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STRUCTURE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE MAKING OF APARTHEID

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BLOOD AND POLITICS/MORALITY TALES FOR THE IMMORALITY ACT: SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN IN LITERARY HISTORY AND SOCIAL HISTORY.

Michael Green

BLOOD AND POLITICS

I

In her review of the *Oxford History of South Africa*, Shula Marks comments upon its failure to use the 'abundance of resources (available) to construct a picture alive with real people and events.'[1] She is referring particularly to the section on the Eastern Cape frontier where the '100 years of warfare' was 'in many ways a dramatic story, punctuated by colourful episodes and personalities' and she decries the omission of the 'eccentric individuals' with which the 'frontier... brimmed'. By way of example she lists Johannes van der Kemp, Coenraad de Buys, Col. Alberti, Ngqika, Ndlambe, Makana, Mlanjeni, and Nonqause, adding: 'one could extend the list indefinitely; their story, however, has still to be written' (p.447).

Several of these figures *had* had their stories written at the time Marks was writing, however, albeit not in a form generally taken into account by historians. De Buys and van der Kemp had each featured as protagonists in historical novels written by Sarah Gertrude Millin, *King of the Bastards* and *The Burning Man* respectively, and many of the other characters listed by Marks (along with a number more from its indefinite extension) are strongly featured in the novels. Their fictionalized status has perhaps understandably isolated them from historiographical concerns and yet there is possibly some profit to be had of re-examining the distinctions that preserve this isolation.

I have argued elsewhere[2] for the serious consideration of the relationship between history writing and historical fiction, and will pause here only to reiterate that, while recent discourse analysis has delighted in exposing the figurative or tropological nature of referential forms of writing such as history, and while popular historical revisionism is again (in a new way) driving history writing towards humanist techniques of depiction not far removed from realist literary conventions, what remains of interest is not the blurring of any distinction between these forms, but exploring the specific significance of their distinction in particular circumstances. It lies, after all, in institutionalized practice, not formal essences. This is born out by the line between formal history writing and historical fiction being at times a very thin one indeed: see for example the Victorian historian-novelists, or, for that matter, cultural resistance in South Africa today.

We will find further support for this point in the fact that historical fiction is often produced in response to ideological and social motivations similar to those that prompt historical revisionism. Evidence of this close to the subject of this paper is the surge in the production of historical fiction in South Africa which accompanied the rise of the various nationalisms in the country in the 1940s, and the corresponding interest in redefining history in terms of these new senses of nationalism. In the novel form this is particularly obvious in Afrikaans literature, but work in English shows a similar tendency.[3] *King of the Bastards* and *The Burning Man*[4] are good, if complex, examples of this.

Certainly Smuts, in his Foreward to *King of the Bastards* (published in 1949), saw the work as an act of historical revisionism:

> In our preoccupation with the Great Trek, the earlier phase of our history has been neglected. Here it stands, freed from the obscurity in which it has been buried for so long. We can now form a juster opinion of our beginnings, and of the formative forces which have shaped this history of ours (p.v).

Given the ideological use to which the Great Trek had been put in 1938 and the role this had had in his recent political defeat, one can easily understand Smuts's desire for a rethinking of the role of historical origins and parallels in contemporary politics. Whether it was wise of him to associate himself so closely with the historical perspective provided by Millin in this novel and its sequel is another question.

Millin had prided herself on what she saw as her political prominence in South African and international affairs. To the degree that this existed, it was mainly achieved through her friendship with Smuts and Hofmeyr. The defeat of the one and the death of the other left her with little political significance even in her own eyes. Hofmeyr's death in particular, however, had a further effect upon Millin: it removed the comparatively liberalizing influence that her political associations had had on her thought. After 1948 Millin slid increasingly into the conservatism that would begin to mark her as an ardent proponent of the Nationalists she had previously vehemently opposed. The two historical novels with which she chose to return to fiction writing after a break of some eight years already make this clear, as we will see below, but we must first consider the route by which Millin came to these novels.

II

Millin's decision to write fiction again was not unrelated to the frustration of her hopes in the political realm. The career of political writer that had preoccupied her during the war had shown signs of faltering even before 1948: that her mammoth five-volume *War Diary* was not a success was beginning to be obvious by the publication of the second volume in 1945. The strong degree of calculation with which she

approached the relaunching of herself as a novelist in the late 1940s is as a result understandable.

Millin's most prominent success as a writer had been her 1924 novel, *God's Stepchildren*; indeed, this is her only work to remain fairly constantly in print, and it is the novel that virtually invariably marks her place in literary histories. Given the implicit racism with which Millin handles its subject of the destructive effects of miscegenation, the work occupies an odd place in standard literary histories. The dominant poetics of recent years situated works within its canon by virtue of their formal and moral exemplary nature; Millin's novel and, for that matter, her career, would thus normally be - as they in fact for some time were - simply excluded. As Southern African literary history began to take itself seriously, however, it became difficult to ignore the single most prominent writer between Olive Schreiner and Nadine Gordimer. Millin thus enters the canon in much the same way as South African literature does that most anachronistic of world literary categories, Commonwealth literature: as a decidedly dishonorary member. Invariably she is included on the grounds of reception rather than literary merit, and earns her place as the best English-speaking representative of her local audience's essentially racist character. Michael Wade puts this general argument most succinctly : '...it is fair to say', he says of Millin's themes,

> that it is difficult to imagine a set of preoccupations more representative of the dominant obsessions of the white group in Southern Africa in the period covered by Mrs Millin's novelistic activity - because in some ways Mrs Millin herself becomes a symbol, an embodiment of a certain ineluctable level of truth about South African society....[5]

Yet - and this is a point usually missed by literary critics - this is far too monolithic a conception of Millin's career if seen in terms of the actual reception of her work. *God's Stepchildren* did not make much of an impression in South Africa in 1924, or, for that matter, in the metropolitan centre with which South Africa had its strongest cultural ties: it did not sell well in Britain despite being critically well received there. It was in the United States that it scored its resounding success, becoming there, in a slightly cut and revised form, both critically acclaimed and a bestseller. While this novel established Millin's international reputation, however, it had little effect on her status in South Africa as a popular writer of fiction.

