

SYMBOLISM AND SOUTH AFRICAN PROSE: A STUDY  
OF 19TH CENTURY SOUTH AFRICAN NOVELS OF  
ENGLISH EXPRESSION

BY  
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me and that it is a record of my research work. It has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are specifically and fully acknowledged by means of references.

J. R. T. O. V.

Signature

1/11/98

Date

## CERTIFICATION

This thesis entitled 'SYMBOLISM AND SOUTH AFRICAN PROSE: A STUDY OF 19TH CENTURY SOUTH AFRICAN NOVELS OF ENGLISH EXPRESSION' by Ujorha, Tadaferua meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Literature of Ahmadu Bello University and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

  
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## ABSTRACT

The rise of Shaka the Zulu and the Mfecane, the entrenchment and consolidation of the Boers in the region, and the Mineral Revolution and its consequences are the essential themes of 19th century South African history. These themes are developed within the context of various literary ideologies in the mass of creative writing that assess South Africa during the period. Critical works on the artistic efforts of the period dwell extensively on the pedigree of the novel, the various thematic thrusts, and the relationships and influences evident in the works. There is also a consideration of symbolism in a general sense. However, no work has been done on the significance of Nature and social symbols, and the evocative power these possess as beacons of social realities in South Africa of the 19th century. This is the thrust of this research which aims at focusing on Nature and Social symbolism to redress the uneven balance of previous scholarship, and to highlight the significance of symbols for purposes of historical reconstruction of the period

The study consists of five chapters. The first chapter surveys details of 19th century South African history, and establishes the basis for the research.

Chapter Two considers Shaka the Zulu and the Mfecane

in Nada The Lily (1958) , ChaKa (1931) and Shaka Zulu (1955)

Chapter Three examines the colonial intrusion which is reflected in King Solomon' Mines (1982) Allan Quatermain (1956) and Mhudi (1978).

Chapter Four is an analysis of God's Stepchildren (1927) and The Story of An African Farm(1976) in relation to the phase of settler life and race tensions in 19th century South Africa.

Chapter Five is the conclusion of the study.

## Chapter One

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN NOVEL

The tapestry of the history of Southern Africa during the 19th century is one which reveals multi-coloured threads and dyes of varying shades. This metaphor lies in the sense that the 19th century was a dynamic era in the region, and it was the moment when the cauldron of time threw up dynamic and powerful socio-political developments, together with the prominent and forceful personalities who were collectively and individually central to these historical developments.<sup>1</sup>

The "Mfecane" translated as 'the crushing' was one of the major political developments of the time, and it gathered momentum during the reign of Shaka the Zulu who subdued his neighbours, and moulded them to become members of the Zulu nation.<sup>2</sup> The Zulu state therefore expanded beyond its initial borders, and many groups came under its dominating and conquering tide. These leaders of groups such as Mzilikazi of the Matabele and Sobhuza of the Swazi, preyed upon and imposed their authority on groups in the region. So there was this great transformation of the Political communities in the region which made them less clan-based. Consequently they were transformed into larger political entities with a much more pronounced national





elements of 19th century South and Southern African history.

#### **LITERARY BACKGROUND**

These themes, as outlined above, are developed within the context of various literary ideologies (or schools) in the welter of writing that assess South Africa during the period under study. The themes are not often developed singly but rather jointly, such that, for instance, we often have a treatment of Shaka that is connected with the larger Mfecane. Criticism on the artistic efforts of the period dwell quite extensively on the pedigree of the novel, the conceptual difficulties in the appreciation of the novel, and the relationships and influences evident in the works. There is also a focus on symbolism in a general sense. However, no work has been done on the significance of Nature and social symbols and the power these possess as communicators of social realities in South Africa of the 19th century.

#### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

This study is an attempt at assessing Nature and social symbols to show how they assist in presenting an image of South African society of the 19th century. Criticism of the novel studying the region of this period

has operated in a lopsided and unbalanced manner such that research into the significance of Nature and social symbols has hardly been done, and where it has occurred, it is largely an isolated treatment wholly divorced from available works of art examining the same region. The thrust of the research will be an attempt to answer the following questions: What image of society do we perceive from the use of Nature and social symbols in the novels? Are there any similarities in the approach towards Nature and social symbols by the respective authors?. Both Gray and Laredo in appraising The Story Of An African Farm (1976) have provided a guide into the appreciation of Nature symbols not only in South African prose, but also in a general cultural sense. In commenting on Schreiner, Gray writes:

In situating her African farm in a karoo, Schreiner establishes a major precedent in the literature. From her flows the most abundant and unending stream of images of aridity, impotence, deformity, isolation and rootlessness that one associates only too readily with a desert landscape--- When landscape is used dominantly, it is most usually used against the drift of the novel<sup>5</sup> \_ \_

Ursula Laredo comments thus:

What she has done in the story is to create a lasting symbol of south Africa: the lonely farm, hauntingly beautiful by moonlight, harsh and demanding in reality, where everyday life becomes a drama played out in a tense multi-racial society; where the individual must conform or engage in a

bitter struggle against sometimes  
overwhelming odds\_\_\_\_<sup>6</sup>.

Thus both Gray and Laredo have demonstrated in the above quotation, how Nature reflects human predilections and experiences in South African prose. This framework will partly guide the mode of analysis in this research.

#### **AIM AND SCOPE**

By a comparative method, the research will also consider the differences and similarities between the various authors in terms of their attitudes towards these symbols. The research will concentrate on works which belong to three literary schools, although there is some relativity in the use of these terms for the particular works. These schools are the Historical, Romance and Realist literary schools. The Historical novel aims at historical objectivity and it is written in the past tense. The account is assumed to have been written in a past time or within an intervening period which is to be viewed in direct relation to the time of writing. The content of the novel also tends to encompass both public and private events, and the central character may be a real character from the past, or a skillfully moulded imaginary figure whose destiny is allied with real events. Fowler posits that the main weakness of the Historical novel is that the author can attribute to the historical character, the





nature and social symbols remain a common feature in the novels, and is the route through which society is commented upon very decisively.

The word Nature refers, on one hand, to the entire physical creation that is observable to the eye, such as lakes, rivers, hills, mountains, landscapes, water trees, etc. With the example of Greek civilisation Nature can also stand to represent an ideal or perfect world towards which man aspires. Thinkers of the classical time such as Plato, Socrates and Aristotle were very eloquent in their perspectives on this ideal Nature, and this research effort will consider and establish these two distinctions in nature as manifest in the novels to be studied.

The theory of symbolism will be a guide to the research. A plethora of ideas dominate with regards to the theory of Symbolism, and Chadwick's comment comes in quite succinctly

Symbolism can then be finally said to be an attempt to penetrate beyond reality to a world of ideas, either the ideas within the poet, including his emotions, or the ideas in the platonic sense that constitute a perfect supernatural world towards which man aspires \_\_\_\_<sup>11</sup>

L-C. Knights makes an addition to the discourse on Symbolism by focusing very centrally on context in relation to the symbol. He writes:

The meaning of a literary symbol emerges from two interlocking contexts, that of the







Millin consider the late 19th century features of South African life. They focus on the Boers, settler life, and ethnic tensions, largely.

Thomas Mofolo was born in 1875 in Basutoland and he attended Morija, a teacher training school from which he graduated in 1899. He studied theology and then taught in Moseru, and later became a reader for the Morija press. He seems to have read Rider Haggard and Marie corelli. Mofolo was born of christian parents, and his christian world view and fairly western orientation colour his art so manifestly. This partly explains his fascination with the Romance literary mode, which we observe in Chaka (1931).

Sol. T. PLaatje was born in 1876. He wrote in both English and Tswana, his first language. He did some translations from Shakespeare which included Julius Caesar and The Merchant of Venice. PLaatje was a historical novelist, a journalist and a politician.

Sir H. Rider Haggard arrived in South Africa at the age of seventeen and spent a length of time with the Zulu's, living with them and learning much of their language, history and culture. Haggard's art operates in the Romance tradition and he defends imperialism.

Olive Schreiner was born in 1855. She was a rebel of a sort and was a Briton who had a burning zeal for the upliftment of the woman's status in society. She was

therefore a very political person. Her novel The Story of an African Farm (1976) is crafted along the lines of realism.

E.A. Ritter was born in Dundee, Natal, in 1890 and his first language was Zulu. He was a daily listener to Njengabanti's recitals of Shaka's deeds. The former was the son of one of Shaka's fellow soldiers in Dingiswago's Izi-owe regiment. All the details on Shaka were widely received by Ritter and he was therefore encouraged to write Shaka's biography. The novel Shaka Zulu (1955) operates in the tradition of the historical novel.

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The primary texts for this research are a series of seven novels. Out of this lot, the novels representing the Romance tradition include Mofolo's Chaka (1931), Haggard's Nada The Lily (1958), Allan Quatermain (1956) and King Solomon's Mines (1982). The selected Historical works include Ritter's Shaka Zulu (1955) and Plaatje's Mhudi (1978). The two Realist works used are Schreiners The Story Of An African Farm (1976) and MILLINS God'S Stepchildren (1927). The analysis will be a comparative one to reveal the nature of 19th century South African society as captured by the symbols.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The study will examine relevant materials on the area of focus as part of the process of situating this research relative to earlier studies on the area.

Tim Couzen's Literature And Society In South Africa (1984) is composed of several essays on art dealing with South African literature but we do not have a concise and special focus on the significance of Nature and Social symbols in works which assess the 19th century. In Couzens work the treatment of nature is always an indirect outcome of a study on other aspects of the novel. The article by Brian Willan on Sol. T. Plaatje and Paul Rich' article on Romance are very useful parts of the work, in the light of the present research, although these do not focus on Nature and Social Symbolism. In a related article elsewhere, Tim Couzens makes a summary of the umbilical roots and trends of black writing in South Africa, but this neatly avoids the factor of Symbolism.

Gerard's Four African Literatures (1971) deals, fairly exhaustively with the initial South African prose of English expression. However, the work is rather biographical and superficial in terms of theme in the authors approach to South African art. In the work the treatment of symbols is not the authors pre-occupation.

