

BOLT



**In this issue:
A new story by Alan Paton.**

BOLT

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It is the only magazine of its kind produced in Natal. While we gratefully acknowledge the generous financial support of the S.R.C. of the University of Natal, Durban, it is due as much to our subscribers that this current issue has been produced, and that we have to date published the work of Douglas Livingstone, Oswald Mtshali, Jon Stallworthy, Laurence Lerner, Peter Strauss, Mike Kirkwood, Andrew Verster and Patrick O'Connor.

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BOLT

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ALAN PATON

THE HERO OF CURRIE ROAD

Mr Thomson was a gentle little man who belonged to the All-Races Party which believed in equal opportunity for all people. Mr Thomson was much liked by many people, but was disliked by many also, some because they thought he was plotting a revolution, some because they thought he would be useless at it anyway.

Mr Thomson's white neighbours definitely thought he was crazy. This was not entirely because he belonged to the All-Races Party. They thought he was crazy before he joined the Party. He always wore an overcoat, summer and winter, and as everyone knows, Durban in summer is no place for an overcoat. His favourite walk was up Currie Road and Grant's Grove to Musgrave Road, down Musgrave Road and Berea Road, and back along Currie Road. He would stop to admire a jacaranda or a flamboyant tree, whether in season for the blossom, or out of season for the shape. To admire the tree he would stand against someone's hedge or wall, so as not to discommode the passersby, and would think nothing of putting his head on one side for several minutes, or of turning his back on the tree, and looking at it over his shoulder.

It must be said that Mr Thomson was well-known in the part of Durban where he lived. This was not only because he took his favourite walk at least twice a day, nor because he stopped, sometimes for ten minutes, to admire a jacaranda, but also because he said good morning and good afternoon to all the people whom he passed. Some of them were surprised when he did this, not having seen him before. Others were amused, because they also thought he was crazy. But there were some, especially the old Indian men and women, who would respond warmly to his salutation.

Mrs Thomson never accompanied Mr Thomson on these walks. She had a big birth-mark that had plagued her for over sixty years, and she had no intention of letting it plague her any longer. Although she never went out with Mr Thomson, she was a strong supporter of the All-Races Party.

Mr Thomson was also well-known in Durban in an anonymous way. He wrote letters under the name of Thos. Bilby to the morning paper and Wm. Breckenridge to the evening paper. These letters always dealt with civil liberty, the rule of law, and the cruelty and folly of Apartheid. Mr Thomson's great enemies on the left were Cossack in the morning, and Demi-Tass in the afternoon, and these enemies sneered at him for thinking that noble ideals would save South Africa without a revolution. He was also attacked from the right by White South African, Voortrekker Boy, Shaka, and Mr J.K. Pillay, for various reasons. It was in the interludes between the battles that he would sally forth, take his walk, admire the trees, greet people right and left, and then return to the fray.

Mr Thomson became famous on September 7th. He and Mrs Thomson were reading in bed when an African scoundrel entered the room with a revolver, and ordered them to put up their hands. Mrs Thomson, a firm believer in the equal rights of the races, refused to do this. The African scoundrel knocked her senseless with his revolver, whereupon Mr Thomson jumped on his back with the firm intention of taking unprecedented steps. Mr Thomson did not use any racial adjective, but merely said, "you devil". Mr Thomson was quite unable at his age and weight to sustain any struggle. It was quite impossible for his weak hands to encompass and hold the scoundrel's neck. He was in fact exhausted in a few seconds, and would have fared badly had the revolver not gone off and sent a bullet into the left breast of the scoundrel, who fell down with a groan. When Mrs Thomson came to, neighbours had broken into the house, the scoundrel was bleeding and crying on the floor, and Mr Thomson was being sick into the chamberpot.

"This will be a lesson to you not to stick up for these black murderers," said one of the neighbours.

Mr Thomson stopped being sick for a moment,

"I have never stuck up for a murderer in my life," he said. Then he was sick again.

Mrs Thomson covered up her birthmark with the blanket and shouted at the neighbour,

"I'll thank you to get out of my house."

Not everyone would have become famous after such an experience. But Mr Thomson did. His heroism was extolled in both the morning and the evening papers. His declaration that his faith in the All-Races Party was unshaken, received front-page notice. "Morally reprehensible but politically irrelevant," was his summing up of the incident. His attitude was applauded by Mr Thos. Bilby in the morning paper, and Mr Wm. Breckenridge in the evening.

His daily walks became triumphal. White people who had never greeted him before shook his hand. Some of those non-white people who had taken him to be crazy treated him with a new respect. He was photographed by the evening paper talking to an old Indian gentleman, Mr Chetty, in his fruit-shop at the corner of Currie and Berea Roads. Both he and the old Indian gentleman were holding their hats in their hands and addressing each other with old-world courtesy.

All this explains how Mr Thomson came to be invited to address the Annual Meeting of the South African Congress.

It was mainly on the strength of his remark, "Morally reprehensible but politically irrelevant." He wore his overcoat as usual, and looked a fragile figure on the platform, flanked by two giant politicians, Mr Andrew Kanyile the Chairman, and Mr George Mapumulo the Secretary, both of whom had been called masterpieces in bronze by visiting journalists. This was the first occasion on which the All-Races Party

had been invited to sit on the platform at a meeting of the more militant Congress. It was quite a thing for Mr Thomson to do, because many members of the Congress had been named by the Government as Communists. But Mr Thomson was not likely to be deterred by so small a matter.

He received an ovation on standing up, and delivered a stirring speech to the Congress on the evils of racial discrimination, and the responsibility of social conditions for much crime. However his speech was not received with unanimous approval. Indeed there were very audible murmurs when Mr Thomson asserted that an important cause of crime was unsatisfactory personal relationships in childhood, and that these were unrelated to the type of social organisation.

Being that kind of person, Mr Thomson did not notice these murmurs, but he was a trifle astonished when a party of younger delegates left their seats while he was speaking, not for the purpose of hurrying to some other engagement, but merely for that of lounging around the entrance doors, where they kept up a distracting number of loud conversations. As soon as the address was finished they returned to their places.

Now a strange thing happened. Mr Phumula of Inanda was called upon to thank the speaker for his address. While smiling at Mr Thomson with the greatest affability, he was able to suggest with an adroitness almost amounting to genius, that Mr Thomson's theories of crime were utterly nonsensical, and that the only tenable thing was that crime was caused directly by capitalism, laissez-faire, exploitation of the worker, and the war in Korea. These remarks were greeted with loud applause by the party of young delegates, who had now changed from supercilious loungers into earnest reformers. Mr Phumula went on to enquire whether the Mau-Mau resistance had been caused by dominating fathers, jealous mothers, and gifted elder brothers. These killings of white people were natural acts of zealots who were determined to free their country from capitalism, laissez-faire, exploitation, and the war in Korea. He declared that the hearts of true democrats went out to the Mau-Mau in Kenya.

It must be said that Mr Phumula's remarks created a difficult situation in the meeting. Some of the delegates applauded, but the great majority sat passive and unhappy. If one had been able to observe carefully, one would have noted that Mr Thomson had many admirers, several of whom looked openly disgusted. But there was no time to observe such things; the whole atmosphere of the meeting was tense and unhappy.

Beneath Mr Thomson's gentle overcoat there was boiling up a great passion, much the same as that which had made him launch his frail form on to the powerful back of the scoundrel who had struck down his wife. Being however a democrat, even if not quite the same kind as Mr Phumula, he looked questioningly at the Chairman. Mr Phumula sat down, and the Chairman rose to his feet.

His face was beaming also, and his remarks were conciliatory. He joined Mr Phumula in thanking Mr Thomson for his address. It was wonderful to him how Mr Phumula, who had certain views on crime, could sincerely thank Mr Thomson, who had somewhat differing views. The fact that there were these differing views showed what a complex problem Mr Thomson had chosen for his fine address.

"Thank you, Mr Thomson, thank you."

"Mr Chairman, I ask permission to say a very few words."

It was quite clear that the Chairman was embarrassed. He wanted to say no, but could hardly do so. His face beamed but his eyes were not smiling.

"Mr Thomson would like to say goodbye to us," he told the meeting.

