

It is from this foundation of absolute social integration without any pretence of exhibitionistic individualization or academic drawing, that education in the arts must begin if it is not to contribute to a pale parody of western European art.

Basically, the problem in Africa is one of coming to terms with the outside world. It is no use pretending that nationalism is enough, or that cultural resistance can find a *modus vivendi* with technological progress. Nationhood is a fact, not an angry argument, and the so-called African "personality" is nothing if it is not the aggregate of millions of individually unique personalities.

The true challenge lies, therefore, in the response to that very simple, that poignantly simple, Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." In the last analysis, is anything else either verifiable or true? □



THE LOVE OF AFRICA

A Review of **Black Bronze Beautiful**, by Adam Small (Ad. Donker, 1975)

by Colin Gardner

In this small volume of fifty four-line poems, Adam Small has attempted—it seems to me—to bring together, in rich brief images and evocations, a number of awarenesses which would normally be thought of as separate.

The speaker of the poems is a woman, a black woman, who invites the man whom she is addressing to recognize and accept her, to explore her, to enjoy her, to learn from her and be enriched by her—to love her deeply and overwhelmingly. After the first few poems it begins to become clear that the African woman is also the continent of Africa itself, and the explorations and enrichments that are offered are variously geographical, geological, historical, psychological, religious. Interwoven with the direct lyricism of human love, then, there is an ecstatic feeling for a land and its meanings somewhat like what one finds in Whitman when he writes of America, and an emblematic suggestiveness a little reminiscent of the 'Song of Songs'.

Africa pleads, encourages, inspires; but who (besides the reader) is being addressed? At times it appears to be a black man or blacks in general; at other times, a white man, or whites in general. In the end the answer must be: everyone who belongs to Africa. One's sense that this is so is confirmed by the epigraph, which reads:

Fifty quatrains
for the African road
to a rhythm, new for
Africa's people, as we are growing together,
all or us.

The political dimension of the poems is very important. Whites are invited, implicitly, to accept, to seek fulfilment, and to be reconciled—to bury their whiteness in the creative darkness. Blacks are urged to expand and relax, both to learn what they are and to **become** what they are. A remarkable feature of the poems is their providing a bodily image for the political attitude known as black consciousness (and no doubt this partly explains the fact that they are the first poems that Adam Small has written in English, which is the language of black liberation in South Africa). Even more remarkable, perhaps, is the blending of black consciousness with an open-hearted appeal to whites. Adam Small seems to reach through, in the best pieces at any rate, to that innermost psychological or spiritual area where the desire to assert one's identity, and the desire to accept and embrace the identity of another, become one.

Clearly my account needs to be filled out by instances. (Before I quote, however, I must mention one minor irritation: the poet has used ordinary punctuation, but omitted

full-stops; this sometimes makes it a little difficult at first to grasp either the meaning or the rhythm.) Here are three of the earliest poems, in which the speaker establishes both her own presence and the predominant mood of the sequence:

3

My limbs, my love, are ebony formed fine
whose coolness kindles fires in the mind
whose quiet raises in the heart a storm:
oh you, don't fear to burn, or blow, or to be mine

4

Come, nest your hands and lips like birds
in my bush of black hair; perch in my branches
all your open being; be truthful utterly: come
hide away in me from people, and from stones and words

5

Bronze is my body like anointed soil
or the most blessed bread, or wine
hallowed by wood and years in cellars deep:
a cup is my bronze body, overflowing oil

The motive force within the poems—what is expressed and what is invoked—is sexual desire. But this is shown as having (as of course it always does have) qualities, aspects, implications, resonances. The fineness of the ebony produces a passionate reaction, almost as a fine day might lead to a storm; the bounty of the woman's black hair is associated with, is a part of, the bounty of the countryside. And in poem 5, as in a number of the later poems, the imagery of nature and of natural things acquires further, biblical overtones: the consummation of human love begins to represent the fulfilment of the relationship between man and the universe and God. One notices, by the way, that the black ebony of poem 3 has become brown bronze in poem 5: the lineaments of the woman are constantly changing, and she encompasses every indigenous African colour (it's worth remembering that Adam Small is himself, in South African terminology, a 'coloured' man).

Before long the woman's naturalness and valid earthiness have begun to become nature, earth, Africa:

9

My cavities are elemental, black the caves
of my dark Self, the hollows of my ears
recesses of my eyes, walls of my womb, all carved
through ages long by lava, lightning, and warm ocean waves

The poems invite a movement, then, into the dark, the primeval, where man will discover an ancient kinship with his environment. Africa means intuition:

10

My body can fulfil you simply since I live
Its pasture is rich, is dark—be like a playful foal
or be a still and youthful god of Thought:
my reason, like my body, is intuitive

and warmth:

11

I am warm: gather my myrrh with spice
and earthy: eat my honeycomb with my honey
I wasn't born from that White Womb, so cold
of glaciers and of aeons of chill ice

Is the 'black consciousness' obtrusive here? Perhaps it is; and yet the poem seems to succeed on other levels. White-

ness is seen as an absence of life and colour; in an earlier poem (6) the poet has suggested that 'fullness' is always black. In one sense, of course, this is literally true. Obviously too the poem is evoking both the coldness of the northern regions from which the whites came to Africa, and the cool inhumanity not (one hopes) of all white people but certainly of most of the laws which represent the mind of the majority of the white community in Southern Africa. Needless to say, there is an element of simplification, even of caricature, in all this; yet it has its point. And white people, in so far as the poem is addressed to them, are encouraged, not to jump into the sea or to freeze in their own frigidity, but to darken themselves, to participate in Africa, to eat the honeycomb and the honey. In one of their dimensions, the poems can be thought of as a plea for miscegenation.

