

ship is seen as being the golden route to economic prosperity and inter-group harmony. Some assistance is obviously required and the work of the publisher is given appropriate recognition in the analysis of black entrepreneurship (pp. 238-9).

The question of whether a *laissez faire* economy can produce social and economic justice in a world in which few of the classical pre-conditions for perfect competition exist is not faced squarely. South Africa is a land of monopoly or oligopoly capitalism – due partly to the economies of scale in its major extractive industries, partly to the state controlled sectors of economy, partly to the dependence on multi-national corporations with their high technology and massive capitalisation. Under those circumstances the rich tend to get richer and poor poorer unless substantial and effective redistributive mechanisms exist. The thrust of the political dispensations proposed by the contributors does little to resolve and much to exacerbate the existing problems of poverty and inequality. They offer a little protection to the urban dwellers at the expense of a growing army of impoverished and desperate “home-land” dwellers who will continue to contribute to the “white” economy as migrant workers but who will cease to be the responsibility of the “white” government. Instead

the impoverished mass will have to support itself in “its own areas” and under its own governments.

In short, since the assumptions upon which this volume is based are faulty and to some extent the goals mutually contradictory, **South Africa's Urban Blacks** fails to resolve the problems or to meet the challenges of a rapidly growing and increasingly restive black population which can not be classified “urban” and “rural” by bureaucratic fiat – and the “rural” dismissed to do their own thing in their own way. The problems cannot be solved by constitutional dispensations – if such formulae worked, Africa would be a continent of model democracies and the Irish problem long since solved. They have also gone beyond the reach of the benign forces of a free market economy – even if one were available to help.

These caveats, substantial as they may be, should not deter the concerned South African reader from exploring this book himself. It is a valuable insight into the heart and mind of enlightened, if not quite mainstream, Afrikanerdom. It probably says more about the near future of our country than most liberal publications. The glossy cover is 90% white with birds of passage and hope fluttering over the cities. The hard cover beneath is 95% black. □

## BRIEF REMARKS ON ZULU LITERATURE

by D. B. Ntuli

(From a paper read at the Congress of the Afrikaans Writers Guild).

Various scholars have expressed their views on Zulu literature. Regarding fiction the main criticism has been that the Zulu writers are unable to portray characters convincingly. Ziervogel, for example, remarks:

Depiction of characters has not been developed by modern writers. They are often much better in describing incidents. (Ziervogel, p. 9)

Nyembezi is of the same opinion. He says:

Quite often characters are mere pegs on which the events hang. (Nyembezi, p. 9)

Referring to our review of Zulu literature which appeared in 1968, Gerard says that these

... comments teem with rather damaging strictures: clumsiness in plot development, unconvincing characterization, unnecessary didacticism, weird improbabilities ... (Gerard, p. 266)

One of the criticisms against Zulu writers is that they limit themselves to a few themes. We should point out here that no critic can express displeasure with a book simply because it is based on a popular theme. Thematic proto-types are limited and it would be absurd for any critic to expect writers to produce completely original works. We would insist, however, that a writer should abandon his story if he cannot add his individuality to the treatment of a well-known theme.

It is encouraging to note that some of the recent publications indicate the writers' attempt to modify the treatment

of well-known themes. The forbidden-love stories of the seventies, for example, have a new freshness because writers give an acceptable motivation for the father's reluctance to encourage an affair between his daughter and an apparently worthless boy.

Critics of Zulu poetry do not seem to have a very high opinion of this genre either. Mazisi Kunene does make a few encouraging remarks about the poetry produced up to about 1960. But his general feeling is that this work is immature. (Kunene, 1961, p. 231). An exception to this criticism is B. W. Vilakazi. As recently as 1974, about 40 years after the appearance of his first book of poems, Cope says:

Vilakazi is still the most successful Zulu poet to write in the Zulu language. (Cope, p. 64)

While the critics generally agree that we have not produced a second Vilakazi yet, I think recent publications show a definite improvement. There is a trend from the simple and straight-forward descriptions of phenomena towards a more philosophical outlook on life. We now find poems whose depth demands a reader's concentration if they are to be fully appreciated.

In a very severe criticism, Jahn, in fact, thinks South African Bantu literature is degenerating. He remarks:

Neo-African literature on the African continent began in South Africa ... The three great South African Bantu languages – Sotho, Xhosa, and Zulu – moved into the foreground one after another at about the interval of a

decade, produced many talents, and became literary languages . . . Finally the Bantu Education Act in 1955 swept away the mission schools and the scanty remains of a half-free literature along with them. What has since been authorized to appear does not deserve the name of literature; it is mere reading matter for primary schools. (Jahn, p. 44)

We do concede that the writers' response to the critiques published in the past has not always been what it should be. Some of the recent publications still have weaknesses which were pointed out in the forties. Nevertheless I notice definite improvement in all spheres of Zulu literature, and I find no grounds for Jahn's allegations.

