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THE COMMITMENT OF NOBEL LITERATURE PRIZE WINNERS TO A SUSTAINABLE, DEVELOPED SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Situé à l'extrémité sud du continent africain, l'Afrique du Sud est un pays stable qui était habité uniquement par des populations noires engagées, par moments, dans des conflits régionaux entre les factions ethniques et tribales jusqu'au XVIII^e siècle. Sa situation géographique fait de ce pays, un territoire convoité à cause de ses potentialités agricoles et commerciales. Ainsi, la région connaîtra une instabilité sociale à partir de 1652 avec l'arrivée des Européens venus précisément d'Hollande et d'Angleterre. La rencontre entre les deux continents a fait de cette partie du continent noire, une zone instable pendant plus de trois siècles. En effet, les Blancs se sont affrontés entre eux pour déterminer le plus fort et ont fini par s'unir pour combattre les Noirs qu'ils catégorisent dans la race inférieure. Face à cette atmosphère invivable, des voix se sont levées pour instaurer un nouvel ordre social. La lutte pour une paix durable dans un environnement viable a connu la participation du monde littéraire dont les plus célèbres auteurs sont Nadine Gordimer et J. M. Coetzee, tous deux reconnus Prix Nobel de littérature en 1991 pour le premier auteur et en 2000 pour le second. Avec la Sociocritique comme moteur d'analyse nous pouvons décrypter les solutions romanesques proposées pour un développement durable et viable dans leur pays.

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INTRODUCTION

Located at the southern tip of the African continent, South Africa is a country inhabited solely by black populations who, at times, were involved in regional conflicts between ethnic and tribal factions until the 17th century. Its geographical location makes it an extremely coveted country because it is conducive to agricultural and commercial ambitions. As a result, the region experienced social instability from 1652 onwards with the arrival of Europeans, specifically from Holland and England. The encounter between the two continents made this part of the African continent an unstable area for more than three centuries. Indeed, white people fought among themselves to determine who was the strongest and ended up uniting to fight black people, whom they categorized as an inferior race. Faced with this unbearable atmosphere, voices were raised to establish a new social order. The struggle for lasting peace in a viable environment saw the participation of the literary world, whose most representative authors are Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee. International recognition of their literary achievements in the struggle for a stable South Africa came in the form of the Nobel Prize for Literature, awarded to the former in 1991 and to the latter in 2000. It is clear that their shared goal is to unite the South African people, transcending social, political, and racial divisions, for a better future.

This study aims to examine or question their literary proposals that may have influenced the behavior of real South African society. In other words, what is the literary manifestation of these writers who call for the transformation of their environment? To address this issue, we will use Sociocriticism as a tool for analysis in order to decipher the fictional solutions proposed by the two writers for sustainable and viable development in their country. Our approach will consist of three parts inspired by some novels by each of the authors. First, we will need to identify the subject and manifestation of the disagreement following the encounter between whites and blacks. Next, we will demonstrate that their condemnation of the imperfect conditions of cohabitation is proof of their involvement in pacifying the South African social environment. Finally, we want to highlight the solutions they propose to improve the country's assets.

1. An established natural wealth and property

South Africa includes a geographical potential and natural wealth. The country itself is a huge reservoir of assets due to its proximity to the sea and its dense vegetation. The description of the country in the UNIVERSALIS encyclopedia highlights its wealth in this passage:

À l'extrémité méridionale du continent africain, l'Afrique du Sud se caractérise d'abord par sa diversité. En un seul pays, elle

rassemble le désert et la savane, les climats méditerranéen et tropical, les hauts plateaux du Veld, les reliefs enneigés du Drakensberg et les vastes étendues du Karoo, et offre ainsi une gamme extraordinairement variée de paysages, de climats, de territoires, de végétations et de vie animale. Cette diversité naturelle se retrouve au niveau humain. La population sud-africaine rassemble, en une nation « arc-en-ciel », Noirs, Indiens, Métis et Blancs d'origines et d'appartenances religieuses et communautaires très variées (<https://www.universalis.fr/>).

