

THE CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN

SHORT STORY IN ENGLISH

**(with special reference to the work of
Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing, Alan Paton,
Jack Cope, Uys Krige and Dan Jacobson)**

**A thesis submitted to fulfil the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts**

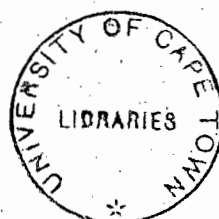
by

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P R E F A C E

In defining the scope of this study it will, perhaps, be helpful to explain exactly what is meant by the term "Contemporary South African Short Story".

The word "contemporary" has been chosen instead of the wider and more general "modern" to describe short stories written in the 1950s and late 1940s. This chronological limitation is not merely arbitrary; it has been dictated by the nature of the material. The 1950s have seen a revival of the South African short story. All major contemporary writers have turned to the short story form, and the work of Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing, Alan Paton, Jack Cope, Uys Krige and Dan Jacobson provides material which is both extensive and important enough for critical study. One chapter has been devoted to the work of the short story writers of the thirties, Pauline Smith, Sarah Gertrude Millin, William Plomer and Herman Charles Bosman. This is in the nature of an introduction, for a study of the contemporary South African short story would not be complete without at least a brief consideration of the outstanding contribution of the earlier writers.

In attempting to explain the term "South African" as used in the title, I cannot do better than quote the definition of the bibliographer and editor, E.R. Seary.

"South Africa, in accordance with the convention established by the collector and bibliographer Sidney Mendelssohn, is taken as Africa south of the Zambezi. The authors are either South African born, or have lived in the country for such a part of their creative lives that they are recognised as South African, rather than English, writers. The themes they write on are whatever men do, or used to do, in South Africa".(1)

(1) E.R. Seary, intro. South African Short Stories, Oxford University Press, 1947.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE MODERN SHORT STORY

One of the most significant literary developments of the twentieth century has been the rise of the short story in England, and the establishment of the English short story as an art form which can no longer be regarded as merely the small, rather disreputable offspring of the novel. Almost as remarkable is the contrasting poverty of the short story in England during the nineteenth century. Until almost the turn of this century there was not one English short story writer of note, compared with the many masters of the form in nineteenth century America, Russia and France.

Across the Atlantic for the past hundred years a long line of writers has established the place of the short story in American literature. The foundations laid in the eighteenth hundreds by Poe, who has been called, with Gogol, the father of the short story, were built upon in the nineteenth century by Bierce and Crane, until O. Henry, with his contrived plot and clever ending, stifled the American short story and gave rise to twenty years of stereotypes. Although the American short story passed through this stage of sterility and poverty until it was rescued by Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway in the twenties and thirties, it could at least look back to the vitality of the nineteenth century; this the English short story could not do.

In Russia the list of authors who gave serious attention to the short story form is a formidable one. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky reveal by the insight and perfection of form of their stories that they are as much short story writers as novelists, something that none of the great English novelists of the nineteenth century, whose short stories are generally off-cuts or left-overs of novels, can claim to be. Gogol, Turgenev, and Chekhov are primarily short story writers and have gained

their reputations and exercised their influence as such. By contrast, until the very end of the nineteenth century, there was no one in England who had concentrated on the short story form. Kipling, in the 1890's, was the first Englishman to make a reputation as a writer of short stories.

It has been said that "We are all descended from Gogol's overcoat", and Gogol has, in fact, more claim to the title of "father of the short story" than Poe. They were both born in the same year, 1809, both were masters of the short story form and each had a remarkable influence, but here their resemblance ends. Poe was a romantic; Gogol was a realist. Poe was fascinated by the strange and the unearthly; Gogol found the substance of his stories in ordinary situations and his characters in ordinary people. Today Poe is dated; Gogol is not, for realism remains the climate of the modern short story.

The Russian who has had the greatest influence on the development of the short story, particularly in England, is Anton Chekhov. His poetic realism has influenced almost every English short story writer from Katherine Mansfield to H.D. Dates, and it is largely due to his masterly skill and insight that the short story has developed as a new literary force in the past three quarters of a century.

France, too, boasted novelists in the nineteenth century such as Balzac and Flaubert who were also masters of the short story form. The giant of French short story writers is, however, Guy de Maupassant, who has exerted an influence second only to that of Chekhov. It was fortunate for the short story that two men of such powerful personality, integrity and deep sensitivity found their most natural expression in this form, and in so doing revealed its potentiality. In spite of

great differences in temperament and outlook, for Chekhov smiles ironically while Maupassant laughs cynically, they share the same desire for realism and terse, suggestive expression, which have become the keynotes of the modern short story.

Comparison with Chekhov and Maupassant effectively dismisses any claim to fame as short story writers which may be put forward on behalf of nineteenth century English novelists such as Dickens, Trollope, Meredith, or even Stevenson. They are novelists, and only novelists: none shares the ability of Tolstoy or Balzac to excel in both forms. The first Englishmen whose reputations rest to a large extent on their ability as short story writers are Kipling and Wells. In spite of obvious weaknesses, for Wells, with his ingenious plots and scientific fantasy, is a mixture of Poe and O. Henry, and Kipling suffers from a rabid imperialism which has dated his stories, these two gave rise to what has been regarded as a little golden age in the history of the English short story. In reality, though they appealed to the millions, they had not produced great short stories, and it was not until the 1920's, when the influence of Chekhov had made itself felt through the translations of Constance Garnett, that the short story in England took a real step forward. It soon became clear that, with the publication of Katherine Mansfield's The Garden Party in 1922, an English short story writer had arrived, with something to say and a remarkable way in which to say it. It was she and A.E. Coppard in the 1920's, not Wells and Kipling, who, by means of their realism, ability to see meaning in ordinary situations and skilful poetic imagery, provided the foundation of the modern short story in England on which contemporary masters like H.C. Bates and Elizabeth Bowen were to build and build well.

It remains to be seen whether the English short story will

be the literary form of the 20th century in the way that the novel became the voice of the 19th century. Perhaps Bates's view that the short story will be seen to be "the most necessary and natural expression of the age"⁽¹⁾ will be proved an extravagant one. What is clear, however, is that the short story has at last won a place in English literature, and that America is no longer the only home of the short story in English.

In addition to the achievements in England in the twentieth century, the short stories of James Joyce, Sean O'Faolain and Liam O'Flaherty have established a powerful Irish tradition; Wales has produced a line of short story writers such as Rhys Davies, Margiad Evans, Dylan Thomas and Glyn Jones; and South Africa even in the 1930's could boast of Pauline Smith, Herman Charles Bosman, William Plomer and Sarah Gertrude Millin. The fact that the 1961 U.N. Smith Literary Award was presented to Nadine Gordimer for her Friday's Footprint is most significant, firstly because Friday's Footprint is a collection of short stories, and secondly because Nadine Gordimer is a South African. This is another indication both of the rise of the English short story in critical esteem, and its widespread influence and development. There is no doubt that South African writers, in their attempts to establish a national literature, are finding the short story a rewarding medium.

Although the modern English short story is established, this does not imply that its form is in any way fixed or final. The very opposite is the case. The fluidity of the short story makes a definition which will fit every case an impossibility.

(1) H.E. Bates, The Modern Short Story, Nelson, 1942, p.222.

Many have been the definitions: Wells, Poe, Walpole, London, Elizabeth Bowen, Coppard and many others have all put forward theories which fitted their stories, and H.M. Bates, in a much-quoted passage, accepts it as axiomatic "that the short story can be anything the author decides it shall be; it can be anything, from the death of a horse to a young girl's first love affair, from the static sketch without plot to the swiftly moving machine of bold action and climax, from the prose poem, painted rather than written, to the piece of straight reportage in which style, colour, and elaboration have no place, from the piece which catches like a cobweb the light subtle iridescence of emotions that can never be really captured or measured to the solid tale in which all emotion, all action, all reaction is measured, fixed, puttied, glazed and finished, like a well-built house, with three coats of shining and enduring paint. In that infinite flexibility, indeed, lies the reason why the short story has never been adequately defined."⁽²⁾

This fluidity and difficulty of definition is to be welcomed. It indicates a healthy, experimental quality. When the short story was in the hands of O. Henry or Wells it was both easily definable and at its lowest ebb. No watertight formula makes for life and growth in literature. But flexibility does not mean that the short story has no standards and no requirements. It is a demanding form, and certain aspects have clearly emerged as qualities essential to the nature of the short story. Before studying one branch of the modern short story, it will be necessary, in order to provide a suitable critical background, to consider these qualities.

Almost everything that can be said about the nature of the short story is dependent upon the apparently platitudinous axiom

(2) Ibid., p.15-16.

that the short story is short. Brevity is the "sine qua non" of the short story, and critics as well as short story writers themselves have felt it necessary to say so. Wells defined the short story as one which could be read in half an hour; Sean O'Faolain regarded shortness as "the obvious distinctive element of the short story - distinguishing it from every other art;"⁽³⁾ and John Hadfield is content to define the short story simply as "a story which is not long".⁽⁴⁾ Such statements are obviously true, but of little critical value. A short story is, of course, one which is short, but it is many other things besides. It possesses certain qualities which, although they are all related to this fundamental brevity, have themselves come to be regarded as essentials, and it is the nature of these qualities, rather than mere brevity, which makes a short story a good or a bad one.

The quality directly dependent on brevity which Poe valued above all in the short story is its "single effect" or "force derivable from totality,"⁽⁵⁾ something which he felt the novel did not possess as it could not be read at one sitting. Today the concept of "totality" has become of greater importance and critical value than the concept of brevity from which it springs.

The next critic of note who paid particular attention to the short story was another American, Professor Brander Matthews. His statement regarding the nature of the short story, written some forty years after Poe's, reveals that he had accepted Poe's

(3) Sean O'Faolain, *The Short Story*, Collins, 1948, p.37.

(4) John Hadfield, ed. *Modern Short Stories*, Everyman, 1939, p.vii.

(5) Edgar Allan Poe, in his article on Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* in *Graham's Magazine*, May, 1842.

concept of "totality" as fundamental, although he uses a different term:

"true short story is something other and something more than a mere story which is short. A true short story differs from the novel chiefly in its essential unity of impression."⁽⁶⁾

This concept of "unity of effect", "totality", or "single effect" demands much more from the short story than mere brevity; it demands a disciplined, organised brevity of the kind visualised by Poe when he declared that "in the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to one pre-established design".⁽⁷⁾

It is significant that this view of the short story is accepted not only by critics but by short story writers themselves. Writers from Chekhov to H. L. Bates have accepted these inter-dependent qualities, stressed by Aristotle and Coleridge, of brevity, unity, and singleness of effect, as the essence of their art form. Chekhov, whose stories, although they give at times the impression of formlessness, are in fact extremely carefully constructed and strongly unified, pointed out that if a gun is described hanging on the wall on page one, sooner or later that gun must go off. H. L. Bates has this in mind when he concludes that the essential of a good short story is a quality of "balance",⁽⁸⁾ as does L. L. G. Strong when he suggests that the essential is "to know where to start and where to stop."⁽⁹⁾ In the modern short story brevity has become careful selectivity for the sake of tight unity and single effect. This prevailing concept requires that the short story be a highly concentrated, controlled and disciplined form. It imposes limitations upon such factors as characterisation, plot, theme, angle or point of view, tone and language to a degree

(6) From The Philosophy of the Short Story, Longmans, 1901, noted by Clayton Hamilton, Materials and Methods of Fiction, 1909, p. 177.

(7) Edgar Allan Poe, Indian's Magazine, May, 1842.

(8) H. L. Bates, op. cit., p. 220.

(9) L. L. G. Strong, in a review of Boris Lessing's The Habit of Love, 1957.

that the more relaxed form of the novel does not.

The limitations placed upon plot and theme by the short story form are obvious. A short story must possess a single plot and a single theme. Sub-plots and complex interrelations of themes and intentions are not consistent with brevity. Unity could, of course, be imposed upon such material, but not within a short space of time. Hence unity as well as brevity is destroyed by complexity of plot and theme. The short story simply cannot cope with this. It is concerned with a single moment, or episode or situation. As Frederick has put it, "the experience which is improbable, highly complicated, or widely extensive or varied, lays upon the short story a burden too great for it to bear."⁽¹⁰⁾

The problem of plot is a simple one compared with that of characterisation. Certain methods of characterisation, though adequate in the novel, are quite out of place in the short story.

It is clear that a short story can tolerate only a very limited number of characters, and only those essential to theme and action can be allowed entrance. Failure to limit the number of characters leads only to diffuseness and ineffectiveness. It is significant that most short stories are dominated by one character only. The others are deliberately out of focus to prevent their detracting from the vividness and totality of the story.

Unlike those of a novel, characters in a short story develop only to a limited extent, if at all, and the phenomenon of the static character is yet another outcome of fundamental brevity. Development cannot be adequately handled within the narrow limits of the short story.

(10) J.F. Frederick, A Handbook of Short Story Writing, F.S. Crofts, 1924.

The good short story writer, however, does something else. He makes his characters begin to develop. Chekhov, Katherine Mansfield, Joyce and others have employed the technique of taking leave of their characters when they are poised on the brink of a new outlook, or even life. The effect of such stories as Katherine Mansfield's Miss Brill or Joyce's Glas is that the character of Miss Brill or Maria lives and changes beyond and after the story, within the reader's consciousness. Joyce's great story, The Dead, has a similar effect. The story ends, but its theme and mood and character ripple on and on in the mind of the reader, just as they did in the mind of Joyce himself.

This type of skilful suggestion is one means of compensating for the inability to allow characters to develop within a short story. There is, however, another more important method, and that is the method of exposure, or what O'Faolain has called "the peeling off of an outer skin or mask."⁽¹¹⁾ The character does not change, but more and more insight is given into his nature, mainly by means of action and dialogue. This technique, too, was perfected by Chekhov and today is extremely popular, having become almost the pattern of the psychologically-biased short story. H.E. Bates, Elizabeth Bowen, and the South African Nadine Gordimer have used this technique of gradual exposure most successfully, and have made it clear that skilful and perceptive characterisation is by no means beyond the scope of the short story.

The fact that the short story character is static does not imply that his presentation is any simpler than that of a character in a novel. The task of bringing a character to life in a short story is, in fact, a more demanding one. The Dickensian character sketch is certainly out of place. The

(11) Sean O'Faolain, op. cit. p.170.

short story form cannot carry such a weight of words without its unity and balance being impaired. Slabs of character description can only be indulged in in a large, loose-structured novel; there is no space for this in a short story.

The principle of short story characterisation is that character delineation must, for the most part, be done indirectly. Character must be implied, not stated, and never explained.

Sean O'Faolain has gone so far as to say that "Characterisation is something that can be no more than assumed in a short story."⁽¹²⁾

The necessity to convey character by implication and suggestion has caused the short story to approach closely to the drama, for the short story writer has borrowed the tools of the dramatist, action and dialogue, as his chief means of characterisation.

Hemingway is the master of the dramatic short story. Stories such as The Hills like White Elephants consist almost solely of characters acting and speaking, and are as much one-act plays as short stories. The implications and suggestions of words and actions supply all the information and characterisation that is necessary, and yet this is done so skilfully that Hemingway's characters never give the impression of being wooden, but possess what O'Faolain has called the magic quality of "appearing to appear."⁽¹³⁾

Katherine Mansfield, following Chekhov, employs a stream of consciousness technique as a means of conveying character and outlook. This subjective recording of a succession of mental states, of thoughts, feelings and impulses, is the complete contrast to the objective method of Hemingway, yet is equally successful and in keeping with the requirements of the short story. It, too, obviates the need for character sketches, labelling and explanation if maintained throughout and reinforced by action, as in such stories as Miss Brill or

(12) Ibid., p.149.

(13) Ibid., p.155

The Garden Party. The fact that the story passes through the consciousness of one character is an added means of achieving an impression of unity.

As with characterisation, the requirements of a short story regarding the angle or point of view of the author are stricter than those of a novel. There are basically only two points of view, the first person and the third, and of these the third person with its important variations requires careful handling by the short story writer.

There are four ways of handling the third person angle. The writer may stand completely outside his story and record speech and actions in an apparently objective manner. He confines himself to describing what can be observed and heard, and never permits himself to delve below the surface. This is Hemingway's technique.

The contrast to this method is "omniscience", where the author not only sees and hears everything, but moves from character to character, recording thoughts and feelings. Today this omniscient method, so enthusiastically used by Fielding and Thackeray, is unpopular even with novelists. For the short story writer it is dangerous. It is not consistent with brevity, but, more important than this, the continual moving from character to character, the seesaw movement of intimate glimpses, makes the achievement of unity in so brief an art form extremely difficult.

The more popular and successful method is for the short story writer to content himself with being semi-omniscient, and to align himself with, and possess insight into, only one character, usually the central one. Almost every short story writer of note from Chekhov to H.E. Bates has used this technique in order to obtain the strong totality of effect produced by unity of character and angle. Once a short story writer has aligned himself with one character he has established a strong unifying factor. He may see, hear, feel and think with and through his character, but he

may not jump even for a brief moment into the consciousness of another without seriously impairing this unity.

The fourth point of view can only be called that of intrusion. Here the author tells his story from a particular angle, but intrudes his own personality and outlook from time to time. This angle, like that of omniscience, produces an unsettled quality and seriously disturbs the unity of a short story. Kipling, in particular, is unable to resist carrying his own personality and outlook into many of his third person short stories. (14)

The safest point of view for a short story writer to adopt is the first person, for this is the only angle which allows the author to trespass with impunity. Kipling, for example, writes more easily and successfully when he is telling a story in the first person. There is no longer the same need for careful control and discipline; he has far greater freedom and scope for self-expression as the "I" of his story. Not only does the first person allow greater relaxation, but also greater intimacy and directness. It is significant that Wells and Poe make frequent use of this angle. They are both writers whose aim is to convince, to give authenticity to the supernatural or the unnatural, and their intimate, highly personal use of the first person angle accounts, to a large extent, for their success.

The principle underlying the use of angle in the short story is that of simplicity and consistency. Brevity demands simplicity, unity consistency; there can be no casually moving point of view in a successful short story unless this is compensated for by some other unifying factor.

Much of what has been said about angle applies equally well to the short story writer's tone. The tone of a writer, upon

(14) Vide Kipling's Miracle of Purun Bhagat, final paragraph.

which depends the atmosphere of his story, can be an important unifying factor, but, to have this effect, it must remain constant. The joyful approval of H.E. Bates in his Uncle Silas stories, the depression and sense of sin of Pauline Smith in her Little Faroo, the ironical amusement of H.C. Bosman in his Mafeking Road, are all powerfully maintained throughout their stories and contribute much to their tight unity and totality of effect. Pauline Smith could not at some stage in a story become light-hearted, nor Bosman moralistic, without destroying a great deal of this effectiveness. The only stage at which the writer's tone may change is at the end of the story. In order to obtain his desired effect Uys Krige employs this technique in the last sentence of his story, The Christmas Box, where his tone changes from black pessimism to faith and hope. But one glimpse of the new outlook is sufficient, and the story closes with its unity maintained. (15)

The difference between a novel and a short story is the difference between a letter and a telegram. Words are far more precious in a short story and have to justify their presence. The language of the short story has therefore become lively, terse and suggestive, implying rather than stating. As Sean O'Faolain has put it, "the short story writer's problem of language is the need for a speech which combines suggestion with compression." (16) H.E. Bates regards the short story as an art form "in which elaboration and above all explanation are superfluous and tedious," (17) a form in which "it is no longer necessary to describe; it is enough to suggest." (18)

(15) Vide the final sentence of Uys Krige's The Christmas Box, in The Dream and the Desert, Collins, 1953.

(16) Sean O'Faolain, op. cit. p.192.

(17) H.E. Bates, op. cit. p.21.

(18) Ibid., p.24.

This need for brevity, terse and suggestive language, disciplined form and strict unity has attracted many writers to the short story who in another age might well have turned their attention to poetry. As early as the 1920's it had become clear that the English short story was in the hands of poets. The difference as regards language between the stories of Katherine Mansfield and A.E. Coppard in the 1920's, and those of H.G. Wells twenty years before is comparable to the difference between poetry and prose. In 1933 C. Henry Warren clearly summed up this new trend in the modern English short story.

"There is in their work (Coppard, Lawrence, O'Flaherty, Manhood, Bates) a lyrical quality, a natural fecundity of imagery, which, if the scales had been tipped a little, might have made for poetry rather than prose."(19)

And this lyrical quality is as strong as ever today. Bates is still writing, and his stories, and notably those of Elizabeth Bowen, as well as those of the Irish school, sparkle with the imagery and sensuous perception of the poet. Indeed, it would seem both from the interest of the public and from the quality of poetry since the 1920's that the English short story is thriving at the expense of poetry.

To the short story writer, as to the poet, the word is extremely important. A writer like Sean O'Faolain with his sensuous, evocative style and love of precise imagery, well appreciates this.

"For where the short story writer works with the sentence and the word in it, the novelist works with the paragraph, or even with the chapter ... When space presses, language speaks shorthand."(20)

(19) C. Henry Warren, The Modern Short Story, in The Bookman, April 1933.

(20) Sean O'Faolain, op. cit., p.196.

The verbose writer cannot write short stories. It has been argued that the reason for the dearth of the English short story in the nineteenth century is that the nineteenth century suffered from a weight of words as well as a weight of moral teaching.⁽²¹⁾ Many novelists, in turning to the short story form, have found it extremely difficult to eliminate unnecessary words and details, and the tendency to overstate, particularly by means of a verbose, leisurely beginning has been well satirised by Stephen Leacock.⁽²²⁾

The short story can no longer be ignored as a literary form, nor loosely bracketed with the novel. It is, in fact, closer to drama and poetry. The simple fact of brevity, applied to material similar to that of the novel, and its disciplining and unifying effect on such aspects as plot, character, angle, tone and language, have produced a distinct and demanding literary form.

The short story is not, however, only short, with all the far-reaching implications of the word; it is a "story." The story element is as interesting as its brevity, not because it has the same widespread implications, but because of the changing concept of the meaning of "story", and the controversy associated with it within the course of this century.

Much of this controversy has centred on the importance or otherwise of plot. To O. Henry and H.G. Wells plot was everything. H.E. Bates has said, on the other hand,

(21) H.E. Bates, *op cit.* p.37.

(22) "It was a wild and stormy night on the West Coast of Scotland. This, however, is immaterial to the present story, as the scene is not laid in the West of Scotland. For the matter of that the weather was just as bad on the East Coast of Ireland."

"I have never from the first had the slightest interest in plots."⁽²³⁾ Sir Hugh Walpole's definition of a short story is that "a story should be a story: a record of things happening, full of incident and accident, swift movement, unexpected development, leading through suspense to a climax and a satisfying denouement."⁽²⁴⁾ Sean O'Faolain has countered this by saying that "anecdote is the least essential element",⁽²⁵⁾ and stories such as those of O. Henry are "commercial stories."⁽²⁶⁾

The contrast between such concepts is a striking one. It is clear that between O. Henry and Dates, Walpole and O'Faolain some influence was brought to bear upon the short story which changed its nature, and this was, in fact, the case. The influence of Chekhov in the 1920's on such writers as Katherine Mansfield and A.E. Coppard changed the whole direction and emphasis of the English short story. In 1940 A.J.J. Ratcliff gave a lucid summing up of this trend.

"In the twentieth century the best masters of the form (the short story) have tended to ignore the well-made plot, the striking situation, and the simple character type, and to give rather a slice of life, a moment illuminating mood or character; the explicit pattern has given place largely to the implicit."⁽²⁷⁾

Today the plot story remains out of favour, and the short story concerns itself with providing insight into ordinary lives and ordinary situations, with presenting "a slice of life". F.V. Lategan in his Kortverhaal en sy Ontwikkeling in Afrikaans has called this type of short story marked by a relative absence of action and plot a sketch,⁽²⁸⁾ but this term is hardly

(23) Quoted by John Hadfield, in his introduction to Modern Short Stories, Everyman's Library, 1939, p.vii.

(24) H.E. Bates, op. cit. p.16.

(25) Sean O'Faolain, op. cit. p.154.

(26) Ibid., p.157.

(27) A.J.J. Ratcliff, On Thinking It Over, in Short Stories by H.G. Wells, 1940, p.204.

(28) F.V. Lategan, Die Kortverhaal en sy Ontwikkeling in Afrikaans, Nasionale Boekhandel, 1956, p.45.

appropriate. A sketch is something which is static; a story implies action and development. Elizabeth Bowen has made the distinction clear:

"I was still not clear, while I was writing Encounters, as to the distinction between a story and a 'sketch'. I failed to see that, while it could be emancipated from plot (in the magazine-formula sense), a story, if it is to be a story, must have a psychological turning-point. A sketch, lacking the turning-point, is little more than knowing, accomplished reportage."(29)

The modern short story does possess this "psychological turning-point"; it does develop, but action has become internal rather than external, and adventure has become "adventure of the mind."(30)

The modern short story writer like any serious artist is expected to have some view of life, some personal way of seeing and interpreting, and the skill to pattern and convey his insight by means of a highly disciplined form. In the final analysis, however, it is the quality of sensibility which is the important factor, not technical skill. A great short story, like a great poem, play or novel, must be the expression of a unique way of seeing and responding to life.

(29) Elizabeth Bowen, Encounters, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1949, p.12.

(30) Sean O'Faolain, op. cit. p.164.

CHAPTER TWOTHE SOUTH AFRICAN SHORT STORY

The Contribution of Pauline Smith, Herman Charles Bosman,
William Plomer and Sarah Gertrude Millin.

In his Faber collection of South African Stories, David Wright refers to such writers as Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer, Paton, Krige and Jacobson as being among the "recent crop" of "brilliant South African writers".⁽¹⁾ As far as the South African short story is concerned these writers constitute what might be more accurately termed a "second crop", the first being a group of well-known writers who produced short stories in the 1920's and early 1930's. Delayed publication has tended to blur the fact that there have been two distinct and important periods of short story production in the history of South African literature, and that there has never been a continuous line of South African short story writers of significance. It was almost two decades after the achievement of Pauline Smith, Sarah Gertrude Millin, William Plomer and Herman Charles Bosman that the short story form again captured the interest of a group of writers of any importance.

A study of this group of contemporary writers would be incomplete without a consideration of the contribution of their predecessors. Each of the four outstanding writers of the twenties and early thirties has a characteristic theme, outlook and style, and each has played his or her part in the shaping of a tradition which was to influence later writers.

Pauline Smith's Little Karoo, published in 1925, was the first volume of South African short stories of real literary merit. Collections of South African short stories had been published as early as the 1860's.⁽²⁾ Olive Schreiner and Arthur Shearley Cripps had produced their dreams and allegories, William Charles

(1) David Wright; intro. South African Stories, Faber, 1960, p.11.

(2) Vide. R. Hodges, The Settler in South Africa and Other Tales, Pickering, 1860.

Scully his melodramatic Kaffir Stories, Glanville and Fitzpatrick their animal stories and hunting yarns, and F.C. Cornell his adventures for the lads of the Empire, but none had revealed the realism, insight and technical mastery found in Pauline Smith's best work.

The often quoted remark of the Afrikaans reader of The Little Karoo - "It is as if I had never known my own people until now"⁽³⁾ - indicates at least the realism and perception of Pauline Smith's stories. It is precisely this quality of realism which had been lacking in South African short stories. Schreiner's Story of an African Farm is, on the whole, realistic, but her collections of short stories, Dreams and Dream Life and Real Life are, as their titles indicate, romantic allegories, filled with the escapism which was to characterise all South African short stories, with the possible exception of Perceval Gibbon's⁽⁴⁾, until the 1920's.

At the root of Pauline Smith's writing is a deep interest in and sympathy for the Boers of the Little Karoo, an ability to sense and share atmosphere and outlook. Her stories give the impression of a writer as temperamentally suited to her subject as Jane Austen was to hers. In both cases there was the same "equilibrium between temperament and circumstances."⁽⁵⁾ Her own seriousness, tenderness, strict morality and frank simplicity harmonise with and find perfect expression in the themes and characters of the Little Karoo.

Pauline Smith chose to write about one people and one place, to do one thing and to do it well. And her consistent self-limitation and concentration have produced several good short stories and one or two of outstanding merit.

(3) William Flomer; preface The Little Karoo, Jonathan Cape, 1957, p.18.

(4) Perceval Gibbon, The Vrouw Grobelaar's Leading Cases. Blackwood, 1905.

(5) Sean O'Faolain, op. cit., p.19.

The people who dominated her imagination were the poor white Afrikaans farmers of the isolated Little Karoo in the first and second decades of this century. They are well described by Arnold Bennett as "simple, astute, stern, tenacious, obstinate, unsubduable, strongly prejudiced, with the most rigid standards of conduct."⁽⁶⁾ They worship a stern and just Old Testament God. The Karoo which has produced them is harsh and desolate.

It is round these lonely, patriarchal figures that Pauline Smith weaves her short stories which possess an elemental and epic quality. Their theme is no less than the response of human nature to suffering and death, and it is handled with a skill that powerfully expresses the universality inherent in such a theme. Characters such as Alie in Desolation and Juriaan in The Pain are epic heroes. In their simplicity they are larger than life, and in the magnitude of their suffering and self-sacrifice they are archetypal figures.

Such stories as The Pain and Desolation reveal the essential difference between limitations of subject matter and shallowness of insight. In no way does Pauline Smith's concentration on the Little Karoo produce an effect of sterile naturalism or reportage. Her self-imposed limitation of character and setting has proved a means of revealing insight and patterning her vision of the mystery of life.

There are no subtleties in these stories which deal in an austere and serious way with such basic themes as love, death, sickness, marriage, sorrow, and with emotions which are uncomplicated and universal. Suffering is the predominant theme. Over all her stories broods the harsh spirit of an impersonal desert land and an impersonal God; and it is man's lot to work and suffer and finally submit. It is not only as regards the

(6) Arnold Bennett, intro. The Little Karoo, p.9.

importance of place and atmosphere in the stories that Pauline Smith resembles Hardy. They share the vision of the smallness and futility of suffering man in a vast and impersonal universe.

It is not only in body that her characters suffer. Physical pain occurs less frequently than sickness of mind. If her characters are not suffering they are sinning, and just as there is nothing petty about their suffering, so there is nothing petty about their sin. Their suffering leads to death, their sin to damnation. There is no sophistication or subtlety in either. William Plomer has truly said that in Pauline Smith's Little Karoo "it is easier to be wicked than vulgar."⁽⁷⁾

Pauline Smith's tone is a striking blend of maternal tenderness and the austerity which springs from what Arnold Bennett describes as "moral backbone".⁽⁸⁾ Without loss of perspective she sympathizes with the sufferer and accepts the sinner and, what is most unusual for a South African writer, avoids any form of satire or ridicule.⁽⁹⁾ Although her essentially tragic outlook and her preoccupation with the theme of suffering produce, at times, excessive sentimentality and morbidity, her best stories are quite free from this weakness. In fact, even certain of her less successful stories cleverly justify their lack of restraint by the use of a narrator with whom "foolish, tender words" are in character.⁽¹⁰⁾

From a technical point of view Pauline Smith's short stories possess two outstanding qualities: unity and structural strength and simplicity of language and style.

Several factors contribute to the unity of her stories: the

(7) William Plomer, preface The Little Karoo, p.15.

(8) Ibid., p.17.

(9) Toontje, in The Sinner, expresses the mood of several short stories when she says, "God forgive me, Nikolaas, if I should judge you, for there is not one of us that has not sinned." Pauline Smith, The Little Karoo, p.82.

(10) Pauline Smith, op. cit. The Schoolmaster, p.55.

narrowness of setting; the homogeneity of her characters; the concentration on elemental emotions; the complete identification of the writer with her theme; and the sustained tone of patient understanding. The result is that once the reader has submitted to the limitations of the Little Karoo, its mood and atmosphere, its standards and its faith, life becomes simplified and unified, and the saga of Juriaan and Deltjie in The Pain or of old Alie in Desolation unfolds with faultless inevitability.

Compared with that of previous writers of South African short stories, such as W.C. Scully, and contemporaries, such as F.C. Slater, her language is strikingly simple and unself-conscious, revealing no trace of the embarrassed circumlocution and affectation which mar so much South African literature. Her diction is almost invariably functional, precise and appropriate to character and mood. The Biblical phraseology which occurs in the dialogue and narration is authentic in the mouths of a patriarchal people whose book is the Bible, and adds to the mood of primitive simplicity. Her dialogue is a technical experiment. It is a blend of the archaic diction of the Authorized Version and literal translations from Afrikaans. Though the retention of the Afrikaans word order produces an effect at times unnatural, this technique, too, is effective in preserving the illusion of strangeness and isolation.

Such technical skill reveals both a trained sensibility and an intelligent grasp of the nature and requirements of the short story form. Pauline Smith is a better short story writer than she is novelist. The Beadle cannot be compared with The Pain and Desolation in quality. Her reputation rests largely on one thin collection of short stories, and rightly so. William Flomer is best known as a poet and novelist, S.G. Millin as a novelist and biographer, but Pauline Smith, like Herman Rosman, takes her place in South African literature as a writer of short stories.

Pauline Smith's contribution to South African literature is well known and her short stories have been carefully studied.⁽¹¹⁾ Herman Charles Bosman is hardly known outside South Africa and his writing has received little critical attention. It is necessary, therefore, to analyse more fully the nature and style of his work in order to assess his contribution to the South African short story.

In this country his reputation rests upon a volume of short stories which he describes as "Simple stories which I believe, in all modesty, are not without a certain degree of literary merit."⁽¹²⁾ Although this collection, Mafeking Road, was published only in 1947, he wrote the first of his Oom Schalk Lourens stories while in prison during the late 1920's⁽¹³⁾ and continued the series in the thirties.⁽¹⁴⁾

His short stories resemble Pauline Smith's in several ways. He too is a regional writer who has limited himself to an isolated and primitive farming community and acquired a great interest in and knowledge of local colour.⁽¹⁵⁾ Circumstances took Bosman, not to the Karoo, but to the Marico Bushveld in the Transvaal, where as a young teacher his imagination was captured by the old Boers, who were, in his words, "wonderful storytellers".⁽¹⁶⁾

His stories share the simplicity of Pauline Smith's, both in theme and in narration. Bosman's themes - love, death, the supernatural - are as elemental as those of the Little Karoo - and he achieves a similar brevity, unity of structure, and simplicity of narration, though by somewhat different means. But here the resemblance ends.

(11) Vide A Study of the Works of Pauline Smith by Geoffrey Haresnapo, U.C.T., 1961.

(12) Herman Charles Bosman, A Cask of Jerepigo, Central News Agency, p.112.

(13) Ibid., p.10.

(14) Ibid., p.12.

(15) Ibid., p.116.

(16) Ibid., p.116.

Bosman possesses one quality entirely lacking in Pauline Smith which transforms his stories and makes them, in spite of similarities, basically quite different from hers. It is an ironic sense of humour.

To understand Bosman's humour it is necessary first to understand his unusually effective technique of narration.

Years after he had written the short stories contained in Mafeking Road Bosman wrote that "I regarded them as wonderful story-tellers; the old Boers who lived in the Marico district years ago".⁽¹⁷⁾ When he came to write short stories himself he found himself eager to write in a similar vein, and the result was the invention of Oom Schalk Lourens. Oom Schalk is Bosman's mouthpiece, the "old Boer" who narrates the Marico stories.