Despite some favourable remarks I have made about Zulu works, it is clear that Zulu literature has not progressed as well as it might. Someone might say we are using a wrong yardstick. Iyasere says:

To assess a work by standards that are alien to it is only to judge one system of values by another, which inevitably leads to a mutilation of the art. (Iyasere, p. 109)

It is true that most of the critics of Zulu literature were brought up with a Western approach to literature. But it is equally true that the bulk of Zulu literature we have at present is patterned according to Western types and styles – which means, therefore, that Western standards of assessment cannot be regarded as being completely alien to it. Naturally within this approach an appreciation of those elements which are indigenous or traditional must be taken into account. I think the present-day critic is fairly broadminded. He complains of the violation of the basic literary requirements. I don't think there is any critic following any tradition of literary criticism who would condone the recurrence of a single story told by different writers who merely use different names for a similar character. No critic would praise a story whose clumsiness of plot is due to the writer's inability to eliminate irrelevant incidents. No modern-day critic would applaud a writer who steps to the fore to preach sermons to the reader every now and then instead of giving the reader a chance to make his own deductions from what is presented to him. An inconsistent character – unless the inconsistency is part of his personality – is unconvincing no matter what standards of assessment we use. A critic who knows the Zulu language and the customs of the Zulus is able to appreciate utterances and actions which are justifiable according to the practices of these people. His employment of the Western yardstick does not prevent him from taking account of the traditional which is often not appreciated by Westerners. In short, most of the critical essays on Zulu literature indicate that some Zulu writers have not mastered the elementary principles of these new modes of artistic expression.

I call them "new modes" because traditionally the Zulus did not have things like the novel and dramatic works in the modern sense. It would be expecting too much to hope that Zulu writers would perfect the novel which he started writing only about forty years ago. The same might be said of drama. The Zulu writer depends a great deal on the Western plays he has read which he has probably never seen on the stage. He starts writing his own play without anticipating the difficulties that the producer of that play will have. With regard to poetry the Zulu poet wastes a lot of time trying to employ old European techniques, like the division of the poem into regular stanzas and using different rhyming patterns – things which even some of the modern Western poets have discarded. This has a tendency of making Zulu poetry sound forced and artificial.

There are other more serious factors which hamper the development of Zulu literature. It has been repeatedly

pointed out that Zulu writers always have a school child in mind. Nkosi, for example, comments:

Vernacular literature is more or less moribund . . . Since the government decides which books are suitable for reading in school, vernacular literature is subject to close official scrutiny. Controversial works dealing with sex, politics, and religion are automatically excluded. (Nkosi, p. 283)

Nyembezi makes a similar observation. He says:

The emphasis on producing books suitable for school use acts as a limiting factor on Zulu writers, it tends to cramp their style as they must keep in mind all the time the school children who are likely to be the main readers of those books. Writers who wish to cater for more mature minds find themselves handicapped. (Nyembezi, p. 5)

It is a tragedy that there are manuscripts which are not published because their standard is too high for school children of up to matriculation level. In fact some publishers are reluctant to publish anything that may be regarded as too difficult for students up to J.C. There are publishers who refuse to reprint a book whose literary merit warrants its prescription for degree courses, because the annual sales of that book will not be sufficient. This indicates that the publisher has no hope that ordinary people or adults outside the classroom will buy a Zulu book even if that book is aimed at adults.

A few people have expressed their ideas on why the readership of Zulu books is so limited. Kunene, for example, says:

. . . the low living standards do not allow literate Africans to have a large collection of books. (Kunene, p. 231)

Nyembezi is of the same opinion, and he adds:

. . . the conditions under which many Africans live are not conducive to the development of a habit such as reading. The homes are small and crowded and there is poor lighting which makes it difficult to read in the evening . . . (Nyembezi, p. 5)

There are other people who do not have these difficulties who will not spend money on Zulu books because they take it for granted that they will not derive any entertainment from books designed for school children. Instead these people spend much money on thrillers and romantic stories written by popular English authors like Agatha Christie and James Hadley Chase.

This is only a statement of the state of affairs. We do not justify the appearance of books of low standard just because those books are meant for school children. Some of the books used at schools should not have been published at all. Our observation is that some publishers use inefficient people to review their manuscripts. It is difficult to control this situation especially when there are so many publishing firms these days. One firm may have a qualified reader who has the development of Zulu literature at heart. He turns down a manuscript which he feels is poor or needs some improvements. The writer takes the same manuscript to another publisher who uses a less-qualified reader. The manuscript is accepted and published. The book is prescribed for, say Form 1, which means the second publisher will make money on it. What does the first publisher think of his strict reader? He would rather publish something mediocre than wait indefinitely for a good book which might just happen to be "too good" to give him good business.

