

Millin's "ideological' parallel with some of Hitler's theories stemmed from her enchantment with Rhodes": both men wanted to conquer the world and replicate, if not their physical selves, then at least their race ideologies:

Rhodes's plan of a secret society to carry out a scheme for setting most of the world...with members of his own race took actual shape in Hitler...Rhodes's Raid that is called Jameson Raid was precisely an Hitlerian Putsch. (TNL:286)

Millin could "describe Hitler no less than Rhodes" in the sense that both embraced the ideas of race domination. (TNL:288) But her obsession with "aggressive nationalism" stems from her own longing for the reproduction of a single, identical race which (in keeping with Hitler and to a lesser degree Rhodes) implied the eradication of ethnic 'inferiority': the removal from the world of individuals who did not resemble the ideal superhuman.



The inferior in Hitlerian terms embodied in the already mixed race group. In the case of Millin it was embodied in the already mixed race group. Millin's theories of race superiority constituted a problem for this group: they possessed elements (genes) of both pure races (white and black), and they formed a group of sub-humans who are "detrilled, bastardized, degenerated, dressed in the offal of European clothing, meager with hunger and frail with disease". (TNL:27) In addition to this, as God's Stepchildren shows, some of them have inherited (from their white progenitors) adulterated variations of the genes that determine intellectual, resourceful and industrious behaviour. This point is best illustrated by the characters of Silla and Kleinhans: the former, as already mentioned outshone her (blacker-looking) brother in every respect, the latter because of his apparent whiteness, "became a prosperous man and a decorous churchgoer [and] reaped the benefits of his paler pigmentation". (GSC:99) A similar fate is true of Barry Lindsell who because of his share of white blood is successful both educationally and socially. Of course, what these characters share, and cannot deny nor transcend is their biological inheritance which, if it does

not foreshadow their socio-economic decline (as revealed by Kleinhans's fate), would serve as an inescapable psychological plague lurking either in the back of the mind or on the tip of the tongue.

In a manner of speaking, Hitler, Rhodes and Millin shared one thing in common: a type of schizophrenia. This issue of a psycho-social 'condition' was similar to one Coetzee refers to and, central to it, I believe, was its manifestations of "irrational thought in the social body and of integrating madness into historical explanations" (Coetzee, 1990:3). But it is not so much the way in which they had interpreted the world as the obsessive compulsion and vigour with which they had done it.

Millin and Edith Lindsell

Another perhaps less striking feature of the novel is its manipulation of the issue of prejudice in order to precipitate the idea of 'equals'. Millin was just as contemptuous of 'degenerate whites' as she was of all coloureds. These two types of beings, in the novel, are portrayed in a similar fashion. In addition, she categorically expresses the social idea (myth) of predetermined match making. People will inevitably (through some sort of predestined, metaphysical force) end up with partners whom they naturally deserve or who match them, if not physically, then socially or morally. These sentiments are communicated in two distinct ways. In the first instance through some of the main characters, and secondly, in Millin's emphasis on the classical notions of beauty: straight hair, blue eyes and a slender build (in the case of women), and social acceptance: wealth, social status and education (in the case of men).

Evidence from the novel to illustrate this point can be derived from the relationship between Elmira and her father's landlord, Adam Lindsell. For Lindsell, it was Elmira's virginal youth, her sensuality and apparent attractiveness that had rendered her desirable in every respect. She was not 'pure white' but the closest to it for him. When Kleinhans objects to the marriage of his daughter to his landlord, the latter promptly remarks, "you think I am old...yes but there are other things than years to be

considered...I mean, first, that I am white and Elmira is not". (GSC:170) Her 'colouredness' cancels his old age; his whiteness and wealth match her looks.