"It is not exactly to say goodbye," said Mr Thomson, "it is just to say that I, and the Party I have the honour to belong to, utterly condemn murder and violence, whether it be committed by Mau-Mau in Kenya, or the British in"

The rest of Mr Thomson's remarks was lost. Some of the delegates booed loudly, even though the majority, which included Mr Thomson's admirers, kept silent. He looked at the Chairman, and the Chairman looked at him. The Chairman's face was still beaming in spite of the commotion, but in his eyes Mr Thomson could see anger that he had been put into this position.

One thing was clear to Mr Thomson. There was an overwhelming wish that he should leave the meeting immediately. He bowed to the Chairman, and accompanied by the Secretary, came down from the platform. As he passed down the aisle, a few people stood up in their places and bowed to him. Those who had booed him now paid him no attention whatsoever; they had already wiped him out of their lives. It made Mr Thomson feel unhappy.

Outside in the street Mr Mapumulo said, "We must get a car for you."

"I should like to walk," said Mr Thomson, and said goodbye to the Secretary and shook hands with him.

He walked away from the meeting sick at heart. The crowds of people, the Indian shopkeepers and the women in their sarries, the African girls walking more gaily and freely than they would have done in the white quarter, the rich smells of the spices from Kajee's warehouse, the windows of goldsmith and silversmith and silk merchant, the white women looking for bargains, the whole surging colourful cosmopolitan scene, the meeting place of three continents, failed for once to excite him. It seemed a monstrous jest of God, this juxtaposition of such different, such utterly different people, people so blind to the vision of harmony and peace, Africans praising Mau-Mau, Indians praising Nehru, Afrikaners praising the Prime Minister, Zulus praising Shaka, the English praising Rhodes. How could he have been so stupid as to suppose that out of all this could come a country of happiness and

peace? In an agonising flash of illumination, he saw how overwhelming was the Government's case, that there would never be any peace until the whole country was refashioned and re-ordered, every man to his own place, every people to its own territory, its own jobs, its own shops, its own doctors, its own customs and happiness.

How he had liked taunting the Government under the names of Thos. Bilby and Wm. Breckenridge! He felt ashamed to think that he at his age could have persisted with such a futility. He had asked the Government whether there would be four, five, six different parliaments, all separate and equal? Or one Parliament above the other Parliaments? Or just one Parliament, a white-supremacy Parliament? He had then gone on to show that racial domination was unstable. Was it? Would it be any more unstable than a dream state granting equality to Mau-Mau praisers, Verwoerd praisers, Shaka praisers, Rhodes praisers? He felt ashamed of his puerilities. He looked in at a shop window and suddenly saw himself as an ineffectual old man, wearing an overcoat, member of a fragmentary Party, husband of a wife obsessed by a blemish, writer of light-weight letters that no one read, or if they read them forgot them, except other ineffectual cranks like Cossack and Demi-Tass and Voortrekker Boy.

He found his way to the Esplanade and sat down on a bench, one of a dozen benches all marked, "For Whites Only". It was against his principles to sit there, but his principles, like himself, were tired. He must have sat there for an hour, all through his lunchtime, and he must have at last fallen into a doze, for he was awakened by the small Indian newsboys crying the name of the afternoon paper. He bought one, and his eye fell at once on the headlines;

Currie Road Hero Boomed at Congress

He had no heart to read on. The words, "Currie Road Hero", so distasteful to him, were exceptionally painful to him in his abject condition. He was aware that elsewhere in the paper there might be a fighting letter from Wm. Breckenridge. He was ashamed to think that this might be so. He was ashamed to think that it should be recorded that he had been boomed at the Congress he had so often defended. What would Voortrekker Boy and Mr J.K. Pillay have to say about that? He dreaded returning to his home, to the wife to whom he had always talked so boldly. But most of all he was distressed about South Africa, about the new South Africa that he wrote about so confidently, that it was in reality his own private dream, that in reality friend boomed friend while enemies mocked at them. How the Government must laugh at them!

He picked himself up wearily, leaving the paper on the bench. He walked to the busstop, hoping to see nobody he knew. He did not want to meet anyone who would say I'm glad or I'm sad that you were boomed at the Congress.

When he got home his wife looked straight at him, which she seldom did because of the blemish. She could see at once that he was tired out and dejected.

"Sit down," she said, "have you had any lunch?"

"No," he said, "I don't want any."

"Where did you spend lunchtime?" she asked.

"Excuse me, my dear," he said, "I don't want to answer questions."

She made him sit down and she put on the kettle.

"You mustn't worry about a few hotheads," she said.

He made no answer. She brought him tea and a plate of small light sandwiches that he liked.

"I don't want to eat," he said.

He drank his tea, and didn't eat the sandwiches, although he really wanted to. Then he was silent for a very long time.

"You know what you said once," he asked, "about going to Australia?"

"I said it," she said, "but I didn't mean it."

"I didn't agree," he said, "but I agree now."

She remembered that he didn't agree. That was a mild way of putting it. He had chastised her with his tongue for about ten minutes.

"It's a few hotheads," she said.

He was too tired to tell her it wasn't a few hotheads. It was the crowd in the street, and the smells from the spice shop, and the African girls care-free in the Indian quarter, and the white women looking for bargains, and the seats for "Whites Only" on the Esplanade. It was the whole thing, the whole total impossibility of fighting the Government because white people wanted the Government, the whole crass stupidity of an All-Races Party. He did not tell her this, but the hopelessness of his silence spoke to her. She got up and went into her room, and for the first time in five years dressed herself to go out in the day-time. In spite of his depression he was moved to comment.

"You're going out," he said.

"I've stayed in long enough," she said. She looked as though she had more to say, then she didn't say it, then she did.

"It was a silly thing to do," she said, "I'm not doing it any more."

She had not been gone long when there was a knock at the door. It was Mr Chetty with a basket of fruit. Mr Thomson greeted him warmly, not only because it was hospitable, but because it warmed him to see Mr Chetty.

"I brought a little fruit for you," said Mr Chetty deprecatingly. He was a humble man and always spoke in this manner.

"That's very good of you, Mr Chetty."

"It's only a little," said Mr Chetty.

"Sit down, my friend. Would you like a cup of tea?"

Mr Chetty sat down on the edge of the chair to show that he did not presume. He was too old to change. He said,

"I have come to apologise that they booed you at the Congress, Mr Thomson."

"A few hotheads," said Mr Thomson.

"We have Indian hotheads too," said Mr Chetty, "but God has His time."

He chatted away politely. He drank his tea, and answered questions about his family, and they ate up Mr Thomson's sandwiches.

"They all know you, Mr Thomson," he said. "They know you are a friend of ours."

"I feel so useless," said Mr Thomson.

"We are all useless," said Mr Chetty, "but God is not useless."

He rose to go, and asked politely if he might have his basket. Then he went.

When Mrs Thomson opened the front door, she heard the typewriter going. A smile broke out on her face, making the blemish look quite unimportant. She knew what it was; it was Mr Thos. Bilby, or Mr Wm. Breckenridge, knocking the daylights out of Cossack, Demi-Tass, Voortrekker Boy, and the rest of that misguided company.

It is rare for a poet to live and die in a small town and for the main body of his work to be discovered and published only long after he has gone and been almost forgotten. It is rarer still for such work to be hailed by his contemporaries as being placed among the best poetry published in his language. Such a one was Reinaldo Ferreira, who was born in Barcelona on the 20th of March 1922, and who died in Lourenço Marques in June 1959, prematurely, from lung cancer.

It is ironical that his only published works before he died were the scripts of a few radio plays of little literary value, the words for a few popular song and part of the text of a couple of musical reviews. It is known that his greatest ambition was to become a playwright and an actor; he showed some promise but these were essentially minor talents.

He was the son of a well-known journalist, and in the carefully guarded phrases of the writer of the preface to the first edition of his work, it is obvious also that he lived a pretty irregular life. He was essentially a meta-physical rather than a lyric poet, something rather rare in Portuguese poetry which tends to have a strong bias towards romantic themes of lost or unrequited love. He sees life in a world that appears to him absurd and chaotic as 'a flight into nothing'. He spent most of his leisure hours in one of the local pavement cafés, the Scala, surrounded by friends, talking and discussing philosophy, religion, sex and politics; and in the evenings he killed time in the dives near the harbour drinking and sharing the little he had with the taxi-girls and 'hostesses' he found there. His most famous poem is written to a taxi-girl called 'Rosie' and in the second two lines he strings out synonyms in English, Portuguese and French.

