

PLOMER'S PORTRAYAL OF THE FAMILY IN RELATION TO A
HEGEMONIC IDEOLOGY.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how ideology is constituted in texts, and how colonial texts generally support the hegemonic ideology, that is, they offer a point of view which is racialistic and a picture of blacks which is patronizing and denigratory. With regard to the colonial white population, colonial texts generally portray a strongly patriarchal, often authoritarian societal structure.

William Plomer writes within the liberal tradition and therefore seeks to undermine the dominant ideology. He shows how contradictory the colonial attitude to the natives is and how the 'civilising' mission often runs counter to the colonial desire for the ease and luxury which require a subject and 'uncivilised' population. The dissertation looks particularly at the portrayal of family life in Plomer's South African short stories and in Turbott Wolfe. It sees that society limits the range of what the author can invent, that the author in many cases 'encounters the solution' (Macherey), and Plomer seems unable to present a work in which a couple of mixed race is able to find a role in society.

In the short stories, Plomer portrays families as weak entities, with married people often yearning for partners of a different racial group. Marriage is shown to be undermined by the racialistic and authoritarian strictures placed upon it. In Turbott Wolfe, Plomer portrays several bigoted and vicious white families with the men having secret liaisons with black women and seldom acknowledging their progeny. The only couple of mixed race,

seems to operate in a social vacuum and has symbolic value only.

Plomer thus presents a society and a familial structure undermined by the very restrictions which are designed to safeguard them.

I INTRODUCTION

We live in an age when language is no longer innocent. Post-Saussurean theory proposes that language is not simply a transparent medium but is deeply ideological, and that through language, one gains access, not to reality, but to socially constructed signifieds. My project is to examine how ideology is constituted in language and, following Althusser, how texts not only reflect the hegemonic ideology of a society, but play a crucial role in creating this ideology. I shall then turn to colonial society and endeavour to show how racial ideology is reflected and perpetuated in colonial texts. In the colonial context, liberal writers generally operate in a counter-hegemonic direction, and Plomer certainly intends to undermine the dominant assumptions of colonial society. I will look at his major South African writing and in particular examine his portrayal of the family, and its role in challenging or reinforcing the prevailing ideology.

II THE THESIS OF A HEGEMONIC IDEOLOGY

In his essay, 'Ideology and Ideological State apparatuses', Althusser presents a revisionist version of the base/superstructure metaphor. In particular, he says, this 'spatial metaphor... obliges us to pose the theoretical problem of the types of "derivatory" effectivity peculiar to the superstructure i.e. it obliges us to think what the Marxist tradition calls conjointly the relative autonomy of the superstructure and the reciprocal action of the superstructure on the base' (p130). He argues that production can only continue because the Repressive State Apparatus is underwritten by the Ideological State Apparatus (I.S.A.). This I.S.A. comprises various 'institutions', among which he lists the education system, the family and the cultural apparatus. These, he says, and in particular the 'School-Family couple' through which ideology is most effectively communicated, are the site of 'bitter forms of class struggle' (p140).

Following Althusser, Raymond Williams who has had a deeply formative influence on shaping a Marxist tradition in England, speaks of revaluing the base 'away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process' (Problems in Materialism and Culture, p.34). This social being determines the consciousness, and the dominant ideology of a society, which

saturates all classes, so that it becomes the unquestioned common-sense of most people. It is incorporated by the 'processes of education; the processes of a much wider social training within institutions like the family ...the selective tradition at an intellectual and theoretical level: all these forces are involved in a continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture' (p39). Literature is seen as a crucial activity in a Marxist State, and any 'oppositional writing' (that which subverts the dominant ideology) will be 'extirpated with extraordinary vigour' (p42). The Western capitalist state, Williams holds, considers texts to be less important - 'if the thing is not making a profit ... then it can for some time be overlooked' (p43). South Africa, however, is in this regard like a Marxist State, and considers literature to be important. Clearly, it holds that this superstructural element has a significant effect, as can be seen by the stormy reaction to the publication of Turbott Wolfe. In Double Lives, Plomer writes that 'Leading South African newspapers devoted long leading articles to vituperation ... not wholly unlike hysterical Nazis decrying "degenerate" art' (p161).

Gramsci highlights another difference between the traditional Western countries and Marxist countries when he comments that hegemony predominates over coercion in the West, whereas the reverse prevails in Marxist countries. In all cases, however, the working class (or those suppressed) tends to suffer from inertia and passivity, and its philosophy is fragmentary and incoherent. In fact, the

cultural ascendancy of the ruling class prevents an effective and active counter-hegemonic ideology from flourishing, and the current political and philosophical dispensation is often accepted, legitimated by, among other things, the increasing level of material rewards, and the practice of parliamentary democracy. Fairly clearly, the colonial state differed from the Western state in this regard. The native inhabitants may indeed often have been politically inert, but the status quo was not underpinned by a democracy in which they could participate. Material rewards were often grievously inadequate and exploitation much more blatant.

Althusser makes one other claim which is significant. Following Lacan, he holds that ideology interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject (Lenin and Philosophy, p162). Thus ideology 'transforms the individuals into subjects' (p163), while in effect denying the ideological character of the operation. The argument is that discourse offers the reader a variety of positions, duplicating those offered by the dominant ideology. Thus Barthes comments on the "naturalness" with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly 'dress up a reality which ... is undoubtedly determined by history' (Mythologies, p11). What is ideological is transformed, and the individual is interpellated and is invited to view the ideological construct as natural. 'The world enters language as a dialectical relation between activities..., it comes out of myth as a harmonious display of essences' (Mythologies, p142). Thus subjects are 'subjected' to the authority of

the social formation. Families and schools, the media and diverse discourses all reproduce the myths which constitute 'reality' and in which the subject can 'voluntarily' take up his appointed place.

Macherey goes so far as to hold that the author's role is limited too. He also has been interpellated and, though creative possibilities exist, the limits of the ideological content of his work, have been set.

The author certainly makes decisions, but, as we know, his decisions are determined;...to a great extent the author also encounters the solutions and resigns himself to handing them on. His narrative is discovered rather than invented...We might say that the author is the first reader of his own work; he first gives himself the surprises that he will hand on to us, he enjoys playing the game of free choice according to the rules...But it is not a question of taking from the authorial consciousness and giving to a collective consciousness or to a specific unconscious...To know the conditions of a work is...to show how it is composed of a real diversity of elements which give it substance. The work is not the product of chance, but it does involve novelty, which is inscribed in its very letter. It is this mobility which makes the work possible, and from which it emerges.

A Theory of Literary Production
(pp48-9)

Realist fiction is an example of the ideological practice in which the author plays 'the game of free choice according to the rules'. The modes of production are suppressed and the reader is offered a number of subject

positions which reinforce the dominant ideology from which the text springs. The fiction depicts the world apparently transparently, and intrusion by the author is infrequent. The reader is invited to accept the selection of facts offered, and the view of the world presented, as an experience of 'reality' into which he can enter and in which he can find his own identity and 'autonomy' reinforced. There is a privileged discourse, often invisible, whereby the reader is invited to share a stable position with the author, vis-à-vis the known world, and the action of the novel is a repetition of the normal and familiar.

Althusser's analysis of the workings of ideology in society has been widely influential. Colonial discourse, as I hope to show, operates on the basis he outlines and 'interpellates' the reader, inviting him or her to share a variety of known and familiar subject positions. Althusser's theory does not, however, adequately allow for the possibilities of ideological struggle, for the creative possibilities of individuals who oppose the determining social structures. Liberal writers in the colonial context have often sought this opposition. Raymond Williams writes of this in Politics and Letters:

However dominant a social system may be, the very meaning of its domination involves a limitation or selection of other activities it covers, so that by definition it cannot exhaust all social experience, which therefore always potentially contains space for alternative acts and alternative intentions which are not yet articulated as a social institution

or even project (p252).

Though certain ideological positions are therefore dominant in any situation (and subjects interpellated correspondingly), the process is not ineluctable. An ideological choice is possible, and Plomer makes this choice, suggesting to his reader a range of alternative 'subject-positions'. Resistance is as real a possibility as domination. As Edward Said puts it,

an isolated individual consciousness, going against the surrounding environment as well as allied to contesting classes, movements, and values, is an isolated voice out of place but very much of that place, standing consciously against the prevailing orthodoxy and very much for a professedly universal or humane set of values, which has provided significant local resistance to the hegemony of one culture.

The World, the Text, and the Critic
(p15)

III COLONIAL LITERATURE AND THE HEGEMONIC IDEOLOGY.

When Plomer first published Turbott Wolfe in 1925, he did so against a widely diffused background of writings on 'primitive man'. Social Darwinism had strengthened the tendency to use race as a means of classifying mankind, with European man at the top of the ladder of development, and the 'primitive' black man at the bottom. Racial or biological models were also used for 'determining' the internal characteristics of the natives such as morality, as if they were passed on like physical characteristics. Colonial writers aimed the product (whether travel documents or colonial romances such as those of Kipling or Haggard) at the metropolitan audience, since the object of their representation (the natives) was debarred from the texts by linguistic barriers or illiteracy. Thus the authors tended to be unconcerned about the accuracy of their accounts, and emphasized the exotic, exciting or savage side of primitive life, at the expense of the commonplace. The tradition of the 'noble savage' found few echoes in the discourse of these colonial writers, and instead of an unspoilt Eden being presented, writers justified the colonial enterprise in terms of the European's civilizing mission, and his inherent superiority. John Buchan typifies this view in his presentation of Davie, in Prester John:

I knew then the meaning of the white man's duty. He has to take all the risks ... That is the difference between white and black, the gift of responsibility, the power of being in a little way a king, and so long as we know and then practise it, we will rule not in Africa alone, but wherever there are dark men who live only for their bellies (p88).

