



VINTAGE

FEATHER FALL
LAURENS VAN DER POST

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The Wonder and the Mystery

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About the Book

This van der Post 'reader', thematically organised to reflect the patterns and themes which have influenced his life and his writing, distils the essence of the writer, thinker, spiritual guru and man of action. This evocative and thought-provoking selection, combining short paragraphs and longer passages is chosen with love and insight from his published and some unpublished writings, (books, introductions, lectures, essays,) and will give pleasure and inspiration to generations of readers the world over.

About the Author

Laurens van der Post was born in South Africa in 1906, the thirteenth of fifteen children in a family of Dutch and French Hugenot origins. Most of his adult life was spent with one foot in Africa and one in England. His professions of writer and farmer were interrupted by ten years of soldiering in the British army, serving with distinction in the Western Desert, Abyssinia, Burma and the Far East. Taken prisoner by the Japanese, he was held in captivity for three years before returning to active service as a member of Lord Mountbatten's staff in Indonesia and, later, as Military Attache to the British Minister in Java.

After 1949 he undertook several official missions exploring little-known parts of Africa, and his journey in search of the Bushmen in 1957 formed the basis of his famous documentary film *The Lost World of the Kalahari*. Other television films include *All Africa Within Us* and *The Story of Carl Gustav Jung*, whom he met after the war and grew to know as a personal friend. In 1934 he wrote *In a Province*, the first book by a South African to expose the horrors of racism. Other books include *Venture to the Interior* (1952), *The Heart of the Hunter* (1961), and *A Walk with a White Bushman* (1986). *The Seed and the Sower* was made into a film under the title *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, and, more recently, *A Story Like the Wind* and *A Far-Off Place* were combined and made into the film *A Far-Off Place*.

Sir Laurens van der Post was awarded the CBE in 1947 and received his knighthood in 1981. He died in 1996.

Also by Laurens van der Post

IN A PROVINCE
VENTURE TO THE INTERIOR
THE FACE BESIDE THE FIRE
A BAR OF SHADOW
FLAMINGO FEATHER
THE DARK EYE IN AFRICA
THE LOST WORLD OF THE KALAHARI
THE HEART OF THE HUNTER
THE SEED AND THE SOWER
JOURNEY INTO RUSSIA
THE HUNTER AND THE WHALE
THE NIGHT OF THE NEW MOON
A STORY LIKE THE WIND
A FAR-OFF PLACE
A MANTIS CAROL
JUNG AND THE STORY OF OUR TIME
FIRST CATCH YOUR ELAND
YET BEING SOMEONE OTHER
ABOUT BLADY: A PATTERN OUT OF TIME
THE VOICE OF THE THUNDER

With photographs by Burt Glinn
A PORTRAIT OF JAPAN
A PORTRAIT OF ALL THE RUSSIAS

With photographs by David Coulson
THE LOST WORLD OF THE KALAHARI

In conversation with Jean-Marc Pottiez
A WALK WITH A WHITE BUSHMAN

Feather Fall

An Anthology

Laurens van der Post

Edited by
Jean-Marc Pottiez

Assisted by Jane Bedford

Chatto & Windus

LONDON

Introduction

Laurens van der Post has a unique capacity to inspire, to heighten awareness and fire the imagination. That, above all, is what I have tried to reflect in this anthology – not just in the passages I have chosen but in the manner of their arrangement; for, instinctive storyteller that he is, there is always a pattern in his writing, a flow and a continuity. My aim has been to convey this sense of movement and exploration, not so much as a chronological progression, but rather with a sense of how the many elements in Laurens van der Post's life and imagination link up and lead on and together form a trail of their own.