A.S. Coppard distinguished between a story, which was written, and a tale, which was told. Oom Schalk makes Bosman's stories tales, with all the advantages of first person narrative. In the story, Mafeking Road, Oom Schalk says with critical awareness, "It is not the story that counts; what matters is the way you tell it. The important thing is to know just at what moment you must knock out your pipe on your veldskoek, and at what stage of the story you must start talking about the School Committee at Drogevllei. Another necessary thing is to know what part of the story to leave out."⁽¹⁸⁾ It is largely the personality of Oom Schalk himself which becomes "the way you tell it" of Bosman's stories. His most amusing and useful feature is the fact that he himself is never amused, but relates the most absurd details with an air of grave and innocent detachment, and cultivates a pose of extreme simplicity.

Through the mask of Oom Schalk Bosman relates stories and creates characters which are both comic and serious. The

(17) Ibid., p.116.

(18) Herman Charles Bosman, Mafeking Road, Central News Agency, 1957, p.50.

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(18) Herman Charles Bosman, Mafeking Road, Central News Agency, 1957, p.50.

essential difference between Bosman's stories and those of Paulino Smith is, in fact, that Bosman can see the Boer as a comic as well as a tragic figure.

The humour of Bosman's stories lies mainly in Oom Schalk's habit of juxtaposing, with simulated innocence, the serious and the absurd, the normal and the ridiculous. The Music-Maker, at once one of Bosman's most amusing and moving stories, contains many examples of this. The very theme of the story is, in fact, the interrelation of the absurd and the tragically serious. Manie Kruger, the best concertina player in the Bushveld, decides to dedicate his life to music and to becoming famous. He stops playing at local dances, ceases to take an interest in his farm, practises continually and gives concertina recitals for the Boer community. Even at this point the absurdity of the situation is tinged with pathos. The incongruities of his first recital are heightened by Oom Schalk's matter of fact description.

"Manie Kruger was sitting behind the green curtain. He was already there when I came in. I knew it was Manie by his veldskoens, which were sticking out from underneath the curtain. Letta Steyn sat in front of me. Now and again, when she turned round, I saw that there was a flush on her face and a look of dark excitement in her eyes.

At last everything was ready, and Joel, the farm kaffir to whom Manie had given this job, slowly drew the green curtains aside. A few of the younger men called out 'Middag, ou Manie', and Jan Terblanche asked if it wasn't very close and suffocating, sitting there like that behind that piece of green curtain.

Then he started to play." (19)

In spite of the element of the ridiculous - the unintentional Bushveld burlesque contained in the protruding veldskoens, and in the warm greetings of the audience - Bosman is careful to maintain an undertone of seriousness and excitement, which anticipates the tragedy, through the figure of Letta Steyn. But a continued use of bathos ensures that these elements remain undertones of a basically humorous surface, for Bosman is not

(19) Ibid., The Music-Maker, p.40.

prepared to tolerate seriousness unrelieved by humour for any length of time.

Bosman's humour, expressed mainly by Oom Schalk Lourens's innocent descents into bathos and absurdity, has several effects on the nature of his short stories. It is an excellent corrective to sentimentality, and the plots of many of Bosman's stories, dealing as they do with love and death, lay themselves open to false or excessive feeling. It conveys the author's width of vision, his perspective, and his unwillingness to be carried away by temporary situations and emotions. It is entertaining. Pauline Smith's stories may move, but they do not amuse. Several of Bosman's do both. Finally, it provides Bosman with his satirical tool.

Bosman's satire of the Marico Boers is in the nature of a mischievous exposure, always basically sympathetic, never harshly critical. He ridicules their treatment of and attitude towards the natives,⁽²⁰⁾ their bravery during the South African War,⁽²¹⁾ the range of their topics of conversation⁽²²⁾ and their laziness.⁽²³⁾ It is only when he touches on their religious outlook that his satire loses its good nature and becomes biting:

"'Don't forget to read your Bible, my sons', he called out as we rode away. 'Pray the Lord to help you, and when you shoot always aim for the stomach.' These remarks were typical of my father's deeply religious nature".⁽²⁴⁾

In almost every case the humour and the satire alike lie in the irony of Oom Schalk. What provides subtlety is Oom Schalk's apparent unawareness of both the irony and his own self-exposure. He is priding himself on his enlightened outlook when he says:

(20) Ibid., Makapan's Caves, p.65.

(21) Ibid., Mafeking Road, p.53.

(22) Ibid., Drieke and the Moon, p.122.

(23) Ibid., Veld Maiden, p.141.

(24) Ibid., Makapan's Caves, p.68.

"Still, sometimes you come across a good kafir, who is faithful and upright and a true Christian and doesn't let the wild dogs catch the sheep. I always think that it isn't right to kill that kind of kafir."(25)

Bosman wishes him to be unaware of the implication that he considers it right to kill every other kind.

Bosman shelters completely behind the mask of Oom Schalk, as Oom Schalk shelters behind his ingenuousness. Such satire as there is in his stories gives the impression of springing innocently and spontaneously from the personality of Oom Schalk. There is never any trace of intrusion by the author in the form of bias or a "message". Bosman's satire is oblique, never direct, stated, or forced upon the reader. He is not weighed down by a sense of injustice striving to assert itself in literature. In this passage from The Music-Maker the satire is lightly carried along by the flow of the story. Oom Schalk is describing Manie Kruger's concertina recital:

"The recital lasted for about an hour and a half, and the applause at the end was even greater than at the start. And during those ninety minutes Manie left his seat only once. That was when there was some trouble with the curtain and he got up to kick the kafir."(26)

Again, it is in Oom Schalk's matter of fact tone rather than in the action that the satire lies. He, and presumably the audience, regards the 'kicking of the kafir' as something quite normal and to be expected.(27) Such an oblique exposure is not only lively and amusing; it is far more effective than a slab of direct criticism which would disrupt both the tone and the flow of the story.

It is quite wrong to regard Bosman as simply a writer of

(25) Ibid., Makapan's Caves, p.65.

(26) Ibid., The Music-Maker, p.41.

(27) Vide Uys Krige's discussion of this passage in his article Has Africa, like America, a Characteristic Contribution to make to Literature? Proceedings of a Conference of Writers, Publishers, Editors and University Teachers of English, Johannesburg, 1956.

light, humorous stories. Almost every story in his collection, Mafeking Road, is a serious story presented in a comic way.

The Music-Maker, for example, is certainly one of Bosman's most amusing short stories, yet, judged as a whole, it is tragic, not comic. Manie Kruger, the Bushveld concertina player, is deluded by his vision of greatness, and though his delusions express themselves in amusing ways, the inevitable conclusion is not amusing. Nor is his lover, Letta Steyn, a comic figure, as she waits for Manie to return from the city where he has gone to give his music to the world. Even in the grim irony of the final paragraph of this story, there is a touch of Oom Schalk's absurdity.

"It was a long time before I again saw Manie Kruger. And then it was in Pretoria. I had gone there to interview the Volksraad member about an election promise. It was quite by accident that I saw Manie. And he was playing the concertina - playing as well as ever, I thought. I went away quickly. But what affected me very strangely was just that one glimpse I had of the green curtain of the bar in front of which Manie Kruger played." (28)

Here Oom Schalk's terse style is as effective for achieving an abrupt, tragic ending as it is for producing comic effects.

It is the endings of Bosman's stories which reveal most clearly their basic seriousness. Almost invariably the laughter of the earlier stages of the stories has changed to a note of sadness. The Rooinek, for example, ends with the discovery of the bodies of a trekker party in the Kalahari desert. The Rooinek, with his books on how to farm and his English habit of wearing socks, has been disliked and derided by the Boers. But he is no longer amusing, nor is the story at all humorous, when Oom Schalk describes how they find his body in the desert.

"But we all agreed that the Englishman Webber must have passed through terrible things; he could not even have had any understanding left as to what the Steyns had done with their baby. He probably thought, up to the moment when he died, that he was carrying the child. For, when we lifted his body, we found, still clasped in his dead and rigid arms, a few old rags and a child's clothes." (29)

The impressionistic and almost mystic closing sentence from the lips of the Boer narrator provides the final contrast to the earlier coarse humour. For a moment after discovering the bodies the Boers simply listen to the Kalahari wind which symbolises the mystery of life and death. The tone is one of deep seriousness, even reverence, and the mood is one of completion and peace.

"It seemed to us that the wind that always stirs in the Kalahari blew very quietly and softly that morning.
Yes, the wind blew very gently." (30)

There is no doubt that Bosman is a short story writer of unusual sensibility. David Wright has remarked upon his "gaiety and ironic dryness of wit", (31) but has not mentioned his sympathy, which, in spite of the corrective of humour, sometimes lies close to sentimentality. For Bosman is many things: a humorist, a romantic and a satirist; a writer who can handle both laughter and tears with the same sensitivity. Most striking is the personality of the writer himself which emerges through the Oom Schalk stories. It is the authority, vitality and originality of this powerful literary personality which led Nadine Gordimer in a moment of generosity to describe this comparatively unknown writer as a 'giant'. (32)

William Plomer was born two years before H.C. Bosman, and

(29) Ibid., The Rooinek, p.166.

(30) Ibid., The Rooinek, p.166.

(31) David Wright, op.cit., p.13.

(32) Bernard Sachs, South African Personalities and Places, Kayor Publishers, 1959, p.84.

published his first volume of short stories in 1927 when he was twenty-four. This collection, I Speak of Africa, possesses three significant qualities. It is, like Turbott Wolfe, a "violent ejaculation",⁽³³⁾ a piece of powerfully imaginative and enthusiastic writing; it is harshly and even crudely satirical; and its language is sensuous and poetic. In the volumes of short stories that followed, Paper Houses in 1929 and The Child of Queen Victoria in 1933, there is a widening of scope and interest, a moving away from South African characters and themes to Continental and English settings, but the three qualities typical of his earliest writing remain.

In temperament and outlook he is very like his friend, Roy Campbell. His opinions are strongly held and his emotions strongly felt. He opposes and despises the shallow, the prudish and the conventional; he admires the natural, the spontaneous and the elemental. This dual tendency provides both the major theme for his stories, and their satirical quality.

Plomer favours the technique of the novelist of creating two characters or, more frequently, two groups of characters who symbolize qualities which are diametrically opposed. In Down on the Farm, for example, Stevens is warm, natural and simple while Kimball is cold, conventional and hypocritical. This clash of character and outlook is very similar to those in the novels of E.M. Forster, particularly the earliest and simplest, Where Angels Fear to Tread. Gino, Forster's Italian, spontaneous and passionate, is similar to Stevens, while the English Merritons symbolize the same cold artificiality as Kimball. It is interesting to note that Plomer dedicated a

(33) Ezekiel Mphahlele, The African Image, Faber, p.

story with a Greek background to E.M. Forster, probably not only because its setting was of particular interest to Forster, but also on account of the clash between the natural and the artificial inherent in its theme and characterization. (34)

In Down on the Farm, it is particularly into Stevens that Plomer projects his own outlook and temperament. The experiences of Stevens over which Plomer lingers are at once mystic and sensuous. His response to life is emotional and intuitive rather than intellectual. Between Stevens and his Coloured servant, "although it sometimes happened that scarcely a single word would be exchanged, there was a deep understanding and affection". (35) Even between Stevens and his horse, as they gallop over the dawn veld, is "that tacit sympathy without which riding is nothing". (36) Moving among the flock at night becomes a mystic experience. The sensations, sights, sounds and smells of the night "combined to comfort and content his inarticulate spirit," and the scene possessed a "pastoral simplicity", "an atmosphere of deep natural instincts being fulfilled". (37)

This is Plomer's major theme - "deep natural instincts being fulfilled". Down on the Farm is an affirmation of Stevens's way of life. Plomer's enthusiasm for life is very similar to that of D.H. Lawrence in that the physical and the spiritual are intimately related. Plomer can speak of "the grace of animal intimacies," (38) and describe the skilled casting of a fleece as a "godlike movement". (39) The sensuous is never purely sensuous. The death of a man or an animal, dawn and

(34) The Crisis in The Child of Queen Victoria, p.181.

(35) William Plomer, The Child of Queen Victoria, Cape, 1933.
Down on the Farm, p.108.

(36) Ibid., Down on the Farm, p.123.

(37) Ibid., Down on the Farm, p.109.

(38) Ibid., Down on the Farm, p.110.

(39) Ibid., Down on the Farm, p.115.

evening, labour and sleep, all contain an element of mystery. The spontaneous response to these is both a sensuous and a mystic experience. Stevens is moved by the sudden death of one of his native herdsmen:

"A string of living rubies ran down on to that dark hand which would never again grip a ram by the horns, guide a plough, caress a woman or carry a child. The body and the traces of blood were removed, the lamentations of the widow rose shrilly in the distance, the ram, ranging among the rocks, tore up the sweet mountain grass with its teeth, and the mystery remained."(40)

It is with this primitive experience of life that Kimball's shrewdness and conventionality are contrasted.

The theme of naturalness opposed to artificiality runs through The Child of Queen Victoria as well. Not only is there opposition between characters, but in addition, within the mind of Frant, the protagonist, the two ways of life meet and clash. The fact that he is a "child of Queen Victoria", is somewhat prudish and conventional, and possesses public school standards of decency and sportsmanship clashes with the "rightness" of a passionate love for an African girl. Eventually the patterned feelings of the public school prefect are broken down, but it is too late. The girl is dead, and Frant returns "to Madumbi, to the store, to the MacGavins, to the making of a livelihood, to the fashioning of a way of life, to a roll of undeveloped negatives".(41)

Plomer sympathizes with Frant, but not with the MacGavins, the white store-owners, who perform the same symbolic function as Kimball in Down on the Farm. The MacGavins are shoddy and second-rate, the committed followers of a sterile pattern of thinking and living. Plomer's satire of them is, however, far more controlled and indirect than in his first volume of short stories, I Speak of Africa. He is content to dispose of Mrs. MacGavin, for example, with such comments as these:

(40) Ibid., Down on the Farm, p.113-114.

(41) Ibid., The Child of Queen Victoria, p.76.

"On the table in that front room there was nearly always a fly-haunted still-life consisting of a teapot and some dirty cups, for Mrs. MacGavin drank very strong tea seven times daily, a habit which no doubt accounted partly for the state of her complexion." (42)

He conveys his criticism and distaste by amassing unpleasant details about appearance, habits and speech.

In I Speak of Africa everything is subordinate to the intensity of the satire. Plomer is concerned with tearing down, not affirming. His anger towards and contempt for the "uncivilized white owners" of the "blasted heath", (43) produces not characters but grotesque caricatures like Takhaar and his sons in Portraits in the Nude. The plot of this story consists of adultery, lashings, seduction, assault, a mad naked man in a church, and a lustful naked woman in her room - in short a literary orgy which becomes ludicrous. As satire it fails because it is too extreme. Plomer's anger and distaste simply produce puppets who are required to dance to a bestial choreography. His language reveals an adolescent cleverness and desire to shock, and is suffused with a contempt which cares nothing for objectivity and true perspective. This is his "Portrait of a farmer who was at Mooi Rivier for Nagzaam's

"a blood-faced hell-handed witless loveless many-acred stone-squeezing leather-bellied blockhead." (44)

This is the crudity of Plomer's early satire, "written in community of thought" with Roy Campbell. (45) Though there is improvement in his later short stories his satire remains heavy-handed and lacks the wit, poise and delicacy of Bosman's. It is significant that the one story in I Speak of Africa which is free from anger and contempt, Ula Masondo, is by far the best

(42) Ibid., The Child of Moon Victoria, p.24.

(43) William Plomer, I Speak of Africa, Hogarth Press, 1927. Preface, p.5.

(44) Ibid., Portrait of a Farmer, p.44.

(45) Ibid., Preface, p.7.

in the collection.

The strength of Plomer's stories does not lie in satire. It lies in his skilful use of sensuous language and imagery, in the poetic gift that he brings to bear on the short story form. He is at his best in natural descriptions, in painting word-pictures and evoking atmosphere. Nor will one quotation do justice to the range of his poetic language. Whether he is describing the wasteland of Ula Masondo's dream,⁽⁴⁶⁾ a humming bird or an orchid in The Child of Queen Victoria or a frosty morning in Down on the Farm⁽⁴⁷⁾ he achieves the same vividness and precision and produces the same effect of immediacy. This is Plomer's picture of the humming bird:

"A humming-bird appeared from nowhere, and poising itself on the wing before every open flower, whirled there like a moth, gleamed like a jewel, darting its thin curved beak, as sharp as a needle, into each for honey."⁽⁴⁸⁾

Its swift movements are conveyed by strong, precise verbs, reinforced by a sharp, staccato rhythm.

His image of the orchids carries entirely different connotations and is equally effective.

"a few epiphytic orchids lolled their greenish mouths open over the ancient, rotting bough that gave them life."⁽⁴⁹⁾

Again the strength lies in the verbs. "Lolled", coupled with "mouths", suggests subhuman but animate qualities - the satiated, lazy heaviness of the parasite thriving on corruption.

There is a confident, emphatic quality in Plomer's descriptions. His language is often heightened not only by bold images such as "the sea wind unwinds a smoking iris from the spray"⁽⁵⁰⁾ or "the moon was caught in a web of flying mist,"⁽⁵¹⁾

(46) Ibid., Ula Masondo, p.136-137.

(47) William Plomer, The Child of Queen Victoria,
Down on the Farm, p.121-122.

(48) Ibid., The Child of Queen Victoria, p.58-59.

(49) Ibid., The Child of Queen Victoria, p.58.

(50) William Plomer, I Speak of Africa, Ula Masondo, p.137.

(51) William Plomer, The Child of Queen Victoria, p.70.

but in experimentation with such figures of speech as alliteration in the following passage:

"these human vermin, starved and swinking, scratching with hoes the scarlet sand, and sowing seeds that sprout as willingly as stones." (52)

Here Plomer is obviously imitating the emphatic Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, and even employs the archaic "swinking" to add to the effect of the primitiveness of the peasant labour.

Plomer's verbal skill cannot compensate, however, for weaknesses in his technique as a short story writer. Brilliance of language is not matched by the mastery of form found in the stories of Bosman and Pauline Smith. Plomer is a poet and a novelist. He remains both when he writes short stories and it is the novelistic element which weakens them.

His stories lack control and discipline. He embellishes them with too many words, details and situations, and his plots tend to be loose and rambling. (53) Characterization is often by means of long and intrusive character sketches which arrest the flow of the story, though the most serious form of intrusion is Plomer's tendency to hold discussions with the reader. (54)

The resultant lack of unity and "totality of effect" mars Plomer's most important short stories. He expresses himself with greater success in the novel or in poetry. Nevertheless he has introduced into the South African short story the vitality and enthusiasm of a strongly held theme and a poetic sensibility which reveals itself in vivid imagery.

(52) William Plomer, I Speak of Africa, Ula Nasondo, p.137.

(53) Particularly Down on the Farm.

(54) William Plomer, The Child of Queen Victoria, p.16:
 "For some of us when young it does not seem so important that we should be successful in a worldly sense and at once enjoy money and comfort, as that we should try and become our true selves. We want to blossom out and fulfil our real natures. ..."

Sarah Gertrude Millin is better known as a novelist and biographer than as a writer of short stories. Nevertheless, she has produced a series of short stories which is of interest and importance. Her first short stories were written at the request of Katherine Mansfield in 1920, and for a time after this she continued to produce stories dealing with the same themes and, most significantly, the same character. The stories, all written twenty or thirty years ago and collected in 1957 in Two Bucks Without Hair, concern Alita, Sarah Gertrude Millin's native maid.

Their intention is an understanding and exposition of the African mind and of the difficult yet often amusing White-Black relationships within a domestic framework. This concentration on race relations, sustained throughout a series of stories, is most significant. Hers were the first short stories of any quality to attempt what is today a literary commonplace.

She was, in addition, the first South African story writer to consistently use the city as her setting, and break the tradition of using the veld as the inevitable background. This, too, was an important change of focus. Today few writers look to the veld for inspiration and local colour. The city has far more excitement and interest and the veld, for a time at least, appears to have had its literary possibilities exhausted.

Mrs. Millin's tone is strikingly different from that of Plomer. Instead of harshness and contempt her stories reveal sympathy and acceptance, blended with a certain emotional restraint. She brings no obviously preconceived patterns of thinking or feeling to bear on her stories, as Plomer does. She is simply concerned to understand Alita and herself and to provide a clear exposition.

In humour and in conversational style Mrs. Millin's short stories resemble those of Bosman. Her humour is, however, more

dignified and aloof and relies mainly on brisk irony.

Technically Mrs. Millin's short stories are interesting on account of the quality of her language and her skilful use of dialogue and dramatization.

Her style is a complete contrast to that of Plomer. She uses no imagery and her language possesses no poetic quality. Nor is she at all verbose, as Plomer sometimes is. Her language is conversational, direct and functional, and is entirely appropriate to her technique of first person narration. It simply conveys information and attitude briskly and efficiently.

This briskness is particularly valuable at the beginnings of her stories. The New House begins with this sentence:

"During the last two weeks I have received three urgent letters from Alita's son, Sidney." (55)

The Black Dress opens with these words:

"Alita wears a black dress now". (56)

There is no preamble, no superfluous detail. Key details have been conveyed and the story has begun its movement by the end of the opening sentence.

Terse, efficient prose is often linked with skilful dialogue, (57) and Sarah Gertrude Millin is the first South African short story writer to employ dramatic dialogue as a major means of narration. A great deal of insight into attitude and outlook is conveyed in the numerous conversations between Alita and Mrs. Millin. In Emily comes to Johannesburg, for example, Alita learns that her daughter, Emily, has been seen in the city with the undesirable Alfred. The news has been brought by one of her relations, Susanna.

(55) Sarah Gertrude Millin, Two Bucks Without Hair, Central News Agency, 1957. The New House, p.146.

(56) Ibid., The Black Dress, p.140.

(57) As in Ernest Hemingway's short stories.

"Alita turned on her with contempt. 'You are a fool, Susanna. How can they be married in the church? Did they speak to us of marrying? Have they invited us to a wedding? Has there been talk of lobola? And who is this Alfred, this wild boy, that he should take my child from me and let me break my word to Sam?'

'He is Josephine's father', I respectably pointed out.

Alita blew out a breath through her wide nostrils.

'It is easy to be a father', she said.

..... 'What shame have we now put on Sam?' (58)

Here the dialogue reveals, more effectively than any analysis, the two moralities, the African and the European. Mrs. Millin is concerned with issues of chastity and illegitimacy. That she is aware of her own position - the conventional and respectable European approach - is indicated by the mildly self-critical word "respectably". This is not Alita's view, however. "It is easy to be a father", she says. To her, the essential factor is not that her daughter has borne Alfred a child, but that Alfred would make a worthless husband, would not be able to marry her in the prescribed way, or that, above all, Alita has contracted to marry Emily to the aged and wealthy Sam.

In addition to portraying the urban African briskly and dramatically, Mrs. Millin's short stories have accomplished something largely unintended. She has given a picture not only of Alita and her kind, but of herself. Her tone and treatment reveal with complete naturalness and unconscious realism the race attitude typical of the cultured liberal of the twenties and thirties, with its blend of superiority, condescension, protectiveness and amusement. And this picture of the European mind is a valuable one, though, in many ways, one of the past. The tone of amused indulgence, however mild, and however softened by sympathy, has dated more than any other aspect of these stories, which Mrs. Millin herself has described as "period pieces". (59) Today the African may be amusing; and

(58) Sarah Gertrude Millin, op.cit., Emily Comes to Johannesburg, p.166.

(59) Ibid., Foreword, p.113.

naive, but he is also tragic and powerful, and it is these elements in particular which are reflected in contemporary literature.

Before the 1920's it was impossible to speak of "the South African short story". Within less than two decades four writers had produced a body of short stories which completely changed this position. Mrs. Millin, Pauline Smith, Elomer and Bosman had each contributed, by means of theme, attitude, technique or sensibility, something of significance to the South African short story. It is against the background of their achievement that the work of those writers of the fifties - Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing, Alan Paton, Uys Krige, Dan Jacobson and Jack Cope - who have found the short story form a satisfying means of personal expression must be viewed.

Pauline Smith's theme of suffering, her moral and religious attitude and her simplicity of language and style; Sarah Gertrude Millin's preoccupation with race relationships and her urban setting; both the poetic skill and the satire of William Elomer; and the ironic humour of Herman Charles Bosman - all these elements are to be found in the contemporary South African short story. Some have merely persisted in the work of one or two writers; others, like the racial theme and the satirical tendency, have become of major importance. Yet, in spite of their debt to the earlier group, each of the contemporary writers has, while accepting the tradition, added something of himself - a preoccupation with a particular theme or aspect of a theme; a characteristic attitude or point of view; or an interesting technical development - with the result that the contemporary short story possesses both a fairly clear general pattern and, within this, interesting individual differences.

CHAPTER THREE
NADINE GORDIMER.

Although Nadine Gordimer has written two successful novels, she has received more recognition as a short story writer, having received the 1961 W.H. Smith Literary Award for her third collection of short stories, Friday's Footprint. The fact that she is, more than any other contemporary South African, an established short story writer, and the fact that, having published three volumes of short stories, she provides a relatively large volume of material for study make her an appropriate and rewarding writer with whom to begin an examination of the modern South African short story.

It is particularly interesting to watch a writer of significance in his early explorations, within his chosen medium, in his movement towards the theme and the form which are essentially his and which must be found and expressed and developed if his writing is to be significant. Herman Charles Bosman found the expression of the mixture of toughness, cynicism and idealism which composed his nature in the humorous and ironical anecdotes of Oom Schalk. The Little Karoo expressed the seriousness, the religious morality and the awareness of life's tragedy of Pauline Smith. A writer "writes what he is", and in her first volume of short stories, The Soft Voice of the Serpent, we see Nadine Gordimer finding out what she is, experimenting with theme and style, developing and expressing what Sean O'Faolain would call her "literary personality".

The Soft Voice of the Serpent is a volume of trial runs. As is to be expected in the first work of a young woman, there is a touch of romantic idealism, bordering on fantasy, quite different from anything in the later volumes. Treasures of the Sea, for example, is the story of a young and wealthy girl who loves and is fascinated by the sea. When she falls in love,

this love, like her passion for the sea, is ideal. Her fiance gives her a pearl engagement ring and she waits for him by the sea till he can join her. This, however, is not to be, for to the wealth and beauty, the mystic fascination and the ideal love, death must be added for the romance to be complete. The girl is drowned, and drowned "beautifully", and is claimed and caressed by her lover, the sea who

"all night long lifted and laid, lifted and laid her body, until there was no part of her that was not touched by the sea. And in the morning, when the tide ran out with the rising of the sun, she lay quietly, sheltered, in the pool, and a soft current rippled beneath her floating hand, playing her fingers delicately as a reed instrument, threading in and out with the softest touch possible about the cold finger on which the pearl still shone, very beautiful in the water."(1)

The gentle, flowing and caressing rhythm, the soft, sensuous and intimate images, and the skilful evocation of an atmosphere of peace and fulfilment, indicate the quality of even her early writing.

Linked with Treasures of the Sea on account of their immaturity are The Talisman and A Present for a Good Girl. The Talisman, too, has a touch of mysticism, and explores the influence of a dress on its owner. This existence of the dress is an evil one and the story is reminiscent of The Picture of Dorian Gray. Indeed, Treasures of the Sea, too, is reminiscent of certain of Oscar Wilde's allegorical fantasies of the Nightingale and the Rose type. A Present for a Good Girl has all the sentimentality and crude pathos of an O. Henry story. A poor mother scripps and saves to buy her daughter (the good girl) an expensive handbag for Christmas. Finally there comes the tragic and ironical climax. The daughter is disgusted with her

(1) Nadine Gordimer, The Soft Voice of the Serpent, Gollancz, 1953. Treasures of the Sea, p.75.

mother and drags her out of the shop thinking she has been squandering her money again, and not realising that the bag is for her. Here Miss Gordimer is making use of the O. Henry formula which never fails to evoke sympathy from the suitably responsive reader, and she succeeds admirably for the first and last time.

The influence of Alan Paton appears to be strong in Another Part of the Sky, the story of a principal of a reformatory and his fears and hopes for a native who has run away and is suspected of attempted murder. In it are many echoes of Cry, the Beloved Country and such short stories as The Divided House.

These elements, however, the romantic, the mystic, the sentimental, once toyed with, are left behind. This trial and rejection indicates Nadine Gordimer's clear appraisal of her early work, her realisation of what was bad and not herself, and a consequent turning towards and concentration on her individual way of seeing and interpreting life.

The first elements of what was to become the essential quality in her writing are clearly and simply seen in the story which gives her first volume its title, The Soft Voice of the Serpent. This story is a study of a cripple who could not bear to let the realisation of his true position "quite reach him." As soon as he felt the full awareness of the fact that he had lost a leg "pressing up, coming, coming, dark, crushing, ready to burst, he always turned away, just in time, back to his book. That was his system." And slowly this system would become a habit, "with all the reassuring strength of a habit. It would become such a habit never to get to the point of realising it, that he never would realise it. And one day he would find that he had

achieved what he wanted; he would feel as if he had always been like that."⁽²⁾ The cripple is "preparing a face to meet the faces that he meets",⁽³⁾ and it is this aspect of human nature that was to capture and hold the imagination of Nadine Gordimer. She becomes intensely interested in the protective 'systems' men and women adopt, in their defence mechanisms, to use the psychological term. She sees them building up facades, ways of acting and thinking, which shield them from harsh reality. And these facades are erected not only to delude others, but also to delude themselves. Life becomes bearable once again, and what is delightful deception gradually becomes reality. In Happy Event she attempts to explain this process by means of an analogy:

"Like ants teeming to repair a broken anthill, like white corpuscles rushing to a wound, all the forces which protect oneself from oneself have already begun their quick, sure, furtive, uneasy juggling for a new stance, a rearrangement for comfort into which, in some way, amorphous life seems to have edged you."⁽⁴⁾

It is as if Nadine Gordimer has said to herself: "Every man, with few exceptions, has his 'little life, his little shelter',⁽⁵⁾ his own little world of thought, attitude and action which he has built up around him, in which he feels more or less secure, and by means of which he copes with life. It is my task to portray this facade, to give an account of 'his little life, his little shelter', and having done this, to probe beneath it and perhaps remove the facade, and in one sometimes horrible moment to give him a glimpse of what he is really like."

This is not a new technique, nor is it a new approach to life. Chekhov and his disciple, Katherine Mansfield, were fond of creating a character, following their creation sympathetically for

(2) Ibid., The Soft Voice of the Serpent, p.2.

(3) T.S. Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.

(4) Nadine Gordimer, Six Feet of the Country, Collancez, 1956. Happy Event, pp.32-3.

(5) Nadine Gordimer, Friday's Footprint, Collancez, 1960. An Image of Success, p.224.

some pages, and then suddenly showing his nakedness in all its pathos, and sometimes in all its ironical humour.⁽⁶⁾

It is this way of seeing life and of conveying this insight, this preoccupation with the facade, which, more than any other factor, characterises Miss Cordimer's short stories. She is thus primarily a psychological writer in the sense that Chekhov, James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, and H.E. Bates are psychological writers. She is concerned both with the surface of words and actions, the pattern of personal and social relationships, and with the deep and often hidden motives and emotions below this surface, for, in her view, people are seldom, if ever, what they seem to be.

So concerned is Nadine Cordimer with the theme of deception that it is only her wide range of observation that saves her work from appearing excessively stereotyped. This combination of stereotyped design and freshness of observation enables her to achieve several variations of her basic theme.

Old age gives rise to many problems of adjustment, and to much self-delusion and pretence. It is not surprising, therefore, that ^{Miss} Cordimer has studied the effect of age on men and women in such stories as A Style of Her Own, Enemies, Face from Atlantis and The Last Kiss. Mrs. Hansen in Enemies, for example, is fighting against that ageing part of her nature, "old fool", as she calls it, which wants to give up the struggle to appear forceful and poised. Yet even from the loneliness of her old age she has fashioned a weapon. Her self-conscious "aloneness" protects her, and becomes a "carapace that did not shut her off

(6) Katherine Mansfield, Selected Stories, ed. D.M. Davin, 1953. Miss Brill.

but shielded her strong sense of survival - against it, and all else."⁽⁷⁾ Mrs. Hansen retires into her carapace, symbolised by her private railway compartment, which wealth has made snug and secure, and ^{Miss} Gordimer watches her there in the little self-centred world which she has created and which she rules.⁽⁸⁾

The reaction to loneliness and emptiness has also interested Miss Gordimer. In The Night the Favourite Came Home she gives an account of a vulgar party from the point of view of a young lady. Freda, polite, distant and slightly superior, retires to her room, and then we realise that, far from being a satire of the crudity and shallowness of a celebration in a lower middle-class South African home, The Night the Favourite Came Home is as much a satirical portrait of the sophisticated Freda. By retiring into her room and into herself she finds, not peace, but a full realisation of her emptiness. She, in herself, is nothing and has nothing, and is as shallow as the producers of the loud laughter in the lounge. She has forgotten the one thing which she needed, her books, and without them she has nothing into which to retire.⁽⁹⁾

Check Yes or No is the study of an illusion of respectability and confidence which has been built up to compensate for an unhappy and sordid past. Phoebe is delighted with herself and her new life until she sees in a circus tight-rope walker a

(7) Nadine Gordimer, Six Feet of the Country, Enemies, p.166.

(8) Ibid., Enemies, p.170. "Back in her compartment, she took off her toque at last, and tied a gray chiffon scarf round her head. Then she took her red-and-gold Florentine leather cigarette-case from her bag and settled down to smoke her nightly cigarette, while she waited for the man to come and convert her seat into the de-luxe bed Alfred had paid for in advance."

(9) Nadine Gordimer, Friday's Footprint, The Night the Favourite Came Home, p.57.

horrifying image of what she really is, a blind, groping, insecure little figure, enveloped in a heavy sack. (10)

The Cicatrice and Out of Season investigate the self-delusion of the jealous and love-starved woman. There are two voices in the jealousy-scarred Hannah in The Cicatrice, the one real, the other assumed. Her jealousy is like "the shocking sight of the beating heart of some small animal, exposed through dissection, and still alive in the cold pain of the air." And her real voice clamours: "He's mine, in that terrible place inside herself where people were fighting, where everything writhed and staggered from wall to wall". (11) Yet even jealousy such as this is camouflaged by the voice of the facade which says:

"I am so glad to meet you. How do you do, Gypey?" (12)

and

"She's pretty, you know - Well, of course. Very tiny. Did you see how I towered over her?" (13)

Hannah deceives herself as she deceives others, and when her eyes dance like "the eyes of the old warrior who hears at last and yet again, the bells of another triumph," (14) her triumph is as much over her true self, which she has again effectively denied existence, as over the other woman.

The scene of Out of Season is a ladies' lunch party, where the hostess, Caroline, ageing though lovely, reads aloud a letter from her absent husband. She is a woman who desperately needs to be loved by her husband, and therefore envied by her friends, in order to retain her poise and self-respect. She

(10) Ibid., Check Yes or No, p.103.

(11) Nadine Gordimer, Six Feet of the Country, The Cicatrice, pp.139-140.

(12) Ibid., The Cicatrice, p.139.

(13) Ibid., The Cicatrice, p.143.

