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# THE LITERARY, PERSONAL, AND SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF WILLIAM PLOMER'S TURBOTT WOLFE.

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Arts,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examines William Plomer's first novel, Turbott Wolfe (1925), within its socio-political and literary context, and also explores the crucial relationship between the author's life and his work. Turbott Wolfe at one level represents Plomer's complex responses to and interpretation of the South African milieu during the early 1920s. During this decade, the foundations of modern Apartheid were being consolidated, and African Nationalism emerged as a powerful challenge to the South African state. Turbott Wolfe is informed by these political developments, and the milieu and events portrayed in the novel vividly express the author's feelings about and attitudes towards the society he found himself in.

Since its publication, Turbott Wolfe has suffered considerable critical neglect. The superficiality of much of the existing criticism about the novel must be challenged, since Turbott Wolfe is not only of tremendous intrinsic literary merit, but also provides valuable insights into the socio-political environment and historical moment in which Plomer wrote. Thus one of the novel's main concerns is the all-informing "colour question", which dominated political debate in the 1920s.

Plomer's appr[illegible]e "colour question" is unorthodox, [illegible]ajor question confronting the reader is how this unusual novel came to be written. An examination of earlier fiction reveals that Turbott Wolfe is both influenced by and a reaction against existing literary traditions, while the major themes show in what way and to what extent the novel is engaged with contemporary socio-political issues. The key to this crucial question, however, lies in a detailed exploration of the author's personal history.

Turbott Wolfe emerges as an important work within the development of South African literature, a novel which encapsulates some of the complexity and diversity of contemporary South Africa, as perceived by its youthful author.

**DECLARATION**

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Michelle Adler

18 day of August, 19 88

I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Tim Couzens, without whose support and encouragement this dissertation could not have been written.

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## INTRODUCTION

If the beginning of a writer's career can be traced to the work that first brings its author a measure of fame or notoriety, then Turbott Wolfe (1925) must certainly be seen as the starting-point of William Plomer's rich and varied career as a man of letters. Several of Plomer's poems had previously been published in Ilanga lase Natal under the pseudonym "P.Q.R.", [1] but the sensational Turbott Wolfe was the youthful author's first novel; it thrust him into the literary limelight both in South Africa and in literary circles in England.

Plomer regarded himself as an English writer, and his intended audience was ultimately an English one. By the time he arrived in London to settle in 1929, aged 26, no fewer than five of Plomer's books had been published by the Hogarth Press, and he was "something of a celebrity". [2] But he was also "one of those rare cosmopolitans who defy categorization - an English writer in the African colonies or the Far East, or Abroad on the Mediterranean ..." [3] Born in the northern Transvaal, Plomer spent much of his youth travelling between South Africa and England. In 1926 he left for Japan, where he spent two productive years. [4] He also lived for a while in Greece, and travelled extensively in Europe, returning to South Africa for one

brief visit, in 1956. The flavour and atmosphere of the countries Plomer lived in and wrote about permeate his writing. His work can in fact be geographically divided; this is vividly illustrated by his aptly titled collection of stories, Four Countries (1949). [5] Despite the relatively short and fragmented periods that Plomer spent in South Africa, his tremendous contribution to South African literature - particularly in the fields of prose fiction and poetry - and the African orientation of much of this work provide ample justification for regarding Plomer as a South African writer as well as an English one. [6]

Turbott Wolfe is Plomer's "African" novel. It has had an extremely erratic and colourful history in South Africa. The initial critical reception of the novel was turbulent, partly due to the fact that like the bilingual journal Voorslag (1926) on which Plomer collaborated with Roy Campbell and Laurens van der Post, Turbott Wolfe was also intended "to sting with satire the mental hindquarters, so to speak, of the bovine citizenry of the Union." [7] Plomer was a fine social satirist; he not only possessed a biting and ironic sense of humour, he was also particularly adept at seeking out and attacking the most sensitive and controversial areas of dominant white ideology and segregationist practices.

If one intended to "sting the *hindquarters*" of white South Africa in the 1920s, no better issue could be chosen than that of "miscegenation". This repulsive pseudo-scientific word was commonly used in the 1920s to refer to inter-racial sexual relationships, one of the most controversial issues of the day. It seems likely that it was largely due to Plomer's unorthodox and unpopular approach to racial issues and "miscegenation" in particular that the initial furore surrounding Turbott Wolfe was followed by decades of critical neglect.

For many years Turbott Wolfe's reputation rested almost entirely on the well-publicized scandal it had provoked in the 1920s, rather than on thoughtful or in-depth critical analysis. Plomer himself contributed to this distorted view of the novel, at times dismissing Turbott Wolfe as "not impressive" [8] while simultaneously revelling in the impact it had made when it first appeared. In "Conversations with my Younger Self", for example, Plomer comments as follows:

> I do not myself think that your first novel is any great shakes as a novel, but I do think it rang a bell - an alarm bell, if you like. It at least did something to shock a few people into facing the explosiveness of a way of life in Africa that had up to then been taken for granted. [9]

Despite some notable exceptions, [10] the critical silence surrounding Turbott Wolfe was so deafening that in 1979 Stephen Gray remarked:

> The fact is Turbott Wolfe is not at all regarded as a scandalous,outrageous work in South Africa today, nor is it kept behind lock and key in any South African library. The truth is worse; it is completely out-of-print, forgotten, and of interest mainly to Africana book-collectors who rate colonial fiction low on their scale of values. [11]

In recent years, critical interest in Turbott Wolfe has begun to revive. More than six decades after it was first published, the novel has an extraordinarily powerful resonance, and several critics have suggested that the novel represents a significant moment within the development of South African literature in English. Partly because of Turbott Wolfe's reputation as the novel which caused an uproar in the 1920s, critical attention has been drawn to the socio-political context of the novel, as well as to the personality of Plomer himself. As early as 1965, when a second edition of Turbott Wolfe eventually appeared, Nadine Gordimer commented on the importance of examining aspects of the novel's background in order to come to a fuller understanding of the book. [12] This shift of critical focus can be traced, for example, in works such as Michael Wade's "William Plomer, English Liberalism and the South African Novel" [13] and in Michael Herbert's

William Plomer [1903 - 1973]: A Biographical and Critical Study (1976). In a short but thought-provoking essay David Brown emphasizes the importance of situating Turbott Wolfe within the context of South Africa in the 1920s, [14] while Stephen Gray, always a staunch defender of Turbott Wolfe, looks at the novel in terms of the development of South African English literature and the author's experiences in South Africa. [15] Unfortunately an extensive and detailed study of the novel's socio-political and historical background falls outside the scope of the essay, but Gray does make several valuable suggestions for further research. [16]

This critical shift to the novel's context is to be welcomed, since it represents a challenge to the sterile, ahistoric formalism which has dominated literary criticism in South Africa. And yet, most criticism about Turbott Wolfe remains superficial and unsatisfactory. It seems that partly because of the nature of Turbott Wolfe's reputation, most critics still regard the novel as something of a curiosity, of interest only to literary historiographers with a liking for the slightly bizarre. Many of the ideas and concerns of Turbott Wolfe thus remain largely unexplored, and this in turn has led to further mystification, for example the tendency to affix simplistic "labels" to the novel. Thus Turbott Wolfe has some-

times been categorized as a spontaneous outpouring of youthful genius, or a landmark within the "liberal tradition" in South African literature in English. [17] Such critical assumptions and superficial labelling need to be challenged; in the case of Turbott Wolfe they serve primarily to obscure the richness and complexity of the novel, while pandering to the mystique surrounding the young author and his creative "vision".

Turbott Wolfe is a remarkable novel: it chronicles a colonial past, while making predictions about South Africa's future; it is occasionally strangely anachronistic, and yet deeply involved with contemporary social and political issues; it is both committed to and alienated from Africa; it draws inspiration from different South African literary traditions, yet in terms of its structure and style, it is strongly modernist, revealing a clear understanding of contemporary European art-forms. It combines ironic wit with a deeply-felt seriousness. It is a novel about politics, aesthetics, love, art, violence. It is about the relationship between the individual and his society, and the relationship between Africa and Europe. It is about race, sexuality and fear; disillusionment and hope. It is a novel that astounds and challenges the reader with its complexity, ambiquity and subtle contradictions.

This assessment of the novel may seem somewhat at odds with Turbott Wolfe's critical reputation. Even Plomer's own responses to Turbott Wolfe are at best ambiguous, an uneasy mixture of pride and embarassment. Here Plomer points out what he regards as the major flaws of the novel:

> Judged as a novel it is very deficient. By realistic standards, the story or plot is exiguous and somewhat absurd, and it was not even well constructed. The main characters are neither well drawn nor convincing, the development is episodic, and the whole proceeding is crude and immature, and disfigured by an unpleasant superficial smartness or vulgar cleverness. [18]

Despite the fact that Plomer has been praised for this "honest appraisal" of Turbott Wolfe's defects, [19] these comments are extremely harsh, and, as this dissertation will show, unjustified. But they do tell us a great deal about a particularly problematic area in literary criticism, namely how a work of fiction is judged. Turbott Wolfe is judged "deficient" by "realistic standards": In other words, it is found wanting when judged in terms of an aesthetic and literary ideal; in this case, the realist novel. It is not surprising that Plomer finds his episodic and fragmented story and his impressionistically portrayed characters neither "well constructed" nor convincing. The fundamental flaw in Plomer's criticism is that he has made

a false equation: Turbott Wolfe is by no means a realist novel. Plomer comes closer to the mark when he argues that "the book is not wholly without merit":

> After a suitable lapse of time a man ought to be able to criticize his own work with some detachment, so let me see what I can do. My impulse was to present, in a fictional form, partly satirical, partly fantastic, some of my own impressions of life in Africa and to externalize the turmoil of feelings they had aroused in me. I had no intention of drawing a self-portrait or of giving a naturalistic account of African life.... To speak of it as a novel is perhaps a misnomer: it was a violent ejaculation, a protest, a nightmare, a phantasmagoria... [20]

These words can be seen as an "epigraph" to this dissertation: they reveal the multi-faceted complexity of the novel, and also intimate the crucial importance of examining the relationship between the author's experiences in South Africa and his novel.

