Sheila Fugard. A Revolutionary Woman. London. Virago Press, 1984. (First published in South Africa by AD. Donker, 1983) 147 pp. incl. glossary; ISBN 0-86068-625-6 pbk.

tion being written today, A Revolutionary Woman openly attacks the country's pernicious system of apartheid and predicts a time when it will be overthrown through revolutionary means. Because it focuses on many of the same issues found in the works of b$r known South African

Like so much South African fic- n ists, such as J.M. Coetzee's Wm ing for the Barbarians or Nadine Gordimer's Iuly's People, it might be tempting to dismiss this book as just another rehashing of familiar ideas. But to ignore this book is to miss the subtleties of Sheila Fugard's im- agination and the universality of her vision. For what is of interest in this novel is not the call for revolution but the kind of revolution it envisions. Of equal interest is the uestion it asks about whether t e South African revolution can originate among the whites or whether it must originate among the blacks themselves. In asking this, the novel also raises the related question of whether or not white liberals have the capacity to effect meaningful ge in their country's political em.

Unlike the violent revolution im- agined by Gordimer, the revolution imagined here is one that has been Sotyogroho inspired by satyagmha, the name given to Gandhi's passive resistance movement in South Africa and In- dia. As its title implies, the source of revolution in the novel is not the country's disenfranchised blacks, but an individual white woman who has become impatient with the new barbarians who run her country. For Christina Ransome is a self- proclaimed "emanci ated woman," an educated an outspoken Englishwoman who is living and teaching in the Karoo dorp 0 New Kimberly in 1920. Trying to keep "Goths and Vandals" at bay, she

Sexual Panic And The F Liberalism

by Katherine Fishburn

takes refuge in her books while dreaming of a more perfect society based on the Hindu ideals of Brahman and Atman. In Hindu thought, B rahman is the ultimate reality of which everything in the world partakes, while Atman is the manifestation of B rahman in in- dividual human bein 5. Thus everything is inter-relate , part of a universal but unimaginable whole.

What interferes with the human perception of this oneness is maya, the illusion that the world itself can be contained in the concepts we use to describe it. It is maya that provides Christina's undoing.

Having been inspired by the Hindu ideals of wholeness, she confuses them in her imagination with her own plans for political reform. Out of her imperfect understanding of Hinduism and her misguided good intentions, therefore, she continually tries to impose her vision of the world on the other inhabitants of the dorp - trying to convince the Boers that they are rotting spiritually and one of her Coloured students that he is "made for revolution." The bitter irony of the novel is that her vision is a corruption of the Hindu ideals as she sits in judgment on the Boers and fails to see what her student is really like. Corrupt as it is, however, it would be an improvement on the current system.

Although her attem ts at political revolution are doome to failure, her attempts at personal revolution are not without .success. Like her American counterparts of the 19205, this woman has mana ed to break free of most of the soci restrictions limiting her behaviour. She has been so successful in rebelling against these restrictions that virtually everything she does sets her apart from her community. Not only has she befriended a young Coloured student, a romantic young man named Ebrahim, but she has broken the rules against pre-marital and inter-racial sex in having an affair with Sanjay Pillay, an Indian immigrant. She has also openly aligned herself with Mahatma Gandhi's attempts to reform the South African political system, thus alienating her

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further from her white community. Finally, simply by accident of birth, this Englishwoman is doomed to be an outsider among the people of New Kimberly where the memory of their defeat in the Boer War is still fresh in everyone's mind.

Although the meaning of the novel is convoluted and fraught with unexpected ironies, the plot itself. is quite simple: a woman breaks the codes of her white society by befrien- - ding a black youth who in turn breaks other codes himself. Having angered other whites, the woman nevertheless survives; the black youth, of course, does not. What makes this novel unusual is the way that Fugard has interwoven her two

themes of revolution and human
sexual desire. Christina, for exam-
ple, describes Gandhi’s teachings as
the "golden thread of truth" - the
thread of his "semen."
In her behaviour toward Ebrahim,
Christina fluctuates between
treating him strictly as a promising
student and trying to convert him to
her own vision of the South African
future. Thus, at times she sternly ad-
monishes him to study for his ex-
aminations, and at others she thinks
Interwoven themes
of him almost as her child or disci-
ple, who will carry her message of
passive resistance to his people.
Complicating her relationship with
him is the fact that he reminds her
of her Indian lover. Having been in-
fected, as Gandhi himself apparent-
ly was, with some peculiar sexual at-
titudes, Christina does not always
behave appropriately with her
young student. Somehow she has
muddled in her own mind the sex-
ual desire she felt for Sanjay with her
own revolutionary fervour. Eager to
inculcate her protege with the pro-
per political erspective, she inex-
plicably con ides that her Indian
lover had taken a child-bride.
Although she had hoped to invoke
in Ebrahim the same outrage she
had felt herself, she succeeds only in
corrupting him, as he sets out to find
a child-bride of his own. Ensnared
bv his own dreams of being white,
this Coloured youth, whom

