

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape



Hermann Wittenberg

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor Litterarum in the Department of English at the University of the Western Cape.

Supervisor: Professor A.N. Parr

May 2004

Keywords

The Sublime

Aesthetics

Race

Landscape

Immanuel Kant

Postcolonial theory

H.M. Stanley

John Buchan

Alan Paton

Rwenzori / Ruwenzori



Abstract

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Hermann Wittenberg

D.Litt. dissertation, Department of English, University of the Western Cape

Classical theories of the sublime, articulated primarily in the philosophical work of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, have increasingly attracted attention from contemporary thinkers and cultural theorists. In postcolonial theory, however, virtually no attention has been given to the colonial manifestations of the sublime. In this dissertation I have argued for a postcolonial reading of the sublime that takes into account the racial and gendered underpinnings of Kant's and Burke's classic theories. The complex and contradictory idea of the sublime, I propose, is one of the ways in which an alien, remote and incomprehensible social and natural landscape could be imaginatively mapped, visualised, and brought under the ambit of colonial reason. The belated emergence of sublime loco-descriptive discourses in late imperial romances and travel writing shows that the sublime not only functioned with references to gender and class, as in metropolitan centres, but that it was energised by the threatening facts of racial difference on the colonial frontier. The thesis uses this understanding of the sublime as a lens for an analysis of the cultural politics of landscape in a range of late imperial and early modern texts about Africa. A re-reading of Henry Morton Stanley's central African exploration narratives, John Buchan's African fiction and political writing, and later texts such as Alan Paton's fiction, autobiographies and travel writing, together with an analysis of colonial mountaineering discourse, suggest that non-metropolitan discourses of the sublime, far from being an outmoded rhetoric, could manage and contain the contradictions inherent in the aesthetic appreciation and appropriation of contested colonial landscapes.

Declaration

I declare that “The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape” is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Hermann Wittenberg

May 2004

Signed:



Acknowledgements

The debts incurred in such a dissertation are many, but I would like to single out a few people without whose support and inspiration this work would not have been possible. Firstly, I want to thank my supervisor, Prof. A.N. Parr, whose interest, calm guidance and meticulous feedback gave me the confidence to bring this project to a final conclusion. Looking further back, Prof. David Bunn introduced me to the field of landscape theory in the graduate seminar *Landscape and Memory* at the University of the Western Cape. I have also been privileged to work with colleagues such as Peter Merrington, who has an encyclopaedic knowledge of Cape Victorian and Edwardian culture, and Peter Kohler, who knows Alan Paton's work better than anyone else. I also need to thank many other colleagues, both at UWC and elsewhere, for their feedback and suggestions at several staff seminars and conferences where I tested some of my initial ideas. Some of the earlier research was carried out during post-conference visits to the excellent libraries of Yale and Emory Universities, and I thank Profs Paul Landau and Sheila Tefft respectively for helping to arrange these informal research fellowships. I am also grateful for the hospitality and help given to me by Jewel Koopman and Estelle Barkhuizen at the Alan Paton Centre in Pietermaritzburg. The research trips to KwaZulu Natal have been funded by a generous grant by the Research Committee of the University of the Western Cape. Most importantly, without the two half year periods of sabbatical leave in 2003 and 2004, I would not have had the time to complete the research and the writing, and I am very grateful to the Faculty of Arts and the Andrew Mellon Foundation for this support. Finally, I would like to thank my entire family, especially my wife Zannie, for giving me the space and time to complete the project.

The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation of South Africa (NRF) towards this research is hereby gratefully acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily attributed to the NRF.

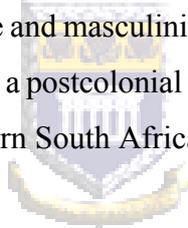
Contents

Introduction		1
Chapter 1	Theories of the Sublime	15
Chapter 2	African Mountains and the Sublime	64
Chapter 3	Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing	115
Chapter 4	Paton's Sublime: Race, Landscape and the transcendence of the Liberal Imagination	176
Conclusion		227
Bibliography		231



Introduction

In what is by now regarded as a classic study of the politics and poetics of the South African landscape, J.M.Coetzee investigates the complex question “as to why the sublime did not flourish in nineteenth-century South Africa” (1988:55) and how the picturesque rather than the sublime became a more dominant mode in colonial “white writing.” In this thesis I want to take up and develop this argument and show that the sublime did indeed become an important though not wide-spread mode in colonial writing towards the end of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century. An investigation into discourses of the sublime in colonial culture and letters about the African interior will help us to gain an understanding of imperial aesthetics, and in particular of how concerns about race and masculinity were articulated and represented. This dissertation will then attempt to develop a postcolonial theory of the sublime in order to re-read a number of late colonial and early modern South African texts.



Classical theories of the sublime, articulated primarily in the philosophical work of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, have increasingly attracted attention from contemporary thinkers and cultural theorists. Jean-Francois Lyotard’s theoretical work, for instance, is a sustained engagement with Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, leading him to declare that the “sublime is perhaps the only mode of artistic sensibility to characterise the modern” (1993:247). Terry Eagleton’s *Ideology of the Aesthetic* is a major contribution to a field of study that was long regarded as reactionary. Similarly, Jacques Derrida’s concept of parergonality, developed in *Truth in Painting*, deconstructs the Kantian sublime from the margins.¹ While theories of the sublime have been fruitfully used to examine a range of areas ranging from postmodernity to masochism, and tourism² to hypermedia,³ virtually no attention has been given to the sublime in postcolonial theory and criticism. My thesis is an attempt to develop such a postcolonial theory of the sublime by rereading the classical Burkean and Kantian theories through the lens of racial difference. In developing a theory about the ideological function of the sublime in imperial aesthetics, my thesis will look afresh at the classic philosophical writings (Burke and Kant), as well as draw on structuralist (Weiskel⁴) and poststructuralist readings (De Bolla, Lyotard) and

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

more recent feminist critiques (Freeman, Labbe). In these latter studies, the sublime is not read as a purely aesthetic category nor merely as a rhetorical style, but as a mode of domination in which a male subject asserts his rational supremacy over an excessive and unrepresentable experience, leading to a triumphantly enhanced sense of identity. As Barbara Freeman, in *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* puts it, the sublime involves a sexually coded dominance of "male spectatorship" over "objects of rapture" (1995: 3). Similarly for Jacqueline Labbe, in her book *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism*, the sublime involves the masculine "power of the eye and a proprietary relationship to the landscape" (1998: 37). The above cited studies concern themselves with the sublime as a mode of representing landscapes revealing a gendered structure of power.

This concern with the structures of power inherent in aesthetic representations is congruent with a large body of work in landscape theory that has emerged in the last thirty years. These theories show how the forces of capital and property accumulation are reflected in landscapes, and treat them as ideological-spatial formations. As Raymond Williams (and a whole school of landscape theorists in his wake) has shown with regard to Britain, picturesque landscapes (both in art and literature) were in a sense an invention of the industrialised cities, through which the degrading effects of capitalism and the presence of rural labour could be suppressed. As John Urry puts it, the spatial politics of the country house and aristocratic estate shows that "class conflicts are in fact caused by, or are displaced onto, spatial conflicts" (1995:14). Urry's point about the imbrication of the social and the spatial has been amplified by a number of influential studies in social geography and postmodern theory, exemplified by the work of Edmund Soja, David Harvey⁵ and Fredric Jameson. A key feature of these post-Marxist analyses is that social space is not only understood vertically in terms of local class differences, but is analysed as part of a larger, over-arching global system that depends on "spatial disjunction" for its exercise of power. As Jameson puts it,

a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside the daily life and existential experience of the home country, in colonies over the water whose life experience and life world – very different from that of the imperial power – remain unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power, whatever social class they

Introduction

may belong to. Such spatial disjunction has as its immediate consequence the inability to grasp the way the system functions as a whole. (1990: 50-1)

Jameson's ideas are intriguing because they characterise the "unimaginable" supra-national capitalist order precisely in terms of the sublime: the labyrinthine immensity of global capital markets and the disaggregated nature of a post-industrial production of value bring about an "inability to grasp" the new system of globalised capital "as a whole".⁶

The above cited studies in a broader sense concern themselves with the problematic discursive effects of European modernity, but, with the exception of Jameson, exclude the wider geopolitical situatedness and a global context in their analyses. The terms 'race', 'empire' and 'colony' are missing in their studies. It is precisely this occlusion of the imperial context of European modernity that is addressed in postcolonial theory. One of the basic tenets of postcolonial criticism (most notably exemplified in the work of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Robert Young) is that Western modernity is inextricably linked to the establishment of colonies and the formation of empires. As Said has put it, the "major ... determining, political horizon of modern Western Culture [is] imperialism" (1993: 60). In Said's work, which has helped to deconstruct the Western academy's blindness to the legacy of empire,⁷ culture is conceived of as the vanguard of empire, and it is precisely "in culture," according to Catherine Belsey, "that hierarchies of power are defined and specified" (1992: x). In other studies, it has been suggested, the colonies have shaped the direction of European modernity. As the Comaroffs have put it, "the civilising mission was no mere exporter of finished products and finished truths. The frontier was also integral to the making of the European metropole, to the rise of modernity at home" (1997: xvi).

Postcolonial criticism has always analysed colonial power through the multifarious signs, metaphors and narratives of both the dominating and indigenous cultures, in other words, the cultural formations and representational practices that can be understood as colonial discourses. Initially these discourses were examined primarily in terms of binary oppositions, as exemplified in Abdul JanMohamed's use of the Manichean allegory as a template for understanding colonial

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

discourse which he defined as a

field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilisation and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object. The power relations underlying this model set in motion such strong currents that even a writer who is reluctant to acknowledge it and who may indeed be highly critical of imperialist exploitation is drawn into its vortex. (1985:63)

Subsequent criticism has tended to regard colonial discourses as highly complex, ambivalent fields that are always unstable and threaten to unsettle the Manichean binary opposition between coloniser and colonised. They need relentless re-inscription and repetition – the work of stereotype – in order to contain their instability. Bhabha’s work, for instance, is saturated with a terminology that is inimical to notions of fixity and essence: hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, discontinuity, liminality. For him “the subject of colonial discourse – splitting, doubling, turning into its opposite, projecting – is a subject of affective ambivalence and discursive disturbance” (1994: 94). Imperial power is not simply imposed; rather, the colony is a contested arena which produces ambivalences and contradictions:

If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the *production* of hybridization rather than the hegemonic command of colonial authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change occurs. It reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and entails a form of subversion that is founded on that uncertainty. (1994: 97)

My interest in the colonial manifestations of the sublime intersects with a number of studies that focus on the complex culture effects that arise in the imperial borders, the unstable terrain of cultural contestation that Mary Louise Pratt has called “contact zones” (1992: 6), or, in Urry’s terms, the “inter-societal systems” of “time-space edges” (1995:16). The complex and contradictory idea of the sublime, I propose, is one of the ways in which an alien, remote and incomprehensible social and natural landscape could be imaginatively mapped, visualised, and brought under the ambit of colonial reason. The belated emergence of sublime loco-descriptive discourses in late imperial romances and travel writing shows that the sublime not only functioned with references to gender and class, as in metropolitan cultures, but that it was

Introduction

energised by the threatening facts of racial difference on the colonial frontier. My major interest in the sublime, one which I will explore in more detail in subsequent chapters, is thus the way in which discourses of sublimity became translocated, not only across time, but also spatially, from metropolitan centres to imperial peripheries, claiming a specificity of form and ideological purpose in colonial settings. As Romanticism waned in the 1830s, and the effects of industrial capitalism transformed European cities and rural landscapes in the course of the nineteenth century, the capacity of nature to evoke sublime experiences at home became progressively eroded. Instead, a variety of exotic colonial locales, made accessible to metropolitan audiences through the expansion of the British empire in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, became increasingly available as settings for romance and adventure. The country-city dichotomy was in a sense displaced on to the imperial terrain, where the unfettered wildness of colonial borders could compensate for an erosion of nature and value in metropolitan centres. The enormous popular appetite in the nineteenth century for exploration writing, romantic quest narratives and treasure hunts set amid the savage wilds show that colonial landscapes functioned as a repository of values that could no longer be accessed unproblematically at home.

The new genre of the adventure novel, exemplified in the writing of H. Rider Haggard, R.L. Stevenson, Conan Doyle, Kipling, H.G. Wells and John Buchan, had a particularly conspicuous flowering in the latter part of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century, a period of increasingly assertive British colonial expansion that is sometimes referred to as the New Imperialism. As several critics such as Patrick Brantlinger (1988) and John MacKenzie (1994) have pointed out, the period of the New Imperialism saw a greater public assertiveness and centrality of empire, but it was a period also marked by increased anxieties that centred on a perceived decline of civilisation, and cultural decadence. Furthermore, British economic and political authority came under threat through increased inter-European rivalry and several colonial crises, ranging from the traumatic defeat of Gordon at Khartoum in 1885 to the Boer War that broke out in 1899. These colonial military setbacks, coupled with the rise of the suffragette movement at home, created anxieties about traditional gender roles, and the masculine adventure novel can in a sense be understood as a nostalgic attempt to resolve these tensions. The

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

empire has conventionally been understood to function as an ideological safety valve deflecting the pressures of home. Imaginary colonial frontiers, in particular those in Africa, could be constructed as terrains in which an effete metropolitan masculinity could be re-energised through manly assertion and intrepid adventure. As Elaine Showalter has put it, the masculine romance novel fulfilled

a yearning for escape from a confining society, rigidly structured in terms of gender, class and race, to a mythologised place elsewhere where men can be freed from the constraints of Victorian morality. In the caves, jungles, or mountains of this other place, the heroes of romance explore their secret selves in an anarchic space which can safely be called 'primitive'. (1991:80)

Similarly, Herbert Sussman, in *Victorian Masculinities* (1995) has written about the colonial frontier as a dangerously charged libidinal arena in which the restless and aggressive male energies could be productively transformed into "a homosocial world of labour and of letters imbued with chaste yet perilously intense masculine bonding" (1995:19)

In focussing on the role of the sublime in the representation of colonial landscapes, my dissertation hopes to show that the sublime, as an aesthetic category, is unthinkable without a notion of racial difference and colonial alterity. I will show that this already applies to the foundational texts on the sublime by Kant, both in the *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* and in the *Critique of Judgement*, as well as in Edmund Burke's famous *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. The aesthetic of the sublime, I will argue, is in this sense a cultural formation in which the emergent new imperial values, stereotypes and desires could be constituted and contested. A re-reading of Henry Morton Stanley's central African exploration narratives, John Buchan's African fiction and political writing, and even later texts such as Alan Paton's fiction, autobiographies and travel writing, together with an analysis of colonial mountaineering discourse, suggests that non-metropolitan discourses of the sublime, far from being an outmoded rhetoric, could manage and contain the contradictions inherent in the aesthetic appreciation and appropriation of contested colonial landscapes. My concern in this thesis is not so much with a symptomatic analysis of textualised landscapes (as artefacts which can be read and decoded), but with the complex

Introduction

cultural politics which produce spaces. A landscape, whether as a material spatiality or its representation, is, as Paul Carter has put it, one of the principal “spatial forms and fantasies through which a culture declares its presence” (1987: xxii).

Postcolonial theories often use spatial terms, but mostly they are used metaphorically. In this dissertation, I intend to move beyond the spatial rhetoric that inhabits much of postcolonial theory and look at the role actual colonial locales played in the construction of imperial fantasies. A key focus area of the thesis is then how the representation of montane colonial landscapes (and their obverse, such as low-lying tropical jungle) both reflects and shapes imperial discourses around civilisation, masculinity and whiteness. In brief, late imperial discourses on mountains rely on a whole range of established beliefs, knowledges and practices: Darwinian social theory (a civilisational hierarchy is overlaid on the altitudinally differentiated topography); aesthetics (mountains as a landscape of sublime experience); sexual politics (colonial mountaineering as masculine proving ground and escape from the cramped domestic spaces of Victorian England); and lastly, imperial geo-politics (mountaineering or vertical colonisation as a metonym for the superiority of one nation or race over the other). All these ideas about mountains rely on a racialised discursive formation that one could call aggressive tropicalism⁸ – a complex of ideas, attitudes and feelings that, similar to Said’s notion of Orientalism, informs knowledge about geography and people. Low-lying hot countries are typically imagined as being inhabited by people of lower civilisational rank. The higher ground, as exemplified in John Buchan’s novel *Lodge in the Wilderness*, is associated with a more noble character, a higher intellectual capacity, and is therefore figured as natural home for colonial settlement. Colonial control and exercise of power, and the potential for civilisational progress is mapped over an altitudinally differentiated terrain in which the high ground is claimed as a natural domain for colonial settlement. Conversely, areas of low-lying bush, whether Stanley’s Congo jungle, Buchan’s Transvaal lowveld or even to some extent Paton’s Kalahari plains, are represented as inferior, disease-ridden wastes fit only for dissolute Africans. In this discursive figuration, African highlands and mountains became invested with a correspondingly high sense of value. As the story of the

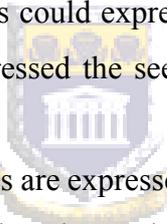
The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

discovery and conquest of the Ruwenzori shows, mountains, especially snow-covered white peaks in the midst of tropical heat, are sites for intense European desire and are thus endowed with sublime value that can be understood as a spatialisation of racial difference. In a range of texts then, colonial montane landscapes are represented as a domain where white presence in Africa can be naturalised and become at home, such as Stanley's conception of the Ruwenzori mountains as a holy "white temple" in darkest Africa, or John Buchan's assertion that European settlement on "the uplands" could solve the "tropical problem". Such an altitudinally differentiated topography plays a key role in articulating Buchan's imperial ideas around race, masculinity and nation. This understanding of the African landscape, incidentally, also underpins Herbert Baker's theatres of the sublime: his memorial and funerary architecture dedicated to Cecil John Rhodes.⁹

While the analysis in Chapters 2 and 3 brings together a variety of montane sites that energised the British imperial project, Chapter 4 will look at the persistence of the racialised structures of the sublime in the post-imperial South Africa. This, I will argue, is evident in Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, where Jarvis's farm "High Places" functions as a vantage point from which not only the ecological damage of the low-lying "native reserve" is observed, but is also imagined as a site for continued patrilineal inheritance of white colonial property in Africa. Despite Paton's wide acclaim as a champion for non-racialism, a closer look at his complex and aestheticised engagement with the African landscape reveals problematic deep structures of racial difference. This becomes particularly evident in a major unpublished manuscript that came to light in the course of the research. In it, Paton tells the story of the Natal Kalahari Expedition which set out in 1956 to discover Farini's mythical lost city of an "ancient civilisation" in the "Aha Mountains". Paton's travel narrative is heavily influenced by the conventions of Victorian colonial quest romances such as those of Rider Haggard, and contains remarkably anachronistic views on the "dark", "primitive" Bushmen. In sharp contrast to his attitudes towards the people of the Kalahari plains, Paton's sublime evocation of the "Aha Mountains" is based on the desire of discovering archeological evidence of a civilised, Northern race in the middle of a dark continent.

Introduction

In the course of my research, I have been repeatedly struck by the number of leading South African political, literary and other public figures that were either mountaineers or professed to be “lovers of mountains”. Such a pervasive and deep interest in mountains is unlikely to be without political and ideological significance, as the example of Jan Christian Smuts, twice Prime Minister of South Africa, exemplifies. It was Smuts’ belief that the “mountain summits” are privileged places to experience “a new freedom, a great exhilaration, an exaltation of the body” and thereby build a new type of citizen endowed with a larger, grander vision of self and society. As the early journals and other papers of the Mountain Club of South Africa show, this organisation played an important role in not only fostering British and Boer reconciliation around a shared outdoor experience, but also shaped an ethos of muscular assertion of white presence in the land. Such a shared love of mountains could express a common moral and civilisational destiny in the dark continent. Smuts expressed the seemingly universal civilised regard for mountains as follows:



In man all moral and spiritual values are expressed in terms of altitude. The low express degradation both physical and moral. If we wish to express great intellectual or moral or spiritual attainments, we use the language of altitudes. We speak of men who have risen, of aims and ideals that are lofty, we place the seat of our highest religious ideals in high Heaven, and we consign all that is morally base to nethermost hell. (1951: 224 -225)

In Smuts’ view, mountainous heights could function as a spatial metaphor that articulated the common “moral and spiritual values” shared by the two civilised white races of South Africa, but also throw into sharp relief the moral and intellectual divisions between “high Heaven” and “nethermost hell”, that in an African context become inevitably racialised. Similarly, Dr H.F. Verwoerd, in a foreword on a book on Cape mountain passes, praised the “beauties of nature, the grandeur of scenery” amidst a “continent of recent darkness and ever-recurring drama”(Burman, 1963: n.p). The South African Mountain Club, incidentally, was not only an exclusively white organisation until twenty years ago, but also barred Jewish members in the 1930s and 40s.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Smuts' use of mountains as a trope for social values is by no means unique and has a longer lineage in the cultural history of the West, as I will show in the following chapter. One of the most influential Victorian writers and philosophers, John Ruskin, used the binary distinction between mountains and lowland as means not only to express a "grand principle of the truth about the earth" but to define a new, assertive sense of male identity:

Mountains are to the rest of the body of the earth, what violent muscular action is to the body of man. The muscles and tendons of its anatomy are, in the mountain, brought out with force and convulsive energy, full of expression, passion, and strength; the plains and lower hills are the repose and the effortless motion of the frame, when its muscles lie dormant and concealed beneath the lines of beauty, yet ruling those lines in every undulation. This, then, is the first grand principle of the truth of the earth. The spirit of hills is action, that of the lowlands repose; and in between these there is to be found every variety of motion and rest... (*Modern Painters* 1903 (1843): 427)

In Ruskin's extraordinarily forceful discourse,¹⁰ mountains are imagined as a powerful metaphor for the muscular "body of man". The gendered opposition between the active mountains and the passive lowlands, conceived of as the contrast between "violent muscular action" and feminine "repose", helped Ruskin to define a new robust aesthetic that distinguished itself sharply from effete aestheticism and excessive artistic sensuality of the later Victorian era, as exemplified by Oscar Wilde. The climber and economist Frederick Mummery, writing in 1895, thus saw climbing as an antidote to the effeminising consequences of Aestheticism and regarded mountaineering as one of the few truly masculine activities still possible in the decadent *fin de siècle*. Similarly, Leslie Stephen, President of the Alpine Club (and father of Virginia Woolf) regarded alpinism as a remedy for dissipation of masculine energies: "The heavy, sodden framework of flesh and blood which I languidly dragged along London streets has undergone a strange transformation, and it is with scarcely a conscious effort that I breast the monstrous hill which towers above me".¹¹ Climbing mountains was considered to be ideal for the formation of a manly character that was shaped by physical exertions and an exposure to danger. As Francis Gorman has put it,

Introduction

For many Victorian Alpine climbers, ... the strenuous activity of mountaineering allowed for the projection of a certain kind of heroic masculine identity beyond the complications and ties of quotidian life (2000:134)

These Victorian ideas about the value of mountains are articulated clearly in John Buchan's South African experiences and will be looked at in more detail in Chapter 3.

The fascination in the West with mountains, particularly through the mediation of aesthetic schemata such as the sublime, is entangled with an ideology of racial and sexual difference. As I will show in this dissertation, the representation of colonial mountains (and their obverse, low-lying tropical plains) is persistently shaped by a notion of civilisational hierarchy where an altitudinally differentiated topography functions as a marker of civilisational and racial difference. It is not surprising then, that the term Caucasian (coined by a German professor who once taught Coleridge) is derived from an Eurasian mountain range, reputedly the origin of the white race. Similarly Herder, the German philosopher whose ideas were later appropriated by the Nazis, saw the racial origins of Europeans in the sublime mountains of the Himalayas.¹² Colonial discourses of the sublime, often used to evoke and aestheticise the rarified and exalted character of montane landscapes, in this sense mask an underlying racial logic. It is particularly this connection between classical European discourses of the sublime and colonial discourses of race that is hitherto unexplored in critical theory, and where my dissertation hopes to break new ground. Rereading colonial discourses of the sublime (particularly when they concern African montane landscapes) in the light of the racial underpinnings that inform Burke's and Kant's aesthetic theories and philosophies, can allow us to develop insights into the dynamics of the simultaneous disavowal and foregrounding of race present in much of South Africa's colonial and postcolonial writing.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida *The Truth in Painting* (1987), pages 49 - 50 *passim*.
2. See, for instance, C. Bell and J. Lyall: *The Accelerated Sublime. Landscape Tourism and Identity*. Their study is potentially interesting, but is marred by superficial analysis and weak theorisation.
3. For example Gayatri Spivak: "The Internet has since then domesticated the sublime, somewhat like the cultivated ruins and wilderness two centuries ago" (1999: 325). See also Tabbi.
4. See Thomas Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (1976) Weiskel reads the sublime in classical structuralist terms, as a phenomenon in discourse when the relationship between the signifier and the signified breaks down. In the Romantic sublime, the endless repetition or flow of signifiers produces a "discourse ruptured by an excess of the signified" (1976: 26). Relying on Roman Jacobsen's structuralist reading of aphasia, Weiskel discerns two distinct modes in the representation of the sublime moment, each with its characteristic anxieties and strategies for resolution. These are the metaphorical sublime and the metonymical sublime:
"In the first case, which threatens an excess on the plane of the signifiers, the syntagmatic flow must be halted, or at least slowed, and the chain broken up if discourse is to become meaningful again. This can only be done through a substituted term into the chain, i.e., through metaphor. ... We may call the mode of the sublime in which the absence of meaning becomes significant the metaphorical sublime, since it resolves the breakdown of discourse by substitution. ... The other mode of the sublime may be called metonymical. Overwhelmed by meaning, the mind recovers by displacing its excess of signified into a dimension of contiguity which may be spatial or temporal" (1976: 28).
5. See Edmund Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) which re-asserts the primacy of space (as opposed to time) as a fundamental category of analysis in social critique. In his attempt to spatialise Marxism, he claims that "spatial issues are the fundamental organizing concern, for disciplinary power proceeds primarily through the organisation, enclosure and control of individuals in space" (1989: 63). David Harvey's *The Postmodern Condition* (1990) is less focussed on economic theory and analyses modernist and postmodern culture in terms of changing conceptions of *both* space and time. He discerns a process of "space-time compression" as an essential ingredient in the shaping of twentieth century culture. This allows Harvey to see less of a strict division between modernism and postmodernism: there is a "continuity of the condition of fragmentation, ephemerality, discontinuity, and chaotic change in both modernist and postmodernist thought" (1990: 44).

Introduction

6. In *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Fredric Jameson develops a theory about the complex relationship between the material reality of a globalised capital order and the cultural forms it brings forth. He analyses the European modernist novel within the context of “the disaccumulative moment of late monopoly or consumer or multinational capitalism” (1981:11). For Jameson, the modernist disavowal of realist aesthetics, the dispersal of linear narrative progression, and the fragmentation of the text into an aggregation of impressionistic images, registers – even as it evades – the way in which social life is instrumentalised and integrated into a global capitalist system. The modernist work is only *seemingly* autonomous from this material reality; its aestheticised language and excessive stylistic experimentation only *appear* to be dislocated from the historical space of capitalism in which all production is rational and market-driven. Jameson’s insistence on the “priority of the political interpretation of literary texts” as “the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation” (1981:13) impels him to detect “the traces of that uninterrupted narrative [of class struggle]” and allows him to restore “to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history” (1981:20). Jameson regards Conrad, in particular *Lord Jim*, as an exemplary instance of a modernist text which reveals, in its form and style, the ideological contradictions of its time:

In Conrad we can sense the emergence not merely of what will be contemporary modernism, ... but also, still tangibly juxtaposed with it, of what will variously be called popular culture or mass culture, the commercialised cultural discourse of what, in late capitalism, is often described as a media society. (1981:206)

For Jameson, modernist style thus emerges as an aesthetic response in which the unpalatable and unrepresentable material conditions of late capitalism are displaced and reconfigured. Realist representation would articulate the increasing social alienation and instrumentalisation of high capitalism too harshly. In *Lord Jim*, for instance, the sea is represented as a nostalgic, free space seemingly dislocated from the alienating effects of capitalism and the strictures of class oppression. Conrad achieves this through an impressionistic stylisation and aestheticisation of the sea, which, Jameson argues, constitutes “a repression of work” and erases the fact that the sea is “the workplace itself” (1981:210) of a globalised capitalism. Jameson thus recognizes the Conradian sea as “the very element by which an imperial capitalism draws its scattered beachheads and outposts together, through which it slowly realises its sometimes violent, sometimes silent and corrosive, penetration of the outlying pre-capitalist zones of the world” (1981:213). For Jameson then, the modernist crisis of representation is thus nothing less than an effect of empire, and this effect is to be seen more precisely in its style and form rather than in its manifest content.

7. Said’s central thesis is that western culture and imperialism are fundamentally entangled with each other: “the novel, as a cultural artefact of bourgeois society, and imperialism are unthinkable without each other to such a degree that it is impossible, I would argue, to read one without in some way dealing with the other” (1993:84)

8. See the chapter “Inventing Tropicality” in David Arnold’s *The Problem of Nature* for a

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

useful introduction to the genealogy of the term.

9. See my paper, "Rhodes Memorial: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Culture" (1993) for a detailed analysis of Baker's funerary architecture.

10. Critics concur that Ruskin's popularity for Victorian audiences is partly due to his extraordinary rhetorical style. Harold Bloom, for instance refers to his "ornate and opulent diction, prophetic rhythm, and extraordinary emotional range" (1983: 1).

11. Mummery eventually met his death climbing in the Himalayas. His ideas, and the quotation by Leslie Stephen are referred to by Gorman (2000:135).

12. For a discussion of the origins of the term 'Caucasian', see Robert Young's *Colonial Desire* (1995: 64-65).



CHAPTER 1

Theories of the Sublime

The sublime has played a major role in the history of Western thought. A concept of extraordinary fluidity, ambivalence and, at times, vacuousness, the sublime has occupied the minds of major philosophers and writers. In Romantic literature and art the sublime became an at times dominant mode of imagining nature, and its influence has since pervaded a wide range of literary periods and genres. While this thesis cannot provide a full investigation into the long and complex history of the concept of the sublime in Western aesthetics, it will rehearse key theories of the sublime and their influence in European culture and letters in order to provide a grounded understanding of late imperial discourses of the sublime in Africa.

At a very basic level, two rather simplistic ‘definitions’ of the sublime may provide a provisional conceptual map. Firstly, the sublime is that which moves one. The sublime has an affective force with the power to transform the subject, to evoke strong, even overpowering feelings, usually in a manner that is elevating and uplifting, but also potentially terrifying. Secondly, such a sublime experience cannot be represented, or at least not *fully* represented. Any discourse of the sublime also embodies, paradoxically, its own representational failure as the immensity of the sublime object or experience exceeds the capacity of language to represent it.

While this latter aspect of sublimity, as an unstable discursive category, is claimed to have played a crucial role in the shaping of the post-Enlightenment or modern subject, I will more narrowly argue that post-romantic discourses of the sublime in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Africa can be understood as a telling index of contemporary conceptions of male white identity in the colonial arena. The sublime, a largely spent aesthetic force in post-romantic Europe, became, I will contend, an ideologically useful aesthetic scheme for the representational management of the imperial borders. Through discourses of sublimity, a potentially threatening landscape of topographical and human otherness could be contained and

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

normalised, converting fear and potential terror into pleasing delight. On the surface, such colonial discourses of the sublime could be regarded as outdated and belated variants of metropolitan aesthetics; a closer analysis reveals how they articulate ideologies of sexual and racial difference. In what I think is an unexplored theoretical approach to the sublime, I will show how the discourses of the sublime helped to reconstruct key imperial concerns about masculinity, race and civilisational superiority in terms of aesthetics. I will show that the sublime, as a discursive structure, had this capacity for aggressive sexual and racial differentiation already in its eighteenth century roots. The larger point is that theories and discourses around the sublime have major ideological implications beyond the merely aesthetic. The colonial sublime, in my understanding, is then less a mode of rhetorical grandeur and loftiness (as in the original Longinian analysis), and more a category of somatic experience which compounds terrors and thrills (as theorised by Burke); or, a highly specialised technique of the Enlightenment imagination (Kant) in which the subject masters a form of alterity that is excessive, overwhelming, threatening and incomprehensible. In this affective technology of the sublime, that excess of otherness is managed and domesticated by reason: a discursive recuperation that allows a paradoxical mastery of the subject over excessive and threatening experience, leading to a triumphantly enhanced sense of identity. In this sense, the sublime can be understood as one of the discursive strategies of imperialism, where that which is to be sublimated is essentially the question of racial difference and the violence of white settlement in Africa.

Before embarking on a theorisation of the sublime and related psychoanalytic notions of sublimation, a more careful terminological investigation may be useful. The words ‘sublime’ and ‘sublimation’, while sharing the same Latin root and thus a certain convergence of meaning, have a quite different etymological history which it is important, at the outset, to untangle. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED X, 29 - 33) traces the word ‘sublime’ and its derivatives to the Latin *sublimis*, comprising the prefix ‘sub’ (not ‘below’, but ‘up to’) and the word ‘limen’ (lintel or threshold). The early uses of the word already embodied meanings of elevation, height and rarification, with the verb forms of the word dominating: “to raise to an elevated sphere or exalted state; to exalt or elevate to a high degree of purity of excellence”, as in “Let your

Theories of the Sublime

thoughts be sublimed by the spirit of God” or “Wine itself is but water sublim’d”. Chaucer already used the word in 1394 (“The care and wo / That we hadden in our matires sublymyng”), but, as most writers until the eighteenth century, he used the word primarily in a chemical or alchemical sense: refining or purifying a substance through the action of heat, inducing it to rise up. A ‘sublimate’ was understood to be a distilled or rarified product of such a chemical process of sublimation: “Sublimate of Arsenick, is arsenick corrected or freed from its more malignant Sulphurs, and raise’d to the top of the Matrass by the force of fire”. But figurative meanings began to develop out the narrower chemical contexts, as in Shaftesbury’s pessimistic observation that “The original plain principles of humanity ... have, by a sort of spiritual chymists, been so sublimated as to become the highest corrosives”. By the end of the seventeenth century, the chemical meaning of the word had begun to be largely supplanted in popular use. Instead, the word ‘sublime’, now used primarily as an adjective, referred to literal extremes of height and elevation (as in towers, columns, buildings), but also, increasingly, to the following domains: lofty ideas, truths and subjects; the elevated subject matter, language and grandness of style used by a writer (“The Bible, the Iliad, and Shakespeare’s works, are allowed to be the sublimest books that the world can exhibit”); and persons who stand high above others by reason of their nobility, or grandeur of character. It is only in the eighteenth century that the word became a substantive, acquiring its defining article (*the* sublime) and a specificity of meaning in aesthetics. Equally significant was its increasing use to describe the elevating and transforming emotional response to the beauty, vastness or grandeur of natural phenomena such as mountains, oceans or space. In this latter sense it became a dominant aesthetic category in the romantic cult of nature.

To sum up, the meaning of the term ‘the sublime’ had, by the eighteenth century, shed its primary meaning derived from chemistry as well as narrower meanings referring to literal height. The meaning of the word ‘sublime’ had stabilised to signify qualities in nature, persons and literature of “the most exalted kind, so distinguished by elevation, or size or nobility or grandeur or other impressive quality to inspire awe or wonder, aloof from and raised far above the ordinary.” (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*). Similarly, ‘sublimation’ no longer referred to chemical processes or purification, but to elated and transformed states of mind.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the advent of Freudian theories that speculated on the workings of the unconscious, that the word ‘sublimation’ acquired a distinctly new set of meanings: the refinement of instinctual (usually sexual) energy into more socially accepted manifestations. Similarly, the term ‘subliminal’ (where the prefix ‘sub’ now means ‘below’ the *limen* or threshold) referred to states of consciousness that one was not aware of. Although the word was coined in 1886 in order to translate the German phrase ‘unter der Schwelle des Bewusstseins’, it is essentially a twentieth century term, becoming especially widespread in American popular discourse after the 1950's. References to subliminal advertising or propaganda, no doubt inspired by cold war paranoia and the ascendancy of corporate power, gained wide currency, in effect narrowing the meaning of ‘subliminal’ to the vulgar American neologism ‘brainwashing’. So, while the terms ‘sublime’ and the modern meaning of ‘subliminal’ share the same Latin root (*limen* = lintel or threshold), the meanings of the prefix ‘sub’ (‘up to’ and ‘below’ respectively) are contradictory, and therefore indicate a fundamental divergence of meaning. But an unduly strict etymological separation should not prevent a reading of both terms as being concerned with the elusiveness and indefinableness of threshold experience. Whether *below* or *beyond* the threshold, both terms stake out the contested terrain of the discursive edges or borders of culture.

Longinian Origins

In order to gain a historically founded understanding of concepts of the sublime, one needs to focus on the eighteenth century, which, according to an incomplete survey by Peter De Bolla, produced more than 1500 texts concerned with sublimity. Propositions, theories and arguments concerning good taste, ideals of beauty and the nature of what could be considered elevated and sublime, saturated the culture and letters of the late eighteenth century. The key theoretical text for the eighteenth century in this regard was the Greek treatise *Peri Hypsous* (*On the Sublime*), dated to the first century AD. Its unknown author is conventionally known as Dionysus Longinus. Although half of the original text was lost, *Peri Hypsous*, in its 1674 French translation and commentary by Pierre Boileau, came to dominate the European discussion of poetics and aesthetics for almost the next two centuries. *Peri Hypsous* was repeatedly translated and published in the eighteenth century (with at least four different translations into English) and

Theories of the Sublime

served as a point of origin for all aesthetic theories concerning themselves with the sublime until the publication of Kant's authoritative *Critique of Judgement* (1790).

Anthony Blackwall's 1737 "translation" of *Peri Hypsous* gives a useful sample of Longinus's ideas:

The Sublime is a just grand and conquering thought. It strikes like lightning with a conquering and resistless flame. It appears beautiful either in plain and figurative style; it admits all ornaments of language; yet needs none of them; but commands and triumphs in its own majesty. The true sublime will bear translation into all languages, and will be great and surprising in all languages, and to all persons of understanding and judgement, notwithstanding the difference of their country, education, interest and party. It carries all before it by its own strength; and does not so much raise persuasion in the heart of the hearer or reader, as throw him into ecstasy, and transports him out of himself. (Ashfield & De Bolla, *Sourcebook*, 1996:18).

In his effort to describe and analyse these extraordinary qualities of the sublime, Longinus makes a number of points in *Peri Hypsous*: the grand style is suited only to objects that are themselves grand and lofty. For ordinary topics, ordinary language suffices. The grand style may or may not be ornate.¹ In fact the sublime often calls for extreme simplicity, and overpowering effects can sometimes best be created without any resort to rhetorical devices or oratorical flourish. As an example, Longinus refers to Ajax's silence in the *Odyssey* that expresses meaning more profoundly than any words. Furthermore, the sublime style is an overwhelming, even violent emotional force. It not only persuades but also ravishes and transports the hearer or reader. The sublime, when it occurs, is more like an unpredictable natural force, than a crafted, carefully honed oratorical skill, and therefore, Longinus claims, it is universal: all men "of understanding and judgement" will be swept before it. As we shall see in the discussion of Kant's aesthetic theories, the supposedly universal qualities of the sublime, already qualified by the faculty of "understanding and judgement" will be more severely limited to become an index of civilisational rank. Longinus also claims that someone who uses sublime language is himself revealed as being great and elevated: "The sublime is an image reflected from the inward greatness of the soul" (Ashfield & De Bolla, 1996: 24). However, the grand work of a sublime mind is often rough-hewn and imperfect in the mundane and finer detail, but this irregularity is

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

part of the overall grandeur. Lastly, the sublime is not only found in art and language, but also in nature, for example in grand rivers and the “Celestial fires” of the universe. Erupting volcanoes are Longinus’s key example of natural sublimity: “do we reckon anything in nature more wonderful than the boiling furnaces of Etna, which cast up stones and sometimes whole rocks, from their labouring abyss, and pour out whole rivers of liquid and unmingled flame?” (Ashfield & De Bolla, 1996: 28).

As we can see, Longinus, as a rhetorician, was primarily interested in the analysis and achievement of sublimity in language, but it were to be his passing comments on nature that were destined to become the basis for an extraordinary interest in his ideas in eighteenth century England. Indeed, the trajectory of theories of the sublime shows that commentators became progressively interested in the natural sublime rather than the rhetorical sublime. But a closer look at the conventional distinction between these two modes of the sublime shows rather more of a convergence than separation. Even in the original Longinian moment of the natural sublime, as quoted above, sublimity is evoked by the discursive labour of rich metaphoricity, by the rhetorical capacity of language to convey grand, natural force. To look at the astounding natural scene of an erupting volcano and be aroused with sublime sensation always required an articulation of that experience, even if that articulation were an admission of linguistic incapacity in the face of an overwhelming natural force. Imagining and experiencing the power of raw nature always, at the same time, invokes the representational (in)capacity of language.

Longinus’s rhetorical sublime gave a convenient vocabulary for the natural sublime, and so, increasingly, the consumption of grand natural scenery (in the form of excursionary tours, landscape art) gave rise to a discourse that was to be characterised by stock images and conventional tropes, as in the romantic apotheosis of the natural sublime. A good example is this passage from Shelley’s poem *Alastor*:

On every side now rose
Rocks, which, in unimaginable forms,
Lifted their black and barren pinnacles
In the light of evening, and, its precipice
Obscuring the ravine, disclosed above,
‘Mid toppling stones, black gulfs and yawning caves,

Theories of the Sublime

Whose windings gave ten thousand various tongues
To the loud stream. Lo! Where the pass expands
Its stony jaws, the abrupt mountain breaks
And seems with its accumulated crags,
To overhang the world; for wide expand
Beneath the wan stars and ascending moon
Islanded seas, blue mountains, mighty streams,
Dim tracts and vast, robed in the lustrous gloom
Of leaden-coloured even, and fiery hills
Mingling their flames with twilight, on the verge
Of the remote horizon. (II, 543-559, qtd Nichol森, 1962:15)

Shelley's high romantic text evokes spectacularly irregular mountain scenery through the by then classical conventions of the sublime discourse: a dramatic verbal landscape of overwhelming, threatening and enclosing sounds and sights ("pinnacles", "precipices", "toppling stones", "yawning caves") transmuting itself into an uplifting, expansive vision of infinity. But even as Shelley's rhetoric presents an imagined landscape in its full sublime plenitude, it also, characteristically, foregrounds the seeming failure or incapacity of the imagination ("unimaginable forms"). In this distinctive sublime paradox, the presentation of unimaginability actually heightens, rather than lessens, the rhetorical effect of awe.

The importance and novelty of the Longinian sublime in eighteenth century lies in the way it wrought a transformation of language. In a revolution in discursive practices, Longinus supplanted the traditional Aristotelean rhetoric of catharsis with that of the sublime. As Ashfield and De Bolla note, the turn from Aristotelean reason to Longinian rapture gave rise to the development of a "new and invigorated vocabulary of passions ... which includes among its terms astonishment, enthusiasm, ravishment, and transport" (1996: 11). The taste for the Longinian sublime even changed publishing practices in Britain, giving rise to a technical development in text presentation: the rise of the anthology in which were collected the most affecting pieces of literature (1996: 11). But the immediate reception of the Longinian rhetoric, taking a lead from the 1674 Boileau translation and commentary, was less concerned with natural sublimity. Dr Johnson, for one, thought nothing of the natural sublime, disliked wild nature and thought that enthusiasm for the Scottish highlands was absurd (Cooper, 1995: 407). Accordingly, the sublime initially became more important in criticism, such as in the William Smith translation and

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

commentary: Shakespeare's *King Lear*, for instance, was sublime in its roughness, irregularity and grandeur, and so was Milton's description of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Joseph Addison's celebrated *Spectator* articles between 1711 - 12 also repeatedly concerned themselves with the evaluation of grand moments in literature. But Addison is interesting in that he was also susceptible to the grandeur of natural scenery, despite, or perhaps because of a personal terrifying passage across the Alps which he described as "agreeable horror" (Cooper, 1995: 407) – a phrase anticipatory of Burke's later classic formulation.² Indeed, in a passage from his *Spectator* article of 28 June 1712 the textual and natural sublime come together in a discussion of Homer and Virgil:

Reading the *Iliad* is like travelling through a country uninhabited, where the fancy is entertained with a thousand savage prospects of vast deserts, wide uncultivated marshes, huge forests, misshapen rocks and precipices. On the contrary, the *Aeneid* is like a well-ordered garden, where it is impossible to find out any part unadorned, or to cast our eyes upon a single spot, that does not produce a beautiful plant or flower." (Ashfield & De Bolla, *Sourcebook*, 1996:66)

Although Addison did not actually use the term 'sublime', his ideas in many ways prefigured the later theories of Burke. Both Addison's and Burke's theories reveal the emergence of a new, independent Enlightenment subject whose body and mind is imagined as a complex and exuberant site of unbounded feelings. Addison's sublime is also an aesthetics of liberation that provides a release of "pent up" energies:

Our imagination loves to be filled by an object, or to grasp at anything that is too big for its capacity. We are flung into a pleasing astonishment at such unbounded views, and feel a delightful stillness and amazement in the soul at the apprehension of them. The mind of man naturally hates everything that looks like a restraint upon it, and is apt to fancy itself under a sort of confinement, when the sight is pent up in a narrow compass, and shortened on every side by the neighbourhood of walls or mountains. On the contrary, a spacious horizon is an image of liberty, where the eye has room to expatiate at large on the immensity of its views" (Ashfield & De Bolla, *Sourcebook*, 1996:24)

The expansiveness of the sublime experience with its "unbounded views" becomes an "image of liberty" that is able to overcome "restraint" and "confinement". Addison's sublime can in this sense be read not only as a political aesthetic in which the subject's social and class containment and constraint can be overcome, but also as a masculine aesthetic in which "pent up" libidinal energies can "expatiate" themselves in a landscape of limitless expansionary possibilities.

Theories of the Sublime

Mountains

Before the sublime could flower properly in the eighteenth century, a revolution was required in the conception of nature, particularly in attitudes to wild and extreme scenery. The story of this cultural shift in attitudes to nature is long and complex and has been the subject of several in-depth studies. Marjorie Nicholson's *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* (1963), though limited by an almost exclusive focus on the changing image of mountains in English letters, was one of the first major analyses to focus on a fundamental shift in the eighteenth century's conception of nature.

Nicholson, anticipating recent revisionist criticism of De Bolla and Ashfield,³ does not trace the flowering of the natural sublime in English letters to Longinus, but a longer philosophical tradition:

The sublime had come to England well before the rhetorical theories of Longinus began to interest Englishmen. Awe, compounded of mingled terror and exultation, once reserved for God, passed over in the seventeenth century first to an expanded cosmos, then from the macrocosm to the greatest objects in the geocosm – mountains, ocean, desert. ... The seventeenth century discovered the 'Aesthetics of the infinite'. It was less the metaphysics of infinity that liberated their imagination than an aesthetic implicit in their response to grandeur, vastness, majesty, a gratification of the richness, fullness, vastness of a universe man might not intellectually comprehend, which yet satisfied his unquiet soul. (1963:143)

Nicholson's study is interesting and worthwhile of a more extended review, because in her focus on mountains, her analysis often intersects with the sublime. Mountains were, after all, sites *par excellence* for experiences of the sublimity. Her main argument is summarised by the title of the book (derived from the chapter titles of Ruskin's largely ignored *Modern Painters*): the transition from 'gloom' to 'glory' in general attitudes to mountains. She attempts to explain the fact that in the eighteenth century "mountains became 'temples of Nature built by the Almighty' and 'natural cathedrals, or natural altars ... with their clouds resting on them as the smoke of continual sacrifice'. A century and a half earlier, however, they had been 'Nature's Shames and Ills' and 'Warts, Wens, Blisters and Imposthumes' upon the fair face of Nature" (1963:2).⁴

The older, fearful and unsympathetic attitude towards mountains is, for instance, writ large over

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

John Donne's "An Anatomy of the World" (1611):

Doth not a Tenarif, or higher Hill
Rise high like a Rocke, that one might thinke
The floating Moone would shipwrack there, and sinke? ...
Are these but warts, and pock-holes in the face
Of th' earth? Think so: but yet confesse, in this
The worlds proportion disfigured is. (qtd in Nicholson, 1963:28)

In the seventeenth century, the island peak of Teneriffe was thought to be the highest in the world and could therefore be a symbol of mountains in general. Andrew Marvell's poem "Upon the Hill and Grove at Bill-borrow" similarly depicts mountains as rude excrescences. Apart from the fact that mountains were regarded as economically useless and physically dangerous spaces, they were, most importantly, not mentioned in the creation narratives of Genesis, and could thus not have originally been part of God's divine plan of creation. Mountains make their first appearance *after* the flood, when the Ark finds a resting place on Mount Ararat. Nicholson charts the theological debates around the belief that mountains had been created by the flood as a sign of damage on the face of the earth and mark of God's wrath. On the one hand, mountains were regarded as a curse of God revealing the decay of the world (a kind of topographical equivalent of man's corruption and sin), on the other hand their existence could also be thought more positively to be a demonstration of the infinite mutability and grandness of creation. Nicholson describes these contradictory attitudes as follows: "Mountains had risen by miracle, making a joyful noise before the Lord; or they were the cataclysmic ruins of a world that had fallen with a universal groan when the sins of man culminated in the Deluge" (1963:159).

A key text in the controversy was Thomas Burnet's *A Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1680) which argued that the flood broke up Adam's smooth, unblemished world and that man now inhabited a ruined paradise. Burnet regarded the presence of gross and rude mountains as prime evidence in support of his theory. The antediluvian "wide and endless Plain, smooth as the calm sea" was replaced by "wild, vast and indigested Heaps of Stone and Earth" (1963:200). Mountains were in effect the ruins of an older, perfect world, serving as permanent reminders of man's sin and God's wrath. But Burnet's belated and controversial views (he was a contemporary of Isaac Newton and corresponded with him) had to give way to a new, more empirical view of the world.

Theories of the Sublime

Edmund Halley (writing in 1691), for instance, saw mountains as a useful part of God's creation: "This, if we may allow for final Causes, seems to be the design of the Hills, that their Ridges being plac'd thro' the midst of the Continents, might serve, as it were, as Alembicks to distill fresh water for the use of Man and Beast" (1963:172). Halley's language of scientific observation makes only a hesitant and conditional gesture ("may allow") to religious orthodoxy ("final Causes").

The new appreciation of mountains also changed the pattern of the Grand Tour, which conventionally took the form of an extended trip - via Paris - to sites of antiquity in Italy and elsewhere in the Mediterranean.⁵ John Urry has described the shift from the seventeenth and early eighteenth century classical Grand Tour to the romantic Grand Tour as an index of an increasing individualism that celebrated the primacy of private, intense pleasures (1990: 4). One of the perils associated with such journeys was the treacherous and dangerous route through the alpine passes of Switzerland. But as attitudes to mountains changed and educated men developed a taste for sublime scenery, the Alps were transformed from places of fearful dread, at best to be avoided, into a thrilling and awe-inspiring landscape. The scenic areas in the Alps (such as the Grindelwald glaciers and Mont Blanc) themselves became a destination for travellers in search of adventure and sensory thrills. In the phrase of John Dennis, a traveller across the Alps in 1688, walking "upon the brink ... produced in me a delightful Horrour, a terrible Joy and at the same time I was infinitely pleas'd, I trembled" (Ashfield & De Bolla, *Sourcebook*, 1996:59). But older attitudes to the terror of the mountains persisted. As late as 1702, as is evident in Johann Jacob Scheuchzer's fantastic *Dracology*, "mountain ranges like the Alps were thought to be densely infested with Dragons"(Schama,1995:412). In *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama sees Horace Walpole's and Thomas Gray's Grand Tour in 1739 as a key moment in marking this changing attitude to mountains. What interested these sceptical, educated men, were experiments with sensation and aesthetic play: "Where earlier travellers had recoiled from mountain terror, Walpole and Gray revelled in

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

it” (1995:449). The business of traversing mountains was not, even then, a venture without danger: before their eyes, their dog was eaten by a wolf. Gray and Walpole, being carried across the Grand Chartreuse in sedan chairs, were, of course, not in real immediate physical danger, and could experience Alpine terror as disinterested spectators. As Burke and Kant would later argue, it is this detached connoisseurship of sublime scenery resulting from threatened, not actual danger, that allows feelings of “joy” to emerge out of “horror”. Gray’s description of the montane scenery is rendered in characteristic sublime fashion:

Magnificent rudeness, and steep precipices . . . You can here meet with all the beauties so savage and horrid a place can present you with; Rocks of various and uncouth figures, Cascades pouring down from an immense height out of hanging groves of Pine-Trees, & the solemn Sound of the Stream that roars below, all concur to form one of the most poetical scenes imaginable. (Qtd in Nicholson, 1963:500)

By the time Horace Walpole and Thomas Gray crossed the Alps, the mental ground had already been prepared for a new appreciation of mountain scenery. There was already an existing stock of ideas about picturesque scenery and the sublime, as is evident in Joseph Addison’s *Spectator* articles of 1711-12. They show that the admiration of sublime scenery had become well established:

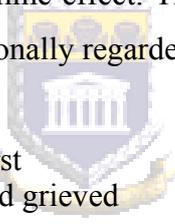
By greatness, I do not only mean the bulk of any single object, but the largeness of the whole view, considered as one entire piece. Such are the prospects of the open champian country, a vast uncultivated desert, of huge heaps of mountains, high rocks and precipices, or a wide expanse of waters, where we are not struck with the novelty or beauty of the sight, but with that rude kind of magnificence which appears in many of these stupendous works of nature. (Ashfield & De Bolla, *Sourcebook*, 1996:23)

The Alps then offered all the necessary conditions for the consumption of such natural sublimity. It was a grand theatre of awe-inspiring and uplifting natural scenery, coupled with the simultaneous threat of danger. The ground had been prepared for the romantic cult of wild mountain scenery. Alpine landscapes became a symbol of the turn away from the order and measured symmetry of neo-classical aesthetics. Nicholson refers to

Theories of the Sublime

the fierce pleasure, these poets felt in the irregularity of Nature, an asymmetry that violated all classical canons of regularity, symmetry, proportion. The rough, jagged, monstrous stones that had once seemed the rubbish of the world have become an integral part of a savage or solemn Nature whose majesty is enhanced rather than marred by their presence and who seems to take as much delight in asymmetry and irregularity as she once felt in the limited, the restrained, the patterned. (1963:15)

In the work of virtually all English and German Romantic poets, there is an evocation of the sublimity of wild mountain scenery. Writers such as Keats, Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth made extended visits to the Alps and this experience reflected itself in their work. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is set in the Alp-inspired Caucasus, as is Byron's *Manfred*. As Mary Jacobus has put it, "The Alpine landscape functions traditionally as the privileged site of the life-threatening sublime" (1989:8). Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1805) however shows his Alpine experience to be curiously evacuated of sublime effect. This can be seen in the passage that records the sighting of Mont Blanc, conventionally regarded as the epitome of sublime Alpine experience:



That day we first
Beheld the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved
To have a soulless image on the eye
Which had usurped upon a living thought
That never more can be. The wondrous Vale
Of Chamouny did, on the following dawn,
With its dumb cataracts and streams of ice,
A motionless array of mighty waves,
Five rivers broad and vast, make rich amends (1986: Book VI, 525-532)

In contrast to the disappointment of Mont Blanc, the nightly ascent of the comparatively low Snowdon Hill in Wales becomes Wordsworth's strongest example of sublimity. When he finds himself surrounded by mist on the summit, the ordinariness of the real landscape dissolves into a fantastic abyssal scene composed by the full force of the imagination:

At distance not the third part of a mile
Was a blue chasm; a fracture in the vapour,
A deep and gloomy breathing-place through which
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice! (1986: Book XIII, 55-59)

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Mary Jacobus, in *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference* (1989) has described the Snowdon episode as the climactic point “of the entire narrative of *The Prelude*” and argues that

the climbing of Snowdon has a special status not only because it serves as the most sustained account of a theory of imagination which has evolved during the course of the poem, but because it allows him to confront, self-consciously, an externalized or naturalised model for the mind. (1989:267)

The disembodied imagination finally triumphs over abyssal pull of nature, and in this sense the transcendental apotheosis of the Snowdon episode stages a Kantian triumph of the supra-sensible or rational imagination.

But if the high romantic view of mountains privileged disorder, chaos and irregularity as a way to induce elevating feelings of the sublime, there was also an irrational or gothic counterpart. Instead of a Kantian rationality prevailing, ultimately, over abyssal chaos, mountains could also become the setting for sheer terror, as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1813) shows. Mountain terror is no longer suspended or transformed by the rational mind into an uplifting experience, but becomes real horror. When Frankenstein pursues his monstrous creation into the Alps, the sudden revelation of daemonic terror amid the exalted Alpine landscape is heightened by the prior evocation of “sublime and magnificent scenes” that “afforded me the greatest consolation that I was capable of feeling”. In order to still his troubled and tormented mind, Frankenstein plans to ascend the mountain in order to be “filled” with “a sublime ecstasy that gave wings to the soul and allowed it to soar from the obscure world to light and joy” (1994: 92-3). But the “wonderful and stupendous scene” of Mont Blanc’s “awful majesty” is displaced by a “sight tremendous and abhorred” when he sees a “figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed”. A gothic sublime has intruded on the elevating feelings in the form of the monster whose “unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes” (1994: 94 -5).

Toward the middle of the nineteenth century the Alps had however become increasingly domesticated and eroded as a source of the sublime. In the footsteps of the Romantic poets followed an ever increasing tide of tourists. Thomas Cook led his first organized tour to the Alps in 1863. As I will show in more detail in Chapter 3, even the remote, high peaks were

Theories of the Sublime

increasingly conquered by mountaineers in the latter half of the nineteenth century, provoking a neo-romantic sentiment against the new sport of Alpinism. One of the key Victorian figures in this regard was John Ruskin who despised mountaineering as a debasement of the sublime and holy distant peaks. In the preface to *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) he laments the loss of "all real understanding of the character and beauty of Switzerland" which is now reduced to "half watering place, half gymnasium" (1903: Vol. 18, 25). In *Deucaleon* (1879) Ruskin castigated mountaineers: "Believe me, gentlemen, your power of seeing mountains cannot be developed by your vanity, your curiosity, or your love of muscular exercise" (1903: Vol. 26, 103). In a sustained attack on Alpinism, he railed against "the vulgar excitement which looked upon the granite of the Alps only as an unoccupied advertisement wall for chalking names upon" (1903: Vol. 18, 24). Mountaineers, according to Ruskin, "make railroads of the aisles of the cathedrals and eat off the altar" (1903: Vol. 18, 27). Rather than achieving the sacrilegious prospect view from the summit, Ruskin preferred to appreciate the architectural complexity of mountains, akin to Gothic cathedrals, from a respectful distance. Equally rewarding was the close-up view where the shape and cleavage of a single rock could reveal, metonymically, the entire mountain range's "truth" and "beauty" and demonstrate human insignificance in the face of powerful natural forces:

in the grain, the luster, and the cleavage-lines of the smallest fragment of rock, there are recorded forces of every order and magnitude, from those which raise a continent by one volcanic effort, to those which at every instant are polishing the apparently complete crystal in its nest, and conducting the apparently motionless metal in its vein . . . you can obtain true perception of those invincible and inimitable arts of the earth herself. ("Fourth Lecture", 1903: Vol. 20, 102-3)

Even if the peaks had been conquered and debased, and the mountains overrun by hordes of tourists, a sublime sense of the power of mountains could yet be recovered from a single rock.

Sublimity and "the rise of the subject"

The overwhelming importance and pervasiveness of discourses about the sublime in the culture and letters of the eighteenth century suggests that sublimity is connected to the social processes and political transformations around the rise of what one can call the modern autonomous subject. As De Bolla and Ashfield put it, the "new subject, the site of various appetites and

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

desires, was increasingly cut loose from the old certainties, those which grounded and provided guarantees for the subject in a predominantly religious culture” (1996:1). The debates around aesthetics in the eighteenth century, in particular the various notions and theories around feeling, sentiment, imagination and the sublime, constituted “a discursive network, a knot of distinct discourses which singly both complement and compete with each other, and collectively amount to a re-drawing of the map upon which we chart our senses of the self” (1996:2). We are, “to all intents and purposes, children of the Enlightenment” in that “[o]ur senses of the self, society, science (in the sense of knowledge) are both derived from and both dependent on models created during the eighteenth century:” (1996:1)

My argument will be substantially based on Peter De Bolla’s study *The Discourse of the Sublime. Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject* (1989), and the notes accompanying a later source book of key texts concerning the sublime, co-edited with Ashfield. De Bolla’s daring and perhaps overstated thesis is that during the course of the eighteenth century, modern subjectivity evolved within the space opened up by discourses of the sublime. He links the production of sublime discursive excess to the rise of subjectivity, which is itself a psychological formation in excess or surplus to the material, bodily reality of a person. In De Bolla’s own formulation: “It is useful to regard the subject as precisely the result or overplus of a discourse of something, and hence adjacent to discursive excess” (1989:19). Underlying De Bolla’s claims is the Foucauldian assumption that subjects are produced in and through discourse.

De Bolla begins his argument by distinguishing between a discourse *on* the sublime and a discourse *of* the sublime. The primary discourse on the sublime “attempts to describe and analyse objects that are external to it but which constantly phrases its explanations and analyses in terms that can only be understood as indications of internal effects, which is to say internal to itself” (1989: 34). The discourse *on* the sublime perpetually slips into a discourse *of* the sublime as it creates “a discourse which not only explained the effect or demonstrated the mechanism by which it is produced, but also ... produce[d] from itself sublime experience” (1989:12). The secondary discourse of the sublime is thus not a direct effect of the landscape, but is a *technology of affect within the subject*. The discourse of the sublime therefore “produces sublimity from

Theories of the Sublime

within the self” (1989: 35) and becomes an autonomous discursive or textual force rather than an effect of external reality. In explaining sublime experiences, the discourse of the sublime reproduces that sublime excess within language. The sublime is thus not so much an immediate effect of real, that is of particular landscape features, but rather a discursive effect. The autonomous subject arises in this space opened up by the productive powers of the sublime.

