

## In Memoriam Enver Docratt

the Afro-Asian writer can seek  
to grasp the whole of life,  
as Docratt did

NOW THAT HE IS DEAD, Enver Docratt will pass into complete oblivion, a price that he must pay because of a cruel fate. By his untimely and tragic death South Africa has lost one of its most promising literary figures. He did not himself care much about publication: had he done so his reputation in South African literature might already have been established. He was not a perfectionist, but also felt that many of the deep questions that preoccupied him needed a mature outlook, and left it to time to provide him with this.

Like another talented writer and journalist, Henry Nxumalo, Enver died at the hands of gangsters, who broke into his place of employment and fired upon him. He was only 24. He leaves behind a wife and a newly born child, and another sordid testimony to the violence of the South African way of madness that strikes at random at all times. Enver died just a couple months after his first work was published — two poems in *The Classic*, the promising South African literary venture edited by the late Nat Nakasa, another young man of promise whose life came to an end in an unexpected and tragic way.

These poems were forcibly taken by a friend and given to Nat to publish. What was important about them was that they prefigured what would have come from his pen in later years. They bestrode the two worlds he inhabited. One was that of his own race-diseased society and the other the spiritual world of man trying to find an answer to the meaning and purpose of his existence. Often they were combined in his writing. But like all true artists his real impulse came from the latter. He always felt that human life was a unit, diversified as it is, and that unless man could find an answer to the meaning of his existence he could find no real solution to his social problems. For this precise reason his writings had a richness hardly to be matched by any non-white writer today.

HIS CHIEF READING was Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Kafka, Dostoevsky, and such writers of man's interior soul, rather than the social writers that are so typical of our time. The only South African writer that he admired was Olive Schreiner. He read her constantly, and his greatest ambition was to write something like her

## BENNIE BUNSEE

*Story of an African Farm*. He struggled hard while still at high school with a novel set in Vrededorp. It was about a young man trying to make sense of the chaos around him.

Like his other early creative work it was related to his own poetic visions. He never found himself writing for the applauding hands of white liberals that tend to have a baneful influence upon many of our writers, or left dogmatists whose only criterion of good literature is its political content. In fact Enver had contempt for much of the Afro-Asian literature found in such profusion nowadays. He felt that sociology should be treated as sociology and be separate from the poetic vision that inspires a writer to create order out of the chaos of the human condition. He feared being confined like a Peter Abrahams to a limited vision of human life. I used to have endless arguments with him, as to whether he was more concerned with his own personal problems than the great social problems that animated our times. Enver's answer in many ways prefigured the celebrated argument between James Baldwin and Richard Wright about the Protest Novel. He was in sympathy with Baldwin's thesis that the protest novel was too limited in its vision

of life, and that a writer must be true to himself and embrace the totality of human existence. He felt that he could not write about the oppressed and the underdog except as part of the great question of man's ultimate fate.

This might appear as a luxury in the context of South African racial problems, but it was just this approach that made Enver's work so rich, and so free from the sentimentalism and melodrama that keeps whining about how oppressed the black masses are instead of asking them to overthrow the whole set-up. Whilst a great deal of the social realist writing of black writers is still confined within the limits of an appeal to the white man's conscience on the grounds of compassion and his better instincts, yet it is just this lack of militancy in their writing that makes it so unappealing and uninspiring. What is needed now in our literature is an attitude that takes a superior moral stance towards the whole rottenness in the white man's culture.

A realisation that the seeds of a truly cultured South Africa are based upon the inviolable law of the dignity of every single inhabitant, is to be found in the lives of the very oppressed and humiliated — those whose very sufferings have taught them the meaning of love and peace and respect for human beings. Implicit in this is the notion that it is the oppressed themselves who can release the white man from the bondage of his racialism. Such an attitude in South African literature must of course realise that the only compassion that is worthwhile is the compassion that is aware of the tragedy of human living itself, where the individual's sense of harmony with his environment is invaded by so many dark and uncertain forces. Compassion that smacks of patronage and that makes a man feel virtuous is immoral. Enver realised this fully, and whilst his writing was full of compassion for the suffering human being, yet he never offered any charity and sympathy that might entail a negation of human equality. A story he wrote about an unwanted child left to die by its mother illustrates this point (it is to be published in *The Classic*). It is just this approach by Baldwin that makes his writing so successful. In *The Fire Next Time* Baldwin wants to know how the negro can assimilate himself to a culture that rejects him and which is torn by so many contradictions. In his play *Blues for Mr. Charlie* he goes even further and says that the negro has the right to reject the white man's culture whatever its quality, as an assertion of his own claim, in terms of human equality, to choose as he wants to.

