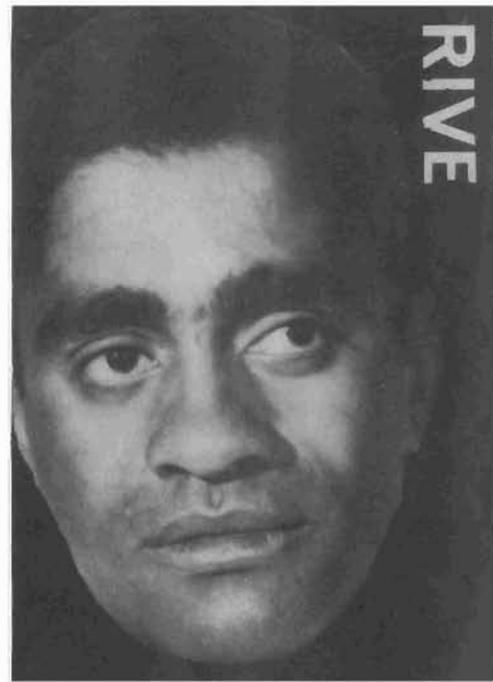
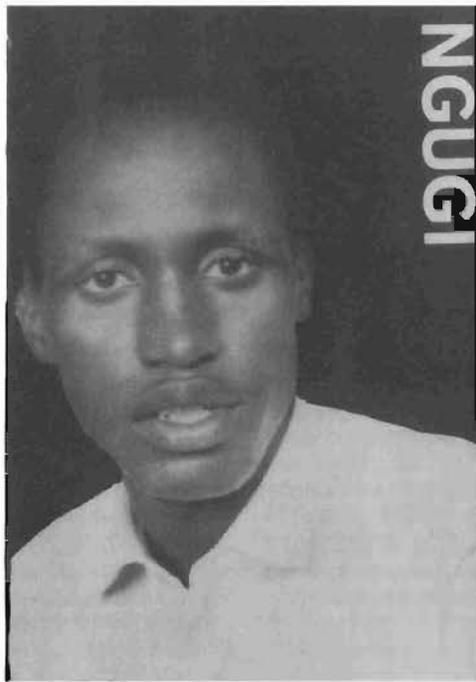


Against the Tribe

Lewis Nkosi



The River Between by James Ngugi (Heinemann, 18s.)
And A Threefold Cord by Alex la Guma (Seven Seas Books, 3s. 6d.)
Emergency by Richard Rive (Faber and Faber, 21s.)
Quartet (New Voices from South Africa) edited by Richard Rive (Heinemann Educational Books, 6s. 6d.)

IF COLLECTIVISM AND THE CENTRALISATION of authority in the hands of the chief and elders still seems to be the driving ideology behind even the most modern of the African states, the African novel seems determined to challenge the central assumption that such a social order is a basis for a good life or individual self-fulfilment.

Frequently the hero of the modern African novel comes to grief because of a certain disharmony between his private vision and the ossified forms of moral behaviour prescribed by tradition. This is no less true of South African fiction than it is of fiction elsewhere in Africa. And since prescribed moral behaviour was sanctioned mainly by African religious systems, the present rebellion of the new African hero against tribal morality signifies a truly African secularism. It is a secularism which could have been only delayed so long as the African communities remained closed societies; for in the African society revolt against the moral wisdom of the tribe was always seen to be an aberration and an evil, with excision rather than accommodation of the defective limb, as the only solution.

As I see it, this rebellion of the African hero also constitutes the African novel's final subversion against the traditional forms of African art whose mode was celebrative and whose main function was restorative through the harmonising of individual being with that of the traditional community.

WAIYAKI, THE HERO of James Ngugi's novel, is representative of an entire breed which is subversive to the extent that it is constantly trying to enlarge the area of personal choice against the demands of tribal affiliation. Yet this conflict between the individual and the tribe or between tribe and tribe during which individual feelings are hopelessly submerged, is not only the central theme of James Ngugi's novel, it

runs through much of the South African fiction. Nadine Gordimer's *A World of Strangers* and *Occasion for Loving* can be related to James Ngugi's *The River Between* by the singular effort of their heroes not to let their private feelings be submerged by the unreasonable demands of the tribe. The only difference is that in South Africa the tribal chief is white and the warring elements are separated by colour.

