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# A Description and Interpretation of Social Values Contained in Two of Robert Ruark's Books, The Honey Badger and Something of Value

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Two of Robert Ruark's books, THE HONEY BADGER and SOMETHING OF VALUE

A DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF SOCIAL VALUES CONTAINED IN

TWO OF ROBERT RUARK'S BOOKS, THE HONEY BADGER AND SOMETHING OF VALUE

of behavior in a feudalistic society of the Western United States. Something of Value is a historical novel which revealed something of a past society. Did these books reflect our basic behavior patterns which are similar or basic to what we have? An Abstract of a Thesis

An Abstract of a Thesis

The first part Presented to the School of Graduate Studies

Ouachita Baptist University

race, religion and war. The primary sources used in this study were two of the cited books written by Robert Ruark.

Historian, novelist, game warden, and author of The Honey Badger. Secondary sources included various books and journals from university libraries.

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

of social values as expressed by the author through the story, also, in The Honey Badger was thought to be of significance in helping to understand the values as expressed by the hero, Peter, in Something of Value.

by

Jane Fowler Quick

August 1967

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Two of Robert Ruark's books, The Honey Badger, and Something of Value, proved their entertainment value, but what of the content of the writings? The Honey Badger was written of the United States and revealed certain patterns of behavior in a sophisticated society of the Eastern United States. Something of Value was written of East Africa and revealed something of Kenya society. Did these books reveal any basic behavior patterns which are similar or could be useful to leaders who are trying to effect social change?

The first part of the thesis problem was to give a descriptive interpretation of selected social values which centered around the basic institutions of family, women, sex, race, religion and war. The primary sources used to study these were two of the eleven books written by Robert Ruark, columnist, novelist, white hunter, world traveler and bon vivant. Secondary sources included various books and periodicals from university libraries.

The Honey Badger, one of the two books studied extensively, is said to be autobiographical. An investigation of social values as expressed by the author through the hero, Alec, in The Honey Badger was thought to be of significance in helping to understand and contrast the values as expressed by the hero, Peter, in Something of Value.

The second part of the thesis problem was to discover similarities of values as expressed by the two heroes relative

to the same six basic institutions.

It was revealed that family life for the two heroes was almost non-existent. Neither had a happy home life.

Women, both black and white, as seen by the heroes were mere playthings. No lasting meaningful relationship with a woman played an important part in either's life.

Sex was important to both heroes only for the moment. It was not seen as something sacred. Infidelity was the order of the day.

Both heroes were racists. Each indicated that he was capable of close relationship with a person of another race, as long as he was "in his place," but each discriminated against races collectively.

Ruark allowed each hero to avoid any serious personal manifestation of religious faith.

War to both men was considered glamorous. It was something which got them out of the house and into an exciting occupation, although both abhorred the catastrophies of war. Neither could explain the reason he felt drawn into the conflicts of war.

In an attempt to find meaning to life, the hero of The Honey Badger ran away from everything that had meaning to him, including wife and home. In Something of Value, the hero ran away from a new bride to fight in a war to which he did not have to go.

It was concluded that the author, Robert Ruark, reflected fundamentally similar social values in the two books and that both books provided valuable insights into the cultures described and into the lives of people caught up in the whirlwind of personal or social conflict. The Honey Badger and Something of Value are more than interesting reading and are significant social documents. They offer well-defined case studies for the student of social values.

A Thesis

Presented to the

School of Graduate Studies

Northwest Baptist University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

John Fowler Smith

August 1967

A DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF SOCIAL VALUES CONTAINED IN  
TWO OF ROBERT RUARK'S BOOKS, THE HONEY BADGER AND SOMETHING OF VALUE

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A Thesis

Presented to the  
School of Graduate Studies  
Ouachita Baptist University

APPROVED:

*[Signature]*  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
*[Signature]*

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by

Jane Fowler Quick

August 1967

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Burke's works in general were recognized by critics, his peers and measurably so by his many readers. He was seen by himself and others as a writer. One of his books, Something of Value, was made into a movie. His cinematic success, which was considerable, further indicated success as an author. These facts suggest that Burke had achieved a national reputation as an author capable of entertaining his readers. But what of the content in his writings? Had it been significant? Had he revealed any basic behavior patterns in the "mainstream society"<sup>2</sup> of the United States or in West African society which could be helpful to leaders who are trying to change society?

In contrast with the recognition of Burke as a writer, the one aspect of Burke and his works which has not received

<sup>1</sup>Time Magazine, (Nov. 11, 1957), 100-101.

<sup>2</sup>Newsweek Magazine, (July 12, 1965), 58-59.

## CHAPTER I

### GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Robert Ruark was a successful young writer of newspaper columns, books and popular magazine articles in the United States. He died an untimely death at the age of 49 years. During his brief time on the American scene, according to at least one literary critic, he lived his personal life much as did the hero in The Honey Badger.<sup>1</sup>

Ruark's works in general were recognized by critics, his peers and measurably so by his many readers. He was seen by himself and others as a writer. One of his books, Something of Value, was made into a movie. His financial success, which was considerable, further indicated success as an author. These facts suggest that Ruark had achieved a national reputation as an author capable of entertaining his readers. But what of the content in his writings? Had it been significant? Had he revealed any basic behavior patterns in the "saloon society"<sup>2</sup> of the United States or in East African society which could be useful to leaders who are trying to change society?

In contrast with the recognition of Ruark as a writer, the one aspect of Ruark and his works which has not received

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<sup>1</sup>Time Magazine, (Nov. 11, 1957), 70:136.

<sup>2</sup>Newsweek Magazine, (July 12, 1965), 66:54.

serious investigation is that of the content of his works. The entertainment value has been recognized but apparently not the content. To the knowledge of this student, no previous attempt has been made to study basic social values found in Something of Value and The Honey Badger. This has been done in order to set forth certain conceptual tools which may prove valuable to people who are trying to effectuate social change.

### THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the social values contained in two of Robert Ruark's books, Something of Value and The Honey Badger, and to determine if his basic values were similar in the two works. The first of these has its setting in East Africa, the second primarily in the United States.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of any body of literature depends on its relevance to other literature, past and present, and probably represents a characteristic way of thinking.<sup>3</sup> Through critical interpretation, it is hoped that the student can discover and set forth significant conceptual tools which others may find valuable in understanding social values in

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<sup>3</sup>Albert D. Van Nostrand (ed.), Literary Criticism in America (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957), p. vii.

the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

The Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention requires its mission appointees to East Africa to read Something of Value as a background to the culture of that region.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that Something of Value has a significance beyond its interest as reading material.

An article in Christian Century speaks of non-church materials which are being increasingly used as tools by church groups:

Theologians are the church's built-in skeptics. It comes as no surprise, therefore, when they criticize the happy little brochures which most mission boards issue as mission study materials. But when the ladies who make up such groups begin to gag on all this sweetness and light, then the time really has come to look for new material. There are some local signs that we are already past that time. Nobody much believes any more that a well run dressmakers' class sews up the Kingdom of God. Hymning an occasional unsung saint solves little. Raggle-taggle children in far-off Sunday schools are darling, but answer only part of the problem. The foreign boards' glowing success stories don't even hint at what the whole problem is for the Christian mission, and so they don't begin to get churchmen ready for the brand-new answers that will have to be tried.

But from nonchurch sources come an increasing number of analytic, background studies that church groups will find much more edifying than the baptized material they've been using. A lot of it is pretty brisk; some of it is brutal; hard things are said about our missionaries occasionally; but the books I have in mind at least set the

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<sup>4</sup>Tyrus Hillway, Introduction to Research (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), p. 103.

<sup>5</sup>Personal letter to author from Rev. Clarence Allison dated June 17, 1967.

Stateside Christian straight on what the mission is up against.<sup>6</sup>

Since Something of Value was referred to significantly in the aforementioned article, this portion of Ruark's writings could be studied intensively. An analysis of The Honey Badger, which is thought to be autobiographical, should assist in such a study.

One aspect of Ruark's writing which had not been examined previously is his expression of social values in the two books. One book was concerned with African society, whereas the other was concerned with American society. The books reflect certain specific values on war, women, sex, race, family, and religion. Apparently the values expressed in the two books are related. Thus it was thought that they could be studied profitably. A study reviewing various social conflict value patterns in East African society could be helpful to missionaries (1) who have not been exposed previously to a description of such value patterns and (2) who have as their major goal moral change.

#### BACKGROUND

Robert Ruark, columnist, novelist, traveler, Merchant Marine, and bon vivant, expressed opinions on everything from

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<sup>6</sup>"Africa for the Ladies," The Christian Century, (August 17, 1955), 72:949.

modern art and women's fashions in America to the Mau Mau uprisings in Africa. These topics along with many others were discussed in newspapers and magazine articles as well as in his eleven books.<sup>7</sup>

#### METHODOLOGY

Although the writer of this thesis had previously read some of the works of Robert Ruark, the first real consideration to do a depth study of the man occurred as a consequence of a conversation with a faculty member. This prompted investigation of Ruark as a man and as a commentator on the contemporary social scene.

To understand the motivation behind Ruark's writings and to place the man and his works in their proper perspective, it is necessary to consider the social environment out of which he came.

Ruark saw great contrasts in his time. He lived through the Great Depression, after which he saw much prosperity. Apparently the personal transition from economic and social nothingness to success was too much for him.<sup>8</sup>

His extended trip to Africa appeared to be an escape. It was an escape from the "saloon society" of New York, as he put it. One of his avowed reasons for leaving New York was to write a book, and this he did--from firsthand knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Time Magazine, (July 9, 1965), p. 84.

<sup>8</sup>Newsweek, loc. cit.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

The consequential fact that the book was to become useful to East African missionaries was certainly no prime objective of Ruark's.

#### METHODOLOGY

The method employed in this study was a comparative description with a critical interpretation. First, a factual description of the man was given relative to the general social background out of which he grew. Specifically, some perceived social elements which may have had later influence on the social values evidenced in his books were sought.

Second, social values as they were perceived in the two books were compared.

The methodology utilized was that of a descriptive and critical interpretation instead of an empirical approach which is mathematically verifiable. Since man is largely able to survive because of his conceptual mastery, it was thought that this method would be valuable.

#### DEFINITION OF TERMS

Following are the more important terms used in the study:

1. Assimilation. Nearly complete absorption of one culture by another. Usually, both take on some characteristics of the other, and descendants of either become nearly indistinguishable from one another with respect to cultural origin and their social patterns.