Where critical exploration of Turbott Wolfe is concerned, a fundamental question needs to be asked: How did such an unorthodox and controversial book come to be written? This question informs the direction and scope of this dissertation, and inevitably points the critic in the direction of the cultural, historical and socio-political context of the novel, as well as the personal history of the author.

In its widest context, Turbott Wolfe must be seen within the sphere of European conquest and imperial dominance in Africa. British imperialism played an important role in shaping the lives and destinies of Plomer's parents and of Plomer himself. It is not surprising that Turbott Wolfe reveals the author's profound awareness of the historical processes at work in Southern African society. Written in the early 1920s and deeply concerned with contemporary political issues, Turbott Wolfe also looks backwards towards an imperial past and the heyday of colonialism in Africa, and forwards to its eventual decline.

Plomer outlines the plot of Turbott Wolfe as follows:

> It will be enough to say that Turbott Wolfe himself was an improbable and ineffectual Englishman who made a sojourn in an imaginary African country (not wholly far-fetched) where he became a negrophilist and encouraged miscegenation. There was not much of a story, but the story was not the point. [21]

The "story" of Turbott Wolfe is in fact much more significant than Plomer's remarks indicate. The idea of an Englishman who travels to a British colony in Africa has strong affinities with a major theme in colonial literature, namely the adventure story of a disillusioned hero who "finds himself" in Africa. Turbott Wolfe can at one level be seen as a parody of the history of imperialism,

and a satire of the plethora of nineteenth century fiction that celebrated the glory of empire. It is clear that Turbott Wolfe should be seen against the background of colonialism and the literature that accompanied it.

Plomer's statement that his protagonist's adventures take place in an "imaginary African country" is misleading, to say the least. The "Lembuland" of Turbott Wolfe is based largely on Plomer's experiences and impressions of Natal - Zululand and the Stormberg region of the Eastern Cape, but it is also informed by the author's perceptions and interpretations of South Africa as a whole. This engagement with South African reality can immediately be recognized in the major themes and concerns of the novel.

The theme of racial conflict in South African literature is almost as old as the conflict itself. The significance of Turbott Wolfe lies not in its inclusion of this familiar theme, but in Plomer's approach to racial conflict and his perception and understanding of the historical moment in which he wrote. During the 1920s the foundations of modern apartheid were being consolidated, and the "native question" was assuming a definite prominence. Mabel van der Horst's response to contemporary obsession with the "native question" - that it is not a question, but an answer [22] - can be seen as a key statement about

Turbott Wolfe's approach to South Africa's racial issues. This statement resonates through South African literature: it is a question and an answer which signals a turning-point in the fictive portrayal of the problem of colour.

It is ultimately in the realm of personal relationships that Turbott Wolfe seeks solutions to the "colour question". This is not surprising: Plomer himself attempted to break through racial barriers by establishing friendships across the "great racial divide", as he put it. Plomer was deeply concerned with contemporary socio-political issues, and his friendship with Africans - in particular Lucas Makhoba and John Dube - was crucial in bringing him into contact with the political aspirations of black South Africans. His identification with these aspirations is one of the most important features of Turbott Wolfe. Thus while Turbott Wolfe focuses on personal relationships, these relationships are underpinned by the powerful workings of contemporary African political ideas.

An issue that inevitably arises in South Africa is the question of where the writer stands in relation to the South African political situation, and Plomer clearly identifies with "the African point of view". But South African fiction is also characterized by the limitations of the "segregated imagination", an inevitable outflow of

being a writer in a rigidly segregated society. The limitations imposed by this environment can be traced in Plomer's life and work in South Africa. What makes Turbott Wolfe extraordinary is Plomer's consciousness of these limitations; the novel expresses the struggles of the "segregated imagination" to reach through an historical and socio-political deformity towards a common humanity.

## Chapter One: TURBOTT WOLFE AND THE "COLONIAL TRADITION" IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

### INTRODUCTION

The appearance of William Plomer's Turbott Wolfe (1925) in South Africa in 1926 resulted in a storm of controversy. For a time the battle-lines were drawn between those who praised Plomer for breaking new ground in his treatment of inter-racial relationships and specifically "miscegenation", and those who perceived him as a traitor to white social and political values. At various times Plomer, Roy Campbell and Laurens van der Post - the "Voorslag writers" [1] - made convincing claims about the novel's originality and impact at the time it was first published, but due to negative reader-responses and the existing segregationist climate Turbott Wolfe was rapidly submerged and sometimes virtually forgotten. [2] Recently, however, interest in Turbott Wolfe has been revived, perhaps because the main themes and concerns of the novel are considered to be of central importance today, although the novel is no longer considered to be explosive or subversive. Critical focus continues for the most part to centre on the novel's treatment of racial themes and Plomer's scathing criticism of white colonial society, but as Stephen Gray has pointed out,

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> Critics in the wake of the three Natal apologists [Plomer, Campbell, van der Post] have, generally speaking, gone little further in their assessment of the novel: reputation has outweighed examination when the critic is sympathetic to the liberal tone of the debate, or has been ignored when the critic is of a different cast of mind. [3]

There is no doubt that Turbott Wolfe is generally considered to have made an important contribution in the development of the English South African literary tradition. Critics have labelled Turbott Wolfe a "significant" novel; its significance is usually seen in terms of the author's "liberal vision".

There has been a tendency to characterize the novel as an eruption of visionary genius, and to regard Plomer as an extraordinary aberration. Nadine Gordimer, for example, describes Plomer in this way:

> ...William Plomer, aged 19, published in 1925 a work of genius, a forced flower fertilized upon an immature talent by reaction against the racialism which had by then become entrenched under the name of a union of the best interests of all people in South Africa. [4]

The portrayal of Plomer as a liberal-humanist genius, out of step with racist and segregationist thinking, is a common one, and in many instances effectively ignores and distorts the limitations imposed by ideological, historical and social reality on the creative and imaginative

process. This view is exacerbated by the ahistoric formalism of much South African literary criticism, which has only recently been challenged. In some cases an ahistoric approach to the novel mediated only by an emphasis on Plomer's "visionary" liberalism has led to the examination of Turbott Wolfe as a more or less isolated artefact, and the belief that it is entirely "original" and "unique" in terms of its criticism of colonial society and treatment of racial themes. [5]

But Turbott Wolfe is by no means the first novel to deal with these themes, although at some levels the novel expresses a distinct shift in political and ideological focus. The theme of "miscegenation", for example, commonly occurs in colonial fiction and is often sympathetically treated, while Margaret Harding (1911) by Perceval Gibbons is far more "shocking" in terms of the interracial romance. Olive Schreiner, Douglas Blackburn and other writers had also written novels which criticized white colonial society. [6] The examination of the internal structures of a text alone cannot fully explain any literary work, and in the case of Turbott Wolfe has often obscured the relationship between the novel and a broader narrative tradition of colonial literature.

Turbott Wolfe is generally regarded as a landmark within

the framework of the literary "liberal tradition" of English South African writing. Michael Wade, who has made an extensive critical study of the "liberal tradition" in English South African fiction, states that "William Plomer received the tradition from Olive Schreiner and expanded it....." [7] while Martin Tucker argues that Turbott Wolfe "may be said to be the prototype of the modern liberal protest in fiction against Apartheid". [8]. The view of Turbott Wolfe as a significant landmark in the literary "liberal tradition" is true also for critics who regard the novel as being of little "literary merit". According to Stephen Watson:

> Given the many artistic faults of the novel, the ineffectualness of Turbott Wolfe himself as a narrator and the lack of focus in the scattered materials of the novel, the important place which Turbott Wolfe is usually assigned in English South African literature cannot be due to its literary merits... Rather, the significance attributed to it is a result of the unique vision which it is claimed to contain.... Indeed, it is the novel's liberalism which is its most significant feature ... [9]

While the "liberal vision" expressed in Turbott Wolfe is of critical importance and will be examined from various perspectives in this and following chapters, the tendency to view the novel as a landmark within the literary "liberal tradition" alone is obviously severely limiting.

These limitations are exacerbated when the "liberal tradition" in English South African literature is seen as the *only* tradition, a type of selective South African "Great Tradition". This critical approach situates Turbott Wolfe as a stepping-stone somewhere between The Story of an African Farm and Cry the Beloved Country; but as Gray points out, "it is only superficially true that first there was Thomas Pringle, then Olive Schreiner, then Plomer". [10]. Thematically, for example, Turbott Wolfe at one level owes as much to colonial adventure novels and romances as it does to the literary "liberal tradition". The process of a careful selection of certain "key" texts and writers which underpins the critical construction of a South African "Great Tradition" is inevitably informed by the assumptions, attitudes, consciousness and cultural orientation of critics, theorists and the class and social groupings they speak for. The structuring of a "Great Tradition" necessarily leads to a slanted, distorted view of South African culture, and the neglect of many literary works which form an integral part of the rich and varied traditions of English South African literature. [11]

In terms of the literary background of Turbott Wolfe, the virtual enshrinement of the novel as a landmark in the literary "liberal tradition" alone, the idea that it is entirely original and unique, and the myth-making

portrayal of Plomer as a visionary genius, must be challenged. To attempt to affix any neat or all-emcompassing label to Turbott Wolfe would be to avoid the many challenges, contrasts and subtle contradictions which the novel presents. For example, in terms of its content as well as the ideas that influenced the author, Turbott Wolfe looks both backwards in history towards a colonial past, but also forwards to a future free of the racism which characterized contemporary South African society.

