Apartheid, Liberalism and Romance
A Critical Investigation of the Writing of Joy Packer

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Abstract

This is the first full-length study of the writing of the South African Joy Packer (1905-1977), whose 17 works of autobiography and romantic fiction were primarily popular. Packer's writing, which appeared mainly between 1945 and 1977, blends popular narrative with contemporary social and political discourses. Her first main works, three volumes of memoirs published between 1945 and 1953, cover her experience of a wide area of the world before, during and after the Second World War: South Africa, Britain, the Mediterranean and the Balkans, and China. In the early 1950s she also toured extensive areas of colonial "Darkest Africa." When Packer retired to the Cape with her British husband, Admiral Sir Herbert Packer, after an absence of more than 25 years, she adopted fiction as an alternative literary mode. Her subsequent production, ten popular romantic novels and a further three volumes of memoirs, is notable for the density of its sociopolitical commentary on contemporary South Africa.

This thesis takes as its starting-point the dilemma, formulated by the South African critic Dorothy Driver, of the white woman writing within a colonial environment which compels her to adopt contradictory, ambivalent and oblique discursive stances and strategies. The pragmatic intention of this thesis is, then, to (re)read Packer for her treatment of that problematic in the context of South Africa.

The approach adopted centres on the reciprocity within Packer's writing between its generic conventions and its discursive environment, broadly defined here as pre-1950 imperial Britain and, in the main, colonial and apartheid South Africa. Within a critical-biographical frame, attention is paid first to formal aspects of the popular memoir and the popular romantic novel. Their discursive function vis-à-vis their apartheid environment is then examined within a series of comparative studies. The burden of the analysis rests, in part, on the identity of Packer's fiction as politicised romans à thèse and, in part, on her personal identification with political liberalism in South Africa, most notably the Cape liberalism of her youth and the various manifestations of liberalism under apartheid. By focusing on differing motifs—Packer's professed adherence to political liberalism, her treatment of race within the idealising constructions of popular romance, the metonymy of the fictional family and the patriarchal state, and her portrayal of women held hostage by the racial and masculine other—the study discusses the extent to which the contradictions predicted by Driver's analysis exist within the apparently seamless fabric of Packer's narratives.

The investigation concludes by recentring its focus on the narrativised identity of the white woman in a colonial environment, at the same time seeking confirmation of the several reasons for Packer's writing to have gained only contemporary rather than lasting approval.

Keywords: Joy Packer (1905-1977); South African women's writing; popular romantic fiction, memoirs; apartheid, colonialism, liberalism; memory, literary amnesia, propaganda, roman à thèse; race, gender, patriarchy.
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In a new South Africa the past will still live with us.¹

We must deny the past its attempt to enslave us.²

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John A Stotesbury
Joensuu, Finland
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Introduction

For a writer . . . success is always temporary, success is only a delayed failure.¹

1. Aims

Since the release of Nelson Mandela on 11th February 1990, South African creative writing of all types has come to be marked by an awareness of an important shift in focus. Suddenly, the "rediscovery of the ordinary" through literature, longed for by Christopher Hope,² argued for by Albie Sachs,³ and predicted by Njabulo S. Ndebele from a time when no end to the struggle was in sight,⁴ has become immediate. Protest literature in particular appears already partially dated, the black writer searching now for a new voice and the white writer questioning again the relevance of his or her voice within the national debate. South African literary criticism and reviews repeatedly echo this awareness of the major significance of recent political events in South Africa and elsewhere, their discussion seeking new ways of articulating the impact of such events on the production and critical analysis of South African literary discourse.⁵

This is no less the case for the international, mass-market popular novel with South African authorship, which, with its roots embedded in the imperial and colonial tradition of romance and adventure, has begun to look for alternative commercially popular themes—less overtly colonialist, less explicitly racist, historically reformist rather than revisionist, and more in tune with the political changes evidenced by, for example, the collapse of the Soviet empire and the

⁵ Tony Morphet's book review, "After Solidarity," which appeared in October 1991 in Current Writing 3.1 (166-70) provides a typical example of this shift. A similar awareness is also evident in a critical anthology, Perspectives on South African English Literature, published after some years' delay in 1992; since its contributions were all written prior to 1990, its editors have felt obliged, somewhat awkwardly, to aver in both an Introduction and an Afterword that they "do not believe . . . that the value of the essays is reduced by this fact" (Michael Chapman, Colin Gardner, and Es'kia Mphahlele, eds., Perspectives on South African English Literature [Parklands: Donker, 1992] xii).
expansion of the global market economy to vast areas such as China.

In the past, too, considerable internal political shifts within South Africa have marked the domestic popular fiction genre, though without the present immediacy of decolonisation within South African society itself. The National Party’s acquisition of power in 1948, the Sharpeville massacre and the transition from the imperial Union to the Afrikaner Republic in the early 1960s, the Soweto uprising of 1976, and the State of Emergency in the second part of the 1980s have all affected the degree to which popular novelists have expected their readers to suspend judgment of the sociopolitical status quo and to undergo what Roger Bromley has expressed in Gramscian terms as the "consensualising effect [which] is one of the functions of popular fictions, a mode of inserting the reader, through its various devices, at the level of consent, not just to its 'story' but to its structurings of that story." Given the eventuality of the success and broad acceptance of social, political and literary change, combined with a sustained interest in the printed text, yesterday’s popular taboo belatedly becomes today’s commonplace; Wilbur Smith’s early fictions of thirty years ago, banned by a prudish South African régime, now re-define the parameters of ennui rather than of passion, and the repeal of apartheid laws governing sexual behaviour appears to have relegated the prurient use in popular fiction of the "miscegenation" theme (sometimes for political purposes) to the status of a historical curio.

A major consequence of the topicality of popular fiction is, then, its sheer ephemerality: public interest in its topical concerns wanes swiftly, to be replaced by seemingly endless fictional reformulations, by new generations of writers, of the human melodrama, set within similar but more recently famous or notorious environments, and the popular novel of yesterday becomes tomorrow’s recyclable pulp.

In reaffirmation but also, in practice, in defiance of this commonplace


7 Notably, in Wilbur Smith’s Rage (London: Heinemann, 1987) and in two of Colin Sharp’s adventure fictions published in the 1980s; see Appendix 1, and Appendix 2: "Popular Writing (South Africa)."

8 This is not to ignore Dorothy Driver’s insistence that “the intrusion of racial barriers into South African society and literature” has had "far-reaching and fascinating" implications for the structure of the novel, most notably in its mode of closure; see Dorothy Driver, "Women and Nature, Women as Objects of Exchange: Towards a Feminist Analysis of South African Literature," Perspectives on South African English Literature, ed. Michael Chapman et al. 461; see also ch. 4, "Racial Fictions," below.
observation, the centre of attention of this study is the South African author, Joy Packer (1905-77), whose books captured an impressively large readership for a period of some thirty years from the end of the Second World War, a readership which dispersed almost as swiftly as it appeared. As an apparent result of popular demand some of her works were reprinted in the years immediately after her death, but since the mid-1980s the availability of her books has declined, the current frequency of their presence in British and South African second-hand bookshops presumably testifying to their clearance from the shelves of an aging and dying readership.

While it can now fairly be said that her work, for all its qualities, has made no detectable or lasting impact on the fabric of Western or, more specifically, South African anglophone literary culture, Joy Packer nevertheless existed as a writer whose extensive journalism, memoirs and fiction attempted to participate in varying ways in the discourse, initially, of British public life and later in that of South African affairs during a period which will be permanently identified with apartheid. Especially important from a critical perspective, her writing demonstrated competence and, indeed, skill in more than one generic arena, and was favourably received by a popular audience which, by its very definition as a commercial one, repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to invest in a series of narratives that participated overtly in that ongoing contemporary public discourse.

In consequence, this study has been undertaken in the spirit of Cherry Clayton’s observations on the value of the critical "recovery of 'lost' [South African] women authors, filling in a broader social and literary context for the more familiar names," an activity, she suggests, which helps to restore "'minor' authors and texts, and often revises an explicit or implicit literary canon." Clayton’s proposal coincides with that of Marilyn Butler, who, in criticising the effects of an excessively strict literary canon, suggests that

an individual academic can at least begin to explore the unfortunate intellectual consequences of letting a small set of survivors, largely accidentally arrived at, dictate the model many of us seem to work with, of a timeless, desocialized, ahistorical literary community.

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9 Possibly the sole exception is the occasional interest of (white) South African schoolchildren working on school literature projects, who come upon Packer’s works in public libraries (reported by Caroline Kingdon, former personal secretary to Joy Packer, personal interview by telephone, 13 Dec. 1993).

While no South African canon may be in danger of Butler's latter stricture, her subsequent suggestions for academic studies (in this instance in the area of early nineteenth-century poetry) are undoubtedly relevant to the purpose of the present project:

What kind of critical difference would it make to study actual literary communities as they functioned within their larger communities in time and place? I propose that poets we have installed as canonical look more interesting individually, and far more understandable as groups, when we restore some of their lost peers.11

It can easily be observed that Packer wrote for a readership which, to varying degrees, had access to a growing number of works by other more or less contemporary South African women authors—in addition, of course, to male authors: Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) was undoubtedly the internationally most influential South African novel to appear in the earliest years of Packer's literary career. Some of the women authors have achieved international fame for dealing with their immediate sociopolitical environment, though the nature of that fame might be considered to differ for each, based on predictably different, if occasionally overlapping, readerships: Sarah Gertrude Millin (1889-1968), to whose writing I shall frequently refer in passing; Daphne Rooke (1914-),12 whose novels sometimes cause critical anxiety when attempts are made to allocate them a space within a South African canon;13 and Nadine Gordimer (1923-), whose familiarity with Millin's writing has probably been far greater than her awareness of Packer's, even though Packer's writing frequently attempts to approach the same kind of South African existential dilemma as


12 Several of her novels have recently been re-issued, most notably *A Grove of Fever Trees* (1946, as *The Sea Hath Bounds*; Cape Town: Chameleon, 1989), *Mittee* (1951; Cape Town: Chameleon, 1987; and Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), and *Ratoons* (1953; Cape Town: Chameleon, 1990).

Gordimer's does.14 To such a list could also be added the name of June Drummond (1923-), an exact contemporary of Gordimer's and the writer of thrillers with an overtly liberal political slant which have continued to appear regularly since the 1950s,15 and a number of academically less-known yet popular South African women writers working broadly within the conventions of the popular historical romance, such as Helga Moray and Christina Laffeaty,16 both of them living and writing outside South Africa. These names could be supplemented by many others whose adherence to a popular romantic formula of the kind commonly identified as "Mills and Boon" (including other similar publishing houses, almost invariably British) has persuaded them to avoid or suppress most, if not all, identifiable references to a fictionalised South Africa.17

It might therefore be argued, as Clayton does in a general sense, that a fuller awareness of Packer's writing will contribute to a filling-in of a "broader social and literary context for the more familiar names." Hence, while since the 1950s major critical attention has been paid to Gordimer's writing predominantly for its relation to the socio-political development of post-1948 South Africa, it might well be contended that Gordimer, among others, could be better comprehended if her wider female literary context were better explored. Such a view has often been displaced firstly by excessive attention paid to the individual author herself, neglecting the nuances of her discourse environment, and secondly by a critical agenda which seems to have been determined in large measure by adherence to conventionally masculine readings of South Africa's historical colonisation, including thematisation of the accumulation of wealth, the heightening of racial and political conflict, and the increase in physical violence in civil and foreign

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14 In the early 1950s Millin actively sought out Gordimer as a literary contact, and Gordimer has subsequently commented favourably on one of Millin's memoirs, The Measure of My Days; see Martin Rubin, Sarah Gertrude Millin: A South African Life (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1977) 240, 251-52.

15 See, for example, June Drummond's The Black Unicorn (London: Gollancz, 1959) and Hidden Agenda (London: Gollancz, 1993).

16 See Appendix 2, "Popular Writing (South Africa)."

17 These include Jayne Bauling, Kathryn Blair, Rosalind Brett, Jean Dunbar, Gwen Westwood, Hilary Wilde, and the novelist recorded as the most prolific of all time, Kathleen Mary Lindsay (1903-1973), who has been credited with "more than 400 novels under ten different names" (David Aden, Ridley Beeton, Michael Chapman, and Ernest Pereira, eds., Companion to South African English Literature [Craighall: Donker, 1986] 125), not to speak of the (probably more accurate) count of 904 (Guinness Book of Records, 32nd ed., ed. Norris D. McWhirter [Enfield, U.K.: Guinness Books, 1986] 87); several of Lindsay's romances do have southern African settings, especially those published under the pen-name of Elizabeth Fenton.
wars.

It is to this kind of gendered disequilibrium which the South African critic Dorothy Driver refers, though in a context concerned more with the mythical foundations of South African literature than with its criticism, when she suggests that there exists a "male-oriented mythologising that informs South African literature and literary criticism, wherein the female perspective is ignored."\(^{18}\) In the light of this kind of implied alternative critical agenda put forward with increasing complexity by Driver and others, the importance for the present study of setting up a framework aimed at partially redressing the balance will be self-evident.

Nevertheless, enhancement and revision of our reading of canonised writers such as Gordimer do not constitute the raison d’être of this study, nor will it be argued here that Gordimer represents the epitome of South African women’s writing. Rather, as I have indicated, this study has been undertaken as a contribution to the current discussion of the ways in which South African women writers, white and black, have participated in the community of voices shaping, moulding, and creating images of the human environment within which they have lived.

The crucial question for the present study has been posed by Dorothy Driver’s hypothesis\(^{19}\) that "in the British context women act as mediators between the classes; in the colonial context they mediate between the races,"\(^{20}\) a claim which she exemplifies by referring to Margaret Ballinger, who for many years acted as a widely-respected white Liberal "Native Representative" in the South African parliament\(^{21}\)—notable here is Driver’s (predictable) foregrounding of racial rather than social class factors as the primary agent of division in South African society. In the same article, she then expands on this by suggesting that "the mediatory role placed upon and assumed by [white] South African women writers involves them in a set of contradictions, ambivalences and obliquities," caused by "[white] women’s sympathy for the oppressed and their simultaneous

\(^{18}\) Driver, "Women and Nature" 457.

\(^{19}\) The hypothesis is developed in two interrelated articles written concurrently but published at widely separated dates: their abbreviated references here are "'Woman' as Sign" (1988) and "Women and Nature" (1992), the former article referring for some of its detail to the latter, which was written in 1985.

\(^{20}\) Driver, "Women and Nature" 467.

entrapment within the oppressive group on whose behalf they may desire to mediate [,which] complicates their narrative stance."22 Nevertheless, Driver appears to offer a counterbalance to this discursive obstacle in her suggestion that "women writers conventionally offer, more or less explicitly, a corrective to patriarchy, whether through 'feminine sensibility' or 'female creativity,'"23 with the implication that all women's writing, no matter what ideological stance it either consciously adopts or involuntarily represents, can act as a counter-force to a male-dominated discourse.

A feminist reading such as this of the generality of white South African women's writing presents a major challenge in the context of Packer's work. Within the broader framework of contemporary apartheid politics, Packer attempts to insert both overt and covert reference to liberal Cape political ideals into a mode of fiction which tends to approximate to the conventions of the popular romantic novel, and the net effect of her expression of a liberal conscience in repeated attempts at ameliorating the full impact of an increasingly illiberal social order is indeed a complication of her narrative stance. That Packer's fictional writing is also prefaced—rather than conventionally complemented and summarised—by a substantial quantity of autobiography serves to emphasise a further aspect of that stance, in that she insists on her ability and right as a woman to address the conundrum of her white female self in an African colonial (and hence political) environment. In consequence, the extent to which Packer herself was able to find the solution to the conundrum, and the degree to which she remained or, alternatively, became a component within the conundrum, constitutes the empirical target of this investigation.

A study of Packer as an individual writer can be seen to rest on a solid and consistently produced body of work. Firstly, in addition to the ten novels which popularised her name and contributed to the contemporary international fame of her country, South Africa, during the middle third of this century, Packer published six volumes of memoirs. These memoirs were devoted, in the main, to her life with her husband, Herbert Annesley Packer (1894-1962), whose career in the British Royal Navy culminated in a knighthood, the rank of Admiral, and a final posting from 1950 to 1952 at the British base at Simon's Town, South Africa. Significantly, the first three of these memoirs, Pack and Follow (1945), Grey Mistress (1949), and Apes and Ivory (1953), were written and published

22 Driver, "'Woman' as Sign" 13.
23 Driver, "Women and Nature" 467.
before Packer had conceived of turning to fiction as an alternative literary mode, and it was within these that she discovered her "voice," and through them established a readership out of which the fiction readership evolved.

Viewed in terms of Packer's personal career as a writer, those early volumes document a life in which her writing was to a large extent subordinate to the formative factors external to writing—childhood, education, marriage, parenthood, travel—in sum, the various phases of individual experience. Subsequently, the transitory nature of the Packers' naval life, which informs the whole of those first three memoirs, was abruptly halted in 1953 by the Admiral's retirement. In middle and late middle age (Joy Packer was her husband's junior by some 10 years), after more than a quarter-century of marriage, they were now building their first settled home together, in Rondebosch, at the Cape. Logically enough, Packer's literary response was to turn from travel-based memoirs—though three further volumes, *Home from Sea* (1963), *The World is a Proud Place* (1966), and *Deep as the Sea* (1975), were still to be written—to a genre which better suited her new circumstances and which still allowed her to observe and comment on the world around her: realistic fiction with plotting and characters set in a fictionalised but recognisably contemporary South Africa. Her first full-length novel, *Valley of the Vines* (1955),24 was an instant popular and commercial success throughout the white Commonwealth and the USA, and she seldom strayed far from the formula it established for her. Her favoured pattern, as I will demonstrate later, consists essentially of melodrama based in dysfunctional white, upper-middle-class, anglophone South African familial locations, presenting both metaphorically and metonymically her vision of the society within which she lived in her youth and in her maturity. These include especially *The High Roof* (1959), *The Glass Barrier* (1961), *The Blind Spot* (1967, published in the USA in 1968 as *The Man Out There*), *Leopard in the Fold* (1969), *Veronica* (1970), and *Boomerang* (1972); *The Man in the Mews* (1964), with its mainly British setting, and *The Dark Curtain* (1977), shared between an imaginary British embassy and a no less imaginary independent African state modelled on Swaziland are minor exceptions, while Packer's second novel, *Nor the Moon by Night* (1957), adopted a setting, the bushveld, with which Packer was largely unfamiliar and for which she carried out research in the surroundings of the Kruger National Park.

These sixteen works may be regarded as her main literary production. Although most of her pre-1945 writing was journalistic ephemera, Packer did,

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however, also gain experience as a writer of book-length work prior to the first of her personal memoirs. In 1934, while in China, she ghostwrote *My Bandit Hosts*\(^{25}\) for a young Englishwoman, "Tinko" (Edith Muriel) Pawley, who had undergone a dramatic and newsworthy kidnapping.\(^{26}\) Later, in 1941-42, Packer attempted a novel, *Lovers Don't Talk War*, "about life in the Blitz," which was returned by the London publisher, Hutchinson's, as, according to Packer, "too sexy."\(^{27}\) Since she concludes her note on this episode with the comment: "and I didn't bother to try anyone else,"\(^{28}\) it might be inferred that she found the experience temporarily discouraging as far as fiction-writing was concerned; she did not return to that mode of writing for more than ten years. Although the typescript of *Lovers Don't Talk War* has survived,\(^{29}\) in the case of almost all of her published works it appears that Packer retained the habits of a journalist; she was unsentimentally careless of literary fame in posterity, invariably discarding the manuscript once a work had appeared in print.\(^{30}\)

It must be added that Packer's critical obscurity remains generally unrelieved in current South African reference works. The *Companion to South African English Literature* (1986) is mildly generous with regard to her autobiographical works, suggesting that their "autobiographical character . . . , a readable style"\(^{31}\)


\(^{27}\) This is confirmed by the publisher's readers' assessments, copies of which still exist in private ownership in Cape Town.


\(^{29}\) The typescript is currently in private ownership in Cape Town.

\(^{30}\) "I have always torn up my manuscripts with great delight as soon as I have publishers[''] proofs to take their place" (Joy Packer to Elizabeth Hartmann [Librarian, U of the Witwatersrand], 19 June 1956 [NELM]), a comment she repeated in interview in 1970 (Joy Packer, interview with Gerald Pawle, SABC radio, 30 Apr. 1970). In addition to her unpublished novel of 1942, the only other exception appears to be the handwritten first draft (under the provisional title of "It Could Only Happen Here") of her favourite novel, *Veronica* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1970), which is preserved in the Joy Packer papers at the National English Literary Museum (NELM), Grahamstown.

\(^{31}\) "Readable" (as my colleague Dr Gerald Porter has pointed out) is frequently code for "middlebrow," as, too, is "literate" in the review by Pamela Ruskin, below. Thus, the comment of a reviewer of another popular memoirist, Dirk Bogarde, is slightly ingenuous in its suggestion that Bogarde is "a writer whose work is continually praised for its 'readability,' as though this were not the first and simplest requirement of any book" (Hugh Barnes, "A Tear in Provence,"
and intrinsic interest of the subject-matter ... gave them a certain vogue,"32 but mentions only five of her six novels published up to 1967, and none of the four that appeared subsequently. This commentary parallels an earlier view of Packer's fiction by the Australian journalist, Pamela Ruskin, though the latter has a more adulatory context: "Her novels make no attempt to be 'literary' or profound, but they are extremely 'literate.' They are romantic, well-written and solidly constructed stories about people who find themselves in dilemmas, usually emotional dilemmas."33 Malvern van Wyk Smith's survey of South African literature, *Grounds of Contest* (1990), is notably less benevolent. In addition to including Packer, somewhat ambivalently, in a category of "many writers [who] have managed to circumvent the demand to produce the overtly committed moral discourse deemed to be dictated by South African socio-political realities, Van Wyk Smith goes on to suggest that "Joy Packer, in several novels set in the Cape or Africa [sic], pursued the blend of romance and adventure in an exotic setting that once made Haggard and, later, Van der Post so popular."34 In fact, Packer's ten novels all have settings which are to a greater or lesser extent South African, and all are mundanely contemporary and largely, though not exclusively, urban. With the exception of her second novel, *Nor the Moon by Night*, and her final, atypical novel, *The Dark Curtain*, they can scarcely be identified as Haggardian or Van der Postian, in the sense of blending romance and adventure in "exotic" settings.35 Nor, as I shall argue throughout this study, is there any significant lack of openness in Packer's attempt to develop a "committed, moral discourse" relevant to "South African socio-political realities"—her difference lies in her choice of genres and in her view of those realities.

The focus of the present study is perhaps best reiterated in a brief critical entry in the recently-published encyclopedic *Guide to Women's Literature* (1992), which, in addition to reaffirming my own approach through its emphasis on the

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32 David Adey et al., eds, *Companion to South African English Literature* 150.
35 In contrast, Wendy R. Katz has suggested that Haggard's "romances of contemporary life" are "generally both exotic and activist enough to be treated alongside the works which are more exclusively adventurist," an assertion which could not be reiterated in reference to Packer's domestic romances (*Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987] 4-5).
discursive ambiguities inherent in Packer's blending of genres and discourses, also indicates the appeal of undertaking a study of her writing:

> Although Packer prided herself on racial tolerance, her novels romanticize apartheid as well as gender inequality, and beg to be examined for their uneasy inclusion of the colonial "other" into the romance formula.36

In brief, ample critical space appears to be available for renewed attention to be paid to the nature of the writing which Packer produced when the ascendancy of apartheid was at its height.

2. Approaches

My intuitive approach to Packer's writing has been shaped by extensive reading across a spectrum of white South African popular fiction published during the past half-century, where by far the loudest voice has been that of the masculine tales of exploration and discovery, and fighting, trading, politicking, the majority articulating an idealising, and hence legitimising, vision of colonial South Africa. Despite reading my first Joy Packer in 1986 at the same time as my first Wilbur Smith and Geoffrey Jenkins,37 distinguishing Packer's own voice and also those of other women writers complementing and contrasting with Packer's has consisted of a struggle against the sheer volume and force of the masculine fictions. Locating the female voice—in effect, discovering the influence of (a single) gender on genre—has entailed a self-conscious distancing from the tales of colonial and economic adventure and a reconstruction of my own otherwise masculine-centred reading strategies. The present study will, doubtless, demonstrate the degree to which I have found answers to questions such as these, which appear central in approaching writing as varied and complex as Packer's.

My own position regarding feminist criticism rests upon Elaine Showalter's claim that "it is in the writing of women . . . that we find the fullest expression

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of the problematic of a feminist criticism: how to combine the theoretical and the personal," a stance which, while (axiomatically) privileging women in the production of feminist criticism, is at once non-exclusionary and also definitive: "Whilst feminist criticism neither must nor should be the exclusive province of women, it is important to understand that its history and expression were determined by issues of gender and sexual difference."38 A statement such as this essentially reasserts and specifies the materialist view held by Peter Humm and others, that "popular fictions . . . need to be read and analysed not as some kind of sugary-coated sociology, but as narratives which negotiate, no less than the classic texts, the connection between 'writing, history and ideology.'"39 This critical stance—including the uncovering of effective ways of reading such literature—has underlain the whole development of this study, and the degree to which I have come to terms with it will become apparent from the various discussions that follow.

My use of the key critical concept of "ideology" will be seen to be largely conventional, relying on a Marxist definition such as Terry Eagleton’s reformulation and summarisation of Althusserian theory:

I do not mean by "ideology" simply the deeply entrenched, often unconscious beliefs which people hold; I mean more particularly those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power.40

At the same time, my analyses of Packer’s writing have also been influenced by more recent Foucauldian formulations of the distinctions to be made between ideology per se and "discourse," in particular in feminist discussions of popular


romance:

For feminists attempting to theorise romance, the prime advantage of the discourse model is that it is conceived as historically and culturally specific (different women, in different historical periods, and in different cultures will have experienced it differently), and that it is dynamic: liable to change and transformation.41

As Stevie Jackson has pointed out in another context, feminist readings of romance from a discursive stance, in addition to avoiding the Marxist ideological view grounded in the idea of "false consciousness," are also able to take "women's pleasure in romantic fiction more seriously and . . . offer more sophisticated accounts of women's reading practices."42 Nevertheless, it will become apparent in the course of the following chapters that, while my reading of Packer insists upon the cultural specificity of the experiential phenomena depicted in her writing, my study tends primarily towards a decoding of the "ideological" practices embedded in her work, rather than a deconstruction of the "pleasure" that her readership, both female and male, has undoubtedly experienced.

In sum, my study of Packer's fiction finds a significant part of its dynamic in its analysis of a mode of romance which has often seemed (after Northrop Frye) to have been "kidnapped" into the service of a dominant ideology.43 This, as I have indicated, has been especially apparent in my reading of the South African masculine adventure story, but also, to equally varying degrees, in the feminine. Although I would wish to avoid unnecessary involvement in the problematic of the aesthetics of popular fiction, it is tempting at this point to appropriate and partially re-direct towards Packer's writing Cecily Lockett's view of the majority of the contemporary writings by black South African women. Lockett initially reminds the reader of Boitumelo Mofokeng's observation that "a literature from these women, or about their experiences, would provide an important social documentation of their lives and provide further materials for addressing women's issues and their role in the struggle," and then goes on to


suggest that "we need perhaps to view black women’s writing from this perspective, to recognise that their work is primarily socio-historical and that its purpose is to record the experiences of black people in South Africa under Apartheid." Both Mofokeng’s and Lockett’s views are implicitly informed by their (admittedly controversial) perception of the "artlessness" of much of black women’s writing, and it could be argued that it is an equivalent "artlessness," though one of a different order, which propels the critic to search writing such as Packer’s for the "information" (in the broadest sense) which it may yield on ways in which the discourse contained in romantic narratives has attempted to (re)construct the lives of women under apartheid.

Part of the special problem posed by Packer’s work arises from her extensive practice within at least two, and perhaps even three or four, distinct genres. Her autobiographical writing in particular might be subdivided into autobiography, memoirs, travel writing and, in the case of Deep as the Sea (1975), more nearly as anecdotal and epistolary biography, all of which co-exist with her fiction and the small amount of her early journalism which I have been able to locate. Similarly, while I identify her novels as, in the main, popular romantic fiction, a status repeatedly confirmed by their re-publication as book club selections and in serialised form in popular women’s journals, they may also be seen to draw on the conventions of the colonial travelogue, of crime fiction and of the popular thriller.

The potential of a detailed discussion of Packer’s writing may, therefore, be considerable, since it will of necessity range from the formal and generic to the historical and ideological. At its heart, however, the whole of her oeuvre tends to demonstrate what Jackey Stacey and Lynne Pearce have described as "the extraordinary power and seduction of romantic discourse," which achieves its ephemeral popularity through the contradictory act of both exploiting and effacing its origins in fundamental aspects of "class, race and sexuality." Where the power of the genre to shape its dominant concerns (which have been considered thus far mainly in terms of its ideological impact) emerges is powerfully expressed in Janice Radway’s celebrated study of popular romantic fiction, Reading the Romance. Radway suggests, for example, that a persistent

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44 Cecily Lockett, "Feminism(s) and Writing in English in South Africa" Current Writing 2.1 (1990): 19.
precondition of the constraints imposed by the specificities of a given genre resides in the fact that popular romance "[denies] the worth of complete autonomy. In doing so, however, it is not obliterating the female self completely. Rather, it is constructing a particular kind of female self, the self-in-relation demanded by patriarchal parenting relations" (147). This limited version of female identity is linked with the formal closure of the romance in that "the romance's conclusion promises [the woman reader] that if she learns to read male behavior successfully, she will find that her needs for fatherly protection, motherly care, and passionate adult love will be satisfied perfectly" (149).

Radway's empirical study of the romance returns repeatedly to her observation that as well as "inadvertently" activating "unconscious fears and resentment about current patriarchal arrangements," whereby in the reading process "powerful feelings of anger and fear [may be] directed at the fictional hero and thus more generally at men[,] the story may subsequently disarm those feelings by explaining satisfactorily why the hero had to act precisely in that way" (157). Similarly, patriarchy controls and directs the emotional insecurity aroused in and by romances, in the form of new awareness of female sexuality, by "confining the expression of female desire within the limits of a permanent, loving relationship" (169). Marriage becomes and remains an ideal and idealised condition of stasis, concretised in the formal requirements of the genre itself:

Although they possess novel personalities and participate in some unprecedented events, women in romances, like mythical deities, are fated to live out a predetermined existence. That existence is circumscribed by a narrative structure that demonstrates that despite idiosyncratic histories, all women end up associating their female identity with the social roles of lover, wife, and mother. Even more successfully than the patriarchal society within which it was born, the romance denies women the possibility of refusing that purely relational destiny and thus rejects their right to a single, self-contained existence. (207)

Hence, the desire of the popular romance, like that of the conventional novel of crime detection, would appear, firstly, to be directed towards an enhanced rationalisation and resolution of actual and potential conflicts, and, secondly, to constrain the interpretations which women might otherwise place upon their own lives and circumstances. Nevertheless, as Radway suggests, "the conflicted discourse of the romance suggests, finally, that with respect to women at least, surface differences mask a more fundamental identity" (207)—an identity which
may be definable in terms other than merely restriction and constraint.

Where more recent discussions of popular romance have augmented Radway’s is in their insistence on identifying romance as a "category in 'crisis' . . . a fractured discourse." Although Stacey and Pearce, for example, describe this crisis as a major characteristic especially of recent British and American romantic narratives, I would argue that it is already present in the fiction produced by Packer under the peculiar conditions of apartheid, some 20 to 40 years ago:

There is no longer a single (foundational) story to which [the narratives of popular romance] all refer. In different texts/contexts, the structural properties of classic romance—action, sequence, contexts, closures—have become radically dislocated. Things do not necessarily happen in the expected order any more, and the roles/actions of the protagonists are being challenged by specificities of gender, class, race, and sexuality. (37)

Writing in 1995, Stacey and Pearce take to task the generality of work by present-day feminist critics in the field, who until recently would appear to have largely ignored issues which some of the South African romance novelists themselves, such as Packer, Millin, Rooke and Laffeaty, long ago attempted to address overtly through their romantic fictions, though frequently in terms which have precluded their ultimate acceptability:

White agendas have dominated discussions of love and romance. Despite the centrality of colonial and postcolonial "others" (countries, cultures, religions, races, ethnicities and skin colours) to romantic discourses, there has been a stunning silence about such issues within standard feminist debates about romance. Much of the earlier feminist critiques of romantic love, for example, ignored the factors of race, ethnicity and cultural difference in the construction of romance. . . . This lacuna could be said to have reinforced the universalising power of romantic discourse which would have us believe that romantic love is an inevitable product of the "biological fact" of sexual difference. (22)

As the present study will underline, Packer’s romances (which I take also to include, broadly speaking, her fictionalised memoirs) were constructed on an

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explicit understanding that the constraints imposed on the fulfilment of idealised love in a South African colonial context were defined by very much more than the "biological fact" of sexual difference.

To cope with the diversity of genres which Packer exploited, at the same time as researching the problematic of the identity of the colonial woman writer, this study has been constructed on a dual axis, providing firstly a brief series of three theoretically-oriented frame-studies capable of carrying forward a systematic analysis, followed by a second brief series of three empirical critical studies of works by Packer which will permit discussion of her writing from several complementary directions. These studies do not discuss the whole of Packer's literary production. In part, and perhaps primarily, the selection of texts for detailed analysis has been based on my assessment of their susceptibility to particular critical methods, although several of Packer's texts—most notably, her second novel, *Nor the Moon by Night*—might have yielded valuable insight, for example, into her view of a stereotypically "African" rural setting, which may be considered atypical of Packer's writing as a whole. Set against this consideration, however, has been my judgment that an analogous setting is included in my discussion in chapter six of *The Dark Curtain*. Similarly, the absence of close attention to *Leopard in the Fold, The Man in the Mews* and *Boomerang* results from an assessment of these texts as less "original" in their formal characteristics than several other novels with comparable concerns.

Chapters 1-3 are concerned with problematising the whole of this study. The first chapter, "*Forms of Forgetting,*" approaches Packer's writing by constructing a critical frame to account for the amnesia now surrounding her work. My investigation focuses primarily on the various ways in which a readership ceases to read, whilst simultaneously my intention is to explore the construction of those amnesiac influences, which range from culture-bound biases in readership and criticism to the larger question of the function and failure of fiction with an overtly ideological intention.

In contrast, the second chapter, "*Why Do We Marry Sailors?* *Autobiography and Travel Memoir as Self-Narrative,*" is designed to provide a focus on the writer's self-image as she projects it through her autobiographical works, which are almost as extensive as her fiction. Since Packer's literature has proven to be ephemeral, that is, of relevance to her contemporary readership but far less so to later generations of readers, my concern here is to examine the source of her popularity and the nature of the authorial identity which permeates her writing in all its generic forms.
After focusing in chapter 2 mainly on the structures informing Packer’s literary identity as it was perceived by the majority of her contemporary readers, my third chapter, "Transitions: The Cracks in the Liberal Seams," will attempt to trace the links in writing such as Packer’s between the past and the present, and between previous and contemporary political formulations of South African liberalism and their relationship to Packer’s writing as it emerged in the earliest years of her return to her homeland at the start of the 1950s. One of Packer’s aims in writing was not merely to produce commercially viable fiction that would entertain but also to convince her readers of the need for a "White" solution to South Africa’s national dilemmas. This chapter will, in consequence, focus on the transitions which Packer’s personal ideology apparently underwent in response to the requirements of her chosen genres and in reaction to the shifting politics of her apartheid environment.

The second part of my thesis will then move on to explore Packer’s writing for the identity of its individual position within the discourse of contemporary apartheid. Chapter 4, "Racial Fictions," is a consideration of her fictional reconstruction of South African attitudes and policies most intimately affecting the private lives of individuals under apartheid; this can be summarised under the common South African preoccupation with miscegenation. The fifth chapter, entitled "Marital Parricide," is then concerned with a related area of Packer’s writing, but one which will permit my discussion to focus more precisely upon her attempted symbiosis of popular literary form and broadly liberal polemics. In this respect, several of her fictions explore the idea of marriage in narrative forms which shift from an initial interest in popular romance to an increasing obsession with the violent death of the white patriarchal husband and/or father. My study in this chapter will attempt to discover some of the broader metaphorical and metonymic implications in Packer’s fiction of the relationship between marriage, the family and the apartheid state.

The final chapter, "Narrative Hostages," then moves on to a cross-generic consideration of Packer’s first and last book-length narratives, which invite explicit comparison for their apparently coincidental treatments of the colonial woman held hostage by the masculine, colonised Other. The focus here will be on the identity of the "self-ness" articulated through the texts and its contrast with the Otherness of aging and the Otherness, ultimately, of Africa.

It is to be hoped that what emerges from these analyses is a vision of the terms of existence and survival on which the white woman with ostensibly liberal ideals lived in the very caricature of a colonial society which apartheid made of
South Africa. In reiteration of the central raison d'être of this study, which I have previously expressed through reference to Driver's hypothesis of the dilemma of the white woman sympathetic to the black struggle but trapped within a need to explain the position of her own fragmented community: my study focuses on the sheer ambivalence of Joy Packer's attempts, as a white South African and as an articulate woman, to come to terms with existence as a member of a dominant minority faction which insisted for too long on a totally racialised and sexualised definition of society as the fundamental condition for the myth of their own pigmented survival.
Chapter One
Forms of Forgetting

"I've got to write down what happens. To take it back to the Cape with me."

"Why? Will you forget it if you don’t write it down?" He wants to force more from her than mere answers, to open something of herself the way the book was open, but she remains tense and stern, unyielding.

"It's easy to forget."

"What you forget isn’t worth holding on to anyway."1

1. Forgetting Authors/Forgetting Fictions
Part of the critical interest of writing such as Joy Packer's consists in its ephemerality. There is an appealing quality to the idea of the frailty of the human endeavour involved. Fables have been constructed within a contemporary discourse, and a system of mechanical production and marketing set in motion; for a time the successful novel has flown high and, like a rocket reaching its gaudy pyrotechnic zenith, has been greeted by an applause most notable for its brevity. Packer's works, finally, like those of countless others, have long since fallen victim to a process of literary and historical selection which, according to the French literary historiographer, Robert Escarpit, "causes 80% of literary production to be forgotten within a year and 99% in twenty years."2

The suspicion that Packer's work—and perhaps also "Joy Packer," the writer implied through her work (or writers, since she wrote prolifically in several modes)—has been forgotten in the course of the two decades since the posthumous publication in 1977 of her final novel has been given some additional credence by an attempt on my part, by means of a letter in the final issue of the South African Government-sponsored international news magazine, Focus on South Africa, to elicit informative responses from former fans of Packer's

2 Robert Escarpit, The Book Revolution (London: Harrap, 1966) 34. The figures are based on Escarpit's own research in France in the first part of the 1960s. The ultimate statistic (though not directly relevant to Packer's writing) has been contributed by John Sutherland: "Up to 50 per cent of all American paperbacks are reported to die on the shelf after an average of two weeks' display life" (John Sutherland, Bestsellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s [London: Routledge, 1981] 36).
writing. Since *Focus on South Africa* was the last, and most liberal, in a line of Nationalist government propaganda publications which drew their contents selectively from the South African press and were distributed gratis on an international scale, it might have been assumed that its readership would still comprise a fair scattering of Packer's former readers.

In one sense, my appeal failed, since the response was complete silence. This was surprising: well into the 1980s several of Packer's works had remained in print and on the evidence of library borrowings her posthumous readership had stayed relatively constant, though declining from the peak it had reached in the first half of the 1980s. It might, then, perhaps be speculated that the present silence of that readership, by no means all of whom are deceased, may be symptomatic of factors related in part to the genre but also to the ideological nature of her writing. On the one hand, there may exist the suspicion, grounded in the individual reader's loyalty to a favourite author, of the motives underlying academic analysis of a popular writer's work. Given the traditional hierarchy of literary values in Western society, such a reaction may very well be understood as a loyal readership's defensive reaction against the perceived antipathy to the genre in the bulk of mainstream literary education and criticism. In addition,

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3 "I have embarked on a PhD study concerned mainly with the internationally popular South African writer Joy Packer, whose ten novels and six autobiographical works appeared between 1945 and 1977, the year of her death. I should be grateful to hear from anyone, in any part of the world, who would like to pass on their impressions of Lady Packer's books and/or their personal memories of her, including her support for the former Progressive Reform Party, especially as no study has hitherto been made of her work" (John A Stotesbury, letter, *Focus on South Africa* [March/Apr. 1993]: 16).

4 My letter was, however, brought to the attention of Packer's son in Western Australia and of her former personal secretary in Cape Town, in both cases through the agency of other readers of the magazine who were aware of their former connection with Packer in a personal rather than authorial capacity. The fact that neither of those anonymous intermediaries, one in Australia, the other in the U.S.A., contacted me personally about their (presumed) reading of Packer coincidentally reinforces much of my speculation in this paragraph.

5 This statement is based on unsystematic observation of date-stamping in copies of Packer's novels held in public libraries in Newport, Isle of Wight, U.K., and in Grahamstown, South Africa, and on the prevalence of original English-language and translated editions held in Finnish and Swedish public libraries. In Grahamstown, date-stamping reveals an increased frequency in borrowing starting from 1977 (the year of her death) which declined sharply in the mid-1980s (noted in August 1991).

in the case of popular fiction by a writer who claimed an explicitly South African identity during a period of profound unease about all things South African, account may also have to be taken of readers' perceptions of the vulnerability of Packer's stance on the South African politics of race, international communism, social reforms and human rights, all of which might be subsumed under the rubric of apartheid.\(^7\)

In relation to the broadest aim of the present study, which is the (at least temporary) recuperation of a "lost" writer, the problem of a silent, or silenced, readership may, therefore, be considered of central importance. Thus far, the nature of that silence has been depicted with some ambivalence, as either the result of forgetting or the result of ex-readers' reluctance to respond to an appeal for informal assistance. Given, however, the apparent impenetrability of that reluctance, the focus of my task has perforce become centred upon the critical and textual problems of literary oblivion. Materials exist—letters to the author from her readership and her editors, contemporary press reviews, and interviews with the author recorded by the South African domestic radio service—which will provide some support for an analysis of Packer's work in terms of reader response, but their value remains constrained, firstly by the selectivity which Packer herself exercised in the preservation of fan mail, and secondly by the paucity of the radio recordings which have survived—none, despite Packer's extensive work in wartime propaganda broadcasting, in the London archives of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and a mere handful in the Johannesburg archives of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC).

For a writer and her work to be forgotten it is self-evident that no conspiracy has been entered into by former readers to forget: the readership especially of prose fiction is almost by definition fragmented, cellular. The separateness of readers comprises an indeterminate number of differences, such

\(^7\) Other contemporary South African popular novelists have reacted with varying degrees of sensitivity to the question of public perceptions of the intrusion of apartheid politics into their writing: Geoffrey Jenkins, for example, attempts to write adventure fiction which, despite its South African settings, is self-consciously "unpolitical" (personal interview, Pretoria, 19 Aug. 1991); Wilbur Smith has scorned the attitudes of the "liberal intelligentsia" (personal interview, Helsinki, 19 Aug. 1989); and Antony Trew, in voluntary exile in Britain, explains how the apartheid régime's reaction to the politically oppositional activities of a family member in the 1960s opened his eyes to the nature of that régime: "this, I imagine, must have influenced my writing" (letter, n.d. [Feb 1987]; personal interview, Weybridge, U.K., 17 July 1987).
as social and educational backgrounds, gender and familial circumstances, and the proximity of centres of literary distribution (e.g., the existence or absence of libraries and bookstores; metropolitan or overseas publication facilities; in contexts which may be rural or urban, affluent or poverty-ridden). At the same time conditions promoting such differentiations contain the potentiality of similarities, and there are obvious structures within a society which mediate consensual rather than differentiated aspects of the reading process (e.g., book reviews, book awards, bestseller lists, word of mouth, bookstore promotions, and radio, television and film publicity). Forgetting has its own commonsense converse in remembering, the functional process of memory, which, for all its individual unreliability, is commonly perceived as something of everyday value.

In the impressionistic sense in which it is used by Escarpit, the term "forgetting" (like its concomitant, memory) signifies less the commonsense phenomenon experienced by individuals than the culturally constructed process which is supra-individual in its occurrence. As I have argued above, and will further demonstrate in the course of this chapter, for writing such as Packer's to have been forgotten a number of complementary but disparate processes may have been involved which on a simple level may be centred on individuals but which can be examined (and in part decoded) only through attention to the generalities of such processes.

The purpose of this study of Packer's work is to examine a writer producing texts in a colonial sociopolitical environment whose narrativisation had been a comparatively recent phenomenon. Any treatment of literatures from a colonial or post-colonial locus must take into account, however briefly, the extent to which imported Western literary conventions have succeeded in displacing the older oral cultures, and this is no less so in the case of Southern Africa. Even more problematic remains the question of the degree to which (in Abdul JanMohamed's terms) the "structural amnesia" of the pre-colonial oral culture has been substituted by the rather different variety of "amnesia" which is demonstrably a major factor in the literary acculturation of a population to Western discursive norms. Contradictorily, however, this latter, "Western" state of amnesia co-exists, as JanMohamed also points out, with a Western collective memory, "a historical consciousness which in turn is very important, as we know, for the development of the novel in Europe and Africa."^8

In a study whose focus is primarily upon the construction of restricted or "false" socio-cultural memories, Roger Bromley has suggested that Western popular cultural forms in particular are open to political manipulation (Bromley’s target is the "Thatcherism" of the 1980s). According to his analysis, the tendency of popular media reconstructions of the past, especially of the recent twentieth-century past containing "living memory," is that the past undergoes "editorialization." Stereotyping, simplification and commodification of the past are achieved through the production of images, symbols and styles that are easily recognisable and identifiable from the perspective of the present. The result, Bromley suggests, has been the creation of a "cultural anamnesia [literally, a 'non-forgetting'] which while it corresponds in its forms to the structures of memory and remembering is, arguably, actually part of a process of forgetting" (7). Anamnesia, in short, works as a way of confronting the insecurity of the present with the already known constructs of the past—history, as Barthes said, slips into myth by a process of elision, omission and simplification. . . . It is a romanticization of the present and a legitimation of its current political formations. (11)

Where this process of "false" memory is open to manipulation, then, is in its "tokenism" vis-à-vis the past, whereby "the injuries of class, war, race, and gender are anaesthetized," and the modern recipient of these commodified or "preferred" memories (4) is "relieved of the burden of remembering" (10). It follows from this line of argument that contained within the "false" or partially-reconstructed memory are elements both of "real" memory and of "real" forgetting, their incompleteness itself permitting the onset of "colonization" of the memory by "popularized imagery" (4). Bromley identifies this process especially in the tendency of popular cultural forms to construct "representative" individual figures containing this kind of imagery as apparent replications of the "logic" of a given period in real time. The result, he concludes, is a "sealing off of an ideology of the 'personal' from more complex notions of the personal-social dialectic" (14), the commodified past becoming a method of constraining popular perception of the ideological present.

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10 "Anamnesia" should not be confused with the medical term "anamnesis," which refers simply to the ability to recall past events.
In sum, it may be suspected that the "anamnesiac" and amnesiac functions and associative features of the popular text collaborate in the reinforcement of a "false" ideological consciousness of the kind once propagated by the critical approach of the Frankfurt School. Such an analysis may be seen to be immediately attractive, since it will facilitate discussion of the literature in terms of familiar tools such as ethnocentricity, racism, sexism, and social class. Whether, however, such mechanisms will be fully adequate in accounting for the actual impact of Joy Packer’s narratives remains one of the additional purposes of this study.

My intention in this opening chapter is, therefore, to approach Packer’s writing by exploring, from several distinct perspectives, the apparently intimate relationship that exists between popular romantic fiction of the kind written by Packer, and the phenomenon of literary amnesia. This will be used as an encompassing frame within which a number of distinct but interrelated connectives between the idea of amnesia and the broader problematic of the literature itself can be examined.

Hence, my attention will be drawn initially (in section 2: "Men’s Fictions/Women’s Fictions") to pragmatic observation of gender bias in existing critical approaches to the whole genre of popular fiction, in particular with regard to the ways in which feminine popular fiction, set mainly in domestic locations rather than in the spatially wider worlds of adventure tales of masculine activity, has suffered from a relatively lesser degree of attention on the part of critics.

Another area of pragmatic observation (in section 3: "Competing Agendas") will then concern the general problems inherent in analysis of a contemporary literature which is perceived by its general readership and by its professional critics to be participating, even if unwillingly or unwittingly, in the ambient discourse of an area of major contemporary political contention—in the case of Packer’s writing, apartheid. My perception here is of a selective critical bias (perhaps better termed an "affirmative critical bias") which has evolved under the impact of the need to assert the potential of a postcolonial non-racial and non-sexist sociopolitical dispensation in a future (and now increasingly present) South Africa, a critical bias which can be seen to be related, in general, to the discursive function of literary and literary-critical texts.

While approaches such as these may assist in the construction of an understanding of the broad social and political context of a forgotten oeuvre, other more closely "literary" theories of the process of forgetting will also assist in defining the generic identity of Packer’s writing. The first of these has been
supplied by John G. Cawelti's identification of an area of popular fiction which, for want of a better label, he has termed the "best-selling social melodrama" (see section 4: "Social Melodrama"). While Cawelti's definition has been criticised for its attempt to align the prose narrative social melodrama with other more clearly defined formula literatures, his identification in popular fiction of the potential links between melodrama and spectacle and the ephemerality of the genre will contribute a significant formal aspect to my argument.¹¹

A further aspect of literary amnesia, partially overlapping with the previous one, can be identified in the didactic and propagandistic functions that have been ascribed to popular fiction, often in a grossly oversimplified and simplistic manner (see section 5: "Propaganda, Ephemeralty, and the Roman à Thèse"). It is self-evident that we are all at times subject to exposure to propaganda in one or many forms, not least the critic of South African literature, as I know from my own experience of being the recipient in the late-1980s of direct mail propaganda from a British-based organisation supporting white military resistance to South African political change—my name presumably culled from South African Nationalist government sources. Consideration of the proximity of Packer's writing to propaganda per se, itself an inherently ephemeral mode of discourse, has been suggested not least by her familiarity with the actual production of propaganda in times of British and imperial crisis. Her first experience of propaganda came (as I note in the following chapter on Packer's life-narratives) in the course of her work as a journalist for the London Daily Express during the Depression,¹² although the scope and sophistication of her involvement in Second World War propaganda work was vastly greater. Hence, my investigation will be directed towards the ways in which such an extensive experience of producing targeted—if benevolent—propaganda for consumption by her own side may have provided Packer with a grounding in the persuasive and sometimes covert strategies of the didactic ideological text. The consequences of such discursive practices for her post-war creative writing may, in their sum total, may have proved to include damage which has made Packer's literary survival impossible: conflicts, after all, at some juncture cease (or change their level of intensity), with the consequence that their associated propaganda must relinquish its purpose and form.

My discussion in this section will, however, finally be directed towards

examining the kind of prose narrative fiction that attempts to persuade its readers to accept its own presentation and interpretation of a given cause, paying particular attention to the ideas put forward in Susan Rubin Suleiman’s *Authoritarian Fictions* (1983). My primary intention is to explore ways in which Packer’s novels can be identified in terms of Suleiman’s formal description of the roman à thèse and to determine how the predominance of the didactic elements in Packer’s works has contributed to their literary amnesia.

Suleiman’s work appears to be of particular value here for its reaction to previous analyses of the broadly "political" or "ideological" novel, and for its attempt to delineate the characteristics of what she considers to be a distinctive and valid fiction genre. At first sight, previous studies appear to express aims that are broadly similar to Suleiman’s in that their authors are concerned with analysing the overt political and/or ideological "messages" of a fiction, rather than decoding and deconstructing fictions in general. In comparison with Suleiman’s more precise narratological agenda, however, many of the previous studies of "'political novels' or . . . 'committed' or engagé literature" have (in her opinion) constructed their ideological topics either too broadly or too narrowly for the novels in question to be identifiable as romans à thèse (6), which Suleiman regards as inclusive of rather more than a mere political or ideological referentiality.