These poems chosen at random will I hope, give the English reader some idea of Reinaldo Ferreira's verse. A translator's task is an ungrateful one. I have tried to keep as closely as possible to the inner rhythm of his poems, but it has been easier to preserve his meaning. Like most modern poets writing in Portuguese, whether in Portugal, in Africa or Brazil, Reinaldo Ferreira was in conventional terms, a drop-out, and refused to come to terms with the society in which he lived. The editors of his work are at great pains to point out that the man who wrote these poems on scraps of paper-napkins and stuck them as book markers in the novels he read, was not the same man who could be seen in the Scala or in the nightspots of Lourenço Marques. The poet, when he writes is not the same man who goes through the daily drudgery of earning his keep, and therefore details of his personal life add nothing to any clear understanding of his literary work.

Though he was born in Spain, Reinaldo Ferreira completed his schooling in Lourenço Marques, and except for a few brief visits to Europe spent the rest of his life in Mozambique.

RECIPE FOR A HERO

Take a man,
made of nothing, like we are,
but full sized.
Make his flesh drunk,
slowly,
with a sharp irrational certainty,
intense as hatred or hunger.
Then, near the end,
Wave a flag,
Sound a bugle,
Serve him up dead.

* * *

She who died at the gates of Madrid,
With a curse in her mouth
and a rifle in her hand,
Had the fate she wanted,
Had the end she had chosen.
Never did she, passive and fearful, pray.
And before she flowered, like so many others,
became mature.
Nobody stole her virginity,
after the sack of a city, rather
she gave it to one who desired it,
in the mud of a trench,
without nausea or pride
under a common blanket
pretending she was cold.

* * *

She did not want, behind the lines,
to lighten the days of senile generals
with champagne, nor did she choose
in the quiet comfort of a hearth
to be active and good, and knit
puerile woollen garments,
nor did she dream of lessening the suffering
of the wounded in the white
heroism of a hospital animal.
One night, at the gates of Madrid,
With a curse in her mouth
And a gun in her hand,
At such and such an hour,
she attacked and died.
She had the fate she wanted
She had the end she chose.

* * *

In the love you feel, put love, nothing more.
Keep your jealousy for those you hate.
And if one day you must slit your veins,
let it be through boredom or because you
renounce the road you chose, and not
for frustrated passion.

* * *

Ask of the flesh only flesh and not ideas:
The sad refuge of ugly spinsters.

* * *

I, Rosie, if I spoke, I would say to you
That partout, everywhere, em toda a parte
Life is the same, identica, égale,
It is always a useless effort,
A blind flight into nothing.
But let us dance; let us dance
Now that the waltz has started
and Nothing must also be ended,
like everything else.
You think of the great advantage
of having a partner
who pays without talking;

and I, drunk and babelas,
I think, look you,
About Arles and Van Gogh's ear
And so between what I think and you feel
The bridge that joins us – is being absent.

REINALDO FERREIRA

TERENCE HAMMOND and DAVID BASCKIN

A ONE ACT PLAY . . . "THE PACK"

The curtain opens on an impersonal, practical, ultra-modern conference room of an unnamed but large business concern. Four men have just arrived and are seated at the eight place coffin-shaped table. They murmur amongst themselves while they unpack their briefcases. An air of tension. They light each other's cigarettes making a joke about, "Not three from the same match. It's bad luck you know". A pause. A bald man speaks. His name is Turk.

TURK: Where the hell are Loosehead and Tighthead? It'll be just our luck if *he* arrives before them.

The air of tension is now well established. A pause. The ash falls off Turk's cigarette onto his papers. In his efforts to sweep it away, his papers fall off the table. Turk and the mustachioed man next to him (Lock) bend simultaneously to pick them up.

TURK/LOCK: Sorry.
(Together)

Turk picks up the papers and places them on the desk. A pause. The door opens suddenly, and a head comes round.

MAN: Oops, sorry!
He leaves.

TURK: (Irritably) Gar!

He rises and begins pacing around punching his hand. Practices a few karate blows in the air.

TURK: (Irritably) This always happens you know. You call a meeting, send the memo and nobody ever comes in time.
 What do they want? Nursemaids?

The three men look uncomfortable.

TURK: Godalmighty!

He looks at his watch.

TURK: Eight minutes past!

He picks up the phone. The door opens. Two men come in. Loosehead and Tighthead.

LOOSEHEAD: Hello! (breezily) Hello, hello. You buggers are early. What are you trying to do? Impress someone?

LOCK/HOOKER: Aaah. We're not early. It's *you* who's late.
(simultaneously)

LOOSEHEAD: Hope you've got the minutes.

LOCK/HOOKER: AAAh. You're supposed to bring them. Who're you kidding? Very funny. Aaah.

Turk still stands with the phone in hand.

TURK: You were phoned last night and I sent a memo this morning. Is it too much trouble to be on time?

Atmosphere freezes. The five men shuffle. All five look abashed and lower their eyes. Turk puts the phone down. Sits at the table and begins checking through a long list of figures. Phone rings. Turk stands up and strides hurriedly to the phone.

TURK: Turk. (Then impatiently) Turk here! HELLO! (tone changes completely) Yes. (Looks at watch) Yes.

Puts down the phone. All five men look at him. Loosehead tries to pick up the atmosphere again.

LOOSEHEAD: Don't let your wife find out.

Turk ignores him. Sits.

TURK: Right – he'll be coming through in a minute. Let's run through the strategy of attack. Firstly, he wants immediate action. As it is we've had material FOUR months. (Glares at the men. Throws down his papers). Ah. What the hell. Let's wait until he comes. Anyone got a light?

Lock silently produces a gold Dunhill lighter with which he lights Turk's cigarette. Turk takes the lighter and inspects it.

TURK: Dunhill hey? Not bad. Don't know how you do it on your salary.

General roar of manly appreciative laughter. Lock smiles abashed. He sits back and wipes Turk's finger marks off it with a handkerchief – a large knot in each corner.

LOOSEHEAD: Polishing your image, hey?
(robustly)

Roar of laughter.

Roar of laughter from all. Turk falls off his chair.

HOOKER: Blood all over the place. Then the barman wades in with a broken bottle. What a mess. All over the wall!

TIGHTHEAD: Shit, hey.

LOCK: Yes? (expectantly)

TURK: That's nothing. You should've seen what I saw on the Reeperbahn.

They all turn expectantly except Lock.

LOCK: Yeah. But what did the barman do with his bottle?

LOOSEHEAD: He shoved it up his arse.

He is ignored.

HOOKER: I once saw two whores fighting over a lighter like that. In a bar. God you should've seen those whores fight. Yuk!

He gazes at the ceiling beaming as he remembers the incident. All the men lean forward expectantly. Pause.

LOCK: What happened?

HOOKER: Ja. This was down at Point Road. In Durban. There was this little Jap sailor off a trawler – little fellow. He might have been a Korean actually – or Chinese. But anyway, a Jap for the sake of the story. Well, he comes into the bar with two blondes. Seems he'd given one his lighter – a Dunhill, probably stole it. Well he left and the other one felt it was more hers.

MEN: (laughter)

HOOKER: Suddenly they set about each other. Hell, man! (with relish).

He gazes blissfully into space for a moment then continues.

HOOKER: There were no Queensbury rules there, hey. Go at each other hammer and tong. We formed a circle around them. No Queensbury rules there. One of them finally pulls the other's hair off. It was a wig.

TURK: Yes. I went there with the guys from Hamburg. It was unnerving, you know. Whenever you were introduced to them – click their heels would go like Nazis.

LOOSEHEAD: Probably members of the Hitler Youth.

He is ignored.

TURK: Very formal. Very formal – despite their long hair.

HOOPER: The Reeperbahn?

Loosehead begins to whistle “The Reeperbahn by Night”.

TURK: Shuddup! Your whistling! Of course they don’t even go there normally – it’s just when they entertain *tourists* (laughs shortly). We didn’t take in any of the animal shows.