2. Ethnocentrism. Belief that one's own group or ethnic community is best. Judging other groups by the standard of one's own group.
3. Family. Basic kinship grouping whose main functions are reproduction, maintenance of child, status placement of child, socialization, and social control over its members.
4. Mobility. Social movement of people up or down a scale of social rank. Frequency of social contact with different cultures and people.
5. Mores. Rules and customs backed by severe punishment and strong emotions.
6. Prejudice. Attitude, usually negative, toward selected categories of people on the basis of stereotypes rather than direct experience.
7. Role behavior. Behavior expected of the individual in a particular social relationship.
8. Segregation. Social and sometimes physical separation between (usually) two groups, whether voluntary or involuntary; based on a desire by the more powerful group to avoid equalitarian social contact.
9. Social change. Alterations in customary social patterns or role relationships.
10. Socialization. Process by which the human animal is made into a social being. Process by which the norms and behavior patterns are learned by a child and become part of his response system.
11. Value. Object of group approval. Norm. Socially accepted goal, whether supernatural, symbolic, or material.
12. Wish (four wishes). Supposedly universal set of wishes (recognition, response, new experience, and security); used to analyze concrete social behavior.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>William J. Goode, "Vocabulary for Sociology" (New York: Data Guide, Inc., 1959).

## DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Robert Ruark wrote eleven books plus many newspaper and magazine articles. This study will include only two of Ruark's major books: Something of Value, published in 1955, and The Honey Badger, published in 1965. The study was limited to these two books because to study all of Ruark's books, since they are so lengthy and extensive, would entail a larger research project than would normally be a part of a Master's degree program. These two books were specifically chosen because it was thought that it might be fruitful to study the contrast between primitive East African society and the sophisticated society of the Eastern United States from which Ruark fled.

## SOURCES AND TREATMENT OF DATA

Books and periodicals from university libraries were the main sources of information. Critical reviews of Something of Value and The Honey Badger were read, as was certain biographical material. One autobiographical work, The Old Man and the Boy, was referred to, as were other biographical references.

The results of the study were arranged into five chapters: Chapter I, the purpose, significance, background, definition of terms, methodology, delimitations, sources and treatment of data; Chapter II, detailed biographical materials;

Chapter III, analysis of selected values in The Honey Badger; Chapter IV, analysis of selected values in Something of Value; Chapter V, summary and restatement of the developments of previous chapters and the more important findings and conclusions of the whole study.

### RUARK, THE BOY

A chapter on Robert Ruark's life would not be complete without mentioning The Old Man and the Boy, which Ruark wrote as a "tracy-racelle picture nostalgic reminiscence of his North Carolina boyhood."<sup>11</sup>

In author Ruark's description, the Old Man is a cross between Thomas and Natty Bumppo, and the Boy a blend of Buck Finn and Hemingway's Nick Adams. The Old Man has a grave regional piety towards nature and the Boy glows with a spontaneous open-eyed wonder before it. The cycle of the seasons takes on a grandeur reality never suggested by the city dweller's falling calendar leaves.<sup>12</sup>

As indicated, the book is not a chronological account of Ruark's early life but is a seasonal account of situational events with his grandfather. The author was thirty-seven years old when he wrote the book, which he divided into twenty-eight chapters of reminiscence.

<sup>11</sup>Time Magazine, (November 11, 1957), 75-76.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LIFE OF ROBERT RUARK

Important to the study of a man's writings is a review of the life of the author. To understand the social values in Something of Value and The Honey Badger, Robert Ruark as a man must be understood.

#### RUARK, THE BOY

A chapter on Robert Ruark's life would not be complete without mentioning The Old Man and the Boy, which Ruark wrote as a "boozy-bucolic picture postcard reminiscence of his North Carolina boyhood."<sup>11</sup>

In author Ruark's memory-misted eyes, the Old Man is a cross between Thoreau and Natty Bumppo, and the Boy a blend of Huck Finn and Hemingway's Nick Adams. The Old Man has a grave regional piety towards nature and the Boy glows with a spontaneous open-eyed wonder before it. The cycle of the seasons takes on a sensuous reality never suggested by the city dweller's falling calendar leaves.<sup>12</sup>

As indicated, the book is not a chronological account of Ruark's early life but is a seasonal account of situational events with his grandfather. The author was thirty seven years old when he wrote the book, which he divided into twenty-eight chapters of remembrances.

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<sup>11</sup>Time Magazine, (November 11, 1957), 70:136.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

Ruark thought the Old Man "knew pretty near close to everything."<sup>13</sup> He declared,

And mostly he ain't painful with it. What I mean is that he went to Africa once when he was a kid, and he shot a tiger or two out of India, or so he says, and he was in a whole mess of wars here and yonder.<sup>14</sup>

Apparently the time they spent together resulted in the establishment of a most meaningful relationship between them. Later the influence would show through quite clearly.

In a lesson on hunting, the Old Man told the Boy that it was the noblest sport yet devised by the hand of man.

If you hunt to eat, or hunt for sport or for something fine, something that will make you proud, and make you remember every single detail of the day you found him and shot him, that is good too.

But if there's one thing I despise it's a killer, some blood-crazy idiot that just goes around bam-baming at everything he sees. A man who takes pleasure in death just for death's sake is rotten somewhere inside, and you'll find him doing things later on in life that'll prove it.<sup>15</sup>

The Old Man's value regarding hunting was possibly influential in fixing Ruark's attitude toward hunting and killing. On more than one occasion, Alec Barr, the hero of The Honey Badger, felt that he had to explain to guests why the trophies were on the wall of his New Jersey home. They were

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<sup>13</sup>Robert Ruark, The Old Man and the Boy, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1957), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

about to die anyway, Barr would always explain to his guests. He did not kill them just for the sake of killing.

The Old Man's opinion of women could have had a great deal of influence on the status which Ruark later ascribed to women. The Old Man credited women as being "natural-born perverse."<sup>16</sup> He contended,

Anything a man takes delight in which they don't understand, and can't share, makes 'em mad. They keep trying to kiss their elbows and turn into boys, and when they can't be boys they don't like it; so they declare war on the boys at a very early age, and win the final victory when they trap themselves a wild boy and turn him into a house pet. Or try to.

Boys like to cuss and chew tobacco and drink a little liquor and shoot pool and play poker and smoke cigars and go huntin' and fishin'. These generally ain't supposed to be sports the girls can share in; so the girls resent 'em.<sup>17</sup>

Another of the Old Man's opinions of women follows:

Man is a simple creature--a very small boy who wants to be patted on the head and told he's a good boy and a nice boy and a smart boy. You can lead him anywhere. But as for women, I don't know. They got a sort of contrary, different chemistry of brain and action from men, which makes them unruly and subject to strange fits. My only advice on women is to stay out of the house when they're cleaning and don't say yes too often.<sup>18</sup>

In the above quotation, man and boy are described as a simple mechanism, whereas women are complex. Later,

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Robert Ruark, The Old Man's Boy Grows Older, (Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1957), p. 29.

knowledge of this influence is to prove valuable in understanding Robert Ruark and how he was able to write as he did.

In The Old Man's Boy Grows Older, Ruark reminisces on the Old Man's attitude toward religion:

He said he reckoned a man knew best what his own God was and how to work with Him, and he was never much of a reformer. He said he reckoned Somebody, no matter what name you called Him, was responsible for sun, moon, mountains, sea, stars, heat, cold, seasons, animals, birds, fish, and food . . . and whether you called him God, Allah, Jehovah, or Mug-Mug didn't make much difference as long as you believe in him.<sup>19</sup>

Such parts of the Old Man's philosophy and adventures appear to have whetted Ruark's appetite for firsthand experiences in life. This is seen clearly throughout the contents of both Something of Value and The Honey Badger.

Further evidence of the Old Man's influence on Ruark is manifest in their conversation while the Old Man was on his death bed. As the Old Man knew he was dying, he stated to Ruark that he was sorry he did not have any worldly possessions to leave the Boy. Ruark countered with the answer that he was the "richest boy in the world."<sup>20</sup>

For one thing, Ruark explained, the Boy had had fifteen years of the Old Man's influence in which Ruark learned "everything he knew."<sup>21</sup> The Old Man had raised him as a man

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

among men. He had taught him compassion, manners, and tolerance. He had given him the gift of reading, making reading a form of sport, as hunting and fishing were sports. He thus attempted to give him the gift of avoiding boredom. The Old Man also gave him eyes to see--anything interesting from a chinch bug to a barnacle.<sup>22</sup>

Most people just stumble through this foolish business called life, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, but when the old boy upstairs whacks you with the scythe you ain't seen anything much. I thought we'd spend some part of this summer getting you accustomed to seeing things instead of just registering them and forgetting them, like a damn camera.<sup>23</sup>

The Old Man would send the Boy out in a boat or along a beach with a command to look and then report what he saw.<sup>24</sup>

Evidently the boy saw and acquired values and skills such as the ability to cast a net, shoot a gun, row a boat, call a turkey, build a duck blind, pitch a tent, scale a fish, build a cave, draw a picture, identify all the trees and most of the flowers and berries, and get along with the colored folks. Indeed, the Old Man had left the Boy a set of functional values and social skills which made him feel that he was in fact the "richest boy in the world." He also schooled him in techniques he would later employ as a first-class reporter.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ruark, The Old Man and the Boy, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

<sup>24</sup>Ruark, The Old Man's Boy Grows Older, op. cit., p. 20.

## RUARK, THE MAN

Born in Wilmington, North Carolina, on December 29, 1916, Ruark received the A.B. degree from the University of North Carolina in 1935.<sup>25</sup> This school was later to receive all his manuscripts, letters and professional papers.<sup>26</sup>

Ruark, a backwoods boy, began his career as a sports writer and columnist for the Washington Daily News in 1937. The following year, he married Virginia Webb. He worked for the Washington Daily News until 1942, at which time he joined the U. S. Navy and began three years of service.<sup>27</sup>

After his Navy hitch during World War II, Ruark returned to the Daily News; but he was determined to land a syndicated column and looked "for the biggest rock he could find to throw."<sup>28</sup> Consequently, he wrote on how women's fashions nauseated returning servicemen. Scripps-Howard boss Roy Howard was so impressed when some 2,500 letters poured in as

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<sup>25</sup>Who's Who In America (Chicago: Marquis' Who's Who), Vol. 33, 1964-65.

<sup>26</sup>From newspaper release clipped inside cover of Reader's Encyclopedia and datelined London (AP).

<sup>27</sup>Time Magazine, (July 9, 1965), 86:84.

<sup>28</sup>Newsweek Magazine, op. cit., p. 54.

a result of this effort that he gave Ruark the column he craved.<sup>29</sup>

As a columnist for the Scripps-Howard chain and 152 other newspapers throughout the United States, Ruark at the age of thirty seven made close to \$75,000 per year with a brew of simple ingredients. "I'm cute, angry, loud, puckish or perverse every day in print," he once said.<sup>30</sup>

In 1953 Ruark decided he had overstayed his welcome as a New York columnist. Furthermore, he declared, he was not "having any fun."<sup>31</sup> Thus in March of that year, upon returning from an African hunting trip, he announced in Manhattan that he was pulling up stakes, moving to Rome, and radically changing his column.