That trail could just as easily have been chronological because the essentials would have been the same. Indeed, one of the most striking features of the books he has written over the last sixty years is the constancy of his fundamental values. The boy who wrote in his diary, at the age of eight, that he would one day go to the Kalahari Desert, seek out the Bushman and 'beg for his pardon' duly fulfilled that promise forty years later, and has since done everything in his power to save these resilient 'first people' of his native Africa from extinction. The young man of twenty who rebelled in spirit, action and words against the canker of colour prejudice in South Africa became one of the truest and most influential opponents of apartheid when the Nationalist government enforced its policy of segregation after the Second World War. And the young writer who, in his first novel (*In a Province*), rejected 'the lure and blasphemy' of communism because of its disregard for the individual, thirty years later witnessed at first hand what life

was like for ordinary Russian people under the Soviet regime, whose downfall he predicted (*Journey Into Russia*, 1964).

In none of these examples, though, is chronology the key factor. What matters is the message itself; the content rather than the timing of the story - which is why I have chosen a thematic approach for this anthology. Nevertheless, it is true that chronology provides a context which is often illuminating. Thus, van der Post's first visit to Japan, which was to prove such a vital experience for him, took place at a time when the Japanese people had only recently begun to emerge from centuries of cultural isolation, and his vivid portrayal of this complex nation in *Yet Being Someone Other* reveals it at a fateful turning point in its history.

History - this time colonial history - helps to explain why Laurens van der Post, who came from a French Huguenot family living in the Dutch Cape Colony of southern Africa, joined the British army at the start of the Second World War. He had been drawn to Britain as the engine room of the empire into which he had been born, a country, as he puts it himself, that 'I had come to love and whose story and great historical values correspond most to my own seeking'. Then, in 1939, he remembered the regiment which in earlier days had defeated his father and grandfather in battle, decided that it must be a good one, and applied to join.

Awareness of history is ever-present in van der Post's life and writing. It manifests itself in his commitment to the cause of the Kalahari Bushmen, among the purest and most authentic representatives of original life on earth, whose stories, dreams and ancient ways belong to a timeless tradition, older by far than all recorded history, and whose intimate partnership with nature, ruined only by the cruel intrusion of human foes and friends alike, exemplifies the sense of balance, proportion and harmony without which no civilization can endure. History, for van der Post as it should

be for all of us, is a continuous, seamless process, and it is more of a matrix than a mould. Even ancient history, the world of Homer for example, is linked with our time by no more than a few spans of living memory.

There is much more to 'memory' than that, though, in van der Post's perception, and readers of this anthology will discover far deeper layers of meaning and patterns of experience which he, both in his life and in his writings, consciously and unconsciously, has done so much to explore.

Who, then, is this explorer? In whose footsteps will we be following as we set out on the trail of discovery which I hope this anthology will be - this anthology which the author himself has named *Feather Fall* after the elusive, but attainable, 'white bird of truth'?

Laurens Jan van der Post was born on 13 December 1906 in Philippolis in the Orange Free State, the thirteenth of fifteen children in a pioneer family whose forebears had taken part in the Great Trek. His maternal grandmother, born in an ox-wagon, was the daughter of one of the first of the trekkers to establish a farm north of the Orange River. It was called 'Boesmansfontein' (Bushman Spring), and Laurens had a half-Bushman nurse whom he remembers to this day as vividly as his own parents. The sense of companionship with the indigenous peoples of Africa, the shared storytelling, the respect for nature and the love of animals which he still feels deeply today, all stemmed from his grandfather's farm, as did the sense of Africa as an 'Old Testament country'. For his grandfather was a God-fearing man, and the collective readings from the Bible, accompanied each night by rousing hymns and prayers, nourished the imagination of young Laurens.

His mother, who had herself received the great gift of stories and storytelling from her own indigenous nurses and native companions, reinforced the craving of the young 'backveld' boy for tales of life at large. And in the library of

his father (a barrister by training who rose to prominence in the old Free State parliament) Laurens found the books that fuelled his spirit and stirred his longing for adventure and travel. For hours on end he would read in his favourite hiding place, a giant mulberry tree in the family garden, or out in the hills as he kept an eye on the grazing sheep.

Laurens was barely seven when his father died. His family left the farm, and before long he went away to school where, over the next few years, he excelled in many subjects; not just in his gift for writing – he wrote his first poem, in High Dutch, at the age of six – but in mathematics, physics and languages (he speaks nine today) as well as in sports (rugby, hockey and tennis). So it was a shock to everyone when, at the age of sixteen, he broke with the family tradition by refusing to go to university and decided instead to make his way in the world.