Burness' Shaka King Of The Zulus In African Literature



**FOOTNOTES**

1. Examples of these forceful personalities include Mzilikazi, Dingiswayo, Matiwane and Mpangazita. D. Denoon, Southern Africa Since 1800, London: Longman Group Ltd, 1972. p.22.
2. J.D. Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath, London: Longman Group Ltd, 1966. P. 32.
3. \_\_\_ A grand military display and dance was held to impress the visitors, but during the celebrations an Ndwandwe spy succeeded in stabbing the king and inflicting a serious wound. Fynn was called upon for medical treatment and Shaka soon recovered. In gratitude he agreed to put his mark to a paper ceding much of present day Natal to Farewell and the other members of his party...  
Ibid. P. 38.
4. D. Denoon, Southern Africa since 1800, London: Longman Group Ltd, 1972. P. 55.
5. Stephen Gray, Southern African Literature An Introduction, United Kingdom: Rex collings, 1979, P. 151.
6. Ursula Laredo, 'Olive Schreiner' in Journal of Commonwealth Literature edited by Arthur Ravenscroft, London: Heinemann, 1969. P. 124.
7. Roger Fowler (ed) A Dictionary of Modern critical Terms, Great Britain: Routledge and Kegan Paul, P. 88
8. Ibid. P. 155.
9. Wendy Katz comments on Romance in her work titled Haggard And The fiction of Empire, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. pp 30-57.
10. Ibid. pp. 162-3.
11. Charles, G. L. G. Symbolism, London: Methuen, 1971. P.6.
12. L.C. Knights in Metaphor And Symbol, L.C. Knights (ed), London: Butterworths, 1960. P. 135.
13. Ezekiel Mphahlele, The African Image, London: Faber and Faber, 1962, p. 171.

## Chapter Two

### SHAKA THE ZULU AND THE MFECANE

This chapter examines Haggard's Nada The Lily (1958), Mofolo's Chaka (1931) and Ritter's Shaka Zulu(1955). The study has three basic thrusts, viz: an analysis of the extent to which the authors adopt identical approaches to nature and social symbols. Secondly, establishing the ways in which these authors may differ in their perceptions on these symbols and enunciating what image of 19th century South African society is revealed by the symbols employed in these novels. The entire analysis will be related to the essential theme of Shaka the Zulu and the Mfecane which are preponderant concerns in the novels'<sup>1</sup>

Haggard's Nada The Lily (1958) is written in the Romance tradition in literature, and it revolves around the adventures of Mopo among the various groups in the South African region in the 19th century. Nada The Lily (1958) takes the form of the adventure novel in the context of Romance, and the authors conscious purpose is to highlight the civilizing light and influence of white, progressive Europe viz-a-viz a developing Africa. Mofolo's Chaka (1931) is an historical Romance, and it concentrates on the person of Shaka, king of the Zulus in a fashion that is biographical. Ritter's Shaka Zulu (1955) is a biography of Shaka and it operates within the tradition of the

Historical Novel, Ritter's novel is celebrative of the 19th century achievements of Shaka and the Zulu nation as a whole.

The similarities enshrined in the use of nature symbols by the various authors include references to the planets, rivers, trees and the description of localities. Differences exist in the way these authors employ nature however. In this context some of the authors see nature as the instigator of human activities. On the other hand nature is also moulded in very human terms by the authors. These differences will be examined later.

An example of similarities in the way these authors employ Nature symbols can be seen in these lines from Mofolo's Chaka (1931).

The greater part of kaffir land lies below the mountains and the sea and is covered with dense bush; hard forests are unknown for owing to its nearness to the sea there is never more than a slight touch of frost. It is green country with luscious grazing, and the soil is a rich clay: this tells us that the crops are large... Its grasses are the 'seboku' and the 'tianyane' and water stands in the valleys\_\_\_\_  
(P.1)

Here we have a positive romantic portrait of nature. Words like 'luscious', 'rich clay' 'water stands in the valleys' are illustrative of this delightful portrait of nature. The sublime moulding of nature anticipates the later portrait of Shaka which is daubed with the fantasy



and wonder typical of the Romance mode in literature. These artists strive to establish the setting of the local environment before moving into a thorough assessment of society. This attitude of Mofolo's is captured by Ritter in the opening paragraphs of Shaka Zulu (1955). The following illustration will suffice:

Geographically, Zululand rises steeply from the Indian ocean in a series of terraces, first of coastal bush - covered plains, then of swelling park-lands, then of broken hill country, girdled with many dense forests and finally, of high and open prairies, all intersected by river torrents in bushy valleys. In shaka's time a land free everywhere to all, to roam and hunt and cultivate at pleasure\_\_ (P.15)

Thus the tender focus on nature by these authors serves as a prelude to the later development of Nature symbolism in the works. This tends to establish a pristine spiritual atmosphere in the novel. The reference to 'terrace' and 'bush covered plains' almost forge an image of an ordered and crisis free 19th century South African society which is isolated from any disruptive influences. Ritter's employment of Romance elements here, for instance 'swelling parklands' shows that even the biographical form which ought to be more objective and down to earth, cannot avoid utilising Romance elements especially in the context of South African writing.

Haggard's Nada The Lily (1958) focuses on the landscape as the previous authors do. Haggard writes:

Our tribe lived in a beautiful country; The Boers whom we call the Amaboona are there now, they tell me \_\_\_ (p.25)

'The Amaboona are there now' indicates a shift in the historical period and experience, and shows that the work is akin to a flashback which may be a suitable tool for the development of a story established on Romance lines. 'our tribe lived' is suggestive of changing historical times too, in the sense that there was a fair level of order and stability, even in the context of the Mfecane, before the 'Amaboona' arrived. The illustration here is a negative one and this is captured in the implication that the countryside is not as beautiful as it once used to be.

All the authors use nature to set the scene or arena within which later social and political developments occur. It is striking to observe how in each case, the stability and peace of the countryside later contrasts with the grand socio-political developments which prevail in the same environment. The landscape attains to power and relevance by acting as a dynamic contrast to the great events that take place in the same environment.

The reference to rivers is ground upon which the novelists exhibit a common perspective on Symbolism. In one instance, Mofolo writes:

When they reached the river (the white Umfolosi) his mother hid herself near to where her son was bathing. When Chaka had



moulded in the fashion of a Seer and this is typical or characteristic of Haggard's European or fair complexioned characters. Thus Nada's gaze into the pool can be seen as a process of divination. A process that intuitively informs her of the dangers that abound. Wendy katz has also made similar comments elsewhere <sup>2</sup>. The Romance tradition feeds on these types of brilliant mouldings. In this case water is symbolic of purification or divination.

Ritter's Shaka Zulu (1955) posses further comment on the significance of water in the lives of the people as we observe below:

A number of older men accompanied them and also watched, slightly apart from them. The Zulus say they like a person to nauka manzi ('to smell of water') and Shaka himself was one of the greatest exponents of this idea. In their natural state they were one of the cleanest races, free from all vermin and body odours —  
(P.99)

Ritter's tendency to focus on the historical significance of events comes out clearly here. For instance the pedigree of the idea of bathing is traced to Shaka, who is portrayed as a proponent of the idea. This is a positive nature symbol in the context of a code on societal protocol which 19th century Zulu society had come to uphold.

We therefore observe a common focus and interpretation of water or river Symbolism in the works under study. From the quotation above we receive an insight into the health



here becomes symbolic of the people's hopes and aspirations and vividly demonstrates the nature of political change and co-ordination of the political system in 19th century South Africa.

Ritter's Shaka Zulu (1955) reveals the centrality of the moon in the people's lives. Thus Ritter writes:

my son I am glad you have come, for very soon now I will goduka (go home). The amadiozi (ancestral spirits) have given a clear vision and I can see you as a mighty tree which, with its branches, will cover the whole country which we know and many moons journey beyond\_\_ (P.104)

The 'mighty tree' is an image of a towering and indestructible force. This reminds one of the Mfecane and the exciting changes which it effected in the Southern African region. The moon in this context is a guide for the establishment of physical distance for the people, and it also plays a vital role in their spiritual World view. Here we have a mixture of positive and negative symbols. The moon, for one, is presented as a guide, while the tree symbolizes power and tyrannical strength.

The use of the Sun is another symbol employed by these authors. Mofolo uses this symbol in a very poignant fashion in Chaka (1931) when he writes:

When the Sun rose that day there was no tribe that surpassed Zwide's in powers or numbers. When it set, this mighty tribe had been wiped off the face of the earth and their villages were empty ruins\_\_ (P.116)

The passage is richly illuminative of the conquering power of Chaka in comparison to the fading strength of Zwibe. The focus on the military activities of the period is important for Mofolo who belonged to the Sotho, one of the groups affected by Shaka's military sway during the period<sup>2</sup>. In sum, the sun becomes graphically illustrative of the changing political climate of the time in question.

In Haggard's Nada The Lily (1958) there is constant reference to the sun by the author. He writes:

My name is Chaka, son of Senzangakona, and my people are called the Amazulu\_\_\_ I am little today, and my people are a small people. But my head will be lost in the clouds; you will look up and you shall not see it. My face will blind you; it will be bright like the sun\_\_\_ (P.25)

In the same novel Haggard also writes:

And he laughed 'ou! he is wise, he is great, his justice is bright and terrible like the sun. (P.45)

Here negative nature symbols are employed, and these are very good references for capturing the turbulence and violence of the Mfecane period. The reference to the sun also links us to the earlier stated tradition of employing the planets as symbols of society by the respective authors.

The sun is also symbolic of happiness and peace as we see in this quotation in Ritter's Shaka Zulu (1955)







a felled tree, he slowly toppled over backwards and crashed rigidly to the ground, thus even in his death striking awe into the three assassins. (P.370)

It is possible to identify a growth or metamorphosis in the meaning and significance of the tree symbol in the novel. We see the tree as a symbol of caution, of mortality and betrayal. This is a negative symbol and can illustrate a segment of the political assassinations, intrigues, and scheming which were all part of the political atmosphere in South Africa of the 19th century.

