Legislating Women

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Summary

This article scrutinises literary texts by white women explicitly or implicitly calling for legislation to prevent miscegenation and, in particular, to prohibit sexual relationships between white men and women of colour. It maintains that, from Schreiner onwards, this theme recurs in a number of writers and examines how it affects the writers' portrayals of male psychology, of incest, of writing and the world of culture.

The article continues by reflecting on the reactions to these texts and by assessing the manner in which they have been used or misused: by male editors and legislators, by white feminist critics, and by subsequent writers.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel neem onder die loep literêre tekste deur blanke vroue wat eksplisiet of implisiet aangedring het op wetgewing om rassevermenging te verhoed, en veral om seksuele verhoudings tussen blanke mans en swart vroue te verbied. Daar word aangevoer dat hierdie tema sedert Schreiner by herhaling terugkeer in 'n aantal skrywers se werk en daar word noukeurig nagegaan watter uitwerking hierdie saak op die uitbeelding van die manlike psigologie, bloedskande, die verhaalkuns en die kulturele wêreld het.

Die artikel ontleed dan reaksies op hierdie tekste en die wyse waarop hulle gebruik of misbruik is: deur manlike redakteurs en wetgewers, deur feministiese kritici en deur latere skrywers.

Introduction

When Dr Eben Dönges, Nationalist Party Minister of the Interior, introduced the first piece of Grand Apartheid legislation, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages, Bill of 1949, he produced the work of three white women as intellectual justification for the act:

> I now wish to come to the reasons for the introduction of this Bill today. One of the principal reasons is undoubtedly the pressure for the preservation of racial purity. It is an urge that is born in the Afrikaner, English-speaking as well as Afrikaans-speaking. I am sorry I have not the book at the moment, but I should like to have read to the House an extract from one of the writings of Olive Schreiner where she pays tribute to the Boer who in the middle of the desert and

> surrounded by barbarians preserved his racial purity; and she says that the little banner of seventeenth century civilisation which he carried into the desert remained intact throughout the centuries. That is a glowing tribute paid to the Voortrekkers of that time who in difficult circumstances and surrounded by a lower civilisation, by a different culture, did not become the prey of what was the fate of so many other white communities, where they as a small band separated from their motherland were encircled by black hordes ....
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> But there is another reason. Apart from the urge for the preservation of race purity there is also the feeling that efforts should be made to prevent the social problems that spring from blood mixture, especially in regard to the consequences to the innocent victims, the children. It is striking that in our South African literature, two women writers, one in English, the other in Afrikaans, have chosen as the theme of their novels the disastrous results of mixed marriages. The one is Regina Neser, who wrote "Kinders van Ismaël" and the other Sarah Gertrude Millin with "God's Stepchildren".
>
> (Hansard [1949]1968: 6167-6168)

Dr Dönges claims to speak in response to the texts of white women. They in turn claim to speak through and against the hidden voices of white men and black women, often on behalf of the unhappy children of such liaisons, children white women could never have. If we take Dr Dönges seriously - and, given the impact this legislation was to have, it is difficult not to - should we not regard texts by white women in which they portray the evils of interracial sex as the most important and influential literary texts in South Africa?

In this essay, I want to examine some of these texts and interrogate their causes and consequences. In the first part, I summarise and discuss some of these texts and argue that there was a long tradition of texts by white women arguing for racial legislation forbidding interracial sexuality. In the second part, I examine some of the major ways in which the texts see race as mattering, arguing that neither a scientific history of ideas nor a materialist approach is adequate, but that the images and ideas found throughout these novels show other ways of thinking about the dangers of mixed race. In the third part, I examine some of the tensions arising when white men use literary texts which start off by criticising white men as a basis for legislation. Finally, I suggest some of the problems these texts raise and suggest ways in which they fit into the larger picture of South African writing.

1 Arguing Race - Sarah's Texts

1.1 Schreiner

We first need to identify the passage to which Dr Dönges refers in Schreiner to see how significant the absence of her text is, to what extent he has distorted her intentions. The passage to which he refers occurs in *Thoughts on South Africa* (1923):

> Nothing so indicates the dogged, and almost fierce, strength of the South African Boer as this unique conservatism. Placed in a new environment, removed from the centres of European culture and thought, thrown out into the African deserts, surrounded by the most crudely primitive conditions of life, and often by none but savage human creatures, nothing would have been easier, or would have seemed more inevitable, than that rapid change should at once have set itself up in the African Boer; nothing more difficult, and almost impossible, than that he should maintain that degree of cultivation and civilization which he had brought from Europe and already possessed. Again and again, under like conditions, men of lofty European races have been modified wholly. Thrown among new and savage surroundings, when, after a few generations of isolation from European life, they again come into contact with us, we find that whatever of culture or knowledge they brought with them has vanished; their religion has atrophied; their habits of life have become modified, and, often inter-blending with the savage races about them, they have lost all, or almost all, the old distinctive European marks. They are a new human modification, but a modification often lower on the scale of life than even the savage creatures by whom they were surrounded, a degenerate and decayed people. On the east and west coast of Africa, in South America and elsewhere, again and again this has happened. Europeans, not having the conserving strength to retain what they possessed, and not being able to emulate the primitive virtues of the savage, have gone back in the scale of being. With the South African Boer this has not been so.
>
> After two hundred years we find him today with that little flag of seventeenth-century civilization which he took with him into the wilderness two hundred years ago, still to-day gallantly flying over his head, untorn and hardly faded after its two centuries' sojourn in the African desert.
>
> (Schreiner 1923: 256-57)

It is clear that there is a slippage from Schreiner to Dönges, from the Boer's cultural resistance to a notion of racial purity, from the qualifications and "inter-blending" of Schreiner to the racial paranoia of Dönges. But it must be said that Schreiner gives ample justification, elsewhere in her treatise, for a fear of the half-caste as social product and sign (1923: 123 ff.) and that this passage evokes her earlier hostility. The earlier section, for example, concludes with the "commandments little heard of in Europe ... which loom

large in the list of social duties in this land" and the "first of these would appear to be - Keep your breeds pure!" (p. 146). Schreiner's sentimental portrayal of the Boers in the style of Tacitus's noble Germanic savages was one she herself later regretted, but it had far-reaching consequences. For Afrikaners, stung by accusations that they were racially tainted by contact with Africa, that they had more mixed blood than the British, Schreiner's description served as ideal - and as justification.