Irving Howe, for example, whom Suleiman also briefly refers to, in contrast to Suleiman assumes from the start of his *Politics and the Novel* (1957) that the cohabitation of "political ideas" and the novel does not in itself constitute a separate genre: "At most, they point to a dominant emphasis, a significant stress in the writer’s subject or in his attitude toward it" (16). Given that Howe is not concerned to produce a detailed structural analysis of this kind of novel, his remarks on his understanding of the "politically-emphatic" novel (as it might be termed) bear comparison with Suleiman’s, in particular for their concentration on the evident function of such works:

> the political novel . . . [is] the kind in which the idea of society, as distinct from the mere unquestioned workings of society, has penetrated the consciousness of the characters in all its profoundly problematic aspects, so that there is to be observed in their behaviour,

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and they are themselves often aware of, some coherent political loyalty or ideological identification. They now think in terms of supporting or opposing society as such; they rally to one or another embattled segment of society; and they do so in the name of, and under prompting from, an ideology. (19)

This frame, in its essence, corresponds closely to Suleiman’s, although in Howe’s description politically oppositional characters and those supportive of the status quo have been permitted to coalesce in a delineation of their broad function as characters committed to political or ideological creeds. Like Suleiman, who starts out by indicating the "impurity" of the roman à thèse as a genre, Howe has also noted the "inescapable" conflict in novels whose characters tend to be drawn in ideological or political terms:

the novel tries to confront experience in its immediacy and closeness, while ideology is by its nature general and inclusive. . . . No matter how much the writer intends to celebrate or discredit a political ideology, no matter how didactic or polemical his [sic] purpose may be, . . . he must drive the politics of or behind his novel into a complex relation with the kinds of experience that resist reduction to formula. (20-21)

In contrast, Charles I. Glicksberg’s *The Literature of Commitment* demonstrates the extent to which discussion of the ideological in literature can, on occasion, inflame the critical breast.15 Glicksberg’s study approaches the politico-ideological novel from an altogether more polemical baseline than Howe’s, and his scepticism of the value of "political" literature is readily decodable from his citing of Charles Dickens, T. S. Eliot, and Hermann Hesse as practitioners and/or advocates of a literature which *refuses* a "fire-breathing, iconoclastic" reading of "the existing social order" (22, 30-31). Their converse, he insists, is to be found in the "simplistic propagandistic fervour of the author, as in Gorky’s novel *Mother*" (24), and in the work of "Negro writers" who "in their theater of commitment . . . unleash their intemperate polemics: plays that resound with visceral rage and murderous hatred of the whites. They use the theater as a forum that will broadcast their denunciation of racism" (55).

There then follows a lengthy critical discussion of the work of writers with "different kinds of commitment" (73), Knut Hamsun, Wyndham Lewis, Ezra

Pound, and Céline, reactionaries to a man, the qualities of whose writing cause Glicksberg to ask: "Does their political error—or aberration—vitiate the creative work they produced in the past?" (74). In the context of the present study, Glicksberg's question would appear to be highly pertinent, since parallels may be drawn with the problematic of the potential canonicity of writers whose works appeared under the "aberrant" conditions of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa.

Glicksberg's response provides no immediate insights: his answer expends its energy on exonerating the anti-semite, Céline, on the grounds of "his conception of human nature as incurably evil, bloodthirsty, unutterably vile" (83); the "reactionary" Wyndham Lewis for his perception of Communism as the source of "degradation of the standard of excellence" (87) and for his "commitment to the politics of genius" (97); and, most remarkably, Ezra Pound's "aberrations," from the perspective that

as we look back on the extraordinary career of this man, we are not inclined to pass judgment on his acts of treason. His Fascist interlude can be forgotten. . . . Pound demonstrates that writers who, out of the best motives, dabble in politics often bring disaster on themselves. (109, my emphasis)

The remainder of Glicksberg's study goes on to attempt the imposition of ideologically-inspired literary "anamnesia" by arguing for the superiority of the "unpolitical" writer who foregoes "Leftist" propaganda in favour of a literature committed, at most, to the form of "moral protest" practised by a writer like Solzhenitsyn against the dominant propaganda of the state (379-401).

Like much of the literature it defends, Glicksberg's criticism reveals its weakness in its over-specified polemical target—Soviet communism and the Cold War—and in its desire to function politically against its own main prescriptive premise: that the function of literature is to be unpolitical—The Literature of Commitment functions, indeed, as a critical-theoretical equivalent of the fictional roman à thèse. And therein lies also its sole strength: that, against its own desire as a critical work, it also demonstrates the discursive ability of polemical criticism to display the structuration of its own ideological sources in its encounter with the overtly ideological literary text.

In the context of this critical tradition, the fifth and sixth sections of this chapter will be devoted to consideration of, firstly, the nature and, secondly, the significance of Suleiman's ideas on the roman à thèse for a closer understanding
of the formulation of Packer's novels, including pragmatic aspects of their literary oblivion. The final section in particular will consider the potential function of Packer's work as propaganda, and the relationship between the propagandistic use of literature and its forgetting.

2. Men's Stories/Women's Stories

It is inevitable that a significant role in the forgetting of Packer has been played by the fictional genre in which she chose to write. Popular fiction, generally and generically, has often been read as inherently conservative, both ideologically and formally. One of the earliest materialist critics of the genre, Roger Bromley, who has been one of a group occasionally referred to as the British culturalist school originating in the 1970s, has suggested from a Marxist-Gramscian perspective that the genre is structured, overtly and covertly, to "persuade us to bow to the given state of affairs" (58). Following a similar line of argument about the masculine adventure thriller (for example, Wilbur Smith's), Jerry Palmer has claimed that the reader is "compelled" to accept a tripartite "dogma," which he summarises as: "(1) Thriller suspense consists of experiencing everything from the point of view of the hero. (2) The hero is distinguished from the other characters by his professionalism and his success. (3) The hero undertakes to solve a heinous, mysterious crime which is a major threat to the social order."17

Similar analyses have been suggested for feminine popular romances, where the compulsion imposed on the reader appears to include selection of the "correct" items from a range of highly marketable binaries packaged within the novel as "moral" and "immoral" values, such as those listed by Christine Bridgwood in her description of the popular family saga: "rebel/conformist, good mother/bad mother, promiscuous/faithful, rightful heir/rival claimant."18 These "moral values," in their turn, seem to underpin a series of binary ideological alternatives such as those classified by Bromley in terms of "absences" and "presences" in the

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16 Jim Collins defines the British culturalist school as that which was led in the 1980s by Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Tony Bennett, Janet Woollacott and John Fiske (Jim Collins, Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Post-Modernism, New York: Routledge, 1989, 18).


text: the "natural/social; individual/collective; equivalence/profit; creativity/reproduction" (43). On the basis of detection of this kind of binary hierarchy it can be claimed that, by attempting to control the reader’s selection of "correct" alternatives, the popular novel in general—and its South African version is no exception—proclaims the supremacy of a profane trinity: domestic order equals economic order equals political order, but the greatest of these is order. There would seem to be little left for the critic to do other than steriley contradict, and, given the mutability of moral orders noted by Cawelti (45-46), no choice for the reader but, eventually, to forget that other alternatives have, in reality, existed.

While agreeing with the broad line of the various arguments already mentioned, Janet Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O’Rourke and Chris Weedon, the joint authors of a 1985 survey of what they provisionally term "men’s stories" (70-85) and "women’s stories" (86-105), underline a factor which has also provided part of the motivation for the whole of the present study. The critical study of feminine romance and masculine romance (i.e., adventure stories and thrillers), they point out, has a "spurious kind of sexual symmetry," since the latter variety of popular fiction "has enjoyed a virtual monopoly of serious attention" (73).

During the decade that has passed since this observation was made, feminist critical studies in Britain and elsewhere have undoubtedly shifted the balance. Nevertheless, for several interlocking reasons—pre-eminently the political struggle against apartheid—the argument put forward by Batsleer et al., largely holds true for South African popular fiction. Typically, when in 1991 the editors of the Routledge Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English were seeking contributors, they were recommended by their South African advisors to commission individual entries only on writers of masculine South African popular fiction (Stuart Cloete, Geoffrey Jenkins, Alan Scholefield, and Wilbur Smith); women’s writing in the genre, including that of Joy Packer, was intended for discussion only under the heading of "Popular Fiction (South Africa)."20

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20 See Eugene Benson and L. W. Conolly, eds, Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English (London: Routledge, 1994) 1297-1300; see also Appendix 2. While the South African advisors originally recommended only male authors for individual entries, according to one of the editors this could undoubtedly have been changed at my suggestion (see Eugene Benson, letter to John A Stotesbury, 16 July 1991).
Further, Batsleer et al. refer to a factor which I have noted impressionistically in my own review of the field, that the differences between feminine and masculine romances are not simply a question of "sexually differentiated readerships": the masculine adventure thriller has a sizeable minority of female readers, a factor which apparently does not hold true in the case of a male readership of Mills and Boon romances (73). A major part of the explanation may be contained in Martin Green's suggestion that, in the nineteenth century,

adventure stories were written about, and for, boys, but they were read by girls. For a girl to identify with boys was always, within certain limits, acknowledged as an advantage. The reverse was true for boys. The tomboy was always, at least in books, to be admired; the sissy was to be despised. Adventure reading was closely linked with tomboyishness.21

Thus—to extend the reference to encompass the modern popular descendant of the nineteenth-century adventure genre—while a well-established South African writer of adventure stories such as Geoffrey Jenkins, with a worldwide as well as domestic readership, can emphasise in interview his awareness that his readership includes a large minority of women,22 Packer, writing in the mid-1970s, noticed that amongst the writers of the fan mail she had received in response to her fiction there were far fewer men than in the earlier mail she received after the publication of each of her first three memoirs.23 This is, perhaps, also a predictable distinction, given the degree to which Packer's memoirs centre on her husband's career in the Royal Navy before, during and after the Second World War, but it is still a distinction which appears to have surprised her, given her own perception of the strength of her feminine perspective in the memoirs, and given the degree to which her interest in the "masculine" affairs of the political world intrudes into the feminine domesticity of her fiction.

Hence, when Batsleer et al. suggest that most attention has been paid to men's stories as part of the unresolved gender bias in critical preoccupations, they also point out that even within this limited sphere of critical activity the "specific

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21 Martin Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1990) 6-7 (original emphasis).
22 Geoffrey Jenkins, personal interview, Pretoria, 19 Aug. 1991; in 1986 Jenkins happened also to put me in contact with his Finnish fan of longest standing, a woman.
cultural codes of the masculine" had not (at the date of writing) been subjected to the kind of analysis which might have attempted to account for the prevalence of a minority female readership of the masculine genre (74). Even with regard to women's stories, "only feminist analysis . . . has shown any serious concern . . . with the relationship between romance and the lives of women. And it takes a brave woman [sic] to state the obvious, and then go on to question it" (88).

3. Competing Agendas

In 1937 Stuart Cloete's historical adventure novel, *Turning Wheels*, was greeted with profound disapproval by the Afrikaner Establishment for its less than idolatrous depiction of the heroic deeds of the Voortrekkers a century previously. Attempts were made, with eventual success, to ban the novel from sale within South Africa. (The ban remained in force for 37 years.) One of the novel's reviews, evidently written from within the South African English laager, reveals part of the mechanism of suppression:

The way to stop *Turning Wheels* from turning in South Africa was to keep absolutely quiet. Dozens of fine books die in just that way—killed by silence. Killed by the lack of the independent non-academic critical faculty which is neglected in every South African university. After some years of silence the author dies too, in the spirit if not in the flesh.

Ethelreda Lewis's perception of the power of established, professional critics to refuse to valorise a particular literary text such as Cloete's iconoclastic work, and in effect from a reactionary stance to attempt to impose the work's oblivion (though failing in this aim in the case of *Turning Wheels*), has arguably found its paradoxical counter-image in the latter years of the apartheid period.

In an overview of what he terms a "revolution" in recent South African historiography, Iain R. Smith has commented that

in a country where the past is seen as having a direct relevance to the

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24 "'There was lust in the laager,' wrote Nadine Gordimer, 'so you can imagine the outcry'" (Christopher Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* [Cape Town: David Philip, 1994] 10).

25 Ethelreda Lewis, manuscript review of *Turning Wheels*, by Stuart Cloete, Dec. 1937 (NELM). She adds ironically that "the English, who like their game high, are very fond of digging his carcase up after death, like a dog remembering a bone, and going all sentimental about him."
present, and where political commitments in the present inevitably affect the approach to the past, there is a very strong pull towards the twentieth-century [sic] and to exposing the still living history of the very recent past.  

A similar process may be seen in mainstream literary studies, in particular in pursuit of the recovery of the long-repressed black voice of South Africa, a process which co-exists with an additional, intense focus upon the emergence of an, as yet unwritten, national literary-cultural future. For many understandable reasons, academic criticism within South Africa of the broad field of popular fiction produced by white writers living under apartheid has become both more complicated and simpler. South African criticism has been simplified in its aims through fostering a mainly negative, ideology-centred reading of the genre, and in consequence it has become much more difficult not to oppose the genre per se but to accommodate it in the construction of complementary critical platforms from which the same fictions might be addressed.

As far as masculine adventure fiction is concerned, the general ("masculine"?) critical rationale in the 1980s was summarised in David Maughan Brown’s ringing echo of Fanon in his claim that the study of the genre in its South African guise is valuable in providing "unique insights in the necessary process of getting to know one’s enemy."  

At about the same time, a similar sentiment regarding the whole of the Western genre of popular fiction was expressed by the South African poet and anti-apartheid activist, Don Mattera (echoing, as he acknowledges in the same talk, a view previously expressed by his fellow poet, scholar and anti-apartheid activist, Dennis Brutus): "Not for us the sensually [sic] bedside Cartland novels. Not for us the Michener epics. Not for us the Mickey Mouse literature of fantasy and intrigue as propounded by the Wilbur Smiths. . . . Voices as poisonous as the toadstools of white liberalism."  

Although there may be a small element of contradiction between


29 Don Mattera, "Some Points about the Literature of Liberation in Present-Day South Africa" *South African Literature: Liberation and the Art of Writing* (Proceedings of the First Conference on South African English Literature, Evangelische Akademie Bad Boll, Germany,
the white critic and the black polemicist, the one recommending the political lessons to be learned from close study and the other urging absolute rejection, the net effect of their two statements is undoubtedly a heightening of the sentiment that, given the horrors unleashed in the mid-1980s by the apartheid régime's state of emergency, this was a conservative, if not reactionary, literary genre that, for both its masculine (Smith) and its feminine (Cartland) modes, deserved perhaps initial dissection but ultimately consciously-inflicted oblivion.

The attack was taken further by Coetzee in an afterword written for the 1987 re-issue of Daphne Rooke's Mittee (which, despite its reliance on high melodrama, cannot be regarded as purely a popular formulaic romance). Of significance here is the detail that Mittee was produced in the early years of the first Nationalist government by a novelist whose works were subsequently forgotten (not least, by academic critics) until the 1980s. For my present argument, the most interesting part of Coetzee's discussion of Mittee consists of what must be considered an agenda prescribed for the contemporary critic of South African literature:

The first question to ask . . . is whether Rooke belongs in the line of Schreiner, [Pauline] Smith, Gordimer and [Doris] Lessing, writers engaged with moral and political issues of class, race and gender, or with Millin (say) and the exploitation for literary/commercial ends of the more spectacularly violent features of South African life, the more picturesque episodes of South African history.30

Having stated these two alternatives, the principled and the unprincipled, Coetzee examines Mittee with an increasing ambivalence which he claims to draw from the novel itself but which, I would argue, is in at least equal measure the result of his critical preconceptions. He suggests initially that "Rooke loses control of her tale," an indictment he bases on his observation that, in producing a closure by various narrative sleights of hand, Rooke appears to be guilty of "the charge that [she] is a mere romancer, out of her depth with larger issues" (208), "writing with her nose so close to the page that she loses sight of the larger picture" (212).

At the same time, however, Coetzee enjoys Rooke's iconoclastic realism, and savours her exposition of a narrative melodrama where, "in the context of the high-minded but rather prim South African liberal novel, Rooke's world of

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pissing and farting, of menstruation and masturbation and orgasm . . . is a welcome relief" (210), concluding, in existential terms, that "it can be argued that for Rooke the fundamental conflict is not between black and white, not between man and woman, but between young and old" (211). Nowhere, however, does he seem to entertain the idea that such a literary concern may be as equally valid, with reference to South Africa, as the overwhelming South African preoccupation with questions of race, gender, sexuality, and violence, despite his conclusion that "the family in Rooke’s imagination is the site of a war of all against all" (213).

In sum, like Maughan Brown and Mattera, Coetzee, as a significant representative of South African academia as well as a creative writer, exerts informed, politically-inspired—and possibly masculine-biased—pressure against the existence of the popular and the melodramatic; he attempts to evict them from the restricted critical space perceived to be available in a state of civil war which is both martial and cultural and, above all, total. He attempts, in sum, to will their oblivion, as a means of neutralising their perceived ideological/propagandistic antipathy to the ongoing struggle and, in consequence, as a means of advocating their historical exclusion from definitions of a post-apartheid South African cultural identity. Hence, unlike popular fictions produced in other areas of the Western world, which, if examined at all, may be subject to a pluralistic criticism, popular, commercial, definitively colonial writing of the kind which includes Packer’s currently appears to teeter on the brink of oblivion in the rising polemical tide of decolonisation, which will attempt in the coming years to recast the national culture of a "new" South Africa by redefining its literary-critical discourse, consigning much of white writing produced under apartheid, perhaps deservedly, to the scrapheap of history.

4. Social Melodrama
At first sight, Robert Escarpit’s estimate, referred to above, of the high percentage of writers forgotten within twenty years of their final publication seems to correspond remarkably well with the conclusions which John G. Cawelti draws from his analysis of the "best-selling social melodrama."

The social melodrama in its fictional form may be identified as such (according to Cawelti) "since it synthesizes the archetype of melodrama with a carefully and elaborately developed social setting in such a way as to combine the emotional satisfactions of melodrama with the interest inherent in a detailed, intimate, and realistic analysis of major social or historical phenomena." He then proceeds to suggest that the result is
a complex double effect: the social setting is often treated rather critically with a good deal of anatomizing of the hidden motives, secret corruption, and human folly underlying certain events or institutions; yet the main plot works out in proper melodramatic fashion to affirm, after appropriate tribulations and suffering, that God is in his heaven and all’s right with the world. The sympathetic and the good undergo much testing and difficulty, but are ultimately saved. Evil rides high but is, in the end, overcome, at least as far as the main characters are concerned. (261)

As subsequent chapters in the present study will demonstrate, this description in its turn may be seen to correspond with the majority of Packer’s novels. These, despite their ostensible dependence not on social melodrama but on either its domestic, family-centred equivalent or, more simply, on the conventional romantic "love story," function almost invariably as metonymically displaced locations within which the larger questions of contemporary South African society undergo emotional and ethical interrogation.

Certain problems exist in Cawelti’s theorisation of melodramatic fiction, since the main distinction stressed in his categorisation of melodrama as a formulaic type appears to reside in its total inclusivity:

Melodrama ... is the fantasy of a world that operates according to our heart’s desires in contrast to the other formula types that are fantasies of particular actions or states of being that counter some of our deepest fears or concentrate on particular wishes for victory or love or knowledge. Therefore, melodrama can contain all of the other fantasies and often does. . . . All formulaic stories are melodramatic, and we might look at the various formulaic types—adventure, romance, and mystery—as simply specialized types of melodrama. (44, my emphasis)

Although, as Jerry Palmer points out, melodrama cannot be regarded as a "formula" in the Caweltian sense, since it "encompasses such an enormous breadth of narrative forms," Cawelti would nonetheless appear to offer a useful explanation for the phenomenon of forgetting undergone by writing such as Packer’s. This becomes apparent through his delineation of the functional, rather than formal, characteristics of the "type," which has

31 Jerry Palmer, Potboilers 40.
at its center the moral fantasy of showing forth the essential "rightness" of the world order. . . . The melodrama shows how the complex ambiguities and tragedies of the world ultimately reveal the operation of a benevolent, humanly oriented moral order. . . . Through [its] complex of characters and plots we see not so much the working of individual fates but the underlying moral process of the world. . . . Melodramatic suffering and violence are means of testing and ultimately demonstrating the "rightness" of the world order. (45-46)

This seems peculiarly apposite in the case of Packer's writing. As much of the following study will show, Packer defines a fictionalised South Africa which is "humanly" and ideologically aberrant in its contemporary adherence to apartheid. It exists, therefore, as a fictionalised setting which must be seen, according to the formal characteristics of melodrama, as the source of all suffering and violence. These, in their turn, must be remedied through logical, commonsense closures which reveal the healing powers inherent in "the 'rightness' of the world order"—a world order consisting, as I shall argue in my third chapter, of Packer's personal interpretation of Western (anglophone) liberalism.

Where Cawelti's analysis eventually touches upon the process of forgetting fiction is in his identification of a fundamental limitation of the genre: "nothing seems quite so dated as a fifty-year-old melodrama because the moralistic assumptions on which its concept of 'rightness' are founded are deeply tied up with culture bound assumptions and beliefs" (46), the majority of which are short-term, with a face-validity which is severely restricted:

Books and authors of this type have achieved an extraordinary popularity within their own era, only to lapse into almost total obscurity in succeeding generations, a pattern that is by no means characteristic of many of the other major formulas. . . . Who outside of dedicated scholars reads today the enormously successful nineteenth-century social melodramas of Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth or Susan Warner? . . . Thus, the social melodrama seems to be the most time-bound of all the major formulas. (263)

According to Cawelti's thesis, therefore, the "extraordinary popularity" of fictions constructed within the social melodrama "type" have achieved their contemporary popularity mainly through melodramatisation of contemporary "moralistic" issues, which, when their motivations have given way in time to other issues in society, have left the melodramatic plot bereft of its detailed referentiality to the real world. The melodrama itself is scarcely powerful enough to continue to attract
a substantial readership. In time, therefore, the surviving readership of such works, as Cawelti notes in a phrase which is echoed and amplified in Suleiman's later study of the roman à thèse, is largely restricted to "dedicated scholars."

As my discussion of Suleiman will indicate, her study achieves a more precise focus upon the phenomenon of literary oblivion than Cawelti's. One of the critical questions raised by any attempt to deal with the whole range of Packer's literary production is the similarity, rather than the perceived difference, of her memoirs and her fiction. An indication of this similarity is provided by the previously-quoted entry on Packer in the Companion to South African English Literature, which admits, though rather grudgingly, that her memoirs have "a readable style and intrinsic interest of . . . subject-matter [which] gave them a certain vogue"—"vogue," of course, being essentially the same ephemeral quality as that attached to the "popularity" of her fiction. In addition, as I have already noted, the last of her works to be re-issued under a new imprint, apparently in response to popular demand, was her fifth memoir, The World is a Proud Place, in 1984, towards the end of her posthumous popularity. Hence, since Cawelti's explanation is restricted specifically to prose narrative fiction, its usefulness appears problematic. It does not appear to be applicable to another prose genre such as the popular memoir, despite (in Packer's case) the common provenance and (with respect to her latter three memoirs) the contemporaneity of the works in the two genres. The implications of this generic similarity will be discussed in some detail in chapters 3 and 6 of this study.

Cawelti's observations on the ephemerality of the popular prose social melodrama (and most formula fiction types with close reference to contemporary issues), while valid in a limited sense for writing such as Packer's, can be seen, in consequence, to provide a less than complete explanation for the phenomenon of literary oblivion per se, although, as I have already indicated, an adequate description of the generality of the phenomenon also lies beyond the scope of my own study. In addition, it is notable that the partial explanations found not only

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32 See below (section 5) and also Suleiman 148. Suleiman (1983), however, makes no explicit connection between the roman à thèse and the types of popular formula fiction analysed by Cawelti, nor, despite their large areas of common interest, does she refer at all to Cawelti's Adventure, Mystery, and Romance (1976).

33 See my Introduction, above.

34 David Adey, Ridley Beeton, Michael Chapman, and Ernest Pereira, Companion to South African English Literature (Johannesburg: Donker, 1986) 150, my emphasis.

in Cawelti but also in the ideas of restricted readerships and selective (or affirmative) critical readings in no way correlate with Escarpit's estimate of the overwhelming majority of works and writers forgotten within a generation of the end of their careers. Since by no means all of the forgotten have exploited narrative melodrama or fallen victim to gender- or ideologically-biased criticism, there must exist, in effect, many other contributing factors, many of which may be located under the popular sobriquet of "lousy writing." The inadequacy of this kind of commonsense dismissal, however, has been shown up by the recuperation elsewhere of works which, for want of a contemporary readership, have required the different (e.g., less gender-bound) insights of a later readership for a fuller appreciation of their value—in the context of South African literature, the early fiction of Daphne Rooke, referred to earlier, may be a case in point.

5. Propaganda, Ephemerality, and the Roman à Thèse

The Novel and Propaganda

In the course of Susan Rubin Suleiman's examination of the roman à thèse, she gestures cautiously towards a critical problem which, since it is intimately involved in the genre, makes its own contribution to the phenomenon of forgetting: "In ordinary critical usage, the term 'roman à thèse' has a strongly negative connotation; it designates works that are too close to propaganda to be artistically valid. No self-respecting writer would consent to call his [sic] novels by that name" (3, my emphasis). Packer herself makes no explicit connection at any point in her career between her own creative writing and "propaganda" per se. For her, propaganda was simply the activity in which she had engaged in wartime, for the good of the nation and empire. Her references during that period of her life to the nature of propaganda, while suggestive, scarcely provide a critical frame for examining her creative writing. Like most citizens of the empire engaged in the war, she conveys the commonsense attitude that "the strength of Allied propaganda [was that] it stuck to the truth." Her understanding of its processes appears to have been similarly uncomplicated: "If a thing is said often enough it takes effect, hence propaganda and advertising."

In several senses Suleiman's caution is well-founded. Firstly, in critical terms, as she points out towards the end of her study, her aim has been "to show how [the roman à thèse], at once novelistic and demonstrative, narrative and

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37 Grey Mistress 147.
doctrinaire, uses fiction in order to impose (or attempt to impose) a 'truth,' and possibly a mode of being or an action, on the reader" (200-201). Her analytical focus (as I shall discuss below) is placed upon a mode of fiction which contains an endlessly varied mix of narrative and of directed ideological message, veering between one and the other and reaching its conclusion(s) through a process of dialectical discursive conflict and compromise between the two.

There seems, however, to be some small contradiction in Suleiman's argument. After having constructed her generic models of the roman à thèse, she goes on to suggest that their application "would become all the easier as one descended from the plateau of 'good' literature to a literature of pure propaganda" (201). This statement appears to contain a taxonomical conundrum, since it implies that the rules which she derives from novels identified as "romans à thèse" could most completely apply to novels of "pure propaganda," with the contradiction that the "purest" roman à thèse must by definition have abandoned its status of compromise in favour of a completely "artless" mode of expression, in fact a roman à thèse which is all thèse, and no roman: a non-novel.

When Suleiman attempts to distinguish between the two modes, the roman à thèse and the "purely" propagandistic novel, the extent to which she has treated the formal narrative structure of the genre at the expense of a proper analysis of its function is illustrated by the manner in which her comments are presented, namely, as a mere endnote:

the roman à thèse in France (and this would be equally true of England and the United States) has represented, for the most part, ideologically minority or oppositional views, whereas the [Soviet socialist realist] Zhdanovist or Nazi novels were expressly at the service of an official ideology. The difference may be unimportant in the long run. . . . In the short run, however, we must recall that the social and cultural significance of a work that represents a point of view in opposition to the status quo is different from that of a work representing an official ideology backed up by the apparatus of power. The difference may be worth exploring.38

This startlingly tardy and somewhat ambivalent reference to the discursive function of the roman à thèse, while not undermining Suleiman's thesis, reveals the modesty of its intentions and also the degree to which her analysis evades the problematic of "propaganda" as a common discursive ideological construct of all

38 Suleiman, note 6, 278, my emphases.
novels.

Some of the critical writings published elsewhere on selected areas of ostensibly propagandistic literature are strongly marked by neglect of this kind, that is, the absence of either a comprehensive or, at the least, a working definition of "propaganda." David Smith's *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel* (1978),\(^{39}\) for example, is noteworthy for providing no theoretical consideration at all of the concepts basic to its subject-matter, such as *socialism*, *the political* and *ideological* structures of fiction, the *narrative strategies* of politically-oriented fiction, nor, indeed, of the concept of *propaganda* itself. The same is true of Peter Buitenhuis's *The Great Wall of Words: Literature as Propaganda, 1914-18 and After* (1989).\(^{40}\) Both Smith and Buitenhuis, it would appear, have become so immersed in the general public rhetoric of their Western societies (Britain and Canada) in the Cold War period that they have been led to assume that "propaganda" *per se* is self-evident and self-defining.\(^{41}\) Writing from a more convincingly defined perspective on propaganda in film, Richard Taylor has illuminated this phenomenon by pointing out that "'Propaganda' becomes what the enemy engages in, while one's own 'propaganda' parades under the disguise of 'information' or 'publicity.'"\(^{42}\) The consequence, as Kevin Robins et al. suggest in their study of the development of political propaganda in the first part of this century, is that

> Propaganda has, regrettably, been conceptualized exclusively in narrow psychological terms, and, moreover, identified with the strong . . . version of this model. Consequently, as more sophisticated and attenuated variants have emerged, so has the very notion of propaganda been depreciated and discredited."\(^{43}\)

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41 Anthony Arblaster suggests that this assumption became commonplace during the Cold War period; see Anthony Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) 323.

42 Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London: Croom Helm, 1979) 19. Taylor's second chapter, "Propaganda and Film" (19-32), provides a detailed overview and discussion of propaganda in general in addition to the medium of film.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that, in addition to its general discursive practice, "the very notion of propaganda" as a literary-critical concern has come under sustained attack. As already seen (section 1, above), a fully-articulated critical depreciation can be found, for example, in *The Literature of Commitment* (1976), by the American, Charles I. Glicksberg. His literary perspective stems apparently from a distaste for "falsehood" that is reminiscent of the pressures which persuaded Daniel Defoe to face down his Puritan critics by asserting the purported factuality of *Robinson Crusoe* in his declaration that "the editor believes the thing to be a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it." Glicksberg, in the rôle of modern Puritan critic, protests that "the omnibus term 'propaganda' is used cunningly and often casuistically to cover a multitude of semantic sins" (20, my emphases), and enlists George Orwell in support of his own view that "most political propaganda is a matter of telling lies, not only about the facts but about your own feelings" (317).

Rather than attempting a definition of propagandistic literature, Glicksberg cites Orwell's usage as a means of promoting a virtual non-definition, or rather one that insinuates a major dilution of the potential critical value of the term:

> Orwell remarks that every writer is a propagandist, but he does not mean that he practices the art of political propaganda. *The honest and gifted artist resists the corruption of politics*, but Orwell repeats his conviction that every artist is a propagandist in that "he is trying, directly or indirectly, to impose a vision of life that seems to him desirable." . . . In practice, Orwell drew a distinction between various types of propaganda, among which he singled out political propaganda as the most damaging.

Glicksberg's idiosyncratic thesis, which, as I have already indicated, is consistently polemical in nature, merely compounds confusion in its desire to avoid acceptance of the remarkable political effectiveness of the literary propaganda which some of Orwell's later writing was to prove.

More recently, however, the prevalence of scholarly publications on

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propaganda indicates its rehabilitation as a descriptive critical category rather than a purely pejorative term. Another American collaboration in the field suggests that "as time separates the study of propaganda from the political ideologies that hovered over academe in the Cold War period, there is a clear revival of interest in the important role of propaganda in many aspects of modern life, not necessarily related to international intrigue or military campaigns." As Steve Neale has pointed out in reference, again, to the cinema,

The importance of the consideration of propaganda lies in the way in which it cuts across a number of traditional divisions and demarcations: between art and politics, between documentary and fiction, between text and institution.

Between and beyond the under-theorised critical approach on the one hand and the covertly politicised on the other exists another developing debate whose primary focus varies from the intentionality of the production of propagandistic discourse to the manner of its reception, without coming to rest on one rather than the other.

For the purposes of the present study, the distinctions to be made between "propaganda" and "persuasion" will appear to be particularly significant for the rôles imposed on and identified in Packer's writing by the writer herself, by society in general, and by the individual reader. In this connection, given the popular perception of "propaganda" as deceptive and untruthful, it must be asked whether Packer's works attempt to function through persuasive, rather than propagandistic, techniques and strategies, and, given such a choice, whether this kind of ideologically-motivated and ideologically-targeted fiction can be identified in Suleiman's thesis of the roman à thèse, and whether, in response, it might better be translated as the "novel of persuasion" or the "novel of propaganda."

Defining the necessary distance between persuasion and propaganda is problematic, since each category is intimately involved in the other. Jowett and O'Donnell's transactional description of persuasion merits attention, especially when applied to popular romantic fiction, which may generally be considered to be synthetically emotive rather than analytical in its immediate intention and impact:


Persuasion as a subset of communications is usually defined as a communicative process to influence others. A persuasive message has a point of view or a desired behaviour for the recipient to adopt in a voluntary fashion. . . . The process of persuasion is an interactive or transactive one in which the recipient foresees the fulfillment of a personal or societal need or desire if the persuasive purpose is adopted. The persuader also has a need fulfilled if the persuadee accepts the persuasive purpose. Because both persuader and persuadee stand to have their needs fulfilled, persuasion is regarded as more mutually satisfying than propaganda.48

Thus, it might be concluded that the question of whether the persuadee’s (i.e., the reader’s) needs are related primarily to the analytical or didactic rather than the emotive aspects of the popular text is less significant than whether the popular novelist has constructed a narrative which can persuade the reader that his or her needs can in fact be fulfilled through either strategy.

Propaganda functions differently, and a definitive consensus appears to exist on a feature which it holds in common with persuasion: its necessary intentionality. Taylor, for example, contends that propaganda "must be both conscious and deliberate: there must be a purpose. . . . We must dismiss the possibility that 'propaganda' can be either unintentional or accidental" (20); and John M. MacKenzie’s working definition for his broad study of propaganda as it was used in the maintenance of the British Empire reflects a similar analysis:

Propaganda can be defined as the transmission of ideas and values from one person, or groups [sic] of persons, to another, with the specific intention of influencing the recipients' attitudes in such a way that the interests of its authors will be enhanced. Although it may be veiled, seeking to influence thoughts, beliefs and actions by suggestion, it must be conscious and deliberate.49

Agreement also seems to exist on the description of the desired potential effects of propaganda, including a dichotomous reading of propaganda as either "agitative" or "integrative," both deriving from categorisations of propaganda

48 Jowett and O'Donnell 21, my emphases.

49 John M. MacKenzie, Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960 (1984; Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985) 3, my emphases. Cf. also: "Propaganda is the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett and O'Donnell 4, original emphasis).
established by Jacques Ellul. Hence, Jowett and O’Donnell suggest that agitative propaganda attempts "to arouse an audience to certain ends, usually resulting in significant change" (8), whilst A. P. Foulkes adds the rider that "it may seek to overthrow a government or established order, but may equally well be used by governments, for example in times of war, when they wish to break down the 'psychological barriers of habit, belief and judgment.'\(^{51}\) Integrative propaganda, in contrast, attempts "to render an audience passive, accepting, and nonchallenging,"\(^{52}\) and should be "more properly regarded as a process designed to produce inertia, or at least conformity."\(^{53}\)

In the literary context, Foulkes identifies this latter process as gratification of "the integrated reader’s need for self-mystification" (34). If popular fiction does indeed participate in a propagandistic mode of discourse, then this would in some measure help to account for the resistance of its readership to analytical dissection of its processes. As Foulkes suggests, the integrated reader develops the ability "to conceal from himself [sic] the process whereby he satisfies the need" for self-mystification (34). The resultant reduction in the reader’s willingness and preparedness to read critically may, it would seem, find an analogous phenomenon in the reluctance of the coloniser to acknowledge the idea of the need for sociopolitical change. As Maughan Brown has pointed out in reference to colonial fiction produced in East Africa, "if the fictional world is self-consistent, if the writer can convince his or her readers that the novel describes the 'lived' experience of individuals, then the characters’ encounters with (or even experience as) lazy blacks [for example] will be accepted, and the myth will be perpetuated."\(^{54}\) The consistent extension of such myths throughout a fictional narrative will draw the novel closer to a propagandistic function, and away from a de-mystifying, transactional mode of persuasion.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{52}\) Jowett and O’Donnell 8.

\(^{53}\) Foulkes 11.


\(^{55}\) The analytical terminology used in the critique of propaganda is occasionally problematic, for instance, in reference to the truthfulness/deceitfulness dichotomy associated with propaganda. Here the common terms are unfortunate in their wider reference, since they may be as confusing and as insensitive to current sociopolitical discursive trends in their original American usage as
Joy Packer's Ideological Fictions

Packer was well aware that much of her fiction had political content, as a letter of 1975 to her literary agent attests:

With regard to Japanese interest in my books, I have been reading *The Blind Spot* [1967] to try to see why they like it.

I think it is almost certainly because it is brimfull [sic] of cracks at our "internal policies" and the racialist tendencies that infuriate the world and so many of us who live here. These tendencies, I may say, for your own information, are improving enormously and world pressures are bringing South Africa into line. However, if you think of trying to interest Japanese publishers in other novels, I suggest the following: *The Glass Barrier* [1961], *The High Roof* [1959], *Nor the Moon by Night* [1957] and, above all, *Veronica* [1970]. All these novels hit hard at racial distinction.56

If consideration of Packer's gross underestimation of the political condition of South Africa can be temporarily suspended—this letter was written, after all, only a year before the Soweto explosion of June 1976—her understanding of the reasons for the popularity of *The Blind Spot* in Japanese translation can still be disputed. It is, for example, by no means apparent that her Japanese readership appreciated her fiction for its "cracks" at South Africa's "'internal policies'" (i.e., for her "thèses") rather than for its successful creation of a romantic social melodrama in an urban setting which may have been only coincidentally South African. In sum, her selection in this letter of these five novels (her second, third, fourth, sixth and eighth) from the nine she had completed by 1975 provides an invaluable indicator both of her attitude to the function of her own writing as political commentary and of the severity of the limitations which her perspective embraced.

Further, she declares the essence of her creed, technique and rôle as a South African novelist in a promotional article for *The High Roof* carried by the book-sellers' professional *Smith's Trade News* of London in 1959:


56 Joy Packer, letter to Gill Coleridge, 6 May 1975 (NELM 1309/283).
"Although I write to entertain myself and my readers, I think perhaps the greatest contribution in my books is the putting over of ideas which I hold dear," says Lady Packer.

"The problems of South Africa can only be solved by tolerance. Everyone concerned—the South Africans, African natives, tourists and the Press—must all show the greatest tolerance towards the problems found in the country if they are to be solved.

"I use my books as a platform to put over this ideal. And I give each of the characters I write about an opportunity to put over a point of view generally held by the type of person they depict. Sometimes I do not agree with those ideas. But I understand why they hold those views. And I leave it to my readers to judge for themselves," added Lady Packer.

That her chosen medium for propounding her general theme of "tolerance" (according to this interview, within an unquestionably white South Africa, which was to "tolerate" the presence of "African natives," categorised as such along with other potentially oppositional "Others": tourists and the Press) was the popular romantic novel, whose marketability, and hence profitability, might have been unduly affected by the presentation of politically sensitive views, prompts her trade reviewer to add the concluding rider: "Do her ideas offend anyone? It would seem not. For her books are equally successful in South Africa."57 In the light of this relatively early assessment of her fiction, it would appear that Packer's success as a popular novelist-cum-"persuader" lay not least in her ability (in Suleiman's terms) to "coopt" the assent of the greater part of her readership, including those who could be regarded as the most fully informed of the particular detail of her ideology.

Not only does Packer appear to have chosen what Janet Batsleer et al. term the "broadly realist narrative mode" of the popular novel as the literary mode which most suited her proven abilities as a journalist and autobiographer but also the "instructive character" of the genre seems to have provided her with a satisfactory medium for propounding her personal ideology.58 At the same time, it is apparent that Packer's commitment as a story-teller sometimes threatens to conflict with her ideological commitments. Like any novelist, she needed to protect her authorial sources and stances, and her novels, like most others’, are

58 Janet Batsleer et al., Rewriting English 75.
prefaced by the conventional disclaimer that "all the characters and situations in this novel are entirely fictitious." There are occasional variations: jocularly, in her first novel, *Valley of the Vines* (1955), where the fictionality of characters is asserted "with the exception of the Cellar Ghost—*die spook*—who belongs to Natte Vallei Wine Farm of the Paarl Valley"; and in *The Man in the Mews*, where the disclaimer is preceded by: "There are many mews cottages in London and many pigeon-haunted cul-de-sacs like the Trident. There are dogs like Flicky, cats like Lucifer, and at least one handsome rag-and-bone mule called Michael." More specifically and topically in *The Blind Spot*, published in the wake of the Prime Minister Hendrick Verwoerd's assassination in the Cape Town parliament, the legal phraseology of the disclaimer is qualified by: "... except for the brief mention of the late Dr Verwoerd and his assassin, Tsafendas, and of the 'tokoloshe killer,' Msmi", and one "Author's Note," undoubtedly reflecting her awareness of the topicality of her fiction, goes a little further: "All the characters in *The High Roof* are fictitious. *Only the setting and way of life is [sic] authentic.*" Packer wanted her fiction to inform her readers about her country. Her correspondence with her literary agents returns repeatedly to her awareness that visitors to South Africa "always want books about the country by South African authors and my novels give them both atmosphere and entertainment," a view which she expanded shortly after with the assertion that "my books have become regarded as authentic pictures of life in South Africa—the less seamy side." (The coincidence of her use of "authentic" both here and in the disclaimer prefacing *The High Roof*, quoted above, tends to reinforce my reading of her fictions as ideologically instructive in intention.) In addition, the timely publication of two further volumes of personal memoirs, *Home from Sea* (1963) and *The World is a Proud Place* (1966), enabled her to comment on the source and progress of her first five novels (up to *The Man in the Mews*, 1964), but also, much more importantly, to allow her readership to discover her own perceptions


of the personal and sociopolitical milieux inscribed in these novels.

The instructive nature of Packer’s writing is, nevertheless, constantly selective and never whole-hearted, leaving open the question of the shade of "gray" which colours—or, perhaps more accurately, obscures—its ideological intent. (Decoding the greyness remains a purpose of my latter four chapters.) Her literary impulses were husbanded and tempered by the awareness that, as an anglophone South African writer, she was writing in particular for her overseas readership or, rather, for an overseas readership that was considerably larger than her domestic one. In consequence, at the start of her fiction-writing in 1955 she abandoned the writing of a novel provisionally entitled Skilpad/Tortoise Farm, which she had foreseen as an attack on the "protected shell of prejudice long ingrained and deeply entrenched in 'paternal privilege' towards labourers." She was in a quandary over the clash its writing engendered between her liberal instincts and her patriotism, and perhaps also by a certain lack of confidence in her literary skills:

The more I considered it . . . the less I felt equal to the task. Too brutal. And too derogatory to my own country. If my reading public were limited to South Africa I’d have gone ahead. But there’s a loyalty that comes into operation as a deterrent against total exposure of the horrible flaws in our attitudes to our brown dependents [sic]—however rotten they may sometimes be.66

In the case of the abandoned novel, Packer herself was largely undeterred by her first perception of the conflicting novelistic interests of the ideologue, that is, of the degree to which she wished aspects of her works to function either simultaneously or consecutively as agitation or integration propaganda. All of her published novels contain extensive—if ideologically restricted—depiction and discussion of her contemporary South Africa, and, as later parts of this study will indicate, she was fully aware that her liberal stance on sociopolitical aspects of apartheid might occasionally have run the risk of falling foul of South African political censorship, particularly in the case of her most impassioned novel, Veronica (1970).

Packer's novels must, then, be considered as engaged, intentionally, and therefore selectively, in the contemporary South African ideological and political

debate. Crucially, one of the most striking aspects of their engagement is their insistence on privileging the present over the past. Indeed, the sense in the novels of the historical origins of the contemporary sociopolitical structures underlying their conflictual melodramas is conspicuously negligible, as Packer herself was aware:

My literary impulses are entirely contemporary. I am interested in the historic past but not in any particular period and certainly have no affinities with any age other than my own.\(^{67}\)

Perhaps coincidentally, Packer's use of "contemporary" may not be entirely chronological in its reference, but overlapping also with the qualitative sense suggested by Stephen Spender, in his *The Struggle of the Modern*, to describe non-modernist literature which confronts contemporary sociopolitical conditions directly, overtly demanding change and amelioration.\(^{68}\) It is precisely at this formally restrained level that the applicability of Susan Rubin Suleiman’s description can be seen: firstly, in the generic concept of the *roman à thèse* and, secondly, in her identification of the ephemerality or "perishability" of the novel of ideas.

**Authoritarian Fictions**

In its consideration of the *roman à thèse*—her preferred label over the "ideological novel," or the simpler "political novel," "committed novel," or "novel of ideas" (3-4)—Suleiman’s *Authoritarian Fictions* offers an extensive investigation of a mode of literature whose oblivion impends at every major shift in the explicit political and ideological referents of its texts. Suleiman points out that inscribed within the *roman à thèse* is a "desire to close the gap between fiction and the real world" (147) to such an extent that the fictional text displays its intention of participating within the real-world ideological-political struggle, at least as commentator and interpreter and ideally as actual protagonist—in the case of André Malraux’s *roman à thèse*, *L’Espoir* (1937), "one of the effects manifestly intended . . . was to provoke the real support . . . of its readers for the Spanish Republican cause. The world of the fiction rejoins here, to the point of

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merging with it completely, the world of contemporary history as it is actually experienced" (144). A novel of this kind is thus subject to a high degree of authorial intentionality whose primary aim is "to blur the difference between fictive referents (objects or events represented in the novel) and real referents, of which fictive referents are merely analogues" (146).

As Suleiman indicates, since the roman à thèse is inevitably highly localised in its contemporary sociopolitical referents it is not "easily exported," and "even in its native land, it becomes 'ancient history' as soon as the circumstance that founded it no longer holds" (147). The sum of this process can, she suggests, be expressed in the form of two rules. Suleiman's first, or "general," rule is that, as the result of its overwhelming specificity, "the roman à thèse is a perishable genre," and her second, "specific" rule adds merely the emphatic comparative detail that "the narrower the thesis—that is, the more closely it is tied to a specific historical circumstance—the more perishable the novel is as a roman à thèse" (148, original emphasis).

Hence, Suleiman's analysis provides a valuable augmentation of my own study of the process of forgetting undergone by writing such as Packer's. At the same time, however, it is apparent that there is no complete fit between Packer's romantic fictions and the roman à thèse as Suleiman describes it. Suleiman makes no reference at all, for example, to the mass-market popular fiction genre, despite the ideological ambitions it frequently holds in common with the roman à thèse. Nor, in her construction of a structural model of the roman à thèse, does she draw upon novels produced by women, so that, by extension, it might also be argued that Suleiman participates to some degree in prolonging the masculinist critical bias against novels of ideas produced by women.69 Possibly most telling of all is her assessment of Malraux's L'Espoir as a "rare" case of "merging" between fictional and real worlds, on the grounds that the "conflict it recounted was a real one, and was furthermore not yet ended when the book was published" (145)—a situation which surely has been repeated in novel after South African novel (some, like Packer's, definably "commercial," and others less so), each

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69 In the course of her discussion of Lukács's treatment of the nineteenth-century Bildungsroman, Suleiman obliquely excuses her omission on the grounds that "the model Lukács has in mind . . . is a masculine model." Suleiman evidently relies for the construction of her structural model of the roman à thèse on canonical texts and their critics, and her unfamiliarity with the (in 1983) still nascent field of feminist criticism (also fleetingly referred to at the same point), not to mention the whole field of popular literature studies, has clearly affected the referential scope of her thesis (see note 5, Suleiman 266).
totally implicated in the ongoing unresolved discursive conflict engendered by apartheid. (This comment would naturally also apply to innumerable romans à thèse originating in other areas of conflict in the world.)

My use of Suleiman's thesis will, in consequence, be tentative. It is not my intention to test the validity of her isolation and recuperation of the roman à thèse as a broad fictional genre (or quasi-genre) per se, which I take as generally substantiated, but to uncover analogies between my own perception of Packer's fiction and Suleiman's formulations (discussed below), and from these to develop further insights into Packer's fiction as a mode of ideological narrative functioning within the restricted political discourse produced within her contemporary white South Africa. These insights will then be tested in the latter three chapters of my study.

In addition to Suleiman's reference to ephemerality—and despite the limitations which I have suggested of the scope of Suleiman's reference—much of Joy Packer's general mode of fiction can be identified in other aspects of Suleiman's thesis, and the selective overview of Authoritarian Fictions which follows, while aiming also at generality, has undoubtedly been shaped by my reading of Packer. What is most apparent and will be argued for throughout my study is my perception of Packer's fictions as having been constructed predominantly as romans à thèse, and that their adherence to the conventions of the commercial popular romantic novel, while undoubtedly conventionally successful within that genre, enables them to function mainly as vehicles for conveying a restricted ideological message to a targeted popular readership.

Perhaps most important in Suleiman's identification of the roman à thèse is the flawed and contradictory nature of the genre as a whole. The genre, she suggests, is "divided against itself, split between 'roman' and 'thèse'" (22). On the one hand there is the novel—the roman—"written in the realistic mode," with the implication of little radical formal experimentation such as "ironic self-awareness or self-reflection" (73). On the other hand, the roman à thèse exists as a specialised mode of the realistic novel which "signals itself to the reader as primarily didactic in intent, seeking to demonstrate the validity of a political, philosophical or religious doctrine," that is, the thèse (7). The consequence, Suleiman suggests, is that the genre is "perhaps condemned to missing its aim, on one side or the other," since "simplification and schematization are more suited to allegorical or mythic genres than to realist genres" (23).

Her identification of the genre as "authoritarian" is drawn from her observation that it "appeals to the need for certainty, stability, and unity that is
one of the elements of the human psyche; it affirms absolute truths, absolute values" (10). She points out that the genre flourishes "in national contexts, and at historical moments, that produce sharp social and ideological conflicts—in other words, in a climate of crisis" (16). The implications of this kind of classification for Packer's fictions, which were all produced under the conditions of a legislative, and increasingly martial, civil war waged by a single ethnic minority—crudely speaking, the Afrikaners—against the South African majority, are immediate and complex, since it can be seen that Packer herself belonged to a secondary ethnic minority (the English-speaking South Africans) who had been largely coopted onto the side of the first. As my descriptions of Packer's approach to novel-writing will demonstrate, it was to her own English-speaking South African community that her novels were initially addressed, although the potential of a wider audience had been indicated to her by the earlier commercial success of her memoirs. The consequences for the roman à thèse produced under such conditions, according to Suleiman's analysis, are that, in its concern to convey a single, "authoritarian" (and, in Packer's case, ostensibly alternative, oppositional, reformist) ideological line, it "aims for a single meaning and for total closure" (22) and "calls for unambiguous interpretation," the story lending itself "as little as possible to a 'plural' reading" (54).

To achieve this aim, "the roman à thèse seeks not only to impose a single meaning, but to impose a system of values" by referring to "a doctrine that exists outside the novel and functions as its intertextual context": the doctrine itself may be either explicit or "only presupposed" (56). Again, as I shall argue in my third chapter, the external system of values ostensibly functioning as intertext for Packer's fictions was constituted by her understanding of the kind of liberalism that had developed in South Africa since the nineteenth century in the face of the growing confrontation between racially-defined and nationally self-defining groups, and between increasingly disparate economic interests.

A major component in Suleiman's narratological analysis of the roman à thèse as a fictional genre consists of her outline of two basic structural models, the "apprenticeship" model and the "confrontational" model (64). The first main type, which Suleiman plausibly compares to the Bildungsroman, involves the drama of learning "the 'right' values" through experience, the drama itself consisting of the "ideological evolution" experienced by the reader during the protagonist's gradual acquisition of the whole of that set of values (142). The mechanism of this process, Suleiman suggests, consists of the role of the reader being "strongly 'programmed'" (141) by the restricted range of readings of the
text intended by the writer, the result being that the "reader is immediately placed in the position of someone who shares the hero's values and desires the latter's victory"—a form of "persuasion by cooptation" (143). Alternatively, the reader who is aligned from the outset with the novel's ideological target will experience a "confirmation" of such values (142). Predictably, the "apprenticeship" model is the type that can be most frequently identified in Packer's romances.