In communities where morality is largely prescribed, the area of personal choice is perilously narrow; consequently, impulsive behaviour threatens the very existence of the social order. Society has to move very swiftly against any of its members who find personal fulfilment outside accepted social patterns of behaviour. Nadine Gordimer's characters are always given the opportunity to bale out before tragedy strikes since the white rebels are usually aliens who seem to arrive in the country from Europe with their return air tickets securely pinned inside their briefcases. In James Ngugi's novel *Waiyaki* is reduced to shame and disgrace as the result of his nonconformity, and his only escape would be to emigrate to Nairobi and be swallowed up by big city life. Thus urbanisation takes on a new significance for African literature.

IN NGUGI'S NOVEL the hero and heroine are caught between warring factions of traditional and Christianised Kikuyus, and though the hero makes an admirable attempt to reconcile the two cultures, both within himself and in the dimly divided community, he fails because as an educated African he has begun to set great store by his own personal aspirations; also he shows the same ambiguities and equivocations of modern heroes everywhere who have submitted to the cult of self-doubt and scepticism.

This seems to me a very worthy successor to Ngugi's first novel, *Weep Not, Child*, which dealt with the Mau Mau conflict. Ngugi's main achievement is a series of evocative passages which are distinguished by their lack of contrivance or any striving after effect for its own sake. There is no reason to doubt that Ngugi owes a special debt to the Nigerian, Chinua Achebe, whose *Things Fall Apart* seems to have greatly influenced him. The main failure of Ngugi's writing so far has been his inability to

allow for easy transition from one scene to another in a way that would suggest a clear progress of the novel. The action tends to jump and most of the scenes are not allowed to develop sufficiently to give the novel its accumulative power.

NGUGI'S ADVANTAGE OVER the South African writers represented here stems from the fact that he has situated his characters in a community where choice can be seen to be real so that personal failure or success can be assessed in universal, human terms. Such an assessment to be possible requires certain minimum conditions of freedom.

As the stories in *Quartet* seem to suggest, in South Africa there is often very little distinction between choice and necessity. Paul Anderson of Alf Wannenburg's story, *Debut*, admittedly clumsy and ineffectual, did not choose to be a member of a privileged white minority. In order to convince us that Anderson's faults are personal ones Mr. Wannenburg should have redeemed for his character a certain amount of individuality and uniqueness beyond the mere attributes of the tribe. Because he has failed to do this his satire falls flat; Anderson is merely a scapegoat for the rest of white South Africa.

In the same way in most of these stories the blacks enjoy an unearned virtue simply because they happen to be the oppressed. Their nobility is in their suffering and just as gratuitous. It is a nobility that is given rather than achieved and it is this failure to suggest a variety of human possibilities for their characters which deprives much of the work of these writers of certain universal qualities so readily felt in the fiction of Alex la Guma.

ONE EXPERIENCES A GREATER IRRITATION and impatience with Mr. Rive's novel, *Emergency*, whose leading characters have turned suffering into an excuse for self-righteousness. Andrew Dreyer, especially, has no individuality to speak of but merely performs as the alter-ego of the writer, full of glib talk and wise-cracks which do nothing to illuminate the full extent of his humanity. In the same way the intellectual bric-a-brac to which the writer is constantly calling our attention, the titles of books in the shelves or classical records on the record player,

are supposed to suggest a certain knowledge-ability. In fact they merely confirm our suspicion that this cataloguing is a strategy which is meant to do the work of characterisation. To fight against apartheid or not to fight is the only choice the characters are allowed to make but since this choice is imposed from above (they either have to fight and suffer persecution or be passive and still suffer persecution) the range of their choice is narrowed down to that presented by a rigid apartheid regime. Predict-

ably it is Andrew Dreyer, as sensitive as hell, who makes a nobler choice than the others.

