

**MICHAEL HARMEL (1915–1974): A SOUTH AFRICAN
COMMUNIST AND HIS DISCOURSE**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the life and work of a South African journalist, editor, and activist Michael Alan Harmel (1915–1974), a political mentor and friend of Nelson Mandela. A resolute believer in racial equality and Marxism-Leninism, Harmel devoted his life to fighting, with “the pen” as well as “the sword”, segregation and apartheid, and promoting an alliance of communists with the African National Congress as a stepping stone to socialism in South Africa. Part 1, after tracing his Jewish-Lithuanian and Irish family roots, follows Harmel from his birth to 1940 when, having joined the Communist Party of South Africa, he got married and was elected secretary of the District Committee in Johannesburg. The focus is on factors germane to the formation of his political identity. The narrative section is accompanied by an analytical sketch. This, using tools of close literary interpretation, catalogues Harmel’s core beliefs as they inscribed themselves in his journalism, histories, a sci-fi novel, party memoranda, and private correspondence. The objective is to delineate his ideological outlook, put to the test the assessment of Harmel—undeniably a skilled publicist—as a “creative thinker” and “theorist”, and determine his actual contribution to the liberation discourse.

KEY WORDS: Michael Harmel—South Africa—history—communism—ideology—discourse—biography—journalism—science fiction

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¹ **Ethics Approval** for the present project was granted on March 16, 2017 under the no. **24186**.

² See Barbara Trapido, *Hunger for Freedom. The Story of Food in the Life of Nelson Mandela* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2008), 39–41; Mark Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki. The Dream Deferred* (Jeppesstown: Jonathan Ball, 2007), 153–154; J. Brooks Spector, "Barbara Harmel—Even the Children of Revolutionaries Have Childhoods," *Daily Maverick*, Oct 16, 2018, accessed Jul 25, 2019, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-10-16-barbara-harmel-even-the-children-of-revolutionaries-have-childhoods/>.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADP – Anthony Delius Papers, ASAML

AJA—American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio

ASAML—Amazwi South African Museum of Literature (formerly National English Literary Museum), Grahamstown

NALN—Nasionale Afrikaanse Letterkundige Museum en Navorsingsentrum, Bloemfontein

ASI—African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

BCM—Black Consciousness Movement

BJPA—Berman Jewish Policy Archive, Stanford, CA

BHI—Barbara Harmel Interviews (A3301), WCL

BL—British Library, London

CCB—*A Compendium of Communist Biographies*

CEJ—*Cambridge Encyclopedia of Judaism*

CI—Communist International

CIB—Colonial Information Bureau

CIB—Colonial Information Bulletin

CHSA 2—Cambridge History of South Africa, Vol. 2

CHSAL—Cambridge History of South African Literature

CMA—Charles Madge Archive, University of Sussex

COI—Census of Ireland

CP/CENT/CONG—Communist Party National Congresses and similar conferences, 1920–1991 (PHM, Manchester)

CP/CENT/PERS—Communist Party of Great Britain, personal files, 1920–1991 (PHM, Manchester)

CPP—Colin Purkey Papers (A1984), WCL

CPSA—Communist Party of South Africa (1921–1950)

CPUSA—Communist Party of USA

CRI—Civil Registration Indexes (Ireland)

CWA—Calendar of Wills and Administrations (Ireland & UK)

DAB—Dictionary of African Biography

DEP—David Everatt Papers (A2521), WCL

DHSA—Dublin High School Archive

DSAH—Dictionary of South African History

DW—Daily Worker

EA—Encyclopedia of Africa (edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah)

ECCI—Executive Committee of the Communist International

EFF—Economic Freedom Fighters

EHP—Ernest van Heerden Papers, NALN, Bloemfontein

FKP—Fanny Klenerman Papers (A2031), WCL

FT—Fighting Talk

GBP—Guy Butler Papers, ASAML

GWU—Garment Workers Union

HCP—Hyman Collection of Papers (A3323), WCL

HRBP—Hilda and Rusty Bernstein Papers (A3299), WCL

IBH—author’s interview with Barbara Harmel

ICSL—Institute of Commonwealth Studies Library, University of London

ICU—Industrial and Commercial Workers Union

ILP—Independent Labour Party

ISER—Institute for Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University

JPCP—John Patrick Cope Papers, ICSL

JFC—Julie Frederickse Collection, AL2460, SAHA

KGC—Karis-Gerhart Collection (A2675), WCL

LAI—League Against Imperialism

LBP—Lazar Bach Papers (A3381), WCL

LCP—League of Coloured Peoples

LM—Labour Monthly

LMF—Library and Museum of Freemasonry, London

LP—Labour Party

MCHP—Mayibuye Centre Historical Papers, Cape Town

MC6—Mayibuye Centre – Oral History of Exiles Project

MEPO—Metropolitan Police Office, London

MHP—Michael Harmel Papers (A3300), WCL

NA (UK)—National Archives, Kew, London

NA (CZ)—National Archives, Prague

NA (SA)—National Archives, Pretoria

NP—National Party

NWA—Negro Welfare Association

OFS—Orange Free State

PAC—Pan-Africanist Congress

PHM—People’s History Museum, Manchester

PSI—Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland

PSSA—Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa

PMB—Papers of Mary Benson (MS 348942), SOAS, University of London

POUM—*Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* (Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification)

RFP—Ruth First Papers, ICS

RKP—Ronald Kasrils Papers (A3345), WCL

RMP—Ruth Miller Papers, ASAML

“RSAF”—“The Road to South African Freedom” (1962)

RSP—Reg September Papers, MCHP (MCH70)

RTSKhIDNI—(*Российский Центр хранения и изучения документов новейшей истории* (РЦХИДНИ) (Russian Centre for the Storage and Study of Documents of Recent History)

RGASPI—*Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории* (РГАСПИ) (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History), Moscow

RPDP—R. Palme Dutt Papers, PHM

RUC—Rhodes University College

SACP—South African Communist Party (after 1953)

SAHA—South African History Archive

SAHO—South African History Online

SALP—South African Labour Party

SAP—South African Party

SARF—South African Road to Freedom (1962)

SLDF—Security Legislation Directorate File, South Africa

SNP—Sylvia Neame Papers (A2729), WCL

UNP—United National Party

TPC—Transvaal Peace Council

TWP—The White People (1959)

UW—University of the Witwatersrand

UWC—University of the Western Cape

WCL—William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

WASU—West African Students Union

WMR—World Marxist Review (Problems of Peace and Socialism)

YDC—Yusuf Dadoo Collection, MCHP (MCH05)

**PART I: THE MAKING OF A SOUTH AFRICAN
COMMUNIST**

INTRODUCTION

A prolific and fearless journalist; a Central Committee member in 1943–1974; the mastermind of the *Liberation* journal (1953–1959); a co-founder of the Transvaal Peace Council (1951) and the Congress of Democrats (1953); a key figure in the clandestine reassembly of the Party (1953); the first principal of the Central Indian High School in Fordsburg (1955); one of the first advocates of armed struggle who helped to elicit Soviet support therefor; the first editor of *The African Communist* in 1959–1972; the principal framer of “The Road to South African Freedom” (1962); the man chiefly responsible for Nelson Mandela’s conversion to Marxism...¹ All that—and more—was Michael Alan Harmel. It was therefore quite appropriate that Ahmed Kathrada should have listed him as one of the “A-team of our struggle”, an A-team which, aside from Mandela (and, we may care to add, Kathrada himself), includes Albert Luthuli, Oliver Tambo, Yusuf Dadoo, J. B. Marks, and Ruth First.² A few years earlier, Harmel had been posthumously decorated by South African president with the Order of Luthuli in Silver for the struggle for democracy, previously bestowed on Neville Alexander, Denis Goldberg, Amina Desai, Mac Maharaj, and Winnie Mandela.³

Ronnie Kasrils, to quote just one prominent SACP/ANC veteran, describes Harmel’s contribution to the South African liberation struggle as “monumental”.⁴ Serious students of the country’s political history, too, consider him a crucial personality. To the man and woman in the street, however, his is not a household name. In the eyes of the public, Harmel is overshadowed by many of his close friends and collaborators, particularly Bram Fischer, Moses Kotane, and Joe Slovo. Why is that so?

¹ This is based on the following: Karis and Gerhart (KGCA); Harmel’s police dossier (SLDF 5) (a CV in the *WMR* archive puts his joining of the “executive committee of Secretariat” in 1942. According to “Fighter against Apartheid” [*Morning Star*, Jun 20, 1974, 3] he joined the CC in 1941); Ntongela Masilela, “Michael Harmel: Intellectual Sketch,” accessed Jun 4, 2019, <http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/NAM/newafire/writers/harmel/harmelS.htm>; Alan Doyle [Harmel], “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Nov 17, 1949, 4; *WMR* archive (РГАСПИ); Transcript of the recording made by Michael Harmel on the early history of the South African Peace Movement, Jul 11, 1972 (HRBP: A3299); Raymond Suttner, “The (Re-)Constitution of the South African Communist Party as the Underground Organization,” *Journal of Contemporary South African Studies* 22, no. 4 (2004): 43–68; Sheridan Johns, “Invisible Resurrection. Re-creation of a Communist Party in South Africa in the 1950s,” *African Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (2007): 7–24; E. Pahad, interview by author, Jan 15, 2015; Alfred Hutchinson, *Road to Ghana* (New York: John Day, 1960), 14; A. Kathrada, interview by author, Jan 22, 2015; Michael Harmel, “South Africa: What Next” (SNP: B19); Bernard Magubane et al., “Turn to Armed Struggle,” in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Vol 1, 1960–1970* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2004), 83; Stephen Ellis, *External Mission. ANC and the Communist Party in Exile, 1960–1990* (London: Hurst & Company, 2012), 13 (cf. Tom Lodge, “Secret Party: South African Communists between 1950 and 1960,” *South African Historical Journal* 67, no. 4 [2015]: 457); Ronnie Kasrils, “The African Communist’s Clandestine Years,” *AC*, no. 178 (3rd qtr, 2009): 19–22; [Brian Bunting], “Death of Michael Harmel,” *AC*, no. 59 (4th qtr, 1974): 8; Tom Lodge, *Mandela. A Critical Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 45; Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown & Com., 1995), 133, 139–140, 424, 541, ePUB; A. Kathrada, interview by author, Jan 22, 2015.

² Ahmed Kathrada, “Last of the A-Team,” Independent Online, Dec 6, 2013, accessed Jun 7, 2019, <https://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/opinion/last-of-the-a-team-1617930>.

³ RSA presidency website, accessed Dec 20, 2016, <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/national-orders/recipient/michael-alan-harmel-posthumous>.

⁴ R. Kasrils, e-mail to author, Oct 14, 2014.

Harmel's relative obscurity stems, first of all, from the *nature* of his contribution to the national-democratic revolution in South Africa, a contribution that was, in the main, textual. But it also has to do with security considerations, ideological principles, and his personal psychology. These factors jointly impelled him to cover his tracks as an individual. He might have been inclined to write an autobiography at a later stage, but his death, premature in any event, came at the moment when the anti-apartheid struggle was still in full swing. There were simply other things to do than look back on one's own life. To make things worse, references to Harmel in memoirs by fellow communists, fascinating though they are, fail to add much to the picture of the man. As Mandela aptly wrote in a letter to Harmel's daughter: "It is given to few men to be able to hide their achievements as successfully as your Pa."⁵

Under the circumstances, one can scarcely blame historians for reluctance to produce a biography of Michael Harmel. Strangely enough, though, we have no monograph on his writings either. To be sure, his journalistic, literary, historical, and theoretical writings are extensive and he enjoys a reputation of a "theoretician/theorist" (Bundy; Lazerson; Lodge; Meredith; Magubane; Rantete); "key" or even "creative thinker" (Sisulu); "foremost Marxist thinker of his generation" (Slovo); "Lenin of South Africa" (Turok).⁶ Nevertheless, in practice, only a handful of texts actually receive attention—and then solely in isolation, randomly, cursorily, and/or for a specific purpose.⁷ No more than three of them have been anthologised under his own name.⁸ If Harmel's authorship is recognised at all, that is, for many of his publications are anonymous and undersigned by pseudonyms and "front men". The sum total of all this is that we have a very inadequate idea of Harmel's thought as a

⁵ B. Turok, interview by author, Jan 28, 2015; Rusty Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting: Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics, 1938–1964* (London: Viking, 1999); Ben Turok, *Nothing but the Truth. Behind the ANC's Struggle Politics* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2003); N. Mandela to B. Harmel, 1975 (MHP: A3300).

⁶ Colin Bundy, "Revolution Around Which Corner?: Revolutionary Theory and Contemporary South Africa," *Transformation*, no. 8 (1989): 2; Tom Lodge, *Mandela. A Critical Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 31; Joshua N. Lazerson, *Against the Tide* (Belville: Westview Press, 1994), 127; Johannes Rantete, *The African National Congress and the Negotiated Settlement in South Africa* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1998), 118; Bernard Magubane et al., "The Turn to Armed Struggle," *The Road to Democracy in South Africa 1, 1960–1970* (Pretoria: SADET, 2008), 83; Martin Meredith, *Nelson Mandela* (London: Penguin, 1997), 89; Walter Sisulu, *I Will Go Singing. Walter Sisulu Speaks of His Life and Struggle for Freedom* (Cape Town: Robben Island Museum, 2001), 181; www.presidency.gov.za, accessed Dec 20, 2016; Joe Slovo as quoted by R. Kasrils in an e-mail to author, Oct 14, 2014; B. Turok, interview by author, Jan 28, 2015.

⁷ Bundy, "Revolution Around Which Corner?," 2; Lazerson, *Against the Tide*, 181. Norman Levy, *The Final Prize. My Life in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (Cape Town: SAHO, 2013), 17, 58, 60, 71, 86–87; James Zug, *The Guardian. The History of South Africa's Extraordinary Anti-apartheid Newspaper* (Pretoria: Unisa, 2007), 166; Corinne Sandwith, "Yours for Socialism," in *World of Letters: Reading Communities and Cultural Debates in Early Apartheid South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN, 2014), 191–192; Lodge, "Secret Party," 433, 435ff; Thula Simpson, *Umkhonto we Sizwe: The ANC's Armed Struggle* (Cape Town: Penguin, 2016), 17–18, 24–25.

⁸ "Observations on Certain Aspects of Imperialism in South Africa," *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, 1, 3, Feb 1954; reprinted in Allison Drew, ed. *South African Radical Tradition: A Documentary History 2: 1943–1963* (Cape Town: Buchu, 1997), 262–269; "Revolutions Are Not Abnormal," in *Africa South, 1956–1961*, M. J. Daymond and Corinne Sandwith, eds. (Scottsville: UKZNP, 2011), 181–186; "Communist Party of South Africa," in *Apartheid: A Collection of Writings on South African Racism by South Africans*, Alex la Guma, ed. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1972), 205–228.

whole and there is, in actuality, precious little to underpin his stereotypical labelling as a “theorist” or “thinker”.

The present work thus, within the bounds of a PhD thesis, constitutes the first instalment towards repaying the debt South Africanists across disciplines owe to Michael Harmel as an historical actor as well as a writer. My ambition is modest. I attempt **(i)** to recapture the early, formative stage of Harmel’s life; and **(ii)** retrieve and make sense of such of Harmel’s writings as could be got hold of and attributed to him.

Part One aims to chart the moulding of Harmel’s political self. To this purpose, I take a close account of his writings from this period, including fiction and poetry (interpreted with emphasis on their “propositional elements”), which is something most historians would probably be disinclined to do.⁹ But my narrative differs from a conventional biography in another respect too. There is no principal source (missives, a journal, an autobiographical fragment) to weave the text around. Instead, the story that follows has been *constructed* through laboriously and painstakingly assembling and putting together of fragments scattered far and wide. My preconceptions and narrative conventions—operative and, indeed, indispensable in any engagement with the past—ensure its comparative coherence. Even so, there remain so many lacunae and question marks in Harmel’s life that in constructing this story I was compelled to be perhaps more conjectural, circumstantial, imaginative, and tentative than tends to be the case in “conventional” historical writing.

The primary material was directly or vicariously culled from a number of archives in South Africa, Ireland, Russia, the UK, and the Czech Republic and supplemented with that recovered from contemporary periodicals and newspapers. The Michael Harmel Papers kept at the William Cullen Library in Johannesburg represent a plenteous source. Harmel himself not having produced a memoir, I found it all the more helpful to tap into published and unpublished memoirs by individuals who—whether acquainted with him or not—occupied the same milieu and whose fortunes in some way parallel his. Similarly, anthropological views of James K. A. Smith and Paul Rich as well as a system devised by Teun van Dijk (marrying sociology and cognitive psychology with discourse analysis) allowed me to approximate Harmel top-down, as an inhabitant of a range of value-laden environments, even where there is no record of him as an individual.

⁹ James Phelan, *Reading People, Reading Plots. Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1985), 27, 44–49, 77 (for the quote).

Part Two naturally unfolds against the backdrop of scholarship of South African struggle, communist studies, and Harmel's life story. But whereas a political historian or scientist would be inclined towards a sort of cherry-picking, centring on what he/she (or worse, the previous tradition) believes to be relevant in the context of the accepted narrative of the South African revolution, I explore the *ideological co-ordinates* of Harmel's textual production, its *inner logic*. This is done not chronologically, but thematically, by identifying, examining, and interrelating prominent and repetitive themes (the rôle of an individual, United Frontism, relationship within the Congress Alliance, non-racialism, etc.) as handled not only in Harmel's journalistic, narrative, and programmatic texts, but also in his unpublished novel which, though on the whole aesthetically disappointing and intellectually awkward, merits a place of honour in the history of South African science fiction.

My approach here may be characterised as "close reading". Harmel being an analyst and ideological leader, his texts can be viewed as not quite a static, systematic, and certainly not decontextualized, but nevertheless ideologically and axiologically unified whole. Leading through writing was Harmel's vocation in life. It was his principal form of political and social activism, his principal contribution to the struggle. And it constitutes, too, his principal and immediately identifiable legacy.

I draw much inspiration from van Dijk's multidisciplinary theory, borrowing especially his definition of "ideology" and "discourse". As opposed to Marxist theories, the Dutch linguist defines "ideologies" as general and shared—albeit personalised—belief systems whose purpose is to "monitor the way people as *group members* interpret and act in their social world [and] function as the basis of their social identity". They are "representations of who we are, what we stand for, what our values are, and what our relationships are with other groups". Ideologies are to be distinguished from values, attitudes, opinions, knowledge, and mental models of events. They can be both of domination and of resistance, the latter having been famously described by Karl Mannheim as "utopias". They are enacted and elaborated through symbols and social practices, particularly—and that is where Harmel comes in—through "text and talk" or "discourse". The latter term is defined in van Dijk's theory as written, oral or mixed *communicative event* or *its product*. It can further refer to "discursive domain" (political, medical etc.

discourse) and “discursive formation” (such as colonial discourse),¹⁰ although I replace “discursive” (ratiocinative, logical) with “discursive” (“of the nature or characterised by discourse”).¹¹ My view of Harmel’s writing is further influenced by the informal semiotic approach of Vladimír Macura (which was, in turn, inspired by Yuri Lotman) and the minute dissection of the communist discourse by Petr Fidelius (Karel Palek).¹² My analysis of narrative, fictional or otherwise, draws upon structural and rhetorical narratology and fictional semantics. But I find van Dijk’s theory of ideology pertinent in the literary area also.¹³

While working on this project, I would most of the time meet with wonder. What made a Czech person, trained in literary studies, research a South African communist? My first encounter with Harmel’s name was whilst reading the autobiography of Nelson Mandela which I later translated into Czech.¹⁴ But what really triggered my interest in Harmel was when it transpired that he his last days were spent in Prague. His sojourn in Czechoslovakia, a communist police state,¹⁵ seemed to me completely out of sync with Harmel’s record as a social nonconformist and fighter against racial segregation and dictatorship. It simply did not make any sense. It was this puzzlement that spawned the present project.

Being an outsider—cultural, methodological, and linguistic—begets problems, but it is also enabling. It permits one to approach the material from a different angle, asking unusual questions, discerning aspects otherwise overlooked or taken for granted. During data collection, veterans-narrators of the anti-apartheid struggle did not seem to appreciate any indication of a differently contextualised—and hence, potentially, more critical—reading of communism in South Africa. That is not to say that the Party is untouchable. But the simplistic narrative of the apartheid struggle—which, across the time and space, pits the good guys on the Left against the bad guys on the Right—is. Questions that problematise, without gainsaying its merits, the Party’s assumptions and practices or raise the issue of its complicity in perpetuating the oppressive regimes in Eastern Europe, Asia,

¹⁰ Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology. A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: Sage, 1998), 5, 11–12, 26, 69, 71 (for the quotes), 314, 334n5, 191–199.

¹¹ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978), 24; the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹² In English: Vladimír Macura, *The Mystifications of a Nation: The Potato Bug and Other Essays on Czech Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010); Petr Fidelius, “The Mirror of Communist Discourse,” in *Good-By, Samizdat. Twenty Years of Czechoslovak Underground Writing*, Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz, ed. (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1992), 193–204.

¹³ For a brief outline see Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, “Ideology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, David Herman, ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 217–230.

¹⁴ Nelson Mandela, *Dlouhá cesta za svobodou* (Praha: Práh, 2010).

¹⁵ For a comparative perspective on South Africa and Czechoslovakia in 1948–1990 see Jan K. Coetzee, Linda Gilfilan, Otakar Hulec, eds. *The Fallen Walls. Voices from the Cells That Held Mandela and Havel* (Cape Town: Robben Island Museum, 2002).

and Cuba are perceived as awkward and reflective of the “cold war mentality”. One claim with an immediate bearing on the present work is that the CPSA/SACP discourse and activities need be considered exclusively within the South African context. It is, supposedly, important

not to identify the role and positions of communists in SA with those in Europe. The first interest of SA communists... was quite clearly the question of what they had to do in the SA context and international issues were secondary and much in the background, which doesn't mean that when there was some crisis in the world arena, they didn't jump in with their assessments. Moreover, they felt themselves called upon when writing books, pamphlets, programmes, to take up international issues... Indeed, this kind of literature should be seen as falling into a specific category, rather different from the day to day struggle in South Africa. The whole orientation of communists in Europe and more especially in Eastern Europe was... quite different, with attitudes to the SU [Soviet Union]... of prime importance.¹⁶

The corollary would seem to be that one can do justice to communism in South Africa only on condition that the ideological and practical links with “real socialism” are played down (or, on the contrary, proudly acknowledged). Downplaying the CPSA/SACP discourse on the international happenings and liaisons with other communist parties would, in our case, mean disregarding a substantial and substantive element in Harmel's work, an element that threatens to undermine or complicate the celebratory master narrative of the liberation struggle which, produced or sponsored by the veterans of the struggle and their sympathisers, maintains much clout in the public arena.¹⁷

This tendency to “quarantine” South Africa is not merely a form of *apologia pro vita sua*. It also reveals parochialism of both the anti-apartheid struggle and its interpreters, a parochialism which—flying in the face of the SACP's swearing by “internationalism”—is mirrored in the indifference of South African communists (including trained historians!) to the history of the socialist countries (even though they might have resided in them for a considerable period of time) and their adherence to myths which kept them going when the going got tough.¹⁸ To cite specific examples: the veterans of the South African struggle, for instance, live in a time warp when it comes to *Report—from the Gallows*, once a source of much inspiration and encouragement for the CPSA/SACP. The news has not yet reached South Africa that the text clandestinely composed in a Nazi gaol by the Czech journalist

¹⁶ S. Neame, e-mail to author, Apr 15, 2016.

¹⁷ Cf. the make-up of the board of trustees responsible for producing authoritative *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, accessed Oct 25, 2018, http://www.sadet.co.za/about_us.html.

¹⁸ Hilary Sapire, pers. comm., Mar 14, 2016; *The South African Road to Socialism*. The 13th Congress Political Programme of the SACP 2012–2017, 31, accessed Oct 22, 2018, <http://www.sacp.org.za/docs/docs/2012/draftpol2012.pdf>.

Julius Fučík (1903–1943) was until the mid-1990s (2000 for the English edition) available only in a bowdlerised version designed by communist martyrologists to make the author appear a less ambivalent figure and conceal a risky game he had chosen to play with Gestapo.¹⁹ Similarly, a leading SACP member persists in describing the *Charter 77* as “hostile opposition to socialism” with which he had “very sharp differences”. Had he bothered to peruse the document, he would have found out it does nothing more than demand freedom of expression, religion, movement, access to information, assembly, political activity, etc.—all of which are enshrined in the constitution of the New South Africa.²⁰

For Harmel, the international scene was not of merely a marginal concern. His analyses of events abroad did not come second and were not penned purely out of a sense of duty. His editorials, opinion pieces, essays, reviews, columns, stories, and histories which have as their subject matter world affairs run to hundreds of pages. Did he not write, after all, that “it would be very wrong, to ignore the world background against which our own struggles take place, or the essential need to learn from similar struggles in other places and times”?²¹ It would be difficult and highly artificial to draw a boundary between his texts on foreign affairs and those addressing South Africa proper. Rooted in one single ideology, the two categories interpenetrate and significantly influence each other. Taking his cue from Soviet ideologists, Harmel perceives South Africa as a part of a larger canvas that consists of two overlapping processes: the “colonial revolution” and humanity’s journey to socialism.²² Had it not been for his perception of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc as the first fruits of these two dreams; had it not been for his implicit faith in, first, Marxism as a philosophy of history and socio-economic analysis; second, Leninism as a manual, tried and true, for Party organisation and flexible alliance-making; and, lastly, had it not been for his embrace of the principles of communist journalism, Harmel would not have been who he was. He would not have been a champion of co-operation with the national-liberation movement and of the Soviet concept of people’s (or national)

¹⁹ Michael Harmel, “The Movement They Cannot Keep Down,” *Guardian*, May 12, 1950, 3; Turok, interview by auth; Essop Pahad, *Yusuf Dadoo* (unpubl. ms) (n.d.), 114 (YDC); Ahmed Kathrada, *Memoirs* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2004), 90; Kamil Činát, “Julius Fučík (1903–1943) a jeho Reportáž, psaná na oprátce” [Julius Fučík and His Report from the Gallows], accessed Dec 10, 2018, <https://www.ustrcr.cz/uvod/antologie-ideologickych-textu/julius-fucik-1903-1943-a-jeho-reportaz-psana-na-opratce/>. First unabridged English translation by Stephen Jolly, Ken Biggs, and Zdeněk Jumr: *Report from the Gallows* (Prague: Orego, 2000).

²⁰ E. Pahad, interview by author, Jan 15, 2015; “Declaration of Charter 77,” *Making the History of 1989*, accessed Oct 22, 2018, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/628>; *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996), 5–20, accessed Oct 22, 2018, <http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/SACConstitution-web-eng.pdf>. The same individual used to peddle ludicrous stories about the “success” of socialist agriculture in Czechoslovakia—see interview by P. O’Malley, Sept 3, 1991, accessed May 12, 2019, <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv00017/04lv00344/05lv00511/06lv00598.htm>.

²¹ “Which Way Are We Going?” *Liberation*, no. 14 (Nov 1955): 6.

²² Irina Filatova, “South Africa’s Soviet Theoretical Legacy,” *Twentieth Century Communism* 15, no. 15 (2018): 124.

democracy as a blueprint for South Africa to come. It would have been impossible for him to be the *spiritus agens* of *The African Communist* and a publicist prepared to “submit the merit of [his writing] to the judgement of those for whom it’s done”.²³ Even should it be practicable, to eliminate one thread of his work in preference to another, which one chances to deem more relevant locally, is to do injustice to his immense debt to Soviet discourse, his deeply cherished internationalism, and the mutuality of his two major ideals.

My main argument for inclusiveness is, however, one of “remit”. The present study does not aspire to salvage what is “best” or historically “most relevant” of Harmel the writer—though I do not shy away from suggesting where I think the quality lies. I am prospecting for Harmel’s ideological self. Such a project requires a catholic approach.

If his journalism and non-fiction, whether addressing local or international issues, are ideologically homogeneous, Harmel’s novel is, in truth, no more than an extension of his political production.²⁴ In dealing with it, I am therefore interested primarily in “the cultural, ideological, philosophical, or ethical issues... addressed by the narrative” rather than in its value as a literary artefact.²⁵ After all, an abortive work of literature tends to be “much more sensitive to the influence of the actual world”.²⁶ Barbara Harmel seems to concur to a point. For she writes that her father’s novel stands in the need of decipherment. It is, however, “tantalising representations of the internal quarrels of the ‘liberation movement’” that for her represents the most remarkable feature of the work.²⁷ As stated above, my interest is of a more abstract nature as I propose to supply a kind of an ideological profile. But the divergence between our interpretations further results from a tension between extra-aesthetic values in the work and extra-aesthetic values that characterise discourses that have “made” the interpreter.²⁸ In other words, in *The White People* I concentrate on what I am culturally and ideologically predisposed to descry. As regards poetry and fiction, the hermeneutic circle may appear relatively unproblematic. The fact of the matter is, though, that it applies equally to reading of non-literary texts, in our case Harmel’s journalism, non-fiction, and Party materials.²⁹ To consider the historical context that bore the texts and to

²³ M. Harmel to B. Lamb, Feb 23, 1974 (MHP: A3300/B).

²⁴ For an example of another (equally tendentious) piece of fiction from this period see Michael Harmel, “Speed-Up,” *FT*, May 1955, 11–12.

²⁵ James Phelan, “Rhetoric/Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, 210.

²⁶ Petr A. Bílek, “Možnosti naratologie v rámci kulturních studií: Literární re-presentatione jako pole mezi ideologií a naratologií” [Possibilities of Narratology in Culture Studies: Literary Re-Presentation as Middle Ground between Ideology and Narratology], in *Vyprávění, média, difference. Vybraná témata kulturních studií* [Narrative, Media, Difference. Selected Topics of Culture Studies], Daniel Topinka et al., eds. (Olomouc: Palacký University, 2009), 41.

²⁷ B. Harmel, “Reader’s Report” (MHP: A3300); B. Harmel, e-mail to T. Lodge & author, Sept 12, 2018.

²⁸ Jan Mukařovský, “Umělecké dílo jako soubor hodnot [Work of Art as a Value Aggregate],” in *Studie II* [Studies II] (Brno: Host, 2007), 11.

²⁹ E. D. Hirsch, Jr., “Three Dimensions of Hermeneutics,” *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (Winter, 1972): 252.

which they respond is not as much of a remedy as it may seem, for even the historical context can solely be re-created through the present context of the interpreter.³⁰ What is, to some, a methodological truism bears re-stating in face of the narrative of anti-apartheid opposition and resistance that—compact of a body of hagiographies and the official discourse—has the most currency and looks with jealousy upon counter-narratives. It is perhaps too much to say that we only find in texts what we already know. One cannot escape one's situation altogether. And I have every reason to believe that my perspective is not just as valid as that of a veteran-historian, but it allows one to see things afresh.

The text proceeds in the following manner:

Chapter 1 presents the story of Harmel's ancestors and their journey from the Pale of Settlement to Dublin, framed by the experience of the entire Jewish community in Ireland. The way the Jewish and Irish legacies reveal themselves in Harmel's political and intellectual outlook and activity is considered. I sketch the background of his father, a trained pharmacist and a Socialist Party of Ireland member, and trace his beginnings in South Africa in their socio-cultural context.

Chapter 2 opens with the birth of Michael Harmel and the loss of his mother, a highly consequential event for his political identity as well as personally. It follows him through years at junior and high schools in the Eastern Cape, institutions designed to instill obedience, team spirit, sacrifice, law-and-orderism, and white paternalism. Harmel's response to this ideology combines rejection with acceptance. Forced to spend most of this period with unloved relatives, he further developed loathing of Jewish observance and petit-bourgeois values. At the age of thirteen, he began to suffer from asthma, a condition that caused him much physical, emotional, and social hardship. I argue that his successful self-treatment at a later stage is symptomatic of who Harmel was and wanted to become.

Chapter 3 is, primarily, an account of Harmel's time at the Rhodes University College in Grahamstown. It looks at his professors, curriculum, and friends as well as the social and political life of the university. The poems, essays, and stories are discussed that Harmel wrote for the student magazine. Considerable space is devoted to his own short-lived periodical which he filled with provocative editorials, reviews, and paeans of Social Credit. The chapter closes with a brief analysis of what are identifiably Harmel's

³⁰ Tomáš Kubiček, *Intersubjectivity in Literary Narrative* (Toronto: Munk Centre for Intern. Studies, 2007), 26.

contributions to the Johannesburg *Star*. It was during this period that he gradually switched from anti-communism to individualist Marxism.

Chapter 4 reconstructs Harmel's sojourn in London at the peak of the Popular Front when he was initiated into the Party by, among other things, hawking *The Daily Worker*. He further learned the ropes of Leninist journalism as a cadet reporter on the same paper and was groomed for assisting in the resurgence of the Party in South Africa. After he joined the CPSA late in 1939, Harmel's political *Bildung* culminated with the marriage to a Lithuanian Jewish proletarian and political refugee, Taube (Ray) Adler, whose portrait ends the biographical part.

Chapter 5 complements, from the vantage point of discourse, the narrative of his early years in delineating Harmel's political outlook. Analytical with a few narrative digressions, it explores leitmotifs that run through Harmel's work post-1940. These leitmotifs—the rôle of an individual, the “truth” of Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union, socialist-“nationalist” merger, anti-racism, etc.—function as linchpins of Harmel's discourse and add up to what he was ideologically “about”. Their examination renders it possible to define his intellectual legacy and determine to what extent he was indeed a major theorist or creative thinker or rather, as some believe, a “party hack” (Martin Legassick) and an “apparatchi[k]” (Lorna Levy).³¹

³¹ M. Legassick, e-mail to author, Oct 14, 2015; Lorna Levy, e-mail to author, Oct 29, 2015.

Chapter 1/ ROOTS: DUBLIN, CORK, AND JOHANNESBURG (UNTIL 1915)

Introduction

This chapter is intended as a prologue to the story proper. After dealing in brief with the Pale of Settlement whence the Harmels hail, it touches upon their social and economic advancement in Ireland, the country in which they set up their home in the 1870s. A discussion ensues of whatever is known about the schooling, professional activity, and politics of Arthur Aaron Harmel, Michael's father. Among other things, I am concerned to verify his son's contention regarding Arthur's association with James Connolly. Following a depiction of Arthur's beginnings in South Africa, I summarise his outlook on socialism, Irish nationalism, and Jewishness preparatory to an attempt to capture the influence he had on his son. My argument is that the Irish legacy, primarily the heroism of the nationalist and labour leaders—conveyed in various ways, but especially powerfully through verse and song—was one of the most momentous factors in Michael Harmel's emotional, intellectual, and ideological growth: it shaped his self-image, his philosophy of history, and his conceptualisation of the interplay between socialism and nationalism. Through him, the epic of the Irish revolutionary traditions reached his next of kin, students, and political associates, including the New South Africa's second president.

From Lithuania to Ireland

Our story begins not in South Africa, but in the Jewish Pale of Settlement, an area that was created in 1792 and went on to embrace Belarus, Lithuania and Moldova as well as parts of today's Latvia, Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine. It was designed to prevent the influx of Jewish merchants into the Russian interior following the Partitions of Poland which had brought hundreds of thousands of Jews under the tsarist rule. In later years, the Jewish community of five million made up about 12 percent of the entire population.¹ The Harmel family was a part of it.

The surname is, like most self-chosen Jewish names, ornamental in character. It in all probability derives from the Yiddish noun *harm* which, in turn, comes from the Middle

¹ *The Cambridge Dictionary of Judaism and Jewish Culture*, Judith R. Baskin, ed. (New York: CUP, 2011), 469, 525–526; Natalie Wynn, "The History and Internal Politics of Ireland's Jewish Community in Their International Jewish Context (1881–1914)," PhD thesis, (Trinity College Dublin, 2015), 9–10. On the life in the Pale of Settlement see Hannah Berman and Melisanda Zlotover, *Zlotover Story. A Dublin Story with a Difference* (Dublin: Hely Thom, 1967), 12, 14–15, 25.

High German *Hermelin* (ermine).² The oldest known member of the family was Philip (Feivel/Fayvel) Harmel (Shraga HaCohen) Harmel.³ He lived a stone's throw from the Latvian border, in the *shtetl* of Pikeliai which in 1897 had a Jewish population of about 1,200.⁴ His sons, including Micha(el) (1844–1911),⁵ the grandfather of Michael Harmel, were among the 1.5 million Jews who left Russia between 1881 and 1914. Most of them were headed for Britain and the USA. The “push factor” for the small number who settled on the Emerald Isle was economic hardship.⁶ The Jewish community in Ireland swelled through the inflow of these Litvaks from 285 in 1861 to 1,779 in 1891.⁷ The majority of the newcomers settled in Dublin, in an area that came to be known as Little Jerusalem.⁸

Michael Harmel was one of the first Russian Jews to arrive in the city. This happened early in the 1870s.⁹ In accordance with what would become a usual pattern for his people, he started as a pedlar. By 1885, he graduated to a draper or wholesaler of cloth. A contemporary describes him as “by far the most prosperous Jew of his day”.¹⁰ In what was a comparatively speedy process of acculturation, he took his place in the native Jewish contingent.¹¹ Although his prosperity was not to last, in 1892 he could afford to secure British citizenship.¹²

His wife was three years younger Hannah Deborah (Dora) (Channe Dvorah in Yiddish) (1847–1922), a native of Leckava, a townlet about a three-hour walk from Pikeliai.¹³ Michael and Dora raised seven children of their own and one adoptive

² Heinrich Walter Guggenheimer and Eva H. Guggenheimer, *Jewish Family Names and Their Origins: An Etymological Dictionary* (Hoboken: KTAV, 1992), 324. Cf. Berman, “Zlotover Story” (unpubl. ms) (Cincinnati: AJA, n.d.), 3; Berman and Zlotover, *Zlotover Story*, 13.

³ Gary Snapper, fam. geneal., accessed Jan 26, 2017, <http://www.gabrielsnapper.co.uk/harmel.html>.

⁴ Nancy and Stuart Schoenburg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities* (New York: Garland, 1991), 215.

⁵ COI 1901, 1911; CWA 1858–1920 (NAI).

⁶ Wynn, “History,” 27, 29, 53, 60, 63, 71–85, 91ff; Cormac O’Gráda, *Jewish Ireland in the Age of Joyce: A Socioeconomic History* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2016), 14, 19; Berman, “Zlotover Story,” 7–8. For details on their motivation see Wynn, “History,” 16, 105. Cf. Joel Wigoder, *My Life* (Leeds: J. Porton & Sons, 1935), 33.

⁷ O’Gráda, *Jewish Ireland*, 32; Louis Hyman, *The Jews of Ireland from Earliest Times to the Year 1910* (London: JHSI, 1972), 156.

⁸ The appellation does not refer to Lithuanian Jews only—see O’Gráda, *Jewish Ireland*, 17 and Wigoder, *My Life*, 66. On Little Jerusalem see Cormac O’Gráda, “Settling In,” *Field Day Review* 1 (2005): 90, 93.

⁹ Berman and Zlotover, *Zlotover Story*, 25f; Hyman, *Jews of Ireland*, 155; Cormac O’Gráda “Lost in Little Jerusalem. Leopold Bloom and Irish Jewry,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 27, no. 4 (Jun 2007): 19.

¹⁰ Berman, “Zlotover Story,” 9; Berman and Zlotover, *Zlotover Story*, 27 (both for the quote). On peddling see O’Gráda, *Jewish Ireland*, 45, 51, 54, 58; Hannah Berman, *Berman’s Story* (unpubl. ms) (Cincinnati, AJA, n.d.), 11.

¹¹ Berman and Zlotover, *Zlotover Story*, 26; Michael Harmel’s naturalisation papers (NA, UK). On his family’s contacts with the native contingent see *Jewish Chronicle*, Mar 10, 1893, 18; Mar 30, 1894, 18; Jul 12, 1895, 22; Mar 6, 1896, 22; Apr 1, 1897, 22. On acculturation of Jewish immigrants see Wynn, “History,” 216–227, 244–245. Whereas quite a few first-generation immigrants did not master English at all, Michael Harmel appears to have achieved fluency. The language of his household would have been both Yiddish and English, but the latter inevitably took precedence with the children. Arthur’s correspondence contains numerous expressions in *loshn Ashkenaz*. See Berman, “Berman Story,” 10; Larry Elyan, “From Zhogger to Cork. An Irish Story,” *Jewish Chronicle Colour Magazine*, Sept 26, 1980, accessed Jun 7, 2019, <http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/zagare/memories.html>; Michelle Heuane, *The Decline in the Use of the Yiddish in Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Jewish Museum, 2000), 13–14, 17.

¹² Michael Harmel’s Naturalisation Papers (NA UK).

¹³ Snapper, fam. geneal.; CWA, 1858–1920 (NAI). The date of her birth given here is based on *Jewish Chronicle*, Nov 17, 1922, 3. On Leckava see the Schoenburgs, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, 170–171.

daughter.¹⁴ We cannot trace diverse fortunes of the Harmel siblings in any detail here. Suffice it to say that none remained in Ireland and at least four of them resided, temporarily or permanently, in South Africa.¹⁵ Worthy of mention is the eldest daughter, Molly (1878–1942), who married a luminary of both the Jewish and Irish community.¹⁶ Her husband Philip Sayers (1877–1964) was an ardent Zionist and, after 1948, a lobbyist for the State of Israel.¹⁷ Whereas Zionism was widespread among Irish Jews, Sayers’ association with Arthur Griffith and his harbouring of Michael Collins during the War of Independence sets him apart.¹⁸ He was the father of the leftist writer Michael Sayers (1911–2010).¹⁹ His grandson is the Marxist philosopher Sean Sayers (b. 1942).²⁰

Arthur Harmel and the Irish Socialists

The father of Michael Harmel Jr, Aaron (Arthur), was born in 1884. He most likely received primary education provided by the Dublin Hebrew Congregation, including (in part) at its Adelaide Road National School, which more orthodox and less “socio-economically advance[d]” Litvaks gave a wide berth.²¹ From 1895 to 1898, he went to the Dublin High School, run by the Church of Ireland. Here, the junior students were instructed in English, Latin, Greek, French, and Mathematics. While essays were judged by penmanship and orthography rather than ideas and argument and while memorising verse and dates was the order of the day, the masters also fostered in their charges an interest in contemporary Westminster politics. The then principal, William Wilkins, “combined an intense pride in his Irish race with a vehement imperialism”. It is thus perhaps no coincidence that many an old boy lost his life serving the country in the Anglo-Boer War. Most graduates went into business, but we can find among them clergymen, classical scholars, surgeons, scientists,

¹⁴ Four died before reaching adulthood. See Michael Harmel’s naturalisation papers (NA UK); *Jewish Chronicle*, Nov 17, 1922, 3; COI 1901, 1911; H. Lewis interview by T. Adler, 1975 (A3300/B); *Jewish Chronicle*, Jul 2, 1915 (page illegible); Ireland CRI, 1845–1958 (NAI).

¹⁵ A. Harmel to Ted and Tilly, Jan 20, 1936 and Sept 29, 1940 (A3300/B).

¹⁶ On Molly see Berman, “Zlotover Story,” 8; COI 1901, 1911; O’Grada, “Settling In,” 89 and *Jewish Ireland*, 97; Rev. Julius Sandheim’s “Register of Births and Deaths of the Dublin Hebrew Congregation,” reprinted in Hyman, *Jews of Ireland*, 257.

¹⁷ On the Sayereses see Berman and Zlotover, *Zlotover Story*, 27; COI 1901, 1911; *Irish Independent*, Aug 18, 1925, 5; Raymond Heppenstall, *Four Absentees* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1960), 36; “Talking Points,” *Irish Press*, May 16, 1964, 11; Anthony Cronin, “Bewley’s Was a Potent Brew,” *Sunday Independent*, Oct 31, 2004, 1; Mac Alla, “Day to Day,” *Irish Press*, Jun 14, 1950, 4. On Sayers’ lobbying for Israel see Shulamit Eliash, *The Harp and the Shield of David: Ireland, Zionism and the State of Israel* (London: Routledge, 2005), 110, 112, 116, 124; Paula L. Wylie, *Ireland and the Cold War: Diplomacy and Recognition, 1949–63* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 220, 223–226, 229–230, 250.

¹⁸ *Jewish Chronicle*, Aug 8, 1900, 20; *Jewish Chronicle*, Jul 24, 1903, 27; Wynn, “History,” 128–145. On the elder Sayers’ connection with Griffith/Sinn Fein and Collins/IRA see, respectively, Statement by Witness (Michael Noyk), Document no. WS 707, National Events of 1917–1920, Roinn Cosanta, Bureau of Military History 1913–1921, 14; and Statement by Witness (Joseph Hyland), Document no. WS 644, do., 5.

¹⁹ Heppenstall, *Four Absentees*, 56, 59, *passim*; Gordon Bowker, “Michael Sayers: Writer Whose Career Never Recovered From Being Blacklisted in the United States,” *Independent*, Jul 22, 2010, accessed Jun 7, 2019, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/michael-sayers-writer-whose-career-never-recovered-from-being-blacklisted-in-the-united-states-2032080.html>; A. Harmel to Tilly and Tilly, Oct 1, 1933; Apr 28 1941 (A3300/B).

²⁰ S. Sayers, e-mail to author, Mar 10, 2016.

²¹ Hyman, *Jews of Ireland*, 198; Wynn, “History,” 219–222.

soldiers, and colonial civil servants.²² The most notable alumni include a Jewish solicitor and republican Michael Noy(e)k (1884–1966), the critic and writer W. K. Magee (aka John Eglinton) (1868–1961), and poet W. B. Yeats (1865–1939).²³

Having left school, Arthur spent some time working in his father’s shop in Cork whither the family moved after Michael Harmel had been “adjudged bankrupt” in 1898.²⁴ By 1905, he went on to train as a pharmacist with the Pharmacy College of Ireland.²⁵ The first component of his training was hands-on and Arthur served an apprenticeship with Patrick Kelly (1848–1914), the proprietor of the Medical Hall in Portobello.²⁶ Life for a chemist’s assistant was not easy. Long hours “at the counter or in the laboratory” produced a sense of isolation. In comparison with England, the pay was niggardly. All that prompted Arthur to initiate the formation of the Irish Chemists’ Assistants’ Association. It furnished him and his confrères with a platform by which to “cultivate one another’s society” and assert their rights vis-à-vis employers. By December 1909, the ICAA accrued a membership of 80.²⁷ After four years, Harmel enrolled at Trinity College, Dublin to complete a one-year academic course that embraced *materia medica*, botany, and chemistry.²⁸ He kept working for Kelly, one of his professors.

Though serious about his career, Arthur did not live for his work only. Probably in the early years of the century he became politicised after the teachings of socialism had captured his imagination. We do not know how this came about. Leaving aside individuals such as Roman Ivanovitch Lippmann (1866–1896), a prominent Socialist League member, there is next to no record of political inclinations among the Irish Jews in the earlier period.²⁹ Later immigrants from Russia, in contrast, are known frequently to have been members of the Bund or Poale Zion.³⁰ And insofar as the Harmel family, highly acculturated though it was, maintained commerce with the new arrivals within the community’s structures, it might have been through them that Arthur first encountered socialist ideas. Other influences were possibly at work. In addition to an odd public talk by

²² W. J. R. Wallace, *Faithful to Our Trust. A History of the Erasmus Smith Trust and the High School, Dublin* (Dublin: Columba, 2004), esp. 121–159; W. B. Yeats, *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 64–67.

²³ DHSA; Paul Rouse, “Irish Lives,” *Irish Times*, Jun 5, 2010, accessed Jun 7, 2019, <http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/irish-lives-1.674617>; Enda Duffy, “Critical Reception of Literary Modernism,” in Joe Clearly, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism* (New York: CUP, 2014), 198–199; Yeats, *Reveries*, 64–67

²⁴ *Daily Nation*, Apr 20, 1898, 1; COI 1901.

²⁵ *Southern Pharmaceutical Journal* 30 (1937): 248.

²⁶ *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, Apr 13, 1904, 4; *Jewish Chronicle*, Jan 21, 1910, 11; *Chemist and Druggist* 85 (Nov 21, 1914): 42; COI 1911.

²⁷ *Chemist and Druggist* 77 (Sept 10, 1910): 36; *Chemist and Druggist* 75 (Dec 11, 1909): 884.

²⁸ Úna Ni Charthaigh (PSI), e-mail to author, Feb 11 and Mar 1, 2019.

²⁹ Fintan Lane, *Origins of Modern Irish Socialism, 1881–1896* (Cork: Cork UP, 1997), 120–128; N. Wynn, e-mail to author, Jan 28, 2019.

³⁰ Manus O’Riordan, “Connolly Socialism and the Jewish Worker,” *Saothar* 13 (1988): 124–127.

an English socialist, Dublin had its own Fabian Society in 1892–1899 and an Independent Labour Party branch from early in 1893.³¹

The Socialist Party of Ireland Arthur either joined or was closely associated with had been in existence since 1904.³² An observer depicted it as a “sterile... sect conning pamphlets”.³³ Tiny in membership, it only got a new lease of life when, in the hopes of attracting new blood, a public meeting was convened in June 1909. A hundred and fifty people turned up.³⁴ The organisers believed there was a need for a party that would encompass left-wingers of all hues. The programme of this revived SPI accordingly limited itself to a single objective: “[T]he Land, railways, and all the other instruments of production, distribution and exchange shall be owned and controlled by whole people”. This was to be achieved at the ballot box.³⁵

Arthur’s name does not figure in the SPI membership and roll books. Nor does the memoir of William O’Brien (1881–1968), the original leader of the party, make a mention of him.³⁶ An invitation poster found among the O’Brien papers, however, shows that in February 1910 Arthur gave a lecture at the Antient Concert Rooms Buildings in Great Brunswick Street entitled “Some Objections to Socialism Answered (A Reply to Fr. Kane, SJ)”.³⁷ This was followed on May 22 by another called “Some Further Objections to Socialism Answered”.³⁸ Robert Kane was a Jesuit priest whose Lenten Discourses, delivered earlier that year at the Gardiner St Church, condemned socialism as a work “of dreamers or of desperadoes” that eventuates in “irreligion and immorality”.³⁹ They formed a part of an all-European campaign by the Roman Catholic Church against the socialist movement. The Dublin Left thought it imperative to respond. Arthur’s polemic, launched in the context of the SPI public talk series, might as well have been the first shot of this counter-offensive. Only a few months later, the party published another rejoinder to Kane as a pamphlet. It was *Labour, Nationality, and Religion*.⁴⁰ Its author was no other than James Connolly.

³¹ Lane, *Origins of Modern Irish Socialism*, 179, 188ff.

³² Donal Nevin, *James Connolly. A Full Life* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005), 383ff.

³³ Desmond Ryan, *Remembering Sion. A Chronicle of Storm and Quiet* (London: Arthur Baker, 1934), 57.

³⁴ Nevin, *James Connolly*, 383; Metscher, *James Connolly and the Reconquest of Ireland*, 96.

³⁵ Pamphlet advertising the Socialist Party of Ireland’s lecture programme for Jan–Mar 1910 (WOP: MS 15,674/3/21)..

³⁶ William O’Brien, *Forth the Banners Go* (Dublin: Three Candles, 1969).

³⁷ Handbill advertising a lecture by A. Harmel entitled “Some Objections to Socialism Answered...”: to be held in the Antient Concert Rooms, Feb. 27, 1910 (MS 15,674/3/21); Pamphlet advertising the SPI’s lecture programme for Jan–Mar 1910.

³⁸ Pamphlet advertising the Socialist Party of Ireland’s lecture programme for Apr–Jun 1910 (WOP: MS 15,674/3/22). Entries for both dates in O’Brien’s diary have nothing to say about these events (WOP: MS 15,705/3).

³⁹ Fr. Robert Kane, SJ, *Socialism* (Dublin: Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, 1910), v, vi.

⁴⁰ Nevin, *James Connolly*, 327–328; Peter Berresford Ellis, Introduction to *Selected Writings*, by James Connolly (Hardmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 42; Metscher, *James Connolly and the Reconquest of Ireland*, 130.

Michael Harmel was later to state that “his father had taught him the socialism as well as the nationalism which he had himself learned directly from James Connolly in his native Dublin”.⁴¹ On another occasion, he is quoted as claiming that Arthur “was mixed up with Larkin and Connolly in the Irish Socialist Party”.⁴² An earlier article in *New Age* described Arthur as “a secretary for the Dublin Socialist Society in Ireland”.⁴³ What do we know about these two organisations and how do they relate to the Socialist Party of Ireland? And does his purported connection with Larkin and Connolly, heavy with implications, pass muster in the light of historical evidence?

Despite being small, the Dublin Left was cantankerous and therefore prone to fragmentation. Parties would split and merge again, while their names kept changing. Organisations could sometimes operate under two different names. More than a century later, one struggles to make sense of this jumble. It would seem, however, that the Irish Socialist Party is, in reality, continuous with the Socialist Party of Ireland. It was the latter name that finally caught on.⁴⁴ This body emerged in 1904 through the amalgamation of two splinters from an earlier organisation, one of which was the Socialist Labour Party.⁴⁵

The Dublin Socialist Society (often erroneously designated as Club) replaced the dissolved ILP branch in 1895 and was responsible for inviting Connolly to Ireland as its paid organiser.⁴⁶ At the age of eleven, Arthur was hardly in a position to join, let alone hold secretaryship. Strangely enough, there is a solitary reference to *a* Dublin Socialist Society as late as 1904. An SLP leader disparaged it as “freaks [that]... constitute a serious danger to the genuine Irish socialist movement”.⁴⁷ Perhaps these “freaks” were later allowed to blend in with the mainstream. If so, Arthur might have been one of them. However, the *New Age* article is more likely to be referring to yet another body, one named the *Irish Socialist Society* and set up by O’Brien after he had left the Socialist Party of Ireland in August 1908. This was an interim organisation that withered away once the SPI had been, as previously explained, revived a year later.⁴⁸

⁴¹ “Anti-Apartheid Meeting in Dublin. Michael Harmel gives exclusive interview to Anthony Coughlan,” *Irish Democrat*, Jun 1964, 8.

⁴² “Road to a United Ireland Is Now Plain,” *Irish Democrat*, Jul 1964, 8. See L. Asmal to R. First, Mar 22, 1964 (RFP); C. Desmond Greaves to M. Harmel, Jun 19, 1964 (MHP).

⁴³ “Working Class Fighters,” *Guardian*, Oct 25, 1945, 5.

⁴⁴ O’Brien, *Forth the Banners Go*, 40; Minute book of the Socialist Party of Ireland, Jan 24, 1905–Jan 21, 1908 (WOP: MS 16,269). O’Brien papers do not list a body by the name Irish Socialist Party either—see Nevin, *James Connolly*, 383f.

⁴⁵ D. O’Brien, Copy of resolution passed at a Socialist Labour Party of Ireland meeting, concerning amalgamation with the Irish Socialist Republican Party, Jul 2, 1904 (MS 15,674/3/6); C. Desmond Greaves claims the Irish Socialist Party eventuated from a merger of the SLP and the Socialist Party of Ireland—see his *The Life and Times of James Connolly* (Berlin: Seven Seas, 1971), 232—which must be incorrect.

⁴⁶ O’Brien, *Forth the Banners Go*, 6–7; Lane, *The Origins of Modern Irish Socialism*, 5n9, 215.

⁴⁷ D. O’Brien, Copy of resolution...

⁴⁸ Thomas J. Morrissey, SJ, *William O’Brien 1881–1968: Socialist, Republican, Dáil Deputy, Editor, and Trade Union Leader* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007), 19, 27.

Mentions of “Big Jim” Larkin and James Connolly made by his son smack of name-dropping, though they contain a kernel of truth. Larkin arrived in Ireland in 1907 and, having been organising unskilled workers in Belfast, Cork, and Dublin, was obviously a household name.⁴⁹ He kept in touch with the Socialist Party of Ireland (or Irish Socialist Party), but we know for certain he never became a member.⁵⁰ Connolly, for his part, left Ireland in 1903 and only came back late in July 1910.⁵¹ To be sure, he was undoubtedly “the master spirit who ha[d] called and held” the Dublin socialists together, even while physically absent.⁵² He exchanged letters with the SPI (ISP) leadership and O’Brien consulted with him by post before re-launching the SPI. It was Connolly who designed it as a “detachment to... make propaganda... of a highly general kind”.⁵³ Not long upon his return, Connolly framed the Socialist Party of Ireland’s new manifesto. All the same, Arthur would have had little (if any) direct contact with him in this period. As early as April 1910, he had announced his plan to relocate to South Africa and his colleagues of the Chemists’ Assistants Society threw him a farewell party.⁵⁴ Four months later, he is reported to have moved to Johannesburg.⁵⁵ We encounter him in Dublin again in September when he is, incongruously, described as having sojourned in South Africa for the past nine months.⁵⁶ Even if he did return to Ireland, however, this was only temporary. By February 1911, he had clearly settled in the Transvaal.⁵⁷ In other words, it was impossible for Arthur to be “mixed up” with Connolly in the Irish Socialist Party and the Socialist Party of Ireland, even though he was positively “mixed up” with O’Brien in either or both as well as, possibly, in the Irish Socialist Society. On account of his age, he could not have served as the secretary to the original Dublin Socialist Society. Its “freakish” namesake had nothing to do with Connolly. But the possibility of Arthur having had dealings with (or been exposed to) the famous revolutionary before 1903 still cannot be ruled out. Upon his arrival in Ireland in 1896, Connolly founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party.⁵⁸ Though

⁴⁹ Emmet O’Connor, “Big Jim Larkin: Hero and Wrecker,” *History Ireland* 21, no. 4 (Jul/Aug 2013): 15.

⁵⁰ J. Larkin to D.J. Cullen, sec. of the SPI, Dec 3, 1907 (WOP MS 15,679/16/1); O’Brien, *Forth the Banners Go*, 44; Francis Devine, “Larkin and the ITGWU, 1909–1912,” in *James Larkin: Lion of the Fold*, Donal Nevin, ed. (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1998), 31, 36, 50.

⁵¹ Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, 248; Morrissey, *William O’Brien*, 44; Nevin, *James Connolly*, 380f, 383ff.

⁵² Ryan, *Remembering Sion*, 57

⁵³ Kieran Allen, *The Politics of James Connolly* (London: Pluto, 1990), 104. Cf. Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, 248.

⁵⁴ *Chemist and Druggist* 77 (Apr 16, 1910): 57.

⁵⁵ *Chemist and Druggist* 77 (Aug 13, 1910): 25.

⁵⁶ *Chemist and Druggist* 77 (Sep 10, 1910): 36.

⁵⁷ *Jewish Chronicle*, Feb 10, 1911, 11.

⁵⁸ Nevin, *James Connolly*, 59ff, 383f. The program of the IRSP was much more distinctive and radical than that of the SPI. It included nationalisation of railways and canals, free maintenance for all children, free higher education, graduated income tax, wide-covering pension scheme, universal suffrage, 45-hour working week, etc. Nevin, *James Connolly*, 62–63; Metscher, *James Connolly and the Reconquest of Ireland*, 7–8; Morrissey, *William O’Brien*, 11–18.

puny,⁵⁹ it made waves. Arthur would have been aware of its protest meetings and publications, particularly the irregular weekly *Workers' Republic*.⁶⁰ His name is not on the Dublin members' lists, but he could have joined a branch in Cork, his home from mid-1898 until at least April 1901.⁶¹ Whether or not he was a member, though, it is quite conceivable Arthur gained or refined his knowledge of socialism by studying the party's journalistic output, the bulk of it authored by Connolly.

What we know about his political position (rather than a trajectory) in years to come marks Arthur as a democratic socialist or social democrat—a doctrine that underlies the programme of the Socialist Party of Ireland, the Irish Socialist Society as well as the Irish Republican Socialist Party, despite their dissimilarities. He was reckoned a “Fabian socialist” by his own relatives. The family lore even has it he met G. B. Shaw in person, which is not impossible seeing that the Irish playwright lectured in Cape Town early in 1932.⁶² At one point, Arthur took an interest in Douglas Credit which, albeit not socialist, presses for a substantive reform of the capitalist economy (see c. 3).⁶³ He was at first gravely concerned about Michael's communism, but gradually came to terms with it. Babbitry disgusted him as did the smugness of businessmen.⁶⁴ There is nothing to indicate he ever joined a political party again after leaving Ireland. Similarly, it is a matter of conjecture who he voted for once he had become a naturalised South African. The South African Labour Party, founded in 1909, would have been a likely choice. True, it was nothing loath to play the anti-Semitic card when expedient, but it also had two Jewish MPs. One would imagine Arthur withheld his support after the Labourites had struck a deal with the National Party in 1924. Afterwards, his ballot presumably went to the South African Party and then to the United Party which most Jewish people in the Union supported.⁶⁵ He was behind Smuts during and after the Second World War.⁶⁶

The most explicit expression of Arthur's political ideal is an article (most likely unpublished) in which he hailed the British Labour Party's election victory of 1945 as an

⁵⁹ Nevin, *James Connolly*, 60–61.

⁶⁰ W. P. Ryan, *Irish Labour Movement. From the 'Twenties to Our Own Day* (Dublin: Talbot, 1919), 153. Harmel is, however, not on the List of subscribers to *The Workers' Republic* in 1899–1902 (WOP: MS 15,675/4).

⁶¹ Metscher, *James Connolly and the Reconquest of Ireland*, 28; COI 1901.

⁶² H. Lewis, interview by T. Adler (for the quote); IBH; A. M. Gibbs, *A Bernard Shaw Chronology* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 284–286; Wilfrid H. Harrison, *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa, 1903–1947* (Johannesburg: Harrison, 1947), 156.

⁶³ L. Thompson to B. Harmel & N. Lazarus, 1982 (A3300/B); M. Oliver Heydorn, *Social Credit Economics* (Ancaster: CreateSpace, 2014).

⁶⁴ IBH; A. Harmel to Ted & Tilly, Oct 1, 1933; M. Harmel to B. Harmel, Dec 28, 1973 (A3300/B, MHP).

⁶⁵ Bill Freund, “South Africa: The Union Years, 1910–1948: Political and Economic Foundation,” in *CHSA 2* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 214–215; Allison Drew, *Discordant Comrades. Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 29; Rubin, “The Jewish Community of Johannesburg,” 90; H. J. and Ray Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa in 1850–1950* (London: Penguin, 1969), 125.

⁶⁶ A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Oct 25, 1939, Sep 25, 1940, Mar 14, 1941 (A3300/B, MHP).

“epical inward revolution”. It did not mean, he added, “a Britain intellectually and emotionally swayed by communism... Australia and New Zealand have had their Labour governments and were happier and more bountiful lands for their peoples than was Britain. They nationalised some of their great industries and remained great.”⁶⁷

What of the second part of Michael Harmel’s statement—that about his father’s nationalism? The prevailing sentiment of the Jewish immigrants to Ireland and their progeny was that of loyalty to the Crown which had taken them under its wing.⁶⁸ It was no exaggeration when, questioned about reasons for wishing to become Her Majesty’s subject, Arthur’s father asserted that “he much prefer[red] to live under British Law to the Laws of his native country (Russia)”.⁶⁹ If the Litvaks espoused Irish nationalism, it was Parnell and then Redmond’s Irish Parliamentary Party. Sayers, Noy(e)k, Estella Solomons, and Robert Briscoe were rare birds.⁷⁰ As was Arthur Harmel, mixed up with socialist “separatists” who “[did] not believe the British government had any right in Ireland, never had any right, and never [could] have any right”.⁷¹ Because, in Connolly’s eyes, the Irish struggle for socialism was interlinked with full national emancipation.⁷² His first party professed Ireland’s independence in its very name. The Socialist Party of Ireland “sought to avoid a split among socialists by not discussing in detail their attitude to the national question”,⁷³ but some of its members, whether or not they had previously belonged to the IRSP, were radical antimonarchists and antiimperialists. Furthermore, although the new body had nothing on the IRSP with its provocative demonstrations on the occasion of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee or against the British campaign in South Africa,⁷⁴ the press still viewed “the independence of Ireland—political and social... [as] the foremost plank of the Party’s ameliorative programme”.⁷⁵ Arthur’s republicanism is confirmed by his 1945 article, quoted above, which reveals him to be no lover of royalty as well as a supporter of *Swaraj* for India.⁷⁶

The elder Harmel did, indeed, in one way or another learn socialism and (Irish) nationalism in Connolly’s orbit. The revived Socialist Party of Ireland (with which

⁶⁷ A. A. Harmel, “Britain’s Conservative Wishful Thinkers” (ca. 1945) (ms) (A3300/B, MHP).

⁶⁸ O’Gráda, *Jewish Ireland*, 188f; Wynn, “History,” 330; Wigoder, *My Life*, 73, 91.

⁶⁹ Michael Harmel’s Naturalisation Papers (NL).

⁷⁰ Wynn, “History,” 128–147.

⁷¹ J. Connolly to W. O’Brien, Jun 6, 1910 (WOP: MS 13,908/2/23).

⁷² Metscher, *James Connolly and the Reconquest of Ireland*, 11–26.

⁷³ Allen, *The Politics of James Connolly*, 105.

⁷⁴ Ellis, Introduction, 14; Nevin, *James Connolly*, 87ff, 91, 386; Metscher, *James Connolly and the Reconquest of Ireland*, 33–42.

⁷⁵ *Irish Nation*, Aug 28, 1909; quoted in Metscher, *James Connolly and the Reconquest of Ireland*, 96. Cf. Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly*, 248.

⁷⁶ A. A. Harmel, “Britain’s Conservative Wishful Thinkers.”

evidence connects him) was certainly a brainchild of James Connolly. The latter was, however, not around until July 1910. And by that time Arthur had already left (or was about to leave) Ireland. One needs further to emphasise it was a pragmatic, loose affair which did not embody Connolly's rich and radical political vision. That is to say, Michael Harmel was exaggerating when he equated Arthur's social democratic or Fabian outlook with Connolly's variety of socialism.⁷⁷ The SPI, ISP, and IRSP were all pledged to "constitutional means" in pursuance of an Irish Socialist Republic.⁷⁸ But Connolly as a Marxist did not rigidly adhere to constitutionalism: "The governing power... must be wrested from the hand of the rich peaceably if possible, forcibly if necessary."⁷⁹ His founding of the Irish Citizen Army and joining forces with "progressive nationalists" in the Easter Rising of 1916,⁸⁰ which ended in his execution, demonstrates that he was ready and able to walk the walk of revolutionary violence.⁸¹ Now Arthur chose a professional career overseas over political activity at home when, with Connolly's comeback and Larkin's trade unionism, Ireland stood on the threshold of a new era. He would only learn about the bloody suppression of the rebellion in which some of his former SPI comrades met their deaths from a newspaper in Johannesburg, thousands of miles away.⁸² It is tantalizing, if not very productive, to speculate what would have become of Arthur had he stayed in Dublin until that day in April when the Independent Irish Republic was proclaimed from outside the General Post Office. Would a fellow Dublin High School graduate have "number[ed] him in the song"?⁸³ What is known about Arthur Harmel strongly suggests that he believed "in constitutional action" alone.⁸⁴

To close this excursus on the politics of the elder Harmel: it has been able to prove Arthur's participation in the central theatre of the numerically small, yet factional Irish left around 1910. His preference was then, as well as in years to come, for reform rather than revolution. Rubbing shoulders with the champions of hibernicised socialism at that particular time and in that particular place still required more than a modicum of

⁷⁷ Kieran Allen, "James Connolly's Vision Never Realised," *Irish Times*, Mar 9, 2016, accessed Jun 7, 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/james-connolly-s-vision-never-realised-1.2556902>.

⁷⁸ Metscher, *James Connolly and the Reconquest of Ireland*, 5, 7; Allen, *The Politics of James Connolly*, 105.

⁷⁹ James Connolly, "Workshop Talks," in *Selected Political Writings*, ed. Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom (London: Cape, 1973), 251. Quoted in Metscher, *James Connolly and the Reconquest of Ireland*, 19.

⁸⁰ Ellis, "Introduction," 26. Cf. Seán Farrell F. Moran, *Patrick Pearse and the Politics of Redemption: The Mind of the Easter Rising, 1916* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1994), 22n10.

⁸¹ Ellis, "Introduction," 22–23; Metscher, *James Connolly and the Reconquest of Ireland*, 187–202.

⁸² Ellis, "Introduction," 29f, 50–51; Morrisey, *William O'Brien*, 19–25; W. P. Ryan, *The Irish Labour Movement. From the 'Twenties to Our Own Day* (New York: Huebsch, 1920), 277; Ellen Galvin, *Walter Carpenter. A Revolutionary Life* (Dublin: East Wall History Group, 2016), 66–67.

⁸³ W. B. Yeats, "Easter 1916," in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, vol. 1, *The Poems* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 183.

⁸⁴ James Connolly, "Trust Your Leaders!" *Workers' Republic*, Dec 4, 1915; quoted in Metscher, *James Connolly and the Reconquest of Ireland*, 187.

nonconformity. More than that perhaps: it required guts. The social climate was hardly favourable to leftism.⁸⁵ His nonconformism would not have exhausted itself by the ideal of a socialist commonwealth, either. Arthur may have likewise been a supporter of gender equality which was publicised and furthered through the platform of the SPI by such people as James and Margaret Cousins and particularly Francis Sheehy-Skeffington and his wife Hanna, the founder of Irish Women's Franchise League.⁸⁶ One can finally argue that Arthur's political behaviour is an indicator of his being a *rara avis* among the Irish Jewry at least in two respects. In addition to being a republican at the time when his co-believers leaned towards Unionism, he mixed rather freely with the gentiles, whereas many, perhaps most, Jewish people in Ireland still thought themselves (and were thought) social outliers.⁸⁷

Arthur's Beginnings in South Africa

The year 1910 when Arthur made his way to Johannesburg was the year of the Union. The economic historian Bill Freund describes the young country as "a slow-growing and impoverished section of the world..." with a "limited urban infrastructure". It had a white population of only 6 million, though the figure would grow almost twofold over the next 35 years.⁸⁸ Johannesburg itself, it can be said, only ceased to be a large mining camp in 1906 when it acquired water pipes, roads, electric tramways, and flush toilets.⁸⁹ Until the First World War, the majority of goods had to be imported and affordable housing was scarce, which made living costs very high.⁹⁰

Jews had a significant part to play in building of the city from the very beginning. So much so that, according to some authors, they had always been considered part and parcel of the society at large rather than interlopers. Indeed, the Jewish contribution was so marked that towards the end of the 19th century it earned Johannesburg the nickname of "Jewburg". Its total population swelled from 60,000 in 1895 to 258,000 in 1936. The Jewish community had 15,000 members in 1904. They divided into three sub-communities. Aside from the Anglo-German Jewry, in place since 1806, there was a contingent of more observant immigrants from East Europe who had made South Africa their home in the latter part of the 19th century. These two groups were joined after the Russian Revolution of 1905 by emigrants who frequently professed socialism and tended to be dedicated Zionists.

⁸⁵ Cf. Nevin, *James Connolly*, 384.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 384, 387; Pamphlet advertising the SPI's lecture programme for Apr–Jun, 1910 (WOP); Jad Adams, *Women and the Vote. A World History* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 225–227.

⁸⁷ C. Herzog, interview by Carol Weinstock, Jul 1987 (NLD); quoted by Wynn, "History," 144.

⁸⁸ Freund, "South Africa: The Union Years," 211, 217.

⁸⁹ Rubin, "The Jewish Community of Johannesburg," 79.

⁹⁰ Freund, "South Africa, The Union Years," 224.

Many of the poorest Jewish immigrants to South Africa earned their keep as *smouses* (or pedlars) and bootleggers. During the period under discussion, most of the country's Jews were craftsmen and shopkeepers. A small number of Jewish men worked in the legal and medical professions. These were outnumbered by pharmacists, though.⁹¹

After the Anglo-Boer War, the Transvaal suffered from a shortage of pharmaceutical professionals. They began to pour in in droves enticed by advertisements in European newspapers offering free passage and even housing. As of 1904, the Medical, Dental and Pharmacy Ordinance No. 21 required them to hold a formal qualification, a criterion Arthur Harmel met.⁹² In 1911, he and one Julius John Simon opened a shop on the corner of Beit Street and Siemert Road in Doornfontein with a branch in Witbank.⁹³ The pharmacy's services would have been very much sought after—the dusty atmosphere of the city resulted in the high incidence of respiratory diseases, for instance. The chemist's work was laborious in those days, with pills and ointments and practically all doctor's prescriptions made by hand. The bottles would be reused after being washed with washing soda which left hands chapped and bloody. Arthur and his partner could not make do without an assistant.⁹⁴

The business must have been good because the partners were able to enter into a general bond on behalf of one Arthur Abrahams, a furnisher of 51 Kerk Street. They probably overestimated his abilities, however. The hapless Abrahams went bust within five months. In June 1914, the court ordered Harmel and Simon to “return all hypothecated property under the bond”. It was nearly £1,200. They were unable to reduce their indebtedness by monthly instalments of £35 as stipulated by the contract. The shop therefore passed into the possession of Sive Bros & Karnovsky, a well-known Jewish wholesale drug company. Luckily, it was not definitive. Arthur still owned the shop in Doornfontein in 1915, according to his sister. Nor did Helen mention his losing the

⁹¹ Mendel Kaplan and Marian Robertson, “The Formation of the Johannesburg Jewish Community 1887–1915. An Overview,” in *Founders and Followers. Johannesburg Jewry, 1887–1915*, Mendel Kaplan and Marian Robertson, eds. (Cape Town: Vlaeberg, 1991), 10, 15, 22, 34; Rubin, “Jewish Community of Johannesburg,” 65, 74, 78, 83–85, 90; Thompson, *History of South Africa*, 188 (there were about 229,000 Africans in the city); Dora L. Sowden, “Transvaal Jewry, 1902–1910,” in *The Jews in South Africa. A History*, Gustav Saron and Luis Holtz, eds. (Cape Town: OUP, 1955), 222.

