

THE FORM OF PROTEST IN KENYA: DRAMA OR THE NOVEL?

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My aim in this paper is to focus attention on one of the crucial conditions of the production of drama and the novel in the very specific social context of post-Independence Kenya. I use the term 'drama' rather than 'theatre' because I have access only to what has been published as text, but I want to shift the focus of interest away from the individual text and look at the putative audience, and the way an author's perception of that audience will determine not only what he wants to say, but how to say it. The relationship between what a writer wants to say and the people to whom he will be saying it is clearly a key factor determining the choice of genre. I have chosen to look at protest literature partly because it is there that any possible conflict between the ideologies of author and readers is likely to show itself most obviously.

A critic's, and, often more obviously, a lecturer's choice of what to look at and how to approach it is always ideologically determined. Mountaineers are on occasion heard to claim that they climb mountains just because they are there. Critics can't pretend to that kind of innocence, so I should start by acknowledging my reasons for choosing this particular topic.

An understanding of the social and ideological factors determining literary production in East Africa is clearly essential in arriving at a knowledge of the works of the individual authors, and very little attention appears to be being focused on East African literature in our universities; but that is only part of my reason for choosing this topic. More important is the parallel between the situation in which the writer in Kenya who wishes to protest about the structure of Kenyan society finds himself or herself, and the situation facing lecturers trying to teach literature in racially selective universities in South Africa. I want to focus attention in the second half of my paper on this parallel, because it raises fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of the study of English Literature in South Africa in 1980. And such questions would seem to be overdue when the annual conference of South African university English teachers can fail to raise its corporate eyebrows at heads of English departments who trot out phrases like 'social relevance and other such sentimentalities', who argue that Brecht's Marxism was incidental to his drama, and who express open, if inarticulate, hostility to the discussion of literary theory.

What then is the situation confronting the writer in Kenya? The social, political, and economic situation about which Kenyan writers have protested is succinctly summed up in Henry Bienen's (1974, p.4) account of criticism of Kenya since 'Independence':

In Kenya's case, the national movement has been said to have been betrayed. The sense of bitterness among Kenya's critics is the greater because Kenya had such a traumatic colonial past. Africans fought and died during Mau Mau only to have the loyalists and the Europeans win out in the end, it is argued. It is said that the African elite has accepted the norms of the old rulers. The critics of Kenya point to a faction-ridden party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), which remains an empty shell. They maintain that power resides in a small clique around President Kenyatta and is wielded through a Civil Service which is colonial in form and substance, down to its very pith helmets. Growth takes place at the expense of the poor: the rich get richer and the poor stagnate or worse. A privileged elite distributes the benefits of economic growth that it gains through alliances with Europeans and through expropriation of Africans and Asians to tribal clients unfettered by any of the formal mechanisms of control which reside in the Legislature and elections. In the process, it exacerbates tribal tensions and creates them where they did not exist before. This same elite arrogates to itself the wisdom to choose a path for development on the grounds that people do not understand developmental problems and will, if left to themselves, allocate resources on a short-run calculation for schools, clinics, roads, and other immediate benefits. Curtailing effective mass participation is thus justified. Organized dissent is not allowed and the heavy hand of civil administration and, if need be, police and riot squads are used to put down opposition.

In 1971 Atieno-Odhiambo (Zirimu & Gurr, 1973, p.97) saw the East African writer's response, his particular version of the criticisms outlined by Bienen, as follows:

Generally the East African writer has since independence been a bitter, sometimes critical mind. He has been angry. This angry writer has had his anger very well focused. He knows against whom he is bitter - against the bureaucracy, its corruption, its despotic narrow-mindedness, its lack of concern for culture, and (ironically) its lack of tutelage over East Africa's intellectual and artistic life.