South Africa's geographical location makes it a reservoir of potential. Most of the country is covered by large protected natural areas, most of which are located on high plateaus at high altitudes. It is the main reason that haunts both whites and blacks. The management of this potential is the origin and, above all, the cause of the disagreement since the two peoples met. South Africa's geographical location makes it a strategic location. This is precisely why Dutch merchants decided to settle there permanently after stopping off on the region's coast. The way they settled is described as follow by Lory (1998, p.32): “sous le commandement de Jan Van Riebeeck, 90 Néerlandais débarquent en 1652 au Cap ouvrant la porte à trois siècles de conflits.” The motivation to settle there arose from the fact that South Africa's maritime border is an oceanic boulevard that facilitates access to Asian territories for the emergence and proliferation of transatlantic trade.

South Africa is also a vast region of arable land, the profitability of which is evident from the admiration of the character *Merhing* in the story by Gordimer (1974, p.23) : « He took friends to the farm sometimes at weekends. They said what a marvellous idea when they debouched from their cars (...) how lovely, how sensible to have a place like this to get away to. » Upon his arrival, the white man already imagines the immense financial wealth and power that exploiting this land will bring him. This is also the interpretation that N. Andrew gives in his journal in the following passage:

Le nombre croissant de conversions des terres agricoles en activités liées à la production de faune sauvage en Afrique du Sud a induit une concentration foncière accélérée, voire une forme d'accaparement de terres. Ce problème se pose dans le contexte de la très modeste réforme agro-foncière nationale, mise en place il y a 20 ans à la fin de l'apartheid. Le phénomène de conversions touche environ 10 000 exploitations commerciales du pays, soit presque le quart du total sur le plan national, majoritairement détenues par les blancs... Les réserves de faune privées (*Private game reserves*, PGR) de luxe associent observation en safari d'animaux sauvages, hébergements et exclusivité au prix fort, ciblant essentiellement une clientèle internationale aisée (<https://journals.openedition.org>).

White domination cannot obscure the fact that indigenous peoples were present before their arrival. Despite political activity marked by social repression by whites, blacks remain the natural owners of South African land. They had always been the only inhabitants before the arrival and permanent settlement of white people. The white people found them there, as acknowledged by the narrator when he asserts that: “...There'll be dissatisfaction because they were here when he come, they were squatting God knows how long before he bought the place they'll expect to have their grandchildren squatting after he's gone” (Gordimer, 1974, p.202). The idea from the story is evidence of the intrusion of the white man into a property previously occupied by the black man. Further on, the story echoes the white man's confession through the relationship between *Merhing*, the new owner of the South African farm, and *Jacobus*, the dispossessed man who became the white man's foreman in this passage from Gordimer (1974, p.206): “...How long you been here? No not how long he's worked for me; how many years on this place is what I mean. Jacobus was in residence when I bought; he had worked for the previous owner, or perhaps it was only on some neighboring farm: boundaries mean little to them, when they say 'here'.”

We also find the same information about the expropriation of South African land in Coetzee (2004, p.12), where *The Magistrate*, a key character, challenges his white brothers on the consequences of wanting to deconstruct Black history in these terms: “The Barbarians you are chasing will smell you coming and vanish into to desert while you are still a day's march away. They have lived there all their lives, they know the land. You and I are strangers – you even more than I. I earnestly advise you not to go.” Indeed, regarding the country's first inhabitants, UNIVERSALIS.fr makes the following clarification:

Lors de l'arrivée des Européens dans la région, que l'on datera symboliquement du débarquement du navigateur portugais Bartolomeu Dias au Cap en 1488, les Khoisans (Khoekhoen et San) occupent toute la partie sud de l'actuelle Afrique du Sud, tandis que les groupes bantous sont installés dans les parties est et nord du pays. L'arrivée au Cap du commandant Jan Van Riebeeck le 7 avril 1652 pour établir, au nom de la Compagnie hollandaise des Indes orientales (VOC), un comptoir de rafraîchissement sur la route des Indes infléchit significativement l'histoire de la région (<https://www.universalis.fr/>).

Based on the information provided above, we can conclude that white South Africans became citizens of this country by adoption. Their definitive occupation of the land and its riches was achieved through violence, as Coetzee (2004, p. 20) reveals here: “They are happy here; indeed unless we chase them away they may stay with us forever, so little does it seem to have taken to lure them out of a state of nature.” The new occupant established his authority over everything that belonged to Black people naturally. Thus, the White intruder imposed a new social order on the non-White community that was difficult for them to accept. This is highlighted in this United Nations report (1969, p.1), which denounces the suffering of black South Africans, following this observation: “Sous le régime de l'apartheid, la liberté de mouvement, les droits politiques, sociaux et économiques de non-Blancs sont extrêmement réduits. La majorité des terres, notamment les zones minières les plus riches, sont réservées à la minorité blanche, tandis que les Africains sont mis à part dans les réserves.”