I don't think a man can be a fresh, provocative writer in the same pattern for more than seven or eight years. And I think the public is getting tired of being told what's what by pundits and columnists like me.<sup>32</sup>

Ruark said that he had a yen to be again what he had been, a reporter, before public demand perverted him into a "wise guy."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>"Converted Wise Guy," Time Magazine, (March 20, 1953), 61:52.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

In his new format Ruark cut his column from five to three days a week and made it a "kind of global feature."<sup>34</sup> He reported what he saw.

Ruark left the Washington-New York "saloon society" and went to Palamos, Spain.<sup>35</sup> Here he wrote his most popular novel on Africa, Something of Value. The book sold more than 100,000 copies in hardcover and paperback; and royalties, along with \$300,000 for the movie rights, gave Ruark the leisure to write other books: Uhuru, The Old Man and the Boy, Poor No More, and The Old Man's Boy Grows Older. To follow his last published book, The Honey Badger, Ruark at the time of his death was completing the third volume of a series. This book, Long View From the Hill, was to be a companion to Something of Value and Uhuru. Ruark was working on this when he became ill in 1965.<sup>36</sup>

Something of Value was a blood-drenched account of the Mau Mau terror, a subject he knew well from his Hemingway-style hunting trips to Kenya. Critic John Barkham in The New York Times Book Review section called the book the work of a brand new Ruark, capable "of turning out a huge and frightening novel."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Newsweek, loc. cit.

<sup>36</sup>Newsweek, loc. cit.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

Newsweek called Robert Ruark a didactic, unflinching reporter

who has adopted East Africa, especially Kenya, as his second home and knows as much about it as perhaps any American living. He is also, when the light is wrong, an arrogant, boastful bore.<sup>38</sup>

The fact that the "light is all too often wrong through Robert Ruark's Africa" is not all Ruark's fault. His aim is to show

the Africa you don't read about . . . . You can't judge it . . . . You can't try the people for putting an old woman out to die. This is their way of life. These are their customs. It wouldn't work if they had to live in America, and our way of life wouldn't work in Africa, and that's the most important point.<sup>39</sup>

Ruark's detractors called him Fascist, warmonger, racebaiter, horse hater and sadist; nevertheless, his books sold by the hundreds of thousands of copies. But praised or damned, Ruark was cut from a recognizable pattern.

With Anzac hat slouched at a rakish angle and chin jutting out dangerously beneath his luxuriant mustache, he was the hard-boiled, sentimental newspaper man turned novelist, a familiar figure in American letters.<sup>40</sup>

Ruark's appraisal of Something of Value was that he had done the best he could with the tools he had. He said,

It wasn't a story about Peter Pan and my name ain't Mary. Look, I ain't humble and I ain't played Uriah Heep

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<sup>38</sup>"Their Way of Life," Newsweek Magazine, (May 28, 1962), p. 60.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

lately. . . . During the two years I was writing the book, I did 65 magazine pieces and sold them. I managed to shoot a couple of tigers. I fished in New Zealand. I don't wind up a beachcomber, and I come back with a bestseller.<sup>41</sup>

Of himself Ruark says, "I started out to be a man. Glad, sad, puzzled, occasionally triumphant."<sup>42</sup> "I'm a pretty ordinary hack," was one of his most-quoted self-appraisals. "I don't evaluate myself as a heavy thinker."<sup>43</sup>

Robert Ruark had a "facile gift for expressing aversion amusingly and in facetiously ungrammatical style."<sup>44</sup> He poked fun at bankers and progressive education, southern cooking, psychiatrists, Texans and the historical novel. Grenadine Etching and Grenadine's Spawn embodied this last hatred. In I Didn't Know It Was Loaded, published in 1948, and One for the Road, published in 1949, there were forty passages lampooning the American scene. An extended trip to Africa occasioned Horn of the Hunter in 1953 as well as Something of Value in 1955.<sup>45</sup>

Of Something of Value, one critic commented that the literary value of this slugging book about the struggle

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Max J. Herzberg and the staff of Thomas Y. Crowell Company, The Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1962), p. 982.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

between whites and Mau Mau in Kenya had always been a moot point.<sup>46</sup> The book is a powerful indictment of man's incredible inhumanity to man, declared Ruark in defending his work, and is "the story of a people who went from the Stone Age to jet propulsion in fifty years and got a near fatal case of the bends. It is no story of hunting and the beauty of African landscape," Ruark warned.<sup>47</sup>

Most of Ruark's weaknesses are the not uncommon frailties of literary newspaper men.

He is obliged to be gruff at regular intervals, whether the gruffness is appropriate or not. He is addicted to frequent coarse and carnal expressions (which are never permitted in newspaper columns). But on the whole, Ruark distinguishes himself by definite and original opinions about things in the world around him.<sup>48</sup>

The Honey Badger, the story of a writer corrupted by success, is a thinly disguised autobiography in which, of course, the names have been changed. The honey badger, or African ratel, is a vicious beast which goes for the groin rather than the jugular vein. It kills, not for food, but rather for the sheer joy of killing.

This is Ruark's leitmotif and symbol for women and life itself. Alec Barr is the hero of this long and apparently honest book. He lives a life which is not all weltschmerz.

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<sup>46</sup>Good Housekeeping, (June, 1957), 144:236.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>New York Times, (October 23, 1949), p. 16.

It is the abundant life of women, wives, whiskey, war, and words.<sup>49</sup>

In this, Ruark's last book, he managed to weave artfully the threads of his impending doom into the fabric of the narrative. According to one critic, H. L. Rosofsky, this was Ruark's grand summing up and is well worth the reading. "There may be no more Ruark," said Rosofsky.<sup>50</sup>

Posthumous books are sad occasions, especially when the book is a legacy of weakness.<sup>51</sup> Newsweek described this last novel as "containing the essence of everything that made Ruark an Osterized puree of Hemingway, Spillane and Hugh Hefner."<sup>52</sup> The dedication of The Honey Badger sets the tone immediately: "This book is for all the nice girls, willingly or otherwise, who supplied the vital statistics without which there would be no book."<sup>53</sup>

Ruark's The Honey Badger becomes but a sad memento mori. "All this toughy talky, all this after-shave wisdom about fellows and girls makes the reader brood gloomily over the book as if it were the skull in the graveyard scene of 'Hamlet.'"<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Library Journal, (September 1, 1965), 90:3477.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Newsweek Magazine, (October 4, 1965), 66:103B.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

According to one news release, Ruark, at the time of his death, left an estate in Britain valued at \$66,942. His property at Palamos, Spain, was left to a friend, Marilyn Kaytor, and half of his residuary estate to his former wife, Virginia Webb Ruark. The author left \$50,000 to his secretary, Alan Ritchie, and his car to his friend, Harvey Matson. His estate in other countries is believed to be much larger than his British holdings.<sup>55</sup>

Robert Ruark died in a London hospital July 1, 1965, at the age of forty nine.<sup>56</sup> He died of an internal hemorrhage. "His friends knew, if they did not say, that his hard living style was partly responsible."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>London (AP), op. cit.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Newsweek Magazine, (July 12, 1965), 66:54.

## CHAPTER III

### AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED VALUES IN THE HONEY BADGER

In The Honey Badger, Ruark chronicles the adventures, sexual and otherwise, of Alec Barr, a prominent author who is the toast of New York's cafe society. Like Ruark himself, Barr is unable to taste real happiness although he quaffs from many cups. He is dissatisfied with life in general and himself in particular--without ever really knowing why.

Much of his antagonism is directed toward his wife, Amelia, from whom he runs away several times as he seeks to escape a painful reality that he never quite defines. Barbara, Penny, Jill and Amelia are all chapters in his attempt to find happiness--or at least satisfaction--in various pseudo-conjugal relationships. After a number of these affairs have turned to ashes in his mouth and a young wife has proved too much for him, he finds himself dying from a particularly painful form of cancer and is persuaded by one of his wife-stand-ins to return to Amelia so he can be cared for in his last days. The denouement is a bleak one for one who had been such a renowned roué.

While the story plot of The Honey Badger is more than slightly seamy, it nevertheless hangs on some rather obvious values held by the author.

<sup>10</sup> Time Magazine, (November 11, 1957),

<sup>11</sup> Ruark, The Honey Badger, pp. 115.

## FAMILY

No doubt, one of the major influences on Robert Ruark was his home life, and his mother in particular. He hated his mother.<sup>58</sup> It is said that The Honey Badger is autobiographical.<sup>59</sup> If this assumption is accepted, then the notion that Ruark hated his mother must also be accepted in the light of Alec Barr's feelings toward his mother. To understand Barr's attitude toward family-related values, then an insight into the combination of his early environment and family relations is necessary.

Barr's hatred for his mother made the rest of his war with the world tepid.<sup>60</sup> As a grown man, the thought of his mother never failed to disturb him. She boasted of "understanding" children, of being a "pal" to children, of "getting along well" with the friends of her child; but this unwanted togetherness embarrassed Alec. Alec wanted parents who ran a house on regular hours and had stated times for meals. He never thought of his mother as "mother" but called her instead by her given name, Emma. He wished that she would devote more time to his father and less effort to making a companion of himself as well as less time trying to

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<sup>58</sup>Robert Ruark, The Honey Badger (Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1965), p. 165.

<sup>59</sup>Time Magazine, (November 11, 1957), 70:136.

<sup>60</sup>Ruark, The Honey Badger, loc. cit.

appear perpetually young before his friends.<sup>61</sup>

At first, Alec's father tried to keep his wife in womanly submission at home; but James Barr was a "frustrated, ineffectual man, blond like Alec, diffident to the point of self-effacement . . . ."62 Emma Barr, on the other hand was strapping and importunate and nagged her husband constantly. She outweighed her husband by forty pounds physically and "by forty tons in authority."<sup>63</sup>

Alec Barr grew up in an atmosphere of constant bickering and shouted recriminations of charges and countercharges, with no meal free of agitation.<sup>64</sup> As for Alec's grandmother, he merely disliked her for her negative, reproachful relationship with his grandfather.

Hatred of his mother had begun roughly at the age of three or four when Alec first became conscious "that his mother for all her self-professed competence, all her hearty activity in the life of the town, really despised her husband."<sup>65</sup> She disliked the idea of motherhood and was jealous and envious of her brother and father and meddled in the lives of everyone around her "while her own dishes went unwashed."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

For the first few years of human consciousness, Alec was helpless before his mother's "unbridled energy, aimless activity, and unleashed garrulousness."<sup>67</sup> Through a combination of family circumstances, Alec Barr was alone for the most part in his formative years. He reveled in this loneliness.<sup>68</sup>

When Alec was about twelve years old, his mother rented the upstairs rooms of their home to four school teachers, "each of whom appeared to own a ceaseless supply of slack-lipped boy friends."<sup>69</sup> Although Alec was discouraged by his parents from going upstairs, occasionally he would slip up in the afternoon to puff a forbidden cigarette.