His first job was in Port Natal (Durban), where he worked for an evening newspaper, the *Natal Advertiser*, quickly gaining experience as a journalist, and taking particular interest in the drama of courtroom stories and the exciting world of ships and the sea.

Then, in 1926, he was invited to join Roy Campbell and William Plomer as the Afrikaans editor of South Africa's first serious literary and cultural magazine, *Voorslag (Whiplash)*. The magazine made a big impact in its short life, not least for its vigorous stand against racial discrimination, which aroused fierce opposition.

Also in 1926, and as a result of a spontaneous act of courtesy towards two Japanese visitors who were refused a cup of coffee because of their colour, van der Post accepted an invitation to go to Japan, travelling on board a tramp steamer, the *Canada Maru*, under the command of Captain Katsue Mori. The story of this long journey, which was to have such a profound influence on van der Post's life, is told in *Yet Being Someone Other*, perhaps the most autobiographical of all his books.

From Japan he travelled back to Port Natal, but reluctantly. The voyage out in the *Canada Maru*, the encounter with Japan itself and the voyage back to Africa had worked a great change in him. He felt he owed it to the newspaper which had sent him to Japan to continue working for it for another year, but he did so in an inwardly rebellious mood, and left as soon as his self-imposed sentence expired to make for England.

He arrived there in 1928 in one of the coldest winters and, as he records in *Yet Being Someone Other*, faced a 'battle for survival in a London dark with economic depression, with unemployed and unwanted lives and abysmal aimlessness around me'. He took to the streets with thousands of other discontented and unemployed men and women. 'I felt compelled to march with the unemployed in Hyde Park and join in passionately with the debate which shook my generation over the nature of the radical reform and renewal that the societies and nations and the institutions urgently needed if life itself were not to be imperilled.' At the same time, 'the same hand of chance . . . which had taken me to Japan directed me infallibly to a chain of acquaintanceships that took me to the heart of Bloomsbury, where I met among many others: the Bells, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, Lopokova, Maynard Keynes and, most important of all for me, Virginia and Leonard Woolf.'

The Woolfs were to publish Laurens van der Post's first book, *In a Province*. In it he rejected the communist ideal which so many of his literary and artistic friends were espousing, and he had spent four years finding a publisher for it. The book was a sensation, and began his long association with The Hogarth Press, which the Woolfs had founded seventeen years before.

In a Province was recognized at once by some of the most distinguished critics of the day, notably Herbert Read and Ernst Robert Curtius, as well as by the younger generation of writers such as Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and

W.H.Auden. But in spite of the acclaim it received, which built on the reputation he had already gained with a devastating attack on segregation in *The Realist* (the literary magazine edited by Gerald Heard and supported by Aldous Huxley), the 1930s did not advance his career as a writer.

Married by now, and with two children to bring up, he had bought a farm in Gloucestershire and tried to combine farming and writing at a time of continued economic recession, when food was often short. The experiment was not a success, although he made his mark as a farmer with an award for the best-run farm at the prestigious Three Counties Show.

His writing during this period took two forms: freelance dispatches as a foreign correspondent reporting on current affairs; and a book of warning - warning about the powerful mythological forces that were breaking loose in Nazi Germany and driving the world to war. The book, provisionally entitled *The Rainbow Bridge* and still unfinished when war eventually came, was destroyed by one of Hitler's bombs; but its message was not lost, because he used its themes later in *The Dark Eye in Africa*, written in the 1950s after another outburst of violence and conflict generated by what a reviewer called 'the supreme African problem - colour.'