IT IS INSTRUCTIVE TO TURN to Alex la Guma to see how he copes with this problem of limited choices imposed by an authoritarian society. Though *Threefold Cord* is less successful than La Guma's previous novel, it still offers certain clues to his success. Within the limited choices available to his characters what La Guma does

suggest is the unlimited range in which they can show their humanity. Most of La Guma's characters have the weight and value of real living people; they wage their fight for survival against a brutal regime, and what is left after they have spilled their blood is their undeniable humanity. Where Rive's characters are unable to make love convincingly simply because they are cardboard boxes and not human beings. La Guma's characters carry the very stench and sweat of living people. ●

Undoing the damage

T. N. W. Bush

Fraser of Trinity and Achimota by W. E. F. Ward (Ghana Universities Press)
Calabar, by Donald M. McFarlan (Nelson)

IF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH of the early 20th century had known the things "that belong to its peace" it would have honoured and encouraged Alek Fraser as one of its greatest modern priest-missionaries. By doing so it would have gained the trust and respect of independent Africa and Asia and wiped out the damage done by centuries of association with the forces of colonialist suppression and paternalism. But this was not to be. The facts narrated in this book tell the story of rejection by Church and State of an exceptional prophet, and their luke-warm co-operation with a progressive educationist and ecumenist who was at least as far in advance of his times and contemporaries as Colenso of Natal.

Sent to Coventry by ordinary white colonialists for condemning British colour prejudice and for championing Indian nationalism, his forthrightness made him an embarrassment and a challenge to many of his superiors as well as to his best friends and most loyal subordinates. It was not comfortable working with Fraser, any more than it could have been to be a disciple of Jesus. But his greatness in his own field secured him an assured place in the world of education which nobody could take from him.

This is a valuable contribution to the literature of the Afro-Asian Freedom Struggle and a scholarly biography of one of its most sincere supporters. The story is told, with scientific accuracy and ample documentation and illustration, of the builder of something far greater, in fact, than the colleges in Ghana and Ceylon to which he gave new life and character. His was the establishment of "education which must draw out national feeling and be based on national needs, an education which must cease

to serve colonialism". And behind the work stood conviction which compelled him to attack all forms of oppression, whether shown in the British massacre of Indians at Amritsar, European responsibility for the slave-like working conditions in Japanese industry, or the cruel labour laws of British Kenya—to mention only a few cases.

Alek Fraser deprecated but was not discouraged by the pettiness of his Church and its preoccupation with minor issues and squabbles. He won through in spite of this and established the educational foundations upon which was later built much of the human leadership of free Africa and parts of Asia. His was the educational revolution which made the political revolution of Nkrumah and others possible and inevitable. For those who wish to understand the new Africa and Asia, this book is essential reading.

"CALABAR" IS QUITE DIFFERENT in every way. It might be called an old fashioned missionary adventure story with all the thrills and excitements. But it is much more than this. It is a useful prelude to the larger Fraser volume, since, it paints a vivid and sometimes horrifying picture of the tribal anarchy which was the inevitable aftermath of the white slave trade in West Africa. It tells of the efforts of early missionaries to grapple with this massive psychological and sociological situation which was characteristic of most parts of West Africa. It explains in part the difficulties with which Fraser had to contend. It does more than this and admits the fact that missionary altruism was in large part offset and cancelled in Africa by the greed and cruelty of traders and administrators who followed them with gin, rum and guns.

While paying tribute to the heroism and self-sacrifice of those who built churches, hospitals, schools and the most famous leper colony in Africa, it lays due blame at the door of officially promoted imperialism for most of the ills which confront newly-independent areas of the continent. If Africa forgives the white man, it will be thanks to characters described in *Calabar* such as Waddell, Slessor and Cruickshank. If the damage is finally undone, it will be due in no small measure to the farsightedness and courage of pioneers such as Alek Fraser. ●

To the Editors

Lessons of Disaster

SIR,—The editorial entitled "The Lessons of Disaster" in your March issue seemed to me designed to encourage the use of violence in South Africa.