He was deeply drawn to the atmosphere of tousled femininity; the slips and stockings flung helter-skelter, the smell of powder and perfume and, from the kitchen, the not-infrequent odor of raw corn whiskey.<sup>70</sup>

It was from this environment that Alec Barr graduated from high school with the highest honors in his class and was proved by test to own the highest intelligence quotient in the state. The year was 1929.<sup>71</sup> His next step was college.

Somehow, Alec Barr managed to go to college where he was a "nobody."<sup>72</sup> For Barr, college was to be remembered as a bad dream.<sup>73</sup> He realized that pants were unimportant if

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

you owned some but very, very important if you did not. This, he felt, applied equally to a college education. In the commercial life to come, the man without the degree would stand trouserless.<sup>74</sup> In college, Barr would wear no gabardine suit, would not drive a shiny car, nor date the prettiest girl.<sup>75</sup>

After Alec graduated, every time he thought of college he cringed. For Alec, college was mercifully finished.

However, it was on the advice of a professor of journalism in college that his life found meaningful direction. Because of Alec's obvious writing talent, the old professor influenced the young man to take a job on a small town paper and helped him secure the position where Alec "would learn a lot about human nastiness--a necessity if one was to become a writer."<sup>76</sup>

"You can't sit down and call yourself a novelist . . . until you've lived some, had some experiences, learned to work under pressure, learned the tricks and shortcuts," the professor advised him.<sup>77</sup> The professor told him that the fastest way to this end was to break in on a newspaper. "This way you eat while you learn; you get shoes on your feet and a coat on your back while you edge up your tools," he said.<sup>78</sup> The old professor's encouragement proved to be the

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

motivation that Alec needed.

Beginning with his mother, Ruark (or Alec) was deeply impressed with the role that women played in his life. For him they had both positive and negative values.

It is in his book, The Honey Badger, that Ruark uses his hero, Alec, to experience various relationships with women.

#### WOMEN

Alec's most lasting relationship with a woman was with his first wife, Amelia. However, soon after they were married they settled into "uxorious boredom." Alec showed early symptoms of rebelling against structured situations.

Monday night was now inflexibly devoted to supper with the family, and Alec developed an active case of acute, if psychosomatic, indigestion at the idea of a lifetime of meals which [were served] . . . Monday seven-sharp . . . . Why have I got to look forward to nothing but a lifetime of Monday night suppers and Lowell Thomas? Why the hell do we have to live by routine . . . ?<sup>79</sup>

The whole idea of marriage was "perversely fascinating to Alec Barr--fascinating in its entire connotation of legal fornication, pride of possession . . . ." <sup>80</sup>

In his early teens, Alec had had a sexually traumatic experience with the school teachers who lived upstairs in his mother's house. This experience left him disappointed,

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

distrustful, and abominating all women. He hated his family for permitting activity that he knew to be evil.<sup>81</sup>

Barr felt that "marriage was nothing but a series of elaborate deceptions and compensations anyhow, mostly based on good manners and on bloody sarcasm."<sup>82</sup> This could possibly be attributed to a combination of his grandfather's philosophy and his own family life.

It was with this philosophy that he began dating Amelia. Desperately poor, he looked at the wealthy girl as

. . . a figure beyond touch. In Amelia, he saw a girl who had never known family shame; a girl who had never pleaded with the Dean of Admissions about a loan; he saw a girl who selected a sorority from a choice of several and had never known the correct spelling of blackball. He saw a girl whose family signed automatically at the country club in the solid responsibility of paying . . . .<sup>83</sup>

All this was the complete opposite of the atmosphere in which Alec had been reared.

Alec had no conscience regarding the number of intimate affairs he had had before he met Amelia or while he was dating her, for that matter. Even after she told him that he would not be her first lover, Alec wanted sexual intercourse with her to wait for marriage. He said, "Boys don't like honesty in girls, I guess. They want to be fooled even if they know they're being fooled."<sup>84</sup> Alec, telling Amelia

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., pp. 173-174.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 239.

that he did not know why people made a fuss about purity in women and thought it smart for a fellow to sow his oats, confessed that he was no "rose geranium."<sup>85</sup>

In Alec, Amelia saw a haggard young man on the verge of exploding and wondered what it would be like to share the explosion.<sup>86</sup> She shared the explosions, not the least of which was the night some years after they were married that he walked out of her life and into the arms of Barbara Bayne. Said Alec, ". . .It was one of those days when nothing works. Suddenly I thought I would go tearing mad if I didn't get out."<sup>87</sup>

Near the end of his affair with Barbara, she accused him of wanting to "go back and chain yourself to a typewriter and whimper and be bored so that you can run away again."<sup>88</sup> She told him that he did not want a real woman but a mother to spank him when he was bad and kiss him when well. She told him that he was afraid to take on a real woman permanently!<sup>89</sup>

A summation of his values where women are concerned is found in the following statement:

Remorse gorged him again as he remembered his first serious infidelities--in Washington, out of spite; in

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

London, because the bombs were falling, and you mightn't see tomorrow. In San Francisco, because you were shipping out for the last assignment of the war, and you knew you would either live or die but you wouldn't get back until they wrapped up the Japs. In Melbourne and Sydney, because you were accustomed to it by now, and after four years your conscience no longer gnawed you when you met a pretty girl and took her to bed, allowing yourself to be briefly, semi-in-love, or at least fond of the fondness, susceptible to the liking.<sup>90</sup>

#### RELIGION

Although there are many religious references in The Honey Badger, most of them are used in a humorous or, at best, a sacrilegious vein. Reared in North Carolina in the twentieth century, Ruark was no doubt exposed to religious experiences and appears to be familiar with at least some scripture passages, although he claimed to be an atheist.<sup>91</sup> Alec Barr's many serious references to God contradict this claim:

Thank God again for all His graces . . . .<sup>92</sup>

This seems to be my day for thanking God.<sup>93</sup>

They sat silent, and Alec thanked God . . . .<sup>94</sup>

God help me, . . . .<sup>95</sup>

If there's a heaven above I think God took a couple of practice swings here.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 352.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 446.

Typical of his misuse of the scriptures is

Seek and ye shall find. This was the day when I was fresh out of green pastures. Come in, come in, and I will maketh you to lie down beside a mint julep. This is a Twenty-Third Psalm sort of day.<sup>97</sup>

And, "Merry Christmas," Alec said. "Enter the junior member of the Three Wise Men, bearing gifts of frankincense and, you should pardon the expression, Bloody Myrrh."<sup>98</sup> Also, "Man shall not live by bed alone."<sup>99</sup>

One inconsistency which may or may not be significant but which is used throughout the book is the use of capital or lower case "g" in the word "God." For example:

What did you say the name of that goddam health farm was?<sup>100</sup>

Then, God pity me . . . .<sup>101</sup>

Thank God the Series starts next week.<sup>102</sup>

I don't want to know his Goddamned name.<sup>103</sup>

Cynical may be the best description of Barr's religious values. This cynicism is apparent in statements throughout the book. For example, to a cab driver Alec said, "Keep the change, like I said. See you in heaven. Just ask for Alec. Somebody will let you in."<sup>104</sup> In dialogue with his

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 548.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 398.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

college professor of journalism, Alec was told

. . .and you'll even have to go to church, if only to see how poison-pious a bunch of sanctimonious bastards can be on the Seventh Day, after they've spent the rest of the week stealing, snapping garters, drinking whiskey on the sly, and talking dirty mean to the neighbors.<sup>105</sup>

After a conversation with a friend who had been extolling Amelia's virtues and admonishing Alec to go back to her, Alec said,

I'm perfectly willing to admit a great many truths in what you say. But may I, please, may I, say just one tiny word in behalf of Barr, the author who has received more good unsought advice than any writing man since the good Lord Jesus got the word on the Mount?<sup>106</sup>

Of Christmas, Alec said, "What a rotten day to get yourself born."<sup>107</sup>

If there were any one thing Alec had a reverence for, it was elephants.

. . .when you see the futility of politicians, the needlessness of wars, the utter damned stupid cruelty of man to himself, the elephant stands as a monument to God in His Wisdom.<sup>108</sup>

If he so valued one of God's creatures, one might wonder how he could kill such a magnificent animal. He answers,

I shoot him for his soul, and his teeth are the monument, as the Cross is revered in Christ's name. And I shoot him when he is ready for heaven, and I don't want him pulled down by people . . . . People who would reduce his flesh to tortured tatters and his tusks to

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 402.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 436.

stupid religious carvings, billard balls, or bangles for some Indian wench's wrists. I shoot him to keep him, him and the memory of how he actually was.<sup>109</sup>

Following this dialogue when Alec was accused of playing God, he responded by giving his own philosophy of religion:

Everybody plays a lot of God, one way or another. Some do it more stupidly than others. And I do not shoot all the elephants I see. When I shoot an old elephant I shoot the memory of man and my particular hope of Heaven, which would be to be put down at ultimate prime by any man--or beast--like me.<sup>110</sup>

#### SEX

Alec had read a phrase somewhere in an English novel-- "she is for marriage"--and that is how he felt about Amelia. He knew that Amelia was no virgin; but he still saved her for marriage, although during his courtship he left Amelia's house one night following a date and immediately made a date with another girl.

But Alec, with a restlessness he could neither justify nor quite understand, took an occasional night off from true love to seek the purging release of purest debasing lust.<sup>111</sup>

This value pattern continued even after marriage. In addition to sex expression with his wife, Alec felt a need of a different experience with others. "Their sex life had deteriorated almost immediately . . ." is a description of Alec and Amelia's relationship soon after marriage.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 436.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 256.

Since sex was terribly important to him, the hero of The Honey Badger was obsessed with the fear of impotency.

. . .once more he was panic-stricken at the necessity of proving himself in the minutes ahead.<sup>113</sup>

. . .Alec found to his horror that he was completely impotent.<sup>114</sup>

Desperately, Alec wondered if he would ever be physically able to perform the act of love.<sup>115</sup>

The fact that the hero died from the particular condition which took his life was something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The cause of death was cancer of the prostate gland.

Heterosexual activity played a major role in the life of Alec Barr. Indirectly, so did homosexuality.

Since Barr was absent from his wife's company more than he was present, she suffered severely for male companionship.

She did not actively seek extra-marital sexual expression. Her female peer group relations were apparently dissatisfying, so she sought and found what for her amounted to a sexless male creature who had the value structure of a female yet furnished the face-saving appearance of being a male companion. She found a homosexual man named Francis.