Apologists for Schreiner have tended to ignore or play down those elements of her novelistic texts marked by racial jealousy or rivalry. (Michael Wade's (1990: 3-5) justification of the passage in *Story of an African Farm* in which Lyndall projects a fantasy of sexual violence onto the black man walking by is a good recent example.) The crucial episode occurs in *From Man to Man* (1927) when Rebekah wakes one night to discover that her husband Frank is having an affair with the maid. She watches him from the dining room as he steals towards the servant woman's room in the moonlight:

> Then she saw in the door of the kitchen, which formed a wing at the end of the veranda, her husband standing. In the shadow of the veranda she could see him in his gray dressing gown near the stand of ferns. Then, instead of walking across the left of the yard toward the little side passage into which the stable opened, he came straight along the veranda. Just as he came opposite the window at which she was standing, he stooped and took off his slippers; he carried them hanging from the first two fingers of his right hand; he moved in past the window of the children's bedroom, and then at the end of of the veranda turned up, keeping near the wall in the shadow of the oak tree; then he turned again and came out into the full moonlight, just beyond the oak tree's shadow, and stopped opposite her, before the little green-shuttered window of the servant-girl's room. He glanced back at the house quickly; then softly, with the tips of the two forefingers of his left hand, struck two short blows on the wood of the shutter which covered the glass of the closed window; light as the taps were, Rebekah heard them; she saw his white naked feet on the gravel and the moonlight on his fair hair. Then the door opened; and she saw him bow his head a little as he stepped down through the low door. Then it closed.
>
> (Schreiner 1927: 223)

The moral topography of infidelity marks the whole passage. The husband deviates from the stable - his pretext for going out - to the servant's room past the children's bedroom, walking opposite the room from which she has been watching for him with concern. The slippers, symbol of domesticity and the wife's devotion, go onto the right forefingers, while the left forefingers knock on the shutter. The "naked feet" and "fair hair" are obscenely attracted to the "almost black" shutters of the maid's room. The

"low door" which forces him to bend completes the portrayal of degradation.

In psychoanalytical or Lacanian terms, the complex of glances and counter-glances, of a mirror situation that gives way to moral vertigo, has Rebekah at once as betrayed watcher, and awaiting lover as she too hears the coded taps, but also as betraying husband as she follows his skirting of the domestic and the entry into degradation. It follows that the next day she must repeat the husband's experience:

> The green wooden shutter of the servant-girl's bedroom was thrown open; but the door was still shut. Rebekah passed across the yard to it, then she stood for a moment and glanced back at the sparrows and the sunshine; and then she knocked at the door. At first there was no answer, and she knocked again. Then a voice called out in Cape Dutch, "Who is there?" And Rebekah said softly, "It is I," and opened the door. She stood for a moment before she stepped down the one step that led into the room.
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> Before the window on the side of her single bed the servant girl was sitting. She was half dressed: her short black wool, with difficulty parted, was combed out to stand in two solid masses on each side of her head; her small dark face, with its puckered forehead even a little blacker than the rest, was raised as Rebekah opened the door. She had on a red striped flannel petticoat and a pair of crimson satin corsets, embroidered with white flowers; above the corsets, from a mass of frilled white lace, showed her puny black arms and bare shoulders; on the bed beside her lay a white nightdress heavy with bows: on the other side lay the serge dress she was just going to put on. The girl placed a closed fist on each of her hips, and raising her chin in the air looked at Rebekah through her half-closed twinkling eyes.
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> "Wat wil jij hè?" she said, throwing her chin yet higher. Rebekah stood silent; all she had determined to say passed from her. The girl threw back her head yet farther and burst into a laugh, intended to be defiant but with an undertone of fear, all her white teeth showing between her thick dark lips as she sat with her fists on her hips.
>
> Then, as Rebekah looked at her, Rebekah knew that it was with that girl even as it was with herself that day.
>
> Softly she turned and went out; she closed the door behind her. Almost on tiptoe, softly and quickly, she ran across the yard, like one who fears something that is following them and tries to escape.
>
> She disappeared through the back door.
>
> (Schreiner 1927: 278-79)

It would be difficult to find a passage more thoroughly riddled with racist stereotypes and hostility. The hair is "wool" and is seen as a grotesque parody of European style; her underclothing garishly signals that she is a scarlet woman; her face, "even a little blacker than the rest," marks in its smallness and puckered appearance, a simian reversion, as do the puny

arms, while the thick lips and white teeth revert to negroid type. In social stereotypes, also, the "girl" shows Coloured impertinence as she produces the impudence of the familiar "jij" which she should not use except with an equal. The closed fist on each hip also suggests an aggressive, challenging sexuality, while the floral touches on the corsets and bows on the nightdress suggest that this woman dares to try to appropriate the symbols of European femininity. The hidden underclothing that will be concealed beneath the respectable "serge" is presumably a gift from the husband and acts as metaphor for Rebekah's discovery.

Schreiner undercuts this hostile portrayal to some extent, it may be argued, by the revelation, in the biblical euphemism, that the servant is also pregnant by Frank. Nonetheless, Rebekah's reaction here mimics Frank's - she leaves quietly, crosses the yard "on tiptoe," and seems to be identified with the white family as she becomes "one" who fears "they" are followed, and she disappears into the house. Our gaze onto the scene shifts from Rebekah as observer to watcher placed between servant-quarters and master's house, seeing the illicit passages between them the master and mistress of the house (rich ironical term) both make. Nonetheless, there is little to suggest that Schreiner distances herself from what is, from one point of view, very simply the hostile view of a wronged woman. Rebekah's whitewashing of the room after the maid departs seems to give both her and Schreiner's view of what such moral turpitude needs.

Schreiner's feminist sympathies might have found this an *ur*-situation of male abuse of woman, stemming from the biological difference that a male can father many children at once, while a woman can carry only one man's child at once. This might have been a moment when a richer sense of the suffering of the other woman might have made the pathos of the "white nightdress" or the "white flowers" on the corsets clear, or made Rebekah enter fully into the awfulness of the woman's position. But what is dominant in Schreiner, as in Rebekah, is horror at the lack of discrimination of the male, of the sexual drive that ignores the proper distinctions, of the biological dissemination that makes the maid her equal.

