

GINWALA: And what if Mr. Tshombe, as he has said, would not attend such a conference. What do you then suggest?

KAMBONA: Personally, I do not think that Mr. Tshombe will refuse to come to the conference. If he does not come to the conference, it means that his masters have asked him not to attend the conference. But I am sure now that the masters see the wisdom of leaving the whole thing to the O.A.U. Therefore, I believe personally that the masters would ask Mr. Tshombe to attend the conference.

GINWALA: One more general question about the United Nations, Mr. Kambona. The liberation of Africa is regarded as one of the prime stages in the development of most countries. What rôle do you think the United Nations should play in this liberation?

KAMBONA: Well, as you may remember, the African countries, with the support of all the peace-loving countries in the world, passed a resolution which really, to us, was one of the most historic declarations of the United Nations—about granting independence to the whole of

Africa. We feel that the United Nations must put pressure of the remaining colonial powers, which are Portugal, now, and South Africa, to abide by the resolution which was passed in 1960 by the United Nations. They cannot become members of the United Nations and then flout the decisions of the United Nations.

GINWALA: Do you think the United Nations has a vital rôle to play in the liberation?

KAMBONA: Very, very vital indeed. This is one reason why the African and the Afro-Asian countries at New York are working very hard to see that the U.N. survives.

GINWALA: You, personally: are you pleased at the increase in the membership of the Security Council and the Economic Commission?

KAMBONA: Well, definitely. I was a party to those countries who were demanding this increase, because we feel that when the U.N. was set up, Africa was completely under the colonial powers and it

was the colonial powers who had organised the membership of these organs. Now, as Africa has about one-third of the membership of the U.N., we feel that Africa must be represented in all the organs of the United Nations if that organisation is going to be effective.

GINWALA: Taking your point further, do you feel that Africa, then, should have one-third of the seats in the U.N. organs?

KAMBONA: Not necessarily, no. But what we feel is that Africa must be adequately represented. I feel that this can be arranged by gentlemen's agreement as they did in the past.

GINWALA: You wouldn't hazard any suggestions as to the sort of African representation?

KAMBONA: Well, we have put some suggestions and these suggestions are being considered by all the members of the U.N. at present. It is very important, we feel, that Africa and Asia must be represented in all the organs of the U.N.

## Apartheid and the Novel

*Desperation and stoicism in a situation which frustrates*

MARTIN STANILAND

LIONEL TRILLING POINTED OUT in his essay "Manners, Morals, and the Novel" in *The Liberal Imagination* that the development of the novel has been stimulated by an observation of the difference in manners and attitudes which is generated by a difference in social status and pretensions. In short, "the novel is born in response to snobbery" and its "characteristic work . . . is to record the illusion that snobbery generates and to try to penetrate to the truth which, as the novel assumes, lies hidden beneath all false appearances". In the sense that he seeks to

distinguish fundamental values and to illuminate the basis of all others in social pretension and in the relative unreality which such pretension embodies, the novelist has a moral purpose: he is "an agent of the moral imagination".

Moreover, in the sense that the novelist is concerned in his moral perception with social variety and mobility, it is natural that he should be attracted to those situations where variety is richest and mobility most marked. Hence, in West African writing the scrambling diversity of Lagos society and the dilemma of the Europeanised African have provided the themes of most novelists. In South Africa the determination of attitudes and manners by wealth alone would be stark enough; but the situation is further dramatised by an all-embracing system of status based upon race. South African novelists are not simply concerned with snobbery and the social implications of wealth: they are concerned further with the obstacle to sympathy and the anaesthetic to conscience that the colour-bar introduces. Elsewhere in Africa the comedy of manners may be appropriate: men achieve dignity in so far as they realise themselves and

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comprehend their environment, they incur ridicule to the extent that they act an appearance and fail to distinguish basic values. In South Africa, however, the balance is upset by the attribution of status according to a feature in men over which they can have no control; in this sense the system is amoral.

WHEN WE EXAMINE THE SOUTH AFRICAN NOVEL in the light of these reflections we can understand both the desperation and the stoicism which characterise it, which distinguish it from other African work, and which give it an affinity with Afro-American literature: desperation because of the enormous difficulty involved in changing the system, stoicism from facing the difficulty (without necessarily surrendering to it). Now this is a general impression and it is based on an assumption which actual study of the novels brings into question. The term "South African novel" is used: but is there any such thing? From the earliest point in South African writing one is forced to recognise the wide spectrum which the novel form comprises. There are African, Afrikaans, Coloured and Anglo-Saxon novelists, and their common concern is limited to one interest: the racial "question". At an earlier stage the question was more diffused and other themes were engaged. Thus in Afrikaans writing there was an emphasis on the work and attitudes of the pioneer. Yet since this theme was the basis of a particular group myth it contributed to the very partition which we observe growing up later.