According to Alec Barr, "A good trustworthy house pansy is as necessary to a modern New York marriage as the

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 554.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 543.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 369.

license and the preacher."<sup>116</sup> Amelia agreed that a girl had to have some sort of escort who would not arouse a lot of gossip and who could be depended on in a crisis. And if one was married to Alec Barr, there was always some kind of crisis.<sup>117</sup>

It was a fact that most of Amelia's crowd turned to the homosexual camp-followers for companionship. "Not the swishers, not the transvestites or the screamers, but charming, willing, thoughtful homosexuals . . . men who were really interested in female doings."<sup>118</sup>

Even though Alec accepted homosexuals as a necessary part of his world, could his over-reaction to them have been an indication of his own tendencies toward latent homosexuality? This was shown on more than one occasion but especially in a night club with Barbara Bayne one evening when he said,

'I'm not a sensitive artist, I'm an insensitive man who greatly dislikes faggots. All faggots, but you in particular.' He pressed one hand on the chest of the nearest pansy, and pushed. The fellow stumbled backward and fell over a chair. 'Get the hell out of my way,' Alec said, and turned to Barbara. 'You coming, or not?'<sup>119</sup>

It is possible that Alec's exaggerated reaction was indicative of latent homosexuality. Alec's best friend thought so when he said,

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

You know something about you, Barr? I think you've got a latent streak of faggot in you. I don't think you really like women at all. Love 'em, yes. But like 'em? I'm not so sure.<sup>120</sup>

In reply to a joke Alec made, his friend replied scowlingly,

It ain't all that funny. There's a twisted streak in you somewhere. You got this Mama complex about Amelia; almost a persecution complex. This girl never did you any harm. All she's done is love you, protect you, and maybe knock a few rough edges off you.<sup>121</sup>

#### RACE

While Ruark allowed Alec to have deep emotional reactions to persons of the minority group known as homosexuals, where racial and ethnic groups were concerned in The Honey Badger strong emotional reactions to race were limited to the character, Sandy Lang.

East African Game Warden Sandy Lang, whom Alec admires, dramatically experiences the differences between his white culture and the black African culture when he deals with the black man who has irresponsibly allowed the honey badger to kill all of the game warden's prize fowl. Sandy's patience has worn thin when he discusses Africa. ". . .It's the bloody people that drive me up the wall," he says.<sup>122</sup> He is

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 453.

impatient for the blacks to learn white ways, white proficiencies, the white levels of skill performance. He continues,

That stupid nugu has just one job, to lock up the birds, and he smokes another pipe of hemp or gets himself drunk off pombe and the whole purpose of his life is forgotten.<sup>123</sup>

Sandy emphasizes further, "You can't understand it, really--the frustration one acquires from dealing with Africans."<sup>124</sup>

Alec reveals recognition of changing racial patterns when he observes about New York's cafe society,

The town had grown enormously in ten years. It didn't even seem strange to see black faces in the Grill or the upstairs dining room now--black faces seated at the tables instead of waiting on them.<sup>125</sup>

The main character in the book is accused of racial prejudice by one of the women in his life as she says,

You make me sick! You really do make me ill . . . . I began to wonder when we first talked politics. I don't think you like Jews. I think you hate Negroes.<sup>126</sup>

Ruark depicts anti-Semitism when he quotes Amelia's father as saying,

I think that fellow Hitler is good for the Germans. They needed a kick to get them started again after the last war. If it hadn't been for Hitler the Communists and the Jews would of had Germany by now.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 488.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 228.

And at another time the same man said, "Hitler's sure got the Jews on the run. About time, too. We could use a lot more of that over here."<sup>128</sup>

Ruark again uses ethnic differentiation when Amelia's father is talking to Alec:

. . .like this--this Catholic fellow that's coming around tonight. You'd think his uncle was the Pope.

. . .I think you've got your head screwed on right. And I know you're not a Catholic because I asked Amelia.<sup>129</sup>

Again the author sets forth a similar racial value in the thoughts of Amelia, who is considering adopting a child:

She supposed there were masses of Japs and refugee Chinese as well--Germans, perhaps?--but it would be better to stick to something less fraught with eventual problems. No Jews, no Arabs, nothing with slant eyes or peculiar colors. There would be school to consider.<sup>130</sup>

Again almost as an aside Alec says, ". . .Korea was a . . . nothing war. You weren't allowed to cross the Yalu, and killing Koreans was about as pointless as going to school with them."<sup>131</sup>

Shortly thereafter Barr uses slurring, racially tinted words to make a point:

And there, Barr, is your big decision. It's a little larger than a flock of Congolese coons in a blackmail conference in Brussels. Will we wed the wench, or will we keep right on being part-time lover boy and full-time jerk?<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., p. 388.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., p. 423.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 492.

The hero is almost unconcerned as he reveals, "You won't hear that 'Bwana' very much pretty soon . . . it's going out of style."<sup>133</sup>

Alec is almost insulting as he unemphatically says,

". . . You can't really make many African friends yelling 'Boy!' any more. Winds of change, and all that. Things've changed since Tom Mboya got his picture on TIME's cover. Big deal."<sup>134</sup>

When the conversation on the subject of race continues, Barr becomes somewhat clinical but still detached where his interest in the topic is concerned:

What's he like, this Mboya?

Smart. Too smart by half, as the British would say. Power-seeker. Got very mean eyes. Slanty. Like a leopard. I think he really hates being black. That's possibly why he surrounds himself with so many white people. I think he sees himself as white, and one day he'll kiss his elbow and turn into a Swede.

. . . Trouble with Mboya is he looked down on savage Africans. In his own words, he 'doesn't like naked niggers with spears.' They've got to go.<sup>135</sup>

Ruark describes thus an argument between Alec and Barbara: "They wrangled happily over words, and fought furiously for an hour over Barbara's use of the word 'exploited' in connection with British colonial policy."<sup>136</sup> Here Ruark has his characters debate about racial exploitation.

Ruark's use of race in The Honey Badger while playing no major part in promoting the plot, reflects deeply

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. 493.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p. 494.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., p. 495.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., p. 586.

ingrained racial prejudice--if Barr is really Ruark.

## WAR

War plays an important part in Alec Barr's life. To Amelia when he is trying to rationalize why he is going off to World War II, Alec declares,

I don't want to wait to be called. I don't want to have to go to war. I don't want to wait until all the shine's rubbed off it, and it's full of farmers and deferred husbands. It's the only big adventure I'm ever likely to see, and I want to be part of it.<sup>137</sup>

Amelia is furious with Alec for wanting to run off "to play sailor when he didn't really have to go at all."<sup>138</sup> Alec could qualify for exemption as a married man before the Selective Service Act, could be a correspondent or have a desk job in Washington in public relations or intelligence.

But Alec does not want to be a correspondent. He does not want to see a war from outside in; he wants to see it from "inside out."<sup>139</sup> There is a great deal of glamour in it for him.

Amelia accuses Alec of wanting to go to war the same way he wants to go to spring training, the same way he likes to cover out-of-town assignments. She indicates that he wants to go to war just to "get out of the house!"<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid.

Alec counters by saying, "Perhaps if we had children. I know. It's my fault. Perhaps that's why I want to go to war. . . ."141

Although Alec values the "love of a good woman" and feels that it could settle him down into the "potency of production," still the pull of war wins when the time comes for the ultimate decision.

He yearned for the steadiness, the respectability, the quiet order of matrimony, the eight-hour sleep and the regular, uncomplicated sex, the good meals, the sobriety, the evening around the fire, but the unquiet portion of him yearned for this war they discussed . . . this unborn war which would whisk him off and away from the very things he craved.<sup>142</sup>

It appears that Alec looks for a war to attend--just the way one attends a bullfight. Years later Alec finds another war in Africa to observe and report. This war to Alec means watching the spirit of nationalism quickly spread through Africa. He thinks it is not going to be a matter of years, but only a matter of months, and that everybody else will "dash headlong on the heels--Somalia, Guinea, Nigeria, the whole kit and kaboodle. One great big minstrel show."<sup>143</sup>

Ruark's abhorrence of war is reflected in the narrative of Alec's abbreviated love affair with Sheila, who was killed when Nazi bombs razed her block. The destructiveness and the

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 425.

separation of death and components of warfare are not in any way desirable to Ruark.

In addition to the rapid, far-reaching changes which war brings, Barr learns of the permanence of death when he loses his young assistant reported in an African war. Alec reflects,

I think the death of young Larry Orde hit me harder in terms of man's impermanence, than anything since the war, and the casual way that life is dismissed and death computed in today's Africa is a shocking experience in terms of the old nightingale in Berkeley Square and tea and scones in front of the fire.<sup>144</sup>

Near the end of his war-time experience, Alec further expresses his views toward the permanency of death:

Being dead, in terms of permanency, meant no more women, no more rare steaks, no more moonrises and sunsets; no more consciousness of autumn's clean, woodsmoky tang; no more spring's tender-maiden vibrancy; no more winter's cold, smooth womanly serenity outside the fire's rosy core; no more pleasant, sweaty, sex-spent August lethargy.<sup>145</sup>

Here he lists almost serially his values one by one. In another conversation with Luke, his house boy, he asks the final unanswerable question of himself. This, in a sentence, tells the story of Alec Barr, boy reporter.

For Alec, war and death were closely related if not synonymous. Upon learning of the suicide of Ernest Hemingway, he discusses the subject with Luke.

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid., p. 518.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 502.

'A Jap killed Pyle,' Luke said. 'Mister Hemingway shot himself.'

'Very little difference in the method. They both gave themselves wholly to a time . . . not their own country, precisely, but for their age--their time. . . .I shot an elephant once. . . .'

'Yeah, you told me, Boss. The old, old boy.'

'That's right,' Alec said. 'I did the same job for the elephant that Ernest Hemingway did for himself with his own gun.'

And where the bloody hell does that put you, Alec Barr?<sup>146</sup>

In summary, the book tends to deal symbolically with the phenomena of life, death and defeatism (destructive elements of life). Ruark through his characters in the book emphatically states that religion, family, sex, women, and war--in fact, life in general--are all bound together in a hopeless, futile and non-productive manner. And such a scene is set against a background of literal terror. This terror is demonstrated by the manner in which the honey badger, a woman, or life in general denies man his ultimate in self expression just at the time when he appears on the verge of realizing his most cherished dreams.

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid., pp. 540-541.

## CHAPTER IV

### AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED VALUES IN SOMETHING OF VALUE

Something of Value by Robert Ruark is a description of the society of Kenya in East Africa during the last day's of British colonial rule and the violent native uprisings that were to produce independence. The gore and destruction of the Mau Mau uprisings in that section of Africa during the 1950's are described in detail and serve as the background for much of the plot.