Schreiner's moral response drives the rest of the plot. The maid leaves (whether dismissed or not is not clear) and Rebekah whitewashes her room. Later, the maid's child, Sartje (at least one presumes this is who she is), is brought up by Rebekah. The emphasis on the upbringing of Sartje is on the reaction of white children to their discovery of racial prejudice in the society around them; from our perspective there are more intriguing questions. What does Frank think about his wife bringing up his mistress's child and why does she do it? Why does the maid abandon the child to a woman for whom she seems to feel such hostility?

White feminist embarrassment at Schreiner's portrayal of this scene must be held accountable for the almost complete absence of reference to what is undoubtedly the most revealing passage (in racial semiotic, or psychoanalytical terms) in all of Schreiner. In their avowedly feminist and psychoanalytical study of Schreiner, Ruth First and Ann Scott (1980: 173) note simply that "his relationship with their coloured servant humiliates her to such an extent that she demands a separation or fresh start, this time with complete honesty between them". They make no mention of the child she brings up, nor of the stereotype of the coloured woman's sexuality, even though their avowed aim is to capture Schreiner's ambivalence towards female sexuality. They point out, quite justifiably, that Schreiner's Jew in the novel is a "disappointingly racist stereotype" (p. 174) but gloss over a racism which is more central to their concerns and enterprise. Cecily Lockett (1988) similarly glosses over this passage to present an amazingly positive and uncritical view of Rebekah's adoption of the child.

Tina Barsby (1988) and Dorothy Driver (1992) analyse more critically. Barsby points out that Schreiner's ambivalence shows in the treatment of Sartje who does not have the same name for, or relation to Rebekah that the other children do. She points out that her behaviour

> constitutes her denial of Sartje's mother's right to her child, and is an extension of the control she exerts over Sartje's mother in dismissing her once she learns of her relation with Frank.
>
> (Barsby 1988: 80-81)

Barsby notes that the adoption is to teach her children a lesson, but the lesson is surely for Frank, or, as Frank is beyond lessons and the novel cannot use him as a moral barometer, for moral-minded men and women reading. The lesson is that the white woman will be obliged to suffer for the moral turpitude of her husband, but her charity becomes, from a more suspicious point of view, a way of at once excluding the black woman's relationship with the white man and controlling its consequences.

Driver (1992) also privileges Rebekah's adoption of the child and neglects a direct consideration of this scene, but makes some telling points: she points to the whitewashing of the room, and shows that the characterisation is racial and that the racial views overtake any form of feminist solidarity. But while Driver concedes that white women take a "complicit" role, she does not consider ways in which Schreiner, like the other writers here, moves from complicity to agency.

Schreiner, we may conclude, finds a more generous novelistic and ideological attitude towards women of colour undermined and taken over by melodramatic and hostile domestic models in which these women are con-

nected with the lowest forms of white male sexuality. Frank descends the late nineteenth century version of the sexual scale, as outlined by Sander Gilman (1985), from the good wife to the worldly courtesan type to the vulgar physical energy of the young woman to the coloured woman as the nadir. As Joyce Berkman (1989) and others point out, Schreiner's thinking on racial matters was highly confused and contradictory, but there is certainly enough evidence here to suggest that Schreiner's novel supports anti-miscegenation legislation. If Rebekah suffers the social consequences of Frank's behaviour so nobly and addresses her letter to him in vain, perhaps the duty of keeping the race pure may have to be imposed on white men.

1.2 Other Texts

How representative were the writers cited by Dr Dönges? In addition to the two he cited, we should add Frances Bancroft's *Of Like Passions* (1907) - in many ways the most complex feminist novel on racial problematics - Nelly Fincher's *A South African Sketch: The Heir of Brendiford* (1909), Whalley's and Eames-Perkins's short stories, *Of European Descent* (1909), and F.E. Mills Young's *The Barrier* (1929). (I omit novels like Tippy Verbrugh's *Dr Björgen se vrou*, published after the legislation, as well as novels by men - none of which seems to fit into this general genre.) Bancroft, Whalley and Eames-Perkins and Neser are explicit in their calls for legislation on sexual relationships between races and all present generally pessimistic and hostile views of racial intermarriage and of interracial sex. We should also note that the novels were published at times when there were intense debates on the legislative treatment of racial and sexual status and were often explicitly intended to influence legislators.

Most of these novels are out of print and very little read now, so plot summary is necessary to show how they share characteristics and concerns.

(a) *Of Like Passions* (Bancroft 1907)

Dr Devine and Bryan Trevanor, both respected members of a small South African community, have, unknown to them, fathered children on black women: Dr Devine, a son; and Trevanor twin daughters. Devine's son, Andries, marries one of the twins, Nichinette. Philip Rooyen, one of a fast set of young men who prey sexually on the black women in the town, seizes Nichinette and when Andries tries to protect her, he is imprisoned. Trevanor's son, young Bryan, is in love with Mary Devine who, hearing of the sexual goings-on mistakenly rejects Bryan as a guilty party. Bryan is strongly drawn to Noyale, who is, unknown to him, his half-sister and they, in

consequence, commit incest. Rooyen marries Kathleen Trevanor.

Andries spies Noyale meeting Trevanor but thinks it is Nichinette and consequently kills her. He escapes from prison and takes vengeance - on Trevanor, but by poetic justice actually on Rooyen - by raping and murdering Kathleen Trevanor Rooyen. He is eventually captured and hanged. Noyale takes poisonous "powders" to find a peaceful death for herself and the child of Andries and Nichinette. Young Bryan Trevanor eventually marries Mary Devine. The feminist protagonist, Irene Mabille, is inspired by a vision of Kathleen to work for legislative and social change.

The plot and authorial position become ways to offer a sophisticated and complex feminist critique of male sexuality and male responses. Bancroft makes her most telling points through narrative and dramatic irony and uses melodramatic conventions in portraying the young men quite well. In her attempts to portray the suffering and feelings of the deserted black women she uses romantic and heavily poetic diction which modern readers are likely to find ludicrous, but the dilemma she faced was real: how to portray the inner life and consciousness of black women without using a dialect usually exploited for comic effect. In this effort, Bancroft at least approaches the feminist sympathy and solidarity typical of the Batavian novels described by Jean Gelman Taylor (1983), in which Dutch female writers explored the household dilemmas and tensions in the East Indies when white women were faced with white men who had been cohabiting with indigenous women.

