THE JOURNEY MOTIF

IN THE

WRITINGS OF LAURENS VAN DER POST

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An Abstract of

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Laurens van der Post is a name which is well known and respected in literary circles. Yet a thorough search of the periodical indexes revealed very little reference material on his works. There were, it is true, numerous book reviews of his various publications, but there were no serious, comprehensive critiques. Consequently the task at hand seemed to demand that avenue of literary exploration which would most clearly reveal the general contours of Van der Post's writings. In the journey motif I believe I have found a topic which will do just that.

The purpose of this thesis, then, is to trace the journey motif as it occurs in Van der Post's major works and to determine the extent to which it affects his art. In Chapter I, I have attempted to trace the pattern of thought implied in Van der Post's journey motif and to illuminate it by surveying the psychological beliefs of C. G. Jung. Chapter II is concerned with a study of The Dark

Eye in Africa, a book which conveniently relates Carl Jung's psychological findings to Van der Post's journey motif. Chapters III and IV are examinations of the journey motif as it appears in Van der Post's other works (with the exception of Journey into Russia).

The results of these studies as related in Chapter V are straightforward enough. In the first place, it soon becomes obvious to even the casual reader of Van der Post's writing that the motif of the journey is central to the shape of nearly every one of his books. Of much greater importance, however, is the fact that he handles this journey motif in several dimensions. There is the inner journey of increasing awareness, and there is the physical journey of exploration through the heart of Africa. The inner journey is synonymous with Jung's individuation principle.

When Van der Post uses this pattern of the inner journey as the thread of his central plot and divorces the inner movement of the soul from the journey in the outer world, his art often becomes propaganda. The plot then becomes a formula for Salvation; the characters become disciples of the Word rather than believable human beings. But when he integrates the inner journey with the physical journey through Africa, as he does particularly well in

The Lost World of the Kalahari and in _Venture to the Interior_, then he takes his place among the great writers of the twentieth century.

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CHAPTER I

THE THEORY BEHIND THE JOURNEY

There is a certain magic that clings to the dream fabric of a journey. It has haunted great artists since Ulysses left a smouldering Troy and sailed away to the enchanted islands of the Mediterranean. Dante felt it when he followed Virgil into the Inferno to meet the doomed heroes of a bygone era. Chaucer felt it when he accompanied a motley group of pilgrims to Canterbury. Goethe felt it when he let his Faust pay the ultimate fare for his tragic journey into perdition. The journey can take many forms: the escape, the adventure, the pilgrimage, the quest for the Holy Grail; but it is more than simply a linear movement through space and time. And in its noblest sense it is usually marked by a movement toward a spiritual goal.

It is this sense of a journey of "becoming" which most characterizes the writings of Laurens van der Post. There is always the evident physical journey shaping the outer structure of his prose, of course, but the vitality of his writing radiates from a sense of dawning inner fulfillment. At the same time, the spiritual journey as seen in Van der Post's works seems to follow a recurring pattern, a pattern which can be closely related to the psychological

theories of Carl Jung. This pattern of thought may also be found in the Gnosticism of the early Christian era, the alchemy of the Middle Ages, or the writings of the eighteenth century poet William Blake; but it is most distinctly and objectively enunciated in the terms of Jungian psychology.[1] It thus becomes decidedly useful to understand the theories of this great modern psychologist if we are fully to grasp the major implications of our topic.

Psychology as defined by the Oxford Universal Dictionary means "the science of the nature, functions, and phenomena of the human soul or mind."[2] Jung himself would doubtless prefer the term psyche to mind or soul, for he believes that it is with this more conclusive organ that man apprehends the world around him. Jolande Jacobi, a disciple of Jung, suggests the greater comprehensiveness of the psyche in the following explanation:

> By 'psyche' Jung means not only what we generally call 'soul' but the totality of all psychic pro-

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[1]There is considerable evidence of Laurens van der Post's close association with Jung. The Dark Eye in Africa was originally a lecture given before a meeting of the C. G. Jung Institute. The Heart of the Hunter, which includes Van der Post's interpretation of Bushman mythology, was dedicated to C.G. Jung. And Van der Post's articles have been published in Eranos, a publication concerned with the dissemination of Jungian literature.

[2]William Little, et al., The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles, ed. C.T. Onions et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 1612.

> cesses, conscious as well as unconscious, hence something broader and more comprehensive than the soul . . . .[3]

In the centre of the area of consciousness rests the ego through which all experience of the outer and inner worlds must pass in order to be perceived. Consciousness itself includes not only the region of thought processes, but also the awareness of emotions, sensations, intuition, and the will. Yet despite its inclusiveness, consciousness only constitutes a small area of the psyche, most of which is comprised of a vast unconscious element. This unconsciousness is divided by Jung into two parts: the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The personal unconscious consists of elements which are stored just beyond the periphery of consciousness and may be called up to consciousness at any time. It includes all types of disagreeable experiences which have at one time been thought or repressed by the individual. The collective unconscious, on the other hand, consists of material which has been inherited by mankind generally as a part of the psychic brain structure. Its contents are much more difficult and sometimes impossible to raise to the level of consciousness.

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[3]Jolande Jacobi, The Psychology of C.G. Jung (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 5.

The total psyche also has four functions which are to be found in every individual: thinking, intuition, feeling, and sensation. These functions are employed by man to apprehend the contents of the outer objective world and the inner more subjective sphere. Thinking is the function which seeks to meet the world by means of cognition and logical inferences, while feeling works through the emotions. Both functions are rational: they both deal with evaluations and judgments, thinking insofar as it works from the standpoint of "true-false", and feeling insofar as it works through the idea of "pleasant-unpleasant".

The two other functions, sensation and intuition, are termed irrational because they do not operate on the principle of judgment. Instead, they work with mere perceptions, unevaluated and uninterpreted. Sensation perceives through the senses and that is all, while intuition perceives by seeing the general "inherent potentialities of things".

Man's consciousness, however, can never completely embrace all four functions at once. It is obvious enough that no man can apply two contrary systems of physical measurement to the same thing at precisely the same moment. Thus it follows that thinking and feeling, both being methods of judgment, are mutually exclusive, as are sensation and intuition, which are both methods of perception.

In fact, every man tends to depend upon only one of the four functions when he meets the world, generally choosing that function which has been most consciously developed. The opposing or inferior function in turn is completely blotted out of consciousness, and descends into the regions of the unconscious where it leads an autonomous life of its own. The two remaining auxiliary functions can be made only partially conscious, and the individual also tends to ignore them. If we suppose that a man's superior function is thinking, as it usually is in the Western World, then the inference is that the function of feeling is unconscious, while the auxiliary functions of sensation and intuition are only partially conscious.

According to Jung the individual may also be classified by his manner or attitude to inner and outer experiences. He suggests two such attitudes: extroversion and introversion, both of which contribute to the psychic process. The extrovert responds positively to the outside world around him while his counterpart, the introvert, reacts negatively. The extrovert orients himself to the outside object; the introvert orients himself to the inner subject. Again, these attitude types are mutually exclusive with opposites which recede into unconsciousness.

Both the extrovert and the introvert must, however, adapt themselves in some way to the world of people and

outer events. In this context Jung speaks of the persona, which may be defined as "the form of an individual's general psychic attitude toward the outside world".[4] It can be seen as that part of the ego which is turned towards the outside world. If the psyche is in reasonable health, the persona merely acts as a supple protective coating which may be discarded at will, depending on the appropriateness of the occasion. There is, nevertheless, a certain danger that the mask will freeze and that the real individual's inner potentialities will wither away or rebel. This is particularly a danger where a man assumes a public office and must continually "put on a face" for the public, or in the case where the individual adopts his persona from one of his inferior faculties and becomes a bull in the china shop of social relations.

Indeed even the man who can meet the world with a well-adjusted persona and is confident of the all-inclusive adequacy of his superior function beneath the persona, will find to his dismay that he cannot ignore the unexplored regions of his psyche. Unlike the conscious function, which may to a considerable extent be controlled by the individual, the unconscious side of the psyche is autonomous and cannot be controlled by the will. The longer it is

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[4] Ibid., p. 26.

ignored, the more likely it is to make its presence felt by primitive, unpredictable eruptions which explode into the conscious life of the individual. Jacobi describes the process in this way:

> The inferior function, on the other hand, is essentially characterized by its practical unreliability, the ease with which it can be influenced, its vagueness and unmannerliness. Or as Jung put it, 'You do not have it under your thumb; it has you'. It acts autonomously, emerging from the unconscious when it pleases. Because it is undifferentiated and wholly embedded in the unconscious, it has an infantile, primitive, instinctive, archaic character. This explains why we so often meet with moody, primitive, impulsive actions in individuals to whose nature as we know it they seem utterly foreign.[5]

Usually, of course, the individual can deal with his outer environment by means of his superior function and attitude, but sometimes he will get into a situation where his one-sidedness prevents him from adapting to reality. For example, if a person of the extroverted thinking type meets his opposite number of the introverted emotional type, he may project the contents of his inferior function onto this individual. Since the contents of his own unconscious are inferior and primitively ill adapted, the man projecting may resent and misunderstand the person upon whom these contents have been projected. In short, the thinking man finds a scapegoat for his own unconscious

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[5] Ibid., p. 17.

shortcomings and is quite unaware of the fact, although other people can easily see his mistake. Thus the psychic energy or libido of the unconscious world is given outlet in the external environment.

The complex marks another invasion of unconsciousness into the outer world. It is defined by Jung as follows:

> . . . 'psychic entities that have escaped from the control of consciousness and split off from it, to lead a separate existence in the dark sphere of the psyche, whence they may at any time hinder or help the conscious performance'.[6]

The complex may be caused by some kind of traumatic shock which was incurred earlier in life, or it may mark the region of the moral conflict which plagues the individual. In any case its presence will be detected by the unconscious reaction released when the particular conflict or trauma is touched upon in consciousness.

It is, however, the dream which provides the most important evidence of the working of the unconscious. Jung maintains that dreams carry on the regulative activity of the unconscious. In so doing they often express the counterpart of the conscious attitude. The more a man depends on

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[6]Ibid., p. 36. Jacobi quotes C.G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, trans. by W.S. Dell and C.F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1933), p. 90.

his conscious, superior function the more obviously the unconscious compensates by conjuring up dreams of a directly contrasting nature. On the other hand, a dream may have a "prospective" purpose and act as a guide to future conscious activity by giving a rough sketch of what is to come for the individual.

Now some dreams are simply products of the personal unconscious and serve as a direct, readily understandable reflection of the day's activities. But other dreams seem to bear no relationship whatsoever to conscious activities and yet make a profound impression on the dreamer. The symbols and motifs in these dreams, Jung suggests, are products of the collective unconscious -- that is, they have been potentially present in the psychic structure of all men since time immemorial. Jung calls them archetypes and traces their presence not only in dreams, but also in mythologies, religions, literatures, and in the universal histories of mankind. For example, the snake, the Wise Old Man, The Great Mother, the Mandala are symbols which may be found throughout the literature and religion of all ages and are also present in archetypal dreams. When the archetypal symbols occur in dreams, they demand attention and Jung explains why:

> Always they were the bringers of protection and salvation, and their violation has as its con-

> sequence the "perils of the soul", known to us from the psychology of primitives. Moreover, they are the unfailing causes of neurotic and even psychotic disorders, behaving exactly like neglected or maltreated physical organs or organic functional systems.[7]

All of the disturbances mentioned above have the one important purpose of reminding man that he must come to terms with the whole of his psyche. Ideally, then, he should constantly strive to make his auxiliary functions more fully conscious and get at least an idea of the inner workings of his inferior, primitive function. For example, he should learn to apprehend the object cognitively, then intuitively track down its hidden potentialities, then palpate it with sensation, and finally -- if feeling is the inferior function -- evaluate it to a certain degree in regard to pleasantness or unpleasantness.

It is this process of individuation or self-fulfillment which the Jungian psychoanalyst concerns himself with when he is treating a patient. Individuation is, of course, a way of treating neuroses and other intrusions of unconscious elements which frustrate the individual's conscious performance. But what is more important, it is a way to

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[7] C.G. Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype", The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (Vol. IX of The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, ed. Sir Herbert Read, et al., tr. R.F.C. Hull, 17 vols., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953-__), pp. 156-57.

salvation and spiritual wholeness.

Here the psychology of Jung differs most noticeably from that of his contemporaries Freud and Adler. Whereas Freud tends to explain all evidence of mans' religious craving in terms of the sex drive and Adler in terms of the will to power, Jung works on the premise that there is also an innate religious aim in man's psyche which demands recognition. This aim in the Jungian sense may be roughly equated with the psyche's need for individuation and a consequent self-realization. Stated in metaphysical terms, the individuation process might be seen as the aim to find the God within or to be united with God.

In youth, it is true, the individual does not feel the need to differentiate all of his unconscious faculties. The young man's energies are bent on consolidating his superior faculty and exercising his ego. If he has any psychic problems at this stage, they usually revolve around the emancipation from the father and mother images and may be resolved by the methods of Freud and Adler. But when a man approaches middle life his undifferentiated faculty may rebel, and in the process his spiritual cravings will make themselves felt. At this time individuation may be prescribed.

The first stage of the individuation process leads to the experience of the <u>shadow</u>, an archetypal figure whose

nature can to a large extent be inferred from the contents of the personal unconscious. In dreams of a personal nature, for example, the shadow may make his presence felt in the form of some brother or sister or friend who personifies the repressed contents of the auxiliary function. On the deeper level of the collective unconscious he can be visualized in terms of the Cain-Abel motif. Similar shadow themes in literature may be traced in Goethe's Faust-Mephisto relationship or in Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Whatever its symbolic form, the shadow on one level represents those elements in the personal unconscious which have been repressed and rejected by the individual for social, moral, or aesthetic reasons. Collectively it usually represents the dark side of human nature (although occasionally the good shadow reprimands his conscious brother for not developing his potential as in the Charles Darnay-Sydney Carton motif in A Tale of Two Cities).

Perhaps the most difficult form of shadow to recognize is found not in the dream, but in projection. Projection, as has been noted previously, involves the identification of the contents of the unconscious (which would include the shadow) with some human subject of the outside world. The difficulties of recognition involved for the afflicted psyche should be obvious. However, let us review the situation again by quoting Jung's opinion:

> Although, with insight and good will, the shadow can to some extent be assimilated into the conscious personality, experience shows that there are certain features which offer the most obstinate resistance to moral control and prove almost impossible to influence. These resistances are usually bound up with projections, which are not recognized as such, and their recognition is a moral achievement beyond the ordinary. While some traits peculiar to the shadow can be recognized without too much difficulty as one's own personal qualities, in this case both insight and good will are unavailing because the cause of the emotion appears to lie, beyond all possibility of doubt, in the other person. No matter how obvious it may be to the neutral observer that it is a matter of projections, there is little hope that the subject will perceive this himself. He must be convinced that he throws a very long shadow before he is willing to withdraw his emotionally toned projections from their object.[8]

But regardless of the difficulties involved, the shadow must be made conscious to the patient undergoing treatment, for only when he has learned to distinguish himself from his shadow will he be able to confront the other psychic opposites which occur on the road to individuation. It is the shadow which occupies the region of the personal unconscious and the undifferentiated areas of the auxiliary functions. If the patient does not recognize its manifestations, the bridge to the collective unconscious is blocked.

Having once recognized the projection of his shadow, the person undergoing psychotherapy will be ready to face

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[8] C.G. Jung, "Aion", Psyche & Symbol, A Selection from the Writings of C.G. Jung, ed. Violet S. de Laszlo (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958), pp. 7-8.

his soul images in the form of either the anima or the animus. These are contrasexual archetypes of the unconscious which represent both the individual concept and the universal inner image of the opposite sex. The anima is the manifestation of femininity within the male's unconscious, while the animus is the masculine archetype within the woman's unconscious. As was the case with the shadow, the anima and animus take shape in the inner unconscious world as dreams and in the outer world as projections. Since the anima and animus are also products of the inferior function, they may serve as a direct contrast to the conscious attitude of the individual. As a consequence the abstract scientist might well carry the anima of an emotional, romantic woman within his being, and, similarly, the sensual, down-to-earth woman may carry the animus of a sensitive, intuitive artist within her soul. Strangely enough, the animus and anima need not take on the forms of humanity in their archetypal state. The anima in its most instinctive form may, for instance, also be represented by a cow, a tiger, a cave, or a ship, while the animus may appear instinctively as a bull, a lion, a lance, or a tower.

Whatever the form may be, the soul image causes peculiar behaviour patterns in Western Man when it takes possession of the unconscious and erupts as a neurosis. The ordinarily well-adjusted intellectual then becomes moody and

prone to emotional outbursts, and the warm-hearted woman assumes the role of the agressive know-it-all who has an irrevocable opinion about all matters of importance. In both cases, of course, the soul images are undifferentiated and consequently display inferior, clumsy modes of behaviour. Note Jung's explanation of the phenomenon:

> Consciousness is fascinated by it [soul image], held captive, as if hypnotized. Very often the ego experiences a vague feeling of moral defeat and then behaves all the more defensively, defiantly, and self-righteously, thus setting up a vicious circle which only increases its feeling of inferiority.[9]

Naturally, this soul image is also capable of being projected onto a member of the opposite sex in the external world. But unlike the shadow projection which consists in part of repressed, formerly conscious material, the projection of the soul image involves an emergence of purely unconscious material into the outer sphere. This fact together with the contrasexual nature of the soul image means that its projection is more often one of love than one of hate. Unfortunately the receiver of the man's undifferentiated anima projection will sometimes typify his own worst weakness; the same can be said of a woman's soul image. Thus love at first sight may be the order of the day for the

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[9] Ibid., p. 15.

sophisticated intellectual who becomes entangled with a brazen harlot, or for the wholesome "girl-next-door" who becomes enamoured of the smooth swindler. To cite another complication, the bearer of the projection may not correspond in reality to the soul image thrust upon him by the love partner's projection. Conflicts and disappointments will be inevitable. Another particular problem in the soul image projection lies in the fact that the mother is the first carrier of the son's anima projection as is the father the first carrier of his daughter's animus. The greatest danger here, of course, lies in the possible inability of the child to transfer his vision of the other sex from his immediate parent to another subject.

But despite the dangers involved in these relationships, the anima may also represent the creative inner femininity which gives birth to a man's inspired work, and the animus may give spiritual directedness and capacity for reflection to the woman's life. Of equal importance is the fact that the soul image acts as a type of regulator between the ego and the unconscious, just as the persona is the regulator between the outside world and the ego. When its appearance in dreams and projections is ignored, complexes and neuroses inevitably result. When, however, the effects of the soul image become reasonably conscious, the individual will find that he may heed its warnings and take them

into consideration on his journey to spiritual enlightenment. Jung explains the matter in this way:

> . . . though the contents of anima and animus can be integrated, they themselves cannot, since they are archetypes. As such they are the foundation stones of the psychic structure, which in its totality exceeds the limits of consciousness and therefore can never become the object of direct cognition. The effects of anima and animus can indeed be made conscious, but they themselves are factors transcending consciousness and beyond the reach of perception and volition. Hence they remain autonomous despite the integration of their contents, and for this reason they should be kept constantly in mind. This is extremely important from the therapeutic standpoint, because constant observation pays the unconscious a tribute that more or less guarantees its cooperation. The unconscious, as we know, can never be "done with" once and for all. It is, in fact, one of the most important tasks of psychic hygiene to pay continual attention to the symptomatology of unconscious contents and processes, for the good reason that the conscious mind is always in danger of becoming one-sided, of keeping to well-worn paths and getting stuck in blind alleys. The complementary and compensating function of the unconscious ensures that these dangers, which are especially great in neurosis, can in some measure be avoided.[10]

Once the soul image has been differentiated, the path leads still further into the depths of the collective unconscious, and we meet the Wise Old Man archetype or his feminine counterpart, The Magna Mater. The Wise Old Man symbol is the personification of the spiritual principle within man, while the Magna Mater is the personification of the

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[10] Ibid., p. 19.

cold impersonal truth of nature. Both archetypes serve the purpose of giving form to the innermost essence of the psyche of either sex. Jacobi explains the meaning of the archetypes as follows:

> . . . now the time has come to throw light upon the most secret recesses of the individual's own being, upon what is most specifically masculine or feminine, or in other words, to elucidate the 'spiritual' principle in man and the 'material' principle in woman. Here we shall not, as in dealing with the animus and the anima, be exploring the contrasexual part of the psyche, but pursuing the innermost essence of the psyche of either sex back to its source, back to the primordial image from which it was formed. To venture a somewhat daring formulation, we might say that the man is materialized spirit whereas the woman is matter saturated with spirit; thus in man the essential determinant is spirit while in woman it is matter.[11]

These primordial images of The Wise Old Man and Magna Mater are called <u>mana</u> personalities by Jung, <u>mana</u> meaning extraordinary power. With them comes not only a real sense of true individuality, but also the danger of spiritual arrogance; for if a person identifies himself completely with this <u>mana</u> he may regard himself a god, as did Nietzsche when he identified himself with Zarathustra.

When the subject has successfully coped with the image of the <u>mana</u> personality, he is very near to the last stage of individuation, which consists of the union of the

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[11] Jacobi, <u>Jung</u>, p. 121.

two psychic systems -- consciousness and unconsciousness -- through that midpoint common to both, the self. Since the realization of the self involves a considerable broadening of consciousness, it is not without dangers. For instance, the new knowledge of the unconscious involves exposing oneself to the animal impulses of the unconscious without identifying oneself with them. In other words, there is a terrible tension involved in the effort of being part of both worlds. But if the tension is accepted it brings about the following result:

> '. . . if the unconscious can be recognized as a co-determining factor along with the conscious, and if life can be lived in such a way that conscious and unconscious (i.e., instinctive) demands are accepted as far as possible, the centre of gravity of the total personality shifts its position . . . . This new centre might be called the self . . . . If such a transposition succeeds . . . there develops a personality who, so to speak, suffers only in the lower story of himself, but in the upper story . . . is singularly detached from painful as well as from joyful events.'[12]

Here, then, according to Jung, is the spiritual goal of the psyche, the end product of the journey of becoming. What results can be equated to Christian baptism, for the final aim of Jungian psychology is the birth of a spiritual man who transcends nature and finds the kingdom of God with-

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[12]Ibid., p. 127. Jacobi quotes C.G. Jung, The Secret of the Golden Flower, trans. by C.F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931), p. 123.

in him. Admittedly the full value of individuation can not be described; it can only be experienced. Nevertheless, Jung has seen its beneficial results in the terms of a new meaning of life for many of his patients, and with these results he is well satisfied.