De Bolla explains his hypothesis in more detail in a reference to Longinus’s *Peri Hypsous*. Longinus firmly locates the sublime in the operations of language:

The effect of elevated language upon an audience is not persuasion but transport.... Our persuasions we can usually control, but the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over every hearer. Similarly, we see skill in invention, and due order and arrangement of matter, emerging as the hard-won result not of one thing nor two, but of the whole texture of the composition, whereas Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and at once displays the power of the orator in all its plenitude (Longinus in De Bolla, 1989: 36-37).

The sublime is thus exactly opposite to carefully crafted classical rhetoric where the orator tries to reign over the listener by using his skill in arranging language in meticulously thought-through patterns and devices. Rather, the sublime is an excessive force which possesses both orator and audience: it is not owned or controlled by an individual, either orator or hearer, but is “the product of an excessive discursivity in which we, as individuals, come into an awareness of selfhood at the moment when the power of the sublime becomes manifest” (1989:40).

In an intriguing related argument, De Bolla argues that a parallel source for eighteenth century subjectivity lay in the popular discourses which arose around England’s unmanageable national debt. During the mid-eighteenth century, in the aftermath of the Seven Years War, national debt rose to astronomical heights. This posed a discursive problem: how was one to comprehend and visualise the excessive magnitude of this debt? De Bolla proceeds carefully in not adducing a causal relationship between discourses around sublimity and debt, but discerns structural parallels. He is therefore cautious in proposing that “the discourse on the debt required a model for the containment of the excess which could be found, very conveniently, in the discourse of the sublime” (1989:15). There are however “non-causative connections” (1989:15) in the

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

historical simultaneity of these two discourses. Both these discourses ultimately revolved around the question of controlling the autonomous subject, which, once created by these discursive networks, now also had to be contained by them. The eighteenth century discourses of the sublime and of national debt can in this sense be thought of as technologies of the subject. De Bolla summarises his argument as follows:

[M]id-eighteenth-century accounts of the sublime do not assume a unified subject; they resist such a concept. What they perform, however, is a certain positioning of the subject; they generate a subject effect, a siting of a space of subjectivity, or, put very simply, a place within their analytic accounts which can be understood as a location for the subject. (1989: 293)

If the discourses around the sublime during the eighteenth century managed to produce, increasingly, spaces for autonomous subjectivity, the romantic sublime of the early nineteenth century is founded on the prior existence of such subject positions. The romantic sublime depends on this split between subject and object, but simultaneously collapses this very distinction: “both subject and object are posited as discrete forms which coalesce in the description of sublime experience, and result in the annihilation of subjectivity” (1989: 45). De Bolla’s example is Coleridge’s account of a visit to a cathedral:

On entering a cathedral, I am filled with devotion and with awe; I am lost to the actualities that surround me, and my whole being expands into the infinite; earth and air, nature and art, all swell up into eternity, and the only sensible expression left is, ‘that I am nothing’ (Coleridge quoted in De Bolla, 1989: 44)

Coleridge’s expansion of consciousness immediately followed by its annihilation is the paradoxical hallmark of the romantic sublime. De Bolla’s account of the sublime is a scenario in which the subject comes into being at the moment of its seduction into discursivity. In locating the genesis of subjectivity and sublimity in excessive textual force, De Bolla however appears to presume a generic subject. His recognition of gender and race as forces situating subjectivity remains vague and not fully fleshed out. I will return to these important questions, but before that it is necessary to examine Burke’s and Kant’s philosophical approaches to the sublime in more detail. Following Longinus, Edmund Burke’s and Immanuel Kant’s classical writings about the sublime, written respectively at the middle and end of the century, are the signal texts in eighteenth century theories of the sublime.

Theories of the Sublime

The Classical Sublime

Edmund Burke's celebrated treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) was the most influential aesthetic theory of its time. Although not the originator of the strict distinction between the sublime and the beautiful, his theories served to entrench the binary opposition between the two concepts. Burke's theories were however radical on two counts. Firstly, for Burke, sublimity was a sensory effect fully *internal* to the subject, dissociated from external verities or universal truths. Burke's phenomenological aesthetics make a decisive break with classic Platonic idealism which posited an independent, external and non-subjective realm of beauty and truth. For Burke, the subject's aesthetic experience is not derived through the mind's imaginative access to an unchanging, timeless domain of ideal forms, but is rather a physical, bodily event located in the sensory, somatic domain. Secondly, by disassociating the sublime from the beautiful, Burke can align the pleasure of sublime sensation with horror, dread and pain. Burke's sublime is thus an incipient sado-masochistic psychic mechanism through which pain is converted into pleasure.⁶ The key 'modern' principle in Burke is then the principle of conversion (not unlike that of Freudian condensation) by which one extreme (pain) is converted into its opposite (pleasure). Furthermore, the Burkean sublime is anticipatory of postmodern theories of language and culture as it deconstructs the stability of discourses and is thus always potentially disruptive of the binary distinctions it itself sets up.

Burke's somatic aesthetics of affect lead him to propose the construction of an "exact theory of our passions" (1757:v) in which "the ideas of the Sublime and the beautiful were [not] confounded" (1757:vi). As opposed to expansiveness of concepts of sublimity, beauty is rigorously demarcated as a separate, lower, affective domain. The "pleasing power of proportion" in beautiful objects is for instance likened to the admiration of well-proportioned vegetables. For Burke all beautiful objects are "spoken of under diminutive epithets" (made smaller as terms of endearment); they are characterised by smoothness, delicacy and gradual variation in form and movement. Objects of beauty are colourful, yet not strong and vivid, but

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

mild: "light greens, soft blues, weak whites; pink reds; and violets" (1757:102).

In Burke's pastel aesthetics, beauty is characterised by weak, small and soft qualities, and it is not surprising that the distinction between the Sublime (always capitalised in Burke) and beauty is also the distinction between male and female aesthetic capacities. In Burke's aesthetic scheme, beauty is that which is diminutive, pleasurable and pretty, in other words, beauty is contained within the confines of the domestic sphere. According to Burke, men appreciate beauty chiefly as a quality of women. Beauty is in this sense a surplus value over the base gratification of biological needs which allows men to distinguish and choose *between* a variety of females: "Men are carried to the sex in general, as it is the sex, and by common law of nature; but they are attached to particulars by personal beauty" (1757:18). The fact that women are regarded by men as beautiful, masks the biological function of male sexual desire: "By beauty I mean, that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it" (1757:73-74). The sublime, on the other hand, is a thoroughly masculine aesthetics.

If beauty is an effect of the love which arises out of the passion which a man feels for a particular woman, the roots of the sublime must be sought in quite different quarters. Burke proposes that if beauty arises from love, the sublime – its aesthetic opposite – must arise in pain. The question is then how elevated and pleasurable sublime passions can be said to derive from pain. Burke's foundational assumption is that pain and pleasure are not dialectically linked as opposites; that presence of pain does not automatically mean absence of pleasure and *vice versa*, but that both pleasure and pain are positive qualities, independent of one another: "Many people are of the opinion, that pain arises necessarily from the removal of pleasure; as they think pleasure does from the ceasing or diminution of some pain." (1757:3) Burke's next step is to propose that self-preservation is the strongest source of all emotions and therefore the most powerful affective force defining the sublime:

What ever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the Sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (1757:13)

Theories of the Sublime

If sublime feelings are associated with terror, danger, the dread of pain and threat to life, in what way can they be a desirable and exalted emotional experience? Burke points out that these terrors and dangers are only *threatened*, not actually unleashed upon the subject. The sublime thus arises out of the suspension of pain and danger:

The passions which belong to self preservation turn on pain and danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without actually being in such circumstances... what excites this delight, I call Sublime. (1757:32)

Burke gives a variety of examples of sublime effects. The potentially threatening magnitude and vastness of an object can cause sublime feelings: "Things of great dimension annexed by the idea of terror, become even greater. Looking at a limitless plain of land is not sublime because terror is lacking; looking on limitless ocean can however be sublime because the ocean is to no small degree an object of terror" (1757:43). Similarly, looking up at an immense object from the safety of below is less sublime than being seized by the vertiginous feeling of looking down: "height is less grand than depth; and ... we are more struck at looking down from a precipice, than at looking up at an object of equal height" (1757:52). When contemplating infinity the subject can also experience feelings of insignificance and loss of self: "Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest sense of the sublime" (1757:52) However, Burke cautions, there are not really that many truly infinite things, but the mind cannot "see the bounds of many things" and even though they are not really infinite, they are perceived thus and the sublime effect is the same: "they produce the same effects as if they were really so. We are deceived in the like manner if the parts of some large object, are so continued to any indefinite number, that the imagination needs no check which may hinder its extending them at pleasure" (1757:52-53). Other sublime sensations arise from repetition and uniformity in a large building (such as Greek pillars), sudden transition from light to dark, and startling sounds: "Few things can be as awful than the striking of a great clock" (1757:66).

Having established the principle that the sublime arises out of the conversion of "pain" into "delight", Burke provides a physiological theory to explain this affective paradox. Asking why the succession of a long line of pillars in a building of great dimensions can excite sublime

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

feelings, Burke proposes that the

rays from the first round pillar will cause in the eye a vibration of that species; an image of a pillar itself. The pillar immediately succeeding increases it; that which follows renews and enforces that impression; each in its order as it succeeds, repeats impulse after impulse, and stroke after stroke, until the eye long exercised in one particular way cannot lose that object immediately; and being violently roused by this continued agitation, it presents the mind with a grand and sublime conception. (1757:138).

Following his theory that such sublime-provoking “agitation” must be painful, Burke asserts that “the whole capacity of the eye, vibrating in all its parts must approach near to the nature of what causes pain, and consequently must produce the idea of the sublime” (1757:131-132). In Burke’s phenomenological mechanics of affect, the subject’s eye is the passive screen for the visual assault of the spectacle. The sublime arises when the invasive force of sensory stimuli becomes excessive and unmanageable and threatens to overwhelm the subject, yet at the same time the subject can perceive these stimuli as only sensory thrills and not as real threats. The sublime is thus a theatre of the passions in which threat and relief, pain and pleasure, terror and delight are subject to a continual oscillation. Eagleton comments as follows on this Burkean paradox and contradiction: “An enervated feminine beauty must be regularly stiffened by a masculine sublime, whose terror must be instantly defused in an endless rhythm of erection and detumescence” (1992: 22).

The major eighteenth century philosopher of the sublime is however not Burke but Immanuel Kant. In the last of the great trilogy of *Critiques*, the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), Kant gives detailed attention to the aesthetic questions raised by the sublime. Kant’s analytic of the sublime presents formidable difficulties, and ranks amongst his most perplexing and complex philosophical writing, containing several troubling concepts and arguments whose meaning continue to be unresolved. Compared to Burke’s radical treatment of the subject, Kant’s philosophy is thoroughly analytical. The entire *Critique* is framed by Kant’s insistence on the autonomous rational mind as the ultimate arbiter and judge of aesthetic experience. Aesthetics is not a matter of expressing subjective feeling and registering affect, but of disinterested, rational judgement imposing itself as a law upon sensory experience.

Theories of the Sublime

Kant's approach to sublimity is founded, not unsurprisingly for eighteenth century treatises, on the fundamental opposition between beauty and the sublime: "The beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having definite boundaries. The sublime, on the other hand, is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it or by occasion of it boundlessness is represented, and yet its totality is also present to thought" (1951:82). The beauty of a landscape lies in its form and well-shaped proportion, for example the picturesque landscaped park, whereas the sublime arises out of rugged formlessness, such as irregular, wild mountainous terrain: "for the most part, nature excites the ideas of the sublime in its chaos or in its wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation, provided size and might are perceived" (1951:84).

The distinction between the beautiful and the sublime is however not limited to the form and shape of the topography. For Kant, the crucial difference between sublimity and beauty lies in purposiveness (*Zweckmässigkeit*).⁷ A landscape is beautiful when it serves a purpose. Domesticated landscapes, regarded as pleasing and satisfactory to the observer, are thus beautiful rather than sublime. The sublime, on the other hand appears "to violate purpose in respect to judgement" (1951:84). Thus only wild nature, which does not serve a purpose (is not *zweckmässig*), can be regarded as sublime. In Kant's conception, the sublime is therefore an undomesticated, uncommodified, pure aesthetic domain outside the economy of use value.

In invoking the concept of *Zweckmässigkeit* as a touchstone for assessing what is truly sublime, Kant implicitly locates beauty in the realm of commodification and consumption, and the sublime outside of this capitalist economy. Beauty is thus passively consumed (beauty "maintains the mind in *restful* contemplation") whereas the sublime involves a "*movement* of the mind" in judging the object (1951:85, Kant's emphasis). Beauty is easily observed and makes itself promiscuously available; the Sublime on the other hand must be produced by the observer's autonomous exercise of reason. If nothing in nature is sublime in itself, sublimity is created as a form of aesthetic labour in the observer's mind. In this way, Kant's conception of the sublime departs from Burke's phenomenological theory in which the awed subject is the passive receptor of sensory stimuli that plunge his mind into ecstatic turmoil. Kant's subject is autonomous and

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

pro-active: its rational inquiring mind creates sublime sensation by observing, comprehending and organising the visual and mental field.

Kant also introduces a rational order to Burke's haphazard collection of sublime objects and experiences. His classification distinguishes between the mathematical and the dynamic sublime. The mathematical sublime is a category of affect which depends less on physical or topographical features than on the exercise of reason internal to the subject's mind. It invokes reason to think and extrapolate from an object its infinity, for example to think of an infinitely long mathematical progression or series of increasing numbers. The mathematical sublime can thus occur *within* the mind of a subject, and is independent of external stimuli. Two operations of thought are necessary for the mathematical sublime: apprehension and comprehension. The sublime arises out of the tension between these two thought processes, when comprehension subdues apprehension. The sublime effect arises out of a paradox: in a rare, literally mind-shattering instant, the subject comprehends how incomprehensible and infinitely vast an object is (such as the universe). In this sublime moment, the rational mind performs a sort of spatio-temporal compression of the vast object, bringing it under the control of reason. The sublime is the supreme moment for the mind in which the Enlightenment subject receives "in one single intuition a measure for magnitude that requires a considerable time to apprehend" (1951:98). Kant sums up the victory of reason over imagination as follows:

The feeling of the Sublime is, therefore, at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of the imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us a law. (1951:106)

In Slavoj Žižek's Freudian formulation, the paradoxical pleasure of the sublime is "beyond the pleasure principle" (1989: 202). The feeling of displeasure, arising out of an initial failure of the imagination to master the unqualified magnitude of the object, becomes converted into a feeling of pleasure brought about by an assertion of the "law" of "reason". The Kantian sublime, to sum up then, is a purely intra-subjective effect or operation of the mind, not dependent on external objects or events, brought about by the capacity of reason to convert the imagination's sensory

Theories of the Sublime

overload into a single abstraction that allows the mind to grasp that which had previously been overwhelming, vast and unintelligible.

Until rescued by the law of reason, the Kantian imagination is however dangerously close to losing itself into a chaotic, limitless realm of the unimaginable and unthinkable:

The point of excess for the imagination (towards which it is driven in the apprehension of the intuition) is like an abyss in which it fears to lose itself; yet again for the rational idea of the suprasensible it is not excessive, but conformable to law, and directed to drawing out such an effort on the part of the imagination: and so in turn as much a source of attraction as it was repellant to mere sensibility. (1951:107)

Until “conformable” to the law of reason, the imagination threatens to collapse into an abyssal realm of excess. Lyotard, as we shall see, understood this latent irrationality of the sublime as a model for postmodern culture. In his rereading of the sublime, it becomes an aesthetic of excess liberated from the Kantian rule of reason.

Kant’s second, less pure category of sublimity is the dynamic sublime, or that which we fear in nature. It is less dependent on the operations of the rational mind, and is more akin to the Burkean life-threatening sublime:

Bold, overhanging, as it were threatening rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastation; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of a mighty river, and such like - these exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might. But the sight of them is the more attractive, the more fearful it is, provided only that we are in security; and we willingly call these objects sublime, because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height and discover in us a faculty of resistance of quite a different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature. (1951:100-101)

Kant, who did not venture out of his native Königsberg, would not have experienced such rugged mountain scenery personally, explaining perhaps why he gave primacy to the mathematical sublime as the purest form of sublimity. The eighteenth century was however an age which produced a prodigious output of sublime art, on which Kant no doubt based his analysis of the dynamic sublime. The aesthetic consumption of sublime landscapes, either in widely circulated

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

prints or as recreational tours, was a commonplace of the times.

In Kant's theory, aesthetic experience of sublimity rests on the by now familiar paradox: the observer seeks out undisciplined and threatening vast natural phenomena to experience feelings of being overwhelmed, but manages these feelings in such a way that his superiority and mastery over these experiences is once again reaffirmed. The experience of the sublime demonstrates the superiority of "pure reason" over the baser emotions of fear. As Kant puts it, "reason exerts a dominion over sensibility" (1951:105). The sublime is thus a moment of triumph for the rational mind in that it "discloses to us a faculty of judging independently of and a superiority over nature" (1951:101).

In the eighteenth century, sublime landscapes became increasingly desirable locations for the educated classes, not simply because they excited the sensory thrills of fear, but because they called up and foregrounded the power of the observer with regard to nature. But this observer of sublime scenery is not just any man. A closer reading of the *Critique of Judgement* reveals that the rational mind, which produces and revels in the rarified delights of the sublime, is not a generic human faculty, and that Kant's analytic of the sublime is framed, at least implicitly, within a class model of society. The higher, more sophisticated pleasures of the sublime (as opposed to those of mere beauty) can only be experienced by the educated, civilised man who is in possession of the faculty of reason. As example, Kant cites the pioneering Swiss alpinist De Saussure who relates how the mountain peasants "unhesitatingly called all lovers of snow mountains fools" (1951:105). Kant concludes that "the sublime presents itself to the uneducated man simply as terrible" (1951:105). In a similar vein, Coleridge believed higher aesthetic capacities to be the preserve of the educated classes:

the rustic, from the more imperfect development of his faculties, and from the lower state of his cultivation, aims solely to convey insulated facts, either those of scanty experience or his traditional belief; while the educated man seeks to discover those connections of things, or those relative bearings of fact to fact, from which some more or less general law is deductible. (quoted in Labbe, 1998: 11)

Kant however also believed the sublime is not compatible with a degenerate aristocratic

Theories of the Sublime

sensibility nor a pre-Enlightenment feudal order. Kant, perhaps careful not to offend his highborn sponsors, is understandably guarded and displaces his critique of decadent aristocratic privilege to the Orient: the sublime is always a state of the superiority of reason over sensuousness, not the "state which Eastern voluptuaries find so delightful" after a massage (1951:114). Implicit in Kant's analytic is the assumption that the ideal bearer of a rational, trained mind and connoisseur of the sublime is neither the simple peasant nor dissolute aristocrat, but the educated middle class subject. Kant's Enlightenment sublime is then, like Addison's, also a political model in that it demonstrates the capacity of the bourgeois subject's self-rule over his unruly senses. If self-rule could be achieved in the aesthetic domain, this form of internal governance could also be extended outwardly into the political domain. The sublime is in this sense an anti-absolutist aesthetic connected with the middle class's struggle for political liberty.

Aesthetics and Ideology

Following Longinus, Edmund Burke's and Immanuel Kant's classical writings about the sublime, written respectively at the middle and end of the century, were the signal texts in eighteenth century theories of the sublime. As we have seen, these theories, while ostensibly and explicitly about matters of art, taste and aesthetics, are not only conjectures about the purely aesthetic domain of art and taste. Their detailed and complex discourses are always social theories with implications, for instance, for gender relations, as can be seen in Burke's binary opposition between female/beauty and masculine/sublime. The views and attitudes expressed about proper taste and the contemplation of what is considered elevated and ideal had consequences for the relation between the governed and the state (Kant's concept of the autonomous rule of reason). Instead of being a politically impotent subject of an aristocratic and autocratic ruler, the new subject, in the psychological sense, ruled his feelings and thus himself. Discourses of the sublime, as we have seen in the argument advanced by De Bolla, helped to create the space for the production of such an autonomous subjectivity. But in creating the possibility for such an autonomous subject, these discursive networks could also become a technology for containing the subject. The following section will follow Terry Eagleton's argument on the formation of the bourgeois aesthetic to explore in more detail how the aesthetic theories are not only liberatory, but also interpellate the subject and fix relations of power.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

In the 1990's the field of cultural theory has seen a resurgence of critical interest in the study of aesthetics. Eagleton's major revisionist study, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), is only one of numerous radical interventions in a field of study which Berthold Brecht thought was supremely reactionary (Regan 1992: 3). Brecht's question "Shouldn't we abolish aesthetics?", deriving from his modernist and Marxist distrust of ideological realms above or beyond social realities, is an index of the discredit into which formal aesthetics had sunk in the early twentieth century. The late Victorian period had seen an increasingly sharp split between a metaphysical and a scientific, rational way of interpreting and appreciating the world. The burgeoning of the positivist sciences was however also accompanied by increased aestheticism (as a detached search for pure beauty and artistic perfection detached from social realities) as well as a rise in occult and esoteric knowledges.



Formal aesthetics was then primarily concerned with the study, analysis and appreciation of rarefied ideals of harmony, regularity, and organic wholeness which were thought to be located exclusively in the artistic work itself, without much regard to the social and ideological context in which such ideas and notion were themselves constituted. While such conventional aesthetic analyses attempted to distinguish between different stylistic and structural principles of an artistic work, relating them to notions of truth, transcendence and beauty, recent approaches have analysed aesthetic values and theories as a way to explore the highly contested social field of cultural value. Rather than proposing new parameters of what should be regarded as beautiful, the study of aesthetics is now increasingly interested in understanding the prescriptive and normalising force of aesthetics as a force in political and social changes. As Terry Eagleton puts it in a subsequent article of the same title as his book, the aesthetic, as a coherent body of ideological knowledge, is a "power apparatus" (1992:17).

Eagleton's complex argument is worth looking at in more detail. He makes a large claim about the importance of aesthetics:

the category of the aesthetic assumes the importance it does in modern Europe because in speaking of art it speaks of other matters too, which are at the heart of the middle class's struggle for political hegemony. The construction of the

Theories of the Sublime

modern notion of the aesthetic artefact is thus inseparable from the construction of the dominant ideological forms of modern class-society, and indeed from a whole new form of human subjectivity appropriate to that order. (1990: 3)

The aesthetic is thus a “law which is not law” erected in the course of the Enlightenment, which, to use Gramscian terms, translates the operations of power from naked coercion into hegemony, that is power exercised with the tacit consent of the governed:

What matters in aesthetics is not art but this whole [bourgeois] project of reconstructing the human subject from the inside, informing its subtlest affections and bodily responses with this law which is not law. The moment when moral actions can be classified chiefly as 'agreeable' or 'disagreeable' marks a certain mature point of evolution in the history of the ruling class. (1992: 21)

Through aesthetics, Eagleton claims, a stable consensus could be established as to what was in good taste, agreeable and acceptable. Matters of truth and falsehood, of right and wrong, were aestheticised as matters of taste, as exemplified in the realist novel's manifold dramas concerning manners and decorum. The bourgeois aesthetics became, according to Eagleton, subtle and all-pervasive: "moral-ideological imperatives no longer impose themselves with the leaden weight of the Kantian Ought but infiltrate the very textures of lived experience as tact and know-how, intuitive good sense or inbred decorum" (1992: 20). The massive discursive and coercive labour which was needed to establish and maintain the new bourgeois social order could be reduced if a stable and unifying consensus existed about matters of taste. “The aesthetic,” Eagleton explains,

offers the middle class a superbly versatile model of their political aspirations, exemplifying new forms of autonomy and self-determination, transforming the relations between law and desire, morality and knowledge, recasting the links between individual and totality, and revising social relations on the basis of custom, affection and sympathy. On the other hand the aesthetic signifies ... a kind of ‘internalised repression’, inserting social power more deeply into the very bodies it subjugates, and so operating as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony” (1990: 20)

In the new aesthetic of the middle classes, sentiment and judgements of taste of the individual subject served as ultimate arbiters of what was regarded as right or wrong, thereby displacing the power of the absolutist state. But such an internalised aesthetic framework, while useful for the middle class's struggle to overcome aristocratic power, became a new cultural dominant in its own right. The middle class's aesthetic is then, to use Fredric Jameson's terminology, a “political

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

unconscious.”

Eagleton does not however simply read the aesthetic as an uncomplicated ideological tool in the service of the social and political interests of the ruling class. The domain of the aesthetic is distinguished by the fact that it *appears* autonomous and unrelated to the material world:

Values are related to social practice, but precisely by their contradictory dislocation from it; it is materially necessary that ideological values should be related to social facts but in such a way as to appear non-derivable from them. (1992: 24)

The apparent non-derivability of values from the market-place (which would yield the worst values) is thus the essential feature of bourgeois culture. But Eagleton also recognises the ambivalent nature of aesthetics as a liberatory, irrational and indeed revolutionary force. In his book, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, he suggests that “the aesthetic, understood in a certain sense, provides an unusually powerful challenge and alternative to these dominant ideological forms, and it is in this sense an eminently contradictory phenomenon” (1990: 3). In his subsequent article of the same title he is more explicit:

Aesthetics was born as a discourse of the body [which concerns] the whole of our sensate life - the business of affections and aversions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, of what takes root in the guts and gaze and all that arises from our most banal, biological insertion into the world. The aesthetic is thus the first stirring of a primitive incipient materialism" (1992: 17-18)

Aesthetics is in this sense a potentially unruly somatic supplement to Enlightenment rationality. Despite the attempts of aestheticians to classify and bring rational order to the sensory and emotive domain of art and affect, aesthetics retains its association with irrationality, feeling and passion. Aesthetics is thus, Eagleton claims, “ the 'sister' of logic, a kind of inferior feminine analogue of reason" (1992: 20).

To sum up then, Eagleton sees aesthetics as nothing less than a political unconscious which, in careful analysis, reveals a quest for, or exercise of power. Political ambitions for emancipation, disguised or refigured in aesthetic terms (such as “spontaneity”) conveniently served the interests of the early European bourgeoisie in its struggle for dominance. Aesthetics became an idealised

Theories of the Sublime

(and therefore incontestable) form of value beyond the actual values of competition, possession and control: a culturally dominant realm of order and harmony which could support and legitimate the political dominance of the emerging middle classes. But if a social consensus and a sense of conformity could be developed around ideals of beauty and civilised conduct, the more complex and contradictory aesthetic of the sublime could also potentially disrupt that conformity. In an anxious mingling of pleasure and unpleasure, the thrilling apprehension of some awesome largeness or grandeur frustrates our attempts to conceive it and to draw experience together in the form of a stable concept. The *mise en abyme* of sublime, where the figured object is only conceivable as an unfigurability, opens up a gap between experience and comprehension and representation.

The Postmodern Sublime

In his encyclopaedic *Companion to Aesthetics* (1995), David Cooper dismisses the sublime as an example of antiquated critic's jargon fashionable in the later eighteenth century and of no relevance and critical force in the present: "By the middle of the nineteenth century the term 'sublime' had largely disappeared from the critical vocabulary, and had begun to sound archaic. Late-twentieth century students have to have it explained, and it survives only in mock-literary writing – in restaurant guides, for example, where it is applied to pastries and rich desserts" (1995: 407).

Cooper's extraordinary claim is of course fundamentally mistaken, as is evident in the sophisticated work of critics such as De Bolla and Eagleton, and, as subsequent sections in this chapter will show, in the various contemporary debates around the concept of sublimity. In the 1980's, scholarship in the arts and humanities became revitalized by new critical theories of psychoanalysis and deconstruction, replacing the traditional practice of literary and cultural criticism that placed a formalist emphasis on harmony, regularity and unity of the work. But this shift in critical method and theory, while spelling the demise of aesthetics in the mould of Monroe Beardsley, opened up the space for a critical study of culture. Indeed, the contradictory, irregular and unstable qualities of the eighteenth century sublime provided rich material for a range of critics working in the fields such as postmodern theory and gender studies.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

In *The Inhuman* (1991), Jean-Francois Lyotard has argued that the classical sublime of the eighteenth century is a prototype for modernist and postmodern aesthetics. Like most commentators over the last 300 years, Lyotard takes his point of departure from Longinus's seminal theories which distinguished, in oratory, between carefully crafted rhetoric and the unpredictable force of the sublime. As we have seen, the Longinian sublime described the power of language to provoke ecstasy and move the reader or listener. Sublime effects in speech are though not the result of conceits, sentimentality or an over-elaborated rhetorical style, but the refusal of ornamentation. The sublime often arises out of the "simplicity of a turn of phrase" (1991: 94) or even profound silence. For Lyotard, the grand simplicity of the sublime then stands in fundamental opposition to the ornamentation of rhetoric.⁸ The former is a disruptive, dislocating, non-contingent force which destroys the closed, regulated structure of the work:

the predominance of the idea of *techne* placed works under multiple regulation, that is of the model taught in studios, Schools and Academies, that of taste shared by the aristocratic public, that of purposiveness of art, which was to illustrate the glory of a name, divine or human....The idea of the sublime disrupts this harmony. (1991:96)

The sublime cannot be proven, predicted or demonstrated, but is, "a marvel, which seizes one, strikes one, and makes one feel" (1991: 97). It is not calculable by the deployment of rhetorical devices; indeed it can be produced by imperfection and ugliness rather than by craft and euphony in speech. Furthermore, the sublime, especially if understood in terms of the Burkean paradox ("delightful terror"), effects a splitting of subject into sensations of pleasure and pain. While Kant attempted to recuperate the sublime dislocations of the subject under the supreme unifying rule of reason, Lyotard emphasises the irreducibly disruptive, non-contingent and radical nature of the sublime which lurks beneath the veneer of Kantian rationality. According to Kant, reflective judgement links an object of beauty presented to it by the senses to a concept in the mind. Judgement links an object of beauty with the concept of beauty, and this harmonious match results in pleasure. When this link cannot be made, as with sublime experience, pain is the outcome. The sublime occurs when imagination fails to match a presented object to a corresponding concept, for example when our ideas about infinity fail to match up adequately

Theories of the Sublime

with the reality of infinity. Any attempt to present ideas to match the concept are painfully inadequate. The sublime is thus interesting for Lyotard in that it is about a failure of representation. For Lyotard the sublime is then anticipatory of the modernist representational crisis and the shocking dislocations of the real. In its turn away from the mimetic and merely beautiful, the modernist artefact disrupts the conventional frameworks of representation and seizes the viewer in painful rapture. In another essay “What is the Postmodern?” (1992), Lyotard claims that the “aesthetic of the sublime is where modern art (including literature) finds its impetus, and where the logic of the *avant garde* finds its axioms” (1992: 10).

Lyotard’s interest in the sublime is part of a sustained critical engagement with Kantian aesthetics across several books and articles. In his subsequent *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (1994), Lyotard narrativises Kant’s abyssal moment of sublime “Aufhebung” as a sado-masochistic process of sexual pleasure. He re-writes Kant’s sublime transcendent moment in the terms of a Freudian sexual economy:

the delight provided by the sublime ... arises ‘indirectly’ as a feeling with two conflicting moments: the ‘vital forces’ experience a momentary check . . . an inhibition; they are held back, repressed . . . When they are released, they ‘discharge’ . . . all the more powerfully in the following moment. (Lyotard 1994: 68).

In this narrative of the sublime moment as a climactic mental orgasm, the momentary pain of delayed gratification heightens the final, excessive pleasure. Lyotard grounds his analysis on the dictum that “there are no sublime objects but only sublime feelings” (1994: 182). The sublime, for Lyotard as for Kant, is always an inner state, and relies on a highly developed and complex sense of subjectivity. In this point Lyotard follows Kant’s assertion that “for the beautiful in nature we must seek a basis outside ourselves, but for the sublime a basis merely within ourselves and in the way of thinking that introduces sublimity into our presentation of nature” (Kant, qtd in Lyotard, 1992:182) For Kant then, appreciation of beauty is appreciation of an object, whereas the sublime offers, more problematically, the possibility of the dissolution of the object. There is a potential narcissistic or masochistic self-circuitry of feeling in the subject. But Kant, whose whole philosophy depends on the absolute distinction between subject and object,

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

does not follow into this radical chain of ideas. Kant rescues the sublime from the abyssal collapse into pure subjectivity that subverts the stability of the subject - object universe. The Kantian sublime always hardens, ultimately, into a describable and definable object, even when it is formless or purely subjective as in the mathematical sublime. Lyotard's postmodern sublime, though rooted in the Kantian sublime, emphasises the inherent disintegrative and abyssal subtext in the *Critique*. The collapse of discourse and the sense of representational insufficiency, already present in the Kantian analytic, becomes a constitutive feature of Lyotard's conception of postmodernity. Lyotard's celebrated "definition" of postmodern culture, as an "incredulity towards metanarratives", can be understood as being grounded in a critique of the Kantian sublime. The grand narratives of modernity, for instance Marxism, give us the illusion that we can seize reality and comprehend it in a single, totalizing Kantian sublime moment. In Lyotard's postmodern and post-Kantian sublime, reality as such is unrepresentable and unrepresentable, and is dissolved into self-reflexive effects of subjectivity.

Besides Lyotard,⁹ Fredric Jameson is one of the leading theorists of the postmodern, and in his celebrated seminal text, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) he also calls for a "return to older theories of the sublime" to grasp the essential features of a postmodern culture. Postmodernity, Jameson summarises, is characterised by a

new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary 'theory' and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in new forms of our private temporality, whose 'schizophrenic' structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in the more temporal arts; a whole new type of emotional ground tone – what I will call 'intensities' – which can best be grasped by a return to older theories of the sublime. (1991: 6)

In *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism* (1993) Paul Crowther pursues a similar, if more reductionist analysis aimed at demonstrating that the sublime, despite intellectually "out of fashion" in the present, nevertheless is a precursor to postmodern cultural modes. Crowther takes Burke's analysis of the sublime as a point of departure. For Burke, the pleasure of the sublime arises out of the *moderation* of the idea of terror and pain: the sublime can only be experienced from a position of real safety and distance from the actual physical threat. Burke's sublime thus

Theories of the Sublime

treats terror as an observed spectacle, which, according to Crowther, can function as a model for the vicarious sado-masochistic pleasures and compensatory aesthetic thrills in the age of late capitalism. Capitalist societies effect a division of labour, resulting in mechanical work routines which have a dulling effect on the senses, hence need for “intensive stimuli that [bring about] existential compensation for the monotony of the work process” (1993:125). Crowther cites as examples the cheap thrills, shocks, surprises provided by the media industry: horror films, the staged sport events, violent gangster movies and sensational news items. A similar postmodern “pleasure from a distance” can be found in the morbid fascination with disaster, accident and violence in the media. Crowther’s use of the concept of the sublime is limited by his pessimism towards popular mass culture: “These shock-stimuli can be voluntarily solicited and enjoyed for their own sake, i.e. without necessarily believing that the thrills and shudders which they will induce will be good for us. But the reason why we enjoy them is because they rejuvenate our sense of life in the midst of monotony” (1993:125). Nevertheless, his grasp of the postmodern sublime as that intense experience through which negation, horror and violence can be enjoyed as a spectacle is a useful way to understand the ambivalence of popular culture where sublime moments of intense pleasure and heightened self-awareness coincide with the loss of traditional identities as worker in a capitalist system.

Similarly, in *Postmodern Sublime* (1996), Joseph Tabbi decries the fact that mainstream literary theories currently afford “little room for the un-ironic, expansive gestures that are traditionally associated with the sublime” (1996: ix) despite the fact that the sublime persists as “a powerful emotive force in postmodern writing, especially in American works that regard reality as something newly mediated, predominantly, by science and technology” (1996: ix). For Tabbi, the postmodern sublime is associated with a third, post-industrial stage of globalised capital:

Kant's sublime object, a figure for infinite greatness and infinite power in nature that cannot be represented, seems to have been replaced in postmodern literature by a technological process. Now, when literature fails to present an object for an idea of absolute power, the failure is associated with technological structures and global governance systems beyond the comprehension of one mind or imagination. (1996: ix)

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Slavoj Žižek has used the Kantian sublime as a model to read a number of postmodern cultural events and texts, ranging from the toppling of Ceausescu's Romanian dictatorship to the film *Silence of the Lambs*. The "relationship between wild, chaotic, untamed, raging nature and the suprasensible Idea of Reason beyond any natural constraint", in other words, Kant's dynamic sublime, "enables us to detect the roots of the public fascination with figures like Hannibal Lecter, the cannibal serial killer from Thomas Harris's novels" (1993:47-8).

An interest in the sublime has also informed a number of recent studies of male sexuality.¹⁰ As we have seen, Lyotard likened the Kantian sublime moment to a vertiginous loss of self in the intense rapture of an orgasm. The conjunction of pain and pleasure, inherent in the sublime, has made it an ideal model for the analysis of the contradictory passions of masochism. According to Nick Mansfield,

Both masochism and the sublime produce a sequence whereby pain precedes pleasure; both masochism and the sublime rely on an object, real or imagined, onto which purely subjective fantasies and investments can be projected. This object is distant, imposing and ineffable, the vision of punishment (in Masochism), the sublime landscape or nature in Kant.... Masochism and the sublime, therefore, have an identical structure. They mirror and condition, produce and reproduce one another, so that although they may not be the same thing, they are inseparable. (1997:28)

Mansfield's analysis of masochism, "a scenario in which there is no difference between pleasure and pain, activity and passivity, power and powerlessness" (1997: ix), takes its cue from Foucault's dictum that sexuality is a historically determined social construct rather than a natural, biological force. The impossible and contradictory scenarios or "theatres" of masochism are thus cultural or aesthetic formations that elaborately stage an ambiguous double structure of sexual play: on the surface the male is subordinate to the female dominating character and endures pain and degradation (whippings, bondage, fetishisation of clothes etc.); at a deeper level the reverse structure is apparent where the man is in control of the scene and derives pleasure from staging his own painful subjection.¹¹ For Mansfield, masochism is then a thoroughly modern formation in that it plays with the staging of identity and multiple subjectivities. He goes as far as seeing "the contradictory, impossible, sublime model of subjectivity ... as a significant version of power in the modern and postmodern eras" (1997: xi)

Theories of the Sublime

with a general application for an analysis of the dispersed and hidden structures of power in a globalised world. The simultaneous exercise and staged disavowal of power in masochism is thus “a model of the way in which politics operates in the postmodern era, where the powerful, from presidents to pressure groups, always disavow their own power” (1997: x).

Post-Kantian models of sublimity also inform several recent studies of the Gothic, such as Vijay Mishra’s *The Gothic Sublime* (1994).¹² Mishra calls for a

postmodern intervention and reading of the sublime not as a simple aesthetic category arising out of a delight with terror, but as the fundamental faculty of the imagination, which grasps the essence of the Gothic before reason intervenes and effectively silences it. This act of censorship is precisely what the Gothic refuses to accept, and it is at this point that the Gothic sublime is effectively the subject’s entry into the abyss as it faces the consequences of the failure to transcend. Where the Romantic sublime, finally, has the triumphant subject, the Gothic sublime is a version of the Lacanian Real as ‘the embodiment of a pure negativity’ into which the subject inscribes itself as an absence, a lack in the structure itself. (1994: 17)

Mishra suggests that the Gothic subverts the Kantian sublime by consciously choosing irrationality over reason. Instead of recuperating the excesses of the imagination in the Kantian law of reason, the gothic sublime is a “moment of entry into the unconscious, the ‘unplumbable’, the tangled depth of the dream-text that surfaces in life only as certain effects like that of the ‘uncanny’ (1994:19). Similarly, David Morris makes the point that gothic sublimity “is a vertiginous and plunging – not a soaring – sublime, which takes deep within rather than beyond the human sphere” (1985: 300). Anne Williams, in *Art of Darkness. A Poetics of Gothic* (1995), makes a parallel point when she claims that “‘Gothic’ is an expression (in the Freudian ‘dreamwork’ of the ambivalently attractive ‘female’ unconscious ‘other’ of eighteenth century male-centred conscious ‘Reason’” (1995: 19). The heterogenous and fluid Gothic genre was consequently always regarded as marginal to the great tradition of romantic poetry and realist novels, and gothic romances were often dismissed as adolescent or youthful distractions. From the high romantic ground, the “disreputable Gothic appears shocking, subversive, delighting in the forbidden and trafficking in the unspeakable” (1995: 4).

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Sublimity and Gender

Edmund Burke's and Immanuel Kant's classical writings about the sublime, while ostensibly and explicitly theories about matters of art, taste and aesthetics, are also detailed and complex discourses about sexual and racial difference. Theories about the sublime are in this way never only conjectures about the purely aesthetic domain, but are always first and foremost social theories. We have already looked at the way Burke aligns sublimity with masculinity, and beauty with femininity. A similar conceptual configuration is also found in Kant's philosophical work, though the *Critique* does not use such explicit terms. For a clearer picture of the sublime as a problematic model of male, rational supremacy we need to go to Kant's youthful philosophical work which has attracted far less scholarly attention than the *Critiques*. In a treatise titled *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), Kant addresses aesthetic questions in a more personal, lively style devoid of the formidable abstractness in his later philosophical works. *Observations* was written nearly two decades before the 'critical' trilogy (*Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *Critique of Judgement* (1790)).

As the title already spells out, Kant's treatise is founded on the fundamental opposition between the beautiful and the sublime. As in Burke's work, this binary opposition serves as the governing logic for an aggressive differentiation between male and female. Kant begins by delineating the respective qualities of the sublime and the beautiful:

Understanding is sublime, wit is beautiful. Courage is sublime and great, artfulness is little but beautiful. Veracity and honesty are simple and noble; jest and pleasant flattery are delicate and beautiful. Unselfish zeal to serve is noble; refinement and courtesy are beautiful. Sublime attributes stimulate esteem, beautiful ones, love... (1991:51)

Kant's classificatory scheme is largely conventional, but what is striking, is the absolute confidence and decisiveness with which he affirms one set of human qualities by bestowing on it the character of the sublime, and devalues another by labelling it as merely beautiful. The sharpness of Kant's aesthetic judgement becomes particularly pronounced when it turns on gender difference. The male bond of "[f]riendship has mainly the character of the sublime, but

Theories of the Sublime

love between sexes, that of the beautiful" (1991:51). Just as love and friendship constitute female and male passions respectively, the mental capacities are also differentiated: "the fair sex has just as much understanding, but it is a beautiful understanding, whereas ours should be a deep understanding, an expression that signifies identity with the sublime" (1991:78) Consequently, in "matrimonial life the united pair should, as it were, constitute a single moral person, which is animated and governed by the understanding of the man and the taste of the wife" (1991:95). Differences between the sexes are not limited to variations in mental capacity, but also extend, stereotypically, to matters of fashion and social deportment:

Women have a strong inborn feeling for all that is beautiful, elegant, and decorated. Even in childhood they like to be dressed up, and take pleasure when they are adorned. They are cleanly and very delicate in respect to all that provokes disgust. They love pleasantries and can be entertained by trivialities if only these are merry and laughing. (1991:77)

Embellishment and decoration are then feminine qualities in the realm of the beautiful; simplicity on the other hand is sublime. Consequently, the worst qualities in man are to be a "dandy or a fop" (1991:54). In claiming the sublime as the exclusive preserve of masculinity and reducing female qualities to the merely beautiful, Kant's argument becomes trapped in a circular, self-justifying logic: a quality of mind is beautiful because it is feminine, and because it is feminine it is beautiful. In reconfiguring the question of what constitutes essential male and female qualities as question of taste, Kant enables aesthetics to police the borders of gendered identities. Sublimity and maleness become fixed in a self-perpetuating loop of mutual recognition that is founded on the exclusion of the feminine.

Kant's and Burke's gendered conception of the sublime has not gone unnoticed in recent feminist criticism. In *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (1995), Barbara Freeman reads theories of the sublime as a masculine mode of domination over "objects of rapture" (1995: 3). Excessive experiences are managed and domesticated by the male subject and made subject to reason, leading to an enhanced sense of identity. Freeman asserts that this triumphalist supremacy over excessive experience is gendered, because the "feminine sublime does not attempt to master its objects of rapture" (1995: 3). Jacqueline Labbe's study, *Romantic*

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Visualities. Landscape, Gender and Romanticism (1998), pursues a similar analysis of the gender politics of eighteenth century prospect poetics. Both Kant and Burke, “structure the sublime in a way that cannot admit a feminine ‘sublimed’ subject” (1998:43). She deconstructs the Romantic “ideology of eminence” (1998: xxi) which has led to a continued cultural celebration of height over lowliness, and the valorisation of generalisation, abstraction and the universal over detail, the specific and particular. The prospect view is not only the vantage point from which to compose a loco-descriptive poem, but also involves “disinterestedness, reason, and the ability to abstract [which] situates this view as distinctly gendered, as, in fact one of the defining characteristics of masculinity” (1998:ix). The masculine prospect of wide and open spaces, pleasing to the eye as they open out to infinity, must be seen as the counter point to the spaces of domestic confinement which were considered natural for women to inhabit. The expansive mind of man needed to be balanced by the modesty and domestic confinement for women. Labbe’s examination of prospect language in romantic loco-descriptive poetry reveals a “gendered dichotomy based on culturally constructed differences in perception - in visibility” (1998:ix). Inhabiting and discursively claiming the prospect position with possibilities of an expanded sublime view, is a privilege of the male writer and an extension of the social privileges which his gender brings him.

Labbe demonstrates her argument in a reading of Anna Seward’s poem “Address to Woman” in which female vision is constrained to the narrower compass of “the shelter’d valley below” whereas “ruffian MAN” inhabits the “mountain’s stormy brow”, as can be seen in the following excerpts of the poem:

Designed for peace, and soft delight,
For tender love, and pity mild,
O seek not thou the craggy height,
The howling main, the desert wild!

Stay in the shelter'd valley low,
Where calmly blows the fragrant air,
But shun the mountain's stormy brow,
For darken'd winds are raging there.

The ruffian MAN endures the strife

Theories of the Sublime

Of tempests fierce and furious seas;
Ah! better guard thy transient life,
WOMAN, thou rosy child of ease.
(Qtd in Labbe, 1998: xiii - xiv)

A similarly gendered approach to the landscape is also found in Wordsworth's famous coming of age poem, "Tintern Abbey", which Labbe cites as an instance, *par excellence*, where sublimity is configured as masculine aesthetic that depends on the displacement of feminine elements into a domestic sphere. I have followed Labbe's general thrust of argument but offer an expanded reading of the poem. The poem's full title, "A few miles *above* Tintern Abbey on revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798" makes it clear that the landscape is viewed from a prospect position and the land below is accordingly rendered as a fluid, boundless, generalised scene: details become universals, the abstract replaces the concrete, and a sense of universalising detachment prevails. Wordsworth's "view" reduces the detail of the landscape ("these plots of cottage ground, these orchard tufts") into a generalised view in which these details "lose themselves 'mid groves and copses". Similarly, an observation of "hedgerows" transmutes itself into "hardly hedgerows, little lines/ Of sportive wood run wild". In this way, the mature Wordsworth distances himself from the tyranny of the immature, feminised eye that seeks out the detail of "beauteous forms" in the landscape. Instead of the "courser pleasures of my boyish days", he abstracts an "aspect more sublime" from the immediacy of the scene, a process that Weiskel has termed Wordsworth's "great program of defamiliarisation" (1976:16). This abstracted sense of the sublime, is crucially dependent on the "eye made quiet", in other words, a repudiation of the primacy of the visual. Wordsworth's sublime hinges on his suppression of the gaze that allows the imagination to gain access to an inner "power/ Of harmony, and the deep power of joy" that is no longer dependent on the landscape itself. Wordsworth describes the picturesque landscape of his excessive youthful infatuation, devoid of "remoter charm", as follows:

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed by the eye. – That time is past...

Instead of the constraining and enclosing landscape of the “deep and gloomy wood”, the expansive prospect view over the Wye valley now allows the older Wordsworth to experience nature in a way that gives rise to “elevated thought; a sense sublime/ Of something far more deeply interfused”. The natural figure for Wordsworth’s sublime is then less the actually viewed landscape of “meadows and woods/ And mountains” below, than an imagined, vast, abstracted natural domain of “setting suns,/ And the round ocean and the living air,/ And the blue sky” that reaches its apotheosis in the “motion and a spirit” in “the mind of man”. In a remarkably Kantian move that recuperates the excesses of the imagination under the law of reason, Wordsworth’s immature “wild ecstasies” are “matured/ Into a sober pleasure” of transcendent nature. Wordsworth’s youthful infatuation with nature (the “language of my former heart”) that he has outgrown, is transferred to his “dearest Friend”, his sister Dorothy. Expelled, as it were as an infection from his imagination, these passions will now be housed in the sister who becomes the “mansion for all lovely forms”.



Wordsworth’s romantic sublime is dependent on a strict repudiation of the “lovely forms” of a feminised nature. Wordsworth, in this sense, follows Burke’s and Kant’s conventional opposition that contrasts the male’s rational capacity to grasp the abstractness of the sublime with a female sensuous love of beauty. As Labbe puts it, the sublime is a “masculine rite of passage ... to elide the feminine” (1998:36). Labbe’s analysis allows us to understand the sublime as a gendered aesthetic, and in the concluding section of this chapter I will attempt to transfer this critique to the colonial arena by inserting the term ‘race’ into the argument. Labbe does not discuss the colonial domain at all, but her reading of the sublime as a structure of dominance is useful for an analysis of colonial manifestations of prospect rhetoric. In this sense one can argue that prospect aesthetics, which were largely in decline in post-romantic Europe, were displaced into the colonial field where they were to become enlisted in imperial politics of domination and conquest.

“The ill effects of black” on the imagination

Theories of the Sublime

While theories of the sublime have been used to re-examine a variety of postmodern phenomena such as sado-masochism, mass tourism and the internet, surprisingly little attention has been given to the sublime in postcolonial criticism and theory. Homi Bhabha, for instance, opens his book, *Locations of Culture*, with the following sentence: “It is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the *beyond*” (Bhabha’s emphasis, 1994: 1), but does not invoke theories of the sublime in his analysis of postcolonial cultures. There is one rare exception, namely Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s close attention to Kant’s theories of the sublime in the introductory chapter of her *Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999).¹³ Her analysis of the Kantian sublime is a launching pad for a broader deconstruction of the authoritative narratives of Western philosophy which are posited as “universal” but are also at the same time “unmistakably European” (1999:8) as they occlude non-western people. Receptiveness for and delight in the sublime becomes, in Spivak’s reading of Kant, the touchstone for this “universal”, rational, educated European subject, because in the “moment of the Sublime the subject accedes to the rational will” (1999:10). Capacity for the sublime is then the hallmark of a civilised, rational subject, whereas for the uneducated and uncultured man (Kant’s “rohen Menschen”¹⁴) overwhelming and immense natural phenomena are merely terrible.

[T]he mistake made by the raw man, for whom the abyss of the infinite is fearful rather than sublime, must be corrected through culture... Those who are cooked by culture can ‘denominate’ nature sublime. (1999: 14)

The triumph of the “law of reason” which gives rise to the sublime is thus a civilisational marker that distinguishes enlightened, rational subjects from aesthetically less developed peoples, and it is this distinction that informs the “cultural mission of imperialism” (1999: 14). In Kant’s philosophical project, Spivak concludes, “The subject as such is geopolitically differentiated” (1999: 26-7) and the sublime is thus imbricated in the “axiomatics of imperialism” (1999: 19). Although Spivak builds her entire attack on the European philosophical project on a deconstructive reading of Kant’s “Analytic of the Sublime”, these critical insights are not used to move beyond Kant, to analyse how manifestations of the sublime have shaped the colonial and postcolonial arena. She appears to be more interested in the sublime as a highly specialised philosophical argument than as a discursive practice that has left its mark on colonial culture. Her argument substantially hinges on Kant’s single throwaway remark about the “rohen

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Menschen” and ignores a wider body of writing on the sublime, such as the troubling racial disavowal in Edmund Burke’s celebrated *Enquiry*.

Burke famously defined the sublime as “delightful horror” (1757: 52) and associated it repeatedly with chaos, blackness and abyssal, dark immensity (“all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree” (1757:42)). When it however comes to the darkness of black bodies (in Burke’s example, a black woman seen by a previously blind child), feelings of sublimity are blocked by “the ill effects of black on his imagination” and give rise merely to “great horror” (1757:145). Blackness, when associated with the female body of the native, emerges as the weak spot that short-circuits the aesthetic mechanism of the sublime. Burke, we will remember, described the sublime as a feeling that arises out of suspended terror. Apprehensions of terror are “delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without actually being in such circumstances.... What excites this delight, I call Sublime” (1757: 32). The delight of the sublime is however but a thin veneer that barely manages to contain the horror of difference and excess that always threatens to erupt out of the real; and as Burke’s telling example of the black woman shows, the sublime fails in the face of racial difference and gives way to absolute terror. Burke’s sublime, already an unstable and ambivalent category of feeling that seeks to represent and contain the unrepresentable, unravels in the face of blackness.

Spivak’s omission of Kant’s own earlier, politically much more revealing *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) is even more surprising than overlooking Burke’s *Enquiry*. Kant’s pre-critical treatise is founded on the by then conventional opposition between the beautiful and the sublime. As in Burke’s work, this binary opposition serves as the governing logic for an aggressive, sustained differentiation between male and female. Furthermore, the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful functions as a template of taste that can be used beyond the aesthetic domain to judge the merits of various national traits and evaluate the respective worth of ethnic groups. Kant deploys the binary opposition between the sublime and the beautiful as an ethno-racial categorisation to differentiate between self and other. He proceeds by evaluating the national and ethnic entities of the world (“Völker”) according to their predisposition for either the sublime or the beautiful: the effeminate Italians and the French are

Theories of the Sublime

distinguished by feelings for the beautiful, but the virile Germans, English, Spanish have a keen capacity for the sublime. The notable exception among European nations are the Dutch who apparently have no aesthetic capacity whatsoever, neither for the sublime nor the beautiful. Kant's scathing comments on the lowlands: "Holland can be considered as that land where the finer taste becomes largely unnoticeable" (1991: 97).

Kant's judgement becomes even more aggressive when it moves into the colonial field. For Kant, the capacity for higher aesthetic judgement is singularly lacking outside of Europe. The only "savage race" that displays a "sublime mental character" is the North American Indian who supposedly has a strong feeling for honour and "seeks wild adventures hundreds of miles abroad" (1991: 111). Kant reserves his lowest esteem for Africa:

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. (1991: 110-111)

In Kant's normative judgement, a quick pronouncement on supposedly innate aesthetic and affective capabilities ("by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling") is used to evaluate matters of character, intellect and the capacity for learning and self-improvement. Equally significant and telling is Kant's equation of "Negro" with "slave". In relying on and *repeating* the argument of Hume, Kant's pronouncements are an exemplary instance of the fixity and stability of racial stereotyping that has occupied postcolonial critics such as Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha.¹⁵ Kant's sublime is then a preserve (with minor exceptions) of the European master races as they alone have the rational mind that can transform baser feelings of fear and abjection into a triumph of the imagination.

The above discussion of Kant's and Burke's philosophical writing shows that ideas of racial difference underpin the classical theories of the sublime. While it would be absurd to argue that the sublime is reducible to a theory of race, or even that racial difference underlies loco-

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

descriptive Romantic poetry such as for example Wordsworth's numerous evocations of the sublime, it would seem inappropriate to read colonial manifestations of the sublime without regard to the way both Kant and Burke sought to define sublimity by using the images of racial others as deficit models.¹⁶ Furthermore, both writers repeatedly invoke distant and exotic locales – often terrains of European colonial expansion – as privileged spaces for sublimity. In colonial discourse, the sublime, in my understanding, is then less a mode of rhetorical grandeur and loftiness (as in the original Longinian analysis), than a highly specialised technique of the imagination in which a subject attempts to master and contain a form of alterity (sometimes coded as blackness) that is initially excessive, overwhelming, threatening and incomprehensible. The discursive operations of the sublime allow a paradoxical mastery of the subject over such excessive and threatening experience on the imperial frontiers, leading to a triumphantly enhanced sense of identity. It is this understanding of the sublime that I will now use as a lens for analysis in the following chapters.



Theories of the Sublime

NOTES

1. Kant was later to take up the analysis of ornamentation or parergonality, which in turn provided Derrida with material for an elaborate deconstructive analysis in *The Truth in Painting*.

2. See also Addison's comments in *The Spectator* (No 418 June 30 1712): "But how comes it to pass that we should take delight in being terrified [...]... We are delighted with the reflecting upon dangers that are past, or looking at a precipice at a distance, which would fill us with a different kind of horror, if we saw it hanging over our heads" (Ashfield, DeBolla, 1996:67-8).

3. Their study aims to "de-couple the British eighteenth-century tradition of the sublime from the Kantian analytic" (1996:3). The Kantian analytic is grounded in the aesthetics of disinterestedness as condition for judgements of taste of an autonomous and universal subject, and in this way attempts to remove aesthetics from the social and political realm. Kant can of course be read in political terms, as we shall see, but De Bolla and Ashfield claim that the British manifestations of the sublime are more overtly connected to social and political processes. The British tradition emphasises affective matters being based in human experience and human nature: aesthetics is not a separate realm divorced from the social.

4. The lone exception was Petrarch's famous climb of Mt Ventoux in the Pyrenees in 1336.

5. The Grand Tour, according to J.M. Black's (1992) *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour of the Eighteenth Century*, was essentially a "finishing education", initially reserved for the wealthy, aristocratic sons of a small elite, but gradually became *de rigueur* for the upper middle classes as well. The predominance of classic literature and philosophy in education, coupled with a belief in the value of foreign travel saw to it that the Grand Tour became increasingly popular in the eighteenth century and in this way becoming an important precursor to modern tourism.

6. In *Justine* (1795), the classic formulation of sado-masochistic pleasure, De Sade argues in Burkean fashion that "there is no doubt that we are much more keenly affected by pain than by pleasure: the reverberations that result in us when the sensation of pain is produced in others will essentially be of a more vigorous character, more incisive, will more energetically resound in us, will put the animal spirits into circulation and these, directing themselves toward the nether regions by the retrograde motion essential to them, instantly will excite the organ of voluptuousness and dispose them to pleasure" (1965: 252).

7. The concept of 'purposiveness' without purpose is one which has remained an enduring philosophical conundrum for many critics. I do not claim any philosophical validity for my gloss. For a recent interpretation, see Anthony Savile's *Kantian Aesthetics Pursued*, which translates the Kantian "purposiveness without purpose" as "being undesignedly functional for an end" (1993: 90).

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

8. Lyotard elaborates this point in another essay, “The Sublime and the Avantgarde” (1993), where he argues that modernist painting, though evacuated of representational meaning, “will of course ‘present’ something, though negatively; it will therefore avoid figuration or representation. It will be ‘white’ like one of Malevich’s squares; it will enable us to see by making it impossible to see; it will please only by causing pain” (1993:44). The modernist cultural artifact is thus only readable through the dialectic of the Kantian sublime.

9. The sublime has also engaged the interest of Gilles Deleuze, whose early book, *Kant’s Critical Philosophy. The Doctrine of the Faculties* (1984), is an attempt to explicate the Kantian analytic. Unlike Lyotard, Deleuze does however not depart radically from Kant.

10. As examples see Nick Mansfield’s *Masochism: The Art of Power* (1997) which is discussed below, as well as Warren Stevenson’s *Romanticism and the Androgynous Sublime* (1996) and Suzanne Stewart’s *Sublime Surrender. Male Masochism at the Fin-de-Siecle* (1998).

11. In her book, *Male Masochism* (1995), Carol Siegel disagrees with Mansfield’s interpretation of the masochistic scenario: “any masochistic male character, despite his apparent masculinity (that is, the masculine gender explicitly attributed to him in the text), occupies the feminine position in a gender-based power dynamic reflecting the binary structuring of patriarchal culture” (1995: 23).

12. Another example is Steven Bruhn’s *Gothic Bodies. The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction* (1994) which argues that the “exquisite distresses” of gothic fictions constitute an aesthetic of pain and suffering that destabilises Cartesian thinking and is “necessary for the romantic construction of identity” (1994: 4). Michelle Massé’s *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism and the Gothic* (1992) adds a gendered perspective. For a general overview of the genre, Victor Sage’s *The Gothic Novel* (1990) is useful.

13. Although the title of Spivak’s book, *The Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, suggests that she frames her project as a deconstructive analysis of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* or *Critique of Practical Reason*, her analysis actually deals with these works only in passing and focuses on Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*. Spivak blends moments of painstakingly close reading with broad summations that sometimes miss the mark. For example, she confuses Kant’s dynamic and mathematical sublimates (1999: 11).

14. The full quotation is: "the sublime presents itself to the uneducated man simply as terrible" (1951:105). Spivak does not disclose that Kant actually refers to Swiss peasants rather than a more third-worldly native informant.

15. See Bhabha’s essay “The Other Question” in *The Location of Culture*: “An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness” (1994: 66). Bhabha describes his concept of stereotype in ways

Theories of the Sublime

which are remarkably similar to discourses of the sublime. Stereotype is, according to Bhaba's argument, a highly ambivalent and contradictory form of knowledge which is best grasped as a fetishistic scene:

the fetish represents the simultaneous play between metaphor as substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously registers lack). The fetish or stereotype gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence... This conflict of pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defence, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence, has a fundamental significance for colonial discourse. (1994: 74)

16. Kant's examples of humanity on the limits of culture, unable to use reason in order to make aesthetic judgements, are the *Neuholländer* (the Australian Aboriginal) and the *Feuerländer* (the man from Tierra del Fuego).



CHAPTER 2

African Mountains and the Sublime

Tropical Alpinism, Imperialism and the Mountains of the Moon

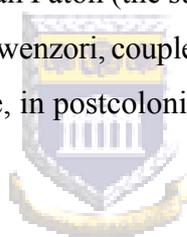
On 12 January 1907 an elite group of England's foremost politicians, businessmen and scientists assembled in London for a prestigious evening hosted by the Royal Geographic Society. The "brilliant and distinguished audience"¹ of more than 2000 men included the King, the first time in 40 years that a reigning British monarch had attended such an event. The upper echelons of London's society, including ambassadors, peers of the realm and high-ranking military men had come to hear HRH, Prince Luigi Amedeo d'Aosta of Savoy, the Duke of Abruzzi give a talk and "lantern show" on a successful mountaineering expedition that he had led a few months earlier to the Ruwenzori Mountains² in East Africa.

