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The literary, personal, and scio-political background of William Plomer's Turbott Wolfe

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> Some of the Christianized Zulus were inclined to give themselves airs, especially the women, who tended to have names like Tryphena and Sophonisba. Perhaps they felt "saved" and therefore a cut above their less enlightened sisters. They tended to adopt European style clothes, to wear shoes, drink tea, do crochet, use strongly scented soap, and air their ability to read and write. In between the naked primitives, daubed with fat and stained with ochre, and occasional prigs turned out by the mission stations were nondescripts caught between two worlds ... [186]

Plomer's preference for "Noble Savages" is symptomatic of the "great divide" which he had experienced at Marsh Moor, where he had viewed African labourers as "heroic bronzes". Plomer's excitement at the prospect of trading in a "Native Reserve" was based partly on the hope that through daily contact with Africans he could cross the racial divide. James Plomer recalls the following:

> Ntumeni as you probably know is largely peopled by those who might be called descendents (as far as it is possible) of the original Zulu families - like the Quabes. William had deeply sympathetic feelings towards the Zulus, understandably for they had much dignity, humour and music. Perhaps he did not fully realize what ruthless warriors the same people could be, though they were still very proud of their earlier military successes ... I would add William spoke Zulu well if not to interpreter standards. [187]

The African characters of Turbott Wolfe are not explored or portrayed in depth. Rather than a rounded portrait of



Photograph of the Church at the Ntumeni Mission (1984).



Photograph of the interior of the Church at the Ntumeni Mission (1984).

their lives, histories or personalities, we are given a series of glimpses, fleeting impressions, sudden insights. On the one hand this is due to the fact that like most writers in a rigidly segregated society, Plomer is limited by the confines of the "segregated imagination"; an inability to fully comprehend and portray people from whom he is socially, politically and culturally cut off. Despite Plomer's conscious attempts to cut through the "racial divides" of South African society, the limitations he experienced are glaringly obvious in Turbott Wolfe. On the other hand, such impressionistic portrayals are ideally suited to the narrative structure of the novel, which unfolds through the deathbed narration of Plomer's protagonist, and follows the pattern defined by his emotional responses to and memories of people and events in far-away Lembuland. Of particular interest is the fact that Plomer's portrayal of African society, despite its characteristic impressionism, is intricately related to the context of Natal and Zululand.

The African characters portrayed in Turbott Wolfe fall into three distinct categories. The first category consists of the customers at Wolfe's trading-store at Ovuzane, who lead relatively independent lives in the "Native Reserve", portrayed from Wolfe's point of view as an unknown, idealized and somewhat mysterious hinterland.

We are not told very much about the Lembus who visit the store; they speak little if any English, wear "tribal dress", and Wolfe admires their "marvelous animal grace." [188] These Lembus, in particular Nhliziyombi, are representatives of an old, "lost" Africa, and are made to appear "as personifications of the natural setting."[189] Dignified, resilient and independent, the greatest threat to their traditional existence and inherent pride and nobility is the rapid and destructive encroachment of "white civilization" in the shape of corrupt missionaries, the magnetic power of towns and industries, degenerate settlers such as Bloodfield and Flesher, eager to grab as much land as they can, and government policy itself.

The second category is made up of those Lembus whose lives have been disrupted and transformed by the encroachment of the colonial world. They have been deprived of their land and their political and economic independence. They are the labourers who work for a pittance on Soper's farm, and fall victim to his particularly vicious brand of "justice". [190] They are the servants in the homes of Natal settlers, and those who migrate to Dunnsport and other "white" towns in search of work. They have been forcibly cut off from the old Lembu way of life. But despite the loss of their independence, Wolfe perceives in these landless and powerless people remnants of a proud, noble and

dignified past.

The idea of a contrast between "old" Africa, resiliently maintaining a traditional way of life in the face of colonial penetration and conquest, and an Africa irrevocably changed by white encroachment, has its basis in reality, and was by no means new. In Natal and Zululand it was of particular regional significance. In the 1880s, for example, the exiled Cetshwayo kaMpande, last of the independent Zulu kings, was asked what he knew of the Kimberley diamond fields. Cetshwayo answered that he was not sure where they were, since "the Zulu people never went to the Diamond Fields; the Natal Zulus did." [191] This statement tells us a great deal about the resilience and independence of the Zulu kingdom at a time when the first stirring of economic revolution was felt in most communities between the Cape and Zambezi, and also about perceived distinctions between Zulus within the kingdom, and "Natal Africans":

> There was as yet no need for [the Zulu] to labour outside their territory for cash or firearms because the expanding forces of colonialism had not penetrated the structure of the Zulu social formation. While other African communities had been forcibly driven from their land, or had lost their self-sufficiency as their surplus products and labour were drawn beyond their borders, the Zulu remained in possession of their land, and their labour was still expended within the kingdom. The Zulu of Cetshwayo's kingdom were very aware of these

> differences between their way of life and that of most of their African neighbours; they were proud of their political and economic independence and the manner in which they had resisted change, as befitted the descendants of Shaka... [192]

When the kindom was invaded by the British and colonial forces in 1879, the king - a powerful figure who expressed the unity of the people and who was a rallying point for any resistance - was exiled, and the Zulu military system terminated. The intensity of Zulu resistance persuaded the British to leave them in possession of most of their land. But this independence was not tolerated for very long:

> The external forces of change, having failed in a direct assault, then started to erode Zulu independence. Divisions within Zulu society were exploited and the material strength of the Zulu undermined; partition was attempted... successfully in 1887, when political authority was divide between the Transvaal and Britain. Zulu were now beginning to leave their homesteads in larger numbers to work on farms, railways, mines and in the homes of neighbouring colonies. [193]

By the 1890s Zululand was firmly locked into the colonial economy of Southern Africa. White settlers in Natal were acutely aware of their weak position; for the fearful settlers, vastly outnumbered by the potential proletariat on their frontiers, the dangers posed always outweighed the potential advantages. [194] The independence of Zululand was seen as a direct threat to settler security and also prevented capitalist expansion into the region. In 1897

the colonists were temporarily appeased when British Zululand was handed over to the colony of Natal which, in the early years of the twentieth century, appropriated much of the land for white settlement. This brought white settlers into direct confrontation with the African population, and rumours that Dinuzulu aimed to rebuild the powers of the Zulu kings, added fuel to the fire:

> The blood-curdling fantasies of white colonists... mingled with the wishful dreams of once independent Africans who were increasingly aware of colonial encroachment on their land and labour. It made a heady mixture, which exploded in parts of Zululand and Natal in the so-called Poll Tax or Bambatha Rebellion of 1906, an uprising that was in some sense the result of self-fulfilling prophecy by the settlers, and the last armed resistance to proletarianization on the part of Africans. [195]

The areas of Zulu occupation became "Native *Reserves*", and the Native Land Act of 1913 confirmed this pattern of land distribution.

Despite the eventual destruction of Zulu independence, the vigour with which the Zulu people resisted assaults on their independence and the defeats they inflicted on the invaders meant that "they also impressed the name Zulu indelibly on the popular imagination of Europe and America ... the name Zulu has entered popular speech and writing over the last century and has become widely identified

with ideas of traditional African savagery, bravery and barbarous nobility." [196] Significantly, the myth of the Zulu as the noblest of savages served to mystify the actual reasons for the invasion; the forcible acquisition of Zulu land and labour. [197]

While at Ntumeni, Plomer recognized in Zululand the still pulsating remains of a once powerful African kingdom. He also shared to an extent the view of the Zulu kingdom as the apogee of noble savagery, and the anachronistic portrayal of the Lembus from the Reserve as remnants of a noble past forms an important part of the setting of Turbott Wolfe. The fact that we are told so little about their day-to-day existence, and are left only with a strong sense of their nobility and dignity, serves to emphasize the fact that "noble savages" are a romantic idea rather than a reality. But this does not mean that Plomer was blind to the realities of colonial conquest in Zululand; he uses the evocative portrayal of "Noble Savages" precisely so that he can illustrate the destructive encroachment of the colonial world, and juxtaposes them with the labourers and servants employed by the despised colonists of the novel. Turbott Wolfe is by no means a novel of the realist tradition, nor does it detail the process by which an economically and politically independent kingdom has been eroded and integrated into the

southern African capitalist system. But Plomer does give us fleeting glimpses of this process, of how a past way of life "has been killed by people like Flesher, by our obscene civilization that conquers everything." [198]

If Turbott Wolfe is concerned with chronicling the past, specifically the experience of colonialism, it is also clearly deeply concerned with broader contemporary issues. In Plomer's view, the traditional African way of life, "old Africa", is something of the past. His interest in contemporary South Africa finds direct expression the portrayal of Caleb and Zachary Msomi, a third category amongst the African characters of Turbott Wolfe. Both Caleb and Zachary are a product of Christianity and colonialism. They are educated, characterized by a middle class respectability, and can be seen as members of the African intelligentsia. For Wolfe, they represent the "new African", the educated elite of African society in twentieth century South Africa.

No longer tied to "traditional" Lembus society, Caleb lacks the exoticism, mystery and romance that colour Wolfe's perception of Nhliziyombi. Caleb acts as a kind of mediator between Wolfe and the Lembus from the reserve. On an intellectual level, Caleb is far more accessible for Wolfe, and becomes his friend and companion as well as his

trusted storeman:

> His natural deference was not a little disturbed when at almost every meal I would exclaim: "Caleb, for God's sake, talk! I want words, words, words." ... He used to begin, I remember, with hesitation, but he always interested me intensely. He used to speak a very simple and deliberate, but graphic English. It was a great deal better than anything you hear spoken in E____. He often stopped, nervous, perhaps, because of the keenness with which I followed everything he said. He gave me so much food for thought that I nearly always spent half an hour with a notebook after those meals. [199]

Caleb's cousin, Zachary, is immediately recognized as "something more than the usual native", [200] and though he is impressionistically portrayed, he has a distinct aura of power, and "the delicacy and dignity of a king." [201] A mission educated clergyman, Zachary is intellectual, political and a pivotal member of "Young Africa". When Zachary first arrives at Hlanzeni, Wolfe wonders whether he is a "portent", and indeed, Zachary's relationship with Mabel van der Horst is the catalyst which exposes the underlying ambiquities in the characters of Wolfe and Friston. His intellect, pride and political determination make him an ideal match for Mabel; they are meant to represent the best aspects of both their races, and epitomize the ideals of "Eurafrica". Although Wolfe laments the passing of the "Noble Savages" of Darkest Africa, it is clear that he pins his hopes for the future

of Africa on "new Africans" such as Zachary.

