

## For Serowe a village in Africa

BESSIE HEAD

SUMMERTIME IN SEROWE is an intensely beautiful experience. It rains unpredictably, fiercely, violently in November, December, January. Before the first rains fall it gets so hot that you cannot breathe. Then one day the sky just empties itself in a terrible downpour. The earth and sky heaves alive and there is magic everywhere. The sky takes on a majestic individuality and becomes a huge backdrop for the play of the rain. Not ordinary rain but very peculiar rain.

All through December and January the rain sways this way and that on the horizon. The wind rushes through it and you get swept about by a cold fresh rain-wind. Sometimes all the horizon rain sweeps across the village in glistening streams. Then the grass roofs of the mud huts shine like polished gold. The barren earth, grazed to a shred by the goats, becomes clothed by a thin fine carpet of green. Under the trees there is a sudden, lush wild growth of long green grass. Everything is alive in this short dazzling summer. Forgotten are the long months of bleaching scorching sun and intense blue skies. The sky is now shaded with large brooding clouds.

It takes such a long while for the insects to come out of hibernation. But in December the earth teems with them. There are swarms of flies, swarms of mosquitoes and swarms of moths—sometimes as big as little birds. Crickets and frogs are all over in the pools and around the village; there is a heavy rich smell of breathing earth everywhere.

Somehow, by chance, I fled to this little village and stopped awhile. I have lived all my life in shattered little bits. Somehow, here, the shattered little bits began to come together. There is a sense of wovenness; of wholeness in life here. There were things I loved that began to grow on me like patches of cloth . . .

THERE ISN'T ANYTHING in this village that an historian might care to write about. Dr. Livingstone passed this way, they might say. Historians do not write about people and how strange and beautiful they are—just living. There is so much necessity living they do and in this village there is so much mud living. Women's hands build

and smooth mud huts and porches. Then the fierce November, December thunderstorms sweep away all the beautiful patterns. After some time these same patient hands, hard and rough, will build up these mud necessities again.

There are just people of Africa here and endless circles of mud huts. They do not seem to be in a particular confusion about anything. The politicians are very agitated because the whole of Southern Africa is a melting pot, they say. But the women just go on having babies and the families sit round the fire at night chatting in quiet tones. Everybody survives on little and there may be the tomorrow of nothing. It has been like this for ages and ages—this flat, depressed continuity of life; this strength of holding on and living with the barest necessities.

THEY SAY THIS and that about aid. They seem to know nothing of the desperate longing to bring out our own creativeness. In Southern Africa this desperation is fierce because we feel that opportunities to venture out on discoveries of our own are going to be forcibly denied us for a long time. We are all really startled alive by the liberation of Africa, but we have been living in exclusive compartments for so long that we are all afraid of each other. Southern Africa isn't like the rest of Africa and is never going to be. Here we are going to have to make an extreme effort to find a deep faith to help us to live together. In spite of what the politicians say people are not going to be destroyed. Not now. There is all this fierce hatred and it is real. There are the huge armies prepared for war against unarmed people and we are all overwhelmed with fear and agony, not knowing where it will end.

Some of us cannot battle with this conflict any more. I cannot. But wherever I go I shall leave a chunk of myself here because I think of myself as a woman of Southern Africa—not as a black woman but as an ordinary and wryly humble woman. There was this immense conflict, pressure, uncertainty and insecurity that I have lived with for so long. I have solved nothing. I am like everyone else—perplexed, bewildered and desperate. ●

# Books & the Arts

## Combinations & permutations

### *Collingwood August*

*African/English Literature* by Anne Tibble (Peter Ower, London, 32s. 6d.)

LONG BEFORE BLACK AFRICA was "discovered" Europeans were already deceiving each other about that part of Africa. And they still are—one of the latest deceivers (though she does this through ignorance) is Anne Tibble. Her contribution is sub-titled a "survey and anthology."

Now, what I know about African literature, apart from that of Southern Africa, is dangerously little; but I have one consolation—though a negative one: What Anne Tibble knows about the literature of Southern Africa is even more dangerous than what I know about African literature as a whole. Let me then meet her on Southern African ground and deal only with the section dealing with South African literature in the first part of her survey. (I can only hope she has been less inaccurate in dealing with the rest).

In his book, *Chaka the Zulu*, Thomas Mofolo, Anne Tibble tells us, ". . . seeks to show how the boy Chaka came to be the blood-thirsty homicidal maniac that he undoubtedly became." And this after telling us that "Thomas Mofolo's sources were memories, legends, hearsay. Yet he believed himself . . . to be making a serious contribution to History."

How can Anne Tibble psycho-analyse any real person (as distinct from a character invented by writers of fiction) on the basis of a novel? She *must* know that novelists and film-producers are for ever taking liberties with History.

She then goes on to tell us that "According to Mofolo the child Chaka was what Europeans call 'illegitimate' and by implication Anne Tibble seems to believe that European customs regarding sexual behaviour are higher than those of Africans for she then eschews "illegitimate" by coining a new word "non-legitimate." Here she is treading on very delicate ground indeed. I hope she has read the anthology section of her book for there she includes a contribution by Prince Modupe, part of which reads: "The first