In Nada The Lily (1958) we encounter the tree again, although this is done rather briefly. It is significant to the extent that it reveals Shaka as an insurmountable force that comforts the needy. Haggard writes:

But Baleka and I loved each other for we  
were both lonely and she clung to me like  
a creeper to the only tree in a plain\_\_\_\_  
(P.63)

The tree in the reference here becomes symbolic of love and support, and is typical of Romance literature which tends, to incorporate a narration about lovers or friends struggling in lonely places. In sum, all three novelists view the tree as an essential symbol in the Zulu world view and experience. This explains the preponderance of this symbol in the novels, therefore. The tree is symbolic of Shaka's political ambitions, his declining political power, and the way power can consume and destroy the leadership of the nation.<sup>4</sup>



this instance Mofolo has made some borrowings from Zulu oral narratives. The characters described seem to belong to the turf of oral tales. Thus an element of the Zulu culture might have been communicated here. The reference to 'animal', 'deceit' and 'treachery' establishes the symbol as a negative one. In sum the depiction of Ndlebe and Malunga falls very handsomely into the turf of Romance literature.

The next difference between Mofolo and the other authors studied lies in his evocation of the supernatural. This is reflected in his reference to the sky as quoted below:

The witchdoctor took his stick and pointed to the sky above and said 'Ngivela kudule' ('I come from far away') And he was silent for a long while, looking upwards to the sky where he had pointed\_\_\_ (P.46)

The reference to coming from 'far away' and the gesticulation upwards assists in defining the metaphysics of the novel as a whole. The reference 'upwards' has always been a classical indication of the sky as abode of the gods or spirits, and this defines the witchdoctor as a vital and integral part of Zulu society.

Haggard's Nada The Lily (1958) employs nature symbols, sometimes in a fairly euphemistic fashion as we observe here:

Had chaka lived he would have been as old as I. None are living whom I knew as a boy I

am so old that I must hasten. The grass withers and the winter comes. Yes, while I speak the winter nips my heart, and well, I am ready to sleep in the cold, and perhaps I shall wake again in the spring \_\_\_ (P.22)

The idiom of winter and spring captures man's inevitable mortality. The opening 'had chaka lived', graphically captures the fact of political assassinations which characterised the turbulent 19th century South Africa<sup>6</sup>

Again, Haggard makes very individual points that characterise his work when he writes:

Good, Slaughterer! I see the gardens and I hear the lowing of cattle, but what of the flower? Where is this flower you went so far to dig in swazi soil? was it a lily- bloom perchance?\_\_\_ (P.242)

The 'flower' in the context refers to Nada the lily, and the figurative use of language operates in the specific context of a man's profound love for a woman. Nada is symbolic of the white civilization and the search for her in the novel might be a metaphorical rendering of Haggard's thesis on the essential superiority of white civilization. The poetry contained in the citation above is also illustrative of the beauty of the dialogue often employed by the Zulu people. The example above therefore captures an important cultural detail of 19th century South African society.

Another fact which differentiates Haggard from Mofolo and Ritter, is the way Haggard allies human actions with

nature. Thus he writes:

The ground lay thus: On a long low hill in front of our impi were massed the regiments of Zwide; there were seventeen of them; The earth was black with their numbers; their plumes filled the air like snow\_\_\_ There was the breast of spears, there were the horns of spears, they were numberless as the stars, and like the stars they shone \_\_\_ (P.48)

The dynamic use of the imagination here is an essential feature of the Romance tradition in literature. Warfare and the presence of a well supplied and majestic army is shown to be a feature of 19th century South African society. The reference to cattle as captured in 'breast' and 'horns' indicates the centrality of cattle in the life of the people. These were used for marriages as dowry, and also to ransom warriors captured in war. The opening 'The ground lay thus' is illustrative of the initial description of the countryside now in the control of the 'Amaboona' which Haggard refers to earlier in the novel.

Haggard also deploys nature as the very symbol of human society. He writes:

The world is a thorny wilderness, my daughter and its thorns are watered with a rain of blood, and we wander in our wretchedness like lost travellers in a mist, nor do I know why our feet are set upon this wandering\_\_\_ (P.86)

This is a negative nature symbol and it captures the tensions, conflicts and uncertainties of the period. 'Thorny wilderness' 'mist' and 'rain of blood' evolve a

complex and bitter experience and eminently illustrates the Mfecane and related events.

Unlike the other authors studied, Ritter establishes Shaka's origins strictly in relation to nature when he writes:

'Impossible' said he, 'go back home and inform them that the girl is but harbouring I-Shaka (an intestinal beetle held both then and now to be a common cause of the suppression of menses)\_\_\_ (P.26)

This is a negative symbol and it is suggestive of the level of medical enquiry in 19th century Zulu society. It is startling to observe how nature influences Shaka every inch of his life. Like his prototype, the beetle, Shaka later becomes the political beetle steadily eating through the socio-economic garment of the nation.

The war formation is moulded after forms of nature. For instance the name 'regiment of the Bees' and the 'Testudo Formation' as captured in the quotation below:

Nothing but this Testudo formation would have permitted the Zulu column to pass through this ordeal in strength. On swept the millipede at a steady walking pace, regardless of the showers of the variegated missiles\_\_\_ (P.244)

In the quotation we have evidence of the military genius of Shaka, and the endless beneficial resource which nature plays in Zulu society. The 'Testudo formation' is an excellent military device borne out of the war mood and the

endless conflicts, which defined the era in question'.

The manner in which riddles are deployed marks Ritter as quite distinct from either Haggard or Mofolo. He writes:

Once more Nobela propounded a riddle;  
 What is it which grows in the banks of  
 rivers and swamps with a flower like a  
 plume: When it is yet a small plant  
 what do you call it? She obviously  
 meant a reed, the Zulu word for what is  
 Umhlangana (P. 208)

This process of clever selection of guilty persons appears to have been a feature of Zulu life of the 19th century. This is a negative symbol from nature essentially because all guilty persons are subsequently put to death. Its reference to 'banks of rivers and swamps' serves as a reminder of Shaka's public bath which is referred to earlier in the novel.

The next symbol Ritter employs is one which relates to the beginning of the annual Zulu calendar. He writes:

The Zulu calendar was based on the flowering  
 of the undubu tree and was consequently self-  
 rectifying, since if the year was forward  
 the tree flowered early, if backward then  
 the flowering was late\_\_\_ (P.290)

The quotation identifies the close relationship that exists between the Zulus and nature. The illustration indicates the protocol and the dynamic that has always defined pre-industrial societies. We learn quite a lot here about the Zulu calendar of the 19th century.

The next set of symbols in the novel are those that



are called social symbols. These are aspects of a people's culture which a people consider valid and relevant to their existence. It is possible to identify similarities, and differences in the general attitude of these authors to social symbols. These contrasting perspectives towards social symbols highlight many details relating to 19th century South Africa.

In Haggard's Nada The Lily (1958) we observe one reference which is similarly made by both Mofolo and Ritter. Haggard writes:

"Hail, Inkosazana - y - Zulu, Hail, Queen of the Heaven! Now the figure of the glorious woman held a rod in either hand and the rod in her right hand was white and of ivory, and the rod in her left hand was black and of ebony\_\_\_ (P. 99)

Haggard writes in the Romance tradition and the reference to the 'Queen of Heaven' is very significant. The reference is the sort of material upon which Romance novels are established. The subsequent reference to the wolf-brethren also falls within this tradition of Romance in the novel also. The idea of a Queen of Heaven and regular visitations by this being to mankind is central to Zulu cosmology. We therefore learn much of Zulu religious thought as obtained in the 19th century, from this positive portrait of the Queen of Heaven.

In Chaka (1931) we observe a similar reference made where the author writes:

writes:

On the other hand those whom Nandi, the Ndlovukazi (The female Elephant, a courtesy titled conferred on Queens in a Ngoni state) smiles upon shall grow fat in my shadow\_\_ (P.77)

The position of Queen, or, in this case, Queen Mother, is a very powerful one in Ngoni society, and the illustration makes this manifest. This is a positive social symbol which signifies that Patriarchal Zulu society also had its limits. Shaka's emotional swing upon the passing of his mother confirms this point. The concession to Nandi above, weakens the argument that Shaka was a tyrant and a despot. Ntombazi can also be mentioned in this present context also, since, owing to the respect her son Zwide has for her, she is allowed to keep the skulls of chieftains that her son defeats in battle.

In their attitude to names, these authors demonstrate a similar position towards social symbols. Names are significant in Zulu and other African communities, and they are related to a definition of one's essence and entire personality. Mofolo writes:

After Chaka had changed the name of his clan and chose instead the beautiful name of Zulu (that is, Heaven), he desired to obtain also a form of greeting that would suit his new clan name, and that would sound well in the ears of all\_\_ (P. 138)

There is a transcendental overtone in the name Zulu (Heaven), and the origins of the name are immediately traced to Shaka, who united many people to become the Zulu nation. This approach by Mofolo accords strongly with the historical element which is neatly married into the novel.

In Nada The Lily (1958) Haggard writes:

\_\_\_ my name is Chaka, son of senzangakona,  
and my people are called the Amazulu\_\_\_  
(P.25)

Perhaps a trifle much more analytical than Mofolo, Haggard links Chaka, first with Senzangakona before the linkage with the Zulu nation is made. Later in the text we also read!

'\_\_\_we are the children of Makedama' they  
answered\_\_\_ P.44)

The tendency to go to the actual pedigree of individuals are very central concerns in these texts.

Ritter also makes some comment on the origin of names which we note in the following illustration:

As soon as the Pleiades (Isi Limela, from Lima to dig) appeared in the Zulu morning sky preparations for digging, or rather hoeing (and, by extension, nowadays, ploughing) were made\_\_\_(P.290)

The point is lucidly made in the above illustrations that names are important and even sacred in Zulu society.

It is therefore possible to gauge the cultural mood of the 19th century in this context, given the illustrations above. There are positive social symbols as they all help to define personalities and situate them in a living cultural context.