The book revolves around Peter McKenzie, a white hunter and farmer, and his society with its rapidly changing values. Ruark focuses on the gathering storm clouds which threaten to disrupt if not end, the lives of those who will be struck by it. He shows the negative effects of radical, swift, ugly change on persons, families, communities and other groups, both black and white. The book is about social conflict, the feelings of people caught up in it, and their changing relationships to one another.

Ruark considers various social systems plus the mores, norms and laws which make up the social structure. Then he sets the structure into motion allowing the reader to view firsthand the devastating effects when an in-group attempts to destroy systematically the out-group way of life without substituting "something of value" in the place of that which

was destroyed. Ruark addresses himself to the problem through one of his characters in his book:

What in the name of God Almighty are you trying to do to these people? You tell them to quit killing the Masai and not to dance the big dances and don't circumcise the women. You teach 'em to read and write and don't give 'em anything to use it on. The men who used to be warriors are spivs in Nairobi. The wenches want lipstick and jazz-dance halls. On the very few shambas that try to operate in the old way, there's a Government howl every time they slaughter a goat for a powwow. You take away all the old stuff and you don't give them anything to replace it with. They've always killed upside-down babies and first-born twins. You're going to call this murder? You're going to correct it by putting Karanja in jail, p'aps, and maybe hanging the two old hags that only did what a thousands generations of old hags have always done?<sup>147</sup>

Ruark does not set out to describe a culture but does so brilliantly as he tells the story of the white hero, Peter, and those closely related to him, especially a black boy named Kimani.

#### FAMILY

Traditionally, in the Kikuyu tribe to which Kimani belongs, when a baby is born feet first, he is smothered. This tribal practice is socially sanctioned and thought of as a good act, not as murder or breaking of the law, as it is viewed by the white landowners and their laws.

Karanja, Kimani's father, has several wives. When one of these has a baby that is born feet first, the baby's father

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<sup>147</sup>Robert Ruark, Something of Value (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1955), p. 97.

orders it smothered. Arrested and sent to jail, at his trial when asked if he believes in the moral imperative, "Thou shalt not kill," Karanja answers that since a child must be one year of age before it is considered by the tribal custom to be human, then he has not killed a child but rather has done away with an unwanted demon. When asked whether or not he would commit the same act again under similar circumstances, he answers that he would. Consequently, he is found guilty but later paroled only to die of tuberculosis soon thereafter.

Learning of this act, Kimani goes immediately to join the Mau Mau in order to fight that which has now cost him his father.

A push-pull situation develops where Kimani and Peter, who had been boyhood friends, are concerned. Kimani is being pushed out of one group, his old Kikuyu tribe, and pulled into another, the Mau Mau insurrectionists.

When Kimani is assigned by the Mau Mau to go on a raiding party, his objective is to capture guns. In accomplishing the objective, the raiders unintentionally kill a native houseboy. Although Kimani is only an accomplice to this murder, his self image is changed in that now he sees himself more identified with the Mau Maus than with the white settlers with whom he grew up. Later, back in the rebels' mountain headquarters, he is administered the ritual oath of Mau Mau membership. This is the second major act or

event which pulls Kimani out of his tribal family and pushes him into the Mau Mau group.

The oath he takes is as follows:

If I am told to bring in the head of a European, I will do so, or this oath will kill me and all my family.

If I am called by my brotherhood in the middle of the night and am naked, I will go forth naked, or this oath will kill me and all my family, and if I betray my brotherhood, this oath will kill me and all my family.

If I see anyone stealing anything from a European, I will say nothing, or this oath will kill me and all my family.

At all times I will say that all land belongs only to the Kikuyu, or this oath will kill me and all my family.

If I send my children to Government schools, this oath will kill me and all my family.

If I send my children to mission schools, this oath will kill me and all my family.

If I am called on to rescue Jomo Kenyatta, I will do so, or this oath will kill me.<sup>148</sup>

The native value given to the family is clearly in evidence here. The family is included in each vow with the exception of one. The oath-taker is asked to place his most valuable possession, his family, "on the line" in behalf of the Mau Mau cause.

Black magic versus white magic is compared in each vow. Black and white values are set off against each other. By the denial of children's rights to attend church or

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 300.

government schools, the process of socialization is altered to meet the wishes of the Mau Maus.

Although torn between two value systems, Kimani takes the oath when it is pressed upon him.

Since the wish for favorable response is one of man's important needs and since Kimani has been denied this approval by the group in which he grew up, hesitantly he now turns to membership in a hostile group which he does not like in order to satisfy his wish for revenge. Membership in this group is for him merely a means to an end, but the oath confirms his membership and is stringently binding.

Kimani immediately identifies with his new group by "gathering cooking stones" with the daughter of the group leader.<sup>149</sup> This act is tantamount to marriage with her. Soon she is carrying his child.

Social change is in the air. Henry McKenzie, Peter's father, sums up the situation when he says to Jeff,

My dear boy, you know it's a lot of bloody nonsense and I know it's a lot of bloody nonsense, but the facts are these: You smacked Kimani. The hyena dropped dung inside the compound. A vulture flew over the hut. Wangu dropped a beer gourd and broke it. A baby was born feet first, and the old hags smothered it and chucked it out for the fisis to eat. This is all normal procedure for the old times, but the P.C.'s been told to start making examples of some of the more flagrant native violations of the raj. This comes, possibly, as a result of that Masai herdsman running a spear into the Game Department bloke last year in that dispute over the white cow.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup>Ibid., p. 343

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., pp. 104-105.

## WOMEN

Women play an important role in many societies, but they are often valued quite differently by different groups. For example, Ruark specifically spells out the difference between the black and the white man's definition of women. The black man describes a woman and his particular value for her thus:

What is a manamouki exactly? And this business of eland straps, whatever they are?

Well, a manamouki is the best word for female in Swahili. It means 'she-thing.' Whether it applies to animal or human, that is what a she-thing is called, 'manamouki.' There isn't any word for sweetheart or fiancée or debutante or wife or loved one. It's just manamouki. And when you care for your manamouki very much, you buy her some eland straps--very strong and supple, from the skin of the big antelope--so that she can carry more firewood and potato tops and banana fronds. This way you know the man loves you, because it pains him to think that you've got to make two trips up that long hill, when with the right straps you could carry all the stuff in one trip.<sup>151</sup>

When Peter finishes describing to Holly how the native East African society views a woman, Holly in contrast tells Peter what life is like for a woman in the civilized society of the city. She follows this by a description of her plans for a female future in the African country.

Peter, I'm a very serious girl. It was fun growing up in London, and fun seeing Europe, and the parties were fine, and some of the people were nice, but it's not for

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

me. There is something sort of sad and sick in the cities that I don't like a bit. Everybody running about and dashing madly and complaining and frightened. Everything rationed and controlled. Every day a new set of crisis in the newspapers. Politicians screaming and cursing, and television blatting at you. People always getting married and divorced in the same year . . . . I used to wake up in the middle of the night and think about how the Rift looks just as you go down the hill toward Naivasha, and I couldn't help but cry. All I want now is to go back to the farm with Mum and Dad and the baby and just sort of sit quietly. And someday I hope to find a chap like Lisa's Jeff, say, a chap who loves me, and then I want to get married and have as many kids as we can afford.<sup>152</sup>

Soon Holly and Peter are married, but after only two nights of honeymoon a Mau Mau uprising at the home of Peter's sister takes him from his bride; and their relationship is never the same after that. Peter reflects on his relationship as he thinks,

It is funny what you miss . . . . I should be missing Holly terribly, but in one way I don't. Any more than I miss Nairobi after I've had a few days and nights of it. When all's said and done I reckon I'm a bush baby. I never really liked to wear a necktie.<sup>153</sup>

Perhaps it is the pressure of the time Peter and Holly are living in that is responsible for their marital difficulties. But Peter does not enjoy being at home, nor is he of the opinion that women generally enjoy being married. He says, however, that there might be an exception occasionally. "But they were rare, my oath, but they were bloody rare."<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., p. 504.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

Where Holly is concerned, Peter could be wrong in his analysis, for once she says, ". . . And I think I could have loved him so much and been such a good wife if all this mess hadn't happened."<sup>155</sup>

Other women on the farms are standing behind the decisions of their husbands who are leaving home to fight, but Holly and Peter's values for such mobility clash. She does not want him to leave.

What actually are you going to do, then? What's all so secret and takes you away from your farm when a man's needed now more than ever before? It seems to me your duty's plainly here. Your family's already suffered enough.<sup>156</sup>

Peter replies,

I'm not asking you to do anything other chaps haven't asked their women. This is your home. I'm not going to let myself be run off it, and neither are you. You'll stay, Holly, just like the rest of the women will stay. Or else we're finished before we start, you and I.<sup>157</sup>

#### RELIGION

Value systems, structures, and functions are changing in family relations, both black and white. They are also changing in the religious aspects of the lives of people, both black and white.

After carefully considering how his own tribe values women, Karanja stands thoroughly confused before the changes

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid., p. 588.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., p. 470.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid.

recommended to him by the white man's religion:

But now they tell us it is wicked to own more than one woman. You cannot be married in the Christian Church, they say, if you have a wife already. What are we to do with those other wives if we wish to follow the teachings of the Bwana Jesus? Turn them out to starve, perhaps? Is this the teaching of the Bwana Jesus Christ?<sup>158</sup>

Again the black man has been directed by outsiders to change his patterns of behavior, and he is confused. He knows what he is going away from, but he does not know into what he is going. He knows he is being asked to change his old values; but what, he asks himself, are the outsiders offering as satisfactory substitutes?

According to the black man, one fact is clear: where the old religious values offered a dependable and balanced way of life, the new way is grossly inconsistent:

They have given you a white man's God and they have told you that to marry more than one woman is not permitted by this God, although when the children go to the mission schools and read in the Big Book, it says often where the favorites of the white God in days long ago had many wives. Their God is a God who always changes his mind, and you cannot depend on him not to curse you.<sup>159</sup>

To the black man religion, family, race, sex, women and war have all been bound together simply. Now the uninvited white man has brought his God and made things so complex that life is almost intolerable under the new value system.

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<sup>158</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., p. 330.

Even some whites are grievously concerned over the irresponsible manner in which other whites have imposed a socio-religious change of values onto the blacks without socially nurturing them beyond the change.

Peter thinks to himself,

We took away a God they understood and tried to shove a white God into them and it didn't take, because a white God was like a white man, which meant that the white God would drink in the Norfolk, where they couldn't go except as servants, and the white God would clap his hands and yell 'Boy!' when he wanted something done.<sup>160</sup>

Matters for the blacks are made worse when, in addition to the black-white conflict of values, a third external force arises to plague and complicate the life of the natives. It is called the Mau Mau group, a band of political rebels which Kimani joins.

