

KENDREW LASCELLES: SELECTED WORKS

A Biographical, Thematic and Stylistic Introduction

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DECLARATION

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of;

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University of KwaZulu- Natal South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged.

I confirm that an external editor was used and that my Supervisor, Professor Michael Chapman, was informed of the identity and details of my editor.

This thesis:

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation – half of the MA in English Studies by coursework and dissertation – examines selected works of the playwright, poet and novelist, Kendrew Lascelles, who spent his youth and young adulthood in South Africa, and who since the mid-1960s has resided in the United States.

The study – the first extended evaluation of Lascelles’s work – focuses on those of his plays that feature an African dimension and on his ‘post apocalyptic’ novel, *Tamara Hunney*.

The argument is that Africa, as a real and symbolic location, persists alongside the US influence in Lascelles’s work, whether explicitly, as in his play about living in apartheid South Africa, or by suggestive parallel in his recognition of intercultural potential: for example, his contrast in *Tamara Hunney* of Los Angeles urban realism and native American (‘Red Indian’) spiritual redemption; that masculinist worlds (e.g. colonial or apartheid Africa; the US ‘wild west,’ whether past or present) are tempered (educated) through gender sensitivity, or a feminine principle; and that an apparent paradox might but be a paradox in a writer who subscribes to foundational (romantic-conservative) values rather than to the trendy-liberal expositions of a media-saturated American society.

The moral vision is captured not only thematically, but is embodied in ‘form’ as meaning: in surprising shifts of generic convention and style. The study suggests that Kendrew Lascelles’s literary work is deserving of serious consideration.

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FOREWORD

Aims, Scope and Method

The study has two interrelated aims: to introduce to and evaluate for a South African readership an author who, if remembered at all, is probably remembered only for his involvement in the early 'anti-apartheid' stage parody, *Wait a Minim!*¹ Kendrew Lascelles left South Africa for the West End, London, in 1964 with the revue *Wait a Minim!*, which later proceeded to Broadway, New York. He settled in California, where he wrote plays, poetry and novels. In introducing Lascelles the study will refer briefly to his works, but will focus on his play *Blood Oasis* (2007) and his post-apocalyptic novel, *Tamara Hunney* (2006).

The study will be evaluative of Lascelles's work in relation to the dominant trope of writing between worlds. The hypothesis is that Lascelles's early South African experience left its mark on his memory and South Africa/Africa recurs as a palimpsest in his work, sometimes more obviously than at other times: for example, the play *Blood Oasis* is set in the Darfur region, whereas in *Tamara Hunney* the migration across a devastated United States to a native-American 'reserve' evokes parallels with the motif of the San in many South African works.

In continuing to explore the trope of writing between worlds, therefore, I shall consider not only the migration of a South African to the United States, but also a journey of internal migration. As I have suggested, the novel *Tamara Hunney* pursues a journey from a devastated landscape to forms of recovery in a 'pre-modern' return to a first-people culture. Accordingly, 'place' has particular significance in Lascelles's work, where it represents both a realism of description and the symbolism of a mental landscape: for example, Lascelles's

early South African experience saw him, in his rejection of his boys' high school rugby ethos, more profoundly in his criticism of a masculinist apartheid ethos, attaching to place a gender sensitivity, what I shall refer to as a feminine principle. In *Tamara Hunney*, for example, the post-apocalypse motif – currently wide-spread in US literature – grants both main characters a gender sensitivity that is marginalised in a novel like *The Road*, the prize-winning work of Cormac McCarthy, which, partly owing to its film version, stands as a kind of landmark of the genre.

In Lascelles's writing content is not unrelated to its aesthetic presentation, and questions of appropriate forms of representation will involve a response to the shifts within the same work from conventions of realism to conventions of romance. Again, a South African parallel is suggested: it is often said that art forms arising from conditions of psychological and cultural insecurity (for example, Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*) rarely fit easily into a single generic category. Similarly, Lascelles not only turns to fiction, plays and poetry, but, more to the point of my study, depicts within any one work not only landscapes of realism and romance, but plot structures (the journey) and characters (individuals or types) that have implications for novelistic interpretation. Should *Tamara Hunney*, for example, be 'read' allegorically?

In introducing Lascelles to a South African readership today I need to keep in mind concepts of the local in the global. How might Lascelles best be positioned in relation to South African interest? A key issue will be the ways in which Lascelles's African memory has continued to influence his literary achievement. If Lascelles is a cosmopolitan writer, then it is a cosmopolitanism that finds its strength in its own immediate locality.

The aim of this study is both to introduce an author who has been neglected by a South African readership at the same time as offering the first extended evaluation of Lascelles's work. It is work that displays a creative tension between concepts of home and exile: Africa as palimpsest, for example, never entirely disappears from his fiction, while the US influence is subjected to a sensibility which is alert to cultural difference. The value granted to 'difference' extends to a consideration of gender-related issues. Accordingly, the guiding questions would be: how did Lascelles's work respond to apartheid in the 1960s? How did the masculinist world of apartheid account for the recurring feminine principle in his work? How does the relationship between place and gender lend shape and significance to his work? Does the work bear out the hypothesis of a 'writer between worlds'?

The works will be discussed within an interpretative paradigm, in which the emphasis will be on the analysis of the individual texts. The texts, however, will not be seen to be divorced from their contexts: for example, Lascelles's earliest work derives its force from the immediate years of apartheid; his most recent work derives its particularity and its allegorical elements from the current wave of post-apocalyptic writing and filmmaking in the United States.

That the texts of Lascelles's work are not readily available to South African readers, or even (in playscript form) to readers in the United States and that relatively little critical commentary exists, has presented its own problems. To give the reader plot directions and to convey the texture of the writing, I have relied on elements of summary and quotation. I have also quoted from correspondence with Andrew Tracey, who was familiar with the 'scriptless' production *Wait a Minim!* and I have included an extended interview with

Kendrew Lascelles himself. Appendices make available interesting comment on production details of the writer and his work.

The opening chapter places Lascelles in his time and place; the following two chapters cover, respectively, his 'African' plays and his 'post-apocalyptic' novel *Tamara Hunney*.

The intention is to deposit Lascelles's material at the National English Literary Museum (Grahamstown) as a resource for future researchers. This study is a modest attempt to lay the groundwork.

Note

1 There is no extant script for *Wait a Minim!* For details see Harris (under the Acknowledgements and References); see also Tracey (2009).

Music from the show is recorded and stored at the UKZN Drama Library, in the care of Professor Mervyn McMurtry.

CHAPTER 1

Introducing the Works of Kendrew Lascelles

The title of this dissertation is inspired by Kwame Anthony Appiah, who states:

Under what rubric to proceed? Not “Globalization”...not “multiculturalism”. I have settled on “cosmopolitanism”...the formulation was meant to be paradoxical...A citizen – a politēs – belonging to a city, ‘polis’ and ‘cosmos’ the world...In geological terms, it has been a blink of the eye since human beings first left Africa...Cosmopolitans...regard all the peoples of the earth as so many branches of a single family and the universe as a state, of which they, with innumerable other national beings, are citizens, promoting together under general laws of nature, the perfection of the whole.

(2006: xiii)

The questions which this study wishes to pose, therefore, should have both local applicability as well as situating the author in a broader context of world literature. Is the struggle for survival in our global village limited to location or does Lascelles reveal cosmopolitan trends as a writer between worlds?

Kendrew Lascelles was born in Manchester, England, on 20th September 1935. South Africa was recommended to improve the young boy’s health. The family arrived in Durban in May 1939, and eventually settled in Natal. Lascelles was enrolled at Marist Brothers, Pietermaritzburg, to commence primary grades and thereafter attended Kearsney College, Botha’s Hill, where his main interests were athletics, music, literature, and poetry. With creative potential, but otherwise not academically inclined, he exhibited no aptitude for mathematics, or science. Lascelles, therefore, posed a problem to the then principal, Stan Osler, who considered it the duty of the school to educate every young boy towards a future career. The family was consulted and Lascelles questioned as to what sort of career he preferred. The surprising answer was, “Well sir, I have been

thinking in terms of a theatrical career.”¹ He was enrolled into strict training with the Shirley Parry Studio of Ballet, in which Professor Elizabeth Sneddon’s Department of Drama at the University of Natal maintained an interest and through which he was encouraged by Professor Sneddon to pursue acting. He proceeded to London in 1955, returning with Checetti Diplomas in ballet, and commenced working professionally in South African theatre in 1957.

Lascelles has not been published locally since he left South Africa with the theatrical production of *Wait a Minim!* in 1964. His role in the revue was co-author with impresario and producer Leon Gluckman. The revue met with international success and surprised the world with its performances of humorous and entertaining talent emanating from a country in the grip of racial discrimination and the draconian Anti-Sabotage Bill. Of the show, in which Paul Tracey and Andrew Tracey were lead musicians, Paul writes to this author in an email:

I just happen to be writing a short article for our local newsletter that goes out to the artists who perform in Los Angeles schools. That's what I do these days. As you can see, I was asked to write about cultural diversity, but I decided to write about *Minim!* anyway. It's not finished yet, I'm still working on it, but it mentions Kendrew and you might be interested in a bit of an inside view on how we created the show.

Madeleine Dahm (she sounds very English, but isn't that a German name?), our editor, asked me to write an article on Cultural Diversity. Aha! She must know me well enough to know that I am Mister Cultural Diversity! But doesn't she also know what a highly charged topic it is, how sensitive people are about anything that has anything at all to do with race? You have to be so *au courant* these days to know how to thread that needle Politically Correctly. Can I do it? Me! A white South African?

Perhaps I have gained some discretion at my age, but in my youth I thrived on being non-PC. In fact, that's the only reason I am a Californian. *Wait a Minim!* was the name of the stage show that my brother and I, and a small team of other performers, created in South Africa. It was a musical revue that poked fun at several different ethnic groups. We were 'equal opportunity' satirists! Designed to have a six-week run at a small theatre in Johannesburg, it ran for seven years worldwide.

My brother had been the president of the Folk Song Society at Oxford University and had amassed a wonderfully diverse collection of international songs. This became the foundation of our show. Then we added the other elements of theatre; our cast, the dancing, the mime, the appropriate musical instruments, which we hurriedly learned, the costumes, the stage set and the lighting.

Sorting them into national groups, we picked the songs we liked best. Then we decided which of them should be presented straight for their musical beauty, and which of them could be used in satirizing the foibles of various nationalities.

We had, for example, a couple of French songs we wanted to include. OK, so what's funny about the French? Ask us in America and we'll tell you how the French love their food and how rude they are to us. We in South Africa didn't have that problem with the French, but we knew that they loved 'love' - l'amour and that they specially loved bicycling, Tour de France.

So we created our French sketch. My brother and I played our guitars while our French-speaking tenor, Michel, handled the lyrics to an ancient ballad, "L'Amour de Moi." Just beautiful! Then gliding onto the stage came our lithe ballet dancer, Zelide. She wore a diaphanous gown and 'glissaded' liquidly while gracefully plucking petals off a rose, en pointe. Gorgeous! That would be have been enough in itself.

But then onto the stage, on his racing bicycle, came the leader of the Tour de France, Kendrew, wearing his yellow jacket. He saw the ravishing woman who was beckoning seductively to him, and being a typical Frenchman, leapt off his bike and went over and danced with her. (They were both superb dancers.)

That was gentle satire. We were much tougher on the Germans and the Japanese, but bear in mind that we created this show in 1962 and WW II was still fresh in our minds.

One group we never joked about was Africans. At that time, the world thought every African would be a successful, perfect gentleman. The arrival of the monstrous Idi Amin in Uganda started to erode that daydream and today's Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe (don't get me started on Zimbabwe!) has finally shown us that African leaders are equally capable of being tyrants as any other world leader.

We played our African music straight. No funny stuff. Not surprising, really, because our father was Dr Hugh Tracey, the leading authority on the music of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. He founded the International Library of African Music and stocked it with his vast collection of recorded music that he'd made in the 1940s and 1950s.

Pa - as we called him - knew the African character pretty well and was neither illusioned nor disillusioned by political events. What he did have was a

tremendous respect for the culture of all the different tribal groups he had encountered on his extensive travels, and this is what we demonstrated in our show, *Wait a Minim!*

Of course, being in South Africa during the apartheid years, we could only have either a totally black or a totally white cast. What was hilarious about this policy was that backstage we could have anyone we wanted, so long as they were hidden from the audience! We often had one black man and one Indian. By the time our show got to Broadway, we had a crew of about fifteen forced on us by union rules.... dressers, props people, scenery movers and even four musicians who were paid not to be there because we played all our own music on stage.

Audiences who came to see the show experienced a brilliant display of cultural diversity, able as they were to believe for the moment that we were the people we were portraying. We changed nationality simply by changing hats. A Sotho hat made us Africans, a beret made us French, and so on. Because we were determined to be as authentic as possible, we learned to play the correct instruments for every group we satirized: bagpipes when we were being Scottish; Chopi xylophones and drums when we were African; steel drums to back a Caribbean calypso; accordion, clarinet and tuba to accompany an Austrian schuhplattling slapping dance, which, once fully established, of course got out of hand!

Our firm belief was that before we made a mockery of anything, we first had to know how to do it really well ourselves. If you're looking for any wisdom in this response, that was it...!

