

Racist Attitudes and Prison Reform in George Webb Hardy's The Prince and The Black Peril

At a time when we are disposed to seek only among the proponents of apartheid and their political and spiritual antecedents for the origins of a specifically South African brand of racism, we need to be reminded that comparatively recent arrivals from Britain sometimes revealed a racism more intense than that of many second and third generation colonials.

This article by Frederick Hale discusses the writings of a journalist who worked in Durban during the early years of the twentieth century. His racial attitudes, which must have found at least some echo among the White inhabitants of the Colony, have all the characteristics of the unredeemed American Deep South, and of apartheid at its worst. Circumstances enabled him to observe a Natal prison from the inside, and he also wrote strongly in favour of penal reform.

Since the 1970s research into the literary history of Natal has shed considerable light on many previously neglected topics. The works of Alan Paton and William Plomer have stood at the centre of much scholarly enquiry, while less attention has been paid to those of less well-known white, Zulu, Indian, and other writers. Yet countless corners remain quite unilluminated. One tenebrous topic is the fiction and journalism of George Webb Hardy. During his relatively brief stay in Durban at the beginning of the century, the published verbal assaults of this rhetorically belligerent Englishman on the judiciary, the alleged ineptness of the public bureaucracy, and prevailing sexual mores gained attention in Natal and the British House of Commons. His words incited the fury of both colonial officials and colleagues in the press corps and resulted in his imprisonment in 1904 and 1905.

Almost nothing of scholarly value has been published about either Hardy or his literary production. The weekly newspaper that Hardy published in Durban from 1901 until 1906, *The Prince*, was mentioned in directories at the time. In *Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal*, for instance, it is generously described as 'a candid commentator on public affairs, and enlivened with *jeux d'esprits*, gossip, and sarcasm'. The editor of that reference work noted that *The Prince* 'has risen to prominence as a social critic and commentator, and as a censor of those whose foibles or frailties enter into the gossip of the town'.¹ Given the attention that both that periodical and its irascible editor received in Durban and Pietermaritzburg at the time, however, it is amazing how historians have ignored it almost entirely. Hardy's novel has suffered only slightly less neglect. J. P. L. Snyman devoted a few hundred words to *The Black Peril* in his

survey of *The South African Novel in English 1880–1930* but tentatively gave the date of its publication incorrectly as 1912 and fundamentally misunderstood the central messages of this book. Explicitly comparing it to Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe*, whose publication in 1925 it antedated by approximately eleven years, Snyman gave readers the impression that Hardy had presented primarily a discussion of various forms of race relations in the South Africa of the future and had argued for ultimate racial equality before the law and, consequently, for integration, as the only viable solution to the quandary in which the Union found itself in its infancy. Moreover, Snyman failed to mention Hardy's legal case or his consequent incarceration and prison reform initiative that comprise much of the book.² Apparently relying uncritically on Snyman, Peter Rees also gave 1912 as the date when *The Black Peril* was published in his brief Master of Arts thesis about Hardy.³ Rees focused on the theme of interracial sexual relations in this novel and gave its prison reform initiative a wide berth.

Hardy was a political gadfly and an intemperate critic of a host of ills he perceived both in Natal and elsewhere in South Africa. Yet he was also a keen-eyed observer and social reformer who proposed changes in the penal system of Natal. In the present article I shall seek to redress scholarly neglect of this journalist and novelist by providing a general introduction to the man and his work, concentrating on his years in Durban and paying particular attention to his principal concerns and prejudices. I shall then consider the case that ended in Hardy's incarceration and conclude with a contextual treatment of the programme of penal reform he presented in *The Black Peril*.

This novel is a *roman à clef* in which Hardy presented in fictional dress both himself and many other characters with whom he interacted both in Durban Central Gaol and elsewhere in Natal. Analysis of the work is facilitated by the discovery in the South African Library of the copy of *The Black Peril* containing the marginalia of Arthur Munro Smith, who was the governor of Durban Central Gaol at the time of Hardy's stay there. He not only identified many of the people (including himself), places, and institutions to whom Hardy alluded, but also recorded his own comments about penal conditions which he believed had been misrepresented in print.

Relatively little is known about Hardy's life before his arrival in Natal. According to his own self-serving testimony in *The Prince*, he had 'passed numerous examinations in law' and been admitted to the Inner Temple in London. Indeed, Hardy advertised free legal advice to readers of his newspaper.⁴ He indicated that he had studied at Cambridge, but never gave details of his academic qualifications.⁵ Perhaps that was just as well; the *Law Lists* for the years 1880–1910 make no mention of him. His absence from that comprehensive source suggests that his claims may have been spurious. That he was well-educated, however, seems beyond dispute. As an editor he did not evince much intellectual sophistication, and frequently his emotions overrode his rationality. Yet Hardy deftly wielded his pen to produce flowing English prose virtually free of grammatical or orthographic flaws and occasionally seasoned with Latin and French phrases. He alluded frequently to the works of Shakespeare and other writers, and discussed legal concepts with apparent ease. Hardy also wrote prolifically, filling the columns of *The Prince* with thousands of his own words weekly. Furthermore, he was quite internationally orientated and had travelled extensively before landing in Durban. Hardy appears to have gained some familiarity with, and a keen interest in, Australia. After 'a spell of domestic life at home', his adventurous spirit had prompted him to sail from Southampton to New York in 1898 on the eve of the outbreak

of the Spanish-American War. However, Hardy was not a mercenary, but rather an argonaut who joined the Yukon gold rush. His rigorous sojourn through parts of Canada and Alaska yielded enough anecdotal nuggets for a lengthy serial that he published in *The Prince* beginning on 13 December 1901.⁶