In this chapter I will try to account for a metropolitan elite's extraordinary interest in an obscure mountain range in the remote interior of Africa, showing that the Ruwenzori were intimately connected to Britain's imperial ambitions in Africa. In a range of exploration narratives, travel stories and mountaineering accounts, the Ruwenzori mountains are invested with symbolic cultural value that is far in excess of any other comparable location. The Ruwenzori, as will become clear, had an enormous continental and symbolic significance in the broader context of African colonialism in Africa. This high regard and excessive valorization of the Ruwenzori was frequently grounded in discourses of racial difference that expressed adoration and awe at a sublime landscape that differed sharply from the surrounding tropical terrain of Central Africa. The contrast between these African mountains and their surrounding jungle lowlands constituted a topographical metaphor in terms of which racial difference and civilisational rank could be mapped and imagined. Accordingly, Africa's snow-capped peaks were imagined as sublime, elevated sites of whiteness, in stark contrast to the supposed darkness of the African interior. More practically, the higher ground was deemed a natural space for European settlement in Africa, as exemplified by the "White Highlands" in Kenya. This attitude was articulated in an

African Mountains and the Sublime

exemplary way by Douglas Freshfield, who held the influential position of president of the British Alpine Club. Freshfield, who had climbed in the Ruwenzori range prior to the Italian expedition in 1905, regarded the cool and fertile foothills as ideal “sites for European cultivation and for a sanatorium” (1907: 328). The Ruwenzori are thus claimed as an ideal space for European colonisation.³

Beginning with Henry Morton Stanley’s original discovery⁴ in 1888 and reaching an apotheosis in the Abruzzi conquest in 1906, the Ruwenzori range exercised an inordinate influence on the West’s popular imagination, spawning a large volume of exploration, journalistic and scientific writing. The mountains drew not only explorers, scientists, colonial administrators and adventurous mountaineers, but also continued to inspire awe and astonishment in a large range of writers, among them John Buchan and Alan Paton (the subjects of the following two chapters). Such an enthusiastic valorisation of the Ruwenzori, coupled with problematic discourses of racial difference, even persisted, as we shall see, in postcolonial writing such as Nadine Gordimer’s early Congo journalism.



Before tracing the emergence of imperial discourses around the Ruwenzori mountains, a brief geographical overview is necessary. The Ruwenzori are a remote mountain range in the Great Lakes region of central Africa, on the border of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the former Zaire. Although just north of the Equator, its highest peaks are covered in snow and glacial ice caps, and form by far the most extensive alpine region in Africa. At 5109 metres, their highest point, Margherita, is the third highest peak in Africa, after Mounts Kilimanjaro and Kenya. Despite their tropical location, these three mountains are the only ones in Africa which have a permanent cover of snow and ice. But unlike the taller peaks in Tanzania and Kenya, the Ruwenzori are not single mounts of volcanic origin, but a 120 kilometre long range of extremely rugged and steep high peaks, of which twenty-five rise above 4500m. The altitude of the Ruwenzori mountains is even more impressive because they rise out of the Albertine depression in the western Rift Valley. Since 1991, the Ruwenzori have been accorded formal national park status in Uganda and in 1994 they were proclaimed a World Heritage Site for “its aesthetic and scenic values and for its significance as the habitat for an exceptional variety of species”.⁵ The

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

extreme altitudinal variation of the area supports a large range of endemic vegetation, including an unusual afro-alpine flora marked by botanical gigantism that includes tree heathers, lobelias and groundsel. With an extraordinarily high annual rainfall of 5 metres, the Ruwenzori are extremely wet, and with rain falling on most days, the higher peaks are only visible on a few days in the year.

The story of the Ruwenzori mountains begins in an important sense with Stanley's celebrated "first" sighting of the snowy peaks on 24 May 1888. He records this moment in the language of revelation:

When about five miles from the Nsabe camp, while looking to the south-east and meditating upon the events of the last month, my eyes were attracted by a boy to a mountain, said to be covered with salt, and I saw a peculiar-shaped cloud of a most beautiful silver colour which assumed the proportions and appearance of a vast mountain covered by snow. Following its form downward, I became struck with the deep blue-black colour of its base, and I wondered if it portended another tornado; then, as the sight descended to the gap between the eastern and western plateaux, I became for the first time conscious that what I gazed upon was not the image or semblance of a vast mountain, but the solid substance of a real one, with its summit covered in snow. (1890:251)

Stanley's epiphany, which both relies on local knowledge ("my eyes were attracted by a boy") and at the same time discredits it ("said to be covered by salt"), denotes the originary moment of what John Urry calls a "place-myth" (1995:195). It is this place myth, of which Stanley is the principal author, that establishes a complex discursive structure about the Ruwenzori site and generates desire to gaze at and to know these mountains. But before we can understand how the Ruwenzori could become Stanley's most exalted African location endowed with sublime value, we need to look at the historical and geographical context of his African exploration in more detail, in particular the relationship of the sublime peaks to the terrors of the vast tropical forests in the Congo basin. Stanley's experience of the gloomy horrors of the "tall dense woods, of true tropic character, dark, sombrous and high, bound one to another with vines and creepers" (1890: 184), produced, I will suggest, a form of dread akin to the Burkean "ill effects of black on his imagination" (1757:145). In sharp contrast to the fear of dark envelopment in the jungle, a fear that is consistently racialised in Stanley's narrative, the "celestial splendour" (1890: 502) of the snowy Ruwenzori peaks were a landscape that could be visually mastered and recuperated,

African Mountains and the Sublime

through discourses of the sublime, as a white, European landscape.

In Darkest Africa

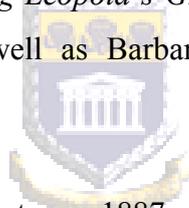
Henry Morton Stanley (1841-1904) is widely regarded as the “greatest of the African explorers and one of the most fascinating of late Victorian adventurers” (Lynn 1989:11). As the *New York Herald*'s star reporter, his celebrated meeting with Livingstone in 1871 on the shores of Lake Tanganjika, was the journalistic scoop of the century. The famous words, “Dr Livingstone, I presume” made him an instant celebrity and earned him enduring fame. Stanley's best-selling travel writing, his highly popular and lucrative public lecture series, and most importantly, his journalism played a key role in representing Africa to western audiences not only as an exciting arena of adventure and discovery, but also a dark, torpid place awaiting civilising colonial rule. His early African travels were almost exclusively financed by the New York Herald. As Paula Krebs has argued in *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire*, the link between author and empire was often through journalistic writing. The new mass-circulation journalism that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century was “coincident with the New Imperialism” (1999:4) and this created a mass public that was sympathetic to imperial expansion in Africa.

The urbane and scholarly image Stanley projected on his public lecture circuits was in sharp contrast to a darker side that emerged during his African exploration trips. He had a ruthless, violent personality, no doubt shaped by a brutal childhood, which earned him the Swahili name *Bula Matari* (the Stone Crusher). Stanley was moreover a pathological liar and was riven by sado-masochistic tendencies, and as John Bierman, his most recent biographer put it, he used “to concoct pathetic lies, and weave Mittyesque fantasies” (1990: 3). One of these “lies”, relating to the Twin Peaks of the Ruwenzori mountains, has, as far as I could ascertain, not been noticed in scholarship about Stanley, and will be discussed in some detail later in this chapter.

As an explorer, Stanley's achievements are principally staked on two epic transcontinental expeditions, both of them traversing central Africa from coast to coast. The first expedition started out in Zanzibar in 1874, and finally reached the Atlantic 999 days later. Stanley's monumental feat lay not only in the fact that he had for the first time succeeded in crossing the

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

continent from east to west, but also that he had traced the disputed course of the Congo river from its headwaters to the mouth. The account of the journey was published in two volumes as *Through the Dark Continent* (1879). Stanley's first-hand knowledge of the Congo interior landed him a lucrative contract with King Leopold of Belgium, and between 1879 and 1884 he was the principal driving force in opening up the Congo basin for commerce and exploitation, building roads and establishing trading posts. The Congo Free State, which Stanley founded as a private colony for Leopold, soon became one of the most rapacious and exploitative colonial regimes in Africa, leading to a large scale extermination of native people. In this sense, Stanley's and Leopold's legacy endures to this day in the chronic underdevelopment and political instability of the Congo. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) was a scathing contemporary indictment of the brutality of Leopold's rule, but the trauma of this legacy and its persistence into the present has continued to engage historians, commentators and writers as can be seen in Adam Hochschild's major revisionist history, *King Leopold's Ghost: A story of greed, terror, and heroism in Colonial Africa* (2000), as well as Barbara Kingsolver's acclaimed novel, *Poisonwood Bible* (1998).



It was on Stanley's second Congo journey, between 1887 and 1889 (and this time from west to east), that he made his most significant geographical discovery "in twenty-two years of African travel" (1890:494), namely the Ruwenzori mountains. The significance and emotional feeling that Stanley attached to this elevated alpine landscape can be partly explained by their impressive contrast to the tropical, lowland Congo jungle in which his expeditionaries had suffered months of staggering deprivations and hardships. But the semi-divine status that the Ruwenzori came to assume in Stanley's imagination must also be understood as a form of compensation for the embarrassing and painful failure of the expedition to achieve its goal, namely the rescue and repatriation of Emin Pascha.

The point of the entire expedition had been the relief of Emin Pascha, the then Governor of Equatoria who was beleaguered by a Mahdist uprising. In 1886, General Gordon had been killed by the Mahdi in Khartoum, and the British public, still smarting from this humiliating loss, was keen to prevent Gordon's successor, Emin, from suffering a similar fate. The British press took

African Mountains and the Sublime

up the cause and Stanley's private relief expedition was partly funded by enthusiastic public subscription. In the effort to avenge the lost honour of Britain, Emin's indeterminate racial and cultural identity mattered less; indeed his colourful personality inspired orientalist fantasies. He spoke twenty languages, was a formidable chess player and a gifted pianist, had converted to Islam and been married several times, including to a Transylvanian concubine whom he had prised out of an Ottoman Pascha's harem. More prosaically, Emin was a German doctor of Jewish ancestry whose real name was Eduard Schnitzer (Bierman 1990: 266-7). The expedition was also bankrolled by William MacKinnon, a Scottish shipping magnate who wanted to expand the profitable British trading presence in East Africa that had thus far been largely confined to Zanzibar. But Stanley was also using the Emin Pascha Relief expedition to further Leopold's imperial ambitions. Leopold, who wanted to extend his already vast territory into Uganda and the southern Sudan, therefore insisted that Stanley travel via the roundabout route of the Congo, not East Africa. Stanley did eventually find Emin on the shores of Lake Albert, but he did not need any rescuing, nor would he have anything to do with Stanley's offer of making him either a viceroy for Leopold, or governor for the British East Africa Company.⁶ But Stanley was determined to "rescue" Emin, forcing him to accompany him to the coast. At Bagamoyo, to Stanley's mortification, Emin however threw in his lot in with the Germans, Britain's colonial rivals.

It was Leopold's fateful insistence that Emin be reached via the treacherous route of the Congo jungle that turned Stanley's expedition into a fiasco. Although Stanley and a few survivors eventually reached their goal, the expedition exacted a huge toll in life and the fate of the lost rear column, associated with scandalous allegations of cannibalism, were to dog Stanley for years to come.⁷ The Great Ituri rainforest, an area the size of France, was a "wilderness of creeks, mud, thick scum-faced quagmires with duckweed into which we sank knee-deep, and the stench exhaled from the fetid slough was most sickening" (1890:144). In the chapter, 'The Great Central African Rainforest', Stanley conceives of the Congo jungle as a vast primeval wilderness in which nature is not benign but assumes the character of a malevolent monster. From a rare vantage point, the jungle appears as "vast as a continent before them, and drowsy, like a great beast, with monstrous fur thinly veiled by vaporous exhalations" (1890:182). In a similar vein,

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Jephson, one of Stanley's lieutenants, wrote of "a feeling of hatred the river inspires one with. One hates it as much as if it were a living thing – it is so treacherous and crafty, so overpowering and relentless in its force and overwhelming strength" (Bierman 1990:275). Stanley's vivid description of a near impenetrable, gloomy landscape of entrapment in many ways prefigures Joseph Conrad's more well-known depiction in *Heart of Darkness* where the "immense matted jungle" of "trees lashed together with creepers" is described as an unshackled natural force, "a thing monstrous and free" (1994:56, 51).

As we can see from the above passages, the unfamiliarity of tropical regions could produce a profound sense of ontological shock in the European traveller. The familiar European landscapes, subject of much romantic contemplation and excursive recreation, could not prepare observers for a radically different and alien form of nature in the tropics. The problem of transporting European conventions of landscape appreciation to colonial locales has been the subject of several studies such as J.M. Coetzee's essay, referred to in the introduction, but the specific problem that the luxuriant tropics posed for European aesthetics had already been addressed by Aldous Huxley in a little known essay titled "Wordsworth in the Tropics" (1929). Huxley makes the point that an export of the Wordsworthian worship of nature with its "cosy sublimities of the Lake District" (1929:113) to the "hothouse darkness of the jungle" (1929:114) was utterly unfeasible and ridiculous. The Wordsworthian adoration of nature had "two principal defects" (1929:114). Firstly, it relied on the idea of a subdued and tamed nature ("gardened Europe"), whereas the "vast masses of swarming vegetation" in tropics make it a terrain "foreign, appalling, fundamentally and utterly inimical to intruding man" (1929:114). Secondly, argues Huxley somewhat derisively, the love of nature relies on a process of distortion and "falsification": Wordsworth "pumps the dangerous Unknown out of Nature and refills the emptied forms of hills and woods, flowers and waters with something more reassuringly familiar – with humanity, with Anglicanism" (1929:117). If Wordsworth had left his "native continent" and experienced "the damp and stifling darkness, among the leeches and malevolently tangled rattans" he would have abandoned his pantheistic idea of a "divinely anglican" unity in nature (1929:129).

African Mountains and the Sublime

For Stanley, a particularly alarming and menacing aspect of the forest was precisely this threat of entanglement and vegetal envelopment, for which the profuse growth of the creepers and lianas became the most prominent figure. They embodied, to use Huxley's phrase, the "hostility of vegetal forces" (1929:114). Peter Knox-Shaw has remarked that Stanley's winding prose is itself a "vivid mimicry" (1984: 11) of the serpentine vegetation, as we can see in the following passage:

length after length of whiplike calamus – spurning and twisting lianes, and great serpent-like convolvuli winding in and out by mazy galleries of dark shadows, and emerging triumphant far above to lean their weight on branches, running coils at one place, forming loops at another place, and then stretching loosely their interminable lengths out of sight. (1890:354)

Stanley's description of the forest dangers, whether sinking into swamps or becoming ensnared in the thick undergrowth, creates a strong sense of claustrophobia and entrapment that complicates the conventional trope of exploration as an act of penetration. Instead, the explorers are themselves subject to being penetrated. A persistent feature of Stanley's forest narrative, almost to the point of becoming a nervous tic, is the continuous presence of stinging insects, snakes, hidden skewers and poisonous arrows. He writes, for example, of "an army of spiteful wasps [that] settled upon our faces, hands, and bodies, every vulnerable spot, and stung us with the venom of fiends" (1890:101). Later, he describes an arrow wound that "was a mere needle-point puncture" but despite the fact that "Dr Parke attended to him with care, it had fatal consequence a few days later" (1890: 115). When he writes that the villages always "swarmed with vermin" (1890: 279) it is not clear whether Stanley means people or insects. Indeed, assaults by insects merge with attacks by native people who become indistinguishable from the jungle. Stanley describes one such attack in which the invisibility of the assailants in the forest heightens the trauma of ambush:

The first person I saw was Lt Stairs, with his shirt torn open, and blood streaming from an arrow-wound in the left breast, about the region of the heart, and I heard a pattering on the leaves around me, and caught a glimpse of arrows flying past. ... There were numbers of men crouching about, and firing in the most senseless fashion at some suspicious bushes across the creek. (1890: 108)

The passage, incidentally, bears strong resemblances to the way Conrad described the attack in on the river steamer at the Upper Station.⁸ The tangled gloom of the jungle complicated the

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

penetrative gaze of the explorers and rendered the assailants invisible even if they attacked from close quarters. Stanley's tropical purgatory was teeming with snakes, thorns and stinging insects; and hostile people that lay in wait unseen. Alan Moorehead compared Stanley's journey to a dark Germanic legend in which all nature is twisted into monstrous shapes, horror is piled upon horror, and the gnomelike little figures of the pygmies dart in and out of the nightmare as upon a canvas painted by Hieronymus Bosch. (1962:515).

The understandable reluctance of the forest inhabitants to present themselves to a heavily armed foreign force and barter food, soon led to severe deprivations. Stanley's starving men were forced to subsist on grubs, insects, slugs and fungi, and the column rapidly disintegrated due to desertion, disease and death. Stanley instituted executions and savage punishments for theft and desertion, and turned to increasingly brutal means to obtain food. Where barter failed, he burned villages and seized women and children as hostages. In stark contrast to the frustrating elusiveness of the pygmy forest people, Stanley's hostile gaze can occasionally dissect a captured "specimen" in full ethnographic detail:

The monkey-eyed woman had a remarkable pair of mischievous orbs, protruding lips overhanging her chin, a prominent abdomen, narrow, flat chest, sloping shoulders, long arms, feet turned greatly inwards, and very short lower legs, and fitly represented the link long sought between average modern humanity and its Darwinian progenitors, and certainly deserved to be classed as an almost bestial type. (1890: 253)

The above passage, in which a description of a native body is used to make aesthetic and supposedly scientific points about racial difference, is only one of several instances in *Darkest Africa* that comment on, describe and measure African bodies in detail. Stanley's text is an example of the way in which landscape and ethnographic description merge in colonial discourse, an area that has attracted considerable critical attention in postcolonial studies. For example David Spurr argues that the

body of the primitive becomes as much the object of examination, commentary, and valorization as the landscape of the primitive. ... The eye treats the body as a landscape: it proceeds systematically from part to part, quantifying and spatializing, noting color and texture, and finally passing an aesthetic judgement which stressed the body's role as object to be viewed. (1993: 10-11)

In Stanley's case however, neither the "body of the primitive" nor the tropical landscape is

African Mountains and the Sublime

valorized; indeed, the primeval, savage nature of the jungle finds its correlate in the pre-human, “bestial” nature of the pygmy woman. In contrast to the racial degeneracy of the tropical lowland, Stanley can valorize “primitive” people when they associated with the Afro-Alpine uplands, as we can see when he writes admiringly about “the mysterious Wanyavingi, who were said to be descended from white men” and thought to live “in the neighbourhood of colossal mountains topped with snow” (1890:269). Ideas about race and landscape, as we shall see more clearly later, are bound up with each other. A similar point was made by Guy Yeoman, author of an authoritative recent book on the Ruwenzori, when he referred to the Bakonjo people as civilisationally more advanced on account of their relationship with a higher landscape: “the very knowledge that the mountains are there and that they are theirs - with that wonderful sense of eternity that the high hills give to mankind the world over - has provided them with an advantage over less fortunate peoples” (1989:29).

The extent of Stanley’s aversion to the gloomy jungle entrapment and its associated tropical horrors becomes clear in the “selfish rush towards the sky” (1890: 355) every time the expedition members come across an abandoned forest clearing. Then there is a climactic moment of Biblical revelation when the expedition has its first “gratifying sight” of the forest edge and the promised open land beyond. Stanley’s ecstatic prose describes

grassy slopes of valleys and hills, rocky knolls and softly rounded eminences, a veritable 'land of hills and valleys, that drinketh the rain of heaven'... This then was the long promised view and the long expected exit out of gloom! Therefore I call the tall peak terminating the forest ridge ... Mount Pisgah, - because, after 156 days of twilight in the primeval forest, we had first viewed the desired pasture lands of Ekuatoria. (1890:167)

When the expedition finally emerges out of “five months of immurement in the depths of forest wilds” (1890: 170), they feel “like men out of durance and the dungeon free and unfettered, having exchanged foulness and damp for sweetness and purity, darkness and gloom for divine light and wholesome air” (1890: 173). The scene before them was

a rolling plain, green as an English lawn, into broadest and sweetest daylight, and warm and glorious sunshine, to inhale the pure air with an uncontrollable rapture.... A hundred square miles of glorious country opened to our view - apparently deserted - for we had not as yet been able to search out the fine details of it. Leagues and leagues of bright green pasture land undulated in gentle waves,

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

intersected by narrow winding lines of umbrageous trees that filled the hollows, scores of gentle hills studded with dark clumps of thicket, graced here and there by a stately tree, lorded it over level breadths of pasture and softly sloping champaigns; and far in the east rose some frowning ranges of mountains beyond which we were certain slept in its deep gulf the blue Albert. (1890:173)

The force of the passage and the intensities of the emotions (“uncontrollable rapture”) relies on the sharp contrast of this benign upland landscape with the tropical horrors of the forest. Instead of a claustrophobic confinement in the tangled, dangerous gloom in which the power of the eye is incapacitated and the body constrained, the open rolling grass fields of the plateau and the far horizon give unlimited freedom to the gaze. In this classic instance of a colonial prospect scene, the landscape is rendered as a receptive garden (“gentle”, “sweetest”, “softly”) opening itself to the exploring eye. Mary Louise Pratt has used the expressive term “Monarch-of-all-I-survey” (1992: 205) to describe the rhetorical stance of such prospect scenes and has linked the commanding view over colonial landscapes with surveillance and imperial control. Pratt discerns three rhetorical strategies in her analysis of colonial prospect scenes. Firstly, the landscape is aestheticised as a beautiful and pleasurable scene to be looked at; then it is invested with a density of meaning that arises out of the rich and varied detail of the description; and lastly, the scene is described in such a manner as to render it subordinate to the power of the observer (1992: 204). Such strategies appear to be at work in Stanley’s passage, where the seeming lack of inhabitants (“apparently deserted”) and the detailed description of the homely park-like character (“an English lawn”) invite the explorer to take possession.

But the delight in the picturesque rolling grass fields of the central plateau is but a prelude to Stanley’s truly sublime landscape of the Ruwenzori mountains. In the two volume travel narrative, the sighting of the Ruwenzori stands out as the climactic moment of the entire two-year enterprise. In sharp contrast to the tropical horrors of the Congo basin, the snow-topped peaks offered a vision of a sublime alpine landscape, set in benign highland pastures and green meadows. The views of the mountains uplifted Stanley

in speechless wonder towards that upper region of cold brightness and perfect peace, so high above mortal reach, so holily tranquil and restful, of such immaculate and stainless purity, that thought and desire of expression were

African Mountains and the Sublime

altogether too deep for utterance. (1890:502)

In a sublime transport away from the dark and violent realities of the African continent he has just traversed, the Ruwenzori offers an experience of uplifting spiritual transcendence. Stanley compares this sublime “exultation” to the “peculiar emotion at the sight [of] any ancient work, be it an Egyptian pyramid or Sphinx, be it an Athenian Parthenon, Palmyrene sun-temple, Persepolitan palace” (1890: 498), and in this way situates the Ruwenzori in the list of historical and cultural destinations of the European Grand Tour. But there is a difference: there is nothing “more powerful and higher [than] that emotion which is roused at the sight of a hoary old mountain like this of Ruwenzori which we know to be countless thousands of years old” (1890: 498). For Stanley, the Ruwenzori are thus the ultimate site of pilgrimage for the traveller, surpassing the Mediterranean sites of antiquity in cultural and aesthetic value.

Stanley’s equation of the mountains with ancient ruins, and his fascination with the effects of geological time on the landscape were shared by many Victorian contemporaries, including Ruskin. In *Modern Painters*, Ruskin argued that the true sublimity of mountains was only comprehensible if they were understood “as remnants or foundations of the vaster ancient pyramids of which the greater part has been by ages carried away” (1903:Vol 4, 230). Similarly for Stanley, a sublime feeling of “wholesome awe” arises when the imagination tries to encompass the immense age and past magnitude of the Ruwenzori mountains:

When we think of how long it required the melted snow to carve out these ravines, hundreds of fathoms deep, through the rocky cone of the range, or the ages required to spread out the debris from its sides and bosom to cover the Semliki Valley and the Nyanza plains, we are struck dumb at the immeasurableness of the interval between that age when Ruwenzori rose aloft into being; and in reply to the still small voice which seems to ask – ‘Where wast thou when the foundations of the earth were laid? Declare if thou hast understanding,’ we become possessed with a wholesome awe, and can but feel a cheerful faith that it was good for us to have seen it. (1890: 498-9)

Stanley and Ruskin saw mountains not as completed or static landscapes arrested in time, but as relics and ruins whose stones bore testimony of immeasurably grand and powerful geological forces that exceeded full comprehension. For Ruskin’s observer, “the idea will force itself upon him of [the Alps] being mere fragments of large masses – splinters and fragments, as of a

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

stranded wreck, the greater part of which has been removed by the waves" (1903:Vol.4, 214). In *Deucalion*, Ruskin later wrote of the "the great sculptural force which ... shaped all the vast ravines which make the great flanks of the mountains awful" (1903: Vol. 6, 111-2) Attempts to describe and encompass the full magnitude of the mountains throughout geological time give rise to a Kantian sense of the sublime: an idea of awe "forces itself upon" the observer in the very moment in which reason apprehends the unimaginable magnitude of the object. The power of the Alps for Ruskin could only be grasped by a deep structural understanding (a "grammar of silicate") of its abyssal geological depth which allowed the observer to imagine the "fracturing power on a bed of conglomerate two thousand feet thick" (1903: Vol. 6,110). For both Ruskin and Stanley, mountains then become truly awe inspiring and sublime when they are looked at with geological insight, and this can best be achieved, not by climbing their peaks, but when viewed reverentially from below, in the valleys, where the inner structure of the mountains is revealed. The observer can thus grasp their sublime grandeur as an endless backward projection into infinite geological time.

One of the perplexing features of the Ruwenzori massif for Stanley and subsequent explorers was the fact that the range was almost perpetually shrouded in clouds and mists, and the snow-clad peaks only rarely became visible. Unlike the vegetal promiscuity of the tropical forest, the virginal high snows of the mountains only revealed themselves in brief, tantalising glimpses. The rare, fleeting views of "the mist-shrouded mountains" are therefore climactic moments of intense, almost erotic revelation and "fill the gazer with a feeling as though a glimpse of celestial splendour was obtained" (1890: 502). In the presence of mountains, Stanley's homage takes the form of sublime transcendence:

These moments of supreme feeling are memorable for the utter abstraction of the mind from all that is sordid and ignoble, and its utter absorption in the presence of unreachable loftiness, indescribable majesty, and constraining it not only to reverentially admire, but to adore in silence, the image of the Eternal. (1890: 502)

The sublime evocation of the Ruwenzori as an "image of the Eternal" suggests that the mountains become a site of intense devotion. They are a holy temple where Stanley could come into the

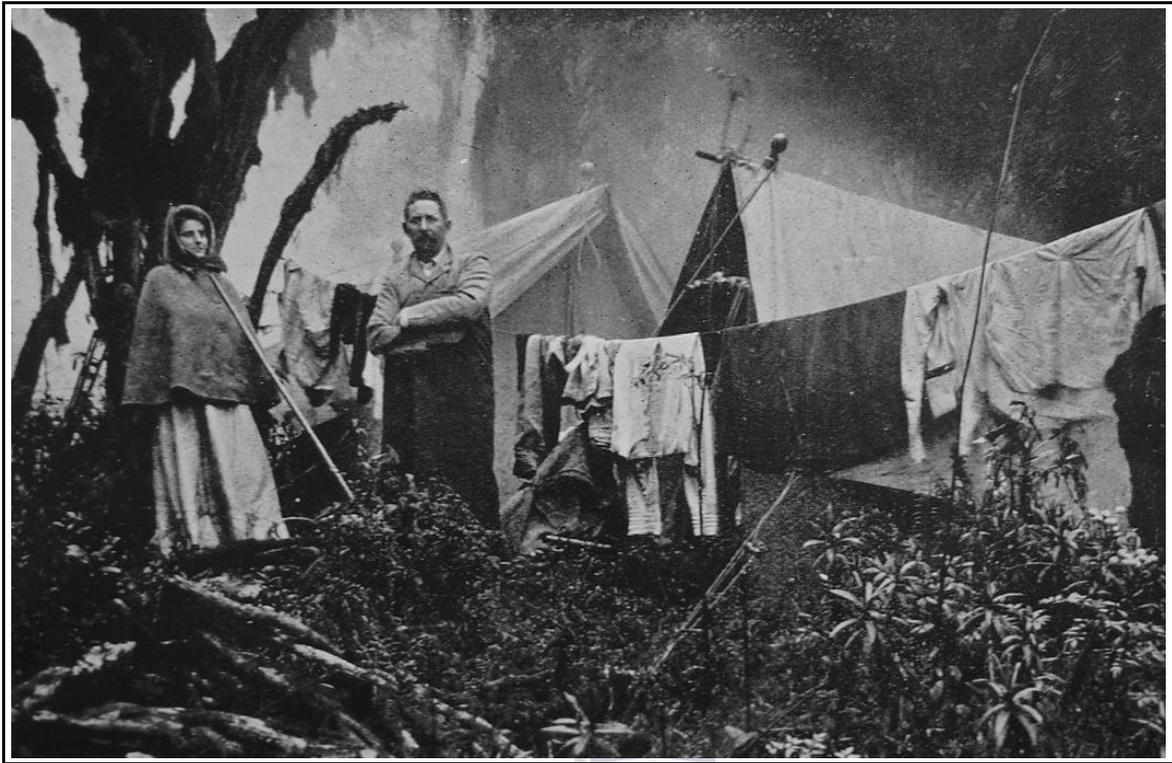
African Mountains and the Sublime

presence of the transcendent, implying that, by contrast, the surrounding African terrain was void of God's presence. Stanley's use of discourses of the sublime constitute an excessive valorisation and identification with the Ruwenzori. The high, uninhabited icy peaks in this sense are a complete antithesis of jungle lowland that had earlier been associated with danger and racial degeneracy. The lofty Ruwenzori can become invested with sublime rapture precisely because they are uninhabited by Africans and the imagination can detach them from their African locatedness. The Ruwenzori are a significant ideological location because they constitute a convenient site through which an ideology of incommensurable racial difference could be articulated in aesthetic terms. In a continent which was discursively figured as a place of blackness and darkness, the paradoxical idea of white, virginal snow in the midst of tropical heat assumed a racially loaded symbolic significance. Stanley's geographical description of place thus slips into a racialised discourse of difference:

What stranger contrast could there be than our own nether world of torrid temperature, eternally green sappy plants, and never-ending luxuriance and verdure, with its savagery and war alarms, and deep stains of blood-red sin, to that lofty mountain king, clad in its pure white raiment of snow, surrounded by myriads of dark mountains, low as bending worshippers before the throne of a monarch on whose cold white face were inscribed 'Infinity and Everlasting' (1890: 502)

In Stanley's sublime vision, the white Ruwenzori is an imperious god-like figure which stands out starkly against an almost inorganic background in which tropical climate, local people and vegetation blend into an amorphous, dark mass. The monarch with the "cold white face" is surrounded by lowly bent "dark" worshippers – a scenario which reduces savage Africa to the mere ground for an imperial assertion of power. The sublime landscape of the Ruwenzori thus becomes an elaborate figure which can both articulate and naturalise white mastery over black Africa.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape



A sublime appreciation of the Ruwenzori fulfilled a similar ideological function for Ruth Fisher, the missionary wife of the Reverend A.B. Fisher who went to western Uganda in 1900 “to proclaim the renown, beauty and majesty of Christ among the heathen” (1919: 31). Like Stanley, whose accounts she had read, Fisher was also appalled by the primitivity and vegetal predation of the jungle where “powerful and unkempt creepers and rubber plants have wound their long bare limbs like poisonous snakes round the barks and branches of the trees till vegetation has ceased to breathe in their grasp” (1919: 44). Fisher became the first woman to climb up to the Alpine zone of the Ruwenzori, reaching the Mobuko glacier – wearing a skirt – in 1903 and again in 1906, a few weeks before Abruzzi’s more famous climb [Fig. 1]. Moved to poetic rapture by the experience, she composed the following verse in the tradition of high Romantic Alpine poetry:⁹

The appearance, instantaneously disclosed,
Was of a mighty city – boldly say
A wilderness of building, sinking far
And self-withdrawn into a boundless depth
Far sinking into splendour – without end!
Fabric it seemed of diamond and of gold,
With alabaster domes and silver spires
And blazing terrace upon terrace high

African Mountains and the Sublime

Uplifted ... Forms uncouth of mightiest power
For admiration and mysterious awe (1919:187)

In her memoirs, *On the Borders of Pygmy Land*, Fisher recounts her first sighting of the Ruwenzori after days of trudging through miles of swamp:

Huge peaks, sharp and rugged, stretched from north to south in an unbroken range of sixty-nine miles long. Heavy black thunder clouds rolled over some of the summits, while the lightning shot out angry tongues of fire. Torrents of rain were sweeping away to our right, while the sun beat down in full strength upon the valleys. Above all, calm and serene, shone the region of snow. For all ages the sun has directed its equatorial power against that ice fortress. Storms have thundered and crushed against its foundations, but it has stood as the one unsullied and impregnable witness of holiness and purity to God, in a land where darkness has reigned, and the storms of passion, vice and barbarity have laid desolate. (1919: 38)

In Fisher's sublime vision, the impregnable "ice fortress" of the Ruwenzori is a transcendent figure for Christianity and Western civilisational superiority withstanding the cataclysmic violent onslaught of the forces of equatorial "darkness". The black storms that ineffectually rage around this unshakable rock of faith are figured as the forces "of passion, vice and barbarity."

At another rare sighting, for a "hot heavy mist that envelops the whole country completely hides the range from view" (1919:173), she compares the mountains to a heavenly citadel. The Ruwenzori was a "land of glittering ice that resembles an enchanted city with its pinnacles, turrets and domes pointing upwards to the sun" (1919:173). In view of the transcendent nature of the mountains as the heavenly abode for the Lord Almighty, it is no surprise that she shares Stanley's views about the unclimbability of the peaks: "To scale Ruwenzori's highest point must remain an impossible task" (1919:174). Fisher's metaphorical treatment of the Ruwenzori is an even sharper example than Stanley's of the conjunction of discourses of the sublime and ideas of racial and civilisational difference. Encouraged by the presence of the "lighthouse" of the Ruwenzori shining over the torpid lowlands of Uganda, she is convinced that progress and a new Christian age are "dawning on 'Darkest Africa' ... for the light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen" (1919: 172).

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Mountains of the Moon



African Mountains and the Sublime

Stanley established the Ruwenzori as his most important African geographic location, but the name that he coined¹⁰ for the mountains, was far too local and insignificant. Before the Ruwenzori could then fully emerge as a landscape of supreme colonial desire, the mountains had to be invested with an altogether more important and historically weighty name. Stanley therefore identified the Ruwenzori with Ptolemy's fabled Mountains of the Moon "whose snows feed the lakes, sources of the Nile."¹¹ It is was this aspect which made the Ruwenzori a far more significant site for the Western imagination than the even higher Mts Kilimanjaro and Kenya: the Ruwenzori are deemed to be the fabled source of the Nile. In every account of the mountains, beginning with Stanley's *Darkest Africa*, various entries in the journals of the Royal Geographic Society, the account of the Abruzzi expedition and even in more recent coverage such as David Bristow's *Getaway Magazine* articles (1996), the Ruwenzori's unique and sublime value as a landscape is seen to reside in its construction as this historically over-determined site.

Claudius Ptolemy, an Alexandrian 2nd century AD cartographer conventionally known as the 'father' of geography, compiled maps of the "Old World" which included a fair share of hearsay and speculation, but had a profound influence on Europe's knowledge about African geography. Renaissance maps often depicted a fairly accurate coastline (drawn from data derived from Portuguese navigation) but relied on Ptolemean knowledge for filling out the interior. For instance in Martin Waldseemüller's 1513 map,¹² Ptolemy's Mountains of the Moon are the only detail in an otherwise blank space (Fig. 2). Until well into the 18th century, even when more

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

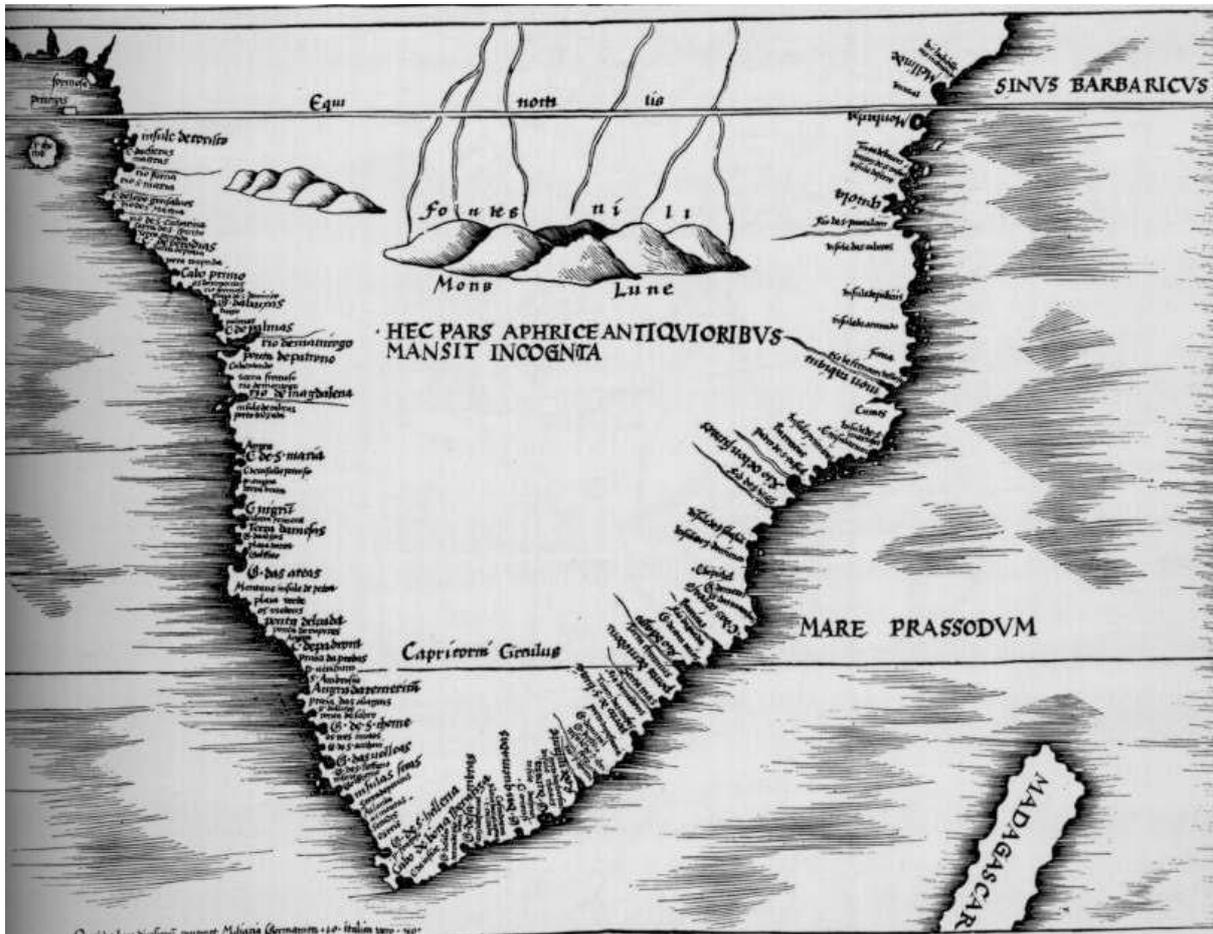


Figure 2: Waldseemüller's Map

details had become known about Africa's interior geography, European maps reproduced a traditional topography based on Ptolemy's Geography. The source of Ptolemy's information was presumably the Syrian geographer Marinus of Tyre who in turn was informed by a Greek merchant known as Diogenes. Diogenes's narrative related how he had landed at Rhapta on the East African coast, travelled inland for twenty-five days and obtained knowledge of two large lakes at the feet of a range snowy mountains. In an age in which the West's Hellenic cultural heritage was strongly emphasised, Stanley must have been thrilled that his find of the Ruwenzori connected him to an ancient Greek discovery. Not only were the Ruwenzori assumed to be connected to Ptolemy, but were also thought to be identical with Aristotle's "Silver Mountain".¹³ Such mythical historicisation continues to exercise a strong influence in the

African Mountains and the Sublime

present, if we look at the example of Guy Yeoman, who called for the declaration of the Ruwenzori as a World Heritage Site, so that the West would "be keeping faith with the Ancient Greeks" (1989:166). Similarly Rennie Bere, the first president of the Ugandan Mountain Club, rehashed Stanley's antique history in his Ruwenzori book, adding that they "may well have been seen by the emissaries of the Queen of Sheba" (1966:76).

Discounting the possibility that Ptolemy's enigmatic Mountains of the Moon referred to the Ethiopian Highlands (the source of the Blue Nile) or Mounts Kilimanjaro or Kenya, Stanley insisted that they are an actual geographic location identical with the Ruwenzori. Indeed, the mythical appellation 'Mountain of the Moon' had been variously applied to the Virunga Mountains of Ruanda, and Mounts Kilimanjaro and Kenya, but their obvious disconnection with the Nile system had led to an even greater discredit of the Ptolemean range as pure fiction. The Mountains of the Moon, Stanley however claimed, were not cartographic invention nor geographic fantasy, but referred to a real place, namely his Ruwenzori mountains. As the infamous case of the Kong mountains in West Africa shows, the depiction of geographic features on maps by no means guaranteed their actual existence. On a succession of maps of West Africa, well into the nineteenth century, the Kong Mountains were depicted as a massive chain of peaks south of the Sahara. Several travellers, no doubt relying more on the cartographic authority than their own eyes, claimed to have seen the range.¹⁴ Similar to the Kong Mountains, the Mountains of Moon could well have been sheer invention, a sort of free-floating mythic topographical signifier which had no basis in real geography. In order to cement his claim about the historical importance of the Ruwenzori and establish the mountains as a site of invested with cartographic heritage, Stanley devoted an entire chapter of elaborate geographic and historical evidence in *Darkest Africa*, looking at both Western and Arab sources [Fig 3]. The Ruwenzori is thus not only the point of origin for the famous Nile, but, as Ptolemy's Mountains of the Moon, they are also connected to the origin of Western geography.

In identifying the range as the Ptolemean Mountains of the Moon, Stanley connected a location in the middle of Africa to the knowledge of classical antiquity, and by implication, to the tradition of Western history and geography. The Abruzzi chronicles represent the mountains in a

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

similar manner. They do not only repeat Stanley's claims, but include a specially commissioned appendix written by Luigi Hugues, an Italian historian. This meticulously researched 10 000 word piece of scholarship sifts through all the available historical and geographical evidence and comes to the conclusion that the Ruwenzori range is "in fact, the only one in the whole of equatorial Africa that completely satisfies all the conditions specified in Ptolemy's *Geography*" (Fillipi, 1909: 287). The mountains are thus historicised by connecting them to the knowledge of classical antiquity. Their (re)discovery by Stanley reclaims them for this European history and makes them part of the West's body of knowledge. Abruzzi himself projects the historical on to the topographical when he refers to "the shining glaciers of the Nile which have through the centuries fed the sources of the majestic river linked to history by so many records of the past" (1907:142). The Ruwenzori thus become a landscape invested with the great trans-continental myth around the sources of the Nile.

Stanley's and Abruzzi's conception of the Ruwenzori is remarkably Hegelian in its denial of history and civilisational agency to Africa. In Hegel's well-known *Philosophy of History* (1834) Africa was seen to be only "on the threshold of the World's History" and "still involved in the conditions of mere nature". Africa was disconnected "with the rest of the World – shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself, – the land of childhood, which, lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night" (1872:130). If the Ruwenzori could assume a history for Stanley, it had to be a history that was not properly African, for Africa had no real history. The Ruwenzori are thus connected to the civilisation of Egypt which, according to Hegel, "does not belong to the African Spirit" but can "be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase" (1872:131).

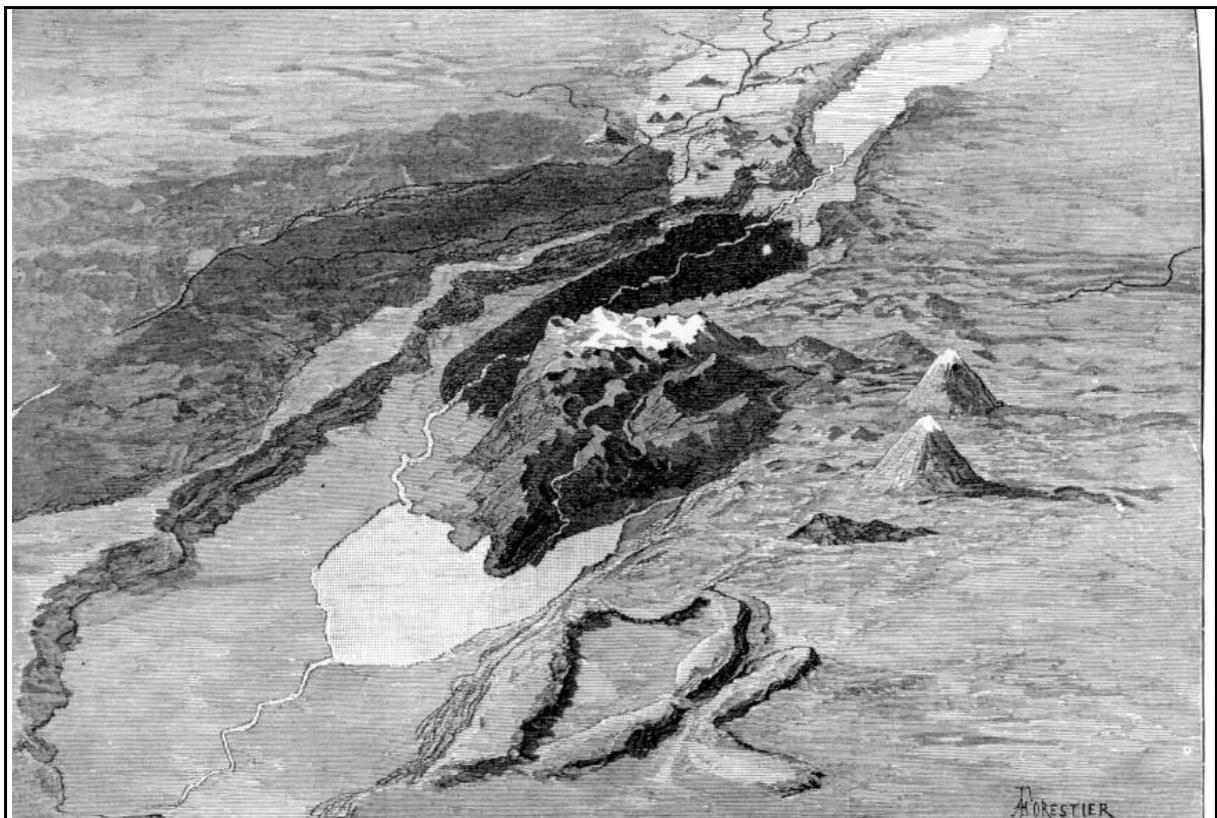
Although Stanley invested the mountains with the authority of ancient history, he also cannot resist in inscribing a new history onto the Ruwenzori, a history of which he is the author. Thus he exercises his "right" to name the mountains. Stanley's act of naming was however contested by Gladstone, the British Prime Minister. In his autobiography Stanley relates how he tried to convince Gladstone to build a railway line to Uganda. While discussing this, Gladstone noticed two peaks on the map:

African Mountains and the Sublime

“Excuse me a minute,” said he; “what are those mountains called?”
“Those, sir,” I answered, “are the Gordon Bennet and MacKinnon Peaks.”
“Who called them by those absurd names?” he asked, with the corrugation of a frown on his brow.
“I called them, sir.”
“By what right?” he asked.
“By the right of first discovery, and those two gentlemen were the patrons of the expedition.” (1909: 420)

Gladstone was incensed by Stanley’s insensitivity to history and insisted on Crophi and Mophi, the “correct” names supposedly given to the peaks by Herodotus. Gordon Bennet was the proprietor of the New York Herald and Stanley’s employer and principal sponsor during the 1874 expedition. The 1887 expedition was partly financed by MacKinnon.

Stanley’s conical pair of peaks, the Gordon-Bennet and MacKinnon mountains have a surprising similarity to H. Rider Haggard’s Sheba’s Breasts in *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) (Fig.3). The



The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

similarity is striking, particularly when we consider that Stanley's snow-clad twin peaks have no basis in the actual geography of Uganda, and must therefore be considered to have been invented mountains. The fact that Stanley was given to hyperbole and fabrication, has been noted by scholars, but that he derived a substantial geographic "discovery" from a work of popular fiction has not yet, as far as I know, been noticed. Stanley's deception has intriguing implications for his relationship to the two men who were thus "honoured", and thus warrants closer attention.

Even before Stanley's discovery of the Ruwenzori in 1888, the intriguing notion of snowy mountains in the centre of tropical Africa had become the subject of intense European public interest. After the earlier discoveries of Mts Kilimanjaro and Kenya were made public in 1850,¹⁵ these geographic curiosities became a popular topic of debate in colonial and geographic circles. It was however Rider Haggard's best-selling *King Solomon's Mines* which created a broad popular interest¹⁶ in the entrancing notion of tropical snow. It is probable that Haggard drew on the discoveries of Mounts Kilimanjaro and Kenya, or even Herodotus's Crophi and Mophi. In Haggard's romance, two snowy peaks, suggestively named Sheba's Breasts, rise out of the Suliman Mountains. Beyond lies Solomon's treasure chamber, filled with immense riches of diamonds, which is guarded by the Kukuanas, a black "tribe" ruled by an evil witch named Gagool. This fictional landscape is presented as the mythical Ophir of the Bible. For both Haggard and Stanley, snowy peaks in Africa not only mark sites of immense value, but are also detached from their African locatedness and become associated with a historical and cultural heritage to which the West, rather than Africa can lay claim. In Haggard's fiction, the white explorers are thus not usurpers but rather the legitimate claimants to King Solomon's legacy and treasure.¹⁷ Stanley's would seem to have been inspired by Haggard's romance, rather than the actual topography of the Ruwenzori. This supposition seems credible since *King Solomon's Mines* appeared in 1885, whereas *In Darkest Africa* was only published in 1890. Stanley did already have a vague view of one of the mountains on the earlier trans-Africa expedition, an account published as *Through the Dark Continent* in 1879, but he only refers to one peak (The Gordon-Bennet Mount) and fails to recognise the presence of permanent snow (Stanley 1879: 404). It is thus probable that Stanley's geographical description was influenced by the topographic eroticism in a work of romance fiction. It is not entirely clear what Stanley's fraud

African Mountains and the Sublime

implied about his relationship with Bennet and MacKinnon, but it was evident that his relationship with Bennet had become fraught as a result of contractual disagreements (Bierman 1990: 270).

The Sources of the Nile

The question of the source of the Nile has a long and complex history tied up as much with the origins of Western civilisation as with the geo-politics of late 19th century imperialism. It is difficult to underestimate the enormous symbolic significance of this river, and the mystery of its origins, in the culture of the West. The quest for the source of the Nile, as Simon Schama has shown, became invested with metaphysical importance as a riverine metaphor for the West's civilisational origins. While medieval European writers commonly believed that the Nile flowed directly from paradise (1995: 266), early imperial thinkers imagined rivers less in religious than in political terms: "as lines of power and time carrying empires from source to expansive breadth" (1995: 261). Such an imperial model of rivers made the search for a source all the more important, and "it was precisely the denial of this sovereign possession to the Greeks, Romans, French, and British that made the Nile so tantalizing, so treacherous -- in a word, so Cleopatra" (1995: 263). By the middle of the nineteenth century, China, America, and Australia had long become known to Europe, but mystery of Nile remained. As Alan Moorehead puts it,

No unexplored region in our times, neither the heights of the Himalayas, the Antarctic wastes, nor even the hidden side of the moon, has excited quite the same fascination as the mystery of the sources of the Nile. For two thousand years at least the problem was debated and remained unsolved; every expedition that was sent up the river from Egypt returned defeated. (1962: 20)

It is in this weighty context that Stanley judged the value of his discovery of the Ruwenzori, and accordingly devoted an extraordinary amount of time and effort in securing its status as the ultimate source of the Nile. Making a detailed survey of the geographic features connected with the range, he measured altitudes and calculated gradients, charted the course of rivers, and explored the placement of the catchment areas and watersheds. In establishing a fluvial connection between the Nile and the Ruwenzori, Stanley was grandly conscious that he had unlocked the secret that had intrigued the civilisations of Egypt, Greece and Rome for centuries; and that this monumental discovery would "win [him] immortal renown" (1890: 467). For

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Stanley, the Ruwenzori are thus altogether the most significant place in the entire continent of Africa: they are “the very mountains before whose shrine Alexander and Caesar would have worshipped” (1890: 467).

The quest for the Nile’s sources was however not only an interest for pre-modern Egypt, Greece and Rome, but also profoundly shaped the imperial projects of European colonial powers. Indeed, if there was one single idea which dominated the imagination of European travellers and explorers during the 18th and 19th centuries, it was the search for the source of the Nile. The sheer volume of expeditions and publications devoted to the quest for the geographical equivalent of the Holy Grail indicates a massive and sustained interest of the European public in the question. Beginning with an account of James Bruce’s 1768 expedition entitled *Travels to discover the source of the Nile* and culminating in Speke’s controversial discovery of Lake Victoria as the Nile’s source in 1858, the question of the Nile had become an obsession for England. Even in Cape Town, interest in the question of the Nile was sufficiently strong enough to persuade the Cape government to give Speke 300 pounds and an escort of ten mounted “Hottentot” police.¹⁸ Speke’s discovery of Lake Victoria as the source of the Nile was vehemently disputed by Burton, probably causing Speke’s suicide before the issue was to be debated publicly. Samuel Baker, following in Speke’s and Burton’s footsteps, verified Speke’s theory and also discovered Lake Albert as a secondary source. Baker’s description of this moment indicates the strength of patriotic energies invested in the project:

It is impossible to describe the triumph of that moment; - here was the reward for all our labour - for the years of tenacity with which we had toiled through Africa. England had won the sources of the Nile! (1866: Vol. 2, 96)

The sources of the Nile were thus deemed to be desirable places which British metropolitan audiences on another side of the globe imagined to have “won”. Britain’s symbolic ownership over the Nile and its sources, initially guaranteed by the mere act of visual registration by an explorer (to first “see” a lake or a mountain), was followed by naming and mapping. Every East African lake connected to the Nile was consequently named after British royalty: Victoria, Edward-Albert and Albert. Britain’s discursive control over the headwaters of the Nile enabled subsequent military conquest and subsequent colonisation. In this sense, the quest for the source

African Mountains and the Sublime

of the Nile was also intimately connected to the opening up of trade routes and the expansion of Britain's mercantile imperialism.¹⁹

After their discovery, the Ruwenzori are thus not simply an obscure mountain range in Africa, but become a highly significant ideological location. By designating the mountains as the fabled source of the Nile, the mountains assume a mythical pre-history which detaches them from their African locale and purports to link them organically, through the river Nile, to the Mediterranean roots of Western civilization. Stanley compared, as we have seen, the sight of the "hoary" mountains to gazing in awe on "an Egyptian pyramid or sphinx" (1890: 494). All subsequent accounts of the Ruwenzori participate in this Hegelian historicisation, and construct the snowy mountains as a site of value in dark a-historical Africa. The people living in the foothills of the Ruwenzori are thus not surprisingly seen to be connected to Egypt rather than Africa:

in their legends and traditions, ...in the form of their musical instruments, in their astronomical symbols carved upon horns, and in certain burial rites, indications have been suggested of relations and contact with ancient Egypt. (Fillipi 1909: 82)

This myth-making is in many ways similar to another transcontinental trope: the Cape to Cairo connection which sought to imaginatively bridge the a-historical terrain of Africa with a

transcontinental meaning-making structure to give coherence to the West's civilizational and imperial projects on the continent.²⁰ The Ruwenzori are thus invented as a landscape embodying a historical memory and a trans-continental significance.



The symbolic value of the Ruwenzori for a continental imperial imaginary can be seen in an exemplary way in Herbert Baker's suggestive glyph (Fig. 4) that is reproduced on the frontispiece of his book *Cecil Rhodes by his Architect* (1934). The glyph represents "Rhodes' Way from Cape to Cairo" in the form of symbols that signify an imaginative control over the whole continent. The stars represent the Southern Cross, the "Pilot stars to the Navigators of the Cape of Storms". They stand for Rhodes's beloved Cape, the southern-most point in the Cape-to-Cairo axis. The two Zimbabwe

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

birds represent the colonies Rhodes founded and gave his name to, namely Southern and Northern Rhodesia. In the centre, surrounded by the other symbols, Baker positioned the snow-tipped Mountains of the Moon from which the waters of the Nile issue. The triangular peaks are also suggestive of the pyramids and in this way complete the northern point of the trans-continental axis. The Mountains of the Moon occupy the centre, indicating the mountain's geographical position in the middle of the African continent halfway between the Cape and Cairo points. They are also the largest element in the glyph, indicating the pre-eminent symbolic importance of the Mountains of the Moon as the vital fulcrum in the Cape-to-Cairo axis. Baker's glyph shows that the Ruwenzori featured large in the imperial geo-political fantasies of Rhodes and the coterie around him.²¹ While appearing to be symbols of Africa, all four elements of the glyph are in a sense exogenous to Africa: the Mountains of the Moon and the waters of the Nile are connected to the Mediterranean, the Southern Cross represents the Portuguese voyages of discovery, and the Zimbabwe birds are considered to be "Gleams in Darkest Africa of Northern Lights".

Tropical Climbing

It is thus no surprise that after news of Stanley's discovery of the Ruwenzori became known in Europe, considerable energies were expended in gaining more knowledge about the mythical Mountains of the Moon. They were regarded as "the one mystery still unexplored with regard to the question of the sources of the Nile" (Fillipi 1909:24). In an address to the Royal Geographical Society, Stanley expressed the wish that

some person devoted to his work, some lover of Alpine climbing, would take Ruwenzori in hand and make a thorough work of it, explore it from top to bottom, through all those enormous defiles and those deep gorges. (qtd in Fillipi 1909:285)

Stanley's language ("devoted", "lover") suggests not only a libidinal relationship between a male explorer and a feminised landscape of geological and erotic depth, but also a disciplinary project: the Ruwenzori is to be taken "in hand" and made "thorough work of". In a slippage of signs not uncommon in colonial writing, Stanley's language of desire to explore and assert control over a virgin body of land barely suppresses a latent violence and aggression.

African Mountains and the Sublime

The exploratory work so desired by Stanley was however easier said than done.²² Whereas Kilimanjaro, which had already been climbed in 1889, involved a technically straightforward if arduous ascent, the Ruwenzori presented extreme physical and logistical difficulties. In fact it was in the same year that Kilimanjaro was first ascended, that knowledge of the *existence* of the Ruwenzori only reached Europe. Apart from the remoteness of the mountains on the western borders of the recently colonised Uganda, two other factors played a major part in keeping the range out of the reach of Europeans: the weather and the terrain. As Fillipi, the chronicler of Italian expedition puts it, the

great mountain range, rising like an island from the vast marshy plains of Uganda and the boundless forests of the Congo, becomes the centre of attraction for the mass of vapours sucked up by the tropical sun, which, condensing around the frozen peaks, form a permanent veil of fog and cloud. Thus it has come about that many a traveller has spent months and months in the immediate neighbourhood without once having sight of the peaks. (1909:26)

Stanley similarly admitted that his sighting had been a rare chance encounter:

Of all the explorers who in the preceding twenty years had travelled through these regions and sailed upon the waters of the lakes at the foot of the chain, not one had suspected the near presence of vast tracts of eternal ice and snow hidden from all eyes in the impenetrable cloak of cloud and mist. (qtd in Fillipi 1909:2)

Even Emin Pascha, who had lived on the southern shores of Lake Albert between 1887 and 1888, had never seen the mountains which should have been directly in his view. Harry Johnstone, the discoverer of the okapi, who also climbed in the mountains in 1900 and later became the governor of Uganda, attributed this failure to Emin Pascha's congenital myopia and the "dull-wittedness" of "his Negroes" who failed to alert him (1903: 250).²³

But even after news of the Ruwenzori had become well known in Europe, explorers found it difficult to see the mountains, let alone reach them. In the mountains themselves perpetual rain, mud and thick forest ensured lack of success. As a result, knowledge about the Ruwenzori at the turn of the century was very confused, sketchy and fragmented. Nobody really knew the extent, height and detailed topography of the range. As Fillipi puts it in the language of divine revelation,

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

“It had been given to only a very few, on rare occasions and from a great distance, actually to have sight of the whole chain” (1909: 22-23). On the other hand, once explorers came closer to the mountains, they were confronted by a labyrinthine maze of gorges and foothills which obscured view of the inner and higher peaks. Most frustrating was however the weather. As Abruzzi puts it, there was “rain almost perpetual; mist in the brief intervals between downpours; rare clearances, and those only before dawn” (1907:124). The perplexing resistance of the Ruwenzori to the gaze of European travellers thus becomes the centrally important part of the place myth.

In view of the technical difficulties posed by the Ruwenzori, the achievements of the Abruzzi expedition are remarkable. The Ruwenzori expedition, as all the duke’s previous endeavours, was a large-scale, meticulously planned and well-resourced operation executed with military precision. More than 300 men, including adjutants, alpine guides, scientists, a doctor, a photographer, cooks and more than 200 Ugandan porters took part in the almost six-month long event, during which all the highest peaks were climbed, the topography charted, accurate heights ascertained, geological, botanical and zoological specimens collected and photographs taken. Where previous British and German expeditions had often struggled to even reach the foothills of the range and failed to make progress in the extremely difficult terrain, Abruzzi’s achievements were a spectacular “tour de force” (Yeoman 1989: 13).