(Tracey 2009)

Wait a Minim! was conceived, therefore, as a multi-cultural comedy revue in which accomplished artists performed either well-known ballads, such as Robert Burns's "My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose", unforgettably interpreted in song by Paul Tracey in the original show (1960) when this writer was in the audience., or parodies against the apartheid regime, the latter devised by Lascelles, where in one sketch he appears as a National Party candidate coming from the wings saying: "We've got them right behind us!" He then drops forward dead with an assegai in his back.(Harris)

Another of Lascelles's popular skits was acting as Van Jaarsveldt, the South African rugby hero, in his green and gold jersey, with rugby ball and scrum cap, brawny and brainless, a symbol of the apartheid government, a national hero who had no answers for the questions

posed to him. A parody-poem appealed to those familiar with South African jargon expressed in mixed vocabulary of English and Afrikaans, such as the following piece by Lascelles:

Last night I sat where the blankes aleen (whites only)
 bloom bright on the black sash trees (Black Sash was a women's protest group)
 and the moon shone low down the long plateau
 where the rooineks wave in the breeze (rooineks – denotes English citizens)
 and I heard a hou links howl in the night (keep left)
 and the voetseks came for the kill
 and a vice squad attack the whole blerrie pack
 came down on a wat jy wil (do as you like)
 then a motherless pic n' foshel (pick and shovel in Bantu)
 came wandering hand in hand
 on a paraffin tin and a boerewors skin (boerewors :from sausage)
 they strummed of a sunny land
 while they strummed this song of a sunny land
 they sang down the moonlit vlei
 and the cares of the night took a no turning right (another road sign)
 and the dagga stomps galloped away
 then over the crags of the poskantoor (post offices)
 the waking sun dwaaled high (dwaal: loiter)
 and I heard the trill of a sabotage bill (death sentence – refer Rivonia trial)
 coo soft on the morning sky
 then the happy apartheids gathered
 and Vier Kleur came with his drum (flag of old Boer Republic)
 and a joy to see was an immorality (Immorality Act indicted John Rudd and Dotty Tio)
 shake hands with a five-yard scrum
 for this is the land where the blink kant bo (sunny side up)
 skips light down the rand cents reef (when S.A. went off the sterling system)
 and all year through you've got nothing to do
 but moenie spoeg nie asseblief.² (please don't spit –TB epidemic)

After a successful run of approximately three years in South Africa, *Wait a Minim!* transferred to London's West End and after that to Broadway. This was followed by a tour of Australia. At the conclusion of the revue's seven-year run, Lascelles, who detested apartheid – he says, he “abhorred its intellectual fanaticism and inhumanity to man” (Lascelles, 2010)– chose to reside in a democratic United States where he continues to live, adding to the number of South Africans working abroad.

His plays with African scenarios are *The Trophy Hunters*, *Exclusive Circles* and *Blood Oasis*. Lascelles utilised an African motif in his plays, as in *The Trophy Hunters* (1970). This play was published in *The Best American Plays of 1970*, edited by Stanley Richards, and *Tigers* was published in *The Best American Plays of 1973*.

Stanley Richards writes:

One of the most rewarding joys of being an editor is the discovery of a play of exceptional quality and originality...*The Trophy Hunters* now emphatically reveals that Mr Lascelles is exceedingly more than a comic sprite. He also is an exceptional serious dramatist who, authentically and provocatively has evoked a mood of the South African bush country and its inhabitants.

(1970: 29)

The Trophy Hunters dramatises the tragicomic situation of ex-patriot and colonial English-speaking Stubb, who has outlived the influence of British rule in Africa. (I intend to explore these pieces together with his other African plays, *Exclusive Circles* and *Blood Oasis*, in the following chapter.)

Tigers, a two-act play, which is not ‘African’ in setting, dramatises the personal relationship between a man and his wife, both resident in an apartment in New York.

Richards writes:

Tigers, published for the first time in this collection, originally was performed on national television during the winter of 1972. Lascelles portrayed Adam in

the production and his performance, just as with his writing, created a subtle and impressive balance between the comic and the serious, illusion and disillusionment.

(1973: 163)

Adam, who is a circus-tiger trainer, is aware that his wife intends to desert him. The dialogue presents an argument in counterbalance as Adam speaks to persuade his wife to abandon thoughts of desertion with a ginger-haired lover, waiting for her in his limousine parked in the street below:

ADAM: Well I'll come back and pick you up then. Where will you be?
Here or at the local?

MRS: I don't know.

ADAM: Well I'll come back and wait for you here...[Adam moves to the door, puts on his Circus cap, picks up his whip. Stops at the door] I was just thinking about my dad again, what he said once...about life being like a tiger...you could let it jump on you and maul you or you could do something with it.

MRS: What?

ADAM: Tame it. You could let it maul you or tame it...taming it will be worth it in the end.

MRS: Why?

ADAM: Yes, because he said, "It's the biggest bloody tiger of the lot!"
That's why. (Pause) Hey Mrs, I love you. [Adam exits]

(Lascelles 1973:187)

The masculinist pretence in contradistinction to feminine sensitivity is an early indication of what would be a mark of Lascelles's subsequent approach.

The poetic side of Lascelles's character was noticed as early as his school days at Kearsney College. After he left school in 1951, and during a sojourn in Johannesburg, he was voted by the South African newspaper *The Sunday Times* as South Africa's most promising young poet (Lascelles: 2010). As Lascelles told the author his poetic gift did not go unnoticed in America, where his verse was published in 1972 by United Artists Music Company on a long-playing album. The album includes Lascelles's anti-war poem, "The Box," which he

first recited on the nationwide television programme, Smothers Brothers Show (the poem was originally recorded by Media Artists). After the broadcast a flow of letters arrived requesting copies and further performances of the piece for broadcast. John Denver liked the poem and sang it as a song in his repertoire of recitals. (Google “John Denver” “Kendrew Lascelles”) America’s famous star actor, Jack Lemon, as well as Peter Lawford, also recited “The Box”. Denver is revered with a statue and a bronze plaque that commemorates his memory and overlooks Denver, Colorado. On the plaque is inscribed the poem, “The Box”, by Kendrew Lascelles.

Two stanzas from “The Box” reveal the poet’s concern for children and the future of humanity when caught as innocent victims in war-conflict zones:

It bumped the children mainly,
And I’ll tell you this quite plainly,
It bumps them everyday and what is more
It leaves them dead and burned and dying,
Thousands of them sick and crying,
'Cause when it bumps it’s very, very sore.

There is a way to stop the ball,
It isn’t very hard at all,
All it takes is wisdom and
I’m absolutely sure
We could get it back into the box
And bind the chains and lock the locks
But no one seems to want to save the children anymore.

(Lascelles 1974)

One of the more haunting pieces on the album is Lascelles’s elegiac cultural lament, “Flute Maker”; this poem has psychic depth in its haunting American Indian tone:

This land
The old man speaks,
this mighty mother
talks of peace
and bloodied brother
of times...

ah yes
a time of times
where the blue smoke rose
above the river pines
and all the country
fills his mouth
turns his eyes
east west north and south
and sweeps the wide horizon
with his hand recollecting
where the vast ancestral eagle cast
his passing shadow on the sand.

(Lascelles 1973: n.p.)

“Flute Maker” so pleased the Zuni Indian tribal chief that he encouraged his people to assist Lascelles and United Artists in the recording of this particular poem. As a consequence, the sounds of beating rhythmic feet, drums, Indian calls and cries, and strange echoing sounds capture a traditional Zuni experience. The poem expresses a compassionate lament for the indigenous American people’s lost buffalo herds, braves, vanished prairies and culture. On questioning Lascelles about the composition of “Flute Maker”, he emailed me the following reply:

At the Dallas Cow Palace, on the occasion of an Indian Jubilee Pow-Wow packed to the rafters, I had just finished reciting “The Box” and was told (beforehand) to exit the stage for the rock group Black Oak Arkansas (to follow me). At the end of my recitation, as the applause rang out, the stage manager hissed from the wings:

“Do more, Black Oak's not ready yet”.

On the spur of the moment I remembered I had the soft-cover copy of Black Elk Speaks in the rear pocket of my jeans, so I whipped it out, cleared my throat and started reading the different memoirs of the chiefs as written, Big Chief Sitting Bull, then Chief Crazy Horse, and so on. The auditorium fell silent. I had read numerous excerpts when the stage manager signalled I could close, which I did. The auditorium erupted! Indians advanced along the aisles to the stage.

(I first thought to scalp me, a white man reading the words of their honoured ancestors.) But no, I was brought gifts, and one a beautiful flute an old man handed to me, and called me “blood brother”. He told me that he had made it himself. I wrote “Flute Maker” on the way back to L.A. on the plane.

(Lascelles 2010)

“Flute Maker” is analogous in its American Indian depictions to South Africa’s San people’s cosmic culture. We hear of affinity with nature and spirit, the personification of animals, and allusions to stars and moons, where men communicate with ancestral spirits. Similarly, the American Indians danced and clapped and held ceremonies to spirit gods of Earth, Air and Sky. The San celebrated the world around them, grateful for her sustenance to their lives. South African history records the annihilation of the indigenous San. The ‘Red Indians’ of America also suffered a dislocation between the years 1883 and 1890. The decimation is mourned in the lines:

Flute maker lined in tribal silence
speaks his fingers up and down
But it’s dead
Gone dead and dying
What was the feather headed pennant,
far sight,
eagle eyes
the primary flower flowering in the land
danced until the rain came down.

(Lascelles 1973 : n.p.)

The line, “the primary flower flowering in the land,” refers to the ancient ‘wand’ symbolising the health and strength of the people and resembles the well-being of the American Indian nationhood. When the wand ceases to flower, the nation is decimated, the lament being “But it’s dead, gone dead and dying”. In *Exodus*, Moses, the prophet of the Israelites, carries a wand or rod that is similarly graced with spiritual symbolism. Furthermore, in Christianity the bishops carry the shepherd’s rod. In the ‘Red Indian’ culture the wand or rod symbolizes spiritual presence within the nation.

The decimated tribes were left to starve and freeze in winter snows following the slaughter to the point of extinction of their tribes and buffalo herds. The poem poignantly expresses the damage inflicted on the ancient inhabitants by colonising European land-grabbers:

here before the first of us,

to be the hated and the cursed of us,
left to perish over wasted places...
gone in every puff of it
prairies, deserts, mountains
every valley field and bluff of it...
home, land, grain and graze
we couldn't grab enough of it.

(Lascelles 1973: n.p.)

Lascelles's novel *Tamara Hunney*, which is considered in Chapter 3, returns its protagonists to a dialogue with the Indian culture celebrated in "Flute Maker".

Lascelles's poetry, as revealed in extracts made available to me in correspondence, is empathetic in tone and expresses a refinement of spiritual affinities and a love for natural primary creation, as in the following example:

Wild Bird

Wild bird be my soul tonight
and soar the skies for me
with visions of the world around
and lights along the sea.

Take my dreams on wind wide wings
my heart within your breast
wash me in the seas of flight
and give my longing rest.

I know there is some far flown thing
my soul has sometimes seen
lay like silvered islands
in the oceans darkening green.

I know there is a distant light
and a bell sound on the foam
and a fire beyond the frozen night
to guide the spirit home.

(Lascelles 2010: n.p)

The lyric is a melange of feeling and empathy with universal creation and sensitive imagery. It is Wordsworthian in philosophy, hauntingly Celtic in yearning of esoteric voyages across eternal and unfathomable seas, where the “distant light” and “bell sound on the foam” metaphorically symbolise a mooring to a quayside of mystique origins: the metaphysical harbour of lost spiritual visions, which lies innate within all creation.

In Lascelles’s early days in theatre, he lived in the then artistic ambience of Hillbrow, and he penned this poem to the reality behind the ambience:

We have lived in alleys,
beneath a sunless sky,
where bound to bootless galleys
the little children cry

and we have seen the blue fly
buzz on heaps of dung
and the filthy trash-cans standing
where poverty is strung

from building wall to building,
the clothes line flags of hope
from where the prossie’s knickers
flutter through the smoke,

the children come from corners
to what the kitchen gives
and among the saints and mourners
the church and prosie lives.

(Lascelles, 2009)

These verses are extracted from a longer lyric describing the living conditions in Hillbrow during the late fifties. On display were elite jewellery stores, fashion boutiques, small grocery and café shops and Greek restaurants; the area had cleanly swept pavements shaded by trees. But, Lascelles knew the hungry face of Hillbrow behind its mask. In those

years Hillbrow could be likened to the Parisian left bank, which although avant-garde, was not immune from the extremes of wealth and poverty that were synonymous with a socially divisive South Africa.

In the United States Lascelles received contracts to write scripts for television, from the Walt Disney Animated Film Studios and numerous filming projects, resulting in his becoming adept at the art of screenplay writing. A highlight of Lascelles's career was receiving a commission from Arthur Miller to transcribe his earliest novel, *Focus*, to filmscript dialogue. The film was directed by John Huston, starring Montgomery Clift, and the camera's long-distance shots remind us of how isolated Semitic people felt in the discriminating attitude of the period. While F. Scott Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), includes anti-Semitic social ostracism, Miller's *Focus* examines the discrimination against Jewish people in New York during the 1930s and forties, at the time of President Roosevelt's America. (The film production of 2001 was directed by Neal Slavin and film script by Kendrew Lascelles. The actors were William H. Macy, Laura Dern, David Paymer, Meat Loaf and Kay Hawtrey.)

Lascelles composed a second filmscript on anti-Semitism from material he found in the recorded transcripts of the Eichmann Trial in Israel. When under cross-examination, the accused confessed to a clash of orders with Himmler, who had secret dealings with wealthy Jewish industrialist Manfred Weiss. In the film Himmler orders Eichmann to save and ensure the escape of the entire family of approximately thirty-four members of kith and kin, arranged to escape together by private plane from Hungary in the dark of night. One of the tense and memorable film scenes is the confrontation between Himmler and Eichmann, who is acid and questions Himmler's orders. But Himmler retorts: "When the Reich orders

you to kill Jews you kill Jews. And when the Reich orders you to save Jews you save Jews. Obey orders!”

The time setting of the film *The Aryan Couple* precedes the Nazi invasion of Hungary by a day or two. Thus the family escapes with an hour to spare. The film is shot against magnificent natural scenery and in ancient and palatial halls, representative of the life of Hungary’s wealthiest armaments industrialist and banker Weiss, who is referred to in the film story as Krautzenberg. The film, with its taut dialogue, was given a Hollywood debut in 2004, and was mentioned as a possible Oscar nomination.

Apart from Lascelles’s appreciation of the engineering of stagecraft in play-writing, he bears in mind the intricacies involved in screen scriptwriting and film-making techniques such as manipulating booms and lighting and movement and drama in coordination with action and dialogue. Such elements characterise his plays.

Lascelles has two hobbies that encourage acuity and imagery in his writing. One is his love of horses, which is a key feature of the novel *Tamara Hunney*. He also excels in landscape paintings in aquarelles of American panoramas, again reminiscent of scenes in *Tamara Hunney* that feature wild horse herds galloping across vast prairies.

Lascelles’s most recent theatrical play is a two-act theatre of the absurd, entitled *Cowboy at the World’s End* (2010). He lives a literary life in his cottage in Sunland, Los Angeles, where he is absorbed in proposals for new works in theatre, film and fiction.