⁹² Dorothy W. Goyns, *Pharmacy in the Transvaal, 1894–1994* (Braamfontein: PSSA, 1995), 23, 25.

⁹³ Opposed Application. Sive Brothers & Karnovsky Versus A. A. Harmel and J. J. Simons 8/108, Ref. 428/1914 (NA, SA); *Chemist and Druggist* 78 (Mar 4, 1911): 37.

⁹⁴ Robertson and Diamond, “Chemists, Doctors and Lawyers: Some Early Jewish Professional Men in Johannesburg,” in *Founders and Followers*, Kaplan and Robertson, eds., 137–138; Edward Roux, *Rebel Pity* (London: Rex Colings, 1970), 5.

pharmacy. And it was still in a Harmel's (though not necessarily Arthur's) hands ten years later.⁹⁵

When Arthur chose to relocate to South Africa, he was not bound for a land of strangers. His brothers Abraham or Ted (or both) might have already been living there or left at about the same time. His uncle's family had settled in East London in the 1890s. Other Litvaks from Dublin and Cork had made for the country too.⁹⁶ These included Sarah Landau (b. 1888) and her four brothers. Their parents Ruben Jacob (1852/1855–1925) and Esther (1844–1891) were Polish Jews from around Łódź who had emigrated to Ireland between June 1881 and December 1882. The Landaus lived on St Kevin's Parade and later on Lennox Street. Jacob was, naturally, a pedlar. When Esther died, the siblings sailed for South Africa. Though the families must have been aware of each other in Little Jerusalem, it was, of course, only in Africa that Arthur met Sarah—or Sally as she was known. We do not know when exactly they got married, but the ceremony took place in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia. That is where her brothers, by now successful businessmen, had set up their base.⁹⁷

Putting down roots in his new home seems to have been a smooth process with Arthur. Quickly and comfortably, he blended in with local notables, Jewish or otherwise. He joined the Pharmaceutical Society of the Transvaal which had in its leadership, for instance, John Christie, a Labour Party member who went on to be a city councillor, mayor of Johannesburg (1921), and a member of Parliament.⁹⁸ Within months of his arrival, Arthur is listed as a member of a Jewish drama organisation "At Homes" that produced light plays and held lectures. Among those involved was Leopold Greenberg (1885–1964), a life-long Zionist who had earned reputation as a barrister and would one day become Judge President of the Transvaal. Another member was the architect Morris Jacob Harris (1875–1950), a son of the first rabbi of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, who like Christie was to sit on the city council for almost two decades and served as the city's mayor in 1923–1924. With Abraham M. Jackson (1884–1967), a Jewish community leader,

⁹⁵ H. Lewis, interview by Adler; *Opposed Application...*; "Sixty Years in Pharmacy. An Interview with Mr. Herman Karnovsky," in Leon Feldberg, *South African Jewry* (Roodepoort: Alex White, 1977), 425–426; *Homestead* (suppl. to *Farmer's Weekly*), Mar 1, 1925, 46.

⁹⁶ *Southern Pharmaceutical Journal* 30 (1937): 248; *Jewish Chronicle*, Nov 17, 1922, 3; A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Sept 25, 1940 (A3300/B); Berman, "Berman's Story," 8; Berman and Zlotover, *Zlotover Story*, 27, 29; O'Gráda, "Settling In," 94 and Snapper, *family genealogy*; O'Gráda, *Jewish Ireland*, 128; Hyman, *Jews of Ireland*, 199.

⁹⁷ COI 1901, 1911; N. Rich, e-mail to author, Dec 3, 2016; A. Landau, e-mail to author, Dec 11, 2016; A. A. Harmel, Death Notice, NA (SA): 5793/59; cf. Alan Landau's Langbourne novel series. Accessed May 16, 2019, <https://www.landaubooks.com/>.

⁹⁸ *Pharmaceutical Journal and Pharmacist* 88 (1912): 591; Mike Ryan, "Aspects of the History of Organised Pharmacy in South Africa, 1885–1946," MA thesis (UCT, 1983), 149.

Arthur may well have been acquainted from Ireland because Jackson was born, and schooled, in Cork.⁹⁹

Finally, at the age of 29, Arthur was initiated into the Freemason Arts Lodge of Johannesburg.¹⁰⁰ This is a significant detail. Occupational structure of the lodge membership corroborates the traditional depiction of Freemasonry as a chiefly middle-class phenomenon, which further helps to place Arthur socially.¹⁰¹ There is more to it, however. In a country divided along racial and national lines, affiliation with an exclusive organisation bringing together men of various national, religious, and political backgrounds,¹⁰² once again speaks to his nonconformity. But Freemasonry meshes with his constitutional socialism too. A mason was expected to be a believer in the “Supreme Being” and “His moral law”.¹⁰³ It was required of him to be an upholder of “the peace and good order of society” and “pa[y] due obedience to the law of any state in which he resides”. This principle manifested itself during the Great War in the avowal by South African lodges of loyalty to the Crown and their full support for the British armed forces.¹⁰⁴ Ideological valency of such a posture becomes apparent especially when we consider it alongside Connolly’s comment about “working class of Europe... slaughter[ing] each other for the benefit of the kings and financiers” and Michael Harmel’s denunciation of the “opportunistic, jingoistic elements” (including those in the South African Labour Party) who had undertaken to oppose the conflict, but instead rallied behind their countries’ war efforts.¹⁰⁵ There is no knowing to what extent Arthur went along with the majority of his brethren on this particular point. Overall, though, he must have embraced the fundamental principles and values of “the craft”—universal fraternity, transcendent ethics, political apoliticality, and “law-and-orderism”.

⁹⁹ *Jewish Chronicle*, Feb 10, 1911, 11; I. A. Maisels, “Leopold Greenberg: An Appreciation,” *Jewish Affairs* 19, no. 9 (Sept 1964): 6–7; R. F. Kennedy, *The Heart of a City: A History of the Johannesburg Public Library* (Cape Town: Juta, 1970), 166; Gustav Saron, “Jewish Immigration, 1880–1913,” in *The Jews in South Africa. A History*, Saron and Holtz, eds., 159–160, 169–170; SA Jewish Board of Deputies. Report for the Executive Council for the Period 21st May 1935 to 31st May 1937 to be submitted to the 12th Congress at Bloemfontein, May 30th and May 31st, 1937, 36; SA Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Council), 1904–2004, 5664–5764: A Century of Communal Challenges, 51 (BJPA).

¹⁰⁰ United Grand Lodge of England Freemason Membership Registers 1751–1921 (LMF).

¹⁰¹ Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880–1930* (Princeton: PUP, 1984), 12–13.

¹⁰² Daniel Weinbren, “Freemasonry and Friendly Societies,” in *Handbook of Freemasonry*, Henrik Bogdan and Jan A. N. Snoek, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 389; Alan Doyle (= M. Harmel), “Afrikaner Nationalism in Big Business,” *FT*, Aug 1957, 6.

¹⁰³ A. A. Cooper, *The Freemasons of South Africa* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1986), 216–217; A. A. Cooper, “The Origins and Growth of Freemasonry in South Africa, 1772–1876,” MA thesis (UCT, 1980), 1.

¹⁰⁴ Cooper, *Freemasons of South Africa*, 130.

¹⁰⁵ *Forward*, Aug 15, 1914; quoted in Ellis, Introduction, 25–26; A. Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years. The Communist Party of South Africa, 1921–1971* (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1980), 32.

Conclusion

The Harmels' story in 1870–1910 is embedded within the broader narrative of mass migration that distinguished the period and altered the face of Western Europe, the United States of America, and South Africa. Theirs is also a multi-faceted story of Jewish acculturation (if not assimilation). Having left the Pale of Settlement in pursuit of a better life, Michael Harmel Sr attained—through industry and enterprise—both fortune and social respectability. Despite being newcomers, he and his family were soon welcomed into the fold of the pre-existing Anglo-Jewish social and institutional structures. This was attended by a rapid process of Anglicisation, a process that had both a linguistic (adoption of English) and axiological dimension (fusion of Jewish and Victorian values) and sooner or later was superseded by a decline in piety and observance and eventually secularisation. As was his people's wont, Harmel spared no expense in providing for the schooling of his children.¹⁰⁶ All of them acquired good primary, secondary and even some tertiary education. Most carried on the family tradition of entrepreneurship. Despite their close dealings with the Gentiles, the Harmels did not much differ from their co-religionists in that they, too, could not help playing the rôle of “the Other” for the Irish.

Arthur Harmel did not make much of his Jewishness, was not a regular *shul*-goer. His granddaughter describes him simply as an atheist. Still, he did not marry outside Judaism nor renounce all Jewish ritual. He further found it hard completely to forsake *kosher* and even as an adult participated in a Jewish organisation.¹⁰⁷ Throughout his life he inevitably availed himself of the globalised ethno-religious networks.

Arthur's political outlook bears the stamp of democratic socialism or Fabianism, although it would appear politics took second place in his life after emigration. After all, he had, primarily, *professional* reasons for leaving Ireland. Though he was subjected to imperialist indoctrination as a high-school student and subsequently had truck with radical anti-imperialists among the SPI (and perhaps even IRSP) membership, sources indicate he stayed clear of either extreme. He clearly did not share the Zionist ideal of those around him. We have no way of finding out with certainty whether or not the Jewish historical experience sensitised him to the African plight—as it did a number of South African Jews

¹⁰⁶ Wynn, “History,” 193f, 212, 247–253, 297, 304, 300, 319, 335; Berman, “Recollections,” 5.

¹⁰⁷ IBH; on the Livaks' horror of exogamy see Wynn, “History,” 118; O'Gráda, *Jewish Ireland*, 185; Wigoder, *My Life*, 170.

who later took a stand against apartheid.¹⁰⁸ It is not unlikely, although his correspondence only contains one instance of what could be a distillation of past encounters with anti-Semitism.¹⁰⁹ One can speculate, too, that Arthur's view of South Africa's racial order was tinted by his socialist ideal, anti-imperialist beliefs, the Masonic ideal of brotherhood of man, and the Sheehy-Skeffingtons' feminism.

Notwithstanding his passion for pharmacy, Arthur was no *Fachidiot*, but a man of many talents and pursuits. From youth, he gravitated to the arts and literature. He doubled as a music reviewer for the British magazine *The Gramophone* for many years.¹¹⁰ He published occasional articles on pharmacy, literature, and politics.¹¹¹ His letters reveal him as a nimble-witted, intelligent, and lively correspondent who enjoyed travel and kept abreast of contemporary politics and technological innovations.¹¹²

Even though the Harmel household (whose very existence is, as we shall see, doubtful) was nowhere near as politicised as that of, for instance, the First or Roux families, the imprint Arthur willy-nilly made on his son is difficult to overestimate. Moderate leftism and middle-class taste were the most significant legacy from him. As for Jewishness, and whatever social and cultural benefits went therewith, that was a given, not something Arthur deliberately nurtured in Michael. The latter grew, if anything, highly contemptuous of the Jewish community, which presumably had to do with the insularity and orthodox mores of his surrogate family (see c. 2).¹¹³ He did appreciate "the age-old liberationist and humanist traditions of the Jewish people", but believed the Jews were in the need of "a real spiritual renaissance". Tellingly, he only deemed it necessary to explain to his daughter about her Jewish ancestry after she had been questioned about it at school.¹¹⁴

The "Irish connection" was a very different kettle of fish. To start with, it had a very practical significance: a holder of an Irish passport, Harmel was able to travel out of (and finally leave) South Africa even when the persecution of the anti-apartheid opposition reached its height. Above all, though, Ireland and Irishness were very much a matter of the

¹⁰⁸ Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 73–104, but cf. his "From One Frontier to Another. Jewish Identity and Political Organization in Lithuania and South Africa, 1890–1939," in *Jewries at the Frontier. Accommodation, Identity, Conflict*, Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 142.

¹⁰⁹ Arthur to Tilly & Ted, Jan 20, 1936 (A3300/B).

¹¹⁰ Barbara Harmel, *Thursday's Child* (unpubl. ms) (2013), sect. 2. I was unable to identify any reviews of his.

¹¹¹ A. Harmel to the editor of *Los Angeles Daily News*, Jul 31, 1945; "Two New Novels," *Adelphi. South African Monthly Review of Literature, Public Affairs and the Arts*, no. 1 (May 1934): 12; "A Pharmacist Abroad," *South African Pharmaceutical Journal* 4–5 (1937–1938).

¹¹² Tilly & Ted of May 6, 1937; Sep 16, 1937; Oct 23, 1939 (A3300/B)

¹¹³ Roux, *Rebel Pity*, 7–10, 20; Don Pinnock, *Ruth First*, 2nd ed. (Cape Town: HSRC, 2012), 6–7; A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Jun 10, 1937 (A3300/B).

¹¹⁴ Alan Doyle, "Jewish Opinion," *Advance*, Apr 8, 1954, 7; "Notes of the Month," *Adelphi*, no. 1 (May 1934): 2; Barbara Harmel, *Thursday Child*, sect. 2.

heart for him, culturally and politically: “You know the words of the old song... ‘Me mother and me father are Irish, and I am Irish too.’ That’s about it... I am proud to call myself Irish or at least Irish South African.”¹¹⁵

He held Shaw and Swift in special regard. The former, a “proud Irishman”, stood apart from the other Fabians, despising jingoism and imperialism, while “[t]he love of socialism and the hatred of poverty and inequality were an abiding passion with him”. The author of *Gulliver’s Travels* (“the most profound and adult satire in the language”) was not merely “filled with a passionate hatred of oppression, injustice and war”, but like Wolfe Tone and Connolly supposedly worked “to establish a people’s republic”.¹¹⁶ It may have been directly from Arthur that he learned Irish revolutionary songs. “Kevin Barry” he loved best and in due time taught it to his daughter too. He played and contextualised these songs to students at the Central Indian High School in Fordsburg in 1955. As they had no access to literature on Irish history (they were, in fact, barred from using public libraries at all), Harmel provided the only source of information on the subject.¹¹⁷

Only seldom would he review contemporary Irish literature.¹¹⁸ His *Guardian* columns, however, repeatedly touch upon the state of affairs in the country which he portrays as “church-ridden” and “miserably divided in two.... enchained as ever by landlords and plutocrats (though they bear Irish names)”.¹¹⁹ It is the ideal of Emmet, Tone, Trandy, Lalor, Davitt, Connolly, and Pearse (“the names are like banners!”) that serves him as a yardstick. His other writings are likewise imbued with deep sympathy for the Irish people, however stereotyped.¹²⁰

According to Pallo Jordan, “[a]s an Irishman, Harmel was far more sensitive to the national dimensions of the struggle than many of his white comrades”.¹²¹ Indeed, Ireland functioned as a paradigm and additional argument in Harmel’s “theoretical” engagement with realities of South Africa and his advocacy of the SACP–ANC alliance. He believed that the history of the country, “a testing-ground of techniques of colonialist domination”, might serve as a well of inspiration to “Africans and others confronted with the continuing

¹¹⁵ Coughlan, “Antiapartheid Meeting in Dublin,” 8.

¹¹⁶ Alan Doyle, “The Shaw Centenary,” *FT*, Jul 1956, 8–9 (cf. “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Oct 19, 1950, 4; Nov 9, 1950, 4; Apr 26, 1951, 2); A. D. (= Harmel), “Two Plays,” review of *The Long, the Small and the Short* and *Hostage*, by Bernard Behan, *FT*, Sept 1959, 13.

¹¹⁷ IBH; A. Pahad, interview by author, Feb 28, 2019; A. Minty, interview by author, Aug 21, 2019.

¹¹⁸ A. D., “Two Plays,” 13.

¹¹⁹ Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, May 31, 1951, 2; Mar 22, 1951, 2. The second quote alludes to Connolly’s “capitalist Liberalism, speaking with an Irish accent” in “Socialism and Political Reformers,” *Workers’ Republic*, Jul 8, 1899 (reprinted in *New Evangel*, 1901), accessed Jan 23, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1901/evangel/socpolref.htm>.

¹²⁰ Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Mar 22, 1951, 2; *The White People* (1959) (unpubl. ms), 203 (A3300/C, MHP).

¹²¹ P. Jordan, e-mail to author, Oct 15, 2014.

struggle for national emancipation”. Harmel brings attention particularly to Connolly’s fusion (both in theory and practice) of socialist and nationalist traditions—a fusion which accords with an earlier conclusion by Marx that, failing support from the English working class, ““a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists””, it was the progressive national forces that would effect liberation of Ireland.¹²² “What we are trying to do in South Africa today,” Harmel said simply in 1964, “is what Connolly, Larkin and Pearse did in Ireland.”¹²³

Harmel would take part in St Patrick’s Day celebrations, speak at a Connolly Association rally held in protest against the discrimination of Northern Irish Catholics and demanding the reunification of the Island.¹²⁴ He valued the narrative of the Irish revolutionism as a motivational factor for his South African comrades.¹²⁵ On June 21, 1962, he took nineteen-year old Thabo Mbeki to the Wits Great Hall where the Irish actor Micheál MacLiammóir (1889–1977) delivered speeches and poems of Irish revolutionaries to a racially mixed audience. The performance Mbeki then reheard from a record in Harmel’s house included Robert Emmet’s Speech from the Dock, the 1916 *Proclamation of the Irish Republic*, Pearse’s “The Rebel”, and “Easter 1916” by W. B. Yeats.¹²⁶ The effect it had on him was little short of an epiphany, possibly resembling Harmel’s own feelings at an earlier stage:

The message of the record to me was that, like the Irish people, I too had to “resign my part in the casual comedy, and be transformed utterly” thus to give birth to “a terrible beauty”. It would be beautiful because it would be freedom from colonial and apartheid oppression, won through the sacrifices of many among our people.¹²⁷

Around the same time, perhaps following from this episode, Harmel introduced Mbeki to Irish poetry. To this day, Yeats remains Mbeki’s best-loved author. Quotes from “Second Coming” and “Sailing to Byzantium”, among others, feature in his speeches, political or otherwise.¹²⁸

In sum, Ireland and Irishness as conveyed through and by Arthur (by way of memories, books, records, etc.) engendered Harmel’s deep and heartfelt concern about the country’s history and present. The emotional and intellectual link with Ireland moulded his

¹²² Alan Doyle, “Ireland: A Case History of Colonialism,” *AC*, no. 52 (1st qtr, 1973): 76, 80–83.

¹²³ Coughlan, “Anti-Apartheid Meeting in Dublin,” 8.

¹²⁴ C. Desmond Greaves to M. Harmel, Jun 19, 1964 (MHP); A. Coughlan, e-mail to author, Jul 8, 2017.

¹²⁵ R. Kasrils, e-mail to author, Oct 14, 2014.

¹²⁶ *Ireland Free—Revolutionary Speeches and Poems of Ireland* (Argo Records, 1959), accessed Jan 30, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWkkNT53Fzw&t=2177s>.

¹²⁷ Thabo Mbeki, “After Empire: Past Premiers in Conversation,” University College, Dublin, Feb 4, 2016, accessed May 17, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10153719638954713&id=38131714712; Mark Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball, 2007), 152–153.

¹²⁸ Speech by President Thabo Mbeki at the Celebration of His 75th Birthday: Johannesburg, 20 Jun, 2017, accessed Jan 26, 2019, <https://www.mbeki.org/2017/06/21/speech-by-president-thabo-mbeki-at-the-celebration-of-his-75th-birthday-johannesburg-20-june-2017/>.

ideological self by way of identification with the heroes of Irish independence struggle. It nourished his political vision and practice, especially his advocacy of the socialist “nationalist” merger, justified by the fact that socialism and nationalism are “not opposed to each other, but... dialectically interpenetrating”.¹²⁹ Through Harmel revolutionary elements of Irish history and culture accrued to his relatives and junior comrades (including Barbara Harmel, Ronnie Kasrils, Aziz Pahad, Pallo Jordan, Abdul Minty, and Thabo Mbeki) and functioned as both a paradigm and a driving force in their own political thought and action.

¹²⁹ Jordan, interview by author.

Chapter 2/ THE SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND ASTHMA: JOHANNESBURG, EAST LONDON, AND PORT ELIZABETH (1915–1932)

Introduction

This section picks up the narrative of the Harmel family and takes it up to 1932. Opening in the year of Michael Harmel’s birth, it follows him through the years of boyhood and adolescence in Johannesburg, Vrede, East London, and Port Elizabeth. Evidence gleaned from a variety of sources implies that apart from his Irish socialist father and prodigious reading, the key elements that went into the making of Harmel’s political self was his uneasy relationship with the Jewish community; the knowledge and ideology encountered through discourse and “cultural liturgies” at the Grey High School; and his ill health. Although signs of nonconformism emerge in Harmel from early on, it can by no means compare with that of, say, Eddie Roux who, galvanised by his maverick father, already began to make trouble as a young boy. Harmel was only getting there.

A Child Is Born

On February 7, 1915 Sally delivered their only child, Michael Alan, ever since known to his family and friends affectionately as “Mick” or “Mike”. He had only just turned three when, on February 12, 1918, his mother succumbed to the Spanish influenza then sweeping the globe. Hers was one of around 300,000 lives claimed by the virus in the Union (the overwhelming majority being Africans and coloureds).¹ Arthur was devastated and would later destroy all Sally’s pictures, ostensibly to protect his son.² Arthur’s sister Helen, as yet unwed, was at the time earning a living as a pianist in Johannesburg cafés. She immediately moved in with her brother to attend to the baby, “skinny, dreamy boy” who would not let anyone feed him unless told a story. The family shortly moved to the townlet of Vrede in Orange Free State where Arthur opened a new shop. The majority of the *dorp*’s whites were then, as they are now, Afrikaners, but it had a Hebrew congregation of 63 and a *shul*.³

¹ The gravestone at the Braamfontein Cemetery; IBH; Howard Phillips, “South Africa’s Worst Demographic Disaster: The Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918,” *South African Historical Journal* 20, no. 1 (1988): 57–73. Cf. Errol Harris, *Bound in Shallows. Autobiographical Reminiscences* (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 2015), 53.

² Barbara Harmel, a trained psychologist, believes that her father not only suffered from depression as a result of not having been mothered, but that it also affected his political behaviour.

³ *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa*, vol. 11, *Tur–Zwe*, B. J. Potgieter, ed. (Cape Town: Nasou, 1975), 292–293; *The Jewish Yearbook: An Annual Record of Matters Jewish*, vol. 26 (London: Jewish Chronicle, 1922), 159.

Helen did not care for the backwater that would sink into darkness after nightfall. Arthur's business, however, thrived. It was not even beyond their means to hire a governess when they journeyed to England in 1919 to show the baby to Ruben Landau and his new wife. While Helen remained in London to further her music training at the Royal College of Music, Arthur returned to the Union and, having sold the shop, found a job as a dispenser with the South African Railways.⁴ Secondment to East London soon followed. The timing was fortunate. In January–March 1922, the Rand Rebellion engulfed the city, transforming the Transvaal into a war zone.⁵

The Finer Things and Manly Virtues

East London in the early 1920s was a small port with a rural feel. Most of its income derived from tourism and the export of wool.⁶ It had a white population of 20,000. This included a large number of East European refugees, mostly Jews, who, working hard, had made, or would make, good.⁷ Africans aggregated around 15,000 people and the number kept rising.⁸

The Harmels lodged with the family of Arthur's stepsister, Cissei Navid. In 1923, Michael enrolled at Selborne College. Its motto was *Palma Virtuti* ("Reward is to the Brave"). It had opened in 1872 as the non-denominational Panmure Public School. Thirty-five years later, it adopted its present name in honour of the then High Commissioner for Southern Africa. In the period at hand the roll stood at 480 students. Whereas Selborne College itself moved from Muir Street to Lukin Road in February 1923, its Primary—which Michael attended—"hived off", remaining in the original location. In 1923–1928, it was headed by Edwin Smedley-Williams (b. 1868). A lieutenant colonel of the reserve regiment of The Kaffrarian Rifles, "Smeds" had earned an array of medals during the Frontier Wars, the Anglo-Boer War, the South West Africa Campaign, and a punitive expedition against the Tswana rebellion in Bechuanaland of 1897–1898. He used to command the Selborne cadet corps and loved music. Every Wednesday, the students would be treated to a concert or talk or engage in a community singsong. The school historians opine that "this dapper Welshman, an odd mixture of the man of action and the artist... was living proof that a love

⁴ Outcoming Passenger Lists, 1878–1960 (NA, UK); RCM records; A. Measroch, e-mail to author, Oct 9, 2014; Arthur would later rise to the rank of the SAR chief chemist and be put in charge of its 23 pharmacies. This was no mean achievement for a person of British extraction at the time of Afrikanerisation of the SAR personnel. See *Southern Pharmaceutical Journal* 30 (1937): 248; A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Jan 20, 1936; Jan 1, 1937 (MHP: A3300/B); Philip Bonner, "South African Society and Culture, 1910–1948," in Robert Ross et al., eds. *CHSA* (Cape Town: CUP, 2010), 263f, 298.

⁵ Bonner, "South African Society and Culture," 268–270.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁷ T. Webster, e-mails to author, Oct 7, Nov 27, 2016.

⁸ Hilstan Lett Watts and J. A. I. Agar-Hamilton, *Border Port: A Study of East London, South Africa, with Special Reference to the White Population* (Grahamstown: ISER, 1970), 30–55; Bonner, "South African Society and Culture," 289.

of the finer things in life—of art and music—need not be incompatible with the other, more robust, manly virtues”.⁹

This seems too rosy a picture. Despite his penchant for art, Smedley-Williams was a military man to the marrow and confused school with barracks. A former student of his would one day recollect:

He carried with him a thick cane walking stick and a whistle. The walking stick was knotted at about 6cm intervals, and when he whacked you, the stick left a thin red line across your rear, with red spots at all the knots. When it was time for school to start, he would blow a long blast on the whistle... If anyone had been tardy at standing up, he would march across the playground to the one in question and deal out one or two brisk wallops and then march back again.¹⁰

A closer look at Smedley-Williams’ military record moreover reveals him as an epitome of the colonial violence at its worst.¹¹ It is thus perhaps not surprising that none of his charges achieved fame as a musician. On the other hand, one can name at least one student—probably a classmate of Harmel’s—who had a gallant military career.¹² Harmel himself adored music, from Bach through Paul Robeson to Sophiatown jazz, and his daughter describes him as a “good tickler of ivories”. This, however, had more to do with the family background. Both his father and his Aunt Helen were highly musical—as would be his nephew, Peter Measroch, “a child prodigy”.¹³

Farmed out to Relatives

His son had been studying at Selborne for only about a year when the SAR management assigned Arthur to Port Elizabeth. The city used to serve as little more than an entrepôt, but about halfway through the Great War, things began to change. Industrialisation as well as drought, floods, and other natural disasters caused the white population of 25,000 to double within the space of one and a half decades as pauperised Afrikaner farmers poured in. Other ethnic groups augmented at equal rate. The residents’ allegiance lay overwhelmingly with

⁹ Michael Harmel’s Grey High School student card; Neil Emslie and Trevor Webster, *Bearers of the Palm: A History of the Selborne Schools* (East London: Selborne Schools, 1976), 22–29, 60–79, 127–131, 140, 184, 256–257, 264 (128 for the quote); Trevor Webster, *The Black and White. A Coffee Table History Book of the Selborne Schools* (East London: Selborne Foundation, 2015), 15–18, 47–51.

¹⁰ Webster, *The Black and White*, 207.

¹¹ Timothy J. Stapleton, ed. *Encyclopedia of African Colonial Conflicts*, vol. 2 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 415; Francis L. Coleman, *The Kaffrarian Rifles 1876–1986* (East London: Kaffrarian Rifles Assn., 1988), 37–45 and *passim*.

¹² Max Arthur, “Captain Gerard Norton, VC,” *Independent*, Nov 5, 2004, accessed Mar 8, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/gerard-norton-vc-18738.html>. On old Selbornians serving in the World Wars see Webster, *The Black and White*, 120–123.

¹³ B. Harmel, e-mail to Louis A. Picard, Aug 30, 2016; P. Measroch, interview by author, Oct 4, 2014.

the British Empire. Port Elizabeth boasted several cinemas and theatres. Its annals attest to a vibrant social and sports life.¹⁴

The Jewish community totalled 6000 people.¹⁵ Only a fraction belonged to a congregation. There were two in Port Elizabeth, a dichotomy resembling the intercommunity divisions in both Dublin and Johannesburg. Anglo-Jewry and the more acculturated as a rule worshipped at the Western Road Synagogue. Most newcomers frequented the orthodox temple in Raleigh Street.¹⁶ A number of Jewish people held public offices and commanded respect of the Gentile majority.¹⁷

Once again, Arthur and Michael were able to move in with relatives. Tilly Smollan was Arthur's niece. She and her husband David, a merchant, lived in 9 Bird Street.¹⁸ Arthur's job involved a great deal of travel so he was frequently compelled to trust his son to the Smollans' care. Helen describes the family as "very active, sporting". According to Barbara Harmel, they were religious, "narrow-minded [and] insular". There was, in any case, no love lost between Michael and the Smollans. The "stiflingly conventional" milieu (as well as contacts with his maternal relatives), in fact, contributed to Harmel's abhorrence for materialism and Jewish culture.¹⁹ His father may carry a share of responsibility for this. Though a deist, if not atheist by this time, he for once yielded to community pressure and cajoled Michael into having *Bar Mitzvah*.²⁰ The detail gains in significance when contrasted with the experience of another South African Jew. Born in Latvia, Ben Turok arrived in South Africa at the age of seven. The family spoke Yiddish in private and in other respects, too, their home retained an "intensely Jewish" flavour. Yet his father actually talked Turok out of being *Bar Mitzvahed*.²¹

Harmel's aversion to all things Jewish is far from unusual among South African Jewish radicals. Though many, unlike Harmel, experienced "social marginality in relation

¹⁴ Gary F. Baines, "New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, c. 1903–1950. A History of an Urban African Community," PhD thesis, UCT (1994), iii, 11–38; H. O. Terblanche, "Port Elizabeth—'N Lojale Britse Stad, 1902–1937," *Historia* 38, no. 2 (1993): 100–111 and "Die Armblanke-vraagstuk in Port Elizabeth 1916–1934: 'n Verkennde Studie," *Contree* 12, no. 33 (1993): 2–5; Margaret Harradine, *Port Elizabeth. A Social Chronicle to the End of 1945*, 2nd ed. (Port Elizabeth: E. H. Walton, 1997), 159, 163, 165, 183, 189.

¹⁵ Lois Raff, "The History of the Port Elizabeth Jewish Community," *Jewish Affairs* 41, no. 2 (1986): 30–32.

¹⁶ Abraham Addleson, "In the Eastern Province," *The Jews in South Africa: A History*, Louis Hotz and Gustav Saron, eds. (Cape Town: OUP, 1955), 307–310; Raff, "History of the Port Elizabeth Jewish Community," 30–32.

¹⁷ Addleson, "In the Eastern Province," 307–309.

¹⁸ Snapper, fam. gen., accessed Jan 26, 2017, <http://www.gabrielsnapper.co.uk/harmel.html>; *Donaldson's Port Elizabeth and Suburban Directory* (Cape Town: Ken Donaldson, 1929). Student cards of M. Harmel and L. Smollan (Grey High School archive).

¹⁹ H. Lewis, interview by T. Adler, 1975 (MHP: A3300/B); IBH; A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Jun 10, 1937 (MHP: A3300/B); N. Rich, e-mail to author, Dec 3, 2016; A. Landau, e-mail to author, Dec 11, 2016. On a life of an observant Jewish family in Port Elizabeth at this time see Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 61–64. Hilda Watts experienced a cultural shock followed by a spell of anti-Semitism after moving in with her religious aunt. H. Bernstein, interview by T. Strasburg, 14, 22 (HRBP, A3299-12).

²⁰ IBH. On a *Bar Mitzvah* in a Port Elizabeth synagogue around 1921 see Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 62f. Sadly, records of *Bar Mitzvahs* were not kept by the PE Hebrew Congregation. L. du Preez, e-mail to author, Mar 8, 2017.

²¹ Ben Turok, *Nothing but the Truth. Behind the ANC's Struggle Politics* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2003), 18–19.

to the established society of whites”, it was also their disaffection “from the Jewish communal and religious framework or even repudiation of it” that put them on the path to social deviance.²²

The Grey High School

David and Tilly had four sons. All of them, at one time or another, attended the Grey Institute, a school founded sixty-eight years before under the auspices of Sir George Grey, the governor of the Cape Colony in 1854–1861. As a state institution, it charged low tuition. Most of the 700 students were day boys.²³ Though unaffiliated with any single domination, the school was grounded in Christian and British values. Its motto *Tria Juncta in Uno* referred to the unity of body, soul, and spirit.²⁴

Harmel enrolled at the Grey in July 1924, entering Standard II. He matriculated in 1932, with the second class. He got to know two headmasters. William Archer Way (1870–1928) was born in Scotland and educated at Oxford. He arrived in Port Elizabeth in 1911, having previously served at high schools in King William’s Town and Graaf Reinet. President of the South African Teachers’ Association for many years, Way perceived the task of an educator as “quicken[ing] the moral and intellectual life of a new generation... furthering the material prosperity and development of a great country, and... cementing the happy union of a great people” [i.e. Britons and Afrikaners].²⁵

When illness forced Way to resign the rectorship, another Scot, Oxonian, and Latinist picked up the baton. James Lang (b. 1882), “str[iking] fear in the hearts of scholars and staff alike”, conceived of education as the release of individual potential. It was he who introduced “houses” within school in order to stimulate competition and honour the past rectors.²⁶

The two men represented an entire generation of British educationalists imported into the colonies. According to Way’s biographer, South Africans in those days lacked “a

²² Gideon Shimoni, *Community and Conscience. The Jews in Apartheid South Africa* (Hannover: UP of New England, 2003), 80–81. Cf. Turok, *Nothing but the Truth*, 22–24; Rica Hodgson, *Foot Soldier for Freedom* (Johannesburg: Picador, 2010), 20–21.

²³ Smollen boys’ student cards; J. J. Redgrave, *Port Elizabeth in Bygone Days* (Wynberg: Rustica, 1947), 126; John Young, *The Spirit of the Tower. The Grey 1856–2006* (Port Elizabeth: Grey, 2016), 234–237. The tuition was approx. £1–2 (I. Pringle, e-mail to author, Oct 19, 2016).

²⁴ Young, *Spirit*, 137. At the same time, the motto is evocative of the Holy Trinity, the Order of the Bath and, through it, of Britain’s three kingdoms, accessed Mar 24, 2017, <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/order-of-the-bath>.

²⁵ I. Markman, e-mail to author, Oct 13, 2016; J. J. Redgrave et al., *Neath the Tower. The Story of the Grey School, Port Elizabeth, 1856–1956* (Cape Town: Timmins, 1956), 65–98. Cf. Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, A. H. J. Bourne, W. A. Way. *Headmaster and Poet* (Cape Town: Gordon & Gotch, 1931), 15ff, 36–37, 68 (for the quote), 74.

²⁶ Ernest van Heerden, “Stretching the Folly” (ts, 1971), 1 (ARC, EHP: 1100/96/1132) (for the quote); Young, *Spirit*, 46ff; *Incoming Passenger Lists*; Class: BT26; Piece: 1110; Item: 55 (NA, UK); Redgrave et al., *Neath the Tower*, 126. It was on Lang’s watch that the Grey Institute adopted its present name.

satisfactory intellectual or moral condition”. It supposedly fell to the finest specimens of the British race to redress this situation by spreading the “Gospel of Education” that would irrigate the “then almost a virgin field”.²⁷

Schoolmates, Teaching Staff, and the Curriculum

Although Ray Harmel would later claim her husband’s “childhood was a very lonely and sad one”,²⁸ Harmel, at least, made friends in Port Elizabeth. His “best pal” for many years was Gussie Porter (b. 1912), a shopkeeper’s son. He would even choose Michael for his best man in 1937. Still, their friendship would not last. As would not that with a son of Lithuanian Jewish immigrants Bernard Cohen (1914–1967). Barbara Harmel informs us that when in the 1950s the National Party launched its red-baiting crusade, Cohen (by now a science teacher with a diploma from the Rhodes University) got the wind up and thereafter gave his “commie” friend a wide berth.²⁹

What about Harmel’s masters? Forty years on, the poet Ernst Van Heerden (1916–1997) reminisced about Ronald Graham thus:

A true aesthete, a highly learned and civilised man who interspersed his classes with frequent references to music, art, drama, philosophy and the classics. Although he taught English, he inculcated in me a great love for Latin and the literature of this classical tongue.³⁰

Rector Way and J. G. R. Lewis who taught English were no less stirring. True, the former specialised in the most senior classes and therefore had little to do with Harmel in his teaching capacity. He supervised and guided his colleagues’ instruction, though. It was the headmaster who urged the other English teachers to set boys poems to learn by rote. And they did so routinely. Homework of 600 lines was not exceptional. The texts included Cowper, Macaulay, Goldsmith, Browning and, above all, Tennyson. Lewis venerated Byron, Milton, and Shakespeare (whom Harmel is said to have “known backwards”),³¹ but students would also memorise the prose of Froude and De Quincey.³²

It has been noted Port Elizabeth was a stronghold of Britishness. Indeed, the majority of the city’s Afrikaners were working class and mostly unskilled or semi-skilled workers at that. The unemployment among them was comparatively high too. All these factors

²⁷ Bourne, *W. A. Way*, 12, 14.

²⁸ Ray Harmel, *Ray’s Story* (unpubl. ms, 1993), 43 (MHP: A3300/C2).

²⁹ A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Sept, 1937 (MHP: A3300/B); Harmel’s admission card; IBH; *The RUC Calendar 1935*, 157; and www.geni.com, accessed Mar 6, 2019.

³⁰ Van Heerden, “Stretching the Folly,” 2.

³¹ Young, *Spirit*, 39; Bourne, *W. A. Way*, 62; Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 58; B. Harmel, e-mail to L. A. Picard, Aug 30, 2016.

³² Godfrey Bobbins, *Classroom Memories of English and Poetry at The Grey and Wynberg High during the Headship of The Late W. A. Way and W. A. Clegg Esq. between 1911 and 1946* (Grahamstown: Bobbins, 1972), 1–7.

would have reduced Harmel's exposure to Afrikaner culture to a minimum.³³ Afrikaans was, on the other hand, in the Grey curriculum. Hence, primarily, Harmel's command thereof.³⁴ It is, however, worth mentioning that W. A. Way considered knowledge of more than one live tongue as detrimental to proficiency in one's first language. What is more, despite being a champion of Southafricanhood, his was a metropolitan concern to preserve "the language of Milton and of Shakespeare" in conjunction with we call today "Received Pronunciation". Perhaps it is an element of the Grey legacy that Harmel, though situationally switching—as most speakers tend to do—among several accents or styles of pronunciation, later displayed a degree of linguistic snobbery.³⁵

Books and Socialism

The economist Harold Lydall complains in his memoir that at Michaelhouse in Natal the library comprised "just a few randomly collected books". The Grey students, in contrast, had few reasons for dissatisfaction. The school library had accrued upwards of 3000 volumes, not to speak of newspapers, journals, and magazines that began pouring in in the early 1930s.³⁶ What was available for the boys to read? The old book catalogue does not survive, but we can at least examine a note by the librarian from 1928.³⁷ This informs us that the school has recently obtained, through donation or purchase, Richard Hakluyt's *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation Voyages* (1589), the diary of Adam Tas, Lord Durham's *Report on the Affairs of British North America* (1839), Cory's *Rise of South Africa* (1910–1930), I. D. Colvin's *Life of Jameson* (1922), and Macmillan's *Cape Colour Question* (1927).

The majority of these works bear description as empire-building and supremacist. Some, namely Hakluyt and the Jameson biography, had the added potential to supply young readers with role models.³⁸ The library as a whole, too, probably echoed the school's imperialist spirit (coupled with a lack of sensitivity towards the Afrikaner students and masters).³⁹ The foregoing sample, however, demonstrates that left-field perspectives could

³³ Baines, "New Brighton, Port Elizabeth," 20; Terblanche, "Die Armblanke-vraagstuk in Port Elizabeth 1916–1934," 6–7, 9. Cf. Harold Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star* (unpubl. ms.), 1f, but also L. R. Humphreys, *Hoffenberg. Physician and Humanitarian* (London: Royal College of Physicians, 2010), 5.

³⁴ Harmel, "Some Contemporaries," *Rhodian* XIV, no. 22 (1936): 9; Hodgson, *Foot Soldier for Freedom*, 128.

³⁵ Redgrave et al., *Neath the Tower*, 105. Harris, by contrast, claims Way encouraged acquisition of Afrikaans (*Bound in the Shallows*, 59); IBH; Barbara Harmel, *Thursday's Child* (unpubl. ms.), sect. 2.

³⁶ Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 10; Young, *Spirit*, 181.

³⁷ "Library Notes," *Grey* XXVI, no. 4 (Nov. 1928): 29.

³⁸ Froude had famously held up as exemplary the spirit of the early explorers (nourished by their Britishness and Protestantism). See his "Britain's Forgotten Worthies" in *Essays in Literature and History* (London: Dent, 1911): 34–80.

³⁹ Significantly, at the time when the memory of the Anglo-Boer war still fresh in the mind of Afrikaners (Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 1), the librarian singled out for special notice the biography of Jameson (1853–1917) whose primary claim to fame was an

creep in. Tas's diary is one example.⁴⁰ Macmillan's *Cape Colour Question* (1927), a polemic with Coryan and Thealian take on the South African past, another.⁴¹ In fact, school libraries, fed as they were rather unsystematically by "discards from family bookshelves", could harbour yet more "subversive" items. In 1936, Rusty Bernstein chanced upon *The Results of a Soviet 5-Year Plan* in the Hilton College library, and even made use of it in a speaking contest.⁴²

Some of the titles mentioned above may have made the required reading list. Graduates recollect that, like the English classes, the study of history at the Grey involved texts challenging both in scope and depth.⁴³ That said, Rector Way still believed that the heavy study load and group activities, which the school set such store by, ought not to prevent students from enjoying private reading.⁴⁴ Harmel, for one, read beyond the required quota. Indeed, his unimpressive academic performance suggests much of his intellectual energy went into reading of his own choice. The Main Public Library in Port Elizabeth does not keep old readers' cards.⁴⁵ Luckily, Harmel would at a later stage particularise his literary preferences in this period, albeit merely *en passant*. It encompassed anything from Burroughs (whom he would devour surreptitiously in geography classes) to the works with "social content" and "humanist, liberating message".⁴⁶ *News from Nowhere* exemplifies the latter category and would always represent for him "the grandest piece of imaginative writing about socialism ever produced".⁴⁷ Perhaps most important of all, Harmel typifies his generation in that he was then "a Shaw worshipper barely this side of idolatry":⁴⁸

I shall never forget the exhilaration, nay, intoxication, of first reading those plays and their grand Prefaces; that heady logic! That sweeping-away of accepted humbug... He liberated us from triviality,

adventurist invasion of Transvaal in 1895–1896. The book is known to have "bolstered Afrikaner loathing of Jameson as a scheming British imperialist"—F. A. Mouton, "'Great and Lasting Service to This Country': Sir Leander Starr Jameson, Conciliation and the Unionist Party, 1910–1912," *Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 7, no. 2 (Dec 2011): 168. Whereas Afrikaner students at the Grey swear they never felt outsiders, in another school with a higher representation of the *Taal*-speakers, fights would take place between "Nats" (National Party supporters) and "Saps" (South African Party supporters, mostly Brits) over their preferred flags. See *The Old Grey Union Centenary 1893–1993* (Port Elizabeth: Grey, 1993), 33; Guy Butler in *Karoo Morning. Autobiography, 1918–35* (Cape Town: Africa South, 1983), 99.

⁴⁰ Tas headed a protest against the Dutch East India Company authorities and was jailed for that. His journal (1705–1706) is regarded as one of the earliest examples of protest literature in the region. Albert S. Gérard, ed. *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 176.

⁴¹ Bruce Murray, "W. M. Macmillan: The Wits Years and Resignation, 1917–1933," *South African Historical Journal* 65, no. 2 (2013): 165–171.

⁴² Rusty Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting. Memoirs From a Life in South African Politics 1938–1963* (London: Viking, 1999), 9–10.

⁴³ Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 59. According to a younger Grey, one English master required his students to read five to six books a week. These were subsequently discussed or reviewed in writing—see Humphreys, *Hoffenberg*, 5.

⁴⁴ Young, *Spirit*, 181.

⁴⁵ It was, at any rate, not necessary to be a subscriber to borrow books. C. Victor, e-mail to author, Mar 28, 2019.

⁴⁶ M. A. H. "New Novels," *Adelphi. A South African Monthly Review of Literature, Public Affairs and the Arts*, no. 4 (Sept 1934): 12; Alan Doyle (= Harmel), "Break Down South Africa's Iron Curtain! A Reply to Mr. Kathrada," *Liberation*, no. 21 (Sept 1956): 13.

⁴⁷ Doyle, "William Morris," review of *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, by E. P. Thompson," *FT*, Jun 1956, 14.

⁴⁸ Doyle, "By the Way," *Guardian*, Oct 19, 1950, 4. Cf. Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 19, 23.

from being egocentric little prigs. He made decent human beings—that is to say, if we had enough guts and intelligence, socialists—of us.⁴⁹

Socialist ideas would have reached Harmel by other literary channels too (although, as we shall see in the subsequent chapter, he was to entertain reservations about their applicability for some time to come). If Ben Turok, aged 16, developed acquaintance with the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin in a household which was not socialist,⁵⁰ there is all the more reason to assume that Harmel, with an insatiable appetite for the printed word, hostile to his bourgeois and religious surroundings and, as a consequence, increasingly receptive to unconventional thought, would have inevitably got a hand on Connolly's and Marx's writings in his father's library. Having said that, one is struck by the profound dissimilarities between the politicisation of Michael Harmel and that of, say, Edward Roux and Ruth First. Whereas the elder Harmel had by this time all the looks of an armchair socialist—putting career before politics, which among other things deprived his son of a stable home—both Roux and First inhabited highly politicised households.⁵¹ It is doubtless symptomatic that—unlike Harmel who served in the Grey's cadets corps, even though conscientious objectors were far from unprecedented—Roux (together with his eccentric father a “fanatical pacifis[t]”) found cadets “challenging to the socialist conscience” and finally contracted out of them.⁵²

Visitors to the Grey

There was a variety of distinguished and not so distinguished visitors to the Grey in Harmel's time. Their personalities as well as what they had to say were part and parcel of the education process. In 1926, Jan Smuts addressed the students. He emphasised that South Africa was “the land of promise” and adjured them to take active part in its upliftment.⁵³ “Remember,” he asseverated, “that efforts have been made before to civilise the African continent and they have all come to naught.” The Great Zimbabwe lay in ruin. Timbuctoo, once a hub of scholarship, had sunk into “the wildest barbarism possible”. But the Union Buildings stood “there for to-day and for ever” with the white South Africans “trying to build up a great civilisation”. It behoved the Grey boys to pursue this mission because their school was one of a magnificent reputation. He pressed home the significance of its name

⁴⁹ Harmel, “The Shaw Centenary,” *FT*, Jul 1956, 9.

⁵⁰ Turok, *Nothing But the Truth*, 23.

⁵¹ Don Pinnock, *Ruth First*, 2nd ed. (Cape Town: HSRC, 2012), 6–7; Edward Roux, *Rebel Pity* (London: Collings, 1970), 7–8, 14; 20ff.

⁵² See Harmel's student card; Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 57f; Roux, *Rebel Pity*, 10–11.

⁵³ “Visit of General Smuts,” *Grey. A Magazine of the Grey High School* XXIV, no. 9 (1926): 2–7 (hence all the quotes). Young erroneously gives 1927 as the year of Smuts' visit. *Spirit*, 40.

by characterising George Grey as “one of those fearless men who helped to make the world”. The concept Smuts would revert to again and again (it features four times in the transcript) was “discipline”, a *sine qua non* for the whites’ civilising mission in South Africa. Accordingly, he urged the boys to join the defence force, repeatedly invoking the sacrifice of South Africans martyred in the Great War.

Albeit apparently an impromptu speech, it was tailor-made for the audience. Smuts made the young listeners feel special. They were both students of a prestigious institution and inheritors of the heroic tradition embodied by the school’s patron and the fallen alumni. He challenged them as someone upon whom the future of their land hinged. The seeds of that future, he stated, were planted before and manifested themselves in the perseverance of the white man’s culture, perseverance that served both to undergird and legitimise his continued presence. What his audience would have taken away from the encounter was thus yet another version of the privilege-obligation ideology instilled into them by their masters. No less important, though then in the wilderness, Smuts was the leader of moderate Afrikaners and personified a quest for a *modus vivendi* of the Briton and the Boer.⁵⁴ He addressed their representatives at the Grey as a single group united in a civilising mission.

A year later, the evangelistic Oxford Group organised lectures and retreats for the staff and a camp for the students.⁵⁵ On many of them, including the rector himself, this had a profound impact.⁵⁶ Accounts of the Group’s activities in other contexts by Alan Paton, Edgar Brookes, Stanley G. Shuttleworth, and Errol Harris leave no room for doubt as to their appeal and influence. According to Paton, the Buchmanites were possessed of “an inexorable intensity of purpose” and out to “hunt and capture souls”. They focused on “key men” and their primary goal was the reconversion of lapsed or lax Christians. An ordinary student and a Jew, Harmel would not have been a primary target for them and their followers. Had they approached him, they would have been, in any event, wasting their time. Whereas years later he would describe the Groupers as a “colonialist” and “imperialist agenc[y]”, they already earned his ridicule in the 1930s:

I remember when I was at school there was a group of chaps (rather unkindly referred to by the rest of us as “The Creepers”) who used to gather privately in the room of one of the masters. He was an enthusiastic member of Dr Frank Buchman’s “Oxford Group,” and according to reports quite a large

⁵⁴ Redgrave et al., *Neath the Tower*, 102; Freund, “South Africa: The Union Years,” 215, 243.

⁵⁵ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds. (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 247, 1204f; Young, *Spirit* 49, 211; Redgrave et al., *Neath the Tower*, 126.

⁵⁶ *Grey Old Union Centenary*, 29; Pieter De Villiers, *Peter My Son* (Cape Town: de Villiers, 1970), 28–30.

part of proceedings used to consist of “confessions” about matters which schoolboys usually treat with either a strict reserve or with ribald laughter.⁵⁷

Early in the following decade, Rector Lang hosted lectures by Rheinallt Jones and Dr Edgar Brookes, leading members of the South African Institute of Racial Relations.⁵⁸ Founded just a few years before, the SAIRR aimed to foster mutual knowledge of the various racial groups in the Union. Data collection was its priority. It had a membership of about 500, including Alfred Hoernlé and Leo Marquard. Initially, the SAIRR steered clear of political issues. Even in its later years, it was able to retain a fact-finding, academic, and high-brow quality. However, it clearly operated within a liberal framework,⁵⁹ which would one day make it fair game for radical historians. They would characterise it as merely seeking “to impress on government the fruits of research on African economic ‘development’ and to humanise as far as possible the thinking behind the government’s ‘native policy’.”⁶⁰ This is probably a fair description of the early days, but there is no denying Jones (1883–1953) spared no effort working for the benefit of the black populace. He possessed intimate knowledge of its situation and commanded the respect of African leaders. Even these, admittedly, saw him as “a social welfare worker rather than... revolutionist’.”⁶¹

To account Brookes (1897–1979) a revolutionary would be equally inappropriate. But he was certainly more of a reformer than Jones. Once something of a “propagandist for the Nationalists”, he evolved into a radical critic of racist science and segregation. Not long after his visit to the Grey he was to gain appointment as principal of the Adams College in Natal that catered to Africans and that during Brookes’ tenure produced such luminaries as Buthelezi, Lembede, and Mothopeng.⁶²

The Institute might not have seen the light of the day, but for Thomas Jesse Jones (1873–1950), the American proponent of “Negro education”.⁶³ He, too, visited the Grey

⁵⁷ Edgar Brookes, *A South African Pilgrimage* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1977), 44–45; Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 82–86; Stanley G. Shuttleworth, *Memoirs of an Industrial Boffin* (Port Elizabeth: E. H. Walton, 1985), 15 (cf. Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 14); Alan Paton, *Towards the Mountain* (Oxford: OUP, 1981), 119–121; A. Cohen and A. Lerumo, “The Central African Federation. Burying the Corpse,” *AC*, no. 12 (Jan 1963), 79; “New Problems of a Continent in Revolution,” *AC*, no. 3 (Sept 1960): 5; Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, May 17, 1951, 2.

⁵⁸ Young, *Spirit*, 50, 221.

⁵⁹ Edgar Brookes, *R. J. John David Rheinallt Jones. In Appreciation of His Life and Work* (Johannesburg: SAIRR, 1953), 13; Ellen Helman, “Fifty Years of the South African Institute of Race Relations,” in *Race Relations in South Africa 1929–1979*, Ellen Helman and Harry Lever, eds. (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1980), 9.

⁶⁰ Paul B. Rich, *Hope and Despair. English-Speaking Intellectuals and South African Politics 1896–1976* (London: British Academic Press, 1993), 76.

⁶¹ Brookes, *R. J.*, *passim* and 33.

⁶² Rich, *Hope and Despair*, 66–89, 70 (for the quote); Adam’s College website, accessed Mar 27, 2017, <http://www.ulwaziprogramme.org/2016/10/adams-college/>.

⁶³ Herbert M. Kliebard, “That Evil Genius of the Negro Race: Thomas Jesse Jones and Educational Reform,” *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 10, no. 1 (1994): 5–20.

High School in 1931, speaking of the need to respect “the less privileged”.⁶⁴ He probably arrived in the company of Rheinallt Jones, a man with whom he shared both the last name and ideological outlook. In his very last address to the SAIRR, Rheinallt Jones quotes Toynbee’s words about “a failure of creative power in the minority” and “an answering withdrawal of mimesis on the part of majority” that precipitate the fall of civilisations. Jesse Jones’ theory of education, in its part, exalts the Anglo-Saxon values, values to which both immigrants to the US and “Negros” are supposed to conform.⁶⁵

In all fairness, most of the criticism we can now heap on these three individuals with the advantage of post-colonial hindsight carries little weight in the context of a South African high school in the 1930s. Neither students nor teachers had had any traffic with Africans other than in the latter’s capacity as domestics and subordinate workers.⁶⁶ The majority had never set foot in a native location. It was highly unlikely they would ever do.⁶⁷ Certainly not while in Port Elizabeth. The township of New Brighton was situated five miles from downtown, which made the “Liverpool of South Africa” one of its “most segregated towns”.⁶⁸ The freehold location of Korsten may have had the distinction of being home to a few thousand whites, but these came from “the poorest industrial classes”. Not included within the municipality until 1932, unsupervised, and unserved, the place had earned the reputation as an “‘appalling’, ‘crime-ridden’ slum”. That would have made it a no-go area for most Europeans.⁶⁹

In sum, the boys’ knowledge of Africans was minimal. The little they did know was highly racialised.⁷⁰ The students fortunate enough to have grown up colour-blind upcountry lost their innocence through the exposure to the segregationist concepts nurtured, not the least, by history classes and reading at the Grey.⁷¹ Lydall recalls that the Michaelhouse students “[a]t no time look[ed] critically at the history and condition of [their] own country. [They] might almost have been living on Mars, without any Afrikaners, Blacks, Indians or Coloureds.”⁷²

⁶⁴ Young, *Spirit*, 221

⁶⁵ Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 4 (London: OUP, 1939), 24 (quoted in Brookes, *R. J.*, 42); Kliebard, “That Evil Genius of Negro Race,” 18.

⁶⁶ Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 72; Bob Hepple, *Young Man with a Red Tie. A Memoir of Mandela and the Failed Revolution, 1960–1963* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013), 10; Jasmine Rose-Innes, *Writing in the Dust: Reminiscences* (London: Deutsch, 1968), 225.

⁶⁷ Guy Butler, *Bursting World. An Autobiography, 1936–45* (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1984), 20–22; Joe Slovo, *Unfinished Autobiography* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997), 28, 37.

⁶⁸ Bonner, “South Africa: Society and Culture,” 287.

⁶⁹ J. M. Cherry, “Blot on the Landscape and Centre of Resistance: A Social and Economic History of Korsten,” BA Hons. thesis (UCT, 1988), 33–36, 56–61, 66; Baines, “New Brighton, Port Elizabeth,” 11, 19, 39, 58–60, 241–242; Terblanche, “Die Armblanke-vraagstuk in Port Elizabeth 1916–1934,” 8.

⁷⁰ Butler, *Karoo Morning*, 205; Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 2, 7; Roux, *Rebel Pity*, 15f.

⁷¹ Cf. Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 8.

⁷² Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 16.

Seen in this light, the encounter with Brookes and both Joneses was likely to put a few cracks into the boys' narrow worldview and open their eyes to suppressed realities of native life. Indeed, one can hardly think of individuals better qualified to conscientise the youth of white South Africa at this stage. Brookes and Jones were au fait with the conditions of African life and strove for their alleviation. They cultivated friendships with black intelligentsia. Brookes was acquainted with the most radical views on the race issue in Southern Africa.⁷³ And all three could claim familiarity with the situation of African Americans and their leaders' ideas.

Having said that, for all the impact these encounters may have had on the racial and ethical consciousness of the Grey students, very few of them (if any) travelled much farther, whereas Harmel's learning curve obviously continued—and steeply so. In 1956, while crediting the SAIRR's output with “factual and objective character”, he plainly states his utter want of faith “in the efficacy of [its] cautious reformism in this time of roaring reaction”.⁷⁴ When shortly after the Nationalist election victory Rheinallt Jones “declared his support for ‘total apartheid’” on condition that it be “‘in accordance with his liberal principles’,” Harmel wrote in no uncertain terms that “to flirt with an ‘improved’ version of... reactionary ideas, to dabble in ‘compromises’ and illegitimate marriage between ‘apartheid’ and liberalism—is to help them enslave South Africa”.⁷⁵

Beyond Words

The values and beliefs were not communicated to, and instilled into, the students merely through the curriculum and outdoor activities, through the library stock and the explicit and implicit messages of masters and visitors. Other and more powerful vehicles of ideology were at work. For Paul J. Rich the cornerstone of the “public school”—which he, in turn, considers the key to the understanding of the British hegemony over the preponderant masses of colonial peoples—was its rituals: “It is no longer enough to study the declared curriculum: the secret curriculum is fully as important. The totems and taboos of school ritualism are as critical or more critical than the textbooks.”⁷⁶

Now dissimilarities between the original public school and the Grey are obvious. The school was not private and nowhere near as elitist. It afforded access to a broader cross-

⁷³ Rich, *Hope and Despair*, 27–28.

⁷⁴ Michael Harmel, “Hysteria and History,” *FT*, Apr 1956, 4.

⁷⁵ Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Jul 28, 1949, 4.

⁷⁶ P. J. Rich, *Elixir of Empire. The English Public Schools, Ritualism, Freemasonry, and Imperialism* (London: Regency, 1993), 17.

section of the white society, including sons of farmers, minor business men and such like.⁷⁷ On the whole, though, its milieu would have had an analogous ideological effect on students, not least because the schoolmasters were public school graduates themselves.⁷⁸ Like public schools in Britain (and their counterparts in other settler colonies), the Grey had its uniforms, its badges and ties, its rifle-toting cadet corps, its flag, its daily assembly with rector's address and devotion, its old boys' union, its boarding establishment, and—most important—its prefect system. Keeping a vigil over Way's ashes (later to be lodged in the school's quadrangle), commemorative panels of the 59 old boys killed in the Great War, with the exhortative and eschatological inscription *Mors janua vitae*, represent nothing else than what Rich aptly calls “mortuary arts”. The ideology inherent in the curriculum, ritual, and symbolism, was finally, framed and reinforced by the school's architectonic design which married Cape Dutch style with Antiquity and featured the eye-catching Tower.

To outsiders, all of this may seem odd, ludicrous, repulsive, even. Whether or not some of the above practices channelled an urge on the part of the lads themselves,⁷⁹ one thing is certain. This total apparatus effectively imbued the student with “spontaneous obedience to his superiors, acceptance of his position on the hierarchical ladder, a deep-rooted team spirit, absolute reliability, and loyalty”.⁸⁰

Counter-narratives

Only very rarely one encounters admissions by the old Greys of *any* kind of discomfort, much less trauma. Yes, junior students would fag for senior ones, hazing was practised, and the masters “used the cane liberally”.⁸¹ Nobody denies that. However, the graduates

⁷⁷ M. J. Ashley, “The Education of White Elites,” *Comparative Education* 7, no. 1 (Aug 1971): 40.

⁷⁸ Redgrave, *Port Elizabeth in Bygone Days*, 323–366, esp. 360. For Way's view see de Villiers, *Peter My Son*, 19.

⁷⁹ Young, *Spirit*, 38, 119, 211, 215, 217–218, 222, 228, 243, 250–252; Redgrave, *Port Elizabeth in Bygone Days*, 359–361; Harradine, *Port Elizabeth*, 159, 175; Bourne, *W. A. Way*, 21, 27; *Old Grey Union Centenary*, 29; Rich, *Elixir*, 66. For details of the prefect system as “a fundamental element” of this kind of schools in general see Giorgia Grilli, “English Public Schools and the Moulding of the ‘Englishman’,” *History of Education and Children's Literature* 10, no. 1 (2015): 649, 657; Rich, *Elixir*, 101. Merely because Harmel did not live in the boarding house which Way perceived as pivotal to his educational project did not let him off the value-instilling hook—see Bourne, *W. A. Way*, 18, 21; Paul J. Rich, *Chains of Empire. English Public Schools, Masonic Cabalism, Historical Causality, and Imperial Clubdom* (London: Regency, 1991), 94. On differences between boarders and day boys—see *Old Grey Union Centenary*, 29, 33–35; Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 56.

⁸⁰ Grilli, “English Public Schools,” 657. See also Bourne, *W. A. Way*, 14–15. The view of ritualism as the essence of the Arnoldian public school might lead one to assume it was something unique. The philosopher James K. A. Smith demonstrates that is not so as he captures the process of “indoctrination” through ritual, material form, and spatial configuration by the concept of “cultural liturgies”. He argues that there is today too much emphasis laid on a worldview as put forth in words. It can be argued values are inculcated by way of identity-forming practices rooted in materiality: “[T]he visions of the good life embedded in these practices become surreptitiously embedded in us through our participation in the rituals and rhythms of these institutions.” *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 17–35.

⁸¹ Humphreys, *Hoffenberg*, 4 (for the quote); Young, *Spirit*, 39, 196, 214. Other secondary schools in South Africa were no different—see Hepple, *Young Man*, 15; Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 13. All these memoirs give the lie to the historians of another school and their cavalier claim that “[c]orporal punishment was accepted without resentment and soon forgotten”. Emslie and Webster, *Bearers of the Palm*, 58.

whose recollections were recorded look back on their time in Port Elizabeth with fondness. Most possibly took the abuse and indignities (if perceived as such at all) in their stride, suppressing or playing down any unpleasant memories.⁸² But what did they make of the school's values as preached by masters and embedded in material practices? Were these implicitly accepted?

Listening carefully, we do catch feeble voices of dissonance. Even in Harmel's time. Van Heerden's poem "*Koskol*" [Boarding School], for one, hints at a more complex reality. One can make out homoerotic undertones ("*gladde pienk lywe*", "*en vir die stil laatnagse wedersydse liefdadigheid*") and a mocking reference to a prefect's obtrusive supervision ("*onder die prefek se voyeur-oog*").⁸³ The poet's other account of the Grey experience, though graciously worded and overall positive, similarly betrays resentment of the school's preachment of hierarchism and ubiquitous display of royalism. That he had some reservations about some of the "shibboleths" the students had to "willy-nilly...live by" is unmistakable as well.⁸⁴

Overt criticism does not come until decades later, though. And it is remarkable that it should be voiced by the only known Grey student whose politics approximate Harmel's.⁸⁵ The ANC's Gavin Adams withdrew into the shell of "frightened conformity" during his years in the school. He felt "contempt for everything Grey represented" and "did not believe in any of the school's archaic values designed for training boys to be children forever":

Grey High School... fancied itself as the town's premier establishment for moulding solid citizens out of white boys. It prided itself on its rugby teams, its large boarding house full of farmers' sons (with the seniors permitted to cane the juniors), and its compulsory cadet corps, run by Citizen Force officers who doubled as teachers and taught us to shoot and salute as we marched around in our khaki cadet uniforms before being sent to camps where we played a game called Nats and terrorists...⁸⁶

Harmel himself did not furnish a comprehensive account of his early years. We must therefore content ourselves with odd references, if not mere allusions, scattered across his discourse. Disparaging remarks about the Oxford Group is one of them. Another is uncomplimentary comments by which Harmel, no more than two years after graduation, settles scores with "the old bitch that taught us geography" and one Miss Pottle who

⁸² J. Young, e-mail to author, Oct 12, 2016. Cf. Butler, *Karoo Morning*, 93–96.

⁸³ Young, *Spirit*, 184.

⁸⁴ Van Heerden, "Stretching the Folly," 1.

⁸⁵ Which is not to say that the Grey graduates never fell foul of the powers that be. I have already referenced a biography of Sir Raymond Hoffenberg (1923–2007). A medical doctor and professor at Oxford, he joined the Liberal Party and served as chair of Aid and Defence Fund which provided succour to political prisoners and their families. After being banned, he went into exile in 1968. See "Sir Raymond Hoffenberg. Interview," *Journal of Management in Medicine* 4, no. 2 (1989): 113.

⁸⁶ Gavin Evans, *Dancing Shoes is Dead. A Tale of Fighting Men in South Africa* (London: Doubleday, 2002), 42–50.

achieved “eminence of playful witlessness”.⁸⁷ Such irreverence, nay, disdain tells of intellectual self-confidence at an early stage, though hardly more than that.

An other-authored text is worth considering too. In 1934, *The Adelphi. The South African Monthly Review for Literature, Public Affairs and the Arts* ran a vitriolic article by R. F. Hawksley, a Maritzburg College master, which dismissed the South African education system as “little more than a mere sham, cramming into immature heads half-assimilated masses of information... teaching the spirit of obedience to and acceptance of authority”. That the periodical was both edited and owned by Harmel (see c. 3) indicates a degree of endorsement. He, furthermore, wrote commendably of Hawksley’s essay in the next issue.⁸⁸

A Strange Valedictory

By far the most significant clue as to Harmel’s view of the Grey would seem to be the story “O Tempora, O Mores” published in the school quarterly in 1932.⁸⁹ It is set in ancient Rome. A centurion on a furlough is walking home in the dead of the night when he is ambushed by two strangers. The robbery falls through as they are disturbed by a resident, who then invites the soldier into his house and, to take the edge off the incident, pours him wine. It turns out to be a set-up. The drink is drugged and the centurion wakes up the following morning in a gutter, without money and a fur coat. The narrator proceeds to prophesy that one of the robbers shall make a fortune, take his place among the Eternal City’s notables, and become a patron of arts. When questioned about the scar sustained in the fight with the centurion, he replies in a classic’s dictum: “*Possidet inventas sanguine miles opes*” (the soldier possesses riches acquired by blood).⁹⁰

Tectonically, the story is somewhat off. Opening as a captivating narrative, it is cut abruptly short in a judgmental, moralistic ending. Its use of phrases “ill-gotten gains”, “dissolute society” or “a reprobate” renders the narrator unnecessarily explicit. One can, however, descry a serious message behind the text. Highly political, it exposes the dubious source of social status and power. Cultivation, knowledge, and sponsorship of arts are portrayed as a sham. And so is, in a way, the beautiful Ovidian line which the villain

⁸⁷ M. A. H., “New Novels,” *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Aug, 1934): 10; “University Literature,” *ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁸ *Pietermaritzburg College Magazine*, no. 5 (Nov, 1932): 2; R. F. Hawksley, “Democracy and Despotism,” *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Jul, 1934): 5; Alan Doyle (= Harmel), “The True Democracy,” *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept, 1934): 4.

⁸⁹ M. A. H., “O Tempora, O Mores,” *The Grey* XXX, no. 2 (Jun, 1932): 35–36.

⁹⁰ Publius Ovidius Naso, *Amorum Liber Tertius*, Elegia VIII, v. 54; *The Heroides or Epistles of the Heroine. The Amours: Art of Love, Remedy of Love*, trans. by H. T. Riley (London: Bohn, 1852), 361.

unabashedly employs to gloss over his criminal past. The world as we know it is deceptive. Underlying it is a theft and violence.

We may be disposed to see the story as little more than an application of Ovid to the present. The original poem brilliantly contrasts the genius of a poet unable to arouse affection in his beloved with a soldier—parvenu who, “his wealth acquired through his wounds”, showers her with presents:

Perhaps, too, he will tell how often he has stabbed a man; covetous one, will you touch the hand that confesses this? I, unstained, the priest of the Muses and of Phoebus, am he who is singing his bootless song before your obdurate doors.⁹¹

But if Ovid deplores the elevation of (blood-stained) wealth to the detriment of the arts and literary genius, Harmel’s story puts an ironic twist on this: the “hero of the day” makes use of a poetic attack on his kind and turns it to his own advantage, desecrating—as it were—the temple of Muses and corrupting the unsuspecting youth in the process. This is Ovid with a vengeance.

One is tempted to read into this juvenile *opuscule* an attack against the whole of society and culture, particularly the loci of authority and prestige, including perhaps the Grey High School itself. Iconoclastic quality of Harmel’s editorials for *The Adelphi* written not long thereafter (see c. 3) would seem to confirm this interpretation.

A Rock and a Hard Place

“My years at Grey,” wrote one of the old boys, “influenced my character and general disposition to a far greater degree than my many years of academic study at university.”⁹² But if the school—with its “tall-poppy-syndrome”, law-abiding ideology, its accent on “duty”, “discipline”, “loyalty”, “obedience”—did exert such an impact, does it not make Harmel and Evans, who ventured beyond the pale, appear something of a paradox?⁹³ Orwell believes it is not necessarily so. His “My Country, Right or Left” speaks of “the possibility of building a Socialist on the bones of a Blimp”: “The young communist who died heroically in the International Brigade was public school to the core. He had changed his allegiance but not his emotions.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ibid., 359–360.

⁹² *Old Grey Union Centenary*, 35. Cf. Rich, *Elixir*, 107.

⁹³ Redgrave et al., ‘*Neath the Tower*, 101. Sir Peter Ustinov once entertained the TV audience with a quotation from a report by one of his Westminster School masters: “He shows great originality that must be curbed at all cost.” *Parkinson*, BBC1, Jul 10, 1971, 7.48–7.59, accessed Jul 17, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RlpfBOVww78>.

⁹⁴ *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, vol. 12: *A Patriot after All, 1940–1941* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2000), 272.

Indeed, whereas many old Greys conceive of their common educational background as a mystical “bond” which binds together all the graduates, and maintain that they “are all one big family as [they] journey through life”, Harmel would find a new family in the Communist Party, exemplifying in his own way the principle that “individual efforts are merely a part of a general corporate life”.⁹⁵

It would be foolish to try to determine whether Harmel’s schooling played a more crucial rôle in his formation than other forces, albeit some would be inclined to see it that way.⁹⁶ Internal and external determinants clash, merge, and multiply. Not even a psychologist can disentangle the knot. One thing is clear, though. Deprived of mother and with a peripatetic father, Harmel was caught between the rock of detested relatives and the hard place of the Grey. He strove to carve out his identity both on the basis of, and in opposition to, these two sites of lived ideologies.

Asthma

Aside from his studentship and surrogate family, the skimpy sources draw to our notice yet another key factor in Harmel’s early years. Its period of operation transcends the present narrative. Since its disturbing onset coincides with Harmel’s time in Port Elizabeth, however, it is in order to discuss it here.