2. A land that unites and divides the same people

As we have shown above, South African land is coveted by all the country's inhabitants. It is closely linked to the social well-being of everyone. It is a source of interest that explains the rigidity of the positions taken by whites and blacks. However, the behavior of the white intruder and the black native suggests that coexistence will be difficult and complex for both sides in this land. Indeed, each claims ownership to assert their belonging to the place. For Black people, it is the only thing they recognize as their heritage and through which they feel they belong to the world. It is theirs, and there is no question of abandoning it under any threat whatsoever. Coetzee's account (2004, p.54) is revealing of this reality here: “They will never permit themselves to be bottled up in the mountains (...) ‘They want an end to the spread of settlements across their land. They want their land back, finally. They want to be free to move about with their flocks from pasture to pasture as they used to.’”

Following Coetzee, we have confirmation that Black people choose serenity on the land of their ancestors over the White man's desire to drive them out in this passage from Gordimer (1974, p.260): “We think something is happen. – But it can only happen to me. They have been there all the time and they will continue to be there. They have nothing and they have nothing to lose.” The same opinion is expressed by Clingman (1992, p.136) in the following statement:

Set on a farm in Africa, its primary allusion is implicit (...) Crucially, the question of possession comes to the fore; here the African farm that Schreiner settled at once so assuredly and uncertainly returns to those from whom it was dispossessed in European on Africa is loosened, as the land comes back to its people and they to it.

How and on what grounds can white people arrogantly claim ownership of South African land? In fact, he claims ownership and exercises authority over it because of his love and devotion to the place, according to Gordimer (1974, p.42): "He lies for what seems a long time. This place – his farm – really is what everyone says of it, he himself as well (and he can hear, as if rehearsing, to jokes about tax deduction...)" Thus, the white man believes that, out of love, this property must be protected by any means necessary. This is the advice that *David Lurie*, the disgraced university professor, intends to give his daughter in order to preserve and protect his plot of land in the South African countryside. Thus, in Coetzee's account (2001, p.144), he believes the idea below:

Lucy devrait acheter un revolver et un émetteur radio, et prendre des leçons de tir. Mais y consentira-t-elle jamais ? Elle est ici parce qu'elle aime cette terre, et le mode de vie ländlich d'antan. Et si ce mode de vie est condamné à disparaître, que va-t-il lui rester à aimer ?

This deep desire for land on the part of the two distinct communities suggests a certain land conflict, according to the narrator's foreboding of the chaos to come in the country's social life. Coetzee (2001, p.137) states this: "Le sang de la vie s'échappe de son corps et c'est le désespoir qui le remplace, le désespoir, comme un gaz inerte, sans odeur, insipide, sans vertu nutritive."

Consequently, all of this portends a conflictual coexistence between whites and blacks. This difficult coexistence is accentuated by threats and almost constant clashes, which are highlighted by the reference made by *Meneer De Beer*, a white character, in Gordimer (1974, p. 54): "My father fought with General Botha... And his father (...) my grandfather he fought in the Kaffir Wars..." Thus, emerging victorious from their confrontation, the white man proudly sings of his success in Gordimer (1974, p. 55): "My grandfather (...) My father's father, had a Kaffir doll they took from the chief's place, there where they burned it in the war (...) One of their dolls they used for magic. It's not much left of it; there were feathers and little bags of rubbish tied to it, but it is old now." He trivializes objects that are symbols of Black culture, brandishing them like war trophies. As testimony to the harm suffered by Black people, Terreblanche (2002, p.6) assesses the damage in these terms:

If one considers the multitude of conflicts and wars in South Africa during the 350 years, one can distinguish certain patterns in the seeming muddle. One of the clearest patterns is that, during the long period of European colonialism and imperialism, the colonial masters were mostly the victors in group conflicts, and the indigenous population groups mostly the losers.

Therefore, in order to save his dignity, the Black man must oppose the deliberate expropriation of his land. He has the capacity to resist. This is an asset that is recognized here, in Gordimer (1974, p.207): "It's a feast or a famine with them; they gorge themselves when they have to, that's their strength." Thus, Black people place their hope in a balance of power to impose social stability. For them, only the guarantee of mutual respect and love for one another can unify the South African people. We must consider a change in mentality that seems inevitable for the advent of the new South African society, as mentioned in Gordimer's vision (1974, p.199): "Everything needs changing. Don't you realize (...) It makes things clearer all around. If you had any sense in that intelligent head of yours, you'd know that's how you had to end up. There isn't anything else they need from you."