To return to my considerations of the external and internal journey of Lascelles in world literature, his work evokes images of his travels across three continents: Africa, Europe and

America. Such images of man, space and creation penetrate his plays, poems and fiction resulting from his life experience before settling in California. Despite his busy schedule he responded generously to my request for an interview, which I include here as an introduction to Kendrew Lascelles in his own words, as it were, to a South African readership.

Chapter Two, to which some readers may wish to turn to immediately, focuses on Lascelles's African plays.

INTERVIEW

Van der Heijden: Mr Lascelles, you were born in England in 1935. When did you arrive in South Africa?

Lascelles: Our family arrived in S.A. in 1939 and my first recollections are of Porterville, in the Cape. My sister and I had a nurse who was a Kenyan, I think, since Swahili's a language not a nation, to whom we were both endeared and were charmed by the colour of his skin, at least I know I was. Encounters with Zulus came later.

VdH: Do you have memories of your infant years in England? Or best boyhood memories of South Africa and your developing years?

KL: My best memories of South Africa could fill a book, albeit I daresay the most striking are those of my teens and in the countryside near the Durban area, when my family lived beside a small railroad stop (a gum-tree-and-a-milk-can siding) Alverstone, about midway between Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and the years before that time when we lived in Greytown. There I first learned to ride horses under the tutelage of Jackie Newmarch, and perhaps developed so close a kinship with the veld that it became second-nature and replaced what were few and infantile memories of Great Britain.

A yet vivid memory of Greytown, a small community then, was walking along a dust road just outside town one day and encountering an ox wagon driven by two old Zulus and asking if I could ride with them. 'Yebo, nkozikaas, woza'. What a thrill it was to sit under the African sun while the team plodded along that hot-brown road as if to forever with the veld grasses sighing in the wind either side. A year or so later, my second and more influential encounter with Zulus was a friendship (I say friendship as I never saw this man as a servant) I sustained with the headman of a small hotel my parents ran in Pietermaritzburg. His name was Stewart Changaan (I believe it was Changaan or Shangaan) a tall and noble individual, polite, kind, and ever caring of us children, three of us by then, an older and younger sister forming our group.

Aware, even before knowing Stewart Shangaan, of the inhumanity of apartheid, its utter callousness pierced me when, one evening, I went to the servants' quarters to ask Stewart something or other and found him sitting on a box in his little cell, bleeding profusely from a head wound and going on in Zulu about an assailant who attacked him and then vanished into the night. The feeling of helplessness at only being able to tut-tut and shake my head in despair at the absolute squalor this noble man was reduced to living in, quite smashed my boyish heart. On the strength of this, it was something of a happy ending memory when Stewart rode with my family into the heart of Zululand one day to introduce us to his family, and my older sister and I left the car and my parents, and walked with him to his family kraal, perhaps about a mile or so uphill off the dirt road and all around stretched the veld of those magnificent Zulu areas, across the Tugela River.

Of course, despite our ages, I think I was about nine or ten, we were offered by Stewart's family and gracious elders, a home made-brew of what we whites then called 'kaffir beer', of which I took more than a good swig and became quite intoxicated since I recall, that after the beer, bounding like an impala through the grass downhill to the car heedless to the angst of my sister's crying 'wait for me', poor dear, not as intoxicated as myself.

A few years later, when ensconced in Alverstone on the edge of what was then a 'reserve', and bordering the Valley of a Thousand Hills, my acquaintanceship with Zulus was as close as it was with my school peers at Kearsney College, since, being one of only three or four day-boys in those years, as Kearsney was then primarily a boarding school, my playmates, after school and during the long summer holidays, were Zulus, and I'd be days on end playing the equivalent of Cowboys and Indians in and about the dongas and engaging in sand clod fights, all of boyishly emulating the Impis versus the Boers.

Then again, as I advanced into my teens and testosterone hell, the 'apartheid' doctrine less confused than both angered and made me THINK. All boys, at that age, become obsessed with the opposite sex, and here we white boys were among bare-breasted Zulu girls and women we were brainwashed into believing were of beings another species. Brainwashed the others might've been, but not me, how many of those gorgeous girls did I innocently flirt with, to their amused chiding about barriers between races, see anything you like, go ahead white-boy, that's all you can do, look!

Doctrine aside, my Kearsney College years instilled in me a sense of tolerance ever since serving me well in life, and broadened my outlook less from reading, writing, and arithmetic than through the edicts of Christian morality stressed by my masters. Our headmaster, at that time, the famous Springbok rugby fly-half, Stanley Osler, who suffered my presence during those years about the school campus, with immeasurable kindness, and, I daresay, from my antics as the class clown, always eager to raise a laugh, applauded (no doubt with much relief) my early departure from formal schooling to theatrical training, as did our Maths master, Mr (Bertie) Nel, a terror with a cane.

“You're going to take ballet?” he said with a smile that shocked me.

“Good for you, Kendrew, me and my wife love ballet. Good for you.”

Of course, all but a few realized that it was the girls, the beautiful, long-legged-ballet-girls, and no competition; me one of three male dancers then in the country, and one of the other two not attracted to women, aside from which, I'd fallen boyishly and secretly madly in love with my prospective ballet teacher, Shirley Parry. This secret infatuation, nevertheless, kept my nose to the grindstone, as it were, and fed my determination to rise above the criticism, it wasn't easy being a ballet dancer in South Africa in the late 1950's early 1960's. Ballet training launched me into acting and pantomime, aside from the dance, and into the crosshairs of such esteemed producers as Elizabeth Sneddon, who cast me as Oswald in *King Lear*, a small part but an enormous opportunity, whence I first met Leon Gluckman, (he played Lear) and as my mother and sisters were overseas at that time, the Natal University and its city annex became my second home. In time I was awarded a job assisting Shirley Parry, (prior to her marriage and embarkation to Australia), instructing Howard College drama students in movement and pantomime. However, not able to advance further in ballet due to the imminent departure of Miss Parry, I left South Africa to further studies in ballet and theatre in London.

VdH: On your return from England, how restrictive and difficult did you find the apartheid regime in reality to creative arts in South Africa between the years 1955 -1967?

KL: It wasn't until my return from two years of studies in London and becoming Frank Staff's lead dancer opposite Vicky Carlson, now Mrs Eugene Joubert. Beautiful Vicky, I've always maintained, had the strength of an ox with the grace of a swan, and, had she chosen a ballet career rather than marriage and motherhood, Vicky would have surpassed

them all as a “world renowned” ballerina, as have many South Africans dancers, the late Frank Staff and likewise John Cranko, whose choreographic works are still performed in the international ballet world. It was at this time that apartheid truly began to needle me and, breaking from ballet to acting and writing my own comic cabaret material, I started performing in professional theatre, first with Brian Brook and Petrina Frye at the their Brook Theatre in Johannesburg, then with National Theatres, then under various producers and a re-acquaintance with the late Leon Gluckman, who was himself a staunch anti-apartheid champion. I wrote slant humorous anti-apartheid satires. Thus, if you'll forgive, establishing something of a name for myself as a comic.

VdH: Did these busy and formative years leave time for romance in your life?

KL:: I was then dating Zelide Jeppe for several years. Zelide had returned to S.A. from dancing with Sadlers Wells, and after I worked for Leon Gluckman in *Thieves Carnival* and then *The Fantasticks*, she and I joined the cast of a decent run of a review written by the late Bill Brewer. Zelide at once winning hearts and minds, a brilliant comedienne and pantomimest, aside from dancer. After that I was cast to play in James Ambrose Brown's *Red Silk Umbrella*, under Leon Gluckman's production and direction, but the show was cancelled in early rehearsal. Zelide and I went to Leon's office on his phone call, and discussed putting a show together as he had paid for and booked the YMCA Intimate Theatre and it was about to lie empty for six weeks. Leon had seen the Tracey Brothers, and decided to ask them to come to the theatre with the eighty-odd African instruments and show us their stuff. Zelide and I sat with Leon while Andrew and Paul sang and played a mix of African-Euro ballads and altogether hooked us, and this was the birth of *Wait A Minim!* The title, I believe was Dr Hugh Tracey's suggestion.

VdH: What happened after that?

KL: As Leon had seen my cabaret work and, of course, we knew one another from Sneddon's *King Lear* those years prior, he had confidence we could co-write a satiric musical revue with an anti-apartheid slant and perhaps run long enough for him to recover his expenses and looming loss through the cancellation of *Red Silk Umbrella*. Little did we know, when the opening night's thunderous applause told us we were enormous; and so much so that after a year's run, touring Durban and Cape Town, Leon capitalized and ventured a second show, this time more slanted to an anti-apartheid satire and included, in the cast, two Indian stage hands in crossover skits, although ‘verboden’ back then.

VdH: That period of your life in South African theatre saw the hardening of the apartheid regime. What particular memories do you have of friends and circumstances?

KL: At that time Zelide and I lived in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, the then equivalent of the Paris left bank, and counted among our friends and acquaintances John Rudd, (the Rudd and Jeppe families of historic Jeppe Street, for instance) Ronnie Kasrils, the late Ken Gampu, Norman Seeff, who was serving his internship at Baragwanath Hospital, as well as giving art classes. We entertained such up-and-comings-as Miriam Makeba in one of our almost kibbutz-like apartment buildings atop Kotze Street, where during a police raid on a GOD-FORBID MIXED PARTY one night, Miriam jumped out the window and near broke her ankle. At that time I recall meeting Lewis Nkosi, on a few occasions, and talking to him about writing, or, the more, listening to him talk about writing, and during

varied 'underground' meetings forming an acquaintance with Zakes Mokai that carried through here to the U.S. having had the distinction of being among the opening night guests of Gluckman's production-direction of Fugard's *The Blood Knot*, brilliantly performed by Athol Fugard and Zakes Mokai; something of a ground-breaking event against apartheid's strict limits on mixed-race performance.

VdH: When did you decide to become a serious dramatist?

KL: During my viewing (as part of the audience) of Brian Brook's production of John Osborne's *Look Back In Anger*, and then seeing Ziggy, Patrick Maynard, Michael McGovern and Nigel Hawthorn in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*; these two plays set my mind on the more serious aspects of theatre writing, and encouraged rather than discouraged me to oppose the restrictions of apartheid.

VdH: Apartheid forbade the appearance of black performing artists on stage together with whites; the theatres you have mentioned had all-white casts and entertained all-white audiences, and yet it seems Zakes Mokai was performing along with Fugard?

KL: Yes, that was something of an unusual event. And that is why I term it 'ground breaking', that Fugard got away with it because *The Blood Knot* became too big an international focus to squash and remains an excellent piece of playwriting.

VdH: In *Wait a Minim!* the cast was limited to whites, as I recall, and a white singer sang the show-stopper song "The Xhosa Wedding Click Click" song, or "Chuzi Mama." Was that Dana Valery?

KL: Yes, Dana. Now living here and happily married.

VdH: But, on the other hand, if you recall the other breaking event was when Gluckman auditioned black South Africans and found a wealth of sophisticated black talent for *King Kong*, a cast composed mainly of black unknown artists from Sophiatown, among whom was the discovery of Miriam Makeba who performed the part of the heroine and lead singer in *King Kong*. This established the record of black actors performing for white audiences in a white theatre venue, which I recall was His Majesty's Theatre, Johannesburg?

KL: I do believe, yes, I only saw the production in rehearsal, it then transferred to London and did quite well, I believe.

VdH: How many years were you associated with Leon Gluckman, the South African impresario?

KL: As previously mentioned, I first met Leon in Durban, when he played Lear in Sneddon's annex production of the play. He had returned to visit his family and was soon off back to London after that. We collaborated together over several years and after the close of *Wait a Minim!*, I got him to come over to Jamaica to direct for Michael Butler's new musical show *Reggae*, for which I wrote scripts and lyrics, but sadly, this production saw the end of his life. Leon was a good friend in the business, and I think something of genius, and, Butler agrees, *Reggae* died with him. His potential cast loved him from the word go.

GvH: To return to your South African time, what was your influence and role in devising the show *Wait a Minim!* and its sequel *Minim Bili*?

KL: Oh I would say a major influence since the entertainment couldn't stand solely on Andrew and Paul singing songs all night, hence the essence of the show being an anti-apartheid musical-satire, for want of an apt description. Sketches had to be devised, written (worked up) and a nominal balance maintained, the sequences dominated, for the most part, by comedy, listen to a *Minim* album or CD today and you'd wonder how the show sustained so long if you hadn't seen it with all the unrecorded sketches and humorous anti-apartheid barbs. We didn't run seven years worldwide on the songs alone. The final combined *Wait a Minim! Minim-Bili*, shows were carefully constructed, with Frank Staff contributing several brilliant pieces of choreography. Andrew, Paul, Michel Martel and myself remained with the show from beginning to the end, never missing a night in seven years. I know I didn't.

VdH: What became of the sequel *Minim-Bili*?

KL: Ultimately *Wait a Minim!* (the recognized title of the show, combined scenes from *Minim-Bili*) and became a West End and Broadway success running for two years respectively, as well as touring Australia.

VdH: How did this production create more public awareness towards South Africa's repressive conditions? What were the attending audiences saying about South Africa?

KL: I think we brought a major segment of international attention to the conditions of apartheid. I don't think any of our audience came away from the show as much happy and entertained, and believe me, our reviews were 100% raves, as much as enlightened to the stupidity of apartheid. *Beyond the Fringe* was Britain's biggest theatrical hit in those years. We followed them into the Fortune Theatre and broke their box-office record the first two weeks. *Wait a Minim!* was enormous, and, as I say, one couldn't come away from it ignorant of apartheid, but not in a heavy and depressing way, but sharpened, by our content to the absolute absurdity of the apartheid regime. Being on the white side of it, we suffered more from intellectual outrage than did our African friends from physical and spiritual discrimination. Hence, unlike oppression for them, much of the time, for us, the whole abomination was outrageous to the point of ridicule. Our friend, Ronnie Kasrils, was under house arrest in Durban, he appeared one night in Johannesburg with his hair dyed blond and giggling his head off:

“What the hell, Ronnie, aren't you under house arrest?”

“Yeah, they put a cop at the front door, so I walked out through the kitchen and back yard. They don't know I'm not there.”

“Why the blond hair?”

“Disguise.”

“Hey, Ronnie, doesn't go too well with your decidedly dark brows and distinctive overall Israeli appearance.”