The second, "confrontational," type (according to Suleiman's classification) is more external, less introspective, and far less exploratory, involving a defence of the "right" values (112), which are neither questioned nor even discovered in the course of the story. They are given from the start, so that the enunciation of these values in the course of the story functions as the explication of already known truths rather than as a new discovery. This means that the reader is immediately placed in the position of someone who shares the hero's values and desires the latter's victory. (143)

At this level of Suleiman's thesis of the mechanism of "persuasion by cooptation" in the roman à thèse, a close critical overlap with Jerry Palmer's analysis of the popular thriller can be discerned:

The thriller narrative compels us to adopt the perspective of the hero: by entirely hiding the identity of anyone who could furnish an alternative perspective, by making the villains caricaturely repulsive, by manipulating the point of view of the narrative. In all thrillers, the end result is the same: we side whole-heartedly, exclusively with the hero. Or, more exactly, in so far as we enjoy the story, we adopt the hero's perspective; if we fail to do so, we fail to derive pleasure from the story.

As I have suggested elsewhere, the common description of this mechanism appears to apply equally well to the popular romantic novel more directly recognisable in Suleiman's typology of the novel of "apprenticeship." Both, I would suggest, may be found within the popular colonial novel of "romance"—the

70 See in particular my discussion in Chapter 4 of Joy Packer's The Glass Barrier.
71 Jerry Palmer, "Thrillers" 80-1.
fictional (re)assertion of Western domestic mores—and of "adventure," where the violent (re)assertion of "civilised" Western values is almost invariably paramount.

6. Conclusions
A number of critical problems remain unresolved by Suleiman’s analysis. The first, which is indeed mentioned briefly but which falls outside the scope of her study, is that of the individual roman à thèse which manages to survive the amnesia affecting recall of its immediate referents, and achieves (or later retrieves) some degree of popular longevity and perhaps also canonicity. Although not a factor that can be associated with Joy Packer’s forgotten fictions, this kind of survival may be found, for example, in the case of popular narratives such as John Buchan’s *Prester John* (1910) and Percy FitzPatrick’s *Jock of the Bushveld* (1907). Both were powerfully implicated in contemporary propagandising of the construction of empire in South Africa between the end of the Anglo-Boer War and the establishment of the Union. Their survival to the present as stories still read by the young may depend on factors such as their appeal to other semi- or unarticulated culturally-determined archetypes or external intertexts. For example, the masculine rites de passage associated with transition from childhood to adulthood appear to have continued to function within the receiver-culture far longer than other masculine referents such as frontiersmanship, imperial territorial and economic consolidation, which may have largely ceased to function with any degree of recognisable similarity to the forms inscribed in such narratives.

A second more immediate problem is that of the roman à thèse whose intentions may not have been "propagandistic" in the narrow description of the term, but whose structure and/or content readily lends itself to adaptation by propagandists for use elsewhere. Taylor suggests that such materials (his study is not confined to literature) may be said to have "propaganda potential." He goes on to suggest that, where intention cannot be established, "we cannot describe the activity as 'propaganda.' The activity may have 'propaganda potential’ but that potential may remain unrealised. This does not mean however that the activity will have no effect on opinion" (21). Though simple in its conception, the idea

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73 See Suleiman 148.
can be seen to apply in the case of literary works whose intended function has been altered by, say, adaptation, translation or bowdlerisation.

Sarah Gertrude Millin’s novel of "miscegenation," God’s Stepchildren (1924), for example, if read in the light cast by Suleiman’s analysis, can be identified, in its desire to argue thematically for the inevitability of white degeneration through interracial procreation, as a variant on the apprenticeship model of the roman à thèse. Perhaps surprisingly, God’s Stepchildren enjoyed only moderate popular success in its native South Africa and in Britain, but was received with enthusiasm in the USA, where the critic/journalist H. L. Mencken praised it for its proof of the "social utility of fiction," i.e., its use as propaganda-like discourse in a context other than (though bearing similarities to) its immediate intended one, South Africa. Where, however, the full extent of its "propaganda potential" was realised was in 1930s Germany. There, despite Millin’s Jewish origins and much to her chagrin, "the Nazis pirated God’s Stepchildren, hailing it as a 'poetical contribution' to Germany’s racial doctrines; 'a lesson to Germany,' and an affair of 'peculiar significance to the German Reich.' It was called a 'Rassenroman' and 'all young Germans [were] urged to read it.'

(Perhaps uniquely, at least in South African literature, God’s Stepchildren remains a roman à thèse which has not been forgotten, largely as a result of the unacceptability of its central thesis.)

Whether Packer’s memoirs and fiction have ever lent themselves to the imposed status of "propaganda potential" in this manner is problematic. Certainly her first memoir, Pack and Follow, achieved publication in Britain in 1945 despite the severe shortage of paper at war’s end, as a result of official British recognition of its morale-boosting portrayal of the Royal Navy in its pre-war years, which could be looked back to in fond nostalgia. In contrast, the various contemporary adaptations of her novels to other purposes tended largely to reinforce their function as romans à thèse conveying Packer’s personal identification with contemporary white South African oppositional views—her first novel, Valley of the Vines was occasionally used as a conventional literary teaching text; her second novel, Nor the Moon by Night, was transformed into

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75 See Martin Rubin, Sarah Gertrude Millin: A South African Life (Johannesburg: Donker, 1977) 84.
76 Rubin 174, quoting Millin’s memoir The Night is Long (1941).
77 See G. Sadie, Notes on Joy Packer’s Valley of the Vines, Study-Aid ser. 558, Cape Town: College of Careers, 1964. Back-cover blurb on the 52-page booklet places it in the company of "Notes in the Study-Aid series . . . available on most major works of literature prescribed for
a Hollywood movie, filmed on location in South Africa, though its eventual storyline bore little resemblance to the novel and the film achieved no lasting acclaim; and several of her novels were serialised on the domestic English service of SABC radio.

An argument of this kind cannot, however, in itself protect her writing from the potential charge of implication in the propaganda of apartheid, and subsequent assessments of her work from within South Africa have tended generally to emphasise the most visible aspects of her accommodation to—rather than her criticisms of—the apartheid society that was undergoing construction throughout her fiction-writing career. When, then, in 1982, some five years after her death, the novel Valley of the Vines was serialised by the still-young state-controlled SABC television service, the reaction of at least one reviewer was acerbic:

Joy Packer moved in Admiralty circles and knew her set. She wrote in the fading glow of a dying tradition. An upper-class England where lips were ever stiff and the people knew their place. Much wartime propaganda film had this tone. Joy Packer restyled it for Stellenbosch, where war evasive English expatriates were rebuilding the feudal system—among the oaks and vines and abundant cheap servants.

Since the novel (as I demonstrate in chapter 3) is concerned, in part, with polemicising the necessity for post-war South Africa to move away from the "feudal system" which Packer identified with the Afrikaner Nationalist régime re-elected in 1953, James Ambrose Brown's "reading" of the television adaptation, rather than of the novel itself, tends mainly to argue for the novel's "potential" as material for domestic propaganda at the hands of the apartheid state.

When popular fictions of the kind produced by Packer are re-viewed in the terms presented in the course of this chapter, their significance is inadequately summarised by weak readings such as that published recently by Elizabeth Waterston in an overview of the genre:

Matriculation, Senior and Junior Certificate Examinations, for G.C.E. 'O' Level and similar examining bodies throughout the world."

78 See Joy Packer, Home from Sea (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963), especially illustrations facing pages 128 and 129.

79 See especially my discussion of Packer's Apes and Ivory in chapter 3, below.

For such South Africans as Stuart Cloete, Joy Packer, and Alan Paton, the record of sales at home and abroad is illuminating. Popular literature often carries subtexts revealing national nerves. In particular, the endings and resolutions of popular books reveal political bias toward conservatism or radical reform. Even a shallow book may leave a deep trace on the empathetic reader's mind—and his or her vote.  

The weakness of such an assessment resides in the simple observation that factors rather more profound than national "nerves" were implicated in the complicitous involvement of most white South Africans in the development and maintenance of apartheid, and (as I suggest later) it is not the white "vote" which led finally to political change in South Africa. As my earlier reference to Neale's critique of cinematic propaganda indicates, the popular text in particular demands to be approached from fresh critical angles which, as Neale points out, may, in the process of cutting across "traditional divisions and demarcations," engender also a set of what he terms "insoluble contradictions" which in their turn will demand a re-formulation of the problematic concerned. Neale's solution, writing from the distance of 1977, was to redefine "propaganda" in terms of the emergent critique of ideology. That, to a certain, limited extent, will be my own concern in the construction of my third chapter.

While the problematic of the links between the ephemerality of Packer's writing and its romantic qualities, which was posited as the objective of this opening chapter, may have been only incompletely defined in my analysis, the necessity has become apparent of a critical discursive frame which can accommodate discussion of both the genre and its general reception (as in section 2, above); of the impact of the discursive context of the criticism on the criticism per se (section 3); of distinctive formal features of the genre which may affect its survival as a mode of discourse (section 4); and of the relationship between the internal structures and the sociopolitical function of the genre in question (section 5). As my subsequent discussion of specific works by Packer will reveal, her writing cannot be categorised simply in terms of the formulae commonly associated with the Mills and Boon or Harlequin popular romantic novel. Like the British novels examined by Roger Bromley in his critique of fictional

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reworkings of the recent historical past,82 for example, Packer's writing can frequently be seen to aspire to the status of "middlebrow," with a desire not only to idealise experience in the form of romance but to address the contradictions and conflicts that arise when romance cannot inhabit a contemporary space that has been invaded by the mundane realities of political and social injustices.

Apartheid, it must be recalled, was never an unchanging monolith. It mutated, rather, in partial adaptation to the periodical demands of the accumulating crisis. Thus, where Packer's writing appears at times to approach the function of propaganda, it does so primarily in terms of the specific contingencies of the historical moment, with the result that the specificity of her various fictions is demonstrably dissipated with the passing of time, rather than constantly recreated. As Suleiman points out, "the narrower the thesis . . . the more perishable the novel is as a roman à thèse" (148). Hence Packer's literary inability to outlive apartheid. If the contemporary fictions that are examined in the latter part of this study have indeed proved to function and to have faded in much the same manner as the majority of romans à thèse, it may be in the struggle to remember, contained in the autobiographical narrative, that the writer has developed more comprehensively the connections between her individual experience and her discourse. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

82 See section 1, above.
Chapter Two
"Why Do We Marry Sailors?": Autobiography and Travel Memoir as Self-Narrative
Pack and Follow; The World is a Proud Place

"I have no wish to dissect my soul or my marriage in print... What I have learned of life through marriage will have to find its way into my work indirectly."¹

1. Introduction
The attention of both this and the next chapter is focused on Joy Packer's extensive autobiographical writing, which in its entirety of six volumes documents inter alia what I shall most frequently refer to as the persona of the author, and thence, from an alternative perspective, her self. Since Packer was also the author of ten novels with a large international readership, one of the questions to be addressed later in this study is that of the literary relationship between the autobiographical and fictional works of the same author.² The simplistic gleaning from autobiographies of biodata of the kind that might be presented in an elaborated curriculum vitae is clearly an inadequate approach to her writing as a whole, and one which, despite its conventional popularity, leads only to "circular bioliterary arguments from life to literature and back again."³ On the other hand, while Brian Finney, like many other critics of the genre, has suggested that "ultimately, what interests the reader is not so much what story is being told but how well it is told,"⁴ for the present study such an agenda is less self-evident. Rather, it finds its main rationale in the general material observation, re-articulated by Stephen Clingman in the mid-1980s in his analysis of Nadine Gordimer's fiction:

If one were looking for a society that has undergone historical experience of a most intense kind, there would be few to compete with South Africa. Also, in its combination of class, racial and cultural

¹ Joy Packer, Valley of the Vines (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955) 190; spoken by the character Hal Fairmead, a novelist.
² See chapters 3 and 6.
struggles, South Africa condenses many of the major problems facing the world at large today. . . . In these circumstances it is axiomatic that whatever writing has taken place has, positively or negatively, consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or by accident, been involved in the wider processes of South African history.⁵

Since Packer, like Gordimer, participated through her writing in the processes of South African history and, moreover, for the major part of her career, did so as an "insider," the significance of the "story" told in her writing may be at least as great as (and perhaps greater than) the skill with which she tells it. Hence, among the critical problems posed by her writing as a whole, which in the present chapter I propose to interrogate primarily through her autobiographical writing, is that of the identity of the writer in relation to her familial, social and political environments.

For Packer, the vital aspects of her personal and professional life ranged from the close-knit white South African upper-middle-class family of her origins, to a foreign marriage which she experienced in a wide variety of exotic and mundane locations in many parts of the world, and to her achieved status as an anglophone South African writer with a contemporary worldwide following. In consequence, it might be expected that her identity as a writer, established as it was from within such additional multiply-imbricated locations as "white woman," "colonial writer," and "South Africa," would be visibly intersected and fragmented by the instability of her environment. On first reading, however, such an interpretation of her autobiographies does not appear to be immediately available. Instead, the "Joy Packer" implied and narrativised from text to text appears on its surface to be seamless and consistently expressive of her self-assessment as a woman, wife, and writer, all of which roles she appears, on the evidence of her memoirs, to have performed with a high degree of authorial and authoritative certitude.

In its essence, then, the thesis addressed in this chapter is that the identity of Packer's written self, lavishly and seamlessly woven in the course of her several initial memoirs, was nevertheless disrupted and unravelled by a coalition of diverse factors in her life and experience. As the following chapter will underline in its examination of Packer's ideological views, not the least of the factors initiating such change was a necessary shift of literary genre at a point

where her popularity and fame had become established through the production of autobiographical narratives. If, as Linda Warley has suggested, "life is a journey, and autobiography fundamentally a quest narrative" in search of the identity of the self, then Packer's temporary abandonment of the genre, forced upon her by the adoption of a more sedentary way of life after her husband's retirement in 1953, occasioned a greater upheaval in her quest as a writer than she willingly admits in her subsequent memoirs.

Axiomatically, the later changes which occurred in the material circumstances of her daily life were similarly disruptive. Writing of European literature in general rather than the work of a single author, Raymond Williams has noted an equivalent phenomenon in reaction to the political upheavals of 1848:

> What a stable society, a known civilisation, most evidently offers is a human emphasis, a place for human emphasis. Given that stability we can look long and deep; look at human possibility, at individual strengths and weaknesses, always intricately meshed with each other; look, examine, with a seriousness that depends, really, on certain other possibilities having been ruled out: say war, poverty, revolutionary conflict. The change of the novel in the mid-nineteenth century had been a change made necessary by just these disturbances: a sudden and desperate realisation of what was really at stake in all our active relationships.7

In Packer's individual case, in a very different but equally unstable environment, she consistently felt herself to be "engaged" in the world around her, with the result that major changes all impacted strongly on her autobiographical work (and also, in differing ways, on her fiction)—in particular, in the early 1960s, the emigration from South Africa to Australia of her son and his family; the death of her husband in 1962 while Packer herself was at the height of her literary powers; and, perhaps most powerfully, her increasing awareness of a cumulative crisis in the social, political and, above all, ethical fabric of the South African state, concretised for her as for many others by the massacre at Sharpeville, the transition to a republican constitution and departure from the Commonwealth, and

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the Rivonia trial of 1963-1964 which condemned a significant part of the radical South African opposition to life imprisonment on Robben Island.\footnote{See especially Packer's fourth and fifth memoirs, *Home from Sea* (1963; London: Corgi, 1974) and *The World is a Proud Place* (1966; Bath: Chivers, 1984). In the case of *Home from Sea* the paperback reprint of 1974, which I generally refer to throughout this thesis except where stated, differs from the first edition in that it contains no photographic illustrations and has been sparingly annotated by Packer for re-publication.} Given such an environment, the quiescence that romance and autobiography conventionally strive for in their search for ideal closures in love and life must inevitably be unrealisable.

Where the present chapter will find its focus is in the straightforward perception that major personal and impersonal changes in Packer's life circumstances, such as those described above, repeatedly confront and challenge the apparently seamless unity of purpose, selfhood, and identity which her autobiographical writing attempts to adhere to, in obedience to the established conventions of the genre. For reasons occasioned by the exigencies of genre, gender, sociopolitical environment and (as Warley indicates) geographic location, I will argue that, despite the self-reflexive agendas of the works themselves, in the case of Packer's memoirs this sense of a unified identity, like the process of aging itself, undergoes constant erosion from within, with profound consequences for the direction and destination of all of her writing.

In addition, the topic of this chapter suggests an immediate contrast with the previous one: the autobiographer—any autobiographer—challenges literary oblivion by asserting her individual right to remember and to be remembered through her discursive right to narrativise that remembrance. Nevertheless, the reticence which Packer occasionally declared to be an essential part of the writer's technique—the epigraph heading this chapter almost certainly echoes the authorial view—serves to efface, rather than recall and celebrate, at least a part of the existential data of the self. Since Packer's autobiographical narratives, as her literary agent pointed out, tended to read "like fiction,"\footnote{*Home from Sea* 12.} the degree to which she asserted her right to remember selectively and editorially in her self-narration is immediately apparent, in that she re-creates dialogue extensively, and emphasises and de-emphasises personal historical "facts" to suit the structure and voice of her narrative. That her self-narratives, as I indicate later, tend towards the conventions of memoir and reminiscence rather than autobiography \emph{per se}, with the attendant desire to portray the writer's social environment rather than explore
the psychology of personal motivation, underlines the degree to which she granted herself the privilege of projecting her own persona as a player standing centrally, but also curiously decentred, self-effacing, as an observer of events and persons whose existence was often merely contingent upon her own.

My use of "persona" coincides largely with John Thieme's use of the term in his analysis of V. S. Naipaul's travelogue, *The Middle Passage* (1962), where Thieme is concerned with locating the identity of the "implied author," for which he draws briefly on Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). The implied author, in Thieme's reading of Booth, is a "persona which the writer assumes, . . . which can be extended to all areas of human discourse, including such non-fictional forms as historiography, autobiography and—travel writing." The writer of a travelogue, he suggests, inevitably "has to invest himself [sic] with his own particular version of the role of the traveller," though this adoption of a particular voice or voices may be performed unconsciously on the part of the writer, rather than as a conscious selection of a specific persona (139).

In addition to its potential for facilitating the self-effacement which I have already suggested with regard to Packer, the relevance of this idea of the writer's adopted persona is emphasised by Thieme's choice of Naipaul's travelogue. As Thieme points out in introducing his approach,

The problem of finding the correct tone for a travel-book about the West Indies is especially acute for Naipaul. For, while his account follows a standard format employed by British and North American visitors—a chapter on each of the societies visited—his own situation is a curiously hybrid one, since he comes as an outsider to write about his own part of the world. The tension between the perspectives of foreigner and local is particularly to the fore when he writes about Trinidad, the island of his birth, but the same outsider-insider dichotomy informs the whole work. (140-41)

Thus the predicament at the centre of Naipaul's work is that of the persona he can adopt which will permit his travel narrative to maintain its required illusion of a consistent, unified, commenting voice, a predicament, as Thieme points out, which is compounded by Naipaul's "outsider-insider" status as an émigré, and as one whose "Indian background makes him someone who is both inside and outside

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Caribbean society" (142).

Packer's predicament is similar. An anglophone South African, her ancestry can be traced back through her matriarchal lineage to seventeenth-century Dutch and Huguenot settlers. That her marriage to an Englishman took her away from South Africa between the ages of 20 and 45 undoubtedly made a "hybrid" of her—despite the extent to which throughout those years she maintained contact with her South African family. Hence, to quote a single example of the way in which Packer was able to use her unstable national identity to signal an opportune shift in persona, she justifies leaving Britain for South Africa with her son in wartime, when private travel was normally unheard of, by declaring: "Although I was married to an Englishman, I was, after all, not English. My roots were not here in this threatened island; these people, facing their hour of tribulation, were not mine." In the light of Thieme's analysis it is only to be expected that the most curiously contorted persona which she was obliged to adopt is that deployed in her third memoir, *Apes and Ivory* (1953), recording two years of her life at the Cape, when the potential recovery of her South African identity was constrained by her husband's role as British Commander-in-Chief South Atlantic. The impact of the contradictions arising from this constraint on the structuration of her worldview, as I shall argue in the following chapter, was considerable.

Despite my critical description of this "hybridity," or ambivalence of perspective, as a predicament which Packer was forced to solve by adopting particular personae, its value for the popular success of her writing is already apparent in the role she adopts in her earliest work, *My Bandit Hosts* (1935), a journalistic adventure story ghostwritten for a younger woman, Tinko Pawley, whose articulacy was sufficient for her to narrate her story to Packer orally but did not extend to a re-casting of her personal narrative in written form. Packer functions in this narrative in the dualistic capacity of a primary narrator who claims to select, organise and evaluate Pawley's orated narrative, while at the same time consciously maintaining her own existential, chronological and spatial distance from the events and experiences recorded. This is a technique which, while recurring in different forms in Packer's later writing, raises the fascinating image of a colonial memoirist and novelist whose alienation from much of her own environment caused her, in a sense, to ghostwrite her own self-narratives: she

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14 For a detailed discussion of *My Bandit Hosts* see chapter 6, below.
appears in them to be both present and absent. While a comprehensive discussion of the phenomenon lies beyond the scope of the present study, its implications will appear at times to be far-reaching.¹⁵

The main purpose of this chapter is, then, to consider some of the strategies, such as ghostwriting, which the author uses to discover her narrative voice(s) through formulating personae, or images of her self, in relation to the world around her. In consequence, after surveying Packer’s six autobiographical works, my approach will consist of a discussion of aspects of the autobiographical genre in relation to the problematic of the identity of the woman writer in a colonial environment. My discussion will then move on to a closer examination of Packer’s first and fifth memoirs, Pack and Follow (1945),¹⁶ and The World is a Proud Place (1966). Pack and Follow is of particular interest here since it conforms most nearly to the conventional autobiography in its attempt to uncover the relationship between childhood and adulthood, between a family-centred juvenile self recovered fragmentarily in recollection, and a more thoroughly defined adult self inhabiting a rationalised and documented context that includes both family and society. This image of the author will then be complemented by consideration of The World is a Proud Place, written two decades after Pack and Follow and more immediately a travel memoir than a conventional autobiography.

Some of the differences between the two volumes are clear. The perspectives of The World is a Proud Place are those of a woman who in the intervening two decades had experienced changes in her personal, political, and professional life, which she documents and narrativises at length: widowhood, engagement in the (white) South African political discourse of her time, and the achievement of international recognition as a popular novelist as well as memoirist. The World is a Proud Place is of further significance not least because it marks the first and only occasion on which she undertook the writing of a memoir of a journey which had no itinerary in some way dictated by the priorities of her husband’s naval career. As such, it can also be read as a record of the existential disorientation of a South African writer who, with her lifelong

¹⁵ In particular my analysis in chapter 5, below, of several of Packer’s novels in terms of “marital parricide”—the apparent desire of the implied author/narrator to destroy the husband/father in order to achieve personal identity—finds parallels in Jerry Aline Flieger’s "Colette and the Captain: Daughter as Ghostwriter," Refiguring the Father: New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy, eds. Patricia Yaeger and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989) 22-38.

bearings lost, and failing to recognise their patriarchal origins, attempted to regain them through circumnavigating the world, only to discover (as I shall argue) that her world was discursively defined by and through the concept and reality of "South Africa."

2. Memoirs of a Marriage

Although in some ways differing from each other in tone and intention, Packer’s first three volumes of memoirs at the same time form a unity, since each of them is identifiable in terms of the existential transitions Packer experienced and recorded in them. The first, *Pack and Follow*, a conventional narrative of childhood, adolescence, and early marriage and motherhood, is significant for its depiction of a young, white, South African, middle class woman (her father was a general practitioner) reaching out, and breaking out, from an apparently stable colonial domestic origin in the Cape, discovering personally the features and functions of the Empire through living and working in metropolitan London and following her British husband in his quasi-diplomatic work as a ranking naval officer and representative of the Empire. *Grey Mistress* (1949), covering the Second World War, supplies an account of the same woman abroad, but this time she is largely alone, isolated from her husband and increasingly also from her son, the roles of her menfolk defined by the (conventionally) masculine enterprise of war. After a spell in London producing programmes on "Aspects of Life in England" for the Africa Section of BBC radio—which in wartime was under the control of the Ministry of Information—Packer moved with her son back to the safety of South Africa, where she worked for SABC domestic radio,

writing topical scripts and taking part in plays and sketches. Some of the features I wrote were to stimulate recruiting, for there was no compulsory call-up in South Africa; others were to stress the fact that "careless talk costs lives," and all had the promotion of the war effort at their core.

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17 In 1961 her son had emigrated with his family to Western Australia because, according to Packer’s husband, "they both hate the racial tensions here, are very progressive in their outlook" (Herbert Packer, letter, quoted in Joy Packer, *Deep as the Sea* [London: Eyre Methuen, 1975] 244) and in 1962 her husband had died, while at the same time the political entrenchment of the Nationalist régime in the early 1960s had, from Packer’s perspective, produced disturbingly radical shifts in the national identity and international image of South Africa.

18 See *Grey Mistress* 153-55.

19 *Grey Mistress* 170.
Then, frustrated by the length of her wartime separation from her husband, she applied to work for Allied propaganda in the Mediterranean, joining first the Ministry of Information, Middle East (MIME) in Egypt, and later, as Italy fell to the Allied forces, moving on to a more sophisticated unit, the Psychological Warfare Branch (P.W.B.) of Allied Forces Headquarters in Italy. Subsequently, in an apparently disintegrating post-war world she confronts Britain and South Africa, two of the many nodes of an empire rapidly losing its pre-war certainties of master and servant, of the well-heeled and the poor, of black and white, human and ethical.

With her third memoir the wheel turns full circle; at the end of the war the husband is restored to his wife—though not their son, for whom the war-years had included his growing out of the kind of childhood dependency on others which had been necessitated by the frequent absence of both parents in separate areas of the war in Europe. *Apes and Ivory* (1953)—as Packer noted, the title is an inverted, more euphonious version of the Old Testament reference to Solomon’s African treasures—describes her return in middle age from the imperial centre to the colonial periphery, (re-)discovering a South Africa which is no longer the world of her youth but a citadel of empire which has fallen (to echo and distort Coetzee’s later work) to the Barbarians from the north, the Boers of the National Party whose drive towards apartheid she views from the apparent permanence and security of the British naval base at Simon’s Town. Later, she identified her perspective explicitly as Cape-centred: "We at the Cape, with our older and less belligerent history, have been politically invaded by this vigorous northern spirit. Our destiny is being shaped by it, and, although we may dislike, resent and fear it, we are compelled to respect its fanatical determination."22

What remains is retirement, "the last loose end of a Naval story that had its beginning and its end in the lee of the Simon’s Berg" (400). It is notable that, at the end of this third volume, Packer persists in the fiction that the overtly masculine aspect of her works—the Royal Navy and war, and imperial diplomacy, which undoubtedly attracted a sizeable male readership— is also its primary

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20 See *Grey Mistress* 227-322.
22 *Home from Sea* 55.
23 This is evident from her extant fan mail preserved at the National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown.
motivation: they were, as she later terms them, "my naval travel autobiographies." At most, she might have conceded, the "Naval story" is one that is told through the paradigm of the dominance/subordination inherent in a "Naval marriage." Although by this stage her writing had become a central factor in her (self-)identity, and supplied a major counterbalance to the prerogatives of her husband’s naval career, there is no hint of her own second career of novelist, which would come to provide her with a further means for seeking the elusive personal and sociopolitical identity displaced throughout these first three volumes, and with a forum for communicating to the wider world her view from the Cape of the "new" South Africa that had begun to emerge from the results of the 1948 elections.

At a later point in her writing, Packer summarised the process she felt that she had undergone: "They’d brought me round full circle, those three volumes, Pack and Follow with its light-hearted beginnings in the land of my birth, a youthful marriage, a little son and the world my oyster as I chased round the globe in the wake of my naval officer husband and his grey warships: Grey Mistress when the shadow of the war years fell upon us: and now this more mature account [Apes and Ivory] of two years in an official position, journeying around and across the vast African continent, by sea, air and land, visiting States and Dependencies in various stages of evolution and 'emergence,' and trying to see the future pattern of newly awakened Black Africa." Her view of the autobiographical process shifting gradually from the personal to the sociopolitical, while geographically accurate, belies her image of the circularity of her experience. From childhood to adulthood, she had in fact experienced an increase in awareness of her status as a white woman in Africa, though the linear chronology of her increasing awareness of that "loss of innocence" was still largely unformulated.

The fourth autobiographical volume, Home from Sea (1963), which appeared two years after her fourth novel and a year after the death of her husband, and the fifth volume, The World is a Proud Place (1966), where her main concern is to apply a personalised South African critique to modern Australia and, to a lesser extent, the United States and Britain, are both marked by a narratorial persona based on her awareness of her established role as a popular, successful novelist. Increasingly in Home from Sea, as in Apes and Ivory, her personal subordination

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24 Home from Sea 10.
25 Home from Sea 10-11.
to her husband's career is replaced by engagement in a social world occupied by fellow popular novelists such as Francis Brett Young, Dornford Yates, Stuart Cloete, Nicholas Monsarrat, and Antony Trew, but also other literary luminaries from outside South Africa, such as Rebecca West, who visited South Africa in 1960 on behalf of the London Times; Packer refers to West, perhaps less in envy than in "sisterly" professional and social identification, as "the famous author-journalist, Dame Rebecca West." 

Besides this kind of literary milieu Packer also documents in some detail the various sources for the plots of her published novels. Frequently, however, the volume also reflects the events of the early 1960s in South Africa. In her typically fictional narrative manner, she describes her husband and herself looking out one evening in March 1960 from their white suburban home which they had built on a hillside in Rondebosch:

The sunset still painted the sky as the first lights of the northern satellite towns pricked the gloom. But there was something else. "Bertie!" I called. "Come and look!"... "It's not a veld fire," he said, puzzled. The smooth white contours of the great Athlone condenser glowed red in the dusk as angry fires leaped into life around it. "It's Langa!"

The night of terror had begun. (174)

In more than one sense, "ground that had once seemed firm and safe was split asunder that night" (168). In the final two volumes of memoirs, what once appeared a comfortably circular process of narrative self-encoding becomes increasingly a linear existential progression towards an infinitely receding horizon marking a dividing boundary between a known self within a known society, and an unknowable self in an unknowable social and metaphysical future. This is conveyed in The World is a Proud Place by the persona of the now-widowed writer producing books no longer simply from within the familiar bounds of Chelsea or the Cape but, for the first time, within a depersonalised location, where she sits, in an anonymous Western Australian hotel-room, using a writer's

26 See Apes and Ivory 56-60.
27 See Apes and Ivory 175-76.
28 See Apes and Ivory 227-30, and Home from Sea 39-40.
29 See Home from Sea 40-41.
30 See Home from Sea 235-37.
31 See Home from Sea 168-71.
equipment that is not her "own" (and, incidentally, also a servant), "working on The Man in the Mews, the novel due to be published in the autumn. I'd hired a typewriter and was often at work while Ettie [the chambermaid] swept and dusted" (26). The Man in the Mews was to be her fifth novel, set primarily in Chelsea and the Transvaal, where the protagonist acts and reacts within a context of popular myths of insanity and genetic inheritance. Packer's eventual circumnavigation of the world which she records in The World is a Proud Place was, one suspects, a poor substitute for the lost certainties of the past.

Finally, breaking the mould of past practice, her sixth volume of memoirs, Deep as the Sea (1975), consists of a work based on her husband's letters from a variety of naval locations around the world. This last volume, with its raw juxtaposition of letters written principally by her husband and linking commentary, partly originating in Joy Packer's contemporary diaries and partly written by her years later, seems intimately and individually addressed to a long-established, perceived and experienced readership, one which faithfully corresponded with her during the years of her separation from husband and son during wartime and after the death of the former and the emigration of the latter. In equal measure, however, these memoirs might also be seen as addressed by Packer to herself, a silent, unarticulated, personal re-narration of the multiple times and places, events and emotions within which she first received, read, and perhaps repeatedly re-read, the letters, which function as instruments—and subsequently as tokens—of a marital relationship which defined, confined and yet also enlarged her whole life as a woman and writer. As such, a work such as Deep as the Sea can be seen to function (for the writer) also as autobiography masquerading as biography.

Packer's work, it might seem, contains characteristics which an American critic, Wendy Lesser, has identified in the English—as opposed to the American—tradition of autobiography in the twentieth century:

Part of my definition of English autobiography... is that it sounds as if it's been written by a man who has gone to Eton or Oxbridge.

What this means, in practice, is that the Englishman knows precisely who he is and to whom he's speaking. His pronouns are exact labels applying to a single author ('I') and a single reader

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33 Many of the letters are now preserved at the Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, to which Packer donated some of her husband's papers in 1976.
Lesser's observations usefully reinforce my opening observations on the tone of "certitude" in Packer's writing. Such self-assurance in style or voice frequently appears to be linked (in the view, at least, of the American female critic) with "Englishness," with social class, and also with masculinity. To extend its identification to Packer's autobiographical and fictional writing is less an attempt at lèse majesté than to suggest that her production of a tone of "English" self-confidence in her writing may have been influenced by the male-dominated professional and social milieux into which she moved from South Africa: Fleet Street journalism, the Royal Navy, British diplomacy and, ultimately, war.

Nevertheless, it would be unwise to locate the source of Packer's self-confidence solely in a British masculine environment. Such an argument could be countered by others such as that of Elizabeth Winston, who emphasises an accumulating rise in women's personal and literary self-confidence in the 1920s, when dramatic changes in women's private and social status became increasingly evident:

Women who published autobiographies after 1920 . . . no longer apologized for their careers and successes. . . . The more confident these women became of the legitimacy of their way of life, the more freely they used autobiography for explicitly personal and, thus, more self-validating reasons—to express strongly held beliefs, explore and understand the self, or experiment with the conventions of the genre.35

It was, therefore, also within this environment, in its British mode, of newly-won freedom of self-expression for women, with its concomitant rejection of previous patriarchal constraints on women's expression, that Packer worked and lived between the mid-1920s and mid-1940s, when her first volume of memoirs, delayed by the material restrictions of wartime publishing, eventually appeared.

Packer's literary intentions cannot, of course, be defined solely in terms of a lofty quest for an existentially- and sociopolitically-defined persona. In the

more mundane sphere of personal economics, for example, her skills as a writer must initially have provided a welcome supplement to her husband's naval income, and later a major source of means in retirement. In one of her early newspaper feature articles entitled "Why Do We Marry Sailors?" she points out that "the naval officer is also unique in receiving no marriage allowance," and when he is posted overseas his wife "scuttles after him as best she may. Sometimes she travels first class, in staterooms, and sometimes she goes steerage. It depends on her private income." Packer's pursuit of her husband through to 1945 almost invariably appears to have been in the latter more lowly class. In the same article she includes amongst the "splendid compensations" for this unsettled and impecunious way of life the "romance in the gipsy life, . . . new lands to be seen . . . and a thousand other vistas outside the quiet philosophy of suburbia. There are new faces, too—black, yellow, brown and white." These were precisely the "romantic" elements which she was eventually able to market successfully to the inhabitants of that suburbia. Her later commentary—"I am firmly of the belief that a novelist needs a wide experience of life—a conviction which has caused me to take many jobs in many parts of the world and to do most of my travelling the rough way"—probably reverses cause and effect. The commercial aspect of Packer's autobiographical writing is also complicated by the kind of critical reading (in this case in reference to the French popular writer, Colette) which suggests that "in the woman living off her marketable skills, there constantly conflict the tendencies to preserve the private self while revealing a public self." (This can also be regarded as an alternative motivation for the memoirist's reticence discussed in section 1, above.)

In sum, however, the net effect of the many extraneous influences on Packer's writing resides in the arguably superficial impression given throughout virtually the whole of her literary output of a self-confident "single author," identified as "Joy Packer," and a relatively uncomplicated "single reader," the combination of which I have identified previously as "seamlessness." Packer's conception of herself and of others, I would argue, remains, ostensibly—but only ostensibly—both singular and constant.

3. Autobiography as a genre

Terminology

I approach the concept of autobiography with some caution. Drawing on his pioneering study, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*, Olney argued in 1980 that

> if autobiography is the least complicated of writing performances, it is also the most elusive of literary documents. One never knows where or how to take hold of autobiography: there are simply no general rules available to the critic. . . . If autobiography fails to entice the critic into the folly of doubting or denying its very existence, then there arises the opposite temptation (or perhaps it is the same temptation in a different guise) to argue not only that autobiography exists but that it *alone* exists—that all writing that aspires to be literature is autobiography and nothing else.

Olney expresses an awareness that the very novelty of the genre as a critical site is responsible for much of the diversity of opinion: "Autobiography is a self-reflexive, a self-critical act, and consequently the criticism of autobiography exists *within* the literature instead of alongside it." His own full-length study depends heavily on a Jungian perspective and is restricted, however valuably, to its own frame of reference.

Although the present study is not primarily concerned with generic boundaries, the formal definition of Packer’s work deserves discussion, in part for its own sake, but in larger part for the light such definition will help to shed on the concerns of the whole of this study. The status of the generic label that might be attached to the kind of autobiographical writing such as that produced by Packer seems to be as much in dispute amongst scholars as more pertinent questions of critical methodology. Given the victory in the battle still waged


in the late-1960s in America by scholars such as Stephen A. Shapiro over the "literary" status of autobiography per se, something of a critical dilemma still seems to reside in the distinctions to be made between autobiography and memoir, and to a lesser extent also in the autobiographical functions of related sub-genres such as reminiscences, collections of letters, and diaries, all of which can be seen to have played an important part in Packer’s formal construction of the six autobiographical volumes. Brian Finney, for example, suggests that the memoir is generally a record of action by "politicians, statesmen, generals, dictators and the like" (13), while reminiscences tend usually to be "group portraits in which the artist includes himself [sic]," without extra prominence given to self (14); and in a consideration of memoirs written by settlers in New Zealand, Joan FitzGerald points out that while "memoir is generally distinguished from autobiography by the attention which is focused not so much on the inner life of the individual as on the external world he [sic] inhabits," the memoir/autobiography dichotomy is misleading, since memoir works rather as a "sub-type of the genre."44

The distinction between the labels has also been discussed by Marcus K. Billson and Sidonie A. Smith, who summarise the traditional roles assigned to autobiography and memoir in the following terms: "For years critics of self-narrative have defined the memoir in terms of the autobiography. They claim the autobiography narrates the story of a person's unfolding sense of identity, the tale of becoming in the world. . . . The memoir, on the other hand, focuses not on the narrating self, but rather on the outer world of people and events: the memoir

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43 See Stephen A. Shapiro, "The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography" (Comparative Literature Studies 5 [1968]: 421-54). While curiously dated by its unfortunate analogy of autobiography to the "Dark Continent" as much as by its critical frame of reference, Shapiro’s article can be regarded as a useful transitional stage in the acceptance of autobiographical writing as a part of literary discourse. He argues strongly against Wellek and Warren’s scepticism over the genre in their Theory of Literature (1942, 1956): "We cannot evaluate literature purely in terms of its formal complexity, as Wellek and Warren recommend. They are wrong to exclude autobiography from the realm of literature because it is not 'imaginative’ or does not refer to a fictional or invented world" (423).

writer's intention is not self-examination." Their objection to this kind of formulation is straightforward. They suggest, rather, that "critics . . . fail to realize that the memorialist's vision of the outer world is as much a projection and refraction of the self as the autobiographer's. . . . The latent content is likewise self-revelation" (163). In brief, from her less completely argued, although no less effective, standpoint, FitzGerald insists on using the terms interchangeably, a practice which, especially at this stage of my consideration of Packer's writing, I shall tend to imitate, while retaining the suspicion that some, perhaps more finicky, scholars may still prefer to regard works like Packer's specifically as "memoirs" rather than "autobiographies." It remains only to add that Packer herself, perhaps predictably, had no such problem with what she was doing. Prior to its publication, she referred to Pack and Follow as a "volume of reminiscences," but its success caused her to reformulate her categorisation:

Why does one write an autobiography? . . . Partly because of the power of suggestion and partly because I suffer from that chronic rash, the itch to write. . . . Life is the material upon which it feeds, flesh and blood its nourishment. . . . Nature had put the wanderlust in my heels, the itch to write between finger and thumb, the love of life and the love of a sailor in my heart—and a book had to come of it.

The case for "memoirs" over "autobiography" rests.

Women's Autobiographies
If the classificatory problem of memoir vis-à-vis autobiography can be regarded, here, as relatively insignificant, the same does not hold true for the ongoing debate over the status of women's autobiography. Where the present discussion becomes more complicated than most published treatments, theoretically and practically oriented alike, is in the special conditions of Packer's writing: few treatments, if any, are concerned with autobiographers whose other writing is generically popular; and few, if any, studies concern writers whose historical and ideological-political "field" appears to be so acutely focused as the racially-

46 Joy Packer, letter to the British High Commissioner in Cape Town, 26 July 1944 (Packer papers, file 10/1, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge).
47 Grey Mistress 146-47 (my emphasis).
divided South Africa underlying all of Packer's oeuvre. In addition to the stylistic self-confidence of Packer's writing already located in this analysis, South Africa, as I also argue later, provides Packer throughout her writing with a "dead-certain," pre-determined, multiple location or site which is not only geographically and temporally pre-defined, but also domestically (familially, sexually), economically and, above all, racially. Such multiply determined categorisation, which was, in effect, legislated and imposed from without by the apartheid state, blends inevitably with the apparently "simple" and "simplifying" formulaic tendencies of popular writing. The result, however, is not a simplification of the critical task, but an intensification of obfuscation. In consequence, the fictional and autobiographical writing of a Joy Packer cries out for a re-historicisation of its popularity, more loudly than the work of, say, a Nadine Gordimer, in a mute demand for explanation of that very popularity.

A critical inlet to Packer's work may, therefore, be discovered not only through the identity of the writer's "self" but also, and more particularly, through the relationship of the "self" to her created, "legendary" self-image or persona which, with the completion of the third memoir, had developed a remarkable fullness and complexity. The contiguity, however, of a tidy formulation such as this with the problems of writerly intentionality reveals further problems raised by the autobiographer's gender. As Shari Benstock indicates, not only is it a mere presumption that the "self" exists and that it is "knowable," it is also observable that "autobiography reveals gaps, and not only gaps in time or space or between the individual and the social, but also a widening divergence between the manner and matter of its discourse. . . . What begins on the presumption of self-knowledge ends in the creation of a fiction that covers over the premises of its construction." Benstock's argument hinges on the perception that "in definitions of autobiography that stress self-disclosure and narrative account, that posit a self called to witness (as an authority) to 'his' own being, that propose a

48 Lynn Z. Bloom and Orlee Holder present an admirably clear summary of the main features of (women's) autobiography, gleaned from a wide selection of studies by other critics. Their study, however, like most others, excessively privileges the individual over her existential environment, an imbalance which, I would argue, does inadequate justice to both autobiography (as self-narrative) and its subject (the self-narrator). See Lynn Z. Bloom and Orlee Holder, "Anais Nin's Diary in Context," Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism, ed. Estelle C. Jelinek 206-20.

49 See ch. 4, section 4, "The Glass Barrier," below.

double referent for the first-person narrative (the present 'I' and the past 'I'), or that conceive of autobiography as 'recapitulation and recall' (Olney 252), the Subject is made an Object of investigation (the first-person actually masks the third-person) and is further divided between the present moment of the narration and the past on which the narration is focused. . . . The fabric of the narrative appears seamless, spun of whole cloth" (19).

Feminist polemics have gone on to articulate a more controversial area of theorisation. Like many others, Benstock argues that a major dichotomy appears to exist between the fragmentariness of autobiography written from the margins of society—"by women, blacks, Jews, homosexuals" (16)—and the kind of autobiography written "in a firm belief in the conscious control of artist over subject matter," a view, she suggests, which is "grounded in [masculine] authority." A similar view has been propounded by The Personal Narratives Group:

Personal narratives of nondominant social groups (women in general, racially or ethnically oppressed people, lower-class people, lesbians) are often particularly effective sources of counterhegemonic insight because they expose the viewpoint embedded in dominant ideology as particularist rather than universal, and because they reveal the reality of a life that defies or contradicts the rules.52

The weakness in this argument is precisely its appearance of determinism—many individuals thus classified according to the feminist desire to stress the disadvantages imposed on them by society would argue that categorisation of this kind prolongs and reinforces circumstances which may in fact be more or less readily surmountable by members of such so-called "nondominant" groups.

In consequence, Benstock's assertions concerning autobiographies "grounded in authority" require to be regarded with some caution vis-à-vis their claim to universality. As the following discussion will indicate, Benstock's suggestion—that "it is perhaps not surprising that those who cling to such a definition are those whose assignment under the Symbolic law is to represent authority, to represent the phallic power that drives inexorably toward unity,


identity, sameness" (19)—may be a less than universal truth, constrained as it is by its heterosexual, Western frames of reference.\footnote{Benstock's analyses, possibly because they stem from a contemporaneous critical school, tend to be reiterated in Estelle C. Jelinek's introduction to her own anthology on women's autobiography, where Jelinek notes that, in contrast to the male autobiographer's frequent (but not universal, \textit{vide} St. Augustine, Rousseau, and others) self-image of confidence, women's autobiographies reveal "a self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding. The autobiographical intention is often powered by the motive to convince readers of their self-worth, to clarify, to affirm, and to authenticate their self-image." In contrast to male "idealization or aggrandizement" she detects in women's life stories "a variety of forms of understatement," and an "irregularity" of form rather than "orderliness" (Jelinek, "Introduction: Women's Autobiography and the Male Tradition," \textit{Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism}, ed. Estelle C. Jelinek 15.) Similar points are also usefully presented at greater length in the same anthology by Lynn Z. Bloom and Orlee Holder in their "Anais Nin's \textit{Diary} in Context" (206-20, especially 206-13). None, however, appears to provide a theoretical analysis approximating at all closely to my reading of Packer's memoirs.}

**South African autobiographies**

In pursuit of the critical significance of the biography of another South African writer, Bessie Head (1937-1986), the South African critic Susan Gardner has usefully approached Head's life as one which was in many respects "made up" by the writer herself. Quoting the Russian formalist Boris Tomasevskij, Gardner elaborates on Tomasevskij's conjecture that "there are writers with biographies and writers without biographies." She recalls that romanticism insisted on the "relevance of personality to creativity," with the result that "authors became obliged either to live a legendary life or to make one up." In Tomasevskij's terms, if a writer has deliberately become "a writer with a biography" and has created "an ideal biographical legend," then it is the juxtaposition of the created "legend" and the writer's other literary works which will reveal "literary fact."\footnote{Susan Gardner, "Bessie Head: Production Under Drought Conditions," \textit{Women and Writing in South Africa: A Critical Anthology}, ed. Cherry Clayton (Cape Town: Heinemann, 1989) 227-28. Gardner refers to Boris Tomasevskij, "Literature and Biography," \textit{Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views}, ed. Ladislaw Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge, Ma.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1971) 55. The biographical "legend" of Bessie Head has assumed new dimensions with the "official record" of her life published by her uncle; see Kenneth Stanley Birch, "The Birch Family: An Introduction to the White Antecedents of the Late Bessie Amelia Head," \textit{English in Africa} 22.1 (1995): 1-18.}

In outline, the "made up" romantic self-narrative approximates in many respects to the idea of the persona which was elaborated in my first section. Missing, however, from this is any reference to the problem of the extent to which the autobiographer's identity—in this case the identity of the South
African, Joy Packer, who could trace her lineage back to the beginnings of the colonial period—may be defined in terms of her "Africanness" as well as her South Africanness.

Linda Warley has argued that the subject of post-colonial autobiography cannot be adequately examined through application of theories of autobiography which draw solely upon Western models:

If "mainstream" autobiography theory has not considered the subject as a located subject, then this forgetting is a foundational problem that points to the persistent refusal of Euro-American theory to adequately address the imperatives of specific, local, material, historical, and geographic differences. A single poetics, a global theory, of autobiography will never be adequate.55

Warley’s initial and main criticism of most Euro-American theory is for its universalising tendencies, which she identifies especially in its neglect of the "issue of place—that is, spatial and geographic location—as a constitutive element of the autobiographical 'I'" (23). After generously allowing for this neglect as a function of the self-confidence of the Western (masculinised) mind in its uncontested possession of place, she goes on to suggest that "the post-colonial autobiographer is engaged in a project of imaginative possession of place, an act of self-articulation at once necessitated by and working in opposition to the invasion of both territory and mind enacted by Europe upon colonial space" (25).

It could be objected that in the context of apartheid South Africa a writer such as Packer represents the colonial subjugator rather than the post-colonial subject, whether her identity is regarded in terms of her Afrikaans/Huguenot inheritance or her anglophone/British present. To a large extent, this is true. It is, nevertheless, also important that sight not be lost of the implicitly ambivalent status of the white woman in the colonising enterprise; as Dorothy Driver suggests in a series of articles, in the colonial context, or space, the white woman has been subject to the imperatives of the colonising man. She has been as much colonised as colonising.

Hence, it could be argued that, in a number of self-contradictory ways, Packer’s writing is at once colonial and post-colonial, both dominant and dominated, overwhelmingly unified by its "whiteness" and yet also fragmented by the indeterminate status of the white woman in the colonial context. Her writing

55 Warley 28-29.
can be seen, for instance, to be participating in the South African white supremacist convention of "[positing] themselves as the norm by subsuming all other groups, at least in official parlance, under the term 'non-white'"—as Erhard Reckwitz adds: "This is exactly where the vicious circle starts in which selfhood and otherness are caught up in every discourse of race, whether colonial or otherwise." After rehearsing the now-familiar linguistic arguments over the negativity of terms such as "non-white," Reckwitz also points out that "in regarding [Africans] only as the non-self the white system cuts off its vital world-referentiality. This failure leads to the system [i.e., the white hegemony] becoming alienated from itself through losing its own carefully constructed identity" (2-3). Under apartheid, he suggests, white South Africa effectively suffered the loss of (or failed to form) its own sense of identity through denying the majority of the population a positive identity of its own. Packer’s writing, as chapters 4-6, below, will tend to illustrate, frequently struggles—though largely in an unconscious and inconclusive manner—to contend with this denial which otherwise forms a part of her own "natural" discourse and cultural identity.

The problem of South African autobiography, then, is dual: Warley’s claim for the importance of the specificities of spatial, geographic data in a critical model requires the further complement of accepting the general humanity of all of the actors in the colonial/post-colonial context. As Reckwitz puts it, we require "new ways of defining one’s identity and of acting or interacting within a changing society that is no longer the playground of the unified bourgeois subject" (19), for which he recommends, in the terms of an equivalent Bakhtinian aesthetic, a "discarding of the white monologue in South Africa in favour of an open or dialogical relationship with all other racial groups" (20). Whether the absence of a radically innovative aesthetic in Packer’s writing is to any extent compensated for by her articulation of the predicament of the subjugated white colonial woman in the face of the supposedly dominant "masculine" construct of the apartheid system will therefore constitute a constant thread in the analyses presented here.

Observations of this kind seem to provide a significant frame of reference


57 An invaluable introduction to recent South African autobiography can be found in *Current Writing* 3.1 (1991); a modest overview may also be found in my own "Decolonisation and Women's Autobiography, with Particular Reference to South Africa," *Teaching and Learning* (U of Joensuu) 1 (1995): 72-84.
for the following discussion of the two selected memoirs by Packer, since, as I have noted above, she appears especially in her first memoir to write not from the margin of society but from its Establishment heart, with a mode of authority which in the later memoir has of necessity found its refuge in her self-created authority as an internationally popular author. There is, then, also a sense in which her fiction, written to a large extent from an ostensibly feminine perspective for a female readership, may prove to be less "self-knowing" and more radically decentred and distanced from the status quo in its quest to define its own stance in relation to apartheid itself.