There is no hint of irony in this passage, and the context makes it clear that the subject position offered to the reader is that taken by the narrator. In fact, Abdul JanMohamed holds that the natives were simply reified as subject matter for romance. Colonial discourse, he says, 'commodifies the native subject into a stereotyped object and uses him as a resource for colonialist fiction. The European writer commodifies the native by negating his individuality, his subjectivity, so that he is now perceived as a generic being' (p83).

The passage quoted from Prester John is in many ways typical of the colonial romance. Both the white and the black man are treated as stable and unaltering types. The intention of the writer is to codify difference, to present a timeless present tense in which habitual attitudes and actions can continue. There is an explicit unity of subject position between writer and reader, which confirms the wisdom and superiority of both. It is a paradigmatic case of the way in which ideology interpellates the subject and normalises the discourse. As Catherine Belsey puts it, 'the task of ideology is to present the subject as fixed and unchangeable, an element in a given system of differences which is human nature and the world of human experience, and to show possible action as an endless repetition of "normal" familiar action' (p90).

Colonial writers were the principal agents whereby the European colonising project was valorized. They had thus to construct an image of Africa for their metropolitan

audiences, and at the same time provide an ideological justification for the destruction of the cultural identity of the colonised people and the superimposition of a radically alien culture. Thus the myth of Dark Africa arose, and the widely shared view that light must be shed. The British were to teach the virtues of trade and industry and at the same time supervise the replacement of savage customs and bizarre superstitions by the one true faith, the one valid culture and the one concept of progress. Even Livingstone, who had more knowledge of, and respect for, Africans, than many, could write that Africa must be opened up by 'commerce and Christianity'. Thus in the name of Imperialist ideology, a discourse was produced which legitimised conquest and offered no concrete vision of a future in which the colonising project would have been 'successful' - in which the natives would be faithful, cultured and industrious. The supposed benefits of the 'civilising' mission were to be indefinitely postponed, and the 'evolution' of the indigenenes from barbarism to civilisation placed at some unattainable point in the future. What had happened in fact, was that race had replaced class as an interchangeable term, and the ideology which had underpinned the dominant class in the metropolitan area, was now being used to underpin the dominant race. Patrick Brantlinger holds that 'Racism often functions as a displaced or surrogate class system, growing more extreme as the domestic class alignments it reflects are threatened or erode ... The hierarchy of classes never seemed so absolute as the hierarchy of races ... the spectacle of the domination of "inferior races" abroad also served to allay

anxieties about both democratization and economic decline at home' (Gates, p201).

The ruling discourse, in which reader and author shared a subject position of domination, was met by what seemed to be acquiescence and silence. Not only were the suppressed people silenced within the text of the ruling race, but linguistic barriers prevented their reply, and illiteracy prevented any record of opposition. For the moment at least, there was a monopoly on discourse. As Frantz Fanon wrote, 'A man who has language ... possesses the world expressed and implied by that language ... Mastery of language affords remarkable power' (Black Skins, White Masks, p18).

IV THE LIBERAL TRADITION

I have traced the theory of the dominant ideology, and the view that texts play a crucial role, not just in reflecting but in establishing and maintaining this hegemonic ideology. In colonial society the dominant group (the European) effaces the voice of the suppressed, and the classical colonial texts reinforce the position of the coloniser and encourage a complicity between reader and author. I have already suggested, however, that every hegemony will be contested, and for many decades it was the role of the liberal tradition to contest the dominant colonial ideology. Recent radical writing has drawn attention to the weakness of the liberal position, and to its failure to engage fully in the liberation struggle. Nonetheless, in the earlier part of this century, the liberal voice was often the only voice to bring to consciousness the deep contradictions afflicting colonial society, to attempt to subvert the moral and political ascendancy of the dominant group, and clarify alternative values; to offer alternative subject positions. It is in this period the liberal text which highlights the opposition between the subjective desire of the white for ease and privilege, and the communal obligation which his 'civilising' mission entails. Althusser points to exactly such a case:

Indeed, if [the subject] does not do what he ought to do as a function of what he believes, it is because he does something else, which, still as a function of the same idealist scheme, implies that he has other ideas in his head as well as those he proclaims, and thus he acts according

to these other ideas, as a man who is either 'inconsistent' ('no one is willingly evil') or cynical, or perverse.

In every case ... the 'ideas' of a human subject exist in his actions, or ought to exist in his actions, and if that is not the case, [ideology] lends him other ideas corresponding to the actions (however perverse) that he does perform.

(p158)

The problem is not, however, simply that the whites express one set of values (the philanthropic or 'civilising' mission) and enact another set (the exploitative mission). Nadine Gordimer draws attention to the lack of an integrated community within which the liberal writer operates. The writer supporting the dominant ideology in South Africa, writes within a powerful tradition, and with a sense of assured subject positions. The liberal writer must create alternative subject positions, but has not the sense of a supportive society to which to refer. While a sense of conflict may provide the motive for writing, Gordimer holds that an integrated culture is necessary for the arts to flourish. One can see this very clearly in the case of Plomer's writing, where there is the sense of there being two, or even three different worlds (English, Afrikaans and Black). Moreover, very often the more enlightened characters seem to operate within a cultural vacuum and have no thrust into society.

V THEORIES OF THE FAMILY

Since I wish to discuss in particular Plomer's portrayal of the family in relation to the hegemonic ideology, I should like to clarify my position with regard to the family.

Various studies of family life have been made by eminent scholars, but in most cases they do not reflect the early twentieth century South African reality. Thus Levi-Strauss in Elementary Structures of Kinship gives a structuralist analysis of primitive society, and Lawrence Stone provides a very detailed examination of the history of family life in Family, Sex and Marriage in England: 1500 - 1800. Both, however, analyse a very different society from that obtaining in South Africa during this century. I shall therefore use selectively part of M. Poster's Critical Theory of the Family, in as far as it relates to the society Plomer is depicting.

Poster makes the point that, whereas the modern nuclear family consists only of parents and children, in pre-industrial Europe, the term 'family' very often referred to all members of a household, whether or not they were blood relations. The composition of such a household was not stable, but it did constitute a cohesive entity or 'family'. I shall use the term 'family' in this sense as a unit whose members are in most cases related by blood, but which may also include 'outsiders' to the blood line.

The relationship between the family and society is

important, Poster holds, for the family is 'always open to the world and always structured by it' (p108) and the family plays an important role in maintaining the stability of society. I should like to examine Plomer's portrayal of the family to see whether this holds in his works: whether the families are moulded by the ideological assumptions of their society and contribute to perpetuating them, or whether they are able to construct creative alternatives.

VI THE SOUTH AFRICAN SHORT STORIES

Portraits in the Nude, a novella, was first published in Voorslag in 1926, and then in the collection, I Speak of Africa, published by The Hogarth Press in 1927. It derives from the period Plomer spent in the Stormberg in 1921. The title indicated that it 'addressed itself to a readership situation which, in his view, demanded an outright declaration of content (Africa) and of intention (plain talk, straight from the shoulder). The proud ring of the phrase also implied that Plomer's collection was to be taken as testimony, as carrying the impress of lived experience' (Gray, p53).

Portraits depicts the 'pre-industrial family' which Poster writes of - a household consisting of the van Ryn parents, three sons, a great-aunt, and two 'outsiders' who are not of the blood line: the governess and a 'very paying guest' (p5), Mr. Cormorant. The point of view adopted is that of Cormorant, through whose eyes we see the van Ryn family and the other family presented in the story, that of the employees, Shilling and Sara.

The narrative opens with a peaceful scene, depicting Takhaar van Ryn and the 'Kaffir' ploughing, and the family subsequently gathering around Minta van Ryn and the 'tall brass coffee-pot'. Mr. Winterhalter, a visitor 'of vast importance' (p2) is due, and it soon becomes clear that he is not only the purchaser of prize rams, but is also Minta van Ryn's lover. Her husband seems to acquiesce in the situation, but evinces strange eruptions from his

unconscious. When his great-aunt dies, for instance, he dresses in sack-cloth and tolls a large bell. He then decrees a fast, locks the governess in her room and strikes his wife for daring to prepare food for him. On being struck in return, however, he whines for help, and subsequently appears cheerful and eats enormously. At the Nagmaal service, he reacts in an even more bizarre manner, entering the church in the nude while tolling the same bell. His wife, we find, has just left him for Mr. Winterhalter's bed.

On the family's return, Dirk (the son) makes sexual overtures to Sara, the maid. He is rebuffed, fetches his brother and between them they tie her husband, Shilling, to a waggon-wheel and whip him, finally stabbing him to death while Takhaar watches, tolling his bell. At this point Minta van Ryn returns, and in the penultimate chapter, 'they seemed to Cormorant entirely united as a family, standing here, this warm morning, with warm colour in their morning-flushed faces, bright-dark-eyed, full of an astonishing tenderness ... Takhaar is silent, as you might expect of a man who dwells in the perfect security of a saint' (p31). The last chapter depicts Lily, the governess, admiring her nude body in the mirror, while waiting for Cormorant to appear.