The strongest archetypal expression of the uniting of opposites into a higher self is called the mandala or magic circle. Its basic form consists of a central circle containing a quadrant or square. The circle is the traditional symbol of heaven and cosmic completeness, while the quadrant represents the union of four psychic qualities, the four elements, and the squareness of the earth. Since time immemorial the mandala has appeared in widely different cultures in a religious context. It has made its appearance in the sand paintings of the Pueblo Indians, in the beautiful religious art of Tibetan Buddhism, in Tantric Yoga, in the Christian art of the early Middle Age, and in the sixteenth century theosophist works of Jakob Boehme. Significantly enough, it is also quite spontaneously produced by patients on the road to individuation with a startling effect:

> If you sum up what people tell you about their experience, you can formulate it about in this way: They came to themselves, they could accept themselves, they were able to become reconciled to themselves and by this they were also reconciled to adverse circumstances and events. This is much like what was formerly expressed by saying: He has made his peace with God, he has sacrificed

> his own will, he has submitted himself to the will of God.
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> A modern mandala is an involuntary confession of a peculiar mental condition. There is no deity in the mandala, and there is also no submission or reconciliation to a deity. The place of the deity seems to be taken by the wholeness of man.[13]

Let us briefly review the implications of Jung's conclusion. The mandala archetype, if it is conscious, produces an inner reconciliation or self- realization which can be equated to a religious mystic experience. Yet the God apprehended seems to be a purely psychic phenomenon. That which in the Christian religion is traditionally felt to be external migrates to the being of man and transforms him inwardly. What is more, the inner symbol of this transformation is found in the religious experience of many cultures and occurs as an empirically proven phenomenon in the uncon-cious of modern, rational, twentieth century man. How can this be explained? To answer the question we must first look at the psychic constitution of archaic man as described by Jung.

The thinking of primitive man differs from that of the modern European largely because the archaic's area of consciousness is so much smaller. As a consequence, his

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[13]C.G. Jung, Psychology and Religion (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 99.

dreams, his visions, and his fears are projected much more easily onto the outer environment in the form of gods and spirits. Where the white man will tend to look for natural causes behind all events of the outer world, his primitive counterpart will explain them in terms of spiritual or magic occurrences. Note Jung's explanation of the difference between the two points of view:

> Thanks to our one-sided emphasis upon so-called natural causation, we have learned to distinguish what is subjective and psychic from what is objective and "natural". For primitive man, on the contrary, the psychic and the objective coalesce in the external world. In the face of something extraordinary it is not he who is astonished, but rather the thing which is astonishing. It is mana -- endowed with magic power. What we would call the powers of imagination and suggestion seem to him invisible forces which act upon him from without. His country is neither a geographical nor a political entity. It is that territory which contains his mythology, his religion, all his thinking and feeling in so far as he is unconscious of these functions. His fear is localized in certain places that are "not good". The spirits of the departed inhabit such or such a wood. That cave harbours devils which strangle any man who enters. In yonder mountain lives the great serpent; that hill is the grave of the legendary king; near this spring or rock or tree every woman becomes pregnant; that ford is guarded by snake-demons; this towering tree has a voice that can call certain people. Primitive man is unpsychological. Psychic happenings take place outside him in an objective way. Even the things he dreams about seem to him real; that is his only reason for paying attention to dreams.[14]

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[14] C.G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), p. 161.

Modern man's own unconscious, of course, contains the same psychic energy used by the primitive for projection, but because his Christian religion is no longer vital to him and because dogma has so often become simply the dead letter of the law, he no longer uses psychic energy to project his God into an exterior anthropomorphic form. This, together with the fact that religion has become equated with superstition and ignorance, repels the rational man of scientific leaning from orthodox Christianity. Yet, as we have noted, psychic energy involved in the projection of a deity does not disappear; it simply withdraws into the unconscious and builds up pressure which explodes in the forms of neuroses and psychoses if it is not given any new channels for an outlet.

Here we return to the mandala symbol and its inner manifestation in the dreams of modern man, for the mandala works not only as a numinous symbol of the unity of opposites, but as a receiver of the psychic energy previously given religious projection:

> The experience formulated by the mandala is typical of people who cannot project the divine image any longer. They are in actual danger of inflation and dissociation. The round or square inclosures, therefore, have the value of magic means to produce protective walls or a vas hermeticum to prevent an outburst and a disintegration. Thus the mandala denotes and supports an exclusive concentration upon oneself. This state is anything but egocentricity. It is on

> the contrary a much needed self-control with the purpose of avoiding inflation and dissociation.[15]

The inhabitants of the Far East have realized this use of the mandala for many thousands of years, and have included it in the practice of their meditations. Instead of looking outward and developing their thinking, rational faculty to the exclusion of all others, they have turned their eyes inward to find "the middle way", the union of opposites in the psyche. They have, in short, accepted the task which Western man is beginning to take seriously for the first time since the advent of the Age of Enlightenment.[16]

But who, specifically, is this Western man, this modern man who finds religious dogma uninviting and who rejects the external God in favour of occult mandala symbols and the like? Surely he cannot be the decent man next door who mows his lawn, drinks his beer, goes to mass every Sunday, and lives a generally placid life. No, Jung admits, the modern man is not Mr. Conservative Citizen, but a rebel, an isolated individual who holds the promise of the future

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[15]Jung, Psychology & Religion, p. 105.

[16]The individuation process does have a Western history of sorts. Its existence can be traced through the Gnostic heresy of the early Christian era to the alchemy of the Middle Ages, and in a more corrupted form, to modern religious groups, such as the Theosophists and the Rosicrucians.

in his hands because he is completely conscious of the present.

> . . . I must say that the man we call modern, the man who is aware of the immediate present, is by no means the average man. He is rather the man who stands upon a peak, or at the very edge of the world, the abyss of the future before him, above him the heavens, and below him the whole of mankind with a history that disappears in primeval mists. The modern man -- or, let us say again, the man of the immediate present -- is rarely met with. There are few who live up to the name, for they must be conscious to a superlative degree. Since to be wholly of the present means to be fully conscious of one's existence as a man, it requires the most intensive and extensive consciousness, with a minimum of unconsciousness. It must be clearly understood that the mere fact of living in the present does not make a man modern, for in that case every one at present alive would be so. He alone is modern who is fully conscious of the present.[17]

While Jung states the general belief that the fully modern man has outgrown the church, he nevertheless agrees that the fortunate individual who can still project his belief in God can find his salvation in organized Christianity. For this reason he often encourages those that can benefit by Christian dogma to keep their journey of becoming within the confines of the religion of their choice. It is only when religion can no longer embrace a man's complete being that individuation becomes an all-encompassing need. Indeed, the Christian religious experience itself

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[17]Jung, Modern Man, pp. 226-27.

may be reconciled with the idea of individuation when one remembers that Christ himself can be seen as the supreme example of the Self or wholeness. If modern man really follows His example, he too will develop his individual self and reject the inadequate compromises of established dogmas. Just as the Son of Man was a rebel against the dead letter of the law as enunciated by the Pharisees, so must the modern man be a transgressor against social convention if he is really to make his life an imitation of Christ's.

There is, of course, still another category of human being whose presence on the twentieth century scene cannot be ignored. I am referring to the mass man of the West, the dullard whose existence marks the antithesis of all the qualities which make up the individuated modern man. As a single entity he is barely more conscious than his primitive brother in the jungles of Africa, but with this difference: Whereas primitive man can give his instinctual religious impulses full play in the worship of his gods, the mass man of European civilization has lost his transcendent deities. They have been explained away for him by the preaching of scientific materialism. But the usual pattern of psychic rejection exerts itself. The psychic energy used up in projection of a God seeks another outlet, this time in the form of a new miracle maker and protector and leader. So the deity of the mass man becomes Science or the Slogan or the

State -- something or someone who can point out Heaven just around the corner and see the Devil right over the backyard fence. The compromise is a cheap one, and instinctively the communal man realizes it. What follows next is neatly clarified by Jung:

> The result, as always in such cases, is overcompensation in the form of fanaticism, which in its turn is used as a weapon for stamping out the least flicker of opposition. Free opinion is stifled and moral decision ruthlessly suppressed, on the plea that the end justifies the means, even the vilest. The policy of the State is exalted to a creed, the leader or party boss becomes a demigod beyond good and evil, and his votaries are honoured as heroes, martyrs, apostles, missionaries. There is only one truth and beside it no other. It is sacrosanct and above criticism. Anyone who thinks differently is a heretic, who, as we know from history, is threatened with all manner of unpleasant things. Only the party boss, who holds the political power in his hands, can interpret the State doctrine authentically, and he does so just as suits him.
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> . . . the individual becomes social unit No. so-and-so . . . .[18]

The whole process of the enslavement of mass man can also be seen as a kind of reverse journey away from individuation into the utter darkness of the undifferentiated collective unconscious. In this context Jung uses the advent of Nazi Germany as his illustration. Germany of the 1930's was technologically the most advanced nation in Europe. However, precisely because its populace had never

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[18]C.G. Jung, "The Undiscovered Self", Civilization in Transition (Vol. X of Collected Works), p. 259.

come to terms with its own unconscious archetypal patterns, these same patterns engulfed the conscious function. For one thing, the collective shadow archetype was not recognized as such when it took the form of Adolf Hitler. Instead the shadow itself possessed the German nation:

> A sorry lack of education, conceit that bordered on madness, a very mediocre intelligence combined with the hysteric's cunning and the power fantasies of an adolescent, were written all over this demagogue's face. His gesticulations were all put on, devised by an hysterical mind intent only on making an impression.
> . . . . . .
> Encountering only slight and in any case ineffective opposition from within, the nation of eight millions crowded into the circus to witness its own destruction.[19]

Like Faust, Goethe's archetypal expression of the basic dichotomy in the German psyche, pre-World War II Germany manufactured its own Mephisto in the forms of Jewry, Masons, and other Arch Fiends. The projection factor involved here is obvious enough.

Then an archetype of the deeper collective unconscious came into its own, and because it was not differentiated, it completely possessed the German spirit. The archetype in question was the symbolic expression of Wotan, the old German tribal god, forever restless and forever on

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[19]C.G. Jung, "After the Catastrophe", Civilization in Transition (Vol. X of Collected Works), p. 204.

the move. With the coming of Christianity he had disappeared only to make his presence unmistakably felt once more in the restless frenzy of the twentieth century German populace preparing for war.

> The rouser of this tempest is named Wotan, and we can learn a good deal about him from the political confusion and spiritual upheaval he has caused throughout history. For a more exact investigation of his character, however, we must go back to the age of myths, which did not explain everything in terms of man and his limited capacities but sought the deeper cause in the psyche and its autonomous powers. Man's earliest intuitions personified these powers as gods, and described them in the myths with great care and circumstantiality according to their various characters. This could be done the more readily on account of the firmly established primordial types or images which are innate in the unconscious of many races and exercise a direct influence upon them. Because the behaviour of a race takes on its specific character from its underlying images we can speak of an archetype "Wotan." As an autonomous psychic factor, Wotan produces effects in the collective life of a people and thereby reveals his own nature. For Wotan has a peculiar biology of his own, quite apart from the nature of man. It is only from time to time that individuals fall under the irresistible influence of this unconscious factor. When it is quiescent, one is no more aware of the archetype Wotan than of a latent epilepsy. Could the Germans who were adults in 1914 have foreseen what they would today? Such amazing transformations are the effect of the god of wind, that "bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth." It seizes everything in its path and overthrows everything that is not firmly rooted. When the wind blows it shakes everything that is insecure, whether without or within.[20]

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[20] C.G. Jung, "Wotan", Civilization in Transition (Vol. X of Collected Works), pp. 187-88.

The general psychic pattern which led to the rise of Nazi Germany is not unique, Jung maintains. With certain variations, it can be seen exerting itself in all countries where the conscious, thinking function has been differentiated at the expense of the whole healthy psyche. But what can the solitary individual do to prevent the enslavement of man and the wars, hatred, bitterness which threaten to ultimately destroy the world? Jung's answer is simple enough: Know thyself. For such problems are never solved by mass meetings and propaganda; they are met only by a change in individuals, and "only the accumulation of these individual changes will produce a collective solution".[21]

One of the figures who can best signal the psychic changes needed by a nation and a civilization is the visionary artist, for he seems to have access to the collective unconscious which is, in turn, reflected in his creations. Not every work of art is visionary. In the field of literature, for example, there are many "psychological novels" in which the artist deals with materials drawn fully from the life of human consciousness. The cares and sorrows, joys and passions of existence may be beautifully portrayed by the psychological work of art, but the deep well of the collective unconscious is not plumbed as it is in visionary

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[21]Jacobi, Jung, p. 146.

art:

> The profound difference between the first and second parts of Faust marks the difference between the psychological and the visionary modes of artistic creation. The latter reverses all the conditions of the former. The experience that furnishes the material for artistic expression is no longer familiar. It is a strange something that derives its existence from the hinterland of man's mind -- that suggests the abyss of time separating us from prehuman ages, or evokes a super-human world of contrasting light and darkness. It is a primordial experience which surpasses man's understanding, and to which he is therefore in danger of succumbing. The value and the force of the experience are given by its enormity. It arises from timeless depths; it is foreign and cold, many-sided, demonic and grotesque.[22]

In this class of visionary art also belong Wagner's Nibelungenring, the poetry of William Blake, the epics of Dante, and the philosophical writings of Nietzsche. All of these masterpieces are magical workings of archetypal myths known to mankind from the dawn of history. It would be a mistake, however, to regard them as material gained second-hand from written myths, for as primordial images of the collective unconscious they are produced quite spontaneously from the hidden depths of the artist's psyche. And the artistic vision is not only a private compensatory device which is conjured up by the unconscious as a safeguard for the artist's own psychic health. A visionary

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[22]Jung, Modern Man, pp. 180-81.

masterpiece speaks to a nation and sometimes to the whole world. Why? Let Jung explain in detail:

> An epoch is like an individual; it has its own limitations of conscious outlook, and therefore requires a compensatory adjustment. This is effected by the collective unconscious in that a poet, a seer or a leader allows himself to be guided by the unexpressed desire of his times and shows the way, by word or deed, to the attainment of that which everyone blindly craves and expects -- whether this attainment results in good or evil, the healing of an epoch or its destruction.[23]

Psychic health can be a collective representation. If this is the case, we can see why Blake wrote "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" in an age when reason and wit were the ideals of every gentleman; and we can see why Wagner composed the Nibelungenring in an age when technical learning had estranged the German people from their gods.

Before concluding this chapter, it may prove useful to review the final implications of the Jungian theories which I have expounded thus far. There is a definite religious instinct in man which moves with an archetypal inner directedness towards a union with God through the individuation process. This instinct has been empirically proven to exist. When it is ignored and man's unconscious remains undifferentiated, then complexes, neuroses, or even psychoses

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[23] Ibid., pp. 191-92.

may erupt and completely distort the individual's life. What is more, this invasion of unconscious material into conscious life can take place on a collective basis, a national basis, or even on a world-wide basis. Since this is so, Jung often refers to the spirit of an age, which term implies a certain general psychic development in any given era. The future tendencies of this development may be prophesied by the visionary artist with his access to the collective unconscious. The question which we are now tempted to ask is this: Does Jung believe that there is some kind of master plan of existence which could prove to be the container of all life forces in all eras? He certainly has some ideas on this topic too, and he introduces them in the concept of synchronicity.

Synchronicity is an age-old concept which has always been characteristic of Chinese thinking. Unlike the twentieth century man of Western culture with his fanatical belief in the principle of natural causality, the Chinese have traditionally thought in terms of the meaningful coincidence of all events at any given moment. They conceived of all developments, all psychological changes, and all accidents in nature as being parallel progressions of some inscrutable master plan in time. So, instead of trying to establish a causal relationship in an isolated sequence of events, they would note all of the individual elements of

one particular moment and relate each to the others. This process, of course, is made relevant because of the belief that all products of life at the same instant share the same time characteristic -- that is to say, they have reached an identical state of development in the master plan of existence. Jung gives a good illustration of the concept in practice as follows:

> Just as causality describes the sequence of events, so synchronicity to the Chinese mind deals with the coincidence of events. The causal point of view tells us a dramatic story about how D came into existence: it took its origin from C, which existed before D, and C in its turn had a father, B, etc. The synchronistic view on the other hand tries to produce an equally meaningful picture of coincidence. How does it happen that A', B', C', D', etc., appear all in the same moment and in the same place? It happens in the first place because the physical events A' and B' are of the same quality as the psychic events C' and D', and further because all are the exponents of one and the same momentary situation.[24]

But how is man to recognize the time characteristic of any given moment? Here we come to the idea of the macrocosm-microcosm, an idea which establishes a definite link to European medieval thought. The Chinese philosophers, like their European brethren of the Middle Ages, believed that man held the greater pattern of the cosmos within his own being. This concept implies a kind of complete correspondence be-

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[24]C.G. Jung, "Foreword to the I Ching or Book of Changes", Psyche & Symbol, p. 229.

tween man's inner being and the pattern of outward events. The outer pattern can be recognized intuitively.

Now we can begin to see the interest which this Weltanschauung holds for Jung. He thinks that it is possible to equate the modern concept of the collective unconscious to the concept of the microcosm. Just as the microcosm inwardly marks out the true pattern of the outer universe, so the archetypes of the unconscious (through dreams or visions) spontaneously inform man of the rightness or wrongness of his orientation to outward events. Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of this type of meaningful coincidence is found in extra-sensory perception, which may take the following forms:

> a) The coincidence of a certain psychic content with a corresponding objective process which is perceived to take place simultaneously.
> b) The coincidence of a subjective psychic state with a phantasm (dream or vision) which later turns out to be a more or less faithful reflection of a "synchronistic," objective event that took place more or less simultaneously, but at a distance.
> c) The same, except that the event perceived takes place in the future and is represented in the present only by a phantasm that corresponds to it.[25]

How can you explain a meaningful coincidence in time if you do not believe that synchronicity is possible? Jung can

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[25]C.G. Jung, "The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche", Psyche & Symbol, p. 282.

think of no other explanation.

> Synchronicity is no more baffling or mysterious than the discontinuities of physics. It is only the ingrained belief in the sovereign power of causality that creates intellectual difficulties and makes it appear unthinkable that causeless events exist or could ever occur. But if they do, then we must regard them as creative acts, as the continuous creation of a pattern that exists from all eternity, repeats itself sporadically, and is not derivable from any known antecedents.
> . . . . . .
>
> Meaningful coincidences are thinkable as pure chance. But the more they multiply and the greater and more exact the correspondence is, the more their probability sinks and their unthinkability increases, until they can no longer be regarded as pure chance but, for lack of a causal explanation, have to be thought of as meaningful arrangements.[26]

The rest is mystery -- or faith.

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[26] Ibid., pp. 280-81.

CHAPTER II

THE JOURNEY OF BECOMING

The bridge between the theory of Carl Jung and the Weltanschauung of Laurens van der Post can be most safely crossed in the book The Dark Eye in Africa, for here Van der Post interprets his own experience of a specific contemporary problem, racial discord, in the terms of Jungian depth psychology. At the same time this book will afford us the opportunity of examining Van der Post's sense of an inner journey in the light of Jung's journey towards self-knowledge.

The original content of The Dark Eye in Africa was presented in the form of a lecture delivered by the author to a combined meeting of the C.G. Jung Institute and the Psychological Club of Zurich. The talk was later repeated before various assemblies throughout Europe and attracted great interest because of the imaginative presentation of the causes of racial unrest in Africa. In its published form the lecture itself comprises only the middle section of a book which is divided into three parts: "Introduction",[1] "Basis for Discussion", and "Discussion". The introduction suggests the motivation behind Van der Post's particular

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[1] A second introduction to The Dark Eye in Africa was added in 1960.

concern with the race problem. "Basis for Discussion", of course, is the essential statement of the author's theory about race relations, while the "Discussion" is written in the form of a dialogue by means of which Van der Post clarifies his position and answers questions posed by a concerned audience.

The Jungian perspective is maintained in each of these sections and gives the book its inner cohesiveness. In fact, the influence of Jung can already be noted in the quaternity invoked at the beginning of the lecture -- that is, a four-dimensional approach symbolic of psychological wholeness is immediately established by the author to explain the race problem. And significantly, the first of these dimensions is cosmic -- symbolically circular in form. Put the circle and the quaternity together and you have a mandala, the end product of the Jungian journey towards individuation and self-fulfillment. Indeed, it is just such a journey which Van der Post sees as the necessary prerequisite to racial harmony and Peace on Earth.

Even in its widest cosmic dimension Van der Post places the race problem in the context of a journey of becoming. Racial discord exists because it is part of the mysterious development of the human race, a part of that Master Plan of time which Jung had noted in his essays on synchronicity. Because Western man carries the pattern of

the Plan within his being, he should be able to apprehend the causes of racial antagonism within himself -- the microcosm -- at any given moment. But he is so obsessed by a causal linear concept of time that he ignores the archetypal warning signals within his unconscious and refuses to come to terms with his complete self:

> We are so caught up in this linear movement that we never stop to consider that time may also have content and nature, a specific meaning of its own which makes it not merely a "when" but also a "what" and perhaps, more important still, also a "how" and a "way to eternity." I suggest, therefore, that incorporated somewhere in the inner pattern of misunderstood time there exists a blueprint from the master architect of life itself, a chart of the ultimate design of being which ceaselessly communicates to us our own unique share in time's fashioning according to the way our lives have to take shape.
> . . . . . .
>
> I believe myself that at the moment there are indications on this inner blueprint which demand a change of direction in our course, a demand, however, of which the world is either unaware or towards which it is deliberately turning blind eyes and deaf ears. There is a kind of shrinking back, a profound fear and horror of being our 1954 selves. As a result, since whether we like it or not we are part of the time we live in, we are inflicted with this unrest not only publicly but also in the privacy of our lives and the silences of the night. So for what it is worth I give it you as my conviction that in the first place the unrest in Africa is part of an infinitely wide disquiet about the current trend of our life on this earth.[2]

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[2]Laurens van der Post, The Dark Eye in Africa (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1955), pp. 36-38

As a practical illustration of Western man's refusal to take the time spirit into consideration with respect to race problems, Van der Post points out the Afrikaaners' desperate attempt to legislate the future relations of black and white in South Africa. "They are taking on themselves an improper and impossible role that belongs only to time. . . . long before a thousand years the causes that today make black skins so repugnant to them will have vanished."[3]

Now note how Van der Post eventually focuses the whole picture of time's meaning into the resolving pattern of a physical journey:

> . . . time is uniquely the way of the spirit. It is the long road upon which the sun not only rises in the morning but upon which the glow of a star shattered a million light years ago overtakes the tired and far-travelled soul in the dead hour of the night. It is the desert track where intimation of the meaning-to-be catches up with the harassed caravan of humanity and comes, like a stranger, to warm its hands by a flickering fire. It is the great plain wherein what is unconscious in the spirit journeys into consciousness. Above all it is the rhythm without which there is no music in the heart; it is the will of the spirit to live and to be whole.[4]

Could Jung's concept of the individuation process have been described more beautifully?