But some East African writers are not as self-interested as Atieno-Odhiambo might seem to imply - their concern is not simply with the effect the neo-colonial dispensation has on their own livelihood, its lack of interest in 'culture'. Some, Ngugi wa Thiong'o is only the most obvious case, recognize, and are more concerned about, the wider social implications, about what the attitude to culture is symptomatic of. So we find Ngugi (1972, p.12) describing the Kenyan elite's cultural subservience to the West, and its origins, as follows:

There are ... people who believe that you can somehow maintain colonial, economic, and other social institutions and graft on them an African culture. We have seen that colonial institutions can only produce a colonial mentality. The trouble, of course, is that many African middle classes helped to smother the revolutionary demands of the majority of peasants and workers and negotiated a treaty of mutual trust with the white colonial power structure. In fighting for independence, some of the African intelligentsia only wanted that which was forbidden to them or rather they saw the struggle in terms of their immediate needs, nurtured by the social position they had attained under the colonial system, whose fulfilment was however frustrated by the racism inherent in the system. They wanted to wear the same clothes and shoes, get the same salary, live in the same kind of mansions as their white counterparts of similar qualifications. After

independence, the racial barrier to their needs was broken. The gold-rush for the style of living of their former conquerors had started. Skin-lighteners, straightened hair, irrelevant drawingroom parties, conspicuous consumption in the form of country villas, Mercedes-Benzes and Bentleys, were the order of the day. Clutching their glasses of whisky and soda, patting their wigs delicately lest they fall, some of these people will, in the course of cocktail parties, sing a few traditional songs: hymns of praise to a mythical past: we must preserve our culture, don't you think?

The major problem facing the Kenyan writer is that the conditions of production of both the novel and drama in Kenya are such that it is precisely for the group described here by Ngugi that he or she is writing. If, that is, that the writing is directed at an African rather than an overseas market. The protest writer seriously concerned about the state of his society will obviously want to direct his protest chiefly towards that society. Just how elite is the African elite Bienen talks about and Ngugi describes?

Arthur Hazlewood's recent book, The Economy of Kenya: The Kenyatta Era (1979) reveals the extent of the discrepancies in income distribution in Kenya. He refers to several World Bank publications which, he says, show that: 'Roughly speaking 20% of the population receives nearly 70% of the total income. This distribution refers ... to both monetary and non-monetary or subsistence income (p. 192). Hazlewood (1979, p.191) quotes the 1972 ILO report which shows that only 13% of Kenyan households had an annual income of more than KSh200 a year, and only 3% had an income of over KSh600, and then goes on to comment:

Therefore the typist with a salary of KSh489 - 690, and the skilled wage-earner with KSh216 - 452 are among the middle class and the rich. But, as the Duke of Wellington, at the height of his fame, replied to the person who approached him with 'Mr Smith, I believe': 'Sir, if you believe that, you will believe anything.' That the typist and wage-earner are in any significant sense among the rich could be believed only by someone without experience of the way they live or with his nose buried firmly in the figures. (Hazlewood, 1979, p.196).

The elite, in whose hands rest political, bureaucratic, and to some extent economic, power, is a very small group indeed, who have their education largely to thank for being where they are. As Hazlewood (p.198) puts it:

The accumulation of wealth since the early 1960s has been mainly the consequence of an earlier access to education, providing the opportunity for salaried employment in business and administration, and of whatever in different cases has determined the ability to achieve political influence.

The elite are the elite largely because of their education, which obviously has a crucial bearing on the conditions of production of the literary work in Kenya. Production, as Marx stressed, is only ever completed by consumption. The primary factor determining the Kenyan novelist's putative audience is clearly the ability to read. In 1970, the latest date for which Africa Contemporary Record (Legum, 1977-78, p.121) would appear to have figures, an estimated 30% of the adult population was literate. Kenya's highly progressive education policy, one of the most advanced in Africa - Africa Contemporary Record says, 'expenditure on education accounts for about 40% of the recurrent budget and for two-thirds of its spending on the social services' (Legum, 1976-77, p.B233) - will have ensured that the figure is substantially higher now. But, as John Hall (1979, p.121) points out when talking about the 'reading public' one must distinguish between 'reading ability' and the

'reading habit'. It doesn't help the prospective novelist much that, say, 40% of the adult population can read if an enquiry into what they read suggests that the situation in Kenya is the same as that in Nigeria where Achebe (1975, pp.38-41), in his essay 'What do the African Intellectuals Read?', has to conclude that African intellectuals read very little.

