Response

A preliminary report on a newly-discovered country, its inhabitants and their strange and unfamiliar customs, with some observations appended on matters social, religious, bucolic, identific, scientific, horrific, potentific, metaphoric, truthful or not, literary and pertaining to the stock exchange.

or

The Irreverence of Relevance

Hein Viljoen

Since I know virtually nothing about Cervantua and Pantasanchez, Tristan le Fataliste or that great masterwork, Don Simplissimus and his sidekick Fatso Faustus, I shall endeavour to reveal a few things about a place that is neither a utopia nor a dystopia, neither paradise nor hell, neither above nor below, neither here nor there - just a place beyond nowhere, called Azininia.

I will make some ludic observations on the country, the identity of its inhabitants and the insanity of its writers and critics.

A General Description of Azininia

The country itself is neither rich nor poor, neither big nor small, not very cultivated and rather hotter and drier than colder and wetter. A middle of the road kind of country.

Its people are believed to survive mainly on a diet of water and crushed maize. And the flesh of mangoes.

One of its interesting features is the many languages its people try to speak or misunderstand. These include not only colonial anglais but all kinds of patois like Transvôls, Houghtonese, Sowetan, Cape or Kitchen

Dutch and a lot of academic discourses I will come to in due course. I should mention in passing the use in certain exotic circles of RDPese and PC-talk - which not only chews up bytes and RAM but regurgitates human rights, equality to all and democracy, not to speak of abrogation and appropriation.

As to its political institutions, a ministry of fantasy has been proposed - in all seriousness - see Sunday's *Rapport*. The incumbent minister qualifies for a third of the salary of less serious minsters, on condition that he/she/it does not promote Father Christmas or Government Policy, but only the Tooth Fairy.

In addition a Commission of Truth Fairies has been set up to delve into the recent past after the truth, meanwhile punishing the opponents of the present government for atrocities of the past.

Oh, and I must not omit the obsession of the inhabitants of this beautiful country with matters of security - security fences, burglar bars, alarms, panic buttons, Rottweiler dogs, infra-red sensors, armed response, condoms, razor wire, hot cooking oil, booby traps poisoned with elephant dung and all kinds of dirty tricks in the fine tradition of the Bureau of Civil Protection.

The Identity of its People

Turning now to the identity of its people, it is easy to observe an ongoing unequal struggle between two main identities - the suave and cool type, modelled on the people of a certain island on the coast of Europe, the Leon or lion or albion type, and the other type, classified as K double-O S - of the white earth or clay type with a predilection for falling off their high horses or exposing their green underpants when toyi-toyiing too enthusiastically. It is hoped that from these opposites a new type can be synthesized during the next few millennia that will have bigger heads, less beard and more between the ears. If such a type is going to survive at all, that is.

Its Life of Letters

I will conclude with a few remarks on the almost moribund life of letters of the great republic of Azininia.

The scene be dominated by two strange figures, much given to meditation, always in recluse, desperately shy of the press, always writing books about this country, another country or arrival and departure; or ages of clay

and iron or the coming of barbarians or other farming novels in this vein. Much in evidence is also the exile type, who, during a long sojourn in far-away countries, has learned precisely how things should be arranged in our dear Azininia - proving beyond doubt that they are true citizens of our dear republic.

And I cannot ignore the critics who laud the efforts of our scribes, worthy or unworthy, in a veritable stream of new-fangled discourses of Derridean, Foucauldian, Spivakian, Eagletonian, Saidian, Gillespian, De Kockian, Swanepoelian or Mandelian type. Oh, and I should not forget to mention Gräbeldegook, very rich in metaphors.

It is this heteroglossic and multi-tongued twittering and twattering, much like a swarm of finches in the reeds, that constitute the foundation and true future of our beloved republic.

We are part of the fiction, and therefore believe in it.