Pause followed by enlightenment on the faces of a few.

TURK: I was too tired. Hurt my arm. So we went to one of the people shows instead. Put on by some Varsity students . . . Big send-up.

LOOSEHEAD: Well it keeps them off the streets. (laughs obviously)

TURK: Cavorting around. Doing it to each other, you know. To music. A musical. This one guy was asking about lecture notes when he was on the job. (Laughs).

TIGHTHEAD: Better than demonstrating against the Boks. Bloody Hippies.

TURK: Hmmmm (in full agreement, but absently). Everybody was doing everything to everybody else. But with all that nudity, hell man, it was just-boring, boring. Left nothing to the imagination. Some of the audience were even asleep.

LOOSEHEAD: On top of each other?

He is ignored. The 8th man has been sharpening a pencil throughout. He is now down to the rubber. He sniffs it, then eats it.

TURK: Man, but you should’ve seen the House of Eros. (Clicks his fingers and laughs). The girls there were lovely, lovely. Nothing like what you expected. I expected to see real, raddled, old hags. You know. All beat up

and dirty. But they're young. 5 Deutsche Marks a half hour. Of course it's run by the Government.

TIGHTHEAD: Weren't you scared of . . . disease?

TURK: Sis man, I didn't GO with one. (Laughs). Anyway they were young and pretty. About 18. I asked one why are you doing this? She said, "In two years I'll have my boutique." Of course she won't. In two years she'll be on the harbour like the Point Road ones.

Chorus of agreement. The door opens and closes.

TURK: Isn't the red light on?
(irritably)

HOOKER: It's probably the projectionist.

LOCK: I saw a guy beaten up with a bottle once. In a taxi.

(Turk, throughout the following taxi monologue begins to become more and more aware that he missed something by not taking in any of the animal shows. A gradual awakening).

LOCK: One of my mates saw someone beaten up with a bottle
(boringly) in a taxi. This guy drove a Pirate taxi after midnight. His own. On weekends. Damn funny actually. He'd cruise around in his beat up mini around the harbour area. Call out "Taxi! Taxi!" sotto voce you know. "Piss off!" they'd reply. "Piss off!" Get it?!
(Laughs aloud and alone).

TURK: I didn't take in any of the animal shows.

LOCK: Ja, well anyway. It was after the British pulled out of Aden actually.

The rest of them look at him blankly.

LOCK: Town was full of the Royal Navy. Ja well anyway, my friend managed to get three of them in the back of his mini and was taking them back to their ship when there was a scream. He looked round to see one of the buggers had hit one of his mates with a bottle. Hell, how those headwounds bleed. (Pause) In about ten seconds he had them outside the Point Road Police Station . . . didn't put the brakes on, nothing. Just leapt out. Took 5 cops to get those Limeys out. I saw the car myself the next day personally. What a mess. Carpets were saturated so he chucked them out.

TURK: There was one with a Shetland Pony and a Negress.
Called Easy Rider. I didn't see it.

The phone rings. Turk snatches up the phone. Listens a few seconds, then slams it down.

TURK: If that bloody woman says, "Call waiting" one more time I'll strangle her.

LOOSEHEAD: A man walks into a pub with a pedigreed pomeranian bitch and a drunk comes up to him and hurls all over it and says "Funny, I don't remember eating
(his voice trails away as)

The door opens and a secretary enters carrying a tray with tea and coffee on it. Loosehead shuts up. The men fall silent. She pours the tea. There is dead quiet until she leaves. As the door closes they all speak at once.

LOOSEHEAD: Are those real?

TIGHTHEAD: They tell me

HOOKER: I've always wanted to

TURK: God, you should see

LOCK: Hell, I also saw something funny when I was in the B A O R. On manoeuvres in the Tank Corps just outside Baden-Baden, and we rode over a despatch rider and his motorbike who were asleep in a ditch. Chopped them in half diagonally from hip to armpit. Bits in the tank tracks except for his boot. He was still alive. I hurled my guts out! He just lay there moaning. For about twelve minutes. We couldn't kill him — didn't have any bullets. We were on manoeuvres you understand.

During this monologue the 8th man leaps to his feet simultaneously clicking his fingers and slapping his thigh with an expression of barely suppressed urgency and excitement. He is ignored by all. He sits.

LOOSEHEAD: As I was saying, a man walks into a pub with a pedigreed pomeranian bitch and a drunk comes up to him and hurls all over it

The phone rings. Turk snatches it up, snaps, "Turk here," and listens at length in silence. All watch him expectantly. A chill has settled.

TURK: Write this down! Pencil! OK. Yes. Wild unblimped Arri . . . yes . . . inkidinks . . . yes . . . brutes . . . make that five brutes . . . It's Nicosia on the line! . . . and a

60 by 30 sound stage *not near an airport*. I'll strangle that pilot. Half-track or full-track? Hydraulic crab . . . yes. Don't give me that Technoscope crap Bongo, its Panavision or I'm not interested.

He continues unabated. Lock is busy writing everything down. The others who sprang to life at the outset are now rapidly losing interest.

TURK: Armstrong Siddley Diesel . . . Yes . . . Genny . . . yes . . . Wind machine . . . yes . . . Mole Richardson . . . yes . . . Variable Broad . . . yes . . . Double and single nets, French frames . . . What? . . . French *flags*, yes . . . *Kidney* frames . . . of course . . . Ulcers, polecats, clamps, brackets, trombones . . . yes . . . an open and closed 3/4 ton truck and camera . . . yes . . .

Loosehead stands. Tighthead follows.

LOOSEHEAD: We're bugging off now.

LOCK: (Desperately, still writing hard and trying to keep up with Turk)
Hey, you can't *go*!

HOKER: (rising and gathering his papers)
Actually, I have to go too. Can't keep them waiting any longer.

TURK: Hello . . . Hello, Nicosia? Nicosia!? . . . The bastard! I've been cut off!

Loosehead, Tighthead and Hooker watch him for a moment then leave.

TURK: The bastards! For God's sake get me Nicosia! Yes, I'll hold on.

He turns imploringly to Lock who watches him intently. Turk turns back to the phone. He continues to say "Hello . . . Hello, Nicosia?" at intervals.

The 8th man tears a piece of paper and makes an elaborate paper aeroplane. Fold by fold, flap by flap. Lock watches Turk intently. "Hello . . . Hello, Nicosia?!" is the only sound heard. The 8th man poises himself and launches the aeroplane after sighting along it and making a minor flap adjustment. The plane falls where it will. The 8th man looks at it disappointedly then turns to Lock. Lock turns to him.

LOCK: Nothing to be done.

8th MAN: I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, "Vladimir, be reasonable. You haven't yet tried everything" . . . And I resume the struggle.

TURK: Hello . . . Hello, Nicosia?!

8th MAN: So there you are again.

LOCK: Am I?

8th MAN: I'm glad to see you back, I thought you were gone forever.

LOCK: Me too.

TURK: Hello?? . . . Hello, Nicosia?????

CURTAIN

ON MINOTAUROMACHY

Two girls like doves
are sitting in the window.
It is evening.

Outside
the retinue of the minotaur goes by.
His hoofs clatter on the cobbles.
He lifts his head as always
and he groans. He moans and bellows.
The blood in his chest chokes him;
not a sinew in his body
but is a whip-lash and a cord:
so muscle-tied. It is not enough
the disembowelling of the horse,
the rickety horse of old age,
the apocalypse —
not enough. Not enough
the violation of the female matador,
the dancer,
her peace in ecstasy of death-like sleep
and the slender breasts parted with a shawl
Did you make this, Minotaur?

Not enough. He stumbles
and clatters on the cobbles, his one arm
stretched out in front of his lust-blind eyes,
and he groans. O Minotaur, O Minotaur,
what song do you sing?
The man escapes up the ladder;
the little girl with the flowers and the candle,
the miniature statue of liberty,
is cannon-fodder. Only
the girls like doves in a window
hear your song.
Hear the whole of your song.

EUPHORBIAS : THE STONY COUNTRY SPEAKS

Euphorbias are cattle
of other planets:

driven
as spume or seed or spittle.