An ideological analysis of this story indicates that the van Ryn parents support the dominant racial ideology and make every effort to indoctrinate their children. Thus Golgo is told:

"Oh, never mind Mandebazana," said Lily. "Remember you're a little white boy, and must learn your lessons. Little Kaffirs belong to playtime."

"He's not a little Kaffir!" Golgo said tearfully, "and I don't want to be a little white boy!"

(pp5-7)

Clearly, as Althusser says, the family is the site of 'bitter forms of [race] struggle' (p140). Golgo makes repeated attempts to include his black playmate in the family's activities and to take him to Nagmaal, but to no purpose. Blacks may drive the oxen to Nagmaal, but the service is racially exclusive. The older brother, Dirk, like Golgo, shows little regard for racial exclusivity, going straight from Nagmaal to the warm arms of the half-caste, Poppy Fitzmichael. However, as so often happens in representations of colonial life, he is shown to expect sexual mastery over any coloured woman, and when repulsed by Sara, reacts with extreme violence and sadism in his treatment of her husband. Instead of penetrating her body, he undresses Shilling and penetrates his body with a knife, while Frans's face lights up in 'religious ecstasy' (p28). Clearly, an orgasmic pleasure is experienced in the lashing and the murder, and Shilling is depicted as the 'Black Christ' (p26), atoning for the sins of racialism passed on from father to son. At no point in the text has Shilling been permitted to express a contrary ideology. He is the 'perfect servant [with] very little to say and a great deal to do' (p25). Plomer is presenting black characters who embody Gramsci's contention that the working class is passive and unable to articulate a virile counter-hegemony.

The dominant ideology is present in the terms of address ('baas' and 'You black bitch') as it is in the dismissal of 'kaffirs' and 'niggers'.

Calvinism is the religious ideology which the narrative presents. It is not only racially exclusive, but, in Laurens van der Post's view, turns people into 'argumentative, dutiful, self-justifying, time-conscious, joyless hypocrite[s]' (Introduction to Turbott Wolfe, p155). The van Ryn family ostensibly subscribes to Calvinism, travelling a long distance to attend Nagmaal. In fact, however, it is at Nagmaal that Minta is transformed from a 'slapper-slippered' (p31) wife to a mistress who 'was looking straight before her under heavy intoxicated eyelids [and] ... smiling dreamily' (p18). In Althusser's words, 'if [the subject] does not do what he ought to do as a function of what he believes, it is because he does something else, which ... implies that he has other ideas in his head' (p158). The 'other ideas' are surely the surfacing of the sexuality which Calvinism has repressed so rigidly. Takhaar's demented reaction indicates his inability to cope with his wife's rebellion, not only against religion, but against conformity and his rigidly patriarchal rule. Plomer's approach to the congregation which has been 'doing the Lord's Supper' and has 'patronized the Lord' emerges clearly as he depicts it becoming a mob with 'bestial voice', eager 'to be in at the kill' (p20). This 'Portrait in the Nude' of Takhaar van Ryn can be juxtaposed against the unwilling nudity of the 'Black Christ' who is sacrificed as a result of frustrated

sexuality, and the other nude 'portrait', that of Lily du Toit. Her unrepressed and natural joy in her body are an implicit comment on the sexual repressions of the van Ryns.

Many of Plomer's stories present the inter-face of cultures, and in this case the inter-face is not only between black and white. Cormorant who joins the van Ryn family, is never allowed to integrate fully into it. Poster suggests that the extended family formed a cohesive entity embodying the blood members and 'outsiders'. However, Plomer indicates that Cormorant is never fully assimilated (nor, presumably, would he wish to be). At the Nagmaal, he is left to sleep in the open with those other outsiders, the 'kaffirs', but at the service his presence is tolerated. The subject position offered to the reader is that of Cormorant, viewing the proceedings ironically, but never able to transform the dominant ideology in any way.

Down on the Farm, Plomer's next novella set in the Winterberg, is writing of a very different type. It is an episodic narrative, depicting an idealised rural scene, in which a 'superb landscape ... thickly covered ... with yellow flowers' (p33) predominates. J.M. Coetzee points out in White Writing that the European pastoral depicts the virtues of the garden with no reference to the ownership of the land. It is a place of virtue, innocence and beauty available to all men, and this garden myth was an animating force in the literature of many Western countries. In South Africa, however, the pastoral has taken the form of a celebration of the farm, a domain over which the patriarch rules and on which he can inscribe his essentially conservative values.

The Afrikaans writers such as C.M. van den Heever have depicted this 'bastion of trusted feudal values or cradle of a transindividual familial/tribal form of consciousness' (Coetzee, p4), and English writers such as Pauline Smith have added their idealized versions of these simple retreats, with their humble inhabitants, heroic virtues and silent suffering. The narratives idealise the social stability and the 'organic mode of consciousness belonging to a people who, from toiling generation after generation on the family farm, have divested themselves of individuality and become embodiments of an enduring bloodline stretching back into a mythicized past '(Coetzee, p6).

Plomer's farm Eden has a number of attributes which distinguish it from others of this genre. Whereas the traditional farmer is lord of all he surveys, this landscape is divided, for 'right through the middle of the flowers runs the fence which divides the two farms, Adventure and Brakfontein' (p33). Whereas the traditional 'plaasroman' locates the conflict between rural and urban civilisations, or between black and white, it is here located between two cousins, owning two adjacent farms. The differences in ideology between them may therefore be expected to be slighter, more subtle, though possibly no less penetrating.

The authorial voice makes it clear from the outset that Adventure, the farm of Mr Stevens, is the favoured model. Direct intrusion by the author does not occur, but the impersonal narrative interpellates the reader, inviting him or her to share a non-contradictory view of this world,

in which some values are unquestionably 'better' than others. It is interesting to note that the reader never learns the first names of either Mr and Mrs Stevens, or Mr and Mrs Kimball, and this may suggest that they are stylised, and are vehicles for a certain ideological projection. What then are the ideological attributes of these cousins? The Stevens family, who receive the greater attention, are simple, hardworking but limited people. Their neighbours differ in degree only - they are less simple, more hardworking and less limited - in fact, they own a car, have more money and are patronising and contemptuous of their relatives. Mrs Stevens spends her time doing appliqué-work, which the authorial voice denigrates, and her husband's speech is as limited as his vocabulary and mind. Wherein then, lies the advantage of this family as a vehicle for Plomer's ideology?. It would seem that the benevolent patriarchy of Mr Stevens is held up for admiration, despite his, 'baby face ... insignificant nose, large ears' (p34). Moreover, his wife, cast in the role feminists refer to as the 'Angel in the Home', centres her life in him and their children. The reason seems to be summed up in the following description - 'he has reached a kind of maturity and seems able to maintain in his own life and in the lives of those about him a balance and harmony which cannot easily be shaken' (p34). Here then is that unity of being, that harmoniously organized sense of self-hood which Lacan claims can never be found once the symbolic order is entered.

A closer reading, however, suggests that Mr Stevens's sense of identity is not founded entirely on his wife and

children. Terms of respect and admiration abound between them, but not terms of love. Love is mentioned in a different context - the earth in fact becomes the lover, and it is with the farm that Stevens is familiar - 'as one is with a lover; he got to know both its contours and its spirit, and never tired of either' (p41). It is the earth-wife to whom Stevens is ultimately wed. And to the black man, Willem, whom Stevens 'trusted, loved' (p37). Conventional colonial discourse places the black man on the periphery, as an Other who cannot be accommodated in the dominant culture. Plomer places Willem centrally. He is silent, like so many black figures in colonial texts, but then so is Stevens. However, his presence is crucial if his master's desire is to be met. Though he is never expected to work at night, he always appears in 'the pastoral simplicity of the scene, [with] the whole atmosphere of deep natural instincts being fulfilled' (p37). On Stevens' return home, though wife and child first meet him, it is Willem's appearance which was 'By no means the least important element in Stevens' pleasure at coming home', and 'there was a deep understanding and even affection between them' (p36). Though the bond puzzles his wife, she accepts it. The narrative makes it clear that it is with Willem that Stevens shares the most intimate moments in his life - the moment of lambing and the death of a labourer, and 'without the exchange of a simple comment the bond between them was strengthened by one more thread' (p39). Finally it is Willem's baby whom Stevens delivers, whom he wraps in his own shirt and 'towards which he felt almost paternal' (p46). Plomer's own homosexuality surely surfaces here in his ambivalent

treatment of a familial relationship he had constructed as the bearer of the privileged ideology. 'I couldn't do without him ... I don't want to show him that he's just everything to me' (p49-50). Yet there is one detail which projects from the text and refuses accommodation - Willem is worth 'ten shillings a week and half a bag of maize flour' (p49) - no more. The black man who is 'everything' must not be 'spoil[t]' (p50).

Thus what starts as an analysis of two related families, ends as something else. Plomer's focus has almost imperceptibly shifted from the rivalry between the Kimballs and the Stevens (and the different values they embody), to the close bond between Stevens and Willem. Unconsciously he has undermined the idealised depiction of the family entity, to suggest a dominance of another relationship. Even here, however, the colonial racialism is to be found. 'Social being determines consciousness', Raymond Williams says, and the consciousness of Kimball is at the deepest level inextricable from the racialism of his society.