(14) Ibid., The Cicatrice, p.143.

cannot bear the fact that the letter ends: "We'll come up again together in September. Love, Ed," and adds the words: "I miss you terribly and need you in my arms ..." and breaks off, "giving a little guilty dismissing shrug, a giggle, as if she had let out a hiccup instead of an indiscretion."⁽¹⁵⁾ As in The Gipsies, Caroline is not so much deceiving others as deceiving and satisfying herself, building the cocoon which makes life easy and bearable.

Harrigan in Madeline Corbinor's stories, and there are many of them, are seldom healthy. For, it seems, would they interest her were they otherwise. Friday's Footprint is a study of marital failure, while stories such as Our Boy and The Four the Years are significant for their insight into marital problems. In Friday's Footprint, Rita Cunningham is trying to convince the world and herself that here is a successful marriage. Her attitude is boasting, confident, hearty, at least on the surface. It is significant of Miss Corbinor's method, and almost an acceptance of her own diagnostic technique, that she actually introduces a psychological test into the plot of the story. Rita's husband finds a questionnaire (entitled "How good a wife are you?") in a newspaper. To the amusement of their guests, Rita undergoes the examination and, amidst laughter, her husband reads out the dismal result. It is this test which is the "Friday's Footprint", the means of revealing to her with horrible clarity their true relationship.⁽¹⁶⁾

Ascendancy-culture, la vie Bohème, self-deception and escapism into the world of extravagance and ostentation form the theme in such stories as The Path of the Moon's Dark Footprint, Our Boy, Remembering August 11, and La Vie Bohème. Maubert's Bohème is mentally ill and unable to cope with reality, and it is

(15) Ibid., Out of London, p.196.

(16) Madeline Corbinor, Friday's Footprint, p.52.

clear why Miss Gordimer attempted to create and expose her own Bovary. Sonia, "Our Bovary", despising her husband (he's too small for me: too small")⁽¹⁷⁾ in her search for fulfilment, plunges into a world of extravagant clothes and jewels, exotic architecture and furniture, music, singing, painting and finally immorality or "having a good time".⁽¹⁸⁾ Like the original, she dies pathetically.

There is one other type of 'little life' or 'little shelter' which Miss Gordimer lays bare, the facade of shallow sentimentality and romanticism. In The Gentle Art she creates one of her very few positive and healthy characters, a simple crocodile hunter, and at the same time, opposed to him, the most flagrantly satirized of all her host of shallow facade-builders, the young woman who is taken on an evening hunt. Every incident is an illumination of his depth of character and gentleness, and of her crude and shallow sentimentality, of which she is, of course, completely unaware.

There is no "Friday's Footprint" or sudden illumination in this story. The exposure is gradual and culminates in vulgar hysteria when the hunter finally shoots a crocodile from as close a range and as humanely as he possibly can.

'Vivien McEwen was on her feet. 'Oh my God,' she cried, grinning, laughing. 'What a man! Wasn't that wonderful Ricks? Did you ever see anything like it! What a man! Oh Mr. Baird, that was terrific. Terrific.'"⁽¹⁹⁾

The hunter has completely captured her adolescent imagination; her world is one of complete fantasy, and simple Jimmy Baird is transformed into the embodiment of "ruthlessness, recklessness, and animal courage",⁽²⁰⁾ the qualities which for

(17) Ibid., Our Bovary, p.149.

(18) Ibid., Our Bovary, p.148.

(19) Ibid., The Gentle Art, p.117.

(20) Ibid., The Gentle Art, p.107.

her constitute true manhood. The quiet, patient dignity of the men in the boat with her provides an effective foil to her extravagance and affectation.

In story after story, whether she deals with age, spiritual emptiness, marital failure, jealousy, pseudo-culture, or sentimentality, Miss Cordimer is doing precisely the same thing. Changes in emotional situations or settings simply provide variations to the pretence-exposure pattern which constitutes her main theme. Deception is her constant preoccupation, and every situation is selected for the possibilities it possesses for providing added insight into the delusions of her fellow men.

In certain stories, in addition to examining personal reactions and adjustments to life, Nadine Cordimer pays particular attention to the values involved in such adjustments. In such stories as A Bit of Young Life, The End of the Tunnel, A Wandering Minstrel I, and The Bridegroom, there is some kind of moral facade-building by a major character, some attempt at personal moral justification. Each is an enquiry into the validity of human values as well as into behaviour and adjustment; each is philosophical as well as psychological.

The End of the Tunnel provides a clear example of a story which is both a moral and a psychological enquiry. It is the story of a woman who has left her husband for the man she loves; its setting is a motor car en route to Lourenco Marques, the destination of the fugitive couple, and a small hotel. Its plot is slight, for the essential feature of the story is the outlook of its characters. Each embodies a different moral viewpoint. To the lover, moral values are personal, not social. He has his own ethical code and is convinced that his action is not immoral.

This was the tempered flesh of the religieux, who does not feel gibes, jeers or the silent mocking of the commonplace because he has too much

faith to see even momentarily, his belief as others see it."(21)

The woman, whose infidelity has caused her to "run counter to laws to which her own moral nature subscribes,"(22) symbolises conventional morality.

"She would doubt herself with every doubt levelled at her, she would have misgivings with every misgiving of an old, hard, jealous world, scratching and whining over what it has never had for itself."(23)

The hotel proprietor's view towards infidelity is one of vague and easy-going sentimentality:

"So long as you love each other, that's what I always say. Keep on loving each other and everything's O.K."(24)

The fourth point of view, which is matter of fact, animal-like and honest, is expressed by the proprietor's wife who "goes out with fellows when she's up in town, and why not?"(25)

The problem Miss Gordimer poses is the problem of who is right. What is the meaning of "morality" or "immorality"? Do the values of society have any real validity, or is morality something entirely personal? Is there, in fact, any difference between the emotions and behaviour of the two women, between the one "who doesn't know anything above the level of her breasts", and the other "who holds all the beauty of the world in her head."?(26)

Miss Gordimer typically avoids any conclusive answer. She implies that there is no simple answer to questions on human values, and that a clear-cut conception of right or wrong suggests immaturity. She does however convey an impatience

(21) Nadine Gordimer, The Soft Voice of the Serpent, The End of the Tunnel, p.188

(22) Ibid., The End of the Tunnel, p.189.

(23) Ibid., The End of the Tunnel, p.188.

(24) Ibid., The End of the Tunnel, p.189.

(25) Ibid., The End of the Tunnel, p.188.

(26) Ibid., The End of the Tunnel, p.192.

with more moral conventionality and sanctimoniousness, "the misgivings of an old, hard, jealous world, scratching and whining over what it has never had for itself."⁽²⁷⁾ Similarly, she derides the sentimental free-love parrot cry of the hotel proprietor, implying that true morality involves personal integrity, not the conforming to social or sentimental patterns. Morality, like salvation, is to be worked out with fear and trembling, and with courage:

"If we're to get out of this, it'll have to be backwards, against the light, on our hands and knees, through a long, dark tunnel."⁽²⁸⁾

Her distaste for moral hypocrisy is revealed in

A Random Minstrel I where values are held in word only as a means to social prestige, and where the one character who is sincere in that she regards as right and wrong is ignored and despised.⁽²⁹⁾ Both The Hour and the Years and Our Bovary are critics of the type of cautious respectability that passes for moral virtue. In The Hour and the Years, respectability is portrayed as something barren and destructive.⁽³⁰⁾ In Our Bovary it is selfish and deceitful; it is finally not the loose living Sonia who is exposed, but the apparently impeccable mother of the narrator who is "pinned and wriggling on the wall."⁽³¹⁾ In the characters of Sonia and the mother two systems of values meet. Again Miss Corwin poses the question of the real meaning of morality, by asking which of the two women is more immoral, the social outcast, adulteress, and uninhibited pagan who says passionately of her husband:

(27) Ibid., The End of the Tunnel, p.183.

(28) Ibid., The End of the Tunnel, p.189.

(29) Hedine Corwin, Six Feet of the Country, p.48.

(30) Hedine Corwin, The Soft Voice of the Serpent, p.34.

(31) E.M. Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.

"I'm a woman, Vangie, he's too small, d'you understand, he's never been anything else, ever, he's too small for me, too small!" (32)

or the mother who can say calculatingly:

"Having a good time is one thing. Herb doesn't keep you tied up. You can travel and enjoy yourself, and who's going to know if you have a - (my mother, suddenly bashful, searched for a harmless-sounding word) a friendship or whatever it may be with some man you meet? But you've lived all your life with Herb, you're not a child who believes in princes. Herb's worshipped the ground you tread on, when he goes one day, you'll be well provided for - doesn't that count for anything, Sonia?"

In this case Nadine Gordimer's answer is more conclusive.

Sonia, regarded socially as immoral, is warm, spontaneous, generous and honest. The mother, eminently respectable, is cold, calculating, selfish and deceitful. Her type of morality is anathema to Miss Gordimer; it is yet another form of facade, of self and social deception. Sonia may be vulgar, but she is at least morally honest. She does not resort to such comforting euphemisms as "having a good time", or "friendship"; her affections bear no relation to whether she will be "well provided for" or not; and the question of "who's going to know?" is more real to the mother, who has live a life of keeping up pretences and of doing the socially accepted and the profitable thing, than to the ingenuous local Bovary.

An Image of Success, Miss Gordimer's longest story, is an examination of not only the individual facade or of moral compromise, but of social patterns and their effect on attitude and action. Its emphasis is first social, then moral, then psychological. It is significant that while her early stories such as The Soft Voice of the Serpent and The Umbilical Cord are purely psychological, expressing no social or moral perception,

(32) Nadine Gordimer, Friday's Footprint, Our Bovary, p.149.

her later stories show greater maturity, in that, though one element may be emphasized, it is never isolated. Such stories as An Image of Success are a recognition that life is not simple; its problems are never only moral or psychological or social, but a complex interrelation of all three.

In An Image of Success Miss Gordimer concerns herself for the first time with class. Caste, in the form of barriers of race, has always concerned her, but it is only in her final volume of short stories that we find such an analysis of class distinction:

"On Saturdays and Sundays I played tennis at the houses of family friends with whose sons and daughters I had grown up, and went in the same company to cinemas and dances at the country club where my parents had been members since I was a child. But during the week my Indian took me into company and places unknown to family or family friends. The division in my life was one that has existed as long as there has been a middle-class; for a time, I wanted something other than my own kind, and that other was sweet, to me, but I was too firmly and comfortably attached to my own kind to want to break away from them, or even to endanger their sound, homogenous continuity in my own person. So the weekend and the week were kept entirely separate, even in my mind. One day, inevitably (and this, in fact, was what I did) I should go back to the weekend for good, and marry one of the daughters of my own kind, and never see again those other girls."(33)

The juxtaposition of these two lives, the upper class life of the weekend and the lower class life of the week, the life of the country club and the life of the cafe, forms the situation from which the moral and psychological implications arise and through which they are woven.

Just as there are two classes, so there are two ways of reacting to the claims of class, and these two outlooks or philosophies in The Image of Success are reminiscent of those in E.M. Forster's Howards End: the respectable materialism of the Wilcoxes and the imagination and individualism of the Schlegels.

(33) Ibid., An Image of Success, p.184.

An Image of Success is the story of two men: a young lawyer who finds apparent success in respectability and materialism, and an old man who finds apparent failure in losing his fortune in an effort to fulfil his heart's desire. The significant word in the title is "Image" for the question which is posed, if never fully answered, is: "What is success?" Is it to be found in the respectability, materialism and wealth of the young lawyer who represses his yearnings for freedom and love, or in the seemingly stupid sacrifice of everything for a hopeless love on the part of the old man?

In Howards End Henry Wilcox is all Philistine and no poet, and Helen Schlegel is all poet. The message of Forster's book is, in fact, "only connect ...". An Image of Success is somewhat different, for in the young lawyer is an awareness of both lives, and the battle is fought as much within him as between him and the old man, who does what he dares not do, and marries for passion, not propriety. What torments the young lawyer is that "Charles Duttons was stretching out his hand and taking what had been agreed (between myself and that order of society in which I wanted my place) must be forgone; that small, sweet, wild apple that was not for daily consumption. He was making the delightfully inconsequent, of consequence... He was breaking the rules."⁽³⁴⁾ The lawyer abides by the social rules. He turns his back on the life of the week and the girl of the week, on the natural and the spontaneous, and takes refuge behind his facade, that of materialism and security, until he is "at that stage of life when it seems that all life may be contained in that well-planned house which, after all, has a place for everything,

(34) Ibid., An Image of Success, pp.195-196.

from the cupboard for golf clubs, under the stairs, to a safe holder for old blades, in the bathroom. There seemed no reason why life should not be this measured cup, poured to a decent level, without mess, by a steady hand."⁽³⁵⁾

This is Forster's Philistine life, a life of exteriority, of form without meaning, which Forster makes Helen Schlegel sum up as follows:

"I felt for a moment that the whole Wilcox family was a fraud, just a wall of newspapers and motorcars and golf-clubs, and that if it fell I should find nothing behind it but panic and emptiness."⁽³⁶⁾

And emptiness and even panic come. The other life, the taste of "that small, sweet, wild apple" that Butters had plucked, cannot be quite forgotten. Butters dies lonely and penniless, and the now wealthy and eminent lawyer goes to his funeral. It is there that he sees through his facade, and it is here that, through him, Miss Cordimer gives the most clear and important statement of her aim and message.

"A mixture of longing and loneliness came to me shockingly, like a cry silencing the babble at a cocktail party. I sat in the back of my open car (I had a driver, by then, to save myself the strain of driving in traffic) and in a trance of regret I watched the veld go by, closed in and brought to the road by the gathering of neat houses in a new suburb. Look at it! Look at it! I told myself. The little life, the little shelter. That's all. If there is longing, it stops at the restriction of the neck-tie. If there's freedom, it never gets through the expensive felt hat. That was my triumph, that I sorrowed for. It was the last time, ever, perhaps, that I should know it; the other man in me, that had never come into existence, had just been buried under the earth."⁽³⁷⁾

The lawyer's life is not the answer. The way of the Wilcoxes is to Miss Cordimer merely another form of "the little life, the

(35) Ibid., An Image of Success, p.206.

(36) E.M. Forster, Howards End, Penguin, p.26.

(37) Nadine Cordimer, Friday's Footprint, An Image of Success, pp.223-224.

little shelter", more substantial than some, but ultimately unreal and unsatisfying to the longing of that "other man". He has missed the beauty, for he has trampled on and denied the longings, and has smothered the freedom beneath his "little life". And, of course, the old man has not succeeded either. All he had was the longing, and an emotion alone could not conquer the barrier of class and convention. He sacrificed all to passion, and the lawyer sacrificed all to what was sensible and socially correct. Again Miss Gordimer gives no answer beyond her exposure of any form of deception and her implication that both the "prose" and the "passion" are necessary. It is likely that Forster's answer is here too:

"Only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted and human love will be seen at its height".(38)

But she wisely avoids stating something both so vague and so ponderous within the bounds of a short story.

Some of Nadine Gordimer's finest short stories concern themselves with problems of race and related attitudes, values, and facades. The relations between Black and White in South Africa, the clashes between ideals and prejudice, fascinate a writer such as Miss Gordimer. Bernard Sachs has gone so far as to describe her as being "completely involved in the racial politics of the country - she has probed it intellectually and is emotionally wrapped up in it."(39) In her stories on the theme of race there are two separate, though related, motifs. The first is, once again, the facade motif which plays through all her work. The second is the barrier of race. It is not uncommon to find both in the same story.

(38) E.M. Forster, op.cit., pp.174-175.

(39) Bernard Sachs, South African Personalities and Places, pp.36-37.

the same stories which most closely examine and reveal the race factor are Something for the Wine Being, Altogether, On the Front of the Country, The Gate, High Low Man, Half-Blooded, and Boa of Love.

In the relationships between Black and White, it is the European who is mercilessly exposed. He is exposed for two reasons - his lack of compassion for his Black neighbors, and the comfortable hypocrisy he employs to justify his action or inaction. With Gardner sees lack of love, injustice and discrimination on the part of the Whites toward the Blacks in South Africa, and this she reveals. But worse than this, she sees men pretending to be idealistic and justifying their discrimination, and it is above all, this hypocritical complacency, this self-deception of the Europeans, that she lays bare.

The wealthy William Gardner in Something for the Wine Being is pleased with his enlightened approach to racial affairs.

"His views on the immorality and absurdity of the colour bar were sound, sounder than (his wife) often felt, than her own, for they were backed by the impersonal authority of a familiarity with the views of great thinkers, scientists and philosophers, with history, political economy, sociology and anthropology." (40)

He helps the Africans in "an anonymous, large-scale and behind the scenes way," (41) while his wife, impetuous and kind-hearted, comes in contact with individuals, for "she knew that she had to see, touch and tell to, people in order to care about them, that's all there was to it." (42) Into William Gardner's smooth-running and satisfying life comes a young native, Nyame, who has lost his job because of his spells in jail on political charges. An uncompromising idealist, he fights for what he believes in and refuses to accept bail. Gardner eventually agrees to find work for him in his factory.

(40) Gardner, Something for the Wine Being, Something for the Wine Being, p.229.

(41) Something for the Wine Being, p.229.

(42) Something for the Wine Being, p.229.

Then comes the incident which exposes the real William Chadder. The native insists on wearing his African National Congress button in the workshop, and Chadder will not allow it:

"I can give the man a job because I feel sympathetic toward the struggle he's in, but I can't put him in the workshop as a Congress man."(43)

To his wife, into whom a great deal of Miss Gordimer's view is projected, this is hypocrisy. Although he is "sympathetic" and agrees in principle, he is prepared to indulge in principles only to a certain extent, as long as they do not affect his status and respectability. He has none of the genuine interest of his wife in the underprivileged; his values are merely useful aids to a complacent mind. And his wife is determined to remove every shred of his facade.

"Anything except his self-respect," she grumbled to herself. "Pretend, pretend. Pretend he doesn't belong to a political organisation. Pretend he hasn't been to prison for what he believes." Suddenly she spoke to her husband; "You'll let him have anything except the one thing worth giving."(44)

"I'm beginning to get to know you," she says.(45) And this is Miss Gordimer's purpose, to get to know you, to see beneath the facade to the real person and the real values, this time in the sphere of race.

Happy Event, which further illustrates the introduction of the unmasking technique into the racial situation, is a study of the relationship which occupies many of Sarah Gertrude Millin's short stories, the South African "madam" and servant relationship. Ella and Allan Plaistow are soon to leave on an overseas tour to which they have looked forward for eight years, when Ella realises to her horror that she is about to have another baby.

(43) Ibid., Something for the Time Being, p.232.

(44) Ibid., Something for the Time Being, p.234.

(45) Ibid., Something for the Time Being, p.234.

The problem is solved by abortion, and Ella slowly manages to rebuild her self-respect as she plans their delightful continental holiday. Then the body of a new-born native baby is discovered in a nearby field and Lena, the Pleistov's maid, is arrested on a charge of murdering her child. As soon as this parallel situation has been developed, Miss Gordinor focusses attention on Ella Pleistov. Will she see that what her maid has done is what she has done, that her maid's action is, in fact, much more justifiable on the grounds of poverty, or will she quickly erect a facade, using one set of values to judge her maid's behaviour and another to judge her own? Ella's immediate reaction is an honest one. She cannot judge.

"Oh but I don't know her, I know nothing about her ..."(46)

But soon Ella ceases to believe that her maid is a person, whose thoughts and motives, and whose very world, she does not understand. Lena becomes once again the depersonalised native servant, one of a type, capable of any inhuman crime. And by despising her maid, Ella regains her complacency.

"By the time the court case came to be heard, the quiet, light-coloured Lena lying in her bed that day with her head turned to her arm for comfort, standing obediently before the questioning of the detective in the kitchen, was changed in Ella Pleistov's mind into the ghoulish creature who emerged out of discussion of the affair with friends and neighbours. A woman who could kill her own baby! A murderer, nothing less!"(47)

The white women take refuge in the conviction that the maid is another species, that any inhumanity may lurk under her black skin, and that all her kind are potentially the same. Ella draws immense comfort from the belief that between "us", the Europeans, and "them", the Africans, there are worlds of difference. Her disposal of her child, if not forgotten, has come to be regarded as something sensible and refined; but Lena is one of "them", (48)

(46) Nadine Gordinor, Six Feet of the Country, Happy Event, p.44.

(47) Ibid., Happy Event, p.45.

(48) Ibid., Happy Event, p.45. The conclusion of the European is: "You never know with them."

a disgusting barbarian capable of even child murder.

Miss Gordimer's second preoccupation in her racial stories is this "them - us" or barrier theme. Between White and Black is the iron curtain of the colour bar, and South Africa is, to Miss Gordimer, a "world of strangers".⁽⁴⁹⁾ Even the direct contrast to Ella Flaiston, the sympathetic housewife in Ah Too is He, cannot cross the barrier of race. She cannot share the sorrow of the African girl whose mother is desperately ill, or react as one woman to another. Their relationship is impotent and pathetic because each is conscious of the one fact that overpowers all others, their difference in colour.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Similarly, on the only occasion in Miss Gordimer's stories when a White girl meets an African alone, she is attacked and robbed by him. The title of this story is significantly the *cri de coeur*, Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet? The girl passes the native in the veld, and the contrast between them emphasises the barrier. She is well dressed, clean and healthy; he is in rags, filthy, and sick. He clutches at her, and attempts to take her handbag and parcel. She breaks away and runs wildly through bushes and barbed wire to the safety of the street. But her final feeling is not fear, or even anger; it is guilt. There is nowhere else where they can meet, and she and her kind are responsible for this. She is ashamed and saddened, and filled with pity and disgust, but through all these feelings runs the sense of guilt and responsibility.

"She thought of the woman coming to the door, of the explanations, of the woman's face, and the police. Why did I fight, she thought suddenly. What did I fight for? Why didn't I give him the money and let him go? His red eyes, and the small and those cracks on his feet, fissures, erosion. She shuddered. The cold of the morning flowed into her."⁽⁵¹⁾

(49) The title of Nadine Gordimer's second novel, *Collanzini*, 1958.

(50) Nadine Gordimer, The Soft Voice of the Serpent, Ah, Too is He, p.143.

(51) *Ibid.*, Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet? p.96.

All that she has, implies Miss Cordner, she has at his expense, and it is her unwillingness, and the unwillingness of her race, to part with superior position and comparative wealth (symbolised by the parcel and handbag) that causes this and other tragic situations. The African is forced to take what he will not be given, and in such circumstances there can never be anything between white and black but fear, jealousy, and distrust.

In her first volume of short stories, particularly, Miss Cordner is preoccupied with racial barriers. Such stories as The Thorns Between Miss Thorne and Captain Foot, The Antelope, Ah Too So Ho and Friday is Better than Sunday all have this as their theme. In her second volume, Five Feet of the Country, it is most clearly expressed in Which Way Can I Go? and Home of Plenty, but in her third volume it is significantly absent. The only story in Friday's Footprint with a racial theme is Something for the Blue Boy, and this is concerned more with the hypocritical friends of the Europeans, contrasted with the uncompromising idealism of the native, than with the idea of racial barriers. The reason is not hard to find. The barrier there is a simple theme; it is the obvious starting point for a writer concerned with race relations in South Africa. Growing tired of her brought Miss Cordner more subtlety than is seen in the early The Thorns Between Miss Thorne and Captain Foot. Many forces are at work to produce this barrier, which in itself only a local symptom, and it is these basic forces within the personality which inevitably fascinate Miss Cordner. She is not "completely involved in the racial politics of the country", as Raymond Asch has said, certainly not in her short stories. She is involved in the much wider subject of human relationships and human adjustments, whether these be racial, social, moral, or

simply personal and psychological.

It has been said that Nadine Gordimer is one of the "committed writers" (52) and so she is. She views her writing seriously and she writes with a serious purpose. She is always a critic and at times a satirist and her main method is that of exposure. The title of her last volume of short stories, Friday's Footprint, is an apt one. In each story there is a "Friday's footprint", an incident which reveals something clearly for the first time, and the revelation is never a pleasant one. But, as has been shown, this technique, or rather this approach to life, is not new. Chekhov used it many times, most significantly in his story The Chorus Girl. Sean O'Faolain has called this Chekhov's "unmasking theme," a term which exactly describes Miss Gordimer's preoccupation. But here the resemblance between Miss Gordimer and Chekhov ends. Katherine Mansfield has inherited Chekhov's technique and, to a large extent, his tone; Miss Gordimer lacks his tone entirely. Both are critical, but while Chekhov is constructive, Miss Gordimer is destructive. She demolishes the facade, but suggests nothing to take its place. Chekhov implies that he does much the same. He says of his characters, "Let the jury judge them: my business is simply to show what they are like." (53) But this is not quite the case. Chekhov does not simply "show"; his tone and attitude assert a norm of positive values and an optimism which are constantly upheld by his tone of sympathy, understanding and ironical humour. This is not to say that Miss Gordimer lacks

(52) Bernard Sachs, op.cit., p.83.

(53) Sean O'Faolain, The Short Story, Collins, 1948. p.83.

these values; but they are not similarly asserted in her writing. Her stories are cold and critical. There is little positive implication of a norm of human values; they are only negatively implied, as in the work of Graham Greene, who came to believe in a Heaven because he believed in a Hell. In such stories as Chained Lives and The Prisoner there is a fleeing from the empty life, not a fleeing towards anything.

In another sense, therefore, Miss Gordimer is not committed. She knows what is wrong, but is not sure what is right. As a result she concentrates on criticising and exposing. Her tone is consequently pessimistic, unsympathetic and negative. As her stories are studies of character, this negative quality is clearly seen in characterisation. Of the many characters studied in the forty-nine stories of her three collections, only five or six are positive characters, in the sense that they have their creator's approval, uphold accepted values, and are not made to stand naked and ashamed. A consideration of these characters is important as it is here that we find the few traces of Miss Gordimer's constructive message. Apart from the gentle and humane Jimmy Beird in The Gentle Art, these characters all have one thing in common. William, in The Path of the Moon's Dark Fortnight, the African, Engoma, and Midge Chadder, in something for the Time Being, and Joyce McCoy and Jessica Malherbe, in The Shell of Death and Flowers, are all uncompromising idealists, acting as they believe they ought to act, despite the cost. These appear to be the ones she admires, yet it is significant that these are the least convincing of her characters. She is far better at bringing to life characters who are suffering from some disease of the spirit requiring diagnosis, far better at laying bare than building up.

Not only does Miss Gordimer lack Chekhov's constructiveness and his positive message, but also his sympathy. Sean O'Faolain

has said of Chekhov:

"Irony was his one defence against despair. Without it he tended to write out of an abstract disgust. With it he could retain pity and love." (54)

Miss Gordiner's irony, when it occurs, is a bitter, even cynical, irony, not an accepting irony. She feels little pity and no love, and the term "abstract disgust" well sums up her habitual attitude towards the scores of human failures who swarm through her pages. Miss Gordiner dislikes her characters, and she enjoys disliking them and revealing just how much they deserve to be disliked. In story after story there is not one character for whom she does not feel some measure of distaste.

Miss Gordiner's distaste for so many of her characters is linked with her distaste for physical ugliness. Indeed, much of her dislike for her characters is conveyed by means of highly emotive physical descriptions. The description of Jake in Which New Era Could That Do? provides an extreme example of this tendency. Here Miss Gordiner is simply indulging her distaste by creating gross ugliness. She sees Jake as

"a Coloured man with the fat of the man of the world upon him, grossly dressed - not out of poverty but obviously because he liked it that way - in a rayon sports shirt that gaped and showed two hairy stomach rolls hiding his navel like a lipless grin, the pants of a good suit, misbuttoned and held up round the waist by a tie instead of a belt, and a pair of expensive sports shoes, worn without socks." (55)

Her women, particularly, are often ageing, fat, conscious of their ugliness, like Rita in Friday's Footprint who "felt a horrible awareness of her big breasts, her clumsy legs" (56) or Mrs. Saiyotovitz in The Defeated who

"was only ugly. She had the short, stunted yet heavy bones of generations of oppression in the Ghetto of Europe; breasts, stomach, hips crowded sadly, no height, wide strong shoulders and a round back. Her head settled right down between her shoulders

(54) *Ibid.*, p.95.

(55) Nadine Gordiner, Six Feet of the Country, Which New Era Could That Do?, p.83.

(56) Nadine Gordiner, Friday's Footprint, p.33.

without even the grace of a neck, and her dun flat hair was cut at the level of her ears. Her features were not essentially Semitic; there was nothing so definite as that about her: she had no distinction whatever,"(57)

or the numerous old women who sit and observe life in boarding houses and hotels with "large fat faces", humps of flesh at the backs of their necks"(58) "fat columns of legs", (59) "bad legs stuffed into their shoes like the legs of a cloth doll", (60) and "glands which are withered". (61)

This tone of distaste is extremely important. It explains her critical unmasking theme, her destructiveness, her negative characters, and her emphasis on the ugly. But the effects go even further. Miss Gordimer is afraid of beauty. She cannot handle it. In fact, in a sense, it does not interest her, because it lacks that which she can criticise and expose and for which she can feel distaste. She allows her characters to be beautiful only if she can finally show that they are not in fact what they appear to be. It is doubtful whether she could tolerate a truly beautiful character. She would find in it the negation of her present purpose as a writer. Face from Atlantis is, in fact, the story of a beautiful woman, Carlitta, and Miss Gordimer's treatment of her is typical of her tone and method. At first she describes her as a young goddess, beautiful, loved, and admired, in order to reveal her years later with "prominent tendons" in her "thin, creased neck", "dowdy shoes", a face which was "too thin", a "dreh, faded skin" which "sagged sallowly", and eyes which "shone on, greedy and tremendous." (62) The

(57) Nadine Gordimer, The Soft Voice of the Serpent, The Defeated, p.198.

(58) Nadine Gordimer, Friday's Footprint, p.68.

(59) Nadine Gordimer, Six Feet of the Country, p.175.

(60) Nadine Gordimer, Friday's Footprint, p.71.

(61) Ibid., p.71.

(62) Nadine Gordimer, Six Feet of the Country, Face from Atlantis, p.68.

extravagance of Miss Gordimer's description suggests that she finds some enjoyment in this exposure. The morally and physically beautiful young mother in A Bit of Young Life suffers the same treatment, as does Sonia Smith in Our Doves, who is, in Miss Gordimer's words, "at first triumphant and superb."⁽⁶⁵⁾ The "at first" is significant.

Nor can Miss Gordimer tolerate beautiful scenes. If she feels they are becoming too pleasant, and therefore too romantic, she introduces stagnant water, either literally or in some form or other, as in this example from The Path of the Moon's Dark Fortnight:

"Mamuel came out on to his little terrace in his dressing-gown and looked out over the freshness of the morning garden. It had rained in the night and the home-made swimming-pool, which was under a jacaranda tree close to the house, was full of leaves and bits of twigs. There was something else in the water, too. He went down over the sparkling grass to see. The thing turned out to be a drowned rat, already swollen; as he prodded at it with a long stick, it bobbed against the weight of the water, and some leaves eddied to the surface."⁽⁶⁴⁾

The dead rat, with its unpleasant and sordid connotations, provides the necessary corrective to the "freshness of the morning", so out of place in Miss Gordimer's stories, and, by reasserting the cold realism underlying the story, prepares the reader for the harsh pessimism and disillusionment of the ending.

Miss Gordimer's critical aloofness results in an atmosphere of coldness and emptiness. And this chilliness is unrelieved by humour. She is clever and ironical; but her stories reveal intelligence and wit rather than humour, for humour implies a measure of sympathy and understanding. When she smiles, she smiles at her characters, not with them. To her, the chaos and injustices of life are too real to permit an attitude of sympathy and acceptance. Sympathy and humour

(65) Nadine Gordimer, Friday's Footprint, Our Doves, p.145.

(64) Ibid., The Path of the Moon's Dark Fortnight, p.127.

smack of compromise and complacency, and these, being types of facade, are anathema to her. Her closest approach to humour is ridicule, being clever at the expense of her characters, as in the following examples.

"He had been married before, and had a permanently subdued nature, as if something had once weighed on his mind and left a dent there."(65)

"He carried his youth with the conscious air of someone who has already lost it."(66)

It must be said in fairness to Miss Gordimer that these are examples from her early collection. They are mere intrusions. She is extremely pleased with her own cleverness, and is simply showing off. Her tone, though critical, is fairly good-natured. In her second volume, Six Feet of the Country, her ridicule is much more intentional, more biting, and, in the final example, even malicious.

"They were the eyes of the old warrior, who hears at last and yet again, the bells of another triumph."(67)

"and the old lady would stir her fat columns of legs as if, years down, she fancied there lived an edition of herself as once such a slip of a thing, like an imprisoned fairy".(68)

"There was not even the scent of her left in the car, the way other women shed their perfume like bitches leaving a trail for the male."(69)

This is the attitude to life which makes Miss Gordimer's stories what they are. This is her point of view, her literary personality. She is determined not to be deceived, she who reveals the self-deception of others. Life to her is not beautiful. God is not in His Heaven, nor is all right with

(65) Nadine Gordimer, The Soft Voice of the Serpent, A Commonplace Story, p.214.

(66) Ibid., The End of the Tunnel, p.185.

(67) Nadine Gordimer, Six Feet of the Country, The Cicatrice, p.143.

(68) Ibid., A Bit of Young Life, p.175.

(69) Ibid., A Bit of Young Life, p.185.

the world. Vanity is something to be viewed with suspicion, to be avoided. She is the anti-Romantic, the iconoclast. What is romantic is, to her, sentimental, and she, like Flaubert, despises sentimentality. "I am not deceived by outward appearances. I know that life is like and it's tough enough and honest enough to show that men and women are really like." This is the tone behind her short stories. It is a superior tone, in many ways an immature tone, and it is best carried up in the words of one of her characters, a girl who thinks, like Miss Cardigan, that she has seen into the heart of things.

"How little. I'd seen. I'd seen, of course. I've seen everything. There's nothing left to hide from me." (70)

Miss Cardigan's tone has one beautiful effect on her technique. Apart from this she is extremely accomplished technically. An occasional and therefore relatively unimportant product of her critical aloofness and lack of sympathy is the clinical style of sentences such as "she felt a momentary depression", and "she must have turned away involuntarily". (71) Even Miss Cardigan is the detached spectator of a psychological experiment, registering her subject's reactions and indulging in deductions. The very words "momentary depression" and "involuntary" are psychological jargon, with the result that the unfortunate heroine of The Hour of the Vein never gives the impression of existing other than as a laboratory specimen.

Miss Cardigan's tone does more, however, than merely produce occasional clinical phrases, and though the following opinion of her work cannot be accepted entirely, there is much perception in it. "She is still largely in the essayistic stage - that is, she can enlighten us on the problem of the African in the anonymous mass, but she cannot illumine him as an individual, and all now

(70) Lucine Cardigan, Friday's Mountain, Hazelle's Mountain, p.170.

(71) Lucine Cardigan, The Best Voice of the Forest,

The Hour and the Vein, p.54.

territory to our knowledge through psychological insight. You feel that the words they speak do not come across the warm breath of a living being, but flow as the cold ink of Nadine's pen, however excellent."⁽⁷²⁾ The term "essayistic stage" is a perceptive one. This is the final outcome of Gordimer's lack of sympathy. She is concerned first with her own feeling of dissatisfaction and distaste, and then with the situation or injustice which produces this and the characters who are involved. The result is that she shares the fault of several of her contemporaries. Her outlook and feeling intrude into the story, and an essay-like quality creeps in. And this personal intrusion of views and feelings constitutes one of the weaknesses in her technique as a short story writer. Miss Gordimer has much of Maupassant's cynicism and chilliness of tone, but lacks his control and objectivity. Just as she cannot resist ridiculing and indulging in the ugly, so she cannot resist putting forward her point of view, because it is this point of view which is most important to her. Nor does she always do this subtly; her outlook is often revealed in bursts, little essays within the stream of the story such as this generalisation from Happy Event.

