CHAPTER 5

CONTENT AND CHARACTER IN THE WHITE RHODESIAN NOVEL—

VENGEANCE OF THE EARTH

Introduction

The novels selected for discussion in this chapter deal with many issues but at the end of each is the question of vengeance meted out to the main characters or to people connected with them, by Mother Africa herself, sometimes called the Earth or the Earth-Woman. This vengeance is invariably in the form of fatal attacks on the characters, for instance, an attack by a lioness in Slatter’s *My Leaves are Green*; by a female hippopotamus protecting its young in Peter Rimmer’s *Cry of the Fish Eagle*,¹ and by a rhinoceros and flood waters in W.A. Ballinger’s *The Waters of Madness*.²

In the other novels, the death of the main characters occurs under different circumstances, such as suicide in Cripps’ *Brooding Earth*,³ and through the use of African magical powers in Cripps’ *Bay-Tree Country*.⁴ As Chennells points out, “Rhodesia is a brooding earth waiting to avenge itself on those who have exploited her…”⁵ Moreover, the brooding earth avenges herself even in lands beyond the borders of Rhodesia; for

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example, the English land in Cripps’ novel *Brooding Earth*. She avenges herself also in Rapuzastan, an imaginary Bantustan in Ballinger’s novel, *The Waters of Madness*. The message seems to be that as long as land is stolen from its rightful owners, the Earth will avenge herself in return. So let us discuss the selected novels to see why and how the land broods and eventually ambushes its captor.

“*TO ME BELONGETH VENGEANCE*…”

*Two of Cripps’ Novels*

To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand and the things that shall come upon them make haste.⁶

This verse is about the children of Israel who anger God by worshipping, as gods, images such as the man-made golden calf, yet God has been exhorting them to worship Him as their only loving God who brought them out of bondage in Egypt. In Deuteronomy Chapter 32, it is in the Song of Moses lamenting the bad behaviour of the Israelites that God assures Moses that He alone, not Moses, can avenge their sins.

In the context of the discussion in this chapter, it seems that is what “the Earth” is saying—“vengeance belongeth to me.” The white settlers in this case are the targets of such vengeance in Africa. In Cripps’s *The Brooding Earth*, however, the Earth in England also takes her vengeance
on those who wrong her. The curse of the Earth in England, therefore, merges with the curse of the Earth in Rhodesia to destroy the wrong doers. Land must be given back to its rightful owners and the usurpers must die.

In *The Brooding Earth* the plot begins in England where the Smith family occupies a piece of common land believed to be cursed because when it was enclosed, it was taken from its rightful owners, the common people, and it is a Gypsy woman who actually curses it. Consequently, the Smith house cracks badly, as does the church next to it. The cracking is dramatic for Stephen, a distant cousin and friend of Smith’s son, Richard or Dick, who sees it as an adventure when a whole piece of ceiling falls into the bath next to his bed. Fortunately for him, he is not bathing at that time. When he tells Smith and family of this, Smith’s response is partly in a form that personifies the house: “it’s the way of the house…it’s also the way of the church. A wild lot of money has been spent on cementing their foundations and stopping their cracks. But their wounds won’t heal properly, or new wounds will keep opening.” The personification is evident in referring to the cracks as “wounds which will not heal.” By calling these cracks “wounds,” Smith is admitting that the problem goes beyond the physical cracking of walls and ceilings. Stephen’s response is also a “wound” metaphor as he says, “What a morbid state to get into…and expensive.” The reason for the “wound” being present at all is

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that the ground “was stolen” from people since it used to be common land about a century before.

The story of this land reminds one of William Wordsworth’s poem, “Goody Blake and Harry Gill” where an old woman is caught stealing firewood from Harry Gill’s fence. When reprimanded she curses Harry Gill by saying,

> God! Who art never out of hearing,  
> O may he never more be warm!

From that moment when

> The cold, cold moon above her head,  
> Thus on her knees did Goody pray;  
> Young Harry heard what she had said:  
> And icy cold he turned away.⁹

As a result of this old woman's curse, Harry Gill is constantly cold, whether it is in summer or in winter. Dick tells his cousin Stephen a similar story about their land when he says, “It’s quite simple… There used to be an old half-Gypsy woman who lived on this Green. She said that the ground where the church and vicarage are built would have no luck. It was a curious thing how the Building Committee came to put them there…”¹⁰

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The bad luck extends to Vicar Smith who bury a wife and three children, one after the other, as they all die young from consumption. Only two children survive one of whom, Dick, also suffers from consumption now and has to leave the country in order to survive. This predicament of the Smith family is known to the community and at a meeting called to discuss the land issue, one speaker derides them as he says,

> The Land’s coming back… They can’t keep her so lightly if she’s no mind to stay. The Land’s like an old woman that it’s ill to cross. It went—some of the land—almost within memory—within my own mother’s memory, anyway. What’s happening here where they stole Land? What about parson’s people?… “Earth! Earth! Earth!” That’s what mother used to say.\(^{11}\)

Notice that “Land” and “Earth” are capitalised throughout this speech, personified by a “local preacher [who is] also a stone-breaker or road mender for the District Council [and who is generally] much too bitter [because] he’s had a real bad time.”\(^{12}\) Then in reference to the two Smith’s living children the local preacher quotes the book of Jeremiah, chapter 22, and then asks,

> Isn’t it coming true? What’s the news now? Only two children left, and one of those two going to foreign parts next week. All because of a nasty field of stiff clay, that was meant for the people, not for parsons… Weep not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep

\(^{10}\) Cripps, *Brooding Earth* 30.  
\(^{11}\) Cripps, *Brooding Earth* 37.  
\(^{12}\) Ibid 36.
sore for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.\textsuperscript{13}

The question of stolen land at home in England becomes a metaphor for the Rhodesian land question in this novel. First, Dick and his cousin Stephen have to work to “earn” the Rhodesian land. The “work” involves fighting in the 1896 war, dirty business as it turns out:

They were in the same troop that played the main part in treading out embers—embers of a smoky grimy little war. They helped to burn kraals and grain bins, to dynamite caves, and to pot Mashonas. They did a variety of work in an unscientific perfunctory way. “The maximum dirty work and the minimum danger” was Dick’s epigram on that war pronounced on the day that he took his discharge after a year’s service. Stephen made no epigram, but he took his discharge on the same day.\textsuperscript{14}

So as a reward for the war effort, Dick and Stephen acquire a farm on which they go into partnership. Meanwhile Dick who leaves England sick and dying is “very fit [and] should soon be fitter” as Stephen tells Dick’s father in a letter.

Ironically, it is not the sickly Dick who ends up being haunted by the land issue. It is Stephen, the distant cousin, into whose bathroom the ceiling falls while he is in bed next to it in the Smith home. Perhaps this is because he is the one who hears the words of the old preacher about

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid 37.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid 38.
“Earth!..” and he is the one who remains unrepentant in his dealings with the land and its owners in Rhodesia. Cripps, too, being a missionary, tends to believe in the past haunting the present and in the power of the supernatural. As for Stephen, as soon as he is on his farm, he attempts to feel at home but fails to find the peace of mind that he would cherish. His quest remains that of an individual searching “for a soul, for comradeship, for inner peace, for a ‘place in the cosmos,’ for hope, for creative satisfactions.”