Angus Calder's (1974, p.83) experience in Kenya led him to conclude in 1971: 'The reading public in East Africa is a small class of highly educated people. Such people also form the bulk of the local bourgeoisie, and would seem on all available evidence to prefer the sick fantasies of James Hadley Chase and the meaningless romances of Anya Seton to novels about real conditions by local writers.' As evidence Calder cites the fact that in two years' lecturing at Nairobi University he found only one first year student out of 75 who had read Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat, which was already available in paperback. This would appear to have been due as much to residual colonial attitudes assertive of black inferiority as to anything else. Calder cites the case of a Nairobi clerk who told him he preferred Ian Fleming to Ngugi because Africans couldn't write good English.

While education is the fundamental qualification for elite status, a man or woman's position in the hierarchy is not determined by his or her intellectual prowess or, beyond a certain point, by the extent of his or her education. As G C M Mutiso (19 , p.133) has put it: 'Those involved in intellectual (university, journalism and publishing) as well as literary work have been outside the formal institutions of power, are despised by the bulk of the power holders, and have no formal basis in traditional societies.'

The vast majority of those who are literate but do not belong to the elite, and might thus be receptive to literature satirizing that elite, are precluded from membership of any realistic putative audience by the cost of books and the inadequacy of library services. The East African Publishing House has adopted the very sound policy of having book buyers in the metropolis subsidize those in the periphery - thus a copy of Armah's Two Thousand Seasons cost £2.40 in London in 1977, but only 15sh. in Nairobi, while Kibera and Kahiga's Potent Ash cost £1.50 as against 9sh.50. But when 77% of the population are earning less than £10 per household per month, and over 50% are earning less than £5, it is clearly going to be impossible for many novels to be bought when they each amount to at least a twentieth of the household's monthly income.

As Calder (1974, p.84) concludes:

The writer, in short, is confined to addressing a small section of the community which is probably, of all sections, least interested in a really radical message or a really subtle criticism of contemporary manners. A writer who saw his novels as blows for the cause of humanity, and who wanted to move a large public, would find no large public to move.

Drama would seem to be the better bet as a medium for protest. Of its very nature it is a communal experience and has to do with a corporate rather than an individual response - it will move more people more quickly. Indeed, drama has been identified by African writers as the obvious genre for the writer with revolutionary ideas. Soyinka (1975, p.65), for example, has argued of the interaction between actor and audience:

Since this is the operative technique, this technique of (sensual and moral) interaction, a technique whose only end can be change, not consolidation (change, however fragmentary, illusory, however transient,

however lacking in concrete, ultimate significancies, nevertheless is change) - it suggests that the theater is perhaps the most revolutionary art form known to man.

And Ngugi (1977) in his preface to The Trial of Dedan Kimathi, written jointly with Micere Mugo, makes it clear that his play is intended to perform a revolutionary function:

We believe that Kenyan Literature - indeed all African Literature, and its writers is on trial. We cannot stand on the fence. We are either on the side of the people or on the side of imperialism. African Literature and African Writers are either fighting with the people or aiding imperialism and the class enemies of the people. We believe that good theatre is that which is on the side of the people, that which, without masking mistakes and weaknesses, gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation.

But the dramatist writing plays in English in Kenya is not, in fact, very much better off in terms of his possible audience than his novelist counterpart. 'Theatres' are confined to the larger centres and are owned and controlled by the elite. While the cost of the cheapest theatre tickets will be less than the price of a novel it will still make very severe inroads into the household budget of the majority of people. More important, the theatre-going habit in 'Independent' Africa has tended to be the exclusive preserve of the elite even more than the reading habit has. Theatre-going has been one of the activities of the colonial elite most avidly taken over by the black elite, as one could have predicted from Ngugi's description quoted earlier. Not only is the idea of going to 'the theatre' taken over - so also is the idea of what a theatre should look like, and what kind of play is acceptable. Angus Calder (19 , p.206), for example, identifying an obsession with naturalistic drama on the part of the Kenyan elite says:

In terms of European theatre, Brecht's drama reached back towards Shakespeare, but was able to borrow also from the non-naturalistic devices still standard in China and Japan. Yet people in Nairobi can talk as if a town with 'theatres' of the European sort can have no 'drama'; as if the tedious naturalism of detective thrillers and light comedies were the consummation of the world's dramatic traditions, rather than a monstrous local aberration.