The work that *did* earn Millin a degree of recognition in her own country was her first work of non-fiction, *The South Africans*, which first appeared in 1926 and was revised and enlarged in 1934 and again, under a slightly different title, in 1951. An impressionistic account of the country's history and society meant to explain the nation to the international community, it was, in only an apparent irony, enthusiastically received in South Africa and only very cautiously

received in Britain and America. Whether this was because the misconception that seems to have attended much of the reception of *God's Stepchildren* - that the work exposes the tragedy of of society's treatment of miscegenation, whereas it in fact treats miscegenation itself as a 'tragedy'[6] - could not have developed around the clear and overt racist distinctions that structure the very essence of Millin's 'factual' account of South Africa, is unclear. What does seem obvious is that, in attempting to revive her career, Millin drew upon (she actually combined) her greatest successes to that date.

After *God's Stepchildren* and *The South Africans*, the next high point in Millin's career (this time in Britain) was her biography *Rhodes* (1933); it is not surprising therefore that Millin should have decided to employ the form of historical biography in her return to fiction. *God's Stepchildren* had had an historical element: in it Millin traced the effects of the 'sin' of miscegenation through the Biblically-sanctioned four generations of a family. The original sin is magnified in its being not a casual sexual encounter, but a deliberate act on the part of a missionary who aimed, superficially at least, to give physical substance to his philosophy of racial equality. This missionary, the Rev. Andrew Flood, is based loosely on Dr. Johannes van der Kemp. Millin refers to the historical van der Kemp in *The South Africans*, where another major figure in the history of miscegenation which so appalled and yet fascinated Millin, Coenraad de Buys, also appears. What better point from which make a come back: develop the historical link between van der Kemp and de Buys, fill their histories out into individual stories, and weave these through the account of South African history she gave in *The South Africans*.

Perhaps this creative strategy was not initially so clear cut, but certainly in the wake of the success of *King of the Bastards* (Millin's vehicle for the story of de Buys) upon its release in 1949 a definite publishing strategy linking all these works takes shape: in 1951 *God's Stepchildren* was reissued with a new preface by the author, and in the same year Millin released *The People of South Africa*, the third version of *The South Africans* referred to above. 1952 then saw the publication of *The Burning Man*, the sequel to *King of the Bastards*. Much of the same historical and biographical material used in *King of the Bastards* is reworked in *The Burning Man*, this time from the perspective of van der Kemp. Indeed, whole sections of the first novel are simply repeated in the second, while both works feature pages and pages of historical background lifted word for word from *The South Africans*.

Whatever literary limitations such an approach to publishing may suggest, South African readers proved ready for this barrage. '*King of the Bastards* was then one of the bestselling novels in the history of South Africa', writes Millin's biographer, Martin Rubin, continuing, 'and its success is an indication of how Sarah Gertrude typified her white countrymen's (sic) views on colour'.[7] All the works mentioned in this project are in fact saturated with the brand of biologically-based racism that is the speciality of Millin's factualization and

fictionalization of race. Rubin does tend towards bland one-to-one generalizations regarding Millin's relation to the attitudes of South Africans; his thesis is, after all, that Millin is representative of these attitudes, as is indicated by the sub-title of *Sarah Gertrude Millin: A South African Life*. While the connection he claims here might be simplistic, it does at least raise, if not answer, some questions all too often left untouched by critics on Millin who simply treat *God's Stepchildren* as a representatively South African text. Why should *King of the Bastards*, universally adjudged by these critics to be far inferior to *God's Stepchildren* - even at the level of readability - as a literary work, have found success where *God's Stepchildren* had not? More significantly, why do critics continue to treat *God's Stepchildren* as *the* indicator of South African racism in literature?

III

David Rabkin, for example, writes that '*God's Stepchildren* was immediately popular, recognised by South Africans as the plausible and articulate ejaculation of their racial nightmares'.[8] In fact, Millin was bitter and resentful at her own country's indifference to her international success in the 1920s. 'While papers like the *New York World, Times, Post,* and critics like Mencken, Bromfield, Stallings were comparing me to the best they could think of', she wrote, 'in South Africa I was referred to as "among South Africa's lesser-known writers" - though who the better-known writers were I can't think; or I was classed with anyone who had ever written a book at all, even an unpublished book.'[9]

We must be careful then, of even the more carefully stated correspondence Stephen Clingman makes between the importance which race assumed in the South Africa of the 1920s, as evidenced by the proliferation of racial legislation in this decade, and the social significance of *God's Stepchildren*.'[10]

Racism is protean in its forms, and its variations are obviously significant. That Millin's conceptualization of race was predominantly in biological terms is without doubt; one of the finest accounts of her work, J.M. Coetzee's 'Blood, Flaw, Taint, Degeneration: the Case of Sarah Gertrude Millin'[11], traces in some detail the intellectual history of Western European racism upon which Millin draws. Coetzee makes it plain that he is concerned with 'the poetics of blood rather then the politics of race' as it is through the former 'Millin's imagination works' (p.42). Further, he feels free to trace this mythico-biological emphasis in Millin's work 'without regard to chronology and with minimal regard to context' because 'Millin's ideas on blood and race, and the complex of feelings that underlay these ideas, changed little between 1920 and 1950' (p.50). Quite so; but the same cannot be said of her audience.