The writer dreams of the disappearance of racial inequalities and social disparities that characterize South Africa. It is this hope that the author conveys in *Mehring's* optimism, which the narrative emphasizes in Gordimer (1974, p. 206): "...–Happy-happy. Tomorrow another New Year, eh, Jacobus. Long time, long time now. –Yes, it doesn't stand still for any of us..." The time has therefore

come to pacify South Africa's socio-political environment in order to envisage the emergence and definitive take-off of the country.

At this stage of reflection, it should be recognized that the literary world, through the works of authors such as Gordimer and Coetzee, is essential for a stable and viable South African society. This will necessarily only come about through respect and consideration for the chronological order in which populations settled on South African soil. This is the first and most plausible condition, according to our authors' accounts, which argues in favour of a South Africa that dreams of a society focused on progress and happiness through sustainable development projects.

3. Proposals for an emerging society through sustainable development

In the literary world's view, South Africa needs to promote itself differently. The country must identify and promote elements that will contribute to a much better image abroad while ensuring visible and steady progress for its people. Those writers feel that they must affect everyday life in order to influence the future of South African society in a meaningful way. However, does J. Roache not share the same view on the contribution of literature when he reveals his thoughts in the following passage?

L'art n'est-il pas le domaine où le désordre du monde matériel est résolu dans l'ordonnance symbolique de l'imaginaire ? Le grand art, par conséquent, transcende le contemporain et dépasse les conflits temporels des forces historiques. Son protagoniste c'est l'humanité entière, unie magiquement, sans considération de race, de sexe ou de classes sociales, dans une arène qui embrasse (ou ignore) tout espace et tout temps (Duchet, 1979, p.200).

Among the actions to be taken in this regard is the definitive establishment of a climate of peace and a society of equality and justice. This is the advice given by *The Magistrate* in Coetzee (2004, p.26): "It would be best if this obscure chapter in the history of the world were terminated at once, if these ugly were obliterated from the face of the earth and we swore to make a new start, to run an empire in which there would be no more injustice, no more pain." Thus, once the socio-political environment has been stabilized, a philosophical approach to sustainable development can be considered through programs that contribute to the happiness of the South African people. It is only right that decision-makers should have this critical report, an invitation to approach the novels of Gordimer and Coetzee, in light of the following thought by J. Roache: "cet état d'esprit particulier, convenant à l'expérience artistique, qui seule permettra d'analyser, d'apprécier et sans doute de comprendre" (Duchet, 1979, p.200).

Indeed, *Merhing* can shed his role as a white capitalist farmer and take on that of a philanthropist, preserving the lives of future generations by fighting against the desertification of the country. His contribution to saving wildlife is to lay the foundations for reforestation, as he himself says in Gordimer (1974, p.223): "– I'm planting European chestnuts for the blacks to use as firewood after they've taken over –". To fulfil this new ambition, he is importing European chestnut trees to reforest the South African countryside. This ecological and humanistic legacy is contributing to the reconciliation of the entire South African people. On the one hand, it is ecological because it contributes to the restoration of flora that is disappearing due to the abusive exploitation of white farmers. On the other hand, it is humanistic because, for once, white farmers are including the happiness of Black people in their structural plans for economic recovery

As for *Julie*, for her futuristic project, she first proposes to save the family of her husband *Abdu* from illiteracy and then combat famine in this desert country in Asia. In fact, she proposes to begin educating the population, whom she convinces to accept learning English, as mentioned by the narrator here:

In addition to the ladies' conversational circle, the lessons for other adults who sought her out, and the play-learning she discovered she could devise... for small children, as well as the classes she taught in the primary school, she had been drawn into coach English to older boys who hoped to go to high school in the capital some days; she had been able to persuade—flatter—the local school principle to let girls join the classes although it was more unlikely their families would allow them to leave home (Gordimer, 2001, p.195).