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[3] Ibid., p. 92.

[4] Ibid.

On a second, less comprehensive dimension, Van der Post sees racial unrest in Africa as a part of a global struggle between those races who have been unfairly denied the journey of becoming and those master races who have enslaved the spirits of their subjects. The overthrow of the French in Indo-China, the Dutch in Indonesia, and the British in Burma and India can be seen as part of this pattern. Again the reader may be reminded of Jung's theory concerning the invasion of the collective unconscious into an overdifferentiated conscious world. The parallel is there, and Van der Post knows it when he suggests that this dimension of unrest can be seen as the struggle "between under mind and top mind, or if you like, between unconsciousness and consciousness."

In the third dimension Van der Post portrays the unrest in Africa as an extension of the traditional European and British struggle between those forces wanting to conserve and maintain the status quo and those wanting "to break out and change". Or, simultaneously, it is the clash between the classical spirit and the romantic spirit. This clash between conservative and radical works on a principle of extremes. Extreme conservatism will engender an extreme radicalism and vice versa. Van der Post gives us an interesting example of the paradox as he notes the coincidence in time of Rousseau's "noble savage" idea with the extreme

rationalism of the French Revolution:

> When the excessively nationalist trend in French history reached its social climax in revolution, there was an official ceremony in Paris at which God was deposed and a goddess of reason crowned in His place. Just before that happened there emerged from the mind of a solitary Frenchman, Jean Jacques Rousseau, almost as if by spontaneous generation, the concept of "the noble savage" which has haunted the imagination of artists, poets and social reformers ever since. You have there, I believe, not only an example of how life preserves proportion and balance by continually going over into the opposites of its excesses, but also an indication of how profound and mysterious is the origin of the unrest we are discussing.[5]

It is in the realm of politics that this polarity most obviously affects the African situation. In Britain, for example, the more the radical Labour Party of the early post-war era tended to side with the insurgent black elements, the more the Conservative Party tended to identify itself with the former white overlords. Thus African unrest can also be understood in the context of a class struggle.

Of course, this struggle between conservatism and radicalism, between classicism and romanticism, has Jungian overtones, for it can be roughly equated to the struggle between the radical unconscious demanding change and the conservative overdifferentiated consciousness denying its

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[5] Ibid., p. 41.

dark, violent brother -- or vice versa in times of unrest. And in its wider context it can be seen as an essential part of the master journey of becoming:

> In classical Chinese philosophy there are two contrary principles, the bright yang and the dark yin. Of these it is said that always when one principle reaches the height of its power, the counter-principle is stirring within it like a germ. This is another, particularly graphic formulation of the psychological law of compensation by an inner opposite. Whenever a civilization reaches its highest point, sooner or later a period of decay sets in. But the apparently meaningless and hopeless collapse into a disorder without aim or purpose, which fills the onlooker with disgust and despair, nevertheless contains within its darkness the germ of a new light. [italics mine][6]

But it is not in the paradoxical workings of radicalism and conservatism that Van der Post seeks out his final dimension of the race problem in Africa. He shifts the grounds of his argument, and comes to rest on the peculiarly African aspects of the case, which he once more interprets in unmistakably Jungian terms. When the white man first made his appearance on the scene over three hundred years ago, the African people south of the Sahara had been separated from the rest of mankind since time immemorial. They had been guarded from exposure to the outside world by a coastline which offered no natural harbours for curious

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[6] Jung, "The Meaning of Psychology for Modern Man", Civilization in Transition (Vol. X of Collected Works), p. 142.

sailors, and by wastelands and deserts which once again barred any extensive penetration by outsiders. A third line of defence was provided by the disease-carrying tse-tse flies and mosquitoes against which the white man was unwilling to exert himself in the search for new adventure. This hidden Africa contained a rich world of flora and fauna, unparalleled anywhere else in the world. Perhaps it would be best to let Van der Post describe it:

> Wherever the invader tried to attack Africa he found it filled to the brim with a vivid, flame-flickering, dancing life of its own, ranging in size from the mosquito to the elephant. When three hundred years ago my ancestors landed at the southern extremity of Africa, there were not merely prancing bushmen and slant-eyed Hottentots to greet them but also hippopotamuses with the same portly shape and air as those Lord Mayors who carry the gold chains of office on their stomachs, kingly lions, royal leopards, rhinoceros [sic] as irritable as peppery generals whose livers have been ruined by whiskey [sic] and curry in the tropics, and wise old elephants, patient as elder statesmen, wading into the breakers to look the new arrivals over![7]

Here in a primeval paradise, the native African dwelt, scarcely disturbing the balance of nature and living out an unchanging pattern of existence from one century to the next. In the South there were the Bushmen and the Hottentots. In the West were the Negroes, a darker, taller people, and in East Africa the equally dark Bantu races

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[7]Van der Post, The Dark Eye, p. 46.

held sway along with their Nilotic and Hamitic relatives. All followed their traditional patterns of living, either by hunting or herding. What Van der Post most emphatically notes about these people, however, is their life of spiritual awareness, for they never questioned the meaning of life or the existence and power of their gods. The extent of their spiritual awareness was, in fact, such that they regarded all animate and inanimate objects in nature as being external manifestations of a spirit world. But despite their profound religious sensitivity, the natives were ignorant of the enormous technical and scientific advances achieved by the Western world.

Then the white man came onto the scene. First, Dutch Protestants landed on the southern tip of Africa three hundred years ago in search of a new Promised Land. Later, other European groups, such as the Portugese, the Belgians, the French, and the British, arrived until finally, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the last defences of the dark continent had been broken down. These white men were, Van der Post maintains, already dangerously one-sided in their attitude to life. Their spirit had been formed by those forces of pure reason which were set loose by the Reformation, stimulated by the French Revolution, and coarsened by the texture of the Industrial Revolution. Their whole history made them hostile to their own deepest natural

instincts and intuitions, and these instincts were repressed or castigated into submission.

When, therefore, the European conquered the African, he was totally unprepared for the instinctive and intuitive approaches to life which the natives manifested in their behaviour. The African was, to Western eyes, superstitious, uncouth, and barbaric. There was nothing to be learned from him, but a great deal to do away with in his stone-age culture.

On the other hand, the African tribes looked upon the whites as gods because they seemed to have a terrible control over the forces of nature, forces, it must be remembered, which in themselves harboured spirits much to be feared. So the black men were very willing to serve and to imitate the superior European culture in a way which seemed almost too good to be true, and unlike many American Indian tribes coming into contact with the white man, they increased and multiplied in servitude. Van der Post muses about this fact and postulates the idea that the natives continued to serve the white overlord with relatively little protest because they saw in him a hope for the future. These African expectations of the future are summed up by the author in the following terms:

> . . . I think the initial readiness of the black man to serve the white man was perhaps because,

> unconsciously, he had long waited for someone like the white man to come and bring him something which only the white man could provide. So, when he did come, it was as if it was in answer to some dream far back in the African mind and in response to some deep submerged hope that Africa had of the future. The white man's coming seemed to imply the fulfillment of a promise which had been made to the African far back by life in its first beginning.[8]

Why then is there racial unrest in Africa today? At this point we come face to face with the concept of "Mata Kelap" which gives the book its title. "Mata Kelap" is a Malay word meaning "Dark Eye". It is used to describe a peculiar phenomenon occurring in the Indonesian islands. The Indonesian Malay is ordinarily the gentlest of people, but occasionally, for no apparent reason, he goes completely berserk and becomes a raging murderer:

> Overnight he revolts against goodness and dutifulness and, knife in hand, goes out and murders everyone who imposed such goodness upon him, father, mother, wife, children, head of the village, or the planter to whom he has been such an exemplary steward.[9]

In brief, the Malay's eye has been darkened so that he can no longer make use of his conscious, rational faculties. That natural, intuitive part of his soul which has been so long repressed revolts and invades the conscious world in

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[8] Ibid., pp. 55-56.

[9] Ibid., p. 66.

the forms of chaotic murderous behaviour. What is particularly tragic, Van der Post maintains, is that this darkening of the eye can take place on a national level, and did, in Asia, when the Indonesians rose up in hatred against their Dutch masters and fought a war which drove them into the sea.

The same "Dark Eye", our author concludes, is now making its presence felt in Africa. But in this context Van der Post emphasizes the darkening of the European eye and emphasizes the added complication of a psychological projection on the white man's part. The European, too, has repressed his instinctive, intuitive impulses. However, as was the case with the Indonesian, these instincts are never destroyed. They are only driven underground to the subconscious division of the psyche where they wreak a terrible vengeance on the human heart. What happens is briefly this: the human condition demands that all sides of our nature be given full recognition. If the sensual and instinctive impulses are repressed and remain unlived, as they largely do in a rational Western civilization, their work is done on the subconscious level, and they emerge in the peculiarly twisted shape of a projection. Now, that which has been repressed is, as a psychological consequence, hated and feared by man so long as it remains in its enslaved condition. Therefore, where those same repressed functions are

externalized in the behaviour patterns of another human being, a simple projection of hatred takes place. Accordingly, when European man sees his hated unconscious functions given their full and natural life in a negroid spirit, his hate is given external form, and the native African becomes a faceless being, losing his individual identity to the dark projection of the afflicted spirit. It is precisely this process to which Van der Post refers when he makes the following statement:

> I think the European is blindly and ignorantly provoking all these events in Africa because, in his deepest nature, he is provoking them in himself.[10]

Van der Post is also very careful to point out that although the black man may draw to himself the projection of the white man's hatred, he himself does not live only in the world of the unconscious. There are, in fact, many negroids with keenly developed rational functions. Nevertheless, it is true that the native African as a rule depends less on his conscious thought patterns than does his European counterpart. Thus he again attracts the white man's hatred and scorn in the form of a projection.

Finally, Van der Post suggests that the black colour of the African is confused in the process of projection

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[10] Ibid., p. 67.

with the darkness that the European feels to be welling up within himself. The very skin colour of the black man is given a projection from the different dimension of spiritual colouring:

> You assume that because the black African has a black skin that he has a "black being" and vice versa with the Europeans. In other words you confuse "colour" in its aboriginal and abiding language of the spirit with its literal meaning. That is precisely what my countrymen in South Africa do . . . .[11]

The European, however, is not the only being in Africa who is developing a "Dark Eye". The rejected black man, partially because of the white man's projection of hatred is, in turn, reacting with a blind antipathy toward his conqueror. As has been previously intimated, the native African with his very limited rational controls over the world around him, was originally prepared to welcome the white man when first he came into contact with him. The European seemed the answer to a long-cherished desire for a fuller existence. At the same time the more "primitive" native had and still has a terrible fear of the increased individual responsibilities and problems which an increased consciousness carries in its wake. Van der Post explains the problem in this way:

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[11] Ibid., p. 127.

> I believe that this fear of "going white" exists at a certain level in all of us. It is the fear that man has of becoming more conscious, of becoming more aware of himself, of detaching himself from the herd and assuming greater responsibility for himself and his actions. For greater consciousness is not attained without effort, pain and added responsibility and is maintained only by a continuous struggle. If this fear exists in modern civilized man, as I believe it does, it is even more active in primitive communities.[12]

When, therefore, a new consciousness is thrust upon the black man by the invader, and his own peculiar spirit is dishonoured by that same invader, the aboriginal heart finds itself in a painful situation. Moreover, the black man discovers that even if he is willing to accept a rationalized dominant faculty as his guidepost of the spirit, the white man will not allow him the advantages and honours which should naturally accrue to the disciple. Now, barred from his old way of life and refused entrance to the new, the African builds up a terrible energy in his barely repressed unconscious and projects his darkened vision upon the form of the European oppressor:

> The black man, too, therefore, has an unlived aspect of himself, a darker brother within, which constant denial daily makes great with the spirit of revenge and powerful with unused energies, and which is fast growing into an angry giant about to

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[12] Ibid., p. 129.

> burst his bonds and use his strength like a colossus.[13]

Using the objective language of physics, just as Jung does, Van der Post describes the two opposing currents of hatred as follows:

> In physics one cannot introduce a negative charge of electricity in a given field without instantly inducing an equal and opposite charge of positive electricity. No matter how great may be your one-sided charge, an equal and opposite keeps pace and parallel with it until finally both become so powerful that they leap the space which separates one from the other and make the zig-zag spark we call electricity. A negative individual and racial projection behaves in exactly the same way.[14]

Bringing this theory of the negative charge to the level of recent events, Van der Post explains the Mau Mau rebellion of the 1950's as a last desperate attempt of the Kikuyu tribe in Kenya to prevent the loss of a national spirit. It was a religious revolt based upon the real fear that the African tribesman would lose his soul. It was the release of an energy previously given scope in the form of tribal wars and meaningful ritual and later denied an outlet by the heavy hand of colonial rule:

> You might have imagined that the white man would

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[13] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

[14] Ibid., pp. 73-74.

> have realized that he had to do something about directing the black man's energy into legitimate channels, that he had to give him a form of living, equip him liberally with all the safety devices and compensations with which our culture has provided us. Unfortunately no one in Africa asked these questions.[15]

To the traditional Christian protest that the white man has offered the African his God, Van der Post gives a sharp retort:

> Do you think that, in dealing with such people, a cerebral Christianity, an argumentative religion, a faith en tête as the French would put it, which is increasingly incapable of transforming thinking and moral precept into living emotion can be an alternative?[16]

The collective nature of the "Dark Eye" concept has been implied by Van der Post throughout the foregoing argument, but what should also be mentioned is his theory about the eventual fate of a collective racial projection. Like Jung, Van der Post believes that a national projection, if it is not made conscious, may eventually give way to a hungry, unlived mythology as it did in Nazi Germany. What is an unlived mythology? Van der Post describes it in the usual Jungian terms:

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[15] Ibid., p. 64.

[16] Ibid., pp. 103-04.

> I believe it to be man's sense not only of the letter but also of the spirit of his original contract and charter with life, the keeper within him of life's wider plan. If man is at one with its terms in his conscious striving, it raises him to great heights. If he is separated from it by the presumptions of his daily self, then this mythological factor within him turns into an archaic force which blindly dominates him, using its great strength on him like a giant.[17]

In short the national myth, if it has not been integrated into the daily life of a country, comes to possess its national spirit. This, Van der Post maintains, is what happened in Germany when that most civilized of nations began to live out its Götterdämmerung myth, inherited from the antique past.

Throughout their modern history, the German people have been haunted by the terrible terms of the "twilight of the gods" mythology, terms which demanded that the gods of light be defeated by the forces of darkness flowing over the rainbow bridge.[18] Finally this unlived archaic concept broke through the barriers of conscious rational thought and twice during the twentieth century took over the soul

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[17] Ibid., pp. 147-48.

[18] Wotan, the German tribal god mentioned in Chapter I, was the leader of the gods overthrown in the final battle at the rainbow bridge. Van der Post is here simply emphasizing a different part of that mythology used in the context of Jung's essay on Wotan. But the theme of "Germany Possessed" is obviously the same in both cases.

of the German nation to lead it to destruction in two great world wars:

> The individual humanistic values which European man had evolved for himself at such painful cost were overthrown. The impersonal, inhuman concepts of the herd took over, and values that one thought permanently discredited, hoary and senile with antiquity, were installed.[19]

What are the characteristics of a nation caught in the web of its own unlived mythology? Van der Post mentions first the inability of the afflicted country to take full responsibility for the insupportable burden of its actions. Secondly, there is the obsession with the idea of a national secret which sets the race apart from its fellow being. Furthermore, the myth-possessed country acknowledges for itself a special task in the world for which it has been selected by the powers above. In short, a mystique about a superior race develops, and it comes to possess the soul of the nation. All of these symptoms, Van der Post points out, were characteristic of pre-war Germany.

But they are also increasingly evident among the whites in Africa, particularly in South Africa, where the master race motif is growing ever more powerful. Interestingly enough, Van der Post notes that the Afrikaaner sympathy with the German cause during World War II can be ex-

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[19]Van der Post, Dark Eye, p. 151.

plained in this context, because for a time the Afrikaaner nation shared a myth of the superior race with the German people. As a result, many Boers were even ready to forgive Germany for swallowing Holland, the mother country itself.

Nevertheless, Van der Post maintains, the South African myth also has its own special characteristics which are grounded upon the Old Testament stories about the Chosen Race and its trek to the Promised Land. When the Dutch Protestants landed in South Africa to escape religious persecution in the mother country, they looked upon South Africa as the Promised Land. As long as they kept pushing into the hinterlands, they kept the myth of the Chosen People alive and healthy, because the Old Testament story presupposed just this type of journey. When, however, their journey was finally checked at the end of the nineteenth century, the Boers, as they were now called, could no longer consciously live out their myth. Just as the Jews would not transcend the national myth of their physical journey into the Promised Land by making it an inward journey into a new Christian consciousness, so did the Boers refuse to transcend the geographical journey and substitute for it a spiritual trek into a non-racial New Testament world. Consequently the journey myth became unlived, and its energies were transformed into a destructive force in their lives:

> . . . one time-honoured myth is that in which man is chosen and called upon to perform "a perilous journey." It is this myth, of course, which is so utterly transcended and accomplished in the New Testament. This is also the myth which rules in the hearts of my countrymen. Only since it has not yet been transcended because the European in Africa at the moment will not carry it forward, and since by the laws of its own dynamic being it cannot stand still, inevitably it has begun to recede and an earlier pattern, a less conscious phase of it, begun to replace a more conscious one.[20]

And thus the Boer now develops a hatred of his black neighbours, an intolerance towards any criticism, and a terrible exaltation of the state at the expense of the individual, all of which follow the pattern of life suggested by the Old Testament and much later by the spirit of pre-World War Germany.

Yet Van der Post is sure that just such an archaic journey myth can be transcended and given a contemporary quality if the individual himself translates it into the spirit of contemporary times and makes it a journey of "becoming". What he envisions, in brief, is the Jungian modern man, who refuses to live in the archaic world of mass projection and literal myth and who uses his energies to become whole once more.

I believe that the myth which provokes man to a

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[20] Ibid., p. 161.

> journey flows directly from the unfailing source of life's transcendent aim and today is concerned just as vitally with man's spiritual survival as it once was with his physical survival. But of course it is obvious that in order to travel on with this inner "sense of the journey" we need a new kind of explorer, a new kind of pathfinder, human beings who, now that the physical world is spread out before us like an open book with the latest geographical mystery solved and the highest mountain climbed, are ready to turn and explore in a new dimension.[21]

But to fulfill completely his potential as a human being, the white man needs just those qualities which his black brother possesses -- his vital experience of religion and the rich life of the unconscious. Similarly the negro yearns for a fuller rational consciousness which only the European can bestow upon him. Hence in the process of becoming whole again, the individuals of both races must learn to love those whom they now reject. Van der Post initially illustrates his conviction about this truth by recalling the legend of the white and the black knights who fought, visor down, to the death, only to discover in the end that they were brothers.

Perhaps the best illustration of Van der Post's concept of wholeness, however, can be seen in his description of what Africa means to his own peace of mind.

Even I who was born in Africa have experienced again

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[21] Ibid., pp. 182-83.

> and again a need which made no rational sense to me to return and explore Africa. Then one night, sitting alone in the bush in Africa with nothing but my black bearers around me, suddenly I realized the meaning of my own compulsion, and perhaps, too, the explanation of the world's extraordinary interest in Africa. I realized in a flash that I walked in Africa in this manner because only thus was I able to walk among the mysteries and uncomprehended complexities of my own heart and mind. I discovered that I travelled in Africa in this way because it brought me to unknown places in my own uncomprehended spirit which I could not have reached in any other manner.[22]

And so for Laurens van der Post, explorer, the journey into the depths of Africa is synchronized with the journey of the modern man in search of his soul.

But Van der Post is more than a modern man. He is also an artist who feels the desperate need to communicate his inner sense of a journey to his fellow man.

> In view of this ominous breakdown in the religious machinery in Africa, writers -- both in Africa and of Africa -- have a tremendous responsibility laid upon them. Art to me is the technique of presenting unrealized and hidden values to people potentially capable of appreciating and understanding those values. It is a vehicle in which men can penetrate places in their minds and souls that they had never reached before. Writing especially can be a kind of magic mirror which holds up to man and society the neglected and unrealized aspects of himself and his age. Writing can be many other things as well, but at this desperate moment I think this may be its most important function.[23]

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[22] Ibid., pp. 80-81.

[23] Ibid., p. 20.

On the surface the above statement represents the Jungian concept of art. The idea that the visionary artist prophetically reflects the collective unconscious of his era has already been noted in Chapter I. Yet the idea of the social responsibility of the artist as implied here by Van der Post, suggests an emphasis not quite Jungian. Jung himself sees the artist as being literally seized by his creation, whether he likes it or not. The poet does not write a poem; the poem writes him:

> Being essentially the instrument for his work, he is subordinate to it, and we have no reason for expecting him to interpret it for us. He has done the best that in him lies in giving it form, and he must leave the interpretation to others and to the future. A great work of art is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is never unequivocal. A dream never says: "You ought", or "This is the truth". It presents an image in much the same way as nature allows a plant to grow, and we must draw our own conclusions.[24]

How can Van der Post's sense of the conscious duty of the artist to society be reconciled to Jung's feeling that the artist simply dreams into life? How can one be an apostle of the "New Life" if one cannot consciously explain and interpret the path to salvation? These are problems which Van der Post does not encounter in his lecture The Dark Eye in Africa. But they are problems which he must

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[24]Jung, Modern Man, p. 198.

face when he writes his works of fiction, including: The Face Beside the Fire, "The Seed and the Sower", Flamingo Feather, and In a Province. A study of these books will be undertaken in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE JOURNEY IN THE NOVEL

Section 1: The Face Beside the Fire

All of Laurens van der Post's major works of fiction are based upon the journey motif. In this chapter I have chosen to study these works in order of their relative closeness to Jungian doctrine. My purpose in so doing is to establish a pattern of correlation between the artistic success of each book and the extent to which Jungian doctrine is employed in its journey motif.