Many differences abound in terms of the particular ways in which these authors approach social symbols. We can use Mofolo to illustrate this point where he writes:

The lion was carried without being skinned to Senzangakona at Nobamba, and he sent it to Dingiswayo who was his chief now that Jobe was dead, according to the law which says: a beast of prey must be eaten at the chief's village\_\_\_ (P.22)

Mofolo, writing a historical romance naturally places emphasis on the laws, protocol and traditions that govern 19th century Zulu society. The fact that Shaka, a mere youth at the time, was able to overcome the lion adds to the atmosphere of wonder and fantasy in the novel. It is significant that Shaka increasingly becomes more like a Lion as his quest for power and supremacy grows.

From the illustration above, we get an insight into the basis for order in the society during the days of the Mfecane. The foundation for law and order is rooted in an endless respect for due protocol in all circumstances.

In a later illustration, Mofolo provides information on other aspects of procedure in 19th century Zulu society. He writes:

"May the heavens bless the king! " I said,  
according to custom" (P.54)

The Zulu are the 'people of Heaven', and the prayer or wish here is a powerful statement indeed. The recourse to Heaven or gods, or even the sky is a recurring feature in all Romance novels. The reference here is also evocative of the Queen of Heaven, treated above.

Ritter's singular treatment of social symbols can be seen in his perspective on the kraal in the quotation below:

The single homestead, popularly called kraal, was the basic unit of the old Zulu state, a microcosm of the whole clan system. For the Zulu clan was but the multiplication of minor families thrown off from a common ancestral source, still represented in the person of the reigning chieftain\_\_\_ (P.16)

This is a positive social symbol and it focuses on the kraal as a significant feature of society which embodies so much of the culture and hopes of the people. The description of the kraal is also fairly reminiscent of Ritter's earlier description of the landscape in his novel. We can thus proffer the view that the kraal is the country in microcosm. This indicates its centrality in the people's lives, and it is significant that the king's kraal becomes an essential reference point for the entire citizenry. The king's kraal, as it were, is the beacon around which the society revolves.

More singular deployment of facts are still found in

Ritter. For instance we see this where he writes:-

"Barking pups are silenced with a  
switch! War was accordingly declared  
in the easy-going old-fashioned way\_\_\_\_  
(P.89)

This is a negative social symbol and demonstrates the fact that the war atmosphere engenders an entire galaxy of witty idioms which make war or foster peace.

This negative symbol also builds upon this argument:

Ngoza summoned to him one Sigwegwe, a very bold man, and ordered him: Go to Shaka and tell him to make ready his spears. And as a sign take a reed and set it up before him'\_\_\_\_ The purport of the sign was that even the bending reed could stand up before the king of the Zulus. It was an insulting declaration of war. (P.235)

The war mood of the Mfecane moulds a system of vocabulary which often operates euphemistically. This element plays a role in vividly delineating 19th century conditions in the novel.

In the works studied, the authors manifest a common bias towards the Romance tradition, and this is a dominant tendency. In terms of nature symbolism, it is possible to aver that there are transcendental influences behind Nature. This is evident when elements of nature are depicted as omens or heralds of certain visitations upon the human community. On other occasions, nature is seen as being irretractably woven into human activity. For instance

it is significant for the commencement of the agricultural year. Social Symbolism is located in the traditions and customs of the people. Such Symbolism often finds expression in idiomatic coinages. Sometimes Nature and social symbols are married together and it is difficult to establish a lucid distinction between both. Through these works we achieve an interesting picture of South Africa in the hour of the Mfecane, and the tensions and passions of the period.

FOOTNOTES

1. The rise to prominence of Shaka the Zulu, and the commencement of the Mfecane are contemporaneous events. J.D. Omer - Cooper THE ZULU AFTERMATH, London: Longman Group limited, 1966. p. 33. D. Denoon, SOUTHERN AFRICA SINCE 1800. London: Longman Group Limited, 1972, P.17.
2. W.R. Katz. RIDER HAGGARD AND THE FICTION OF EMPIRE Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1987 P. 30.
3. A Gerard, FOUR AFRICAN LITERATURES, Berkeley: University of California: Press, 1971, P. 116.
4. This is a very instructive comment on the state of political affairs in the area under study during the 19th century.
5. C. Ikonne, 'Purpose versus Plot: The Double vision of Thomas Mofolo's narrator' in ASPECTS OF SOUTH AFRICAN WRITING (Editor) Heywood, London: 1976. P. 54.
6. Dingiswayo was deceived by Zwide and murdered in a similar fashion. This reference also covers the assassination of Shaka by his brother.
7. The Testudo formation is eloquent testimony to the war mentality and the resultant state of military alertness which defined South Africa of the 19th century.



## Chapter Three

### THE COLONIAL INTRUSION

This chapter provides a comparative analysis of King Solomon's Mines (1882) Allan Quatermain (1956) both by H. Rider Haggard, and Mhudi (1978) by Sol. T. Plaatje. The two novels by Haggard involve journeys to Africa by the European characters and the 'amazing' discoveries made.<sup>1</sup> Both works are written in the Romance tradition operating within the mode of the adventure novel. Plaatje's Mhudi (1978) is a historical novel which elaborates on the activities of Mzilikazi, king of the Matebeles, in relation to African and European social groups in the region. The novel has a dominant love theme, and bears evidence of Romance elements also.

The chapter will analyse the similarities and differences evident in the way the selected authors present Nature and Social symbols. How these symbols reflect social conditions in 19th century South Africa will also be considered. The symbols will link up with the thrust of this chapter which considers the beginnings of the colonial intrusion in the South African area.<sup>2</sup> A careful reading of the works reveals the following similarities in each authors use of Nature symbols: First, this is seen in the description of locations (environment), the portrait of

trees, the moon, the lily, the Romantic atmosphere in the works, the reference to stars, and the way nature approximates human feelings and tendencies. The differences emanate from those symbols which are, particularly, characteristic of individual authors. For instance the romantic portrait of nature, the reference to stalactites, and the brief but powerful contrasts employed by these authors are examples of this.

The keen attention given to the description of the landscape by these authors is seen where in Mhudi (1978) Plaatje writes:

Emerging from my limited outlook of many days in the ravine, where only the music of the birds could reach my ears, the sight of the extensive landscape was like being born afresh. The succession of woods, and clearings, depressions, and rising ground with now and then the gambols of a frisky troop of gnu among the distant trees where the woods were less dense, refreshed me, for I had never seen the world to such perfection ... (p.43)

The perfect world evoked here is a natural outcome of the characters relative freedom from the activities of Mzilikazi's plundering army. The loving and tender attitude towards nature arises because the author is striving to contrast the land as it was in the past before the Boer transformation of the landscape<sup>3</sup>. The delineation of the landscape in the novel can therefore be linked up with historical changes in the region.

In Allan Quatermain (1956) Haggard presents a similar portrait of the environment where he writes:

In every direction the bush rolled away in great billows for miles and miles as far as the glass would show, only here and there broken by the brighter green patches of cultivation, or by the glittering surface of lakes... (p.6)

In the quotation the environment is presented in fairly idyllic terms in which the African dwelled and flourished, moulding a civilisation, long before European commercial interest and new technological initiatives intervened to tamper with the environment<sup>4</sup>. In his usual manner Haggard is clearly introducing a fertile land that is open to exploitation to European society. The urge to satisfy the imperial instinct characterises much of Haggard's writing<sup>5</sup>. The reference to the lake is a pre-figuration of the frightening lake of fire.

In King Solomon's Mines (1982), Haggard makes another description of an environment where he writes:

It is a lovely coast all along from East London, with its red sandhills and wide sweeps of vivid green, dotted here and there with Kaffir Kraals, and bordered by a ribbon of white surf which sprouts up in pillars of foam where it hits the rocks ... (p.32).

On the surface we are presented with a rich and fertile environment that is most suitable for colonial conquest and exploitation. However, select words like 'Kraals', 'white surf' and 'Pillars of foam' are indicative

of growing tensions and rivalries which presuppose an eventual conflict. Thus in nature we are given a picture of 19th century South African life in the hour of colonial intrusion. In this context we observe the nature of environmental change owing to the foreign intrusion. It is significant to note that Twala's kingdom manifests so much of the African pristine architectural system, and contrasts the description as above. This is a negative nature symbol.

Another nature symbol common to these authors is that of the tree. In Mhudi (1978) Plaatje writes:

Ra-Thaga, in order not to be attacked by wild animals, was wont to sleep in the top branches of some large tree where he would weave a hammock of ramblers and ropes of inner barks, tying it up with twigs ... (P.34).

This is a positive nature symbol which is suggestive of security, and this contrasts the tensions wrought by the political leaders of the time. That there were conflicts and tribulations long before the colonial intrusion is a significant historiographical point for it shows that the people, at one level, were attempting to resolve their inner political conflict and tensions. The comfort that nature affords here is eloquently preceded by Mhudi's experience in the forest as cited above.

In Haggard's Allan Quatermain (1956) the author writes:

In the centre of this square thus formed

was, perhaps, the most remarkable object we had yet seen in this charming place, and that was a single tree of the conifer tribe, varieties of which grow freely on the highlands of this part of Africa ... (p. 46).

Haggard's emphasis here is the wealth and the physical heritage in Africa that European society could put to good purpose. This is therefore a negative social symbol. It is important to note that the towering mass of Umslopagaas is fairly reminiscent of this tree.

In King Solomon's Mines (1982) Haggard makes a second reference to the tree again, and the reference occurs as part of a dream. He writes:

I had been dreaming that I was bathing in a running stream, with green banks and streams upon them, and I awoke to find myself in that arid wilderness ... (P. 71).

The dream in context is indicative of ideas preponderant in 19th century Europe about the wealth and splendour of Africa. Thus the colonisers journey to Africa was simply an effort at confirming these ideas. The dream also plays a role in locating the novel within the tradition of Romance.