When he was thirteen, Harmel experienced something terrible—so terrible that thirty years later his mind still reverberated with the memory with undiminished force:

I shall never forget my first attack of asthma... I woke up early one summer’s morning with a feeling of tightness in the lungs. My breathing was noisy and I seemed unable to get enough air into my lungs.... I was badly frightened. I did not know what was happening to me.⁹⁷

Thus, with a sense of drama, opens Harmel’s account of his battle with asthma which he would wage, on and off, for the next thirteen years.⁹⁸ At first, he would not tell a living soul. Consumed with shame, he construed it as a punishment for a “rather feverish fascination with sex”.⁹⁹ Recurrent fits of dyspnoea took their toll: insomnia, fatigue, loss of weight, and lack of concentration.¹⁰⁰ Though Harmel does not say so, a period of academic underperformance very probably ensued. His physical activity must have been

⁹⁵ *Old Grey Union Centenary*, 33, 35, 37; Bourne, *W. A. Way*, 14. Cf. Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 5.

⁹⁶ Cf. Bourne, *W. A. Way*, 37.

⁹⁷ Michael Harmel, *How I Cured Myself of Asthma* (Johannesburg: Challenge, 1957), 5.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁰ According to his Rhodes records, Harmel was ill throughout the 2nd term in 1936. We do not know for sure whether it was with asthma, of course (CL RU).

seriously affected too. And it did not end there. Modern medicine informs us that asthmatics exhibit “depressed mood, low self-esteem... irrational fears and introver[sion]”.¹⁰¹

Both the medicaments prescribed by doctors and drugs procured by Arthur brought at most a temporary relief. Harmel felt a “prisoner of his condition”.¹⁰² It would sometimes put him out of action for weeks on end. Just what an ordeal the entire thing was for him is made apparent by the sheer range of evocative expressions employed to capture it. His condition involved “anguish”, “frigh[t]”, “dread” and “fear”. It was a “burden that plagued him”, wreaking in him a “deep mental shock” and making him “a pathetic and frightening sight”.¹⁰³

With time, Harmel came to perceive the horror of an asthmatic attack as the greatest problem. It was this horror that he believed had to be overcome. He reasoned he had to help himself “through a proper understanding... and the use of [his] own free will”, of “conscious self-control”.¹⁰⁴ In other words, it was his own self he was to fight rather than the disorder. He conceptualised the victory over asthma as one of the cerebral over the instinctive: “You are a rational, thinking, human being, not a blind, unreasoning creature—and you can master this thing if you can master yourself.”¹⁰⁵

The method he ultimately adopted consisted simply in containing panic which seizes the asthmatic as he or she experiences the first symptoms of yet another paroxysm. As per this method, it is imperative to keep calm and stay relaxed rather than struggle for breath. One must breathe “shallowly” for as long as it takes for the attack to abate.¹⁰⁶ It may not be universally applicable, but it worked for Harmel. Early in the 1940s, he experienced his very last fit of asthma.

Though awake to the entanglement of psychological and allergic factors in asthma aetiology, Harmel in the booklet does not reflect on the long-term impact, good or bad, the protracted predicament had on his mind and character. Why should he? He did not write it to put to rest old nightmares. He did not produce it to tell his own life. It is a helping hand extended altruistically to *others*.¹⁰⁷ This instance of other-centredness, quite genuine and

¹⁰¹ Emel Bulcun et al., “Psychological Characteristics of Patients with Asthma,” *Clinical Respiratory Journal* 12, no. 1 (2016): 117.

¹⁰² Harmel, *How I Cured Myself of Asthma*, 11.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, 19, 18.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 13, 16.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 3; IBH.

rather affecting, is itself symptomatic of who Harmel was. But so is, in a different way, the curative mechanism presented in the text.

It was by self-discipline, indeed, voluntaristically, that Harmel says he conquered first himself, his own fear, and, *ipso facto*, asthma. With a view to his further personal and political progression, the asthma episode assumes a nearly paradigmatic import. Such a triumph of redemption as he describes would have had an affirmative effect: it was a can-do experience. As such, would it have had not a natural way of replicating itself under different circumstances? The self-fashioning of Harmel the revolutionary, involving as it does suppression of all things bourgeois in oneself,¹⁰⁸ becoming someone else, transforming oneself from within, may be the most salient example of this mechanism (see c. 4).

Conclusion

Harmel spent no more than one year at Selborne Primary, which would have helped to mitigate the potentially traumatic effect of what one cannot perceive as anything but a grotesque compound of music worship, pseudo-military drill, and mindless violence. On the other hand, the Grey High School inevitably left an indelible imprint on his mind and soul. This South African incarnation of the traditional British public school afforded Harmel access to intellectual resources best designated as “middle-class cultural capital” that—purged, shaken up, and reoriented by Marxism-Leninism—he would bring to bear on his political work. Although some of the students and teachers maintain that South African education in those days left much to be desired, academic bona fides of the Grey masters together with the challenging curriculum in both English and history classes at the very least made for what is, by today’s standard, erudition in the humanities.¹⁰⁹ Harmel further received solid grounding in Latin, even though it was something of a bother to him, and acquired a speaking knowledge of Afrikaans.¹¹⁰ Equally as important, he was exposed to the ideology of discipline, loyalty, team spirit, service, militarism, white supremacy, paternalism, etc. He, consciously or unconsciously, embraced some of these values and beliefs, repudiating others. Yet others stayed with him, but would realign themselves.

Values inherent in the school’s text and talk, its ritualism and architecture, powerful as they were, naturally operated in conjunction with other factors. The Jewish and

¹⁰⁸ Barbara Harmel, *Thursday’s Child*, sect. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 5.

¹¹⁰ M. A. H., “Afrikaans,” review of *The Achievement of Afrikaans*, by T. J. Haarhoff and C. M. Van den Heever, *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934): 11.

entrepreneurial world of his relatives that he came wholeheartedly to loathe, to begin with. Another was Harmel's independent reading, particularly of G. B. Shaw, and the loose doctrine of democratic socialism he had got from his sole parent. Given his situation of a half-orphan, his father's absenteeism, his hostility to the Smollen family, and his emerging critical distance towards the Grey, Harmel's childhood was "a lonely one". His "intermittent" home was not as politicised as that of some of the other South African communists. He was left politically to his own devices and his ideological maturation would have been the slower.

Though seemingly unrelated to his ideological trajectory, Harmel's battle with a chronic respiratory disorder that developed in him during this period had far-reaching and multiple implications. Not only was it mentally and physically wearing, and therefore undermining of his self-esteem, academic performance, and social interaction. It went on to be highly transformative in the sense that it taught Harmel the power of will, self-control, self-reliance, discipline, and reason. His faith in these would stand him in good stead when he set about carving a communist revolutionary out of his bourgeois self.

Chapter 3/ STUDENT, WRITER, AND JOURNALIST: GRAHAMSTOWN AND JOHANNESBURG (1933–1938)

Introduction

The third chapter follows Harmel through his student years at the Rhodes University College and two spells on *The Star* newspaper in Johannesburg. This was a highly consequential period for at least three reasons. Between 1933 and 1938, he received training in economics, philosophy, and criticism. He very probably fell in love. For the first time, he gave vent to a deeply felt public spirit and social consciousness—journalistically, literarily, and editorially—starting a career of a political writer. I examine his juvenile writings, hitherto practically unknown. They are remarkable both in themselves and as a window onto his intellectual, axiological, and ideological progression at the time. They show that in 1934–1938 Harmel said a radical no to South Africa’s racial order, travelled from anti-communism to communism, and began a process of aligning himself with Soviet-style socialism. At the same time, he embarked on a life-long (and contradictory) journey of distancing himself from his “bourgeois” side.

Grahamstown and the Rhodes University in the 1930s

The Rhodes University College (RUC) was founded in 1904 in the city of Grahamstown which itself had only been in existence for less than a century. Though its golden days had been over by the early 1930s, the city found a new *raison d’être* as a centre of education. Apart from Rhodes, it was home to St Andrews, St Aidan and Kingswood Colleges, and the Training College for female teachers. The 1936 census breaks down the population thus: whites (including students) 8,198; Africans 9,131; Coloureds 2,322; and Indians 122. The second figure had nearly doubled over the foregoing decade and a half. Most of the black people lived in the poverty-stricken Old Municipal Location and the townships of Tantyi and Newtown, finding employment in domestic service.¹

The RUC founders conceived of it as a British institution. This ethos found expression, among other things, in marking or celebration of the birth and death of Cecil Rhodes, Queen Victoria’s birthday, George V’s silver jubilee, and the Battle of Delville Wood anniversary. In 1935, undergraduates paid £6 per term in tuition plus £1 registration

¹ Sean Andrew Greyling, “Rhodes University during the Segregation and Apartheid Eras, 1933–1990,” MA thesis (Rhodes University, 2007), 23; Paul Maylam, *Rhodes University 1904–2016* (Grahamstown: RU, draft), 54; Hilstan Lett Watts, “Grahamstown: A Socio-Ecological Study of a Small South African Town,” PhD thesis (RU, 1958), 108, 176, 313, 325–332; D. H. Thompson, *A Short History of Grahamstown* (Grahamstown: Grocott & Sherry, 1952), 1ff, 34; Harold Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star* (unpubl. ms), 20.

fee. Unless living with parents or awarded exemption, they were required to stay in unisex residences supervised by wardens.² The student roll stood at 450 in 1933, about three times less than the UCT and Wits.³ Rhodes had no more than 10 departments, some of them, however, incorporating as many as four disciplines. Between them, they covered most subjects in the Humanities and Science, including psychology, zoology, commerce, music, and fine arts. The academic staff comprised around 50 members. These numbers, together with the RUC being basically a residential institution, meant that everyone on campus knew everyone else and that university-organised events tended to be well-attended.⁴

Blacks and Whites at Rhodes

Teaching at Rhodes was the white man's job. Black people were relegated to auxiliary positions, such as cleaners and gardeners. That made the college no different from other institutions of higher education in the country. Unlike the other two Anglophone universities, though, the RUC voluntarily barred non-whites from enrolment.⁵ That said, opportunities for closer contact between Africans and Europeans did exist. The students of the Native College of Fort Hare participated in the Rhodes debating contests, for instance. The National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) allowed black delegates at its conferences. White Rhodians, for their part, volunteered for coaching of African primary school teachers. The Social Studies Club—with a membership of 100, including, at one point, Harmel himself—supported the Bantu Social Centre in the location, raised money for its secondary school, co-managed township library, and organised relief for black orphans. Its “Bantu Section” hosted Indian and African speakers (Paul Mosaka, Victor V. T. Mboobo).⁶ Finally, one could “ge[t] a glimmer of understanding of the social conditions under which the Blacks lived” by attending Grahamstown criminal court proceedings.⁷ Taking a course in South African criminal law, Harmel would have naturally found his way

² Paul Maylam, “Reminiscences. A Hundred Years of History at Rhodes University: Some Reflections on the Department’s Centenary Colloquium, Sept 2011,” *Historia* 57, no. 1 (2012): 166; *Calendar 1935*, 4–5; Nigel Cave, *Delville Wood: Somme* (London: Leo Cooper, 2003); *Rhodes University College Calendar 1935*, 148. £6 and £1 amount, respectively, to £390 and 65 in today’s currency.

³ Richard Buckland and Thelma Neville, *A Story of Rhodes: Rhodes University 1904–2004* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 2004), 135; Howard Philips, *The University of Cape Town 1918–1948: The Formative Years* (Cape Town: UCT, 1993), 186; Bruce K. Murray, *Wits, the Early Years. A History of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and Its Precursors, 1896–1939* (Johannesburg: Wits UP, 1982), 215.

⁴ *Calendar 1935*, 9–13; Maylam, *Rhodes University*, 70; Stanley G. Shuttleworth, *Memoirs of an Industrial Boffin* (Port Elizabeth: Walton, 1985), 14; M. A. H., “Let Us Build a Utopia of Small Communities,” *Rhodian* XIII, no. 2 (1936): 27; Murray, *Wits*, 338; Rusty Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting. Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics 1938–1963* (London: Viking, 1999), 17.

⁵ Maylam, *Rhodes University*, 60; Greyling, “Rhodes University,” 24–28; R. F. Currie, *Rhodes University, 1904–1970: A Chronicle* (Grahamstown: RU, 1970), 76. Even at the UCT it was not all roses for the forty Coloured and Indian students. They were not welcome at the cultural and sports events and would not join student clubs and societies. In lecture theatres and laboratories, most whites treated them “with cold reserve” (Phillips, *UCT*, 192–193).

⁶ *Calendar 1935*, 137; Buckland and Neville, *Story of Rhodes*, 43, 46; Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 21 and Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown & comp., 1995), 103, ePUB; Guy Butler, *Bursting World: An Autobiography, 1936–45* (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1984), 104–105; Maylam, *Rhodes University*, 79f; Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 20; *Rhodian* XIV, no. 1 (1936): 38; *Rhodian* XIII, no. 2 (1934): 37. On the participation of Africans in NUSAS conferences cf. Maylam, *Rhodes University*, 57f.

⁷ Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 19.

into the courtroom. These points of contact, albeit limited, sometimes sufficed for the whites to correct their racial preconceptions.⁸

Why Rhodes?

Why did Michael Harmel opt for Rhodes in the first place? We do not know for certain. Perhaps Arthur still could not afford to support him overseas for an extended period of time.⁹ Michael might as well have been loath to leave the Eastern Cape where he had grown up. His father had been transferred to Durban and then to Johannesburg so they would only spend vacations together or meet briefly when business brought Arthur to Port Elizabeth or East London.¹⁰

Aware of the “petty narrowness of its views” and its provincial complacency, young Harmel by no means idealised Grahamstown. But he came to prefer its tranquillity and familial atmosphere to materialism, corruption, and anonymity that, or so he felt, characterised the City of Gold.¹¹

Subjects...

As to the field of study, Arthur gave Michael free hand.¹² His BA was in English and Economics. Students were supposed to sign up for at least 11 qualifying courses in both major and ancillary subjects. Harmel, apparently, lost whatever was left of his interest in the classics as he dropped, or failed, first Latin and then Classical Culture. Although he earned a credit for Ancient Philosophy, it would seem that (within the boundaries of the curriculum) more contemporary and applied (or applicable) subjects attracted him: Constitutional and South African Criminal Law, Ethics, Politics, and Economic History. He did his Masters in English only.¹³ Details are not forthcoming, however, except that he probably did not indite a thesis. History and psychology students did submit a written work in support of their candidacy, but neither Harris (philosophy) nor Butler (English) suggests anything to that effect.¹⁴

⁸ Cf. Butler, *Bursting World*, 48; Harris, *Bounds in Shallows*, 79; Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 24.

⁹ Until about 1936, it was Sally Harmel's brother Harry who footed Michael's tuition bill. Arthur could not have been exactly out of pocket, though, as for his 21st birthday, he presented his son with a motorcar (Ford 21). A year later, he purchased him another one (Ford Coupé 1937) (A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Jan 20, 1936 and Jul 23, 1937, MHP: A3300/B). That Arthur was not in a bad way financially can be further inferred from the fact that he could afford to make an around-the-world voyage aboard the MV Silverpalm in 1937–1938 for \$600 (A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Mar 13, May 6, Jun 1, June 10, Jul 27, Aug 21, Aug 29, 1937 and Jan 12 1938, A3300/B)

¹⁰ Harmel, *How I Cured Myself of Asthma*, 9; A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Jan 20, 1936 (A3300/B); Michael's student card (CL RU); Arthur to Tilly & Ted, May 6, 1937.

¹¹ M. A. H., “Let Us Build a Utopia...,” 27.

¹² A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Jan 20, 1936. It was, however, the Board of Studies who had the final say in determining the choice of the degree subjects based, primarily, on one's previous academic performance. Butler, *Bursting World*, 3; Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 68.

¹³ *Calendar 1935*, 39 and MH's Student Card.

¹⁴ Lynn Berat, “Interview with Thompson,” *South African Historical Journal* 30, no. 1 (1994): 17; *Calendar 1935*, 189; Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 77; Butler, *Bursting World*, 113.

...and Faces Behind Them

Since the RUC had very small departments, we can safely identify Harmel's professors. Wielding a virtual monopoly over the instruction and examination, their training and personalities put a distinctive stamp on the way they introduced students to their respective disciplines. Let us take a glance at three of them, one by one, and compare their ideas of English, Economics, and Philosophy with Harmel's discourse.

Peter Haworth (1891–1956) received his degrees at Universities of Manchester, Oxford, and Innsbruck. The last one was a PhD, which tallies with Hobsbawm's opinion that, in the humanities, doctorates were back then condescendingly regarded as "a German peculiarity".¹⁵ Though his doctoral research concerned the plays of John Webster, it was not beneath Haworth to compile four anthologies of "popular" fiction.¹⁶ The better part of his only scholarly volume likewise deals with genres passed off by "serious" literary scholarship in those days.¹⁷ The award-winning essay on English hymnody, in particular, broke new ground.¹⁸ The majority of these works appeared prior to his assumption of the Rhodes professorship in 1932. Afterwards, his time was, for the main, taken up by teaching. In this capacity, he acquitted himself exquisitely.¹⁹ Here is Haworth as remembered by Guy Butler who would some years later take over his place:

I had never seen anyone take possession of a room and an audience like that before. He used the entire front of the lecture theatre as a stage, striding backwards and forwards, reading two, sometimes three, parts of a Dickens or a Shakespeare. He breathed upon the dead bones and they rustled into life. On more than one occasion his performance impelled me towards the library.²⁰

Haworth believed that "rightly and devotedly to study literature means... to enter into spiritual communion with the noblest of our race".²¹ It is "the works of great artists and great poets... [that] constitute the proper study of a student of English".²² These statements point to an idealist, individual-centred and, indeed, an elitist approach. Haworth's interest in "marginal" genres indicates they do not tell the entire story. His courses, however, clearly

¹⁵ "Peter Haworth 1891–1958," *Rhodes Newsletter* 1, no. 6 (Sept 1958): 2; Universitätsarchiv Innsbruck records; Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York: Pantheon, 2002), 104. Cf. *Calendar 1935*, 10.

¹⁶ *Before Scotland Yard: Classic Tales of Roguery and Detection* (1927); *The Dead Man's Chest: Classic Tales of Hidden Treasure* (1929), etc.

¹⁷ Peter Haworth, *English Hymns and Ballads and Other Studies in Popular Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1927).

¹⁸ Haworth, *English Hymn Ballads*, 1–29; C. H. Herford, Preface, *ibid.*, xi.

¹⁹ Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 18.

²⁰ Butler, *Bursting World*, 6.

²¹ "Peter Haworth 1891–1958," 2.

²² Peter Haworth, "Co-ordinates of Criticism: Part Two," in *Proceedings of the Second Conference of University Teachers of English held at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg, Jul 4–7, 1949)*: 2.

manifest a preference for a critical perspective that, by the 1930s, was already becoming obsolescent.

Works of criticism Haworth prescribed to his students were, in fact, few. Save for two anthologies,²³ it was only *Essays in Criticism* (1865) of Matthew Arnold. Given the latter's eminence both on the list and in the history of English letters,²⁴ one can assume Arnoldian theory of criticism and ideal of the critic was something Haworth sought to instil into them.

For Arnold, "the critic" is more of a public intellectual than an *arbiter elegantiarum*. He encompasses the entire reality. By providing its "interpretation", he renders artistic endeavours possible.²⁵ This task can only be fulfilled, however, as long as the critic possesses the ability to be "disinterested", with his mind impervious to political, humanitarian, social, and practical considerations for such threaten to blind him to imperfection.²⁶ He strives for a "speculative" view of things distinguished by a discerning sense of subtleties, respect for facts, dislike of theory, openness to compromise, and ambiguous idiom. Arnold accordingly mocks the "Philistines" who "organise and combine a party to pursue truth and new thought".²⁷ In general terms, his approach is characterised by hostility towards revolutionism on the one hand and loyalty to those in power "till right is ready" on the other.²⁸ All this, together with his view of true literature (as opposed to religion, politics, and popular writing) as one that spreads the ideal, does away with classes, and "console[s]... and sustain[s]",²⁹ could not have by any manner of means stood the test of time with Harmel. The latter's writings may not as yet put a premium on "humanist, liberating message" of literature and art.³⁰ He, however, already subjects to irony an artistic type that, immured from reality, finds satisfaction in the cloud cuckoo land of narcissistic imagination.³¹ Even his early journalism (political, if not literary) exhibits partisanship and zeal that arise, as Arnold would have put it, from "a dizzying effect" of "the rush and roar of the practical" that "draw him into its vortex".³²

²³ E. D. Jones, ed. *English Critical Essays (XIXth Century)* (London: OUP, 1916); D. Nichol Smith, ed. *Eighteenth-Century Essays on Shakespeare* (Glasgow: MacLehose, 1903).

²⁴ Harry Blamires, *A History of Literary Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 268–275.

²⁵ Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism," *Essays in Criticism* (New York: Burt, 1900), 10, 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21–22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 26–27.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

²⁹ Arnold, "The Study of Poetry," in *Essays in Criticism*, 280.

³⁰ Alan Doyle, "Break Down South Africa's Iron Curtain! A Reply to Mr. Kathrada," *Liberation*, no. 21 (Sept 1956): 13.

³¹ M. A., "The Artist," *Rhodian*, Vol., no. 2 XV (1937): 9.

³² Arnold, "The Function of Criticism," 25.

Coming back to Haworth's syllabi, we can notice that all works of criticism listed therein were written before 1900 and, barring one, pertain to poetry alone. Furthermore, the majority come from literary practitioners rather than critics. Finally, they all belong to the critical period that generally satisfied itself with comprehension. Yet only a short while before the New Critics invented the interpretive study of literature as we know it today—as one that aims to produce a “hypothesis as to the most general principle of structure which can be abstracted from the combination of linguistic elements”.³³ Haworth could cite very practical reasons for not including into the syllabus the pioneering works in poetics and the theory of the novel produced in Germany and Austria after the 1870s:³⁴ Rhodians generally did not read German, French or, for that matter, any other European language.³⁵ To the ideas of Richard and Empson, however, the professor was opposed on principle. As he explained in 1949:

I fully appreciate the special difficulties which confront us in the teaching of English in South Africa, but to encourage a captious and sceptical frame of mind, in our dealings with young and inexperienced students, may have positively dangerous results. An overdose of Practical Criticism may impair and even destroy his aesthetic faculties for the rest of his life... I take it that the chief objects of literary criticism are threefold:

- (a) to judge a writer's aim;
- (b) to criticise his technique; and
- (c) to evaluate his work.³⁶

Arnoldian aesthetics (with its ideological substratum) in the end cut little ice with Harmel. The absence of an interpretative and poetological component in the English syllabus, however, did have a lasting effect on his critical practice. Not only are his reviews and essays, including the Olive Schreiner booklet,³⁷ destitute of any interpretive dimension. We would be hard-pressed to find in them so much as a touch of literary morphology. At most, Harmel likes to discuss “style” and “technique” which, if deserving,

³³ John M. Ellis, *The Theory of Literary Criticism. A Logical Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 206–207; quoted in Kenneth M. Newton, *Interpreting the Text. A Critical Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Literary Interpretation* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1990), 27.

³⁴ Cf. Blamires, *History of Literary Criticism*, 303–346; Tomáš Kubiček, *Vypravěč. Kategorie narativní analýzy* [The Narrator: A Category of Narrative Analysis (Brno: Host, 2007)], 20–45. A quick glance around the Empire shows that other “offshore” departments of English may or may not have been more up to date. At the Victoria College of Wellington, the syllabus lists Saintsbury's *First Book of English Literature* as a general outline, but there are only three “critical” books *sensu stricto* (Arnold, Hazlitt, and Pater). Interestingly, these are not treated differently from other “greatest works” of a given period (*Victoria University College Calendar 1935*, 57–60). At “Dal” in Nova Scotia English professors did require familiarity with three contemporary works of criticism, including Richards' *The Principles of Literary Criticism and Practical Criticism. Dalhousie University Calendar, 1935–1936*, 75–77.

³⁵ Butler, *Bursting World*, 20; Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 55f, 59.

³⁶ Haworth, “Co-ordinates of Criticism: Part Two,” 3.

³⁷ Michael Harmel, *Olive Schreiner 1855–1955* (Cape Town: Real Printing, 1955).

he relishes with a gusto of an aesthete.³⁸ After he joins the Party, this perspective gradually merges with the “scientific worldview” into “socialist realism”.³⁹ His penchant for “good writing” abides, but is now closely tethered to equally vaguely and superficially defined “content”. Semantic relevance of its “cloth[ing]” is lost on Harmel to such an extent that, though genuinely appreciative of Nadine Gordimer’s technical mastery, he admits not being able to remember what her book was “about”.⁴⁰ In the last analysis, the “content” should take precedence. “Brilliancy and fluency of expression” has the potential, Harmel maintains, for “defeat[ing] [one’s] subject” and “message”. Literature ought to be rooted in “here and now”, must be “true to life”, “revelation of truth”. It must be “real and convincing”, “representative”, and typical, lest it become “inartistic”.⁴¹ Good art “speaks in plain tones to the people, the workers in factory, mine and field... is near and dear to them, and at the same time uplifts and inspires them, enlarges their understanding and experience...”⁴² Exigencies of the South African liberation struggle call for a book of fiction to convey “a positive philosophy”, to chart a “road out”.⁴³

To sum up, the superannuated perspective of the RUC English Department could nourish neither attention to form nor interpretive skill. Although Arnoldian ideal, occupying a special place in Haworth’s syllabi, would have been (or become) completely foreign to Harmel, he in some other respects never extricated himself from the confines of his critical training.

Another of Harmel’s professors, Desmond Hobart Houghton (1906–1976), was already well on the way to becoming the leading South African economist. A scion of a

³⁸ See Harmel, “Witwatersrand” and “New Novels,” *Adelphi. A South African Monthly Review of Literature, Public Affairs and the Arts* (May 1934): 12; (Jul, 1934): 11; (Sept 1934): 12. See also his review of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* by T. E. Lawrence, *Rhodian* XIII, no. 4 (1935): 28; “This Book Is Dynamite”; “Retreat from Reality?” review of *A Wreath for Udomo*, by Peter Abrahams, *New Age*, Jun 7, 1956, 6; “Nadine Gordimer—Coloratura Writer,” review of *Six Feet of the Country*, by Nadine Gordimer, *New Age*, Nov 8, 1956, 7; “The Shaw Centenary,” *FT*, Jul 1956, 8; “Two New Plays,” review of *The Long, the Short and the Tall* and *Hostage*, by Bernard Behan, *FT*, Sept 1959, 13.

³⁹ “Voices of Angry Men,” 9. What Marxist criticism Harmel read remains unknown save for two titles. In “Voices of Angry Men” and “Shaw Centenary” (9), respectively, he quotes from Engels’ letter to the writer Minna Kautsky (Nov 26, 1885) and Alick West’s *G. B. Shaw: Good Man Fallen Among Fabians* (1950). Engels’ letter was published in *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art*, Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski, eds. (St Louis: Telos, 1973), 112–113. On West (1895–1972) see Maynard Solomon, ed. *Marxism and Art: Essays Classic and Contemporary* (New York: Knopf, 1973), 492–496.

⁴⁰ Harmel, “Shaw Centenary,” 8; Harmel, “Nadine Gordimer...”

⁴¹ “Shaw Centenary”; “Nadine Gordimer”; “Challenge,” *Adelphi*, no. 7 (Feb 1963): 1; “Reality and Fiction in South African Literature,” *Liberation*, no. 1 (Feb 1954): 8; *Olive Schreiner*, 2, 10; “Much Ado about Pasternak. A Review of *Doctor Zhivago*,” *Liberation*, no. 34 (Dec 1958): 10; “Two New Plays,” 13; “This Book Is Dynamite.”

⁴² “Challenge,” 1.

⁴³ “Reality and Fiction,” 9 (cf. Corinne Sandwith, “Culture in the Public Sphere: Recovering a Tradition of Radical Cultural-Political Debate in South Africa, 1938–1960,” PhD thesis [University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2005], 231–233); Alan Doyle, “Resignation and Despair. Second Thoughts about *Cry the Beloved Country*,” *Guardian*, Nov 3, 1950, 3. According to Sandwith: “Literary discussion amongst white Communists like Lionel Bernstein and Michael Harmel departed very little from the by now well-trodden paths of a Soviet inspired literary-cultural criticism. An abiding emphasis on literature as a weapon in the broader liberation struggle, and a tendency towards overt political discussion are combined with... a preference for realism; a high regard for literature which tells the ‘truth’ about the contemporary socio-political scene; a valorisation of collective rather than individualist concerns; a preoccupation with the representation of ordinary experience; and a strong preference for the depiction of inspiring and heroic resistance.” “Culture in the Public Sphere,” 290.

“pro-black” family, he chaired the Grahamstown Joint Council for a number of years.⁴⁴ His classes dealt with such topics as distribution of wealth, competition, monopoly, socialistic and communistic systems, and capitalism. The list of books prescribed to his students was long, diverse, and challenging. When it came to comprehensive publications on the finance and economy of the Union, however, there was not much to choose from. Only three works more or less fitted the bill: M. H. de Kock’s *An Analysis of the Finances of the Union of South Africa* (1922) and *Selected Subjects in the Economic History of South Africa* (1924) and D. M. Goodfellow’s *A Modern Economic History of South Africa* (1931).⁴⁵

Harvard-educated De Kock (1898–1976) was then a UCT lecturer and one of the chief architects of the South African Reserve Bank.⁴⁶ The thick volume of *Selected Subjects*, heavily dependent on official publications,⁴⁷ addressed issues ranging from land and agriculture through taxation, mining, banking to labour and “the poor-white problem”. His recipe for the welfare of white South Africans was typical of the time:

[I]t seems clear that territorial or industrial segregation will have to be put into effect to a greater or less extent, as the uncontrolled competition between white and coloured is undermining the whole social and economic fabric of the Union.⁴⁸

What Harmel would have made of such proposals is inferable from his early writings (examined below). Some fifteen years later he also plainly stated what he thought of de Kock as the Governor of the Reserve Bank as well as “bankers, economists and such like” whose message to citizenry in the time of economic trouble boiled down to “work harder and eat less”. Wrote Harmel: The liberal economist’s “prescriptions are so nasty, his ‘laws’ so iniquitous and his arguments so threadbare” that he has to conceal the real meaning in “a special mumbo jumbo”.⁴⁹ De Kock, a sort of an economic pope, represents to him a living example of an “unbridgeable gulf... between the point of view of a banker and that of an ordinary working man and woman”.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 76 (for the quote); Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 18, 20–21; Maylam, *Rhodes University*, 61. On the Grahamstown’s Joint Council see A. C. M. Torlesse, “A History of Grahamstown in 1918–1945,” MA thesis (Rhodes University, 1993), 32, 209–211, 215–220.

⁴⁵ *Calendar 1935*, 81–83; *Calendar 1936*, 81–83.

⁴⁶ Christopher Saunders, *Making of the South Africa Past: Major Historians on Race and Class* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1988), 117; South African Reserve Bank website, accessed Feb 21, 2017, <https://www.resbank.co.za/AboutUs/History/PreviousGovernors/Pages/DrMichielHendrikdeKock.aspx>

⁴⁷ Arnold Plant, review of *Selected Subjects in the Economic History of South Africa*, by M. H. de Kock, *Economic Journal* 35, no. 140 (Dec 1925): 633.

⁴⁸ *Selected Subjects in the Economic History of South Africa* (Cape Town: Juta, 1924), 464.

⁴⁹ Alan Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Aug 2, 1951, 2.

⁵⁰ Alan Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Aug 10, 1951, 4. Cf. “Putting the Screws On,” *Liberation*, no. 4 (Aug 1953): 4.

Goodfellow's book provided the only general view of South African economic history at this point.⁵¹ It left much to be desired as a synthesis as it centred almost exclusively on gold mining.⁵² But it suffered from other weaknesses too. The author, for instance, perceives the "native" population solely in terms of labour supply, while his almost unquestioning discussion of exploitative and segregationist practices lends them a feel of normality.⁵³

Where did Hobart Houghton himself stand in relation to the socio-economic affairs in the Union? In a lecture series from the time, he bluntly admits that "the European capitalists...have no intention of allowing their supply of labour to be cut off by giving the Natives in the reserves so much land as to make them economically independent of employment outside". The only way to go is therefore to carve out "an industrial future for the Bantu people in the rough and tumble of modern life". Their ties with the tribal past severed, Africans shall be able to unionise and obtain better working and living conditions.⁵⁴ However, they can already "consolidate their position" by a "[g]reater specialisation, more continuous application to work, higher education, better living conditions, and the restraint that comes from living as a member of an organised and permanent social unit". In this manner, black people should be able to acquire higher efficiency and consequently "earn higher wages".⁵⁵ A cause-effect confusion? Not according to Hobart Houghton. Although the colour bar demoralises both blacks and whites, African poverty has other roots too. "Internal" factors, namely "inefficiency... and inability to assume responsibility", have as much of a rôle to play. Africans would do well to pay less heed to their political grievances. The economic organisation of the country is what they should above all understand.⁵⁶

Could there exist more of a gap between data and conclusions? The very politics Hobart Houghton was keen to leave out of discussion effectively set bounds to what he could say.⁵⁷ His analysis, delivered before a predominantly black audience,⁵⁸ works to disempower the African community and preserve the *status quo*. As late as the 1970s, overseas authors would accuse him of "economism" that was "insufficiently critical of the

⁵¹ Donald Wright and Christopher Saunders, "The Writing of of the History of Canada and of South Africa," in Stuart Macintyre et al. eds. *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 4, 1800–1945 (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 404; J. Coatman's review of the book in *International Affairs* 11, no. 6 (1932): 883.

⁵² John Hicks' review in *Economic Journal* 42, no. 165 (1932): 109; Saunders, *Making of South African Past*, 117–118.

⁵³ D. M. Goodfellow, *A Modern Economic History of South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1931), 72–73, 139, 238f.

⁵⁴ D. Hobart Houghton, *Some Economic Problems of Bantu in South Africa* (Cape Town: SAIRR, 1938), 19.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 44–45.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 43, 53–54.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁸ Alexander Kerr, *Fort Hare 1915–48: The Evolution of an African College* (Pietermaritzburg: Shutter & Shooter, 1968), 132.

interrelations... between politics and economics, between economics and race” and of reflecting “established white perspectives and prejudices”.⁵⁹

As a student, Harmel had some regard for his professor. In 1972, reviewing the second volume of *The Oxford History of South Africa*, to which Hobart Houghton contributed a chapter, he deplored the loss of the spirit his professor had once possessed:

Houghton’s economic history is virtually a paean of praise to the remarkable growth and development of the South African economy... But there is no attempt whatever to correlate the great growth of profits and developments with its true source—the grinding poverty, dispossession, proletarianisation and exploitation of Africans. Under the influence of the ultra-reactionary American economist Walt Rostow, Houghton has lost the clarity of vision and crusading spirit of his earlier, more progressive days.⁶⁰

The Fort Hare lectures indicate these earlier days were not so much more “progressive”. After all, Harmel’s criticism was not completely new. For “apolitical” scholarship had been Hobart Houghton’s hobbyhorse for decades. When, in 1937, he drew the line at “intoxicating draughts of prejudice that flow” from political parties and demanded impartiality in social science, Harmel was quick to recognise the illusiveness of such a proposal, citing the influence the powers that be exercised on university courses.⁶¹

In view of the above, it seems something of a paradox that from about 1931 courses in politics became Hobart Houghton’s responsibility as well.⁶² The syllabus demonstrates he was not in his element. Compared with his economics classes, it appears bland, listing only a handful of topics: history of institutions, theories of the State, Sovereignty, and Law and Rights in modern thought. There are no more than four set books: Aristotle’s *Politics*, Bosanquet’s *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (1889), Jenks’ *The State and the Nation* (1919), and Lord’s *The Principles of Politics* (1921). One might conclude that both the syllabus and reading were an inheritance from the author of the last-named title who had taught the courses before.⁶³

⁵⁹ Timothy M. Shaw, review of *The South African Economy*, by D. Hobart Houghton, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10, no. 3 (1977): 466–467.

⁶⁰ D. Hobart Houghton, “Economic Development, 1865–1965,” in Leonard Thompson and Monica Wilson, eds. *Oxford History of South Africa*, vol. 2, *South Africa 1870–1966* (Oxford: OUP, 1972), 1–48; A. Lerumo (=M. Harmel), review of *The Oxford History of South Africa*, vol. 2, *South Africa 1870–1966*, edited by Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson, *AC*, no. 47 (4th qtr, 1971): 124–125.

⁶¹ D. H. H., “A Plea for Social Science,” *Rhodian* XV, no. 2 (1937): 28; M., “But...”, *ibid.*, 28–29.

⁶² William Sweet, “Arthur Ritchie Lord (1880–1941): A Bio-bibliographical Sketch,” in A. R. Lord, *Foundational Problems in Philosophy. Politics Ethics, Aesthetics, and Religion* (Lewiston: Mellen, 2006), xvii.

⁶³ *Calendar 1935*, 84. The work was for years used as a textbook at the UCT and Wits – see William Sweet, “Lord’s *The Principles of Politics*,” in Arthur Ritchie Lord, *The Principles of Politics* (Lewiston: Mellen, 2006), xiiin25. Cf. Sweet, “Lord’s *The Principles of Politics*,” i.

“Ciceronian elegance”—that is a quality attributed by Butler to the oratory of Arthur Ritchie Lord (1880–1941), the professor of philosophy. Errol Harris, W. M. Macmillan, and A. F. R. Hoernlé echo this praise.⁶⁴ Lord earned a degree in *literae humaniores* in Oxford. Joining the Rhodes University College staff in 1905, he contrived to hold the chair of philosophy for 35 years, despite his “infirmity” and a serious drinking problem.⁶⁵ Harmel took his courses in Ancient Philosophy (1933) and Ethics I (1936). The former aimed at a thorough examination of Plato’s *Republic*, with focus on the tension between morality as an internal phenomenon and its worldly context. In the latter, the key texts were Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and T. H. Green’s *Prolegomena to Ethics*, although their detailed study only followed in Ethics II.

Lord published little. His unpublished manuscripts, however, make for three volumes, spanning a gamut of subjects. He was a thinker in the idealist tradition, with an aversion to some of the more recent trends—Bertrand Russell’s philosophy, for instance.⁶⁶ Idealism underlies his assertion that “the material world is nothing in itself, but is a material world in and for Mind”. With Hegel, he viewed history as “the story of human consciousness”.⁶⁷

Idealist philosophers devoted especial attention to ethics. So, too, Lord. He defined it as a speculative or theoretical discipline which concerns “human conduct as it affects the aims and destiny of mankind”.⁶⁸ His principal area of interest, however, lay in political philosophy. He set forth his conception thereof in three texts: the lecture “The Problem of Modern Democracy” (1918), the textbook *The Principles of Politics* (1921), and the essay “Freedom” (1941).⁶⁹

Though following in the footsteps of Bosanquet and Green, Lord takes note of new political and social currents, which makes him not less interested in the concepts of “democracy” and “freedom” than in those of “obligation” and “the legitimacy of the state”.

⁶⁴ Butler, *Bursting World*, 7; Errol Harris, “Recollections,” in Lord, *Foundational Problems in Philosophy*, 1; W. M. Macmillan, *My South African Years* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1975), 112; R. Hoernlé to H. Reyburn as quoted in Sweet, “Bio-bibliographical Sketch,” xliiifn24.

⁶⁵ Buckland and Neville, *Story of Rhodes*, 39. Thompson to B. Lamb & N. Lazarus, 1982; Harris, “Reminiscences,” 1 and *Bound in Shallows*, 78; R. Hoernlé to H. Reyburn, Oct 5, 191, quoted in “Bio-bibliographical Sketch,” xliii24; Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 18.

⁶⁶ *Calendar 1935*, 73, 75; Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 71, 78; Nettleship, *Lectures*, 49, quoted in Sweet, “Bio-bibliographical Sketch,” xxiv.

⁶⁷ Sweet, “Bio-bibliographical Sketch,” xxxiv, xix.

⁶⁸ Lord, “The Methods of Ethical Speculation,” 98; quoted in Sweet, “Bio-bibliographical Sketch,” xxv.

⁶⁹ Unless stated otherwise, the following section draws upon all three texts of Lord’s as interpreted by William Sweet in “A. R. Lord and Later British Idealist Political Philosophy,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 7, no. 3 (Jul 2005): 48–66. Cf. Sweet, “Bio-bibliographical Sketch,” xxxi–xiv.

Indeed, his lecture of 1918 begins with the statement that “the future is to Democracy”.⁷⁰ But what does he mean by the term? To Lord, democracy is tantamount to “popular sovereignty” achieved by the masses identifying the best in their midst to whom they delegate decision-making. Such an “aristocracy of merit” comprises men who possess insight into the meaning of life.⁷¹ They represent the General Will as defined by Bosanquet.⁷² The subjection to it secures freedom and morality of human existence. But the delegate must not confuse the General Will with his own. He serves as an instrument through which the Will interprets itself:

to the extent that... those who discern are listened to, and that their reports of the interest of the people... are acted upon, we have popular sovereignty—and therefore democracy. This is independent of the structure of political systems and of institutions...⁷³

Individual is not free from (or in spite of) institutions because these institutions objectify “the universal wisdom of the past”: “we are more self-determining in obedience to the state”.⁷⁴ Freedom, as Lord sees it, is a social freedom. Individual freedom comes through the participation of an individual in the social freedom. The participation takes the form of putting roots into “the essential values to the highest degree” (i.e. “Absolute mind”), the values that, as suggested before, find their expression in state institutions, reflecting the General Will.⁷⁵

Students gained acquaintance with Lord’s views on ethical and political philosophy through, first of all, his only published book *The Principles of Politics*. This, as we have seen, remained a required reading even with Hobart Houghton taking over the politics course. Another source was his lectures. Still another was the manuscripts he was happy to loan.⁷⁶ The philosopher William Sweet believes that Lord’s “deliberate practical orientation would have influenced the students... who came to be leaders in the Union of South Africa”.⁷⁷ Harmel represents this group. His dealing in *The Adelphi* and *The Star* with the proposals of alternatives to traditional democracy certainly suggest as much (see below). After converting to communism, he would embrace its idiosyncratic construction of morality, democracy, history, etc., coupled with a hostile attitude towards institutions of

⁷⁰ Sweet, “Bio-Bibliographical Sketch,” 32; Lord, “The Problem of Modern Democracy,” in A. R. Lord, *Foundational Problems of Philosophy* (Lewiston: Mellen, 2006), 82.

⁷¹ Lord, “The Problem of Modern Democracy,” 87.

⁷² This is a recollection of Errol Harris. Sweet, “Bio-bibliographical Sketch,” xxxi. General Will (*volonté générale*) is originally a Rousseauian concept, of course.

⁷³ Sweet, “A. R. Lord,” 54.

⁷⁴ Lord, *Principles of Politics*, 268, 271; quoted in Sweet, “A. R. Lord,” 57.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 30; quoted in *ibid.*, 60.

⁷⁶ Harris, “Reminiscences,” I; Dingemans, “Late Professor Lord,” Ivi.

⁷⁷ Sweet, “Biobibliographical Sketch,” xxxviii (cf. xix).

the capitalist state. However, the concept of the General Will interpreted by a meritocratic class; subordinate status of these interpreters; obedience to the “universal wisdom of the past” embodied by the state as a key to freedom; social, non-individualist nature of this freedom; democracy as a matter of content rather than form—all these concepts dovetail with (and sometimes closely parallel) Marxist-Leninist discourse.

Life on Campus: Loves, Books, and Politics

Rhodes in the 1930s lived by rigorous regulations, beginning with a detailed dress code for both sexes. Prohibition applied on campus. Women were not allowed on outings, or to the pictures, unchaperoned. Any public show of intimacy—defined rather broadly—was considered improper. In this respect, memoirs suggest, neither the parents nor authorities need have worried, however. Sex was not the order of the day. The majority of the students displayed what cannot be described as other than innocence, if not prudery. By today’s standards at any rate. As for Harmel, we know merely that he fell in love, perhaps for the very first time. Charlotte Lilian (Cherry) Kussel (1912–1985) studied commerce. She was of Lithuanian Jewish descent and her father owned a business in Port Elizabeth. They stayed in touch in their later years when she had married a sheep farmer.⁷⁸

Though Harold Lydall, from the distance of sixty years, recalls otherwise, the stock of the RUC library was, at least until 1936, “pathetically limited”. This did not trouble Harmel. How taken aback was Butler by his older colleague discerning in his story the influence of Hemingway! The future head of the Rhodes English Department had never heard the name before.⁷⁹ Similarly, when Butler eagerly had a loan of a rare copy of *Ulysses*, smuggled into South Africa by E. R. Seary, the English lecturer, Harmel had already been acquainted with Joyce’s scandalous novel, possibly due to his Irish background, but maybe just because he had come across it at the Vanguard Bookshop in Johannesburg.⁸⁰

The more socially conscious students, including Butler and Harmel, complained about the Rhodians’ apathy as well as the poverty of their communal life. The latter, the

⁷⁸ *Bursting World*, 3f, 51; *Calendar 1935*, 32; Maylam, *Rhodes University*, 80–82; Butler, *Bursting World*, 50, 52, 61; Jasmine Rose-Innes, *Writing in the Dust: Reminiscences* (London: Andre Deutsch 1968), 205–207, 223–224; Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 23. IBH; H. Lewis, interview by T. Adler, 1975 (MHP: A3300/B); K. Abrahams, e-mail to author, Apr 5, 2016.

⁷⁹ Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 17; Currie, *Rhodes University*, 81 (for the quote); Butler, *Bursting World*, 47.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 69f, 72. Seary (1908–1984) spent in Grahamstown the period of 1935–1951 (excepting the war service). He later joined the Department of English at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. See “Note on the Author,” in E. R. Seary and Sheila M. P. Lynch, *Family Names of the Island of Newfoundland* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 1998), xiii–xiv. It was A. J. Leventhal (1896–1979), a native of Dublin’s Little Jerusalem and an acquaintance of Joyce, who was among the first favourably to review *Ulysses* in 1923—see Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: OUP, 1982), 513. On the Vanguard Bookshop see Veronica Belling, “More than a Shop: Fanny Klenerman and the Vanguard Bookshop in Johannesburg,” *Jewish Affairs* (Pesach 2017): 15–22.

critics alleged, exhausted itself by drinking, dancing, and picture-going.⁸¹ Was theirs a fair criticism? It does not seem so on paper. Grahamstown had its share of student clubs and societies. Christian students would visit the penurious elderly and organise street corner services. Others were scout-mastering.⁸² Harmel himself was responsible for the “international relations section” of the Social Studies Club which, besides its benevolent pursuits, hosted lectures on social sciences, the League of Nations, “native question”, and what was euphemistically called “Italo-Abyssinian Dispute”.⁸³

SSC’s lectures indicate politics was not completely absent from the student life despite an official ban on political discussion and agitation on campus. Individual faculty members, would, too, occasionally nail their political colours to the mast and topical issues could thus be broached in the classroom. In 1937, I. J. Rousseau (1888–1970), a history professor, publicly aligned himself with Nazism. And Afrikaners took part in the Great Trek Centenary celebrations.⁸⁴

One is able to name students who came to be identified as “liberals” (Anthony Delius, Hardwicke Holderness, Pat Lewis, N. N. Franklin, Leonard Thompson).⁸⁵ At this juncture, however, they would have best fitted the description as “loosely socialist and humanitarian” in their outlook, an outlook “not grounded in any sophisticated theory”.⁸⁶ What of those who later got involved in radical politics, people like Miriam Luntz/Hepner, Monte Shapiro, Harold Lydall, Jasmine Gordon-Forbes/Rose-Innes, and Harmel himself?⁸⁷ Lydall denies there being much of a difference between “liberals” and “socialists”. On the eve of an annual mock parliament, he was, purportedly, not even certain which camp he belonged to.⁸⁸ But Rose-Innes remembers otherwise. Supposing “Charles Kendall” is an alias for

⁸¹ Butler, *Bursting World*, 47; “Editorial,” *Rhodian* XV, no. 2 (1937): 1; Maylam, *Rhodes University*, 83. Students of the South African College (= UCT) in this period voiced similar complaints—see Alan Lennox-Short and D. J. Welsh, eds. *UCT at 150. Reflections* (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1979), 25.

⁸² Butler, *Bursting World*, 42, 56–57; Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 74, 76, 78f, 85; *Calendar 1935*, 138–140; *Rhodian* XIV, no. 1 (1936): 34–51; *Rhodian* XIV, no. 2 (1936): 33–61; Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 18, 23; Rose-Innes, *Writing in the Dust*, 214; Shuttleworth, *Memoirs*, 18.

⁸³ The speakers on two of these occasions were Hobart Houghton and students Hendrik Altman (b. 1892) and Lydall (*Rhodian* XIV, no. 1 [1936], 38). The title of Lydall’s talk, “The Black Menace”, prompted a Rhodes University historian into concluding that the club had not been “liberal” (Maylam, *Rhodes University*, 79f). But even if one were to disregard Lydall’s claims that he was then already sympathetic towards the black majority, the title might well have been intended as polemical. Cf. Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 24.

⁸⁴ *Calendar 1935*, 34; Maylam, *Rhodes University*, 55; Butler, *Bursting World*, 46 (but cf. 73f), 48, 82–83; cf. Berat, “Interview with Thompson,” 16–17. Rousseau’s Nazi period might have something to do with his having been a roommate of Roy Campbell’s. See Butler, *Bursting World*, 74; Roy Campbell, *Broken Record. Reminiscences* (St Clair Schores: Scholarly Press, 1978), 34.

⁸⁵ Anthony Delius, “Liberal Faith,” *Contrast* 1, no. 4 (1961) (ts) (ADP: 1973.171.1 ASAML); Butler, *Bursting World*, esp. 55–57; Tony Jaffey, “Hardwicke Holderness,” *Guardian*, Jun 28, 2007, accessed Mar 22, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2007/jun/28/obituaries.mainsection>; Hardwicke Holderness, *Lost Chance: Southern Rhodesia 1945–1958* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publ., 1985); Norton Norris Franklin, PRABOOK, accessed Mar 22, https://prabook.com/web/norton_norris_franklin/757687; Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 19, 28.

⁸⁶ Butler, *Bursting World*, 43, 47, 57–58; L. Thompson to B. Lamb & N. Lazarus.

⁸⁷ On Hepner and Shapiro see below. On the third named see Oliver Bernard, “Obituary: Jasmine Rose-Innes,” *Telegraph*, Jun 23, 1998, accessed Mar 22, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/10121359/Oliver-Bernard.html>.

⁸⁸ Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 21–22, 25.

Lydall, then it was he who, “disliked and dubbed an unbalanced revolutionary”, introduced her to “a political world of cause and effect, of oppressor and oppressed”. Moreover, there was “a group of young ‘bolshie’ intellectuals” that Lydall mixed with.⁸⁹ This may have been identical with that “of self-proclaimed socialists clustered around Monte Shapiro” (1912–2000),⁹⁰ the pioneering psychologist and a CPGB member in 1937–1956.⁹¹ Butler’s autobiography likewise suggests the “socialists” were probably much clearer (and more vocal) about their beliefs than the liberal bunch. For he describes Harmel as a full-blown Marxist, an imprint that his arguments from 1936–1937 evidently bear, as we shall see shortly. That said, Harmel was at this stage without “a singular allegiance” and did not even “closely associat[e] with” the Shapiro group.⁹²

Every now and again, office-holding politicians would be invited to address the Rhodians. The most high-profile of these in this period was Jan Hofmeyr, the minister of education. His speech on the “native problem”, delivered on 12 August 1936, made a deep impact on not a few students.⁹³

Hofmeyr maintained that the only remedy for the fear of the “native” majority could be faith and patience rooted in a “new... restrained liberalism”, one not in the line of sentiment, but a well-considered, educated, and active liberalism based on “sympathetic first-hand acquaintance with the Native peoples”.⁹⁴ He would not deny that “racial antipathy” represented “too real a fact in our life”.⁹⁵ The unsustainability of the reserves and a far too great number of detribalised Africans, however, rendered segregation impracticable.⁹⁶ Whites dreaded miscegenation and intermarriage—and these were naturally “repulsiv[e]”—but statistical data from the USA showed one need not worry.⁹⁷ Strangely enough, Hofmeyr shrugged off the ominous disenfranchisement of Cape blacks—which had come into effect earlier that year and which he had, in fact, opposed most vigorously in Parliament, being one of no more than eleven nays—as “adjudicated”

⁸⁹ Rose-Innes, *Writing in the Dust*, 222–223 (for the quote); K. Rose-Innes, e-mail to author, Mar 26, 2019. Lydall later joined the CPGB, but afterwards developed into a fierce critic of socialist systems—see his *Following a Glimmer of the Star*, 44 and *A Critique of Orthodox Economics. An Alternative Model* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 1998), 146.

⁹⁰ L. Thompson to Barbara Lamb & N. Lazarus.

⁹¹ D. Shapiro, e-mail to author, Jan 8, 2017; KV2/4038 (Shapiro) (NA); Stephen Morley, “Monte Shapiro. Putting Clinical Psychology at the Service of the Patient,” *Guardian*, May 2, 2000, accessed Feb 2, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/may/02/guardianobituaries1>.

⁹² Butler, *Bursting World*, 43, 47; L. Thompson to B. Lamb & N. Lazarus.

⁹³ Alan Paton, *Hofmeyr* (Cape Town: OUP, 1964), 242–244; Butler, *Bursting World*, 23; Berat, “Interview with Thompson,” 17; L. Thompson to B. Harmel & N. Lazarus.

⁹⁴ Jan Hofmeyr, “The Approach to the Native Problem,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 36, no. 144 (Jul 1937): 272, 278–279, 293, 296–297.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 281, 290–292.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 278, 281f (cf. Harris, *Bound in Shallows*, 73), 295f.

and of little importance.⁹⁸ Thompson does not recall whether Hofmeyr’s speech “affected” Harmel. It would have been inexplicable had it not done. Reading his unequivocally Marxist journalism from those years, however, one is inclined to think he was none too impressed by this vague, non-committal oration.⁹⁹

Hepner, Thompson, and the Others

Butler believes that “our fellow students have a more powerful influence on us than our teachers”. The poet himself was both three years younger and far too naïve and self-absorbed to strike up a close friendship with Harmel.¹⁰⁰ The latter was, nevertheless, no loner whilst at Rhodes, but surrounded himself with a circle of like-minded individuals.¹⁰¹ Only a handful do we know by name. Aside from Porter and Kussel, it was Miriam Luntz (1913–2001) who developed a romantic interest in him. She was studying politics and law and joined the Women’s Social Studies Club. Later marrying Bill Hepner, she would work with Harmel in the Communist Party and the Congress of Democrats.¹⁰² It was Miriam who, while employed by the Tailoring Workers’ Union, first introduced Harmel to his future wife in 1938.¹⁰³ Friendships with all three lasted beyond student years. And so did that with a leading historian of South Africa and a Yale professor Leonard Thompson (1916–2004).¹⁰⁴ He and Harmel enrolled in Rhodes in the same year, attended Lord’s philosophy classes together and for a time even shared “digs”. In the late fifties, Harmel asked Thompson to comment on the manuscript of *The White People*.¹⁰⁵ He did likewise a decade later after drafting the opening chapter of *The Fifty Fighting Years*. An unlikely friendship indeed, made possible, no doubt, by their respective outlooks still being in flux. It was not until later that, under the influence of the political thinker Ernest Baker, Thompson acquired a life-long “negative attitude towards totalitarian regimes in general, and both fascist and communist types in particular”.¹⁰⁶ That said, he always “had the greatest admiration” for Harmel, “remember[ing] him most specially for his courage—in

⁹⁸ Hofmeyr, “Approach,” 279–280; T. R. H. Davenport and Christopher Saunders, *South Africa, A Modern History* 5th ed. (London: Macmillan, 2000), 329. For an exhaustive exposition of the Native Representation Act see H. J. and Ray Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850–1950* (London: Penguin, 1969), 495.

⁹⁹ L. Thompson to B. Lamb & N. Lazarus; cf. Paton, *Hofmeyr*, 244.

¹⁰⁰ Butler, *Bursting World*, 6 (for the quote), 43, 47–48, 57.

¹⁰¹ In 1937, his father generously treated six of his best “pals” to dinner. A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, May 6, 1937.

¹⁰² IBH; H. Lewis, interview by T. Adler; V. Measroch to B. Lamb, Jul 3, 1974 (MHP); *Rhodian* XIII, no. 2 (1934): 37; Immanuel Suttner, ed., *Cutting Through the Mountain: Interviews with South African Jewish Activists* (London: Viking, 1997), 619.

¹⁰³ Ray Harmel, *Ray’s Story* (unpubl. ms, 1993), 42 (MHP: A3300/C2); R. Harmel, interview by C. Purkey (1990) (transcript: 36–37) (CPP: A1984-E/E3).

¹⁰⁴ Thompson lectured at UCT in 1946–1960 before emigrating to the US. He took up a professorship at Yale in 1968. See Berat, “Interview with Thompson” and Christopher Saunders, “Leonard Thompson’s Historical Writing on South Africa: An Appreciation,” *South African Historical Journal* 30, no. 1. (1994): 3–15.

¹⁰⁵ M. Harmel to R. Tabakin, Jun 23, 1960 (MHP: A3300/B); L. Thompson to B. Lamb & N. Lazarus; A. Sachs, interview by author, Sept 27, 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Berat, “Interview with Thompson,” 17.

the really important sense of having the courage of his convictions—and, always, his humour.” Could it be that there were also personal reasons for Thompson’s reserve in dealing with the Marxist historiography?¹⁰⁷

Thompson remembers Harmel as a skilled, rather “gruff” and “sardonic” conversationalist, actively participating in the debating society.¹⁰⁸ According to his father, he was “extraordinarily attached to Rhodes and his academic way of life” and for a while even considered a temporary lectorship at a university.¹⁰⁹ This is how Arthur, with humour and affection, portrayed Michael in his first year at Rhodes:

Though he has largely inherited my own contemptible “*luftmensch*” characteristics, they are well compensated by the level-headed qualities he got from his mother. He is a better man than me. Steadier, more practical and with much more of a balanced judgement. But he too has the “artistic” temperament and the Lord alone knows how it works itself out in him. Physically, he is tall (taller than me) and lusty, although not particularly rugged. He is handsome and combines Sally’s eyes and mouth with a profile having a shape of brow and jaw line into mine. He’ll make a mark some day, you may be sure.¹¹⁰

Harmel as a Writer, Editor, and Polemicist I: *The Rhodian* (1933–1937)

Throughout his years in Grahamstown, Harmel wrote for *The Rhodian*, a biannual publication of the RUC students, in existence since 1906. He first contributed to the magazine as a freshman, writing a poem and a prose piece. In the vers-libre “Advent”, the expectant speaker awaits his inamorata in a hayloft. The title obviously carries religious connotations, but the entire poem is rife with religious imagery appropriated for earthly purposes. Her coming assumes salvational, resurrectionary proportions, while the time becomes majestic. Eros triumphs over Faith: “As quiet I waited, quiet and afraid, / For centuries waited, centuries and aeons, / Still and afraid.” Lifeless in his waiting, surrounded with “inanimate things”—“Dumb, I stood. Passive. Dead”—the girl’s arrival brings him back to life: “O joyous vitality, wonder of living!”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ L. Thompson to B. Lamb, Aug 26, 1974. It is Professor Davenport who finds such a reserve in Thompson’s work—see “Leonard Thompson and South African History,” *South African Historical Journal* 24 (1991), 226–227.

¹⁰⁸ L. Thompson to B. Lamb & N. Lazarus (cf. Butler, *Bursting World*, 47); A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, May 6, 1937. This might have brought him into contact with Fort Hare students (see above).

¹⁰⁹ A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Oct 1, 1936.

¹¹⁰ A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Oct 1, 1933.

¹¹¹ M. A. H., “Advent,” *Rhodian* VII, no. 5 (1933): 7. What I believe to be Harmel’s contributions to the university magazine are alternately initialled “M. A. H.,” “M. A.,” and “M.” Most of these texts are contained in MHP which were compiled by his daughter from the papers left by her late father (MHP, WL). Hence my attribution even of the texts undersigned simply “M.”

The other piece carries on, in a different way, Harmel's prior attack on hypocrisy. Division of labour and cooperation renders possible the workings of the community. The latter is protected by the policeman to whom more respect is due. That is how one could paraphrase "The Arm of the Law" which once again makes use of Harmel's classical training and in which a Socrates points out to his young listeners the unfairness of the treatment meted out to the law enforcement officers: "What wretched perversity, what based iniquity, and distorted jaundiced standards are those which mock and revile those upon whom rest our security and peace."¹¹²

Many years later, Barbara Harmel limned "Birdman", a short story awarded the Rhodian Prose Prize on the recommendation of Professor Haworth, as being "personally prophetic". As well she might. The nameless man, having always longed to fly, does fly one day, "sustaining himself aloft"—how significant! (see c. 2)—"by a desperate effort of the mind". His extraordinary gift, setting him apart from the crowd, however, arouses hostility of the hidebound masses:

The people were consumed by a silent hatred of this unfamiliar thing. There are so few things that men can be sure of... Destroy this knowledge and you have destroyed their security. Now they feared the man up there; feared and hated him.

The flyer suffers ridicule and humiliation from a "bestial and terrifying" multitude. They even assault him. Still, seconds before his earthward fall—thus is the fate of pioneers and mavericks—he experiences a feeling of triumph for in him human mind has conquered the body, however transitorily.¹¹³

Powerful in its simplicity, "Two Laments" employs a prayer structure, juxtaposing relational emptiness arising from affluence with an analogous decline in the world at large. The poem sounds sceptical and provocative (all the more so in a university periodical) and uncannily augural:

O Pray ye for to-morrow's men, with servile dupes to school them;

O pray ye for the moneyslaves with moneykings to rule them;

With parliaments to sell their souls and bloodhucksters to buy them,

With evil thoughts to loose their tongues, and evil laws to tie them.

¹¹² M. A. H., "The Arm of the Law. A Modern Socratic Dialogue," *ibid.*, 17–19.

¹¹³ M. A. H., "Birdman," *Rhodian* XIII, no. 3 (1935): 15–18; B. Lamb to L. Thompson, Aug 30, 1974. The poem was reprinted in *Adelphi. Literary Review*, no. 1 (Jul 1962): 2–3.

O pray our sinful slavery to liberty may drive them;

And for their fathers' heresy the good God forgive them.¹¹⁴

The narrator's neighbour in the story "Habit" has bidden farewell to the world in which commerce is a "brutish sort of gang-war" and "success", seen philosophically, amounts to failure. If before "his soul was cribb'd, cabined, and confined in the drudgery of moneygrubbing", now, in solitude, his deliberately routineless, erratic life affords him freedom, freedom manifested by nudity. When his neighbour takes his own life, the narrator moves from the description of him as "anti-social" to gratitude for enlightenment. A suicide note the man leaves behind sets an unsentimentally logical seal on his Cynical creed: "Living is a bad habit. I have given it up." References to Lucian once again echo Harmel's classical education in the text that cuts to the quick of human circumstance in bourgeois order and that, like "Birdman", seems highly autobiographical from today's perspective.¹¹⁵

The same issue contains Harmel's review of T. E. Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.¹¹⁶ Surprisingly sympathetic, its text does not so much as touch upon the narrative, the politics, and cultural bias of the famed "British agent-Orientalist".¹¹⁷ The reviewer concerns himself exclusively with the "noble and profound simplicity" of the book's "keen swift prose" and "excellence of its craftsmanship".

Next year Harmel served as a sub-editor, while continuing to contribute to the magazine. Whereas the poem "Mr. Pontiff, and the Barbarians at the Gates" is a straightforward, though implicit, assault on Nazism/Fascism with its mass ritualism (as is the essay "The Right to Die"), "A Renunciation for True Believers", somewhat in parallel to "Advent", sarcastically exposes the self-destructive logic of religious asceticism whose corollary is nothing short of non-being. Love, hate, effort, music, literature, nature, vibrancy of life—all is sinful and therefore to be renounced. Significantly, the whole poem contains just one rhyme, which pairs the supreme spiritual entity with inanimate soil. Both thus contrast with the preceding, sumptuous depiction of sensual delectation in the beauties of living: "I give my body to the cold damp sod, / That my soul may live with Thee, my God."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ M. A. H., "Two Laments," *Rhodian* XIII, no. 3 (1935): 25.

¹¹⁵ M. A. H., "Habit," *Rhodian* XIII, no. 4 (1935): 14–15.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

¹¹⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 2003), 246. See also 240–243.

¹¹⁸ M. A. H., "Mr. Pontiff, and the Barbarians at the Gates," *Rhodian* XIV, no. 2 (1936): 10; "The Right to Die," *ibid.*, 26; "A Renunciation for True Believers," *ibid.*, 10–11 (reprinted in *Adelphi. Literary Review*, no. 6 [Jan 1963]: 4).

In the self-same issue, Harmel again rails against materialism, greed, and flock mentality, this time in his own voice, and—as a part of his editorial effort—keeps an eye on other university magazines in South Africa and Britain. Whereas the first article is alive with youthful idealism, his review of student publications (overlooking *The S.A.N.C. Magazine* of Fort Harians) sounds precocious and didactic as when he pronounces that “the motive of the young writer should be enthusiasm”. Traditionally rather vague in his critique of verse, he insists that domestic periodicals ought to take cognizance of “vital issues”.¹¹⁹ What exactly he had in mind became clearer when Harmel and Thompson assumed editorship of *Rhodian* and introduced a new section under the head “Controversia” in the hopes of awakening “some sort of social conscience at Rhodes”.¹²⁰

It was, in all likelihood, Harmel himself who in a text undersigned “M.” reacted acerbically to an aggrieved complaint entitled “Communism: The New Snobbery”.¹²¹ The writer, who likewise preferred to conceal his identity with an initial A., claims to be on the side of the poor. Communism, however, repels him, as do all other political movements. Three things particularly stick in his craw: its utopianism, violence, and the danger of putting unbridled power into the hands of either “navvies” or bourgeois communists. He also takes issue with the way communist bully their opponents by cant-phrases and labels. One such is, he avers, the adjective “bourgeois”, a conversation stopper. A. reaffirms his commitment to concepts of “liberty”, “justice”, etc., defending one’s right not to belong.

Harmel begins his rejoinder by questioning A.’s intellectual abilities. He accuses him of using “polished verbiage” in lieu of “a true exposition of a social science”.¹²² A.’s image of communism, he declares, is a caricature based on Nazi propaganda and serves merely to justify inaction. Violence is the work of dictators like Mussolini. Communists abhor it. No, Utopia does not lie around the corner. It needs to be worked for. If the writer shrinks from a party membership, it only proves his “ostrich-like indifference”. Most people do not inhabit the same “self-created unreal world” as the smug students of a provincial college. A.’s purported humanitarianism is spurious. He might be sympathetic to the poor and oppressed,

¹¹⁹ M. A. H., “Let Us Build...” *Rhodian* XIV, no. 2 (1936): 26–27; M. A. H., “Some Contemporaries,” 28–30. Cf. Les and Donna Switzer, *Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: a Descriptive Bibliographic Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers, Newsletters and Magazines 1836–1976* (Boston: Hall, 1979), 200–201.

¹²⁰ *Rhodian* XV, no. 1 (1937): 1. See also Butler, *Bursting World*, 47.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

¹²² M., “Indifference: An Old Snobbery,” *ibid.*, 24–26.

but will his generous emotion butter the bread of the vast mass of white people who live in an abyss of poverty and misery, or the helotised millions of non-Europeans in this country and the hundreds and millions of workers and colonial peoples who toil by their lives to enrich a handful of bankers and capitalists?

As for the “labels”, like “bourgeois”, at which A. bristles, Harmel puts it to him that communists did not invent them. They were “invented” by A.’s “own economic conditions and upbringing”.

In reading these texts, we are handicapped by ignorance of the proximate stimulus for the exchange and suchlike pragmatic factors. It arguably originated in an event or discussion on campus.¹²³ After all, some of Harmel’s allegations, such as that of political apathy, can hardly be justified on the basis of A.’s article only. In other words, they do not make much sense unless Harmel had been familiar with his interlocutor and his political and social record.

Whereas the first text is a personal protest, a statement of annoyance, Harmel’s rejoinder reads as an exercise in eristic. Several of its stylistic features catch the eye. A.’s outburst, compact of some 320 words, employs 16 first-person pronouns (I, me, myself). In contrast, Harmel’s text, though nearly three times longer, contains merely 5. The majority of these are uninformative of the speaker for they function as connecting or contact devices (“I commend”, “I suggest”, “my friend”). Only in a single instance a personal pronoun carries some information—and even here it fails to lift ambiguity altogether because the “I” does not quite explicitly state whether the writer accounts himself a communist: “‘A’ is appalled by violence and dictatorship. So am I and so are all Communists.”

Notwithstanding his advocacy of the *Marxist* doctrine, Harmel naively confuses its conceptualisation of reality (“the bourgeoisie”) with the reality itself, purporting to be a voice of “serious political thought”, nay, “social science”, a voice which—equipped with “decency and intellectual honesty”, connected to the masses and familiar with their plight—is capable of putting forth “a true exposition” and rationally “analys[ing] the historical and economic conditions”. It is, indeed, no more than an impersonal, disembodied voice. That puts Harmel’s scornful article in stark contrast with the guileless complaint of A.’s with its self-exposing sincerity. And yet, on a closer look, one cannot help noticing Harmel’s *ad rem* arguments are thin on the ground. The bulk of his text is made up of sarcasms and

¹²³ Communism was among the topics lectured on in the Social Studies Club—see *Rhodian* XV, no. 2 (1937): 48.

personal invectives which, directly or obliquely, delineate the other writer as a “so-called intellectual”, “smug and snug”, “ostrich-like”, “insular”, “indifferent”, “armchair or common room politician”, “ignorant”, a child of privilege, and his text or point of view as “verbiage”, “superficially clever”, “unreal”, and “nonsensical”. What though A.’s picture of communism may be distorted? That surely does not justify his portraiture as one who has been had by Goebbels and his merry men!

It is worthy of reminder that despite stating emphatically that “the history of mankind is largely determined by political movements”, which foreshadows his disciplined marching in the red ranks, Harmel himself was yet to throw in his lot with the Party. And he was, of course, in many ways a typical product of the middle class, one of the very few students in Grahamstown who owned an automobile!¹²⁴ One thus feels inclined to construe his contempt for the bourgeoisie, including a churlish remark about “A. sneering down his bourgeois nose”, as a sign not so much of hypocrisy, but rather a kind of “auto-exorcism”. Harmel’s impersonal pose anticipates an approach he would apply over and over in his *ideological* writings in which—hidden behind a *nom-de-plume* and avoiding self-reference—he transforms himself into a mouthpiece of the Party, a faceless purveyor of “eternal” truths.

The problem of violence is baffling. Harmel seems to dismiss the news of Stalinist terror when he insists that communists “abhor violence”. But then again, as we shall see in the next section, he was highly critical of the Soviet Russia, indeed, of communism in 1934. Had he altered his views in the meantime? To some extent, yes. But not altogether. For a year after the polemic in *Controversia* Harmel draws a parallel, however tamely, between the Nazi regime and Stalinism: “Think of the present position in Germany or Russia, and you will get an idea of what might happen in our own country should some of our more extreme politicians achieve power.”¹²⁵

Butler speculates that a scathing reply to his own self-complimentary (“We rebels against tradition and accepted law”) and woolly appeal for pacifism might have come from Harmel as well. To be sure, the text has a different by-line.¹²⁶ But the writer advances the same cure for the world’s ills as is implied by Harmel in his previously quoted philippic: the destruction “of the system of private ownership of capital”. It is “[c]apitalism that

¹²⁴ A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Jan 20, 1936, Jul 23, 1937; cf. Butler, *Bursting World* 8–38.

¹²⁵ M. A. H., “But...” *Rhodian* XV, no. 2 (1937): 29.

¹²⁶ F. G. B. (=Butler), “Pathetic Pacifist,” *Rhodian* XV, no. 1. (1937): 26–27; Butler, *Bursting World*, 48; K., “War Clouds Over Europe!” *ibid.*, 27–29.

breeds War”. Do away with the former and you will have put paid to the latter. The author contends such “vaguely good intentions” as Butler’s can only bear fruit if harnessed by a clear programme and a constructive effort that has as its objective “World Socialism and World Peace”. He waxes rhapsodic about the working classes world over which—as opposed to the “real government”, backed by the pressman and the clergyman—“do not want war, never have wanted war.”