Find temporary haven (here among us)
among granites

or wizen
pyramid mountains; govern

in this season
(horned towers, gaunt outposts)
these ambits also;

descry
messages; emblazon

us with age (us outcry
of semi-deserts . . .)

Their upturned udders
milk the electrical sky
in steady lamb-like shudders

for what there pothers
or winks

I too

(a piper with his mouth awry)
have kleza'd at those tits,

those crescent tits,
and tasted what was bitterer
than bitters,
or wind that weathers.

*(Kleza – a Zulu word meaning to milk from a cow's udder into one's mouth,
as a herdsboy might.)*

Do you think that Afrikaans poetry, white Afrikaans poetry, can ever claim an authenticity while, as a whole, with exceptions such as Breytenbach, it refuses to face the history of apartheid, which is the history of the white man in South Africa?

Ja, now let me put it like this. My work, as you know, my Afrikaans work, is mainly satirical, I say mainly satirical, and I am beginning to write more and more non-satirically if you like, despite this, of course, still socially. As for myself, I very strongly feel that unless Afrikaans exploits the entirety of life, and I use the word exploits here in its artistic sense, the entirety of life for ourselves in South Africa will, obviously must, include things that so many of us do not want to talk about, then Afrikaans won't exist for as long as I in any case hope that it might exist. It was Van Wyk Louw himself who said once that unless Africa alongside Europe is opened up in Afrikaans, Afrikaans will not survive and I very much feel the same way. I would say that it is not only a matter of apartheid society being involved. When I talk about the entirety of our society I go a little deeper than even apartheid. I think of the totality of injustice, and you might say then this is too universal; injustice is everywhere, and it is always. My attitude towards this is I think an attitude which you might call classic and correct. The attitude that unless we focus on particularity in the first place it is impossible to be universal in your art. That is to say that art can only be universal insofar as it comes to grips with the particular. And to this extent I find Afrikaans, also Afrikaans poetry, lacking still. There has been some moving in that direction. But far too little. Breytenbach is perhaps *the* exception. One does find a moving in this direction in the work of Opperman, however; one does find a moving in this direction, but far too little, in the work of Van Wyk Louw. I think, for instance of a poem of his like *Nuusberigte: 1956*. Breytenbach, I would say, is a poet who must still be discovered. He is at the moment overestimated for the wrong reasons. I would like him to be properly estimated for the right reasons. He has a marvellous control of the Afrikaans language *and* he is at the very same time coming to grips with realities of our situation in a poetic way, an artistic way, which makes him, as far as I am concerned, an absolutely outstanding poet and literary man. I'm sure that more or less answers your question, although in a very roundabout way.

Following on that, why, when one looks at your books, Verse Van Die Liefde, Kitaar My Kruis and Sê Sjobbolet, does one discover that they are all published by Afrikaans publishing houses. Why are they? Simply because you're accepted as an Afrikaans poet even though what you have to say I find far more outspoken than most Afrikaans poetry? Why do they take you? Afrikaner Pers, for instance

Now this is a fascinating situation. I suppose what happens here is what happens in every case where I suppose the consideration is – money is money. It is a pity that there isn't really a black press in South Africa. I publish where I find a publisher. At the moment I think that the position is considerably better than when I first started out publishing. I'm thinking for instance of a publisher like Buren Publishers, and Buren has shown considerable courage I would say and integrity publishing for instance Breytenbach's work, publishing one or two other things that I think certain other publishers might not have wanted to touch, really. And at the moment there are also a number of younger, up and coming publishers. Young Afrikaans people with more initiative and more truth, I would say, about their make-up, than the more or less staid and established publishers, and I fix my hopes on these people. I consider myself, culturally, to be Afrikaans, to be very many other things, culturally, but among other things, to be Afrikaans, and I have no objection whatsoever to being published by an Afrikaner publisher. I do think that in this sort of regard one has to be careful however, one has to be a bit of a strategist, at times. If I had a black publisher, I would publish black. This is not because I am a racist, that is the one thing in the world I think nobody can accuse me of

*Would you call yourself a Christian poet? I think of poems in that early volume, Verse Van Die Liefde, specifically of poems such as 'Sal Niemand?'
Sal niemand dan soos ek erken / dat liefde tog die stryd sal wen /*

I'm very careful of labels. I try to stay away from them as far as possible so I will not hang the label of Christian around my neck. I will say however, that call it a metaphysical sense in which I am religious if you like, I am religious. God is to me a problem more than anything else. A beautiful problem if you like, but also a very difficult problem. Christianity in the ordinary sense is for me something too facile, superficial, too easy; not only that, unfortunately very often also hypocritical, and something which makes me very, very sad indeed. So there are very good reasons why I would like to stay away from this label of being a Christian. If you want to call me a Christian in something of the sense of Soren Kierkegaard, then I will feel happy, though I am not entirely happy with Kierkegaard's category of the individual because man for me is very, very definitely social in the first place. That means that the Christian injunction of love your neighbour is for me very, very important altogether, and I love to refer people, my students, all kinds of people, to the Biblical word, Jesus speaking, saying – how is it possible for you to claim that you love God whom you don't see if you find it so difficult to love your neighbour whom you do see?

*Could I take up on that, then? Because in your book **Kitaar My Kruis**, you seem, as regards this question of charity, to be, in your earlier phrase, more down to earth about it, certainly more toughminded about it. And the poems in that book, to generalise again, seem to me more openly, overtly, political, and also to deal more specifically with problems of race and colour.*

I'd like to respond to that by saying that God for me is a social concept like all concepts for me are social concepts. A mathematician perhaps might have problems with me here, but I am inclined to take this idea of mine very, very far, even to a certain extreme, I would say all concepts are for me social concepts. I do not feel at all for a religion which is, or which directs itself, away from social things. There is this inclination in South Africa to divorce religion from politics, to divorce all sorts of things from all sorts of other things, but life cannot be compartmentalised like this, at all. I never see myself as a man as a thing of compartments. I think this is just philosophically wrong. And just the same way as a man cannot be compartmentalised, the life that he leads cannot be compartmentalised, the society cannot be compartmentalised, because religion belongs with everything, and everything belongs with religion, and it is therefore very, very natural that I should in my satirical work see politics and God as though they were completely involved with each other. And this is the way I think when I think all my concepts, that the one is completely involved with the other all the time. Of course something I must point out is that between say *Verse Van Die Liefde* and today, there has been a considerable development, so it isn't as if I have all the time held the position that I find myself holding today.

Yes. Because the transition from your earlier work, the thing that's notable to me, is that its satire is now considerably more savage than it was.

Well, in this connection, might I say, you may consider this to be a sort of metaphysical statement again, there is a sense today in which I am beginning to consider hatred to be necessary in certain circumstances; in which I consider, paradoxically if you like, hatred of certain things to be a form of love.

*If I could then ask you, writing as you have done in your last two books almost exclusively in black Afrikaans, how do you look on people like Sidney Clouts in say his *Hotknife Poems*, or Fugard, in *Boesman and Lena*, who try and portray the black from within a white skin? Do you think it's feasible?*

Frankly, I admit I consider that there is something inauthentic about their writing. *Boesman and Lena*, when I saw this at the University of Natal, Durban, performed the first time, made a certain impact on me. There were even a few moments I felt close to being truly moved, but, from within our own skin I felt the drama to be not authentic. There was something that for me didn't ring true. I don't want to say however that a playwright like Athol should not be doing this sort of writing. I think that would be utterly wrong. A playwright, an artist, should explore the entirety of his experience and if this is part of Athol's experience then he should explore this. And I think what you find in a case like this is that here, at least, you have a man with the kind of integrity that I appreciate, who tries to understand what is very difficult to understand – for him. I would like myself to be this kind of person, too, also as an artist trying to understand things that I find very, very difficult to understand, but making a very, very genuine effort, effort of integrity. I think that this is what is so wrong with our society, that people because their experiences are different and they recognise their experiences to be different accept that they therefore have to stay away, keep apart from each other, not even to try to understand what goes on across the border. This is just utterly wrong, it is not human, it is not philosophically correct, everything is the matter with it. For this reason I do not condemn this kind of writing. I question the result but I do not question the injunction that the author, as it were, gives himself, in this connection. I cannot possibly do that.