The first issue of *The Prince* had rolled from the press on 25 October of that year. Hardy explained that the title had been selected to commemorate the recent visit to Natal of George, Duke of Cornwall and York — soon to be named Prince of Wales — and his wife.⁷ The *raison d'être* of the newspaper was, in the flattering words of its editor, to fill the need in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, cities that manifested 'progressive ideas' and were 'twin keystones of a great Colony, and two pillars of the Empire', for a 'weekly newspaper of standing and position to represent them'.⁸ Immediately below the title on the first page of each issue stood a quotation from Terence, *Humani nihil a me alienum puto* (i.e. I count nothing human foreign to me). The format of *The Prince* changed little during the life of the newspaper. Each issue comprised approximately sixteen two-column pages. The contents consisted chiefly of Hardy's editorials, political cartoons, advertising for firms in Durban, satirical items, and exposés of corruption and ineptness in the colonial government and municipal administration. The tone of Hardy's writing was initially sardonic, but became increasingly venomous.

The first few issues of *The Prince* revealed some of Hardy's underlying prejudices and overarching concerns as a colonial Englishman, themes that would *mutatis mutandis* echo in its pages for the next five years. One was his chauvinistic pride in the British Empire. The occupation of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal more than a year earlier had not brought the Second Anglo-Boer War to an end. Like many imperialists in England, Hardy blamed opponents of the conflict for its protraction. The prominent English journalist William Stead served as his principal scapegoat. Hardy declared that Stead 'cannot see through a pane of glass' and asserted that his description of the war as a 'bloodthirsty enterprise' was 'arrant nonsense'.

Another leitmotiv readily discernible early on was Hardy's condescending racism. In the second issue of *The Prince* he began to complain about integration of the railways in Natal. In what may have been an appeal to the sentiments of working-class readers, Hardy grouched that 'poor people cannot travel third class, because they have a rooted, and olfactory, objection to being shut up with oderiferous [*sic*] natives or coolies'.⁹ Fear, apparently sharpened his dislike of non-white peoples in Natal. In the same issue, Hardy asked: 'How is it that natives, umfaans and "boys" are not compelled to produce papers showing where they were last employed, and what character they bear!' Evidently as a means of preserving white domination in Natal, he proposed that any 'boy' unable to produce satisfactory documentation 'be arrested as a vagrant, and put into Government harness at once'.¹⁰

Thirdly, from the outset Hardy evinced a willingness to thrust his rhetorical rapier into public officials and to employ unrestrained language in describing both them and public institutions. In the first issue of *The Prince*, he called both the police and the tram conductors 'public slaves', asserted that the overcrowding of the trams 'infringes on the laws of humanity' and should be investigated by the SPCA, described the public library as a 'shack' that would be 'an ignominious thing to show our visitors', and, with regard to the tardiness in erecting an appropriate city hall, accused the municipal leaders of Durban of using 'an unconscionable time to digest the details of any scheme that is

submitted to them'.¹¹ At the same time, however, Hardy accused the city fathers of being 'certainly very far behind the moderate standard of politeness which is supposed to be reached in the English-speaking races' and defended himself from the ire of Attorney-General Gustave Labistour, who had taken exception to satirical verse that Hardy had published about him. The lines had been composed in a 'kindly spirit', he explained, adding that his purpose had been merely to have a 'little fun at the expense of public men which public men look upon at Home as almost their due'.¹² His dual standard of being willing to dispense but not accept criticism foreshadowed years of conflict between him and his adversaries in public office and competing newspapers.

During the first five years of the twentieth century, Natal was experiencing a rising tide of criminal activity that placed increasing pressure on the already overcrowded penal institutions of the colony, including Durban Central Gaol. In his synopsis for 1902, Arthur Munro Smith reported that 5 973 prisoners had been admitted, an increase of more than 1 000 over 1901, and described general conditions at that facility as 'at times much overcrowded'. One consequence of this had been 'a certain loss of discipline', although the governor did not provide details of disciplinary problems.¹³ In 1903 Smith reported that the number of admissions had climbed to 7 229 and that the gaol was 'practically always much overcrowded'. Most of the cells, designed to accommodate one prisoner each, held three. Smith suggested that the gaol be sold and another built to replace it. Furthermore, he called particular attention to the fact that nearly 300 of the inmates had been juveniles and proposed that a reformatory, similar to the one in Cape Town, be established for young convicts.¹⁴ No such institution was immediately forthcoming in Natal, however, and the perennial problem of overcrowding persisted. At the end of 1904 Smith reported that the number of convicts admitted to Durban Central Gaol had risen to 7 657 that year. He complained that 'the most pressing need of accommodation at present is in the Females' Gaol, where the number of cells is very insufficient and there is absolutely no hospital for female prisoners'. Indicative of the racism inherent in the penal system, Smith found some consolation in the implementation of one reform at the behest of the Natal government: 'The supervision and guarding of Europeans partly by Native warders and guards has been abolished. I cannot speak too highly of this change, which has removed a great source of irritation, and must commend itself to all thoughtful people'.¹⁵

Hardy was then on the verge of adding his presence to the swelling population of Durban Central Gaol. The immediate cause of his incarceration was the publication in *The Prince* on 7 October 1904 of an article titled 'The Black Peril'. A week earlier Hardy had sent up a trial balloon by mentioning in an untitled piece an unfolding scandal at a girls' school in Durban that entailed 'such a filthy form of immorality . . . that it is entirely impossible for the public Press to refer to the matter in detail'. He did not identify the institution or state the details of that particular case but obliquely indicated what it involved: 'Mixed marriages are bad enough in all conscience; secret immorality of married women with natives is all too common; but when we have young girls ruining their bodies and souls in conjunction with natives and secretly attempting to procure medical means of hiding their sin, it is time to sound a note of warning as to what is going on'.¹⁶