Significantly, it was two "new Africans" whom Plomer met at Ntumeni who revealed to him some of the undercurrents and debates in African political circles in Natal. These men, Lucas Makhoba and John Dube, can be seen as a key to some of the political ideas expressed in Turbott Wolfe, particularly the "Young Africa" organization.

In Turbott Wolfe, Wolfe's storeman, Caleb Msomi, is described as "a trustworthy and amusing encyclopedia of local matters", a man of integrity, sensitivity and intelligence, Wolfe's friend and confidante and fellow member of "Young Africa." Caleb also contributes an article to the local Lesbuland newspaper The Morning Star (based on Ilanga Lase Natal), in which the formation and ideals of "Young Africa" are described. Plomer's portrayal of Caleb Msomi is based largely on Lucas Makhoba (or Makoba), who worked as an assistant at the Plomers' store, and with whom Plomer established a relationship similar to that between Wolfe and Caleb. According to James Plomer

> Lucas Makoba worked in the store before my time. I would guess for a couple of years. He spoke excellent English and received his education at the nearby mission. Lucas used to come to the store quite often while I was there. It would seem he was the important source of information on the daily life and customs of the Zulu nation which William seemed to understand well ... he

had many other friends, not as close, but who came often to the store if only to chat. [202]

Lucas Makhoba exposed Plomer to a variety of ideas outside the narrow confines of his background and social strata; his conversations with Plomer were not limited to "local gossip" or anthropological information, but may also have contributed indirectly to some of the political and religious ideas which inform Turbott Wolfe. But while Plomer recalls Makhoba in his autobiography only as the Ntumeni storeman and a valuable companion, Makhoba was to become an important figure in the development of the African Congregational Church, which was linked to the rise of African nationalism. [203]

Makhoba was born on Christmas Day 1899, at Eshowe Mission Station (Kwa Mondi), one of the stations of the Norwegian Mission Society, where he was baptized. After the South African War, the Makhobas returned to his father's hometown in the Biyela district where Makhoba attended a school run by the daughters of a Lutheran missionary, Reverend O.S. Norgaard.[204] At one point Makhoba, aged about nine, made his way alone back to Eshowe to attend a school there. An article about Makhoba which appeared in Drum (June 1963) states that he "left school in standard VII" and "became a storeman in his hometown of Eshowe, Zululand ..." [205] It was here, at the Ntumeni store,

that he met Plomer. Educated in mission schools and encouraged by his father, Makhoba had always been interested in church and mission issues, and in 1929, some years after leaving the store, he became a minister of the Lutheran Church:

> One year later, he resigned to join the African Congregational Church. It was a momentous decision, his new spiritual home was a rebel group which had broken away from the White controlled American Board Mission. [206]

The African Congregational Church was founded by the dynamic Gardiner B. Mvuyana (1866 - 1925) in 1917 as a reaction against the white missions, and the repercussions in Natal and Zululand were considerable. [207] Makhoba was elected president of the African Congregational Church in 1943.

While working at the Plomers' store, Makhoba was already concerned with political issues, which later led him to join the breakaway African Congregational Church, and some of these concerns are touched on in Double Lives, where Plomer recalls some of his conversations with Makhoba:

> He had some concern about the hopeless position and prospects of his race, political, social and economic ... We used to have long talks on the subject, and I asked him to write down some of his ideas. [208]

Some of Makhoba's ideas (as related by Plomer) reveal the influence of his mission education, and many of the issues he discussed with Plomer were at the time receiving considerable attention in mission circles. [209] Makhoba was particularly concerned with the relationship between husband and wife, spoke scathingly about the practice of lobolo, and "regretted that too many of his people wished to be teachers instead of learning some useful work." [210]

Makhoba als

> lamented that his people were too resigned to their position ... "fast asleep." "Let us all stand up on both feet," he wrote, "and see what will happen tomorrow." By this he did not mean political insurgence, which he knew would be hopeless for a long time to come, but work and self-reliance, in which he had been taught to believe. [211]

Plomer relates that Makhoba "lamented the lack of unity among his people" and looked "with envy and admiration to the achievements of the negroes in the United States and [wished] that his own people could be like them ... " [212] The importance of unity and the example of American blacks were at the time important topics in political debate amongst the African intelligentsia, and Makhoba's concern with these and other issues may have contributed substantially to Plomer's growing political awareness. In

Makhoba's ideas and attitudes Plomer found some confirmation of his own political ideas, as well as valuable insights. His relationship with Makhoba and other Africans who visited the store, must also have represented a breakthrough in terms of the racial divide which hitherto had characterized Plomer's relationship with Africans.

In one of the notes Makhoba made for Plomer he wrote:

> Our paper, Ilanga, is not taken into sufficient consideration. The man who founded it and built up a school at Ohlanga has done a great work, and we do not appreciate it. [213]

This was an opinion shared by Plomer:

> I had for some time been in correspondence with the man alluded to. Ilanga Lase Natal was the only Zulu newspaper, and the first periodical, I think, ever to print a poem by me. John Dube - more formally the Rev. John. L. Dube - who had founded and edited it was a man of great worth. The Ohlanga Institute, which he had also founded, produced the Late Chief Luthuli, the Nobel Prize winner, and it was Dube who, with Africans from other tribes, established the African National Congress for the political advancement of the African people. [214]

In Turbott Wolfe Plomer pays pointed tribute to Dube and Ilanga Lase Natal (The Sun of Natal): in Africa Wolfe finds himself "inflamed with the sun of a new day." [215] Plomer had learnt Zulu in order to exchange ideas rather than to give orders, attempted to break through racial

taboos and conventional master-servant relationships in his friendship with Makhoba and others, and read Ilanga Lase Natal, which must have exposed him to a number of experiences and attitudes beyond the sphere of conventional white Eshowe society. Plomer's poetry was first seen in print in Ilanga Lase Nata[l] and this in itself is significant. Most critics have assumed that his poem, "A Stranger at the Wedding", reprinted in Turbott Wolfe, [216] is the first and only one of his poems to appear in Ilanga Lase Natal (March 24, 1924). But previous poems under the pseudonym "P.Q.R." had appeared earlier in 1924, namely "Brothers in Christ" (February 1, 1924), "A Game of Chess" (February 15, 1924), "Post Mortem" (March 7, 1924), "Gifts to God" (also March 24, 1924), amongst others. Most of these poems address the "colour question" and the possibility of racial harmony, and are mediated by the idea of Christian tolerance and fellowship. The fact that Plomer's poem was first printed in Ilanga Lase Natal rather than in the local "white" newspaper, The Zululand Times, is revealing; it is doubtful that the poems would have been unacceptable for publication in The Zululand Times and one must assume that Plomer chose to have them printed in Ilanga Lase Natal, a Zulu-English paper and mouthpiece for African political debate in Natal. This can be seen as symptomatic of Plomer's conscious and active engagement with African society and culture and

specif[illegible]socio-political concerns, which in turn crucially influenced Turbott Wolfe's engagement with socio-political reality. [217]

In 1924 Plomer met the editor and founder of Ilanga, John L. Dube. James Plomer remarks that:

> William stayed with John Dube once or twice and they got on like a house on fire. Dube was the editor of what was probably the first Zulu language newspaper. If there was an intellectual influence on William this was the man. [218]

Plomer recalls visiting Dube at Ohlanga, staying up late at night talking, and Dube taking him to a Tolstoyan settlement founded by Mahatma Gandhi and run by his son Manilal:

> It was a strange meeting this, between the son of a great man who had been kicked, stoned and imprisoned for defending his own people in this harsh and radiant country, a representative of a recently barbaric race who was seeking to better his oppressed and disorientated people by helping them to adapt to a "Western" civilization of sort, and then myself, a mere youth, a member of a ruling race who was there to show he regarded it as a misruling race. [219]

It is clear that Plomer was being exposed to people and ideas generally shunned by white Natalians, and that Dube must have been a key-figure in the development of Plomer's political ideas at this time.

Dube was a remarkable man, eulogized by B.W. Vilakazi on his death as "the incarnation of the spirit of his age." [220] Born in Natal in 1871 and one of the first ordained pastors of the American Zulu mission, he was educated at Inanda and Amanzimtoti theological school (Adams College). He spent some years studying and teaching in America, and on a second visit collected money from American philanthropists for a Zulu industrial school similar to the famous Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, established by Booker T. Washington. Dube established his school at Ohlanga in the Inanda district in 1901 and in the same year was a founding member of the Natal Native Congress. A couple of years later he started Ilanga Lase Natal, and in 1912 he was invited to become the first president of the South African Native Congress (later to become the African National Congress.) Ousted from the presidency in 1917, "he continued in a prominent position in the Natal branch of Congress, running it virtually as an independent fief, until his death in 1946." [221] Shula Marks describes Dube as "the spokesman of the Kholwa (ie. African Christian) community", [222] and his position as newspaper and political leader "had led white Natalians to regard him as a provocation and a challenge, 'a pronounced Ethiopian who ought to be watched.'"[223]

In the light of James Plomer's comment that Dube was at this time the greatest intellectual influence on Plomer and Plomer's obvious admiration for Dube, [224] it is clear that Plomer must have come into contact with many of the social and political concerns which dominated contemporary political debate in and around the South African Native Congress in Natal. His contact with ideas so radically different from those encountered in the white community in Eshowe - which at best showed a philanthropic concern for the plight of Africans, characterized by the concept of Christian "rescue" - could not fail to leave its impression on the youthful Plomer, bringing severe disillusionment with the "ruling race" in its wake. The crucial way in which Plomer's exposure to some contemporary African political ideas and debates informs Turbott Wolfe will be examined in detail in the following chapter.

Plomer's experiences as a trader in Zululand and the setting of the trading store in a "Native Reserve" clearly influenced the setting of Turbott Wolfe and Plomer's portrayal of an English trader who comes into contact with a variety of white colonials and Africans, and is driven to political involvement. In Zululand, as elsewhere in South Africa, the "colour question" was of central concern, but here Plomer was exposed to a different perspective on "colour issues", largely due to his contact with

Makhoba and Dube. In the words of Michael Herbert, Plomer's "frustration, anger and idealism clamoured for an outlet, which was provided by writing. For out of a welter of experiences came the impetus for a most fruitful period of literary endeavour." [225] Plomer comments that at Ntumeni "my strong flow of feeling had to shape something, if only a protest. The shape it took was on paper." [226]

Turbott Wolfe was the immediate result of his intellectual and emotional turmoil, "written with a hard pencil on thin paper," [227] and completed when Plomer was twenty-one. It was published by the Hogarth Press in 1925, but owing to a printers' strike appeared in 1926. In South Africa the appearance of the novel caused a minor storm of controversy which Plomer recalls with pride and more than a touch of vanity in his autobiography and elsewhere:

> It was in the spirit of revolt that Turbott Wolfe had been engendered, and I should have been surprised if it had been received locally with rapturous applause. I was pleased with the violence of reaction it provoked .. Turbott Wolfe had rubbed the open wound of South African racialism. [228]

The novel catapulted Plomer into the literary limelight. On a visit to Durban "to buy useful and ornamental things, for the supposed benefit of both the Zulus and the

Plomers" [229] Plomer met the poet Roy Campbell. He agreed to collaborate with Campbell on the production of a literary magazine, Voorslag, which first appeared in June 1926 and caused a stir in literary circles. [230] Plomer recalls that the "short period of our close association was in fact remarkably fruitful for both Campbell and myself ... Every moment seemed fertile. A writer going through a strongly creative phase may find he has developed a more than ordinary power of immediate assimilation." [231] Plomer's writing from this period includes poetry, reviews, and stories like "Portraits in the Nude" and "Ula Masondo." [232] But if Plomer's experiences in Zululand and Natal acted as a catalyst in the writing of Turbott Wolfe and the beginnings of Plomer's literary career, another crucial feature was his self-conscious perception of himself as a "rebel" and "outsider" in a mediocre colonial environment, and a "political-aesthete."