Let us first examine The Face Beside the Fire, a novel published in 1953, soon after its author had become acquainted with the theories of Carl Jung.[1] The book traces the fortunes of its hero, David Alexander Michaeljohn, in terms of the Jungian journey towards individuation. Unfortunately, the resulting mixture of psychoanalysis and biography seasoned with a dash of gothic mystery is completely unpalatable.

Things start out well enough. As the scene opens in

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[1]When I met Mr. Van der Post in November, 1965, he indicated that he had not read Carl Jung's works until just after he had completed Venture to the Interior (published in 1952).

a South African village, we become immediately conscious of a brooding shadow hovering over the lives of the members of the Michaeljohn family. Why does the child Anna Maria Michaeljohn spurn the affections of her brother David? Why does David compulsively detest his baby brother, Edward George? Why does Albert Michaeljohn resent his young son, David? And why is he so particularly fond of Anna Maria? Why does Albert suddenly drink so heavily in his middle age when he has been an exemplary member of the community for most of his younger years? Why does Mary, the beautiful mother of the family, favor her son, David, over the other children, and why does she contrive to make him so miserable through a mistaken sense of duty? These questions are asked in the first few chapters, and our interest is aroused. Much to the detriment of the plot they are also answered by the omniscient narrator in those same few chapters. In other words, instead of trusting the characters to reveal the central conflicts of their lives through dialogue and action as the novel progresses, Van der Post explains the mystery behind their existence almost immediately. And he does it in terms of the Jungian formula.

Albert's history, for example, is a classic illustration of a case study in Jungian psychology. Rejected by British society because of his illegitimate birth, he comes to South Africa, studies law, settles in a small community,

becomes its Member of Parliament, and marries the daughter of the richest landowner in the district -- this despite her love for another man. In the process of his compulsive search for respectability, he represses his natural emotional and artistic instincts which, in turn, eventually rise in revolt from the regions of the unconscious.

> His love of culture, his genuine appreciation of music and painting, suggested that if he had been born a normal child he might well have become something quite different; but all his life he remained a stranger to his initial and special self.
> . . . . . .
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> And now with his marriage to Mary, Albert Michaeljohn had added another heavy burden to his soul. He was tied for the rest of his life to a woman whose deepest nature would not allow their union to be complete. . . . his own especial nature knew that it had been rejected by Mary just as it had been rejected by life; and it smouldered with a sense of injury and with sullen rebellion.
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> I find it significant in this connection that at forty-five Albert's life began to undergo a violent and revolutionary change. Always so sober, so conscientious, so controlled, so correct and sociable, he began to develop disorderly and licentious habits. He began to drink heavily and smoke incessantly.[2]

Case Study Number Two involves Mary Michaeljohn, née de Beauvilliers. When Albert appears on the scene, Mary, we are told by the narrator, is deeply in love with Pierre le

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[2]Laurens van der Post, The Face Beside the Fire (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), pp. 22-23.

Roux, a dashing but poor young adventurer. But she is forced into marriage with Albert out of a sense of duty towards her socially ambitious parents. Many years later her repressed emotional instincts lash out against her beloved son David. For example, she cruelly has David beaten by Albert for the theft of a gold sovereign. Similarly, out of a perverted sense of duty she tries to deny David his naturally artistic desires, just as she had denied her own emotions many years before. Note the crisis which ensues when David indicates his desire to become a painter:

> I am certain that David, merely by "wanting" to do something for no other reason than that he loved doing it, at once turned himself into a fresh battleground for the ancient campaign in Mary. In his person she fought again the fight between herself, her family, and the community when she had had to choose between Albert and Pierre. How could she let David have his way without repudiating her choice? How let him win without defeating what she had become?[3]

Case Study Number Three is focused upon Anna Maria, daughter of Albert and Mary. She instinctively loves her father, but hates her mother for rejecting him. When Mary chooses David as the love substitute for the father, Anna Maria transfers her hatred to David. But after her father dies, she too represses her natural instincts, and history

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[3] Ibid., p. 87.

repeats itself as Anna Maria becomes another Mary, presumably out of a sense of duty.

> Anna Maria to this day is one of the most beautiful women in the country. She has had her girlhood wish, if one could use such a free word in connection with such an innately-compelled person. She has married a member of Parliament who has also become a Cabinet Minister, and who may one day well achieve the Premiership, provided he can control his craving for drink.[4]

David Alexander Michaeljohn is, of course, the principal case study presented in the novel and is the hero on the journey towards individuation. The background material for this journey is suggested by the narrator as follows: David loves his mother passionately, but his affection is driven underground into the unconscious by his mother's insistence upon duty and discipline. Conversely, he hates his father, the harsh figure of authority, and the rival to his affections. The one thing that brings father and son together is their mutual love of painting. David's hatred of Edward George, his baby brother, also involves rivalry for the affection of Mary, while his unrequited love for Anna Maria marks a transference of affection to the second Mary.[5]

When Albert dies, young David is stricken with guilt,

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[4] Ibid., p. 6.

[5] Cf. ante p. 16. See explanation of the mother as anima.

for he has secretly desired the death of his father. This guilt complex[6] is expressed in his unhealthily accentuated desire to paint (Albert loved painting). It is also intimated in David's violent reaction to thunder storms:

> There was David, on his knees, deathly white, his hands folding tightly in prayer, saying in a voice which was shaken with involuntary sobs and which did not seem to belong to him: "Dear Father in Heaven, please spare me to-day. Please save me, for Jesus Christ's sake. Please forgive me. Please spare me, for Jesus Christ's sake. Please forgive my sins. Please spare me."[7]

And then, of course, the narrator relates the inevitable estrangement with Mary, whose love David had possessed at Albert's expense:

> At times his attitude to Mary would be one of a grave, resigned and melancholy responsibility. At others he was irritable and shrank under the most solicitous and affectionate touch of her hand on his shoulders. When he kissed her good-bye or good-night, he did so quickly and fearfully almost like someone committing a crime.[8]

In short, the love for Mary is repressed and driven into the unconscious where it lurks in wait for vengeance.

Now, once the narrator, David's friend, has penetrated

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[6] Cf. ante p. 8. Refer to section on complexes.

[7] Van der Post, Face Beside Fire, p. 69.

[8] Ibid., p. 59.

the mysteries behind the lives of the principal characters in terms of a psychological formula, the wonder of it all is snuffed out, and we mechanically follow the fortune of our hero to its inevitable conclusion, using a handy pocket guide to Jung as our passport. I think E.M. Forster presents the crux of the matter in his definition of a plot.

> Let us define a plot. We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. "The king died and then the queen died" is a story. "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. Or again: "The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king." This is a plot with a mystery in it, a form capable of high development. It suspends the time-sequence, it moves as far away from the story as its limitations will allow.
> . . . . . .
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> This element of surprise or mystery -- the detective element as it is sometimes rather emptily called -- is of great importance in a plot. It occurs through a suspension of the time-sequence; a mystery is a pocket in time, and it occurs crudely, as in "Why did the queen die?" and more subtly in half-explained gestures and words, the true meaning of which only dawns pages ahead. Mystery is essential to a plot, and cannot be appreciated without intelligence. To the curious it is just another "and then --" To appreciate a mystery, part of the mind must be left behind, brooding, while the other part goes marching on.[9]

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[9]E.M. Forster, "The Plot", Approaches to the Novel, ed. Robert Scholes (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1961), pp. 147-48.

We know the answers to the mystery of David before he ever moves into his journey -- that is, we know if we have even the most threadbare knowledge of psychology. Consequently the reader is always tempted to say, "Look, you silly fool. Can't you see?" But much to our chagrin, David cannot see. First, there is the archetypal dream, which warns David of his refusal to come to grips with his natural instincts. In the dream, Anna Maria, symbolic child of nature, is in terrible trouble (i.e., David's own natural instincts are being destroyed). David wants to help Anna Maria, but he is imprisoned behind the city gates, which do not open (i.e., repressions). However, a little old black man appears and shows him the one gate that can be opened (i.e., the negro symbolizes the dark unconscious, knowledge of which is essential for psychic health). David tries to get to Anna Maria but is pursued by a wolf bitch (i.e., Mary's unlived self). It can all be worked out so neatly.

Having ignored the dream, David is again warned by the unconscious through his paintings. For example, in one painting, later exhibited in London, he shows the strong, sinewy back of a Bantu youth. The implication is that David has not come face to face with his unlived desires.

Finally, our hero embarks on the physical journey, still burdened by the weight of his repressed guilt and hidden desires. It is a journey into darkness, for in

London he meets Helena, the second Mary and the unresolved anima figure. At this point he is forced into marriage by his unwilling attraction to his own inner weakness. The marriage fails dreadfully, and after a miserable nine years David, now an alcoholic, is driven back to Africa to try to discover the meaning of his anima carrier (Mary). But his voyage is fruitless, and he sets off on his return trip to London still bathed in inner darkness.

Then the revelation comes, as he meets his truly creative anima,[10] Alis, on board the ship returning him to England. The rest of the voyage is composed of contrived ecstasy as the two lovers reveal their extrasensory perceptions of each other's psyches.

However, when the boat docks David and Alis are still not free to unite their lives. There is the trivial matter of their marriage partners to dispose of. More important, David must go through the whole of his individuation process in order to emerge as the completely modern man in charge of his soul. And so in a small hotel room he carries on an inner dialogue, which leads him to his individuated self.

The shadow, the anima, the Wise Old Man, the mandala, and other archetypal symbols all make their appearance in a tedious parade of images and are translated into the terms

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[10] Cf. ante p. 16.

of David's past life. David's soul is purified. The journey has ended:

> I wept when the great procession came to an end, for one and all, great and small -- I loved them all. Yes, even to the worm that brought up the rear, with shaded night light and a nurse's white, in its dress concealing a phial of the drug of the greater sleep made with a touch of the hand of God's great, good night. Yes, David told himself, I love them all; I believe them; I am ready for battle; and to continue at their head the journey of them all to the end of the road in my blood. At last, purified and complete, I am ready to awaken and defend my love.[11]

Yes, David has saved himself, but the novel has died long since, stifled under the heavy weight of dead words.

I have, in the earlier part of my critique, mentioned the death of the sense of mystery in David's journey, and now it is necessary to elaborate upon that disharmony which is created in the novel as a direct consequence. When Van der Post, or any novelist for that matter, sets out to tell a story and to unravel a plot, he should lead the reader into a self-contained world.

The structure of that world is established by the author's tone, his setting, his treatment of the characters and by the dominant mood of his vision. Its magic is woven of a fragile fabric which is usually destroyed by the in-

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[11]Van der Post, Face Beside Fire, p. 294.

jection of any kind of foreign matter.

To use a crude analogy, if a television viewer turns his set on and is greeted by the picture of two lovers gazing soulfully into each other's eyes, he settles back, prepared for what seems to be an idyllic romance; but when suddenly one of the lovers pulls out a package of cigarettes and says, "Smoke du Maurier, the cigarette of good taste," the spell is broken. The viewer feels cheated. What he thought was going to be a love story was simply an advertisement.

Something of the same sort happens in The Face Beside The Fire. At the beginning of the novel we are ushered into a wonderful world of mystery and gothic shadows. But suddenly we become aware that the novel is not a mystery but a disciple's message pointing the way to salvation. The terms of the original contract between writer and reader have thus been broken, and the dream is violated. What is more, because the disciple's conscious message has been grafted into the dramatic tissue of the novel, it too sinks into impotency. By way of illustration it might prove useful to look at two passages from The Face Beside the Fire. The first describes the narrator's vision of Anna Maria sitting beside a campfire enraptured with the fierce spontaneity of a lion's roar as her Hottentot nurse brushes her hair:

> As Klara brushed Anna Maria's hair it seemed, in that light, to twist and curl like a kind of moon-mist round her brown fingers. I have never seen hair of so fine, so light a quality as Anna Maria's. I have never seen it so beautiful as it was that night. As we came near her she looked up at us from under that wide, serene forehead she had inherited from her mother, her blue-grey eyes shining with a light so deep that it seemed to belong to a world before our world, and she said in a voice alive with excitement but bright and clear as a silver bell: "I say, outjies, did you hear him roar! Wasn't it wonderful! Klara says he's not dangerous. He's just calling for his mate."[12]

Here the narrator's vision is charged with the wonder and excitement of discovery. There is nothing false about it. Turning to David's apocalyptic vision at the end of the novel, we see something quite different:

> I saw the square on a heavenly hypotenuse equal the sum of the squares on the sides of a sacred triangle. I lived through the moment when the battle of the triangle was won and the creation and consolidation of the square begun. I saw the three points of the triangle, father, mother, and son, joined by love, and learnt that if the angles were to be rightly made for the true sum of the great square, then love of father and mother for each other must be precise and accurate if the sides and base are to be truly joined to apex of child projected into the dark future; otherwise, fear comes in and makes the angle acute. I know, for I have just learned that my angle to Albert was too acute: and that

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[12] Ibid., p. 9. This scene, incidentally, gives the book its title. It is symbolic of the uninhibited natural self from which David later becomes estranged.

> with Mary too wide. Worst of all there was lack of love at the base itself.
>
> I was a coward but I had right to fear, for this journey I was contracted to perform without my seeking from birth to death, from past to future, from world without to world within on to world without end, is not possible without love.[13]

Here the speaker has moved outside a dramatic context. He is consciously preaching to some figure outside the world of the novel, namely the reader. And he leads that reader to pencil and paper in order to work out a contrived intellectual proposition in Jungian terms. The result is not rebirth, but abortion. The journey has failed in both the world within the novel and the world outside it.

At this point we are driven back to Van der Post's statement from The Dark Eye in Africa:

> Art to me is the technique of presenting unrealized and hidden values to people potentially capable of appreciating and understanding those values.[14]

Jung's definition can be placed beside it once more:

> A great work of art is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is never unequivocal. A dream never says: "You ought", or: "This is the truth". It presents

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[13] Ibid., p. 290.

[14] Van der Post, The Dark Eye, p. 20. Cf. ante p. 60.

> an image in much the same way as nature allows a plant to grow, and we must draw our own conclusions.[15]

And novelist Nadine Gordimer, writing about South African authors in the Times Literary Supplement, clinches the matter with an inevitable conclusion:

> It is a curious thing about propaganda in novels: the competent propagandist who merely makes use of the fact that a story provides a palatable way to present his propaganda usually succeeds in turning out a reasonably interesting book. But when a real novelist, one who has struggled with the strangeness of life, reached to the unexplored borders of the imagination, and taken us into the territory he has marked out of the unknown -- when he decides for some reason or other to write propaganda-with-a-story, the result is likely to be unreadable.[16]

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[15]Jung, Modern Man, p. 198. Cf. ante p. 61.

[16]Nadine Gordimer, "The Novel and the Nation in South Africa", The Times Literary Supplement, August 11, 1961, pp. 520-23.

Section 2: "The Seed and the Sower"

The last of Laurens van der Post's works of fiction to date was published in 1963 under the title The Seed and the Sower. It consists of three novellas, "A Bar of Shadow", first published separately in 1953; "The Seed and the Sower", which gives its name to the trilogy as a whole; and "The Sword and the Doll". The book is roughly held together by the similarity of setting in each of the three stories (Indonesia under Japanese rule), and by the fact that each of the three stories is a reminiscence shared by the narrator with his war-time comrade, Colonel Lawrence. It is, however, only the second story, "The Seed and the Sower", which need attract our attention in this thesis, since it is most obviously here that Van der Post once more returns to the journey motif.

"The Seed and the Sower" relates the confession of Jacques Celliers, a young South African whom the narrator had met in a prison camp in Indonesia. It is a biography framed in an ostentatiously Jungian setting. At the beginning of the tale, Jacques is pictured as a boy imprisoned by his own persona.[17] Wonderfully handsome, very athletic, and an extremely good student, he plays the hero role which

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[17]Cf. ante p. 6.

people expect of him.

> . . . I was shackled not so much to my good looks as to what people, after seeing me, first imagined and then through their imaginations compelled me to be. I know now that from my earliest age the effect that I had on those about me enticed me away from myself, drew me out of my own inner focus of being, and left me irrevocably committed to the role that my admirers and the obscure laws of their magnetic attraction automatically demanded of me.[18]

Yet despite his prepossessing appearance, Jacques feels that he has a deep, dishonoured shadow within himself, a shadow[19] that is demanding recognition. Note what he sees as he gazes into the depths of a pool:

> . . . I saw my own reflection coming up out of the purple depths of the pool to meet me. I could not see clearly. The reflection remained shadowy, very different from my bright morning figure bent low over it. It stayed there, a dark dishonoured presence straining in vain for freedom of articulation against that trembling, dawn-incarnadined water as if the corrugations on the surface were not the bars of a natural vibration but rather those of a cage contrived to hold it forever prisoner.[20]

This shadow is given dramatic identity in the form of Jacques's younger brother, an anonymous hunchback who repre-

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[18]Laurens van der Post, "The Seed and the Sower", The Seed and the Sower (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Ltd., 1963), p. 51.

[19]Cf. ante pp. 11-13.

[20]Van der Post, "Seed and Sower", p. 52.

sents the antithesis of all those qualities which make Jacques so attractive. Whereas Jacques is fair, his brother is dark; whereas Jacques is extroverted, his brother is introverted;[21] whereas Jacques is athletic, his brother is awkward and hates games; and whereas Jacques is strikingly handsome, his brother has a deformed grotesque body. Add to these characteristics the little brother's almost mystical attraction to the vegetative earth, and you have the perfect shadow figure in the Jungian sense of the word.[22] But despite his misshapen appearance the little brother is not evil; on the contrary, he is essentially innocent, naive, and extremely sensitive about his deformity, particularly about the small hump on his back.

Unfortunately this very deformity attracts the irrational hatred of both Jacques and his school mates. On initiation day at the boarding school the hatred erupts

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[21] Cf. ante p. 5.

[22] An interesting comment by Jung in Psychology and Religion throws some light on the physical characteristics of Jacques's brother:

> If the repressed tendencies, the shadow as I call them, were decidedly evil, there would be no problem whatever. But the shadow is merely somewhat inferior, primitive, unadapted, and awkward; not wholly bad. It even contains inferior, childish or primitive qualities which would in a way vitalize and embellish human existence . . . . (pp. 94-95)

into mob violence as the repressed collective unconscious seizes upon a scapegoat -- and Jacques stands aside to let it happen:

> For a moment my brother's white face remained outlined against the afternoon fire flaming along the red-brick quadrangle wall, his eyes ceaselessly searching the screaming, whistling mob of schoolboys. Then he vanished like the last shred of sail of a doomed ship into a grasping sea. I don't know if you have ever listened to a crowd screaming when you have been alone and divorced from the emotion which motivates it? At any time it is a sobering experience. But when the scream is directed at your own flesh and blood -- At that moment my heart, my mind, my own little growth of time all seemed, suddenly, to wither.[23]

Yet Jacques does not consciously admit to himself that he has betrayed his brother. Instead he represses the knowledge and pretends that nothing has happened, whereupon his inner shadow gradually assumes enormous proportions and effectively blocks the road to future spiritual development. Time for him thus assumes the shape of futility:

> . . . at this period the bitter process of cancellation within me had reached such a point that there were times when I could barely summon up the energy to get up in the mornings or, once dressed, to get through the day. Often, the day over, I was unable to undress for bed. This distaste of life, joined to my fear of the distaste, lengthened in my heart like my own evening shadow cast behind me on a great, yellow plain of the

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[23]Van der Post, "Seed and Sower", p. 88.

> high-veld. When at last one September our African spring came, it fell on my torn and tattered senses like the rap of a policeman at my own door with a warrant for my arrest. I was at my wits' end -- and my wits, as my career showed, were not inconsiderable.[24]

The war comes, and Jacques enlists; but his repressed shadow, his unlived self, still haunts him and makes him even more aware of the futility of his life:

> I went like someone profoundly preoccupied walking unaware with one foot on a pavement, the other in a gutter; one mind content with my men in that moment; another hopeless and strangely defeated in another epoch of time.[25]

Finally, however, the journey into darkness is ended when, after he has been posted to Palestine, Jacques has a feverish vision of Christ's accepting Judas back into his fold. Jacques, instinctively identifying himself with Judas, now suddenly realizes the nature of his own sin. The shadow is integrated into consciousness, and life once more assumes some meaning:

> 'But I'm not free,' I hastened to add. 'I had a brother once and I betrayed him ---'
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> 'Go to your brother,' He said at once, 'and make your peace with him even as I have had to do with

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[24] Ibid., p. 109.

[25] Ibid., p. 117.

> my need of you.'
>
> At that I felt the sweat break out on my skin and run down my body like tropical rain. I began slowly to grow warm again and I could hear the cool wind of an autumn nightfall stirring down the slope and through the leaves. For long I had feared the voice of the wind, but now I was grateful for the sound. It was almost dark and the stars were dropping their light like tears of compassion upon the night. Amazed, I looked around me. There were no people to be seen. I was quite alone yet for the first time in many years I did not feel lonely. I stretched back into my blankets and lay down watching the stars go down behind the hill between Imwash and Bethlehem. I don't think I slept at all and yet it was the shortest night I have ever known. The day came so swiftly that night could have been the mere shadow of a cloud passing across the sun. My own darkness had been overtaken at last.[26]

So Jacques returns to South Africa to beg his younger brother's pardon.

Having made peace with his brother the young soldier returns to the war and acquires a new sense of complete awareness. He becomes the Jungian modern man[27] in charge of his soul, a disciple of the "new way".

> What he meant by 'awareness' was perhaps a sense of the as yet unimagined wholeness of life; a recognition that one could life [sic] freely only on the frontiers of one's being where the known was still contained in the infinite unknown . . . .[28]

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[26] Ibid., p. 127.

[27] Cf. ante pp. 24-25, p. 57.

[28] Van der Post, "Seed and Sower", p. 144.

Jacques Celliers's philosophy of complete awareness is put to the ultimate test when he is captured by the Japanese in Indonesia and thrown into a prison camp commanded by a very handsome but brutal Japanese officer named Yonoi. The young South African immediately realizes that the commandant is burdened by an inflexible persona just as he, Jacques, had been, and that his "dark eye" of brutality simply marks the invasion of the undifferentiated unconscious into the light of day.[29] Consequently at the moment of crisis, when it seems that Yonoi will murder a number of prisoners, Celliers steps forward and kisses his Japanese captor. The spell is thus broken, and Yonoi once more sees his prisoners as individuals rather than as a dark collective entity. But Jacques, the sower of the seed of light, is buried alive, a martyr to his cause.