Myth, though of a tragic rather than a gloating aspect, is also central to early African writing. However, there is a difference in function to be noticed. Thus Abrahams, in *Wild Conquest*, is concerned mainly with moral conflict within the African society (as were Mofolo and, to a lesser extent, Plaatzje). So although a myth is created, there is not in it the intrinsic racialism which is involved in the Afrikaner myth of conquest and subjugation. This difference can perhaps be partly explained by the missionary background of the early African writers, partly by the evolution of Boer society from a frontier to a ghetto mentality. In short, the function of African myth was to console: that of Afrikaner myth to consolidate.

It is only with the development of Johannesburg and the settlement of large numbers of Africans in that city that South African novelists have moved beyond the semi-anthropological romance. With Europeans and Africans forced into juxtaposition the novelist acquires a possibility of social observation, of moral irony which the limited encounter of farm and village debarred. Most important, the new situation compels a recognition of the social partition and thereby sophisticates its treatment in the novel.

AT THIS STAGE TRILLING'S DISTINCTION between appearance and reality in social life becomes relevant. To a person who is in a position to observe the contrast in manners between the African community and the society of the white managers, the former may seem in the sense that we originally considered it to be more "real", to be more clearly aware of "fundamental values". Toby Hood, in Nadine Gordimer's *A World of Strangers*, having experienced upper-class white society, looks at the township

from a hill and an African friend remarks awkwardly that "when you get back, this will seem like an ugly dream". Hood realises that even to an alienated African such a community must be "the reality of the present to which he was born—the only sure destiny any man has". For that reason it would be "impossible for me ever to look back upon it, from another country, as 'an ugly dream'. It was no beauty, God knows, but it was no dream either". He asks why "the life of poverty is regarded as more real than any other life", noticing that "in almost all of us with full bellies, whose personal struggles are above the sustenance level, there is a nervous, even a respectful feeling that life may be elsewhere".

Yet "to regard total preoccupation with survival, food and reproduction as the criterion of reality is to ignore other needs that men have created for themselves, and which, in combination with the basic ones, makes men's reality". Thus "real life" for each man is the demands of his own condition; only "life in the townships seemed more 'real' simply because there were fewer distractions, far fewer vicarious means for spending passion, or boredom. To each human being there, the demands of his or her own condition came baldly. The reality was nearer the surface".

THUS URBAN LIFE has provided for the novelist in South Africa a stimulus towards considering his central problem of appearance and reality. The traditional though partial solution to this problem in South African writing has been to deny its necessity, to regard the African as a temporary inhabitant of the city. The real life of the African is said to be in the reserves, the real life of the European in the town; thus the philosophical problem is dispersed rather than resolved. This view is taken or assumed in Afrikaner writing certainly as late as 1959; sometimes it is combined with a parallel dislike of the depersonalization which industrialism involves, as in Laurens van der Post's *In a Province*.

The best known example of this treatment is probably Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* and this work is important in two respects: first, because it represents the climax of this tradition in which revulsion and nostalgia mingle; second, because, whatever the crudity of its characterisation and the imbalance of its sympathies, it attracted a hearing for the South African novelist which was not necessarily attentive only to writers with Paton's views. It has been described as the South African *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This may be true in several senses. For it is a powerful statement of one position; but to generate this force a certain amount of cheating takes place. Why does the one African politician have to be presented as corrupt? Why are only Anglicans seen to be decent? And why do all the black Anglicans have to appear passive, leaving the limelight of philanthropy to their white superiors?

A CAPACITY FOR DETACHMENT and an experience of the flimsiness of social categories are obvious and necessary assets of a writer in the urban situation. It is interesting that most of the novelists concerned with city life have been English-speaking or Coloured, not Afrikaner or (so-called) Bantu. Except as a setting for comedy directed against Africans (as in Frans

Venter's *Dark Pilgrim*) or for further warnings against miscegenation and the corruption of simple primitives by city life, there is nothing in the novel for the Afrikaner or indeed for any white person who sees himself primarily as white. The situation virtually compels the novelist, if his functions are those we suggested earlier, to become a writer of protest literature, so intense is the social disparity which he observes.