4. First Autobiography: *Pack and Follow*
Between her marriage in 1925 at the age of twenty and her husband’s retirement in 1953, Joy Packer’s life and, subsequently, her writing were dominated and shaped by the mobility demanded by his career. As a high-ranking naval officer he was frequently absent for long periods, especially in wartime, leaving his wife to cope with a personal life which included, for example, the evacuation of their son from Britain to the relative safety of the Cape. As each, but especially the first, of her volumes of memoirs records, during the quarter-century between her marriage and her husband’s retirement Packer spent time, partly on her own, in Britain, Malta, Greece, and China, as well as going on numerous shorter visits to other countries. These were the 1920s, ’30s and ’40s, and throughout this period her visits often coincided with significant moments in the history of various countries. She met many of the key figures of political and cultural history, encounters which she repeatedly records without boasting—she had become used to mixing with public celebrities since childhood. Her father had frequently brought home figures such as the later South African Prime Minister, General J. B. M. Hertzog, and in 1920, at the age of fifteen, she had gained a major insight into the conflicts of white South African politics by travelling in the company of three Nationalist candidates, including Hertzog, on their election campaign tour of the Orange Free State. Subsequently, whether the occasion was an intimate tête-à-tête with Charlie Chaplin in mid-Atlantic,
a pre-Second World War social engagement at which Winston Churchill for a whole evening monopolised her attention with tales of his adventures during the Anglo-Boer War,\textsuperscript{62} or participation in a diplomatic meeting with Mustapha Kemal Atatürk,\textsuperscript{63} the world in which Joy Packer moved was one which, on the evidence of her memoirs, she faced with considerable confidence, personal flexibility and self-assurance.

Because her creative writing career is prefaced by these three commercially successful volumes of memoirs, which firmly established her name and reputation before her subsequent fiction reached out to a wider audience, it would appear important to consider the nature of the discourse through which she projected her perception of the "real world" around her. As I contend above, the relationship between the apparently accurate history contained in her memoirs and the fictional worlds constructed in her novels is complex, and the following description of, mainly, \textit{Pack and Follow} is intended, in essence, to foreground and discuss the ways in which Packer attempts to present an image of herself as a woman who was both a writer and a South African.

Her first memoir, \textit{Pack and Follow}, was, as Packer notes, by no means the first of her publications. Her initial attempts at writing were unsuccessful. Using a year’s study at the University of Cape Town in 1922 as a kind of finishing school—she describes herself as a "miscellaneous student . . . aspiring to no degrees" (84)—she had come under the influence of a Professor of Social Anthropology, a "tall, lean Englishman with a lock of iron-grey hair tossed back from an intellectual brow" (85). Her sense of the stylistic value of delicate irony becomes apparent in her description of how the presumably un-South African values of a foreign liberal persuaded her to attempt to write articles for the South African press: "Much of his information was astonishing and some of it embarrassing; all of it proved the aborigine to be a more highly moral person than his [sic] betters. I wrote articles deploring the interference of the missionary with so many excellent primitive customs and suggesting that charity begins at home. The papers to which I sent such effusions immediately returned them" (85).

In later life Packer evidently remained unaware of the detail that the professor who had so profoundly influenced her was A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, who with Bronislaw Malinowski became one of the founders of the influential functionalist school of social anthropology. Personally invited by General Smuts

\textsuperscript{62} See \textit{Pack and Follow} 125-28.
\textsuperscript{63} See \textit{Pack and Follow} 420-25.
in 1921 to set up the social anthropology course at the University of Cape Town, Radcliffe-Brown's contribution at this point was significant for the development of liberal scientific attitudes to the indigenous peoples of Africa, as Paul B. Rich has described:

The collection of ethnological data on African societies . . . now became systematised into a more coherent theory of "culture contact" that emphasised the continuity and functional stability of African social institutions, and not their simple collapse in the face of missionary proselytisation. . . . South African anthropology provided an important basis for the conception of a situation of "race relations" derived from the growing interaction between an urban, market-oriented society with a rural, folk-oriented one.64

It is with some irony, then, that Packer's ideas in maturity, some thirty or forty years later, appear frequently to coincide with Radcliffe-Brown's assessment at the start of the 1920s of the dilemma facing South Africa:

The one great problem on which the future welfare of South Africa depends is that of finding some social and political system in which the natives and whites may live together without conflict; and the successful solution of that problem would certainly seem to require a thorough knowledge of the native civilisation between which and our own we need to establish some sort of harmonious relation.65

Packer's actual training in writing, if not in liberal politics, came in the course of working as a journalist on Fleet Street for the *Daily Express* and the *Sunday Express* between January 1931 and January 1932.66 There she learnt

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66 A minor detail which nevertheless indicates the selectivity of the information contained in these chronologically linear memoirs is the absence in them of all but the briefest mention of the further substantial journalistic experience she gained in 1934 when her husband was appointed to the "China Station": "I did other jobs in Hong Kong. Journalism and broadcasting. Bertie [her husband] washed his hands of these manifestations of energy" (*Pack and Follow* 255)—a description which she scarcely extended in a later profile written in 1964: "I worked on a Hong Kong magazine and broadcast for the Hong Kong radio." Similarly, in *Pack and Follow* her selection of the self-ironising description of the influence of the liberal Cape Town University professor also contains the non-selection of the information that at that time she also
from Russell Stannard, the editor of the latter paper, that "'No one cares about the place; they want to hear about the people'" (200), although as the threat of the "economic hurricane"—the Depression—developed she also "began to realize another side of journalism. . . . A great newspaper has a responsibility towards the public—the Popular Press most of all." The responsibility included the "morale-angle," a somewhat paternalistic mode of propaganda whose aim was to guide the "ship of the 'Little man' safely into port" in the face of the economic "storm" by means of morale-boosting journalism (202). This was a lesson which, arguably, Packer was to apply years later in her adaptation of South African events to the demands of fiction, as much as in her adaptation of fiction to serve the demands of South African events.

At about the same time she also attempted short fiction. Like her fellow South Africans William Plomer and Sarah Gertrude Millin a few years earlier, her immediate fictional concern was with "miscegenation": "I wrote of an artist's model who married a Negro (I had Mimi in mind and the big black man from Martinique) and of Fernande deserted by her Japanese lover" (175). After initial rejection by various publishers of popular romance, to one of whom she protested that "In books things happen like life" (176), her "cameo tale, 'Nigger Baby,' was accepted and published." Her added comment some twenty years after, "though its title was changed" (182), is perhaps remarkable for its brevity.67

Joy Packer is good at memoir-writing. She involves the reader intimately in her articulate selection and blending of homely, popular cultural, and high-political detail. Her world on the page is one that is credible, fascinating, convincing; read fifty years on it can still persuade the reader that, where there were choices to be made in support of her personal interpretation of her world, those choices could rely upon a framework of integral familial and national—ultimately British, imperial—values. Her stylistic reinforcement of this assurance and certainty is as subtle as her sense of the power of irony. She participates, for instance, in the certainties of her age by indulging in the (ultimately commonplace) aphoristic eulogising of the heroes of the time, yoking together the Boer and the Briton who featured so prominently in popular heroism during the Anglo-Boer War, and whose activities in old age continued on an


67 The occasional Daily Express "Cameo Tales" in the early 1930s typically occupied approximately one third to one half of a broadsheet page. Packer eventually reveals that "Nigger Baby" appeared under the revised title of "Gallant Lie" (Pack and Follow 203).
international scale to impress and influence: "Once in a century a man is born with world vision—a great statesman. The Boer Jannie Smuts is such a one, and so is the Englishman Winston Churchill" (42). She is secure in such evaluations; few readers in 1945, and very few until recently, would have dared or cared to contradict.\(^6\)

*Pack and Follow* is full of such stereotyping claims, which seem, nevertheless, stylistically unobtrusive precisely because of their combination of portentousness and commonplaceness. "No South African can 'keep off politics' any more than he can keep off the share market," Packer declares with aplomb (40, my emphasis). She would no more have expected her white, British, imperial reader to have disagreed than she would have expected "him" to have quibbled over her use of the typicalising masculine pronoun, as she does in this instance in reference to her *mother* rather than her father.

Declaring herself to be "a feminist myself" (195), her perception of women, of their "womanly" qualities, and perhaps also of her self-image, frequently depends on this kind of stereotyping. As a journalist she perceives, with unintended ambiguity, that "women are eager, intelligent readers and they get as good value out of a live, interesting paper as men" (196). In the world of fashion clothing, where she worked temporarily as a model in London in order to gather "copy" for her first, qualifying apprentice-article for the *Daily Express*,\(^6\) she notices that each mannequin developed a particular attachment to a single item of clothing she modelled: "It is a woman-thing. Any woman will understand" (193).\(^7\) She sometimes attaches "feminine" characteristics to men she

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\(^6\) While Smuts’s political reputation has since undergone many fluctuations (e.g., Bernard Friedman, *Smuts: A Reappraisal* [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975]), it is only recently that a revisionist work such as John Charmley’s *Churchill: The End of Glory* (London: John Curtis/Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), has attempted radically and systematically to demythologise Churchill’s popular image (see Peter Malherbe, "History Puts a Hero in the Dock," review, *Sunday Times*, Johannesburg, 10 Jan. 1993: 17; see also Anthony Howard, review of *Churchill*, by Clive Ponting, and *Churchill: An Unruly Life*, by Norman Rose, *Sunday Times*, London, *Books*, 1 May 1994: 7.6; Howard suggests that "it is beginning to look like open season for assaults and attacks upon Winston Churchill").

\(^6\) The article, "All This to Make Her Chic," was published anonymously, though prominently, on a centre leader page, under the tongue-in-cheek by-line "Written by A Famous Mannequin" (*Daily Express* 10 Mar. 1931: 10).

\(^7\) Her tendency to stereotype women continues throughout her writing, sometimes amusingly; hence, "[Australian] women, who are also beer-drinkers, have good figures and plenty of vivacious charm," who evidently pursue "that status symbol of the Australian woman—a good kitchen" (*The World is a Proud Place*, 35, 40); and, re-using the "woman-thing" coinage from *Pack and Follow* in one of her later novels, *The Glass Barrier*, to articulate
encounters: Beverley Baxter, the editor of the *Daily Express*, "can be mischievously provocative and inconsistent as a woman" (180), and "Bax is a musician, and there is in every musician a strong streak of feminine intuition" (195). Her reading of the feminine in Baxter is less important here than her evident attachment to the stereotypicality of "feminine" flirtatiousness, inconsistency and intuitiveness.

Set against Packer's image of self in relation to the feminine is her perception of a separate world inhabited by very different beings identifiable in terms of race, although the racial element is frequently combined and confused with elements of social class. In portraying this other world, her descriptions are notably less considered, though unexceptional in the context of the contemporary white discourse on race. A gardener at her childhood home in Cape Town, for example, is considered to be "on the verge of that brainstorm which affects Malays and sometimes Indians" (22), and his necessary successor is "the most aboriginal little man I have ever seen. He must be the last of the Bushmen, so astonishing is his behind" (23). Her assertion that "Baboons are little brothers of the Bushmen" (30) is no less bluntly stated than her assessment of "Ugly," a gardener whom she employs in China: "He was very old, a wizened little creature whose shrunken countenance bore out the theory of Eugene Marais\(^7\) that there is little to choose between a man and a baboon" (227). As in Packer's description of her childhood family's innumerate and illiterate cook and promiscuous housemaid, all three gardeners inhabited another place, their "own brown world" (18), defined by apparent madness, deformity, and animality.

Packer's refuge and emotional strength lie within the verbal construct of her family. She describes a childhood that is emotionally and physically secure: nightmares are dispelled when her father would "carry me to the big bed he shared with Mother and dump me down beside her. Oh, the comfort of her warmth and softness, of her arms and breasts! How could fear linger here in her embrace?" (32-33). When the Spanish Influenza epidemic of 1918, eventually,
though not fatally, strikes down even her father, a doctor, it also takes "a terrible
toll of the coloured population," but her description of the suffering of this latter
population group is remarkable for its clichéd brevity in contrast to her
dramatization of the effect of the disease on the white population: "They [the
'coloureds'] died like flies, and District Six was a place of tears and mourning.
Old and young, healthy and sickly, were stricken alike" (57). Nevertheless, the
familial structure of her childhood had its small share of insecurity: "Daddy and
Mother were apart. Daddy was always rushing off to see patients." Her father
was evidently a kind of "rough diamond," while, in contrast, "Mother had
 glamour" (24).

In adulthood her desire for familial security is frustrated by the mobility
demanded by her husband's profession and by the necessity of leaving their only
son, Peter, for long periods in the care of South African relatives or British
private schools. The desire comes through eloquently, for instance, in her
description of a period of temporary domestic stability with her husband in Paris:
"As we climbed the stairs to the little apartment on the third floor and put our key
into the lock we knew that we were stepping right into the warm, solid,
bourgeoisie [sic] heart of France—la famille française—our family, any family"
(166). It is, however, in her assessment of the qualities that go to make up a
"good" journalist (and, by extension, novelist) that her sense of personal insecurity
can most explicitly be detected: "Is a happily married woman too smug to be a
good journalist? Does the germ of domestic discord heighten her faculty for
seeing and dramatizing that all-important human interest? Perhaps" (203). In her
own assessment at least, Joy Packer was a "good journalist," and the subsequent
popularity of her fiction, which in essence is journalistic in its contemporary
debate, seems to point to her ability to perceive and describe issues of "human
interest." Her personal motivation perhaps stemmed from that "germ of domestic
discord" which she alludes to but in her constructed persona in this memoir so
vehemently denies.

5. Travel Writing: The World is a Proud Place
As will become evident from the following analysis, which is concerned in the
main with the more cohesive initial two-thirds of a loosely-constructed volume,
the writing of The World is a Proud Place was complicated precisely by its
contemporary chronology, since the eight months in 1964 during which Packer
was absent from South Africa on her travels coincided with the final months of
the Rivonia Trial, which opened in December 1963 and ended in June 1964.\(^{72}\)

As I have repeatedly indicated, while Packer was a romantic novelist, she was also an experienced journalist with the kind of political "nose" which persuaded her to use her literary talents to produce a curious blend of both "agitation" and "integrated" propaganda.\(^{73}\) It was inevitable, therefore, that *The World is a Proud Place* became a rather more complicated text than some of her regular readership might have expected in terms of a straightforward record of a family visit to Western Australia, combined with a tour of parts of the United States and Britain. Rather, the text attempts to function as a manichaean narrative: a self-conscious subnarrative consisting of a homely study of Australian history, landscapes and people (and subsequently a less detailed study of the same in America and England), which functions as a partially camouflaged vehicle for her views on colonialism and culture in South Africa. Besides her intended narrative and subnarrative, however, there also exists, as in much of her fiction, an alternative, less consciously directed subnarrative which can be identified in terms of Rivonia, race, and survival.

Although *The World is a Proud Place* was by no means the last of Packer's works—five novels and a further memoir devoted to her husband were still to appear after 1966—it seems to have been one of the last to have been reissued in a new edition, according to the blurb on the jacket of the 1984 edition as a "title . . . selected from suggestions submitted by Librarians throughout the United Kingdom." With the exception of her final novel, it differs from all of her works, fiction and memoirs alike, in that it contains no elements which could, in even the broadest supra-generic terms, be regarded as a "love story"—unless the travelogue can be read as a tale of love for colonialism; she does, after all, assert that "Australia is hard, masculine and challenging" (161).

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\(^{72}\) The Rivonia trial, named after the northern suburb of Johannesburg where some of the most prominent leaders of the ANC military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), were arrested in 1963, for a time effectively destroyed militant resistance to apartheid within the country. The arrest, trial, and subsequent life imprisonment of these leaders acquired important mythical dimensions for the struggle through Nelson Mandela's celebrated courtroom declaration: "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die" (qtd. in Heidi Holland, *The Struggle: A History of the African National Congress* [1989; London: Grafton, 1990] 158). For a fuller, "insider's" account, see Hilda Bernstein, *The World that was Ours: The Story of the Rivonia Trial* (London: SAWriters, 1989).

\(^{73}\) See chapter 1, section 6, "Conclusions," above.
Packer’s writing in this volume has none of the qualities to be found in the more memorable works of other women travellers: the self-deprecating good humour of, say, the Englishwoman, Mary Kingsley, in West Africa in the last decade of the nineteenth century74 (whom Packer herself praises for being "afraid of nothing. Not even of speaking her mind")75; or, more recently, the semi-Westernised, quasi-feminist76 puzzlement which turns to abhorrence felt by the South African, Noni Jabavu, at the customary marital chauvinism she finds her sister enduring in 1950s Uganda77. Nor does Packer express an intimate sense of personal conflict over racial difference and similarity of the kind felt by Martha Gelhorn visiting Haiti alone in the early 1950s,78 or anything similar to Tela Zasloff's feeling of acute alienation in a Vietnam exactly contemporaneous with Packer's Australia, a visit which Zasloff ends in overwhelming pessimism: "As I looked around, I was suddenly struck by a powerful revulsion for every person in the place, a blind prejudice against the whole people, the whole country" (170).79

In the practised manner of an established popular novelist, Packer constructs a persona accessible to a familiar, homely readership which she expects to sympathise with her views as much as she claims to sympathise with theirs. Her observations bear all the hallmarks of the commonplace, but, as in her fiction, the commonplace plays its vital role in the illusory construct of communication between writer and reader. At its most emotive it exaggerates in tabloid fashion, in the certainty of attracting widespread consent; racial (as well as ideological) fears are easily conveyed: "'This [Australia] is an Asian continent occupied by whites.' I found that rather a chilling reflection. Too close to home! What of the African Continent!" (84). And she is sure of a consensus of opinion with and amongst her readers when she describes a Sydney University "Rag" parade: "Their floats were in aid of the Higher Education of Africans in South Africa! I would

75 *Apes and Ivory* 270.
like to suggest that they looked at the education of Australia's aborigines before
going quite so far afield. . . . Young white Australia's preoccupation with
African higher education and America's Deep South seemed incongruous in view
of the fact that her own far north contains countless aborigines who have never
heard of higher education or known the franchise" (141). Although she concludes
the episode with the "balancing" observation that "in . . . 1965, a group of
Sydney's students travelled thousands of miles on a fact finding tour of the
Aboriginal Reserves, encountering some white resentment and a few rotten eggs
in the process" (141), the balance suggests a stronger, if more ambivalent,
resentment on the part of the writer herself.

Throughout, despite her concern to suggest consensus with her readers,
Packer re-asserts her persona as a writer: "I had resumed my intermittent habit of
keeping a Writer's Notebook" (22), she announces importantly. Later, however,
on meeting a stranger, she finds reassurance in the fact that "she had read my
books and . . . I was not a stranger to her" (104). On other occasions the persona
is expressed in terms of a social and professional contrast: (to re-interpret an
excerpt quoted earlier in this chapter) in Perth, "I was, at that time, still working
on The Man in the Mews . . . I'd hired a typewriter and was often at work while
Ettie [the chambermaid] swept and dusted" (26). On tour in the Outback, she
announces that "I began to scribble in my soft-cover note-book" (131), an
observation later echoed in America, as if to convey a sense of the dangers and
discomforts she has assumed on the reader's behalf: "I scribbled the gist of that
conversation into my writer's note-book. As I put it away the police sirens
screamed. Their sinister wail was as much a voice of the night as the roar of a
hunting lioness in my own distant country" (242).

In Australia, however, the writer suffers no hardships and faces no
dangers.80 The land she re-creates in the travelogue is filled with analogies with
South African settings. With the implication that she would expect the same in
her South Africa, Packer's Australia is one where hotels and travel connections
in the remotest areas run smoothly (her travelling companion gradually overcomes
even her susceptibility to airsickness), and the visible population and its forebears
remain reassuringly definable as either kith or kin, both ethnically and

80 Packer was, however, familiar with discomfort as a traveller, as her husband noted in
China: "You gloss over your great hardships on this journey and make an adventure of
them—your interest is unfailing—your letter is full of humour and I travelled with you through
the blasting heat" (Herbert Packer, letter to Joy Packer, 1 June 1934 [Packer papers, file 3/2,
professionally.\textsuperscript{81} Where analogies appear to put Australia at an organisational advantage over South Africa, as her expansive descriptions of the School of the Air\textsuperscript{82} and the Flying Doctor Service\textsuperscript{83} tend to, Packer’s invariable strategy is to summarise the commonplace in terms of the pioneering colonial heroic.\textsuperscript{84} Her subnarrative is seldom far from the narrative surface.

The narrative surface of \textit{The World is a Proud Place} appears to function as a "potboiler" in the fullest sense of the term:\textsuperscript{85} the author’s intention is to supply, and thereby sustain, her loyal readership with a select update on the course of her life and writing, in this case by permitting them to view a more or less unfamiliar world of landscapes and individuals through her own observing eyes.\textsuperscript{86}

The title of the book itself, which establishes its tone, has been taken from a quotation from Emerson, which appears as an epigraph: "The world is a proud place, peopled with men of positive quality, with heroes and demi-gods standing round us, who will not let us sleep" (11), a dedication to the builders of empire, the anonymous European colonisers of land who, "in pushing forward the frontiers of their own lives, . . . help develop and settle their country" (64). Predictably, therefore, Packer’s focus is on the mythopoetic aspects of the settlers’ historical and contemporary economies in Australia: sheep-farming (44-45), gold-mining (48), and, latterly, the extension of the resources of Western civilisation in the form of education and medical services to the remotest regions.

\textsuperscript{81} Cf. Packer’s description of an Australian fellow-novelist, Mary Durack: "Her grandfather, Patrick Durack, was the central character of the book [\textit{Kings in Grass Castles}] and again and again, as I was reading, I thought: this could be South Africa and Patrick Durack could be my own Marais grandfather whose destiny was also shaped by the growth and promise of a young country" (\textit{The World is a Proud Place} 58). Packer herself wrote no historical family sagas.

\textsuperscript{82} See \textit{The World is a Proud Place} 114-19.

\textsuperscript{83} See \textit{The World is a Proud Place} 95-101, 120-39.

\textsuperscript{84} Cf. the conclusion of her encounter with the Flying Doctor Service at Broken Hill: "As I stood in front of the powerful transmitter I thought of John Flynn and Alf Traeger, and of the faith and spirit of those others who had made all this possible—the will to serve, to help, to befriend and never to forget or abandon those who live in the Great Australian Loneliness" (\textit{The World is a Proud Place} 101).

\textsuperscript{85} "A literary or artistic work of little merit produced quickly in order to make money" (\textit{Collins English Dictionary} 1979); or, more neutrally: "a piece of writing . . . which a writer . . . has created in order to earn money quickly rather than as a work of artistic merit" (\textit{Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary}, 1988).

\textsuperscript{86} Although my assessment relates to this travelogue, Packer herself might very well have disagreed: "I couldn’t do a potboiler. I have to believe in my fictional world and escape into it" (Pepe Sofianos, "Joy Packer’s World of Love" [\textit{Personality}, 31 May 1974: 14]). "Potboiler" implies a lapse from a less commercially-intended mode of writing.
Beneath the guise of a narrative in which, as ever, she insists that her interest is focused more on individuals than places, Packer provides the anglophone reader with a paean to the work of colonial settlers and their descendants, that is, individuals in a definable place—in broad terms, the whole of the English-speaking world, but particularised in this instance by Australia. Nevertheless, the status of Australia in her descriptive vision remains insecure; a threat of double vision repeatedly intrudes, with South Africa as its dominant image. Hence, in the "Australian" first part of this memoir, her subnarrative constantly privileges "South Africa" over "Australia," in particular in her consideration of the colonising process in "South Africa with its curious parallels to Australian pioneering" (63). (The same process of inversion of focus, whereby the viewed people and places are used to comment on South Africa, rather than vice versa, is observable in the later, shorter part of the memoir, which extends its scope to comparisons of South Africa with the United States and, briefly, the United Kingdom.)

When, therefore, she describes her perceptions of the Australian landscape she does so in existential terms, idealising the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European explorers of the Australian landscape—those forerunners of the Emersonian heroes and demi-gods—as participants in a Haggardian quest undertaken by men possessed by an

inexorable compulsion to cross the centre . . . as if they were poets and lovers pursuing the inescapable lure of a predestined fate. (51-52)

At the same time she seems to identify herself in the same quest, repeatedly reiterating, as if it were also her own perception, the explorers' view of the existential "centre" as a place of "isolation" and "loneliness"—although it is a loneliness which, to some extent, has since been relieved, as she indicates in a moment of slightly surrealistic levity: "Beer is Australia's national drink and the great continent is littered with empty beer-cans" (35).

Her romantic vision of the colonial past is countered by the present-day farming landscape, which early on she regards with some curiosity:

Something was missing from the scene. There were tall eucalypts on the skyline, wheat fields, salt-pan, ploughed earth, pasturage where the flocks grazed contentedly. What was it? Suddenly I knew. There

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87 The World is a Proud Place 49, 51, 56, and 61.
were no shepherds! No old coloured man or Bantu with his dog and his crook went along with the sheep, a hurt one or a lamb slung over his shoulder. There were no walled kraals to which they were guided at nightfall to protect them from the fierce marauders of the veld. I had expected to see aborigines. But there were none. (45)

In the course of her travels in the continent she then acquires the shadow of an understanding of the gap in her expected vision of the postcolonial landscape. Her immediate explanation for the "emptiness" is in economic terms, suggesting that "the Australian wool industry is so highly mechanised that the minimum of labour is required" (45). Recognising this explanation to be inadequate, she then proceeds to locate the missing Aborigines in spaces which are existentially, racially, economically and textually separated: in "their own" reserves, to enter which "you" (an implicitly white "you") need a "permit from the Government," and where "temperamentally unreliable," "'unemployable'" people will be found (45). The separateness of cause (economically ill-defined) and effect (spatially and racially ill-defined) in this explanation of the "invisibility" of the native Australian is coincidentally and, no doubt, unintentionally emphasised by a division into separate paragraphs. A truer integration of cause and effect might have demanded a closer visual and textual cohesion than Packer's explanation could warrant or supply.89

Superficially, as she suggests of Australia in the context of the history of colonisation, "this could be South Africa" (58). On another level, however, she is aware that it could not be so. Viewing Rottnest Island, near Perth, she notes the coincidence of its possessing a Dutch etymology and history in common with those of Robben Island. "'It could be Robben Island,'" she informs her British companion, and yet it is not, and her editorial expansion attempts simultaneously

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88 Cf. Packer's later description of another area of the Outback: "'Aren't there any aborigines here?' I asked her. 'They seem to be the invisible people of Australia.' 'They have their own reserves,' she said" (The World is a Proud Place 125, my emphasis). She was evidently strongly affected by this observation, which she repeated in a subsequent radio interview: "They were the invisible people" (Joy Packer, SABC radio interview, 13 Dec. 1964 [SABC Sound Archives, Auckland Park, Johannesburg]).

89 Elsewhere, her attempts to put forward historical reasons for the apparent absence of the aborigine from the landscape equally lack conviction: "The Victorian Government granted the kindly aborigines two hundred acres along the Cooper, but the tribesmen have since then become almost extinct. Missions tried to help them, but the impact of white civilization, slight as it was, brought them few blessings. Australia's black problem, unlike that of South Africa, slowly but surely dwindles" (The World is a Proud Place 136).
to inflate and yet conflate this coincidence and her awareness of its ambivalence:

Robben Island in Table Bay was once a gaol too. . . . It is now once more a gaol where political prisoners are confined with time and leisure in which to reflect upon past errors and future prospects. (32)

While the popular market for a travelogue by a romantic novelist will tolerate little more than reassurance of the continuity of "God in his heaven"—heaven, in this case, being a liberal view of the colonial mission—Packer’s more deeply submerged agenda (concealed by linguistic distracters such as the clichés "with time and leisure," and "past errors and future prospects") is indicated precisely by her reference to Robben Island, where the Rivonia trialists were incarcerated in June 1964, while Packer was still visiting Australia. In her fiction, the suppression of African nationalism in South Africa, and the maltreatment of South Africa’s black population in general, provides a constant subnarrative, and one which she treats with an ambivalence which (as I have argued at the end of section 2, above) has been dictated by her dualistic adherence to the conventions of the popular literary marketplace and to the principles of liberalism. Hence, in this work, presumably in deference to a perceived conservative readership which was, in part, white South African, but predominantly non-South African, she lauds the apparent successes of colonisation in Australia, including its humanitarian endeavours in medicine and education.

At the same time, she combines this with the common white fears of the process of decolonisation still to come in South Africa, though the fear is tempered by an awareness of the need for, and the inevitability of, decolonisation itself. Her text, for all its trivial depiction of the colonial "ideal," in its essence remains haunted by her flawed historical vision, not of the similarity of the Australian and South African human landscapes of the 1960s, but of their remarkable difference. Again inverting her focus, she declares:

The Cape Hottentot [sic] no longer exists. He [sic] has died out or been absorbed. And the Australian aboriginal too belongs to a declining race. It is the black man [sic] of very different stock and calibre who is the dominant dark race in the world today. He [sic] is the true Negro, the descendant of warriors, . . . physically strong, mentally alert and quick to learn. (45)

While Australia’s "black men" in 1964 appeared to have vacated their landscape permanently, it is with only partially concealed perceptivity that Packer records
her awareness that the "invisible" inhabitants of the South African version of the
Australian Rottnest Island indeed had "future prospects," although she herself was
not to live to see their realisation.

6. Self and Identity
The dichotomous reading presented in the two sections above of Packer's
autobiographical writing reveals the extent to which her return to South Africa in
the early 1950s affected her approach to her self-appointed task. From an
overwhelming concern with the parameters of selfhood in the earlier memoirs, her
writing, while still seeking to entertain and inform a readership which she
evidently perceived to be continuous with that of the 1940s and early 1950s, had
also become during the 1950s and 1960s a medium for conveying an engaged and
politicised South African message. It is unsurprising that her ideas were often
gauche and sentimental, and frequently couched in the obsolescent terminology
of colonialism rather than that of the brave new world of postcolonialism. As a
novelist writing in the popular mode her distance from the more sophisticated and
more radical oppositional literary establishment of her time was inevitably
considerable. The degree to which she continued in the 1960s and 1970s to
cultivate socially-engaged attitudes which might be termed "politically
oppositional" will become apparent in the remainder of this study.

In a recent American feminist critique of the autobiographical genre, Estelle
C. Jelinek has suggested that "women's autobiographies rarely mirror the
Establishment history of their times. They emphasize to a much lesser extent the
public aspects of their lives, the affairs of the world, or even their careers, and
concentrate instead on their personal lives—domestic details, family details, close
friends, and especially people who influenced them." As every contemporary
devotee of Packer's self-narratives might have testified, Packer undoubtedly
concentrates on the minutiae of her personal life (as my brief descriptions of both
Pack and Follow and The World is a Proud Place indicate), but it is equally
apparent that her first three volumes of memoirs, which record, in the main, her
non-South African experience, also "mirror the Establishment history of their
times," a history which is definably and inevitably British and imperial. Shaped

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90 In the course of personal interviews and correspondence with a number of South African
popular novelists I have found that (no doubt like their colleagues elsewhere) they frequently
appear to have little contact either with the "serious" literary establishment or with
academia—more likely is a mutual antipathy or contempt (cf. chapter 1, note 7, above).
91 Estelle C. Jelinek, "Introduction" 7-8.
by her husband's Establishment career and also by her own successful experience within the influential, interpretative world of Fleet Street journalism, these volumes reflect the "ideological baggage" which she had packed during the quarter-century prior to her re-migration to the Cape in the early 1950s. In a complex sense, she had indeed "packed and followed" in the wake of her husband.

Nevertheless, it also becomes apparent that when Packer's more sedentary life at the Cape persuaded her to turn from travel-based memoir to fiction, the ideological baggage she proceeded to unpack was radically different in function from that of the past. While Packer may have identified with the historical "English" South African opposition to things Afrikaner, to which she refers in *Apes and Ivory* and *Home from Sea*, her allegiances were not as clear-cut as she seems at times to have imagined. On the evidence of *The World is a Proud Place* as well as most of her fictional works it could be claimed that a significant desire of her writing—despite its contradictions and ambiguities, in particular with regard to colonialism—was to express a humanitarian abhorrence at the effects of racist legislation. Whether this straightforward reading holds true for her fiction as well as for her other self-narratives will be explored in the chapters which follow.
Chapter Three

Transitions: The Cracks in the Liberal Seams

Apes and Ivory; Valley of the Vines

Like it or not, liberalism is the common disease that afflicts all writers of real ability.¹

"At least I know where I stand with you. It's better than those liberals who say one thing and mean something else."²

"It’s you who did this. It’s all you liberals. You incite people. Now we will get you. We will get the lot of you."³

1. Introduction

Western liberalism has struggled to survive in South Africa in the twentieth century, with commentators continuing to the present day to dismiss it as an aberration stemming from the colonial past, with no effective role in a liberated, democratic South Africa. The grounds for dismissal have been clear: liberalism is indisputably Eurocentric in its origins and philosophy, and its emphatic interest in the rights of the individual has frequently been seen to run counter to the collective rights of oppressed majorities in a colonial context. Similarly, the identification of liberalism with Western capitalism and the profit principle has caused it to be challenged repeatedly for its inability to supply the basic material needs of the mass of the population, the communal and private structure of whose lives has been disrupted by the imperatives of segregation and "separate development."⁴

Even when liberalism’s strengths have been extolled, press articles and editorials, especially during the inter-party negotiations on the provisional state


constitution prior to the 1994 elections, have carried headlines which repeatedly suggest the marginality of liberalism in the present as well as the past: "Whatever Happened to the Old-Style Liberals?,"5 "Fashioning a New Role for Fashionable Liberalism,"6 and "If Everybody's Liberal, What is Liberalism?,"7 while the heading of a recent article by an avowedly liberal academic commentator on South African affairs is expressive of a similar degree of half-heartedness: "Rubbing Along in the Neo-Liberal Way."8 Each of these and many other press articles both before and since the liberation of the South African political process in 1990 has reported the apparently well-meaning but politically ineffectual attempts of liberals to redirect the seemingly endless struggle between the nationalisms of African and Afrikaner for power over the territorial and economic destinies of Southern Africa. The absence of any significant reference to the liberal Democratic Party from recent commentaries such as Allister Sparks's Tomorrow is Another Country, a detailed account of the negotiations leading to the liberation of the South African political process, reflects yet again the marginalisation of political liberalism in that very process.9

The counter-arguments to such a diagnosis are nevertheless many. While political liberalism under apartheid undoubtedly failed to persuade white South Africans to vote to reform their parliamentary system—in effect, to legitimise its abolition and replacement10—individual liberals at parliamentary and sub-parliamentary levels played an indispensable dual role: firstly—as the latter two

9 See Allister Sparks, Tomorrow is Another Country (Wynberg: Struik, 1994).
10 Although indirectly linked with a similar cause, the referendum held in March 1992 (the final whites-only vote in South Africa) was initially called by President de Klerk to counter claims from the far right, including the Conservative Party, that he had no mandate to negotiate with the extra-parliamentary opposition; hence, the referendum was inspired by white nationalist rather than liberal principles. See Sparks, Tomorrow is Another Country 133-34. Another South African journalist, Shaun Johnson, has commented that "While many white South Africans know what they voted against, they are not so clear on what they voted for" ("A Plein Street Tableau," originally published in the Saturday Star 21 Mar. 1992, rpt. in Shaun Johnson, Strange Days Indeed: South Africa from Insurrection to Post-Election [1993; London: Bantam, 1994]: 176).
epigraphs, above, would tend to suggest—of being conscientious objectors to apartheid; and secondly of maintaining unofficial channels of communication between the illiberal régime and its more radical submerged opposition, including the task, particularly at the height of the period of detention without trial, of demanding humanitarian conditions *in extremis* where none might otherwise have been provided.\(^\text{11}\)

Given the range of force with which the apartheid régime attempted to counter all opposition to its policies in the 1950s to 1970s (as well as later), it is then in some measure remarkable that, both privately and in her writing, Joy Packer was not merely sympathetic to liberal ideals, but that she allied herself with the most visible representative of political liberalism, the Progressive Party, which, as she revealed in interview, she had joined as an individual member: "Surprisingly, perhaps, because of her Establishment background, Lady Packer’s politics are Progressive, and in her novels her sympathy for the non-whites of her country is evident."\(^\text{12}\) Unlike her fellow party member, the popular novelist June Drummond, however, Packer was not actively engaged in politics,\(^\text{13}\) and there is no indication available of the date of her becoming a member of the Progressive Party, whose foundation postdates the two works examined here.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^\text{11}\) In recalling individuals and institutions best-known to his non-South African readership, Geoffrey Leach idealises, to the virtual exclusion of others, the oppositional role played by English-speaking liberals: churchmen such as Trevor Huddleston, Ambrose Reeves, Cosmas Desmond and (by linguistic cooptation) Desmond Tutu; the English-medium universities; anglophone and "dissident Afrikaner authors," such as Olive Schreiner, William Plomer, Nadine Gordimer, Alan Paton, Laurens van der Post and André Brink; Ken Owen, as an outspokenly anti-Marxist liberal newspaper editor, now of the Johannesburg *Sunday Times*; and the "alternative" press in general (much of it disappearing since the early-1990s); see Geoffrey Leach, *The Afrikaners: Their Last Great Trek* (London: Macmillan, 1989) 263-69. For a less chauvinistic record of liberal opposition to apartheid see, for example, Helen Suzman’s memoirs of her political career, *In No Uncertain Terms* (1993), especially 185-86; and for an analysis of Black Sash, the liberal women’s protest movement, whose leaders have included Packer’s sister-in-law Molly Petersen, see Kathryn Spink, *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa* (London: Methuen, 1991).

\(^\text{12}\) Pamela Ruskin, "'Man is Born to Fight and Love,'" *The Age* (Australia) 7 Feb. 1976: 22.

\(^\text{13}\) Packer’s former personal secretary, Caroline Kingdon, has confirmed that Packer paid her annual dues to the Progressive Party, though only as a passive member (telephone interview, 13 Dec. 1993).

\(^\text{14}\) The Progressive Party was formed in 1959, when 11 MPs left the United Party. Merging with the smaller Reform Party in 1976, its name was changed to the Progressive Reform Party, and in the following year to the Progressive Federal Party, when further members of the United Party joined. Additional party mergers in 1989 resulted in a new name, the Democratic Party. See Helen Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms* 58, 180-81, 275.

Nevertheless, since all parliamentary political activity under apartheid was marked by an unavoidable ambivalence, the specific nature of Packer’s personal attachment to liberalism and the Progressive Party, and her desire to present a liberal view of contemporary South African society in her writing, can readily be dismissed as irrelevant to the struggle for democratisation. Stephen Watson, for example, has attempted to deconstruct the liberalism of what is undoubtedly the best-known South African roman à thèse, Alan Paton’s *Cry, The Beloved Country*.

His criticism of the novel appears, however, to be on grounds of its style and sentimentality as much as for its liberalism, which he does not condemn outright but for the "self-serving arguments which the novel puts forward" (42). In a second article (published a year later, but probably written at about the same time), in which he pours impassioned scorn on the often futile attempts of individual white liberals to alleviate the suffering inflicted by the state on other individuals, Watson refers to their interventions as "paternalistic offers of 'ambulance work'"—essentially, a powerlessness to affect the root causes of the multiple injustices perpetrated by the state. In contrast to the first, this second article attacks South African liberalism in its entirety: for its paternalism (120), its "tinkering with symptoms instead of causes" (121), its tendency to "condemn [the individual] to an impotent isolation and voyeurism" (123), and its "exclusive emphasis on the individual, [which has] led to its inability to understand nationalism and group identities within South African society" (127). All this, he concludes, "is reflected in the demise of the liberal realist novel" in South Africa (130).

In this connection, one of the most recently published references to Packer’s

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18 Watson notes, for example, the contradictions in Paton’s dependence on the "social determinism" portrayed in the novel as a source of the injustice present in pre-apartheid South Africa, whilst simultaneously attempting to "legitimize" the legal system as it appears in the novel in order to construct the "inevitability" of the tragedy of the Kumalo story (Watson, "Cry, The Beloved Country" 43, n. 6).
writing links her name with that of another contemporary writer, Laurens van der Post (1906-), and contrasts her work with that of four others whose writing is a whole literary generation younger:

Towards the end of the eighteenth century enough of the European debate about liberty, equality, and fraternity had trickled through to inspire the beginnings of "Cape Liberalism," a version of Afrikaner paternalist and racial politics camouflaged by notions of enlightened trusteeship and benevolence. The Cape novels of Joy Packer and Laurens van der Post celebrate this world, just as the contemporary Cape fiction of Menan [sic]20 du Plessis, J. M. Coetzee, Karel Schoeman, and Zoë Wicomb describes its disintegration.21

Van Wyk Smith's concise categorisation of Packer's writing, while undoubtedly accurate, is challenging for a number of reasons, not all of which fall within the scope of the present study. Its primary challenge, however, consists in its identification of Packer's literary adherence to the ideological aftermath of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Cape liberalism. This claim also implies a high degree of similarity between Packer's largely unsystematic personal ideology and Van der Post's altogether more complex world view, which he has expressed in a series of very different novels, memoirs and travel writing from Packer's. In an important sense this similarity would nevertheless appear to hold true: in a brief survey of Van der Post's writing up to 1985,22 David Maughan Brown emphasises the ways in which "contradictions and anomalies . . . pervade all his works" (139), an observation which could be applied with equal vigour to Packer's writing. Maughan Brown draws particular attention to the contradictions that occur in Van der Post's "conscious effort to repudiate colonial race myths . . . [while his] own writing repeatedly falls into the same traps" (140), and the examples which follow of Van der Post's predilection for racial stereotyping, his occasional insensitivity to racist metaphors, and his "pro-individualist, anti-collectivist message" (143) will find many echoes in both this and the other chapters of this study of Packer.

20 Read "Menán."


Where Packer may differ, and where (as I have suggested earlier) my own analysis may also eventually find its conclusions, is not in the internal contradictions in her writing—which are many, and cannot be ignored in the course of my analysis—but in the ways in which she produced a woman’s view of the colonial predicament as it has been formally articulated, for instance, by Dorothy Driver. Secondly, unlike Van der Post’s, the most important site of Packer’s fictionalisation of South Africa is emphatically (if not exclusively) contemporary and urban, and definably "Western" in focus, rather than "African" or oriental. And thirdly, despite their common ancestry in romance, the generic gap between the two authors’ works is wide and, unlike Van der Post, Packer has claimed no conscious allegiance to such masculine colonial literary forebears as Rider Haggard and Kipling, both of whom are powerfully implicated in the literary mythology of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Africa.

This study has been undertaken with a view to finding whether, despite its colonialist "blind spots," the differences of Packer’s writing—its generic popularity, its gendered perspective—may have contributed anything substantive to its readership’s understanding of contemporary South African society. The question raised here is, therefore, that of the degree to which her "personal" brand of liberalism worked either in defiance of or in collusion with its apparently reactionary origins and modern ramifications, that is, whether it responded to or, alternatively, remained untouched by any of a number of contemporary factors, including her chosen literary genres, her perception of her target readership, and—perhaps most important of all—the more radical opposition to apartheid of others in her own time. As my reading of Packer’s The World is a Proud Place in chapter 2 has shown, by the 1960s, when she was faced with a multiplicity of insecurity, her awareness and acceptance of the eventual necessity of radical change in South Africa had begun, timorously, to emerge—despite, it would seem, the limitations imposed by her favoured generic conventions and by the supposed conservatism of her perceived readership. A reading such as Van Wyk Smith’s reaches, therefore, to the heart of the present study and potentially

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24 That the Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English entry omits presentation of the century-and-a-half of Cape liberalism between the late-eighteenth century and Van der Post’s In a Province (1934) and Packer’s My Bandit Hosts (1935), their first publications, may presumably be attributed to the concision required of such entries, rather than being a deliberate partial dehistoricisation of South African liberalism.
supplies an area of her writing for exploration which will continue to preoccupy the remainder of the present study.

Rather than falsely pre-empting my final conclusions, my immediate intention here is, therefore, to examine the South African roots of Packer’s liberalism, and to relate my findings to several apparently significant moments of formal and ideological transition in her writing as it developed after her return in 1950 to live, at first temporarily, and then in 1953 permanently, at the Cape. Focusing my investigation on two consecutive works, *Apes and Ivory* (1953) and *Valley of the Vines* (1955), my intention is discover some of the ways in which variations in the focus of her personal ideology were evidently dependent upon a combination of factors influenced by sociopolitical environment, genre, and personal circumstances.

2. Liberalism in South Africa

It must be emphasised that my intention here is a selective overview, rather than a detailed historical investigation, of what appear to be the most important phases of liberalism in South Africa in the course of two centuries, starting from the British assumption of power at the Cape at the turn of the nineteenth century. Since Packer’s year of birth in Cape Town, 1905, occurs at approximately the mid-point of that span, it will be useful to indicate points at which her own life-experience coincided with, and was occasionally influenced by, the general South African discursive environment that included liberal thought and practice, especially at the Cape. While liberalism—against the odds—has survived to the present as a political creed in South Africa, thus potentially informing a contemporary re-reading of the Packerian text, my own interpretation in this vein will appear in my concluding chapter rather than here.

The general, largely unattributed, source that I draw on is Paul B. Rich’s *White Power and the Liberal Conscience* (1984), which, while written from a non-South African perspective and less detailed in its attention to the immediate conflict in liberalism produced by the election of the first Nationalist government in 1948 than Janet Robertson’s *Liberalism in South Africa 1948-1963* (1971), attempts to establish a wider perspective on the South African liberal phenomenon in this century. Both, however, can be usefully supplemented by H. J. and R. E.

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Simonses' preliminary discussion of the nineteenth-century "liberal Cape," in their broadly Marxist study of *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950* (1969). For an understanding of the general sociopolitical context within which South African liberalism came close to foundering—and arguably did so as a collective political force—I rely (as elsewhere in this study) in particular on Hermann Giliomee's and Lawrence Schlemmer's *From Apartheid to Nation-Building* (1989), while noting that none of these works could anticipate the proximity of radical political change in South Africa in the 1990s and the speed and relative peace which have accompanied its initial stages.

A prerequisite of any discussion of South African liberalism is the recognition that it has formed a part of the discursive importations of colonialism. Given this precondition, where the Simonses' account differs marginally from the others is in its emphasis, firstly, on the environment which liberal ideas encountered at the Cape—the fervent Calvinism of the rural Boers, and the generally feudal structure of the small white community settled there. Simons and Simons emphasise, secondly, that currents of liberalism arising from the American and French Revolutions predate the first and second incursions of the British at the Cape in 1795 and 1806, which are more usually associated with the transplantation of European liberal ideas. In addition, the brief return of the Cape to Dutch rule between 1803 and 1806 during the Batavian Republican interregnum in Holland seems to offer its own historical irony, since, according to T. R. H. Davenport, "in their tolerant view of creeds other than the Reformed, in their preparedness to secularise marriage and public education, and in their liberal humanitarianism, they were innovators of a kind the colonials had been taught to view with extreme suspicion." As Simons and Simons comment, an indigenous [i.e., Dutch] liberalism, rooted in South African soil and embracing a section of the Afrikaner people, might have grown to maturity. Instead, it was the British who represented the age of enlightenment, and the new liberalism came to be identified in the

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29 Giliomee and Schlemmer also suggest that liberalism, as such, "is unlikely . . . to reproduce itself in a post-colonial situation of black majority rule" (135).
minds of all South Africans with the policies of British imperialism.

(15)

In the spirit of liberalism, British imperialism brought with it reforms such as the establishment of circuit courts, security of land tenure, the encouragement of further land settlement with the arrival of the 1820 Settlers in the Eastern Cape, and, most remarkably, the abolition of slavery. This was associated in southern Africa with economic hardship endured by the previous slaveholders (mainly Boers) as a result of inadequate and fraudulent British government compensation, and led in 1836 to the mythopoetic Great Trek north- and eastwards of those Afrikaners who preferred their own illiberal tradition. The subsequent century-long British imperial quest to expand its southern African territory by subjugating the African and Afrikaner populations under the guise of its "civilizing" imperative served only to create a "cultural dualism among the whites that developed into rival nationalisms."31

"Cape liberalism" as such appears, therefore, to have flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century on account of British adherence to the rule of law, which by definition was "colour-blind." In consequence, as Simons and Simons point out,

Cape liberalism gave [the mixed-race "Coloureds"] equality before the law, access to the courts, protection against lawlessness, a free labour market, and in all other respects permitted a high degree of discrimination. They were emancipated from slavery, but not from poverty, ignorance and disease. As the legal gap narrowed, the social gap between them and the colonists widened. White supremacy was entrenched by a growing inequality in educational opportunities. (29)

In partial contrast, Geoffrey Leach also claims (predictably, given his excessively anglophile agenda) that some of the "harsher edges" of segregation at the Cape were softened when "the British colonial rulers came face to face with the crucial question of whether racial segregation could coexist with an expanding capitalist economy."32 According to J. D. Omer-Cooper, however, the economic decline of the Afrikaner population at the Cape, relative to the growing wealth of the insurgent British, involved "Dutch-speakers . . . in a strange alliance with humanitarian and progressive groups supporting the Coloured population,"

32 Leach 252.
whereby a "significant number" of "Coloureds," and some Africans were able to meet the franchise property qualifications, which were set low in order not to exclude the majority of Afrikaner whites. Nevertheless, as Omer-Cooper goes on to point out, the liberality of such a provision was only apparent: "any economic qualification at all was bound to discriminate against Coloureds and Africans[,] who made up the poorest section of the population. The system ensured that white voters formed the great majority of the electorate."33 Hence, where overt colour prejudice had to be concealed, refuge could be taken by the colonist in enforcing laws, such as those controlling the franchise, which could operate on terms dictated ostensibly by social class.

The pace at which such liberal concepts as "equality before the law" unravelled increased with industrialisation. The process had started slowly in the 1820s and 1830s when colonial agents such as missionaries and officials engaged on the frontiers of British-administered territories "began to advocate segregation as a form of trusteeship."34 Where this process gained its full momentum was in the development of new frontiers represented less by territorial expansion and the acculturation of indigenous populations to European educational and moral norms than by the accumulation of capital in the diamond fields in various locations (from 1867) and in the mining of gold on the Witwatersrand (from 1886). The normalisation of racial segregation is perhaps most graphically illustrated and symbolised by the established practice of isolating indentured African labourers in fortified compounds on the Kimberley diamond diggings for the duration of their employment as a means of preventing the concealment and theft of diamonds. However, as even as uncritical a work as Oswald Daughty’s *Early Diamond Days* (1963) points out, "The white man’s passion for these 'light stones’ as the natives called them merely confirmed the servant’s [sic] belief in his [sic] white master’s childishness or insanity. Not until they learned their value from the white, civilized Christians did diamonds become a temptation."35

The impact of the diamond and gold industries on liberal ideals found its full force in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, which, in addition to asserting British control over the major source of South African wealth and over the political processes of the former Boer republics, led to further impoverishment of

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34 Giliomee and Schlemmer 4.
"poor white" Boer farmers, especially those owning no land of their own (the bywoners), who could no longer compete with the wages paid to African labour in the mines and on the railways. As Giliomee and Schlemmer indicate, "white poverty was no longer seen as a class issue, but explicitly as a racial issue," with the result that whites increasingly demanded state intervention to prevent "white degeneration" (9). The systematisation of segregation in the diamond and gold fields was, in consequence, gradually extended to the whole of South African society as a means of reinforcing and protecting the racially-defined labour rights of the minority white population against the threat of the majority who continued to live in poverty.36

The third phase of South African liberalism, which coincides largely with Packer's childhood, youth and young adulthood, is marked by the attempts of liberals in the Cape Province, where racially "egalitarian" legal structures had been retained throughout the nineteenth century, to resist the demands of Natal and the "new" provinces of the Union of 1910 for further restrictions on the civil rights of the Cape "Coloured" and African population. The period is marked by a succession of parliamentary measures to that end: the 1913 Natives Land Act, allotting some 7-8 per cent of the land (later increased to 13 per cent) as reserves for the "natives"; the 1922 Stallard Commission on influx control to the white urban areas, which—foreshadowing Verwoerdian apartheid laws in the 1950s—advocated tolerance of blacks in white areas only where necessary "to minister to the needs of whites"; the 1923 Native Urban Areas Act, which created segregated residential "locations" (the later "townships") for "non-whites" outside the whites-only towns; the 1932 Native Service Contract Act, which tied labourers more tightly to the farms employing them; and the 1936 Representation of Natives Act, which provided only for white representation of the "non-whites" at the Cape, restricted to segregated voters' rolls. The list of restrictive measures introduced in this period could be lengthened by reference to the types of work which, by law, could not be performed by "natives," and the restriction of compulsory education to white children.37

Liberalism of the kind practised by Jan Smuts and Jan Hofmeyr was unable to withstand the pressures exerted by a divided white electorate. On the one hand, as Robert Fine and Dennis Davis have pointed out, while indicating their scepticism over the state of South African liberalism at the start of the 1940s,

36 See Giliomee and Schlemmer 7-10.
37 See Giliomee and Schlemmer 14-20.
what was called 'liberalism' was not a homogeneous entity but rather a spectrum of political thought ranging from Smuts on the right to Hofmeyr\textsuperscript{38} in the centre and Marquard\textsuperscript{39} and Saffery\textsuperscript{40} on the left; but what united the liberal bourgeoisie was the view that the racial political superstructure of South Africa posed obstacles to the growth of modern industry and needed some degree of relaxation.\textsuperscript{41}

Most accounts of the period also refer, however, to the pessimism of outspoken South African liberals such as Alfred Hoemlé,\textsuperscript{42} who by the end of the 1930s had both advocated the ideal and recognised the impracticality of a policy of "Total Separation" (rather than inegalitarian segregation) of the races\textsuperscript{43}—incidentally praised by Giliomee and Schlemmer as a "classic liberal model of decolonization" in its declaration of the need for "separate freedoms" (56-57). Watson, in contrast, declares the political reality, that by 1939 Cape liberalism was, in perhaps more than one sense of the word, "spent."\textsuperscript{44} The involvement of South Africa in the Second World War, at the insistence of a coalition supporting Smuts, served only to conceal temporarily the polarisation of white and black nationalisms, which included the membership of a considerable number of post-war Nationalist politicians not only in the clandestine Broederbond but also in the Nazi-influenced paramilitary Ossewabrandwag.