In 1938, judging war to be inevitable, van der Post arranged for his wife and children to return to South Africa. He stayed on in England and, when war was eventually declared in September 1939, enlisted as a private soldier. He was soon sent on the officer-training course at Aldershot - where he passed out top of his battalion, and, once in active service, took part in commando missions in North Africa, the Middle East, Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) and Burma before joining General Wavell's forces in Java in 1942. His guerrilla activities against the Japanese ended in his capture, in dramatic circumstances, in the jungles of Bantam, and for the next three-and-a-half years he was a

prisoner-of-war. These experiences he has described in his own books, in particular his collection of linked 'Christmas' stories, *The Seed and the Sower* (later dramatized by the Japanese director, Nagisa Oshima, in the film *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*) and in *The Night of the New Moon* - a reference to the night of 6 August 1945, after the first atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. This book drew a special tribute from Raymond Mortimer: 'I rank Colonel van der Post with the best living writers of English . . . this book confirms my constant admiration, not just for his talent but for the force of his imagination and the nobility of his mind.'

Laurens van der Post has never dwelled on the treatment he suffered in the prison camps during those long years. Suffice it to say that, like many of his fellow prisoners, he endured deprivation, torture and repeated threats of execution, yet he never became embittered. More than that, he went to great lengths, in the most debilitating circumstances, to instil in others the level of understanding and tolerance that enabled tens of thousands of his fellow survivors at the end to return home with their spirit intact and forgiveness in their hearts.

His own war continued for another two-and-a-half years as he returned to active service as Lord Mountbatten's political and military adviser in Indonesia and, later, as military attaché to the British minister in Java. By now he had been appointed Commander of the British Empire for distinguished and gallant service in the field, and a long-term career in the army was open to him. However, he decided to resign, his instinct taking him to the peacetime roles of explorer, writer, film-maker, conservationist and political adviser to which destiny (if that is the right word) had, in some mysterious but unmistakable way that he came to recognize with increasing clarity, been directing him from the start.

In 1949, his war now over, he married for the second time and, through his new wife, Ingaret Giffard, was introduced to Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychologist whose pioneering work in the field of human understanding had made him world famous. The rapport between the two men was instant and enduring, and in time van der Post was to write a book entitled *Jung and the Story of Our Time*, which went beyond biography into areas of instinct and imagination that both men knew to be at the core of human experience, yet which were still largely unexplored. Jung confirmed much that van der Post had felt instinctively for years: about the significance of dreams, the unseen links and subtle patterns that shape our daily lives, the need for wholeness, balance and proportion, the essential complementarity of the masculine and feminine in life, the unconscious forces that determine so much in both individual and collective behaviour, and the quest for higher meaning.

Meeting Jung and finding so much in common with him undoubtedly helped van der Post to explore these inner areas of personal experience just as he was setting out to explore unknown areas of the outer world. For that is what he now did; and in so doing, found the way to the rehabilitation he so badly needed after the long ordeal of war.

Over the following years he led a number of expeditions to remote parts of Africa, some of them for special government purposes. His mission to Nyasaland (modern Malawi) in 1949 formed the basis of his book, *Venture to the Interior* (1952), which established him overnight as a bestselling author. This was followed a few years later by *The Lost World of the Kalahari* (1958) which, together with his documentary film of the same title (whose television ratings for the BBC matched those of the Queen's coronation), drew to the attention of a vast public the extraordinary spirit, skills, vitality and wisdom of the aboriginal desert Bushmen, as well as their desperate plight. Both books have been in

print ever since; both were translated into many languages; and both went far beyond the boundaries of conventional travel writing, touching on mysteries of mood and place and venturing into the primal world of dreams, symbols, imagery and legend.

In the thirty-five years since then Laurens van der Post has never stopped writing – stories of action and adventure, probing narratives of travel and exploration, reflections on life, war, history and human aspiration. Few of his books fall into the familiar categories of fiction, history, travel, psychology, biography or autobiography. Rather they reflect his own many-layered outlook on life: a mixture of the practical and the spiritual that comes naturally to a man who has always wanted to combine being and doing; a man who has proved himself as a farmer, soldier, explorer, diplomat and trusted adviser, but whose creative imagination is that of a poet, artist and philosopher. Like the whaler hero of his book *The Hunter and the Whale*, he is ‘a poet in action and an incorrigible romantic at heart’; not a romantic with a vague and idealized vision – his life has been far too deeply embedded in the taut world of reality for that – but one who has an unfaltering faith in mankind and, more important still, a compelling awareness of a larger dimension in life beyond our understanding.