The authors are similarly romantic about nature. In Mhudi (1978) Plaatje would write:

A gentle breeze was blowing with a rustle over the grass tops; the waves of the mimosa and wag-n-bietjie bushes and the silvery waves of the yellow-wood tree waved like fans in the sway of the wind; it was bracing to find all this life in the air in spite of

colonial interest.

In Allan Quatermain (1956). Haggard comments thus on nature:

I longed once more to throw myself into the arms of Nature. Not the Nature which you know, the nature that waves in well kept woods and smiles out in corn fields, but Nature as she was in the age when creation was complete, undefiled ... (p.17).

The decay in European civilisation and society impels Allan Quatermain to gravitate towards Africa. His attitude is rather escapist.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Africa is still depicted as a healthy and wealthier alternative to European society. This is a positive nature symbol which provides further insight on European perspectives towards Africa.

In King Solomon's Mines (1982) Haggard develops further the romantic portrait of nature where he writes:

The brooks of which the banks were clothed with dense masses of the gigantic species of maidenhair fern interspersed with feathery tufts of wild asparagus, babbled away merrily at our side, the soft air murmured through the leaves of the silver trees, doves cooed around and bright winged birds flashed like living gems from bough to bough. It was like paradise ... (p.91).

The landscape is painted elegantly to justify later colonial conquest, specifically in term of the mineral wealth that obtains in the region. This nature symbol appears on the surface to be positive, but its general import is to highlight the mineral wealth of the region for subsequent exploitation. Thus, the symbol has both

negative and positive overtones.. In sum therefore, the three novelists by romanticising nature have collectively illustrated the mineral wealth of South Africa. In the case of Haggard the picture of south African society delineated, reveals its wealth to the colonial interest. For Plaatje, the romantic moulding of nature establishes the psychological mood of the character. The African characters depicted in the three novels are inextricably bound up with nature. Umslopogaas, who is often half-naked, with his endless nature idioms is an eloquent testimony to this fact. Mhudi, and Ra-Thaga are other examples also.

The authors exhibit a similar attitude to the stars. In Mhudi (1978) Plaatje writes:

She marvelled at the stars and at their numbers; she did not seem to have noticed that there were so many before. While she admired the greater and lesser brilliancy of each planet, she was baffled to find that what looked like vacant spaces between the constellations proved on closer scrutiny to be no spaces at all but further clusters of numerous stars ... (p.75).

Mhudi's interest in the stars would seem to emerge from the bitterness she experienced on account of the Matabele attack. She subsequently develops a strong interest in the stars which have a calming and soothing effect upon her. One can argue that Plaatje's interest in the effect of these wars on the individual might be part of

emphasis on man's mortality. It forms an excellent pattern with the reference to stars employed in the two novels above.

In King Solomon's Mines (1882) Haggard develops further the African understanding of the stars as part of their cultural world view. He writes:

Tell me, O white men, who are wise, who know the secrets of the world, and the world of stars, who flash their words from afar without a voice ... (p.59).

The quotation strives to establish European superiority over the African. Words like 'wise', and 'secrets' confirm this point. Haggard's ambition is to confirm and establish European ascendancy over the African, and this was a typical British/European 19th century opinion.

The African traditional religion gives a central position to the stars and this partly explains why the African characters give it so much reverence. The stars highlight the alienation engendered by the Mfecane, and also the stars bode good or evil for the society.

Closely allied to the stars is the way these authors manifest an identical fashion in the way they present the moon in their novels. In Mhudi (1978) Plaatje writes:

The moon rose above the hills, and appeared like a huge ruddy ball of fire above the tree tops. As she cleaved her way upwards



and mounted higher and higher up the skies, she laid aside her orange glow and assumed a silvery hue (P.56).

The presentation of the moon here contrasts sharply with the eclipse which occurs later in the text. The steady and radiant rise of the moon gradually parallels the increasing tempo and dynamism of social events in South Africa which by the novels close results in a much more concretised Boer presence in South Africa.

In Allan Quatermain (1956) Haggard writes:

The white light of the moon peering in beneath the lofty boughs threw a wild glamour over the scene, while the melancholy souging of the night wind passing through the millions of pine needles overhead added a sadness of its own to what was already a sufficiently tragic occasion ... (P.75).

Nature combines here to reveal the sombre tone of the 19th century South African society.

In King Solomon's Mines (1982) Haggard expands further on this portrayal of the moon. He writes,

and the moon poured her light upon the forest of their raised spears, upon their majestic forms, waving plumes and the harmonious shading of their various coloured shields ... (p.130).

The military formation here is established in a fairly romantic order, under the benign influence of the moon.

The reference to the lily is a common meeting ground in the novels under comparison. In Mhudi (1978) Plaatje

writes.

Half-a-crown may be permitted to digress, and describe the beauty and virtues of one of king Mzilikazi's wives - the lily of his harem, by name Umnandi, the sweet one.. (p.91).

The lily itself is a white flower, and in the context of South African writing, it may refer to white culture or civilisation. Why Plaatje, an African writer should do this remains a bit of a puzzle, although the missionary influence might have conditioned his thoughts in this respect. Umnandi also echoes Mhudi and Ra-Thaga's love for her.

In Allan Quatermain (1956) Haggard writes:

I asked her if she had ever seen or heard of the 'Goya' lily, which central African explorers have told me they have occasionally met with and whose loveliness has filled them with astonishment ... Looking at it for the first time I well remember that I realised how even in a flower there dwells something of the majesty of his maker ... (p.53).

This quotation defines the novel as belonging to the era of the discovery of the African interior or the initial hour of colonial intrusion which was populated by missionaries and travellers of different persuasions. The lily can be seen as being representative of the entire mineral wealth of the African people's and society. Thus there emerges the legend of the lily which is a summary of all that is great and amazing in Africa. In Haggard's

perspective, 'white' implies European intellectual, technological and spiritual superiority.<sup>8</sup> The fact that Flossie is also referred to as a lily concludes this point.

In King Solomon's Mines (1982) Haggard introduces another aspect of the lily as a nature symbol. This is seen here:

in the place of the grim ranks of serried warriors were company of kukuana girls, not overdressed, so far as clothing went, but each crowned with a wreath of flowers, and holding a palm leaf and a tall white lily (the arum) in the other ... (p. 143).

The lily is a symbol of joy therefore, and it is used to accompany ceremonies which are celebratory. Thus the cultural habits of 19th century society is captured in this brief quotation. In the works therefore, the lily is symbolic of joy, and also refers to European cultural and technological superiority.

Another similarity between these authors is the way in which nature is made to parallel human emotions or to capture the state of the human mind. We see this in Mhudi (1978)

In the midst of this vision I was awakened by the cooing of the friendly doves, and the coo-coor-r-ro of the bush pigeons. I found myself in a strange country and different landscape from the land I travelled through at sunset the day before. The korhaan at the bottom of nearly every glass knoll made

the morning lively with their friendly cackling while the butcher-birds, and other warblers also sang or whistled in a variety of dialects - my only living friends were the turtle doves whose language I thought I could also understand. I think that if this solitude had been prolonged for another month I should have been able to sing their songs and learned to converse with them ... (p. 48).

Here we have the quintessential Romance tradition which tends to establish the wonderful and the fascinating out of the ordinary, and this is what Plaatje makes of nature here. The movement to a fresh and new landscape allows the character the chance to explore the beauties and revel in the undistorted harmonies of the war-free environment. The romantic portrait forms a pattern or sequence with similar portraits of nature earlier presented.

In Haggard's Allan Quatermain (1956) nature is portrayed in a fashion identical with Plaatje's:

The quiet dawn began to throw her everwidening mantle over plain and forest and river ... mighty kenia wrapped in the silence of eternal snows, looked out across the earth, till presently a beam from the unrisen sun hit upon this heaven-kissing crest and purpled it with blood ... (p.89).

'Purpled with blood' presupposes the violence and blood shed that dominate the novel much later. The serene environment with its potential wealth is reminiscent of

Africa on the eve of colonial intrusion and violence.

In King Solomon's Mines (1982) Haggard makes an elaboration on nature which is made to parallel his characters joy:

To the left stretched a vast expanse of rich, undulating veldt or grassland, on which we could just make out countless herds of game or cattle ... The landscape lay before us like a map, in which rivers flashed like silver snakes and Alp-like peaks crowned with wildly twisted snow wreaths rose in solemn grandeur, whilst over all was the glad sunlight and the wide breadth of Nature's happy life ... (p. 86).

A very delightful portrait of nature is presented here, although this portrait is weakened by the sombre reference to 'silver snakes'. This 'rich, undulating veldt' is later to be transformed by colonial presence, a presence which might be symbolised by the silver-snake. Thus by using nature in similar ways, these authors have, wittingly or unwittingly, established a link with the exploitative capacity of the metropole in the novel.

The authors under consideration employ nature symbols in ways, that are substantially different. An instance is the occasion when Haggard presents the symbol of the mountains of the moon in King Solomon's Mines (1982). Haggard writes:

The mountains standing thus, like the pillars of a gigantic gateway, are shaped exactly like a woman's breast. Their bases swelled gently up from the plain, looking at that distance perfectly round and smooth,

and on the top of each was a vast round hillock covered with snow exactly corresponding to the nipple on the female breast ... (p.73).

The symbol is a powerful and dynamic use of the natural environment. The breast is symbolic of the potential wealth of the region. The region is allied with a woman who has potential to produce and reproduce vast amounts of wealth. Haggard's symbol has become the definitive picture of European attitudes to Africa and Africans.

The employment of the stalactites in King Solomon's Mines (1882) is a unique marshalling of symbolism by Haggard. The stalactite is made to fall over the dead kings, and it is a preservative or acts in the fashion of a preservative. The fact that the stalactite keeps the corpses in a stagnant or permanent form relates to the imperialist theses on the stagnant backwardness of Africa. Thus, the western society with its spiritual and technological advancement will need to intervene to cast off the cloak of stagnant and slow progress. The strangeness of the stalactites also finds a partner in the unusual eclipse which is employed to good effect in the novel.