In The South African Autobiography, Plomer writes of his novella, Ula Masondo, that it was 'more coherent and objective than Turbott Wolf, and gave, I think, an original perception of the impact upon a tribal African of being immersed in an industrial revolution' (p175). He here postulates a connection between history and textuality. Edward Said puts it this way:

Texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted. ... [There is a] connection between texts and the existential actualities of human life, politics, societies, and events. The realities of power and authority - as well as the resistances offered by men, woman, and source movements, to institutions, authorities and orthodoxies - are the realities that make texts possible.

The World, the Text, and the Critic (p4-5)

Ula Masondo, (in many ways a fore-runner of Cry the Beloved Country) is deeply implicated in historical and ideological actuality. It responds to the dominant colonial ideology, represented by the white storekeeper and his family, by offering an ironic reading of this ideology and by highlighting the contradictions inherent in the colonial enterprise. Two families are depicted - the unnamed white storekeeper's family, and the Zulu Masondo family. The *raison d'être* of the European's existence is trade - he has sold a blanket before breakfast, and therefore feels cheerful. Clearly, previously established customs and modes of dress have been displaced by the Imperial need to sell British manufactures. The result is a dependence of the white on the black for his material existence, at the same time that the modes of address indicate the subservience of the black and the superiority of the white, who is addressed as 'baas' (p51). His privileged position (steak and eggs for breakfast) as well as his sense of moral

superiority, rests on the economic basis of a trading store, and Plomer is at pains to emphasize his enlarging economic horizons: 'The natives are getting to want more and more every year, and by and by little Freddy will be able to start a second Harrods here in Lembuland' (p52). This is the familiar colonial reverie, in which the colonial territory is seen to be opening up and being peopled by a population which will provide untold wealth to the traders and the metropolitan manufacturers. There is, however, a contradiction at the root of the white man's patronising attitude - buying an expensive blanket proves that the Masondos are 'extravagant, improvident' (p51), but, 'What I like about that family is they're not afraid to spend a bit of money'. What Plomer is doing is thematising the colonial mentality, which, he indicates, is exploitative and ambiguous. The last page of the story returns to this theme.

'Give me the raw nigger any day, is what I have always maintained.'

'Oh, go on, Fred, you're the one that's always talking about increasing their wants, and getting the trade built up for little Freddy.' (p81)

In the Heart of Darkness, Marlow makes a point which is relevant here. He says that

the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems [conquest] is the idea only (pp50-51).

Plomer offers us an ironic reading of the trader's

attitude, positioning us as subjects who are enabled to see the hollowness of the pretensions and the strategies employed to maintain the dominant position of the whites.

The inferiority of the Other is highlighted by the store-keeper by the formal device of indicating that he is stereotypical - 'those Masondos are all alike, ... And so they'll go on, generation after generation' (p51-2). The fiction of a fundamental difference is presented, and the colonist is depicted as having an inbuilt moral, cultural and economic superiority, that authorises the trader to give his customer (a 'boy') 'a piece of his mind' (p81).

When the Masondo family is depicted, it is represented as an example of the 'noble savage'. We have the storekeeper's condescending comment on the elderly grandmother who is 'a fine old girl' and on the degree of family cohesion - 'they all keep in touch with the old people ... yes, they always come back to the old people' (p52). There is a joy and vivacity in the depiction of the tribal entity - 'The whole valley was full of sunlight, and Ula Masondo's walk became a dance' as the Masondo family turned out to 'receive their splendid son' (p52-3). The idealisation of rural values is evident in the description of the patriarch, 'a person of importance' who has 'suffered the proud privations of fasting and exposure and circumcision'. His home is warm and attractive, 'his young wife made a mother... her familiar feminine smell', and 'her voice .. young and tender'. He has 'his tradition, his dignity' (p54). The ominous tones of racial conflict are however,

already evident. The blanket is red, 'like the blood of a white man'.

The noble savage becomes the degraded savage when he leaves the rural peace and enters the townships and the compound of the mine. He has had no adequate preparation for this interface of cultures, for coping with the degeneracy of the dirty children in dongas among old tins, while a 'white borzoi dog' (p57) sits in a purring grey motor-car. The transition from a communal life to a competitive and individualistic society is fraught. Ula Masondo, who 'from the time he was born, had never slept by himself' was 'found lying at night with a friend for warmth and company', (p57) and nearly flogged for sodomy. The fringes of European Johannesburg gradually obliterate Ula's sense of familial and communal responsibility, and he goes 'recklessly from one debauch to another' (p57). The authorial voice intrudes at this point, to offer the comment that this is not an illogical way of life 'for a man who has no freedom for six days in the week.' Plomer thus deliberately valorizes the African position, in a situation where the dominant race offers little opportunity for choice. Moreover, the European's claim to wisdom and skill is undermined repeatedly by the counter-hegemonic discourse - 'Where there is intuition, what is the use of psycho-analysis?' (And we recall that the store-keeper claimed skill as a psychologist.) 'Where is the white man who can hide his character from a Kaffir?' (p62) This echoes the quotation from Louis Couperus which prefaces the tale. The penetrating and analytical skills are attributed to the

black man, not the white and thus the ascendancy of the dominant group is subverted.

Not only the black family disintegrates in the face of urban pressure, but the same fate overtakes the white families on whom Ula and Vilakazi prey. The colonist and the colonized are two faces of the same process, the one a mirror image of the other.

The story Black Peril was written during the period when there was considerable hysteria about black-white relations. David Brown writes that 'Black Peril may be described as the phobia about sexual relations between black and white, with particular emphasis on the fear of white women being raped by black men. The notion of the white race "melting" into the black was seen by many white writers as a threat to "civilisation", and hence to white dominance... In the 1920s it reached fever pitch and manifested itself in the State's ideological apparatus with the passing of the Tielman Roos Act.' (Turbott Wolfe, pp187-8). What Plomer does in his story is to invert the problem. The threat to white 'civilisation' and white domestic security, is seen to come from a white woman, who desires a brown man.

Freud maintains that the 'royal road' to the unconscious is dreams, and Black Peril is largely a dream sequence, framed by a realistic discourse at the beginning and end. These two aspects are complementary, for the realistic passages present the social and ideological situation which gives birth to the manifestations of the unconscious presented in the dream. To put it another way,

those aspects of life which colonial, bourgeois society cannot face directly, which it can only hint at or suppress, surface through the subconscious.

Sander Gilman suggests that 'the "white man's burden" ... [is] his sexuality and its control, and it is this which is transferred into the need to control the sexuality of the Other' (p237). Thus the white man, fearful of his own drives, projects them onto the black man, finding him therefore to be an inferior being. In Prospero and Caliban, Mannoni confirms this view, holding that 'in order to preserve our peace of mind, we are compelled to believe that people whose thoughts - as it seems to us - are the same as our own innermost thoughts, are inferior beings and have nothing in common with ourselves at all' (p20). Thus, in the story, Charles is seen as 'a Caliban figure escaping from proper Prosperian control' (Malan, p159), and in the realistic passage at the end of the story, the woman has been 'outraged' and 'black brutes are all alike'. They should be 'hung' or 'lynched' (p89). This sort of discourse in which racial and sexual Otherness are conflated, serves to shut off rational investigation into how the 'outrage' has occurred, and acts as an agent of closure. In Plomer's hands, however, the closure is incomplete, because the dream sequences probe the deep attraction which black has for Vera Cornelissen.

The scenes that float through Vera's delirious dreams, have two dominant images: death, and blackness. They seem to be omnipresent, and the constant tense switches ('she was

twelve years old ... she is on the farm' (p83)) serve to dehistoricize the sequences, and present death and the dark-skinned person as constant forces. Always the black person is sensual and soft. When she is two and her sister dies, it is a black nursemaid - 'her hands are hot, her voice is soft, she has a strange, friendly smell' (p83). Again, at meals, the details of the 'native man' remain with her as a sensual impression - 'the smell of soap and ... his warm dark skin ... she can see a rose-brown flush that suffuses his cheeks'. At Dunnsport, she remembers the 'native man ... caressing, with his sensual lips' (p83). The result is predictable - at twelve she is sexually involved with 'a native boy', at school she is familiar with the native quarters by night, and Zulu, Arab and Indian figures haunt her subsequent dreams.

Plomer depicts the deep sexual excitement that dark-skinned people offer Vera, but he has her marry George, a fair-skinned member of the 'commercial aristocracy' (p86). The whole colonial ideology is set against miscegenation, and the mulatto figure in particular, is rejected. He is the figure of mediation between the races, and he embodies the possibility of two antitheses becoming one.

"I suppose it isn't a sin to be coloured", Vera says.

"But it's a sin to look coloured," he says ..."Quite enough people are touched with the tar-brush." (p87).

The white girl who is sexually involved with a black loses all claim to virtue (not so if she had an illicit affair with a white man); the black is flogged

'nearly to death' or ~~hanged~~. But Vera's marriage fails, because the dark skin of Charles offers too much allurements.

Plomer's view of the 'security' of the white family is here entirely counter-hegemonic. The threat comes from the white woman, whose sexual appetite has not been sated; it comes from the European who has wished to cross the colour barrier to marry, and has been prevented by the enormous pressures of colonial society. But colonial society, Plomer suggests, is decaying and corrupt. The houses are rotting, the windows vacant, the values mocked by the 'derisive laughter of monkey-birds' (p86). The first wave of 'Wesleyan Conquistadors' (p86) has perished. The next wave with fewer 'civilising' justifications and with 'their fortunes ... in plantations of sugarcane' (p86) are almost choked by indigenous growth. Plomer uses Vera's hallucinations to undermine the dominant ideology of the realistic passages. In the dreams, he shows the decay of a white civilisation which will be trodden underfoot and obliterated by the Eurafrikan nation, already represented by the peanut-seller.