In 'The Black Peril' article a week later, Hardy insisted that the public was demanding an exposé of the scandal and indicated his willingness to provide one. He disclosed that it involved sexual intercourse between girls from

thirteen to seventeen years of age and black men in the bushes near the school that the former attended and where the latter were employed. Not content with declaring that the pupils knew 'methods of vice that would do honour to a Parisian brothel', Hardy ventured far out on a theological limb and, alluding to Mark 3:29 and parallels, asserted that the intimacy in question, 'willing prostitution of merry maidens before the loathsome lust of the natives of South Africa', was 'the unknown sin against the Holy Ghost himself'. This self-styled attorney advocated lynch law to deal with the 'hideous blacks' whom he deemed responsible. Hardy told his readers that 'one fine day you [will] find your daughters, not willing lambs that have gone to the slaughter like the girls of whose iniquity I have written, but pure and noble girls forcibly raped at brutal hands'. He provocatively asked, 'Then, when all too late, you will take your guns, and gather your ropes, and seek the nearest tree. Why not do it now?'¹⁷

Hardy was arrested and charged with committing indecency in publishing a 'lewd article' that was 'likely to give offence to women'. Unable to find bail of £500, he was remanded to Durban Central Gaol. After nine miserable days there, the bond was reduced to £300, which Hardy was able to raise.¹⁸ On 26 October he was tried before the acting chief magistrate in Durban, J.C.C. Chadwick, found guilty, and sentenced to three months in the same institution. The crux of Chadwick's judgment was that the article was intended to create in the mind an image 'which in itself is improper and lewd . . . not only to women, but to all decent-minded people'. One of Hardy's barristers immediately appealed against the verdict, allowing Hardy to remain temporarily out of gaol. The convicted editor's friends and supporters post-haste established a defence fund to defray his legal expenses. At that time *The Prince* had a weekly circulation of more than 5 000.¹⁹

The Natal Supreme Court heard the appeal in Pietermaritzburg on 13 February 1905. That body reversed Chadwick's verdict on the grounds that the statute of 1898 on which it was based did not apply to journalistic texts. Nevertheless, and in Hardy's view in violation of a fundamental principle of Anglo-Saxon justice, the Supreme Court allowed him to be prosecuted anew, albeit on the basis of common law.²⁰ Placed in jeopardy a second time on 22 February, Hardy was again convicted of public indecency, this time before Chief Magistrate Percy Binns in Durban, but sentenced to only two months' imprisonment without hard labour. The Supreme Court allowed this conviction to stand. Hardy returned to Durban Central Gaol on 11 April 1905. He was released from custody on 10 June. *The Prince* continued to appear weekly while Hardy brooded behind bars, critically observed his surroundings, and mentally composed the germ of his reform programme.

Less than a fortnight after his release, Hardy began to publish a nineteen-part account of his experiences as a prisoner. Titled 'Prison Life in Natal', it ran in *The Prince* from 23 June until 24 November 1905. The series was highly subjective, replete with self-pity and bitterness towards judicial and penal authorities. There is no compelling reason to doubt that Hardy was a sincere reformer, and to some extent his observations were corroborated by the comments of Arthur Munro Smith and members of a prison reform commission that would soon begin a supposedly comprehensive investigation of penal conditions in Natal. Yet Hardy's transparent intentions in devoting many thousands of printed words to his own case included self-justification and revenge. His sincerity encompassed a belief in his own innocence, and his criticism was intended in part as a means of striking back at men in power who



'Flying for their lives'

had caused him both public and private humiliation. He also wished to convince readers that the penal system had failed to cow him; remorse was apparently far from his mind. Much of 'Prison Life in Natal' must therefore be taken with a pinch of salt.

Certain overarching themes dominate this protracted series and contribute indirectly to an understanding of Hardy's observations and the agenda for reform that he would propose explicitly both near its conclusion and in *The Black Peril*. It should be underscored at the outset that condescending racism underlay much of what Hardy wrote in this regard. Among other things, he detested the crowded conditions at Durban Central Gaol and urged the abolition of the policy of shoehorning three inmates into one cell. Hardy reasoned that 'reform is absolutely hopeless so long as men filthy and diseased in body and soul are herded together like pigs in a sty'. His abhorrence of homosexuality accentuated this plea. With typical hyperbole, Hardy declared that 'the block of buildings in Durban Gaol that is full of long-time blacks, three in a cell, is a very hotbed of vice unsurpassed since the days of Sodom and Gomorrah'.²¹

The racist element in this plea permeated much of what Hardy wrote in *The Prince* about his imprisonment and obviously fuelled his reform initiative. Racial integration burdened his emotional state practically from the moment he entered the gaol. He found it humiliating to remove his clothing in the presence of black Africans. Furthermore, Hardy saw in this temporary nudity a challenge to white domination of South African society. 'Such treatment of white men is carefully noted by the coolies and kafirs in the prison', he noted, 'and tends to encourage the coloured man in his belief that he is the equal of white men who are treated like dogs by their fellow-men'.²² Hardy also found the partially colour-blind policies of the gaol utterly unhygienic. He informed readers that at one end of the exercise yard there were 'latrines for white men and kafirs, side by side, (you would hardly think that the scene is laid in Natal, but it is)' and thought it even more outrageous that 'white men and coolies and kafirs, rotten with lice and disease and filth, were herded together like the Christians of old waiting for the lions, or the Russians of to-day out on the long Siberian trail'.²³ Hardy thought it 'most horrible of all [that] the same razors are used by whites, coolies, and kafirs — a disgraceful and really appalling state of things'. He explained that because many of the African and Asian prisoners were 'rotting away with the filthiest forms of venereal disease', this practice posed a hazard to the health of the 'valuable white subjects' of the Crown.²⁴ What seems to have agitated Hardy most, however, was that imprisonment was a social leveller: 'If the public did but know it, this prison is doing most deadly work in the way of equalizing blacks and whites, and so fulfilling the mission of Exeter Hall and damning the real interests of South Africa more than any combination of circumstances throughout the whole of South Africa, than any putrescence that ever emanated from that bastard thing, the Nonconformist Conscience'. Removing whatever doubt might have remained in the minds of his readers about his view of racial equivalence, Hardy declared that the 'germ of equality between black and white . . . is the most dangerous germ that ever lived and moved and had its being in a civilized land'.²⁵