One way in which such contrasts can be explored is by initially situating the novel within a broader narrative tradition of colonial writing, seen against the background of British imperial intrusion, dominance and eventual decline in South Africa. For Turbott Wolfe is at one level intricately connected to this historical process; while the novel is clearly a critique of dominant racist and segregationist ideas which characterized white political debate in the 1920s, it is also an exploration of the colonial past and the gradual decline of imperial dominance in the twentieth century. This context is crucial in helping the reader or critic understand Turbott Wolfe as both influenced by some of the dominant ideas which characterized white colonial society, and also a rejection of colonial values and beliefs.

In the decade after World War One, it became clear for many that the heyday of Empire was declining, and this awareness found its way into fiction. [12] Turbott Wolfe, concerned as it is with a colonial milieu, expresses a severe disillusionment with the practice of colonial control, while simultaneously revealing the extent to which it is influenced by some of the ideas and attitudes of contemporary colonial society. Turbott Wolfe is in many ways a novel of the "colonial" tradition, which sometimes mediates the liberal tone of the novel. Although "written with sympathy", Turbott Wolfe is, like most colonial novels, written "with a view of Africa as seen by an outsider." [13] Section I will tentatively explore the relationship between Turbott Wolfe and earlier colonial fiction; such a comparative exploration reveals not only some marked similarities, but also the extent to which Turbott Wolfe is also a parody of the British imperial policy of conquest and domination that informed colonial adventure novels and romances.

Further evidence that Turbott Wolfe is not merely an outpouring of spontaneous genius and liberal vision can be found in the fact that the novel's disillusionment with imperialism and the mechanisms of colonial control is not an isolated concern. These qualities can be found in many novels which are similary concerned with the decline of

imperialism in the early twentieth century, for example Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1902) or De Stille Kracht (1900) by the Dutch writer Louis Couperus, amongst others. The relationship between Turbott Wolfe and De Stille Kracht (The Hidden Force), which will be explored in Section II, is of particular interest, since Plomer was directly influenced by Couperus's novel.

> ...Empire was a more universally available escape route: black sheep could be lost in it; ruined or misunderstood heroes could go out and return with fortunes; the weak of every kind could be transferred to it; to make a new life. Often indeed, the Empire is the source of the unexpected legacy...It is clear that the use of the Empire relates to real factors in society. (Raymond Williams) [14]

> I thought then, as I think now, that trade is like art. Art is to the artist and trade is to the tradesman. I think the greatest illusion I know is that trade has anything to do with customers...if you are able to be a success in trade, in art, in politics, in life itself, you must never give people what they want. Give them what you want them to want. (Turbott Wolfe) [15]

At its simplest level Turbott Wolfe is the story of a young Englishman, Wolfe, who comes to South Africa to trade and explore a new and exotic environment. and returns to England enriched by his African experience. The most obvious source for the creation of Plomer's trader protagonist can be found in the author's own experiences as a trader in Zululand in the 1920s. [16] Wolfe is, however, not a new figure in South African fiction:

> His appearance on the scene, no matter how blurred or incomplete, must be seen against the background before which Plomer places him. He is by no means a new figure in South African fiction: his predecessors have names like Sylvester Tramper, Alexander Wilmot, Jasper Lyle,

> Everard Tunstall, Richard Galbraith, Johnny Bull, Allan Quatermain, Richard Hartley, Davie Crawfurd and more - traders and adventurers all, who return to Great Britain educated and enriched by their African experience. [17]

The term "trader adventurer" is derived from the portrayal of British trader protagonists in imperial fiction, particularly in "adventure" novels or "romances", the popular literary form in the era of imperial intrusion into Africa.

The protagonists of popular British imperial fiction - explorers, hunters, pioneers, frontiersmen, soldiers, traders - can be seen as powerful metaphors for imperial penetration, and later in the century, when imperialism had become an active policy, for aggressive colonial conquest and expansion. The emergence of the British "trader adventurer" protagonist can be traced to The Travels of Sylvester Tramper (1813), and in the romance genre of John Buchan's Prester John (1910) he achieves the proportions of a full-blown imperial superman. The imperial "trader adventurer" typically comes to South Africa with little more than a sense of adventure, inherent British patriotism, and the opportunity to make his fortune in the "coming country". [18] But "trader adventurer" fiction cannot be dismissed as mere "adventure yarns": "trader adventurer" fiction forms a distinct theme in colonial

literature, and it is necessary to see Turbott Wolfe within this tradition and as a reaction against it.

The emergence of "trader adventurer" protagonists in imperial fiction is related to what Raymond Williams refers to as the use of Empire in nineteenth century English fiction. [19] Empire was often used as a convenient literary device so that "characters whose destinies could not be worked out within the system as given were simply put on the boat" [20] to sink or swim in some distant corner of the empire. In this way unwanted characters could be lost, and heroes miraculously return to the life-world of the novel with fortunes that need no explanation. Imperial fiction can be seen as the other side of the coin; it tells the story of what actually happens to such characters once they arrive in an imperial outpost. The use of Empire in fiction is related to real factors in society:

> At a simple level, going out to the new lands could be seen as self-help and enterprise of the purest kinds. Also, in the new lands, there was a great need for labourers, and emigration as a solution to working-class problems was being widely urged, often by the most humane critics of the existing system... [21]

Imperial fiction played a crucial role in "selling" the colony to the mother country - colonial P.R. - and the in-

ternal structures of adventure or romance novels were ideally suited to mediate and express the main themes of imperial thought, encompassing a broad spectrum of metaphors and symbols that gave powerful expression to the ideology of expansionism. Turbott Wolfe is linked to this often neglected aspect of colonial fiction through the portrayal of a British "trader adventurer", an outsider who perceives Africa through essentially English eyes. Through an exploration of the development of "trader adventurer" fiction, the fictive portrayal of imperial intrusion and decline are symbolically linked, although limited space has dictated an extreme selectivity in the texts examined in this section. [22] Against this background, the trader protagonist of Turbott Wolfe represents a significant moment in colonial fiction; by the time Plomer wrote his novel, the dreams, justifications and rationalizations of empire building were being widely questioned and criticized, and at one level the dying and disillusioned Wolfe becomes a powerful metaphor for imperial withdrawal and decline.

## A. The Emergence and Development of the "trader adventurer" as a fictive Protagonist

### i) Le Vaillant's Travels: The Romantic Explorer

The emergence of the "trader adventurer" in imperial fiction about South Africa is directly linked to the travel writing of the French writer and explorer Francois le Vaillant who travelled to the Cape in the 1780s. Under the influence of the enlightenment and particularly Rousseau, Le Vaillant presented to his readers a romantic, idealized portrait of the Cape interior.

Le Vaillant's Travels, first published in the early 1780s - the records of his journeys into the interior - became best-sellers in the increasingly popular field of travel literature. [23] After translation into English the Travels inspired the creation of the hero of The Travels of Sylvester Tramper (1813), arguably the first of a long line of "trader adventurer" protagonists in literature about South Africa.

Le Vaillant wrote for a European audience which knew little or nothing about Africa. Armchair explorers may have received their first impressions of Africa from




La Vaillant's romantic "adventurer in Africa".




A "Noble Savage" from L. Vaillant's Travels.

encyclopaedic travel literature which brought them glimpses of the exoticism, mystery and "local colour" of strange and distant places. The Travels can be seen as an outsider's attempt to explain and categorize a foreign environment. Describing the Cape from the perspective of Rousseauan romanticism, Le Vaillant portrays the interior as a pagan paradise, populated by "Noble Savages", which contrasted sharply with the artif of Europe. Le Vaillant's admiration for Africa's "Noble Savages" is epitomized by his love for a Khoi woman he calls "Narina". [24] It is a romantic, pre-imperial view of Africa; Le Vaillant argues that "the mild and frank behaviour of these sons of nature" makes imperial conquest unthinkable, since "the ideas of conquest and empire.....spring from obstacles and resistance". [25] It is a view of Africa which was to change rapidly during the nineteenth century.

Le Vaillant makes his way through trading, or as he would have it, by presenting gifts to the "savages" he meets during his travels, such as cloth, tobacco or "a knife, a steel, a box of tinder and a necklace of large glass beads. To the woman I gave necklaces, and brass wire for bracelets". [26]

Le Vaillant's version of the Khoisan as "Noble Savages" and his refutation of the "scale of being", a popular

theory of racial hierarchy, [27] did not take root in South Africa, but can be traced in the work of later writers like Thomas Pringle, William Plomer and Laurens van der Post. From 1800 it was English, not French culture, that was colonizing the Cape; Le Vaillant's romantic vision was overrun by the more aggressive, pragmatic approach of English settlers who came to the Cape in 1820. Accordingly, the image of the "trader adventurer" as a romantic explorer changed radically during the nineteenth century.

ii) Sylvester Tramper: "Comic Hero"

Le Vaillant's Travels was heavily satirized during the two decades following publication. The translation of his work into English led to the appearance of The Travels of Sylvester Tramper, [28] a parody of his romantic idealism and of the romantic image of the "adventurer". Written "with a particularly British sense of stiff upper lip", [29] the work heralds the emergence of the "trader adventurer" as a fictive protagonist in literature about South Africa in English.

The full title gives some idea of what awaits this heroic, if satirized, "trader adventurer" in Southern Africa: The Travels of Sylvester Tramper through the Interior of the

South of Africa, with the Adventures and Accidents that he Encounters in a Journey of More than Two Thousand Miles through those Unknown Wilderness, Constantly Exposed to Danger from Beasts of Prey, and the Attacks of Savages [30] sets the scene for adventure in an exotic environment. It is an exaggerated, humorous "imaginary voyage" made possible by the existing uncertainty of what awaited European explorers in the interior.