The extraordinary exploits of the Duke of Abruzzi, born in 1873 as son to King Amadeus of Spain, in many ways exemplify the last vestiges of exclusive aristocratic privilege of an age which was rapidly coming to an end. The duke had both the leisure and substantial private means to indulge in extreme adventure such as the 1897 first ascent of Mt Elias in Alaska (the fourth highest peak in North America), an extensive polar expedition during which he reached the furthest northern point at that time, the fabulously successful exploration of the Ruwenzori, and a failed attempt in 1909 to reach the then as yet unclimbed summit of K2 in the Karakoram, the world’s second highest and arguably most difficult mountain.²⁴ John Buchan, himself a mountaineer, described Abruzzi as “the greatest of all living mountaineers” (1941:111). Social conditions in the last years before the First World War still enabled members of the aristocratic

African Mountains and the Sublime

elites like Abruzzi to undertake explorations on a global scale and treat the world as an arena for personal adventure.

What is however interesting about the Abruzzi expedition is not so much the nature of its mountaineering achievements, but that it provides insight into a culture which allowed and indeed encouraged a certain class of people to indulge in expensive, time-consuming and dangerous endeavours. What drove Abruzzi and many other European men like him to seek out icy, isolated and dangerous places on the edge of civilisation? Whereas the exploits of men such as Stanley had a direct bearing on the development of imperial mercantile projects, practices such as alpine mountaineering had no tangible utilitarian benefit.

A fairly simple way to approach these questions and explain the significance of colonial mountaineering, would be to draw an analogy between the conquest of the peaks and the race between the European powers for African colonial possessions. In East Africa, the second half of the 19th century was dominated by ongoing friction between Britain, Germany, and to a lesser extent, Italy, for territorial control. For instance, the Emin Pasha relief expedition organized by Stanley (during which he “discovered” the Ruwenzori) was almost exclusively motivated and funded by popular jingoistic desire to secure and maintain a British “sphere of influence” in the heart of “darkest Africa”. The 1886 and 1890 bi-lateral agreements between Britain and Germany involved a curious geo-political trade-off: Germany gave up territorial claims to parts of what is now Kenya and Uganda in return for the North Sea island of Heligoland. Britain thus secured control over the headwaters of the Nile although Germany retained a firm grasp on the Tanganjikan “hinterland”, putting paid to the intercontinental “Cape to Cairo” connection so desired by British imperial dreamers.

The intense rivalry between the European imperial powers over colonial territory - initiated and fuelled by the early travellers, missionaries and merchants - was in a sense continued by the mountaineers. Military aggression was displaced into alpinism: Kilimanjaro was climbed in 1889 by two Germans (Hans Meyer and Ludwig Purtscheller) and Mt Kenya by the Briton Halford Mackinder in 1899. The remoteness and technical difficulties of the Ruwenzori however

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

mitigated against small-scale or solo ascents. The noble and romantic individualistic feat of the sportsman-hero was not feasible for a successful conquest of the Ruwenzori. At least four separate attempts to scale the peaks had already failed before 1906. The mountains required a large-scale expedition organised along military lines with sufficient logistical back up. It was only with the 1897 “pacification” of Uganda and the completion of the railway line from Mombasa on the Indian Ocean to Lake Victoria in 1901, that such a large and complex expedition could be mounted. As Fillipi puts it, it “had become possible to reach the centre of the African continent without difficulty, at small expense and with an immense saving of time” (1906:16). The Italians were keenly and anxiously aware of the danger that other expeditions, that is German or British, should beat them to their goal:

No explorer availed himself of the favourable conditions until the end of the year 1905, when the interest in the Ruwenzori seemed suddenly to reawaken. Thus it happened that at that very moment when HRH the Duke of Abruzzi was forming his plan for an expedition in this region, and in the beginning of 1906, when he had actually taken such measures for carrying it into effect ... the range was already being attacked by determined mountain climbers bent upon rending the veil of mystery which had so long shrouded its secret. (1909:16-17)

In view of the fact that Africa, and indeed virtually the entire globe had by the end of the nineteenth century been claimed as possession by various colonial powers, inter-European rivalry focused on the few remaining remote wilderness regions which could be conquered by sporting prowess or feats of endurance²⁵ and thereby symbolically demonstrate the superiority of one nation over another.

It is interesting in this regard to note that the discourse of mountaineering uses a military lexis. Terms such as “attack”, “assault” and “conquest” reveal a disturbing affinity between Alpinism and warfare. Conquering mountains in the name of a nation or monarch became a synecdoche for conquering and claiming territory. A marker of this nationalistic impetus in mountaineering is the hoisting of the flag at the summit.²⁶ It is not co-incidental that the nationality of the two major expeditions which preceded the Duke of Abruzzi’s act of planting the Italian flag on the Ruwenzori’s highest point, were Italy’s imperial rivals in eastern Africa: Germany and Britain. As the duke’s own account at a Royal Geographic Society lantern show reveals, the moment of

African Mountains and the Sublime

conquest was an overtly political event. Accompanied by triple “Vivas!” he named the two highest summits “Margherita” and “Alexandra”, after the queens of Italy and England,

in order that, under the auspices of these two royal ladies, the memory of the two nations may be handed down to posterity - of Italy, whose name was the first to resound on these snows in a shout of victory, and, of England, which in its marvellous colonial expansion carries civilization to the slopes of these remote mountains (1907:138)

The sense of shared unity and a common idea of sportsmanship among the civilised powers was expressed in John Buchan’s comment that “No Englishman will grudge that the honours of the pioneer fell to so brilliant a climber” (1941:121). The Ruwenzori mountains do thus not only become a powerful symbolic figure for colonial possession but also for unity amongst Western powers in their common purpose of rule over “the still unknown and savage wilds of Africa . . . for the advance of civilization” (Abruzzi 1907:139).

The ascent of peaks in an uninhabited alpine region also allowed European explorers to take imaginative possession of African space without the attendant violence of subjugating and dispossessing native people. The Ruwenzori were thus figured as a separate enclaved natural space, rather than as a part of the inhabited and settled African landscape. Fillipi expresses this imaginative detachment of the Ruwenzori as follows:

There was an impressive sense of solitude in perching on this narrow snowy ridge, with the whole earth cut off from them by the mist. [A]ll [was] veiled by the dense layer of fog, interposed like a barrier between the burning regions of Equatorial Africa and the eternal Alpine snows. (1906: 186)

Similarly, J. Moore, an alpinist who had ascended one of the lower peaks in 1899, held that “the *Mons lunae* were something quite above the monotonous sweltering barbarism of the tropics” (1902: 77).

Paul Carter has observed that it is especially in the act of place-naming that “space is transformed symbolically into a place, that is, a space with a history” (1987: xxii-xxiv). The naming of the peaks refigures their space as a landscape with a European history and makes it accessible to the metropolitan imagination. Naming, according to Carter, is the foundational imperial act which

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

asserts the coloniser's discursive control: in attaching signifiers to features in the landscape, naming produces a web of signification which transforms an unknown and potentially threatening place into a set of knowable and familiar signs. It is on the basis of such knowledge that power can be exercised. Similarly, Edward Said sees imperial naming and mapping practices as "an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control" (1993: 271). Abruzzi uses the convenient fiction of native linguistic incapacity to legitimate his own authority to confer the names of his choice: "To give native names seemed undesirable, because the natives do not distinguish between the peaks, but only the valleys" (1907: 139). Instead, the mountains become a pantheon immortalising the names of explorers and their royal patrons. Abruzzi's magisterial and authoritative naming of the mountains ("I give the name of Speke", "I call after the King of Italy", "I name after Sir Harry Johnstone", "The fifth massif I name Mount Gessi" etc.) becomes an authorial act of creation as he inaugurates the space of the Ruwenzori as a landscape under the discursive control of colonial rule. In god-like fashion, Abruzzi's naming creates order in the confusing chaos of indigenous, British and German names. In assuming the authority of naming the mountains of the range after European explorers and royalty, he however has to leave out his own name. One cannot appropriate the authority as giver of names and at the same time make oneself subject to that same authority. Abruzzi is however conveniently persuaded by the Royal Geographic Society's audience to consent to lending his name to one of the peaks.

A Brief History of Climbing

In the previous section I have tried to locate the extraordinary appeal of the Ruwenzori within a framework of colonial history: as highly prized landscape within Africa's ideologically overdetermined continental topography. What has not however become entirely clear is why in the first place high mountains, especially snowy, unclimbed peaks in unknown regions, should exercise such an inordinate appeal on the European imagination. In order to begin to understand the motivations and dreams of men such as Abruzzi, it is necessary to chart a brief history of alpinism.

The idea that relatively affluent people would devote their leisure time to the strenuous and

African Mountains and the Sublime

dangerous activity of mountain climbing is a cultural phenomenon which has a history. To belong to the upper and royal classes traditionally meant that one was privileged enough *not* to have to walk,²⁷ work or engage in menial activity. Idle leisure time and the absolute minimum of physical exertion was conventionally a marker of status before the Enlightenment. According to Robin Jarvis the “cult of pedestrian touring ... appeared in the last quarter of the eighteenth century” (1997:ix) and the “creativity of Romantic art” is linked to the “conditions, qualities and rhythms of a body in motion, a travelling self making excited passage over the land, or through the streets, discovering locomotive and representational freedoms that were unavailable to previous generations” (1997: ix). It took the rise of industrial modes of transport (the railway, the tram, and later the car) to remove “the association of walking with necessity, poverty and vagrancy” (Urry 1995: 200). The large-scale use of mechanised forms of transport by the working classes allowed slower forms of mobility to assume status among the higher classes. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, excursive walking thus began to be seen as an ennobling and culturally enriching experience capable of renovating the individual and society. The romantic idea of “rambling” through nature increasingly also functioned as a compensation for the alienation, degradation and loss of value in industrialised urban centres. Ruskin, an advocate of the walking tour, thus saw the railway as a form of commodification of the individual: “Going by railroad I do not consider travelling at all, it is merely being ‘sent’ to a place, and not very different from becoming a parcel” (quoted in Culler, 1988: 157). The new passion for walking was perhaps best embodied in the wanderings of romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Byron.²⁸ Their writing and painting in a sense transformed the rural landscapes of Europe from places of agricultural labour to picturesque arenas in which individuals could imagine personal freedom and remake themselves spiritually.

During the course of the nineteenth century, the romantic consumption of nature in the form of excursionary tourism became an increasingly fashionable leisure activity of the literate middle classes. For example in the opening pages of Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, “three young men of a superior class, carrying small knapsacks strapped to their shoulders” (1988: 52) make their appearance in rural Wessex. Already in 1800, Wordsworth had to contend with more than 500 visitors a year to his cottage at Rydal Mount. Soon the “unspoiled nature” which had

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

been the preserve of the elites was overrun by the middle and working class masses brought to the countryside by railway. Wordsworth laments the coming of the tourist industry in the poetic epitaph to his *Guide to the Lakes*: “Steamboats and Railways ... on sea on land at war/ With old poetic feeling / Nor shall your presence, howsoe’er it mar/ The loveliness of nature, prove a bar/ To the mind’s gaining that prophetic sense / Of future good, that point of vision whence/ May be discovered what in soul ye are” (1977:165).

Polemical attacks on the common tourist became in vogue among those who needed to distance themselves as a marker of status. As Jonathan Culler puts it, “other travellers are always tourists” (1988:156). A particularly virulent but not uncharacteristic example was Ruskin’s tirade against “the stupid herds of modern tourists”, “cheap trains pouring out their hundreds at a time along the margins of Windermere” and the establishment of entertainment venues, pothouses and beerhalls “run by the lower class of innkeeper” (qtd in Urry, 1995: 202). The feverish enthusiasm with which English railroads were built in the 1830s and 1840s is not only an index of the rise of mass tourism, but also

betray the ardent desire to escape from the working and living conditions of the industrial revolution. But the network of the railway system destroyed the very freedom it seemed to create: tourism had thought of the net as a liberation, but knitting this net more tightly, society closed in again. (Enzensberger 1996: 126)

The countryside which once promised to be a free space in which walking could be romantically imagined as unalienated labour, became subordinated to the commercialisation of industrial capitalism. If romantic excursionary tourism into the countryside was provoked by the industrialisation of cities, alpinism can be understood as an attempt by the elites to get away from the tourist mob which had invaded and commercialised “their” unspoiled lakes, mountains and seashores. The Swiss Alps thus became a landscape of refuge in which the upper classes could engage in the noble and solitary pursuit of unspoilt and wild nature.

England, which had been at the forefront of European industrialisation was also not coincidentally in the lead in alpine tourism. Ruskin, who had so vehemently condemned the tourists to the lakes, in tourist fashion, daguerreotyped the Matterhorn in 1849.²⁹ English poets

African Mountains and the Sublime

such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Byron climbed in the Swiss Alps, and in 1857, another Englishman, Edward Kennedy, founded the Alpine Club, the first organization of its kind (Enzensberger 1996:126). A landmark event in alpinism was the spectacular ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865, by the English artist Edward Whymper. Such had been the onslaught by mainly English climbers, that by 1870 all major peaks had been conquered. The Alps were exhausted as pristine landscape. As Enzensberger puts it,

The key role of alpine endeavour consists in the fact that it symbolizes the very concept of the romantic ideology of tourism. It strives for the “elemental”, the “pristine”, the “adventure”. Whatever name one assigns this goal, the dialectic of the process remains the same: once it is achieved, it is destroyed. Since the untouched can only be experienced by touching it, it is important to be the first. (1996: 126)

The Alps’ exhaustion lay not only in the fact that they no longer offered untouched and unclimbed peaks, but that they too had become a destination for mass tourism. Thomas Cook, pioneer in mass tourism for the middle classes, brought his first guided tourist party there in 1863 and soon tourist hotels, railways and funiculars dotted the Alpine landscape. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the elite tourists and alpinists thus started looking further afield: the Americas, the Himalayas and Africa. It is precisely this globalization of Alpinism in the search for the “untouched” and pristine in colonial landscapes that is the context for the Duke of Abruzzi’s expeditions.

Touching the untouched

When the Duke of Abruzzi managed to reach the Alpine zones of the Ruwenzori mountains he found himself, as he had foreseen, in an extremely fortunate position: not only a single mountain, but an entire range of unclimbed snow-capped peaks were at his sole disposal and awaited conquest. Besides, he had hundreds of porters, ample supplies, the latest equipment and an able support team at his command. Abruzzi made the most of this opportunity and during the next 40 days every major peak was climbed. A typical ascent would start before dawn and follow a route already reconnoitred by Swiss alpine guides.³⁰ Shortly before reaching a summit they would halt so that Abruzzi would have sole privilege in setting foot on the peak’s highest point.³¹ In this fashion the duke methodically tackled peak after peak until no heights worthy of note were left to

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

climb. As the first climber to reach each summit, he alone was assured immortal fame. As Abruzzi well knew, alpinism prizes beyond anything the first ascent. It is this first ascent which immediately and irrecoverably destroys what was once pristine and untouched.

On the face of it, Abruzzi's ascents of the peaks appear to continue the romantic tradition of individualistic pursuit of unspoilt natural beauty. His solo first ascents are however not so much classic alpine achievements of individual sporting prowess and heroic strength of character in the face of adversity. Rather, they are a function of his wealth, managerial skills and logistical acumen which are "thrown" at the mountains. The duke's success is achieved on the back of a saturation-level deployment of resources and an extraordinarily complex organisation organised along quasi-military lines. The Ruwenzori ascents are thus orchestrations of the modern imperial disciplines of administration and logistics with only a passing resemblance to romantic climbing. John Buchan therefore praised Abruzzi as not only a superb climber, but as "an organiser of mountain travel" (1941:111). Abruzzi's "siege" style ascents in this sense prefigured the large-scale Himalayan expeditions of the late 1930's and 1950's that were run on quasi-military lines, often with military officers in charge of logistics.³²

In this sense, the Abruzzi expedition thoroughly exhausted the sublime value of the Ruwenzori and eroded the mythical, untouched landscape which Stanley founded. For Stanley, we will remember, the Ruwenzori were a sacred, distant landscape approached with "wholesome awe" (1890: 499). The mountains were a divine place beyond "mortal reach" and of "such immaculate and stainless purity that thought and desire for expression were altogether too deep for utterance" (1890: 502). Stanley's Ruwenzori mountains were for him a truly sublime landscape which exceeded his capacity to comprehend and represent them fully. This language is no longer possible after the Abruzzi expedition. The Fillipi chronicles replace Stanley's sublime rhetoric of awe and abjection with the technicist discourse of alpinism. For example:

A rock precipice on the east side [was] surmounted by a big cornice of snow and was joined by a rounded ice col to the northern peak, which was somewhat higher, and from which ran down two ridges, one eastward in a straight line towards the valley, the other north-westward, slightly concave, and terminating in a characteristic shoulder. (Fillipi 1909: 178-9)

African Mountains and the Sublime

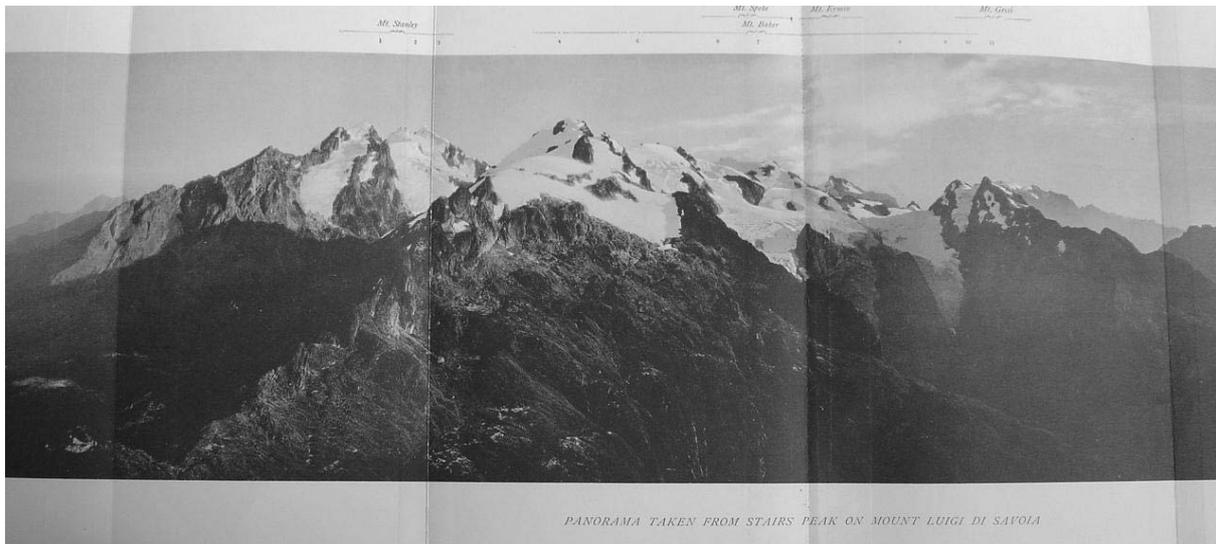
Large sections of the chronicles describe the mountains in this fashion. The text is also frequently interspersed with detailed lists of figures obtained from barometric measurements and trigonometrical calculations. Instead of romantic worship, the mountains are subjected to a modern scientific project: maps are constructed, a variety of instruments are used to take measurements, samples are analysed, and rocks, plants and animal are classified into their respective taxonomic categories. In this way, the mountains are represented in an “objective” language evacuated of all emotive content.

But the Abruzzi expedition is particularly interesting because it pursues both a scientific project as well as a romantic quest for undisturbed natural beauty. The former reduces the landscape to a set of empirical data; the latter seeks pristine landscapes but at the same time brings about their inevitable destruction. The expedition solves this contradiction by means of the technical apparatus of the camera.³³ Through photography it is possible to capture the pristine landscape as a timeless, arrested image of desire which is forever resistant to an erosion of value. Vittorio Sella’s superb alpine photography³⁴ gives a seemingly direct access to the unspoilt natural beauty of the Ruwenzori. Even today, as one opens the folds of the panoramic photographs, the eternally untouched virginal mountain landscape seems to unfold before one’s eyes (Fig. 5). Sella’s photographs are, to use Barthes’s terms, “always invisible” as they appear to provide direct unmediated access to the snowy peaks. They are a “weightless transparent envelope . . . never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents)” (*Camera Lucida* 1984: 5-6).

A closer examination at the photographs however reveals that they are carefully constructed composite images. In order to take only one panorama, Sella had to camp for a week on the Freshfield Pass and climb the peak several times. The few rare moments of ideal light and weather, which in reality were dispersed over time, are synthetically fused into one perfect “natural” image. Sella also takes great care to efface all traces of human presence in his classic mountain photographs. The members of the Abruzzi expedition remain mostly outside the frame, or on the margins (Figs 7 & 8). The photographs also commodify the pristine landscape of the Ruwenzori into images which can be brought back home, reproduced and consumed by imperial audiences. Photography circulates and disseminates the imperial gaze and thus plays an important

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

role in popularising colonial landscapes as a repository of authentic nature. In this sense, the 1907 Abruzzi expedition articulates two major discourses: a nostalgic, romantic longing for unspoilt landscapes and an emergent technocratic desire for control over colonial spaces.



African Mountains and the Sublime

After Abruzzi

After being opened up by the Abruzzi expedition, the Ruwenzori became a regular climbing destination for a variety of European alpine clubs. Apart from a brief lull during the First World War, every year saw at least one climbing expedition, with the British, Germans, Belgians and Swiss being particularly active. So thorough was Abruzzi in charting and naming the various features of the Ruwenzori range that most subsequent explorers and climbers had to concede that the mountains had been “done” and little of any geographic or sporting interest remained. The Ruwenzori were exhausted as a landscape of spectacular geographic discovery. Instead of daring adventure, only bookish botanical and zoological work remained. Patrick Synge, in an account of a British Museum expedition to the Ruwenzori in 1936, defensively compared the collection of botanical specimens to the more manly and adventurous pursuit of big-game hunting, except that botanising was “more noble” because “trophy in one's garden are better than stuffed heads” (1937: xxi). Synge, as most other writers, repeated Stanley's Mountains of the Moon legends in an appendix, not because he had new evidence, but because “the legends are so attractive and so picturesque” (1937:189).

Most subsequent expeditions therefore had to be content in repeating the duke's feats and verifying his findings. The only surprising exception was an expedition mounted in 1953 by Douglas Busk, then British ambassador in Addis Abba. He opened up a new climbing area in the southern, lower part of Mount Stanley, and found a small glacier which Abruzzi had inexplicably missed. In view of Elizabeth II's ascent to the British throne, the glacier was named Coronation Glacier. The two minor peaks from which the glacier issued were given the names Elizabeth and Phillip; consequently becoming known as the ‘Royal Peaks’ of the Ruwenzori (Bere 1966: 79-80). Belatedly, Britain had staked a claim, albeit minor, on the range.³⁵

But despite the fact that the Ruwenzori had been conquered, photographed, mapped and thoroughly explored by Abruzzi and subsequent expeditions, a succession of explorers, tourists and writers still felt that an aura of mystery and magic clung to the peaks. John Buchan included

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

a chapter on the Ruwenzori in a book titled *The Last Secrets: The Final Mysteries of Exploration* (1941), claiming that “happily the unveiling has not foiled the romance” (1941:112). Although he conceded that “on the whole, the range offers no great scope for the energies of the mountaineer” owing to the appalling weather of “a few hours of sunshine once a week” (1941:122), Buchan was fascinated by the sublime contrasts of the Ruwenzori, where Nature “has set snowfields and rock *arêtes* in the heart of a giant hothouse.” (1941:113). Buchan relished retelling the incredible tales of the earlier explorers that imagined the Mountains of the Moon as “ice-peaks of Himalayan magnitude, soaring out of flame coloured tropic jungles”, but despite the fact that the “truth is prosaic besides these imaginations”(1941:123), “these mountains have no fellows on the globe” and retain a solitude and mystery “inviolate” (1941:124 - 5). Although Buchan never visited the Ruwenzori, he referred to the range in several books and short stories, most notably in *Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906), a novel that will be looked at more closely in the following chapter. In *Lodge in the Wilderness* Buchan depicts a party of British aristocrats that go on an excursion to the Mountains of the Moon and come across a glacier that they realise “was the source of the Nile – the place which Alexander the Great saw in his dreams, and Speke and Baker thought they had found in Lake Victoria” (1906:181). In the following year Buchan wrote a short story “The Knees of the Gods” where the narrator claims that serious climbers no longer bother with Europe but can be found “mainly in the Himalaya and the Karakoram” although the “Ruwenzori, too, has a reputation because of the difficulty of equatorial snow” (1995: 94).

Alan Paton, like many of his contemporaries, also appears to have succumbed to sublime awe in the presence of the Mountains of the Moon. In 1958, Paton, together with his wife, sons and daughters-in-law, undertook a grand tour of southern and central Africa. Travelling in Paton’s huge, red Pontiac motor car, they drove north, taking in Rhodesia, Zambia, Congo, Ruanda and Uganda.³⁶ Apart from trivia such as hotel receipts, Paton left no written record of the journey and omitted references to it from the second part of his autobiography, *Journey Continued*. Paton’s lack of enthusiasm for any form of writing that reflected the sights and experiences of a month-long road trip through Africa may well be connected to the fact that his previous attempt at travel writing had been a fraught experience. Chapter 4 will examine this intriguing text, the Kalahari narrative, in more detail, but it seems likely that the experience of writing this travelogue made

African Mountains and the Sublime

Paton wary of trying his hand at travel writing again. The Kalahari narrative thus remains his only travel writing, despite the fact that Paton became a frequent and enthusiastic traveller, a past time that he continued to enjoy to the last.

There is however a record of Paton's African safari in the form of a diary kept by Doris, Paton's wife.³⁷ It is a bland, unremarkable narrative but gives insight into Paton's experience of the Ruwenzori mountains. In mid-July 1958 the Patons had arrived at the Ruwenzori Hotel in Mutwanga on the Congo side of the range for a few days of relaxation in the cooler climate of the uplands. A receipt shows that Paton paid for Pygmy dances. Doris Paton's entry for Sunday, 13 July 1958 records Paton's first sighting of the snow-clad peaks:

I woke up at 6:15 this morning and saw Alan standing outside near our bedroom door. I asked him what on earth he was doing – he was still in pyjamas – and he said he was looking at the mountain. I was out of bed in a flash and rushed out, and there was Ruwenzori, clearly visible, but even as I watched the veil was drawn across, and it was hidden from view. But what a thrill, even that brief glimpse – a dream realised – I've seen the Mountains of the Moon. ... So our wish was fulfilled, and we consider ourselves very lucky.

Paton evidently did not share his feelings at the sight of the peaks with his wife, but it is nevertheless clear that the sighting of the Mountains of the Moon was "a thrill" and "a dream realised" and constituted a highly significant and eagerly awaited event for the Patons. Indeed, according to the diary, it is the highlight of the entire journey.

In Nadine Gordimer's "Congo River", the sighting of the Mountains of the Moon is similarly the climactic event in her travel narrative. In 1960, on the eve of Congolese independence, Gordimer visited the Ruwenzori mountains after an extended trip up the Congo river. Her narrative is pervaded with references to Conrad and Stanley. Referring to the contrast between Stanley's despair of getting out of the forest and the exhilaration of his release, Gordimer writes that the "end of the forest" is today even "more dramatic, for you can drive in one day from equatorial forest to sight of snow" (1988: 151). Gordimer's first sighting of the Ruwenzori is a Stanleyesque sublime moment:

At four in the afternoon, the trees fell away before us, the green land fell away beyond that, and a great blue ghost of a mountain hung across the horizon. It was

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

infinity: a palm or two stood clear in the foreground against swimming blue. Then the cloud at the top of the blue shape shifted a little, the outline neared and hardened; we saw a white glitter, the soft contour of snow on jagged peaks of the whole range. It was the Ruwenzori – Ptolemy’s Mountains of the Moon. And we came upon them, remote as the moon, from out of the close warm forest and the pygmies burrowing there. (1988: 151)

Without any sense of ironic detachment, Gordimer’s vision replicates a classic colonial moment of discovery, reproducing not only Stanley’s sublime awe (“It was an infinity”) but also invoking the mythical name of the mountain’s Western father, Ptolemy. Gordimer’s awe and astonishment also relies on the sharpness of the contrast between the “close warm forest” and the distant “white glitter”. This contrast is not only a matter of geography and landscape, but assumes a racial dimension. The juxtaposition of a sublimely transcendent mountain landscape with “the pygmies burrowing” in the dark tropical jungle lowland below can be understood as a spatialisation of racial difference. As in Stanley’s travel narrative, the Ruwenzori are capable of evoking sublimity when they are imaginatively dislocated from their dark African context and connected to ancient Western history.



Quite a different account of the Ruwenzori emerges in John Preston’s travel narrative *Touching the Moon* (1990). It is the crazy story of a drug and alcohol-fuelled trip to the Ruwenzori in search of adventure romance and erotic titillation. Preston went to Uganda in 1986 with copy of Haggard’s *She* in his pocket (Fig. 9) and several packets of Durex condoms in his bag, resulting in an embarrassing search at customs. Inspired by the film version of *She* in which Ursula Andress’s “white dress still pulled impossibly taut over the jutting splendour of her breasts” (1990:26), Preston fantasised about a mythical white goddess and the land of Kôr in the Ruwenzori:

Rider Haggard was always the inspiration, the Mountains of the Moon favourite location. Here was the place infused with all the excitement I could imagine. I thought of huge snow-capped mountains linked by a tracery of hanging bridges

African Mountains and the Sublime

and tiny paths. There were great fortresses rearing up into the clouds, dark pools where men in armour drank long draughts of inky water, plateaux where armies thundered back and forth in perpetual combat (1990:12)

In Preston's vivid narrative, the fantasy of exploring the Mountains of the Moon merged fantastically with the dangers and excesses of Idi Amin's reign of terror. In Preston's manic impressionist prose, he reads the urban jungle of Kampala's bars and strip clubs as *She*, but there are also shades of Conradian horror when he encounters one of the many disease-ridden, emaciated beggars:

I placed a couple of notes in an upturned palm. The woman had very long thin fingers, so thin that the flesh fell away from either side of the fingernails. Again, very slowly, her fingers curled and clenched over the money. (1990:65)

In Preston's narrative, Uganda is on the point of an army rebellion due to a rumoured shortage of beer, and the rotting corpses on the streets, the rampant AIDS crisis, rumours of cannibalism and voodoo rituals, together with the incessant boom of Christian revivalists, paint a vivid picture of tropical dissolution and chaos. The *Sunday Review*, as Preston delights in telling, is published on Friday. In Preston's tropicalist discourse, social disintegration breeds both sexual opportunities and dangers. Uganda, for Preston, is above all a country of rampant promiscuity, and he fantasises about "women [who] started gang-raping men who no longer wished to avail themselves of their services", and "white men" who "have Ugandan girlfriends or mistresses" (1990:50). On the other hand there is the ever-present danger of AIDS which means that "white women who had had affairs with Ugandans now found themselves off-limits to white suitors" (1990:50). There are also dark rumours of a "castration corner" where depraved voodoo rituals and mutilations are performed on unsuspecting victims (1990:54).

Like Stanley's Congo jungle, Kampala is a hothouse of tropical promiscuity and dissolution for Preston. But unlike Stanley, he finds the Ruwenzori a huge disappointment. Instead of sublime transport, Preston's Ruwenzori experience turned into a gothic nightmare. Wading through thick mud in driving rain he regards the scene as a "vast secret laboratory for botanic mutations, where hidden hands laboured to produce the most misshapen growths imaginable" (1990:161). The "entire landscape was bristling with aggression" (145). For Preston, the Ruwenzori were an

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

altogether alien and threatening landscape, akin to a gigantic monster that could turn on him at any moment:

There was no sight of sun. The lake had opened out into a huge black pupil, watching our every move. At any moment I felt the whole landscape could suddenly flex and throw us off. (1990:176)

Appropriately, Preston registers the horror of the landscape as an effect on his body, in particular his genitals. When finally reaching a mountain hut, and feeling very sick, he discovers that his "penis had turned a dark shade of navy blue" (1990:140). Eventually, he realises the extent of his self-delusional, romantic fantasies:

I'd miscalculated badly. There were no white-robed immortals here, no eighty-five copper statues from whose mouths the Nile spewed forth. How could there be? This wasn't the Africa I knew – a vast backdrop against which Europeans could act out their romances, covering themselves in self-proclaimed glory. This was a different place entirely. (1990:147)

Preston's narrative, for all its colonial stereotypes and wild sexual fantasies, is a transgressive, self-reflexive postcolonial text in which racial and sexual borders dissolve, and the white, heroic explorer figure becomes undone. Africa is not romanticised, and the European colonial fantasies about the Ruwenzori mountains become unmasked.

Conclusion: Ruwenzori and the Postcolonial

In this chapter I have shown that discourses of the sublime have been used by a number of travellers, climbers and writers to fashion an understanding of the Ruwenzori as a landscape detached from their African locale. Evocations of the divine and exalted character of the snow-clad white mountains can in this sense be understood as an imaginative transcendence of the facts of blackness. Discourses of the sublime allowed observers to suspend, if only momentarily, the terrors of central, tropical Africa. The suffocating jungle and marsh vegetation, the stifling heat, and the alien, threatening nature of the black indigenous inhabitants could be supplanted, through the imagination, by an exultant vision of a heavenly, white landscape. Together with discourses of the sublime, processes of mythical historicisation and naming practices transformed an unimaginable African wilderness into a cultural landscape, a space that could be understood and

African Mountains and the Sublime

controlled by Western eyes.

These myths, in a packaged format, continue to energise the marketing of the Ruwenzori as an eco-tourist destination, by both Ugandan tourist agencies and foreign tour operators.³⁸ But despite the conquest of the Ruwenzori by various forms of the imperial imagination, including that of contemporary tourism,³⁹ they remain a site that is not only alluring, mysterious and opaque, but also resistant to exogenous control. The Ruwenzori, as we have seen, do not only perform an ideological function for the imperial imagination, but are also an important and contested place for local history, a history that has been mostly obscured by the myths and the marketing around the Mountains of the Moon. Western tourists, who are drawn to the Ruwenzori because of the mystique of an ancient, mythical pre-history, might be discouraged if they knew the actual contemporary history of the mountains as a site of anti-imperial resistance. In fact, a violent contestation over the Ruwenzori land has not only shaped the history of the area, but has also discouraged Western visitors from climbing in the range.

Guy Yeoman gives a useful background to the earlier colonial history of the mountains, although, as we have seen, his views are coloured by Konyophile sympathies. In the latter decades of nineteenth century, when Leopold made territorial claims on the upper Nile region, Britain tried to establish Uganda as a block of influence to thwart Leopold's and Germany's ambitions, culminating in the establishment of a protectorate in 1894. To this end, first Frederic Lugard (who arrived in Uganda in 1890 with the British East Africa Company) and later Harry Johnstone tried to establish strong regional kingdoms loyal to Britain. This included the establishment and extension of the Toro Kingdom with came to include the Ruwenzori territory of the Bakonjo. Several minor uprisings by the Bakonjo against Batoro overlordship ensued over the years and the disaffection came to a head in 1961, when a local schoolteacher and councillor named Isaya Mukirane led broad-based protest action. After his arrest by the British, Mukirane skipped bail and fled into the Ruwenzori mountains where he formed Rwenzururu Resistance Movement and announced the birth of the Independent Kingdom of Rwenzururu. (Yeoman, 1989:104). After independence from Britain, repression, imprisonment and forced exile of Konjo people continued as the new Uganda state attempted to assert its unified nationhood. The Bakonjo were living on

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

both sides of Ruwenzori, in Uganda and Zaire, and this divided and weakened them as a political force. In 1965, President Obote announced an amnesty designed to stop resistance, leading to a serious split among the Bakonjo and internecine violence. A truce was negotiated in 1982, but fell apart after Obote's second government was ousted by Yoweri Museveni. The rebel Rwenzururu Kingdom continued to maintain a separate guerilla state in the mountains, launching sporadic attacks on the towns in the lowlands. While violence declined in the early 1990s, the dissolution of Mobuto's Zaire and the increased conflict in the Great Lakes region has seen a dramatic upsurge in fighting, including cross-border incursions by new armed groups such as the ADF (Allied Democratic Forces).⁴⁰

The renewed outbreak of conflict has had a devastating effect on local communities, such as the one in Ibanda, a densely settled rural area in the Mobuko valley that has traditionally supplied porters and guides for the climbing expeditions. With the support of USAID, a local NGO, the Rwenzori Mountain Service (RMS) had been established to provide logistical support to Western climbers, and income for local men who were trained as guides. A charming restaurant provided visitors with local cuisine and generated employment opportunities for women. The RMS also had developed infrastructure such as paths and huts, and visitor numbers accordingly grew from about 200 per year in the mid-eighties to more than 1000 in the mid nineties.⁴¹ Since the upsurge of violence, these community development projects have been severely disrupted and tourism has ground to a virtual halt. Jimmy Matte, a community leader in Ibanda, and a senior mountain guide for the RMS, wrote a letter to me and my wife in 1999 that described the desperate situation:

Here in Uganda, the situation is really very bad, worried and alarming. This has been because of the ADF rebels that came in from Zaire and entered Uganda. This has created a lot of problems more especially on the slopes of the Rwenzoris. Many schools, churches, property, peoples lives has been damaged by those rebels hence we have left our homes and now we are misplaced and scattered. ... [They] are killing people and stealing our properties and kidnapping other people and taking them into the forest to train them.

The future of the Ruwenzori mountains and the communities that live around them is bound up with the geo-political machinations and wars that continue to engulf the Great Lakes region. Ironically, the hopes of communities such as the one in Ibanda are linked not only to the return of

African Mountains and the Sublime

peace, but also a continuation of colonial myths about the Mountains of the Moon. In order to draw tourists and attract development, the Ruwenzori must continue to be inscribed with a Western history. The mountains have thus retained, to this day, the names conferred on them by Abruzzi. The only change is from Ruwenzori to Rwenzori. But otherwise the imperial names remain. In what is now a national park only one lowly feature is named after an Ugandan: the John Matte hut on the trekking circuit.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Notes

-
1. The audience was described by the editors of the *Geographic Journal*, in a preface to text of Abruzzi's talk, entitled "The Snows of the Nile"(1906).
 2. The correct name for the Ugandan mountain range is Rwenzori. I have however consistently used the older colonial name Ruwenzori because virtually all the texts discussed use the name given by Stanley.
 3. A year later, Ruth Fisher, the wife of a missionary, reached one of the glaciers and was fascinated by the idea of standing "on that untraversed land of ice where scarcely mortal foot had trod". Like Freshfield, Fisher believed that exposure to the alpine zone would prove energising, and she expressed her desire "to inhale this cool life-giving air so that we might be refreshed for a return to work in the hot tiring lowlands" (1919: 175). Fisher's climb will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.
 4. I use the word "discover" in a relative sense: as discovery for European knowledge. European explorers, as they themselves knew, were of course not the first people to see these geographical features.
 5. See the UNESCO web site for a detailed motivation and description of the mountains, at www.unesco.org/whc/archive/repcom94.htm#684.
 6. See Alan Moorehead's *The White Nile* for more details on this complex history, especially chapter 17.
 7. See Tony Gould's *In Limbo. The Story of Stanley's Rear Column* (1979) for a critical history of the episode.
 8. In Conrad's description of the attack on the steamer, Marlow is shot at by people invisible in the "tangled gloom" of the jungle, until, in a traumatic moment of revelatory sight, a "veil [is] removed" and he sees "naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes, – the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze colour" (1994: 64).
 9. I am thinking here particularly about Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Mont Blanc. Lines written in the Vale of Chamouni" which contains many phrases and images that suggest that it possibly served as a model for Fisher.
 10. The name Ruwenzori, which Stanley claimed to mean "rain-god" or "cloud-king" is mainly derived from the local Rukonyo language. According to Bere (1966), Stanley might have constructed this hybrid term by combining several local words: 'ru' meaning high or long, 'enjura' meaning rain, and 'enzururu' referring snow or hail. Stanley justified his

African Mountains and the Sublime

invention by complaining that no uniformly used local name existed for the mountains. For instance the term ‘gamabalagala’ (my eyes smart) was used by people living further away from the range, a meaning possibly derived from the bright glare of the ice and snow on the peaks.

11. In Ptolemy’s *Geography*, Book IV, qtd in Johnstone, H. *The Nile Quest* (1903: 22).

12. Reproduced in *Landmarks of Mapmaking* (1979: 159)

13. The quotation is taken from Luigi Hugues’s essay in Fillipi (1909: 290).

14. For a detailed discussion on the authority and intertextuality of maps, see T. Basset’s and P. Porter’s “The Mountains of the Kong.”

15. Knowledge about the snow-covered peaks of Kilimanjaro and Kenya was first published in 1850 by Krapf and Rebmann, two German missionaries. Their accounts were initially widely disbelieved in Europe.

16. David Bunn’s seminal analysis, “Embodying Africa: Woman and Romance in Colonial Fiction” cites the fact that more 31 000 copies of the *King Solomon’s Mines* were sold in the first six months after publication, “making it one of the most popular documents of the late nineteenth century” (1988: 9).

17. Bunn’s essay also points out the gendered nature of Haggard’s fictional geography. African space is feminised “as an uncharted ‘virgin’ zone that awaits to be inscribed by a masculine dominating zeal” (1988: 11). Anne McClintock largely reproduces Bunn’s argument in the opening sections of *Imperial Leather* when she claims that “Haggard’s map abstracts the female body as a geometry of sexuality held captive under the technology of imperial form” (1995: 4). Bunn also discusses Haggard’s autobiography in which the writer reveals a dream of his ideal landscape. Interestingly, this landscape features mountains which are the source of a Nile-like river.

18. See Speke’s *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (1863). The “Hottentot” police were however soon became afflicted by fevers and Speke only found them useful as camp cooks.

19. Societies such as the “Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa”, founded in 1788, brought together not only eminent scientists and explorers (such as Joseph Banks), but also politicians (William Wilberforce) and bankers, industrialists and merchants. The quest for scientific knowledge was thus reinforced by the commercial motives of a capitalist class which “speculated on the products that the unknown interior might reveal, the markets that those teeming millions ... might afford the growing manufacturers of Great Britain” (R. Hallet *The Penetration of Africa* 1965:197)

20. I am indebted to Peter Merrington’s suggestive work on the Cape to Cairo theme. See for

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

example his article “Cape-to-Cairo: tracing an imperial imaginary” that also discusses Baker’s glyph.

21. The panorama model of Rhodes’s Matopos grave at the Rhodes Cottage museum in Muizenberg is flanked by two impressive Zimbabwe stone birds, sculpted by the South African modernist artist Ivan Mitford-Barberton. Merrington also points out that Baker’s imperial symbolism, including the glyph, is found in a number of other sites such as Rhodes House in Oxford.

22. Stanley himself had tried and failed. In 1889, during his second visit to the mountains, he despatched a party under the leadership of Lt. Stairs into the mountains. Due to the difficulty of the terrain, Stairs was forced to abandon the attempt without even having reached the snow-line.

23. Emin Pascha later became better acquainted with the Ruwenzori during an expedition in 1891. Together with the German naturalist Dr F. Stuhlman, he explored the western side of the range. Stuhlman reached the snowline on the western slopes of Mt Stanley. His photographs were to prove a valuable resource for the Abruzzi expedition.

24. During the K2 climb Abruzzi set a world altitude record at 24000 ft. Abruzzi’s experiences prepared the ground for the use of oxygen in subsequent high-altitude expeditions. During the war Abruzzi became commander-in-chief of the Italian fleet and subsequently was appointed Governor of the Italian colony of Somaliland. He died in Mogadishu in 1933.

25. See also Scott’s ill-fated 1910 - 1912 polar expedition in which national rivalry between Britain and Norway played a major role. Scott’s (and metonymically, Britain’s) defeat in the race to be the first to plant the national flag on the South Pole, could only be managed by creating a popular myth around the stoic, manly heroism of Scott. In the jingoistic British press, Admudsen’s achievement was denigrated as “cheating” because he had used dogs to pull the sleds. Scott’s determination to reach the pole on foot shows the residual strength of the romantic ideology around walking. See the next section for a fuller discussion.

26. The raising of flags on summits is still a pervasive feature of mountaineering, a sign that alpinism continues to be imbricated in nationalist discourses. Ian Woodall’s controversial “South African” ascent of Everest in 1996, for instance, used summit photographs of the South African flag as justification for the claim that the climb had been a symbolic achievement for the “rainbow nation”, despite the fact that Woodall, who has British nationality and his co-climber, Kathy O’Dowd, a member of South Africa’s ultra-rich elite, represent no-one other than themselves. As the case of O’Dowd illustrates, alpinism is not only tied up with nationalist politics but also with privilege and class. The fiasco of the South African Everest expedition was widely reported in South African media, especially the *Sunday Times* which sponsored the climb. See also Jon Krakauer’s acclaimed book *Into Thin*

African Mountains and the Sublime

Air (1998) for a critical account of Woodall's actions.

27. Such residual conventions associated with royal privilege are still alive today. Thus Prince William's wish to *walk* behind Diana's funeral cortege was a rebellious act in that it violated the ancient norms which governed ceremonial courtly behaviour.

28. Urry cites extraordinary figures in support of his claim that walking became a widespread cultural pattern among the educated classes:

The distances walked by intellectuals were prodigious: William Hazlitt claimed to walk 40 to 50 miles a day; De Quincey walked 70 to 100 miles a week; and Keats apparently covered 642 miles during his 1818 tour of the Lakes of Scotland. (1995: 202)

29. Cited in Gernheim (1971: 97).

30. Abruzzi's three guides were J. Petigax, C. Ollier, J. Brocherell. The latter two had also climbed for Halford MacKinder on his ascent of Mount Kenya in 1899.

31. In this respect, the duke's mountaineering efforts are not unlike the exploits of wealthy European and American trophy hunters in Africa. Abruzzi "bagged" his peaks in a not too dissimilar fashion as hunters whose encounters with sought after game were often carefully staged.

32. The last major climbing expedition in the mould of heroic, individualistic adventure was Mallory's and Irvine's fatal Everest attempt in 1924. The successful British assault in 1953 was organised by a military officer, Col. Hunt, who had replaced the mountaineer Eric Shipton. See also Gordon Stewart's essay "Tenzing's Two Wrist-Watches: The Conquest of Everest and late Imperial Culture in Britain 1923-53."

33. Sella, the photographer, was able to achieve a greater freedom of mobility and thus better images through the development of new photographic technology. The dry-plate camera was far more robust and mobile than earlier wet-plate apparatuses. By contrast, Auguste Bisson, who was the first to take photographs on the summit of Mont Blanc, needed 25 porters to carry his equipment (Gernheim 1971: 97)

34. Sella was a widely acclaimed photographer who specialised in mountain landscapes. Besides the extraordinary photographs of the Ruwenzori, he was active in the Alps, the Caucasus and the Himalayas. John Buchan called Sella "The greatest of living mountain photographers" (1941:112).

35. The first ascent of Everest in the Himalayas became even more overtly linked to the coronation. In the popular press, the conquest of Everest by Edmund Hilary, a "commonwealth subject," was connected to the coming of a new glorious Elizabethan age. See Gordon Stewart's essay "Tenzing's Two Wrist-Watches: The Conquest of Everest and

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

late Imperial Culture in Britain 1923-53."

36. Paton's journey is briefly mentioned in Peter Alexander's biography (1994: 311).

37. Doris Paton's diary, together with miscellaneous receipts and travel documents relating to the trip, is archived as PC 1/7/1/3 in the Alan Paton Centre at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

38. A number of tour operators offer climbing and hiking trips to the Ruwenzori, although at least one of them has suspended operations due to "pending improvement of services in the park". The Executive Wilderness Programmes website, <http://www.ewpnet.com/rwenzori.htm>, touts the mountains as the Ptolemean range. The Ecoexpeditions organisation (<http://www.ecoexpeditions.no/eastafrica/uganda>) advertises trips to the "mysterious 'Mountains of the Moon'".

39. What I have in mind here is the ongoing revalorisation of the term "colonial" in the South African post-colony, and elsewhere in tourist-friendly Africa. The nostalgia for the colonial is particularly evident in contemporary tourism, where private game lodges often orchestrate African wilderness experiences for wealthy Western tourists in such a way that recall older cultural templates of the colonial period. Pith helmets and other colonial accoutrements are worn without irony. The revalorisation of the colonial also extends into contemporary interior decor, fashion and food, and produces an idea of the colonial evacuated of any sense of history, of violence and dispossession.

40. See regular reports in the online version of *New Vision*, Uganda's largest daily newspaper. The reports show that, currently, there are almost weekly incidents of violence. For example on 7th April, 2004, the Alpine Brigade of the Uganda Defence Force ambushed seven ADF

rebels, killing two of their commanders in the Ruwenzori Mountains.

In the following month, in a *New Vision* report of 19th March, 2004, the National Political Commissar, Dr. Crispus Kiyonga, blamed the Rwenzururu monarchists for creating the ground for the Allied Democratic Front rebels to invade Kasese district. He said that the "original Rwenzururu Freedom Movement was good because it was fighting against oppression, but it lost course when it started demanding for the restoration of the kingdom." Kiyonga, who is also the Member of Parliament, opposed the establishment of a Rwenzururu Kingdom, but admitted that other local MPs support it.

41. The figures have been taken from the UNESCO web site: www.unesco.org/whc/archive/repcom94.htm.

CHAPTER 3

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

The idea of a racially inflected sublime, connected to an imperial vision of the Africa landscape, emerges perhaps most clearly in the African writing of John Buchan (1875-1940). In his time, Buchan was one of Britain's most celebrated writers and politicians, and ranks among the most prolific and widely read English authors of the 20th century. Buchan, like Stanley, Abruzzi and Herbert Baker, was fascinated by Africa's mountains, particularly the Ruwenzori range, and invested them with geo-political significance. At the end of the first book he wrote about Africa, in a fantastic panoramic moment, Buchan envisioned a vast Southern African dominion "girdled on three sides by ocean, and on the fourth looking north to the inland seas and the eternal snows of the Ruwenzori" which would serve as the "noble cradle for a race" and a place of adventure where "that breath of romance, which is the life of the English race, can inspire thinkers and song makers" (1903: 392). In Buchan's imagination, the Ruwenzori Mountains help to define the geographic and racial contours of Britain's imperial possessions in Africa and become the birthplace of a newly invigorated English civilisation on the dark continent.¹

Mountains, as we shall see in this chapter, are special places for Buchan, and in the contested colonial landscape of Africa, they are imagined as the vital hubs of power, endowed with a significance far in excess of aesthetic pleasure or sporting achievement. "Gaining the eminence"(1998: xii), to use Jacqueline Labbe's phrase, is always an expression of power, for he "who achieves a certain height of observation is able, because of his enlarged view, to command both a larger landscape and the respect of others" (1998: xi). Or in the words of one of Buchan's fictional characters, "the great thing in the world is to reach the proper vantage-ground" allowing access to certain truths that "can only be known to the man on the hill-top" (1906: 31- 32). Buchan's African writing clearly shows that climbing mountains is not only suggestive of an

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

elite viewpoint, but, that the imaginative and physical possession of mountains in the racially contested landscape of Southern Africa is expressive of colonial power and civilisational superiority.

During his brief time in South Africa, Buchan became, for the first time, a serious mountaineer. It was an outdoors activity that, together with fly-fishing, he would continue to pursue for the rest of his life. Subsequent to his exploits in South Africa, Buchan climbed in the Alps for the first time in 1904, his appetite for high mountains having been whetted by the high peaks he climbed in "the Drakensberg and in the ranges of the Northern Transvaal" (1940:133). In his post-South Africa writing on mountaineering, one theme dominates: how to preserve the heights as an exclusive domain for the higher classes. Buchan's distaste for the vulgar consumption of mountains by the lower classes is expressed in several contributions to *The Scottish Review*. He takes a strong stand against unfettered access to mountains for the uneducated working classes that he fears will overrun the wilds and "ruin the amenities of the land itself, denude it of its wild denizens, and spoil it for the pleasures of its true lovers" ("Access to Mountains", May 21, 1908). In a subsequent piece, he concedes that "in Britain mountaineering is the fad of a small and more or less leisured class" ("The Dolomites", July 23, 1908). For Buchan then, mountains were the privileged higher ground that had to be preserved against encroachment of those of lower class and less refined sensibilities. Buchan's abhorrence of the touristic cheapening of mountains by the common man is well expressed in a short story, "The Knees of the Gods" (1907) where he satirises the commercialisation of the Alps:

You go to the Schwarzsee or to the Zermatt, and you find a door where you take a ticket - 10 francs it costs. Then you are conducted by housemaids up carpeted stairs heated by electricity. At every third landing or so there is a restaurant where you can lunch, and there are balconies for the view. In the end you come to a little glass cupola and you raise a skylight and climb out on the top. Or you can do the whole thing in a lift. The top is a sort of German beer-garden (1995: 94)

Buchan was interested in reserving mountains for the serious climbers who invariably belonged to the educated and upper classes. In order to gain the elusive, pure "moments of illumination" (1940: 134) on the heights, Buchan had to elevate and distance himself from the common dross of humanity. In Africa, as I will show, Buchan's elitist notion that mountains were the preserve

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

of a more elevated class of people, was figured primarily in racial terms.

A High Veld Sublime

Soon after a brilliant career reading law at Oxford, Buchan was appointed, at the age of 25, as an assistant private secretary to Lord Alfred Milner's "Kindergarten" in the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War. Milner had recruited a number of young, bright Oxford men to form the nucleus of a new, progressive Transvaal and Orange Free State civil service. For nearly two years in South Africa, between September 1901 and July 1903, the young Buchan contributed to the reconstruction of the Transvaal, helping to build a new colony that would turn a truculent and backward Boer republic into a model dominion within the British empire. Buchan's principal task was closing the over-crowded and disease-ridden concentration camps, and then resettling the displaced Boers on the newly conquered land. To this end, Buchan was put in charge of the Land Department with more than 100 staff below him. In keeping with Milner's contentious anglicisation policies, Buchan wanted to bring in substantial numbers of British settlers in the hope that the new colony would also acquire a predominantly English character in the rural areas. He himself, as we shall see, fantasised about becoming one of the new breed of gentlemen settlers and establishing an anglophile colonial squirarchy on the Transvaal highveld.

Although Buchan's subsequent public career initially fell short of expectations after his colonial posting in South Africa,² he eventually reached one of the highest political offices in the Commonwealth as the Governor-General of Canada, and was elevated to the peerage as Baron Tweedsmuir of Elsworth. Despite this distinguished public career in which he became the confidante of royalty and had the ear of presidents, even becoming the first Briton to address the United States Congress, he is not primarily remembered as a politician, but as the author of popular "shockers" such as his celebrated spy thriller, *Thirty-Nine Steps*. Altogether, Buchan wrote more than a hundred books, among them historical novels, imperial romances, adventure thrillers, travel narratives and volumes of short stories; and alongside his literary efforts, he was a prolific writer and commentator on matters of politics, mountaineering, agriculture and history. Buchan's dual career as both a writer of imaginative fiction, and a politician in the service of the British empire is particularly interesting in that it occupies the nexus between culture and politics, or that process that Edward Said has called the translation of knowledge from the

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

“textual and contemplative into ... administrative, economic and even military” practices (2003:210). Buchan is in this sense an exemplary instance of what Bruce Macleod has called a “strategic writer” whose work is “relational to, situated, and invested in the flows of knowledge, power, and opposition that course through the capillaries of Britain’s empire” (1999:16).

In connection with his official duties in South Africa, the young Buchan had ample opportunity to get to know the Transvaal landscape intimately on frequent extended trips into the countryside. But he also explored the country in his own free time, such as climbing in the high peaks of the South Africa’s eastern escarpment. Buchan experienced this as the most exhilarating time of his life: not only did he have unprecedented freedom to roam the wide, open spaces of South Africa, but, after years of bookish study, he could, for the first time in his life, become an out-doors man of action, and realise his high-minded ambitions and ideals in a job that was largely his own making. As he wrote in his autobiography, his “taste for letters was winnowed and purged, for the spirit of the veld is an austere thing” (1940:124). Buchan’s muscular, outdoor experience of South Africa and its landscape left a deep mark on him, becoming not only the background to action in his African fictions, but also a formative influence on his political vision. Although his African texts occupy a very small part of his large *oeuvre*, Buchan’s experience of South Africa was the key to his political philosophy, in particular his belief that the destiny of the English nation was tied up with that of the empire.

Despite his brief stay in South Africa, the experience of “the fairest country under the stars” (1975:3) and the memory of its landscapes had a profound, transformative effect on his life. As Bill Schwartz put it, “what drove Buchan’s imagination, from this time on, was his experience of South Africa” (1997:67). Writing in Canada, close to death, almost 40 years later, the emotional intensity of Buchan’s South African experience had not diminished:

I recovered an experience which I had not known since my childhood, moments, even hours, of intense exhilaration, where one seemed to be a happy part of a friendly universe. The cause, no doubt, was largely physical, for my long treks made me very fit in body; but not wholly, for I have had the same experiences much later in life when my health was far from perfect. They came usually in the early morning or sunset. I seemed to acquire a wonderful clearness of mind and to find harmony in discords and unity in diversity, but to find these things not as conclusions of thought, but in a sudden revelation, as in poetry of music. ... The

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

world was a place of inexhaustible beauty, but still more it was the husk of something infinite, ineffable and immortal, in very truth the garment of God. (1940:120 - 121)

The “intense exhilaration” of the African landscape and the sublime revelation of “something infinite, ineffable and immortal” was, as will become apparent, closely tied to Buchan’s idealistic dream for a new empire. Buchan’s ecstatic vision of the high veld and the idea of empire become fused in a form of sublime transcendence in which all contradictions and tensions could be dissolved in a “harmony in discords and unity in diversity”. These sublime moments, in which Africa’s “scents, sights and sounds blended into a harmony so perfect that it transcended human expression, even human thought” (1940: 121) could be translated into a powerful political vision, a vision which was born on the South African veld and which sustained Buchan to the end:

Those were the days when a vision of what the Empire might be made dawned upon certain minds with almost the force of revelation. ... I dreamed of a world-wide brotherhood with the background of a common race and creed, consecrated to the service of peace; Britain enriching the rest out of her culture and traditions, and the spirit of the dominions like a strong wind freshening the stuffiness of the old lands. (1940:125)

A powerful theme in Buchan’s imperial vision was the contrast between the fresh “strong wind” of the colonies and the “stuffiness of the old lands”. Buchan, together with many of his contemporaries, believed that there was a loss of direction, a general blindness and dullness, even a decay and degeneration at home. On his return to England, from the “strenuous, coloured land” he had left, Buchan felt particularly disenchanted with “dull mercantile” London, the “vulgar display of wealth, and a *rastaquouere* craze for luxury”, and he experienced the “ugly fear that the Empire might decay at the heart” (1940: 127-8). Buchan’s anxieties must be understood in the context of a generally felt unease at the excesses of *fin-de-siècle* decadence that stood in sharp contrast to the proliferation of urban poverty and social degeneration towards the end of the century. The New Imperialism, as exemplified by Buchan and his contemporaries, can be understood, in part, as a response to the general crisis in confidence that marked late Victorian and Edwardian culture. There was a general consensus that the richness and true potential of English civilisation could best be realised by an exposure to the vitality (and danger) of the

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

frontier. The wilderness and chaos of the colonial frontier could be the energising proving ground where a new, robust English masculinity could emerge that had, since the glorious days of Drake and Raleigh, been in long decline. Buchan's African writing, in its most sublime moments, is consistently animated by this energising and reinvigorating potential of the frontier landscape, and it is precisely the simultaneously dangerous and exhilarating nature of the frontier experience, that excites and overwhelms Buchan's imagination most strongly. The sublime contrasts of the frontier, the Burkean juxtaposition between dread and delight, is essentially the racially coded seam between white civilisation and "savagery". His high veldt sublime can in this sense be understood as a textual and imaginative strategy to control and subdue the dangers of the racialised African frontier and the threatened irruption of dark, irrational forces. Buchan's sublime vision of the landscape discursively contains and manages the racial dangers of the border, and in so doing clears the space for the emergence of a new, virile Englishness that could triumphantly assert its presence in the colonies.

In Buchan's African writing, the South African landscape is thus a grand arena for a thrilling, consciousness-expanding imperial vision, but it is, simultaneously, also permeated by an unsettling sense of the uncanny. There is always a threatened loss of racial identity arising out of the collapse of the stable binary oppositions of the border. This conflictual nature of Buchan's African landscapes can best be understood, I propose, by firstly, analysing them in terms of a postcolonial understanding of the sublime, and, secondly, by tracing the occult presence and displacement of the figure of Cecil John Rhodes, the outstanding imperialist of his time and embodiment of imperial geo-political expansion. This chapter will then provide a critical reading of the complex relationships between landscape and ideas of empire in *the complete corpus* of Buchan's African writing, something which has, to my knowledge, not been attempted before in any academic study.

Besides the well-known and hugely popular blockbuster thriller *Prester John* (1910), Buchan's African texts comprise *African Colony: Studies in Reconstruction* (1903), a lengthy socio-economic and political assessment of post Boer war South Africa, suffused with autobiographical travel narrative; *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906), a political discussion novel about the future

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

of the empire in Africa; and three short stories titled "Kings of Orion"(1906), "Grove of Ashtaroth" (1910) and "The Green Wildebeest" (written in 1912 and first published in 1927). There is little poetry dating from his African experiences besides juvenalia, for example this racist couplet: "They ca' Transvaal, / A land o' Jews and neeger men" (1996:14). In 1905, Buchan also began but did not finish a novel entitled "The Mountain", set in South Africa. Some parts of the manuscript were later incorporated into *Lodge in the Wilderness*. Apart from the above texts, Buchan's well-known autobiography, *Memory Hold-the-Door* (1940), also reflects, in part, on his South African experience. Lastly, Buchan also wrote a school textbook, *South Africa. Historical Biographies* (1927), published by the British Empire Educational Press, that has been overlooked by all commentators. It contains chapters on the main players of South African history, including Cecil John Rhodes.