Stephen’s problem, first of all, is greed, which causes him to incorporate about 300 acres of land of the Native Reserve into his farm because he envies the beauty of one of the kopjes, an action which is tantamount to stealing native land. He is actually trying to get the red soil, but his actions put him in a similar situation to the Smith’s stolen land in England. He succeeds in obtaining this extra land by getting Wilson, a Government surveyor, to re-survey the farm and to re-adjust the beacons so as to incorporate the extra land with red soil. At first, he prospers, having ploughed his inherited small fortune into the farm and bought cattle cheaply from the Africans. The kopjes he admires so much are the same ones where there is a cave that he and Dick dynamited during the war, full of the Shona people. Yet he does not want to hear talk of this event, preferring to blot it out of his mind instead of seeking some kind of accommodation for it. By blocking the horrors of that war out of his mind, he has pushed them into the recesses of his psyche and this

16 Cripps, *Brooding Earth* 42-43.
becomes a problem later when the earth rebels, which it does: “One of them at least [that is, Stephen or Dick], I suppose, ‘ll die, if they go on that farm—fever or whisky-fever or both, the way most of us go. The Earth here,… doesn’t like the white man. She’s black or red or brown herself, and she’s got her prejudices.”\textsuperscript{17} This particular quotation suggests that whites have no place in Africa. That is an interesting dimension of this novel considering the contents of the rest of the book and how Cripps’ own life contradicts such a statement.

Stephen’s quest for inner peace, for a soul, for comradeship as mentioned earlier, is expressed to Anne, his cousin and Dick’s sister, who comes to visit them in Rhodesia. She fails to understand how her brother and cousin/friend can live in a horrible, nervy, drunken, idle country where she is endlessly bored about Kaffirs and labour’s dignity.\textsuperscript{18} Although Stephen loves his farm, he complains of loneliness in spite of his popularity among other farmers and as an employer among “natives.” He mourns to Anne:

\begin{quote}
But I’m so lonely…I get lonelier and lonelier. I’ve had years and years of it now, and I’ve had lots of fever lately. The old Earth rises up against me here, just as she does at home in Essex…There’s something wrong about this place too… I didn’t think it mattered much once, but I know it matters now. I dream of the Earth sometimes here. She comes like a great brown native woman with a cruel cold moon-face down the path from the kopje, and she comes after me. She never stops for a moment while the dream lasts. She pads along down the track after me.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid} 43.
\textsuperscript{18} Cripps, \textit{Brooding Earth} 53.
And I run like fury, but I can’t shake her off.  

Cripps mixes art with mysticism and religion. His character, Stephen, experiences a void in his soul; so that even though he is surrounded by people—other farmers or his faithful workers like Shambira, giving them all-night parties—he still feels alone. So the narrator explains, “His loneliness came on him night and day now, like an army with death’s-head banners. Strangely enough, the more he felt this loneliness, the more he avoided comradeship, such comradeship as the township and farms nearby afforded.”

Stephen further withdraws from former friends in reaction to this soul-void. He exhibits an eccentricity with the gun, to the point where “Boys, such as Shambira, who had stayed with Stephen since Dick left the country, seemed in no two minds about them—they were signs, mighty works, miracles of sorts.” Stephen feels orphaned as it were, alien, “without home, alone, impotent.” It is Cripps’ deliberate form to let the land question in England speak to that in Rhodesia. Basically he is attacking capitalism. Landowners in England, who enclosed common land so that they could profit from it, are in the same tradition as the British South Africa Company. In England the Smith’s home and the vicarage both crack as a result of the curse. In Rhodesia Stephen experiences mysterious dreams and sees a strange light on the kopje at

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19 Ibid 54.
20 Ibid 56.
21 Cripps, Brooding Earth 56.
22 Stanley Romaine Hopper, Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature, xii.
night, particularly two nights before he commits suicide.\textsuperscript{23} In mixing the artistic with the mystical and the theological, Cripps brings together what Hopper calls, a unity of

the otherwise disjunct materials and facets of experience which comprise the raw material of his [novel]. The literary artist’s use of mysticism, of myth, of metaphor, are here explored; and the oblique disclosures of religious implication as found in literary existentialism, the artist’s experience of moral isolation, and the entire problem of religious theodicy which his own task imposes on him… are here explored.\textsuperscript{24}

For Stephen there is only one way to get out of his predicament—return the stolen land to its owners by getting the farm resurveyed.

Stephen’s “sin” though, is not only limited to his stealing 300 acres of African land, but also to the way he treats these Africans. He is no different from the other prejudiced settlers around him. Cripps shows the usual contradictions that are manifested in other novels by white writers where whites claim to treat “their” Africans well, yet in reality the opposite obtains. For instance, in this novel, they are “boys,” often denigrated. Concerning the question of land, one of the characters, Ellis tells Dick, “It’s a rotten poor farm. I used to go over there a lot, so I know. Good ground for monkeys, and possibly for niggers—scores of stony kopjes, that’s about all you can say.”\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} Cripps, 84; 92.
\textsuperscript{24} Stanley Romaine Hopper, \textit{Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature} xii-xiii.
Natives are also exploited in trade since their cattle are bought at below market price. Sometimes Stephen practises his sport of shooting by shooting “over a boy’s head with an affectionate whizz as he called him to bring breakfast.” He also belittles Africans in many other ways that include making Shambira, the “boss boy,” appear foolish by applauding delightedly, his shooting escapades around other Africans’ heads.

Nevertheless, in *The Brooding Earth*, Cripps does not really deal in detail with the condition of the African under white dominance. It is in *Bay-Tree Country* where he does that. In *Brooding Earth*, he concentrates on the character of Stephen who emerges as the main character in his interaction with the Smiths and with his environment in Rhodesia. Cripps also sees Stephen as having a feudal relationship with his workers—and feudal seems to be used positively. It is also curious that Cripps does not see his use of “boy” as insulting. He uses the term throughout his early books, and yet more than any other white person, he claims to be a nationalist! Similarly, Kaffir does not seem to him to have the current objectionable associations with the word. He never uses “nigger,” which is used by really prejudiced and racist whites. It is, therefore, ironic that he is blind to the inappropriateness of these two words, “boy” and Kaffir when used to denote Africans. He needs to stop and wonder why no one uses the same appellations for the white people.

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25 Cripps, *Brooding Earth* 47.
26 *Ibid* 50.
In *Bay-Tree Country*, Cripps deals more directly with the issue of the ill-treatment of Africans. First of all, Africans are looked upon as sub-human, which is the usual treatment given them by white authors and their characters. As elsewhere, Africans are boys, kaffirs and niggers who are forced to work for white people under duress. Cripps explores the theme of African forced labour through the use of various taxes, Rhodes’s “gentle stimulus” as discussed in chapter 3. The reader first hears about these taxes when two characters, Lyndhurst and Jack are talking, with Jack telling Lyndhurst of an event that he witnessed years back when he was travelling and had to stop at a hut where he sought shelter against an African thunderstorm. It was here that he met Colonel Hawkins Green who gave him a pink paper showing off his “supreme speech” to the Legislative Council concerning “this heavy-fathering of a most blackguard scheme for piling up poll-tax on every Kaffir, man or lad, who did not work for European profit six months in every year.”