“That's too complicated for these guys. Look for Ronnie Kasrils, five eleven, dark hair's the extent of their IQ!”

VdH: Your works after 1967 in America included writing and staging plays on the South African discriminatory policy. These plays included *Trophy Hunters*, *Exclusive Circles*, and *Waterhole*. Could you tell us a little about those productions?

KL: Yes, there was, and still is a market for such plays here, protest pieces, I suppose, albeit *Waterhole* is revised and changed and is now set in the Darfur region under the title, *Blood Oasis*. The play deals with what I term economic apartheid conditions, not racial discrimination. The main instigators of this are the major media outlets and, I regret to say, the ruling class.

VdH: What were the contributory influences that prompted your theatrical pieces based on the South African human drama?

KL: I think, *The Trophy Hunters* and *Exclusive Circles* certainly came into creation through memories of growing up and maturing in South Africa. For all the turbulence, it was invigorating, and I saw it all as less confined to South Africa than internationally endemic. Although Afro-America had triumphed in civil rights, for the most part I was shocked when Ken Gampu told me, for his starring role in Cornell Wilde's *The Naked Prey*, he was paid peanuts, and Wilde had him carry equipment and virtually serve as an extra grip. The nail in the coffin was Wilde buying him a one-way ticket to the U.S. for his presence at the Hollywood premiere, after which Gampu was left to his own devices. He arrived back in New York penniless, kid you not, penniless and ignored. Our stage manager, Frank Rembach, caught me after the show one night and told me. Hence, I personally bought Ken his airplane ticket back to South Africa. Apartheid's still alive and well in the U.S., only now it's against Christian Republicans.

VdH: Your poetry likewise became involved in the American anti-war effort when public opinion turned against the Vietnam War. At the time you were a contributory scriptwriter to the Smothers Brothers T.V. show that was aired live in the USA weekly. Your poem "The Box" (against the Vietnam crisis which you recited on Smother Brothers live television?) became an overnight success, bringing in a million letters in two weeks. Could you describe the American mood and the reception of the poem?

KL: The mood's still prevalent. I get royalties on the piece, not as enormous a cut of the pie as when I first performed it and John Denver, Peter Lawford, and Jack Lemon picked it up, nor as anti-war generated as during the Vietnam War, a hippie-driven exuberance for a disastrous peace. Albeit the reception was tremendous, in some ways I feel quite disappointed in perhaps having had a share of snatching defeat from the jaws of the victory. It was mainly the media that brought on the fall of Saigon and two million dead in Phol Pot's Cambodian bloodbath. The U.S. were on the brink of restoring Vietnam, but, as usual, the so-called peace-loving clowns got their way and achieved defeat and had their own brave boys spat on when they returned home here. As with Iraq, praised at first, then vilified at the behest of the local media. The trouble with Americans is that they believe the media with the same sheepish docility as the Ruskies believed Pravda. See Solzhenitsyn.

VdH: After many years of work, in American film and theatre circles, your latest creative writing output is in the genre of fiction. To date you have published three books, although others await publication. The novels are *Tamara Hunney*, set in America, *A Child's Guide to Heresy: The Great Yorkshire Witch Trial of 1249* as titled, set in Yorkshire; and *Blood Oasis*, set in North East Africa close to the Chad border, ostensibly Darfur region. In these books you are a writer between worlds, the context of the three novels concern humanitarian and social causes and possible solutions. Readers may also notice a distinct tendency relating to female abuse and subjugation, resulting in questioning leadership

and authority? The novels likewise show distinct geographical and cultural differences through the three narratives. Does the ease with which you write in different settings spring from your South African upbringing? And what makes you intrinsically sensitive to female abuse throughout the narratives?

KL: If I come across as intrinsically sensitive to female abuse I must be doing something right to my characters. I'm intrinsically sensitive to ALL abuse, and these days particularly over the populist and media driven-abuse of Christianity, at least as prevalent as it is here in the U.S. I will, however, say, my South African upbringing strikes a distinct chord in my creative melody, in that growing up within those parameters of utter geographic grandeur interwoven with political racial disparity, one's emotions balance a tightrope of acceptance and rebellion, this conflict enters my writing. Place is easy to narrate, the characters universal in their triumphs and despairs. I simply dress my characters in their indigenous personalities and costumes, be it Linda Vaughn the glamorous movie star, or Sukari, the breath-taking beautiful naked harem-bound Sino-African virgin, worlds apart, but with a mutual gender-cross to bear.

VdH: This dissertation intends to examine two works, *Tamara Hunney*, with its American issues, and *Blood Oasis*, highlighting Africa's saga of conflict. In *Tamara Hunney* the reader feels there is a basic apocalypse theme? Were you influenced by Cormac McCarthy's book *The Road*?

KL: Not at all, never read it, in fact, I must look at its copyright date, as we may have written our pieces at the same time. I recently picked it up in a bookstore and read the first page. Not for me. His style with minutiae becomes tedious for me of late. I couldn't finish it. Neither could I complete reading *No Country For Old Men* for the same reason, and I'm a thorough McCarthy disciple. His *Blood Meridian's* one helluva masterpiece, along with *The Crossing*, I feel the best of the trilogy, between *All The Pretty Horses*, and *Cities of The Plain*.

VdH: The bombing of the Twin Towers and the Pentagon with a close miss on The White House left the American people shaken. How did these events and the subsequent War against Terror contribute to the American neurosis towards the apocalypse syndrome?

KL: Drastically, at the time, but soon forgotten and even buried by the current administration and its sycophantic mainstream media.

VdH: It seems that the media split into dividing camps, one in support of President Bush's response to Terror Warfare when at first the media praised the President and backed his policy; then two years later it seems that the American media turned against President Bush, particularly after the capture of Saddam Hussain of Iraq, when no destructive nuclear weapons were found in the Iraq Military Armoury on the fall of Baghdad. What are your observations of the American media stance and how did the anti-Bush campaign influence you to write *Tamara Hunney*?

KL: It's so easy to hang the 'NO WEAPONS WERE FOUND' label, as an albatross about Bush's neck to qualify the hatred much of the media-brainwashed population bear towards Bush. But the media also hate Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, Winston Churchill, among other heroes. And with all due respect to Mandela, for instance, what about De Klerk, wasn't he party to the fall of apartheid, or was he just chopped liver? No,

it wasn't so much the campaign against Bush that inspired *Tamara Hunney*, but the predictable tract of deliberate ignorance espoused by mainstream here, and worldwide. As a result events have already started towards horrific international consequences. The United Nations' collection of dictatorships condemn Israel for existing, and on the strength of the worldwide dissolution of religion, thumbing its collective nose at God, putting them and ourselves in for divine retribution beyond our imaginings. This administration even has the gall to threaten Israel not to attack Iran's nuclear facilities on pain of having U.S. warplanes and missiles down Israeli pilots. And this guy's the President of Israel's one true ally? Give me a "freakin-break", as Tammy would say. Why I originally subtitled *Tamara Hunney* "SOON TO BE A MAJOR NON-FICTION", itself a parody on advertising logos, "SOON TO BE A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE". So, yes, some fat in the fire from Bush-bashing, much more from the previous and ongoing trend. Hence consider *Tamara Hunney* a prophetic novel in the vein of Orwell's *Animal Farm*. (1984)

VdH: Tamara Hunney is the name of the heroine, who together with Sam Winterstone, are survivors of a nuclear attack on America. In their pursuant trek for survival the story reveals the problem American society has with cult personality groups, such as Manson, Hugh Hefner, etc. In the novel this prototype is drawn in the character of Teal, the powerful and wealthy media mogul? Do cult societies still trouble America? If so, how influential are they in promoting crime, paedophile circles, and drug and sex racketeering?

KL: Yes, very influential, but Larry Flint, more than Hefner. The porn giants are considerable champions of paedophilia and drugs and all the rest, worshipped by all liberated pundits, *The World Upside Down*, Christopher Hill's book, making such points as when *Minim!* was playing in Britain church attendance in England was 60%, today it's 3%, churches are closing, most of the kids are born to single mothers, school's no more than a place they go to learn the three 'Rs'. No uniforms, no school pride, none of that. Kids are ignorant, drugging, living under bridges and on the dole. Prostitution in various forms is in practice in the USA as throughout Europe. God is finally eradicated, and these bozos think things will improve? You, in South Africa, are altogether blessed with schools the likes of Kearsney College, Hilton, Michaelhouse, if those are still thriving? Here, they're sending American kids home for carrying the Stars and Stripes flag during a Mexican holiday. Illegal aliens are called immigrants, running child sex-slave syndicates, arms, and drug enterprises at will, and what happens when Arizona forces the law, it gets condemned. But wait, Texas and Minnesota are about to crack down on illegal people too.

VdH: Looking at *Blood Oasis* as fiction in an African setting in this scenario your characters fall into different indigenous cultures. The narrative is set in Africa, with an interesting group of African heroes and a beautiful African heroine, but at the same time the context has cultural diversity among its character types who are Gurk, an elderly white African pioneer and who hails from an aristocratic European status. The heroine, Linda, is an American film star who is counterpoised by an African beauty whose life and soul are at stake. The context confirms that you continue to be influenced by African issues?

KL: I think African issues are international issues, family of man sort of thing, save some governments are less corrupt than others, few these days. The underlying struggles are

those of voiceless, brainwashed, disenfranchised minions hankering after true freedom and economic equality, and what happens? Greece, prime example, unions and government hand-in-hand, gone to destruction on retirees promised life time handouts; the younger generation can neither earn, afford, nor secure employment, why, because the private sector's eradicated.

VdH: The fiction, *Blood Oasis*, was first performed as a three-act play, titled *Waterhole*, at the Mark Taper Forum, Civic Center, Los Angeles, in 1985. Were the American audiences convinced at that time, of the dangers of the rising inter-tribal terror wave in Africa, and the dangers in the growing power grab by rebel Islamic forces?

K.L: Although the play *Waterhole* was well received in 1985, at that time the American public were not well informed on foreign affairs and felt secure in their limited boundaries although distant threatening Islamic issues would impact on US democracy by 2001. 9.11

VdH: Have you adapted to the American way of life and how much of its terrain, culture, and diversity of peoples help you to feel as if part of Africa is with you in the United States?

KL: You can't shed your roots. America, after forty years, is still novel to me, that's why I enjoy writing and painting it, and plugging for its God-fearing restoration to improve sector enterprise and give it a damned good dose of common sense.

NOTES

1. Biographical details and unpublished playscripts and poems were provided to Van der Heijden by Lascelles. (See Lascelles 2010).

2. Script supplied to Van der Heijden by Lascelles (2010).

CHAPTER 2

The 'African' Plays

(1) *The Trophy Hunters*
[A Play in One Act]

This play, published in 1970, was the first of Lascelles's three African scenario plays and was performed in the USA where, according to Lascelles, it was successfully received.

The play, *The Trophy Hunters* was first produced in tandem with my other one-act play, *Tigers* (1978-9) at The Company of Angels Theater, Los Angeles. Charlie Robinson played Hellalooya. William Glover played Stubb. I played Lang. Robert Miller directed both the plays, which were produced by J. De Wilde and Bill Snell. The plays received excellent reviews and ran about six weeks, Wednesday to Saturday nights only. Arthur Miller saw the production and suggested the play should be extended to two acts, which I did and it was produced at the Denver Center Theater Company (1986). Stack Pierce played Hellalooya. Stack was known as a brilliant TV and movie actor here. The man who played Stubb in Denver has since died. I can't recall the name of the actor who played Lang save he was brilliant and the reviews were tremendous. The play ran four weeks. Unfortunately my reviews are lost.

(Lascelles 2010)

When he wrote the play, Lascelles had recently left South Africa and the emotional content of the play colours the script. The plot explores the white man's diminishing presence in Africa, particularly what remains to an elderly English ex-patriot Stubb, who was once a legendary 'big-five' game hunter, a man at variance with himself and whose reactions foretell the inevitable demise of Western influence in sub-Saharan Africa. In the sunset of the British Empire he is nothing more than a displaced person between worlds. His mythical world can be seen in the décor setting and heard in his dialogue with others alien to his 'colonial' inheritance.

The set is described as:

the living room of an owner-built house in the middle of the African bush...no African curios or objects des primitive arts. Pictures should depict British Cavalry

charging into battle. The furniture is sparse and drab...Stubb's chair. Hellalooya, a middle-aged black man, is seated up stage, reading...Stubb winds the gramophone and plays a record...

(Lascelles 1970: 31)

Stubb is a broken man, recuperating from cerebral haemorrhage. The medical trope aligns the image of the personae to the deserted and crippled ex-patriots who were promised parcels of farming land in Africa on emigrating from England to colonise African lands. However, England's post-war policy changed from 'imperialism' to 'home-rule' and national independence. In contrast to colonial apathy, a vigorous group of African leaders emerge, Hellalooya representing the typical man-servant prepared for independence, a dignified and reserved figure, literate as a result of his master's teaching and one who can argue medical facts on Stubb's health. The trope suggests the disintegration of the colonial system and the rise of Africa's own people.

These events provide the setting. At that time in 1970 when the play was written, the majority of whites in Africa denied the feasibility of new political dispensations. The rise of African strength is contrasted in the weakening of Stubb, whose signature tune on the antiquated gramophone is anachronistic. Transitional Africa could not, would not 'fall into line,' and march with the British Grenadiers, as Stubb does in his moralistic leave-taking on the final curtain when he is left gazing from his window and sees vultures gathering over a carcass. (The trope is analogous to the carcass of the Englishman in Africa.)

LANG: What are you staring at all the time, hey?

HELLALOOYA: Vultures.

LANG: What vultures?

HELLALOOYA: Up there. They have been up there since early this morning.

LANG: Oh, ja I see them now...That's what you were staring at when I came in hey?

STUBB: Yes.

LANG: Hell man they're pretty high.

STUBB: Not as high as they were yesterday.

HELLALOOYA: Yesterday? Were they here yesterday?

STUBB: Yes and the day before.