Since we are talking now of writing in English by white South Africans, English poetry written by white South Africans in this country has a sad history – with the exception perhaps of Campbell. Would you offer any comment? I mean given, I would hold anyway, that the white English speaking South African in this country is a strange animal in a very strange situation, displaced, who has always had to try in one or the other to construct a tradition. Whether you've got Guy Butler in Grahamstown going back to Pringle, or whatever. There is this desperate attempt to find roots where no roots really exist.

Here I want to enter the concept of Black Consciousness just for a moment. I want to say that what is positive for me about Black Consciousness is this creative aspect in terms of which you have the people trying to establish who they are, what they are, their relation to the soil, and I mean soil in a very literal sense of the word.

It's a question of identity. Now I know that the word identity is misused the way it is, but it is still a very significant concept altogether. People looking at themselves in the mirror and asking themselves important questions, and I feel that the problem, not only with English White South Africans, but with Afrikaner Whites in this country also, is this – that they have never really

reached this point that Blacks have reached at this moment. The Afrikaner is as strange to this soil as the English white person is to this soil. He's alienated from the soil. This big boast about his history is so much breath and air and there is very little profound philosophical substance to this. He's a colonialist, probably the worst colonialist that you have in this part of the world at the moment. And the English White is as lost, I agree with you entirely, and what I insist on is that our people in South Africa, we cannot speak of South Africans, really, there are only people in South Africa, should begin to think in cultural terms, profound cultural terms. We have no philosophy of culture in South Africa at all. Van Wyk Louw has moved in this direction a little, but if you consider the great black thinker of Africa like Leopold Senghor for instance, then you really feel just a little ashamed of the position in South Africa. We have not got close even in an attempt to think profoundly about the basic cultural concepts and I feel that people cannot really have a history or histories without having moved in this direction of thinking, culturally. For the simple reason that their awakening to a history is to be measured in terms of how aware they are of themselves. It is a matter of self-consciousness, really, culturally.

Are you working on anything at the moment?

Ja, I am working on what I consider to be a very meaningful project altogether. It is a comparative study; Leopold Senghor, Van Wyk Louw, as two minds of Africa. Very, very purposely I have the Black African thinker and the White African thinker. I consider Senghor to be the profounder thinker but Van Wyk Louw has made such an important contribution philosophy of culture, and a contribution that should speak to us in South Africa, especially against the background of Senghor. I want to indicate a certain lack in Van Wyk Louw that I think we can overcome precisely on the basis of what he has done for us already. I do hope that this work will be meaningful for all our people in South Africa. This is my main occupation at the moment. I'm steeping myself in Van Wyk Louw and Leopold Senghor. Then I have ready for publication at the moment, it will probably be published before the end of this year, fifty quatrains, and I entitle this *Black Bronze Beautiful*: symbolism of Africa, imagery of Africa, the black and the bronze woman: erotic if you like, but much more than erotic, too, subtitle: *Fifty Moments In The Creation Of A Myth*. And the concept of the myth is very important to me. It's positive, it's negative – what I have in mind is the positive myth. We live in terms of myths to a large extent. The myth is therefore very, very important to me. Then a book of poems in what you might call Black Afrikaans will be appearing together with photographs by Chris Jansen, and I consider some of these to be, well, if not the best, then some of my better poems in Black Afrikaans and this should be appearing sometime in October.

STEPHEN GRAY

THE TAME HORSES OF VREDEDORP

Their realm is from Piel's Sausage Wholesale
the Fresh Produce Market at the cooling towers
skidding on onion skin and tar under M1
to No Animal Drawn Vehicles by Brixton
Tower residential area I tell you a slum

down the Rand they shuffle past Phineas
McIntosh childrens' park they used to play
centaurs in the old days out for spoils
horses and men raiding over to Langlaagte
taking off over fences and clover with our girls

past the clipped mown green and the Indian gravel
pits dropping off mielies for black bus queues
and then over Church Street Bridge and then
door to door the hawker yelling man
like five for a bob's back in commerce again

they wear horseshoes for luck blinkers bells the lot
shafts bend with them snort in their nosebags
you can hear Pegasus rising from the fumes
stirring flies he travels high on octane
stabled at sunset carried by golden grooms

no chances the tame horses trot pulling carts
back to Vrededorp sammy's in a hurry now
his whip slamming like a chariot race
at the light's it's the Mayfair cavalry
trampling ghettos enemies of the state

shame you'd think they'd let a gelding retire
on the highveld where lucerne's so high but
that sack of worms knock-kneed shrunken-withered sight
makes a last obliging haul past Piel's Wholesale
to the abattoir mark X on his forehead and Petz-D-Lite.

ON THE DISPOSAL OF EFFLUENT

If you have never dug a drain
There are some rules. Select

A quiet place. It will not do
To hear in the house across the garden

We have to have them I suppose but need
We be reminded. Be discreet

About drains : never
Near the flowerbeds or frequented lawns.

With a clean and sharp spade
The pit itself is easy, a hole,

A few old rocks thrown in,
And nature does the rest.

And if you are wise let the pipes
Have a smooth fall, lest waste

Back up, and clog, the system.
And then it's finished.

Good name for a drain would be Stinkwater,
Or any other resettlement really.

CHRISTOPHER MANN

FROM THE NOTEBOOK OF A SMALL TIME REVOLUTIONARY

Wind spits
Rain and grit down Twist Street
Where the eight o'clock buses lumber
And rattle and discharge their passengers
With a dry cough.

In this tidy room
Restful as stonechip shaken out a shoe
The tacky ink
On the small stone pad
Needs only a wipe of turpentine.

And with a rub
Of pumice in the tin basin
My messy fingertips
Will be perfectly presentable as well.

In their ruled boxes
Like little black whirlpools
The whorls
Lie calm and sharp.

These are indelible
And these
Could be my credentials.

EVA ROYSTON

TORTOISE

She is a hillock in the sun,
A millenia.
Catatonic lady, she inches
Waxily over the grass.
Now her bleary eye and wattle neck
Are withdrawn.
A humped mansion is her back.

RUTH KEECH

HER THOUGHTS ON THE WAY HOME
FROM THE MARRIAGE GUIDANCE CLINIC

“Yes, I must remember when he says
This, I must say not That –
Which is what I’ve always done –
But another thing, to break the old routine.

And he must remember not to answer me
Back, in what he thinks is fun.
He must remember to think twice
Before he starts to speak – to shield me from defeat.

But will I always manage to forget
That all his acts spring now from skilled advice?
And will he always overlook
The fact I’ve been instructed how to please?

Won’t in fact this ideal he and I
Both long for one whose failures look
Easy to love without contortion?
Whose faults would fit ours like a magic glove?

Instead of trying for an ideal middle way
Achieved by both our selves’ distortion,
Won’t we both come round to find
It’s better that we take two roads and say,

“Adieu”? Future conditionals so subtly
Refined, fail to advance her honest mind.

ROBERT GREIG

THERE ARE UNICORNS

There *are* unicorns.
I haven't seen them myself
but others have, reliable men
who write in books, in newspapers.
Once, travellers told
of blue-eyed unicorns with barber's pole horns
that raced in deserts, or visited virgins in dreams.
There's even talk of a unicorn
that walked down Adderley Street
through a department store,
and speaking a mixture of Greek and English,
ordered nectar at the milk bar.
Someone asked for its autograph;
a father, eyeing that horn,
hauled his daughter away;
an elderly woman, beneath a black hat,
wanted to call Someone:
"It looks like a foreign idea."
(The unicorn sniffed its coke.)
Then the men from the Natural History Museum arrived.
They wanted to see its skeleton,
said it was a kind of horse,
and people said yes, they are Authorities after all,
which is why no-one actually saw
the unicorn.

MONGANE WALLY SEROTE

THE GROWING

No!
This is not dying when the trees
Leave their twigs
To grow blindly long into windows like fingers into eyes,
And leave us unable
To wink or to blink or to actually close the eye,
The mind –
Twigs thrusting into windows and leaves falling on the sills,
Are like thoughts uncontrolled and stuffing the heart.
Yes,
This is teaching about the growing of things:
If you crowd me I'll retreat from you,
If you still crowd me I'll think a bit,
Not about crowding you but about your right to crowd me;
If you still crowd me, I will not, but I will be thinking
About crowding you.
If my thoughts and hands reach out
To prune the twigs and sweep the leaves,
There was a growth of thought here,
Then words, then action.
So if I say prune instead of cut,
I'm teaching about the growing of things.