The short story, Stephen Jordan's Wife offers the reader two views of colonial society: that represented by Colonel Gunn-Drummond, and that represented by Stephen Jordan. Gunn-Drummond is sketched with little finesse - he is the traditional racist, unthinking, repetitive, 'reciting his reminiscences' (p90), and presenting a stereotypical picture of the 'nigger', for whom there is only one answer - the gun. His discourtesy and lack of sensitivity show him in an adverse light even among his own race. In fact, it is a feature of Plomer's writing that the racists are generally intolerable even within their own society.

Jordan represents the more moderate considered view. He wishes to consider the 'native trouble in Lembuland' (p91) rationally, and holds that 'Guns aren't everything' (p91). His character and position only emerge obliquely, however, partly through a day dream, and partly through Gunn-Drummond's clumsy gossip. The dream sequence recalls the far longer passage in Black Peril where Vera in her delirium recaptures the moments of sensual bliss with dark-skinned men, all terminated abruptly by society's prohibition. Here, the dream is of an idyllic marital relationship, and where reality ruptures the image, there is a desire to explain, to excuse and to dream further. All the images - the 'clouds like amorini ... the maternal bleating mingl[ing] with the quavering cries of innumerable lambs' - contribute to the picture of rustic peace and domestic bliss. The reality is of course different - a slattern with uncombed hair, a mouth like a gun and a habit of contradicting every statement made. (It is noteworthy

that the racist shoots with bullets, while the liberal's wife is almost as deadly, with words.) Even Drummond himself is not unimpeachable - not only is he ineffectual in dealing with his wife, but he seeks refuge with a widow in the neighbouring town.

What is Plomer's ideological project? He clearly intends to present an unthinking and bigoted man negatively. However, he indicates that the Colonel is not representative - he is an extreme example of his type, one whom few acquaintances will care to speak to. Neither he nor Jordan is able to deal with reality - the one cannot cope with what he perceives as a racial threat; the other cannot cope with a threat to marital peace. It is as if Plomer's ostensible project - to present the liberal case positively - is undermined by his inability to present an enlightened individual who is not damaged by his familial circumstances. It may be that 'the overt, cognitive structure of an ideological discourse is in fact subordinated to its covert, emotive structure' (JanMohamed, p267).

When the Sardines Came differs in one significant respect from Plomer's other stories: there is no protagonist who embodies the dominant ideology. Certainly, the divisions in Natal society occasioned by this ideology are explicitly stated -

Divided at all times by a thousand barriers, of race, of money, of caste, of class, of language, of pride and fear, but especially by various kinds of colour bar- the

Indians and natives living in mutual contempt, the 'coloured' people looking down on their darker neighbours, the whites and near-whites looking down on everybody else, and being, in consequence, for the most part mistrusted in their turn - divided like this at all times, they were now, quite surprisingly, all brought to a level.

(p136)

However, the narrative focuses on a single married couple, somewhat apolitical, but treating 'the natives with fairness and even kindness' (p132). Here then, is not the conventional counter - hegemonic antagonist either; just a childless couple, obviously happy, almost a 'model married couple' (p133). Notes of disquiet emerge fairly early, however, particularly in the exteriority of the description, the evident lack of inner communication between them; the wife's weekly visits to Dunnport.

The description of Reymond is in many ways analogous to that of Stephen Jordan. Both are retiring, quiet and harmless men, unprejudiced and of domestic inclinations. Neither is able to cope adequately with his wife. Whereas Jordan escapes to an imaginary life, however, Reymond sees reality and accepts it because he feels it to be in the interest of his wife's happiness. A familiar ideological structure is thus revealed. A liberally-minded man has not the inner depth to establish a satisfactory marital relationship. His wife in this case finds a brief passion in a relationship with a young Russian, who becomes 'a son, and a friend and a sweetheart all rolled into one' (p140). Passion is once again revealed as transitory and marriage as

unfulfilling. The liberal protagonist has many admirable qualities, but in the end, lacks the fire which Plomer views as desirable.

The Child of Queen Victoria is one of Plomer's major achievements. Like Turbott Wolfe, it has many autobiographical aspects. In fact, there is often very little distance between author, narrator and protagonist. Like Frant, Plomer came from his public school in England to South Africa; both ran a trading store, and both were fascinated by the indigenous inhabitants.

The text is deeply ideological, reflecting both the dominant colonial ideology in which it was created, and the counter-hegemonic ideology which Plomer espouses. Whereas the classic realist text presents the world as 'natural' Plomer undermines this position and interpellates the reader, inviting him to see society's role in establishing this world of white privilege and domination; to consider his objectives in life, and to identify with the liberal option. The following passage, with its changing pronouns, shows remarkably clearly how language can be used to construct a subject position.

He was flying in the face of the world, as the young are apt to do, with the finest of ambitions. 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, so that we should try and become our true selves. We want to blossom out and fulfil our real natures.

(p100, emphasis added)

Plomer goes on to emphasize the role of heredity and environment in shaping one's position. Raymond Williams claims that 'social being determines consciousness'. Plomer's formation (public school, family) has shaped his discourse, both in the alternative positions it adopts (contrary to the current orthodoxy), and in the positions it cannot adopt. The evasions and failures of the liberal ideology are as significant as its achievements, and one is reminded of Macherey's claim that a writer encounters his solutions and that many of his decisions are predetermined by his society. Some of these 'dominant' solutions Plomer can reject but some are perhaps too deeply entrenched. He is, however, willing to examine the specific individual and cultural differences between European and native, and to reflect on the efficiency of European values. Whereas colonial writers writing within the dominant ideological paradigm, examine Africa to see if it measures up to Europe, Plomer reverses the process and examines Europe to see if it can bear the comparison. As JanMohamed puts it, the liberal authors are 'grounded more securely in the egalitarian imperatives of western society [and are] more open to the modifying dialectic of self and other' (p85).

The reader is offered two opposing colonial ideologies - the ostensible one, and the real one. Ostensibly, there is no possibility of romantic or sexual relationships with the natives; in fact even to treat them 'as if they were really human beings' (p116), to desire to get to know them, is unacceptable. In reality, there are many relationships possible with natives, but they are all disrespectful or

exploitative. Mr MacGavin is out to profit, sexually and materially, from the Lembus. In the course of his trading, he would 'pinch their breasts and slap their behinds' (p115) and then fly into a rage with them as he projected the negative elements of his own nature onto them. All this despite his comment that one has to get used to 'the stink' (p108). The contradiction is clear. Frant, who is willing to decentre his own cultural norms, regards the smell as 'heady, like the very smell of life itself ... promis[ing] joys not yet tasted' (p108). Mr MacGavin focuses on the 'several layers of ochre and fat all over them by way of skin treatment' (p108) and feels revulsion. Coetzee comments that to the racist the smell of the African carries connotations of 'both moral contagion and physical defilement ... It is a dirtiness that goes beyond and beneath all language' (p155).

The MacGavin family is in Lembuland for trade only - the natural beauty passes unnoticed. MacGavin and his wife are the embodiment of the hegemonic ideology, being filled with every prejudice possible. Despite this, MacGavin treats the natives fairly, 'though this was a matter of business rather than principle with him' (p105). His store epitomises his objectives - it is filled with the 'refuse left over from the war' - it is as if the whole world had 'conspired to make a profit on this lonely Lembu Hilltop' (p102). Even what is given away has the power to corrupt the unspoilt Africa - tobacco leaves for the men and cheap sweets for the children, 'promising a quick decay to strong white teeth' (p102). It is in this store that Frant

experiences an oppressive smell - 'the combined aroma of the dressing that stiffened the calicoes of Osaka and Manchester into a dishonest stoutness, and, to speak figuratively, of the sand in the sugar' (p108). To sell his wares better, MacGavin has acquired a smattering of Lembu, but has never become fluent, as he has no desire to enter into the world of the Lembu. On the other hand, if a Lembu addresses him in English, he flies into a towering rage, lest this suggest any notion of equality. Fanon comments that 'A man who has a language possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. Mastery of language affords remarkable power' (Black Skins, White Masks, p18). This power in MacGavin's view, no black should have. In fact, very little conversation by Blacks is heard. The ruling discourse is by whites, and the text reveals the 'real social and economic relations' (Williams), and in these, the speech of the native is effaced by that of the colonist.

Plomer's discourse, in common with all colonial discourses, produces a view of Africa for the Europeans. His ideological project underlies his representation, and it encompasses not only MacGavin and his establishment, but the whole environment of which he is part, and where he has played a role in 'installing the edifice of domination and legitimizing its hierarchy' (Gates, p146). The narrator observes the natural beauty from the subject position that would be Frant's. He sees that, though it is picturesque, it is overcrowded and that the whites have taken the fertile land and squeezed the natives into the heights which offer poor pasturage and inadequate space. The result is clearly

indicated in the text (and the Imperial expansionist project thereby undermined) - the whites who share this landscape, experience unease and sense a menace:

what at first seemed peaceful was felt to be brooding, and stillness and quietness seemed to be an accumulation of repressed and troubled forces, like the thunderclouds that often hung over the horizon of an afternoon. Those sunny hills seemed to be possessed by a spirit that nursed a grievance.
(p105)

The result is the same wherever colonisation has usurped the natives' rights. Fanon expresses the same sentiment:

The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession - all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive 'They want to take our place'.