While tracing the evolution of Buchan's landscapes in his African writing, from *African Colony* and *Prester John* to *Lodge in the Wilderness*, I came across Tim Couzens's excellent article on the same material. This chapter will initially retrace Couzens's argument in "The Old Africa of a Boy's Dream' - Towards Interpreting Buchan's *Prester John*" (1981) with three, I think, significant additions and variations. Firstly, Couzens analyses Buchan's landscape in terms of a static binary structure where the high ground is in opposition to the low ground. Couzens proposes that these oppositional spaces are not simply innocent landscape descriptions, but ideologically highly significant. My analysis largely agrees with this symptomatic reading, but I propose a ternary configuration where the opposition between the high and low ground is mediated by an unstable intermediate terrain, often subterranean, in which the contradictions between the former are seemingly resolved. Secondly, Couzens omits the short story "Grove of Ashtaroth" in his analysis, which is the key text in understanding Buchan's landscape not as a static system but as a dynamic and indeed unstable construct. Thirdly, I examine the way in which these fictional landscapes constitute a sustained engagement with the person and the imperial politics of Cecil John Rhodes.

The other outstanding scholarly analysis of Buchan's African texts is Bill Schwartz's article "The Romance of the Veld" (1997), a meticulous and nuanced analysis of Buchan's writing and

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

its contribution to the larger impact of South Africa in the cultural politics of Edwardian England. Schwartz correctly emphasises the transformative effect of the South African landscape on Buchan, but does not recognize that this landscape is not the generic Transvaal veld, but one very specific place in the north-eastern Drakensberg escarpment that inspires Buchan to sublime rapture. As Buchan himself put it, the “main feature of this place is its sharp distinction from the common South African landscape” (1903:126). It is the specific and unique geography of this locale that enables it to become a powerful spatial metaphor for initially constructing Buchan’s imperial vision of South Africa, and then deconstructing that very ideal. Like Couzens, Schwartz also omits “Grove of Ashtaroth” and this distorts the overall findings and prevents an analysis of Buchan’s fraught relationship with Rhodes. The purpose of this chapter then is to systematically look at the whole body of Buchan’s African writing, tracing the complex connections between them. I will argue that all Buchan’s African texts, despite their considerable differences, are essentially staged in the same idealised landscape, and that this obsessive spatial fixation serves to articulate Buchan’s views on empire and his complex and ambivalent ideas about race. Landscape, as W.J.T. Mitchell reminds us, is not just topography, but a highly expressive and contested medium of culture that

might be seen more profitably as something like the ‘dreamwork’ of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance. (1994:10)

Buchan’s African landscapes, while partly derived from actual topography, can similarly be understood as his ideological “dreamwork”, or put differently, “perfected” imaginative constructions that reveal not only Buchan’s imperial fantasies, but also embody barely suppressed fears and anxieties.

Tropical Scotland

Although Buchan’s texts hinge around one specific, idealised place, this obsession occurred in the context of a general valorisation of the whole of Southern Africa as an earthly paradise. In his autobiography he nostalgically writes about

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

the castled summits of Mont aux Sources and Basutoland, where the streams descend in sheer veils of lawn to Natal; the scarp whence one looks into Swaziland and Zululand glens, and further north, across a hundred miles of bush to the dim outline of the Lebombo; the ridges which huddle behind Lydenburg into the sunset; the lake country of Ermelo; the endless spaces of the high veld; the Zoutpansberg and other ranges of the north, honeycombed with caves and secret waters; the Limpopo running its fantastic course from its springs on the edge of the Rand through high veld and bushveld to the lush flats of Mozambique. (1940: 118)

In the manner of a classic “monarch-of-all-I-survey” landscape description, which, according to Mary Louise Pratt always involves a “particularly explicit interaction between esthetics and ideology” (1992: 205), Buchan chooses the high ground, indeed one of the highest peaks in Southern Africa, as the vantage point for his panoramic, sweeping view across the entire eastern and northern part of Southern Africa. A vast and unseen territory is appropriated imaginatively as an open, seemingly uninhabited nature park ready to be explored. This fantastic vision of Africa as a light, open pleasure garden stands in stark contrast to other contemporary, less benign views of Africa, exemplified perhaps best by Joseph Conrad's landscape of tropic horror and jungle entrapment in *Heart of Darkness*. The Conradian fear of dark, racially coded jungle entrapment and emasculation is also, as we shall see later, found as a menacing undercurrent in Buchan's narratives. Indeed, the phrase, “heart of darkness” even crops up in *Prester John* where it refers to the underground occult terrors of the Rooirant cave (1975: 119). But in the autobiography these demons are long exorcised and there is no longer any sense of such ambivalence.

Buchan's panoramic vision of Africa as a vast, natural garden is a prelude to the depiction of his real landscape of desire and enchantment, namely the “Wood Bush in the North Transvaal which lies between Pietersburg and the eastern flats” (1940: 119). This landscape, the primary inspiration for all of Buchan's imaginative African writing, is located in the Haenartsburg area east of Pietersburg (now Polokwane) in the present-day Limpopo province. Today a small, easily overlooked bronze plaque on the road past the present Ebenezer Dam commemorates the place of his enchantment. Several lengthy quotations are necessary to give a full sense of the edenic garden landscape that Buchan had vowed were his “true Hesperides” (1903:117). In *Memory*

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Hold-the-Door he describes the place as follows:

You climb to it through bare foothills where the only vegetation is the wait-a-bit thorn, and then suddenly you cross a ridge and enter a garden. The woods of big timber trees are as shapely as the copses in a park laid out by a landscape-gardener. The land between them is rich meadow, with, instead of buttercups and daisies, the white arum lily and the tall blue agapanthus. In each cup is a stream of clear grey-blue water, swirling in pools and rapids like a Highland salmon river. These unite to form the Bruderstroom which, after hurling itself over the plateau's edge, becomes the feeder of the Olifants. Here is the true lodge in the wilderness, with on the one side the stony Pietersburg uplands, and on the other the malarial bushveld. The contrast makes a profound impression, since the Wood Bush itself is the extreme of richness and beauty. The winds blow as fresh as in mid-ocean, soil and vegetation are as wholesome as an English down. I have entered the place from different sides – by the precipitous road up the Bruderstroom, by the Pietersburg highway, from the north along the scarp, and once from the bushveld by a tributary glen where my Afrikander pony had to do some rock-climbing; and on each occasion I seemed to be crossing the borders of a *temenos*, a place enchanted and consecrate. I resolved to go back in my old age, build a dwelling, and leave my bones there.” (1940: 119 -120)

The memories of the “place enchanted and consecrate” are still remarkably fresh and precise for the old Buchan after almost 40 years, given the fact that he never had returned to the Wood Bush, and his dream “lodge in the wilderness” remained unbuilt. But the autobiography is not clear as to why this particular place, despite its beauty, should be so extraordinarily captivating and dear to his heart. The earliest reference to the “earthly paradise” of the Wood Bush is found in a letter to sister Anna, dated 4 January 1903, where he describes the place as a “kind of celestial Scotland”:

I have been over to Wood Bush, an elevated plateau in the Zoutpansberg mountains overlooking the low fever country. I have never been in such an earthly paradise in my life. You mount up tiers of mountain ridge, barren stony places, and the suddenly come on a country like Glenholm. Terrific blue mountains rise to the South, but the country is chiefly little wooded knolls, with exquisite green valleys between. The whole place looks like a colossal nobleman's park laid out by some famous landscape gardener. (Qtd in Lownie 1995: 77-78).

At the end of the letter, he enthuses about the place's remoteness that makes it “fairly inaccessible to the tripper for Saturday to Monday.” Buchan, we remember, valued mountains as a preserve of the elite and had inveighed against the “cheapening” of the wilds by common

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

tourists and day-trippers. Part of the value of the Wood Bush landscape is that it is an exclusive space that preserves class privilege.

A similarly enthusiastic description by the young Buchan of the same locale is found in *African Colony* (1903), his assessment of the future political and economic prospects of the new Transvaal colony:

Hereabouts, when my ship comes, I shall have my country house. There is a place of flat land, perhaps six acres square, from which a long glen runs down to the Letaba. There I shall have my dwelling. In front there will be a park to put England to shame, miles of rolling green dotted with shapely woods, and in the centre a broad glade in which the salmon-river flows in shallows and falls among tree ferns, arums, and bracken. There may be a lake, but I am undecided. In front I shall have a flower-garden, where very temperate and tropical blossom will appear, and in a sheltered hollow an orchard of deciduous trees, and an orange plantation. Highland cattle, imported at incredible expense, will roam on the hillsides. My back windows will look down 4,000 feet on the tropics, my front on the long meadow vista with the Iron Crown mountain for the sun to set. My house will be long and low, with broad wings, built of good stone white-washed, with a thatched roof and green shutters, so that it will resemble a Prazo such as some Portuguese seigneur might have dwelt in old times. Within it will be cool and fresh, with stone floors and big fireplaces, for the mists are chill and winds can blow sharply on the mountains. There will be good pictures and books, and quantities of horns and skins. I shall grow my own wine and tobacco. Rides will be cut into the woods, and when my friends come to stay we shall drive bushbuck and pig, and stalk tiger-cats in the forest. There will be wild-fowl on the lake, and Lochleven trout in my waters. And whoever cares to sail 5,000 miles, and travel 1,500 by train, and 50 over a rough road, will find at the end of his journey such a palace as Kubla Khan never dreamed of. (1903: 119-120)

It would be easy to dismiss this passage as an inconsequential and self-indulgent private fantasy of a day-dreaming, excited, young man, but its magisterial and confident voice and the intensity of the vision are none-the-less striking for a man in his mid-twenties. In Africa, Buchan could imagine what would be near impossible in Britain for the son of Scottish Free Church minister, namely see himself as the lord and master of an immense country estate of his own. In his vaulting ambition, he even places himself, as the imagined owner, in the league of British royalty when he compares his "own" picturesque park to "Chatsworth or Windsor, so perfectly laid out that one could scarcely believe that it was not the work of man" (1903: 117). Buchan gives free reign to his dreams, investing much thought and passion into inventing his dream country house,

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

as can be seen in the detail of the vision concerning the precise planning of the picturesque garden, the type of material and colour of the house and its furnishings. This fantasy would be fully fleshed out in the subsequent *Lodge in the Wilderness* where his Cape Dutch style house with its wide verandahs, cool stone pillars, and warm red tiles has a fine library, a well-stocked wine cellar, and is decorated with an eclectic mix of oriental furnishings, old Portuguese charts, and African game trophies (1906: 17 - 18).

The Wood Bush Picturesque

As might have become apparent by now, Buchan consistently imagined the Wood Bush plateau in terms of the picturesque conventions that dominated popular landscape appreciation in eighteenth century Europe. Buchan uses these conventions in the construction of his fantasy Wood Bush landscape, but also *exceeds* them to arrive at a new, more ideologically suited aesthetic that we may term the imperial sublime. A substantial body of academic writing³ has looked at the cultural history and the ideological implications of the cult of the picturesque. I will not review this material in full here, but a short detour in the argument may be needed here to situate Buchan's picturesque in its proper context. Indeed, according to Bruce Macleod, the replacement of geometric formal gardens towards the end of the eighteenth century with seemingly wild natural parkland "coincided with a mystification of empire" and a naturalisation of Britain's domination of colonial spaces (1999:221).

The picturesque country parks of English squires clearly provide the model for Buchan's dream estate, and they were mostly laid out according to the aesthetic schema codified by enthusiasts such as Uvedale Price, William Gilpin⁴ and Humphrey Repton. The latter was the "famous landscape gardener" Buchan probably had in mind as the imagined creator of his African rural park. The picturesque originally and literally referred to a painted picture of a landscape, particularly in style of Claude Lorraine, Nicholas Poussin and their numerous disciples and imitators. These paintings, and the English landscape parks modelled after them, typically composed the scene as a seemingly natural garden characterised by irregularity, variety and intricacy.⁵ The conventional elements of the picturesque are present in Buchan's Wood Bush: framed by the window of the imaginary house, the eye travels over a scene composed of receding

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

planes of soft, green “rich meadows” that are “dotted with shapely woods” and traversed by “a stream of clear grey-blue water”. Later, in an elaboration of the same landscape, Buchan would also include another picturesque stock element, namely an ancient ruin.⁶ In the centre of the “picture”, there is “a broad glade” flanked by *coulisses* of luxuriant tropical vegetation leading to “a lake” that leads the eye to a luminous, infinite horizon beyond. The lake is not actually there yet, because Buchan is still “undecided”, but later in the paragraph we can see that it has emerged as a firm fixture in the landscape (“There will be wild-fowl on the lake”).⁷ This act of reshaping – literally landscaping – is characteristic of picturesque gardens and often involved the artificial creation of new, improving landscape features such as lakes, and sometimes the removal of visually disturbing elements such as a hill or even a village.

The picturesque landscape park embodies, above all, a proprietary mastery over the land. This includes the power to landscape and reorganise the terrain, and to clear from the field of vision “the facts of production”(Williams,1975:125). Raymond Williams and a whole school of revisionist landscape theorists in his wake have focussed on such a materialist reinterpretation of English landscape, literature and visual art, and Williams' *The Country and the City* (1975) remains the most persuasive account of the spatial politics of the English countryside. Williams shows how an idealised version of the countryside began to efface the harsh economic realities of eighteenth century rural England. In a subversive reading of literary forms such as the pastoral poem, Williams discerns the development of a “structure of feeling” that attempted to compensate for an erosion of traditional values in an increasingly exploitative era of capitalism. Set in an idealised, golden time-less age, these pastoral utopias had the ideological function of screening the cities from “the processes of rural exploitation, which have, in effect, been dissolved into a landscape” (1975: 61). Williams links the rise of aestheticised idealisations of the countryside to the emergence of a “self-conscious observer: the man who is not only looking at the land but who is conscious of doing so as an experience in itself” (1975: 150). The new observer, whether poet, tourist or landed aristocrat, is not a worker on the land. His relationship to the land is not that of an organic, economic connection, but he is a detached observer who views and consumes the land in aesthetic terms. The pleasurable delights of the picturesque landscape are dependent on such a “separation of production and consumption” (1975: 150). In

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

this argument, Williams departed radically from conventional explanations of the rise of English landscape art (exemplified by Kenneth Clark) and attempted to connect pastoral aesthetics with the intrusion of capitalist modes of production into rural, agricultural spaces. Thus “the clearing of parks as ‘Arcadian’ prospects depended on the completed system of exploitation of the agricultural and genuinely pastoral lands beyond the park boundaries (1975: 154). The strength of William’s analysis is thus that it links the emergence of two specific historic spatial practices: firstly, the control over rural peasantry during the enclosure process, and secondly, the development of the picturesque landscape park, a manipulation or “improvement” of nature into an arranged design around the country seat of the landowner.

The mathematical grids of the enclosure awards, with their straight hedges and straight roads, are contemporary with the natural curves and scatterings of park scenery. And yet they are related parts of the same process – superficially opposed in taste but only because in one case the land is being organised for production, where tenants and labourers work, while in the other case it is being organised for consumption – the view, the ordered proprietary repose, the prospect. (1975: 154)

The picturesque landscape park is thus a spatial arrangement that suppresses the facts of production, a space in which rural labour has no place. Its landscape is, according to Williams, a compensatory mechanism which elides the exploitation of rural labour and instead produces a carefully conserved illusion of a seemingly natural, non-contradictory space. As Macleod puts it,

The picturesque knitted together topographical information with aesthetic taste. Regimented territory was given a natural veneer and cultural value which allowed the ownership, production and domination of such landscape to be pleasantly overlooked. (1999: 221)

It is interesting in this regard, that the new English landscape park no longer used the rigid, classical design of Italian or French gardens, but attempted to create an unspoilt natural scene: precisely that which had been destroyed outside the park.⁸

“An Evening on the High Veld”

If the English picturesque landscape park reorganised rural terrain in order to clear from the field of vision “the facts of production”,⁹ Buchan’s colonial picturesque performs a similar clearing of space, but where the primary references to class are replaced, or rather overlaid by references to

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

race. The picturicity of the landscape masked its control over space. Buchan's Wood Bush plateau is an empty, unpeopled African landscape, cleared of black bodies. However beyond the imaginary borders of the park, the terrors of a racialised wilderness lurk. When Buchan briefly leaves the meadows of the plateau and descends into the jungle below, a sense of claustrophobic entrapment overwhelms him: "Every step had to be fought for, the place was hot to suffocation, and I was in mortal fear of snakes" (1903 :118). Like all earthly paradises, Buchan's Wood Bush has its serpent. The actual place in which Buchan becomes entangled with the jungle is, tellingly, Magoebaskloof, named after a local chief who had used the thickly wooded terrain – Buchan's Wood Bush – to resist Boer authority. Chief Magoeba (or more accurately Makgoba) and his people were finally defeated by a mercenary Swazi impi in 1885. Buchan tells the story of Makgoba (Machudi) as follows:

Machudi was a blackguard chief whom the Boers long ago smashed in one of their native wars. He was a fierce old warrior and had put up a good fight to the last, till a hired impi of Swazis had surrounded his hiding-place in the forest and destroyed him. A Boer on the plateau had his skull and used to drink whiskey out of it when he was merry. (1975: 145-6)

Buchan's proprietorial control of the Wood Bush landscape, is as we can see, imposed on an actual, historical scene of black resistance and an ensuing violent massacre. In Buchan's blood-stained Wood Bush, the actual black threat has already been cleared from the landscape, and the memory of the armed uprising can be transformed into a picturesque *banditti* history. The violent territorial displacements of the European picturesque find their colonial correlate in the mutilated and dismembered native body of Makgoba. White colonial power is moreover asserted in a distasteful triumphalist manner, through the conversion of the chief's head into a trophy.¹⁰

If the picturesque could be useful in creating and enclosing cleared white settler estates, it had its limitation in mastering the larger geo-political landscape of Africa. In order to deal with the violent potentiality of the colonial border, the tame, domestic ordering of the landscape according to picturesque conventions was insufficient. The aesthetics of the gentle garden comprising soft meadows and copses, delicate waterfalls and banks of flowers are unable to hold their own, as it were, in the harsher, violent world of the African wilderness. Buchan's Wood Bush landscape

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

seeks to be an enclosed picturesque garden modelled on English estates, and simultaneously assert its vanguard settler presence aggressively and confidently on the colonial frontier. It manages these contradictions and tensions through a hybrid aesthetics in which the homely codes of the picturesque give way to the vigour of an expansive, imperial sublime. At the edge of the escarpment, as the vision turns from the rich, green, homely glens in the foreground to the vast African plains and horizons below, the picturesque submits to the sublime.¹¹

The Wood Bush is then, in effect, an attempt to imagine a wild locale as a picturesque English home and, simultaneously, to triumphantly project a settler presence in the wilderness of Africa.

The Wood Bush “is England,” Buchan insists, only

richer, softer, kindlier, a vast demesne laid out as no landscape gardener could ever contrive, waiting for a human life worthy of such an environment. But it is more – it is that most fascinating of all types of scenery, a garden on the edge of a wilderness. And such a wilderness! Over the brink of the meadow, four thousand feet down, stretch the steaming fever flats. From the cool fresh lawn you look clear over a hundred miles of nameless savagery. The first contrast which fascinates the traveller is between common veld and this garden; but the deeper contrast which is a perpetual delight to the dweller, is between his temperate home and the rude wilds beyond his park walls. (1903: 126-7)

The lamination of the picturesque and the sublime is encoded in the thrilling “deeper contrasts” of the landscape, where the homely delights of the “softer, kindlier” English landscape are reinforced by a sense of awe and horror at the vast, “nameless” wilderness beyond the “brink”. The imagination, unable to fully comprehend the vast, savage wilds of Africa, converts the threatening facts of the unrepresentable and excessive African frontier (“the nameless savagery”) into a distant backdrop. The threatening wilderness of Africa is thus reduced to a sublime prospect that can be safely viewed while standing on the “cool fresh lawns” of the homely estate. The political dimensions of this landscape become clearer in this passage, not only in the telling transformation of the “traveller” into a “dweller”, but in the way the Wood Bush is imagined as a place “waiting for a human life worthy of such an environment”. If perhaps not exactly a completely cleared, uninhabited space, its present black residents are not deemed “worthy”

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

enough to be allowed real ownership of the place. The reference to “demesne” also suggests that Buchan was imagining a quasi-feudal, pre-capitalist ownership of the land, with the implication that local people would be allowed little more status than rural serfs. On the “cool fresh lawns” of Buchan’s imagined estate, the African wilderness is kept safely outside the “park walls”; inside, civilisation reigns in the form of a fine library, Lochleven trout and Highland cattle.

But what is particularly striking, is Buchan’s “perpetual delight” in the “deeper contrasts” of the landscape that articulate themselves both spatially and racially. The English country house set in the temperate parkland on the uplands is juxtaposed with Africa’s “steaming fever flats” and “hundred miles of nameless savagery” in the plain below. Buchan’s tantalizing dream of a receptive, benign African garden landscape, of which he is the sole lord and master, is thus not merely a matter of private dreams and passions, but provides a spatial model with which he can imagine the conditions under which white settlement and rule in tropical Africa are possible. The Wood Bush is not just a screened off estate, but a way of government. The altitudinally differentiated topography (temperate plateau versus hot plains) is then a powerful model for an imagined new racial order in the Transvaal: the settler estates that would strategically occupy the choice agricultural ground on the high veld, and from this vantage point rule over the black reserves in the hot, fever-ridden lowlands. In the Wood Bush, Buchan had found his sharpest frontier.

The inordinate power of Buchan’s dream landscape therefore resides in the way that it deals with the “facts of blackness” and presents itself as a tantalising solution to the contradictions accompanying colonial white presence in the inhospitable wilderness of Africa. Although set in hot, tropical Africa, Buchan’s fantasy estate is a temperate place where the “winds blow as fresh as in mid-ocean, soil and vegetation are as wholesome as an English down.” (1940: 119). In this way the landscape of the Wood Bush allows the settler to enjoy the exotic appeal of tropical Africa and exploit its riches while, at the same time, being safely shielded from its deleterious effects. A thrilling sense of the frontier pervades Buchan’s evocations of the place: it is an outpost of civilisation, surrounded by perilous savagery in close proximity, but yet a safe, enclosed garden. The powerful exhilaration of the Wood Bush landscape is thus constituted by the fact that it is imagined as the seam between white order and black chaos. The intensity of

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

affect which Buchan invests in this dream topography can be understood in terms of a racially coded sublime which contains and displaces the facts of black presence on the land in such a way that white settlement is naturalised in Africa. The “perpetual delight” in the pleasures of the uplands is thus inseparable from the apprehension and horror of the “fever” and “savagery” below. Indeed, it is precisely this “deeper contrast”, the Burkean juxtaposition of dread and delight, that constitutes the essential sublimity of Buchan’s Africa. The intense elation of Buchan’s imperial imagination emerges not only out of a sense of being distant from and safely removed from the dark, dangerous plains below, but also triumphantly rising above this perilous landscape and containing its dangers.

The sublime rapture of Buchan’s extended landscape descriptions of the Wood Bush must then be understood as nothing less than an attempt to imagine a suitable geography for such a new colonial order. The deeply personal and lyrical nature descriptions are thus only seemingly in sharp contrast to the rest of the text’s preoccupation with matters of colonial policy and administration. The sublime enthusiasm of the romantically titled chapter, “Evening on the High Veld”, is therefore not merely a sentimental interlude, but must be understood as an integral part of Buchan’s political vision in *African Colony*. Much of the text takes the form of a seemingly detached and objective political analysis of South Africa that focussed on one main issue: how to establish and maintain a white and predominantly English civilisation and dominion in Africa in the face of an overwhelmingly black population. In effect, Buchan was attempting to understand and solve the fundamental racial problem of South Africa.

One of the immediate problems to be resolved in the colony was the status of the former enemy, the Boer, who had been defeated by the British, with the help of armed African support. Despite his Scottish Presbyterian roots which made affinity with the Calvinist, Bible-reading Boers possible, Buchan was less than enamoured by the Boer’s “old, sluggish Batavian ” (1903: 60) character and his civilisational backwardness. For Buchan the real question was who would rule over South Africa and its black people: civilised, progressive and enlightened whites, or lazy, backward and degenerate whites. Buchan’s African writing is populated with characters that exemplify both types of white men, for example the foppish figure of Peter Japp in *Prester John*

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

who is juxtaposed with the clear-thinking and action-orientated Captain Arcoll. At the same time, Buchan was certain that the success of the new colony and indeed the future of the British empire in Africa would depend on a co-option of the Boers. This meant that the Africans, who had in a sense emerged from the war as co-victors with the British, had to be firmly relegated to the status of a subaltern, subservient workforce, and it is this reconquest of the "native races" of South Africa, that is essentially the story of *Prester John*. The African, according to Buchan, would never attain the civilisational status of Europeans and could therefore not be accorded political rights. He is

as crude and naive as a child, with a child's curiosity and ingenuity, and a child's practical inconsequence. Morally he has none of the traditions of self-discipline and order, which are implicit, though often in a degraded form, in white people ... With all his merits, this instability of character and intellectual childishness make him politically far more impossible than even the lowest class of Europeans. (1903: 290)

With the loyal Boers on the other hand, the empire would secure "one of the greatest colonising forces in the world. We can ask for no better dwellers upon a frontier. If the plateaux of our Central and East African possessions are to be permanently held by the white man, I believe it will be by this people who have never turned their back upon a country which seemed to promise good pasture-land" (1903: 75). Buchan's politics is intimately interwoven with geography: in order to control the "lower races", the aim of imperial policy is to hold the high ground, not only the Transvaal highveld, but also the plateaux in the tropical parts of Africa to the north.

African Colony, written primarily to impress his superiors, was addressed to the political elite and decision makers of his time. Written by a man who had been in charge of land affairs in the Transvaal, the views expressed in it are not inconsequential private musings, but are more than likely to have had an influence on future colonial land policy. Indeed, the complex question of land and the status of Africans had increasingly begun to exercise the minds of colonial administrators at the time, leading Milner to establish the Native Affairs Commission that sat between 1903 and 1905. Buchan's ideas about African labour and the administration of the "natives", together with his sublime vision of the Wood Bush plateau no doubt helped to lay the foundation of a racially stratified colonial order that would find subsequent administrative and

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

legislative expression in the Native Land Act of 1913. The notorious Land Act prohibited Africans to have any ownership or lease of land outside designated reserves, and established the permanent division of South Africa into exclusively white and black areas. The landscape of Buchan's Wood Bush was to be no exception. The temperate uplands around Haenartsburg did in fact become white farmland and much of the plains below were designated as black reserves that eventually came to be the "homelands" of Lebowa and Gazankulu. As Couzens comments, "These were the years when the pattern of land ownership was beginning to freeze in South Africa" (1981: 9).

A Ruskinian Empire

The interweaving of geography, racial thinking and imperial politics is nowhere clearer and indeed more crass than in Buchan's largely forgotten and obscure *Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906). Mainly a static political discussion novel with little dramatic action, save for an excursion to climb the Ruwenzori mountains, it is, compared to Buchan's thrillers, not eminently readable. Even so, it must have found some popular resonance because it was reprinted the following year, reissued in 1917, followed by a belated colonial edition in 1922. The novel is an extraordinary literary homage to Cecil John Rhodes' version of an expansive and aggressive imperialism, and it is a key text in understanding Buchan's conception of empire. In a foreword Buchan sermonises in quasi-religious language that the "Empire is a mystic whole which no enemy may part asunder, and our wisest minds are now given to the task of devising a mechanism of union adequate to this spiritual unity" (1922: x).

In criticism on Buchan the matter of his imperialism is often not satisfactorily treated. The only major book-length study on the question, namely Juanita Kruse's *John Buchan (1875 - 1940) and the Idea of Empire* (1989), provides at best an ameliorative account. While she concedes that "under the influence of Milner, Buchan became an almost fanatical imperialist," this was "an aberration incompatible with his basic attitudes and temperament" (1989: 21). Buchan, after all, was the epitome of a civilised, well-educated gentleman. Similarly, Andrew Lownie, the influential doyen of Buchan scholars, is careful to ignore the racism in *Lodge in the Wilderness*, which he rightly regards as one of "Buchan's most revealing books on the subject of Empire"

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

(1998: 59). Lownie's only two quotations from the novel are vague, romantic platitudes which fall far short of providing any ground for a critical assessment: "[Imperialism is] a key to life, an ideal which will leave out nothing and satisfy the hunger of the heart" (1998: 59); and "You cannot carve an epic on a nutshell or expound Christianity in an aphorism. If I could define Imperialism satisfactorily in a sentence I should be very suspicious of its truth" (1998: 62). Lownie accepts Buchan's idealist views on empire at face value and is thus able to regard him as "far in advance of many of his contemporaries with his view of the empowerment of the individual and the Empire as a liberalising force for good" (1998: 59). The term "race" is completely missing from Lownie's account of Buchan's imperialism. This is not to suggest that the term "racism" should have been used as an insulting epithet in order to dismiss Buchan's ideas, but rather, that a racial/spatial logic should have been diagnosed as the fundamental operative category in his thinking.

While a Darwinian conception of racial difference is a central organizing idea in Buchan's African writing, it is also true that it lacks the crass racism and gratuitous violence of other popular writers of the period. Several key studies of imperial literature have perhaps therefore focussed on richer material in colonial writing, particularly H. Rider Haggard's lurid imperial romances. Robert MacDonald's *The Language of Empire* (1994) and Patrick Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism* (1988) only mention Buchan in passing; Joseph Bristow's *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (1991) contains, surprisingly, no references to Buchan amid discussions of Rider Haggard, G. A. Henty, Conrad and Kipling. Despite the crude racial schema in Buchan's writing where Africans are always less than fully human, and words such as "kaffir", "brute" and "savage" proliferate, his fiction did not depict bloody violence towards natives, as in Haggard's homicidal adventures (for example when Curtis discovers of his Viking past and he starts wielding an ax in *King Solomon's Mines*); or Henty's boys' stories which involve the large-scale decimation of natives. Instead of guns, Buchan's protagonists rely on their superior intelligence, knowledge and cool-headedness to subdue the "black peril", or, after Rhodes, call an indaba to talk sense into the heads of the African chiefs. The black uprising in *Prester John* is thus put down more or less peacefully, and it is the white man's enlightened reason and civilisational superiority, rather than his guns, that

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

manage to bend the “unruly natives” to white rule. Buchan’s educated, patrician outlook and upper-class reserve set him above the crasser, jingoistic excesses of his time, and the high-minded idealism of his politics allowed him to be regarded as one of the “significant exemplars of inter-war decency” (qtd in Schwartz 1997: 93). Even after Gertrude Himmelfarb’s scathing exposé of his racist and particularly anti-semitic tendencies, sympathetic critics such as Janet Adam Smith, Andrew Lownie and David Daniell took pains to present a picture of Buchan that emphasised “his fine intelligence and unusually wide human sympathies” (Daniell 1975: xi) – and emphatically dismissed Himmelfarb’s charge of latent homosexuality. After the First World War, as imperialism became politically more unfashionable, if not offensive to the educated classes of Europe, Buchan would ameliorate the sharpness of his novel’s racial politics and therefore largely escaped being tarred by the racist brush. As Schwartz puts it, “for the past thirty years or more barely a hostile word has been published about him. Indeed he has been recuperated as the rational, civilised gentleman” (1997: 93).

In his autobiography, Buchan was understandably careful to emphasise the positive, affirming qualities of imperialism:

I saw in the Empire a means of giving to the congested masses at home open country instead of a blind alley. I saw hope for a new afflatus in art and literature and thought. Our creed was not based on antagonism to any other people. It was humanitarian and international; we believed that we were laying the basis for a federation of the world. As for the native races under our rule, we had a high consciousness: Milner and Rhodes had a far-sighted policy. The “white man’s burden” is now an almost meaningless phrase; then it involved a new philosophy of politics, and an ethical standard, serious and surely not ignoble. (1940:125)

Buchan allies himself here with Milner and Rhodes, but the “high consciousness” in the idealist imperial thinking of Buchan and these men can be traced back to the ideas of another Oxfordian, John Ruskin, who, despite his relative obscurity today, was one of the most popular and influential thinkers of the Victorian age. His Oxford lectures regularly attracted more than a 1000 listeners, and often went through more than 20 editions. Ruskin’s inaugural Oxford lecture in 1870 is often cited by scholars as a key imperial moment:

There is a destiny now possible to us, the highest ever set before a nation to be accepted or refused. We are still undegenerate in race; a race mingled of the best

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

northern blood. . . This is what England must either do or perish: she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men; seizing every piece of fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on, and there teaching these her colonists that their chief virtue is fidelity to their country, and their first aim is to advance the power of England... (1870: 42)

Ruskin's well-known imperialist exhortation displays the prototypical imperial structure of a dominant, energetic centre and a dependent and subservient periphery, but is also a discourse that is founded on contradictions: the English are at the same time still an "undegenerate" race but also "mingled"; the ground to be seized is "fruitful" at the same time as that it is "waste". But despite the rather crude and obvious imperial schema, Ruskin's critics have mostly quoted him baldly and out of context. Preceding this passage, Ruskin makes it clear that he is fundamentally opposed to the crass materialism marking the emerging global imperial order:

Within the last few years we have had the laws of natural science opened to us with a rapidity which has been blinding by its brightness; and means of transit and communication given to us, which have made but one kingdom of the habitable world... Who will be the king of the world? Will it become an obscene empire of mammon? Or will you, youths of England, make your country again a royal throne of kings, a sceptred isle, for all the world a source of light, a centre of peace; mistress of Learning and of the Arts ... (1870: 41-42)

Buchan's hope for a "new afflatus in art and literature and thought" and his idealist belief that a Milnerite or Rhodesian empire would be based on a "new philosophy of politics, and an ethical standard, serious and surely not ignoble" is directly traceable to Ruskin's prophetic vision.

The effect of Ruskin's imperialism on men such as Buchan, Milner and Rhodes makes it important to examine his ideas more carefully. Ruskin was one of the leading Victorian figures attacking the destruction of spiritual values and social well-being in the face of a burgeoning industrial capitalism and materialism. As the first Slade Professor of Art at Oxford, he elevated the visual arts to the status of literature. Ruskin's work can in this sense be understood a precursor to contemporary cultural studies, for in applying ideas about creativity and imagination from poetry to painting, sculpture and architecture he was not retreating into a highly rarified aesthetic realm of art appreciation, but was brought into direct confrontation with the politics and economic conditions of his day. Judging his contemporary society and culture in aesthetic terms

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

led him (with William Morris) to establish the Arts and Crafts movement which nostalgically valorized the older arts of craftsmanship in order to turn the tide of labour alienation and industrialised forms of mass-production. In his vision of fusing the artist and the workman, Ruskin even went as far as wanting to establish a degree in metal-working at Oxford. Ruskin shared the Marxist concern that the alienation of labour was the root cause of all social evils, but his solution was not for workers to own the material means of production, but to become artists, with creative power over their goods. Ruskin however despised a refined or effete aesthetic sensibility and privileged practical and muscular activity, as exemplified by his celebrated Oxford road-digging experiments where he persuaded the undergraduates in his drawing class, among them the young Alfred Milner, to dig a road (to access a picturesque rustic landscape of "well-placed country cottages") so as to "let my pupils feel the pleasure of useful muscular work" (1903: Vol. 20, p.xii.). Ruskin's passionate condemnation of deadening mechanical labour and loss of cultural value is particularly well articulated in *Unto This Last*, a socialist political manifesto regarded highly by Tolstoy, Gandhi and George Bernard Shaw.

But already in his early *magnum opus*, *Modern Painters*, Ruskin was concerned with the loss and recovery of cultural value through nothing less than a revolution in visual experience. In campaigning for a new visual sensibility, he pitted himself against the primacy of reason, and the logocentric concern with the word. The dominance of a world of words silenced other forms of insight which the study of colours and forms could provide. Ruskin saw himself as a passionate prophet of those "modern" painters (such as Turner) who departed from classic mimesis and in so doing could make our sight aware of the "essences" of clouds, mountains and trees. "Modern" art could enable men to see the world clearly and truthfully again, and these insights could release creative energies.

Ruskin's infamous call to colonisation was then not a straightforward jingoist imperial manifesto aimed at the enlargement of British power, but an ambitious programme aimed at the recovery of those aesthetic and social values which had been lost at home through the alienating effects of industrial capitalism. The colonies were spaces which could compensate for a degraded England in which "we have blackened every leaf of English greenwood with ashes" (*The Crown of Wild*

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

Olive, 1906:185). A year before the Oxford speech, it becomes clear that for Ruskin, colonisation was, to summarise massively, a globalisation of the Arts and Crafts movement:

We may send [the youth] on the truest foreign service, founding new seats of authority, and centres of thought, in uncultivated and unconquered lands; retaining the full affection of the native country no less in our colonists than in our armies, teaching them to maintain allegiance to the fatherland in labour no less than in battle; ... establishing seats of manufacture in the climates and places best fitted for it, and bringing ourselves into due alliance and harmony of skill with the dexterities of every race, and the wisdoms of every tradition and every tongue. (*The Crown of the Wild Olive* 1906:185)

Ruskin's cry, "Back to the land" and his dream of new creative organic communities is only imagined to be possible in the invigorating space of the colonial frontier, with the proviso, that climate and place, as in Buchan's Wood Bush, were "fitted for it".

High Drama

It is the above passage, rather than the infamous imperial call to arms of the inaugural Oxford lecture, that is quoted admiringly in *Lodge in the Wilderness*, Buchan's grand imperial apology. *Lodge in the Wilderness* can be understood as an attempt to elaborate the landscape of the Wood Bush in such a way that its climate and topography would become a model Ruskinian imperial space. The importance of Ruskin for Buchan can be gauged by the fact that he is the only contemporary thinker whose ideas are discussed by the novel's characters, alongside frequent references to classic philosophical ideas of Plato and Hegel. Ruskin and Buchan shared the same university, and although Ruskin had long retired in a mentally deranged state to Brantwood House in the Lake District by the time Buchan studied law, the influence of Ruskin was still, according to Herbert Baker, Rhodes' architect, "ringing in the ears of the University" (1938:10).

In *Lodge in the Wilderness* Ruskinian idealism and imperial realpolitik come together in an extraordinary literary homage to Cecil John Rhodes, who had died 1902, during Buchan's tenure in the Transvaal. The lodge in *Lodge in the Wilderness* is called Musuru, the fictional East African home of Francis Carey, "the most patriotic of millionaires" (1906: 1) who,

exiled in early youth to the colonies for his health's sake, he made a profession of necessity, and secured in short space of time bodily well-being and an immense

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

fortune. Few could trace in the square muscular figure of forty-five the pallid and consumptive boy of twenty. By a singular turn of fate he had stood by the cradle of great industries. He was the pioneer of the richest gold-mining area in the world, and scarcely less famous were his shipping lines, his railways, his newspapers, his teak forests, and his vast tobacco farms. ... And yet in the prime of life, in spite of the wiles of many women, he remained a bachelor. (1906: 11)

The references to Rhodes are unmistakable and barely disguised, especially when we are told that he is responsible for "a vast scheme of education, inaugurated by him, [that] tied the schools of the Colonies to the older institutions of England" (1906: 13). Despite the fact that the rich Carey has many homes at his disposal, including residences in a "scented Kashmir valley", a "bungalow in a Pacific isle", "a fishing lodge in New Zealand", and "a superb farm of the old Dutch style in the Blaauwberg", "his true home ... was his house of Musuru", located "on the scarp of the Mau plateau, looking over the great trough of Equatoria. Here, in the midst of a park of many thousand acres, he lived as Prester John may have lived in his Abyssinian palace" (1906:12).

This grand imperial estate is used by Carey as a conservative think tank in which he gathers like-minded people around him: the coterie of "Careyites" who need to regroup and strategise after the Tory defeat in 1906 when "the name of empire stank in the nostrils of the electorate" (1906: 14). The rise in "the vulgar popular feeling" in Europe which is now "sick of the very name of Empire" (1906: 27) does not however unduly disturb Carey who "trusted the instincts of race and was not sorry that the dross should be purged and the spirit purified by misfortune" (1906:14). Consequently he goes into a retreat at his East African mountain lodge, accompanied by carefully selected guests. They are all well-bred, highly intelligent, assured individuals with more than a dash of Oxford in them, and their conversations and interactions are marked by a sophisticated wit and an easy, urbane manner. The fictional characters include Lord Appin, the defeated Conservative prime minister; Lord Launceston, a former Viceroy of India (modelled on Milner); Ebenezer Wakefield, the Canadian premier; Hugh Sommerfield (Buchan himself); and, surprisingly, several women, such as Lady Gardner (based on Lady Lugard) and Lady Flora Brume (Buchan's then current love interest). Carey is adamant that "if a man is married he must come without his wife, and the same for the woman. We must be unattached, for domesticity ... is the foe of friendship" (1906:15). Buchan's inclusion of women as independent and equal partners

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

in the high-minded discussions of state puts him, incidentally, far in advance of many of his contemporaries, especially those in conservative circles.

Musuru becomes a bastion for the continued faith in the Empire and the novel deals with the interactions and discussions of the Careyite elite. In the discussions about the future of the empire, imperialism is finally defined as

the closer organic connection under one Crown of a number of autonomous nations of the same blood, who can spare something of their vitality for the administration of vast tracts inhabited by the lower races... [It is] a racial aristocracy considered in relation to their subject peoples, a democracy in their relation to each other. (1906: 28).

Buchan's conception of empire is, despite all the high minded idealism, a "racial aristocracy" founded on the brotherhood of white, English "blood" that is the glue binding separate dominions together with each other and with the "Crown". Those who share the "same blood" can live together as equals in a democratic order; the "lower races" need to become "subject peoples" under an elevated class of white settlers and administrators. But such a "racial aristocracy", characterised by the generous and selfless gift of British "vitality for the administration of vast tracts inhabited by the lower races" is only possible in a specific geography whose contours are familiar to us from *African Colony* and *Memory Hold-the-Door*. The location of Musuru, although projected onto the landscape of East Africa, is unmistakably Buchan's "enchanted and consecrate" Wood Bush in the Northern Transvaal.

Musuru is then the prototypical and ideal imperial space in which such a home for such a "racial aristocracy" can be imagined. It is located on the edge of the high rift valley escarpment in the "thin upland air" in a hybrid, ideal landscape "which might be in Scotland" but is also at the same time a Mediterranean park "dotted with shapely copses and full of ... orchards, vineyards, olive groves" (1906: 17). Most strikingly, the house offers an unparalleled prospect view of the African landscape below: "on every side seems to stretch an unknown world, calling upon the adventurous mind to take possession" (1906: 19). Musuru's landscape does thus not only provide aesthetic satisfaction of a grand, panoramic vista, but is also the vantage point for the imperial "possession" and control of the vast terrain below.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Although Musuru is in the tropics, by virtue of its high altitude, it is removed from its unwholesome effects. The geo-political importance of altitude and reaching “the proper vantage-ground” becomes clear in Buchan’s mythical narrative of Musuru’s origin: Carey, who is sick and weak from malaria after trekking through the tropic lowlands of Uganda, ascended a mountain where

there was a fresh, clean wind blowing which put life into my bones, and I stood here at the edge and looked down thousands of feet over the little hill tops to the great forest and on the horizon, which was all red and gold. I knew that there was fever and heat and misery down below ... I realised that the great thing in the world is to reach the proper vantage-ground. I learned that things are not what they seem to the fighter in the midst of them; that the truth can only be known to the man on the hill-top. I realised that the heavenly landscape below me was far more the real Africa than the place of fever and dust I had left. And in that hour I saw my work, and I think, too, the ideal of our race. If we cannot create a new heaven, we can create a new earth. (1906: 31- 32)

In this revelatory passage, the act of climbing to the top of an African mountain confers not only health but also “truth”, and a god-like, visionary power over all the terrain below. The “truth” of the mountain is then that it allows the imaginative projection of “a new earth” as the ideal home for “our race”. Reaching “the proper vantage-ground” becomes a strategic act of geo-political positioning which distances the imperial adventurer from the reality of “fever and heat and misery down below” and allows him to imagine a new “real Africa” that is more real than the actual place he finds himself in. In this discursive sleight of hand, the “man on the hill-top” can transform an actual place of “fever and dust” below him into a “heavenly landscape” that conforms with his desires. In this sense, Buchan’s sublime landscape depends on a fundamental and deliberate mis-recognition: the imagination converts the feverish plains below into a distant vista that is “all red and gold”. The landscape is painted in imperial colours, recalling Rhodes’s infamous desire to paint the map of Africa all red.¹² A similar and even more striking mis-recognition occurred in *African Colony* where Buchan’s fantasy invents a white, civilised landscape that replaced black presence:

As far as the eye could see, the faint blue line of the Rooi Rand, the Portuguese border, was just distinguishable from the sky, with the little fingers of the little

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

Lebombo breaking the thin line to the south. One forgot the weary miles of swamp and fever that lay between, and saw only a glorious sunlit plain, which might have been full of clear river and vineyards and white cities, instead of thorn and kaffir huts. (1903:118)

Buchan's eye is drawn, not unsurprisingly, to the "blue" mountains of the far horizons, but what disturbs the prospect view, if only momentarily, is that which "lay between". This middle ground, the "weary miles of swamp and fever", is converted, by the imagination, into "a glorious, sunlit plain" that has "vineyards and white cities" instead of "kaffir huts". Buchan's "truth" of the mountain is anything but true: the prospect view allows the imagination to invent a "new earth" in Africa and projects a fantasy of civilisation and progress on a terrain that displaces the facts of blackness.

The geography of this new imperial Africa becomes clearer when one of Carey's guests, Lord Appin dreams of a renaissance for the empire in Africa that is based on the permanent occupancy of the high ground: "The colonies occupy only the healthy country and leave the lowlands as dependencies under the central executive" (1906:118). High ground, "fortunately", is plentiful in Africa from the Cape right up to Manicaland, the Shire Highlands, and in "East Africa we have this gorgeous plateau as the vantage ground for the coast strip and Uganda" (1906:118). "Tropical administration," declares Appin, must be necessarily spasmodic, "but not too spasmodic." In order to retain the "mental and bodily vigour" of the colonial administrators who have to labour away in "the great hot flats", there need to be close-by

health resorts where these Englishmen can go when their vitality ebbs and lay in a fresh supply, and where the greater administrative problems can be thought out. They will be what Simla is to India, the workshop of government. They are near enough to be within hail of the lowlands, but they are in another climate, and give a tired man the moral and physical tonic he needs. (1906:118)

The political value of tropical highlands is perhaps most clearly expressed by another of Carey's guests, Lady Wakefield:

If only each hot country had been given a habitable mountain, they would be the only places in the world to live in. On the ordinary upland you dominate the flat country because you are higher up, but here we also look down on the plain

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

because we are wholesome and cool and sane and they are fevered. We are a lighthouse to the whole of Equatoria, and if there were fifty other lighthouses in the Empire there would be no tropical problem. (1906: 113)

The contours of an altitudinally and racially mapped empire are extraordinarily clear here: places of elevation are not only the key to efficient colonial administration in the tropics (“you dominate the flat country”), but are also beacons of light, progress and civilisation in darkest Africa. This stark altitudinal differentiation also implies a crass racial and civilisational divide between the “cool and sane” colonial elite on the uplands, and the “fevered” African population on plains. In this vulgar Darwinian conception, the tropics are seen as places in which the lower races thrive, while the cool highlands are suited for civilisationally more advanced people. On an excursion down from the escarpment, one of Carey’s guests, Lord Asbury (who is a noted mountaineer and can “endure extremes of cold and exhaustion and only finds his energies quickened”) is exhausted and listless. He asks

What does the white man get from the Tropics? His strenuousness goes out of him, and he becomes a heavy-eyed cucumber on the ground. At Musuru I am always thinking about reforming the world, while down here in this place the world can go to pieces for all I care.(1906:108)

The frontier, if it is to be energising and invigorating, cannot be too hot. It needs cool sanctuaries. Only women, who “are more oriental than men” (1906:108) seem to cope better and are more at home in the heat. Living in the hot, low-lying tropics can thus be perilous for the white man, especially if one’s moral and racial character is suspect, as can be seen in Buchan’s telling contrast between Scotsmen and Portuguese: “An eager fellow can live in them for years and be none the worse, but your waster dies. That is why a lean sandy-haired Scot is perfectly happy in West Africa, while a Portuguese sickens at once” (1906: 110).¹³

Interestingly enough, Buchan’s son Johnnie was to find himself in precisely the same situation that *Lodge in the Wilderness* had theorised. As a young District Officer in Ugandan lowlands, he fell ill from amoebic dysentery in 1935 and had to be evacuated to Kenya in order to convalesce in the “high altitude in Naivasha ... marvelling at the contrast and coolness” (Tweedsmuir, 1953: 208). When he discovered trout in the clear streams of the cool upland landscape, the younger

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

Buchan indulged in his inherited passion for fly-fishing, and felt that "Africa fell away, and Peebleshire was there instead" (Tweedsmuir 1953: 210).

Buchan, as we can see, understood the "tropical problem", that is the difficulties of administering Britain's hot, low-lying colonial possessions and settling them with Europeans, primarily in terms of health. Diseases and fevers, particularly malaria, were feared as the prime obstacles to successful colonisation – not armed resistance by Africans, as would be the case in the subsequent *Prester John*. This attention to the political significance of matters of health and climate was by no means unique to Buchan, but was shared by colonial administrators and European settlers across the continent. A large volume of popular and scientific publications attest to public interest in the matter, for example J. Murray's *How to live in Tropical Africa* (1895). Murray called for "the colonisation of a New Africa" based on a sound, scientific study of the "regions physiographically possible for white settlement" (1895: 4). These regions were the African plateaux that could, with the proper attention to hygiene, be transformed into settled, white highlands. In the introduction he paints a rosy, enthusiastic picture of a great anglophile empire in Africa:

to the highland countries along the main axis of the continent we must look out for the most favourable districts of Equatorial Africa; for it is here that for climate as well as political reasons, we have the best chances of personally and effectually controlling the destinies of Africa. (1895: np)

The tropical highlands were important for the future of Empire, primarily because they offered an opportunity to solve the old problem of disease that had dogged previous attempts at colonisation. Murray's vision of a new, modern Africa is very similar to Buchan's idea of an Equatorial empire:

Its pestilential littoral, its higher ague and fly belts – that formed almost insuperable barriers, destroying the lives and marring the health of the few adventurers who laboriously tried to traverse them – are now in process of annihilation by steam. This means, in short, that a central highland region of singular beauty, richness, and fertility, large as Europe, has been thrown open with unprecedented quickness, not merely as a possible, but as an inviting field for European expansion. STANLEY and RHODES did this work for us. (1899: np)

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

The language of Buchan's Wood Bush sublime also resonates with Murray's description of the awesome African interior:

Every thing is on a colossal scale, from its mournful, silent deserts, to its regions of exuberant fertility and teeming life. Desolate wilderness, boundless savannas, illimitable forests, sea-like lakes, mighty rivers, and glorious sunny park-lands, alternate with valleys of ravishing beauty and mountain scenery, sublime in its desolate severity. (1895:16-17)

It is in this mode of expansive imperial vision, that Africa is imagined at its most sublime. Similarly, in Buchan's *Lodge in the Wilderness*, the awe-inspiring, grand landscapes of Africa, seemingly empty of people, are the vast arena for imperial geo-political expansion. Africa is also a site of romance between the young Careyite, Hugh Sommerfield (modelled on Buchan) and the beautiful Lady Flora, but their platonic love is subordinate to the larger imperial matters at hand. At the end of a gallop to the edge of the escarpment, they survey the immense continent below their feet: the Abyssinian highlands to the north; to the west, the Great Lakes and the Ruwenzori mountains; and in the south, the Nyasaland and Shire highlands. Enraptured by the scenery of unfolding, endless space, Sommerfield exclaims: "Well, that is imperialism!" (1906: 68). Darkness, disease and other tropic horrors are banished in a sublime triumph of the imagination.

The landscape of Musuru, like the Wood Bush, is then founded a stark spatial division between the upland and the tropic lowland, and in this way Buchan is able to work out the problem of white settlement in Africa. Montane landscapes offer prospects, in two senses: a cool climate conducive to the creation of agricultural wealth, and a commanding view over lower lying terrain. In Musuru, colonisation and settlement are modelled on Ruskin's ideal of organic communities. Musuru's emigration experiment thus has a settlement of some fifty English working class families who are selected according to "love of the soil". The settlement features "the orchards, the plain substantial houses, the well-made roads, the buxom contentment of the women" (1906: 40). A similar Ruskinian organic settlement is also present, albeit with a significant variance, in *Prester John*.

But *Lodge in the Wilderness*, with its barely fictional central character, Carey, is above all a

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

single-minded homage to the memory of Cecil John Rhodes and his imperial vision. The book as a whole is pervaded with a sense of undiluted adoration of Rhodes that is in a strange contrast to Buchan's subsequent writing on the matter. Rhodes, we must remember, died in Muizenberg while Buchan worked in the Transvaal. His death, while widely expected, shook the whole of South Africa, and the subsequent drawn-out funeral procession from the Cape to the Matopos Hills in the then Rhodesia was the biggest public event yet witnessed in South Africa. Buchan was no doubt deeply impressed by it, and it seems likely that Rhodes' death and the dramatic funeral arrangements were the primary inspiration for *Lodge in the Wilderness*. Yet despite writing an enthusiastic 200 page novel about Rhodes and his political vision, Buchan appears to have subsequently downplayed the extraordinary influence Rhodes had on him.

In a popular history textbook aimed at schoolboys, Buchan describes Rhodes as
a great man, a very great man, and like all great men had his faults and committed blunders. Rhodes' faults were mainly caused by his desire to hasten the course of the British Empire and to push forward the hands of the clock. (1927: 33)

Rhodes' "faults" and "blunders" are not disguised, but the overall tone is exculpatory. It is in his autobiography, that Buchan's harsher views on Rhodes are revealed. His reminiscences of Rhodes are here strangely muted and dismissive, and take up less than a page, compared to an entire chapter on the heroic Milner who is "Plato's philosopher-turned-king, a scholar who in his forties had made history" (1940:97). Buchan's disparaging treatment of Rhodes is odd, given the fact that he had inspired an entire novel. This strange and contradictory fascination with Rhodes has, to my knowledge, not yet been acknowledged in the substantial academic literature on Rhodes, and has only received limited attention in Buchan studies. Both Couzens and Schwarz, whose studies of Buchan's African writing refer to *Lodge in the Wilderness*, note the fact that the fictional character Carey is strongly modelled on Rhodes, but they do not pursue the ambivalent nature of this connection. In the major biography of Buchan, Andrew Lownie's substantial *John Buchan. A Presbyterian Cavalier* (1995), there is not even a single reference to Rhodes. This lapse in criticism can be partly explained by the obscurity of *Lodge in the Wilderness*, and Buchan's later dismissive treatment of Rhodes in his autobiography.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

A closer look at *Memory Hold-the-Door* is necessary here. Buchan mentioned that he had met Rhodes several times in England and that Rhodes had given him “various pieces of advice” that were unsolicited and superficial: Rhodes had, for example, spoken against vanity that “will always let you down” (1940: 113). Buchan conceded that Rhodes was a “great personality” (1940: 113) and had a strong influence on him, but this admission is deflated in the same sentence:

He impressed me greatly – the sense he gave one of a huge but crippled power, the reedy voice and the banal words in which he tried to express ideas which represented for him a whole world of incoherent poetry. I did not know him well enough to like or dislike him, but felt him as one feels an imminent thunderstorm. (1940:113)

With adjectives such as “crippled”, “reedy”, “banal” and “incoherent”, Rhodes’ power is effectively emasculated. Although the last words Buchan would ever write on Rhodes describe him as a “genius thus to brood over a land and have this power over the human spirit” (1940:114), these words appear to be less his own, than borrowed from Kipling’s famous epitaph at Rhodes Memorial.¹⁴

Buchan’s sceptical and critical assessment of Rhodes, written at the age of 65, may be more accurate and believable than the picture which emerges in *Lodge in the Wilderness*. But on the evidence of this hagiographic novel, Buchan was less than candid when he wrote that he did not then know whether “to like or dislike” Rhodes (1940: 113). He had in fact become an ardent, if not fanatical, admirer. The question thus arises how and why Buchan came to disown his youthful enthusiasm for Rhodes and empire. The key text in this regard is the short story “Grove of Ashtaroth”, written four years after the novel. In this supernatural tale, effectively an anti-text to *Lodge in the Wilderness*, Buchan attempts to exorcise the spirit of Rhodes that had exercised such a powerful sway over his imagination and eventually comes to regard him “with an overpowering repugnance” (1997: 234).

“Riddles of Lust and Terror”: Grove of Ashtaroth

In “Grove of Ashtaroth” (1910), Buchan presents us again with the familiar escarpment landscape of the Wood Bush, and a Rhodes-like figure who has taken up residence there in a

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

grand country house overlooking the plains below. The location is not Musuru, but an unspecified place in Southern Africa, and instead of Carey, the text's wealthy mining tycoon is called Lawson. The story is told by a first-person narrator, who is not only a friend and confidant of Lawson, but is also privately critical of the millionaire's ambitions and passions, eventually saving him from his own dark folly. The first-person narrator, with his Scottish ancestry, is clearly modelled on Buchan himself, and the governing tension of the tale is the contrast between the two men.

The story's narrative stance and the adversarial nature of the characterisation already show that Buchan was distancing himself from Rhodes. In *Lodge in the Wilderness*, Buchan had placed Rhodes in his beloved Wood Bush landscape and had installed him as the master of his desired future home, a telling substitutive relationship that reveals Buchan's strong sense of identification with Rhodes. In "Grove of Ashtaroth", Rhodes' hold over Buchan's dream landscape is broken and the Wood Bush can again become a place of true adventure. In this sense, "Grove of Ashtaroth" can be understood as a *transitional text* between *Lodge in the Wilderness* and *Prester John*: the deeply flawed Rhodes figure is catastrophically weakened, to be finally replaced, in *Prester John*, by Buchan's *alter ego*, the young, virile Scotsman, David Crawford, who can now again take up residence in the Wood Bush.

The story begins when the narrator and Lawson are hunting together in the wilds and come across a place that Lawson considers ideal for his home. The extreme spatial contrasts between savage wilderness and civilisation, familiar to us from earlier descriptions of the Wood Bush, characterise the grand landscape of Lawson's fantasy home:

When you come and stay with me, you'll get the best food and drink on earth, and sport that will make your mouth water. I'll put Lochleven trout in these streams – at 6000 feet you can do anything. We'll have a pack of hounds, too, and we can drive pig in the woods, and if you want big game there are the Mangwe flats at our feet. I tell you I'll make a country-house as nobody dreamed of. A man will come plumb out of stark savagery into lawns and rose gardens. (1997: 220)

The more sober-headed narrator owns that he "did not care for the country" and wants to know what his friend sees in the place. Lawson elaborates:

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

I can't quite explain. I think it's the sort of land I have always been looking for. I have always fancied a house on a green plateau in a decent climate looking down on the tropics. I like the heat and colour, you know, but I like hills too, and greenery, and the things that bring back Scotland. Give me a cross between Teviotdale and the Orinoco, and, by Gad! I think I've got it here. (1997: 220)

The narrator privately dismisses Lawson's passion as "a new fad" and explains his infatuation with this hybrid landscape as a manifestation of Lawson's own racial ambiguity: "The two races were very clear in him – the one desiring gorgeousness, the other athirst for the soothing spaces of the North" (1997: 221). The contrasts of the Wood Bush are thus seen in terms of racial difference – not, as we might by now expect, the opposition between black and white, but between Jew and Christian. Lawson, as it turns out, has a secret dual ancestry, both Scottish and Semitic:

Lawson was very proud of his birth. When he first made his fortune he had gone to the Heralds to discover his family, and these obliging gentlemen had provided a pedigree. It appeared that he was a scion of the house of Lowson or Lowieson, an ancient and rather disreputable clan on the Scottish side of the Border. He took to shooting in Teviotdale on the strength of it, and used to commit lengthy Border ballads to memory. But I had known his father, a financial journalist who never quite succeeded, and I had heard of a grandfather who sold antiques in a back street at Brighton. The latter, I think, had not changed his name and still frequented the synagogue. The father was a progressive Christian, and the mother had been a blonde Saxon from the Midlands. In my mind there was no doubt, as I caught Lawson's heavy-lidded eyes fixed on me. My friend was of a more ancient race than the Lowsons of the Border. (1997: 219)

Lawson's mixed blood then explains his strong passion for the "mixed" landscape of the Wood Bush. The desire for the "gorgeousness" of the tropics is rooted in his oriental ancestry; the thirst for the "soothing spaces of the North" is explained by his "blonde Saxon" heritage. The hybrid landscape of the Wood Bush in this sense mirrors the contradictions of Lawson's racial identity. As Lawson elaborates enthusiastically on his fantasies about the dream country house (including plans to bring in his Tintoretto oils and Ming vases from his London residence), the narrator fears that his friend's infatuation with the tropical "gorgeousness" of the place might overpower his sober, Northern restraint: "I told myself, as I turned in, that the Saxon mother from the Midlands had done little to dilute the strong wine from the East" (1997: 221).

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

The sharp binary oppositions that Buchan sets up in his tale between an oriental affinity for the luscious tropics and a western taste for the cool, green meadows of the uplands, are made more complex by the presence of a supernatural, occult force in the landscape. If Musuru had been conceived as the imaginative epicentre of a supremely rational British Africa, "Grove of Ashtaroth" radically reconfigures its sublime imperial arena into a space of gothic horror. The ambiguously pleasurable terror of the gothic, we will remember, can be understood as the aesthetic flip side of the sublime. The gothic, according to Anne Williams, is "pervasively organised around boundaries (and boundary transgressions)" and the "essential situation" of gothic fiction involves a destabilisation of "the border between self and other" (1995: 16). The stable and knowable space of Buchan's colonial border is threatened by an irruption of the irrational. Increasing critical attention has been given to the uncanny in colonial writing, or what Patrick Brantlinger has called the "imperial gothic". According to Brantlinger, the imperial gothic

combines the seemingly scientific, progressive, often Darwinian ideology of imperialism with an antithetical interest in the occult. Although the connections between imperialism and other aspects of late Victorian and Edwardian culture are innumerable, the link with occultism is especially symptomatic of the anxieties that attended the climax of the British empire. (1988: 227)

Buchan's tale can however also be understood to have a proto-modernist awareness of how close the primitive and archaic lies below the thin veneer of civilised values. Brantlinger's analysis connects the occult dimensions of imperialism with the gothic rather than an incipient modernism, and while there are indeed significant gothic elements in many imperial adventure romances, including Buchan's, the term "colonial uncanny" is perhaps better suited to an analysis of this story. Homi Bhabha writes that "the 'unhomely' is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition" (1994:9) and that "the uncanny forces of race, sexuality, violence, cultural and even climatic differences ... emerge in the colonial discourse as the split and mixed texts of hybridity." (1994: 113). The term "uncanny", as Sigmund Freud famously defined it in his 1919 essay, hinges on the play between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. The uncanny (literally, the unhomely) is then not the opposite of homely, but "the class of the terrifying which leads back to

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

that long known to us, once very familiar” (1925: 369-370).