Despite his patent antipathy to black Africans, Hardy called attention to racial discrimination in the administration of corporal punishment. Claiming that there were 'tons of floggings' in Durban Central Gaol during his two months there and that 'when you see the thing going on a feeling of revolt and

disgust is bound to come over you if [you] are a human being at all', he insisted that 'no whites are ever flogged, except for rape, but blacks are unmercifully thrashed over and over again for the most trivial offences, and the whole thing is certainly degrading, even if only to the white men who look on and smile at that which they would never dream of allowing to the vilest mongrel that was ever called a dog'. Hardy also reported that the flogging-warder was a sadist who revelled in the suffering of his victims.²⁶ Capital punishment also violated his moral sensitivities when he witnessed it, despite his hitherto bombastic rhetoric about lynching black men who had sexual relations with white women. Hardy related how one Indian convict who had been sentenced to death on the gallows was clearly mentally ill and only Hardy's intervention had stayed the execution. He saw further evidence of racial discrimination in this case. 'Had he been a white man it is a million to one that he wouldn't have been in the condemned cells a week', Hardy asserted. 'But he was only a mad coolie and would most certainly have been hanged had I not intervened just before the execution was to have taken place'.²⁷

One final dimension of Hardy's criticism of Durban Central Gaol that merits attention is his perception of that institution's administrative staff. He thought Arthur Munro Smith, the governor, was reasonably kind but 'weak, hopelessly weak' and, 'like all weak men, sheltered himself under the authority of his superior officers'. In this case, those superiors were the Natal Police and, ultimately, the Natal Minister of Justice. In this hierarchy, Hardy deduced, Smith 'appears to be afraid of everybody and absolutely hopeless in the realms of individuality or originality or in sense of responsibility'.²⁸ Given Smith's alleged spinelessness, the medical officer, Dr. Birtwell, wielded disproportionate discretionary power and, to Hardy's relief, frequently overrode prison regulations in the interest of inmates' health and well-being.²⁹ On the other hand, the disgruntled editor held no brief for Chief Warder Davis, whom he regarded as capricious, arrogant, and unwilling to observe the limits of his own authority.³⁰ Hardy insisted that most of the approximately twenty warders could be bribed to contravene regulations and provide special privileges, and that several of them had done so for him at one time or another. This allowed him to eat well, read newspapers, and carry on regular correspondence during his two months of incarceration.³¹

The historical significance of Hardy's reform initiative can be elucidated further by considering that launched by one of his journalistic rivals, F. Horace Rose, editor of the *Natal Witness* in Pietermaritzburg. On 30 May 1904, approximately five months before Hardy published *The Black Peril*, Rose had made 'A Plea for the Criminal' in his own newspaper. 'Why Not an Industrial Prison?' Rose had asked. This young editor, who like Hardy would subsequently become a novelist, had visited Pietermaritzburg Central Gaol and described a typical cell there as a 'living tomb'. Conscious of penal reforms abroad, especially in England, Rose had called for the appointment of a parliamentary commission to investigate the prisons in Natal and propose ways in which they could be improved and their inmates rehabilitated.³² In both that and subsequent issues of the *Witness* he had published responses from various public officials and other prominent men in Natal who agreed with his general assessment and the need for reform.

Heeding this plea, Governor Henry McCallum appointed a five-man commission in May 1905. It first met four months later. During the next year and a half it interviewed sixty-two witnesses and visited most of the gaols in Natal, which ranged in size from a two-cell institution at Hlabisa to that in Durban

with no fewer than 260 cells. The commission filed its sixty-three-page report in 1907. In brief, this document reviewed the history of penal institutions in Natal, gave synopses of conditions in its gaols, presented certain ideas current in criminological circles overseas, and proposed reforms. That some of the gaols were woefully inadequate was obvious to the commission. Among the worst physical conditions were those at Vryheid. The report was succinct and entirely unappealing:

Latrines open into Females' Cell and Hospital Cell. Atmosphere throughout the gaol unspeakable. No proper kitchen; what there is cannot be used owing to the smoke. No bathing accommodation. Hardly any yard-space. Water supply totally inadequate. Soil at back of latrine in Male Quarters saturated with filth. Ventilation altogether unsatisfactory throughout the gaol.³³

Conditions seemed notably better at Durban Central Gaol, but the commission nevertheless found much to fault there on its visit of 10 October 1905, i.e. a few months after Hardy's release:

Great lack of yard-space. Not enough work to keep female prisoners employed. Waste food is given away, not sold. Meat rations are issued and weighed uncooked, no allowance for waste in cooking. Food is always cold when it reaches the prisoner. Bathing accommodation satisfactory. Indian prisoners are given tailoring to do in preference to Europeans. Open bucket, placed in cell, for sanitary purposes; remains there all night. (This has since been remedied in some of the Blocks by replacing them with covered commodes.) A flogging of 15 lashes sometimes necessitates 2 to 3 more weeks' treatment in hospital. No chapel; services are conducted in the corridor. At times it is necessary to accommodate prisoners in corridors on account of lack of space. Two coloured men and one white man in the same cell; in another cell were one man convicted of Bestiality, one of Assault with intent to commit Rape, and one of Forgery. Immorality amongst Native prisoners said to be common. Time of Chief Warder wholly taken up in clerical work, assisted by convict-clerks; has not time for supervisory duties. Obvious that some of the warders are unfitted for the work. Kitchen much too small; there ought to be a separate kitchen attached to the hospital. No lights in cells of New Blocks; very little light from windows of cells in Females' Block; additional accommodation being built at date of visit.³⁴

The commission's report ranged well beyond a description of the inadequacies of the physical facilities, paying great attention to how incarceration failed to achieve its objectives and in many cases seemed counterproductive. The 'most pressing' reforms that it called for were: a systematic grading of gaols; the amelioration of the condition of untried prisoners and detained witnesses, and of the treatment of prisoners not sentenced to hard labour, and those certified to be unfit for such; classification according to crime and sentence, and the subdivision of these according to character; the frequent interchange of prisoners from cell to cell, with the object of checking immorality, and lessening opportunities for escape; the assemblage and employment of women at convenient centres; the collection of the chronically and seriously sick at a

common infirmary, for treatment; the collection of short-sentence men in labour camps; dress, and diet, etc.³⁵

Beyond these immediate reforms, the commission also called for the implementation of indeterminate sentences for many criminals, the construction of separate facilities for juvenile offenders, a general reduction in the use of corporal punishment and, when floggings were nevertheless carried out, the striking of the buttocks rather than the shoulders, and a general emphasis on prevention of crime and rehabilitation of criminals rather than the use of imprisonment as a deterrent to further criminal activity, as incarceration had usually failed to reduce the rate of recidivism.

Racism lay at the heart of the commission's recommendations. It declared unabashedly that 'an independent prison for Europeans, with its different sections for Adults and Juveniles, Inebriates and Vagrants, must be the foundation of any attempt by the state to protect Society through the reclamation of the fallen and the criminal'.³⁶ With regard to rehabilitation as a primary goal of penal reform, the commission emphasised that this should apply only to whites because they are 'of a higher average intelligence, and possessing a higher moral basis, with a better knowledge of the claims of society, and of the advantages of being reconciled thereto' and therefore 'offer a more promising field for reform than would be presented by individuals of other races'.³⁷

The degree of overlapping between Hardy's observations and recommendations on the one hand and those of the commission on the other is conspicuous, even though the irate editor wrote from personal experience as an aggrieved inmate rather than as a dispassionate observer and was evidently motivated in part by his eagerness to justify himself. Both programmes proceeded in part from the racist attitudes of the British colonial mind. Both assumed the cultural and moral superiority of Europeans over indigenous Africans. Both took a dim view of corporal punishment. Both highlighted the need to improve physical facilities, prison administration, and the competence of personnel. Both espoused the desirability of education as part of imprisonment, at least for whites. Both stressed the need for segregating juvenile offenders from adult convicts. For all his righteous indignation and self-serving rhetoric, Hardy was in many respects in harmony with his journalistic rivals and governmental adversaries with regard to penal reform.

When Hardy wrote those sections of *The Black Peril* that deal with penal reform, he drew heavily on his serial article 'Prison Life in Natal'. Indeed in places he quoted it verbatim. Nevertheless, Hardy's novel clearly reflects the fact that he completed it at a different time and in a more progressive political milieu, and intended it for more liberal readers in England than for subscribers to whom he had appealed in Durban. Pivotal dissimilarities between the two works illustrate the impact that such factors have on a literary production. They also reveal something of the tensions in the mind of this former colonist who after returning to England manifested a critical spirit towards some aspects of imperialism but never fully shed the racist attitudes that he had paraded while editing *The Prince*.

Precisely where Hardy stood in relation to the debate over British imperialism after he returned to England is unknown. The dispute had deep roots in Victorian Britain and flared anew during the Second Anglo-Boer War, owing not least to the publication of John Atkinson Hobson's ground-breaking volume of 1902, *Imperialism, a study*, in which this increasingly influential

English economist had argued cogently that neither philanthropy nor other morally defensible factors but rather the financial interest of the capitalist class were the 'governor of the imperial engine'. Hobson had advocated the termination of imperialism on the grounds that its economic benefits were far less than the cost of the wars, armaments, and administration needed to preserve it, and that focusing on the maintenance of the British Empire detracted attention from sorely needed domestic social reforms. His perception of the etiology of imperialism would eventually exercise a profound influence on Lenin's theory of the same; in the short term it caused part of the British intelligentsia to question openly the ethical defensibility and practicality of the Empire.

It was in this new climate of national self-criticism that Hardy published *The Black Peril* in 1914. Approximately 310 pages in length, the novel was dedicated to John Shepstone (1827–1916), with whom he had become acquainted in Natal. Known as a paternalistic and uninspiring man, this Shepstone had been a colonial administrator, especially in 'Native Affairs', and resident magistrate. *The Black Peril* is written largely from a conventional omniscient narrator perspective, although, as we shall see shortly, a major section of the novel is an epistolary reproduction, albeit in appreciably modified form, of material that Hardy presented in his series on 'Prison Life in Natal'. As literary art Hardy's novel does not fly very high. Its scholarly value today lies arguably in the contrast it provides when juxtaposed with what Hardy had written for consumption in white colonial circles in Durban and elsewhere in South Africa.