In writing plays in English for a theatre-going public who have wholly accepted the colonial cultural norms, the playwright, like the novelist, is confined to addressing a small section of the community, the section least interested in radical messages, or, for that matter, in any form of social criticism, which will inevitably come down, in one way or another, to criticism of itself.

The definitive endorsement of this view would seem to have come not from a literary critic, but from the Kenyan Government. Early in 1977 Ngugi's most recent novel Petals of Blood, an avowedly, and at times polemically, Marxist novel, was officially launched by one of Kenya's most senior Cabinet Ministers, Mr Mwai Kibaki, the Minister of Finance. The Kenyan Government had clearly assessed the novel's potential impact on Kenyan society, come to the same conclusion as Angus Calder, and decided that it could afford not only to countenance but to patronize the novel. Just as it had realized it could afford to ignore The Trial of Dedan Kimathi (1977) and This Time Tomorrow (1970). Indeed, Petals of Blood provided the opportunity for a useful government propaganda exercise. C B Robson (1979, p.136) reports that, in launching the novel, Mr Kibaki 'announced the government's decision

to maintain freedom of expression.' Later in 1977, however, Ngugi co-authored a play in Gikuyu with Ngugi wa Mirii. Robson provides the fullest available account of this play's history. The play, Ngaahika Ndenda, about a poor peasant who loses his land to a wealthy farmer, broke entirely new ground in drawing on the local peasantry for its actors and actresses. It opened in October 1977 to packed houses at a community centre near Ngugi's home in Limuru; in November 1977 it was banned by local officials on the grounds that it was creating divisions among Kenyans and awakening old rivalries; in December 1977 Ngugi was detained without trial. A significant event in a country with a far better record on detention without trial than South Africa's. Ngugi was released only after the death of Kenyatta, while his university post was advertised shortly after his detention. Freedom of expression in Kenya would appear to be acceptable only so long as it is directed at, or accessible only to, those who can be guaranteed to remain unmoved by what is expressed. The novel is acceptable because it is available only to the literate and, generally, only to the better off among the literate at that; the dramatist is safe as long as he writes in English, because that limits his audience sufficiently for the neo-colonial state's comfort. But let the writer speak directly to people who might really want to listen and extreme forms of censorship are unleashed.

Most of what I have said so far falls into the traditional realms of sociology and economics - areas within which the literary critic must obviously move if he or she is to arrive at a knowledge of literature, or the formulation of statements about literature which aren't simply revelatory of the critic's own, no doubt finely honed, sensibility. And of all the relevant conditions determining the Kenyan novelist's or dramatist's production I have glanced at only one - the prospective audience; an examination of the others would involve further excursions into these fields. Rather than do that, though, I would like to take one example by way of illustration and glance briefly at the way the situation I have outlined has been the key determinant of Leonard Kebera's (1970) novel Voices in the Dark. It seems a particularly appropriate example for a paper on both drama and the novel in that it is a novel about the futility of writing plays.

Voices in the Dark is a dense, elliptic, and impressionistic novel, whose form is clearly determined more by a reaction against the demand for naturalism discussed earlier than by anything else, and whose plot is difficult to pinpoint, let alone summarize. The scene shifts mainly between a pair of crippled beggars in an alley in Nairobi, two ex-Freedom fighters whose plight symbolizes the effective quality of the freedom they fought for, and Gerald, a socialist playwright. Gerald assaults the ruling elite with his plays, has an indecisive relationship with Wilna, the daughter (in the Romeo and Juliet pattern of the early Ngugi) of the leading neo-colonial capitalist villain, and gets shot in a very casual pair of parentheses at the end of the novel.

