

CULTURE

COUNTER CULTURE

GERALD HANLEY: AN IRISHMAN IN AFRICA

by judy stone

The first question that Jomo Kenyatta put to Gerald Hanley back in 1962 was, "Where do you come from?"

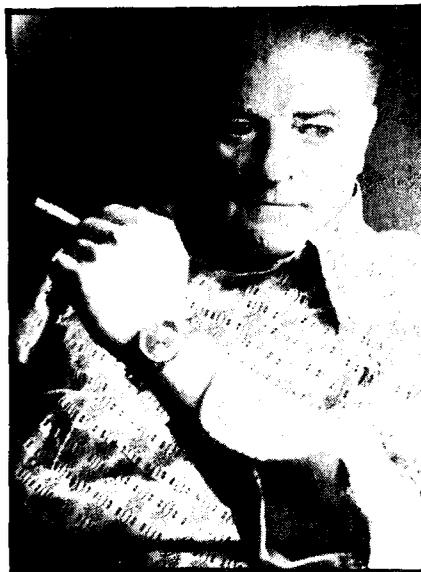
"I said, 'I've just come from Ireland.' Kenyatta—who later became president of Kenya—turned to the Kikuyu elders in the room and he said, 'This man has come from a country that has known every aspect of colonialism. You name it, they've seen it. The Irish people have been through every single stage that colonialism can produce.' The elders were amazed to learn that there were white men who had been colonized."

In Kenya that year, the Masai bush telegraph swiftly carried the news about the "curious white man who went about stopping old men and asking questions about times so long ago that only a few could remember." Mindful of the ancient Gaelic oral tradition, Hanley wanted to help preserve Masai racial memories before it was too late. He couldn't catch up with one 90-year-old Masai who covered the mountains and marshes like a 20-year old, but finally Marieni Ole Kertella came to him and told him about the past that exists only in the keen memory of a few elders. "He was a marvelous man," Hanley said. "He was a warrior before the white man came. He's seen the whole thing happen: the coming of the white man and the going of the white man."

The transcript of that unique interview is in the appendix of Hanley's fascinating new autobiographical book *Warriors and Strangers*, as well as a very special find, the two "lost" agree-

Judy Stone edits the daily entertainment section of the San Francisco Chronicle.

ments of 1904 and 1911 in which the Masai loaned their land to the British in exchange for being let alone to go their own cattle-grazing way. From the vantage of his return trip to Somalia and Kenya in 1962, Hanley offers a compelling look at the gallery of char-



Gerald Hanley

acters he has known—tribesmen, settlers, colonial officials, soldiers—during some traumatic times of transition in East Africa.

The book is infused with what is immediately striking about Hanley himself: his unquenchable curiosity and generosity toward other people, sympathy without sentimentality. I met him three or four times in Dublin; invariably, he was encouraging someone or other to write, praising a new author's first-born novel, offering helpful, unexpected insight into the other fellow's project. A friend of his showed me a cherished old photograph of Hanley looking like a cross between Omar Sharif and Ronald Colman when he was a "British" Major in the Irish Fusiliers—but he was never seduced by that role: "I was an amateur officer. I never forgot I was descended from potato eaters." He's a large man with a voice so soft and gentle and civilized

when he talks about ancient cultures, old religions and new revolutions, that it's difficult to imagine him as a lion-killer, but he was, once upon a time before he started to think it all out.

Hemingway himself took along Hanley's second novel, *The Year of the Lion*, when he went on safari in Ngorongoro, Tanganyika, in 1953. Later he bought ten copies in Nairobi and told the amazed bookseller to have Hanley call him if he stopped by. When Hanley did, Hemingway said, "C'mon down, kid, the wine's open."

In a recently published fragment of his African Journal, Hemingway tells of reading *The Year of the Lion* very slowly "because it was such a good book I didn't want to finish it . . . an excellent book and very inspiring when you were in the lion-hunting business."

A British critic, John Davenport of *The Observer*, once commented that Hanley's "masculinity reminds one of Hemingway, but emotionally he is more mature." Hanley himself was touched and pleased when he read the Hemingway journal. "He liked the part in my book where the lion charges. 'I'd love to think I had something to do with that,' he said. I told him he had an influence on every one of us writers under 40. He was very good and generous to writers. He also liked a part in my book about the old man worrying about death and wondering if there was a life after death. He talked a lot to me about a fellow named Jimmy Joyce. I didn't know then that Hemingway had been one of the first to recognize *Ulysses* for what it was."