"For Africans there is no stigma attached to any involvement with the forces of the law; the innumerable restrictions by which their lives are hedged from the day they are born make transgressions commonplace and punishment inevitable. To them a few days in prison is no more shaming than an attack of measles. After all, there are few people who could go through a lifetime without at least once forgetting to carry a piece of paper which is their 'pass' to free movement about the town, or without getting drunk, or without sitting on a bench which looks just like every other bench but happens to be provided exclusively for the use of people with a pale skin."⁽⁷³⁾

(72) Bernard Sachs, op. cit., p.85.

(73) Nadine Gordimer, Six Feet of the Country, Happy Event, pp. 42-43.

This passage reveals both the length and the nature of Miss Gordimer's digressions. The action of the story has ceased; her central character, Ella Flaistow, has faded and disappeared, and ^{Miss} Gordimer is blatantly holding forth on the subject of the attitude of the African to law from a private platform which she has constructed right in the middle of a short story, where there should, in the words of L.A.G. Strong, be "no admission except on business." (74)

This intrusion further detracts from the unity and totality of effect of her stories in that it causes them to have more than one angle or point of view. In Happy Event, for example, the story is begun from the point of view of Ella Flaistow. She is meant to give it what could be called the unity of angle. Miss Gordimer's point of view is, however, superimposed on hers so often that there are really two angles, the one the author's and the other her character's. Miss Gordimer is too good a craftsman to be unconscious of this danger and she tries hard to make her own view appear to be the view of her character, that is, to merge the essay into the short story. In Which New Era Would That Be she tries to make Jake the mouthpiece of her views on "progressive whites", but is not successful. (75) The result is that Jake ceases to be a living, speaking character. Miss Gordimer is coming to life, not he. The essay is spoiling the short story; they cannot exist together. The only way of expressing her views without this clash of angles and disunity is to write in the first person. She must either get right out or right in, in the sense that Maupassant is right out and Herman Charles Bosman, through his Oom Schalk, is right in. This is why Miss Gordimer's best stories such as An Image of Success and Six Feet of the Country are those told in the first person. Here

(74) L.A.G. Strong, Instructions to Young Writers, Museum Press, p.55.

(75) Nadine Gordimer, Six Feet of the Country, Which New Era Would That Be? pp.83-84.

the clash between the essayist and the short story writer does not occur. Miss Gordimer has achieved significant success in using the first person, and her technical skill in handling this angle of vision deserves study.

Some of Nadine Gordimer's best stories in the first person employ a technique which Chekhov perfected in his famous story Gooseberries. This technique involves a subtle shift of emphasis from one character to another. In Gooseberries, for example, the narrator tells the story of his brother's life. Throughout the story attention is focussed on this brother. Only at the end does the reader realise that the story is as much about the narrator, and that there has been a gradual and continual self-revelation on his part. This technique interests Miss Gordimer, and she makes effective use of it as a further means of exposing and unmasking. Ah Woe is Me, in her first volume of short stories, provides a simple example of this technique used for this purpose.

Ah woe is Me is, on the surface, a story about an African maid, Sarah, and her family, told by her mistress, a housewife. In the first paragraph all attention is immediately focussed on Sarah. It appears to be her story, although even at this stage, there are some hints as to the character of the narrator.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Sarah is grimly determined that her children will grow up respectable and educated, and she accordingly saves every penny and rules them with severity. "Ah woe is me" is her comment on life. In less than three pages, however, the first person has entered the story. The housewife is no longer merely a narrator; she is as much a character as Sarah. She is "ashamed", "angry" and conscious of the ugliness of the "notions

(76) Nadine Gordimer, The Soft Voice of the Serpent, Ah, Woe is Me, p.133. The observation that Sarah "was a good cook though extravagant with butter" reveals more of her mistress than it does of Sarah.

picked up by Native women from contemporary European vulgarity."⁽⁷⁷⁾ Sarah has to stop working, owing to the condition of her legs, and now and then she sends her children to see her former employer. Now it is the housewife who is being exposed or who is, more correctly, exposing herself as she explains how she gives little Janet, the child whom Sarah hoped would become a teacher, "an orange and an old dress or pullover that had imperceptibly slipped below the undefined but arbitrary standard of the household."⁽⁷⁸⁾

Sarah's husband loses his job, and she is too sick to take in washing. Her eldest daughter runs away, her little son has to work, and Janet stays at home to nurse her. A long time passes before Janet pays another visit. Again the housewife feels embarrassed and guilty and gives her the usual old clothes, five shillings, and a cup of tea. Janet is about to leave when her self-control snaps and she bursts into tears.

"But what's the matter, my girl, I said. What's wrong? You musn't cry. What's wrong? Tell me. She tried to speak but her breath was caught by the long quivering sigh of tears: My mother - she's very sick ..., she said at last. And she began to cry again, her face crumpling up, sobbing and gasping. Desperately she rubbed at her nose with her wet arm.

What could I do for her? What could I do? Here ..., I said. Here - take this, and gave her my handkerchief."⁽⁷⁹⁾

This is the climax of the narrator's self-exposure. All she could do or would do was to give Janet her handkerchief, the symbol of utter futility. Once again Miss Gordimer is occupied with the facade, in this case the facade of self-delusion and complacency. Old clothes, money and cups of tea all help the housewife to maintain her self-respect, her feeling that she is "doing something". But she is prepared to do nothing really

(77) Ibid., Ah, Woe is Me, pp.135-136.

(78) Ibid., Ah, Woe is Me, p.138.

(79) Ibid., Ah, Woe is Me, p.143.

adequate, nothing which causes her any inconvenience. The words: "My mother - she's very sick", are only the cause of further embarrassment. There is no understanding of the true position, no sympathy for their pain and poverty. The focus has shifted from Sarah to the selfish and hypocritical white woman, and the title, Ab Woe is Me, takes on a new and sinister significance. It is not Sarah whom Miss Gordimer sees as of all women most miserable, but the narrator.

In Six Feet of the Country Miss Gordimer's use of the "gooseberry technique" is more subtle. Again the use of the first person justifies the occasional essay-like quality of the story, as Miss Gordimer has a narrator to put forward a point of view which would disturb the unity of a third person story.

In Six Feet of the Country the partner in a luxury travel agency who tells the story has a small farm on the outskirts of Johannesburg. One night he is called to find a young native dead in the servants' quarters. He is the brother of one of his employees, Petrus, and has walked all the way from Rhodesia, contracting pneumonia on the way. As he is an illegal immigrant there is trouble with the police and health authorities, who remove, examine, and dispose of the body. Petrus is most upset. His father is on the way to Johannesburg for the funeral and he wants his brother's body. Eventually, after he has raised what is to him the enormous sum of twenty pounds, the body is exhumed and delivered by the authorities, and the funeral procession begins. Then comes the climax. The old father drops the corner of the coffin he is carrying. "My son was not so heavy," he says.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Frantically the coffin is opened and the strange native inside is certainly not his son. The travel agent tries to recover the body, but without success, and the old native begins his long journey back to Rhodesia.

(80) Nadine Gordimer, Six Feet of the Country, p.18.

The story is a satire of the police force, officialdom, and the casualness born of race prejudice, but it is more than this. It is primarily a satire of the man who is telling the story. Miss Gordimer allows him, for example, to express a biting criticism of the South African police force, but his very words of abuse subtly reveal his own complacency and hypocrisy.⁽⁸¹⁾ He is, in fact, an extremely cleverly developed character. Every insight into his nature is gained obliquely as an unconscious self-revelation, and it is the gradual accumulation of these details through dialogue and action that makes the unpleasant travel agent live more fully with every page. His initial tone is one of distasteful familiarity with the reader. His language is casual, colloquial, and confiding, "My wife and I are not real farmers - not even Lerice, really."⁽⁸²⁾ His wife and marital details are discussed with candour.⁽⁸³⁾ He is opposed to racial prejudice, yet is unaware of his own complacent superiority when he explains that "We've rather prided ourselves that the poor devils have nothing much to fear, being with us."⁽⁸⁴⁾ And as he runs on, suave and familiar, indulging in sentimental thoughts about "poor black devils" and what he has done for them, so Miss Gordimer, with as much delight as Feste behind the box hedge, exposes the shallowness and hypocrisy of her Malvolio.

As in Ah Woe is He, it is in her narrator's final words that Miss Gordimer cuts most deeply with her satirical whiplash. In Ah Woe is He, the one word chosen for its power as a symbol which would vividly compress and express all the futilities of

(81) Ibid., Six Feet of the Country, p.13.

(82) Ibid., Six Feet of the Country, p.8.

(83) Ibid., Six Feet of the Country, p.10.

"I wasn't in our bed but sleeping in the little dressing-room-cum-linen-room next door, because Lerice had annoyed me, and I didn't want to find myself softening toward her simply because of the sweet smell of the talcum powder on her flesh after her bath."

(84) Ibid., Six Feet of the Country, p.10.

the previous pages was "handkerchief". In Six Feet of the Country the words are "rather better off". The old father begins the long and lonely journey home without having seen his son's body, and the travel agent concludes his story with his departure.

"The old man from Rhodesia was about Lerice's father's size, so she gave him one of her father's old suits and he went back home rather better off, for the winter, than he had come." (85)

The words "rather better off", with their bitter irony, reveal far more effectively than any explanation possibly could, the shallowness of the travel agent. He is quite unaware of the significance of the fact that the old man has lost his son, and of the grief and hopelessness he feels as he leaves. The whole affair has been to him merely a petty irritation. He is incapable of sympathy. His businessman's mind thinks in terms of compensation, and his complacency finds it easy to believe that a cast-off suit of clothing is all that is required to set matters right. Even here his very language and tone are casual and unconcerned, and euphemistic colloquialisms such as "old man", "went back home", and "better off" add to the effectiveness of this conclusion as a revelation of spiritual emptiness. Miss Gordimer has mastered the technique, so important in a short story, of "running" characterisation, where insights into character are skilfully implied by dialogue and action.

Nadine Gordimer's stories belong to the modern genre of the poetic short story. They are not dramatic, in the sense that Hemingway's stories are dramatic and packed with dialogue, like one-act plays, nor are they plot-stories like those of O. Henry,

where everything depends on a cleverly engineered construction. They are poetic in the sense that the stories of Chekhov, Antonino Lombardi, L.H. Bates and Elizabeth Bowen are poetic. In his essay, on Stephen Crane, L.H. Bates analyzes this poetic quality of the modern short story, ⁽⁸⁶⁾ and much of what he says is relevant to Lion Toller's method.

"Crane is working with pictures; he is painting rather than writing. And his method is one by which the surface, however seemingly trivial or unimportant, is recorded in such a way as to interpret the individual emotional life below." ⁽⁸⁷⁾

Lion Toller, too, is working with pictures, and using the surface to record the emotional life below. Bernard Sachs has described her as "a writer with the eye of a camera," ⁽⁸⁸⁾ and it is her excellent visual imagination which has attracted the attention of the reviewers. Walter Allen in the New York Herald Tribune delivers the only lucid criticisms of her stories among dozens of extravagant and ecstatic reviews.

"Lion Toller has a sensibility and the art of expressing it in beautifully vivid images which recall Miss Elizabeth Bowen at her best." ⁽⁸⁹⁾

The comparison with Elizabeth Bowen is significant, for she has acknowledged herself to be a "poet language", who has fallen back on the short story and found poetic expression there. ⁽⁹⁰⁾

It must be stressed, however, that the important point is not whether Lion Toller skillfully created these "pictures" or images, but whether, in the words of Bates, this surface imagery "is recorded in such a way as to interpret the individual emotional life below." The "surface beauty of phrase" so admired by a reviewer ⁽⁹¹⁾ is of little worth unless it expresses by implication and suggestion, a sensibility and insight of like

(86) Vladimir 3, p.34.

(87) L.H. Bates, Stephen Crane's Short Story, Nelson, 1942, p.70.

(88) Bernard Sachs, op.cit., p.27.

(89) Quoted in Walter Allen in The New York Herald Tribune.

(90) Elizabeth Bowen, Letters, New York, 1961, p.2.

(91) New York Herald Tribune, 1942, p.2.

quality. Miss Gordimer's images and descriptions have been criticised for their failure to do this.

Whilst Anthony Woodward admires Nadine Gordimer's "acute sensuous registering", he feels that her "very gift of sensuous particularity often becomes, even in her short stories, a kind of virtuoso display - an ultimately meaningless accretion of surface vitality to conceal a hollowness of content".⁽⁹²⁾

Bernard Sachs holds an almost identical view:

"Her eye roves like a camera over a wide scene, and picks out fine detail that illuminates the landscape, because the lens is very good. But it is all panning ('pan is Hollywood's abbreviation of panorama) - there is no close-up of living, speaking characters. And it is not an X-ray camera. She gives us a tremendous amount of detail, but not the psychological depth which would enable her to create real living characters."⁽⁹³⁾

Both statements are too extreme and one-sided.

Miss Gordimer is gifted with a remarkable descriptive ability and her very originality and vitality do, at times, lead to a "poetic exhibitionism".⁽⁹⁴⁾ But it is quite incorrect to suggest, in general terms, that a brilliant superficiality characterises her writing. Often the surface detail of her stories, like that of Bates and Elizabeth Bowen, by its power of suggestion, provides the depth and insight these critics require.

In the picture the travel agent in Six Feet of the Country gives of the old farm burial-ground there is this quality of impressionism, where tone and insight are implied by vivid surface description.

"from where I was standing, you can see the graves quite clearly, and that day the sun glinted on bits of broken pottery, a lopsided home-made cross, and jam-jars brown with rain-water and dead flowers".⁽⁹⁵⁾

(92) A. Woodward, Nadine Gordimer, Theoria, No.16, 1961.

(93) Bernard Sachs, op.cit., p.87.

(94) A. Woodward, op.cit., p.5.

(95) Nadine Gordimer, Six Feet of the Country, p.16.

Miss Gordimer intends this scene to contrast radically with the appearance of the suave, wealthy travel agent practising his gold strokes. The general scene of the little graveyard with its broken pottery, lopsided cross and dirty jam-jars symbolises the squalor, poverty and pathos of the native labourer's life. The fact that the cross is lopsided and the flowers are dead conveys an atmosphere of failure, hopelessness and defeat, which sets the tone for the further stage of misery, when the old native discovers that he has been deceived and that it is not his son's body that has been given to him. The theme of Six Feet of the Country is the futility and hopelessness of an oppressed and broken people and this glimpse of the graveyard is a typical means of emphasizing the theme.

In a similar way Miss Gordimer uses surface description to illuminate character, as in this example from Friday's Footprint:

"Oh, get on with it, Rita said, with the possessive, irritated yet placid air of a wife, scratching a drop of dried egg yolk from the print bosom of her dress."(96)

Here she again allows the connotative value of words and pictures to imply what would otherwise have to be stated. The cheap print dress, the dried and neglected egg yolk, the crude scratching, are all a further means of conveying her distaste for Rita, and of strengthening the impression of coarseness already created.

The recurrence of certain images indicates that it is Miss Gordimer's practice to use pictures which have, for her, a strong connotative value. The egg yolk image, for example, recurs in The Hour and the Years under conditions very similar to those in Friday's Footprint.

"she caught sight of her face in the mirror and saw that where Sydney had kissed her good-bye, on her cheek, there was a faint yellow smear of egg yolk."(97)

(96) Nadine Gordimer, Friday's Footprint, p.32.

(97) Nadine Gordimer, The Soft Voice of the Serpent, The Hour and the Years, p.34.

here the mass of egg yolk carries the same unpleasant connotations, and suggests, together with its unchangeable position, that their relationship has become casual, and even slightly distasteful, as indeed it has.

Metaphors and similes such as "beard of egg yolk", a "drowned rat in a pool,"⁽⁹⁰⁾ a crowd of faces "like a bed of coarse, early-growing flowers,"⁽⁹¹⁾ and legs with "the thick, blunted look of frozen meat,"⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ have something more in common than vividness and suggestiveness; they all convey the same tone of distaste. Her most skillful creative language excels in the unpleasant.

Miss Trenchard's short stories are poetic in a further sense, in that she not only conveys much of her meaning by means of force imagery, but also possesses a strong feeling for symbolism. This is clearly seen in the projections of her favorite theme; the recurrent idea of withdrawal into a private, sheltered life is often reinforced by means of symbols. The spiritual withdrawal of Mrs. Benson in The Enemy and Broda Grant in The Light the Favorite Came From is matched by a physical withdrawal. Mrs. Benson retires into her private railway compartment and locks the door; Broda withdraws to her room to read. Both the compartment and the room are physical projections of "the little life, the little shelter". At the dinner of Shee's Men or Bro, Broda sees the immensity and silliness of her life symbolized in the groping figure of a tightrope walker, enveloped in a heavy sack; the cornucopia in Land of Plenty symbolizes the wealth and luxury of the white, in contrast to the poverty and wretchedness of the black; and the wild flowers in Land of Plenty are a ready symbol of the free, happy but elusive life which is true success.

(90) Miss Trenchard, Michigan Testimonial, and the Life of the Moon's Park Portmanteau, p.127.

(91) Ibid., Michigan Testimonial, p.14.

(100) Ibid., Michigan Testimonial, and the Life of the Moon's Park Portmanteau, p.122.

There is nothing ecoteric about her symbolism; it is simply an efficient means of emphasizing and clarifying theme and intention, of which she makes frequent use. Apart from an occasional bluntness and machine-like quality, as in Cheek Yes or No, her symbols are generally organic parts of her stories, harmonising with mood and plot, and a further powerful means of suggesting without stating.

It is not surprising that Nadine Gordimer should favour the symbol. Symbolism indicates that the idea is stronger than the story, and this is, indeed, the case. Her theme of insight and exposure preoccupies her; it demands constant expression in various forms. In no sense are her short stories anecdotes or entertainments; they are the means of this expression, the means of capturing and conveying the ideas, feelings and attitudes of an acute and essentially serious mind. Their purpose is not to entertain; it is to enlighten.

Skilful and perceptive as Nadine Gordimer is, she cannot follow the pattern of facade and anagnorisis in story after story without her work as a whole appearing stereotyped and her least successful stories somewhat contrived. Not all the situations she chooses are suited to this pattern and the result is that in several stories action and character are psychologically false. Her insistence on a dramatic moment of revelation, strengthened by the preference of The New Yorker for a final revealing twist, tends to reduce certain stories to neat and unrealistic formulae. The denouements of Friday's Footprint, The Path of the Moon's Dark Fortnight, Little Willie and A Style of her Own are unconvincing. They are simply neat twists, artificial exposures, relying on technical accomplishment to give an impression of profundity.

While these are some of the comparative failures, the inevitable outcome of a single rather limited theme pursued

relentlessly, Six Feet of the Country, for example, is a brilliant study and here Nadine Gordimer handles her theme of facade and exposure with complete mastery. It would seem, however, that she has gone as far as she can in this direction and that the time has come to turn to fresh themes. Some of the stories in her earliest volume, The Soft Voice of the Serpent, such as A Watcher of the Dead, indicate the quality of her work before she became preoccupied with the facade-exposure pattern. A Watcher of the Dead has as its most striking feature a complete naturalness, an uncontrived simplicity of plot which, matched with her habitual depth of insight and verbal skill, produces a most effective short story. Such simplicity and freedom will have to be regained if Nadine Gordimer is to develop her undoubted talents as a short story writer.

CRISTEN RUMP.LOUIS LESSING.

The Africa of Nadine Gordimer is Johannesburg. She is concerned with the people and the problems of the city. Of all contemporary South African short story writers only Doris Lessing has felt and attempted to communicate the nature of primitive Africa, "the shimmering Giant", to use McMeile's phrase. (1) This almost mystic response to local atmosphere has been left, for the most part, to the poets, particularly Roy Campbell, Jay Ristic, Anthony Heilbrunn andillian Plomer, and to travel writers like Learmann van der Post. Doris Lessing, however, whose parents settled in Rhodesia when she was five, and who grew up on a farm in Mashonaland, can and does say with Plomer:

"That was the Africa we knew,
 There, wandering alone,
 No sun, heraldic in the heat,
 A scorpion on a stone." (2)

Her Old Chief Ahlunge is an attempt to express a similar sensitivity to the atmosphere of "the Africa we know". A young white girl, filled with the pride of colonist and conqueror, gradually gains a new and humbling awareness of the age, dignity and mystery of Africa and her people. The change begins when she meets Old Chief Ahlunge, is struck by his dignity and self-respect, and realizes that a native is not merely a thing designed to do the white man's bidding. Then, as she walks alone through the veld on her self-imposed pilgrimage to see the chief and know him, she feels for the first time the spirit of Africa, and she is lonely, insignificant and afraid.

(1) Michael McMeile, Africa - Shimmering Giant? Boston, 1959.

(2)illian Plomer, Collected Poems, Cape, 1960, p.19.

"I had read of this feeling, how the bigness and silence of Africa, under the ancient sun, grows dense and takes shape in the mind, till even the birds seem to call menacingly, and a deadly spirit comes out of the trees and the rocks. You move warily, as if your very passing disturbs something old and evil, something dark and big and angry that might suddenly rear and strike from behind."⁽³⁾

All is vast and silent and old, and to the interloper, hostile and threatening. And once she has felt this, Africa is never the same; it can never be underestimated. In the words of Gay Butler, it becomes at once "familiar and terribly strange."⁽⁴⁾ The girl's meeting with the old chief is a failure. They have nothing in common, for he is as ancient and secretive as Africa itself.

Africa is "The Old Chief's Country" and his alone.

Mrs. Lessing implies that it cannot, in fact, be mastered or understood by the white man, even if he feels he is at one with Africa, its wild and its animals. George, in Leopard George, is such a man, a mixture of animal and mystic. He loves the land, protects the animals, lives alone on the rugged highlands, and as he looks over the miles of bush at night, feels "as if he was flowing softly outwards, diffused into the bush and the moonlight."⁽⁵⁾ But the cruelty of Africa in the form of a leopard ruins open this life. His mistress, a beautiful native girl, is killed, his relationship with the Africans shattered, and as he gazes at the towering boulders, black against the blue sky, which symbolize Africa, "it was as if that familiar and loved shape moved back from him, reared menacingly like an animal and admitted danger - a sharp danger, capable of striking from a dark place that was a place of fear."⁽⁶⁾ As in The Old Chief Nahlang, Africa is seen as something alive, a hostile, even evil,

(3) Doris Lessing, This was the Old Chief's Country, Joseph, 1951. The Old Chief Nahlang, p.15.

(4) Roy Macdon, Poets in South Africa, Maskow Miller, 1950, p.11.

(5) Doris Lessing, This was the Old Chief's Country, Leopard George, p.205.

(6) Ibid., Leopard George, p.209.

force. For George Africa becomes the claws and fangs of the leopard, and love turns to fear and hate. His battle against the leopards is his battle against the terror which Africa now holds for him.

Africa is not only a land of fear; it is a land of mystery, and the Africans are a people of mystery. In No Witchcraft for Sale, even the great trust and affection between the European family and their native servant cannot unlock the secrets of the African mind. There are certain things he will never tell them, and their enquiries change his good humour into sullenness and hostility.⁽⁷⁾

Important as this atmosphere is, it is but a part of the background and setting of Mrs. Lessing's stories. Just as she is responsive to the spirit of "the old chief's country", so she senses the atmosphere superimposed upon and often clashing with the age, dignity and mystery of Africa, the British outlook and way of life of the settlers. In this respect she resembles Forster. Important and fascinating as India is to him, India itself is not all-important. What is important is the Anglo-Indian relationship, the clash of civilisations, the social and personal contacts. So with Mrs. Lessing. It is the presence of the conquering British aristocracy on the highlands of Rhodesia which brings to Africa the element of contrast and clash, and provides the nucleus of dramatic situations. Mrs. Lessing's background, then, is not simply the background of Africa. It is the background of England and Africa or England in Africa. The settlers are self-consciously colonists: Britain is "home"; Africa is their land of exile. The mother in Flavours of Exile longs for a pie "made of real English gooseberries", for brussel sprouts from "Home", and for "barrows loaded with cherries in the

(7) Ibid., No Witchcraft for Sale, p.37.

streets of London".⁽⁸⁾ England becomes sentimentalized and glorified. Determined not to lose their "Englishness", the women especially retreat from the harsh reality of Africa into the pleasant fantasy of England. But it is no more England than the hills of Mashonaland. It is a generalized, imagined England, an England of stock phrases and stock responses which keep warm the sentiments of "Home". The talk is of "a real London pea-souper", or "chestnuts by the fire" or "cherry blossom at Kew".⁽⁹⁾

Unreal though this remembered and imagined England is, it is a powerful force in the outlook of the Whites of the Rhodesian highlands. It results in the cherished pride of race and feeling of superiority satirized by Forster in A Passage to India; it produces cliques with the philosophy that "we Whites must stand together"; and it is a barrier to any real awareness of Africa and its people. To the girl in The Old Chief Mshlanga the Africa in which she lives cannot become real because of the British tradition, jealously guarded by her family, with which she has been nurtured. For her, as for so many of Mrs. Lessing's settlers, Africa does not exist as a country in its own right. She cannot see the strength, mystery, age and vastness of her surroundings.

"And a gutting piece of rock which had been thrust up from the warm soil of Africa unimaginable eras of time ago, washed into hollows and whorls by sun and wind that had travelled so many thousands of miles of space and bush, would hold the weight of a small girl whose eyes were sightless for anything but a pale willowed river, a pale gleaming castle - a small girl singing: 'Out flew the web and floated wide, the mirror cracked from side to side...'"⁽¹⁰⁾

Her mind is full of England, and she is yet to become gradually aware of the "Old Chief's Country". Her England is the roman-

(9) Ibid., p.128.

(10) Doris Lessing, This Was the Old Chief's Country, p.7.

ticised England of her parents. Instead of dreaming of chestnuts and Kew Gardens and pea-scupers, she escapes into the fairy world of the Lady of Shalott and Sir Lancelot, where rivers are pale and willowed, and ancient English castles gleam through the Northern mist.

This is the Anglo-African atmosphere which provides the background to Mrs. Lessing's short stories, and it is the human relationships arising from such a background which provide her with her themes. Relationships between racial groups, social groups, families and individuals fascinate her. The problem of mutual understanding interests her as much as it does Forster. Can people and groups, divided by background or race, come to understand one another? In fact, can two people, even if they are as closely linked as husband and wife, ever understand each other? Every story is an attempt to explore this problem by a study of one or more relationships, and ^{Mrs.} Lessing has not been exclusive in her study. The relationships between Black and White, English and Afrikaans, husband and wife, old families and new families, all provide her with material.

In stories such as No Witchcraft for Sale, Leopard George and The Old Chief Mhlanga Mrs. Lessing does what almost every other South African short story writer has done, and explores the most obvious relationship, that between White and Black. The majestic old chief, Mhlanga, says to the white farmer who has the power to reduce the people of his humble village to starvation, "All this land, this land you call yours, is my land, and belongs to our people."⁽¹¹⁾ Mrs. Lessing sees the Africans as a subdued and beaten people, yet is aware, like Roy Campbell, of "the sullen dignity of their defeat."⁽¹²⁾ Her attitude to them is one

(11) Ibid., p.20.

(12) Roy Campbell, Collected Poems, Bodley Head, 1949, p.31.

of sympathy, and sympathizing with the black, she satisfies the white. Old Chief is a man. Old Smoke is known George, Cideon in George's place. He was treated with understanding and consideration, as well, even tragic disaster. The Old Chief is chief in name only, and his son, who will inherit a title as barren as the land he owns, turns in the direction of the white man to support the poverty-stricken tribe. Old Smoke is abused in the eyes of his young man and broken and humiliated in his old age, when his young wife denounces him for the white man he has loved and served. Cideon, who has saved the life of his employer's little son, is looked upon with suspicion and distrust because he will not share his only valuable possession with the white man. Yet, though they are conquered, though Chiefs have become servants, and rich have become poor, Mrs. Lonsing's Africans are never abject. The Old Chief proudly and sadly gives his last challenge to the white man. (15) In Old Smoke, too, there is this blend of nobility and grief as he meets the white man who has had the power to take everything from him. He says nothing, but merely looks at George with contempt and turns his back on him.

"After a while, the old man looked straight at George with the first time, but it was not as George was an object, a thing, which had nothing to do with him. When he moved himself against the arm of the young man in an effort towards independence, and seeing that he failed, his escort turned gently round with him, and the three moved slowly off again to the entrance." (16)

Mrs. Lonsing reveals the humanity of the Indians, in a society where white superiority has tended to deprive him of human dignity. In addition to doing this directly, she secures indirect effect by contrasting his depth of character with the shallowness of the white man's heart. The Old Chief, for example, speaks with dignity, sincerity and depth of feeling.

(15) Marie Lonsing, This was the Old Chief's Country, p. 20.

(16) Ibid., known George, p. 203.

The Rhodesian policeman, who agrees that something ought to be done about this chief who does not know his place, is made to reveal, by way of contrast, a flippancy, shallowness and complete lack of awareness of the tragic conditions of the native tribe.

"No remarked: 'That kraal has no right to be there; it should have been moved long ago. I don't know why no one has done anything about it. I'll have a chat to the Native Commissioner next week. I'm going over for tennis on Sunday, anyway.'" (15)

The speech of Mrs. Lessing's Europeans is characterized by this ease and complacency regarding the natives. The gliding assurance and self-righteousness of "no right", the casual, easy understatement of "moved" and "done anything", the nonchalance of "chat" and "Sunday tennis" all sum up the typical attitude of the leisured "aristocracy" to a conquered people.

Mrs. Lessing's technique of satirizing the whites is not to pass judgment or attempt even mild criticism such as Forster unobtrusively introduces into A Passage to India, but rather to put into the mouths of her characters words which will provide the necessary self-revelation. At times this satire through dialogue is far more extreme than the ridicule of Forster.

"Later, we talked about the thing, saying how odd it was that natives should commit suicide; it seemed almost like an impertinence, as if they were claiming to have the same delicate feelings as ours". (16)

This is overdone. It is acceptable only if the speaker is being consciously ironical, which she is not. As it stands, it reveals a lack of awareness far too excessive for even the worst of Mrs. Lessing's landed gentry. Satire is verging on excessive parody.

(15) *Ibid.*, The Old Chief Bohlangwe, p.20.

(16) *Ibid.*, The Guernsey, p.73.

What Mrs. Lessing dislikes particularly is the tendency of the Whites to regard their native employees as another species. She attempts to convey this by imitating the crude and shallow generalizations used to sum them up, such as, "He was a good worker, but he drank too much at the week-ends",⁽¹⁷⁾ or "He knows how to handle oxen, but he can't handle his women",⁽¹⁸⁾ or "He is only a black boy."⁽¹⁹⁾ Their observations are always superficial; their tone is always flippant.

Partisan though she is, Mrs. Lessing is far from being a negrophil. A gentle and rather sad sense of humour which emerges at intervals smiles not only at the white man but at the native too, and serves, to a certain extent, to balance her view. Although Gideon in No Witchcraft for Sale is sympathetically treated, he is at the same time, mildly ridiculed for his sullen obstinacy and childish behaviour. The Long One in The Nuisance is portrayed as an almost comic character: "He would have been on the stage if he had been another colour".⁽²⁰⁾ In this story Mrs. Lessing juxtaposes comic and tragic elements with complete objectivity. The Long One's life is blighted by a nagging and ugly elder wife who creates havoc in the household and, in the words of the Long One, is as irritating as "a flea on your body; you could scratch but it always moved to another place, and there was no peace till you killed it."⁽²¹⁾ And eventually this

(17) Doris Lessing, This Was the Old Chief's Country,
The Old Chief Mshlanga, p.13.

(18) Ibid., The Nuisance, p.69.

(19) Ibid., No Witchcraft for Sale, p.32.

(20) Ibid., The Nuisance, p.69.

(21) Ibid., The Nuisance, p.70.

brotherhood is something they will never live to see. For Carruthers and van Heerden, Gale and de Wet, as for Forster's Indian Aziz and English Fielding, the judgment is "No, not yet," and "no, not there."⁽²³⁾

Major Carruthers, when he meets his assistant "liked the look of the man:" he liked his honest and straightforward face; but he is conscious that he is English and van Heerden Afrikaners, and therefore "instinctively dropped his standards of value as he looked, for this man was an Afrikaner, and thus came into an outside category."⁽²⁴⁾

The Englishman is dignified, cultured, kindly and weak, "a gentleman farmer going to seed", with a "wispy moustache".⁽²⁵⁾ The Afrikaner is crude, powerful, animal. Each is embarrassed by the presence of the other. By means of a series of revealing incidents Mrs. Lessing conveys the fact that they have, and are able to have, nothing in common. Van Heerden squashes a huge spider between his fingers, and Major Carruthers is filled with disgust. He decides not to invite van Heerden to live in his house. "They had nothing in common, they would make each other uncomfortable - that was how he put it to himself." But he knew that had his assistant been an Englishman he would have found a place in the house and a "welcome as a friend."⁽²⁶⁾

Major Carruthers finds that in order to gain employment van Heerden has deceived him by pretending to be single, and the breach widens still further. Van Heerden's wife appears to Major Carruthers to be even more crude and animal-like than van Heerden himself. He sees here as "a vast slatternly woman", "a sow among her litter".⁽²⁷⁾ She is the complete antithesis

(23) E.M. Forster, A Passage to India, Penguin, p.317.

(24) Doris Lessing, This was the Old Chief's Country, The Second Hut, p.45.

(25) Ibid., The Second Hut, p.40.

(26) Ibid., The Second Hut, p.46.

(27) Ibid., The Second Hut, p.47.

of all he stands for. She is earthy, sensual and stupid. He has been conditioned by family, public school and army, and is sensitive and reserved. He sees the difference between himself and her as the difference between mind and body, between spirit and flesh, and is frightened and disgusted by her.

"The woman seemed to Major Carruthers less a human being than the expression of an elemental, irrepressible force: he saw her, in her vast sagging fleshiness, with her slow, stupid face, her instinctive responses to her children, whether for affection or temper, as the symbol of fecundity, a strong, irresistible heave of matter. She frightened him." (28)

The Major cannot see her as a human being because there is no place for her and her kind in what he calls his "British standards of value". She is flesh, matter, movement, a vast reproductive organ without a mind such as his, without his regimented and refined emotions. Contact between them is impossible.

The failure in human relationships is, in Mrs. Lessing's view, not only the fault of the Afrikaner. Dull and animal though Lievrou van Heerden may be, the Afrikaner woman is "the symbol of fecundity". Mrs. Gale, too, in The de Wets Come to Kloof Grange, concedes this when, while contemplating the arrival of the Afrikaans family, she feels that "she simply couldn't put up with a tribe of children - for Afrikaners never had less than twelve -" (29) It is this "fecundity" that the English settlers lack. In Major Carruthers and his invalid wife, in Major Gale and Mrs. Gale, there is a sterility and frigidity which contrasts with the warmth and sensuality of the Afrikaners. This is their failure. Major Carruthers

(28) Ibid., The Second Hut, p.55.