In this story of Colonel Hawkins Green, Cripps demonstrates the power of the white master over the black “slave,” even after death. For while the three are sheltering against the storm, lightning strikes, killing Hawkins and his black “slave.” When Hawkins’s brother, Gerald Green, arrives, the slave rises from the dead briefly in order to deliver a message from his master, Hawkins, warning Gerald against staying where he is and advising him to take another route home because, “there is much trouble here. It is not good to come here. Farewell Sir…” The “slave”
then returns to his corner to lie perfectly still again to the shock of Jack and others who witness the incredible event.\textsuperscript{29}

Gerald takes longer to comprehend this mysterious encounter because he does not know that the slave has been struck dead by lightning like his brother. Cripps is being satiric in demonstrating how the power of the white master can conquer death. The slave’s soul may not rest in peace as long as the master has errands to be run, whether the master or servant or both be dead or alive.

Sarcasm is also evident on the question of cheap labour for the farmers in Zambesia/Rhodesia. For example, at the Piazza Restaurant where Lyndhurst and Jack stop to have breakfast, Jack reads about a farmer’s meeting—a “Deputation of Farmers to the Government.” This deputation announces government emergency measures where the Chief Native Commissioner is “instructed to ask chiefs to impress upon their young men the advantages of going out to work. Maximum period—three months. Maximum wage—fifteen shillings.” After reading this, Jack laughs and comments, “Peaceful persuasion? Who said ‘forced labour’?\textsuperscript{30}” The sarcasm continues when Green’s drunken “nigger driver” rejoices at this legislation and says, “Now we’ll get ‘em over their heads, seize their women, collar their passes! Our N.C.’s just the boss for the job.”\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{29} Cripps, \textit{Bay-Tree Country} 106.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid} 117.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid} 119-120.
Further, on the question of ill treatment of Africans, Cripps describes a bit of what Samkange calls, “Charter ‘Ro’.” Under this system, “The Shona people were subjected to what is still remembered today as ‘Charter Ro’ (Charter Law)—rough and brutal treatment. This and the sjambok have become part of Mashona oral tradition…”32

So in *Bay-Tree Country*, there is this sort of brutality of the settlers as they seek the elusive African labour. Lyndhurst comments:

> It’s on the supposed-to-be obsolete lines,… the unforgotten lines of the Cecil John Company system. The messengers metal-badged, with guns and sjamboks, go round and assert that their baas wants “Company.” “Company” was enforced with beating, and seizure of women not so long ago. “Company” plays fast and loose with the boys’ instincts and habits of feudal loyalty. So they [Africans] go like lambs now to be distributed, and there’s never even an angry word. It’s a bad shame of course. It’s a bad shame, feudalizing for commercial ends.33

This voice is somewhat critical of the labour recruiting methods of the “Cecil John Company,” and the feudal system at work.

Cripps also criticises the Company’s system of forced labour and obtaining taxes from the natives. In this system described by Africans as “chibharo,” the Africans were forcibly conscripted to work for white people. In the novel, at Mubaiwa’s kraal such conscription is going on when Lyndhurst offers himself to be conscripted instead of one African

33 Cripps, *Bay-Tree Country* 128.
victor. Lindhurst has painted himself black, and is, therefore, mistaken for a black person. Although the conscription begins calmly, more or less, it progressively becomes violent: “Victims were collected fairly peacefully up to a certain point. Then at the fourth and fifth kraals there were stampedes. Boys were chased, and there were hot recriminations and blows. Women were caught as hostages at one kraal and brought along….”

The sarcastic line comes in the narrator’s description of Rhodesia and labour recruitment and how far she has a right to do so as an English colony. As the collection of natives for the “company” continues, the Native Commissioner’s messenger comes to the last kraal in the affected villages and “the head-man gave his son in feudal loyalty to his superparamount chief.” Then the sarcasm or criticism follows: “How was he to know Imperial England’s *raison d’être* of liberty? How was he to know that the tiny dependency of Rhodesia was just chancing her arm, just bluffing a subject-race on the sly, without her mother’s knowledge? Of course she did not mean to do it. Of course her officials had blundered. But—….”

The narrator draws the reader’s attention to the fact that “Charter Ro” and “chibharo” are illegal, and that England, the Imperial mother power, is ignorant of these practices or professes such ignorance since she preaches

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34 Cripps, *Bay-Tree Country* 130.
35 *Ibid* 133.
36 *Ibid* 134.
liberty and protection of the natives from themselves and from outside marauders.

The working conditions that these Africans are forced to endure are those of slaves. Cripps’ narrator describes them vividly with Lyndhurst in disguise as one of the conscripted workers, researching and documenting daily occurrences in his diary. He volunteers to go and work for Gerald Green under his nigger-driver called Hind, whom he and Jack meet in the train earlier on. So the conditions in the “house of bondage” get recorded without the master’s knowledge. The labourers’ rising time daily is at the second cockcrow, and they work till after dusk. The death of one boy from pneumonia and overwork is recorded along with many such similar events.37

For Cripps, this dealing in what is effectively slave labour constitutes Gerald Green’s and Hind’s major sins just as the readjustment of the beacons constitutes Stephen’s major sin in *Brooding Earth*. These sins do not haunt their perpetrators at all in *Bay-Tree Country* because these perpetrators are devoid of any human compassion. But the Earth eventually avenges itself in a bizarre manner.

Cripps also uses irony in his criticism of racism in Rhodesia. This irony is in connection with Lyndhurst, a spy into the treatment of Africans, who works for Gerald Green. It turns out that Bill Lyndhurst is not spying just for humanitarian purposes, but is interested in Rose, an English girl who

is to marry Gerald. While at work, however, Lyndhurst is considered a nigger like all the others since he has coloured himself black. But he finds an opportune moment to talk to Rose alone, whereupon he reveals his identity and tries to persuade her to leave Gerald who is a bad person as shown by his dealings in Rhodesia. When she refuses to be persuaded, he leaves her but as he walks away from her, he is gunned down by Hind who himself is walking with an African girl. So the incident has double irony—Hind finds it objectionable for Bill whom he thinks is a black boy, to be talking to Rose, a white woman, while it is all right for him, a white man, to have an African girlfriend. The injustice in that situation is paralleled by the injustice of the Rhodesian judicial system. For after Hind shoots Bill, he confidently proclaims to Rose, “Don’t you be afraid, Miss. I’ve given that nigger what-for. I’ve taught him to talk to you! There’s not a jury in all Rhodesia will convict me!”

Later, Mrs. Cerito who is Gerald Green’s sister and who is comforting Rose after the shooting incident, also condones the shooting as she says, “Curse that devil!… What did he want to do like that, just to get his name in the papers? Of course the nigger spoke to you at his own risk. That was his indaba.” Meanwhile, the whole district of Roseberry sends Hind telegrams to congratulate him on his spirited action. They tell him that they would put up his bail, a bail running into four figures most likely and he would get off at the High Court the following month. When Rose comments that she hopes he will not get off so easily, Green answers,

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38 Cripps, Bay-Tree Country 143.
39 Ibid 144.
40 Ibid 145.
“Even that young rip who cut up a Kaffir girl in jealousy and put fire to her, got off. It’s the way of white juries in Rhodesia to let off white men in native cases. It keeps up the prestige of our colour.”\textsuperscript{41}

Cripps is being satiric and ironic, particularly when Mrs. Cerito endorses the above statement on the Rhodesian jury with, “It’s right in Rhodesia—all right in Rhodesia, though Gerald’s chapel friends in England say it’s all wrong.”\textsuperscript{42} Cripps dramatises the injustice in Rhodesia against the black people. Although the Company remains intact, Bill Lyndhurst dies, thus, paying dearly with his life as the Earth revenges in some way. Yet he is the one who tries to investigate the Company’s injustices; hence, the irony of the situation.