Hanley was off on a long flow of reminiscence. It was the eve of his first visit to the United States and he was looking forward to a big bash with his nephew, playwright William Hanley (*Slow Dance on the Killing Ground*) and his niece, the actress Ellen Hanley; eager to learn what made America "break out" ten years

ago, fascinated by Malcolm X, wondering how Alex Haley traced his African ancestry, curious about how young American blacks feel about the freedom of Africa, wishing that they particularly would read his new book. He wanted to check out the validity of his theory that dialogue is the American way of revolution: "When there is a scandal in America, they *do* sit around a table and discuss it. They *do* print the Pentagon Papers. I'm not too wide-eyed, of course," he added happily, but he was obviously filled with zest for the next adventure as he must have been when he set out for Africa at 19, a poor kid from "Irish Liverpool."

He had been born there in 1916, that fateful year for the Irish, son of a Dublin printer, descended from a long line of Dublin printers. He had to leave school at 14 because he couldn't afford to continue, became a steelworker, slinging a sledgehammer for four pence an hour, but he also started writing at 16.

"There were four brothers, but only one got an education—Francis, a linguist, he teaches Russian at a Benedictine monastery in London. James, the eldest, is a very good writer. He writes about the sea, he's a better writer than I am, he's a writer's writer."

It was James (*Another World*) and his friend, the writer John Cowper Powys, author of *Wolf Solent*, who set Gerald up with a job in Africa as helper on Willie Powys' 200,000 acre ranch on the slope of Mt. Kenya.

"You lived like the Africans lived. I lived in a grass hut. We had 10,000 head of wild cattle, 20,000 sheep, lions, zebra, game. It was not like any other form of ranching. It was very tough, there were diseases by the hundreds. The first thing I had to do was learn the language and the only way I could learn it was from the Africans. The tribal Africans influenced me enormously. They made me think like mad. There are two kinds of strangers—those who never learn the language and don't want to know and those who are fascinated. I was fascinated. So I learned the tribal language Maru and the lingua franca called Kiswahili and of course, I learned the customs of the tribe. It was a doomed world, a world that's dying. I recognized that quite quickly

in 1935. You could see that the next few generations would not be the same."

The experience left him with chronic malaria, incurable nostalgia, and the stuff for a number of novels. In England, some critics compared him to Sir Richard Burton and E. M. Forster. Not only is he a superb storyteller, but his novels provide sharp, unrivaled insight into the breakup of great colonial empires by showing the "colonizers and the colonized" as complex, unromanticized men and women under the impact of revolutionary change. A smart paperback



Hemingway and big game

publisher ought to snap up the republication rights not only to Hemingway's favorite, but to *The Consul at Sunset*, *Drinkers of Darkness*, and Hanley's other works.

"There is a place every man belongs to forever," he told me. "Mine is East Africa. It's a very strange place. Once you've lived there, you never get over it. You can't describe it, but you try. You *long* to describe it *perfectly*. Isak Dinesen got nearest. Nobody else but Dinesen has got that feel of why you like Africans, of why you learn to respect them, why you want to know all they can tell, once you learn the language, once you've gone into their minds. Then you realize that something's going to be destroyed and

they're going to destroy it themselves, the Africans. They want civilization. Once the tribal world comes in touch with it—like Ireland in the 17th century—they're hooked. You start to adapt or die."

Brought up "soaked and indoctrinated" in Irish nationalism, Hanley said that, when he first went to Africa, he was "very conscious of the fact that you can't own anybody else's land. I knew that. I knew the white man couldn't keep a chunk of Africa unless the black man wanted him to."

Then World War II changed the whole scene. Although the Irish Free State was neutral, the Irish clinging to Wolfe Tone's old slogan that "England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity," Hanley enlisted—as did 250,000 other anti-Fascist Irishmen. "You know we all wished we'd fought in the Spanish Civil War and didn't. I joined the British Army because politically I felt quite deeply. Then we found out that World War II was really to get Hitler married to Eva Braun." He spent the war years in Somalia and Burma with the 11th East African division. "It was quite strange. The whole division was African. We even had a Congolese medical unit. It was pretty shattering for the Africans to meet modern warfare in a country like Burma. When an African from an obscure village goes into a modern war with bombers and planes and guns and tanks, it was quite a shock. We lived on rations from parachute drops and the Africans had the same rations as the white and Indian troops. When they came back from the war, they had finished with their tribalism and they became politically interested: they realized who they were and they could never go back to where they were. The people who had joined up were no longer the people they had been. They had adopted all kinds of new habits and of course they wanted a new Africa and they began to work for it."