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Christina has fondly called her Italian boy, seduces the only white female available to him in the dorp - a simple-minded Boer child whom he inevitably gets pregnant. In-furiated by this threat to their racial purity, the twelve white men of the local kommando ride to take their revenge. But Ebrahim outwits the men and commits suicide, achieving a kind of grace and freedom by beating his captors at their own game. i

As befitting the triangularity of the plot, the novel itself is divided into three sections: "A Revolutionary Woman," "The Seduction," and "The Kommando." Significantly, the title of part two, "The Seduction," does not refer to Ebrahim at all, but only to his violation of community law - just as the titles of parts one and three refer only to the roles played by other major characters. As might be expected from these titles, the characters in this novel function primarily as represented ideas rather than fully realised personalities. This is not to say that the novel is simply allegorical, for the Characters do go beyond their roles. But it is to suggest that the white woman and her Coloured student act out a kind Breaking the white code of ritual violation of the white man’s code. Once their code is broken, the white men themselves respond in a pre-determined, ritualistic fashion, giving the whole novel a kind of dreamlike, fatalistic quality.

Part of what takes this novel out of the strictly allegorical category is the fact that it brings so many unex-pected ideas to bear on its plot. This. melding of ideas is typical of Fugard, who has imagined other unexpected combinations in her two previous novels, The Castaways (1972) and Rite ufPassage (1976). In her first novel, she finds parallels between Buddhism and the experiences of the mentally ill. In her second novel, she borrows from the I Clzing and the tribal rites of the Pedi. By so consistently bring-ing together such diverse traditions, Fugard manages to represent a kind of mythic wholeness, a melange of Eastern and Western ()2 cultural inheritances. In fact, her work has the uncanny ability to find correspondence where most of the rest of us would only find contrast.

Ironically, one of the images of inter-relatedness in Fugard’s third novel is one of common repression - that shared by blacks and women. Like many other feminist writers, Fugard draws a parallel between the

way the blacks are treated by whites and the way women are treated by men. Just as she implies that all South African blacks must agree on the need for revolution before it can succeed, she implies that all women must see their common bondage if their emancipation is to take place.

For example, Christina Ransome must learn to see her lover's child-bride as a victim of a legalised system of child abuse. She must be freed of her illusion that Lakshmi is her sexual rival - a temple goddess eager to destroy her. Because of her own sexual doubts she has found it easier to identify with Kasturbai, Mahatma Gandhi's loyal and obedient wife who in many respects was sacrificed to the political and philosophical goals of her ambitious husband - especially the vow of celibacy he took in his mid-thirties. With Ebrahim's sacrificial death, Chiristina can finally see that both Lakshmi and Kasturbai represent different aspects of Hindu tradition - the Path of Desire and the Path of Renunciation. She also sees that both can be integrated into her own vision of wholeness - a vision that reveals the secondary status of women in the South African culture

It is primarily because Christina can identify with Kasturbai that she feels ambivalent about her hero, Mahatma Gandhi, thus introducing another major theme of the novel, that of the failures of liberalism. For Christina is not blind to the fact that Gandhi failed to take his wife's sexual needs into account. At the same time, Christina repeats many of his mistakes in her own behaviour.

When she learns that Gandhi, back in India, has adopted a family of untouchables, she sees a parallel between what he has done and what she is doing with Ebrahim.