As a result of her own extensive absences from South Africa after 1925 and her devotion to coping with the various family predicaments occasioned by her husband's career, Packer was largely insulated from a personal experience of this political fragmentation, in the course of which the liberal values of her Cape origins underwent a process of almost complete marginalisation. On her return


\textsuperscript{39} Leo Marquard was elected equal Vice-President, with Alan Paton, of the newly-founded South African Liberal Party in 1953; see Peter F. Alexander, \textit{Alan Paton: A Biography} (Oxford: OUP, 1994) 282.

\textsuperscript{40} Lynn Saffery, Secretary of the South African Institute of Race Relations in the late-1930s, became increasingly isolated as a radical liberal in the early-1940s; see Rich, \textit{White Power} 50, 79.


\textsuperscript{42} See, for example, Watson, "The Fate of Liberalism in South Africa" 119.


\textsuperscript{44} Watson, "The Fate of Liberalism in South Africa" 122.
to the Cape in 1950 the social revolution set in motion by the first Nationalist government of 1948 had to a large extent already acquired, in Packer’s assessment, the status of a *fait accompli*, and her continued partial isolation from, and ignorance of, the daily processes of the practical implementation of apartheid is repeatedly apparent in *Apes and Ivory*.

In the new political world of 1948, South African liberals encountered an entirely new situation, where the failure of earlier gradualist policies had become suddenly visible, and where the incursion of Afrikaner nationalism at the highest levels of government had brought liberal aspirations and expectations to an abrupt halt. While commentators on the changes pursuant to the 1948 elections often refer to the pre-existence of segregationist legislation, a Marxist analyst such as Harold Wolpe has offered the conflicting view that greater emphasis should be placed on the impact of nationalism as a revolutionary force. To present merely a "simplistic view of [the] historical continuity" of apartheid policy from the legislation of the past is, Wolpe suggests, to ignore the degree to which apartheid attempted a "structural transformation" of South African society as a whole. One of the manifest differences, as Giliomee and Schlemmer have pointed out, was in the shift from a horizontal paradigm of racial segregation to an attempt by apartheid to create a vertical and "equal" division of society:

Apartheid also differed from the liberal model which English-speaking opinion-formers of the time used to categorize society. The liberal model is based on the individual who is invested with rights. The apartheid model portrays man as a social being who finds fulfillment only in a community. . . . Whatever rights the individual enjoys are derived from the collectivity. (40-41)

The distinction underlines the innovatory nature of apartheid, compared with segregation, and also the similarities with apartheid that have been detected in "totalitarian" systems elsewhere.

In terms of political movements, the 1950s produced two significant liberal responses: the first the establishment of a Liberal Party in 1953, with Alan Paton as one of its founding members; the second the breakaway in 1959 of eleven M.P.s from the declining United Party to form the Progressive Party, joined by one of the two white Liberal "Native Representatives." The difference of the Progressives, as an organisation, from the struggling Liberal Party consisted

especially in its continuous, if tenuous, presence in parliamentary politics. Helen Suzman's defence of the controversial Progressive decision to continue operating within the parliamentary system, despite its racial exclusivity, has been on the grounds that "we felt that we had been sent to Parliament to fight the racist policy of the National Policy, and that the United Party wasn't doing the job properly."\textsuperscript{46} When the Nationalists eventually enacted legislation (the Prohibition of Improper Interference Act) in 1966 to ban multiracial party membership, it was the Liberal Party, rather than the Progressives, who felt bound to go into liquidation.\textsuperscript{47}

As I have suggested earlier, liberal opinion nevertheless continued throughout the apartheid period to play a significant humanitarian and conscientious rôle. It is, therefore, surprising to find that while most analyses of post-1948 South African politics emphasise the worldwide sense of outrage at the continuation of racist policies in the aftermath of the Holocaust, little account is taken of the growing contrast between South African liberalism in the 1950s and 1960s and its counterpart in Western societies, in particular in the United States. From the 1930s on, Western liberalism was confronted by what was popularly, if inaccurately, termed "totalitarianism" in its various forms: the Fascism of Italy, Nazism in Germany, and from an earlier date Communism in the Soviet Union. In the post-war period, the Western response to the surviving "totalitarian" power, the Soviet Union, and to the emergence of Communist China, was, according to Anthony Arblaster's comprehensive analysis of the origins and development of liberalism,\textsuperscript{48} either "doubt and disgust" leading to pessimism and withdrawal of the kind expressed by Hoemlé, or, in contrast, an "aggressive defence of a strongly conservative version of the liberal tradition," whose principal battleground became familiar as the Cold War (299).

Arblaster's account emphasises the process, in what he terms "Cold War liberalism," of an accumulating contradiction, expressed in particular in the excesses of "McCarthyism" in the USA:

\begin{quote}
Freedom of speech and opinion, tolerance and diversity, were suddenly discovered to be principles which need not be applied to communists, or even those who might be communists, or who had, to use one of the
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{46} Suzman 50.
\item \textsuperscript{47} See Giliomee and Schlemmer 133.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Anthony Arblaster, \textit{The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism} (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).
\end{itemize}
conveniently elastic phrases of the time, "communist sympathies." By the same token, a blind eye could be turned to illiberal and repressive regimes which happened also to be anti-communist; or, worse still, specious justifications could be produced for them. Cold War liberalism, it can be argued, was not "true" liberalism, but a betrayal of it. But it was a betrayal perpetrated and endorsed by people who claimed to be liberals. (309-10)

Arblaster goes on to suggest that Cold War liberalism "ceased to retain any vestige of radicalism, ceased to pose any shadow of a challenge to the existing order of capitalist society. It became wholly defensive and fundamentally conservative" (331-32). The contrast with the political practice of the minority of South African individuals who in the 1950s and 1960s opposed apartheid from a liberal baseline is therefore considerable.

The significance of Cold War liberalism for my discussion of Packer's writing is potentially far-reaching. On her return to South Africa in 1950 she had no connection with domestic liberalism, and little insight into the origins of the considerable pressures which liberalism was subjected to in the new post-1948 political environment. On the contrary, it may be argued that her world-view was fundamentally and vitally shaped by her husband's position in the Royal Navy as Commander-in-Chief South Atlantic, stationed at one of the principal strategic bases of the Cold War, at the Cape.

3. Transitions

*Apes and Ivory*

In turning firstly to *Apes and Ivory*, my intention is to examine some of the discursive problems created in this text by Packer's varying relationship with South Africa during and after her absence of 1925-1950. In particular, my attention will be focused on the degree to which she appears to have been conscious of the crisis in South African liberalism that ensued from the failure of the weakly-liberal United Party to convince the white electorate of the validity of its gradualist approach to black empowerment. I am here taking for granted the typicality of the individual experience of prolonged residence away from a previously familiar discourse environment: in the course of time, language, ideas, fashions and fads, preconceptions and prejudices will inevitably develop and change. Despite occasional or even frequent re-immersion in an environment cast off in young adulthood, patterns of behaviour and belief once intimately familiar to the individual acquire characteristics in his or her absence that are sometimes
subtly, sometimes radically, different from those fossilised in the memory. Hence, the impact of the remembered past (or the past reconstructed by the memory) on the individual's perceptions of the present will be disjunctive, whether consciously so or not.

The hypothesis I will attempt to examine is, then, that, despite Packer's origins and the degree of contact that she had maintained with South Africa, she was profoundly unprepared for the sociopolitical environment which confronted her on her permanent return in 1953, and which she had committed herself to narrativise in her subsequent novels and memoirs. That many other liberal white anglophone South Africans were also profoundly unprepared for the post-1948 revolution in political practice and ethics—as indeed they had been for the strength of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1920s—does not invalidate my argument with respect to Packer. Where her experience differed was in its individual particularities and in the ways in which she exploited it in her writing.

Simply stated, my perception here is concerned with the way in which Packer re-entered the discursive environment represented by South Africa in 1950, at the start of the historical period identified by and with the legislation and implementation of apartheid. In 1949 the Nationalist government had passed the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, and during the year of Packer's return its counterpart, the Immorality Act, came into effect. Laws such as these and other key apartheid legislation of 1950, the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act, represented a massive intrusion by the state into the privacy and freedom of the individual, and were abhorrent to liberals and others committed to maintaining and improving the rights of individuals: all of this was eventually to determine the kind of fiction that Packer wrote.

*Apes and Ivory*, the memoir which Packer wrote on her temporary return in 1952 to Britain from South Africa, is marked by the assurance and poise familiar from her earlier memoirs, although in this case the persona she constructs appears to derive from her role as her husband's consort at the Cape rather than from a quest for a narrative of the self—the memoir functions superficially as a record of the final two years of her husband's career, which he spent as the chief British Naval representative at Simon's Town. Packer accompanied the Admiral not only on his official tours of South Africa but further afield, to Central, West and East Africa, gathering observations en route on the non-South African "Darkest Africa" of the colonial world: her final novel, *The Dark Curtain* (1977), for example, is

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49 See Leach 255.
heavily dependent upon their tour of Swaziland, recorded a quarter of a century earlier in her journals.50

Displayed within such relatively perfunctory records is a celebration of colonialism similar to that observed in her later memoir, The World is a Proud Place (1964).51 Of greater significance, however, is Packer's less overt self-narrativisation, which I would identify principally in the degree to which Apes and Ivory functions for her as an initiation into the Otherness of Africa. Typically, for example when confronted with a white colonial enclave in Swaziland, which she visited with her husband in 1951, Packer defines herself as a writer who will not permit her feelings to be stirred—or, rather, altered—by the gaudiness of what appears, in her text, to become a far-off, exotic land, despite its proximity to the country of her birth and residence:

If the Katmandu effect was impressive at sunset it was even more wonderful in the morning light. As we looked across the velvet veld to the far blue peaks, Mrs. Morgan said, "It would be hard to find a view to touch this."

The red jerseys of the convicts working in the garden and the red flowers of the kaffirbome flamed in the hard clear light.

"It makes one long to be a poet," I said.

Yet now I sometimes wonder. Perhaps there is more real poetry in one small Chelsea churchyard than in all the wide savage scenery of Swaziland.52

The kind of sentiment she has espoused is of an entirely different order. Her writer's heart, she implies, lies firmly embedded, not within her native Africa, but within the greater heart of the imperial metropolis. The seeming uncertainty of "Yet now I sometimes wonder" is a mere literary device, employed to convey a (self-)conscious shift from the view which she rejects—the "wide savage scenery" of Africa—to a perspective where order reigns (in a confined, defined space) and where the sequentiality of Western historiography can be seen to be engraved/"en-graphed"/"en-graved" (entombed, interred) in the apparent permanence of (grave)stone.

This reading, which is essentially a reading of the "non-Afrocentrism" of Packer's writing, can be reinforced by consideration of the contiguity of the two

50 See my discussion of The Dark Curtain in ch. 6, "Narrative Hostages."
51 See ch. 2, section 5, "Travel Writing: The World is a Proud Place," above.
52 Joy Packer, Apes and Ivory (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953) 160.
elements in this quotation which Packer appears to link solely through the superficial quality of redness: the convicts and the flowers of the kaffirbome (the coral tree). Her focus on the stereotypical "picturesque" qualities of the scene appears to obviate any need for her to reveal awareness of, or concern for, the penal terms of colonial convict labour or, linguistically, for the pejorative ramifications of the term "kaffirbome," where the initial element of the compound might have been related with at least minor irony to the African convicts (this is to ignore entirely the further irony of a description of a landscape such as this, with its convicted felons, as in the least picturesque).

In this connection Packer can scarcely be defended as unaware of such associations. Although she has chosen here to use kaffirboom (pl. kaffirbome) as a standard Afrikaans rather than South African English term (which it also has been), from a sociolinguistic perspective the kaffir element has, in the usage of either language, long been strongly marked for its dominant, ultimately racist, colonial origins, and is generally rated as "offensive."

Hence, the several editions of Jean Branford's A Dictionary of South African English are notable for their increasing foregrounding of the public offensiveness of the term, and by the third edition (1987) Branford includes in her main definition of kaffir that "its offensive nature was early observed by William Shaw [in 1847]," a fact which in the first edition of 1978 she keeps a mere footnote. Similarly, while the first edition records that public use of the term kaffir is "now a punishable offence in some parts of Southern Africa," by the latter part of the 1980s its punishability becomes universal (3rd ed., 1987), and remains so in the latest, fourth edition of 1991 (with only a change in legal terminology, from a "punishable offence" to an "actionable insult").

Lexical usage, of course, is never immutable. The evidence discussed here tends to suggest a shift that was well under way in Packer's time, a change which, in the light of William Shaw's observation from as early as in the mid-nineteenth

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56 "Kaffir, kaffer (3)," Jean Branford with William Branford, A Dictionary of South African English, 4th ed. (Cape Town: OUP, 1991). In each of the cited editions of the Dictionary the primary definition of the term remains unchanged: "A mode of address or reference to a black regarded by most black and white S. Africans as offensive."
century, was temporarily and only partially concealed by the predominance of the common discourse encouraged by apartheid. Thus, while the Dictionary of English Usage in Southern Africa (1975) rates the usage of "kaffirboom" (otherwise occasionally known as the "coral" or "lucky bean tree") as "acceptable," its use appears to have become increasingly controversial, as a recent popular magazine article reveals: "'It's the same situation as the Kaffirboom,' says [Professor Elwyn] Jenkins [a member of the National Place Names Committee]. 'We may prefer to call it a coral tree or an erythrina nowadays, but when a botanical name is registered in the international reference books, you can't simply change it for reasons of social or political sensitivity.'"

In line, however, with the first (but not the second) part of this protestation, it is notable that when, in 1979, the state-funded magazine South African Panorama illustrated its front cover with a painting of flowers of the tree, the illustration was labelled with a linguistic caution surely provoked by an awareness of a potential international reaction to the racist overtone of the kaffir element: "Harbinger of Spring, the vibrant coral tree."

In sum, while on the one hand Packer's writing from the first three decades of apartheid reveals an unceasing awareness of (and concern about) the many points of racial friction in South Africa, including those caused by verbal use and abuse, it may also be claimed that the textual surface of her writing will sometimes reveal linguistic "blind spots" in fossilised forms surviving from her "colonial" youth in the 1910s and 1920s (that is, before her overseas "exile" between 1925 and 1950) rather than from the contemporary South African English discourse of apartheid. Where evidence of such linguistic neglect in Packer's work may prove to be problematic, therefore, is in its implications for the whole of her discursive product as a writer who professed to be actively engaged in the contemporary sociopolitical debate in apartheid South Africa.

In the context of a critical quest for the identity of Packer's writing a linguistic reading of a fragment of Apes and Ivory such as this suggests that this kind of evidence is in fact merely symptomatic rather than diagnostic of the contradictions in the text as a whole. Historicised by extension to the liberalism which in later years Packer adhered to publicly by her demonstrative membership

59 South African Panorama 24.6 (June 1979): front and inside cover; my emphasis.
of the Progressive Party, a global reading of the memoir reveals other more problematic contradictions.

The framework of the discursive agenda of *Apes and Ivory* is supplied by the familiar pre-1948 theme of the need for reconciliation between white Afrikaner and English-speaking South Africans, expressed through the reassuringly metropolitan metaphor of *Romeo and Juliet*:

> the racial [i.e., ethnic] tragi-comedy of Boer and Briton—Montague and Capulet fighting down the ages when the vendetta is already dead and the need of friendship as vital to their lovely land as breath is vital to life itself. (4)

The motif echoes on to the closing chapter (which with some historical irony is entitled "Nkosi, Sikelel' i Africa"), where she concludes that

> only time will tell whether this unique experiment of a White civilization in the southernmost portion of a dark Continent can survive. . . . If the White races are to survive in South Africa they must unite. (381-82)

Politicised clichés such as "this unique experiment," "White civilization," "the Dark continent," "the White races," "survive" and "unite," linked within conditional structures ("whether," "if") by the compulsive imperative ("must"), not only recall the sloganeering of the illiberal régime but find their echo throughout her subsequent writing, notably in her novel most immediately affected by the assassination of Verwoerd, *The Blind Spot* (1967).60 Examples could be multiplied exhaustively, each underlining the intertextual continuum of the discourse established by white supremacy. Most significantly, this short extract suggests that the linguistic border had ceased to exist which had traditionally marked the supposed disjuncture between the Afrikaans- and the English-speaking spheres of racial politics.

Against its own volition, however, Packer’s text locates at its centre the source of its own deconstruction: Zimbabwe. In depicting the ancient stone fortress located in the then-British colony of Southern Rhodesia—long the focus of colonialist dissension over the capacity of an African people to construct on such a scale and with such complexity—Packer reverts to the well-tried formula of claiming to construct an ideological equilibrium in the narrative which will

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60 See ch. 5, "Marital Parricide," below.
permit her readers the freedom to "judge for themselves".\footnote{See ch. 1, section 5, "Joy Packer's Ideological Fictions," above, for my commentary on Packer's assertion that "I use my books as a platform to put over this ideal. And I give each of the characters I write about an opportunity to put over a point of view generally held by the type of person they depict. Sometimes I do not agree with those ideas. But I understand why they hold those views. And I leave it to my readers to judge for themselves" (Joy Packer, as qtd. in A. M. P., "An Author with the Golden Touch," \textit{Smith's Trade News}, 19 Sept. 1959: 54).}

You can take your choice of the theories about Zimbabwe. Like Angkor, in Cambodia, it is one of the world's mysteries. You may place it three hundred years before Christ and call it the Kingdom of Ophir, whence Solomon's Navy [sic] brought those entrancing cargoes of "gold, and silver, and ivory, apes, and peacocks," or it might have been built anywhere between the fifth and fifteenth centuries A.D. by people of Bantu or Dravidian origin. The latest tests suggest the sixth century A.D., but, dreaming on the Acropolis, my thoughts were upon the lovely unlikely notion of vanished Ophir. (172-73)

Hence, she establishes a purportedly balanced contrast between fact and fantasy. On the one hand, she acknowledges the proven historicity of the construction of Zimbabwe by the Shona people of southern Africa—though here, too, ambivalence is permitted to intrude: "by people of Bantu [i.e., African] or Dravidian [i.e., non-African] origin." But, set against this, the power of the individual fantasy is granted free rein, foregrounded in the very title of the memoir and drawing on the obsolescent myth of an ahistorical semitic origin for the ancient site, a myth as obsolescent as Cape liberalism itself and nourished by Old Testament mythology of the kind introduced to southern Africa by the missionaries of colonialism.\footnote{The anachronism of Packer's stance can be illustrated by reference to standard popular travelogues and histories which regularly referred to the pre-Second World War shift in Western colonial historiography concerned with the origins of the Zimbabwe structures. For example, A. W. Wells discusses what might be termed the "Africanisation" of Zimbabwe in 1929 by the South African archaeologist, Miss G. Caton-Thompson, who "said she did not think Zimbabwe belonged to any romantic pre-Christian era, as some people think, but was of Bantu origin" (A. W. Wells, \textit{South Africa: A Planned Tour} [1939; London: Dent, 1947] 121); and, evidently also drawing on Caton-Thompson's field research, A. F. Hattersley, then Professor of History at Natal University College, implicitly objects to the difficulty "some writers" found in believing "that Bantu workmanship was capable of designing and erecting stone buildings of this description" (A. F. Hattersley, \textit{South Africa, 1652-1933} [London: Thornton Butterworth, 1933] 14-15. Wells's account also refers to the detail that Zimbabwe "provided Sir Henry Rider Haggard with material for some of his most exciting romances" (120), thus contributing to the mythologisation of a non-African origin for Zimbabwe. For a fuller account of Zimbabwe, see}
her closing sentiments to privilege the "feminine" formula of the "heart ruling the head," which constructs, in effect, an "imaginative" effacement of the historicity of pre-colonial Zimbabwe in favour of an appeal to the power that emerges from, and merges with, the idealised fantasies of colonial mythology.

In brief, in *Apes and Ivory* Packer finds no substantial quarrel with white supremacy. Where, on the one hand, a historical review of this period states that "the continuities between liberalism and apartheid were recognised by Smuts when he declared that 'there is a great deal about apartheid which is common to all parties in this country,'"$^{63}$ Packer's personal contemporary view is, perhaps predictably, expressed in noticeably similar terms. Meditating at Smuts's funeral service on his striving for white reconciliation, she concludes that

> even the basic principle of apartheid was no real bone of contention [between Boers and Britons]. It was a traditional policy built as much upon the theories of Cecil John Rhodes as upon those of Dr. Malan. Only its application was felt to be too harsh in an enlightened age. It could and would be modified if our two White races would show goodwill and good sense. (31-32)

She can see good reason, for example, for the Group Areas Act, segregating the various race-groups into their own white-designated locations. On the one hand, she observes, "this racial and social apartheid is not artificial. It is in the very nature of life in South Africa" (17); on the other, she notes that when "an exceptionally liberal [Port Elizabeth] City Council refused to countenance any repressive controls on its Black community . . . in 1952 . . . a series of riots blew up for no apparent reason, as is often the way in Africa. . . . Human beings reverted to primitive senseless apes and the Black man's cause was set back for generations. When primitive Africa is worried or afraid she kills" (45). In an attempt at racial levity, she discovers the most exemplary inhabitants of locations set up in South Africa to be creatures apparently endowed with their own sense of the naturalness of the new order:

> We discovered at once that the black and white rhinos of [the game park at] Hluhluwe observe strict laws of apartheid. They tolerate one another, but keep to their own residential localities; they require a different diet, and they do not inter-marry; each branch of the rhino

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$^{63}$ Fine, with Davis, *Beyond Apartheid* 19.
race develops along his own lines according to his lights—which are not very bright, for all rhinos are nearly blind. The blacks are rude, ferocious and polygamous, while the more massive whites are modest and retiring and are imbued with a strong sense of responsibility towards family obligations. (362-63)

Given the reality of suffering under the enforcement of apartheid legislation (though implementation was still in its preliminary stages in the early 1950s64) discourse of this kind requires little further categorisation.

Where Packer participates most directly in the contemporary discourse of race at the Cape is in her attempts to narrativise the "coloured" community as a potential buffer against the influx of the black African majority.65 Her text blends measured praise with bids at arousing white pity for the plight of the mixed-race individual who approximates to the appearance of whites. Hence, a passage such as the following confers on the "coloureds" the "white" attributes of gaiety, White blood, and a contempt for "savages," inherently countered and weakened by the "black" attributes of irresponsibility and drunkenness, linked with a non-South African reference to an inferior social class, the Cockneys:

the Cape Coloured are a gay, good-natured people with pride in their White blood. They identify themselves with the White way of life, and frankly regard the Native as a "savage." As a whole they tend to be irresponsible and to drown their sorrows, but they are kind and generous to one another, and their ready humour is as quick and individual as the Cockney's. (89)

Similarly, a tour of the Afrikaans-speaking Baster communities in South West Africa provides her with an opportunity to justify apartheid for its defensive strategies against the "inevitability" of physical and mental degeneration resulting from miscegenation, in sentiments reminiscent of Sarah Gertrude Millin's:

I felt a sharp pang of pity as I looked at those children of mixed blood, some fair-skinned and blue-eyed, some with blond hair and the

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64 See, e.g., the description of the immediate impact of "residential and cultural apartheid" in Davenport 379-80. Davenport later supplements this and also supplies statistics on forced removals of the "coloured" and Indian communities under the Group Areas Act for 1950-72: whereas only 1513 white families had to move because they lived in the wrong group area, 44,885 Coloured and 27,694 Indian families had been moved by the end of 1972: 135 white families, 27,448 Coloured and 10,641 Indian still had to move, as well as 1162 Chinese" (420).

65 See also my discussion of The Glass Barrier in ch. 4, "Racial Fictions," section 4.
heavy features of a darker race, and others with little trace of their white blood in their faces. . . . One could see the result of a "pilot plan" for South Africa as the Communists would like it, with no social barriers and inter-marriage between Black and White the order of the day. And it was not encouraging, for even these Reheboth Basters, who have achieved a certain success and independence, are a meagre-bodied folk with idleness bred in the bone and the liquor craving strong in them. . . . The centuries will leave [South Africa] barren as a desert, the home of the hybrid—the half-breed. (343-44)

It would seem that in her attempt to restore personal communication with her South African past, fossilised in memories a quarter-century old and confounded by her (false) consciousness of a personal and sociopolitical authority deriving from the popular commercial success of her first two memoirs and from her husband's position, Packer threw in her lot with a discourse which attempted, equally unsuccessfully, to enact, through legislation and in practice, the fossilisation of its own idealised memory of the past in order to construct a future where the white South African settler was (supposedly) still dominant and black Africans inhabited their own, "Othered," invisible space, in obedience to the wilful fantasy of the colonising intruder.

Stated bluntly, a narrative such as Apes and Ivory cries out for the kind of counter-text that later works such as Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth (1961) would provide. The remoteness of Packer's memoir even from an earlier, benevolent Cape liberalism is overwhelmingly insistent: it has no detectable redeeming traits. Regarded in terms of my earlier discussion of the didactic or instructive nature of her writing it would appear that Apes and Ivory might, at best, be classified as integrative propaganda serving, however involuntarily, the political purposes of the state which she identified with the task of maintaining "white civilisation" in "White" South Africa. On the basis of this text, it would, therefore, appear to be difficult to associate Packer's writing with pre-war Cape liberalism, and even more so with the emergence of post-war "radical" liberalism. If the memoir were to require an apologia, its sole defensive recourse might arguably be found in an appeal against the influence of the author's contemporary circumstances which, as I have speculated, may not only have been unduly biased by her immersion in the general tenor of the earliest

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66 First published in English translation in 1965.
years of the Cold War but also incalculably magnified by her understanding of her personal domestic involvement in her husband's final career posting at the Cape. The question therefore remains of the extent to which her subsequent publication, the novel *Valley of the Vines*, participated in a similar discourse.

*Valley of the Vines*

In 1953, Packer's original literary career as a memoirist was threatened by the simple domestic problem of "settling down." She was no longer obliged to pack and follow her husband around the world, with the consequence that she no longer had access to the Establishment figures who were a natural part of her husband's high-ranking occupation and who constitute a major part of the social and political configuration of the more public aspects of her memoirs. If she wished to continue writing she would be obliged to find an alternative literary genre, and also an alternative platform for viewing the world around her.

As Packer later records in her fourth memoir, *Home from Sea* (1963), she was aware of the problems involved in this upheaval in her career. As a popular writer, her autobiographical works had thus far made her name well-known throughout the white Commonwealth, although it was not until the publication of her first novel in 1955 that any of her work was issued in the USA or—with the sole exception of a Swedish edition of *Apes and Ivory*, which appeared after her return to South Africa—and in the many translations which popularised her name throughout much of the Western world. More significantly for her engagement with the "new" genre which she employed in her newly readopted homeland, she realised the degree to which fiction would also require the adoption of a different perspective. Reviewing her writing ten years later, Packer describes a degree of engagement in her art which is entirely discourse-centred:

> Up to now I had interpreted places, people and events in a purely personal way. But, apart from a new technique, a novelist would need a more intimate brand of insight into character, and a wide objective viewpoint, especially a South African novelist. And I fully intended to write about my own controversial country. . . .

Her engagement as a writer of fiction intended to exceed the popular generic

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68 *Home from Sea* 42. The Swedish translation of *Apes and Ivory* evidently was published in response to the long-lasting Swedish fascination for travel literature on Africa.

69 *Home from Sea* 19.
conventions of popular romance could scarcely be more clearly articulated.

In consequence, my original starting-point for this study of Packer's two works which celebrate her return from residence overseas was based on the contention that her individual world-view could potentially have been modified by the impact of one or a combination of several transitions—dislodged, however slightly, from its original course and thereby producing a revised vision of her task as a writer who "fully intended to write about [her] own controversial country." The predictable image that can be used here is that of the kaleidoscopic pattern which can be infinitely altered by a single tremor of the (writer's) hand, moved by any one or more of a multitude of impulses experienced in reaction to her changing task as a writer or to the South African world that she found on her return—by uncertainty, timidity, fear, withdrawal, or perhaps nausea; or, more productively, by anger and outrage at the South African re-enactment of institutionalised racism of the kind which she had participated in fighting against in Europe through her work in Allied propaganda.

_Apes and Ivory_ defies any such reading. The uncertainty and unfamiliarity which Packer may have felt on re-entering the South African arena of public discourse are effaced and transmuted in that memoir into a partially concealed attempt at re-establishing links, not with the post-Smutsian humanitarian or (in relative terms) "radical" liberalism of Alan Paton and the new Liberal Party, but with a past represented by her domestic vision of British imperialism and by her memory of a Cape liberalism increasingly compromised by its acquiescence in the politics of separate development. If, then, there is a shift in Packer's writing at this point, it can be identified only in terms of a desire to move seamlessly from participation in an authoritative Britocentric discourse to its equivalent in South Africa. Returning and discovering herself to be doubly an outsider in her own "Afrikanerising" native land—not only as an English-speaker (and one of decidedly Afrikaans origins) but also as one who had (in multiple senses) cohabited with the British adversary—remains a motivating conundrum for most of her subsequent writing, and as my discussions of her fiction will show she found no easy answer.

Like many commercially successful popular writers, with her first novel Packer happened to find a theme which, despite the structural weaknesses of the novel as a whole, gave it both an instant and a lasting appeal.\(^\text{70}\) Within two

\(^{70}\) South African examples of successful first novels in the popular genres include Antony Trew's depiction of an averted nuclear submarine catastrophe in _Two Hours to Darkness_ (1963),
years of first publication in 1955, *Valley of the Vines* achieved sales of more than 600,000 copies internationally,\(^71\) and (as noted earlier) it continued to enjoy a shelf life which considerably exceeded the norm for popular romantic fiction: as a teaching text in the mid-1960s, and as an SABC television serial in 1982. Its last reprint in its standard British hard cover edition was in 1983.\(^72\) As I have repeatedly suggested elsewhere in this study, the Packerian novel is never simply a romance. Early in *Valley of the Vines*, the protestation of one of the characters, Adrian Fairmead, an English novelist, that "'I shan't write a book settling the problems of Africa,'" is countered by the mocking response of his interlocutor, a South African journalist: "'You'll be the exception. . . . Everybody writes books on Africa'" (26). Packer herself, as both journalist and novelist, could not abandon her personal agenda to write about her own "controversial" country, so that, while the romantic element of the plot contributed primarily to the successful worldwide marketing of the novel as a whole, its internal function in Packer's production is more complex. *Valley of the Vines*, like all of Packer's novels, is, finally, not only a popular romance but also a politicised, ideological novel, a South African *roman à thèse*. As such, it desires not simply to exploit—literally, to "cash in on"—firstly, the consumer-orientedness of romance and, secondly, the growing notoriety of South Africa in the world, but also to participate in the shaping of interpretations placed upon that notoriety. If the novel has any claims to "novelty," then its originality lies in the degree to which it successfully employs the highly marketable conventions of the popular romance both to contain and, simultaneously, to propagate that ideologised thesis or theme.

The initial formula of the novel was simple: "'the conflict between old and

\(^{71}\) Publishers' Preview of *Nor the Moon by Night*, by Joy Packer, "New Books, July-Dec. 1957," Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1957: 1. By 1964, the selection of *Valley of the Vines* by the Literary Guild had accounted for more than 500,000 copies in the USA, and 80,000 copies had been sold in hard cover in the Commonwealth. These sales were supplemented by later paperback editions, and by translations, including German, Norwegian, Finnish, Danish, Swedish, Dutch, French, Portuguese and Spanish (the press report omits mention of Afrikaans). See Simon Townsend, "She Packed and Followed Her Star to Fame," *Sunday Chronicle* (South Africa) 20 Dec. 1964: 16.

\(^{72}\) This was probably in response to the posthumous popularity which I discuss in ch.1, section 1, above; Methuen (the publishers who had meanwhile acquired Eyre and Spottiswoode's interests) also reissued at least two other novels by Packer in 1983, *The Glass Barrier* (1961) and *The Man in the Mews* (1964).
new,"" as Packer subsequently reported her husband's observation on her search for a focus for her romantic story. The setting she chose, the Constantia vineyards at the Cape, was indeed the site of contemporary conflict of a kind which causes the novel to resonate still in the aftermath of her opportune intervention in a moment of historical discourse: the ongoing changes in ownership and exploitation of the land, and radical shifts in the habitations and occupations of white, "coloured" and black South Africans. The novel's link with contemporary sociopolitical events in South Africa is, in consequence, explicit, and was undoubtedly a major part of the reason for its popular success. As Packer also reports, American reviewers labelled it "the plantation novel of South Africa," presumably comparing it with the pre-war "blockbuster," *Gone with the Wind* (1936), though without analysing the essential difference of Packer's localised version of the popular historical romance: its contemporary immediacy.

In this respect, *Valley of the Vines* functions in a way remarkably similar to *Apes and Ivory*. Where the preceding work projects an idealised image of a quasi-Victorian golden age of British imperialism surviving into the new age of apartheid by accommodating the apparently minor disagreements between Britons and Boers, in several overlapping senses the novel also attempts, by means of several self-contradictory strategies, to conserve the past. Citing her somewhat later novel, *The Glass Barrier* (1961), Paul B. Rich has located Packer's fiction in one of two main strands of post-war South African fiction, that of the pastoralist-naturalist rejection of the corruption of the individual in the face of urbanisation (Rich identifies the alternative mode as "urban modernism"). He links this in part with the liberal pessimism of the 1930s and in part with the emergence of the "Christian liberalism" epitomised in Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, eager to correct the wrongs of colonialism, but ultimately incapable of devising a radical, modernist or post-colonial literary form to achieve its purpose. Like several of her later novels, *Valley of the Vines* also displays an awareness of the accelerating shift of power away from the liberal Cape towards the nationalist strongholds of the old Afrikaner north, the Orange Free State and

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73 *Home from Sea* 21.

74 *Home from Sea* 58.


76 According to Rich, the eventual demise of South African pastoralist-naturalist fiction can be traced in "the genre of South African adventure yarns of the 1960s and 1970s such as Wilbur Smith's *Gold Mine* (1970)" (Rich, "Liberal Realism" 59-60); see also Appendix 1, below.
the Transvaal. The novel deflects the full force of its aversions and fears, however, by focusing on local issues: the encroachment of suburbia on the traditional farm- and winelands of Constantia, the influx of new populations, and the fomentation of unrest by "European" Communists, manifest in the threat to "White" property by "Coloured" fire-raisers.

As with most of my discussions of Packer's novels, the following examination of *Valley of the Vines* will appear to emphasise the social, political and historical underpinnings of the story at the expense of the romance itself. To ignore the romantic "story" completely, however, would be to miss an essential aspect of the narrative, which is permeated by representations of its initial idea, that of transition from the past to the present. Its conventional romantic heroine, Roxane, emerges from deliberately cryptic European origins, the orphaned child of a "true" heroine, an English mother who has died in wartime France while operating as a secret agent, and of a father whose identity is denied her until she achieves the status of adulthood, which, as in many conventional popular romances, is marked by marriage. Roxane's move in 1939, at the age of four, from "threatened England" to the Cape as a partially anonymous "sea-vacuee" further obscures her specific identity, which is only partially restored by her adoption by Constance de Valois, familiarly known as "Grannie Con," the dowager owner and, in effect, Victorianesque monarch of the Dieu Donné—"God Given"—wine estate in the Constantia Valley.

Roxane's progress displays its adherence to the standard formulae presented in the Caweltian model of the popular romantic novel. *Valley of the Vines* fulfils the main criterion, in that "its organizing action is the development of a love relationship, usually between a man and a woman" (41): from the age of 15, Roxane's emotions are engaged by an Englishman, Hal Fairmead, the son of a novelist and himself a budding writer, and after numerous experiential vicissitudes the two are eventually united in marriage. Secondly, as Cawelti suggests, while the "moral fantasy of the romance is that of love triumphant and permanent," the fulfilment of that fantasy requires the overcoming of all "obstacles and difficulties." In the case of this novel, these commence with the initially significant disparity in the lovers' ages, which in its turn causes Hal to

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77 Packer observes the prevailing discursive practice of marking the un-South Africanness of "Communism" by not identifying its adherents according to the government-sanctified classification of "White."

live through the failure of a first marriage and Roxane to come close to entering into a "safe" marriage to a fundamentally flawed character. Then, in its depiction of the economic and politically-motivated threats to the survival of the Dieu Donné estate, the novel fulfils Cawelti’s third criterion of romance, according to which there may be "elements of adventure, but the dangers function as a means of challenging and then cementing the love relationship" (41). For the practised reader of romances, the ultimate fate of the heroine is, according to formula, never in doubt: the complications, setbacks and self-doubt which Roxane experiences will assuredly be resolved according to the romantic attainment of "monogamous marriage and feminine domesticity."

Reading *Valley of the Vines* is nevertheless a technically disconcerting experience. Given its dual focus as, at once, a popular romance and as a *roman à thèse*, its gaze is not only fixed conventionally upon the maturing female figure of the young heroine and her idealised desires, but is distracted within the same narrative space by a second powerful obsession symbolised by changes in the geophysical setting, the Constantia Valley and its diminishing significance as an image of the historical European settlement at the Cape, which is intimately linked with the Valley’s transformation under the pressures induced by new political phenomena. The narrative produces this dualism—as in several of Packer’s later novels, such as *The High Roof* (1959), *The Blind Spot* (1967) and *The Dark Curtain* (1977)—by partially decentring the role of the romantic heroine: her self-consciousness, in effect, has to share its "normal" centrality with the novel’s self-conscious foregrounding of its ideological agenda. Hence, if the Packerian novel can be identified, in Susan Suleiman’s terms, as a *roman à thèse* functioning according to her "apprenticeship" model, then it can be seen

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79 Roxane’s Afrikaans cousin by marriage, Thinus, who suffers from several anti-romantic "disfigurements," both physical—the wartime loss of an eye and two fingers—and "moral”—a weakness for *dagga* (marijuana) combined with a sexual relationship with a "coloured" servant-girl. According to the historicised setting of the novel, the latter had, of course, been criminalised under apartheid legislation, and therefore poses an insuperable disqualification for the potential partner of a white South African romantic heroine. The narrative does not modify its own response to the status of apartheid by enlisting the reader’s sympathy for Thinus’s rejection.

80 Cawelti 42.

81 See my discussion of these novels in chs. 5 and 6, below.

to be narratissuing a dual process of learning "the 'right' values":\(^{83}\) firstly, in the heroine's gradual achievement of an understanding of her own destiny, epitomised in the eventual attainment of marital harmony, despite the restrictions imposed by apartheid; and, secondly, in the novel's construction of its unified politico-ideological message.

*Valley of the Vines* depicts an environment where change is perceived as hazardous rather than beneficial, although it expresses this less in terms of the impact of apartheid than as the result of an unlicensed implementation of the forces of capitalist investment. The financial viability of the Dieu Donné vineyard under Grannie Con's ownership has weakened as wartime and post-war industrialisation at the Cape has caused the suburbs of Cape Town to encroach on the land and production costs to rise. Industrialisation has also brought about a change in the working population. With preferential industrial employment for the "coloureds," they have begun to move away from the low-paid labour of the vineyards. For Grannie Con, the threat of change and loss is acute. Her apparent heir, her granddaughter Merle, has joined forces with Mr Krifti, a land and property speculator of Greek—rather than Afrikaans, Huguenot, or British—descent, in an attempt to buy up the land and destroy its heritage. The crisis is reached when, with Grannie Con aging and enfeebled, and with blight and Communist-inspired fire-raising threatening to destroy a season's crop of grapes, the last financial means of resistance to destructive change appears to be lost.

Dramatically, however, the day is saved by Grannie Con's friends, who have been concerned to find a way "to ask the little old Queen of the Valley to abdicate" (242) so that the obsolescent feudalism of the estate's past could be replaced by the liberal economics of modern capitalism. Thus, Grannie Con's stereotypically Jewish businessman friend, Solly, proposes, in the pedestrian tones of the didact, that

"Dieu Donné could be run as a Limited Company, consisting of perhaps yourself; Adrian Fairmead, Roxie and myself. We are all interested in the fortunes of Dieu Donné, we love it and we want to see it kept intact and running at a profit. . . . The creation of a Company need make no difference to the running of the estate, . . . except that there will be capital upon which we will be able to draw for improvements; and your autocratic powers, dear Grannie Con,

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\(^{83}\) Suleiman 142.
would be whittled down. . . . We will solemnly undertake to preserve it, not only as a private home, but as valuable Africana—the oldest, most historic and loveliest homestead in the first vine-growing valley of the Cape." (244-45)

The message is necessarily contradictory. To guarantee a future for the commodified "Africana" created by white settlement—the wine estate, the memory of its Huguenot founders (whose De Valois descendants, somewhat anachronistically, have been both anglicised and anglicanised rather than Afrikanerised and calvinised), and its community of "coloured" rather than black labourers—Packer proposes an economy based on a benevolent variety of capitalism to be installed in the midst of a political environment where benevolence had ceased to play any significant rôle. In consequence, the final romantic dénouement, in which Roxane's identity is revealed as a true member of the De Valois family, though the illegitimate offspring of Grannie Con's son and of a "beautiful and attractive" (and now conveniently dead) young Englishwoman (285), serves largely to reinforce the novel's dependence on defunct formulae rather than confronting the challenge of the "new" South Africa of the 1950s to which Packer had returned as an author keen to write about her own beloved, though controversial, land.

4. Conclusions

In commencing the present discussion I suggested that my aims were, firstly, to examine the South African roots of Packer's professed liberalism and, secondly, to search for ways in which her personal ideology was manifest at moments of significant transition in her writing and life. Given that the whole of this study is focused on the writing of a single author, my investigation nevertheless undoubtedly falls foul of present-day critical strictures on paying undue attention to the purported links between biography and text. Where some defence may be offered is in my insistence on presenting the author as a figure existing within a definable, observable historical moment—apartheid—that has articulated her to at least the same extent as she also attempted to articulate her understanding of her own position within that historical moment. Hence, to ignore ways in which the individual narrativised her understanding of her historical context would be anomalous.

My investigation of the memoir *Apes and Ivory* tends to suggest that Packer was less than fully in control of the task that she had undertaken. Rather, she was herself subjected to contemporary discourses which revived in her the
commodified memories of the discourses of her youth, which combined their forces along a route which offered least challenge and least resistance, of conformity to the dominant contemporary discourse of her time—identified here, at least partially, as the rhetoric of the Cold War crudely linked with the apparently irresistible rhetoric of the apartheid state.

A different genre and a changed personal status appear, in some perhaps minor respects, to have shifted the focus of Packer's ideological rhetoric in her first novel, *Valley of the Vines*. Where Packer's two works demonstrate similarity, however, is in the effort they expend on attempting to locate a contemporary ideological debate within a strongly formulaic popular narrative. The degree, for example, to which Packer resorts to stereotyping as a means of furthering her argument ultimately weakens and defeats her own attempts at coming to terms with her remembered past and hence also with the increasingly authoritarian South African environment which she had chosen to return to. The question of whether, or to what extent, this problem was recognised by Packer herself is insoluble. It might, however, be speculated that, had Packer and her husband decided not to retire to the Cape but to stay in Britain, close to the "real poetry" in its mannered churchyards and cultivated gardens, her travel writing would have petered out, and any fiction that she might have produced would have been a less challenging, and undoubtedly even less memorable, variety of "pure" popular romance, in contrast to the uneasy blend of discourses which it in fact became.
Chapter Four
Racial Fictions
The Glass Barrier; Veronica

The fabric of family life of millions of our people has been shattered.¹

1. Origins
Writing in 1976 at a moment which coincided with both the final phase of Joy Packer’s long career and also with the prelude to yet another major upheaval in the struggle for freedom in South Africa, Nadine Gordimer gave voice to an observation which had so long been a reality that at the moment of its writing it was a truism—though one demanding endless reiteration:

All that is and has been written by South Africans is profoundly influenced, at the deepest and least controllable level of consciousness, by the politics of race. . . . There is no country in the western world where the creative imagination, whatever it seizes upon, finds the focus of even the most private event set in the overall social determination of racial laws.²

It can be argued on the basis of her fiction alone that Packer, despite her political differences, might scarcely have cavilled at her fellow-novelist’s assertion. Both novelists have demonstrably attempted through their writing to raise the politics of race to consciousness; their fiction is racial fiction, their mutual concern to argue for changes in the status quo imposed on South Africa by apartheid.

Equally obviously, Gordimer’s attempts have been marked by enduring critical acclaim, with the writer herself achieving the status of a significant cultural power-broker in the current transition to a more equitable political and social dispensation. Packer, in contrast, wrote from what often seems a literary generation earlier, from a different political baseline and in a different mode of fiction from Gordimer’s. Packer’s novels float amphibiously between the popular and the "serious," uncomfortably insecure in their attempt to cater for a mass commercial market at the same time as debating the immediate social and political concerns of contemporary South Africa.

The scope of the present study precludes comparison in any detail between

the two writers; nevertheless, an awareness of Gordimer’s treatment of race unavoidably underlies the present analysis, which attempts to explore some of the ways in which race appears in Packer’s romantic fiction and to discuss some of the problems raised by theme and fictional mode. Particular attention will be paid to two novels, *The Glass Barrier* (1961) and *Veronica* (1970), largely for the intensity of their focus on questions of race and racism, although it will be apparent that my study could be extended to the whole of Packer’s published and unpublished writing.

To study race in Packer’s work would appear to be unproblematic. In contrast to the blatantly racist structurations of the fiction of another, somewhat earlier, South African writer such as Sarah Gertrude Millin, whose novels, stories and memoirs appeared between 1920 (*The Dark River*) and 1965 (*Goodbye, Dear England*), Packer’s fictions, for all their reliance on a patriarchal white South African social order, reflect a different, liberal, flawed reaction to the apartheid society within which she lived. In the case of Millin’s writing, the present consensus of critical opinion suggests that it functions as a touchstone for the literary discourse of racism in South Africa in the first part of this century, although assessments are often expressed with minor, qualifying reservations over the degree to which, in the context of "miscigenation," Millin’s sociopolitical realism is outweighed by her personal racism. M. van Wyk Smith has added the interesting point that "the strangest thing about Sarah Gertrude Millin’s appearance on the South African literary scene is not what she said but that she was not accompanied by a host of like-minded writers," although this view is apparently restricted to the South African literary canon, ignoring the numerous derivative works within the more popular fiction genres. In Millin’s declining

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5 See, e.g., David Adey et al., *Companion to South African English Literature* (Craighall: Donker, 1986): "Her essentially 'racist' view has come under much current criticism" (137-38); and Tony Voss’s "Preface" to Sarah Gertrude Millin, *God’s Stepchildren* (1924; Craighall: Donker, 1986). M. van Wyk Smith also notes that her "novels, while espousing abhorrent ethnic theories, also expose their viciousness" (*Grounds of Contest* [Kenwyn: Juta, 1990] 59).
6 M. van Wyk Smith, *Grounds of Contrast* 57.
7 Another South African critic of Millin, David Rabkin, both disagrees and, with some circumspection, agrees with Van Wyk Smith: "God’s Stepchildren is a frankly racialist novel, of a type common enough in its time, but probably quite rare today" ("Race and Fiction: God’s Stepchildren and Turbott Wolfe," in Ken Parker, ed., *The South African Novel in English* [London: Macmillan, 1978] 82). There may be grounds for speculating that, rather than lacking
years she identified fully with Verwoerdian apartheid policies, as is evidenced in her final published work, *White Africans are Also People* (1966), a compilation of a half-dozen articles by notorieties such as the Marquess of Salisbury and Millin’s fellow novelist, Stuart Cloete. As Martin Rubin has commented, "It was clearly a work which demonstrated her moral and literary bankruptcy."8

Again in contrast to Millin, Packer, who was a generation younger, openly espoused Progressive Party politics to the end of her life,9 and her novels, autobiographical works and papers reveal an awareness of, and concern for, the social injustice and inhumanity of apartheid legislation.10 Her eighth novel, *Veronica*, for example, is remarkable evidence of the way in which this kind of concern could persuade a writer of formulaic romantic social melodramas to break away from a conventional mode of fiction geared to initial publication in serial form, with consequent loss of this particular commercial outlet, in order to express her views on the impact of apartheid legislation.

Thus, the distinctions that may be drawn between Millin’s and Packer’s attitudes to race are considerable. While some would argue that Millin’s personal ideology shifted from a vaguely "left-of-centre" source in her humble origins to


9 See Pamela Ruskin, "'Man is Born to Fight and Love,,'" *The Age* (Australia), 7 Feb. 1976: 22.

10 Packer’s liberalism is also typically evident in her autobiographical *Home from Sea* (1963; London: Corgi, 1974), where, for example, she refers, by no means disparagingly, to the Black Sash organisation (whose Federal "Chairman" [sic] in 1960 was her sister-in-law, Molly Petersen): "This non-party-political band of women was pledged to uphold the humanities and to draw attention to repressive legislation by every passive means in its power, an obligation which it faithfully continues to honour" (172).
an ultimate stance that overtly allied itself with the dominant voices of apartheid\textsuperscript{11}—Van Wyk Smith indicates also the \textit{simultaneity} as well as the progression in the "ambivalence between Millin’s humane sympathies and her racial beliefs"\textsuperscript{12}—Packer’s world, in contrast, was always one of public service and relatively high social status, and the contours of her writing career were shaped less by the need to achieve and maintain status, either literary or social, than by her desire to employ a skill honed through many years of professional journalism, wartime propaganda production, and autobiography-cum-travel writing. While Millin’s main critical biographer, Martin Rubin, can write of his subject that "as usual she did not question the innate injustice of society’s attitude but preferred to approach the matter having accepted the prevailing outlook," Packer can be observed throughout the 1940s to 1970s practising a high degree of journalistic professionalism, collating press reports, attending trials, travelling, questioning. It is tempting, therefore, to posit a contrast originating in the insecurity of Millin’s identity—she was born in Lithuania in 1888 immediately prior to her parents’ emigration to South Africa\textsuperscript{13}—while Packer herself seldom tires of reminding her readership of her own solidly white South African credentials, which she could trace back to the seventeenth century: "On my father’s side I am a third generation South African of Danish and German descent. On my mother’s side I am an eleventh generation South African descended from the Huguenot Marais family, which escaped into Holland in 1692[\textsuperscript{*}] after the revocation of the edict of Nantes [in 1685]. . . . My ancestors were amongst the first Huguenot emigrants to sail from Amsterdam to the Cape."\textsuperscript{14}

The results, from a literary perspective, are equally contrasting. Millin, racist and social parvenu as she undeniably was,\textsuperscript{15} and with a literary career

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item M. van Wyk Smith, \textit{Grounds of Contest} 59.
  \item Rubin 12.
  \item Joy Packer, "Biographical Back-Ground [sic] Material," NELM 1309/1307. [\textsuperscript{*}]Packer has later amended this date, in her own handwriting, to suggest an earlier provenance: "earlier than this, see Theale[?]." The net effect is a strong emphasis on the antiquity of her South African antecedents.
  \item Retrospectively, I find that my own view coincides closely with that of the South African critic, Tony Voss: "In South Africa the Liebsons [Millin’s parents] were \textit{parvemus}, brought here
\end{itemize}
which in the post-war years declined ever more steeply as she indulged in racist stereotypes, has achieved a lasting, though mainly negative, position in the canon of colonial South African literature for her key work, *God's Stepchildren* (1924). Packer's oeuvre, on the other hand, professional, sincerely liberal in intent and, within its genre, of fairly consistently high quality, languishes in a critical limbo.