Sylvester Tramper shares many of the characteristics of later less humorous "trader adventurers", and can be seen as the fictional ancestor of John Buchan's David Crawfurd and other imperial "trader adventurers". Tramper is a Yorkshireman whose sense of adventure fills him with the longing to explore exotic and "unknown" regions, "to rove free as air..the first and paramount wish of my Heart". [31] He travels to the Cape and sets off "like one of the patriarchs of old....to penetrate the interior regions of Africa". [32] He makes his way by trading; in exchange for brass wire, penny whistles, jew's harps and other commodities he travels through largely imaginary terrain under safe conduct from an African prince. Tramper's rationale for his travels is based partly on the idea of a "civilizing mission", but a series of mishaps - including an encounter with Mozambican savages - turn him into a disillusioned and despondent figure. A confrontation be-

tween the English navy and French buccaneers, reflecting the existing competitive nationalism between Britain and France, [33] revives Tramper's "inherent" patriotism. The year of his return to the Cape coincides with the British occupation of the Cape, preventing further French revolutionary influence in Dutch South Africa, including, presumably, Le Vaillantian ideas about "Noble Savages".

After the French have been "exterminated like vermin" [34] Tramper returns to England, cured of his wanderlust, reassured of his manliness and of British superiority:

> I ... am now settled upon my own estate, perfectly cured of my desire to travel, and satisfied that the laws, constitution, religion, manners and morals of my own country are superior to those of all others on the face of the earth. [35]

Compared to England, South Africa is a place where

> ...no improvement has been made in civilization from the remotest part of history; and perhaps, future ages will pass away without producing, in this immense portion of the earth, those wondrous effects which the cultivation of the human mind has brought forth in other regions. [36]

While Le Vaillant regarded his stay in the Cape as a temporary sojourn in paradise, Tramper sees Southern Africa as "a desirable station for our European settlement", [37] predicting the arrival of the first major wave of British

settlers in 1820. The indigenous population presents no problems for European settlement since in Tramper's eyes Africans are generally friendly, easily bribed and harmless, although they in no way resemble "Noble Savages", being repellent and disgusting in appearance. [38] Tramper's encouragement of British settlement is related to the fact that the early nineteenth century saw the beginning of the classical epoch of capital development and the emergence of Britain as a major colonial power determined to protect her trade route to the East. [39] His scathing description of Africans, an attack on Le Vaillant's romantic notions, is also symptomatic of the escalating process of racial dehumanisation of Africans during the nineteenth century, which later found expression in imperial literature as well as in the pseudo-science of Social Darwinism. [40] Even the most squeamish of imperialists would not hesitate to conquer people who are regarded as sub-human.

A "trader adventurer" protagonist is ideally suited for exploring the concept of European economic intrusion into Africa, and is also an ideal hero for an adventure tale, since he must penetrate beyond the boundaries of civilization (the settler enclave) into unknown, mysterious terrain where anything can happen (and usually does). During the early nineteenth century, traders, isolated

trekboers, missionaries, hunters, explorers and others often travelled beyond the colonial frontier into largely "unexplored" territory; it is not surprising that pioneers and sportsmen often find their way into colonial literature as "adventurers". [41] The Travels of Sylvester Tramper, with its "adventurer" protagonist, can be seen as a predecessor of the popular adventure novels which exploded onto the literary scene in the second half of the nineteenth century as a celebration of colonial conquest, the subjugation of the indigenous population and the supremacy of British imperialism.

iii) Frontier Conflict and the "Trader Adventurer"

The first major wave of British immigrants to the Cape, the 1820 settlers, heralded the arrival of a more permanent English-speaking population in Southern Africa and British cultural colonization of the Cape. Early settler poetry [42] expresses a new sense of determination to make a home in South Africa, which echoes dominant colonial interests. On the Eastern Cape frontier, the settler community came into constant conflict with the indigenous people, [43] resulting in a profound sense of insecurity. For settlers and the British authorities alike, the frontier was a major concern.

Literary responses to the frontier were varied, but novels like Jasper Lyle: A Tale of Kaffirland (1852) by Harriet Ward or Thomas Forester's Lyerard Tunstall: A Tale of the Kaffir Wars (1851) can be seen as direct responses to the ongoing frontier conflict, and should be examined within the context of permanent British settlement in the Eastern Cape. Both novels express settler concerns about the defence of the colony against insurgents, the threat of "internal rebellion" by the disaffected Dutch, and illegal arms trading across the frontier. Their plots revolve around the activities of villainous traders, armsdealers who pose a direct threat to the safety of the colony. Against the background of the frontier wars, the trader emerges as a sinister and dangerous figure in colonial fiction. Although the two novels are strikingly similar in their expression of dominant settler interests, their protagonists - Lyle and Tunstall - are exact opposites. Of the two, Lyle is of particular interest since he epitomizes the "trader adventurer" as villain, while Tunstall is portrayed as an heroic British adventurer of the type that will be examined later on in this section.[44] While they present an interesting contrast, it is Lyle's role as a "traitor" and his criticism of colonial society that reveals the "trader adventurer" in an ironic light.

Briefly, Tunstall's sense of adventure and British enterprise bring him to the Cape where he is apprenticed to a Dutch farmer, van Arneveld. Tunstall discovers that van Arneveld and a trader named Graaywinkel are selling arms and ammunition to the Xhosa across the frontier; [45] they plan to incite an attack on the colony after which the Dutch will be able to regain control of the Cape. Tunstall hastens to the defence of the colony and largely due to his "inherent" British manliness and courage the plot fails and the enemy is destroyed. In a final vindication of British colonial conquest and expansionism, Tunstall ends up owning van Arneveld's farm and controlling his trading interests, while the Dutch rebels are forced to trek North in search of greener pastures.

Lyle on the other hand, arrives at the Cape as a convict, having been deported from England for conspiring against the British government and "rousing the lower classes" through stirring "the people up to discontent by disseminating false principles." [46] The convict ship in which he is transported is wrecked off the Cape coast [47] and Lyle makes his escape. He joins up with a group of traders, gunrunners who-

> to outward observers travelling the country carried on a harmless traffic in ostrich feathers, skins, horns, tobacco, snuff and such comforts as civilization in her slow march

> through Kaffirland had taught the use of to the natives. [48]

The traders conspire with the witchdoctor Amani - a character based on the historical figure Makanna [49] - to instigate an attack on the colony, and Lyle uses revolutionary rhetoric to good effect:

> There are people in my country beyond the great waters, who know that the English colonists are great liars ... Quarrel not amongst yourselves; the musket and the flint, and the powder and the bullet, are all good when used together; apart, what are they? Drive these greedy white men into the sea ... [50]

The novel's complex web of sub-plots culminates in the defence of a British homestead against attack by the well-armed African insurgents, the results of the machinations of the traitorous "trader adventurer" who provides arms for the Africans and the Dutch. The rising is eventually crushed by the loyal and heroic settlers, and Lyle comes to a bad end, the standard Victorian solution for wicked characters.

Jasper Lyle is a justification and motivation for British settlement in the Eastern Cape and a celebration of the imperial spirit. Ward's Diary [51] - written in the 1840s after the author had spent some years in the colony, thus qualifying her as an "expert" on African society and cul-

ture - provides some useful insights into her political thinking. The diary includes information on the history of the colony and the frontier conflict, and a chapter of advice to prospective settlers. Ward advocates the need for an aggressive policy of expansion and conquest, and her writing is informed by racist and segregationist thinking. [52] Like Forester [53] Ward believes that missionaries (and traders) generally work against settler interests, and she is eager to reassure her readers that there is no validity in misr'onaries' criticism of colonial policy regarding the African population. [54] Her chapter of advice to settlers is aimed at encouraging British settlement at the Cape in the interest of colonial consolidation.

Similarly, Jasper Lyle provides the author with a useful ideological framework for the insertion of ideas about colonial conquest and consolidation, and British superiority. The ideological landscape of the novel is divided into the colony, with its "green and undulating parks" [55] and the threatening landscape beyond the frontier. The colony is a Garden of Eden which contrasts invitingly with the "crowded homes of England, its pallid manufacturing children, its cities with dark buildings jammed together, its thronged populace, toiling, toiling on, with heaven's sunlight bricked out ..." [56] The

landscape is fraught with racial tension; loyal and beleaguered settlers are determined to protect "British possessions" against all comers, whether marauding Africans, the rebellious and ungrateful Dutch, or British traitors. Against this background of "total onslaught" the "trader adventurer" Lyle stands out as a dangerous and aberrant figure.

Lyle is clearly the kind of settler Ward does not want. His function in the novel is twofold; to focus attention on the threat posed by arms-trading across the frontier and to emphasize the danger of a threepronged attack on British control of the Cape; from Africans, the disaffected Dutch, and from British traitors. Through her portrayal of Lyle, Ward further reveals her ideological persuasion and class allegiance; anyone who criticizes the British ruling class or its ideologies must be inherently aberrant, evil and violent, and will (at least in fiction) be defeated by the heroic imperial spirit.

In terms of the development of the "trader adventurer" as a fictive protagonist, Lyle is remarkable for his attitudes to imperialism. The author unintentionally allows Lyle to express valid criticism of imperial policies and the colonial ethos which masquerade as a "civilizing mission". William Plomer's protagonist Turbott Wolfe is

clearly not the first British "trader adventurer" to see the dark side of imperialism.