A further irony in this case is that Rose knows who Bill really is, that he is not a nigger but a white man in disguise. Yet she chooses not to reveal that fact. Because she does not “talk,” Gerald makes a saint out of her behaviour. Responding to his sister’s puzzled query as to why she would want a kaffir to make a confidante of her, he says, “It was like her good heart…to listen even to a boy’s troubles.”\textsuperscript{43} She, thus, appears nobler than she really is. Later she marries Gerald happily, her dilemma as to what to do with Bill Lyndhurst having been resolved.\textsuperscript{44} To complete the irony, Bill’s burial becomes more dramatic when it takes place at Vaughan’s Mission since he has been found with a crucifix around his neck and gets mistaken for a mission boy. So he is buried a few paces away from the

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid 144-146.
\textsuperscript{42} Cripps, \textit{Bay-Tree Country} 146.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid 145.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid 147-148.
hut where he leaves his kit on his way to Green’s farm, a fact which is discovered only much later.\footnote{Ibid 150.}

Cripps, therefore, reveals heinous crimes against Africans, not only at the local places of work but also in the Rhodesian judicial system by citing examples to demonstrate such injustice. One such example is the lack of seriousness with which Hind’s crime of murder is handled. We also learn that besides killing Bill, Hind “got fined ten quid and bound over for cutting up a boy’s back” the previous year.\footnote{Cripps, \textit{Bay-Tree Country} 146.} Earlier on, Green cites the case of the young girl who is “cut up,” and again, no legal action is taken against the perpetrator of this crime. Indeed, when Hind comes to trial for the murder of Bill Lyndhurst, the jury acts according to the approved Rhodesian tradition, and he remains a free man.

One can, however, see where events begin to turn against this general racist Rhodesian thinking. In \textit{Brooding Earth}, it is when Wilson, the government surveyor who shifts the beacons in Stephen’s farm, turns up at Stephen’s door, destitute, that we realise things have not been good.\footnote{Ibid 58-60.} He dies later, in hospital, of a disease contracted from a native woman fixed by her husband to trap men who may sleep with her in his absence, something like a punishment for breaking a chastity belt of old.\footnote{Ibid 73-74.} His death can be attributed to the curse associated with this land that he helped to cheat natives out of.
The curse affects Stephen for the first time when his cattle begin to die of East Coast Fever. The narrator comments, “Rebellion was manifest in those days. The Earth had rebelled against those that helped themselves from her. Hers was a continuous carnage. Week after week fowls of the air came to it, wallowed in it, and gorged their fill.” Thus, Stephen, who had become rich, becomes so poor that he has to sell his farm to settle his debts. He has only one solution to his problem of the curse—return the stolen land to its owners. His cousin in England, Anne, works hard to find money of her own to buy common land for the people. She writes to Stephen explaining her attempts to appease the Earth,

“I am buying the field opposite the school, and making it common land from mid-summer, please God. It is all bought with my money, most of it made by poultry farming and scribbling... The field should be paid for and dedicated about Midsummer Day. Can’t you try and do your as-you-were just as I am trying to do mine? Then can’t you get ready to sail at once?”

Anne’s act of atonement to redress the wrong done seems to bear good results as she reports that, “the church and vicarage haven’t cracked this year or more. Perhaps the old Earth-Woman means to let bygones be bygones at last.” This is evidence of the author’s belief in spiritual intervention in the lives of people. Stephen’s story, however, does not have a similar happy ending because he cannot easily tear himself away from this land and he feels he would be a misfit in England as he laments:

49 Cripps, *Brooding Earth* 61-62.
50 Cripps, *Brooding Earth* 57-58.
"Yet I don’t want to go to England a bit. I’ve forgotten it or gone off it, or grown out of it… The farm, this jumped corner of it—I’m simply rooted into its red soil. The kopje’s part of my daily bread alone, you know."

Earlier, it is the doctor and the parson talking and asking each other why they stick here in this Rhodesia. The doctor finally answers, "I know. We stick because this place is sticky. The earth draws us somehow as treacle does flies, and for the same sort of purpose." It seems Stephen is a living example of one who is drawn or who sticks to the land in order to be killed by it, especially his particular piece of land.

Stephen tries to get things corrected by selling the land with a letter attached to it concerning the shift in beacons. But he gets cheated by Dr. Davys, the buyer of his farm, who resells it to Crossfield at a handsome profit. The note that Wilson writes to explain the beacons issue, ends as ashes in the good Doctor’s chimney. Broken-hearted, Stephen commits suicide by shooting himself at dawn, on a day that he and his cousin, Dick, were to sail back to England. It is left to Dick to pay Crossfield back his money and to locate Brown, the missionary favoured by Stephen to take over the farm so that he can continue to do his “native work” there. The Earth-Woman has exacted payment in blood for her land just as the Smith family in England has had to pay with blood for land.

Ibid 76.
Ibid 86.
Ibid 44.
wrongfully acquired. Hence, the relevance of the statement, “to me belongeth vengeance and recompense…” as the Earth seems to be saying.

It seems also that, because Anne redeems her family, Dick gets healed and can go home again. Maybe Stephen cannot be absolved because he genuinely cannot let go of his farm. It takes someone like Anne and Dick to get absolution because they can distance themselves from the land they are working and living on. They can be objective about the issue. Stephen cannot as he moans, “But oh! the farm, how can I leave her! What God hath joined let no man—it says in the Gospel. The land lugs at my sleeve when I sit down to write the advertisement….”54 Since he considers it to be his bride, then only death can part them, to continue his marriage image. Once again, the land issue in England and in Rhodesia merges.

Stephen can be considered a hero who has “refused the call” to get away from the sticky trickle situation, as Joseph Campbell would probably put it. His circumstances are well described below:

Often in actual life,…we encounter the dull case of the call unanswered; for it is always possible to turn the ear to other interests. Refusal of the summons, converts the adventurer into its negative. Walled in boredom, hard work, [loneliness], or “culture” [the Rhodesian one of drink for instance], the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved. His flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels

54 Cripps, Brooding Earth 65.
meaningless—even though...he may through titanic effort succeed in building an empire of renown.
Whatever house he builds, it will be a house of death:
a labyrinth of cyclopean walls to hide from him his minotaur. All he can do is create new problems for himself and await the gradual approach of his distintegration.\textsuperscript{55}

Clearly, this is the condition in which Stephen finds himself as he ignores Anne’s call to sail immediately to England after fixing his farm affairs so as to attain the as-you-were position again. All he does is “await the gradual approach of his disintegration.”

In \textit{Bay-Tree Country}, Cripps’ belief in the supernatural manifests itself more vividly in the deaths of Gerald Green and Gilbert Hind. He goes further to include the operation of African witchcraft in those deaths and even hints at the fact that Hawkins Green’s death by lightning is a result of Gilbert Hind's visit to the headman of a certain village, a man who concocts some \textit{muti} to get rid of him in revenge for whatever disagreements they may have had.\textsuperscript{56} In all these cases, therefore, the motive behind the witchcraft is vengeance.

When Hind is fired by Gerald Green for killing Bill Lyndhurst, he feels so bitter that he goes to look for an African N’anga, bargains hard with him and finally works out a deal to finish off Gerald Green, his former employer who is suffering from pneumonia in England. That becomes

\textsuperscript{56} Cripps, \textit{Bay-Tree Country} 156.
his revenge for losing his job. When the n’anga fails to get his payment from Hind because the latter is simply destitute and arrogant, he, too, seeks revenge, particularly after he is beaten by the debtor in the process of following up his debt. The result is that the n’anga uses his own magic to find Hind and to induce a fatal haemorrhage, thereby getting satisfactory revenge for non-payment.