The other strength of Bancroft's novel is the ironic portrayal of the racial responses to the rape and murder. The mass hysteria of the crowd and their self-righteousness as they await Andries's punishment is portrayed more or less sardonically, as Bancroft points at how male business interests try to exploit the situation for labour legislation, or how the sale of drink aggravates the situation. In one sense, Andries becomes a scapegoat who attains a near Christ-like status in consequence. Bancroft uses an overtly feminist commentator, the mysterious Irene Mabille, to comment directly and hostilely on white male behaviour, but her authorial stance is more complex than that. In dividing her novel into five books with titles drawn from the natural cycle of growth: (Seedtime, Growth, Fruit-Bearing, Harvesting, Ingathering) Bancroft draws on biblical notions of just recompense, and probably influenced writers such as Millin.

Above all, Bancroft uses the novel to support her general analysis of the situation, given in, for example, an article published in *The Englishwoman* and translated into French and republished in *Le Monde* (1911). In this she argues that white men, in their sexual exploitation of black women, provoke black men to reactions of sexual vengeance that would otherwise not have

risen. On the one hand, legislation to stop the access of white men to black women is necessary to undo the evil. On the other hand, if white men treat white women as inferior, for example by not giving them the vote, black men will draw the consequence that they, who could be eligible for the vote, are superior and act accordingly.

(b) *A South African Sketch: The Heir of Brendiford* (Fincher 1909)

Anthony Treloar and his South African wife, Lonita, have a son called Theodore, who is the likely heir to a British title. Theodore is mainly brought up by a young Zulu companion, Umteuqah, a chief's son. Somewhere on the Umkomaas River, the boys bathe naked, and a colonial version of James's "The Turn of the Screw" takes place. The young Englishman emerges with distinctly non-Victorian attitudes to sex and Zulu maidens. In spite of his being packed off to boarding-school in England, the damage has been done and he deserts his British fiancée to return to South Africa and go native, living with a Zulu woman by whom he has had a child, though he still idolises Gertie, the English intended. Umteuqah is now a troublesome Zulu chief with several wives. Treloar relinquishes his birthright and title.

This novel is about notions of racial honour - the family crest reads, "After dishonour, death". The novel attacks colonial child-rearing practices because they expose Theodore to very different sexual mores that will result in undesirable intimacies. The novel is both too coyly Victorian, and too demonising (the James parallel should not be regarded as frivolous) to investigate the psychic dynamics of South African child-rearing. Nor does it shed light on why a child should not, quite naturally, prefer the warmth and ease of one social system to the one of distance, inaccessibility, and the indifference of parents, as well as boarding-school. The author can never, in other words, quite make up her mind whether she is going to accuse the parents of negligence or not, and sidesteps the issue. Only much later would a professional psychologist, Simon Meyerson (pseudonym Des Troye) return to this issue with the pseudonymously published *An Act of Immorality* (1963) in which he portrays the sexual drive of the white adult male as stemming from the childhood warmth of the black servants in opposition to the aloofness and withdrawal of white parents.

(c) *Of European Descent* (Whalley & Eames-Perkins 1909)

This collection of short stories is probably the most virulent racist document of all, presented explicitly as a description of social conditions and a plea for legislative and social action. The authors offer a variety of strategies to enforce racial and class codes: a well-delivered snub often acts as a timely reminder to pretentious "coloureds" of their proper place in the social order. But there are many admonitions to the male legislative bodies as well.

The prefatory "Note to the Reader" warns us that the writers offer us

> a plain statement of facts, a retailing, without any resort to fiction, of certain events within their own experience, strictly true in every particular; believing that in so doing they are, perhaps, throwing a searchlight on an insidious danger which is threatening family life in this Colony of South Africa.
>
> (Whalley & Eames-Perkins 1909: 4)

They complain against white masters for running a class system whereas a racial system should be in place and for being so

> oblivious of that duty of upholding the white race, which is so strong a duty in a country like South Africa, as so to arrange their household as to allow a coloured man daily and unrestricted intercourse with them [white women] on *equal terms*.
>
> (1909: 42)

They complain that

> the present unrestrained sexual intercourse between the white and black races in South Africa is distinctly a moral and therefore a political crime. A crime of great magnitude, for it is the self-murder of a nation.
>
> (1909: 101)

The racial fears transmute into fears of blacks getting the vote and voting as a block. In the period before Union, the authors invoke the moral effect of "the disintegration of the white race, by intermarriage and unrestrained sexual intercourse with the coloured" (p. 105). Their stirring sexual-political call casts a long shadow:

> A white South Africa! Was it not an ideal worth striving for? Was it not the duty of each unit in the white race to endeavour to stem the fatal current which threatened it, if not with extinction, certainly with deterioration by this pernicious mingling of alien blood.
>
> (Whalley & Eames-Perkins 1909: 78)

They want to "bring forth in the future that glorious fruit the ideal of the Imperialist statesman - a white population for South Africa!" (1909: 78).

This work was published in Cape Town rather than London and represents a colonial rejoinder to the racial attitudes of the metropolis. It attacks Miss Colenso, Little Englanders, and missionaries who "have combined to throw a sort of glamour round the black man, which is incomprehensible to the white man who is brought much into contact with him" (p. 106). This external concern has led to the "half-compassionate half-admiring interest in the 'black man', for which Exeter Hall is so largely responsible" (p. 114).

At the end of the work they call for various forms of legislation and civic action. They call for mixed marriages to be declared illegal; for soldiers and sailors to be forbidden sexual relations with coloured women; for racial purity groups to form; for separate schools for different races; and for supervision of white servants working for non-white masters. It is rare for a work of fiction anywhere to have its legislative fantasies achieve such stunning success.

(d) *The Barrier* (Young 1929)

F.E. Mills Young's *The Barrier* (1929) draws on earlier authors in the genre, notably Millin, but tries to find a tone and method for a novel of ideas about heredity and environment. In the novel, Esther Moxham, a clergyman's daughter, marries Dr Grimston after the latter tried to save her father who had been run over by a car driven by the wealthy Mr Durrant. Grimston is a cold, self-absorbed, theoretical sort of man, with advanced ideas about racial equality.