Chapter Three: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF TURBOTT WOLFE

INTRODUCTION

More than four decades after the publication of Turbott Wolfe, Plomer stated that it "was in a spirit of revolt that Turbott Wolfe had been engendered." [1] These words are more significant than Plomer may have intended. No doubt Plomer, autobiographer and urbane London man of letters, had in mind his youthful revolt against the values and ideas of his class and background; a revolt which in retrospect he tended to trivialize. [2] But Plomer's comment can also be interpreted in a different way, for at the time he wrote Turbott Wolfe, in the early 1920s, South Africa itself was experiencing a "spirit of revolt" which influenced both Plomer and his novel. A "spirit of revolt", both on a personal and on a socio-political level, forms a crucial and complex subtext to Turbott Wolfe.

Several recent critics of Turbott Wolfe have tended to label it a "liberal novel." [3] And yet, contemporary critics who attacked Turbott Wolfe as a scandalous betrayal of racial conventions were well aware of the fact that in many ways the novel went far beyond the bounds of

the "liberal impulse" and acceptable levels of dissent. It is here where Plomer's "spirit of revolt" can most easily be discerned; in his attacks on dominant racial attitudes and colonialism, in the ideals of "young Africa", and in his depiction of interracial sexual relationships as acceptable and admirable at a time when both black and white were vocal in their condemnation of "miscegenation." Seen within the social and political context of the 1920s, many of the political ideas and solutions expressed in Turbott Wolfe seem extraordinary.

And yet, one of the most striking features of Turbott Wolfe is its profoundly ambiguous portrayal of colonial society in South Africa, specifically Natal-Zululand. Wolfe's harsh critique of colonial society is sometimes tempered by a deeply-rooted trepidation; he wavers between outright condemnation and fearful apprehension in the face of alternatives. Wolfe, like Plomer himself, is caught in the inevitable dichotomy of a "spirit of revolt" against the norms and ideas of colonial society, while inescapably belonging to it. Plomer's intricate and somewhat ambiguous portrayal of colonial society in Turbott Wolfe is a theme well worth exploring.

Plomer's protagonist recalls his experiences in Zululand (based largely on Natal and Zululand) in a state of

frenetic excitement engendered by the fever he has brought back from Africa. But his "African fever" is more than some tropical disease. It is also a state of mind generated by memories of a place itself characterized by a feverish quality; the Lembuland of Wolfe's imagination is associated with undertones of fear, anger and aggression, overt conflict, and portents of violence.

These associations have some basis in reality. The characteristics of Plomer's fictive landscape and society can be found in Natal itself:

> There is something about Natal in the past one hundred and fifty years that is difficult to define or give a name to, but that colours the region's history throughout that time; it is a febrile quality in the public temperament, particularly of white Natalians. That temperament - at least in its observable moods - is frequently hysteric and delusive, occasionally laughable and sometimes vicious; in a multi-ethnic society, it manifest itself particularly in exaggerated and morbid forms of racially defined conflicts and fears. [4]

It is precisely these qualities that Plomer focusses on and satirizes in his portrayal of white society in Lembuland. The action of the novel develops along the divisions that occur in white society in the face of a deeply-rooted sense of insecurity and "racially defined conflicts and fears."

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The source of this insecurity can be found partly in the immanent and almost tangible "spirit of revolt" amongst the African population of Natal. This "spirit of revolt" had a long, varied and bloody history. The "pacification" of Natal and the destruction of the Zulu kingdom was a drawn-out and arduous process. In Natal in the 1920s there were still many Africans and white settlers who could recall such events as the British defeat at Isandlwana in 1879, the defence of Rorke's Drift, and Disraeli's famous comment on "the remarkable Zulu people who convert our bishops, defeat our generals, and put and end to a great European dynasty." [5] Zulu power and independence had always been regarded as a force to be reckoned with, and even the British victory at Ulundi did not eradicate the lasting fears and insecurity of Natal settlers.

Settlers' pervading sense of anxiety and vulnerability was not entirely unfounded. There was a great deal of open violence between black and white during the first decade of the twentieth century, for which the Poll Tax or Bambatha Rebellion of 1906 provided a focal point. The Rebellion exploded "against a background of rumour, much of it relating to the supposed restlessness of the evergreen but not irresponsible Dinuzulu..." [6] Such events were unlikely to reassure white Natalians who harboured a lurking fear of outbreaks of rebellion amongst "Shaka's heirs".

By the 1920s there were further disturbing challenges to the already precarious sense of security amongst whites in Natal and elsewhere. In the 1920s militancy was so widespread amongst South African blacks throughout the country that many whites feared that the country was on the brink of revolution. The immediate post-war period was punctuated by strikes, demonstrations and violent confrontations. The I.C.U. was gathering strength in the early 1920s, and was perceived as a decided threat to the country's stability. Similarly, the S.A.N.N.C. took on a more aggressive air under the presidency of Makgatho between 1917 and 1924, sponsoring both a passive resistance campaign against the pass laws on the Rand and a spate of strikes. Many whites saw in these organizations the seeds of revolutionary spirit and a direct challenge to white domination.

Sporadic outbreaks of violence in rural areas - such as the Bondelswarts rebellion of 1921 [7] - were quickly suppressed, but this did little to eradicate white fears. Many whites were quick to seize on the more emotive undertones of resistance. For example, the Israelite sect's defiance of the government which culminated in the Bulhoek massacre of 1922, drew inspiration from millenarian teachings and the passing of Halley's Comet, widely regarded as

a portent for the end of white domination in South Africa. [8] A similar millenarian quality can be found amongst the "Ethiopian" Church movements, which terrified whites associated with Garveyist ideas of "Africa for Africans." [9] Indeed, the very name "Ethiopian" suggested black nationalism in the decades after the Ethiopian victory over the Italians at Adowa. [10] In Natal, "Ethiopianism" was of regional significance, since there was some "Ethiopian" involvement in the Bambatha rebellion. In some ways "Ethiopianism" can be seen as the Natal equivalent of "Yellow Peril." [11]

Several ideological influences on African political consciousness during the early 1920s exacerbated white fears in the face of the pervasive state of unrest. The war itself "aroused visions of a better world and directed attention to the international events - in particular the struggle of subject peoples for political emancipation." [12] The ongoing influence of Negro America on African political thinking, particularly the ideas of Marcus Garvey, was perceived by many as threatening and even dangerous. Internal influences such as the involvement of the International Socialist League and the South African Communist Party in African political affairs seemed to bring the "threat of revolution" even closer. [13]

Although Turbott Wolfe contains undertones of violence and fear, Plomer did not share the exaggerated fears of other whites. Any overt acts of violence or aggression are committed by white characters in the novel, not black. Plomer was an unusual "White Natalian" in that he was able to identify strongly with African political aspirations and recognize the oppressive and violent forces at work in white society. That he was able to do so, is partly due to Plomer's personal "spirit of revolt", but also due to his contact with people like Lucas Makhoba and John Dube. It is difficult to assess the extent of their influence on Plomer, but it is possible to argue that they were key figures in exposing Plomer to a different perception of the growth of African political consciousness and nationalism. Plomer's unorthodox approach to contemporary political debate can be traced in the central theme of the novel, namely his treatment of race and "miscegenation."

Plomer's concern with political issues contrasts sharply with his ideas about the insular nature of "art". A third important theme in Turbott Wolfe thus revolves around Plomer's concern with the relationship between a writer or "aesthete" and his society, which he perceives as rooted in conflict. Plomer's exploration of this theme centres on his formulation of what he calls the "Politico-Aesthete"; someone who experiences a conflict between "art" and the

political demands of his society. An examination of this theme not only provides the reader with a profound insight into the characterization of Wolfe and Friston, but also into Plomer's literary ideas at the time he wrote Turbott Wolfe. Through Plomer's portrayal of the "Politico-Aesthete" his ideas about the relationship between a "spirit of revolt" on a personal and on a political level are vividly illustrated.

Section I: Repudiation and Trepidation: TURBOTT WOLFE and the Portrayal of a Colonial World

> I think if you go into the question thoroughly you will find that ultimately, our civilisation is obscene. (Turbott Wolfe) [14]

> ... the old wonderful unknown primitive African life - outside history, outside time, outside science. (Turbott Wolfe) [15]

One of the major concerns of Turbott Wolfe that has attracted considerable critical attention, is its satirical portrayal of colonial society. Turbott Wolfe is populated by a variety of colonials, ranging from absurd and ineffectual "outsiders" who are inextricably tied to Britain, to downright vicious caricatures of bigotry and racism. All these characters are realized in biting satire.

Although South Africa became a Union in 1910 under the leadership of Louis Botha, and despite the challenges presented by the rise of African as well as Afrikaner nationalism, British cultural and economic dominance remained a crucial influence for many years to come. Plomer's critique of the colonial ethos is thus primarily aimed at English-speaking colonial society. In particular, critics have noted and praised Plomer's harsh rejection of the racism implicit in the colonial ethos; indeed, Plomer himself saw racism and bigotry as his major "targets" in

Despite the author's stated intention to attack racist thinking and practice, a careful reading of the text reveals that his critique of colonial society is shot through with a profound ideological ambiquity and trepidation which occasionally mediates or contradicts the acerbity of his onslaught. The question that immediately springs to mind is to what extent the youthful, selfconsciously rebellious author was himself influenced by contemporary white political thinking, despite his explicit condemnation of segregationist ideas. It is a question well worth exploring. Turbott Wolfe is on the one hand a deeply-felt repudiation of colonial practice and ideology, and on the other also an expression of profound ambivalence and trepidation in the face of the demise of Empire and white dominance in Africa.