(The Wretched of the Earth, pp31-2)

Earlier I mentioned Frant's deep desire to 'blossom out and fulfil [his] real nature.' This he said was, for him, 'an affair of the heart' (p101), a sexual matter. Since Plomer has given so unflattering a picture of the one colonial family the narrative presents, one might expect him to present the reader with an alternative model, a family which might represent an alternative ideology. In fact, he adopts an ambivalent position. Frant's upbringing has instilled in him an anomalous desire to uphold 'the white

man's prestige' (p111). Though he does not fear 'going native' (p114) (a spectre of regression to savagery haunting many colonial minds), and though he has neither alcohol nor gun (unlike most colonial whites), he experiences 'moral impotence' (p115) in the presence of Seraphina. We see that ambiguities appear in Plomer's description of the beloved, and we find that her features are scrutinised for their ethnic traits, for the racial ancestry they betray, rather than for their passion or sensitivity. The 'remote Arab strain' (p112) which he detects prevents her features from being 'exaggerated'. Frant himself is described as 'young, sensual by nature and sexually repressed' (p114) and he finds himself unable to declare his love. The narrator's voice suggests the advice which needs to be given, which could be summarized as Carpe Diem. However, Plomer does not take the step of allowing Frant to internalise this encouragement. Moreover, it is significant that Frant does not even contemplate marriage, only a sexual union. Even within this alternative liberal ideology race is seen as an absolute barrier to marriage.

It is after this encounter with Seraphina that the astounding racial outburst occurs. Various explanations can be given - that Plomer is signalling Frant's abhorrence at the possibility of MacGavin's sexually molesting the beloved, or a deep-seated revulsion against miscegenation is surfacing. Perhaps, in 'discovering his narrative' (Macherey) in this delicate field of multi-racial relations, the dominant ideology is so strong as to prevent any other outcome being presented. It is significant that

in all these texts, no successful multi-racial union occurs. Plomer has Umlilwana present the traditional prejudice - 'We are all people, but we are different' (p124). Ian Glenn poses the question, whether writers like Plomer 'make symbolic gestures to a social reality [they] cannot fully confront' (p7). There is a further possibility. No sensitive and thoughtful protagonist in these stories enters into any sort of sexual relationship - there seems an inability to establish a satisfactory familial unit and Plomer's story's are ideologically structured to present a negative view, not only of the patriarchal, racial colonial society, but also of the family itself. His own homosexuality may account for his inability to confront heterosexual unions, just as hostile social opinion may account for the fruitless ending of all the multi-racial relationships he sketches.

The title perhaps summarises Frant's position. Though it is awarded him by a disreputable elderly black man simply to indicate his place of origin, it is significant that he is pre-eminently a child of his period. Idealistic and eager, he was lured to the colony 'with the finest of ambitions' (p100) and was unwilling to play any part in legitimising the dominant prejudice. However, the influence of the 'parent' had gone deep and left a permanent mark on his consciousness. It was this social conditioning, this indelible mark of the consciousness of his age which prevented him from translating some of his aspirations into practice.

VII TURBOTT WOLFE

Turbott Wolfe is the major achievement of Plomer's South African oeuvre. In later years he records a negative judgement of it which is perhaps too harsh. In Double Lives (p160) he writes:

I was full of youthful priggishness, of the conceit of the solitary and the false confidence of inexperience, and, in the matter of writing a novel, I was attempting to reach by a shortcut what can only become even visible by taking an arduous road.

His great friend, Laurens van der Post, in his lengthy introduction to the 1965 edition, holds a far more mellow and tolerant opinion of it.

This judgement, to me, remains as harsh as it is incomplete. What Plomer calls 'youthful priggishness', I found a natural impatience with the underlying hypocrisies of civilized life around him. The 'conceit of the solitary' to which he refers, I preferred to call the confidence of someone whose courage has not failed him in dealing with the inner dangers and fears to which I have referred.
(pp151-2)

Plomer was essentially the outsider (for all his South African birth), educated and largely formed in England, returning to the county of his origins, to meet the 'others'. And the 'others' were both black and white; they were the often idealised 'noble savages', and the often exaggerated brutal and ignoble white savages. In his review of the 1980 edition, G. Haresnape compares Plomer to his friend E.M. Forster, saying that they 'were alike in regarding India and Africa respectively as exotic locations which either could be idealized or from which images of the abyss could be wrought: Thus ... the divine Nhliziyombi ...

[and] the "roar of chaos" which Wolfe hears above the hymn-singing at a wedding ceremony'. (p89) These reactions to the people and landscape are what Tomaselli has called 'deep-seated culturally determined ways of coping or making sense in response to objective conditions' (AUETSA, 1985, p10). These 'deep-seated culturally determined ways of coping' included the fact that he had been shaped 'by England, by English civilisation and by English men, women, and children', (South African Autobiography, p423), and then exposed to the 'objective condition' of a 'complex and violent' (p422) Africa. The result, Tomaselli goes on to say, is that 'these texts are not only a result of certain ideological and cultural formations, but also ... feed back into these formations, shaping interpretations of reality (p19). This is Althusser's notion of the reciprocal effect of superstructure on base. Significantly, though, Plomer's writing has not been frequently reprinted. Turbott Wolfe has been printed only in 1926, 1965, 1980 and it is only in the latest edition that it is accompanied by a range of lucid commentary. However, its influence on South African writers has been considerable.

The form of Turbott Wolfe is not the stable realist novel; it fits more easily among its European modernist counterparts. Plomer himself says that he has no intention of giving a naturalistic account of African life. Paul Rich comments that Turbott Wolfe has the interests in painting, art and music that would fit the

'mainstream' European modernist impulse, and it is as if the novel's preoccupation with sexual relations across the racial line is really the employment of the most ready vehicle to hand in the exploration of the possibilities open to the free

individual at a particular time and place ... This is the classic modernist theme of the individual pursuit of moral and cultural liberation.. (p53-4)

Not only the thematic matter is modernist, however. The form also is experimental. Starting with the dying Turbott Wolfe, it operates through a series of flash-backs, punctuated by dream sequences and drug-induced fantasies. All the main concerns of the novel surface in Friston's dreams—visions of Eurafrika, of a half-caste nation of which he is patriarch, visions of chastity and sexual repression - metaphors of Chastity Wolfe 'Like a lily; like a lamb' (p95); or the metaphor of the rocking chair on Mrs Soper's verandah, moved by the winds of the imagination, and expressing the grief of the world. It is in metaphors like these that the aspirations of the novel are so succinctly expressed. There are also the metonymic dream sequences. There is the vision of Tyler-Harries who drowns drunk in the arms of a coloured stewardess, beside Mabel with her 'custard-coloured child' (p101) whose name is 'Young Africa', (or perhaps 'Eurafrika') and whom she is going to drown, because 'He doesn't come up to expectations.' (p101). And there are Friston's wakeful dreams, his hope for a 'great compromise between white and black; between civilisation and barbarism; between the past and the future; between brains and bodies' (p102). In his view, reality is expressed in dreams. He says, "'I myself belong to the world of dreams, which is the actual world. The world we live in simply reflects part of the truth from that other, that actual world of dreams"' (p66).

Certainly these dreams, metaphoric or metonymic,

summarise the deepest concerns of the novel; they are also a comment on Wolfe's (or Friston's) hyper-sensitivity, on his inability to act, and his propensity to dilettantism. His diary with its stream - of - consciousness technique (linking it clearly to modernism) is yet another indication of the sensibility of the protagonist, and of the form of the novel.

The unified subjectivity of the protagonist in a realist novel is missing in Turbott Wolfe. This disruption and division of the subject is such that both Turbott Wolfe and Friston hold contradictory views within the text. The intention is to prevent the reader from an easy identification with an ideological position. Plomer has clearly embarked on a project of undermining the dominant ideology. Since the realist novel is the medium usually chosen by writers supporting a hegemonic ideology, the modernist form is more suitable to a subversive project. However, the liberal alternative is seen to be often ambiguous and the discontinuity of the point of view is at times striking.

The immediate hysteria which greeted the publication of the book was caused at least partly by a lack of careful reading. Perhaps the mere introduction of characters who espouse miscegenation was so shocking as to prevent further thought. Ideologically, it is very clear what the novel is opposing and that racism is the cardinal crime. How tenable the liberal options are, however, is left as an open question. David Rabkin points out that 'Turbott Wolfe does not end in any clear way ... The fragments of verse and prose appended to the narrative are intended to be gnomic

and ambivalent' (Parker, p89). Plomer offers a number of alternative subject positions. I hope to show that some of the ideological ambivalences are caused by Plomer's difficulty in dealing with the sexual aspects of his theme; while miscegenation seems in theory an admirable solution to the problems of racialism, he draws back repeatedly from the consequences of this point of view.

Plomer makes it clear from the beginning that the novel's primary concern is colour. Early in the work, Turbott Wolfe relates how he attended a fair, and there 'It came upon me suddenly in that harsh polygot gaiety, that I was living in Africa; that there is a question of colour' (p13). What follows is a description of ^a brief encounter between a white man and a 'not white' girl, and the crowd's lascivious comment; its bawdy laughter. He sees this as a portent of a 'half-caste world'. Again, in experiencing a rebuff from a 'hearty Colonial', he comes to accept that 'There would be conflict between myself and the white; there would be conflict between myself and the black. There would be the unavoidable question of colour. It is a question to which every man in Africa, black, white or yellow, must provide his own answer' (p17). Mabel, in her usual abrupt style, comments that there is no 'native question' (p65) - there is only an answer. If the black man's country is taken away from him, he will eventually retaliate - 'The world is for dagoes ... Europe is as dead as mutton' (p66).