Writing of the development of the concept of segregation in the South African context, Paul Rich states that

> the important point about segregationist ideology was that it did not incorporate in any significant manner the tradition of European biological racism, which was easily available to a settler regime seeking to defend its ostensibly 'racial' identity. It could perhaps have done so, for the phase of late nineteenth-century expansion of European imperialism certainly acted as a powerful fillip to the tradition of race-thinking which went back to the eighteenth century.[12]

Rich proposes a distinction between conceptualising segregation in biological and territorial terms to account for this:

> ... the general conclusion can be made that South African racial ideology did not need to employ in quite the same manner theories of biological racial inferiority as in the American instance, since the concept of territorial racial separation acted as a form of cultural and ideological buffer (p.5),

a point which would help explain the extremely popular reception of *God's Stepchildren* in the United States, and serve as a clue perhaps to the reasons for the muted reception it received in South Africa in the 1920s.

The few instances of the use biological determinism in support of the ideology of segregation before Union were, Rich notes, 'of a second-hand variety, resting on the claims of the American race theorist, Robert Bennet Bean, Professor of Anatomy at the University of Virginia, that Negro brains were inferior to Caucasian ones' (p.5). South African segregationist thought did allow itself the comparative luxury of developing a racist cast of a more biological bent, but this was only after settling the more materially pressing claims of territorial domination. After the 1913 Native Lands Act and the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act had solidly established rural and urban segregation, space could be made for inter-racial mediation - an area of course where South Africa's liberal tradition, safely paralysed politically, could be drawn in. To follow Rich again:

> If white racism *per se* could produce no new categories of analysis (for race-thinking), the compensating influence from the liberal tradition of missionary interest in African societies, and the experience of cultural and social mediation between African and white settler societies, ensured a fund of expertise which the nascent settler state could not ignore (p.124).

Hence the growing inclusion of some major strands of liberal thought, whatever its original orientation, in the construction of an ideology of segregation suitable for a modern industrial state.

Millin's work of the 1920s would appear to be in line with exactly this development, her own shift from the cautious liberalism of her earlier years to the avowed supporter of apartheid she became finding at this point its crucial ideological hinge on the issue of biological racial determinism. The poetics of blood is a powerful weapon in the ideology of race, which in itself is a persuasive way of accounting for the politics of segregation, and it is true that it is in this respect that Millin may have found, what Wade calls in a different context, 'liberalism's true voice in the situation'.[13] The evidence of literary reception would suggest, however, something of a cultural lag in the popular reception of these issues. While other factors - such as the status of local publications in South Africa in the mid-1920s, and the all-out assault launched by Millin and her publishers of the 1949-1952 period - must be taken onto account, the reception *King of the Bastards* and *The Burning Man* received on publication is a significant indicator of a distinct cultural shift in white English-speaking South Africa. This would suggest too that the literary-historical emphasis on the significance of *God's Stepchildren* has led to an underestimation of the significance of the later historical novels in social history.

It is difficult to establish, but perhaps worth wondering if this is because we are not still too used to perceiving our literary history from a metropolitan perspective. Neither of the historical novels did well internationally, especially in the United States. 'After *King of the Bastards*', writes Rubin, ' (Millin's) American publisher, Harper, had refused to renew her contract and (*The Burning Man*) had appeared under the seal of G.P. Putnam's Sons. After the almost universal condemnation of *The Burning Man*, however, no New York publisher would accept any of her fiction' (p.230). Without wishing to claim that only the overt racism of the novels was a factor in this, the resurgence of liberalism (in a more internationally accepted sense) which accompanied America's involvement in the Second World War did, according to Rich, challenge the 'caste explanations for race relations (which) had been much in vogue in the 1930s in the United States' (p.130); this would make it less likely that such overtly racially saturated works would be sympathetically received there. This failure should not explain the failure of South African literary history to deal with works which achieved such local prominence.

MORALITY TALES FOR THE IMMORALITY ACT

IV

It is to the historical form of these novels we must now turn in our examination of their significance. Much of their popularity is likely to have been due to this element; as mentioned earlier, the increase in nationalist sentiment in post-war white South Africa had prompted an increase in historical awareness, one of the cultural manifestations of which was a greater interest in and production of historical novels. Certainly Millin's historical perspective lent itself to popular consumption as it drew upon, confirmed, and even helped foster many of the most ingrained biases in popular white conceptions of South African history.

Her choice of period for her paired novels is telling in itself in this respect: the Eastern Cape frontier of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reverberates through conventional histories of South Africa as the crucible of Afrikaner nationalism. Its twin themes of conflict between black and white and resistance to British imperialism find vital originary moments in the events of this period. Millin's choice of protagonists is equally revealing: de Buys, the Voortrekker, and van der Kemp, who precedes John Philip in prompting the antagonism believed to have caused the Trek itself, are excellent contrasts around which to polarize such an account of South African history. What makes them irresistible to Millin as central representatives of the actual and potential 'tragedy' of that history is their common bond in miscegenation, always her own strongest theme.