The sanctity of the human spirit and all that guides it is the essence of his faith. Though brought up in a religious household, he has never been confirmed in the church into which he was baptised. He has never accepted the severe, sexist, misogynist and intolerant Calvinist concept of God which prevailed in Africa in his youth, responding instead to a more universal, less personal God whose love smoulders at the core of the Bible, nowhere more ardently than in the writings of St Paul and the mystics.

Many reviewers have testified to the strong moral quality of van der Post’s writing. To choose a recent example, Simone Guyé, reviewing in the *Journal de Genève* the French

edition of his inspirational book of hope and healing, *About Blady: A Pattern out of Time*, described him as 'not only one of the great writers but also one of the greatest spirits of our time'. Rosamond Lehmann made a similar judgement: 'Laurens van der Post, citizen of the world. He lived through hell in Japanese prison camps and emerged to become a great spiritual thinker and writer.'

Not just a thinker and writer, however, but also a man who takes part, joins in, commits himself to causes - championing the conservation of nature and respect for animal life, backing the Capricorn Society in its aim to establish 'a new order of emancipation and multi-racial integration in Africa', or contributing in countless other ways with characteristic clarity of purpose, energy and generosity of spirit. He has always been discreet about his confidential role as a political and personal adviser, but the services he has given to the public life of his country were recognized with a Knighthood in the New Year's Honours List of 1981.

Sir Laurens van der Post, CBE, author of twenty-five exceptional books written over more than sixty years, is the man whose anthology I have been privileged to compile. For me and those who helped me on the way it has been a labour of love, but also a challenge - to ensure that the long, living, shimmering tapestry of his work is not reduced to patchwork. A sampler, rather, is what I had in mind; certainly not a substitute. My selection cannot begin to replace the books themselves - books of action and dream, dream and reflection, mystery and wonder, full of seed words and seed stories.

If you, my readers, should happen to share some or even all of the pleasure I have had in re-reading and travelling again with Laurens van der Post, this anthology will help you to discover, or rediscover, a writer whose work is that of sower, pathfinder, message-bearer and bridge-maker all in one - a bridge, as he says himself in *The Heart of the*

Hunter, between 'the first pattern of things' and the world of our own time.

My hope is that, for readers everywhere, *Feather Fall* will be the start of a long and fulfilling quest, such as I myself experienced when I came across my first van der Post book, *The Seed and the Sower*. That inspiring story, soon followed by *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, set me on my own irreversible way to 'planet van der Post', as I have come to call the worlds, both those within and without, which he explores.

Gradually I have formed the impression, now a certainty, that Laurens van der Post is a member of a vast family which constitutes a community of spirit and heart that has existed throughout our history. Like those wells in the desert that are so difficult to find and so far apart, yet are linked beneath the ground and combine invisibly to quench one's thirst, this vast and ever-growing family of fellow travellers is the company in which, step by step, century after century, we can all join in the ultimate quest, following the flight of the great white bird of truth, ready in heart and mind for its eventual feather fall.

JEAN-MARC POTTIEZ

Paris, 16 October, 1993

Feather Fall

IN THE HEAT of the day a young hunter came to a clearing in the Forest of the Night, and there he knelt down by a pool of water, transparent with the blue of the African day, to quench his thirst. At that moment he was dazzled by the reflection in the pool of a great, white bird of a kind he had never seen before. Instantly he looked away and up, but the bird had vanished.

From that moment he was filled with a great unease and could not rest. His community, who valued him greatly, assured him that the restlessness would pass, but a conviction that he would not rest until he had seen the great white bird itself grew stronger in him by the day until one morning he left the place where he had been born and set out to search for it.