Grimston and Esther are coolly if satisfactorily married until Grimston sees Christina, the nubile adolescent coloured daughter of the washerwoman, Meta. It transpires that he believes he is Christina's father and becomes obsessed with the idea of bringing her up as his child. He forces Esther into accepting this by passing it off as a social experiment, but he pushes his medical practice into disaster as patients disapprove of his attention to the child. He neglects Esther to pay attention to Christina, with whom he has a relationship strongly flavoured by sexual attraction.

Esther tries to interest Christina in Robert McLaren, a young coloured schoolmaster, who falls in love with her, writes her poetry and attends church with her, but Grimston discovers the relationship and intervenes, forcing Mclaren to desist. He reveals to Christina that he is her father and insists on her obeying him. The novel now changes its focus from Esther and concentrates on the intellectual arrogance of Dr Grimston and its cata-

strophic consequences. While holidaying in Port Elizabeth, Grimston has to choose between saving his wife or Christina when a shark attacks. He saves Christina. After Esther's death, Grimston is free to marry. He has, in the meantime, ascertained that he is not Christina's father, so he seduces her and then marries her. Their child is born with distinctly negroid characteristics and Christina runs off with Robert McLaren, who is prepared to sacrifice his respectable teaching post to be with her. Grimston throws the baby out of the window, but it is retrieved by a black woman who gives it to Meta who plans to bring it up and get Grimston to pay for it.

1.3 *God's Stepchildren* (Millin 1924); and *Kinders van Ismaël* (Neser 1933 & 1950)

Millin's novel has been more thoroughly analysed and outlined than most of the others discussed here, though usually without much sense of the local literary tradition into which it fits. I would simply make two preliminary observations as a way of prefacing my argument in the next sections. The first is that Millin's desire for racial clarity and her scapegoating procedure indubitably have strong roots in her childhood upbringing and the social uncertainty created by being one of the very few white children on the Diamond Fields. The second is that Millin was married to a prominent lawyer who later became a Supreme Court judge.

Neser's novel was first published in 1933 and republished, with extensive changes, in 1950 after the passing of the Mixed Marriages Act. In her novel, the two protagonists, Professor Richard Maynard, and Valaria Sanico, are both passing for white in spite of each having one black grandparent. She is the illegitimate child of a member of parliament, Edward Eekhout - who uses the alias of Allison when visiting Valaria and her mother in England where Valaria grows up. Richard and Valaria marry, against her mother's fervent wishes, and have two "white" children before they ignore the Mendelian laws of which they are consciously aware and have a still-born and crippled third child and then, a disastrous fourth, coloured child - a son, Roddy. They leave Cape Town for Natal where they hide the fourth child by sending him to study in the United States.

The "white" children are morally bad - the eldest son Eric secretly marries a coloured playmate from his youth and abandons her in Swaziland. The daughter marries a man without telling him of her "coloured" past. Eventually the "black" son Roddy, who is noble, returns from the United States. In a confrontation with his brother, he is killed, and Eric passes the murder off as self-defence against a burglar. The daughter has a "coloured" child, kills the child and commits suicide when her husband abandons her.

Richard and Valaria only have each other for comfort at the end.

The novel, in the 1933 version at least, is highly sympathetic to the existential and social dilemmas of the two main characters, who are the focalisers and articulators of action and commentary. Valaria indeed comments on the need for legislation to prevent unbridled mixing, but her calls are mixed with a sharp sense of the difficulty of legislating desire, and her wish to go to Parliament to address the lawmakers is full of dramatic irony in that her father himself is one of the lawmakers.

From one point of view, the novel shows that racial appearance and character do not inevitably go hand in hand. Once blood is mixed, the novel seems to suggest, appearance can no longer be confidently linked to character because appearance hides essential blood. The nobility of the "black" character is tragic because there is no way in which he can express himself fully.

2 What Racism Means in These Novels

These novels are novels of ideas, where debates, explicit and implicit, about the importance of race and inheritance are expressed in explicit conversations, authorial interventions, or in the development of the plot. A large part of their symptomatic interest now lies in their incoherencies and ideological confusions. I want to point out some of the more obvious inconsistencies in Millin's work, before commenting on three issues that have been inadequately identified because of each novelist's personal interpretation of race.

In the case of *God's Stepchildren* (Millin 1924), it is often assumed that the phrase of the title applies to the "coloureds" or those of mixed blood. Yet in the novel itself, it seems clear that it simply applies to those who are not white. The basic, existential injustice or plight of those who feel themselves excluded from the divine, is a quite separate issue from that of racial interbreeding, though one would not guess this from Millin's confusions. Similarly, Millin has no real problem with "coloured" communities or families *per se*, and spends only a modicum of time on the numerous brown children of Kleinhans. What concerns her is the child who passes for white, who defies categorisation and threatens boundaries. The problem of racial interbreeding is thus its uncertain results and the uncertainty it casts over white identity and appearance in particular. Neser's text, also, can be shown to lead logically to very different conclusions from the ones which she drew, particularly when Maynard and Sanico are presented as the intellectual giants of the university community from which they exclude themselves in shame.

I wish to offer one more preliminary comment on Millin. J.M. Coetzee has analysed Millin's ideas on blood persuasively by placing her within the context of the scientific ideas of race of her time, but one must take issue with him when he claims that it "is the poetics of blood rather than the politics of blood that sets off Millin's imagination" (Coetzee 1988: 138). In both a superficial and a much more powerful sense, it seems to me that Millin was a fairly conventional racist and that the poetics of blood became a way of exploring both causes and consequences of racial encounters.

The first conventional set of physical and moral contrasts she sets up, is between white women and women of colour. At the beginning of the novel, the stress on the racial-sexual features of the Hottentot women is obtrusive and insistent, and intended to shock. Later, and more interestingly, Millin goes beyond the unreflected form of female rivalry that one might find in her early account to present the tension and hostility between Edith Lindsell, the frustrated white spinster daughter of Adam Lindsell, and Elmira Kleinhans, the beautiful teenage coloured girl who has attracted her father's attention. (This tension is powerful enough to let us suggest this as one of the sources of Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* (1976) with the opposition between his Edith-Magda and Elmira-Klein Anna.) Nonetheless, Millin tries to protect her novel from being simply a white woman's jealousy by using Edith as a comic version of this jealousy. In due course, Edith's own neurosis will be presented as a way for the narrator and novel to detach us from her suffering and feeling. But she will, nonetheless, be true to white type by caring for the child which the feckless coloured mother abandons.