As my opening reference to Gordimer has admitted, my selection of "race" as a way into Packer's writing is, in a sense, merely a commonplace in the discourse surrounding and included in South African literature. In his discussion of Millin's writing, David Rabkin, for example, also asserts that the "colour question" is "the central moral issue of South African society." From contemporary as well as later sources, both anecdotal and academic, we know that Packer wrote from within a society whose common discourse was not simply racially centred but racist, just as we know that Millin had early merged her authorial voice within the common choir, and also that in the early 1950s Gordimer was commencing a career that would prove to be in total disharmony with that common, racist, apartheid cacophony. It is, then, to be expected that Packer's work, as the literary product of a self-declared liberal member of the anglophone South African establishment, will prove to be as problematic in its own way as Millin's—or, indeed, Gordimer's—since part of that problem (as I argue throughout this study) is that it appears to be an area of South African literary discourse whose liberal as well as popularised voice has been compromised by its imperial and colonial origins. It is also possible that her fiction is compromised by the conventions of its own genre. In sum, Packer's voice is undoubtedly one that has tended to be muted, critically, by the sheer volume of the conflict between the white racist and the white radical as much as by the general, though no longer universal, unwillingness of academia to come to

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on the wave of the diaspora that rose in Tsarist Russia in the late nineteenth century. This too may have contributed to the author's defensiveness about her own racial place in South Africa" (Tony Voss, "Preface" 14). It is also worth noting that, at the end of his biography of Millin, Martin Rubin's final assessment is that she was "one who had, above all, sought fame" (*Sarah Gertrude Millin: A South African Life* 281).

16 Rabkin 93.

17 A typical contemporary anecdote recorded by the British journalist, James Morris, suggests how "tediously obsessive" the subject of race was in (white) South Africa in 1957: "As on a drab treadmill, conversation in South Africa revolves endlessly round and round the black man, what his future is to be, whether we can trust him, how we should approach him, what we ought to do about him, how he smells, how delightful he is, how awful he is, [etc, etc]" (James Morris, *South African Winter* [London: Faber, 1958] 14-15).
terms with the predominance of uncanonised modes of literary discourse.

2. Race and Apartheid

The details of the "official" racism of post-1948 South Africa have been exhaustively documented elsewhere, and require little further elaboration. Where academic dispute may still exist is, rather, over the degree to which the post-1948 National Party government instituted a revolutionary shift in racist legislation and undertook its implementation, as opposed to imposing policies which were simply another stage in a historical, socio-political continuum. As Hermann Giliomee and Lawrence Schlemmer point out, although the novelty of the post-1948 apartheid statutes lay in their attempt at achieving both absolute and multiple barriers between people and groups within a single national entity, their roots lay in earlier South African legislation; for example, the Immorality Acts of 1950 and 1957 can be traced back to an earlier parliamentary Act of 1927 (83). The absoluteness of apartheid's intentions, however, marked a revolutionary break with the past (as we have seen in Chapter 3), which was to be repeatedly underlined by the Nationalist régime's attempts to counteract the influence of trends in contemporary Western societies towards granting individual rights.

Where the South African writer is concerned, be it Joy Packer, Sarah Gertrude Millin, Nadine Gordimer, or any other, the year 1948—and its contiguity with the end of the Second World War—appears to signal a radical shift in the social and also individual awareness of "race" and "racism." As J. M. Coetzee has pointed out in the introduction to his consideration of racism in Sarah Gertrude Millin's writing: "If we return to the discourse of racism before 1945, what strikes us first about it is its nakedness, its shamelessness," and he goes on to list some of the prominent nineteenth- and early twentieth-century race theorists whose work, for a century up to 1945, "passed for scientific research" (27): "racialism" (as it was more frequently known) up to 1945, had a relatively respectable intellectual pedigree, and its discourse was common currency.

18 For specific details I have relied on Roger Omond, The Apartheid Handbook: A Guide to South Africa's Everyday Racial Policies (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) and Hermann Giliomee and Lawrence Schlemmer, From Apartheid to Nation-Building (Cape Town: OUP, 1989), although it should be noted that the latter also draws to some extent on Omond.

19 As Packer eloquently puts it in Home from Sea (1963), "the law has deliberately devised a system of embargoes and embarrassments calculated to sabotage all human bridges between the races" (32).

20 J. M. Coetzee, "Blood, Flaw, Taint, Degeneration" 27.
An early seminal work such as Ruth Benedict's *Race and Racism*, which first appeared in 1942 under the urgent need to publicize the gravity of European anti-Semitism, emphasises the nature of the "scientific" credentials of the contemporary racist beliefs which she hoped to reveal and discredit. 21 A notable feature in this work is the stress Benedict places on the tradition of biological racism: "Racism is the new Calvinism which asserts that one group has the stigmata of superiority and the other has those of inferiority. According to racism we know our enemies, not by their aggressions against us, not by their creed or language, not even by their possessing wealth we want to take, but by noting their hereditary anatomy" (2). Through analogy with the past, Benedict's analysis insists that racism survives over time by adapting its referents to its historical context. As an example, she notes that, while the earliest white attitudes to "natives" in Africa were based on the religious dichotomy of Christian/pagan ("Kaffir") rather than on the white/black racial dichotomy, in the wake of Christian missionary work by the beginning of the nineteenth century in South Africa . . . the old theory of a division of the human race into "believers" and "unbelievers" no longer corresponded to the facts, and the same dilemma was arising in other parts of the world. . . . The time was ripe for a new theory of superiority and inferiority, and people began to talk of natives as sub-human, as related to apes rather than to civilized man. . . . After all, colour . . . set off the opposing parties on the frontier as religion often no longer did. (108-109)

Since in 1942 Benedict could not foresee the impact that post-1945 awareness of biological racism would have on future racist guises, her analysis has been pertinently augmented by John Rex, the editor of the 1983 re-issue of *Race and Racism*:

Even the government of South Africa nowadays seeks to justify its apartheid policies on cultural and historical rather than biological grounds. There is some reason indeed for shifting concern to the non-biological and non-racist theories which are used to justify inequality22

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This point has been made in similar terms by John Solomos in *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (1989): "The focus on attributed biological inferiority is being replaced in contemporary forms of racist discourse by a concern with culture and ethnicity as historically fixed categories," suggesting a present-day form which, despite its modern sophistication and complexity, bears a remarkable similarity to the earlier, pre-racial varieties of religious discrimination. Nevertheless, Benedict's conclusion underlines her awareness of future trends: "To understand race conflict we need fundamentally to understand conflict and not race" (151).

The physical expression of the intellectual tradition of biologically-determined racism in the Nazi death camps of Europe destroyed the remnants of its acceptability. Millin's racism is too blatant for a post-Holocaust world. As Coetzee suggests, hers is a "naturalistic tragedy of victims subject to a biologized fate initiated by the meanest of lusts," and one which is distinguished by the "ethnicized set of her mind as she reads appearances." Coetzee's reaction to Rubin's relatively mild reading of Millin is, therefore, firm: "Millin is thus a child not only of the 'isolation and intellectual sterility' (Rubin, p. 82) but the ethnocentrism of the dominant intellectual tradition of her day." It could not survive in a world that had become aware of Auschwitz.

Hence the ambivalence of South African post-war racism. As Coetzee has put it (again, in the context of a discussion of Millin's ideology):

While the atrocious extremes to which the prescriptions of racial eugenics were carried under Hitler had the effect of driving the science of degeneration underground, and perhaps even of killing it, in the West, the shadow of the Nuremberg trials passed over South Africa too lightly to drive the lesson home: the laws of apartheid passed after 1948 depended heavily on it [the "pseudo-science of degeneration"] for their justification.

On the one hand, apartheid attempted to perpetuate and intensify, through legislation, the "shamelessness" of pre-War racial discourse (referred to by Coetzee, above) that had been so absolutely discredited by Nazism; at the same time, however, it insisted on its own beneficence for all of the designated racial

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24 J. M. Coetzee, "Blood, Flaw, Taint, Degeneration" 41, 43.
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groups. Official racism under apartheid depended on enforcing the submissiveness of the "non-white" population, but also on enforcing its acceptance, by one means and another, by the white population. Therefore, the dilemma for the newly established apartheid state, was, in a sense, that of who would control a dominant discourse which could both convey and, simultaneously, conceal—through censorship, intimidation, persuasion—the shameless grammar of the racist state: its structure, its definition, and its implementation.

The importance of both Rex and Solomos for the present study, therefore, lies also in their general agreement on a cultural ambivalence which neither writer considers in fuller detail. Solomos suggests that:

> It has long been recognised that . . . races do not exist in any scientifically meaningful manner. Yet it is also clear that in many societies people have often acted and continue to act as if race exists as a fixed objective category, and these beliefs are reflected in political discourses and at the level of popular ideas. (xiii, my emphasis)

Rex, in his editorial capacity, made a similar point a few years earlier:

> Popular culture . . . remains suffused with racist ideas and as some of the more advanced countries have faced internal and external problems there has actually been a resurgence of biological theorising about human differences and inequality. (xii, my emphasis)

While there is nothing specifically "South African" in this popular adherence to biological racism, in the context of the shifting ambivalence inherent in a racially-defined government and nation in a post-1945 world there emerges the potential problematic of a popular culture, a popular imagination, a popular perception of people and society, which stubbornly refuses to recognise the linearity of time. In this perception of existence there is no past, and awareness of the Holocaust has no moral impact. "Popular" racism, it would seem, frequently, though not invariably, insists on maintaining a Millinesque view of its own world. Therefore, on the level of an unofficial, unsanctioned, non-dominant, uncanonised popular literary discourse, which remains largely unrecognised and uncriticised, there may be rejection (not simply of a non-racist literary-critical interpretation but also) of the received, "non-biological," overt governmental interpretation of its contemporary social context. Whether and how these ambivalences find expression in the popular fiction of Joy Packer will be considered in the following.
3. Frames of Reference

The immediate frame of reference for this analysis is a densely-written article by Tim Rackett on racist social fantasy and paranoia, which, in drawing on British national press reports (in particular, though not exclusively, in the "popular" rather than the "quality" press) of the Brixton (south London) "riots" of 1981 for its material referents, appears to offer a practical model for the present analysis.

Rackett's intention is to develop, in three phases, a "psychoanalytic-semiotic" model which may be used in the interpretation of "white racist" discourses. His initial approach follows the familiar line of the "racialised" identification of the Other in visual terms. Firstly, he notes that "if we scan the different newspaper accounts of the April 1981 Brixton 'riots' what clearly emerges is a surprising number of shared social myths, repetitions of stories and images," which he identifies in turn as constituting "a type of collective figure of racist fantasy which anchors a 'gaze' in which looking is adequated [sic] with knowing, directed at the 'rioting' subjects." He then proceeds to describe the generality of the "rich visual scenarios" underlying the racist fantasy: they concern "spatial demarcations, boundary divisions between Brixton as an 'inside' and the world (i.e., Britain) 'outside,' and a fear of invasion and destruction of the latter by the former," and he concludes with a description of the inflammatory "rhetoric" (in terms mainly of lexis) of many of the reports in both the tabloid and the "quality" press. The resultant reportage "is as if 'Britishness' is being contaminated, invaded and destroyed by the indigenous [black] population of Brixton" (190-91).

Extending his argument to trace the historical sources of such manifestations of racist fantasy, Rackett goes on to suggest that the foregrounding of visual aspects such as the confusion of the black African with the ape in both sexual and Satanic terms has led to a situation in which "... the colonial Other is constructed as a menacing being who bears its 'inside' on its 'outside' as a sort of stigmata [sic] signalling a nature reducible to, and deducible from, 'appearance' alone" (195). The net effect of this textual and visual presentation of violence and aggression in the behaviour of the racial Other is, in Rackett's opinion, the stimulation in the reader of a desire to read further without having "to exercise

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any critical faculties" (192).

In sum, Rackett's main observations posit a fatal flaw in white racist vision: "On the one hand there is a desire for mastery, dominance and control over the black Other, whilst on the other hand there is the always disavowed recognition of the impossibility of such a [racially supremacist] place." Given the racist fantasy that "once upon a time there were no blacks, everyone was the same," Rackett sees the racist's response to this fantasy to be the construction of a "phantasmatic fort," an "imaginary identity" which is symptomatic of a "desire to alter alterity, indeed to deny its very existence," a "paranoia [which] is a logical correlate to racist identifications." Therein lies the seed of racist self-destruction through self-contradiction, since "the riotous desire of white racism in its paranoid modality . . . works to decompose its subject and its illusions of mastery and dominance" (196-99).

As already stated, my specific intention is to test in conjunction with Rackett's model (which I do not assume to be wholly applicable) several interrelated hypotheses which have coalesced during my reading of Packer's fiction and autobiographical travelogues, with a view to elaborating the inter-relationship in her fiction of its narrative form and its potentially "racist" (or racially-influenced) ideological structuration.

My first hypothesis is concerned with Packer's narrative deployment in one fiction after another of what I shall term the "dystopic family"—the family flawed, broken and disrupted, an inversion of the popular image of the idealized, unified Victorian family which, nevertheless, remains the touchstone for her familial values. "Dystopic" seems more appropriate than the more familiar sociological term, "dysfunctional," which it subsumes, since the dystopic family functions recurrently as a formulaic metonymic displacement of Packer's perception of apartheid South Africa. There is nothing very innovatory in such an analogy. Its identification in Packer's writing, however, permits identification of the repetitive narrative formula exploited by her in most of her novels, where mending the flaw in the narrative-centred familial structure appears to constitute a substitute for advocacy of radical sociopolitical remedies for apartheid.

My second hypothesis is that Packer's texts, both fictional and autobiographical, function for the writer as the site of her personal identity. This identity may be considered with reference to two areas. Firstly, like many of her contemporaries, Packer searches for a definition of her identity as a white South African living and working in that country during the establishment and concentration of apartheid, but at the same time travelling widely in the world and
observing alternatives to the South African apartheid system. In consequence, in
the face of apartheid she discusses and defines a personal ideology which is at one
level unfixed, shifting, inconsistent, and—given her contemporary South African
environment—"liberal" in spirit, whilst, at another "deeper" level, rigidly
ethnocentric (see chapter 3, above). Secondly, Packer, taking up the career of
writer in her early forties, can be seen exploring her identity as a woman living
under apartheid, a socially and morally conservative ideology. Though general
in appearance, this concern is probably more central to the psyche of her writing.

My third hypothesis is enmeshed in the first and the second, in that it is
concerned primarily not only with overt and covert themes or discourses on
apartheid and identity, but also with a perception of presumably unintentional
subnarratives which centre on a subliminal fear of the African Other in South
Africa. Packer's fictions are pervaded by physical, sexual and psychological
violence exercised both by and against the collective, impersonalised black
African, combined with a recurrent (and, indeed, "atavistic," given its reversion
to a purportedly pre-racial prejudice) mistrust of the "dark" psychological
processes of the racialized collective black (after Rackett) as aspects of
"superstition" or, by extension, "heathenness."

Since it is my contention that these hypotheses are interrelated, the
discussion which follows is an integration of the three rather than an attempt to
treat them separately.

4. The Glass Barrier
It is notable that for Packer the literary setting is a function attributable not only
to the geopolitical (South Africa) and the temporal (contemporary); appropriately,
given the existence of acts of parliament governing race classification and group
areas, it is also attributable to the racial (white/"coloured"/Indian/black), the
economic (white wealth vs "coloured"/black poverty) and the domestic/familial
(separated locations in houses, marital conditions, generational shifts, male/female,
etc), all of which act as South African prerequisites for the enactment of Packer's
romantic "love stories," which rely for their action on recognisable, "knowable"
locations. Such choices seem appropriate, given that all of her fictions fall within
the broad category of the formulaic popular novel, where the deployment of stock
plots, familiar characters, and predictable closures permits the popular novelist to
engage, at a subnarrative level, in the production and projection of a personalized
ideology.

Even a cursory reading of a handful of Packer's novels makes it immediately
apparent that she repeatedly sets up a variety of familial arrangements each containing elements which seem to embody major disruptions of the stability of the family. In *The Man in the Mews* (1964),\(^{28}\) for instance, the threat is insanity, apparently inherited from a father hanged for murdering prostitutes in wartime London; in *The Blind Spot* (1967),\(^{29}\) an American journalist intrudes, sexually and ideologically, into the stability of a white South African marriage; in *Leopard in the Fold* (1969),\(^{30}\) the young widow of a bankrupt South African tycoon threatens to disrupt the orderly economic progress of another business-oriented family into which she subsequently marries; in *Veronica* (1970), the child of a British immigrant and a "coloured" laundry-maid threatens the stability of the white man’s later marriage to an Afrikaner woman; and in *Boomerang* (1972),\(^{31}\) the increasing hereditary deafness of an Anglophone South African woman threatens to destroy communication with her Afrikaner farmer husband, with his family, and with his community.

Familial dystopia, therefore, is structured in the novels in a variety of ways, some genetic, others placing more emphasis on the social, economic and legal dispensation obtaining in apartheid South Africa. Most importantly, each dystopic situation can be summed up, popularly, as one where "bad blood" threatens to disrupt the stability and continuity of the family.

An exemplary case in point may be found in one of Packer’s earlier romantic fictions, *The Glass Barrier*. In that novel she sets up a general contrast between the rural and the urban: the Paarl Valley and Cape Town. Within that geographical setting she establishes a familial location of two sets of cousins, each set consisting of one male and one female. The rural brother and sister, Claude and Maxie Lamotte, experience a childhood and adolescence shared with Simon and Rima Antrobus, whose city-dwelling family owe their wealth to a nationwide chain of department stores, the closest in Cape Town itself; it is within these familial expectations of farming and business continuity that the adolescents move towards adulthood. There is, however, in a genetic sense a single potential "flaw" in the familial structure of inheritance which predetermines the feasibility of the plot: Simon is an adopted brother to Rima, and therefore unrelated by "blood."

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The novel is complex in structure, revealing a linking of familial dystopia with a subtly imbricated series of displacements of Packer's concern to racialise and politicise her message. The first, superficial, threat to familial stability in *The Glass Barrier* consists of a sexual rivalry between Maxie Lamotte and Rima Antrobus for the attentions of Simon Antrobus, Rima's adopted brother (the "glass barrier" metaphorises the paradoxical transparency/impenetrability of this emotional rivalry, which the girls themselves recognise but can do nothing to remedy without causing irreparable damage to the family). Maxie's narratorial voice, given the example of a successful marriage between cousins elsewhere in the novel, asserts her right to pursue her male cousin without concerning herself over any potential of "bad blood" arising in the course of a marriage with a near relative. The resolution is, therefore, unimportant; so, too, is the genetic (non)-threat of the quasi-incest of Rima's and Simon's eventual marriage: the subnarrative voice insists that, in both cases, the bloodline will remain unimpaired.

At a second level, however, more serious dystopia, in this case both genetic and social, threatens in the form of miscegenation: Rima's brother, Claude, studies chemistry in England, continues an alliance with a "Coloured" woman, Fara September, marries her, and in so doing cuts himself off from inheritance of the land of the Lamotte family. Given apartheid, he cannot return. Ultimately, however, the problem is again proven to be insignificant when their slightly dissolute, anglophone South African father is shown to have mismanaged and gambled away the Lamotte heritage, but also manages, fortuitously, to be butchered in an uprising in Langa\(^{32}\) thereby bequeathing to his family not homelessness—for there are adequate shares and skills to guarantee a comfortable survival—but considerable disruption to all of their earlier dreams of continuity on their ancestral lands. Packer, however, deliberately blurs the over-simplicity of this formulation by rendering the loss of the land ambivalent: it is sold to an absentee English landlord investing in a future for his teenage son, but passes into the temporary control of the true farmer, represented—naturally enough—by an Afrikaner, Jamie Vermeulen, a childhood friend and long-suffering suitor of Maxie's. Nevertheless, this kind of resolution, the racialisation of land returning—however impermanently—to its "rightful" inheritor, the "boer," appears

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\(^{32}\) Packer personally observed the legal proceedings in Cape Town which followed the Langa uprising of March 1960, taking notes in court and collecting press cuttings (see *Home from Sea*, chapters 15-17).
to act as yet another narrative displacement of the more fundamental implications of the text.

At a third level, the novel can be seen to be loaded with white assessment of the collective nature of the "Coloureds" and the "Bantu": "Jamie knew the Coloured people with his instinct, their moods, sullen and gay, their loyalties and ready humour, their limitations [my emphasis]. . . . Already they accepted "baas Jamie" as their friend, their young master, and their adviser" (22-23). The narratorial assessment of "Coloureds" such as Fara September, who achieves a successful singing career in England, who achieves a successful singing career in England, is equally "knowing": "She had all the emotionalism of her people" (132); "the flamboyance of her race had been disciplined" (133); "She drank very little herself. 'I mustn't. I have to watch that. You know how it is with my folk'" (134). Remarkable in these three quotations is the density and range of the synonyms—"her people, her race, my folk"—employed for marking the Otherness of the "Coloured," combined with discrete examples of "coloured" limitations.

Maxie's narratorial stance is clear: "Although my mind agreed with Claude's multi-racial attitude and way of life, my instinct went with Jamie, who quite frankly preferred to stick to his own kind" (166). Maxie's virginal fear of sexuality and its passion is emphasised by her aversion to a "Coloured" servant girl, Corinne, who reminds Maxie of a past incident where she has suffered burns in a bush fire, but who is also described as a creature of false innocence, with a "diffident smile that betrayed a gap of four missing front teeth" (55)—a reference to the practice of fellatio (a reference, incidentally, which must surely have given many readers innocent pause to wonder at the lamentable state of dental services for the "Coloureds" of South Africa!). In addition, when Corinne decides to marry a "Bantu," her identity is further racialized in Maxie's eyes:

I fancied that Corinne's skin had darkened, that her hair was frizzier and her body heavier. . . . Her quick lively Coloured rhythm had been slowed down to the unhurried tempo of the tribal woman. In some mysterious way she was becoming more African, the thin White blood in her veins thickening in her body. . . . After a few words with me, she went back across the garden to the big house, her buttocks rolling as she walked. (183)

Corinne, like her future "Bantu" husband, has betrayed her so-called race-group and her punishment, from the protagonist-narrator's perspective, is an
intensification of her "Bantu-ness." Her loss of the "superior" group identity is emphasised later by the physical appearance of her newborn son, "a small near perfect replica of his father" (279).

The death of Maxie’s father at the hands of black inhabitants of the Langa township reinforces her stance. Here the parameters of the racialized world of the novel become clear. While the text can envisage the union of white and "Coloured" through their common ancestry and shared creole languages (English, Afrikaans), the Other remains the black man and the black woman. Contrasted with the "knowable Coloureds," Maxie’s father’s "unknown [black] murderers had killed him because his skin was white and thus he was the 'enemy.' They had hacked him with knives, they had burnt and mutilated his body" (198). "Such senseless baboonery" (208), comments her admittedly fuddy-duddy elderly uncle, Gideon Antrobus, who, after reference in the novel to the attempted assassination of Verwoerd in 1961, promptly increases the pay of his "non-European" labour as an insurance policy against economic unrest (209), while Rima’s and Simon’s quasi-incestuous flirtation with the mere concept of "bad blood" is rewarded by Rima’s unintended death at the hands of a mysterious "tribal" black intent on ritually murdering the "coloured" Corinne for her intrusion into black space.

The analysis of The Glass Barrier presented thus far has yielded a less than complete pathology of the novel. Absent, for instance, is any record of its critical reception, which at its best, in reviews in the British trade and local press, was highly adulatory, suggesting that the novel was her best thus far, for its "readability" and for the immediacy of its reference to South African affairs: "This title ... is unquestionably the author’s most readable novel to date"; "Joy Packer offers an excellent novel which is at once a moving love story but so

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33 A similar negroidisation of the mixed-race character, Ben, in Packer’s first novel, Valley of the Vines (1955), also appears to function as emblematic "punishment," firstly for his physical flaw of deafness, and secondly for his addiction to alcohol and dagga (marijuana), deriving from the degeneration popularly assumed to result from "miscegenation." See Joy Packer, Valley of the Vines (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955) 205, and chapter 3, above.

34 Packer’s commentary in Home from Sea on the attempted assassination derives in part from her liberal opposition to apartheid politics: "As so often happens when violence is the weapon employed to serve an end, it defeats its own purpose. Dr. Verwoerd by his dignity and courage became an object of sympathy, and his 'miraculous' recovery undoubtedly increased his followers’ belief that he was a man of destiny divinely appointed and preserved to lead the country in her 'hour of liberation,' for it was thus that they regarded the coming birth of the Republic" (184).

35 Rev. of The Glass Barrier, by Joy Packer, Smith’s Trade News 9 Sept. 1961: n. pag. (original italics), NELM.
much more as well";36 "this sort of book makes 'international affairs' as real and immediate as television does";37 "many novels have been written around apartheid and the colour bar, but the convincing ones are those that carry these problems right into the home, into family life and familiar situations. Joy Packer manages to do just this,"38 and, most remarkably of all, "It is undoubtedly destined to rank high among the ranks [sic] of this century's controversial classics."39

In the case of her South African reviewers, a degree of reserve can be detected which probably stems from their greater familiarity with the material referents of the novel, though here the critical stances, while more developed, differ considerably from each other. Hence, J. P. L. Snyman, while condescendingly suggesting that "Lady Packer has proved an acquisition to South African writing," inaccurately concedes that she "deals realistically and objectively with South African affairs without allowing the background to interfere with her study of character."40 In contrast, Lucy Bean, in an otherwise complimentary review in the Cape Argus, succeeds in hinting at her own awareness of the significance of genre and ideology:

_The Glass Barrier_ is in many ways her best. Topical, completely contemporary, it reflects the restlessness and uncertainty of the times and tensions that bedevil relationships among people. . . . For foreign readers the novel gives a vivid and exciting picture of how well-to-do, kindly South Africans and their servants live in the dying days of the Cape semi-feudal system and in the dawn of the African emergence from tribalism. The view is tolerant and shines with goodwill towards all men [sic]. For South Africans unwilling to look into the mirror of their anxieties the book gives the vicarious pleasure of a holiday in the

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36 Rev. of _The Glass Barrier_, by Joy Packer, _Manchester Evening News_ 22 Nov. 1961: n. pag., NELM.
40 J. P. L. Snyman, "Joy Packer," (South African Writers 13), _Femina & Woman's Life_, 21 Nov. 1963: 97 (NELM). Snyman's opinion is more positively echoed by the review already referred to from the _Manchester Evening News_: "The author . . . makes valid if controversial—to some—observations of no small value in assessing the country's dilemma. It is all the more praiseworthy that this is achieved at no expense to an absorbing love tale."
Though unduly deflating the novel's engagement with the "other" South Africa(s), Bean's review, with its suggestion of a sense of the novel's formula-based orderliness where "incidents fall neatly into the plot," and its over-reliance on a *deus* (or *daemon*) *ex machina*, points towards the possibility of structural descriptions such as mine.

Nevertheless, my account of the novel also needs to take account of the desire of the novelist to write "truthfully" about her perception of the emotional and political realities of individuals in a real society. In addition to ignoring the narrative qualities of the novel, my description has thus far lacked a sense of the (in Packer's writing, often synonymous) personal and journalistic urgency of the moment of writing which survives in the published text. Her memoirs of that period reflect the violence engendering and engendered by transition, and openly discuss the fears she felt for her personal safety in encounters with individuals representing the black South African Other. Her summation of this process, though grounded in fear, is resolutely political in nature: "I had become acutely aware that the other half of our world lives too—and dimly aware of how it lives."42 In consequence, in addition to fear, Packer was able to record that as she continued to write *The Glass Barrier* "all the highlights of 1960—South Africa's year of fate—forced their way into my latest novel, and I found myself, against my will, reflecting the tragedy and tumult of a time of transition."43

The politically-motivated story—in a sense, the conventionally "masculine" aspect of the novel—cohabits, as if against the author's own desire, with the other, "feminine" facet of the novel which appears in the guise of the love story, also told by the I-narrator, Maxie Lamotte. The "romantic interest" of *The Glass Barrier* consists above all in Maxie's struggle to discover "love," which from the age of thirteen she has identified in the form and being of her cousin Simon. Simon's emotions, however, are primarily engaged not by Maxie but by his own step-sister—a liaison and eventual marriage which (unrealistically?) are calmly accepted by the couple's otherwise socially conservative parents.

Hence, the novel is, in part, a love story dependent on high melodrama of a kind which I have earlier suggested functions as a displacement of the more

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42 Packer, *Home from Sea* 188.
43 Packer, *Home from Sea* 167, my emphasis.
fundamental, racialised politics of human relations in South African society. However, despite the validity of such a reading, it is one which is in contention with—or, at best, ignores—a third alternative structuration of the novel, in which, in addition to its obvious binaries such as masculinity/femininity and social (racial, political)/private (racial, romantic), *The Glass Barrier* can also be seen to be attempting to conform to the conventions of the *Bildungsrroman*. In this respect it contains many perhaps superficial similarities to Nadine Gordimer's first novel, *The Lying Days* (1953). From an I-perspective it narrates the story of a white, anglophone, South African girl who between the ages of 13 and 21 has to learn to come to terms, firstly with an overwhelmingly complex emotional situation, and secondly with her personal economic and political present and future in a South Africa riven by violence perpetrated by one group against another. As we have seen, both hypothetically and in narrative practice, it is inevitable that all the terms of this personal quest have been racialised in the text, at the "deepest level" (to repeat my opening quotation from Gordimer) as much as at the surface.

It is, however, in its ending that the novel's ultimate ambivalence emerges. Maxie rejects her suitor, Jamie Vermeulen, the Afrikaner boy-next-door, and leaves South Africa itself for the classical tranquillity of Italy; the conservative-liberal Maxie cannot commit herself emotionally and materially to an Afrikaner whose personal and sociopolitical "instincts" are still too close to those of his forefathers, nor can she come to terms with a society which is perceived to be in the grip of violent conflict between racially-defined "radicals," the Afrikaner Establishment on the right and the "Pan-Africanists" on the left. Given the uncertainty of change under apartheid, the still-immature liberal alternative would appear to be self-imposed exile from emotional involvement and a diffusion of personal and national identity.44

5. **Veronica**

Like so many other South African novelists, Packer came eventually to write a novel of "miscegenation," though in Packer's case perhaps more than in many others she must have been aware that the ideas and emotions conveyed in the novel would be consumed by an international, "popular" readership extending

44 It is probably superfluous to point out that in the early 1960s, with the growing ascendancy of Afrikaner Nationalist policies, many white anglophone South African liberals, including Packer's own son and his family, were reacting similarly to this dilemma.
throughout the "white" Commonwealth and the USA, and in translation to much of Western Europe. The result, *Veronica*, was written, according to Packer's correspondence with her publishing agent in London, "quickly and compulsively with none of the usual doubts and agonies," an observation she repeated almost verbatim a fortnight later. A year before publication, *Veronica* had already become a novel which "for once in my life I have faith in . . . myself," and it remained her favourite to the end of her life.

The sources of the novel in Packer's own immediate South African experiences are not clear. Her collection of press-cuttings from this period suggests an interest on her part in the social and genetic effects of racial mixing, and to prove to her cautious British publisher that she had written on a marketable theme she despatched a batch of cuttings demonstrating that "the [South African] press is not muzzled on this subject." In the synopsis of the novel sent to her agent she claims that the, as yet, unfinished novel "is a very human story of a coloured girl, a young Englishman and the South African girl he marries caught up in the tragic machinery of the Immorality Act which in this country makes it a criminal offence to have any form of love across the colour bar, from an hour's casual amusement to marriage." Notably, however, the most recent version of the Immorality Act banning "unlawful carnal intercourse" or 'any immoral or indecent act' between a white person on the one hand and an African, Indian or Coloured on the other" had come into force in 1957, more than a decade before Packer undertook her literary protest against it, but in her correspondence she mentions no immediate reason for having taken up the topic (other than the continuation of the human injustice of the Act) nor any hint of a long gestation of the novel, which is announced to her agent in the tones of a surprising piece of news, as much for herself as for him. A key to Packer's

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45 It was not until the mid-1970s that any novel of Packer's appeared also in Japanese, resulting in good sales for *The Blind Spot*. See Joy Packer, letter to Gill Coleridge, literary agent, London, 6 May 1975 (NELM 1309/283).
46 Joy Packer, letter to John Smith, 22 March 1969 (NELM 1309/142).
47 "I have written this novel quickly and under strong compulsion" (Joy Packer, letter to John Bright-Holmes, 12 Apr. 1969, NELM 1309/414).
49 See Pamela Ruskin, "Man is Born to Fight and Love."
50 One of the cuttings is headlined "'Colour' Victims of a Genetic Coincidence: Why Some Whites have Dark Children" (n.p., n.d., NELM).
51 Joy Packer, letter to John Smith, 22 March 1969 (original emphasis).
discursive sources emerges, however, from the paradoxical detail that, while she was concerned (as I have noted earlier) that the novel might be open to banning in South Africa on political (rather than "pornographic") grounds, Packer's synopsis of the plot, quoted above, locates the "very human story" precisely in terms of the discourse of apartheid: juxtaposed to the young Englishman and the South African girl is a presumably stateless and apparently non-South African "coloured girl," Veronica.

Hence, Veronica, as well as being a novel by a South African writer participating in the amorphous racialised discourse referred to by Gordimer, also contains a self-consciously politicised racial message, one which Packer believed to participate in a recognisable community of articulated opposition to the dominant political voice of her time. Evidently she also believed that her discourse community, as it might be termed, would be articulate and powerful enough to protect her against the force of apartheid legislation. In effect, to restate Packer's position in "popular" terms, in writing and having Veronica published she was attempting to break the law—apartheid law—and to get away with it, as much as do the main characters in her novel.

The novel itself is eminently the story of a dystopic family. Much of its early focus falls on a businessman in his early twenties, a fresh British immigrant to 1960s South Africa, who prior to his marriage enjoys a sexual liaison with his "coloured" laundry-maid, Veronica, the daughter of a schoolteacher and part-time

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53 See Joy Packer, letter to John Bright-Holmes, 12 Apr 1969. Vernon February has listed some of the most celebrated rumours mocking the crassness of apartheid censorship: "Black Beauty, by Anna Sewell . . . was reported to have fallen foul of [the Publications and Entertainments Amendment Act] at one stage. Rumour also had it that Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native was also banned. Could it have been that the automatic translation of the title into Afrikaans as Die terugkeer van die Kaffers caused all the rumpus?" (V. A. February, Mind Your Colour: The "Coloured" Stereotype in South African Literature [London: Kegan Paul International, 1981] 132-33.

54 Perhaps coincidentally, Packer's memoir Apes and Ivory records that her "girl-gardener" in Simon's Town was named Veronica. Typically, however, since that Veronica was "a tall young Rhodesian," and therefore white, Packer does not categorise her racially, emphasising instead that she "carried herself with Olympian grace and wore a rope of sun-bleached hair twisted round her head like the golden laurel crown of Flora our figurehead. Her face was the more engaging for one platinum eyebrow and one brown." Also typically, Veronica's "real responsibility lay in keeping the five Bantu garden-boys [sic] at their job." Although the two Veronicas are linked by Packer's descriptions of their physical beauty, the racialised ambivalence of the fictional character evidently prevents Packer from making any reference in her later correspondence to her use of the name in the novel. See Joy Packer, Apes and Ivory (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953) 22.
"scholar and thinker" (62), Luther Arendse. Derek Symes is fully aware of the Immorality Act: "I'd been in South Africa long enough to realize the utter folly of what we'd been doing" (38), so that a six-month transfer from Cape Town to Johannesburg provides an escape from his "reckless double life in the Peninsula" (39). In Johannesburg he encounters his future fiancée and wife, Lindy van Vuuren, the "butter"-blonde, "smoky"-blue-eyed, "faintly-freckled" daughter of a conservative Cape Afrikaner doctor and his similarly pro-apartheid wife, Kate. The engagement of the couple is announced and the wedding already planned, when Derek is informed by a relative of Veronica's, Danie Jacobs, "a hunchback dwarf—a queer ugly little fellow who muttered to himself" (33), that Veronica has borne a son and needs financial assistance.

Danie's role as messenger—between the "coloured" world and the white—and, in effect, as procurer—between the white man and the "coloured" woman—subsequently increases with the intrigue of the plot, since, with the additional agency of a white South African friend, John Burford, a lawyer, Derek arranges a clandestine system for supporting the "coloured" son he has never seen. The melodrama attains momentum when, after several years of marriage, Derek's past is revealed to his wife by Veronica, who dreams of her "pass-for-white" son, Lex, breaking through the "barriers" of apartheid (240) by having him adopted by Derek and Lindy while Derek is on a two-year assignment to London. It is during the months following their return to Cape Town that all the subterfuge constructed to achieve this end swiftly unravels, since the two "communities," white and "coloured," remain inextricably interwoven economically, familially, and genetically. The story contrives its ultimate climactic pathos with the fatal injury of the now six-year-old child in a road accident, torn between his two mothers, "coloured" and white, and desperately trying to escape from the former to the latter when it is revealed to him that his racial and material origins are not what he thought.

In addition to the very obvious metonymy of the familial, racial and national

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55 The character's self-description (see Veronica 14); her stereotypical contrast is her own view of the "light skinned" Veronica whose "high aggressive breasts" and "protuberant buttocks straining at her short, tight skirt" are complemented by "glossy black hair," slim waist and slender legs. She is also "rather tall for one of her race," and has "good teeth—rare among the coloureds," and "only her soft full lips and small flattened nose betrayed her mixed ancestry" (9-11).

56 "Lex" in the novel is the familiar abbreviation of his full name, Alexander. It is unclear whether Packer intended any play on its coincidence with the Latin for "law," beyond the terms of which, under apartheid, Lex is conceived, adopted, and dies.
dystopias that Packer has used as the emotive site of her story, she has attempted to achieve what she considered objectivity by abandoning the conventional realistic narrative form of her earlier novels in favour of a story told from several perspectives, each of the 20 chapters being narrated by one of six of the characters involved in the story. The three main narrators are those most intimately embroiled in the melodrama—Lindy, Derek, and John Burford, their friend and lawyer—but not Veronica, since "the story is told through the eyes and pens of several of the characters and Veronica comes strongly through in each chapter. She never tells her own story. She is it."\(^{57}\)

Hence, Veronica’s "story" is narrated (with the additional though minor perspectives of the conservative Afrikaner, Kate van Vuuren, the middle-aged anglophone South African, Ann Seymour,\(^ {58}\) and Veronica’s father, Luther Arendse) almost exclusively from perspectives which, as a consequence of their racialised sources, are definably unreliable. Each voice is projected with characteristic differences, though it could be argued that the weakness of this kind of narrative strategy, despite its ambition to permit the construction of a liberal, democratic vision of many views on a single dilemma, consists in its tendency to propel the image of each voice towards stereotypical characterisation. Thus—to consider firstly Veronica’s three main spectators—Derek’s image tends to coalesce towards a stereotype of the Immature Young Englishman in South Africa with more sex than sense, though with a capacity for personal responsibility; Lindy’s individuality is swallowed up in the myth of Afrikaner Motherhood; and John Burford’s chivalrously concealed love for Lindy battles eternally but hopelessly with the dragon of jealousy at her marriage to Derek. In the case of Veronica’s three minor spectators, where the characters are constructed to project divergent socio-political views, the weakness also becomes more obvious. Hence, the

\(^{57}\) Joy Packer, letter to John Smith, 22 March 1969 (original emphasis). She later emphasises that she could not materially change any aspect of the novel, since "the story is not Lindy’s but Veronica’s" (Joy Packer, letter to John Bright-Holmes, 24 May 1969). At the same time, she demonstrates a contradictory detachment from the subject matter when, in a discussion of the problems of serialisation in the British weekly magazine, Woman, her response is entirely different: "I think it could be called Lindy and the emphasis shifted onto Lindy, leaving her the heroine. . . . All political angles would be cut" (Joy Packer, letter to John Smith, 27 May 1969, NELM 1309/420). In the event, the structure of the novel appears to have prevented serialisation.

\(^{58}\) Again, there may be some slight though unconfirmable reason to think that Packer intended an allegorical undertone in the homophonic Seymour/"see more." My reading of the white racist voyeurism which appears to be integral to the novel can be seen to be reinforced by such an analogy.
novelist's positioning of the "coloured" father, Luther Arendse, as the final narrator violates the novelist’s claim to impartiality, since Luther, in the novel’s logic, functions as a "coloured" whose culture is predominantly "white"—as Lindy, the liberal Afrikaner, concedes to Veronica, "You coloureds belong with us. . . . We [whites] in the Cape know that" (70). In consequence, the pressure towards a logical closure expressed in the language of the dominant ambient discourse of the novel rather than the taal of District Six proves irresistible, and the location of Veronica in her eponymous literary (rather than socio-political) context remains unexplained, since she is given no opportunity to present her story from her own perspective and in her own tongue.

At this point it becomes apparent that this novel of "miscegenation" has thrown up at least two significant by-products, both of which have a powerful tendency to work against the declared desire of the writer herself. Firstly, implicit in the role of each of the narrators, and emphatically in that played by John Burford, is a manifestation of racio-sexual voyeurism whose gaze is focused on Veronica and increasingly also on the product of Veronica’s and Derek’s outlawed union, Lex. Burford’s view of Veronica realistically constructs in the narrative an explicit racio-sexual stereotype which is ultimately dependent on the reader’s decoding of Burford himself as racist voyeur: "I watched her walk the little distance from the schoolhouse to her home, back straight, buttocks swaying. They can’t help it, they all have that special tart’s come-on wiggle, even the best of them. But I wasn’t thinking of her supple body then, I was thinking of her ravaged face when she spoke of the child and wept" (194). In his function as the intermediary he merely underscores this voyeuristic phenomenon, allied as it is with the frustration implicit in the gaze he also directs throughout the novel at Lindy and her relationship with her husband, Derek. That his gaze is transmuted by the narrator’s voice into masculine chivalry and personal loyalty can be read as a displacement, on the part of both the character and the novelist herself, of the less apparent function of that gaze. Hence, when Burford, in his "logical" role

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59 Packer has evidently also attempted to use one of the stereotypes associated with the "coloured" schoolmaster, namely his position of authority within his community; Giliomee and Schlemmer point out that by 1946, for want of any other large professionally-educated groups, leadership of the "coloured" community "was largely in the hands of the teachers" (From Apartheid to Nation-Building 26).

60 The Afrikaans language, literally "the language," though Packer invariably uses the term to refer to the "bastard Afrikaans" of the "Coloureds" (see, e.g., Valley of the Vines 11). Modern linguistic theory argues that the taal has developed from the mixed-race creolisation of Dutch rather than purely in the isolation of the white-skinned Boers themselves.
as lawyer and agent for the white couple visits the Arendse household in District Six in order to assess the credibility of Veronica’s claim for assistance in Lex’s upbringing, the function of the gaze he directs at the newborn baby is multiple:

I stepped to her side and looked down at the tiny head. The baby lay on his back, one diminutive hand was outside the blanket, the nails surprisingly rosy. The thick fluff of hair on the little head was dark auburn and the smooth skin of the face was pale like mutton-fat jade. The features were tiny and delicately carved. With a shock I realized that I was staring into the face of a European baby. (59)

The cloying repetition of tiny, diminutive, little, and again tiny—scarcely credible in its density as part of the masculine lexis of an unmarried, childless man—may serve to humanise Burford in the eyes of the novel’s intended readership, but the shock which he feels at the sight of the baby also functions in fulfilment of that same readership’s demand for visual confirmation of their expectations of the child’s racial identity. The tension and appeal of the novel resides overwhelmingly in the supposed confusion and ambiguity of a child engendered by a "white" man and a "coloured" woman, that is, the reader is inevitably cajoled and drawn by the novelist into the same racially-defined frame as the one she has created for Burford and the other characters within the novel itself—a frame defined ultimately by apartheid. It is, then, a mere irony of the novel’s narrative logic that, in employing a lawyer as intermediary agent (and intermediary voyeur), it projects a character who, for all his sympathetic features, is given to play a role which echoes and blends with the apartheid state’s legislated white assessment of "coloured" identity under the Population Registration Act of 1950. (The same, of course, holds also for the other white assessments of Veronica and Lex, though to a slightly less emphatic extent than for Burford’s.)

The second contradictory by-product of the novel exists in its omission of a narratorial perspective whose role might have been at least as significant as any of the others’ for the balance it could have supplied. While Veronica and her father may be defined by their white voyeurs according to their "colour" and social roles as essentially static entities, the focus is thrown into imbalance by the exclusion from the role of narrator of Danie Jacobs, the "hunchback dwarf" who operates as "coloured" agent. His most notable feature is his physical deformity, a formulation which—apart from its occurrence in other areas of literary tradition—in the South African context brings Packer precariously close to concurring in the Millinesque creed of the inevitability of degeneration resulting
from racial mixing.

The disruption Danie contributes to the story is more than simply blackmail; he serves as the activator of Lex's racial memory—specifically in the features of the "coloured" home Lex has inhabited with Veronica for his first four years, but also in terms of the whole "coloured" area of District Six which functions metonymically for the racial group as a whole. While in London, and again after his return to live in white Cape Town, Lex is repeatedly seen by his narrators as (according to Lindy) "by instinct and habit . . . a child of the streets," and (according to Derek) "a child of the city and the street by instinct" (157), an emphatic aspect of the "dark introspective side of him we can't reach. The other is pure sunshine" (158, my emphasis). When, therefore, Danie plans to help Lex remember his past (183), the invasion of Lex's suppressed memory is devastating (if stiltedly expressed):

[Danie:] "These are your real folk. This is where you belong."
[Lex:] "No! No! My grandpa is white, my mother is white. This is a coloured person's home! I want my mother, I want my own mother! I won't go with you to any other room in this house!" (214)

While entirely credible that a child would suffer shock at the blow to its sense of identity, and fear the threat of removal to an environment marked by poverty, violence and deprivation, perhaps the most revealing aspect of this episode is the degree to which the novelist believes that the perspective of a six-year-old child, even one designated as South African and as "pass-for-white," will be so completely racialised.

In addition to the "realistic" details of Danie's increasing dependence on dagga (marijuana) and alcohol (which logically contribute to his disruptive function in the plot, since the cost of his addictions motivates him to attempt to extort money by blackmail from the Symes family), he is attributed explicitly with a "normal" heterosexual capacity. As if to draw on the common white racist myths of the irresponsible fecundity and unfastidious sexual nature of the "coloureds," Danie has a wife who has borne him five children—and, in addition to his growing rapaciousness, it is his drug- and alcohol-enhanced attempt at rape which motivates Veronica to stab him to death in the aftermath of Lex's fatal accident. The murder, which is willingly concealed as self-defence by the lawyer, Burford, as a means of protecting Lindy rather than Veronica, appears to bear a multiplicity of functions. At the surface level of the narrative it functions as justifiable revenge, while at another level it may be read as the eradication of
familial and social disorder. As a largely unintentional sub-narrative, however, Danie's death may also be regarded as an unformulated attempt by Veronica to destroy the living, physical evidence embodied in Danie's twisted, foreshortened body of the racist myth of the degeneration inherent in "mixed blood." That Lex fails to live to produce evidence of that degeneration in his own potential offspring—a fear constantly repeated by the novel's white narrators—may, in the idiolect of the novel, be counted both a conveniently tied "loose end" and a "blessing in disguise."

6. Conclusions
As I have noted elsewhere in relation to The Blind Spot, Packer's novels conceal both an intentional and an unintentional subnarrative. Story after story earnestly depicts "love" under contemporary apartheid, and an intentional subnarrative concerns itself with a liberal presentation of the pros and cons of a multiracial society. However, a writer such as André Brink—whose earlier novels depend to a major extent on the formulae of popular fiction, and who therefore should know—has argued the apparent impossibility of writing a "simple love story" under apartheid. His own response to the challenge, he claims, was to write States of Emergency (1988), a novel which, according to Brink's own summary, is about "a man who tries to write a book to find out whether he can write a book about love while living in a society disrupted and maimed by apartheid, [but who] abandons the writing of his book, which tends to suggest that such an endeavour is impossible. Yet my own novel is there—which tends to suggest the opposite" (10). Brink's subsequent novel, The First Life of Adamastor, marks (in literary terms) a more radical attempt at achieving the same through blending elements of African orature with those of the Western literary tradition.

Unlike Brink, Joy Packer, as a writer of (on one level) conventional romantic stories, has little room for the complex strategies of metafiction or reconstructed orature to achieve a critical distance from the emotional and ethical conundrums thrown up by apartheid. While the majority of her novels function, albeit uneasily, as an amalgam of romance and political commentary, at the touch

of the metafictional, for instance, they would, one might predict, have shrivelled and their readership have fled. In addition, sexuality, which can be assumed to play an integral role in any love story, remains a problem in Packer's novels which may appear to be addressed by the text, but never tolerated, explored, or condoned beyond the bounds imposed by contemporary, white, South African, middle-class, heterosexual mores. The resolutions of both of these novels are remarkable, in fact, for their reliance on opportune but emotive deaths which permit the dominant mores to remain uncha(lle)nged.

Hence, while novels such as *The Glass Barrier* and *Veronica* function not simply as love stories but as politicised critiques of incest, ethnicity and miscegenation in South African settings, their commitment to constructing that narrative critique is ultimately dominated and distorted by the logic of the popular romantic genre, which demands a narrative closure which is both conventionally and emotionally restricted—as Cawelti has pointed out—to a final restoration and reassertion of the status quo. As Dorothy Driver has pointed out, however, given the politicisation of all intimate human relationships governed by apartheid legislation, "normal" fictional closures became distorted. Since Packer's settings are framed solely within the genre-specific parameters of the white South African family, when the (white) family is threatened with permanent dystopia, the *a priori* logic of the popular romantic novel genre demands a positive, healing resolution, which in every case can only involve the expulsion of the intrusive, dystopic agent, the bearer of "bad blood," rather than the creation of any other more radical resolution.

In some cases that agent is minor: deafness can be cured by sophisticated Western medical science (*Boomerang*), and madness can be diagnosed as non-hereditary rather than congenital (*The Man in the Mews*). People can be


65 In a remarkable piece of dialogue placed authoritatively in the mouth of a white South African character, Packer suggests, perhaps unwittingly, that racial "black blood" is as much a congenital flaw as hereditary madness: "'Dammit, we know in this country [South Africa] what black blood can do to a family. It's always there, ready to come out, it may skip generations and then suddenly there's a dark one—one you can't mistake. *It must be the same as other inherited features* [my emphasis]. How can Rachel [the heroine] have children—knowing who her father was—*what he was*? How can she risk transmitting that sort of madness to her descendants?'" (*The Man in the Mews* 175). The perspective is, of course, dominated by that of Packer's discourse environment, apartheid.
expelled beyond the borders of the Republic of South Africa if their "bad blood" involves the taint of too radical or revolutionary an ideology, or the taint, simply, of being black (The Blind Spot). Children can also, if really necessary, be expelled from life itself, if, as in the case of Veronica, death can resolve the dilemma of a novelist who would otherwise be left with a mixed-race child on her hands in 1960s apartheid Cape Town.

In this light, The Glass Barrier is perhaps more complex. The future, in this novel's terms, lies in the attenuated narrative hope of romantic union between the anglophone businesswoman Maxie Lamotte and the Afrikaner farmer Jamie Vermeulen. Its subnarratives, however, reveal a racialised and sexualised paranoia which, in Tim Rackett's terms, indeed "works to decompose its subject," the white racist who, in attempting to erect the apparently "known" "coloured" community as a barrier against the depredations of the unknown black Other, is willing to dispel white familial dystopia by sacrificing both the white patriarch (Maxie Lamotte's father) and the white mother and unborn child (Maxie Lamotte's cousin) in order to maintain its "illusions of mastery and dominance."
Chapter Five
Marital Parricide
*The High Roof; The Blind Spot*

The scene of writing and of reading is, like the grave, a private place.¹
There is no private life in South Africa; all privacy is the small version
of what is writ large out there.²

1. *Fictional Fatalities*

Where many of the critics of Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* may still agree is with
her apparently uncomplicated assertion that "patriarchy’s chief institution is the
family. It is both a mirror and a connection with the larger society; a patriarchal
unit within a patriarchal whole." She expands on this axiom with the now
familiar claim that "co-operation between the family and the larger society is
essential, else both would fall apart,"³ although here the limitations of Millett’s
conceptualisation have been revealed by intervening changes in our understanding
of the developing identities of "family" and "society." Despite this constant
mutability of norms, the value of Millett’s critique in the present context, given
her contemporaneity with Joy Packer, is in no way depreciated: in most respects
the two writers participate in a shared range of family- and society-related
expectations which fundamentally informs their respective literary tasks.