The journey lasted so long and took him so far and wide that he was an old man, feeling his end was near, when he came to a great mountain. There he had firm news of the bird at last. He was told that it nested on the summit of the mountain. Enfeebled as he was, he slowly climbed the mountain and, towards the end of a long day, as he came over the last of many false summits, he found himself confronted by a final cliff he knew he could not scale. At the end of his physical powers, sadly he prepared himself to face his end.

But then it was suddenly as if a voice within him was commanding him to look up at the forbidden summit and as he did so he saw, in the light of one of the greatest of mythological African sunsets, a pure white feather fluttering down from on high towards him. He put out his hand and

grasped the feather and, they who told me the story said, he died content. When I asked them what the name of this great white bird was, they told me: 'The bird has many names but we believe it was the Bird of Truth.'

LAURENS VAN DER POST

1994

Chapter One

Africa as a Mirror

My Mother's Country

AFRICA IS MY mother's country. I do not know exactly how long my mother's family has lived in Africa; but I do know that Africa was about and within her from the beginning, as it was for me. Her mother, my grandmother, was cradled, if not actually born, in an ox-wagon driving in the thirties of the last century steadfastly deeper into the unknown interior of southern Africa. The ox-wagon was part of the small and ill-fated Liebenberg Trek. My mother's grandfather was its leader. This little caravan consisting of no more than seven or eight wagons, this small group of people numbering no more than forty or fifty souls, had moved in the far forefront of a vast exodus. They formed part of the Great Trek of Dutch farmers from British rule at the Cape.

They had crossed the Karroo safely; hauled their wagons laboriously through the boulder-strewn drifts of the Orange River; crossed the wide, melancholy plains of the Free State and forded the deep, yellow Vaal River. They had gone safely across the highveld of the Transvaal, which was plundered bare and still smoked after the raids of Zulu and Matabele, and were moving into the bushveld, somewhere near where the town of Louis Trichardt stands today, when they in their turn were attacked. We shall never know precisely what happened.

My grandmother was little more than a baby; she could just run about and speak. All that is known about the attack

is what was gathered afterwards from the incoherent account in broken Afrikaans given by the half-caste maid, who looked after my grandmother and her baby sister.

According to the maid, the wagons, after a long and exhausting trek, had come to rest the night before on the banks of a fairly big stream. During the night the two little children were very restless and had kept their parents awake with their crying. As a result, the maid was ordered just before dawn to dress the children and take them out of earshot of the wagons. One gets a clear impression from this order of how little the sleeping laager suspected what fate had in store for it. The maid had collected the children and had taken them down to the stream, as she had some washing to do.

She had not been there many minutes when the quiet – that lovely musical, rhythmical quiet of the bushveld at dawn – was broken with the war-cries and yells of the attacking Kaffirs. She must have walked through a gap in the encircling *impi* [Zulu or Sindabile army or regiment, usually attacking in a crescent moon formation] just before it drew its horns tight around the sleeping wagons. She snatched the two little girls and, with one under each arm, ran ducking along the side of the stream until she came to a wide, shallow waterfall. The stream fell, as I myself have so often seen them do in Africa, over a wide, overhanging ledge of stone. Behind the water there was a dry hollow, and shelter. The nurse dodged in behind this curtain of water and sat there fearfully all day with her terrified, uncomprehending charges. Late that night she crept out. She found the wagons burnt out and the battered, disfigured bodies of all who had been in them strewn far around.

Somehow, sheltering behind the waterfall by day and going out to forage when it became dark, she kept herself and the children alive. Nearly a week later they were picked up by a party of horsemen, who were wisely patrolling the

disturbed country ahead of a much bigger trek following in the Liebenberg tracks.

I have no intention of writing a family history, but this much appeared necessary because it shows, as nothing else can show, how much Africa is my mother's country.