(29) Ibid., The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange, p.81.

sees Mevrouw van Heerden as "a heave of matter", but Mrs. Gale is seen by the de Wets as "a middle-aged English lady, in a shapeless, old-fashioned blue silk dress, with a gold locket sliding over a flat bosom, smiling at them coldly, her blue, ninted eyes critically narrowed."⁽³⁰⁾ To Major Carruthers Mevrouw van Heerden was simply a "woman", to the de Wets Mrs. Gale is a "lady", for she is dignified, aloof and superior. Not only is she a lady, but they are conscious that she is an "English lady". Contrasted with the crude, healthy sensuality of the de Wet couple is the barrenness and age of the English-woman, her shapeless old-fashioned dress, her flat bosom, her coldness and her tendency to criticize. Mrs. Gale and her kind despise physical contact and love. She and her husband were "friends and could forget each other".⁽³¹⁾ Major Gale, too, is weak and impotent, and emerges after his bath "pink and shining like an elderly baby".⁽³²⁾

Major Carruthers in The Second Hut is sensitive, cultured, reflective, idealistic, but a practical failure, who "tugs at the long wisps of his moustache in frustrated anger", and who gives up the struggle to exist in Africa and "writes for a job at home."⁽³³⁾ His wife is a miserable creature who has "washed her hands of life",⁽³⁴⁾ and who lies with her face to the wall in her dark room, "the cave of a sick animal".⁽³⁵⁾

Mrs. Lessing's Englishmen are all mind, and are unable to cope with the practical, the emotional and the physical aspects of life. Her Afrikaners are all body. She sees, on the one hand, the sterility of the spirit, and, on the other, the stupidity of the flesh. Both are failures, and neither group has any means of understanding the other.

(30) Ibid., The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange, p.87.

(31) Ibid., The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange, p.78.

(32) Ibid., The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange, p.78.

(33) Ibid., The Second Hut, p.65.

(34) Ibid., The Second Hut, p.51.

(35) Ibid., The Second Hut, p.62.

Among the English settler families themselves there is no such absolute incompatibility. In fact Mrs. Leeming sees among the "established farmers" a type of understanding, the nature of which interests her as much as the clash between white and black, English and Africaner.

Old John's Place, in particular, diagnoses the quality of this "understanding". It is the story of the relationship between the people of the district, mostly solidly established farmers who intended to live and die on their land⁽³⁶⁾ and the groups of newcomers, the sinclair and the Jaceys, who, in succession, inhabit the farm known as Old John's place. Neither family is able to stay because neither can be accepted into the exclusive circle of the established families.

Mrs. Leeming sees the necessity of this circle as depending upon adherence to a social pattern. They live together harmoniously, and "understand" one another, only because each family is a social to play according to the rules. Certain things are done or not done; certain things are said or not said, and the older families have carved a long period of imitation into the conventions of this so-called English society. The sinclair and the Jaceys cannot or will not conform, and therefore cannot be accepted. They are "judged, and judged as vagabonds".⁽³⁷⁾

Here, the daughter of the Jaceys, one of the established couples, takes to explain to Mrs. Leeming something of the social pattern, which, since she cannot conform to it, is forcing her to leave. Mrs. Leeming, through these youthful and therefore relatively objective eyes Leeming sees and describes the social relationships, faithfully takes to rationalize the values by which the society of her parents operated. "Isn't you see?" she says.

(36) Ibid., Old John's Place, p.134.

(37) Ibid., Old John's Place, p.144.

"It's not what people do, it's how they do it. It can't be broken up." (38)

Accepting Mrs. Lacey means accepting a different pattern of social behaviour, and this, says Mrs. Lessing, (through Kate Cope) the colonial society cannot do. Convention and conformity are its life-blood; it cannot be "broken up" without breaking the society itself. Therefore chickens must continue to be served at parties, women must continue to wear "dresses of an indeterminate floral crepiness that was positively a uniform", (39) and infidelity must continue to be ignored and "treated with patient discretion". (40) When Andrew Wheatley, for example, returns from the darkness and rejoins the Sinclairs' party with Nan Fowler, "their eyes heavy, their sides pressed close together, Mrs. Wheatley would simply avert her eyes and remark patiently, 'her lips tightened a little, perhaps) 'We ought to be going quite soon'. And so it was with everyone". (41) All realise the danger of revealing the vulgarity which lies just below the surface. As soon as someone refuses to respond in the correct way, the bonhomie of the group will be exploded and its hypocrisy exposed. Therefore, for the sake of everyone and for the sake of the colonial establishment, no one must miss his cue.

This is Mrs. Lessing's depressing picture of social relationships among the White settlers. Old John's Place is the story of a girl's "social education", (42) her initiation into the society of her parents. Gradually she becomes more and more like her mother. Gradually she learns to practise what Mrs. Lessing regards as the pillars of this society, conformity and hypocrisy.

(38) Ibid., Old John's Place, p.177.

(39) Ibid., Old John's Place, p.152.

(40) Ibid., Old John's Place, p.139.

(41) Ibid., Old John's Place, p.139.

(42) Ibid., Old John's Place, p.140.

Marital relationships in Mrs. Lossing's stories, like social relationships, follow a clear pattern. Her men are all land-obsessed, farm-obsessed or horse-obsessed. Mrs. Gale, in The De Vets Come to Kloof Grange, knows that her husband "was hardly conscious of her; nothing existed for him outside the farm",⁽⁴³⁾ and Major Gale is typical in this respect of most of Mrs. Lossing's established farmers. The wives are all lonely, bored and frustrated. Their husbands may have their horses in a new country, but the women are, and will remain, exiles. They are conscious of enduring the ordeal of Africa for the sake of their husbands, "for dig deep enough into any one of these wives," says Mrs. Lossing, "and one would find a willing martyr alarmingly apt to expose a bleeding heart."⁽⁴⁴⁾

Though the wives react to their exiled loneliness in various ways, here, too, there is a behaviour pattern. Each indulges in some form of escapism. Mrs. Carruthers in The Second Exit finds escape in hypochondria, while Mrs. Gale in The De Vets Come to Kloof Grange and the mother in Flavours of Rile find relief by escaping into a dream-world. Mrs. Gale has filled her living-room with eighteenth century English furniture. Every week for thirty years she has written to Betty, a childhood friend in England. The letters have become a ritual; Betty's memory is revered, and in her imagination Mrs. Gale moves in the circle of Betty's English friends. She even imagines from time to time that Betty is with her on their farm on the African highlands. She knows very well that Betty is now a chroux, elderly woman doctor, with whom she no longer

(43) Ibid., The De Vets Come to Kloof Grange, p.77.

(44) Ibid., Old John's Place, p.136.

has anything in common, but she tries not to think of this, for "it was necessary for her to have Betty remain, in imagination at least, as a counter-weight to her loneliness."⁽⁴⁵⁾ She escapes too, into the past and spends many hours dreaming about the distant days when she was the squire's daughter in a little English village. She changes the name of the farm from Kloof Dek to Kloof Grange, "making it a link with home",⁽⁴⁶⁾ and tries to anglicise her segment of Africa by lavishing care on her garden, her English lawns and her water-garden with goldfish and water lilies. Her world of romance eventually embraces even a part of the land of exile. The distant African mountains become to her a symbol of herself and she loves to sit and gaze, lost in adoration of their beauty. Her sense of her own loneliness is romanticised and she comes to see herself as strong and majestic.

"They were her mountains; they were what she was; they had made her, had crystallised her loneliness into a strength, had sustained her and fed her".⁽⁴⁷⁾

She is happy, for her loneliness has opened to her worlds of the imagination infinitely more satisfying than the world of reality.

Whatever her theme, Mrs. Lessing endeavours to deal with all its aspects. This is the case in her study of escapism. Although withdrawal into themselves is a common reaction, there are many of the settlers' wives who are not as imaginative as Mrs. Gale and seek another way of escape. Mrs. Lessing sees the other way as that of unfaithfulness, and stories such as Lucy Grange, Getting off the Altitude, Old John's Place and

(45) Ibid., The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange, p.83.

(46) Ibid., The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange, p.79.

(47) Ibid., The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange, p.84.

Winter in July all deal with the theme of adultery. Although Lucy Grange feels repelled by the coarse sensuality and vulture-like appearance of the insurance salesman, she hungers for his sympathy, understanding and love, and is easy prey. He says:

"'You must be lonely here, my dear,' and she was astounded to find her eyes full of tears. 'One does what one can to make a show of it'. She kept her lids lowered and her voice light. Inside she was weeping with gratitude.'"(48)

She hates herself and him for deceiving her husband, but her loneliness and need are stronger than her standards. She feels that, exiled among the "poor Colonials"⁽⁴⁹⁾ fifty miles from the nearest town, "abdication of her standards"⁽⁵⁰⁾ is inevitable and almost justifiable. And she is pleased when he makes this abdication easier for her by saying the significant words:

"'Yes, yes, my dear, in a country like this we all learn to accept the second-rate.'"(51)

All the social and personal relationships which Mrs. Lessing so carefully studies are "second-rate". They are second-rate, she implies, because the values upon which they are based are second-rate. Just as it is true to say that her stories are studies of patterns of human relationships, so it is true to say that they are, on a deeper level, a continual exposure of moral and emotional shallowness.

Underlying these patterns of behaviour of the Settler community Mrs. Lessing sees a spiritual emptiness. The Carruthers, the Gales, the Wheatleys, the Copes, the Lacey and the Sinclairs all share this emptiness, which, with one exception, they cannot or will not see. Mrs. Sinclair in Old John's Place

(48) Doris Lessing, The Habit of Loving, Lucy Grange, p.82.

(49) Ibid., Lucy Grange, p.81.

(50) Ibid., Lucy Grange, p.83.

(51) Ibid., Lucy Grange, p.83.

thinks she sees it, as she gives her farewell party for the neighbours she despises. What she does see is the automaton-like conventionality of her guests, and she detests the pattern of behaviour from which they draw their unity and strength.

"What I can't stand is the sameness of it all. You press a button - that's sufficient alcohol - and then the machinery begins to turn. The same things happen, the same people, never a word said - it's awful." (52)

Mrs. Sinclair condemns the settlers because she sees them as stereotyped machines, not because they lack spiritual depth and moral values. To her, their sin is lack of imagination and lack of subtlety, for she "likes a little more - what? - grace? with her sin." (53) Mrs. Lessing, however, is not content with this judgment, and, in order to indicate that the fault lies deeper than this, uses Kate to pass judgment in turn on Mrs. Sinclair. The girl realises that in the Sinclairs' outlook spiritual values simply do not operate, and that their standards are quite as second-rate as those of the neighbours they detest. Kate sees these standards as having "nothing to do with beauty, ugliness, evil, goodness," and senses that the Sinclairs' one attribute is "a kind of expensive and solid ugliness". (54)

In The de Wets Come to Kloof Grange, instead of using the mind of a character like Kate to gradually gain an awareness of this emptiness, Mrs. Lessing suggests it herself by means of dialogue. Major and Mrs. Gale sit in their deck chairs as they do every evening, watching the African sunset, and then have their meal. When they speak it is to say words such as

(52) Doris Lessing, This was the Old Chief's Country, Old John's Place, p.140.

(53) Ibid., Old John's Place, p.141.

(54) Ibid., Old John's Place, p.143.

these. "Good sunset tonight." "Mosquitoes!" "Here is the post": "I shall go and have a bath". "Bed".⁽⁵⁵⁾ These are the clichés of routine, the shell which protects them from a view of themselves. Major Gale does not merely announce that he intends to have a bath, he does so "determinedly". The trivialities which constitute the pattern of his life are invested with importance and dignity, and in this way he succeeds in retaining his poise and self-respect.

Only one of Mrs. Lessing's stories is a study of someone actually becoming aware of her own spiritual emptiness. Apart from this, her characters are gloriously unaware of their true natures. Only Julia, in Winter in July asks herself the question, "What am I?"⁽⁵⁶⁾ Her life has been a succession of actions and reactions, of travelling from country to country, from man to man like a "migrant bird",⁽⁵⁷⁾ and, middle-aged and married, she peers for the first time below the surface of her life. She begins to fight against what Mrs. Lessing sees as so powerful, the world of habit and pattern, "that no-man's land of feeling in which she had been living for so long, that undersea territory where one thing confuses with another, where it is so easy to drift at ease, according to the pull of the tides."⁽⁵⁸⁾ Julia feels that what she and her lover, Kenneth, lack is, in her own words, "spiritual vitality".⁽⁵⁹⁾ They need something and someone to believe in, something to make meaning of life, something which will enable them to answer the questions: "What am I?" "What do our lives add up to?"⁽⁶⁰⁾ And she begins to feel the reality and the necessity of values and ideals.

(55) Ibid., The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange, p.74 and 78.

(56) Ibid., Winter in July, p.245.

(57) Ibid., Winter in July, p.230.

(58) Ibid., Winter in July, p.252.

(59) Ibid., Winter in July, p.256.

(60) Ibid., Winter in July, p.251.

Winter in July, like several of Nadine Gordimer's stories, is a study of human values. Through Julia, Mrs. Lessing states a problem: Is there any reality in ideals and values? Is there, in fact, any meaning in life? Or should men and women merely "live without rules"⁽⁶¹⁾ because there are in reality none to live by? Kenneth scoffs at Julia's awakening idealism. His view of happiness based on idealism is "that the whole damn thing is a lie from beginning to end."⁽⁶²⁾ Sometimes, he agrees, ideals are desirable for peace of mind, but then it must be realised that they are merely a form of self-deception. He believes that "in a marriage it's necessary for one side to be strong enough to create the illusion,"⁽⁶³⁾ but, to him, it will never be more than an illusion.

Julia is one of the most interesting of Mrs. Lessing's gallery of the spiritually empty and reveals much of her creator's outlook. Mrs. Lessing is, in a sense, giving Julia a chance denied to her other characters, a chance of an awareness of spiritual values and an opportunity to escape from her enslavement to "the pull of the tides". It is significant that she does not take it. There is an uncompromising realism in Mrs. Lessing's view of life. Society is depraved. People act as they want to act and as they have always acted. Whether there are absolute values or not, they will not be accepted. She can tolerate no saints or heroes. Julia is not prepared to change, and neither the cynical Kenneth nor Mrs. Lessing imagined she would. The story ends with a pessimistic refusal to show any faith in regeneration. Kenneth says to Julia:

(61) Ibid., Winter in July, p.222.

(62) Ibid., Winter in July, p.234.

(63) Ibid., Winter in July, p.253.

"Go to bed, my dear. Do stop fussing. Are you prepared to do anything about it? You aren't, are you? Then stop making us miserable over impossibilities. We have a pleasant enough life, taking it for what it is. It's not much fun being the fag-end of something, but even that has its compensations."

Julia listened, smiling, to her own voice speaking. 'You put it admirably,' she said, as she went out of the room".(64)

Ideals remain "impossibilities"; society continues to consist of "fag-ends", and the "fag-ends" remain complacent, even if they are occasionally aware of their spiritual emptiness.

Although Mrs. Lessing is generally careful to be non-committal in dealing with moral values and concerns herself with presenting, not with passing judgment, she does attempt to define the nature of evil, and her view is a most interesting one. Julia, in Winter in July, has a "vision of evil" when she looks out of an hotel window over a city and sees "people blowing like leaves across her vision, as rootless as she, as impermanent, their lives meaning as little."(65) The evil life is the meaningless life, the life which stands for nothing and is "rooted" in nothing. The lives of the Carruthers, the Gales, the Lacey and the Sinclairs are evil lives, because they are sterile patterns and mean nothing. None of these families is "rooted" in Africa. None of these families "contributes" anything, in the sense that Julia uses the word as she gazes over the African farm, feels the rhythm and creativity of nature,

(64) Ibid., Winter in July, p.256.

(65) Ibid., Winter in July, p.221.

and asks, "What do I contribute to all this?"⁽⁶⁶⁾ Kate, in Old John's Place, as she examines the packing cases of the Sinclairs, knows that "when the lorries came in the morning nothing would be left of the Sinclairs."⁽⁶⁷⁾ They were nothing and had contributed nothing. In fact, Mrs. Lessing's view of the settlers of the African highlands, who are the characters of her stories, is that they are a "rootless" people who cannot answer Julia's question: "What am I?" In England, they might have been able to do so, but not in Africa. Only the old Chief Mshlanga can answer this; only he is "rooted" in Africa and can assert this with dignity.⁽⁶⁸⁾

In her more recent short stories Mrs. Lessing confirms the fact that for there is spiritual emptiness, and that whether her setting, in England or Africa or Germany she will concern herself with the spiritually empty. Major Gale and Major Saxuthars reappear in Germany as Captain Forster in The Woman; the husband-wife relationship of the African highlands finds an echo in France in the relationship of "he" and "she" in Line; and her most recent volume of short stories, The Habit of Loving, contains as many 'rootless' men and women as This was the Old Chief's Country.

Mrs. Lessing's use of language provides a vivid contrast to the verbal falliness of certain of her contemporaries. Her short stories, like Nadine Gordimer's, are poetic, in the sense that they rely for much of their effect upon imagery and evocative language. Although Mrs. Lessing is fully in control of her stories and "tells" as much as she "shows", she

(66) Ibid., Winter in July, p.246.

(67) Ibid., Old John's Place, p.143.

(68) Ibid., The Old Chief Mshlanga, p.20.

seldom indulges in unnecessary descriptions or explanations. The most striking feature of her style is her vivid, sensuous imagery, and it is probably this quality that has prompted Elizabeth Nicholas to say that she "has captured the sight and sound and smell of Africa." (69)

Her imagery is seldom confined to one sense. Though her descriptions of the gardens in The de Wets Come to Kloof Grange and Flavours of Exile depend mainly on visual imagery, smell too plays a part in adding to the atmosphere of fertility and lushness. This is how the young girl in Flavours of Exile sees the vegetable garden at the foot of the hill:

"The smell of manure, of sun on foliage, of evaporating water, rose to my head: two steps farther, and I could look down into the vegetable garden enclosed within its tall pale of reeds, rich chocolate earth studded emerald green, frothed with the white of cauliflowers, jewelled with the purple globes of eggplant and the scarlet wealth of tomatoes. Around the fence grew lemons, paw-paws, bananas, shapes of gold and yellow in their patterns of green." (70)

Even so enthusiastic a description as this is not merely description for its own sake. The idea of something rich and precious, conveyed by words such as "rich", "emerald", "jewelled", "wealth", "gold", the vividness and brightness of the colours, (chocolate brown, white, purple, scarlet, yellow, green) and the warm, heady, ripe atmosphere, all reinforce the theme of Flavours of Exile, which is the ripening and maturing of a young girl, and her responses to the warm fertility of tropical Africa and to love.

This quality of relevance to theme appears even in tiny descriptive touches such as Mrs. Lessing's visual image of the distant locust swarm in the story Locusts.

(69) Elizabeth Nicholas, Sunday Times.

(70) Doris Lessing, The Habit of Loving, Flavours of Exile, p.125.

"Over the rocky levels of the mountain was a streak of rust-coloured air."(71)

Not only does "rust" well denote the reddish colour of the locusts and "streak" the shape of the formation and its distance from the farm, but the rust streak carries with it deeper connotations. The associations of rust relative to the theme of the story are those of corrosion and destruction. The locusts are to eat away the ripening crops as rust eats and corrodes metal. Like that of the farm garden, therefore, this description is valid on two levels, the literal and the symbolic, and it is the latter which reinforces the theme.

In spite of the claim that Mrs. Lessing has "captured the sound of Africa", her stories with a few exceptions, such as A Sunrise on the Veld, are generally lacking in sound imagery. This is not necessarily a weakness. The abundance of other sense imagery, particularly visual, and her sensitivity to atmosphere makes this absence of sound hardly noticeable. Further, the natural background of her stories is one of silence and solitude. When she does describe sounds they are never harsh or loud, but sounds harmonising with the quiet rhythm of the African highlands. Nor does she lack skill in evoking images of hearing, on the few occasions that she makes use of them, as this description from A Sunrise on the Veld indicates.

"All around him he could see trickles of ants disappearing into the grass. The whispering noise was faint and dry, like the rustling of a cast snakeskin".(72)

This blend of sound and movement is extremely skilful and is a further illustration of the poetic quality of her writing. The simile of the snakeskin is effective, not only because it so

(71) *Ibid.*, Locusts, p.104.

(72) Doris Lessing, This Was the Old Chief's Country, A Sunrise on the Veld, p.30.

well sustains and illustrates the dry, sibilant sound effect created by "whispering" and "rustling", but also because it is a natural image in keeping with the setting and theme of the story. This is the kind of parallel which would suggest itself to the young boy in A Sunrise on the Veld, who has spent his life in the bush. Mrs. Lessing does not, however, achieve her effect by the aptness and associations of her words alone, but also by the sound value of the words themselves. The alliteration of the s-sound is most striking, and adds greatly to the hissing, whispering effect of the passage.

Just as Mrs. Lessing responds to what could be called the spiritual atmosphere of the Rhodesian highlands in her study of behaviour patterns, so she responds to the physical atmosphere. Her images of heat and smell are generally heavy and oppressive and they are often blended to produce sensuous passages reminiscent of the intoxicating quality of Ode to a Nightingale or Lawrence's Sons and Lovers. Mrs. Gale sniffs "the heavy perfume of the moonflowers" mingled with an "odour of decay",⁽⁷³⁾ and "sitting there on her exposed shelf, a smell of sun-warmed green, of hot decaying water, of luxurious growth, an intoxicating heady smell, rose in waves to her face."⁽⁷⁴⁾ Her images of touch are images of heat. The smells are the smells of heat and moisture, heavy and heady, never fresh and delicate. Indeed, Mrs. Lessing is physically conscious of the heat of her setting to such an extent that its oppressiveness is used to dominate the entire mood and tone of her first novel, The Grass is Singing.

(73) Ibid., The De Vets Come to Kloof Grange, p.82.

(74) Ibid., The De Vets Come to Kloof Grange, p.84.

Some of Mrs. Lessing's most striking word pictures are her images of movement. She describes an army of ants as "glistening black water flowing through the grass", (75) a simile which precisely expresses their apparent cohesion and liquid movement. Her description of the leopard in Leopard George provides another example of her technique of combining light and colour with movement.

"He saw one of the shadows a dozen paces from him lengthen gradually, and at last separate itself from the rock. The low, ground-creeping thing showed a green glitter of eyes, and a sheen of moonlight shifted with the moving muscles of the flank." (76)

Several factors contribute towards the success of this passage. The absolute, unrelieved silence adds to the tension of the situation. The slowness of the rhythm, produced by repetition of long stressed syllables as in "ground-creeping thing", conveys the extreme stealth of the animal, and reinforces the word "gradually". The rhythm is smooth as well as slow, and alliteration in "sheen ... shifted" and "moving muscles" emphasizes this sensuous smoothness. The alliteration in "green glitter" produces, by way of contrast, a harder and more ominous effect and introduces the note of danger. Most significant is the visual image. Apart from the sound and rhythm of her words, the movement of the leopard is evoked entirely by means of variations of light, shade and colour. This is the technique of the camera, and the picture produced is a rhythmical variation of black, grey, green and yellow.

It is clear that the description of Nadine Gordimer as "a writer with the eye of a camera" applies equally well to

(75) Ibid., A Sunrise on the Veld, p.26.

(76) Ibid., Leopard George, p.212.

Doris Lessing. The quality of Mrs. Lessing's visual imagination is seen not only in descriptive imagery, but also in the manner in which whole scenes are visualized and captured. She frequently employs the technique of causing a character in her stories to stand still and observe a scene while she records his impressions. The viewer provides a sense of immediacy to the picture which in every case is fully developed with light, shade and colour playing an important part. Major Carruthers and van Meerden, for example, peer into the darkness of a disused hut.

"The one window was boarded over, and it was quite dark. In the confusing shafts of light from the door, a thick sheet of felted spider web showed itself, like a curtain halving the interior, as full of small flies and insects as a butcher-bird's cache. The spider crouched, vast and glittering, shaking gently, glaring at them with small red eyes, from the centre of the web."(77)

Again, lighting is all-important. The darkness, the "shafts of light", the sheen of the web, the glitter of the spider, the red gleam of its eyes are all vividly conveyed. On two occasions in her short stories Lessing actually makes use of a mirror to add to the visual quality. In The Habit of Loving there is "a big mirror which nearly filled the end wall of the large, dark room. George saw himself in it, an elderly man sitting propped up on pillows watching the small doll-like figure standing before him on the carpet."(78) In

Getting off the Altitude the young girl who narrates the story sits in the dark bedroom with "the circle of lamplight focused low," and, after the tragic figure of Molly Slatter has left, looks into the mirror, "dusted yellow from the lamplight, with the dark watery spaces of the glass behind". It is not that

(77) Ibid., The Second Hut, p.45.

(78) Doris Lessing, The Habit of Loving, p.15.

The words "stone" and the "hen" and the "vulture" show Mrs. Lessing's skill in selecting an apt simile. There is no description of appearance for its own sake; each image carries with it connotations and suggestions which provide deep insight into character. Words are made to work.

In each story one of her clearly visualized characters has the particular function of providing the perspective or point of view. Mrs. Lessing is always particularly careful to align herself with one character and to avoid any movement into the consciousness of another. Often the point of view is provided by the protagonist himself, as in Leopard George, but as frequently Mrs. Lessing allows the story to pass through the mind of an observer, such as Kate in Old John's Place. Such an alert and neutral observer is particularly useful in stories which attempt to record and understand social and personal relationships. While remaining comparatively uninvolved, Kate listens to conversations, studies actions and reactions, asks questions, ponders, and gradually becomes aware of the patterns of behaviour and the motives and values which control her parents' lives.

The fixed point of view of Mrs. Lessing's stories is one aspect of their careful construction. Her plots resemble those of Flomer. She too is fond of parallel situations and of opposing characters. In Flavours of Exile the romantic dreams of the young girl who nurses the ripening pomegranate, her symbol of love and fulfilment, are contrasted with the sour maturity of William, who smashes it. In Sunrise on the Veld the vitality and exhilaration of the boy who runs through the jungle are strikingly contrasted with the feeble responses of the dying buck, and his awareness of this contrast provides him with the disturbing knowledge of his own mortality. In each case the careful structure and

the balancing of character and action indicate a firmly held theme and intention.

Careful construction does not, in Mrs. Lessing's case, imply neat, satisfying conclusions. She avoids the contrived ending so tempting to short story writers, not only because of its artificiality, but because she is unwilling to indulge in clear-cut decisions. All her stories are, in a sense, inconclusive, but they are the more realistic for being so. Each asserts Mrs. Lessing's belief that life presents no neat solutions. Her stories solve no problems; her characters undergo no metamorphoses. They are simply better understood and their problems more clearly seen by the end of the story.

It is Mrs. Lessing's characterisation which gives the impression of being contrived, not her plots. Her preoccupation with social patterns leads her to view characters as social types. They tend to become illustrations rather than individuals. Her technique of juxtaposing contrasting characters merely assists in producing stock Englishmen and stock Afrikaners, rather like group representatives. Her pictures of crude Afrikaners and mild Englishmen, for example, are too extreme to be true, and when characterisation fails the entire story suffers from artificiality, no matter how perceptive an analysis of social pattern it contains.

Her preoccupation with the exposure of social patterns leads to a further technical weakness. Relationships fascinate her to such an extent that at times she does not know where to stop. The Second Hut, for example, is a study of no less than four relationships: those between English and Afrikaner, Black and White, husband and wife, and Africa and "Home". Mrs. Lessing is attempting to follow too many threads

within the limits of one short story. The care exercised in construction cannot prevent diffuseness of effect; the short story must have one central theme. Such stories as The Second Day, After the July, Old John's Place and The Day After Tomorrow, are embryonic novels. They possess too great a complexity of theme, relationship and incident to be successful short stories. It is not surprising, that in 1955, two years after the publication of The Day After Tomorrow, Mrs. Longing published Only a Woman of the Short Novel, or short stories which had grown into novellas. In 1956 William Flomer, the novelist in this journal, compares the short story writer for the writer of short stories must sacrifice, while the novelist expands.

Novelists, in other respects Mrs. Longing excels. She has the advantage that of the novelist, for example. One of the novelist's weaknesses is the extent to which she feels dramatic and dramatic and allows this tone to intrude into her stories. Mrs. Longing is more conscious of the danger of this type of emotional intrusion and has achieved a greater degree of objectivity. She has said that the plausible fiction of fiction, the acceptance of fiction, is as much a part of the writer's life as the acceptance of the single concrete view of man; both are aspects of criticism - and are before there is a resting-point, a place of decision, and to which all precariously balanced. Living in this kind of state it is impossible to make final judgments on "a whole of events of value". (85) Mrs. Longing's tone is, consequently, one of cautious pessimism. She observes, reveals

tends to adopt a point of view, but refuses to arrive at a neat conclusion. To Julia's question, "What are we?" she suggests the word "evil", but even this is a tentative suggestion, and is never balanced by any assertion of the nature of "good".

Mrs. Lessing certainly does not "make final judgments or absolute statements of value"; her task is rather to explore and expose social patterns and personal relationships, and it is here that both her strength and weakness lie, for this theme, with which she is so well equipped to deal, is not ideally suited to the short story form. In spite of this, she has produced a number of excellent short stories. She possesses seriousness of purpose and integrity, clear insight into social relationships and values, objectivity, and great technical skill.

CHAPTER FIVE.ALAN PATON.

A good short story writer, even if he is the most objective of craftsmen, invests his work with a distinctive personal quality, which is a blending of theme, tone and expression. It is often difficult to define this quality, but in Alan Paton it is so strong as to be unmistakable. It is the force of compassion and righteous anger.

Dobbie Go Home, Paton's collection of short stories, has been described as "primarily one of the author's many weapons against the false and the cruel, in a personal campaign which, with 'Cry, the Beloved Country,' won him international respect".⁽¹⁾ Dobbie Go Home, like Cry, the Beloved Country, is indeed a weapon, and it is important to realize the nature of Paton's campaign in order to evaluate his short stories. Paton's compassion is for the under-dog in his 'beloved country', the African, whom he sees as voiceless, frustrated and hopeless. He is at the mercy of harsh and discriminatory racial policies, has to bear insults and contempt, and lives in fear both of the white man's law and of the native's lawlessness. In the face of this, Paton has dedicated himself to fight for justice and human rights. In the story Dobbie Go Home, for example, the battle is against job reservation and hypocritical patronage by white officials, as Paton reveals the tragic irony of a debutantes' ball for non-European girls. In A Drink in the Passage Paton focusses attention on racial discrimination in the field of art, and the futile attempt of an Afrikaner youth to understand and make contact with an African because, although he thinks he has conquered his racial pride, it is as strong as ever. In

(1) The Observer, July 2, 1961.

Life for a Life, in which a murder is sanctioned and a murderer protected by the state, he strikes at race hatred, the police force and "spiritual wickedness in high places". It is an indication of his sincerity and singleness of purpose that his activity has not been confined merely to the literary field. He was principal of a native reformatory for thirteen years and is the leader of the Liberal party in South Africa.

Paton's literary credo has been firmly stated. "I have a strong sense of the social function of the novel", he has said. Such a concept immediately suggests a preoccupation with factors potentially destructive to literature - didacticism and propaganda - but Paton sees no reason why social and moral function should contradict the highest demands of literary form.⁽²⁾ His work is, of necessity, a sustained attempt, with varying degrees of success, to avoid any such contradiction.

The social purpose of his novels is obvious. Cry, the Beloved Country is retiring into the position occupied by Uncle Tom's Cabin in American literature. Its purpose was an exposure of suffering, an attempt to arouse social conscience, to humanise a racial attitude. Too Late the Phalarope possessed a similar educative function. Its purpose was to reveal to the white South African that he had gone so far in debasing White-Black relationships that he had "created his own sense of sin and his own form of tragedy".⁽³⁾

(2) "But this is the job that has to be done, this painful laying bare of the truth, in the form of story telling whose rules must be faithfully obeyed".
 Alan Paton: Proceedings of a Conference of Writers, Publishers, Editors and University Teachers of English, Johannesburg, 1956. p.157.

(3) Nadine Gordimer, The Novel and the Nation in South Africa, The Times Literary Supplement, August 11, 1961. p.521.

Just as Paton has accepted the necessity of "social function" in his writing, so, as a South African writer, he has accepted the inevitability of the theme of race.

"If one is observing and interpreting life in South Africa", he has said, "one cannot evade the theme of race".⁽⁴⁾

"Race is not a plot, or a structural pattern, or an obsession; it is the very stuff of our lives".⁽⁵⁾

While Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing introduce the racial element as an aspect of larger themes, Paton focusses all his attention on the social and moral implications of race relationships. With complete self-awareness and without apology he uses literature as a means of expressing a strong humanitarian and liberal outlook. His writing is part of "the job that has to be done, this painful laying bare of the truth ...".⁽⁶⁾

In such stories as Life for a Life and The Waste Land Paton gives form to his compassion for the Coloured people and anger at the conditions under which they live, by creating dramatic situations very like those of one act plays in structure and effect. These are stark, primitive stories; Paton is not concerned with the subtle insights of Nadine Gordimer or Doris Lessing. The emotions of his characters are physical terror, misery, hopelessness and bitter frustration. Paton is not afraid to make use of scenes of violence and death; they are part of the lives he depicts.

The violent situation is the basis of his method of conveying misery and generating pity. In Life for a Life an influential white farmer has been murdered and the innocent

(4) Alan Paton, Proceedings of a Conference, p.152.

(5) Ibid., p.149.

(6) Ibid., p.157.

Coloured shepherd families cower miserably in their huts, knowing that suspicion must inevitably fall on one of them. Webster, the old policeman influenced by race hatred who dominates the story, is determined that one of the "swartzyng yellow-bellanted bastards", as he calls them, will die for this. He terrorizes old Noah Thompson, the head shepherd, and his wife Sara, and eventually murders the old man. Sara, usually informed that her husband has been killed accidentally, and has already been buried, fights in vain against the official machine, but the case is closed. And as witness cannot be suggested by the town, she is given three days to get up and leave.

In the end, a native man returning home with his wagon is surrounded by a gang of young troopers. He escapes their knives by plunging in among the twisted metal and wire of a scrap yard, but the young men are there too. He slashes at the heads of the figures who loom up ahead of him with his heavy stick, killing one of them, and eventually eludes the gang by dragging himself under a lorry. He does not realize that the trooper he has killed is his son.

Plots such as these are entirely conspicuous material for short stories. They are by their very nature so charged with emotion and action; they arouse intense anger and compassion on the part of the author, that the danger is that they will become too obvious, and suffer from sentimentality and a lack of reality. In this instance this is, in fact, the danger. The author feels and tries to convey in so powerful that the story is forced out of shape in order to contain it, and the note of falsity which results defeats his purpose. The way in which the emotion flourishes at the expense of the story is seen particularly in plot construction. The struggle in the flesh-tearing waste land of scrap metal well conveys the pain, hopelessness and the fear of the urban

native exposed to the cruelty and lawlessness of his fellows. But Paton is not satisfied. In striving for greater tragic effect he cannot resist three elaborations. One of the incidents is the old man's son; father kills son in the darkness; and finally the gang swing his body under the lorry where the old man is hiding, so that it rests beside him. By this time the story has long passed its point of maximum effectiveness, and a moving, realistic and potentially tragic situation has become distastefully contrived and melodramatic.

