friends, and island home.

Another remarkable volume of poetry is David Dabydeen’s *Slave Song* (Denmark: Dangaroo), which was awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. The fourteen poems — some of which won the Quiller-Couch Prize in 1978 at Cambridge University — explore the experience of the oppressed Guyanese peasants on the sugar-estates during the colonial days. This theme has been written about before, but Dabydeen’s striking use of language, rhythm, and imagery makes this volume a powerful restatement. Moreover, he focuses not on the peasants’ brutal treatment at the hands of their masters but on their coarsened lives, the consequence of their brutalized existence. The poems are written in authentic — not literary — dialect and needed the extensive annotation provided to make them accessible to the reader unfamiliar with the dialect. Dabydeen, in fact, gives full translations of the poems, which often can stand on their own as separate poems that are as good as the dialect versions.

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Two other volumes should be noted: *Deadly Ending Season* (London: Akira) by the Jamaican poet, Desmond Johnson, and *Human Rites: Selected Poems* (London: Anvil) by the Montserrat poet, E.A. Markham. *AJS at 70* (Georgetown, Guyana), a volume in honour of A.J. Seymour’s seventieth birthday, edited by Ian McDonald, has pieces by, among others, Mervyn Morris, Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott, and Edward Brathwaite, and includes some representative Seymour poems chosen by him. Two poetry anthologies for students were published: *Caribbean Poetry Then and Now* (Hodder and Stoughton) edited by Stewart Brown, and *The Chatto Book of West Indian-British Poetry*.

Earl Lovelace’s *Jestina’s Calypso and Other Plays* (Heinemann) has three plays, none of which is new. The title play was first performed in 1978. It has an absorbing dramatic situation. Jestina is expecting a pen-pal from the United States, who has proposed to her, having seen only a photograph of her. A warm-hearted but ugly woman, she has sent her pen-pal not her photograph but that of a beautiful friend. Lovelace focuses on Jestina’s personal plight, but he uses it to reflect the social situations in post-colonial Trinidad. The second play, ‘The New Hardware Store’ (1980), examines the relationship between an uncaring employer and his dissatisfied staff; and ‘My Name is Village’, first performed in 1976, is a lively musical about village life.

In criticism, there was Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon), which has a bibliography of material available in print and on tape. Elgin W. Mellown has been working since the 1960s on *Jean Rhys: A Descriptive and Annotated Bibliography of Works and Criticism* (N.Y. and London: Garland Publishing). This has been described as the definitive bibliography on Rhys. Ken Corsbie’s *Theatre in the Caribbean* (Hodder and Stoughton) is an introduction, for students, to theatre in the Caribbean. Two significant critical studies were reissued in paper: Kenneth Ramchand’s revised and updated 1983 edition of *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (Heinemann), and Lloyd Brown’s *West Indian Poetry* (Heinemann) which was first published in the Twayne World Authors Series. *Critical Issues in West Indian Literature* (Parkersburg, IA: Caribbean Books), edited by E. Smilowitz and R. Knowles, has ten articles culled from papers presented at three conferences on West Indian Literature (1981-83), organized by the English Departments of the universities of the region. There are papers on regional criticism, women and theatre, creole socio-linguistics, Lamming, Heath, Naipaul, Lovelace, Selvon, and Marson.
Two journals brought out special issues on Caribbean literature. *Modern Fiction Journal* devoted Vol. 20, No 3 (Autumn 1984) to V.S. Naipaul. There are articles on the early and later novels and *Among the Believers*, and a lively sketch of Naipaul the man by Paul Theroux. A checklist of primary and secondary material is appended. *The Journal Caribbean Studies* (Vol. 4, Nos 2 & 3) is a special issue on the Afro World. There are short stories on black women in literature, West Indians in Canada, female slaves, African dance, the Jamaican church, and the fiction of Charles Chesnutt. Finally, there is a new scholarly journal, *Antilia*, produced by the Faculty of Arts, St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies (Trinidad). It is published twice yearly, focuses on Caribbean culture, and includes creative writing and reviews. The first issue (1983-84) has Selwyn Cudjoe interviewing Kenneth Ramchand about V.S. Naipaul. The second (1984) includes pieces on Carpentier and Cuban poetry.

VICTOR J. RAMRAJ

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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