He recalled one incident at the end of the war which illustrated that feeling. "Three white men were waiting to be flown back to Europe and one of the African soldiers, who thought all white men were rich, said to me, 'You're going back to Europe to all the goods, cars and all that. We're

going back to a tribe.' They didn't like what they were going back to because it was a poorer life than the one in the army. I said, 'You don't realize it. You're going back to *land*. You have *land*. They have no land. They're going back to work in factories and they don't want to. They'll be lucky if they get jobs.' They were staggered by this. They were infected. Once you've got a wrist watch and cigarettes, you want to have it all—you want TV—and I'm for that."

The "infection" in all its varieties fascinated him. Twenty years after the Burma campaign, Hanley wrote *See You in Yasukuni*. "It is a novel about the only Japanese soldier I ever saw surrender, the only deserter from the Japanese army. No Japanese unit ever surrendered, they all committed suicide. But this was a little Japanese who had worked for the Americans and he was infected. He knew that the Emperor wasn't a god and that when he was killed in a battle uselessly, his soul wouldn't go to a place called Yasukuni."

Hanley confessed that he used to be sentimental. "I went to Africa because I thought it was peaceful there. I'm not sentimental now because I realize the Africans didn't want that. A lot of people want a lot of things for a lot of people, which will keep them nice and quiet, but it's what people want themselves that's important. It took me a long time to discover that. You think you know what's right for people because you've read a lot of books and have led a lot of lives but you discover what *you* want for them, what *you* think is good for them, they don't want that. They want what *they* want.

What made him realize it?

"Well, Chri. . . . I have to think. Now wait. Probably in Somalia for the first time. I said to an old chief, 'What do you want?' He said, 'I want to be well-governed, but I want to be left alone.' That's it, isn't it?!" Hanley exclaimed, nodding his head. "That's it! What's interesting about man is that not only does he want good for other people, he wants to be *known* to have done it for them. In other words, to stay there, to govern them, being daddy. I don't think he should do that.

"Once you've taught the apprentice how to use the tools," said Hanley, the

daddy of seven himself, "you should be dragged away forcibly and leave them alone, but you want to stay as the daddy who says, 'remember all I've taught you about this.' You want gratitude. You want your medals and your sash. Fascinating, this longing to be remembered for being daddy."

And big Daddy has a lot to answer for. In 1945, Hanley kept a curious eye on African soldiers viewing a film about the liberation of Belsen with its "bulldozed hills of corpses." "I watched the African soldiers when the lights went up and I am certain that many of them were looking at us, the white men, with a strange new kind of eye. They were as appalled as the rest of us by the scenes in Germany, but they had an extra reason for puzzlement, and perhaps they knew that until the white man could manage his own anthropoid passions he should stop feeling superior to blacks merely because he was a white man."

Mau Mau itself, Hanley believes, "was a scream of anthropological rage, a puzzled and bloody turning upon the Christian varieties of religion which the white men them-

selves did not bother with."

The true story of the Mau Mau has not been written yet, of that he was certain. "I have reservations about all those 'revolting' old tribal customs we heard about. It was to the interest of the white man at that time to denigrate the African. Even now. They *like* to hear about revolting customs. I'm not satisfied about the revolting rituals of the Mau Mau. I'll tell you why I'm not. I was given a printed document by a British officer—an intelligence report—and I know the kind of mentality who wrote this, I know it well. He described a ritual involving a mixture of menstrual blood and semen that took place at a spot called Kibirichia and he calls it a 'Kibirichia cocktail.' Anyone with the mentality to be smart about something as sad as that—if it was true—can make you rather cynical. Further, I'm not convinced because the Kikuyu are a very fastidious people and they had a very strong moral code. Now it's true that the Mau Mau wanted to destroy that moral code to make another kind of Kikuyu, but I'm not convinced about these rituals. They may be true. It's not that I don't want to believe it, but

SIGNS

by Van Schley

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we've read war propaganda before. That war was a shattering thing for the Kikuyu people. The Kikuyu weren't supposed to be able to fight. They were never recruited as soldiers, but they fought and the score at the end was 10,000 Kikuyu dead to 33 white men. So I'd like to read more about the Mau Mau, an authoritative book. I was there for six months then and I was shattered by the war myself."