Obviously, the journey motif as seen in "The Seed and the Sower" follows the same pattern as that in The Face Beside the Fire. There is in both cases a movement into greater consciousness and towards the goal of individuation. Nevertheless, the journey in "The Seed and the Sower" is much more satisfying. Why? Simply because we are not as often caught in the monotonous backwash of a submerged, introverted soul. The journey in "The Seed and the Sower" can

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[29]Cf. ante pp. 47-49.

be seen developing as a series of suspenseful incidents in the outer world of conflict. There is, for example, the chilling episode of the initiation to grip our attention. And there is the gripping climactic scene of confrontation between Celliers and Yonoi. Look at the suspense when Hicksley-Ellis's execution is suddenly interrupted:

> When Yonoi opened his eyes again after his short prayer to the spirit, the Maru of his sword, Celliers was barely fifteen yards away. Amazement like the shock of a head-long collision went through him. Going white in the process he stared in a blank unbelieving way at Celliers. For the first time in days he was compelled, because of the unfathomed identification between Celliers and himself, to see someone outside himself.
>
> Amazement then gave way to consternation and he cried out a command in English that was also a plea: 'You -- officer -- go -- back, go back, go back!'
>
> But Celliers went on to place himself between Hicksley-Ellis and Yonoi and said something quietly and unhurriedly to Yonoi.
>
> Yonoi appeared not to have heard him. He shrieked again: 'You -- go back, back, back!' like someone trying to scare a ghost.[30]

But despite its superiority in this respect "The Seed and the Sower" is plagued by the same basic weaknesses which mar The Face Beside the Fire. The formula, the formula, always the predictable formula of spiritual development in

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[30]Van der Post, "Seed and Sower", p. 169.

the Jungian way. And above all, why do the narrators have to pause so often along the way in order to preach The Message, the content of which would be so much more convincing if it were simply acted out on the bare stage of life itself?

Section 3: Flamingo Feather

Flamingo Feather,[31] Laurens van der Post's third novel, received a more kindly reception from the critics than did its predecessor The Face Beside the Fire, and for good reason. It is a much more exciting tale, cast in the mould of John Buchan and Rider Haggard.

The story begins when Pierre de Beauvilliers, the adventurous hero of the novel, comes into possession of a flamingo feather under mysterious circumstances. The feather is found on the corpse of a Bantu warrior belonging to the Amangtakwena nation just after he has been murdered on Pierre's estate in Cape Province. Learning that the feather serves as a signal to all members of the Amangtakwena that a great dream has been dreamt, Pierre sets out to discover the mystery of this dream. (The Amangtakwena believed that great dreams acted as guides to their national endeavours.) His search takes him on safari deep into the coastal jungles of Mozambique where he eventually discovers The Flamingo Water, a secret harbour used by the Russians to smuggle arms into the country. From this point, one fantastic happening leads to another as Pierre strikes out to stop a Communist-inspired native revolution from engulf-

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[31] Flamingo Feather was first published in 1955.

ing the continent. Needless to say, he is successful.

Now what attracted the enthusiasm of the critics most particularly was not so much the exciting plot of the story, but rather the author's vivid description of Africa, her foliage, her animals and her people. Let us look at a sampling of these critiques:

> The extraordinary thing about Flamingo Feather is that while gleefully ticking off the clichés, one comes to accept them. For Van der Post writes with such pace and conviction and with so wide and deep a sympathy for Africa that his people become believable simply because he himself believes in them. If you accept the teeming magnificence of Mr. Van der Post's bush, there is no cause for you not to accept the strangled sparseness of Pierre de Beauvilliers's sex life; the villainous agent Harkov is no more improbably sinister than the snakes that glide underfoot.[32]

> Africa properly bestrides this book like the colossus it is, for which all honor to our author. Read simply as a thriller it has action, suspense, timeliness and a refreshingly different story. But read as a novel of Africa, it has majesty, mystery, and that indefinable atmosphere which eludes the uitlander. "Flamingo Feather" is that rarest of birds, a true African novel of adventure, and a scintillating one at that.[33]

> Within the cinematic there is a core of intense seriousness -- a stirring sensitivity to the heart and mind of primitive Africa; a sad awareness of

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[32]A Book Review in The Spectator, 6613:364, March 25, 1955.

[33]John Barkham, "On the Altar of an African Dream", The New York Times Book Review, February 20, 1955, p. 5.

> the white man's burden of guilt and a deep concern over the future of the African world which the author knows and loves so well and brings so vividly to life.[34]

The critics, I think, were right in this one respect. It is Africa which steals the limelight of this novel, the Africa that Pierre de Beauvilliers sees on his great trek through the hinterlands en route to the Flamingo Water. Look, for example, at the dramatic immediacy of the description of the ape which suddenly drops beside Pierre:

> I jumped round in some alarm to see a great black ape dropping with amazing agility on top of a boulder near by. He, too, had never seen man before. Nor had I ever seen his kind either. He was taller than a gorilla and though not so wide in the shoulder was much longer in the arm. His coat was a dusky purple, and his face so clear of hair and the skin so supple that I distinctly saw the start of astonishment send the hair on his head flying back fast, and the long, narrow forehead break out in a dozen wrinkles. His strange midnight eyes blazed with the suspicion which lies at the core of that small seed of intelligence in the first man, and a long prehensile lip did an electric jibber of anger and dismay.[35]

Or look at the transparent delicacy of the ducks floating on a jungle pond:

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[34]C.J. Rolo, "Reader's Choice", The Atlantic Monthly, 195:82-83, March, 1955.

[35]Laurens van der Post, Flamingo Feather (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 126.

> We pitched our camp at sundown by a deep blue pool. Round its edges were finely-pointed starry blue and yellow lilies. Duck with bodies of speckled egg-tan were drifting like Chinese paper boats towards their bed among the reeds, and the water itself was so still and preoccupied with the twilight mood of this remote land that when Said came up to me and said in his Arabic patois, "Surely, Effendi, you could call this place Bhir-Es-Salaam: the peaceful water," I instantly agreed . . . .[36]

The description of Pierre's Africa is not only vivid and exciting; it also has that special numinous quality of a poetic vision. In other words, we are often aware of the beholder being transformed by a great leap of the soul. Pierre's first sight of the buffalo might serve as a good illustration of what I mean:

> Twelve yards away, his muzzle wet and shining with light and health, grey scimitar of powerful horn thrown back, expert nostrils searching the air, stood our first buffalo bull, the grass wherein he stood clasped close around his throat and lying like a cape of gold against his purple flanks. It is for me always a solemn moment when I first see buffalo again after a long time. The buffalo's powerful head darkening the yellow grass, like the lion's imperative roar and the elephant's long, somnambulistic stride, has more of the quintessential Africa in it for me than any other manifestation of all the scores of animals that I love and know. It's as if in the buffalo the very stones and earth of Africa, all its vast, ponderable, withdrawn and solidified matter have turned magically into a living design of life; as if all the tranced magnetic power of the land is released in

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[36] Ibid., p. 134.

> their drumming hooves and in the easy lift of the weight of their head.[37]

These "spots of time" experienced by the narrator roughly cluster into a symbolic pattern, a pattern which illuminates the successive stages both of Pierre's physical journey and of his inner journey toward the final ecstatic vision of the Flamingo Water. Thus when the safari approaches the dark forest of Duk-Aduk-Duk we are made aware of a sinister, cynical quality in the landscape as well as of the shadow which hangs over the spirits of the travelers:

> As the day progressed and the thorn bushes began their dance, I thought at times I discerned a cynical half-smile of superior disdain on the dark handsome forest face. I could almost believe that it was perfectly aware of our presence and conscious of the need to spy on our progress.[38]

Once the safari has entered the forest the midnight atmosphere disturbs them even more:

> I must confess I found the strain of marching underneath these silently watching and patiently absorbing trees far greater than anything I'd yet experienced. At times I felt as if I were drowning or nightmare dreaming in a deep sea of leaves: as if I were a character who had climbed out of the Nautilus of Jules Verne and was walk-

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[37] Ibid., pp. 132-33.

[38] Ibid., p. 131.

ing alone twenty thousand leagues beneath the sea.[39]

And then the journey through darkness rises up to the final dazzling vision of The Flamingo Water:

> I wish I could describe the scene adequately, but words themselves are not enough. It needs the brush of Fragonard to reproduce the salon elegance of birds which fed themselves to their own flame, drawing the luminous stilts of their long mannequin legs like Venetian glass out of the crucible of that fire. It needs Stravinsky's music for the quick reds and fast intertwining classic pinks. And who could do justice to the supple curve of those long sea-foam necks and the greater grace of their heads? Above all, who could paint, what words describe, the sense of participation almost mystical in an innermost secret of life which made me feel that what I was seeing was not the birds themselves, but rather reflections thrown from behind the barrier of a super-sensory dimension to the mirror of this tranquil water?[40]

Obviously this journey of Pierre de Beauvilliers could be interpreted in Jungian terminology. The movement into the ancient forest is the journey into the unconscious. The vision of the Flamingo Water is the mystical vision at the end of the road of individuation. Finally the Amangtakwena warriors who soon appear possessed by the tyranny of their dream are good illustrations of a myth-possessed

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[39] Ibid., p. 139.

[40] Ibid., pp. 145-46.

people.[41] But the point is, Van der Post does not follow the pattern as he would a formula. Pierre's journey is real, his vision is natural and spontaneous -- at least it is as long as he is involved in the safari to the Flamingo Water. The author has managed to back away from his formula and has integrated the Jungian mystique into the fabric of the physical journey.

Pierre's journey to the Mozambique coast makes up only the central episode in the plot of Flamingo Feather. We must still consider the master pattern of the spy-thriller chase. The first part of the novel is unfolded in an atmosphere of tense mystery. What is the meaning of the flamingo feather? Why was the Amangtakwena prince murdered? What is the secret behind the voyages of the Star of Truth? How are Harkov and Lindelbaum connected to the great dream of the Amangtakwena? These are the questions which loom large as Pierre searches out the pieces of his giant puzzle. They generate enough excitement to keep the first part of the novel intriguing. Then the suspense thriller merges into the beautiful journey to the Mozambique coast, and the transition, I think, is successful. Even while we are admiring the African panorama, we are always made aware of the race against time as Pierre tries to reach the harbour

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[41] Cf. ante p. 28, p. 54.

before the mystery ship does.

Once Pierre's safari has reached the Flamingo Water the thread of suspense once more asserts itself. At this point Pierre and his companions become fugitives as they try to elude the clutches of the Amangtakwena warriors. Again the transition to melodrama is achieved with little effort. The African setting makes for an exciting backdrop in the game of cops and robbers. Here, for example, is the scene where Pierre and Tickie are hiding from the Bantu search party.

> Thus slowly the minutes dragged by. We lay so still and silent that the birds came to collect yellow berries around our heads and picked unconcerned away among ferns at our feet. Then, about three in the afternoon, I noticed that the birds were increasing round about us with a tendency to mass in bigger trees. This, at this hour of the day, was rare enough to make our nerves tingle. It could only mean that instinctive caution had made these prudent little creatures retreat warily in our direction.
>
> "Bwana!" Tickie whispered softly and slowly in the manner of his people when stalking game. "People! Many people on your side, about half a mile away, searching the path you took this morning."[42]

But when Pierre's party reaches the Mountains of the Night and discovers the armed training camp that the Russians have set up for Amangtakwena warriors, the story's

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[42]Van der Post, Flamingo Feather, pp. 161-62.

credibility collapses. This is particularly so when we realize that, as a result of wildly improbable circumstances, Pierre's long-lost friend Colonel Sandysse is the commandant of the camp. The latter's explanation of the Russian plot finally brings the mystery down to the level of farce. Contrary to what the reviewer from The Spectator[43] suggests, our disbelief can no longer be suspended.

> Yes, John assured me sombrely, it was a deadly fact that cigarette lighters were arriving already filled, not with benzine, but with Russia's latest organic poison. This poison, according to the instruction which he was ordered to translate into good simple 'Takwena, was odourless, colourless, and tasteless, but one drop of it placed in liquid of any kind was enough to kill the drinker in five days, leaving no appearance of poisoning, but rather of a strange new plague in the blood. As fast as these new cigarette lighters came in he was ordered to produce bearers for Ghinza to send them to their proper destinations whenever told to do so. What that destination was, he had no idea.
>
> For a moment after he'd told me this, John paused as if the horror of the thought made it impossible for him to continue, then he turned to me rather desperately and said surely he needn't remind me what drinkers of teas, coffees and other liquids all Europeans in southern Africa were -- and all prepared and served by black hands.[44]

The farcical note continues. The rest of Pierre's race to

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[43] Cf. ante p. 86.

[44] Van der Post, Flamingo Feather, p. 234.

stop the revolution is, with the exception of one episode, contrived horse opera complete with snipers lying in wait along the sides of a deep canyon.

Again, as he did in The Face Beside the Fire, the narrator finally ends the novel by tacking on some wayside preaching of a definite Jungian flavour.

> And there I must leave it. In most lives, and particularly in a life such as mine, points of departure inevitably are arbitrary, so are ends; are ends, indeed, only of other beginnings. This end, too, which comes down like a curtain upon us is the end only of that search which brings a man to the threshold of his private and personal task, the task that life demands of him day and night in his blood: to live with love out of love; to live the vision beyond reason or time which draws him from the centre of his being as the vision of Joan drew me in spite of my fearful, conscious self.[45]

As I have mentioned, there is one episode in the last part of the book which does not degenerate into stereotyped escapism, and this is the tribal assembly scene where the great dream is interpreted -- the climax of the book. The atmosphere here is fraught with tension. Ghinza interprets his part of the dream and is then proven to be a betrayer of his people, whereupon, convicted by tribal law, he marches over the cliff to his death on the rocks below. Now what makes this scene so gripping is not so much the

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[45] Ibid., pp. 319-20.

duel between the old induna and Ghinza (although that too is impressive); it is rather the breathtaking panoramic vision of the natural amphitheatre, Kwadiabosigo, packed with all the members of the Amangtakwena nation. Here is a part of that picture:

> I saw fifty thousand clansmen, each clan with its own blanket, specific design of texture and pattern of colour, silently converging from all sides on the open ground below the cave. Oh, Lindelbaum, the inspired African merchant, had served the tribal tastes well! Below us were the fifty thousand of a thousand different tribes, each group in its own blanket, and each blanket woven and dyed deep in the colour which the heart of Africa takes straight from the palette of the land's mythological sunsets and its high, barbaric dawns. Clasped round fifty thousand throats these blankets had the light of many-coloured candles tied by flame against the moving air to long black wicks; or, perhaps, considering the breeze of morning, they were like ardent leaves wrenched from the princely redwood of someautumnal dawn, swept, gathered and now steadily drifting towards the mouth of the cave.[46]

I think that the above quotation serves to illustrate two conclusions which the reader of Flamingo Feather grasps in retrospect. The first seems obvious: that Van der Post's imagination is always drawn out by the electrifying atmosphere of Africa's natural environment, be it human, animal, or vegetable. The second conclusion is equally inevitable: Van der Post's imagination involves essentially a pictorial

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[46] Ibid., p. 279.

vision. He loves to stop and describe a scene, a scene which he can envelope with blazing similes and caress with a painter's brush. This is why the journey through primitive Africa serves as such an excellent vehicle for his talents.

But when he enters the world of civilized man, the world of bureaucracy, abstract ideas, and much talk, his vision withers into a series of tired clichés. In the first part of the novel we do not notice the dead language, largely because our interest is diverted from the characters who use it and directed towards the essential mysteries of the plot. However, once Pierre returns from the magic world of Mozambique and holds a supposedly civilized discourse with Colonel John Sandysse, or Aramis, or the Head of the British Mission, the cliché-ridden speech, combined as it is with a farcical plot, stands out bald and ugly in stark contrast to the luminous intensity of the preceding passages. Look, for example, at John Sandysse's account of his initial capture by the Russian soldiers:

> He was helped into the truck and deposited on the bottom with Serge in the midst of a group of unsmiling, phlegmatic, slant-eyed faces and suet-pudding heads. Immediately the truck drove off fast, not in the way it had come, but round and round the tamarisk clump in ever widening circles, like a hound casting around for a lost scent.
>
> "What on earth are they doing?" John wondered of Serge.

"Looking for parachutes," Serge promptly told him.

Yes, he and John were suspected of being American spies dropped there by parachute. They refused to believe anyone could have escaped from Harbin and lived to tell the tale.

But, John protested at once, weren't the Americans as much allies of Russia as was Britain? Serge merely shook his head and told John that the war had finished only a fortnight before. Russia no longer had either need or desire of allies. But, anyway, wouldn't they take his word as an officer and a gentleman that he and Bolenkov weren't spies? John insisted. This merely stung Serge into saying with bitterness that, though there might still be officers left in Russia, he feared there were no gentlemen. In fact, from what he had seen and heard that day at the big base camp further back, he thought it'd be far better if John did not disclose himself as an officer or a gentleman, but pretended to be a man of the common down-trodden people -- that was why he'd told them John spoke no Russian. He believed John would have a far better chance of getting back to England that way, for make no mistake about it, they were in the soup. He was convinced that if they knew John was an officer, they'd separate him from Serge, the volunteer private he'd already described himself to be. And that, Serge stressed, would not be good for John, and possibly disastrous for him, Serge. The Commandant back there in camp had given him a very Siberian-salt-mine look when he'd confessed he was a White Russian, come back freely to fight for his country in the war.[47]

The question is, why? Why does Van der Post have to resort to this type of tedious reporting at the very point where the excitement of the chase should be reaching its climax? For one thing, the author in this case obviously has to account for the presence of Colonel Sandysse. He has

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[47] Ibid., pp. 220-21.

to fill in background information, contrived though it may be. But what is more important, this sort of background material does not lend itself to the pictorial imagination, or to the little scene, artfully presented. The time element is too important. "And then what happened? and then what happened?" are the questions governing the whole report of events past. We are deluged by a rain of essential but lifeless information. To make matters worse, this information is too often recorded in the form of indirect discourse, thereby reducing the character telling the tale to a mere useful device. Of course, Van der Post tries to sustain his magic world by adding horrifying details of the Russian plot to the narration given by his civilized characters, but this data, as I have noted, simply turns improbability into farce.

It is then ultimately the inability to sustain a steady vision of his immediate journey, the tendency to be weighed down by the reporting of essentially lifeless background material, and the habit of using too many characters as mere recording devices to further the plot, which badly flaw the latter part of a potentially excellent novel.

Section 4: In A Province

Laurens van der Post's first novel, In A Province, was first published in 1934, long before the author had become familiar with the psychoanalytical theories of Carl Jung.[1] Yet this novel, like the other works of fiction, is based on the motif of a hero's journey into increased consciousness.

At this point, however, the resemblance ends. In A Province conspicuously lacks those inherent weaknesses which pervade Van der Post's later work. For one thing, the narrator does not continually intrude to point out the moral of the story. Nor does he break the mood of his creation by arbitrarily directing the reader's attention to a doctrine of salvation. Generally he confines himself to linking the threads of the narrative or to filling in pertinent background material. This is not to say that the narrator is completely objective, but it is to say that his point of view is for the most part buried within the consciousness of the major characters, notably Johan van Bredepoel and Kenon. As a consequence, our awareness is that of the protagonists, and the reader proceeds on the journey only so far as the consciousness of these two men will allow.

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[48]Cf. ante p. 62. See footnote 1.

The focus of this journey is the race problem in South Africa. We first follow van Bredepoel's slowly dawning realization of the black man's tragedy. The seeds of van Bredepoel's awareness are sown by Meneer Broecksma, his free-thinking tutor, when the latter points out the beauty of a young native girl and comments upon the subject of race prejudice in South Africa:

> ". . . haven't you noticed what a good figure that girl Johanna has? I bet you haven't! But just look at her, there's something for you to write about."
>
> "But, Meneer Broecksma!" Johan exclaimed, overcome with surprise. "She's black!"
>
> "Black! Of course she is black; I'm not blind," the old man replied more warmly than seemed necessary. "But that doesn't make any difference to the fact that she is very beautiful. It's necessary to have grown up in this awful country not to have seen that. Every time I look at her, I feel that we lose a hell of a lot by being civilised. Look at her yourself and be inspired!"[49]

But awareness of the beauty of the black man's nature really takes shape only after van Bredepoel moves from his country home to Port Benjamin, a thriving metropolis. Here the homesick young white man becomes attracted to the complete spontaneity of his black servants' way of life:

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[49]Laurens van der Post, In A Province (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), pp. 43-44.

> He made out the forms of some black servants standing against a wall. Well away from the wall was another figure, taller and stronger than any of the others, whirling round and round in a dance of wild abandon. . . . Every movement of the dancer was counterpointed by music played on a mouth-organ, stamping of the feet of the men against the wall, and every now and then a shout of "Oh, Ash Cake!" -- evidently the name of the dance -- "You beautiful thing!"
>
> The tune itself was monotonous but its rhythm vivid and catching . . . .
>
> Van Bredepoel found himself deeply moved.[50]

Van Bredepoel's awareness focuses most particularly upon Kenon, a young native fresh from the hinterlands of South Africa, the same hinterlands from which he himself had just arrived:

> "Joseph," van Bredepoel said to him in his own language, "you are not of Port Benjamin. How long have you been here?"
>
> "Inkosan', it is four days and a night since I left the kraal of my father," he replied.
>
> "Joseph," van Bredepoel told him, "it is four days and a night since I left the hut of the brother of my father."[51]

The barrier has been broken. Johan no longer sees his servant as an undifferentiated member of the black race.

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[50] Ibid., pp. 57-58.

[51] Ibid., pp. 66-67.

Kenon has become an individual. And with van Bredepoel's interest in Kenon comes a fascination with the Bantu's rich world of myth and fantasy.

Unavoidably, van Bredepoel's attraction to Kenon leads to a need for personal commitment. The young Boer cannot avoid seeing that the false glitter of the white man's world is beginning to corrupt Kenon as well as his fellow natives. What is he, Johan, going to do about it? Unfortunately he does very little except to encourage Kenon to keep sending money home. Eventually the essentially innocent young black man is lured into a brothel where he is arrested on a false charge of assault and battery. After six months' imprisonment he is released, embittered and broken by a law he does not understand, only to lose his employment with Mrs. Harris soon after. Van Bredepoel sees this final disintegration of Kenon as a sign of his own personal failure. But even his failure marks an advancement in his awareness:

> The picture in his mind of this still, black figure lost in the shadows of a backyard in Port Benjamin haunted van Bredepoel; it became the symbol of his failure to help the boy when he alone could have helped. He did not try to justify himself as once, to his tutor, he had justified a complete lack of interest in a native girl with the mere exclamation: "But, Meneer Broecksma, she is black!" Since those days he had moved far.[52]

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[52] Ibid., p. 145.