The moral you drew from the recent abortive attempts was not that sabotage was a wrong tactic but that the wrong sabotage tactics were used. And in case the point was missed you added that these "sabotage tactics . . . must be changed for others"—violence, that is, directed against persons rather than property.

Editorial speculation on probable future developments is perfectly valid, but you should be careful to distinguish between speculation and advocacy.

You claim that "The idea that this is the end of revolution should be reserved for the establishment" with the implication that those not for the revolution are in fact helping to "prop up the establishment by their subservience" and, again lest the point be missed, you spell out your lessons for aspirant saboteurs.

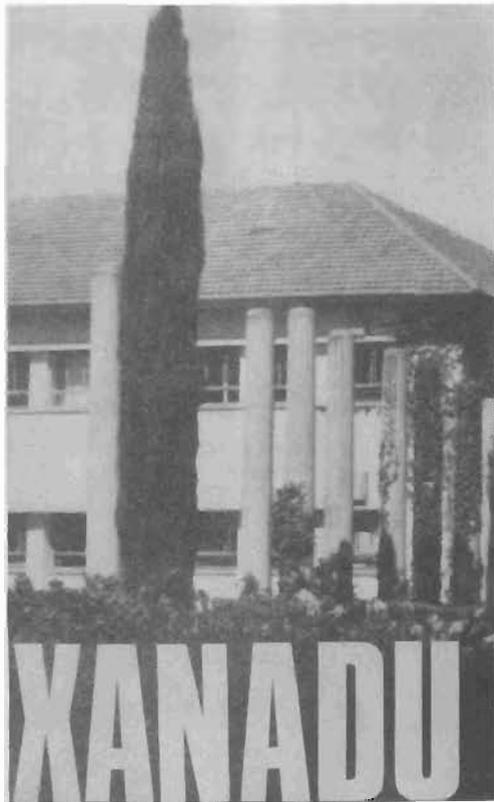
The Liberal Party of South Africa, of which I am a member, absolutely rejects the use of violence and would deny that it is either a practical solution to the problem or a way of introducing the non-racial society we would like to see.

As a regular contributor to your columns I should like to disassociate myself from your attitude towards what I regard as an *unmitigated* disaster. JOHN CLARE

Whitley Bay, Northumberland

"Perhaps," we wrote, "the lesson in chief that has been learned is that the sabotage tactics that lost the battle that began with the launching of Umkonto weSizwe in 1961 must be changed for others that will more quickly bring about the end of terror, bloodshed and white baaskap in South Africa."

Surely 'perhaps' implies speculation and 'others' not only military but political tactics as well. —THE EDITORS



They Built for the Future, by Margaret Macpherson (Cambridge University Press, 25s.)

UNIVERSITIES HAVE BEEN GROWING UP in African countries to the north of the Republic for the past fifteen years. They have, with the exception of the university at Salisbury, been planned primarily to meet the needs of Africans within their territories, none, however making discrimination on the grounds of colour nor refusing hospitality to a large number of students from other lands. There are now at least fourteen of these universities or university colleges in English-speaking Africa alone. An observer isolated in South Africa can guess the part they are playing in the political awakening of the African continent when he learns that at Makerere University College, whose history is told in this book, there are over one thousand students.

Something of the weight given to university education in the national development can be understood from the fact that the only organisation in Uganda whose business exceeds that of Makerere is the Uganda Electricity Board, which operates the whole of the Owen Falls power network and supplies electricity to Kenya as well as to the tiniest Asian stores in remote corners of Uganda.