Hanley experienced the same kind of English mentality in India where he worked for the J. Arthur Rank organization and the BBC, and later wrote *The Journey Homeward*, a novel about the struggle for power in a small princely state in 1947, after the departure of the British. When he produced a script about Gandhi and a documentary film on India gaining its freedom, he came in contact with "a certain kind of Englishman who needed to feel that India needed white men to rule it because it had too many caste systems and too many languages."

As for the religious and tribal warfare that erupted in India and Africa after independence, how could an Irishman "preach" about that, he asked.

"The north of Ireland is like an iceberg melting. It was a frozen area. If the Catholics—we'll call them Catholics—the minority—who are really representatives of the original race who were occupied by the settlers—if they'd been black, it would have been much more understandable to the world, this struggle in the north. It was about some people who feel superior to the people they live on top of. Some people need to feel superior, they can't *live* without feeling superior. There must be niggers or wogs or yids or wops or paddies—in order for some people to feel comfortable. Well that's finished now. Of course it's very painful when it ends, very painful, very bloody. It's like the Negroes in the States. Whites didn't want to live next to black men and now plenty of black men don't want to live next to white men. I think it was inevitable, but it's very sad. It's tragic, that black men should feel so aggrieved, so shut out, that they've decided they want their form of apartheid. They don't want to live with whitey. It's tragic but understandable. You've got to be a

marvelous person—blacky—to feel aggrieved about whitey and yet to remember that the whitey you're sitting with didn't do that."

Hanley, who reads Arabic and is now researching a book on the slave trade, went on, "The Arabs took the East coast and whitey did the West, but as usual there were black chiefs of black families who sold the black men. The blacks did much of the hunting of the blacks to help the Arabs. It's awkward, it's uncomfortable to look at the facts, but when they're faced, it's easier. Now Islam has got one thing in it—it doesn't give a damn what color you are. I was very interested and touched to learn that Malcolm X was shattered to find, as he was introduced to all the Muslims on his way to Mecca, that he knew nothing about Islam, the meaning of Islam, when he met white Muslims, grey Muslims, yellow-haired Muslims, blue-eyed Muslims. There are all kinds of whiteys and there are all kinds of blackys and brownies. Malcolm finally realized you just can't hate whitey really, and, I think, he got shot for that." ○

CONSCIOUSNESS AS A COMMODITY

by r.g. davis

Ringolevio: A Life Played for Keeps, by Emmett Grogan, Little Brown & Company, \$7.95.

Emmett Grogan has blown his cover and is doing the best he can to hold onto the pieces.

The first portion of *Ringolevio*, the heroic adventures of Kenny Wisdom, a 16- or 17-year-old fantasy-Grogan, is unimpeachable. It is a short novella for the kids from the streets of all big cities—the loner, robber, adventurer, planes, Europe, cleverness, trickery, jails, money, sex and all the street wisdom any hippie would love to possess: a HOLLYWOOD MOVIE.

In the second portion, Grogan the

R. G. Davis founded the San Francisco Mime Troupe and directed it from 1960 to 1970. He is the author of a forthcoming book on guerrilla theatre.



Emmet Grogan

writer tells us of Grogan the political activist who originated the Diggers' operations in the Haight-Ashbury, and about 50 other spectacular occurrences. This section is more difficult for Grogan the writer because current events have more than one person in attendance.

Ringolevio, a game of the Brooklyn gutters, is a prisoner-based game and a catchy title. It is useful in describing Kenny Wisdom's cops' and prisoners' life style. Fortunately, Grogan (the writer) doesn't elevate it to a Ringolevio Game Theory of the events from 1966 through 1970 in the Haight.

Even so, the book has enough claim to childish purity and adolescent imagery. The first photo in the large volume is one of a baby with an American flag (didn't Jerry Rubin do that first?) and the last photo is of Grogan himself in leather vest, tight Levi's, cigarette, and wristbands around ready fists, walking on Hester Street.

I read the first 170 pages of Kenny Wisdom's adventures in Brooklyn and in Europe, and I threw the book down. Page 86: "One of the cardinal rules of burglary is that when you go on a job you should never take anything with you that might identify you if you have to split in a hurry and drop everything. . . . A good thief should go in clean, with a new set of clothes with the labels torn out. . . ." The murder-mystery style runs through the exciting Novella. Page 87: "Wisdom left his