Rolin's Rhodesia *By H. Rolin translated by D. Kirkwood.* Bulawayo, Books of Rhodesia, 1978, 304pp., illustrated, ZR$17,00.

A Right to Be Proud *By A. P. Di Perna.* Bulawayo, Books of Rhodesia, 1979, 245pp., illustrated, ZR$13,90.

These two works are part of a well known series of reprints but they both represent new departures for the publisher. The former of the two books is the first translation in the series and the latter is a reprint only in the sense that it is an updated and extended version of a Ph.D. thesis only a few years old.

Specialists in the early history of European rule in Southern Rhodesia have long known, and profited from, Rolin's *Les Lois et l'administration de la Rhodésie* (Brussels, E. Bruylant, 1913); this translation into English will now make this work available to a wider reading public. The book is largely a factual description of the way in which the British South Africa Company governed its territory south of the Zambezi, but it also has useful material on the organization of land settlement and mining. It is in effect, the nearest we have to a constitutional history of the B.S.A. Company, and it is a pity that an analytical introduction was not provided.

Di Perna's book is essentially an explanation of the reasons why Southern Rhodesia opted to end Company rule and become self-governing rather than a part of the Union of South Africa. The short answer of the author is that a Rhodesian nationalism had developed—and that it is only ignorance of that factor that has made Britain and the world underestimate Rhodesian determination since 1962. While there is some truth in this line of argument, it greatly oversimplifies the complexities of the 1922 Referendum and no account has been taken of considerable research, notably by Mrs Elaine Lee, a doctoral student of this University, much of which has been published.

Whatever criticisms may be made of these two books, however, it is important to welcome these new ventures by the publisher in making such works accessible to the reading public and students of Zimbabwe Rhodesia.

R.S.R.

The Yellow Mountain *By L. Burton.* Salisbury, Regal Publishers, 1976, 293pp., ZR$7,50.

Spotted Soldiers *By C. E. Dibb.* Salisbury, Leo Publications, 1978, 160pp., ZR$4,80.

Operation Zambezi : The Raid into Zambia *By P. Armstrong.* Salisbury, Welston Press, 1979, 256 pp., ZR$2,75.

Ten years ago after ZAPU guerillas had clashed with security forces in the Wankie district several authors used the incident as a basis for novels about an imaginary war in Rhodesia. Wilbur Smith's *The Sunbird,* David Chapman's *The Infiltrators* and Lawrence van der Post's two novels *A Far-off Place* and *A Story like the Wind* all give a fictional rendering to that early incursion and all managed to invest it with a curious quality of fantasy. That is nothing new. Long after the armed resistence to the occupation of

Rhodesia had faded into history, Rhodesian novelists had continued to titillate their readers with stirrings in the Reserves. What is remarkable was that after the incident in which members of the security forces were killed and the organization and tenacity of the newly militant nationalist groups had become obvious, novelists seemed incapable of throwing off the habit of seventy years: African objections to White rule could still be stylized as the eccentricities of the primitive man or be used to add additional colour to the novelists' depiction of the mystery and romance of Africa.

Ten years later that comfortable distancing of the significace of such events is no longer possible. No one, Black or White, is unaffected by the war. Refugees in their hundreds of thousands have flocked to the towns and cities. The dreary toll of human life has become a part of our consciousness. We live, as the Catholic bishops recently said, in a 'tormented land'.

It is not surprising then that the latest novels show an immediacy in their treatment of the war that was absent in novels published even three or four years ago. The daily tensions of farm life in Chipinga are described with a precision in C. E. Dibb's *Spotted Soldiers* that has not been managed in any previous novel and she does not attempt to make the war a passing albeit rather unpleasant phase in the life of the country. Peter Armstrong's *Operation Zambezi* conveys something of the way in which the war has come to dominate our lives if only by permeating even the sub-plots that clutter his narrative with aspects of the war not dealt with in the reconstruction of the October 1978 raids into Zambia which are the novel's principal concern. Even Lloyd Burton's *The Yellow Mountain*, a celebration of White Rhodesian superiorty against all comers, manages to become more sombrely realistic in the chapters actually set in Rhodesia.

But having made that point one still notes with surprise how shallow is the insight of all three novels into what the war is all about. In *Spotted Soldiers* this is perhaps defensible. The novel had its genesis as a serial in the South African magazine *Fair Lady* and is at least as unpretentious as that origin suggests. Felicity MacIntyre, its widowed heroine, who is determined to continue to run her coffee plantation despite the hostility of her neighbours and the scepticism of the army, is characterized with some skill and she manages to achieve an individuality not normally associated with women's magazine serials. Her love of the farm is justified by the occasionally adept description of Gazaland scenery, although these are sometimes damaged by Dibb's adjective-laden prose. The plot is similar to Jeffery Farnol's *The Money Moon*, a popular Edwardian romance and no doubt hundreds of others like it, only here the neighbour who wants both Felicity and her land is a rather simple-minded Afrikaner— he says 'No, my proud beauty . . . Don't try to fight me' but the book is not generally written as badly as that—and the stranger coming fortuitously into her life is Rod Napier, an attorney and Captain with the Territorial Army. In short, it is the stuff that women's magazines serials are made of except Gazaland today does enforce a realism of detail on that hackneyed plot. It is hard to be completely fatuous when the machinery of your novel includes F.N.s, Agric-Alerts, ambushes, homestead attacks and the tired faces of men fighting an apparently endless war. Only when Dibbs describes a recruiting incident does she fall back on that curious propaganda cliché that children can be lured from schools only with promises of scholarships. It is inconceivable that a sixteen-year old lad in Gazaland would be unaware of why he was being invited by an armed man to cross the border into Moçambique. But that and a *nganga* smelling out dissidents in a camp at Espungabera can be balanced against a compassionate