It is true, as Chennells writes,

> Spirituality manifesting itself in destruction and revenge is something that Hind travels into the mountains to seek and both he and Gerald are killed by the charm. Gerald and Hind are linked by ambition and avarice; the witch doctor is brought into their system of values by his anger at Hind’s failure to pay him. With an original stroke Cripps allows primitive evil to be linked with sophisticated materialism and as Hind burns with unquenchable thirst we are recalled to the thirst of Dives at the beginning of book. The obsessional pursuit of wealth which characterises Mashonaland is, it is suggested, an old evil impulse and one that finds a kindred spirit in the basest sort of witchcraft of the Shona.⁵⁷

Cripps ends the story of Lyndhurst on an original note, too—he is seen as a martyr for the black cause; a man who dies trying to research into the labour atrocities of the Chartered Company, the “Charter Ro.” Lyndhurst is, therefore, perceived as a Black Christ if we remember Chennells’ statement that “The Black Christ is the controlling concept behind Bay-Tree Country.”⁵⁸ This concept begins with Hawkins Green’s servant who

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⁵⁸ Ibid, 22.
rises from the dead to warn his brother Gerald about the route to travel along. The Lyndhurst image is another, except that it remains incomplete. Christ lived and died as a public figure for a public cause while Lyndhurst dies for a secret cause, noble though it may be. He is mistaken for a native labourer and so his death has no impact on his killers in terms of behavioural change. He, therefore, redeems no one, not even Rose who knows his true identity but chooses to be silent about it. Later when Vaughan, his wife, and Jack discover his true identity and reasons for his disguise which lead to his death, they, too, choose to be silent. They do not even reveal this identity to Muzoriwa, the “small boy” who brings them Lyndhurst’s diary. In addition, instead of quizzing Rose about this issue, they choose to leave her alone… “‘let’s leave her alone Jack,’ Vaughan said [sic]. ‘Don’t let’s be bitter. Let’s fight fair for all we’re worth in the new year and the new paper. Leave R in peace in England. There are many more live bay-trees in the Commonweal’s way out here, that want lopping.”

Herein lies Cripps’ ambivalence and non-committal critique. Although he tries to condemn colonial cruelty, he does so in a lukewarm manner and not outright. The question then arises, what is he doing in the country? As a missionary, it seems his presence fails to respect Shona values. Lyndhurst has, when still alive, condemned Hind for his bad treatment of workers in his diary where he writes, “A man like Hind should not have boys. How is the treatment of native labour in Southern

59 Cripps, Bay-Tree Country 167-168.
Rhodesia ever to improve (God knows it needs improvement) if brutes like Hind are to have labour sent to them by Government authority?"\textsuperscript{61}

Jack and Vaughan remain undecided as to whether or not to use this material in the new paper that Jack wants to publish. Jack even argues that “the whole thing’s stale now, stale as the old year—a regular bad un of a year that, even for this country.” Vaughan finally ends the conversation on this issue by a mere observation, “The system,… the Southern Rhodesian system, lies like a great sleepy python coiled about the villages. It may be nodded or winked up any time. There’s danger always, as long as Native Commissioners and messengers keep their present billets.”\textsuperscript{62} Nothing practical follows from these two people’s discussion in terms of redressing the white man’s racism against the Shona. Even after reading Lyndhurst’s diary, they decide to leave Rose alone! That is why we say Cripps’ condemnation of a bad system is lukewarm.

So we can say that Cripps does not want to rock the boat of colonialism, something similar to what Charles Dickens does in \textit{Hard Times}. Both he and Dickens point out the oppressor’s faults and leave them intact. Perhaps they prefer to leave it to their readers to react to what they write in different ways. An exposition of the ills of society, such as happens in Dickens’ \textit{Hard Times}, and in Cripps' book, \textit{Bay Tree Country}, sensitises society of its conditions. The writer who points out these ills in society does not necessarily have to come up with solutions to them. This form

\textsuperscript{61} Cripps, \textit{Bay-Tree Country} 166.  
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid} 166.
of fiction writing is called critical realism. What Cripps does very well is to point out that anyone who gets land by grabbing it, whether in Rhodesia or elsewhere, and forcefully conscripts the dispossessed owners to work that land, eventually pays the ultimate price: death by various means. The Earth ultimately carries out her own vengeance. Absolution comes only with the correction of the original fault.

“TO ME BELONGETH VENGEANCE…”

Other Novels

The same message of Earth’s vengeance seems to be echoed in other novels such as Slatter’s My Leaves are Green, Ballinger’s Waters of Madness, and Peter Rimmer’s Cry of the Fish Eagle. My Leaves are Green has been discussed at length in a previous chapter. The part that is relevant to this chapter is the end of the novel where the main character, David/Paul, meets his death. He decides to go and eliminate the lion that has been stalking his livestock. It seems that the Earth-Woman has endured David’s blunders in life long enough—his involvement in the wars of dispossession in South Africa against Cetshwayo, in Rhodesia against the Shona and Ndebele people; his fraudulent acquisition of his identity-twin brother’s name, causing alienation from his own family; his deceitful elopement with Anna-Marie, thereby causing an estrangement between her and her father; his excessive jealousy and, of course, his role in the occupation of Mashonaland, a role which results in the local people becoming landless and despised labourers. He pays dearly for all these
misdeeds in Africa. Firstly, all his family members get killed on his farm while he is away in Salisbury. He has, indeed, been negligent of his duty towards his parents, and he has been arrogant towards the Shona people.

Secondly, he pays with his own blood. He and Nyoni, his Basuto worker, see a lion and stalk it. Meanwhile a lioness hides and waits till he climbs down a tree when it attacks and wounds him fatally. Significantly, it is the lioness that kills him, a symbol of Mother Africa or the Earth-Woman, since it is female. After his death, Nyoni and his son have to leave Rhodesia. “To me belongeth vengeance…” the Earth seems to be saying yet again.

The problem of land dispossession does not get resolved by the death of David/Paul and the departure of his son and servant because many more settlers remain. However, they, too, get shaken by the killing of some of their people during the 1893 and 1896 wars. Though they do not realise it, the calm that follows is a restless one because the land still has not been returned. Absolution is not yet possible if we follow the motif that predominates in this chapter.

Nowhere has dispossession been so painfully portrayed as in Peter Rimmer’s *Cry of the Fish Eagle*. In this novel, first published in 1993, Rimmer describes the loss of a farm, a home, and a heritage, by the Pengelly family in England and how that loss affects them. The last of the Pengellys, Rupert, leaves England to carve his own niche in Rhodesia. It is his reason for going to Rhodesia that is relevant to this chapter. It is
the fate of Philip, Rupert’s friend which is of great concern as well in this chapter.

The story of the Pengellys is that during the Second World War, a distant relative, George Geake, takes advantage of a situation where his grandparents have an unresolved land dispute with the Pengellys to whom they are distantly related. The Pengellys, on their own part, go through a period of financial difficulty and so in 1921 they sell 300 acres of their land to the Geakes in order to get out of debt. Then during the depression of 1934, they raise a mortgage on the remainder of the land, about 600 acres, in order to defray their expenses. Besides these difficulties with land, their livestock also dies from various diseases, forcing them to sell their breeding stock in order to survive the depression. The Second World War then breaks out and the Pengellys find it even harder to service their mortgage and other debts. The worst comes when Grandfather Pengelly dies and the state raises death duties on top of all the other debts they have. The death duties are what makes it impossible for the current Pengellys, Chris, the father, and Rupert, his son, to pay off debts from their meagre salaries.