The poem “The Boss’s Daughter”—which sneeringly declares null and void a love indistinguishable from the desire to possess material externalities—complements these polemical exchanges.¹²⁷ And so does another contribution, a satirical piece which qualifies Harmel as one of the pioneers of South African speculative fiction.¹²⁸

“A History of the Rise of Schlenterism” chronicles in a tongue-in-cheek sort of way the solution of the twofold problem faced by white South Africa: how to preserve the white domination, while maintaining a supply of cheap “native” labour.¹²⁹ In 1952, Joseph Schlenter, a Rand magnate, solves the issue by opening his “Labour Farms” where natives are “rationed with a scientifically balanced diet, and kept in perfect physical condition. Every morning they [are] weighed, and regularly they [are] subjected to a medical examination.”¹³⁰ As a consequence, Schlenter’s pits never lack effective and compliant labour force. They cut down costs and make a fortune. Farms equipped with chapels and recreational facilities keep the workers happy so even a communist-incited strike in 1971 founders.

Through Mr Schlenter’s generous patronage, Eugenics became an exact science. He vastly improved the Bantu stock, breeding from the Xhosas, the Basutu and Zulus a hardy and strenuous race, of great physical strength and endurance, and of ready and tractable intelligence... May the memory of this great and noble man always remain as a lesson to posterity of how, through the beneficent workings of democracy and private enterprise, a single man was able, by his enlightened self-interest and lofty idealism, to inaugurate a new era in history, and to transform his country from a humble “outpost of the empire” into a mighty power for good among the nations of the world.

The last issue of the magazine Harmel edited contains yet another reflection on the individual–mass relationship (with the latter shown as soulless, obtuse, aimlessly

¹²⁷ *Rhodian* XV, no. 1. (1937): 21.

¹²⁸ For an overview see Mark Bould, “African Science Fiction,” *SFRA Review*, no. 311 (2015): 11–18; Luiza Caraivan, “21st Century South African Science Fiction,” *Gender Studies* 13, no. 1 (2014): 93–105; Jaroslav Olša jr. and Ondřej Neff, eds. *Encyclopedie literatury sci-fi* [Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Literature] (Praha: H&H, 1995), 122–124; Nick Wood, “South African Speculative Fiction Over The Ages,” accessed Oct 2, 2010, <http://nickwood.frogwrite.co.nz/?p=598a>.

¹²⁹ *Rhodian* XV, no. 1 (1937): 7–11.

¹³⁰ In South African English, *schlenter*, a word of Yiddish origin, stands for a counterfeit diamond. It can function as an adjective. See Kingsley Bolton and Braj B. Kachru, eds. *World Englishes: Critical Concepts in Linguistics* 2 (London: Routledge, 2006), 155.

wandering) as well as a ridicule of escapism in popular culture and stupidity of its sentimental audience.¹³¹ “The Artist”, in which the narcissistic bubble of a work of art is pricked by invading reality has been referred to before. “Surrealist Adventure” dutifully employs all the paraphernalia of the titular movement in painting what may be a metaphor of human condition, dreamlike, absurd, and uncontrollable.¹³² What, however, claims especial attention in this issue of *Rhodian* is Harmel’s comments on the clashes between Africans and the police that took in the Vereeniging location on September 18–19, resulting in casualties on both sides and hundreds of arrests.¹³³

Politicians stated quite frankly, he writes, that the justice of the protesters’ case was of no matter for they must obey white man’s law. In other words, white man’s loyalty toward his own comes before his loyalty to fairness. For Harmel, this is not merely an opportunity to attack conservative forces. He, above all, calls the liberals’ bluff. They must admit and tackle the crux of the matter—the economic and political inequities Africans are subject to. Paul Maylam maintains that “[s]uch a forthright expression of radical political opinion as this cannot be found in any other Rhodes publication before 1960s”:¹³⁴

The liberals would eliminate “prejudice” against the Native, they would have him looked on as a good fellow who really doesn’t stink. For heaven’s sake let’s stop being hypocrites. The Native does stink, because he’s stinking poor; his poverty and our injustice raise a stench that all our perfumes of hypocrisy and benevolent sentimentality cannot conceal. A clash like that at Vereeniging serves to bare the naked forces of greed and oppression and brutal exploitation underlying our “protection” of our Native “children”... The statement of the authorities is a clear challenge to our “liberals” and “Negrophiles”. If you truly sympathise with the Native, you are a traitor to your class and race. You must be prepared to accept the Black as an equal and a human being, to forgo the position of ease and luxury we derive from the exploitation of our Native slaves. If you are a true liberal, and really wish the Native to be free, you must realise that he can never be free under a capitalist economy and a political oligarchy.¹³⁵

Racial relations are likewise the subject matter of “The Builders”, a story published in the magazine after Harmel had left the university.¹³⁶ Embodying a belief that people are born colour-blind and capable of a spontaneously constructive and happy co-existence until an authoritatively enforced, irrational prejudice puts an end to it, this semi-allegorical scene

¹³¹ “Fables,” *Rhodian* XV, no. 2 (1937): 13; “Lyric for a Crooner,” *ibid.*, 16–17.

¹³² “The Artist,” *Rhodian* XV, no. 2 (1937): 9; M., “Surrealist Adventure,” *ibid.*, 20–22.

¹³³ Philip Bonner, ““Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women?” Liquor, Prostitution and Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920–1945,” *African Studies Seminar Paper*, no. 232, University of the Witwatersrand, May 1988, 1–3, accessed Jul 2, 2019, <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/handle/10539/8433>; Baruch Hirson, *Yours for the Union: Class and Community Struggles in South Africa, 1930–1947* (London: Zed Books, 1990), 63–75.

¹³⁴ Maylam, *Rhodes University*, 85.

¹³⁵ M. A. H., “Vereegining,” *Rhodian* XV, no. 2 (1937): 30.

¹³⁶ M. A. H., “The Builders,” *Rhodian* XVI, no. 1 (1938): 18–19.

from the South African life, though written with the best of intentions, appears somewhat naïve in comparison with the mercilessness and forcefulness of “Vereeniging”.

Harmel as a Writer, Editor, and Polemicist II: *The Adelphi* (1934)

Having sketched Harmel’s involvement with *The Rhodian*, we now need to rewind to 1934. For there is an ellipsis to fill in. There were no contributions to the university magazine by Harmel for the whole of that year. Barring one. And that was a reprint of his “Foreword” to *The Adelphi. A South African Monthly Review of Literature, Public Affairs and The Arts*, launched with Arthur’s financial backing.¹³⁷

Harmel asserts that South African writers of the English language tend to be absorbed by British literature. It was now high time they were reclaimed by their motherland.¹³⁸ Predating by years efforts by E. R. Seary and N. H. Mackenzie,¹³⁹ he calls for the foundations of a South African literature to be laid as there is “a stirring of... what we may call... a new national culture-consciousness...”.¹⁴⁰ *The Adelphi* aims to furnish a platform for (i) those of South Africans whose literary output is better known abroad and for (ii) budding authors. As he would admit years later, the review “announced itself grandly”.¹⁴¹ Indeed, it was full of hopes and youthful idealism that today sound bombastic: “It will not augur well for South Africa and for this modern age when such a venture as *The Adelphi* fails.... for battles and deeds may linger long in the minds of men, but only art is deathless.”

Fiction, Poetry, and Reviews

Aside from the novelist Francis Sibson (1899–1976), who had already achieved some standing,¹⁴² the literary contributors to *The Adelphi* were fledgling South African writers and poets. Careers of most of them would never really come off. They included Pierre Bosman (1906–1968), the brother of a classic of South African literature; a post-war MP and native representative Herbert Burman; David Dainow (1884–1961), editor of the

¹³⁷ *Rhodian* XIII, no. 1 (1934): 22–23; A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Jun 6, 1937. Other than that, the review was to live on subscriptions, although there are occasional advertisements.

¹³⁸ It is ironic that he gives as examples Roy Campbell and William Plomer both of whom deliberately renounced their South Africanness. See Craig Mackenzie, “The Metropolitan and the Local: Douglas Blackburn, Pauline Smith, William Plomer, Herman Charles Bosman,” in David Attwell and Derek Attridge, eds. *CHSAL* (Cape Town: CUP, 2012), 340, 367, 369.

¹³⁹ Seary (see above) published *Tentative Edition of a Biography and Bibliography of South African Writers in English* (1938) and compiled a landmark anthology of *South African Short Stories* (Cape Town: OUP, 1947). Mackenzie carried out a PhD research into South African travel literature—see *South African Travel Literature in the Seventeenth Century* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1955). For biographical details see N. H. Mackenzie, “Academic Odyssey. A Professor in Five Continents (Part 1),” in Clifford Matthews and Oswald Cheung, eds. *Dispersal and Renewal: Hong Kong University During the War Years* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 1998), 25–38.

¹⁴⁰ “Foreword,” 1.

¹⁴¹ *Adelphi*, no. 1 (Jul 1962): 1.

¹⁴² Francis Sibson, “The Journey,” *Adelphi*, no. 1 (May 1934): 5–7. On the author see *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, accessed Oct 2, 2017, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/sibson_francis_h; David Adey et al. eds., *Companion to South African English Literature* (Johannesburg: Donker, 1986), 182–183.

Zionist Record; Gideon Chagy (1916–1994), a son of the famous cantor; and a Port Elizabeth copywriter Hubertha J. Metcalfe.¹⁴³ Authorial kudos, though not in the line of fiction, on the other hand, awaited the critic, playwright, and broadcaster Percival Baneshik (1915–1999).¹⁴⁴

There are two literary items by Harmel himself. For obvious reasons, intertextual as well as biographical, one may be disposed to construe his euphonic, iconically segmented poem “The Strong Warriors” as a metaphor of the human race (or an avant-garde group) in its cyclic and self-destructive striving for progress they are in a ceaseless process of achieving, erosionlike. The previous fighters may have fallen into oblivion, but they did their bit:

The deep mournful music of the ever-breaking waves

On their far shore.

Heaping up in crests and billows crowned white,

And creaming o’er.

Then rolling for the shore like turbulent cohorts

With their dark roar.

And crashing down upon the beach and foaming

white...

Then, waves no more,

But naked weaklings, cowards, shrinking from the kiss

Of the cold shore

Into the bosom of the heaving dark sea-mother

Who them bore,

Who ever sends her mighty cohorts striving forth,

¹⁴³ Pierre Bosman, “The Dream,” *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Aug 1934): 8–10 (on the author see Valerie Rosenberg, *Herman Charles Bosman: Between the Lines* [Cape Town: Struik, 2005], 69, 105–114); Herbert Burman, “Percussions,” *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Jul 1934): 9 (on the author see *Who Is Who of Southern Africa*, vol. 32 [Johannesburg: Argus, 1947], 29, 1490); David Dainow, “Danger,” *Adelphi*, no. 2 (Jun, 1934): 12 (on the author see Edgar Bernstein, “A Gift for Friendship: A Last Tribute to David Dainow,” *Jewish Affairs* [Feb 1961]: 11–14); Gideon Chagy, “Why?,” *Adelphi*, no. 2. (Jun 1934): 9–10 (on the author see “Gideon Chagy, Arts Consultant, 78,” *New York Times*, Feb 24, 1994, accessed Oct 2, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/24/obituaries/gideon-chagy-arts-consultant-78.html?mcubz=3>). His father, Berele (1892–1954), is introduced on G. L. Shisler’s website, accessed Oct 2, 2017, <https://geoffreyshisler.com/biographies-2/berele-chagy/>; Hubertha J. Metcalfe, “Flesh in Twilight,” *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934): 9 (on the author see *Gregg Magazine* 10 [1942]: 208). It proved impossible to identify Robert Hall (Jul 1934) and Sonia Myrnaw (Jun 1934).

¹⁴⁴ Percy Baneshik, “Pictures,” *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Aug 1934): 5–7. See also Naomi and Reuben Musiker, “Percy Baneshik. Doyen of South African Theatre Journalists and Broadcasters,” *Jewish Affairs* 61, no. 4 (2006): 79–80.

Strong as before,
Till weakly, in defeat, they kneel, and kiss, and flee
From that cold shore.¹⁴⁵

A painful monologue of heartache and hopelessness, “April”, alludes to miscegenation and incest, perhaps even murder. Unhealthy racial order constitutes the context of the drama. For the black narrator was besotted with his half-sister whose father,

big, strange... was a kind man and gentle... but... blonde and cool and different from our fierce dark folk. God knows he never did me wrong, and many’s the charity I can never repay him for. But if he thought it no charity I did, and as I can never repay him, so can I never forgive him.

It speaks volumes about his then state of knowledge of black life that years later Harmel would dismiss the topos of “miscegenation” as one resorted to by white writers for want of familiarity with African realities. Despite being a completely marginal phenomenon, Harmel would conclude sneeringly, “a novice should be able to produce a tear or two with it”.¹⁴⁶

According to Barbara Harmel, the music reviews signed “Heberin” could well have been the work of Arthur Harmel who used to double as a critic for *The Gramophone*. Percy Baneshik is an even more likely candidate for their authorship. But Harmel himself cannot be ruled out either. Whatever his identity, Heberin’s authoritative, acute, lexically opulent columns form a vital part of *The Adelphi* project. Uncompromising in tone and upholding high standards, which chimes with the general spirit of the review, their author is far from happy about the state of South African music scene. He describes it as being under the control of “teeming low-brows”, “ignoramuses” (May, 9) and “the black bad-will of Demos” (Jul, 10). He thinks shameful and reflective of “gross carnality and spiritual cowardness” (Sept, 9) that the prosperous city of Johannesburg should have no good orchestra (ibid. and May 9). A large portion of his write-ups accordingly concerns performances in Durban, a city blessed, in contrast, with a quality musical ensemble under the adept baton of Dan Godfrey.¹⁴⁷

Most of the literary notices were produced by Michael Harmel. The sheer number of the titles critiqued by “M.” is impressive. It is not below him to review works of

¹⁴⁵ “The Strong Warriors,” *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Jul 1934): 10.

¹⁴⁶ Michael Harmel, “April,” *Adelphi*, no. 1 (May 1934): 10; “Reality and Fiction in South African Literature,” 7.

¹⁴⁷ IBH; cf. c. 1; on Godfrey see Peter Gammond, *The Oxford Companion to Popular Music* (Oxford: OUP 1991), 229.

unpretentious pulp fiction he considers a welcome “escape from a humdrum daily life”.¹⁴⁸ He particularly enjoys Burrough’s Tarzan and Mars series. And *Turnabout* (1931) of Thorne Smith is “the slickest, most hard-boiled and darn funniest book [he has] read for a long time”.¹⁴⁹ Harmel knows exactly where to draw a line, however. When no lesser critic than J. B. Priestley raves about the German novelist Vicki Baum,¹⁵⁰ the young South African shows more sobriety: all right, her *Grand Hotel* (1929) might be “excellent entertainment”, but it is, “in essence, superficial”.¹⁵¹

Though hailing Laurens van der Post’s *In a Province* “as a work of art” and characterising it as “a notable contribution to our literature”, Harmel vehemently disputes the book’s “philosophy” which places the root of the baseness of modern man in his rotten nature rather than in the “abnormal and unnatural... System”. Because this amounts to giving up any hope of redress and detracting from the endeavours of “sincere social reformers”.¹⁵²

The name of Norman Giles no longer rings a bell.¹⁵³ And yet his *The Ridge of White Waters* earned Harmel’s praise for its covert narration and “vital absorbing figures”. The reviewer went so far as to declare the book “the greatest novel South Africa has yet produced”.¹⁵⁴ His assessment of the bestselling Louis Golding seems more adequate. Harmel finds him “illiterate and vulgar” and in a well-argued text tears to pieces his Joycean monograph.¹⁵⁵ The reason? It overflows with “dreary, vacillating, idiotic pages”. As such, it can in no way do justice to the author of *Ulysses*, “the only giant in an age of literary pygmies”.¹⁵⁶ Well, perhaps not just pygmies. For elsewhere Harmel proclaims T. F. Powys “one of the finest living writers of English prose”.¹⁵⁷

For a “monthly” and a “review” that styles itself “literary”, Harmel’s notices, albeit composed with facility, vigour, and wit, appear somewhat newspaperly: they are cursory,

¹⁴⁸ “New Novels,” *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934), 12. If his authorship of the music column is not certain, Arthur Aaron Harmel (or A. A. H.) did produce a review of Sibson’s novel *Unthinkable* for the first issue—see “Two New Novels,” *Adelphi*, no. 1 (May, 1934), 12. The text does not display the same the stylistic brilliance one finds in the music reviews, but that may simply mean that Arthur was not on his game in these waters.

¹⁴⁹ “New Novels,” *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934), 12. James Thorne Smith (1892–1934) was a seminal US writer of humorous and fantasy novels—see his *Turnabout* (Maple Circle: eNet, 2012), 6–8.

¹⁵⁰ J. B. Priestley on her *Secret Sentence* in *Evening Standard*. See the blurb section of Viki Baum, *Secret Sentence*, trans. Eric Sutton (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1934).

¹⁵¹ “New Novels,” *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Jul 1934): 11.

¹⁵² “New Novels,” *Adelphi*, no. 2 (Jun 1934): 12. For more on the novel see Christopher Heywood, *A History of South African Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 132–134.

¹⁵³ This was a pseudonym of Australian-born N. R. McKeown. See Adey, ed., *Companion to South African English Literature*, 217.

¹⁵⁴ “Witwatersrand,” review of *The Ridge of White Waters*, by Norman Giles, *Adelphi*, no. 1 (May 1934): 12.

¹⁵⁵ “New Novels,” no. 2 (Jun 1934): 12. Louis Golding (1896–1958) was a British-born Jewish author. Particularly *Magnolia Street* (1932) was a great success. See Glenda Abramson, ed. *Encyclopedia of Modern Jewish Culture*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2005), 463–464.

¹⁵⁶ “James Joyce,” review of *James Joyce*, by Golding Louis, *Adelphi*, no. 1 (May 1934): 10.

¹⁵⁷ “New Novels,” *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Aug 1934): 10.

brief, and stereotyped in their use of vague evaluative labels (Jun, 12; Aug, 10; Sept 12). The critique of Golding's monograph and the review essay devoted to the apologetic book *The Achievement of Afrikaans* (1934) suggest Harmel really comes into his own when faced with non-fiction.¹⁵⁸

A reviewer for *The Critic*, a Cape Town journal, wrote that the latter publication afforded "much useful and interesting information about the richly pulsating spiritual life" of the Afrikaner community.¹⁵⁹ Harmel thinks otherwise. He bluntly states that the *Taal*, put on equal footing with English as an official language in 1925,¹⁶⁰ was "forced upon an unwilling country by the machinations of politicians, whose living depended upon the stirring up of intense discord in this country of immortal hatreds". The government would have been well advised to expend the money thus squandered on "public works", particularly the betterment of the conditions of our "black brothers". Afrikaans represents "a temporary and transient phase" and merely deepens isolation of its speakers. In the hands of a master, it could prove "flexible and vigorous literary medium". But in the event, contemporary literature in Afrikaans is "meagre and mostly uninspired" and its readership so puny that the tongue does not stand a chance without subsidy and "political jugglery".

It is doubtful Harmel revised his position on Afrikaans letters when not long afterwards Dertigers (or writers of the thirties) made their debut, ushering in "the rapid growth of a more cosmopolitan and technically accomplished literature".¹⁶¹ But he *did* modify his view of the growing isolation of minor-language speakers owing to his contacts with the African culture and exposure to the Soviet theory of nationhood.¹⁶² Not that he was ever one for disparaging the mother tongue of any group, Afrikaners included.¹⁶³ In the mid-fifties, however, Harmel not only demands "for Zulu and Sesotho, Xhosa and Setswana, Shangaan and Tshivenda, the same status... that are at present enjoyed exclusively by English and Afrikaans in the Union", but even calls on African "poets and writers [to] ... glorify and enrich our [*sic!*] language".¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ "Afrikaans," *The Achievement of Afrikaans*, by T. J. Haarhoff and C. M. van den Heever, *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934): 10–11. On the authors see Albert S. Gérard, *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 202; Murray, *Wits*, 146–147, 276–278.

¹⁵⁹ J. F. Burger, review of *Achievement of Afrikaans*, by T. J. Haarhoff and C. M. van den Heever, "Critic. A South African Quarterly Journal" 3, no. 1 (1934): 59.

¹⁶⁰ Bill Freund, "South Africa: The Union Years, 1910–1948," in *CHSA* 2, Ross et al., eds. (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 230.

¹⁶¹ Gerrit Olivier, "The Dertigers and the *Plaasroman*: Two Brief Perspectives on Afrikaans Literature," 308 (for the quote); Tony Voss, "Refracted Modernisms: Roy Campbell, Herbert Dhlomo, N. P. van Wyk Louw," in *CHSAL*, Attwell and Attridge, eds., 339–342; 351–356.

¹⁶² Neville Alexander, *Language Policy and National Unity in South Africa/Azania* (Cape Town: Buchu, 1991), 32–33; Baruch Hirson, "Language in Control and Resistance in South Africa," *Journal of African Affairs* 80, no. 319 (Apr 1981): 230, 232.

¹⁶³ M. H., "A Racialist Indicts Racialism," review of *White Man Boss. Footsteps to the South African Volk Republic*, by Adamastor, *Guardian*, Nov 23, 1950, 4.

¹⁶⁴ Alan Doyle (= Michael Harmel), "Languages: Another View," *Liberation*, no. 6 (Nov 1953): 18–19.

Social Credit

Besides promoting home-grown literature in English, Harmel aspired to supply “a clearer, saner outlook on public affairs than is possible in a press dominated by capitalism and vested interest”.¹⁶⁵ The last such undertaking in English was, he maintains, *South African Nation* sponsored, paradoxically, by the National Party.¹⁶⁶ At present, “people who think” have no other.¹⁶⁷

Harmel assured his audience the magazine aimed to preach no doctrine. However, no sooner had the maiden issue of *The Adelphi* been out than the readers reproached him for a lack of impartiality. Prompted by a flurry of letters, he had to expand on (and *de facto* contradict) his initial pronouncements by proudly stating that “reform [was] inevitably partisan” and that the existing South African press, by being bland and scrupulously inoffensive, encouraged “the drugged public” into complacent apathy: “the press is potentially the greatest force for improvement that exists. It has become the gyre that shackles us to a state of poverty...”¹⁶⁸ But what sort of reform did the magazine so vigorously espouse?

Some accused *The Adelphi* of being an epigone of a review. The name itself was an obvious target. Harmel adamantly denied any inspiration by the English journal of the self-same name. The title of his own periodical had been a “purely arbitrary choice”.¹⁶⁹ For its namesake in the UK the editor purportedly harboured “no special sympathy, either in policy or doctrine”. Indeed, South African *Adelphi* has little in common with *The Adelphi* of J. Middleton Murry (1889–1957), a promoter of the “communism for Englishmen”. But one cannot overlook its resemblance to *The New English Weekly*, resemblance that goes beyond layout, typography, and content.¹⁷⁰ This in and of itself would justify a charge of unoriginality. The two periodicals, however, exhibit a strong political affinity too. They both avowedly champion Social Credit, the philosophical-economic theory of Major C. H. Douglas (1879–1952).¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ “Foreword,” *Adelphi*, no. 1 (May 1934): 1.

¹⁶⁶ “Notes of the Month,” *Adelphi*, no. 2 (Jun 1934): 3. *The SA Nation* was published in 1926–1928.

¹⁶⁷ “Foreword,” *Adelphi*, no. 1 (May 1934): 1.

¹⁶⁸ “Impartiality,” *Adelphi*, no. 2 (Jun 1934): 1.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ G. D. H. Cole, “Communism for Englishmen,” *Adelphi* 4, no. 1 (Apr 1932): 441–449. *The Adelphi* (later *New Adelphi*) ran in 1923–55, while *The New English Weekly* was published in 1932–49. Alvin Sullivan, ed. *British Literary Magazines 4: The Modern Age, 1914–1984* (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 8–18, 276–282. For instance, *The New English Weekly. A Review of Public Affairs, Literature and the Arts* 1, no. 17 (1932) contains, like Harmel’s *Adelphi*, a *so-tissier* entitled “Current Cant” that carries a selection of nonsensical statements from the press and literature.

¹⁷¹ See Frances Hutchinson and Brian Burkitt, *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism* (London: Routledge, 1997), esp. 28, 59–69, 92. A perspicuous introduction is M. Oliver Heydom’s 2014 Social Credit Series, accessed Nov 11, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJ_mEOq7Ujw.

Though it is not common knowledge, Douglas did not produce the foundational writings of Social Credit (serialised in *New Age* between 1918 and 1922) single-handed. Informed by the theory of guild socialism, these texts were co-authored by A. R. Orage (1873–1934), the editor. And it was Orage who, in 1932, started, and for two years edited, *The New English Weekly* seeking to “integrate the truths of Social Credit into a sufficient social synthesis”.¹⁷² Harmel most likely provided *The New English Weekly* editor with a complimentary copy for he proudly quotes a message from Orage that commends *Adelphi* as “the most promising literary periodical I’ve seen from South Africa”.¹⁷³ Oddly enough, the supplement to Orage’s journal of August 30, carrying a list of social-credit publications, names merely one in South Africa, the mimeographed *Social Credit Bulletin*.¹⁷⁴

Social Credit is a complex and multifaceted system.¹⁷⁵ Harmel in his preachment of it confines himself only to two aspects—monetary policies and the conspiracy of bankers.¹⁷⁶ According to Douglas destitution, unemployment, overproduction, etc. stem from the lack of purchasing power. For this, private banks are to blame as they withhold money from circulation. The only solution lies in the creation of a state bank that will oversee “the distribution by the state of a National Dividend to every citizen”.¹⁷⁷ This would “once and for all ... destroy actual poverty”. The Union is “ideally circumstanced for the application of Social Credit”.¹⁷⁸

If one of the politicians who are toying with the Douglas’ theory could but muster sufficient courage to go to the country with a straightforward social credit programme he would gather round him the strongest and most honest and the most intelligent political party that has ever been known in South Africa.¹⁷⁹

Douglasism, according to Harmel, presents the best alternative not only to the “poison of fascism and the *bane of communism*”,¹⁸⁰ but also to socialism of which there are too many brands and which “cannot be provender in this country for a hundred years”.¹⁸¹

¹⁷² Hutchinson, *Political Economy*, 2, 14, 62, 158–159. The quote is from M. B. Reckitt, *As It Happened: An Autobiography* (London: Dent & Sons, 1941), 178 (see Hutchinson, *Political Economy*, 104). Harmel’s cousin Michael Sayers (see c. 1) in later years wrote theatre reviews for the *NEW*.

¹⁷³ See “Notes of the Months,” *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Aug 1934): 2. A. R. Orage Papers at Leeds University Library contain neither the copy of *Adelphi* nor the letter from Harmel.

¹⁷⁴ Hutchinson, *Political Economy*, 144; *New Democracy* 3–4 (1934): 196.

¹⁷⁵ Heydorn, “Social Credit Politics” and “Social Credit Philosophy,” in *Social Credit Series*.

¹⁷⁶ “Fundamentals,” *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934): 3. Some perceive in the original Social Credit signs of anti-Semitic conspirationism – see Derek Wall, “Social Credit: The Eco-socialism of Fools,” *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 14, no. 3 (Sept 2003): 99–122.

¹⁷⁷ “Fundamentals,” *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934): 3.

¹⁷⁸ “Notes of the Month,” *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Aug 1934): 2.

¹⁷⁹ “Notes of the Month,” *Adelphi*, no. 2 (Jun 1934): 3.

¹⁸⁰ “Notes of the Month,” *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Jul 1934): 2; my emphasis.

¹⁸¹ “Notes of the Month,” *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Aug 1934): 2–3; no. 2 (Jun 1934): 2. Although its critics on the Right at times associate Social Credit with socialism, socialist writers reject this. The economist Maurice Dobb wrote that Douglas’ theories “are no more than a petit-bourgeois attempt to prolong the evils of capitalism and dispossess the workers of the world”. Other Marxist authors consider Social

The Adelphi found a number of sympathetic readers, possibly many. Harmel's views were echoed in "Social Credit and Its Critics" by C. D. Keet, a leading member of the Social Credit Group in Johannesburg and author of Social Credit brochures.¹⁸² A Transvaal attorney and legal publicist T. P. C. Boezaart seconded the editor in "Why a State Bank?".¹⁸³ A high school teacher R. F. Hawksley, too, took the side of Douglas' theory.¹⁸⁴

"Notes of the Month"

It is especially the "Notes of the Month" that set the distinctive tone of *The Adelphi*. The column has a Social Credit axe to grind, but its scope is broader as the author comments upon political and economic affairs at home and overseas.

With apprehension Harmel watches happenings in Germany where "the triumvirate of mad swashbucklers had infected the whole population with their own madness" (Sept, 2), madness they are now "actually attempting to foist upon the world" (May, 2). His hopes lie with America where the new President Roosevelt, having nationalised private gold stores and taken his country off gold standard,¹⁸⁵ "is making valorous efforts to reduce the chaos". Their principal objective is what every Social Creditor could dream of: "[t]o match producing to consuming power" and put banksters "in their proper place" (May, Jun, Sept, 2). The success of FDR's policies affords in the end the only chance for Germany to be saved "from the *spiritual hell of Communism* that yawns beneath her and the whole world from a similar catastrophe". Truly, "Notes of the Month" demonstrate that in 1934 communism is yet to become Harmel's kind of thing:

The communists dominate in such organised groups as exist, and they are the only element that is not merely not demoralised, but who know exactly what they want. If this should occur and if there be no interference from outside, we will be witnesses of the most dramatic episode in human history. *Will the German people make a better job of it than Russians did?* There is really no reasonable parallel. There is, first of all, the vast superiority of human material. Sixty-five million educated Germans are a very different proposition to the illiterate Russians of double that number. On the score of tractability, the Germans, sheep-herded for centuries, may not offer much more resistance than they did to Hitler" (Sept, 2; my emphasis).

Credit "inimical to working-class solidarity, and hence to the power base of socialist leaders". Quoted in Hutchinson, *Political Economy*, 83-91, 125-126.

¹⁸² C. D. Keet, "Social Credit and Its Critics I and II," *Adelphi*, no. 2 (Jun 1934): 3-5 and no. 3 (Jul 1934): 8-9. On Keet see *New Democracy* 3-4 (1934): 40.

¹⁸³ *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934): 5-7. On him see G. W. Cook, "Time to Remember," *De Rebus*, no. 117 (Sept 1977): 553.

¹⁸⁴ "Democracy and Despotism," *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Jul 1934): 4. On Hawksley see c. 2.

¹⁸⁵ Shannon Venable, *Gold. A Cultural Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2011), 95-97, 123.

Citing personalities as diverse as the King, Hilaire Belloc, and Edwin Muir, Harmel strongly opposes gold standard (May, 2 Jun 2 and Aug, 1), abandoned by South Africa two years earlier, and of gold as such.¹⁸⁶ Continuance of gold industry in the Union, he writes, is solely in the interest of mining tycoons (Aug, 1), “the gang of cosmopolitan exploiters” who represent “the real, secret government of the Union” (ibid., 3). Before long “the nations [will] come to realise that gold is unnecessary and that they can more realistically express their money tokens in terms of a direct relationship to their real wealth” (May, 2). South Africa urgently needs to develop other “avenue[s] likely to render us more self-contained and self-supporting” (ibid.).¹⁸⁷

The Fusion and the Status Bill as well as the goings-on of Smuts, Malan, and Hertzog earn his scorn.¹⁸⁸ For whereas these politicians are engaged in “slimly hair-splitting over piffling issues of a past generation” (May, 2), the national strife in the Union has economic causes. Of all South African politicians only Walter Madeley merits Harmel’s approbation (Jun, 2).¹⁸⁹ The former’s promotion of Social Credit is, however, no more than a “slaver”. For, when all is said and done, the Labour Party leader barely differs from other politickers who “exploit the nascent feeling for social justice that pervades the whole body of intelligent opinion in the country”. Madeley, Barlow, and Roos, the founder of the new Central Party, are no more than “charlatans, chancers, bunglers” with no programme at all.¹⁹⁰

The European crisis resembles the South African one in that chauvinistic turmoil is only a red herring designed to divert popular attention from economic trouble: “Mussolini, Hitler and Mosley are mere pawns in a conspiracy to enslave the world. And the purpose is to make world secure for big finance and bankocracy” (Jun, 3). If the war is at hand, this is not so because the said dictators themselves desire it. It is inscribed in the logic of the present state of economy (Jul, 1).

¹⁸⁶ Leonard Thompson and Lynn Berat, *A History of South Africa*, 4th rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2014), 182.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Ross, *Concise History of South Africa*, 106; Freund, “South Africa: The Union Years,” 217, 219, 223, 246.

¹⁸⁸ See Thompson, *History of South Africa*, 182–183; Saunders and Davenport, *South Africa*, 304–305, 319–323.

¹⁸⁹ On him see Apollon Davidson et al., eds. *South Africa and the Communist International*, vol. 1, *Socialist Pilgrims to Bolshevik Footsoldiers, 1919–1930* (London: Routledge, 2015), xxiv.

¹⁹⁰ Tielman Roos (1879–1935) was a founding member of the National Party and a justice minister in the Pact government. His Central Party was formed in May 1934 only to be dissolved a year later. He was a rabid racist. See J. P. Brits, *Tielman Roos se rol in die Suid-Afrikaanse politiek, 1907–1935* (Pretoria: Makro Boeke, 1979); Edward Roux, *Time Longer than Rope. A History of the Black Man’s Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 203. By August, Harmel—perhaps swayed by a letter from a member—changed his mind. He now describes Roos and his new organisation as “a body of men eminently imbued with the spirit of high concern for the country’s welfare”—see “News of the Month,” *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Aug 1934): 3. For the letter see *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Jul 1934): 12.

With the world in such dire straits, different groups, as always, find a scapegoat in the Jews. In South Africa, Barlow's *Sunday Express* and the *New Guard*, particularly, add fuel to the anti-Semitic fire (Jul, 2).¹⁹¹ The doctrine of the Greyshirts is so "outrageous" (Sept, 2) that they should be either ignored or suppressed (May, 2).¹⁹² The Jewish community, however, cannot be safe for as long as the present economic order lasts. The only avenue open to Jews is to seize the initiative. Omitting to mention his own Judaic background, Harmel avers that the Jewry "have the mind, the vision, the courage, and they but need the desperate will to become a conquering spear-head to dispel the fog and the inertia which render mankind supine and helpless". How is this to be done? It is incumbent on "every intelligent, educated Jew" to acquaint himself or herself with the work of Major Douglas (May, 2f).

"Notes of the Month" make a fascinating reading. Their harangue, instinct with Social Credit zealotry, projects an image of an angry young man, idealist, and iconoclast. He immodestly accounts himself a trailblazer for South Africa at large and, covertly, for the Jewish community. He is a crusading, sharp-tongued, impatient provocateur, struggling to break the general apathy, to make the "distraught and confused" (Sept, 2) people see and act. To be sure, he comes across as a peremptory, irreverent, impudent know-all. Implicitly and passionately believing in what he preaches, Harmel is all those things. To some degree, however, this speaker is more of a rôle he created for himself (or, by way of exaggeration, out of himself)—a rhetorical pose, partly spontaneous and partly deliberate, employing a "challenging invective" (Sept, 3).

Africans and the History of South Africa

It bears pointing out that "Notes of the Month" is all but completely absorbed by white politics and financial policies. Only seldom does Harmel take notice of the African community and its hardship and then just generally (Aug, 3).¹⁹³ Obsessed with what Douglas offers as the solvent of the world's trouble, he concentrates on those who have a vote and are, theoretically, in a position to effect change. Consequently, he has nothing

¹⁹¹ Arthur Barlow (1876–1962) was a politician, journalist, and labour MP in 1921–1929. *Selections from Smuts Papers* 7, Aug 1945–Oct 1950, ed. Jean van der Poel (Cambridge: CUP, 1973), 374.

¹⁹² The Greyshirt movement, founded in 1933, melded anti-Semitism and racialism with Afrikanerdom. Norman Levy, *Final Prize. My Life in the Antiapartheid Struggle* (Cape Town: SAHO, 2013), 16–18. The *New Guard*, a paramilitary, semi-fascist organisation, originally emerged in 1930 in New South Wales. Using the slogan "One Empire, One Flag, One King", it was anti-Semitic and opposed to Fusion and republicanism. Norman Abjorensen and James C. Docherty, *Dictionary of Australian History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 271; John Lambert, "An Identity Threatened: White English-speaking South Africans, Britishness and Dominion South Africanism, 1934–1939," *Kleio* 37, no. 1 (2005): 56.

¹⁹³ Cf. "New Novels," *Adelphi*, no. 2 (June 1934): 12 and "April".

concrete to say on the ubiquitous racialism and the statutory discrimination of Africans, Indians etc.¹⁹⁴

Black activism is beyond his ken too. Perhaps understandably so. The national movements of Africans were then either in the doldrums or already defunct.¹⁹⁵ We have seen as well that the world of African protest politics, trade unionism, and culture was by no way easy to find out about for whites.¹⁹⁶ Having said that, there still existed ways of learning about realities of African life, even in Grahamstown itself and first-hand at that. Some were rehearsed at the beginning of this chapter. Periodicals represented another potential source. *Umsebenzi* was again widely read at the time and so comparatively easy to procure. At Fort Hare, a stone's throw from Grahamstown, students had been reading *Indlela Yenkululeko*. And there were others.¹⁹⁷

Be that as it may, Harmel in *The Adelphi* period left it to other contributors to deal with African plight in more detail. These writers, however, took an unambiguously radical stance on "native policy". Whereas Hobart Houghton in his Fort Hare lectures spoke benignly of "co-operation" between Europeans and the Bantu upon the advent of capitalist economy, Harry Bloom (1913–1981), who would rise to fame as a novelist, flatly states that the Native, "bewildered" by European civilisation and "unable to protest", was "manoeuvred into" his position in the industry. A fellow student of Harmel's, G. E. Stent, accused "native administration" of "crass stupidity" and repressiveness. R. F. Hawksley demanded suffrage for Africans, Indians, and Coloureds. Even the "charlatan" of an historian I. J. Rousseau voiced a hope that, one day, a history of *all* peoples of South Africa ("not only white, but yellow, brown and black") would supersede the "endless succession of partisan" accounts—a left-field view at that time.¹⁹⁸

Democracy

It is most apposite that in the period of mushrooming authoritarian regimes and movements a common thread traversing all the issues of *The Adelphi* should have been that of

¹⁹⁴ Freund, "South Africa: The Union Years," 233–242, 256–259.

¹⁹⁵ Allison Drew, *Discordant Comrades. Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 113, 167; Philip Bonner, "South African Society and Culture, 1910–1948," in *CHSA* 2, Ross et al., eds., 304.

¹⁹⁶ Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 15.

¹⁹⁷ The Switzers, eds. *Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho*, 37–38, 40–42, 77–78, 91–94, 110–111, 121–124, 271–272; Roux, *Time Longer than Rope*, 275–276.

¹⁹⁸ Hobart Houghton, *Some Economic Problems of Bantu in South Africa*, 8; Harry Bloom, "Is It Fair?" *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934): 7–8; G. E. Stent, "South African Native Policy," *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Jul 1934): 6–8 (on the author see *Rhodes Calendar 1935*, 181; "Our Contributors," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 1, no. 2 [1948]: 141–142); R. F. Hawksley, "Democracy and Despotism," *Adelphi*, no. 3 (1934): 5; I. J. Rousseau, "The 1820 Settlers," review of *The 1820 Settlers in South Africa*, by Isobel Edwards, *Adelphi*, no. 1 (May 1934): 8 (cf. Butler, *Bursting World*, 83; Berat, "Interview with Thompson," 16); Robert Ross et al., "Introduction"; Saul Dubow, "South Africa and South Africans: Nationality, Belonging, Citizenship," in *CHSA* 2, Ross et al., eds., 3, 43–44.

democracy, a system then alternately as in peril or, having failed, on its way out.¹⁹⁹ Harmel approached several of his contemporaries with the following question: What do you make of the present state of democracy? His responders were Sibson, Hawksley, his own professor of constitutional law George Grant McKerron, and a philosopher A. H. Murray.²⁰⁰

The editor himself, disguised as “Alan Doyle”, concluded the debate in September. Self-confident, if not lordly, in tone, his “The True Democracy” rejects proposals of all the other writers, except one.²⁰¹ McKerron, concerned about the effect of “party democracy” on individual liberties, commends “benign despotism” as a solution. Harmel rightly sees that as a contradiction. He has no more appreciation for Murray whose “All Quiet on the Democratic Front”, an argument for “state socialism”, is no more than “obscure rodomontade” characterised by “a marked caution and apparently deliberate vagueness and fulsome platitudes”. Sibson’s ideas, for their part, simply “smel[I] like fascism”. No benign despot is available, writes Harmel, only dictators stirring up the crowd into violence. At all events, despotism of any ilk would be tantamount to suppression of both “rule of law” cherished by McKerron and the arts and literature Sibson represents. Only Hawksley, being like *The Adelphi* “ahead of time”, puts up “a well-reasoned and convincing case”. The principal virtue of his “Democracy and Despotism” is its refusal to blame the SA government.²⁰² After all, does not every nation have a government it deserves? Each government follows from necessity and the level of development of the men and women it rules. For any reform to be conceivable, “[n]ew thought must seep and sink from the top through to the bottom layer of the mass of the people”. Problems cannot be removed through

fulminations of agitators. Whatever they may say and whatever they may do, the final and irrevocable power is in the hands of the people. And in the long run the will of the people will be accomplished... Socialists and Social Creditors, they are crystal-gazers, seeing farther than their generation to the future that is brighter... They will cry to deaf ears and will not be discouraged... But however noble their

¹⁹⁹ Cf. A. C. Partridge, “Against Democracy,” *SA Opinion*, Feb 20 (1937): 7–9 and “The Fascist and the Nazi Philosophies,” *SA Opinion*, May 1 (1937): 5–6.

²⁰⁰ Edinburgh-educated George Grant McKerron (1885–1945) was a specialist in the law of delict and critic of the Roman-Dutch law. His wife Marjorie (1895–1980) was a pioneering educationalist. See A. J. Kerr, “Legal Education at Rhodes University 1904–1996,” *Consultus* 9 (Nov 1996): 135–141; *New Dictionary of South African Biography*, vol. 1, edited by E. J. Verwey (Pretoria: HSRC, 1995), 105–106. Murray (1905–1997) lectured in philosophy at Wits and the UCT. After 1948, he was a supporter of “separate development”. Considered an authority on communism, he appeared as an “expert witness” for the prosecution in trials of anti-government activists. See Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 237, 269; Treason Trial Records (WCL: AD1812), 6198–6201. For more on Murray as a philosopher see Pieter Duvenage, “Migration of Ideas and Afrikaans Philosophy in South Africa” in *Migrating Texts and Traditions*, William Sweet, ed. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2012), 105–120.

²⁰¹ *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934): 4.

²⁰² A. W. Murray, “All Quiet on the Democratic Front,” *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Jul 1934): 3–5; Francis Sibson, “Democracy and Despotism: A Middle Course?,” *Adelphi*, no. 2 (Jun 1934): 7–9; R. F. Hawksley, “Democracy and Despotism,” *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Aug 1934): 3–6.

purpose and however strenuous their efforts, reforms will only be achieved when the vast mass of people takes its next slow step forward secure in the knowledge that the step has been tested by the only measure it will accept—experience.

One may wonder why he did not show more sympathy to McKerron's penetrating, foresighted, and highly specific analysis of the very erosion of the rule of law through emasculation of the judiciary, illiberal legislation, and infringement of human rights that would affect Harmel and his associates in years to come. He clearly has a point, though, questioning the professor's call for an introduction of enlightened authoritarianism. Harmel's insistence on the centrality of *vox populi* attests to his faith in the man in the street who shall ultimately be won over through education. Such a dissemination rather than imposition of an ideal is to him the only way to transform society if "democracy" is to endure. Harmel does not say as much explicitly, but it would seem parliamentarianism is only to be preserved so long as the people so wish. It is not a necessary condition for democracy. Both this idea and that of enlightening the masses from above by the more forward-looking echo the thought of A. R. Lord. They likewise foreshadow the ideology Harmel would embrace later: it is the experience of "the one fifth of humankind" that would be acknowledged as *the* irrefutable proof that "it [is] possible".

The Adelphi Goes out of Print

There was a considerable number of those who felt outraged by the vicious tone of the editorials and notices in *The Adelphi* as well as its aggressive advocacy of Social Credit.²⁰³ Harmel swept all negative feedback aside priding himself on "our own powers of challenging invective", "critical values", and "unconventional... outlook on public affairs". With sarcasm, he fields criticism of stories which he puts down to the belief "that sex was a private affair and (like latrines, brothels, banks) ought not to be discussed publicly at all".²⁰⁴

The readers who generally welcomed the review's appearance (without necessarily taking out a subscription) appear to have preponderated, though. Among those who, in some cases jogged by a complimentary copy, had bidden his periodical bon voyage, Harmel lists such a variety of individuals as the St Andrew's College headmaster Rev. C. B.

²⁰³ T. P. C. Boezaart, "The Central Party," *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Jul 1934): 12.

²⁰⁴ "Notes of the Month," *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934): 3.

Armstrong,²⁰⁵ a fellow Social Creditor H. G. Cornish-Bowden,²⁰⁶ prominent politicians Reitz, Hofmeyr, Smuts, and Hertzog, the popular radio broadcaster Selina Hirsch, and the Trotskyist bookseller Paul Koston.²⁰⁷

Demands on Harmel's time became such as to necessitate a suspension of his studies so he could pursue *The Adelphi* project on a full-time basis. He even saw it convenient to relocate to Durban where Arthur was then most likely based.²⁰⁸ Over time, however, dependent as it was primarily on subscriptions and both short of advertisers and shrinking from (or incapable of) self-advertising (Aug, 3), *Adelphi* ran out of money.²⁰⁹ After merely five months, Harmel had no recourse but to close up shop. Bitter about the failure, he was once again losing his sense of proportion:

As it is, South Africa by its meanness and apathy and nauseating materialism, by its suffocating smugness and moronic opposition to new and possibly disturbing thought, has killed the bravest and most hopeful literary endeavour the country has ever produced... the failure of *Adelphi* brands the intelligent section of the South African people with the inexpugable stigma in the eyes of the world.²¹⁰

The Adelphi: An Assessment

To contend, as Harmel did, that aspiring writers in English at that time lacked a forum in South Africa, was to lay it on thick. To be sure, *Ringhals* had collapsed and Bosman left for London early in 1934. Granted, too, that it was only in November that Clewin Webb managed briefly to revive his previous venture as *New Ringhals* and that *The South African Opinion* (1934–1947) commenced publication.²¹¹ In other words, it is easy to see why Harmel deemed it necessary to step into the breach. But there were alternatives all the same.

²⁰⁵ R. F. Currey, *St. Andrew's College, Grahamstown, 1855–1955* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), 133–141; C. B. Armstrong, "My Company," *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sep 1934): 8.

²⁰⁶ Maj. Cornish-Bowden (1870–1937) was an English serviceman who became acquainted with Social Credit whilst living in South Africa (through *Adelphi* perhaps?). In 1936, he joined the Green Shirt Movement, an organisation which helped to popularise Social Credit among the unemployed and later developed into a political party. See Mark Drakeford, *Social Movements and Their Supporters: The Greenshirts in England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997), 187, 197.

²⁰⁷ Eric Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening: The Early History of Radio in South Africa* (Cape Town: Purnell, 1974), 66–67. Koston (or Koston) possibly came into contact with Social Credit through the short-lived International Socialist Club (formed in 1931) or through Lenin Club, its successor. Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 118, 139–141.

²⁰⁸ Harmel was away from the university from June 1934 to March 1935 (CL RU). See *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Aug 1934), 3; Harmel's *How I Cured Myself of Asthma*, 9.

²⁰⁹ "Impartiality," 1; "Notes of the Month," no. 2 (Jun 1934): 3.

²¹⁰ "New Novels," *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934), 12. In "Notes of the Month" (*ibid.*, 3) he cast "a hearty malediction on those pusillanimous, would-be reformers who think that social revolution is an omelette that can be cooked without breaking eggs". Harmel would have us believe that the reviewer M. and the author of "Notes of the Month" are different personalities. This is one instance when their voices sound very much alike.

²¹¹ Eugene Benson and L. W. Connolly, eds. *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (London: Routledge, 2004), 125–126, 903–904; Leon de Kock, "The Sjabok Era: Johannesburg's Popular Press of the 1930s," in *African Studies Forum* 1, Romaine Hill, Marie Eloiße Muller, and Martin Trump, eds. (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1991), 109–122; Rosenberg, *Herman Charles Bosman*, 116; Corinne Sandwith, "The Work of Cultural Criticism: Re-visiting *The South African Opinion*," *Alternation* 15, no. 2 (2008): 38–70.

The Outspan (1927–1957) contained a literary section and so did the Labour Party's *Forward* (1924–1957). Even black writers had a platform, namely *The Bantu World*.²¹²

His attempt to cultivate distinctly South African literature in English was, no doubt, advanced for its time. Or at least in tune with it, anticipating as it did a more sustained and ultimately more successful efforts by *The S. A. Opinion* contributors who, from the onset, worked to formulate a South African canon and evolve “a distinctive South African aesthetic”.²¹³ Five issues were, however, not sufficient for the literary department of the *The Adelphi* to progress in such a way as to revolutionise South African literary scene. Besides, Harmel did not have a very lucky hand in choosing literary contributions. Finally, as compared to editorials, articles, and notices, *creative writing* apparently remained something of a Cinderella in *The Adelphi*.

Yes, if Harmel's magazine merits a place in the cultural history of South Africa, this is primarily on account of its “uncompromising” literary, cultural, and political *journalism* which rendered it noticeable, however ephemerally, and which places *The Adelphi* in the tradition of the periodicals—the most significant of these being Campbell and Plomer's *The Voorslag* (1926–1927)—that sought to “challenge the political and cultural establishment”.²¹⁴ That said, it was highly pompous of the editor to summarise readers' letters as claiming that in *Adelphi* he had managed to put “this country on the journalistic map”.²¹⁵ Leaving aside daily papers, one can name “progressive” periodicals, such as the CPSA's *Umsbenzeni*, the SALP's *Forward* (both mentioned earlier), and the Christian monthly *South African Outlook* (1922–1995). All of them, despite their ideological baggage, decidedly represented “serious South African journalism”.²¹⁶ There is a difference, of course. All these publications were aligned with specific organisations and advocated their respective points of view. Harmel may be a fanatical Social Creditor and he is certainly biased in many other ways, but nevertheless speaks his own mind, representing no-one. That gives him *carte blanche* publicly to state things he would avoid saying as a Party member, such as that “every new movement seemingly must attract a

²¹² Adey, ed. *Companion to South African English Literature*, 153; Johnson, “Literary and Cultural Criticism in South Africa,” in Atwell and Attridge, eds. *CHSAL*, 823–824; Heywood, *A History of South African Literature*, 116–117; the Switzers, *Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho*, 122–124.

²¹³ Sandwith, “The Work of Cultural Criticism,” 38, 44.

²¹⁴ J. Innsbruck, “Some Criticism,” *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Jul 1934): 12 (for the first quote). See also “New Novels,” *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Jul 1934): 10–11; “Louis Golding,” *ibid.*, 12; “Foreword,” 1; “Impartiality,” 1f. On *The Voorslag* see Peter F. Alexander, “Campbell, Plomer, Van Der Post and *Voorslag*,” *English in Africa* 7, no. 2 (Sept 1980): 50–59; William Plomer, “*Voorslag* Days,” *London Magazine* 6, no. 1 (Jul 1959): 46–52; Mackenzie, “The Metropolitan and the Local,” 370; Johnson, “Literary and Cultural Criticism in South Africa,” 824 (for the second quote).

²¹⁵ “Notes of the Month,” *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Aug 1934): 2.

²¹⁶ Switzer, *Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho*, 269–270; “Foreword,” 1.

number of hare-brained cranks and fanatics. Is the social credit movement in this country free of them?”²¹⁷

The cessation of *The Adelphi* was brought about by a combination of factors. One was probably Harmel’s aggressive rhetoric that had alienated many. Another would have been, as stated previously, his ill-conceived approach to marketing. He, finally, seems to have overrated the strength of the people of “intelligence and vision” whom he continually invoked.²¹⁸ All these weaknesses may be, of course, conceptualised as fortes for they demonstrate that Harmel, in his missionary zeal, was neither prepared nor able to pander to “hoi polloi” to boost the sales.²¹⁹ For demographic and economic reasons, too, he stood against high odds. That he took the plunge—and even dropped out of university, quite possibly not knowing whether or not he was ever coming back—bespeaks a young man not afraid to take chances for the sake of things he holds dear.

On *The Star*

Although Harmel had at one point toyed with the idea of an academic career, journalism had much more of a pull for him. During the winter vacation in 1937, he did a short spell on *The Star* in Johannesburg. Later that year, Vincent and Hugh Grocotts, having spotted his talent, tried to recruit him for *Grocott’s Daily Mail*.²²⁰ He must have felt there was no more for him to achieve in the small pond of Grahamstown by now for he chose temporarily to re-join *The Star* in January 1938.²²¹

Johannesburg was as dynamic and fast-changing a city in those days as it is nowadays. Every white person who could so afford owned a motorcar. The mid-thirties saw the advent of trolley buses, opening of the Rand Airport, and the inauguration of the Public Library. In 1937, the city acquired its tallest building in the 21-storey ESCOM House. There was a constant growth in population with each ethnic group more stratified than anywhere else.²²² American influence made itself felt in entertainment and hospitality industries. Whereas Arthur Harmel enthused that “old Joburg...continue[d] to be an amazing city,” his son used to be disgusted by the milling around of “all the mean little

²¹⁷ “Notes of the Month,” *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Aug 1934): 2.

²¹⁸ *Adelphi* (May 1934): 1; (Jun 1934): 1; (Jul 1934): 1; (Aug 1934): 2; (Sept 1934): 3.

²¹⁹ Cf. De Kock, “*The Sjabok Era*,” 111.

²²⁰ Louise Vale, “History of *Grocott’s Mail*,” *Grocott’s Mail*, 2017, accessed Dec 19, 2016, <http://www.grocotts.co.za/history-of-grocotts-mail/>.

²²¹ A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, May 6, 1937; B. Harmel to C. Abrahams, Jun 3, 1980 (GBP: 1994.2.1.39, ASAML).

²²² Sarah Gertrude Millin, *Night Is Long* (London: Faber, 1941), 115; William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 355; Naomi and Ruben Musiker, *A Concise Dictionary of Greater Johannesburg* (Cape Town: Francolin, 2000), 19–20; James Clarke, *The Star. The Extraordinary 20th Century* (Johannesburg: Star, 1999), 66; Freund, “South Africa: The Union Years,” 248; Bonner, “South African Society and Culture,” 290.

greedy people, who calculate their interest in all their actions, whose hopes are base, and whose fears are disgraceful". He could not gainsay the city's "intellectual stimulation", however.²²³ There was much happening in the way of "alternative" culture and politics. Bantu People's Theatre had been in existence since before 1936. The Merry Blackbirds, an African swing orchestra, enjoyed popularity across the colour divide. People's and Vanguard Bookshops not only served as rendezvous points for leftists, but they were also places where blacks and whites could rub shoulders.²²⁴

Harmel would have already frequented the Left Book discussion club in the Public Library organised by the Vanguard Bookshop's Trotskyist owner Fanny Klenerman.²²⁵ A 1945 election leaflet points out his participation in campaigns in support of the Spanish Republic, Abyssinia, and China.²²⁶ Perhaps he found his way to the irregular study classes organised by Louis Joffe. That he still did not join the Party at this juncture had a good reason. Although communists had a hand in organising some of the above activities and although a dedicated few continued to hold Town Hall meetings, the CPSA could only claim about 50 card-carrying members in the whole of South Africa.²²⁷ Having been emaciated by "internal struggles", Harmel wrote later, the Party was yet to "make its presence felt as an organisation".²²⁸

The Star was only slightly younger than the city of Johannesburg itself which had just celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. On the editorial premises in President Street, the budding journalist could meet the veteran employees who had been with the paper since before it relocated by wagons from Grahamstown to the Witwatersrand in 1887. It was a pro-British and liberal-leaning daily.²²⁹ The editor-in-chief, Charles D. Don, a native of Scotland and an occasional writer and poet, had worked on *The Cape Mercury*, *Times of Natal*, and *Rhodesia Herald*. He joined *The Star* in 1915. In contrast to the editor of the *Grocott's Daily Mail*, he regarded critically the Union's "pseudo-democracy based on adult

²²³ A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Oct 25, 1939; M. A. H., "Let Us Build Utopia..." 27.

²²⁴ Leaflets, Brochures, and Newspaper Clippings from Agitation-Propaganda Section of CI for South Africa, Jul 24, 1936–Jan 17, 1939 (PI'ACIII 495.14.359); Corinne Sandwith, "Yours for Socialism. Communist Cultural Criticism, Radical Theatre and Jack Cope," in *The World of Letters. Reading Communities and Cultural Debates in Early Apartheid South Africa* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014), 193; Gwen Ansell, *Soweto Blues: Jazz, Popular Music, and Politics in South Africa* (London: Continuum, 2005), 45–47, 54, 57; Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 186; Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 119; Belling, "More Than a Shop," 20.

²²⁵ Belling, "More than a Shop," 19; Michael Harmel, "Die Transvaaler versus the Truth," *Guardian*, Sept 4, 1941, 2; Alan Doyle, "By the Way," *Guardian*, Aug 24, 1950, 4.

²²⁶ MHP: A3300.

²²⁷ Mia Roth, *The Communist Party in South Africa. Racism. Eurocentricity and Moscow, 1921–1950* (Johannesburg: Partridge, 2016), 125; Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 186.

²²⁸ A. Lerumo (= Harmel), *Fifty Fighting Years. The Communist Party of South Africa 1921–1971* (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1980), 69.

²²⁹ L. E. Neame and Eric Rosenthal, *Today's News Today: The Story of the Argus Company* (Johannesburg: Argus, 1956), 253; Kevin Ritchie, Letter from the Editor, accessed Jul 11, <http://www.iol.co.za/the-star/about-us>; Rosenthal, *Today's News Today*, 252; Clarke, *Star*, 64, 79–80.

franchise for the European minority” in which “[t]he non-European is subject to an autocratic rule... far from ‘benevolent’ despotism”.²³⁰ He was, as we shall see, ready to tolerate a range of opinions on the pages of his paper.²³¹

Don was pleased with Harmel’s performance and predicted “a very rosy future for him”.²³² But we do not know how much time the young man spent on *The Star*, nor what exactly his brief was. There are articles from winter 1937 and summer and autumn 1938, particularly in “Among the Books” section, that might have come from his pen. Or else there was at least one more ardent leftist on the editorial. To be sure, notices expressing sympathy with German socialists, “chivvied from pillar to post, beaten up by the guards, hustled into oblivion or openly shot”, or finding “inhumanitarianism in mass production” do not necessarily betoken a socialist radical.²³³ An anonymous notice of *The Economic System in a Socialist State* (itself a theoretical treatise rather than a blueprint for socialist construction) by Robert Lowe Hall, too, simply accords with the spirit of the era as it says that “so much utter nonsense is prattled about Socialism today that Mr Hall’s look will come as a timely reminder that even those who yearn for ‘socialism in our time’ should get down to it and see how it is going to work”.²³⁴ The reviewer of Feuchtwanger’s *Moscow 1937* is a horse of a different colour. For he is satisfied that the Soviet people, “at one with the ideas of the Government, ... are not bullied into expressing their content”: “[t]hey are living Communism and liking it”. He believes, too, that the cult of Stalin is “deplored by nobody as much as Stalin himself”.²³⁵ To claim thus would have taken more than a Labourite or Fabian. Indeed, it would have clearly taken more than an anti-Soviet Marxist. That Harmel himself may not have written it is indicated by his position on the Soviet Russia as expressed in a 1937 article for *The Rhodian*, quoted previously.²³⁶ Since the text in the university magazine undoubtedly refers to Stalin, it is perhaps more likely Harmel authored a notice of Trotsky’s *Revolution Betrayed* which echoes the book’s claim that Stalin’s bureaucracy made “socialism impossible” and that purges had “the object of

²³⁰ Charles D. Don, *And Having Writ: Memories and Impressions* (Johannesburg: Central News Agency, 1942), 11, 123f, 129, 157–160, 164, 197–198 (for the quote). On racism of the *Grocott’s Daily Mail* editor see Torlesse, “A History of Grahamstown,” 199–200.

²³¹ “Spain and Russia,” *Star*, Feb 2, 1938, 12; “Mr Wells and Dictators,” *Star*, Feb 23, 1938, 10; “Light on Public Affairs,” *Star*, Jun 15, 1937, 8.

²³² A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Jul 23, 1937.

²³³ “*Our Street*. A Tale of Travail,” review of *Our Street: A Chronicle Written in the Heart of Fascist Germany*, by Jan Petersen, *Star*, Mar 9, 1938, 23; “Sinclair and Ford,” review of *The Flivver King*, by Upton Sinclair, *Star*, Apr 27, 1938, 25.

²³⁴ “Socialism,” review of *The Economic System in a Socialist State*, by R. L. Hall, *The Star*, Aug 17, 1937, 22. On the book and its author, an Oxford lecturer in 1927–1950 and Labour Party adviser in 1947–1961, see Kit Jones, *An Economist Among Mandarins. Biography of Robert Hall, 1901–1988* (New York: CUP, 1994), 41; Diane Langmore, ed. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 1981–1990, Vol. 17: A–K (Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 2007), 475–476.

²³⁵ “Feuchtwanger in Russia,” *Moscow 1937: My Visit Described for My Friends*, by Leon Feuchtwanger, and *People’s Front*, by G. D. H. Cole, *Star*, Sept 21, 1937.

²³⁶ M., “But...” *Rhodian XV*, no. 2 (1937): 29.

preventing the discontent of the masses from finding a coherent political expression”. While admitting Trotsky himself bears a portion of responsibility for the revolutionary violence, the author describes him as “the most scathing and the best informed critic of Stalinism... clearer than Wells and often more pungent than Shaw”.²³⁷ But again, there is no certainty as to Harmel’s authorship. For all we know, he may have not produced either of these articles. After all, both are unsigned. And he deemed it necessary to initial even a part of a multi-review.²³⁸

Let us then take a look at the three texts in *The Star* that are positively Harmel’s. Proceeding chronologically, one might read the review of Sutton’s *Farewell to Rousseau* and Madariaga’s *Anarchy or Hierarchy* as a sequel to “The True Democracy”.²³⁹ Once again, Harmel weighs up alternatives to the failing (or failed) liberal democracy.²⁴⁰ He believes that “Liberalism and Democracy are to-day being subjected, like all political doctrines, to severe criticism”. For Sutton, an Oxford tutor and a member of the British Union of Fascists,²⁴¹ liberal democracy can no longer deliver since the modern society lacks homogeneity and one “general will”, instead “consist[ing] of groups and bodies of competing and even warring interests”. Harmel points out that this is not much of a discovery. After all, the jurists Hugo Krabbe and Léon Duguit have observed as much before (as has Marx, for that matter, even though the reviewer, cagily, does not mention him). And Sutton’s prediction of an era in which democracy shall be superseded by “authoritarian aristocracy” (i.e. “the rule of a selected, trained and privileged elite”) does not hold water. For how do you keep such a dispensation going? asks Harmel. Yet he will not mount a full-blown attack against a logical corollary of Sutton’s theory, namely, a need for an oppressive apparatus and limits himself to saying that “Mr Sutton is inclined to lose himself in vague generalities”, whereas “politics has to stand with its feet particularly deep down among the facts”.

Anarchy or Hierarchy by a Spanish essayist and historian similarly advances a “semi-totalitarian state”.²⁴² And, in fact, there is, according to Harmel, much to be said for its idea of “sacrific[ing] equality” in order to preserve “the social heritage of liberty”.

²³⁷ “Trotsky ‘Growls’ at New Russia As Bad as The Old?,” review of *Revolution Betrayed*, by Leon Trotsky, *Star*, Jul 6, 1937.

²³⁸ A. H. M., “The World’s Affairs,” review of *Native Administration in Nigeria*, by Margery Perham, *Star*, Jan 5, 1938, 10. Harmel writes that Perham’s study of indirect rule in Nigeria—though insufficiently critical and, occasionally, “jingoistic”—“has value for South Africa with its policy of political segregation and problems of native administration”.

²³⁹ Claud Sutton, *Farewell to Rousseau. A Critique of Liberal Democracy* (London: Christophers, 1937); Salvador de Madariaga, *Anarchy or Hierarchy* (London: Macmillan, 1937).

²⁴⁰ A. H. M., “Democracy on Trial,” *Star*, Jun 8, 1937, 8.

²⁴¹ Martin Connolly, *Hitler’s Munich Man: The Fall of Admiral Sir Barry Domvile* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword 2017), xii.

²⁴² Tracy Chevalier, ed. *Encyclopedia of the Essay* (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 515–516.

Unfortunately, Madariga, too, is “drifting in clouds, be they beautiful clouds”. When Harmel vaguely concludes that the two books represent “a new tendency in political thought toward aristocracy”, one cannot once again escape the impression much has been left unsaid.

The same non-committal (and scrupulously evasive) tone informs the brief reviews that follow in the same text. Harmel, for instance, welcomes a book by two German authors as one “interesting for nothing so much as for the presentation of the orthodox Nazi standpoint”.²⁴³ The non-committal pose is gone, however, as soon as he comes to what for him represents, it would seem, the way out of the crises of liberal democracy. Indeed, he waxes propagandistic even as he stresses the scientificity of the socialist project. The book under review is *The Position of Women in the USSR*:

The aim of the author in this book is not only to show how the principle of full equality for women is being carried out in the Soviet Union, but also to investigate the whole subject in a scientific way. The result is a highly illuminating study, backed by a good deal of statistical data, which afford the reader an accurate insight into the path upon which the USSR have placed woman in Russia, a path which leads to the widest possible assimilation of women into Socialist construction, and their fullest cultural and social development.²⁴⁴

When he sat down to write a review of Reuben Osborn’s *Freud and Marx*, Harmel had not yet embraced Soviet repudiation of whole branches of psychology as “a bourgeois pseudoscience”.²⁴⁵ True, he laments “the enormous amount of trash written under the name of psycho-analysis” and one can sense his lack of faith in Freudianism. But the “clumsy probings of the Freudians” would only earn his explicit contempt much later.²⁴⁶ At this stage, he does not mind admitting Freud and Marx are “the two most influential prophets of modern times”. Nevertheless, Osborn’s attempt at marrying Marxism and psychoanalysis, Harmel believes, comes a cropper. For two reasons. Firstly, Freud’s discoveries are too fresh to be “critically appreciated”. Secondly, like the majority of contemporary communists, Osborn exhibits a very poor grasp of what Marx really meant by dialectics, a method purportedly utilised in the book to effect a fusion of the two theories. According to Harmel, the German thinker “was essentially idealistic, in spite of the scorn that is poured on this word”. Whoever wishes fully to understand him must study Hegel: “to pretend to be able to cast the whole history of mankind into the pea-and-thimble trick

²⁴³ G. Kurt Johannsen and H. H. Kraft, *Germany’s Colonial Problem* (London: Butterworth, 1937).

²⁴⁴ G. N. Serebrennikov, *The Position of Women in the USSR* (London: Gollancz, 1937).

²⁴⁵ IBH; cf. Raymond A. Bauer, *The New Man in Soviet Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1952), 116–127.

²⁴⁶ Harmel, *Olive Schreiner*, 3.

of the current interpretation of dialectic is merely to be ridiculous. There is more to the dialectic—and to Marx—than meets the eye of most Communists”. Osborn’s application of psychoanalytical concepts of *id*, *ego*, and *super-ego* to the problems of “class consciousness” and “class hatred” is superficially analogical and therefore fruitless. Economic aspects of problems, indeed, tend to be over-emphasised by communists. What we need instead, though, is reason rather than psychology. Once we understand Marx through Hegel, we shall not only be in a position to revise psychoanalysis, but safe from trying to interpret social reality in such psychoanalytic terms as the “‘emotional reactions’ and fatalistic ‘predispositions’”.²⁴⁷

Harmel strikes a similarly disapproving note when he finds fault with a new volume on Marxism, an “infant” of a philosophy, for “an astonishing lack of a sense of humour” and resorting to “glib phrases like movement of matter” that “no critically trained philosopher will let... pass “. “To use phrases like that,” maintains Harmel, “is to run away from the perennial problems of philosophy”.²⁴⁸

The three or four texts in *The Star* identifiable as Harmel’s are very little to go by. The genre of a review, too, renders them less illuminating of his ideological stance than would otherwise be the case: one can at most hope to catch a glimpse of his unstated, understated or vaguely stated position through the text of another. With this caveat in mind, a number of observations can be made all the same. Harmel is as deeply interested in current affairs, political, economic, social, as ever—even more so, it would appear, than he is in fiction. He has given up on bourgeois democracy and is ready for a better system. Right-wing proposals are, unsurprisingly, not to his liking. As he already seems to buy uncritically into some of the USSR success stories, it is quite clear he views socialism as practised in Russia as the way forward. This is, however, not to say he is already a Stalinist. The indication of anti-Stalinism from not long before as well as the possibility of his having authored the Trotsky review may suggest his ideological position is not yet quite consolidated and coherent. If he, on the contrary, produced the sympathetic notice of Feuchtwanger’s travelogue, his posture towards the USSR must have only just changed or been on the turn. Whatever the case, one cannot overlook that Harmel regards critically the

²⁴⁷ A. H. M., “The Influence of Freud and Marx,” review of *Freud and Marx: A Dialectical Study*, by Reuben Osborn, *Star*, Jun 15, 1937, 8. J. D. Bernal, the Irish communist-scientist, makes points similar to those of Harmel. Unlike the latter, though, he bluntly denounces Freudianism as “paralysing action”, as “a creed of escape into an inner world of complexes and repressions and away from social and economic realities”. J. D. Bernal, “Psycho-Analysis and Marxism,” review of *Freud and Marx: A Dialectical Study*, by Reuben Osborn, *LM*, Jul 1937, 435–437.

²⁴⁸ A. H. M., “Marxist Ideals. Translation from the Russian,” review of *A Textbook of Marxist Philosophy*, *Star*, Aug 24, 1937, 18.

communist discourse, including a publication prepared by the Leningrad Institute of Philosophy and therefore bearing an imprimatur of the Soviet authorities.²⁴⁹ Some of these criticisms are framed in the language of academic philosophy, which speaks to his university training. Questioning arguments or competence of other communist authors, including Soviet ones, has no parallel in Harmel's textual output. But neither does his concern with "pure" philosophy.

Conclusion

This chapter traversed the period when Michael Harmel, studying at the Rhodes University College and serving a stint as *The Star* journalist, found ideological anchorage first in Douglas Credit and then in Marxist theory. Whereas the former proved fugacious, the latter was to last, although continuities exist between the two stages, such as anti-capitalism, conspirationism, and scientific pretension.

Whatever his ideological persuasion at a given stage, from 1934 onwards Harmel writings largely sound a clarion call for a radical changeover of what he believes to be a deeply iniquitous social and economic order. Indifference, ignorance, "spurious cynicism, a stilted self-consciousness... caution and lack of original ideas" disgust him, particularly in young people.²⁵⁰ His heartfelt desire for a "better world" mingled with faith in the power of the press impel him to launch *The Adelphi*, engage in polemics, and opt for a journalistic rather than an academic path (and for a metropolitan rather than a provincial newspaper at that). Though he, on the face of it, places art and literature above "battles and deeds", it is his concern about public affairs and politics in the broad sense that dominates most of what he does. Through much of Harmel's early fiction and verse shines the same fiery socially-conscious mind that produced "Notes of the Month", the biting commentary on political and economic affairs. Many common threads of his journalism (individual v. mass, non-conformism v. conformism, truth v. hypocrisy, engagement v. apathy) we encounter here also. Both in journalistic and creative writing, he is strikingly self-conscious in his rebelliousness ("The Birdman", "Two Laments", "Old Warriors").²⁵¹

Rhodes might not have been the best of universities. Professors dictated their lectures, students were not required to read or write much, and those of them who went on to further

²⁴⁹ M. Shirokov, ed. *A Textbook of Marxist Philosophy*, trans. A. C. Mosley and rev. and ed. by John Lewis (London: Gollancz, 1937), 7.

²⁵⁰ M. A. H., "University Literature," *Adelphi*, no. 4 (Aug 1934): 7.

²⁵¹ See also Doyle, *Olive Schreiner*, 10; "Voices of Angry Men," 9.

their education in England were in for a shock.²⁵² Harmel’s “intellectual arrogance” on the one hand, and his marginality within the leftist culture of London (pointed out in the next chapter) on the other, may be two opposite sides of the “false stature” he acquired within the small RUC community.²⁵³ He had the good fortune to meet at least three remarkable academics whose influence on his thought and discourse is pronounced. That said, not only did he not fully embrace the schools of thought each of them represented, but essentially launched a powerful attack on the inconsistent liberalism of his economics professor (“A History of Rise of Schlenterism”, “Vereeniging”).²⁵⁴ On the whole, it would seem that if his time in Grahamstown proved “academically expansive and exciting, with the mind reaching out beyond itself towards the main currents of world thought in expanding spirals”,²⁵⁵ this was, once again, in large measure Harmel’s own doing. As much can be said of his political maturation. Although he was not the only socialist or even Marxist at the university, in political vibrancy Rhodes cannot compare with, say, Wits in the same period.²⁵⁶ And Harmel, albeit alive to the power of political organisation, was not a joiner yet anyway.