The uncanny in Buchan’s story involves the emergence of an oriental spiritual force that possesses Lawson. Near the place of the intended house, Lawson and the narrator had discovered a “little conical tower, ancient and lichened” in a sacred grove. It is similar to the temple in the Zimbabwe ruins, “but a thousandfold more perfect”. The narrator, clearly captivated by the ancient magic of the place, feels like an intruder:

What right had I, a common vulgar modern, to be looking at this fair thing, among these delicate trees, which some white goddess had once taken for her shrine? (1997: 223)

If the narrator feels unease in the presence of the tower, Lawson is positively possessed: “Lawson had hungry eyes. In his enthusiasm they used to glow and brighten; but now, as he sat looking down at the olive shades of the glen, they seemed ravenous in their fire” (1997: 223). The narrator dispels any connection of the temple to Africa, “the land which they say has no history”,¹⁵ but links the ancient tower to the “Phoenician and Sabeian wanderings, and the ritual of Sidon and Tyre” (1997:224). Lawson’s fancy for a temple of ancient east Mediterranean origin, it seems, is explained by his Semitic blood, and his burning desire to build his dream home near the temple, is then a strange form of uncanny homecoming. As Freud puts it, the “uncanny [*unheimlich*] is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression.” (1925: 394)

The connection between Lawson’s new home and his repressed cultural and blood memory is further elaborated in the second part of the narrative. It is three years later, the dream house has been built, and the narrator returns to visit his friend. Since their last meeting, Lawson’s appearance has however become strangely transformed:

[H]e had grown fat. In place of the lean young man I had known, I saw a heavy, flaccid being, who shuffled in his gait, and seemed tired and listless. His sunburn was gone, and his face was as pasty as a city clerk’s. (1997:225)

At dinner, the narrator finds that Lawson’s personality has similarly changed. Instead of former exemplary manners and abstemiousness, he now “swallowed disgusting quantities of champagne

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

and old brandy” and “cursed the servants with a brutality that left me aghast” (1997: 226). The narrator asks himself what “horrid alchemy in the place had turned a gentleman into a brute?” (1997: 226-7). Lawson has taken possession of his dream house in the African wilderness, but has become possessed himself: the imperial dream has mutated into a nightmare. The colonial *heim* has become uncannily converted into the domain of the *unheimlich*.

The source of Lawson's affliction is of course the haunted tower in the grove, which, as the narrator comes to discover, is a temple of Ashtaroth, “the old goddess of the East” (1997:232). The clue is found in 1st Kings, chapter 11, which describes how Solomon strayed from the righteous service of God and “went after Ashtaroth, the goddess of the Zidonians”. The narrator asks: “Was it not possible that in all Semitic blood there remained, transmitted through the dim generations, some craving for her spell?” (1997:232). The uncanny truth about the grove is eventually revealed at full moon, “the season of ecstasy and sacrifice”, when the narrator follows the sleepwalking, entranced Lawson into the night:

The suddenly from the shadows came Lawson. He was stark-naked, and he wore, bound across his brow, the half-moon of alabaster. He had something, too, in his hand – something which glittered. He ran round the tower, crooning to himself, and flinging wild arms to the skies. Sometimes the crooning changed to a shrill cry of passion, such as a maenad may have uttered in the train of Bacchus. I could hear no words, but the sound told its own tale. He was absorbed in some infernal ecstasy. And as he ran, he drew his right hand across his breast and arms, and I saw that it held a knife. I grew sick with disgust – not terror, but honest physical loathing. Lawson, gashing his fat body, affected me with an overpowering repugnance. I wanted to go forward and stop him, and I wanted, too, to be a hundred miles away. (1997:234)

It is difficult not to read this passage as a classic instance of the split subjectivities that emerge on the colonial borders.¹⁶ Lawson's flawed racial hybridity can no longer contain the contradictions between day-time Anglo-Saxon reason and restraint, and the orgiastic outpouring of Canaanite paganism at night. Dionysian rapture and excess overwhelm and destroy him. The act of masochistic self-mutilation is an example then of the inherent instability of male identities, and represent a catastrophic rupture of the heroic colonial subject. The naked Lawson / Rhodes, in the role of the Maenad, is effectively emasculated and becomes an object of nausea and “physical

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

loathing”. The fracture within the persona of Lawson thus also has an external correlate, in the form of a fundamental break between the two men. Buchan’s former identification and hero-worship of Rhodes is converted into a sense of “overpowering repugnance”.

But in one vertiginous moment, for “one brief second”, the narrator is also in grave danger of being drawn into the abyssal, oriental ritual of the tower:

I seemed to peer into a new world. A strange passion surged up in my heart. I seemed to see the earth peopled with forms – not human, scarcely divine, but more desirable than man or god. The calm face of nature broke up for me into wrinkles of wild knowledge. I saw the things which brush against the soul in dreams. (1997: 235)

Buchan’s narrator is saved when the cock crows and "the homely noises of the earth were renewed" (1997: 235), and on the next day, with the help of Jobson, the practical and solid Scottish foreman, a radical exorcism is performed: the whole grove is cut down and uprooted, the tower dynamited and the whole terrain is thoroughly plowed over by stolid Afrikaner oxen.

“Grove of Ashtaroth” can be read as an attempt by Buchan to exorcise the unhealthy fixation with Rhodes from his life, and also deal with the demons in his own imagination. Such a suggestion might sound far-fetched, but a small detail in the autobiography points us in this direction. In *Memory Hold-the-Door*, Buchan admitted to an odd fascination with Euripides:

I discovered that I did not want any sort of literature, with one curious exception.

This was Euripides. I had never greatly cared for him, but for some obscure reason I took to reading him on the veld. (1940: 117)

The curious anomaly of reading Euripides “on the veld” is more likely than not connected to the Bacchanalian excesses in the Wood Bush. Buchan’s affective response to Wood Bush was, as we have seen in the letter to his sister, and in *African Colony*, a rapturous, ecstatic form of transcendence, coloured, we may speculate, by an enthusiastic reading of Euripides’s Dionysian drama. In “Grove of Ashtaroth”, a cool and detached Apollonian rationality eventually prevails, and Buchan repudiates the excessive spiritual and emotive fixation of his youth. This aversion is also transferred on to the landscape of the Wood Bush, when the narrator exclaims that he “hated this lush yet frigid tableland, where all the winds of the earth lay in wait for one’s marrow”

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

(1997: 221). Buchan's earlier passionate infatuation with the Wood Bush is now, in "Grove of Ashtaroth", simultaneously displaced and converted into its opposite. His sublime delights in the Wood Bush are transferred, with undiminished fervour, on to the racially tainted and discredited figure of Rhodes / Lawson. At the same time, through the autobiographical figure of the first person narrator, Buchan now registers a deep sense of revulsion for the excesses of his youthful ardour.

Buchan's nauseous distaste for Lawson's fetish-worship of the tower can thus be understood in the same terms as his own unhealthy and excessive passions for the Wood Bush landscape. When the sacred tower is finally dynamited to smithereens, this can be understood as an attempt not only to remove Rhodes' hold over his imagination, but also to repress and contain his own irrational affective response to the African landscape in which the figure of Rhodes had become entangled. The Rhodes / Lawson character, through its simultaneous loss of self, and ritual identification with the fetish, becomes part of the daemonic grove. When it is violently obliterated, the Rhodes/ Lawson character is effectively erased from the landscape as well. The Wood Bush, once purged of the uncanny presence of Rhodes, can thus finally, in *Memory Hold-the-Door*, again become Buchan's distant dream home, albeit far removed in space and time. Writing in far off Canada, close to death, Buchan's Wood Bush fantasy is safely contained in the realm of nostalgia and pure memory.

In *Prester John*, published in the same year as "Grove of Ashtaroth", we can however see a more immediate persistence of Buchan's troubled relationship with the previously enchanted dream landscape. Once Buchan's narcissistic identification with Rhodes is overcome and Rhodes' hold over the Wood Bush is broken, the stasis of his abyssal fixation on the landscape can give way to an energetic release of masculine energies. There is virtually no contemplative, self-absorbed observation of the landscape in *Prester John*; instead, the narrative is crammed with breathless, dashing adventure whose hero is always less of a thinker and more of a doer. The young, practical-minded Crawford is never overwhelmed by the picturesque delights of the Wood Bush, and although he lives there, in the fictional village of Blaauwildebeestfontein, he does not take imaginative or physical possession of the land. At the end of his rugged adventure, having made

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

his fortune, he wants “above all things” to leave South Africa and “get home” (1972: 218). And his true home is not the Wood Bush, but “the grey shores of Fife” in his “own country” (1972: 219). For reasons that we cannot precisely fathom, a rupture had taken place somewhere and somehow between Buchan and the place of his enchantment, and it is no wonder that he never returned to it, nor built the home of his dreams. It is perhaps this traumatic loss of a home, that we need to take into account when trying to gauge the full force of Buchan’s remark that “South Africa had completely unsettled me” (1940:128).

Prester John

Prester John (1910) is Buchan’s most famous and popular African text and in this tale, the oriental occult danger of “Grove of Ashtaroth” is substituted by the more immediate peril of a black insurrection that threatens the future of the white man’s country.¹⁷ Strong traces of dangerous occult though remain and infiltrate the idea of a black uprising, most significantly through the device of the “heathen fetich” (1975: 114), the legendary ruby snake collar of Prester John that embodies the power of black Africa to rise up against white domination. The novel has provided rich material for several critical postcolonial analyses, but I will confine myself to a contextual reading that draws attention to the overlooked connections with Buchan’s other African writing.

In *Prester John*, Buchan substitutes an imaginative mastery over the terrain – the sublime sense of exultation and ecstatic transcendence over the facts of blackness (as in *African Colony* and *Lodge in the Wilderness*) – with a more practical and direct mastery over colonial terrain expressed through muscular daring and military action. *Prester John*’s triumph of action over imagination is however not without its costs, for the subdued imagination appears to find an illicit outlet through Crawford’s morbid fascination with the uncanny and the occult. The sublime, as it were, has gone underground, and we can see this literally in the only truly sublime event in the novel: the subterranean “coronation” of the charismatic black rebel leader. It is a scene where sublimity, occult and homoerotic desire come together in a dangerous ritual scene that threatens to collapse the hitherto stable boundaries between self and other, black and white, civilisation and savagery.

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

The action of the novel is built around the conventional opposition between a white hero (Crawfurd) and a black villain (Laputa), but this structure is significantly complicated by a powerful and dangerous identification between Crawfurd and Laputa, the leader of the uprising. Laputa is consistently orientalised in the novel in a way that ameliorates his Africanness, and makes him available as an object of identification: "He had none of the squat and preposterous Negro lineaments, but a Hawk nose like an Arab, dark, flashing eyes, and a cruel and resolute mouth." (1975: 25). Indeed, at the end of the novel, Laputa, "the last of the kings of Africa" (1975: 221) has died heroically, and is no longer a villain. Instead, he is commemorated by an impressive statue. Buchan's description of Laputa's statue is curiously similar to an actual statue of Cecil John Rhodes in Cape Town's Company Gardens:

In front of the great hall of the college a statue stands, the figure of a black man shading his eyes with his hands and looking far over the plains to the Rooirand. On the pedestal it is lettered 'Prester John', but the face is the face of Laputa. (1975: 221)

In a comparative reading of *Prester John* and "Grove of Ashtaroth", Rhodes and Laputa occupy the same structural position as antagonists in the narratives. While not suggesting that Laputa is yet another fictional incarnation of Rhodes in the manner of Carey and Lawson, both Rhodes / Lawson and Laputa are powerful yet uncanny figures that engage in an occult, lunar ritual involving a knife as in the following scene witnessed by the narrator:

There was something desperately uncanny about this great Negro, who had shed his clerical garments, and was now practising some strange magic alone by the sea. I had no doubt that it was black art, for there was that in the air and the scene which spelled unlawful. ... A thick smoke rose of which we could feel the aromatic scent, and when it was gone the flame burned with a silvery blueness like moonlight. Still no sound came from the minister, but he took something from his belt, and began to make odd markings in the sand between the inner circle and the fire. As he turned, the moon gleamed on the implement, and we saw it was a great knife. (1975: 13 - 4)

Both Rhodes and Laputa are deeply ambivalent figures with which identification must at all costs

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

be resisted. As Crawford admits already in the first paragraph of the novel, Laputa “haunt[ed] my sleep and disturbed my waking hours” with “the cold grue of terror” (1975: 7). However, when they subsequently meet again on the plains, Crawford can not keep his appreciative eyes off Laputa’s “splendid proportions” as revealed by the scanty “savage dress”, and admits that he “forgot all else in my admiration of the man”. The homoeroticism of the scene is heightened by a description of Laputa’s “slim and fine” hand that is “more like a high-bred woman’s than a man’s” (1975: 90). Laputa, who inspires both terror and adoration, is a curious hybrid figure in the novel, embodying impossible contradictions.¹⁸ As an educated black man, and a respected minister, he is at home in Crawford’s (and Buchan’s) civilised world, yet, as the atavistic ritual on the Kirkcapple shore reveals, he is also at the same time a “savage heathen”. What is dangerous and unsettling about Laputa is that he is simultaneously at home in the orderly, rational white world quoting Virgil and the Bible, while secretly being a black revolutionary fomenting a violent overthrow of that same order.

On the face of it, *Prester John* is again set in Buchan’s characteristic Wood Bush landscape, marked by the sharp, racialised contrast between a lush highland plateau and the hot, arid wilderness of the plains. Here, the young, nineteen year old Crawford tries to flee his black pursuers:

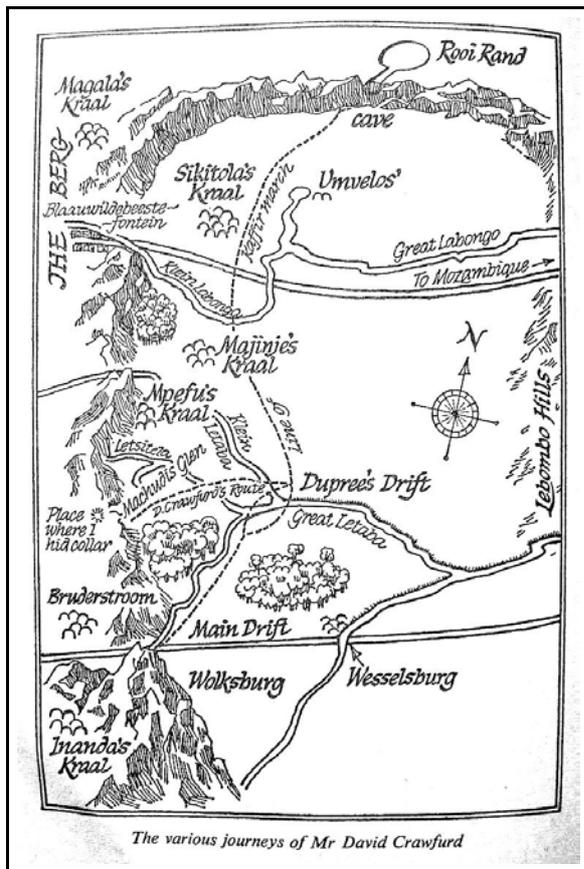
The Berg must be my goal. Once on the plateau I would be inside the white man’s lines. Down here in the plains I was in the country of my enemies. Arcoll meant to fight on the uplands when it came to fighting. The black man might rage as he pleased in his own flats, but we stood to defend the gates of the hills. Therefore over the Berg I must before morning, or there would be a dead man with no tales to tell... [But] I was approaching my own country. Behind me was heathendom and the black fever flats. In front were the cool mountains and bright streams, and the guns of my own folk. (1975: 135, 140)

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

Crawfurd is here attempting to escape from Laputa's army, and as in all of his escapes in the story,¹⁹ it is always upwards, using his mountaineering skills to climb to the safety of the white plateau. The stock phrases of Buchan's Wood Bush landscape ("black fever flats", "cool mountains and bright streams") represent the struggle between white and black as a racially stratified opposition between the mountains and the plain. The spatial configuration of the escarpment (part real geography, part invention) is depicted on the frontispiece map (Fig. 9). It shows the mountains of the escarpment as semi-circular fortress walls enclosing Laputa's black army on the plains.

The spatial opposition between white / high versus black / low is however not only a feature of the Wood Bush, but is more pervasive in the novel. It already structures the first meeting between Crawfurd and Laputa on the Kirkcable shore. The truant boys (among them the younger

Crawfurd) use the cliff heights to observe the daemonic black preacher at his ritual on the shore below. Danger threatens when the boys descend to the shore, and venture, as it were, on Laputa's turf. After their discovery, they escape from the "huge figure, knife in hand, bounding towards us" (1975: 14) by fleeing "up the steep screes ... toiling to the top" (1975:16), eventually reaching safety on the high ground. A similar, racially inflected spatial division, though in reverse, is found on the ship which later carries Crawfurd to Africa. Crawfurd travels in steerage whereas Laputa occupies the upper deck as a first class passenger. The perverse inversion rankles, as expressed by Tam Dyke, Crawfurd's friend: "That black brute must be made of money ... Hang it all, what are



The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

we coming to, when we're turning into a blooming cargo-boat for niggers?" (1975: 29).

Although the landscape of *Prester John* is presented as a stable division between a white upland and black plains, this division is progressively unsettled in the novel, until, at the end it has completely dissolved. When David Crawford eventually arrives at his trading store in Blaauwildebeestefontein to "exploit the pockets of the black men" (1975: 23), he imagines himself as the character Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* who has finally arrived at the "Delectable Mountains" at the gates of paradise:

After many dusty miles by rail, and a weariful journey in a Cape-cart through arid plains and dry and stony gorges, I had suddenly come into a haven of green. The Spring of the Blue Wildebeeste was a clear rushing mountain torrent, which swirled over blue rocks into deep fern-fringed pools. All around was a tableland of lush grass with marigolds and arum lilies instead of daisies and buttercups. Thickets of tall trees dotted the hill slopes and patched the meadows as if some landscape-gardener had been at work on them. Beyond, the glen fell steeply to the plains, which ran out in a faint haze to the horizons. ... The fresh hill air had exhilarated my mind and the aromatic scent of the evening gave the last touch of intoxication. Whatever serpent might lurk in it, it was a veritable Eden I had come to. (1995: 33)

Despite appearances, the edenic plateau landscape of *Prester John* is only distantly related to the sublime evocations of earlier versions of the Wood Bush, even though the views "exhilarated" the mind and produced a "touch of intoxication". It is more in the class of the beautiful than the overwhelming, and its superficial, innocent charms are subverted by a hidden sense of the malignant. The depiction of the "veritable Eden" is incomplete without the reference to the serpent, and we are reminded of Buchan's previously expressed "mortal fear of snakes". Instead of hidden snakes in the bush, though, Crawford finds that the Wood Bush "was crawling with natives" (1975:36) and he comes to the uncanny realisation that he is the subject of secret surveillance:

I would suddenly become conscious, as I walked on the road, that I was being watched. .. I never caught a glimpse of one of the stalkers. Wherever I went – on

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

the road, on the meadows of the plateau, or on the rugged side of the Berg – it was always the same. I had silent followers, who betrayed themselves now and then by the crackling of a branch, and eyes were always looking at me which I could not see. (1975: 40)

His employer also thinks that there is something sinister about Blaauwildebeestfontein that “gives the ordinary man the jumps” (1975: 28). Uncanny effects proliferate in the “ghoulish land” (1975: 62), and we can see that they are evenly dispersed across the landscape, on both sides of the escarpment frontier, when Crawford contrasts the “uncanny bush” of the plains with the “homely streets of Kirkcapple” (1975: 62). The turn towards the uncanny, initiated in “Grove of Ashtaroth”, strongly pervades the novel’s treatment of the landscape and action.

The signs of unseen peril are of course symptoms of the impending black uprising and they unnerve and debilitate Crawford because he cannot do anything about them. This helplessness in the face of invisible danger effectively undermines his manliness: “I was horribly afraid, not only of unknown death, but of my impotence to play any manly part” (1975: 66). The uncanny stasis in Blaauwildebeestfontein finally comes to a head with the “eerie sound” of the native drums that rolls over the landscape. For Japp, Crawford’s foppish boss, the sound means the end to the isolated white frontier settlement of Blaauwildebeestfontein:

A drumming like that I only heard once before. It was ‘79 in the ‘Zeti valley. Do you know what happened the next day? Cetewayo’s impis came over the hills, and in an hour there wasn’t a living white soul in the glen. (1975: 67).

But for Crawford, the drums are also “the voice of that world between which is hid from man’s sight and hearing” (1975: 67). The ensuing action of the novel is then largely centred on Crawford’s dangerous entry into “that world between”. This uncanny, interstitial space not only undoes the sharp binary oppositions of the frontier, but also threatens to unsettle Crawford’s hitherto stable racial and masculine identity.

The place that eventually becomes identified as “that world between” and the epicentre of uncanniness is the Rooirand, and it is worthwhile following the multiple transformations of this extraordinarily unstable space in the narrative. Crawford’s first approach to the place, from below, is marked by a fear of snakes that we have already seen to be strongly racialised: “I was in

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

constant fear lest a black mamba might appear out of the tangle” (1975: 49). After a perilous ascent of the cliffs he emerges “very limp and weary” on a plateau where an unexpected picturesque scene awaits him. It is the idealised dream landscape of the Wood Bush, the site of his fantasy lodge in the wilderness:

I saw a wonderful prospect. It was a plateau like the high-veld, only covered in bracken and little bushes like hazels. Three or four miles off the ground rose, and a shallow vale opened. But in the foreground, half a mile or so distant, a lake lay gleaming in the sun. (1975: 50)

Similarly as in “Grove of Ashtaroth”, the homeliness and familiar comfort of the place is soon disturbed. Crawford discovers that the river which issues from the lake disappears mysteriously underground, and below his “feet came the most uncanny rumbling and groaning ... so eerie and unearthly that for a moment I shivered” (1975: 50 - 51). Eventually Crawford loses his wits and manly courage in the “uncanny cliffs” and runs from the “gully as if the devil and all his angels had been following me” (1975: 52). In an extraordinary transformation, the picturesque surface of the Rooirand is undermined, literally from below, by an uncanny depth. The mysterious subterranean world of the Rooirand is then neither plateau nor plain. It is a third category of in-between space that collapses the stable nature of the frontier landscape, testing the manly resolve and racial integrity of the hero.

The Rooirand, it transpires, is “the headquarters of the rising” (1975: 103) and in the course of the narrative Crawford is required to return to it twice in order to “save the country” (1975: 211). In so doing not only has he shouldered the white man’s duty and shown manly courage in confronting the black insurrection single-handedly, but he also has to confront his irrational fears by entering the subterranean world. Both of Crawford’s forays into the Rooirand cave test him to the fullest and are crucial moments in the narrative. In the first cave episode, Crawford secretly intrudes on a great gathering of black chiefs that had assembled to witness Laputa’s ritual assumption of Prester John’s snake collar, and swear the oath of allegiance. In Buchan’s lengthy description of the elaborate underground ceremony, a sublime emerges that had, in a sense, been banished from the Wood Bush landscape above. Crawford finds himself in a “gigantic chamber” lit by “torches stuck round the wall”. On the side a

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

river fell from the heights into the infinite depth below. The torches and the fire made the sheer stream glow and sparkle like the battlements of the Heavenly City. I have never seen a sight so beautiful and strange, and for a second my breath stopped in admiration. (1975: 106-7)

While Crawford is “enthralled by the majesty of the place” (1975: 108), he is even more “horribly impressed” by the “wild incantation” of the ancient ritual that spoke of “death and life, love and hate, joy and sorrow” (1975: 109). The sublime dissolution of contrasts reaches an apotheosis in the powerful voice of Laputa when he proclaims his grand vision of a “golden age” in which “another Ethiopian empire would arise, so majestic that the white man everywhere would dread its name” (1975: 114). Crawford cannot help being carried away by the sublime force of Laputa’s vision when he admits that “a strange emotion tingled in my blood, half awe, half sympathy” (1975: 113). His “mind was mesmerized by this amazing man” to the point that he “could not refrain from shouting with the rest” and he had “a mad desire to be of Laputa’s party” and be “mastered” by him (1975: 114). Crawford’s whiteness dissolves in the dark insurrectionist passions of the cave and his traumatic loss of identity reaches its climax when he has to take the oath of allegiance. Under the influence of sympathetic magic, the debilitated young hero “staggered crazily to [his] feet, and shambled forward” (1975: 116) but is saved from the oath when he faints and is discovered to be a spy.

At the end of his first Rooirand ordeal, Crawford experiences a catastrophic loss of his male, white identity, resulting in extreme bodily weakness. It is not surprising that after his capture and imprisonment he experiences a stifling “sense of impotence” (1975: 118) that inaugurates an ordeal of “four days’ toil and terror”(1975:185) which leaves him weak and fevered. At the end, though he manages to escape to the freedom of his own people on the plateau, Crawford needs to return to “the heart of darkness” (1975: 119) of the Rooirand to recover his compromised manhood and assert his mastery over his own destiny. Going back to the Rooirand for his reckoning with Laputa “mattered everything in the world”(1975: 190) and the resolute Crawford claims he “had conquered terror and seen the other side of fear.” (1975: 191). The mortally wounded Laputa finally concedes defeat of the uprising and bequeaths the ancient gold and diamond treasure chests to Crawford, not before he has however broken down the stone bridge

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

over the chasm, trapping them both in the cave. After witnessing Laputa's heroic dying words – a quotation incidentally from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* – Crawford, who has by now “quite forgotten the meaning of fear and death” (1975: 195) manages to surmount near impossible mountaineering obstacles, climbing out of the abyss back onto the plateau:

Behind me was the black night, and the horrid secrets of darkness. Before me was my own country, for that bracken might have been on a Scotch moor. The fresh scent of the air and the whole morning mystery put song into my blood. (1975: 206)

At this point in the narrative, the uncanny transformations of the Rooirand have come a full circle. The Rooirand is again a homely landscape of his “own country”, purged of Laputa's presence and the threat of a black uprising. Crawford has endured the dangerous contact with Laputa in the cave and has triumphantly emerged out of the subterranean purgatory. The terrors of the deep have been vanquished and the occult forces of the cave are exorcised, and a rich treasure is there for the taking. Crawford has confronted his inner demons and has emerged with both his manhood and whiteness newly affirmed. The experience, he says,

turned me from a rash boy into a serious man. I knew then the meaning of a white man's duty. He has to take all risks, recking nothing of his life or his fortunes, and well content to find his reward in the fulfilment of the task. (1975: 215)

The order of the frontier can also now be restored again through the military defeat of Laputa's leaderless army. The plateau is cast as a white fortress which holds the black uprising of the plains at bay: “the Plains found at all points the Plateau guarded ... and at every pass which the natives tried the great guns spoke and the tide rolled back” (1975: 208). The stable division of the landscape into white and black is reasserted. Once the war is won, Crawford dynamites open the Rooirand cave and retrieves the gold and diamond treasure. He cannily sells “the diamonds to De Beers” in order not to “upset the delicate equipoise of diamond values” and sails home to Scotland as a rich man “having secured a fortune of a trifle over a quarter million pounds” (1975: 218).

But there is one final, surprising transformation of the Wood Bush landscape that is unprecedented in Buchan's other writing. In contrast to the grand country estate fantasies in

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

African Colony and *Lodge in the Wilderness* which would now be within reach of the rich hero, the Wood Bush is abandoned by Crawford. Instead of a starkly divided escarpment landscape where a white settler aristocracy on the berg rules over the black plains, *Prester John* eventually creates a unitary African landscape. After Crawford's departure, Blaauwildebeestefontein becomes a model settlement, not for European settlers, but for Africans. Both plateau and plain are unified into a progressive black rural community: "you will see in the glens of the Berg and in the plains Kaffir tillage which is as scientific as any in Africa" (1995: 220). Funded by benevolent mining capital (a rich diamond pipe has been found in the area), "a great native training college" together with "playing-fields and baths and reading-rooms and libraries" is established in Blaauwildebeestefontein. It is

no factory for making missionaries and black teachers, but an institution for giving the Kaffirs the kind of training which fits them to be good citizens of the state. There you will find every kind of technical workshop, and the finest experimental farms, where the blacks are taught modern agriculture. (1975: 220).

In Buchan's version of Bantu education, practical skills are everything in moulding "good citizens of the state". Given the experience of Laputa's dangerous qualities, missionary training is out of the question, and neither can the teaching profession be entrusted to Africans. The teacher who benevolently presides over this nascent African civil society is Mr Wardlaw, Crawford's bookish friend from Scotland. In a "queer transformation" (1975: 222), the Wood Bush landscape has been converted into a scene of homely, rural industriousness where the new African farmers "have created a huge export trade in tobacco and fruit" and the "indiarubber business is prospering" (1975: 220). Wardlaw has even "cleaned up all the kraals" and instituted an incipient democratic order: "the chiefs are members our county council, and are as fond of hearing their voices as an Aberdeen baillie" (1975: 221-2). Buchan's Wood Bush has indeed come a long way, and a Lugardian form of indirect rule has supplanted the earlier imperial dreams of white settlement.

"King of Orion" and "The Green Wildebeest"

Before concluding the analysis of Buchan's African writing, we need to briefly look at the two short stories which have not yet been dealt with. The texts in themselves do not contribute to a more complex understanding of Buchan's treatment of the African landscape or his views on

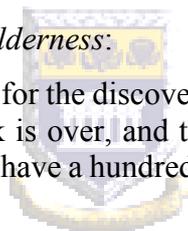
The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

empire, but re-use familiar settings, characters and themes. One of these recurring themes in Buchan's African writing is the mythical Mediterranean pre-history of Africa which includes various references to the Phoenician and Sabeian wanderings, the myth of Prester John's great Christian empire and the Queen of Sheba, and the non-African provenance of the Zimbabwe ruins. Buchan's exogenetic ideas about Zimbabwe are already expressed in *African Colony*:

the old Semitic settlers mingled their blood with the people of the land, and as the trade outlets became closed a native tribe took the place of the Phoenecians [but] the blood of the ancient builders of Zimbabwe still runs, in a very diluted form, in the veins of the Bantu races. (1903:10)

In "King of Orion" (1906), the hero's knowledge of ancient Semitic languages and customs become the key to his survival in an African uprising. The story is told in a frame narrative set in Scottish midlands. It is a hearth-side tale told by one man to another at the end of a day of fly-fishing, and the narrator shares his passion for his African dream landscape that bears close resemblance to the Musuru of *Lodge in the Wilderness*:

I had gone through life with a keen eye for the discovery of earthly paradises, to which I intend to retire when the work is over, and the fairest I thought I had found above the Rift valley, where you have a hundred miles of fair horizon and the weather of Scotland. (1995:74)



The story involves an elderly man called Tommy, who is stationed as a colonial administrator in an unspecified East African town. Similar to the Mr Wardlaw figure in *Prester John*, Tommy compensates for his lack of physical strength by immersing himself in bookish study, particularly the supposed Phoenecian and Sabeian pre-history of Africa. But when a native rebellion breaks out, he alone manages to quell the unrest by addressing the "natives" in their ancestral tongue. As philologist he had studied their language and ancient customs and can therefore talk to them as father to children.

The story "The Green Wildebeest" was written in 1912 and was Buchan's last fictional engagement with Africa. It also marks the first literary appearance of the South African mining engineer, Richard Hannay, the dashing and valiant hero of *Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Greenmantle* and *Mr Standfast*. Through the Hannay character, the prototype of the imperial adventurer who has the world at his disposal as an arena for masculine adventure, Buchan's experiences in Africa

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

continued to exert an influence on his later writing. "The Green Wildebeest" is a tale of an uncanny encounter with mystical, magical Africa in a mountain above Pafuri, in the north of the present-day Kruger Park. A young boer, Andrew Du Preez, thoughtlessly assaults an old African wise man who is the guardian of a sacred source of water. The eerie fountain is set in a dark grove and lined with a parapet of ancient hewn stone. The setting has elements of "Grove of Ashtaroth" and the uncanny Rooirand in *Prester John*, but also again invokes Buchan's theories about ancient ruins left by non-African civilisations:

The spring was nearly circular, with a diameter of perhaps six yards, and what amazed me was that it was surrounded by a parapet of hewn stone. In the centre of the grove there was more light, and I could see that that stonework had never been made by Kaffir hands. I dipped my hand in it and it was as cold as ice. There was no bubbling in it, but ... a surface of darkest jade, opaque, impenetrable, swaying to some magic impulse from the heart of the earth. (1995:87)

The keeper of the ancient mystery of the grove is an "ancient kaffir", but his facial features are "high-boned and regular, like some types of Zulu" and he had "probably Arab blood in him" (1995:85). Du Preez's act of thoughtless violence against the guardian of the fountain eventually unleashes dark occult forces (figured as a giant hoary Green Wildebeest) which destroy him in the end. Of interest to our reading of *Prester John* is the close association of place names. The name of Buchan's invented village, Blaauwildebeestfontein, closely resembles the name of the uncanny fountain of the green wildebeest. The affinity is not only one of name, but also extends to a shared uncanniness of the landscape.

The topos of an enchanted African grove and fountain crops up again in Buchan's writing, namely in the memory of an uncanny bush experience in *Memory Hold-the-Door*:

I found myself in a glade where the brook opened into a wide clear pool. The place was a little amphitheatre; on my left was a thicket of wild bananas, with beyond them a big baobab ... I stopped in my tracks, for I had been here before. Something had happened to me here, and was about to happen again; something had come out of the banana thicket. I knew the place as well as I knew my own doorstep. And then the spell broke, for my mules clattered up behind me. (1940: 122)

The shift in Buchan's conception of the African landscape – from the evocation of grand

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

imperial vistas to an awareness of its hidden, occult properties – is not only registered in his imaginative fiction, but also reflected his autobiographical writing.

Lastly, there is also a pseudo-Buchan, namely J.D.F. Jones's *The Buchan Papers* (1996). In his foreword, Jones tells the story of his "discovery" of an old manuscript in the Barlow Rand archives, written by "J.B" and addressed to the Rand mining tycoon Lionel Phillips (to whom Buchan had actually dedicated *Prester John*). The novel, purportedly Jones's edited version of the manuscript, is the story of a secret African adventure which Buchan could never publish "because it was too close to the diplomatic dramas of the first years of this century" and in it we are given the "answer to the mystery of Kruger's Gold, that romantic myth which has lurked in the corridors of South African history" (1996:10). Jones uses his extensive knowledge of Buchan's novels to create a clever pastiche of historical fact and fabulation that incorporates actual people such as Milner and Chamberlain, and fictional characters that resemble figures in Buchan's later novels (Richard Hannay, Peter Pienaar, Colonel von Stumm). Jones's energetic prose borrows many of Buchan's characteristic turns of phrase and at times reads like paraphrase of *Prester John*:

I came over the Berg as the moon was rising behind the Lebombo. They were gaining on me with every stride, I could hear their steady breathing and the slap of feet on the turf. I snatched a glance over my shoulder and they saw it and hallooed again, almost cheerfully, and several of them brandished their spears at me as though to make promises. I had a deathly dread that I was within their range and in these next seconds would be skewered in the back. That terror must have given me a last infusion of energy, because briefly I seemed to gain on them, and now I could see the brink of the cliff face like a trapdoor opening in front of me. I was far beyond thought, I must have abandoned my life at that moment, because I measured these last yards and I launched myself out over the Berg and into the blackness, spreadeagled into space ... (1997:57)

The recognisability of the language heightens the authenticity of the text, but the resemblance sometimes appears too forced and contrived, and Jones rarely achieves the same effortless stylistic mastery as the genuine Buchan. The adventurous tale of a treasure hunt is set in Buchan's characteristic Wood Bush landscape, although Jones has here implausibly inverted the relationship between the plains and the plateau. The escape from the pursuing natives is, as we

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

have seen above, downwards to the plains.

Conclusions

I have suggested that Buchan's African fictions produced a racialised imaginary topography which overlaid itself on real African space, in such a way as to initially promote and sustain anglophile, colonial settlement in Africa. In this regard height and altitude figured as a marker of colonial ease and homeliness in the African landscape. The landscape in *African Colony* and *Lodge in the Wilderness* is constituted according to such a spatial / racial logic. But Buchan's texts also show that the seemingly clear divisions and borders between mountain and lowland, the temperate versus the tropic, or Englishness against foreignness, and white against black are inherently unstable. The sublime enlarged view, the capacity to simultaneously see and encompass the dangerous, fever-ridden, miasmatic lowland, and subsume its terrors into a divine prospect, is not a secure scenario of control of the self and its senses. Even as the imperial imagination rules the scene, an uncanniness in the landscape disturbs the stability of the frontier. The clear, precise line separating white from black, is continually under threat. In Buchan's later African fictions, particularly in "Grove of Ashtaroth" and *Prester John*, this safe, reassuring dichotomy always threatens to collapse into a third, dangerous, intermediate space in which the borders become dangerously blurred. Topographically, this intermediate space is often interior and subterranean: the dark cave (as in *Prester John* where the hero slips into a confusing identification with Laputa), or the deep jungle gorge as a site of entrapment. This unstable third space disrupts the verities of untroubled male imperial rule.

A careful look at the sequencing and the structural relationship between Buchan's African texts shows that they make use of the same idealised Wood Bush landscape, but that the meaning and significance of the geography is various. Indeed, as will have become clear, the Wood Bush is above all a transformational space in which the relationship between the self, landscape and a powerful Rhodes-like figure is constantly restaged and redefined. In *African Colony*, Buchan appropriates the Wood Bush for himself through his enraptured vision of a dream country estate in Africa. In *Lodge in the Wilderness*, a Rhodes-like figure has displaced Buchan from his beloved Wood Bush, or, alternatively formulated, Buchan's identity merges with that of

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Rhodes/Carey. “Grove of Ashtaroth” begins the anxious process of exorcising Rhodes from the landscape, a process eventually accomplished by dynamiting his fetish from the Wood Bush. In *Prester John*, the self-absorbed, narcissistic stasis in the Wood Bush is broken, and it becomes a contested landscape in which the adventurous hero has to risk his life to save the white nation. At the end, the threat from the plains is defeated and the Wood Bush is won for civilisation. But instead of turning it into the home of the hero, it becomes a progressive African community, albeit under a paternal, supervisory white eye. Only in the much later autobiography, Buchan belatedly reclaimed the Wood Bush as his true home.

An overall assessment of Buchan’s African writing in the end poses more questions than answers. The problem thus remains as to why Buchan eventually abandoned his African Wood Bush paradise. What happened to Buchan that he withdrew from the initial ideal vision of a civilising empire in Africa? The Ruskinian pastoral utopia that occupied Buchan’s earlier fantasies became poisoned and troubled by a profound unease, that, as we have seen, was connected to a sense of an occult, daemonic force in the landscape. I want to suggest that Buchan finally could not adequately dispose of the indigenous meanings of the land, the uncanny traces of history and indigenous knowledge that erupt in the margins of his work. The land carries an intrinsic excess of meanings, either as the surreptitious signs of violent dispossession (such as Makgoba’s severed skull), or in the form of sympathetic magic and powerful occult forces that cannot be brought under the control of the imperial imagination. In *Prester John*, an intangible, indigenous semiotic order remains immune and even superior to Western technology, as seen when Arcoll admits in an aside that “we can’t match their telepathy; but the new type of field telegraph is not so bad” (1975: 84). In “Grove of Ashtaroth” dynamite is needed to literally disperse the gathered forces of ancient occult power, but in “The Green Wildebeest”, Buchan’s last African text, the beast has escaped out of the grove, and with it “terrors older still out of the primordial African shadows” roam dangerously free on the highveld, claiming the life of the possessed young Boer (1995:92). Buchan, we must conclude, can ultimately not contain such an indigenous, subversive semiotic in the picturesque order of his Wood Bush estate, nor assert an imperial sublime vision over the African landscape. Buchan’s sublime must thus be seen not only as an assertive expression of the imperial imagination, but also as an unstable aesthetic that

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

threatens to collapse into an abyssal, dark space of primordial terror. Buchan's imperial imagination had initially created a sublime landscape that set the stage for settlement and colonial possession, but at some point, somewhere on the African veld, the imagination became contaminated by a sense of the uncanny, leading to an abandonment of the Wood Bush.

But if neither Buchan, nor his Rhodesian *alter ego* were to settle happily in the Wood Bush, another famous South African mining tycoon would. In the Duivelskloof area, only a few miles north of Buchan's beloved place, Hans Merensky established himself as a country squire of note. His autobiographer describes the young Merensky's infatuation with the sublime contrasts of the Wood Bush in terms that strongly echo Buchan's response of the same area a few months earlier:

He had seen it for the first time twenty-five years ago, and he often thought back to that magical first glimpse. It made an impression that time had never dimmed. It was in the course of his mineral tour of the Transvaal in 1904 and his destination in the northern area was the gold fields of the Murchison Range. But on the way was Magoebaskloof, and nothing he had heard of this countryside prepared him for the beauty that surprised him from the top of the Magoebaskloof Pass. It was very hot; one of those dry, dusty African days when the heat seemed to be sucked into the ground and forced out again, so that everywhere it was turgid and airless. He was exhausted by the time he reached the top of the mountain, and speechless when the road breasted the last rise and began to drop down on the far side. He was looking into a different world, a cool, green, luscious slice of Paradise it seemed to him. .. Before him the hills stretched far way across the valley in a series of soft, green folds, and forests of trees were banked up in a mass of foliage whichever he looked. There were tall ferns and mossy paths, and countless little streams meandered down the hills. The earth was dark and rich, and the air was no longer scorching hot. It was cooled by the streams and the trees and the tall grass, and smelt deliciously soft. (Lehmann 1955:100-101)

Merensky was the famous German - South African mining prospector and geologist credited with the greatest geological discoveries of his time: the world's biggest platinum deposits at Rustenburg, the world's richest deposits of alluvial diamonds in Namaqualand, the spectacular find of the Free State gold reef, and, finally, a massive conglomeration of valuable industrial minerals at Phalaborwa. After making his fortune by selling his Alexander Bay diamond claims to the state in 1930, he was one of the richest men in the country and soon started to invest his fortune in property, buying up vast estates of impoverished German nobility, among them a

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Silesian hunting estate that belonged to the Crown Prince of Saxony and a 40 roomed manor house in Mecklenburg that was home to the famous Von Bülow family. But Merensky's first and most beloved purchase was Westfalia, an extensive escarpment block of farms near the site of his youthful infatuation. Coincidentally it had briefly belonged to Lionel Phillips, the Johannesburg mining magnate and friend of Buchan's to whom *Prester John* had been dedicated.

Merensky settled in at "Top House", the rustic old farmstead whose wide verandahs gave matchless views of the landscape below, and he continued to add several more farms to the property, until, at his death in 1952, he had accumulated a vast estate on the Berg. He kept an open house and entertained guests lavishly, among them mining magnates, visiting royalty and politicians. General Smuts, the Prime Minister of South Africa, was a frequent visitor. On the estate, the "squire of Westfalia" (Lehmann 1955: 125) embarked on a massive agricultural project to restore the impoverished soils which supposedly suffered under a large number of "native squatters who camped on the farm" and were "causing wholesale destruction". His solution to the "big native population" was simple: "It must be moved" (1955:126). In Merensky's modernist vision, the clearance of his estate of signs of black rural presence was coupled with a paternalistic programme of rural upliftment:

They gathered together on the verandah of the Top House, and listened gravely to his plans ... why he wanted their people to move, where he wanted to give them lands, how he meant to improve their crops ... Solemnly they clicked their approval and nodded in unison. The Doctor was evidently a wise man. (1955: 127)

Like many of his contemporaries, including also Alan Paton, Merensky's idea of modern, scientific agriculture was grounded in an obsessive preoccupation with improving the health of the soil. Native land practices, like pasture burning, the "hoarding" of "unnecessary" cattle, and across-the-contour ploughing had to be eradicated on the model estate. Instead, Merensky embarked on ecologically dubious projects of his own: large scale afforestation of the Berg (exotic aliens such as eucalyptus and pine) that earned him the epithet "The man who is painting South Africa green". Merensky died on his beloved Westfalia, and above "Top House" there is a memorial park where a simple stone slab is surrounded by a grove of German oaks. Merensky's acquisition and development of Westfalia is not only an exemplary instance of the way colonial estates attempted to produce pseudo-European landscapes and in so doing create sense of

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

homeliness in a land cleared of a black, rural presence, but also of the way in which country property for many Rand lords could function as a mechanism to convert *arriviste* mining capital into a semblance of landed "old money".

To conclude this chapter, I would like to briefly look at one of the enduring ironies of Buchan's Wood Bush vision, namely the fact that his dreaded "black fever flats" were soon to become transformed into a "South African Eden" (1937), to use the title of James Stevenson-Hamilton's memoirs of his Kruger Park years. Stevenson-Hamilton, like Buchan, was a Scot, and both were civil servants in the employ of the Transvaal colony at the same time, but there is no evidence that they knew of each other or that their paths ever crossed.²⁰ Stevenson-Hamilton arrived as Warden of the fever-ridden Sabi Game Reserve in 1902, the same year that Buchan had his Wood Bush epiphany. In the following year, Stevenson-Hamilton managed to persuade the government to enlarge the reserve northward into the Singwitsi region, the area that would have been visible as the prospect view from Buchan's dream country estate. Like Buchan, Stevenson-Hamilton conceived of the Low Veld wilderness as a vast hunting area, to be preserved for the sporting exploits of the colonial elite. To this end, Stevenson-Hamilton clamped down on poaching and large-scale "biltong hunting", and cleared the land of much of its black rural population. But gradually, Stevenson-Hamilton began to become converted to the idea of non-utilitarian wildlife conservation. The concept of a purely recreational Kruger Park began to emerge out of the earlier notion of a hunting reserve, and today Buchan's pestilential plains have become transformed into one of Africa's most prized landscapes.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Notes

1. In this vision Buchan owes a considerable debt to John Ruskin's ideas about imperialism and the prospects of English civilisation. Ruskin's ideas are, as we will see, an important intertext to Buchan's African writing and his conception of an anglophile colonial landscape.

2. Buchan unsuccessfully lobbied Lord Cromer for a senior financial post in Egypt. As an outsider to the political and hereditary elites in England, Buchan always remained, as Bill Schwarz has argued, "an *arriviste*" in the power centres of the state, despite his considerable administrative and intellectual gifts. Schwarz also interprets Buchan's proconsular posting to Canada as a "kind of exile from the real centres of power" (1997: 91).

3. See for example Alan Lui's *Wordsworth: the Sense of History*. Stanford: Stanford U.P. 1989, for an excellent study of the picturesque. Also Simon Pugh (ed.) *Reading Landscape: Country – City – Capital* (1990); W.J.T. Mitchell's *Landscape and Power*. (1994); Ann Bermingham's numerous publications, for instance the essay in Mitchell.

4. McCleod makes the intriguing observation that Captain John Bernard Gilpin (1701-76), father of the theoretician of the picturesque and inspiration for the romantic movement, William Gilpin, spent more than twenty years involved in the occupation of Scotland, and that his "passion for landscape sketching, which he passed on to his son, developed in the context of military topography" (1999: 221).

5. See Uvedale Price's essay *On the Picturesque*, particularly chapter IV. In Ashfield and De Bolla (1996).

6. See Buchan's "Grove of Ashtaroth". The ruin, in the form of a Zimbabwe-like tower, is however not simply a decaying, old pile of stones, but is inhabited of an occult power.

7. In his essay, "The Picturesque and the South African Landscape", J.M. Coetzee has drawn attention to the lack of "surface water on the South African plateaux, and the subsequent lacuna in the repertoire of the artist." (1988: 44). Lakes were strongly associated with conventional picturesque landscapes, as for example in the picturesque landscape *par excellence*, the Lake District. The absence of lakes in the South African interior disturbed the application of imported aesthetic schemata such as the picturesque. This complicated the task of Europeans when they tried to represent the African landscape. In Buchan's case his imagination simply invents a lake where none exists.

8. For a useful example of the Palladian aesthetic, see John Wood's *Origin of Building* (1743): "In the Works of the Divine Architect of all Things, we find nothing but perfect Figures, consisting of utmost *Regularity*, the sweetest *Harmony*, and the most delightful

Ideology and Topography in John Buchan's African Writing

Proportion" (qtd in Macleod 1999: 216).

9. John Barrel, in a sense, attempts a similar analysis, not in pastoral literature, but in landscape painting. His title of his study, *The Dark Side of Landscape* (1980), refers to an ideological strategy, evident in paintings, to shift rural labour into the periphery and the shadows of the visual space of the canvas.

A more complex approach to the picturesque, owing more to Foucault than Marx, is Alan Liu's analysis of the context of Wordsworth's loco-descriptive poetry in *Wordsworth: A Sense of History*. Liu reads the emergence of the picturesque in terms of a Whig liberal consciousness investing itself libidinally in a pure landscape evacuated of all distracting narrative meaning. Instead of interest being generated by the narrative elements of a picture (as in religious paintings), the by now arrested, frozen landscape scene had itself to be constructed as worthwhile object of desire. Hence it must have attributes of "variety", "intricacy" and "roughness" to generate and sustain the delights of visual pleasure. Indeed, these qualities eroticise the visual field which becomes a "lamination of eroticism and sadism, intricacy and roughness (1989: 64). In the picturesque, "narrative has been forgotten, passion has no outlet more exciting than the seductive curve of a branch or the rough upthrust of a rock. Passion ends in pure picturicity" (1989: 83). Liu's main point is political though, and he describes the picturesque as an "enclosure act of the eye" (1989: 93) that becomes "in every sense a form of social control ... a ministry out of office, a shadow government" (1989: 90).

10. Significantly, in *Prester John*, Buchan would return to this locale and use the jungle gorge ("Machudi's Glen") as the setting for two highly significant points in the narrative. Firstly, the young hero, robbed of all strength and vitality, is caught by "the remnants of old Machudi's tribe" (1975:141). The gorge still functions here momentarily as a place of entrapment and emasculation, but subsequently, on his forced return, he triumphantly flees up the ravine to escape the leader of the black rebel army, and thereby seal his antagonist's fate. Buchan's "mortal fear of snakes" is similarly transmuted and exorcised when the hero uses the jungle gorge to hide a precious jewel snake ornament from his opponent.

11. The way in which the picturesque slides into a more assertive imperial aesthetics is evident in even small details, such as Buchan's "white-washed" house. Instead of blending the architecture into the landscape, Buchan imagines the house to be highly visible to those below. It would be, as he put it subsequently, more like one of the "lighthouses in the Empire" (1906: 113) shining its light of progress on to the dark plains below. One is reminded of Wordsworth's injunction against the conspicuous and harsh "glare of whitewash" (1977: 69) of buildings in his *Guide to the Lakes*. Wordsworth castigates such "gross transgressions" against the "fine gradations by which in Nature one thing passes away into another" (1977: 72-73).

12. There are several references to this key imperial moment. See for example Sarah Gertrude Millin's *Rhodes* (1933: 31).

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

13. In Buchan's writing the figure of the racially degenerate Portuguese is consistently the object of the highest scorn, for example in *African Colony*. Buchan's distaste of hybridity is here a textbook counter example of Homi Bhabha's valorised version of the concept: "The white man's pride died in their hearts. They were ready to mix with native sons on equal terms. Now concubinage is bad, but legitimate marriage with half-castes is infinitely worse for the 'morale' of the people. And since Nature to the end of time has a care of races but not of 'hybrids' this tolerant, foolish, unstable folk dropped out of the battle lines of life, and sank from conquerors to resident aliens, while their country passed from empire to a vague seaboard" (1903: 30).

14. Kipling's epitaph on Rhodes Memorial is as follows: "The immense and brooding spirit still / Shall quicken and control. / Living he was the land, and dead / His soul shall be her soul!" (1903: 63).

15. Buchan was undoubtedly referring to Hegel's dictum in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1872).

16. Leo Bersani defined masochism as "a particularly powerful force against the concept of unitary selfhood" (qtd in Siegel 1995: 31).

17. Tim Couzens has traced the likely historical influences on Buchan's 'black peril' thinking in some detail, citing six distinct instances of black resistance: Makgatho's Venda-based revolt, the Ndebele-Shona rising in 'Rhodesia', a threatened uprising in Sekhunkhuneland, the Bambata rebellion, and Makgoba's resistance. Couzens however says that "none of these early incidents and leaders were sufficient in themselves to be the sole inspiration of *Prester John*. Rather, some or all gave a *general* context" (1981: 12).

18. We need to remember that hybridity, for Buchan, is always something degenerate, unstable and unlawful, something that should by rights not exist. The presence of the hybrid is troublesome and disrupts the natural order. Hybrids are doomed to fail, as we can see in the case of Laputa's fate or in the case of the Portuguese empire. See also note 13.

19. Escape, as here, is always upwards, and mostly involves mountaineering skill, for example when Crawford flees from Laputa after surrendering the collar, and "figured up a route up the cliff" (1975: 170). Finally, Crawford also manages the perilous ascent out of the Rooirand cave.

20. Stevenson-Hamilton mentions "a number of local burghers returning to their farms, equipped with cattle, sheep and horses, provided through the Repatriation Department" (1993: 30). Buchan was ultimately responsible for these arrangements, and Stevenson-Hamilton is somewhat disparaging about the fact that "Government money was flowing like water" (1993: 30).

CHAPTER 4

Paton's Sublime: Race, Landscape and the transcendence of the Liberal Imagination

During the course of 1944, Alan Paton took a weekend off from his job as principal of the Diepkloof Reformatory in Johannesburg and travelled up the Great North Road in the direction of Pietersburg. Heading off east along an ascending country road, he came through “a countryside where long hills lay like tawny lions in the sun”. As Paton recounts somewhat dismissively in his autobiography, he had come to “the country where John Buchan dreamed up his story of Prester John” (1986: 251). The fine prospect views that had enthralled Buchan left Paton cold; nevertheless, this journey over the Woodbush escarpment was to be an “intense emotional experience” (1986: 250) that became the trigger of the most powerful instance of sublime feeling that we know of in Paton’s writing. In the company of Edith Rheinallt-Jones, Paton had come to the impoverished black reserves of the north-eastern lowveld (below Buchan’s Wood Bush) to inspect Wayfarer troops, a type of African girl guide movement that was Rheinallt-Jones’s pet upliftment project. But what impressed Paton most strongly was the novelty of a genuine inter-racial friendship between Rheinallt-Jones and an African teacher named Mrs Takalani. Paton, whose “own relations with black people were extremely polite” (1986: 252), was struck so forcibly by his first encounter of warm, easy friendship across the “colour bar” that he presented Mrs Takalani with a poem written for the occasion.¹ When Rheinallt-Jones died a month later, Paton was moved to an ecstatic vision of inter-racial harmony that we will later examine in more detail in this chapter. Four years later, Paton would write out his traumatic racial fears in the form of the novel that would make him famous. In *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), Paton’s anxious attachment to the beloved landscape of Ixopo would be the primary object of sublime rapture, but, as I will show, it also presents another form of sublimity, in the form of a powerful black voice that we can trace directly back to Buchan’s famous Wood Bush novel, *Prester John*. Buchan’s Wood Bush sublime in this sense can be thought of to enter Paton’s work in an oblique and displaced manner, not as a landscape but as

Paton's Sublime

the uncanny voice of Laputa that emerges in the political agitation of John Kumalo.

In this chapter, I will be looking at the pivotal role that the sublime plays in Paton's complex and ambivalent response to the South African landscape. I will suggest that Paton used discourses of the sublime to manage and contain the contradictions inherent in the aesthetic appreciation and appropriation of contested colonial landscapes. Paton's use of sublimity is, as I will show, inextricably linked with anxieties about race. In *Cry, the beloved Country*, the sublime is a mode of the liberal imagination that attempts to reconcile the facts of racial injustice and the associated fears of violent racial retribution with white settlement and a sense of being at home in the African landscape. The first part of the chapter will provide a close analysis of Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, in what I think is an unexplored light. The second part will develop approaches to a long forgotten travel narrative that came to light in the course of the research.

Cry, the Beloved Country: "A Story of Beauty and Terror"

The sublime, as Burke tells us, is "productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling". Such powerful emotional forces also accompanied the creative process that gave rise to *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Its origins, in the dark cathedral² of Trondheim, arose, as Paton puts it, from "the grip of a powerful emotion" (1986: 268) and in the following three months of travel across Europe and the USA he was "in a fever to write" (1986: 271) and the story "continued to possess" him (1986: 272). Elsewhere, Paton refers to the "tumult of my emotions" (1986: 269). Upon rereading his own novel twenty-five years later, this same emotion "mastered" him (1986: 272) and, as Paton believes somewhat hubristically, it must have evoked "the same emotion in hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of readers" (1986: 272). In an article titled "Why I write", Paton remarked that: "I have written very little; but what I have written has been produced under compulsions, emotional compulsions"(1950:15). Paton never detailed the exact nature of this passionate and overpowering emotion, as if it was itself beyond discourse. That the novel was able to evoke powerful feelings in many of its readers is without doubt, and even harsh critics such as Stephen Watson, who condemned it as a sentimental, politically naive "tear-jerker" (1982: 39), confirm the novel's emotive force. In J.M. Coetzee's somewhat uncharitable

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

judgment, *Cry, the Beloved Country* only works because of “the intensity of its driving passion” since Paton “had no particular gift for narrative” and his novels “are statically constructed, depending on their effect on character and emotion” (2001: 325).

Not only is the novel entirely suffused with an overpowering affect that overwhelms its author, but the very nature of this emotion is, as in the classical Burkean sublime, a peculiar amalgam of simultaneous delight and terror. Many critics have noted this contradictory and ambivalent nature of the novel’s emotive force, without however using the term “sublime”. As Tony Morphet puts it, the overpowering emotion which pervades the novel is a strangely paradoxical kind of fear which

is a powerful unifying force in the novel, acting almost as a kind of connective tissue within which the shapes and pattern of experience are lodged It is the structural unifier, the common emotion felt and shared by everyone and present in everything, but it is also the destroyer, the cancer which eats away and breaks down the will to do good. The medium in which the story lives is itself destructive. (1983: 4)

Similarly, Andrew Nash’s analysis avoids the term “sublime” but describes Paton’s emotional ambiguity in precisely the ambivalent and contradictory language that is commonly associated with sublimity: “The ‘beloved country’ was to become a source of anguish as well as a source of delight, the threat to its enjoyment was anguish to endure” (1983: 18). Both Morphet and Nash recognise the paradoxical and conflictual nature of this emotion, that, I propose, can be best understood by invoking a postcolonial theory of the sublime.³ As Paton himself puts it in the foreword of the 1987 edition, it “is a story of the beauty and terror of human life” (1988: 5 -6).⁴ The governing tension of the text, already encapsulated in its title, is the overwhelming love for the beauty of the land and a simultaneous fear that destruction and racial violence are imminent. In its primary form, Paton’s sublime involves the simultaneous presence of contradictory and contesting affective forces: an evocation of the rapturous and thrilling delight of African landscape, and, at the same time, the looming presence of the blackness and racial retribution that threaten to destroy the colonial settler order.

An exemplary instance of how the disturbing facts of racial displacement and difference structure

Paton's Sublime

Paton's sublime evocation of the land is found in the well-known opening passage of the novel.

It warrants a more extensive citation and closer analysis:

There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Carisbrooke; and from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest valleys of Africa. About you there is grass and bracken and you may hear the forlorn crying of the titihoya, one of the birds of the veld. Below you is the valley of the Umzimkulu, on its journey from the Drakensberg to the sea; and beyond and behind the river, great hill after great hill; and beyond and behind them, the mountains of Ingeli and East Griqualand.

The grass is rich and matted, you cannot see the soil. It holds the rain and the mist, and they seep into the ground, feeding the streams in every kloof. It is well-tended, and not too many cattle feed upon it; not too many fires burn it, laying bare the soil. Stand unshod upon it, for the ground is holy, being even as it came from the creator. Keep it, guard it, care for it, for it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it and man is destroyed.

Where you stand the grass is rich and matted, you cannot see the soil. But the green hills break down. They fall to the valleys below, and falling, change their nature. For they grow red and bare; they cannot hold the rain and the mist and the streams are dry in the kloofs. Too many cattle feed upon the grass, and too many fires have burned it. Stand shod upon it, for it is coarse and sharp, and the stones cut under the feet. It is not kept, or guarded, or cared for, it no longer keeps men, guards men, cares for men. The titihoya does not cry here any more.

(1988: 7)

Paton's narrative presents the Natal midlands as a landscape deeply invested with affect, as a space intensely charged and suffused with feeling to the point that the capacity of language breaks down (signalled by the word "beyond"). In this characteristic sublime moment of the simultaneous expansion and collapse of discourse, the narrator's lyric reverence in the form of an extended loco-descriptive praise song is insufficient to express the fullness of sentiment. In the narrator's passionate homage, the overwhelming beauty of the landscape exceeds representation and is "beyond any singing of it".

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

At a first glance, this sublime moment represents a classical colonial prospect scene: the authorial narrative performs a survey of the surrounding landscape from a position of elevation. The sweep of the eye first travels across objects of close proximity (“About you there is grass and bracken”), then takes in the far distance (“the mountains of Ingeli and East Griqualand”), but subsequently, in a panoramic, consciousness-expanding moment typical of sublime discourse, moves beyond the visible ground to imaginatively take in the unseen but known landscape of the entire Natal (“from the Drakensberg to the sea”). Following numerous studies in postcolonial criticism (see for example Mary Louise Pratt, David Bunn, Anne McClintock), prospect passages such as this could readily be interpreted as a scene staging imaginative colonial mastery and control over a pliant, subjugated terrain, particularly when we consider that the as yet unnamed vantage point that provides the platform for this expansive gaze is later identified as “the farm and dwelling-place of James Jarvis, Esquire” (1988:112), the English-speaking white farmer protagonist of the novel. Aptly named “High Place”, it is one of the settler farms that commands the high ground adjoining the “native reserve” in the valley below and it is from here that the landowners can look out and control the land below from “the long verandas drinking their tea” (1988:113).