It should now be evident to the reader that van Bredepoel's journey into increased consciousness is remarkably parallel to Jung's pattern of thought. Van Bredepoel, when he realizes the worth of Kenon's spontaneous spirit, is in effect being attracted to what Jung would call the unconscious. Conversely, of course, he is being repelled by the white man's atrophied spirit, and it is this repugnance which leads him on the second part of his journey. The young Boer's growing disillusionment with his compatriots is first framed in isolated pictures impinging upon his consciousness. For example, a white man and his wife pass van Bredepoel on the street and he notices their behaviour:

> A young couple were approaching him from the other end of the street; the man, dressed in a navy-blue suit and pushing a pram, walked with a tired and depressed air, as if the high hopes he had placed in the companionship of the woman at his side had been utterly frustrated. The woman was dressed in black, had on a large black hat with a cluster of cherries at the side, a sulky expression lay in the corners of her thin white mouth, and she, too, looked as if the man had disappointed her.[53]

He tries to get a general impression of Port Benjamin's white population and is further disillusioned. The falseness of the European's way of life in the city is unmistakable:

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[53] Ibid., p. 150.

> He remembered his uncle telling him when he was little how the old Boer farmers used to sit all day, calmly and happily, on their stoeps, drinking coffee and smoking their pipes, never a word of bitterness about themselves, content both in their past and their future. And he could not imagine one of that pretentious crowd which filled the eating-houses and cinemas of Port Benjamin to suffocation sitting still alone for even half an hour. Their thoughts, the moment they were alone with themselves, would follow a slant just like his own, turning inevitably to the secret sources of their common misery, and thoughts of this kind were just what all wanted to avoid. . . . They fled from themselves, from the reality of their lives, to games, to cinemas and books which lifted them into a world where human beings were miraculously free from the natural consequences of their actions. The gaiety, the cheerfulness of everyone, except perhaps the children, seemed to him but a disguised and painted joylessness.[54]

Again, the similarity to Jungian doctrine is unmistakable. Here is a vision of modern mass man, the insecure man who has outlived his religious instincts and has shut off the regions of the unconscious from further exploration.

The next step on van Bredepoel's road to consciousness comes soon after when he witnesses the unlived instincts of the white man erupt into wildly distorted projections of race hatred.[55] A European on board a tram asks an East Indian to give up his seat to a white woman and bursts into hysterical anger when the request is refused. Here van

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[54] Ibid., p. 159.

[55] Cf. ante pp. 5-6, p. 48.

Bredepoel, in his first real gesture of commitment, runs against the grain of white prejudice and serves as a witness against the attacker. The passive onlooker has actively taken sides.

But the most shocking form of race prejudice displays itself to van Bredepoel when he sees the mass man in his natural environment -- the mob. He attends a protest meeting where a sententious black orator known as the Doctor is addressing a crowd composed of both blacks and whites. When the words white women are uttered the Europeans are transformed:

> Suddenly the Doctor's uplifted hand dropped to his side, his body stiffened, and he shouted loudly: "If the white women . . . ."
>
> He got no farther. The mood of the crowd heaved immediately like a big ship caught in a submarine convulsion.
>
> "Leave the women out of it, nigger!" To van Bredepoel that scream, a mindless, sub-human scream, sounded as if it came from one throat. Around them were people in evening dress, sports clothes and blue overalls; next to the cloth caps of workmen, blonde and shingled heads on slender shoulders covered with silk shawls. But all the odds between one individual and another had gone; here there were neither rich nor poor, but only cells of a single organism.[56]

The collective unconscious has erupted.

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[56]Van der Post, In A Province, p. 209.

It is this same type of mob hysteria which furnishes the final climax of In A Province. Kenon, drugged with hashish, stands before a black mob of natives and, much to van Bredepoel's horror, attacks the white police. A massacre of the blacks ensues. The last step towards race warfare has been taken.

Yet van Bredepoel cannot sympathize with those communist agitators who believe that the last act of the drama between black and white must be played out with violence. He has learned his lesson too well to believe that revolution can cure the cancerous growth in the hearts of men. Listen to his final impassioned plea to Burgess, the doctrinaire communist:

> "Under your system the just will still be just, the unjust still unjust, we will be no farther forward and you'll have put the world through a period of bloodshed and anarchy in vain. Your enemy and mine in this country is not the system but the heart of every white man. You can't legislate a man's heart away."[57]

Van Bredepoel does not get a chance to put his new philosophy to the test. He is shot by white commandos as he tries to help Burgess escape from Paulstad, the scene of the race riot. But van Bredepoel's journey, the narrator cries out, taking off his mask of anonymity, will be taken up by

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[57] Ibid., p. 334.

future generations.

> "Johan! Kenon! Poor, unhappy children of life, courage! People like Burgess still sow out of their love of the oppressed the seeds of a terrible hate. Life is bent low with hate. But take heart. For here, where your footsteps disappear, so near that if you stretched out your hands you could almost feel them, come the feet of the generations that trample the dim future, and there may be love at their side."[58]

"The final solution is in the mind and heart of every individual," we can almost hear Carl Jung whispering in the background.

Perhaps now is the time to say a few words about Van der Post's method of characterizing the two major figures in this novel. As I have mentioned, the story is largely framed by the consciousness of both van Bredepoel and Kenon. But van Bredepoel's vision is the dominant one. This means in effect that although he is the observer, the seeing-eye of the author, he himself is seldom observed. Of course, a few comments of other minor characters, such as Mrs. Harris, fill in the skeleton outline of his outer appearance, but for the most part we are aware only of the modulation of his inner being as it comes into contact with the outside world.

This system of characterization has several advan-

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[58] Ibid., p. 350.

vantages. Not only can the author use van Bredepoel as an observer, but he can also provide a series of flashbacks which fill in the spiritual history of the man. And the dramatic conflict is no problem. Van Bredepoel always speaks of himself in the third person. When he is involved in dialogue the shift into the first person gives the immediacy of the situation well enough. Nevertheless, because he is nearly always framed in his own vision, he lacks one dimension, and there is a certain loss in the reader's ability to judge him objectively.

Kenon, on the other hand, is a much more intensively defined character, and again, the author's method of characterization is in large part responsible. In the first place, all eyes are directed towards him. As he proceeds on his tragic journey into consciousness, not only van Bredepoel, but many nameless minor characters give their opinions of his outward appearance, his idiosyncracies, and his merit. For example, when he first comes to Port Benjamin we see his essential freedom and spontaneity through the eyes of an elderly European gentleman:

> Sometimes an elderly European, hot and uncomfortable in a close-fitting navy-blue suit, would be quite honest with himself and look after Kenon rather wistfully, admitting into his consciousness a pang of envy. And he would wonder how life could possibly burn so vividly, so spontaneously, so un-

shadowed by doubt and illness, in a human being.[59]

Again, this same natural innocence is noted by van Bredepoel when he calls Kenon (Joseph) to his room and presents him with a tip.

> Unlike the servant who had brought up van Bredepoel's luggage on the night of his arrival and had received a tip very much as a matter of course, Joseph held out both his hands cupped together, taking a few shillings as though they were a glittering pile of gold, and then raised a trembling hand above his head as a salute of gratitude, just as the natives on "Vergelegen" had done when they were paid.[60]

Similarly the young Bantu's gradual deterioration is defined by van Bredepoel and some of the other minor characters. Mrs. Harris, for one, describes his new manner after his return from prison as she speaks to her boarder:

> You know what a cheerful good-natured creature he used to be. Well, now he goes about this place like a thunder-cloud. I can't complain about his work exactly, but there's something I don't like about him. He has been having the most awful rows with the maids in the kitchen.[61]

Van Bredepoel's vision of the new Kenon corroborates that of his landlady:

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[59] Ibid., p. 78.

[60] Ibid., p. 66.

[61] Ibid., p. 131.

> "Come in, and close the door behind you," van Bredepoel said gently.
>
> Kenon did as he was told and then looked at his feet. There seemed to be no vitality left in him, his old vividness was dulled. This Kenon was a strange person.[62]

The second dimension of Kenon's character is added by the record of his consciousness as it gropes with the phenomena of the outside world. In the beginning, naive and vulnerable, he is overwhelmed by the strangeness of the white man's train:

> Towards dawn he woke. His ears instinctively were tuned for that silence round his home, broken only by the noise of the cattle stirring in the kraal, the barking of dogs, and the sound of the wind shepherding a ghostly mist up and down the Valley of a Thousand Hills; but he was bewildered to hear hundreds of people shouting and talking loudly as they bundled out of the train. Quickly he sat up, grasped his luggage case, his sticks and umbrella, and joined in the crush at the door.[63]

But Kenon's spirit retains its vitality, at least for the first few months of his stay in Port Benjamin. Listen to the end of his tale of Masakama, the great tribal god:

> "Masakama, you see, Indosan', was a great chief

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[62] Ibid., p. 132.

[63] Ibid., p. 76.

> and a wise man. Never shall the Bambuxosa see his like again, but the old men say that one day Masakama will come back to his people on the clouds with man warriors and much cattle . . . ."[64]

When he runs afoul of the white man's law the reader's sympathy is invoked by the bewildered consciousness of the young native. His vision of the court strikes a particularly poignant chord:

> In a few seconds he came out in the witness-box. As he looked around him his bewilderment increased. The number of people about, the policemen in shining uniforms, and the lawyers sitting at their tables, gave such an air of importance and gravity to the occasion that he was frightened and could hardly shut his mouth properly. He longed for someone to talk to, to confess all his difficulty about forgetting what had happened, to ask what he had really done; but one look round the court, full of strange and severe faces, and he realised that that was impossible.[65]

And then Kenon's consciousness affords us a last glimpse of a man broken in spirit, his gods dishonoured, his manhood sullied, staring bleakly over the horizon at a futile world. Kenon has come home, but his journey has ended in darkness.[66]

Below him on the crest of every hill in the valley

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[64] Ibid., p. 88.

[65] Ibid., p. 118.

[66] Cf. ante pp. 51-52.

> were the neat brown circles of huts, and round them irregular patches of cultivated land. Here and there someone wrapped in a white and black blanket was walking at a steady unhurried pace on a red foot-path. None of these people seemed to have an obvious destination and the country over which they were walking was so big, and so much of it was exposed to the eye, that Kenon felt as the look-out on a steamer must feel when he sights in mid-Atlantic some small dinghies. The feeling that, no matter how far they walked in that wide fertile land, they could never reach any final destination, came to Kenon and depressed him unutterably.[67]

If the passage above is framed in Kenon's consciousness, how then can we account for the haunting image of the lookout on a steamer? Kenon has never been to sea. That problem brings us abruptly to the third dimension in the character study of Kenon. The young tribesman, marching into the abyss of European civilization gradually becomes aware of the enervating influences which beset him on every side, but he can never quite understand them. It thus remains to the author and narrator to mould Kenon's consciousness into a coherent pattern of images. The fact that he can do so with so much compassion as well as artistry is a tribute to his genius. Herbert Read sums up the achievement more precisely when he writes the following critique of In A Province:

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[67]Van der Post, In A Province, pp. 142-43.

> Mr. Van der Post's prose is always adequate to his theme, and at times extremely vivid, conveying the swiftness of action or the actuality of atmosphere with great precision. But good writing of this kind is no more than good reporting, and though good reporting is not to be despised, by itself it can only give a novel bright surface, and not depth. This other quality can only come from something I will venture to call humanity, a word I use conscious that on one side stands humanism, on the other humanitarianism. Humanism and humanitarianism are doctrinaire attitudes -- one historical, the other contemporary -- and art is not compatible with the doctrinaire. Mr. Van der Post's novel is a timely document, for on a great question, full of import to millions of men, he shows and I think shows convincingly that the attitude of the artist (including the poet and the novelist) cannot be doctrinaire. But his attitude is not one of arid detachment. It is an attitude of charity or sympathy that comprehends the polarities in human nature.[68]

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[68] Herbert Read, A Book Review in The Spectator, 152:336, March 3, 1934.

Section 5: Conclusion

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have attempted to examine Laurens van der Post's major works of fiction with the purpose of determining the principal merits and weaknesses of his handling of the journey motif. Now it is necessary to draw a few relevant conclusions.

In the first place, it soon becomes obvious to any reader of Van der Post's fiction that the journey motif in every novel is largely used to trace the hero's movement from a limited overdifferentiated consciousness towards self-realization. In two of these works of fiction, The Face Beside the Fire and "The Seed and the Sower", this journey follows all too precisely the Jungian formula for individuation. If the reader knows the formula, something of the spontaneity of a character's development in the plot is lost. Even if the reader is not familiar with Jungian doctrine, he is made altogether too aware of the narrator halting the journey to attend to his ministry.

In Flamingo Feather the journey into awakened consciousness is handled quite differently, or rather it is in the central safari episode. Here we can feel for ourselves the surge of excitement as Pierre's awareness leaps out to grasp a dazzling vision of Africa. The sense of the inward journey is communicated through the immediacy of the outward

scene. Yet even in Flamingo Feather there is the skeleton outline of the Jungian quest suggested in the growth of Pierre's relationship to Joan Sandysse, an obvious anima figure. And the disciple delivering his sermon is there too in a goodly number of instances, as the following quotation might suggest:

> I felt isolated and perturbed by the glimpse that my failure gave me of the giant shadow of back-door barbarism which our one-sided culture inevitably begets, and in need of rejuvenation in the spring of a more natural and spontaneous way of living.[69]

Now, this Jungian mould of the journey motif has a particular cumulative effect on the reader's impression of the characters in all three novels mentioned above. Look at the comment made by Pierre de Beauvilliers, the adventurer, in the passage just quoted. It could just as easily have been made by Colonel Sandysse, the spy; or by David Alexander Michaeljohn, the artist; or by Alexander David Fraser, the farmer; or by Colonel Lawrence, the army commander; or by Jacques Celliers, the lawyer; or by Laurens van der Post, the author of The Dark Eye in Africa.

There is, in short, a monotonous sameness to each of these characters, simply because, ironically, they are all

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[69]Van der Post, Flamingo Feather, pp. 314-15.

slaves to the same doctrine of inner freedom -- theirs are disembodied voices preaching in unison.

When, however, the seeing eye of these characters is directed toward the immediate scene, the compelling panoramic view, or the suspenseful conflict, we become aware of another world of numinous magic. And there is life once more.

In A Province, as the reader will remember, was published in 1934, long before Van der Post had come into contact with the writing of Carl Jung. It is pertinent, therefore, to emphasize once more that the novel is also framed in the terms of the hero's movement into greater consciousness, and that the theme of the integration of consciousness with the unconscious is evident in the relationship of van Bredepoel to Kenon. In other words, In A Province gives evidence that Van der Post had arrived at many of the same conclusions as those suggested in Jungian psychology, but by another quite independent route.

What is significantly lacking in this early novel is the doctrinaire sermon directed towards the reader by the omniscient narrator. And what is significantly present is good characterization, particularly in the presentation of Kenon, the Bantu servant. As a result, we can believe in the journey of both van Bredepoel and Kenon much more easily. One possible conclusion is obvious. Van der Post's novels

may have been adversely affected by his exposure to Carl Jung. Even though the latter's concepts of life were very similar to those originally his own, it seems that Van der Post, once he had integrated Jungian thought into his own philosophy, became more dogmatic in his thinking. Another strong possibility, of course, is that Van der Post's dogmatism is simply the result of impassioned conviction about the nature of life, a conviction gained through many troubled years as a guerrilla fighter, a commander of men, and a prisoner of war. Whatever is the case, Laurens van der Post, the novelist, had by 1953 become the devoted disciple of the Way to Self-Fulfillment, a propagandist in the noblest sense, rather than merely an artist intent upon writing a novel as a completely self-contained work. All of his later novels and his credo[70] itself bear evidence to this fact. Unfortunately the aims of propaganda and those of the novel are quite different, as a rule. Van der Post's fiction serves to indicate the difficulty involved in reconciling them.

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[70] Cf. ante p. 60.

CHAPTER IV

THE PHYSICAL JOURNEY

Section 1: Venture to the Interior

In addition to the writings already discussed, Laurens van der Post has published four major works of non-fiction: Venture to the Interior (1952), The Lost World of the Kalahari (1958), The Heart of the Hunter (1961), and Journey into Russia (1964).[1] As was the case in the novels we have just examined, every one of these books is based upon the journey motif. But in the non-fiction works more often than in the novels the physical journey of exploration is closely correlated with the inner journey of becoming. Let us examine the first of these journeys as it appears in Venture to the Interior.

Venture to the Interior is an account of Van der Post's expedition to Nyasaland in 1949, the purpose of which was to discover the agricultural potential of two inadequately explored areas in the Protectorate, namely the Mlanje mountain region and the Nyika Plateau. Although

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[1] In this chapter I will examine only the three books which are written within the African context. They will, I think, adequately illustrate the use of the journey motif in Van der Post's non-fiction works.

the expedition presumably failed to find any new arable land, its leader did discover a fascinating primeval world to serve as the subject of his book. And he does the subject more than justice.

Characteristically, Laurens van der Post, explorer, does not look upon his journey to Nyasaland as simply a movement through space. He sees it rather as the outward manifestation of an inner conflict which he had not resolved -- that is, the conflict between a conscious sense of identity with Europe and an unconscious love of Africa. In other words the Nyasaland expedition is only one more venture of a restless soul which has not found its home.

> Plainly, conscious conviction was not the only thing concerned in my case. I could not have spent one half of my life leaving Africa for Europe and the other half returning from Europe to Africa, if it were no more than that.
>
> I would tend to put it down rather to an unresolved conflict between two fundamental elements in my make-up; conscious and unconscious, male and female, masculine and feminine; the continuation of my father and the presence of my mother in me. On one side, under the heading "AFRICA", I would group unconscious, female, feminine, mother; and under "EUROPE" on the other: conscious, male, masculine, father.[2]

Interestingly enough Van der Post puts this dichotomy into a literal historical perspective by giving a short

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[2]Laurens van der Post, Venture to the Interior (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), p. xiii.

family history. His mother, he notes, had Africa in her blood. She was descended from the first Boer Voortrekkers into the Transvaal. Her own pioneer instincts, however, did not assert themselves until her old age, at which period of her life she too became a Voortrekker.

> Many years ago my father had bought a vast tract of land on the edge of the Kalahari desert. For fifty years no one had made any effort to develop it, and those broad acres were left there, lying parched and unwanted in the desert sun. There my mother went at the age of eighty. The only people who seemed willing to accompany her were displaced persons; there was a German geologist who had been interned during the war; a delicate Bavarian missionary, whom she made her secretary; and an Italian carpenter and mason, an ex-prisoner of war, who became her foreman.[3]

Van der Post's father, on the other hand, was of Europe, an immigrant aristocrat from Holland who, despite his colourful contribution to South Africa as lawyer, commando chief, and statesman, died an exile from the culture which he loved the most:

> The doctors said he died of double pneumonia. I know he died of exile.
>
> There was not a part of my being to which that knowledge did not penetrate in the years that followed, and with it a growing realization that somehow my life must find a way out between my father's exile and my mother's home. It was as if far back

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[3] Ibid., p. 8.

> at its source, long before birth, life had divided into two deep streams flowing on parallel courses that could not meet this side of infinity. It presupposed, in its ultimate meaning, this among other journeys.[4]

But how, in more practical terms, is Van der Post's inner conflict related to the journey itself -- to the physical journey between the air terminal in London and the remotest regions of Nyasaland? The answer lies within the confines of the author's point of view. Since he is afflicted with a fundamental duality between the Europe and the Africa within his own being, Van der Post is acutely conscious of the same duality pervading all areas of the outer world where Africa meets Europe. His inner problem manifests itself in the choice of outer detail and incident as he proceeds on his journey. For example, the plane from London flies over Omdurman in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and Van der Post notes hundreds of devout Moslems faced towards the East and praying. He immediately frames the picture in terms of Europe versus Africa -- conscious intelligence versus unconscious faith.

> It had an extraordinary effect on one, to fly suddenly out of the desert and the night into a whole world at prayer. It filled one with tremendous respect for those people down below. I felt humble before them.

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[4] Ibid., p. 20.

> Our machine must have looked to those simple, impoverished black people below like the quintessence of human achievement as it flashed broad wings over their unpretentious homes. Yet if we looked back at the night we had just endured, it was not difficult to realize how much greater than the knowing and the assurance expressed in the speed of our plane had been that great darkness of wonder and unknowing without. Were those simple people below by any chance saying for us the prayers that we should have been saying? Had it come to this, that we Christians needed the prayers of the heathen?[5]

Coming to Nairobi, Kenya, Van der Post notes something incongruous about this uninspired European town placed arbitrarily in a magnificent African setting:

> As a town it is pleasant enough and comfortable enough, but frankly unworthy of the country around it. One must go outside it and climb the blue hills in the distance, or travel along one of those dusty roads leading out of it in order to get the feel of the vast and immensely exciting physical presence of the Africa by which it is surrounded.[6]

Again in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, when he sees a group of prim young English school girls embarking on a plane to South Africa, the incongruity of the scene strikes the author:

> They filed suddenly out of the door of the aerodrome building and walked tidily over to a large aircraft standing nearby. . . . I heard someone

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[5] Ibid., p. 39.

[6] Ibid., pp. 50-51.

> near me say, "Yes, St. ____'s: good school, you know, better than we have here, and it's so easy nowadays to fly them to the Union."
>
> The whole incident passed off without emotion, without tears or recognizable regret and even without a sense of the unusual, except the unusual degree of detachment with which it appeared to be viewed by the girls in the plane and their parents on the ground. But to me it was such an unexpected, such a surrealist addition to the traditional features of these wide African uplands that I found myself parodying a limerick:
>
> "These are the young ladies called bright
> Who can all travel faster than light,
> They leave home to-day
> In a relative way,
> And come back the previous night."[7]

Then comes Nyasaland, and Van der Post sums up the whole rather negative character of his flight by once again referring to the curiously unresolved nature of his inner being.