(1970: 43)

The character Hellalooya is described as a middle-aged man of the locality beyond Beit Bridge, north of the Limpopo River. In years past when Hellalooya was a youth he had come to work for Stubb as a big game-tracker, and Stubb undertook his education, turning him into a literate adult. When the curtain rises Hellalooya is seated up stage, reading. Stubb treats Hellalooya patronizingly because he has educated him, but is, at the same time, totally dependent on him. Lang, the South African, who speaks with a clipped Afrikaans accent, enters and treats Hellalooya disdainfully. *The Trophy Hunters*, therefore, presents the audience with three personae types from different anthropological, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The dialogue between Lang and Stubb is dislocated. Stubb stubbornly (the puns stub-end, stubborn, are deliberate) refuses to acknowledge the arrival of Lang, although he has been peering through his windows for Lang's visit for months. Lang tells him that it is four months since his last visit and that it is now October. At the mention of October Stubb falls into a reverie on memories of his mythical England:

STUBB: Incredible. Oh I do love October...Brr. The best of all
Autumn...Chestnuts roasting...St James Park, London...I love Autumn...

(1970: 33)

We recognize here how place is overlaid with memory, and each person's memory contains personal emotions that are often incommunicable across racial and cultural boundaries. Lang cannot share Stubb's recollections of London. He brings Stubb back to reality by telling him that the Americans have walked on the Moon. Stubb replies:

"Twaddle!"

(36)

This dysfunctional dialogue has its humorous moments when in typical colonial parlance

Hellalooya, the black Rhodesian, is accused of stealing:

STUBB. Do you know what he does?

LANG. Alright man what?

STUBB: He steals my underpants. Steals them off my body sir, while I'm sleeping.

HELLALOOYA: I do not steal them.

STUBB: It's bloody humiliating waking up and finding yourself debagged every morning.

LANG: (to Hellalooya) What's the matter with you, hey?

HELLALOOYA: What do you suggest I do? Leave him to sleep in wet ones all night?

LANG: Give him a dry pair, man.

HELLALOOYA: I give him dry ones in the morning, at midday and in the evening...because he has only got two pairs.

(37)

Stubb's urinary weakness is a social embarrassment. The implicit point, however, is that although two white men are in discussion, the exchange is devoid of any meaningful communication. The white man in Africa is alone, single and deserted.

An argument breaks out between Lang and Stubb when Stubb declares Hellalooya to be his only friend:

STUBB: He's a good fellow, Evvie...He doesn't draw a salary. You know that, don't you? He doesn't have to stay on...I'm talking about friendship...

LANG: And you, man... you've given him plenty, all this blarry geography, history, sums, mathematics, every damn thing you taught him. The blokes even talk about that, hey, he's about the smartest bastard in the whole blarry area, and you taught him, man, you don't owe him a thing, I can tell you.

(50)

Here one hears the tone of sarcasm and resentment towards the African indigenous majority. Lang is true to his Afrikaner prototype: a man of independent culture, a man of the earth, a hardy 'trekker', and one who is ready to meet all contingencies according to his own rules, a man who can out-stare African danger and the roughest route. Stubb,

whose heritage is an English cultural background with a heritage of ‘class distinction’ latent to loyalty with Queen and Empire, looks at Africa through a mist. In contrast, Hellalooya is African born, a man whose dialogue is self-possessed, self-confident and not estranged because Africa is his home; his language is slow and thoughtful, patiently waiting for the only possible outcome of majority rule when minority white power capitulates to the majority.

Stubb yearns to go down the road to Mwanza and see “the boys in the local village pub”.

The following dialogue echoes vacuous colonial pub-talk on African evenings:

STUBB: Do me a favour old boy...Don't tell them that I wet my pants...That part of my brain's gone dead you see, I can't feel the sensation which is supposed to register, so I wet my pants...So you still gather at Sarrels...

LANG: Ja.

STUBB: And look out across the Vic?

LANG: Just sit there and look out across the lake is right hey?

STUBB: And my name comes up?

LANG: All the time man.

(40)

In the course of the dialogue, Stubb refers to his past hunting experiences, and recalls the death of a wildebeest. The wild cow wildebeest lay in the grass oblivious of his presence. A grub from a wasp's sting had entered the wildebeest's brain through the bloodstream where the larvae feed on the cells until the animal is mindless. Stubb recalls:

STUBB: She just lay there in the grass quite still...Do you know what I did...I went up to her and chucked her...you know. Chuck, chuck, chuck, chuck! Like that, under the chin.

(46)

Metaphorically this symbolizes the way the white Rhodesians and ex-patriots felt when British power in Westminster seemed like an apathetic brute suffering Alzheimer's disease.

The premise of the play is kept deliberately simple: the playwright explores attitude towards 'the wind of change' in Africa. His three characters are simultaneously individuals and types. Exploitation of Africa is evident as Stubb points out:

“The whole bloody continent’s gone to pot...look at that desolation...I haven’t seen a herd in years...I haven’t seen a herd of bloody grasshoppers...I’ve got a mind to take my savings and go back to London...I could get a comfortable little flat right on King’s Road for a few pounds.”

(47)

Again Stubb retreats in his scenes and ramblings to a London that no longer exists. He is an ex-patriot of a past era; Lang reinforces the point, his crude expression cutting through Stubb’s delusions. There can be no friendship between settler and indigene, not even between particular individuals like Stubb and Hellalooya:

LANG: Friendship hey?

STUBB: Yes. If you really put your mind to it and when it comes down to brass tacks he’s the only true friend I have.

LANG: Now I’ve heard everything, hey.

STUBB: I don’t need your South African prejudice...

LANG: That’s just what I mean about brass tacks, you should think about everything...and not just washing your blarry underpants...the payments on petrol and provisions, hey?

STUBB: Johnson’s got strict instructions to deduct everything from my savings.

LANG: That’s what I mean, what savings...?

STUBB: My savings, they’re there!

LANG: Just shurrup for one second! The pilot, the petrol, the cost of hiring the helicopter, the medicine, doctor’s fees...Stubb just open your eyes and think about the world out there today, man. There are ous* walking round on the moon and Queen Victoria is dead.

(ous*: South African idiom for men.)

(53)

The Trophy Hunters, with its all-male cast, typifies masculine patriarchy in a segregated African context. Unlike Hollywood films that create heterosexual romance in African hunting scenarios, the theatre script avoids sexual embellishments; there is no hint of a feminine presence in the elderly hunter’s past or present; and neither does the playwright burden the script with such allusions. Yet behind the realism there is the hint of romance in

the literary trope: that of a quest. The quest is the trophy, the treasure is Africa, the premise is the struggle between the hunter who dreams of a return to the lost imperial past and Hellalooya, the new hero who speaks for African freedom as the curtain comes down.

Paradoxically, however, the ending is not celebratory. What lingers in the mind is a callous, all-male world. Lascelles avoids the Hollywood formula (the Rider Haggard formula) of the female trophy. His ploy is to suggest a loss of feminine regeneration. In this sense the play was prophetic: African freedom has proved to be a ‘big man’ affair. In Zimbabwe the ‘big man’ Smith (like Stubb, an anachronism) gave way to another ‘big man’, Mugabe, who, like Hellalooya, had imbibed Western education, but who has ended up tyrannizing his own people. Twenty-first century Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society. *The Trophy Hunters* is the only work by Lascelles that excludes a feminine presence.

(2) ***Exclusive Circles***
[A Play in Two Acts]

The play was written in 1981 when Lascelles was ‘in-house dramatist’ to the Denver Theater Company, Denver, Colorado, where *Exclusive Circles* was first performed. Stage directions have the playing area as

The living room of a large and opulent house in the hills, overlooking the city of Durban, South Africa. A Front door u.b. A door s.l. leading into a kitchen. An exit way or hallway u.r leading into the house. Windows with glimpses of vivid flora. Bougainvillea. Honeysuckle and sky beyond...Furniture...A large hifi and radio cabinet ...silver sculpture of a galloping horse about 18 inches high occupies a place of quiet prominence...A large pair of field binoculars in a leather case stands permanently on one of the window sills.

(Lascelles 1981: n.p)

Nel du Plessis Davis is described as a British colonial matriarch in her mid-to-late sixties.

She is married for a second time; firstly she was Mrs du Plessis and secondly, Mrs Davis. Bosman du Plessis is her eldest son, and Kline is his half-brother. Kline Davis is from Nel's second marriage and represents an easy-going English-speaking liberalism, and as in *The Trophy Hunters*, the characters are both individuals and types. The play depicts the Afrikaner (Dutch) as South Africa's first 'farmers', and the British as the 'colonial power'. Kline is an artist who lives and works in the gold-mining metropolis of Johannesburg, where he shares his liberal sympathies for change with black and white friends. He arrives home in Durban on a visit to his mother, and his presence provokes a catalyst of converging and opposing emotions. In terms of dramatic action Kline's presence 'deconstructs' apartheid absolutism in what appears to be a normal South African household, where the possibility of a majority democratic government, under the then imprisoned Nelson Mandela, is unrealistic to the minority white South African electorate. In contrast to Kline is Bossie, his half-brother. Bossie du Plessis is a colonel in the Security Branch of the police. His portfolio is to denounce 'communist activists', who support Mandela's political agenda.

The scenario highlights the upper-middle class, English-speaking society of Durban during the Emergency Promulgation, when people disappeared in 'detention without trial'. Working within Durban's privileged white society is their maid Millicent Dabeni, of whom Nel Davis says:

"Victoria... sent her to me as soon as she had finished school...I got her papers and everything...she's turned into a wonderful maid and runs this entire house top to bottom...and she's doing a correspondence course with a business school as well. She tells me she wants to be a secretary someday".

(1981: Act 1.Sc.1)

This small excerpt establishes 'madam and maid' as the accepted norm from one generation to the other. Millicent (the daughter of Victoria), however, has other ambitions

in her efforts at self-education towards a secretarial career, which would be an unusual achievement under the reactionary attitudes of predominantly white office staff.

The following lines of dialogue anticipate the political theme when Kline asks of

Millicent:

KLING: How's your brother Ben doing these days?

Nel interrupts.

NEL: While I was waiting for master Kline at the airport, I saw this tall handsome Zulu in a grey suit, and a hat and dark glasses, and I thought he was Benjamin for a moment.

Millicent drops the cups and spills the tea, and Nel remarks:

NEL: Goodness child you're trembling like a leaf, now it's only a broken cup...

The sharp juxtapositions of Nel's ease and Millicent's reaction capture the underlying tensions. Nel lives a sociable life; Millicent is terrified of her brother's safety, and as it transpires in the course of the action, the consequences to her family resulting from her brother's involvement with the militant wing of a banned political organisation.

Kline is an artist with a cosmopolitan manner, who unwittingly introduces conflict into the family 'exclusive circle'. His untypical social intimacy – a sexual intimacy is suggested – with Millicent and adds to her expression of fear:

You do not understand what life is like for me outside this house, master. The other servants are already suspicious of me because the madam is the mother of Colonel Bossie du Plessis. They look at us with suspicion...I was at a funeral near Kwa Mashu Township. There was a girl there. Someone pointed to her and shouted "Collaborator." The mob rushed at her, pulled off her clothes, kicked her unconscious and poured petrol on her and burned her to death...

(2:1)

Despite the playwright's long absence from South Africa the play mounts its critique of apartheid. The audience is drawn into the dark world of a police state, its violence explicit in the townships behind the apparent calm of white suburbia. Yet unlike the unrelieved

masculinity of *Trophy Hunters*, the action of *Exclusive Circles* is leavened by the female characters, whether politically naïve Nel or politically aware Millicent. Between the extremes of Nel and Millicent, Lascelles introduces Hannie, the wife of the Security Branch officer. It is Hannie, an Afrikaner, who has stepped beyond the stereotype, and who redefines any simple black/white dichotomies. Like Kline she reminds the audience of the redemptive possibility of a ‘feminine principle’ of love and generosity in an oppressive society as a dramatic trope against apartheid patriarchy. Her husband, Bosman du Plessis, in contrast, is the representative of a chauvinist system as conveyed in his confidential chat to his half-brother Kline:

BOSSIE: ...the point I'm driving at is personal...Intelligence; I have to share with you...not a joking matter. So shut up and listen, it's to do with your friendship with Millie...

KLINE: Millie? What've I done with Millicent?

BOSSIE: Nothing... but, Millie's being watched. Supposedly Solomon is dead. [Millie's brother] Fifty pounds of dynamite's the easiest way to dispose of bodies, blood, bones...to make them disappear...Solomon was in a work party of five...we never found the other four, two years ago we got word that they were seen, all four of them, over the border, Solomon included, they're involved ...with Inkatha...one of our informants tells us that Millicent goes to Clermont or Kwa-Mashu whenever a certain visitor comes to town, she's connected and it all points to the possibility that its him.

[Whether it is Inkatha or the ANC is never established]

(2.2)

Circumstances thwart both Millicent and Hannie, while Nel descends into a caricature of colonialism. Yet the play insists on the value of tenderness and understanding and not institutionalised brute force. The tone had been captured in the early exchange between Kline and Millicent:

MILLICENT: I have not forgotten, my childhood or you or the farm, or the horses, or how we used to all splash in the river together...but we are not those children anymore...we are adults in an adult world and we have both changed...I am the employed...I choose and am comfortable in addressing you, master.

(1.1)

Millicent respectfully maintains her distance. In her current circumstances she knows her status and social responsibility. There is, however, a deeper reason for Millicent to distance herself from any intimacy and that is her need to shield others from violence that might descend on them as a result of her brother's political activism. Kline, however, continues to confide in Millicent. He speaks of his experience in Johannesburg's Baragwanath Hospital where, in endless file, the elderly, starving, and abandoned human beings seek a corner to die. The dialogue in this episode is empathic in its appeal beyond race divisions. Millicent is looking at one of Kline's sketches, "The Old Man on the Blanket", drawn in Baragwanath Hospital. Kline recalls to Millicent:

He...had such incredible eyes. I haven't really caught them there. That's all he had, the blanket and the space it took up on the hallway floor and that shoebox, well he just sat so still. Like a sculpture smiling, strangely, wistfully like praying. I got totally engrossed sketching...I heard him sigh ...I looked up he was falling over, I reached out to stop him...he grabbed my arm with such force...he reached the other arm around me and just clung...not a word and then slowly, slowly let go...I let him down...I don't think he knew I was there in the end...when we came back they'd already taken him. Blanket and all but left the shoebox...money was gone, but the string of beads was still there.

(1.2)

The particular social condition intrudes: the under-resourced medical care for black patients.