Venture to the Interior, Chapter 1

My earliest memories of Africa seem to focus round the large dining-table in my grandfather's ample home near the Great River. The scene in this theatre of my past is almost invariably the evening meal. One waited for this meal with the kind of excitement I was to experience later as a dramatic critic before the raising of the curtain on the first night of a new play in London by a friend from whom one expected much. The excitement would start when the coloured maids began to light the heavy oil lamps in the darkening house: first in the long passage which led from the front door on the stoep which surrounded the homestead which my grandfather had designed and built, and last, the largest lamp of all, which hung in the centre of the dining-room. In the middle of this room was the family table made out of African wood so hard and so heavy that a piece would sink like iron if thrown into water. Suspended in massive chains from the ceiling over this table, hung an immense brass lamp that shone like gold. It took one person over an hour to polish it every week and to me it always looked like the kind of oil lamp referred to in some New Testament parable or, better still, a lamp which Solomon might have hung in his first temple in the Promised Land.

I used to watch the lighting of this lamp as one might watch the performing of a miracle. I would experience a great sense of reassurance as I observed the heavy shadows roll back into the darkest recesses of the old Cape-Dutch furniture and saw the lamplight fall, as in a Rembrandt picture, on the table set and ready for its full complement of guests. At the same time I would become

aware of a subtle scent of spice drifting in from the kitchen, despite the solid doors and passage in between.

First Catch Your Eland, 'Prelude'

All who worked for my grandfather no matter whether Griqua, Hottentot, Bushman, Basuto, Bechuana, Cape-coloured or poor white, were ultimately held in equal affection as part of his family, and the relationship was nightly redeemed by calling them into his dining-room to share with his wife and children in his communion with his God. One can only realize how significant such an attitude was when one remembers that the descendants of men like my grandfather are today trying to exclude such people from common worship in the same churches. I concluded, therefore, that in a brutal age my mother's people might have been, perhaps, less brutal than most. That helped, though not overmuch, for I knew that with their deep Calvinist addiction to what they thought right, they would have done their duty conscientiously. Human beings are perhaps never more frightening than when they are convinced beyond doubt that they are right.

The Lost World of the Kalahari, Chapter 3

It was significant that my grandfather never referred to it as the Bible but always as the Book. He had such a feeling for the Book (which had been almost his only reading because he had never been to any school) that he had a special ritual before reading. He would reverently lift the large, heavy leather covers of the book with their metal clasps that shone like silver and open it slowly on the first ivory pages, smooth them out with his long, brown hand and then let them lie there exposed on the table a brief moment. I think perhaps he did this so that he could survey the large, green family tree with its spreading branches painted across both pages, and seek out, among the leaves, the names of his forefathers recorded there from the time they had

landed in Africa as refugees from persecution in Europe some two hundred and fifty years previously. I suppose this silent roll-call of family history was necessary to quicken in him his feeling of continuity which, as he became older, appeared increasingly threatened by the discord gathering in the spirit of his people.

Jung and the Story of Our Time, 'The Time and the Space'

I remember vividly the day when my grandfather's favourite monthly magazine arrived with the weekly mail. It was printed in High Dutch and was called *The Church Messenger*. It had a bright yellow cover which I found repulsive with its title and sub-titles printed in a massive and inelegant black type. But it did have one virtue in my young eyes - its illustrations. In this particular issue there was one of what I thought to be the most beautiful ships I had ever seen. However, to my amazement, my grandfather seemed to be far from impressed by the beauty of the vessel. Pointing at it with a finger trembling with indignation and speaking in a voice which sounded to me like an Old Testament prophet, he resounded, 'Laurens Jan, do you know what they say about this ship you are looking at? They say it is unsinkable. And mark my words, the Almighty will have something to say one day about so arrogant and blasphemous a boast.'

The lesson learnt was to go deeper when, in a later edition of the magazine, the same illustration was reproduced with the news that the ship had sunk after a collision with an iceberg in the North Atlantic, together with a monstrous loss of life. The name of the ship, of course, was the *Titanic*.

Yet Being Someone Other, Chapter 2

Above all, there was my Bushman nurse, Klara. She said her name meant 'light', and, for me, she was bathed in wonder: the light of rainbow morning, a crystal day and magic lantern evening, playing on the bright blue beads of glass of

a heavy necklace around the smooth apricot skin of her throat. I remember her face as one of the most beautiful I have ever known; oval, with a slightly pointed chin, high cheek-bones, wide, large and rather slanted eyes full of a dark, glowing light as of the amber of the first glow on earth shining through the brown of evening on man's first day. These features gave her an oddly Chinese appearance, especially as I never saw the thick, short, matted hair which was always wrapped in cottons of the brightest colours. No one ever shone more brightly in my emotions. She remained at the deep centre of the love of the feminine which has given me so much.