To return to Smuts's foreward to *King of the Bastards*; he applauds the shift of historical emphasis back a generation or so, but what is the result of this shift? 'The tragedy of colour which is South Africa stands revealed for all to see it (sic)', writes Smuts (p.v), who then invites us to contemplate it 'in wonder and awe, but not in despair.' This is an invitation the novels ignore; Millin never achieves anything like a sense of wonder or awe in her depiction of de Buys, or for that matter, van der Kemp - indeed, it is quite obviously never her intention. Their lives are simply morality tales for the Immorality Act. For those who break this law sanctioned by nature itself there is only despair, and not of the tragic sort in any serious sense either.

It is true Millin does make a half-hearted attempt to work de Buys up into something of a tragic figure, just as she had attempted to give a Hardyesque sense of tragic inevitability to *God's Stepchildren*. The attempt fails for the same reason in the later novel as in the earlier one: as David Rabkin points out,'the essence of (Millin's) proposition about miscegenation is that it is a *voluntary* act of evil'.[10] We will see that Millin tries hard to account for the complicity of her protagonists' own agency in their fall, but all references to a

tragically determined fate eventually founder on this point. This makes the type of tragedy referred to by Smuts especially inaccurate.

Following A.C. Bradley's definition of tragedy, Smuts writes of de Buys: 'what he might have been and achieved, under a better star! But there was a twist in him, as there sometimes is in great men.... His story reads like a Shakespearian tragedy moving to inevitable doom...' (p.vii). Nothing could be further from achieved effect of the novel, whatever Millin's intentions. De Buys's greatness stays resolutely limited to his physical size throughout the work, and all too quickly even this becomes only an ironic counterpoint to the stature he can never regain in white eyes - and only briefly attain in black eyes before the 'magic' of his whiteness wears off - after 'going native'. While Smuts prefers to keep de Buys's 'tragedy' in the realm of the metaphysical and the aesthetic, Millin spells out its material base bluntly in her explanatory notes to *King of the Bastards*: 'He (de Buys) might have come to be regarded as the greatest amongst his people, but for this one thing: his women were black: his families were the coloured rabble that ended as the Buys-volk, kept apart from other people in a land of their own' (p.viii).

V

King of the Bastards opens in a contemporary setting, 'the summer of 1948'. With the 26 May behind them, the 'council of the Buyses' discuss (yet again, we are told) whether or not the 'Buys people' should 'try for white'; they, indeed Millin herself, have little idea of the increasingly bitter resistance to such a plan that lies ahead of them, but for Millin at least, this would be incidental. For if there is any tragedy in de Buys's story, it is here. One of the Buyses has suggested breeding their whitest children with whites, but, 'throughout their talk, none had spoken of the tragedy of Honoratus' daughter, the whitest in all the nation of the Buyses' (p.3). Neither does Millin at this moment, but with this brooding absence in the background, she launches into Coenraad de Buys's history. After some 336 pages of this, she concludes with a return to the contemporary scene where the Buyses are now about to vote on their proposed racial course; the outcome is not given, and the futility of voting at all is illustrated by a return to the absence haunting the story we have been told:

> Throughout their talk, none had spoken of the tragedy of Honoratus' daughter, the whitest of the Buyses - of what befell her when Louis sent her forth to bring back a white bastard for the descendants of Coenraad de Buys, King of the Bastards
> Nor is this the place to speak of it,

writes Millin abruptly, before Louis Buys says, 'Let the people vote' (p.338). The strategy behind this refusal to fulfil the expectations she has ostensibly set up is obvious: Millin preserves the contemporary absence in order to let the history which it frames flood in. The unspoken present echoes the past as origin, cause, and parallel.

What then is the explanatory nature of the history that Millin has to tell?

Firstly we should establish that Millin took her history fairly seriously. There is evidence that she engaged in a fair degree of research to write her historical novels; she mentions in her explanatory notes to *King of the Bastards* consulting 'the records in old registers, the words here and there of officials and missionaries' (p.viii), and Smuts writes of her 'buil(ding) up his great figure... from sentences here and there in old records' (p.vi). The vagueness and paucity of sources claimed - stressed by the repeated 'here and there' - is unfair, however, at least to the travel writing of the period: she lifts, from Barrow and Lichtenstein especially, passages and even pages liberally. She certainly uses van der Kemp's Diary of 1799-1801, and possibly A.D. Martin's biography *Dr Vanderkemp*, published in 1931. She even went to Amsterdam to do research for *The Burning Man*. She seems, oddly enough, to have missed the one substantial publication available on de Buys, *Coenraad de Buys: The First Transvaler*, which A.E. Schoeman published in 1938, based on a thesis written for the University of Pretoria, but did gather first-hand oral evidence from de Buys's descendants (see *King of the Bastards*, p.338).

What is more, in her notes Millin is overt about stating which sections of the story have 'some basis in fact', and which must 'be considered as romancing' (p.x). Like all historical novelists - indeed, this probably holds true for historians too - the most telling parts of her recreations are the perhapses and maybes of historical record. We must credit Millin with being honest in this regard, although it is difficult to remain patient with the significance she gives to these lacunae. In her interpretation of the facts available she remains solidly grounded in the 'settler school' of South African history writing - particularly with respect to blacks and missionaries - but she uses the gaps in the records to drive home this interpretation with a vengeance. In *King of the Bastards* this reaches its apogee in her account of de Buys's activities in Zululand. Millin writes in her notes:

> A white man is said to have taught Dingiswayo European ways of fighting and trading. Since the white man is not known and Coenraad disappeared into Zululand for a while, the liberty has been taken of making Coenraad that white man. This is the only deliberate inaccuracy in the novel; but for a gap of four years, it might not have been an inaccuracy, and who really knows about those four years?