B. The "Trader Adventurer" as Imperial Superman

i. The Romance genre and the "adventurer" protagonist

Where ideology is concerned, fiction can be regarded as a privileged site; contrary to the widely-held assumptions of its innocence, as is the case with romance novels and literature for adolescents in particular, fiction is

> ... a vital instrument for the insertion of individuals into the perceptual and symbolic forms of the dominant ideological formation, able to accomplish this function with a "naturalness", spontaneity and experiential immediacy possible to no other practice. [57]

Romance fiction, which emerged as a popular genre alongside the growth of late Victorian readership, is characterized by

> the crucial element of distinction ... between literary "realism", which looks outward towards a stable set of social norms, and the more inward-looking nature of "romances", which tend to imply wish-fulfilment and childhood fantasies ... romance has a regressive and primordial tendency of looking towards inward psychological states and worshipping the heroic and marvelous. [58]

The element of "wish-fulfilment" can be found in, for example, the anachronistic nature of much romance fiction. By the late nineteenth century the influence of the mining

revolution was felt in most societies of Southern Africa, bringing about violent socio-economic transformation; but these developments are seldom reflected in the romance novels of writers like H. Rider Haggard (1856 - 1925) and John Buchan (1875 - 1940), who wrote best-seller romances set in Southern Africa. [59] The Africa they portray seems to belong to a pre-imperial world, unaffected by large-scale expansion, conquest, labour migrancy, landlessness or the mining revolution. This anachronistic Africa is imbued with a sense of nostalgia which echoed settlers' longing for the "good old days", a "Darkest Africa" where Africans exist in their "natural state" of primitive savagery.

The internal structures and form of romances are ideally suited to mediate and express the main themes of imperial thought, and "as a mode of fictional writing, it was readily given to a society lacking the stability of cohesive governmental structures". [60] Through a crucial misinterpretation and misunderstanding of history and African society, romance novelists buttressed ideologies of conquest and separatism, and often provided rationalisation for "native administration". [61] Characteristically, romance fiction emphasizes the unEnglish nature of the African landscape, while the ideological geography is often one of immanent (and imminent) racial conflict. As

in Jasper Lyle, whites tend to exist in an idyllic terrain, surrounded by Africans who lurk threateningly on the periphery. African social structures and culture portrayed in romance novels are largely the product of writers' imaginations. The rural setting is crucial since it obscures the real position of Africans in urban and rural areas and their role in the economy. The ideological geography of romances clearly reveals the way in which it is informed by segregationist designs. Into this nostalgic, virtually "untouched" Africa strides the heroic figure of the romance protagonist, an imperial superman beset by dangers, to "discover" and explore the African interior.

What Paul Rich calls "worshipping the heroic and marvellous", finds ideal expression in the depiction of heroic "adventurer" protagonists. Protagonists of romance novels are invariably male, white, British, and Christian, and penetrate Africa to bring "civilization" and imperialism in their wake; the "great man" theory of history, popular amongst the dominant classes of the nineteenth century, is clearly at work here. Heroic British "adventurers" are ideal metaphors for the imperial spirit, and embody the pursuit of white, male and colonial ideals. These protagonists - explorers, pioneers, sportsmen and "trader adventurers" [62] - are imbued with

a mystique of manliness, courage and sportsmanship which appear to be necessary accompaniments to the imperial spirit. They penetrate Africa with a confidence, enthusiasm and crusader spirit not unlike that engendered by the quest for the Holy Grail. The romance hero travels through ideological space and time, first from Britain to Africa and then into the interior; here he is usually invigorated by the climate, confronts countless dangers, proves his manhood, and is enriched in the process, before returning in triumph to Britain. Africa is juxtaposed with everything that is familiar and "civilized" in British society and culture, and Africans are generally regarded with fear and contempt, despite the occasional appearance of the stock character, the "loyal native" or servant. [63] The interaction between white hero and savage Africa occurs in terms of direct racial conflict and polarisation. The qualities of the romance hero can be seen to crystalize and enhance the qualities of earlier British hero protagonists. A typical imperial hero and "trader adventurer" can be found in John Buchan's Prester John (1910).

ii. Prester John

John Buchan was one of the most popular writers of his time and Prester John (1910) was one of his most popular

novels. Despite the overt intention of the novel to provide entertainment for adolescent boys in the form of an adventure yarn, Prester John is closely linked to the needs and aims of imperial rule in South Africa, specifically colonial administration. [64] The novel's ideological underpinnings, which reveal the workings of contemporary imperial thought, are inextricably linked to Buchan's role in the colonial administration and civil service in Southern Africa. [65]

Prester John centres around the story of a heroic young "trader adventurer", David Crawfurd, an ideal of British boyhood. Crawfurd is endowed with all the qualities Buchan sees as admirable in healthy boyhood; manly, rugged, patriotic and individualistic, he epitomizes racial and specifically British superiority, and can be seen as a semiological representative of the imperial spirit. He is superior not only in contrast with Africans, but also vastly superior to the Portuguese Henriques, representing a colonial rival in Southern Africa.

Crawfurd's adventure begins in Scotland when he witnesses an African minister, Reverend John Laputa, [66] performing naked and "devilish" rites on a deserted beach. This convinces Crawfurd that the Reverend is not a Christian, and must be up to no good. years later, Crawfurd's

father having conveniently died, he is packed off to the Eastern Transvaal as an assistant shopkeeper at a trading store at Blaauwildebeestefontein, a place-name resonant with exoticism and potential adventure. Crawfurd is told by a schoolmaster that

> ...we'll be in the heart of a native reserve up there... There are no white men living to the east of us because of the fever...It sounds like a place for adventure, Mr Crawfurd. You'll exploit the pocket of the black men and I'll see what I can do with their minds. [67]

The ideological landscape is thus that of an anachronistic "Darkest Africa", and the scene is set for racial conflict.

In South Africa Crawfurd's suspicions about Laputa are confirmed when he discovers that Laputa has set himself up as a direct descendant of the mythical Christian king, Prester John, [68] and is in possession of a hidden treasure. From this position of mystical power, Laputa incites and organizes a rebellion against the colonial authorities. Crawfurd finds himself at the centre of a great adventure from which he predictably emerges triumphant, having thwarted the rebellion; the plot contains all the ingredients of a gripping adventure story.

All the hoary myths about Africa can be found here. Iso-

lated whites are threatened by savage black hordes under the leadership of an "outside agitator" - Laputa has been educated overseas - under the slogan "Africa for Africans". The "agitator" is a familiar and recurring figure, Africans being considered incapable of organising their own rebellions. In Prester John, the rising is associated with the Ethiopian movement, [69] regarded as a direct threat to civilization and to empire, a return of "The Heart of Darkness". Nonetheless, Crawfurd patriotically insists that "though [Laputa] roused every Kaffir in South Africa he would be beaten". [70]

Buchan's racial attitudes, in the light of his close involvement with the development of "native policy", can be seen as representative of dominant white colonial ideas. His style and language emphasize the "historicity" and "accuracy" of his statements:

> [Africans'] brains are insensible to pain, and I have seen a man stand on a piece of red-hot iron without noticing it, 'til he was warned by the smell of burning hide. [71]

From the mouth of the heroic Crawfurd, a role-model for adolescent readers, such ideas become a valuable ideological tool, and echo the pseudo-scientific racial theories of social-Darwinism and eugenics, then very much in vogue. [72]

By subduing the rebellion, Crawfurd saves British civilization in South Africa from "nameless savagery" and helps smooth the way for efficient colonial administration. Like most adventurer protagonists of romance novels, his patriotism includes a belief in imperialism as a necessary civilizing mission, while the act of "taking up the white man's burden" tests his manhood and confirms his sense of inherent British superiority:

> ... it is an experience for which I shall be ever grateful, for it turned me from a rash boy into a serious man. I knew then the meaning of the white man's duty. He has to take all risks, reckling nothing of his life or his fortunes, and well content to find his reward in the fulfilment of his task. That is the difference between white and black, the gift of responsibility, the power of being in a little way a king; and so long as we know this and practice it, we will rule not in Africa alone, but wherever there are dark men who live only for the day and their bellies. [73]

In a final flourish of patriotism and concern for the colonial economy, Crawfurd sells the diamonds he has captured (Laputa's treasure) to De Beers, "for if I had placed them on the open market I should have upset the delicate equipoise of diamond values". [74]

Prester John and other romance novels are not innocent "adventure yarns", but aggressive vindications of British

resourcefulness, superiority and mercantile enterprise, manifested in the characteristics, ideas and experiences of their "adventurer" protagonists. A "trader adventurer" hero gives the author an ideal opportunity to portray an anachronistic Africa; the isolation of a trading-store, an outpost in darkest Africa, sets the scene for racial conflict and emphasizes the heroic qualities of a lone colonial superman in the face of unspeakable dangers. The author's choice of literary form and the inclusion of an accessible role-model for adolescent readers, allows Buchan to insert ideologies and political agenda which in the light of his novel's popularity may have profoundly influenced his readers' perceptions of Africa and African society. His misinterpretations and distortions aimed to perpetuate myths of savagery and primitive incompetence, cultivate dominant ideas about colonial control, and confirm the ideology of inherent British superiority.

The plethora of colonial fiction which emerged in the nineteenth century can be seen as a crucial tool in the popularisation of dominant ideas on imperial conquest and control.

c. Turbott Wolfe: the disillusioned "trader adventurer"

There are several important similarities between Plomer's protagonist Wolfe and his colonial "trader adventurer" predecessors which need to be explored. The main focus, however, will be on the crucial differences between Wolfe and earlier "trader adventurers" and the significance of these differences. By the time Plomer wrote Turbott Wolfe, the fictional figure of the "trader adventurer" was more than a century old and had emerged as an idealized British superhero in the romance novels of writers like Haggard and Buchan. Against this background Wolfe stands out as a figure of "calculated parody." [75]

Wolfe's youthfulness, British background, sense of adventure and desire to explore a new and exotic environment, and the fact that he comes to Africa to trade and returns to Britain enriched by his African experiences, are some of the more obvious characteristics Wolfe shares with other fictional "trader adventurers". Like them, he is a temporary sojourner in South Africa who views Africa through essentially foreign eyes. Wolfe narrates the story of his experiences in Africa to "William Plomer", who appears as Wolfe's confidante and amanuensis in the novel, [76] maintaining the ironic distance of an observer while Wolfe's tale unfolds. Wolfe recalls a time when he

was ill and "hardly recovered from the aftermath of adolescence ... with no friends, no passion, no anchor whatever" [77] to tie him England. Like his fictional predecessors, Wolfe is unexpectedly presented with the opportunity to travel to South Africa:

> I was inflamed with the sun of a new day ... I was suddenly ordered to Africa by some fool of a doctor. [78]

Like Buchan's Davie Crawfurd, he is destined to become a trader in Africa:

> I was to be started with a trading station, in a region neither too civilized nor too remote. The prospect pleased me. I could think of nothing more thrilling than a small business, under my own eye, under my own hand, in which no halfpenny would be able to stray. [79]

A familiar scenario emerges: Wolfe's Africa appears initially to be the land of opportunity, the "universally available escape route" of colonial fiction, where villains can be lost and heroes made.