The Voice of the Thunder, 'The Great Memory'

Meetings between different cultures, particularly of so-called civilized and so-called primitive men, are events of the most traumatic and fateful consequences, as immense as they must be unforeseen and irreversible. Neither 'civilized' nor 'primitive' men can ever be the same again once they have met one another and started the process of being a part of one another's daily lives. No matter how much the exponents of one culture would like to limit participation, interpenetration or even partnership with other cultures, these are matters to which no human or conscious limits can be set.

Yet Being Someone Other, Chapter 1

I could remember the fear and the unbearable anguish which the drought of 1911 - when I was barely four years old - brought not only to the earth but into my own being. This drought was clearly not just part of the external world, hurting the land, killing sheep and cattle and the toughest of wild animals, and turning the veld into a Dead Sea of scorched land, but it was in my own blood and scorched spirit, and made me feel that I would die of a thirst beyond thirst myself, if the rain did not soon come.

When I heard the distant sound of the first thunder from below the horizon and saw it announce its presence in long sweeps of lightning through the dark, the inrush of hope and sense of promise brought back into a hopeless moment of life was almost unbearable and could have been overwhelming were they not immediately balanced by a fear that the clouds might vanish again as they had often done, and the rain still not come. By this time our sheep and cattle were so weak that they could no longer walk and move from the places where they lay, the sheep with muffled, moaning little bleats breaking from them from time to time, adding a bleak sound to a bleak scene. We had to take their ration of water and food to them, each and every one – a task which went on from dawn to dusk through those burning fiery days.

The Voice of the Thunder, 'The Other Journey'

He was surprised I had not heard of it because the main wagon road from the capital into the interior wound round and over the shoulder of this hill. It was famous among all transport men because the road was so steep there that the oxen hauling their wagons had to strain at their yokes so much that the holes in their behinds yawned like old men fighting their sleep: hence it was also called 'Make-the-oxen's-arse-holes-yawn': but its real, its ancient name was Icooco.

The Hunter and the Whale, Chapter 4

Van Bredepoel was just about to walk casually to the edge of the veranda, when there came the sound of an aeroplane flying towards the town. This was so unusual that even he hurried forward to look. Both natives immediately stood up, their backs to him, and scanned the sky.

'What is that?' he heard the old man ask his companion.

'An aeroplane,' replied the other.

'It is heavy. Why does not it fall?'

'It has a machine like a motor car which keeps it up.'

'But why does not a motor car fly like that?'

'Its machine does not go fast enough. You see, old father, the machine of that aeroplane goes so fast that before it can fall from one place it has already reached another.'

'Ah!' replied the old man, evidently satisfied.

In a Province, Book III, Chapter 3

There is always for us who are truly born of the earth of Africa a kind of drama in the sunset hours, which no contrived theatre can equal. They are not merely remote impersonal moments confined to the external world. They are events joining the wheeling systems of a universe beyond even the light-year limits of our discerning, in a single totality because they correspond to a pattern within the human spirit, charged with a natural mythological import as of participation at that precise moment in some kind of cosmological sacrament.

Yet Being Someone Other, Chapter 1

In the high street of our hushed little township, total darkness came over us, and the black snuffed out the light as utterly as the silence quenched the sound.

There is no black like that black left anywhere in the world today, because the busyness and unease which have deprived us of pure silence have robbed us of the same quality in the dark. For again, everywhere there are almost as many lights attacking the black over the earth as there are stars in heaven. Even below the remotest horizon of the deepest bush and desert there is a ceaseless vibration of light of all kinds, not illuminating any essential road for the human spirit or being, but depriving it of the healing rest which the perfect black over Africa gave it in my youth.

About Blady, Chapter 2