Indeed, my argument in this chapter is based on the observation that one of
Packer’s most unvarying narrative strategies consists of attempts to test Millett’s
dictum to its limit. She creates fictional melodramas which centre not only on
familial relationships under stress but also on the ways in which familial survival
under such conditions becomes and remains emblematic of her conceptualisation
of a contemporary South African identity. Inevitably, therefore, her fictions
contain and reveal a constant historical specificity which, as I have argued earlier,
has on one level contributed to their popular ephemeralità—it is, in fact, a
specificity which differs in few respects from other contemporaneous South
African writing which cannot be classified, like Packer’s, as part of the
internationally marketed popular genre.

Thus, if the basic validity can be assumed of the criticism of patriarchy as

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Cf. also: "There is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life" (George
a principle whereby, in Millett's terms, "male shall dominate female; elder male shall dominate younger" (25), the broad aim of the analysis contained in the present chapter is not to demonstrate the historical patriarchal foundations or superstructure of Packer's South African environment, which are assumed to be both self-evident and also well-documented elsewhere, but to reveal significant aspects of the phenomenon of patriarchy in both its gendered and its generational forms as it occurs in her writing.

In this connection, the generic form, or forms, of Packer's melodramas also becomes significant. Firstly, her novels are, in general, popular romances of conventional familial relationships, including courtship, marriage, parenthood and childhood: though few of her characters are at the conventionally dependent stage of childhood, their emotional and/or economic dependency on their elders in young adulthood is often marked. Given the intimacy of such relationships, descriptions of sexual behaviour are, almost without exception, discreetly brief, unphysical, obscure, of a kind similar to that demanded editorially by Mills and Boon until only recently. When instances of sexual experience emerge with greater frequency in her novels of the 1960s and 1970s, no doubt in (perhaps partial) tune with the accumulating latitude in Western culture in individual mores, for her female protagonists in particular to entertain the possibility of premarital sexuality they must already have crossed (or have intended to cross) the threshold of formal engagement to marry. At the same time, with equal predictability, extramarital sexuality is without exception made emblematic of a more general personal immorality, though also with transparently wider, sometimes derivative, significances for the social and political ramifications of the narrative as a whole.

Secondly, however, it can be posited that throughout Packer's fiction familial—including sexual—relationships are linked in an almost consanguineous relationship with violent death. An exception may, arguably, appear in her first novel, Valley of the Vines, where the main, though by no means only, death is that in old age of the protagonist's grandmother-by-adoption, but even here death occurs in the aftermath of violence occasioned by a member of her quasi-feudal household, which functions in effect as an extended family, the death itself marking the essential shift from an outdated feudal society at the Cape to the new capitalist order of 1950s South Africa. In brief, the frequency of violent and dramatic death in intimate, domestic, familial locations suggests that, although by

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no means all of her fictional deaths are legally definable as murder, Packer might almost be read as a crime writer manquée. Her protagonists function as witnesses to mortal crimes and near-crimes within, or in the proximity of, their families which are perpetrated by characters filling the superficial formulaic categories so convenient to romantic melodrama of deranged wives and social misfits (the two are often synonymous)—in the latter category, notably mediated fictionally as blacks, "Coloureds," and Afrikaners and deculturated English-speakers from the Transvaal, whose presence in the Cape is seen as familially and socially intrusive, disruptive, and potentially destructive.

There is little originality in the adoption of an element of crime fiction for novels whose main narrative intentions lie palpably outside, or beyond, the expectations of that particular genre; as Jon Thompson has pointed out, "literature has contained themes of detection at least as far back as Oedipus," whilst the specialised detective novel, which he describes as the "paradigmatic crime-fiction form," is, in comparison, a mere innovation. In an article entitled "In Pursuit of the State: Uses of the Detective Novel Form in Recent South African Fiction," Susan Thornton has usefully pointed out that in some cases "South African writers, writing out of the discomfort and oppression of their conditions, have taken the detective novel and given it an unusual twist. . . . They explode the form to create powerful, disturbing fictions" (29). She then proceeds to describe the "explosions" occasioned in André Brink's A Dry White Season (1979), Alex la Guma's Time of the Butcherbird (1979), and J. M. Coetzee's Age of Iron (1990).

Assuming for the present argument the terms "detective novel" and "crime fiction" to be broadly synonymous, the value of Thornton's discussion rests in particular in her single, genre-centred observation that whereas "in the tradition of the detective novel, knowledge is potentially, never actually, fatal, . . . [i]n fictions by these South African writers, knowledge is almost certainly fatal, and there is no assurance that the protagonist will survive" (29). In the place of closures which logically predicate the conventional restoration of order at the end of most crime fictions, these novels are, according to Thornton, "doubly disturbing" (29) since the demise of their protagonists is accompanied by "the

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uncomfortable knowledge [for the reader] that the state is responsible for all of these deaths" (30). Whether it is the protagonist or the reader who functions in the main role as "detective" in search of the "truth," the discovery is finally the "existential knowledge that action in the world [of these novels] is futile" (32). This, as Thornton points out, is the inverse of the closure of conventional detective novels.

If, then, my reading of many of Packer's novels as, in part, quasi-crime fictions is to be maintained, Thornton's suggestion will provide a partial template for comparison. At the same time, it is predictable that some of the distinctions to be drawn between Packer's writing and that of writers like Brink, La Guma and Coetzee will be further emphasised, since her closures, with few if any real exceptions, obey the similar parallel logic of popular romance, which requires the orderly culmination of its processes in the achievement or reaffirmation of marriage. Hence, it may be suspected that it is particularly in the necessary convention of their logical romantic closure that her fictions shy away from the implications of endemic familial and social violence, and restoration from an impending disintegrative closure (more typical of, say, Brink, La Guma, or Coetzee) is achieved.

Nevertheless, despite the soothing, restorative role of closure required and predetermined by the genre, in all of Packer's romantic fictions death remains an important and unavoidable disruptive constant. From Valley of the Vines, where it marks a fictionalised transposition of white South Africa from a feudal past to a new age of capitalism, to the posthumous The Dark Curtain,7 in which the novelist herself is sacrificed according to the "timeless" ritual of Africa, death repeatedly acts as both agent and emblem of change which, while presented within the commonsense and emotive terms of marriage and the family, extends outwards from the family to exploit the metonymic link between family and society posited by Millett.

Further, Packer's partial fictional resistance to patriarchy may be detected in the generalisation that a significant majority of her mortal victims—though by no means all subject to criminal attack rather than accident—are not only familial but male: husbands, fathers, sons, lovers.8 It may, therefore, be hypothesised in the broadest terms that, for Packer's female protagonists to achieve full fictional

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8 Exceptionally, in The Dark Curtain, as I shall discuss later, the most prominent death is that of the protagonist's aunt doubling in the role of the writer's self.
identity, at least one representative of patriarchal order has to be mortally eliminated before narrative closure can be satisfactorily achieved.

Within this broad frame, several of Packer's fictions contain an idiosyncratic foregrounding that amounts almost to an obsession: the portrayal of marital relationships between partners of different ages, where the marriage itself has to act as a linking span between recognisably different generations. Like much of Packer's writing, the idea sprang from her own experience, although self-evidently the resultant novels bear little, if any, resemblance to the detail of her own life, other than a firm grounding in the minutiae of the domestic and professional lives of white, middle-class, South African women and men living, supposedly, at the Cape in the 1950s and 1960s. In *Valley of the Vines*, for example, where the idea is largely peripheral, the protagonist rejects one older suitor for another still older (in this case, a widower whose unsatisfactory wife conforms to the laws of popular romantic narrative by absenting herself conveniently from the story firstly by an obsessive, "unfeminine" devotion to her career, and ultimately by suicide), whilst *Leopard in the Fold*, in contrast, uses a wide disparity in age between a female character and her chronically ill husband to motivate his murder at her hands, thereby facilitating access to his wealth and her lover (again, a cautionary tale employing Packer's favourite formula contrasting right- and wrong-headed and -hearted romance).

Where these ideas come fully to the fore is in two of her more ambitious novels, *The High Roof* (1959) and *The Blind Spot* (1967), which foreground, respectively, the dilemmas of youth and advancing age experienced by the young husband and the aging wife, and the young wife and the aging husband, while remaining acutely aware of the ways in which these aspects of private life mesh with aspects of that "great experiment," apartheid. Written with an evident awareness of the requirements of their initial publication in serialised format, *The

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9 As indicated in my chapter on "Autobiography," the difference between Packer's age and that of her husband (the elder of the two), whom she consistently referred to affectionately as "Unkie" (Uncle) because "he made me feel safe" (*Deep as the Sea* 19), was some 10 years. Both offspring of the British Empire at its height, the formative periods of their early adulthood can be seen to differ considerably, between active naval service in the First World War on the one hand, and, in Packer's case, studenthood, marriage and migration in the midst of the "flapper" years of the 1920s; for Packer's biographical portrait of her husband, see Joy Packer, *Deep as the Sea* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1975).


High Roof and The Blind Spot are pure soap, both permitting the reader’s attention to be sustained at length by the development not of a single heterosexual relationship but of three, interwoven and undergoing tests of endurance whose moments of intensity peak and trough at appropriately spaced intervals.

A major part of the popular appeal of both narratives is their construction of a generational contrast between two relationships, where each situation is complicated by the conventional young female protagonist’s widowed parent having re-married, with the new partner being noticeably closer in age to the protagonist than to the protagonist’s parent. This is very much the stuff of romantic melodrama; through such constructs, the novelist is able to explore the conflicts aroused by the senior marital partners’ consciousness of physical aging and psychological maturation, a consciousness which has been heightened by remarriage to partners a generation younger than themselves. This inter-generational conflict is both personal and sociopolitical: inevitably the junior partners view their own sexuality and also their social environment from existential perspectives which differ from those of their aging spouses.

At the same time, the ostensible protagonists (the conventional heroines whose stories illustrate the progress of modern courtship into marriage with their age-peers) supply the plot with the romantic elements expected by the kind of readership analysed at length by Janice A. Radway.13 Radway emphasises that where the "ideal romance symbolically represents female needs within the story and then depicts their successful satisfaction, it ratifies and confirms the inevitability and desirability of the entire institutional structure within which these needs are created and addressed" (138). As will become apparent, however, from analyses of the two selected novels, their protagonists’ stories are to a large extent marginalised, in the first place, by those of the (step-)parents, which are complicated in part by the personal existential gulf opened up by age and in part by their differing experiences of apartheid society. In addition, however (as will become apparent in the course of the following discussion of the two novels), this reading of the "counter-marriages" will also, in the light of the crime-related elements in both novels, tend to be shown to be partially incomplete and in some senses distorted.

My hypothesis here is based on the common observation that the institutional superstructure of private life under apartheid, also for the "white"

population group in whose defence it was erected, was demonstrably remote from the "inevitability" or "desirability" posited by Radway as the perceived ideal institutional structure within which the female romantic protagonist can operate. Since apartheid legislation (notably the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Immorality Amendment Act of 1957, but also the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act of 1950) represented a massive intrusion into the sexual and marital sphere, affecting both private choice and public expression of that choice, there is no way in which a writer like Packer could have attempted to construct a credibly realistic conventional romance within a contemporary South African setting without foregrounding the fundamental contradictions and injustice of such legislation and of the society which it was intended to structure. On this issue Packer was (in part, in the face of the hostility of the South African régime to domestic criticism of apartheid, though undoubtedly also to preserve her South African market) somewhat evasive in interview immediately prior to first publication of *The High Roof*: "'My novel does not concern itself ostensibly with apartheid, because I am not trying to plead a cause, but chiefly to entertain my readers. But one cannot write about South Africa without our racial problems cropping up.'"¹⁴ That the foregrounding of the deleterious human effects of apartheid was, despite her protestations to the contrary, a major part of Packer's intentions is especially apparent in *The High Roof*, though in this novel and, more especially, in *The Blind Spot* contradictions between content and generic context arise which become insuperable.

It is apparent throughout this study of Packer's writing, and particularly so in the case of *The High Roof* and *The Blind Spot*, that each novel consists of what may be thought of as the "ordinary" and the "un-ordinary." In Caweltian terms, the ordinary is the stereotypical, the formulaic, the melodramatic.¹⁵ In the structuring of much of their stories, characters and domestic settings, for example, Packer's romances adhere to the familiar generic archetypes repeatedly drawn on in post-1945 popular fiction, and as I have demonstrated elsewhere with regard to *The Blind Spot* its romantic plot can be summarised coherently without any reference at all to its localisation within a specifically (South) *African* setting.¹⁶

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That her interests led her to incorporate elements from the formulae of popular crime fiction tends to reinforce this view of her dependence on the formulaic; Packer's fictions, in this sense, are typical of the hybridity of modern Western popular culture.17

This description, as I have also noted earlier, must nevertheless be reviewed within the broader function of popular fiction. In this respect, commentary frequently points out that the role of the genre as "entertainment" is routinely complemented by its didactic function. As Radway and other critics of the genre have noted, its readership expects to find pleasure and diversion away from the mundane, but also to receive suggestions as to how the mundane can be endured, ameliorated, enhanced, and sometimes changed.18 When, therefore, a novelist like Packer "discusses," for example, the topic of marriage from the perspective of the interrelational stresses occasioned by generational differences between partners, she is providing the "ordinary" service expected of the popular novelist, of educator, advisor, and moralist. The integrity of her combination in the narrative (and in the emerging sequence of her narratives) of these roles of storyteller and didact will be measured by the response of her readership.

Where Packer's fiction displays its "un-ordinariness," then, is in the manner in which, as I have argued earlier, it may be viewed as an extension of the kind of ephemeral journalistic writing which she had learnt and practised extensively in her earlier years in Cape Town, London, and the Far East, and in wartime radio and press propaganda. In fiction after fiction she localises the ordinary; that is, she links the formulaic, the pleasurable and the didactic with what must be termed the journalistic, locating the "human stories" within the "actual," creating structured fictional narratives out of the specific, headline-grabbing personal and social dilemmas thrown up by the extra-ordinary conditions imposed by apartheid. (From the 1950s onwards, Packer collected and collated press-

135. It must be pointed out that my view of The Blind Spot in that article (heavily influenced by my reading of South African masculine adventure fiction) as a form of covert "apartheid propaganda" (135) has since undergone some modification.

17 See Thompson, Fiction, Crime, and Empire 4.

18 In addition to Radway's Reading the Romance, see, for example, John Sutherland, Bestsellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s (London: Routledge, 1981) 34; and Geoffrey Beattie, "The Mirror Cracked," The Listener, 29 Sept. 1988: 24-25.

19 This term has been borrowed from Tim Couzens's description of the relocation and updating of myths and stereotypes in modern South African re-workings of nineteenth-century colonial adventure stories, i.e., it has temporal as well as spatial dimensions. See Tim Couzens, "The Return of the Heart of Darkness," English Academy Review, Nov. 1982: 49.
cuttings reporting on contemporary South African social and racial problems, as potential source materials for her writing.\textsuperscript{20}

In sum, given Packer's overt awareness of her contemporary society as acutely dysfunctional, her fictions focusing on dysfunctional marriages within such an environment would appear, in the light of Radway's analysis, to be exceptionally appropriate discursive areas for such an exploration. The main purpose of this chapter remains, therefore, to consider the ways in which Packer's romantic fiction explores the often violent crises of identity experienced by women and often also men living within a patriarchally-defined society.

2. \textit{The High Roof}

The marital romance functioning as the frame for the narrative of the "ordinary" in \textit{The High Roof} is that of Kirsten (or "Kit") de Vries, a young, anglophone South African woman from the Cape, who on a stormy flight into Cape Town遇ounters Michael ("Mike") Day, a British Anglo-Dutch businessman whose masculine role is that of incoming local representative of his mother's family whaling and shipping company. Their relationship blossoms swiftly into marriage, domesticity, maternity, Kit in due course giving birth to twins, a boy and a girl.

In outline, therefore, the Western, middle-class conjugal norms are fulfilled according to stereotypes whose conventionality and familiarity allow any eventual disruption in the marriage to be read with the heightening of emotional sensibility that marital melodrama requires and yet also with the reader's (temporarily suppressed) acquiescence in the preconception (as articulated by Kate Millett, above) that this kind of marriage is and remains the norm, a symbol of the private equilibrium on which the social order ultimately rests. Hence, the rift which separates the couple for a time, while dramatic, is known by the reader to be other than final. Its impetus is a disease afflicting their male twin, which to save his life requires the excision firstly of one eye and then of the second. When Mike, his father, unwilling to accept the blinding (in effect, of course, the emasculation) of his male child, delays the second operation in order to consult an optical specialist in London, the imperial metropolis, his son's death results in the parents' separation, Kit staying on to work in London while Mike sails off in a whaler to the ice and isolation of Antarctica. Where the popular didactic message

\textsuperscript{20} Many of these are preserved in the Packer archives at the National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown.
of the novel emerges, then, is in the story of the ways in which wife and husband acquire an emotional understanding of each other’s reaction to the death of their son and the conflicting human motivations of its circumstances.

While the marriage of Kit and Mike is an "ordinary" tale of immature suffering succeeded by maturation resulting in reconciliation, that of Kit’s mother, Terry, and her second husband, Pierre Delaporte, who is twelve years her junior, assumes an entirely different "ordinary" role in the narrative. Tensions between the two are several: though Terry has re-married at 38 and at the opening of the novel is only four years older, for unstated clinical reasons she is unable to bear any further children, and her days are filled with the dilemmas involved in preserving her marriage by delaying the onset of the physical signs of middle age; the culmination of her quest is a face-lift undergone clandestinely while on a visit to Europe.

Her husband, Pierre, meanwhile, lives in a marital limbo, the subject of an existence carefully crafted, structured, and financed by his wife. When Terry visits Europe, purportedly in an attempt to bring about a reconciliation between Kit and Mike but in fact for her face-lift, Pierre’s frustrations find their release in an affaire with Terry’s alter ego, her niece Lois de Vries, and the marriage begins to unravel.

The preoccupation of the narrative with the origins and effects of marital instability resulting from generational differences erupts with crude vigour prior to Terry’s departure, in a domestic scene where Pierre expresses his concern about Lois’s safety, since she is working as an investigative journalist on stories concerned with social and racial injustice:

Pierre rose without another word and went into the house. He wore only his bathing trunks, and his body—pale olive skin and strong limbs—still shone from the water. Lois’s eyes followed him. He moved with fluid strength. It was animal, that lithe restless grace, like his moments of frozen stillness.

When he returned he was carrying something in his hand, something that caught the light. He went to Lois and squatted down by her on the grass.

"This’ll be protection for you. You needn’t load it. You’d better not, though I’ll give you some cartridges for it."

"Your revolver!" Terry gasped.

"I’m lending it to Lois," he said. "There’s no need to change the licence."

Lois took the little weapon from him. It was warm from his
palm, light, as such things go, easy to slip into a handbag. She held it at arm's length and closed her left eye while she sighted along the barrel with the other. He was surprised.

"You know how to use it?" . . .

"Dad has a revolver," she said. "But not the same as this one. Show me how to load it."

"It's a five-shooter," he said. "See, this is how you load, cock and unload." (92)

The scene contains an obvious and simplistic symbolism based on common stereotypes; further, it signals a more extensive implication that "unlicensed" sexuality may be closely allied with a potential for violence which derives not simply from the male but more closely, from husbands and fathers.

In addition, Packer appears to be including an overt message about the dangers of endogamy. In a white South African context, the dictionary definition is particularly appropriate: "marriage within one's own tribe," raising implications of the psychological and social threat inherent in the incestuous relationships engendered within the closed and genetically self-contained space which, according to apartheid, should be inhabited by the whites in isolation from the degenerative influence of other racially-defined groups. The spectre of incest is also omnipresent in Packer's predilection for the father/daughter, mother/son marital and quasi-marital paradigms which, as I have noted, recur throughout her fiction.

Initially, however, it would seem that it is exogamy which poses the greater threat. The Anglo-Afrikaans South African, Kit de Vries, marries a foreigner (admittedly of English and Dutch parentage, as Mike Day underlines in their initial mid-air encounter), and although their first marital argument focuses with some realism on their differing cultural and social preconceptions, the greater threat to their marriage is the gap created by differences which, ultimately, are gender- rather than culture-based. This becomes most apparent in the course of their struggle to decide on the best course to take in the treatment of their son's eye disease, when male and female (and paternal and maternal) expectations are portrayed as instinctively and innately different, the male concerned with the male victim's loss of his freedom of action, and the female with the continuation of his

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22 See The High Roof 10, 74-75.
ability to live and adapt, especially within familiar *domestic* environments.23

Like the Day's marriage, that of Terry and Pierre Delaporte is exogamous, as Kit points out to Mike: "'Anybody from outside is a foreigner in the [Cape] Peninsula—even Pierre, who comes from Johannesburg'" (75); Pierre's name is also undoubtedly intended to indicate his Huguenot rather than Dutch ancestry. Nevertheless, despite its exogamy their "counter-marriage" fails, and it does so partly on account of its sterility (both procreative and socioeconomic), but also in large measure because of the shared genetic and temperamental inheritance of the aunt and her niece, Lois, whose origins are emphatically *endogamous*:

"'[Kit's] father and mine [Lois’s] were identical twins. . . . Our mothers were cousins," she said. 'Did you know that? Our fathers evidently had the same taste in women'" (86). Hence, according to the logic of the novel, Pierre, frustrated by unfulfilled fatherhood and against his better moral judgment, succumbs to a generation-younger physical and psychological imitation of the woman he has married, with fatal consequences.

The third component of Packer's examination of South African marriage in *The High Roof* underlines the degree to which she has evidently intended to politicise this otherwise ordinary popular romance. While the two marriages already described might have constituted the main components of a popular romance set in any Western society, the story of the "Coloured" whalerman, Bok McKierie and his love for Lily Laguna arguably seeks to achieve an "explosion" of the formulaic romantic novel similar to that detected elsewhere by Susan Thornton (see above), by subverting the love story's normally predictable patterning of its formulaic components. For here, in the South African love story, the barrier to emotional fulfilment consists, not of emotional incompatibility or difference in age or an inability or reluctance to procreate, but of legislation based upon an ideology of race.

As Packer later points out in her fourth volume of memoirs, *Home from Sea*,24 "Bok Makierie [sic], the young Coloured whalerman, sailed off with my third novel, *The High Roof*. He not only absorbed me as a personality but he came to symbolize the frustrations of his people. . . . His life was conditioned by the limitations of apartheid. . . . I learned a great deal from Bok" (130).

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23 These reflect the often-cited stereotypical distinctions made between the "masculine" novel of adventure and the "feminine" novel of romance; see, for example, Batsleer et al. in section 2 of my first chapter.

Apart from his periodic employment on whaling expeditions, Bok is well-known to the Delaporte and Day households for the practical tasks he performs, and for his ambition to marry the "borderline Coloured" factory-worker, Lily, the exogamous offspring of a mixed-race mother and an Italian: "She was what the Coloured people termed 'fair,' with a light skin the shade of an autumn oak-leaf, warm and pale with a hint of gold in it. Her eyes were strange and made a man look twice and three times and lose himself in looking. One was grey and the other brown. . . [and her] hair was straight and coppery" (63). When Bok returns from a whaling trip undertaken to help finance his ambition, he finds that Lily has won classification as White, but she agrees to his plan that they should emigrate to England, where their different race classifications would not prevent them from marrying. Refused help by a white acquaintance with the cost of emigrating, Bok decides to steal Lois's pay packet from her rooftop apartment, but while he is still trying to persuade her to open her wall-safe, Pierre enters and is fatally wounded by Bok with his own revolver. Bok subsequently dies while attempting to evade capture, falling from a high place on Table Mountain; but not in vain. While Lily Laguna is left with only the consolation of her "pass-for-White" identity, and Lois's duplicity is punished by means of banishment to the harsher professional world of Johannesburg, the Delaporte-De Vries family crisis is resolved in the crime's aftermath by the reunion of Kit and Mike, with an additional reassuring gesture towards an eventual relationship for a chastened Terry with a faithful male admirer of similar years to her own.

That Packer was intent on creating a hybrid between the popular romance and the "serious" protest novel becomes apparent once more in the final pages of the novel, where Kit and Mike are observed by a "Coloured" fisherman walking along a wintry beach at dusk: "He saw their footprints in the sand, the large and the small, side by side, separate and distinct. . . . 'They've quarrelled, man,' he said to his dog. 'Shame!'" (283). In the following pages the conventional closure produces the requisite reconciliation of the estranged wife and husband, and when next, in the novel's closing lines, the fisherman sees their footprints, their significance for the wider intentions and implications of the novel appear to be signalled by a reiterative lexical redundancy: "The tide rose and washed away the footprints in the sand. But they had been there; merging, stopping, continuing reluctantly upon their way, no longer separate and apart. Lovers' tracks" (288, my emphases), echoing the apartness of apartheid, and the separateness of apartheid's euphemistic "separate development." Progress away from the dysfunctional society, the novel of romance appears to say, will be found
somewhere in the non-racial freedom to love and in the assimilation of disparate cultures to each other, although the unintended implication remains that in the process of locating that freedom the ambivalence of both the racial prominence and the social marginality of the "Coloured" story will continue.

3. The Blind Spot

For her sixth novel, into an idyllic Cape setting of terraced gardens surrounding a fourth-generation mansion Packer inserts a formula-laden plot which might be summarised in terms of (para-)sexual rivalry and parental sentiments and responsibilities ("para-sexual" indicating the non-sexual role of wife-substitute played by the conventional protagonist, Claire Hammond, after the death of her mother). The idyll—of the setting, the family and, by analogy, of South Africa—is broken on the opening page of The Blind Spot by the symbol-laden scream of a stone curlew trapped by its wing in the hedge and barbed wire surrounding the family home. The bird is freed and, in the process, the potential breakdown of harmonious family relationships becomes apparent to Claire, who is the daughter of Judge Charles Hammond and the step-daughter of twenty-five year-old Vale, Claire's former tutor and only six years her senior. Much of the ensuing action is concerned with the emotional tensions and strategies of this potential breakdown between the Judge and his young wife, whose declining relationship receives a pale but salutary counter-image in the growing intimacy of his daughter, Claire, and her fiancé, Guy Steele.

Such a formula contrasting a failing love relationship with a developing one would be largely uninteresting if it were not for the essential ingredient of sexual rivalries built into the plot. The secondary rivalry is relatively muted, that of the "daughtery wife" (my expression) who has taken an older man away from his daughter, who throughout her adolescence has played the rôle of a "wifely daughter" to her widowed father. Far more overt is the rivalry, which acts as the prime mover in the romantic plot, between the old Judge and a young American journalist named Jefferson Broome, who has pre-existed in the story as the object of Vale's affection and also of Claire's then-teenage crush.

The love relationship of the "eternal triangle" of Jef, Vale, and the Judge is irreversibly complicated by the Judge suffering a skiing accident which confines him to a wheelchair and to an impotence reminiscent of Sir Clifford Chatterley's. In this novel, however, sexual impotence is no symbol of a spiritual or emotional failing: Judge Hammond sustains the reader's sympathy for the duration of the novel. The Blind Spot is, then, the story of an older man, subsequently an
impotent man, whose younger, second wife falls in love with another man from a different culture. Torn by his wife’s threat to take their four-year-old son Mickey to America and recognising Jefferson Broome’s features in Vale’s baby born in the course of the story, the Judge drives his invalid car off a clifftop road at a hairpin bend, the more concrete of the two "blind spots" built into the fiction (the other, in the novel’s terms, is a blend of personal and political blindness suffered by the Judge). The widow, Vale Hammond, will not, however, leave South Africa with her shame. Instead, her lover is deported from the country by the authorities for his "radical" criticisms of apartheid, and the future is faced brightly, with smiles reciprocated forgivingly between Vale and Claire Hammond (now Steele), who is now bearing her own infant contribution to the future of South Africa. Claire, at least, fulfils her husbandly father’s dreams of family continuity and stability.

In sum, *The Blind Spot* can be regarded as a substantial work, written while Packer was at the height of her professional skill and also at the height of a contemporary popularity witnessed to by magazine serialisation,25 publication in both Britain and the USA (under the title *The Man Out There*), re-publication by a major British book club, re-issue in paperback, and translation into numerous European languages; initial sales in British hard cover editions exceeded 80,000 copies in 1967. Its American edition(s) will probably have sold considerably more.

More important for the present study, however, is the detail that *The Blind Spot* was written during and after the Verwoerd assassination in September 1966, a public event which evidently complicates the structuration of the novel as a whole. Hence, a simple structural reading, such as that which has thus far been presented, is, despite its occasional oblique reference to a fictionalised South Africa set in the 1960s, insufficient to account, firstly, for the genre-specific constraints imposed on Packer by her use of the popular romantic mode of fiction and, secondly, for the constraints imposed on her by the discourse community within which she thereby chose to participate. Nor is it adequate for revealing the incoherence of the narrative, which I shall discuss at length in conclusion.

The constraints contained within the plot appear to function at several levels of reading. The clearest are those intended by the novelist herself to create and

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motivate the story: the emotional and social constraints defining, and also confining, the "ideal" marital relationship, which are conveyed in positive terms in the Claire-Guy pairing and generally, though not totally, negatively in the Judge-Vale conflict. At this level, where the reader's interest in the novel will normally be engaged in selection from the "moral" binaries typical of the family romance, such as those proposed by Christine Bridgwood, Packer appears to be threatening to exceed the conventional boundaries of the popular romance. As in The High Roof, it is apparent that the choice towards which the reader is directed is that of the ideal rather than the dysfunctional or dystopic. Dystopia, however, reigns supreme: the Judge's wife has borne a child fathered by another man; the Judge himself dies, possibly by his own hand; and the continuity of the family, signalled by the lapse at the end of the story in their generations-long occupancy of a family home, is vitally disrupted—though not finally broken. In the contrast between the "unbalanced" marriage (the youthful Vale and the middle-aged Judge) and the "balanced" one (Claire and Guy) there is, nevertheless, the novelistic problem that readerly interest, despite its "moral" choice, will be most powerfully focused on the former.

In consequence, the dilemma confronting the reader resides less in the tension between the dystopic and the utopic marital-domestic establishments than in the absolute nature of each of the two. Pertinent here is Jon Cook's Freudian analysis of the common patriarchality of popular romances in contrast with trends emerging during the modern historical period, which has, he suggests,

seen a decline in the functional authority of the father—his power to command in politics, economy, and the law—it has also seen a recreation of that power in a bizarre theatre of desire which finds its most evident locus in the family, but extends beyond that to suffuse

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27 The distinction I make between the "dysfunctional" and the "dystopic" is largely one of focus, the former referring to the present entity under scrutiny, while the latter is used to indicate a degree of similarity, especially metonymy, between the private and the social or sociopolitical.

28 As Packer's literary agent pointed out before publication (though principally with reference to the structure demanded by serialisation): "once you have Claire and Guy married the young romantic interest has to some extent been fulfilled and you then have to hold the serial interest with their involvement in the death of the Judge. . . . It [is] difficult to judge just how strongly you are holding, by plot and structure alone, the interest and anxiety of the reader" (John Smith, letter to Joy Packer, London, 1 Dec. 1966, NELM).
the seemingly anonymous character of modern power with the characteristic sounds of the bartering of male privilege.\(^{29}\)

However, in contrast to the Kit-Mike marriage in the earlier novel, *The High Roof*, there is no apparent gender-related conflict contained within the Claire-Guy relationship, and only an inter-generational (and therefore ineffective) relinquishment of male privilege: in the aftermath of the Judge's quasi-emasculation in his skiing accident, the protagonist relies increasingly on her fiancé, a stereotypical situation which Cook traces back to *Emma* and to *Mill on the Floss*: "a powerful masculinity replaces a weak one in her life, but they are both versions of the same authority which she must learn to love" (154). Claire's primary wish is, indeed, to be "weaned" (45) by her future husband from her father's obsolescent sociopolitical views, although solely in order to replace a recognisably outdated set of patriarchal standards by those of the coming generation of male South African power-brokers. In other words, in Cook's analysis, "the romantic hero comes into this situation as a hyper-patriarch who restores authority over the heroine. . . . It is not surprising that he should remind her of her father. . . . His authority pervades the world. . . . [and] the heroine is relieved from the anxiety of growing up" (158-59).

It may, then, be the case that especially in *The Blind Spot*, and contrasting in some measure with *The High Roof*, Packer appears to be working within the remnant of what Anne McClintock, in a study of Rider Haggard's late nineteenth-century romances, identifies as the "reinvention of the tradition of fatherhood displaced onto the colonial bureaucracy as a surrogate, restored authority," a colonial-historical tradition in South Africa within which "the reinvention of patriarchy [as apartheid] . . . would have calamitous consequences."\(^{30}\) If the "colonial bureaucracy" of the nineteenth century may be broadly equated with the legal structure of apartheid South Africa in the 1960s, then the under-articulated norms of this novel become multiply significant in terms of the metonymic function of the fictional South African family which I have referred to earlier.

Given, then, the novel's obsession with the maintenance of patriarchal power, its discussion of threats to that power assumes added significance in the light of the discovery that in Packer's fictional world the challenge no longer


comes from within the White laager (in the form of a nascent marital feminism, for instance, like that of Terry Delaporte) but from without. In 1966, the year prior to the first publication of *The Blind Spot*, Hendrick Verwoerd was assassinated by a white (or near-white: descriptions are various\(^{31}\)) man, Dimitrio Tsafendas. This famous incident and the subsequent trial seem to contain the germ of the novel. As Judge Hammond explains to a friend of his daughter, Tsafendas was spared from hanging on the psychological grounds of schizophrenia, and he contrasts this with the death sentence imposed on a *tokoloshe* murderer, one who claimed to be possessed by a magic spell placed on him by an enemy, which had compelled him to commit sixteen killings.\(^{32}\) But the text has already established, by means of an interior monologue, the Judge's attitude to murders committed by Africans:

Murder for *muti*—medicine. Could you fairly blame the murderers? You were compelled to condemn them, of course, but the principle was not so unreasonable. Human sacrifice for the good of the tribe. Christian teaching has the same basic theme. Human sacrifice for the sake of all mankind. (20)

The novelist's strategy requires discussion of the theme of differentness, and the contrast between Tsafendas and the *tokoloshe* murderer provides the excuse for reiterating the apartheid of black and white:

The demon tapeworm [causing Tsafendas's schizophrenia] was a pathological delusion while the tokoloshe was a deadly tool in the paraphernalia of witchcraft. We don't encourage witchcraft. We try to eradicate it. . . . It is still the duty of the Church and the State to stamp out witchcraft in its sinister forms. Sorcery is the scourge of

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\(^{31}\) W. A. de Klerk's description of Tsafendas underlines the irony inherent in the white/black dichotomy intended by Packer: "He had been engaged as a White, but was, in fact, a Coloured. Neither was he born in South Africa. He had come to the Republic from Mozambique in a rather doubtful way. He was of mixed Greek and Mulatto descent" (*The Puritans in Africa: A Story of Afrikanerdor* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976] 278).

\(^{32}\) Belief in the power of the *tokoloshe* as witches continues to the present, especially, according to press reports, in the Eastern Transvaal. Their subliminal threat to white survival under apartheid may have been linked with white fears of the "supernatural" sexuality of the African Other: "A *tokoloshe* is believed to have an uncanny power called *mashoshapansi*—'to make it go under.' It can extend its penis to any length and send it underground into the genitals of a sleeping or unsuspecting woman" (Lazarus Sentsho, "The Little Creature with a Big Appetite," *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 27 Jan.-2 Feb. 1995: 10.)
Black Africa. (149)

Here, as elsewhere in her fiction, Packer subscribes to the fallacious white concept of the African (or Muslim, etc) existing in a state of superstitious medievalism—a formula which has formed a part of the popular fiction stock-in-trade in its South African guise as much as in other areas of the western world. Hence, the black African, Packer insinuates, is living "in mediaeval times" (149), and the dichotomy between white and black is widened further in the course of dialogue ringing with the phraseology of apartheid: "our black brethren" who are subject to the "superstitions and animalism of primitive tribalism," but who face the task of "emerging . . . into the sophistication of the twentieth century," though they are at present at "varying stages of evolution" (146).

Sometimes superficially and sometimes profoundly, The Blind Spot, while criticising selected aspects of apartheid society, appears repeatedly to accept the "normality" of its existence. Like the bulk of her fiction, this novel has been constructed with a major element of what Cedric Watts terms "Janiformity." In the case of The Blind Spot, Janiformity, according to Watts' formulation, can be seen to consist firstly of a surface narrative which conveys a story which is idealised, its closure constructed to fulfil the reader's most immediate needs in terms of both the logical and the emotional predictions of the novel's plot. Hence, the story, crudely summarised, is that of a young woman whose dependence on her father—combined with his dependence on her—must give way to often melodramatic changes—including the death of her father and her own emotional fulfilment in marriage—for her to develop as a mature and integrated individual and as a member of her society.

Combined with this, and partially concealed by the surface narrative, Watts posits an intentional, more realistic sub-narrative, a secondary, covert plot which, in the case of this novel, tells what is in effect a "story" (perhaps in essence the

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33 This Eurocentric image has been consistently repeated in South African popular fiction, powerfully re-emerging, for example, in Danielle Thomas's Children of Darkness (1992; London: Pan, 1993). Structured as a kind of "time-warp" myth carried over from the realm of science fiction, it exploits an illusionary myth of differently-paced though coterminous socio-cultural orders, where Eurocentric norms oblige others to acknowledge their own system to be dilatory. This is projected as symptomatic of an "underdeveloped," "medieval" inferiority, in fact concealing a reality grounded in a spectrum of coterminous, and often collaborating, systems of wealth-creation, -distribution and -possession.

story) of contemporary apartheid. Though centred like *The High Roof* on the individual human injustices occasioned by apartheid legislation, this novel reflects more fully the real effects of apartheid in its piecemeal, fragmentary gestures towards the ways in which those who did not fit into the master plan of apartheid were forcibly expelled from the white paradise it was attempting to legislate into existence: "Bantus" on one-way tickets from Jan Smuts Airport who "were not necessarily issued with permits of re-entry" (59), "Bantus" on one-way tickets to the gallows (43), "Bantus" on one-way tickets to the "Bantustans" (234), and foreign "Bantu"-sympathisers on one-way tickets out of a country which could not tolerate their criticisms (230).

On this intentional subnarrative level the novel, like many of Packer's others, functions admirably as a vehicle for polemical protest, a *roman à thèse* whose voice could reach ears which other more radical fictions lacking the appeal of popular narrative romance could not hope to reach. It can, nevertheless, be argued that a second, unintended, and only partially articulated subnarrative also emerges which contends with the liberal appeal of the first. Under the stress of the tension between the "ideal" and the "real," the narrative erodes, splitting into black and white, and the characters, similarly, into white and black, the visible and the invisible, the articulate and the inarticulate, the rooted and the uprooted. Eventually, Packer's binary narrative betrays her own liberal intentions, since *The Blind Spot* as a novel functions also as her personal ideological response to the "radical" anti-apartheid novel of the kind supposedly written by her own creation, the non-South African intruder, Jef Broome.

Broome's function within the novel is essentially ambiguous; on the one hand, the character provides an illustration of the fate of those who dared question the apartheid state while, on the other, his status as a fictional novelist places him both in competition with and at the mercy of the "real" novelist, Packer. As we have seen, his "positive" contribution is the reward he receives for his writing: expulsion from the putative cohesion of the fictive South African society created in Packer's "real" novel. Unlike Broome's novel, however, the focus of Packer's *The Blind Spot* is, at a fundamental level, an aspect of Packer's personal liberal ideology: the "love" between individuals, and the relation of its presence and absence to the cohesion of society.

At the level of the subnarrative, in defence of the personal and social structures which support and define that "love," the focus of the novel then shifts to the presence and absence of threats to the continuance of the social structures permitting the fulfilment of romantic love. Unfortunately for the romantic novel
represented by *The Blind Spot*, in the South African context of the 1960s only the power to silence and dismiss the "swart gevaar" (the black peril) and its domestic and foreign radical allies could function adequately to that end.

Nevertheless, to abandon the narrative and its critical analysis at this point to the binary structures inscribed in the narrative itself would be to concede victory to their claim to the "correctness" of the author's selection of positive and negative alternatives for the reader's selection. Rather, as I have argued above, there is no final equilibrium in the form of a positive closure. Despite the predetermined moral and ideological choices proffered by the text, its appeal to the reader, that is, its "power," lies elsewhere than in this simplistic, "push-button" programme provided for readerly activity during the process of reading.

In a study of popular fiction on Africa produced principally by British and American writers, Abena Busia observes that "in re-presenting Africa to us, they give us back again those very structures which limit their own lives." In representing her own South Africa, the structure of Packer's vision has skewed and distorted the conventional structure of the romantic love story almost beyond recognition into a form which, I would argue here, is shaped entirely—and confusedly—by one of the central myths of the period in which she wrote: Verwoerd.

Where this ideological incoherence may best be seen is in the characterisation of the Judge, which is diegetic rather than mimetic: stated rather than shown. The reader is informed that he has "wisdom" (10), and "where Hammond was tolerant and penetrating, his daughter was emotional and harsh in her criticisms, capable of making terrible mistakes" (18)—though, again, this aspect of Claire's "personality" is scarcely in evidence in the novel itself. From the perspective of Hammond's colleagues, as a judge he is "Godlike" (10, 234): "When Charles gives sentence he sees himself as God" (140, my emphasis). After his death (which under the advice of her literary agents Packer left deliberately vague regarding its cause—suicide, or emotional distraction?—in either case provoked by his wife, Vale) the man becomes Christlike in his daughter's memory, the Biblical phraseology surely intended to reinforce the reader's


36 See John Smith, letter to Joy Packer, 1 Dec. 1966 (NELM): "I think the more normal ending helps keep it more firmly in its category and does not push it quite as far into the suspicion-of-murder motive that the original ending had."
perception of this character as analogous to an ultimate Patriarch: "he was a man of sorrows and humility, strength and mercy. . . . It was terribly sad and terribly beautiful. Every man has his Gethsemane, his Cross and his Calvary" (220-21, my emphases).

It would seem that the high emotionalism of this assessment points to a major incoherence in the substructure of the novel as a whole. As I have already indicated, Packer was writing in the immediate aftermath of Verwoerd’s assassination in September 1966—a draft of the manuscript was in the hands of her publishers in December of that year. While it might be argued that her inclusion of a relatively factual reference to Verwoerd (148-49) may have been only for reasons of marketable topicality, Verwoerd’s death had made a considerable impact on her as in varying ways it had on all South Africans. Two days after the deed, for instance, Packer wrote to her American publisher:

We are all shattered here in South Africa by the assassination of our Prime Minister, Doctor Verwoerd. Even those of us who disagreed with his policies respected his sincerity and statesmanship, and this lunatic act can benefit no one.37

The link with the novel may also be traced in the words of Judge Hammond’s inheritor, Guy Steele, who assumes the paternal role of directing Claire’s view of her world. Guy compares the paralysed Judge with Roosevelt: "'He was a paraplegic, but it didn’t prevent him from being America’s President and the leader of a great nation in time of war'" (129). The subnarrative link with another "leader of a great nation," South Africa, also "in time of war"—against its own citizens—has thus been tenuously established in the reader’s reconstruction of the character. Paternalism, self-sacrifice and death, linked with Packer’s own loss of her husband, combine in the character of the "Godlike" Judge, whose significance both effaces and enhances that of the principal modern representative of white South African patriarchalism, Verwoerd. For all its surface liberalism, embodied in the Judge’s daughter and her eventual husband, Guy Steele, The Blind Spot, in this reading, coalesces and reaches an unnatural and self-defeating stasis of acquiescence in the status quo.

To read a feminine romance like The Blind Spot in a way which emphasises its narrative and ideological incoherence might ordinarily earn the criticism that the novel itself does not deserve the weight of evidence levelled against it. This

novel, however, is in an essential way both a typical "women's story" and yet scarcely a "feminine" romance, in that the character of the conventional heroine, Claire Hammond, remains almost totally subservient to that of her father and, after his death, her husband. In that process, the novel becomes increasingly an act of homage to the dead patriarch, the authorial desire shaped not by romance or reform but in the firm hope of a narrativised resurrection. Its incoherence lies, therefore, not in the powerful sincerity of that hope, but in the identity of the idealised self-sacrificing patriarch.

4. Conclusions

The High Roof and The Blind Spot illustrate the complexity of the task which Packer undertook in attempting to use the popular romantic narrative mode as a means of propagating her personal views on the state of South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. What emerges with increasing frequency from this analysis of her writing is the extent to which she underestimated the incompatibility of the two modes of discourse which her fiction repeatedly attempts but fails to wed: on the one hand, an idealised mode of popular romance, in which partners strive to locate an emotional and physical harmony, often in situations—like that of the "coloureds," Bok McKerie and Lily Laguna—against the odds; and on the other hand, a politicised polemic that is fundamentally aware of its impotence in the face of the impending assault on its very existence by the "invaders" from the north.

Packer's ultimate subnarrative, unarticulated and unintended, is always that of fear—of Afrikaner Nationalist incursions on the liberal anglophone Cape; of black African incursions on that same territory, against which liberals such as Packer tried so desperately to erect the "coloureds" as a racio-cultural buffer; and the fear that, from beyond the confines of the white South African liberal laager, the voices of less-committed, more freely-perceptive critics—like her own creation, the American "radical," Jefferson Broome—might shatter the careful constructs of a precarious colonial survival.
Chapter Six
Narrative Hostages
My Bandit Hosts; The Dark Curtain

An attention to the subjectivity of the colonizer can erase the subjection of the colonized.¹

1. Introduction
This final chapter has been suggested by an apparent coincidence of themes in Joy Packer’s first and final book-length works, My Bandit Hosts (1935),² ghostwritten on behalf of Tinko Pawley, and the last of her ten novels, The Dark Curtain (1977),³ whose proofs she corrected but which she did not live to see in print. Both works deal, in essence, although obviously in very different narrative ways, with the experiences of Western women kidnapped and held to ransom by men from other cultures. As such, the similarity of the theme in either work has to be assumed to be coincidental, since no surviving documentation suggests that the later text was in any way intentionally informed by the earlier one. It is, however, clear from at least one source that, despite the passing of time and the considerable success and far greater fame of her subsequent writing, Packer remembered her first book well and continued to regard it with affection.⁴

In any environment, hostage-taking is a traumatic event which profoundly belies its English etymological roots in the Old French hoste, or guest. It is an extreme act of bodily theft which, in depriving an individual of personal control over his or her own freedom (within the specific constraints of "normal" life), reduces selfhood by attempting to deny not simply liberty but also a personal sense of identity—though at the same time, and contradictorily, relying for its impact on others precisely through their memory of the identity which has been denied. Kidnapping is also an assertion of physical power which, while most frequently associated with demands for payment of a ransom or for the reciprocal release of other prisoners, can have unexpected and bizarre psychological effects on its victims. One such unpredictable effect is what is now popularly referred


⁴ "It didn't do badly at all" (Joy Packer, SABC radio interview with Gerald Pawle, SABC Sound Archives, Auckland Park, Johannesburg, 30 Apr. 1970).
to as the Stockholm Syndrome, where, as a result of stress, dependence, and a need to cooperate for survival, hostages begin to identify emotionally and morally with the aims of their captors—in effect, as a result of several triggering mechanisms, the self may assimilate the Other. In many essentials, therefore, the syndrome's victims appear to assume new psychological identities which may jar discordantly with the old. Hence, it may be argued that a part of the overall attraction of the idea of the hostage for Packer, who as a journalistic writer was always concerned with capturing the element of "human interest" contained in any story, must surely have been its potential for the narrativisation of physical and mental crises in the form of melodrama.

The constant critical quest of the present study has been for indications of the relationship of text to identity, which in the case of Packer's writing refers especially to the author's sense of her own identity within identifiable sociopolitical contexts, especially that of South Africa under apartheid. Although the present analysis is most immediately concerned with texts which must be categorised respectively as biography and fiction, the proximity of questions of self and identity to the surface of these texts suggests also the proximity of permissible readings which in large measure can ignore the conventional formal differences between generic categories. In consequence, I will argue in my subsequent discussion that this partial abandonment of generic distinctions can be justified by appeal to several critical criteria.

One of the most suggestive theoretical resources, since it draws upon the developing critique of autobiography within South Africa itself, can be found in the recent work of Judith Lütge Coullie, whose concern is with the relationship

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5 The Stockholm Syndrome was named after an incident in Stockholm in 1973, during which a bank employee became romantically attached to a robber who held her hostage. The situational "archetype" has been typically exploited by the British popular novelist Jack Winchester (alias Brian Freemantle) in a thriller with a South African topic, Deaken's War (1982; London: Arrow, 1985).

6 One of the most celebrated cases in recent decades has been that of the wealthy newspaper heiress, Patty Hearst, who was held prisoner in California for 19 months in the mid-1970s by a multiracial revolutionary group known as the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA). Whether Hearst can be regarded as having been "held hostage" for the whole of that period is open to question, however, since after a period of some 10 weeks she participated with apparent willingness in a violent bank robbery committed by SLA members, for which she was eventually indicted despite pleas of psychological incompetence. See Encyclopedia Year Book 1975 (New York: Grolier, 1975) 128-29, and Encyclopedia Year Book 1976 (New York: Grolier, 1976) 171.
between autobiography and fiction. 7 According to Coullie's analysis, the South African autobiographical text in particular is marked emphatically by "recognition of the fact that the body of the writer will signify in the interpretative strategies applied by most readers" (12, my emphasis). In the context of South African writing, the body has always been not only named and gendered but also racialised to a degree which must inevitably determine such strategies in distinctive ways—as Coullie points out: "the discourse of racism is inescapable" (8).

In addition, she regards autobiography as the site of four voices which can be located with varying degrees of ease: "The narrator as a linguistic construct is an isolatable part of the text, distinct from the protagonist(s) and the implied author, as well as from the material person, the real author" (4-5). Hence, in the case of autobiography, Coullie's observation that "the 'I' of the autobiographical text serves as a temporary rallying point for these distinct entities" (4-5) suggests primarily the specific problems posed by the autobiographical text (rather than a text of another genre) of distinguishing one component voice from the others. Nevertheless, at this level of analysis I would argue that, while accepting the presence of Coullie's four "distinct entities," the distinctions to be drawn between autobiography, biography and narrative fiction would appear to consist largely of degrees of emphasis.

The particular points raised by Coullie which have especially reinforced my own concerns in the present analysis are again those which address the problems of genre in relation to ideological context:

Generic norms in operation at a specific juncture will, to a very large extent, determine the range of options facing the writer. Nevertheless, the textual depiction of identity will of necessity, poststructuralists argue, comprise a composite of various culturally and historically specific subject positions; identity will appear to be the function of a unified "personality" or "nature" only if the inescapable indicators of disjunctions in selfhood are ignored. It is in the examination of these culturally and historically specific subject positions that poststructuralist readings of South African autobiographical texts can expose particular features of the network of beliefs and practices which inform the complex, ceaselessly changing social formation of contemporary South Africa in its articulation with the rest of the

Hence, the present chapter will attempt, firstly, to trace some of the ways in which Packer transforms the theme of the white woman hostage into chronologically separated narratives which differ generically, the first narrative an example of journalistic biographical "faction," the latter a conventional popular novel of the kind intended for mass circulation in serialised and book formats. More particularly, the present discussion will consider the narrative strategies adopted by Packer and their relationship to what, in essence, are the personal and sociopolitical concerns of the narratives. These will be viewed from the perspectives of their parallel metonymic structures, which can be seen to be aptly centred in the idea of the "private body" (the individual), the "familial body" (the family), and the "civic body" (society). In a final section, the discussion will then turn to further consideration of the connection between text and its context, which appears to consist of an inscription of the body of the author in the civic body itself. My final aim will then be to determine the degree to which a disjunction in the relation of coloniser and colonised can be discerned in the complex relationship apparently existing between the two texts.