This concern with multi-racial relations runs through various aspects of Plomer's writing. Haresnape quotes from the Cape Times of October 25, 1929, in which a letter from Plomer comments that "The majority of the world's

inhabitants are 'coloured people' and to believe in a vigorous colour bar is simply to deprive oneself of the opportunity of understanding and enjoying most of the world' (AUETSA, 1985, p5). In the same edition, the sub-editor, adds a comment that 'The writer's views are not popular in his native country, but their unpopularity, it may be pointed out, is not in itself a proof they are mistaken' (p5).

It is of interest to recall that Sarah Gertrude Millin's novel, God's Stepchildren, was published within two years of Turbott Wolfe, and that it has the same thematic preoccupation. Her point of view is exactly the opposite, however. 'Colour was so rare a thing ... the ordinary person did not think of it', she writes, and proceeds to trace the devastating effects of the 'sin' of miscegenation, over many generations. Black people are inherently inferior, she holds, but are at least racially pure. It is the mixed breeds, the 'coloured people' who must always suffer, as they carry in their blood the taint of interbreeding. Coetzee points out that 'The flaw is thus like an inherited reminder of a fall from grace, the grace of whiteness, into a state similar in many respects to a state of sin. This similarity enables Millin to use the language of religion ... [and to] evok[e] supernatural sanctions' (p141).

Plomer likewise sees a relationship between race and religion. He sees Christians as supporting racism at the same time as preaching love and tolerance. One is reminded of Althusser's claim that 'if [a man] does not do what he ought to do as a function of what he believes, it is because he does something else which ... implies that he has other

ideas in his head as well as those he proclaims' (p157). These 'other ideas', in Turbott Wolfe are drink, keeping black women and getting rich fast. Thus Christianity is dismissed as a fraud, or, at best, an illusion. Turbott Wolfe's own conversation with Friston summarises the approach.

Can you tell me what on earth your sort of religion has to do with these natives? Do you honestly think that Christianity can ever touch them? It's like giving them a slap in the face, and hoping they will be branded for life.

(p55)

The creed which is acceptable is a political creed, the prototype pronounced by Friston.

Credo ... that the white man's day is over. Anybody can see plainly that the world is quickly and inevitably becoming a coloured world. I do not assert yet that miscegenation should be actually encouraged, but I believe that it is the missionary's work now ... to prepare the way for the ultimate end. Let us take the native, and instead of yapping to him about Jesus Christ and Noah's Ark, let us tell him about himself ... in relation to himself and to the white man.

It is worth pondering why the dominant Calvinist form of Christianity in South Africa, has allied itself so strongly to racism and repression, and why rejection of the one very often has gone hand in hand with the other. Laurens van der Post, like many contemporary colonial theorists (S. Gilman, P. Brantlinger, B. Johnson) sees the white's rejection of the blacks as occasioned by a powerful attraction, by the fear of provoking 'the great passion and emotion which ... had been locked away in a grim underworld of the national spirit' (p154). The mark of Calvinism, he holds, is its bleak, cold, joyless and self-justifying

tyranny, in which it keeps in subjection all that is spontaneous and instinctive. Thus, the South African white 'feared that, if not daily on his guard, he himself might go 'black' in the sense that black was the image of all that was natural and rejected in himself' (p155).

I would like now to examine the portrayal of families in Turbott Wolfe, in relation to the ideology of racism, supported by a version of Christianity. The first surprise is that Plomer does not polarise Afrikaans and English on the bad-good scale. The Voortrekker families, though briefly treated, receive warm praise from him. They are pictured as indomitable, hardy and firm of purpose. Certainly they had, 'peasant-minds, and patriarchal names and manners' (p21), but it was their successors who 'lacking balance' (p22), betrayed their hopes.

A diametrically opposed force is the Reverend Fotheringhay and his wife. Designated as 'the English church priest', he shows no hint of awareness of his vocation. In fact the shock of having to confront the reality of Africa has been too much for him, and he has been 'stranded on the rock of his own consciousness in that bewildering sea that is life in modern Africa' (p22). Both he and his wife (whom he married for her money) have retreated before the conflicting ideologies and become 'charming innocuous anachronisms' (p49). Patronising to servants ('they are such curious creatures') (p26), who in turn view them cynically as lunatics, they live as in a fish tank, insulated from the world around by the thick plate glass. For fifteen years Aucampstroom has been their home, but they have never begun to think of Africa. Mrs

Fotheringhay in particular, lives immersed in the scent of the wallflowers in Surrey, protected by a father with perfumed whiskers.

This withdrawal is one extreme of reaction to the ideologies of Africa. Another is represented by the brutal and prejudiced Bloodfield and Flesher, shouting about 'blooming niggers' (p18) but content to keep native concubines and produce children by them. Mr and Mrs Schwerdt belong to the same company - beastly, 'unclean' and unsavoury in person and reputation, involved in degrading and depraved activities. Schwerdt's father is depicted as having come to Africa as a missionary, bringing syphilis and brutality. The treatment of all these characters is exaggerated; their extreme racism and irreligion pushed too far. Nadine Gordimer comments that 'a young man's spleen makes Flesher and Schwerdt beastly beyond credibility' (p167). They are repulsive in their dealings with whites as well as blacks, and Roy Campbell makes the point that Plomer has undermined his own project by thus falsifying their position. More would have been gained if he had depicted the contradiction between their brutal and callous treatment of blacks, and their often devout and decent behaviour to their own families. 'This type', he says, 'is far more normal than the bloodthirsty type described by Mr Plomer, and it confronts one with a far more terrible enigma' (p125).

The Soper family presents a more interesting, because more credible, picture. It is portrayed as being dominated by contradictory passions, irrational and violent. The husband is an extreme racist - "Native

gentlemen - our black brothers! Man, it makes me sick, that kind of thing does. Hell, they're no better than animals," (p74). Quick to categorize men by their race, he yet admits to having considered marriage to a 'coloured' girl, with a 'touch of the tar brush', because of her beauty. Yet the question of the girl's possible reaction to such a proposal does not enter his consciousness. He relates an anecdote of how he and Romaine, a neighbour, find the latter's governess having a sexual relationship with a native. They make no enquiry into the matter but castrate and in effect, murder, the man. The girl whom presumably they were protecting, is 'kicked out' prior to giving birth to her child. It is only then that they realise that she had called the man to her, that she had loved him and was 'to blame'. The contradictions between this hasty murder and Soper's own potential miscegenation; between their 'protection' of the governess and rejection of her, between Soper's subsequent apoplectic anger that a white man (d'Evedere) should laugh with a black man at the tale of a white man being beaten, while Soper himself will instruct his servant to kill a white neighbour's straying sheep - all these arise from tensions and unresolved conflicts within the soul of this colonist. His own child becomes an emblem of the family's situation. 'Abandoned' outside to play with a native child, he is stretched between two totally antagonistic world views. The narrator's ironic voice comments that 'his small mean soul [is] getting coloured with the monstrous intangible darkness of the native point of view. The child [is] in danger' (p77).

Sadly, the mentality of this sort of colonist will

allow no honest examination of the prevailing ideological orthodoxy, and his real reaction to it. Miscegenation can happen in dark corners (as with Flesher) but not be openly allowed. The profound attraction of the black man or woman for whites who have often been nursed by black women, and brought up with black playmates, is driven underground, and surfaces in many strange aberrations.

As a contrast to the ineffectual Reverend Fotheringhay and the evil Reverend ^{ch}Swerd₁dt, Plomer presents two other clerics, Nordalsgaard and his predecessor, Klodquist. Neither is in a permanent sense able to convert the blacks, but both have personal qualities which Plomer admires. Klodquist, a mid-Victorian patriarch from Norway, had preached Christianity with the aid of a magic lantern, a Bible and some vin ordinaire. In his old age he had gone to Norway and returned with a young cousin as bride, who had shortly after died. It seems conspicuous that the capacity to breed seems to be denied to the more desirable humans by Plomer. It is as if in Plomer's mythology, those who do battle with Africa nobly, are consumed in the process, leaving no familial line. The same applies to Nordalsgaard, who also marries in his old age, in this case his equally elderly house-keeper. Nordalsgaard attracts Plomer's (or Turbott Wolfe's) warmest admiration - 'He was a man whose nature it was to break a mountain of rock if only he might find a little vein of gold' (p15). For forty years he had laboured among the Lembu and was loved and influential. Yet when he returned to Norway with his wife, he went defeated and despairing. 'What had he done? He had wounded history.' (p60). He did leave a son, one Olaf Shaw, but because he was a 'middle-class half-caste, second rate' (p60), he lacked any

stature. It is conspicuous that Plomer attributes no weight to this son of a good man. In a book in which miscegenation features so prominently, he might have symbolised the future society. However, presumably because his father would enter into no contractual relations with his mother, his significance is void. Nordalsgaard underlines his attitude in a letter from Norway in which he expresses a profound antipathy to mixed marriage. Against this judgement, his half-caste son is obviously in no position to bear any weight in society. He writes that

A long residence of nearly forty years in Africa has convinced me that it is impossible for a white woman to retain permanently the affections of a black man. If the marriage takes place it will certainly be the cause of trouble and suffering.