Who, indeed! It is by no means certain, amongst all the other uncertainties here, that de Buys did go to Zululand. Preller claims he did, but Schoeman can find no evidence of this other than that if he did he could not have gone during the dates Preller gives.[16] We are here in the heartland of some of the most deeply ingrained South African historical myths, however, where counter-factualization carries very

little weight. In her novels Millin gives support to nearly all the ten major myths that Marianne Cornevin lists in her *Apartheid: Power and Historical Falsification*[6]: whites and blacks arrived in South Africa at the same time, blacks were migrants until they met the whites, the Voortrekkers advance into uninhabited land that belonged to no one, only the advent of the whites saved the blacks in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, and so on, but she becomes truly offensive is her version of the myth that the black's original political ideas were always inspired by the whites. For, if Millin does not entirely agree with the myth that all Zulu leaders were bloodthirsty despots, this is only because she feels they lacked the ability to effectively be despots. Which is where de Buys comes in: he, we are told, 'knew what the Amatetwa did not know; what any white man knew, but hardly a black man' (p.121). Dingiswayo must learn then from de Buys how to trade (with the Portuguese), fight ('there was a thing no African understood, and that was the drilling of armies into regiments (p.122)), and nation-build ('"there are small peoples all around you whose power is nothing because they are separate. Let them come together under Dingiswayo of the Amatetwa. Thus a very great nation will be made"' (p.121)). In the narrative that follows Chaka (sic) learns these lessons from Dingiswayo, and Mantatisi and Moselikatze (sic) learn the most destructive of them at least from Chaka. And so we have Millin's account of the *Mfecane*, with Coenraad de Buys now standing at the head of a genealogy of spilled as well as mixed blood.

De Buys gains little reward for his contribution to black culture, however; trekking in his old age into the northern Transvaal, he finds not the 'empty land' claimed by the Voortrekkers, but the devastation that is in the process of 'emptying' it. Thus his contribution to South African history, in this respect no less than in those of his sexual exploits, comes crashing ironically down on his own head. The poetic justice involved is no melodramatic coincidence, however: the 'idea (of introducing de Buys to the Zulus) was,' Millin tells us, 'to bring the Zulus into what is, in effect, the story - running parallel with Coenraad's - of the black man's total decline in South Africa' (p.ix-x). And it is with regret that she ponders, 'perhaps one should not have given up the idea of linking Coenraad with Mantatisi'; after all, how could so important (even in its destructiveness) an area of black history have been allowed to happen of its own volition!

What force could elevate a white man to such a pivotal position in black history? The answer is, as is always the case in Millin's 'tragic' view of race in South African history, the failure to recognize and maintain racial boundaries. De Buys has not only lived beyond the frontiers of white settlement, he has internalized the frontier in his sexual relations and can thus never again live on one side or the other. While an outlaw, it is his family of mixed blood which prevents him from ever properly taking up the various offers of pardon from different Cape governments; he and his 'farcically mongrel' (p.98) brood are rejected by family, society, and church when he attempts to resettle in the colony. Millin does not hesitate to project a fully developed apartheid mentality back on to the Eastern Cape frontier - indeed, it is precisely

her own contribution to the past that she has projected *forward* into 1949! The double manoeuvre of attributing contemporary racial attitudes into the past and then finding the origins of those contemporary attitudes in the past is a given of her historiographical procedure. In this, of course, she was in no way alone, as the seminal work of Martin Legassick has helped establish.[17]

Millin's racist preoccupations are driven to even more ludicrous lengths, however; 'colour consciousness', we are told in *The South Africans*, is a 'profound feeling' that can only be overcome by one other biological force: sexual desire.[18] And for sexual desire to choose to satisfy itself across racial lines it must be perverted in some way, which is how we come to the founding 'flaw' underlying the whole panoramic saga of Coenraad de Buys.

De Buys's mother was married four times, a historical fact which leads Millin to a conclusion for which there is no evidence whatsoever: she murdered her husbands (a 'deliberate inaccuracy' she fails to mention as such). Millin, as we have seen, had a predilection for repeating material, and the research on the symptoms of strychnine poisoning she had done for her novel based on the Daisy de Melker case, *Three men Die* (1934), finds a new use in Christina de Buys's method of removing her husbands. The young Coenraad is meant to have discovered and observed this (his father was Christina's second husband), and as a result - we are laboriously and unconvincingly reminded of this throughout the novel - has been put off white women for life.

Why does Millin invent this melodramatic and sensationalist account of de Buys's preference for black women? The novel is written some ten years before E.H.Erikson's *Young Man Luther* made psychohistory a controversial genre, and Millin's comment on the 'good wizards' of tribal life ('They were what are today called psycho-analysts...' (p.129)), suggests no great love for the profession. To appreciate more fully the actual strategy involved here, we must defer answering the question until we have considered Millin's representation of van der Kemp.

VI

To what degree de Buys is aware of the source of his taste in sexual preference is never quite stated. That he recognises it as a folly that will determine the coming to nothing of all his potential is, though, the only rag of respect left him in the reader's eyes. Van der Kemp is denied even this insight. In both *King of the Bastards* and *The Burning Man* he is a pathetic figure, rejected ultimately even by Buys for his failure to recognise his sexual hypocrisy. A central passage from *King of the Bastards*, which becomes word for word the opening passage of *The Burning Man*, has van der Kemp introduce his black wife to de Buys with the words:

'How much have I learned from you, my friend! Do you remember your words to me? "You do not, as I," you said, "live with them and through them to prove there is no difference between black and white!" How deep a lesson that was to my groping mind!'