Meanwhile, the Pengellys believe that Charles II gave them this land (hence the name of the property, King’s Water), and that it is theirs, while the Geakes believe that they were given it after it had been stolen from them earlier. The Geakes, therefore, have a generation-long agenda, a mission to repossess their stolen land. Yet to the generation of the living

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63 P. Rimmer, *Cry of the Fish Eagle* 113.
Pengellys, this is unheard of since they claim to have lived at King’s Water for the past 300 years!⁶⁴

It is in pursuit of the Geakes’ mission that George Geake decides to contact his “friend,” Herbert Wilkins, at the Department of Inland Revenue to push for the payment of the King’s Water death duties without delay. The Pengellys, in the meantime, are hoping that that Department can wait until the end of the war before asking for payment. Because of George Geake’s pushing, Chris Pengelly and his family find themselves facing eviction from their cherished land. That prospect is responsible for a number of behavioural reactions on their part and most of these are fatal. These reactions underline the importance of land, not only to Africans in Rhodesia, but also to the English people in England, some of whom come to Rhodesia to occupy African land.

**The Pengelly Reaction to the Impending Loss of King’s Water in Cornwall, England**

For Rupert, the last Pengelly son, life is worth living in King’s Water. If they were to vacate it, he has no idea what would happen to his father, his mother and his grandmother.⁶⁵ What happens to the family when eventually they vacate this land, is something even bigger than he could anticipate.

⁶⁴ P. Rimmer, *Cry of the Fish Eagle* 88.
⁶⁵ Rimmer, *Cry of the Fish Eagle* 14.
Although his mother tries to reason with Wilkins who gloats over the rich losing their property, Wilkins refuses to reconsider his terms and so she is forced to sell the whole farm below its present commercial price. Wilkins enjoys this and considers it to be the cutting off of “the last head of three hundred years of privilege.”\textsuperscript{66} For him the problem lies in the system where the Aristocratic Haves are pitted against the Have Nots who have to work the land. His loathing for the aristocratic class is evident when he tells Mrs. Pengelly to “be reasonable… go home and find a way to raise the money… All you rich people have ways of raising money.”\textsuperscript{67} The problem is that in the case of the once rich people who have lost much of the splendour of life, there is no way out of their anguish, so Geraldine Pengelly, Rupert’s mother, has to sell her property, especially after her husband gets killed in war. Her husband gets killed as a result of his reaction to the impending loss of King’s Water. The thought of such a loss is overwhelming for him:

> The pending loss of King’s Water rested so heavily on [Chris] Pengelly that his own surveillance of sea and sky was dulled. He was angry… For three days his stomach had churned and he seethed uncontrollably. He did not see the Japanese Navy Zere heading out of the sun on a collision course with the bridge of his ship….\textsuperscript{68}

Chris Pengelly becomes angry and absent-minded while commanding the Admiral and, in a moment of such absent-mindedness, he is bombed by a Japanese aeroplane without having had the chance to avert the on-coming

\textsuperscript{\textit{66}} Ibid 88.  
\textsuperscript{\textit{67}} Ibid 89.  
\textsuperscript{\textit{68}} Ibid 95-96.
danger. It is, therefore, the pending loss of King’s Water that has him killed.

When his mother, Grandmother Pengelly, hears the news of her son’s death a week later, she is unable to bear it because for her there is nothing more to live for, “not even the old home.”\(^\text{69}\) So she climbs a cliff behind the house and falls off into the sea and dies, for there is “no purpose to her life.”\(^\text{70}\)

Chris Pengelly's wife, Geraldine, begins to lose her memory after the funeral of Grandmother Pengelly. She has already sold the farm to George Geake and she gets a fresh threat of more death duties if it turns out that her son, reported missing in action, ends up being reported dead, too.

Rimmer uses a very powerful symbol of doom in describing the last few days of Geraldine Pengelly’s life, the same symbol that Herman Melville uses for Bartleby in his novel, *Bartleby the Scrivener*, that of facing the wall:

> There was a small window in the only room in the flat which looked *out onto a brick wall*. Geraldine had the off-licence deliver a case of gin and bottles of synthetic orange juice. She drank it two-thirds gin and one-third orange, *staring at the wall*, dripping its endless winter rain. There was no heat in the flat. On the third day of her loneliness, she took Chris’ service revolver from the

\(^{69}\) Rimmer, *Cry of the Fish Eagle* 97.  
\(^{70}\) *Ibid* 98.
drawer and blew her brains out through the window so that they splattered against the blank, wet wall (my italics for emphasis).

Geraldine shoots herself (unlike Bartleby who slowly starves himself to death) rather than face an empty life without a home, a husband and she also believes, without a son, but especially as a result of having to give up her land, her family home for the past 300 years.

Rupert’s reaction to the loss of King’s Water on the other hand, is far from being fatal or defeatist. While he feels that all his fighting and struggle to survive after his fighter plane gets shot down has been in vain since he has no family and no home now, he feels that this setback gives him the chance to go and start all over in Africa. He feels that he is no longer wanted in England and “A man should never stay where he’s not wanted…I’m going to Africa, carve out a new world. I’ll have my own King’s Water…I’ll have a farm so big I won’t see anyone’s chimney smoke…A farm so big you can look into your own distance.”

He does not, however, ask himself if he is wanted in Africa, but that is a different issue.

A more drastic reaction happens deep inside Rupert’s soul soon after he is told about his father’s death. He goes through a moment of seething anger at “them…those who made him go to war and then laughed at his efforts,” presumably "them" is the British government. Then “they” pull the rug under him by impoverishing him. The anger does not destroy him

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71 Ibid 105-106.
72 Rimmer, Cry of the Fish Eagle 114.
though. Rather, it strengthens him and spurs him on to make a resolution about his life in the future. For “when he turned from the window [through which he was looking outside], he had grown up. There was not the least trace of naivety [sic] left in his mind. From now on… he was going to take and not be taken [a resolution reminiscent of Wanja’s “eat or you are eaten” in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Petals of Blood*]. Let them have the past and he would have the future. Romantic shit, for what it was, could stay with them and all the false believers.”

This reaction is what Joseph Campbell calls a “call to adventure;” a call or a summons to live, a summons to some high historical undertaking; “the awakening of the self.” Campbell goes on,

> But whether small or great, and no matter what the stage or grade of life, [this is] the call that rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration—a rite, or moment of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand.

For Rupert Pengelly the typical “circumstances of the call are the dark forest” in which he spends three and half months trudging through with his colleague after their plane is shot down by the Japanese in the jungles of Burma and the equally dark forest that his soul goes through on learning about his father’s death and later about his grandmother’s death, his mother’s death and the loss of his beloved home. All he is left with is

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73 *Ibid* 103-104.
Badger, his dog. So when he goes to bid farewell to King’s Water it is an act of severance:

He stood there, looking at the silent house, sightless as it stared down the slope of sheepless fields, as tired as he but sitting where it had always sat and empty of workmen. They had torn the heart out of the old home and there were piles of rubble on the driveway, dumped and waiting for the cartage truck. Finally he walked the farm for the last time, around the fence, the new posts still waiting…. 