account of one of the boys, Luka, returning to see his mother where a fine tenderness of detail allows some humanity to the boy even while acknowledging that he has been involved in acts of brutality in the border area. In Luka's sudden doubts about the justness of his cause and Sonny van Niekerk's dealing with the guerillas in order to drive Felicity into his clutches Dibbs is attempting to describe a situation worthy of her title. Shakespeare understood that in war the most spotless cause cannot rely solely on 'unspotted soldiers'. Bombarded as we have been for so many years by propaganda that makes one side wholly good, the other wholly evil, one can only be grateful for the implications of the novel's epigraph.

Altogether a different sort of novel is *The Yellow Mountain*. Lloyd Burton came to Rhodesia only in 1972—the year the war started in earnest—and the love his Rhodesian characters feel for the land is asserted rather than demonstrated. Whereas one has no doubt why Felicity MacIntyre is fighting to retain her land, the Cochrane family of Burton's novel are offered as types—they have already fled Kenya because of Mau Mau and are now faced with another insurgency threat in their adopted land. They are Whites at the mercy of a turbulent continent. In their determination, however, that the flight from Kenya will not be repeated they are given a stature that makes them at once incredible as characters and at the same time worthy participants in a more or less incredible series of events.

A German officer, Krans, discovered oil while drilling for water in the Sahara during the Second World War; he also captured a huge consignment of gold sent by British Intelligence to win the allegiance of desert nomads. The British Treasury is after the gold; an American oil company after the oil; the local corrupt police officer also wants the gold and the situation is further complicated by the intelligence officers of an Eastern-block country becoming involved. An even greater complication is that both gold and the maps of the area where the oil strike was made are hidden in a booby-trapped fort, Jebal Safraa, the yellow mountain of the title, which is used as a training centre for a Zimbabwean guerrilla group.

With that sort of opposition any sensible Rhodesian might be expected to call it a day but the Rhodesians of *The Yellow Mountain* are not so pusillanimous. Cochrane, his daughter and a young patrol officer from Beit Bridge helped by Krans manage to obtain and escape with both gold and maps. What emerges from the plot then is that Rhodesians can take on representatives of most of the world and by sheer force of will and cunning emerge victorious. It is for some White Rhodesians a comforting fantasy— the British are shown to be peculiarly incompetent and spiteful—but the triumphant activities at Jebal Safraa necessarily contrast with the beleagured homestead of Cochrane's adopted son and the likelihood that his farm will be abandoned after he has been paralysed during an attack on the house.

The object of getting the gold and selling the oil maps to the Americans is to provide a laser beam defence system along the Moçambique border—Cochrane's brain-child. There is a sad inconsistency between this desperate attempt to keep track of incursions—without the gold from Jebal Safraa there would not be enough money to pay for these installations—and the easy heroic role of Rhodesians in the Saharan town. Whereas in earlier novels the war was a fantasy and White Rhodesia's victory a certainty, in these later novels ways of ending the war become increasingly far-fetched.

This is confirmed by the latest novel about the war, Peter Armstrong's *Operation Zambezi*. Here, a temporary respite to Rhodesia's problems is

provided by the capture of the Soviet Ambassador to Zambia. He is brainwashed into supporting ZANLA and withdrawing support from ZPRA. Quite why the Rhodesian war effort should benefit from Cuban soldiers being shipped to Moçambique and a cargo of arms being sent directly to Robert Mugabe is not made clear except in the rather unconvincing observation: ' "Any confusion in the unholy alliance which is working against us can only be of benefit, even if it only lasts for a few days" '. It is indicative of the desperateness with which the novelists are forced to view the situation that hope of winning the war should be made to hang on such slender threads. Another sub-plot charts an attempt to assassinate Joshua Nkomo by a man whose girl-friend had been murdered in the Viscount disaster of September 1978, although there is no suggestion that anything would have been achieved had such an attempt succeeded. In the descriptions of Spark's obsessional hatred of Nkomo and his determination to avenge his girl-friend's murder Armstrong seems to be working out a fantasy with which many White Rhodesians would be able to identify.

The main concern of the book is with the Rhodesian raids into Zambia which are described with competent reportage, although how accurate they are in fact it is impossible to know. What is interesting is to speculate why Armstrong felt it necessary to pad out these accounts with his improbable sub-plots.

The raids were, in terms of what they set out to do, successful and must have demanded courage and dedication from those who took part. Despite this even when the book was being written the war continued to escalate. Nothing had changed. Is that not the reason why novelists like Armstrong cannot rest with realistic accounts of the conduct of the war? To the novelists ten years ago the idea that a large-scale war could develop seemed fantastic; to the contemporary novelist the war is only too real. They have to allow their fictions to lapse into fantasy for only in fantasy is there any sort of comfort.

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Prominent Rhodesian Personalities 1978 *Edited by L. Newitt.* Salisbury, Cover Publicity Services, 1978, 238pp., illustrated, no price indicated. This work is a new version of *Prominent African Personalities of Rhodesia* (reviewed, *ante* (1978), VI, 221), expanded by the inclusion of some 60 more Africans and about 140 Europeans. Although of some use in respect of the personalities included, the coverage is too inconsistent and scrappy to make it a valuable work of reference.

R.S.R.