Such contradictions reveal not only the complexity of the novel and the precariousness of making snap judgements about the nature of Plomer's attack on colonialism, but also reveal the ambiguity of the author's position as an Englishman in South Africa; despite the novel's consumate engagement with contemporary social and political reality, Turbott Wolfe at one level also presents an "outsider's view" - specifically an "English" view - of Africa.

Plomer, like his protagonist Wolfe, may have criticized colonial society, but remained - inescapably - a member of the society he condemned.

A. TURBOTT WOLFE and the Colonial Milieu

On the republication of Turbott Wolfe in 1965, Nadine Gordimer wrote that it was "the only novel of poetic vision to come out of our country since Olive Schreiner's Story of an African Farm". [17]. To a lesser extent than Schreiner, Plomer has also been mythologized as a writer of visionary "genius", an interpretation based on the liberal ideology expressed in the novel, and also to an extent on the extreme youth of the writer at the time he wrote Turbott Wolfe. This critical interpretation tends to obscure the extent to which he was influenced by the social and political context in which he wrote, and his work coloured by its assumptions and limitations.

The "liberalism" expressed in Turbott Wolfe must be seen in the context of the colonial milieu which the novel addresses. The main impetus for liberalism in South Africa prior to the establishment of Union in 1910 had come from the nineteenth century Cape; the South African liberal ethos had thus developed within the context of colonialism in South Africa. The period up to and after the South African War of 1899-1902 showed an escalation of racialization in political dialogue within white settler society, while the more paternalistic mode of Victorian Cape liberalism was forced to become increasingly defen-

sive. Radical territorial segregation formed the basis for successive government policy after the establishment of Union in 1910, the industrial colour bar was entrenched in 1911, and in 1913 the Natives Land Act confined African landholding to some 9% of the total area of the Union. In the 1920s the crucial issue of the "colour question" - simply stated, the question of what should be done about the African majority - was an overriding concern in white political thinking:

> The dominant political logic of segregationism ultimately defined the direction of political thinking amongst South African liberals...[18]

Thus while Plomer's Turbott Wolfe overcomes many of the limitations of Schreiner's novel [19] this is not the result of a disembodied visionary "genius". Rather, the novel's engagement with aspects of social and political reality, specifically the "colour question", should be seen in the context of dominant political and ideological concerns. [20]

The liberal humanism which tends to operate on an existentialist plane in The Story of an African Farm becomes in Plomer's work a political liberalism as well, a fictive engagement with the all-informing issue of the "colour question" which in the 1920s was assuming a definite

prominence. The racial theme is introduced almost at the beginning of the novel:

> There would be conflict between myself and the white; there would be conflict between myself and the black. There would be the unavoidable question of colour. It is a question to which every man in Africa, black, white or yellow, must provide his own answer. [21]

Plomer's engagement with the "colour question" is illustrated in a celebrated and often-quoted statement by one of the characters of Turbott Wolfe, Mabel van der Horst:

> ...native question! What the hell is the native question? You take away the black man's country, and shirking the future consequences of your action you blindly affix a label to what you know (and fear) the black man is thinking of you - "the native question". Native question indeed! My good man, there is no native question. It isn't a question. It's an answer. I don't know whether people are wilfully blind, that they can't see what's coming. The white man's as dead as a doornail in this country. [22]

It is a question or an answer which no subsequent South African writer of note has been able to avoid.

Turbott Wolfe not only addresses the colonial milieu; it is also in some ways a novel of the "colonial tradition", sympathetically written but nonetheless an outsider's view of Africa, as we shall see. Plomer makes trenchant criticisms of the white colonial ethos in South Africa,

and perceptively exposes many of the hypocrisies implicit in white colonial attitudes. In its recognition of the importance of racism - which Schreiner ignores almost completely in her novel - Turbott Wolfe is obviously an advance on most previous South African novels. Plomer's protagonist, Turbott Wolfe, an Englishman who comes to trade in South Africa, interprets the racism of his white neighbours in this way:

> I began to learn the hard lesson that in Lembuland it is considered a crime to regard the native as anything even so high as a mad animal. I was *so* surprised that I began to seek with keenness for information about the relations between blacks and whites in those parts ... [23]

But the novel also reveals the difficulty of escaping the imprisoning effects of white *consciousness* in a segregationist climate. Wolfe describes how he arranges to paint a portrait of a white neighbour and an African woman, "their arms interlaced" [24], but the white neighbour *refuses* to pose with an African woman. Wolfe's response to her bigotry is profoundly ambiguous:

> The native girl came to me pathetically and sat down at my feet. I thought for a moment that she might compensate me - but I suddenly felt as cold towards her as if she had been a *monkey*. [25]

Wolfe cannot escape the taint of racial prejudice in a

climate of segregationist thinking.

Wolfe's criticism of his white neighbours is realized in biting satire. For the most part his neighbours are extremely unpleasant caricatures of racism and bigotry. Bloodfield, Schwerdt, Soper and Flesher (even their names are revealing) represent for Plomer the worst aspect of the colonial ethos. Flesher

> ...strutted like a mountebank (but without a mountebank's style) in breeches and leggings, carrying his five feet of wretchedness as though he wished you to believe that the responsibilities of a continent were transported about on those thin legs. 26]

Schwerdt is

> ...a waster himself, but I believe his father had been even worse. The old man had come out to Africa as a missionary in days long past, but finding that he could not collect money and women quite fast enough had deserted his pulpit for a counter. He had, indeed, attempted to trade on the very site that I was afterwards to occupy. He failed, old Schwerdt, they tell me, because of his brutal treatment of the natives. He was murdered by a native woman to whom he had given a disease that shall be nameless. Young Schwerdt seemed a true son of his father... [27]

A more effective presentation of his unpleasant white characters occurs when Plomer stops giving them set racist speeches and "leaves room for suggestive implications, as in the powerful poetic description contrasting Soper, angrily stamping in his field, with his dignified

labourers and the magnificent landscape, to which he seems impervious". [28]

Not all of Wolfe's white neighbours are boorish and repulsive bigots. Mrs Dunford, for example, is a pleasant, scatter-brained woman with liberal views, who becomes the innocent butt of Plomer's satirical linguistic jokes:

> "Do you like my flowers?" [Mabel] asked. "Cyclamen has a sensual beauty, I think." "I think so, too", said Mrs Dunford. "You're right Mabel. Cyclamen has essential beauty." [29]

Plomer also satirizes a different type of colonial, the well-meaning but ineffectual Reverend Fotheringhay and his wife:

> ...although they had spent nearly all their lives in Africa, they had never begun to think of Africa. The rector himself must have noticed where he was, and I suppose he concluded that they must put up with it. But as for Mrs Fotheringhay, she had clung tenaciously to the past ...for her there was nothing so real in the world as the warm savour of wallflowers that had been growing under the drawing-room windows in Surrey in the early seventies: the scent was in her nostrils still ... Nothing in Africa could match the inviolable memory of the heavy intoxicating clusters of lilac, wet with rain and honey, bowed down and odorous on a vanished English lawn ... She had lived, incredible English woman, for fifteen years in Aucampstroom without noticing that Aucampstroom existed. [30]

Like the Norwegian missionary Nordalsgaard, the Fotherin-

ghays are examples of "white consciousness fossilized within its own skin outside Europe". [31] Colonial alienation in "the black man's country" is a central concern in the novel and exemplified by the cultural insularity of the Fotheringhays. But because they are so completely "drugged with Africa... caressing only the ghosts of memory and tradition" [32], the Fotheringhays escape the destructive consequences of the cultural schizophrenia to which Wolfe falls prey.

One of the most important areas of exploration in Turbott Wolfe, concerns the experience of the nonconformist Wolfe in the colonial milieu of the novel. Both Wolfe and Rupert Friston, the two major characters of the novel, despise the colonial ethos which they see as being characterized by bigotry and racism, and deplore the decadence of western civilization whose imminent decline and destruction they predict. That Turbott Wolfe is engaged with the decline of British colonial dominance, is made explicit in a discussion between Wolfe and the missionary Nordalsgaard:

> "I have been here more than forty years", he said simply. He took hold of my left arm gently with his right hand. "I look back. I wonder what I have accomplished?" His old eyes had tears. Ah, but you must know that I was utterly moved. I was shaken. I was suddenly filled with the madness of vision. What was it before me? The encroachment of Africa? Was it not the

> nineteenth century, slowly disintegrating? The eighteenth, the seventeenth century; the Middle Ages? This old man was time. He was more than time... [33]

Unlike his predecessor Klodquist, whose "muscular christianity" makes him seem almost god-like in the heyday of Imperial dominance in Africa, Nordalsgaard represents decline and disintegration. Like Rupert Friston, like Wolfe himself, he "staggers, poor man, under the weight of the past; and he struggles, poor man, under the load of the future". [34] Yet Wolfe is, as Laurens van der Post has argued, "a moving symbol of the civilization he calls 'obscene'. He can recognize what is sterile and destructive in his civilized values, he can be stirred by the beauty of Africa, yet he is just as incapable of rejecting the one as committing himself to the other." [35] Wolfe is depicted as talented and brilliantly versatile, "equally gifted in painting, musical composition and performance, the writing of poetry and sculpture. He embodies the experience of Europe". [36] In the colonial milieu of the novel, Wolfe's "aesthetic individualism" is as alienating and isolated as the cultural insularity of the Fotheringhays, and simultaneously part of the civilization he deplores and whose decline he predicts.

Turning away in distaste from the unreality of the Fotheringhays, the crude racism of Bloodfield and Flesher

and the spiritual impotence of Nordalsgaard, Wolfe, along with Caleb and Zachary Msomi, Mabel van der Horst and Rupert Friston, participates in the formation of a nonracial society, "Young Africa". "Young Africa" represents the culmination of Plomer's (and Wolfe's) repudiation of the colonial ethos, since it presents a vision of future racial harmony through a dramatic reversal of the racism which characterizes the colonial milieu of the novel. "Young Africa" naively and idealistically promotes the concept of a harmonious, post-colonial "future Coloured World" through "miscegenation", an exceptionally unconventional approach in the light of dominant white political thinking of the time [37]. The notion of the white race "melting" into the black was deplored by many contemporary white writers, for example Sarah Gertrude Millin, as a threat to white "civilization" and dominance.

But if Turbott Wolfe is at one level a critique and repudiation of the colonial ethos, it is also a novel about colonial trepidation and uncertainty, as exemplified by Plomer's protagonist Wolfe, and the decline of British dominance in South Africa. While Wolfe is critical of the colonial ethos exemplified by Bloodfield and his ilk and the Fotheringhays, he cannot commit himself to the alternative presented by "Young Africa"; he toys with the idea of integration into Africa, but recoils in horror when

Mabel van der Horst marries Zachary Msomi. Wolfe's trepidation, ambiguity and disillusionment shows the extent to which he is himself trapped in the colonial ethos, with its racist overtones.