Gerald is a fictional embodiment of Kibera's recognition of the futility of writing in the Kenyan context. His role as a writer is satirized throughout. The reader is told, for example:

He would go to the workers' end where things happened and take a good look around. There he would write three great plays (The Beggars, The Beggars' Squad and The Beggars' Squad Revisited) and devote himself to the squalor that disturbed his conscience. Then, impoverished, he would retire humbly into obscurity. As soon as his candle of creativity died out he was bound to follow, leaving behind him a blank check against royalties to all the beggars he had so faithfully exploited. (p.36)

It is specifically Gerald's role as a writer that is satirized, rather than Gerald himself, for Gerald acts, much of the time, as the author's mouth-piece in an indictment of neo-colonialism which is every bit as mordant as Ngugi's. As seen, for example, in Gerald's reflections:

That he might alienate from his theatre certain segments with a tendency to judge him on the expatriate standards of Stratford-on-Avon did not particularly bother him ... And what he felt most impatient with were those Africans who carried their good English around forever in a trance, forever believing they owed Allan Quartermain and Tarzan a debt of the soul. For it was these very people who, in an attempt to offer their own version of the Welfare state through African Socialism, made nonsense of the latter and very wisely took to exploitation. (p.68)

At those points at which Gerald is seen in the least favourable light Kibera is always leading up to a comment on Gerald as playwright. At times the desire to satirize the role of the creative artist in the Kenyan context leads Kibera to attribute thoughts to Gerald which seem rather out of character. Thus Gerald's reflections on Wilna's crying run:

It made him feel great to be a man because men never cried. They were strong and only the weak stupid ones among men displayed tears; the strong ones never did. So the strong ones should whip hell out of the weak ones and give them something to cry for. It was great to be a man; for a man directed his tears and energy to his playwriting and creative art, or chewed bubblegum when his eyes threatened to become watery. (p.97)

Playwriting in the Kenyan context can only be a form of therapy, on a par with chewing bubblegum. 'But then what would you expect?', the novel seems to ask through its undisguised satire on the Donovan Maule theatre, described by Adrian Roscoe (1977, p.205) as: 'East Africa's own Restoration Theatre in the Tropics, decorating an opulent corner of national life untouched by African culture.'

The underlying question, inescapable in view of the possible audience, is 'what difference does literature make?'. Has Ngugi, Kibera's lecturer at Nairobi, really done anything to convince the elite that the suffering of the Kenyan peasantry is a cause for concern? Or even, for that matter, that the Kenyan peasantry are suffering? Does literature really succeed in imparting the values it, or its proponents, take such pride in, to any one at all - let alone to anyone in a position to embody them in a programme of social reform? As Wilna says to Gerald:

And even your plays - they help the establishment. As long as writers just write they will do nothing only praise one another at literary conferences and mutual admiration groups. A good line done for the day and you are off to celebrate. Like the rest of them. (p.93)

As Adrian Roscoe (1977, p.203) puts it:

Gerald's ultimate message is that novels like Voices in the Dark are a waste of time. They make no difference to the victims they champion, though initially they make a difference to the author, allowing him the luxury of a regularly eased conscience. From the idea of art to change the world we are reduced to art as private therapy, art as penance and absolution. Thus an assumption instinct in most African writing - that literature can change men's hearts and hence the course of social history - gets some very sceptical treatment. We are left with beggars in the darkness of their alley hooting with laughter

while they ask if they too should write plays.

Perhaps more to the point for our purposes here, the reader is left to ponder the truth of Mama Njeri, Gerald's mother's, statement: 'There is only one book worth writing, son, and that is a pamphlet on food and politics. I don't care for bigger words.' (p.135)

It is the conditions under which the writer in Kenya has to produce his literature that determine the hopelessness and weariness which permeate Voices in the Dark. In Gerald's words 'Actually I am tired of writing plays. I'm tired of this one-man symphony against the English. No one listens. Everybody is too busy riding in the back seat of some expensive donkey.' (p.145)

Kibera comes to the conclusion that writing plays is futile and writing novels is equally so; he thought it worthwhile writing a novel to say so, but hasn't published one since. Sembene Ousmane switched his attention from novel to film production long before that. Achebe has said: 'I can't write a novel now. I wouldn't want to. And even if I wanted to I couldn't.' (see O'Finn, 1975, p.50). Ngugi wrote Petals of Blood, but felt it necessary also to write plays in Gikuyu, and was arrested for his pains. And that hasn't assisted the production of further novels - a new Ngugi novel, Devil on the Cross, has been being faithfully promised by Heinemann ever since early 1977, and is still not forthcoming. The movement seems to be from novel, to play or film in the language of the conqueror, to theatre in the vernacular, as the author who wishes to protest about his society feels compelled to look further afield, often literally afield, for people who are not only able, but also willing, to listen. But the conditions of production of both drama and the novel in neo-colonial Africa would seem to be such as to determine that, in the end, non-production becomes the response of many of Africa's most important authors.