Again, in this respect, Millin fell into the autobiographical trap of expressing not only her personal prejudices but also her dismay at her own physical attributes. Rubin stresses that Millin was "always to remain a rather unfeminine woman direct, masculine and strong". (Rubin, 1977:16) Millin's representative in God's Stepchildren is Edith Lindsell, who resembles Millin physically and to some extent psychologically. Millin's insomnia is substituted by Edith's unattractiveness: both conditions plague them throughout most of their lives. Edith is obsessively self-conscious of her appearance as a woman, and is frequently haunted by the fact that at age twenty-seven she

knew as certainly as if she had seen the tablets of her life written to the very end, and signed by the word 'Finis', that she was destined to spend the rest of her life as what people called an old maid. (GSC:161)

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This was a thought that dominated the mind of the young Millin whom Rubin describes in the following way:

In the aridity and loneliness of her youth, Sarah Gertrude was disturbed by the increasing fear that she would remain a spinster, doomed like the unfortunate woman she had known in the hostel in Kimberley. Forbiddingly sharp in manner, uncomfortingly clever, and somewhat unattractive, she was not a young woman who appealed to any man with whom she was in contact. (Rubin, 1977:36)

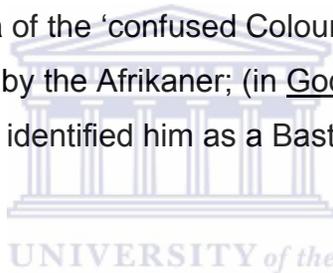
These sentiments are true of Edith especially in her realization that her sister's would-be lover, Darrell Tibbitts, did not have the slightest inclination towards her. In this sense, the point of 'surreptitious' autobiography creeping into the novel is reinforced.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

Millin's race ideology, as portrayed in God's Stepchildren, can be summed up as projecting four major strands of thought. Firstly, she believed that the prime function of the Coloureds was to remind the white race of its (spiritual and moral) weakness. The Afrikaners, for example, (whose language the Coloureds adopted) rejected the Coloureds on the grounds that they were

evidence of this frequent lapse on [the part of the Afrikaner] and [the Coloureds] often received a peculiarly virulent brand of hatred because of [their] supposed degeneracy. (Rubin, 1977:18)

This point alludes to the idea of the 'confused Coloured' who had been bastardised 'traditionally and historically' by the Afrikaner; (in God's Stepchildren Kleinhans is assaulted by Boers who had identified him as a Bastaard). Coetzee cites Cronje's observations thus:



because Coloured people are neither white nor black, it cannot as easily be said...what they are as what they are not...they want to be like whites [and] the result is 'inner confusion'...the 'bastard' is regrettably doomed to be unhappy since he suffers from inherited disharmony...his only salvation is to marry within the 'bastard' community. (Coetzee, 1991:13)

The point is explicit in the novel at a stage where Deborah, the child of the first mixed union, seeks advice about the apparently white man for whom she shows a liking: "you say black is not for me; you say white is not for me...what is for me then?". To which her employer, Mrs. Burtwell, replies: "The same as you are!". (GSC:91)

Millin hoped to ridicule any attempts (by any ethnic group) to initiate and promote the ideals of social integration and harmony; miscegenation, which represented the epitome of such attempts, she believed to be the original sin. The myth of Eden, as

touched on earlier, is an undercurrent in the novel but in this, the sin is not deceit but race betrayal; the consequences are similar, though: eternal damnation in the form of social embarrassment bestowed upon the transgressors and their offspring.

Secondly, God's Stepchildren can be construed as Millin's literary attempt at tracing of the origins of inter-race union, and thereby the beginnings of a history of a Coloured 'race'. But she did more than just sketch four generations of Coloureds and their ascent to the 'throne of whiteness'; she carefully articulated a detailed, graphic analysis of the physical, social, cultural and mental being of this apparently homogenous group. However, the major dilemma which she (and others like her) had faced was the practical impossibility to articulate a single and static definition of the term 'coloured'. This conflict is synonymous with the one which attempts to define 'race'; for just as 'race' (with 'ethnic group' as its euphemistic cousin) has proven to be a mutable concept, so too has the concept 'coloured' eluded the trappings of linguistic definition and stagnation. Dubow perhaps offers one way around this difficulty by declaring that "intellectual racism" in South Africa has been overlooked or denounced as pseudo-scientific. He proceeds to argue that

the tendency to dismiss racial theory in this fashion initially arose out of the post-war anti-racist consensus that 'race' was a biological 'myth' whose meaning was socially constructed rather than intrinsic. (Dubow, 1989:3)

This insight, I believe, escaped Millin's construction of the Coloured a term which was also a biological myth but one that she wanted to revitalize and validate in literary form.