His conversion to communism was comparatively speedy, but gradual and uneven. As an apologist for the doctrine, he assumes a pose that would become his standard rhetorical stratagem—that of a disembodied voice of indisputable “science”. Elsewhere, though, his approach to communism and Marxism seems inflected by his philosophical background which leads him to animadvert upon some of the contemporary communist discourse, including that of Soviet provenance. The new-found creed of his is, withal, for a period of time attended by misgivings about aspects of Bolshevism, particularly Stalinist methods of government, as an article in *The Rhodian* and, possibly, *The Star*, indicates. He is, nonetheless, impressed by the supposed successes of the Soviets in building of a new society.

Whereas Gordon-Forbes, while still living in Grahamstown, “did not approximate natives of South Africa with the working classes of Great Britain whose plight so preoccupied [her] mind”,²⁵⁷ Monte Shapiro’s “political views were formed in response to exploitation of black people in Africa as well as economic injustices and the rise of

²⁵² Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 24, 31.

²⁵³ IBH; Rose-Innes, *Writing in the Dust*, 222.

²⁵⁴ Jack Simons claims that as an MA student he “moved more and more towards a radical position, mainly because the teaching was done by liberals and [he] rejected their approach”. Interview by J. Frederikse (transcript, 1) (SAHO: JFC/AL2460).

²⁵⁵ Rose-Innes, *Writing in the Dust*, 217–218.

²⁵⁶ Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 14–16.

²⁵⁷ Rose-Innes, *Writing in the Dust*, 225.

fascism”.²⁵⁸ Whatever the exact development in Harmel’s case, he was clearly one of those able to apply class analysis to the situation of the African from early on. Having mercilessly exposed the true nature of the country’s racial order in a satirical piece, Harmel adjures in his own voice that anyone serious about race equality needs to put money where their mouth is and become “traitor[s] to [there] class and race and accept the Black as an equal and human being”. Far from being only an intellectual and ideological proclamation, these words chart Harmel’s future trajectory in politics and life.

²⁵⁸ D. Shapiro, e-mail to author, Jan 8, 2017.

Chapter 4/ THE PARTY IN ACTION: LONDON AND JOHANNESBURG (1938–1940)

Introduction

This chapter deals with Harmel's *Wanderjahr* in London, particularly his stint at *The Daily Worker* and his ideological formation within the Communist Party of Great Britain. It closes with a potted biography of Ray Adler, a Jewish immigrant proletarian. Michael and Ray got married in 1940 and went on to be tied in what was, in the end, unhappy, yet politically and psychologically highly meaningful marriage.

The fifteen months Harmel spent in London were of tremendous significance in moulding his political self. The capital of the British Empire in the late thirties had been greatly politicised by the growing possibility of another armed conflict. The CPGB managed to accrete an unprecedented number of sympathisers who were impressed by its defence of democracy. However small the Party was in numbers, its zealous, counter-cultural milieu could endow its members with a total identity.¹ Harmel joined the CPGB before he did the CPSA. It was in the context of the former that he was processed into a committed, self-sacrificing, and hopeful fighter for a historic cause. A non-conformist on the strength of his intellect, anti-racism, and social outrage, he had been poised to make the leap of faith by the time he arrived in Europe. London rounded off this development by effecting in him a switch from an inconsistent, non-affiliated communist Marxist to a Leninist communist, from a footloose radical intellectual to a soldier. In its depth and breadth, a conversion of this description could not have occurred in South Africa at that time. The CPSA was yet to recover strength after years of infighting. In fact, its revival in the Transvaal in the early years of the war was to be the work of young communists, including Harmel who had been groomed and instructed by comrades overseas.

His adoption into the fold of a disciplined, family-like organisation that accounted itself a midwife of a new and better era was facilitated by his prior emotional odyssey and would have, conversely, far-reaching implications for his personal identity. I have previously lamented the dearth of "ego-documents". In research for the present chapter this autobiographical silence made itself felt even more pronouncedly. Paradoxically, though, the very same chapter, charting the birth of a Leninist revolutionary, makes the silence speak. For it would appear the conspicuous absence of a self-referring voice we are faced with in Harmel's

¹ Thomas Linehan, *Communism in Britain. From the Cradle to the Grave* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007), 2, 4.

case does not derive merely from his character, busyness or demand for secrecy.² It can also be interpreted as a symptom of who he thought he was, who he wanted to become and whom this middle-class individualist in his public discourse *kenotically* (to borrow a theological term) turned himself into: a humbled, self-effacing servant of a supra-individual cause.³ His marriage to Ray, authentically working class, logically complements the process begun in England.

To London

Harmel must have left South Africa by mid-July for the SS Edinburgh Castle, aboard which he sailed, put in at Southampton on August 1, 1938. The date of departure was so timed as to see him arrive in time for the wedding of his cousin Muriel to which he was dispatched as the representative of the South African branch of the family. He was meant to stay in England for about a year. Not only did his father want to “test him out”, he also hoped that time overseas might aid in ridding Michael of his communist leanings, including, perhaps, risky support for African emancipation.⁴ That being the case, apprenticeship on *The Daily Worker* was hardly a part of the plan. True, one finds no sign of disapproval in a letter by Arthur in which he reports Mick’s “tremendous happiness on his job”.⁵ As no details are forthcoming, however, it is possible that his son, at least for a time, kept him in the dark about the true nature of his situation. Helen Lewis, though aware that Harmel had sold *The Daily Worker* in London, did not make any mention of his journalism when interviewed years later.

Britain was then a standard destination for fledgling South African journalists. The future writer and a colleague of Harmel’s on *The Guardian* Jack Cope worked during the same period as the London correspondent for the “Morning Group” of SA newspapers.⁶ His brother John covered the Italo-Ethiopian War for the *Manchester Guardian*.⁷ Herman Bosman made England his home in 1934–1940, serving as the deputy editor of *The Sunday Critic*.⁸ Fleet Street was the point of departure for the South African-born poet and sociologist Charles

² A self-reflective aside in a letter to his daughter reads: “God damn it, this letter is full of my least favourite word—the first personal pronoun” (Feb 28, 1974, MHP: A3300/B).

³ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Teologický slovník* [Dictionary of Theology], trans. František Jirsa et al. (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2009), 162; Ken Jowitt, “The Leninist Phenomenon,” in *New World Disorder. The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 3–4. *Kenosis* is the self-abasement of Jesus Christ by becoming incarnate.

⁴ UK, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1878–1960, *Board of Trade: Commercial and Statistical Department and Successors: Inwards Passenger Lists*; Class: BT26; Piece: 1164; Item: 41 (NA); William H. Miller, *Picture History of British Ocean Liners, 1900 to the Present* (New York: Dover, 2001), 10; H. Lewis interview by T. Adler, 1975 (MHP: A3300/B); Ray Harmel, *Ray’s Story* (1993) (unpubl. ms), 42 (MHP: A3300/C2); R. Adler [Harmel], interview by C. Purkey, 1990 (transcript, 25) (CPP: A1984/E32). Muriel’s fiancé was a German refugee—see Muriel and Bruno to Ted, Jul 17, 1940 (MHP: A3300/B).

⁵ A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Dec 8, 1938.

⁶ James Zug, *Guardian. The History of South Africa’s Extraordinary Anti-Apartheid Newspaper* (Pretoria: UNISA, 2007), 61; M. Cope, e-mail to author, Feb 12, 2018. The Morning Group embraced the *Cape Times*, *Natal Mercury*, *Rand Daily Mail*, *Sunday Times*—see P. Eric Louw, *South African Media Policy Debates of the 1990s* (Belville: Anthropos, 1993), 167.

⁷ Zug, *Guardian*, 45; JPCP (ICSL), accessed Feb 22, 2013, <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/f281acd6-0589-3943-ac90-67bdd9eaf4e2>.

⁸ Valerie Rosenberg, *Herman Charles Bosman. Between the Lines* (Cape Town: Struik, 2005), 115–128; Stephen Gray, *Life Sentence. A Biography of Herman Charles Bosman* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 2005), 198–220.

Madge.⁹ The same is true of Ivor Benson, an anti-Semite collaborator of Ian Smith.¹⁰ Another South African writer, Peter Abrahams, arrived in England in October 1940, soon to find a job as a sub-editor for *The Daily Worker*.¹¹

The United and Popular Fronts

By the time Harmel reached London, the Communist Party of Great Britain had abandoned the ultra-left policy of the Class against Class. The Comintern had changed tack in 1934. The wake-up call came with the electoral triumph of Hitler which, it was believed, might have been averted if the Communists and Social Democrats had joined forces.¹² The member organisations received instructions to set about building a United and, later, Popular Front in order to confront Fascism and Nazism.

In Britain, the new policy was calculated to result in the replacement of the incumbent government with “a popular front administration which would ally with Soviet Russia”.¹³ This bid came to nought. Communists proved unable to pull off an alliance with the Independent Labour Party and Socialist League, let alone affiliate with the Labour Party. The courtship of the Liberal Party and disgruntled Tories had even less chance of success.¹⁴ However, the CPGB’s anti-fascist crusade bore much fruit. One of its highlights was the Battle of Cable Street in October 1936. The CPGB also played a crucial part in the Aid Spain Campaign—its press never left off attacking both the Non-Intervention Agreement and military support to Francoists from Germany and Italy that violated it. Even more significant, communists made up a large percentage of the 2500 men in the British Battalion. This uncompromising stance towards Fascism and Nazism represented a key factor in attracting mainly young people to the Party.¹⁵ Owing to the influx of, in particular, “bourgeois intellectuals” and artists, the membership increased considerably in this period.¹⁶ To be sure, this development did not turn

⁹ On Madge see *New Writing*, New Series 2 (Spring 1939): x and CMA, accessed Feb 23, 2018, <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/994d5445-1d39-3612-806c-ecb1b9409382>.

¹⁰ On Benson see Ciarán Ó Maoláin, *The Radical Right: A World Directory* (Burnt Mill: Longman, 1987), 187, 244, 302; Mark Weber, “Ivor Benson. Obituary,” *Journal of Historical Review* 13, no. 3 (1993): 21, accessed Feb 23, 2018, <http://codoh.com/library/document/2422/>.

¹¹ Peter Abrahams, *The Black Experience in the 20th Century: An Autobiography and Meditation* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001), 20–48; E. K. Akyeampong et al., eds., *DAB*, vol. 1 (New York: OUP, 2011), 51; KV 2/2504 (C. Palme Dutt).

¹² Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within. The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party* (London: Merlin, 1999), 46; Harry McShane, *No Mean Fighter* (London: Pluto, 1978), 214.

¹³ Jean Jones, “The Anti-Colonial Politics and Policies of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920–51,” PhD thesis (University of Wolverhampton, 1997), 145.

¹⁴ Keith Laybourn and Dylan Murphy, *Under the Red Flag. A History of Communism in Britain, c. 1849–1991* (Stroud: Sutton 1999), 78, 80–83, 85, 87; Willie Thompson, *Good Old Cause. British Communism 1920–1991* (London: Pluto, 1992), 53, 56–57; Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow 1920–1943* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 225ff.

¹⁵ E. P. Thompson, interview by A. Whitehead (Dec 1, 1991), accessed Feb 15, 2018, <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/ep-and-dorothy-thompson.html>; G. Matthews, interview by A. Whitehead (Dec 2, 1991); D. Healey, interview by A. Whitehead (Dec 13, 1991) (BL).

¹⁶ Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1927–1941* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985), 204–210; Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1958), 80–81. But cf. Laybourn and Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, 78–92.

the CPGB into a mass organisation along the lines of the British Labour Party.¹⁷ Nor could the CPGB compare with other communist parties in Europe.¹⁸ However, communist influence was in disproportion to its numbers. For years, the Party managed to galvanise and orient a substantial part of the public-spirited stratum of the British society.¹⁹

The main vehicle for this influence was the Left Book Club, to all intents and purposes a communist affair. Over the period of ten years, its titles sold 6 million copies. By 1939, 1,200 LBC groups had been in existence, commanding a membership of 57,000. Far from limiting themselves to book talk, they held lectures, screened movies and staged anti-fascist campaigns. The Club produced *Left News*, organised Russian language classes as well as tours of the USSR. The most high-profile of these associated activities were the LBC rallies. Addressed by communists, Liberals, Christians, and wayward Labour Party members, they came as close to the Popular Front as it could get.²⁰

Leftist London

The LBC activities aside, 1930s London bears description as a hive of leftist culture. Much of it had originated in the Party's self-imposed isolation earlier in the decade and included cafés and restaurants, cinemas, theatres, and bookshops. In October 1933, the CPGB acquired Marx House in 37a Clerkenwell Green. Within three years, its Workers' School, designed as an answer to Labour Colleges, had enrolled 1,533 students. The curriculum included courses in Russian Revolution, the history of the CPSU, essentials of Marxism, history, and policies of trade unionism. Short courses of the later years, led by communists and "cryptos", addressed the topical issues of Spain, the British Empire, science, class system, and political economy. One-off lectures dealt with India, cinematography, and literature. Marx House published *International Book Reviews*. It had a fast-growing library.²¹

¹⁷ In 1939, the LP had a membership of 2,663,067 (including, however, trade union, co-operative, and other society membership) – see Henry Pelling and Alastair J. Reid, *A Short History of Labour Party* (London: Palgrave, 1996), 198.

¹⁸ James Eaden and David Renton, *The Communist Party of Great Britain since 1920* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 62; Thorpe, *British CP and Moscow*, 243.

¹⁹ D. Cox, interview by A. Whitehead, Jul 1, 1990 (BL); Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, xi, 62; William Rust, *The Story of The Daily Worker* (London: People Press, 1949), 41; cf. Jack Cope, Diary, Sept 9, 1936 (JCP: 1987.10.2.3, ASAML).

²⁰ George Barrick Neavill, "Victor Gollancz the Left Book Club," *Library Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (Jul 1971): 201–208; Thorpe, *British CP and Moscow*, 228; Richard Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936–1939* (London: Routledge, 2004), 35; Jasmine Rose-Innes, *Dog Star* (unpubl. ms, n.d.), 31.

²¹ Alun Howkins, "Class against Class: The Political Culture of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1930–35," in *Class, Culture, and Social Change. A New View of the 1930s*, Frank Gloversmith, ed. (Atlantic Highlands: Harvester, 1980), 249–250; Branson, *History of CPGB*, 211; Collin Chambers, *The Story of Unity Theatre* (London: Lawrence Wishart, 1989), 124–161; R. M. Fox, *Smoky Crusade* (London: Hogarth Press, 1938), 180–184; Margaret Cohen, "Revolutionary Education Revived: The Communist Challenge to the Labour Colleges, 1933–1945," in *Search for Enlightenment, The Working Class and Adult Education in the Twentieth Century*, Brian Simon, ed. (Leicester: National Inst. of Adult Cont. Education, 1992), 137–152; David Gerard, "The Marx Memorial Library, Clerkenwell Green, London," *Library Review* 51, no. 8 (2002): 417–419, accessed Mar 26, 2018, <https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/00242530210443163>.

A more high-brow centre of leftist thought, represented especially by Harold Laski, was the London School of Economics. Scholarship of Africa flourished at its Department of Social Anthropology. Here Bronisław Malinowski could count among his students in this period Jomo Kenyatta, W. Arthur Lewis, Eslanda Robeson, and Z. K. Matthews. In 1936, Jack Simons finished his PhD under Malinowski's supervision.²²

Harmel had chosen journalism in preference to a spell at the LSE—a decision suggestive of his inclinations and priorities. He, however, designated himself as a “student” as late as September 29, 1939, and it would have been certainly easy for him to drop by and make academic contacts in case he got any second thoughts. The South African Fabian Julius Lewin, a protégé of both Laski and Malinowski, would spend hours in the LSE common room for the research students before being able to secure a lectureship in 1938. During vacations, Eric Hobsbawm would use the LSE library and make acquaintance with “central Europeans and colonials” whose presence, in his opinion, made the school less provincial than Cambridge.²³

Having come from a comparative backwater, Harmel would have plunged himself eagerly into this vibrant arena of politics and culture. That would explain why—unlike his fellow South Africans Charles Madge and Fay King Goldie—he did not contribute to *New Writing, Poetry and the People* (1938–1940) or, as far as we can ascertain, any other major literary periodical.²⁴ True, his creative writing had taken a backseat by then. Working for the *DW*, attended by political education, would have kept him busy too. Yet his traineeship on the newspaper did not last very long and he did not produce much in the way of political journalism other than, possibly, anonymous articles of informative nature. The most plausible reason for his authorial silence is thus, indeed, that—apart from carrying his party duties—he was sucked into this heady, highly politicised, and intellectually stimulating milieu. Jack Cope later recounted:

The young South Africans came to England full of excitement, of grave inquiry, bringing all they had greedily drunk up from books and from endless talk to compare with the reality. And they were dazed—

²² Ralf Dahrendorf, *LSE: A History of the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1895–1995* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 196–266; Marc Matera, *Black London. The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 311–361, ProQuestEbrary; Ayanda Wiseman Nombila, “Christianity, Education and African Nationalism: An Intellectual Biography of Z. K. Matthews (1901–1968),” MA thesis (UWC, 2013), 68; Hugh Macmillan, *Jack Simons: Teacher, Scholar, Comrade* (Auckland Park: Jacana 2016): 22–26. See also “Obituary — Bronisław Malinowski: B. August 7, 1884; D. May 16, 1942,” *Oceania* 13, no. 1 (Sept 1942): 104–105.

²³ 1939 Register of England & Wales (NA UK); Noam J. Pines, “Professor Julius Lewin (1907–1984),” *African Studies* 44, no. 1 (1985): 98; Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times. A Twentieth-century Life* (London: Panteon, 2002), 121.

²⁴ See *New Writing* II (Spring 1939) and III (Christmas 1939). On Goldie see David Adey et al., eds., *Companion to South African English Literature* (Johannesburg: Donker, 1986), 91; Leaflets, Brochures, and Newspaper Clippings from Agitation-Propaganda Section of CI for South Africa, Jul 24, 1936–Jan 17, 1939 (ГІАСПІИ 495.14.359).

things were bigger, more complex, infinitely more profound and moving than anything in their experience.²⁵

The Daily Worker

The Daily Worker commenced publication on New Year's Day 1930.²⁶ It was intended as the mouthpiece of the Party's "independent revolutionary leadership" after the Comintern had ordered its affiliates to refrain from any more approaches to "non-revolutionary" trade unions and non-communist Left.²⁷ Accordingly, the *DW* in the early years went out of its way to set itself apart from the "bourgeois" press. The choice of the first editor-in-chief is a case in point. William Rust possessed no prior experience as a journalist. And that was precisely his foremost asset for communist ideologues perceived traditional journalism as potentially corrupting.²⁸ Most of the other editors, workers and craftsmen by profession, similarly had to learn on the job. Worker correspondents represented another connection with working class life. Those few members of the staff who had cut their journalistic teeth on Fleet Street were kept on a short leash. As a result, the daily more than anything else resembled, to quote a CPGB leader, a "Party... bulletin". Small circulation compelled the leadership to adopt a more realistic attitude so in time it became possible to engage seasoned newspapermen who were not even Party members.²⁹

Though Rust would have us believe the paper, boycotted by wholesalers and advertisers, was kept afloat by a fighting fund and "a strict business-like approach",³⁰ research showed that up to the latter part of the 1930s, the *DW* had been in receipt of Soviet pecuniary backing. Indeed, at one point it swallowed as much as fifty percent of all the "Moscow gold" bound for Britain.³¹ One can assume, however, the money went towards distribution costs rather than wages. The former were, owing to the boycott that included debarment of the *DW* from newspaper trains, very high.³²

²⁵ Jack Cope, "Boy from Natal. Portrait of Geoffrey Long," *Contrast* 1, no. 4 (1961): 37.

²⁶ Rust, *Story of DW*, 9.

²⁷ Kevin Morgan, "The Communist Party and *The Daily Worker* 1930–1956," in *Opening the Books. Essays on the Social and Cultural History of British Communism*, Geoff Andrews et al. eds. (London: Pluto Press, 1995), 142–159 (for the quote); Thompson, *Good Old Cause*, 50; Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, 31, 36, 53; Becket, *Enemy Within*, 36–37.

²⁸ Morgan, "Communist Party and *DW*," 143–144; Herbert Pimlott, "The Radical Type? G. Allen Hutt, the Communist Party and the Politics of Journalistic Practice," *Journalism Practice* 7, no. 1 (2013): 81–95

²⁹ Rust, *Story of DW*, 9, 24; Morgan, "The Communist Party and *DW*," 144–145; Pimlott, "Radical Type," 84; Morgan, "Communist Party and *DW*," 146f, 148; Cockburn, *I, Claud Cockburn*, 152–153.

³⁰ Rust, *Story of DW*, 15–16, 42 (for the quote); Ernie Pountney, *For the Socialist Cause. The Class Struggle in the Times of My Forebears and Myself* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1973), 64.

³¹ Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, 39; Thorpe, *British CP and Moscow*, 243; KV 2/1187 (Campbell). See also Beckett, *Enemy Within*, 44f; Morgan, "Communist Party and *DW*," 144; Laybourn and Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, 86. Cf. Douglas Hyde, *Dedication and Leadership Techniques* (Washington: Mission Secretariat, 1963), 6, accessed Jun 7, 2018, <https://www.garynorth.com/Hyde.pdf>.

³² Francis, Producing the *DW*, Nov 16, 1936, 2–3 (ПГАСПИ 495.20.73). Cf. Cockburn, *I, Claud Cockburn*, 216–217.

Aside from channelling finances to the CPGB, the Communist International closely watched the layout and the contents of the *Worker*. It would take British communists to task whenever the paper fell short of its peculiar standards.³³ In a memorandum of June 1936, the Comintern's Cadre Department ascribed "anti-Party character and scandalousness" to the caption "Stalin. When he dies, the Soviet regime will continue to exist". To add insult to injury, the picture it accompanied was "smudgy and very difficult to distinguish". The CI officials further took issue with an inadequate spin put on a story of the Moskva Hotel a photograph of which allegedly made it look "rather like a very ordinary sort of a big house". All this demonstrated a "direct influence of bourgeois journalism, if not the direct work of the class enemy". The root cause was easy to detect. It lay in the recent recruitment of journalists with credentials from the capitalist press. The Cadre Department had already attempted to have Cockburn and Harvey removed from "the responsible editorship and from the editorial in general" citing their "very inadequate idea of what [is Leninism and what is Party work]".³⁴ Though the General Secretary stood his ground about Cockburn, it was probably to humour Moscow that a political overhaul ensued with R. Palme Dutt assuming editorship.³⁵

The Comintern is documented as having wielded influence on other occasions too. The dismissal of Dave Springhall as the editor-in-chief in the "early years" was claimed by R. W. Robson to have been the CI's doing. In 1938, J. R. Campbell was summoned to Moscow as his articles were supposedly "deviating from the Party line".³⁶

Professionalism/Ideology

It has been noted that the CPGB leaders gradually became more flexible in their attitude to enlisting bourgeois journalists.³⁷ Are we then to take it that Harmel's prior experience went down well with his *DW* betters? Whatever the Comintern had to say on this point, the continued employment of Cockburn and the use of Fleet Street volunteers at that time would certainly indicate as much. There is, on the other hand, a testimony to the contrary by Charlotte Haldane.³⁸ The career of Allen Hutt (1901–1973), too, exemplifies the enduring power of ideology. An experienced pressman and typography expert, Hutt was more than anyone else responsible for the visual aspect of *The Daily Worker*. During the war, he turned it into "a

³³ Beckett, *Enemy Within*, 45, 76, 83; Morgan, "Communist Party and *DW*," 148; KV2/1769 (Cox).

³⁴ Krayevsky and Loba, Memorandum on the Work and the Workers of the *Daily Worker*, Jun 9, 1936, 2, 3 (РГАЦИИ 495.20.73).

³⁵ Cf. Cox, *Personal and Political Recollections*, 55 (CP/IND/MISC/2/3); Francis, London *Daily Worker*, Nov 16, 1936, 1 (РГАЦИИ 495.20.73).

³⁶ KV2/1596 (Springhall); KV 2/1187 (Campbell).

³⁷ Pimlott, "The Radical Type?," 81–83.

³⁸ Morgan, "The Communist Party and *DW*," 148; Krayevsky and Loba, Memorandum on the Work and the Workers of the *DW*, 2; Charlotte Haldane, *Truth Will Out* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1949), 99. See also 176, 289.

disciplined, efficient newspaper along the Fleet Street model of professionalism”. He went on to become a world authority on newspaper design and for twenty-four years served as editor of the National Union of Journalists’ periodical. On the *DW*, however, chief sub-editorship was the most he could hope for before hitting the glass ceiling. His impeccable ideological track record did not help.³⁹

Prior to the advent, with Hutt, of serious professional training,⁴⁰ the problems of style, composition, genres, sources, etc. appear to have been dealt with rather generally. Ideological considerations were inseparable therefrom:

Each member of my reporting staff was encouraged to begin his day with a quick reading of the rest of the Press. In particular, he was expected to see his opposite numbers on the other papers as direct rivals and compare their stories with his own. And as he judged whether he or they had done a better job he had to apply to himself a double test. Firstly, his story must be as well written, easily understood and well informed as the best in the capitalist papers. Secondly, it must... have provided the *Daily Worker* reader with a Marxist interpretation of the situation or a Communist guide to action...⁴¹

A Good Communist...

Editorial offices were not the only setting in which Harmel received political instruction. Joining the Party not long after his arrival,⁴² he was put on probation, obliged to attend Marxism-Leninism classes, and perhaps even subjected to some sort of moral catechesis.⁴³ All that would have been preceded by, or contemporaneous with, an embodied initiation into the Party life.

When Harmel’s hawking of *The Daily Worker* gets mentioned,⁴⁴ it is not appreciated what rôle exactly this activity played in moulding values, opinions, and identities of neophytes, in completing their conversion and sealing their commitment. In truth, it was a form of a coming out:

...it is of profound psychological significance. I sold communist papers... I hated it... you try to bring yourself to shout *Daily Worker*, and the first time it sounds like a squeak and not like your voice at all... Here is an act of tremendous significance. [The new member] is making a public witness for a new thing which he has accepted. He may feel a fool as he does it, but he begins to see the significance of it when he has been there for a little while. People pass by... Sooner or later, too, someone who is not just an abusive critic but an intelligent critic comes along and starts to ask questions... This is tremendously important

³⁹ Pimlott, “The Radical Type?,” 81–95; MEPO 38/50.

⁴⁰ Pimlott, “The Radical Type?,” 87.

⁴¹ Hyde, *Dedication and Leadership. Learning from the Communists* (London: Sands, 1968), 131.

⁴² “Some Notes on the Communist Party of South Africa,” 15 (RCP); *WMR* archive (РГАСПИ 577).

⁴³ Douglas Hyde, *I Believed. An Autobiography of a Former British Communist* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1950), 76; Linehan, *Communism in Britain*, 95, 103, 129.

⁴⁴ “Michael Harmel,” *SAHA*, accessed Jun 6, 2018, <http://sahistory.org.za/people/michael-alan-harmel>; Zug, *Guardian*, 51.

because he has not got the answers. He is not supposed to have the answers at that stage. This is all part of the operation.⁴⁵

With distribution hampered by the wholesalers' boycott, hawking served a very practical purpose, making up around 10 percent of the sales. Yet even after the boycott ended, selling of the *Worker* remained "a regular task" of British comrades. Taken most seriously and more often than not coupled with proselytism, it helped to perpetuate their commitment and along with other political activities tended to flow over into most spheres of their lives.⁴⁶

The South African Communist Party followed this model.⁴⁷ Harmel himself replicated the same activity at home, especially when, much later and for a brief period only, he found a job outside the Party apparatus.⁴⁸ As he was to write: "In Britain, it is the *Daily Worker*, in France *l'Humanité*, in Moscow *Pravda*—no matter where he is, a good Communist will always be found selling progressive papers to his fellow-workers at his place of employment..."⁴⁹

Changing One's Class Skin⁵⁰

In the case of the communist journalists, agitating and distributing Party material, including *DW*, represented a form of inoculation to "prevent any negative influences of professional journalism from taking root".⁵¹ Intellectuals and students, for their part, were to be exposed to the wholesome radiation of the working class,⁵² though it had gone out of fashion to declare that an intellectual must "*forget that he is an intellectual... and remember only that he is a Communist*".⁵³ Whether or not Harmel was required to hawk the paper in working class neighbourhoods and outside factory entrances, encounters with representatives of this group could not be avoided. Not only had most of the *DW* editors a "proletarian" background, the Party itself still retained, for all the influx of middle-class recruits, a predominantly working-class character. Dealings of this description could have been awkward, if not unsettling, for non-proletarian communists. Consider, for instance, an episode recounted by Haldane who had a fall-out with a fellow comrade over a Cezanne reproduction. The same writer mentions

⁴⁵ Hyde, *Dedication and Leadership Techniques*, 15.

⁴⁶ Francis, Producing *DW*, 2; Rust, *Story of DW*, 13; Morgan, "The Communist Party and *DW*," 149; Hyde, *Dedication and Leadership*, 22–23; Hyde, *Dedication and Leadership Techniques*, 15; Linehan, *Communism in Britain*, 96, 133–134.

⁴⁷ Norman Levy, *Final Prize. My Life in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*, 2nd ed. (Cape Town: SAHA, 2013), 8–9; R. Harmel, interview by S. Neame, Sept 27, 1987, 4 (SNP: A2729/E); Les Switzer, "Socialism and the Resistance Movement," in *South Africa's Alternative Press. Voices of Protest and Resistance 1880s–1960s*, Les Switzer, ed. (Athens: Ohio UP, 1997), 286.

⁴⁸ IBH.

⁴⁹ Alan Doyle [= Harmel], "By the Way," *Guardian*, Mar 23, 1950, 4.

⁵⁰ P. Cadogan, a writer, as quoted in Kevin Morgan et al. ed. *Communists and British Society 1921–1991: People of a Special Mould* (London: Rivers Oram, 2007), 81.

⁵¹ Pimlott, "The Radical Type?" 85. Pimlott discusses the work of Adalbert Fogarasi (1891–1959) and his "The Tasks of the Communist Press" (1921). Reprinted as "The Tasks of the Communist Press," trans. Paul Breines, *Radical America* 3 (May–Jun 1969): 68–75.

⁵² Hyde, *I Believed*, 88f; Branson, *History of CPGB*, 208–209.

⁵³ R. Palme Dutt as quoted in Branson, *History of CPGB*, 206 (emphasis original). In the 1920s, intellectuals who had joined the Party were likely to have been cut down to size by being allotted menial tasks, such as chalking walls and carrying platforms. See Morgan, ed. *Communists and British Society*, 80.

compulsory classes for middle-class artists, designed to disabuse them of their bourgeois taste.⁵⁴

One is therefore minded to envisage Harmel's first immersion in the world inhabited by the working class and informed by working class values (as interpreted by the Party ideology) as disconcerting and humbling. It would have prompted an effort of self-transformation. For not a few British communists concede that they were at pains to "shed [their] bourgeois background" signified by their apparel, surnames, accent, and living environment.⁵⁵ Harmel's discourse, both private and (semi-)public, displays reverence (completely orthodox) for the proletariat with its redemptory rôle, the proletariat the "contempt" for which can "only lead to political sterility".⁵⁶ At the same time, it is rife with "protestations of contempt for all things 'bourgeois'".⁵⁷

People of the *DW*

As we have seen, some communications between the CPGB and the Comintern respecting *The Daily Worker* survive. The *DW* staff records as such are not extant, though. Due to constant police surveillance and harassment, they would have been kept to a minimum anyway. For want of such records, the length of Harmel's stint on the daily is, once again, a matter of conjecture. His letters to Arthur prove nothing else than that he was working for the *DW* in December 1938.

As a precaution against frequent lawsuits, the chief editor remained in anonymity. MI5's view on this matter is certainly no more than guesswork. Citing the Welsh unionist and a CC member Idris Cox as her source, a Party historian claims that in 1938–1939 the *DW* was first edited by R. Palme Dutt, then by Dave Springhall. When the latter was assigned to Moscow in August 1939, J. R. Campbell took over. However, in a letter to Barbara Harmel, predating the above chronology, Cox recollects that, Dutt being otherwise engaged, it was he who was in charge of the newspaper when Harmel first came to London. Cockburn likewise controverts the picture supplied in *The History of the CPGB*. According to him, Pollitt briefly held the

⁵⁴ Branson, *History of CPGB*, 208; Linehan, *Communism in Britain*, 105; Haldane, *Truth Will Out*, 308–309; Rose-Innes, *Dog Star*, 245;

⁵⁵ Linehan, *Communism in Britain*, 139; Morgan, ed. *Communists and British Society*, 81–82. According to the latter work, "bourgeois influences and defects of character [were seen as] identical". The critic Alick West confessed humbly that he was "liable to withdraw into '[himself]'—that is to dodge the class struggle". He added: "I have not carried out my theoretical work with sufficiently clear consciousness that it must be part of the struggle to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and must be guided by the needs of the struggle, not by 'my' own wishes".

⁵⁶ Michael Harmel, "Much Ado about Pasternak. A Review of *Doctor Zhivago*," *Liberation*, no. 34 (Dec 1958): 10–11; *The White People* (unpubl. ms, 1959), 220f, 314–315, 328, 381, 471 (MHP: A3300/C); A. Lerumo, "Stimulating Polemics by Woddis," review of *New Theories of Revolution*, by Jack Woddis, *AC*, no. 51 (4th qtr, 1972): 122 (for the quote). Cf. Morgan, ed. *Communists and British Society*, 81.

⁵⁷ Barbara Harmel, *Thursday Child* (unpubl. ms), sect. 4, sect. 5.

position before Campbell.⁵⁸ Not that all this is of much matter. More significant than the precise order in which editors followed one another is the overall trend—one of fluctuation motivated by political considerations and dictated by Moscow.

The only member of the *DW* staff, indeed, the only British communist who ever acknowledged his acquaintance with Harmel in this period is Idris Cox. Born in 1899 in Wales,⁵⁹ Cox began to work at the age of 13. He joined the LP and as the chairman of the local Miners' Lodge obtained a scholarship for the Central Labour College financed by trade unions. There he studied economics, imperialism, dialectical materialism, strike strategy, and English literature. His encounter with the Marxist theory conducted to a painful apostasy from Nonconformist Christianity he had hitherto practised. Cox became a CPGB member in 1924, went on to organise the unemployed, and served as a full-time Party worker. From 1929, he sat on the CC. His first tenure as the *DW* editor began in 1935. Cox was prolific as a publicist and writer. Years later, Harmel hailed his *Socialist Ideas in Africa* (1966) that impugned experiments in indigenous “socialism” and upheld Marxism’s universality. Cox’s interest in Africa derived, in part, from his chairmanship of the CPGB Africa Committee of the International Department after the Second World War. It was in this capacity that he supervised a party cell of Ben Turok, Vella Pillay, and M. D. Naidoo in 1953. He was involved in the anti-apartheid movement, exchanged letters with Ruth First and was friends with Dave Kitson. Following his exile in 1963, Harmel’s contacts with Cox intensified as considerable correspondence for the South African communists went to the CPGB headquarters in King Street. Cox frequently visited Czechoslovakia and contributed to the *World Marxist Review*. The two friends would thus occasionally see each other in Prague during Harmel’s twilight year.⁶⁰ Accompanying Cox to Prague was his wife Dora (1904–2000). Daughter of a Ukraine-born English trade unionist father and a Jewish Lithuanian mother, she graduated from the Trade Union College in Moscow, evolving into an activist in her own right. If she did not know Harmel in 1938–1939, she came to know both him and his second partner, an Irish communist Kathleen O’Callaghan, after the war.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Branson, *History of CPGB*, 57; *CCB*; Cox to B. Lamb, n.d., 1975 (MHP: A3300/B) (for the quote); Cox, *Personal and Political Recollections*, 55; I. Claud Cockburn, 217–218.

⁵⁹ Unless stated otherwise, the ensuing paragraphs draw upon Idris Cox, *Personal and Political Recollections* and an e-mail from J. Cox (Mar 8, 2018).

⁶⁰ Cf. Cohen, “The Labour College Movement Between the Wars,” 105–136; Branson, *History of CPGB*, 339; KV2/1769 (I. Cox); Michael Harmel, review of *Socialist Ideas in Africa*, *LM*, Oct 1966, 491–492; Turok, *Nothing but the Truth*, 35; KV2/1770 (I. Cox); I. Cox to R. First, Jul 5, 1969 and First to Cox, Jul 7, 1969 (RFP); Cox, *Story of a Welsh Rebel*, 85; I. Cox to B. Lamb, Feb 1975; KV2/1770 (I. Cox).

⁶¹ D. Cox, interview by A. Whitehead, Jul 1, 1990 (BL) and Mar 3, 1993; J. Cox, e-mail to author, Mar 8, 2018; *CCB*. See also KV2/2062, KV2/2061 (D. Cox).

The position of Rajani Palme Dutt (1896–1974) within the CPGB remotely resembles that of Harmel in South Africa. Editor of the *Labour Monthly* and the Party’s chief ideologue, he was for decades a towering presence of British communism. Most contemporaries and historians alike describe him as “Jesuitical” and devoid of “human sympathy and idealism”, though.⁶² There is an attendant tendency to contrast him with “the broad human appeal” of Harry Pollitt (1890–1960), chairman of the Party in 1929–1939. Generally popular and respected, he, nevertheless, had his critics too. Dorothy Thompson, for one, describes him as more of a “Machiavelli”, even “bully”. Dutt was, in her opinion, “very humorous” and the YCL members like herself, studied his *Notes of the Month* devotedly—as did comrades outside the UK.⁶³

While in London, Harmel met Pollitt—who was in the habit of dropping by the editorial premises practically every day—and in a letter of condolence many years later described him as a “resolute and clear-minded champion of the working class” who “had remained as an inspiration and source of strength”.⁶⁴ They were never to meet again. In contrast, there is no explicit evidence Harmel knew Dutt personally when he first sojourned in Britain. After the war, however, the latter would serve on the editorial board of *Inkululeko*, the organ of the CPSA, which Harmel had previously co-edited. He was as well an occasional contributor to *The African Communist*.⁶⁵ Harmel, for his part, wrote for his *Labour Monthly*. The Dutt Papers contain letters in which the editors draw each other’s attention to potential contributions. Though on the first name terms, and informal as to the way of address (“Dear Raji”, “Dear Mike”), their communications are merely informative.⁶⁶

The reason why Dave Springhall (1901–1953) quit the *DW* editorship in August 1939 was his appointment as the CPGB representative to the Comintern. Earlier in that decade, he had studied at the Lenin School in Moscow and served as a political commissar in Spain. A fellow comrade portrayed “Springie” as “motived by an extreme admiration for Russia that... would have been more becoming to a Soviet citizen than to a British communist”. As well he

⁶² Matthews, interview by Whitehead. See also Hyde, *I Believed*, 160ff; John Calaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt. A Study in British Stalinism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), 10, 30; Beckett, *Enemy Within*, 29–33, 65.

⁶³ KV2/1807 (Dutt) (for the quote); D. Cox, interview by Whitehead, Jul 1, 1990 (for the first quote); Matthews, interview by Whitehead (for the second); Beckett, *Enemy Within*, 27–29, 64; Eadon and Renton, *Communist Party*, 17–18; D. Thompson, interview by Whitehead; Rusty Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting. Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics 1938–1963* (London: Viking, 1999), 36.

⁶⁴ Francis, London *Daily Worker*, 1; M. Harmel to J. Gollan, Jul 5, 1960 (CP/IND/POLL/14/4).

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Ceiriog Jones, “*Inkululeko*: Organ of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1939–1950,” in *South Africa’s Alternative Press*, Switzer, ed., 343. Dutt’s articles are “Africa and Communism,” *AC*, no. 8 (Jan 1962): 36–46; “British Labour and Africa,” *AC*, no. 24 (1st qtr, 1966): 17–31; “The Crisis of the World Capitalist Economy,” *AC*, no. 48 (1st qtr, 1972): 37–46.

⁶⁶ R. P. Dutt to M. Harmel, Mar 21, 1967; Harmel to Dutt, Nov 26, 1968; Dutt to Harmel, Dec 3, 1968 (CP/IND/DUTT/05/10). They exchanged formal letters when Dutt turned seventy—see A. Lerumo and R. Palme Dutt, “Rajani Palme Dutt Is Seventy,” *AC*, no. 26 (3rd qtr, 1966): 86–87.

might. In 1943, to his Party's embarrassment, Springhall was convicted of espionage for the USSR and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment.⁶⁷

The remaining editors (Rust, Campbell, Hutt, Holmes, Pountney), as well as some of the regular contributors (J. B. S. Haldane), were known to Harmel and would have affected him either personally or through their writings.⁶⁸ In default of a more tangible link between him and them, however, there is not much point in dwelling on their personalities and political trajectories. It may be more useful briefly to reflect on such nameless journalists as portrayed by the "renegade" Douglas Hyde who joined the *DW* in 1940. Like Michael Harmel, these men were young intellectuals of middle-class background. One of them, a dishevelled public school and university graduate, well versed in Marxism, displayed—according to Hyde—a loathing for his own class. Another, likewise an old boy, supposedly turned communist on account of emotional want, and his joining of the CPGB estranged him from his family.⁶⁹ Resemblance of their stories to Harmel's is apparent.

In and Out of the *DW* Office

What was the life and work of the *Daily Worker* personnel like? The day started at 10am with the perusal of "capitalist papers". This was followed by a meeting at which "the day's issue of the paper [was] reviewed, brief political talks engaged in and a brief summary of the current day's news made as well as a digest of the news contained in letters and reports for [*recte*: from] worker correspondents." Denied the use of newspaper trains and dependent upon passenger ones, the *Worker* went to press at 7.30pm, hours before other dailies.⁷⁰

The editorial office was—in contrast to bureaucratic and humourless climate of some CP branches—characterised by "free-and-easy atmosphere" which combined with "a certain amount of heterodoxy", even cynicism. Only the appointment of Hutt as the chief sub-editor marked the arrival of professionalism and put a stop to "happy-go-lucky atmosphere of irregular hours, constant banter and everybody mucking in".⁷¹ Hand in hand with the seeming

⁶⁷ Beckett, *Enemy Within*, 85–87; Branson, *History of CPGB*, 267; Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, 70–71; 115; Hyde, *I Believed*, 143; CCB; KV2/1596 (Springhall).

⁶⁸ On Holmes see Rust, *Story of TDW*, 25–26, CCB; KV2/1001 (Holmes, Torr). On J. R. Campbell see Matthews, interview by Whitehead; Cockburn, *I, Claud Cockburn*, 218–220. On Rust see Beckett, *Enemy Within*, 29–33; Andrew Flinn, "William Rust: The Comintern's Blue Eyed Boy," in *Party People, Communist Lives: Explorations in Communist Biography*, John McIlroy, Kevin Morgan, and Alan Campbell, eds. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2001), 78–101. On Pountney see CP/IND/MISC/8/5 and his *For the Socialist Cause*, 62–64. On J. B. S. Haldane see Gavan Tredoux, *Comrade Haldane Is Too Busy to Go on Holiday: JBS Haldane, Communism, and Espionage* (London: Encounter, 2017).

⁶⁹ Hyde, *I Believed*, 9, 155–157. In fairness, public school alumni were not numerous in the CPGB—see Morgan, ed., *Communists and British Society*, 85–87.

⁷⁰ Francis, *Producing the DW*, 2–3.

⁷¹ Morgan, "Communist Party and *DW*," 148, 151; Morgan, ed. *Communists and British Society*, 89. The contrasting picture of a local branch is found in Jason Gurney, *Crusade in Spain* (London: Faber & Faber, 1974), 23: "[A]ny hint of levity was treated like farting in church. In addition, they were always right."

disorder and levity, however, went a self-sacrificing commitment. Indeed, the tremendous pressure under which the *DW* people operated suggests that Hyde's portrayal of fatigued journalists seeking outlet in unbridled sex (sometimes also meant as a slap in the face of bourgeois morality) cannot be completely fictitious, though the picture was more complex.⁷² Temperance preached, with mixed results, by the Party was by no means characteristic of the overworked and overstressed pressmen and presswomen, either.⁷³ Their favourite haunt was The Eagle, a public house that exists to this day. In Cockburn's witty rendition:

The place did good business in those days—partly because the *Daily Worker* staff and people from King Street [*GBCP HQ*] who had come along to advise and supervise, and people from all over who had come to wheedle from the paper free publicity for their bazaar or protest march, all used it, and partly because, in consequence, there were rarely less than three plain-clothes men from the C. I. D. [*Criminal Investigation Department*], putting their whisky down to expenses inevitably incurred in the pursuit of important political secrets such as might be expected to drop from the lips of the subversive types regularly there assembled.⁷⁴

Hands Off the Colonies!

Cub reporters, indeed, all but the most prominent contributors, were not eligible for a by-line.⁷⁵ This presents, once again, a problem in trying to identify Harmel's articles. The only one he wrote under his name was published in October 1938.⁷⁶

The year had started with the resignation in February of Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden who opposed the appeasement of Italy.⁷⁷ The following month, Hitler annexed Austria, which Harry Pollitt described as “the first fruit of the infamous Chamberlain policy... Tomorrow it will be Czechoslovakia and then France.”⁷⁸ The CPGB leader was right, as we know. Looking back on the agreement reached by the French and British premiers with Hitler and Mussolini on 29 September, Harmel would later write, somewhat unfairly:⁷⁹

I shall never forget that at the time of Munich, with Chamberlain, standing up like a cheap actor, waving his message from “Herr Hitler”, and the Tories and the Labour blokes cheering him like mad—Gallacher

⁷² Hyde, *I Believed*, 80–81, 153, 166 (Springhall, for instance, was a notorious womanizer [KV2/1596, Springhall]; Linehan, *Communism in Britain*, 129, 132; D. Cox, interview by Whitehead. However, there was, to Hyde's own admission, a proliferation of “unbedworthy” female comrades (*I Believed*, 158). These, “[t]o support their detachment from everything but the ‘cause’ dressed in plainest black and seemed to take pleasure in making themselves as physically unattractive as possible” (Gurney, *Crusade in Spain*, 37). Cf. Haldane, *Truth Will Out*, 177.

⁷³ Linehan, *Communism in Britain*, 135–136; Morgan, ed., *Communists and British Society*, 75, 89.

⁷⁴ Cockburn, *I, Claud Cockburn*, 210f.

⁷⁵ Hyde, *I Believed*, 157.

⁷⁶ “Danger in South-West Africa. Michael Harmel Exposes Nazi Methods in the Colonies,” *DW*, Oct 18, 1938, 2. A better written article on the same topic, “Nazi Activities in Africa”, was anonymously published in *CIB* 2, no. 8 (Aug 15, 1938): 2.

⁷⁷ Rust, *Story of DW*, 52 and Beckett, *Enemy Within*, 53. In April, Britain and Italy crowned this rapprochement by signing Easter Accords that, *inter alia*, recognised Mussolini's occupation of Abyssinia—see Anthony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain. The Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 438–442, 626–628, ePUB.

⁷⁸ Quoted by Rust, *Story of DW*, 54.

⁷⁹ The Munich Treaty was condemned not only by Churchill, but also Anthony Eden (Tories) as well as Duff Cooper and Arthur Greenwood (Labour). See R. A. C. Parker, *Churchill and Appeasement* (London: Pan, 2012), ePUB.

was the one man who stood up in that hysterical situation and denounced the Munich affair for what it was...⁸⁰

The memory of this “dirty betrayal and... guarantee of war” was still very fresh in his mind as he set about discussing ominous developments in South-West Africa.⁸¹ What immediately prompted the editor to request such a text was Hitler’s demand for the return of German colonies.⁸² A drawing of a sullen-looking African viewed from below accompanies the article.⁸³ That is misleading for the text itself essentially reassures the British public that, in the wake of Munich, white inhabitants of Southern Africa, particularly those in the Union, faced with the threat of fascism on their own soil, will under no circumstances allow South-West Africa to go back to Germany.⁸⁴ At the same time, Harmel stresses that hand in hand

[w]ith that opposition there must also go a strengthened demand for the extension of real liberties to the native peoples—a demand which every democrat should welcome. For although no one would wish to see Nazi tyranny strengthened by the gift of colonies, neither would any sincere person maintain that the present situation of the native population under British rule is in any way satisfactory.

The government of South Africa, continues Harmel, is clamping down on pro-German agitation at home. With reference to the local press, he lists a number of fascist organisations that operate both in the Union and South-West Africa, abetted by propagandists imported from Germany, and sketches their agenda. The spirit of the “United Front” subtends the assertion that “the British, the S. A Dutch and the Jews” are all targeted by the Nazi newspapers in South-West Africa as it does his pointing out the fascist features of Hertzog’s government itself. The article further dovetails with the then approach of the Comintern which had subordinated the “secession... to the interest of defeating fascism”, or, more precisely, to the interest of the Soviet security.⁸⁵ In the pages of the *DW*, such a reordering of priorities was reflected by the coverage of colonial developments that drew notice to the loyalty of the “natives” to the Crown,⁸⁶ and expounded in the writings of Ben Bradley and R. Palme Dutt. The former writer

⁸⁰ Alan Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Mar 2, 1950, 4. On Gallacher, the CPGB’s only MP, see Andrew Thorpe, “Communist MP: Willie Gallacher and British Communism,” in *Agents of the Revolution: New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, Kevin Morgan, Gideon Cohen, Andrew Flinn, eds. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 133–158.

⁸¹ Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Mar 1950, 4.

⁸² E. Joanides, “No Colonies for Hitler,” *DW*, May 3, 1939, 2; Ben Bradley, “A Threat to Africa’s People,” *DW*, Nov 3, 1938, 2.

⁸³ *DW* was actually short of pictures of Africans and used this one repeatedly—see *DW*, Nov 23, 1938, 7.

⁸⁴ South West Africa, a German colony from 1884, was invaded by South African forces in 1915. After the War, the League of Nations placed the territory under the Union’s mandate. See John Grotzinger, *Historical Dictionary of Namibia* (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1994), xviii–xx. Germany never seriously contemplated the retrieval of South West Africa. This idea originated with the younger generation of German-speaking South-West Africans. The Union was in any case opposed to such a transfer, although it did not object to a partial restoration of German possessions in Central and West Africa as a check on the French and Italians with their “progressive” race policies and as a counterweight to Britons. Albrecht Hagemann, “Very Special Relations: The ‘Third Reich’ and the Union of South Africa, 1933–1939,” *South African Historical Journal* 27, no. 1 (1992): 127–147.

⁸⁵ Dmitry Manuilsky, “Communists & the Struggle of the Colonial People (extract from the speech of D. Manuilsky at the 18th Congress of the CPSU on March 11, 1939),” *CIB* 3, no. 2 (May 15, 1939): 2 (for the quote); A. J. Mackenzie, “British Marxist and the Empire. Anti-Imperialist Theory and Practice,” PhD thesis (Birkbeck College, London, 1978), 244ff.

⁸⁶ An article “6000 in Africa Rally against Nazi Threat” (*DW*, Oct 28, 1938, 3), adopted from *The Telegraph*, informs that “[n]atives carrying banners ‘Hands off Tanganyika’ were prominent in the crowd”.

argued that while the British Empire oppressed her peoples and colonialism must be ended, fascism represented the bigger of the two evils and its victory would be as much to the detriment of the people in the colonies as those in the metropolis.⁸⁷ For the nonce, the colonial nations, backed by European democrats, ought to make obtaining of civil liberties their first concern:⁸⁸ “To the degree that democratic rights are extended to the colonies... to this extent will the colonial people realise the true meaning of this war and their place alongside us in the fight to smash Nazism.”⁸⁹

Why Harmel Did Not Join the International Brigades

According to Barbara Harmel, her father was for a while toying with the idea of enlisting in the International Brigades. One can easily understand his motivation. The Spanish Civil War was reckoned a proxy war against Germany and Italy and Harmel was already possessed of a visceral hatred of fascism, having observed the rise of the Greyshirts and been involved in the campaign of Friends of the Spanish Republic in the Transvaal.⁹⁰ For a young leftist champing at the bit to sign up, the first step was comparatively easy. The CPGB, after all, vetted the volunteers. In the beginning, the recruiters’ chief concern was whether the men were “fit and healthy” and whether they had any previous military experience. Subsequently the emphasis shifted to political competence. Harmel would have been found wanting in none of these areas. He was an avid tennis player and therefore in good shape. As a former cadet, he knew how to handle a firearm. His political outlook was beyond cavil.⁹¹ But all these speculations are purely academic. For it was too late. Harmel only reached England early in August 1938. The last bunch of British recruits (and a very small one at that) joined the International Brigades later that very month.⁹² Shortly thereafter, the Spanish prime minister elected to let the remaining foreign fighters go. Not only were the Brigades depleted and exhausted, but Negrín hoped their departure would create diplomatic pressure for the withdrawal of German and Italian forces.⁹³

Yet even though Harmel did not become one of the few South Africans who fought with the British Battalion—which would have been a source of some frustration—the war in Spain

⁸⁷ Ben Bradley, “Justice for the Colonies,” *DW*, Sept 9, 1938, 2; cf. Bradley, “A Threat to Africa’s People,” *DW*, Nov 3, 1938, 2.

⁸⁸ Bradley, “Justice for the Colonies.” These were listed in “the minimum Charter of Rights for Colonial People”, proposed by the CPGB. They comprised universal suffrage, compulsory and free education, liberty of speech, the media, and association, “[f]ull rights of trade union and peasant organisation, and a minimum level of labour and social legislation” as well as the abolition of pass laws and poll tax. “Peace and the Colonial Question,” *CIB* 2, no. 3 (Jun 1, 1938): 5.

⁸⁹ Ben Bradley, “Colonies, Freedom and War,” *DW*, Sept 19, 1939, 3. Cf. “The Colonies and War,” *CIB* 3, no. 10 (Sept 16, 1939): 2.

⁹⁰ IBH; Gurney, *Crusade in Spain*, 30, 36; Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 31–35; “Notes of the Month,” *Adelphi* (May 1934) and (Sept 1934): 2; election leaflet (1945) (MHP: A3300).

⁹¹ Rust, *Story of DW*, 39–41; Gurney, *Crusade in Spain*, 37–38 (for the quote) (cf. Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 153n16); Branson, *History of CPGB*, 233.

⁹² Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 11.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 187n127; Francisco J. Romero Salvadó, *Historical Dictionary of Spanish Civil War* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2013), 171f.

had a powerful and lasting effect on him.⁹⁴ *The Daily Worker* as the mouthpiece of the CPGB unambiguously sided with the Republicans and dispatched several reporters to the Iberian Peninsula, including Cockburn, Peter Kerrigan, and Rust, though the last named in fact served as a political commissar—as did Dave Springhall and Walter Tapsell. Pollitt, too, made a number of visits to Spain.⁹⁵ Some of the *DW* staffers and collaborators—namely Tapsell, the critic and writer Ralph Fox, cartoonist Maro (W. C. Rowney), and the son of George Hardy (see below)—were killed there.⁹⁶ Harmel knew their stories. He would have learnt even those “gory details” that had been disfigured by official propaganda or that, for whatever reason, did not make the newspaper at all. Soon upon his return to South Africa, he reveals himself as having been much affected by “the heroic soldiers of the Spanish Republic”. Many years on he still cherished the Spanish War as a motivator for his young South African comrades.⁹⁷ It bears mentioning, though, that his perception of the conflict remained forever stuck in the rut of the construal purveyed by the Party which he did not feel required to supplement with further research. A quarter of a century later, it was not enough for him to condemn the rising of anarcho-syndicalists and other organisations in Barcelona in May 1937 as irresponsible and deleterious to the common cause. Anxious to drive home the wickedness of Trotskyism, he portrayed them as in cahoots with Hitler and Mussolini—a shameful calumny disproved by Orwell as early as 1938.⁹⁸

Interpreting the War

In February 1939, the British government, once again amidst the protests in the Commons by Gallacher, recognised fascist Spain. On 15 March, the Wehrmacht occupied the Czech lands (or what was left of them). Only days later, Lithuania ceded to Germany the Memel (Klaipėda) Territory.⁹⁹ April saw the ultimate defeat of Republican forces in Spain as well as Italian invasion of Albania. The British Party kept up its anti-Nazi/Fascist agitation when German and Soviet foreign ministers signed the Non-Aggression Pact. Though it came out of the blue, to

⁹⁴ Gurney, *Crusade in Spain*, 37; Georgina Brewis, *Social History of Student Volunteering. Britain and Beyond 1880–1980* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), 127. For the names of South Africans involved in the Spanish Civil War see Richard Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors: The British in the Spanish Civil War and the Struggle* (London: Aurum Press, 2014), 481; Martin Sugarman, *Against Fascism—Jews who Served in the International Brigade in The Spanish Civil War* (London: Association of Jewish Ex-servicemen and Women, 2014), 12, 14, 17, 20, 24, 108, accessed Feb 15, 2018, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/spanjews.pdf>; Scheepers Fourie, “Across the Colour Line: Some Notes on South African Writing,” *AC*, no. 19 (Oct 1964): 83; Luminous Lint, accessed Feb 12, 2018, http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/photographer/Vera_Elkan/A/; Peter F. Alexander, *Roy Campbell: A Critical Biography* (Cape Town: D. Philip 1982), 174–181.

⁹⁵ Branson, *History of CPGB*, 230; Rust, *Story of DW*, 28, 38–40; KV2/1551 (Cockburn); Beckett, *Enemy Within*, 51–53.

⁹⁶ Branson, *History of CPGB*, 234; Rust, *Story of DW*, 33, 39; George Hardy, *Those Stormy Years Memories of the Fight for Freedom on Five Continents* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1956), 237–239; KV 2/1028 (Hardy).

⁹⁷ Michael Allen [= Harmel], “Paul Robeson. Great Artist—Great Man,” *Guardian*, Feb 16, 1940, 6 (for the quote); R. Kasrils, e-mail to author, Oct 14, 2014. On the “socially shared interpretations” of historical events and their significance for social groups see Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology, A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: Sage, 1998), 123.

⁹⁸ Terence Africanus [= Harmel], “The First International. 100 Years After,” *AC*, no. 18 (Apr 1964): 84; George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 144–168; Beevor, *Battle for Spain*, c. 23.

⁹⁹ Zigmantas Kiaupa, *The History of Lithuania* (Vilnius: Baltos Lankos, 2002), 341–346, 446f.

grasp the thinking behind it did not seem to have been much of a challenge for British communists. The somersault was, after all, in full conformity with the principle of tactical “flexibility”.¹⁰⁰

When the British and French governments declared war on Germany, the CPGB adopted the line of the “War on Two Fronts”. This called for a government without Chamberlain, while backing the British war effort. Even the MI5 director characterised Pollitt’s pamphlet that argued a case for this policy as “well-reasoned”. The *DW* went on to explain away the Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland on September 17.¹⁰¹ But the Comintern’s denunciation of the war as “imperialist”, followed by the German–Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Demarcation (September 28), precipitated a crisis in the CPGB leadership. Pollitt, Gallacher, and Campbell defied the change of line. It was, however, “the Russian bunch”—Dutt, Rust, Springhall, and their followers—who won the day. Pollitt, unconvinced, stepped down as the Party’s secretary, but later made a public recantation. The new policy was publicised on October 4. *The Daily Worker* did its bit to sell it.¹⁰²

The reversal of the line alienated not an insignificant number of fellow travellers and even a small number of members, such as those as had meanwhile joined up. Still, most of the CPGB rank and file, once again, appear not to have had much trouble digesting just another about-face. Several factors are cited. One of them was the traumatic memory of how the socialist parties, contrary to a previous resolution of the Second International, rallied behind their respective governments at the onset of the Great War. The authority of the Comintern’s Secretary Georgi Dimitrov, “world-famous hero of the Reichstag Fire trial”,¹⁰³ as opposed to Chamberlain, pictured as Hitler’s ally, had a rôle to play too. Above all, the USSR was simply to be trusted and protected at all costs.¹⁰⁴

Harmel unreservedly subscribed to the official line. When he came back to South Africa later that year, it was, according to Issy Heymann, his “duty to explain the reason why the Party did not support the war in Europe”. The only other piece of writing from the same period that we can positively attribute to him corroborates Heymann’s recollection for it more or less

¹⁰⁰ Ivor Montagu, “The Strongest Country in the World,” *DW*, Aug 25, 1939, 2; “Soviet’s Dramatic Peace Move to Halt Aggression,” *DW*, Aug 23, 1939, 1; Joseph Stalin, *Foundations of Leninism* (New York: Intern. Publ., 1939), 92–94.

¹⁰¹ Maj. Gen. Sir Vernon Kell to Brigadier S. T. Wood, Jan 7, 1940 (KV 10/1038, Pollitt); “Advancing Red Army Cheered,” *DW*, Sept 19, 1939, 1; Pelling, *Communist Party*, 110. Cf. Norman Davies, *Europe. A History* (London: Pimlico, 1997), 1001–1006.

¹⁰² KV 2/1807 (R. Palme Dutt); KV 2/1038 (Pollitt); KV 2/1187 (Campbell). For a lengthy case for the Imperialist War concept see R. Palme Dutt, “Notes of the Month,” *LM*, Oct 1939, 579–596.

¹⁰³ Terence Africanus [= Harmel], “Comintern,” *AC*, no. 36 (1st qtr, 1969): 36; A. Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years. The Communist Party of South Africa 1921–1971* (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1980), 66.

¹⁰⁴ Branson, *History of CPGB*, 250–274; Eaden and Renton, *Communist Party*, 67–75; Beckett, *Enemy Within*, 90–101; Laybourn and Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, 105–108. See also Cockburn, *I, Claud Cockburn*, 207–8, 215; Cox, *Personal and Political Recollections*, 57; Haldane, *Truth Will Out*, 180–182; McShane, *No Mean Fighter*, 229–233.

equates British imperialism (essentially defended by Harmel in October 1938 as the lesser of two evils) with “fascism”.¹⁰⁵

The new official organ of the Communist Party of South Africa, *'Nkululeko/Inkululeko*,¹⁰⁶ whose editorial team Harmel joined in 1940, naturally peddled the CP's interpretation of European conflict—and without much sophistication at that. It may have been Harmel himself who wrote in an editorial in September: “It is a year now since the groups of rich men who rule England and Germany dragged their people and the people of other countries, into this terrible war... African people know very well that the war has brought no benefit to them.”¹⁰⁷ Luckily, the workers of the world can look “with pride and hope towards the Soviet Union” which, having sent the ruling classes packing, “will not bring its 180 million people into the war on either side of imperialists. They will keep up their policy of neutrality and struggle to bring peace to the world.” From this perspective, annexation of the Baltic republics in June–August 1940 caused the CPSA no embarrassment. Not outwardly at least. Harmel or one of his comrades enthused that Estonians, Lithuanians, and Latvians had every reason for jubilation for the USSR had now taken them under its wing. It used to be there very much like in South Africa. Now, Utopia has arrived:¹⁰⁸ “Work for everybody, with short hours and good wages. Schools for all children. Hospitals and doctors for everyone who is sick. Pensions for all old people. Equality and brotherhood for all, regardless of race or colour.”¹⁰⁹

Harmel would always sweep aside as careless of “facts” any suggestion that Russia for a time, to all intents and purposes, fought on Hitler's side.¹¹⁰ But he never truly tried to put the record “straight”. His CPSA/SACP histories are reticent about the zigzags in August–October 1939 as well as the Soviet invasion of Poland and Finland.¹¹¹ In addition, they portray the imperialist war line not just as the first and only one adopted by the Party, but one that was decided upon by the South African communists themselves, independent of Moscow. With the awkward period safely behind him, Harmel reports loudly (and with relief) that it was the

¹⁰⁵ I. Heymann, interview by C. Purkey (1983) (transcript: 23) (A1984/E2-A); Allen, “Paul Robeson. Great Artist.”

¹⁰⁶ For details see Jones, “*Inkululeko*,” 331–372.

¹⁰⁷ “Events of the Month,” *Nkululeko. Organ of the Johannesburg District Communist Party* (Sept 1940): 2. See also Drew, *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 225; Mia Roth, *The Communist Party in South Africa, Racism, Eurocentricity and Moscow, 1921–1950* (Johannesburg: Partridge, 2016), 37–38. Though individual CPSA members enlisted, the U-turn in Soviet policy had caused no more than small ripples—see Jones, “*Inkululeko*,” 337; Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 31–38.

¹⁰⁸ “Events of the Month,” *Nkululeko* (Jul 1940): 3–4.

¹⁰⁹ “Events of the Month,” *Nkululeko* (Sept 1940): 3. Cf. Andres Kasekamp, *A History of Baltic States* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 95–131.

¹¹⁰ A. L., “Guilty Land,” review of *Guilty Land*, by Patrick van Rensburg, *FT*, Feb 1962, 15.

¹¹¹ Cf. Aaron Segal, review of *Fifty Fighting Years. The Communist Party of South Africa, 1921–1971*, by A. Lerumo, *American Political Science Review* 70, no. 4 (1976): 1347.

operation Barbarossa which wrought “a profound change... in the character of the war”.¹¹² When in 1943 the Trotskyist magazine *Trek* began to speculate about a Soviet-German separate peace, Harmel—as flexible and “logical” as ever—wrote a long rebuttal, concluding that “a close and enduring friendship between Russia and her present Allies, [was] the hope of the world”.¹¹³

Noni

While in London, Harmel reportedly became enamoured of Noni Jabavu, a young South African woman who was to achieve a great standing as a non-fiction writer. It is possible they were in love, but split up when she would not follow him back to South Africa, although Barbara Harmel admits that the relationship might have been “more significant to him than it was to her”.¹¹⁴

Jabavu was born into a prominent African family in 1919. Her grandfather J. T. Jabavu (1859–1921) was from 1884 to 1921 not only editor, but, unprecedentedly, also the owner of a newspaper printed partly in an African tongue. D. D. T. Jabavu (1885–1959), her father, campaigned against the disenfranchisement of the Cape Africans. His students at the South African Native College in Fort Hare, where he held a professorship, included Mandela, Tambo, and Govan Mbeki. The womenfolk in the Jabavu family were equally extraordinary.

Having matriculated at a mission school in Lovedale, Noni became the only black student at the Mount High School for Girls in York, run by Quakers.¹¹⁵ In autumn 1938, she enrolled at the Royal Academy of Music to study violin, piano, harmony, and singing. Her surrogate family in England were Arthur Bevington Gillett and his wife Margaret, a close friend of Jan Smuts. Jabavu would spend holidays in their home in Oxford.¹¹⁶ A black person was bound to stand out in London of those days,¹¹⁷ but Jabavu and Harmel might well have been brought

¹¹² Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years*, 70–71; “From Fusion to Fascism,” *AC*, no. 46 (3rd qtr, 1971): 36; Michael Harmel “The Communist Party of South Africa,” in *Apartheid: A Collection of Writings on South African Racism by South Africans*, Alex la Guma, ed. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1972), 214; [Michael Harmel], “South African Communist Party, 1921–1971. Aspects of Party History,” *Marxism Today* (Aug 1971): 235; *Fifty Fighting Years* (ms), 26 (SNP). Police records show Harmel had most dramatically proclaimed as much in public meetings after German invasion of the Soviet Union. “A Mass Meeting of the Communist Party was held at the Market Square, Newton on 22nd June 1941 at 3pm” (HCP: A3323).

¹¹³ Michael Harmel, “The Truth about the *Trek*,” *Freedom 2* (Oct–Nov 1943): 5–7.

¹¹⁴ IBH. Looking back on the late 1930s in England, Jabavu nevertheless speaks of her “bouts of homesickness for South Africa”. “Friends in High Places,” *Daily Dispatch*, Mar 30, 1977, 12.

¹¹⁵ Les and Donna Switzer, *Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: A Descriptive Bibliographic Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers, Newsletters and Magazines 1836–1976* (Boston: Hall, 1979), 40–41; Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 166–198; Edward Roux, *Time Longer than Rope. A History of the Black Man’s Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 288–289; Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown & Comp., 1995), 60–61, ePUB; Luli Callinicos, *Beyond the Engeli Mountains* (Cape Town: New African Books, 2012), 101, 109; Colin Bundy, *Govan Mbeki* (Athens: Ohio UP, 2012), 33; Makhosazana Xaba, “Jabavu’s Journey,” MA thesis (University of the Witwatersrand, 2006), 14. On all the Jabavus see *DAB*, 179–184.

¹¹⁶ RAM; Alfred Gillett Trust website, accessed Jul, 2017, <https://alfredgilletttrust.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/mcg.docx>; Xaba, “Jabavu’s Journey,” 33–34; Piet Beukes, *Romantic Smuts. Women and Love in His Life* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1992), 50–62.

¹¹⁷ Matera, with qualification, estimates the number of Afro-Caribbeans in Britain in the 1930s as 14,000 (*Black London*, 50).

together by their Southafricanhood or passion for classical music. Leftist circles represent another possible interface. Through the Gilletts, Noni met the communist-scientist J. S. B. Haldane and became friends with Ran Nahum, Firoze Gandhi (later to marry Indira Nehru), and the future Labour Party MP Anthony Crosland. A close friend was Mohan Kumaramangalam (1916–1973), a minister in an Indira Gandhi cabinet.¹¹⁸ He was reading history in Cambridge, mixing with Victor Kiernan, Eric Hobsbawm, and other leftists at the university,¹¹⁹ 100–400 of whom were communists.¹²⁰ These, in turn, had links with young people in Oxford and London, including *DW* contributors.¹²¹ It is conceivable Harmel met Jabavu through this political/social network.¹²² At the same time, the relationship with Jabavu might have afforded him a look into the world of student politics as well as that of the colonial “lefties”, then exploring the possibility of a united front against imperialism.¹²³

Interracial affairs and intermarriage were not exactly uncommon in England. They, however, tended to be between a white woman and a black man. Politics was inseparable from such relationships. As Marc Matera puts it: “Private life ... became another arena in which black men contested the limits placed on their existence and expressed their anti-colonialism.”¹²⁴ What applied to a black rebel can be, *mutatis mutandis*, applied to a white nonconformist too. One only needs to consider the admission by Jack Cope, a fellow South African and communist sympathiser, of his own “unreasonable prejudice on colour” which made him uneasy in personal dealings with “black negroes” (*sic!*) and “Indians” during his first year in London.¹²⁵ The environment that permitted such relationships, however, determined their nature. They were nowhere as transgressive as they would have been in South Africa, the Caribbean, and the US South. And Jabavu, very probably the first black person with whom Harmel became close or even intimate, was not an ordinary Xhosa woman from the Cape. She had been reared “as an Englishwoman” and accounted herself a “Black European”.¹²⁶

¹¹⁸ N. Jabavu to D. and J. Keenan-Smith, Oct 19, 1985 (ASAML) and “Friends in High Places.” On Nahum see Andrew Whitehead, “Remembering Ram Nahum,” May 4, 2014, accessed Apr 12, 2019, <https://www.andrewwhitehead.net/blog/remembering-ram-nahum>. On Kumaramangalam see the entire issue of *Socialist India* (May 26, 1973).

¹¹⁹ V. G. Kiernan, “Mohan Kumaramangalam in England,” *Socialist India* (Feb 23, 1974): 5–7, 36; Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 115.

¹²⁰ Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 115; E. P. Thompson, interview by Whitehead; Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (New York: Norton, 1990), 34. The Oxford University had 4,391 undergraduate and 536 graduate students. Of the total number merely 17 were women. See L. W. B. Brockliss, *The University of Oxford. A History* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 760.

¹²¹ Kiernan, “Mohan Kumaramangalam in England,” 36; E. P. Thompson, interview by Whitehead; Mulk Raj Anand, “Changing India,” review of *Changing India*, by Raja Rao and Iqbal Singh, eds., and *The Problem of Minorities*, by K. B. Krishna, *DW*, Jul 19, 1939, 7. On Anand see Talat Ahmed, “Mulk Raj Anand: Novelist and Fighter,” *International Socialism. Quarterly Review of Socialist Theory* 2, no. 105 (Winter, 2005): 40–63.

¹²² Kumaramangalam later published in the CPSA fortnightly edited by Harmel—see his “War against Japan,” *Inkululeko*, Jul 22, 1944, 4.

¹²³ Kiernan, “Mohan Kumaramangalam,” 36.

¹²⁴ Matera, *Black London*, 75, 200 (for the quote), 266, 270, 289–291, 306; Abrahams, *Black Experience*, 40f.

