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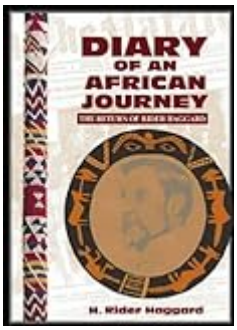

H. Rider Haggard. *Diary of an African Journey: The Return of Rider Haggard.* Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000. 345 pp. R149.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-86980-981-5.

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The colonial inscription of Africa in literary works, and especially in the fictional canons of the Empire writers, has been shown to be frequently inaccurate, ambiguous, amusing or downright malicious. A survey of fictions written in the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, including the "notorious" writings of Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling and Sir Rider Haggard reveals a certain predicament of the colonial writer to prescribe and authorise attitudes for the "natives." These writings, without much prompting, engendered the perennial literary resistance by African writers to the categorisations imprinted in these works, as the credo of ideologies like the Ngritude advanced by Sedar Senghor, Aime Cesaire and Leon Damas, and Orientalism advanced by Edward Said, have uncovered.

The colonial African literature is replete with explorations. For the explorer, the African landscape has always been the blank spaces in which the quester longs in his sojourn to bring under a system that renders it amenable to discursive control. The explorer's narrative, conditioned by the conventions and discursive expectations which govern the relationships between the "centre" and the "other," is a narrative of the centre, by the centre and for the centre. Later, the explorative spirit gave rise to representative exploitation by which the centre deployed its agents to establish "control" in the colonies and dominions, and this later metamorphosed into other kinds of exploitation, direct or oblique, that consolidated these representations in a more malignant manner, making "post-scription" the more difficult. I use the term "post-scription" here for narratives whose aim is to explain or re-present colonial narratives in a more acceptable manner, acceptable in the sense of erasing original prejudices expressed by the original narratives, a kind of rationalisation after the fact.

The "imperial romancê, to borrow a phrase from Laura Chrisman's study, [Rereading the Imperial Romance. British Imperialism and South African Resistance in Haggard, Schreiner and Plaatje (2000)], enjoyed its fun where it found it (Kipling), without any apology, and this is why "uncovering" the diary of Sir Rider Haggard, *Diary of an African Journey: The Return of Rider Haggard* pro-

vides a refreshing discursive moment and a "context" for post-colonial studies. When I first encountered the book, with my colonial baggage and post-colonial placards, my immediate reaction was to consign the Diary into the basket containing other exercises in colonial apologia, so current nowadays, but an initial reading soon convinced me that this was a collection of impressions unlike any that came forth from the pens of Haggard. With a canon consisting of *King Solomon's Mine*, *Allan Quatermain*, *She*, and *Nada the Lily*, a novel on the Zulu history, and depictions like that of Gagool and Umslopogaas, you wouldn't blame me much for my initial reaction, given the understanding of a scholar whose early dosage of colonial literature was suffused with imperial ideological "brainwashing" and who is just beginning to extricate his totality from the discourse of "label ideology." ("Anthropological," "Commonwealth," "Third World," "Black," "Reactionary," and such other terms used to describe Africa's nascent literary outputs, i.e. the counter-narratives). Also, one wondered what new revelations or positions from the imperial apologist could have been left out of *The Days of my Life: An Autobiography* (1926) and *The Private Diaries of Sir H Rider Haggard* (1980). Further, the theorising of the 1970s and the decentring tendency of literary discourses, originating with post-colonialism have a way of contributing to the cognitive knowledge associated with writings. Moreover, the pursuance of constant interrogation within the same object-field not only yields distressingly few, new results but also forecloses other areas of prospectively fruitful inquiry, or so I thought.

Stephen Coan, who edited the Diary, and whose association with Haggard dates back to when he was twelve years old (a generational trend for both the "centre" and the "others"), provides an illuminating Introduction to an otherwise engaging recollection. The Introduction, in a way, clears the doubts expressed above.

The Diary is a recollection of views and impressions held by Rider Haggard during his last visit to Africa in 1914 as a member of the Dominions Royal Commission set up in 1911 to examine the role that Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa could play in the consolidation and furtherance of the British imperial endeavour.

Henry Rider Haggard first came to Africa as a nineteen year old in 1875, attached to the entourage of his father's friend and newly appointed Lieutenant- Governor of the British colony, Sir Henry Bulwer. His second coming therefore in 1914 must have been remarkable to him because of a lot of political and social changes that took place in the interim, some of which he was part of conceiving, and some he did not particularly approve of. This shows in the Diary as general concerns even if the language and sentiments are sometimes patronising.

His reception during the 1914 visit was also unique in that the Haggard who left South Africa as a farmer/administrator in 1881, came back as a celebrated author of "romances." This point, coupled with his status as a Royal commissioner, gave him a certain importance and opened many vistas of opinions to him, some of which he might not have experienced otherwise. Again and again, Haggard mentions encounters with people who claimed to physically identify his literary environment, some of which suggested themselves to his imagination without any physical association. While the Diary is a collections of reminiscences and adventures of Haggard as an old man, it nevertheless reveals a lot of the younger Haggard and the historical events that formed the backdrop to the periods of his familiarity with South Africa, i.e. 1875 - 1881. However, Haggard in the diary is more concerned with values that were no longer current at the time of his visit but which were very real in the late nineteenth century when he first visited and lived in South Africa, and which dictated the formation of the South African Union.

The overdetermining presence of the narrator, or even of the editor, in the case of the Diary, is actually minimal, making the recollections more objective and less subjective, though the exploration of issues of power and marginality, the same issues which engage eurocentric narratives, still occur, but from a different viewpoint.

Diary reads like a post-scription for Haggard's romantic views and it prescribes the thought processes behind the transformational mode of the novels. As such, it registers an acknowledgement of the transitions in the dialectic of history. It presents a mirror of South Africa that is different from most of the current historical and political perceptions.

However, while Haggard transits positionally throughout the regions of South Africa and present-day Zimbabwe, he remains fixed, outside of the context of the journeys, a narrator intent on capturing moments without intruding. Still, he cannot help exhibiting a certain "superiorisation" of achievements by disputing that the Zimbabwean ruins were the handiworks of "kaffirs."

Throughout the Diary, one can not fail to read instances of the imperialist who came bearing hybrid memories of Africa and left with a deep disenchantment about the future of the empire, caused mainly by the "colonial

dealings" with the "natives." In that, he was quite accurate. For instance, Haggard"s impressions made him to conclude that:

"The white man has a very heavy bill to pay to the native and certainly he will be called upon it in this coin or in that. Those who persist in sowing the wind must expect to reap the whirlwind. Possibly in the end South Africa will become more or less black, no white race has succeeded in establishing itself permanently in Africa," (p. 239) and

"The justice of many of our dealings with them [Zulus] is open to the gravest question. On every occasion and pretext we take their land leaving them the worst and most unhealthy portions. The present position seems to me to be full of dangers, which are either not understood or are ignored by the political persons who have the practical control of their affairs (p. 231)."

This book is of interest to researchers and students of colonial discourse analysis; South African literature and politics; Victorian imperialism; African nationalism; English literature 1880-1920; postcolonial theory.

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