Life for a Life is even more charged with emotion, but, in spite of this, it does not suffer from a similar lack of realism. Four factors make it one of Paton's most successful stories. The plot is skilfully constructed; nothing is out of place and the story moves with a smooth inevitability. Every detail and every incident is closely bound to the central theme. Paton's powerful tone of anger and pity, though always present, is always controlled, and never leads to sentimentality in the form of a false word or incident. The most striking feature of the story is its dramatic quality. By his use of terse dialogue, movement and interpretative comment, Paton succeeds in developing an atmosphere of tension in the little stone house on the hill as gripping, and as moving, though of course not as sustained, as that of Hemingway's famous story, The Killers. Just as Hemingway's two gunmen, Al and Max, dominate the lunch room, so the brutal Robbarts dominates the scene in the cottage as he interrogates Leaman. In this scene Paton has matched Hemingway's ability to create hypnotic tension, to so dramatize a situation that the utter ruthlessness of its dominating character produces a slowness of pace and a hush or calm which fascinates both actor and reader because it will at any

moment explode. (7)

The final quality which contributes to the success of this story, and indeed of many of Paton's stories, is the depth of his insight into the heart-break and tragedy of those in South Africa who have a "sun-warmed colour of the skin", and it is his ability to convey this insight which makes Life for a Life, like Cry, the Beloved Country, a "deeply moving experience". (8) Sara, particularly, is one of the great tragic figures of the South African short story, comparable with old Alie in Pauline Smith's Desolation. Each is crushed by the burden of life, Alie by sickness and poverty, Sara by her realisation of the futility of her fight against the prejudice and discrimination which can murder her husband with impunity. In Desolation there is at least a glimmer of hope that little Koos may receive some chance in life. In Life for a Life the hopelessness is as unrelieved as that of Lear, and is even intensified by Paton's final ironical observation that old Sara set out for the Cape "where people lived softer and sweeter lives". (9)

The only weakness in this story lies in the character of Robbertse. That he is too extreme and that his brutality is unmotivated is the obvious criticism. Nevertheless, an extreme character is not necessarily an unrealistic one. Paton would argue that Robbertse symbolises a South African type and attitude, and that his action is not without factual basis. Lack of motivation, too, could be partially excused by pleading the demands of the short story form. In the novel there is space for explanation and development of character;

(7) Alan Paton, Dobbie Go Home, Cape, 1961. Life for a Life, pp.47-51.

(8) From an Observer review of Cry, the Beloved Country.

(9) Alan Paton, op.cit., Life for a Life, p.58.

in the short story character is generally static.

In spite of this, Life for a Life does reveal the danger of Eaton's outlook and purpose. It is a clear exposition of the liberal preconception - the brutal policeman and the suffering African - and such an exposition is dangerous not because it is entirely untrue, but because it is only an aspect of the truth. It is too near, too simple. It is a racial cliché which hinders a true awareness of the complexities of the South African situation. Critic has been assumed, blame apportioned and sympathy extended in accordance with a fixed preoccupation. Political dogmatism is inevitably reflected in a set literary pattern.

This political preoccupation moulds dialogue, too, from time to time. In Robbie Go Home, the Coloured father says these words to his son:

"I was brought up in a world where we always hoped for the best. But you live in a time when no false hopes are left. I was a white man, don't forget".(10)

This is, from a liberal point of view, a fairly neat political concept, but it is not authentic dialogue. These generalisations with their pseudo-profundity are stiff and unnatural on the lips of the Coloured father. The story suffers because it is being used as a vehicle for propaganda and it is inevitable that the demands of the "job that has to be done" will lead, at times, to distortion of character, dialogue and situation.

Contrasted with Eaton's dramatic third person stories, are his quieter, more reflective, first person stories of reformatory life. Autobiographical and conversational in

(9) Alan Eaton, op.cit., Life for a Life, p.58.

(10) Ibid., Robbie Go Home, p.19.

in the short story character is generally static.

In spite of this, Life for a Life does reveal the danger of writer's outlook and purpose. It is a clear exposition of the liberal preoccupation - the brutal policeman and the suffering African - and such an exposition is dangerous not because it is entirely untrue, but because it is only an aspect of the truth. It is too narrow, too simple. It is a racial cliché which hinders a true understanding of the complexity of the South African situation. Truth has been obscured, blame assigned and sympathy extended in accordance with a fixed preoccupation. Political dogmatism is inevitably reflected in a set literary pattern.

This political preoccupation reveals dialogue, too, from time to time. In Life for a Life, the Coloured father says these words to his son:

I was brought up in a world where we always hoped for the best. But you live in a time where no false hopes are left. I was a Christian, don't forget. (10)

This is, from a liberal point of view, a fairly neat political concept, but it is not authentic dialogue. These generalisations with their pseudo-profundity are stiff and unatural on the lips of the Coloured father. The story suffers because it is being used as a vehicle for propaganda and it is inevitable that the demands of the 'job that has to be done' will lead, at times, to distortion of character, dialogue and situation.

Contrasted with Stein's dramatic third person stories, are his quieter, more reflective, first person stories of recollection, like 'Autobiographical and conversational in

(9) Stein, Life for a Life, p. 90.

(10) Ibid., Life for a Life, p. 10.

tone, each deals with the case-history of a native youth, seen from the point of view of the reformatory principal. In The Divided House Paton tells the story of Jacky, who wanted to become a priest but could not resist the temptation to smoke dagga. Spike, in Death of a Tsotsi, is confronted with a choice between returning to the tsotsi gang or working honestly in a factory. In each case the reformatory youth is torn between good and evil, and in each case the ending is pessimistic. Jacky never succeeds in becoming a priest; Spike works hard to support his young wife, but is stabbed on his way home from work by the tsotsis.

The reformatory stories share the compassion of the dramatic stories, but lack their anger. The Paton who reveals so much of himself in these stories is patient and accepting. Evil is generally stronger than good; crime and corruption cannot be eradicated by idealism; all success must be weighed against much failure. "After all", says Paton, "one cannot remake the world".⁽¹¹⁾

The most significant feature of these stories is that their central character is not Jacky, or Spike, or Sponono, or En'penny, but Paton himself. Each story is a personal reminiscence. Each story is dominated by the rather self-conscious, dignified presence of Paton, the reformatory principal, at his desk with his filing cabinet beside him, indulging in professional musings. "Now take the case of Spike . . .," he is saying, and the result is that Spike remains merely a case, an illustration of a line of thought, and does not come to life.

The concluding paragraphs of these intensely personal

(11) Ibid., Death of a Tsotsi, p.64.

stories are especially significant as illustrations of their quality and intention. The conclusions of Ma'tenny, The Divided House, and of Death of a Tsotsi, quoted below, are generalisations curiously out of keeping with the spirit of the modern short story.

We were all of us, white and black, rich and poor, learned and untutored, bowed down by a knowledge that we lived in the shadow of a great danger, and were powerless against it. It was no place for a white person to pose in any mantle of power or authority; for this death gave the lie to both of them.

And this death would go on too, for nothing less than the reform of a society would bring it to an end. It was the menace of the socially frustrated, strangers to mercy, striking, like adders for the dark reasons of ancient minds, at any who crossed their paths'. (12)

This is the studied conclusion of an essay rather than a short story. (13) It is a statement of Taton's view of life, the view of the social worker, the saddened idealist, a generalisation conveyed without any attempt to incorporate it in the flow of the story. With such a conclusion, the story element tends to become little more than an illustration of an outlook, a means of moralising more effectively.

Just as excess emotion endangers his dramatic stories, so excess reflection endangers these. They are heavy with ideas, problems and story. The moral, almost judicial tone and comment, added to the excessive intellectual content, is a further cause of their affinity to the essay, rather than the short story.

It is clear that Taton's concern with such characters as sponsons, in the story of this name and Jacky, in The Divided House, is, to a large extent a moral one. Not only does he examine their actions and attitudes judicially, but he

(12) Ibid., Death of a Tsotsi, p.69.

(13) Montaigne's explanation of his essays, "It is myself I am painting", well applies to this group of stories.

examines himself equally critically. Sponono, particularly, is an admitted attempt at moral self-justification. Paton begins by blatantly stating that

"I feel I must put up some kind of defence against this indictment which questions qualities of my character of whose existence I have been moderately certain".(14)

The intellectual and moral issues considered in Sponono are those of forgiveness and punishment. Much of the story is dialogue between Paton and Sponono, a Xhosa youth in his reformatory. The rest is Paton's discussion and interpretative comment. Though the relationship between Paton and Sponono is often effectively and humorously presented by means of dialogue, the story is not primarily an exploration of character or a study of personality. It is Sponono's saintly and completely unrealistic moral code that interests and amuses Paton, the philosophy rather than the person, and the clash between this outlook and his own. (15)

Even in his dramatic stories Paton makes his presence felt. This is the essential difference between Paton's

(14) Ibid., Sponono, p.99.

Consider also Paton's personal moral involvement in Halfpenny, p.32.

"So she left for Bloemfontein, after her strange visit to a reformatory. And I was left too, with the resolve to be more prodigal in the task that the State, though not in so many words, had enjoined me".

(15) Paton represents the moral viewpoint that "you may forgive a person, and I may forgive him, but that does not mean that he should not bear the consequences of his act". Sponono believes that "if a person is forgiven, his offence is wiped out as though it had never been done", and, in spite of repeated offences, expects to be forgiven accordingly. (Sponono, p.109.)

Life for a Life and Hemingway's The Killers. Paton is obviously telling the story and his personality is an integral part of it. Hemingway's presence is imperceptible. His story moves entirely by means of dialogue and action. This is not to say that for this reason The Killers is a better story; it is merely that its technique is different. The touches of stage direction and insight into character which Paton supplies are very skilfully blended with the action. Nevertheless, Paton is present, while Hemingway is not. And Paton's presence becomes an important factor in each of his stories.

The following extract is a typical example of the way in which Paton participates in a dramatic third person story.

"The shepherd was suddenly filled with a new apprehension. Hobbertse was preparing some new blow. That was the kind of man he was, he hated to see any Coloured man holding his head up, he hated to see any Coloured man anywhere but on his knees or his stomach".(15)

This is clearly Paton's viewpoint, but it is carried across to the shepherd and slips into place as a natural development of Maarsman's "apprehension". Similarly, a long passionate discourse on the lot of the Coloured man, an expression of Paton's anger, is neatly merged into Sara's anger by the fact that it terminates with the sentence: "But the anger went from her suddenly, leaving her spent".(16)

Paton employs irony as a further means of conveying his attitude without obvious intrusion. It is a bitter, unsmiling irony, used to express contempt for white injustice and

(15) Ibid., Life for a Life, p.49.

(16) Ibid., Life for a Life, p.54.

hypocrisy. As Hendrik Baadjies brings the sympathy of the brown people to the bereaved Sara he twists his hat in his hands "almost as though she were a white woman".⁽¹⁸⁾

The police are apologetic. "Alas they could not give her her husband's body, it was buried already. Alas, she would know what it was like in the summer ..."⁽¹⁹⁾ Once again, however, the irony is as much Sara's interpretation of the official view as Paton's, and the angle of vision of the story is undisturbed.

In making a final analysis of Paton's short stories one is faced with a curious contrast between the emotional and dramatic stories on the one hand and the philosophical and reflective on the other. One is faced, too, by the remarkable extent to which Paton makes his personality and outlook a part of his stories, whether they are dramatic or reflective, and of the resulting danger of subjectivity in the form of excess feeling and excess thought. His reformatory stories are a blend of essay and story for this reason. In this free first person form Paton's intelligence and idealism too easily make the idea or the problem swamp the story, and it is clear that his contribution does not lie here. In the other group of stories, however, he has shown his ability, not to withdraw himself, but to intrude artistically; to harmonise his emotion, the emotion of his characters, and the tone and atmosphere of the story, and to enable his participation to sustain, not hinder, its dramatic movement. For Paton, with his idealism, compassion, and tendency to moralise, such an achievement has not been easy, but Life for a Life, in

(18) Ibid., Life for a Life, p.58.

(19) Ibid., Life for a Life, p.55.

particular, has shown that he does have the skill to express the mood of Cry, the Beloved Country in short story form.

More than this Paton cannot do, nor is he concerned to do more. His task, as he sees it, is "a painful laying bare of the truth", and his stark stories, like Cry, the Beloved Country, expose themselves to criticism on account of his limited vision of the truth. The danger is that his work will come to be regarded as a collection of period pieces, the writings of an angry idealist with a sympathy that though often deep was too narrow to permit a true perspective.

CHAPTER SIX.JACK COPE.

Like Alan Paton, Jack Cope may, with some justification, be regarded as a "racial writer". Ten of the thirteen stories in his collection, The Tame Ox, are concerned with race relations, and several other short stories as yet only in periodicals, such as The White Church,⁽¹⁾ The Man who Doubted⁽²⁾ and Women and Men,⁽³⁾ deal with racial themes. Like Paton, he regards race as the stuff of South African life and argues that to avoid race is to avoid life. Nevertheless, he is extremely critical of contemporary writers who capitalize upon the current demand for "racial" stories.

He resembles Paton in the further respect that he finds the material for his short stories in "pity-generating" situations. The futility and loneliness of A Crack in the Sky, the fear and hopelessness of The whole of Life and the uncomprehending pain of Say It with Flowers all reveal his tendency towards pathos. The situations which attract him as a short story writer are those which are able to involve him emotionally, and enable him, in turn, to evoke emotion. He shares the tendency with both Alan Paton and his close friend, Uys Krige, to regard emotional depth and literary quality as very closely related.

Cope's short stories differ from Paton's, however, in certain fundamental ways. Paton is a fighter for human rights, a man deeply involved in a political struggle, and his writing reveals the pain and anger of the combatant. Cope is far less partisan. Political issues do not preoccupy him as they

(1) Meanjin Quarterly 1: 1961. p.54.

(2) The London Magazine, Dec. 1961. p.12.

(3) Contrast, August, 1961. p.11.

do Paton. Cope would not make a character say

"I was brought up in a world where we always hoped for the best. But you live in a time when no false hopes are left. I was a Smuts man, don't forget".(4)

and endanger his story, as Paton does in Debbie Go Home, by allowing the political and social situation to so dominate his imagination that the human situation he chooses to reveal there appears contrived and unnatural. While Paton makes a direct frontal attack on the racial situation in his stories Cope avoids such a concentration, regarding the wider human situation as more valid literary material. He believes that race is to be treated only indirectly, as a factor of varying importance in the human situation.

While Paton concerns himself for the most part with portraying the clashes in South African society, Cope, more withdrawn from the political battlefield, sets himself the task of concentrating on sympathies. His own sympathetic and optimistic outlook is clearly revealed in the relationships of the characters he creates.

The Chancellor in The Tame Ox understands the mixture of pride and inferiority in Dr. Njilo and sympathizes;⁽⁵⁾ the tragedy of the Afrikaans boy in A Crack in the Sky produces a feeling of pity which draws families together;⁽⁶⁾ the efficient

(4) Alan Paton, Debbie Go Home, Jonathan Cape, 1961. p.19.

(5) Jack Cope, The Tame Ox, Heinemann, 1960. pp.21-22.

(6) Ibid., A Crack in the Sky, p.38.

"All of them, the two lonely families, trudged on again to the house. It was the kind of occasion, like a birth or a death or a christening, when barriers fall down imperceptibly and there is a subtle feeling of get-together".

impersonal doctor in The Whole of Life shows sympathy for the repulsive and depraved Mogamat;⁽⁷⁾ the African intellectual in The Little Missionary finally feels pity for his enemy, the Afrikaans girl;⁽⁸⁾ the hospital orderly in Say It With Flowers pities the Mosuto woman who has run away in order to die with her own people;⁽⁹⁾ and the crude native labourers show sympathy and give assistance to the white woman wandering through the forest in The Flight.⁽¹⁰⁾

The Flight is Cope's version of Nadine Gordimer's Is there Nowhere Else we can Meet? and these two stories well illustrate the difference in outlook between the two writers. To Miss Gordimer a meeting between a white woman and a native in a lonely place could have only one result - assault. In Cope's The Flight, the meeting produces sympathy and pity and a new understanding. Cope is as aware of the barrier of race as Miss Gordimer, but he feels that it is possible for pity to break this middle wall of partition, even after such a blaze of anger as that which forms the climax of The Little Missionary.

There is in Cope's stories a sense of sharing a common humanity, a quality of emotional understanding, present in the writing of Krige and Paton, but absent in that of Nadine Gordimer. In One and a Half Paul Moleng thinks nothing of interrupting his train journey to care for the pathetic Eva Lefela:

(7) Ibid., The Whole of Life, pp.81-82.

(8) Ibid., The Little Missionary, p.97.

"Benjamin Segode rushed from his place at the tree and stopped the children throwing wood chips. 'Hai!' he hissed at them furiously. 'What is this? Are you hooligans?'"

(9) Ibid., Say It with Flowers, p.105.

(10) Ibid., The Flight, p.200.

"Paul Moleng lifted her feet up and laid her on the bench. He took a blanket from his case and covered her with it. Yes, he too wondered how she had come to be there. The passenger list recorded her name as Eva Lefela and the police were holding her for child-murder. Others had also wanted to stay and help, but he had said: 'I know something of the law and I can watch over her. Not all of us can be her brother.'"(11)

Though "not all can be her brother", many are willing to be, and Cope's stories are crowded with these "brothers" who sympathise and help. In a similar way the hospital orderly in Say It with Flowers wins the confidence of the frightened and pain-racked Mosuto woman by revealing to her the nature of pity. "What is pity?" the woman asks. "It is that one knows another's suffering," the orderly replies.(12) The tone of sympathy and concern which flows through his stories reveals that Cope too "knows another's suffering", and is eager to assert that there is a place for optimism and understanding in a pessimistic and critical contemporary South African literature.

Cope is aware of the danger of the cliches of South African literature, more aware than Alan Paton, who is, in a sense, obsessed by what may be political realities, but have become literary cliches. Paton may state from time to time that the South African tragedy is a group tragedy, but he does not show it.(13) He has taken the one side so wholeheartedly that he cannot clearly see the other. Cope would not accept a character such as Paton's brutal policeman, Robbertse, but would regard him as an oversimplification, a conventional symbol of herrenvolkism to a liberal writer. He would regard Life for

(11) Ibid., One and a Half, p.53.

(12) Ibid., Say It with Flowers, p.105.

(13) Alan Paton, op.cit., Death of a Tsotsi, p.69.

a Life as one-sided, a short story written to illustrate a preconception. To Cope objectivity and width of outlook are extremely important, and his most significant contribution to the South African short story is the success with which he has presented a balanced interpretation of South African life. All literature involves a patterning or a simplification of life, but much of South African literature is over-simplification. In such stories as The Little Missionary, The Tame Ox and, to a certain extent, The White Church, Cope has escaped this tendency, and has produced stories reflecting the true complexity of the South African situation, or, more accurately, the complexity of human relationships within the South African setting.

The Little Missionary is regarded by Cope as his most satisfying story, and it is certainly one of his most objective.⁽¹⁴⁾ Its plot is a simple one. Benjamin Segode, an embittered young Basuto leader, visits a shanty village on the Cape Flats and is enraged to find a young Afrikaans girl conducting a Sunday School for the African children at the end of a woodcutter's yard. He berates the drowsy woodcutter and his washerwoman wife. He has "a heart of wood and a brain of wood," and she "soapy water in her veins".⁽¹⁵⁾ To Segode, the woodcutter is prepared to "sell his own flesh and blood for a morning on his back in the sun".⁽¹⁶⁾ Though Segode

(14) Uys Krige has described The Little Missionary as one of the most moving and objective of South African stories. Vide Proceedings of a Conference of Writers, Publishers, Editors and University Teachers of English, Johannesburg, 1956.

(15) Jack Cope, op.cit., The Little Missionary, p.88.

(16) Ibid., The Little Missionary, p.88.

is the son of a devout churchwarden and keeps a Deute Bible at the bottom of his tin box, he sees the Christianity of the white man as yet another means of oppression. He takes the Bible from the frightened African girl and says:

"Juffera in Africa, we black people know this book - do you understand? We have had it for more than a hundred years, two hundred. It is full of good, it is written in a way that the heart of a man understands. But I say we should put it away for a time. I mean that we do not accept it from you. Do you hear? We do not believe you, we do not trust you - you, little girl, and your dominion and your rich men and your soldiers and policemen. When we are equal and free we will take up the Bible again. Then we will be happy with it and no one will make us afraid. Is that understood?"(17)

A crowd gathers, and told to "vat jou boek en trek", Angelina On isoon runs blindly down a path into the bush. Eventually she stops. She is lost and the bush is dangerous. Besides, to run is to admit guilt. She retraces her steps to the nearby village, finding comfort and courage from the "thought of the little children she had come to teach and know".(18) Under the tree where she had held her Sunday School Bego is addressing the people. There is a hush as she approaches. She proceeds to complete her lesson, but now the children react to her appeal with jeers and by pelting her with chips of wood. Bego rushes to help her. "Hoi!" he blazes at them furiously. "What is this - are you mad?"(19) And the story ends with the static situation of the sobbing little missionary and the silent crowd.

Much of the value of the story lies in the fact that Gogo has used a simple and authentic plot to illumine not one but several aspects of the racial theme. The human and

(17) Ibid., The Little Missionary, p.92.

(18) Ibid., The Little Missionary, p.95.

(19) Ibid., The Little Missionary, p.97.

emotional situation is a complex one. The key figure is the idealist, Segede, the symbol of African nationalism, and it is mainly his outlook which provides the story with its point of view. He clashes first with his own tired and apathetic people, then with Angelina, who is both white and an ambassador of the white Church, and finally with the African children, his "own flesh and blood".⁽²⁰⁾ From being one to be driven away, the African girl becomes one to be protected, while the children who were to be protected from slavery,⁽²¹⁾ become "soldiers".⁽²²⁾ Segede's anger and sense of injustice become pity and shame; Angelina's faith becomes the pain of disillusionment. The position is no longer the simple one of white oppressor and black oppressed, the oppressor, Segede's "flesh and blood" or the Sunday School teachers' "little children" whom she had come to teach and love,⁽²³⁾ have become the oppressors. All are guilty; all are hurt; and all are involved. The tragedy of The Little Missionary is a group tragedy.

In The Little Church Segede conveys a similar complexity of situation and group responsibility. Both stories end with a blend of anger and pity. Though Segede is drawn to the assistance of the white girl, his sympathy and her tears constitute an admission of the immensity of the problem they share. Similarly, the priest in The Little Church who judges the white father of an illegitimate coloured child morally,

(20) Ibid., The Little Missionary, p. 90.

(21) Ibid., The Little Missionary, p. 92.

(22) Ibid., The Little Missionary, p. 97.

(23) Ibid., The Little Missionary, p. 95.

"and finds him a pretty bloody rotter",⁽²⁴⁾ comes to accept that there is neither a simple judgement of nor a simple solution to the tragedy caused by the racial situation.

Although Cope often achieves his aim of avoiding the racial clichés which are so much a part of South African literature, he is guilty of clichés of a different nature. The wide sympathy which produces his awareness of complexity often develops into sentimentality, and his stories suffer from emotional conventionality.

In his effort to concentrate upon the sympathies within the racial situation, rather than the clashes, he inevitably tends to produce varying degrees of sentimental falsification. The conclusions of several stories suggest a preconceived warmth; they are contrived, satisfied endings, in which the clashes have dissolved into sympathy and understanding.

Say It with Flowers, for example, the story of an African woman who, feeling that she is soon to die, flees from a strange city hospital, ends with the paragraph:

"For all the pain and the weight on her heart, he had given her hope, and with it, fear. She whispered to herself: 'I want to live like the others, I want to live, but I am afraid.'

'Let me help you, ausei'.

'How can you help me?' She knew that he could, though it needed every last drop she had left from the great river which gave her life to force herself back. And now she had chosen, she stood a little longer, then turned to go with him."⁽²⁵⁾

The sentiment is false and strained. Cope has marred his story with a conventionally comforting ending.

Emotional conventionality reveals itself technically in the form of clichés. Cope is at his worst in sentences such as these:

(24) Meanjin Quarterly 1: 1961. p.63.

(25) Jack Cope, op.cit., Say It with Flowers, p.105.

"The wound they made was deep in her breast". (26)

"She stood in the doorway, her heart bursting, and her tears came in a rush". (27)

"But there was a strange quiet acceptance far down in her soul". (28)

The sentiment is immature, the language flaccid. These are hackneyed and hence, for serious purposes, inexpressive emotional phrases, possessing the 'breasts' 'tears' 'hearts' and 'souls' so at home in women's magazines because of their pseudo-depth and sentimental evocations. Even in the effective The Little Missionary, Cope cannot resist the temptation to see Angelina's grief in terms of the tears running down her "small" face, (29) thus allowing a cliché to taint a potentially moving climax with a cloying sentimentality.

An aspect of Cope's frequent failure to handle emotion with precision and delicacy is his tendency to overstate, his frequent "telling", instead of "showing" or implying. The short story form cannot tolerate tedious elaboration or explanation; its language must be terse and suggestive. Cope's is, however, often too explicit. In A Crack in the Sky for example, the movement of the story is held up by over three pages of tedious background description, while in several other stories he underestimates the awareness of his reader by carefully explaining the obvious:

"She was killing herself. Unless he brought her back with her own consent and till she would die". (30)

"They loved their little teacher and were troubled and a little panic-stricken at the manner and tone of the powerful secretary". (31)

Then Cope is at pains to explain what he regards as a more than

(26) Ibid., The Little Missionary, pp.96-97.

(27) Ibid., Escape from Love, p.147.

(28) Ibid., Escape from Love, p.149.

(29) Ibid., The Little Missionary, p.97.

(30) Ibid., Met It with Flowers, p.104.

(31) Ibid., The Little Missionary, p.91.

normally complex emotional situation his overstatement verges on verbosity. The striving for effect of the following paragraph, its vain attempt to make a situation convincing by describing it with apparent intensity of feeling and weight of words is reminiscent of the habitual style of a South African short story writer of the 1890s, William Charles Scully. (52)

"In the hidden core of her heart was an awareness that she was facing not Dismata the witch-doctor nor Franz's shock and his will to recover the lost sheep. Her instinct went at once to the centre and saw the man in his rising against her - not even against her, but against absorption, domination by her sex. Against love. It took a great heart to endure love and a great spirit to be free. Against the fear of the darkening of his life Franz was groping not into light but into a hell, back into the nightmare of her people, the terror that crept in the small hours of the night when life was weakest and the soul grew small on its lonely flight". (33)

"The hidden core of her heart", "the darkening of his life" and "the soul grew small on its lonely flight" are metaphorically stale and ineffectual. That the emotion of the passage is both excessive and affected is revealed not only by such pompous clichés, but by the strained and melodramatic intensity of the language: "absorption", "domination", "spirit", "soul", "love", "nightmare". This striving to convince simply indicates the intellectual and emotional captivity of the passage. Cope is not clear as to what he wishes to say; he is groping, inventing, falling back on a weight of words to compensate for a lack of meaning. The spate of abstract nouns is a sound indication of the vagueness and bluster of the passage.

Cope's tendency to overstate and supply explanatory padding has a further result. It affects the point of view

(32) William Charles Scully, *The White Heavens*, Methuen, 1897.

(33) Jack Cope, op.cit., *Escape from Love*, p.137.

or angle of his stories. While Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing, and Krige make effective use of the first person angle, Cope never uses it. He is always omniscient, slightly withdrawn and watching the story as a whole. Omniscience is dangerous in that it can lead to intrusion by the author and hence disunity, as in certain of Nadine Gordimer's stories. Applied to the short story form, it requires most careful handling. If the writer begins with "I" he is at an immediate advantage. He knows that the "I" will provide a great deal of the unity essential to a short story, and that the strength of personality of the first person may compensate for careless digressions. This is not the case when the writer begins with "he". The writer who uses the third person angle cannot impose upon his story the unity of his own personality or that of the character he has created to tell the story, such as Oom Schalk in Bosman's Mafeking Road. He has to achieve the unity in another way, by aligning himself with one character or, in the words of Sean O'Faolain, "making the entire story pass through the mind of one character".⁽³⁴⁾ The writer cannot except in rare cases where there are other strong unifying factors (notably O'Connor's In the Train), jump from character to character, from point of view to point of view, without marring that unity so essential in a short story. And it is here that another of Cope's weaknesses lies. He is often too self-consciously omniscient in his use of the third person angle, and does not align himself with a central character. In The Whole of Life, for example, the angle shifts from one character to another, and unity and totality of effect are marred. There are no less than seven points of view in this short story, those of Mogamat, the old woman, Nurse

(34) Sean O'Faolain, op.cit., p.181.

Jolivet, the constable, Dr. Bergson, Mrs. Paulse, and Julyga. (35)

The Tame Ox, The Flight and Lower (36) are among Cope's best short stories partly because they possess strong central characters and therefore offer Cope neither the opportunity nor the temptation to shift the point of view by explaining the emotional or mental states of other characters. The Tame Ox is dominated by Dr. Njilo, The Flight by Johanna, and Lower by the schoolboy, Andre. They provide unity of angle.

(35)

- (1) "Mogamat had no qualms resting there on the death coffer".
The Tame Ox, The Whole of Life, p.70.
- (ii) "The old women then thought of the dreary night outside and drew their shawls closer round themselves. They were secretly excited and each of them had a sweet and prickling pain in her heart". (p.70)
- (iii) "Nurse Jolivet looked down at her with eyelids half closed, and with a slight shrug she bent to tuck her arms under the blanket. She could not stop to think of the awful purpose behind each life. And having so much faith and so little power, she would never understand the part God permitted her to play in the everlasting swing between living and dying". (p.71)
- (iv) "One of the younger constables clipped and unclipped his revolver nervously. He was anxious to go and began moving towards the door". (p.81).
- (v) "It seemed to Dr. Bergson that something extraordinary was happening. It did not concern him - that was his motto in the silent war of the slums. It did not concern him. And here he was, vitally interested". (p.81)
- (vi) "Mrs. Paulse flung her apron over her head. An inexpressible gladness crept through her breast and she could not move or speak or weep". (p.83)
- (vii) "When Julyga awoke the four women smiled as they put the little boy in her arms. She knew them. They told her, but it mattered nothing that it was not a girl as she had wished. She knew he was alive because she felt him stirring strongly against her. He was alive, the world had waited and suffered for his coming. He seemed to be the whole of life". (p.83)

(36) The Cape Argus, July 5, 1960.

The fact that The Little Missionary does not adhere rigidly to this unity of angle does not, however, detract from its effectiveness. Were the change of point of view from one character to another is justified. It is, in fact, essential. Two factors justify this.

Firstly, the story is a study of a clash between two personalities and two points of view, and secondly, both angles are not employed when the central characters are together. The Little Missionary is told from the point of view of Angelina only when Benjamin Segode is not present. When they are together Cope allows the mind of Segode to dominate the situation. Even in this story, however, Cope cannot resist introducing a false note in the form of a brief, new point of view which, besides affecting the unity of angle, is unnecessary and has been quoted as an example of pure overstatement. The children's feelings are obvious, but even if it were necessary to express them, this should have been done from the point of view of the secretary, Segode, and not by introducing a new consciousness, even if it is only for a moment.

"He turned to the children. 'Do you like sweets on a Sunday morning?' They did not answer but lowered their big wondering eyes to avoid his sneering look. They loved their little teacher and were troubled and a little panic-stricken at the manner and tone of the powerful secretary".(37)

H.E. Bates has said that there are two things a short story cannot tolerate: "a weight of words" and "a weight of moral teaching".(38) Cope's overstatement and intrusion result, at times, in nothing less than "a weight of words".

(37) Jack Cope, op.cit., The Little Missionary, p.91.

(38) H.E. Bates, op.cit., p.37.

Certain of his stories suffer from a degree of heaviness and lifelessness. His language needs to be more disciplined, stripped of inessentials, and made vivid and suggestive. The vagueness, ineffectualness and consequent dullness which result from stereotyped expressions are his greatest enemies. His explanations, instead of producing the desired clarity in the mind of the reader, have precisely the opposite effect. The tone of the author, the feelings of the characters, the atmosphere of the story are not communicated as they cannot penetrate the word-heavy curtain of explanation.

When Cope is content simply to tell his story, preserve unity of angle and confine himself to concrete description he is much more successful. His account of the death of the yellow cobra in A Crack in the Sky is swift, vivid and effective.

"It ducked suddenly as if in a feint and uncoiled quick as a whip, straight for Nico to attack him. A swing took it out of line with the boy and the instant it raised its head again to get him in sight, Nico fired".(39)

Cope's language is ideally suited to the situation. His short, sharp words convey both speed and urgency, and the terse colloquial expressions, "ducked", "quick as a whip", and "the instant", give the directness and immediacy of a commentary. The rhythms of the passage are equally effective. The key words in the first sentence, "ducked" and "uncoiled", are followed by the swift succession of monosyllables in "as if in a feint" and "quick as a whip". In addition, the first twelve words in the second sentence are monosyllables,

and the resulting rhythm is extremely light and swift. Not one word is wasted. The purpose of the passage is to convey speed and movement, and every image is one of swift, muscular action: "ducked", "uncoiled", "swing", "raised", "fired". The precision of these words and the fact that they follow in such close succession convey exactly the complexity of movement involved in the situation. Here Gope has allowed the action to speak for itself. He has used words sparingly and precisely and has made them work, instead of bolstering them by means of deadening explanation and qualification.

At present Gope is technically inconsistent. The White Church, published in 1961, reveals experimentation with a diction which is more compressed and suggestive.

"Bitter iron-blue sea"⁽⁴⁰⁾ is an effective impressionistic image, which by blending the senses of taste, touch and sight, and conveying overtones of coldness, harshness and cruelty, does much to provide an appropriate emotional and physical setting for the action which follows. In the same story, however, such phrases as

"world reeling under his drunken feet"

and

"shuddering with the pain of revelation"⁽⁴¹⁾

reveal that there has been no improvement upon the extravagant and ineffectual clichés of the earlier "Escape from Love". Success and failure side by side in The White Church clearly reveal what Gope can and cannot do. He has the ability to convey the concrete widely, to create an immediacy, an

(40) Meanjin Quarterly 1: 1961. p.55.

(41) Ibid., p.55.

illusion of place and action, but he is not as successful in his attempts to convey emotional states.

The Tame Ox is a striking exception to this rule. It is free from emotional conventionality mainly because it is free from excessive sympathy, or rather from such situations as demand a respectable quota of sympathy from so human a writer as Cope. The dominant emotion is one of humour, a warm, amused acceptance, which provides no opportunity for indulgence in the clichés of sympathy.

Though Cope shows some inconsistency too in his use of dialogue, his ear is generally good, and he can provide far more insight into an emotional situation by a line of dialogue than by some sentimental simile. The apparently casual words of the Coloured women at the graveside in The White Church are particularly effective. Muriel, a Coloured girl, is being buried in a pauper's grave, and, feeling guilty and ashamed, her sister, Rose, who has passed for White and has married a Government official, attends the burial service. The old Coloured women stare at Rose in her expensive clothes until she turns on them almost hysterically.

"We wasn't staring, merrem," (42)

is all they say. Not only is the language grammatically and orally authentic, but the innocent, insolent denial and the cruel irony of the usually respectful "madam" show both their contempt of her and at the same time their acceptance of the fact that her 'try for White' has been successful.