[Confiding in his dog he says], “It’s just you and me, Badger,… We’ll make it. Just got to stick together, you and me. You do want to come with me to Africa?” The collie barked back at him with yapping, happy certainty, and Rupert began to cry.  

It is also Rupert’s soul that is waiting to be carted away to a new land since his own heart has been torn out of himself at having to vacate his old home. There can be no other home in England just as there had not been for his father, mother and grandmother. While they have died, he has been transfigured; has gone through “a rite, a moment of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth.” He will “die” to England, and “be born again” to Rhodesia, as a Rhodesian. This he is told by Jamie Grant, a Rhodesian he meets in London after the war in 1945 who says, “You’ll have to become a Rhodesian. Our rule number one.” To become a Rhodesian is to think as the whites there do about blacks. Rupert accepts the call to adventure and so it begins.

74 Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces, 51.  
75 Rimmer, Cry of the Fish Eagle 109; 121.  
76 J. Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces 51.
Peter Rimmer's form has been truly revealing. He has given this detailed description of the land issue in England to show how much of a burning issue it is for another race of people besides the Africans who clamour for it and who go to war for it more than once. If a man, his mother and his wife could all die from a heart-break over losing a piece of land in England; if a government civil servant could gloat over dispossessing the rich families of his country; and if a young man could become hardened by that experience and resolve to “take and not be taken” from that moment onwards, then, Rimmer seems to be saying, we ought to understand why, later in his long novel, Africans resolve to also recover their land taken from them by people like Rupert and his fellow countrymen.

In this novel, the simultaneous references to land in England and land in Rhodesia are constant and revolve around Rupert: for example, his King’s Water in Cornwall and his King’s Water in Centenary, Rhodesia. He gets dispossessed of his land by George Geake and his home country government. He switches countries and adopts a new country as home to create a new and bigger King’s Water, even though he does so by keeping his resolution “to take” land from Rhodesian Africans. The political aspects of this novel, aspects surrounding the land question, will be the subject of another chapter. For now it has been demonstrated that land is a commodity for which people are prepared to die.

***AGAIN, “TO ME BELONGETH VENGEANCE…”***
Besides the aspect of land, Peter Rimmer also seems to say at the end, that Africa herself has a way of repaying her own debt. That is where Philip comes in.

Of all the white people who fight in the Zimbabwean Second War of Liberation that ends in 1979, Philip, a Selous Scout, is the most vicious. Earlier, when the girl, Sally, who becomes his wife eventually, asks Arthur, Rupert’s first son, if he has seen his friend, Philip, anywhere, (Sally has met Philip previously), Arthur’s reply is to discourage her from getting involved with him because “Those Scouts are something else…the war hasn’t done him any good.” 77 As a Selous Scout Philip tracks down and hunts “terrorists” with his whole body painted black, thus, literally transforming himself into another self. He takes part in a massacre in Mozambique; he lives in the bush like a dangerous animal, eating lizards, roots, raw meat and so on. 78 His eyes are often described as a killer’s eyes: “The faraway look she [Sally, now his wife] had dreaded was back in his eyes, and the professional killer in him had taken full control.” 79 He and fellow Selous Scouts are described as “well-trained bloodhounds.” 80

When the war ends, he helps to set up Remano, the dissident group that fights the Frelimo government of Mozambique, the intention being to perpetuate his career in killing. When he leaves Mozambique, he gets

77 Rimmer, *Cry of the Fish Eagle* 462.
78 *Ibid* 480; 592.
79 Rimmer, *Cry of the Fish Eagle* 505.
80 *Ibid* 506.
employed in independent Zimbabwe by the Department of Parks and Wild Life to fight against poachers. We are told, “Philip had received orders from Harare to shoot all poachers on sight, and they were the kind of orders of which he approved.”81 He hunts men as one hunts animals. He becomes totally dehumanised in the process:

He loved every minute of it. The bush. The campfires. The flies. Finding food in the form of lizards, mopani worms, fish and grasshoppers. The killing. He enjoyed the deadly hunt, knowing that the poachers were desperate and as well armed as he was. The contest was even. It was better than any sport he had ever played before… The Government had given him a licence to slaughter his prey, and the poachers knew the bush as well as he did… He forgot all else but the quarry. His origin, parents, wife and son were lost in his obsession to kill.82

When there is a lull in the hunt for poachers, Philip feels so bored that he thinks of “going up to Zaire [as a mercenary] where General Mobutu was having trouble.”83 On his next and final call to hunt poachers, he is so eager to be gone that he forgets to kiss his wife goodbye.84 However, it seems as if Mother Earth, or the Earth-Woman, has had enough of Philip’s kind of work. She cannot forgive Philip as his slaughter of human beings has gone beyond the call of duty. So while “no man was

81 Ibid 591.
82 Ibid 592-593.
83 Rimmer, Cry of the Fish Eagle 595.
84 Ibid 595.
going to kill Philip when Philip was looking for trouble…,”\textsuperscript{85} the Earth-Woman is going to do that.

After killing two of the seven poachers,

Philip was almost at the edge of the water when the hippopotamus cow charged, her great jaws open in anger at the man who stood between herself and her calf. As Philip turned to investigate the new, deadly sound, he found himself looking into the jaws of the creature, as the teeth came down around his body and cut him in half. He died with a terribly puzzled and faintly disdainful expression on his face, as if disbelieving of the fluke chance that had killed him, something no man had ever been able to do.\textsuperscript{86}

The hippo cow is symbolic of the Earth, nurturer of her land and her children, just like the lioness which kills David/Paul under different circumstances in \textit{My Leaves are Green}. It is not that Philip is wrong in annihilating the poachers who are vandalising certain species of the land’s wild life. It is what Philip has become, a killer machine, that is objectionable. So after killing this killer machine, “the cow went back into the river herding her calf into the darkening water while it still reflected the blood-red of the sun-caught clouds. The evening was quiet, broken only once by the lonely cry of the fish eagle.”\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Ibid} 595-596.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Ibid} 597.
\textsuperscript{87} Rimmer, \textit{Cry of the Fish Eagle} 597.
The world seems safe again for Rhodesia and her children once the killer robot has been dispatched. It is emphasised in the statement that no man is capable of killing Philip. So something else has to do that, as if he were some supernatural being, or someone who bears a charmed life. The Earth then, symbolised by the hippopotamus cow, proves once again that to her, “belongeth vengeance” for all those who abuse her. Peter Rimmer has effectively portrayed this vengeance.

**Ballinger’s Waters of Madness**

Ballinger’s novel, *The Waters of Madness*, deals with the land issue in a different manner, but in the end the Earth still exacts her prize. This time it is the rhinoceros that seems to object to the settlement of the main character, Piers de Kuyper, in the land of the Ba-Rapuza, an imaginary territory somewhere between South Africa and Rhodesia.

The author uses the rhino as a powerful symbol that signifies the occupation of land forcibly by Piers de Kuyper. Chapter one of the novel, therefore, first describes the rhino and his habits before it describes de Kuyper. The author has the rhino behave like a human being. It marks, for itself, territory extending ten to twelve miles, enclosing “most of a flat plain of long, well watered grass, some copses of mixed wood, an area of scrub. Almost half of the valley bottom of the Silent Valley on this side was the property of the old white rhino and he was content with his kingdom.”