Immediately conspicuous among the differences separating *The Black Peril* from Hardy's journalistic writing in Durban is his attitude towards imperialism, particularly with regard to South Africa. This underlies his partially differing treatment of the need for penal reform in Natal. On the first two pages of his novel Hardy comments very unfavourably on the history of European expansionist policy in southern Africa generally and especially that of Britain. He declares that 'it is two or three hundred years since adventurers from Europe landed there and began their self-imposed task of grabbing country from the natives'. This position is almost diametrically opposed to Hardy's general attitude towards imperialism in *The Prince*. Moreover, having praised Cecil John Rhodes to the skies in his newspaper, Hardy now ridicules the monument to him in the Company's Garden in Cape Town. There the consummate British expansionist is depicted in a sculpture 'at the foot of the principal street, and pointing at a great mountain as if he were a music-hall acrobat telling his audience that he is about to perform the most marvellous leap in history'. [Actually the statue points northwards, away from Table Mountain. Hardy either made a genuine error, or indulged in poetic licence to suit what he wanted to say about Rhodes — Editor, Natalia.] Alluding to the conquest of Matabeleland and the establishment of Rhodesia and other British possessions in southern Africa, Hardy alleges that Rhodes and his cohorts 'then proceeded to steal land from the natives, to wage little wars, and to found Colonies that have given more trouble to the British Empire than any country on earth' (pp.9–10). Hardy sees in the economic development of the Witwatersrand the most lucid examples of the subordination of ethics to economic expediency. The Randlords in particular he takes to task, for in their devotion to the acquisition of wealth and desire to wrest the South African Republic with its mineral deposits from the Afrikaners who governed that country 'they had a very exact notion of how it could be made to influence British statesmen,

and alter in the twinkling of an eye England's most cherished ethical ideas' (p. 13). In his attitude towards the Second Anglo-Boer War, Hardy thus had turned virtually 180 degrees from his journalistic position in 1901, when he had assailed William Stead and other pro-Boers for opposing British military intervention in the Boer republics.

With regard to the equally pivotal topic of race relations, *The Black Peril* is replete with condescending and stereotypical comments about Asians and black indigenes in South Africa, but Hardy had become sensitive to the exploitative character of the migratory labour system, especially as it was practised on the Witwatersrand:

If the Chinese were in a state of slavery in the Golden City, so were the natives before the war and so they are today. That is, if slavery means being to a large extent confined in compounds; bullied and sworn at and sjamboked in the compounds and underground where nobody can see the thing done; treated more like animals than human beings when nobody is looking; worked to death; starved on inferior food; killed by the hundred every year by being brought from the lowlands to the bitter cold of the winter nights of the Golden City, where, racked and exhausted with pneumonia, they die like rotten sheep, a death that would dishonour even owners of dogs. (p. 16)

In *The Prince*, by contrast, Hardy had written little about economic exploitation of blacks by whites. He had, however, criticised Randlords for depriving white miners and other labourers of their livelihood by importing large numbers of Chinese workers in 1904.

The generally autobiographical plot of *The Black Peril* is relatively simple, and readers with any familiarity with Hardy's career in Durban, especially his encounters with the judiciary of the colony, will experience little difficulty in seeing through the transparent disguising of various places, persons, and institutions. Arthur Munro Smith's marginalia referred to at the beginning of the present article are useful in this regard. In brief, an English journalist named Raymond Chesterfield arrives in Durban, here called 'Mosquito' in the colony of Zutul (an obvious ligature of Zululand and Natal) shortly after the conclusion of the Second Anglo-Boer War. He is described as a 'highly-strung' man, slightly over six feet tall, from the north of England. Hardy otherwise portrays his protagonist as an alumnus of Oxford, where he acquired liberal to radical views in political and religious matters, who is thirty-three years old at the time of his arrival in Durban and has written for newspapers in the United States of America, has participated in the Klondyke gold rush, and has spent time in Australia and Fiji *en route* to southern Africa to fight in the 1899–1902 war, in which he has served on the British side and earned an officer's commission. Together with an Australian whom he has met during the war, he launches a newspaper called the *Mosquito Argonaut*.

Chesterfield stays at a boarding house called Slapchester House, which Smith identified in his marginalia as The Oaks in Ridge Road (p. 77). Its proprietor is an alcoholic Anglican cleric, Timothy Trelawney, who Smith believed had been inspired by Archdeacon Colley (p. 42). Chesterfield feels an affinity with another resident of Slapchester House, an idealistic English-woman named Mary Rosebery who has come to Natal to study the 'Native Question'. Unlike most of the other residents, Rosebery praises Chesterfield for the courage he evinces in editorially challenging corruption and other

public ills. With regard to race relations, however, their progressive views gradually fall victim to what they regard as the realities of colonial life. The incident that strikes the decisive blow in this regard is the attempt of a Zulu servant named Jim at Slapchester House to attack Mary. Hardy describes the assault more obliquely than some that he had reported in *The Prince* but nevertheless makes it clear that only the arrival of a rickshaw puller prevents a rape from taking place. Trelawney also appears on the scene and beats Jim. The incident prompts Chesterfield to write about the sexual threat of black men to white women in Natal, a subject which he long has contemplated. In *The Black Peril*, his attitudes are more carefully differentiated than they had appeared in *The Prince*. In the novel, Hardy describes his spokesman as holding steadfast to 'the cause of absolute justice to them [i.e. black South Africans], of political equality with whites for educated men with coloured skins'. On the other hand, 'social equality between blacks and whites was to him an impossibility'. Hardy admits that his change of heart was largely subjective:

But when Raymond faced the idea of a Kafir kissing the girl he loved, and, with his strong imagination, pictured that Kafir becoming an educated civilized being and capturing the soul of one who was dear to him, perhaps his own sister, his whole being revolted against intimate relations between black and white in any shape or form. (pp. 195–196)

After reading the works of Gobineau, Lapouge, and Galton, who propounded the superiority of the white race, Chesterfield finds his evolving racial attitudes confirmed. He publishes in the *Argonaut* an article about a case of interracial rape that has little in common with the one Hardy had publicised in September and October 1904. The piece causes a public outcry and leads to legal difficulties similar to the quandary in which Hardy had found himself after publishing *The Black Peril*. Chesterfield persuades the disillusioned Rosebery to return to England; he himself enters Mosquito Gaol, a thinly disguised stand-in for Durban Central Gaol.