At the end of The White Church Cope attempts to use dialogue, charged with dramatic irony, to achieve a similar effect. Bond is leaving the church, the dead Coloured girl who years before

(42) Ibid., p.59.

dwellers and Coloured fishermen, English-speaking Europeans and Afrikaans-speaking Europeans, farmers and doctors. Krige's stories, in addition to their preoccupation with death, are limited in subject to the war and childhood. Cope's stories have no such limitations and range freely from racial group to racial group and situation to situation. Paton has little sympathy to spare for the white man, and Nadine Gordimer has none at all. Cope sympathises with and accepts all, finding in the diverse sections of the country the unity of a common humanity, a humanity which reveals itself in response to human need.

Allied to this breadth of outlook is Cope's objectivity and balance, and his dislike of political or social "slants" in fiction. There is no villain in The Little Missionary nor, in fact, in any of Cope's stories. Segode and Angelina are involved in a situation; neither is responsible for it.

Cope is very conscious of South African attitudes and points of view, and of their subtle warping and distorting effect on literature. It is this very alertness which enables him to preserve his perspective. He narrates The Tame Ox with an urbane sense of balance, observing not only Dr. Njilo, the Tame Ox, with detachment, but also several other characters representing divergent outlooks. Dr. Njilo, the principal of a native college, is about to receive an honorary degree. Made confident by the Kaffir beer given to him by admirers before the ceremony and roused by the chanting of his people, he leaps down from the platform and hurls himself into the giya, a strenuous Zulu dance. The various reactions of the onlookers well reveal Cope's awareness of, and hence his ability to avoid, stock points of view regarding the African.

"The Bishop sat still, a withered smile on his kindly, intelligent face. The Commandant of Police was enjoying it in his own way. How right I am about these black devils, he thought. Miss Poynton looked like a guinea-fowl shot on the wing; she was rapidly coming to earth, her eyes stared before her in a piteous, dying expression. Her ideal of progress seemed in ruins, the feet of the idol crumbling away. Behind the platform Reverend Charles Gumede stood with closed eyes and his lips moved as if in prayer.

The Chancellor rose and advanced slowly to the front of the platform. His blue eyes sparkled; he was amazed but full of admiration. An old warrior chanted wildly: 'They say he is a tame ox. There he is, hau! hau! hau! a blackemane lion among the herds!'"(44)

In spite of a number of optimistically contrived endings, there is in Cope's work a certain realism. He is more fully in touch with his country than most South African writers, and speaks Zulu fluently. This fact is important at a time when all write about the African but few know either him or his language. The situations and problems in his most important stories are typical, not contrived. He examines, for example, the tension between the educated and the primitive African, between the African who supports the establishment, "the tame ox", and the one who distrusts it; the poor white conditions on the drought-stricken farms; the squalid conditions in the towns; the despair of the raw native forced to enter the city; and the difficulty of contact and co-operation between White and Black. Cope's preference for a sound factual basis for his stories is well illustrated in Power, which is actually based on a newspaper report. He has said that every short story he has written has, to a greater or lesser extent, a factual basis. His realistic outlook is best seen in his rejection of easy solutions to racial problems in such stories as The Little Missionary, The White Church, and Women and Men. In each story the stage of idealism, the stage of simplification, does not last. Segode in

The Little Missionary realises that what he hates in the White man is in his own people too; the priest in The White Church hates the situation which views crossing the colour bar as more serious than disowning a child, despises the man who subscribes to it, but cannot but accept it; and the farmer's wife in Women and Men comes to realise that "men are not more free than their passions", (45) when her African farm labourers reject her scheme to lift them out of their wretchedness.

It is these three qualities - width of outlook, objectivity, and realism - which mark Cope's contribution to the South African short story though, in his attempts to compensate for the liberal distortion, he has at times erred in the direction of an equally distorted warmth of sentiment.

(45) *Contrast*, Autumn, 1961, p.25.

CHAPTER SEVEN.UYS KRIGE.

Uys Krige's short stories reveal a motive different from that of his contemporaries. In his foreword to his autobiographical novel, The Way Out, he writes: "This is a book which I had on my conscience - on my conscience as a human being and not as a literary craftsman."⁽¹⁾ In The Charcoal Burners, the narrator, an ex-prisoner of war, says of his story, "It's time, I think, I got it off my chest".⁽²⁾ In Two Daumiers, the war-correspondent says of the after-battle scene, "The only way to get rid of that scene is to write it down".⁽³⁾ In all Krige's serious stories there is this element of compulsion, of "getting off his chest" something real and personal. His motive is emotional rather than intellectual. Compared with that of the critical, aloof and intellectual Nadine Gordimer, Krige's response to life is an extremely simple one. Throughout his stories there is a humanity, a sympathy and a feeling for people which links his work with that of Cope and Paton. There is in Krige, as there was in his friend Roy Campbell, a great love of life, of simple things and simple people, and it is this sympathetic response to life which causes this need in him to "get rid of that scene by writing it down". For the scenes which call out to him for expression are scenes of suffering and death, the contrast and the denial of his optimistic idealism and love of life. Each story becomes a means of justifying his faith that life is good, that men are brothers, and that "God's in His heaven, all's right with the world". No short story

(1) Uys Krige, The Way Out, Unie-Volkspers, 1946. Foreword.

(2) Uys Krige, The Dream and the Desert, Collins, 1953.
The Charcoal Burners, p.155.

(3) Ibid., Two Daumiers, p.129.

writer is more involved in his stories. Each is, in fact, a problem of faith, a problem which arises when a simple idealism is disturbed by an unusual sensitivity to suffering and death.

Krige's stories are personal not only in the sense that they involve problems which affect him deeply, but also because they are to a large extent autobiographical. Of the eight stories in his collection, The Dream and the Desert, four are about the Second World War and two are about an Afrikaner boy. Jannie, the Afrikaner boy in The Dream, is very interested in rugby and plays well. So did Krige. Jannie's father is a great rugby player and his name is Japie. Uys Krige's own father was the famous rugby player, Japie Krige. In both Death of the Zulu and Two Daughters, South African soldiers are captured in North Africa. Krige himself was a prisoner of war. In The Charcoal Burners a South African escapes into the mountains and is assisted in his escape by Italian peasants. This was precisely Krige's experience, as related in The Way Out. This autobiographical quality extends even to small details. Krige was captured while taking shelter in a bomb crater. Mostert and Johnstone in Two Daughters are also hiding in a bomb crater when they are captured. His characters tend to be projections of himself, and his stories are generally in the first person. He, wisely, does not attempt the third person angle which requires an objectivity and perspective of which he would be incapable. It is significant that it is only in his fairy stories that he achieves such objectivity. This is because delightfully told fantasies such as The Invisible Shepherd and La Misericordia are completely unrelated to his own experience, and present no temptation to intrude.

As has been indicated, of his six serious stories in

had been his mistress, and his dark-skinned illegitimate son, who has no idea that the White man who has been present at his mother's funeral is his father. As Bond is starting his car the boy runs up with his hat, saying:

"You left this behind, master". (43)

The obviousness of the ambiguity - he has left the boy behind too - does not detract from the force of the word "master". This word, the word of any Coloured boy to a White man, used here by a son to his father, reveals the pain and shame of Bond's position with an impact that could not be achieved by laboured explanation.

Viewed as a group, Cope's stories vary a great deal in quality. Such stories as The Little Missionary and The Tame Ox, are far superior to No Tea for the Mensahib and Escape from Love, which appear in the same volume. While The Tame Ox, for example, pursues a realistic theme which is intellectually and emotionally grasped by the author and conveys insight into human relationships, No Tea for the Mensahib, with its context of mental abnormality, murder and Ambrose Bierce humour, is pure sensationalism.

The inconsistencies should not, however, obscure the importance of Cope's contribution to the South African short story. His work reveals an unusual breadth of outlook, and this has not been an easy achievement. His understanding and acceptance include all groups and all people, and he is, in this sense, fully South African. He deals sympathetically with educated Africans and primitive Africans, Coloured slum-

(43) Ibid., p.64.

The Dream and the Desert, two deal with childhood, and four with war. All six, however, deal with death and suffering. Jannie, the young Afrikaans boy in The Dream, is obsessed with the death of his newborn brother, Kleinboet. The Afrikaans lad in The Coffin tells of the cheerful suffering and eventual death of his "Great Oupa". In Death of the Zulu, a mortally wounded Zulu soldier pleads with a South African comrade to shoot him and end his agony. In Two Daumiers, two South African war correspondents are faced with death in three forms: the graves of three young South Africans, the remains of Italians in their shattered and burnt-out tanks, and a dead Basuto with a rifle held proudly in his hand. In The Charcoal Burners, death comes as an ironical sequel to a successful escape, when the Italian peasant family who have saved the South African are finally shot by the Black Shirts. The Christmas Box has as its theme suffering, rather than death, within the setting of a plastic surgery ward of a military hospital.

This preoccupation with death is significant enough, but it is linked with a fact of further significance. In each story there is a character reacting to the experience of death, a character remarkably like Krige himself. And it is this reaction which is more significant than the form of death which motivates it. In each story the fact of death asserts itself in defiance of what is to Krige a beautiful world. In each story either an Afrikaans boy or a South African soldier faces this experience and struggles to maintain his faith. It is the poet in Krige which is sensitive to suffering and the ugliness of war and death, and the idealist in Krige which refuses to become cynical and nihilistic. His characters are always sensitive, always human, always capable of this realisation of suffering and death, in fact always poets thrown into the chaos of war and forced either to make meaning or

accept the madness. Each story is a gradual moving towards an acceptance of suffering and death.

The first stage in this movement is often apathy, as in Death of the Zulu where the captured South African soldier has become numb and callous:

"There were bodies lying beside the road, some singly, some in batches. Dead or wounded, I didn't look, I wasn't interested. My eyes slid over them as if they were so many pieces of old motor junk scattered about a disused yard somewhere".(4)

The Christmas Box begins with the same apathy. Krige simply wants to avoid any response to or personal involvement in the suffering of the mutilated soldiers in the plastic surgery ward. The mood is escapism, an unwillingness to expose himself to the necessary of sharing the pain and the fear. He desires merely to be "a lizard in the sun", or "an old crab, motionless on a dry beach somewhere out of reach of the tide".(5)

In certain stories, however, the first stage in the reaction to death is not apathy but its contrast, a terrifying involvement. Jannie, the Afrikaner boy in The Dream, for example, realises in a moment of terror in a dream the significance of death. The death of his brother, Kleinboet, becomes merged with the death of his grandfather and the drowning of his aunt and cousins, until it is not just the death of Kleinboet which torments him, but death itself. In his dream

"Jannie was in the middle of the pool, he stood close to the swaying bodies, saw that the fourth body was Kleinboet and felt, for the first time,

(4) Ibid., Death of the Zulu, p.96.

(5) Ibid., The Christmas Box, p.192.

a stillness, the stillness of the pool, the stillness of the pine trees, of Oupa's open grave

Kleinboet had turned and on his bare back, close to his short little neck, Jannie saw a big red crab with its two protruding eyes staring malignantly at him and its claws stuck deep into Kleinboet's soft flesh".⁽⁶⁾

For Jannie, as for Krige, the crab, a scavenger with its claws embedded in the flesh of a baby, is the symbol of all that is repulsive, corrosive and 'malignant' in death. For both, the horror of the juxtaposition of the baby and the crab, the soft flesh and the horny claws, the pure and the corrupt, the living and the dead, is unbearable. Jannie's zest for life is stifled, for ultimately there is nothing but "the stillness of the pool" and the waiting crab. Death has become the reality, not life.

At Kleinboet's funeral Jannie again "sees the skull beneath the skin".⁽⁷⁾ Into his peaceful vision of "Oupa and Kleinboet together in that small coffin, Kleinboet lying on Oupa's chest, his tiny head resting in Oupa's long white beard," springs "the red crab of his nightmare. Then the old stillness had leapt from the grave, that nameless horror was again upon him".⁽⁸⁾

This stage of apathy or of terror does not continue, however. It is seldom the final note, for Krige is basically an idealist. Nadine Gordimer is content to expose the wound; Krige, having exposed it, proceeds to cover it up and heal it. Life is good and meaningful, and Jannie and his adult counterpart, the South African soldier, must see this. The Christmas Box, which begins with apathy and spiritual death,

(6) Ibid., The Dream, p.69.

(7) T.S. Eliot, Selected Poems, Penguin, 1952.
Whispers of Immortality, p.40.

(8) Uys Krige, The Dream and the Desert, The Dream, p.78.

ends triumphantly:

"And suddenly my spirit soared and I knew a joy that I had not experienced in years".(9)

Even Jannie's terrible dream, his vision of the awfulness of death, is not allowed to remain the final comment on life. Jannie's awareness of the meaning of death loses its poignancy, for he is young, life is sweet, and he is determined to live it to the full. Terror becomes sorrow "for all those who would never again walk about in the sun".(10) Sorrow for the dead becomes a sorrow for the living too, for all men, for himself, until out of this cathartic experience "as if it had come from a long way off and had taken a long time to reach him, there was a great peace in him".(11) Having accepted death, he plunges back into life, hurtling down the hillside on his bicycle, reasserting the validity of the physical. Speed, exhilaration, and vitality once again become realities, and Krige leaves Jannie with thoughts not of the crab of death or the pool of silence, but of custard and rugby.(12)

If Krige is obsessed with death, he is more obsessed with life. His optimism, his idealism, his love of life and beauty,

(9) Ibid., The Christmas Box, p.200. Compare the Wordsworthian mysticism of the climax of The Charcoal Burners, p.167. Both passages convey an ecstatic joy of living.

o "but suddenly my life made some sense, it was a whole - I was one with man, nature, the seasons, as intrinsically part of all things created as that wind outside, this towering mountain. Then everything seemed to come to a sharp, exquisite point in me and there were tears running down my face, warm tears of a joy I had never felt before".

(10) Ibid., The Dream, p.93.

(11) Ibid., The Dream, p.93.

(12) Ibid., The Dream, p.94.

"Bending low over the handlebars he pedalled furiously in order to dive into the dip this side of the bridge at his highest possible speed. As he rose out of the dip like a swallow, the breeze smacked him full in the face, there was a surge of joy within him and his exhilaration seemed to take him by the throat. There would be custard for lunch, Mother had said, lots of custard, they'd have two helpings each, and what a match it would be this afternoon, what a match!"

and his lack of realism, have caused him to be considered a romantic.⁽¹³⁾ His tendency to romanticise can best be seen in characterisation. It is significant that the most idealistically portrayed characters, the dying Zulu in Death of the Zulu, and Pietro and Mariana, in The Charcoal Burners, are those who have been created to die.

This is the South African soldier's impression of Pietro, the young Italian who guides him to safety:

"The young man - with a stag slung over his right shoulder, its antlers almost touching his knee - was colossal, at least six-foot-three, with leonine head and a chest like the shield of Aeneas. He seemed to block the entrance, to be towering above his father, the girl beside him, myself, the whole cave. He seemed even to have completely shut out the night that - loud with wind and the clash of boughs - had until now been so much part of the cave.

His thick curly hair was as blond as his father's was dark, his eyes a deep blue. But what was his most arresting feature, was his face. It had the bold simple outlines of sculpture, its expression composed, almost grave".⁽¹⁴⁾

This is a Greek god, not an Italian peasant, a statue not a person. Krige has produced a figure as unrealistic and extravagant as a primitive epic hero, with his immense size, strength and beauty. The shouldered stag and the cave dwelling suggest both his power and mastery over the beasts and his primitive closeness to nature. Krige's similes are classical and heroic in their connotations. "Like the shield of Aeneas" conveys not only the size and strength of Pietro's chest but endows him with the glory and epic heroism of Aeneas or Ulysses. His face with its "outlines of sculpture" carries the similarly idealised connotations of a Greek god, which reinforce the regal associations of "leonine" head. Even the word "colossal" has a classical derivation and adds

(13) F.V. Lategan, Die Kortverhaal en Sy Ontwikkeling in Afrikaans, p.167.

(14) Uys Krige, The Dream and the Desert, The Charcoal Burners, p.162.

to the total impression of romantic distance and unreality. Captured by his vision of incarnate power and beauty, Krige has allowed Pietro to become the symbol of an immense life force, and his tone has become one of admiration, awe and homage.⁽¹⁵⁾ The atmosphere of romance and unreality affects the setting and is reflected in the night "loud with wind" and the "clash of boughs". Not only do these phrases verge on pathetic fallacy, suggesting, as they do, that the elements too are wild and powerful and Pietro is part of them, but they possess an excessive grandeur. They are romantic clichés; their diction and structure is archaic and affected, adding to the mood of unreality.

In The Charcoal Burners Krige indulges his romanticism at the expense of his story. Not only are characters unrealistic, but a note of affectation and sentimentality intrudes into descriptive passages, such as the following:

"Once Pietro stood just outside the mouth of the cave, shouting into the night. What he was shouting I could not hear, but it sounded wild and exultant - in complete contrast to the sweet sad song he had just sung with Mariana - like some elemental cry of joy at the strength within him and the savage grandeur of the night".⁽¹⁶⁾

There is a note of idealistic conventionality about it all. His emotive language is particularly vague and ineffectual and the passage is entirely lacking in concrete imagery. Krige can generally handle emotion, and the sentimentality and extravagance displayed in such verbose clichés as "elemental cry of joy" and "savage grandeur of the night" reveal how seriously his romanticism can mar his stories if

(15) He shares this tone and tendency with his friend, Roy Campbell. See such poems as Horses of the Camargue, Tristan da Cunha, To a Pet Cobra, The Albatross.

(16) Uys Krige, The Dream and the Desert, The Charcoal Burners, p.166.

it is not handled with caution and restraint.

Because Krige's stories explore the minds of simple, unintellectual men faced with elemental problems of war and death, and on account of their underlying optimism, they may appear to lack that element of critical awareness which is present in so many South African short stories. He is certainly not a critic in the sense that Nadine Gordimer is. Krige never merely exposes and ridicules, but it is not correct to say that his idealism and optimism prevent his stories from having any element of criticism. It is clear, for example, that he shared the feeling of fellow soldiers that it was a disgrace that Africans should be asked to fight, but were not to be trusted with rifles. Mostert and Johnstone in Two Daumiers have just left a Basuto who asks them when he will be given a rifle.

"It makes me sick," said Mostert angrily, 'when I think of those smug mamparas sitting there in Parliament six thousand miles away from the nearest bullet, making a decision like that! I'd like to see the whole bang shoot of them flapping around here amongst the Stukas and Mark Fours without a rifle between the lot of them.'"(17)

"What in the hell's he going to fight for anyway? The Pass Laws?"

'Of course - and for the privilege of paying his poll-tax', said Johnstone with, for the first time, a note of anger in his voice".(18)

Such criticism is blunt and practical, and very different from the subtle and often ironical suggestions of Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing. Nadine Gordimer, particularly, has a natural tendency towards didacticism; Krige has not. His writing is more lyrical and emotional, and when he finds criticism such as this necessary, it appears contrived and

(17) Ibid., Two Daumiers, p.119.

(18) Ibid., Two Daumiers, p.136.

overstated. It is frank and functional, rather than a homogeneous part of his story.

War itself is never romanticised, and Krige is harsh in his criticism of war and the glorifying of war. Here too, his direct criticism is not effective; it is too self-consciously didactic. (19)

What saves Krige from depression is the fact that he can see life as a whole. Although he is so much a participator in his stories he is in this sense objective. He can link suffering in a military hospital with a flowering cyclamen on the window sill, a young boy's realisation of death with rugby and custard for lunch. It is this sense of balance, this consciousness of the wholeness of life, that preserves him from Pauline Smith's unrelieved tone of suffering and tragedy, and Nadine Gordimer's critical aloofness, and invests his work with a humour totally lacking in these writers. Krige is fond of linking life and death, ugliness and beauty, war and peace,

(19) Ibid., Two Daumiers, p.126. Krige causes a war correspondent to find a picture of Mussolini among the after-battle wreckage, and makes this the basis of his "direct criticism".

'Look at him ...' Mostert muttered, his voice rising. 'Just look at him, grootbek Caesar!' 'The old bullfrog of the Pontine marshes', Johnstone said quietly. 'Blowing himself up like that and he blew up fifty million of his own people with him. Where was his Roman intelligence?'

'Obbedire, Combattere, Vincere, Musso's favourite slogan! For twenty years he's been dinning it into the ears of the Italians. They obeyed and they fought' - Mostert was pointing at the tank - 'whom did they conquer?'

Bending down, Mostert had picked up the photograph and was looking at it more closely. 'Glorifying war, loving it, lapping it up', he said in a slow almost flat voice, 'you stupid bastard, you stupid bloody old bastard!' And tearing up the photograph, he threw the pieces on to the ground".

laughter and tears, the sublime and the ridiculous. The hymn, "Rest, My Soul, Thy God is King", for example, sung at the funeral of old Mieta in The Coffin, must be linked with "those blasted pests", and Great Oupa is quite unaware of the incongruity of the situation.

"Great Oupa beckoned Adoons with the whip to come and resume his office in the ceremony. Against the ridge above the drif he conducted the service, together the three of them sang, 'Rest, my Soul, Thy God is King', each dropped a handful of red earth upon the coffin, Adoons filled up the open grave with a spade Oom Nie had placed in the wagon for the purpose, and Great Oupa, seeing a couple of hawks circling high above his head, marched off to fetch his gun and fix those blasted pests that were always gobbling up great Ouma's eggs".(20)

Similarly, the death of Oupa is immediately followed by the birth of his "twentieth great-grandchild".(21) Life must have the final word, not death. As Great Oupa says to Francina, "Don't cry any more my child. Life is much too precious for you to mourn over someone's death. Life goes on".(22)

The simultaneous awareness of life and death, laughter and tears, is maintained throughout The Coffin. Great Oupa's coffin, which nestles between apples and tobacco in the loft, is normally used as a storing place for "dried fruit, tea and sugar, and tinned food".(23) Ouma, who has climbed up to the loft to fetch apples, is surprised to see that the contents of the coffin have been piled carelessly on the floor and that "on a tin of sardines, at the head of the coffin, lay Great Oupa's pipe".(24) Oupa himself is stretched out in his coffin, fast asleep.

(20) Ibid., The Coffin, p.185.

(21) Ibid., The Coffin, p.189.

(22) Ibid., The Coffin, p.188.

(23) Ibid., The Coffin, p.176.

(24) Ibid., The Coffin, p.176.

The situation delights Krige; it has all the incongruous juxtapositions he could wish for. Oupa explains that, as he will be obliged to spend so much time in his coffin eventually, he thought it as well to "see what it feels like". (25) Then he sits bolt upright -

"What about those mutton chops of yours? You know it is my favourite dish ... And I am so hungry my insides are shouting for food!"

Laughing happily, they went arm in arm down the broad staircase". (26)

Once more the joy of living flows through the story, and this time the symbol of life force is not a flower, as in The Christmas Box, or custard, rugby or a speeding bicycle, as in The Dream, but mutton chops! Again the stillness, finality and decay of death are balanced by what is commonplace, physical and wholesome.

Krige's sense of humour is an essential part of this breadth of outlook, this ability to see the coffin and the sardine tin side by side. And it is his humour, as much as his idealism, which transforms the theme of death into a theme of life. Great Oupa is very much Krige when he says the following:-

"Laughter is a glorious, sacred thing', Great Oupa once said, 'a gift from God ... In this old life of ours that can be so hard and bitter, laughter is often our only defence against life. And also our only defence against death, enabling us to look it straight in the face, and even sometimes, play the fool with it...' (27)

And Krige often "plays the fool with death", not because he is insensitive, but because he is too sensitive to be entirely serious. Laughter is his "defence against death", his means of asserting that death is only one aspect of life and must remain only one. It must never be allowed to become so real

(25) Ibid., The Coffin, p.177.

(26) Ibid., The Coffin, p.177.

(27) Ibid., The Coffin, p.183.

that its gloom fills life with bitterness and futility and makes a mockery of everything physical, "custard" and "mutton chops".

It is not only love of life which characterises Krige's short stories, but also love of people. Gordimer is the great critic; Krige is the great acceptor. "He sees his brother in every man",⁽²⁸⁾ and is warm and sympathetic towards him. This barrier-breaking camaraderie is seen in the relationships between du Toit and the Zulu in Death of the Zulu, the war-correspondents and the Basuto in Two Daumiers, Great Oupa and Kobus van Graan in The Coffin, the escaped soldier and the Italian peasants in The Charcoal Burners, and among the men in the military hospital in The Christmas Box. Pietro, in The Charcoal Burners, is dear to Krige's heart.

"I am glad Father found you. I am glad you are with us. You are my brother. I am your brother. Welcome to our simple home..."⁽²⁹⁾

Pietro is simple, spontaneous, sincere and affectionate, very different from the cold, complex characters of Nadine Gordimer. Krige could never develop Nadine Gordimer's capacity for criticism; Nadine Gordimer could never feel his warm understanding, and create a character like Great Oupa with whom to share the joy of living.

This theme of the brotherhood of man is yet another aspect of his romanticism. "Welcome to our simple home" conveys all Krige's romantic yearning for a simple, ideal state where men are warm, spontaneous and sincere, bound together by a consciousness of sharing a common humanity.

Most of Krige's poetry and prose has been written in brisk,

(28) F.V. Lategan, op.cit., p.168.

(29) Uys Krige, The Dream and the Desert, The Charcoal Burners, pp.162-163.

simple and lively Afrikaners. His English short stories share, for the most part, this vitality and simplicity, and his visual imagery is particularly effective, as the following extracts well illustrate.

"The door at the top of the stone staircase stood ajar, and a greyish-blue mistiness lingered about the loft. Broad tobacco leaves - a ripe gold and deep brown - hung in rows from the roof; and in the dim corners there was a reddish glow where apples lay in heaps".(30)

"A last lazy flick of the voorslag and a cluster of dewdrops on a tuft of grass splintered into sparks".(31)

"One tank lay on its side, another was embedded in a patch of yellow churned-up mud like some monstrous grey fly stuck in fly paper...".(32)

These passages are significant not merely as vivid descriptions, but for the rich connotations of the imagery, and their evocation of appropriate mood and atmosphere. The suggestion in the first is of warmth, richness, mellowness and peace, the perfect setting for the placid and loving understanding of Great Oupa and Great Ouma in The Coffin. The second evokes a mood of vitality and action, crispness and freshness, and symbolizes the life force of the youthful Great Oupa. The third carries with it entirely different connotations, those of distaste, ugliness, unhealthiness, inglorious death and futility, which support the prevailing mood of Two Daumiers.

Krige's sensuous perception reveals itself in his tendency to blend images of sight and touch. He feels colour as well as sees it, and this merging of colour and texture gives his imagery both compression and precision. The "mistiness" of the smoky, "greyish blue" air in the loft, and the "glow" of the red apples, give texture to the colours by endowing them with

(30) Ibid., The Coffin, p.176.

(31) Ibid., The Coffin, p.174.

(32) Ibid., Two Daumiers, p.123.

warmth and softness. Similarly, the battlefield mud is not only "yellow"; it is "churned up". Its yellowness is merged with its irregular, semi-solid texture. "Splintered" is a particularly compressed sense image. As a visual image it evokes the flash and sparkle of breaking glass; its tactile evocations are those of hardness, sharpness and brittleness; and, in addition, it involves the sense of hearing, by conveying the sharp, explosive crack of the whip.

Krige displays not only the poet's sensuous response to his environment, but also his sensitive ear and rhythmic sense. He has the poet's love of alliteration and makes effective use of it. The repetition of the lengthy "l" sound in "last" and "lazy" both links these words and produces a slowness which makes the swifter movement of "flick of the voorslag" all the more effective. The alliteration of the "f" sound in "flick" and "voorslag" again serves to link two closely related words, but, in addition to this, produces a sound bordering on sibilance which possesses onomatopoeic value in suggesting the airy sound of the swishing whip.

Krige's use of rhythm in this passage is as skilful as his use of sound. "Cluster of dewdrops on a tuft of grass" possesses a fairly regular rhythm. In the last three words of the passage this changes entirely. Of the five syllables in "splintered into sparks" only two, the first and the last, are stressed. The result is an initial impact, followed by a quick, tripping movement over the three unstressed syllables, which coincides exactly with the desired effect, that of a blow followed by exploding dewdrops, expressed metaphorically in terms of splinters of tinkling glass. The final stress ends the irregular pattering movement and reasserts the normal prose rhythm.

When Krige's language is simple and concrete it is generally good, but it does not always retain these qualities. Of these two descriptions of dawn the first is clearly visualized, vivid and concrete; the second becomes vague and ineffectual.

"And Hostert waved his hand at the surrounding desert that until a few moments ago had been a shadowy waste pricked here and there by the red spot of an early morning fire, and was now like an immense stage slowly being lit up with the pale gold light of the sun rising above the eastern escarpment".(33)

"A dim light was stealing over the veld. Through the gaps among the sombre clouds, massed over the horizon, the day, bronze and scarlet, was breaking. Then the light came so quickly, it was as if the whip had split the clouds, letting in the new life and investing that spacious world with another dawn".(34)

Such phrases as "stealing over the veld", "sombre clouds", and "investing that spacious world with another dawn", are particularly weak and conventional. They are in the same category as such vague and verbose clichés as "savage grandeur of the night"⁽³⁵⁾ and are a further illustration of the sentimentality and complete lack of realism which results from time to time when Krige indulges in romantic introversion. These lapses are, however, the exception, not the rule, and his language is, for the most part, brisk, vivid and effective.

Not only are the simplicity and evocative quality of Krige's language particularly appropriate to the short story form; his achievement of artistic unity, too, deserves mention. This unity is seen particularly in Death of the Zulu and The Coffin. These stories, constructed with a poet's

(33) Ibid., Two Daughters, pp.116-117.

(34) Ibid., The Coffin, p.174.

(35) Ibid., The Charcoal Burners, p.166.

sense of form, are carefully balanced in order to give a single, concentrated effect. Krige simply makes his ending his beginning, and by making the story close as it opens, conveys a sense of finality and completion.

Death of the Zulu begins and ends with soldiers marching along the dusty road to Tobruk. The Coffin begins and ends with the birth of a baby. Not all his short stories possess this unity. The Two Daumiers, particularly, suffers from a lack of cohesion, but generally Krige "knows where to start and where to stop, knowledge which most short-story writers take a life-time to acquire". (36)

Krige's views on racial themes are strongly held and have been clearly stated. Like Cope, he believes that the human situation is the only artistically valid situation, but, while Cope has always tried to see the human situation within the context of the racial, Krige has preferred to avoid racial themes altogether. He feels that South African writers are obsessed with one theme - the black-white problem - and have tended to regard this as the whole of life. "A country's literature", he has said, "can become so characteristic that it becomes characterless. When we are so obsessed with the problem or message that we see it only as an abstraction, then we can't see the wood for the trees, we can't see the human being for the problem". (37)

(36) L.A.G. Strong, The Spectator.

(37) Uys Krige, Proceedings of a Conference of Writers, Publishers, Editors and University Teachers of English, Johannesburg, 1956. p.89.

The term 'human' is very dear to Krige. It occurs again and again in his critical writing and is always used in contrast to something abstract or contrived. Krige does not share Paton's belief in the social function of literature. "What is this message nonsense?" he has bluntly asked. "Literature has little business with problems or messages per se. Its chief business is with the human soul with all its complexity and vanity". (38)

To a writer holding strong views on the social function of literature this would amount to escapism. Whilst Krige would agree that his stories escape from South African problems, he would not agree that they escape from life. He would argue, in fact, that they do precisely the opposite.

In spite of weaknesses, such as his excessive romanticism, and in spite of the fact that he has written comparatively few short stories in English, his contribution to the South African short story is a valuable one. By refusing to share the group preoccupation he has reasserted individualism and freedom of theme, and the freshness of his tone and outlook is matched by the vitality and evocative power of his language. His contribution is the more remarkable when one considers that his home language is Afrikaans.

(38) Ibid., p.89.

CHAPTER EIGHT.DAN JACOBSON.

Dan Jacobson does not share Uys Krige's dislike of racial situations. In spite of the fact that they are in danger of becoming stereotypes, such topics as the insensitivity of a White family to their Coloured servant,⁽¹⁾ the brutal superiority of the Afrikaner towards an African child,⁽²⁾ the embarrassment and guilt of the European liberal⁽³⁾ and the humiliation of the educated African⁽⁴⁾ all provide him with material for several short stories. Like Paton, Jacobson views the racial situation with its moral issues and emotional relationships as something to exploit rather than avoid.

There are, however, more differences than similarities between the stories of Jacobson and Paton. Jacobson, unlike all South African short story writers of note except Nadine Gordimer, is Jewish. The fact that Nadine Gordimer is Jewish is irrelevant from a critical point of view; there is little reflection of this in her short stories.⁽⁵⁾ This is not the case with Dan Jacobson. He has complicated the racial situation by introducing into the short story what could be called a Jewish consciousness. To the group outlooks of White and Black, English and Afrikaner, he has added yet another. Several of his stories reveal the emotions, aspirations and sensitivities typical of the South African Jew and possess a strong Jewish background.

(1) Dan Jacobson, A Long Way from London, Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1953. The Box, p.9.

(2) Ibid., A Day in the Country, p.19.

(3) Ibid., After the Riot, p.51.

(4) Ibid., A Long Way from London, p.151.

(5) Only A Watcher of the Dead and The Defeated have Jewish backgrounds.

The Promised Land reveals the fervid Zionism of the Jewish adolescent, the blend of nationalism, idealism and religion which has captured the imagination of millions of young Jews since the birth of modern Israel. The subject is treated with sympathy and insight. Jacobson participates as the first person of his story, and, as a young Jew who in fact worked for some time in an agricultural settlement in Israel, he is qualified to do so. Yet his participation in the story is marked by restraint and self-awareness. The adolescent motives and emotions are viewed from a distance and critically weighed and analysed, rather than enthusiastically experienced.

A Day in the Country reveals a similar combination of involvement and critical awareness. The clash between Jew and Afrikaner in this story provides a variation from the often oversimplified clash between White and Black which so dominates South African literature.

Here the African, in the form of a frightened boy, merely serves to bring together representatives of the two White groups, an Afrikaners and a Jewish family. Once he has provided the motive for action and interaction he ceases to participate. Jew and Afrikaner face each other in a blaze of anger, but the dreaded words "bloody Jew" are not said and the Jewish family finally secures a moral victory. It is the quality of this victory that interests Jacobson. Does the Jewish family oppose the Afrikaner on the grounds of humanity and justice or from motives of inferiority and fear? Is their action primarily reaction to the words

"bloody Jew", (6) unsaid but not unfelt by an anti-semitic people? Jacobson suggests it is; that the anger of the Jew springs from guilt, inferiority and fear, and that neither Jew nor Afrikaner has in fact won. "We had all lost so much, somewhere, farther back, along that dusty road." (7)

A further difference between the short stories of Jacobson and those of all other South African short story writers with the possible exception of Nadine Gordimer lies in Jacobson's preference for the homely relationships of the family circle. Nine of the twelve stories in his collection, A Long Way from London, deal to a greater or lesser extent with family relationships. The relationship is generally that between parent and child, particularly between father and son. (8) In several stories there is in this family background a strong autobiographical note. In The Box, particularly, the family is Jacobson's family, and the three brothers in the story, called Dandy, Hitch and Yoshiva by Jan Louw, their houseboy, are clearly Dan, Hirsch and Joshua Jacobson. A Day in the Country is an adventure of the same Jewish family, as is After the Riot.

These three factors, interest in racial relationships, his Jewish consciousness and a preoccupation with the family, especially his own, constitute the context and framework of Jacobson's stories. Within this framework he pursues two main themes.