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It is the same territory that the rhino claims which de Kuyper intends to possess and reveals his feelings about it:

Even in the dusk as he outspanned his scrawny oxen
Piers de Kuyper knew that this was the place. The grass was good. There was water. Certainly this was the place… He stooped and pulled a tuft of grass from the ground, sniffed deeply at the scent of the soil. Good earth. Farmer’s earth. He felt a sudden impatience to feel his plough furrow it, see its rich, moist blackness exposed to the sun.  

Both the rhino and de Kuyper make significant claims to the soil and there ensues a contest between the beast and the man; the indigenous occupant and the invading stranger; the Ba-Rapuza and the Afrikaner. There are many other political, social and economic issues raised in the novel, but the contest between de Kuyper and the rhino persists right up to the last page. It is a powerful symbol that the author uses to denote the struggle for land ownership and occupancy between the Africans (symbolised by the rhino), and the strange new comers, in this case represented by Piers de Kuyper. The challenge is hinted at when the tranquil life of the rhino is disrupted by a strange noise: “Uneasily the rhino continued on his rounds, trying to dismiss the sound and what it portended. But fear continued to echo in his tiny brain. The fear was justified for the sound was the sound of wheels turning. Civilization was marching in.”

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89 Ibid 15.
90 Ballinger, The Waters of Madness 15.
Like Rupert Pengelly in *Cry of the Fish Eagle* who leaves England because he has lost his farm to George Geake, de Kuyper leaves his home, a farm at Witwater, 1000 miles southwards, because it has been burnt down. Thus, he is in search of new roots. When he settles, however, he manifests the usual settler’s prejudice against the black people who already occupy this land and he denies their humanity as he proclaims, “No other *man* had been here then…No man. I was the first. Ach, yes there were kaffirs, but no *man* had been here. I came and the Ouma and we trekked for ever and then the Lord gave us this land and it was ours.”

The struggle to control the land is waged between de Kuyper and the rhino on a personal level. He plants his garden. The rhino comes by night to plunder it till de Kuyper decides to wait for and shoot it. It kills one of his dogs; crunches his leg causing a multiple fracture; and crashes into his house, destroying it as it is also set on fire. Luckily the rest of his family is not hurt. But from then on the rhino and its annihilation becomes de Kuyper’s obsession. His second obsession is the building of a dam to irrigate the Silent Valley. The dam does get built, but it is sabotaged by the rhino during a rare rainstorm. The rhino dies in the waters of the dam and its body gets washed down the river and blocks the tunnel through which the water of the dam should pass. So the dam collapses. Piers de Kuyper dies of a heart attack as Adam, his grandson, carries him from the collapsing wall of the dam. The rhino eventually

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91 Ibid 20.
dies, too, because de Kuyper has trapped it. It gets caught in the trap which it drags around till it dies—in the waters of the dam! It is as if nature herself has objected to the intrusion of this new symbol of a different civilisation, as we hear:

April [Adam’s wife] could not take her fascinated gaze from the jerking shape of the rhinoceros. She should not look, she told herself, and yet she had to look. She thought she could hear the rip of the great teeth through the softening flesh. Then she realised it was another sound she heard, something more distant but coming closer. Something was sweeping across the lake in a cold, running hiss, a furious sound, as if nature was expressing an ultimate anger.93

The symbols of the rhino and the storm merge with the struggle of Adam, April his wife, and their on-coming son, for survival (April is pregnant and near delivery):

“And still the rain fell. To Adam also it seemed that it would never stop. The world had narrowed in to this tiny focal point. There was the boat. There was April. There was himself. And over the side there was this pursuing, vengeful shape that was the body of the rhinoceros, following them…

The rhinoceros's body was there again. Adam flailed at it in his formented fury. Then he paddled once more…

Then there was the rhino again, kicking, tumbling as the crocodiles tore at it.

93 Ibid 333-334.
Adam’s mind began to work clearly. The rhino. Their own boat. The other boat. Why should they be all together? What force brought them together. Blind chance could not have brought him so often to the great dead body. There had to be a reason. The reason was a current. A current was carrying them, bringing them together. They were being carried towards the side of the coffer dam, to the overflow tunnel. There was no other current in the lake….

The dam, symbol of a new civilisation is, thus, destroyed. The story portrays Ballinger’s idea of development in a Bantustan with its attendant prejudices against black people. Afrikaners are pitted against both blacks and the English. There are also political and economic manoeuvres that always go on with a project of this kind—all are highlighted, including the involvement of external big powers and the corruption that goes with such major development. Although Ballinger sets his story in a South African Bantustan called Rapuzastan, his theme and content are still the same as those of other white Rhodesian authors—concern over possession of land and what it produces. Land is such an indispensable resource that Piers de Kuyper wants, indeed, dreams of his own dam to guarantee his total possession of such land. He uses the Bible to justify his personal right to such possession with absolutely no consideration of the rights of the indigenous black population of Rapuzastan. After all, he was the first man in this territory. Blacks do not count. However, Ballinger does not seem to approve of this appeal to the Bible for personal gain because de Kuyper’s dam bursts.

Ballinger has, therefore, used a powerful image, the constant struggle of de Kuyper with the rhino and with nature in the form of the storm, to symbolise the constant struggle of the white man, be he Afrikaner or English, with the local people whose land they occupy.

The struggle in other novels has been described. Many novels describe situations where there is no peace of mind for the settlers as long as the land issue remains unresolved. Some authors end their books on an optimistic note, but for some there is always a nagging sense of insecurity, as will be seen in the following chapters.

In this novel, *The Waters of Madness*, Ballinger ends on an optimistic note. The dam has been destroyed but it will be reconstructed and the de Kuypers have buried people from three generations of their family which entitles them now to a secure title deed of the land according to the beliefs of the Ba-Rapuza. Both the rhino and de Kuyper have died and so the conflict seems to have ended over who owns this territory. But questions remain: it is not clear whether Adam cares enough to continue what his grandfather started; his first son has died, born pre-maturely when they are caught in the ferocious storm which destroys the dam and kills de Kuyper. The baby, fourth generation from de Kuyper, symbol of the future, of continuity, is dead. Perhaps there is no future for the de Kuypers in this Bantustan? These concerns could symbolise the nagging insecurity of the white man in these territories. Such insecurity is felt in other novels, too, such as *The Rain Goddess, Towards the Tamarind*
Tree, and Stronger Than Armies. These concerns could also suggest that from the ashes of the struggle will emerge an Africa in which the whites and the blacks will live harmoniously side by side. Only time will tell.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter it has been shown that there are some authors who link the problems of land in a foreign country with those in Rhodesia where their characters end up settling. Some of these characters go through frustrating, traumatic experiences related to land in their home country and then they come to new countries such as Rhodesia to carve out new land and build a new home. However, settling on land that belongs to other people by force results in what we have called vengeance of the Earth, as the Earth metes out her own justice to those she considers her offenders. The rhino, as a symbol, is very powerful in Ballinger’s novel. It is inexorable and cannot be pacified. It guards its own territory jealously and even sacrifices its life for it. The Africans, too, sacrifice their lives, from the colonial days onwards, to regain their land. The hippopotamus in Peter Rimmer’s novel is also a powerful symbol, so is the lioness in Slatter’s novel. The authors have used form in such a way that the reader cannot miss the conflict that arises among characters and their environment in each novel concerning land and its occupation. In all cases, the Earth exacts its price, yet the resolution to the problems seems to remain elusive.
The next chapter discusses those novels where the author’s voice seems to see no hope of a tranquil life in these new lands.