Kibera and Ngugi are committed to the cause of an African revolution against neo-colonialism and oppression - it is this that makes their perception of their audience so crucial a determining factor in their literary production. A violent manifestation of that same revolution is gathering momentum outside the windows of our conference rooms and lecture halls. In July 1980 the Association of University English Teachers of South Africa held its annual conference in Johannesburg. In terms of a ban on all meetings attended by more than ten people at which criticism of the South African government might be voiced, that conference was allowed to proceed only on the pre-supposition firstly, that South African English Lecturers do not share the commitment of Kibera and Ngugi, and, secondly, that we are not likely to relate anything in the literature we discuss to our immediate situation. In the event we chose to come together to discuss Shakespeare, among others, in those circumstances without, apparently, finding it necessary to ask what we were doing. There was only one paper on literary theory, and no public debate on what the ultimate object of our teaching English Literature in the current South African context is intended to be. It appeared to be generally assumed that we all know that is meant by 'literature', that there is a common consensus on how it should be approached, and a set of shared views on what is supposed to be being achieved. These assumptions seem to me to be no longer tenable; nor, I would suggest, is the value of a literary conference in South Africa in 1980 simply self-evident.

What I have been saying about the problems facing writers in Kenya who wish to protest about their society suggests to me a number of specific parallels with our own situation as teachers of literature, English or African, in

South Africa today, and raises a number of specific questions. I want to end by asking those questions. They fall into three related groups.

Firstly, to what extent are teachers of English in South African universities in a similar position to that identified for East African writers by Angus Calder? Aren't we, and through us the literature we choose to teach, confined to addressing a small section of the community which is probably, of all sections, least interested in a radical message or a subtle criticism of contemporary manners? The message need not even be radical. Can we really convince ourselves that the last thirty years of preaching the Leavisian noble values have had the humanizing effect on white South Africa that we would, if we got as far as formulating our intentions in teaching English, like to pretend that they must have had? Even when the universities are opened will we not just be exchanging a predominantly black elite, the same black elite castigated by Ngugi and Kibera, for our present predominantly white elite? Perhaps we should be asking ourselves, as Gerald does in Voices in the Dark, whether it isn't true that: 'No one listens. Everybody is too busy riding in the back seat of some expensive donkey.' As Calder's view would seem to have been confirmed in Kenya by the government's feeling free to promote Petals of Blood, so its application to South Africa would seem to be endorsed by this government's policy of letting academics get on with it, as long as they don't involve themselves in trade union activities. Are we, as English teachers, simply voices in the dark whose only achievement over the last thirty years has been, in line with the rest of our universities, to fit our graduates for their niche in an apartheid society which runs totally counter to the values of the literature we teach? We may not be able to determine whom we talk to but we should surely be continually reassessing our function; asking, what, in the South African context, we are trying to do, and whether we have found the right way of doing it. And perhaps, to lend immediacy to our deliberations, we should reserve space permanently at the back of our minds for the question: At what point, if ever, in a society like ours, does it in fact become true that there is only one book worth writing - and presumably worth lecturing on - and that is a pamphlet on food and politics?

The second group of closely related questions arises directly out of Wilna's statement: 'And even your plays - they help the establishment. As long as writers just write they will do nothing, only praise one another at literary conferences and mutual admiration groups.' Do our literary conferences, in Kibera's term, get beyond being mutual admiration groups? You scratch my sensibility and I'll scratch yours. People are being shot in our streets. Repressive state action against dissent will usually attempt to justify itself in terms of the necessity to preserve what is valuable in the existing social order. 'Culture' is frequently seized on as an obvious symbol; and you don't get many more obviously cultural activities than University conferences on English Literature. Is it conceivable that people are being shot so that we can sit at those conferences, or anywhere else for that matter, and talk about Shakespeare? If so, what would an adequate response on our part be?