As in most earlier "trader adventurer" fiction, the rural environment of the trading store is significant. Partly based on Plomer's experiences as a trader in Zululand, [80] the novel's environment at one level provides the opportunity for exploring the destructive encroachment of

colonial culture on a romanticized pastoral Afri The portrayal of a "lost" Africa is not a new one in colonial fiction, [81] and is echoed in Plomer's autobiography where he recalls his initial responses to the idea of trading in Zululand; [82] by the early 1920s, a trading store in a "native reserve" was as close as Plomer could get to what he regarded as a relatively "unspoilt" Africa in an increasingly industrialized and urbanized South Africa.

The ideological landscape of Turbott Wolfe is divided into "Lembuland" [83] - populated by the indigenous "Lembu" people and a scattering of white farmers, traders and missionaries - and the white town of Aucampstroom. [84] The racially divided landscape and society in which Wolfe finds himself is characteristic of "trader adventurer" fiction, and relates to real factors in society. The idea of keeping African societies separate from the colonial white society was not a new one, and the practice of segregating separate African societies into tribal and pre-capitalist reserves is an important aspect of the novel's socio-political background. The idea of territorial segregation was not alien to white liberal thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, [85] and reserves were often seen as "natural" terrains for African societies. [86]

Plomer shares the view of African societies as "naturally" pastoral [87] and in Turbott Wolfe the encroachment of colonial culture on a pastoral Africa is personified by colonials who are at best ineffectual (the Fotheringhays, Nordalsgaard) or stereotypes of viciousness and bigotry. Wolfe's neighbours are for the most part

> ... of extreme mental and physical repulsiveness. Even their names - Bloodfield, Flesher - are used against them; and their attitudes are beastly almost to the point of caricature. [88]

Repulsed by his white neighbours, Wolfe finds himself at his trading store "faced with the impact of African consciousness of his isolation"; [89]

> ...I turned my feelings, in escape from the unclean idea of Flesher and Bloodfield, far too much into sympathy with the aboriginal. [90]

True to his pastoral vision of an "essential" Africa, Plomer portrays Africans as "noble savages", and Nhliziyombi is a twentieth century version of Le Vaillant's "Narina". [91] Nhliziyombi is for Wolfe a personification of a noble, primitive Africa which has been virtually destroyed by colonial culture, and belongs to what Wolfe perceives as a lost paradise:

> She was a living image of what has been killed by people like Flesher, by our obscene civilization that conquers everything. [92]

Wolfe is not the first "trader adventurer" to see the dark side of imperialism, [93] nor are his ideas on the destruction of African society unusual in the context of white liberal thought in the 1920s, which often displayed a philanthropic concern to protect African societies "from the over-hasty penetration by western economic pressures." [94]

The racially divided ideological landscape and society of Turbott Wolfe becomes the setting for inevitable conflict. The "colour question" is a central concern of the novel, and reflects the all-informing importance of the "colour question" amongst the white South African intelligentsia in the 1920s. [95] Wolfe, nicknamed "Chastity" by the Lembus, experiences his first brush with "the question of colour" when he falls in love with Nhliziyombi, an unthinkable act for British heroes of the Davie Crawfurd variety.

In most colonial "trader adventurer" fiction Africa is seen as a "man's world" and women are assigned peripheral roles or are virtually nonexistent. [96] In Turbott Wolfe, two women play pivotal symbolic roles in Wolfe's

response to "the colour question". While Nhliziyombi is a personification of a "lost" Africa of the past, Mabel van der Horst, an Afrikaans woman with the same qualities of spiritual and physical nobility as Nhliziyombi, is for Wolfe a "goddess of the future". [97] For Wolfe, the solution to the "colour question" lies in the promotion of a "future coloured world" through "miscegenation". Mabel becomes a symbol of what he calls "Eurafricanism", a harmonious future South Africa as unattainable as the "lost" Africa.

Wolfe seeks to break down racial and cultural barriers, "...to create a black and white consciousness beyond colour, for the future of Africa ..." [98] To this end Wolfe participates in the formation of the nonracial political organization, "Young Africa", which embodies the principle of "miscegenation" as a solution to the "colour question". [99] While the theme of "miscegenation" is not a new one in "trader adventurer" fiction, [100] Plomer's approach clearly is, and represents a complete reversal of the segregationist underpinnings found in Jasper Lyle, Prester John and other colonial fiction.

But the "Young Africa" movement and the ideals of "Eurafricanism" are doomed to failure in a climate of segregationist thinking, and Wolfe is forced to leave his

trading store ns to England a defeated a... disillusioned fig... yet enriched by his experiences in Africa. It is Wolfe's ultimate disillusionment and defeat that is the key difference between him and the heroes of "trader adventurer" fiction; and that reveals him as a figure of parody. If Davie Crawfurd is seen as representative of the triumphant imperial spirit, then Wolfe must be seen as the other side of the colonial coin.

The "trader adventurer" hero of the colonial tradition generally returns triumphantly from Africa to England, invigorated, materially enriched and reassured of his inherent British supremacy. The opening scene of Plomer's novel, however, first alerts the reader to the fact that Wolfe is not a conventional hero of colonial romance. The reader first meets Wolfe in a startlingly incongruous setting, where "he was about to die, at no great age, of a fever that he had caught in Africa." [101] Wolfe narrates the story of his experience in Africa from his deathbed in his English seaside lodgings, a room "William Plomer" describes as

> ...so tawdry as to be grotesque. Patterns of flowers, sewn or painted in smudgy colours, decorated the walls, the curtains, the linoleum on the floors, the linen, the furniture; and they were all different. I felt obscured by all those scentless bouquets... [102]

This peculiar and seedy room, a singularly inappropriate setting for any self-respecting colonial hero, "becomes for [Wolfe] an ideal background". [103] The bizarre deathbed setting portrays Wolfe in a satirical light and emphasizes his failure as a "trader adventurer" in Africa. Despite his initial optimism and confidence, Wolfe is singularly ill-equipped to cope with South African reality. He is an outsider in the context of white colonial society, where his ideas are considered dangerously aberrant, but also in relation to African culture and society:

> I found myself all at once overwhelmed with a suffocating sensation of universal black darkness. Blackness. I was being sacrificed, a white lamb, to black Africa. [104]

This fear of the unknown is characteristic of Wolfe's personality, contrasting effectively with Mabel van der Horst's frank impulsiveness. It also indicates Wolfe's deep-rooted ambiguity: on the one hand his actions and attitudes are the affirmation of the possibility of inter-racial relationship; on the other he is almost paralysed by a sense of insecurity and uncertainty.

Wolfe is no colonial hero, imbued with exaggerated qualities of British manliness, courage and enterprise; he regards himself as a sensitive artist, a humane man of culture, and entirely lacks the singleminded sense of pur-

pose that characterizes Davie Crawfurd. Wolfe is a dilettante with a somewhat pretentious and absurd vanity:

> I have never been satisfied to plough one furrow ..... They have been pleased to tell me, one or two who have had the chance and I hope the wit to judge, that the work I did during that period had value. They have been kind; I have been flattered. [105]

Wolfe's artistic endeavours, like his political vision, are doomed to failure; a manuscript describing Wolfe's work in Africa is lost at sea when its distinguished author is drowned. Defeat and disillusionment seem to haunt him; the failure of Wolfe's love for Nhliziyombi - a name that ironically means "bad-hearted" - is no more than a "bitter lovemaking", and contrasts sharply with Mabel van der Horst's marriage to Zachary Msomi. This echoes Wolfe's loss of confidence in the ideal of "Eurafricanism".

The missionary Friston (Wolfe's friend and fellow "Young Africa" member) tells him that he ought to be called "Sheep" rather than Wolfe, since he lacks the courage of his conviction or the ability to cope with what is perceived as the reality of colonial Africa:

> ... you don't believe one thing you think [Friston tells Wolfe]. I don't believe one word you say. Oh you slimy coward! Your god's fear. So is mine. But wait till you see "HORROR" my

child, written on the sun ... [106]

Thus "While satirizing Wolfe's dilettantism and pretentiousness, Plomer also means the reader to feel his numbness, his impotence, his oversensitivity which leads to inaction and frustration." [107] Unlike his "trader adventurer" predecessors who stride through an Africa they regard as just another British possession, Wolfe recognizes that he is an outsider in Africa, a temporary sojourner who can have no permanent impact in South Africa. Wolfe's impotence and eventual death can be seen as Plomer's analogy for the ultimate failure of colonialism and the imperial spirit, and echoes Mabel van der Horst's belief that " The white man's as dead as a doornail in this country. You gain nothing by not looking facts in the face. All this blooming Empire - building's a blooming blind alley ". [108]

Wolfe is not the only defeated "adventurer" of the novel. Frank d'Elvadere is brought to South Africa by the Gold Rush, but instead of making his fortune, he is destined for a life of rootless wandering. Wolfe's last image of "the voluptuous pioneer" is that of a colonial Don Quixote:

> He climbed wearily into the saddle...the horse was a poor thing, and ambled down the long sloping road, ambled slowly, with that enormous old

> man upon its back...I was left with the sound of water, the emptying sound of water, running loudly in the ditches. [109]