In contrast to Kline's social conscience, his mother Nel enters, bedecked in diamonds and dressed for dinner in honour of Kline's visit. (Her costumery summarises the point.)

Kline's disinheritance focuses the family portrait.

We see Hannie swallowing 'sundowners' to drown her misery of marital incompatibility.

We learn that she had hoped to marry Kline whom she loved. But Kline was disinherited

by his father when Kline persisted in pursuing a penniless artistic career instead of entering the South African industrial mining system. Fearing for her financial security Hannie married Bosman. She confides to Kline that Bossie's profession as a 'Colonel' in the Security Branch "makes her flesh creep" and the marriage is sour:

HANNIE: Driving off on our honeymoon, he took the road past the townships. "Bossie," I pleaded. "Please don't drive past the black townships". "Don't worry," he said honking the horn down the road ...and sure enough a bunch of kids threw rocks at us... but Bossie stuck his head out of the window shouting: "Missed you black...K's (expletives). I said, "Us in a big flashy car, me in a frilly white wedding dress, they in their bare feet and rags, man how do you think they feel?" "Screw them," he says. Perfect start to a wedding! Kline you haven't kissed me?

(1.2)

Kline responds to Hannie's pain; he takes her in his arms and they recapture their love, briefly. Nel is angered, however, when she discovers a romantic liaison between Kline and Hannie; she regards their affair as 'incestuous adultery' (2.2)

Unknown to Kline and the family, the home is under radio surveillance; nothing is private even in exclusive circles. During a broadcast of a racing event Nel's horse wins the thoroughbred stakes of the season. The celebration is marred though when the Security Police barge in and, acting on instructions, arrest Millicent on no other pretext than that she is the sister of a wanted political activist, Solomon:

BOSSIE: You two have got me into a helluva lot of trouble, hey. My superiors have wired this house without me knowing ...how could you do this to me, Kline, Milly? I could be thrown off the bloody force! (to Millicent) They're waiting for you, my girl. You've got to go. They want to question you at Central.

(2.2)

Pointedly, the dialogue concentrates on Bossie's only concern that Kline's sympathy for Millicent has "got him into trouble". Millicent is taken into custody at Durban Central Police Headquarters, a notorious holding facility, from where she does not return.

The ending is bleak, yet the bleakness has the dramatic effect of emphasising by contrast the small moments of tenderness, sympathy, even love that characterise Kline's catalytic relationships with both Hannie and Millicent.

In retrospect, a South African audience today might argue that the dialogue attributed to Millicent is too sophisticated a vocabulary for a Zulu maid of that period. The playwright's aim in dialogue, however, is to distinguish between the acid corrosion of discrimination and the human capacity to realise one's potential. (The references to Millicent's studying are not extraneous and point forward to a future South Africa which has produced the likes of Dr Mamphela Ramphele.) This notwithstanding, we do the play an injustice if we simply remove it from its specific time and place: the dark days of the apartheid past. Its menace intruding into exclusive circles is its strength. Its conviction of possibilities beyond race is its ongoing value. That it bequeaths value of significance to its younger female characters lends it an accent of contemporaneity.

Exclusive Circles has never been performed in South Africa. It would be interesting to gauge audience reaction to its revival in the country of Lascelles's birth.

(3) *Blood Oasis*

[A Play in Three Acts]

Written in the early 1980s and first produced in 1985 in the New Theater for New Festival at the Mark Taper Forum, Civic Center, Los Angeles, the three-act play *Legends* was subsequently revised as *Waterhole* in 1994 and again, in 2007, under the title *Blood Oasis*. Modifications took account of new developments in the Darfur region, the action taking its spur from the conflict between indigenous inhabitants and Jihad Arab rebels supported by

the government (or its 'warlord' composition) of Sudanese President Omar Al Bashir, who currently has an arrest warrant issued against him by the International Criminal Court at the Hague for war crimes against humanity.

The conflict, in brief, encompasses an international economic dimension and political power play, the latter embroiled within racial conflict (major economic interests in the north-western Sahara desert – the extraction of natural resources – attract international competition). As in the plays discussed so far, Africa – this time Africa beyond its southern confines – is the place, real and symbolic, that compels, or has continued to compel, Lascelles's imagination. As in *Exclusive Circles*, a male, patriarchal world is leavened by the involvement of women characters. Characters – again, as in the two foregoing discussed plays – who serve also as types. We encounter colonial males; Nubians; and a Hollywood film star whose liberal 'human rights' (an easy multiculturalism) is set in contrast to an intransigent, and male-dominated African reality, both in its indigenous and colonial attitudes and behaviour.

According to Lascelles (2010) his interest in the Darfur region was initially prompted by Leni Riefenstahl (1901-2001) who, in 1973, lived with the Nuba tribe of Kau in north-eastern Somalia. In her book, *The Nuba of Kau* (1976), she found the Nuba to be a magnificent people who had survived desert conditions within an Iron Age culture. An element of romantic photo-shoot aside, Riefenstahl was concerned when on her return in 1987 she sensed political danger with Nubians being harassed and under attack from insurgents who were backed by the Islamic government in Khartoum. Government regulations had re-drawn boundaries and restricted 'tribal' movement under ordinances

originally introduced by the British colonial system in 1922 as ‘closed districts’, described by Mamdani as:

...a number of legal ordinances that gave combined administrative and judicial power to officials in the native authority... beginning with nomadic sheiks those ordinances were to extend to sheiks in villages. The 1927 Powers of Shayks Ordinance built on the 1922 Nomad Shayks Ordinance. The most disenfranchised in this arrangement were pastoralist groups whose very mode of life was based on seasonal movements.

(Mamdani, 2009:160)

Consequently, the Nuba lost their rights to traditional desert land, ‘closed districts’ being reminiscent of apartheid ‘removals’.

The play commences with a young semi-nude and manacled Sino African woman, Sukari, led onto centre stage. The sound of a faulty helicopter interrupts the concentration of Gurk, who is laying detonations around his campsite. The pilot of the helicopter, a South African named Gerry Walsh, enters. His beautiful passenger is Linda Vaughn. These are the main characters, together with Matata, as described in the playscript.

The setting is sketched:

An arid encampment under the branches of a huge baobab tree that rises U.B. of the stage and is surrounded with the paraphernalia of the trading camp, sacks of rice and grains from UNICEF, fifty-five gallon gasoline drums sawn in half. Two antiquated Browning Machine guns. An iron bed topped with a tick mattress, a table, primitive chairs and a wood stove. Animal cage eight feet high by three and a half square. Books on makeshift book shelves. Military gear is thrown about. There is an assortment of elephant’s tusks, leopard skins, horns of African gazelle. From the tree branches hang African woodcarvings and masks, African beadwork and crates of vivid bolts of materials, Persian rugs, kerosene lanterns, machine parts, toolboxes and a broken radio transmitter. Lights up on the cyclorama U.B. suggest a white-hot cloudless sky. The crowing of a rooster is heard. (Lascelles 1)

[Gurk: barefoot, in threadbare khaki pants below the knees, and an old tank top. Gurk is obviously a recluse and his clothing denotes his lonely and hardy living conditions under a hot desert sun against which he never wears or dons a hat at any time.

Matata carries a camel cane, wears a white turban and a dust-stained white robe. They crossed the desert by camel caravan which should be heard off-stage, and which is due to be loaded with supplies.

Sukari, barefoot, should appear naked through an almost transparent shift, she wears a thong, is natural and proud and unaware of any shame in nudity. Rather like one of the lost tribe of Amazon women last mentioned in 1300 B.C. [See photo studies by Riefenstahl]

Walsh, the helicopter pilot, is dress conscious and sees himself as the Safari evening campfire Don Juan. He believes he is irresistible to women. He wears a safari suit (that means a safari jacket and matching khaki pants), leopard skin banded bush hat. Gold watch, gold-rimmed shades, and his deportment is vain.

Linda Vaughn, the American film star from Hollywood. Enters the scene wearing fashionable, faded blue denim jeans over western boots (of 17" shanks), a pastel blouse and sun hat and carries a splendid fringed leather shoulder bag of Native American handwork.]

(Lascelles 2007:1)

The descriptions – as a guide to directors – immediately point to both individual types and prototypes, from the manacled Sukari to Gurk the trader, to Walsh the South African pilot and Linda Vaughn, the Hollywood film star.

Gurk, who hails from Germany's aristocratic circles, is an elderly trader at his outpost beneath a baobab tree over his waterhole in dusty dry sands. Gurk knows the desert, its people and trade routes. Matata, a chief's son of the Kau-Nuba tribe, arrives by camel train with his cargo Sukari, who is intended for the harem of Arab Sultan, Bakali. The manacled girl is the arranged betrothal gift between Nuba chief Kaud and the wealthy and powerful Sultan. Linda Vaughn is on a UN mercy mission, and her portfolio is to pose with dying women and children in order to raise world awareness and funds for the refugees' relief camp in not so distant Darfur. To Linda the assignment is just another fund-raising publicity stunt for charity. The arrangement was to fly in, shoot photographs, and fly out, but the helicopter has been shot at and damaged. The pilot has had to make an emergency

landing at Gurk's trading post, Wodoji. Such details are provided – Ibsen-like – in the opening exchanges of dramatic dialogue. An advance warning of the strangers approaching had been heralded by 'Junkyard', a crowing cock.

Linda is shocked when she sees the manacled young woman who, we learn, is to be evaluated as 'bride price'. The shock signals the beginning of Linda's conversion in the course of the action from the, albeit, well-meaning liberal in the language of the Civil Rights movement, to a person who has to learn her own hard lessons of African reality, prior to her involvement, not only in a love interest with Gurk, but also in a political and cultural clash between worlds. The personal stories are intertwined with public events. We hear that Sukari is in love with Matata, who reports to Gurk on the nature of Sukari's unwilling delivery as a potential bride. Cultural differences are invoked here between modern and pre-modern marriage codes:

MATATA: He brings you 10 camels: 5 tolas of gold.

LINDA: Who is she?

WALSH: She's what Kaud's trading Miss Vaughn.

GURK: Whom he's trading. Her name is Sukari, Miss Vaughn ...she's a virgin going to the Sultan Bakali. He re-stocks his harem every couple of years.

LINDA: What? (2007. Act 1:5)

Linda says that she will report Gurk for slaving:

LINDA: The minute we get back to Gwabere I'll report him to UNICEF, to the Red Cross, the World Council on Human Rights, the United Nations...to that U.N. attaché we're going to tonight.

(5)

Linda intervenes. Gurk, the old trader in Africa, is at first taken aback by her vehemence. He has become immune to a language of liberal democracy. His 're-education', his return to sensitivity towards individuals in modernity, is provoked by Linda's own learning experience: from Hollywood star to concerned individual human being. Such is the core

tension, the personal story as microcosmic of the political story: new insights into the difficulties of cultural difference. Initial positions are captured in the early exchanges:

GURK: Her mother was raped by several Chinese sailors in Mogadishu. So instead of stoning the poor woman to death, or killing her baby at birth, which most of these tribes do with illegitimate half-castes, they consulted the witch doctor ...who told them our Sukari here would grow up very beautiful ...she must remain a virgin to be sold to the Sultan's harem when she comes of age. She is of age.

LINDA: Slavery? You're slaving ...?

GURK: Let me paint the local picture for you, Miss Vaughn. Here's the poverty-stricken little clan stripped of their land by government and droughts, further starving themselves to keep a beautiful half-caste healthy enough to fetch a price, and, lo and behold, here comes Jubijubi on his one eared donkey riding like some heaven-sent benefaction out of the saffron dusts.

LINDA: And who's Jubijubi?

GURK: The sultan Bakali's harem scout. He's heard by word of mouth of this extraordinary beauty harboured by Kaud's clan...and comes to see for himself. "Gadzooks", he proclaims on setting eyes on her naked splendour...and offers Kaud ten camels and five tolas of gold on Bakali's behalf...I'm assuring justice in an age-old tradition.

LINDA: Justice?

GURK: In the harem trade.

(Act 1: 19)

An ancient code is invoked: Stone the woman and kill the baby at birth; or trade off the girl at puberty to prostitution or, preferably, to a harem, if the young woman is fortunate. This statement reflects actual practices that, in Nuba culture, have persisted along East Africa's ocean seaboard. However, contemporary political power play is not absent. Linda offers to buy Sukari in order to set her free. At this stage the intervention is interpreted as naïve and unfeasible. Both Gurk and Walsh convey to Linda that any 'report' to the United Nations would be unlikely to be followed up.

Both Walsh and Gurk convince Linda that any 'report' to the Human Rights and UNO is absurd. Mamdani validates such an argument in the following account:

The primary acquisition of slaves was carried out by local merchants or chiefs who fought one another and then exchanged their captives for products acquired through long distance trade. Abu Salih, an Armenian thirteenth century writer, states that slaves and cattle were bartered for manufactured goods near upper Maqs, where the Lord of the Mountain was said to reside...Slave raiders were from three groups: the Fur trading parties sent by the sultan southwards...The Baggara of the Fulani immigrants.

(quoted in Mamdani 2009: 135)

Linda Vaughn learns that slavery is older than freedom and her mission of mercy to Africa is a rude awakening.

LINDA: If you're deliberately goading me Mr Gurk, don't. Besides being shot at and seeing things I've never seen before in my life, I'm about up to here with it all.

(Act 1: 22)

In such comment – the seriousness of the issue is handled in semi-colloquial qualifiers – Lascelles aptly captures Linda's 'American' naivety, a naivety captured in dialogue and attitude straight out of Los Angeles and not aware of Africa's older practices or current Islam Jihad conflicts. A play, however, is not a sociological treatise. With an almost old-world shift of register Gurk, behind his brusqueness, reveals a streak of gallantry, a kind of older 'Hollywood' tradition than the contemporary Hollywood which Linda Vaughn typifies:

LINDA (demands): Sell her to me!

Gurk is ambiguous when he replies:

GURK: Sell her to you's tantamount to my committing suicide, and condemning her to death into the bargain...So don't stand here talking about buying her to save her from a fate worse than ...

LINDA: Well what would you want?

(Gurk is ambiguous when he replies):

GURK: You. (Waits through her amazed silence) I'd want you to sit down and have dinner with me while he (Walsh) flies her home...I'd shower and shave and wear a tux; I mean you don't think I'd sit down to dinner with you and me looking like this, do you?