Though I would thus hesitate to see Millin or any of these novelists as coherent thinkers or even propagandists, there are three elements of their accounts that seem to emerge with enough force and power to demand consideration as consistent - or at least persistent - ideological strands.

2.1 The Psychology of the White Men

The novels use debate about racial issues both as a subject within the novels, but also as a way of defining and presenting character. They usually present racial mixing as a result of a white male drive stemming from this particular male's neurotic frustration or inability to cope with surroundings. Much of the psychological drive of the novels is to explain what could possess a white man to marry; what possesses a white man to sin is worth commenting on in Schreiner, but not elsewhere. The novels treat this issue with increasing complexity: Andrew Flood, the figure of the first generation sin in Millin (1924), is more obviously helpless and inadequate than Lindsell, and less complexly self-deceiving than Dr Grimston in Young's

(1929) novel.

Yet it should be noted that the white men in question are not uniformly presented as cads, or typically degenerate, or lower class. Although it is initially part of Schreiner's portrayal of Frank, she tries to break away to a more general portrayal of male desire, seeing its transferability as inherently degrading to women. Bancroft (1907), Millin (1924) and Young (1929) have a different emphasis. In choosing, in professional and class terms, upper-class and educated men, they can emphasise the male temperament in its most logical and lucid form. (The prevalence of doctors as sexual sinners gives the clue that the women are trying to confront Western male scientific understanding at its weakest point.) But all the intellectually superior men (Dr Devine, Adam Lindsell and Dr Grimston) end up helpless, the former two in the hands of white women who have to look after them. In racial terms, these texts serve as a warning of the weakness of white male resistance to the threat of racial intermingling and a half-fantasised threat that their sin will lead to their helplessness at the hands of white women. But there is a particular psychological element of the white male drive which seems at once cause and consequence of racial interbreeding.

2.2 Incest

Racial interbreeding in these novels leads to, and seems inextricably linked with, incest. Racial integration seems to break down or destroy a necessary difference, and identity - to the point that the unnaturalness of racial mixing is simultaneously literally or metaphorically incestuous. In *Of Like Passions* (Bancroft 1907), the title itself suggests at once propriety but also a nightmarish mirror-world in which there are not only unknown sisters who can be taken as wives or lovers, but the sisters themselves are twins, at once uncannily unlike, and confusingly alike. In Millin and Young, the father figure of Lindsell or Grimston lusts after youth in the form of a baby, or a young woman who will become a child-bride who will, in due course, abandon him for a more natural passion. In both cases, after the unnatural marriage the child-bride is explicitly made to refer to the husband-father by the former title as "Mr Lindsell" or "father" to stress the unnaturalness of what has happened.

The white man, who should, in biblical-political terms, be a patriarch figure, loses his proper place and places racial dignity and difference itself in jeopardy, when he acts as the aged Abraham and takes a young bondwoman to wife. Part of the psychology of the white men concerned is thus of men who ignore the proper differences of age and respectability and succumb to what the novelists sometimes portray as an intense sensual and

even sexual provocation. As a result of their (often secret) actions, the world of kinship is damaged beyond recognition, and children cannot be traced with certainty to one set of parents and grandparents before them. In political terms, too, the father figure casts patriarchy and white pre-eminence aside, becoming a son-in-law or brother-in-law. These Sarah-narratives do not respond to this by the casting out of Ishmael and Hagar, but by indulging in suicides, murder and self-destruction as the only honourable ways out for these living signs of white male failure.

It may be, as Sander Gilman (1985) suggests, that an intellectual link made by late nineteenth and early twentieth century analysts between the sexuality of the child and that of the primitive underpins the female suspicion of what men are seeing in these child-primitives, but these novels - and this is particularly true of Young's work - also use the racial issue as a vehicle for writing about the sexual drive of middle-aged men, and tensions between mothers and daughters.

2.3 Writing

The most powerful set of ideas associated with racism in these novels has to do with the writing itself. When Andrew Flood, the missionary, goes to do his missionary work, he is engaged in a fruitless correspondence with Mary Keeble, a young woman he has met on a ship to South Africa. When her letter refusing his offer of marriage arrives, he turns in desperation to marriage with Silla, the young Hottentot woman. Silla does not write, but speaks: "She would open her mouth and show him her red tongue achieving the correct effect" (Millin 1924: 27). The tongue becomes, obscenely, a sexual organ based on proximity and presence, as opposed to the absence, propriety, and emptiness of his correspondence.

This opposition plays itself out throughout the rest of this novel and in most of the others discussed here. In Schreiner's (1927) novel, the other female characters pen semi-literate notes to Frank or relapse into silence. In Millin or Young, the coloured characters cannot really learn their lessons and their precocious intellectual abilities fade. Elmira is bored after marriage because she "was not given to reading" (Millin 1924: 204). Lindsell shows to what extent he has betrayed his heritage when he abuses the urbane, correct mode of the letter in which he reveals Elmira's birth to the Krells in Cape Town, to stop their son's *mésalliance* with her because he wants Elmira to return to the farm. When she does, he speaks to her to seduce her. When Barry Lindsell marries, his English wife cannot understand the fuss about race until an ill-written letter from Barry's relatives concerning his long-lost mother arrives, revealing the shakiness of his

cultural past, and driving her back to England in dismay.

At the end of *The Heir of Brendiford* (Fincher 1909), Anthony Treloar refuses to let his native wife into the parlour where he keeps the picture of Gertrude and where he tries, through music and letters, to keep some kind of spiritual kinship with her world. In his case, even the native woman's attempt to speak English is resented as a kind of impertinence.

These novels, in other words, assert something rather more ominous than a belief in literacy or education as a desirable erotic property. In more profound terms, race determines proper correspondence, denying the inherent suitability of coloured characters to correspond properly with whites. Where they manage to correspond through writing, it is, as in the church scenes in *The Barrier* (Young 1929) when Robert McLaren and Christina speak nobly to each other, with another character of the same racial composition and the achievement is a temporary and flimsy one, likely to be undone by sudden racial passions. These novelists, in other words, see the capacity for the spiritual and emotional education of black women, in particular, as severely limited. When both Elmira and Christina leave their elderly husbands with the child and go off with younger men, the novelists mark their most profound disapproval by the brevity and lack of feeling of the notes they leave in explanation.