But Paton’s use of prospect rhetoric is not easily readable as a triumphalist imperial gesture in the manner of Buchan’s Wood Bush sublime; in fact the text’s already muted deployment of the romantic sublime is almost immediately undercut by a change in direction of the gaze. It soon abandons the expansive horizontal axis with its views to the far-off mountains and instead follows the vertical plane downward. In almost cinematic fashion, the initial sweeping pan shot cuts to a high-angle shot that then zooms in to a close-up examination of the valley far below. The narrative first describes the condition of the grass and soil on the up-lands, and then the gaze descends into the valley below to reveal the degradation and poverty of the “native reserve.” What unsettles the moment of sublime delight is then the reality of the valley, requiring the eye to abandon the high prospect view and examine the landscape below at ground level (“the stones cut under the feet”). The stark socio-political realities of rural Natal undermine, literally from below, the grandiose, sweeping views which the settler farmers might enjoy. Peter Kohler has also written about the unsettling effect of the opening passage:

Paton's Sublime

For Paton, the locus of the symbolic eye has shifted; the single, winding view which slips across the water and up into the mountains, finally settling in the mist, the God-head, is replaced by an eye that is, momentarily, displaced, bewildered, questioning, reflective.... It is the colonial view displaced (1995: 210)

An overall assessment of the passage, and indeed the novel as a whole, suggests then that Paton's use of the sublime is rather more complex and contradictory. The awe-inspiring and overwhelming sublime effect of the landscape does not merely arise from the beauty and vastness of the land, but is always accompanied by, or rather produced by the underlying facts of blackness and racial difference. The facts of black rural poverty and dispossession, and the potentiality of racial retribution and violence are always inherent in Paton's imagining of the sweeping, beautiful landscape. The structure of Paton's sublime, effectively a Burkean lamination of "beauty and terror", heightens the sense of loveliness and poignancy of the landscape by imagining its loss in the racial conflict that threatens to engulf South Africa. This juxtaposition of "beauty and terror" becomes a structuring motif in the novel, for example when the narrator asks:

Who can enjoy the lovely land, who can enjoy the seventy years, and the sun that pours down on the earth, when there is fear in the heart? Who can walk quietly in the shadow of jacarandas, when their beauty is grown to danger? (1988: 67)

In the striking image of the jacaranda, Paton shifts the focus from brightness and comforting sunshine to darkness and danger. The jacarandas, exotic trees whose purple blooms are conventionally associated with many white urban landscapes on the South African highveld, are no longer the merely beautiful, restful, leafy avenues that provide delight for the eye and cool shade for residents. Paton sees them as threatening avenues of fear and their shade is less a refuge than a dark place of potential danger.

This theme is also found in an untitled article, written at Anerley on the Natal South Coast soon after the publication of *Cry, the Beloved Country*. In it, Paton sketches the troubling racial

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

landscape of South Africa, and ends with a quotation from his own novel:

We white South Africans, are a conscience-troubled people. Not all our colourful fruits and birds, our beauties of mountain and plain, our long hours of sun, our mineral and other wealth, can distract us from graver, deeper, more anxious thoughts. What I wrote in 'Cry, the Beloved Country' is the plain and simple truth: 'The sun pours down on the earth, on the lovely land that man cannot enjoy. He knows only the fear of his heart.' (n.d.: PC 1/8/1/1/16)

This structure of denied joy and fearful beauty arising from "graver, deeper, more anxious thoughts" can be discerned in one of the signal passages in the novel that can almost be read as an anti-sublime, repudiating the rapturous delight in the "beauties of mountain and plain" of the South African landscape:

Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear. Let him not love the earth too deeply. Let him not laugh too gladly when the water runs through his fingers, nor stand too silent when the setting sun makes red the veld with fire. Let him not be too moved when the birds are singing, nor give too much of his heart to a mountain or a valley. For fear will rob him of all if he gives too much. (1988: 72)

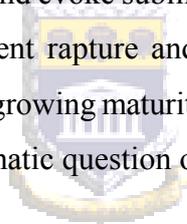
But although the narrative compellingly foregrounds the dangers of giving oneself to the seductive aesthetic pleasures of the land, there is, in the act of disavowal, a simultaneous passionate evocation of this very same landscape. Even here, in this repudiation of aesthetic pleasure, a lingering sense of the romantic love and delight in the land is not completely obliterated by the underlying threat of a racial cataclysm. Paton's sublime, to use Tony Morphet's words, "keeps the full force of contradiction alive" (1983:6).

Youthful Ecstasies

The degree to which a political awareness of race in *Cry, the Beloved Country* intrudes on and

Paton's Sublime

disrupts a more innocent romantic vision of the land is remarkable if one considers that only five years before, as Paton admits, he had still “clung to the irrational idea that one could maintain white supremacy and yet be just” (1986: 240). This political stance, as we shall see, is not entirely absent in the novel. Indeed, traces of Paton’s politically “irrational idea” conceal themselves in the sublime moments of the text, perhaps precisely because the sublime itself exceeds the rational. When Paton started to abandon his supremacist political position, partly due to his experiences at Diepkloof reformatory and serving in the Anglican commission that had been tasked “to define what it believed to be the mind of Christ for South Africa” (1986: 238), this had irrevocable and painful consequences for the way he could imagine the South African landscape. Paton’s growing awareness and intense emotive response to the racial problems of South Africa are, in effect, the motor driving the shifts in his aesthetic appreciation of the “beloved country”. His capacity to write and evoke sublimity shifts from its roots in an initially romantic, youthful and politically innocent rapture and delight in the landscape to a more complex aesthetic response that reflects a growing maturity and a sustained engagement with the politics of the land, in particular the traumatic question of race.



The development of Paton’s youthful sublime is described in some detail in the autobiography *Towards the Mountain*:

I cannot describe my early response to the beauty of the hill and stream and tree as anything less than an ecstasy. A tree on the horizon, a line of trees, the green blades of the first grass of spring, showing up against the black ashes of the burnt hills, the scarlet of the fire-lilies among the black and the green, the grass birds that whirred up at one’s feet, all these things filled me with an emotion beyond describing. ... I was much older before I responded, and no less intensely, to the beauty of the plain and sky and distant line of mountains. (1986:4-5)

In this passage, Paton refers to two distinct aesthetic modes that shaped his earlier responses to the landscape. The first, corresponding to the period of his boyhood rambles in the veld around Pietermaritzburg, revels primarily in the textures and minute details of nature, an impulse that

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

would continue to shape Paton's later amateur interests in ornithology and botany, fields in which he would become highly competent. Traces of this aesthetic mode repeatedly influence the descriptions of nature in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. It is also an aesthetic that was shaped, from early childhood, by a sustained and intense exposure to romantic literature, especially Robert Burns and R.L. Stevenson. Later, while studying at Natal University College, he would imbibe the larger English canon of poetry. Together with a group of "boy-men" (1986: 63) they would read the poetry of "Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Tennyson, Browning" (1986: 63) and recite verse while romantically rambling through the Natal midlands on excursionary walks.

The later, more developed sublime of "the beauty of the plain and sky and distant line of mountains" involves a grander, more expansive vision that goes beyond the minutiae of natural details and the self-absorbed recitation of verse. It is more directly a source of the landscape descriptions in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, such as in the novel's opening paragraphs. We can trace the development of this sublime to the late 1920's, the period of Paton's teaching in Ixopo, where the recently graduated young man fell in love with Doris, a married woman who was later to become his wife. On the excursionary walks they went on together in the surrounding hills, Paton's passion for his first true love must have fused with the ardour he already felt for the landscape of Natal.⁵ "I was in love with the countryside and its bracken and its mists" (1988:101), Paton writes, and was "[w]alking the hills with an energy that is limitless" (1988:102). He writes of "the intensity of response to this magic country. ... The Ixopo countryside laid me under a kind of spell" (1988:85).

But this landscape, as it is initially described in *Towards the Mountain*, is not yet the truly sublime space that it would become in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. While undoubtedly inspiring passion and delight, it lacks the elements of imagined fear and traumatic loss to give it its sublime pathos. As Paton concedes, his youthful ardour was completely evacuated of any sense of political awareness around the question of land ownership and a social concern about the people whose land it once was: his "great love of the country ... was in those days not a love of its peoples, of whom I knew almost nothing" (1986: 56). It is only Paton's later political

Paton's Sublime

understanding that would introduce the painful idea that the beauty of the landscape was threatened by the facts of racial injustice. Indeed, the rolling hills of Ixopo could only become recuperated by the imagination as a sublime space after they had, in reality, become a lost landscape. The language of the following passage, fed by this sense of loss and yearning, is instantly recognizable as part of the sublime discourse of *Cry, the Beloved Country*:

Much of the beauty of the Ixopo countryside has gone, because the grass and the bracken and the rolling hills and farms have in large part given way to the endless plantations of gum and wattle and pine, and the titihoya does not cry there anymore. (1986: 86)

The landscape of Ixopo, as Paul Rich has pointed out, is written out of nostalgia as it was even then “written on the crest of a profound economic and social transformation in rural Natal which had important consequences for the landscape” (1985: 56).

An unfinished and unpublished story written by the younger, largely unpoliticised Paton offers us another intriguing glimpse into the pre-sublime Ixopo landscape. “Secret for Seven” (written in the early 1930's) deals with the marriage of Mary Massingham, daughter of an old, genteel, landed Natal family who falls in love with and marries Charles Draper, son of a carpenter. The problem set up in the narrative is not so much one of violating class distinctions (landed old money marrying working class), as the matter of Draper's swarthy mother whose racial identity is dubious (“A dark-skinned woman about whose descent kindly tongues did not enquire”).⁶ The theme of miscegenation and race is clear in the moment of crisis: Mary gives birth to their first child, who turns out to be black skinned. Major and Mrs Massingham arrive and Draper, who must break the news to them, resolves to disown the child, giving it to Catholic nuns. The story ends unfinished, as if Paton is unable to resolve the intractable problem of race.

Of more interest to my argument is the setting of the story. It is, prototypically, the same spatially and racially divided colonial landscape of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, contrasting the high ground occupied by white settlers with the low-lying reserve of the Zulu people:

A world apart; for when the mists came down over the mountain, they cut off

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

white from black with their level line. Up here the swirling mist, & wattles dripping eerily in it, & gates looming suddenly out of it; down there clearness & stars, & the cries of natives from kraal to kraal, & lights here & there from hut and hut. Up here the farms of white people, houses, wireless, mist; down there the lands of blacks, huts, singing, & stars. ... She [Mrs Massingham] and her daughter would sit on the verandah of 'Emoyeni', looking down on the valley below at a different world. For there lived the natives in their reserves, a land where no mist came & no bracken grew & no titihoyas called; where the earth was red, & the thorn-tree and the aloe flourished, a hot country where colours were more vivid & sounds more loud.

The similarities to *Cry, the Beloved Country* are striking but so are the differences. 'Emoyeni' is Zulu for 'High Place', but the low-lying "reserve" here is not yet recognised by Paton as the degraded land that speaks of dispossession and racial injustice. Compared to the white farms that are isolated from each other in the cold, swirling mists of the uplands, the reserve is a scene full of song, warmth and vibrant life. It is a happy, exotically colourful locale as opposed to the hunger-stricken, rural labour-pool of Ndotsheni. It is clear that "Secret for Seven" cannot achieve the sublime juxtaposition of *Cry, the Beloved Country*: the urgency of human suffering and tragic awareness of racial oppression is missing from a scene that is more akin to a tourist postcard.

"Unspeakable sorrow and unspeakable joy"

In *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Paton is then fully aware of the stark, racialised divisions of colonial space which produce, on the one hand, elevated settler landscapes of transcendent and wholesome beauty, and on the other, environmentally degraded lowlands of African poverty, malnutrition and social dysfunction. The novel diagnoses the causes of rural poverty and environmental degradation as being rooted in the wholesale colonial dispossession of Africans from their land. As the novel puts it in Arthur Jarvis's words: "We set aside one-tenth of the land for four-fifths of the people" (1988:127). The problem however is that despite the novel's trenchant analysis of the colonial land question, settler farms such as Jarvis's "High Place" are presented as benign, custodial spaces that somehow respectfully combine agri-business with the

Paton's Sublime

preservation of the edenic, natural or imaginary pre-colonial wholeness of the land, keeping it “even as it came from the Creator.” Such an account cannot but validate the right to continued ownership. So even as Paton’s novel eloquently exposes the injustice of colonial land dispossession and indeed foregrounds the intrinsic structural connections between white wealth and black poverty, his sharp critique of the colonial land question results in at best paternal, ameliorative interventions (supply of milk to malnourished children), or gradualist environmental upliftment which can only fail to change the basic inequitable racial structure of land ownership. Although the novel incorporates and even validates a more politically radical critique gesturing towards revolutionary systemic change (John Kumalo and the agricultural demonstrator), these voices ultimately can not shake the affective force of Jarvis’s love for his land that dominates the novel. Owning and retaining the “High Places” is non-negotiable in Paton’s liberal vision of South Africa. Through the figure of Jarvis’s orphaned grandchild, who is allowed to recuperate from the menace of Johannesburg’s racial violence on the family farm, the novel can indulge in the fantasy of continued patrilineal inheritance of white colonial property in Africa. It is an escapist agrarian political solution that nostalgically seeks to validate and revitalise a vanishing paternal rural order of just and strong but compassionate gentlemen farmers, and loyal, simple and honest African rural folk.

In his sublime, Paton is thus able to admit and contain the disturbing facts of blackness, but in such a manner that the overall sense of identification with the land and colonial ownership is not displaced. Paton’s sublime, as it finds expression in *Cry*, is then less about the rapturous effect of indescribable natural beauty, but rather represents that tenuous and illusionary moment in the white liberal imagination where an impossible oneness with the beloved land can be imagined. In a transport away from the trauma of social and political realities, South African white guilt and responsibility are temporarily suspended in a purely affective space in which the subject can be momentarily redeemed in the presence of God’s creation. Such sublime moments of settler transcendence were becoming less sustainable in the contested landscape of South Africa, and Paton’s other expressions of sublimity invoke fantasies of political and social utopia, of a “promised land” rather than the land itself. Indeed, in arguably the most powerful deployment of sublimity in Paton’s *oeuvre* – the description of the funeral of Edith Rheinallt-Jones⁷ – the

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

sublime has shifted completely away from the landscape and finds itself in a social event that promises a glimpse of a future non-racial society:

Black people, white people, Coloured people, European and African and Asian, Jew and Christian and Hindu and Moslem, rich and poor, all came to honour her memory, their hates and their fears, their prides and their prejudices all for this moment forgotten. ... As for me, I was overwhelmed, I was seeing a vision, which was never to leave me, illuminating the darkness of the days through which we live now. To speak in raw terms, there was some terrible pain in the pit of my stomach. I could not control it. I had again the overpowering feeling of unspeakable sorrow and unspeakable joy.⁸ (1986: 252 -3)

In this passage, the opposites that structure South African politics, here conceived of primarily in terms of race and religion, merge into a sublime Kantian *Aufhebung*. But it is primarily racial difference and the illusionary moment (“a vision”) of its dissolution into an imaged oneness that is the primary emotive force here in Paton’s imagination, for he can conclude that he “was no longer a white person but a member of the human race” (1986:253). Paton’s use of the sublime, as we can clearly see in this passage, is founded on a simultaneous recognition of racial difference (he writes not of “people” but defines them as “Black”, “white” and “Coloured”) and the collapse of these racial categories. The result is an ecstatic and painful loss of identity that is “unspeakable” and resists full representation. Paton’s sublime, as we can see, has fully shifted from the evocation of a beloved landscape to the thrilling vision of the promised land of racial harmony. Of course, the multi-racial homage to Jones that gives rise to Paton’s sublime feelings reaffirms the centrality of the good white liberal who selflessly “gave her money, her comforts, her gifts, her home, and finally her life” (1986:253) in the service of black upliftment. The liberal political vision of South Africa is ultimately affirmed rather than challenged.⁹

“Africa dark and savage”

But this mode of transcendence – which we might call Paton’s utopian sublime – is but one mode of sublimity. It is counterbalanced by another form of rapturous transcendence, a sublime that replaces the vision of racial harmony with the terror of racial retribution. As the novel’s narrative moves from the degraded, yet orderly rural world of Natal to the modern urban setting of Johannesburg, we encounter John Kumalo’s powerful black African voice:

There are those who remember the first day they heard it as if it were today, who

Paton's Sublime

remember their excitement, and the queer sensations of their bodies as though electricity were passing through them. For the voice has magic in it, and it has threatening in it, and it is though Africa itself were in it. A lion growls in it, and thunder echoes in it over black mountains. (1988:158)

Kumalo's voice, just as the vast, rolling expanses of the African landscape of the novel's opening paragraphs, has the capacity to achieve sublime effect. His voice is the landscape of "black mountains", it is "Africa itself". His consummate oratorical skill is, in the words of a white security policeman "like the great stop of an organ. You can see the whole crowd swaying. I felt it myself" (1988:161). Paton's description of Kumalo has a curious resemblance to John Laputa, the revolutionary preacher in Buchan's *Prester John*. As we have seen in the beginning of the chapter, Paton was aware of the novel and had most certainly read it. Not only do both characters share a common first name, but both are black revolutionaries preaching African liberation. But most tellingly, they share a powerful, mesmeric voice that enralls their black audience, and even casts a spell on white bystanders (Crawford and the white security policeman). While Paton likens the Kumalo's voice to "the great stop of an organ", Laputa's voice "played upon the souls of his hearers as on a musical instrument. At will he struck the chords of pride, fury, hate, and mad joy" (1972: 113).

The simultaneous awe and horror that the voice of Kumalo inspires can be traced, I suggest, to the ambivalent figure of Buchan's Laputa. In both cases there is a dangerous sense of identification that needs to be resisted. On the one hand, Kumalo's message of liberation is in agreement with Paton's own views. His speech pleads for economic justice, and for higher wages for the workers on the rich goldmines: "We ask only for those things that labouring men fight for in every country in the world, the right to sell our labour for what its worth, the right to bring up our families as decent men should" (1988:159). He also suggests that workers should use their only weapon, namely withholding their labour. This is hardly revolutionary stuff, in fact Arthur Jarvis's treatise spells out much the same: "It is not permissible to mine any gold, or manufacture any product, or cultivate any land, if such mining and manufacture and cultivation depend on their success of keeping labour poor" (1988:126). But in a revealing illiberal moment, the

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

narrator twice contemptuously describes Kumalo as a man lacking intelligence, a “bull voice” without brains. So what is it about John Kumalo that makes him the target of aggressive disparagement? Why is he depicted as the stereotypical uppity black man whose rhetorical accomplishments are but a thin veneer over a primitive mind? The key is not in what Kumalo actually says, but what he could say should he want to. The fact that the narrator fears Kumalo despite his politically agreeable message, suggests that, in Paton’s imagination, the figure of Kumalo slips into the more dangerous figure of Laputa. Inherent in Kumalo’s oratorical mastery is thus the threat of powerful racial incitement and a native uprising: his voice could “paint for them pictures of Africa awaking from sleep, of Africa resurgent, of Africa dark and savage” (1988:158).

If John Kumalo’s speech-making contains the germs of a violent black uprising, the archetypal stuff of white South Africa’s fears, it also holds the promise of a future black liberation, a goal Paton was publically committed to. Indeed, it is this very political objective that the entire thrust of the novel is ostensibly directed at. But Kumalo’s brand of ethnically defined, worker-lead liberation is fundamentally at odds with Paton’s paternal Liberalism that still sees responsible and enlightened whites (such as Edith Rheinallt Jones) as the central agency for effecting change in South Africa. In the “white man’s burden” argument of Arthur Jarvis’s treatise, white colonisation destroyed the old African tribal system and “[o]ur civilisation has therefore an inescapable duty to set up another system of order and tradition and convention” (1988:127). White leadership is thus ultimately required to repair the ill effects of colonisation and lead black Africans into an orderly and rational South African modernity. In such a political vision, revolutionaries such as Kumalo must necessarily be represented as a threatening and destabilising force. In the figure of Kumalo, Paton allows us to imagine a form of transcendence that conjures up images a future mass uprising and of black freedom – a revolutionary sublime that simultaneously appals and fascinates.

An overall look at the sublime in Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country* shows that it is a key discursive structure that shapes the text’s complex and ambivalent representation of South

Paton's Sublime

Africa's politicised landscape. Although the term "sublime" is itself not used in the novel, Paton, reread through this critical lens, emerges perhaps more creditably as a writer intensely alive to the complex politics of race than has been allowed by his numerous critical detractors in the late 1970s and 1980s.¹⁰ Paton's imaginings of transcendence do not evade the racial and colonial trauma of South Africa, but rather embody these very tensions and shape them into an ambivalent and contradictory affective force that can, I think, be best understood in terms of the sublime. Put differently, the sublime that so powerfully pervades Paton's "story of beauty and terror" is unthinkable without the spectre of racial violence as its driving force. Paton, as we have seen, evokes sublimity in different ways in his writing, ranging from a youthful, innocent rapture in the land to a more mature and complex compound of overwhelming terror and exultation that accompanies visions of either racial harmony or of racial cataclysm. But while Paton's sublime is fed by the fear of a looming racial conflict, it also manages to contain that very fear and transcend its terror. Racial difference and its political consequences are the forces that produce Paton's sublime, but paradoxically, these sublime moments in the text manage and contain the very fears that have produced sublimity in the first place in such a way that intensify the affective force of his love for the land into an ecstatic affirmation of belonging.

Paton's Kalahari Narrative

Another fascinating perspective on Paton's use of the sublime is his Kalahari narrative, the only travel writing that we know of in his *oeuvre*, and a major text that has, extraordinarily, remained unpublished to this day. The story of the writing and subsequent suppression of Paton's Kalahari narrative, a significant work of South African travel literature, allows us insight into the complex relationship between memory and disavowal, and the trauma of racial politics in South Africa. Paton buried this text and memories of the episode because, as I will suggest, it contained

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

politically problematic material that could dent his liberal, non-racial reputation, as well as expose serious and painful flaws in his capacity to see, understand and make sense of an African landscape and its people. These inadequacies revealed themselves sharply around the controversial figure of the Bushman,¹¹ and in this regard, Laurens van der Post played an important though unwitting role. Furthermore, Paton's writing shows a disturbing debt to colonial travelogues and adventure romances, with Rider Haggard, in particular, casting a long ideological shadow over Paton's imagination. These influences, connections and discontinuities allow us significant new insights into the work of a major South African writer and as such, warrant much closer attention.

In 1956, Paton set out on a curious and ultimately unsuccessful expedition to find a mythical 'lost city' in a remote range of mountains deep in the Kalahari desert. Armed with a "side arm" and ammunition against dangerous wildlife and natives, Paton, together with six other amateur adventurers from the Natal Midlands, embarked on the grandly titled "Natal Kalahari Expedition" in search of the ruins of a lost, ancient Mediterranean civilisation. Setting out on 26 June 1956, they travelled in an old five-ton truck whose "engine boiled continuously" and frequently broke down, covering almost 3000 miles in the process, mostly on bad roads and vague, sandy tracks. The expedition was led by a Nottingham Road farmer and old East Africa hand, Major D.C. (Jock) Flower, but its main driving force was Reginald (Sailor) Ibbetson, a Hammersdale farmer, who was obsessed with G.A. Farini's curious 1886 book, *Through the Kalahari Desert*, and was determined to find the ruins of the "lost city" that Farini, an American showman and cattle-rancher had allegedly seen. The other members of the party were Keith Walker, a Michaelhouse College Physics teacher, who was to act as the navigator, and three garage men, Brian Pole, Pole's father and Len Tree, who came along as drivers and mechanics. Paton's duties were set down as "scribe and bottle-washer" according to a lovingly detailed, six page long typed list of camping and expedition equipment, that was found, posthumously, in Paton's copy of Robert's *Birds of Southern Africa*. The document sets out the object of the expedition ("To find Lost City, by truck and foot patrols") followed by the conspiratorial injunction that everything had "to be kept secret", though Ibbetsen appears to have outlined his grandiose plans to any journalist who cared to listen.¹² Among the equipment and provisions taken along were items such as sleeping

Paton's Sublime

bags, haversacks and great coats, two cases of brandy and copious amounts of food. Besides the army biscuits and milk powder, there were “200 lbs of mealie meal”, presumably to feed the native auxiliaries, and seeing that this was a Natal expedition, there was also curry powder. The list ends with a curious item: “Knives and Mirrors for Natives”, indicating that the expeditionaries expected to barter cheap trinkets while making their way through the desert.

At first sight, the Natal Kalahari Expedition and Paton's role in it appears to be more at home in the antiquated realm of nineteenth century romance fiction and colonial travelogue than in the second half of a twentieth century, modern South Africa. Despite initial doubts as to the historical veracity of such an incongruous and eccentric affair, the account of the expedition was not just a quaint piece of imaginative fabulation, as might reasonably be assumed, but actually did happen. *Life* magazine sent along a photographer, Terrence Spencer, on the Kalahari trip, but never published any of the hundreds of Spencer images. As far as can be ascertained, only one Spencer picture [Fig. 10] saw print in *Time*, accompanying an unrelated book review. Spencer would later become a famous rock celebrity and showbiz photographer. Both Ibbetsen and Harold Pole took film footage, and Pole's material has since come to light. It is a 20 minute long colour film, possibly the earliest film footage of Paton in existence, that shows the author and his fellow expeditionaries walking around the Kalahari bush. Furthermore, there was extensive press coverage, as several articles in the *Natal Witness*, *Sunday Express* and *The Argus* attest.¹³ But even in the press reports, the “facts” of the expedition often border on the realms of the fantastic.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape



The *Natal Witness* for instance reported on its front page that the “all-Natal expedition” hoped to “make archaeological history”, and that “the 22ft diesel truck ... will be fitted with a grapnel to enable it to pull itself out of the deep sand” (1956, June 25).

But the real question raised by this odd expedition is the following: what was South Africa’s world famous author of *Cry, the Beloved Country* and recently elected chairman of the Liberal Party doing on a colonial-style adventure in Africa, spending almost a month on the back of a decrepit truck travelling through the Kalahari wastes with men he hardly knew or had anything in common with?¹⁴ And why was a major liberal public figure and progressive intellectual sinking a not insubstantial sum of his own money into the discovery of a fabled “lost city” in the heart of darkest Africa, an irredeemably colonial and ideologically dubious objective? This was a time in South Africa, it is worth remembering, that had just seen, earlier in 1955, the bitterly contested destruction of Sophiatown which Trevor Huddleston, a close friend of Paton,¹⁵ played a major role in resisting. Later in that year, there was another watershed event which drew the battlelines between the state and progressive forces: the Kliptown People’s Congress that adopted the

Paton's Sublime

Freedom Charter. The government subsequently reacted by arresting more than 150 ANC and Congress Movement leaders, leading to the first treason trial. It was a tense period in South Africa, with a rigid and powerful state under Strijdom and Verwoerd rolling out the programme of grand apartheid without regard to domestic and international protests. Paton became increasingly drawn to adopting a more active political role in mobilising protest against discriminatory laws. He helped to organize funding for the trialists' defence, activities that culminating in his brief arrest in December 1956. In his second autobiography, *Journey Continued*, Paton writes that the

year 1956 was a notable year in the life of the Liberal Party in Natal. In spite of the fact that we had withdrawn from the Congress of the People, our relationship with the South African Indian Congress and its Natal division grew very strong indeed. ... I myself spent many of my weekends away from home, travelling to almost every town in Natal, and to many in the Transvaal, to speak at large protest meetings against the Act. (1986:158)

In the context of Paton's progressive political stance and his energetic contributions to the anti-apartheid struggle (the Defence and Aid Fund which he helped to found played an crucial role in sustaining resistance and mounting legal challenges to the apartheid state well into the 1990's), the Kalahari expedition appears to have been a naive, politically dubious and intellectually backward colonial adventure. It seems curious that the 53 year old Paton, a major literary and public figure in South Africa, would take a month off from a demanding international and domestic schedule of speaking engagements and political meetings to play boy scout in the bush.

But it could also be possible that Paton was in need of a complete break from the pressures of South African politics and the demands placed on him as a public figure. While he had been attending the Kent College commemorative celebrations in Connecticut earlier in the year, and would fly to New York later in 1956 to receive an award, these international visits did not necessarily provide a respite from the trauma of South Africa because he invariably travelled as an engaged South African. In his speeches, sermons, conversations and seminars, both at home and overseas, he consistently addressed his country's racial problems. The Kalahari journey could provide Paton with a momentary escape from the traumatic political problems at home. In the

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Sunday Express, he writes with anticipation that the explorers “shall be in the desert and do not expect to see any white man, to read any newspaper, to send or receive any message, or to hear any political speech”.¹⁶ Paton was clearly relishing the thought of not having to think or engage with the increasingly depressing political realities of South Africa.

While it would be easy enough to attribute Paton’s great Kalahari escapade to a temporary flight from the trauma of South Africa, or perhaps to a belated mid-life crisis, or even to a thrill-seeking escape from a difficult marriage, the contradictions and disjunctures around this episode are more complex and involve, as we shall see, the seductive nature of myth and the allure of stories rather than only biographical circumstance. In order to understand these apparent contradictions in Paton’s life, a more detailed look at the Kalahari papers and their context are necessary.

Besides the already referred to list of equipment and provisions, Paton’s Kalahari papers¹⁷ contain a rough diary whose tattered pages and often jumpy handwriting suggest that it was partly written on the moving truck; two hand-drawn maps of the route; a detailed account of the daily and cumulative milage; and an incomplete diary written by someone in the party other than Paton (possibly Flower or Walker). There is also a short telegraph Paton sent to the *Natal Witness* on the 5th July 1956 from Ghanzi:

truck brought down heavy branch of camelthorn which smashed canopy and came to rest inches from heads of keith walker and self party well cheerful very dirty paton

The swashbuckling bravado of the text suggests that Paton was revelling in the danger and excitement of the adventure. But the most important text in the papers is a substantial 52 page manuscript in Paton’s handwriting that provides us with a rivetting account of the month long journey. This travel narrative contains evocative descriptions of the vast desert and bush landscape and detailed observations of the people of the Kalahari. With a self-deprecating sense of humour the text relates the arduous of travel and the series of misfortunes that befell the party. Not dated, nor titled, this narrative (hereafter cited as *N*), was obviously written after Paton’s return, possibly for international magazine publication. It is a polished and fluently written text, showing evidence of an accomplished writer at work with full command of his creative powers.

Paton's Sublime

An initial answer to the question as to why Paton joined the quixotic quest for the lost city lies in the power and suggestive force of text and story-telling. As Paton suggests in the opening paragraphs of his narrative, he came under the mesmeric spell of Ibbetson's beguiling story and the mysterious aura that he wove around Farini's book. A lengthy quotation is necessary to give a sense of the Paton's enchantment:

I picked up Sailor Ibbetson on the main road from Pietermaritzburg to Kloof. He was a nice-looking young fellow with clear blue eyes, a ruddy face, and a powerful body, though he was little above medium height. I do not know how he came to mention the Kalahari, but it was clear at once that he was a fanatic.

"It's the dream of my life to go there," he said, "and to find Farini's lost city."

"Farini?" I said. "Who's Farini?"

In 1884 Mr. G.A. Farini, an American cattle-rancher, was visiting Coney Island when he made the acquaintance of Gert, a half-breed hunter from South Africa. Gert had gone to New York as interpreter for a party of "Earthmen", small people from the Kalahari.

Gert's account of the Kalahari, its grass-covered plains, its teeming game, and its diamonds, determined Farini to visit this paradise that he had always thought to be a desert. He spent several months there with his son Lulu, observing people, plants and animals, and making notes for his very readable book "Through the Kalahari".

Near the end of his journey he camped beside "a long line of stone which looked like the Chinese Wall after an earthquake." But it turned out to be a man-made wall, built out of worked stones. Farini and his son spent two days there, excavating pavements, and convincing themselves that here indeed had been "a city, a place of worship, or the burial ground of a great nation, perhaps thousands of years ago."

"Haven't other people tried to find this lost city?" I said.

"They went to the wrong place," said Sailor. "They looked too far to the south."

"Where are you going to look?"

He looked at me out of his blue eyes, and uttered the magic name.

"The Aha Mountains," he said.

"Why them?"

"I flew over them once," he said, "from Windhoek to Maun, and down below me I saw a clearing, and in the clearing a series of parallel walls, and I said to myself, that's the lost city."

...

"Will you take me on your expedition?" I said.

"It's done," he said. "You'll never be sorry. We can't fail. We'll find the lost city." (N:1-4)

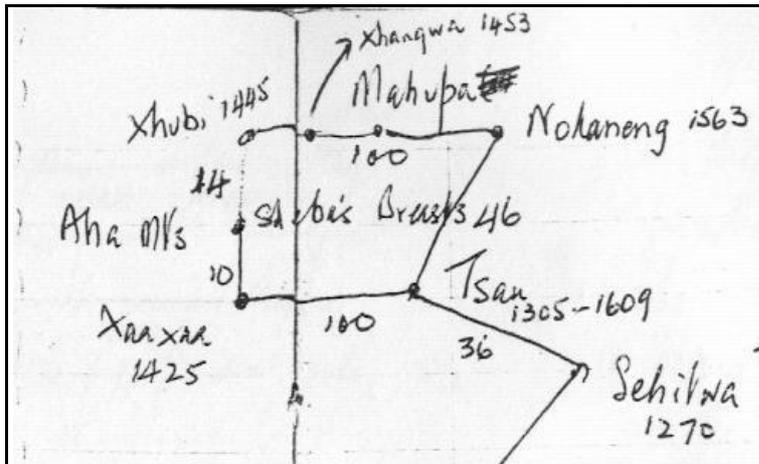
The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Fragments of stories are tantalisingly embedded in other stories. Like a Chinese box riddle, Paton's narrative constitutes a puzzle of Gert's, Farini's and Ibbetsen's stories, all revolving around a central mystery. The stock ingredients of the adventure romance tale are all in place: the chance meeting with an enigmatic stranger who possesses secret knowledge (and shares it), the tantalising prospect of revealing an ancient mystery that would "shake the world" (N:6) and win them instant fame, and the opportunity to travel to unknown, remote landscapes and discover riches which had lain there for ages. Transfixed by the power of words, Paton is instantly enthralled, as can be seen in the sublimely awing affect on Paton when Ibbetsen mentioned the place Tsabong: "He said the name as though he were striking a great brazen gong" (N: 7-8) Paton, on his way home to comfortable suburbia in Kloof, is confronted by the irruption of the exotic, mysterious and romantic and made the impulsive decision on the spot to follow in the footsteps of Farini.



In its plot structure and characterisation, the narrative follows many of the generic conventions of nineteenth century quest narratives, for example the fact that it is an all male group of explorers comprising stock characters: the military officer with a distinguished war record (Maj. Jock Flower), the quiet, bookish schoolmaster (Keith Walker), and the two ginger haired mechanics, working class men capable of hard drinking but nevertheless utterly solid. Paton for example describes Len Tree as a "rough fellow as true as steel. He was a small man with a tremendous moustache" (N: 10). As in all quest narratives, there are many obstacles and trials the party has to undergo before reaching their destination. The problems mainly centred around their vehicle. Ibbetsen originally had a brand new seven ton Leyland Albion truck "in the bag," pressed on him by the "British firm anxious to advertise their product" (N:6). On setting out, Ibbetsen could however only produce a slightly used five tonner. Already on day of departure there was "dismay at the amount of oil used" and on the next day, three miles out of Winburg, there was "a horrible noise in the engine" (anonymous diary) which necessitated its complete removal in order to replace a broken crankshaft. Mechanical failures continued to dog their progress and the improvisational skill and ingenuity of small town mechanics from the Natal Midlands – as well as the provisions of whiskey¹⁸ – proved invaluable to keep up morale. It is a major credit to the party's resolve that despite constant mechanical failures and intermittent breakdowns they pushed

Paton's Sublime



on.

Sheba's Breasts

But it is the topos of the “lost city” that situates Paton’s narrative not only within the broader story-telling conventions of colonial romances, but link it to a specific text, namely H.

Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon*

Mines (1885). Haggard’s bestseller tells the story of three adventurers, Sir Henry Curtis, Captain Good, and the narrator, Alan Quatermain, who venture into the unknown African interior. Guided by an ancient parchment map, they hope to discover the fabled site of King Solomon’s diamond mines. Both Haggard’s and Paton’s texts revolve around the quest of a male band of adventurers travelling through a desert in search of a lost city that was originally built by ancient Mediterranean colonists. In both texts, the ruins of a lost city are located in a mountainous, remote landscape. A central feature of Haggard’s story is, as David Bunn and Anne McClintock have shown, an eroticised mountain landscape dominated by the twin peaks called “Sheba’s Breasts”. This allegorical landscape, rather than the nubile charms of the Kukuana maidens, provides surrogate titillation for the Victorian imagination. In Haggard’s narrative, the mountain peaks “are shaped exactly like a woman’s breasts. Their bases swelled up gently from the plain, looking, at a distance, perfectly round and smooth; and at the top of each was a vast hillock covered with snow, exactly corresponding to the nipple on the female breast” (1977:73). If there is any doubt that Haggardian romance was inhabiting Paton’s fertile imagination, a small detail in the hand-drawn map of the diary provides a telling clue: two peaks in his Aha Mountains are named “Sheba’s Breasts” [Fig. 11].¹⁹

As we saw in Chapter 2, a similar cross-fertilisation between romance fiction and the supposedly more factual mode of travel writing occurred in Henry Morton Stanley’s depiction of the geographically non-existent, snow-clad “Sheba’s Breasts” in vicinity of the Ruwenzori

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Mountains. Given the contemporaneity of Farini's and Haggard's books one might even be tempted to locate Farini's Kalahari ruins in the realm of Haggard inspired fiction. *King Solomon's Mines* appeared in the same year of Farini's travels, and had already become a well-publicised bestseller by the time Farini wrote his narrative. On his return from the desert Farini gave an extensive interview to *The Argus* on 22 July 1885 which makes no mention of the ruins, dwelling instead on grandiose plans for cattle ranching in the Kalahari. In his subsequent lectures at the Royal Geographic Society in London and in Berlin, Farini mentioned the ruins only in passing, presenting only tenuous evidence.²⁰ In sharp contrast to his presentation to a sceptical audience of learned men, was a lavishly illustrated public show Farini put up at London's Royal Westminster Aquarium which featured an exhibit of live Bushmen, specimens of fauna and flora, photographs taken by his son Lulu, and reconstructions of the lost city ruins. By the time the book *Through the Kalahari* was published later in 1886 (there were simultaneous German and French editions), the story of the ruins had become a more fully elaborated, and even the subject of an awkward but affecting poem which mythologised his discovery:

A half-buried ruin – a huge wreck of stones
On a lone and desolate spot;
A temple – or a tomb for human bones
Left by man to decay and rot.

Rude sculptured blocks from the red sand project
And shapeless uncouth stones appear,
Some great man's ashes designed to protect,
Buried many a thousand year.

A relic, maybe, of a glorious past,
A city once grand and sublime,
Destroyed by earthquake, defaced by blast,
Swept away by the hand of time. (1886a: 359)

Farini's penchant for showmanship and dramatic exaggeration has lead many critics to doubt the details of his story, but even so, Haggard's influence cannot be conclusively proven. But certainly in the case of Paton's "Sheba's Breasts", geographical description and mapping was shaped by the eroticised topography of *King Solomon's Mines*. These intertextual connections between Haggard and Paton demonstrate, yet again, the extraordinary influence Haggard's romances have had on South African fiction. Several academic studies, such as those by Laura Chrisman and

Paton's Sublime

Lindy Stiebel have traced Haggardian motifs and narrative strategies not only to writers such as Sol Plaatje, Stuart Cloete and Wilbur Smith, but also to films in the Indiana Jones mould and synthetic tourist landscapes such as Sol Kerzner's Lost City themed holiday complex.²¹ It seems that one can now confidently add Paton to the list of Haggard's literary heirs, reinforcing Stiebel's cautiously cited argument that "[i]n a strange, oblique way, the last eighty-five years of South African fiction has been an extensive footnote to Rider Haggard" (qtd in Stiebel, 1998: 566). In none of the above cited studies is there, incidentally, any mention of Farini's Kalahari ruins or Paton's own lost city odyssey.

Mediterranean Ruins

The myth of Farini's lost city also intersects with colonial discourses around the ruins of Great Zimbabwe that continue to dispute the African, indigenous provenance of the elaborate, finely worked stone structures. They were "discovered" in 1871 by Carl Mauch, and his find was almost immediately connected to King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Although the theory of the ruin's supposed Mediterranean origins had already been conclusively debunked by archaeologists around the turn of the century,²² the myth of Sabeian or Phoenecian provenance continued to inhabit the popular white imagination, and was given endorsement by literary figures ranging from John Buchan to Wilbur Smith. Cecil John Rhodes, as we have seen, was particularly fascinated by the soapstone bird sculptures that were found in the ruins. Rhodes adopted them as his personal motif, and they were incorporated in several Herbert Baker designed buildings, as well as in the Cape-to-Cairo glyph. Fay Goldie, who published a summary of Farini's book with additional information on more recent expeditions, including Paton's, made it clear that the link between the Zimbabwe and the Kalahari ruins was a commonly held belief:

It is generally believed that the mysterious 'Lost City' is a very important link in the history of Africa, and that the rediscovery of it will unveil new and vital facts bearing on the origin of the ruins of Zimbabwe. (1963: vi)

Part of the lure of the lost city for amateurs like Goldie and Ibbetsen lay in possibility of proving academic historians wrong. Even if the Mediterranean myth of the Great Zimbabwe ruins could increasingly be spoilt by politically correct archaeologists and historians, the lost city of the Kalahari would remain forever immune from revisionist scholarship.²³ It had, after all, not yet

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

been discovered and only existed in the rambling writings of Farini and in the imagination of his devotees. The ideologically conservative and even racist myth-making woven around the imaginary Kalahari ruins is illustrated by the speculative musings of Doreen Tainton, who accompanied her husband on a 1952 Kalahari expedition in search of the city. Referring to Farini's description of ornate carved stone-work, Tainton asserts

that no Bantu race ever included fluted columns in its architecture. Who, then, were these long dead builders? Did some Roman Legion, escaping from the vengeance of Caesar, march down Africa and settle her? Was it the Greeks or Phoenicians, sailing from the West Coast, or Egyptians or Arabs penetrating from the East, or – the tastiest morsel for the tongue of fantasy – was the African littoral at one time many miles east of its present position, and was this city built by colonists from lost Atlantis? Ex Africa – we all know the rest – out of Africa, always something new. (Qtd in Goldie, 1963:20)

In Tainton's florid historical fantasy every possible northern origin except the local and African is imagined, well in advance of the actual discovery of any archaeological evidence. In her daydream, desire for the lost city is shaped by two interlinked notions: on the one hand, the explicit disparagement of any possible civilisational achievements of the "bantu race", and on the other hand, the contrasting fantasy of a northern, Mediterranean legacy in the sands of the Kalahari.

The myth of classical ruins lost in the desert not only inspired the likes of Tainton, but gained a more widespread currency. It is useful to look more carefully at the full extent of Lost City mania that gripped sections of South Africa's population, not only because it is a largely forgotten chapter of cultural history, but also because it allows us to understand Paton's own quest not merely as an eccentric aberration, but rather as a venture in tune with the times. The popular reception of Farini's book shows that until at least into the mid 1960's, the lost city became a powerful imaginary site of desire that stimulated the dreams and fantasies of countless people in South Africa and abroad. A.J. Clement, a Wits University academic who himself came under the spell of the mythical ruins, lists 27 fully equipped expeditions between 1932 and 1965, besides dozens of individual and small-scale quests.²⁴ One of the best resourced attempts was the 1951

Paton's Sublime

“Panhart-Capricorn Expedition” led by the French explorer Francois Balsan. It included the well-known paleo-anthropologist Philip Tobias who became more interested in the Middle Stone Age tools that he found in raised terraces along the Nossob River. Tobias, in any case doubtful of Farini's story, subsequently found natural lime-stone formations near Ky-Ky along the Nossob River that looked like old walls. That settled the matter for Tobias and his findings were reported in *Die Burger* of 6 September 1951 under the headline: “Kalahari se ‘Verlore Stad’ is maar net kalkformasies.” Balsan however left the Kalahari believing that there were at least two other real lost cities in the Kalahari.²⁵

Several writers like Lawrence Green bemoaned the fact that Farini's book was long out of print, although Struik eventually published a facsimile edition in 1973. Green, a well-known and prolific writer on South African travel lore and bygone historical curiosities, joined a University of Cape Town expedition in 1936 to find “a Zimbabwe of the Kalahari” (1948:28), and despite not finding anything of note, he expressed the belief that “the ancient ruin will be found again one day” (1948:28). Green was inspired by a Dr Meent Borcherts of Upington, who was regarded as an authority on the lore of the lost city. Borcherts and F.R. Paver, a Johannesburg newspaper editor, had explored the Kalahari in 1933, and Paver subsequently published a series of thrilling articles in *The Star* which excited the popular imagination. Paver's journalism played a major role in elevating Farini out of obscurity (Clement 1967:xii).

Borcherts would tell Green that he had it from “impeccable sources” that the lost city existed, corroborating Farini story. But the names of “the two men who declared they had been to the lost city” had to be kept secret “for they are farmers who crossed the Bechuanaland border to poach game” (1948:34). Even more fantastical was the story told to Borchert by a local police sergeant. While on a camel patrol in the desert, he had come across an old stone quarry with some of the remaining squared stones still on the spot, as well as the remains of an ancient, fourteen foot long river boat. Green's book alludes to the possibility of a navigable river that once flowed through the desert from Lake Ngami and on whose banks the lost city must have flourished.²⁶

As in all legends, the lore of the lost city increasingly nourished more tales, which in turn

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

generated a web of stories in which fiction, facts and hearsay blended into a seamless, alluring body of rich myth. Lennox van Onselen, who regarded the ruins as “one of the last real mysteries of Darkest Africa” (1961:122), wrote a curious book, *Trekboer*,²⁷ in which he recounted several lost city stories such as a certain Charlie Swart “seeing a fabulous ruin of white stones in 1905” as well as reports of “Hottentots bringing out gold ornaments and diamonds” (1961:123). Like the fabled Kruger millions, the story of Farini’s lost city, liberally inter-leavened with tales of diamond riches, attracted eccentric amateur historians, fortune-seekers and adventurers. As already apparent from the example of Ibbetsen’s fanatical enthusiasm, the idea of the lost city attracted a fair share of dreamers and visionaries, such as a Mr D. J. Herholdt and J. Daneel of Vanderbijlpark who appealed through the press to “give us a lorry, and we’ll find the lost city”: “If we had a reliable lorry, good tyres, food, water and a couple of revolvers, we will lead an expedition to the lost city of the Kalahari” (Goldie, 1963:18). Not finding a sponsor, Herholdt and Daneel actually set off one weekend to the Kalahari in an old car, and were forced to forego sleep in order to complete the journey as quickly as possible in order to get back in time for their Monday shift. Herholdt claimed to have been “within six or seven miles of the heart of the city before circumstances forced them to return” (Clement, 1967:25).²⁸ A similar story was told by a Michael McDonald, a Johannesburg municipal employee, who claimed, in his book *The Voice of Africa* (1961) to have seen a city “beyond Francistown” that “consists only of ruins of houses of 3000 to 5000 people of ancient Phoenecian, Arab, Ethiopian and Hottentot stock. Their cattle were the predecessors of our present Afrikaander cattle” (Clement, 1967:28).

The expeditionary fervour reached its climax in the 1950's when at least ten different attempts were made, according Goldie, who herself participated in aerial and ground searches in hope of “spectacular and tantalising discoveries” (1963:1) in 1957. In 1951, a well-known Cape Town surgeon, Dr F.D. du Toit van Zyl made two separate searches and even persuaded the Ministry of Defence to loan him an airforce Dakota plane plus aircrew, thus drawing even government resources into the quest.²⁹ But the undisputed Farini devotee of his time was a Pretoria chiropractor, Dr J. N. Haldeman, who financed no less than nine ground and aerial searches between 1957 and 1965, on one occasion accompanied by two journalists from *Die Transvaaler*. Each unsuccessful expedition would strengthen his belief in Farini’s veracity. Haldeman

Paton's Sublime

believed, similarly to Tainton, that “this would be a major archaeological find, if it could be located, as it would show that the Egyptians were this far south”(Goldie 1963:2). The last of the recorded attempts were made by in the mid-sixties by two groups of Northern Rhodesia Boy Scouts who searched the Aha Hills, the same area covered previously by Paton's expedition. Goldie, who admitted that she herself was a “slave to the enchantment of the Kalahari and to this particular mystery” (1963: vi) was struck by the addictive powers of the lost city and the fact that most adventurers' belief in Farini's ruins was strengthened rather than weakened by each successive failure. Farini, she writes, “unwittingly let loose a will o' the wisp that is still tormenting the speculative minds of men, and sends successive expeditions into the desert wilderness” (1963:1).

The enthusiasm and obsession with the quest for the lost city was, as we have seen, spread across a wide spectrum of white South Africans, ranging from journalists, academics, and doctors to adventurous housewives, boy scouts and mineworkers. These facts underscore Martin Hall's assertion that “the ‘Legend of the Lost City’ ... is a master narrative that structures a cultural politics of Africa” (1995:181). Indeed, the Lost City fervour became such a part of the cultural landscape that it also attracted the scorn and derision of sceptics. In Herman Charles Bosman's short story, “Lost City”, one of his back-veld characters complains that “you'd have no quiet in the Kalahari. Or room to move. From Molepole onwards it seems that there's just one expedition on top of another, each one searching for a lost city” (1988:181). Bosman satirised the obsessive fanaticism of Farini devotees through the sly, deprecating wit of his familiar Groot Marico characters. Jurie Steyn, Bosman's quintessential bushveld naive, wonders at the implausibility that “people would go and build a city, and then just lose it”, and thinks the Lost City cannot be found because thieving Bushmen have made off with it, “washing hanging on the clothes-lines and all”(1988: 182).

A Kalahari Sublime

It is clear then that Paton's Kalahari exploit was not simply an isolated, eccentric act but was part of a larger, more widely held obsession with Farini's story that animated many of his contemporaries. Paton was, as we have seen, certainly not alone in being seduced by the lore of

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

the Kalahari ruins. His manuscripts highlight the fact that the mythical topos of the lost city is a pervasive one in South African literary and cultural history. But Paton's narrative does not only document the story of an obsession, but also, at the same time, reveals the folly of such monomania.

The strength's of Paton's text lie in the way his narrative opens up a sceptical distance between it and the generic conventions and stock tropes of adventure writing. Although Paton's travelogue situates itself within the larger narrative conventions of colonial exploration writing and romance fiction, it also undercuts these conventions with ironic detachment. The narrative uses, as we have seen, the rhetorical allure of ancient myths, unknown lands and the excitement of discovery, but it also consistently distances itself from these enchantments in a way that foregrounds the gap between the expedition's impressive preparations and plans ("the documents were majestic" (*N*: 6), the truck was "in the bag" (*N*: 8)) and the inadequacy of their implementation. There is frequently an almost comic sense of self-deprecation:

We were due to leave Nottingham Road at three p.m. We left on the minute. This was the only efficient thing we did. I, ageing man, found myself lying on a mess of pots and pans, in the body of an ancient truck, over which an ancient canopy had been erected. The wind roared through it, sending it bellying in, then plucking it madly out, then suddenly flicking a corner of it wickedly at one's eyes. (*N*: 9 - 10)

As is already apparent from the vivid descriptiveness of the above passage, the real strengths of Paton's narrative emerge out of a disenchantment with romantic notions of expeditionary travel. Elsewhere, the painful experience of driving thorough the nights reveals the chaotic organisation of the expedition: "one was sleeping on pots, pans, the edges of spades, the rims of iron boxes, & the points of crowbars" (*N*: 22). Once disabused of the glammers of safari-style exploration adventure, Paton is faced with the reality of bone-jarring discomfort, and extremes of heat and cold, but is in these moments that the narrative gathers strength:

Yet there was something compelling about those strange nights. When the track narrowed, the thorn branches would excoriate the canopy from end to end & it sounded like great waves passing along side a struggling ship. At times the gear box screamed, at others we reached top gear, which was rare, and hurtled through

Paton's Sublime

the Kalahari night at what seemed to be an incredible speed. I do not know how many thorns there are in the Kalahari, but it is clearly on the order of millions of millions. They took their toll on us. Our younger expeditionaries in the day time loved to sit on the roof of the cab ... so that they could feast their eyes on this fascinating monotony of plain and grass & tree. It was like a drug of which one could never have enough. (N: 23)

A Kalahari sublime emerges in Paton's narrative: the immensity of the empty desert landscape becomes an exalted, overwhelming space invested with feelings of ecstatic rapture. The sublime effects of the landscape become increasingly powerful as the expedition moves deeper into the Kalahari:

We had taken off the canopy, & the truck was inches deep in leaves & insects of many kinds. Some of us were badly lacerated by the thorns; we were filthy and sweaty, & we were surrounded by bleeding strips of gemsbok meat. But we shouted & sang in a kind of ecstasy born of this desolate waste. (N: 38)

Structurally, Paton's Kalahari sublime conforms remarkably with classical conceptions of the sublime, such as Edmund Burke's idea that the delightful rapture of the imagination arises out of bodily pain and danger.³⁰ In Paton's narrative, the ecstasies of sublime transport similarly have their base in extreme bodily discomfort and physical pain, heightened, in this instance, by the slippage between the "badly lacerated" bodies of the travellers and the "bleeding strips of gemsbok meat". Another effect of the sublime is that the spectator is overwhelmed and awed, or, put differently, that the subject undergoes a transformation leading to a deeper, real, or rather, hyper-real state of consciousness. In his narrative, Paton repeatedly likens the depersonalising, hypnotic force of the sublime to a mind-altering, addictive "drug" that distorts the conventional realities of time and space and allows the subject to enter into a primitive or pre-modern state of being:

the slow passage of time, the absence of ordinary duty, the hot sun burning, the antelopes running, the attractive monotony of the acacia trees, & the yellow grass of the everlasting plain steal over one like a drug. One can never have too much of it, because it is like breathing, something so near to nature that it cannot sate one; one does nothing, one is content to be. (N: 34)

There are several other points in the narrative where Paton evokes a sense of timelessness and endows the landscape and its people with a mythical historical depth. At the Tsane Pan, Paton for

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

instance comes across a “biblical scene” (*N*: 25) that transports him immediately into the world of the Old Testament:

Over the white floor came hundreds of cattle on their daily trek to the eight wells that are dug in the sides. These wells must be as primitive as those at which Abraham’s servant saw the beautiful Rebecca. The bucket, weighted with a stone, is lowered into the well by men using a rope of cattle hide; when it comes up boys empty into a trough scraped out of the trunk of a camelthorn. The cattle stampede and bellow, the boys shout and throw stones at those that want to drink again, the men curse the boys, all this under a cloudless sky & a brilliant light, around us the desert, before us the blinding expanse of the pan. (*N*: 25)

It is Paton’s masterful evocation of the Kalahari landscape, rather than his co-option into a deluded quest for a lost city that makes the narrative fascinating reading today. Of course, Paton writes with the wisdom of the hindsight that no such city existed, but the narrative makes it clear from the beginning that he was less interested in arcane archaeological discoveries than seeing the sublime “Aha Mountains”. Even before setting out, Paton admits to their spell:

I had in my mind a picture of the Aha Mountains as clear as if I had seen it with my eyes. There they rose, out of a land of rock and sand and stone, unbelievably austere, waterless, plantless, lifeless: and I saw their colour was that of yellow ochre darkened by umber, because that was the colour of them on the austere and empty map that Sailor spread out on the floor. (*N*: 7)

The Aha Mountains are then at the core of a powerful vision that sustains Paton throughout the arduous journey, and it is inevitable that the actual experience of finally seeing them cannot meet the weight of expectation. Perhaps that is why the point of climax – when they finally see the long-awaited peaks – is curiously evacuated of affect. The narrative records the moments as follows:

We were now two days from Tsa, & suddenly, on a small rise we were ordered to stop. Far in the distance, barely visible above the trees, were a long flat hill & two lesser eminences. They were the Aha mountains. There was great excitement; Sailor was congratulated as though he had made them himself. We all tried to climb on the roof of the cab, which creaked ominously. Photographs were taken,

Paton's Sublime

words written, discomforts forgotten. The guide & the constable watched us with amused astonishment. Sailor said to me with emotion, "I'm pent up, I'm pent up."

(N: 38)

Paton's narrative here is detached and dispassionately records the emotions of others, rather than sharing in them. The moment of dramatic achievement becomes transformed into an anti-climax: the mountains "revealed themselves as a number of low hills about 200 feet above us, set in a rough circle enclosing a portion of undulating plain" (N: 41). Even the enigmatic name, "Aha Mountains", its very name promising revelation, reveals itself to be a corrupted invention of Ibbetsen, deriving from a nearby pan called Xaa-Xaa. On getting closer to these "low hills", Paton's disappointment is somewhat tempered by the sight of a single, majestic baobab tree: "The scene was unreal and remote. Though the Aha Mountains had turned out quite other than expected, I was excited to be near them" (N: 42).

Predictably, the expedition does not find any sign of a lost city and Paton, to his credit, immediately gives up on the idea:

I came to the conclusion that there was no lost city in these parts. The bushmen registered total incomprehension; Jack thought they were lying, that they were trying to hide their secret from the white stranger. My own belief was that had there been a thousand lost cities, we could easily, with the aid of a supply of tobacco & green basins, have found them all. (N: 41)

Although scouting for the ruins proves unsuccessful, Paton is rewarded by the prolific bird life and is able to push up his tally of South African birds to 400 during several rambles through the hills. Others in the expedition were not so easily discouraged. Flower, for instance, told the *Natal Witness* of his plans to resume the search following year: "I fully expect to find the city. I am convinced that it does exist despite the many decrying remarks made of Farini's claim. I would like very much to find it because it is there" (1956, July 24: 5). Not having found Farini's city, Paton's narrative closes with this sceptical paragraph, but ultimately leaves the question open:

But was there really a lost city? Did Farini really see it, or did he devote two pages of his beautiful and factual book to a piece of the pure imagination? Why did his son, Lulu, the photographer take no pictures of the Lost City? Did something go wrong with the camera or the plates? Is this lost city sacred to the

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Bushmen, & the Hereros, & the Batswanas so that no one will breathe a word about its location? (N: 52)

Paton's Bushmen

One of the puzzling questions arising out of Paton's Kalahari narrative is why this rivetting and well-written travelogue by one of South Africa's major literary figures has remained unpublished to this day. The Kalahari narrative may well rank among the minor classics in South African travel writing and its omission from Paton's published *oeuvre* is puzzling, given the fact that some very indifferent pieces of his writing have seen print. Moreover, the lost city story is ignored in the very substantial body of Paton scholarship, in a context where postcolonial theory has repeatedly given attention to the problematic ideological nature of colonial quest narratives in search of white civilisations in the heart of darkest Africa. Paton's burial of the Kalahari episode was so successful that, despite substantial press coverage at the time,³¹ it has almost completely escaped critical scholarly assessment. Even a close associate such as Colin Gardiner, a Professor of English at the University of Natal and editor of a collection of Paton's shorter writing, was unaware of the existence of the travelogue. Given the contentious nature of the Kalahari material, coupled with the fact that Paton is a major South African writer, this lack of critical attention reveals a surprising and substantial gap in South African literary criticism. Even Peter Alexander's self-proclaimed "critical" 500 page biography of Paton devotes only five perfunctory sentences to what he calls a "harebrained expedition" (1994: 311). Alexander also seems not even to have read the major narrative text in the Kalahari papers, because he states that Paton "found neither the city nor the Aha mountains" (1994: 311) though he "seems to have enjoyed himself" (1994: 311). In fact, as both the map and the narrative make clear, the expedition did reach the mountains and spent four days exploring the area.

To complicate matters, Paton himself omitted the episode in his otherwise candid second autobiography, though, on the evidence of his Kalahari writings, the adventure must have been an intense emotional and physical experience, and certainly his most extreme and fantastic travel exploit. The nature of Paton's experiences in the Kalahari suggests that it was hardly a matter of simple forgetting. The expedition's general amateurish ineptitude and its failure to find anything

Paton's Sublime

of archaeological significance, may have provided some grounds for suppressing the episode in *Journey Continued*, but this does not explain why Paton wrote a substantial travelogue about the trip and why he then did not have it published. Paton's suppression of his Kalahari experience and non-publication of the resulting travelogue was then not the result of the failure to find the lost city, for the text is richly readable despite, or perhaps even because of the expedition's failings.

One reason for Paton's reluctance to speak about the Kalahari trip after 1956 may have been an acute sense of embarrassment, not so much about the amateurish nature of the expedition, but about the fact that he had been swindled out of a substantial sum of money by Ibbetson. This emerges in an extraordinary interview that was conducted with Paton early in 1988, a few weeks before his death. In possibly the last interview of his life, Paton finally talked about the Kalahari expedition that he had been silent about for more than thirty years. A tape recording of the interview was tracked down in Pietermaritzburg last year during the course of my research. It was made by Mark Pole, the grandson of Harold Pole who had accompanied the expedition. Harold Pole, we will remember, had made an 8mm film of the journey, and his grandson had thought it an interesting idea to show the old footage to Paton. His tape recorder was running throughout the screening, but the sound quality is very poor due to the noise of the film projector and it obscures most of Paton's comments during the viewing. But after the film has stopped and the projector switched off, Paton made a few remarks about the events. He described Ibbetson as "a very conceited young man" who "decided he could find the Lost City" despite the fact that "none of us knew anything about archaeology. The only one I believe who might have was the chap from Michaelhouse, I've forgotten his name." Although Paton's memory had let him down on some details, he had vivid recollections of being cheated out of money by Ibbetson. In a cantankerous moment a clearly riled Paton recalls the events in which Ibbetson conned him:

Ibbetson did not tell me that the truck had been hired from some chap in Durban. Altogether we spent three weeks there and all we found was a stone wall and you'd have to have a very strong imagination to take that for the lost city. When we came back one day Ibbetson came to see me at Kloof in a terrible state and said that he was in very great trouble.
I said, 'Why?'