Throughout her narrative, in fact, she continually draws parallels between the caste system of India and South African apartheid. Unfortunately for Ebrahim, Christina is so caught up in her political comparisons and ambitions that she forgets her young student is not just an idea but is a living breathing person with dreams and ambitions of his own. Failing to see him for what he really is, Christina insists on imagining him as the instrument of revolution through which she will bring racist South Africa to its knees. Even when he insists that it is not his struggle, not his war, she persists in her illusion, trying to impose her vision of life on him. Ironically, the only vision she effectively imposes is the very one she despises, that of the

Indian practice of child-brides which he finds irresistibly seductive. Thus the revolution that Christina has imagined is doomed to fail because it is one that the whites are projecting on the blacks - it is not one born in the blacks themselves. At least Gandhi, for all his flaws, was an Indian working for the good of other Indians. Christina Ransome, for all her good intentions, is neither a revolutionary leader nor a saviour. She is thus named ironically. She is no Christ, and is not capable of ransoming the blacks of South Africa. Although she herself has failed, she nevertheless continues to predict revolution - a revolution that has not yet occurred 65 years after her prediction. It is a revolution, Fugard implies, that cannot hope to succeed unless a black leader emerges from black South Africa. Whether this revolution will be peaceful or violent the novel does not say. But by showing the failure of one woman's attempts at passive resistance, it strongly implies the revolution will be violent. And in its image of Ebrahim's suicide, it does make an urgent case for immediate change, however it is accomplished. I

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Breaking the white code

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Autobiography
Of Hope
by Adetokunbo Peorse
Ellen Kuzwayo.Call Me Woman,
London,. The Women’s Press 1985
266 pp.
llen Kuzwayo’s autobiography
reads like a miniature history of
South Africa. Fourpropositions
we the work this unique quality.
She was born during the first quarter
of this century, a period when the
whole world had hopes of a bright
future, based on newl discovered
technologies. She has een around
long enough (seventy one years to
date) to witness the birth of many
dreams and the stifling of many
more. Her experiences are varied,
from mother to actress, to civil ri hts
leader. The unassuming style 0 her
prose is the fourth quality which
elevates Ms Kuzwayo’s story from
being merely a personal record to be-
ing the story of a nation.
The author’s recollection of life in
South Africa of the 1920’s is that of
beautiful landscapes and a cultural-
&, integrated society. In that society
lack people played a dignified role
in the scheme of things. Some were
successful farmers, like her family
who owned acres of farmland and
produced food for their own con-
sumption and crops for cash. In ad-
dition to the family’s economic suc-
cess, her grandfather was active in
the political life of his community
and became the Secretary to the
Native N ational Congress (now the
African National Congress)(ANC).
Her grandmother was an outspoken
and industrious woman, a match for
any avant-garde of the age.
With the coming of the ’Group
Areas’ legislation, South Africa
underwent a rapid change from a
society which provided equal oppor-
tunity for its citizens to one in which
increasingly disciminatory legisla-
tion was levelled against its black
population. In 1913, the ’Native Land
Act’ left ownership of the land in the
hands of the whites. When this Act
failed in its desired effect to drive the
black country folk to the city, the ’Poll
Tax’ was introduced. Faced with the
prospects of going to jail for failure
to pay tax, and unable to raise money
in the country,’ black men were forc-
ed into the mines. In the 19305 com-
munity land in the countryside was
declared ’Tryst Land’ and removed
from the control of black people.
Farm lands were declared ’black
spot’ areas, and blacks prohibited
from even living there. ’The Group
Areas Act’ denied black people the
right to trade within the city of
Jo annesburg. To monitor their
movement and ensure that they are

employed only in areas of the economy which best suits the ruling class, black people have by law to carry a pass. With one callous piece of legislation after another, attempts are made to render black people homeless, landless, stateless wanderers in the land of their birth. When one considers that these beleaguered people, who form 75%

of the population, cannot even vote at elections, it becomes quite clear that white South Africa has decided to make itself the graveyard of the democratic process.

Ms Kuzwayo informs us that although cornered by law, constricted by regulation and trapped by Legislation, black eople in South ica have refuse to turn the other cheek. Their methods of protest have included direct confrontation with state police, sit-ins and strikes. The women especially have been adept at combating South Africa’s climate of fear. They have habitually made bonfires of their passes. And the Skokian queens with their secret market strategies have in their unique way undermined the racist government’s economic strategy.

With the departure of the men to the mines, the burden of looking after the family became that of the women. As Ms Kuzwayo puts it, the woman ’became overnight, mother, father, family administrator, counsellor, child-minder, old age caretaker and overall overseer of both family and neighbourhood af-