The white man who goes native abandons the world of writing and all it implies: contracts, wills, testaments, delays, reflections, Europe, even novels themselves. Instead he surrenders himself to the immediate and the evanescent: the tongue, the body, the present, Africa, youth. The image of horror persistently summoned up is that of the dance, that rouses the dark blood and the primitive, and leaves the shocked white in horror of the sensual power unleashed. These novels cannot even manage the recognition by Conrad's Marlow that not only is part of one's own humanity revealed by the dance, but it is also a Nietzschean celebration of power.

For white women, too, the writing of these novels is an antidote to, a substitution for, the secrecy and physicality of relationships between white men and black women. The content depends upon the revelation of that which should not be - children of mixed blood - and thus creates an unstable form which calls beyond itself to legislation for its resolution.

3 The Texts and the Legislation

Most of these novels blame white men, above all, for the problem, so we now have to ask whether racial legislation prohibiting the access of white man to black women represented a triumph of female will and moral

suasion, or whether there is a tension between the novels and the legislation enacted, either from the point of view of the writers, or the legislators.

In the case of Schreiner, I have suggested that a powerful imaginative tendency to see the black woman as the Other in a sexual domestic melodrama, and the additional tendency to portray the Afrikaner as a noble European savage were part of the ideological confusions that hampered her literary production in the latter part of her career, and that her confusions made her eminently exploitable by Afrikaner Nationalism and white racism.

More simply, we can see that the republication of texts by Millin and Neser after the new legislation in 1949 posed sharp questions for them. In Millin's case, she produced an uneasy, handwashing preface in 1951 for a new edition of *God's Step-children.* In the first place, she denied any connection between the new racial legislation and her novel, adducing a very different and implausible reason for the republication:

> ... as the dark-skinned peoples are now standing up in the world, *God's Step-children* has been thought worth reviving, with an explanation of how I came to write it.
>
> (Millin 1951: vii)

She continues with an even more suprising failure to connect:

> Now there are laws in South Africa which not only prohibit concubinage or marriage between white and non-white, but tear apart white and not-white who have long lived together ....
>
> (Millin 1951: xii)

Millin's case is simple compared with Neser's, for Neser was, to a large extent, in the cheap 1950 republication of her novel, overwhelmed by the paratextual apparatus of a menacing cover with slogans of racial purity and the danger of mixed blood, while a host of textual changes strove to make the novel fit more smoothly into the model of National Party ideology and racial legislation. The introduction on the cover explicitly used the book as a novel calling for racial legislation and praising the novelist for her visionary warnings, while the preface by Neser's husband, which admittedly was there in the 1933 edition, warned readers not to take the sympathetic portrayal of the characters too seriously.

The sympathetic internal view of the characters, their existential questioning, the moral doubts on the fitness of legislators to legislate morals - all these had to go or be toned down, along with names of Afrikaner sexual sinners, while District Six came in for harsher treatment and a more intensely suggested legislative attention in the revised version. I have not been able

to ascertain whether Neser herself was responsible for the changes, especially as the use of the biblical story of Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael as preface to the revised edition, suggests a more lucid sympathy for the suffering outcasts. Some of the propagandistic material, at least, was imposed on her - as the incorrectly spelled name of the heroine on the blurb makes clear. Though I lack the space here to go into a detailed examination of the different versions, anyone wanting to see Afrikaner Nationalist propaganda in action could use this as a case study.

This suggests that a patriarchal establishment was able to use women who could neither reverse nor abandon former ideological positions. But still, how are we to understand the willingness of white males to legislate what women wanted? I want to suggest three answers to that.

The first answer (and here I follow a paper by Jonathan Hyslop 1993) is that social conditions had changed so much between the time these novels had been written, and legislation had been passed, that white men were increasingly concerned with access of non-Afrikaner men to urbanised Afrikaner women, and so wanted to pass an act which forbade marriage between, for example, Indian men and white women, and simply used the women writers for reasons of expedience.

The second answer would be that men accepted, with whatever reservations, the role of women as cultural superego because it gave them a class role and power as the responsible members of the dominant class, who could be trusted to control their libidos and thus the dominated classes - presumably including women. The most dramatic version of this was no doubt demonstrated by Senator C.J. Langenhoven in the 1926-27 debate on the Immorality Act. Langenhoven, Dirk Joubert (1974) tells us, said in his speech that a women's organisation (which he did not name, but was surely an Afrikaner one) had urged that, in order to prevent the transmission of sexual weaknesses to following generations, only one remedy was fully suitable: castration. Langenhoven embraced this rather chilling suggestion warmly, putting himself, as responsible Afrikaner man, ostensibly under the sign of the castrating mother, but in reality one must assume, as the man who reappropriates her protest and moral authority. (I must say as an aside, in the light of the recent debates on the national anthem and Bobbitmania, that this suggestion of Langenhoven's puts a rather sinister slant on "Ons sal offer wat jy vra.")

Finally, and perhaps more controversially, it seems clear that Afrikaner Nationalists saw themselves as a responsible class responding to the social conditions of poor whites as detailed, for example, in the Carnegie Report with its descriptions of racially mixed liaisons. In class terms, their duty must have seemed to them clear and, to some extent, I suspect they follow-

ed the analysis of Schreiner, Millin and Neser in perfectly good faith, albeit with false consciousness.

4 Sisters Under the Skin? - The Above-mentioned Texts and South African Literary History

How are we to characterise the importance of these texts in our definition of English South African literature? At present, these texts are typically regarded as interesting but ideologically embarrassing, or, more typically, not regarded at all. What plausible explanations can we give for these novels?

The first observation is that the novels are avowedly hostile towards white men, but not towards black men or black women. Millin's tone in her Preface to the later edition of *God's Step-children* may be taken as typical:

> I began to think very much then of the tragedy of mixed blood, and the people I blamed altogether were the white fathers - the creators of this endless tragedy. I hated them.
>
> (Millin 1951: xi)

White men, to be sure, had passed legislation which according to the Transvaal law of 1897, for example, prohibited black men and white women from sleeping together and made a white woman's voluntary sexual activity with a black man punishable with up to five years' imprisonment (Joubert 1974: 22). White men had access to black women, so the writing of white women against this abuse was from the start a complaint against injustice, which no doubt had elements of selfless and sisterly indignation.