It is worth reflecting briefly here on one aspect of Francis Coppola's provocative film Apocalypse Now (1980). Coppola makes his Colonel Kurtz read Eliot's 'The Hollow Men' aloud to himself, he has Frazer's The Golden Bough and Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance prominently displayed on Kurtz's bedside table, he has the US helicopters blare Wagner out of loud-speakers 'to scare the hell out of the slopes' in the process of obliterating Vietnamese villages. One of the points Coppola is making is that the culture represented by Conrad, Frazer, Weston, Eliot and Wagner has not prevented the

Vietnam war, indeed it has been appropriated as war-material. The other point he is making is that the visible artefacts of that culture have been turned into symbols of what the war is being fought about - it is Western 'Civilization' supposedly resisting the onslaughts of communism. To what extent are we, and the literature we value, being used in the same way? While we cannot, perhaps, ultimately do anything very much about the co-option of literature to ideological ends we can surely try to make that co-option as difficult as possible. Which would necessitate, for a start, the alerting of our students to the working of ideology.

The third group of questions is raised by Ngugi and Mugo's assertion: 'We believe that Kenyan literature - indeed all African literature and its writers is on trial. We cannot stand on the fence. We are either on the side of the people or on the side of imperialism.' The study of neo-colonialism which any serious examination of African literature necessitates reveals that Ngugi's demarcation of the battle lines, with 'the people' on one side and 'imperialism' on the other, is an accurate one. Is it then true that those committed to the teaching of African and South African literature are equally on trial? That we, too, are either on the side of the people or on the side of imperialism? Is it really possible to evade that choice in South Africa today by falling back on the claim to be teaching English and not African literature, or by claiming that literature, and the way it is taught, have nothing to do with politics?

Michael Vaughan, in a recent, unpublished paper, 'A Marxist polemic contra Practical Criticism', has argued, to my mind unanswerably, that the confrontation with Marxist literary criticism has exposed practical criticism as a politically determined practice: 'When practical criticism and Marxism confront each other in the arena of critical debate, neither can any longer pretend to be an innocent and open practice.' That does not bother the Marxist critic whose political commitment is acknowledged, but it does reveal the contradictions in the avowedly politically neutral character of practical criticism. The argument is a complex one, impossible to summarize in a sentence or two, but it is based on the recognition that the conceptual fields (or problematics) of Marxism and practical criticism are mutually exclusive. Because no one can simultaneously inhabit both conceptual fields, the one having autonomous individual sensibility as its determinant concept, the other having the class struggle, a choice has to be made. What, finally, is the essential difference between that choice, which has to be faced by everyone teaching or writing about literature, and the choice between being on the side of the people or on the side of imperialism?

Perhaps what we, as English lecturers in South Africa in 1980, should be saying to our students, and remembering ourselves, is best summed up in a passage from Petals of Blood (1977, p.200), which I will have to paraphrase, somewhat loosely, as the novel is banned. It stresses the importance of the ideological factors operating on author and audience, conditions of production of the literary work which crucially determine what is said and how the audience responds; it implies that one of the things teachers of literature should be doing is examining the working of ideology, and in particular the relationship between literature and ideology; and it confronts us, very starkly, with the choices outlined above. A Nairobi lawyer, having been asked by Karega for some books which will give him a vision of the future rooted in a critical awareness of the past, and having had a selection of books returned to him by a dissatisfied Karega, points out in his reply to Karega that he wanted the latter to judge for himself. Intellectuals, educators and men of letters, which would obviously include both writers and critics, are, he argues, only voices which, in spite of appearances, are

not neutral or disembodied, but belong to parties with vested interests. It is imperative for anyone looking for the truth of the words uttered by any voice to identify the body behind the voice. For any voice always provides a rationalization of the caprices, the vagaries, the needs and the desires of the body behind it. Discover then, the lawyer argues, the ideology in whose interests the intellect is acting and you will be in a position to analyse its utterances with confidence. The choices are clear-cut: you either serve those who are oppressed and exploited or you serve those who do the oppressing and exploiting. In a situation in which the polarities are as stark as this there can be no genuine neutrality, for all the apparent neutrality, in any approach to politics, history or literary criticism. Those who wish to learn should look about them; choose their side.

If English teachers in South Africa in 1980, are qualified for anything, they are qualified to look about and learn.

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