### THE SLENDER CHILD

*The slender child is dying in the bush  
And the mother beats the broken drum:  
Boom! Boom! Spare the heart and take  
the sheep,  
And the pot of grounded meal. Boom!  
Boom!*

*The slender child will sin no more.*

### THE STORM

*There is a treachery in the bush:  
The road has withered in the storm.  
And mighty men remain  
To worship demons and obey.*

*There is a treachery in the bush:  
The sky is washed in pain,  
And children talk of sex  
Where demons drink the blood and pray.*

With acknowledgements to *The Classic*

THE TRAGEDY ABOUT MOST AFRO-ASIAN LITERATURE today is that its vision is restricted to bourgeois values. There is no grasp of the whole of life. This of course is understandable. When ordinary bourgeois demands are denied through poverty and a

grinding exploitation, there is little time to sit back and contemplate the meaning of life. But it is precisely suffering that tears the veils of vanity and egoism and induces one to ask just what life is all about. Because of this, an Afro-Asian writer is in an extremely favourable position today. He is also able to evaluate a broad span of human culture, since he has a knowledge both of traditional cultures, albeit raped by colonialism and imperialism, and that of the West, which for the past few centuries has led the rest of the world. He must ask himself just what has happened to Western culture that human values have become vague, shadowy things. He must translate this dialogue between the values of his own civilisation and those of the West into a meaningful literature for the whole of mankind, and not something that speaks for only a section of humanity.

This is what James Baldwin has been able to achieve, and why he is one of the most meaningful writers of our time. He has been able to relate the negro's oppression in America to the white American's civilisation and culture, and show that they are integral parts of a single unit. He has shown that the negro himself can never be free in white American society until the white American himself is free in a real sense. The negro is oppressed because the white American ascribes to him his worst fears. He is oppressed because so many untruths lay stored in the heart of the white American who can only free himself by facing them courageously.

Enver like Baldwin lived in a milieu where different races and cultures are struggling to find and create a common national identity. Such an identity must transcend narrow, parochial interests and be based upon what is permanently valuable in human history, and must be the summation of human experience throughout the ages. South Africa, represented by Europe, Asia and Africa, is in a position to bring about such an evaluation. Enver tried to respond to the South African challenge in just this manner.

THE FACT THAT HE DID SO AS AN INDIAN was of additional importance. For the Indian cannot make any significant contribution to South African culture unless he regards himself as a permanent part of the South African soil — which he generally does not do, for he has one foot in South Africa and another in India. And the fact that Enver was able to respond as he did is proof enough that there already exists in South African society elements for the birth of a true South African nationhood. For in the final resort the true representative of a worthy South African way of life will not be the politician with his clamour for non-racialism, but the artist who will define what is best in the human race, those values that unite the human race into a brotherhood based upon dignity. ●

# Books & the Arts

## The DANGERS of inaction

DAVID RUBADIRI



*Neo-Colonialism/The Last Stage of Imperialism* by Kwame Nkrumah (Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd. 42s.)

THIS IS A SUBJECT which Africa feels very deeply about. It is important that an outstanding African has now written a book on the topic of neo-colonialism before that word becomes a hackneyed term. There is no doubt that Dr. Nkrumah feels very deeply about the subject. The tone of the book reveals the man himself, his concern and his challenging plea to Africa. His main thesis is sustained throughout the book — this being that Africa must urgently and openly unmask the evils of neo-colonialism before they reduce the continent to economic and political impotence. Nkrumah defines neo-colonialism as the efforts of powerful outside nations to exploit, influence and rule the new independent states.

In vigorous and well-developed arguments Dr. Nkrumah argues that neo-colonialism is the ultimate stage of imperialism. Africa has neo-colonialism to blame for all the ills that have beset her during the colonial period and after it. The argument is made that Africa has vast natural resources, vast tapped and untapped potential in all fields, but Africa still remains poor and is still being used as a resources reservoir by the highly developed countries which under the guise of aid projects are in fact getting more from Africa than they are putting in.

To Dr. Nkrumah, this is the classical struggle between the "haves" and "have nots." He uses the Marxian argument that

inevitably capitalism is bound to produce its own crisis and conflict as the gap between the rich and the poor grows bigger and bigger. "World capitalism has postponed its crisis but only at the cost of transforming it into an international crisis."

The sum total of this relationship is dangerous for Africa and the world. "The danger now is not civil war within individual states provoked by intolerable conditions within those states, but international war provoked ultimately by the misery of the majority of mankind who daily grow poorer and poorer."

Dr. Nkrumah's concern for the effects of interested capitalism in Africa is deeply felt. He puts into clear focus the various methods now employed to solve the problems of world poverty. He is contemptuous of the ways they are applied in Africa. He tears off the screens that have been used in Africa to hide the real interests of powerful nations in their aid programme. This is the most revealing part of the book. It is not only closely and passionately argued — it is also fully documented by examples and figures. The aid-giving states are in fact "parasite" states whose welfare states can only survive by exploitation. The sheep's skin is, in fact, hiding a wolf and if Africa is to survive she must very quickly upset the system. The poor countries, Dr. Nkrumah pleads, must now take the initiative instead of standing by watching the powerful rich nations churn the waters around them.

OF GREAT INTEREST TO AFRICA will be his