(Act 1: 25)

Walsh is anxious to get Linda to safety, and to be alone with the star, whom he intends to seduce:

WALSH: What have you said that's made her so mad, man? She's been a bitch with me all day. You know me? They're usually in the sack before they're in the air...

GURK...before she got here. What happened at Wodoji? [Refugee Camp]

WALSH: Oh, some kid died close up and personal. But she was O.K. before that.

GURK: Then you put down at a sacked camp strewn with headless corpses, right? A troubling day for her, never mind her philanthropic agenda, fact finding for her magazine...

WALSH: She's not a journalist. She's a movie star!

GURK: I see the problem now...being pampered by leading men ...don't forget underneath the movie star there's a woman ...with a streak of motherhood instinct ...as wide as the bloody Nile...you'll have to be nice to her first...do something magnanimous...something humanitarian...The knight in shining armour.

WALSH: (Linda re-enters) I don't mean to hurry you, Miss Vaughn, but...

LINDA: Could we take Sukari?

WALSH: Sukari? No. Why?

LINDA: I've bought her.

WALSH: What for?

LINDA: My diamond bracelet.

WALSH: She's not worth that!

LINDA: Oh, what is she worth, considering Gurk's got to guarantee the rest of his life, gunning down a squad of raiders in the morning? What is she worth, Gerry?

(Act 1: 36-37)

Perhaps there is a faint echo here of Mel Gibson (Walsh) confronting Humphrey Bogart (Gurk)! Or, Linda changing from one Sharon Stone role to another: she pulls a gun on Walsh, who capitulates in the face of her determination to right a wrong. Walsh agrees to fly Sukari home (to her tribe and beloved Matata). Linda dines with Gurk. The stage direction defines the ambience:

Gurk and Linda partially visible under the shower together. They kiss before he steps out...

LINDA: Do you think we're attached in time...and sort of gravitate toward one another until somewhere in time and space we click like molecules?
(Closing and kissing him)

I love your smell...Alan the (film) director was my first and only ...but, I've never felt so right as I do now...I keep wanting to say something ridiculous like I love you...

GURK: I'd want to believe it...

GURK: You know, until now, with you getting down from the Bell [helicopter] this morning and seeming to go right through me like a bullet, I was thinking about...

(Act 2: 51)

True to the ironic shift of conventions – from an ‘issue play’ to a romantic adventure – a sex scene concludes dinner (but a scene in the ‘older tradition’; gentlemanly, the possibility of love as a transforming power) and a battle scene (the sound off stage) sees right triumph over wrong, at least as a conservative, as distinct from a promiscuous, modern morality play. So concludes the action: Sukari is not recaptured; Gurk’s consciousness and conscience are re-awoken by Linda Vaughn who, in turn, tempers her initially fashionable ‘human rights’ responses with a more complex understanding of the real challenges of difference, of multiculturalism, as more than a US melting pot. The crowing of the cock, ‘Junkyard’, effectively marks shifts in action and tone.

Given heightened sensitivities post-9/11 to Western/Arabic or Christian/Islamic tensions, could *Blood Oasis* now strike an audience as hinting at ‘Islamaphobia’? I doubt it. The play does not condemn Islam or champion any uniform Christian or Western code of belief or behaviour. As Lascelles reveals in interview (see Chapter 1), his concern is that Western-Christianity has somewhat lost its own sense of seriousness, or at least its own distinctions between right and wrong. Yet, if Lascelles is conservative, he seems to be that modern amalgam of a romantic-conservative. Does *Blood Oasis* subscribe to a view that Africa is trapped in a patriarchal, pre-modern past? Not unambiguously. The action does not endorse Sukari’s entrapment. It does invest her, instead, with a dignity, a reserve that is the

consequence of traditional mores. These are the mores that Linda Vaughn learns to incorporate into her initially too-easy subscription to a liberal ‘human rights’ response. African tradition is made to qualify Western liberalism, but not to the exclusive advantage of either.

Aware that issues can blunt dramatic representation, Lascelles attempts a daring play on theatrical convention, shifting in and out of Hollywood modes. There is a risk here, particularly as far as the female characters are concerned. Sukari embodies her dignity, at one point, in having to fight, literally, for her freedom (in the final battle scene). Linda, as I have indicated, falls in love with Gurk. Yet the play – if directed with due sensitivity to its balance of moral attitudes and dramatic conventions – has the capacity to grant to the women characters powers to effect a change, to call into question ‘masculinist attitudes’ as we have seen also in *Exclusive Circles*. Realism and romance, in their literary manifestations, represent the two generic categories, which Lascelles – it is beginning to be clear – interweaves in his response to writing between, or perhaps as in *Blood Oasis*, across worlds.

Such summarising observations offer a useful introduction to his novel, *Tamara Hunney*, the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Tamara Hunney

A 'Post-apocalyptic' Novel

Prior to recasting *Blood Oasis* as a play Lascelles had explored its subject in narrative form. Yet dramatic representation seems to be his imaginative metiere. His other prose narratives, *A Child's Guide to Heresy* (2010) and *Tamara Hunney* (2006) both turn to novelistic account what may be identified as dramatic-poetic presentations in terms of character, dialogue and setting. *Child's Guide to Heresy*, which I do not discuss, utilises a high proportion of direct speech in a favoured 'playscript' form – that of the trial. (Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* comes to mind here.) *Tamara Hunney*, too, invests exchanges of direct speech with considerable power – in fact, character portrayal relies not so much on psychological interiority as on techniques of foreshortening, in which, as in the oral mode, characters reveal themselves in both the substance and accent of their speech. Settings are evoked with economy: a scarcity of adjectives, an acute eye for detail in which the object (the rocky trail) is the adequate symbol, thus suggesting a backdrop of 'scene painting', while the plot is contracted to the stages of a quest in a movement, again somewhat reminiscent of dramatic convention, in separate, but interlinked, 'acts'.

As is evident from the 'blurb,' the novelistic genre in which *Tamara Hunney* is located was immediately identified by the publisher's readers as a post-911 'apocalyptic' fiction. To lend a further dimension to the trope of writing between worlds, Lascelles in this novel might be said to have written himself out of a destructive present and towards a redemptive future. Rewritten since its initial publication in present tense syntax (the playwright asserting himself?), *Tamara Hunney* will probably not be familiar to readers. A synopsis, therefore, is in order.

The plot concerns a devastated American landscape as a result of an EMP (Earth Magnetic Pulse) atomic blast. Electrical power and communications break down. Contemporary times turn to savage survival. Tamara is an abused teenage orphan. After escaping roaming gangs, she meets an elderly Christian cowboy, Sam Winterstone, who has returned to a faith in God the Creator. He is in sharp contrast to modern American trends arising after the Woodstock Rock Festival of 1969, a festival marked by sexual liberation and a drug culture in its mid-century rejection of conservative values. Tamara insists on staying with Sam who, she finds, is the first person to respect her being. Together they in-span a team of steers and a few riding mounts, and set out from Los Angeles to Denver in a vain attempt to find Tamara's only relative, Aunt Tilly. The journey tests courage, fortitude and survival against both the winter elements and specimens of a morally destructive humanity.

Such moral collapse is graphically portrayed when Sam and Tamara accept the hospitality of media mogul, John Teal, who symbolises much that Lascelles (we recall his remarks in his interview in Chapter 1) sees as wrong with modern America in particular and modern Western society in general: the destruction of family values; sexual licence including child abuse, and the pervasive and often pernicious power of the commercial media. Tamara and Sam escape the mogul's mansion and head towards the Navajo Indian reserves. The shaman, Flying Hawk, regards John Teal as the man who killed his granddaughter, Sue Ellen, or Mooncloud by her Navajo name, as well as his granddaughter, Desert Lilly. Consequently, Flying Hawk colludes with Sam to trap the Teal posse that has set out to hunt down Sam and Tamara for a bounty of steers. The climax comes amidst thundering hooves of driven herds, on open desert plains, where Sam and Teal clash as forces of good and evil in a 'cowboy Western' shootout in which Teal is killed and Sam barely escapes alive. Under Indian tribal law Sam and Tamara conclude a symbolic marriage as Pretty Bait

and True Redemption in a hybrid Navajo-cum-Christian ceremony.

Stated so baldly the novel could seem to be operating at the simple 'good-versus-evil' morality of the generic conventions it deliberately invokes: those of the popular Western within the romance tradition. Yet we are alerted in the numerous exchanges between characters that the romance can involve a serious examination of issues, a trait which I identified in the previous chapter in my discussion of *Blood Oasis*. We may recall here the distinctions between literary realism and literary romance. Literary realism, according to Ian Watt's influential study *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), has 'formal realism' superseding earlier pre-modern, pre-bourgeois romance modes (the epics of classical and mediaeval inheritance). The key distinctions are: romances are set in an unchanging, mythic time and space; realism depicts the detail of modernising societies in which time is not cyclical (the rhythms of the seasons), but causal (cause giving rise to logical effect); romances utilise typical heroes (denoted by strong, singular qualities such as courage or cowardice); realism draws psychologically inward, individual characters; romances find resolution to idealised oppositions; realism often rejects resolution as not true to particular experience.¹

It would seem that Watt regards realism as an advance (at least, in literary conventional terms) on romance. Yet critics such as Gillian Beer (1970) make a strong counter-claim for the 'truth' of the romance mode: abstract issues are 'taught' within experiential and imaginative plots in which we enter the sharp but testing human colourings of what, once we strip away our tendency to complexity, remain the core values of any civilisation, whether of the past or present: how do we conduct our lives in ways that are not destructive but creative; how do we surmount the testings that confront us along the journeys of life? Fundamental to the continuing hold over our imaginations of the romance mode is its

human capacity to interpret experience allegorically, whether in the children's folktale or the adult quest. I am being schematic. Rarely in the literary work do realism and romance not to a degree overlap, thus complicating each other's mode of perception. While Lascelles, I argue, works within the romance convention, the opening section of *Tamara Hunney* sketches a devastated landscape with a harsh realism of detail and dialogue. The novel opens on these lines:

THE NIGHT, as every other the girl thus far survives since the pulse-blast, darkens devoid of all electrical power, lies putrid with the stench of death, and lurks with slow-dying gangs of rapacious marauders. During her search for a safe place to sleep, she sees several moonlit men prowling half-naked between the weeds and derelict vehicles blocking the boulevard alongside the old Warner Brothers lot, and they catch sight of her. (Lascelles 2010: 6)

Of these opening lines critic Gary Sorkin (2010:27) observes that Lascelles "lassoes" his reader's attention.

The girl, at this point unnamed, escapes being gang raped by hiding overnight with rats in a culvert. But what she sees by the first light of dawn is as repulsive as the day before. The narrative continues:

She rose and peeked out...the man drew behind him a bare breasted woman...a filthy length of rope tethered about her neck...she felt her way and croaked at him to slow down. A cat hung by its tail from his other hand...dribbled blood from mouth and ears...

(2010:9)

The focus is not on the causes of the atomic blast. Rather, apocalypse is the metaphorical expression of a failure at both individual and governmental level. While Tamara and Sam focus the issue on the experience of individual lives, an array of character-spokespersons whom we encounter along the way (the Bunyanesque technique of *The Pilgrim's Progress*), sound the wider concerns. Such is the case of the Afro-American Morgan Warrington who

meets up in the evening with Tamara and Sam and who, in expressive 'stage' language, is critical of Washington DC and its foreign policy:

A bearded black man, with grey hair and looking as worn and weathered as his horses, called out as he neared... "Don't need nothin'. Just wanna talk" he said . . . "Nevada. You've never heard of it, huh? Never heard of itself. Bunch of whorehouses and a politician, went to D.C. and screwed us over some time back...Didn't do much to stop this, did his damndest to bring it on...blamin' past administration for everythin' when it was his own useless party broke the bank...Worse thin' we ever did, scrap prayer in school, trash the Constitution, legislated from the dumb ass bench, huh...."

(120)

The apocalyptic scenario – written in the present tense in *Tamara Hunney* – places Sam, the man, in the centre of the blighted universe around him. Sam, in his response to Morgan, quotes from the Bible:

Sam shook his head, sighed: "Then said I, Lord how long?" And He answered: "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate."
"Utterly des'lit huh? Who's that?"
"Isaiah, six, eleven."
"Said it right, huh?"

(125)

Biblical reference occurs not in the context of preaching, but, as M. Bull suggests, ties events to chiliastic consequence:

We should note that the activities of certain wise men in antiquity were not at all dissimilar to the concerns of the apocalypses and that the public who ignored prophetic messages induced catastrophe, after which followed reconstruction as foreseen in the religious voice. Then again we learn that "The discovery of fragments of the Enoch apocalypse at Qumran have pushed the date back well before the second century BC."

(1995: 46)

In contemporary parallel, the chiliastic tempo that hovers behind a burgeoning apocalyptic genre, whether in film or book, is recalled by Lascelles:

The morning of Sept 11th [2001], I lay in bed, in my cottage at Burbank and watched re-runs on T.V of those planes flying into the Twin Towers. Then getting up and going across the road and tacking up Chaka for his/my daily constitutional; this was way before I ever dreamed of *Tamara Hunney*, and rode him up Rattlesnake Trail to Skyline Ridge (those are the names of two of the 75 miles of trails in Griffith Park towering over Los Angeles basin south, North Hollywood, north) and cresting the hill to start the slow walk down and back to Silver Spur Stables, thought how extraordinarily peaceful the world seemed with no planes in the sky, altogether pristine and given to red-tail hawks and flitting finches and sparrows and the 134 freeway carrying the morning's traffic east to west reduced to small sound far below us. Chaka has a habit of walking the verge of the trail away from the inner bank, on the rim of the void, as if riding one on the very air itself, and I recall thinking how ominous (on the other hand) that serenity was, Wordsworth's "all that mighty heart is lying still" as opposed to the shocked stillness I assumed was holding all of Manhattan, as I didn't know then (since I didn't dawdle in bed gawping) the towers had fallen, and being one without a cellular pressed to my ear, wondered how NYCFD [New York City Fire Dept] were going to manage the fires; ... it must have been two years later when I started working on *Tamara Hunney* ...

