

Maes-Jelinek, Hena: Stuart Cloete. In Vinson, James (ed.). *Contemporary Novelists*. London: St. James Press, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972, pp. 276-279.

**CLOETE, (Edward Fairly) Stuart (Graham).** South African (born British). Born in Paris, 23 July 1897. Educated at Bilton Grange, Rugby; Lancing College, Sussex. Married Florence Eileen Horsman in 1918 (divorced, 1940); Mildred Elizabeth (Tiny) Ellison, 1941. Served in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, 1914-17, and in the Coldstream Guards, 1917 until his retirement because of wounds, 1925. Farmer and Rancher in South Africa, 1926-37, 1949-53. Trustee, South African Foundation. Recipient: National Institute of Arts and Letters Fellowship, 1957. Address: Box 164, Hermanus, South Africa.

#### PUBLICATIONS

##### Novels

- The Turning Wheels.* London, Collins, and Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1937.  
*Watch for the Dawn.* London, Collins, and Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1939.  
*The Hill of Doves.* Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1941; London, Collins, 1942.  
*Christmas in Matabeleland.* New York, Doubleday, 1942.  
*Congo Song.* London, Collins, and Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1943.  
*The Curve and the Tusk: A Novel of Change among Elephants and Men.* Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1952; London, Collins, 1953.  
*Mumba.* Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1956; London, Collins, 1957.  
*The Mask.* Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1957; London, Collins, 1958.  
*Gazella.* London, Collins, and Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1958.  
*The Fiercest Heart.* Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1960; London, Collins, 1961.  
*Rags of Glory.* London, Collins, and New York, Doubleday, 1963.  
*The Thousand and One Nights of Jean Macaque.* New York, Simon and Schuster, 1965.  
*The Abductors.* New York, Simon and Schuster, 1966; London, Collins, 1970.  
*How Young They Died.* London, Collins, 1969.

##### Short Stories

- The Soldiers' Peaches and Other African Stories.* London, Collins, and Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1959.  
*The Silver Trumpet and Other African Stories.* London, Collins, 1961.  
*The Looking Glass and Other African Stories.* London, Collins, 1963.  
*The Honey Bird and Other African Stories.* London, Collins, 1964.

*The Writing on the Wall and Other African Stories.* London, Collins, 1967.  
*Three White Swans and Other Stories.* London, Collins, 1971.

#### Uncollected Short Story

"My Friend William", in *Tonkees Adam* (Durban), 1970.

#### Verse

*The Young Men and the Old.* Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1941.

#### Other

*Yesterday Is Dead* (sociology). New York, Smith and Durrell, 1940.

*Against These Three: A Biography of Paul Kruger, Cecil Rhodes, and Lobengula, Last King of the Matabele.* Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1945; as *African Portraits: A Biography of Paul Kruger, Cecil Rhodes, and Lobengula, Last King of the Matabele*, London, Collins, 1946.

*The Third Way* (sociology). Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1947.

*The African Giant: The Story of a Journey.* Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1955; London, Collins, 1956.

*Storm over Africa: A Study of the Mau Mau Rebellion, Its Causes, Effects, and Implications in Africa South of the Sahara.* Cape Town, Culemborg, 1956.

*West with the Sun.* London, Collins, and New York, Doubleday, 1962.

*South Africa: The Land, Its People and Achievements.* Johannesburg, Da Gama, 1969.

*A Victorian Son* (autobiography). London, Collins, 1971.

Manuscript Collection: Boston University Library.

#### Stuart Cloete comments:

Most of my work deals with Africa south of the Sahara. The non-fiction is reporting and commentary.

In fiction my aim has been to entertain since I see the novelist as primarily a story teller in the old tradition, the tradition of the campfire and the spinner of yarns. My only novel with a theme was *The Abductors*—an effort to arouse people to the fact that a world-wide traffic in women continues to exist. In a world torn apart by hatred and dissension, it seems to me that a novel should provide an escape from the present and transport the reader into other situations, where he can, for a while at least, lose himself and forget his worries.