Africa is free; but it is also confined, an unappreciated woman, awaiting understanding and fulfilment:

13

If I am sealed and like a garden locked, then let me out
If I am closed and like a covered well, then let me out
Release my fragrance, free my fountains, my love:
let blow your wind, let waft my odours, and my water
spout

Once one begins to explore Africa, one finds that she is vast, varied, enticing; but to be lost in her beauty is to be renewed:

18

Men lose themselves in me—those found are few
Lost in my mountains, rivers: Kilimanjaro, Congo
or my desert or tall grass: my hope, despair
Finding themselves in me, however, they are new

The exploration, sexual on one level and geographical on another, suggests other sorts of renewal and discovery. Africa teaches, through its animals, an elemental sensitivity:

19

My thought is earthy and original, strides
with the panther's paws softly and sensitive
along the path of nostrils and quick eyes:
mottled it moves and graciously it glides

Yet there is nothing simple about Africa; its qualities are in some ways paradoxical, like those of a woman:

21

God with thunder and lightning in his hand
made my soft sounds; with black and blinding love
modelled my sight; and God in deepest silence
fashioned my war-cries: mine is ambiguous land

These paradoxes, however, are also those of God and man; to embrace them is to broaden one's humanity:

22

My cups are a honeyed calyx and an aloe'd phial
Ambiguous is my heart: silence and sound at once
and you would understand me truly if you hold
the desert sand esteemed just like the flooding Nile

As the next poem points out, the spirit of Africa—her liveliness, her flexibility—is summed up in the love of dancing:

for dancing is essential
and rhythm is my foremost requisite.

And the African dance maintains itself in spite of the rigidities of misunderstanding, of colonization and oppression. Nothing can prevent her from being the living woman that she is:

24

Despite their weighting of my feet with woe
Despite the ball they've chained upon my grace
bolts upon my bearing, locks upon my liteness
my rhythm is intact: See me come and go

As the music wakens her to greater vitality, she asks to be accepted, guided, loved:

25

My mind, pulsating black, throbs—hold my hand
The black drums of my soul beat—hold my waist
The music grows, beauteous and black now
like a black child grows into a tall black man

Singling out the political dimension, one may feel that the appeal in these lines is simply to black awareness and not to the imagination of a white person; but the whole sequence invites all the people of Africa to accept her in her wholeness—to accept and to play a part. There is something overwhelming and barbaric about love, however, once it is fully aroused. Africa must be herself, and must assert herself; those who don't belong, who can't participate, may have to be swept away:

26

To love and to love lavishly, that is my need:
a sheer necessity. Let then the vultures fly
My sky is vast and blue; and what must die, let die
My earth is wide and far. Let the hyenas feed

The next poem switches to a very different mood, and shows us a different aspect of Africa's experience:

27

Oh they have ravaged me, have raped
this land and forced my children far from me, away
from my black soil and soul; proud do I walk despite
—the rainbow round my supple shoulders draped

And so my commentary might go on. As must by now be obvious, the poems are permeated (as some of Whitman's

are) with a romanticism which both idealizes and simplifies: yet the thoughts and feelings that the poems convey, and the images and suggestions that they throw up, are sufficiently related to the reality that we know—people and politics and sexuality and the African earth and the African past—for the poems to be genuinely challenging and moving. Sometimes the image is a little forced, the rhythm falters. On the whole the sequence must be regarded as a remarkable contribution to imaginative self-awareness in the Southern Africa of the late seventies.

I want to conclude not with the critic's evaluations but with the poet's music. Here are four more of the quatrains. The first evokes the laughter of Africa, associated with the love of dancing:

31

My laughter blows over the ancient highlands
stirring the birds in black and twittering trees
on Futa Jalon, Mount Tahat: my laughter,
warm, fills full the Plateau winds

The next one is a direct appeal to whites (though some blacks may feel invoked too), and it brings together the personal and the political in a daring manner:

44

Tap from my shapely body earthy and dark wine
intoxicating cupfuls: Oh let us drink, first drink, then try
to live-together: for, sober, we fashion schemes so very neat
of hate, while having drunk we humanly incline

The sequence ends gently:

49

Rest in my shade, my love—Oh come, revive
Sit in the shadow of my walls, yes come
I am for you an open door to enter by
I am your room and harbour of fresh life

and (summing up innumerable evocations) encouragingly:

50

To nurse you back to life, if you but will
I am good ears of corn for you—Bake bread!
I am sweet bunches of black grapes for you—Make wine!
I hold life out to you, full and delectable.□

INSTANT COFFEE COUNTRY

On a political map of East Africa Kenya stands out like a pearl among swine to the Western business world and the rapidly expanding Kenyan middle class comprising a multi-racial mixture of Asians, Africans, Americans and Europeans.

The past twelve years since independence have proved to be secure and prosperous ones by world standards for the middle classes.

The white settlers who remained and multiplied after Independence are still enjoying their privileged position. There is still the coast to swarm upon at Christmas, despite the nuisance of tourists many of whom come on package tours from Germany. There is still the bush despite the

VW combis, fitted with American tourists, that occasionally disturb the peace. When the holidays are over there is still the elegant house to return to, even if the gardens have been cut from five to one acre and the property needs constant patrolling by askari's and mbuakalis. There are plenty of opportunities to work up a thirst for the sundowner gin and tonic by playing tennis or squash at one of the many exclusive clubs. It provides an interest for the bored housewives and a break from giving orders to house staff and Asian shopkeepers. Many have successfully managed to avoid Africanisation in employment and by hook or by crook have obtained work permits. In the halcyon days before inflation it was no strain on the finances to send the children