This situation will not change unless something positive is done. A few remedies have been suggested. Kunene says:

The immaturity of these works also originates from the fact that there is no organised form of literary criticism

whose function would be to set up the standards.  
(Kunene, p. 231)

I think it might be of help if a column was available in some of our newspapers where different people were invited to discuss various aspects of Bantu literature. The Zulus are lucky in this respect since they have a half-yearly magazine called *Umcwaningi*, in which, among other things, one finds very enlightening scholarly discussions on Zulu literature. Some services of Radio Bantu have programmes where new books and other literary topics are discussed. A serious writer who listens to such programmes and reads books on writing and literary theories can thus improve his skill. He will be able to avoid common errors found in the published works.

If a writer reads the works of colleagues in his own language and in the other languages, he is in a better position to avoid producing mere paraphrases of other people's stories. He can try to emulate the techniques employed by the successful masters.

Another suggestion is for writers to form a club where possible. They can circulate their manuscripts among themselves before approaching the publishers. In such a club obvious weaknesses like inconsistencies and irrelevancies could be eliminated. Of course members of such a club should be knowledgeable, objective and selfless.

Many critics have suggested that a writer should use the technique of his traditional literature as much as possible. With regard to the novel, for example, Joachim says

The African novel will begin an authoritative existence the day its writers abandon a sterile imitation of Western forms of expression and return to the native land to search for originality and a specifically African style.  
(Joachim, p. 300)

Many voices have encouraged Zulu poets to make more use of *izibongo* as a basis for their poetry. Nyembezi says:

... a blending of the style of Izibongo with the European forms might produce some interesting new forms which might be a valuable contribution. (Nyembezi, p. 9)

Nkabinde is of the same opinion:

Izinkondlo zesiZulu azihlumele ezibongweni ukuze kulolongwe isu lobabamkhulu lona elalondolozeka lajamelana neziphepho kanye nezithiyo zonke emlandwini weNdlu emnyama. (Nkabinde, p. 16)

I agree with these views. In fact some of the best poems by people like J. C. Dlamini and others employ the style of *izibongo*. We admire the spontaneity of such poems. Of course it does not mean that the mere use of traditional devices will elevate any uninspired nonsense into good literature. There are many elements which contribute towards the production of an acceptable piece of art apart from the external structural forms. I think the Zulu poet is fortunate in that he can draw from so many established poetic patterns and manipulate these according to the themes of his poems and the effects he wants to achieve.

I wish to end this discussion on a note of optimism. Modern Zulu literature is still young. It would be too much to expect the appearance of many works of classical stature during this short period. The Zulu writer is after all still experimenting with new modes of artistic expression. At the same time we do not expect Zulu literature to crawl for centuries before it gets where we wish it could be.

Opportunities are created for Zulu writers to meet and discuss their problems. More critical essays are available to young writers. Zulu literature can be studied up to post graduate level. I think more people are keen to read good books in their own language. The Bureau for Zulu language and culture offers books to its members and thereby encourages them to read their literature. I don't think it will be very long before we get good writers who will produce material for developed minds. □

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cope, T.: *The Zulu People – A select Bibliography*, Univ. of Natal, 1971.
- Gerard, A. *Four African Literatures*, Univ. of California Press, 1971.
- Iyasere, S.O.: "Oral tradition in the Criticism of African Literature" in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 13, 1, 1975.
- Jahn, J.: "The tragedy of Southern Bantu Literature" in *Black Orpheus No. 21*, 1967.
- Joachim, P.: "French-speaking Africa's Poètes-Militants" in *A Handbook of African Affairs* edited by H. Kitschen, New York, 1964.
- Kunene, R.: *An analytical Survey of Zulu Poetry, Both Traditional and Modern*, M.A. dissertation, Univ. of Natal, 1961.
- Nkabinde, A. C.: "Makufunwe isu eliyilo ekubhaleni izinkondlo" in *Umcwaninge 2:1*, March 1971
- Nkosi, L.: "South Africa: Literature of Protest" in *A Handbook of African Affairs* edited by H. Kitschen, New York, 1964.
- Nyembezi, C. L. S.: *A Review of Zulu Literature*, Univ. of Natal, 1961
- Van Rooyen, C. S.: "Book Reviews: Zulu", *LIMI*, June 1972.
- Ziervogel, D.: *Linguistic and Literary Achievement in Bantu Languages of South Africa*, Univ. of South Africa, Pretoria 1956