¹²⁵ Jack Cope, *Diary*, Feb 2, Feb 4, Mar 13, 1936.

¹²⁶ Jabavu, “Enter the ENT Specialist,” *Daily Dispatch*, Jul 27, 1977, 8; “When Whites Hold All the Aces,” *Daily Dispatch*, Oct 26, 1977, 14 (quoted in Xaba, “Jabavu’s Journey,” 19).

Though certainly not free of racism, England was a paradise in comparison with South Africa.¹²⁷ If the two young people indeed developed a relationship that transcended friendship, return to their home country was not a very good idea. To be sure, a law of 1927 forbade only *extramarital* sex between a white man and a black woman (the reverse had already been outlawed on the provincial level) and a union of a white “European” and an African female was therefore legal. We know, however, that no marriage of this description was entered into in South Africa between 1931 and 1936. While records of 1937 list 101 mixed marriages, the overwhelming majority of these were between a white man and a coloured woman.¹²⁸ In other words, such a relationship as one could envisage between Harmel and Jabavu, albeit lawful, would have been highly unusual and, in addition, generally frowned upon, to say the least. Children born in a wedlock like that bore a life-long stigma.¹²⁹

A more serious obstacle to a relationship with Harmel than politics of skin colour may have been Jabavu’s apoliticality. Her contacts with individual communists aside, this was already much in evidence in her youth.¹³⁰ As she would admit decades later, although she had much respect for the bravery of her political friends Indira Gandhi, Smuts, Kumaramangalam, and Churchill, she was “concerned only with, and wr[ote] books only about, human affection, love, jealousies, reconciliations...”¹³¹ Hobsbawm, however, maintains that “[t]o have a serious relationship with someone who was not in the Party or prepared to join (or rejoin it) was unthinkable”.¹³² There were communists who broke up with their lovers citing as the reason their careers as professional revolutionaries. And it is amply documented that the CPGB meddled into privacy of its members, matters of the hearts included, especially where these threatened to impinge on their political performance.¹³³

Black London

On top of everything else, interwar London essentially functioned as the hub of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. Indeed, Marc Matera portrays it as a cauldron of different African and West-Indian identities and ideologies which, catalysed by recent political developments and

¹²⁷ Hakim Adi, “Forgotten Comrade? Desmond Buckle. An African Communist in Britain,” *Science & Society* 70, no. 1 (Jan 2006): 30; Abrahams, *Black Experience*, 30; Matera, *Black London*, 67; Leonard Thompson and Lynn Berat, *A History of South Africa*, 4th ed. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2014), 154–186.

¹²⁸ Jonathan Hyslop, “The Representation of White Working-Class Women in the Construction of a Reactionary Populist Movement: ‘Purified’ Afrikaner Nationalist Agitation for Legislation against ‘Mixed’ Marriages 1934–1939,” *African Studies Seminar Paper*, no. 340, May 24, 1993 University of the Witwatersrand, 5–6, accessed Jun 1, 2018, <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/handle/10539/8783>.

¹²⁹ Cf. Olive Schreiner, *From Man to Man, Or, Perhaps Only*—(London: Virago, 1982), c. 12.

¹³⁰ Xaba, *Jabavu’s Journey*, 14.

¹³¹ Jabavu, “Love, Law and Languages,” *Daily Dispatch*, Jul 20, 1977, 6; quoted by Xaba, “Jabavu’s Journey,” 72. Indeed, in 1977 Jabavu wrote that “money, and politics [were] a closed book to” her (“Friends in High Places”).

¹³² Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 135. Cf. Morgan, ed. *Communists and British Society*, 83.

¹³³ Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 126; Haldane, *Truth Will Out*, 176; Linehan, *Communism in Britain*, 129, 132–134.

impregnated by other internationalisms, produced an “expansive conception of Africanity” and a network of transatlantic and intra-African connections. This commerce of cultures and ideologies unfolded on both personal and social level (clubs, societies, periodicals, restaurants, etc.) and culminated with the 5th Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945 that foreshadowed the era of de-colonisation.¹³⁴

One of the three or so most high-profile representatives of Black London was Paul Robeson. Not long after his return to South Africa, Harmel wrote about a Left Book Club rally he had attended at the Empress Stadium on April 24, 1939. There the CPGB general secretary was able to share the platform with (ex-)Labourites, Liberals, and Hewlett Johnson aka “the Red Dean” of Canterbury.¹³⁵ Lloyd George took the opportunity to accuse the Tory government of betraying Britain,¹³⁶ while Pollitt called for its removal from power and for stealing a march on Hitler by signing of a military pact with the USSR.¹³⁷ What made by far the most impression on Harmel was the enthusiastic reception by the 10 000-strong crowd of Robeson by which “the true representatives of the British working class expressed their real fellow-feeling with a member of a subject race”. After the rally, Harmel had a quick conversation with the singer, who “turns down all big and lucrative contracts” and “prefers to tour small halls and to sing simple folk songs to the common people”. When asked about his message for black South Africans—who lionised Robeson by then—the American artist pointed out that in the USA “more and more of the Negro people were turning to Socialism and the working class movement as the only path to a decent future for themselves”. He added that his son went to school in the Soviet Union, a country completely free from racial discrimination. It was the Leninist concept of “merging of the workers’ revolution in the advanced capitalist countries and the national liberation movements of the oppressed into a single, mighty stream of world anti-imperialist revolution” confirmed from the horse’s mouth.¹³⁸

Robeson might have had close ties with the USSR and the Party, but never actually became a card-carrying communist.¹³⁹ He was also certainly out of Harmel’s league. In other

¹³⁴ Matera, *Black London*, esp. 24–48 (31f for the quote), 76, 88–89, 93–94, 107, 139ff, 150, 153–154 (cf. Paul Robeson, *Here I Stand* [London: Dobson, 1958], 41–42); Abrahams, *Black Experience*, 45–48.

¹³⁵ Matera, *Black London*, 286–287; Harmel, “Paul Robeson.”

¹³⁶ “Britain’s Trust ‘Betrayed’. Mr Lloyd George’s Attack,” *Times*, Apr 25, 1939, 9. Cf. “Mr Lloyd George on Nazi Triumph. ‘Eve of Great Perils,’” *Daily Telegraph*, Apr 25, 1939, 16.

¹³⁷ Don Melville, “2000 000 Left Books Sold: Club Rally a Huge Success,” *DW*, Apr 26, 1939, 4; “Mr. L. George and Government. Worst for 50 Years. Its Failure to Lead. Left Book Club Rally,” *Manchester Guardian*, Apr 25, 1939, 6.

¹³⁸ Michael Harmel, “Lenin and National Liberation Today,” *LM*, Apr 1970, 184. On Robeson’s popularity in SA see R. Bunche to E. & P. Robeson, Jan 11, 1938; quoted in Robert Edgar, ed. *African American in South Africa. An African American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J. Bunche, 28 September 1937–1 January 1938* (Athens: University of the Witwatersrand, 1992), 23, 40n77.

¹³⁹ Marie Seton, *Paul Robeson* (London: Dobson, 1958), 174.

words, they met by happenstance.¹⁴⁰ Could the young South African have had a more regular and hence potentially more consequential traffic with the black subculture? His whiteness and communism, in fact, militated against such contacts. The black people in Britain, facing specific challenges, including racial discrimination, had a natural tendency to stick to their own. Most Afro-Caribbeans were associated in organisations like the West African Students' Union and the League of Coloured People.¹⁴¹ The Class against Class period, the CPGB's puniness, poor organisation, and racism, too, kept the number of black communists low.¹⁴² The few Afro-Caribbeans in the Party had had a parting of ways with communism by the time Harmel reached London in mid-1938. The reason for this rupture has been already discussed. It was the Party's altered view on colonial liberation. As any bid for independence threatened to weaken the British Empire when an alliance between Soviets and the West was urgently needed, colonial nations were temporarily to limit themselves to demands for civil rights. Once in receipt of those, or so the argument went, they would be able and willing to ally with their erstwhile rulers against Nazism and Fascism.¹⁴³ The problem was that for African-Caribbean radicals like George Padmore, Chris Braithwaite (Jones), and Arnold Ward fascism and British and French imperialism amounted to much the same thing,¹⁴⁴ so they naturally concluded "that, like the Labour Party, the Communist Party too had sacrificed the interests of the colonial peoples in favour of British imperialism".¹⁴⁵

All that said, not even during the ultra-left period had there existed an unbridgeable gap between the Afro-Caribbean community and the CPGB. They would launch joint initiatives. There were cases of cross membership. And even people like Padmore (whom Harmel was to condemn as a purveyor of "a shabby doctrine of anti-communism") continued to draw inspiration from Marxist thought.¹⁴⁶ One can withal name representatives of the black community who had not resigned from the Party. Two of them were Desmond Buckle (1910–

¹⁴⁰ Harmel would have *seen* Robeson act or sing before—see "A Worker's Notebook," *DW*, Nov 3, 1938, 2; "Bazaar's Last Day is the Big Day," *DW*, Dec 17, 1938, 1.

¹⁴¹ Matera, *Black London*, 52–77 and *passim*.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 78; Callaghan, "Colonies, Racism, the CPGB and the Comintern in the Inter-War Years," *Science & Society* 61, no. 4 (1997/1998): 517–520. Hakim Adi is of the view that Desmond Buckle (of whom more below) was the very first African member of the CPGB and that he became so only in 1937 and fully as late as 1941. See his "Forgotten Comrade," 23, 31.

¹⁴³ Abrahams, *Black Experience*, 27; Matera, *Black London*, 78, 112–113, 140; Jones, "The Anti-Colonial Politics and Policies of the CPGB," 174–175.

¹⁴⁴ Jones, "Anti-Colonial Politics and Policies of the CPGB," 149–150; Christian Høgsbjerg, "Mariner, Renegade, Castaway: Chris Braithwaite, Seamen's Organiser and Pan-Africanist," *Race and Class* 53, no. 2 (2011): 16. All three were in the habit of heckling communist meetings (*ibid.*, 22).

¹⁴⁵ Mackenzie, "British Marxists and Empire," 248–249, 253.

¹⁴⁶ John Callaghan, "Colonies, Racism, the CPGB and the Comintern in the Inter-War Years," *Science and Society* 61, no. 4 (1997): 517; Matera, *Black London*, 139ff; Abrahams, *Black Experience*, 38; *KV* 2/1838 (Blackman); *CIB* 3, no. 3 (Jun 1, 1939): 10; *CIB* 3, no. 6 (Jul 15, 1939): 1–2, 7; Adi, "Forgotten Comrade?," 29, 32; Alan Doyle [= Harmel], "A Professional African Abroad," review of *Pan-Africanism, or Communism*, by George Padmore, *FT*, Nov 1956, 13; Jones, "Anti-Colonial Politics and Policies of the CPGB," 175.

1964) of the Gold Coast and Peter Blackman from Barbados (1909–1993).¹⁴⁷ When, years later, the South African government imposed travel restrictions on the representatives of the Transvaal Council of Non-European Trade Unions, Buckle stood in as their world congress delegate. This inspired Harmel to render him tribute, though he did not give any indication as to whether they were acquainted.¹⁴⁸ London of the 1930s did not exactly teem with Afro-Caribbeans, though. Buckle and Blackman moreover had a significant rôle to play in the CPGB. The latter was regarded as “the Party’s main expert on Negro affairs”. And both worked with the Colonial Information Bureau, a body through which the British Party channelled most of its colonial work after the League against Imperialism ceased operation in 1937. Even without palpable evidence that would link Buckle and Blackman with Harmel, one can assume that they did meet and that the two black comrades, similar to Robeson, personalised in Harmel’s eyes the common cause of the Western working class and subjugated Non-European masses as defined by Lenin. Not the least, they were, like Jabavu, well-educated and self-assertive representatives of a race with which Harmel would previously have had only superficial and unequal intercourse.¹⁴⁹

The Colonial Committee and South Africa

The CIB was further associated with Reginald Bridgeman (1884–1968), a fellow traveller and the *spiritus movens* of the LAI,¹⁵⁰ but especially with Ben Bradley (1898–1957), a Meerut trialist and expert on India whose writings on matters colonial were cited in the preceding text.¹⁵¹ Bradley further headed the Party’s Colonial Committee (alternatively called Colonial Department, Commission or Bureau) set up in 1925 after the Comintern had devolved to the CPGB “responsibility for anti-imperialist work within the British Empire”.¹⁵²

South African communists who sojourned in Britain between the wars as well as Britons about to relocate to the Union, would make contact with the Colonial Committee and the Party leadership to seek counsel or offer their services. Eddie Roux, a research student in botany at

¹⁴⁷ Adi, “Forgotten Comrade?” 24. According to MI5 (KV 2/1838), Blackman became a CPGB member in 1936 or 1937, but resigned in July 1939. Though viewing the Party’s colonial work as “lukewarm”, Blackman nevertheless continued to contribute to *DW*. He returned to the fold after the war.

¹⁴⁸ Alan Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Oct 27, 1949, 2. Just before his death, Buckle published an article “The UAR, a Bastion of Anti-Colonialism,” in *AC*, no. 18 (Apr 1964): 40–48. See also Buckle’s obituary in *AC*, no. 19 (Oct 1964): 15.

¹⁴⁹ Abrahams, *Black Experience*, 25–26; KV2/1838 (Blackman) (for the quote); Stalin, *Foundations of Leninism*, 82–87. Visitors from all over the Empire kept passing through the CIB, demonstrating to anyone in its orbit the internationalist and multiracial dimension of the movement (MEPO 38/94).

¹⁵⁰ John Callaghan, “The Communists and the Colonies,” in Andrews, ed. *Opening the Books*, 4–22; Branson, *History of CPGB, 1941–1951*, 67; Adi, “Forgotten Comrade?,” 29; *Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress*, Sept 16–19, 1938, 30–31. See also Bridgeman’s obituary in *AC*, no. 37 (2nd qtr, 1969): 11–12, possibly by Harmel.

¹⁵¹ CP/IND/BRAD/01/01; CP/IND/BRAD/01/02.

¹⁵² John Callaghan, “Communists and Colonies,” 8; “Colonies, Racism, the CPGB and the Comintern in the Inter-War Years,” 516; *R. Palme Dutt*, 96–98; Jones, “The Anti-Colonial Politics and Policies of the CPGB,” 22 (for the quote). See also Kevin Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left: Labour Legends and Russian Gold* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006), 122n23, 208; *The Ninth Congress of the CPGB (held at Caxton Hall, Salford, Oct 1927. Reports, Theses & Resolutions*, 3 (CP/CENT/CONG/02/02).

the University of Cambridge in 1926–1929, frequented the committee’s meetings. In this way, he became acquainted with Ralph Fox, the Burnses, and the Dutt brothers, gaining insight into the life of revolutionary organisations in other parts of the Empire and being “able to contribute some first-hand information on the situation in South Africa”.¹⁵³

Hilda Watts (Bernstein) who joined the CPGB in 1935 and moved to South Africa two years later recalls that she “had to have a talk to Party people before [she] left”. One of them was Jimmy Shields, the CPSA chairman in the mid-twenties. With the South African Party at a low ebb, he straightforwardly told Watts that she had “only one task—build the Party!”¹⁵⁴

As a graduate student at the LSE, Jack Simons worked in the CPGB and earned praises of an anonymous referee for “a really remarkable understanding of Party policy and basic principles”, which made him suitable material for “promotion inside the district or for full time work”. When Simons began to get ready for return to the Union, Harry Pollitt, whom he considered his mentor, furnished him with a letter of recommendation for the South African comrades.¹⁵⁵

By February 1938, another member of the Colonial Committee, George Hardy (1884–1966), a Comintern envoy to South Africa in 1936 and a personal friend of Bill Andrews and Issy Wolfson, supervised a “South African group”.¹⁵⁶

The foregoing implies Harmel inevitably got in touch with the Colonial Committee and along with other South Africans received some form of political instruction under its auspices. This was to be of practical moment after he had returned to South Africa.

At the meeting of February 21, 1939, the CPSA acting secretary, Eli Weinberg, reported to the committee on the sorry state of his organisation. It transpired, first of all, that in 1937 two comrades—Wolfson and Basner—entrusted with the delivery of detailed instructions for the SA communists, had in fact suppressed (or lost) the document.¹⁵⁷ The Party in South Africa was not only weak in numbers, commanding the nationwide membership of no more than 200 (possibly an exaggeration), but it was barely operative. Weinberg admitted that

¹⁵³ Edward Roux, *Rebel Pity* (London: Collings, 1970), 52.

¹⁵⁴ H. Bernstein, interview by D. Pinnock, 1992 (transcript, 2–3; 6 for the quote). On Shields see KV 2/2801; Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 76, 85, 97–98, 120; Sheridan Johns, “The Comintern, South Africa and the Black Diaspora,” *Review of Politics* 37, no. 2 (Apr 1975): 221n45.

¹⁵⁵ CP/CENT/PERS/6/7; Macmillan, *Jack Simons*, 21, 25, 28–29, 38, 42; Simons, *All My Life, All My Strength*, 91.

¹⁵⁶ KV2/1028 (Hardy); KV2/2801 (Shields). On Hardy see Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 179–180, 183–184, 189–190, 207, 227; H. J. and Ray Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850–1950* (London: Penguin, 1969), 477–480, 495–496, 513–515; Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 228–236.

¹⁵⁷ Apollon Davidson et al., eds. *South Africa and the Communist International. A Documentary History*, vol. 2, *Bolshevik Fightsoldiers to Victims of Bolshevisation 1931–1939* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 286, 297n1, n2. Weinberg’s presence in London was noted even by the MI5 (KV2/1028, Hardy). The situation of the CPSA at the time is discussed in detail by Drew in *Discordant Comrades* (178–199).

the Party centre has not been functioning for the past year. In Cape Town we have had no contact with the Centre and the Party organisation is simply chaotic; the press has failed to issue a paper for more than 6 months; only one issue of *Umsebenzi* has come out and that a duplicated copy. Finances are in terrible disorder.

A decision had, consequently, been made (Weinberg went on) to move the Central Committee to Cape Town where “the Party organisation was on a much healthier basis”.

Bradley in his response suggested that it ought to be the priority for the Party in South Africa to confront “fascist influences”, an umbrella term for suppression of civil liberties, anti-Semitism, segregation, and Afrikaner nationalism. It was “urgently necessary that a paper should be published and that it should contain items in English and the [*sic!*] native language and Afrikans [*sic!*] if possible”. He left open to debate whether or not the left-oriented paper *The Guardian* could serve this purpose.¹⁵⁸

Supposing he was in attendance—besides Bradley, Hardy, and Weinberg, six more unnamed comrades took part in the meeting, among them probably Shields and Blackman—Harmel was put wise to the state of the Party in the Union with which he had been at most superficially familiar. A part of his political training, it would have been the preparatory stage of his involvement in the CPSA affairs.¹⁵⁹ The most exigent demands facing the organisation in the Union were, to sum up: (i) the setting up of a Party newspaper (ii) with an indigenous section and (iii) the restoration of the Party in Johannesburg. In *Nkululeko*, launched probably in the late 1939, renamed *Inkululeko* (Freedom) in December 1940 and co-edited by Harmel since earlier that year, the CPSA met all of them.¹⁶⁰

An MI5 “telephone check” corroborates the assumption of Harmel’s noviciate with the Colonial Committee. His name figures in the summary of a conversation between Bradley and Shields (Apr 4, 1939) regarding an unspecified event, then in preparation, with which Harmel was in some way associated.¹⁶¹ This represents the only instance when he is mentioned in all the potentially relevant de-classified dossiers (Blackman, Hardy, Shields, Kerrigan, Bridgeman...).¹⁶² As the transcriber got the spelling wrong (“Harmall”) and as the name is not capitalised, one can assume Harmel himself was *not* under surveillance. Both confirm the low

¹⁵⁸ Report to Colonial Committee, London, Feb 21, 1939, 3, 5–6 (PGACPII, 495.14.360a).

¹⁵⁹ In later years, the Harmels and Weinbergs became neighbours in what was jocularly called Red Square (an area in the Gardens, Johannesburg). P. Measroch, interview by author, Oct 4, 2014.

¹⁶⁰ Jones, “*Inkululeko*,” 341f; Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 45, 56–58.

¹⁶¹ KV2/ 2801 (Shields).

¹⁶² For an analysis of MI5 files, their (un)availability, interpretation, etc. see Kevin Morgan, “Within and Beyond the Law? British Communist History and the Archives of State Surveillance,” *Political Extremism and Radicalism in the Twentieth Century*, Cengage Learning (EMEA) Ltd, 2018, accessed Jun 18, 2018, https://www.gale.com/binaries/content/assets/gale-us-en/primary-sources/intl-gps/intl-gps-essays/full-ghn-contextual-essays/gps_essay_plex_morgan1_website.pdf <https://gale.com/uk>.

profile or even marginality suggested by his minimal journalistic output. For comparison: whereas Eddie Roux repeatedly wrote on South Africa for the *Labour Monthly*, Harmel never did. To be sure, Roux had already been a communist by the time of his arrival in Britain and a comparatively senior one at that.¹⁶³ But even Jack Simons who, too, only became a Party member in England left more of a mark both in the CPGB and at his university.¹⁶⁴

Down and Out in London

Ray Harmel would later claim that, having learned of his association with *The Daily Worker*, Arthur cut Michael off from money. Mrs Lewis, on the other hand, believes he had supplied his son with the wherewithal for the entire year. Both women were in their eighties when interviewed and it is therefore hard to say which of them was misremembering. Maybe both. They are, in any event, agreed that Michael soon became “reduced to rags and tatters”. His *DW* internship would scarcely have made much of a difference even if it had been remunerated (which was not the case). Ray believes he started washing dishes in a West End hotel or restaurant to support himself. He was able to pay the rent for his room in Orsett Terrace in Paddington, but would sometimes go hungry. Sunday lunches at Aunt Ethel’s provided a “regular source of food”. Her husband supplied him with hand-me-downs, though they probably did not fit as Alf was, according to Barbara Harmel, rather short.¹⁶⁵ Supposing Ray’s version is wrong, his straitened circumstances may have stemmed from a Bohemian nonchalance or, viewed otherwise, ineffective husbandry, a skill he was never quite to master.¹⁶⁶ It could have also been a more or less conscious stab at “self-proletarianisation”, such as bourgeois communists are documented as making. Possibly all these three factors combined. In any case, unlike another member of the South African group, he is *not* reported to have been making the rounds begging for a loan, although he would occasionally freeload at trade union banquets.¹⁶⁷

The outbreak of the War cut Harmel’s OE short. His father was about to leave for Europe so they were probably planning to come back together. Arthur heard the ill tidings just before

¹⁶³ “White and Coloured Workers in South Africa,” *LM*, Oct 1927, 632–633; “Agrarian Revolt in South Africa,” *LM*, Jan 1928, 55–62; “What Is the ILP Doing in South Africa?” *LM*, Feb 1929, 90–96; “The Recent Events in South Africa,” *LM*, Mar 1930, 54–57. It is quite conceivable for Harmel to have anonymously contributed to the *CIB*, edited by Bradley. Between August 1938 and October 1939, the periodical frequently discussed South African affairs.

¹⁶⁴ Macmillan, *Jack Simons*, 19–20.

¹⁶⁵ R. Harmel, interview by Purkey (transcript, 19–20); H. Lewis, interview by Adler (for the quotes); Zug, *Guardian*, 51; IBH; 1939 England and Wales Register (NA UK). On the remuneration for the *DW* editors, sub-editors, etc. see Hyde, *I Believed*, 79; 156; Pountney, *For the Socialist Cause*, 62; Cockburn, *I, Claud Cockburn*, 216–217; Morgan, “The Communist Party and *DW*,” 152.

¹⁶⁶ According to Gurney, in those days one could make do with £3 a day (ca. £187 in today’s money). Of this, food costs amounted to roughly half-a-crown (almost £54 today). A pint of bitter cost about 8d. See Gurney, *Crusade in Spain*, 20–21, 34; cf. Roy Plomley, *Days Seemed Longer. Early Years of a Broadcaster* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), 72.

¹⁶⁷ Linehan, *Communism in Britain*, 139; Morgan, ed. *Communists and British Society*, 86; KV2/ 2801 (Shields); Alan Doyle (= Harmel), “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Apr 19, 1951, 2.

boarding a train for Cape Town. Getting there, he was too upset to proceed. He cancelled the journey and instructed Michael by cable to rush home. With Britain in panic, it took him some time to secure a ticket. Arthur observes Mick had a “rough time”.¹⁶⁸ In the middle of October, he nevertheless managed to embark in Liverpool on Themistocles. The exhausting voyage took almost a month. He finally landed in Cape Town on November 10. His only luggage was books.¹⁶⁹

Ray

While in Cape Town, Harmel addressed a meeting of the Friends of the Soviet Union. It just so happened Ray Adler, whom he had met in Miriam Hepner’s office in Johannesburg more than a year before, was in town as well so they could renew their acquaintance.¹⁷⁰ Soon, in fact, they were going steady. In June 1940, Arthur reported to his brother:

Mick’s stuck on a girl—Ray Adler—and wants to marry her. I say good—go ahead. Right sort for him: Has same political ideas, is herself a worker and a secy of a trade union. Not good looking, but tremendously honest and will be a mother to him as well as a wife. He needs that sort. I like her very much.¹⁷¹

There is some confusion as to when exactly Ray was born. She would alternately give 1907 and 1908 as the year of her birth.¹⁷² According to Barbara Harmel, her birth had never been registered and was only later calculated as December 1, 1905.¹⁷³ She was, in any event, not inconsiderably older than her husband, which explains Arthur’s remark about her mothering capacity and fits in with an emotional deficiency Michael, half-orphaned at the age of three, had developed. To Ray, deprived of her little brother, Motke, the marriage to a younger man may have similarly been a sort of a “transferred caretaking”, though she also felt attracted to him as an intellectual, someone she could “learn from”.¹⁷⁴

The life story of Ray Harmel—or Taube Adler as she was then called—began in Rasein (Raseiniai), a Lithuanian *shtetl* with a population of 5,270, nearly forty percent of it Jewish (1923).¹⁷⁵ Her paternal grandfather was a *shamas*, while her grandmother worked in a bakery.

¹⁶⁸ A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Sept 9 and Dec 12, 1939; Rose-Innes, *Dog Star*, 112 (for the quote); Lydall, *Following the Glimmer of a Star*, 48.

¹⁶⁹ H. Lewis, interview by Adler; IBH. See also A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Sept 9; Oct 25; Dec 12, 1938.

¹⁷⁰ The five principal sources for the ensuing section are the Purkey and Neame interviews, *Ray’s Story*, IBH, and SAHO, but I only reference them when a direct quotation is made or a significant fact stated. Ray Harmel’s memoir is to be treated with extreme caution. She had never carried out any research to supplement, contextualise or correct her recollections. She was, withal, advanced in age when the interviews were recorded and her memoir written.

¹⁷¹ A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Jun 15, 1940.

¹⁷² Harmel, *Ray’s Story*, 1; R. Adler interview by Purkey (transcript, 8); R. Harmel, interview by Neame, 1.

¹⁷³ IBH; SAHO.

¹⁷⁴ Harmel, *Thursday Child*, Sect. 2; *Ray’s Story*, 39, respectively.

¹⁷⁵ Dov Levin, ed. *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities. Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), accessed Apr 17, 2019, https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/lithuania6/lit6_230.html.

One of their five children was Moise Adler, Ray's father. He ran a small cartage business, but later went into trade.¹⁷⁶ Though loving towards his daughter, he was a drunk, which may be why Ray herself scarcely ever imbibed.¹⁷⁷ He had many Gentile friends. Her mother, Fagamilla, was a daughter of a Talmud scholar from Tsitevyan (Tytuvėnai) and, unusually for the time, could read and write. Unlike Moise, she was strictly observant. Detesting her religiosity, resignation, and hypochondria, Ray instead found a role model in Grandmother Hannah, a practical and hard-working woman.¹⁷⁸

Moise and Fagamilla raised seven children, six boys and one girl. Save for Ray and her brother Sydney (1908–1990), who emigrated to South Africa two years before her, all of them, as well as the parents, were later murdered by the Nazis, something that was to trouble Ray for the rest of her life, even making her physically punish herself.¹⁷⁹ The family spoke Yiddish, but Ray achieved various levels of fluency in Lithuanian, Russian, German, and Polish too. Like many of their co-religionists in what was the least developed part of Russia,¹⁸⁰ the Adlers lived in abject poverty. They used a bucket toilet. Their palliasses stank. They did not have enough blankets. Ray's wardrobe consisted of a single dress and no underwear. She sometimes had to put on stockings and shoes whilst they were still wet from washing. They used to bath no more than once a week and virtually subsisted on cabbage and potatoes.

After only five years of schooling, Ray started to work to bring in some money. Inspired by a socialist visitor, she and her friends founded a Jewish "sports club" that hosted lectures by older people "on the struggles of the workers for higher wages and their terrible poverty".¹⁸¹ During the Great War, one of her brothers, Taffa, was called up. While in the military, he converted to communism. Joining the club upon his return, he had much influence on Ray and her friends. In April 1926, Taffa asked his sister to collect political literature in Kovno (Kaunas). The leaflets she brought back called for the government to follow up on the land reform and unban the Party. They were distributed on the 1st of May.¹⁸² The next day the police arrived, arresting seventeen people, among them one of Ray's brothers. She fled back to Kovno. For about two years, she lived in the neighbourhood of Slabodka (Slabotkė), working

¹⁷⁶ S. Adler, interview by Purkey (1988) (transcript, 1) (CPO: A1984-E24).

¹⁷⁷ A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Mar 14, 1941.

¹⁷⁸ R. Adler, interview by Purkey (transcript, 2). Cf. Purkey, with S. Adler (transcript, 3).

¹⁷⁹ Harmel, *Thursday Child*, sect. 2; Geoff Sifrin, "Taffy Adler," in Immanuel Suttner, ed. *Cutting Through the Mountain: Interviews with South African Jewish Activists* (Parktown: Penguin, 1997), 8–11; D. Adler, e-mail to author, Jun 6, 2019.

¹⁸⁰ Veronica Belling, "Recovering the Lives of South African Jewish Women during the Migration Years, c1880–1939," PhD thesis (UCT, 2013), 24.

¹⁸¹ *Ray's Story*, 12.

¹⁸² The latter part of the statement seems unlikely for the CP was only outlawed after a right-wing coup in December 1926. On the land reform see Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, 113–114. On the persecution of the communists under the Smetona regime see Alfonsas Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania: From the National Liberation Movement to an Authoritarian Regime (1893–1940)*, trans. Alfred Erich Senn (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2015), 149, 163.

in a saccharine factory, and then in a bakery. It was then she joined the diminutive Lithuanian Communist Party and threw herself into its activities:¹⁸³ colportage, political discussions, and recruitment of new members. Whereas earlier she had come across books by Marx and Kautsky (though she could not get her head around them), it is unclear what kind of literature her Party group studied.¹⁸⁴ Only that printed propaganda being scarce, most of it had to be imported from Germany and passed from one cell to another. They would have read *The Communist Manifesto* as did the comrades in the group of Ray Alexander (Simons), a native of Varaklan (Varakļāni) in Latvia. On the whole, though, Adler learned communism at the coalface. Her instruction in neither revolutionary theory nor practice could compare with that of Alexander who before her departure for South Africa was not only supplied with a copy of the *Communist International* and *What Is to Be Done*, but underwent a crash course in conspiratorial techniques.¹⁸⁵

Those arrested in Raseiniai were still behind bars when in mid-1927 the police got on her track again. A decision was taken that Ray should leave the country. She dressed up as a prostitute and bribed a policeman to take her across a small river into East Prussia. A judge in Stallupönen (Nesterov) sentenced her to five days in jail for illegally crossing the border.¹⁸⁶ However, he allowed her to remain in the country as a political refugee. Having served her time, Ray entrained for Königsburg. There she received support from the International Organisation for Aid to Revolutionaries (MOPR), controlled by the Comintern, before finding a job in a factory, sorting onions.¹⁸⁷ The German CP, operating openly and mounting anti-Nazi demonstrations, made a great impression on her. After six months in Königsburg, spent mostly in the company of other Lithuanian refugees and doubtless receiving further ideological training, Ray headed off to Hamburg where she boarded a ship for Cape Town. She would rather have stayed in Germany or been sent to the USSR, but finally chose to join relatives in South Africa.

She first stayed with her Aunt Ethel, a former Bund member, in Bertrams, Johannesburg. While still fresh off the boat, Ray participated in founding the Jewish Workers Club in Doornfontein, an anti-Zionist socialist group which hosted lectures by CPSA members (including Africans), staged plays, held dances, published its own Yiddish newspaper, and even

¹⁸³ Its membership was between several hundred and several thousand, a large proportion of them Jews. Saulius A. Suziedelis, *Historical Dictionary of Lithuania* 2nd ed. (Plymouth: Scarecrow, 2011), 82ff.

¹⁸⁴ *Ray's Story*, 14.

¹⁸⁵ Ray Simons, *All My Life, All My Strength* (Johannesburg: STE, 2004), 40, 45.

¹⁸⁶ Her portrait on SAHO claims she was detained for six months. This is incorrect. See Harmel, *Ray's Story*, 24–25; R. Adler interview by Purkey (transcript, 4); R. Harmel, interview by Neame, 3.

¹⁸⁷ On MOPR see J. Martin Ryle, "International Red Aid and Comintern Strategy, 1922–1926," *International Review of Social History* 15, no. 1 (1970): 43–68. Cf. Simons, *All My Life, All My Strength*, 42, 46.

got into fights with the Greyshirts at the City Hall steps.¹⁸⁸ Taking English lessons with the bookseller Fanny Klenermann, Ray quickly acquired fluency, although she never lost her Yiddish accent.¹⁸⁹ A Polish immigrant taught her tailoring and she went on to work for ten years as a machinist in Sam Jaff's plant.¹⁹⁰ She organised a lending library, dances, picnics, and a buying club for her co-workers, mostly Afrikaners. She joined the Garment Workers Union and was elected a shop steward and made friends with Anna Scheepers and the Cornelius sisters.¹⁹¹ Her integrity, spirit, and a sense of justice led to frequent brushes with the factory owner. Passionately anti-racist, she also found herself in a grave dispute with the GWU's general secretary and communist, Solly Sachs, who for tactical reasons favoured segregation in the union. Although Sachs was soon afterwards ousted from the Party, Ray would remain unforgiving and disparage him even at his funeral in 1976.¹⁹²

In 1930 or 1932, she herself became a CPSA member. One of her tasks was fundraising and selling *Umsebenzi*, the Party paper.¹⁹³ For a period, she served as the Treasurer of the Johannesburg District Committee. Not long after joining, she fell in love with Lazar Bach, a Latvian-born, highly doctrinaire member of the Politburo.¹⁹⁴ Though unmarried, they moved in together. Then politics intervened. This was a period of factionalism, infighting, and expulsions in the Party. Bach, a chief expeller of “right-wing opportunists”, clashed with the Kotane group over the interpretation of the Native Republic policy.¹⁹⁵ In 1934, he set out for Moscow to seek arbitration by the Comintern.¹⁹⁶ There not only did he lose his case, but was branded a “Trotskyite” and sentenced to forced labour in Russian Far East. He worked as a hewer in gold mines and as lumberjack in the taiga, an extremely hard work, all the more so for an intellectual, “small of stature”.¹⁹⁷ Bach was only 35 years old when he died in Kolyma in February 1941 from “general exhaustion... of the organism, myocarditis, severe frostbites of fingers and toes, phlegm build-up in the left lung”.¹⁹⁸ Profoundly shaken, Ray nevertheless remained a communist and USSR supporter. Decades later she wrote:

¹⁸⁸ S. Adler, interview by Purkey (transcript, 1); Taffy Adler, “Lithuania’s Diaspora: The Johannesburg Jewish Workers’ Club, 1928–1948,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1979): 70–92.

¹⁸⁹ FKP: A2031/A (Ray is not mentioned, though); P. Measroch, e-mail to author, Oct 9, 2014; B. Brown, e-mail to author

¹⁹⁰ On Jaff see Hanlie dos Santos, “Fashion and Family Business Entrepreneurs: Jaff and Company, 1931–1980,” *New Contree*, no. 58 (Nov 2009): 107–129.

¹⁹¹ Records of the GWU: AH1092 (WCL); E. J. Verwey, ed. *New Dictionary of South African Biography*, vol. 1 (Pretoria: HSRC, 1995), 50–53.

¹⁹² Ray Adler, “The Garment Workers,” *Liberation*, no. 27 (Sept 1957): 24–26; P. Joseph, interview by author, Jul 30, 2015.

¹⁹³ Switzer, *Black Press in SA and Lesotho*, 77–78.

¹⁹⁴ Simons & Simons, *Class and Colour*, 448; Brian Bunting, *Moses Kotane. South African Revolutionary* (Belville: Mayibuye, 1998), 67.

¹⁹⁵ Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years*, 65.

¹⁹⁶ Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 166–185; Roth, *Communist Party*, 109–120; Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 67–80; Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid. The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992), 19–21.

¹⁹⁷ Edward Roux, *Rebel Pity* (London: Collings, 1957), 97.

¹⁹⁸ A. N. Ananyev to B. Harmel, Mar 23, 1993 (LBP: A3381) (for the quote); Boris Piliatskin and Brian Pottinger, “Purged by Stalin,” *Sunday Times*, Aug 9, 1992.

Of course I was very, very upset about this but there was nothing I could do. I said at the group to which I belonged that if that was the decision of the Comintern I would have to accept it but that never, never had I heard Lazar express Trotskyist views. I couldn't argue with the Comintern. I wasn't there.¹⁹⁹

When Barbara Harmel was born in 1942, Ray left the factory. With a credit from Jaff, she partnered with Rebecca Kotane and started selling clothes to Africans on the never-never. Her patch was Sophiatown, while Kotane attended to Alexandra. Tilly First, another Litvak and the mother of Ruth First, provided transport as they went around collecting monthly payments. Moses Kotane, an erstwhile rival of her beloved, kept their books. In the 1950s, Ray was able to open an above street level dress shop in Bree Street, the first to allow black women to try on the dress before purchase. She, famously, made Winnie Mandela's wedding gown in 1958.²⁰⁰

Even within the Party circles, the Harmels seemed an odd couple.²⁰¹ D. James Smith is misquoting Barbara Harmel when he has her say that "her father only married her mother because he was romantic about the working class".²⁰² Putting love's chemistry to one side, however, the idea of being wed to a proletarian must still have been appealing to a bourgeois intellectual anxious to shed his class skin. Ray further served as a conduit between him and the working class he was supposed to educate and lead. To quote Leon Levy, a trade unionist and one-time tenant of the Harmels:

He was genuinely interested in trade unionism and, through her, he was close to it. She was his eyes and ears and would brief him and discuss the tensions and differences of opinion in the trade union movement, policy directions and other areas of political activities. It may have been a compatible relationship at that time.²⁰³

Compatible indeed. Not the least because it was bound to strengthen Harmel's own commitment. *The White People* contains a scene which demonstrates how the journalist Jack Waldron's decision to embark upon a precarious path of a revolutionary and to say farewell to the "jolly, carefree sort of a bloke" is bound up with *Eros*—his love for unlearned, yet commonsensical and uncompromising Sue.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ *Ray's Story*, 41. When a rumour spread in the 1930s that foreign-born Jews might face deportation, Ray entered into a formal marriage with a fellow communist Rowley Arenstein (IBH).

²⁰⁰ See "The Nelson Mandela Foundation Mourns the Passing Away of Barbara Harmel," Oct 9, 2018, accessed Apr 17, 2018, <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/the-nelson-mandela-foundation-mourns-the-passing-away-of-barbara-harmel>; Alan Wieder, *Joe Slovo and Ruth First in the War against Apartheid* (New York: Monthly Review, 2013), 32–40; Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 250–251.

²⁰¹ A. Sachs, interview by author, Sept 27, 2014; A. Kathrada, interview by author, Feb 22, 2015; A. Ruff, e-mail to author, Feb 19, 2016. Cf. Morgan, ed., *Communists and British Society*, 83.

²⁰² David James Smith, *Young Mandela. The Revolutionary Years* (London: Phoenix, 2010), 143.

²⁰³ L. Levy, e-mail to author, Oct 27, 2014.

²⁰⁴ Harmel, *The White People* (unpubl. ms, 1959) (MHP: A3300/C), 82–86, 103, 167–169.

Yet no matter how well matched they were politically, theirs was not a happy matrimony. Barbara Harmel describes it bluntly as “a marriage made in hell”. Michael was busy working for the Party and his next of kin inevitably took a back seat. He was messy and careless, laziness and irresponsibility, to his own admission, “deeply ingrained in [his] nature”.²⁰⁵ He maintained an “undergraduate life-style”, reading and writing into the small hours and sleeping through much of the day. Ray would sometimes pop over to their house at lunchtime only to find him still abed.²⁰⁶ Like not a few anti-apartheid dissidents, black and white, he played the field.²⁰⁷ Ray respected him as “a fine Marxist”, but came to understand he was “a very self-centred man and not really a family man at all”.²⁰⁸ They fought ceaselessly, which left deep scars on the mind of their only child. Many interviewees are emphatic Harmel treated his wife badly, even with other people present.²⁰⁹ In private, however, she would respond in kind, pelting him—a “bleddy intellectual”—with “recriminations and scoldings”.²¹⁰ Most comrades and friends found Ray easier to strike up a relationship with than her “polite but very judgmental” spouse. They portray her as “caring, warm—a people person [,] [c]apable, efficient... always willing to help”. At the same time, she could be “rude... abrupt... scathing”. And one cannot fail to notice her outlook on politics was narrow-minded, clichéd, and intolerant. Ray did not take kindly to people who dared question things she took for granted.²¹¹

Women communists in Britain generally divided into activists on the one hand and Party wives on the other.²¹² In Ray, these two categories were rolled into one. After she became a mother, though, issues of bread and butter to a great extent crowded out politics. For much of his life, Michael Harmel was a full-time Party functionary, earning a pittance. In mid-1940s, for instance, he received £6.5 a week, that is nearly £1.5 less than an average white worker in private industry around that time.²¹³ While Soviets supported some of the communist families in Johannesburg in the 1950s, the “Moscow gold” would pour in in small amounts and without regularity. Harmel was one of those charged with handling the kitty, but he would have just

²⁰⁵ I. Wilson (Fischer), e-mail to author, Nov 28, 2014; “Rowley Arenstein, friend of Mandela, supporter of Buthulezi, talks to R. W. Johnson,” *London Review of Books* 13, no. 4 (1991): 22; M. Harmel to B. Lamb, Feb 28, 1974 (for the quote).

²⁰⁶ Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 124 (for the quote); L. Levy, Oct 27, 2014; R. Harmel, interview by Neame, 6.

²⁰⁷ Sepels, interview by author, Jul 30, 2015; Levy, interview by author, Jan 25, 2015; M. Berman, interview by author, Feb 11, 2015; Smith, *Young Mandela*, 143 Cf. Smith, *ibid.*, 97–99, 105–108; G. Slovo, interview by A. Clare, BBC 4, Aug 10, 1997, accessed Apr 25, 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00751vc>.

²⁰⁸ R. Harmel, interview by Neame, 6; Harmel, *Ray's Story*, 43.

²⁰⁹ The Sepels, interview by author; M. Berman, interview by author, Feb 11, 2015; B. Brown, e-mail to author, Dec 24, 2015; Lorna Levy, e-mail to author, Oct 29, 2014.

²¹⁰ Barbara Harmel, *Thursday Child*, sect. 4; M. Harmel to B. Lamb, Nov 17, 1970, resp.

²¹¹ L. Levy, e-mail to author, Oct 24, 2014; B. Brown, e-mail to author, Dec 24, 2015; P. Joseph, interview by auth; N. Levy, interview by author, Jan 25, 2015.

²¹² Morgan, ed. *Communists and British Society*, 43.

²¹³ Liquidator to V. Berrangé, May 9, 1951 (SLDF 5); W. H. Hutt, *The Economics of the Colour Bar* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), 182.

passed the money on.²¹⁴ The burden of earning the family's keep rested primarily—and sometimes solely—on Ray.²¹⁵ When a forgiving uncle left Michael £5000, he would have simply given it all to the Party, had it not been for Ray who put her foot down.²¹⁶ In the event, they used the money to build a house in 47 High Road in 1954. It was to serve as a rendezvous for anti-apartheid activists as well as a party venue.²¹⁷

Michael left the country on the Party's orders in April 1963. Ray followed him later that year. In London, their marriage finally broke down and they separated in mid-1960s, even though politically they had no differences. Harmel found himself a new partner, Kathleen O'Callaghan, an Irishwoman from Mullingar who, after the Second World War, had joined the Tooting branch of the CPGB and worked as a secretary at the University of London.²¹⁸ They met in Budapest. Ray remained on her own, going through a number of jobs, tailoring and housekeeping. Her involvement in the Party continued and she was also active in the anti-apartheid movement. Well into her eighties, she would thrice a week still volunteer at the Publicity Department of the ANC in Goodge Street, performing assorted “dogsbody” tasks. Despite her being “100 percent behind” Gorbachev, the fall of the Berlin Wall came as a terrible shock to Ray.²¹⁹ Her granddaughter recollects: “Everything she had been taught to believe in was crumbling before her eyes. It was very painful to watch. I think it must be like getting proof that there's no God if you're a religious person.”²²⁰ She recovered, eventually. Her thin memoir, written four years later, closes with a reassertion of her unwavering faith in the doctrine she embraced as a young girl in Lithuania:

I am very disturbed and saddened by events in the Soviet Union but must emphasise that this has not in any way lessened my conviction that nothing in the world will destroy socialism and communism for I know that that is the only solution for the future salvation of mankind.²²¹

Ray Harmel, “a loyal foot-soldier in struggle”, lived out her days in the Hammerson House for the elderly and passed away in March 1998.²²²

²¹⁴ G. Ludi, e-mail to author, Sept 12, 2017; W. Sisulu, interview by P. Bonner & B. Harmel, Jun 10, 1994, 7–9 (BHI: A3301/B21). Cf. Barbara Harmel, *Thursday Child*, sect. 2, 5.

²¹⁵ R. Adler, interview by Purkey (transcript, 40); “Ray Harmel,” SAHO, accessed Apr 18, 2019, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/ray-harmel-nee-adler>.

²¹⁶ In *Ray's Story* (42) and in interview by Neame (7), respectively, Ray claims it was £2000 and £3000, but Barbara Harmel disagrees – see her *Thursday Child*, sect. 5.

²¹⁷ Kathrada, interview by author; A. Pahad, interview by author, Feb 28, 2019.

²¹⁸ CP/CENT/PERS/5/5 (PHM).

²¹⁹ Adler, interview by Purkey (transcript, 34);

²²⁰ L. Lamb, e-mail to author.

²²¹ *Ray's Story*, 66.

²²² Stephanie Kemp, *My Life: The Making of an Afrikaner Revolutionary in the South African Liberation Struggle* (Cape Town: SAHO, 2018), 127 (for the quote). See also Glenn Frankel, *Rivonia's Children: Three Families and the Cost of Conscience in White South Africa* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2011), 337–338.

Conclusion

Harmel's extended sojourn in England was the first time he had left the shores of South Africa. The paucity of sources notwithstanding, it patently constitutes a turning point in his *Bildung*. He arrived there a readerly, unaffiliated Marxist confident of his superior understanding of Marx's teachings and, to a degree, disdainful of contemporary communists.²²³ Fifteen months later, he left a disciplined Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist, having been challenged and transformed by his encounter with a truly internationalist "Party in action".²²⁴ In South Africa, especially in Johannesburg, the puny CPSA had just reached rock bottom. In contrast, its British counterpart was a dynamic, high-profile, and comparatively popular organisation. Its members were, on the whole, experienced, dedicated, and self-sacrificing. They did not hesitate to put their careers, indeed, their very lives on the line for the Cause, putting up with police harassment and hostility by much of the public, serving prison sentences, and being martyred in Spain. Some of them had witnessed first-hand Italian, Japanese, and German aggressions, schooled in Moscow, and met such working-class luminaries as Dimitrov, *La Pasionaria*, and Stalin himself. It is inconceivable that these people did not play—as Harmel himself would, self-revealingly, write regarding Clemens Kadalie and his dealings with communists—"a tremendous part in influencing, moulding and training" him.²²⁵ All the more so because, far from remaining an onlooker or a passive subject of indoctrination, he took an active part in the CPGGB activities, be it an initiation by way of selling the Party paper or writing for it in conformity with the principles of communist journalism.

This world of utmost commitment and historical optimism hinged, in large measure, on one thing: the myth of the USSR, its apparent economic, social, and cultural achievements.²²⁶ While Harmel's articles for *The Star* and *The Rhodian* indicate he might still have been in two minds about Soviet Russia, there is no trace of any such ambivalence in his uncritical praise in *The Guardian* of Hewlett Johnson's *The Socialist Sixth of the World* (1939).²²⁷ For a citizen of a country in which racialism and capitalism were inextricably linked, for whom the experience of the exploitation of Africans could not but have been a key radicalising factor—for such an individual the Soviet way of handling the national and race question seemed particularly

²²³ A. H. M. "Influence of Freud and Marx," *Star*, Jun 15, 1937, 18.

²²⁴ Hyde, *Dedication and Leadership Techniques*, 12–13. Leninism was defined by no lesser man than J. V. Stalin as "Marxism of the era of imperialism and of the proletarian revolution..." (*Foundations of Leninism*, 10). The issues encompassed by the Leninist "method" include those of the structure and discipline of the Party, its links with the working-class (non-Party masses), its strategy and tactics, achievement and maintenance of the dictatorship of the proletariat, relations with national liberation movements, etc.

²²⁵ A. Lerumo, "Kadalie of the ICU," review of *My Life and the ICU*, by Clements Kadalie, *AC*, no. 44 (1st qtr, 1971): 104.

²²⁶ Robert Service, *Comrades! History of World Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010), 58–81, 97–106, 130–163, 174–175, 179–189.

²²⁷ Harmel, "Paul Robeson."

relevant. Whereas in Germany and Italy anti-Semitic terror was being unleashed, Bolshevik Russia could pride itself on “absolute racial equality”.²²⁸ “No minority problem” existed in the USSR: “Cultural rights [were] the same for all... everything has been done to foster industry among the non-Russian nationalities.”²²⁹

One of the key ideas in Leninist interpretation of imperialism was that of “amalgamation” of the national liberation and working-class movements, “amalgamation” which Harmel saw embodied, as it were, in Blackman, Buckle, and Robeson. In a public lecture of 1937, Palme Dutt invoked both Lenin and Marx in expounding the concept—one that, advocated by Harmel, would acquire fundamental significance in South Africa where it paved the way for the Congress Movement.²³⁰

The colonial struggle cannot be dismissed as being outside the Class Struggle of the workers: it is an integral part of it... the petty bourgeoisie are the allies of the workers in so far as by getting rid of the alien rulers, they make it possible for the class struggle to be taken a step further. Communists must therefore work inside an existing National Movement, extending their contacts and permeating it so that when the nation becomes free, the class struggle can become the paramount question and dictatorship can be taken over by the oppressed classes as a transition stage.²³¹

The British communist of the 1930s might have been as much of a racialist as the next man (and woman), but since anti-racism and solidarity with oppressed masses in the colonies were tirelessly crammed into him by the leadership and the Comintern, they, perforce, came to form part and parcel of his ideological equipment.²³² Colonial liberation, too, albeit temporarily deprioritised, remained a *sine qua non* of the communist vision.²³³

London witnessed the birth of Harmel the revolutionary. It was a crucial juncture of his self-fashioning as delineated in *The White People*. There, one of the character narrators reflects on the need for “remaking” oneself into “someone dedicated, austere... like a revolutionary from old-time France or Russia”.²³⁴ But a true revolutionary is not, Harmel exhorts elsewhere, “impatient for ‘revolution right away’”. Rather, he (or she) is a “scientific revolutionar[y], adheren[t] of the profound world outlook of historical materialism”.²³⁵ He (or she) is ready “to

²²⁸ Callaghan, *R. Palme Dutt*, 97.

²²⁹ Walter Holmes, “A Worker’s Column,” *DW*, Nov 7, 1938, 2. Cf. Service, *Comrades*, 148, 150–151, 188.

²³⁰ David Everatt, “Alliance Politics of a Special Type: The Roots of the ANC/SACP, 1950–1954,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 1 (Mar 1992): 19–39.

²³¹ R. Palme Dutt, “The Colonial Struggle for Liberation,” 1–5 (in KV2/1807, R. Palme Dutt).

²³² Callaghan, “Racism, the CPGB and the Comintern in the Inter-War Years,” 521. Cf. Stalin, *Foundations of Leninism*, esp. 84–86.

²³³ “Peace and the Colonial Question,” 2–3; R. Palme Dutt, *The Political and Social Doctrine of Communism* (London: Hogarth, 1938), 17.

²³⁴ *TWP*, 82. Barbara Harmel remembers reading a letter by her grandfather that recounts a meeting with Michael who, tearful, lamented his “unworthiness” to be a Party member. Though I did not find any such missive among Arthur’s correspondence at the MHP (it is either lost or I might have missed the passage in question for the handwriting is not always easy to decipher), Ms Harmel is highly unlikely to misremember. She found the episode too “desperately sad, poignant” for that.

²³⁵ Africanus, “First International,” 80; Africanus, “50th Anniversary of the Great Socialist Revolution III: Shaking the World,” *AC*, no. 31 (4th qtr, 1967): 28.

face hard slogging work of persuasion and organisation, often lasting many long and thankless years”.²³⁶

Harmel had claimed so before, but only in London did he really come to appreciate that intellectual conviction counted for little without Party discipline.²³⁷ He grasped that it did not suffice to “want Socialism and a better world”:

[T]he workers must fight like an army... they must have discipline, they must have a party in which they could be organised. The workers must study how to fight, just as a soldier must learn how to handle a gun and a tank and an aeroplane. The workers must have leaders who are brave and who are trustworthy... skilled in the art of war, who can direct operation, and who can teach soldiers to fight not only with courage, but also with understanding.²³⁸

The nature of Harmel’s own input to the revolution was preordained by his class and profession. Not being a proletarian and for all the potential attempts at “self-proletarianisation”, he was destined merely to serve the working class because “intelligentsia... can perform an invaluable auxiliary role in the conquest of power... [b]ut they cannot perform... an independent role”. He was called to aid, modestly and self-denyingly, in bringing the working class to consciousness, by joining the ranks of (to use van Dijk’s term) “symbolic elites... who preformulate and stimulate ideological debate”.²³⁹

He had a busy start. Apprised of the crucial significance of a newspaper in the Party life as well as the abysmal state the CPSA found itself in, particularly in the Transvaal, Harmel had no sooner returned home than he assisted in kick-starting propaganda activity and began to pass on his expertise in Marxism-Leninism.²⁴⁰ As for the former, he was tasked with editing *Inkululeko*, rendering himself so indispensable in this capacity that the Party would later not let him join up.²⁴¹ The latter took the form of tutoring at the Party night school in Fox Street. Before everything else, however, he had to make a case for the “imperialist” war policy.²⁴² As he had morphed into an unconditional Stalinist by now, his argument was instinct with as much conviction and pseudo-rationality as was his advocacy of the United Front.

²³⁶ Africanus, “First International,” 80.

²³⁷ M., “Indifference: Old Snobbery,” *Rhodian* XV, no. 1 (1937): 25; Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 133; Stalin, *Foundations of Leninism*, 119–120. It is possible, with Ken Jowitt, to perceive Harmel’s conversion as coming together of two imperatives of Leninist theory. He had already been possessed of, or inclined towards, what Jowitt describes as a modern element of Leninism (“a materialist orientation that... calls for an empirical, undogmatic examination of social change and organisation”). What experience of the “Party in action” added to this substratum was a charismatic component represented by the “working class, cadres, and Party as heroic elements”. “Leninist Phenomenon,” 11; see also 4, 8.

²³⁸ [Michael Harmel], “Fighting for Freedom. The Story of the Communist Party,” *Inkululeko*, Nov 20, 1943, 2.

²³⁹ R. Palme Dutt, *The Political and Social Doctrine of Communism*, 23–24; Van Dijk, *Ideology*, 316.

²⁴⁰ I. Heymann, interview by D. Everatt (1987) (transcript: 1) (DEP: A2521); [Bunting], “Death of Michael Harmel,” *AC*, no. 59 (4th qtr, 1974): 7.

²⁴¹ Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 45, 56–58; Jones, “*Inkululeko*,” 331–372. A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Jul 22, 1944: “Mick ... is really invaluable to the Party and he is having a row to be let go. Most of his friends are in the army and he frets about it.”

²⁴² N. Mandela to B. Harmel, 1975 (A3300/B); Heymann, interview by Purkey (1983) (transcript: 23).

Early in 1940, Harmel was elected Secretary of the Johannesburg District Committee.²⁴³ From then on, things began to move forward: public meetings were staged with higher frequency and on a bigger scale, new attempts were being made to organise African miners. “Within a few years,” wrote Harmel, “Johannesburg had become once again the largest and most active districts.”²⁴⁴ His contribution to all this was paramount.²⁴⁵ He rapidly established himself as a leading leftist activist in the Transvaal. Arthur proudly reported to his brother in America:

I attended a meeting of Left Groups the other night. When Mick stood up as lecturer he was cheered for 5 minutes before he even said a word. That’s a remarkable thing and he is a remarkable figure nowadays. Don’t know if you can remember the famous W. H. Andrews who was the Sec of the Party in your time. He used to be very popular but he had nothing on Mick.²⁴⁶

Having proven himself both on *The Daily Worker* and in Hardy’s South African group, Harmel was most likely earmarked for all this work by the CPGB leadership. In other words, while he was a rookie and out of his element and therefore did not make a mark in Britain, it was there that “his obvious talents and leadership calibre were recognised”.²⁴⁷ All that makes him (alongside Basner, Simons, Watts, Weinberg, Wolfson, Hardy, and Kerrigan) yet another intermediary between the British and South African Parties just before the CPSA at last managed to stand on its own feet as the influence of both the CPGB and the Comintern (dissolved in 1943) began to wane.²⁴⁸

Harmel’s marriage to Ray Adler, though it was ultimately unhappy and wound up on the rocks, must be discussed in the same breath with Harmel’s politics. It would be unfair and insensitive to reduce it to the political. One cannot help noticing, however, how perfectly his choice of a partner—representing the class conceived of as the powerhouse of revolutionary change, a class he could never ever belong to—fits in with his ideological outlook. Just witness the difference between Ray and Noni Jabavu! Both Michael and Ray were, in their distinctive ways, committed activists, unwaveringly supporting the USSR, ready to sacrifice much, if not all, for their ideals, a stance that could only grow stronger being shared. Ray, too, in some ways served as Michael’s mentor, a connecting link with the proletariat as well as the world of the Holocaust victims. And finally, their union was simply a symbiosis with practical implications

²⁴³ Turok, *Nothing but the Truth*, 110; G. M. Gerhart and Thomas Karis, eds. *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa: 1882–1964*, vol. 4, *Political Profiles 1882–1964* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1977), 36.

²⁴⁴ Michael Harmel, *Fifty Fighting Years: The South African Communist Party 1921–1971* (ms), 25 (SNP: A2729/B11). Cf. Heymann, interview by Purkey (1987) (transcript, 29).

²⁴⁵ [Bunting], “Death of Michael Harmel,” 7.

²⁴⁶ A. Harmel to Tilly & Ted, Sept 25, 1940.

²⁴⁷ Yusuf Dadoo, “An Outstanding Revolutionary,” *AC*, no. 59 (4th qtr, 1974): 22.

²⁴⁸ Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, 190, 225.

for the entire anti-apartheid dissent: “Mick could work for the Party because Ray worked and supplied, looked after everything.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ Brian Bunting quoted in R. Adler, interview by Purkey (transcript, 40).

PART II: DISCOURSE

Chapter 5/ NOT “I”, BUT “WE”. THE IDEOLOGICAL TEXTURE OF MICHAEL HARMEL’S DISCOURSE (1940–1974)

Introduction

This chapter shall discuss Michael Harmel as a journalist, Party historian, and fiction author. Seeing that Harmel’s work still remains largely unknown, my primary object is “a form historical retrieval”.¹ Secondly, I would like to make sense of Harmel’s textual output as a whole. In line with the interdisciplinary approach advertised in Introduction and employed throughout the first part of this thesis, I propose to do so by using tools of literary interpretation and analysis. The following text thus identifies, examines, and interrelates prominent themes and recurrent emphases of Harmel’s discourse, themes and emphases that can be viewed as expressions and elaborations of central beliefs in his worldview.² Not that Harmel’s intellectual legacy exhausts itself by communicating and developing in discourse of these “ideologemes”.³ They, however, constitute its organising axis, its matrix, its “langue”, if you will. Their identification and survey are desirable inasmuch as we wish to replace hagiographic labels projecting an image of Harmel as “deeply devoted to the liberation of all mankind, most passionately in his homeland” with something more tangible.⁴ Having done so, we should be in a position to determine whether (and if so, to what extent) Harmel was, indeed, what he is stereotypically made out to be, namely a “theoretician” (Bundy, Lazerson, Lodge, Meredith, Magubane...); “Lenin of South Africa” (Turok), a “creative thinker” (Sisulu), “always original, never working from sterile doctrine” (Turok).⁵

¹ Corinne Sandwith, “Yours for Socialism,” *World of Letters: Reading Communities and Cultural Debates in Early Apartheid South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2014), 174.

² In no way can I disentangle myself from the categories of the communist studies and South African history. However, I did my utmost to approach Harmel’s textual production inductively to the extent that the prevailing themes or motifs here analysed were identified on quantitative basis. The themes of an “individual”, “scientificity of Marxism-Leninism”, the USSR, “united front”, and (non-)racialism are quite obviously ones that Harmel set great store by, though not always quite consciously. As such, they may be viewed as building blocks of his ideological posture. The specific designation of these “units” is culturally determined, even subjective.

³ I borrow this term from Bakhtin, but redefine it as simply “a basic belief” of an ideology. See “Discourse in the Novel,” in *Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 333.

⁴ “Michael Harmel,” SAHO, accessed Nov 2, 2018, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/michael-alan-harmel>.

⁵ Colin Bundy, “‘Revolution Around Which Corner?: Revolutionary Theory and Contemporary South Africa,” *Transformation*, no. 8 (1989): 2; Joshua N. Lazerson, *Against the Tide* (Belville: Westview Press, 1994), 127; Tom Lodge, *Mandela. A Critical Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 31; Johannes Rantete, *The African National Congress and the Negotiated Settlement in South Africa* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1998), 118; Bernard Magubane et al., “The Turn to Armed Struggled,” *The Road to Democracy in South Africa 1, 1960–1970* (Pretoria: SADET, 2008), 83; Martin Meredith, *Nelson Mandela* (London: Penguin, 1997), 89; www.presidency.gov.za, accessed Dec 20, 2016. B. Turok, interview by author, Jan 28, 2015; Walter Sisulu, *I Will Go Singing. Walter Sisulu Speaks of His Life and Struggle for Freedom* (Cape Town: Robben Isl. Mus., 2001), 181; Ben Turok, *Nothing but the Truth. Behind the ANC’s Struggle Politics* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2003), 110.

The writings here analysed are taken from a range of periodicals and newspapers Harmel contributed to between 1940 and 1974 when his political identity had been consolidated. It is, above all, *The Guardian* and its subsequent incarnations (ca. 1940–1963); *The Fighting Talk* (1950–1963); *Liberation* (1953–1959); and *The African Communist* (1959–1974).⁶ The bibliography provides a full list of these publications. Harmel’s history of the CPSA/SACP, *The Fifty Fighting Years*, served as another significant source. Collation thereof with its previous and abridged versions, including the manuscript, affords some fascinating insights. As did perusal of Harmel’s most ambitious literary project, *The White People* (1959), a science fiction novel which never found favour with publishers in England or South Africa in spite of efforts by author himself, his daughter, and Professor Neil Lazarus.⁷

The question of authorship poses a more serious challenge to the delimitation of the corpus to work with than a thematic (and qualitative) dichotomy postulated from the presentist standpoint (see Introduction). As also stated before, a great deal of what Harmel produced appeared under *noms-de-plume*,⁸ not all of which have been cracked.⁹ Very often, too, he wrote anonymously. At least on four occasions, he assumed the name of Dan Tloome.¹⁰ Harmel further co-authored most CC documents, where his contribution is both “buried in the anonymity of a collective work” and diluted by the input of others. Last not least, even a periodical like *The African Communist* was not

the “personalised” journal of its editor bearing his special, idiosyncratic stamp. It has been, as Michael was always at pains to make it, a party journal, expressing the main lines of policy and interpretation of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party. Michael was, above all else, a party

⁶ On these see James Zug, *The Guardian. The History of South Africa’s Extraordinary Newspaper* (Pretoria: Unisa, 2007), xiii.

⁷ T. Huddleston to B. Lamb, Feb 10, 1975; N. Lazarus, e-mail to author, Oct 27, 2015. The SACP leaders in London were “frosty” in their response when Barbara Lamb (Harmel) suggested the novel for publication in the 1980s. This might have had to do, according to Neil Lazarus, with *The White People* touching upon the contentious issue of the Party’s self-dissolution in 1950. Years later, Ravan Press cited the novel’s “uncertain ‘marketability’” as the reason for turning it down. I. Obery to B. Harmel, Aug 17, 1990, MHP: 3300/B. The novel is known to a handful of researchers and Harmel’s comrades—see N. Levy, interview by author, Jan 25, 2015; Zug, *Guardian*, 308en62; Paul Landau, “Communist Controlled? Reassessing the Years of ANC Exile,” review essay on Stephen Ellis, *The External Mission: The ANC in Exile* (unpubl. paper), 31.

⁸ They are Michael Allen, Spectator A(nton) Lerumo, Alan (Allan) Doyle, and Terence Africanus—see, respectively, Elizabeth Ceirog Jones, “*Inkululeko*,” in Les Switzer, ed. *South Africa’s Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880s–1960s* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 346; IBH; Ronnie Kasrils, “*The African Communist’s* Clandestine Years,” *AC*, no. 178 (3rd qtr, 2009): 17–29. As he occasionally covered a single topic for different audiences, he would even covertly quote himself—see Lerumo’s “A Historical Step Forward. Background and Prospects of the New All-African Federation of Trade Unions,” *AC*, no. 2 (Jan 1960): 13; “The All-Africa Trade Union Movement,” *FT*, Feb 1960, 10. He did not employ these pen names for security reasons only. Some of them operate rhetorically: Lerumo, a speaking name (“spear” in Southern Sotho), evokes an African bearer, while Allen/Alan Doyle sits well with Irish topics.

⁹ For instance, Tom Lodge, taking his cue from Baruch Hirson, characterises “Alan Doyle” (= Harmel) as “a Wits psychologist and another of the Party’s university student leaders”. See “Lionel Forman’s Trumpet: National Communism in South Africa (1953–1959),” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 63, no. 4 (Oct 1993): 606.

¹⁰ “The Africanists and the Congress,” *FT*, Aug 1958, 8–9, 12; “Africa for the Africans,” Vol. 12, no. 6 (1958): 7, 10, 13; “*The Freedom Charter* and the 1949 Programme of Action,” Vol. 12, no. 7 (Nov 1958): 11–12; “Exit the Africanists,” Vol. 12, no. 8 (1958): 7, 12, 16. Reprinted in *Sophiatown Renaissance. A Reader*, Ntongela Masilela, ed., 438–472, accessed Sept 25, 2018, <http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/nam/general/essays/Sophiatown%20Reader%20Real.pdf>. That Harmel rather than Tloome authored these articles is a recollection of Paul Joseph who sat on the editorial board of *The Fighting Talk*. Interview by author, Jul 31, 2015.

man, his special talents and abilities at all times subordinated to the collective guidance and the collective work of the party... All his life, in everything he did, the party came first.¹¹

Bunting's reminiscence accords with the precepts of Soviet journalism. This conceived of a publicist not as a subjective commentator, but as an "ideological warrior' for the party", his task being to "reveal the laws that determine the functioning and development of economic, social, ideological, and intellectual life in society".¹² The fourth chapter, too, demonstrated that being a communist meant a voluntary participation in the "corporate identity" of the Party.¹³ In like vein, Mia Roth, examining the early history of the CP in South Africa, observes that the agency often lay with the organisation rather than individuals who frequently served "merely" as its instruments.¹⁴ This would suggest an inclusive approach to the work of authors like Michael Harmel. That is to say, the present project having as its objective the reconstruction of Harmel's thought-world, one feels justified in considering all manner of texts: from highly individualised through "pen-named" to collective and anonymous discourse. Another corollary is that one can legitimately perceive Harmel as representative of perhaps not of his entire in-group (CPSA/SACP), but of a certain type of a twentieth-century communist. To be sure, "the idea that a single individual's life can be taken as representative of a wider group undercuts notions of individuality".¹⁵ But that was precisely what the communist ideology and the enactment of it by Party members in their lives and discourses added up to.

Before we proceed to make an attempt at unpicking Harmel's discourse after 1940, let us take a quick look at his fortunes in this period seeing that Part 2 deals with them only sporadically.

Soon after joining the Party, Harmel replaced John (Jack) Gathercole as Secretary of the Johannesburg District Committee.¹⁶ He started friendships with, among others, Bill Andrews and Moses Kotane who personify the two major strands of the communist

¹¹ [Brian Bunting], "Death of Michael Harmel," *AC*, no. 59 (4th qtr, 1974): 6–8.

¹² The quotes come, respectively, from Rilla Dean Mills, "The Soviet Journalist: A Cultural Analysis," Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois (1981), 100 and E. P. Prokhorov, "Journalism," in *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., vol. 9 (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 298.

¹³ Harry Kreisler, "The Individual, Charisma, and the Leninist Extinction" (interview with Kenneth Jowitt), *Conversations with History*, Dec 6, 1999 (transcript 3, 4), accessed Oct 19, 2018, <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people/Jowitt/jowitt-con0.html>.

¹⁴ Mia Roth, *The Communist Party in South Africa. Racism. Eurocentricity and Moscow, 1921–1950* (Johannesburg: Partridge, 2016), 4–5.

¹⁵ Gideon Cohen and Andrew Flinn, "In Search of a Typical British Communist," in *Agents of the Revolution. New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, Kevin Morgan et al. eds. (Oxford: Lang, 2005), 49–50.

¹⁶ Ben Turok, *Nothing But the Truth: Behind the ANC's Struggle Politics* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2003), 110 and Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 26. On Gathercole see also Sisifo Mxolisi Ndlovu, "The Western Super-Powers and the Liberation Struggle in Africa: The Politics of Imperialism, Domination and Resistance, 1948–1980s," *Afrika Zamani*, no. 17 (2009), 159.

movement in South Africa.¹⁷ He met young Nelson Mandela, gradually succeeded in disabusing him of his anti-communist sentiments and later encouraged him in reading through the Marxist canon.¹⁸ With Edwin Mofutsanyana and Rusty Bernstein, Harmel carried on editing the Party newspaper *Inkululeko*.¹⁹ In February 1943, he was elected to the Party's Central Committee.²⁰ Throughout the Second World War, he would regularly speak at the CPSA rallies at the Johannesburg City Hall.²¹ In October 1945, the Party ran him, abortively, for the Johannesburg City Council in the Von Brandis Ward.²² In August 1946, Harmel reported for *The Guardian* on the African mineworkers' strike on the Witwatersrand, whereupon he found himself among the 52 people charged with abetting the strikers. He got away only with a £50 fine, however.²³ In the general elections in 1948, he contested the Hillbrow/Berea constituency, but garnered no more than 690 votes.²⁴ The National Party, which won the elections, made no secret of its intention to outlaw communism. The CPSA leadership chose to forestall the government by dissolving itself,²⁵ even though Harmel and Andrews opposed the motion, the only two CC members to have done so.²⁶ He helped to found the *South African Society for Peace and Friendship with the Soviet Union* and, in April 1951, the Transvaal Peace Council.²⁷ In May 1952, as a "listed" communist, Harmel received a banning order under the Suppression of Communism Act. This instructed him to "abstain from any gatherings other than social and religious... and... to withdraw from a number of organisations".²⁸ The authorities would renew and tighten the ban throughout the decade, compelling Harmel to resort to less open and more vicarious ways of political work. Early in the 1950s, he was one of those who incited and organised

¹⁷ See Arthur to Tilly & Ted, Sep 25, 1940; Alan Doyle (=Harmel), "By the Way," *Guardian*, Jun 29, 1950, 4; Brian Bunting, *Moses Kotane. South African Revolutionary* (Belville: Mayibuye Books, 1998), 266, 205.

¹⁸ Elleke Boehmer, *Mandela. A Very Short Introduction* (New York: OUP, 2008), 36.

¹⁹ Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 45, 56–58; Jones, "Inkululeko," 331–372.