But the question then arises whether it is possible to write a protest novel as such. On this point a polarisation seems to have emerged, based roughly on the social categories: at the extreme "European" position there is little significant literary contribution, the slightest irony being subversive of the rigid defence mechanism upon which this position is founded. At the extreme "African" position there is a very significant contribution, but mainly of short-stories whose primary function often seems to be to make a point against the situation rather than to consider personal relationships in the complexity and depth that is required of the novelist. I do not say that the type of perception involved is different, but only that in the short-stories the making of a protest may be prior to the detailed and wide observation of social ironies which concerns the novelist before all else.

Between these two poles lies the group of white liberal, Coloured and African writers whose theme is commonly the necessity for satisfactory individual relationships despite the situation, an emphasis on basic human equality, a passionate desire for colour-blindness. The pity and the irony are that such cosmopolitanism should be primarily the preserve of the least powerful and most vulnerable social groups; and the insistence on individual relationships may seem to more vigorously political writers wilfully blind, or even treacherous. The point, however, is that the situation overloads the writer as a writer: as Mphahlele puts it in *The African Image* (to which I am greatly indebted), "the urges to preach, protest, hand out propaganda, to escape, sentimentalize, romanticize, to make a startling discovery in the field of race relations, to write thrillers, and other urges, all jostle for predominance in the writer".

In view of the dilemma described by Mphahlele and of the social circumscription to which even the cosmopolitanism of the liberals is subject, one begins to wonder whether the writing of novels in South Africa may not shortly become an unattractive and repetitive activity. If we look at the more recent novels set in urban society we can appreciate how much sophistication the South African novel has acquired since *Cry, the Beloved Country*; but the futility has also become clearer. In these works the common situation is one of love between the races: such is the theme of Abrahams' *Path of Thunder*, Jacobson's *Evidence of Love* and Nadine Gordimer's *Occasion for Loving*. It is not true to say that Eliza in Abrahams' *Mine Boy* represents such a bridging of the racial barrier, for her primary concern is only to become white. And what is important to Abrahams as much as to Jacobson and Nadine Gordimer is that such categories should not be recognised. Thus in Abrahams' *Mine Boy* Paddy tells Xuma, "... it is not good to think only as a black man or only as a white man. The white people in this country think only as white people and that is why they

do harm to your people. . . . You must think as a man first. You must be a man first and then a black man . . . when you understand that you will be a man with freedom inside your breast. It is only those who are free inside who can help free those around them".

Between the other two novelists cited, Dan Jacobson and Nadine Gordimer, a considerable contrast is observable: Miss Gordimer's examination of personality is more fastidious, her ethical recommendation less overt. And yet both are concerned that something be salvaged by a scrupulous responsibility in personal relationships. In Miss Gordimer's *A World of Strangers* and *Occasion for Loving* the dominant characters are people who deny the relevance of colour by their way of life. Such a denial logically involves dissociating oneself from all protest movements, and this is the position of the most striking of these characters, Steven Sitole, in *A World of Strangers*, "a rebel against rebellion" who defies the system by the vigour and independence of his own life, by repelling every external infringement upon the autonomy of that life.

But however much equality through personal relationships and initiative is stressed by Miss Gordimer, it is unhappily clear that such equality is achieved more easily by white people than by black people in South Africa. In *Occasion for Loving* Ann, a white girl, is described by her African lover, Gideon Shibalo, as being always "herself, her splendid self, a law to herself, and limited as little to the conventions of opposition as to the conventions of submission. She loved him; she did not love him across the colour-bar: for her the colour-bar did not exist".

So her philosophy is just like Sitole's: the only difference is that, ironically, the very system which she disdains makes it easier for her to apply that philosophy than for him. Again the situation frustrates the novelist, and indeed towards the end of *Occasion for Loving* the main white character, Jessie, thinking about the position of the lone African, Gideon Shibalo, asks, "What's the good of us to him? What's the good of our friendship or her love?" And it is because of the frustration which the present South African system seems to present to the novelist as a humanist that I think Miss Gordimer's work may stand as the ultimate in the South African novel for some time. What she says about Jessie and her husband is equally true of the liberal South African novelists and it may be taken as a summary of the contemporary situation of the South African novel—perhaps even as its epitaph:

"They came again and again to the stony silence of facts they had set their lives against. They believed in the integrity of personal relations against the distortions of laws and society. What stronger and more proudly personal bond was there than love? Yet even between lovers they had seen blackness count, the personal return inevitably to the social, the private to the political. There was no recess of being, no emotion so private that white privilege did not single you out there; it was a silver spoon clamped between your jaws and you might choke on it for all the chance there was of dislodging it. So long as the law remained unchanged, nothing could bring integrity to personal relationships. . . . Tom began to think there would be more sense in blowing up a power station. . . ."