

reasoning that makes her finally talk to the adults about the incident. Their responses are loving and reasonable, another reassurance to the younger reader who might be experiencing this predicament.

*Kentucky Daughter* has enough good writing in it to keep the reader going past some awkwardness in the early pages, where the dialogue seems strained and uncomfortable. Scott appears to gain fluency and confidence in the course of the novel. Particularly apt is the Chesapeake crab migration—the females first cradled by their mates until their shells harden, then eventually migrating alone to their destiny with “strength, dignity, courage” (p. 143)—as a metaphor for both Mary Fred’s journey to Virginia and her mother’s growth as a folk artist after the death of her husband. Mary Fred at one point says, “I wish I had someone to hold me while I grew strong” (p. 122), but she does not, and she still goes on. She is such an engaging character, such a complex and interesting person to know, that we end the book feeling that both Saks and Norman are only temporary way-stations on her drive to be somebody, and that that somebody will do worthwhile things.

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**Samuel Selvon. *Moses Ascending*. (London: Heineman, 1975)  
141 pp., \$5.50 paper.**

Sam Selvon’s fifth novel *Moses Ascending* addresses the ethnic experience with dual prongs: linguistic and racial. Although the situation of the novel is not new—the plight of the subject come to the motherland—having been treated by George Lamming and others, this handling of the basic theme is: all the sacred cows fall before Selvon’s iconoclastic pen. Moses, the “I” protagonist, is but a faintly veiled, highly disillusioned Selvon who dares look at the present world situation: the emperor has no clothes.

An assault on the King’s English, this book is a linguistic experience in many ways: disrupted syntax, dialects, clichés from many cultures, sounds. The author’s mastery of the various dialects, not to mention languages, represents a certain evolution in his writing. For example the early work (1952) *The Brighter Sun* laid in his native Trinidad makes use of dialect strictly in dialogue. *The Lonely Londoners* to which *Moses Ascending* is a sequel often employs the Trinidadian speech patterns.

But this novel merges, meshes, inverts, explodes language into a composite of our contemporary world. And we are plunged into a linguistically orgiastic chaos.

So the language intensifies the satire—Juvenalian satire, not so narrowly focused on Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* perhaps. Racism, along with materialistic upward mobility, is the primary target. The attack on religion begins early. Moses of Biblical fame led the Israelites out of Egypt but never entered the Promised Land, negating the "Ascending" idea. Thus combining "Moses" and "Ascending" in the title sets up an immediate and irreconcilable tension. This Moses, an aspiring writer, "rises" to purchase a house in Shepard's Bush; the Biblical Moses, a shepherd, saw God in the Burning Bush. Moreover it is in the backyard that Moses assists the Pakis, whom he helps to smuggle other Pakis into Brit'n for twenty pounds a head, in ritualistically slaying the sacrificial lamb, but it is a Muslim ceremony and Moses keeps muttering "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet."

Clearly the black rising middleclass is satirized in the character of this black Moses who formerly lived in a basement and who buys a house so that as a landlord he may terrorize his tenants. Seeking to sever all ties with his race, he retires to his penthouse ivory tower to produce his memoirs. But his Black Power friends occupy his basement from which they organize party activities and publish subversive materials—all of which Moses disregards. In turn they criticize his writing: Galahad insists that a writer must experience the movement and Brenda scorns, "The only sentence you know, Moses, is what criminals get. Your conjunctions and your hyperboles are all mixed up with your syntax..., you should stick to oral communication and leave the written word to them what knows their business." Nor does the movement itself escape, for it is the Black Panther speaker from America who absconds with the party's funds. And Moses observes that those who are strongest in the movement "usually have a white woman in tow."

Of the police who raid the rally throwing Moses, an observer, into prison, Moses remarks, "It doesn't seem to a black man that though he is as pure and white as the driven snow—if you will pardon the expression—that it got something, somewhere, sometime, what he do wrong, and that even if it don't exist, the police would invent one to trap him." When a black man is locked up, the Jailer throws away the keys, and killing a black man is as easy as "swatting a blue arse fly what got into the house in the summer."

Whites, like blacks, are satirized in the portrayal of characters. Black Moses' servant is white Bob who becomes almost an anti-hero. Called "Skinhead" by Moses, Bob embodies all the worst stereotypes applied to blacks; he is an illiterate, filthy, sex maniac who will do anything for

“black pussy,” whom you can fool with “any shit if he believes it will prolong the sex act,” and who given an inch will take a mile. When he’s not working, he slouches in a chair, leafing through comic books. Moreover, as a member of the “party,” he possesses all the loathsome traits of the white bleeding hearts and sob sisters. However, at last after Bob’s marriage to white Jeannie and Moses’ obliging act of “lending” the newlyweds the penthouse as a “bridal suite,” the roles are reversed. Bob, now “Robert,” orders Moses about: Moses again lives in the basement, and Robert is writing the book.

But Moses fears that black power militants will misconstrue the moral to be: “that after the ballad and the episode, it is the white man who ends up Upstairs and the black man who ends up Downstairs,” so he concludes the novel by letting us in on his revenge plan.

Clearly this book satirizes man and his institutions; the condition of cities, of humans, of relationships. Nor does Selvon lie when he asserts “None of this narrative is fiction: if I lie I die.” People living in cities do live in a dream world, refusing “to believe or accept the things that happen under their very noses.” Yes, we have here satire, stinging satire, delightful satire that combines language and situation to give us Selvon’s truth: humans are a sorry lot.

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**Sipho Sepamla. *A Ride on the Whirlwind: A Novel of Soweto*. (London: Heinemann, 1981) 244 pp., \$7.50 paper.**

South African poet, playwright, and teacher Sipho Sepamla has in his second novel, produced a fictional but tensely revealing narrative of events surrounding the 1976 Soweto riots. Dedicated to the young heroes of the day, the novel chronicles daily life in an atmosphere of fear, suspicion, distrust and terrorism.

The fundamental themes of the book, identity and trust, are developed through vignettes exploring the interplay of black and white, age and youth, male and female. Illuminated by the glare of hate-filled extremity, these relationships, shorn of subtlety, reveal in their starkness the pathos of terrorized life.

The novel covers a brief period in the summer of 1976 when a series of terrorist acts challenged the stability of white rule in Soweto. The youthful Mandla and his loosely organized band of teenage saboteurs take great pride in their ability to embarrass the heavily armed and