And yet, we have to point out, there is no example of the Batavian genre in which the European woman sympathetically considers the plight of the displaced indigenous woman, who has been used by the European man as servant and sexual companion, and has to make way for the imported European bride. Bancroft's novel comes closest, but many of the other novels take a far less charitable view of the non-European woman. Though the emphasis is on the folly of white men and the double standards they have set up, black women move very quickly from being seen as heroic in their fatal suffering, to being irresponsible and sexually charged figures who should be excluded by a variety of means: social pressure, snobbery, European ideals, charitable works - and legislation if needs be. Black men, if portrayed at all, are seen as figures goaded by the irresponsibility of white men into retaliatory action.

The material and gender political issues at stake when white women writers describe black women have, it seems, often disabled white feminist critics, reducing them to blaming white men which simply reiterates the sentiments of the authors themselves. Cecily Lockett, for example, sees the portrayal of black women in South African literature as the result of the "distorted reflections of .... [white] men concerning gender and race" (1988: 21). Lockett usefully points to the tendency to see black women as alternately "untouchables" or "unattainables" but without noticing, it seems, how often - and at crucial periods prior to legislation - the white female authors were the hostile ones insisting on the untouchable status of black women, and for what reasons.

We need, to move beyond this polemic, to consider the problems these novels pose for a social-historical and particularly a feminist understanding of white women and racial attitudes, by investigating much more closely issues that can only be hinted at here: the role of white women's organisations including charitable women's organisations; and the more general attitudes towards the sexual behaviour of women of colour that would be found, for example, in women's magazines or newspapers. It may be helpful in doing this to consider some of the more general literary historical issues these texts raise.

4.1 Marriage Markets and Race

These novels define boundaries for marriage, community, and identity. In identifying colour as the mark of exclusion, they left themselves relationships between whites as the proper subject. The novel of relationships between the races became, by definition, a genre describing the hidden, the illegitimate, that which called for legislation and correction. Writing the boundaries of race became a way of writing the boundaries of fiction. Bancroft, typically, after one novel on racial topics in the current sense of black and white, wrote many more on racial topics in the older sense of the relationships between English and Afrikaners in the light of the tensions caused by the Boer War. Young, too, seemed to need to write about interracial sexuality once so as to the dismiss it as a valid theme for literature.

More generally, then, these novels must be seen as part of a discourse of exclusion and self-definition that has still not been fully superseded. The importance of writing as integral to a certain conception of race influences and shapes the very idea of literature itself. To write and read such a novel is to mark oneself as member of a civilised group, and literature becomes a way of excluding from marriageable status those who simply talk rather than write and read. Part of modern literature is marked by the moment at

which Jane Austen's heroines prove their capacity for proper romance by their ability to read (novels, letters, people); these novels turn these conventions to colonial use.

In Schreiner's *From Man to Man* (1927), Rebekah writes Frank an improbably long letter after she sees him go to the maid's room, pouring out her bitter realisations about his infidelities, but it is not clear whether he ever reads it. Schreiner deliberately seems to be allegorising the position of the white woman as archetypally protesting writer, and much of what follows in her novel and others draws white women into a position of writing to white men about excluding black women.

There is a larger issue, of course, in the connection between writing and literature, in the assumptions of what damaging and condescending things could and should be said in a space which, by definition, excluded men and particularly women of colour. Here Millin's short stories about her maid are typical. What needs further consideration is the effect this manoeuvre of exclusion has had on black South African conceptions of literature and culture.

4.2 Male Reaction

Writing by men on similar topics during this period neither shares the attitudes and concerns of these novels, nor challenges them fully by, for example, praising the qualities of black women. Douglas Blackburn in *Love Muti* (1915) comes closest to doing this when he hesitantly turns the genre against white women by making a white woman and a half-breed the rivals for the English protagonist's love and letting the latter win. His novel is perhaps the most interesting in recording very fully all the racial stereotypes, and female reactions to rivalry.

Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe* (1925) and Gibbon's *Margaret Harding* (1911) are other examples of a more sympathetic treatment of interracial sexual relationships, but they focus much more on black men and white women rather than on the dominant kind of relationship between white man and black woman. The writer who comes closest to the hostile view of male sexuality was W.C. Scully (1984) in his short story, "Kellson's Nemesis", but that story seems to me more acute about the dilemmas of male desire in a colonial context than any of the female writers are, and the magistrate's suicide as a way out of the dilemma caused by his illegitimate coloured son gives a very different solution to that of the female novelists.

4.3 Writing since 1950

It would be tempting to argue that these novels were part of an earlier era

that formed no part of post World War II English South African writing, yet the links between, for example, Millin and Gordimer are direct and strong. Gordimer's unpublished first novel drew strongly on Millin, as Stephen Clingman (1986: 26) notes, and Gordimer seems to me to share, for much of her career, a sense of the white man being at fault, and the white woman having to use writing to retaliate. In *The Conservationist* (1976), particularly, Meiring's sexual encounters in the plane, and at the end, have the flavour of incest and racial transgression typically found in these earlier novels. What Gordimer stresses is the black man's sexual-political desire, but the issue is very much there in Bancroft.

These writings by women were so disapproving and censorious of sexual relationships between white men and women of colour, that it has been difficult to find a powerful and positive portrayal of such a relationship in South African literature since then. In the work of Gordimer and André Brink, our most powerful representers of interracial heterosexual passion, it seems completely absent - at least until Brink's most recent work. In ways I have suggested here, these earlier women writers have influenced South African Literature - and law - more powerfully than anyone has recognised.

Acknowledgements

This paper has benefited from the generous expertise and criticism of Dr Carli Coetzee, and from the work of research assistants Brenda Atkinson, Cheryl-Ann Michael, and Francois Verster, while Professor Kate O'Regan was a generous and helpful respondent to an earlier version presented to the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town. I am also grateful for material support from the CSD and the University of Cape Town; none of the above should be held responsible for the opinions expressed.

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