De Buys responds, '*Verdomde* hypocrite!' and continues:

> 'I taught you this! Where was I when you were running around the brothels of Leyden? ... And I will tell you, you lie when you say you learned from me to show there was no difference between black and white. You knew me, what I was - a sinner, an outcast. And I will tell you, the whole thing is you are still the man that danced in the brothels of Leyden; and a worse man, with the madness of age, not youth, on you; and not any more a wild soldier, but a Christian minister teaching the way of God is for an old man to satisfy himself with a little black girl.' (*King of the Bastards*, pp.186-187; *The Burning Man*, pp.1-2.)

The reference to Leyden is meant to remind us of the lust that is the one constant in the life of this vacillating protagonist. Throughout the novel he is referred to as a 'divided man' in every other respect; this is the thematic refrain around which the work is constructed, to the degree that it could just as well have been entitled 'The Divided Man'. It is significant, however, that it is not.

We first meet the young Johannes van der Kemp rejecting his brother Didericus (just appointed Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Leyden University) as a 'superstitious man in the Age of Enlightenment and Reason' (p.6). Shortly after, he is rejected by his mistress as 'no genuine child, like me, of the Age of Enlightenment and Reason' (p.22) because he is unable to completely break with the religious and moral conventions of the time. He is continually finding himself in situations of divided allegiance, as in this typical passage summarizing his position during the French invasion of Holland:

> ...in this..., as in other passionate things, Johannes was a divided man. On the one hand, his thoughts marched with the French Revolutionaries and he felt for the down-trodden; on the other, he could not forget his allegiance to the Stadtholder and the traditions of his class (p.51).

Yet he must remain in Millin's characterisation a 'burning' rather than a 'divided' man; this is because intellectual confusion of itself could not provide the essential ingredient needed for his failure within the novel's paradigm. Johannes's rational argument with Didericus in the opening scenes, for example, is reduced to mere intellectual posturing before his brother's damning reference to his 'dissipated existence'

(p.5), and all van der Kemp's other struggles pale before his difficulties in controlling his sexual passions. And so the significance of the title comes to the fore; as Millin quotes in her explanation of the title: '"burn" means here..."to be perpetually haunted with lustful desires"'. It is essential to Millin's thesis that it must ultimately be van der Kemp's lust, rather than any intellectual confusion, that condemns his potential abilities.

Van der Kemp is cast in the same false tragic mould as de Buys: a man of great potential (as too in the case of de Buys, this is a potential claimed rather than ever really demonstrated in the novel) destroyed by a flaw in his character. He is exceptionally talented in many areas - medicine, theology, philosophy, and science are mentioned - but throws away careers in all of them. The flaw that causes him to do this is damaging enough in Europe, but there at least it is limited to the personal realm. Transported to Africa in a religious fervour it will have a far more destructive effect, all the more so for being wrapped up in European ideals that have no place in Africa.

That the tragic flaw at the heart of *The Burning Man* is not the confused Enlightenment philosophy of its protagonist can be demonstrated by considering Millin's attitude to the the swiftly changing rulers at the Cape in the period covered by her novels. Of these, Millin has most sympathy with the short-lived Batavian government. This sounds incongruous, given her attitude to the principles of the Revolution as applied to South Africa, until we see her depiction of Commissioner de Mist and Governor Janssens. Both had known van der Kemp in Holland, and we are given extended scenes of their meetings with him. (In the case of Janssens, these substantially follow Lichtenstein's first-hand accounts gathered while he served as Janssens' medical attendant). We can in passing note how close Millin's interpretation of South African history is to on-going hegemonic historical attitudes, for what emerges from her recreation is extraordinarily close to the ambivalent attitude Dean, Hartman, and Katzen's find expressed in mid-seventies school textbook accounts of these figures. In Boyce's *Legacy of the Past* we find: 'Both men were firm believers in the principles of the French Revolution - liberty and equality - nevertheless they were practical men and able administrators' (p.99). 'Why "nevertheless"?', ask Dean et al., continuing,

> Why should believers in equality not be practical and able? Van Rensburg et al. (*Active History*) have almost the same thing: 'Liberals as they were, they nevertheless believed in strong government, and though much attracted by the ideas of equality and brotherhood, they were shrewd and practical men' (p.61) *History in Black and White: an Analysis of South African School History Textbooks*, p.63.

For Millin, no less than the historians in question, the word 'nevertheless' refers to the two officials' tendency to take local

conditions into account - which certainly covers the crucial area of race. In the novels, de Mist and Janssens are depicted as remaining 'practical' chiefly in their withdrawing of the initial support they had given to van der Kemp's religious settlements. This was in fact largely simply a side-effect of their decision that reconciliation of the trekboers to the Government should become the central focus of their frontier policy,[40] and it seems likely that even the trekboers's complaints regarding Botha's Farm, Fort Frederick, and ultimately Bethelsdorp had as much to do with labour as race. But Millin makes, as we may expect, race the overwhelming factor. Here is her version of de Mist on the difference between Janssens and himself and van der Kemp:

> '...he is, while we are not, absolute in his requirement of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. We clap eyes on the savages of the land and our senses recoil from accepting them as our free and equal brothers, or indeed, as our brothers at all' (p.257).

Janssens himself is even stronger in his prejudice and rejection of the missionaries:

> 'For my part, I cannot look at our dark citizens - and especially the Hottentots - without feeling that to teach such savages the mysteries of the Christian religion is mere insanity (p.258).

De Mist regrets the limits of Enlightenment, to be sure, but in the ensuing conversation agrees with Janssens that practical maintenance of order ('Do not feats of the mind, as of the body, depend on control? Is not to be uncontrolled mad?' (p.258)) is of final importance.