Hardy devotes sixty-one pages of *The Black Peril* to reproducing in modified epistolary form much of the material he had presented in his serial on 'Prison Life in Natal'. To some extent the underlying motivation of self-justification has now receded into the background, but penal reform remains a keynote. Tempering the reform programme in the novel signifies a softening of Hardy's attitudes of racial supremacy and the supposedly self-evident necessity of white rule in Africa. Ideologically, moreover, Hardy sings a different tune after his return to England. 'I am more and more inclined to see in a modified Socialism the best hope of humanity', he writes, perhaps influenced by the ascent of the Labour Party, 'and to look for no great diminution in crime under the terrible competitive commercialism that pushes many men and women to the wall, and that is, perhaps, approaching its apotheosis in this materialistic sub-continent' (p. 305). Furthermore, and entirely in harmony with his commitment to social and economic factors, rather than innate ones in individual people, as determinants of criminal behaviour, he announces through Chesterfield his disagreement with the once-influential theories of the Italian psychiatrist and criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) as propounded especially in his study of *L'Uomo delinquente*, which was initially published in 1876 but had appeared in a fifth and much enlarged version in 1895. Lombroso had perceived, in such supposed indicators as the cephalic index, propensities for social misconduct. 'The most of the whites in Mosquito

Gaol when I was there had certainly no inherent or inevitable criminality, so far as I was able to study them', he asserts. 'There was nothing whatever in the shape of their heads, or in their features, to differentiate them from the average human being' (p. 303). Smith agreed; he wrote in his copy of *The Black Peril*: 'Quite so. I agree'. Instead of genetic determinants, Hardy believes that most inmates had committed crimes 'because under the stress of life, and especially financial circumstances, they had become the victims of weakness of character or misapplied strength of character, and had made one or two mistakes which they had not been clever enough or lucky enough to keep from the eyes of society'. He also cites immoderate consumption of alcohol as a cause. Hardy's summary of this was succinct: 'All, generally speaking, were the victims of what is called 'environment,' either in early or later life' (p. 304). This general perception militated against typical colonial attitudes that the primary factor in crime was racial.

The extent of Hardy's conversion, if it may be called that, should not be exaggerated. He apparently felt no more inhibited in sharing with British than with Natalian readers his revulsion at being compelled to share amenities with black and Indian prisoners: 'Three in a cell — think of it — with the same bucket of water from which to drink, the same bucket to use as a latrine, the same blankets continually interchanged, the same filth, and insect-life creeping and crawling from white to black and from black to white!' (p. 275). In a few instances Hardy adapts his rhetoric of racism to fit his British readers. A prime example is his description of how he was compelled to disrobe and don a prison uniform. 'I was compelled to change from my own clothes to the prison ones in the room at the gate of the gaol, in the presence of warders, criminals, kafirs and whites, another quite unnecessary indignity', Hardy writes. 'It did not tend to give the Kafirs a very high opinion of the sense of justice of the white man' (p. 266). As indicated earlier, Hardy complained in 'Prison Life in Natal' that an incident of that sort 'tends to encourage the coloured man in his belief that he is the equal of white men who are treated like dogs by their fellow-men'.

Despite the strong vestiges of anger and racism in his writing after returning to England, in *The Black Peril* Hardy argues that penal reform should be undertaken in the interest of rehabilitating criminals and improving what he had experienced as dehumanising conditions. 'The whole life in prisons ought to be ameliorated in the direction of better food, plenty of books of all kinds, no work of a degrading character, and a moderate amount of social life among the prisoners', he wrote. The process of rehabilitation should not end when convicts are released. Hardy emphasised that 'above all, society must recognize that a prisoner, having paid his debt, is fairly entitled to be allowed to begin life again without stones continually being thrown at him' (p. 304).

There is no firm evidence that Hardy's programme helped to bring about reforms in the prisons of Natal. He left Durban in 1906, published *The Prince* for a few months in Johannesburg, and, apparently, then returned to England. Hardy's image as a maverick in the eyes of the colonial government would have militated against his exercising significant influence in the area of public policy, although he promised readers of *The Prince* that he would share with the Prison Reform Commission his ideas for 'making the prison a little less like the barbarism of Russia and a little more like the civilized humanitarianism of which Britons boast'.³⁸ In any case, the prison reform commission appointed in 1905 had the attention if not necessarily the obedience of the men in Pietermaritzburg who made decisions in this regard. Even if it exercised little

influence in the short term. In 1907 the principal reforms effected included creating a separate category for prisoners of mixed race, the revision of the prison diet, the employment of short-term prisoners on road parties, and longer hours of exercise for prisoners on remand and others not sentenced to hard labour. Curiously enough, medical authorities had strongly opposed the commission's recommendations regarding corporal punishment, which included use of a cane instead of a whip and that punishment should be inflicted on the buttocks instead of the shoulders.³⁹

The chief historical significance of Hardy's observations about Durban Central Gaol lies in the detailed insights they provide of conditions there, viewed through the eyes of an aggrieved and angry, but intellectually gifted, inmate. The literary importance of 'Prison Life in Natal' and the related sections of *The Prince* is less readily summarised, but one could develop a case for the use of these texts as illustrations of abiding racism when considering theories of colonial discourse. It has been argued repeatedly by such scholars — economic, psychological, and otherwise — Europeans writing about subordinated ethnic groups in imperialistic situations employed their pens as instruments of subjugation, that this was often done unconsciously, and that condescending depictions of the 'other', i.e. people of ethnic groups other than one's own, remained strong even when the writers in question sympathised with them.⁴⁰ Hardy's approximately parallel texts, some springing from the geographical and attitudinal centre of British colonialism in south-eastern Africa shortly after the beginning of the twentieth century and others from a more liberal milieu in England approximately a decade later, provide a small but rich lode of ore for literary scholars interested in working it.