In Mhudi (1878) we see how the natural environment is self-sufficient in itself. Both Ra-Thaga and Mhudi are able to feed quite satisfyingly from the bounties of

nature. Plaatje writes:

There is the mothananyane shrub, I will spin a stick against its limb and start a spark while you keep watch ... (p. 37).

The portrait here is one of a perfect and idyllic world which contrasts vividly with the arrival of the Boers which comes later in the text. The spark is reminiscent of the fires that wrecked the Barolong villages earlier on, and pre-figures the fires that emerge from the guns of the Boers.

In Mhudi (1978) Plaatje writes:

I overheard today the great one telling sombebe that Dingana, king of all the Zulus was no more; and if great trees like those crumble down over their own shoots, what must become of shallow sprouts like the Matabele --- strangers in a strange land ... (P. 149).

It is only Plaatje who embarks upon this very special type of close comparison between man and nature. We achieve insight into the Zulu belief in the sacred omnipotence of kings, and the transience of the lives of the subjects.

A further difference in the use of nature symbols, is seen in the following quotation by Haggard in Allan Quatermain (1956).

I think I have said somewhere of her that she reminded me of the sea on a calm day, having the same aspect of sleeping power about her. (P.237).

This comparison with the sea evokes a reference to the frightful sea upon which they coursed on their way to Zuvendis.

Social symbols are deployed in similar ways by these authors. In Mhudi (1978) a special emphasis is made on cattle breeding and Platje writes:

Cattle breeding was the rich man's calling and hunting was a national enterprise. Their cattle which carried enormous horns ran almost wild and multiplied as prolifically as the wild animals of the day ... (p.25).

Cattle breeding was a prerogative of the rich, and the entire activity is couched once more in lovely colours. These conditions thrive healthily and serve as a fair contrast to later historical accounts where mention is made of the vast cattle which plundering Boers captured from the African peoples. Cattle is central to African life and the illustration reflects a value that was to be altered later in the wake of the establishment of colonial power. Much later guns become the symbol of position, prestige and power.

Haggard operating in a fairly identical manner in Allan Quatermain (1956) writes:

That gun, the Boer I bought it from many years ago, told me had been used by his



father at the battle of Blood river, just after Dingaan swept into Natal and slaughtered six hundred men, women and children, so that the Boers named the place where they cried 'weenen', or the 'place of weeping. ... (P.73).

The gun is symbolic of white power and the threat of extension, and it is highly illustrative of social relations for the time. The symbol of the guns also anticipates the guns used later on in the conflict with the Masai.

In another illustration Plaatje writes:

"Dumela (good day) my sister' he said, I am Ra-Thaga, the son of Notto. I belonged to the Sehuba section of the Barolong at kunana, the burnt city ... "my name is Mhudi', replied the girl,' my people belonged to the Kgoro clan ... (p. 36).

All three writers exhibit a common focus on norms and social codes which guide behaviour and attitudes among individuals in the society. In the above quotation the system of greeting and introduction is the primary emphasis. It reflects social protocol among the African communities. This again contrasts with the speech pattern followed by the European characters.

The authors manifest a common attitude to social symbols in the context of their respective attitudes to dress patterns, preference for male children and even the cleaning of weapons.

In King Solomon's Mines (1982) Haggard writes:

he was a pure bred Zulu. He came out with his thin aristocratic looking hand placed before his face to hide a yawn, so I could only see that he was a 'keshla' or ringed man, and that he had a great three-cornered hole in his forehead....  
(P.50).

'great three cornered hole' establishes the atmosphere for mystery in which the European held the African or Africa. The 'keshla' is symbolic of a certain position or standing in the African community. The description of Sir Henry with his great height and broad span approximated the European conception of a well bred and refined gentleman. Thus the 'keshla' represents one of the criteria for establishing status within the South African community.

In Mhudi (1978) Plaatje later writes:

These reproaches she bore with fortitude, but the king's waning interest, in addition to their jeers, was more than she could stand, Umnandi would willingly have given up her beauty and stately mien and forgotten her skill in cookery, in return for the birth of a baby boy as a present to her husband and his people ... (p. 92).

19th century Barolong society was one which was established on patriarchal lines and this is clearly established in the quotation. Quite clearly the absence of a male child becomes the basis for conflicts in the home. It is interesting to observe how South African society of the 19th century accorded a privileged status to women

especially as Queens or Queen mothers. Nandi, Shaka's mother is a case in point.

Related social symbolism is captured in Allan Quatermain (1956) where Haggard writes:

We then returned to the verandah, where we found Umslopogass taking advantage of this favourable opportunity to clean all the rifles thoroughly. This was the only work that he ever did or was asked to do for as a Zulu chief it was beneath his dignity to work with his hands, but such as it was he did it very well ... (p. 51).

The social code among the Zulus in relation to their chiefs of the period is vividly borne out here. A corollary to this are the privileges which Nyleptha and Sorais enjoy as Queens of the Zu-vendis. Haggard is saying that European and African civilisations operate similarly in these respects.

Further in Allan Quatermain (1956) the author writes:

Afraid? Oh no! they never interfere with me, I think they believe that I am 'Ngai' (of the Divinity) because I am so white and have fair hair. And look here", and driving her little hand into the bodice of her dress she produced a double-barrelled nickel-plated Derringer ... (p.55).

Haggard's vision on Africa is allied to the belief that western civilisation symbolises the very acme of perfection and superiority. It is therefore unsurprising to find Flossie holding forth on her 'whiteness, or that the novel is moulded such that the African characters view



The regular symbolism of the moon is distorted, and this marks the essential character of the colonial intrusion.

In Haggard's novels, there is the dominance of the white colour which also translates into white characters and their superior ambitions and qualities. The continued focus is on a civilising group of Europeans coming into contact with a degenerate African Society. Umslopogaas is the very epitome of this inferior status. Plaatje's novel serves as a sort of balance to Haggard's bias. Plaatje demonstrates that the African had a culture and a civilisation, and were, indeed, far from degenerate by the time the European power arrived. Through a deft deployment of Nature and social symbols, the authors reveal the slow but steady pattern of colonial intervention around South Africa during the 19th century.

FOOTNOTES

1. W. R. Katz, RIDER HAGGARD AND THE FICTION OF EMPIRE Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 31.
2. The beginnings of the intrusion involve mental speculation in Europe about the continent, the making of physical journeys to Africa, and the usual presumptions that guide these journeys. There is also the shock involved when the travellers enter Africa, and observe realities on the ground. The novels assessed demonstrate these themes in one way or the other.
3. This is allied to Plaatje's interest in the history of the Southern African region.
4. Haggard makes the point unconsciously though. His actual motive is to justify imperialism.
5. P. Brantlinger, RULE OF DARKNESS, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988, P. 189.
6. A. Gerald, FOUR AFRICAN LITERATURES Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
7. But then Africa is viewed as a repository of a rich horde of treasures and minerals. This was an essential imperial instinct of the 19th century.

## Chapter Four

### Settler Life and Race Tensions

Sarah Gertrude Millin's God's Stepchildren (1927) and Olive Schreiner's The Story Of An African Farm (1976) are the last two novels to be considered in this study. Both are female writers and they write in the Romance mode, although it is possible to identify some veins of the realist school in their writing<sup>1</sup>. The two works assess the South African situation during the 19th century and the focus here is on a settled white colonial interest and the beginnings of ethnic tensions and conflict<sup>2</sup>

The mode of analysis will be an assessment of the similarities and differences in the way these authors employ Nature and social symbols, and the way these symbols comment on the socio-cultural and political terrain of 19th century South African society.

Certain basic similarities can be observed in the way these authors employ Nature symbols. These can be seen in their attitude to the moon, the sun, the stars, the reference to the drought, and particularly in the way these authors mould nature such that it becomes a commentary on the human situation.

The sun is evoked in such a way that it approximates the depth of the social vacuum in the South African society together with the bitterness that characterises daily

existence. Thus Millin (1927) writes:

It was the month of December - the hottest summer time. The sun poured down a flood of heat and light; the earth lay burning beneath it, swamped in fire; the air danced and quivered as to the music of a thousand cicadas\_\_ But gradually, as the day passed, mountains and hills and water and green vegetation and sudden patches of wild bright flowers and an occasional Boer farmhouse became things of men\_\_ P. 30)

The arid atmosphere evoked here presupposes the spiritual poverty of the land. The sun that is delineated becomes a violent nature symbol. The reference to the 'music of a thousand cicadas' tends to situate the novel within the context of the Romance tradition in literature. Millin's novel is actually about arid landscapes and souls that, to varying degrees, manifest forms of spiritual bankruptcy. Thus, heat and aridity are dominant symbols in her novel.

In Schreiner's The Story Of An African Farm(1976), the sun is depicted thus:

The overseer, seen by daylight, was a huge German, wearing a shabby suit, and with a childish habit of rubbing his hands and nodding his head prodigiously when pleased at anything. He stood at the kraals in the blazing sun, explaining to two kaffir boys the approaching end of the world\_\_ (P.24)

The violence associated with the sun in the quotation is indicative of the burning need for inner spiritual reform. Both Millin and Schreiner are interested in



depicting a society that is spiritually bankrupt. The reference to 'overseer' is suggestive of a settled establishment, and 'kaffir' immediately reveals the nature of ethnic feeling in that society. Sunlight establishes the spiritual bankruptcy in society which was a condition that partly allowed racist feelings to develop.

The next Nature symbol which characterises the two novels is that of the stars, and this image seems to suggest the level of rigid fatalism which dominates the society. In God's Stepchildren (1927) Millin writes:

As without protest, the stars ran along  
their endless course, and women went so  
many months with child, and seeds burst into  
life, through the earth, and death came  
swishing along, so with the same abandoned  
sense of fatality, Elmira accepted her  
function as Adam Lindsell's wife —  
(P.195)

Schreiner manifests her solidarity with the feminist cause in the quotation, and she lucidly condemns the male domination of women which often results in the latter's docile subservience towards man<sup>3</sup>. The reference to the stars or planets is a continuing symbol in Schreiner's novel. In The Story Of An African Farm (1976) Schreiner also employs the star symbol to demonstrable effect, especially since it would seem to highlight the alienation which the characters feel. She writes:

or, best of all, were these not warm,  
dark, starlight nights, when they sat  
together on the doorstep, holding each

others hands, singing German hymns, their voices rising clear in the still night air\_\_\_ would they not sit looking up at the stars and talking of them, - of the dear Southern cross, red, fiery Mars, Orion, with his belt, and the seven mysterious sisters - and fall to speculating over them\_\_\_  
(P.40)

This is a graduation from the opening page of the novel with its initial evocation of that bright moonlight night. Far from a mere analysis of the heavens, the interest in the stars depicted above, reflects the characters increasing isolation and alienation from the society in which they live. 'Fiery Mars,' 'Orion, with his belt' and the 'seven mysterious sisters,' are all elements of Romance because of the mystery and wonder that surround them.