(2010)

A characteristic of the 'apocalypse' genre has been its masculinist ethos, or mystique. In probably the best-known example of the genre (partly because of its internationally distributed film adaptation) Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer prize-winning novel, *The Road* (2006), has the woman character (the wife of the Man and mother of the Boy) disappear early from the narrative into suicidal oblivion; the father and son sustain the journey. As the synopsis might have already suggested, Lascelles's novel does not subscribe to the masculinist ethos. It is a key difference of approach that distinguishes the respective visions of *The Road* and *Tamara Hunney*, the two novels having been written at roughly the same time. It is a distinction – beyond *Tamara Hunney* – that is central to my argument in this dissertation: Lascelles's inclusion into traditional masculine (or 'masculinist') worlds – apartheid South Africa, colonial/Islamic/global economic encounters – of female agent-characters (strong willed, active) or, in allegorical echo, the feminine principle.

The spirited Tamara, to return to the text of the novel, notices an old man praying beside a dying woman; she watches him mercifully shoot a suffering horse. The girl follows the man to his trailer-park home and makes herself known to him as an orphan. The girl desires security, shelter; she is an abused child, a teenager in search of trust. She epitomises a general breakdown of social and moral mores: the abstract issues are focused in the human exchange between youth and age. The relationship that develops between the teenage Tamara and the elderly Sam generates the sympathetic core of the action. As Robert A. Miller says:

No book... is worth one's time without compelling and sympathetic characters and Lascelles delivers these in both Sam and Tamara, although you may find it hard to believe when you first meet them....

(2006)

Together, these two seek to reconstruct the world out of human wreckage:

“What’s your name...?”
“Tamara.”
“Tamara who?”
“Hunney.”
“Honey as in bee honey?”
“No, u-n-n ...”
“Y?”
“E-y”
“So you can read and write?”
“My mom used to read to me, and I was in school and learnt how to read and write and kiss a dyke and majored in putting condoms on fff...friggin cucumbers, okay? ’Sides I just thought, you know, you’d like a blow job.”
“I said knock it off. I’m old enough to be your grandfather, great grandfather, so show some bloody respect.”

The brief exchange alludes to educational issues in the contemporary US, implicit in what Lascelles regards as moral decay. We notice that the teenager does not lack sexual experience or education on human sexuality. Readers who are not familiar with the American education system might find the dialogue obscene; it is, however, a serious criticism of a system that elevates sexual knowledge above spiritual or ethical principles,

these being too controversial in a multicultural environment. The American Constitution, of course, regards matters of religious persuasion to be an individual's private choice, and in *Tamara Hunney* the author is saddened at the outcome. Tamara, nonetheless, grows towards a new conception of her own dignity. Sam Winterstone, who describes himself as an ageing and Christian cowboy, pursues the initial conversation:

He adjusted his office chair... "Did they tell you anything at all in school?"
"Other than about sex, 'n tolerance an' straights?"...
"About what's going on, " he snapped.
"Nah, they just closed down the day the blast...and everything stopped ...I sat on the sidewalk and split to Vegas with some Hell's Angels."
"On bikes?"
"Duh...they were friends okay? ...Well my mom's friends... Suze had her own Harley...dikes on bikes. Friends?"

(90-91)

This encounter between youth and age acts as a prelude to an encounter between material needs and spiritual responses to life.

Behind the rough talk we have an early hint of a damaged soul, a soul in search of nurturing, emphasised when Tamara intervenes in the street confrontation with two teenage boys who have hurled insults at Sam, the old man:

"Great boobs, huh, what 'cha think?" asked Louis
"You wanna smoke a joint and give us some of what you got?" Tino clutched his crotch. "She doesn't."
"Who's askin' you, you her father, lover, pimp, what?"
"Angel of death."
Tino...stopped when Sam put his hand on the replica. [Gun]
"That ole piece of shit work?"
"It works." Tamara cleared the Colt. "He's my boyfriend, and I'll kill your ass graveyard dead if I don't Tino."

(62)

So, a rudimentary relationship having been established, Sam and Tamara prepare to leave the destruction of Los Angeles on the beginning of a journey of trials and eventual redemption. Tamara's re-education begins in her introduction to the discipline of survival

skills, including the need to care for the welfare of the horses that will be their mode of transport. Lascelles's own love of the equestrian art (his earliest experiences of 'horse culture' returning him to his South African youth) is evident in his careful descriptions of a human/animal bond in the preparation of the horses for the journey ahead:

They roughed out a schedule. "Repeat it back to me."
"Why, I won't forget".
Sam rested on a pitchfork. "If we don't do it right we'll sicken them instead of fattening them up. We have to be precise..."
"Half a scoop of flax seed each, one whole scoop of pellets, half of weight builder, chopped hay and molasses, two tablespoons of hoof food, okay?"
"When?"
"After their morning cubes and Timothy hay...I won't forget."

(93)

Just as Lascelles took a calculated risk in *Blood Oasis* by a sudden switching of generic conventions and, hence, interpretative expectations (from social critique to love-and-war, as it were) so in *Tamara Hunney* the grimly real depictions of Los Angeles after the blast switch in Teal's mansion to a mode of the hyperreal. To compress the interlude we have Teal, media mogul whose magazines are semi-pornographic; Teal, fake Mormon who is willing to prostitute his wives to Sam Winterstone; paedophilic Teal, who has 'non-penetrative' sex with his under-age daughters; Teal, who murdered his 14-year-old Indian lover and their child (he suspected her of having been intimate with one of his "nigger" cowhands); Teal, whose attempt to have sex with Tamara ends in her asserting her street-wise education, her teeth severing his penis, her shooting Teal's son who also has sexual designs upon her, and her taking the initiative in extracting both Sam and herself from Teal's 'hedonistic empire'.

The episode at Teal's relies for its 'authenticity', precariously, on the reader's response to matters of tone and style. As mentioned earlier, Lascelles invokes the hyperreality, but in a controlled hyperbole, which parodies the soft-porn magazine language of his villain's

publishing ventures. To lend a menace to caricature Teal's household is made to resemble an armoury of suppressed violence: guns are prominently displayed, but stay behind glass cabinets. Teal's discourse is an 'unholy' mix of sex and religion: a mix which his wife Beatrice (one of his two wives) exposes for the sordid reality it is:

“Oh spare me, he was never frocked to begin with. In his instance it wasn't so much as his wanting to buy himself status...as it was his seduction of one of the General Authority's twelve year olds ...that got him forever banished...He called himself an apostle and bought network time and published a magazine called *Heavenly Beauties* and filled it with warped scriptural references to full frontals...”

“And it's all Teal money?”

“Money's his forte, useless at everything else, brilliant with money, newspapers, beef and sex. Lots of sex and ugly...”

As she said so Teal stopped in the doorframe, “Be nice B. You put Tammy out of your mind Sam, but you and B here have my blessing.”

(103)

The end of the Teal episode is accompanied, formally, by an abrupt change of register: despite Teal's threats of vengeance (a testing episode in the romance genre) a panorama of landscape suggests the opening of space, a return to healthy air, the possibilities of freedom. Lascelles invests in the 'Teal' episode all his anger – as expressed in his interview – at the collusion of an American 'media-saturated' reality in the destruction of what he admires: foundational, as distinct from fundamental, moral values, somewhat conservative, never inhumane.

The human/animal bond, to which I have previously referred, is reinforced in the next scene, in which Tamara's response to the dog, Lucky, suggests, once again, an innocence thwarted, but perhaps not entirely destroyed, by tough circumstances:

On the drive back to the house a dog walked out of the boulevard weeds and watched them approach...a large skeletal mutt, part-Labrador with floppy ears and long filthy black hair...looked up at them with sad eyes...

“Please can we...may we?”

“You're worse than me.” He leaned over and opened the back door, “Come on in then.” The dog wagged its tail and climbed in amongst the packages on the back seat...they named him Lucky...

(98)

From a heightened action and accent to a slower pace of syntax, appropriate to the imagery of majestic mountains and the wide spaces of prairies. On horseback the two head for the Nevada Mountains. The panorama of romance is checked, however, by attention to mundane but necessary detail: detail, for example, of fodder required for the sustenance of the horses. Arriving in Indian reserve territory Sam and Tamara, in the final 'movement' of the novel, are introduced to Navajo tradition by way of rediscovering the wisdom of the great Indian tribes whose culture of living with nature and the spirituality of seasonal rhythms had endured for thousands of years prior to the arrival of the Puritans and other immigrants. (Lascelles earlier had given expression to Navajo cultural associations in his poem, "Flute Maker", lines of which are quoted in the introductory chapter.) Again, romance is checked by social reality. As in Alan Paton's evocation of valleys lovely beyond any singing, valleys nonetheless pocked by soil erosion and human poverty (*Cry, the Beloved Country*, 1948), so the Navajo reserve is scarred by an American history of cruelty against and neglect of early inhabitants:

Midmorning they pass young bucks herding sheep over tracks of saltbush south of the Abajo Mountains, see more flocks farther off and by mid-day ride a stony road of an arid reservation commune squalid with indigent dwellings.

(278)

It is in such a setting that Sam and Tamara complete their mutually enhancing education: Sam, the old cowboy, once a womaniser and hard drinker – as he confesses he was prior to his rediscovery of firm Christian values – has to learn to temper his 'masculine' posture with flexibility, with tolerance of difference, not only in the spiritual realm of the shamanism of the Navajo leader, Shining Hawk, but also – more to the point of his journey in its entirety – in the leavening influence of youth on his long, lonely life experience. The leavening influence of youth is embodied in Tamara, her too-early-acquired female

survival instincts, in turn, having begun to be modified by her first experience of a man who is not an abuser of the male/female relationship.

What of the Navajo Indians? Are they presented simply as idealised figments of the 'Westernised', urban imagination. The South African reader might be reminded here of Laurens van der Post's *The Lost World of the Kalahari* (1957), (in which the San function as Jungian psychological motifs symbolising a lost Western innocence.) While wishing to invest the Navajo with a certain idealising quality – the culmination of the romance-tradition quest for redemption – Lascelles is alert to the dangers of sentimental closure. Shining Hawk, for example, articulates the 'reality' of contemporary American Indian life: in which the youth are enamoured of the city in both its fascinations and perversions: family disintegration and drunkenness, as a modern American Indian disease. We are told that the young Navajo girl, Mooncloud, had not been immune to the wealthy, sexually bizarre world of the Teal mansion. (She had left the reserve to join Teal, whom she thought of as her white lover, her 'sugar daddy', as is current in South African parlance.) Shining Hawk's aim is not an easy one: the "restoration of decency... among our youngsters" (286).

As if to remind the reader of both the myth and reality of American history, the stylistic register again changes. (Lascelles's 'dramatist's imagination' – as we have seen – favours what are abrupt scenic shifts in the narrative.) The shift, in near climax, is to the cowboy genre as Teal arrives with his posse to take revenge on Sam and Tamara. (Billy the Kid gallops towards Roy Rogers?)

And when the desert stirs with a wind as faint as a sigh of death ...she bends at the last to his face and cries aloud: "Don't leave me," and are yet watching when the demons of the night are done and he opens his eyes and smiles at her in the morning.

(313)

As in the cowboy Western, the crook almost kills the hero: Teal's bullet is deflected by Sam's belt buckle. Teal dies; Sam recovers with Tamara at his side. A Navajo marriage ceremony is kept in the realm of the symbolic. The journey from devastation to redemption is sufficiently particularised within American culture, popular and serious, to prevent its allegorical structure from too idealised a distance from contemporary social issues. If the youthful Tamara at times reminds us of the resourceful young girl in the John Wayne Western 'classic', *True Grit*, the young Tamara Hunney is shaped very much by Lascelles's concerns about a moral decline in current American education and life.

I return to a key distinction between Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Lascelles's approach to the apocalyptic genre. This bears upon the spiritual dimension, which both novels invoke. Despite the 'Celtic' reverence in McCarthy's vision, his ending is unremittingly bleak. Why should the family which, at the end, adopts the Boy, not regard blood as thicker than water and kill the Boy for the food necessary for their own survival, man's resort to cannibalism having been central to the novel's depiction of survival? Lascelles, in contrast, holds fast to a set of religious convictions, which, at first, might seem at odds with those of liberal democracy, but which convince him of the continuing value of 'lawful', as opposed to lawless, conduct. As in the romance tradition in its serious application, idealism and ethics are inseparable.

Note

1. For my discussion on romance genre I am indebted to G Beer. *The Romance* (1970).

CONCLUSION

My intention has been to introduce to readers in South Africa an author whose formative years were spent in South Africa and for whom Africa, whether a real or symbolic location, has continued to shape his work. At the same time, the influence of Kendrew Lascelles's adopted country, the United States, is palpable, especially in his 'post-apocalyptic' novel *Tamara Hunney*, where his concerns with what he sees as urban moral degradation in a 'media-saturated' society are offset by his commitment to romantic-conservative values, a gender sensitivity, and the redemptive potential of pre-modern, first-people cultures, the last having parallels with ongoing aspirations in South Africa to reconnect to a San inheritance. 'Africa' grants focus, also, to the plays that I have chosen to interpret, with South Africa under apartheid in *Exclusive Circles* reminding us that Lascelles's early theatrical experience involved his role in the long-running revue sketch *Wait a Minim!*, in which, a targets was the National Party-ruled South Africa of the 1960s.

My identification of Lascelles as a writer between worlds may be interpreted both thematically and stylistically: thematically, in that cultural difference is almost a motif, whether in Africa of the 'wind of change' (*The Trophy Hunters*), apartheid South Africa (*Exclusive Circles*), the West in Africa, or Islamic Africa (*Blood Oasis*) and, as previously stated, a suggestive parallel in the journey in *Tamara Hunney* from the 'gutter realism' of Los Angeles to American-Indian redemptive allegory. Stylistically, Lascelles's shifts between 'worlds' of convention from realism to romance range from colonial pastiche and Western cowboy idiom to a penetrating dialogue on his own core moral values. Whether writing poetry, plays or fiction, Lascelles displays strong tendencies towards a 'dramatic art', in which descriptions of settings are economical and vivid, and in which character portraiture relies strongly on pacey and, at times, racy dialogue.

My contention is that in its challenges to modern urban morality, in its commitment to gender and intercultural sensitivity, Kendrew Lascelles's literary achievement is deserving of literary-critical consideration, whether in the United States or South Africa.

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Appendices

1 Lascelles

2. Programme: *Wait a Minim!*

3 Recent Reviews: *A Child's Guide to Heresy* [A three Act Play]