B. An "Outsider's view" of Africa

In The Story of an African Farm, Schreiner states a crucial commitment to a local world:

> Those brilliant phases and shapes which the imagination sees in far-off lands are not for [the writer] to portray. Sadly he must squeeze the colour from his brush, and dip it into the grey pigments around him. He must paint what lies before him. [38]

At its most obvious level this statement is a comment on the exoticism of much colonial fiction in South Africa as well as on the necessity of engagement with a local environment. While Turbott Wolfe is engaged with a local world, and to a much greater extent than Schreiner's novel engaged with social and political reality, at some levels it registers only alienation. In Plomer's portrayal of the Fotheringhays, for example, cultural alienation is consciously expressed, and criticized; but Plomer's own alienation from the environment he portrays is unintentionally revealed in a view of Africa through essentially English eyes. Because Plomer was born in South Africa, but partly educated in England, South Africa remained for Plomer in some ways an exotic and foreign place. This "outsider's view" of Africa, which informs and mediates his writing, is a characteristic of much imperial fiction, which portrayed Africa through the eyes of its white over-

lords.

Through a crucial misunderstanding of African society and culture, the Africa of imperial fiction is imbued with mystery and exoticism, the "Darkest Africa" of the imperial imagination. Ancient mythical kingdoms, primitive rituals, evil rites and all the paraphernalia of a society which represented the exact opposite of western civilization, served to mystify and distort the realities of imperial conquest and domination. What is significant here is that at times Plomer portrays a similarly exotic and mysterious Africa, and that this is symptomatic of the outsider's (and the colonizer's) point of view. For example, the Africa described by Wolfe includes elements of the supernatural and mysterious, a ploy commonly used in colonial fiction to illustrate the primitive and savage nature of conquered or about-to-be-conquered peoples. Wolfe receives a mysterious parcel which he associates with primitive and evil African rites:

> The parcel contained certain illegal articles of commerce of a kind that I have never seen outside Africa. I was aghast. I felt unclean from contact with the parcel, and it was a long time before I could get to sleep. [39]

Wolfe also describes a mysterious African drug that drives people mad:

> You know that S_____ is a worse drug than hashish, the food of assassins. The natives are addicted to it all over South Africa, especially in Lembuland. There are different ways of preparing it. In Lembuland they mix it with the flowers of a herb called m_____. It is the wickedest of drugs, this mixture, one of the most precious formulas of African witchcraft. [40]

It is clear that Plomer is ignorant of what the parcel is supposed to contain, or what "S_____" is supposed to be. Such references to the strange and supernatural unconsciously reveal the extent to which Plomer shares the colonizer's view of Africa, where the continent is traditionally portrayed as dark, mysterious, exotic, irrational and primitive.

Plomer's "outsider's view" is also revealed through the attitudes of Wolfe to Nhliziyombi, an African woman to whom he is strongly attracted and who represents for Wolfe a primitive, noble, pre-imperial Africa which has been destroyed by European penetration and conquest in Africa:

> She was an ambassadress of all that beauty (it might be called holiness), that intensity of the old wonderful unknown primitive African life, outside history, outside time, outside science. [41]

The view of a pre-colonial, anachronistic Africa existing outside history and outside time is a typically colonial

one, and contrasts ironically with the novel's engagement with social and political reality. In rejecting overtly racist stereotyping of Africans as "Sambo" figures ("natural" servants or slaves) or savage brutes, Plomer adopts the image of Africans as "Noble Savages", an essentially European ideological construct which dates back to the period of the European Enlightenment. Rousseau is widely regarded as the father of the "Noble Savage", who was "gradually adopted as an illustration of the freedom, simplicity and general closeness to nature, which the age admired". Contrary to the belief that the "Noble Savage" was "practically dead as a literary fad" by the 1820s, [42] the "Noble Savage" continued to survive in South African colonial literature, for example, in the writings of Thomas Pringle and William Scully, and in this century in the work of Laurens van der Post. [43] Plomer portrays Africans as "Noble Savages" in order to contrast them more effectively with the "obscene civilization" of the white colonials of the novel; while this specifically European image clearly emphasizes Plomer's outsider's perspective of Africa, it also shows the extent to which Plomer shared the contemporary liberal view that Africans are "naturally" pastoral and should be protected from the over-hasty penetration of western economic interests. [44]

In many ways Turbott Wolfe can be seen as a South African

Heart of Darkness (1902). Plomer and Conrad employ the literary device of a framing narrator who remains outside the action of the narrative, but who introduces the reader to a second narrator who is implicated in the plot. The second narrator - Plomer's Wolfe and Joseph Conrad's Marlow - tells the story of an excursion into Africa; like Conrad and Plomer, Marlow and Wolfe are tied to English culture and society, and penetrate Africa from the outside. Wolfe and Marlow are participants in the stories they narrate, but in both cases a second protagonist - the mysterious Kurtz and Plomer's Rupert Friston - plays a pivotal role. Both Kurtz and Friston descend into a form of insanity in the face of their African experiences, and ultimately reveal the central meaning of each novel in remarkably similar ways; just as Kurtz sums up his African experience through his deathbed utterance, "The horror! The horror!" [45] Friston cries out during a nightmarish lapse into madness that "fear has withered swiftly since HORROR was written on the sun". [46]

Turbott Wolfe and Heart of Darkness are also similar in their profound ideological ambiguity, the expression of moral doubt and trepidation, and their portrayal of modernist disintegration embodied in Kurtz and Plomer's Friston and Wolfe. Marlow, like Wolfe, sees whites as intruders in Africa; colonial penetration of the continent

is a violation which brings despair in its wake. What Marlow sees of whites' behaviour in Africa represents some form of evil or another; ruthless exploitation, futile action, hollowness and pretence. He perceives that the so-called "bringers of light" to the "Dark Continent" can also be agents of darkness. Yet Marlow's feelings about colonialism are profoundly ambiguous:

> The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only... [47]

What determines Heart of Darkness more than anything else is "Conrad's ideological confusion over colonialism. Colonialism is shown up in the first part of the novel as unmitigated evil, yet Conrad's loyalty to Britain, the "greatest" colonial power, prevents an unqualified condemnation". [48] Indeed, it is efficiency and the "idea" behind colonialism which in Marlow's eyes is its saving grace. Like Marlow, Wolfe's own loyalty to Britain is expressed in his unwillingness to relinquish his ties to what he condemns as an "obscene civilization". Despising colonialism, Wolfe cannot accept integration into Africa. To some extent Wolfe's uncertainty and inner contradictions express Plomer's attempts to solve the contradictions within himself.

There are further similarities between the two novels. Marlow's tale is also about an ordeal which tests the individual man, and which reveals him to be fascinated by his own "dark instincts". The novel operates on two distinct planes; an actual journey into Africa, and a symbolic expedition into the psyche, into the human "heart of darkness". One of the recurring ideas in Heart of Darkness is that in Africa the veneer of "civilization" falls away. Of Kurtz it is said that "his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad!" [49] In Turbott Wolfe, Wolfe's experiences in Africa also operate on an actual and a symbolic plane. Wolfe's experiences in the colonial milieu in which he finds himself must also be seen as a "voyage of discovery" within himself. Both Wolfe and Friston are, like Marlow and Kurtz, examples of "hollow men" from Europe who attempt to use Africa to compensate for their psychic hollowness. Friston's journey of self-discovery, in the face of the principle of "miscegenation" which he advocates, drives him to madness. For Wolfe, self-discovery is essentially the recognition of his own limitations and the "hollowness" of his ideals. He searches for meaning in life in the spheres of love, art, trade and politics, and yet leaves Africa a despondent and disillusioned man:

> My life, Caleb, is like a bucket with no bottom. Nothing can fill it. Once I thought Africa could fill it, but I doubted. Now [Nhliziyombi] is married and has children. Once I thought fame could fill it, but Mr Tyler-Harries, who was going to get it for me, went down to the bottom of the sea - very unreasonably. With Young Africa I allowed myself to be cheated into the idea that politics would give me what I sought. Now, under the barren pear-tree, I see that Young Africa was a monstrous farce. Caleb, I have looked at everything. Perhaps the only thing that satisfied me is my own image in a looking-glass: but even that, perhaps, is not what I want ... Caleb, I am an egoist. [50]

Plomer, like Conrad, predicts the eventual decline of existing empires, and recognises the "heart of darkness" in western civilization itself. Even this perception is linked at one level to the writers' "outsider's view" of Africa. Plomer's concern with the demise of western civilization and the decline of empire should be seen in the context of post World War I Europe and Britain; Turbott Wolfe reflects the mood of postwar crisis and pessimism, which also brought the validity of Imperialism into question. [51] This ideological crisis is also expressed in Wolfe's trepidation and existentialist angst, and that of Friston. Both these protagonists represent aspects of the modern postwar man whose predicament is exemplified in the alienating context of colonial society. Turbott Wolfe has been criticised by some critics for its "erratic" and "confusing" structure, but in fact the expressionist form

of the novel is ideally suited to convey Wolfe's uncertainty and sense of crisis, as can be seen in Plomer's use of "stream of consciousness" in Wolfe's diary extracts. [52] The modernist register of Turbott Wolfe means that the novel remains an interesting and peculiar exception to the main wave of literary realism in South African fiction, since "it exhibits quite a strong understanding of European modernist art forms". [53]

It is clear that Plomer is crucially tied to western culture and society. Plomer portrays Wolfe as a nonconformist outsider in Africa, who recoils in horror from his experiences there. Indeed, Africa proves fatal for Wolfe, who returns to England to die of a fever he has caught there, and also for his fellow idealist, Rupert Friston, who is mysteriously murdered. In Wolfe's mind, Africa is ultimately dangerous for outsiders:

> I thought of the unfortunate Tyler-Harries, fresh from the keen intellectual air of London...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 of Africa, that violence which was the tropical thunderstorm raging on the roof... [54]

This view of Africa permeates Plomer's writing about South Africa. In his celebrated poem "The Scorpion", for example, Africa is portrayed as a harsh, inhospitable and

ultimately treacherous continent:

> Limpopo and Tugela churned
> In flood for brown and angry miles
> Melons, maize, domestic thatch,
> The trunks of trees and crocodiles;
>
> The swollen estuaries were thick
> With flotsam, in the sun we saw
> The corpse of a young negress bruised
> By rocks, and rolling on the shore,
>
> Pushed by the waves of morning, rolled
> Impersonally among shells,
> With lolling breasts and bleeding eyes,
> And round her neck were beads and bells.
>
> That was the Africa we knew,
> Where, wandering alone,
> We saw, heraldic in the heat,
> A scorpion on a stone. [55]