> I had travelled nearly 7,000 miles; I had passed from a spring of sunshine, of uncompromising and unending blossom into an early and barren winter. I had not, it is true, travelled faster than light and I had travelled in an absolute rather than a relative way, but I felt as if I had come back much earlier than the previous night, at some unfinished, unresolved moment far back in the past; and I was more relieved than I can express to have done with flying for some months at least.[8]

The implications of the above comment should be obvious. Up

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[7] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[8] Ibid., p. 71.

to this point the venture has for Van der Post described a futile circle around his unresolved inner duality. The journey has progressed through space, but it has not ripened with time.[9]

This same sense of deadened time is present in Van der Post's experience in Blantyre, the capital of Nyasaland. For instance, he goes to a field hockey match between Europeans and Indians. Looking around, he is appalled by the realization that all of the spectators are watching the match simply to kill time:

> They looked a good, unpretentious, pleasant crowd, not yet pulled out of proportion by Africa as were so many of their neighbours. But as I watched them I suddenly realized with a shock that they, and I, were all there, not because we really liked it, but in order to kill time. I have known the phrase all my life, but until that moment I had never fully appreciated its awful implications. . . . When the sun went down behind the hill and the damp, dark shadows welled up like a tide round the clubhouse, it was almost as if we had succeeded so well in our object that a faint, misty, smell of death welled up with them.
>
> There and then I decided that I would not waste a day on my journey; I would get up and down that mountain, and over my plateau as fast as I could; and so out of Africa.[10]

But the dichotomy which Van der Post feels within him and around him does not disappear when he comes into con-

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[9]Cf. ante p. 39, pp. 57-58.

[10]Van der Post, Venture, p. 90.

tact with Mlanje, the object of his expedition. Rather the mountain itself in a mysterious, evil way assumes the shape of an objective equivalent to the inner duality. Here is the author's first view of Mlanje. Note the split between darkness and light:

> Black clouds from the Portuguese border were rolling over the base of Mlanje and soaring up like deep volcanic explosions round its flanks. The highest peak had spiked one of the darkest clouds and seemed to be whirling it triumphantly round its head; but, as I watched, a whole concentration of cloud rolled down on it and hid it from view. I then noticed a very curious thing; the clouds advanced no further over the mountain. They had in their possession one half of it, including the highest peak, and they seemed content to stay and consolidate their formidable position. But the eastern half of the mountain remained astonishingly clear and, as the afternoon deepened, drew lovely colours and tones into its keeping. It made the mountain appear divided against itself; one half of it dark and turbulent; the other bending a shining head over the evening.[11]

This duality of the mountain seems to attract the unconscious weakness of all associated with it. When, for example, Van der Post together with the forestry officials, Quillan and Vance, move out from their home base on the Chambe Plateau, the note of discord is faintly sounded in Vance's brusque and awkward farewell to his wife, whom he loves so dearly. Then again, after the expedition gets un-

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[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

der way, the ordinarily sensible Vance, on a schoolboy's whim, springs the trap of one of his firewatchers -- much to Van der Post's dismay:

> It seemed to me not only a thoughtless thing to do but, unintentionally, a betrayal of the unknown watcher's trust. I felt shocked by it out of all proportion to the importance of the material issue involved. Obviously no great practical harm would be done if the trap were left sprung, but somehow I found the incident impossible to stomach. Something was wrong in our set-up, we were off the true somewhere, if we could behave like that. My reaction had nothing to do with the ethics of the occasion; it was the discord that worried me. It jarred as I believe the first misfire, indicating a fault in some smoothly-running machine, must jar on the ears of an engineer.[12]

The note of discord sounds again. When Van der Post wants to shake the hand of the half-caste, Fitz David St. Leger, to thank him for his hospitality, embarrassment is felt by all concerned. A half-caste is not a white man.

Finally the deepest cleft in the mountain -- the Great Ruo Gorge -- and the cleft within the soul of Vance, the forester, meet. The young man tries to ford a swift-moving stream, disregards the agreed-upon precautions, and is swept into the gorge to his death. The journey has ended in tragedy.

Later, as Van der Post tries to assess the responsibility for the tragedy, his mind comes to rest on the

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[12] Ibid., p. 129.

duality within himself:

> I had left England in a mood of resentment and had always been in a divided state about Africa. Supposing my own conflict about it had been resolved, could I have ever got entangled in a set of circumstances so disastrous as those on Mlanje?
>
> My instinct was to say no; that a split in ourselves produces a split in the pattern of our lives, creates this terrible gash down the middle, this deep, dark Mlanje gorge, through which disaster runs and the devil drives. Accident and disaster without feed on accident and disaster within. The design of our outward life, from its minutest detail up to the atom which we put in our latest bomb, reflects and confirms our deepest and most private purposes.[13]

Turning to the life of Dick Vance, Van der Post sees the same cleft between consciousness and the unconscious. Vance had had an unhappy, insecure childhood, and all his life he had been afflicted by a feeling of inferiority. On the mountain it had seemed to be different. He was happy with his existence for the first time; he seemed to have escaped his past. Yet his repressed sense of inferiority exerted itself once more in the final tragic moment of crisis:

> How little those unfortunate children of life knew of the hound of unfulfilled nature within the blood that is for ever on our trail, ready to aid and abet the dark fates without.

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[13] Ibid., p. 160.

> Now I shall never know any more detail about the life of that brave, upright young man; but it seems to me certain from what I know already, that sooner or later there was bound to be a reckoning between himself and his nature which I could not influence, save as an instrument of the inevitable. On Friday at ten-thirty in the Great Ruo gorge of Mlanje the unpredictable in himself and the unpredictable in the mountain, the split in himself and the dark gash in Mlanje met and became one.[14]

The second part of Van der Post's expedition is directed towards a survey of the largely unknown Nyika Plateau in northern Nyasaland. Significantly, just as the Mlanje journey is correlated with the inner journey of alienation and discord, so does the Nyika journey mark the healing of the breach between Europe and Africa within the author's being. Once more it is the selection of details in the outer world which provides the symbols of the reconciliation within. For instance, the author notes the apparent reconciliation between Africa and Europe in the life of Grantham, an English administrator living near the base of the Nyika Plateau:

> All the texture of his mind, the weave of his spirit, the very dream he was living on the Vipya, that high country, which smokes with mist as its native name implies, was essentially European.
>
> Every detail of the room in which we sat testified to this. . . .

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[14] Ibid., p. 162.

> The point of it all, so it seemed to me, was this. People like Grantham could no longer sustain Europe; they needed, in a manner which is not yet clear to me, the support of Africa; the presence of black faces and black natures confirms their vision, their old, essentially European dream. It was as if, by losing themselves in Africa, they re-established the solidity and significance of the European in themselves.[15]

Proceeding on his journey north Van der Post enters Karonga and meets Dowler, an English veterinarian who has also tried to reconcile the two sides of his psychic being through a peculiar relationship to Africa:

> Dowler was a bachelor. He was a man of about thirty-five. He was sensitive and loved civilized things -- music, books, good food, and comfort. His house on the lake bore eloquent testimony to all this; but, if he wanted civilization, why come to Africa? He lived by the great lake with a certain royal abandon. He had four handsome, well-dressed African servants, who were obviously devoted to him and he to them. He watched over them with a solicitude remarkable in one so young. The more I got to know Michael, the clearer became my impression that he gave these children of African nature the consideration and affection he would have liked to give his own dark, unfulfilled self, only centuries of so-called European civilized values prevented him from doing this. We all have a dark figure within ourselves, a negro, a gypsy, an aboriginal with averted back, and, alas! the nearest many of us can get to making terms with him is to strike up these vicarious friendships with him through the black people of Africa.[16]

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[15] Ibid., pp. 174-75.

[16] Ibid., pp. 186-87.

Van der Post himself comes to terms with his unconscious during the progress of the journey. For instance, one morning just before they reach the Nyika Plateau, he wakes up strangely depressed for no immediately discernible reason. Then he remembers that it is the anniversary of an execution which he had witnessed in a Japanese prison camp many years before. When he now also remembers how he had reconciled the demoralized prisoners with stories of Africa on that black day, his depression lifts and he feels strangely elated.

> I had realized then how deep, how life-giving and strengthening was this vision of Africa in my blood; that possessing this, and my knowledge of our nearness to each other, I could travel to the end of the world and time.
>
> Suddenly I sat up, on the top of Charo, with so keen a feeling of happiness and release, that tears came to my eyes. . . . I could not have been more than a minute or two, reliving that moment seven years before. But the good of it was mine. The rest receding. . . .
>
> I had a vision of the universe and myself, in which the circumference was reduced to a mere mathematical abstraction, and in which all was Centre; one great unfailing Centre, and myself, in the heart of Africa, in the heart of the Centre.[17]

When the author reaches the native village of Njalowe, he is again reminded of the need of life for a re-

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[17] Ibid., p. 212.

conciliation of opposites. The frankly erotic dancing of the villagers accompanied by the urgent beating of drums illustrates vividly for him the dark passionate soul which has been rejected by the European's overdifferentiated culture. And the Southern Cross which glows in the heavens that night in Njalowe is the ideal symbol for the wholeness of life. Van der Post explains why:

> These shapes of crosses litter our horizons from birth to the grave, but do we know what they mean? Out of what tender wood, by what great carpenter, are they nailed?
>
> We must shut our eyes and turn them inwards, we must look far down into that split between night and day in ourselves until our head reels with the depth of it, and then we must ask: "How can I bridge this self? How cross from one side to the other?" If we then allow that question to become the desire for its own answer, and that desire to become a bridge across the chasm, then, and only then, from high above on this far peak of our conscious self, on this summit so far above the snowline of time, in this cold, sharp, selected moment, clearly and distinctly we shall see a cross. A gulf bridged makes a cross; a split defeated is a cross.[18]

For Laurens van der Post, explorer, the split within his being is finally defeated the next day in his first view of the Nyika Plateau. Here paradise on earth reveals itself in a panorama of gold grasses, purple irises and abundant wildlife. Significantly, there is something of

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[18] Ibid., p. 230.

Europe blended into the scene:

> I wish I could describe the effect that view had on me, but I will say little more than that it seemed to me miraculous. It was so unlike anything else. It was deep in the heart of Africa and filled with the animals of Africa, and yet it was covered with the grasses, the flowers and colours of Europe. Yet it was unlike any other colour I have ever seen: I expect, basically, it was a tawny gold, the gold of the leopard's rather than the lion's skin, but this gold was shot through with undertones of a deep blood red and a shadowy purple.
>
> As I looked at it, I understood at once why I had felt below that there was a large, purple cat purring up there behind the clouds. It looked in its colours, its shape and its isolation, a contented, serene, and deeply fulfilled land. It seemed a place which, without human interference, had made its own contract with life, struck its own balance with necessity and nature. Beyond that I cannot go.[19]

This journey in Venture to the Interior closely parallels the Jungian concept of the movement towards self-fulfillment.[20] The split between the unconscious and conscious elements in the author's character can be equated with the Jungian theory of overdifferentiation. The concept of reconciliation of the Europe and the Africa within

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[19] Ibid., pp. 233-34.

[20] When I met Mr. Van der Post in November, 1965, he indicated that he had not read any of Carl Jung's works before the completion of Venture to the Interior. Nevertheless, the book again illustrates how closely Van der Post's pattern of thought resembles that of Carl Jung. Cf. ante p. 62.

is identical to Jung's ideal of individuation.

Why then is Venture to the Interior so much more satisfying as a work of art than is any one of Van der Post's works of fiction (with the possible exception of In A Province)? For one thing, the thread of the real physical journey is there from beginning to end to give an emphatic immediacy to the author's vision, an immediacy which, for instance, is so deplorably lacking in much of The Face Beside the Fire with its purple patches of tangled prose. Furthermore, because the inner journey of increasing consciousness is so beautifully integrated with the physical journey we never become uncomfortably aware of the formula involved. Van der Post makes us aware of his philosophy of life, it is true. Yet his passages of doctrinal explanation are embedded in a dramatic context. Thus when he ponders his part in the tragedy at Mlanje and advances the theory of the split in the psyche,[20] we can forgive him readily enough. It is only natural for a man who feels responsible for disaster to try to analyze the situation which has caused it. Similarly, when he mentions the significance of the symbol of the cross,[21] he does so within the context of the journey itself. The natives of Njalow are

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[21]Cf. ante p. 127.

[22]Cf. ante p. 131.

revealing the spontaneous rhythms of their spirits in their frenzied dances beneath the starlit sky. Would it not be understandable at this point for a sensitive European used to a restricted conscious manner of life to wonder what it is that the white culture has lost, and to arrive at some theory about life as a consequence?

Finally, we come to the characters that Van der Post meets on his journey. Are they believable? Do they contribute to his presentation of the journey in Venture to the Interior? The answer is "Yes." There are some excellent character sketches presented in this book. Quillan, the forester, and most notably Vance, his subordinate, are flesh-and-blood characters. Their strengths and weaknesses are quite apparent as they meet the hazards on the journey through the Mlanje region. And the poignant sketch of the relationship between Dick Vance and his wife Val is superbly done. Even the minor characters, the hosts of officials that Van der Post meets along the way, make a definite contribution to the total effect of the journey because they all act as living symbols of that meeting between Europe and Africa which gives the inner dimension to the expedition. Appropriately, the officials of Blantyre near Mlanje tend to be exiles, killing the time of their sojourn in Nyasaland and instinctively rejecting Africa. Alan McBean, for example, is an exile simply doing his duty, sending out no

roots in the Protectorate. In sharp contrast the officials of northern Nyasaland living near the Nyika Plateau, Grantham, Henderson, Michael Dowler, all need Africa to enrich the meaning of their lives. It is equally appropriate that their lives should be touched upon as the author nears the fulfillment of his journey.

Thus, in the final analysis, Venture to the Interior is successful as a work of art largely because all of its parts converge to make up a single cohesive entity. The book has technique, and as Mark Schorer suggests in one of his essays on that subject, "the difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique."[23]

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[23] Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery", Approaches to the Novel, p. 249. Italics mine.

Section 2: The Lost World of the Kalahari

The Lost World of the Kalahari is an account of Van der Post's expedition to the Kalahari Desert to find the last remnants of the Bushman clans of Southern Africa. This journey to find the Bushman, Van der Post points out, begins not with the actual expedition, but with his boyhood dream about the little yellow men who had once peopled his homeland:

> The older I grew the more I resented that I had come too late on the scene to know him in the flesh. For many years I could not accept that the door was closed for ever on the Bushman. I went on seeking for news and information of him as if preparing for the moment when the door would open and he would reappear in our midst. Indeed I believe the first objective question I ever asked of life was: 'Who, really, was the Bushman?' I asked it of people of all races and colours who might have had contact with him, to the point where many a patient heart must have found it hard to bear with the uncomprehended importunity of a child. They told me much. But what they told me only made me hunger for more.[24]

From here the author leaps into a description of the Bushman as he must have been before coming into contact with Bantu and white. The Bushman was undoubtedly the oldest inhabitant of Southern Africa. He was there thousands of

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[24]Laurens van der Post, The Lost World of the Kalahari (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962), p. 12.

years before the advent of either the white man or his black counterpart, the Bantu. Indeed there is evidence, particularly in his peculiar physical characteristics, to suggest a close relationship to the ancient Egyptians. A superb hunter, a brave warrior, an avid storyteller, and a magnificent artist, the Bushman was yet despised by both Bantu and European, who waged incessant warfare against his kind. So successful were these wars that the Bushman had by the late years of the nineteenth century been practically eliminated from the South African scene. Only in the remotest areas of the Kalahari did a few sad remnants of the race survive to eke out a precarious existence.

His imagination having once seized upon the Bushman, Van der Post never forgot about this most natural of all men, and he made several unsuccessful attempts during the period of his youth to find the few unspoiled survivors of a once great race. But the war interrupted his efforts, and Van der Post did not return to the Kalahari until he was committed to a series of government expeditions after the war, expeditions which again whetted his appetite for finding the Bushman. It was at this point that he realized the meaning of the little desert dweller to his own inner being. The Bushman stood for the renewal of that part of life which was spontaneous and most natural, a part of life which the author felt he himself had almost lost:

> Increasingly, my own imagination became troubled with memories of the Bushman, and in particular with the vision of the set of footprints I had found in the pan in the central desert at the foot of a great storm-tree. It was almost as if those footprints were the spoor of my own lost self vanishing in the violet light of a desert of my own mind. I found myself compelled against my conscious will towards the conclusion that, ridiculous as it might seem, I myself ought perhaps to take up the spoor where it vanished in the sand. Then one morning I awoke to find that, in sleep, my mind had been decided for me.
>
> 'I will go and find the Bushman.' I told myself, suddenly amazed that so simple a statement had never presented itself to me before.[25]

In order to make his journey possible Van der Post approaches the BBC to enquire about the possibility of their helping to sponsor his expedition in return for which he will attempt to produce a documentary film that could be used as a television series. With the acceptance of his proposal, other preparations are quickly made. Land Rovers are ordered, official documents and permits are obtained, and potential members of his party are recruited. The expedition sets out in August, at the beginning of the dry summer season, a time when only the truly untamed Bushmen (those who had not been used as servants by the frontier Europeans) would remain in the desert areas of the Kalahari.

As was the case in Venture to the Interior, the

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[25] Ibid., p. 67.

first part of Van der Post's journey assumes a definite shape woven of the strands of both inner conflict and outer events. The resultant mixture adds up to discord. There is, for example, Spode, the cameraman, whose inner bitterness and fright erupt to cause disharmony to the whole spirit of the expedition. When he presents Van der Post with a petition of complaints the die is cast for the journey. Similarly the conflict of loyalties within Simon Stonehouse, Spode's companion, deepens the note of discord within the party. The symbolic figure of the half-caste Bushman whom Van der Post sees being taken away to prison for the crime of ritual murder, also throws a shadow over the beginnings of the expedition:

> I was laughing with the police lieutenant over some reminiscence when suddenly for no obvious reason at all desire to laugh went from me. More, I felt all confidence and zest drain swiftly out of me. I had no idea what caused it. Alarmed I turned round. Immediately behind me shackled between two policemen on his way to judgement went a young man of Bushman blood. Our eyes met briefly and I knew then that the black invasion of my being came from him. I looked in those eyes filled with neither hope nor despair, and recognized the black hand that puts out that candle in the heart when it knows its gods have failed it.[26]

And the report of the suicide committed by a man whom Van

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[26] Ibid., p. 89.

der Post had passed on the road the previous day deepens the mood to a midnight pitch. His reason for suicide -- guilt about sexual relations with a black woman. The relevance of these symbols to the journey undertaken is for Van der Post unmistakable:

> All I suspect is that the fear that drove the Bushman to ritual murder, and this poor lonely boy caught between the swamp and the desert to suicide, together with the forces of law and order that condemn them both, are all part of the rejection and subsequent inhumanity of the slanted modern mind. And on this particular occasion I feared, beyond explanation, that the coincidence of these events with our own movements could not have been so precise unless we were, unwittingly, off the beat of some mean of time[27] in our own spirits.[28]

The above quotation, of course, brings us once more to the mystique of the inner blueprint of time[29] and to the Chinese concept of synchronicity.[30] Van der Post feels that his expedition is haunted by the spirit of negation, by the unrecognized and defiled unconscious within which rises up to meet the forces of negation in the outer world.

This thread of negation continues to wind its way

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[27]The phrase mean of time is a reference to the mystique that man, the microcosm, at any given moment should recognize intuitively what the Master Plan of life demands.

[28]Van der Post, Lost World, p. 120.

[29]Cf. ante p. 39.

[30]Cf. ante pp. 33-34.

through the activities of the expedition when it enters the swamplands of the Okovango River to try to find the last survivors of the River Bushmen. For instance, the first glimpse of the little river dweller serves as a poignant symbol of emptiness and gradual decay:

> On the far side of the stream, clearly outlined against the bleeding west, a lone paddler was about to turn a makorro into a channel leading into the heart of the impersonal universe of water, darkness, and reeds. Already in the channel a swell had risen full of evening fire to rock his craft over a pool where a hippo had just dived out of sight. Unconcerned, he paddled on with long, easy strokes as if before him was not the evening twilight but the dawn of a new day. His silhouette was slighter than that of any African man and had something oddly Chinese about it.
> . . . . . .
>
> I wanted to send someone hastening to bring him back, but I was told it would be useless because he was deaf and dumb. For a generation or more he had been living alone on a small island about fifteen miles on into the swamp. . . . No one knew where he came from or who his people had been. Whether he knew himself no one could tell. I stood there stirred to the heart, watching his progress across the burning water deeper into the papyrus standing so erect before the night. In that mythological light of the dying day he seemed to me the complete symbol of the silent fate of his race.[31]

As the expedition delves deeper into the swamp country the note of negation sounds more stridently in the grumblings

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[31]Van der Post, Lost World, pp. 130-31.

of the native paddlers, who protest the discomforts of the trip, and finally reaches its climax in Eugene Spode's inability to face Africa and his own weaknesses any longer. Thus cameras and cameraman disappear.

In the next phase of the journey Van der Post sets out with a new cameraman, and under the guidance of Samutchoso, a native medicine man, the party moves towards an ancient meeting place and temple of the Desert Bushmen known as the Slippery Hills. Here again the pattern of discord asserts itself when Van der Post's hunters, uninformed of a taboo against killing of any kind, shoot some animals for meat. Van der Post immediately blames the incident on his own preoccupation with the disturbances of the previous days:

> With an acute sense of guilt, I realized I had forgotten to keep faith with him. My anxieties in the swamp, my absorption with the problem of Spode, the long journey out and back from Johannesburg, and many other things had overlaid the moment when he and I had first discussed the journey to the hills. I had completely overlooked the essential condition of the promise extracted by him from me: that there should be no killing on our way to the hills.[32]

When the travellers finally reach the hills they move into a world of black magic where the spirits punish the

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[32] Ibid., p. 180.

killers of the previous day by sending bees to attack them and by ruining the new cameras, which had been transported into the desert at so much expense. Van der Post offers no other explanation of this strange sequence of events; he simply shows that these things occurred. Indeed any reader who looks at the hills through the author's eyes might be awed into belief. The atmosphere of magic is there:

> Beneath the hills the shadows were cool and heavy, but, far above, the ragged, jagged shark's tooth edges of the purple crags were lined with warm sunlight. However, below the bright hem of that still morning one saw other cuts, wounds, and scars in the steep surfaces that from a distance looked so impervious. There was hardly a face that was not torn, pock-marked, pitted, and wrinkled as if with incredible suffering and s truggling. Everywhere great fragments had broken away to lie in massive splinters in the sand at the base, or to balance precariously on the edge of an abyss. Now one understood better the stern mood of the place, because one was looking on an entire world of rock, isolated and without allies of any kind, making a heroic stand against disintegration by terrible forces of sand, sun, and time.[33]

But there ia also a Garden of Eden atmosphere attached to the setting of the beautiful pool within the amphitheatre of rocks. And the rocks themselves are covered with an exquisite variety of Bushmen paintings. If only the cameras had not broken, this temple might have marked the culmination of the journey into the Kalahari.

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[33] Ibid., p. 186.