In pure form, then, the principles of the Age of Enlightenment and Reason, in South Africa, become (and remain) in Millin's view as pathetically out of place as the grubby little rebellions of the 'Patriots' of silly and short-lived 'Republics' that punctuate the action of *The Burning Man* and *King of the Bastards*. Pragmatically tempered - especially in terms of race - some good can be allowed of the Enlightenment, but in the sexual realm especially its foolish idealism can reach 'tragic' proportions.

Here, principles of equality, not to mention liberty and fraternity, unleash their full destructive power in disregarding racial divisions. Nothing marks van der Kemp as more misguided in Millin's eyes than his belief that he had 'reconciled religion with science. All men are the children of God. That is religion. All men belong to the same - the human - race. That is science' (p.262) The only undivided position van der Kemp is able to come to in his life is in fact a false one. The truth lies rather in the words of the mature, sensible, practical, and good Cape resident, Mrs Matilda Smith, to van der Kemp: "'Here the difference in race is so strong that only" - she paused; he waited -

"only the power of sex seems able to overcome it"' (p.118). Mrs Smith shows questionable taste in becoming attracted to van der Kemp - who Millin obviously finds loathsome even physically - but her opinion here is sanctioned by being, as we have seen, directly that of the author.

Van der Kemp will later reject the Christian, if slave-holding, Mrs Smith in marriage in favour of his unconverted 'little black girl', thus loading irony on irony on to St Paul's injunction (quoted in the note to the title of the novel) that 'it is better to marry than to burn'. And so we see the divisions in van der Kemp multiply into both marrying and burning. But a 'burning man', tortured by an implacable sexuality into his ultimate degradation, he must finally be. Millin can conceive of no intellectual, religious, or moral force - no matter how divided against itself - powerful enough to be so 'tragic'.

VII

Which brings us to the most remarkable trick Millin has played on us throughout these historical novels. Its essence is that these are not, even in the terms they themselves suggest, historical novels at all. By this I mean they do not finally explain anything in historical terms, although this is what they purport to do. Millin does engage another time in order, ostensibly, to analyse the origins of aspects of her own. The whole thrust of the novels, emphasized by the contemporary framing sequence that begins and ends *King of the Bastards*, is meant to make of the lives of Coenraad de Buys and Johannes van der Kemp historical causes of presently felt tragic effects. Explaining in terms of cause and effect, however, turns out to be more problematic than Millin, and perhaps we ourselves, have allowed.

It is fortuitous that the man whose most original and influential ideas dealt with the problem of causality should date from the period in which Millin's historical novels are set. Hume is in fact the philosopher Millin has van der Kemp most admire. What is perhaps surprising about this philosopher who is famous for his skepticism regarding causality is that he initially found fame as a historian: after all, from Herodotus to Montesquieu to Voltaire, history was conceived of as the organization of past experience in terms of cause and effect. Even mid-twentieth century arguments concerning the role of causation in historicism left E.H. Carr unruffled in his conviction that 'the study of history is the study of causes'.[4] More recently, however, causality has become suspect again in the detotalizing historiographical strategies of writers like Foucault. For Foucault causality is a primary feature of linear, progressive history - be it Marxist, liberal, positivist, even empiricist - in its attempt to control or domesticate the past in the form of knowing it. He wishes to challenge the concept of 'continuous history' because it

> is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to

> him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject - in the form of historical consciousness - will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode.[23]

Such a perspective can, of course, be seen as a radical challenge to structures in power at present, or as intimately conservative attempts by those same structures to prevent those oppressed by them from claiming a sense of subjectivity within history. No concept is innocent of context. In the case of Millin, however, its liberatory use is evident. The causal links she establishes with her subjects draws them into a historical continuum in which they are made, as causes, to carry the blame for present ills. In the process she obscures the present material causes for those ills. By refusing to allow a difference between colonial and capitalist racial practice, she obscures the causes of the latter behind the effect of the former. In the process she loses the material motivations of the past as much as those of the present. As we have seen, she reads apartheid attitudes into the Eastern Cape frontier, and then, with the most surprisingly convincing (if the standard myths of South African history are anything to go by) sleight-of-hand, finds in the Eastern Cape frontier justification for apartheid attitudes!

Along the way Millin appropriates black history into white (via, as demonstrated above, Coenraad de Buys), making its most striking features knowable in ascribing their cause to a white instigator and architect, but leaving them their inherent villainy by making that cause its victim as well. It is not surprising that at the very moment she was pandering to white historical tastes by producing a string of colourful anecdotes about tribal history that reinforced the worst stereotypes of an otherwise ignored historical past, urban blacks were turning away from tribalism with a vengeance. *Drum*, for example, was drastically shifting its emphasis from the rural, tribal, and historical to the racy urban present at the very time Millin was producing these novels.[23]

Yet Millin's use of causation in her historical appropriation is suspect in more than its chauvinism. When we say that one thing causes another, all that we actually observe, Hume demonstrated, is 'that like objects have always been placed in like relations of contiguity and succession'.[24] Causation, and in particular the temporal priority we accord to cause, is an interpretation of this relationship, as Nietzsche's analysis of the trope that governs causality makes clear:

> The fragment of the outside world of which we become conscious comes after the effect that has been produced on us and is projected *a posteriori* as its 'cause'. In the phenomenalism of the 'inner world' we invert the chronology of cause and

> effect. The basic fact of 'inner experience' is that the cause gets imagined after the effect has occurred'.[35]

This tropological inversion governs much history writing, as it does Millin's historical novels; the 'cause' (race attitudes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century frontier situations) is imagined - here literally, in the form of the novels - after the 'effect' (mid-twentieth century apartheid). The normal hierarchy of cause and effect, Jonathan Culler reminds us, 'makes the cause an origin, logically and temporarily prior. The effect is derived, secondary, dependent upon the cause.... If', however, he continues (following Nietzsche), 'the effect is what causes the cause to become a cause, than the effect, not the cause, should be treated as an origin'.[36] Which is precisely the figurative operation Millin has applied to race: in her novels contemporary racism 'causes' the racism she writes into the past, while ostensibly being an 'effect' of it. Claimed to be the 'origin' of contemporary racism, her depiction of racial attitudes in the past in fact finds its origin in contemporary racism.