NOTES

1. *Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal: Its People, Commerce, Industries and Resources* (Natal: Lloyd's Greater Britain Publishing Company, 1906), pp.282, 287.
2. J.P.L. Snyman, *The South African Novel in English 1880–1930* (Potchefstroom University for C.H.E., 1952), pp.80–82.
3. Peter Rees, 'George Webb Hardy, Journalist and Novelist, and Race Relations in Natal, 1901–1906, with particular emphasis on miscegenation' (Master of Arts dissertation, University of Natal, Durban, 1991), unpaginated 'Abstract', pp.22, 87.
4. 'Legal Advice', *The Prince*, 14 April 1906, p.492.
5. Untitled memoiristic anecdote, *The Prince*, 1 November 1901, p.19.
6. 'Through Ice and Snow', *The Prince*, 13 December 1901, pp.119–120. Hardy's chronology was confused. Writing in 1901, he indicated that he had left England in July four years earlier to sail directly to New York and that the Spanish-American War had broken out shortly after he disembarked in that city. In fact, the United States Congress declared war on 25 April 1898, and Spain sued for peace in July of that year.
7. 'Obiter dicta', *The Prince*, 25 October 1901, p.2.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Untitled editorial, *The Prince*, 1 November 1901, p.20.
10. *Ibid.*
11. 'Obiter dicta', *The Prince*, 25 October 1901, p.5; 'Obiter dicta', *The Prince*, 1 November 1901, p.19.
12. 'The Civility That Costs Nothing', *The Prince*, 1 November 1901, p.22.
13. H. [sic] M. Smith, 'Annual Report of the Governor of the Central Gaol, Durban, for the Year 1902', *Colony of Natal. Report of Chief Commissioner of Police for the Year ending 31st December, 1902* (Pietermaritzburg: Times Printing and Publishing Company, Ltd., 1903), p.57.

14. A. M. Smith, 'Annual Report of the Governor of the Central Gaol, Durban, for the Year 1903', *Colony of Natal. Report of Chief Commissioner of Police for the Year ending 31st December, 1903* (Pietermaritzburg: Times Printing and Publishing Company, Ltd., 1904), unpaginated.
15. Arthur M. Smith, 'Annual Report of the Governor of the Central Gaol, Durban, for the Year 1904', *Colony of Natal. Report of the Chief Commissioner of Police for the Year ended 31st December, 1904* (Pietermaritzburg: Times Printing and Publishing Company, Ltd., 1905), pp. 44–45.
16. Untitled article, *The Prince*, 30 September 1904, p. 569.
17. 'The Black Peril', *The Prince*, 7 October 1904, pp. 607, 609.
18. 'The Story of the Black Peril', *The Prince*, 4 November 1904, p. 631.
19. 'The Story of the Black Peril', *The Prince*, 11 November 1904, pp. 665–673.
20. 'The Black Peril', *The Prince*, 17 February 1905, pp. 241–245.
21. 'Prison Life in Natal', *The Prince*, 24 November 1905, p. 1535.
22. 'Prison Life in Natal', *The Prince*, 14 July 1905, p. 949.
23. 'Prison Life in Natal', *The Prince*, 30 June 1905, pp. 885–886.
24. 'Prison Life in Natal', *The Prince*, 18 August 1905, p. 1103.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 1103–1104.
26. 'Prison Life in Natal', *The Prince*, 25 August 1905, p. 1139.
27. 'Prison Life in Natal', *The Prince*, 1 September 1905, p. 1171.
28. 'Prison Life in Natal', *The Prince*, 28 July 1905, p. 1011.
29. 'Prison Life in Natal', *The Prince*, 11 August 1905, p. 1075.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 1076.
31. 'Prison Life in Natal', *The Prince*, 2 October 1905, pp. 1387–1388.
32. F. Horace Rose, 'A Plea for the Criminal', *The Natal Witness* (Pietermaritzburg), 30 May 1905, p. 7.
33. *Colony of Natal. Report of an Official Enquiry into the Prison System of the Colony, with recommendations touching the sentencing, punishment and treatment of Prisoners* (Pietermaritzburg: P. Davis & Sons, Government Printers, 1907), p. 54.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
38. 'Prison Life in Natal', *The Prince*, 17 November 1905, p. 1510.
39. Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg, Archives of the Prime Minister [PM], PM67, ref. 978/1907. Minute paper in response to question by Mr. Jameson of the Legislative Council regarding 'Action taken by Govt. upon recommendations of Prison Reform Commission', 3 August 1907.
40. There is a large and rapidly growing corpus of theoretical literature pertaining to colonial discourse, and a consideration of it lies outside the scope of the present article. For two seminal and brief studies, see Homi Bhabha, 'The other question: difference, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism', in Francis Barker, *et. al.* (eds.), *Literature, Politics and Theory. papers from the Essex Conference 1976–1984*. Methuen: London and New York, 1986, pp. 148–172, and Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', *Critical Inquiry*, XII, no. 1 (Autumn 1985), pp. 59–87.

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