Since a group by definition is composed of members who share common meanings, values, and goals,<sup>161</sup> then it follows that the group, in order to survive, must socialize or inculcate into its members certain in-group values. Kimani's education is about to begin as a member of the Mau Mau speaks:

All the things the white man brought are part of a plot. . . . The bwanas built hospitals to cure us as a trick to gain our confidence. Once our confidence was gained, they gave us schools so that we might learn English and get good jobs. And once we had the schools and hospitals, then we were expected to go to churches and become Christians.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup>Ibid., p. 593.

<sup>161</sup>Goode, loc. cit.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

Of course, it is not likely that any church had devised such an overall strategy or plan. Evidently the church did go into East Africa and set up hospitals and schools in order to win converts, and the black man was correct in the description of the by-products of the change in his value structure.

An older man, a member of the Mau Maus, continues talking to Kimani:

Of course that is true. We could not learn English without adopting the Christian teachings. And what do they teach? That a man may not marry but one woman and still be a Christian. The white man has been very clever. He has separated us through cleverness. First he stole away the land and then he stole away our customs and finally he stole away our God.<sup>163</sup>

The Mau Mau was essentially correct in his analysis. Old values of religion, sex, women, race and family were falling at every turn; new values were replacing the old.

#### SEX

All human beings value sexuality to some degree, but certain social systems value it more highly than do others.

For example, the romantic aspect found in pre-marital man-woman relationships in the western civilizations is relatively absent in Kenya, East Africa, according to Ruark. "There is no proper 'love' between man and woman, because the woman is bought for goats and is used as a beast of burden."<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

In thinking to himself Karanja, the head black man on Henry McKenzie's farm, describes the manner in which his tribe values women:

They [white men] are all so very rich . . . . At first I never understood it, why they didn't take more women, so that they could breed more children and so that the women could work for them. But now I know that they do not know how to make women work, and so if a man had five wives he would have to work five times as hard as a man with one wife in order to please the five wives. Yet they lie always with each other's women and occasionally shoot each other or the women when the fact of lying with another's woman is discovered. It makes no sense. A woman is valuable, and to shoot her for sleeping with another man is as foolish as killing a cow because her calf is sired by another bull than your own. You still own the calf. A woman is made to lie with; women are tireless creatures who can accommodate many men, while a man can barely satisfy one woman with any frequency.<sup>165</sup>

The tribesmen hold their women in low esteem particularly in comparison with the place of women in other societies. Yet they have a set standard of moral values where their young people are concerned. Karanja, Kimani's father, accurately perceives the threat to these tribal mores as he compares sexual mores before and after social change:

How different it all is now, he thought. I do not understand much about it, but it cannot be very good. The children have no respect for elders. The young men hang about Nairobi, drinking and gambling. They have forgotten all the old ways, all the old good ways, and will not listen long enough to be taught. They know nothing of their people or of their people's law. They heed only the fool's talk of that Jomo Kenyatta, who has been across the seas to England. They join secret societies. They dance openly with young women, holding

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<sup>165</sup>Ibid., pp. 87-88.

them obscenely as white men do. They wear white man's clothes and lie with whores. They will not work their land. Only the old men and women work the land. The young people go to Nairobi to loaf and plot and get drunk in the bazaars. Only the old men should be allowed the right to a beer drink. . . .<sup>166</sup>

By contrast, it is evident that the hero, Peter, attaches value to sex expression, although fidelity to the marriage bed is not a part of his sexual ethic. Unlike Peter, Holly misses her mate terribly while he is away at war, although she is acutely aware of the fact that when at home her husband is usually drunk and ineffectual in bed.<sup>167</sup>

Both Holly and Peter are functioning under excessive tension and stress, which conditions tend to reduce the sex drive. Holly has all of the responsibilities of the marriage institution and almost none of the privileges. She takes care of Peter's sister, keeps house and tries to run the farm, all under terrible hardships.

Holly was only twenty-three and her honeymoon had lasted two nights and now her husband came home to grind his teeth and sweat and stumble and stagger and . . . forget he'd made a bloody botch of bed. She had to live with it but she did not have to like it.<sup>168</sup>

Ruark attributes the mutual failure in sex to the unstable situation:

If love meant rising in the night and unlocking and locking doors in order not to run the risk of making a baby, then many women whose bodies had grown accustomed

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<sup>166</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., p. 549.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid.

to their husbands took a simpler, more basic step toward the avoidance of baby-making. They slept with their husbands, but they rarely did anything more than sleep with their husbands. Which was generally just as well, quite all right, with the husbands. It was difficult to prowl forests by night and kill by day and then come home to pretty pillow-talk and a slap and a tickle.<sup>169</sup>

As Peter expresses it, "one needs peace for love, peace for relaxation and dalliance."<sup>170</sup> In Kenya on the farms after the war started there is no peace and no relaxation and no dalliance. However, Peter does observe the following about extra-marital exploits:

. . .When a bloke got into town, it seemed that suddenly little Prue Something or little Joan So-and-So looked alarmin' fine, and if there were enough grogs in the evening a man might wind up making a damn fool of himself and wondering next day what had led him to it and why, since he'd much better bed fare at home.<sup>171</sup>

But when Peter returns home to Holly from the mountains and fighting, he finds himself to be impotent.

His hands moved over her, and then his eyes opened wide in panic, almost in horror.

'No!' he said. 'No! I can't!' He hid his head in her shoulder, and once again his body shook with sobs.<sup>172</sup>

Even before marriage, Peter's ideas about sex are contradictory. Greeting Holly, whom he is to marry, upon her return to Africa from her schooling in London, Peter takes her to her hotel room following a happy day together. Although Holly invites Peter in for a nightcap, he refuses, saying that

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<sup>169</sup>Ibid., p.545.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., p. 468.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid.

he will see her the next day. Then he goes straight to the arms of an airline stewardess and spends the night with her.

Peter . . . went away to the manager's cottage, where there was a bottle of whisky. He took the bottle and crept quietly round to the stewardesses' cottage. There was a light in the window, and he rapped gently on the door.

The pilot, Michael, was lying on the sofa, his right hand languidly trailing the floor, where a freshly filled glass rested. His head was in the lap of the girl, Ruth, and she was stroking his face and occasionally putting a cigarette to his lips. She was wearing a negligee over nothing, and the pilot had taken his blouse and shoes off. Sitting curled on her feet in a chair, also wearing a negligee, was the girl Pamela. She smiled at Peter and got up, clopping in mules as she went to a sideboard on which a new drink sat. She handed the drink to Peter, then stood on tiptoe, heels rising from the mules, and kissed him on the mouth.

'It took you quite a long time,' she said, and led him into the bedroom. She closed and locked the door. Peter looked at the bottle in his hand. 'Well, at least I'm glad I brought the bottle,' he said. 'It looks like another sleepless night.'<sup>173</sup>

Since Holly and Peter desire but cannot attain satisfactory sexual union together, it is clear that their mutual frustration is likely to lead to separation. "And if you want a divorce I'm almost certain I can find time to supply the necessary grounds," are Peter's words to Holly.<sup>174</sup> To this Holly replies,

So it ends up like it always ends up in the books. I'm glad it's over, Holly thought, and went into the bedroom to weep.

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<sup>173</sup>Ibid., pp. 241-242.      <sup>174</sup>Ibid., p. 588.

And the awful thing is I'm relieved, Peter thought, because all along I saw it on the wall. Maybe I always was a bachelor.<sup>175</sup>

Peter's sex values attach little importance to traditional, monogamous marriage. And Ruark's antipathy toward homosexuality is noted in Holly's commentary on London society:

Half the men are pansies and the other half think that because they aren't pansies every woman they meet is panting to hop into bed with them, and they're not so far wrong at that. It sort of made me sick to my stomach.<sup>176</sup>

#### RACE

Peter, the hero, is a young white boy of fifteen years when the story begins. His best friend is Kimani, the son of Karanja, the head black man on Peter's father's farm. One of the first significant events in the book occurs when a neighboring white landowner, Jeff, who is to become the brother-in-law of the hero, slaps Kimani in the traditional manner of controlling natives. This is done after Peter curtly instructs Kimani, who starts to argue with him.

'Hit him,' Jeff said. 'With your fist.' Peter looked puzzled and a little frightened. 'Hit him!' Jeff said. 'Hit him hard!'

'No,' Peter said. 'No. I won't.'

Jeff walked over to Kimani and cuffed him across the face with the flat of his hand. 'Do what the Bwana says,

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<sup>175</sup>Ibid.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

suria!' he said in Swahili. 'Now and in a hurry or I will thrash you with a kiboko. And when the Bwana tells you something in the future, do what he says or maybe the Bwana will have to kill you to teach you obedience. Now, jump!'<sup>177</sup>

This is a study in the process of socialization which includes what one learns in order to adjust to society. Jeff, an older and respected male, directs Peter to use Kimani as a servant. This is something which Peter has never done before, for Kimani has always been considered as a brother and friend-- a relationship permitted children but not adults in colonialist Kenya.

Peter's value for personal friendship supercedes Jeff's value for the traditionally structured master-servant relationship, and he cannot comply. The seeds are thus sown for value conflicts within the social system of both Peter and Kimani.

A social system is a multiple of strategies which clash occasionally.<sup>178</sup> When Jeff slaps Kimani, two systems collide. If education may be described as the destruction of innocence, then this traumatic incident may be considered the beginning of Kimani's education in the ways of a white-dominated society. Kimani is understandably confused by this action:

He kept thinking about the slap Jeff Newton had given him. His father had never cuffed him. No one had ever hit him in anger. A father who struck a son would be guilty of a grievous sin, because he would be, in Kikuyu family structure, guilty of striking his own father, since eldest sons

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<sup>177</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>178</sup>Goode, loc. cit.

are always named after their father's father and are formally addressed as 'father.'<sup>179</sup>

Although the slap in the face is physical, it is also social and symbolic in that it is rightly interpreted by Kimani to be an indication of increased social distance. Before the slap, he considers himself an equal to Peter.

There is no difference between Peter and me . . . . Peter speaks Kikuyu and I speak English. Peter has been to school and I have been to school. My father is the friend of his father. We are the same age and would be circumcision brothers if he and I were of the same color and tribe.<sup>180</sup>

The social closeness of blacks and whites in colonialist Kenya is recalled in a conversation between Peter and Holly:

'Who reared me, Holly?' Peter asked.  
 'An African woman.'  
 'Who was my best friend and playmate?'  
 'A Kikuyu.'  
 'Who was my father's best friend, really?'  
 'Old Karanja. A Kikuyu.'  
 'And who took care of you as a little girl?'  
 'Africans. Swahili and Kikuyu.'<sup>181</sup>

After the slap, Kimani recognizes that there is an intolerable and unequal distribution of power between himself and the white power structure; thus, he flees to the mountains. To Kimani, for the first time the expected social distance between the whites and the blacks has been defined. He now knows that he is a member of the exploited group.