Tyler-Harries, the writer who comes to Africa to compile an illustrated record of Wolfe's cultural activities and notch up another best-seller for the "Pomegranate Press", arrives in Africa "strutting down the gangway of the Rochester Castle" [110] and ends his illustrious career ignominiously by drowning in the arms of a coloured stewardess during the voyage home. The idealistic Friston, one of the pioneers of "Young Africa", descends into a drugged madness when confronted with the reality of "miscegenation" (the marriage of Mabel and Zachary); he is later murdered for "political or religious reasons". [111] Wolfe's dominant image of the Norwegian missionary Nordalsgaard best describes what awaits the colonial adventurers of Turbott Wolfe. It is a warning and a prophecy:

> He had set out once, how finely. He had been purposeful. Oh, he had gone out with gifts and weapons this man. His blood had been tradition; his brain, knowledge; his body, purpose. He had gone out, this old man, this old-world man, with a deliberate, elegant, mincing step to conquer Africa, to conquer the world, to conquer time. It was not a wreck: you could not call it a failure, this. It was defeat. [112]

The defeated "adventurers" of Turbott Wolfe contrast effectively with Nordalsgaard's predecessor Klodquist, a glorious, heroic figure of nineteenth century

imperialism.[113]

A particularly striking difference between Turbott Wolfe and earlier South African fiction can be found in the novel's structure and style. Plomer's portrayal of Wolfe's existentialist dilemma finds expression in the modernist form of the novel, and modernism itself is ideally suited to exemplify moral doubt in the realist imperial vision:

> The main focus of modernism from the 1890's up to the 1920s was the pursuit of new codes of conduct in the freer sphere of European urban culture and the exploration of the various new freedoms compared to the previous century. It was thus centred around a new moral autonomy of the individual and it was not surprising that it held many attractions for writers and artists seeking escape from the closer and more restricted confines of colonial society. [114]

Plomer's own ambivalence in response to the imperial vision is expressed in the profoundly ambivalent ideology of Turbott Wolfe; Wolfe's repudiation of the supremacist colonial ideology of Bloodfield, Flesher and Soper is realized in biting satire, but his endorsement of an alternative is fraught with ambiguity. The alternative to colonial exploitation and oppression is ultimately that of modernist disintegration, with its psychic repression, embodied by Wolfe.

If earlier "trader adventurers" are metaphors for colonial intrusion (Sylvester Tramper, Jasper Lyle) and the triumphant imperial spirit (Allan Quartermain, Davie Crawfurd) the dying and disillusioned Wolfe must be seen as a metaphor for imperial decline and disintegration. More broadly, Plomer is speculating about the decline of the West, "a process which he associates with the rise of the dark races and the triumph of Bolshevism". [115] Through the "trader adventurer" protagonists of colonial fiction, imperial intrusion and decline are symbolically enacted.

## Section II: The Decline of Empire: TURBOTT WOLFE and THE HIDDEN FORCE

> But above the droning could be heard, with a distinct and awful and unceasing significance, the loud roar of chaos. And there could be felt that which Couperus found in Java, weighing down on his senses, "the hidden force". (Turbott Wolfe) [116]

Turbott Wolfe opens with two epigraphs. The first epigraph is by the Dutch writer, Louis Couperus (1863 - 1923), whose novel De Stille Kracht (1900) had been translated into English shortly after the First World War as The Hidden Force. Plomer read The Hidden Force in the same year he began writing Turbott Wolfe at the age of nineteen. He was so impressed with the novel that Couperus remained one of his favourite writers, [117] and there are indications that The Hidden Force had a profound influence on Turbott Wolfe. The opening epigraph in Turbott Wolfe reads as follows:

> As for the native, he reads his overlords with a single penetrating glance, he sees in him the illusion of civilization and humanity and he knows that they are nonexistent. While he gives him the title of lord and the homage due to the master, he is profoundly conscious of his democratic, commercial nature and despises him for it in silence and judges him with a smile which his brother understands; and he too smiles. Never does he offend against the form of slavish servility; and; with his salaam, he acts as though he were the inferior, but he is silently aware that he is the superior. [118]

Virtually no critic has taken notice of this epigraph, but as Stephen Gray points out, Plomer

> meant the two epigraphs to the novel by Louis Couperus and Hermann Hesse to be taken very seriously; and it is in a piece about Couperus himself that he lays most of his cards on the table ... of Couperus's The Hidden Force he writes in terms of "horrors", of "political matters vast in their implications, of "erotic and supernatural variations"... Substitute Asia for Africa, and Wolfe for Van Oudijck (Couperus's hero), and you have: "A man, a thoroughly just and estimable man, like [Turbott Wolfe] denies the alien, the unconscious, the uncomfortable, and in the end they break him." [119]

The two epigraphs, from the works of two prominent European writers, gives an indication of the extent to which Plomer was rooted in European culture; before writing Turbott Wolfe, Plomer had read many contemporary writers' works - including Joyce's Ullysses - which contributed to his strong understanding of European modernist literary forms. This influence can be traced in the modernist register of Turbott Wolfe, particularly in Plomer's use of "stream of consciousness" to capture the spectrum and flow of Wolfe's mental processes. [120] But perhaps no European writer influenced the writing of Turbott Wolfe more directly than Louis Couperus; the aim of this section is to briefly explore this influence.

## A. Couperus's Java and "The Hidden Force"

Louis Couperus was born in the Netherlands in 1863; his family had a tradition of civil service in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), and belonged to what can be described as a "class of higher officials" [121] and colonial administrators. In the Netherlands these officials tended to gather in the Hague as part of an "Indies coterie", and apparently were regarded as "outsiders" by their countrymen particularly if they returned to Holland with Eurasian wives. Couperus consequently regarded himself as an "outsider", and remarked that he "was a child born in Holland but within the Indies tradition in mind and spirit". [122] The contrast between Dutch and Indies culture and tradition formed an important part of Couperus's self-perception:

> I consider myself to be warmer, sunnier, and more Eastern than my compatriots in Holland are ... the real Dutch part of me, I'm afraid, is a little taken aback by this. [123]

William Plomer, as will be seen in Chapter II, was also born into a family with a history of administrative service in the colonies, and like Plomer Couperus travelled back and forth between the mother country and the colonial outpost a number of times, which contributed to his feelings of alienation in Holland. At the age of 9 he left

for the Indies for the first time, where the family lived in Batavia (Djakarta). In 1899, already an established writer in the Netherlands, Couperus returned to the Indies and during the year he spent in Java he wrote De Stille Kracht (The Hidden Force), completed in 1900.

The novel is set in Labuwangi, a town in Java, at the time a Dutch colonial possession. It tells the story of the Dutch Resident, Van Oudijck, "practical, coolheaded, quick in decision from the long habit of authority", [124] colonial administrator in an alien land, who is eventually destroyed by his experiences there. Van Oudijck is portrayed as an upright ruler, a man who lives for his work and works only to further the welfare of his district. He is a civil servant from the "glorious days" of the Indies civil service, which reigned autocratically with nearly absolute powers based on the principles of strictness and "justice".

Notions about self-government or democracy are alien to him; in his eyes Dutch authority is unassailable. He is an "imported Hollander", an outsider who remains in many ways deaf and blind, alienated from the foreign environment he finds himself in;

> He believed neither in the force beyond things, nor in the force within things themselves. He

> did not believe in a taciturn fate, and he did not believe in silent gradualness. He only believed in what he could see with his own eyes: in the harvest, the roads, districts and villages, in the welfare of his domain. This unclouded clarity of his simple male nature and his practical sense of life and of duty had only this one weakness: his tenderness, deep and female in its sentiment, which he felt toward his domestic circle; to his family, which he could only see as a blind man, unable to perceive their true nature ... [125]

Van Oudijck's blindness is partly avoidance of the perverted sensibilities of his second wife, Leonie, who has "the indolent grace of all Indies-born women" and is carrying on an affair with Theo, Van Oudijck's son by a former marriage. He is also unaware that his daughter Doddie has fallen prey to an infamous seducer. Van Oudijck avoids one of life's "hidden forces", namely sexuality, which in the novel is connected to images of violence and terror. [126] But his real blindness is seen in terms of his avoidance of the "hidden force" at work in Java itself, which Couperus portrays as hidden, inexplicable powers, with connotations of the supernatural and the occult. Eva Eldersma, one of the characters in the novel, is one of the first of the Dutch colonials to sense the existence of a "hidden force":

> Still she continued to sense something alien which she could not put her finger on, something mysterious and darkly secret. [127]

The mysterious "hidden force" is the background to Van Oudijck's tragedy, and is introduced at the beginning of the novel, as Plomer points out in a piece he wrote about The Hidden Force:

> "The full moon wore the hue of tragedy that evening"... This tragic moon illuminates a languorous evening in Labuwangi,... and the air is full of "an oppressive mystery": indeed the atmosphere is quite as oppressive and mysterious as any in Conrad... Tragedy, we know from the first, impends: we do not yet guess its nature. "Mystery", a brooding melancholy, a vague threat, a "hidden force" is, we are told, in the air, is behind the faces and beneath the surface of people and things ... [128]

The "hidden force" is something strange, indescribable and mysterious which in Couperus's eyes is inherent in Javanese culture and society and can never be understood by the alien Dutch. The mystical and threatening properties with which Couperus foreshadows and shrouds the events of the novel conjure up an atmosphere of dread and fatality which was characteristic of Couperus's own belief in "fate"; "He experienced the world of the Indies in a way that was a projection of his own sensibilities." [129] Couperus's view of Javanese culture is clearly that of an outsider; he portrays it as exotic, mystical and essentially alienating, containing a "hidden force" which works mysteriously against the Dutch authorities, yet which the colonials cannot pinpoint or fully describe. A threaten-

ing mood permeates the novel, evoked by Couperus's recurring use of such words as "dark", "mysterious", "mystical" and "incomprehensible".