Schreiner develops the star image when she writes:

He walked with his eyes bent upon the ground, but overhead it was one of those brilliant Southern nights when every space so small that your hand might cover and show fifty cold white points, and the milky way is a belt of sharp frosted silver\_\_\_ (P.104)

The stars do not simply provide beauty to the story, rather they become indicators of specific human conditions. In this context the stars become symbolic of the profound isolation and alienation which the individual experiences as a consequence of the ordering of society.

The moon is used in fairly similar ways by these

authors. In Millin's God's Stepchildren(1927) the author writes:

But, Minjheer, it is the Hottentot custom. They believe that the stars are the eyes of the people who are dead, and that the moon is God, and when the new moon is in the sky they come to pray\_\_\_ (P.31)

'Minjheer' is a title denoting a social status which operates in the context of a changing South Africa now playing host to a variety of races. The reference to Hottentot customs establishes the presence of just one more ethnic category in the novel.

In The Story Of An African Farm (1976) Schreiner describes a scene in this way:

The full African moon poured down its light from the blue sky into the wide lonely plain. The dry, sandy earth, with its coating of stunted 'karroo' bushes a few inches high, the low hills that skirted the plain, the milk-bushes with their long finger-like leaves, all were touched by a weird and almost oppressive beauty as they lay in the white light\_\_\_  
(P. 21)

Again, the aridity established here is indicative of the spiritual and moral bankruptcy in society as a whole.

Schreiner further writes:

In the next room, where the maid had forgotten to close the shutter, the white moonlight fell in a flood, and made it light as day. There were two small beds against the wall. In one lay a yellow-haired child, with a low forehead and a face of freckles; but the loving moonlight hid defects here as

elsewhere, and showed only the innocent face  
of a child in its first sweet sleep\_\_\_\_  
(P.22)

A beautiful portrait of nature is presented in the quotation and this can be linked to the typical motifs of the Romance mode<sup>4</sup>. This serene and joyful environment depicted is akin to South Africa which is serene and calm on the surface, but raging with tension and conflicts within. This is very illustrative of the mood of the 19th century in this region. In sum therefore, the moon is a symbol of the African religion as in Millin, and also a form of escape from everyday life, as in Schreiner.

The drought is another Nature symbol that is commonly employed by these authors In God's Stepchildren (1927) Millin writes:

There were bushes of various kinds here and there, and even in the sand little meagre flowers were growing. But the effect was not one of greenness. The scanty grass lay yellow and withered with drought. He wondered what the cattle found to eat at all\_\_\_\_  
(P.310)

The drought illustrates the hollow values and traditions which characterise South Africa of the 19th century. In The Story Of An African Farm (1976) Schreiner writes:

At last came the year of the great drought,  
the year of 1862. From end to end of the  
land the earth cried for water. Man and  
beast turned their eyes to the pitiless sky,  
that like the roof of some brazen oven  
arched overhead\_\_\_ (P.30)

This is a powerful symbol of heat and sterility. This can be linked to the larger poverty of values and vision in a society that is fundamentally ethnic in its organisation.

The manner in which Nature is moulded to sympathise with human feelings is another foundation upon which Millin and Schreiner act quite similarly. In God's Stepchildren(1927) Millin writes:

She was not given to reading, Adam Lindsell insisted on several servants, and Elmira found that she had nothing to do but sit all day long on the stoep watching the grass grow\_\_\_ (P.204)

The slow growth of the grass becomes an image of the slow and vacuous existence of Elmira in Lindsell's house. We are therefore given an insight on the status of women in South Africa of the 19th century.

In The Story Of An African Farm (1976) Schreiner writes:

The purple flowers, the little purple flowers

The purple flowers, the little purple flowers are his eyes looking at us. We kiss them, and kneel alone on the flat, rejoicing over them And the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for him, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as a rose\_\_\_ (P.13)

The words 'mysterious' and 'alluring' contribute to the atmosphere of fantasy here. The diamond fields and the activities connected with them were one characteristic feature of settler life in South Africa of the 19th century.

In The Story Of An African Farm (1976) Schreiner writes:

Beyond the "kopje " grew some pale-green, hairy-leaved bushes. We are so small they meet over our head; and we sit among them, and kiss them, and they love us back, it seems as though they were alive\_\_ (P.125)

A loving and very romantic portrait of nature is established here. The loving relationship between plants and human beings is indicative of the hollow quality of human life in 19th century South Africa.

In God's Stepchildren (1927) Millin writes:

In the evenings that were cool, he would wander about in the neighbourhood of the fires with which, for fear of wild animals, they surrounded their camp, looking at the stars, brighter and more numerous than he was accustomed to know them\_\_ (P.22)

The tendency to gaze at the stars is evidence of an increasing lack of interest in human society. While being strongly indicative of the element of Romance in the novel, it is evidence of the characters deepening alienation from the society also.

Another nature symbol is seen in Schreiner's work where she writes:

Those stars that shone up above so quietly,  
 they had seen a thousand such little  
 existences fight just so fiercely, flare up  
 just so brightly, and go out, and they, the  
 old stars shone on for ever\_\_\_ (P.106)

Thus Millin and Schreiner employ nature symbols in a fairly identical fashion in these novels. Often that beautiful portrait of nature is made to indicate the characters increasing alienation from the society. Sometimes the attitude to nature begins to resemble South Africa itself which is calm and delightful in the moonlight, but a citadel of storms by daylight.

It is possible to identify some difference in the way Millin and Schreiner employ Nature symbols in their novels. Millin's description of the huts, the references to human eyes and the white colour are some of her very special uses of the Nature symbol. In Schreiner's novel the differences are a bit more elaborate in comparison with Millin. The references to the beetle, rocks, bees and the sea are some of her private uses of the Nature symbol.

In God's Stepchildren (1927) Millin opens with a reference to Table Mountain:

nearly three months after they had left  
 England, they at last found themselves  
 facing Table Mountain with its white Table  
 cloth of clouds (P.16)

'Table Mountain' and 'Table cloth of clouds' indicates a meal or feast and presupposes the subsequent exploitation

of South African riches. 'Clouds' also links us sharply with the element of fantasy associated with the Romance mode in literature. Table Mountain is the maturer and larger expression of the brief rocky outcrops that dot the banks of rivers in the novel.

The description of the huts illustrates how Millin employs her Nature symbols in a manner that is typical of her art. he writes:

About half a mile away there were a few kaffir huts; black they looked against the setting sun, and like big hives of wasps. These huts were, Barry knew, made of bits of sacking and tin over a foundation of mud and reeds\_\_\_ (P.303).

There is a dehumanising vein contained in the words 'hive of wasps,' and even 'kaffir' is very derogatory. The huts which are made of sack or tin illustrate an exploited people. This is significant in the context of the fact that the novel operates in the context of the rush towards the diamond fields. Again, the symbol of the sun which opened the novel is continued here.

Millin also employs her Nature symbols in a fashion unique to her art. She writes.

Barry had told Nora that her eyes were blue as the African sky, her hair golden as the African sun, her skin pure as the African air\_\_\_ (P. 273)

There is a deliberate effort to glorify the environment in the quotation. The sun occurs again in a



gentle, loving way, rather than in the initially harsh portrait that was presented. Thus there are several suns in the novel.

A final point about Millin's use of Nature symbols is the permanent image in her novel of the flood. This is instantly suggested by the name Reverend Andrew Flood. Just as a flood covers the land and affects every portion of it, so Reverend Flood's marriage to a 'Hottentot' woman affects the social existence and acceptability of his descendants in a permanent way. The flood image also highlights the massive social stigma against blacks and coloureds, who are products of mixed marriages<sup>5</sup>

In Schreiner's The Stry Of An African Farm (1976) we observe Nature symbols employed in a manner that is characteristic of the author. Her reference to the beetle is one of such symbols:

The beetle was hard at work trying to roll home a great ball of dung it had been collecting all the morning; but Doss broke the balls and then bit off its head and it was all play, and no one could tell what it had lived and worked for. A striving and a striving and an ending in nothing\_\_\_ (P. 94)

The beetle is a symbol of the African or Africa, and Doss symbolises the European presence which limits the effort towards development attempted by the former. This limiting effort often manifests in racist arguments and varying aspects of violence.

Another Nature symbol is that of the bees and the flowers. Schreiner writes thus:

The bees are very attentive to the flowers till their honey is done, and then they fly over them. I don't know if the flowers feel grateful to the bees, they are great fools if they do \_\_\_ (P.178)

There is a vivid suggestion of exploitation here. The Bee symbolises the European, and the flower suggests the African. In view of the rush for Diamonds, for instance, the symbol captures typical 19th century conditions in South Africa. The symbol here can also be seen to represent the male attitude to the woman in the South African society. This is one of Schreiner's enduring concerns in the novel.

The comparison involving the earth and the moon is another aspect of Schreiner's art in respect of her use of Nature symbols. She writes:

Men are like the earth and we are the moon, we turn always one side to them, and they think there is no other because they don't see it\_\_\_ but there is \_\_ (P.186)

Schreiner's enduring concern with gender issues is borne out here. The 'moon' symbol which opened the novel is continued here. Thus there are several moons in the novel. One is a delightful and loving moon as a basic symbol of nature. Another is the moon as a symbol of the woman.