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

Peter, manifesting friendship and not a master-servant relationship, follows Kimani in the hope of bringing him home. Instead he finds Kimani with his foot caught in a trap and hyenas about to attack. Because of friendship between the white hero and the African native, Kimani's life is saved. In an intense discussion which follows, neither boy feels he could continue in the structured way of life of the other, so once again they are forced to part geographically, socially, and politically. Horizontal mobility has occurred. New social values are formed, set and locked into the personality structures of each boy. The seeds of discord are illustrated during the discussion when Kimani cannot understand why he always has to bear the guns for his friend but can never fire one as his friend does. Kimani both dramatically sees and deeply feels the measurable social distance between himself and his friend, Peter.

. . . Peter is white and I am black, so already he is the master and I am the servant. He is rich and lives in a big stone house and has a bicycle. I am poor and live in a mud-wattle hut and have no bicycle. Yet the land he lives on belongs to my people. So my father has told me of the old days, when the Kikuyu owned all the world on this side of the mountain, until the English came with guns and took the land, driving the Kikuyu ahead of them like stolen sheep.<sup>182</sup>

The situation is no longer tolerable to Kimani, who has correctly defined the situation. In an important structural sense this decision converts Kimani into a leader.

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

According to Kimani, the new Kimani, he sees his old values as being structured in an intolerable manner. He can no longer function under such an unequal distribution of power.

His value set is reinforced to such a high degree that he wants to strike back at what he considers to be the source of discomfort, namely, Jeff, the white landowner who slapped him in the face. Jeff's prejudicial attitude not only confuses Kimani but also separates him forever from his good friend, Peter.

Someday, Kimani said in his brain, I'll kill him for that. When I am bigger, a man full-grown. In the meantime I will learn all I can from the white bwanas, because they have many things we can use. And someday I too will have a Chevrolet and a wireless and perhaps a white man to come when I call 'Boy!'<sup>183</sup>

Strike back Kimani does when he comes down out of the mountains and tries to shoot Jeff. The killing fails, but Kimani does not know this. Once again he flees to the mountains, thinking himself a killer, a wanted man, a social outcast of the worst kind.

Although Peter understands well the culture of the blacks and has a nostalgic longing for the old ways which made life simple and enjoyable for the African tribes, he is basically a racist. He loves the individual black (Kimani), but he loves him in his place as a servant. Peter defends, with all his might, the white settlers' ownership of the land

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<sup>183</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

and economic exploitation of the blacks. There is no sympathy for Jomo Kenyatta, the black nationalist leader, or the Mau Maus who served under him in the fight for freedom from white, colonial rule. As he sees the old way of life which he knew as a white settler's son disintegrate, he deplores the winds of change.

#### WAR

Kimani becomes established as a leader of his new Mau Mau group and leads a raid on the home of Jeff, the man who slapped him. Although Kimani kills no one personally, everyone in the house is killed except Elizabeth, Jeff's wife, and she is crippled grotesquely. Only when Kimani steps in is Elizabeth's life saved.

When Peter suddenly leaves to go to war against the Mau Maus, because he knows the bush country and is needed, Holly fervently registers her disapproval, saying that he can let the army fight--that he does not have to go.

It is interesting to note that neither Peter nor Kimani really wants to go to war, but powerful forces pull each of them into battle. However, as the war mounts and tension builds between black and white, it becomes increasingly important for the white forces to learn from the captured oath giver the names of the members to whom he has secretly given the Mau Mau oath. Their efforts fail until

finally Peter's father is called on to try to get the old man to talk. The religious values of the old man hold that he must always tell the truth while he is touching the "holy stone." After much pressure is put on him, he gives names, times, communication, codes and places, thus helping to break the back of the Mau Mau uprising.

The old man is unable to remain faithful to the Mau Maus because of the strength of a previous socio-religious set of values which had continued consistently from birth. The white man is able to use the native's religion as a tool to force him to reveal Mau Mau secrets.

Peter and Kimani, separated for some months by the fighting, meet on one occasion to talk as brothers and as leaders. Peter tells of having taken his sister, Elizabeth, to the hospital so she could give birth to her child. Each speaks of peace and the hope of one day being able to rear their families without fear. Kimani tells of his family and especially his son. He confesses that, although he led the raid on Jeff's shamba, he did not personally kill any of Jeff's family.

This incident pointedly emphasizes that these two men, leaders in opposing forces, recognize that war is not an ideal social condition. Neither has any personal love for killing and death, inevitable aspects of war. As they depart, each agrees that he will try to effect a peace talk

between settlers and Mau Maus. Peace is an ideal both hope for.

Peter goes to Nairobi to see his wife and sister. When Holly asks if he has to go back, Peter replies that he is sick of fighting and does not want to return, but return he must. This reflects painful separation which war necessitates.

The peace meeting is accidentally sabotaged when Kimani's wife is killed during Peter's search for Kimani. When he finds Kimani, they fight and Kimani falls into a pit where he lies dying. He looks up to Peter holding his infant son in his arms and begs Peter to hand down the baby so that the two can at least die and be buried together. The scene depicts well the ultimate tragedy of war.

Gifted as he is in descriptive ability, Ruark pictures the horrors of warfare in gruesome detail, depicting the physical suffering, the mental anguish, the personality destruction, the material loss, and death, all inevitable parts of war. There is nothing attractive or appealing about it as Ruark presents it.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to consider two of Robert Ruark's books, The Honey Badger and Something of Value, to see if they had more than entertainment worth and to compare the social values in the two. Were these two works, cast in the totally dissimilar settings of New York and East African society, similar or dissimilar in their social values?

After a biographical study of the author, whose personal life was in many ways like that of Alec Barr and Peter McKenzie, heroes of the two books, The Honey Badger and Something of Value were studied as to their emphases on family, women, sex, religion, race, and war--social institutions arbitrarily selected for intensive and comparative consideration.

Robert Ruark, as well as the heroes in The Honey Badger and Something of Value, repeatedly manifested the values of the Old Man, the author's grandfather who so greatly influenced him. Ruark did so throughout his life, and the two heroes did so throughout each book.

The two books were amazingly similar in their basic social values as well as in the basic character of their central figures.

Whether lampooning American saloon society or chronicling the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, Ruark revealed values

in regard to family, women, sex, religion, race, and war which were essentially the same.

The heroes in both books encountered man's incredible inhumanity to man. The two main characters, Alec and Peter, were unhappy themselves; and each man tended to destroy the persons with whom he tried to establish a meaningful relationship. In both books Ruark's goal seemed to be a description of the lost lives of the two heroes, both trying to "escape" the reality of their existence by seeking refuge in whiskey, extra-marital sex, or war.

The values noted in the two books are as follows:

Family. Neither Peter nor Alec had any affection for a known mother. Peter's mother died at birth, and Alec hated his mother. He made it a point never to call her "mother" but rather by her given name, "Emma."

Both heroes valued ideal family relationships. Each frequently described them. For Peter, it was his married sister's home which he considered ideal. For Alec, Game Warden, Sandy Lang had an ideal home life.

Women. Both heroes valued women, black or white, as man's plaything.

Both wives, Amelia and Holly, were sorely mistreated by their often-absent husbands. The wives had nearly all of the marital responsibilities with very few marital privileges such as a husband's presence, companionship, sexual

fulfillment, and identification with his occupation or vocation. The wives of the heroes in both books, while working

Both wives were viewed as not understanding their husbands. Amelia did not understand writers, and Holly could not understand why Peter had to go to war when the Army was there to do the fighting. This "misunderstood male" syndrome is an implied justification of sexual promiscuity in both books.

The Old Man's opinion of women apparently influenced Ruark. The Old Man saw women as being "naturally perverse." He said that they really preferred to be boys; but when they learned that this could not be, they became angry and tried to trap boys into marriage.

The Old Man and both heroes refer to all women as being complex whereas all men are considered the opposite.

Sex. Sex held the same place in both books. Each hero had premarital sexual intercourse, but neither had it with his wife-to-be. Each hero had extra-marital sexual relations, as did his wife. Both Peter and Alec failed at achieving a satisfactory sex life with their wives. Both seemed to find sex outside of marriage much more exciting and satisfying than within it.

Peter and Alec both valued marital infidelity. They mutually shared a fear of sexual impotency with their wives but not with other women and experienced it within marriage

but not without. The wives of the heroes in both books, while engaging in extra-marital intercourse, did not relish it as their husbands did.

Religion. Both books recognized religion as a fact in the lives of some people but did not acknowledge it as an important factor, particularly in the lives of the principal characters. Using the name of deity profanely was an accepted practice; and, apart from the black Africans, nobody seemed bothered by religious precepts or ethics.

In both books, the hero was amoral. Religion was never a point of reference for his conduct.

Race. Peter and Alec saw the process of racial assimilation occurring in both East Africa and the United States.

Undoubtedly, Ruark's position was that of a racist. To the author, individual blacks were all right; but collectively, they were scum. He considered them, in both books, as properly servants to the white man and thought them shiftless and undependable.

Ruark could be credited with showing feeling for members of another ethnic group as long as they were "in their place," that place being an inferior status. In both books when he noted cultural differences he concluded that the "white society was the right society." The passing of the white-dominated, segregationist society of colonial Africa is lamented as a great tragedy.

War. Both heroes went to war, yet they had difficulty in explaining why they went. Both wives vociferously expressed their disapproval of their husbands' leaving to fight and actively denounced whatever reasons the husbands offered. Neither of the men had children to leave behind, nor did he have any particular financial limitations which might keep him from going. Both men went to war against the wishes of their wives when actually they could have stayed at home.

Both men considered war as something to "get in on." Alec said he wanted to get in on the one great adventure of his life before the shine rubbed off and that he was not going to miss it. Peter, at the height of tension during one jungle stalking experience, expressed his opinion of war when he said, "Man, this is a real hunt."<sup>184</sup> For both heroes, war was apparently a game into which they were mysteriously drawn, for better or worse. Always it was personally exciting.

Both books reveal war as gruesome, destructive, bloody, and heart-breaking. Alec found that the girl he loved, Sheila, had been killed in a London blitz bombing. Peter saw his neighbors slaughtered and his best friend die in the Mau Mau war. In both books, marriage paid a high price for its relation to war.

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<sup>184</sup>Ibid., p. 507.

In the two novels, Ruark came to grips in vivid fashion with the basic institutions of family, women, sex, religion, race and war. Whether the setting is in sophisticated, twentieth-century New York or in an Africa teetering between the Stone Age and modern times, the author reflects fundamentally similar social values. Whatever else one may think of Ruark, he must admit that as an author he is consistent with himself.

Both books provide valuable insights into the cultures described and into the lives of people caught up in the whirlwind of personal or social conflict. The Honey Badger and Something of Value are more than interesting reading spiced with frequent pornographic recitals; they are significant social documents and offer well-defined case studies for the student of social values.

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