It is Van Oudijck's denial of the existence of the "hidden force" that ultimately destroys him:

> because he did not believe in the hidden force in life within life, and in all that teemed and tossed like volcanic fires within the mountains, like so many plots behind a throne, and because he did not believe in the mysticism of the visible world, life could catch him unprepared and weak precisely where it least conformed to his logical expectation of it. [130]

The main theme of the novel is the tragedy of the European in a colonial world who is defenceless precisely because of his alienation from a foreign culture and society, and because of what Couperus sees as his lack of faith in supernatural and alien forces; Couperus himself associates Javanese culture with the supernatural, with magic rites and witchcraft. The threatening and mysterious atmosphere of the novel reaches a climax when Van Oudijck tries to dismiss the Javanese Regent, Sunario, who then uses occult powers to destroy him. Plomer describes the resulting night of terror in this way:

> One night Leonie, stepping out of her bath, suddenly finds her naked body being pelted with gobbets of "something slimy" like clotted blood, apparently betel-stained spittle, discharged at

> her she knows not whence, and she is driven almost out of her mind. The Resident finds his bed befouled; he lifts a tumbler to drink, and it falls to pieces, or a drink suddenly grows cloudy between the moment of pouring out and the moment of drinking; he hears a persistent, unaccountable hammering overhead. [131]

After this night of supernatural horrors, Van Oudijck visits the Regent's mother, and the mysteries cease. But if Van Oudijck has won a moral victory, he has also been destroyed; he has lost his certainty and begins to age rapidly, his practical "realism" becomes suspicion, restlessness, insecurity and superstition:

> ... I was as if struck dumb, like an idiot, a lunatic; - right in the midst of ordinary life, with all my logic and practicality, the life that suddenly seemed to me to be based on the wrong values, like a complete abstraction; - because right through it all events took place that belonged to another world, events that eluded me, me and everybody else ... I was no longer myself. I no longer knew what to think, what to do, or what exactly I had done. Everything in me faltered. [132]

Van Oudijck ends his days in obscurity somewhere in the Javanese interior, where he lives with a Javanese mistress.

Couperus belonged to the school of "Dutch Sensitivists", a modernist literary movement which was attempting to break away from the dominant literary realism of the nineteenth century. In The Hidden Force Couperus is concerned (like

Conrad) with the disintegration of any absolute scale of values, and the relativity of "civilization" leads him into developing a distinctly modernist notion of the individual man (Van Oudijck) who becomes cut off from his own society and moral order. [133]

The Hidden Force also expresses a modernist moral doubt in the realist imperial vision. Couperus is concerned with the idea of clashing "separate worlds" and alien cultures that cannot meet; as Plomer comments, "he comes perilously near the claptrap about East being East and West being West and the twain never meeting", [134] but an extension of his complicated and ambivalent argument can be found in his prediction of the end of the colonial world. Interestingly, Plomer doubts whether Couperus intended his novel as a thorough indictment of Dutch rule in Java, but his doubts are perhaps related to Couperus's ideological ambivalence, and to Plomer's own belief in the necessary separation of the "political" and the "aesthetic":

> ... The truth is that Couperus was touching on something much greater than the life of a Dutch ruling family in Java, with erotic and supernatural variations. But he was out to write a novel, not a political prophecy; he tells his story, he throws out his hints and ideas, and leaves the reader to do the rest. But there is a key passage where he speaks directly enough: ... "The European, proud in his might, in his strength, in his civilization and his humanity, rules arrogantly, blindly, selfishly, egoistically, amidst all the intricate cogwheels of his

> authority, which he slips into gear with the certainty of clockwork, controlling its every movement, till to the foreigner, the outside observer, this overlordship of tangible things, this colonizing of territory alien in race and mind, appears a masterpiece, a very world created. But beneath all this show the hidden force lurks, slumbering now and unwilling to fight... [135]

It is in Couperus's premonition that the slumbering "hidden force" may one day awaken that his doubts about the imperial vision are exemplified.

B. Plomer's Africa and the "Roar of Chaos"

Like Couperus, Plomer is at one level concerned with a colonial milieu, and the superimposition of western culture on that of a colonized society. The most obvious similarity between Turbott Wolfe and The Hidden Force is that Plomer's Wolfe and Friston are like Van Oudijck "outsiders" in an alien country, and are eventually destroyed by their experiences there. But while Couperus portrays Van Oudijck as the epitome of bourgeois conventionality, Wolfe and Friston are self-consciously nonconformist compared to most of the English colonials described in the novel. It is precisely this nonconformist quality in the Dutch colonials (with the exception of Van Oudijck) portrayed in The Hidden Force that Plomer finds fascinating:

> We are certainly far from any breezy British convention of colonial life, with its hard-riding, straight-shooting, boyish man, a pipe between his teeth, and his "little woman" ordering an early tiffin so that they can be in time for the gymkhana ... No, the Labuwangi whites are of a different order. [136]

Wolfe and Friston are clearly also "of a different order"; it is interesting to note that one of the things that makes them unconventional in the South African colonial context is their attitudes to "miscegenation" and the

colour question, but that in the Javanese colonial milieu described by Couperus this would not have raised an eyebrow. [137] In The Hidden Force it is Van Oudijck's rigid conformism to Dutch social and moral values that eventually destroy him; in Turbott Wolfe it is their self-conscious nonconformism and ideological ambiguity that destroy Wolfe and Friston. But in both cases the "hidden force" and the "colonial experience" are keys to their destruction.

There is a clear indication that Turbott Wolfe was directly influenced by Couperus's novel. Wolfe describes a wedding-feast in honour of the marriage between the Norwegian missionary Nordalsgaard and Rosa Grundso:

> Friston had a society manner. Mrs Nordalsgaard was busy memorising recipes dictated by a hausfrau. The guests were noisy. Several native teachers and parsons were standing aloof, on their dignity. Olaf Shaw was there. He had come for the occasion. His collar was uncomfortable. As the coffee was getting cold the bridegroom began to read telegrams and letters of congratulation. The company sat down and applauded. When Nordalsgaard had finished, they sang doleful hymns. [138]

On the surface it is a conventional wedding. But Wolfe senses something else:

> above the droning could be heard, with a distinct and awful and unceasing significance, the loud roar of chaos. And there could be felt that

> which Couperus found in Java, weighing down on his senses, "the hidden force". [139]

"The hidden force" that Wolfe senses as a "loud roar of chaos" beneath the veneer of everyday existence plays a crucial role in Turbott Wolfe: as in Couperus's novel it is intangible, mysterious, threatening. Wolfe describes pre-colonial Africa in romantic terms as a glorious, primitive paradise, outside history and outside time; the "hidden force" he senses is something inherent in colonial Africa, in colonialism itself. Like Conrad's "heart of darkness" it is a destructive force associated with the colonial experience, with undercurrents of danger. Plomer hints at impending danger from the beginning of the novel; we are told that Wolfe is about to die from a fever he has caught in Africa, that in Africa Wolfe felt himself

> all at once overwhelmed with a suffocating sensation of universal black darkness. Blackness. I was being sacrificed ... [140]

Just as Couperus portrays a slumbering force lurking below the veneer of Dutch authority in Java, so a brooding and powerful force, which Wolfe can only define as the "loud roar of chaos", lies below the surface of everyday colonial life. In Turbott Wolfe this "hidden force" is associated with explicit premonitions of violence. Wolfe is first touched by an inexplicable violent force during a

thunderstorm:

> The air is thunderous (it is late afternoon), charged with electricity, with violence. I have always been sensitive to weather conditions, and I, too, am charged with electricity, with a flowing current, more suave than threatening, of potential violence. I am at the window to watch the approaching storm. The sky is darkly overcast, blue and tortuous, undershot with a few flung rays of the westering sun, now invisible ... I am admiring my avenue of tree-ferns; all at once the wide extended leaves are creamed and writhing like waves of the sea, before an onslaught of wind. And under them a figure, with head bowed and body muffled against the storm, is rapidly approaching; it is a figure as significant as an omen; it is a supernatural figure, coming under the agonized tree-ferns, out of mystery, to me. [141]

This mysterious figure is strangely reminiscent of the shrouded figure of a hadji that appears and disappears in the Resident's garden in The Hidden Force; the hadji is also seen as an "omen", a representative of the mystical "hidden force" at work in Java, which white colonials can never understand. As in The Hidden Force, Wolfe sees the person coming towards him through the storm as a "supernatural" apparition, perhaps a woman; but it turns out to be Zachary Msomi, the cousin of Wolfe's assistant Caleb. Wolfe is profoundly disturbed by Zachary's appearance; just as Van Oudijck seeks "objective reality" in tangible things - roads, harvests, villages - so Wolfe moves around his studio seeking solace in familiar objects:

> I touched with my hand a piece of sculpture, my own work ... I caressed it as though it were human. My eyes found pictures on the wall, and a chest against it where others were stored. There were the drawers of a bureau full of manuscripts - prose, verse, music. And all about me were my tools and mediums and instruments - a chisel, a camera, a spade, a pen, a piano. [142]

But at the same time his thoughts turn to what he perceives as a hidden violence, a destructive and often fatal force, which he associates with colonialism and with Africa itself:

> I thought of the unfortunate Tyler-Harris ... who had gone down, uncoffined, and more than a little drunk on raw cane-spirit, in company with a lady of colour, down, down, with only bubbles to his funeral, down to the uttermost depths of the sea. Now he was associated in my mind with a whole host of others. He was with those who had been broken or beaten or besotted with the almighty violence which was the tropical thunderstorm raging on the roof; which was the grace of Zachary; the beauty of Nhliziyombi; and even the trustworthiness of Caleb. [143]

Wolfe recognizes what is described as "the force beyond things and the force within things themselves", a force that Van Oudijck denies. In a passage very similar to Couperus's portrayal of a "slumbering force" waiting to awaken beneath the veneer of Dutch colonial life, Wolfe comments that

> Even the vast fabric of government, the preposterous structure of officialdom, had been set up

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