Like Wolfe, Plomer is ultimately unable to come to terms with what he perceives as the contradictions and violence of Africa. Plomer writes the following in his autobiography:

> I remember Africa as a complex and violent revelation made to me when young. From all that I knew, its complexity and violence had increased. I could not imagine living there in a state of tension that I should only find endurable if bent upon martyrdom or at least victimisation... [56]

In some ways "Plomer's venture into the interior of South African reality is little more than a foray by an essentially European sensibility, which, moreover, is forced to withdraw in horror from what it encounters." [57]

Section II: Race and "Miscegenation" in TURBOTT WOLFE

> Colour is still the question. It's far more than a matter of prejudice or discrimination of conflicting loyalties - all things you can take or leave alone; we have built a morality on it. We have gone even deeper: we have created our own sense of sin and our own form of tragedy. (Nadine Gordimer) [58]

> It came upon me suddenly in that harsh polyglot gaiety that I was living in Africa; that there is a question of colour. (Turbott Wolfe) [59]

From the moment Turbott Wolfe first appeared in South Africa, South African readers focussed on and were scandalised by the attitudes towards race, sexuality and "miscegenation" expressed in it. Many regarded the novel as a betrayal of existing racial conventions. "Scrutator" (A.W. Lee), the Zululand Times reviewer who believed that he had been satirised in the novel as an ineffectual, bumbling Anglican missionary, summed up the attitudes of many outraged readers. Mr Plomer's novel, he states categorically, "is not cricket". He continues:

> Was the author consciously inspired in his choice of a title for his book? The two words "Turbott" and "Wolfe", allowing for a slight alteration in their spelling, do seem admirably to fit this admixture of stinking fish and vulpine ferocity in showing up other people's weaknesses ...
>
> .... Mr Plomer is evidently still young enough to believe that to print indecencies is the sign of a superior mind. He is still impressed with

> the necessity of exposing all the seamy side of colonial life to the gaze of the highbrow world in order that the weaknesses of humanity may provide that elevated class with causes for thankfulness that they are not as other men are. [60]

While "Scrutator" seethed with indignation, other contemporary critics greeted Turbott Wolfe with varying degrees of enthusiasm or repugnance. Ruth Alexander (a contributor to the Cape Times) called it "the most vital book about South Africa since The Story of an African Farm". [61] Desmond Young of The Natal Witness praised it, [62] and Roy Campbell wrote a vigorous defence in Voorslag (no 1, June 1926). In "The Significance of Turbott Wolfe" Campbell describes the novel as "an extremely bold and sincere piece of work .... what has made Turbott Wolfe such a portent is the manner in which Mr Plomer has seized on the emotional aspects of the colour situation." [63] But most critics found Plomer's racial and sexual themes hard to swallow. "It would be better burned, was one of the milder shrieks in the public chorus of abuse in South Africa, led by the howling leader - writers", Plomer recalled in 1965. [64] Harold Wodson, liberal editor of the Natal Advertiser, said that Turbott Wolfe made him "bristle" with rage, [65] while The South African Nation labelled it "pornography". [66] In his introduction to the 1965 edition of Turbott Wolfe, Laurens van der Post describes the negative responses to the novel in this way:

> I remember the excitement and impassioned argument provoked at various times by Lady Chatterley's Lover, The Well of Loneliness ... But none equalled the pitch and hysteria of this African occasion. I imagine one may well have to reach back to some aspects of the Dreyfus affair and Emile Zola for parallels, since the appearance of Turbott Wolfe had a marked sociological and political as well as literary impact. In fact, looking back on it all now, I find it something of a mystery that Plomer escaped the public tarring and feathering inflicted on a lecturer at a South African University some years later for less said. [67]

It is clear that most contemporary critics, whether in praise or condemnation of the novel, regarded Turbott Wolfe as a "hymn to miscegenation", to use one critic's phrase. [68] Indeed, it is the novel's focus on the highly contentious issue of "miscegenation" that Plomer rather proudly claimed was the main reason why his novel had been kept under lock and key in the Durban Public Library along with other "indecent" works. [69] Reading the novel today, it is perhaps difficult to understand why Turbott Wolfe caused such a storm of controversy when first published; those who, intrigued by some of the more outrageous contemporary reviews, read the novel in the mistaken belief that it might be South Africa's first pornographic novel, are in for a great disappointment. The critical focus of contemporary reviewers is significant, since it indicates a selective misreading of the text; while Turbott Wolfe cannot adequately be described as a "novel about miscegenation", other aspects of the novel were scudiously

ignored. This misreading of the text and the violence of some contemporary responses tell one a great deal about the increased racialization of white political thinking in the 1920s, and the central importance of the "colour question" - the question of what was to be done with the African majority. The fact is that Plomer touched on some extremely controversial issues of his day, and since Turbott Wolfe is at one level a conscious engagement with contemporary political issues, Plomer's thematic treatment of race must be firmly situated within the context of the "colour question" debate.

A. *The "Colour Question"*

The "colour question" and segregationist solutions to this question achieved particular prominence in the 1920s, a crucial decade in the formation of South Africa's "racetocracy". [70] The "colour question" was hotly debated at almost every level of society, as browsing through contemporary newspapers will reveal [71]. A famous slogan from the 1922 strike - "Workers of the World Unite for a White South Africa" - symbolizes the extent to which white working class consciousness was informed by prevailing segregationist ideas. [72] General Smuts, in a speech made in 1920, stated that:

> Of our internal problems the greatest, the most fundamental, the most far-reaching, is undoubtedly the Native question, and its present developments are very ominous ... What is the policy of the S.A. Party on this gravest of all questions? Nine years ago our programme laid down that the Native question should not become a party question, that we should secure for Natives their natural and distinct development as opposed to merely Europeanizing them ... [73]

The debate surrounding the "colour question" was of course not confined to whites. The intense activity among African and Coloured leaders in the face of their effective political exclusion after the formation of Union in 1910, has been recorded in some detail by Andre Odendaal, Peter Walshe and others. [74] From its inception, every edition

of Ilanga Lase Natal, like the Cape African newspapers Imvo, Izwi and others, reveals the centrality of the "colour question" which dominated not only political debate, but increasingly, every aspect of Africans' lives. The S.A.N.N.C., formed in January 1912, and the I.C.U. (Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of South Africa) became the major organisations that vocalized Africans' political aspirations, and actively opposed the policy of subordination of the South African government. [75]

General Louis Botha's Government which took office in 1910 was dedicated to reconciling Britons and Boers, and as far as "native policy" was concerned, the consensus reached amongst South Africa's white rulers can be summed up in one word: segregation. In Native Life in South Africa, first published in 1916, Sol Plaatje wrote:

> Awakening on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, The South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth. [76]

This striking opening sentence of Plaatje's political testimony refers to the devastating consequences of the Land Act of 1913, which effectively limited African land ownership to a very small area through radical territorial segregation. The 1913 Land Act was enacted to eliminate once and for all the possibility that large numbers of

rural Africans would be able maintain a self-sufficient peasant existence, and followed a long series of legislative acts directed at pushing Africans off the land and into the employment of whites. This pattern of policy, which persists to the present day, profoundly affected the character of both urban and rural African society. The result was a large-scale movement of Africans off the land, either into a state of permanent urbanization or into a migrant pattern between rural reserves and employment in "white" areas. In the view of white urban-dwellers, which coincided with the interests of the mining industry, the ideal African worker was a migrant who worked on short contracts for whites and left his family behind in the rural areas. Not only could he be paid less, but he could also be accommodated in a compound or hostel, thus preventing him from putting down permanent roots in the white man's city:

> Just as the independent African on the land threatened to undercut the livelihood of white farmers by depriving them of labour, the independent African in town threatened to compete for jobs with unskilled whites, mostly rural-bred Afrikaners, who were also being rapidly drawn into the urban labour market. In order to protect the status and prosperity of whites, therefore, it was necessary that the whole townward movement of Africans be closely controlled. [77]

For most urban whites the alternative to a rigid system of

control, reinforced by legislation, was that "white" towns would be overrun by surplus Africans, whose "natural" habitat was the rural areas, in labour *reserves or* employed on white farms. Thus:

> In the 1920s segregation - industrial segregation, urban residential segregation, and territorial segregation - became even more clearly the leading principle of public native policy. Laws were amended and old Acts were changed for new in the efforts to draw more clearly the lines between white and black .... Racial discrimination and the protection of white man against black man were avowed purposes of the policy of segregation. [78]

According to the Native Affairs Commission of 1921, "the town is a European area in which there is no place for the redundant Native, who neither works nor serves his or her people but forms the class from which the professional agitators, the slum landlords, the liquor sellers, the prostitutes and other undesirable classes spring." [79] The Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 enshrined the principle that Africans were only to be in urban areas insofar as they ministered to the needs of whites, and pass-laws aimed to ensure that a rigid control over the movement of Africans to urban areas was efficiently maintained. Plomer's father, working at the central pass office in Johannesburg, played a direct role in this system of control, while Plomer's story, "Ula Masondo", effectively describes the process of labour migrancy which brings

Masondo to Johannesburg to work as a "temporary sojourner" on a mine in the "white" town, leaving his family behind in a reserve.

In the 1924 election, Smuts and the SAP were ousted by the Pact government under Hertzog. The Pact government took segregation further and made it more systematic; this posed very real threats to middle class and lower class blacks.

That the immediate measures imposed to control African urbanisation were not entirely successful, can be seen from the prominence of the "colour question" in the 1920s, the proliferation of segregationist legislation, and the emotive nature of some aspects of the "colour question" debate in the white community. The dangers of being "swamped" by Africans were often described in lurid detail, sometimes in the language of biological racism or eugenics: [80]

> The imagery of social Darwinism is clearly discernable in three important areas of political debate: speculation about the relative intelligence of blacks and whites; the almost universally expressed horror of "miscegenation"; and fear of racial "degeneration" following upon the uncontrolled development of black and white proletariat in the city. [81]

The latter two areas - fear of racial "degeneration" and

of "miscegenation" - were particularly emotive issues.