²⁰ Although Turok maintains Harmel became an CC member in 1941 (*Nothing but the Truth*, 110), according to Gerhart he was only elected to the CC in 1943 (KGP WCL). This is confirmed by Harmel's police dossier (SLDF 5). Cf. Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 62, 71. A CV in the WMR archive puts his joining of the "executive committee of Secretariat" in 1942.

²¹ Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 49–52. Paul Joseph who would attend the meetings opines Harmel "wasn't a rhetorical speaker, he wasn't a rabble-rouser, he spoke very steadily, very quietly, with a good insight... which was different to the other guys. The other guys were punching... the air, that sort of thing." Interview by author, Jul 31, 2015.

²² "Appeasement Policy Attacked by Election Candidates," *Guardian*, Oct 4, 1945, 1; Harmel, "The Elections – and After," *Guardian*, Nov 8, 1945, 5; Stephen Clingman, *Bram Fischer. Afrikaner Revolutionary* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts 1998), 176–177.

²³ Michael Harmel, "Strike Diary," *Guardian*, Aug 22, 1946, 3, 6; A. Lerumo (= Michael Harmel), *Fifty Fighting Years. The Communist Party of South Africa, 1921–1971* (London: Inkululeko, 1980), 78; Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, 179–184; SLDF 5.

²⁴ KGC; *Fifty Fighting Years*, 79.

²⁵ Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 114–128.

²⁶ Sheridan Johns, "Invisible Resurrection. Recreation of a Communist Party in South Africa in the 1950s," *African Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (2007), 20.

²⁷ Doyle, "By the Way," *Guardian*, Nov 17, 1949, 4; WMR archive (PFACIII). Transcript of the recording made by Michael Harmel on the early history of the South African Peace Movement, Jul 11, 1972 (HRBP: A3299). The document is somewhat involved and contradictory. The speaker further got some of his dates wrong. On the TPC see Gwendolyn M. Carter and Thomas Karis, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1964: Hope and Challenge, 1935–1952, Vol 2* (Stanford: Hoover Press, 2013), 68. Harmel was tried for breaching his ban by attending a meeting in protest of the Korean War (which had a UK lawyer and left-wing activist D. N. Pritt as a guest of honour), but was acquitted by a sympathetic magistrate (recording, 6–8). See also D. N. Pritt, *The Autobiography of D. N. Pritt: The Defence Accuses* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1966), 66–67; "Peace Meeting Was Not Political. Michael Harmel Acquitted," *Clarion*, Aug 7, 1952, 3.

²⁸ Transcript of the recording... 6.

the clandestine reassembly of Party.²⁹ The Congress of the Democrats leadership would routinely seek his counsel.³⁰ When, in the mid-fifties, the South African Indian Congress opened the Central Indian High School in Fordsburg, Harmel joined its faculty as an English teacher and became the school's first principal.³¹ With a fellow teacher, Alfred Hutchinson, he authored a futuristic play *2005*, a dramatic adaptation of *The Freedom Charter* that portrayed a multiracial democracy in South Africa after liberation. It was staged at the end of the school term, featuring Barbara Harmel, Thembi Mandela, Sheila Weinberg, Toni Bernstein, and others.³² The year 1959 saw Harmel launch the SACP's *The African Communist*.³³ During the State of Emergency in 1960, declared after the Sharpeville shootings, he was among the handful of communist leaders who, having escaped arrest, initiated public re-emergence of the Party.³⁴ He went on to make a case for launching armed struggle.³⁵ Dispatched to Moscow as a delegate to a meeting of Communist Parties later that year, he assisted in negotiating Soviet support for this new course of action.³⁶ Back in South Africa, Harmel briefed the CC on the Sino-Soviet dispute.³⁷ He was involved in procurement of a safe house in Rivonia (Lilliesleaf Farm),³⁸ though Paul Landau, WCL Historical Papers, and SAHO are wrong in claiming Harmel served on Umkhonto we Sizwe high command.³⁹ Even in this busy period, he found time

²⁹ Johns, "Invisible Resurrection," 20; Tom Lodge, "Secret Party: South African Communists between 1950 and 1960," *South African Historical Journal* 67, no. 4 (2015), 433–464. His underground activities were hallmarked by a lack of fear "to the point of recklessness" (B. Turok, interview by author, Jan 28, 2015). Harmel earned displeasure of his relatives when he had held a secret meeting in their garden (P. Measroch, interview by author, Oct 4, 2014). He used to go for walks when supposed to lie low (Turok, interview), drink and drive around with secret documents (the Sepels, interview with author, Jul 30, 2015) or play loud music in a safe house in the middle of the night—see Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 327–328. He even lost a list of contacts—see Bob Hepple, *Young Man with a Red Tie* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013), 99. Whereas Albie Sachs, who briefly worked with Harmel in July 1960, recalls his "effective" use of "a cap and a moustache" (interview by author, Sept 27, 2014), Rica Hodgson does not believe his disguise would have deceived anyone—see *Footsoldier for Freedom* (Johannesburg: Picador, 2010), 127.

³⁰ Turok, interview by author, Jan 28, 2015.

³¹ Ahmed Kathrada, *Memoirs* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004), 117; Amin Cajee, *Fordsburg Fighter: The Journey of an MK Volunteer* (Johannesburg: Face2Face, 2016), 15–17, ProQuest Ebrary. Harmel's teaching diverged from the official curriculum by including Olive Schreiner and contemporary black poetry (E. Pahad, interview with author, Jan 15, 2015). Moosa Moosajee and Molly Fischer followed Harmel as principals. Alfred Hutchinson, *Road to Ghana* (New York: John Day, 1960), 14; A. Kathrada, interview with author, Jan 22, 2015).

³² Hutchinson, *Road to Ghana*, 8; H. Godwin, e-mail to author, Feb 3, 2015; IBH.

³³ Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 258–260.

³⁴ Turok, *Nothing But the Truth*, 103–118; Hepple, *Young Man with a Red Tie*, 98–103; Johns, "Invisible Resurrection," 15–16; R. and M. Sepels, interview with author, Jul 30, 2015; Harmel, "Notes on the Communist Party in South Africa," 12 (RKP).

³⁵ Lodge, "Secret Party," 457; "South Africa: What Next" (SNP).

³⁶ Vladimir Shubin and Maria Traikova, "'There is No Danger from the Soviet Bloc,'" *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Vol. 3, International Solidarity* (Johannesburg: Struik & Zebra, 2013), 991; Stephen Ellis, *External Mission. ANC and the Communist Party in Exile, 1960–1990* (London: Hurst & Comp., 2012), 13; Philip Bonner, Jabulani Sithole, Peter Delius, Janet Cherry, Pat Gibbs, and Thozama April, "Turn to Armed Struggled," in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Vol 1, 1960–1970* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2004), 83. Lodge suggests the "policy switch" was raised with the Soviets later than claimed by Matthews (ibid.), namely in 1961 ("Secret Party," 457).

³⁷ Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 226; Hepple, *Young Man with a Red Tie*, 105.

³⁸ David James Smith, *Young Mandela: Revolutionary Years*. London (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010), 222–223; Joel Joffe, *The State Versus Nelson Mandela. The Trial That Changed South Africa* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2007), 80–82; Martin Meredith, *Nelson Mandela. A Biography* (London: Penguin, 1997), 203.

³⁹ Paul Landau, "The ANC, MK, and 'The Turn to Violence' (1960–1962)," *South African Historical Journal* 64 (2012): 553; <http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory/U/collections&c=A3300/R/9009>; <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/michael-alan-harmel>; accessed Dec 21, 2019. Cf. A. Kathrada, interview by author, Jan 22, 2015; Joe Slovo, *Unfinished Autobiography* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997), 173f.

to revive, in July 1962, *The Adelphi*, partly as an “insurance” in anticipation of the banning of *New Age*.⁴⁰ It carried works of literary heavyweights like Sartre and Yevthusenko as well as stories and verse by John Pepper Clark, Christopher Okigbo, Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, young Thabo Mbeki, and the editor himself. In late 1962, Harmel was placed under 24-hour house arrest for five years.⁴¹ With the liberation movement under fire, the SACP ordered him to flee the country. He crossed the border into Botswana with Rica and Jack Hodgson in April 1963.⁴² Briefly, he was toying with the idea of undergoing a plastic operation that would enable him to be infiltrated back into South Africa and sounded the Czechoslovak authorities out on the viability of the plan.⁴³ However, no sooner had the news broken of the police raid at Liliesleaf Farm than he threw himself into rallying international support for the Rivonia Trialists and, subsequently, for his friend Bram Fischer.⁴⁴ For the next ten years, Harmel operated in and from England. He was instrumental in setting up the SACP’s external mission. He travelled to socialist countries and cultivated liaisons with the British communists.⁴⁵ He had a hand in the foundation of the British and Irish Anti-Apartheid Movements.⁴⁶ He participated in the landmark conference in Morogoro (1969) at which the ANC adopted a new programme (*Strategy and Tactics*) and opened its ranks to non-Africans.⁴⁷ While writing occasionally for a number of periodicals, his principal assignment remained the editorship of *The African Communist*. Exile brought on depression, to which he was probably predisposed anyway.⁴⁸ His drinking problem exacerbated as well.⁴⁹ Early in the 1970s, Harmel fell foul of the AC editorial board, was removed from the post and late in 1972 seconded to Prague as the SACP

⁴⁰ Mark Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki. The Dream Deferred* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball, 2007), 127.

⁴¹ “Journalists under ‘House Arrest,’” *Democratic Journalist* 11, no. 1 (1963): 5; SLDF 5.

⁴² Hodgson, *Footsoldier for Freedom*, 124–128.

⁴³ A minute of a meeting with Bohuslav Laštovička on July 12, 1963, Office of President Antonín Novotný Collection, 2nd part, JAR [RSA], box 111 (NA, CZ).

⁴⁴ See Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, pt. 7, “Rivonia”. See “Le proces de Prétoria est truqué à l’avance,” *Combat*, no. 16, Sam-Dim, Nov 17, 1963; Harmel, “High Drama in Pretoria,” *LM*, Jun 1964, 277–281; “Heroes of Rivonia,” *Solidarity*, Suppl. no. 9 (1964): 1–2; “A Brave Man Stands in Court,” *Solidarity*, Suppl. no. 7 (1966): 1.

⁴⁵ Communist Party of Great Britain Congress (31st Congress, 1969), tape 8 (BL).

⁴⁶ “Lowestoft May Have Anti-Apartheid Group,” unspecified (MHP). “White Miner in South Africa Earns £95 More a Month than a Non-White,” *Littlehampton Gazette*, Feb 7, 1964; Harold Cosh, “Cure for Unwelcome Apartheid Laws. A Bullet, It Seems,” *Littlehampton Gazette*, Feb 14; Michael Harmel, “Hits Back ‘Rather Silly Letter,’” *Littlehampton Gazette*, Feb 21 and 22, 1964; Kader Asmal, *Politics in My Blood: A Memoir* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011), 54; L. Asmal, e-mail to author, Aug 29, 2014; Tom Lodge, *Sharpeville. An Apartheid Massacre and Its Consequences* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 254; Harold Soreff and Ian Greig, *The Puppeteers* (London: Tandem Books, 1965), 29; “Anti-Apartheid Meeting in Dublin. Michael Harmel gives exclusive interview to Anthony Coughlan,” *Irish Democrat*, Jun 1964, 8.

⁴⁷ J. Jele, e-mail to author, Mar 27, 2016. On the landmark conference see Ellis, *External Mission*, 60–82; Maloka, *South African Communist Party*, 25–29; Nhlanhla Ndbele and Noor Nieftagodien, “The Morogoro Conference: A Moment for Self-Reflection,” in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 1, 1960–1970 (Pretoria: UNISA, 2004), 573–599.

⁴⁸ See Turok, *Nothing but the Truth*, 110–111. As mentioned in Pt 1, Barbara Harmel detects in her father signs of clinical depression from early on (IBH).

⁴⁹ According to Hazel (Hutchinson) Goodwin, Harmel looked unwell when she last saw him in 1974 and was suffering from “a liver disease”—see *The Other Side of the Road* (London: Governor House, 2010), 538. The “liver disease”, however, did not kill him, as she believes. On Harmel’s alcoholism/heavy drinking see IBH; H. Goodwin, e-mail to author, Feb 3, 2015; J. Jele, email to author, Mar 27, 2016; P. Jordan, e-mail to author, Oct 15, 2014; S. Neame, interview by author, Jan 29, 2016; A. Sachs, interview by author, Sep 27, 2014; the Sepels, interview by author, Jul, 30, 2015.

representative on the *World Marxist Review*, a Soviet-controlled propaganda journal.⁵⁰ He died suddenly from cerebral haemorrhage on June 18, 1974.⁵¹ The last goodbye was a small affair, with only Ray, Barbara, Kate O’Callaghan, Mark Shope, Yusuf Dadoo, and Joe Slovo present.⁵² His urn was placed in a columbarium at the Břevnov Cemetery in Prague. The lease of the niche expired in 1997. Eight years later, Harmel’s ashes were scattered at a glade in the cemetery in the neighbourhood of Liboc-Vokovice. In Autumn 2019, a delegation of South African communists for the first time paid their respects to the late comrade by visiting his final resting place. At the time of writing (late December 2019), an installation of a memorial plaque in the Liboc-Vokovice was being considered.⁵³

Against the Individual

The Only Test We Recognise

The narrative section revealed Harmel as a non-conformist, someone who had always gone against the tide. That did not alter even after he had been aggregated to the Party and found a global fellowship in revolt against the hated social order. For as a communist he could live a paradox, wedding non-conformity to conformity. The far-sighted individual, hungry for truth and confronted by the obtuse, Philistine crowd whom we encounter in Harmel’s juvenile fiction joins forces with brothers and sisters in a family-like movement.⁵⁴ He is no longer on his lonesome. And it is this “communion of saints” that matters.⁵⁵ The individual, on the other hand, is time after time cut down to size in Harmel’s discourse. Jack Cope in *Comrade Bill* (1943), he writes, correctly placed emphasis on classes rather than individuals since it is the former that “determine events”. The Simonses, in contrast, erred by doing the very opposite in *Class and Colour in South Africa* (1969).⁵⁶ Nkrumah is “egoistic” and “conceited” and Kadalie’s careerism and self-aggrandisement (as against

⁵⁰ According to Sylvia Neame, “he was pushed out”, possibly owing to his drinking problem (interview by author, Jan 29, 2016). Essop Pahad, denying Harmel was an alcoholic, believes the former was assigned to Prague on humanitarian grounds as his health had been deteriorating (interview by author, Jan 15, 2015). Kasrils in “*The African Communist’s Clandestine Years*” (22) puts Harmel’s secondment to Prague at 1970. Gerhart dates it three years later (KGP). Bunting accurately remembers he took over from Harmel in 1972, but he is obviously in error in claiming it happened only after his predecessor passed away (“Introductory Essay: *The African Communist*,” 3, accessed Oct 12, 2018, http://disa.ukzn.ac.za/sites/default/files/pdf_files/ess00000000.040.026.001.pdf). Harmel’s letter from this period, undated though it is (MHP) as well as the *WMR* archives corroborate Bunting’s recollection.

⁵¹ B. Harmel to N. Mandela, Feb 7, 1975 (MHP).

⁵² IBH.

⁵³ V. Čmoková, e-mail to author, Jul 2, 2014; M. Karpíšková, e-mail to author, Nov 28, 2019.

⁵⁴ M. A. H., “Birdman,” *Rhodian* XIII, no. 3 (1935): 15–18.

⁵⁵ Cf. Thomas Linehan, *Communism in Britain, 1920–39: From the Cradle to the Grave* (Manchester: MUP, 2017), 100; Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times. A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Pantheon, 2002), 134.

⁵⁶ Harmel, “*Comrade Bill*. Biography of Great Labour Leader,” review of *Comrade Bill*, by R. K. Cope, *Guardian*, Sept 30, 1943, 3 (cf. “Trade Unions Face the Future,” *Liberation*, no. 10 [Jan 1954]: 5); Lerumo, “A Century of Oppression,” review of *Class and Colour in South Africa*, by H. J. and R. Simons, *AC*, no. 40 (1st qtr, 1970): 84.

selflessness of the communist members of the ICU) should serve as a warning to African revolutionists.⁵⁷ “[T]he great weakness” of the lead character of Schreiner’s *From Man to Man* lies in that “her clash with bourgeois ideology is... a lonely one“, that “she carries it out single-handed within the ranks of the middle class“.⁵⁸ We live in a time when what is “needed [is] not protest, but organisation” and “collective action”.⁵⁹ Now and then, Harmel pauses to consider achievements of individuals. But he does so almost apologetically.⁶⁰

When *Fifty Fighting Years* reports the (“incorrect”) Central Committee’s resolution to disband the Party in anticipation of the anti-communist legislation, the readers are left in the dark about the identity of the two nays. Perhaps it is no more than a natural modesty for Harmel himself was, as we have seen, one of them. But the book was published under the name of A. Lerumo which, until very recently, has not been *generally* known to be Harmel’s alias. His name, furthermore, figures elsewhere in the text.⁶¹

It is because *The Freedom Charter* “provides us with... conception of what the **people**—not just this or that individual means by Freedom” what makes it great and, in essence, a conversation stopper: there is no more to talk about now. Only “creative energy of masses”, their “impetuous revolutionary spirit”, not individual leaders, however brilliant, can provide guarantee that economic independence will follow political one in the former colonies.⁶²

A firm belief in the superiority of “collective wisdom” to which an individual must yield received clear expression in a letter to Lionel Forman whose manuscript *March to Freedom* earned Harmel’s displeasure.⁶³

...we, the movement collectively, work very hard to establish, distribute and keep going publications which express and help our collective point of view, and therefore those whose extremely responsible

⁵⁷ Doyle, “The Gold Coast Revolution and The Nkrumah Cult,” review of *Kwame Nkrumah*, by Timothy Bankole, *FT*, Sept 1956, 14 (cf. Doyle, “Ghana and the Gold Coast Revolution,” review of *Autobiography*, by Kwame Nkrumah, *FT*, May 1957, 11); Lerumo, “Kadalie of the ICU,” review of *My Life and the ICU*, by Clements Kadalie, *AC*, no. 44 (1st qtr, 1971): 103–108.

⁵⁸ Harmel, *Olive Schreiner, 1855–1955* (Cape Town: Real Print. & Publ. Comp., 1955), 9.

⁵⁹ Lerumo, “Going It Alone,” review of *The Autobiography of an Unknown African*, by Naboth Mokgatle, *AC*, no. 48 (1st qtr, 1972): 106.

⁶⁰ Lerumo, “David Ivon Jones, 1883–1924,” *AC*, no. 58 (3rd qtr, 1974): 64.

⁶¹ *Fifty Fighting Years*, 78–79, 82 (cf. “Notes on the Communist Party in South Africa,” 7 [RKP]); IBH.

⁶² Africanus, “A Note on Mr Mboya’s ‘Socialism,’” *AC*, no. 14 (Jul 1963): 63; “Turbulent Africa,” 9 (for the quotes) (cf. “The Africanists and the Congress,” 443; “Cairo Seminar,” *LM*, Dec 1966, 577); Harmel, “After the Colonial Revolution,” *Liberation*, no. 25 (Jun 1957): 12, 16–17. In “Turbulent Africa”, Harmel postulates three (interdependent) stages for the African revolution: (i) anti-colonial revolution (political independence, Africanisation of the army and police, etc.); (ii) social revolution (detrabalisation, agrarian reform, industrialisation, labour legislation, non-capitalist development, mass participation of workers and peasants in the running of the state); (iii) African unity and socialism (obliteration of arbitrary colonial borders and unification of the continent on a socialist basis).

⁶³ A. L., “Authoritative Soviet Voice,” review of *Following Lenin’s Course*, by L. I. Brezhnev, *AC*, no. 50 (3rd qtr, 1972): 107 (for the quote); “Much Ado About Pasternak. A Review of *Doctor Zhivago*,” *Liberation* 6 (Dec 1958): 11.

task it is to write for these publications have a duty to express that collective point of view and not just ride our own individual hobby horses...⁶⁴

Not surprisingly, in his novel, too, the collective leadership of the USSR compares most favourably with the US presidential system—a system that is, moreover, hijacked by the financial oligarchy.⁶⁵ And this “ideologeme” is not confined to the *diegetic* level, but inscribes itself in the “structure of narrative transmission”.⁶⁶ Harmel’s novel comprises four first-person (or, more precisely, *homodiegetic*) narratives, an epistolary chapter, and an epilogue, but there is hardly any sign of “polyphony” as the segments are not varied in style and one can discern no “battle between point of views, value judgements and emphases”.⁶⁷ After all, the narrators belong to a comparatively small, if global resistance movement and share the same basic beliefs and values. As for the cognitive constraints, these are easily overcome: the narrators have pooled their knowledge and are in the know. The act of producing a counter-narrative parallels the foregoing anti-colonial struggle (or at least its “progressive” strand): it is ideologically monochromatic and a collaborative endeavour. In other words, Harmel’s novel demonstrates by its *sjuzet* as much as its *fabula* that it originates within an organisation. It argues that, whatever the task, there is safety in numbers—and unity.⁶⁸

It bears mentioning that whereas in *The White People* collectivity surmounts limits of an individual perspective and imperfections of human memory,⁶⁹ these limits and imperfections are intrinsic to the experience of cataclysmic events in many other works of science fiction where the focus tends to be on a single individual.⁷⁰ The narration is made to appear tentative, nuanced and, to some extent, inconclusive even by the South African historian Arthur Keppel-Jones and his nameless chronicler in *When Smuts Goes* (1947).⁷¹

⁶⁴ M. Harmel to L. Forman, Sept 16, 1958; quoted in Sadie Forman and André Odendaal, eds. *A Trumpet from the Housetops: The Selected Writings of Lionel Forman* (Cape Town: D. Philip), xxvii–xxviii.

⁶⁵ *The White People* (unpubl. ms, 1959) (MHP: A3300/C), 42f, 46, 111, 178–179, 196, 202, 265, 267, 270, 279ff, 345.

⁶⁶ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse. The Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978), 24.

⁶⁷ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980), 243–254; Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 316 (for the quote).

⁶⁸ Ms Harmel in her “Reader’s Report” (MHP) avers that “the novel’s attempt to forge a vision of history as a site of sequential struggles, each more demanding than the last, towards human freedom, is undercut by its failure to rise above manifestly class-based stylistic and dialogical idiom”. As her critique neglects to specify what exactly is meant by “idiom” and what features render it “class-based” or “orthodox”, I find it impossible to controvert. In any event, I claim that there, in fact, exists a homology between the diversity-within-unity in *diegesis* (multinational and multi-creedal Human Information Society as a crucial force of liberation) and that in the narrative situation (a unanimous picture of the past collectively constructed by members of HIS).

⁶⁹ Ideological skewness does not worry Harmel either. The resistance organisation’s remit is to spread “information” rather than “propaganda” (166f) as though the difference were easily defined.

⁷⁰ H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (London: OUP, 1956), 71, 101, 119; Wyndham, *The Kraken Wakes* (London: Penguin, 1979), 7, 11, 15; Lewis Sowden, *Tomorrow’s Comet. A Tale of Our Times* (London: Hale, 1951), 9–10, 90.

⁷¹ *When Smuts Goes. A History of South Africa from 1952 to 2010 First Published in 2015* (London: Gollancz, 1949), 44, 147, 183, 226.

Harmel's essays on *Doctor Zhivago* and a John Osborne play likewise resound with the overtones of his (and the communist) view of the individual. He objects to Pasternak's vision of the October Revolution, the "Great Patriotic War", and the *post-bellum* development because the novelist, instead of plumping for "genuine, representative people, acting upon and being acted upon by events" as reflectors, treats the reader to "the worm's-eye view of the revolution: an *unedifying* caricature".⁷² By contrast, the protagonist in *Look Back in Anger* represents "a valid and convincing type". Why? He emerged out of what Harmel interprets as "the intellectual and moral damage wrought upon millions of the finest people in Britain by dismal shortcomings of the Labour Party."⁷³

Epistemological and ethical *a priori*s of such a perspective leap to the eye. There is only one truth and it can be arrived at by effort. The author is under an obligation to make it known. For a failure to do so there is no excuse. These *a priori*s emerge from Harmel's article most clearly indeed. One might argue, though, that this "truth", not only consecrated, but furnished by the official or ideologically acceptable discourse (here made up of pragmatic texts which serve as a yardstick for fiction), is tantamount to a *collective* viewpoint.⁷⁴ And it is this "collective" viewpoint that warrants the rejection by the publisher of Pasternak's manuscript which is, or so Harmel believes, "unendurably offensive to the public as a whole". A partial perspective, the perspective of an individual who "is only carried along" and does not appreciate "the real meaning and significance of what is happening about him", is to be barred from the public existence. In fairness, Harmel himself does not want it done by a decree. As he wrote elsewhere, art and culture produced by "inward-looking cliques of intellectual snobs" and "[d]ivorced from the people" will "wither and die" anyway.⁷⁵

Stalin

My observations on the extensional component of *The White People* (1959) passed over one remarkable detail. Although the Soviet leadership is a collective one, in the character of the "wise and powerful leader" with the Latinate name *Manant Oram* ("they penetrate the region", "they extend borders", etc.) who reigns the space invaders, one cannot but

⁷² Harmel, "Much Ado about Pasternak," 10 (my emphasis). See also Franz K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 9, 58–60.

⁷³ Harmel, "Voices of Angry Men," review essay on *Look Back in Anger*, by John Osborne; *Not by Bread Alone*, by Vladimir Dudintsev, *FT*, Dec 1957–Jan 1958, 8.

⁷⁴ Doyle, "Voices of Angry Men"; Harmel, "This Book Is Dynamite," review of *Transvaal Episode*, by Harry Bloom, *New Age*, May 10, 1956, 6.

⁷⁵ "Objection," *Adelphi*, no. 8 (Mar 1963): 1.

sense the echoes of the Stalin and Mao cults.⁷⁶ What did Harmel—reckoned by some “a rigid Stalinist”—make of Stalin?⁷⁷

His respect and admiration for the Soviet leader is attested, for instance, by a cable of late 1941 in which Harmel, on behalf of the Johannesburg District Committee, congratulated Stalin on his birthday.⁷⁸ Though he did not join the public mourners twelve years later,⁷⁹ Harmel probably felt it was his duty as a leading Party intellectual to take a stand on Khrushchev’s exposé of Stalinist crimes in 1956. His analysis of “the personality cult” betrays initial disbelief and embarrassment.⁸⁰ Rife in contradictions (as the general secretary’s speech itself),⁸¹ it is at pains to play the revelations down and hastily consign them to the past. Let us move on, he seems to be saying. The coverage of the congress by the foreign press is, claims Harmel, “grotesque and wildly exaggerated”. Without taking into account the broad scope of Khrushchev’s report (including the achievements of the last five-year plan) one cannot correctly grasp the significance of the “discussion on collective leadership and the cult of the individual”. It is not easy to assess the personality of the late leader:

For Stalin rendered services of incalculable value to the cause to which he devoted his life. He was foremost in the stern struggle against the Trotskyites, Bukharians and other traitors and saboteurs, who sought to undermine the country and to divert it from the course charted for it by Lenin.

Extermination of “Bukharians” and “Trotskyites” is therefore not to be included into the Stalinist murderous record. That consists in the persecution and extermination of innocents. The guilt of the former group cannot be doubted. They got their just desserts. But it would appear we cannot hold Stalin directly responsible for the “real crimes”, either. He was just fallible. By incorrectly promoting the intensification of the class struggle after the liquidation of capitalism, he allowed “the Security services” to gain undue power and “bec[o]me law unto themselves, above the Party and Government alike”. “The Beria gang” assumed control and instead of, Harmel suggests, merely doing away with the easily

⁷⁶ TWP, 49, 420. Note the name does not constitute a grammatical construction (“mano” being an *intransitive* verb) and can thus only be loosely evocative. P. G. W. Glare ed. *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), 1074; J. Tatum, e-mail to author, Jun 21, 2019. On the extension/intension of the literary narrative see Lubomír Doležal, *Heterocosmica. Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998), 135–137.

⁷⁷ L. Levy, e-mail to author, Oct 24, 2014.

⁷⁸ Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, 157.

⁷⁹ “South Africans Mourn with Soviet People,” *Advance*, Mar 12, 1953, 1, 4; Sam Kahn “A Great Leader Passes,” *Advance*, Mar 12, 1953, 2. Cf. Norman Levy, *The Final Prize. My Life in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*, 2nd ed. (Cape Town: SAHA, 2013), 145; Bob Hepple, *Young Man with a Red Tie. A Memoir of Mandela and the Failed Revolution, 1960–1963* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013), 28.

⁸⁰ “Collective Leadership in the Soviet Union,” *New Age*, Apr 5, 1956, 4; reprinted in *South African Communists Speak. Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915–1980* (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1981), 242–245.

⁸¹ Boris I. Nicolaevsky, Introduction to *The Crimes of the Stalin Era. Special Report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: New Leader, 1956), 5.

identifiable foes of socialism (which they had every right to do) contravened socialist law by “fram[ing] up innocent people on false charges, for motives of their own”. Fortunately, all is well again. One stroke of a pen and a vague gloss suffice to put the nightmares of the past to rest: “Steps have now been taken to set right injustices and to establish safeguards to preclude further violations of the legal rights of citizens. Departures from accuracy and objectivity in the study and teaching of history are being rectified.”⁸²

The character of the infallible leader in *The White People* and his later journalism indicate either that Harmel grew more critical with years or that his analysis in *New Age* was not in good faith. Or perhaps both. In any event, he never came fully to appreciate (or, once again, openly admitted) the massive scale of the Stalinist terror.⁸³ Rather than dealing with this terror itself and the possibility of its being intrinsic to the system, he is concerned with Stalin’s egocentrism and supplanting of the collective leadership. Only that troubles him. A year after his commentary on Khrushchev’s speech comes the following formulation: “The lessons of recent history are far too much in our minds for us to overlook the terrible dangers of building a cult around an individual.”⁸⁴ A text from 1962 condemns “the idolatrous and un-Communist glorification of an individual... which prevailed during the period of the Stalin cult”. Yet Harmel is quick to emphasise that the late leader deserves credit as a “brilliant and lucid teacher of Leninism and Lenin’s theories on the national question; tireless fighter against Trotsky and other renegades”. Can there be any wonder, then, he reflects in an almost personal aside—rare in his more ideological lucubrations—that “much of our political life was devoted to defending him”? Though censorious of Enver Hoxha for executing an individualistic leadership and warning Africans against “bowing in superstitious reverence before this or that leader... of treating his word as holy writ”, Stalinist atrocities ultimately represent to him but a “blemish on our glorious record”.⁸⁵ Two years subsequently, Harmel takes up the issue again, admitting Stalin’s own agency in cultivating the cult. But he remains in character, adding that lest such things should recur, it is imperative to “to restore the principles of the collective leadership”. In contrast to the 1962 editorial, he thinks pointless to try and “balance the wrongs of the cult of against Stalin’s major contributions”. Such “an assessment the future will be able to make more objectively than ourselves”.⁸⁶

⁸² “Collective Leadership in the Soviet Union,” 243–245.

⁸³ Cf. Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), 959–965.

⁸⁴ Doyle, “Ghana and the Gold Coast Revolution,” 11.

⁸⁵ “Towards Communism. A View of the Future,” *AC*, no. 8 (Jan 1962): 3–5.

⁸⁶ “The First International. 100 Years After,” *AC*, no. 18 (Apr 1964): 85–86.

Whereas *The Road to South African Freedom* inexplicitly perhaps, but still emphatically addresses the Stalinist legacy (again interpreted as an erroneous swing towards the individual),⁸⁷ Harmel’s CPSA/SACP history creates the impression as though Stalinism, indeed, Stalin himself had never existed. When it comes to the highly sensitive issue of South Africans murdered in the purges, the author obfuscates the issue. Stephen Clingman described the treatment of this detail in *Fifty Fighting Years* as “benig[n]”.⁸⁸ For Harmel simply wrote that during the period of infighting and expulsions a CC member, Lazar Bach, had “left for Moscow to place his case before the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in 1935. In this he was unsuccessful, and he never returned to South Africa.”⁸⁹ As we saw in Chapter 4, Bach had been in a relationship with Ray Adler before she met Michael Harmel and his death was a devastating blow to her. What is more, Bach’s opponent was no other than Moses Kotane, one of Harmel’s closest friends. The manuscript of *Fifty Fighting Years*, in fact, makes no bones about the episode: “Bach, a Latvian by origin, became involved in the wave of repression that existed at the time of the cult of Stalin and was executed.” However, Sylvie Neame who edited the text, advised the author—by mere “Ugh” and “No”—to sanitise the passage.⁹⁰ This illustrates the way in which the CPSA handled texts designed to serve, or speak for, the organisation.⁹¹ Harmel—and I cited this before as an argument for an inclusive approach to his output—completely subscribed to this method.

For It Is True

Marxism-Leninism as a Science

In *The Adelphi* period (1934), Harmel evinced reservations about socialism. What put him off was, it would seem, its multiformity. Reading Marx and Lenin and experiencing “the Party in action” showed the way out. The sole variety of socialism, which had emerged victorious from the decades of experimentation in Tsarist Russia, declares Harmel, is Marxist socialism.⁹² The Reason? Unlike its predecessors, it is “linked with the conquest

⁸⁷ “RSAF,” *AC*, no. 2 (Apr 1963): 57.

⁸⁸ Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, 133.

⁸⁹ *Fifty Fighting Years*, 66. In another version of the Party’s history Harmel wrote yet more problematically that the Comintern’s directive in 1935 to build a Popular Front had been “a rebuff for ultra-left and sectarian policies, and its adherents *departed from the scene*”. “The Communist Party of South Africa,” in Alex la Guma, ed. *Apartheid: A Collection of Writings on South African Racism by South Africans* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1972), 213 (my emphasis).

⁹⁰ *Fifty Fighting Years* (ms), 24 (SNP); S. Neame, interview by author, Jan 29, 2016; M. Harmel to S. Neame, Feb 15, 1971 (SNP).

⁹¹ That said, Ms Neame’s recollections (ibid.) make it clear *Fifty Fighting Years* is not an authorised history. “Foreword,” too, though speaking of “the detailed guidance of members of the Party leadership”, concedes “a detailed collective discussion” was impossible. See also Maurice Cornforth and Kevin Waddington, “The Communists of South Africa,” review of *Fifty Fighting Years*, by A. Lerumo, *AC*, no. 49 (2nd qtr, 1972): 105.

⁹² Africanus, “50th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution 1,” *AC*, no. 29 (2nd qtr, 1967): 44–46; “The First International,” 73–75; “The New Africa—Capitalist or Socialist,” *AC*, No. 1 (Oct 1959): 5.

of power (i.e. state) by the most advanced social class—the working class”.⁹³ Seen from this perspective, other socialist traditions merit little respect.⁹⁴ Only Marx’s unprecedentedly materialist and dialectical grasp of history as “a *rational process* of development from lower to higher stages of social organisation“ is scientific (and therefore in the need of its own elaborate terminology).⁹⁵ Harmel alternately describes Marxism as an “unrivalled method of analysis”, social science, and “theory”.⁹⁶ He also portrays it as, essentially, an exact science and—like other communist authors—likens it to “mathematics” and “astronomy”.⁹⁷ On closer inspection, it seems more of an applied science, even a technology: an “attempt to take control of and direct forces of social change as the chemist controls and directs the forces of chemical change“. ⁹⁸ This accounts for the frequent use of words like “correct”, “incorrect”, and “error” in the communist discourse, including Harmel’s.⁹⁹ For reality, it would appear, knows no unknowable. If there are any “gaps”, they shall be filled in good time. To quote one of the narrators in *The White People*: “[A]lthough I did not know the answers, I was sure there were answers, and they would in due course be found.”¹⁰⁰

Past Polemics

Harmel likes to credit Marxism-Leninism with vitality. It is not “a closed book”.¹⁰¹ Yet it soon transpires that the doctrine is *completely cut and dried* for him. As a young man, he was able to regard critically Soviet interpreters of Marx, reproaching them for “glib phrases” and “an astonishing lack of a sense of humour”. Still, he already drew the line at

⁹³ Africanus, “Karl Marx: The Man Who Changed the World,” *AC*, no. 34 (3rd qtr, 1968): 25–26.

⁹⁴ Cf. Doyle, “William Morris,” review of *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, by E. P. Thompson, *FT*, Jun 1956, 14. For Harmel, “Morris stood firmly within the Marxist tradition”.

⁹⁵ Africanus, “Karl Marx,” 26; M. H., “What Is in a Name?” *Freedom* 2 (May/June 1943): 16. That scientific and technological “progress” held fascination for Harmel is amply evidenced—see “A New Era,” *Liberation*, no. 28 (Nov 1957): 1–5; *TWP*, 234; IBH. From today’s perspective, the view seems naively optimistic. One needs to bear in mind, however, Harmel is a believer in a state-controlled science as opposed to one which finds itself at the mercy of business.

⁹⁶ Lerumo, “A Century of Oppression,” 84; Harmel, “Movement They Cannot Keep Down,” *Guardian*, May 11, 1950, 3. Yet elsewhere Harmel describes Marxism as “scientific ideology”—see “Africa and World Peace,” *AC*, no. 10 (Jul 1962): 52; “The Things That Bind Us,” *AC*, no. 3 (Sept 1963): 20. Its ideological character apparently does not detract from its scientificity. The latter is defined as “objectivity... disinterested and impartial examination”—see Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Feb 16, 1950, 4. On the fusion of “science and ideology” in Marxism-Leninism see Michal Kopeček, “Obraz vnitřního nepřítele: Revizionismus v Otázkách miru a socialismu 1958–1969” [The Image of the Enemy Within: Revisionism in Problems of Peace and Socialism 1958–1969], in *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu*, vol. 1, Zdeněk Kárník and Michal Kopeček, eds. [Bolshevism, Communism, and Radical Socialism in Czechoslovakia] (Prague: Dokořán 2003), 237–238.

⁹⁷ Africanus, “A Note on Mr Mboya’s ‘Socialism,’” 64. Cf. Emile Burns, *What Is Marxism?* (Sydney: Inter. Marxist Publ., 1957), 8.

⁹⁸ “Karl Marx’s Capital,” *AC*, no. 31 (4th qtr, 1967): 13; cf. “Marxism,” 3. On occasion, however, his wording suggest that history is self-directed—see Africanus, “Shaking the World,” 35; Harmel, “Collective Leadership in the USSR,” 243.

⁹⁹ Doyle, “Languages: Another View,” *Liberation*, no. 6 (Nov 1953): 18–19; Harmel, “Hungary—Fact or Fiction,” *FT*, Dec 1956–Jan 1957, 3; Lerumo, “David Ivon Jones,” 69; Africanus, “50th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution 1,” 45; “Dr. W. E. B. DuBois. A Great African Passes,” *AC*, no. 15 (Jan 1963): 4; Africanus “A Note on Mr Mboya’s ‘Socialism,’” 65; “Liberia! The Black Whites,” review of *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege*, by J. G. Liebenow, *AC*, no. 44 (1st qtr, 1971): 103; “A Century of Oppression,” 85; “The Communist Party of South Africa,” in *Apartheid*, la Guma, ed., 222; *Fifty Fighting Years*, 42, 77, 87.

¹⁰⁰ *TWP*, 393–394.

¹⁰¹ “Karl Marx,” 32.

an attempt by Ruben Osborn to marry Marxism and psychoanalysis.¹⁰² In his mid-fifties, Harmel shows as little sympathy for works of much greater sophistication, this time, however, without first having read them at all. If Debray's idea of revolution is "romantic", Marcuse sinned, above all, by his "contempt of the working class... that can only lead to political sterility". Failure to appreciate "the need for a worker-peasant alliance" is where Fanon went wrong.¹⁰³

Harmel frequently cautions against emptying the concept of socialism by idiosyncratic teachings of African leaders, reaffirming instead the universality of Marx.¹⁰⁴ Though not averse to diversity of applications, he fails to elaborate on this point.¹⁰⁵ Condemning "[s]tereotyped formulas and slogans rendered all but meaningless through endless repetition", his texts are themselves littered with them.¹⁰⁶ Ideological boilerplate, in truth, mars even the best of his writings. Harmel's idea of a discussion (to which he gives much lip service) is orthodoxly Leninist and therefore rather narrow.¹⁰⁷ Its boundaries are firmly delineated by the principal tenets of Marxism-Leninism which, once and for all, uncovered the historical truth. The permissible form of a discussion includes solely "the communists and the working masses".¹⁰⁸ The others fall victim to what Stanley Fish describes as "originary exclusion", an initial blackballing of would-be interlocutors.¹⁰⁹ For they are right-wing or left-wing opportunists,¹¹⁰ "cowards and confused elements within" (unwittingly aiding imperialists),¹¹¹ if not straight "fascists".¹¹² The most despicable category is "renegades".¹¹³ Harmel demands that loyal comrades shun former CPSA members like Harry Snitcher, Lucas Philips, and Betty Radford.¹¹⁴ When writing about

¹⁰² A. H. M., "Marxist Ideals. Translation from the Russian," review of *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy* edited, by John Lewis, *Star*, Aug 24, 1937, 18; "The Influence of Freud and Marx," review of *Marx and Freud. A Dialectical Study*, by Ruben Osborn, *Star*, Jun 15, 1937, 8.

¹⁰³ Lerumo, "Stimulating Polemics by Woddis," review of *New Theories of Revolution*, by Jack Woddis, *AC*, no. 51 (4th qtr, 1972): 122–123.

¹⁰⁴ "Africa and World Peace," 52 and "RSAF," 18–19.

¹⁰⁵ "A Note on Mr. Mboya's 'Socialism'," 63; "New Light on Kenya. Jaramogi Oginga Odinga's Hard-Hitting Autobiography," review of *Not Yet Uhuru*, by J. Oginga Odinga, *AC*, no. 30 (3rd qtr, 1967): 77; a review of *Socialist Ideas in Africa*, by Idris Cox, *LM*, Oct 1966, 492.

¹⁰⁶ Africanus, "Comintern," *AC*, no. 36 (1st qtr, 1969): 80. Cf. Africanus, "Lenin and Africa," *AC*, no. 40 (1st qtr, 1970): 15; "Cairo Seminar," 576.

¹⁰⁷ "Karl Marx," 32; V. I. Lenin, "What is To Be Done," in *Essential Works of Lenin: What Is to Be Done and Other Writings*, Henry M. Christman, ed. (New York: Dover, 2012), 56f.

¹⁰⁸ "Karl Marx," 32.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Lowe and Annemarie Jonson, "There Is No Such Thing as Free Speech." An Interview with Stanley Fish, *Australian Humanities Review* (Feb 1998), accessed Oct 23, 2018, <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/1998/02/01/there-is-no-such-thing-as-free-speech-an-interview-with-stanley-fish/>

¹¹⁰ Africanus, "Comintern," 76–77; "Lenin and Africa," 18–19.

¹¹¹ "War Against the People," *Liberation*, no. 34 (Dec 1958): 6. "...to belittle socialist ideology in any way, to deviate from it in the slightest degree means strengthening bourgeois ideology." Lenin, "What Is to Be Done," 80; italics original.

¹¹² Hirson, *Revolutions in My Life*, 201.

¹¹³ Doyle, "By the Way," *Guardian*, Sept 22, 1949, 4.

¹¹⁴ Harmel, "Some Notes on the Communist Party in South Africa," 5–6. He went even further. According to Miriam Basner, in 1963 Harmel and Kotane refused to confirm to the Tanganyikan authorities the political bona fides of Bettie du Toit who had been expelled from the CP. She was compelled to seek asylum in Ghana instead. It bears mentioning that only a short while before Harmel and du Toit,

traitors from overseas—André Gide, Arthur Koestler, Max Yergan and others—he evidently disbelieves the authenticity of their new creed. In his eyes, they are after money, an interpretation reminiscent of the Leninist view of Social Democrats and trade unionists which Harmel is in the habit of reproducing and which attributes their policies to a plain sell-out for the mess of imperial super-profits rather than to any ideational divergence.¹¹⁵

It bears mentioning that the only detailed testimony we have of Michael Harmel as a Party tutor similarly does not suggest “a person who was really interested in discussion of ideas”, even within the Party structures. A Trotskyist journalist Paul Trehwela attended his Marxist study class in the early 1960s. Despite allowing for the “very tight” conditions under which the course took place, he describes Harmel’s tutoring as

a tedious and laborious exposition from the *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*, issued by the CPSU(B) [Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961]. It was very dull... There were no assignments and no exams, and I don’t remember if there was any discussion either... There was a great disjunction between the thickness of the book and the very short period of time in which we were addressed from it. It was impossible for any adequate learning to take place from the book, whatever its merit or demerit. There could only have been very few copies in the country, and it was not possible for Michael Harmel’s students to have independent access to it. This alone gave the classes a very formal, top-down quality. Study of philosophy of any kind was really not the purpose of these classes. Not much was expected except that the students gave formal assent to the words covering the main philosophical categories, such as “dialectical materialism”.¹¹⁶

Like the communist movement, the ANC ought to, according to Harmel, “tolerate within its ranks men and women of many shades of opinion”, indeed, “every shade of democratic opinion”.¹¹⁷ This principle is, however, undercut by his insistence on what is clearly democratic centralism: “[I]n the stern struggles of the day, an element of discipline and unity is necessary. Once a majority decision has been taken, the minority must fall in line.”¹¹⁸ In like strain, he pronounces the *Freedom Charter* the “touchstone of a true South African patriot” that needs to be embraced fully and without reservation for there is nothing

both refugees, briefly shared a room in Rica and Jack Hodgsons’ house in Botswana. M. Basner, interview by T. Lodge, 1984; Hodgson, *Foot Soldier for Freedom*, 131; C. Rose-Innes, e-mail to author, Mar 22, 2018.

¹¹⁵ Doyle, “By the Way” (contains a review of *God That Failed*, by Arthur Koestler et al.), *Guardian*, Feb 23, 1950, 6. Cf. Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years*, 41; Harmel, “Trade Unions Face the Future,” *Liberation*, no. 10 (Jan 1954): 4; Lerumo, “Historical Step Forward,” 13; Africanus “Lenin and Africa,” 18; Africanus, “Comintern,” 75; Harmel, “The Simons History—the Class Angle,” *Sechaba* 4, no. 2 (1970): 23.

¹¹⁶ P. Trehwela, e-mails to author, Dec 22, 2015 and Feb 21, 2016.

¹¹⁷ Tloome, “Africanists and the Congress,” 470f; “The Crisis of Leadership,” *Liberation*, no. 6 (Nov 1953): 3.

¹¹⁸ Tloome, “Africanists and the Congress,” 470f. On democratic centralism see Józef Wilczyński, ed. *An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Marxism, Socialism and Communism* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 139–140.

more to add. *The Charter* clears the way for an ominously sounding “ruthless break with sectarianism”.¹¹⁹

Harmel will give scholastic discussion no house room, either. Though well aware that some perceive historical determinants in Marx as arbitrary, he prefers to play a straight bat on this point:

We will ignore the professors and continue with our job of explaining to the exploited and oppressed, the inheritors of the storehouse of the revolutionary teachings of the scientific doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, why they hold the future in their own hands.¹²⁰

Past polemics—that’s what he is. That is an impression one gains, too, from a reference in the *Zhivago* essay to the scene from *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919). In it, a student questions a sentry about socialism. The soldier provides what for Harmel is a pithy answer: “‘To me it seems perfectly simple... there are only two classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie’.”¹²¹ The mindless parroting of “catch-words” naturally disappoints the student. Harmel, however, spurns him as an “insufferable snob”.

“Democracy”

His discourse similarly disparages the multi-party system that, to its advocates, stages an exchange of views and competition of values. Harmel, in any case, finds political pluralism ill-suited for the New Africa emerging from the events on the continent in the fifties and sixties. True, a single-party arrangement is not universally applicable. And there is a risk of it being hijacked by a despotic elite (which, Harmel concedes vaguely, occurs quite frequently). But as long as it enables “the will of the people”—which equates democracy—to be carried out, as long as that one party remains “linked with the masses and give[s] expression to their aspirations”, such a system is “correct and progressive”. Other political groups then become dispensable. If they share values and opinions of the party in office (as they do in the West), multi-party democracy is no more than “childish playing at politics”. And should they be opposed to anti-colonialism and socialism, these parties must be suppressed by “a vigilant dictatorship of the people” relying on “people’s militia and people’s liberation army”.¹²² Under such “national democracy”—which is at issue here—merely unspecified “schools of democratic and progressive opinion” are allowed a part in

¹¹⁹ Tloome, “Africanists and the Congress,” 455, 470; “Out of the Ditch,” 6.

¹²⁰ “Marxism—The Property of All Working People” (ca. 1971) (unpubl. ms) (MHP: A3300),” 12–13.

¹²¹ Harmel, “Much Ado About Pasternak,” 11.

¹²² “Turbulent Africa,” 12–13; “RSAF,” 57. Although the phraseology and the overall narrative would suggest Harmel’s authorship, the former article contains two quotes from journals in French, a language Harmel did not know. He could have had assistance, of course.

public debate.¹²³ And it is for the Party to decide what counts as democratic and progressive.¹²⁴ These conditions, however, render political pluralism logically impossible. They further fly in the face of Harmel's claim (made, admittedly, not in a Party periodical) that once freedom has been attained, it shall be possible to debate "the rights and wrongs of socialism".¹²⁵ Whereas Lionel Forman and Moses Kotane, picturing the post-liberation future of South Africa, assumed it would retain "all the civil freedoms conventionally associated with parliamentary democracy," Harmel's vision of the transition to full-blown socialism, though not quite coherent, has definitely a "much more uncompromising and radical" feel.¹²⁶

When Harmel lauds communists as "democrats" who, faced with the National Party dictatorship, fight for the preservation of the traditional democracy, particularly—as Milton and Paine had once done—for free speech,¹²⁷ we must take his words with a pinch of salt then. Most communists view "Western" (i.e. "bourgeois") democracy as "in substantial measure illusory", indeed, a "swindle". Or as Harmel's favourite author put it, "impotence and delusion".¹²⁸ It has one redeeming virtue, however. It "provides a means for social progress, and a bastion against reaction".¹²⁹ That is to say, CPSA/SACP writers champion liberal democracy with its comparative ideological diversity solely in order to create favourable conditions for the introduction, in South Africa, of "national democracy". The latter, in Harmel's conception anyway, implies elimination of traditional democratic attributes as well as the classes (intellectuals, businessmen) that believe in the preservation of these attributes, even though they once joined the "common struggle for freedom".¹³⁰

Live Reality

Discussion is superfluous also because, upon his return from London, Harmel can employ ostensive arguments for Marxism-Leninism. The doctrine has been substantiated beyond any cavil by the "remarkable, all-conquering history of international communism". The

¹²³ "RSAF," 56.

¹²⁴ Petr Fidelius, "Zrcadlo komunistické řeči" [The Mirror of Communist Discourse], in *Řeč komunistické moci* [The Discourse of Communist Power] (Prague: Triáda, 1998), 168.

¹²⁵ Tloome, "Africanists and the Congress," 470.

¹²⁶ Tom Lodge, "South African and Czech Communists" (paper presented at the 177th Gellner Seminar, Prague, Czech Republic, May 14, 2019), 3.

¹²⁷ Doyle, "By the Way," *Guardian*, Jun 16, 1949, 4; and Mar 30, 1950, 6; May 18, 1950, 4 (for the quote); Nov 9, 1950, 4; Harmel, "The Movement They Cannot Keep Down," *Guardian*, May 12, 1950, 3; Doyle, "By the Way," *Guardian*, Nov 30, 1950, 4; Mar 30, 1950, 4.

¹²⁸ Doyle, "Swart and the Judges," *FT*, May 1955, 6; "The US War on Vietnam," *AC*, no. 21 (1965): 12; G. B. Shaw, Preface to *Androcles and the Lion. Overruled. Pygmalion* (New York: Brentano's, 1916), lxxix; quoted in Doyle, "By the Way," *Guardian*, Oct 19, 1950, 4. Cf. "The New Africa—Capitalist or Socialist?," 6.

¹²⁹ Doyle, "Swart and the Judges."

¹³⁰ "The New Africa—Capitalist or Socialist?," 8, 9; Cf. Fidelius, "Zrcadlo komunistické řeči," 176.

USSR and other socialist states afford a living—and “irrefutable”—proof “that socialism works” and that “the ordinary workers and peasants are perfectly capable of governing and conducting of the affairs of a great country”.¹³¹

Harmel’s knowledge of this “breath-taking economic and industrial advance” derives almost exclusively from the official socialist discourse.¹³² He has implicit faith in this source, contrasting it with the views of Western ““experts”” and their “gutter-literature”.¹³³ In many respects, socialist realities remain for him a matter of conjecture, though. Writing about *Not by Bread Alone*, for instance, he speculates that the novel he generally likes perhaps

exaggerates shortcomings and thus presents an unbalanced picture of Soviet life. It is *unbelievable* that an industrial civilisation which produces such brilliant achievement as the Sputniks could be dominated by elements of the Drozdov type.¹³⁴

For all we know, Harmel did not journey to the Soviet Union until 1957 or even 1960, although Mia Roth insists that, as a leading CPSA/SACP member, he would have been expected to make an *ad limina* visit to Moscow much earlier.¹³⁵ Following his exile, Harmel would occasionally travel to the GDR.¹³⁶ This would happen with increased frequency when, in 1969, East Germans had taken over the printing of *The African Communist* and other SACP publications.¹³⁷ In 1966, Michael, Ray, Barbara and her husband set out, by road and rail, on a trip across Europe. Their itinerary embraced Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania. In September 1970, Harmel participated in a meeting of the representatives of 45 Communist and workers’ parties in Budapest.¹³⁸ He represented the

¹³¹ “Marxism,” 2 (cf. 21); “Fiftieth Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution 3: Shaking the World,” *AC*, no. 31 (4th qtr, 1967): 29; “The New Africa—Capitalist or Socialist?,” 4. Cf. Vladimír Macura, *Šťastný věk. Symboly, emblémy a mýty 1948–1989* [The Happy Age: Symbols, Emblems and Myths 1948–1989] (Prague: Pražská imaginace, 1992), 10.

¹³² “New Problems of a Continent in Revolution,” *AC*, no. 3 (Sept 1960): 9.

¹³³ Harmel, “Voices of Angry Man,” 9; Lerumo, “50th Years of the Communist Party—3: From ‘Fusion’ to Fascism,” *AC*, no. 46 (3rd qtr, 1971): 36; “Collective leadership in the USSR,” 243; “Shaking the World,” 28; A. Lerumo and Amath Dansoko, “The Famine in Africa: Is It Drought Alone?,” *WMR* 17, no. 1 (1974): 41; Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Jul 15, 1949, 4.

¹³⁴ “Voices of Angry Men,” 9; my emphasis.

¹³⁵ *WMR* archives (РГАСПИ); Roth, *Communist Party in South Africa*, 60n26; Henry R. Pike, *A History of Communism in South Africa* (Germiston: Christian Mission Intern. of SA, 1985), 386n6. Both Roth and Pike (a rabid anti-communist) believe Harmel was a KGB agent (Roth, e-mail to author, Oct 21, 2017).

¹³⁶ Internationale wissenschaftliche Session anlässlich des 100. Jahrestages der Gründung der I. Internationale, 25. Bis 29 September 1964, Teilnehmerliste (MHP).

¹³⁷ Hans-Georg Schleicher and Ilona Schleicher, *Special Flights: The GDR and Liberation Movements in Southern Africa* (Harare: SAPES, 1998), 55–56, 77n191; Hans-Georg Schleicher, “GDR Solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African Liberation Struggle,” in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 3, pt. 2, *International Solidarity* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2008), 1106, 1119–1120. Harmel’s traffic with *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Socialist Unity Party of Germany), documented in Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR in Berlin, awaits a thorough examination (H.-G. Schleicher, e-mail to author, Dec 28, 2015).

¹³⁸ IBH; *WMR* archive (РГАСПИ).

SACP in Moscow—for example in 1960,¹³⁹ 1968, and 1969–1970. A number of times, the SACP (or ANC-SACP) leadership met both in Moscow and Prague.¹⁴⁰

But it was not until his assignment on the *World Marxist Review* in 1973–1974 that he was brought in daily contact with “real socialism”. It did not escape his notice things were not as rosy: “Stuff has an extraordinary way of appearing in the shops for a while and then is all gone. Now you see it, now you don’t... One hot weekend they even ran out of beer of all things.”¹⁴¹ Lionel Forman, Amin Cajee, Albie Sachs, and Myrtle Berman all admit their stays in Czechoslovakia “pricked some of their illusions”. Not so Harmel. Whatever unpleasant experiences he might have had (and most worldly comforts meant little to him) were dwarfed by the joy of living the dream: “I like Prague anyway. Seriously, it is an enormous privilege not just to visit but to live for some time and work in a socialist country with stable prices... low rents, taxes, transport, etc. and immensely rich cultural life.”¹⁴²

In 1958, the *World Marxist Review* (or *Problems of Peace and Socialism*), published at a later stage in no fewer than 41 languages, replaced the Cominform periodical *For a Lasting Peace, for a People’s Democracy*. As a “grouping” of communist parties’ representatives, it enabled an ongoing ideological interchange and practical co-ordination: the delegates served, essentially, as liaison officers. As a periodical, the *WMR* provided a platform for the pro-Soviet chorus, particularly from outside the socialist bloc itself.¹⁴³ In the early years, it had evolved into a “dumping-ground” for politically unreliable characters and, as a consequence, a comparative island of free thought. Supplied with foreign literature and supposedly free of censorship, its editors were able to discuss unorthodox ideas. Some of them would one day join Mikhail Gorbachev’s closest circle of advisers and today like to claim that it was in Prague that *perestroika* had been conceived.

The Warsaw Pact invasion of August 1968 not only cut short the liberal reform in the country at large, but put an abrupt end to the latitudinarian climate at the *WMR*. The

¹³⁹ Vladimir Shubin, *ANC. A View from Moscow* (Belville: Mayibuye, 1999), 26–27; Shubin and Traikova, “There is No Danger from the Soviet Bloc,” 991.

¹⁴⁰ Maloka, *South African Communist Party*, 20, 35; *WMR* archive; A. Urmov, interview by author, Aug 2, 2014; Petr Zidek and Karel Sieber, *Československo a subsaharská Afrika v letech 1948–1989* [Czechoslovakia and Sub-Saharan Africa 1948–1989] (Prague: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 2007), 108.

¹⁴¹ M. Harmel to G. Lamb, Nov 14, 1973 (MHP).

¹⁴² Cajee, *Fordsburg Fighter*, 84–85, ProQuest Ebrary; Spectator [=Lionel Forman], “The Revolt in Hungary,” *New Age*, Nov 1, 1956, 4; A. Sachs, interview by author, Sept 27, 2014 (for the quote); M. Berman, interview by author, Feb 11, 2015; M. Harmel to B. Lamb, Dec 28, 1973 (MHP). A “rich cultural life” refers to the classical music scene. M. Harmel to B. Lamb, Apr 24, 1973.

¹⁴³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Conflict and Unity*, 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge: HUP, 1967), 475–476; Henry Kamm, “Evolution in Europe: With Nonreaders Gone, Marxism’s Journal Fails,” Special to *New York Times*, Jul 3, 1990, 12, accessed Apr 17, 2019, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/03/world/evolution-in-europe-with-nonreaders-gone-marxism-s-journal-fails.html>; R. Lewis, e-mail to author, Jul 30, 2019 (for the quote).

unreliable Soviet editors and their families were deported. Trusted apparatchiks came in their stead. It now took one disapproving editor for an article to be spiked. Not that this was a frequent occurrence, for the writers dutifully self-censored.¹⁴⁴

As Czech editors used their own separate office in Vinohrady neighbourhood, the South African representatives—Harmel (1973–1974), Alan Brooks (1974–75), Essop Pahad (1975–85), and Jabulani “Mzala” Nxumalo (1987)—dwelt in an ivory tower.¹⁴⁵ Their employer did not keep them busy, but paid well. Harmel was fixed up with a rent-free flat in the district of Bubeneč and enjoyed other perks.¹⁴⁶ *The Morning Star* and *The Times* would land on his desk with regularity. Czech classes were available for the editors, although Harmel (whether he attended or not) soon despaired of learning the language.¹⁴⁷ As a result, he had barely any clue as to what went on around him. Scarcity of goods, adverted to in a letter to his son-in-law, was merely the tip of the iceberg. The invasion had claimed 108 Czech lives. In its wake, more than 70,000 people left the country. The police brutally crushed the demonstrations to mark the first anniversary of the August events. In 1970–1972, dozens of the regime’s opponents were put on trial. The so-called *prověrky* (screenings) resulted in expulsion from the Party of 21% members who would not give their consent to the intervention or were otherwise undesirable politically. Many workplaces were similarly purged. The new powers that be formally or informally prevented leading scientists, intellectuals, and artists from working in their respective fields, forcing them either into manual professions or exile.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ A. J. Liehm, “*Otázky míru a socialismu*” [Questions of Peace and Socialism], *Listy*, no. 5 (2014), accessed Jun 11, 2019, <http://www.listy.cz/archiv.php?cislo=145&clanek=051447>; L. Dobrovský, e-mail to author, Aug 18, 2016; Fredo Arias-King, “Perestroika Began in Prague. Interview with Yevgeny Ambartsumov,” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 17, no. 4 (Fall, 2009): 373–388; Josef Pazderka, ed. *Invaze 1968: Ruský pohled* [Invasion 1968: The Russian View] (Prague: ÚSTR, 2011), 151–178; Kamm, “Evolution in Europe”; Lewis, e-mail to author

¹⁴⁵ The main office was housed in what used to be the Faculty of Catholic Theology (Thákurova St. 3, Dejvice Dist.). The communist authorities had moved the seminary to the town of Litoměřice, taking over the premises in 1953—see Vojtěch Novotný, *Katolická teologická fakulta 1939–1990. Prolegomena k dějinám české katolické teologie druhé poloviny 20. století* [The Faculty of Catholic Theology 1939–1990: Prolegomena on the History of Czech Catholic Theology of the 2nd Half of the 20th Century] (Prague: Karolinum, 2007), 158–162. See also E. Pahad, interview by author, Jan 15, 2015 and by P. O’Malley, Sept 3, 1991, accessed May 12, 2019, <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv00017/04lv00344/05lv00511/06lv00598.htm>; Blade Nzimande, “A Prophet of True Radical Transformation,” *Sunday Times*, Feb 26, 2017, 17. “Mzala”, plagued by ill-health, stayed in Prague for only two months.

¹⁴⁶ National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations, 1858–1995) (NA UK); E. Pahad, Jan 15, 2015, interview by author; L. Molnár, interview by author, Aug 23, 2014. According to Molnár, the *WMR* occupied 90–110 flats in Prague and owned a recreation facility in the country. The children of the Soviet editors travelled to school by charter bus. “Many of them led a glorious life of parasitism,” claims Molnár, a CP member who was charged with liquidation of the review and its assets. “The idea that the editorial board was packed with people ready to sacrifice their lives for an ideal is... No... Prague was not such a bad place.” Rupert Lewis of the Workers Party of Jamaica, too, is of the view Russians especially were happy to be stationed in Prague with its much more satisfactory supply of consumer goods. Even Essop Pahad preferred to do his shopping in Czechoslovakia rather than England, impressed by both affordability and quality of local textiles and pharmaceutical products (interview by O’Malley).

¹⁴⁷ M. Harmel to B. Lamb, Feb 28, 1973 and Dec 28, 1973.

¹⁴⁸ Milan Bárta, *Victims of the Occupation: the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia: 21 August–31 December 1968* (Prague: Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, 2008), 6; Zdeňka Kuchyňková, “Do dvou let odešlo po srpnu 1968 do emigrace 70 tisíc lidí” [Within Two Years of August 1968 70 000 People Emigrated], *Radio Praha*, Aug 25, 2018, accessed Dec 13, 2018, <https://www.radio.cz/cz/rubrika/panorama/do-dvou-let-odeslo-po-srpnu-1968-do-emigrace-70-tisic-lidi>; Jan Rychlík and Vladimír Penčev, *Od minulosti k dnešku. Dějiny českých zemí* [From the Past to the Present. A History of the Czech Lands] (Prague: Vyšehrad,

All this was lost on Harmel. His article for *The African Communist* advertised as a “factual description” of the life under socialism is, therefore, anything but a realistic vignette from “normalised” Prague.¹⁴⁹ Merely echoing his previous texts, Harmel protests that, socialism now being more than a theory, one needs to direct attention to “the daily experience of hundreds of millions of people”.¹⁵⁰ He does (and could do) nothing of the sort. There is little to indicate the author got to know socialism first-hand. It might as well have been written by anyone else. All it took was to refer to the statistics and eulogies in the *WMR* and Brezhnev’s speeches.¹⁵¹ Another source Harmel invokes is impressions of the 1973 Berlin Youth Festival participants.¹⁵² He, finally, draws upon an article in *The Times* whose author does confirm the official boast of economic success, but—and Harmel saw it fit to hold this information back from his readers—cites examples of the Western know-how playing an increasingly vital part in Soviet economy.¹⁵³

Apart from the contention that 250 million people in the USSR (including non-Russian minorities) “enjoy approximately the same standards of living, of education, of social services and of opportunities”, it is, above all, Harmel’s ode to socialist ecological policies, “bringing green spaces and fresh air to the cities”, that has a surreal ring to it.¹⁵⁴

The Bastion of Socialism

In 1934 and 1937, respectively, Harmel portrayed communism as a “bane” and suggested Russia was a country run by “more extreme” politicians.¹⁵⁵ Before long, however, he felt compelled to conclude that the Bolsheviks had, after all, got it right. The corollary being that communism and fealty to the USSR were inseparable.¹⁵⁶ As recounted in Chapter 4, Harmel was instrumental in furnishing a rationale for the Imperialist War policy in 1939 as well Soviet annexation of the Baltics. Following German invasion of Russia, he duly threw

2016), 572–573; Jaroslav Pažout, “Trestněprávní perzekuce odpůrců režimu v Československu v období takzvané normalizace (1969–1989)” [Criminal Persecution of the Opposition to the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia during the So-called Normalisation, 1969–1989], in *Český a slovenský komunismus 1921–2011*, Jan Kalous, Jiří Kocian, eds. [Czech and Slovak Communism 1921–2011] (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2012), 173.

¹⁴⁹ Lerumo, “Socialism for Africa,” *AC*, no. 56 (1st qtr, 1974): 113.

¹⁵⁰ Lerumo, “Socialism—the Live Reality,” *AC*, no. 58 (3rd qtr, 1974): 87.

¹⁵¹ “Socialism—the Live Reality,” 90, 92. He is right in stating there was a general growth after 1972, but to say that the “revisionist period” (1968–1969) nearly saw the country bankrupt (ibid., 89) is a patent untruth. It was the other way around. See Radek Soběhart et al., *Hospodářské dějiny Československa 1918–1992*, 2. díl, *Období 1945–1992* [Economic and Social History of Czechoslovakia 1918–1992, part 2, The Period 1945–1992] [Prague: Set Out, 2013]), 320–321, 391–392, 659–672.

¹⁵² “Socialism—the Live Reality,” 90.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 88; Edmund Stevens, “Soviet Style ‘Campaigning’ for Kremlin Leadership,” *Times*, Jan 2, 1974, 12.

¹⁵⁴ Lerumo, “Socialism—the Live Reality,” 91, 96. The US, on the other hand, “is a sick society with a sick economy.... Unrestrained private capitalism is poisoning the air and the water supplies...” Lerumo, “A Marxist on Black Power,” review of *Ghetto Rebellion to Black Liberation*, by Claude Lightfoot, *AC*, no. 35 (4th qtr, 1968): 90. On the state of the environment and ecological policies of communist authorities see Miroslav Vaněk, *Nedalo se tady dýchat: ekologie v českých zemích v letech 1968–1989* [You Could Not Breathe Here: Ecology in the Czech Lands in 1968–1989] (Prague: Maxdorf, 1996), 1–30.

¹⁵⁵ “Notes of the Month,” *Adelphi*, no. 3 (Jul 1934): 2; M. A. H., “But...” *Rhodian XV*, no. 2 (1937): 29.

¹⁵⁶ James Eaden and David Renton, *The Communist Party of Great Britain since 1920* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), 66.

himself into preaching an unbreakable bond of the East and West. When this “unbreakable bond” began to show the first signs of breaking, Harmel naturally resumed his old rhetoric. In December 1944, assuming the USSR does not in any way meddle in internal affairs of the liberated territories, he launches a broadside against Britain which, in his estimation, had first backed “more or less unrepresentative politicians” and their “shadow Governments” in exile and now has “come down heavily on the side of the small reactionary groups”, particularly in Greece and Belgium.¹⁵⁷ “However unwelcome the politics of liberated Europe may be to British Tories,” Harmel declares, “they must respect the right of the people to solve their own problems in their own way.”¹⁵⁸

After the USSR troops put down the Hungarian revolt in November 1956, killing nearly 5,500 people in the process, he wrote in similar vein that “whatever actions m[ight] be taken by the Soviet Union, her policy towards Hungary and other independent States of the socialist camp differ[ed] from those of imperialist countries towards their colonies as night differs from day”.¹⁵⁹ For the Soviets, champions of workers and oppressed nations everywhere, strive for one thing and one thing only: world peace. And so every blow they strike represents—somehow—an altruistic blow for freedom: the USSR is not a “superpower” and “[t]here is no such thing as ‘Soviet imperialism’.”¹⁶⁰

As per this logic, the Cuban crisis, too, was an *American* provocation. Installation of Soviet missiles on *Isla de la libertad* posed no real threat to the United States, but merely supplied a pretext for mounting an offensive against Castro. Fortunately, this intrigue was scotched by “the brilliant handling of the situation by the Soviet leaders, which disregarded brazen American provocations and forced the aggressors to retreat”.¹⁶¹

To justify the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968, Harmel employs a manipulative parallel with an overture to the Second World War. Far from being a home-grown reform, the Prague Spring constitutes yet another attempt by inveterate Nazis of (West) Germany to gain “neo-colonial rule over” the Czechoslovaks. It is the old Munich crisis again. Except now the country is not a citadel of bourgeois democracy, but of socialism. Whereas thirty years before, the Soviets—poised to come to its rescue—had

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (New York: CUP, 1992), 133–137.

¹⁵⁸ Spectator, “Inside Europe,” *Inkululeko*, Dec 9, 1944, 4.

¹⁵⁹ “International Scene,” *Liberation*, no. 22 (Nov 1956): 8. The number of casualties is given by László Kontler in *Millennium in Central Europe: A History of Hungary* (Budapest: Atlantisz, 1999), 429.

¹⁶⁰ Africanus, “Shaking the World,” 29; “Prospects for Peace,” *Liberation*, no. 5 (Sept 1953): 1–2; Lerumo, “Veliká síla proletářské solidarity” [A Great Power of Proletarian Solidarity], *Otázky míru a socialismu* 15, no. 10 (1972): 66; “The New Africa—Capitalist or Socialist?,” 7 (the last two for the quotes).

¹⁶¹ “Hands off Cuba,” *AC*, no. 12 (Jan 1963): 4.

been thwarted by Czechoslovakian politicians whose “class fear of socialism was greater than their patriotism”, this time they were able to save the Czechs, as well as Slovaks, from the aggressive expansionism of Teutonic capitalism. One needs to, Harmel urges with some caution, “see the deeper historical meaning behind these events”. In both Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the Soviet Union proceeded with view to “the great central issue of our times—the fight against imperialism”. True, each country has the right to manage its (socialist) affairs by itself. But “there is another principle which is even more basic”, namely to “put the interests *of the movement as a whole* before local or temporary sectional interest”.¹⁶²

Even *The White People*, a work in which ideology keeps a *comparatively* low-profile, not only, as we have seen, favours the Soviet political system, but through its story consistently projects a positive image of the socialist countries in general, and the USSR in particular, their intellectual and moral superiority. It is the Soviets (and the Chinese) who are continuously imaged as proud, rebellious, courageous, and unbending, as upholders of human rights.¹⁶³

The son of Harmel’s British comrades characterised his mother’s allegiance “to the Soviet Union” as “akin to that of a football fan”. Exasperation Harmel invariably registers whenever the USSR becomes subject to criticism creates a like impression. He avers, for instance, that Eddie Roux’s “anti-Soviet obsession disfigured his historical writings”. Alan Lipman attributes his apostasy from communism in 1956 to “intense disagreements over Soviet imperialism” with Harmel. And Barbara Harmel, too, recalls an “unpleasant exchange about Prague invasion” she had with her father.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² “Czechoslovakia,” *AC*, no. 35 (4th qtr, 1968): 9, 11–14. For Harmel, the Prague Spring represents, like the revolt in Hungary (“Hungary—Truth or Fiction,” 4), a counter-revolutionary conspiracy by a “subtle technique”. Czechoslovaks have been fooled: “Under the cover of the slogan of ‘democratisation’, ‘freedom of speech’, etc. a platform was provided... for dissemination of views radically hostile to the class interests of the working people, to socialism and the Communist movement” (“Czechoslovakia,” 9). It is worth mentioning that Harmel’s interpretation of the Soviet stance at the time of Munich is completely mythical. Soviet succour was contingent upon the readiness of France to honour the Treaty of Alliance and Friendship it had signed with Czechoslovakia in 1924. Seeing that the USSR shared a border with neither Czechoslovakia nor Germany, it would have had to cross Poland had it desired to intervene. The reconquest of East Poland was its main ambition. See Rychlík and Penčev, *Od minulosti k dnešku*, 442–443.