IT IS NOT, OF COURSE, in these material terms alone that one will think of higher education in Africa. But it shows that to Britain and America, as well as to the independent African countries who have accepted the gift, a university is likely to be one of the three or four main tributaries running into a national myth—the head of state himself, the legislature, the religious bodies, whether dying or emerging, being three others. Dr. Nkrumah has thus given his name to the university at Kumasi, but only provided that it became a university of science and technology; and Dr. Azikiwe is building a new university almost in his own front garden at Nsukka in Eastern Nigeria, where programmes are offered in physical education and journalism. New universities appearing in Basutoland, Malawi and Zambia are tailored to meet political and economic limitations. Like Nsukka they are taking in students at "O" level, a little below that of the



South African matriculation certificate, and two years prior to the "A" level requirement of Legon, Ibadan, Salisbury and Makerere. Their work will be gathered round the need to produce administrators, agricultural and veterinary officers, or lawyers, or doctors, or engineers. The need for teachers is pressed so hard that several universities are having to do much as the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland, where some students will be able to water down the academic content to allow for courses in education and periods of practice teaching to be carried on without lengthening their period of study.

It is here that the experience of Makerere should be shown as important. In the last five years its peaceful undergraduate teaching has been convulsed by several efforts to meet the criticism of politicians that it was living within an ivory tower. There have been short courses for administrators who have required no higher educational qualifications for entry than that they occupied important posts; and for several years A.I.D. money has sent teams of young American graduates to take a course at the Institute of Education prior to two years' teaching in East Africa.

BUT WHILE THESE THINGS are duly catalogued by Mrs. Macpherson she regards them as no more than items in a continuum. She is much more concerned to record the jolly voices of the builders chanting all the time the college's motto, *Pro future aedificamus*. Which implies the past. With the faint voices of generations of jolly builders puffing the dust softly from one pile of annual reports to another in the dark of a basement.

Makerere belongs to the early generation of African universities born soon after the Second World War into societies so shy that they had nothing to say about the kind of university they would like to have. Thus the University of Ghana at Legon, the University College of Ibadan in Nigeria, and Makerere University College, under the gentle but conservative paternalism of the University of London, have hardened into types: their students, fully provided for in feudal halls looking out on to quadrangles or stately parklands, supplied with cricket and football fields, tennis courts and

Donald Stuart

swimming baths, reading in the shade and ventilation of some of the finest library buildings in London or Manchester or Harvard. And they have succeeded when they got there, because the standards were really the same.

FROM THE LATE FIFTIES, however, criticism has been growing. Political leaders in independent countries, whose economies trembled at the prospect of maintaining these institutions, have questioned their objectives. Between the colleges of the University of East Africa there is, as Mrs. Macpherson rightly says, a lot of co-operation. But the fact that the colleges in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam have come into existence ten years later has led them to be intensely critical of what they think to be the other-worldliness of Makerere. Many British and American observers concur: they think that there is something complacent about the posture of Makerere sheltering under the assurance of high academic standards designed to prove no more than what is now quite well known, that the African is capable of true scholarship.

The Makerere myth, furthermore, is fed by two very similar aristocratic traditions which were given strong encouragement throughout the conservative fifties—that of the elect British public school feeding the elect British university, and that of the Kiganda feudal aristocracy, under the Kabaka and his Saza chiefs. Mrs. Macpherson is quite conscious of the lush quality of this living, gained from these remarkably similar sources; and she manages to convey a sense of immense overseas riches rained upon the hill and fructifying into the sheer physical bounty of courts, towers, topless pillars, clocks, common rooms, telephones, clumps of flowering trees and vistas along lawns, which to other eyes obscures rather than reveals the links between higher and lower education in Uganda. This is Xanadu; while out on the plains teachers who are ill-qualified and overworked struggle to give an "A" level education in high schools with no libraries, nor books to put in them, and no contact with the world of reading or of art or of science.

THESE ARE THE CRITICISMS which are often made of Makerere. And Mrs. Macpherson has not only done nothing to forestall or meet them; she leaves them out of the record. One feels that she should have collected some of the evidence which points towards the impossibility of building up an institution of so unfamiliar a kind in Africa without nourishing a slightly fanciful myth. Some people have come only slowly to believe in the value of a university in their new country; others are still quite mystified as to why it should be there at all. Here is a fertile field for sales talk and deception. This book would have been more useful if it had chronicled more of the disappointments and heartsearchings and severity of thought that have gone to the making of Makerere.