THE AUNTIE OTHERSIDE

She's like casual
Whatever that is,
And that is her life.
She's fertile like the mushroom soil,
As moist as
The piece of earth close to the wall
At the backyard.
Maybe she was smiling, I saw her teeth as she passed,
She had oranges
To her breast, on the stomach so big,
And she was going to her home
Of eight children.

CHRISTOPHER HOPE

THE POET IN THE ABATTOIR

Elsewhere in this issue, Adam Small talks of hatred as being a possible means of expression. There is something in this. Contrary to what is given out by liberals and nationalists alike, we need not less, but more, animus, in this country, if we wish to get one another into some sort of perspective. Paradoxically, an exchange of fisticuffs and bloodied noses might do a damn side more for race relations than bleeding hearts, boerish paternalism or fearful bridge-building. Differently coloured and cultured people need to look long and hard at each other and to describe what they see.

For a while now, the Afrikaner intellectual has been given to a lengthy and bloomy inspection of his own features in the mirror. The Black intellectual is also becoming increasingly selfconscious. At the moment, these developments remain parallel, but, who knows, they might one day defy the laws of geometry and apartheid, and suddenly merge. Perhaps the White nationalist will wake up one day to find an identical black face confronting him in his morning mirror. Will he notice the resemblance, and wonder?

And just where, one asks, among these mirrors I have been flashing about, will the English White be found? The answer, I suspect, is that he will probably be selling them, or cowering behind the largest.

Mongane Wally Serote's book of poems *Yakhal 'inkomo** is the second in a series from Lionel Abrahams' enterprising Renoster Books following on the publication of Oswald Mtshali's phenomenally successful *Sounds Of A Cowhide Drum*. Serote writes out of his experience of what it is like to be Black in the townships, in Johannesburg, in White South Africa: *Yakhal 'inkomo* : the cry of the cattle going to slaughter. What he has to say is emphatic, sometimes harrowing. He is a man at war. 'The poetry is in the pity,' Wilfred Owen said of a situation no less extreme, and thereby caused a great deal of damage to poetry, because people began to conflate the two things. The question is whether the poet has the right to indulge his rage by giving way to it? There is a danger if he does so. Brutality is indivisible and no matter how severely tempted he may be to paint it literally in black and white, to do so would misrepresent the subtle and steely savagery of the South African way of life. Serote is aware of this:

* *Yakhal 'inkomo* – Renoster Books, Johannesburg, 1972; R1,75

My brothers in the streets,
Who booze and listen to records,
Who've tasted rape of mothers and sisters,
Who take alms from white hands,
Who grab bread from black mouths

(My Brothers In The Streets)

Also, gross brutality is not easily assimilable in poetry, and in trying to encompass it, Serote is given to apostrophe, exclamation and large statement. Often his words seem to float away and off the page:

The endless horizon
Usurps all.
For man is but a prodigal nation.
The pattern
That the eyes, the ears, the thoughts,
Our blood, our heart, weave.
A hunger,
Oh God!

(On Wondering)

There is too much of this sort of thing: the same ballooning rhetoric which bedevils so much South African verse. The result is seldom poetry.

I think that South African writers are either too conscious of 'overseas' literature, and write under the influence, as it were. Or they ignore it and blaze their own purple trails. I don't know which is worse. Serote allows American idioms to interfere with his work, specifically, the rhetoric of the Black militants. *Ogay* and *Whitey* are two terms which he uses often, with cursory explanation of their meaning. It's a pity, because even when one grasps their significance, one realises that they don't carry quite the same punch out here. They are good credentials among in-the-know Blacks, that's all. It has been fashionable lately for American Black militants to yearn back to Africa. It is more understandable, though just as sentimental, for Black Africans to derive their identity from America.

I wonder who will see a copy of *Yakhal' inkomo*? The Black Consciousness people with whom Serote undoubtedly feels a kinship will find something in it, although his position is ambivalent. The book opens with an implicit appeal to Whites which ironic trappings do not conceal:

Do not fear Baas,
My heart is vast as the sea
And your mind as the earth.
It's awright Baas,
Do not fear.

(*The Actual Dialogue*)

but moves towards a confrontation:

Trying to get out
Words. Words. By Whitey.
I know I'm trapped.

(*Black Bells*)

The chances are that most of the people who read this book will be liberal, English-speaking Whites – those whom one can rely on to discover in Serote's enraged, often incoherent, lyricism, that things are as bad as they suspected.

The same people; tea and cheese cake, or coffee,
Or milo: or whatever you want.
To change the monotony
They dapple the house
With the black of the Indian or the black like mine.

(*They Do It*)

Nonetheless, we may expect that they will welcome this book, while overlooking the poetry, and that all Serote has to fear from this quarter are invidious comparisons with Mtshali and *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*. I can't help wondering whether this book will also start a poetry-buying bonanza in the bookshops, galleries and boutiques of White South Africa. Serote deserves better. At his best, in poems such as the finely observed, *The Auntie Otherside*, and his gently homiletic, *The Growing*, there is a talent which cannot be hidden by the blood and guts that spoil so much of the verse.

Yakhal 'inkomo is not so much the cry of the cattle in the slaughterhouse, but rather that of the poet in the abattoir. The abattoirs pre-suppose butchers. The poet and his readers should not forget that butchers are not much moved by the sight of blood.

A NEW STAR AMONG THE DEBRIS?

The luminescence of English poetry as typified by such tried and tested navigational aids as, say, Auden, Enright, Fuller, Brock, Ross, Barker, Bunting, Causey, Watkins, continues to shimmer undiminished amid the vast tracts of Stygian cosmic dust. And if surprisingly, Lowell, in his more recent work in the little magazines, appears to be drifting towards the bone-white, dry, cerebral glitter of Middleton's constellation, whereas one would have hoped for an opposite migration, we are none the less grateful for both.

Some fade, of course, like Larkin who appears to have dried up, leaving us half a dozen poems of somewhat subdued, but still impeccable felicity.

Some (to continue the metaphor) have proved to be no more than meteorites: short-lived, fashionable and shallow, signifying nothing much beyond a venturesome spleen or their own sanguineous appetites. Hughes, once considered to be among The Firmament, has recently executed a play in which the actors, whether about their daily business or in their eyeball to eyeballs, shout words like "Oog" and "Og" at each other with expected energy. (Molière would have had fun with this one!) No one except, predictably, the TLS critic understands a word. Which is a relief of sorts: at least the word "blood" in *Jabberwock* cannot bore his audience to the same extent as that clottish fowl which splashed with such hysterical self-dramatising malevolence through eighty pages of faked-up gore, taking the paying customers blind to the hopeless vulgarity of it all. Meanwhile the Liverpudlians, flexing their miniscule and quite uninteresting instant-poetic selves, have blown like Kleenex up, up and away – unsung and unlamented except perhaps by one or two (past it) pop-moppets. Truly, the passing of the hours brings certain consolations.

So the auguries for English poetry remain good. A couple of years ago it was the electrifying deployment of the language by *Door Into the Dark* (if *riskless*) Seamus Heany; this year, granted star-spotting is allowable as a harmless pastime, it's James Fenton.*

* *Terminal Moraine* by James Fenton. Published by Secker & Warburg, London. 63 pages. £1.50.

Fenton, born in Lincoln, educated at Oxford (psychology and philosophy), has travelled in France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Poland. A socialist, he has served on the staff of the *New Statesman*. In 1968, he won the Newdigate Prize at Oxford for his poem "Our Western Furniture", and more about that later. His work widely embraces his culture as a good poet's should; at the same time he is particularly attracted to out-of-the-way items of pharmacological, mycological and anthropological information which, in his own hands, are wielded with appealing wit and a deft quirkiness. He wears his not inconsiderable erudition lightly and his poems here and subsequently in little magazines, exhibit a quiet force larded at times with an often comic brilliance. He is developing fast and well:

*. . . We think of all those gallons
of arsenate of lead being pumped over
Our native soil. How can we help comparing
Ourselves to the last idiot heirs*

*Of some Roman province, still for the
Sake of form eating off lead platters?*

(From "The Fruit-Grower in War-Time")

The sudden historical and geographical enlargement of the platitude** (the refurbishing of platitudes is a problem every poet has to face) with its accurate change of focus and subjectively stated menace to our very lives is authentic, uncomprising, masterly and original.