¹⁶³ *TWP*, 42f, 111, 163, 196, 202, 265, 267, 270, 345. Cf. ridicule of the USSR by Sowden in *To-Morrow’s Comet*, 181.

¹⁶⁴ J. Cox, e-mail to author, Mar 9, 2018; J. Jele, e-mail to author, Mar 27, 2016; Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years*, 65; “Xenophobia, Nationalism and Greedy Bosses. An Interview with Alan Lipman,” *Zabalaza. A Journal of Southern African Class Struggle Anarchism*, no. 9 (2008): 12 and Alan Lipman, *On the Outside Looking In: Colliding with Apartheid and Other Authorities* (Johannesburg: Architect Africa, 2009), 124; IBH.

In Search of Unity

United Fronts Old and New

Another keynote of Harmel's discourse (an ideal as well as an actual historical tendency) is that of "unity" in struggle. Between 1919 and 1943, the ideological cohesion of the communist movement had been maintained by the Third International. Harmel accounted for its dissolution by declaring that World communism had reached a stage when "the working-class movement [was] united as never before in its history".¹⁶⁵ He is not blind to the organisation's flaws and blunders. An article of 1964, for example, concedes the CI was not always "intimately informed" of the situation on the spot, which resulted in "gross errors", including expulsion of people like Sidney Bunting and Bill Andrews.¹⁶⁶ But the crisis in Czechoslovakia, actions of Albanian, Yugoslav and Chinese comrades,¹⁶⁷ self-will of Ceaușescu as well as the first signs of Eurocommunism—all that caused that Harmel turned a nostalgist for the good old "worldwide Party".¹⁶⁸ Both in *The African Communist* and in conversations with the Soviet delegates to the world meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties in June 1969, he voiced a hope that it would "be possible to re-create real unity of the communist movement within the framework of a new international organisation like the Comintern".¹⁶⁹

Harmel is very much a believer in Pan-Africanism too, although he avoids the term itself because of its association with the Pan-Africanist Congress on the one hand and George Padmore on the other.¹⁷⁰ He welcomes the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity in Addis Ababa (1963): only a close co-operation of the newly independent countries makes it possible to stem or restrain the unabated forces of colonialism. But if we are to see a "full political and economic integration of our Continent", if "a fraternal commonwealth of Africa" is to materialise, the countries yet enslaved must, of course, gain freedom.¹⁷¹ This applies also to his native country which now presents a security threat to

¹⁶⁵ Spectator, "The Communist International," *Inkululeko*, Jun 5, 1943, 4.

¹⁶⁶ Africanus, "The First International," 88–89. It is the concept of the "native republic" he considers the most valuable part of the Comintern's legacy in South Africa. The slogan itself was unfortunate, but it helped to rid the Party of "the remnants of white chauvinism" and directed it towards the oppressed masses of black Africans (ibid.).

¹⁶⁷ Africanus, "The First International," 92; "Comintern," 80; "Karl Marx," 31.

¹⁶⁸ Africanus, "Light on the Comintern," review of *Outline History of the Communist International and Speeches at Congresses of the Communist International*, by V. I. Lenin, *AC*, no. 53 (2nd qtr, 1973): 119. On the emergence of Euro-communism see Robert Service, *Comrades! History of World Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010), 326–327, 380, 385.

¹⁶⁹ *WMR* archive [РГАСПИ]. Cf. "Czechoslovakia," 15.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Alan Doyle, "A Professional African Abroad," review of *Pan-Africanism, or Communism*, by George Padmore, *FT*, Nov 1956, 13.

¹⁷¹ "African Unity Moves Closer," *AC*, no. 14 (Jul 1963): 3. Cf. "New Problems of a Continent in Revolution," 2; "RSAF," 21, 63. In "Turbulent Africa" he speaks of "a great socialist African Union" (8).

both the continent and entire world.¹⁷² After the Unilateral Declaration of Independence Harmel even appeals to African states to take a joint military action against Smith's regime.¹⁷³

As far as South Africa is concerned, the imperative of unity echoes in Harmel's promotion of the broad coalition of all anti-apartheid forces.¹⁷⁴ He looks for allies in the all-white parliament, appreciates fearlessness in individual United Party MPs, commends liberal individualists who, however confused, are on the learning curve, and even acknowledges Pan-Africanists.¹⁷⁵ A natural manoeuvre? Perhaps. But it is also orthodoxly communist. As Lenin put it:¹⁷⁶ "[T]he struggle of the working class for power [is] a long and complicated process, at each stage of which it [is] necessary to isolate the main enemy and to gain allies."¹⁷⁷

One form of an "alliance" takes precedence over all the "temporary and unstable" alliances, representing the "merger" of the struggle by the revolutionary proletariat in capitalist countries with that of national liberation organisations in colonies.¹⁷⁸ It is the coalition of communists with the ANC, SAIC, and SACTU necessitated—or so goes Harmel's argument—by a special type of colonialism in South Africa.¹⁷⁹ Such a joining of forces culminates the hitherto search for an adequate method of the struggle. Obviously, the liberation movement behind the overthrow of the colonial rule, a priority in South Africa, must be of "progressive" character if (i) nationalism is not to be "tantamount to replacing a black oppressor instead of a white one",¹⁸⁰ indeed, (ii) if socialism is to follow, or coincide with, independence.¹⁸¹ The ANC now meets these requirements. Harmel, in

¹⁷² Lerumo, "Liberation of the Southland. The Crucial Task Before Africa," *AC*, no. 24 (1st qtr, 1966): 50–52; "New Africa and the Union," *Liberation*, no. 36 (May 1959): 4; "New Problems of a Continent in Revolution," 8; Lerumo "Agony of South Africa," *AC*, no. 3 (Sept 1960): 34–35; "South Africa Is at War," *AC*, no. 14 (Jul 1963): 19; "The Heroes of Rivonia," *Solidarity*, Suppl. no. 9 (1964): 2; "Southern Africa Fights for Freedom," *WMR* 10, no. 9 (1967): 32.

¹⁷³ Lerumo, "The Battle for the Congo and the November Aggression," *AC*, no. 20 (Jan 1965): 31.

¹⁷⁴ Lerumo, "Agony of South Africa," 36. Cf. *TWP*, 159, 171.

¹⁷⁵ Doyle, "By the Way," *Guardian*, Jun 29, 1949, 3; Doyle, "Can Democracy Find Allies in Parliament?" *New Age*, Jul 7, 1955, 8; Harmel, "Patrick Duncan Explains Himself," *Advance*, Jun 25, 1953; Lerumo, "Agony of South Africa," 36.

¹⁷⁶ Africanus, "Lenin and Africa," 19 (cf. *Fifty Fighting Years*, 42).

¹⁷⁷ Africanus, "The First International," 81. Communists had worked with the national liberation movements, on and off, ever since the 2nd Congress of the Comintern, but the policy did not receive ultimate blessing from the Cominform until 1949. See David Everatt, "Alliance Politics of Special Type: The Roots of the ANC/SACP Alliance, 1950–1954," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, no. 1 (Mar 1992): 23–24.

¹⁷⁸ Doyle, "Can Democracy Find Allies in Parliament"; Harmel, "Lenin and National Liberation Today," 184 (for the quote); "Karl Marx," 29; Africanus, "Lenin and Africa," 20. Cf. Lerumo, "After 40 Years. Anniversary of the Communist Party of South Africa," no. 7 (1961): 71; Harmel, "The Simons History," 23; Lerumo, "Fifty Years of the Communist Party—2: The Stormy Twenties," *AC*, no. 45 (2nd qtr, 1971): 98.

¹⁷⁹ [Michael Harmel], "South African Communist Party," *Marxism Today* 16 (Aug 1971): 236–237.

¹⁸⁰ ["Black Consciousness and Black Power"], 2 (unpubl. ms.) MHP: A3300/D.

¹⁸¹ Filatova, "Lasting Legacy," 510–511.

fact, insists that most contemporary African revolutions are not being carried out by bourgeois nationalists, but by “the working class and peasantry”.¹⁸²

The Leninist concept of “alliance” as pertinent to South African conditions found its definitive formulation in the SACP’s 1962 programme. Harmel prepared the first draft.¹⁸³ But his touch very much makes itself felt in the final document as well. He clearly thought *The Road to South African Freedom* a masterpiece for he literally spent his remaining years paying tribute to, and popularising, its “penetrating Marxist analysis”.¹⁸⁴ What is more, the programme’s central theses (especially that of the historical inevitability of the Congress Alliance) moulded his histories and furnished a paradigm for his analyses of national-liberation movements in other countries.

Martin Legassick was the first author to draw notice to teleologism in Harmel’s portrayal of the Congress Alliance as a product of “steady ideological growth”, of “deepening [Party’s] own understanding” (which itself echoes the progressivist character of Marxist philosophy).¹⁸⁵ This teleology, in fact, permeates Harmel’s presentation of the entire South African past for the socialist-“nationalist” unity resolves the problem which is the country’s history. The quest for this “truth” supplies the Simmelian *ideelle Linie* that governs selection and assessment of the past events and persons.¹⁸⁶ That is to say, Harmel, preoccupied with the present, could not care less about “social investigation”.¹⁸⁷ He prospects for “his kinsmen in history”.¹⁸⁸

Thus, for example, he dismisses the thesis advocated by the CPSA in the 1920s, namely that the “unity between white and black workers” is the precondition for the socialist revolution. He anachronistically argues that it was “completely inadequate as a theoretical basis for the *development of the South African democratic revolution for the*

¹⁸² “New Africa and the Union,” *Liberation*, no. 36 (May 1959): 3; “1960: Year of Destiny,” *Liberation*, no. 39 (Dec 1959): 4; Lerumo, “After 40 Years,” 79; “Forms and Methods of Struggle in the National Liberation Revolution,” *AC*, no. 8 (Jan 1962): 13, 14 (for the quote).

¹⁸³ [Bunting], “Death of Michael Harmel,” 8.

¹⁸⁴ Lerumo, “Our People in the USA,” *AC*, no. 33 (2nd qtr, 1968): 20.

¹⁸⁵ Harmel, “The Communist Party of South Africa,” *Apartheid*, in la Guma, ed., 221; Lerumo, “Stormy Twenties,” 105 (for the quotes); Martin Legassick, review of *Fifty Fighting Years. The Communist Party of South Africa*, by A. Lerumo, *African Affairs* 72, no. 287 (Apr 1973): 211–212; cf. Allison Drew, “Writing South African Communist History,” *Science & Society* 61, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 109–110. The implicit faith in technological and epistemic progress found in Harmel’s journalism (“Out of the Ditch,” 3) is shared by *The White People* narrators. They, correspondingly, embrace the theory of evolution (*TWP*, 129–130, 452, 461), considering it the final and completely satisfying answer to the problem of man’s origin (234; cf. 393–394). That the narrators are all “reliable” and that the motif of evolution is woven into the argument of the novel as a whole (the White People turn out to be advanced human beings originally from Earth rather than a distinct species from outer space) would seem to support a view that evolutionism constitutes an article of faith for the implied author too. Cf. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 103–105.

¹⁸⁶ Wolf Schmid, *Narratology. An Introduction* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 195–196.

¹⁸⁷ Tom Lodge, “Charters from the Past. The African National Congress and its Historiographic Traditions,” in *History from South Africa. Alternative Visions and Practices*, Joshua Brown, Patrick Manning, Karin A. Shapiro eds. (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1991), 142.

¹⁸⁸ This is a characterisation by the Czech historian Josef Pekař (1870–1937) of the philosopher and politician Tomáš Masaryk’s (1850–1937) historical conceptions. See Milan Machovec, *Tomáš G. Masaryk* (Prague: Svobodné slovo, 1968), 108.

national liberation of the African people".¹⁸⁹ Not that it was, writes Harmel, only communists like Kotane who had "stood for the united front of national liberation".¹⁹⁰ Much earlier, Moshoeshoe of Lesotho cherished the same dream and "attempted to build a united front of African resistance..."¹⁹¹ While disunity long plagued the struggle of the "Bantus" against colonialism, in the African National Congress an organisation entered the scene whose "profoundly revolutionary objective" was "the building of a united African nation..."¹⁹² If Ivon Jones in 1921 ironised the Congress as a "small coterie of educated natives... satisfied with agitation for civil equality and political rights", it represented an "erro[r] of analysis and emphasis" which the international communist movement later put right.¹⁹³ The African People's Organisation, too, pioneered "the concept of a united front of the oppressed people against white minority rule" with its leader Abdullah Abdurahman drawing inspiration from, and looking for help to, socialists.¹⁹⁴ Decline of the ICU was down *primarily* to Kadalie's policy of anti-communism.¹⁹⁵ Harmel identifies yet another early instance of the socialist-"nationalist" merger when he insinuates that the ANC deputation to Versailles, the ICU dockers' strike in Cape Town, and Bulhoek and Bondelswart incidents alongside the activities of white workers were among those "[r]adical ideas and actions given impetus by the October Revolution".¹⁹⁶ He goes as far as describing, without explanation, the Israelite sect and the South West African tribe as the "working people".¹⁹⁷

The validity of "alliance" as a Marxist-Leninist concept (and, by the same token, the legitimacy of the SACP-ANC coalition) is further established by its applicability to other

¹⁸⁹ Lerumo, "Stormy Twenties," 102. My emphasis.

¹⁹⁰ Harmel, "Some Notes on the Communist Party in South Africa," 4 (emphasis original).

¹⁹¹ Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years*, 14; see also "Forms and Methods of Struggle—the South African Democratic Revolution," *AC*, no. 9 (Apr 1962): 45; "RSAF," 26; Harmel, "The Apartheid Story," *Solidarity* 4, no. 12 (1965): 10. Though Moshoeshoe did endeavour (and was able) to unify a number of "Sotho-speaking communities", he was not actuated primarily by the need to oppose white invasion—for a brief summary see L. D. Ngcongco, "The Mfecane and the Rise of New African States," J. F. Ade Ajayi, ed. *General History of Africa VI, Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s* (Berkeley: UNESCO, 1989), 111–115. It is highly ahistorical to picture him as a sort of a precursor of the Congress Movement, particularly the alliance of communists and the ANC. The underlying message is, of course, that the Congress Movement is firmly rooted in the domestic traditions of anti-colonial resistance, indeed, a direct continuation thereof. Harmel's novel demonstrates he found the military tradition of the unvanquished people of Lesotho most inspiring (*TWP*, 463, 467 etc.).

¹⁹² *Fifty Fighting Years*, 6, 11, 28.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 42. This passage carries autobiographical connotations. Harmel himself was among those who sensed the ANC's revolutionary potential as early as the 1940s. For it to be released, the Congressites would have to "learn that deputations of leaders [were] no substitute for mass action by people" (*Spectator*, "I Listened to the Democrats," *Inkululeko*, Oct 9, 1943, 4). Ironically, though, Harmel's view of the ANC *before* such a transformation does not significantly differ from that of Jones—see *Fifty Fighting Years*, 42.

¹⁹⁴ *Fifty Fighting Years*, 29–30.

¹⁹⁵ Harmel, "The Communist Party of South Africa," in *Apartheid*, la Guma, ed., 211; Lerumo, "Kadalie of the ICU," 107. Cf. Ambros Jacobs, "The Rise and Fall of the Industrial and Commercial Union of South Africa 1919–1929," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1, no. 1 (Jan 2011): 44.

¹⁹⁶ *Fifty Fighting Years*, 43–44.

¹⁹⁷ "South African Communist Party, 1921–1971," *Marxism Today* (Aug 1971): 230; "Stormy Twenties," 90. Recent research seems to vindicate Harmel's use of the term – see, for instance, Robert Edgar, *The Finger of God. Enoch Mgijima, the Israelites, and the Bulhoek Massacre in South Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018) and Bernard C. Moore, "Canines, Carnivores, Capitalism, Colonialism: Some Transformations in Hunting, Agriculture, and Labour in Southern Namibia, 1915–1930s," MA thesis (Michigan State University, 2016). I wish to thank Peter Limb for drawing this fact to my notice.

countries and contexts. An article significantly entitled “Our People in the USA” opens with a parallel between the assassination of Martin Luther King and the mysterious death of Chief Luthuli, both of them “African leaders”. King’s amicable posture towards communists receives praise as it distinguishes him from “the petty-bourgeois Negro nationalists and compromising white liberals”. One would be ill-advised to inflate the similarities between the two places, admits Harmel. Nevertheless, he still perceives things in America through the prism of the SACP’s 1962 programme, including the concept of a “colonialism of a special type” whose defining feature is the living of the coloniser and colonised cheek-by-jowl. In resemblance to the Congress Alliance, “the Negro people of the United States” are “moving in the direction of the building of a united, militant movement of national liberation”.¹⁹⁸ Claude Lightfoot, to boot, quite correctly observed that Afro-American nationalism was “of a progressive character” and constituted “a vital component of the forward movement of all working people for new American revolution”.¹⁹⁹

“Unworthy Thoughts of ‘Domination’”

For communists, it was possible to work with the ANC and such-like organisations as long as “these movements [were] really revolutionary and if their representatives [were] not opposed to us training and organising peasantry [etc.] in a revolutionary way”.²⁰⁰ Harmel himself had a hand in “educating” African leaders—both in private and in classroom.²⁰¹ He believed that if the Party was able to provide the African, Indian, and Coloured leaders with patient guidance and if their “movement[s] [grew] in strength, confidence, and political clarity”, they would simply converge with the socialist view.²⁰²

For quite a while, historians have been trying to settle the problem of the relationship between the CPSA/SACP and ANC before 1990. Was it one of equals or some sort of

¹⁹⁸ Lerumo, “Our People in the USA,” 13, 20.

¹⁹⁹ Lerumo, “A Marxist on Black Power,” 89.

²⁰⁰ Lenin, *Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions*, Jul 26, 1920, quoted by Filatova in “Lasting Legacy,” 509. This requires a close relationship with the USSR—see *Theses on the National and Colonial Question Adopted by the Second Comintern Congress*; quoted in Callaghan, *R. Palme Dutt*, 84–85. Cf. Lerumo, “New Problems of a Continent in Revolution,” 8–9.

²⁰¹ W. Sisulu, interview by B. Harmel & P. Bonner, Jun 10, 1994, 12–13 (BHP); Elinor Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu. In Our Lifetime* (London: Abacus, 2003), 106, 148; N. Mandela to B. Harmel, 1975 (MHP: A3300); Luli Calinicos, *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains* (Cape Town: New African Books, 2012), 308.

²⁰² “Observations on Certain Aspects of Imperialism in South Africa,” 266; “The New Africa—Capitalist or Socialist?,” 6. Their evangelisation of the national-liberation movement would have been all the easier as the black bourgeoisie was, in Harmel’s analysis, negligible, with “the progressive, working class tendency [playing] an increasingly influential part” (ibid.) But this “proletarianisation” of the ANC was in itself one of the things communists were eager to achieve. In an interview with Mary Benson, Harmel relates how the ANC Youth League leaders, being “intellectuals”, tended to underrate the “working man” as “inarticulate”. It supposedly took them some time to realise that the latter was actually “the salt of the movement and politically conscious” (PMB). Communists moreover did their utmost to make the Congresses appear proletarian: some of Harmel’s texts characterise Walter Sisulu as a “miner” or at least accentuate his mining past (see, respectively, “Jihoafričtí rasisté na pranýři národů. Interview s Michaelem Harmelem” [South African Racists Pilloried by Nations of the World], *Rudé právo*, Dec 1, 1963, 5; “Some Notes on the Communist Party in South Africa,” 15). In reality, however, Sisulu only worked on the mines for about a year. Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu*, 39–41.

domination? Stephen Ellis went to great lengths to prove Communists had gained control of the Congress in exile. Allison Drew, from a different perspective, speaks of a practical dissolution of socialism in the national-liberation movement after the Party's illegalisation in 1950. Eddy Maloka explains the traction the "communist theory" gained within the ANC, while concluding one should view the relationship of the two organisations as a "two-way process". Mia Roth argues that communists indeed came to dominate the ANC and that the process began as early as the mid-forties. According to Tom Lodge there is no evidence that, before exile at least, the Congress got fully under the sway of the Party. The former organisation did not lend itself easily to centralist control and its members launched their own initiatives. As of mid-1950s, however, communists, having been deprived of a legal platform, increasingly penetrated the ANC and started recruiting its local leaders. There is, finally, no doubt that the "SACP ideologues succeeded in shaping the ANC's programmatic orientation," albeit it is too much to claim (as does Lodge) that *The Freedom Charter* contains a vision of people's democracy.²⁰³

The CPSA/SACP discourse, Harmel's included, teems with contradictions regarding the relationship of the Party and the national-liberation organisations. On the one hand, as stated previously, the communists make little secret about their ambition ideologically to mould the Congresses in their own image.²⁰⁴ At the same time, they take pains to refute allegations by political opponents, black or white, that they pull the strings.

In spite of their having aided in purging the ANC of "narrow nationalism, Black chauvinism, anti-communism and other outlooks which are harmful to the people's cause" and which (like ultra-leftism) "aris[e] from petit-bourgeois confusion or outside intrigues",²⁰⁵ the communists still maintain that the Congress "does not represent any single class, or any one ideology".²⁰⁶ Although *The Freedom Charter* expressly demands nationalisation—a number of SACP authors actually hailed it as "communist"—Harmel prefers misleadingly to speak of the country evolving along "non-capitalist lines" or about

²⁰³ Stephen Ellis, *External Mission. The ANC in Exile, 1960–1990* (New York: OUP, 2013), esp. 73–112, 278–281 (for a critique of his thesis see Paul Landau, "Controlled by Communists? [Re]Assessing the ANC in Its Exilic Decades," *South African Historical Journal* 67, no. 2 [2015]: 222–241); Allison Drew, *Discordant Comrades. Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left* (Pretoria: Unisa, 2002), 282; Maloka, *South African Communist Party*, 45–46, 68–82, 174–175 (for the quote); Roth, *Communist Party in South Africa*, 258–260; Lodge, "Secret Party," 463–464.

²⁰⁴ "Nationalism and the Class Struggle," in *South African Communists Speak*, 210–211; "Some Notes on the Communist Party in South Africa," 13, 14 (RKP); "RSAF," 4; Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (London: Longman, 1983), 29–30.

²⁰⁵ "RSAF," 42 (cf. Filatova, "Lasting Legacy," 510f); Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years*, 94; "Fifty Years of the Communist Party—4: Apartheid, Resistance & Armed Struggle," *AC*, no. 47 (4th qtr, 1971): 49.

²⁰⁶ "RSAF," 42.

“by-passing” capitalism.²⁰⁷ It is only when infuriated to the utmost by Western atrocities in the Congo that he lets the cat out of the bag, proclaiming bluntly that free Africans “must... develop their countries on socialist lines”.²⁰⁸

As early as 1958, Harmel addressed the problem of the white-black and communist-“nationalist” relationship in an article series that launches a broadside against, in particular, the Pan-Africanist Congress with its assertion that “the African National Congress is not an independent body”.²⁰⁹ Not only does one find the scope of the attack (four instalments in all) striking.²¹⁰ Equally remarkable is the fact that it was published under the name of Harmel’s African comrade, Dan Tloome.²¹¹ This detail—when known—suffices significantly to undermine the central message, namely that the Congress Movement member organisations are people who “work together for the same objectives, on a basis of mutual respect and confidence”, which leaves “no room for unworthy thoughts of ‘domination’”.²¹²

A passage in the draft of *Fifty Fighting Years* stresses that while communists could not work openly in the Congress Alliance and Peace Movement between 1950 and 1960, they nevertheless contrived “to evaluate the situation and the stage of development of the movement at each successive stage and to advance correct and realistic policies for the advancement of the revolution, in the light of its scientific socialist ideology”. Even here, of course, Harmel hastens to add that “[t]he picture presented by the enemy of a secret ‘Communist conspiracy’ imposing its line on the movement was based on a vulgar misconception of the fraternal relationship, based on mutual respect and confidence...”²¹³

Harmel’s discourse about the Party’s re-emergence after Sharpeville displays as much bad faith. He had written that the SACP, constituted early in 1953, had been from the

²⁰⁷ Filatova, “Lasting Legacy,” 524, 534 (for the text of the Charter see <https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/anc/1955/freedom-charter.htm>); Africanus, “Lenin and Africa,” 21; “RSAF,” 62; Harmel, “Lenin and the National Question,” *LM*, Apr 1970, 184. Tellingly, a passage in Mandela’s article on *The Freedom Charter* in which he predicts a boom of “trade and private enterprise” after liberation was excised by Ruth First, the editor of *No Easy Walk to Freedom* (1956). See Anthony Sampson, *Mandela: Authorized Biography* (New York: Vintage, 2000), 95.

²⁰⁸ Africanus, “The Battle for the Congo and the November Aggression,” 18.

²⁰⁹ Tloome, “Africanists and the Congress,” 440.

²¹⁰ See above in the main text. Quotes from Masilela, ed. *Sophiatown Renaissance*.

²¹¹ P. Joseph, interview by author, Jul 31, 2015. Harmel’s authorship (or heavy redaction) is further indicated by characteristic turns of phrase and quotes. For instance, “as Olive Schreiner put it, you cannot hold a man down in a ditch without getting down in there with him” (445) can be founded also in “Out of the Ditch,” 3 and Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Sept 7, 1950, 2 (Harmel’s trademark sneer at “the romantic, unstable romantics” strongly suggests his authorship of the former, unsigned text—cf. “Lenin and Africa,” 18–19; *Fifty Fighting Years*, 40). The articles undersigned by Tloome also touch upon Harmel’s pet peeves (“the arrogant little clique associated with *The Torch* newspaper”, 444)—cf. Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Jul 13, 1950, 4; “Striking Out under the Republic,” *FT*, Jul 1961, 8.

²¹² Tloome, “Africanists and the Congress,” 442.

²¹³ *Fifty Fighting Years* (ms), 197 (SNP). For what it’s worth, the police reports that in July 1954 Harmel, briefing an Orlando organiser, equated the CPSA with COD: “The name Communist Party will never again be used as long as this Government is in power, but you know that the organisation recently formed in fact represents our party.” Feiteverslag van Komitee Aangestel Kragtens Artikel 17 van Wet 44 van 1950 soos gewysig (SLDF 5).

start resolved to “see that it emerged under its own name among the people in the shortest possible time”.²¹⁴ We know, however, that when it did resurface in mid-1960, this only happened after a heated debate in the rump Central Committee with Kotane apprehensive “that it would cause an enormous rift within the ANC”. Though in the event the Party’s comeback did not cause any major stir among the Party’s allies, some of the COD and ANC members nevertheless felt they had had their trust betrayed.²¹⁵ That is to say, the re-emergence was not an unproblematic move without repercussions for the relations in the Congress movement. It is only the manuscript of *The Fifty Fighting Years*, however, that supplies any details at all:

It was also during the state of emergency of 1960 that the Central Committee of the Communist Party announced its existence and policy to the people... the first... leaflet defiantly announced that the Nationalist Party Government never had and never could make good its boast that it had destroyed the Communist Party.²¹⁶

Both in a journal article concerned with this period and in the book, the event is strangely soft-pedalled. The author confines himself to the observation that “the Communist Party... came out with its first illegal leaflets for mass distribution in all the main industrial regions of the country”. In Harmel’s short CPSA/SACP histories, it goes unremarked altogether.²¹⁷

The Big Lie

Anti-racist “Crusade”

The merciless tone of Leninism may make the alliance with the ANC appear a purely pragmatic (if not cynical) affair. In South African context, though, such a co-operation stemmed from concrete human relationships and mutual respect which it, in turn, nourished. The particulars of how Harmel disencumbered himself of his supremacist baggage are unknown. We are thus in no position to decide whether he initially found personal commerce with black comrades, and Africans in general, challenging, as did, for instance, Bram Fischer and Ben Turok.²¹⁸ Experience in the struggle and friendships there struck up, in any case, clearly moulded his profoundly non-racialist outlook. Upon joining the Party and the editorial team of *Inkululeko*, Harmel began to mix not merely with black

²¹⁴ “Some Notes on the Communist Party in South Africa,” 9 (for the quote), 11, 14 (RKP). Cf. *Fifty Fighting Years*, 82.

²¹⁵ Rusty Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting. Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics 1938–1963* (London: Viking, 1999), 218–219; Turok, *Nothing But the Truth*, 117–118; Magubane, “The Turn to Armed Struggle,” 74.

²¹⁶ *Fifty Fighting Years* (ms), 202 (SNP).

²¹⁷ Lerumo, “Apartheid, Resistance & Armed Struggle,” 51; Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years*, 95; “The Communist Party of South Africa,” in *Apartheid*, la Guma, ed., 205–228; [Harmel], “South African Communist Party 1921–1971,” 237.

²¹⁸ Clingman, *Bram Fischer*, 51f; Turok, *Nothing But the Truth*, 37.

communists, but also with the ANC people (Pixley ka Isaka Seme), including anti-communists in the Youth League (Lembede, Mandela). He made visits, with Kotane, to black townships; observed clandestine meetings of African miners and their bid to unionise in the teeth of persecution; spoke with impoverished Tswana peasants; and witnessed from close-by “the glorious heroism, unity and determination” of the 1946 strikers “who lit the flame of freedom that will never be put out”.²¹⁹

Writing for *The Rhodian* and *The Adelphi* in the 1930s, he railed against “oppression and brutal exploitation” of the African majority and referred to “the helotised millions of non-Europeans”.²²⁰ His subsequent treatment of the race relations, however, grows in specificity and acquires a more personal tone. Indeed, a “crusade” against “an immoral policy of white supremacy” assumes a central place in his textual output. What he stated in an obituary of the psychologist Wulf Sachs holds equally true in his own case: for Harmel “racial equality was not only an abstract theory, but a personal human issue”.²²¹

The Guardian columns—like his analyses for *The Fighting Talk*—demonstrate as much most distinctly.²²² In addition to discerning, witty, and humorous debunking of apartheid policies, discourse, and ideology, they document in vivid detail and with genuine compassion everyday humiliation of Africans, whether witnessed by the author himself or communicated to him by his black friends.²²³ After a visit to a Pass Office in his capacity as a “native welfare officer” for Unterhalter Sr’s Rosy Doze mattress factory, for example, Harmel confides to the readers that he was

shocked and outraged afresh by the atmosphere of this dreadful place... As I watched the scores of anything-but-civil servants hectoring the long queues of the members of the public with whom they have to deal—their testy impatience always on the verge of explosion into an ill-mannered, foul-mouthed outburst of bad temper—every clerk a little Hitler—I realised the source of the evil stench that hangs over this evil place. It is the stink of a slave market.²²⁴

²¹⁹ Jones, “*Inkululeko*,” 342–343; Bernstein, *Memory against Forgetting*, 29, 46, 56–58; M. Harmel, interview by M. Benson; Mandela to B. Lamb, mid-1970s (MHP); M. Harmel to B. Bunting, 1974 (quoted in Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 205); Michael Harmel, “400 000 for Democracy,” *Guardian*, Jul 9, 1941, 9; Alan Doyle, “2: 1946: The Great African Mine Strike,” *FT*, Jun 1961, 14; Spectator, “The Struggle for Land. Trouble in North Transvaal,” *Inkululeko*, Feb 12, 1944, 4; Harmel, “Strike Diary,” *Guardian*, Aug 22, 1946, 3–4 (for the quote).

²²⁰ M. A. H. “Vereniging,” *Rhodian* XV, no. 2 (1937): 13; M., “Indifference: An Old Snobbery,” *Rhodian* XV, no. 1 (1937): 25.

²²¹ Allan Doyle, “Smuts after UNO,” *Inkululeko*, Jan 10, 1947, 2; Alan Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Jun 20, 1948, 6.

²²² Doyle, “White Politicians Discuss the Black Problem,” *FT*, Mar 3, 1954, 6; “Swart and the Judges,” *FT*, May 1955, 6; “The People Versus the Senate Bill,” *FT*, Jun 1955, 7; “Hysteria and History,” *FT*, Apr 1956, 3–5; “Afrikaner Nationalism in Big Business,” *FT*, Aug 1957, 6; Harmel, “Over the Voter’s Shoulder,” *FT*, Mar 1958, 3–4; Doyle, “Stark Realities. The Significance of June 26th,” *Liberation*, no. 26 (Jul 1957): 16–22.

²²³ For instance Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Dec 15, 1949, 4; Feb 9, 1950, 4; Feb 16, 1950, 4; Jun 8, 1950, 4; Jun 13, 1950, 6; Apr 26, 1951, 2; May 31, 1951, 2 or May 10, 1951, 3. See also Harmel, “Strike Diary” and “Delightful Book about Africa,” review of *Trial by Sasswood*, by Esther Warner, *New Age*, Jan 10, 1957, 8.

²²⁴ Doyle, “By the Way,” *Guardian*, Nov 10, 1948, 2. On Harmel’s employment see Barbara Harmel, *Thursday Child*, sect. 4; KGC.

Throughout his writing life, Harmel beats the drum for “African” or “colonial” revolution” in which groups hitherto stamped upon reclaim their rights.²²⁵ These rights do not belong to them out of mercy or by virtue of “bargains and negotiations between foreigners”. They are theirs automatically, regardless of what Europeans make of their level of “civilisation”. Mass resistance, armed or otherwise, manifests that Africa’s people are “fully capable and ready to liberate themselves”. With the job finished and the sneaky forces of neo-colonialism held in check, they “shall take their part in the world community not as dependents, inferiors, or pawns in the diplomatic game, but as equals and full partners”. They must, however, decolonise their own minds by rejecting “the ideas the whites hold of” them because many Africans actually “begin to see [their] world in these terms”.²²⁶

Harmel contributes to this decolonising of the African mind, above all, by rebutting, in whatever genre, the “shameless lie [that] was told by the imperialists... that of their alleged ‘civilising mission’ in Africa”. For, in truth, they “left behind the continent virtually in ruins”.²²⁷ His most extensive non-fictional critique of the colonial myth is contained in the opening chapter of *Fifty Fighting Years*. Following in the footsteps of Leonard Thompson and radical amateur historians (Forman, Jaffe, Roux), “Conquest and Dispossession” counters a number of concoctions disseminated by “the upholders of white supremacy”. Not only is Harmel adamant Africans resided in the region long before 1652, but maintains—less cogently—their “values and traditions [were] in many ways far superior to those of the representatives of capitalism who invaded and destroyed them”.²²⁸ The same revisionist paradigm prompts him to question the interpretation by both Afrikaner and British historians of the Great Trek, which anticipates recent developments in historiography.²²⁹ Far from buying into the depiction of this much mythologised venture as “an act of rebellion against British rule”, he condemns it as a “military expedition to

²²⁵ “1960—Africa’s Year of Destiny,” *Liberation*, no. 39 (Dec 1959): 4; “New Problems of a Continent n Revolution,” 2; “Forms and Methods of Struggle in the National Liberation Revolution,” 12; “RSAF,” 15–23; Lerumo, “After 40 Years,” 79; “Turbulent Africa,” 3; *Fifty Fighting Years* (ms), 198–199.

²²⁶ Doyle, “The Forgotten Million,” *FT*, Feb 1956, 6f (cf. “New Africa and the Union,” *Liberation*, no. 36 [May 1959]: 3); “Sunshine and Shadow,” *Liberation*, no. 24 (Apr 1957): 2–3; Lerumo, “Imperialist Strategy in Southern Africa,” *WMR* 15, no. 7 (1972): 32 (cf. “The Agony of South Africa”, 35); “Children of the Storm,” *Liberation*, no. 1 (Feb 1953): 2 (cf. Lerumo, “A Historical Step Forward,” 12); [Black Power and Black Consciousness], 3–4.

²²⁷ Lerumo, “Socialism for Africa,” 107–108. Cf. “The New Africa—Capitalist or Socialist?,” 4; “RSAF,” 15; Harmel, “Hysteria and History,” *FT*, Apr 1956, 4.

²²⁸ *Fifty Fighting Years*, 2–3. He is fain to add that for their “primitive communism” these communities were, “in the light of Marxist historical materialism... [,] backward”. Cf. [“Black Power and Black Consciousness”], 4; Sandwith, “Yours for Socialism,” 19. On the previous “Africanist” historiography see Christopher Saunders, *The Making of the South Africa Past. Major Historians on Race and Class* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1988), 131–139.

²²⁹ Cf. Diderick Justin Erasmus, “Re-Thinking the Great Trek: A Study of the Nature and Development of the Boer Community in the Ohrigstad/Lydenburg Area, 1845–1877,” MA thesis (Rhodes University, 1995), esp. 1–26.

conquer, dominate and occupy African lands”.²³⁰ In his eagerness to underline the legitimacy of the African kings affected by the Boer exodus, Harmel goes as far as picturing the slaying of the Retief party as an “arres[t] and execut[ion]”.²³¹

Africans in The White People

His novel synthesises and elaborates his ideas on race and colonialism. To be sure, much of South African science or speculative fiction, in one way or another, touches upon the politics of colour. But Harmel’s manuscript stands out in this context for it represents a highly informed view from within rather than a superficial view from without. Rooted in the Congress Alliance ideology, it centres on the African experience and struggle and “deconstructs” the apartheid mythology with the aid of materialist analysis. South Africa’s freedom is purchased in the story by a multiracial and multi-creedal movement from below rather than by a decree of white politicians, domestic or otherwise. Finally, Harmel envisages the new country as not black or white, but “black-and-white... as a whole”.²³²

Before turning to this aspect of the work itself, however, let us briefly consider the image of Africans found in the works by Harmel’s fellow practitioners of science and speculative fiction in South Africa by the early 1960s. Most of them project, like *The White People*, an idiosyncratic future for the country and will thus serve as a foil to Harmel’s singular handling of the matter.²³³

Interracial relations may be a thematic fixture in South African literature, but there have been those who pleaded for writers to ignore the problem of colour altogether. A liberal journalist and playwright Lewis Sowden (1903–1971) was one such.²³⁴ His *Tomorrow’s Comet*, indeed, does not materially concern itself with racial issues. Sowden’s Africans serve, more or less, as staffage. They are illiterate simpletons with one foot still in the blissful pre-modern innocence of rurality, in superstitious awe of the white man. And it is to the white man, “cruel, arrogant, rapacious, wasteful, unmerciful, tyrannical, hard-hearted” though he might have proved, that the Earth still belongs.²³⁵

“[H]istorical prognostication” is one of the objectives of *When Smuts Goes*, a quasihistorical narrative by another liberal, the historian Arthur Keppel-Jones (see

²³⁰ *Fifty Fighting Years*, 9. One of the first authors to claim so was probably Jaffe—see Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past*, 137.

²³¹ *Fifty Fighting Years*, 12.

²³² [Michael Harmel], “Reality and Fiction in South African Literature,” *Liberation*, no. 1 (Feb 1953): 7.

²³³ I leave out of this outline works by C. J. Langenhoven and Jan Rabie because they are not available in English translation.

²³⁴ “Reality and Fiction in South African Literature,” 6. On Sowden see Bernard Sachs, *South African Personalities and Places* (Johannesburg: Dial, 1959), 156–160.

²³⁵ *To-morrow’s Comet*, 94, 143, 166–167, 234, 301 (for the quote).

above).²³⁶ It views the black people conventionally, stereotyping them as indolent and directionless. As such, they inevitably end up relegated to the position of historical objects.²³⁷ The radical activists and traditional leaders in their midst fail to impress the narrator. The small number of westernised “natives” that do merit his approval cannot save the day. The forces of progress are to be found in Western and especially Anglo-Saxon values or principles of “civilisation”, diligence, discipline, organisation, “restraint”, and constitutional democracy. It is only logical that the book envisages apartheid as being brought down by a foreign intervention.²³⁸

Unlike Keppel-Jones, Henry Allan Fagan (1889–1963) was well-acquainted with both the predicament and aspirations of the African population. In fact, he considered the escalating tension between the white and black the central problem of the day. The novel *Ninya*, in a way, complements Fagan’s chairmanship of the Native Laws Commission (1946–1948) which, while discouraging social and political integration, unavailingly advanced a number of reforms.²³⁹ The fictitious prefacer to the narrative, whose philosophy of history echoes Spenglerian thought, believes that the Western civilisation has reached its acme and now faces, as all those before, decline and fall. The cause lies in “deeper and less bridgeable cleavages of race and colour”. For the nonce, no civilisation “of any nearly comparable standard” is capable of taking the place of the West.²⁴⁰ Events on the Moon, the depiction of which follows, foreshadow developments on Earth in the story world and allegorically mirror cataclysms in the actual one. Whereas thus far, the Moon has been dominated by enterprising Zelians of the North, distinguished by their white mane, black-maned Nidians of the East (“lethargic and stagnant”), together with other minorities, are beginning to assert themselves.²⁴¹ Zelian intellectuals call for equality and more contact among different groups. Yet their arguments fall on deaf ears. The narrator cares little for “deceptive... simplicity” of revolutionaries, but Zelians’ advocacy of dictatorship to preserve their own privileges is no more to his liking. He sees the absence of an honest discussion as the key problem. In lieu of rational arguments, both sides resort to vague

²³⁶ A. H. Jonker, Foreword to *When Smuts Goes*, vii. On the author see Alan Jeeves, “Interview with Arthur Keppel-Jones,” *South African Historical Journal* 32, no. 1 (1995): 11–23.

²³⁷ Cf. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 93, 100, 135; Nicholas Visser, “The Politics of Future Projections in South African Fiction,” in Pauline Fletcher, ed. *Black/White Writing. Essays on South African Literature* (London: Associated UP, 1993), 64.

²³⁸ Keppel-Jones, *When Smuts Goes*, 18, 27, 56, 91, 116, 139, 155–188, 198, 203, 209–210, 213–214, 216, 223.

²³⁹ P. J. Nienaber, “A. H. Fagan,” *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde te Leiden, 1965–1966* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 160–162; Erika Terblanche, “A. H. Fagan”, both accessed May 1, 2019, http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/jaa003196601_01/jaa003196601_01_0033.php and <http://www.litnet.co.za/ha-fagan-18891963/>; Christopher Saunders and Nicholas Southey, *A Dictionary of South African History*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2000), 98.

²⁴⁰ *Ninya. A Fantasy of a Strange Little World* (London: J. Cape, 1956), 26–28.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 82, 119.

“assertions” and “watchwords”.²⁴² While Keppel-Jones calls upon sensible whites to rally behind Jan Smuts to avert a disaster, Fagan’s novel was written when apartheid had already been well underway and, though deploring the want of *Agape*, it has no such an easy remedy to offer. One might prefer to describe *Ninya* as a lament. The flood is coming that has been precipitated by “careless and unkind thoughts” on both sides.²⁴³ It is too late to do anything about it. And besides, is not the death of a civilisation quite a natural thing to happen once in a while?

Rueful resignation would have found little sympathy with another contributor to the debate about the South African crisis. Not that Allighan’s (1895–1977) *Verwoerd: the End* is to be taken quite literally.²⁴⁴ Underlying it is, nevertheless, a firm belief South Africa can (and ought to) be fashioned into a bastion of anti-communism. The book perceives Africans, Indians, and Coloureds as “junior partners” of the white man for their contributions to the development of the country “have been of far less importance”.²⁴⁵ They are a voiceless material for benevolent social engineering that aims at a fairer “bantustanism” melded with elements of petty apartheid—“an instinctive way of life”.²⁴⁶ Allighan does not reckon with continued decolonisation and, barring one exception, approximates Keppel-Jones in representing Africans as an undistinguishable multitude. They have no “appointed leaders”, are unsuited for parliamentary work, lack in good husbandry and moral standards.²⁴⁷

A superb novel *The Day Natal Took Off* by a self-professed liberal, Anthony Delius (1916–1989, see c. 3), is a junket of irony. No-one is safe from it.²⁴⁸ Unlike Sowden, Keppel-Jones, and Allighan, Delius surely portrays Africans as history-makers. Their leaders, too, are neither ineffectual nor venal. That said, his Jack Kumalo, an advisor to the Zulu king, is a Machiavellian manipulator rather than an idealistic freedom fighter.²⁴⁹ Through cunningly choreographing events, he sees Zululand well-armed, independent, and provided for by surreptitiously discovered oil deposits.²⁵⁰ White Natalians first become its virtual clients and then—what an ironic turning of the tables!—ask the Zulus for protection. African troops duly annex Durban. Unification may yet become reality, but for now South

²⁴² Ibid., 135, 172, 200.

²⁴³ Ibid., 209.

²⁴⁴ On the author see Bill Schwarz, *The White Man’s World* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 541n65.

²⁴⁵ Gary Allighan, *Verwoerd: The End* (Cape Town: Purnell, 1961), 96.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 71, 75 (for the quote), 112, 133, 171.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 134, 172, 183, 206, 219.

²⁴⁸ *The Day Natal Took Off: A Satire* (Cape Town: Insight, 1963), 22f, 74f, 112, 132, 146, 166f.

²⁴⁹ His donning of a traditional Zulu “get-up” (160) echoes Mandela’s sartorial antics. See Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown & Com., 1995), 376–377, ePUB.

²⁵⁰ *The Day Natal Took Off*, 70, 118ff, 129.

(or rather Southern) Africa has been fragmented into several entities, including homeland-like South Sotho-Nguni Republic, the Orange Free State, multiracial Good Hope Republic, and Southern Rhodesia. The Nats and Reds jointly set up a totalitarian hybrid in the Transvaal. This patchwork, reflecting the region's cultural diversity and allowing for voluntary apartheid ("It seems to well up in us like gas in a mineral water"), came into existence without any outside help and, to a great extent, through a gradual and peaceful process. Therefore, "life goes on much as usual". The past seems to have left no hard feelings and there is no sense of a loss.²⁵¹ Ignoring economic aspects of apartheid and underestimating African plight, Delius does not anticipate a bitter and prolonged pursuit of democracy and racial equality. He counts on common sense as the universal solvent as well as on self-marginalisation of fanatics. While Africans do play a material part in the transformation, they are not the key agent (as they are, effectively, in Harmel), merely one among many.

The sole non-white characters in Delius' satirical poem *The Last Division*—a coloured boiler-attendant and a Bushman—bear description as mere likeable walk-ons. Most of the plot unfolds in the National Assembly of South Africa in the 1980s, a "place that seem[s] to focus human idiocy/ in... a concentrated form".²⁵² The majority party, called Neths, decides to erect an "ox-hoof-shaped" wall in the middle of a desert. It is their "'last bulwark against common sense...'", made of "[m]emoranda, estimates, blue-books, Hansards..."²⁵³

Harmel wrote *The White People* (subtitled either *A Satirical Fantasy* or *A South African Novel of and beyond Its Time*) during 1959.²⁵⁴ It is a classic story of an alien invasion, though one with an explicit anti-colonialist twist.²⁵⁵ The people of Oxindu, covetous of the Earth's mineral resources, gradually gain dominion over the technologically less advanced and ever-feuding tellurians. The more benevolent era of an enlightened reformism that supersedes the initial tyranny proves highly effective in transforming all aspects of human civilisation beyond recognition. At long last, the Oxinduri rulers are worsted, but only following a protracted, complicated struggle by

²⁵¹ Ibid., 147ff, 161–162 (for the quote), 165–166.

²⁵² *The Last Division* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1959), 20. The second and third cantos were originally published in *Africa South* 1, no. 3 and 4 (1957): 107–127 and 108–128. Harmel was a one-off contributor to the journal. Delius worked as a lobby correspondent for the *Cape Times* in 1958–1964. See Elaine Potter, *The Press as Opposition: The Political Role of South African Newspapers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), 133–134, 158. For a minute analysis of the poem see David Stefanus Albertyn, "Anthony Delius as a Satirist," MA thesis (Potchefstroom University, 1970).

²⁵³ *The Last Division*, 66–67.

²⁵⁴ The second subtitle is used in the manuscript held in RSP (MCH70).

²⁵⁵ On the anti-colonial dimension of classic science fiction see John Rieder, "Science Fiction, Colonialism, and the Plot of Invasion," *Extrapolation* 46, no. 3 (2005): 373–394.

assorted resistance groups, including the Human Information Society some of whose founding members comprise the main cast of characters.

Harmel concedes he drew inspiration from a passage in Schreiner's *From Man to Man*. When the "alethic aliens" of Oxindu land on the Earth, the narrative is set in motion.²⁵⁶

Their faces and hands were white! But utterly white; whiter than the page of this book you are reading; whiter than the flesh of a lily! Not pinky-brown like the skins of those European peoples whom we used to call "white men" before Advent, to distinguish them from the duskier brown of those whom we used to call "black."²⁵⁷

Thus ends the first chapter. It is a defining moment of the narrative not only as an artistic structure, but also in its relation to the actual context. For it relativises with a single stroke the black-white dichotomy vital to South Africa and the rest of the colonial world. Whites (together with all the other racial groups) become subject to the same treatment they used to mete out to the people of "colour".

Harmel disputes traditional portraiture of blacks as "slothful" and "irrational" that we have encountered in most works of South African speculative fiction, exposing the social representations of the (extra-terrestrial) invaders as self-serving, opportunistic and, as a matter of fact, far from "rational".²⁵⁸ True to form, he stands apart from the other writers of this group by his chiefly negative assessment of the colonial era. Although Oxinduri leaders account themselves benefactors of the inferior races and although their advanced science and utilitarian ethos undoubtedly succeeded in conquering "[t]he worst enemies of man—poverty, disease, racialism, war, premature senility", the invaders also wrought incalculable damage to the cultural heritage of the subjugated peoples, whose values, languages, traditions, literatures, artifacts, collective memory were marginalised, displaced, or irretrievably lost.²⁵⁹

In contrast to *The Day Natal Took Off* with its idea of cultural variety and uneven progression that translate into a multiplicity of states, South Africa remains united in Harmel's *The White People*. Multi-racial society (which Allighan thinks "entirely impracticable and inapplicable") thrives too. The country has a black president, an Indian

²⁵⁶ *From Man to Man, Or, Perhaps Only*—(London: Virago, 1982), 411–453; Doležel, *Heterocosmica*, 119.

²⁵⁷ *TWP*, 22.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 100, 130, 132, 138, 145f, 315, 338–339, 343–345, 415, 419. Although Harmel (like Keppel-Jones before him) debunks absolutist pretensions of other belief systems, he is—screechily grinding his own ideological axe—inevitably guilty of the same sin. That is to say, his facile relativism backfires. The terrestrials counter social representations of the Oxinduri with "common sense" (270, 320), superior aesthetic norms (143, 322, 373, 390–392), and "indisputable" scientific facts (129–130, 452, 461), i.e. the theory of evolution (130).

²⁵⁹ *TWP*, 141, 143, 390, 405, 412; 477, cf. 137f, 143, 390, 428ff, 435, 439, 441, 475, 487.

foreign minister. There is Albert Luthuli Express Way, Dadoo Hospital, and Charter Square in Kliptown.²⁶⁰ Its races mingle with what would have seemed, at the time of writing, a blasphemous abandon.²⁶¹ The book values cultural and linguistic syncretism over “purity”.²⁶²

The first anti-colonial revolution is shown to have been home-grown, while neither of the two came through a comparatively unproblematic adoption of what works by the people of good will (Delius), but through a long, painful, concerted effort of what is, at least in case of the first revolution, unambiguously identified as the African National Congress. The novel portrays indigenous people in general as assertive and dauntless, with Lesotho—held by Keppel Jones’ narrator as a glowing example of the beneficial effect of the British *Überkultur*—embodying the resilience and continuity of African tradition.²⁶³ Fagan’s pessimism is entirely foreign to Harmel who views history as linear rather than cyclic. To be sure, there are setbacks aplenty. These contain priceless lessons, however. The entire humankind is continuously climbing towards a freer and “finer way of life” and a better understanding of the universe:

Up the centuries we had struggled, out of the steaming primeval swamp, ever upwards. We had crawled on the face of our earthball, first downward-looking, on all fours, then proudly erect, looking up into the skies, where we would soar on man-made wings, into the atmosphere and beyond it. Ever upwards. Inspired by our great thinkers and poets and leaders of men, we had probed deep into the secret of the world and the universe about us, striven unevenly, but surely, to a finer way of life, created a lofty and noble culture...²⁶⁴

Conclusion

Employing methods of literary interpretation and analysis, the foregoing section made an attempt to grasp the inner logic of the *entire body* of Harmel’s discourse by distilling and examining themes which dominate it. These themes, their variation and organisation, show what bees Harmel had in his bonnet, but also expose his ideological frame of reference, the principles that governed, and confined, much of his discursive practice. For anyone but dimly familiar with Marxist-Leninist doctrine or the history of the CPSA/SACP, my findings may not be much of a discovery. They, however, afford a more solid and systematic basis for a fair appraisal of Harmel’s intellectual legacy than patchy

²⁶⁰ *TWP*, 177–178, 219, 416; Allighan, *Verwoerd*, 82;

²⁶¹ *TWP*, 226ff, 236–237.

²⁶² The son of Steve van Wyck (an Afrikaner worker) joins the Dhlaminis (a black family) for a trip around the country. On the way, they chat in a mélange of Zulu and the *Taal* and sing songs in these languages (*TWP*, 226ff).

²⁶³ *TWP*, 190, 201, 247, 416, 463, 467; Keppel-Jones, *When Smuts Goes*, 216.

²⁶⁴ *TWP*, 202, 234, 471; cf. 393–394.

recollections of contemporaries and ready-made, facile labels assigned to him without first-hand knowledge of his textual production:

1. The texts here examined reveal Harmel as almost obsessively mistrustful, nay, hostile to individuality and individualism. He identifies the latter with self-centredness, selfishness, and snobbery. It is impossible for an individual to make history. A progressive individual therefore must be a joiner. Once in the ranks of a movement, he (or she) must submit to “collective wisdom”, become a disciplined team player. Dangers of his or her failure to do so are painfully demonstrated by the unfortunate record of the personality cult. It is in this context that Harmel frequently puts on a mask of a “Party-man”, even willingly turns himself in a mouthpiece of ideology.²⁶⁵ The psychological motives for his doing so have been touched upon in Part 1. In general terms, they were articulated by Haldane in her analysis of “spiritual self-mutilation” in the middle-class communists.²⁶⁶ For a more positive assessment, one can refer to Mandela who saw Harmel as simply “one of those men who fully understood the meaning of their life as part of mankind generally and as individuals”.²⁶⁷ And this was self-effacingly to serve an idea.

2. Marxism-Leninism is a “social theory” or “scientific ideology” that supersedes all others, making them redundant. It supplies the definitive analysis of reality. Harmel’s confidence in the doctrine derives from (and further encourages) his Enlightenment-style belief in science and progress. Paradoxically, while Marxism-Leninism itself may be a science, inasmuch as its truth has been already established by the achievements of the socialist countries, there is no need whatsoever to put it to test again. Polemical impulses, including scholarly ones, break against the armour of what is a quasi-religious faith. It is to be remembered, though, that Harmel gears his texts dealing with Marxist-Leninist ideology almost exclusively to his in-group.

3. Harmel commends “discussion”. The communist discourse, however, defines this concept idiosyncratically. Questioning socialism is *verboden*. So is any criticism of the Soviet Union. A long list of *personae non gratae* includes “black chauvinists”, anti-communists, social democrats, Trotskyists, and renegades. The principle

²⁶⁵ Macura, *Štastný věk*, 17.

²⁶⁶ Charlotte Haldane, *Truth Will Out* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1949), 298–302.

²⁶⁷ N. Mandela to B. Harmel, 1975 (MHP: A3300/B).

of democratic centralism keeps within clear bounds exchange of opinions among the communists themselves and is recommended to fraternal organisations as well.

4. As all communists, Harmel has little faith in “bourgeois democracy”.²⁶⁸ Freedom and equality that supposedly obtain under it are to him make-believe. His version of “national democracy” that is to replace “bourgeois democracy” in South Africa entails elimination of “democrats” who had made a common cause with the Party in the face of apartheid dictatorship, yet do not share its ideological axioms.

5. The Soviet bloc, China, Cuba, etc. are claimed to demonstrate the practicability of socialism. Harmel, however, has very poor acquaintance with realities on the spot and extracts his data from English-language propaganda. The sojourn in Czechoslovakia, where he led a sheltered, cushy life of a visiting comrade, worked no change in this respect.

6. The USSR is central to this “live reality” of socialism. At the same time, it befriends and protects the oppressed world over. As such, it must be defended no matter what. Harmel’s perception of the country, its leadership and policies, again remains “unsullied” by reality and is pseudo-sacral.²⁶⁹ He is either economical with the truth or unreflectively dualistic when it comes to controversial issues in the Soviet foreign policy.

7. The partnership of the communists and African nationalists, educed by circumstances in South Africa and in general terms preached by Lenin,²⁷⁰ is Harmel’s pet theme. He applied himself to the promotion of a united front as the one “correct” avenue to attain non-racial democracy, one either followed by, or already coextensive with, socialism. Seeking to justify the concept of the SACP–ANC alliance, he (i) points out analogous phenomena in other contexts (the US, Ireland) and (b) allows it to—in a wise-after-the-event sort of way—(mis)shape his reading of history of both the Party and South Africa as a whole.

8. It was imperative for the communists, attacked both from within and without the Congress, to tread the fine line between influencing its ally (as required by the Leninist science) and not appearing to exercise undue influence. Harmel’s discourse evinces this ambivalence. He openly calls upon the ANC to embrace mass action, subject itself to

²⁶⁸ Lenin, “The State and Revolution,” in *Essential Works of Lenin*, 322–324, 331–332.

²⁶⁹ Ken Jowitt, “‘Moscow Centre’,” in *New World Disorder. The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 164–165.

²⁷⁰ Joseph Stalin, *Foundations of Leninism* (New York: Intern. Publ., 1939), 76–87.

democratic centralism, get rid of anti-communists and “black chauvinists” and otherwise turn leftwards. But he, on the other hand, goes to great lengths (both under his own and assumed names) to “naturalise” or downplay the Party’s ideological leverage over the ANC.

9. A significant strand in Harmel’s work is made up by an anti-supremacist “crusade” and rehabilitation of Africans, Indians, and Coloured people. His articles, analyses, and comments, imbued with patient rationality and heartfelt humanitarianism, draw upon intimate knowledge of black communities. They constitute a forceful indictment and critique of the freakish ideology of Afrikanerdom and its falsification of history. This rehabilitative zeal occasionally drives Harmel to the opposite extreme. That said, he is similarly set against what he perceives as inverted racism of the PAC and, potentially, of the Black Consciousness Movement.²⁷¹

10. Harmel’s unpublished novel mounts his most elaborate polemic against apartheid and colonialism. Steeped in the communist ideology, its economism, scientism, pro-Soviet bias, and epistemological optimism, *The White People* is, in many respects, no more than an extension of his overtly ideological discourse. It, however, still exacts critical notice. In contrast to all the other specimen of South African science fiction in the same period, the book (drawing considerably upon the Congress Movement ideology) analytically challenges the postulate of white superiority, endows non-white groups with nobility and historical agency, and foresees a multiracial society.

Such are the main thematic concerns, and ideological principals (*sic*), of Michael Harmel’s discourse. The points 1–8 manifest that much of his work is (like that of other communists of his cohort) characterised by dehumanising anti-individualism, doctrinal rigidity, scientific naïveté, disregard of facts, and “whiggishness”. I further argue that Harmel exhibits a high degree of hypocrisy when acclaiming communists as champions of (bourgeois) “democracy” and that *his* vision of the first stage of South African revolution (“national democracy”) implies a forcible suppression of plurality. All of this is frequently couched in a lively and skillful perhaps, but still mostly humourless, “unitary” language.²⁷²

²⁷¹ Tloome [= Harmel], “The Africanists and the Congress,” 442; [Harmel], [Black Power and Black Consciousness], 2.

²⁷² Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 270–271.

Another conclusion to be drawn is that Harmel can only be designated as a “theorist” with the proviso that we bear in mind the peculiar sense “theory” (like “democracy”) assumes in the communist discourse. It does not consist in autotelic contemplation on things. Rather, “theory” is to be one with “practice” and service the Party in the process of attaining power and engineering socio-economic transformation.²⁷³ Harmel himself defined it as simply a “search for clarity”, answering two questions: “Where are we going, and how do we get there?”²⁷⁴ His “theorisation” is firmly embedded in (i) the struggle with the National Party’s supremacist, anti-communist dictatorship and (ii) a broader clash with the global forces of “imperialism”. It is not a “detached inquiry and speculation,” but a topical, partisan, combative response to the problems of the day.²⁷⁵ Symptomatically, Harmel always characterised himself as a journalist and voiced (quite Marxian, in fact) disregard for “professors”; “academic onlookers”, and “intellectuals” in general.²⁷⁶ A character in *The White People* sums the problem up thus: “We are not philosophers surveying an abstract problem, but desperate people, in deadly peril.”²⁷⁷

Harmel was a “theorist” solely in the sense he knew his Lenin, had a penchant for “scientific” hair-splitting (which earned him a sobriquet “Talmudic scholar” even among fellow communists),²⁷⁸ and kept abreast with new ideas emanating from Moscow, ideas he treated as Holy Writ. He could not have been a “creative” and “undogmatic” “thinker” even if he had so wished (which he *manifestly* did not). Ideological discourse in general, and Leninist communism in particular, simply do not leave much (if any) room for creativity. Ideologies may be personalised, but they are social in nature and their dissemination in text and talk—which my subject considered his historical mission—affords speaker only very limited latitude.²⁷⁹ Harmel’s discourse in its “theoretical” dimension could (and was actually intended to) do little beyond echoing a number of precepts and attitudes contained in “the experience of the working-class movement in all countries taken in its general aspect”.²⁸⁰ Harmel could, at best, bring such experience to bear on local conditions. That his handling of such issues as the rôle of the individual, the

²⁷³ Cf. Wilczyński, ed. *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Marxism, Socialism and Communism*, 589; Stalin, *Foundations of Leninism*, 22, 25, 27–30.

²⁷⁴ “Which Way Are We Going?” *Liberation*, no. 14 (Nov 1955): 5.

²⁷⁵ Africanus, “Karl Marx,” 26.

²⁷⁶ Harmel, “Notes on the Communist Party in South Africa,” 16; Coughlan, “Anti-Apartheid Meeting in Dublin,” 8; Doyle, “The True Democracy,” *Adelphi*, no. 5 (Sept 1934): 4; Africanus, “The Vision of Henry Winston,” *Strategy for a Black Agenda*, by Henry Winston, AC, no. 56 (1st qtr, 1974): 117; “Turbulent Africa,” AC, no. 16 (Jan 1964): 8; “The Africanist and the Congress,” 443, 466; *Fifty Fighting Years* (ms), 199 (SNP). On Marx’s view of philosophy see Terry Eagleton, *Marx* (London: Routledge, 1999), 16.

²⁷⁷ *TWP*, 169.

²⁷⁸ P. Joseph, interview by author, Jul 31, 2015.

²⁷⁹ Service, *Comrades*, 200; Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology, A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: Sage, 1998), 29–30.

²⁸⁰ That is how Stalin defines “theory”—see his *Foundations of Leninism*, 28.

status of the USSR, his idea of discussion and truth conform to the communist orthodoxy one can scarcely overlook. Derived, nay, slavishly borrowed, from the Soviet discourse, however, are also the more specific concepts of “non-capitalist development”, “merger”, “alliance”, “formal independence”, “national-democratic revolution” or a peaceful attainment of socialism.²⁸¹ Even the “colonialism of a special type” thesis—which did originate in South Africa—was, in actuality, not formulated by Harmel himself.²⁸²

In spite of his being a mediator or populariser rather than a thinker, one may still argue, as does Albie Sachs, that

what’s called today the Mandela revolution, the Mandela miracle, has as much to do with the contribution of people like Michael Harmel as with miracles; with Michael’s sharp brain helping to create the theoretical basis for embracing African nationalism, rather than pure class struggle, as the major engine of change, but... infusing into the structures of the liberation movement the discipline, the organisation, the commitment...²⁸³

Harmel’s history of the CPSA/SACP, conceptualising the country’s past as an inexorable movement towards a “united front”, constitutes his most extensive contribution to forging “the unbreakable bon[d]” with the Congress.²⁸⁴ Though privately criticised by the likes of Jack Simons, this pep talk of a narrative not only commanded a wide audience, but achieved virtually the status of the SACP’s “bible”, especially among the MK recruits.²⁸⁵

The Party’s 1962 programme, framed principally by Harmel, served as the SACP’s (and ANC’s) cynosure for the next quarter century. To this day, its thesis of “internal colonialism” as well as that of “national democracy”—somewhat modified and now openly associated with socialism—inflect the SACP and ANC’s thought and policies as they do those of Julius Malema and his EFF.²⁸⁶ Working together of the Congress and the Party in the National Assembly and the cabinet, however fractious and complicated, represents an

²⁸¹ *The Road of South African Freedom*, a document Harmel set such store by, even reproduces—verbatim, but covertly—the definition of the “national democratic state” as reached by the 1960 Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties in Moscow. See Filatova, “Lasting Legacy,” 517n32, 529; Irina Filatova, “South Africa’s Soviet Theoretical Legacy,” *Twentieth Century Communism* 15, no. 15 (2018): 119f; 121–125. According to Vladimir Shubin (see the latter article, 125) and Ellis (see *External Mission*, 16) the South African communists submitted the programme for approval to the CC CPSU.

²⁸² The concept conceived by the liberal author Leo Marquard features in the Party document “Nationalism and the Class Struggle” (Jan 1950) whose principal author is believed to be Jack Simons: “The distinguishing feature of South Africa is that it combines characteristics of both an imperialist state and a colony within a single, indivisible, geographical, political and economic entity”. *South African Communists Speak*, 201 (for the quote); Filatova, “South Africa’s Soviet Theoretical Legacy,” 120; Macmillan, *Jack Simons*, 47f. On the “colonialism of special type” see Filatova, “Lasting Legacy,” 526; Everatt, “Alliance Politics,” 32–38.

²⁸³ Sachs, interview by author

²⁸⁴ Lerumo, “From ‘Fusion’ to Fascism,” 41.

²⁸⁵ H. Macmillan, e-mail to author, Oct 16, 2017; R. Kasrils, e-mail to author, Oct 14, 2014; S. Rabkin, e-mail to author, Sep 19, 2016; E. Pahad, interview by author, Jan 15, 2015.

²⁸⁶ Filatova, “Lasting Legacy,” 536–537; Filatova, “South Africa’s Soviet Theoretical Legacy,” 112, 119, 126–129. Cf. “The Path to Power—Programme of the South African Communist Party as Adopted at the Seventh Congress, 1989,” *AC*, no. 118 (3rd Qtr., 1989): 73–74.

enduring fruit of Harmel’s vocal and consistent advocacy of the “united front” in contemporary South Africa.²⁸⁷

There are other “collected views, understanding and theoretical concepts” in which Harmel “lives on”. One can cite evidence of how readers considered “illuminating” his articles for *The African Communist*, articles which not only made a case for the progressiveness of African nationalism, but provided accessible instruction in the fundamentals of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, anathematised deviations, and popularised the defining events of the movement.²⁸⁸ As a consequence, the vocabulary and the conceptual repertoire of both the SACP and ANC are, for good or ill, much beholden to the likes of Harmel, in spite of their dilution by *laissez-faire* and reality checks and in spite of the fact that—as his nephew, David Adler, puts it—“Mick would be heartbroken at the neoliberal outcome of his struggle”.²⁸⁹

For all the impact that Harmel had on the formation, upholding, and ideological profile of the Congress Alliance and that he, however unsung, continues to make on the South African political scene, the points 9–10 indicate that his contribution to the *broader* discourse of anti-racism (as well as non-racialism) deserves as much notice.²⁹⁰ Harmel’s encounter with white supremacy may be bound up with his socialist ideal and political work. It is not predicated on it, however. Indeed, whereas his version of socialism has had its innings and failed disastrously, the discourse of emancipation, rehabilitation, and equality Harmel co-produced played a significant part in preserving and fostering in his country values that today meet with a nearly universal acceptance and that constitute a key feature of the New South Africa as a whole. It is, finally, in this province that Harmel, unconstrained (or less constrained) by dogma and taboo, free of sophistry and pathological rhetoric of self-concealment, went the full hog and put into effect his instinctive humanitarianism, analytical capabilities, facility of style, and humour. Quite a few texts of this ilk (or their parts)—especially many of the *Fighting Talk* analyses and “By the Way” columns—bear description as gems of South Africa’s political journalism or, at the minimum, warrant critical attention for singularity of their argument (*The White People*).

In summary, one can truly posit a dichotomy in Harmel’s work (see Introduction). Not one of domestic versus international topics, though. The dividing line (frequently cutting

²⁸⁷ Tom Lodge, “Post-Communism and the South African Communist Party,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 66 (2018): 1–14.

²⁸⁸ R. Kasrils to B. Lamb (n.d.) (MHP); J. Jele, e-mail to author, Mar 27, 2016.

²⁸⁹ D. Adler, e-mail to author, Jun 6, 2019.

²⁹⁰ Cf. Roth, *The Communist Party in South Africa*, 263.

through individual texts) runs between argument on the one hand and assertion on the other, between critical thought and intellectual shutdown, between “tru[thfulness] to oneself” and self-abnegation, between common sense and blind faith.²⁹¹ As he himself wrote in *The White People*, referring to the space invaders (and hence to European colonisers): “For all their worship of ‘the rational’... there were certain subjects the Oxinduri were completely incapable of considering rationally at all.”²⁹²

²⁹¹ Jon Elster, *Introduction to Karl Marx* (New York: CUP, 1999), 13. The Poet Ruth Miller (1919–1969) described Harmel’s novel thus: “So full of journalese and SO full of the self-consciousness of the man who can never forget how educated he is, politically, how responsible to the masses. Totally dishonest and untrue to oneself—slick, though.” R. Miller to S. Cohen, Oct 22, 1959 (RMP: 20.11.1967.2.2, ASAML).

²⁹² *TWP*, 130.

CONCLUSION

The chapters 1–4 of this thesis essayed to supply a maximally coherent picture of a (South African) communist in the making. Based on exiguous, fragmentary, and scattered sources, they construct an account, at times highly conjectural, of events, milieux, and personalities that arguably shaped values and the political outlook of Michael Harmel—a man who, for better or worse, had a key impact on the strategy, tactics, and culture of the CPSA/SACP and who, having been a chief architect of the Congress Movement, materially contributed to the fall of apartheid; a man, too, whose influence still reverberates through the SACP and the ANC and therefore through the country at large.

The formative forces that *can* be (often merely circumstantially) identified include his Irish heritage, the democratic-socialist persuasion of his father, conservative and bourgeois relatives on his mother’s side, elitist and “jingoist” environment of the Grey High School, predominantly liberal and intellectually outdated world of the Rhodes University College, the CPGB’s Popular-Frontist Bolshevism, the Marxist-Leninist orientation of *The Daily Worker*, his personal dealings with Afro-Caribbean individuals in London and black activists in South Africa. One must further factor in Harmel’s motherlessness, chronic health issues, and his marriage to a proletarian Stalinist. The list is not complete. A number of other influences are either lost to the past or too subtle to put one’s finger on.

An analytical examination of Harmeliana attempted in the final chapter had been long overdue. For although Harmel commands the reputation as a chief “theorist” of the South Africa struggle, the overwhelming majority of his texts—what a paradox!—remain unread, while SACP- and ANC-aligned historians misrepresent his intellectual legacy by hagiographic clichés and presentist whitewashing. Of course, Harmel’s work is extensive, comparatively variegated, and uneven in quality. To consider it en bloc would not be good policy if one aimed, in any possible sense, at separating the wheat from the chaff. That is not what I was trying to do, though. Not in the first instance at any rate. Exporting methods of literary interpretation and analysis into the territory of journalism and non-fiction, I endeavoured to lay bare the ideological texture of his discourse, its general drift, its axiological confines. Specific findings aside, I have concluded—with a degree of simplification—that Harmel’s work is distinguished by a duality. On the one hand, it makes an impassionate, powerful, intellectually, and humanly convincing case for racial equality, mercilessly unpicking the supremacist myth. On the other hand, one is faced in it with what is—from the standpoint of someone who does not uncritically subscribe to the Marxist-

Leninist doctrine as a measure of things—a contribution to the realm of the “unitary language” which “gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralisation, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralisation”.¹ We may wish to embrace one pole and dismiss the other. However, this tension is central to Harmel as a writer, historical actor, and human being, indeed, to many communists of his generation.

¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 270–271

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