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. Life In The Belly
Of The Beast
by Barney Pityono
Molefe Pheto- And Night Fell:
fairs in a community which had hands is to experience hell. Exactly
been totally deprived of its active
male population’ (p. 13). Ellen Kuz-
wayds story is the proof that some of
the women met this awesome
challenge admirably. She has been
a teacher, secretary of the Youth
League of the African National Con-
gress (ANC), social worker, youth
worker, General Secretary of the
Young Women’s Christian Associa-
tion, member of self-help groups,
member of community economic
Frojects, and head of a single parent
amily following the death of her
husband.
Now the protests of the past, such
as the 1976 unrest in Soweto have,
the author reminds us, taken a new
and sharper focus. The African Na-
tional Congress (ANC) has ste ped
up its attack against South rica’s
economic life-lines. Children are
once more taking to the streets and
embarrassing the government. Black
stooges of South Africa’s apartheid
have become ostracised by their own
people. All the indications are, im-
plies Kuzwayo, that the tinder box is
about to explode.
Ellen Kuzwayo tells her own story
through the narration of communal
experience, and is eager to share the
limelight with others; Nelson
Mandela, Winnie Mandela, Steve
Biko and her own colleagues who
are not such famous public figures
. are equally commended. The title of
the book Call Me Woman su ests an
assertion of womanhood an all that
it entails; motherhood, custodian of
tradition, defender of human rights,
victim in a male-dominated world
but one most able to turn a deficit in-
to an asset. The book ends with the
type of selfless concern which
characterises this sensitive work; a
prayer for mother Africa.
Nkosi Sikelel’i Afrika
God Bless Africa.
All we can add is our gratitude to the
writer for giving us this autobio-
graphy of hope.
Re Ieboga Ramasedi go b0 0 refi’le Basadi
ba ba tshwanang 16 Ellen Kuzwayo.
Thank God for women like Ellen
Kuzwayo. I
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MEmoirs of a political prisoner in
South Africa. Allison & Busby, Lon-
don & New York; First published
1983; 158.95 UK. only
ike Solzhenitsyn, Molefe Pheto
Lhas gone through his own
Gulag experience. Like him, a
painful experience has become the

inspiration for an epic study that rises above the confines of the ex-erience itself. For what Pheto so aithfully recounts is not just a par-ticular episode in the life of one man but the Black condition in apartheid South Africa, her invincible spirit and the abiding call for liberation. On the other hand ,White people, as seen through the pranks of the security police, are re resented as less than human, foo ish,trying to manage an increasingly un-manageable situation. Ringing through the pages of this book is the confidence of many in today's South Africa that truth will revail. Pheto's memoirs are both unny and ex-cruciatingly painful, confident and yet grim, mocking and yet serious. The touchingly human and very personal story has not prevented the writer from narrating the story with a degree of reflection and analysis. He speaks about the South Africa he loves so dearly and the pain that love induces. The crisis of South Africa is hauntingly communicated and the scale of her human tragedy does not make Pheto sentimental and banal. This is a real life human story. Molefe Pheto was a music and cultural activist in Soweto. He ap-pears to have embraced all the values and commitments of the liberation struggle and held them together with his cultural pursuits. That seems to have been his undoing. Without any warning one early mor-ning he was wrenched unceremon-iously from his family without any explanation.

The security police in South Africa have enormous powers of arrest without due process of the law. In-deed they have come to believe that they have the power of life and death over their captors. To fall into their that was to be Pheto's life for the next 270 days before a Charade of a trial was played out which led to his 'discharge'. The security police are cruel and raw. By and large they suf-fer from an inferiority complex and blind hatred of Blacks. To do one's job properly one surely must be a raving racist and lunatic. They func-tion with the hel of a tight network of informers an the connivance of Black security police underlings. There is no skill in interrogation but one is made to yield by the use of brute force against a weak, vulner-able and unprotected prisoner. Central to their strategy is to humiliate, dehumanise and strip the detainee of all human defences and pride. Arrest always takes place with a heavy hand and insults, one is stripped naked, confined to in-human surroundings, denied access

to washing facilities, made to submit to a discipline and language of baaskap one instinctively rejects. At the same time the process of mind control is accentuated by isolation, no access to family, own lawyer or doctor, no awareness even of the ordinary day. The disorientation makes one dependent on one's captors for their goodwill even for conversation. Finally they are very ready to use physical torture to drive home their power over the hapless detainee. Molefe Pheto suffered more than his fair share of all these. He was repeatedly beaten up, made to stand for long periods, misled about the intentions of his captors. How did he manage to cope for so long before he reached the point where he knew that his body could no longer take punishment. It appears that his love for his wife and Children both weakened and strengthened him. He was haunted by their helpless and pleading gazes when he was taken away and by the image of his baby daughter Pello. The breakdown is told in a matter of fact way:

"Finally, the confession they all had been waiting for came suddenly, as I could endure no more. To hell with it! They could do as