All this is bad history, but - for our sins - history of sorts it remains. We have, to be thorough about Millin's causal chain, to go back yet a step further to find the originary moment when history itself disappears. The lives of de Buys and van der Kemp may serve as causes for the present, but what, as it were, caused them? From what origins do their tragedies stem? Millin goes to great lengths to situate her protagonist's historically, but how does she account for the crucial individual twists that make them what they are?

As I have been at pains to establish, the flaws that mark them and through them and the history of which they are a part are, finally, simply contingent. Lost in a murky pseudo-psychological, quasi-biological, prehistoric swamp, the origins of Christina de Buys's husband-murdering tendencies which had so telling an effect on her son Coenraad, and Johannes van der Kemp's ever-burning lust are as quirkily unexplainable as any other historically irreducible given. As ultimate causes then, they are ahistorical and lack all explanatory power in historical terms. The source of the tragedy of mixed blood flowing through South African history, and more importantly, the cautionary metaphor for maintaining racial purity it actually is in Millin's work, slips away over the horizon of history, leaving its irrational stain as unexplained - in these terms - as ever.

Georg Lukács condemns those historical novelists who 'make history private, (who) turn it into an exotic, colourful panorama based upon some eccentric case of psychology'.[37] This is an excellent description of Millin's failure, although Lukács is speaking of another place and time, and other reasons for this failure. What makes it all the more intriguing that Millin should fail in this way is that it goes against her own enterprise. She genuinely seems to want write history, but there is for her no history of race. It is a trans-historical given, and any

attempt to explain it historically must then remain, at best, tautological. In much the same way, she genuinely wants to write a tragedy, but there can be no tragedy of race without a history to define it; all that is left otherwise is contingency, which is to say, farce.

VIII

I will risk the charge of bathos in attempting, in conclusion, to draw together the two arguments of this paper. Millin presents racism in monolithic terms, identical across all South African history. As a result her historical novels lose any real historical sense, for their subject is treated ahistorically. Literary critics have tended to see Millin's career in monolithic terms, as a unitary expression of white South African racism. In doing so, have they not risked losing, in the case of Sarah Gertrude Millin, some of the nuances of a truly historically-based literary history?

NOTES

1. 'African and Afrikaner History,' *Journal of African History*, XI, 3 (1970), p.447.
2. See my 'History in Fiction: Oliver Walker and John Dunn', *English in Africa*, 15 No.1 (May 1988), especially pp. 30-33.
3. Based on S. Kierson, *English and Afrikaans Novels on South African History* (University of Cape Town School of Librarianship, unpublished, 1958).
4. I have used the following editions: *King of the Bastards*. Melbourne, London, Toronto: Heinemann, 1950; *The Burning Man*. Melbourne, London, Toronto: Heinemann, 1952.
5. 'Myth, Truth and the South African Reality in the Fiction of Sarah Gertrude Millin', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1 (1974), p.92.
6. Millin's rather suspect use of tragedy is discussed below.
7. *Sarah Gertrude Millin: A South African Life*. Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1977, p.228.
8. 'Race and Fiction: *God's Stepchildren* and *Turbott Wolfe*', in Kenneth Parker (ed.), *The South African Novel in English*. London: McMillan, 1978, p.79.
9. *The Night is Long*. London: Faber and Faber, 1941, p.161.
10. 'Beyond the Limit: the Social Relations of Madness in Southern African Fiction', unpublished paper delivered at an African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, October, 1988.
11. First published in *English Studies in Africa* 23.1.80, pp.41-58. Republished in *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988, pp.136-162.
12. *White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism 1921-60*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984.
13. Wade, M. *op. cit.* p.107.
14. Rabkin, D. *op. cit.* p.91.
15. A.E. Schoeman, *Coenraad de Buys: The First Transvaler*. Pretoria: J.H. de Bussy, 1938, p.68.
16. Marianne Cornevin, *Apartheid: Power and Historical Falsification*. Paris: UNESCO, 1980.

17. See 'The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography', Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore (eds.), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*. London: Longman, 1980, pp.44-79.
18. *The South Africans*. London: Constable, 1926, pp.255-56.
19. Elizabeth Dean, Paul Hartman, and May Katzen. *History in Black and White: an Analysis of South African School History Textbooks*. Paris: UNESCO, 1983.
20. See Andrew Ross, *John Philip (1775-1851): Missions, Race and Politics in South Africa*. Aberdeen: University Press, 1986.
21. *What is History?*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987, p.87 (First published 1961).
22. *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan-Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972, p.12.
23. See Anthony Sampson, *Drum: An African Adventure - and Afterwards*. London, Sydney, Auckland, Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, especially p.29.
24. *Treatise of Human Nature* (I,III,vi), quoted in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. London, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, p.87.
25. *The Will to Power, Werke*, vol.3, p.804. Quoted in Culler, *ibid.*, p.86.
26. *ibid.*, p.88.
27. *The Historical Novel*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981. (First published 1937; English translation 1962), p.340.