The phenomenon of "poor whiteism", for example, was frequently used as a warning of what could happen to the white race when unrestrained African urbanisation and proletarianisation was allowed to continue. For biological determinists the existence of "poor whites" was a perfect example of the inevitable decline and degeneration of white civilisation and values under these adverse conditions. Just as successive "Native Bills" were often portrayed as "protective" measures to safeguard Africans from corrupting influences in "white" towns, so "poor whites" were also portrayed as being in need of "protection" from Africans, both economically and socially. The spectre of whites being "tainted" or "degenerating" through contact with Africans was powerfully exploited in white political debate. [82]

On the republication of Turbott Wolfe in 1965, Plomer comments on the "emotional" aspects of his novel which had caused such a stir in South Africa:

> White South Africans saw themselves reflected in the book, and didn't like what they saw. What agitated them most were my then unheard of assumptions that black Africans were human and might have a future, and that the relations between White and Blacks were in fact emotional as well as economic. What effect did all the rumpus have on me? I was contemptuously amused, and as

> gratified as a man has a right to be when he scores a bull's eye with his first shot. [83]

From this somewhat selfconsciously arrogant statement it appears that Plomer intended the novel to be controversial. Not only does Turbott Wolfe engage with the "colour question" debate, it is in many ways an outspoken critique of contemporary white political thinking, focusing specifically on the more emotive aspects of the debate, as Campbell pointed out. [84] However, Plomer's comment that his view of Africans as human beings was "unheard of" is at some levels an exaggeration. Not all white South Africans were proponents of the crude racism to which Turbott Wolfe was partly a response; indeed in some ways the novel owes much to the influence of contemporary white liberal thought. [85] Plomer was also limited by the social environment in which he wrote. Plomer, like, most South African liberals between 1921 and 1953, never satisfactorily grasped the ideological challenge thrown up by territorial segregationism, [86] despite his attacks on other aspects of the "colour question". With Turbott Wolfe Plomer does not create a new political discourse, but operates within the confines of existing discourse. It is in and through a social deformity, inflicted on him by his class, race and education, that Plomer reaches for the idea of a common humanity. Moreover, Plomer's suggestion that his approach was "unique" effectively omits the

powerful influence his contact with members of the African intelligentsia in Natal must have had on his political thinking. [87]

Where Turbott Wolfe's engagement with the "colour question" is concerned, Plomer's portrayal of his protagonist Wolfe as an "outsider", an Englishman in Africa, is an extremely useful literary technique. Plomer portrays Wolfe as arriving in South Africa untainted by an awareness of the "colour question" or by racial prejudice. Only gradually does he become aware that in South Africa there is "the unavoidable question of colour." [88] His initial responses to the racially divided nature of South African society - his "outsider's view" - can therefore be portrayed as fresher, more objective and detached. As Wolfe comments at one point:

> I felt myself to be like a scientist who watches some enormity of nature through a microscope - I was an entomologist observing the titanic and elemental lusts of beetles infinitesimal in a tiny battleground, where blades of grass were greater than tree-trunks ... [89]

Wolfe first becomes aware of the importance of the "colour question" when he visits a funfair, "Schonstein's Better Shows", where he encounters a microcosm of South African society:

> Round us as we talked circulated a crowd of black, white and coloured people: English, Dutch, Portuguese, nondescript were the whites; Bantu, Lembu, Christianized and aboriginal, Mohammedan negroes were the blacks; and the coloured were all colours and all races fused. [90]

In 1905 an article in the Diamond Fields Advertiser, which highlights the centrality of the "colour question" at every level of social intercourse, makes the following comments about the famous Pagel's Circus, then visiting Kimberley:

> If the management desire the people of Kimberley to patronise the reserved seats, better arrangements will have to be made than was the case on Saturday evening. Ladies who attend cannot be expected to force their way through a crowd of all colours - especially in this weather - and many turned away in disgust rather than face the ordeal. [91]

Nevertheless, during the 1920s, circuses, funfairs and menageries remained "the only democratic entertainment that caters for all, irrespective of race, creed or colour" [92], and it is in this "polyglot gaiety" that Wolfe witnesses a white man kiss a girl who is not white. The incident becomes one of prophetic significance:

> Bawdy laughter. A sally in the darkness. A pursuit by the crowd. And after a time the man saunters back to his friends, fluttering one hand high above his head in lewd farewell. Is it a flag on [illegible]n, that hand? A portent, preceding a hali[illegible]e world? [93]

With this experience Wolfe becomes "colour conscious"; he begins to concern himself with the colour of people's skins. By the time he meets Rupert Friston, Wolfe has "become the complete Colonial", and they immediately begin talking "like all white men in Africa, about the natives." [94]

For Wolfe, a newcomer to a race-obsessed society, the crude and blatant aspects of racism are vivid and shocking. Plomer has been criticized for his stereotyped caricatures of racist colonials, [95] but as J.M. Coetzee reminds us, "If we return to the discourse of racism before 1945, what strikes us first about it is its nakedness, its shamelessness ... So remote does the biologized history seem that formed [the basis of racist ideas] that we might conclude they are best simply consigned to oblivion." [96] Coetzee makes the important point that "What we may tend to ignore about ideas like these, however, is that they were viable intellectual currency for a long time ..." [97] It is precisely on these commonly held racist beliefs and ideas that Plomer focuses, and seen through Wolfe's eyes they are shocking rather than commonplace. His portrayal of the repulsive Flesher, Bloodfield, Schwerdt and Soper is a pointed attack on the reality of biological racism which often informed the lan-

guage and imagery of contemporary discourse on the "colour question". Thus a common assumption amongst white colonials in Turbott Wolfe is that Africans are "like children" or "animals" in terms of a *pseudo-scientific* racial hierarchy, [98] an assumption that echoes Lord Selborne's statement that "As a race, the white race has received a superior intellect and mental endowment. The white man is the racial adult, the black man is the racial child." [99]

In attacking racist assumptions, Plomer effectively reverses racist stereotyping and jargon. The crude racism of some of Wolfe's neighbours is echoed by their physical repulsiveness, and they are *recurringly* described as degenerate, "filthy" and "unclean", while Flesher has "rotten blood" and hideous sores. [100] Contrary to commonly held assumptions that whites (specifically Western Europeans) were biologically *destined to* rule Africa and the world, Plomer's portrayal of white colonials completely undermines this notion. Wolfe argues that western civilization is ultimately "obscene", and that "the poor whites, like Flesher and his kind, like the *Government*, like the rulers and taskmasters of the unfortunate natives ... seemed unclean ..." [101] The "unfitness" of South Africa's white rulers is emphasized by d'Elvadere's mocking memory of Nigel Blades (Cecil Rhodes), adulated symbol

of imperial rule in Africa and founder of the "Dark Continent Exploitation Company", "laid out by a bottle of brandy ..." [102] While technological superiority was generally seen as a sign of inherent racial superiority, Wolfe states that:

> It has always seemed to me to be the chief mistake of our age that we take it for granted that science is a panacea. The chief tendency of modern science has been to produce noise. [103]

The idea that Western civilization and white dominance was disintegrating - highlighted, for example, in Friston's comments that "the white man's day is over" [104] and that "Europe is as dead as a mutton," [105] ideas echoed by Wolfe and Mabel van der Horst - clearly expresses the ideological crisis within a broader political context, with massive repercussions in the realm of Empire. Another crucial factor was Plomer's contact with some of the ideals of African nationalism, through his friendship with Lucas Makhoba and John Dube.

By contrast with most of the white colonials, Wolfe sees Africans as physically, emotionally and morally superior to their detractors; Wolfe is increasingly attracted by them, and this does not go unnoticed. Wolfe soon realizes that the "colour question" is not merely a question of personal prejudice; it permeates every level of society

and form the basis of governmental policy. Wolfe receives two anonymous letters which reveal the extent of political polarisation around the "colour question" issue, one from an African and one presumably from Flesher:

> I am speaking for my native people [reads the first letter]. We see that you are in sympathy with us: and we are glad ... We hope that you will not be afraid to help us in the political world. We know that a good man is greater than governments. We pray that you will carry on the good work you have begun. [106]

The second letter is decidedly ominous:

> You had better be careful. You think people have no ears or eyes. Your tricks are known. If you go on hobnobbing with niggers there are others besides the government that will get their knife into you. There are other white people in Lembuland beside you. You call yourself a white man: but you behave like a -. Look out! [107]

Wolfe is profoundly disturbed by the possibility of governmental disapproval. On rereading his trading licence agreement, the following clause, written in painfully convoluted bureaucratic language and dealing specifically with political aspects of the "colour question", catches Wolfe's eye:

> The licensee is not to interfere or intervene in any way or to cause interference or intervention of any kind or description whatsoever or to encourage or to provoke in any way any form of interference or intervention in any questions, matters, arrangements, laws, rules, agreements, settlements or disputes arising from, or per-

> taining to, or concerned or in any way connected with any political or tribal affairs whatsoever, pertaining to or in any way concerning the aboriginal inhabitants, commonly called natives, of Reserve No. 61, commonly known as the Ovuzane Reserve ... the GOVERNMENT to be the sole arbiter of what does or does not constitute interference or intervention on the part of the licensee. [108]

Wolfe is so incensed by the letter and by "the restrictions some oily bureaucrat had attempted to place on the warm heart of any human that saw the black man first not as a black but as a man ... that I was almost driven on the hot impulse of the moment to that very political interference so expressly forbidden." [109] What is interesting here is the word "driven." Wolfe is forced through personal experience into an understanding of the centrality of the "colour question" and thus to political involvement. Politics thus constitutes an invasion and distortion of Wolfe's artistic or "aesthetic" nature. In some ways this echoes the development of Plomer's own political consciousness. Plomer regarded himself as an "aesthete", [110] and his political development was primarily informed by personal experience and by his contact with individuals like Edward Wolfe, Lucas Makhoba and John Dube. It is perhaps not surprising that Plomer's formulation of an answer to the "colour question" should focus primarily on the area of personal relationships, as we shall see.