2. Hostages

*My Bandit Hosts* was written on behalf of a young, newly-married Englishwoman christened Edith Muriel and nicknamed Tinko, the daughter of a missionary doctor to Newchwang (now Yingkou) in the Chinese province of Manchuria, and the wife of an English businessman a few years her senior, Kenneth Pawley. Popular journalism in conception, of the kind that Packer had practised freelance on the *Cape Argus* and *Cape Times* in the mid-1920s and honed during her year on the *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express* in London in 1931-32, *My Bandit Hosts* is a proficient and highly readable account, largely (according to Packer) in Tinko Pawley’s own words, of her kidnapping, an event of six weeks’ duration that had occurred some nine months before the two women met. While common enough at that time in China, the event had not only caused a furore amongst the expatriate European community in Manchuria but had also caught the imagination of the British through extensive press coverage, in particular in the *Daily Mail*. As Packer was to point out later, Tinko Pawley’s story was "sure fire human

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8 Between 10 Sept. 1932 and 22 Oct. 1932, the *Daily Mail* printed at least 27 reports on the Pawley kidnapping.
The case had the right mix of popular ingredients. A defenceless eighteen-year-old English "girl bride" had fallen victim to ruthless, uncivilised bandits, who in their turn could be identified with one of the common bogeys of the first decades of this century, the Yellow Peril exploited by populist politicians and popular writers and reporters alike. There was the constant threat not only of physical suffering but of progressive mutilation by dismemberment at the hands of bandits intent on extorting a large ransom, and although Tinko was not alone her sole protector was not her husband but his friend and her former fiancé, Charles Corkran, a chivalrous young Englishman who displays endless fortitude and good humour. All this is combined in Tinko's tale with the quasi-patriotic steadfastness displayed by the kidnapped couple's three dogs, Whiskey and Rolf, both Alsatians (the former escaping to make his intrepid way back to Tinko's family and the latter falling victim to the bandits' brutality and doubtless also to their culinary appetites), and Squiffy, a pointer pup.

That Packer made Pawley's acquaintance in China less than a year after the event proved opportune for both women. Pawley's dramatic experiences were still close to the surface of public memory; hence it was likely that they would be marketable. It may also be imagined (since Packer does not mention this in either the book or any subsequent reference) that Pawley's act of narrating her experiences helped play a part in the psychological healing she undoubtedly still needed. At the same time, Packer herself had time on her hands while she lived as a naval wife on the "China Station," her son Peter in exile from his own parents, growing up in the Cape in the care of his South African grandparents, and her husband involved in Britain's naval maintenance of its role in the international commercial and military spheres of influence within China. In addition to repeated clashes between the Chinese National People's Party

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9 Joy Packer, *Pack and Follow* (1945; London: Corgi, 1974) 279. Packer is here quoting Russell Stannard, the editor of the British *Sunday Express* at the time she worked on the paper in 1931-32.

10 See, for example, Sax Rohmer's thrillers, the first of which, *The Mystery of Dr Fu Manchu* appeared in 1913 (re-issued as recently as in 1985 under the J. M. Dent "Classic Thrillers" imprint), establishing a formula which Rohmer repeatedly exploited for more than three decades (e.g., *The Shadow of Fu Manchu* appeared in 1949).

11 Packer refers in the middle of the account only to the "appalling state of mind to which Tinko was reduced by boredom and inactivity" (159, my emphasis), and records on the final page, in Tinko's own words, that "'For some time after we returned to our home in Tientsin I was haunted by the terror of Pei Pa-tien and the bandits,'" with the addition that "'in time the nightmare began to grow dimmer'" (282).
(Kuomintang) government and Chinese Communist forces which continued from 1930 to 1934, in 1931 open conflict had flared in Manchuria between the Chinese and the insurgent Japanese, a situation which had contributed to the disorder and lawlessness under which hostage-taking thrived. The danger faced by Tinko Pawley and her companion is aptly illustrated by a report carried by the *Daily Mail* at the same time as it covered the Pawley story, in which the kidnapping of another Englishwoman by Manchurian bandits ended in the woman's murder, the subsequent lynching of one of the bandits by outraged Chinese citizens, and the shooting of two others by the Chinese police.\(^{12}\) Packer's desire to write and the appeal of Tinko Pawley's story of a young white woman held hostage therefore made successful common cause.

Some forty years later, Packer returned to the idea of the kidnapped woman for her final novel *The Dark Curtain*. Although the novel's romantic protagonist is the South African British ambassador's daughter, Jane Etheridge, whose marital ambitions are temporarily frustrated by her fears of being the bearer of a potentially fatal inherited genetic defect, the story focuses in larger measure on the protagonist's grandmother, an aging, female crime novelist named Maud Carpenter, "born and bred in South Africa . . . but . . . addicted to London and the countryside" (16). Maud is caught up in a kidnapping which leads via the inevitable ransom demands to her equally inevitable death at the hands of her African hosts—the term *host* is, naturally, used here in the same sardonic spirit as in the title of Tinko Pawley's narrative. The settings within which the melodrama is enacted shift between the unreal quietude of the British Embassy in Cape Town and an isolated African village in a newly-independent neighbouring state, Nyangreela, which Packer modelled in part from impressions gained on an "unofficial tour" with her husband of the British Protectorate of Swaziland in 1951\(^ {13}\) and in part from her reading of contemporary news reports

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\(^{12}\) See "Englishwoman's Bandit Murder," *Daily Mail* (London), 14 Oct. 1932: 13. Similarly, at the start of its Pawley coverage the newspaper carries another report from Manchuria under the headline "Bandits Routed: Britons Foil another Kidnapping Attempt"; the same article, however, also reported on the kidnapping of a three-year-old Russian boy, and on the derailment of a train in which 600 passengers had been robbed (*Daily Mail*, 12 Sept. 1932: 12).

\(^{13}\) See Joy Packer, *Apes and Ivory* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953) 153-68. In this travelogue, as in *The Dark Curtain*, Packer is preoccupied by African tradition, especially witchcraft, although the earlier text is marked by a sardonicism which is notably absent from the novel. Significant as a minor key to her sources, her account in *Apes and Ivory* refers briefly to a report that "the body of an old White woman, who lived alone on a small farm, had been found under conditions suggesting medicine murder." If the idiom of her sense of outrage is
about Swazi political unrest in the mid-1970s.  

If The Dark Curtain is viewed from the critical perspective of its status as a novel, its structure can readily be dismissed as only partially coherent. Like much of Packer's fiction, the classic realism of The Dark Curtain is flawed by her attempt to pursue at least three disparate lines of discourse within a single text. At once a stereotypical romance complicated by medical dilemmas, a thriller drawing its melodramatic tensions from a fictional account of an international kidnapping, and then also a politicised journalistic commentary on the inadequacies and immaturity of newly-independent African states, the novel struggles to integrate these ideas sufficiently well to maintain a sense of direction. The problem is compounded by the dominant kidnapping element of the plot, where Packer's under-conceptualisation of the necessary spatial and military dimensions contributes to an air of unreality and implausibility that defies the realist logic of the popular genre(s).

Ultimately, however, The Dark Curtain emerges as neither stereotypical love story nor thriller. While its "quality" as a novel can scarcely be defended, even according to the criteria of its genre, The Dark Curtain is important for the present study for the statement which Packer seems to be making through its narrative about her understanding of her position as a white South African woman. Like her fictional character Maud Carpenter, Packer was a popular novelist and, like Maud Carpenter, she was aware during her writing of the novel that, in a historical sense, not only had she been taken hostage by Africa but also that her personal survival was finite. As such, this novel, despite its flaws, emerges as Packer's most intimate statement on Africa and when read in tandem with My Bandit Hosts serves as an valuable statement about her sense of her personal identity within an unstable postcolonial world.

3. Texts and their Sisters
For the initial part of my discussion of these two works, I will attempt to blur their generic boundaries in the belief that to do so will permit me to focus on their thematic and structural similarities, and thence to discover some of the

deconstructed in a somewhat facile manner, it might even be claimed that The Dark Curtain functions as Packer's belated attempt to inflict narrative retribution on the medicine murderers, since she comments: "The killers were never brought to book" (160).

14 Information received from Caroline Kingdon (Packer's former personal secretary), personal interview by telephone, 13 Dec. 1993. Swaziland gained its independence from British protectorate status in 1968, and had undergone several political upheavals by the mid-1970s.
significant continuous and/or discontinuous aspects of the writer's conceptualisation of self and Other.

Such an aim will tend inevitably to exert pressure towards a treatment of both *My Bandit Hosts* and *The Dark Curtain* as cryptic autobiographies, although in a conventional generic sense, of course, neither is. The status of a ghostwritten memoir such as *My Bandit Hosts* is particularly unclear, since it is largely journalistic reportage, and the information and sentiments it contains can, in the main, be gathered from the extensive sequence of contemporary press reports. In the case of this volume, however, the term *ghostwriter* conceals the degree to which Packer intervenes in Tinko Pawley's story whilst simultaneously suggesting that "I want to tell Tinko's story as far as possible in her own words, just as she gave it to me" (11) and "this is Tinko's story and it is best that she should tell it after her own fashion" (17). Packer's claim to be re-narrating Tinko's story in a manner faithful to Tinko's personal mode of communication may be seen to be typically given the lie by a letter of Tinko's (not included in *My Bandit Hosts*) written from captivity to thank the *Daily Mail* for its ongoing intervention in the kidnapping. In this, Tinko's text is marked by contemporary age-, gender- and class-bound phrasing to a degree which, had Packer attempted close stylistic imitation, would probably have been considered unreadable and unmarketable:

Dear Daily Mail:
It is really frightfully sporting of you to work so hard for the release of a couple of fools who can't even go on a racecourse of a morning without getting into trouble, and we appreciate terribly all your efforts.

Apart from the fact that we're bored stiff and filthy dirty, while some of the bandits are a trifle lacking in respect, we can stick it.

We're sworn at daily by the 200 bandits in this little party, and our education proceeds apace. . . . We are a source of great interest to all and sundry, and realize exactly what it means to be an inmate of the Zoo.16

Given such an informant, Packer's solution is to identify herself emphatically to the reader as the dominant first-person narrator, with the result that, when Tinko's

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15 Since in *My Bandit Hosts* Tinko Pawley becomes a narrative construct, rather than remaining a historical figure in a purely journalistic report, the present account will generally refer to her as "Tinko" rather than by her full name or surname. Similarly, in the case of *The Dark Curtain* the present account will generally imitate the narratorial voice by referring to the fictional character Maud Carpenter as "Mrs Carpenter."

account of her experiences is reconstructed by Packer as apparently verbatim monologue, Tinko, functioning now as a secondary I-narrator, is firmly enclosed and constrained within quotation marks which multiply whenever her historical dialogues are also reconstructed within this verbatim monologue. Some twenty years later, Packer reinforces this assessment of her role when writing the first of her own memoirs:

Brave little Tinko, with . . . her child’s inability to express herself or do justice to her own sufferings and experiences, is part of the pattern of my China years—a gold thread of courage and faith against a turbulent background.”

In sum, the implication of this ghostwritten text is that of the ghostwriter (Packer) as selector and editor but also, more powerfully, as textual colonizer (and therefore appropriator) of Tinko Pawley’s narrative, which is reinvented in obedience to the constraints of Packer’s own identity as narrator.

The potential status of the novel, The Dark Curtain, as "autobiography" is similarly obscured by its conventional generic identity as a cross between a late-colonial adventure tale and popular romantic fiction. As I have already indicated, however, the text of this work lacks adequate integration of its constituent discourses, evidenced by such key aspects as the marginalisation of the traditional romantic heroine by the presence of an altogether more interesting character, Maud Carpenter, whose "similarities" with Packer are almost obtrusively obvious—Packer attributes to Maud such publicly-known features of her own biography as South African origins attenuated by long-term anglicisation, a successful career as a popular novelist, an obsession with travel, an awareness of aging, and a consciousness of the proximity of her own death.

In a remarkably different literary context from that represented by Packer’s writing, Ann Jefferson has asserted that "the conjunction of autobiography and fiction in actual writing practice is still apt to be felt as something of a scandal." Jefferson’s reference is to the apparent shock felt at the publication of autobiographies by Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute in the early 1980s:

17 In later accounts, Packer reveals that she reconstructed Tinko’s story to an extent which is not apparent in the book itself: "She was quite inarticulate" (Joy Packer, SABC interview, 30 Apr. 1970) and "She didn’t tell me her story in any proper sequence. It just came out bit by bit as the mood took her, and when she had gone I made my notes and later I strung them together" (Joy Packer, Pack and Follow 279).

18 Joy Packer, Pack and Follow 281.
the *nouveau roman*'s subversion of character and plot, its erosion of distinctions between real and imaginary, and its subordination of representation to a self-reflexive process of writing [which] all conspired to set it at odds with the basic generic presuppositions of autobiography. . . . Autobiography in these instances is, if not necessarily ultimately unassimilable to the fiction, then at least disturbingly different.19

While there exists an obvious generic distance between the *nouveau roman* and the kind of conventional melodrama enacted in Packer's writing, Jefferson's critique of the problems posed by the autobiographies of the *nouveaux romanciers* appears to supply several stimulating reference points relevant to the present problem. Under the general theoretical concept of intertextuality, Jefferson is concerned with exploring the problems raised by the production of autobiographies by writers whose mode of fiction had always denounced the authorial figure (109). In consequence, she suggests, writers such as Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet have committed the "heresy" of insisting "on presenting their autobiographies as continuations of their ever-evolving fictional enterprise" (109-10). The most observable function of these writers' autobiographies, Jefferson claims, is that of "*metatextual* commentary on the fictional works" (110)—a commonplace with respect to the literary autobiography, and one that applies to each of Packer's main volumes of memoirs after the first, with the additional detail that in Packer's case a memoir occasionally refers metatextually to an earlier memoir: *Grey Mistress* (1949), for example, comments briefly (as I have noted earlier in this study) on *Pack and Follow* (1945), while both *Home from Sea* (1963) and *The World is a Proud Place* (1966) comment frequently on the progress of her novels, starting with the publication of *Valley of the Vines* in 1955.

Intertextual analysis is of particular relevance for the present discussion of Packer's two works in Jefferson's coining of "*sister-text*" as a "term to describe the relations between one text and another within the corpus . . . of a given author" (though with the unexplained rider that she considers the term most applicable to "texts which fall within the same generic category," a restriction immediately contradicted by her reference to "the relation between novel and

novel—and novel and autobiography when the latter is regarded as a continuation of the former" [110-11]). "Sister-textual" relations, Jefferson suggests, are not actively intertextual in that they don't entail explicit or implied comment on one text by another, nor any transformation of one text by another, but it is nevertheless an intertextual relationship that is enormously powerful for readers: one of the first moves in any reading is to place a new text in the intertextual context of the corpus to which it belongs. (110-11)

Hence, the problem of reading Packer's two very different texts "autobiographically," that is, in terms of Packer's personal life story, may arguably be displaced by an alternative reading which, while resting upon the apparent thematic "coincidences" of *My Bandit Hosts* and *The Dark Curtain*, can concern itself rather with analysis of the ways in which Packer attempted, at very different moments in her life, to identify and textualise women's views of their experience of hostile environments. Integral to this critical narrative, it would seem, is the kidnapped subject's sense of her inscription, firstly, within her own body, which as an individual adult she has felt empowered to nurture but which has been taken captive and subjected to abuse which may be caused by hunger, neglect, or physical (including sexual) violence. This kind of narrative, however, inevitably also contains the captive's sense of her personal inscription within the sociopolitical "body" of the civil society within which she normally lives and which she has hitherto assumed will nurture her. In the case of Packer's two texts, the locations of these experiences of (denial of) self-nurture and of (deprivation of) social nurture range between the "child-wife" (9) (or, alternatively, the "girl bride"), Tinko Pawley, and the elderly widow, Maud Carpenter, and from the margins of the British empire in the 1930s to southern Africa in the 1970s. Given the implicitness of the sister-textuality of the two works—a kind of unarticulated complicity—their coincidences with Packer's biography need, therefore, scarcely be drawn.

4. *My Bandit Hosts*

When asked in interview in 1970\(^20\) to recall the origins of her writing career, Packer returns first to her earliest journalism in Cape Town in the years immediately prior to her marriage in 1925, and then to her year in London at the

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\(^20\) Joy Packer, SABC interview, 30 Apr. 1970.
beginning of the 1930s. Journalism, she insists, taught her the discipline of observation and of listening to the ways in which others speak. Her recollections then move on to her earliest travels in pursuit of her husband’s naval postings, firstly to Malta, which was "great fun," and subsequently to China. China in the mid-1930s fired her imagination. In her own words, it was a "magical world of adventure," one which, combined with the opportunity to write the Tinko Pawley story, was to enable her to attempt to cross the boundary between her personal existential adventure of discovering and observing this other culture and the magical adventure of moulding another person’s experiences into an extensive narrative.

Read in conjunction with the press reports of the kidnapping, *My Bandit Hosts* illustrates above all its formal difference from journalism. Unlike the press correspondent who reports the immediate past (his most recent sources), draws analogies with a more remote past (the hostages’ social background), and then speculates about the unknown present and future (potential mutilation, ransom, rescue), Packer is able to write with complete hindsight about the events of two years previously, and in the process discovers—no doubt naïvely rather than through application of scholarly study—the significance of narrative form in achieving a successful crossing of the boundary between self and Other.

Most importantly, she has recourse to the archetypes of the folk tale (and in so doing relies on another mode of intertextuality): the kidnapped woman becomes the captive—as well as captivating—princess, her male companion the loyal servant, and her captors ogres. Further, the appeal of the story can in part be read in terms of what might be considered incomplete or selective recollection of the traditional tale of "Beauty and the Beast," as a conflict between the goodness of beauty and the supposed evil of its converse. Incomplete or selective recollection implies a lack of retention of the full details of the plot of the folk tale, often accompanied by a reduction of its narrative to its central characters, in this case the Princess and the Beast, who survive mnemonically in terms of their basic attributes—beauty and ugliness. This will not, of course, be true of any audience of modern adaptations of the tale in other media such as the Disney cartoon movie (1993). The incompleteness of the analogy also extends to Tinko who, as Beauty, does not inhabit the castle of the bandit chief in order to preserve her father’s life, though it may be interesting, in postcolonial terms, to speculate on whether, had she agreed out of compassion to marry the Chinese Beast (or Other), he might have been transformed (or transformed himself) into a handsome prince.
In consequence, Packer’s description of the nineteen-year-old Tinko months after the kidnapping, while typical of the portrayal of girlishness projected throughout the narrative, implies a restoration of the unspoilt "princess" of a year previously, prior to the kidnapping:

She is small and graceful with red-gold hair cut rather short, unfaltering blue eyes, and an impudent smile, and extremely beautiful hands, long, tapering and surprisingly firm. She was nineteen when I met her and still in the first year of her marriage. (9)

The image of Tinko’s captor similarly appeals to the archetype, although it is assumed that his identification is with an evil that is actual rather than apparent, moral as well as physical:

"The [bandit] chief himself was an indescribably loathsome monster with small red eyes close-set against a fleshy broken nose, and a drooping purple underlip protruding beneath a vicious set of ferocious fangs like those of a beast. . . . Every day he came to see us, and we dreaded his visits and his tantrums. He was so odious, with his ogre’s mouth and his tiny red eyes, and when he was in a rage, he was truly awe-inspiring."21

Where, however, the story gains most in effect is in Packer’s readiness to subvert the folk tale by grounding it in a form of psychological realism which is expressed largely through racial and sexual innuendo. Thus, a major part of the pressure exerted by Tinko’s captors on her family, on the British government and also on the Japanese military authorities to comply with their ransom demands consists of continuous threats to despoil her quasi-immaculate body (that of the "child-wife," alias the "girl bride") both sexually and through mutilation, thereby contributing to the diurnal tensions of the tale (the bandits’ nocturnal activities are severely constrained by intoxication). As Packer points out a decade later, with marginally greater candour than she could afford in My Bandit Hosts, the story maintained a sexual undertone which powerfully engaged the voyeuristic gaze of its contemporary press readership:

Tinko was young and pretty, and everyone wanted to know, would the bandits or wouldn’t they? And later, when she was returned to her

21 *My Bandit Hosts* 22, 139. Quotation marks occur in the original text, purportedly indicating Tinko Pawley’s own recollections rather than Packer’s commentary.
parents and her husband complete with fingers, toes and ears, people asked one another in hushed whispers. "Did the bandits, or didn’t they?"\textsuperscript{22}

They didn’t.\textsuperscript{23}

For "them" (the bandits, the Other) to have done so would have caused My Bandit Hosts to offend against one of the central tenets of the popular romance which it approximates to, where

the underlying pattern, despite more superficial variations, very often moves from the heroine’s initial loss of social identity (through force of external necessity) and an unpleasant encounter with an aristocrat or otherwise powerful man (whose behaviour is misunderstood) through a series of stages including "hostility" and "separation" towards "reconciliation," and the transformation of the man into an emotional being with a heart who declares his love for the heroine, whose new social identity is in turn restored.\textsuperscript{24}

Tinko’s story can be seen to fulfil each of these criteria, though with some small variations. In being taken hostage, she loses her social identity (though gaining the alternative status of female European captive), and her encounter with the all-powerful abductor stimulates in her a profound hostility and withdrawal. Where the analogy falters, however, is in the conventionally singular identity of the male gaze, which according to romance should be transformed finally into reciprocated love, accompanied by restoration of the heroine’s true, though new, identity. As already indicated, in the romance of My Bandit Hosts the masculine Otherness of the "aristocratic" captor is displaced by an alternative and far more powerful Other, which in the form of the Chinese bandit chief is definably racial. In terms especially of Packerian romance, such an identity automatically precludes rapprochement between captive and captor, so that Tinko’s hope for physical salvation emerges not in the form of her essentially emasculated companion, Charles Corkran, nor that of her absent husband, Kenneth Pawley, but through the

\textsuperscript{22} Pack and Follow 279.

\textsuperscript{23} "One had to marvel at the Providence that . . . had allowed her to survive, untainted in mind and body, the daily close contact of the lowest and most bestial human beings" (My Bandit Hosts 99).

quasi-paternalistic power of the colonial forces in China, most notably the Japanese military.

One of the two central motifs in Packer's appeal to realism is that of the effects of captivity on the physical body. Textualised in *My Bandit Hosts*, the body functions in a dual capacity. On the one hand, as Kathleen Woodward suggests in an impressively concise article on the many literary treatments of human aging, "the body is the permanent record of time, and Western literature records that gaze at the aging Other." The hostages undergo an experience whose effects are equivalent to a process of accelerated aging. Over a period of six weeks, they suffer the predictable deprivations of a kidnapping: lameness from forced marches through rough countryside; unpalatable food; contaminated drinking water; only rare chances to wash their clothing and bodies; lice; sleeping tied together and to their guards; fevers, diarrhoea, and the threat of cholera; having to attend to physical needs still bound together and under the constant scrutiny of guards and curious bystanders; the threat of dismemberment; and periods of acute fears and depression—all of which contribute towards an incremental state of decrepitude.

In addition to the particularity of these physical and psychological hazards the narrative deliberately underlines the cumulative process by which the captives become assimilated physically into the Chinese Other. Tinko's observation of Chinese village-women, for example, as "'rough and coarsened [since] they hardly ever change their clothes or wash their bodies, and the very grain of their skin is dark with dirt'" (71) is swiftly complemented by her first view of herself in a mirror: "'My cheeks were streaked with grime and my hair matted with dust and mud'" (74-75). This assimilation to (her perception of) the Chinese norm lingers to the end of the narrative: "'My hair was a sort of dun colour, all caked with dust and dirt and clinging together in strands, and my face was streaked with grime and tears, and even the grain of my skin was embedded and greyish'" (279). Tinko's awareness of the Othering effects of such deprivations is concisely expressed in her comment that "It is amazing how the difference between being reasonably clean and hopelessly dirty can affect one's outlook" (203).

Nevertheless, such personal decrepitude does not survive the narrative, since its impact as a form of degeneration (*pace*, for instance, Sarah Gertrude Millin's theories of white racial decline through miscegenation) is necessarily alleviated

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by its narrative displacement on to the Chinese themselves. This can be seen most acutely in the process of the now-ransomed captives’ return to (European) normality, during which they trek through a landscape in which the European self is temporarily dwarfed by the absolute degeneration of a whole society in the grip of lawlessness and war, conveyed (with perhaps surprising effectiveness) through the image of the wasteland of a neglected open graveyard:

"From time to time we passed coffins lying out in the fields, for there is no proper burial in that district. A few spadefuls of earth are heaped on to the coffin and that is all. In hard winters it is not unusual for pigs to uproot the coffins, gnaw through the wood, and devour the contents. Sometimes we came upon a solitary woman sitting wailing on the graves. As we went by they [sic] stopped caterwauling and watched us, mute with terror." (226-27)

In sum, the account parallels a physical progression from youth to old age, from self to Other, and—after the payment of the requisite ransom—from the dust of the grave to the potential of a physical resurrection.

The second of the two central motifs is then that of resistance to premature decrepitude (or degeneration). Tinko’s first observation of her personal assimilation to the physical appearance of the Other, taken as it is by means of a "'blurred, primitive [Chinese] glass,' serves to stimulate a simple reaction: "'I was horrified’" (74-75). As Woodward suggests,

It is not surprising that the image of the mirror should dominate literary representations of the aged body. The horror of the mirror image of the decrepit body is the inverse of the pleasures of the mirror image of the youthful Narcissus. (55)

Though distorted by being viewed from the perspective of the Chinese Other represented by the "primitive glass," the reflected image is the result of a process which impacts on Tinko (and/or on the dominant narrator, Packer?) and on the reader as (according to Woodward’s analysis) "an affront to our desire for youth—for strength, comeliness, vitality, appetite for life" (51). If the horror evoked by the image is to be rejected, then its causes must also be resisted.

Hence the popular "narcissistic" appeal of Tinko Pawley’s story. Together with her companion Charles, who is necessarily marginalised in the narrative as a result of his inability to function according to stereotype as a male rescuer, she defies the prematurity of physical decrepitude by re-asserting her will to regain
the freedom of her youthful sexual/quasi-virginal body. Tinko's resistance takes several forms. Cosmetics, for example, supplied from the outside world, besides conventionally restoring her feminine "self-confidence and self-respect" (107) become not so much an instrument of female erotic enhancement as a means of demonstrating difference from the encroaching Chinese Other: "My lipstick and some powder and cold cream had come, too, and a tiny mirror, and these things thrilled me enormously. I immediately began to clean my face with the cream, and make it up. . . . They [the Chinese] teased me for my vanity, . . . And they laughed and gazed at me, determined to witness these weird feminine rites to which I attached such importance!" (172). Secondly, Tinko and her companion Charles maintain their distance from the Other through humour: "Charles and I have quite a lot of fun here with the bandits. They are comic really" (241)—a comedy of Otherness expressed, for example, through her description of the desire of one of the bandits to take possession of two pairs of her old pink silk pants (110, 123-24).

The semiotics of Tinko's resistance also takes linguistic forms. Chinese identity is appropriated and neutralised by the classic colonial strategy of (re)naming the Other; hence, a bandit claiming to be a Christian becomes "John the Baptist" (31), another suffering from chronic flatulence "the Badger" (31), and a third is dubbed "'Albert the Good' because he was so evidently the worst man we had ever come across" (32); "Napoleon," "the Worm," "Beauty"; only Pei Pa-tien the bandit chief consistently retains his Chinese identity, in evident recognition of his power over their treatment and survival. Tinko's ultimate defensive strategy is nevertheless her proficiency in the language of her captors. This, together with her awareness of their ignorance of English, permits her to renegotiate daily the essential terms of their survival, a skill which, in Packer's doubtless accurate summation, amounts to a "shrewd instinctive analysis of the Chinese character and temperament, and [an] ability to amuse and impress the bandits. . . . In spite of themselves, they had to admire the brave and imperious girl who betrayed fear of neither God nor man" (8).

At the same time, however, Tinko embodies an ambivalence. Born a child of the Empire in China, and with fluency in both the language of colonisation and also the bandits' Manchurian dialect, she is both/neither English and/nor Chinese: involuntarily, she embodies self and Other. While the narrator can declare that "the Chinese mentality is an enigma to the Western mind" (73), Tinko's personal faculties include an insight into the Chinese mind which has been defined as "instinctive" (8), innate, native. In consequence, the equations set up as a key to
her identity by simplistic oppositional binaries such as English/Chinese, beauty/ugliness, civilisation/chaos, youth/decay are inadequately solved by a text such as *My Bandit Hosts*. Tinko Pawley is/was a child/wife, a girl/bride, but the father/husband who might conventionally have complemented and protected her identity is a physical absence from the processes she undergoes, and the colonial English father/husband is substituted by the grotesquerie of the Chinese bandit.

Tinko’s remembered experience of Otherness has been colonised, instead, and inevitably distorted, by a narrator who has been fascinated by the "magical world of adventure" embodied in the Otherness of China but who also, like Tinko while at school in England, is "desperately homesick for the long, low bungalow and the beautiful rambling garden of her childhood, for her kindly doctor father and the gentle charming mother" (14). The underlying ambivalence is, therefore, constructed (in Coullie’s terms) within the tension raised between the secondary "I" (or protagonist, Tinko) and the selfhood of the dominant narratorial "I," which in this text appears to shift seamlessly from narrator to implied author, and on to the real author, the anglophone Afrikaner, Joy Packer.

5. *The Dark Curtain*

In rejecting the implicit "Chinese-ness" of the European, Tinko Pawley, *My Bandit Hosts* resists acceptance of the aspect of Otherness implicit in her own ambivalent identity and in so doing participates in a psycho-political construct which in another colonial space, South Africa, became increasingly—though by no means exclusively—pertinent. In reference to the wilful apartheid process of ignoring and forgetting the borderlessness of the private, familial, and civic body, I have suggested elsewhere that "the anomaly of South Africa’s self-created dilemma . . . [was] the degree to which its inclusive space [was] officially designated exclusive space."26 This process of exclusion of integral elements of human experience, I would argue here, can be seen analogously as much in Packer’s last work, *The Dark Curtain*, as in her first.

Where *My Bandit Hosts* can be read on a generalised level as a work asserting the normative values of youth, including the illusory indestructibility of the private body and the equivalent reliability of the civic body in restoring order and preserving the existence of the individual, on a similar level *The Dark Curtain* is concerned less with the irreversibility of aging than with death itself.

This novel is typical of Packer’s work in that its popular love story, while a continuous element of the novel, is overshadowed by a more forcefully articulated discussion of the fictional identity of an internationally popular crime writer, Maud Carpenter, whose kidnapping is presented as an event that has occurred prior to the opening of the narrative itself. These two elements of the novel, the love story and the African adventure tale represented by the attempts of Maud Carpenter’s family and friends to undo the kidnapping, remain to a large extent causally detached from each other and as such, distract from and efface an aspect of the novel which I will identify tentatively in metatextual terms. This appears to consist in *The Dark Curtain’s* alternative, largely concealed status as a crime novel—which naturally it is in the obvious sense of the kidnapping itself. In addition, however, Packer has chosen as her main protagonist a character whose identity is that of crime writer, thereby setting up a metafictional dialogue which comments upon the sociopolitical conditions giving rise to the kidnapping and to its ultimate consequence, the murder of the protagonist. Arguably, therefore, the novel begins to work against the ostensible intentions of the real author, becoming a whodunnit demanding answers to the problems of the identity of the culprit and the culprit’s motivation, and in so doing subverting both the story and its surface ideology. In consequence, the following discussion will tend to neglect not only the love story, which remains the novel’s peripheral interest, but also the adventure tale, focusing instead upon the crime novel that has become the main preoccupation of the real author, Joy Packer.

In their superficies, then, the two works clearly differ. Set respectively in a historical China and a fictional southern Africa, the first is a journalistic sketch, the latter a work of popular romance; the one is centred ostensibly in the subjective identity of another white colonial woman, the other in that of an imaginary popular novelist. Perhaps most striking, however, is the difference concealed in the similar mechanisms of the two works devised to suggest the Otherness confronting their protagonists. Where *My Bandit Hosts* depends for its effects on the anarchic amorality of the bandits, *The Dark Curtain* locates its own threat to survival in an area of consistent (that is, non-anarchic) African cultural practice that has long been demonised in the Western perception of the "Dark Continent": witchcraft.

The South African political journalist, Allister Sparks, has usefully pointed out that the discovery by seventeenth-century European travellers in Africa of forms and practices of witchcraft "resonated in their minds in terms of what witchcraft meant in their own Judaic-Christian cultures," most notably the
profound belief that "Satan himself is the power behind all such conspiracies." Sparks goes on to suggest that, in a contemporary Western context,

these images are lodged deep in the psyche, and although, with the exception of a few isolated and aberrant cases, the practice of witchcraft has long since died out in the West, the psychology that gave rise to it has not. There is still a recrudescent impulse, especially in times of social stress, to blame the crisis on subversion from outside and betrayal within, and instead of attending to the underlying causes to seek out these imagined conspirators. Thus the witch hunt. (18-19)

Hence, it may be argued that African witchcraft deployed in a modern popular fiction intended for a Western readership will retain a potent myth-invoking and myth-creating content. Constructed within the frame of a realist fictional discourse, apparently factual details of witchcraft retain or gain a credibility which can be resisted only with difficulty by the majority of readers, whose assessments of their factuality will originate from a personal and ethnic centre which differs only with minor degrees of emphasis from that identified by Sparks in the experiences of the early European travellers.

As Sparks’s observations predict, other modern South African popular novels overtly concerned with contemporary African witchcraft—most notably Peter Essex’s *The Exile* (1984) and *We the Enemy* (1986)—invariably invoke "witch hunts" which function more nearly as attempts to search out and eradicate modern displacements of witchcraft: African cross-border armed "subversion" of South Africa allied with "betrayal" of the purported integrity of the apartheid state by domiciled black "communists" and their liberal white sympathisers. In the case of many other popular fictions, especially those by the influential and prolific South African authors Stuart Cloete, Geoffrey Jenkins and Wilbur Smith, the topic of witchcraft itself is almost entirely suppressed in favour of the subversive Otherness of African sexuality and of militantly oppositional African political movements, thus participating, as David Maughan Brown has noted at length of East African colonial popular fiction, in "the automatic linking of sex, violence and blackness in colonialist consciousness."  

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28 See Appendices 1 and 2, below.

These factors, needless to say, also play their own role in *The Dark Curtain*. Packer's conception of African witchcraft is entirely conventional; in her earlier novel, *The Blind Spot*, for example, the narratorial voice, merging almost seamlessly with that of one of the protagonists, suggests that "We don't encourage witchcraft. We try to eradicate it... It is still the duty of the Church and the State to stamp out witchcraft in its sinister forms. Sorcery is the scourge of Black Africa." Most notably, Packer considers it unnecessary in either novel to construct a narrative explanation of the historical role of witchcraft in traditional African society, or to adhere to any basic distinction between witchcraft and sorcery, or between witchcraft and traditional healing. Witchcraft/sorcery, rather, is restricted in *The Dark Curtain* to a status governed by a limited number of violent and superstitious practices conducted at the heart of every "African" sociopolitical community, endemic to it, and hence typical of the cohesion of "African" social organisation.

The representation of African witchcraft in *The Dark Curtain* is focused both on and through the body of Maud Carpenter, an independent and slightly eccentric character in her sixties who in her widowhood has sought solitude on a safari in a South African game sanctuary, wishing only to observe "'the innocence of wild animals'" (17). She has vanished without trace, and the mystery of her whereabouts introduces dialogue amongst other characters which fixes her characterisation and points towards some of the principal topics of the novel as a whole.

The eccentricity of her personality is matched by that of her kidnapping, since it has been carried out by strangers but on behalf of an old friend, Solomon, who more than a decade earlier has succeeded to the throne of the fictional kingdom of Nyangreela, a state unusually fortunate in that "the people... were all of the same tribe" (67-68). Despite (and as a result of) the king's assumption of autocratic powers, his rule is eventually challenged: "A new spirit had begun to weaken traditional loyalties. Power-hunger stirred among his younger subjects, restlessly poised between the long past and the immediate inflammable future... in which the mighty world powers of East and West sought to manipulate the developing African nations to their own best advantage" (68). To assert his authority, he must proclaim his successor to the throne by selecting one of the

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sons of his traditionally polygamous marriages, and his choice, imposed on him by the most forceful of his wives, is a seven-year-old, Solinje.

At this point, the topic intended as the logical centre of the plot comes into play. Given the king's age—he is in his fifties—and that of his son, Solomon realises that he must "remain in full control until [Solinje] has proved his manhood with his courage in the circumcision rites" (69). To do so, the king is persuaded that he must resort to witchcraft "to strengthen both father and child." . . No one would dare question [the] power of the Rain-Maker and the tribal witchdoctor, Dr Samuel Santekul (70-71)—the latter a character who must be presumed to have been cast in the role of Surgeon-General to the nation, noted in particular for his high consultancy fees. The king is, therefore, faced by a dual problem, firstly of how to finance payment of Santekul's professional fee, and then from whom to obtain a human body part of sufficient quality to make effective muti (or medicine) to ensure the continuation of his grasp on power. Santekul's solution is straightforward: by kidnapping, holding to ransom, and then not releasing alive Solomon's old acquaintance, Maud Carpenter.

Mrs Carpenter's captivity is entirely different from Tinko Pawley's. Held hostage in a remote border village which also serves as the location of the king's mountain spa, as Solomon's personal friend from colonial days she is well-treated, properly clothed in an African manner, well-fed, accommodated in a hut of her own within the village, and granted the freedom and safety to move about and communicate with whomsoever she chooses, receiving affection in return especially from the small boy, Solinje. Given such treatment and given her initial ignorance of the unalterable death clause contained within the unwritten kidnapping contract, there is no suggestion that she could or would wish to resist assimilation to the African norm. As she acknowledges, it consists to a large degree of conditions which, while "Other," are no less beneficent than some she has imagined existing in England—though not experiencing them herself: "Sharing this primitive village life in the continent of my birth is a unique experience. I wonder if it's basically so very different from that of the remote English hamlets I've chosen as the settings for my favourite thrillers?" (60). Her amenability to what she believes to be her "Africanisation" is also evidenced, for instance, in the typically Western anthropological interest she displays in the significance of patterning on the traditional African clothing she is given to wear (63). Her interest in the traditional African village causes her to appear, in the earlier phase of her captivity, to play the role of the white African rediscovering her connections with her native subcontinent. In sum, for all its Otherness, in
most respects the village is an apparently idyllic, unthreatening location for a fictional kidnap victim to await payment of a ransom in return for the freedom she expects and takes for granted.

The main precondition of Maud Carpenter's captivity is, however, traditional African "tribal" witchcraft. Witchcraft expands exponentially to permeate the whole text, becoming a more totally pervasive manifestation of Otherness than the physical and psychological degeneration imposed upon Tinko Pawley. According to the novel, its source lies in the pre-scientific irrationality of "superstition," and its effects are expressed in terms of the non-individual and non-corporeal collective African psyche which is purportedly beyond Western understanding and control. "Never underrate the sorcerer," thinks Mrs Carpenter to herself, "He or She is Africa!" (90), an opinion which is given its psychological counterpart in a white assessment of one of the most Westernised of the Nyangreelans: "I'm not stupid enough to imagine that I can really tune in to his mind. His thinking apparatus probably operates quite differently from yours and mine. It's a matter of upbringing and environment. His standards are not necessarily ours. He's a foreigner, Janie. To get right under his skin and into his brain might be to enter a labyrinth. Blocks and surprises all the way, and some pretty weird booby-traps to discourage intruders" (253).

When, however, the second, mortal aspect of the kidnapping becomes apparent to her, its alienness to the Western mind is effaced in the narrative by Maud's understandable inability to acquiesce in the terms of her own death. Her only recourse is resistance by means of the power of her (Western) intellect.

Her resistance takes two forms, the first familial in its consequence, the second entirely personal, though both are implicated in her physical identity. Thus, firstly, she outwits Santekul's material greed by preventing payment in Switzerland of the ransom against her witnessed signature. This she achieves by asserting aspects of the legal differences between her public identity, "Maud Carpenter" (which is concerned with the production of fantasies and which is by implication "African" since it is known to her African captors), and her private identity, "Maud Jane Carpenter" (which is familial, ethnically and culturally European, unknown to her captors, and concerned with the production of capital which can be handed down to later generations of that same family rather than to anonymous strangers). And, secondly, although she cannot prevent her own death at the hands of the "surgeon," Santekul, she achieves a personal victory over her physical perception of the event when, at the moment of her sacrifice in which her heart—emphatically, according to her granddaughter, a "thinking heart"
(194)—is to be removed from her living body for use in King Solomon’s muti, she swallows hemlock, the Socratic means of escape for the Western philosophical mind (315-16).

In addition to the protagonist’s resistance to the African Other, which exists by right of the logic of the realist narrative, a secondary resistance is also deployed in the text at the level of the narrator’s or implied author’s voice. In this case it functions through a de-historicisation of the fact of superstition in Western culture; Western superstition, the narrative repeatedly asserts, once existed, but has been superseded by the rationality of science, the shift manifested in the systematicity of modern post-Freudian psychology. Where superstition may still be referred to in Western culture is merely in the fantasies textualised in literary fiction.

Hence the significance of Maud Carpenter as a creator of romanticised popular fictions, who exclaims: "I’ve cooked up some pretty fearsome mixtures in my own literary stew-pot—local superstitions and hauntings, the evil eye, wicked squires, fake parsons, half-witted yokels and all the local gossip that makes rural life so intimately intriguing in a little place where everybody is concerned with everybody else’s business" (60). While she exploits the idea of witchcraft and superstition, The Dark Curtain insists that she does so in the belief that, as far as Western culture is concerned, they are phenomena which now linger on only within the atavistic recesses of the popular imagination rather than in actual practice. Typical of the textualisation of this view in The Dark Curtain is dialogue between Mrs Carpenter’s grand-daughter and a friend:

   Jane said: "There was plenty of witch-hunting in Europe a few centuries ago. . . ." Judy agreed. "Your grandmother wrote a splendid thriller about a coven of witches in the Isle of Wight in this century!"

   (140)

The temporal non-sequitur between "a few centuries ago" and "in this century" is effaced precisely by the historicity of Jane’s statement and the literary non-historicity of Judy’s. The difference, the Otherness that has both to be resisted and also, according to the novel’s insidious logic, to be maintained, is the absolute difference between, on the one hand, superstition and witchcraft as an actual, dynamic, African force and, on the other, their vestigial remnants which, in the form of entertaining fantasies such as those contained in popular fiction, still occasionally haunt the rationality of the Western scientific mind.
6. Erasure

If two such texts as *My Bandit Hosts* and *The Dark Curtain* can be seen in "sister-textual" proximity to each other despite the temporal gap in their production, their main significance may lie not only in their encoding of patterns of difference, of "self" and "Other," but also in their revelation of a continuity over more than four decades of what might be considered conventional Western ethnic expectations. Especially in the context of commercial, popular texts such as these, the continuity of their expectations cannot be explained simply in terms of the singleness of the identity of the writer. The writer writes to communicate her personal views (or ideology) to an audience, but since her commercial concerns are closer to the surface the design of her product must enter into a contract with market forces, by adapting her own perceptions, in some measure at least, to the tastes of her clientele.

In creating the terms of that literary contract between real author and implied reader, both works significantly reject the possibility of meaningful communication across the borders of ethnic, cultural, psychological difference, while carefully ignoring the possibility that similar degrees of "Otherness" may exist not only within our view of what is visually and tangibly Other but also within our "own" culture and our own "self." The silences of the texts, it may finally be claimed, neither restore the broken private and familial body of the colonised held hostage under colonialism, nor do they release white South Africa from its reluctant, self-imposed captivity within the greater civic body that is Africa. Their silences, rather, mark their ephemeral participation in the ongoing Western effacement of the actual, epitomised in the conundrums of apartheid legislation.

At the moment of her writing her final novel, Packer's South Africa was in the throes of the 1976 Soweto uprising, a time of immense social stress which expressed the explosion of frustration felt especially by a young, partially-Westernised, urban black population at state-imposed constraints on their educational advancement. Focusing, however, as it does upon the subjectivity of the coloniser, Packer's response to contemporary crisis, in "sister-textual" memory of earlier personal observation in other disrupted colonial contexts, in China and in Swaziland, has resulted in a no less opaque fictional text than many of those by other contemporary South African popular novelists, and the subjection of the colonised indeed remains unrelieved.
Conclusion

And I thought of all the women’s novels that lie scattered, like small pock-marked apples in an orchard, about the second-hand book shops in London. It was the flaw in the centre that rotted them. She had altered her values in deference to the opinions of others.¹

The sum of my investigation of the writing of Joy Packer declares that she wrote opportunistically, selecting appropriate generic forms under the pressures of external events—her husband’s absence, her son’s wartime safety, and her nation’s peacetime ethics. Regarded in the light of Western writing in the twentieth century, her work seems marked especially by its voluntary subjection to the conventionally masculine discursive structures dictated by colonialism, the racial politics of pre- and post-war South Africa, and the machinery of warfare itself: not merely the sea and ships but profoundly, for her personally, by her induction into the discursive mechanisms of propaganda.

The results of this willing subjection, for Packer’s self-narratives as much as for her fiction, were contradictory. As my opening chapter indicates, the choices that she made with regard to genre, readerships, and the internal structure of each work, whether autobiographical or fictional, required compromise. If her novels are (re)read primarily as romans à thèse, as Packer herself came increasingly to regard them, they may be seen on the one hand attempting to negotiate the terms of survival which (white) women could expect in a post-apartheid world, but ultimately they fail to achieve a form or a vision which might have enabled them to begin to come to terms in any significant way with the growing divisions within their discursive community, apartheid South Africa. The fulfilment of a peculiarly South African variety of white colonial desire—the achievement of comfort, security, and the right to individual liberties of a kind that was visible, remotely, elsewhere in the Western liberal democracies—fills her fictions with mirage-like forms, glimpsed upon the horizon but always remaining, finally, unattainable. Like the paintings of early colonial artists whose vision was shaped elsewhere according to formal conventions and cultural expectations which had no equivalents in the colonised landscape, popular romance demonstrates that forms imported along with the alien cultural baggage of other societies and circumstances fail to supply an adequate metaphor for the hybrid society that

Packer inhabited and feared.

Packer's work must, in consequence, be regarded as profoundly reactionary. If, in the Freudian terms of Brian Finney's examination of the self-narratives of childhood, the "human life cycle" indeed consists of "a series of attempts to recover the security of the infant by various substitute procedures," such as reliving one's childhood "either in fantasy form or in the course of artistic creativity,"\(^2\) then Packer's earliest autobiographical work, with its idealisation of the masculine power of the imperial Establishment and its reconstruction of a childhood in the security of the Mother City of the Union, can be seen to function emblematically for the whole of her writing. As my analysis in chapter three indicates, however, Packer's return to South Africa in mid-life impacted on her work in ways which were not immediately predictable, to the extent that her memories, vision, and insight seem constantly to revert to discursive constructs grounded in childhood, though re-constructed by the adult to reflect "adult needs and adult fears as much as it signifies the absence of childhood."\(^3\) It had been, above all, a childhood lived under a different régime.

Conclusively, the writing of Joy Packer is the product of its time. From the early 1920s, when as a student she attempted ingenuously to mediate through journalism the iconoclastic ideas of an influential university teacher to an uncomprehending public, through to the mid 1970s and the coincidence of the Soweto uprising with the writing of her final multiply-flawed novel, she perceived no more than a shadow of the significance of the events that besieged and invaded her work at every turn. At the height of her humanitarian concern for the impact of apartheid on individuals in South Africa, in particular on individuals "of colour," it can be seen that Packer failed to realise the full potential of the task at hand for her as a writer. At the end of her career as much as at its beginnings, as my study of her first and final works in chapter six indicates, her gaze remained fixed upon the subjective experience of the coloniser, and where her writing reveals concern for the subjection of the colonised—as it undeniably does in both her novels and her later memoirs—the extent, duration and location of that concern continued to be firmly circumscribed by the prerogative of the coloniser.

When I set out on this investigation, my first and main empirical aim was simply to examine ways in which Packer's work, long since neglected in the


\(^3\) Finney 119.
popular market-place and generally consigned to relatively brief entries in critical reference works, might be recuperated for its own sake. I found her writing both puzzling and fascinating: her earliest memoirs were full of the unimportant minutiae of a cosmopolitan and upper-middle-class English culture which had already ceased to exist before my own birth, fragments of lives lived a generation or two before my own, as inaccessible to the less mobile, less privileged strata of English society then as the passing of time has made them now.

The appeal of Packer’s writing was, then, its otherness—not a gendered Otherness, since, as my description of her various works may have revealed, her personal narratives maintain a restrictive control over access to the kind of sensual self which may be accessible in many other works within the same autobiographical genre. Packer, it might be claimed, mastered the skill of editing out the self, adroitly avoiding the potentially voyeuristic gaze of the Other, the reader. As memoirist, she stubbornly preserved the privacy of her personal life whilst appearing still to perform its bodily functions in the full glare of the public eye—if Joy had been a Tinko, and her husband a gallant but essentially peripheral Charles, then we, the curious, prying readership, would undoubtedly have been intended to play out the rôle of the unwashed barbarian bandits, momentarily believing that when we held her text in our hands we had actually taken the narrativised Joy Packer hostage. Part of the secret of the relative longevity of Packer’s popular success, it might then be claimed, lies in the extent to which she was able in this way to sustain her rôle as an illusionist, pleasing a public which evidently desired, and had paid, to be gulled.

Packer was an illusionist, however, not only to the extent that her self-narratives narrate so little of the self, but in the way in which her writing, as it moved on from the memoir to the popular fictional romance, played subliminal political games with a popular readership whose primary familiarity with her fiction was often not in the form of tangible, hard- or soft-covered books but in the fragmented, abbreviated chunks distributed in the ephemeral format of magazine serialisation, perhaps an ideal medium for the dissemination of contentious opinion. Packer essentially declared her discursive intentions when she decided to write fiction that would express her own views about her "beloved though controversial" homeland in an era when the international image of white South Africa was repeatedly under attack from opposition politicians, expelled and relocated clergymen, and other representatives of Western liberal dissent. Just as Pack and Follow and Grey Mistress, despite acute post-war paper shortages, had been granted publication rights on the grounds of their potential function as
integrative naval propaganda, so too did all of her subsequent publications reassert the apparent viability of a nostalgically post-imperial, white, middle-class South African society. In assuming the mode of the roman à thèse, however, her South African fictions unavoidably subvert their claim to romance, thus denying its potential insight into the sensuality expected of its genre and defrauding its readership of the promise of love. If true romance, the expression of desire in Western culture, can foster the growth of "resistances to the norms, proprieties and taxonomies of the cultural order," as Catherine Belsey has recently suggested,⁴ then Packer's writing, divided against itself like the white racist society within which she wrote, curiously confirms the validity of commentary such as Theodor Adorno's, though made in a very different context:

A work of art that is committed strips the magic from a work of art that is content to be a fetish, an idle pastime for those who would like to sleep through the deluge that threatens them, in an apoliticism that is in fact deeply political.⁵

Had Packer been a committed romancière, then the romance of her writing might indeed have stripped away the "magic"—the illusions—of her fetishistic, complacent, and essentially de-politicised, pseudo-liberal, anglophone discursive environment which had been engendered by the racism of colonialism and apartheid. Instead, as my analyses have shown, her writing fails repeatedly to approach what Adorno describes as "the uncalculating autonomy of works which avoid popularization and adaptation to the market."⁶ Lacking commitment to the morality of change, democratisation, or a de-racialised, colour-blind humanity, her works collapse inward upon their own frail structurations: the centre cannot hold.

The starting-point of this study of Joy Packer's writing was found in Dorothy Driver's observation that "the mediatory rôle placed upon and assumed by [white] South African women writers involves them in a set of contradictions, ambivalences and obliquities [since their] sympathy for the oppressed and their simultaneous entrapment within the oppressive group on whose behalf they may

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⁶ Adorno 190, my emphasis.
desire to mediate, complicates their narrative stance."7 The humane potential of Packer's liberalism, as the lives of many of her contemporaries testify, was great, but the ideological contradictions and the discursive ambiguities encoded in her chosen modes of writing reveal a world-view which, of necessity, remained essentially as it had started—the product of apprehension and insecurity in the face of a post-colonial future which in large measure could not be articulated for fear of losing an only too tenuous grasp on the past significance and present continuity of the historical moment of colonialism.

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