This is not to say that Millin was oblivious to the problem, even though Rubin holds that Millin disregarded the socio-evolutionary explanations for her own ideological preoccupations. I believe that Millin represented, almost prophetically, the ideals of social integration by representing it as a major theme in her novel. Moreover, she did

more than just excite levels of consciousness about miscegenation. Instead, God's Stepchildren added impetus to the whole 'phenomenon' of sex and marriage across the 'colour-line'. The subject was nothing new to the South Africa of Millin's time. Perhaps, what she tried to do was to warn her fellow white (bourgeois) South Africans about the emergence of a class who, if it would not aspire to match them physically, would soon threaten their (the lower middle-class whites') socio-economic position and so doing, invalidate Millin's claims of race superiority.

Thirdly, the novel signaled Millin's mark on the literary scene. An achievement which was more noticeable as she had not received a formal education. (Rubin, 1977:33) Unfortunately, this novel (like some of her others) is overshadowed by the racist ideologies of its author. This is particular true in her inimical representation of Coloureds and her blatant hatred for Coloureds along with her inability to perceive the social underpinnings of the "manifestations of degeneracy, drunkenness, lewdness and sloth". (Rubin, 1977:19) I therefore agree with Rubin when he states that:

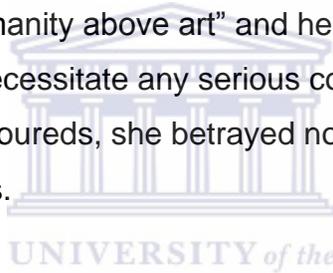
Millin simply wrote about the kind of life she saw all around her, paying more attention to local colour and types than to character development, with the result that people [in the novel] tend to be stereotypes rather than individuals and thus believable characters. (Rubin, 1977:33)

She was, however, more set on manipulating the characters, depicting the setting and eloquently narrating the text as a marketable piece of literature which she hoped would be quantitatively consumed abroad. It remains rather unfortunate that a writer of her measure could acquiesce to purely politically and financially motivations. She drew on the history and experiences of a then marginalized community and reproduced them in literary form with the sole intention to capitalize on its success.

Lastly, the novel is symptomatic of Millin's internal perplexity about her own world-views regarding ethnic difference. She both admired Smuts as liberal statesman, and loathed his apathy towards the plight of the Jewish people and his consideration for

the Coloureds. She worshipped Rhodes whom she believed resembled Hitler politically and ideologically; Hitler, in his turn, she completely abhorred. What is perhaps most prominent about her confused state of mind was her apparent rejection of Hitlerian eugenics which in most cases resembled the principles of her own race theories: she was sensitive to the predicament of the German-Jews, a victimized and despised people, but did not foster the same emotions for a local majority who had been suffering a similar fate.

It is perhaps not entirely over-zealous to reduce Millin's racism to an aristocratic, snobbish and unenlightened rejection of the constructive values of humanity, philanthropy and equality. She admittedly held personal (capital) gain in higher regard than the qualities that enhance or develop the lives of the less fortunate. Her claims of "putting both justice and humanity above art" and her regard for human kindness as the greatest virtue, do not necessitate any serious consideration. (TNL:150) In her misrepresentation of the Coloureds, she betrayed nothing less than a lack of interest in the plight of the Coloureds.



If eugenics involves selective breeding, then God's Stepchildren can be construed as an experiment in the literary engineering of a people. The Coloured people in the novel certainly do not appear. They are consciously and progressively pieced together but only to discover a disjointed nature. This interpretation would reinforce the author's position as a quasi-scientist/anthropologist, for the novel uses features familiar to a study of the human anatomy and to some extent physiology even though it tends to purport that it operates on an ethno-cultural level.

Millin, S.G

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