In the words of Mabel van der Horst, the "Native question" is *not a question*, but an answer, and in this way Plomer attempts to undermine the entire "colour question" debate. The idea of the negation of segregationism, specifically in the realm of personal relationships, finds political expression in the "Young Africa" organisation: "A society of small size, great energy and clear views .... How it would stir the poor whites!" [111] But the formation of "Young Africa" is *not only* a personal response to white racism; it also has its basis in real events. The background to the idea of "Young Africa" can be clarified by an understanding of the type of organisations that sprang up in the 1920s. During this decade

> the African National Congress and the ICU ... became the major vehicles for voicing black aspirations. Within these organisations, liberal and communist views were influencing factors. It is the manifestation of the former, and the type of organisation that arose as a result, which is clearly reflected in the Young Africa movement in Turbott Wolfe. [112]

One of the central problems confronting white liberals and welfare workers prior to and during the 1920s was how welfare organisations and mission work could be adapted to rapid industrial transformation and the growing political divisions around racial issues, specifically in urban areas. [113] In addition, "large numbers of private in-

dividuals ... witnessed with increasing nervousness [the] manifestation of the growing will to unity among the Bantu", exemplified by the I.C.U. and African National Congress:

> It was amazing to see how, almost overnight, so many Europeans, hitherto seemingly indifferent to the plight of Africans, now emerged as pro-Bantu-ists, became "interested in the poor Natives" and wished to "do something to help them." Joint councils were organised, welfare clubs sprang up, missionaries and parsons came out openly with appeals for a Christian attitude towards the blacks ..... [114]

Frederick Bridgman, for example, an American Board missionary in Johannesburg, argued that "the church as a whole clung to the medieval fallacy of saving souls while ignoring the body in which the soul lives", and urged the need for recreational facilities for Africans on the Rand to direct them from political pursuits and other corrupting influences in the city. [115] A number of welfare societies were established in response to such concerns, for example the Bantu Men's Social Centre, which Ilanga Lase Natal comments aimed to assist Africans to spend their leisure hours "in an innocent and pleasurable way." [116] Inter-racial contact in societies like the Gamma Sigma Club, a literary and debating society centred at the Bantu Men's Social Centre, convinced many white liberals of the value of such groups where they could involve them-

selves in dialogue with members of the African intelligentsia such as R.V. Selope Thema, Selby Msimang and Horatio Mbelle. [117] Such contact was not only motivated by the idea of philanthropic "rescue", but also by the possibility of exerting considerable political influence:

> Though the discussions were described as 'often heated", the groundswell for inter-racial co-operation was laid through the dissemination of liberal ideas that emphasized the role of individual rights and liberties at the expense of nationalist and group identities. [118]

The value of inter-racial contact was emphasized after the 1920-1922 strike wave, with attention focused on the African intelligentsia in the towns. In 1920 General Smuts made the following comments about African political unrest, specifically the 1920 mine strike:

> The secession movement of the Nationalists and the Bolshevistic tendencies of labour are not leaving the Natives untouched. A sane and moderate S.A. native thus describes the present tendencies of Native opinion: "Bolshevism and its Nihilistic doctrines are enlisting many Natives up country. Socialism of the worst calibre is claiming our people." [119]

The strike not only illustrated the extent of African proletarianisation, but the possibility of their being influenced by radical groups like the International Socialist League, or after 1921, The South African Communist Party. At this stage militancy was so widespread

amongst Black South Africans, that many whites believed that revolution was imminent. The crucial mediating role played by the African intelligentsia was seen as a key to defusing radicalism by instilling "some form of political accommodationism linked to alternative political outlets through the rural reserves." [120] Prominent liberals such as C.T. Loram and J.D. Rheinhalt-Jones, [121] attempting in the inter-war years to define a role for liberalism in relation to government segregationist policy, [122] can be said in some ways to have played a mediating role between the state and sectors of the African intelligentsia. In the 1920s this occurred primarily through the Joint Council movement, where African opinion could be expressed, and where liberals attempted to exert political influence through personal contact and dialogue. A contemporary commentator writes in Ilanga Lase Natal that:

> The membership of this Joint Council of Europeans and Natives I think, discuss Native matters affecting their (Natives) existence in this country and bridge the gulf between whites and blacks. [123]

The Joint Council in some instances acted as a channel by which African organisations on the Rand could obtain white liberal support on certain issues, for example the issue of "night passes" for African women. [124] Although the Joint Council achieved only partial political support

amongst the African intelligentsia - for example, the radical ANC leadership centred around the newspaper Abantu Batho disassociated itself from the Council - it did have many prominent supporters, including A.W.G. Champion and John Dube. A leading member of the Joint Council movement at the time Plomer met him, Dube wrote in 1926 that "Race co-operation must be the watchword", particularly in the light of the existence of "hot headed agitators amongst us Natives, who might prove to be a bigger menace to this country than is generally realized today." [125] Similarly, James E. Kwegyir Aggrey, a West-African educated in America who visited South Africa in 1921, preached racial harmony and co-operation at a time of tremendous militancy amongst Black South Africans. His ideas had a profound effect on many whites and middle-class blacks. [126]

It is this type of organisation, based on the idea of inter-racial co-operation and dialogue through personal contact, that provided Plomer with precedents for his portrayal of "Young Africa".

Like the Joint Council, the membership of "Young Africa" is made up of "enlightened Europeans" and "African Intelligentsia". It concerns itself with "political opinion" and the "furtherance of sociological positions

and welfar[illegible]zu peoples throughout the continent of Africa t[illegible] our Fatherland, and Elsewhere." [127] The pan-Africanist view implied by this last statement suggests the possibility of influences other than the multi-racial organisations which emerged in the 1920s. For example, the ideas of W.E.B. Dubois, one of the ideological fathers of pan-Africanism, made a considerable impact in South Africa during the 1920s. In 1921 Ilanga Lase Natal reported extensively on the Pan-African Congress and called Dubois "the centre and soul of the Congress ... a remarkable man, a born leader of men, whose intellectual ability places him above the ordinary". [128] Another possible influence is indicated by one of the principles of "Young Africa", namely that "Africa is not the white man's country". [129] This is similar to one of the central ideas of Garveyism, [130] exemplified by the slogan "Africa for Africans" popularized by Marcus Garvey (1887 - 1940).

The Jamaican-born Garvey was a pan-African nationalist dedicated to "the total liberation of Africa from alien rule, and the eventual establishment of a united and powerful African state." [131] Martin Luther King eulogized Garvey as "the first man of colour in the history of the United States ... on a mass scale and level to give millions of Negroes a sense of dignity and destiny

..." [132] In 1917, Garvey established a branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Harlem, and five years later the membership had increased to "several million" Blacks in the U.S., The West Indies, Latin America and Africa. Addressing an audience of an estimated 25 000 in New York in 1920, Garvey stated:

> We are the descendants of a suffering people ... we shall organise the 400 million Negroes of the world into a vast organisation to plant the banner of freedom on the great continent of Africa ... If Europe is for the Europeans, then Africa shall be for the black people of the world... [133]

It seems likely that the idea that "Africa is not a white man's country", expressed by "Young Africa", has its source in Garvey's considerable influence in South Africa in the 1920s, where the slogan "Africa for the Africans" found popular appeal amongst many Black South Africans.

However, the most striking aspect of the "Young Africa" manifesto is its promotion of "miscegenation" as a solution to the "colour question" and the "true foundations for the future Coloured World." [134] The solution to the "colour question" thus lies in the realm of personal relationships and the breaking of racial taboos, and in this, to use Plomer's words, the "Young Africa" members are indeed "pioneers".

B. "Miscegenation" and TURBOTT WOLFE

"Mere prejudice is becoming unfashionable", wrote Edgar Brookes in 1934, "and those who hold reactionary views on the status of the Native in South African society are attempting to rationalise them by various cultural, anthropological or political theories ..." [135] Such theories were by no means new; by the turn of the century racism was firmly established not only in white popular opinion, but also in science. [136] Eugenics - the "scientific" study of "racial stocks" based on the idea of social engineering through the manipulation of genetic pools [137] - was one of the theories used to justify racism.

Nowhere is the language and influence of eugenics more apparent than in the obsession with "miscegenation" - a word seldom heard today but commonly used in the early twentieth century to refer to inter-racial sexual relationships - which reached fever-pitch in the 1920s. So strong were feelings regarding this issue "that African politicians took care to distinguish their political claims from the implication that they desired "social equality" - often as not a euphemism for miscegenation." [138] Eugenics warned against the fatal dilution of "pure racial stocks" through the admixture of the blood of dif-

ferent races, which would lead to the inevitable degeneration and decline of white civilization. The word "miscegenation" lent an air of respectability to the stark racism of prevailing attitudes towards such relationships, while horror and fear at the idea of "race fusion" (another popular euphemism) could be freely expressed in the name of science.

One manifestation of the prevailing fear of "race fusion" can be found in the occurrence of "Black Peril" scares - sporadic outbreaks of mass-hysteria in the white community, engendered by widespread fear of sexual attacks by Africans on white women. [139] Although the last major "Black Peril" scare had occurred before the First World War, the sexual terror and hysteria which characterised the periodic waves of "Black Peril" on the Witwatersrand between 1890 and 1914 remained a powerful influence in the 1920s, contributing to the general aura of fear and repugnance surrounding the "miscegenation" issue. An article in Ilanga Lase Natal (August 26, 1921) comments as follows on "Black Peril" scares:

> Instances of the so-called "black peril" are recorded in every page of our daily papers, and the average European has been forced to the belief that every Native is a potential danger to his womenfolk ... It would be as impossible to satisfy the majority of white men that the Native is generally no more vicious than they are themselves, as it would be to convince the

> white housekeeper that the Native male domestic is human flesh and blood as she is. [140]

The article also examines the possible origins of "Black Peril" cases, which often involved white females and their black domestic workers or "houseboys":

> There is no doubt whatsoever that the house boy is in many cases given freedom of access to the intimacies of white femininity from which the white male would be rigidly excluded. [141]

Another contributor to Ilanga, outraged by the hypocrisy and hysteria surrounding "Black Peril", argues that the real danger is in fact "White Peril":

> While this white peril is threatening our very existence, while our villages are full of white children, and while our women and girls are at the mercy of some immoral white men, we hear much of the doctrine of "no intermixture of blood". Did ever such hypocrisy exist before ... Of course those who employ it mostly are the promoters of the so-called scheme of segregation, and to get supporters they have created a bogey known as "Black Peril" ... [142]

As discerned by this writer, the "solution" to preventing "miscegenation" was seen to lie in increased segregationist measures. Thus the Tielman Roos Act of 1925, the forerunner of the infamous Immorality Act, prohibited all inter-racial sexual relationships, bolstered by a host of other segregationist legislation.

The same year, 1925, saw the publication of Turbott Wolfe as well as Tightening Coils by Ernest Stubbs, a magistrate. Subtitled "An Essay on Segregation", Stubbs's work paints an apocalyptic portrait of the dangers of "racial fusion":

> The danger in which we live is real and urgent. It is contact that makes the preponderating Native population a real and ever present menace to the security of the White. It is contact that gives a suicidal flavour to every step taken by the white race for the mental and moral improvement of the Black. Continued contact means the utter and irretrievable ruin of the white races of South Africa ... [143]

A contemporary review of Stubbs's work in the Eshowe-based Zululand Times comments as follows:

> The Author draws an alarming, but not over-coloured, picture of the result of the intermixture of races as he sees them ... the inevitable outcome of the present intermixture of races is the degradation of the white. His cure for this is segregation ... [144]

Stubbs's crude use of "Black Peril" scare tactics, far from being isolated or aberrational, clearly echoed popular sentiments. Thus the liberal thinker Maurice Evans, speaking on behalf of the "average white South African", states categorically that "the admixture in blood of the races is the worst thing that can happen, at least for the white race, and perhaps for both." [145]

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