Life can truly change if people in society are educated about best practices. This has the potential to transform their daily lives and meet their needs. Secondly, she campaigns for the introduction of modern agriculture based on irrigation to combat the precariousness of the population in this remote part of the world. Thus, transforming arid land into arable land can help combat famine. Her sustainable development plan for establishing a viable social climate is evident in the following conversation with her husband in Gordimer (2001, p.211):

—Drill. Drill for water, you mean? —
 —Yes, make a well. And grow. —
 —Grow rice? —
 —Rice, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, beans, many things. They're saying it can be, if they have money—
 —You can get permission to drill a well?—
 —If they had the money they can do it, even right now. They will if they had the money. Just the money! (...)
 —And they'd know how to go about cultivation—growing the rice?—
 —They know, Julie, oh from years—learning from Mr Adoukanim, of course they know.

She observes that we just need to dig to find water that would make this desert area viable for vegetable and rice production in sufficient quantities for the population. This initiative could solve problems of dependence on outside aid and the desire of the country's children to leave. Gordimer, through *Julie's* fight aims to save humanity in this famine-stricken region through innovative agricultural practices. It is the responsibility of social leaders to succeed and rise to the challenge of providing for the needs of the population using new technological means. Responsibility also lies in exploitation that does not compromise reserves and future prospects, as Beck (2008, p. 401) argues in this statement: "Les innovations technologiques augmentent la prospérité collective et individuelle..."

Sharing the same opinion as Gordimer's character in *The Pickup*, Mayor (1999, p.87) states this: "Nous n'avons qu'un seul patrimoine intact : C'est l'avenir. Là est notre espoir. Préservons les terres vierges du futur : semons dès à présent les valeurs de l'avenir. Cultivons-les. Confions-les à des successeurs. Nous léguerons ainsi à nos enfants un héritage ouvert, vivant sans testament." Consequently, writers believe that by choosing to promote the country's strengths, the new South Africa is choosing to reposition itself in relation to the new global challenges that must concern the entire population and not the people of South Africa separately. The country must consider its economic approach in a world of globalization and internationalization. This is the meaning of the reflection related to this commitment in the following issue in Coetzee (2001, p.31):

... nous ne pouvons pas vivre nos vies quotidiennes dans le monde des idées pures, dans un cocon qui nous protégerait de l'expérience des sens. La question n'est pas : Comment préserver la pureté de l'imagination, à l'abri des assauts de la réalité. La question qu'il faut se poser, c'est : Pouvons-nous trouver le moyen de les faire co-exister ?

It should therefore be noted that the challenge for Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee, as literary figures, is to guide political choices and decisions toward long-term development for a viable economy in

South Africa. To this end, their call for the empowerment of the South African people does not lose sight of the definition of the term "sustainable development". Indeed, referring to the World Commission on Environment and Development, Baudin (2009, p.16) estimates that it is as follows: "Le développement qui répond aux besoins du présent sans compromettre la capacité des générations futures à répondre aux leurs." This brings us back to a realization that allows us to exist in our own time and in the future, when residents will be able to recognize our merit in having anticipated their needs in terms of solidarity. In other words, today we need a responsible society that, in its choices and lifestyles, gives itself the means to eliminate waste. In short, we need to live healthily by planning our use of resources for ourselves while thinking of others. To meet this challenge, Mpenjou (2002, p.9) offers the following advice:

Face à (la) mise en danger de la planète, le progrès économique doit non seulement rechercher la satisfaction des besoins présents mais doit intégrer les préoccupations des générations futures. La sauvegarde de cette solidarité intergénérationnelle nécessite une action commune ; sinon les efforts des uns (protecteurs) seront annulés par le laxisme des autres (pollueurs).

So, we can say that for these writers, sustainable development is nothing more than the generosity of contemporaries towards people they may never know. It is also the deprivation that South Africans are willing to impose on themselves today so that other South Africans can survive tomorrow. This vision and form of anticipatory social materialization is supported by Berger and Luckman (1967, p.133), who believe that: "The formation within consciousness of the generalized other marks a decisive phase in socialization. It implies the internalization of society as such and of the objective reality established therein, and, at the same time, the subjective establishment of a coherent and continuous identity."

CONCLUSION

South Africa, due to its geographical potential and natural resources, is a reservoir of assets linked to its proximity to the sea and the density of its vegetation. The country is covered with large protected natural areas located on high plateaus, including a vast region of arable farmland. To keep up with the times, the country must consider its economic approach in a world of globalization and internationalization. To achieve this, writers such as Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee are striving to guide political choices and decisions toward long-term development for a viable economy in South Africa. Therefore, for these writers, sustainable development is nothing more than the generosity of contemporaries towards people they may never know. It is also the deprivation that South Africans are willing to impose on themselves today so that other South Africans can survive tomorrow.

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