(6) Dan Jacobson, op.cit., A Day in the Country, p.26.

(7) Ibid., A Day in the Country, p.30.

(8) The parent-child relationship is prominent in A Day in the Country, After the Riot, The Stranger, Stop Thief!, The Zulu and the Zeide, The Little Pet, Two Women and A Long Way from London.

The first theme is particularly explicit in Stop Thief! It is a study of domestic power politics, of domination of one person by another.⁽⁹⁾ The incident on which the plot of Stop Thief! hinges is simply a means of revealing with whom the power and authority in a family really lies. The story possesses a simple three-stage plot. At first it is the wealthy father who dominates his family. His authority over his children, a boy and a girl, is symbolized by the game he loves to play, where he is the hunter and they the hunted.

"There was a boy and a girl, both dark-haired and thin, the boy a little older than his sister and protective towards her with servants and strangers, with everyone but his father: he did not dare to protect her when his father sprang at her from behind a bush, and carried her shrieking, upside down, to his lair that was, he told them, littered with the bones of other children that he had already eaten".⁽¹⁰⁾

The children are beaten nightly in their game with their father. Their mother has been more soundly defeated and has withdrawn into a life of warmth, books and deck chairs where "her eyes would go back to the book, or she would again carefully wrap the towel about her eyes and her ears, and sink back into her drowse. She seemed sunken under her husband, under his wealth, under his strength; they had come down upon her as the sun did where she lay at the side of the swimming bath, and she questioned them no more than she could have questioned the sun. She had submitted to them."⁽¹¹⁾

This is the first stage of the plot. The father is "king of his castle".⁽¹²⁾ Then there is a clear break, and

(9) The modern English novelist who finds this theme particularly interesting is Charles Morgan. vide The Judge's Story.

(10) Dan Jacobson, op.cit., Stop Thief! p.91.

(11) Ibid., Stop Thief! p.93.

section two begins as follows:

"Then one night the burglar came to their house".(13)

The coming of the burglar is the catalyst which promotes a change in the system of domestic authority. The father is shown to be a coward. Although a miserable African lad has been caught and is held shivering with fright by the servants, he is unable to cope with the situation.

"The little boy waited for action from his father, but no action came. The son was the first to see that his father could make no action, could give no word".(14)

The child gives the word himself. He screams at the servants to "hit the burglar".(15) He flies at him and scratches his face with his nails before he is finally carried off.

The final stage is inevitable. The father has lost his position and his power. It has passed to

"the son to whom she (his mother) now submitted, the son who after the night the burglar had come to the house was not afraid to protect his sister, when her father fell upon her in their games in the garden, and who fought, when he himself was picked up and carried away, as an adult might fight, with his fists and his feet and his knees, to hurt. His will was stronger than his father's, and soon they were facing each other like two men, and the wild games and the shrieking among the trees grew rarer. For the father was afraid of the games he sometimes still had to play with his son, and there was none among them who did not know it, neither the son, nor the daughter, nor the mother, nor the father from whose hands in one night the violence in the family had passed."(16)

(13) Ibid., Stop Thief! p.94.

(14) Ibid., Stop Thief! p.99.

(15) Ibid., Stop Thief! p.99.

(16) Ibid., Stop Thief! pp.100-101.

The theme of personal power is a recurrent one. In Two Women the wealthy old father is "diminished and without power".(17) When he decides to throw off the domination of his wife and daughter by investing his money contrary to their wishes it is not anything as tangible as loss of money they fear: "It isn't money that I'm thinking of". Bridget's face was set. 'I'm not thinking of money either'."(18) It is loss of power.

More important than Jacobson's interest in the question of power and control is his concern with what is best described as emotional honesty. Several of his stories are similar to those of Nadine Gordimer in that they deal with hypocrisy and deception in the form of emotional facades. The Zulu and the Zeide, Jacobson's best story, has this as its theme.

In Stop Thief! it was the burglar who was the instrument in showing where the ruthless authority in the family lay. In The Zulu and the Zeide it is a senile Jewish man, the father of Harry Grossman, who performs a similar function. It is in depicting the reactions of two people to old Grossman that Jacobson is able to achieve his purpose of objectifying and exposing emotional hypocrisy.

Harry Grossman looks after his senile father, who is continually escaping from the house, with a grudging sense of duty.

"Harry Grossman knew that there was nothing else he could do. Dutifulness had been his habit of life; it had had to be, having the sort of father he had, and the strain of duty had made him abrupt and begrudging".(19)

(17) Ibid., Two Women, p.34.

(18) Ibid., Two Women, p.43.

(19) Ibid., The Zulu and the Zeide, p.103.

Harry goes further, however than merely criticising the old man and indulging in self-pity on account of his filial responsibilities. He comes to regard his attitude as in every way worthy of a son burdened with a senile father.

The Zulu, Paulus, is employed by Harry to look after old Grossman and accompany him on his many wanderings. Harry is much amused at the unusual pair - the senile Jew and the large Zulu - and "persisted in regarding the arrangement as a kind of joke, and the more the arrangement succeeded the more determinedly did he try to spread the joke, so that it should be a joke not only against his father but a joke against Paulus too". (20)

Harry's attitude changes, however, when he sees the tender care of the Zulu for the old man, and his father's growing affection for and need of him. Paulus is succeeding too well. Harry's pride in his own 'sense of duty' is in danger of being shaken. To his friends who persist in admiring the gentle Zulu he says: "'Do you think if I had nothing else to do with my time I wouldn't be able to make the old man happy?'" (21) But the fact is that Harry cannot make him happy. He is shut out of the intimate relationship between the old man and the Zulu, and eventually neither ridicule nor self-justification can protect him from the fact that the Zulu occupies a place in his father's life denied to him. Now Harry longs to be able to help his father, but the old man needs only the Zulu.

"'I want der schwarzer.'
'Pleaseo", Harry said. He threw out his arms towards his father, but the gesture was abrupt, almost as though he were thrusting his father

(20) Ibid., The Zulu and the Zeide, p.113.

(21) Ibid., The Zulu and the Zeide, p.113.

away from him. 'Why can't you ask it of me? You can ask me - haven't I done enough for you already? Do you want to go for a walk? - I'll take you for a walk. What do you want? Do you want - do you want - ?' Harry could not think what his father might want. 'I'll do it', he said. Then Harry saw that his father was weeping".(22)

Old Grossman dies after being struck by a bicycle and Paulus is dismissed. Throughout the story Harry and the Zulu have been opposed and contrasted in their relationships with the old man. The Zulu, who is paid to do a job, shows care and affection for old Grossman. Harry, his son, shows no tenderness. To him, far more than to the Zulu, looking after his father "is a job. It's something you've got to do."(23)

The irony of this situation and his own emotional barrenness strikes Harry as he meets Paulus for the last time. Paulus's relationship with his father has humiliated Harry and he is determined to inflict the final hurt himself. He asks Paulus what he is going to do with the "fortune" he has saved while working for him, but the Zulu's reply, instead of giving cause for contempt and satisfaction, is the final revelation of his own inability to feel, contrasted with the African's warmth and affection.

"Johannes spoke to Paulus and came back with a reply. 'He says, baas, that he is saving to bring his wife and children from Zululand to Johannesburg. He is saving, baas,' Johannes said, for Harry had not seemed to understand, 'to bring his family to this town also'.

The two Zulus were bewildered to know why it should have been at that moment that Harry Grossman's clenched fist-like features should suddenly seem to have fallen from one another, nor why he should have stared with such guilt and despair at Paulus, while he cried, 'What else could I have done? I did my best', before the first tears came."(24)

(22) Ibid., The Zulu and the Zeide, pp.118-119.

(23) Ibid., The Zulu and the Zeide, p.104.

(24) Ibid., The Zulu and the Zeide, p.121.

Although this story resembles most of Nadine Gordimer's stories in theme, in characterization and construction it is different. Jacobson uses the technique of opposing two characters - one to uphold the norm and the other to contradict it. The servant, Paulus, symbolizes the warmth and affection which Jacobson implies a son should feel towards his father. The son, Harry, displays a cold, business-like complacency, masked by a facade of dutifulness. Nadine Gordimer seldom asserts a positive norm of values in this way. She creates many characters like Harry Crossman, but few like Paulus.

Jacobson studies the same theme and employs the same method of opposing characters in A Long Way from London, The Burden and The Little Pet. In each case the actions of one character reveal the false emotions of another.

Jacobson's situations and backgrounds - his preference for family relationships, particularly with a familiar Jewish flavour, and for relationships between racial groups - are realistic ones. His choice of major themes, those of personal power and emotional honesty, suggests maturity and intelligence. Nevertheless, few of his stories are completely successful. There are several reasons for this which are best approached by considering more fully his purpose as a short story writer. Jacobson's purpose, like Nadine Gordimer's, is to expose any kind of deception, to present the surface pattern of words and actions and reveal underlying emotions and attitudes. This leads to his study of real and artificial authority, and real and artificial affection. In addition, he is making a sincere attempt to avoid stock South African situations and move from social and political themes to slighter and more subtle studies of personal relationships and awarenesses. And he is attempting to be as realistic as possible.

In story after story Jacobson is clearly striving for

these qualities of subtlety, realism and perception, yet the very techniques he employs to achieve his purpose cause his comparative failure.

His means of conveying an impression of subtlety and realism is to write with an assumed casualness of tone and to include numerous trivial details. He overdoes this to such an extent, however, that several stories inevitably suffer from a diffuseness and lack of direction. Their structure tends to be rather more relaxed than the short story form permits.

In The Box and After the Riot he makes use of trivial family details to make his situation appear natural and authentic, not realising that his story is being smothered in irrelevancies. There is too much personal and family background which remains unintegrated in the story. These stories, in particular, reveal Jacobson's lack of perspective. He needs to see more clearly the relative unimportance of such sentences as "My father, my brother and I drove home to lunch"⁽²⁵⁾ or "A few weeks before the riot my brother and I had arranged to visit that Monday night a friend of ours who worked with us on a committee of which we were members".⁽²⁶⁾ His problem is to create a story which is objective and welded together, not a semi-diary which lacks the selectivity essential in a short story. This is not to say that his short stories should not involve details personal in origin, but these details should become integral parts of something entirely new, should be included because they are extremely important to the story, not because they are important to the

(25) Ibid., After the Riot, p.52.

(26) Ibid., After the Riot, p.54.

writer or because he feels that they will inevitably make for greater authenticity.

Jacobson's basic lack of selectivity reveals itself in other ways. The tediously slow, unchanging pace of his stories results from the inclusion of masses of unnecessary detail. Nor does he make any attempt to deal with these details briskly; the language in which they are expressed suffers from the same relaxation. The compression and terseness of language which one looks for in a modern short story is as lacking as the disciplined selection of the details to be expressed. In the stories of good contemporary craftsmen such as H.E. Bates and Elizabeth Bowen every word justifies its place in the story. Their language is alert, evocative and "combines suggestion with compression".⁽²⁷⁾ Sean O'Faolain holds the view that while the novelist works with the paragraph or even the chapter, the short story writer "works with the sentence and the word in it".⁽²⁸⁾ Jacobson does not really work with words; in fact his short stories in general lack the precision and evocative quality found in certain of his novels, particularly A Dance in the Sun. This is most noticeable when he feels obliged to give important background details such as these from After the Riot.

"I should explain here that the car we had taken with us on the visit was the Dodge, my father's car, and we had left behind the little English car, which my brother and I shared, which my father despised and very rarely drove, and then only with the direct effects on its rather delicate little gearbox. And while I am explaining I should add too..."⁽²⁹⁾

Jacobson is painstakingly concerned to make sure that the

((27) Sean O'Faolain, op.cit., p.192.

(28) Ibid., p.196.

(29) Dan Jacobson, op.cit., After the Riot, p.57.

reader is put in possession of all the necessary family details. This is amateurish writing. It is a mere ripple of weak, unevocative words and clichés such as "I should explain here", "direct effects", and "rather delicate". The somewhat pompous author-reader explanatory tone, occurring in the course of what is intended to be an exciting motor car drive, quite interrupts the atmosphere, severs the continuity and further illustrates Jacobson's inability to stand back from his work, judge and select. The sharp, urgent rhythm with which the car ride began is completely lost by the strained, unrhythmical and undisciplined sentence construction. Bates or Katherine Mansfield would have conveyed all this and conveyed it much more vividly in two or three words; by dialogue, by use of strong suggestive verbs, or a crisp, lively image of the well-built father in his son's car, anything but this tedious and incredibly badly phrased explanation. It may well be that this style is deliberate, that Jacobson is again striving for a casually realistic effect. If so, he is hardly successful, for the realism he achieves is remarkably flat, a type of dull reportage which could with advantage have been omitted from the story. Characterisation, too, is explicit and drawn-out. Jacobson has sketches of character and appearance which run into two and three pages, and at the end leave the character lifeless and unvisualized.⁽³⁰⁾ Yet Hemingway, for instance, without appearing to describe character or appearance at all, conveys both merely as undertones of dialogue and action, and does so most vividly.⁽³¹⁾ Jacobson, like Cope, in his

(30) Ibid., A Long Way from London, pp.151-153.

(31) vide the opening paragraph of The Light of the World in The First 49 Stories, Cape, 1944.

eagerness to make his story appear authentic, feels obliged to give his readers slabs of information and explanation, not realising that this is, ironically, the sure way to defeat his purpose. He has not mastered the technique so essential for a writer of good short stories, that of conveying without stating, of allowing action, gesture and dialogue to do a great deal of the work of supplying characterisation or background. Instead of doing this or struggling for a vivid image, Jacobson satisfies himself with what he regards as pleasant-sounding and rather clever abstractions, such as his description of Arthur Panter who was "civilized right up to the minute or even a little beyond it"⁽³²⁾ or of the mother in Stop Thief who "questioned them no more than she would have questioned the sun. She had submitted to them".⁽³³⁾ Such language is sterile and inexpressive; no real insight into character is provided.

Such explanations of character and attitude would be justified were they truly perceptive. But, at the root of Jacobson's comparative failure is the fact that most of his explanations and elaborations are inclined to be trite and obvious. He under-estimates his reader to such an extent that several stories contain what might be described as a "narrative level" and an "explanatory level". A consideration of The Box will illustrate this. The theme of this story is a European boy's realisation that a Coloured servant has feelings remarkably like his own and is as much a human being as he is. The plot, like most of Jacobson's plots, is simple and realistic. The Coloured servant, Jan, makes the boy a box

(32) Dan Jacobson, op.cit., A Long Way from London, p.153.

(33) Ibid., Stop Thief! p.93.

in which to keep his pigeons and presents it to him with great pride in his craftsmanship. The boy realises it is quite useless, but says nothing. The climax comes when Jan discovers that his box has been dismantled and used for another purpose, and is deeply hurt. It is the sight of the old man crying that enables the boy to understand and sympathise with him for the first time. This situation - the reaction between the old man and the boy - expressed in terms of dialogue and action is the "narrative level". But dialogue and action are not nearly sufficient for Jacobson. He will not allow the climax of the story, the old man's tears and the boy's words and actions of shame and sympathy, to speak for itself, but feels it necessary to provide the following elucidation:

"I suppose my attitude could be verbalised into a wonder: I didn't know that they felt like that. And they were all the Coloured and African people that I passed every day and took for granted, taking their serf-status and their ragged clothes and everything else about them for granted. They were a strange, twilight people to me; I liked some and was afraid of others, but they were beyond an uncrossable barrier, even when we played with them or listened to them talking. And the barrier was simply that they didn't feel. They had emotions; I had seen them angry or laughing or subdued under a white man's curse. But somehow they weren't real emotions; my emotions; they were black emotions, different to my own. But now Jan had crossed the barrier. He was crying as I might cry. There was no difference between us at all. He was human, and he was crying".(34)

This laboured explanation provides no further insight. In fact, its very triteness spoils a potentially effective climax and makes the entire story appear somewhat naive.

(34) Ibid., The Box, pp.16-17.

Jacobson's habit of repeating in intellectual terms what has already been expressed in dramatic terms indicates his present dilemma. He wishes his plots to be simple and realistic, yet feels that such situations do not, in themselves, give the impression of profundity and depth of insight he requires. In fact, so concerned is Jacobson to provide his stories with an aura of profundity that he goes even further than this. In several stories he makes a deliberate attempt to create this effect by artificial means. This is particularly noticeable at the end of his short stories. A Day in the Country, Jacobson's well-known study of the fear and guilt which mark the Jewish-Afrikaner relationship, ends as follows:

"But we had all lost, so much, somewhere, farther back, along that dusty road".(35)

This is typical of the superficially "satisfying" ending of countless magazine stories. It appears weighty, inevitable and conclusive, yet an examination of its tone and literary quality reveals the hollowness of a stylised and exaggerated grand finale. Jacobson is striking a pose. The underlying emotion is not universal guilt, humility or anything like it. This is a vague, pompous, declamatory ending, attempting to sound impressive but being instead merely theatrical.

At present Jacobson lacks the confidence in himself and in his reader to do what Chekhov said every writer must do, "simply write about how Peter got married to Marie".(36) Verbal dullness, tedious explanations, irrelevancies and striking of poses mar his work. The skilful evocation of atmosphere of his novel, A Dance in the Sun, is almost entirely lacking in his short stories. Only the early pages of The Stranger indicate that he is capable of sensitive

(35) Ibid., A Day in the Country, p.30.

(36) Sean O'Faolain, op.cit., p.79.

description.

Almost all Jacobson's short stories are marred by these weaknesses and it would be true to say that he has not been able to master the short story form were it not for one striking success. There is no false profundity or laboured explanation or mere reportage in The Zulu and the Zeide. It is successful because it is Jacobson's most dramatic short story, in the sense that it consists almost entirely of dialogue and description of action. The surface of word and action has been allowed to speak for itself; there is no "explanatory level" in this story. Jacobson has achieved both the realism and the insight into an interesting personal relationship he requires, not by intruding and explaining, but by withdrawing from the situation he is describing. It is such withdrawal that is required in future, matched by a fuller realisation of the fact that in the short story form skilled use of dialogue, action and descriptive touches is a far more effective means of providing true insight than heavy rationalisation.

CHAPTER NINE.CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this final chapter is to move from a study of specific writers to an assessment of general trends. An attempt to classify in some order of merit the six writers whose work has received detailed study would not be of real value. It is easy to conclude in general terms that Nadine Gordimer is, at present, a better short story writer than Dan Jacobson, or that Doris Lessing's language is more polished and skilful than that of Jack Cope, but such observations lead no further and overlook the fact that each of the six short story writers has his particular strengths and weaknesses.

It is more profitable to conclude by examining contemporary short story writers as a group and in this way attempt to analyse contemporary trends.

While there have been two distinct periods of short story production, a comparison of the work of the thirties with that of the fifties shows that there is a significant change in emphasis rather than anything essentially new in the contemporary short story. Even the theme of race relations cannot be viewed as entirely new, for the group preoccupation of the 1950's began as an individual interest in the 1920's. It was, in fact, Sarah Gertrude Millin who first concentrated entirely on what is a major theme of the contemporary South African short story. Her central interest in her *Alita* stories, the "madam-maid" relationship, has occupied much of Nadine Gordimer's attention.

Each of the earlier writers contributed something which has been developed in the contemporary short story. Sarah Gertrude Millin, in addition to directing the South African

short story writers towards the racial theme, assisted in "urbanising" the short story. In the 1920's every short writer except Mrs. Millin preferred the background of the veld; today the majority of short story writers of importance choose the city as their setting.

The influence of Pauline Smith's theme of suffering, of the explicit moral and religious attitude of her stories and of her simplicity of language and structure emerges most clearly in the work of Alan Paton.

Though contemporary writers lack Herman Charles Bosman's remarkable anecdotal skill, his sense of fun and his tendency to juxtapose the comic and the serious persist strongly in the short stories of Uys Krige, the contemporary writer who is, without a doubt, closest to him in temperament.

William Plomer's most important contribution - the poetic quality of his short stories - finds an echo in the skilful imagery of Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer and Uys Krige, while the satirical tendency he shares with Bosman has become almost as important as the racial theme.

In spite of this clear traditionalism there has been what can best be described as a very significant change in consciousness in the younger writers. The writers of the twenties wrote essentially as individuals. It is impossible to classify them in terms of a common theme or outlook, or perceive in them a group preoccupation of any importance. The opposite is true of contemporary writers. The individual outlook, the sense of freedom and exploration in the work of Pauline Smith, Sarah Gertrude Millin, Plomer and Bosman has been replaced by a general preoccupation with social and political patterns and a sense of the social

function of literature. These factors constitute, in general terms, the main trend of the contemporary short story.

There are probably several reasons for this emphasis on group attitudes and social patterns. Perhaps it would be helpful in gaining perspective to compare the South African with the English short story. A fundamental difference is that the English short story is not nearly so aggressively English as the South African short story is aggressively South African. There is in South Africa a remarkable closeness between literature and land. South African writers are writing primarily about South Africa, while English writers have reached the stage where they can take "land" for granted and write about people.

The difference between the two literatures lies primarily in the difference between the two countries. South Africa is now at the stage of development where she has strongly defined social patterns which are sufficiently important and interesting to enable writers to feel that they need to be revealed. Sarah Gertrude Millin's God's Step-Children, Plomer's Turbott Wolfe and Paton's Too Late the Phalarope all set out to reveal and interpret social and moral patterns peculiar to South Africa. And today the South African short story is characterised by the same purpose.

In addition to this general need for self-discovery and definition, there is a more obvious reason for this emphasis on social and political patterns. Sociology and politics in South Africa are themselves interesting and dramatic, not, as to the average Englishman, dull, distant and academic. In South Africa everyone tends to be a politician, simply

because the heart of South African politics is the problem of race relationships, in which all are involved.

The fact that, generally speaking, contemporary short story writers tend to think in terms of groups rather than of individuals is a similar reflection of the social and political situation. For South Africa is a land of groups. Sharp distinctions between racial groups, language groups and political groups must inevitably be reflected in literature, particularly in that of a country whose writers are still preoccupied with the problem of self-discovery. And the more emphasis there is on these groups, on group attitude and group action, the less there tends to be on the individual within the group.

The fact that the contemporary short story is influenced by and reflects social and political patterns does not imply that each writer is influenced in the same way or that a stock literary pattern characterises the work of all. This is clearly not the case. The social orientation of the contemporary short story does not preclude individual emphasis and direction, but in each case social pattern is reflected in some form of literary pattern.

Alan Paton is the most extreme believer in the social function of literature. The social pattern which obsesses him is the clash between White and Black, the injustice of the former and the oppression of the latter. To him literature is both the expression of a struggle and a weapon in the struggle. His reaction is one of anger; his intention as a writer is to expose those aspects of the South African pattern which will help to change it.

Cope's stories can be seen as a reaction against the militant liberalism of Cry, the Beloved Country and several of Paton's short stories. He feels that a pessimistic emphasis

on the racial clash and on the misery of the African is not a true or complete interpretation of the South African situation, and he tends to swing to the other extreme. The social pattern which characterises his stories is both more balanced and more idealistic than Paton's. Cope stresses racial sympathies and chooses to see the bridges rather than the barriers.

Naïne Gordimer is not, like Paton and Cope, preoccupied primarily with racial patterns. Nevertheless, her stories reveal most clearly the tendency of contemporary writers to see life in terms of a literary pattern. Personal, social and racial relationships all provide her with material for her own pattern, that of the exposure of facades, and she pursues her theme of deception with remarkable single-mindedness.

The contemporary short story writer who is most obviously concerned with social relationships as such is Doris Lessing. The purpose of the majority of her stories is simply to interpret and expose patterns of social attitude and action; and her study includes relationships between White and Black, Englishman and Afrikaner, husband and wife and established families and newcomers.

Jacobson does not proceed so obviously, though he too is interested in the relationships between Jew and Afrikaner and White and Black within the South African setting. He makes an attempt to free himself from the contemporary tendency to see life in terms of groups and patterns, and to focus attention on the individual, though he is seldom completely successful.

Krige's reaction to the social preoccupation of contemporary literature which he condemns so

unequivocally,⁽¹⁾ is simply to escape, to avoid racial themes and social patterns, and to concern himself with what he describes as "humanity".⁽²⁾ His approach has certainly brought a freshness and individuality back into the South African short story, and he has illustrated the limitations of a literature which is too closely tied to its social context.

This over-emphasis on social and literary patterns has far-reaching effects. It leads to stories in which idea or attitude is of more importance than action, or even character. It leads, too, to a seriousness and a dedication which is not entirely literary; for seriousness has become as much a social as a literary responsibility. And it leads to an outlook which is essentially critical. With the partial exception of Cope and Krige, contemporary short story writers are concerned with what they dislike rather than what they like. Social dislikes are literary preferences. Paton feels anger, Nadine Gordimer distaste, Doris Lessing mild and well-controlled disapproval, while Dan Jacobson's tone varies from obvious dislike to dispassionate acceptance. The striking thing is that they all choose subjects which cause them some degree of personal displeasure. Their criticism, like their tone, varies remarkably in degree. At its best it is subtle satire; at its worst heavy didacticism, but each writer, including Cope and Krige, is, to some extent, a satirist.

Importance of idea and attitude, seriousness and satire

(1) Uys Krige, Proceedings of a Conference of Writers, Publishers, Editors and University Teachers of English, Johannesburg, 1956. p.89.

(2) Ibid., p.89.

are, in themselves, neither helpful nor harmful to literary achievement. Yet the group preoccupation with social patterns and the tendency of contemporary writers to match these with literary patterns does have one particularly adverse effect. Contemporary short stories frequently possess an unrealistic neatness and conclusiveness. In the work of Mrs. Lessing this is seen in the use of somewhat contrived characters whose purpose is to personify the traits of the groups they represent. Nadine Gordimer's plots, with their recurring pattern of facade followed by exposure, tend, at times, to be forced and artificial. Not all the situations she makes use of can be fitted into this mould without loss of authenticity. Both Paton and Cope have their own often excessively neat literary moulds, which are the expressions of their social and political outlooks. Paton's stock situation is racial clash and his stock character the suffering African. Cope's pattern is exactly the opposite. His favourite situation involves what is essentially a meeting of groups or individuals, and suffering is to him a means of hope, not as to Paton, a symbol of hopelessness. Paton's pessimism refuses to see any solution; Cope's optimism finds a solution rather too easily. Though Jacobson is moving towards greater subtlety, several of his stories, particularly those on racial themes and the theme of family authority, share this tendency to stress the pattern at the expense of personal insight, with the result that their structure appears mechanical and their conclusions give the impression of being neatly attached.

The question which arises is whether the contemporary short story, so influenced by the social situation, is, like

the bulk of the poetry of the First World War, simply "phase literature", literature which is so wedded to a particular situation that it lacks any lasting quality. To a large extent the contemporary short story is literature typical of a particular phase in South African development, and the bulk of short stories written within the last ten years will, on account of their preoccupation with social patterns, become dated as these patterns either change or cease to be interesting. This does not, however, imply that there is nothing of lasting quality in the contemporary short story. Each of the major short story writers possesses a special sensibility as well as skill in handling the short story form. As a group they can claim to have carried out their purpose of exposing social patterns and "revealing South Africans to themselves as they have become"⁽³⁾ with fair success. What is most important is that in their finest stories all the writers studied have reached beyond the social and literary patterns to the human situation. Such stories as Cope's The Tame Ox, Jacobson's The Zulu and the Zoids, Krige's The Coffin, Paton's Life for a Life, Nadine Gordimer's A Watcher of the Dead and Doris Lessing's Getting off the Altitude have transcended the limitations of social preoccupation. These are essentially stories of human relationships and possess the universality so often lacking in South African literature.

There are, however, too few short stories of this quality. What is required now is greater technical skill,

(3) Nadine Gordimer, The Novel and the Nation in South Africa, in The Times Literary Supplement, August 11, 1961.

for no contemporary short story writer is without his or her particular technical weakness or weaknesses, and, above all, freedom from the social obsession. The emphasis must shift from pattern to person; the contemporary short story writer must think in human rather than social terms if the South African short story is to progress.

This study began with a view of the past and it is appropriate that it should end with at least a glimpse at the future.

It is difficult to pick out promising writing which may indicate future trends from the hundreds of South African short stories published in popular and literary magazines every year. Nevertheless, such writers as Lionel Abrahams, Ronald Byron, Bertha Goudvis, Richard Rive and a group of African writers have produced interesting work which deserves comment.

The few short stories that Lionel Abrahams has published reveal that he is determined not to be regarded as a writer of magazine stories. He carefully avoids both the stereotyped plot and the stereotyped emotion which characterise commercial stories. His most successful work is personal, introspective and analytical. My Fellow Man, for example, lacks action and formal structure, and is almost entirely a succession of thoughts, memories and musings.

His tone is serious and reflective and his language possesses a heavy precision, in keeping with a mind which forges slowly and thoroughly towards a conclusion. States of mind and feelings are approached with uncertainty and

painstakingly analysed and labelled.⁽⁴⁾ Abrahams has been described as "ruthlessly honest",⁽⁵⁾ and he is certainly eager to be absolutely precise in his statements. Though careful, his language is inclined to be dull and unimaginative. Abrahams has none of the striking imagery and sensuous perception of Nadine Gordimer or Doris Lessing, nor does he show any skill in handling dramatic situations. Nevertheless, his intellectual and reflective approach to personal relationships contrasts favourably with the sentimentality of so many of his contemporaries, and his perspective and his tone of sympathetic acceptance show maturity of outlook. Perhaps most important is his interest in people as people, not as representatives of racial or social groups.

Although Ronald Byron's stories are light and superficial in comparison with Lionel Abrahams', they are interesting in that they completely disregard contemporary literary attitudes. For Byron is a humorist who has chosen to see the African as a comic figure. His tone of amused superiority is similar to that of Francis Carey Slater in his short stories of 1908,⁽⁶⁾ or of Frank Brownlee, a short story writer of the thirties.⁽⁷⁾

Humour is lacking in the contemporary short story. Only Krige is to any degree a humorous writer, and Byron's skilfully constructed social comedies provide a corrective both to portentousness and sentimentality. Nevertheless, his superiority leads to a certain superficiality, and his

(4) I have in mind such statements as "... I felt elated", and "... perhaps it was relief".
Standpunte, July, 1956. p.39.

(5) Bernard Sachs, *op.cit.*, p.136.

(6) Francis Carey Slater, The Sunburnt South, Digby Long, 1908.

(7) Frank Brownlee, Corporal Wanzi, Allen and Unwin, 1937.

Africans tend to be excessively naive. His sense of fun and his skill in creating amusing situations need to be matched with greater sympathy and insight.

Bertha Goudvis is one of three writers who have attempted to follow Pauline Smith in weaving experiences of Karoo life into short stories. Only she has achieved a measure of success, for both Joey Muller⁽⁸⁾ and Fay King⁽⁹⁾ lack the emotional maturity to do justice to their themes and setting. Joey Muller escapes into morbid fantasies, with death, insanity, heartbreak and tears as their stock ingredients. Situations which are intended to be tragic are, on account of their melodrama and extravagance, merely ridiculous. Fay King's fantasies are, on the other hand, blissfully innocent and idealistic. Death is carefully avoided, happy endings abound, and each story possesses a clearly stated message of moral uplift.

The stories of Bertha Goudvis are lighter, conversational, and far more realistic. She attempts to portray neither the bliss nor the tragedy of the veld, but the domestic squabbles of the dorp. She writes with a worldly-wise and almost gossipy tone, and with humour and irony at times not unlike Bosman's. Though she differs from Pauline Smith as regards tone and intention, certain of her stories, with their realism and narrow focus, are far closer to The Little Karoo than those of Joey Muller and Fay King. Her stories are slight and often lack technical skill, but, in concentrating on domestic comedy, she has complemented

(8) Joey Muller, "Mrs. Holtjie" and Stories of the Karoo, C.N.A.

(9) Fay King, An Ear of Wheat, C.N.A.

Pauline Smith's tragic picture of the Little Karoo and produced amusing and perceptive pictures of dorp life.

The short stories that are being written in increasing numbers by African writers bear out Alan Paton's generalisation that the African is least able to write objectively. His sense of suffering and injustice and his desire for sympathy or revenge are at present too strong to permit restraint or perspective. Peter Abrahams' short stories, his first published work, are spoilt by excessive pathos and sentimentality.⁽¹⁰⁾ Ezekiel Mphahlele's are marred by excessive crudity.⁽¹¹⁾ Both are serious short story writers, but, like so many African writers, they are, in a sense, too serious, too obsessed by suffering and violence to avoid the extremes of situation and emotion which cause their work to appear forced and immature.

Though much of Peter Kumalo's work reveals his desire to please a magazine editor and to write to a commercial formula, one or two short stories suggest real ability. Death in the Sun, for example, is as violent as any story by Mphahlele, but, unlike his, it is narrated with sensitivity and restraint, and gives no impression of immaturity. Kumalo's language, which is often affected and pompous, can become vivid and precise as he handles a scene of violence with careful understatement.⁽¹²⁾ Whether he will develop his ability as a short story writer

(10) Peter Abrahams, Dark Testament, Allen and Unwin, 1942.

(11) Ezekiel Mphahlele, The Living and Dead, Ministry of Education, Ibadan.

(12) Peter Kumalo, Death in the Sun, in An African Treasury, ed. Langston Hughes, Collancz, 1960. p.118.

depends upon the extent to which he is able to free himself from the conventionality of plot and expression which the demands of the popular magazine have imposed upon the bulk of his writing.

What Peter Abrahams, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Peter Kumalo have in common is a determination to express in short story form the awareness of violence, suffering and oppression of their people, and the seriousness of their work is entirely unrelieved by humour. William Modisane's short stories share neither their preoccupation nor their solemnity, and The Dignity of Beggars reveals what may well be the beginning of a new objectivity among African writers. This is essentially a humorous story, possessing a remarkable degree of self-awareness and amused self-acceptance. It is, in fact, a mildly cynical exposure of the melodramatic poses which characterise much African writing.

Modisane's stories are an attempt to escape from the immaturity which is prevalent in the majority of short stories by African writers. His means of gaining a measure of objectivity through humour and irony has been, in a sense, a short cut. The average African writer is far too serious to share Modisane's tone, and far too self-consciously a spokesman of his people to indulge in ironic detachment. True perspective will come when the African writer can write as an individual, not preoccupied by any feeling of negritude or the thought that he is the mouthpiece of his oppressed continent.

The few short stories that the Coloured writer, Richard Rive, has published, indicate that he may well have the ability to deal with the racial theme with the objectivity so lacking in his African contemporaries.

Rive's accomplishment is his mastery of dialogue and dramatic situation. His understanding of and sympathy for the Cape Coloured, and his awareness of both the comic and the tragic elements of his life are conveyed with poise and restraint in such stories as The Bench and Dagga Smoker's Dream. In each case a dramatic situation and terse, authentic dialogue effectively reveal attitude and emotion.

Rive's situations, like those of Modisane, are ordinary, rather than violent or extreme. This, too, is important, for the non-European writer is too prone to think in terms of explosive situations, and to ignore the more subtle drama in ordinary events of ordinary lives.

It is clear that non-European writers are beginning to play their part in South African literature in English, and that the general immaturity of their work will gradually give way to greater restraint, insight and technical skill. The most recent and probably the most important anthology of South African short stories contains no work by African or Coloured writers.⁽¹³⁾ It is certain that in ten years' time a similar anthology will not be able to disregard their contribution.

(13) David Wright, ed. South African Stories, Faber, 1960.

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