I am not particularly intellectual or literary. Having left school at 17 and gone straight into the army and war, such education as I have has been through my association with men, women and events, being like every other man a product of what I have seen and lived through. A writer only differs from other people in his sensitivity to such experiences. These sensations filtered through the mind become stories over which the author often enough has very little real control. Minor characters take major and unforeseen parts, as occurred with Elsie in *Rags of Glory*.

Though I am a writer, I should have preferred to be a painter, particularly of horses, women, and flowers. That is to say, of beauty. Again, as in my writing, an escape from the sordid and ugly into what many would call the sentimental and banal. My joys have come

from women and animals—horses, dogs, and cats in particular—and this shows in my work.

I was brought up to believe in heroes, to believe in love, in beauty—all very old-fashioned today. I like stories with a beginning, a middle and an end. I believe with Freud that sex, or sublimated sex, is the driving force of life. I find it difficult to believe in any established religion or dogma, or in the existence of a benevolent God, but remain aware of a power that transcends man's comprehension.

In much of what I have written about Africa in *The African Giant* and about world conditions in *Yesterday Is Dead* and *The Third Way*, I have unfortunately been proved right on most counts, though the events I foretold came more swiftly than I expected.

Finally, as a man I am very happy, but as a human being I am in despair, as I see no answer to overpopulation or pollution. These views are, I think, all apparent in my work.

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Stuart Cloete is a prolific novelist and an indefatigable story-teller. Most of his novels take place in Africa, which he knows extremely well and to which he is deeply attached. At various stages in his career he wrote historical novels about the Boers of South Africa. Together these novels form a vast epic retracing the country's history from 1815 to the end of the Boer War, chronicled in his most ambitious work *Rags of Glory*. They explain to some extent the complex tensions in contemporary South Africa. Though not blind to their shortcomings, Cloete is very sympathetic to the Boers, their fierce individualism and courage. Stimulated by their fanatical love of independence to withdraw from hardly conquered land or to fight the English, who harassed from the South, meeting with the resistance of Africans who were pressing down from the North, they suffered such hardships individually from one generation to another that hatred was inevitable. Though Africans are seldom present in his novels as individuals, Cloete's view of history is, on the whole, unprejudiced. He presents the wars fought by the Boers as ineluctable clashes of cultures with the Africans on the one hand and the English on the other, in many ways similar to the wars fought by the American pioneers.

Most of Cloete's novels are built on a similar pattern, and the psychology of his characters is fairly simple. The males are led by two ruling motives: love in its different guises and the need to assert their virility through courage or violence; the females are exclusively concerned with the fulfilment of their womanhood. For this reason the characters in the South African novels tend to be stereotyped, all the more so as their virtues and vices are shown to be largely hereditary. Yet they are also memorable because they are flesh and blood people living through extraordinary adventures. Good and evil are seen as relative notions; not justice but blind chance rules the world, and the best human beings can do is to fulfil themselves according to their nature. In this respect, men are not so different from animals as they are willing to acknowledge, while the latter often prove more capable of psychological subtlety than is generally assumed. A masterly illustration of this view is to be found in *The Curve and the Tusk*, a novel about elephant hunting in Mozambique.

A prominent documentary trend supports Cloete's vision of life as an endless cycle of reproduction and destruction in which man's participation is only relative. All life, whether human, animal, vegetable or mineral, is interdependent; everything is part of everything else, and all things merge imperceptibly into each other. Though Cloete shows that civilization cannot be halted, his African novels suggest that, except in cities, the white man has so far made no real impact south of the Sahara. He has destroyed much and attempted to leave his stamp on the African continent, but most of it remains untamed and is perhaps untamable. Cloete's descriptions of the multifaced and mysterious "African giant" are among the best parts of his fiction.

Only a few of Stuart Cloete's novels are purely imaginary. Among his latest works *How Young They Died* is a story of initiation into warfare and love in the First World War, while *The Abductors*, a novel about sex and morals in Victorian England, is based on an actual case

of white slavery. Whatever its subject, his fiction is highly readable and no doubt appeals to a large public.

—Hena Maes-Jelinek