(p106)

Before turning to the two main protagonists, Frank d'Elvedere perhaps merits some attention. He is described as a 'voluptuous pioneer' (p84) and an iconoclast, and is deeply prejudiced against missionaries. Yet because of his honesty and his willingness to confront the colonial ideology head-on, he earns Plomer-Wolfe's warm approval. To the question, 'Tell me ... your views about miscegenation', he returns the answer - 'my views are biased, Mr Friston. I cannot claim that no black woman has ever shared my bed'. Yet even Frank will speak in terms of the 'ladder' of civilisation:

Never suppose you can elevate the black man to your own level. You can't. ... But it is very easy for a white man to lower himself to the level of the native. ... South Africa ... can never be anything but a black, or at least a coloured man's country. (p64)

This man, also denied progeny by Plomer, rides off on his horse into the wilds of Africa, having no destination, and claiming only a paternity of affection as he leaves: "'The very best of luck, God bless you, my son", said the man who had no son' (p84). It is clear that, though miscegenation is practised widely, by both admirable and contemptible characters, nowhere is marriage even contemplated (except by one woman, Mabel van der Horst). This refusal to enter into a socially validated contract is a profound comment on the society whose prohibitions run so deep. Moreover, it is conspicuous that in almost every case mentioned, it is a white man who beds a black woman (an exception is, interestingly, the Dutch governess of Romaine, 'But these Dutch girls, you know - Colour's nothing to them.' p76). This would normally be less socially objectionable, as it would reinforce the concept of white/male dominance and distance the fearsome concept of the 'Black Peril'.

I have at times used the names of Plomer and Wolfe interchangeably in referring to the narrator. Plomer tells the story related to him by the dying Wolfe. Though it is obviously possible to try to distinguish one from the other, there is little in the novel to build this distinction on. Glenn makes the comment that 'there is in fact little in or out of the novel to suggest that Plomer would have wanted to be distanced from [Wolfe's] ...depiction...' (Malan, p155). Wolfe, through Plomer, relates the account of how he first fell in love with the Lembu collectively. He speaks of their 'euphonious conversations ... marvellous animal grace ... the patriarchal grace of each old man ... large-eyed tender women who were mothers, warm-handed tender daughters

who were lovers' (p20). He is aware that he is losing his balance, that he is in danger of 'being sacrificed, a white lamb, to black Africa' (p20). Indeed, he does not regain his balance, but instead falls in love with Nhliziyombi. It is worth examining how she is described. Whereas the characters previously were distinct individuals, she is typified as a noble savage in the following terms:

She was an ambassadress of all that beauty (it might be called holiness), that intensity of the old wonderful unknown primitive African life - outside history, outside time, outside science ... She showed in a very marked way that almost aggressive mildness and courtesy ... that you only find in certain savages that have never happened on some God-forsaken missionary.

(pp31, 38)

Wolfe's reaction is one of fear that he has experienced 'amorous feelings' (p31). The possibility of declaring his love and, if she were willing, acting upon this declaration, never crosses his mind, yet at no point does he give any rational explanation for this stasis. 'I supposed myself to be in a very similar position to a monk in love with a nun... I fully believe that the girl Nhliziyombi was as chaste as I was reputed to be' (p33) he claims, though there is no ^{in the narrative} basis _^ for his presumption. His account of his dilemma is interesting.

What I knew fundamentally was that if I abandoned my determination I should lose my own opinion of myself ... You can imagine the tortures that a man suffers when he is in love against his own conscience [Emphasis added]... That is where I want you to be quite clear. I saw that I should be sacrificing my own opinion of myself [Emphasis in original].
(p33)

He then denies that race has anything to do with his dilemma.

My good William Plomer, pray accept my assurance that that had nothing whatever to do with it. I am too much the humanitarian to be colour-blind. (p33)

Now what Wolfe is saying, is the opposite of what he is meaning. Eagleton has this to say about slips of this nature.

There are ... what Freud calls 'parapraxes', unaccountable slips of the tongue ... which can be traced to unconscious wishes and intentions. ...We may have certain unconscious desires which will not be denied, but which dare not find practical outlet either.

(p158)

I suggest that Plomer's own homosexuality is the factor which is suppressed and which causes the 'slip'; moreover, that since Wolfe and Plomer are so far identified, he cannot negotiate a romantic engagement for Wolfe and that he therefore withdraws in this somewhat unmotivated manner. Shortly after, Wolfe hears that Nhliziyombi has gone to be married to her cousin, to whom she has been betrothed for six months. It is thus clear that he has misread her situation - she is no 'nun' and we hear of her husband and children at the end of the novel, when Friston pays them a visit. Sex, marriage, progeny - all are denied Wolfe by his alter ego, Plomer. Nhliziyombi, however, is part of a community, rearing 'charming' children.

The ideological thrust of the novel is given further impetus by the formation of Young Africa, its aims (chiefly miscegenation) being announced in an article by Caleb Msomi. Caleb's English is correct and yet utterly foreign.

calls to mind a passage from Joyce's Portrait of the Artist - 'His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech ... My soul frets in the shadow of his language' (p189). He has been drawn from his tribal surroundings and weeps at the news of Friston's departure. Though Friston predicts that he will 'propagate the species' (p110), the chances of his reintegration seem remote. Young Africa does, however, provide one marriage, this time between a black man and a white woman. Zachary Msomi is not, however, a fully drawn character and certainly does not qualify for association with Black Peril. The initiative is entirely with Mabel and the union is heavily symbolic of the future Plomer ^esees for South Africa. The symbolism is, however, empty, for they seem to exist in a social vacuum. Their commitment to Young Africa makes it clear that they do not envisage themselves simply as two individuals, claiming the right to choose their marriage partners. They see themselves as pioneers, laying 'true foundations for the future Coloured World' (p70). However, the lack of any community within which to operate, ironically undermines their objective.

Friston, like Wolfe, is denied any contact with women, and 'with disarming feminine frankness' (p102) announces his plan to leave Hlanzeni. He has told Caleb that life offers him 'nothing but a few sensations, more or less indecent, which I know are only illusions'(p110). Like Wolfe, Friston had hoped to 'step forth free ... to conquer Africa' (p52). Like Wolfe, Friston's political intentions have turned to dust, and he is incapacitated from forming a heterosexual relationship, a family, heirs. Plomer's political programme

seems to have been undermined by his inability or unwillingness to depict sensitive or aesthetic young men in anything but a social lacuna.

VIII CONCLUSION:

Plomer approaches South Africa as an outsider, very aware of the hegemonic ideology, and intent on undermining it. He depicts a colonial society in which 'social being determines consciousness' i.e. in which the 'common sense' of the white colonist is racial, frequently violent, and beset by sexual repression. White families are often depicted as incorporating this dominant ideology and attempting to transmit it to their children. However the children at times reject racism, though the rejection is often only partial. Blacks, on the other hand are generally silent or sparing of speech, indicating perhaps that they have internalised the colonists' evaluation of them. They show little evidence of having a coherent alternative view of life to offer.

Plomer interpellates the reader, offering him a subject position which views the dominant ideology critically. He shows that though white-black relations are generally exploitative, an alternative is possible. Moreover, in depicting white-black sexual relations, at no point does he give any indication of a traditional 'Black Peril' - no black men violently possess white women. On the other hand, a number of white men violently take black women, and even when violence is not involved, they seldom acknowledge their progeny. Where Black men do partner white women, Plomer in each case depicts the woman as the initiator of the relationship - Vera Cornelissen lures Charlie to her, and Mabel van der Horst is very much the dominant partner in her relationship with Zachary Msomi. It is clear that Zachary, like his cousin Caleb, is caught

between two worlds, and this accounts for the social vacuum in which these relationships operate. In fact, these unions operate primarily on the symbolic level, and are shown to have little or no thrust into society.

This is part of the weakness of the liberal position - to some extent, as Macherey says, society determines what the narrative will be, and the writer's options are limited. Plomer indicates this in the fate of both Friston and Turbott Wolfe. Friston dies, having vainly attempted some political or religious mission, and Wolfe retires to England, there to die of a fever (both spiritual and physical) contracted in Africa.

The families which Plomer depicts form part of the contradictions and ambiguities of colonial society. They are, as Poster puts it, 'open to the world and always structured by it' (p108). In the short stories, though marriages unite people of the same racial and social groups, the families all have members whose deepest desires are to reach partners denied them by their society's ideology. In most cases, their desires are for dusky bodies - thus Dirk Takhaar desires Poppy and Mr. Kimball is drawn to Willem; Vera Cornelissen experiences rapture with Charlie and many others, and Frant desires Seraphina. Minta Takhaar betakes herself to the son of a Hungarian count, and Mrs. Raymond's passion is for Boris, a young Russian. In these cases, the body is not black, but there is a similar reaching beyond the bounds of marriage, and beyond the norms of South African society. Only Stephen Jordan and his wife do not reach out to a member of a different social group, but there too, the marriage is radically undermined.

Plomer presents us with a society whose ideological demands are absolute and the strains are very evident. Families are depicted as fragile and fraught entities and Plomer seems unable to allow any sensitive or intelligent young man to establish familial relations. He sets out to contest the hegemonic ideology, but ends up undermining not only the ideological foundations, but family life as well.

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