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

‘Because the chap with the truck he never told me that I owed him £400 for the truck. And he said he will take my farm away.’

So I fished out £400. So in the end I paid for the damn expedition. The others put up seven times £140 and I put up £400 and then Ibbetson gave me the film, sort of as a return. Well, he rang up, ‘Can I lend the film?’ because some American wanted to see it.

I said, ‘Alright, you can borrow the film,’ but I never saw it again. It’s typical Ibbetson. (Mark Pole Interview)

Paton’s last words about the trip are however more positive. Although “as a scientific expedition it was absolutely worthless”, as a holiday in the Kalahari it was “good, very good. I enjoyed it.”

While Ibbetson’s fraudulent behaviour after the trip had been an undoubtedly sore point for Paton, the decision to conceal the Kalahari story is not necessarily quite explained by it. Indeed, the narrative consistently treats Ibbetson in a sceptical and ironical manner that suggests that he was not to be taken seriously. Paton’s suppression of the Kalahari narrative is connected, I wish to suggest, to a different type of inadequacy, namely a failure of Paton’s vision. The Kalahari papers and their context expose a particular blindness in Paton’s vision, which turned on the problematic figure of the Bushman. Paton repeatedly sees Bushmen, but consistently imagines and describes them in ways that appear extraordinarily dated and out of touch with contemporary attitudes. Paton’s views on Bushmen do not only betray a painfully colonial, dismissive and even racist stance, but reveal a failure in compassion and in imagining a common humanity. I am suggesting that Paton belatedly recognised these failings, and that this recognition accounts for the suppression of the episode in his autobiography and his reluctance to publish the travelogue. The trigger for this awareness, I venture, was the publication of Laurens van der Post’s book, *Lost World of the Kalahari* (1958), and possibly Paton’s knowledge of the even earlier screening of the BBC documentary of the same title.³² Van der Post’s book thus functions as an unwitting intertext to Paton’s manuscript and highlights the painful shortcomings of the latter, rendering it unpublishable at the time. The *Lost World of the Kalahari* not only throws a harsh light on Paton’s foolish lost city quest, but also highlights his reactionary views of Bushmen that contrasted sharply and unfavourably with Van der Post’s.

What are then the problems with Paton’s Bushmen? Paton encounters “his” first Bushmen not far

Paton's Sublime

from Ghanzi and is disappointed (as all travellers have always been) that they are not “pure” and “wild” since they obviously pose for photographs. A conventional ethnographic description follows that details size, clothing and physical characteristics:

The men were just over 5 feet in height, the women a little shorter. Some appeared of tremendous age, but perhaps they were not really old, for a nursing mother with a babe looked at least 60. The men wore nothing but a girdle, from which ran, from front to back, a black piece of cloth under the crotch, like a pair of swimming trunks simplified away. The women wore little more; what clothes they wore, some of skin, and some of manufactured cloth, were also black. ... Some bushmen exhibit steatopygy in small & great degree, that is the accumulation of fat on the buttocks, which is said to be Nature's provision for the unborn child in times of hunger. Neither men nor women are beautiful, their hollow backs, protuberant bellies, & spindly legs prevent it. (*N*: 29)

The stock elements of colonial Bushman ethnography are all present in stereotypical plenitude, and the descriptive details focus on aberrancy, lack and deficiency which serve to depict the radical otherness of Bushmen. They are, in Paton's discourse, a form of humanity that exists on the fringes of normalcy. Paton repeatedly characterises the Bushmen as “primitive” by focussing his attention on two areas: their lack of possessions, and their deviant physiognomy. But it is ultimately the issue of dirt that leads to a deep “revulsion” of their “nasty & brutish life”:

The dirt of the Kalahari seems to become one with the skin, even on the head. It was my first acquaintance with such primitive human life and though it was there before my eyes, I found it hardly credible. Had I stayed with them, no doubt I would have begun to have an affection for them; but as it was I experienced a revulsion, perhaps not so much from them as from their nasty & brutish life, so that I did not really care to stand & observe them. Or it may have been that their skin was dry, dirty, & rough, which is a condition I cannot endure for myself. (*N*: 30-31)

Even their legendary “veldcraft” and hunting prowess is disparaged, for example when Paton asks a Bushman youth to demonstrate his skills as marksman, and the arrow misses the target. Similarly, on another occasion, Paton expresses disdain when a Bushman fails to make a fire, a

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

much vaunted skill.

Altogether, Paton's views on Bushmen are out of step with many contemporary attitudes, views that are even more remarkable for a man with strong liberal, even progressive intellectual and political credentials. Even in the 1950's, before Van der Post's *Lost World of the Kalahari* popularised the nostalgic and neo-romantic image of Bushman culture as the authentic repository of the human spirit and civilised values, the Bushman had already long emerged from the shadow of colonial persecution and disparagement. It is worthwhile to follow these shifts in more detail in order to gain a fuller sense of Paton's anachronistic views. A.E. Voss has traced the changing image of the Bushman in South African English writing:

The dominant view of the Bushman from about 1850 until the 1920s is of a barely human, duplicitous, cruel savage. Late in the nineteenth century the seeds are sown of the neo-Romantic, modern image of the Bushman – kind, noble, indomitable, independent, infinitely adaptable to Nature because infinitely wise in her ways. (1987:26)

The mid-nineteenth century views on Bushmen were in sharp contrast to the earlier poems of Thomas Pringle, in which his “bushboy” companion “afar in the desert” is indebted to the tradition of the noble savage.³³ The discourse of the latter nineteenth century saw the rise of an increasingly aggressive disparagement of Bushmen. Maughan-Brown similarly detects a waning of the Noble Savage myth, and by the time of the 1847 Bushman exhibit in the Egyptian Hall in London, the *Times* could write: “In appearance they are little above the monkey tribe, and scarcely better than mere brutes on the field... They are sullen, silent and savage – mere animals in propensity, and worse than animals in appearance” (qtd in Maughan-Brown 1987:58). Such attitudes were shared by Charles Dickens, who saw the exhibition and declared that he “abhors, detests, abominates and abjures” the “horrid little leader ... in his festering bundle of hides, with his filth and his antipathy to water, and his straddled legs, and his odious eyes shaded by his brutal hand” (Maughan-Brown, 1987:59). Such attitudes were also held by missionaries in Southern Africa such as Livingstone, who, drawing on Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859), believed that “the Bushmen of the Desert are perhaps the most degraded specimens of the human family” (qtd in Voss, 1987:26). Even as late as 1924, in “The Karroo”, the poet Francis Carey

Paton's Sublime

Slater could describe Bushmen as “scattered and wandering pygmies, hideous, filthy, and squat” (qtd in Voss, 1987: 27). Paton’s views, as revealed in the Kalahari narrative, would place him firmly in this tradition, making him one of the most belated exponents of the “nasty & brutish” character of the Bushmen.

But by the end of the nineteenth century the eradication of Bushmen as a threat to farming, coupled with a diminishing importance of agriculture in an increasingly modern and industrialising South Africa, had brought about conditions for a change in attitudes. With the virtual absence of real Bushmen in the land, a nostalgic myth could develop that would value them as representatives of a vanishing species of humanity. The threat of Bushman extinction allowed a more sympathetic and benign outlook, which was increasingly concerned with preserving the remnants of an ancient culture. One of the earliest exponents of such attitudes was W. H. Bleek’s and Lucy Lloyd’s celebrated linguistic and ethnographic research of /Xam or Cape Bushman culture, which already started in the 1870's. Even Farini, who earned money out of Bushman exhibitions, already believed that “the Bushmen and other local tribes are too little known, and if properly studied in this, their free homes, before they become first contaminated and then exterminated by civilisation, much important ethnographic information will be obtained” (1886a: 53).

The increasingly sympathetic view of Bushmen around the turn of the century was part of a wider conservationist movement that took interest preserving the vanishing wildlife and heritage of South Africa. The first South African nature and wildlife reserves were declared in the last decade of the nineteenth century. By regarding Bushmen as just another type of wildlife threatened with extinction, these conservationist discourses paradoxically however perpetuated the older colonial notions of animal-like Bushmen. Just as the wildlife of South Africa, the Bushmen also had to be preserved, whether in parks such as the Kalahari Gemsbok or, if not living, in the form of casts and museum displays such as the controversial dioramas in the South African Museum. Bushmen would be conserved, but only if they remained trapped in the ahistorical, natural world of fauna and flora. General J.C. Smuts’s linkage of Bushmen and animals in 1937 is typical of this conservationist discourse:

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

If they live in their traditional way, and kill game in the process, we will protect them. We will treat them as we treat the game. If they shoot with bow and arrow, and live in their primeval way, according to their traditional methods, we shall not disturb them. (1951:53)

The implicit threat is that Bushmen are valued and protected only as long as remain in their “primeval” world among the animals; culturally pure and isolated from the rest of humanity. Should they show any signs of acculturation or technological progress (such as using guns), this protection would turn to prosecution. In Smuts’s view, the borders around this cultural and racial purity needed to be sharply policed in order to avoid “problems”. Impure Bushman, or those who “pose as Bushman” like “half-breeds such as Griquas and Bastards” and shoot game with guns “not to live but to gain” will be punished with the full force of the law (1951: 53). It is clear, then, that Bushmen can only be tolerated in modernity as primitives, remaining part of the natural world of wildlife and denied full accession to humanity. This is a discursive configuration which has changed comparatively little in the last hundred years, if we consider recent tourism marketing efforts.³⁴ As Paul Landau’s astute analysis of the shifts in the history of Bushman photography reveals, shooting with the camera replaced shooting with the gun, but the image of the Bushman remains trapped “in a discourse in which ‘natural’ animals and people both were valued and thought worth preserving. Thenceforth bushmen stayed in a ‘natural’ aspect for the Western imagination - a position maintained, against all odds, even today” (1996:129).

By and large, Bushmen, as long as they remained ‘natural’ and uncontaminated by progress became not only objects of sympathy in the twentieth century, but could also be imagined as subjects with whom one could identify. The Bushman could even be co-opted into the project of South African modernism and the avantgarde. As William Plomer would write in 1926, in *Voorslag*, he and the other ‘Voorslagters’ were “like twentieth century Bushmen, [who] had left vivid paintings on the walls of that dark cave, the mind of the White South African” (qtd in Voss, 1987:35). *Voorslag*, the rebellious literary magazine that saw its mission in bringing international modernism to the cultural backwaters of colonial South Africa, was founded by Plomer, Roy Campbell and Laurens van der Post. The *Voorslag* trio represent a progressive, radical tradition in South African literature from which Paton’s writing was quite distinct, but also, as we will now

Paton's Sublime

see, curiously intertwined.³⁵

Paton's and Van der Post's paths must have literally crossed in the Kalahari, and their respective visits to the Aha Mountains and Tsodilo Hills were less than a year apart.³⁶ Despite this temporal and spatial proximity, their respective travel narratives are worlds apart. As suggested previously, these differences emerge out of profoundly divergent conceptions of the Bushman people of the Kalahari. In Paton's Kalahari narrative, Bushmen are largely absent, defined by lack and squalor, and barely imagined as human. When not statically posed and subjected to the ethnographic gaze, they become shadowy, elusive figures in the landscape that give Paton "the feeling that we were being watched".³⁷ The Bushman, in Paton's writing, becomes a site of lack, producing, eventually, a profound failure of the imagination.

Van der Post's *Lost World of the Kalahari*, on the other hand, is a remarkably passionate and sustained homage of the Bushmen, who "moved in the glare and glitter of Africa with a flame-like flicker of gold" (1988: 10). Their language, often an object of colonial disparagement, is transmuted into sheer poetry: "the click of the complex consonants flashes on his tongue as he utters them as the sparkle of sun on a burst of flower from our sombre mountain gorse" (1988:11). Their skin, for Paton "dark", "rough" and "dirty", becomes, in Van der Post's enchanted eyes, "a lovely Provençal apricot yellow" (1988:10). Van der Post's evocative language and Mediterranean imagery create a powerful mythic image of the Bushmen living in an African Eden as first people. As a natural human being, the Bushman "contained, and was contained, deeply within the symmetry of the land" (1988:19) and possessed an authenticity and purity of soul that had been lost to modern man. The allure of the Bushman for Van der Post lay precisely in the promise of a recovery of an elemental, more deeply authentic self:

With our twentieth century selves we have forgotten the importance of being truly and openly primitive. We need primitive nature, the First Man in ourselves, it seems, as the lungs need air and the body food and water. (1988:122)

Contrary to Paton, the term "primitive" is here positively charged. Such a valorisation of primitivity is indeed a characteristic commonplace for much European modernist art and writing, but what is interesting about Van der Post is not just that the primitive Bushmen could inspire

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

modernist sensibilities, but that Bushmen and their art could themselves be brought into the modernist project. Van der Post for instance sees “a tall female giraffe with an elegant Modigliani neck” (1988:161) in the rock art galleries in the Tsodilo hills.

Compared to Van der Post’s passionate homage to the Kalahari Bushmen, Paton’s disparagement and general lack of empathy appears, at the very least, unfortunate. On this count alone, his narrative is lacking in vision. But Paton’s shortcomings become even more serious in the light of Van der Post’s Tsodilo hills experience. Reaching the Aha Mountains, as we can recall, was the climax of Paton’s journey, although the hills did not live up to his high expectations. For Van der Post, the Tsodilo hills are a true sublime climax:

By eleven o’clock the highest of the hills rise out of the blue of the distance, and between us and them lay a bush of shimmering peacock leaves. After so many days of flat land and level swamp, the sudden lift of the remote hills produced an immediate emotion, and one experienced forthwith that urge to devotion which once made hills and mountains sacred to man who then believed that, whenever the earth soared upwards to meet the sky, one was in the presence of an act of spirit as much as an act of geology. I thought of the psalmists’s “I will uplift my eyes unto hills from whence cometh help. (1988:154)

Paton’s Kalahari narrative, when read against Van der Post’s *Lost World*, reveals inadequacies which must subsequently have become painfully obvious to Paton. Van der Post’s powerful nostalgia for the “lovely Provençal apricot yellow” Bushmen and his paintings that “burn within the aubergine shadows of the cave and overhang of cliff and kran” (1988: 25) completely overshadowed Paton’s travelogue. Indeed, Van der Post’s interpretation of Bushman culture made *Lost World* an authoritative landmark text that almost singlehandedly shifted public opinion. Edwin Wilmsen, one of the most influential scholars of the Kalahari Bushmen, describes this shift as follows: “Times had changed dramatically in a decade; the Bushman who few wanted to see in 1950 was, by 1960, the hottest show on the road, with administration, academia, and the media vying for production rights” (1995:222). In a context where the public image of Bushmen was largely shaped by *Lost World*, and Van der Post’s subsequent Kalahari writing, Paton would have found it difficult, if not impossible, to publish his own text. Written on the cusp of a

Paton's Sublime

widespread popular enthusiasm for Bushmen, the Kalahari episode became a story which Paton would try to erase and forget.

In order to further contextualise Paton's problematic views about the Kalahari Bushmen, it is important to get a broader sense of his treatment of Bushmen in his other writing. In one of Paton's earliest reference to Bushmen, in a 1949 article dealing with South Africa's racial problems, he sketches the country's history and refers to the "aboriginal inhabitants of the country, the not very aggressive Hottentots, and the much more aggressive but animal-like Bushmen" (1949:1) They could, however, not hinder the advance of Dutch settlers as the colony moved further into the interior and consequently "fled into the mountains and caves, gradually to be exterminated for their depredations and their irreconcilability" (1949:1). Coming only a year after the celebrated compassion and humanism of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Paton's views place Bushmen firmly in the realm of the non-human. In keeping with standard attitudes of time, their demise is represented as an agentless event³⁸ and the blame for their extermination is placed on their "depredations" and "irreconcilability".

In 1955 Paton wrote a high school text book on South Africa intended for the US market. *The Land and People of South Africa* takes its readers on a grand tour through the history and geography of the country with Paton in the role of a personal tour guide ("let us stop here and look", "After twenty miles we will come to", "You will notice that"). Here, Bushmen are again unfavourably regarded as more "primitive people" (1955:82) than the Hottentot, but their accomplishments in hunting and art are given recognition: they "were great hunters with poisoned arrows, and they have left behind fascinating rock paintings in caves"(1955:82). Paton's explanation of their extermination now identifies the "white man" as the agent, but the narrative structure of the sentence presents the killing of Bushmen as a warranted consequence of raids and thieving: "With the coming of European civilisation, they withdrew farther and farther, into mountain fastnesses or into the desert. They raided the white men's cattle and possessions, and the white man in their turn pursued and killed them" (1955:82). Paton's closing remarks on Bushmen leave them firmly anchored in the world of wildlife: "Today there are very few left; they live in the Kalahari Desert, and are protected by the Government, in much the same way as

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

the wild animals of the Kruger Park” (1955:83).

The following year, Paton went on the Kalahari trip and encountered for the first time, we can assume, Bushmen. His consequent revulsion of “primitive” Bushmen and their “nasty & brutish” life is not out of line, as we have seen, from his pre-Kalahari writing that stresses the Bushman’s proximity to animals. By the time however that Paton wrote the first part of his autobiography, *Towards the Mountain* (1980) almost twenty-five years later, his views on Bushmen appear radically revised. But even here, the passage opens with a troubling sentence that places South Africa’s early “inhabitants” in the same category as the “wild animals”: “In the days before writing was known to South Africa, before there were historical records, the majority of the inhabitants were wild animals” (1980:47). The passage that follows is however a generous assessment of Bushman culture:

This earthly paradise was lived in by several peoples of whom I shall name two. One were the San people (once called the Bushmen), people of small stature, magnificent hunters and trackers, superb marksmen with the bow and arrow. They knew all about the herbs and plants of the veld, as food, as medicine, and as the sources of some very virulent poisons with which they tipped their arrows. They worshipped the moon and ascribed supernatural or magical properties to certain creatures such as the praying mantis. But their immortal achievement was their rock painting, in which figured humans, animals, birds, and the pleasures of the chase. (1980: 47)

Paton focusses on the culture and art of the Bushmen rather than their physical characteristics. But it is important to note that this information was not gained from his personal experience in the Kalahari, but presumably from books such as Van der Post’s. The fact that he even distances himself from the term “Bushman” shows him not only in tune with popular opinion, but also aware of recent revisionist academic debates.

Conclusions

What emerges out of an analysis of the Kalahari papers and Paton’s other early writing is that the figure of the Bushman is treated as quite distinct from that of the “native”. In Paton’s writing, the

Paton's Sublime

Bushman exists on the fringes of humanity, and is a radical figure of racial difference and human otherness. He emerges, unlike the black peoples of South Africa, as Paton's fully developed colonial other. The figure of the Bushman is then a persistent stain in Paton's writing, revealing a dark, illiberal and unchristian underside to a man who was celebrated for his powerful vision of redemption, and reconciliation between black and white, as articulated in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. In this regard, the Kalahari narrative forces a more radical reassessment of Paton's political and ethical vision that goes beyond the leftist criticism prevalent in the 1970s and 80s. Paton's depiction of naive rural simplicity in *Cry, the Beloved Country* then became an easy target for many critics, ranging from Gordimer and Coetzee to Mphahlele and Brutus,³⁹ and Peter Alexander's candid biography subsequently exposed cracks in Paton's iconic public stature by revealing personal weaknesses such as his sexual proclivities and an early penchant for caning schoolboys. But in the public domain, Paton's reputation as a voice of liberal conscience and advocate of social justice remained intact. Indeed, according to Vanzanten Gallagher's judgment, Paton's writing can "now become a postmodern symbol of the postcolonial South Africa" (1997: 387), and is quoted approvingly by Nelson Mandela, Mamphela Ramphele and other leading figures in a new South Africa. Paton's more problematic racist reflections, as revealed in the Kalahari writings, suggest that such an enthusiastic rehabilitation may be premature, and that a more careful reassessment of the politics of race in Paton's thinking is needed. Such a reassessment does however also need to take into account the fact that Paton successfully kept his Kalahari story out of the public domain. We may not know whether this was Paton's way of solving some of the contradictions posed by his Kalahari experience, but the very fact that he suppressed his Kalahari writings is perhaps his last unspoken word on the matter, indicating perhaps that finally, the story of the lost city was itself to be lost.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Notes

1. In the poem, “Black Woman Teacher”, Paton gives credit to the work of ordinary people such as Mrs Takalani: “your humble work is noted and remembered / By the might and power and glory of the land”(1995:85)

2. Cathedrals were a long established commonplace for evocations of the sublime. See for example the following passage by Coleridge:

On entering a cathedral, I am filled with devotion and with awe; I am lost to the actualities that surround me, and my whole being expands into the infinite; earth and air, nature and art, all swell up into eternity, and the only sensible expression left is, ‘that I am nothing’ (Coleridge quoted in De Bolla, 1989: 44)

3. Peter Kohler is the only scholar I am aware of who has recognized the sublime as an important aspect of Paton’s fiction: “The convention that Paton’s language speaks (partly borrowed from the picturesque) aspires to describe a landscape in which the highest points need be mountains, and they in turn should be exotic, if not sublime” (1995:207). The imperatives of the sublime, according to Kohler, result in a general upward distortion in scale, rendering the Natal landscape more grandiose and majestic. This mismatch between the real landscape of Natal and the demands of the aesthetic conventions Paton chose to follow, can be seen in the text’s marginalia. In a Derridean attention to detail, Kohler has drawn attention to the way Paton concedes, in a footnote, that the “Umzimkulu is called a great river, but it is in fact a small river in a great valley” (1995:207).

4. Paton’s son, Jonathan, used these words to describe South Africa of the 1990s. Jonathan Paton rewrote his father’s school textbook on South Africa, *The Land and People of South Africa*, and described it as a land of “beauty and terror” (1990: 7).

5. It is interesting to note that another instance of Paton’s sublime invokes the language of the marriage vow. As he returns from his first trip abroad, “the sight of Table Mountain rising from the sea overwhelmed me. I doubt if I put my thoughts into words, but it was clear that at the age of twenty-one I had, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, given myself to this strange country, to love and to cherish till death do us part” (1986: 62)

6. “Secret for Seven”, unpaginated and undated manuscript. Alan Paton Centre: PC 1/3/4/6.

7. Ironically, the person who gave rise to Paton’s “intense emotional experience” was, by his account, a singularly unattractive woman who, “had she not kept her facial hair under control would soon have been bearded” (1986: 250).

8. Paton uses very similar terms on previous occasion, also a memorial service, where he was “near to being overwhelmed by a feeling of unspeakable sorrow and unspeakable joy” (1986:

Paton's Sublime

235). This memorial service honoured the fallen soldiers of St John's College.

9. Paton reprises this scene in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, but the sublime force of the autobiography's narrative is curiously dissipated in the novel. Instead of Edith Rheinallt-Jones, it is the funeral of Arthur Jarvis. Both the fictional younger Jarvis (a character closely modelled on Paton himself) and Jones share a similar liberal philosophy and are engaged in philanthropic projects that seek to uplift the "natives". The funeral also brings together "[w]hite people, black people, coloured people, Indians" (1988:128), but this multi-racial gathering fails to become a moment of transcendence for the grief-stricken James Jarvis. The handshakes with black people afterwards ("the first time he had ever shaken hands with black people" (1988:129)) also have little effect on him.

10. See for example Watson's strident critique: "Paton attempts to solve what is clearly and statedly a material, sociological problem by means of metaphysics; against the multiple problems caused by detribalization and urbanization he advances the solution of love. Thus Msimangu maintains that 'there is only one thing that has power completely, and that is love. Because when a man loves, he seeks no power, and therefore has no power' (p. 37). Of course this is useless; the problem has not been caused by a lack of love in South Africa, and therefore to prescribe an antidote of love for it is simply naive and beside the point" (1982: 35). Watson reads the novel emphasis on reconciliation and love (which comes out of the specific postwar climate of reconciliation and reconstruction) for what it is patently not: a political blueprint dealing with South Africa's seemingly intractable political problems in the 1980s.

11. I am aware of the contested nature of the term "Bushman" but use it in this paper for two reasons: firstly because this term is now again generally, though guardedly, in scholarly use when referring to hunter gatherer peoples of Southern Africa in general terms. In specific linguistic and anthropological contexts, more accurate terms such as !Kung or /Xam are appropriate. Secondly, Paton uses the word "Bushman" and the introduction of other terms would complicate the argument.

12. Ibbetson told journalists that the huge truck was to have two decks, the lower one carrying a jeep useful for reconnoitring, and "while separated, the jeep and truck will be in communication by walkie talkie." (*Natal Witness*, 25 June 1956). Even more ambitious plans were fed to *The Argus* (22 June 1956) which duly reported on a small aircraft that was to accompany the ground crew and help in making a major archaeological discovery. Paton also mentions "the cars of newspaper boys" (N: 10) who followed the expedition truck out of Nottingham Road.

13. Articles relating to Paton's Kalahari expedition were carried by the following newspapers: *Natal Witness*, 25 June and 24 July 1956, and *The Argus*, 22 June 1956. Paton wrote a major preview of the expedition for the *Sunday Express* of 17 June 1956, reprinted in Goldie (1963: 27 -29).

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

14. Paton's diary reveals considerable differences within the party. When their guide is punished for a minor misdemeanour, Paton writes: "I must confess the callousness of my fellow white SA's disgusts me – Jack is the worst, Len follows, & Harold & Brian, such good fellows are no better – Terry, Keith, Len & I keep silent - there is no point in uttering sharp censures on such a trip, but I feel outraged."
15. Huddlestone frequently stayed with the Patons and was also the model for the "rosy-cheeked priest" in *Cry, the Beloved Country*.
16. *Sunday Express*, 17 June 1956. Reprinted in Goldie (1963: 29).
17. None of the texts has, to my knowledge, been published and they remain in manuscript form in the Alan Paton Centre, in Pietermaritzburg. Referenced as "Natal Kalahari Expedition", manuscript PC 1/7/1/3.
18. The anonymous diary relates the fact that on the 28th June, two days after setting out, the bleak mood is only lifted by a bottle of whiskey. By evening Tree and Ibbetsen are drunk, and Pole, the only sober driver, is worn out by all the driving he has to shoulder. Matters improve as they pass Kimberley and reach Kuruman on the next day.
19. The map is part of Paton's Kalahari diary. In a second, more carefully drawn map, probably created in a more sober moment after Paton's return, the Aha Mountains are *sans* the words "Sheba's Breasts" but still have two prominent round mounds.
20. See "A Recent Journey in the Kalahari" in the proceedings of the *Royal Geographic Society*, Vol. VII: 437 -53, 1886. Both this text and the *Argus* article are reprinted in Clement (1967).
21. Both Martin Hall (1995) and Sally Ann-Murray (1996) have given detailed attention to the Haggard's impact on popular culture. See Murray's "Tropes and Trophies: The Lost City 'Discovered'" and Hall's "The Legend of the Lost City; or, the Man with the Golden Balls."
22. See for example David Randall-MacIver's 1906 paper given to the Geographical Society in London in which he debunked the Queen of Sheba myth and asserted that the ruins are not ancient but "medieval and post-medieval" in origin and that the "buildings were constructed by the people whose implements, weapons and ornaments are found there – that is to say by a negro or negroid race closely akin to the present dwellers in the country"(1906: 328). MacIver's unpalatable findings were hotly disputed by the lay audience, and caused a storm of protest among the Rhodesian settler community who were outraged that they had been robbed of the heritage of a higher civilisational presence. Another archaeological investigation was subsequently commissioned with the aim to discredit MacIver, but had similar results.
23. Martin Hall draws attention to the rich connections between Haggard, the ruins of Great Zimbabwe and Wilbur Smith's *Sunbird* (1971), but misses the more obvious links to Farini's

Paton's Sublime

lost ruins. Smith's lost city, Opet, is located in the northern Kalahari, and was founded by a "race of fair-skinned golden-haired warriors" (1971:241) who came across the seas to mine gold and found a great city. Tragically this great civilisation is swept away by the dark forces of Bantu migration, leaving the magnificent city to decay. Like the many Farini devotees, the novel's protagonist, Ben Kazin (Director of African Anthropology and Prehistory in Johannesburg) is convinced of Carthaginian influence in Southern Africa. Smith takes a side-swipe at academic historians who distort the "truth" with dry, empirical science and fail to see the real, grand history of Africa. His Kalahari ruins are therefore only accessible to true adventurers such as Lourens Sturvesant, not "politico-archaeologists" (1971:59) who would attribute Opet to "another culture of obscure bantu origin" (1971:139).

24. Clement's meticulous research into the Farini legend went as far as studying the passenger lists of mail boats and provides an exhaustive overview of the various legends and expeditions. Clement claimed to have laid the ghost of the lost city to rest, when he finally located natural dolorite stone formations near Mier that appeared to match Farini's description.

25. See Philip Tobias's foreword to Clement's book (1967).

26. Green was not the only writer who was entranced by the lost city myth. Already in 1931, *The Automobile*, a motoring magazine, announced that it was organising an expedition to find Farini's ruins, led by Dr Gustav Preller, a well-known Afrikaans historian and literary figure (*The Automobile* I: 21-4, March 1931.)

27. The book's jacket text contains the following description that could, save for one word, easily be mistaken for a treatise on Bushmen: "In the desolate, northwest corner of the Cape Province of South Africa, there exists a breed of man, the last survivors of a nomadic race, to be found nowhere else on the face of the earth. In the limitless wastes of Bushmanland, Namaqualand and the Kalahari desert, the Trekboer ekes out a precarious existence as did his forefathers."

28. In several interviews with the *Rand Daily Mail*, Herholdt gave further vent to his fantasies: The lost city must have been the "mother city of a rich empire" that linked Zimbabwe and Mapungubwe and the "advanced state of the civilisation ... pointed to either Egyptian or Roman origin". In the following day's paper, Heroldt claimed to have been to an almost completely submerged city in the sands, where he "found two huge tombs cut out of solid rock in a hillside. Lying in front of each tomb was a rock door covered by strange characters resembling hieroglyphics" (*RDM* of 19 and 20 July 1951, qtd in Clement, 1967:29).

29. Van Zyl was acting on a tantalising story told to him by a Mr Jack Hauser, a Kimberley policeman, who allegedly saw the ruins while out on a desert camel patrol. Van Zyl reports Hauser's story as follows: "They camped one night in an ordinary part of the desert. There were no buildings about. During the night a terrible storm arose and continued for three days

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

and three nights. They sheltered behind their camels and in this way probably escaped death. After the third night the wind stopped and when they woke up, they found themselves in the vicinity of several stone ruins. The ruins had been uncovered by the wind. Before they were able to depart from the site of their ordeal, the wind started blowing again. When it eventually subsided, they once more looked for the ruins and found that they had disappeared – covered by sand” (qtd in Clement, 1967:18-19).

30. See Burke’s *Observations of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, for instance: “What ever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the Sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (1757:13).

31. Even *Life* sent a photographer, Terence Spencer, on the Kalahari trip. Paton’s journey took place on the cusp of Van der Post’s impact, and *Life* never published any of the hundreds of Spencer images. As far as can be ascertained, only one Spencer picture saw print in *Time*, accompanying an unrelated book review. Spencer would later become a famous rock celebrity and showbiz photographer after an extended photographic assignment with the at that time still uncelebrated Beatles.

32. The six part BBC documentary was first screened between 15 and 20 June 1956, just preceding Paton’s Kalahari trip. See Edwin Wilmsen (1995). Paton might have become aware of this screening or of a later rebroadcast.

33. See also Pringle’s poem “Song of the Wild Bushman” in which the “lord of the Desert Land” “his den doth yet retain” in the face of colonial persecution.

34. See for instance Gordon *et al* (1996).

35. Apart from the Kalahari connection between Paton and Van der Post, some of the other links are more well known: Paton was a life-long admirer of Campbell’s modernist verse and had made considerable progress on a biography of the poet before passing on the task to Peter Alexander. Alexander subsequently became Paton’s biographer. Plomer had become *Cry, the Beloved Country*’s first English editor when Plomer’s publishing house bought the United Kingdom rights from Scribners. And Van der Post’s *Lost World* begins with Roy Campbell’s evocative incantation: “Pass world!: I am the dreamer that remains; / The man clear cut against the last horizon.”

36. Van der Post’s Kalahari travels began in September 1954, lasting until the spring of 1955. Paton arrived in the area at the end of June 1956.

37. Paton’s Kalahari diary, p. 23.

38. See Nigel Penn’s “‘Fated to Perish’. The Destruction of the Cape San” (1996). Penn’s

Paton's Sublime

title quotes the South African historian Theal, who represented the Bushmen's history as an agent-less demise. Penn's research reveals a complex colonial history of commando campaigns to subdue, capture and exterminate the San.

39. Susan VanZanten Gallagher has traced the ups and downs of Paton's reception as follows:

“Enthusiastically received by many black South Africans in the fifties, *Cry, the Beloved Country*'s critical stock fell throughout the seventies and the eighties with the advent of the Black Consciousness movement. Noted authors such as Mphahlele, Nkosi, and Dennis Brutus derided the novel's stereotyped African characters, naive political stance, and apparent paternalism” (1997: 384).



Conclusion

In this dissertation I have argued for a postcolonial reading of the sublime that takes into account the racial and gendered underpinnings of Kant's and Burke's classic theories. The Kantian sublime, as we have seen, implicitly disallows a female or subaltern sublimed subject, and makes the triumph of reason over excessive and overwhelming experience only available to the enlightened Western man. The sublime is a form of stability or closure that attempts to establish rational order over dark, immense and threatening experiences. Colonial discourses of the sublime therefore need to be read in such a way that not only takes into account the racial underpinnings of classic theories of the sublime, but also recognizes that the sublime is a model of the imagination that allows for the mastery of excessive, incomprehensible and threatening experiences, precisely what often confronted European travellers, explorers and settlers on the imperial borders. But as Burke's treatise shows, the sublime, which is energised by the sharp contrasts between "delight" and "horror", is also an unstable category in the imagination: instead of giving rise to uplifting rapture, the colonial margins have the capacity to produce traumatic "ill effects" on the imagination, as exemplified by the figure of the black woman. Colonial discourses of the sublime therefore also need to be read as profoundly unstable discursive formations that are constantly in danger of slipping from an exultant mastery of the border to racially coded experiences of barely contained horror and loss of self. In this regard I have used the term "colonial uncanny" to analyse the abyssal collapse of identities and the irruption of the irrational on the colonial frontier.

In Chapter 1 we have seen that the awe-inspiring montane landscape of the Alps was a privileged locus of romantic sublime experiences for European travellers, artists and poets. But as these mountains became progressively tamed and domesticated in the course of the nineteenth century, their capacity to instill sublime feeling became increasingly eroded, and in their stead, the thrilling dangers of far-off colonial frontiers became domains in which the familiar and by then outdated European discourses of the sublime could find a new purpose. The colonial manifestations of the sublime that emerged in the closing decades of the nineteenth century in

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

this sense replaced the romantic sublime that had flourished in an earlier period, but in such a way that the compounded feelings of dread and delight no longer only referred to wild, dangerous and awful landscapes, but also to the facts of racial difference and the threatening dangers of colonial otherness. The Kantian triumph of the rational mind over baser feelings of fear and abjection could function as a model for the assertion of masculine, settler dominance in the colonial arena, and the sublime could bring an incomprehensible social and natural landscape under the control of colonial reason. But the older, conventional associations between sublimity and exalted European landscapes such as the Alps nostalgically persisted in the colonial domain in the form of an often excessive valorisation of African mountains. Mountains could be imagined as lofty, uninhabited landscapes detached from their African locatedness, as lighthouses shining over a dark continent. This was particularly the case with the Ruwenzori mountains, the landscape that has in a sense become the background to this entire project, but also other sites of elevation such as Buchan's Wood Bush escarpment, Paton's 'High Place' and the Aha Mountains in the Kalahari.



As has become apparent in this dissertation, each of the writers discussed forged specific discourses of the sublime that were suited to their particular colonial context, and even within the work of individual writers the sublime was variously adapted to meet changing circumstances and attitudes. But in all cases, discourses of the sublime are entangled with discourses of racial difference. In the case of H.M. Stanley's exploration narratives, the Burkean lamination of terror and delight was in a sense spatialised and projected on to a racialised topography of Central Africa: the terrors of the tropical Congo jungle were represented as a claustrophobic hotbed of racial degeneracy and vegetal promiscuousness, but also mortal danger where the dark gloom of the jungle landscape merged with the black, unseen assailants. In sharp contrast, the alpine, snowy landscape of the Ruwenzori was not only as a place of transcendent beauty, but also stood as a figure for white mastery in darkest Africa, endowed with historic depth and a myth of Western origins. Accordingly, the Ruwenzori continued to inspire sublime awe in a wide range of travellers and writers, including Buchan and Paton, and became one of the key sites that energised British imperial dreams in Africa. The persistence of such imperial imaginings of the Ruwenzori has continued to exert an influence, as the example of Nadine Gordimer and

Conclusion

contemporary tourism marketing efforts show.

John Buchan's African writing is an exemplary instance of the way in which the sublime is not only implicated with notions of racial difference, but also with the geo-political imperatives of British imperial rule. Buchan's Wood Bush sublime, as I have shown, functioned as a model for colonial governance in Africa, in that it not only attempted to erase and contain the facts of blackness in the land, but also produced an imaginary space that was simultaneously capable of ruling the surrounding terrain, as well as being a homely estate for the settler. But Buchan's writing is particularly interesting in that the sublime is not just a model for colonial mastery, but also becomes an increasingly unstable scene in which loss of self, identification with blackness and abyssal terrors threaten to overwhelm the hero. Buchan's initial imperial vision became poisoned and troubled by a profound unease that was connected to an occult force in the landscape and the associated figure of Cecil John Rhodes. I have suggested that Buchan eventually abandoned his beloved Wood Bush to indirect rule because his imagination could finally not contain and sublime the uncanny traces of a violent history in the land.

In Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, the sublime attempts to erase the contradictions of a racially divided society and allows Paton to imagine himself as a truly indigenous South African who is part of the landscape. His sublime, whether as a rapturous evocation of a divine, pastoral landscape, or the painful ecstasies attendant upon social events of inter-racial harmony, allow Paton to transcend the troubling social facts of South Africa's racial trauma. Paton stares into the abyss of a racial cataclysm that is threatening to engulf South Africa, and uses the sublime in an imaginative attempt to overcome that terror. Such ecstatic moments of settler transcendence were frequently imagined to occur on mountains and other symbolic places of elevation, such as "the holy mountain where they neither hurt nor destroy" (1986:306). Paton consistently saw himself travelling *Towards the Mountain* throughout his life, if we take the title of his autobiography, seriously. In a different sense, the Kalahari journey was framed by a desire to reach a far-off, mythical mountain that provided access to a pre-colonial history. In his Lost City narrative, the Aha Mountains are valorised and endowed with sublime feeling, in sharp contrast to the presence of the black, impoverished and degraded figure of the Bushman on the Kalahari plains. In this sense, Paton's evocation of the sublime Aha Mountains, as the site a northern, Mediterranean

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

civilisation is similar to Stanley's transcendent vision of the Ruwenzori as a site of Western history in the middle of dark, pre-historical Africa. In contrast to *Cry, the Beloved Country*, the sublime in the Kalahari narrative, is however less a form of engagement with the troubling realities of South Africa, but rather an imaginative transport away from them. The vast Kalahari desert and the remote Aha mountains are sublime in Paton's imagination because they can become a purely affective space in which he can directly connect with a seemingly timeless, a-historical landscape, unmarked by the troubled racial history of South Africa. The Bushman is thus not imagined as a colonial subject, as are the black people of South Africa, but becomes an archaic figure of pre-colonial otherness beyond the racial history of his home country.

In conclusion, it is clear then that the sublime became an important though not widely used discourse in late imperial and subsequent writing, particularly in writers who regarded themselves and what they wrote with a certain sense of self-importance. As the example of Stanley, Buchan, Paton and other discussed writers shows, the sublime flourishes especially in writing which regards itself and its grand purpose seriously, and it has little room for playfulness, irony, humour and understatement. The high-minded earnestness of the sublime makes it less adaptable to contexts where a serious political purpose is not required, and it remains to be seen if the sublime will remain an aesthetic confined to the particular historical period associated with empire and its after effects, or if it will exert an influence on culture in the South African postcolony. The geo-political structures of power and the cultural politics that are associated with empire continue to exert their influence in the present, not only in the persistence of a spatial order of uneven development, but also through the repetition and reassertion of racial categorisations. My dissertation's focus on the imbrication of the colonial aesthetic with racial difference, and attempts to denaturalise the imaginative processes in culture that veil the practices of imperialism, is hopefully therefore not merely an investigation of arcane colonial archives, but is also a contribution to an understanding of contemporary postcolonial culture.

Bibliography

Bibliography

- Abruzzi, Luigi. 1907. "The Snows of the Nile". *Geographic Journal*, February (2): 121-147.
- Alexander, Peter. 1994. *Alan Paton. A Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Arnold, Arnold 1996. *The Problem of Nature. Environment, Culture and European Expansion*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ashfield Andrew and Peter de Bolla (eds). 1996. *The Sublime. A Reader in British Eighteenth Century Aesthetic Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baker, Herbert. 1934. *Cecil Rhodes. By his Architect Herbert Baker*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Baker, Samuel. 1866. *The Albert Nyanza, great basin of the Nile*. Vol 2. London: Macmillan.
- Barrel, John. 1980. *The Dark Side of Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barthes, Roland. 1984. *Camera Lucida*. London: Fontana.
- Basset, T. and P. Porter. 1991. "The Mountains of the Kong". *Journal of African History* 32: 367-413.
- Bell, Claudia and John Lyall. 2001. *The Accelerated Sublime. Landscape, Tourism and Identity*. Westport: Praeger.
- Bere, Rennie. 1966. *The way to the Mountains of the Moon*. London: Arthur Baker.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Bierman, John. 1990. *Dark Safari. The Life behind the Legend of Henry Morton Stanley*. New York: Alfred Knopf.
- Black, J.M. 1992. *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour of the Eighteenth Century***
- Bloom, Harold (ed). 1986. *John Ruskin. Modern Critical Views*. New York: Chelsea.
- Blunt, Alison. 1994. *Travel, Gender and Imperialism. Mary Kingsley and West Africa*. NY & London: Guilford Press.
- Bosman, Herman Charles. 1988. "Lost City". In *The Collected Works of Herman Charles Bosman*. Cape Town: Southern Books.
- Brantlinger, Paul. 1988. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Bristow, David. 1995. "Mountains of the Moon". *Getaway Magazine*. April Issue. Available online at <http://www.getawaytoafrica.com/content/magazine/features.htm>.
- Bristow, Joseph. 1991. *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World*. London: Harper Collins.
- Bruhn, Steven. 1994. *Gothic Bodies. The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction*. Pennsylvania: Philadelphia Press.
- Buchan, John. 1903. *The African Colony. Studies in Reconstruction*. London & Edinburgh: William Blackwood

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

and Sons.

- 1906. *A Lodge in the Wilderness*. London: Thomas Nelson.
- 1908. "Access to Mountains". *Scottish Review*. May 21.
- 1908. "The Dolomites" *Scottish Review*. July 23.
- 1927. *South Africa. Historical Biographies*. (Empire Series). London: British Empire Educational Press.
- 1940. *Memory hold the Door*. London: J.M. Dent.
- 1941. *The Last Secrets. The Final Mysteries of Exploration*. London: Thomas Nelson.
- 1972 (1910). *Prester John*. London: Pan.
- 1995. *The Complete Short Stories*. Ed. Andrew Lownie. London: Thistle Publishing.
- 1996. *Collected Poems*. Ed. Andrew Lownie & William Milne. Aberdeen: Scottish Cultural Press.

Bunn, David. 1988. "Embodying Africa: Woman and Romance in Colonial Fiction." *English in Africa* 15/1 (May): 1-28.

— 1994. "'Our Wattled Cot'. Mercantile and Domestic Space in Thomas Pringle's African Landscapes". In W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.). *Landscape and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Burke, Edmund. 1757. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. London: R and J Dodsley.

Carter, Paul. 1987. *The Road to Botany Bay: An essay in spatial history*. London: Faber & Faber.

Chrisman, Laura. 2000. *Rereading the Imperial Romance. British Imperialism and the South African Resistance in Haggard, Schreiner and Plaatjie*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Clement, A. J.. 1967. *The Kalahari and its Lost City*. Cape Town: Longman.

Coetzee, J.M. 1988. *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Radix.

— 2000. *Stranger Shores. Essays, 1986-1999*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Comaroff, John. and Jean Comaroff. 1997. *Of Revelation and Revolution. The Dialectics of Modernity on the South African Frontier*. Vol.2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English. 1983. J.B. Sykes (ed.), 7th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Conrad, Joseph. 1985 (1902). *Heart of Darkness*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Cooper, David (ed.) 1995. *A Companion to Aesthetics*. Blackwell, Oxford.

Cosgrove, Dennis and Stephen Daniels (eds) 1988. *The Iconography of Landscape. Essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of pastoral environments*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Coulsen, David and James Clark. 1983. *Mountain Odyssey*. Johannesburg: MacMillan.

Couzens, Tim. "The Old Boy in Africa". *English in Africa*. 181/ 24.

Crowther, Paul 1989. *The Kantian Sublime*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Culler, Jonathan. 1988. *Framing the Sign. Criticism and its Institutions*. Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press.

Daniell, David. 1975. *The Interpreter's House: A Critical Assessment of John Buchan*. London:

De Sade, Marquis Donatien Alphonse. 1965 (1795). *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and other Writings*. New York: Grove.

De Fillipi, F. 1909. *Ruwenzori. An Account of an Expedition of H.R.H. Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoy, Duke of Abruzzi*. London: Archibald Constable.

De Bolla, Peter. 1989. *The Discourse of the Sublime. Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject*. Oxford:

Bibliography

Basil Blackwell.

De Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1984. *Kant's Critical Philosophy. The Doctrine of the Faculties*. Trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam. London: Athlone Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1987. *The Truth in Painting*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Eagleton, Terry. 1990. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

—. 1992. "The Ideology of the Aesthetic". In Stephen Regan *The Politics of Pleasure. Aesthetics and Cultural Theory*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Eco Expeditions. 2004. Online brochure. Available online: <http://www.ecoexpeditions.no/eastafrica/uganda>. Accessed 4 February.

Enzensberger, H.M. 1996. "A Theory of Tourism." *New German Critique*, 68 (Spring/Summer): 117-135.

Executive Wilderness Programmes. 2004. Online Brochure. Available online: <http://www.ewpnet.com/rwenzori.htm>. Accessed 4 February.

Farini, G.A. 1886a. "A Recent Journey in the Kalahari." *Royal Geographic Society*, Vol. VII: 437 - 453.

—. 1886b. *Through the Kalahari Desert. A Narrative of a Journey with Gun, Camera, and Note-book to Lake N'gami and back*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington.

Fisher, Ruth. 1919. *On the Borders of Pygmy Land*. London: Marshall Brothers.

Freeman, Barbara. 1995. *The Feminine Sublime. Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Freshfield, Douglas. 1907. "The Conquest of the Ruwenzori: A Note." *Geographic Journal*. March (3): 326-229.

Freud, Sigmund .1925. "The Uncanny". In *Collected Papers*. Vol. IV. Trans. Joan Riviere. London: Hogarth.

Gernheim, H. 1971. *A Concise History of Photography*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Giddings, Robert (ed).1991. *Literature and Imperialism*. London: Macmillan.

Goldie, Fay. 1963. *The Lost City of the Kalahari. The Farini Story and Reports on other Expeditions*. Cape Town: Balkema.

Gordimer, Nadine. 1988. "The Congo River". In *The Essential Gesture. Writing, Politics and Places*. Cape Town: Taurus and David Phillip.

Gordon, Rob; Rassol, Ciraj & Witz, Leslie. 1996. "Fashioning the Bushman in Van Riebeeck's Cape Town, 1952 and 1993." In Pippa Skotnes (ed.) *Miscast. Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Gorman, Francis 2000. "'The Mightiest Evangel of the Alpine Club': Masculinity and Agnosticism in the Alpine Writing of John Tyndall". In Andrew Bradstock *et al* (eds) *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture*. Houndmills: Macmillan Press.

Green, Lawrence.1948. *To the River's End*. Cape Town: Howard Timmins.

Green, M. 1980. *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*. New York: Routledge.

Hall, Martin. 1995. "The Legend of the Lost City; or, the Man with the Golden Balls." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21 (2): 179 -199.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

- Hardy, Thomas. (1891) 1988. *Tess of the D'urbervilles*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Harvey, David. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity. An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Hegel, G.W.F. 1872. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Trans. J. Sibree. London : Bell & Deldy.
- Hochschild, Adam. 2000. *King Leopold's Ghost: A story of greed, terror, and heroism in Colonial Africa* . London: Papermac.
- Huxley, Aldous. 1929. "Wordsworth in the Tropics". In *Do What You Will. Essays*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Jacobs, Jane .1996. *Edge of Empire. Postcolonialism and the City*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jacobus, Mary. 1989. *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Jacqueline Labbe. 1998. *Romantic Visualities. Landscape, Gender and Romanticism*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Jameson, Fredric.1981. *The Political Unconscious*. Durham: Duke University Press.
— . 1990 "Modernism and Imperialism". In Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said (eds): *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
— .1991. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- JanMohamed, Abdul. 1985. *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Jarvis, Robin. 1997. *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Jay, Martin.1988. "Scopic Regimes of Modernity". In Hal Foster (ed.) *Vision and Visuality*. Seattle: Bay Press: 3-23.
- Johnstone, Harry. 1903. *The Nile Quest*. London: Lawrence and Bullen.
- Jones, J.D.F. 1996. *The Buchan Papers*. London: Harvill.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1951 (1790). *Critique of Judgement*. Trans. J.H. Bernard. New York: Hafner,
— . 1991 (1764). *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. Trans. John Goldthwait. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Kingsolver Barbara.1998. *Poisonwood Bible*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Kipling, Rudyard.1903. "The Burial". In *The Five Nations*. London: Methuen.
- Knox-Shaw, Peter. 1984. "The Explorer, and Views of Creation". *English in Africa* 27 / 1: 1 - 25.
- Kohler, Peter. "Afterword". In Alan Paton. *Songs of Africa. Collected Poems*. Ed. Peter Kohler. Gecko Books. Durban
- Krakauer, Jon. 1998. *Into Thin Air*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Krebs, Paula. 1999. *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Kruse, Juanita. 1989 *John Buchan (1875-1940) and the Idea of Empire*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen.
- Landau, Paul. 1996. "With Camera and Gun in Southern Africa. Inventing the Image of the Bushmen, c.1800 - 1935." In Pippa Skotnes (ed.) *Miscast. Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Lehmann, Olga. 1955. *Look beyond the Wind. The Life of Dr Hans Merensky*. Cape Town: Howard Timmins.

Bibliography

- Liu, Alan. 1989. *Wordsworth: the Sense of History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- Lownie, Andrew. 1995. *John Buchan. A Presbyterian Cavalier*. London: Constable.
— . 1997. "John Buchan, The Round Table and Empire". In A. Bosco and A. May (eds) *The Round Table and British Foreign Policy*. London: Lothian Foundation Press.
- Lynn, Frank. 1989. *Stanley. The Making of an African Explorer*. London: Constable.
- Lytard, Jean-Francois. 1991. *The Inhuman. Reflections on Time*. Cambridge: Polity.
— . 1992. *The Postmodern Explained*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.
— . 1993. "The Sublime and the Avantgarde". In Thomas Docherty (ed.) *Postmodernism. A Reader*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
— . 1994. *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- MacDonald, R. 1994. *The Language of Empire. Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mackenzie, John. (ed) 1994. *Imperialism and Popular Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mansfield, Nick. 1997. *Masochism. The Art of Power*. Westport: Praeger.
- Masse, Michelle. 1992. *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism and the Gothic*. Ithaca:
- Matte, Jimmy. 1999. Private correspondence addressed to Zannie Bock and Hermann Wittenberg. 8 January.
- Maughan Brown, David. 1983. "The Noble Savage in Anglo Saxon Colonial Ideology". *English in Africa* 10/2 (October).
- McClintock, Anne. 1995. *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*. New York: Routledge.
- McLeod, Bruce 1999. *The Geography of Empire in English Literature 1580 -1745*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Merrington, Peter. 1996. "Cape-to-Cairo: tracing an imperial imaginary." *Inter Action* (4): 93-97.
- Meyer, Hans. 1891. *Across East African Glaciers: The First Ascent of Kilimanjaro*. London: Longmans.
- Millin, Sarah Gertrude. 1933. Rhodes. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Mishra, Vijay. 1994. *The Gothic Sublime*. NY: SUNY Press.
- Mitchell, W.J.T.(ed.) 1994. *Landscape and Power*. London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Mitchell, W.J.T. 1994. *Landscape and Power*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Moore J. 1902. "First Ascent of one of the Snow ridges in the Mountains of the Moon". *Alpine Journal* (May)156: 77-90.
- Moorehead Alan. 1971. *The White Nile*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Morphet, Tony. 1983. "The Honour of Meditation". *English in Africa* 10/2 (October): 1-10.
- Morris, David. 1985. "Gothic Sublimity". *New Literary History* 16: 299-319.
- Murray, J. 1895. *How to live in Tropical Africa. A Guide to Tropical Hygiene*. London. George Phillip.
- Murray, Sally-Ann. 1996. "Tropes and Trophies: The Lost City 'Discovered'". *Ariel* 27 (1): 149 - 179.

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Musgrave, William. 1997. "That Monstrous Fiction: Radical Agency and Aesthetic Ideology in Burke". *Studies in Romanticism* (Spring) 36: 3-26.

Nash, Andrew. 1983. "The way to the Beloved Country: History and Individual in Alan Paton's *Towards the Mountain*." *English in Africa* 10/2 (October): 11-27.

New Vision. 2004. Online version of *New Vision* newspaper. Available <http://www.newvision.co.ug>. Accessed 25 April.

Nicholson, Marjorie Hope 1963. *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory. The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*. New York: Norton.

Noyes, John. 1992. *Colonial Space. Spatiality in the Discourse of German South West Africa 1884 -1915*. Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Oxford English Dictionary. 1989. Simpson, J. and E.S.C. Weiner (eds), 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Paton, Alan. 1949. "South Africa's Racial Problems of an intensity and complexity unknown to any other country." Alan Paton Centre: PC 1/8/88/12.

— . 1950. "Why I write". Alan Paton Centre: PC 1/8/1/1/17.

— . 1955. *The Land and People of South Africa*. Philadelphia and New York: Lippincott.

— . 1980. *Towards the Mountain*. Harmondsworth: Penguin..

— . 1986. *Journey Continued*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

— . *Songs of Africa. Collected Poems*. Ed Peter Kohler. Gecko Books. Durban.

— . 1988 (1948). *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

— . n.d. "Natal Kalahari Expedition". Alan Paton Centre: PC 1/7/1/3.

— . n.d. "Secret for Seven". Alan Paton Centre: PC 1/ 3/4/6.

Paton, Jonathan. 1990. *The Land and People of South Africa*. London: Harper Collins.

Paton, Doris. 1958. Untitled diary and related material. Alan Paton Centre: PC 1/7/1/3.

Penn, Nigel. 1996. "'Fated to Perish'. The Destruction of the Cape San." In Pippa Skotnes (ed.) *Miscast. Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen*. Cape Town: UCT Press

Pratt, Marie Louise. 1992. *Imperial Eyes*. London: Routledge.

Pole, Mark. 1988. Tape recorded interview with Alan Paton, Kloof.

Preston, John. 1990. *Touching the Moon*. London: Heinemann.

Pringle, Thomas. 1970. *Poems Illustrative of South Africa*. Cape Town: Struik..

Pugh, Simon (ed.) 1990. *Reading Landscape: Country - City - Capital*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Randall-MacIver, David. 1906. "The Rhodesia Ruins: their probable origin and significance". *Geographical Journal* (April).

Regan, Stephen. 1992. *The Politics of Pleasure. Aesthetics and Cultural Theory*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Rich, Paul. 1985. "Liberal Realism in South African Fiction, 1948 -1966". *English in Africa* 12 /1 (May): 47 - 81.

Richards, Thomas. 1993. *The Imperial Archive. Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*. London and New York: Verso.

Rider Haggard, H. 1977 (1885). *King Solomon Mines*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Bibliography

- . 1984. *She*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Rose, Gillian. 1993. *Feminism and Geography. The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ruskin, John 1903 (1843) *Modern Painters*. Vol1 - 4. In *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. J. Cook. Vol3, 4. London: George Allen..
- . 1903 *Deucalion*. In *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. J. Cook. Vol. 6. London: George Allen.
- . (1865) *Sesame and Lilies*. In *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. J. Cook. Vol. 18. London: George Allen.
- . 1870. "Inaugural Lecture". In *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. J. Cook. Vol. 20. London: George Allen..
- . 1874. "Fourth Oxford Lecture". In *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*. Ed. J. Cook. Vol. 20. London: George Allen.
- . 1906. *The Crown of Wild Olive: Four Lectures on Industry and War*. London: Allen.
- Sage, Victor. 1990. *The Gothic Novel*. London: Macmillan.
- Said, Edward. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Verso.
- . 2003. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.
- Savile, Anthony. 1993. *Kantian Aesthetics Pursued*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Schama, Simon. 1995. *Landscape and Memory*. London: Harper Collins.
- Shelley, Mary. 1994 (1818). *Frankenstein*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Showalter, Elaine. 1991. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de siècle*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Siegel, Carol. 1995. *Male Masochism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Smith, Janet Adam. 1965. *John Buchan. A Biography*. London: Rupert Hart-Davies.
- Smith, Wilbur. 1971. *Sunbird*. London: Pan.
- Smuts, Jan Christian. 1951. *The Thoughts of General Smuts. Compiled by his Private Secretary (P.B. Blanckenberg)*. Cape Town: Juta.
- Soja, Edward. 1992. *Postmodern Geographies. The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Speke, J. (1863) 1906. *Journal of the discovery of the source of the Nile*. London: Everyman.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1999. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.
- Stanley, Henry M. 1879. *Through the dark Continent*. Vol 1 & 2. New York: Harper.
- . 1890. *In Darkest Africa*. London: Sampson, Low, Marsden, Searle and Rivington.
- . 1909. *The Autobiography of Sir Henry Morton Stanley*. Ed. Dorothy Stanley. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Stevenson, Warren. 1996. *Romanticism and the Androgynous Sublime*. Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses.
- Stevenson-Hamilton, James. 1993. *South African Eden. The Kruger Park 1902 -1946*. Ed. Jane Carruthers. Cape Town: Struik.
- Stewart, Gordon. "Tenzing's** Two Wrist-Watches: The Conquest of Everest and late Imperial Culture in Britain 1923-53." *Past and Present* 149 (November): 170-197.
- Stewart, Suzanne 1998. *Sublime Surrender. Male Masochism at the Fin-de-Siècle*. Ithaca: Cornell University

The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape

Press.

Stibel, Lindy. 1998. "The Return of the Lost City: The Hybrid Legacy of Rider Haggard's African Romances." In Rita Wilson and Carlotta von Maltzan (eds): *SAVAL Conference Papers: A Sense of Space*. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand, 566 - 581.

Sussman, Herbert. 1995. *Victorian Masculinities*. Cambridge University Press

Synge, Patrick. 1937. *Mountains of the Moon. An expedition to the Equatorial Mountains of Africa*. New York: Dutton.

Tabbi, Joseph. 1995. *Postmodern Sublime. Technology and American Writing from Mailer to Cyberpunk*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Tooley, R.V. and C. Bricker (eds). 1976. *Landmarks of Mapmaking*. Oxford: Phaidon.

Tweedsmuir, Second Lord of. 1953. *Always a Countryman*. London: Robert Hale.

UNESCO. 1997. *World Heritage List*. Available at <http://www.unesco.org/whc/archive/repcom94.htm>. Accessed 23 June 1999.

Urry, John. 1990. *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and travel in Contemporary Societies*. London: Sage.
— . 1995. *Consuming Places*. London: Routledge.

Van Onselen, Lennox. 1961. *Trekboer*. Cape Town: Howard Timmins.

Van der Post, Laurens. 1988. *The Lost World of the Kalahari*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Vanzanten Gallagher, Susan. 1997. "The backward glance: history and the novel in post-apartheid South Africa". *Studies in the Novel*. 29/3 (Fall): 376 -386.

Voss, A. E. 1987. "The Image of the Bushman in South African English Writing of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries". *English in Africa* 14/1 (May).

Watson, Stephen. 1982. "Cry, the Beloved Country and the Failure of Liberal Vision". *English in Africa* 9 /1 (May): 29 - 44.

Weiskel, Thomas. 1976. *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*. Baltimore: John Hopkins.

Williams Anne. 1995. *Art of Darkness. A Poetics of Gothic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Williams, Raymond. 1975. *The Country and the City*. London: Paladin.

Wilmsen, Edwin. 1995. "Primitive Politics in Sanctified Landscapes: The Ethnographic Fictions of Laurens van der Post." *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 21/ 2 (June): 201 - 223.

Wittenberg, Hermann. 1993. "Rhodes Memorial: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Culture". *Inter Action*. 2: 217-230..

— . 2000. "Ruwenzori: Imperialism and Desire in African Alpinism". In Rita Wilson and C. von Maltzan (eds). *Spaces and Crossings. Essays on Literature and Culture in Africa and Beyond*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Wordsworth, William. Guide to the Lake District

Wordsworth, William. 1986. *The Prelude. A Parallel Text*. Ed. J.C. Maxwell. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Yeoman, Guy. 1989. *Africa's Mountains of the Moon. Journeys to the snowy source of the Nile*. New York: Universe.

Young, Robert. 1990. *White Mythologies. Writing History in the West*. London and New York: Routledge.

Bibliography

—. 1995. *Colonial Desire. Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London and New York: Routledge.

Žižek, Slavoj 1989 *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.

—. 1993. *Tarrying with the Negative. Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham: Duke University Press.