Her next symbol is that of the sea which she moulds to parallel human attitudes. In The Story Of An African Farm

(1976) her character states'

of all the things I have ever seen, only the sea is like a human being, the sky is not, nor the earth. But the sea is always moving, always something deep in itself.. stirring. It never rests\_\_\_ (P. 264)

The restlessness of the sea is similar to the spiritual and liberatory struggles essential to thrust that 19th century society forward. The sea also captures the inner turmoils which characters like Waldo and Lyndall experience.

The symbol of the rocks also delineates the society of that time. She writes:

The rocks have been to us a blur of brown, we bend over them, and the disorganized masses dissolve into a many coloured, many - shaped, carefully - arranged form of existence. Here masses of rainbow tinted crystals, half fused together, there bands of smooth grey and red, methodically overlying each other. This rock here is covered with a delicate silver tracery, in some mineral resembling leaves and branches\_\_\_ (P.138)

The varieties of the rocks described suggest the preponderance of ethnic blocs and their individual cultural and political characteristics in the South African region<sup>6</sup>

The symbol of the 'kopje' is employed very powerfully in the novel. The 'kopje' is described thus:

This 'kopje' if it could tell us how it came here! The 'physical Geography' says he went on most rapidly and confusedly 'that what are dry lands now were once lakes, and what

I think is this - these low hills were once shores of a lake; this kopje is some of the stones that were at the bottom, rolled together by the water\_\_ (P.35)

The transformation which the 'kopje' has undergone over time suggests the transformation that South Africa has experienced over time also. This is in terms of the physical landscape and the human personalities involved in historical events. The 'kopje' is therefore symbolic of changing historical times in South Africa. There are changes brought about by man, and in this context, a hint is given of the dynamism of settler life and the ethnic tensions that prevail.

Operating in a fashion that is fairly distinct from Nature symbols are a series of social symbols which are indicative of previous developments in society.

Accordingly, Schreiner in The Story Of An African Farm (1976) writes:

on the door step stood the Boer woman, a hand on each hip, her face red and fiery, her head nodding fiercely. At her feet sat the yellow Hottentot maid, her satellite, and around stood the black kaffir maids, with blankets twisted round their half-naked figures ... 'Don't tell me,' cried the Boer-woman, "the man isn't born that can take one in \_\_\_ (P.37)

Interestingly, the African characters are referred to rather abstractly as 'Hottentot.' This is reflective of the ethnic tensions in the society.

Millin writes in a similar fashion in her novel where

she states:

Enormous Dutchmen, in blue cloth jackets and trousers and tall hats, passed them in the street, each followed by a small Hottentot Slave holding an umbrella over his master's head\_\_\_ (P.16)

'Hottentot slave' and 'master' complete the picture of race distinctions in this settler society. This provides the basis for subsequent conflicts and tensions in the society also.

Schreiner refers to a similar social symbol later on in her novel where she writes:

saying this, he turned his nose full upon a kaffir of two years old. That small, naked son of Ham became instantly so terrified that he fled to his mothers blanket for protection, howling horribly \_\_\_ (P. 38)

The allusion to Ham of the Bible establishes the black experience in the context of a curse reaching back to ancient times. Thus if the Africans are inferior or undeveloped, it is seen by white society to have its origins in history. As a follow up to this, Millin writes:

They came obediently and squatted down like baboons in a semi-circle before him. There was an expectant look on their faces. Now and then they would fire off a cannonade of clicks at one another, and laugh a little throaty laugh which made the missionary feel vaguely uneasy\_\_\_ (P.25)

'Baboons', 'cannonade of clicks', are references which do no pride to the African. Thus both writers highlight the nature of racial tensions and conflicts that prevailed in

South Africa of the 19th century.

Both Millin and Schreiner possess individual approaches to social symbols also. Schreiner in The Story Of An African Farm (1976) writes:

"Ah, no" said her companion "I suppose some day we shall go somewhere, but now we are only twelve, and we cannot marry till we are seventeen. Four years, five, - that is a long time to wait. And we might not have diamonds if we did marry\_\_\_ (P.31)

Social propriety argues that seventeen is a ripe enough age for marriage. It is also implied that some matters of inheritance are also woven into the matter of marrying at seventeen. We are therefore provided a glimpse of typical Boer life of the 19th century .

Later Schreiner writes:

The kaffir servants were not there because Tant' Sannie held they were descended from the apes, and needed no salvation. But the rest were gathered for the Sunday service, and awaited the officiator\_\_\_ (P.55)

The 'ape' theory concerning the origins of the Africans, and the reference to primates is a recollection of ideas preponderant in South Africa of the 19th century concerning the origins of the African.

Schreiner advocates a position on race when she makes Bonaparte to exclaim:

"Ah, Friend", said Bonaparte, "when the grace of God is in our hearts, is it not so with us all? Do we not love the very worm we tread upon, and as we tread upon it, do we

know distinctions of race, or of sex, or of colour? No! (P.70)

The essential metaphor of the worm captures the point being made about the distinctions of race and sex in South African society.

Millin has a consciousness of social symbolism in her novel. She writes:

He went, on the first discovery of diamonds, to the diamond fields. On these diggings might be found a great concourse of white men, the beginnings of a new civilisation\_\_ (P.103)

Millin draws the readers attention to the abundance of mineral wealth in the South African area, and how this wealth defines human relationships, and the concentration of social groups. The reference to diamonds and its symbolism reminds one very clearly of the symbolic reference to Table Mountain which occurs as the work opens. Millin appears to be very keen on moulding very apt symbols for the delineation of a specific 19th century experience in South Africa.

Millin probes further into these social conditions especially here where she rationalises on the 'Bastaards':

And the offspring of Hagar were beginning to seed the wilderness; were uniting in marriage and tradition; were becoming a nation. They carried well-known European names. They called themselves proudly the Bastaards\_\_ (P.79)

There is a biblical reference in the first line, and

it follows quite logically with Millin's attempt to explain the origin of the 'Bastaards'. More than Schreiner she is keen on exploring the pedigree of social groups in the society. The name 'Bastaards' elaborates much on the nature of ethnic tensions and feelings in 19th century South Africa.

The two works centre on settler life and the initial stirrings of ethnic conflict in the region. A combination of these symbols reveals the rhythm of settler life and the tang and passion of ethnic feelings in the region. Like the other novels assessed in this study, both novels manifest a bent towards the Romance mode which is intrinsic to South African art<sup>7</sup>.



FOOTNOTES

1. W.R. Katz, Rider Haggard And The Fiction Of Empire Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. P. 34.
2. N. Gordimer, 'English language literature and Politics in South Africa' in (Editor) Heywood Aspects Of South African Literature, London: Heinemann, 1976. P. 139.
3. U. Laredo, Olive Schreiner in (Editor) Author Ravenscroft, The Journal Of Commonwealth Literature No. 8 December 1969. P. 11
4. W. R. Katz, P. 30
5. And this is one entire theme running throughout the text which brings to the fore the issue of race or colour as a determining factor in human relations.
6. Some of these groups include the Boers, Sothos , Xhosa, Zulu, Fingus etc.
7. Schreiner initially titled The Story Of An African Farm (1976) as 'a romance' and only changed its name later, but not the details of the text.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

The perspective of this research effort has been a study of selected South African novels to highlight historical developments of the 19th century. The focus has been to reveal how such novels, in the context of Nature and social symbolism, typify social conditions in South Africa of the 19th century.

The point has already been made that the terms 'Romance' and 'Realism' are insufficient references as a description of the novels employed here. This is essentially because these terms are largely tentative when considered in relation to the text. At the time these novels were written, South Africa was still a mystery to the outside world, and the texts therefore were largely crafted in the Romance mode. In sum even the texts that are called or classified as 'Historical' or 'Realist' still embody much of these elements of Romance etc. Thus these terms are only used tentatively and not with any sense of finality.

The approach here has primarily been sociological, and it has operated by assessing Nature and social symbolism and how these combined symbols present a picture of the 19th century experience. Through the agency of the symbols, we are able to observe the Mfecane and the roles of Shaka

and Mzilikazi within it. Then, the steady influence of the Boer and the Briton is also highlighted. The Boers are presented as adventurers who employ religion as a basis for expanding and acquiring territory. Africa is also presented, as a land pregnant with riches and fabulous wealth. There are hints of the Gold rush and its consequences for the African, and European communities in the area. A picture also demonstrates the dense Boer presence and the spiritual and cultural vacuity of the group. Therefore art can capture historical circumstances through the gateway of symbolism and these novels aptly demonstrate this point.

There is an extent to which one can aver that the ideological background of the author affects the choice of symbols used by that particular author. Thus an author like Schreiner who is a feminist, uses images of aridity and sterility which tend to summarise male attitudes towards the woman. The 'white' colour or symbol, is preponderant in the writings of Haggard who defended and rationalised imperialism. Mofolo, was from the Sotho tribe which suffered much under the sway of Shaka, and it is not surprising to find that the work is preponderant with dynamic images and symbols of Shaka. E.A. Ritter was born in South Africa. Although he was a Scot, his novel is filled with exciting images which are actually celebratory,

and he presents one of the finest portraits of Shaka in South African literature.

Ritter's Shaka Zulu (1955), Mofolo's CHAKA (1931) and Haggard's Nada The Lily (1958) present a picture of the Mfecane phase in South African history. This process began long before Shaka matured and we observe his childhood in the midst of an increasingly militarised universe, which resulted in the greater expansion of the Zulu nation. Through a portrayal of nature and social symbolism we are presented with the living contours of Zulu civilisation, and the traditions and mores which gave it breath.

Haggard's King Solomon's Mines (1982) and Allan Quatermain (1956) give an impression of a society in transition. There is abundant suggestion that the African society depicted is backward and uncivilised, and undergoing cultural and technological buffetings from the west. Plaatje's Mhudi (1978) epitomises African civilisation and the validity and functionality of its traditional values, while also demonstrating increasing western influence and racist tensions and attitudes in society.

God's Stepchildren (1927) and The Story Of An African Farm (1976) examine a settled Boer existence and the tensions and contradictions central to that environment.



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