His squibs are apposite and his powder is commendably dry:

*. . . Kaunda's row with Heath was said to show
Something about the Six. (And when, oh dear
The Point of Pinkville, every one should know,
Was that it crowned some journalist's great career,
I thought the Statesman reached an all time low.)
Then with a piece called "It Could Happen Here",
You recommend Special Branch be sent
To areas of real discontent*

And leave the universities in peace

** The near-pun is unavoidable!

and

*. . . With Penguin Modern European Poets
Usually it's last year's conversation stopper
Like Miroslav Holub or Vasko Popa.*

*Talking of whom, I see Alvarez took
The lazy line he holds out of pure habit
On Hughes' Crow. I struggled with the book
But if there was a point I didn't grab it.
I thought the whole thing one enormous rook*

(From "Open Letter to Richard Crossman").

There is more of such, coolly and eximiously handled which is always particularly gratifying in a first collection. My single reservation: I am hesitant about the transfusion of the whole or portions of scientific works by others (all suitably acknowledged) into the circulatory system of a poem. This poet is obviously a very intelligent man and must therefore know that the practice imparts an unfair slight to his own otherwise elative work, that aspects of it are distinctly worn. Where he has done this the poem appears to stumble away from him; and one of the sixties' concepts of the "found poem", apart from certain questionable moral aspects, was reminiscent of the so-called happening and is now best left to rest in peace, I think. Certainly in the vicinity of a talent of this stature.

If this were all, James Fenton would have to be reckoned a substantial new poet. But this collection includes the sequence of twenty-one sonnets on Commodore Perry's successful expedition to Japan: "Our Western Furniture", which must surely rank as a luminary among the handful of good poems of the last decade. It is a sustained, near-flawless piece with a penetrative on-target unerringness at the focal point of his probings into the national psychologies of two giants: Japan's and America's, and therefore into Man's. Employing usually well-grounded language and the blatantly insolent presumption of hind-sight that our received wisdoms are necessarily greater for having appeared later in history than those of the two protagonists, Fenton has effected — well, is it (a word one hesitates to use at all) a masterpiece? Only time (survival) can clinch the label. At this moment it is a powerful chiselled artifact, tricky and intelligent, with that peculiarly satisfying and delightful savour a completely good poem accords its readers — an enhancement of the comprehensive faculties, if you like: the sensation that things will not be quite the same hereafter.

The poet opens with the ghost of Bashō (the long-dead great Japanese poet, here I think, representing the spirit of “unsullied” – unWesternised - Japan):

*I am Bashō: an old man walking north
After the setting of the moon . . .
This country is full of ghosts; I meet some:
Sometimes the poets dying with the frost
Or when the politician sees a flower
And pauses . . .*

In No. 2, he has “An Encounter at Dawn”:

*. . . I saw the salmon flash, caught in the net.
It was the only light. It flicked the spray.
An energy to spawn and procreate! . . .
. . . “I saw the ships in Nagasaki Bay”.*

In No. 3, another ghostly poet “Sanyō Speaks”:

*. . . I was a poet too
And warned the throne, and died, and left a voice
Forecasting threats to peace . . .*

In No. 5, “1853: News Comes via the Dutch of Perry’s Impending Arrival”:

*. . . In Kyoto, spies inform the Son of God
As he sits in his palace, silent, motionless:
The red-haired Westerners will not turn back
This time.
He hears the message with a nod.
His painted face at first shows no emotion,
But then he smiles. His teeth are painted black.*

In No. 8, “Commodore Perry, as his Ship Approaches Japan, Falls into a Fever”:

*. . . And Fujiyama rising like a threat
To me, my god, my country and the world.*

In No. 9:

*. . . Europe had failed. Japan for you alone
Like some immodest oyster shows her pearl.
You had the mastery, you hold the gun . . .*

In No. 10, "The Japanese on the American Gifts":

*They bring us instruments of death and war.
Means for controlling men, expanding power.
They show us crops to plant and tools that can
Replace the efforts of a dozen men.
They fill our diplomats with alcohol,
Call us their friends, but train their guns to shore . . .
. . . If to invade, why do they give us guns?*

No. 11 refers to the "Display of Skills on either Side":

First the Japanese:

*"After their show of power we thought it best
To tilt the balance back again so
Produced our finest wrestlers, men like bulls,
The pride of their owners, bred for their strength . . ."*

Then the Americans:

*"A more revolting spectacle than these
Bestial subhumans, men who had been bred
Like cattle . . .
. . . Having observed them execute their skills
I ordered our marines to give a show
Of gun-drill. And the Japs were quite impressed".*

In No. 12, one of the American party writes home:

*. . . heaven protect us from those lacquered cups
Which have no handles. It becomes abundantly
Clear that Japan's only a third-rate country.*

In No. 13, "At a Banquet on Board the Flagship Powhatan the Japanese Get Very Drunk":

*. . . "Japan – America – one heart!"
Cried drunken Matsusaki, and embraced
The Commodore, crushing his epaulettes.*

No. 14, "The Morning After . . ." is pivotal to the whole work, the apparent corruscations of cynicism are transcended by the truth at its centre:

*. . . I see your plan
Clearly . . .
Our land is old, and sought by long seclusion
To disengage itself from groping powers
Who spread their ethnic . . .
Your newborn country's growing potency
Bursts like spring rivers through surrounding plains.
You pick on us as sparring partner, try
Our strength, but find us hopeless at your game.
Sensing your strengthening sinews with delight
You give us guns, and challenge us to fight.*

In No. 15, the "President of the USA Greets Perry on his Return":

*. . . We see in History how ancient nations
Losing their impetus falter and fail,
And how retarding old civilisation
Can be to Progress . . .*

In Nos. 17, 18 and 19 Perry is seen to dream, wake, remember and die in some exceptionally moving lines.

In No. 20, Townsend Harris, first American Consul in Japan remembers Perry:

*. . . Sometimes I see you holding out your sword
For them to run on . . .*

which is a neat example of how Fenton composes: with a deceptive surface simplicity of plain language, but that sword and that "run on" evoke those reverberations which have the Japanese rituals for formal self-destruction at their centre.

The last sonnet is a clever disclaimer which will not be to everyone's taste but which reveals yet another aspect of the discipline and control integral to this poet's psyche:

*Pause . . . if you think Japan
Lost . . . America . . . wrong.*

*. . . their views
Were less than partial glimpses of the truth . . .*

*. . . Instead we offer you an almost fiction
Constructed on a grid of contradiction.*

Undoubtedly, major work this, of mature and considerable accomplishment. Incredibly and most happily for English poetry, and a particular delight for this particular star-gazer, James Fenton is only 22 years old.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Alan Paton is currently working on the official biography of Roy Campbell.

John Torres lectures in Comparative African Government at the University of Natal, Durban.

Terence Hammond is a Durban film producer and,

David Basckin is studying psychology at U.N.D.

Peter Strauss lectures in the English Department at U.N.D. He won the Pringle Prize of the English Academy in 1971 for his *Diary of A Man Reading Spenser*, which first appeared in *Bolt*.

Adam Small is professor of philosophy at the University of the Western Cape. His new book of poems, *Black Bronze Beautiful*, will be appearing shortly.

Stephen Gray lectures in English at the Rand Afrikaans University, and is editor of *Izwi*.

Christopher Mann is at St. Edmunds College, Oxford, on a Rhodes Scholarship.

Eva Royston is a Johannesburg poet.

Ruth Keech, whose work has been published before in *Bolt*, is a marriage guidance counsellor in Durban.

Robert Greig is a Cape Town journalist.

Mongane Wally Serote is 28 years' old, and lives in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg.

Douglas Livingstone won a Cholmondeley Award in 1970 for his second collection of poems, *Eyes Closed Against The Sun*.