There are more positive experiences which also shape the course of the journey into the Kalahari. Not surprisingly, these experiences, too, cluster around the theme of synchronicity. In the Okovango Swamp, for instance, Van der Post's almost magical shooting abilities are linked to his wife's urgent request that he buy himself a new gun. It seems that she had the ability to foretell the great use that would be made of it:

> . . . to this day the way I shot, the manner wherein I acquired the gun, and the full extent to which it served the imperative mood of that part of the journey, for me holds something supernatural. I still do not like to think of what our plight might have been had I not had that gun and shot with it as I did. For days it was the only positive force in our midst, and the decisive factor in our fortunes. I do not know what the paddlers might not have done had it not enabled me to feed them so well.[34]

The togetherness of things is again illustrated in Van der Post's recognition of the link between himself and the Cape Buffalo of his dreams. The encounter at the same time marks a step forward in the journey of increased awareness:

> I felt that the encounter had for a moment made me immediate, and had, all too briefly, closed a dark time-gap in myself. With our twentieth-century selves we have forgotten the importance of being truly and openly primitive. We have forgotten the art of our legitimate beginnings.

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[34] Ibid., p. 166.

> We no longer know how to close the gap between the far past and the immediate presence in ourselves. We need primitive nature, the First Man in ourselves, it seems, as the lungs need air and the body food and water . . . .[35]

On the level of practical affairs the positive coincidences pave the way for the resumed filming operations and the ultimate success of the journey. By coincidence a plane lands at Muhembo airport just at the moment Van der Post has to go to Johannesburg to pick up a new camera. By chance he finds a cameraman in Johannesburg who has exactly the camera needed for the special type of film used by Spode (it was the only camera of its kind in the city).

The last episode of The Lost World of the Kalahari brings Van der Post and his party to the ultimate goal of the expedition -- contact with untamed Bushmen, who follow the same rhythm of life as did their ancestors. Having made contact, the author proceeds to set up camp near their sip wells and to record the pattern of their life and spirit. Thus he learns of their hunting prowess, of their incredible physical endurance, of their dancing, of their music, of their love ritual, and of their mythology. The one thing that is apparent in all of their activities is an essential wholeness of their lives, a wholeness which civilized man

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[35] Ibid., pp. 150-51.

has long since lost. Look at his description of the old Bushman couple:

> Outside the last of the shelters sat two of the oldest people I have ever seen. They were Nxou's grandparents and the skins of both were so creased and stained with life, weather, and time that they might have been dark brown parchment covered with some close Oriental script. Both had serene expressions on their faces and they looked continually from one to the other as if in constant need of reassurance that the miracle of being together after so many years was indeed still real. They seemed to have grown old in the right way, they and their spirit being contained within their age as naturally as a nut is enclosed within a shell, and only when fully ripened falling obediently to the need for a renewal of life.[36]

So impressive is this serenity of a noble people that Van der Post himself leaves them feeling that he has recovered something of his own lost innocence and that he has reconciled the lost child within his being:

> . . . in that vast world, behind the glitter of pointed leaves and in the miracle of sand made alive and thorn of steel set alight with flower by the rain, the child in me had become reconciled to the man. The desert could never be empty again. For there my aboriginal heart now had living kinsmen and a home on which to turn. I got back into my Land-Rover. I drove over the crest and began the long harsh journey back to our twentieth-century world beyond the timeless Kalahari blue.[37]

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[36] Ibid., pp. 209-10.

[37] Ibid., pp. 252-53.

As the foregoing commentary suggests, The Lost World of the Kalahari, like Venture to the Interior, is the document not only of a physical journey through Africa, but also of man's parallel progress towards self-fulfillment. Some critics of the book object to the note of mysticism present in this inner journey. Here, for instance, is the decidedly caustic comment that the reviewer of The Times Literary Supplement offers:

> Like a hopeful young novelist trying to prove himself engagé he can seldom resist drawing a cosmic conclusion from his experiences. For him life is very real, terribly earnest, and (at least when translated into literature) sadly humourless.[38]

But the point is surely that this very "earnest", "cosmic" approach to the journey is precisely the element that gives the book its magic. Because we always are aware not only of the immediate physical scene but also of the transcendent glow of the author's spirit, another dimension is added. The following description should illustrate my meaning:

> There, as still as if they were stitched petit point by point into olive-green tapestry, lay an apricot lechwe male with a harem of five all fast asleep around him. I watched them, barely thirty yards away, for twenty minutes as they continued to breathe deeply without opening an eye behind

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[38]"Hidden Bushmen", The Times Literary Supplement, November 28, 1958, p. 686.

> their long black lashes. My companions begged me to shoot but I couldn't do it. As we already had our daily food, I felt it would be a betrayal of natural trust and such treachery to the deep feeling of at-one-ness that had grown in me since leaving camp that I feared some terrible retribution would follow the superfluous deed.[39]

And I do not think that the author intrudes with his mystique or formula as he does in three of his novels. No, The Lost World of the Kalahari is once more successful in integrating the journey of a nomad soul with the physical venture to the interior.

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[39]Van der Post, Lost World, p. 156.

Section 3: The Heart of the Hunter

In The Heart of the Hunter Van der Post continues to trace the pattern of the journey begun in The Lost World of the Kalahari, and then proceeds to an investigation of the Bushman's significance to the twentieth century. In the first section of the book, entitled "World Lost", we find Van der Post's expedition slowly winding its way out of the desert after having departed from the sip wells. But their progress is halted by the discovery of a new group of Bushmen who are following the night lightning in the hope of reaching a drought-free area where game can be found. Determining to help the little hunters get meat, Van der Post sets up camp with them, and once more savours the opportunity of acquainting himself with their mode of life.

Upon ushering the reader into the dream-like world of the primitive Bushman, the author displays his usual powers of sympathetic description. Van der Post loves his Bushmen, and the reader in response cannot help loving them too. Look, for instance, at the warmth in the picture he paints of the Bushman mother dedicating her son to the stars:

> Slowly, against the water-light of the stars lapping briskly among the breakers of thorn and hardwood around us, emerged the outline of a woman holding out a child in both her hands, high above

> her head, and singing something with her own face lifted to the sky.[40]

In fact, as Van der Post sees the situation, both the Bushmen and the Kalahari Desert habitat in itself serve as a kind of "bright mirror wherein they [white men] see the arid reflection of their own rejected and uncared for selves". By way of illustration he chronicles the lives of the men he knew who gave up the European's civilized life to live alone on the desert and in several instances to take Bushmen women. The case of the Protestant missionary's son is typical:

> A member of a family with a long and distinguished record as missionaries of a Protestant society in Africa, he had once served in the desert as an officer of the administration. Gradually he turned his back on the world and the people from whom he had come, finding that he could make his peace with whatever the desert meant to him only by becoming a sort of European Bushman. He took to having Bushman wives: with the zeal of the convert, he became almost more of a Bushman than the Bushman himself.[41]

But the Europeans as a rule do not learn a spiritual lesson from this example of "going native". Rather they reject the Bushman just as they reject their own unlived

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[40] Laurens van der Post, The Heart of the Hunter, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), pp. 44-45.

[41] Ibid., pp. 85-86.

selves. Van der Post sees the results of this rejection in his Bushman interpretor Dabé, who has accompanied the expedition through the Kalahari wastelands. Dabé has been used as a servant by a frontier family of whites for some thirty-six years and the white man's accumulated contempt for his race lies heavily on his shoulders. Just before the expedition reaches the edge of the desert and civilization, the old Bushman bitterly summarizes the plight of his race in this way:

> The black man, the Herero, the Bastaards, had kraals and lands of their own, and the white man houses of stone. But could I tell him what and where was a Bushman's place?
> . . . . . .
>
> If a Bushman killed a giraffe, an eland, a gemsbok or even a bird like the giant bustard for food because he was dying of hunger, and the police discovered it, he was taken away to prison and often never seen again . . . . . .
>
> . . . if the black man at his cattle outposts in the Kalahari wanted a Bushman servant he just went out to hunt for one and took him. If he wanted Bushmen women, he just took them whether they had men of their own or not. If the men fought back, they were either killed or severely beaten up by the black man and his powerful friends. Should a Bushman kill his persecutors, the police were sent to take him away. White men too would sometimes take their women, but above all they loved to steal their children. There in South West Africa, working in European households, were many many Bushmen who had been taken away as children and were never seen again by their parents. Even he sitting there beside me -- he beat his chest with a clenched hand -- was afraid of what would happen to him in this

white man's land to which I was taking him.[42]

Yet Dabé with all of his bitterness towards European civilization cannot return to his own people. His formerly innocent spirit has been soiled by his long contact with the white man. And so he remains a "soul in hell; for hell is the spirit prevented from going on, it is time arrested in the nothingness between two states of being."[43] For him life's fullness is in a world lost.

In the second part of The Heart of the Hunter, entitled "World Between", Van der Post leaves the Kalahari Desert and travels south into the Union of South Africa where he once more becomes uncomfortably aware of the race problem between black and white. For example, as he passes a school yard not far from the Bechuanaland border he notices a slight coloured boy being assaulted by a white school boy for no apparent reason.

Using this incident as a springboard to his topic, the author then begins to ponder over the race problem in South Africa. Most of his ideas on the subject, as might be guessed, follow the pattern established in The Dark Eye in Africa, but here he also makes special note of the sym-

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[42] Ibid., pp. 64-65.

[43] Ibid., p. 66.

bolic importance of the Bushman to the conflict. Just as the black man is now being rejected by his white master, so has the Bushman been rejected by both black and white. In each case the more natural and instinctive race is condemned by the culture which is relatively one-sided or over-differentiated. Yet, as far as Van der Post can see, it is the Bushman who represents "the purest manifestation of life lived in the beginning according to life's own design rather than man's wilful and one-sided plan for it." The cynic, at this point, may ask,"Does he want us to throw away our clothes and become savages again?" Surely this is not the point. What Van der Post is suggesting is that civilized man has lost that inner balance which the Bushman on a more immediate level so beautifully personifies.

> I surmised that examination of his [the Bushman's] inner life might reveal a pattern which reconciled the spiritual opposites in the human being and made him whole.[44]

Therefore, by looking at this objective model of inner balance, both white man and black may see what they have destroyed in life, and perhaps be reconciled once more, not only to each other, but to their own suffering inner life.

In the third section of the book, entitled "World

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[44] Ibid., p. 147.

Regained", Van der Post makes an examination of the inner pattern of Bushman life by interpreting the latter's mythology both in the light of his own experience and by drawing from authorities on Bushman life such as Bleek, Stow, and Lucy Lloyd.

One way in which the mythology of the Bushman differs from that of other primitive people is in its greater precision and intimacy. The Bushman has a story which connects him with every animal, bird, insect, and natural phenomenon. Always his story suggests a sense of being known, of being a kindred spirit to the other creatures of the earth and even to the stars in the heavens.

> As he knew the stars, so did they know him. They knew him so well that they knew also the hour of his death, shooting through the heavens to carry the sombre news to others. "At the time when our heart falls down," said the Bushman, "that is the time when the star also falls down, while the stars feel that our heart falls over as when something that has been standing upright falls over on its side. Therefore the star falls down on account of it." So great was this sense of kinship that he believed many of the stars were people of the early race. Indeed the sun, all animals, birds, insects and even trees and plants were once people of the early race.[45]

The reason for this greater sense of individuality and intimacy in Bushman mythology lies in his reliance upon

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[45] Ibid., pp. 207-08.

his own self. Unlike other African people who tended to mass together in great tribes which sacrificed the individual to the organization, the Bushman, being a wandering hunter, always stayed in family groups. As a result his spirit never became distorted by numbers. "There was about his life none of this cold, inhuman feeling that the existence of numbers inflicts upon the heart of the individual in our days."[46]

To illustrate further the wholeness of the Bushman's being, Van der Post introduces us to the animal characters that live out the allegory behind the myths. First there is Mantis, the insect God and spirit of creation, who represents the wholeness of the beginning of life as well as the differentiated part of life "striving towards a more meaningful reunion with the whole from which it came". Then there is Mantis's family, which includes Kauru, the Rock Rabbit, his wife; Porcupine, his adopted daughter whom he loves the most; Kwammang-a, Porcupine's husband; and the brothers, Ichneumon, the Mongoose, and Kwammang-a Junior. Each one of these strangely assorted characters surrounding Mantis represents some element of his greater self. Kauru, the Rock Rabbit, is the social realist with her feet firmly on the ground and is as well a great breeder. Porcupine is

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[46] Ibid., p. 204.

intuitive and instinctive, a possible anima figure. Kwammang-a, the rainbow, is the spirit of analysis and discrimination. Ichneumon is the extrovert and Mantis's balanced future self, while Kwammang-a Junior is an introvert. Social realist, breeder, instinctive spirit, soul image, analytical intellect, extrovert, introvert -- put them all together and you have a rough but reasonably adequate picture of the Jungian psyche -- alias Mantis.[47]

Again the reader cannot help noticing that Van der Post sees the Bushman myths centered upon Mantis in terms of the journey of becoming; that is, in terms of the Bushman's gradual advance toward a more balanced awareness. One example here should suffice. Mantis declares war on the elephant, symbol of excess (overdifferentiation) and exaggeration in man's spirit. Notice what follows:

> . . . Mantis killed an elephant because it swallowed a small first thing of life, his beloved pet, a small Springbuck lamb. He was feeding it with honey which he was digging out of a hole, devoting the sweetness of his nature to nourishing the tender and the small, when an elephant came along and swallowed the lamb. When Mantis discovered this he went after the elephant, entered it by the navel, going as it were to the origin of the monstrous, killed it from within and emerged with the lamb, to carry it to his home -- that is, to give the small a permanent place in his spirit. Way back there at his home, his sister looked at the grass on the veld and saw the wind blowing over it: the wind was coming out of the East. "Oh!

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[47]Cf. ante pp. 4-5.

> people, look!" she cried; "why is the grass blowing this way? The wind is where the Master told me it would be when he turned back, when he was coming home . . ." The wind, the spirit, was coming out of the East where the day is renewed after the night, to bear witness to the fact that Mantis, in rescuing the significance of the small from the tyranny of the great, had renewed life on earth.[48]

There you have it. The Bushman, as Van der Post sees him, is an individualist concerned with the wholeness of life, an individualist who constantly strives towards greater awareness. He is, in short, the primitive prototype of the Jungian "modern man".[49] Is it any wonder that Van der Post struggled across the desert to find the heart of the hunter? Is it any wonder that he wants to preserve that hunter's message to the world?

But now the awkward question arises. Does the Bushman really embody the Jungian concept of wholeness as Van der Post indicates? Or is his wholeness simply projected upon him in the form of hopeful interpretation? There are definitely a few signs that the author forces his myth into a preconceived pattern. To choose a pertinent example, he tries to justify Porcupine in the role of Mantis's intuitive soul as follows:

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[48]Van der Post, Heart of Hunter, p. 184.

[49]Cf. ante pp. 24-25.

> . . . I soon realized how fitted she was in that world of first things to be the supreme expression of Mantis's intuitive soul. In Africa the porcupine is an animal that emerges only at night. Unlike the hyaena she is a creative aspect of darkness: she does not go about to kill or injure any living thing, but merely to graze delicately under the stars on green grass and tender roots.[50]

It is difficult to see how grazing on tender roots can be symbolic of creativity.

However, my most serious criticism of The Heart of the Hunter is on the question of its form. There are sensitive descriptions of Bushman life here, along with sincere and often eloquent pleas for understanding between the races of Africa, but the book, to my mind, lacks unity. In what way? The inner journey of becoming and the physical journey through Africa, which were so beautifully synchronized in Van der Post's other two documentaries, seem not to blend in this instance. Van der Post begins his book with the physical journey through the Kalahari Desert and whets his reader's appetite for more of the intensive dramatic description which was so much a part of The Lost World of the Kalahari. But having done that he loses the spoor of the physical journey in the hot desert sands, and drifts into a series of reminiscences, dogmatic explanations and

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[50]Van der Post, Heart of Hunter, pp. 191-92.

interpretations of myths.

However interesting and relevant these passages may be to the interpretation of Bushman life and the race problem generally, they carry the reader into rigid regions of abstract thought and leave him enlightened, yes, but still homesick for the journey.[51]

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[51]In saying this I realize that Van der Post intended the last two sections of the book to be part of his inner journey. But there is no feeling of dawning awareness in his dogmatic explanations of the race problem and Bushman mythology. The reader, upon arriving at the last two sections of The Heart of the Hunter, is faced with a pre-conceived system of looking at life.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

If there is one phrase to sum up the writings of Laurens van der Post that phrase is total commitment. He is totally committed to the journey of the modern man in search of his soul and always shapes his writings into one form or another of this motif.

In a world where non-alignment seems to be the order of the day in spiritual as well as in political affairs, it is refreshing to find a serious writer who knows where he stands. And Van der Post's diagnosis of the ailments of a world divided is convincing. It is difficult to refute his basic premise that Western man, because of his one-sided emphasis upon the rational aspects of life, has lost touch with his own innermost being.

Yet Van der Post, particularly in his post-war fiction, succumbs to some of the dangers of incorporating spiritual dogma into his stories. For example, the inner journey reflected in The Face Beside the Fire degenerates into a mechanical formula for salvation, thereby killing the mystery and suspense of the plot. To a lesser extent this is also true of the two later works, Flamingo Feather and "The Seed and the Sower". Similarly, these works of fic-

tion display a pronounced tendency for the narrator to intrude in the protagonist's journey of becoming. (Why must the doctrine behind the journey be explained?) In other words, the reader becomes uncomfortably aware of the propaganda element behind the story. And because the protagonists mentioned above speak always in Van der Post's own voice, define Van der Post's own dogmas, and travel his own peculiar journey, there is a deadening sameness to their characters. They become servants of the Cause or carriers of the Word rather than flesh-and-blood human beings.

When, however, we enter the realm of the physical journey, when Van der Post fuses his inward journey with the outward venture into the interior of Africa, then the reader falls under the spell of a quickened vision which has few parallels in modern English literature. In fact one can almost work out an equation. Van der Post's success as a writer is directly proportional to the extent to which he integrates his inner journey of becoming with the physical journey in the outside world.

In The Face Beside the Fire the reader wades into a morass of psychological formulas, doctrinal interpretations, and submerged emotions. There is the voyage between South Africa and England, of course, but David's vision here is directed inward toward his psychological problem. Admittedly there is some attempt made to give an objective equi-

valent from the outer world to David's inner turbulence. But look what happens. Here is a spectacular sunset at sea:

> The sun began to contract. It was the golden dome of the Sailor Sultan's mosque in the Great Gulf, became a pointed Moorish minaret, a jewelled arc in Alhambra and top of the tattooed Caliph's tomb. Then it shrunk down until it was a lotus about to close among the lilies in the pool of the sacred crocodile. Finally, and briefly, it was the tip of Apollo's spear thrust for hardening into the fire of the great blacksmith, night.[1]

Whatever else one may see in this enormous purple patch, it is not the sunset. Nor is it the exultation of the beholder. What we see instead is a failure of artistic vision.

When we come to "The Seed and the Sower" the physical journey is only intimated, never described, the emphasis being on Jacques Celliers' formalized inner journey of increasing awareness. Yet the inner journey here is an improvement over that in The Face Beside the Fire because it does take us more often into the fresh air of dramatic physical confrontation.[2]

In Flamingo Feather the physical journey into Africa is introduced in the central episode, and Pierre's inner journey is blended beautifully into his vision of the

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[1]Van der Post, Face Beside Fire, p. 231.

[2]Cf. ante pp. 82-83.

African jungles.[3] But Pierre's expedition is only one episode of a book which degenerates into farcical escape fiction. The latter part of the book loses the thread of the inner journey almost completely.

Turning to Van der Post's first novel, In A Province, we see van Bredepoel's journey of becoming fused neatly with its objective equivalent, Kenon's journey into the darkness of corrupted western civilization. Or stated differently, the reader becomes conscious of the gradually changing inner pattern of van Bredepoel's awareness through his reactions to the plight of Kenon in the outer world. The narrator does not intrude with a formula. And the novel is an artistic success in that all of its component parts are integrated to make up a self-contained entity.

This, however, is not quite the case in The Heart of the Hunter, where the physical journey is ultimately superseded by the dogmatic formula. When the physical journey trails off into the desert sands, we lose the immediacy of the vision, and try as he will, the author cannot bring us back into the magic world of Africa by explaining the anatomy of a formula.

But when we look at Van der Post's travel documentaries, Venture to the Interior and The Lost World of the

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[3]Cf. ante pp. 87-90.

Kalahari, the inner journey is again beautifully fused with the outer journey of exploration. Even the flat characters met in the outer world serve as symbols of the author's inner journey.[4] It is true that here too there is the Jungian formula of the modern man in search of his soul, but we do not become aware of the formula as a thing in itself, as an unnatural growth that should be cut away from the living dramatic tissue. No, here we are in the presence of that achieved content[5] which is art in the best sense of the word. Everything contributes to the central vision.

In retrospect it is exactly this central vision of Africa which haunts the reader's memory. Who can ever forget the picture of the great leopard luxuriantly settling himself into the grass above a pool in the Nyika Plateau:

> A very big male leopard, bronze, his back charged with sunset gold, was walking along the slope above the pool on the far side about fifty yards away. He was walking as if he did not have a fear or care in the world, like an old gentleman with his hands behind his back, taking the evening air in his own private garden. When he was about twelve yards from the pool, he started walking around in circles examining the ground with great

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[4]Cf. ante pp. 134-35.

[5]Cf. ante p. 135.

> attention. Then he settled slowly into the grass, like a destroyer sinking into the sea, bow first, and suddenly disappeared from our view. It was rather uncanny. One minute he was magnificently there on the bare slope and the next he was gone from our view.[6]

Or who can ever forget the glimpse of the old River Bushman staring desolately into the waters of the Okovango Swamp:

> The last I saw of him was at his fishing trap in his flat-bottomed makorro, leaning heavily on his punting pole and looking, not at our receding craft, but deeply into the water as if his spirit had need of concentration on the one element that endured unchanging in his world, into which angry men had come so thick and fast upon one another's heels to cut down, one by one, the branches of a race that it had taken many thousands of years of secluded life to grow.[7]

I like the way Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, who was a traveller in his own right, sums up the case for the integrated direct vision which is represented above:

> To know is not to prove, nor to explain. It is to accede to vision.[8]

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[6]Van der Post, Venture to the Interior, pp. 234-35.

[7]Van der Post, Lost World, p. 178.

[8]Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, "Flight to Arras", Airman's Odyssey, tr. Lewis Galantière (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), p. 313.

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