

coldness is recognised as the factor which breaks up his relationship with a negro girl.)

TO ILLUSTRATE what I believe to be essential attitudes behind this mystique of negritude, I am reminded of two episodes observed in Cape Town buses during this past month. On the first occasion, a lorry loaded with African workers pulled up, in a traffic jam, behind the bus in which I was sitting—and the bus was suddenly filled with their vital, spontaneous song. On the second occasion, a drunk white woman got into a bus and started to cry and moan hysterically. On both these occasions, the reaction of the white passengers was the same—shock, uneasiness, disapproval with an admixture of smug, sniggering amusement. Bourgeois reserve predictably responded to the raising of a curtain—whether what was revealed was, as in one instance, something natural and joyful or, as in the other, something nakedly, neurotically desperate.

I believe that, in any of the quotations cited above, the word “bourgeois” could quite effortlessly be substituted for the word “white”—in Kerouac, in Mailer, in Nadine Gordimer, even in Baldwin. Why does the negro fulfill this particular role as a vehicle for anti-bourgeois protest? Because, in both the United States and in South Africa, economic colour discrimination has prevented the negro from becoming integrated into the bourgeoisie which provides the “national” values. He has been spared the corrosive pressures of total bourgeois alienation.

The white writers who express the mystique of negritude are in a different position. They are revolting from *within* the bourgeoisie—and in its terms of individual nonconformity. There are elements of Rousseau’s concept of the Noble Savage—through a parallel with Baudelaire and

Rimbaud is a far more exact one. Working in terms of their society, they inevitably tend to see negro “freedom” in terms of bigger and better “kicks”. The protest is therefore a highly confused one. It does not analyse causes or suggest solutions. The basic problems of a sick society remain untackled.

It should be noted here that the same criticism can be applied to African negritude. Reading the almost hysterical lyricism of Chisiza’s Africanist praise poem in a previous issue of *The New African*, we can see it as a very natural reaction to the “white” values imposed by centuries of colonialism, an assertion of national pride which is probably an essential element in a national liberation struggle. But we have only to examine what our reactions to it would be, if it had been written in terms of “whiteness” instead of “blackness”, to see that it is, ultimately, without direction.

It is significant, in this context, that those whites who support Pan-Africanism are usually those who do not desire any fundamental change in society and whose social planning takes them no further than an abolition of the “colour bar”—which amounts, in fact, to applying first-aid dressings to a wound which requires surgery.

To quote lines written by William Empson in quite another context: “Slowly the poison the whole bloodstream fills. The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.” While the fact that white negritude’s exponents should actually envy those who are suffering acute oppression starkly demonstrates the moral and emotional vacuum existing in certain societies, “not enough night” is a complaint for which it is hard to feel great sympathy in “the harsh light of common day”. As an ethos, negritude remains essentially an evasion. ●

AFRICANA

- “He (Kerina) is wanted in South Africa on several serious carnal charges, and I can tell you that he is still active in his subversive activities against this country.”—Security Branch Chief, Colonel H. J. J. van den Bergh, *Sunday Express*. [P.R.]
- It is my belief that in 20 years time there will be a white population here of 15 million. The growing trend is for the better class of Europeans to escape their dreary countries for our sunshine, leaving them to the socialists and West Indians. Who could blame them?—Editor, *Cape Times Weekend Magazine*. [V.G.]
- At his daily family prayer meeting a burly 48-year-old farmer prayed for the soul of an African he is accused of having beaten to death with a sjambok and a length of hosepipe, the Circuit Court was told at Potchefstroom yesterday.—*Rand Daily Mail*. [Anon.]
- It is a signal contribution to an understanding of the race problem. A scholarly effort to put the issues of race inside the framework of Western traditions and world history. What “Race and Reason” does is to help the ordinary man-in-the-street understand that the tremendous, unthinking drive to force equality strikes at the foundations of national freedom.—Book review in *baNtu*. [R.F.]
- “I used to be very fond of Dickens and Goldsmith and of the later writers I read every book of Lawrence Green.”—Mr. N. J. le Roux, Chairman of the present Board of Censors and a member of the newly-appointed Publications Board, interviewed by the *Cape Times*.

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